

# A Time of Sorrow and Renewal

*Some Opening Remarks — By J. ROBERT OPPENHEIMER*

THE Congress whose anniversary we are celebrating has, in English and German a name which entails a slight ambiguity, characteristically absent from the French. We are the *Congress for Cultural Freedom*, the *Kongress für Kulturelle Freiheit*, the *Congrès Pour la Liberté de la Culture*. I find some merit in the ambiguity. We must maintain, extend and deepen our concern for the liberty of culture, for our colleagues who, in many parts of the world, are still sorely deprived of it; but we have rightly come to accept another commitment, which is for the culture of liberty itself, for the quality and virtue of those societies that do live with a reasonable measure of political freedom.

It seems right to me that these questions will be immanent in our discussions. How we shall assess the progress in liberty of the decade ahead will perhaps best be discussed at the end, by those who have talked and thought about it. For me, at the very opening of these sessions, it seems more appropriate to turn to the more modest question of the great changes of the decade just past.

How great they are, how the very conditions of our life have altered, reminds us of the central feature of our time: in the span of a man's life, we live many lives, in many worlds. A decade ago this city, and almost all of Europe, still bore everywhere signs of the ravages of war. This city, like much of Europe, has in some sense recovered. Its economy and prosperity could hardly have been anticipated a decade ago. But the greatest change here, in this city, is that, in one respect, there has been no change, that its citizens live with a government and a style of life very largely of their own choice.

TEN YEARS AGO the Korean war, surely in the making, had not yet broken out; and the guns that were to open that limited but most bitter conflict had not yet spoken. Ten years ago one could hardly have imagined that this spring and summer some dozen newly constituted nations would be on the point of seeking membership in the United Nations Organisation, nor that the quest for national independence, for rapid modernisation, and for appropriate regional or cultural international co-operation could have progressed so far and so fast.

We have, on these vast changes, and their future

portent, a sadly limited perspective; but are surely all aware, in my country and in Europe, that we are called upon to help; that our help in the past has been not nearly enough, not nearly massive enough, and, even more important, that it has not been good enough, that it requires, beyond resources, also intellectual effort and creative understanding. It is in the interest of our citizens, and above all it is a requirement of the ideal of fraternity, that we turn together to these many varied, difficult problems.

Ten years ago Stalin ruled Russia; in China the new Communist government was at the beginning of its consolidation of power. Ten years ago there was an almost total barrier to cultural and technical communication between the scholars of the Communist world and the West. Ten years ago it could still be argued what vitality and what promise would lie in the gradual creation of a united Europe.

AMONG all the changes of this strange decade there are two to which I would address myself. One is brutal. Ten years ago my country had barely lost, and still effectively had, a monopoly of the great new weapons, the atomic weapons; and for their use in combat our armed forces, and all others, had means of delivery not essentially different from those of the second world war. Yet it was then generally held, and I believe correctly, that these armaments constituted for all of us a hideous argument against the outbreak of general war. To-day there can be no talk of monopoly: we are deeply into the atomic age, in which many nations will be so armed.

In this decade the deadliness, the destructive power of atomic stockpiles has increased far more than a hundredfold—how much more, it may be neither permissible nor relevant to tell. To-day, the new means of delivery and use have made of the command and control of these weapon systems a nightmare fully known only to those responsible; they have added chance to anger as another cause of disaster.

LET ME SAY ONLY THIS: What some of us know, and some of our governments have recognised, all people should know and every great government understand: if this next great war occurs, none of us can count on having enough living to bury our dead.

This situation, quite new in human history, has from time to time brought with it a certain grim and ironic community of interest, not only among friends, but between friends and enemies. This community has nothing to do with the injunction that we love our enemies, but is a political and

*These texts were the introductory and concluding addresses delivered by Messrs. Oppenheimer and Kennan to the recent tenth anniversary conference of the Congress for Cultural Freedom in Berlin.*

human change not wholly without hopeful portent.

The *Bhagavad Gita*, that beautiful poem, the great Hindu scripture, is a sustained argument on the nature of human life and its meaning, introduced by Prince Arjuna's reluctance to engage in fratricidal combat, and by Vishnu's clarity that this combat was a simple and necessary duty, whose performance would preserve the way of Arjuna's salvation, and whose evils were of no deep meaning, either for him or for those whom he might kill. Can we be thus comforted?

TRADITIONALLY, the national governments have accepted as their first and highest duty the defence and security of their peoples. In to-day's world they are not very good at it. We all know that the steps which we have taken, alone or in concert, have at very best an uncertain, contingent, changing, and above all transitory effectiveness. This is one reason, important but perhaps not central, for a second change in this past decade. We have come to doubt the adequacy of our institutions to the world we live in; beyond that, we have come to doubt certain aspects of the health of our own culture. In this, I speak with my own country in mind, because the traits that have given rise to our anxieties are as marked with us as anywhere. Yet I think I see that in the older, more traditional societies of Europe, the same problems are beginning to appear, and will inevitably grow more grave. I think that I see that in the measure in which liberty comes to the peoples now largely deprived of it, in the measure in which productivity, education, and the modern world come to the peoples that aspire for them, these problems, in their own form, will come too.

Compared to any high culture of the past, ours is an enormous society. It is for us an egalitarian one, in which we hope—and I pray that we may always hope—that there be no irrelevant exclusiveness from participation in its highest works, its powers, and its discourse. Ours, for special reasons of history, rendered more and more acute by the nature of the twentieth-century world, is a fluid society, with rapid change its hallmark. Like so many others, it is, in its politics, and much of its public life, a largely, even an inherently, secular society. We live, as we all know, with an expansion of knowledge overpoweringly beautiful, vast, ramified, quite unparalleled in the history of men. We live with a yearly enrichment of our understanding of nature, and of man as part of nature, that doubles every decade; and that is in its nature, necessarily, inevitably, and even in part happily an enrichment of specialisation.

This age of ours is the scientific age, in which our work, our leisure, our economy, and an increasingly large part of the very quality of our lives, are based on the application of newly acquired knowledge of nature to practical human problems; in which size, egalitarianism, flux, are the social hallmarks of a continuing cognitive revolution.

I HAVE BEEN MUCH CONCERNED that in this world we have so largely lost the ability to talk with one another. In the great succession of deep discoveries,

we have become removed from one another in tradition, and in a certain measure even in language. We have had neither the time nor the skill nor the dedication to tell one another what we have learned, nor to listen nor to hear, nor to welcome its enrichment of the common culture and the common understanding. Thus the public sector of our lives, what we have and hold in common, has suffered, as have the illumination of the arts, the deepening of justice, and virtue, the ennobling of power and of our common discourse. We are less men for this. Our specialised traditions flourish; our private beauties thrive; but in those high undertakings where man derives strength and insight from the public excellence, we have been impoverished. We hunger for nobility: the rare words and acts that harmonise simplicity and truth. In this I see some connection with the great unresolved public problems: survival, liberty, fraternity.

LET me be clear: I do not think that living in to-day's world is an easy task, or that any human society has ever solved the problems that now confront us, or has even lived with them in dignity. This is for us not so much a time of anger as of honest sorrow, of renewal, of effort.

Let me be clear also on the great virtues of to-day's world: the recession of prejudice, of poverty, disease and degradation which marks so much of it; the creative, intimate and lovely communities which thrive in it; the brilliance and wonder of the sciences that lie at the root of it.

What is at stake is a view that is not truly a necessary view, but one that has been the specific mark, the *cachet spécifique* of European civilisation. If I cannot be comforted by Vishnu's argument to Arjuna, it is because I am too much a Jew, much too much a Christian, much too much a European, far too much an American. For I believe in the meaningfulness of human history, and of our role in it, and above all of our responsibility to it.

Great cultures have flourished without this belief; perhaps they will again. If the switches of great war are thrown, in anger or in error, and if indeed there are human survivors, there may some day again be high art, perhaps, and some ennobling sense of the place of man and his destiny, and perhaps great science. There will be no sense of history. There will be no sense of "progress in freedom."

Indeed, just this belief and this dedication have brought us where we are. All high civilisations have had a tradition of learning the truth, of contemplation, of understanding. Since Greek times, many have understood as well the role of rigour, of proof, of anchoring consequence to hypothesis. They have had as well the art of putting questions to nature, of experiment; they have had forms of communication, perhaps inadequate, but at once robust and intimate. It has taken all these, re-discovered and slowly recaptured in the last millennium, to make the age of science; but it has taken more. Transfused with these, there has been a special sense of progress, not merely in man's understanding, but in the conditions of man's life, in his civility, in the nobility of his institutions and his freedom, a sense of progress not for the indi-

vidual soul alone, but of progress in history, in man's long story.

WE MAY WELL HAVE LEARNED that if we of the West do not look to our own virtue, and that of our institutions and our life and lives, we shall be ill

equipped to bring liberty to our colleagues now deprived of it, or to make either our culture or our liberty relevant and helpful to the lands newly embarked on unprecedented change. Let us, in many varied ways, turn to this, quite without flattery or illusion, but not quite without hope.

## “That Candles May Be Brought . . .”

*Some Closing Remarks — By GEORGE F. KENNAN*

THIS organisation, the Congress for Cultural Freedom, has had from the outset two orders of danger to consider in its work: the external dangers, brought to us from outside by those who do not believe in the value of freedom at all; and the internal dangers, the ones that can and do arise, unintended and often unperceived, from the development of our own society in a life where freedom can never be taken for granted but must, as Goethe correctly observed, be conquered anew with each passing day.

So far as the first of these dangers is concerned, there has been, since this organisation was founded, a certain change in the nature of the danger itself. A decade ago, there was still lively apprehension lest the deadening hand of ideological regimentation reach beyond the political limits to which it then extended and come to hamper the life of the spirit in regions still farther afield. Such an extension was conceivable only in two ways: by ideological and political conquest from within, or by war.

So far as ideology is concerned, the danger seems to me no longer great. We have all learned much in these past ten years. I doubt that there is to-day any country, in the part of the world not now controlled by Moscow or Peking, where educated people could be persuaded voluntarily to sell their birthright of creative independence for the pseudo-security of subordination to a militant disciplined movement, devoted to the maintenance of the illusion of purpose. The obsolescence, the rigidities, and the hypocrisy of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine, under its contemporary priesthood, are too widely apparent for that. To-day it is, in this respect, not we who are on the defensive: it is those who have still not learned that the life of the spirit represents the cumulative experience of civilisation over the course of millennia, not to be made the mere instrument of any single, passing, political régime, and who are now faced with the insistence of their own youth on the right to knowledge and enquiry.

IF WE TURN, on the other hand, to the question of the possible curtailment of the area of cultural freedom by means of war and conquest, here the

danger is no longer that the area of regimentation might be increased by such devices. That, too, is unlikely. The danger is rather that out of present political rivalries and military anxieties there will come a war of such destructiveness as to render meaningless the very question as to control over political and cultural conditions in its aftermath. Political regimentation hampers and disturbs the life of the spirit; nuclear war could deprive it of its meaning.

With respect to this danger, I can say nothing comforting. The *status quo* that has endured over these past seven or eight years is now, it seems to me, beginning to break up. The auspices under which this process is setting in are not reassuring, from the standpoint of the prospects for world peace. Mistakes have been made on both sides. New tensions and sources of frictions have arisen, partly from the logic of the weapon race itself. The problem is not made easier by the fact that one great segment of Communist opinion, centering around Peking, seems indifferent to the destructive implications of a nuclear war. The situation is indeed such that if we were obliged to think in terms of the weaponry, say, of the first World War, we would be obliged, in the light of historical experience, to recognise the chances for avoidance of war as poor. If to-day we do not have to come to so pessimistic a conclusion, it is only because we know that there are a great many people on both sides who understand that no rational political end is to be achieved, and no positive values are to be promoted or even defended, by the use of the weapons of which certain great governments now dispose. Some people take more comfort than I do in this factor of reassurance. To me, it appears as an intolerably fragile one, weakened by the ever-present possibility of accident and misunderstanding. However that may be, it is, for the moment, our greatest hope.

I do not know for how many others I speak when I say that I feel personally a great helplessness in the face of this situation. Perhaps this is only a personal predicament. Perhaps there are narrow limits to the frequency with which an out-