Address

By

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I appreciate the opportunity to share with you in this Consultation on "Beyond Development Communication". My presence here expresses the concern of WACC in the search for a more just, liberated and peaceful world and solidarity with all those who are working in the field of communication trying to achieve the same aim.

In the search for this goal it is necessary for all of us to establish as one of the starting points the reality of the world we are living in. The recognition of a world made of unevenness at social, political and economical levels which allow for abundance in certain areas and poverty in many. A world which has found in communication a powerful weapon to extend and strengthen its domination.

For instance, the dazzling possibilities of the new technologies should not hide the dangers existing alongside them.

The experience in Third World countries is that the new technologies are bringing about greater dependency, stagnation, together with the concealment and underevaluation of local cultures. How can we share the creativity of new development without overlooking the de-humanizing elements which are present in them? How to solve the present dilemma? Is it impossible to bring about concrete development? Are our goals lacking in vision?

Some things should be said, at least as a provisional answer. Let me say them in three brief sentences.

Firstly, it is necessary to re-create the concept of development in relation to human rights. But we must do it starting from the actual situation we are living through.

The consciousness of the meaning of Human Rights does not stem from-this is the experience of many-a theoretical elaboration, but from the painful and tragic experience of their violation. It is the experience of lacking everything, not due to scarcity but to other's plundering that the consciousness of the abuse of human rights is moulded.

This consciousness of the need to develop human rights is accompanied by the need to act in order to reverse the situation and help bring about a more just and solidary society. But then it is no longer the inherited development models which determine action, but one's own will to reverse the situation with one's own resources.

Secondly, what is the meaning of all this in relation to the subject of communication? Here we find everything concerning the meaning of participation.

Participation is not simply determining the place each one will take, but the involvement each one will bring to in making communication concrete.

For this reason the problem is not so much the use of the media, the use of the new technology, but their ownership. In a world where commercial use of communication defines its structure, use and development, the key to its efficiency can hardly rest on its use. Usage, from the very beginning, is already contaminated by economic and technological factors which define, beforehand, its own projection. To participate means to become involved and to really be able to produce mutual fertilization in an encounter with others. Otherwise what we are favouring is actually the imposing of a certain cosmic vision - which is the result of a political and commercial management - which distorts all local cultures.
Thirdly, all this we are saying does not ignore the value new technologies can have for the development of a local culture, even though in many parts of the world this is not yet true. But we must say this without overlooking the fact that it will be possible only if the people's participation is begun, as they take control of their own technology.

Hence, either this type of development is encouraged, favoring human rights, searching for true participation, or what is sought after is simply retaining the status quo.

Finally, I think that perhaps all I am trying to say is well summarized in an affirmation of "The Christian Principles of Communication," approved by the last Central Committee of the WACC that reads: "Communication which liberates, enables people to articulate their own needs and helps them to act together to meet those needs. It enhances their sense of dignity and underlines their right to full participation in the life of society. It aims to bring about structures in society which are more just, more egalitarian and more conducive to the fulfilment of human rights".

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