



Charles Malik

Biography and Achievements (1906-1987)

By Tony E. Nasrallah

Childhood (1906-1923)

Charles Malik was born in Btīrrām on February 11th, 1906 to Dr. Ḥabīb Mālik and Zārīfa Karam, in what was the *Mutuṣarrifiyyah* of Mount Lebanon--an autonomous pocket in the Ottoman Empire. Charles received his primary and elementary education in the adjacent village Bishmizzīn and his secondary education in Tripoli in a Protestant missionary school known as the American Mission School for Boys. He graduated in 1923 with a high school degree. Many decades later Charles referred to his village and its vicinity projecting it in history to describe Christ's setting:¹

“He also moved about with his disciples in those idyllic Galilean villages only about a hundred miles south of where I was born, villages not much different from the villages that I know perfectly to my own region.”

In school little Charles performed well though the external settings were not always smooth. During his school years, specifically between the age of six and twelve, the First World War erupted and the famine swept the region killing up to a third of the population of the area.² The prevailing poverty was an unbearable scene which probably stamped young Charles' life. A professor at the American University of Beirut who eye-witnessed the First World War in Lebanon reported:³

“Those who did not flee to the interior in quest of sustenance joined the ever-increasing army of beggars in the city. Among the beggars were those with enough

¹ Charles H. Malik, “These Things I Believe,” *A Journal of Orthodox Opinion*, accessed March 14, 2011.

http://www.orthodox.cn/catechesis/thethingsibelieve_en.htm.

² About one hundred thousands died [see: Philip Khuri Hitti, *Lebanon in History: From the Earliest Times to the Present* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 485] and the population of Mount Lebanon was about three hundred thousands.

³ Jurjus al-Khūrī al-Maqdisī, as conveyed and translated by Hitti, *Lebanon in History*, 485

energy to roam the streets and knock at the doors, ...Others would lie down on the side of streets with outstretched arms, emaciated bodies and weakening voices. Still others, including infants, could speak only through their eyes...By 1918 the lowest class of society had been practically wiped out and the middle class taken its place.”

Though Charles eye-witnessed such crisis, his family was less likely to starve. Although Dr. Ḥabīb had become the poorest among the Maliks (for his mother Ḥanneh—the influential grandmother of Charles—had sold much of her land to have Ḥabīb educated), he nonetheless had some olive fields, and more importantly, he was a medical officer in the Ottoman army. Joining the Ottoman army was not a choice, but an obligation imposed by Istanbul. Half of the medical doctors who graduated with him underwent a similar obligation.

Charles devoted a great deal of his energy on studies and on reading in general. He was given a separate room at home for that, which probably bothered some of his brothers who were no less distinguished at school. Charles apparently enjoyed studying. One summer, the school principal who had said of Charles that he was the smartest student to enroll in the principal’s days, promoted Charles two grades in one go instead of one. Charles gladly conveyed the news to his Mother, and spent his summer vacation studying diligently the curriculum of the year about to be skipped. The strange and telling anecdote of this incident is that by the end of summer Charles told his mother, “if I miss the year I will be missing a lot. I would rather take it with my colleagues.”¹ Charles excelled particularly in Mathematics and Physics, and he chose these subjects to be his specialty at the university.

On a spiritual level, little Charles was very much interested in Orthodox Christianity, which was the only faith he had been amply exposed to both in his village and the neighboring one. In the secondary school in Tripoli, however, Charles got a pluralistic exposure to the various Christian denominations as well as to the non-Christian persuasions around. The school was Protestant and attracted Maronite-Catholics as well as Greek Catholics, and also some local Sunnis from Tripoli. Charles served as an altar boy for many years, and apparently it was there that he got his first spiritual experiences and encounters with God. His spiritual/philosophical book *Wonder of Being* was dedicated to “the memory of [distant

¹ Suhā Khayr, Interview, Dūmā, October 23, 2010. and interview with Salīm al-‘Azār, Beirut, January 14, 2010. Suhā is Malik’s niece and she heard this and many other stories from her grandmother Zarīfa Karam, the mother of Charles. Salīm is the son-in-law of Charles’s school principal.

uncle] Father Mikhael Nicholas Malik, Orthodox priest of the Church of Bṭirrām, al-Koura, Lebanon, under whom I served as a child for seven years as acolyte in the inner temple of the church”

Undergraduate Studies (1923-1927)

Charles joined his father’s *alma mater*, the American University of Beirut—which already had half a century of history—to study mathematics and physics. In 1922 Charles’s father left Lebanon to settle in Egypt, and by 1924 all the family, save Charles, followed.¹ The American University was quite an experience for Charles. On the academic level he performed well in his studies, scoring a full mark in his major subjects across the four years of study and getting a general average unchallenged throughout the first century of the institution’s one fifty years. Yet, despite his seriousness, Charles was popular among his peers and helpful to them; the renowned linguist Anīs Frayḥā mentions in his autobiography how by the end of his first year at the American University of Beirut he was completely confused in trigonometry in *sine* and *cosine* and on the eve of his final exam he asked Charles for help, who helped him in “all care and love”, without which Frayḥā would not have graduated.²

First Jobs (1927-1932)

Charles graduated from the American University of Beirut with a degree of Bachelors in Science in 1927 and thereafter got his first job as an instructor of mathematics and physics for two years at the same university. It was at AUB that Malik first heard the name “Whitehad”, and was guided to read his recently published book of metaphysics. In 1977 he wrote how two of his professors, Stewart Crawford and Julius Arthur Brown, guided him to Alfred North Whitehead’s book *Science and the Modern World*:³

“I read it with great passion. I examined it meticulously in a way I had never done before. I filled its pages with notes of my own, and also wrote hundreds of pages of remarks, interpolating the contents and the author’s aims. [...] I took two decisive decisions that marked the rest of my life: the first one was based on my discovery

¹ Rafīq Ma’lūf, “Shārl Mālik: Tārīkh al-mu’jizah w maḍmūn al-risālah” in Rafīq Ma’lūf, *Charles Malik: Dawr Lubnān Fī Ṣan’ Al-I’lān Al-‘Ālamī Li Ḥuqūq Al-Insān* (Beirut: Nawfal, 1998)., 21

² Anīs Frayḥā, *Qabl an ‘Ansā* (Beirut: Jarrūs Press, 1989), 96.

³ Charles H. Malik, *Al-Muqaddimah, Sīrah Dhātīyyah Falsafīyyah*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar AnNahar, 2001). 314-5. Malik also told E.J. Kahn in 1950, “My reading of the woks of Alfred North Whitehead fired me with an ambition to study under him at Harvard, so I became determined to go there” E.J.Kahn, “Talk of the Town,” *The New Yorker*, December 9, 1950, 32.

that philosophy constituted my lifelong ambition where I wanted to immerse myself, and the second was that I most certainly had to study philosophy under Alfred North Whitehead, even if he were in the North Pole or on the planet Mars!”¹

Malik probably found mathematics and physics less stimulating a subject than philosophy, and thus shifted from physics to metaphysics. But this step was taken only after mastering physics and mathematics. Malik’s shift during his university years between 1923 and 1927 is parallel to that by Pablo Picasso on the other end of the Mediterranean at about the same time as he shifted from realistic art into abstract art—but only after mastering the realistic classical art.²

In this period, Malik seemed to be influenced by Whitehead’s Monism. A quasi spiritual experience that he underwent may partially clarify this influence:³

“And if I do forget I may never forget a mystical experience I passed through on a fine spring day in my village Bṭirram. It was during my youth years, and I had mastered Darwin’s theory through botanist Alfred E. Day and zoologist William Thomson Van Dyck, both of whom were professors at the American University of Beirut. So that day I went with a group of friends and relatives cousins to the prairies of the village, and the Spring season of Lebanon had filled the Earth with flowers and fragrance, and the warm Sun was radiating on us under a clear blue sky with a few white clouds. [...] the birds were singing all around ... and the fig leaves were between green and blue [...] so we started discussing and recollecting, and we spoke of matters relating to science as well as matters relating to sentiments [...] some of us started preparing the barbeque meat while others prepared the drinks, all on the green prairie in the most beautiful setting. At that joyful instant and in the midst of that meeting [...] my mind was filled with Darwin’s theory about the formation of categories and how species evolved and descended from each other. I suddenly felt united with nature in all its beauty and loudness and diversity and harmony and contradiction, and that I am one of its fruits and I have flowered from its branches and roots... I felt that indeed I was an indivisible part of it, strongly tied to it, not just emotionally and not just intellectually, but especially in the craving of the original branches, and in the unity of existence--all existence!

¹ Malik. *Al-Muqaddimah* 314-315.

² Compare for example, Pablo Picasso’s *Seated Woman*, 1927 with his 1923 *Portrait of Olga Koklova* (his first wife).

³ Malik, *Al-Muqaddimah, Sīrah Dhātīyah Falsafīyah*. 279-280.

When I felt that I started weeping like a child, and my friends did not understand what was happening to me, and I kept crying for about ten minutes [...] I could not speak, and my friends were puzzled [...] when I regained my strength, my heart was still filled with joy; a joy that I may never forget as long as I live [...] Then I had to explain to my friends: the theory of Darwin on the origin of species, and I detailed to them at length its contents, and I even made them sense that we are all one: us and the fig and the olive and the vine and the green weeds and the vermin with the beautiful birds and the flies and Sun and the sky and the clouds and the doves. Then we all ate meat, both raw and cooked, and drank Lebanese Arak and we drank the toast of Darwin and his theories of formation and evolution.”

In 1929 he travelled to join his family in Egypt. He benefited from a research fund by Ford Foundation¹ to prepare a study about the bilharziasis disease which was widespread in Egypt. In this period Charles published some articles in the Egyptian *Al-muqataṭaf* and in *Al-urwah*.

In Cairo Malik led discussion groups in the Y.M.C.A. with mixed Muslim and Christian youths. The discussions evolved around themes like faith, freedom, evil, fate, etc. and the meetings were recorded in minutes.² “The three years I spent in Egypt” he wrote “saw me practically every evening either in the Y.M.C.A. or at home reading philosophy and theology.”³ Malik was quoted referring to his Egypt years with the words, “During the summer of 1930-something, I used to sit by the banks of the Nile and I read through all of Hardy and Meredith. But I also read Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and Aquinas's *Summa*.”⁴ From Egypt Malik corresponded with Whitehead, who too had studied and taught mathematics, but at the Trinity College in Cambridge, England. To him Malik wrote:⁵

“Throughout my college course I concentrated on mathematics, and for the past five years I have spent most of spare time in studying by myself, discussing with others and writing in Arabic on, philosophy. My chief interest has been modern philosophy, and your philosophy has been the focus of this interest.

¹ He also worked for the Rockefeller Foundation. See <http://www.un.org/ga/55/president/bio13.htm>; though the website has errors on Malik's biography; for example they say that he earned his PhD in 1934 but in fact it was 1937.

² Rafiq Ma'lūf, “Shārl Mālik: Tārīkh al-mu'jizah w maḍmūn al-risālah” in Ma'lūf, *Charles Malik: Dawr Lubnān Fī Ṣan' Al-I'lān Al-'Ālamī Li Ḥuqūq Al-Insān*, 23.

³ Letter by Charles Malik to AUB president Bayard Dodge, signed and dated 28/10/1937. The letter was published under the title “Letter addressed by Charles Malik to Bayard Dodge (Philosophy, AUB, and the Near East)” *Al-Abhath*, XLVI, (1998) 137-146. This quotation comes from p. 141.

⁴ Edward W. Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (London: Granta Books, 2000), 265.

⁵ Letter from Malik to Whitehead at the Library of Congress Manuscript Division, the Charles Malik Papers, Box 52 Folder 10.

[...] I am applying by this letter for a position in your kitchen or garden, if you knew with what absolute enthusiasm and earnestness I tender this application I am sure you would not hesitate an instant in sympathizing with it, let you be made up wholly of flint. And the tragic aspect of it all is that there is no way of proving this earnestness to you.

I am not asking you, Professor Whitehead, to believe any word in this letter. I am merely speaking to myself as I say that I am immensely interested in philosophy, and especially in your vein of it; that I think I understand what you are after; that it is relatively very easy to secure unsurpassable recommendations from people holding responsible and important posts here in Cairo and in Beirut; and that the one present object in my life is to study under you.

[...] This Arabic Near East is in crying need for a vital leavening in its modes of thinking. My life's hope is to be able to catch some of your spirit first-hand and to pool my unworthy share in this vitalizing attempt.

[...] I have written to myself without anybody seeing them some reflections inspired by parts of your "Science and the Modern World." They can imperfectly help to prove to you that I am interested in your thought, and I can copy and send them to you should you care to see them.

What a fool I have been! Do I expect Dr. Whitehead, busy as he is with cosmic process, to read this letter, and having read it, to expand on it the tiniest iota of care and sympathy? But who knows, indeed who knows, he may discern through it a happy chance for undeserved service that perhaps may make him happy ever afterwards!"

Indeed, a while later, Whitehead replied to Malik's overture inviting him to find his way to Harvard and guaranteeing him that the bulk of his financial needs will be covered by Harvard starting the second semester. In fall of 1932 Malik sailed from Alexandria to the United States. His mixed feelings as he sailed from Alexandria to a new world were feelings of anxiety embedded in happiness, and in complete reliance on God.¹ Although Malik was not the first lay-person to travel to the Western World for graduate studies from Lebanon (he was notably preceded by historian Philip Hitti a quarter of a century before, and a few others), yet Malik was the first to venture into Harvard's philosophy department.

¹ Ma'lūf, 23.

Cambridge, Massachusetts (1932-36)

Twenty-six year old Charles worked hard on his studies in order to secure a scholarship for the coming term.¹ He also managed to find time for a suitable part-time job: teaching Arabic. Among his students was the famous historian of science, later lecturer at Harvard, Dr. George Sarton. In memory of Sarton, Malik wrote, “I knew Dr. Sarton very well from 1932 on. I used to meet with him twice a week for three or four years in his office, Widener library 189, where I taught him Arabic.”²

Malik built solid friendships there with colleagues. Among them was a friendship with Howard Schomer, the fate of that friendship was to last for many years to come. Schomer described Malik’s physical appearance during his first semester at Harvard: “could have modeled for Michelangelo as Jeremiah. Enormous head, immense arc of a nose, burning black eyes, bristling curly black hair and bushy black eyebrows.”³ By their final year, Schomer got to know Malik rather well and could describe not just his appearance but his character and love for debate, with these words:⁴

Malik was quite impecunious, always wearing the same outfit—a ridiculous greenish tweed jacket and knickers—and he lived off-campus sharing a quite cheap room with a budding atomic physicist. He invited a few students from various disciplines to drop in Tuesday nights for free-wheeling exchanges of ideas and concerns. Before our brainstorming ended toward 2:00 A.M. we usually had consumed quantities of oranges or other fruit. Charles launched the evening's talkfest by reading a brief provocative passage from some current theologian, philosopher, scientist, or intellectual historian...he was clearly out to get to the bottom of any serious issue. Hating bland smoothing over of significant disagreements, he was single-mindedly in search of the truth.

In fact all those who knew and appreciated Malik highlight his hate for “soothing” and his love for truth. After graduating, Malik contrasted the philosopher with what he called the

¹ Ma’lūf, *Charles Malik: Dawr Lubnān Fī Ṣan’ Al-I’lān Al-‘Ālamī Li Huqūq Al-Insān*. 26.

² Malik, C., “Dr. Sarton’s Study of Arabic” in *ISIS*, #48 (1957), 335. Note that this famous journal was founded by Dr. Sarton.

³ Howard Schomer, “In Homage to My Icons and Mentors,” *Berkeley Outlook Club*, February 20, 1992, 19–20 as reported in Mary Ann Glendon, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2001).

⁴ *Ibid.*

“man-in-the-street” who is “the symbol of commonsense” only, with no abstract or philosophical depth:¹

“he flees reality and himself and his truth, never wanting to have anything to do with these things. He begins his day by reading the morning newspaper... he enjoys remaining in this distracted, dispersed state of confusion...he jumps from one thing to another, from one book to another, from one subject to another, from one place to another, always seeking something new and never finding it.”

Malik then asserts the inevitable remark: “And this man-in-the-street is you and I in one mode of our existence.” But there is no doubt that Malik gave the impression of seeking the truth even at the expense of his comfort. This was probably a key element in attracting listeners to whatever he taught and in imposing self-respect.

Whitehead’s impact on Malik was definitely a great one. Later on and after returning Harvard, Malik stated that whereas Darwin offered a magnificent methodology for understanding the biological world and Einstein presented a similarly groundbreaking methodology for explaining the workings of the physical world, it was only through Whitehead’s philosophical approach that Malik was able to discover a methodology that synthesized both.²

Fourteen Months in Germany (1935-36)

Albeit the competition, Malik excelled academically at Harvard the way he had excelled in Beirut. He was granted a travelling fellowship award, and was given to choose a place in Europe to visit for research, and Malik chose Freiburg in Germany to attend the lectures of Martin Heidegger, who was almost unknown in the American world at the time. Malik later recalled that his feeling in Germany was that he outgrew Whitehead, and needed to progress further.³

Malik wrote to Heidegger on May 14 1935, introducing himself and informing him that he had just received the Shedlon Travelling Fellowship, “with which I expect to study

¹ Malik, C., *The Meaning of Philosophy: Lecture delivered at the American Junior College for Women* [February 24, 1938]. (Beirut: 1938), 14-15.

² Malik, *Al-Muqaddimah, Sīrah Dhātīyah Falsafīyah*, 132.

³ E.J.Kahn, “Talk of the Town,” *The New Yorker*, December 9, 1950, 33. Cf. Glendon, 125.

Philosophy in Germany” and inquiring whether “it would be possible to me to have the privilege of studying under you next year.”¹

Malik was accepted by Heidegger, and was later to write, “There were 37 of us in them from all over the world. We were all hand-picked by Heidegger himself.”² Young Charles began his German language lessons at Harvard, and continued in Germany. His goal was to read comfortably German philosophy in the original language. The writings of Heidegger were quite difficult, and Malik noted that “[s]ome have held them the most difficult of all German philosophy”. But he did reach a stage when he could read Heidegger “faster than any newspaper.”³

Heidegger’s seminars which Malik attended dealt with the following subjects: Leibniz’s *Monadology*, Schelling’s philosophy of freedom, Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* and one with Heidegger’s reflection on the question, “What is a Thing?”⁴

Of his experience in these seminars, Malik wrote, “In the midst of the lecture certain statements would often fall from Heidegger’s lips which I took to mean something very personal to me. Not that he was thinking in the slightest of me or of anybody in particular, or even was aware of my existence in the lecture hall, but the statements themselves were of such nature that I felt they applied to me directly, and always, alas, unfavorably.”⁵

Besides the contents of the lectures, Malik learned particular traits from his professor. For example, the way Heidegger lectured was by focusing, “sometimes for hours on a single proposition, a focusing onto which we the students would be thoroughly drawn at every step. He would bring to bear on that proposition the entire history of philosophy and much besides of the experience of other facets of Western civilization.”⁶ Such was one of the teaching methods that Charles was to carry on in his classes in Beirut.

Malik’s synthesis of Heidegger may be expressed as the “detheologizing of theology—not the destruction of it, but the detheologizing of it—, that is, the secularizing, the humanizing,

¹ Letter to Herrn Professor Martin Heidegger, May 14, 1935, LoC Box 53 Folder 7.

² Charles H. Malik, “A Christian Reflection on Martin Heidegger,” *The Thomist* 41, no. 1 (January 1977): 19, 7.

³ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁴ Malik, “A Christian Reflection on Martin Heidegger.”⁵

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

the intellectualizing, the ontologizing, the immanentizing, of it. [...] Heidegger is theology, but without God, and certainly without the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.[...].”¹

Malik’s “Jeremiah” features were not something particularly welcomed in Germany at the time. He was once kicked fiercely by a Nazi officer who mistook the young Levantine for a Jew, and traces of the beating remained on Charles’s legs for many decades to follow. Malik then preferred to leave the precious lectures by Heidegger a little shy of the scholarship’s ending, and returned back to Massachusetts. At Harvard he reported:²

“What can I say to impress on you the absolute ubiquity of the Hitler spirit? SA and SS uniforms everywhere. Hitler youth, Hitler girls, Arbeitsdienst, the new army. Swastika flags sticking out of every window on official occasions. Columns of uniformed men—strong, healthy, hopeful, confident—marching, marching; singing, singing. National-socialist papers the same everywhere; the same controlled news, the same terrible hatred against communists, the French, the Jews and what they call the colored races. The Professors at the University beginning their classes with the Nazi salute to which the students respond. On the southern side of the University inscribed lately "Dem ewigen Deuschtum"—to the eternal German race—, to counterbalance what had been for a long time inscribed on the western side, "Die Wahrheit wird euch freimachen"—the truth shall make you free.”

If Charles Malik’s primary exposure to Christianity was in his parish Church in Bṭirrām and with his grandmother, and his primary exposure to Islam was in Egypt, his exposure to the West was in Harvard and his exposure to the German thought was at the hands of Heidegger.

After successfully defending his dissertation on *The Metaphysics of Time in the Philosophies of Whitehead and Heidegger*, Malik spent an entire summer editing parts of his doctorate, and hoped to publish chapters on Whitehead in a separate book, but he never did.³ His thesis, however, though unpublished, was used by other researchers.⁴ His years in the West were

¹ The rest of the quote is quite significant as well, “One does not write "a theological critique" of Marx or Russell or Dewey or Bergson or Wittgenstein, because these thinkers had nothing to do materially with theology, and that despite the *Deux Sources* in the case of Bergson. But one does write ‘a theological critique’ of Heidegger because the subject matter of Heidegger is the very subject matter of theology, though camouflaged in a non-theological dress. Malik.19.

² Charles Malik, *Fourteen Months in Germany* (c.1937; unpublished manuscript in the Malik Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division). Cf., Glendon, 126.

³ The Manuscript was published in 2016: Charles Malik, *The Systems of Whitehead’s Metaphysics*, ed. Habib C. Malik and Tony E. Nasrallah (Louaize: Notre Dame University Press, 2016).

⁴ Malik, *Al-Muqaddimah, Sirah Dhātīyah Falsafīyah*, 316.

best summoned by his own statement: “There is no exaggeration but a modest sense of reality in saying that my five years of work in America and in Germany brought me into intimate contact with the best living bearers of the Western philosophic tradition.”¹

Professor (1937-45)

Malik returned to Lebanon in 1937 to teach and found the philosophy department at the American University of Beirut. But what is home? His family was in Egypt, and the young Charles of 31 years had spent almost the same number of years outside his home-town Bṭirrām as in it. Nonetheless, he could relate well to Beirut, and especially to the university and its vicinity. It was in this period of his life that Charles met and married the love of his life: Eva Ḥabīb Badr, a graduate student at the American University of Beirut.² Though she came from a strong Protestant background (her grandfather was a pastor) and he came from a strong Orthodox background (he too had an uncle who was a priest), yet they had enough common ground that overcame their differences. Charles and Eva were children of Syrian Protestant College alumni; incidentally both Charles and Eva were children of “Ḥabīb”s who graduated in 1898.³

Charles referred to his marriage to be divinely inspired.⁴ About twenty years after their marriage, Malik described Eva with these words in his private diaries:⁵

“Eva is the most wonderful women I know and certainly one of the most wonderful women in the world. Absolutely remarkable her perceptions, her intuition, her insight, her understanding, her sense of humour. I owe her everything. I am not worthy of her shoes. I know what I am saying.”

It was in these professorial yeas during the Second World War that Charles earned a reputation of an impactful philosopher. Although Charles was not yet a public figure in the political arena, he surely had his circles of influence, primarily though not exclusively among

¹ Letter by Charles Malik to AUB president Bayard Dodge, signed and dated 28/10/1937. The letter was published under the title “Letter addressed by Charles Malik to Bayard Dodge (Philosophy, AUB, and the Near East)” *Al-Abhath*, XLVI, (1998) 137-146. This quotation is on page 141.

² An interesting anecdote is on how the two met: Charles was delivering a lecture at the American University when Eva publicly disagreed with him pointing to him some of his errors. Najlā’ ‘Aqrāwī, *Quṭūf al-ayyām*, (Beirut: Dār Nilson, 2005), 60.

³ Ma’lūf, 29.

⁴ ‘Aqrāwī, *Quṭūf al-ayyām*, 60.

⁵ Charles H. Malik, *Diaries*, December 9, 1960.

some of his students. As a colleague of his put it, “He was a marvelous teacher he managed to illustrate complicated philosophical discussions which would interest his students.”¹

Many of his students joined the Catholic Church due to his fiery lectures on St. Thomas Aquinas, although changing sect in Lebanon at the time raised more than a few eyebrows. One of his students said:²

“His method was [applicable to] whoever he was teaching. Plato ... was the truth with a capital P... . Then we moved to Aristotle and there we discovered that Plato was incomplete. Aristotle was the real culmination of the search for truth. Then once we moved into the Middle Ages we discovered that Aristotle was half a philosopher, the real philosopher was St Thomas Aquinas.”

It became spoken that “behind every reform in the Middle East there is a student of Malik”³

Malik’s circle of influence surpassed his handful of students. His profile surely helped him get the ears of the politically ambitious, for it was in this period that the Second World War was unfolding—fortunately its terrors were much milder than the First World War on the Lebanon. Hence Malik and many around him were able to discuss ideas.

Howard Schomer, Malik’s old friend from Harvard, visited him in Beirut and described the intriguing philosophical circles clustered around Charles:⁴

“[Charles] had already gathered a group of young professors of diverse backgrounds—Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Marxist, radical secularists—for fortnightly evenings, striving to build a strong bridge between Middle Eastern and Western cultures and future leaders.”

Dragged into International Diplomacy

Malik’s poly-lingual abilities and his influence were positively noticed by the Lebanese government. In the summer of 1944, the thirty-eight year old professor was invited along with a hundred or so persons to a dinner party at the home of president Bishāra el-Khūrī of the newly independent Lebanon. Malik the academician was now for the first time in the

¹ “*Recollections of Charles Malik*” Lecture in the Form of a Dialogue Cecil Hourani and Tony Nasrallah. ILT, NDU, Louaize., 2015.

² Ghassan Tuani, *A Set of Interviews* by Nadim Shehadi, Beirut, Winter 2003.

³ Ma’lūf, 28.

⁴ Howard Schomer, in Glendon, 126.

political milieu—he had analyzed and discussed politics profoundly yet always as an external observer. His first contact was by no means pleasant. He confessed to his diary that the evening was “terrible, awful, horrible” and that “I do not belong in this crowd of unreality and untruth,” where the atmosphere is that of “snobbishness, ruthlessness, commercialism and sensuality.” Malik felt “a complete foreigner” in this class.¹

Malik was asked to become representative of Lebanon to the United States. As Mary-Ann Glendon puts it:²

“The new country's leaders, however, had apparently decided that the Harvard-educated professor might do as their envoy to the United States. They soon made overtures along those lines, appealing to his patriotism. A man reputed to be the owner of one of the finest stables of Arabian horses in the world told him, ‘I love my horses, but I have put them aside for a time. You must put aside your books.’ His letters and journal do not reveal what finally swayed him—love of country, intellectual curiosity, the thought of future regrets about a path not taken, desire to make a difference at a historic moment—but on Christmas Eve 1944 Malik confessed ruefully to his diary that he had ‘fallen to political worldly seduction.’”

After a lot of hesitation, Malik accepted the offer, assuring himself that it will be only something temporal. Malik consulted some friends and they all seemed to encourage him to take the step.³

A former colleague at AUB reflected, many decades later, that Charles teaching at the time had a great concentration on Plato’s *Republic*. This book influenced Malik’s intellectual thought and later on his political life. “In *The Republic*”, reflected the colleague, “Plato discusses various kinds of leadership and his conclusion is that the best leader is the leader who doesn’t want to be a leader. And in a way that may be considered an aspect of Charles.”⁴

In April 1945, Malik headed to the United States on a propeller plane where he presented his diplomatic credentials to US president Truman. Then Malik continued his journey further west to San Francisco, to represent Lebanon as part of a delegation in the founding conference of the United Nations.

¹Charles Malik Diaries, August 20, 1944 as reported in Glendon, 126.

²Glendon, 126.

³Ma’lūf, 32.

⁴ “Recollections of Charles Malik” Lecture in the Form of a Dialogue Cecil Hourani and Tony Nasrallah. ILT, NDU, Louaize.

Not yet forty, Malik was one of the youngest delegates to sign the United Nations charter. Lebanon too was among the youngest nations in terms of independence. The young professor was still a total stranger to politics. “Many people talk rhetorically in order to produce an impression...The mere thought that I might be doing that is enough to paralyze my powers of speech”. He wrote in his diary: “Intrigue, lobbying, secret arrangements, blocs, etc. It's terrible. Power politics and bargaining nauseate me. There is so much unreality and play and sham that I can't swing myself into this atmosphere and act.”¹

Malik had a dual mission: the founding of the Lebanese Embassy in Washington, and representing Lebanon in the UN. In the UN he had a prominent role to play. Political loneliness went hand in hand with his own, personal loneliness. Malik wrote:²

“When Lebanon was under the wing of France, France was our friend. But then we had no chance to sit in international councils. Now France is weak; we have a chance to sit in such councils. But who is our friend? Who is our politico-socio-ideological friend? Who can give us counsel, friendship, guidance, support in the cold international plane? France is impossible. England doesn't care, it only ‘uses’. Russia will never answer to our deep needs. America believes in the United Nations—that is the extent of her interest in others. The Arab world is more lost than we are; it is not a support, it must be supported. The loneliness, the unutterable loneliness of Lebanon.”

On a personal level:³

"a deeper existential loneliness in my heart....I went to the Council room this morning in the car alone. I sat there at the Council table alone. I almost sat at lunch alone, but for the kindness of the Yugoslav delegate who asked me to sit with him. Last evening I was all alone back at the hotel. When I re-turned this afternoon I returned in the car alone. I am now all alone eating at the restaurant of the hotel. A feeling of void and blankness overtakes me. I must bear my loneliness. Drink and sex can never relieve it. On the contrary, they cover it up, for a time only. Then it comes back with added force. It cannot be evaded, it must be faced."

Within a short while, however, Malik assumed productive involvement in various committees in the United Nations. Being a Middle-Easterner with Western inclinations may

¹ Glendon, 20.

² Ibid., 128.

³ Ibid.

have helped in attracting listeners, yet one should not undermine the fact that Malik himself was an eloquent speaker. He was rightfully described as becoming “one of the best-known figures in the UN, and one much sought after by journalists, perhaps because he never lost his love of explaining, arguing, and analyzing.”¹ The man once described to resemble Jeremiah was described in the United Nations to be a palm tree with a thunder-voice.²

In February 1948 Charles Malik was elected by secret ballot to the presidency of Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. He often played many roles in the United Nations simultaneously. By fall of 1948, for example, he was the president of the Economic and Social Council, chairman of the UN's Third Committee (the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Affairs Committee), and the *rapporteur* of the Commission on Human Rights, and throughout that period he was the founding ambassador of Lebanon to the United States.³

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Among the United Nations committees that Charles Malik was on was the committee that drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was approved on Dec. 10 1998. The crucial role that Malik played in the hundreds of sessions in the drafting process has recently been unearthed by Harvard Law professor Mary-Ann Glendon. Except for a few minor changes, the preamble of the Universal Declaration—which frames the whole Declaration philosophically-- was written by Charles Malik over a weekend. In his diary, Malik wrote on a Friday (June 11, 1948): “Was asked by Mrs. Roosevelt to prepare Preamble over weekend.”⁴ On Monday (June 14, 1948), he wrote:⁵

“Did not catch my morn. plane for N.Y. Had to take a later one, Missed morn. meeting. On plane worked & finished preamble. Arrived late in Lake Success, missing morn. meeting. What a terrible man Chang is! Full of hatred and venom and bitterness. My text of the preamble was mainly adopted; there were additions by Cassin. Chang wants to delete the word “inalienable” just because I had added it. Nor does the independent article I had suggested on the right to a good social and international order seem to have much chance for success. I feel a bit dizzy today & tired. Went to St. Patrick's this eve.”

¹ Ibid., 129.

² Alois Derso & Emery Kelen, in the introduction to their book of United Nations caricatures. Cf. Glendon, 130.

³ Ibid., 65

⁴ Ibid., 44.

⁵ Ibid., 65.

Glendon noted how the credit went to Cassin, who, eventually, in 1968, became a laureate of the Noble Prize for Peace:¹

“Unfortunately a few careless authors created the impression not only that Cassin had written the first draft, but that he was the principal architect of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This error not only scanted the roles of other key individuals such as Humphrey, Malik, and Chan, but it detracted from the universality of the document.”

Malik believed in natural law, and in the universality of Human Rights. His uncompromising perception of Christian faith and his rejection to relativism were his incentives to push the Human Rights declaration towards Universality. Within the drafting committee Malik was resisted by the Chinese representative, philosopher Peng-Chun Chang, who took more of a relativist approach to the Declaration.² Malik later wrote:³

The first ideological confrontation concerns the metaphysical character of these rights. Are they original and inherent or are they granted and derived? Do they belong to the nature of things, or are they the gifts of governments and systems? Are they absolute, or are they relative to conditions, circumstances and stages of historical developments? Are they man-made or do they derive from a source other and higher than man? Two terms came up here in the course of the discussion: the term “arbitrary” and the phrase “the nature of things”. On the whole, the Soviets, the Scandinavians and some Asians were opposed to these rights being conceived as ‘belonging to the nature of things’; they considered them derived from the will of governments and the determination of history; either they did not understand the phrase “the nature of things” or they viewed it as verging on the occult. (Rene) Cassin of France was ambivalent on this matter and to some extent also the United States.

At some point in 1948 Malik became the *rapporteur* of the drafting committee. When the Soviet representatives seemed to be hindering the progress of this work, and when the meetings of the drafting committee seemed to be going nowhere, Malik bought a stopwatch

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid., 134

³ Charles H. Malik, *The Challenge of Human Rights: Charles Malik and the Universal Declaration*, ed. Habib C. Malik (Oxford: Charles Malik Foundation & Centre for Lebanese Studies, 2000), 245.

and made sure no intervention goes beyond a limited number of minutes. He later recalled on his usage of the timer to be:¹

mercilessly, warning each speaker by a stroke of the gavel 30 seconds before the end of the time allotted to him. Now and then I used my judgment about the 3-minute limitation, but as I recall, I never allowed more than 5 minutes, be the speaker Mrs. Roosevelt or Cassin or Pavlov or Santa Cruz or Chang or Azkoul of Lebanon. The Committee cooperated splendidly.

Thanks to this firmness, the deadlines of the declaration were met on time. Mrs. Roosevelt's State Department Aid, Durward Sandifer, appreciated how the representative of Lebanon "was the only person I ever knew who succeeded in holding a stop-watch to [The Russian representative] Pavlov"² Another voice of appreciation came from committee-member Humphrey who wrote that Malik "was one of the most independent people ever to sit on the commission, and he was dedicated to human rights."³ He even appreciated Malik's firmness:⁴

We were fortunate in having Charles Malik in the chair, presiding over a much more turbulent body—perhaps the most turbulent in the United Nations, he conducted the proceedings with a firmness that at first surprised me. There were indeed times when he approached arrogance, even losing his temper, and with a bang of his gavel refusing the floor to delegations. But my respect for him grew as the session progressed, and he got the Declaration through the committee.

Indeed Malik was independent⁵, for many possible reasons: firstly, the Lebanese government--like the rest of governments of newly independent states--did not necessarily value the importance of the Declaration being drafted but perceived it as a statement for the general good. Secondly, it would not be embarrassing for tiny Lebanon to approve and sign such a declaration, but it may have been embarrassing for larger nations. And finally Malik who was probably more propelled by ideas and faith than by balance of powers.

¹ Ibid., 254.

² Quoted in Glendon, 163.

³ John P. Humphrey, *Human Rights and the United Nations: A Great Adventure* (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.: Transnational Publishing, 1984), 17, 23–24, 37 as noted by Glendon, 44.

⁴ Glendon, 163.

⁵ "The Communist delegates were kept on such a tight rein that the Commission's proceedings were often delayed while they waited for instructions. Most other members had greater latitude. Malik and Cassin, in particular, seem to have been left quite free to exercise their own judgment. Mrs. Roosevelt, though she cooperated closely with her State Department aides, was able to influence U.S. policy at several key junctures, especially by keeping the spirit of the New Deal alive where economic and social rights were concerned." Glendon, 45

Malik was one of the early voices to warn the West about the dangers of Soviet Communism; he delivered extensive speeches at the UN about its threat. On a televised interview Malik said, “Well I read Marx and I read Lenin and I read Stalin rather carefully, as much of them as I could, and I do not believe that these men honestly believe that there can be peace until they have communized the whole world! And that’s what they say. I’m not saying that, it is they who first said it!”¹ Yet he often repeated that “Communism in Russia cannot last for decades.”²

Foreign Minister (1956-58)

In 1955 Charles Malik decided that his mission in launching the embassy of Lebanon at the United States had been satisfactorily fulfilled and thus returned to teach in Lebanon after a decade of diplomacy. A few months later, and in the light of the Suez Crisis, the Lebanese President Camille Chamoun could read the new emerging role of the United States. A number of ministers resigned from the Lebanese cabinet when he refused to break diplomatic relations with France and Great Britain for attacking Egypt. The president then formed a new cabinet of pro-Western Lebanese leaders and with Charles Malik as minister of Foreign Affairs. It was a time when the Egyptian President was turning to the Soviets for aid in development that Malik—whose friends included major US decision makers such as President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles³-- was appointed.

The 1956 Suez crisis had further effects on Lebanon: the majority of the Muslims in Lebanon supported Nāṣir’s call for pan-Arabism and viewed him as their vindicator of their rights. This feeling was boosted when Nāṣir created the United Arab Republic with Syria. The Lebanese society witnessed its first major sectarian split since independence—even since the creation of Le Grand Liban in 1920. In line with his political convictions, Malik resisted the now pro-Soviet Nāṣirites. Malik’s negotiations were diplomatically instrumental in leading the military intervention of the US marines in Lebanon against the threat of Communism. He promoted the need for military intervention against “a threat not merely to Lebanon but to the whole Middle East, in fact to the peace of the world.”⁴ These perceptions of a communist-

¹ Longines-Wittnauer with Dr. Chalres Malik, 1953.

² Interview with Dr. Antoun Salem, February 2016.

³ Malik had delivered a speech in 1949 entitled “War and Peace” before the UN General Assembly. The speech was later published by “the National Committee for Free Europe” whose members included Eisenhower and Dulles. Malik’s relation with Dulles goes to the drafting committee of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, on which both were members.

⁴ Memo of conversation between Malik & Dulles & Reinhardt, Sept. 18, 1957. Foreign Relations of the United States, DC: GPO, 1940-60.

inspired threat played a significant role in precipitating American intervention. The American response—no doubt accelerated by the coup in Iraq against the pro-American Hashemite monarch—was to send a battalion of 14,000 US Marines on the exercise named Operation Blue Bat.

During his years as minister, Malik ran for parliamentary elections and won himself a seat-- in a parliament of sixty-six seats-- on August 20, 1957, and served for one term.

As Chamoun's tenure was ending, Malik became a candidate for the presidency of the United Nations General Assembly, and in September 1958, he was elected by the representatives of the nations for this post. By receiving the gavel from former assembly president Sir Leslie Munro of New Zealand, Charles Malik became the president of the thirteenth general assembly session. Although today he is remembered for his contributions to the Human Rights declaration, Malik was famous during his lifetime for the Presidency of the United Nations General Assembly.

Back to Teaching: Hard Times (1959-1975)

After his diplomatic and political career from 1945 till 1959, Malik went back to the academic world, teaching full time at the American University in Beirut. "This was not his time" for politics, he said, and he distanced himself to some extent from politics. Malik's tone in his lectures became more of an observer and analyst than of a decision maker. "I am not here to plead any cause," he clarified at the beginning of a lecture of his in 1972, "or to proclaim any special doctrine; nor do I represent at present any government or international organization. Rather it is my intension to make a few general observations on the world situation."¹

Malik taught in the United States for a few semesters in the early 1960s before returning to Beirut. During this entire period Malik compiled many of his lectures and published them in various books and other publications. He also organized international conferences on various topics. In 1966, for the centennial of the American University of Beirut, he organized two

¹ Charles Malik talk at Witwatersrand Branch of the Institute on Sept 21 1972, later published as Malik, C., *Some Reflections on the General World Situation*, (Johannesburg: The South African Institute of International affairs, 1973), 1. In the same speech (p.4) Malik said: "The situation in the Middle East is so exceedingly delicate at this moment that any comment ventured by a person like myself not carrying political responsibility at present could do more harm than good. Only the politically responsible must speak now. Consequently I am making no statement on the Middle East."

conferences with international speakers on *God and Man in Contemporary Christian Thought* and *God and Man in Contemporary Muslim Thought*.

A subject that Charles had always been interested in was Christian unity. Given his philosophical mind and international fame, Malik served Christianity in key international positions for lay-persons. He was elected Vice-President of the United Bible Societies from 1966 to 1972, “of which the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Coggan, was president.”¹ He also served as President of the World Council on Christian Education from 1967 to 1971. Malik attended all three meetings of reconciliation between Pope Paul VI and Orthodox Patriarch Athenagoras in the 1960s (Jerusalem 1964, Istanbul and Rome in 1967). Malik was in the official entourage of the Patriarch. He later described his tears during these events. Malik received the title Grand First Magistrate of the Holy Orthodox Church by Patriarch Athenagoras I.²

Once more into Politics (1976-1987)

Thirty years after he was dragged into politics for the first time, Malik walked freely into politics during the Lebanese Civil war. He did not represent the government of a newly-born Lebanon as he did in the 1940s, but rather he tried to recover the newly-torn county. Malik considered the times then to be the most crucial for the survival of Lebanon. He co-founded, with Camille Chamoun and other Christian leaders, “the Front for Freedom and Man” as he named it until it was renamed “The Lebanese Front”, and called for the saving of the Christian community in Lebanon.³

Malik’s old friend Schomer visited him in Beirut and described how Malik⁴

“would not abandon his home in the hills above Beirut even as artillery shells skimmed over his roof, or give up his daily walks in the hills. He deplored the exodus of Lebanese Christians to safety in other lands, which he believed threatened the very survival of the Christian church in the Bible land where it had sustained itself unbrokenly since the time of Jesus.”

¹ John North’s “Foreword” in Malik, C., *A Christian Critique of the University*, 2nd ed. (waterloo: North Waterloo Press, 1987), 9.

²Ibid.

³ Malik, C., Chamoun, C., Gemayel, P., *The Lebanon we Want to Build*, (1980).

⁴ Howard Schomer, “In Homage to My Icons and Mentors”, *Berkeley Outlook Club*, February 20, 1992, 23 as reported in Glendon, 211.

The Lebanese Front played a vital role in promoting Bashīr Gemayel for presidency, and it was Charles Malik lobbied for 34 year old Bashīr in Washington. Former student of Malik, the afore-mentioned Ghassan Tueini who had now become a political rival to his professor, recalled how he travelled to the US to lobby against Bashīr and met Malik there who was lobbying for Bashīr.¹ On the election day, Malik was sitting next to Bashīr and together followed the results while international media was monitoring the reaction of the candidate. Bashīr was indeed elected president and this was Malik’s final political victory, though shortly lived. Three weeks after the election Bashīr was assassinated. Bashir’s successor was not only from the same party, but also his brother, and yet Malik was to some extent critical of the new president² and he distanced himself from politics.³

Legacy

Charles Malik died peacefully at the age of eighty-one. During his life Malik signed the founding charter of the greatest international organization of the twentieth century, the United Nations, and signed and shaped one of its greatest documents, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and was among the pioneers in the Anglophonic world to write about Heidegger, and founded one of the first philosophy departments in the Middle East. It is not surprising at all that he was an author for Encyclopedia Britannica and that he was conferred forty-six honorary doctoral degrees—a number that remains unchallenged—during his lifetime.

Malik’s legacy is well kept in a diary of 34,000 pages spanning fifty years. Through Charles’ pen, these diaries attest to the formation of many historical decisions. He never published his memoirs, either in parts or in full. Wherever he went, the philosopher-made-diplomat had a bunch of white papers in his briefcase and was ready to write events and thoughts, what is now his personal history. His diaries are unconventional in the sense that he recorded events at random, often focusing on the more important scenes scrupulously. Whereas a classical diarist would sit every night to update his chronicle, Malik would often write down his notes during meetings, over coffee shortly after a meeting, as he read and prayed, or during late evening hours when he was awake due to his chronic insomnia. At times he would dictate, either to his wife, Eva, or, in later years, to his son, Habib (and off and on to various of his

¹ Tueini, G., *Sirr al-mihna w asār ‘ukhra* (Beirut: al-Nahar, 2002), 415-416.

² “Al-Ṣayyād tuḥāwir Shārl Mālik” in *Al-Ṣayyād* #1988 (17 December 1982), 19.

³ Elie Salem, *Violence and Diplomacy in Lebanon* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 1995). 157.

trusted secretaries), recollections of meetings of the previous day. The document has largely been unexplored due to its lack of public accessibility, unlike the bulk of Malik’s letters and speeches which have been stored in the Library of Congress since the 1979, and have been on public display since 2004. Accessing the diaries requires the approval of its owner, Malik’s son, Dr. Habib C. Malik. Harvard law professor Marie-Ann Glendon has been the only scholar who has worked on Malik’s diaries, and her research was on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.¹ The manuscript’s inaccessibility vindicates the absence of published monographs on such an international figure, including a definitive intellectual biography. This biographical essay, along with the rest of the work done at NDU’s ILT, are surely in the right direction of making this giant known, and preparing the way for scholars to delve into his realm.

¹ Mary Ann Glendon, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2001).