

Alan Paton *speaks*

A passionate concern for the application of Christian principles to the problems of South African society has characterized the life of Alan Paton, making him one of the great champions of freedom in today's world. Through his writings, speeches, and political activities he has boldly attacked *apartheid* in his native land and vigorously challenged archaic methods of handling juvenile delinquents. On these and other crucial issues he has written and spoken with conviction, candor, clarity, and courage.

He is best known for his novel *Cry the Beloved Country* and for his second novel *Too Late the Phalarope*. But he has also written volumes on *The Land and People of South Africa*, *South Africa in Transition*, *Hope for South Africa*, and *Tales from a Troubled Land*.

In politics he has been a leader in the Liberal Party, a small but significant group with a comprehensive program for radical changes in South Africa. His defense at home and abroad of Africans who have challenged *apartheid* by non-violent methods caused the government to revoke his passport in 1960.

Alan Paton was born in 1903 in Pietermaritzburg in South Africa, the son of English settlers. Following his years in primary and secondary schools, he entered the University of Natal from which he received a degree in science and a diploma in education. For many years he taught in a variety of schools, becoming Principal of the Diepkloof Reformatory near Johannesburg, where he stayed 13 years. In his spare time he travelled, spoke, and wrote. In 1952 he and his wife went to live in a community for colored tubercular patients near Durban.

With wisdom and foresight he speaks today:

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ON AFRICA IN TRANSITION . . .

"The whole continent of Africa is in transition. The Industrial Revolution which during the last century changed forever the life of Europe and America, and therefore changed forever the life of the human race, has begun to change the life of Africa also."

"What actually is happening in Africa? What is this unrest that we read so much about? Why are these events so important to the world?"

"The answers to these questions do not lie in Africa. They lie in that fantastic flowering of human genius that took place in what we call Europe or the West. Men began to master the secrets of nature at a greater pace than ever before. They had ships, instruments, skill, and guns. They therefore were able to conquer and colonize, or at least to rule the people or control the trade of vast regions.

"People from the East also played a great part in Africa. They colonized the north, crossed the Sahara with their trading caravans, and converted millions to Islam. But it was Europe that carved up the great bulk of Africa for itself.

"So the whole world, in a sense, yielded to the West. Today, the process is being undone.

"This process of undoing is changing the life of Africa. It is accompanied by disturbance and uncertainty."

"The continent of Africa, after years of isolation, is developing its resources. Its seers already look to a day when no skill, no knowledge, no occupation, and therefore no right and no responsibility will be closed to Africans. One thing is certain. Such a day is coming. How long it will take, no one can say."

ON SOUTH AFRICA IN TRANSITION . . .

The truth is that our Christian civilization is riddled through and through with dilemma. We believe in the brotherhood of man, but we do not want it in South Africa. We believe that God endows men with diverse gifts, and that human life depends for its fullness on their employment and enjoyment, but we do not want it in South Africa. We believe in help for the underdog, but we want him to stay under. And we are therefore compelled, in order to preserve our belief that we are Christian, to ascribe to Almighty God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, our own intentions, and to say that because He created white and black, He gives the Divine Approval to any human action that is designed to keep black men from advancement. We go so far as to credit Almighty God with the intention of having created black men to hew wood and draw water for white men. We go so far as to assume that He blesses any action that is designed to prevent black men from the full employment of the gifts He gave them. Alongside of these very arguments we use others totally inconsistent, so that the accusation of repression may be refuted. We say we withhold education because the black child has not the intelligence to profit by it; we withhold opportunity to develop gifts because black people have no gifts; we justify our action by saying that it took us thousands of years to achieve our own advancement, and it would be foolish to suppose that it will take the black man any lesser time and that therefore there is no need for hurry. We shift our ground again when a black man does achieve something remarkable, and feel deep pity for a man who is condemned to the loneliness of being remarkable, and decide that it is a Christian kindness not to let black men become remarkable. Thus, even our God becomes a confused and inconsistent creature, giving gifts and denying them employment."

ON TRIBAL SOCIETIES . . .

"Our Government would like to restore the power of the chiefs and restore the unity of the tribes. Can this be done? I myself think it is impossible, but it remains one of the most burning and controversial questions facing our country."

"The old tribal system was, for all its violence and savagery, for all its superstition and witchcraft, a moral system. Our natives today produce criminals and prostitutes and drunkards not because it is their nature to do so, but because their simple system of order and tradition and convention has been destroyed. It was destroyed by the impact of our own civilization. Our civilization has therefore an inescapable duty to set up another system of order and tradition and convention."

ON THE IMPACT OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION . . .

"One cannot dwell too much or too often on the tremendous impact of Western Civilization upon tribal life. I desire to draw no comparisons between the two, in favor of one or of the other. I merely wish to state that for good or for ill, no tribal culture, no tribal system of law and custom, no tribal habit of dress, no tribal habit of food, no tribal education, can stand beside Western, Christian, industrial, technical civilization, without withering away."

"The tragedy is not that things are broken. The tragedy is that they are not mended again. The white man has broken the tribe. And it is my belief . . . that it cannot be mended again. But the house that is broken and the man that falls apart when the house is broken, these are the tragic things."

ON THE AFRIKANERS . . .

"Of all the racial groups in the world, the Afrikaner Nationalist group is the most closed to others, the most turned-in upon itself, the most powerful in group opinion."

"The Church plays a tremendous role in Afrikaner life and has always been closely identified with the struggles and aspirations, social, political, cultural, educational, and economic of the Afrikaner people."

"Their Dutch language, already changing, continued to change in a fascinating way, becoming much simplified, and enriching itself with a host of new idioms influenced by the kind of country they lived in and the kind of life they led, by the ox, the wagon, the loneliness, the dry watercourse, and the thorn."

"In a way he (the Afrikaner Nationalist) is a tragic figure. He is the African who is afraid of Africa. He is the African who never identified himself with Africa. If Africa rejects him, it will be because he rejected Africa. This is doubly tragic because he actually called himself the 'Afrikaner', the 'man of Africa.' "

"If he cannot change, if he cannot become a true man of Africa, then there cannot be any orderly solution of our problems. One thing is certain, he won't change just by persuasion or out of the goodness of his heart. He will change only when the pressure inside and outside the country becomes unendurable."

"There is one thing about him that I am totally unable to comprehend and that is that he does not appear to see the havoc he inflicts on others in his headlong journey to a goal that isn't there."

ON THE COLOR CURTAIN . . .

"Apartheid is without rival, the best known, the most hated, of all the national policies of the world."

"It is not only white people's fear that hinders change; it is also their conviction of their own superiority, and of the inferiority of others."

"The fear that motivates this whittling away of rights is of course understandable. It is the fear that generosity or statesmanship of any kind leads sooner or later to 'swamping'. It is said of course that the fear is really otherwise; and is rather the fear of imperilling the civilized standards of one's society; but it goes deeper than that—it is the fear of being 'swamped' by a black majority, who, however civilized, will seek revenge for past wrong."

"Africans once endured silently because they could do nothing else—the repressive laws of the color-bar countries. But they are becoming more and more confident that there is no need to be silent any longer."

"Cry the beloved country for the unborn child that is the inheritor of our fear. Let him not love the earth too deeply. Let him not laugh too gladly when the water runs through his fingers. Nor stand too silent when the setting sun makes red the veld with fire. Let him not be too moved when the birds of his land are singing, nor give too much of his heart to a mountain or a valley. For fear will rob him of all if he gives too much."

ON RAISING THE COLOR CURTAIN . . .

"The future of the white man in South Africa depends entirely on his willingness to negotiate it sensibly, his courage to negotiate it faster than his reluctance advises him."

"One thing we can be grateful for—it is getting very hard indeed for a Christian to think that God likes his own race better than other races. A Christian may still like his own race better than others, but it is getting very hard to think that God agrees with him. And even if he does think that God agrees with him, it is getting very hard, almost impossible, to say it aloud."

ON SOUTH AFRICAN LIBERALS AS CURTAIN RAISERS . . .

"These few white people reject the ideal of a separated society and uphold the ideal of a common society. They do not believe in racial discrimination (or differentiation, which is another name but the same thing to them) by law or authority. They believe that the evils of racial discrimination, or differentiation (or segregation, to give it its ugliest name), is always done by someone with power to someone without power and is fundamentally unjust. They may believe that this goal of a common society must be reached by steps, but they have no doubt what the goal is—a Union of South Africa, united and indivisible, belonging equally to all its people, offering to all its people equal opportunities, rights, and duties, knowing therefore no discrimination whatsoever on the grounds of race and color."

ON LOVE VERSUS FEAR . . .

"... the only power that can resist the power of fear is the power of love. It's a weak thing and a tender thing; men despise it and deride it. But I look for the day when in South Africa we shall realize that the only lasting and worthwhile solution of our grave and profound problems lies not in the use of power, but in that understanding and compassion without which human life is an intolerable bondage, condemning us all to an existence of violence and misery and fear."

ON LOYALTY TO HUMANITY . . .

"But an allegiance to our own countries becomes deeper and truer when we owe an allegiance to something greater, to truth, to justice, and to the welfare of the whole human race. That is what I believe, and I know that many Americans believe it too; they believe that that is the way to become not only better citizens of the world, but better citizens of America also. They become better able to carry out their great responsibility to the world."

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