

THE LEBANON AND THE INTERNATIONAL LIFE

AN ESSAY BY
DR. CHARLES MALIK

The following essay, written by Dr. Charles Malik, was published in Geneva on July 25, 1948.

This is not an historical essay. But little Lebanon's international role, though historically checkered, is not the making of yesteryear. To be mentioned by name more than fifty times in the Bible, oft in terms of unparalleled excellence "and glory," is not a simple matter. To have been inhabited once by sea-faring people, the ancient Phoenicians, who helped for more than a thousand years to carry the positive arts of civilization to the most inaccessible regions of the earth, and who have been therefore characterized by the leading Anglo-Saxon philosopher of our time, Alfred North Whitehead, as the most daring people the world has ever known, is not irrelevant to the proper understanding of "insignificant" Lebanon's significance in the life of the nations. Nor was the Lebanon "out of touch" throughout the ensuing periods: there was always some direct relation, however faint, with the centres of life and light; there was always some man from Lebanon seeking culture at its source. Three acts in the nineteenth century intensified and in a sense perfected this internationalizing process: the interest of the European Powers, whatever their motives, in securing in the sixties the autonomy of the Lebanon within the Turkish Empire; the great and meaningful epic of emigration whereby the Lebanon has sons and daughters today in every corner of the earth; and the founding in the Lebanon of Western centres of learning. The potent influence of French culture during the last thirty years has given us added avenues of approach to the world beyond us.

The outcome of this maturation, variously determined and rooted, is to produce a distinctive world-consciousness. There are in the Lebanon hundreds of graduates of European and American institutes and universities. A man from the Lebanon has either lived himself for some time in the outside world, or has direct relatives with whom he is in constant correspondence in Cairo, Manchester, Sydney, Buenos Aires or Detroit. He often knows more than one European language, sometimes to the point of conducting his thought processes in them. He is the agent, usually for an area wider than the Lebanon, of commercial concerns in Paris, London or New York. The crises of Europe and of the Arab world reflect themselves keenly and equally in his consciousness. He is thus related to the outside world not externally and by accident, but internally and in essence. He is a veritable world microcosm, of his own kind of course.

There is then in all this an ideal preparation for the international life. No sooner did we acquire our full independence in the second world war than we found ourselves quite prepared to take our modest place in the concert of nations. Accredited ministers went to

a score of capitals, and Beirut today is a major diplomatic centre in the Near East. Our first fundamental act in the international field was to join with our sister independent Arab states in the formation of the Arab League. Our second act was to join the United Nations.

The principle of the Arab League is free cooperation on the basis of complete equality and independence. We have cooperated and of course mean to continue to cooperate with our sister Arab states to the utmost. Their concerns are our concerns. The Lebanon has played an active, positive, creative, reconciling part in the affairs of the Arab League. In every international council we exhibit a united front. In the defense and definition of justice and right for Palestine, the representatives of Lebanon have taken a leading part.

The Lebanon was the forty-seventh and last country to sign the "Declaration by United Nations." By the strangest coincidence her representative affixed his signature to this document at the very moment, to the minute, in the afternoon of Thursday April 12, 1945, when President Roosevelt passed away. The President whose signature headed the list died at the exact instant when the last signature was being inscribed. His greatest life work, the conception of the United Nations, was thus sealed and completed. And in thirteen days the United Nations Conference on International Organization was to be convened in San Francisco.

At San Francisco the Delegation of Lebanon, representing as it did a country that had just emerged from the mandate system, took, together with the other Arab Delegations, a keen interest in the formulation of Chapters XI, XII and XIII of the Charter, dealing with the trusteeship system. It pressed successfully, in concert with the other Arab Delegations, for the conclusion of Article 78, which reads: "The trusteeship system shall not apply to territories which have become Members of the United Nations, relationship among which shall be based on respect for the principle of sovereign equality." This language was in part the suggestion of the Delegation of Lebanon. The total impact of our Delegation at the Conference was to stress in all humility the importance of education, mind, truth and justice as foundations for enduring peace. From the very beginning the representatives of the Lebanon grasped the importance of the Economic and Social Council and of the Lebanon's possible contribution therein.

At the time of the first meeting of the General Assembly, in London in January, 1946, there were still foreign troops on the soil of the Lebanon and Syria, and it was not clear when they were departing. Consequently the Delegation of the Lebanon to that session devoted all its energies, in unison with the Delegation of Syria, to pleading before the Security Council the cause of the immediate and unconditional evacuation of all foreign troops from our two countries. Its efforts were crowned with success, and before the year was over all foreign troops were withdrawn from the two sister republics. It was in that session that the Lebanon

was elected on the Economic and Social Council for a term of one year. In the second part of the first session of the General Assembly, convening in Lake Success in the fall of the same year, the Delegation of the Lebanon played an active role in the discussion of the problem of the veto, in the elaboration of the Constitution of the International Refugee Organization and in general economic and social matters. The resolutions of that session on the translation of the classics and on the provision of technical assistance to less developed member states were both due to the initiative of the Delegation of the Lebanon. It was then that the Lebanon was reelected on the Economic and Social Council for a further term of three years, being the only country of those whose term was expiring, besides the United States, to enjoy that privilege. In the second regular session of the General Assembly in the fall of 1947, the Delegation of the Lebanon, while dedicating most of its efforts to the question of Palestine, played its customary role in the economic and social committees and collaborated with the Delegation of Egypt in the elaboration of the resolution concerning the Economic Commission for the Middle East.

Representatives of the Lebanon were invited to sit on the Security Council whenever this organ was examining the question of Palestine. Both in the Security Council and in the two special sessions of the General Assembly in the springs of 1947 and 1948 the representatives of the Lebanon presented the Arab side of this question with reasoned fairness, objectivity and strength, and with the deepest concern for truth and peace.

In the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary and related organs the representatives of the Lebanon stood for the vigorous affirmation and implementation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, for the receiving and examining of petitions and communications concerning human rights, for the elaboration of a convention on genocide, for the development and industrialization of the less developed areas of the world, for international economic interdependence, for regional economic organization, for an economic commission for the Middle East, for the equitable resettlement of unrepatriable refugees and displaced persons, for intellectual and spiritual sharing among the nations and cultures of the world as a fundamental condition for understanding and peace, and for every action that signified and promoted knowledge, science, truth. They stressed the desirability of the United Nations evolving a separate, original, autonomous power whereby it could actively lead, initiate and challenge, and not merely receive, discuss and recommend. They helped to keep alive the all-important distinction between the mere form of peace and its substantive matter; between the mere absence of international conflict and the real securing of conditions of economic, social and intellectual justice whereby peace is positively assured; in short between the negative, regulative work of the Security Council and the positive, material, constitutive responsibilities of the Economic and Social Council. In the positions

they took they tried to maintain an attitude of objectivity, reason and independence with regard to the fundamental issues dividing “East” and “West” today.

The representatives of the Lebanon served as chairmen, vice-chairmen and rapporteurs of diverse international bodies. The President for 1948 of the Economic and Social Council is the representative of the Lebanon on that organ. True to her fundamental historical vocation as a mediator of goods and ideas, the Lebanon has been especially active in two of the specialized agencies, the International Trade Organization and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. The latter decided to hold its 1948 conference in Beirut. On the nuclear sub- commission on the status of women there was a woman representative from the Lebanon. Upon the invitation of the government of Lebanon, the Commission on the Status of Women decided to hold its 1949 session in Beirut.

The Lebanon has a positive vocation in the international field. It is not political. It is spiritual and intellectual. It consists in being true to the best and truest in East and West alike. This burden of mediation and understanding she is uniquely called to bear.

The Lebanon could not be true to East and West alike except if she stood for existential freedom. In the end this is alone her justification. This means freedom of choice, freedom of being, freedom of becoming. Whoever is about to suffocate must be able to breathe freely in the Lebanon. Here the possibility of access to the truth, the whole truth, must be absolutely real. Existential freedom interprets man as being subject only to the compulsion of truth. He is determined, but unlike the mob which is determined by every darkness and wind of doctrine, by the misguidance of every passing principality, his is the determination of truth.

Thus the individual human soul, by nature free to seek the truth and able to attain it, this is the metaphysics of the Lebanon. The converse of this proposition must also be affirmed: the truth in all its concreteness is there to be sought, attained, espoused and loved.

Lying existentially “between” and “in” West and East, the Lebanon could either fritter away her substance in eclecticism and impotence, or rise to heights of original synthesis. Commercialism, eclecticism, Levantinism, these are one and the same thing: they constitute our besetting devil, our fall. But neither can synthesis mean compromise. The false cannot be synthesized : it must be discarded. To detect it you need a higher standpoint, the standpoint of truth. Thus authentic synthesis is a summons from the beyond. To respond to it is to be goaded with the eros of being.

When therefore the Lebanon fearlessly stresses in the councils of the nations the ultimacy of freedom, the primacy of the individual, the fact that man is an end and never a means alone, the subordination of the economic and social to the intellectual and spiritual, the

supremacy of ideas, mind, reason, truth, the virtue of understanding, when the Lebanon unflinchingly stands for these values she is true to herself and then and thereby to East and West alike.

Now the “middle term,” the principle of mediation, is, according to Aristotle, the mark of reason. In this sense mediation is moderation. To be able to perform her moderating and mediating function between East and West, the Lebanon must be and feel secure in her existence. The narrow nationalist may grudge her her being; to the superficial aesthete she may be an embarrassment. But the Arab world, of which she is an integral part, and the West, in which she profoundly participates, must both see in a strong, self-respecting, peaceful, independent, free and secure Lebanon blessing to everybody. Only the love of truth can really see this. Thus the secure existence of the Lebanon measures the degree of love abroad.

Everything that strengthens the Lebanon as thus conceived must be good. To swerve from her basic idea is to court disaster. Her basic idea is not political; on the contrary, her political existence is derivative. If she succumbs to the political temptation, to the manifestation of power, she will move from one defeat to another. The principle of international politics is power; but Lebanon’s power is reason, truth, love, suffering, being. She can pass from strength to strength only if she suffered being.

In truth the Lebanon in the life of nations is but a function of the life of Lebanon in herself. There is a danger that we realize ourselves from the outside, that we ground national in international existence. The brilliance of international existence is either an accident or the expression of an inner strength. The authentic return to the inner, that is our crying need. To be Lebanon is either a tragedy or a glory. Thus the Lebanon is a fundamental task, the task of converting tragedy into, glory, “the glory of Lebanon.”