

Russian, U.S., Chinese Address Rhodes Forum

Vladimir Yakunin (Russia)

Excerpt from the keynote by the World Public Forum (WPF) founding president, and president of the Russian Railways company, titled, “Diversity of Civilizations as a Vehicle for Attaining Successful Global Changes,” Oct. 4. Translated by EIR.

Today, many people in the world realize that all the passion and the efforts of those who initiated the establishment of a global world with a new economy, new politics, and a new democratic organization of the world community on the Anglo-Saxon model, were based on the notion of it being possible and necessary to effect as rapid as possible a progressive transformation of human life, regardless of civilizational context. But, consciously or not, what was left out was not only the fact that mankind is capable of changing dynamically in the process of self-development, but also that this phenomenon is inseparably connected with making use of accumulated historical experience and the particular features of the traditional and unique cultures and religions which are proper to various civilizations, i.e., of the invariable



Vladimir Yakunin of Russia

components of their spiritual and material life. . . .

West and East alike face a common problem, namely that political and economic imbalances have built up since the end of World War II; the community of nations has reached a point where, unless they come to their senses in time, destruction and decay of the very foundations of the civilized world order may begin. . . .

British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher once employed this metaphor: “The veneer of civilization is very thin.” The political meaning of her words became clear during the Yugoslavia crisis, when Mrs. Thatcher promised the obstinate Yugoslavs to bomb them back to the Stone Age. The threat was carried out, and ever since, bombing and armed interventions have become, in the view of Western politicians, virtually a legitimate means of knocking sense into anyone who disagrees with Western ways of democratizing their societies and liberalizing the economy in their countries.

Here, indeed, “precedent law,” which the British are so fond of, has been applied. And now, 50 years after the brutal Cuban Missiles Crisis, we may again witness the very same kind of development of events. Under present conditions, however, it will be insufficient for just the leaders of the two superpowers to reach agreement on standing down. There needs to be a responsible and effective dialogue. . . .

The systemic crisis of the liberal-economic foundations of the world system, which now has struck, has placed on the agenda



The Rhodes Forum was created in opposition to Samuel Huntington's thesis of the inevitable “clash of civilizations.”

the question of long-term strategies as guarantees for the preservation of statehood, freedom, and the survival of the entire system of international and intercivilizational relations, formed over millennia. The time has come to acknowledge that civilizationally well-grounded projects are the ones that contain the greatest potential for agreeing, through dialogue, on the foundations of a more stable and just world order. . . .

The world cannot stay poised forever in a state of such tense disequilibrium, which is fraught with the danger of exacerbation and conflicts. The world needs greater certainty and a greater ability to predict future events, as well as a foundation for long-term relations based not merely on pragmatic interests, but also on profound spiritual aspirations.

We are now witnessing the destruction of the illusions of the unipolar world. In this situation, it is important for us to understand that a transition to the realities of a multipolar world does not happen all by itself: As illusions are destroyed, the desire to preserve unipolar influence in the world remains.

It seems to us that the way out of the dead end of the collapsing ideology of globalism, in addition to preserving the real content of the integrative processes of world development, is to be found, above all, in recognizing the primacy of international law in a polycentric world. What form this will take is a difficult problem, which is to be resolved in dialogue. But it is absolutely obvious that it must ultimately be based upon, inclusively, recognition of the uniqueness and the special historical and cultural features of various civilizational images of the world.

Especially important today is mutual understanding among peoples in the humanities and public life. Today we are witnessing the end of the epoch of chaotic globalization. One outcome of that epoch is to have cast doubt on the belief that some absolute universal forms of humanistic values exist.

Regarding the concept of “democracy,” we see a general tendency toward the formation of democratic regimes that little resemble, for example, the ones in North America, where the very idea seems to have been completely devalued and has acquired the status of a commodity that can be sold, bought, or imposed according to a fixed standard (the commodification of democracy). As for human rights, it is worth listening to the opinion that the institution of a formal set of civil rights and freedoms at the national level should pro-

mote the conception of the dignity of the human individual that is proper to a specific civilization. In any event, human rights must not suppress or contradict the conception of human dignity upon which a given civilization is based and which constitutes its human essence.

By no means, in my view, do these differences indicate that the world is entering a period of relativism with respect to values. It only means that the world is entering a period of genuine civilizational diversity. And we ought to recognize this and learn to live in this reality. . . .

Fred Dallmayr (U.S.A.)

Excerpts from “Who Are We? What Is WPF-Dialogue of Civilizations?,” a speech by WPF co-chairman Prof. Fred Dallmayr, of the University of Notre Dame, to the Forum in October 2011, and reprinted for this event.

At this plenary session—and with a view toward our 10th anniversary next year—it seems proper to ask: Who are we? What are we trying to do? What is this World Public Forum? What kind of organization is it? Now, on a purely formal level, this question can easily be answered: it is an NGO (a non-governmental organization) concerned with or committed to the cultivation of a global public forum in the context of a dialogue of civilizations. So far so good. But what kind of commitment is it? What really does the phrase World Public Forum mean or entail?

Let me proceed *ex contrario*, that is, by indicating what the World Public Forum is not. We are not a government or a governmental institution—although we maintain friendly relations with many governments. Nor are we an inter-governmental organization, like the UN, UNESCO, or WHO—although we often support the agendas of these organizations. Like all NGOs, we operate on the level of civil society, actually a global civil society, and our concern is with everything that touches the public life of the world community. This is how we differ in principle from the World Economic Forum and the World Social Forum. The point is that basically all issues can touch public life—including private or family issues, economic issues, cultural and religious issues, educational issues, including the education of the young generation or youth. . . .

Continuing the topic of what we are not: We are not a political party, either on the left or on the right. We do



Fred Dallmayr of the United States

not run election campaigns and do not sponsor candidates for political office in any country. There are other things we are not. We are not a business or a corporation. We are not assembled for economic gain. If anything, WPF is an organization not for profit. This does not mean that we do not have many economists and business leaders participating in WPF—and they are always welcome and appreciated.

We are also not a strictly academic organization. We are not a History Association or a Sociological Association or a British or American Political Science Association. This does not mean that we do not have historians, sociologists, political scientists, and other academics in our midst—and we welcome and appreciate their presence. However, our purpose is different. The associations I mentioned exist basically for academic and career objectives: for the promotion of the study of history, sociology, politics, and the career advancement of practitioners in these fields. We do not promote careers or serve narrowly professional interests.

Nor are we a church or a religious organization or religious sect—although we have many religious people and also members of the clergy in our midst and we welcome their presence. We do not promote religion or any kind of religious belief, nor do we oppose religion or religious belief. Our concern is rather the question: To which extent do religions or religious beliefs further or obstruct a viable public life in the world? This is a legitimate question in a global public forum.

Finally, we are not a social club existing simply for the enjoyment of members—although we, of course,

hope that members or participants also enjoy our conferences as well as each other's company....

So, this leaves then the question: What and who are we, if we are not all these things? Here I have to come back to the commitment I mentioned at the beginning: the commitment to a world public forum in the context of dialogue of civilizations. Again, I ask: What kind of commitment is this, if it is not a professional or career commitment, not a religious or clerical (church-related) commitment, a commitment not for profit? Well, it can only be a moral or ethical commitment: a commitment to a world where public affairs are settled not by brute force, warfare, and military might, but by reasoned discourse of

participants in a public arena; a commitment to the prospect of a dialogue among civilizations in contrast to the clash of civilizations. Such an ethical commitment does not come easy. It has to be cultivated and nurtured diligently, from early childhood to adult life, and in all societies and all walks of life. It also requires strength of character and a sense of responsibility. It requires of us to stand up and speak out if brute force and military might take the lead and threaten to undermine social justice and peace.

Thus, our Forum cannot fail to be troubled by political, economic, cultural, and religious crises as they flare up around the world. In all these instances, our stand is bound to be to discourage or oppose rash, reckless or violent solutions and to encourage calm, peaceful, and dialogical efforts to settle existing disputes with a view toward reaching the greatest possible justice for all sides. The standard or goal of dialogue in the World Public Forum is not discussion for the sake of discussion, but the achievement or at least approximation of peace with justice.

To give examples: The Forum is concerned about the present situation in the Middle East which, as we know, can (unless contained) flare up into a monstrous conflagration. We are troubled by the stalled peace process in that region, and the lack of serious efforts to resume the process. We are also deeply troubled by designs for military intervention and externally engineered regime change in some countries' designs which are in violation of international law and also frequently have the flavor of neo-colonialism and imperialism....

Sienho Yee (China)

Excerpt from “*The International Law of Co-Progressiveness and the Co-Progressiveness of Civilizations*,” by Professor Yee of Wuhan University, Institute of International Law.



Sienho Yee of China

At the end of his 1996 book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Samuel Huntington said that “The futures of both peace and civilization depend on understanding and cooperation among the political, spiritual, and intellectual leaders of the world’s major civilizations.” I have a hunch that just understanding and cooperation may not be enough to ensure a good future for us. It is possible that we may understand each other quite well, and we may cooperate, but our different perspectives may remain, get entrenched, and become irreconcilable. The step taken from irreconcilable differences is pivotal. It can help us to assure a good future for us, if that step is taken with a bent for progressiveness, within the framework of the international law of co-progressiveness. Here I will highlight the features of this framework and then explore the role of civilizations within the framework. . . .

Making the Promoter Role Effective: As a strong special promoter of the co-progressiveness of international society, a civilization will have to struggle with some problems in order for that role to be effective.

First of all, a civilization has, itself, to be a progressive one. If it is not, then that civilization may run the risk of being considered not practicing what it preaches and its effectiveness will suffer substantially. How a civilization becomes progressive is a difficult question. Usually, it is internally driven. Internally driven progress also lasts a long time. Of course, it can also be externally induced, just as personal liberty can be. Worse yet, it can also be externally coerced. How such a situation is evaluated, I will leave for another day.

Secondly, a civilization must be able to manage its inter-civilizational relations with others in a satisfactory manner so that all civilizations become co-pro-

gressive. Of course, this is the most difficult question and there is no silver bullet to solve this problem. Assuming that between civilizations there should never be any malice or intentional harm and that all inclusiveness is a virtue, I offer additional three tools here: 1) a “two-man mindedness” attitude when taking action; 2) a Thomas Henry Sanderson lens when perceiving a disadvantage; and 3) benign competition. I will explain these one by one.

The “two-man mindedness” attitude: This was given a chance to find a place in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but did not make it there because of, probably, the Tower of Babel. Mary Ann Glendon related this to us in her book on the drafting of the Universal Declaration.¹ During the drafting process, the working group added to René Cassin’s draft preamble the sentence that “All men are brothers.” Being endowed with reason and members of one family, they are free and equal in dignity and rights.

Then, the Confucianist who participated in the drafting, Mr. P.C. Chang, [Glendon wrote], “suggested that besides naming ‘reason’ as an essential human attribute, the article ought to include another concept. What he had in mind, he said, was a Chinese word that in literal translation meant ‘two-man mindedness’ but which might be expressed in English as ‘sympathy,’ or ‘consciousness of one’s fellow men.’ The word was *ren*, a composite of the characters for ‘man’ and ‘two.’

“A word emblematic of an entire worldview and way of life, *ren* has no precise counterpart in English. To Cassin, it would surely have evoked Rousseau’s notion of compassion, but that word, too, fell short of the mark. Chang’s suggestion was accepted, but his idea was rendered awkwardly by adding the words ‘and conscience’ after ‘reason.’ (That unhappy word choice not only obscured Chang’s meaning, but gave ‘conscience’ a far from obvious sense, quite different from its normal usage in phrases such as ‘freedom of conscience.’)”

If individuals adopt such an attitude, probably there would not have been those insulting cartoons or movies and the aftermath. If a civilization adopts such an attitude, there would be fewer occasions for tension or worse.

1. Mary Ann Glendon, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: Random House, 2001). Editor’s footnote.