

# Cape Town 2010 Articles

## The Church and Poverty, Ethnic Conflict and Climate Change

RECONCILIATION is THE PRIMARY THEME OF DAY TWO OF Cape Town 2010; Participants from 198 nations Grapple with the Role of the Church as it Relates to Poverty, Ethnic Conflict and Climate Change.

**CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA, 19 October 2010**—The second full day of the Cape Town 2010 Congress focused on the role of the church in the ministry of reconciliation—reconciliation of women and men with God’s creation, reconciliation between people of different economic status, and reconciliation between people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds.

Ruth Padilla DeBorst, the General Secretary of the Latin American Theological Fellowship, began the day by leading participants through a study of Ephesians chapter two. She provided thoughtful insights about the nature of God’s transformative power in changing people and societies.

“Jesus made peace by doing justice, by restoring to rightful place and right relations those who were being deprived of them by unjust systems, human greed and abuse of power,” Ruth Padilla Deborst said. “God lives wherever men and women together allow the Community-of-love to imprint God’s image on them, to speak reconciliation into being in their midst, to tear down all humanly constructed walls and spiritually bolstered exclusions so that unity becomes visible, to remind them that once we were all together in death and that our lives, our value and our purpose depend entirely on God’s unmerited grace. God yearns to build the world church today into his earthly dwelling place.”

### **Reconciliation with Creation**

In an afternoon session a panel of environmental leaders from five continents focused on the role of the Church in the global environmental crisis. Panelists challenged participants to consider their doctrine of creation, to remember God’s mandate to care for the earth, and to think about how changes in the environment are negatively impacting the poor.

“Christians have been attacked for a wrong interpretation of the biblical doctrine of creation,” said Ken Gnankan. “We have mandate from God for us to be keepers, tenders, stewards of God’s creation. So, I think there is no opting out of it.”

Sir John Houghton, co-chair of the intergovernmental panel on climate change (IPCC), showed how rising sea levels could displace significant populations of the world’s poor in places like Bangladesh where more than one million people live in an area projected to be consumed by the sea.

“[Environmental change] is a Christian issue because it’s affecting the world, the ecosystem, God’s creation—and because it affects the poor more than anything,” Houghton said.

### **Reconciliation with the Poor**

Ajith Fernando, who since 1976 has served as the National Director of Youth for Christ in Sri Lanka, encouraged Christians to think about how fully reconciling with the poor requires changes in lifestyle, organizational structures and work philosophies.

“One of the things we found as soon as the poor started coming to Christ was that we encountered strong anger within them because they suddenly realized that they were equal in Christ but they had not been treated as equal all these years,” said Ajith Fernando. “That began a process of about 30 years of adjusting our organizational structure and our philosophy of working so that the poor can emerge as leaders in our movement.”

### **Reconciliation with Difference between Peoples**

Antoine Rutayisire, Dean of the Anglican Cathedral of Kigali, Rwanda and commissioner of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, said that working with the poor was essential for bringing restoration to a nation and its people. He said that people who are poor live in the midst of injustice and for that reason can be susceptible to promptings to violence.

“I come from a broken nation, but a nation that is healing, and I grew up wounded,” said Rutayisire. “I grew up angry. I grew up full of hatred and bitterness, but the cross of Jesus Christ has made a difference in my life. Because we are a holy nation of God, we are not Hutu or Tutsis or . . . white or black or yellow or green or whatever we may call it; we are a holy nation to God and Christ Jesus.”

Sharing the podium together, a Palestinian Christian and an Israeli Messianic Jew talked about the power of reconciliation in their lives. Shadia Qubti, the Palestinian, serves with Musalaha, an interdenominational initiative seeking to expand reconciliation between Jewish and Palestinian believers in Christ.

“As a Palestinian, it’s very difficult to reach out to my enemy,” said Qubti. “But as a Christian Palestinian, I have the ability to do that. Because Jesus gives me the eyes to see them as he sees me, Jesus gives me the confidence to go against my society; he gives me the power to embrace them.”

Daniel Sered, the Director of Jews for Jesus in Israel, described how difficult it would be for his family to see him standing next a Palestinian. Yet he emphasized the power of reconciliation in the ethnic conflict between Jews and Palestinian Arabs.

“When Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs can say to one another, ‘I love you in Jesus’ name,’ the world will see the powerful reconciliation work of the good news,” said Sered. “The only hope for peace for the Middle East is truly Jesus.”