

on my desk / Mennonite Weekly Review
Melvin Gingerich 8/15/68
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South African Christian Writes Devotional Book

ON MY DESK is a new book by Alan Paton with the title *Instrument of Thy Peace*. This book was published in 1968 by the Seabury Press and sells for \$3.50. It may be ordered through your local book store. Written for the Lenten season of 1968 it is a book that will be read for years to come because it brings together many of the deep spiritual insights of this outstanding Christian leader of South Africa.

THE AUTHOR has written a half dozen books, of which perhaps the most famous is *Cry, the Beloved Country*. Although he is known as a novelist, in this book he establishes his status as a writer of devotional literature. The book has 21 meditations. He states that he writes this book "for sinners and for those who with all their hearts wish to be better, purer, less selfish, more useful; for those who do not wish to be cold in love, and who know that being cold in love is perhaps the worst sin of them all; for those who wish to keep their faith bright and burning in a dark and faithless world; for those who seek not so much to lean upon God as to be active instruments of his peace."

THE TITLE is taken from the famous prayer of St. Francis of Assisi which begins with the famous phrase "Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is sadness, joy; where there is darkness, light." The 21 messages of this book revolve around these concepts of St. Francis. The chapters have quotations from the life of St. Francis and there are statements by other outstanding people who have grasped the meaning of the concepts of Jesus and of St. Francis. Each chapter ends with an original prayer by Alan Paton himself. These prayers are outstanding and can readily be used for devotional periods during any time of the year. I read these chapters at bed time over a period of several weeks and found them to be most stimulating and humbling.

THERE ARE MANY QUOTATIONS in the book that I have marked and which I would enjoy

O Lord, to stand up and be counted, to stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves, to stand up for ourselves when it is needful for us to do so. Let us fear nothing more than we fear Thee. Let us love nothing more than we love Thee, for thus we shall fear nothing also. Let us have no other god before Thee, wether nation or party or state or church. Let us seek no other peace but the peace which is Thine, and make us its instruments, opening our eyes and our ears and our hearts, so that we should know always what work of peace we may do for Thee."

He TELLS US that his highest vision of the church is for it to be the servant of the world, "Not withdrawn but participating, not embattling but battling, not condemning but healing the wounds of the hurt and the lost and the lonely, not preoccupied with its survival or its observances or its articles, but with the needs of mankind." For him he thinks the worst sins in the world are cruelty and coldness. Cowardice, he says, is contemptible, but cruelty is horrible, "and to me the most horrible form of cruelty is that which men practice in order that some noble end may be achieved."

ALAN PATON is an outstanding leader of the Reformed movement in South Africa. Because he was that he was the recipient of the Freedom Award in 1960. This review closes with one other prayer from Mr. Paton. It is this, "Lord, teach me the meaning of Your commandment to love our enemies, and help me to obey it. Make me the instrument of Your love, which is not denied to the hungry, the sick, the prisoner, the enemy. Teach me to hate division, and not to seek after it. But teach me also to stand up for those things that I believe to be right, no matter what the consequences may be. And help me this day to do some work of peace for You, perhaps to one whom I had thought to be my enemy."