

AMERICA IN THE WORLD

AN ESSAY BY

DR. CHARLES MALIK

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America in the World

The time seems now to have passed when it was possible to speak of America and the world as two separate entities, each following its own independent course of development with little thought of—and less concern about—the other. For better or for worse, America is now in the world. The world looks up to America for leadership, and America, feeling herself belonging integrally to the world, seeks genuine relations of cooperation and understanding.

The circumstances which occasioned America's transition from isolation to involvement have left their decisive imprint upon the character of America's being-in-the-world. It was two world wars and the threat of a third global conflict, together with the intervening periods of tension and misery, which prompted the United States to abandon her earlier and traditional position of aloofness. It was either a world torn by strife and threatened by destruction, or a world in urgent need of assistance for reconstruction and rehabilitation, in short a needy world, a privative situation, in which America found herself almost overnight involved, and of which she felt herself all of a sudden an integral part. The world into which America found herself stepping was, in all the senses of this pregnant term, a world-in-crisis.

This genesis of America's world responsibility, this coming-to-be of America's being-in-the-world, has been decisive so far in determining the character of that responsibility. For emergencies, by their nature, render impossible that slow pace of normal maturation which would have been an ideal preparation for the present enormous responsibilities. America-in-the-world thus came into being almost unprepared for the new and dramatic role, having been denied, as 't were, the stage of carefree childhood, or the adolescence which can afford to try and to err. In the unfolding of the past, destiny was more tender and less impatient with the great peoples who successively received the mantle of leadership at her hands.

The ordeal of actual war or the spectre of imminent aggression have overshadowed all other elements in the world situation. Absolute negations and absolute affirmations overwhelmed the manifold shades of positions and attitudes which a calmer encounter with the world

would have engendered. It is thus unfair to judge the future of America's world role in terms of the crisis-born improvisations of the past few decades. The eye of understanding love, piercing the future, already discerns the coming of age of a balanced, positive, thoroughly grounded viewpoint emerging out of the crusading spirit with which America has embarked upon her world responsibilities.

The world in which America finds herself is anything but a unity. It is more like a galaxy, a set of worlds fairly distinct from one another, yet brought together and compelled to confront one another by the miracles of modern communication. There is thus the Western European world, including such cultural offshoots as Australia and New Zealand. There is secondly the vast Soviet world. There is thirdly the Asiatic world, comprising the Far East, India, the Middle East and the Near East, and including perhaps also Africa. And there is, of course, America's own immediate world, the New World, including the Latin American countries and Canada.

America in the world is America in and among these worlds. She is thus confronted by distinctive problems, challenges, claims and opportunities in each one of them.

The Western European world presents, from the American standpoint, three main problems: economic, politico-strategic and cultural-ideological.

It is obvious that in the present highly interrelated world. There is and there can be no sound world economy, and, therefore, no sound American economy, unless Europe is economically healthy and prosperous. American aid to Europe under the European Recovery Program is thus one of the most momentous acts of statesmanship which the United States has performed in her new role of being-in-the-world.

It is also obvious that Europe's security is integral to the security of the United States. To abandon Europe to unfriendly forces is, purely strategically and from the point of view of industrial potential, absolutely fatal to the security of the United States. No sound American strategy can therefore be conceived apart from some such instruments as the North Atlantic Treaty and the Military Assistance Program.

But entirely apart from Europe's economic and strategic significance, America can never view with equanimity any spiritual weakening of Europe. For Europe and America constitute one cultural whole: they are connected with each other—in the words of Mr. Acheson—"by common institutions and moral and ethical beliefs," which are "the strongest kind of ties, because they are based on moral conviction, on acceptance of the same values in life." Consequently, any decline of Europe—spiritual, intellectual, cultural, ideological—is creeping sickness that will sooner or later strike at the roots of American life. For if the European

spirit should succumb to forces of decay, whether they sprout from within or descend on the continent from without, what guarantee is there that the kindred spirit of America would not yield to the same forces also? America-in-the-world must mean an intense interest in the spiritual vigor of Europe.

In their gifts and possibilities, the members of the Atlantic Community complement and reinforce one another. The ultimate problem of this Community is how to harmonize its diversity of gifts, material and spiritual, in the service of those principles which constitute the proper justification of Western civilization: namely, the bold affirmation of freedom, the quest after truth, the sincere passion for justice, belief in God, and the peace which comes from righteousness and love alone.

The world today means certainly the vigorous presence of the Soviet Union. Nothing has become more apparent than that to be in the world America must take full account of this reality

REALITIES OF THE SOVIET SCENE

There are two externally striking ways and one—in my opinion—more fundamental mode in which the Soviet reality makes itself felt. There is first of course the Soviet economic challenge. This challenge rests on two principles which constitute the character of the Soviet economic system as opposed to that of America. The first principle pertains to the antithesis between individual and collective ownership of the means of production, between the collective and the competitive modes of economic enterprise. This is in fact the economic counterpart of the basic antithesis between the Soviet conception of the primacy of the collectivity and the Western-Christian conception of the primacy of the individual. The second principle concerns the amenability or otherwise of the economic process to control, planning and direction. The Soviet thesis is that the economic process is not intrinsically, and need not be actually, chaotic, but that it can and ought to submit to the guidance of thought and the control of reason, always allegedly in the interest of the whole community. This interest, however, is invariably determined by the holders of state power. American free enterprise, grounded in a spirit of empiricism which at its best bespeaks a genuine humility before the truth, cannot admit the validity of this monolithic political rationalism in the economic field.

The second Soviet challenge, which is fast-moving today and therefore marked by particular urgency, longs to the realm of power. There is a Soviet conception of the state. government, law, authority, power, political organization, which is at variance with Western political philosophy. As a result of this doctrine there has arisen on the Eurasian continent an unprecedented centralization of power which has completely upset the balance of power throughout the world, and which is at the basis of the prevalent sense of tension and insecurity.

These two challenges—the economic and the politico-social—are, however, but derivative from the more basic opposition between the Soviet-Communist and the American-Western views of life in general. Communist practice, the strategy and tactics of Communism, in every field, follows from and reflects the basic Communist monism, materialism, immanentism, atheism and relativism. The whole realm of being is reduced, ultimately, to matter, its one and only principle. The existence of God and the whole order of the transcendent is denied. The absoluteness and objectivity of the truth and of moral values are rejected. The complex factors that constitute history are oversimplified: for the entire course of history is held to be determined by the forces of economic production and distribution. Conscience and reason are but by-products of man's material existence, epiphenomena of the physical, the biological and the social. The spirit personality, moral freedom, the uniqueness and irreducibility of man, his ability to repent and forgive, his ever-present need for forgiveness himself, all this has no place in the Communist outlook, save in so far as it conduces to the "interest" of the collective, the class. On every count, this amazingly simple and consistent philosophy of Communism seems to be a violent negation of what the American heritage has throughout regarded as sacred and irreducible.

To speak of the possibility of a peaceful coexistence the two systems without a prior appropriate modification of doctrine on the part of Communism, whose whole theory is based on the damning of the rest of the world and the transvaluation of all its values, is of course joke: unless it be a tactical manoeuvre aimed at lulling the simple. Three conditions must be fulfilled if this necessary modification of doctrine is to take place peacefully: the non-Communist world must adequately look after its own defenses; the non-Communist world must achieve economic, social and political justice without loss of its higher values; and the Soviet Union must remain a vigorous participant in the United Nations.

THE SOVIET'S PLACE IS IN THE UN

No matter how absolute the clashes and differences, it is most essential for world peace that the world and the Soviet Union keep on arguing with each other under the aegis of the United Nations. Without the active presence of the Soviet Union, the United Nations is certainly not itself. Debate then becomes for the most part abstract and unreal: it omits the other elective half of the world. No statesman can really assess the concrete forces with which he must reckon in the world today without direct contact with the Soviet point of view. Faithfulness to the Charter of the United Nations may still induce the necessary transformations of policy which would avert an armed clash.

Although the European and the Soviet worlds display between themselves sharp antitheses, yet they refer to one common frame of reference, to one generic idea. It is sufficient merely to remember that Communism is inconceivable without the philosophy of German idealism, without the economy of the nineteenth-century industrialism, without the Christian and humanistic conceptions of social justice and equality, and without the Byzantine form of state-organization—it is sufficient, I say, to remember all this in order to realize the community roots between Communism and Western-European civilization and, consequently, between Communism and the American offshoot of that civilization.

But when we come to the Asiatic world we find an entirely different situation. The Soviet world is, so to speak, “the other within the same;” the Asiatic world is in a sense “the wholly other.”

America is foreign to Asiatic traditions, cultures and valuations. It is not an accident that Asia is associated in the American mind with the mysterious, the weird, the thrilling. So far the main categories in terms of which most Americans have tried to understand the Asians have been aesthetic. To large portions of Asia, the typical representative of America is the tourist, the sightseer, ever hunting for mysterious antiques or interesting, sensational items of Asian life.

REALITIES OF THE ASIAN SCENE

Once Americans try to penetrate the real life of Asia, they will find there a bewildering variety of ancient civilizations and cultures, each with its coherent outlook on reality, God, the universe, man and society. They will also realize that the Asiatic is quite keen on the preservation of his modes of life; that he has his proper dignity and is fiercely jealous for it; that he is not necessarily overawed by the West, and is not on the whole in any particular haste to adjust himself to its standards. They will further discover that they cannot take it for granted that the Asiatic necessarily respects them, or at least respects them for that on account of which they respect themselves, although he may fear them, and even perhaps covet their might. Today Asia’s respect for the West can only be earned.

On further exploration it will be noticed that Asia is on the threshold of a great dawn, one characterized at once by an awakening and a revolt: the awakening is as Asia’s own actualities and possibilities, the revolt is against the West at whose hands Asia has known much humiliation, division, and exploitation. This revolt against the West is perhaps the most significant single element in the Asiatic situation today. At times it is tame and disciplined, sublimated into genuine nationalism and yearning for self-mastery, which are worthy of all respect; at other times there is a radical defiance assuming the form of utter rejection of foreign counsel, however well-meant it might be.

This spirit of revolt is fully understood and exploited by Communism. For, in the first place, there are ethnic and geographical continuities between the Soviet peoples and the peoples of Asia, continuities which render relatively easy the transmission of ideas and the expansion of political control. In the second place, Communist appeal to the famished and enslaved is fairly tangible and concrete, kindling the imagination and firing the will. In the third place, Russia has not been associated with the adventures of Western imperialism which the peoples of Asia seem to remember with unmixed resentment.

It is obvious that, as far as the Asiatic world is concerned, America enters the race with the Soviet Union at great initial disadvantage. Everything depends on the quality of American statesmanship. There is need for wisdom, understanding and true love. There is need also for humility. Above all, there is need for firmness, firmness in the truth, an absolute lack of shame of one's deepest convictions.

Potentially, this Asiatic world is the future. That it is a prize for everybody is objectively demonstrated by the derogatory sense at present attached to the word "imperialism"; the Communists never tiring of speaking of "the Anglo-American imperialists," and Western leader referring more and more lately to "Communist Imperialism" or to "the New Imperialism": both camps obviously using these terms of reproach with an eye to Asia. America's ultimate problem in the world, then, is not so much how to meet the challenges of Europe and the Soviet Union—both relatively easy to resolve in the long run—but how to approach and come to terms with Asia, how to understand and be understood by Asia, how to love and respect and be loved and respected by Asia. The real encounter of the future is between the Asiatic and the non-Asiatic worlds. And America is simply non-Asiatic.

IN SEARCH OF AMERICA'S IDENTITY

It is her own world that America must primarily comprehend, elaborate, make sure of, if she is to be able adequately to contend with the rest of the world. America is today coming to self-consciousness, asking herself fundamental questions about her proper destiny, her supreme values, not so much as a result of a quiet internal development, as under the impact of staggering external challenges. There is a spiritual and material slump in Europe; Asia is rising; the Slavic world presents a formidable counterpole: in the face of these tremendous facts, in a world that has become physically one, America is under outer as well as inner necessity to seek to know who she is and where she really stands.

Anglo-Saxon democracy is undoubtedly one of the great teachers of mankind. Representative government through periodic and free elections, the principle of the will of the people as the source of all authority, the two-party system, deciding by discussion and debate and not by arbitrary rule, acting cooperatively and persuasively and not by coercion, making positive use of minorities not by ostracizing them but by drawing them creatively

into the dynamics of the social fabric, careful organization of effort, putting the past and the present in the service of the future, respecting and demanding freedom of thought, speech and conscience, a sense of social responsibility which does not smother the equally important sense freedom and independence, looking upon others as ends in themselves, and placing a high premium on individual initiative and responsibility—all this belongs to the essence of the democratic way of life. This complex concrete structure of existence has deeply informed the rest of the world. I for one, knowing its truth and recognizing its deep spiritual roots, can only pray: may it long prosper!

But this complex structure—wonderful as far as it goes, and necessary for the schooling of the world—is not sufficient for the needs of the moment. It deals for the most part with pure form. with the external means and machinery of existence: whereas the real need is for much more than that: the real need is for content and matter, for fullness of being, for the truth that completely satisfies, for a spiritual core of conviction, for the bold facing of the final issues. The crisis of the moment is that much more is expected of America than democracy seems able to give; but—and here I speak with absolute responsibility—certainly not more than America, fully mobilizing her immeasurable spiritual resources, can give.’

WANTED: AN AMERICAN MESSAGE

One often gains the impression that the West tries to vie with Communism in Communism’s own terms: for so-called “social justice,” against starvation and hunger, for higher and higher standards of living. The pattern is to advocate more and more of the same kind of thing. It is always bad, however, to draw the substance of one’s message from the character of one’s opponent. Surely as integral heir of four thousand years of cumulative tradition America can conceive a more original message than mere economic and social advance. In these matters alone Communism has a decided advantage, because it is ruthless in its methods and because, owing to the cultural and racial affinities between it and the rest of the Old World, it can successfully stress the sense of belonging. The only avenue of salvation is to rise to an original plane of the spirit which will utterly eclipse the crudities and simplicities of Marxism.

Not endlessly higher and higher standards of life alone; not just more and more comfortable living; not better and better material goods only; not mere control of nature; but intellectual and spiritual virtue; moral excellence; the joy of reason; the cultivation of inward depth; the control of man, including above all self-control; the perfection of man—this, I submit, belongs to what is best in America. And the greatest error of this age is to suppose that the perfection of man can come from the perfection of material things. Only an original act of the spirit, whereby the perfect man from the very beginning posits himself as our ideal and justification, can gradually induce our perfection.

The virtues that made New England and started America on the path of greatness were not primarily material; they certainly had nothing to do with comfort and pleasure. If I understand the original spirit of New England correctly, it craved for the freedom of the spirit; it trusted in God; it believed in the dignity of man and of his work; it honored frugality; it developed a sense of independence and self-reliance; it set up fixed principles and standards which it ultimately derived from Christ as judge; it promoted a wonderful community spirit, an intense feeling of belonging, as for instance in the great communities of Concord, of Cambridge, of Lexington; it took therefore special joy in giving and in sharing; it accepted risks, trusting in Providence with an inner poise and a lightness of heart which put all external busyness to shame. I believe the modern spoiled world can sit at the feet of the original New England asceticism and learn a lot.

It is most important that the United States maintain her vigorous leadership in and for the United Nations. Whatever others might do or might not do, it can be shown that nothing but good supervenes, both to the United States herself and to the world at large, from a sustained, unfaltering, bold United States leadership.

Now leadership does not mean imposition. That is why it should not be feared. Leadership means vigorous companionship, rational guidance, unflagging interest, genuine concern for the welfare of even the least and weakest, willingness to negotiate and consider, clarity of fundamental aim, certainty as to the possession of the truth, sticking out one's neck at critical moments and accepting the consequences, bearing and forbearing one's fellows. Under the banner of her deepest traditions, and with the proper humility befitting the historic moment, America is able to rise to the required quality of leadership.

MISSION FOR THE UNITED STATES

There is a tendency today, with America in the world, in a fairly needy world, to expect everything of America: limitless material assistance, absolute military protection, foolproof political guarantees, the miracle of a new spiritual revolution. Much indeed is expected of America, but America-in-the-world, partly because her resources are limited, partly owing to her inherent respect for freedom, cannot mean the destruction of the freedom and responsibility of others. Every one of the rest of us must do his part to see the world through the present crisis. The supreme task of world statesmanship today, whether within or without the United Nations, is to elaborate a creative concept of partnership wherein even the weakest member is not let down in regard to what is truly expected of him. With her priceless heritage of freedom, America can play a significant role in the determination of this concept.