



G20 Religion Forum (R20) Plenary Session 2:

Identifying and embracing values shared by the world's major religions and civilizations

“The aspirations of the R20 are ambitious and the obstacles great.... [but] the time is right for a multicultural, multinational effort to broaden and deepen the quest for shared civilizational values.”

~ Keynote address by Professor Mary Ann Glendon

BALI, Indonesia, 2 November 2022 — A diverse array of religious, political, business, and academic leaders gathered on the first day of the R20 Summit to discuss the urgent need to identify “shared values common to all religions, which may become the basic reference point from which we can embark upon a joint endeavor... to ensure that religion functions as a genuine and dynamic source of global solutions rather than problems” (R20 Founding Chairman KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf).

The second plenary session began with a keynote address titled “The Quest for Shared Civilizational Values,” delivered by Harvard Law Professor and former US Ambassador to the Vatican, Mary Ann Glendon. Author of the book, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Professor Glendon is a leading expert on the emergence of the post-World War II human rights project.

In her speech, Professor Glendon observed that:

The decision to incorporate this summit of religious leaders and scholars for the first time in the G20's annual meeting schedule is a landmark event, and surely most welcome to all of us here today. Yet one cannot fail to notice that it has created a certain amount of puzzlement in international policy circles. Perhaps you have heard questions like: “What has religion got to do with the aims of the G20 to promote global economic stability, growth and prosperity?” Or, “How can religion help to meet the increasing challenges to social harmony, political stability and economic growth when it has so often been a divisive element, and when religious teachings have so often been used as pretexts for violence?” And, “How can there be any shared moral and spiritual values, given the great differences among the world's cultures and religions?”

Such questions will hover in the background of our discussions today and tomorrow as we share thoughts on such challenging topics as how to deal with historical grievances, how to reconcile universal principles with respect for cultural diversity, and how to assure that religion will be a source of solutions rather than problems in years to come....

It thus seems clear that the time is right for a multicultural, multinational effort to broaden and deepen the quest for shared civilizational values. Indeed, to give up on that quest is to invite resignation to a world where force and violence rule the day....

It must be admitted that the aspirations of the R20 are ambitious and the obstacles great. So it is to be expected that they will be dismissed by many as unrealistic — just as the aims of the post-World War II human rights project were dismissed by the so-called realists of that day. Yet the 20th century human rights project proved that ideals are real, as real as earth and water. And today, as this gathering shows, there are many men and women of good will who are ready to take up the challenge of making them real again.

To be sure, the path forward will be strewn with hazards and obstacles. But it's worth remembering that the men and women who dreamed 75 years ago of an international order based on shared values were not naïve in their idealism. They had lived through two world wars and severe economic crises. After seeing human beings at their best and worst, they took encouragement from the fact that while the human race is capable of great evils, it is also capable of imagining that there are better ways to live, of articulating those shared values in declarations and constitutions, and of orienting their conduct toward the ethical norms they recognized....

Years from now, people not yet born will form opinions regarding our stewardship of the post-war generation's legacy, which was founded upon idealism tempered by realism. They will pass judgment one day on whether we enhanced or squandered the inheritance handed down by men and women who once strove to bring a standard of right from the ashes of terrible wrongs.

So I will close with profound gratitude for the decision to call this historic meeting in Bali — and with great anticipation for the results of our discussions!

Ambassador Glendon's entire address may be [read](#) or [viewed](#) online.

Prof. Glendon's keynote address was followed by a panel discussion moderated by Rebecca Supriya Shah, a Trustee of the Divya Shanthi Association in Bangalore, India. The speakers included:

- The Honorable H. Yaqut Cholil Qoumas, Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, who delivered an address titled "[Pancasila Nation and a Tale of Two Globalizations](#)."
- His Excellency Dr. Hamdan Musallam Al-Mazrouei, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Mohammed bin Zayed University for the Humanities (United Arab Emirates).
- His Excellency Andrés Pastrana Arango, President of the Centrist Democrat International and former president of the Republic of Colombia, who delivered an address titled "Western Humanism, Christian Democracy, and Humanitarian Islam: An Alliance for the Twenty-First Century."

- The Honorable M. Arsjad Rasjid P. M., Chairman of the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, or KADIN, who delivered an address titled “[Infusing Religious Values into the Realm of Business and Economics.](#)”
- Professor Alberto Melloni, Secretary of the Foundation for Religious Studies (fscire.it) and UNESCO Chair on Religious Pluralism and Peace at the University of Bologna (Italy), spoke about “The Greatness and Misery of Interreligious Dialogue.”

An excerpt of Professor Melloni’s remarks, edited for publication, appears below.

It has become customary in the past two decades, at least, to use an argument concerning interfaith dialogue that peace is the “true” use of religion, and violence is the “abuse” of religion.... However, the historian must say that facts induce us to have a certain prudence around these claims. Because history is there to tell us that religious beliefs have an inherent power to feed violence or to foster peace....

In the past decades of interfaith dialogue, we have seen many times that the same “first mile” has been traveled. The players of dialogue have sadly retraced again and again the very same first mile of dialogue, returning to the same starting point, repeating more or less the same arguments, after having achieved a platform in media or in theology from which they pretend to exhibit the non-inevitability of conflict between or inside faiths and the clash of civilizations coming from them....

There is a joke that I sometimes tell, which is that to hold conferences in which people declare that true lions are vegetarians is useless. Lions are not vegetarians, and the people of faith — human beings, for those who have read Augustine — are not vegetarians, but are dangerous. So to curb violence, you do not need to say that true lions are vegetarians. Instead, you have to take responsibility....

What religious authorities, political leaders, and intellectuals should accept as their task is to heal what Cardinal Matteo Zuppi in Bologna called the “pandemic of war.”

[In Bologna](#), what we have suggested is not therefore to launch a campaign concerning values, but to launch a campaign concerning virtues. And we wrote a little parva charta and delivered it to the G20 leaders at the Summit in Rome — a very short statement based on the idea that responsibility can be rooted in religious or non-religious persons as one of their deepest convictions....

The proposal reduced the three points into a small paper, a parva charta of just three propositions: “We will not kill one another, we will help one another, and we will forgive one another.” Commitments that require specific conditions: there is no forgiveness without truth, no succor without generosity, and no disarmament without justice.

If interfaith dialogue is simply a place in which religious leaders parrot standard opinions “in their own words,” it is destined to be a useless exercise. If theologies merely endorse the agendas of those who are most powerful in society, assimilating religious values with other [largely secular] values, this will ignite rebellion. If religious pluralism is nothing but a facile sermon on fraternity to be kindly preached, it will never become reality. If faiths only serve to provide motivational support for

economic agendas that already lie at the heart of the G20, this will become an empty effort.

On the contrary, religious leaders must adopt penance and truth, conscious that the Almighty knows everything about each of them, knows everything about each of us here, knows our intentions. And what the historian knows is that the most powerful sermons, the most powerful prophets, are those who are fully conscious that He knows — knows the sincerity of the sincerest ones, knows the ideology of the ideological ones, knows the superficiality of the superficial ones, and knows the hope for peace and desire for unity that exists among the human family.

There is a sentence of Gregory the Great: “Divina eloquia cum legente crescent.” “The Word of God grows with the one who reads it.” And I hope that the R20 will be a place in which we can read again the truth that has been revealed to us, and that offers to us a chance to assume our responsibility.

An excerpt of H.E. President Andrés Pastrana Arango’s remarks, edited for publication, appears below.

Congratulations, President Jokowi, as your people like to call you, for recognizing the R20 as an official G20 main event and for your leadership and clairvoyance in bringing these players onto a new game board. It is indeed essential to the well-being of humanity that moral and ethical values weigh equally with economic and political considerations in shaping public policy.

Today, dear President, you are making history like President Sukarno did in 1955 with the Bandung Conference, one of the most significant geopolitical events of the 20th century. With the R20, you are offering an historic opportunity to revive the spirit of the Bandung Conference and update its agenda to confront humanity’s current challenges....

And it is precisely here where we meet with the ultimate goal of the R20, as stated by our good friend Pak Yahya, Founding Chairman of the G20 Religion Forum and General Chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama: “We hope to facilitate the emergence of a global movement, in which people of good will of every faith and nation will help bring the world’s geopolitical and economic power structures into alignment with the highest moral and spiritual values, for the sake of all humanity.”

The session concluded with reflections on values shared by the world’s major religions and civilizations, delivered by His Holiness Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami (photo above), an ordained Hindu monk of the Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) and Head of the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute, Akshardham, in New Delhi, India. His address was titled “[Let us Reach out to Extend the Circle of Global Harmony.](#)”

[View R20 Plenary Session 2.](#)