

# FOUNDATIONS OF PEACE

AN ADDRESS BY  
DR. CHARLES MALIK

The following is an address delivered by Dr. Charles Malik at Denison University on June 9, 1952.

The world is obviously not at peace – of this there can be no doubt. But is it then at war? The answer to this query is not so simple. Certainly the possibility is not excluded that when the history of our epoch is written it will appear that the present situation is but the preliminary phase of a curious kind of war. But this depends on how future events shall develop. This is always the case, that the present, far from fatalistically determining coming events, is itself remorselessly at the mercy of the future. This fact, that the future in its total concrete character is really undetermined, and when it determines itself will cast back an interpretative light upon the present, is the ground of all hope.

But nothing that shall happen is going to alter the fact that we are not today at peace. The slide toward the abyss may still be arrested, but sliding in that direction we all are. And it is this undeniable phenomenon of the constant deterioration of the world situation – or at least of the absence of any substantial improvement – that defines what we mean when we say that the world is not at peace.

Thus the first ground of peace is to recognize the ugly truth that we are living in a very dangerous epoch, and recognizing it, to put up with it as best we can. Gone are the happy old days – the days of our fathers or perhaps our boyhood – when any of us could feel secure for any length of time. If any of you is counting on a relaxation by magic or by accident or by the sheer passage of time, then you had better be disabused of this thought immediately; relaxation can come about only through patient, hardheaded, intelligent, long-suffering effort. And this means recognizing the danger fully, realistically, unblinkingly. War is far more likely to come upon us if we live in a fool's paradise than if we wake up to the full scope of the crisis in all its dimensions and grapple with it like men.

But there is a difference between recognizing the danger and exaggerating it. War is hastened not only by blinking the facts but also by falling into exactly the opposite error, namely blowing up the facts out of all proportion to their real dimensions. Deadly things cannot be met by frantic gestures, but by the calm and sober confrontation of the truth.

For great and present as the danger is, there are radical differences between the situation today and the situation as it obtained prior to the First and Second World Wars. In 1914 and 1939 there was a military machine at the heart of Europe consciously bent on military conquest. I doubt that the Soviet military machine has the same concept of war as the Germans had; at least we can say that the Russians are infinitely more cautious. And caution breeds time, and time reflection, and reflection the possibility of modification leading to a peaceful settlement.

Secondly, the mighty concentrations of power today without whose participation there can be no general war exist in countries which are not in need of territorial expansion. At least, therefore, this urge, which was exceedingly potent in 1914 and 1939, is absent from the causation of war today.

Thirdly, the fact that America and Russia are not as critically contiguous to each other as Germany was to her immediate neighbors is of the greatest importance so far as war and peace are concerned. Between these two giants there is plenty of room to maneuver, to trade so to speak space for reason, namely for the opportunity of allowing people to reflect and devise possible alternatives to war. It is significant that neither the collapse of China nor the Korean war in Asia, nor the communization of Czechoslovakia in Europe, has led to general war. The present situation then where the two decisive concentrations of power are separated by countless peoples and places permits much greater flexibility than was the case in 1914 and 1939 when the least little movement on the part of Germany brought her into immediate conflict with her serious enemies.

Fourthly, I think it is a fact that neither the American character nor the Russian character glorifies war. Whatever may or may not be the wish of cliques or parties or governments with respect to war, since all wars today must be total wars involving every single citizen at his deepest levels, no war can be really waged without some preliminary assurance of a positive sustaining response on the part of the general public. The aggressive character of Communism is not so much military as social, political, and ideological; and this leaves room for meeting the menace in other ways than actual war.

Finally the growing consciousness of the unspeakable destructiveness of modern war serves as a powerful brake upon any responsible leader's desire to resort to war as an instrument of national policy. Thus what General Eisenhower said the other day, that any nation that would deliberately seek war today is very foolish, is perfectly true. It is therefore rational to assume that people are not going to provoke war, but that if war comes, it will be because we shall stumble into it. And this necessarily means active search for alternatives.

The quiet contemplation of all these five essential differences between the present situation and the state of things prior to the last two World Wars should enable us to place the present grave danger in its right perspective. Certainly we are in danger of war, but certainly also there are powerful factors which seem to conspire to make war not inevitable.

On the purely physical plane, peace is always a question of equilibrium of forces. As soon as a disequilibrium arises, then even if there were angels on the side of the stronger force, they would be tempted to strike. Now Communists are not angels; thus even apart from

the fact that their doctrine seems to require a world revolution if the world is to be safe for Communism, they are distinctly tempted to strike, at least by internal subversion, wherever they feel they can get away with it. Such tempting situations exist in Asia, in the Middle East, and in Europe; that is why in these regions Communism is on the march, in one form or another. The problem is to remove these temptations as effectively as possible.

Western rearmament, as I understand it, is designed to restore these equilibria of power. This rearmament appears to be aimed precisely at helping to prevent any further loss of territory to the Communist realm, whether this loss should come about by revolution from within or by conquest from without. I take this to be the meaning of the policy of containment. The Western world feels that any further defection in Europe, in the Middle East, or in Asia will sooner or later spell disaster and must therefore be prevented at any cost. Such defection is interpreted to mean the point of no return whereby war will have actually started. To serve notice in advance that at most so far but certainly no farther is an obvious ground for peace.

But even if the present territorial and political situation were neatly frozen, I still doubt whether peace can in the long run be secure so long as Europe is partitioned by the iron curtain and so long as China is not economically and politically independent. Already these two facts alone have profoundly upset the balance of power in the world. I believe, therefore, that no work for peace is more urgent than to try vigorously to restore a healthy, strong, united, self-confident, and independent Europe and China. This requires greater boldness and imaginativeness in statesmanship than has been displayed so far. So long as the Western world is not resourceful enough to devise ways and means for penetrating the Communist realm just as effectively as Communism has penetrated the West, the streaming of influence across the iron curtain will always be one-sided and as a consequence there will never be peace. Peace means mutuality of intercourse, equality of relationship, a finely balanced system of action, reaction, and interaction, the meeting of Communist dynamism by equal and opposite dynamism from this side.

In the patient articulation of the structure of peace, no region is more important than the Near East. Strategically, economically, politically, however you consider it, the Near East is as vital to the West as any other part of the world. One may conceive the possibility of the temporary loss of the Near East in war, but what one cannot conceive is that the West will ever acquiesce in the permanent loss of the Near East. And yet the West has in diverse ways gone out of its way to antagonize many peoples in the Near East. One thing is certain – the security of the West, insofar as it depends upon that central region, will always be shaky so long as the Arabs remain in their present state of deep disaffection. It will not be easy now

to meet this situation. But an integral link in the chain of peace is for statesmen to assume a much greater and much bolder responsibility in actively seeking an overall Near Eastern settlement on the basis of justice and agreement. Beyond a certain point, I do not believe in patchwork; the settlement must be thorough and comprehensive. It must penetrate beneath the husk of external political arrangements, seeking to supply both vision and motive power whereby profound economic, social, and mental transformations may be brought about. The situation now is more ripe for creative care and responsibility than ever before.

It is customary these days to speak of the developed and the underdeveloped countries. This distinction refers to the extent to which technology has exploited the resources of nature, and in the last analysis this is measured by the per capita income of people. Development therefore is something relative, for even the most developed countries are still patient of further development. But so far as a minimum decent standard of living is concerned, one can say that about two-thirds of the world is very poor. The average American is at least 20 times as rich as the average inhabitant of these regions. Entirely regardless of whose fault it is that people in Asia, in Africa, in the Middle East, and in Latin America are so poor and destitute, this situation can never lead to peace. A deep sense of injustice and dissatisfaction sets in, and in their unreasoning rebellion people will rise up not only against the rich and privileged in their own country but against the West itself whose material progress they are wont to interpret, rightly or wrongly, as a metaphysical injustice committed against them. The exalted conception of Point Four is America's response to this challenge. I believe that Point Four may in the reckoning of time turn out to be one of the most creative ideas of the second half of the 20th century. We are at the barest beginning of its development today, and I doubt not that the American people, when they fully apprehend both the magnitude of the need and the issues at stake for war or peace, will multiply their effort a hundred-fold for helping the underdeveloped and needy to stand on their feet. Point Four is certainly one of the major grounds for peace in our time.

The deepest ground of peace is not something military, nor something political, nor even economic, but something spiritual. The Communist assault on the world today is in the first instance spiritual, and unless it is met on that plane, all else will in the long run prove of no avail. It is the inner decay that must first be faced and met, for what if after defeating Communism externally you turn around only to find out that it has overcome you from within.

Marxist Communism is at once the outcome and the aggravation of this inner spiritual decay in the West. There is in Karl Marx and in all that has stemmed out of him thoroughgoing economic determinism, a materialism of the most sordid type, an elemental lust for power, absolute moral relativism, a radical cynicism concerning man's freedom and

his inner personal worth, a fundamental denial of objective truth and of reason's ability to grasp it, and finally not only radical atheism in the sense of disbelief in any personal living God, but a violent rejection of everything transcendent, above the perishing of time. Now he will be a very ignorant man who will deny that materialism, sensualism, relativism, cynicism, anti-intellectualism, atheism, and the exaltation of the economic and political, have been for generations working havoc with the Western soul. I emphatically believe that there can be no peace and no compromise with Karl Marx and all that he stood for, as he aims at nothing short of the radical transvaluation of the deepest positive Western values that have been known and loved for thousands of years. But were it not for a prevalent intellectual and spiritual decay in the West, Communism would never have arisen and taken root.

Every tragedy in history has arisen because somewhere, somehow, man has misinterpreted himself. He took himself to be what he was not, or not to be what he was. You and I are not only political animals belonging to a certain polis and feeling the strength of its solidarity and the venerableness of its traditions. Nor certainly are we mere creatures of desire and lust, wanting today a hamlet, tomorrow a palace, today a bicycle, tomorrow an airplane. You and I will walk barefooted and sleep on the floor if only our deeper moral and spiritual needs are recognized and met.

Man lives by friendship and love, and thrives upon righteousness and justice. Nor will he rest until he has embraced some kind of myth, and his deepest peace is in the myth that is true. His spirit must be fed, his hope reassured. Unless man truly knows that he is a partner in the establishment and maintenance of righteousness on earth, he will rebel, and not only against a million bombers, but against the universe itself.

Hence we must look forward not to the politicians and economists, nor to the statesmen and generals, but to the agencies which promote man's humanity, to the institutions which deal with his spirit and his mind. What are these agencies and institutions which minister love, truth, friendship, righteousness, justice? They are principally five – the home, the school, the church, the factory, and the word. Peace is lost or won in the home, in the school, in the church, in the factory, and by the printed or spoken word.

The family these days suffers from enormous strains. The solid virtues of the hearth are disintegrating, and children are not obedient. But if there is no peace and love in the home, there will never be peace in the world.

As regards the school, so long as mechanism, utilitarianism, vocationalism, and professionalism dominate educational theory, how can you produce a race of men in whose soul there is peace and rest? For the soul rests only upon the vision of the truth, and this

can be had only in an education that is liberal, free, unhurried, disciplined by reason and argument, utterly “useless,” and taking unbounded joy in knowledge and being for their own sake.

Peace in industry can never come about so long as employer and employee are pitted against each other with material profit as their only object of desire. Only as the factory becomes a sort of sacrament and communion in which the industrial process is carried out in the name of something higher and nobler than mere material gain can the turbulent desires of men be composed.

Concerning the word, how can there be peace so long as the public is constantly fed with the cheap, the fantastic, the sordid, the mysterious, the thrilling, the sensuous? Peace does not reside in the imagination and senses, but in the heart and mind. Popular literature does not command and challenge; it does not portray the difficult, the remote, the inaccessible, the holy. It makes everything easy and simple, ready at hand for the listless observer. It feeds with the spoon. The word must be rescued from the present sacrilege to which it has fallen, so as to become the faithful bearer or norms of beauty and truth and goodness – austere, transcendent, permanent, eternal.

The church is the original ground for all hope of peace. If all other grounds fail us, this ground will never fail us, because its founder had conquered the world. The family, the school, the economic process, the babblings of men – all these things are subject to the law of decay and death, and if they are to live again they must rise with Him who overcame death. Peace is replenished in our hearts every time we turn to the Prince of Peace for succor and forgiveness. He gave us His peace, not indeed as the world gives, but as He alone knows how to give; and He asked us to pray and pray, assuring us that whatever we ask in His name shall be granted to us. Peace then is the gift of God through the prayer of the Church.