

69 11/10/2 | 33

A SPIRITUAL TREAT

A very fine book by Alan Paton is entitled: "Instrument of Thy Peace." These words, you may recall, are taken from the beautiful prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, and the book provides meditations on this well-known prayer. Alan Paton is not a Catholic; he lives in the troubled land of South Africa, has suffered a great deal, and cherishes a deep devotion to the little poor man of Assisi.

In the foreword Malcolm Muggeridge writes that there is a world beyond history. "When St. Francis turned aside from the pursuit of happiness to the pursuit of God he signaled the occasion by embracing a leper. This was not a dramatic gesture designed to overcome his repugnance for the leper's rotting flesh, but a joyous recognition that he had found in him a beloved brother."

Paton states, "I write this book for sinners, and for those who with all their hearts wish to be better, purer, less selfish, more useful . . . for those who wish to keep their faith bright and burning in a dark and faithless world." He says that most of us are tempted to keep some, if not most, of our love and pity for ourselves. But St. Francis tells us to give our love away, if we really want to keep it.

The book is filled with words worth pondering. For instance, Paton writes that the only way a Christian can counter hatred, injury, despair and sadness is "by throwing off his helplessness and allowing himself to be made the bearer of love, bringing the hope of God and His comfort to those who grieve."

One of the author's prayers is, "O Lord, open my eyes that I may see the needs of others." He adds that we must not be afraid to defend the poor because of the anger of the rich, continuing, "O Lord, show me where love and hope and faith are needed, and use me to bring them to those places."

The whole little book is filled with such beautiful thoughts and prayers and meditations. One of my favorites is, "No one is too weak, too vile, too unimportant, to be God's instrument of love."