

There are shifts of balance taking place in the world today. It is something like what you might experience about a third of the way through a 1000 piece landscape puzzle when a whole sequence of pieces unexpectedly come together. Up until then you were at work on one side of the puzzle. But now at the other corner of the total scene, a jagged part of the picture has come abruptly into focus.

Something like this has happened to world watchers in the last few years. Most of us are not sure how to put the newly discovered scenes into the portrait, but they undeniably belong to the whole picture and now it is our task to find out just where they fit in.

The first surprise occurs on a corner of the puzzle world watchers thought they understood. Some pieces have come together that threaten to undo the way the corner was shaping up. Who would have predicted that the industrial-scientific revolution with its servant-like technology would falter as it has in the last ten years? Two great problems have stalked this servant of the affluent industrialized nations. Outer starvation. And inner uncertainty. Outer starvation results from the almost insatiable need of industrialized modern society for energy. But energy is more complicated than simply supply and demand. The squeeze by oil producing countries of three years ago produced a near panic effect upon the world and has permanently shifted the economic balance and changed the political vocabulary of the world as well. Nothing is the same as before.

But there is a more severe dislocation than the problem of energy sources. There is a widespread feeling of uneasiness that lies within modern science and technology itself. We are now unsure of the very speed and power that has been offered to us by technology. For example, the SST Concorde is too fast and environmentally too loud. Atomic power occupies a similar twilight zone.

This uneasiness is compounded as scientists continue to search for a clear focus on the meaning and purpose of it all. The key questions are who will make use of science and how will it be used? For good or for evil?

Fortunately, the Christian world view can offer a substantial overview



for this part of the puzzle. The Christian understanding of the earth unites a commitment to the search for truth within the created order together with the doctrines of stewardship, repentance and self-limitation. The first part of the commitment is rooted in God's revelation to us of himself as light. "In him is no darkness at all." (John 1). The second part of the commitment is rooted in the integrating Lordship of Jesus Christ so that we discover in Christ that the order of redemption takes precedence over the order of creation and gives meaning to it. We do not, therefore, worship the earth or its immense power. We know from the Gospel that meaning and authority come from the Author of Creation--God himself. When we begin to spell out the implications of this fact, technology is a benefactor because its work is within the larger framework of reality.

This ecological-economic dislocation is a very awkward part of the puzzle for both the developing countries and the industrialized ones. In the midst of this dislocation, Christians must play a major role in making the case for a stewardship



view of earth. We have a theology that shows the reasons and the need to make it known. (1)

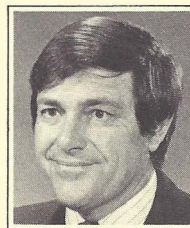
There is another part of the puzzle that has been a surprise. The rapid emergence of the two-thirds world, sometimes called the Third World. The world of Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Africa south of the Sahara, India, Latin America, and China.

Coupled with this rapid political and economic rise is the remarkable growth of the Christian church in the two-thirds world. Though a long history underlies it, the fact is that everything has happened very quickly so that right now there are more Christians in the Third World and so called younger churches than there are in the older churches.

Who are they and where are they? In some cases, the Christians are small minorities within ancient cultures. This is the situation of Christians in places like Japan, India, Thailand and most of the Islamic world. In other places, the Christians are a larger percentage of the total population and therefore take on very real social-political power. Christians in the Phillipines, much of Africa south of the Sahara, and Latin America fit this category. Still another situation is where Christians are growing at such an unprecedented rate that soon they will form a large part of the social whole. Places like South Korea, Indonesia, Taiwan, Singapore. There are also places in the world where Christians are strategically present in centers of social-intellectual upheaval. Such is the case right now in Hong Kong where many of the younger Chinese communist intellectuals are now adrift. For years they were firmly anchored as Maoists to what appeared to be a certain, unshakable doctrine. But now with the overthrow within China of the "Gang of Four", there exists for many of these young communists an overwhelming sense of ideological dislocation. Many of these young intellectuals are taking a fresh look at Jesus Christ through the witness of Christians who are strategically placed nearby.

In each of these settings, the Christians face profound challenges. They must make sense of their part of the puzzle. They face the same human, social and political problems that we face in

American-European Christianity. These issues invoke solutions to problems of long term economic and social justice, meaningful freedom for the human being, preservation of the family, protection of the rights of minorities, education of the young, jobs, food, livable cities, real help for the poor and the friendless, drinkable water, stewardship of the earth for future generations. These challenges have never been simple and each of them requires long term strategies. But each of these problems is like the tip of an iceberg. There are more fundamental issues, values and decisions that underlie them all. Beneath each separate issue are the central questions of the purpose of life, the meaning of an individual life, the source of meaning that sustains and integrates ethical concern, and the healing of people when values go wrong. In other words, all of the issues faced by the community of man-woman are human issues before they are economic ones. And the human part of them continues long after we think the economic problems have been solved. What Christians first learned when they heard the Gospel--God's creation, His judgment, His love--are still basic and prior to everything else we need to make life whole. Each Christian bears a double responsibility because of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which we share. We are compelled by the very nature of the Gospel to share its liberating offer of salvation to the people around us. We are also drawn together by the Lord of the Gospel into a community of believers whose whole purpose is to live out the implications of the reign of Jesus Christ as brothers and sisters within the Body Christ creates. This community is the Christian church and the thousands and thousands of these gatherings of believers around the world form the very core of the holy strategy of God in the world. It is the same world strategy that St. Paul is talking about in Romans 12:16. (2)



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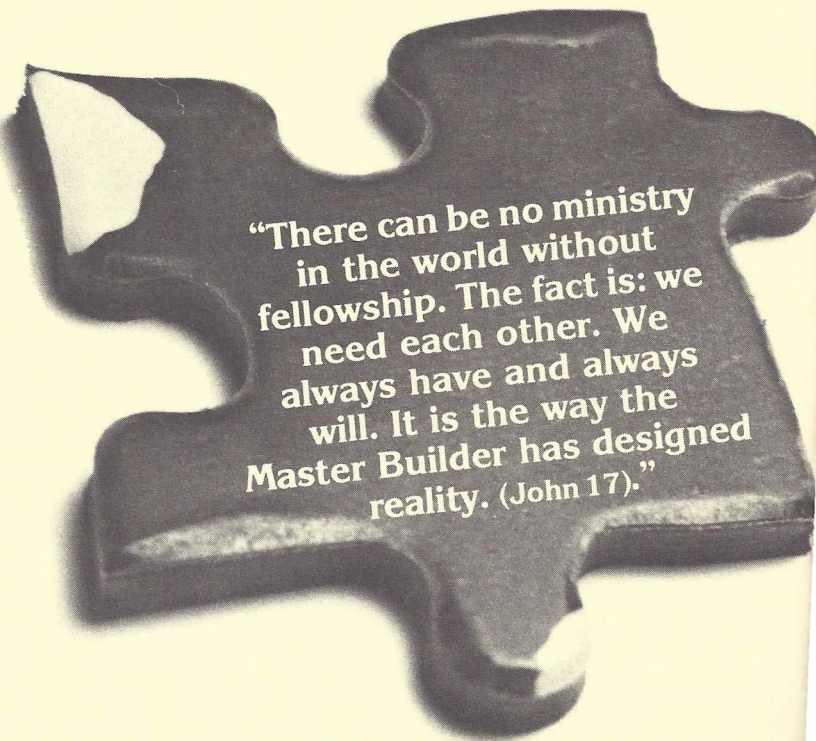
Christians in the two-thirds world have been mobilized by the Lord of the Church to a remarkable degree in the last few years. (What Ralph Winter calls the "twenty five unbelievable years") (3). This mobilization has produced other surprises in the puzzle.

One surprise is provided by Christians who live in Eastern Europe and who live each day under the heel of atheist governments. These Christians show signs of spiritual vigor and they are growing numerically as well. In fact, Catholic Christians in Poland are probably more spiritually alive and healthy now than they were during the earlier period of their history when the state was solicitous of their welfare.

Another surprise is that the old equation about money and mission has proven faulty. Consider the example of Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship (known worldwide as International Fellowship of Evangelical Students). This movement has thrived in places like the Philippines, Southeast Asia and India. It's conscious strategy is founded upon indigeousness, locally supported ministries. IFES does not encourage large inputs of funds from outside a ministry area. IFES is representative of a dynamic and realistic strategy of Christian ministry that is being created by the Holy Spirit world wide. What IFES is committed to is an inter personally oriented, in-depth ministry that takes time and a vision and fellowship. These three discipleship ingredients are more vital than money. Money will often become a hindrance because it tends by its very nature to deflect the original vision by entangling the leadership in secondary matters-- namely the administration of funds. The excessive flux of funds also usually encourages the artificial kind of institutional growth where the institution enlarges beyond the real committment support of the body of believers who must give vision and meaning to the institution.

Another part of the puzzle very baffling to mission strategists who try to understand world wide missionary strategy on the basis of a single set of evidence is the vital question of cross cultural witness. We now are discovering that there are increasing needs for Christians of all races and backgrounds to

take part in evangelistic and helping ministries among minority groups. Far from a call to moratorium is cross cultural missionary activity east to west and west to east. It is now clear that a North American white Wycliffe translator may be better able to relate without a lot of excess cultural baggage to mountain tribe people in Indonesia or the Phillipines than Christian Tagalog lowlanders in Manila or Sumatra Batac Christians can. What cross cultural ministry needs is open



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to communicate the Gospel powerfully in recent evangelistic meetings in La Canada, California reaching white middle class Californians with the claims of Christ.

Another puzzle surprise is the growing theological significance of Christians from the Third World. The whole of Christians is being effected. No longer will the newer churches dutifully learn their Christian theology from Europe and America. They are doing their own Biblical study and are coming up with a distinctive theological vocabulary and discipleship models to describe what the Gospel of Christ means to the world as they perceive and flexible people who love Christ and love people. Every other consideration

is secondary. The same discovery has been made within our cultural situation. Bishop Festo Kivengere of Uganda was able to do it. New theological schools are emerging and growing all over Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Most of these schools are evangelical in concern and many are local in leadership and vision. Their importance cannot be overemphasized because the way pastors and laity are trained greatly affects the future of the churches.

What does all this mean? What is God's will for our lives in the light of this complicated, changing puzzle?

Here's what I think it means.

There can be no real ministry in the world without fellowship. The fact is: we need each other. We always have and always will. It is the way the Master Builder has designed reality. (John 17).

But let us examine the relationships more closely. The previous denominational structures and alliances within Protestantism are not as meaningful since the trend of localism has swept Protestantism worldwide. This has resulted in a more informal face for Protestantism. The dangers in this localism are the old problems of Christians being cut off from other Christians and therefore being tempted by the idols of indulgent independence and self-righteousness. But fellowship is not a luxury like the coffee hour after church.(4) Fellowship is the means used by the Holy Spirit to keep the people of God accountable and theologically responsible. Since the older denominational structures lack the widespread role they once had in this regard, the emergence of transdenominational evangelical fellowship/advocacy communities is crucial. Like Wycliffe, Latin American Mission, Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia Sojourners, Young Life, Campus Life, and even the Wittenburg Door. And of course, the seminaries that have sprung up around the world.

Let me make another reflection. The Apostle Paul was so confident of the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that he wanted at all costs to stay close to the crosscurrent of cultures and races in his world of the first century. He makes it clear in Phillipians 1 and Romans 12:16 that the Gospel carries out its strategy of salvation in pluralistic social settings as well (if not better) as in a friendly

cultural setting. Christianity has historically done well in the market place and this century is providing new and striking proof of the appeal of the Gospel within what would appear to be the oddest and most hostile of settings. Intellectuals within the Soviet Union who are disillusioned with a marxism that is fatigued and trivial are considering the Christian world view from a fresh perspective. It is already true among the vast population of overseas Chinese who live throughout the rim of Asia. Many of these Chinese have become Christians and they form a theological, thoughtful, and deeply committed body of Christians that God has raised up.

Another fact of our time is the reign of world peace that we now experience. It is an odd peace. A delicate peace. A strained and yet nevertheless as real a peace as social peace ever is. The great powers have maintained it by virtue of the military overkill that each side holds in readiness. It's not an ideal peace but it is what we have.

The result of this peace of terror is that local wars like the present conflict in Ethiopia are harder to understand or even describe in the older simple terms of aggressor-defender. The role which Christians should play in this situation is founded upon two assumptions. (1) From our personal journey, we know too well the reality of sinfulness that infects every human endeavor regardless of its moralistic or revolutionary rhetoric. (2) On the other hand, we believe that people can be changed, made whole, forgiven by the love of Jesus Christ. The result is that we cannot endorse solutions that build upon the way of death, destruction, murder. The Christian has learned from our Lord that social justice ends do not justify deadly, small scale means. "Not everyone who says, 'Lord, Lord'... but they that do the will of my Father". (Matthew 7).

Because we believe that people and settings can change, we are a strategic people. The Christian knows from his/her experiences with the Gospel that Christ is able to break through bondage in human life. This belief in the power of the Gospel makes us want to stay close to people and to try out new models of hope

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## **The New World: A Giant Jigsaw Puzzle:**

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even in what looks like totally despairing settings.

For this reason, we Christians are not anarchists who fantasize about an idealistic society and then fail to face up to the real pluralistic social contract that is present here and now.

And that is why I do not endorse the too simple solutions of idealists who want to economically blockade either Cuba or South Africa, therefore isolating a whole country of people. I believe in the exertion of moral and even economic pressure upon nations in order to moderate their policy. But to isolate totally a nation because we do not agree with its policies is like Paul refusing to enter Corinth because of the corrupt Corinthian policies toward women and slaves. Paul's strategy was bolder and more confident. He planted a colony of real people in a real place. The Christian church in Corinth.

The same logic applies to such nations as the USSR, North Korea, China, and Viet Nam. I believe we as a nation should hold to a policy of honorable relationships with de facto governments whenever that is possible. I believe that the most sound policy is one that preserves an evenhanded balance. For instance, it insists upon preserving the integrity of Taiwan which is a de facto nation state of some 20 million people while at the same time opening doors and securing a relationship with Mainland China. This is essential if there is to be a meaningful chance for encounter between people.

This is our age and I find the signs encouraging even though I may not know how to cope with the rapid stream of challenges that confront me as a Christian disciple. The one fact about which I am convinced, however, is that what the world needs most are colonies of Biblically obedient Christians who will follow Jesus Christ. What is encouraging is that there are more and more of these kinds of people astir and they come from the whole earth.

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1. S. Solzhenitsyn, *From Under The Rubble*, E. F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful*, Mark Hatfield, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*.
  2. E. F. Palmer, *Salvation By Surprise*, pg. 139 ff.
  3. Ralph Winter, *The Twenty Five Years*, William Carey Library Press.
  4. Richard C. Halvorsen, *How My Mind Has Changed About The Church*.