

# Called to Reconciliation

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A South African Christian sees continued efforts at upbuilding  
as our only proper response to the riot and turmoil of the day.

ALAN PATON

Violence flared in Detroit again yesterday, and the death toll rose to 35. There had been a few hours of calm - during which Black leaders threatened guerilla warfare and said: "We stand on the eve of a Black revolution."

Violence also flared in another seven Michigan cities yesterday - Saginaw, Grand Rapids, Pontiac, Flint, Muskegon, Benon Harbor and Mount Clemens. - *The Natal Mercury, morning edition, July 26, 1967.*

2000 Black American paratroopers, some just back from Vietnam, are still guarding East Detroit.

Rioting continued last night in Toledo, Cincinnati, Chicago, Cambridge (Maryland), San Francisco and Phoenix. At least 20 people were arrested in Toledo after Negroes had thrown fire-bombs and looted shops. - *The Daily News (evening edition), July 27, 1967.*

Tired Federal troops finally curbed America's costliest ever riots in Detroit yesterday, but more Negro violence exploded in other cities across the country.

In Los Angeles, fire-bombs were thrown in the streets of the Watts section - a grim reminder of the six-day 1965 riots there in which 35 people died.

Guardians used riot gas in Cambridge, Maryland, to disperse 200 Negroes who had gathered for a street rally. The town was the scene of a violent riot two days ago. - *The Natal Mercury, July 28, 1967.*

Stokely Carmichael has issued from Havana a threat of black vengeance. . . . "We are not waiting for them to kill us. We will move to kill them first, or rather, we are working towards that goal. . . . One good thing about the Vietnam war is that the United States has taught us how to win. Our brothers returning from Vietnam are bringing back that training well in the cities of the United States." - *The Natal Mercury, August 3, 1967.*

† WHEN I read this news my heart aches, not only for America but for myself too. Why is there all this depth of hatred, and when did it begin? It had several sources, and slavery is certainly one of them. In the 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th and even 19th centuries after Christ, the ships of Europe carried slaves from Africa to the New World. In 1790, according to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 74,000 Africans were forcibly removed from the west coast of Africa. Of these, one-eighth would die on the journey, one-eighth die in the harbor, and one-third die in the "seasoning." It is estimated by some that 20 million

Africans were abducted from Africa during the life of the trade. Some fell into the hands of humane masters, some lived lives of unspeakable misery, suffering the extremes of cruelty and degradation. All lived the lives of slaves.

Abraham Lincoln (in his Second Inaugural):  
*Fondly do we hope - fervently do we pray - that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bondman's 250 years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid for by another drawn with the sword, as it was said 3,000 years ago, so still it must be said, "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."*

Lincoln certainly would have called these riots judgments of the Lord. The harvest we are reaping comes from the seed that we have sowed. What must be done now? Clearly the main task falls to the authorities, to create that kind of society in which hatred will die away, because when there is hope, purpose, recognition, then hatred does die away. This society has been called the Great Society, but no great society will ever be built as long as there exist gross inequalities of income, opportunity and status. To remove these is going to cost a lot of money, a lot of thought, a lot of work. We shall never build the Great Society so long as we pour our money into armaments. And what is hardest of all, we shall have to endure hatred while we are building it. While we are building it we are going to be hated, cursed, stoned, shot at, perhaps even killed, by some of the very people for whom we are building it. We are going to have to go on building while we are being hated. I doubt whether any nation has ever before been faced with such a task.

*But it has to be undertaken.* The alternatives are unthinkable. One alternative would be to partition the United States of America. The other would be to go back to segregation, to the shooting, lynching, hanging, back to real segregation, with stockades, gates, barbed wire, floodlights, armed guards, machine guns, death rays, and if that doesn't solve the problem, back to the gas chambers. America cannot go back one inch on that road. So great is the crisis confronting her that she would be justified in organizing a great army, not to fight the enemies abroad but those at home, using all the energy and idealism of her young people, many of whom would willingly

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devote their lives to such a cause, many of whom are now rebels without any cause at all.

When I face some problem whose solution seems impossible I always think of London on October 15, 1940, when 480 German aircraft dropped an estimated 386 tons of high explosive and 70,000 incendiary bombs. The incendiary bombs were something new, and while Londoners sheltered in the basements, strategic and historic buildings burned out above their heads. If this were to go on night after night, nothing of London would be left. And what could Londoners possibly do? "To the basements," wrote Churchill, "must be replaced by 'to the roofs.'" What had seemed a hopeless future became an inspiring present. Everyone pressed forward to do his or her share. "Many became adept," wrote Churchill, "and thousands of fires were extinguished before they took hold. The experience of remaining on the roof night after night under fire, with no protection but a tin hat, soon became habitual." What Londoners did then, we must do now, because people are threatening to "burn America down."

And what must I do, apart from what I do as a citizen enrolled by my government at a time of national crisis, or as a member of some civic or church or other group?

I must try to understand what makes people hate, loot and kill. If I am white, then I must try to understand the consequences of that amazing intellectual flowering of the West, accompanied by technological advances that enabled the people and nations of Europe to go into every country of the world and virtually to do what they liked, even to the extent of annexing whole countries that belonged to other people — that tremendous historical process known as colonization, which was as catastrophic in its undoing as it was in its doing, so catastrophic that it will take the world generations to recover from it all. If I am tempted to point to African wars, I must remember World War I and World War II, and the massacre of the Jews by Hitler. If I am tempted to sneer at Congo chaos, then I must remember who prepared the way for it. If I am angered by Congo brutality, then let me also remember Leopold II. If I am tempted to hate, and if I fall to the temptation, then either I repent or I cease to be a Christian.

There is only one thing I can do in times like these, when some people, and some of them very intelligent people, fear a total estrangement between black and white. Then I, whether I am black or white, must ask to be made an instrument of God's peace, so that one more healing stream may flow into the river of hate. It is hard for me to see God's power working in these dangerous times unless it works through us.

In April 1958, when Dag Hammarskjöld was

beginning his second term, the staff gave him a surprise party, and he made a speech of thanks. He concluded, Henry P. Van Dusen tells us, with a favorite verse from the Swedish poet Gunnar Ek-elöf: "Will the day ever come when joy is great and sorrow small?" and added his own answer: "On the day we feel we are living with a duty, well fulfilled and worth our while, on that day joy is great and we can look on sorrow as being small."

*Lord, strengthen us in these troublous times. Save us from a retreat into hatred or despair. Call us out of the shelters and send us up to the roofs, even if day and night we are under fire. Help us to rebuild the house that is broken down, and to put out the flames before they destroy us all. Rebuke us for any self-pity, and teach us rather to keep our pity for others who need it. May we remain calm in the midst of violence and panic, and may reason and love and mercy and understanding rule our lives. And may we this coming day be able to do some work of peace for thee.*

### *The Worried Ones*

★ THE worried ones of too many luxury bills wrote Dear Santa for an overstuffed manger (of the post-Thanksgiving variety) where they might bury themselves and suckle on the Eternal while watching fifty footbowl games; when what to their wondering eyes should appear but thousands of children all filled with fear of American soldiers about their Uncle Sam's business in alien temples where human sacrifices burned unnoticed, and a very thin Santa in shirt-sleeves busy making Mama and Papa dolls that walk talk bend sit stand drink wet and cry in the night for the thousands of scarred children who never heard of him and have lost the real thing; so the worried ones simply shopped by phone (or mail) added earmuffs and blinders to overburdened charge accounts and mourned a son lost on a hill, the wrong son on the wrong hill without a manger.

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