

# A VIEW OF THE WORLD

Abraham Martin Murray

**ENVIRONMENT.** Many Americans will no doubt miss the environmental crisis. It was one of the better crises of recent years, uniting us in common endeavor across political and ideological divides. "We're over the hump on the most obvious environmental problems that confronted the country five years ago," says John Quarles, deputy director of the Environmental Protection Agency. "Now we're moving into a second generation of problems, the area of prevention rather than cure." Started in 1970, EPA became the country's largest regulatory agency, with nine thousand employees spending more than \$2 million per day. The official record, if accurate, will give comfort to those who believe it might make sense to "throw money at social problems" after all.

**KOREA.** It will take more than money to solve the problems of President Park Chung Hee of South Korea, although money he continues to get in abundance from the U.S. His image problem, as they say, continues to be exacerbated by dissidents, notably among the Christian population, who protest the absence of the democracy Park professes to be defending. The option of withdrawing U.S. support seems less attractive, however, when one looks at Park's counterpart in North Korea, Kim Il Sung, who has recently named his son as his successor and practices a species of oriental despotism that some imaginative Western leftists call Marxism.

Last July, at a World Council of Churches meeting in Geneva, one Kim enthusiast conveyed the good news that not only has Kim created "the good life" in North Korea, but, best of all, "he has the power to make everybody enjoy the good life." In an interview with a Japanese newspaper Kim was asked about admitting American newsmen to North Korea. "It's no good," he answered, "if American reporters come and watch our country with prejudice and go home carrying with them a bad impression of this country." The only Americans he would admit, he said, are those who "contribute to the unification of our country." That would seem to pose credibility problems for the next American reporter who gets into North Korea.

**PIKE'S PIQUE.** A different attitude toward the free flow of information is espoused by Congressman Otis Pike, who was just narrowly prevented from having Secretary Kissinger cited for contempt. Pike is well aware of the publicity potential in sleuthing among the confidential memoranda of the executive branch. Before his confrontation with Kissinger, Pike's pique was a very minor legend on Capitol Hill. More significant is the disturbing agreement that, under the Con-

stitution, Kissinger would not have had a legal leg to stand on had he been cited. It is supposedly a gentlemanly understanding that the boss is held accountable and the Congress does not play office politics with his underlings. But as Joe McCarthy and others have shown, such understandings are exceedingly fragile.

**ANGOLA.** Secrecy is hardly the problem in connection with U.S. actions in Angola. In that sense, at least, Angola is hardly another Vietnam. State Department and CIA policy-option memos seem to be reaching the front page of the *New York Times* about the same time they get to the desks of the superiors for whom they're intended. If the U.S. walks into this quagmire, it will likely be with eyes wide open.

China's foreign policies in the same quagmire are fraught with exquisite ironies. For the last several years, for example, Mao's China has undoubtedly been the staunchest supporter of the U.S. defense of freedom through NATO. Now, in a Disneyworld of Marxist revisionism China finds itself aligned with the U.S. and South Africa in opposition to the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). This may be too much even for Chinese *Realpolitik*, and there are signs the Chinese may be retreating from their engagement.

As for U.S. policy, it is hard to know how much will turn out to be too much. The rhetoric about facing up to Communist intervention and drawing the line somewhere is frighteningly reminiscent of the early years in Indochina. America's national interest in Angola would seem to be marginal at most. If, as Ambassador Moynihan says, Russia is aiming to "colonize" Africa, the alarm and the request for U.S. aid would better come from the African nations themselves. After having largely ignored the Third World as incidental to the big game of global politics, it seems unfortunate that Kissinger's first spurt of real interest in Africa takes the form of military intervention. And if America's aim was to choose the most unpopular ally possible, guaranteed to preclude domestic support for such an intervention, the choice of South Africa must be deemed a stroke of genius. Of course one does not always get to choose one's allies. Not too long ago our comrade-in-arms was that staunch champion of human liberty, the Soviet Union. Great threats may warrant great compromises, but the threat posed by the Angola situation hardly seems comparable to that posed by the Third Reich. The U.S. intervention so far, and what it may portend, calls for much more persuasive justification than has been offered to date.

Meanwhile, and as usual, the little people are not consulted. Reliable reports, including some

from the U.N. High Commission for Refugees, say that a million or more are on the edge of starvation in Angola. During the fighting between Portuguese and the National Front they fled north to Zaire. "When the people heard that independence was coming," says one German doctor, "they flocked back, with each group going to exactly the same lands it left fourteen years ago. The people believe that the spirits of their ancestors made these lands holy." Unfortunately, sanctity did not assure food supply. The U.N. and other agencies are reportedly reluctant to launch a major relief effort without the consent of the MPLA. And the MPLA refuses to consent to relief efforts that might aid the enemy in the North. Among the rediscoveries of our enlightened age are the military uses of starvation. Remember Biafra.

**ZIMBABWE (RHODESIA).** Elsewhere—but not far away in Africa—there is uncertain movement toward some kind of settlement in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia). The breakaway Ian Smith regime has signed "an agreement to negotiate" with Joshua Nkomo, a nationalist leader long imprisoned by the regime. Smith seems to have succeeded in dividing the leadership that represents more than 95 per cent of Zimbabwe's population. The estimable Bishop Abel Muzorewa is exiled (has exiled himself, some say) in neighboring Zambia and refuses to recognize Nkomo's role as head of the African National Council. Nkomo insists he will settle for nothing less than an immediate interim government reflecting black majority rule. With Smith under pressure from South Africa to get some kind of settlement, it would be sad if this moment of opportunity created yet another set of conflicting black parties in Africa. A U.S.-Soviet confrontation in Zimbabwe in, say, 1979, is not beyond imagining.

**WCC IN NAIROBI.** Still in Africa, the World Council of Churches held its fifth assembly in Nairobi, Kenya. The final reports are not yet in, but the assembly seemed to hold few surprises. There was a gesture—oh, so very gentle—toward being less selective in expressing outrage at the violation of human rights. Russian churchmen hinted they might walk out if the Council addressed the issue of religious persecution in the Soviet Union, but some exponents of greater candor persisted, and the Council came closer to acknowledging that not all the results of original sin are to be discovered in the West.

In a major address an American theologian spoke in Spanish in order to symbolize his rejection of "the language of imperialism." We have not learned how English-speaking delegates, the Nigerians and Tanzanians, for example, responded to this insight. In any case, it suggests yet another thing for Americans to feel guilty about—not that we were running out of reasons for

breast-beating. Taking the logic a step further, white Westerners might next repress not only their language but their color and come to the next assembly in black face.

Exponents of the "theology of liberation," a kind of gospel according to Che Guevara, seemed to fare well, dominating a large part of the agenda and gaining new leadership positions. Canon Burgess Carr, head of the All-Africa Council of Churches, pressed his case for a moratorium on mission personnel from the West. The idea has been around for some time, but has not really caught on among most African church leaders. In some earlier forms the moratorium was also to cover foreign money, but that was even less enthusiastically received. John Mbiti, perhaps the leading African theologian and a regular contributor to *Worldview*, is not enamored of the moratorium idea. While pressing for "Africanization," Mbiti says, African Christians "can't afford to throw away the other parts of the Church." Nor, he notes, can the rest of the Church afford to be isolated from the great renewals emerging from African Christianity.

**THE SOVIET HARVEST.** As everyone knows, one-party states are more efficient. Witness the figures on the Soviet harvest this year, which peaked out at the per capita harvest yield of 1913, a rather poor czarist year that is regularly cited by Soviet statisticians in order to demonstrate the progress made by the Revolution. The story is told of a festive party in the Kremlin some years from now, celebrating the final collapse of the U.S., the last holdout against Marxist-Leninist scientific socialism. Amidst the gaiety one Central Committee member is seen with a long, gloomy face. "Comrade, why aren't you smiling? Aren't you happy over the final triumph of the Revolution?" "Yes, of course, Comrade. But now where will we get our wheat?"

**SOLZHENITSYN.** In speaking to the détente between the USSR and the U.S., Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn continues to get low marks for public relations, although on candor he no doubt scores higher. Outraged by the dismissal of James Schlesinger at Defense, Solzhenitsyn suggests that Kissinger is "least of all a diplomat," who fails to understand the meaning of peace. Peace, says the exiled Russian, is "the opposite of violence." "Cambodian genocide and Vietnamese prison camps [are not] the attainment of peace.... A peace that tolerates any ferocious forms of violence and any massive doses of it against millions of people—just so long as this does not affect us for several years yet—such a peace, alas, has no moral loftiness even in the nuclear age."

It seems likely that Solzhenitsyn overshot his mark this time. One view is that the removal of Schlesinger had less to do with moral or strategic

judgment than with the fact that President Ford fiercely resented what he viewed as Schlesinger's condescending manner. As one White House source put it: "The President was sick and tired of being lectured to as though he were a schoolboy—and a not very bright schoolboy at that." One wishes Solzhenitsyn had saved his ammunition for a more appropriate occasion. On the other hand, it is reliably reported that he has a lot more where that came from. And that is good news for those who persist in believing that freedom has something to do with people being free.

**RELIGION & PUBLIC POLICY.** Moral judgment shaped the agenda for the meeting of the Roman Catholic bishops of America in Washington, D.C., November 17-20. "A Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities" that issued from that meeting has encountered sharp criticism in some quarters, and not only from those who support the 1973 Supreme Court decision on abortion. Critics say that a plan for political organizing of such unprecedented explicitness and thoroughness plays into the hands of those who contend the bishops are more anxious about human justice before birth than after birth.

To their credit, however, the bishops underscored that, while abortion is the very immediate concern, "pro-life" must, in order to be credible, encompass the whole of the human condition. Strong statements on housing and economic justice accompanied the pastoral plan. Most important, the bishops emphasized their refusal to accept the separation of moral and political judgment. The protection of human life in all its forms is not, they insisted, a "Catholic issue." The definition and security of human life is, they said, the most elementary *public* question facing the whole of society. At a time in which the IRS continues to make threatening noises about limiting the amount of political activity churches will be permitted without endangering their tax exemption, the bishops have issued an unusually straightforward challenge, which, quite apart from the question of abortion, should be welcomed by all who are committed to a livelier interaction between religion and the public realm.

**HUMAN RIGHTS IN CHILE.** It has been a long time since an ecclesiastical interdict has been imposed successfully upon a regime or country. But something like an interdict was in effect last December in Chile for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. The auxiliary bishops of Santiago suspended all masses as a protest against the regime's prohibition of marches and pilgrimages. In fact, the conflict goes much deeper than that. Cardinal Raul Silva Henriquez, Archbishop of Santiago, has made no secret of the continuing tension between the Church and the Pinochet government. The continued violation of human rights,

including the arrest and jailing of priests, is reported to be a subject of "most intensive concern" also in the Vatican.

**LEBANON.** The unhappier side of the interaction between religion and society is brutally evident in Lebanon. There many more people have been killed in the last three months of civil strife than in the past decade of Catholic-Protestant warfare in Northern Ireland. Since a certain species of enlightened opinion has decreed that religion is a declining force in the world, the conflict in Lebanon, as in Northern Ireland, is frequently described in terms of Muslim "left" against Christian "right." As Conor Cruise O'Brien, among others, has convincingly argued with regard to Northern Ireland, such ideologizing of essentially religious conflicts is a serious disservice to understanding. Both for better and for worse, religion, along with nationalism (another "declining force" that was supposed to be obsolete by now), continues to exercise enormous potency in shaping the modern world.

In Lebanon, France, the former colonial master, and the Vatican are actively seeking some kind of settlement. According to some sources, the Vatican would consider it a "diplomatic coup" if its efforts toward that end were successful. Scoring diplomatic points seems somewhat incidental, however, to the urgent task of restoring a degree of peace. Some Jewish leaders in this country privately have expressed wonderment that American Christians seem so indifferent to the fate of their fellow Christians in Lebanon. Such expressions may have something to do with Israel's fear that Lebanon may entirely succumb to pro-Palestinian forces. The alleged indifference no doubt has something to do with the fact that the ecumenical movement has not progressed to the point of developing strong fellow feelings between most American Christians and the Maronite Catholics who make up most of the Christian population of Lebanon.

This from an almanac published only two years ago: "The smallest sovereign country in the Middle East, Lebanon is often cited as the exception to all the rules that apply to the Arab world. Its government has long been stable. Its leaders are freely elected, and it is a stronghold of laissez-faire capitalism....Lebanon has a profusion of political parties, a free press, a comprehensive social-security system, and some 120 legitimate labor unions, the only such groups in any Arab country. Its cosmopolitan capital, Beirut, is the financial and social hub of the Arab world...."

The ancients spoke of the *lacrimae rerum*, the tears that flow from the very heart of things.

*Abraham Martin Murray is the collective name of those who contribute to "A View of the World." The opinions expressed sometimes coincide with those of the editors.*