

INTERNATIONAL ORDER

AN ESSAY BY
DR. CHARLES MALIK

The following essay, written by Dr. Charles Malik, was published in the *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics* in 1973.

A Christian believer holds that the international order is governed by a deeper invisible order. God holds the world in his hands including all political and social relations. Nothing escapes God's rule, and whatever is could not have been and cannot continue to be without his will and power. Even if we cannot "prove" this in every detail, it remains nevertheless a firm article of faith. The laws of nature, the laws of development, the moral law whereby nations rise, mature, decay and disappear, are all created and allowed by God. Augustine in his *City of God* outlines the principles of a Christian interpretation of history and therefore of all international order. In this sense Christ, being Lord of lords and King of kings, is affirmed by faith as the Lord of history.

Keeping all this in mind, we wish nevertheless to concentrate in this short essay on the visible international order. The nation, as the unit of this order, is a juridical international entity determined by a distinct territory, a distinct people with their special customs and relations, a distinct government, and distinct laws. What constitutes a nation formally is the unity which its government and laws impose upon its people and the recognition by other nations of its distinctness and independence. This recognition is expressed by respecting its territorial integrity and political independence, and by exchanging diplomatic representation with it. A nation may exist without every other nation recognizing it, but no nation can juridically exist if no nation recognizes it. Recognition is of the essence of a nation.

Just as the world of matter is made up of some 104 chemical elements (theoretically scientists speak of another 50 or so possible but highly unstable elements), so the world of men is made up of (strange coincidence!) some 150 nations, of which 130 constitute the United Nations. And just as in the world of matter there are highly stable and highly unstable elements, 80 in the world of men there are stable and unstable nations. The order that obtains between these juridical collective entities is governed by six sets of laws.

There is first the recognized laws of international intercourse which together form a corpus known as international law. Such laws always existed, at least in some incipient form, between international political communities, but it was Grotius (1583-1645) who, more than any other man in history, first identified them as constituting a distinct subject matter for rational inquiry and elaboration. International law covers all kinds of regulations and usages between the nations, both in time of war and in time of peace (diplomatic exchanges and usages, elementary courtesies and proprieties, reciprocal rights, the form and character of treaties,

how sovereigns or heads of state or members of government are addressed or treated from one nation to another, the treatment of prisoners of wars, etc.) The nations in their dealings with one another submit in varying degrees to this immense body of international law.

There is second the law of the United Nations (its Charter as well as its cumulative jurisprudence) which applies, at least so far as matters relating to international peace and security are concerned, to all nations, whether or not members of the world organization. The nations keep this law in mind all the time, because, should they violate it, a complaint might be lodged against them in the appropriate organ of the United Nations, and a decision could be taken against them,

On top of these two elements of international order, nations regulate their dealings with one another by all sorts of special treaties or agreements or arrangements or instruments, covering military, defense, economic, commercial, legal or cultural matters. When they conclude these treaties or arrangements they make sure that their terms do not conflict with international law or the law of the United Nations. Without mutual trust between the contracting parties, international treaties would be impossible. The proof of the sway (at least partially) of the moral order in international affairs is that no nation would want that it be said of it that it broke its plighted word.

There are further commercial or cultural dealings which are not covered by special treaties or general international law. When a commercial deal is concluded between, say, General Motors and a private company in France, or when an American university engages French professors or uses French books, or when these two nations listen to each other's radio broadcasts or see each other's works of art, these dealings need not come under any special agreement between France and America. But they help to govern and constitute the international order.

Then there are underlying cultural affinities between peoples and nations uncovered either by international law or by special treaties or by private transactions. Thus, for example, there are common unformalized customs and mentalities between the English-speaking peoples, or between the Slavic peoples, or between the nations of Europe, or between other groups of nations with common traditions. These communities of mind and mores determine and constitute the international order.

Finally, there are certain norms and standards which belong to human nature as such, and which need not be codified by international law or embodied in special agreements. That it is not in a nation's interests to insult or attack another, that the more a nation finds that its trust of another nation is well founded the more this trust is likely to continue, that

the stronger a nation is, both materially and spiritually, the better for its security vis-à-vis other nations, that it is in a nation's interests to increase the circle of its friends, to promote mutually advantageous relations with other nations, and to have a favorable image of itself cast abroad, that self-defense is a sacred natural right, all these and a myriad other such norms are taken for granted in any international order, and no nation need that it be taught them or that it subscribe to them in any formal pact, because they all spring from the very nature of things. As such, they, too, enter into and constitute the international order.

When the international order breaks down on a large enough scale, we have war, But so long as it lasts, it is determined and constituted, in varying degrees and modes, by the law of nations which has accumulated over the centuries, the special international organization of the moment, the special treaties and agreements which have been concluded between the nations, the unformalized private transactions between persons and cultures, such communities of mind as exist between certain groups of nations, and all that belongs to what might be termed the human law of nature.

World order is far more determined by the intercultural than by the international order. Nations come and go, and if there are 150 such units today, it is almost certain that the number will be different a hundred years from now—some breaking up, some merging together. Who can predict the exact political order, fifty or a hundred years from now, between the two Koreas, the two Vietnams, the two Chinas, the two Germanys, the two Irelands; or within such large nations as Canada, India, the People's Republic of China, the Soviet Union, the United States; or among the 20 Latin American nations, or the 15 or more Arab states, or the 30 African nations? What appear to be far more abiding in world history are a few fundamental world outlooks. There are six such outlooks, each capable of further refinement and discrimination: the Western European world, including the whole of the Western Hemisphere; the Eastern European world, including Russia; the Islamic world; the Chinese world; the Indian world; and the African world,

These worlds, each more or less coherent within itself, have different outlooks on matter, mind, law, man and his destiny, the nature of history, the nature of society, the nature of truth, the nature of morality, and the nature of the supreme being. A composite world outlook has been developing in recent years, but, in fundamental matters, it is still most precarious and unstable.

In general, one can still speak—and doubtless one will continue for a long time to speak—of six distinct world cultures. Intercultural world order is the fundamental thing, and world history is not so much the history of the nations as the history of the development of these six cultural worlds, both internally and in their fateful interactions with one another.

The world has become, physically, more or less one; this same world, however, contains a multiplicity of apparently irreducible cultures with different and, in important respects, contradictory outlooks. It would appear that the only possible order in a world that has become physically one but continues to be spiritually many is an order of freedom and respect—freedom for each of the many in itself, respect when the many interact so as to produce a unitary effect.