



## G20 Religion Forum (R20) Plenary Session 3:

### Historical grievances, truth-telling, reconciliation, and forgiveness

***“If we are to proceed beyond the surface talk and shallow agreement typical of most interfaith gatherings, and truly be worthy to contribute to global discussions and decision-making, we must first confront the violent sectarianism amongst us.”***

***~ Keynote address by Archbishop Bashar Matti Warda***

BALI, Indonesia, 2 November 2022 — A diverse panel of religious leaders and scholars from the Middle East, South Asia, Europe, North and South America, and the Caribbean convened on the first day of the R20 Summit for a candid and wide-ranging conversation about the injustices that religious communities have inflicted upon each other throughout history. Their conversation was directly inspired by R20 Founding Chairman KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf, whose address to the opening plenary urged religious leaders “to engage in honest discourse” and “acknowledge the problems that befall us so that we can find a way out of identity-based conflict.”

In his remarks, Mr. Staquf observed:

*For centuries, human civilization has grappled with the reality of strife between religious communities. Today, we inherit a situation in which people of different faiths are engaged in competition, antagonism, and conflict motivated by religion. We still witness this crisis of conflict across the world: in West Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and even in Europe and America.*

*It is as if — because of the history of conflict between different religious communities — we have inherited a state of gridlock. The painful experiences associated with religious competition, antagonism, and conflict have lasted so long that they have ossified and become an integral part of religious establishments and their relations with others.*

*As a result, enmity has seeped into religious believers’ perceptions and teachings. We do not need to deny that our religious doctrines still contain elements that can easily be weaponized to justify competition and civilizational conflict with groups that are considered to be different.*

*It falls to us — religious leaders from across the world — to assume responsibility for this state of affairs and to find a way out for all humanity. We must make a concerted effort to analyze this state of continuous gridlock, because it is akin to smoldering embers in dry straw. Whenever and wherever a desire arises to kindle a fire — that is, to ignite competition between religious communities — religious teachings can easily be weaponized to spark conflict and worsen relations....*

*So let us build upon the enthusiasm that we see and feel here today, and engage in honest discussion. There is nothing to be afraid of, because we are here to understand and accept our differences. We will not blame each other for the past. We will not humiliate each other. We know that we come from different circumstances. Let's acknowledge our differences. Let's openly and honestly confront, together, the problems we're facing, so we can find a way out of the conflicts that engulf our respective communities and, God willing, help all of humanity in the process.*

This communiqué provides extensive excerpts from addresses delivered during the R20's third plenary session on the afternoon of Wednesday, 2 November 2022. These excerpts are intended to allow readers — including religious leaders, policy makers, scholars, journalists, and other interested parties — to readily access and understand the substantive nature of the R20's agenda and of the presentations delivered by prominent religious leaders at the R20 Summit in Bali.

Plenary Session 3 began with a keynote address titled “The Future of Religious Pluralism: A Warning from Iraq,” delivered by the Most Rev. Bashar Matti Warda, a Chaldean Catholic cleric and the Archbishop of Erbil in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Following the 2014 conquest of Mosul and the Nineveh Plains by the Islamic State, Archbishop Warda played a decisive role in securing food and shelter for displaced minority populations fleeing religious persecution at the hands of ISIS. From 2015 to 2018, Archbishop Warda worked with the Knights of Columbus to collect witnesses and evidence of ISIS atrocities. Thanks to these efforts, ISIS' treatment of Christians and Yazidis in Iraq and Syria has been widely recognized as an act of genocide and crime against humanity.

An abridged version of Archbishop Warda's address appears below.

*Today I will speak to you on the future of religious pluralism, both in the Middle East and globally. Because of my personal background and experience, this message will take the form of “a warning from Iraq,” where a failure to grow beyond the nightmare of endless sectarian violence has left us not as a functioning country, but merely a place where competing power factions act out their aggressions with impunity, and where the marginalized suffer first, last, and most.*

*Nevertheless, I come from a people of hope. And my hope and prayer in sharing our story with you is that those of us gathered here in Indonesia — and, on a much larger scale, the diverse peoples of every faith and nation — may begin to find a place of honest discussion about the realities of hatred and violence that darken both the past and the present for us all.*

*This discussion amongst our faiths will certainly be difficult, and often uncomfortable. Yet ultimately, it is necessary if we are to survive as peoples of faith, as brothers and sisters in mutual dignity, in a world that is growing ever more hostile to the moral and spiritual values that we hold dear. It is my fervent prayer that a critical mass of the world's religious leaders will have the courage to address the demons within our own communities, and the wisdom to choose a path in which our too often divided faiths may join in solidarity and contribute to the emergence of a far more stable, prosperous, and peaceful world, built upon respect for the God-given dignity of every human being....*

*Thanks to the visionary efforts of Nahdlatul Ulama, which founded the R20, and the Muslim World League, which is co-hosting this Summit, all of us assembled here have the privilege of assuming a place at the table of global discussion and decision, where the elements of faith and spiritual dignity have so often been ignored or neglected. We know that our sense of dignity, as religious believers, is inseparable from our faith. We welcome the opportunity to proclaim this openly within the context of the G20, whose discussions and decisions, directly or indirectly, impact all of humanity. However, if we are to proceed beyond the surface talk and shallow agreement typical of most interfaith gatherings — and truly be worthy to contribute to global discussions and decision-making at the highest level — we must first confront the violent sectarianism amongst us. And it is the confronting of this violence which I will address today....*

*We Iraqi Christians now face an existential struggle. It is possibly the last struggle we will confront in Iraq. The most recent immediate cause is the ISIS terror that led to the displacement of more than 125,000 Christians from our historical homelands and left us, in a single night, without shelter and refuge, without work or properties, without churches and monasteries, without the ability to participate in any of the things which give one a life of dignity: family visits, celebration of weddings and births, the sharing of sorrows. Our tormentors stole our present while they blew up our past and did all within their power to destroy our future.*

*And yet we are still there. Scourged, battered, and wounded. Yet still there. And having survived thus far, to this point of near finality, we have been granted a position of clarity and courage that we have perhaps lacked, or avoided, up until this time. And in this we can no longer ignore what has been a relentless persecution of our people for nearly a millennium and a half. The time for addressing the difficult reality of our situation is directly upon us.*

*When a people have nothing left to lose, in some sense it is very liberating, and from this position of clarity and new-found courage, I must speak to you honestly on behalf of my people and speak to you the truth. Please understand that this truth comes, ultimately, from a place of love and forgiveness for all.*

*And the truth is that there is a fundamental crisis of violence within Islam itself which in the year 2022 can no longer be ignored. This crisis of violence continues to affect the entire Middle East, Africa, Asia and beyond. And if this crisis is not acknowledged, addressed, and fixed, then ultimately there can be no future for Christians or any other form of religious pluralism in the Middle East. Indeed, there is little reason to see a future for anyone in the Middle East, including within the Islamic world itself, other than in the context of continued violence, revenge, and hatred. And as we have seen too many times, this violence, once unleashed, overtakes us all....*

*Prior to the ISIS horror of 2014, we Iraqi Christians had historically attempted to maintain a dialogue of coexistence with Muslims, unequal though it may have been. In this dialogue we refrained from speaking honestly and truthfully to our Muslim rulers in order to simply survive and live quietly. We would not openly face the long history of recurring violence against us. We did not push back against the constantly recurring periods of extremism that inflicted such pain and violence against the innocents, both Muslim and Christian alike. But following the horror of ISIS there is*

*nothing left for us now but to speak plainly and truthfully: for the sake of humanity, including the followers of Islam themselves, it must be addressed openly and honestly.*

*Apologists for the history of the last 1,400 years of oppression against Mideast Christians will point to the various periods of Islamic tolerance of minorities as the possible and desired alternative to the other periods of violence and persecution. One cannot deny that such periods of relative tolerance have existed. And yet all such periods of tolerance have been a one-way experience, in which the Islamic rulers decide, according to their own judgment, whether the Christians and other non-Muslims are to be tolerated in their beliefs or not. It has never been a question of equality. Fundamentally, in the eyes of Islam as practiced in the Middle East, we Christians and all other non-Muslims are not to be treated as equal to Muslims, only to be tolerated or not, depending upon the intensity of the spirit of Jihad that prevails at the time....*

*So where, we ask, is there hope for the future in any of this? Should an ancient, peaceful people, be allowed to simply perish without comment, without objection? It seems an almost absurd question to ask in these modern times, does it not? Well then, we object. We object that one faith should have the right to kill and marginalize another. We object. And we say that if there is to be any future for the Christians — and other religious minorities — of Iraq and the Middle East, there must be a fundamental correction away from sectarian violence and marginalization, and towards the quiet and humble acceptance of the human dignity within us all, Muslim and Christian alike.*

*What then is the truth of the Iraqi Christian experience over the past decade? How should we look at the terror that was, and still is, ISIS? When asking whether ISIS was truly an “Islamic State” or a distortion of Islamic theology, consider the following words, quoted during the ISIS war in Time Magazine:*

*“Western politicians should stop pretending that extremism and terrorism have nothing to do with Islam. There is a clear relationship between fundamentalism, terrorism, and the basic assumptions of Islamic orthodoxy. So long as we lack consensus regarding this matter, we cannot gain victory over fundamentalist violence within Islam.”*

*and:*

*“Within the classical tradition, the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is assumed to be one of segregation and enmity. Perhaps there were reasons for this during the Middle Ages, when the tenets of Islamic orthodoxy were established, but in today’s world such a doctrine is unreasonable. To the extent that Muslims adhere to this view of Islam, it renders them incapable of living harmoniously and peacefully within the multi-cultural, multi-religious societies of the 21st century.”*

*These words came not from some right-wing political figure in the West, but from the leader of the largest Muslim organization in the world — Indonesian Islamic leader Yahya Cholil Staquf. As you are all aware, His Excellency Pak Yahya was the driving force behind this R20 Summit, and I am grateful to him not only for that effort, but for*

*allowing this most important discussion to take place in the open light of day. In any case, we cannot run from it, any of us here.*

*We live at a tipping point of history, one in which an aggressive secularism seeks to drive all elements of faith into oblivion, and with it all the basic principles of the sacred nature of life, of family, of our obligation to our Creator. And while I am personally convinced that the world of faith will ultimately prevail, it cannot do so when the constant face of our world of faith is one of violence against the other, or even against ourselves.*

*At the heart of this discussion lies the question of interpretation, or lack thereof, of the sacred texts to which we all, in our various faiths, struggle to adhere. Will our faith communities continue to accept, and act upon, superficial and violent interpretations of our faiths — which allow us to torment others, while we remain certain of our own moral righteousness? Or will we, as peoples of faith, evolve to something greater and deeper, a place where the culture of faith is always and everywhere understood to be a universal blessing, because it is a culture of life? My dear brothers and sisters, we people of faith can lead the world in this direction, if only we dare to try. If only, in each of our faiths, we hypocrites can remove the logs from our own eyes, as Christ asked of us, before pointing out the speck of dust in our brothers' eyes.*

*Historically, we Christians have certainly played the role of hypocrites ourselves and often embraced the most radical and violent interpretations of our faith. The disastrous consequences may be seen in the brutal, faith-driven wars that ravaged Europe for nearly two centuries, and the persecution of heretics and apostates that began soon after the conversion of Rome to Christianity. Christians, no less than members of other faiths, have committed immense atrocities in war, including horrific violence against innocents, women, and children. We can never forget that the Holocaust occurred primarily within the heart of "Christian Europe." In my own religious community, it was not until the Second Vatican Council in 1962 that the Roman Catholic Church embraced freedom of conscience in religious matters as essential to the "dignity of man." And we need only to look at the news of today to find, once again, Christians killing Christians, brother against brother.*

*Yet out of this evolving history I bring you to our Iraqi Christian experience today in which there is, perhaps, an example of hope. What you will not hear from our people is any demand for revenge or reprisals. We are a very imperfect people, and no doubt when we stand in our final judgment our own sins will be found to have been great. And yet I can say to you, we Iraqi Christians turned away from violence, and towards the difficult path of forgiveness....*

*Is change towards true coexistence, slow and difficult though it may be, truly possible?*

*Fundamentally, in the Middle East this change in direction can only come about as the conscious work of the Islamic world itself. I stand before you as both the leader of innocent victims and a most deeply interested observer, and dare I say it, a friend. But I am under no illusion that I, or any other non-Muslim, can force this change. I can suggest a path and tell of the consequences to the victims on the road of*

*destruction already traveled, but it remains with the world of Islam itself to make these choices on its own....*

*Earlier in this talk I referenced the unique horrors of the last decades as having roots which lie in part outside the historical issues of sectarian religious violence. I speak here of geo-political actions, largely Western, which were inflicted upon us by people claiming to have meant well. We pray that these planners and decision makers can today find, finally, the humility to recognize that their theories and actions, which over the past decades have become our horrific reality, have been almost universally wrong, based in fundamentally flawed assessments of the Iraqi people and situation. We have likewise seen this same flawed thinking in far too many conflicts and failures around the world in these last decades. And in these mistaken policies and strategies, designed in comfort and safety from afar, hundreds of thousands of innocent people in my country were killed. An entire country was ripped apart and left to the jackals.*

*This horror all began with policy makers and planners, and we beg those who will be assembled in the forthcoming G20 summit, those who continue to have access in shaping policy for the world, to daily remember that your global planning decisions have life or death consequences for the people living on the outside. Please, I implore you, walk humbly and make sure that you truly understand the reality of the people on whom you are passing sentence. Be mindful of the fact that coldly considered economic policies, lacking in any proper spiritual understanding of human dignity and mercy, can kill the innocents and the marginalized just as brutally and surely as poorly considered geopolitical policies, regardless of how well-intentioned either might be.*

The complete text of Archbishop Warda's keynote address, "[The Future of Religious Pluralism: A Warning from Iraq](#)," may be read online.

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Archbishop Warda's keynote address was followed by a panel discussion moderated by Stephen Rasche, Vice Chancellor of the Catholic University of Erbil (USA/Iraq). The speakers included:

- Professor Tariq Mansoor, Vice Chancellor of India's Aligarh Muslim University, who spoke about "Conflict and Cooperation in Pre-Modern Indian History";
- Sri Swapan Dasgupta, an Indian writer and former Member of Parliament, who delivered an address titled "Truth Alone Triumphs";
- Rev. Christian Krieger, President of the Conference of European Churches (France), who addressed "The Legacy of Intra-Religious Conflict within Christianity: Lessons from the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre";
- Prof. Alexandre Brasil Fonseca, Vice Rector of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), who spoke about "The Role of Religion in Fostering Peace and Equality in Latin America"; and

- Dr. Jacqueline C. Rivers, Executive Director of the Seymour Institute for Black Church and Policy Studies (Jamaica), whose speech was titled “From Truth to Reconciliation, Forgiveness, and Peaceful Co-Existence”
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An excerpt of Prof. Tariq Mansoor’s remarks, edited for publication, appears below.

*Since time immemorial, India has been a land that has attracted numerous invaders and conquerors. It has also been a land of opportunities, where many trading and mercantile communities migrated and prospered.... If one reads the Rig Veda and compares it with the Zend Avesta, we discover that many intellectual and cultural exchanges took place between those who lived in what we call India today, and the region of Fars, or modern Iran. Some of these contacts with the outside world were quite violent in the initial stages, but ultimately resulted in mutual give and take. For example, the invasions by Greeks, Scythians, Achaemenids, and Huns. The invasions of Alexander and Seleucus are particularly well known.*

*Those who invaded India since ancient times included many ethnicities and religious groups, including the Greeks, Mongols, Iranians, Turks, Arabs, Portuguese, French, Dutch, English, etc. But each conquering ethnic group or religion was to contribute to the development of an all-encompassing Indian culture.*

*One invasion, which most of us remember for its brutality, was the invasion of the Ghaznavid ruler, Sultan Mahmud. During his multiple invasions, many cities were devastated and many places of worship, including ancient Hindu Temples, were harmed. Some Muslim rulers also imposed discriminatory policies such as additional taxes on non-Muslims. Despite all this, a number of Muslim rulers stood for harmony and tolerance, and there were periods marked by peaceful co-existence. It was not always conflict. Interactions also led to new sciences, new modes of architecture and construction, the development of the art of making paper, the distillation of wine, the evolution of new languages, and numerous other innovations.*

*Let me highlight the role of a few Muslim rulers who stood for unity and peace....*

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An excerpt of Sri Swapan Dasgupta’s remarks, edited for publication, appears below.

*Obfuscation and denial [of traumatic historical events] has only worsened the situation and created a mismatch between what can be called the official narrative and popular perception [of Indian history]. And when popular perceptions take over in a democracy, that is what really rules the roost in electoral politics. So, this is one basic area which has to be addressed: the entire question of history, of how frontally do we address the rough edges of history, especially when religious conflict and the loss of political sovereignty converged at some point.*

*Here is an important point which we find in India, where the conflicts of a certain religion [i.e., the Muslim conquest] and the loss of political sovereignty [by Hindus] actually met at some point. And I think that this is a problem which will need to be addressed very, very seriously. Because if we are to get healthy, wholesome politics, which believes in harmony, which believes in nation building, [which believes in] taking all the people along, there has to be some form — at least in the history books, in the official narrative — of truth and reconciliation.*

*But that's not all. I think there is another aspect which needs to be dealt with. The earlier speaker, the honorable Vice Chancellor from Aligarh Muslim University, spoke quite rightly about the fact that the important thing in India is that 90 percent of Indian Muslims are basically converts. And this is also true, perhaps mostly, of the Christian community as well.*

*There is a practice in Australia, which I find very appealing, whereby whenever any public function occurs, they first acknowledge their debt to the indigenous communities whose lands had been appropriated at one point. I do not necessarily mean that this practice should be adopted [in India], but what is important is that a certain measure of historical continuity has got to be absorbed into the official psyche.*

*[Instead, what we have had is] a complete mental break from the past, a dismissal of what existed in the past. [But] a change of faith does not necessarily mean a change of nationality. That idea is very important to put across. Until that is [acknowledged and publicly internalized], we are likely to get a situation where popular feelings of “They belong somewhere else, we belong here” will continue to recur.*

*And it is in this realm that religious leaders of both [Hindu and Muslim] communities, who are responsible for popular religious practices, have a very, very large contribution to make. But [efforts to transform popular religious perceptions and practices] can only succeed if they are complemented by the works of scholars and historians, who must abandon a policy of denial and squeamishness and address these issues frontally.*

*So what I am suggesting here is that meetings such as this — where the G20 can actually address the question of religion frontally — should talk about theology, sometimes bluntly. Awkward issues need to be raised, but with the larger purpose being [the development and promotion of] a wholesome citizenship, which is the ultimate objective. Peace and common development for all — that should be the primary goal.*

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An excerpt of Rev. Christian Krieger's remarks, edited for publication, appears below.

*On 24 August 1572, Saint Bartholomew's Day, and in the days that followed, more than 3,000 Protestants were brutally mutilated and murdered in Paris. This massacre initiated a disastrous wave of assassinations that set the kingdom of France on fire and produced more than 10,000 victims in a few weeks. Perpetrated by the Catholics,*

*with the complacency of the kingdoms, this terrible massacre of Protestants left a lasting mark on people's consciences in France and more widely in Europe.*

*On 16 September 2022, precisely 450 years after the massacre, the religious authorities of Protestantism and Catholicism, heirs of both the victims and the perpetrators of that time, inaugurated together, in the heart of the Louvre district in Paris, a memorial garden of the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre.*

*How could the heirs of this bloody symbol of religious fanaticism, some of whom are the bearers of a memorial wound of victimhood and others the heirs of an embarrassing responsibility, unite their voices to finally inscribe, 450 years after the events, the memory of the victims in the Parisian urban landscape? This is the purpose of the contribution I have been asked to make. I will try to do so by means of four remarks.*

### *I. Situating the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre*

*The attempt to reform Christianity, initiated by Martin Luther in 1517, met with the firm opposition of Pope Leo X, and as a result, it developed into a major schism, the second in the history of Western Christianity.... Eight religiously motivated civil wars took place in the kingdom of France between 1562 and 1598, pitting supporters of Catholicism against supporters of Protestantism (the 'Huguenots') in military operations that could go as far as a pitched battle. The Catholics were generally supported by the royal power and its army, but both sides had their own military forces. For some decades, periods of armed conflict alternated with times of peace.*

*In 1572, in order to seal religious peace in the kingdom, the Catholic Marguerite de Valois (sister of the King), married the Protestant Henri de Navarre (future Henri IV). Protestant warlords were invited to Paris for the wedding. The streets were festive, because peace was finally offered as a possible future.*

*It was then that history took a turn for the worse. On 22 August, Gaspard de Coligny, the military leader of the Protestants, was the target of an attempted assassination. Late in the evening of 23 August, the king held a council. Worried about a resumption of the war, he signed the death warrant for the Protestant leaders. These assassinations, followed by those of about twenty Protestant notables, liberated and galvanized the hatred of the crowds, who were not content to simply kill their Protestant neighbors, but also to mutilate their bodies.... They dehumanized them to foreshadow the eternal condemnation they believed was promised to them. The decapitated and emasculated bodies were thrown into the Seine, which, as far as the eye could see, carried human remains in its blood-red waters.*

*A terrible barbarism was prepared for a long time by religious fanaticism, which was only waiting for a spark to unleash the hatred and release the ardor of the massacres towards those who had always been their neighbors. The provinces were soon to follow suit and mimic the appalling carnage. Without being premeditated, the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre was prepared during decades of hatred and persecution, so much so that it is clear that there is a troubling continuity between the time before and the time of the crime. The so-called Saint Bartholomew's Day*

*Massacre has entered the collective consciousness as a bloody symbol of religious fanaticism and the tyranny of the great....*

#### *IV. Healing memories*

*But overcoming conflict is not enough, we must also heal the wounds of memory. This notion of memorial wound was inspired by the philosopher Olivier Abel. He wants to describe the humiliation that an identity wound produces over time and how it is transformed into persistent resentment, even violence and hatred. By virtue of a memorial wound, “peoples remain humiliated...from generation to generation, with this terrible time lag that the descendants of the guilty are not really guilty, and do not feel so, whereas the descendants of the victims are still often victims, or feel so.” Humiliation, let us say, is much more serious in the long run than pure and simple violence, and this is what poisons violence, when the enemy is held in contempt.*

*We cannot change history, but we can change the influence it has on us. The time for healing memories is precisely that time which comes in a conflict when the use of weapons has been suspended, and the cycle of violence interrupted in favor of dialogue which aims to find a peaceful solution to the dispute. Then comes the time of reconciliation, which aims to establish a lasting peace, the time when swords are turned into ploughshares (Micah 4:1-4). For time alone is not enough to heal memories.*

*Reconciliation is needed to heal the wounds of memory, those humiliations that are the seeds of tomorrow’s conflicts. It is an opportunity to convert the hatred of otherness into respect and the resentments into fraternity, and thus to breathe life into the ethics of peace. One of the key moments in this process of healing memories is that of writing together the common account of the facts, a work of truth that justice requires in order to allow access to a logic of reconciliation, even forgiveness.*

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An excerpt of Prof. Alexandre Fonseca’s remarks, edited for publication, appears below.

*At the end of the twentieth century the world witnessed an unexpected religious resurgence. Religious disputes with global dimensions gained visibility and highlighted the presence of “public religion”....*

*In Brazil, current estimates are that 55% of the population are Catholic and 30% are evangelical, of which the majority are Pentecostal. The latter are 17% of the population, or 35 million, which means Brazil has the largest contingent of Pentecostals in the world. In some circumstances, these believers have acted as agents of social emancipation and promotion of human rights, demonstrating a potential to contribute to social transformation, especially considering their disproportionate presence among women, the poor, and black people — generally located in the shanty-towns and on the urban peripheries....*

*Latin America was the birthplace of Liberation Theology, which emerged from Catholicism and sought to develop a socially engaged Christian faith. In the*

*evangelical world, there is the Theology of Integral Mission, which emphasizes the importance of contextualization. This, in a continent such as Latin America, was the basis for Christian groups that sought social emancipation and the tackling of inequalities and racism.*

*The dialogue of these Christian theologies with the work of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire was important. I would emphasize here the concept of conscientização (awareness-raising), the result of a process in which people look around themselves with greater clarity. Conscientização is an act of knowledge, a critical approach to reality....*

*Conscientização invites us to dare to assume a utopian stance towards the world. Freire understands utopia as creating a dialectic between the acts of denouncing and announcing: the act of denouncing dehumanizing structures, on the one hand, and announcing humanizing structures, on the other. The more aware we become, the more able we are to be both announcers and denouncers.*

*The examples of denouncers of Latin American reality are abundant: leaders who confront inequalities by peaceful means and through dialogue, and Christians who denounce situations of injustice and announce ways of solving them. As in the Gospel parable inviting followers of Christ to be both “salt” and “light,” they are the light that exposes and denounces and the salt that preserves and announces. The announcement-denunciation tension illustrates the role carried out by a segment of the churches in Latin America....*

*In Peru, the action of evangelical leaders was central in the process of national reconciliation. Grave conflicts were overcome and democracy was strengthened, through a process of conscientização.... Violent acts and armed conflicts were occurring, but the Peace and Hope organization was able to involve diverse segments of society, build bridges and establish effective and broad action for promoting and defending human rights. In the Brazilian case, religious groups represent a vehicle capable of building a bridge between civil society and the State, involving significant sectors in promoting peace and actions that contribute to strengthening democracy and overcoming inequalities and racism. There are numerous examples of such a dynamic.*

*For this, it is key that the dominant posture among religions is one which defends pluralism, the democratization of the State, the valuing of citizen participation and the peaceful resolution of domestic and international conflicts. As shown in the experience of Peace and Hope, it is possible to act by constructing and maintaining broad networks that take up an agenda around progress on social questions; around diminishing violence, hate speech and inequalities; around facing up to racism, xenophobia and misogyny; and around the promotion of a form of development that is sustainable and that values respect for diversity and social inclusion.*

An excerpt of Dr. Jacqueline Rivers's remarks, edited for publication, appears below.

*This is a conference in the tradition of the Bandung Conference of 1955. The nation of Indonesia is again playing a leading role on the global stage, advocating once again for peaceful co-existence among the nations and for the eradication of racial and religious prejudice and violence. I am humbled by the thought that I might in some very small way recall the role played by Richard Wright, the great black American novelist, who wrote about the Bandung conference in order to insist that the Western world pay attention to this assertion of sovereignty among newly independent nations.*

*I speak at this event as a black woman, a Jamaican. I speak as a Christian, redeemed by the death and resurrection of Christ. I speak as a humble servant of Jesus Christ who has sought to serve the poor, living in impoverished neighborhoods to bring hope, reduce violence and improve education for African Americans facing daunting structural obstacles. I speak as a lecturer who seeks to raise issues of racial inequity and Christian responsibility in universities and conferences in the United States. I speak as an advocate for religious freedom who seeks to advance the right of every human being to respond to his or her God-given conscience, to embrace faith in whichever religion seems right to him, or to reject all religion. I speak as one who deeply believes that only that freedom enables true faith, to be expressed through private devotion, corporate worship and action in the public square.*

*It is through these lenses and with these limitations that I speak. But it is also with respect for the many and widely varying religious traditions that are represented at this conference. Though I speak from my own background and experiences and commitments, I hope to appeal to the common thought and shared values that we are here to uphold today.*

*This panel is one on grievances and truth-telling. That is a very heavy charge in a world suffering from ubiquitous evil. There is much to confess. But confession is the first step to living in peace. So, in the spirit of confession, I would like to mention just one of the many examples of oppressive behavior carried out under the banner of Christianity. The conquest of the so-called New World by European powers starting in the fifteenth century was often justified in part by religious claims.*

*The Roman Catholic Popes of that era claimed that lands that were inhabited by people not deemed to be the social equals of Europeans were subject to conquest by nations such as Spain. On the strength of this claim the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean were subjected to near slavery in the encomienda system. They were worked brutally hard, isolated from key food sources and exposed to diseases to which they had no resistance. These peoples were subjected to mass baptisms, supposed conversions to Christianity.*

*Surely actions such as these are among the historical grievances that we must address. As a Christian, I have spoken of the sins of the Christians, but which of us can say that we are not guilty of some wrongdoing? To achieve reconciliation, we must all confront our own shortcomings....*

*Forgiveness is the healing balm that not only frees the perpetrator but also soothes the wounds of those who forgive. In the Christian tradition, forgiveness is central to our core beliefs. God the Father forgives us our sins through the death and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Repentance, turning away from the harm we perpetrate, unlocks forgiveness. It is the key to accessing God's forgiveness. And to accessing the forgiveness of those we have wronged. But we are called to practice forgiveness even of those who do not repent. God commands us to do as He does, to forgive as He has forgiven us....*

*Forgiveness is possible, my friends! It is possible. Think of the members of Mother Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. These faithful African American Christians were attacked by a terrorist, Dylann Roof. These people welcomed Dylann Roof into their Bible study. They worshipped and prayed with him for an hour, and then he turned on them and murdered nine of them. Yet they did not seek revenge. Instead, the people of Mother Emmanuel Church forgave Roof; even people who had lost their mothers forgave Roof. Some forgave him within 48 hours of the shooting....*

*We too must do the same. Whatever our tradition of faith, we are created by the same God, we share a common humanity, we all suffer pain when we are wronged, we all stumble; we all do wrong ourselves; we all have access to God's forgiveness. We can all experience the peace that comes from God. So, we must all confess our wrongdoing. We must all forgive those who wrong us. Through the strength that comes from God's divine power we must pursue reconciliation. We must seek God's strength to forgive. We must love as He loves us. We can do it!*

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