

The Struggle for Peace

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Charles Malik

This is a moment of great anxiety in the history of the world. Just for this reason and because God exists and oversees the whole thing, this is a moment of great hope. Ours is an age of the possibility of great heroism, if only we attend to the problems and throw ourselves on the great possibilities. Never before was the opportunity open for so many men and women to rise to the highest pitch of heroism in every walk of life as it is today. Whether it be in science or industry, whether it be in politics or international relations, in literature or in the realms of the spirit, this is the moment to create and be. It all depends on whether you appraise the problems precisely and profoundly and whether you have it in you, constitutionally and morally, to grasp the possibilities and throw yourself wholeheartedly upon them. It all depends, in brief, on whether you are called to the heroic stature of the moment.

Anxiety of Vietnam

We are all anxious about the war in Vietnam. Is it a hopeless struggle? Is it a meaningless one? Do the objectives justify the sacrifices incurred? When will it come to an end? How will it come to an end? May it lead to the Third World War? Such being the decisive place of America in the world today, these questions are asked at the deepest level of human conscience, not only by you, but throughout the world. Whatever vitally affects America vitally affects the world.

We are all anxious about the situation in the Middle East. Has the war of last June [1967] brought us closer to, or has it taken us farther away from, real peace and real stability in that vital region of the globe? What are the conditions for peace and stability? Can the Arabs and the Israelis agree on them? Can the interests of the great powers in this region be so reconciled as to enable them to help in promoting a just and lasting settlement? These are some of the questions that arise. And whoever is able to penetrate into the depths and to have something to share and above all to do about them will be one of the heroes of this age.

We are all anxious about the United Nations, and whether it has lived up to the expectations originally placed upon it. So much happens in the world without the United Nations doing anything about it that one is forced to ask, "Has the United Nations failed? Why is it so impotent?"

What indeed has it done? Have we outgrown it altogether? And, can anything be done to lift it out of its paralysis and helplessness?

We are all anxious about China. At the present rate of growth the population of China at the end of this century, namely in only thirty years, will be one and a half billion human beings. It will have an advanced industrial technology. It will possess the most devastating weapons and the most modern systems of weapon delivery. And if the present mentality continues to prevail, China will be harboring radical suspicion, hatred, and aggressive design toward the rest of the world. China is the world's greatest long-range problem, and we are all in the same boat with respect to China—Americans, Russians, Indians, Europeans, Asians, Africans. The Russians have very painfully discovered this fact, so indeed have the Indians. And so no question is deeper than the question, "What must be done about China?"

Soviet-American Relations

We are all anxious about the state of Soviet-American relations. On the one hand there has been a real amelioration of these relations; on the other hand there appears to be a real roadblock in developing them further by reason of Vietnam. On the one hand we read of stories of the free spirit in Russian thought and life; on the other hand we hear of continued religious persecution and further clamping down upon free expression. The brute fact is that the peace of the world and the whole tenor and spirit of international conduct depend on the degree of confidence and agreement and cooperation that is obtained between the super states, namely the Soviet Union and the United States.

Similarly, we are all anxious about the future of Asia and Africa and about the problem of war. The public, happily, knows very little about the new weapons of mass destruction except that they are horrible beyond imagination. And so we are all deeply involved in the question of how to avoid war: Can mankind stand this balance of terror indefinitely? What if these weapons in five, in ten, in twenty years proliferate all over the world, as proliferate indeed they will? Is this the best outlook we can bequeath to our children and grandchildren? Must we not all do the impossible to bring about genuine honest, verifiable disarmament?

We are all anxious about the American racial situation. It cannot be repeated too often that America's position in the world today is so outstanding that whatever vitally affects America vitally affects the rest of the world. And so this problem is watched with the greatest anxiety all over the world.

We are all anxious about life in the urban society with all the problems of slums, and anonymities and the breakdown on community life, and the breakdown of morals that that kind of existence entails.

Rebellion of Youth

We are all anxious about the ideas in motivation of youth, because there is a real rebellion all over the world, not only in this country. There is a kind of cult of cruelty and violence, of uncouthness and sheer dirt. There is worship of sheer vulgarity. The “kick” is the thing these days. What lures people is the strange, the different, the abnormal, the exotic, and the more different and exotic the better. And there is a host of other sources of anxiety: Whether Europe is eclipsed for good or whether it can reassert its balancing, mediating position; whether western civilization can recollect itself into some effective unity in the face of the wholesale assault upon its fundamental values from all directions, from within and from without—the population explosion, the so-called sexual revolution, the rise of atheism and materialism, the trend of the spirit in the classic and performing arts; whether the technical and scientific have overwhelmed for good the liberal, the free, the human and humane, the spiritual in universities and colleges and other institutions of intellectual culture; the problem of leisure, when men need not work at all and there is absolutely nothing to do, as is going to be the case in only thirty years in this country as the result of automation and many other devices; and, finally, the problem of anxiety itself. There are so many sorts of anxiety and fear today that men are simply anxious all over.

This is an age of problems and challenges on every side and from every direction. To live in an age, my friends, is to live its fundamental problems. If these things to which I have referred leave us unmoved and unconcerned, then we are not living in this age; and a man who is not living in his age is obviously dead. You can be a creative hero in any one of these fields depending on your calling and your opportunity. To be man is at the moment you face a problem immediately to start searching for a way out. The more fundamental the problem is, the more it is a challenge—an opportunity. Problems are never dead ends. You can always do something about a problem; at least you can understand it. And if you are in a position of responsibility and competence you can at once move to finding new ways and means for grappling with it.

People differ, I assure you, not so much according to their ability to sense problems—we are all alike there—but according to their hidden moral resources on which they can pin their hopes. Before the demanding and dangerous, nothing is more unworthy than simply to analyze and stop there. The pure analysts who analyze and stop are the plague of this age. I believe in a living God, and he is my secret ground of hope in every instance. This is his world. He knows exactly what is going on, and he has a way out for every impasse, for every situation, even for that “limiting” situation. In God, problems always point to possibilities.

In committing myself before you today during the few minutes left me on some of these issues—on very few of them—I represent no government and no agents; I speak only for myself. Most certainly I do not claim that I know the mind of God for every situation; but equally, most certainly I affirm that God, being who he is and what he is, has a definite mind for every situation; and it is my bounden duty to seek that mind. And when I express a view it is always my honest, best view; although having regard to the enormous limitations of my knowledge and considering that I am certainly mortal and certainly fallible and liable to corruption that view may be wholly wrong. Thus I often cry with St. Paul, “Let God be true, and every man alive.” But it is always my faith in God as having a mind for every situation that steadies my purpose and sustains my zest and thrills me with the deepest and most arising hope, even in the darkest moments of my life and despite all my limitations.

The Challenge of Vietnam

On Vietnam I will make only four short remarks. Considering the magnitude of the war effort, I find it remarkable that the United States appears to be taking the whole thing in its stride. Of course people debate the war and are worried about it, and Washington has the war uppermost on its mind. But on the whole, the American people appear to be relaxed about it, certainly far more relaxed than other peoples would be if they were making a comparable effort. Secondly, one wonders whether the United States, so preoccupied in Southeast Asia, can still attend with equal efficacy to its far flung world responsibilities elsewhere. Thirdly, one hopes that after the recent elections in Vietnam an honorable settlement can be arranged. And finally, if such a settlement is arrived at, it would be tragic indeed if in three or five years the developments which the United States has been fighting to prevent from occurring in Southeast Asia should, nevertheless, actually occur. In that event the settlement would certainly not have been an honorable one.

On the Middle East I wish to say virtually nothing, not because I am not interested nor because you are not interested nor because I know little about it (I assure you I know quite a lot), but because the situation there could not be more delicate or more fluid, and because it is now in the decisive hands of the policy-makers concerned. And when this is the case, talking much about it in public does not help, especially by one who does not bear public responsibility as present. I would only add that, because the situation is exceedingly great, historic opportunities offer themselves now for the most creative statesmanship.

On the United Nations I will say very little. The United Nations should not be blamed; it is an instrument, and those who should be blamed are its

managers who do not put it to adequate and greater use. And the United Nations has done wonderful work in a score of important treaties.

I shall treat the Soviet and Chinese problems together. Three things, two negative and one positive, have brought about a relatively relaxed atmosphere between Russia and America in recent years: the common peril from China, the mutual deterrence of the atom, and increased economic, political, social and cultural contacts between the two systems.

East and West

I regard the Chinese problem, as I said before, as the most formidable long-range problem facing the entire world. Vietnam cannot be understood except against the background of China. Russia has been for a decade far more concerned with its relations to China than about its relations either to Europe or to America. When Russia thinks ahead ten or twenty years from now, it is China that moves before it as a principal danger. Despite the official Marxist ideology, Russia is essentially European and Western—intellectually, culturally, spiritually, historically. On the other hand, despite its Marxism, China is neither European nor Western. De Gaulle is quite right in stressing the over-arching cultural unity of Europe from the Urals to the Atlantic. There is nothing Chinese, nothing, that speaks to your soul and to mine as do Pushkin and Dostoevsky, and Tchaikovsky, and Gogol, and Tolstoy, and Chekhov, and Pasternak. And Russian spirituality, despite the official atheism, is presently Orthodox Christian. I have no doubt this underlying spirituality will reassert itself one day even in official circles, purified and enriched by the Marxist experience. I wholly agree with Berdyaev that atheism and materialism are a passing episode in Russian history.

People speak of great changes having occurred in the Soviet Union in recent years; this is quite true. But religion is not granted in actual right to present and propagate itself, and there is an audible murmuring by the intellectuals that they do not enjoy the responsible freedom necessary for them to create. Not until there is real freedom of religions, thought, expression, and discussion will the Soviet Union really feel secure herself, and will the Western world feel confident and relaxed in its relations to it. Thus everything must be done to increase the scientific and cultural contexts, and the competition under the stalemate of the nuclear umbrella is going to be subtle and intense. He is likely to win in this fateful competition in Asia, in Africa, in the Middle East, in Latin America, and in his own homeland who never lets his God down; who outsmarts the other fellow in the manipulation of the free rules of the game; who pushes his material and political advantages to the utmost; who keeps on enlarging the areal corporation on a sound basis; who knows how to draw out from the other

fellow what both have in common; who believes more firmly in his fundamental values; who develops a greater capacity for patience and love; and who holds out more against all that softens and corrupts.

Russia and America are the daughters of Europe, and Europe, having been the center of things for more than 2,000 years, is finding it difficult to adjust to the fact that its two daughters are now over, shadowing it. Europe, recognizing the immense political and material assets that its two daughters enjoy over it, nevertheless believes that she still leads in matters pertaining to gracious living, to refinement of taste, depth of thought and feeling, spiritual creativity (especially in philosophy, theology, and the arts), peace of soul, and continuity with the past, for man is not man without these things. In such matters the Europeans do not believe that either Russia or America has much to teach them.

What is happening today is that there is a change in the relationship between the Atlantic community and Russia. The old formula was the Atlantic community versus Russia. The emerging picture is Europe between Russia and America. The predicament of Britain is pretty deep. Dean Acheson was quite correct in saying that Britain lost an empire and has not found a new role. Life in Britain is stricken at every level—politically, internally and externally, economically, and above all, morally and intellectually. The kind of philosophy which Oxford and Cambridge are turning out at present is simply unworthy of a great people and a great nation.

Youth Want Spiritual Food

We should never judge youth; we should love them and understand their rebellion. They want more spiritual food than the meager fare they have been served. It may be we would do exactly what they are doing if we were in their place. It may be it is we who have failed them. I find them most sincere, most stimulating, most challenging, most promising, but on many matters, quite off. Again and again I am amazed, and I praise God for how much wisdom, patience, and love eventually pays. They do snap out of their dreams under the steady influence of love. And they become great leaders—chastened, profound, and humble. A searching youth, even a lost youth, is worth ten of the blas, middle-aged.

Today the exotic provides the “kick.” Wait until the pendulum has swung back in ten years, then the natural and normal will have become so strange and rare and abnormal that it will provide the “kick.” There is no danger that nature can be violated and sinned against indefinitely. Whoever attempts this trick will be avenged by nature herself; she will simple see to it that he leaves no trace behind. This applies to cultures and schools of thought no less than to individuals.

Youth are dying to give their lives to great and true causes. Who can provide them with these gripping lures? In the end, only the high political leadership, the spiritual leadership of the church, the intellectual leadership of the universities, and the creative leadership of art and literature. Youth today are at the mercy of these four agents. The real, the true, and the existing must constantly be held up before them. Above all, the living part of repentance and forgiveness must always be kept open in absolute understanding and compassion and love. You will recall that when the returning son was yet a great way off, his father saw him, had compassion, ran and fell on his neck and kissed him, and killed the fatted calf in celebration. And how many times must I forgive my offending brother or sister, or both of them, or family? Seventy times seven times! And I am assured that unless first I forgive my brother his trespasses God will not forgive mine.

My friends, you can patch up things here and there in all these things I've talked about, and you can improve them a little here and there. Your enthusiasm and your efficacy may last a year, a decade, a generation, a lifetime. And the enthusiasm and efficacy of your culture or your nation may last a century or five, but things will always slip back under your fingers; and they will always come back sooner or later to problems, perplexities, trials, sufferings. The world by itself cannot mend its ways, and you by yourself cannot mend it either. The world lives under a sort of curse. This is what the exuberant humanism of this age cannot see.

Now, my friends, all this, believe me, is the truth, and any sentimental rosiness, any shallow optimism is but illusion and deceit. You will get over it one day; if not you, then certainly your children or grandchildren. I assure you this is the most honest realism you will ever come across, even were you to live a thousand years, and even were you to learn a thousand philosophies. Hence, there is a need for an honest hope from outside ourselves and outside the world, a hope that we do not wishfully invent because we happen to need it, but a hope that we desperately need and seek because it is given, because it is there, because it is real and genuine, and that completely and independently from us and from our need. And because it is real and given, it exerts on us a wistful lure, albeit strange and distant.

World Unity in Christ

This is a meaning of the gospel that there is good news—the news, namely, that God is certainly there, that he supplies the objective help we need, that he has called us and is calling us through Jesus Christ. That is why, my friends, to me the greatest event of this century is what is happening to the churches. Never perhaps in history were the Christians so open to one another and so eager to understand one another as they are today. I believe all human failings stem originally from a failing in the order of the

spirit. I also believe that God has made himself and his will quite clear for mankind in and through Jesus Christ. And it is quite clear from the Bible and from the nature of things that Christ meant all those who believe in him to be one. The present ecumenical movement among Protestants in America and elsewhere, among Orthodox all over the Orthodox world, and between Protestants, Orthodox, and Catholics is this generation's mode of responding to the prayer of Jesus Christ that we all be one. The changed atmosphere to which everybody has contributed is amazing. Nobody would have dreamt ten years ago that we would find ourselves where we are today. Nobody is being asked to give up anything he believes in, but everybody's own conscience is facing him with the challenge of Jesus Christ that we be one. We are all asking ourselves not to be afraid of one another, therefore, to approach one another; to seek to understand to learn from one another; to forgive one another; to love one another despite our differences; to trust one another in Jesus Christ; to find out if we have not been prone to certain prejudices and misunderstandings about one another; to seek, therefore, in trust and in love how far we can agree, and above all how far we can work together in practical matters of common interest.

No harm whatever can come from all this, even to our dearest pursuits. On the contrary, a great deal of good can come from it and indeed has already come. I owe the Protestants more than I can ever dream of paying them back. They made the Bible living to me, and I now live in the Bible. And the Mormon Church, with which I have had very friendly connections for a number of years, has always impressed me as producing characters of the highest order, integrity, depth, concern, and real enthusiasm for the higher values. I have been active within our Orthodox Church, and between it and other churches. I find the Catholic Church the same as the Orthodox Church, only the one was the church first maturing in the West and the other the church first maturing in the East. I was present when the Pope and the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople met each other on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem three years ago and in Istanbul last July, and I shall accompany the Patriarch, God willing, when he returns the visit to the Pope later this month [October, 1967] in Rome. I was present in Geneva early in August of 1967 in connection with certain consultations conducted by the World Council of Churches. I have followed much of the ecumenical literature that has come out so far. Therefore, I can tell you, not from theory, not from wishful thinking, but from first-hand knowledge, that we live in a moment in history of the greatest possible spiritual promise. What is happening is nothing short of the mighty explosion of the Holy Ghost. I cannot begin to tell you of the love, the tenderness, the trust, the understanding, the good will, the positive approach, the sincere attitude of "let-by-gones-be-by-gones" that are now exploding from every site

and in every heart. There are meetings, discussions, dialogues, joint searches for agreement going on all the time in an atmosphere of genuine Christian good will. Certainly no such atmosphere has been obtained, either since the Reformation of the fifteenth century or since the split between the East and the West of the eleventh.

My friends, I believe Christ has a mind, the right mind, the perfect mind, the divine mind, the mind that we all dimly seek for every situation. If we remain apart from one another, we are not likely to know that mind as he wants us to know it, especially as part of that mind, and perhaps the most important part thereof is first to be one. He has a mind for all the problems I set forth at the beginning—for Vietnam, for China, for the Middle East, for Soviet-American relations, for the social situation in America, for youth, for the proper relationship between the technical and the liberal, and for man in his total anxiety today. That mind is always the best possibility for that problem and that situation. If the Christians came together in Christ, they could face the future with perfect confidence because the spiritual and material resources they can then pull together will penetrate every problem and overcome every difficulty. They are coming together under God in our day, waiting in patience and confidence until this process has completed itself. It will complete itself in God's own day and in God's own way. You will then see wonders for man and for society of which you cannot now dream. Then shall scripture be fulfilled which affirms that all the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before him. For the kingdom is the Lord's and he is the governor among the nations.

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