

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY  
IN THIS  
WORLD CRISIS

By NICHOLAS MURRAY BUTLER

An address delivered at a  
General Assembly of the University Faculties  
McMillin Academic Theatre  
Columbia University  
October 3, 1940

At the opening of this new academic year it is of high importance that we examine and reflect upon the problems which face Columbia University in view of the world crisis which is shaking our historic civilization to its foundations. Our University, founded nearly two hundred years ago as a simple American college, has become with the passing years a powerful public servant in the field of liberty. It has responded to the opportunities and ideals of historic university development, and its place in the intellectual life of the world and in the shaping of public policies, national and international, is now well established.

Because of the present world war, primarily economic but now violently and brutally military as well, this institution at work in the field of liberty is called upon to co-operate with government. The purpose of this co-operation is to strengthen the defenses of our American system of economic, social and political liberty, and to defend them and the republican form of government built upon them from attack having its origin either without or within our own country. This co-operation with government is a service which Columbia has always been willing and quick to offer. The greatest names on its roll became famous through leadership and service in this field of action. Today as Columbia approaches the end of its second century of corporate life, it will not be found wanting in this endeavor.

The appalling war which has now in its grasp practically the whole of Europe and a great part of Asia and of Africa as well, has brought the United States of America face to face with an emergency such as it has never hitherto known. We hope and pray that it may not be our lot to have to take part in the military struggle which is going on, but we are involved, and have been from the beginning, in the economic aspects of that struggle and in the war of ideas and ideals which it represents and reflects. At such a time it is a direct responsibility of the Federal Government under the leadership of the President of the United States to plan quickly and thoroughly for the defense of the nation. Already the President and the Congress have taken far-reaching action on behalf of all of us in order to enable the American people and their government to protect and to defend themselves. At such a time every citizen and every institution of public service built in the field of liberty have a direct responsibility to bear. My purpose in inviting this General Assembly of all the Faculties of the University was to indicate to them in what way the activities of our University can be used in co-operation with the Government to strengthen the nation's defense.

One who reads carefully the history of Europe during the past half-century will recognize that military preparedness, highly important though it be, is but one part of national defense. It is of still higher importance that the people as a whole and their representative institutions understand what it is which they are called upon to defend, and to plan with thoroughness and skill for their part in that defense.

In order that careful and systematic study might be made of this problem, I appointed on July 5 last a University Committee on National Defense constituted of the following members of the University staff in addition to the President of the University:

CARL W. ACKERMAN, Dean of the Faculty of Journalism  
CHARLES W. BALLARD, Dean of the College of Pharmacy  
JOSEPH W. BARKER, Dean of the Faculty of Engineering

FREDERICK COYKENDALL, Chairman of the Trustees  
CONDICT W. CUTLER, JR., Trustee of the University  
LESLIE C. DUNN, Professor of Zoölogy  
FRANK D. FACKENTHAL, Provost of the University  
VIRGINIA C. GILDERSLEEVE, Dean of Barnard College  
ROBERT M. HAIG, McVickar Professor of Political Economy  
HERBERT E. HAWKES, Dean of Columbia College  
GEORGE B. PEGRAM, Dean of the Graduate Faculties  
EDMUND A. PRENTIS, Trustee of the University  
WILLARD C. RAPPLEYE, Dean of the College of Physicians and Surgeons  
LINDSAY ROGERS, Burgess Professor of Public Law  
WILLIAM F. RUSSELL, Dean of Teachers College  
J. ENRIQUE ZANETTI, Director of Chemical Laboratories

*Executive Committee*

FRANK D. FACKENTHAL, Chairman  
DEANS PEGRAM, HAWKES, BARKER, DR. CUTLER

This representative Committee has been at work for three months upon its problem and has already submitted the first of a series of helpful reports.

It is fortunate that we shall have no difficulty and no difference of opinion in recognizing the true function of a university in this co-operation with government. The aim of a university, of course, is the conservation and extension of knowledge. Therefore, that conservation and extension of knowledge must be undertaken with redoubled vigor in respect to the analysis and understanding of the economic, social and political problems which are involved in this world war and which are creating for the United States the crisis which confronts it. It is fortunate, also, that the Government of the United States in its plans for national defense appreciates this university function. The Government plans the least possible disturbance of the teaching and research work of colleges and universities, and the least possible disturbance of university scholars and

students. Indeed, the President of the United States in a public statement has called upon students of all kinds to return to their studies. The Acts recently passed by the Congress recognize this attitude and policy in very considerable degree. Inasmuch as we are confronted in this country and in every other country by emotional outbursts which are quite hysterical in their character and which lead to acts of the utmost cruelty and violence, we must make sure that the scholar uses his opportunity, which is as unique as it is tremendous, to guide public opinion into paths of reason, of reflection and of understanding. It is of the very essence of our national defense that our people as a whole shall understand what it is which they are defending, and that they have this presented to them with calmness, good judgment and full knowledge. In this regard the responsibility of each one of us is very great. We must not ourselves be misled by phrases or formulas, and we must do our best to keep others from being so misled.

We shall no doubt hear much throughout the country in the immediate future in respect to academic freedom. That subject is one which has been discussed several times in my Annual Reports as President of the University, and I need not repeat here what I have said so emphatically in these Reports, particularly in those for the years 1918 and 1935. The policy of Columbia University in this respect has long been well and thoroughly established. As I pointed out in my Report for 1935, for those who are *in statu pupillari* the phrase academic freedom has no meaning whatsoever. That phrase relates solely to freedom of thought and inquiry and to freedom of teaching on the part of accomplished scholars. We all know the history of academic freedom from the time of its first establishment some two centuries ago at Halle and Göttingen. The purpose of academic freedom is to make sure that scholarship and scientific inquiry may advance without being hampered by particular and specific religious or political tenets. Of course, academic freedom has never meant and could not possibly mean in any

land the privilege—much less the right—to use the prestige, the authority and the influence of a university relationship to undermine or to tear down the foundations of principle and of practice upon which alone that university itself can rest. University freedom is as important as academic freedom. Before and above academic freedom of any kind or sort comes this university freedom which is the right and obligation of the university itself to pursue its high ideals unhampered and unembarrassed by conduct on the part of any of its members which tends to damage its reputation, to lessen its influence or to lower its authority as a center of sound learning and of moral teaching. Those whose convictions are of such a character as to bring their conduct in open conflict with the university's freedom to go its way toward its lofty aim should, in ordinary decency and self-respect, withdraw of their own accord from university membership in order that their conduct may be freed from the limitations which university membership naturally and necessarily puts upon it. No reasonable person would insist upon remaining a member of a church, for instance, who spent his time in publicly denying its principles and doctrines.

It may be taken for granted that the Trustees and the Faculties are prepared to be generous and abundant in understanding in regard to the problems of individual members of the staff or of the student body who are called into full military service. It will be the policy of the University to grant leave of absence without salary to University officers who are called, and I shall recommend to the Trustees that in order to protect the ultimate retiring allowances of such officers the University should assume in the case of those who have already undertaken Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association contracts, to meet both of the 5% contributions called for by those contracts.

Students called to the colors will likewise be given leave of absence and no student in good standing will incur loss of tui-

tion fees through entrance into full time military service during the academic year. The proper officers of the University will make an equitable arrangement of credit to such students. Wednesday, October 16, will be an academic holiday in order that both officers and students affected by the provisions of the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 may have ample opportunity to register.

Already the University Committee on National Defense has organized activities of military usefulness for the voluntary participation of students and has still others in prospect for the academic year 1941-42. That Committee will welcome suggestions from any member of the University, whether teacher or student, in relation to matters which fall under its jurisdiction. The special courses and programs which have already been arranged include:

1. a unit for the training of air pilots under the Civil Aeronautics Administration
2. an Orientation course under the direction of the Department of Civil Engineering, making use of the facilities both at Morning-side Heights and at Camp Columbia. This course in military engineering will be given academic credit in Columbia College and in the School of Engineering.
3. In addition, it is hoped that there will shortly be organized a Marine Corps Reserve Training unit which, if established, will lead to a commission as second lieutenant in the Marine Corps Reserves, and will involve one night a week during the academic year and training at Camp Columbia for two periods of six weeks each, following the Sophomore and Junior years.

Attention of students is also called to the opportunity quite likely to be offered in the immediate future by the Navy Department for training through courses of Naval Reserve Midshipmen leading to commission as Ensign in the volunteer Naval Reserve.

Undoubtedly, other opportunities will be arranged in the not distant future.

It is of the highest importance that we all bear in mind the need which will be most pressing when armed hostilities come to an end, to undertake once more the task of laying the foundations for a system of international organization and co-operation for the protection of the world's prosperity and the world's peace. We must not be disheartened because of the failure of the attempts toward this high end which had already been made. We must resume those attempts with redoubled vigor and armed with the new knowledge which the experiences of the last quarter-century have brought us. Fortunately, we have a statement of ideals and of the program by which those ideals may be best achieved in the noteworthy plan agreed upon by the members of the Conference held at Chatham House, London, in March, 1935. At that Conference sixty-two of the most distinguished statesmen and men of affairs in the world, coming from ten countries including Germany and Italy, agreed unanimously upon a series of recommendations which were subsequently endorsed by the unanimous vote of the International Chamber of Commerce. These recommendations constitute a convincing program for world reconstruction. It is upon this world reconstruction that our eyes must be fixed. It will not do to sit helplessly by and content ourselves with saying that no reconstruction is possible, that civilization is on its way to death and that the world as we and our ancestors have known it can never be restored. The temptation to that point of view and that attitude is certainly very great, but it is a temptation to which we simply must not yield. It would not be characteristic of us as American scholars to lose our faith, our hope and our confidence in the ability of mankind to bring ultimate victory to moral principle and the spirit of service over the mad and cruel lust for gain and for power; for that is the essential struggle underneath and behind the economic war. Behind the war of conflicting political doctrines, underneath and behind the war of lust for gain and for domination over one's fellow-men, there

lies the war between beasts and human beings, between brutal force and kindly helpfulness, between the spirit of gain at any cost and the spirit of service built upon common sense and moral principle. Let there be no doubt where Columbia University stands in this war.

Additional copies may be had by addressing  
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