

***Lex Vivendi**: Alan Paton's Work for Peace Making in South Africa from a Liturgical Perspective**

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Alan Paton is well known as a literary author who was also a committed political and social activist who helped found the Liberal Party in South Africa. A recipient of numerous literary awards, his first novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, sold over 15 million copies before his death and remains popular around the world.¹ The novel's themes deal with love and justice, courage and endurance, hope and the dignity of humanity from a Christian viewpoint. These themes can be found in other works throughout his life.² As Nelson Mandela stated, Paton is "one of South Africa's leading humanists."³ In this research, I will carefully examine the major theological elements of Paton's writings and show how his work demonstrates his life as a Christian humanist within the

* In this paper, I would like to use the terms *lex orandi* (law of prayer), *lex credendi* (law of faith), and *lex vivendi* (law of life) to analyze Alan Paton's life and work. *Lex orandi* and *lex credendi* explain the inseparable and influential relationship between theology and liturgy. It explains that the theology of the church should be rooted in the liturgy of church. Alexander Schmemmann notes as follows: "*Lex orandi* is the church's *lex credendi*, and the theological task is ultimately an interpretive and descriptive process which attempts to grasp the theology as revealed in and through liturgy." See Alexander Schmemmann, *Liturgical Theology, Theology of Liturgy, and Liturgical Reform* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1975), 218.

1. "Cry, the Beloved Country." *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cry_the_Beloved_Country (accessed on April 10, 2012).

2. Peter F. Alexander, *Alan Paton: A Biography* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 492-500. Paton wrote three novels: *Cry, the Beloved Country*, *Too Late the Phalarope*, and *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful*. He also wrote one collection of short stories, two biographies, three autobiographies, and a number of poems.

3. Kenneth Hermansson, "The Tithoya Cries at Dawn: A comment on Alan Paton's South African Novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country*," <http://hem1.passagen.se/pasteur/Cry.htm> (accessed on April 10, 2012).

specific social and political context of South Africa.⁴ This research surveys Paton's Christian life and theological themes and practices relating with Christian understanding of peacemaking, reconciliation and healing from a liturgical perspective. In particular, I will apply his life and work as resources for a model of *Lex Vivendi*, a law of life, the ultimate goal of genuine Christian worshippers.⁵

Christian Faith and Commitment

Alan Paton grew up in a Christian home and sought to live out his Christian beliefs throughout his life. Paton's parents were deeply religious, and it was from his parents that he learned tolerance towards the Afrikaner⁶ people and appreciation for their language and culture.⁷ He later learned the Afrikaans language and studied the literature and history of the people. Callan points out that "all these attempts to appreciate and understand were strengthened by religious motives."⁸

While in college, Paton was active in the Students' Christian Association. He embraced the Anglican Church when he became an adult. Like other twentieth century writers or public figures whose faith influenced their work such as C. S. Lewis, T. S. Eliot, Flannery O'Connor

4. Since Paton was an Anglican Christian, I personally recommend *The Study of Anglicanism* as a resource to explore the Anglican aspects of Paton's life and thought. See S Sykes, J. Booty and J. Knight, eds., *The Study of Anglicanism*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: SPCK/Fortress, 1998).

5. One may say the concepts of *Lex orandi* and *lex credenda* are not directly demonstrated in Paton's life. Rather, the aim in my research is to introduce Paton as an example of the combination of doctrinal confession with a life of social activism. In Christian life, these two worlds often exist independently of one another. Paton successfully unites them through his literary works and political activity. He is a rare example of the amalgamation of intellect, emotion, and volition.

6. See Alan Paton, *Cry, the Beloved Country* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 275. According to Paton, Afrikaner is "now used for the descendants of the Boers. Some large-minded Afrikaners claim that it has a wider connotation, and means white South Africans, but many Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking South Africans would object to this extension of meaning. It is used here (*Cry, the Beloved Country*) in its usually accepted meaning." In addition, Afrikaans is the language of the Afrikaner. Afrikaans and English are the two official languages of the Union of South Africa.

7. Edward Callan, *Alan Paton* (New York: Twayne, 1968), 25. Paton was raised in a very strict Christian family. His parents were immigrants from Scotland. His father, James Paton, constructed a rigid form of religious life in his home. For example, James Paton made his children preach a sermon to him on an assigned text.

8. Callan, *Alan Paton*, 25.

and even Dag Hammarskjöld,⁹ Paton sought to live out his Christian faith and can be regarded as an example of how the faith and beliefs of a modern Christian layperson may be demonstrated in the social and political realms. As Noll indicates, "Christianity was Paton's moral anchor"¹⁰ during his lifetime and Paton himself confessed that his autobiography is "the story of a poor life as a Christian."¹¹

Paton wrote many books and poems deeply related with his Christian faith. In the case of his internationally acclaimed 1948 novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country*,¹² Paton's prose evokes strong emotions in readers viewing the terrible past of South Africa through the eyes of Stephen Kumalo, a black Zulu who is also an Anglican priest. The novel skillfully depicts the fundamental Christian themes of forgiveness and reconciliation.

The reconciliation between Kumalo and his white neighbor, James Jarvis, is a key scene of the novel. In the novel, Kumalo's son, Absalom, is to be executed for murdering Jarvis's son, a white activist. Kumalo visits Jarvis and upon hearing the story of his son's murder, Jarvis says, "I have heard you" and "I understand what I did not understand. There is no anger in me."¹³ The novel thus concludes with forgiveness and reconciliation between the black priest, the father of the murderer, and the white farmer, the father of the victim. They join together to work for better conditions for black people. Paton suggests this reconciliation as an example for all of South Africa to follow.

Throughout Paton's novels and poems, one can easily find Christian themes of forgiveness and reconciliation, such as the beautiful relationship between the two pastors, Kumalo and Msimangu, in *Cry, the Beloved Country*. Rev. Msimangu gives his money to Kumalo for expenses in Johannesburg. Kumalo deeply thanks him for his hospitality and

9. The UN Secretary General whose posthumous literary journal was edited by the Christian poet W. H. Auden.

10. Mark Noll, "Midwives of South Africa's Rebirth," *Christianity Today* (July 1995): 34.

11. See Peter F. Alexander. *Alan Paton: A Biography* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 394. This statement is originally from a sermon delivered in Great St. Mary's, Cambridge, 27 April 1975. It is also interesting to note that there are many biblical references in his novels and most of the personal names have biblical origins.

12. Paton embraces Christian faith especially in his novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* and his two major biographies (one is of the politician Jan Hofmeyr and the other is on the Anglican bishop Geoffrey Clayton). See Alexander, *Alan Paton* and Noll, "Midwives."

13. Paton, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, 177.

praises him by saying, "In all my days I have known no one as you are."¹⁴ Msimangu replies: "I am a weak and sinful man, but God put His hands on me, that is all."¹⁵ Here, this powerful message reveals Paton's Christian view of a fallen humanity. In his view, like the traditional Christian view, people are weak and sinful; however, they are able to overcome this limitation by God's grace.

Paton admits the weakness and limitation of human beings and as such declares the reality of their sinful nature. According to his writings, repentance is the means of overcoming these flaws. Through God's grace, people can devote themselves to God and to others and true reconciliation can occur. In this respect, Paton's writings are obviously based on his Christian faith and love.

Paton's 1968 book, *Instrument of Thy Peace*, is one of the most prominent expressions of Paton's faith in his works. Paton's *Instrument of Thy Peace* is a series of personal meditations based on the famous prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. In the prologue of *Instrument of Thy Peace*, Paton discusses the reason why he wrote this book as follows:

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 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 the active instruments of his peace.¹⁶

It is clear that Paton's view of Christian models includes those who are working for the realization of Christian love in the world. Paton did not hide this dream in almost all of his writings. As previously mentioned, Paton's faith encompasses repentance, forgiveness, and finally, peace and reconciliation. Paton is a Christian writer who practiced his Christian commitment through authoring distinguished works of literature.

Lex Orandi est Lex Credendi

I will now like to explore a deeper, spiritual aspect of Paton through another lens. That is, how does Paton manifest the concepts of *lex orandi* and *lex credenda* in his work and life?

Geoffrey Wainwright explains, "The Latin tag *lex orandi, lex credendi* may be construed in two ways. The more usual way makes the rule of

14. Paton, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, 210.

15. Paton, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, 210.

16. Paton, *Instrument of Thy Peace* (New York: Seabury, 1968), 7.

prayer a norm for belief: what is prayed indicates what may and must be believed. But from the grammatical point of view, it is equally possible to reverse the subject and predicate and so take the tag as meaning that the rule of faith is the norm for prayer: what must be believed governs what may and should be prayed.¹⁷

Paton's life, it may be surmised, was a balance between the two notions of *lex orandi* and *lex credenda* in his understanding of the Bible and theology. First of all, I believe that Paton regards the Bible as a "norm for ethical behavior."¹⁸ Paton read the Bible from a practical, societal lens and in so doing, defined a Christian as a person with an authentic lifestyle and an open mind, who engages in dialogue with the oppressed and identifies him/herself with the oppressed as Christ did. This is particularly relevant in the context of much of modern South African history, plagued by the evils of apartheid and racism.

Paton places emphasis rediscovering the Gospel in South Africa's particular context despite the reluctance of the authorities.¹⁹ Paton believes that "they (authorities) want it to stay as it is, because they want the country to stay as it is. Apartheid and the gospel are more or less the same thing, and anyone who doesn't believe in apartheid is really not believing the gospel."²⁰

In Paton's understanding, a Christian brings one's own contemporary experiences to the Bible, and reinterprets the Bible in her/his own context. Just as one's life is different from that of another, personal contexts are varied and various. Paton is aware of his own experience as a source and context for theology and establishment of his belief. His interpretation of the Bible can show us one of the proper senses of hermeneutics.

Regarding Christian theology, Paton confesses that he is afraid of dogmatic understandings of Christian faith. He stated, "I speak as a Christian, but as one who is afraid of dogmatic thought, and believes it had done great harm to the church. It seems to me that ultimate reality, assuming that there is such a thing, can be comprehended only by God,

17. Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 218, and Maxwell Johnson, "Liturgy and Theology," in *Liturgy and Dialogue*, ed. P. Bradshaw and B. Spinks (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 210-218.

18. I borrowed this term from Reginald H. Fuller. He describes the Bible is a norm for theology and a norm for ethical behavior in the Anglican tradition. See Reginald H. Fuller, "Scripture," in *The Study of Anglicanism*, ed. S. Sykes (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988), 92.

19. Alan Paton, *Knocking on the Door*, ed. C. Gardner (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 215.

20. Paton, *Knocking on the Door*, 215.

and that therefore we should not pontificate about it.”²¹ For that reason, Paton noted that he was not able to comprehend the mystery of the Trinity. As he described himself, he was “a humble disciple of Francis of Assisi” who asserted that the only way to find God’s will through prayer was to be made into an instrument of God’s peace.²²

Paton’s *Instrument of Thy Peace* is thus a primary example of *Lex orandi* and *lex credendi*.²³ The sincere attempt to live out the prayer of St. Francis led him into the troubled realities of the world and molded him into an “instrument of thy peace.” For him, the law of prayer (*Lex orandi*) becomes the law of faith (*lex credendi*), and vice versa. His faith is beautifully articulated as prayers and his written confessions turn out to be a solid commitment, realized through his life devoted to the reconciliation and healing of his country.

In this respect, biographer Peter Alexander describes *Instrument of Thy Peace* as follows:

[It] is a book of deepest spirituality, written without affectation and in the simplest possible language, deeply and continuously moving. It is not groundbreaking theology. But it is a most practical and profound series of homilies on such problems as the nature of pain, or how to cope with sin, despair, fair, and weakness.²⁴

Another scholar, Susan VanZanten Gallagher, evaluates Paton’s writings as follows:

“Paton uses a sparse biblical prose and a kind of liturgical repetition of key phrases ... [T]his rhetoric and thematic concern become much more significant when viewed in the context of the National Party’s and Dutch Reformed Church’s use of biblical rhetoric and Reformed theology to justify their stance on apartheid. Paton answers the forces of apartheid in their own language.”²⁵

21. Paton, “The Nature and Ground of Christian Hope Today,” in *Knocking on the Door*, 286.

22. Paton, “The Nature and Ground of Christian Hope Today,” in *Knocking on the Door*, 286.

23. See Nicholas A. Jesson, “*Lex orandi, lex credendi*: Towards a liturgical theology” (Nov. 2001), from http://ecumenism.net/archive/jesson_lexorandi.pdf (accessed on April 10, 2012). For an explanation of *Lex orandi, lex credenda*, please see “*Lex orandi, lex credendi*,” *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lex_orandi,_lex_credendi (accessed on April 10, 2012).

24. Alexander, *Alan Paton*, 345.

25. Susan VanZanten Gallagher, “Alan Paton (1903-1988),” *Reformed Journal* 38 no 5 (May 1988): 7.

Indeed, Paton avoids theological jargon to explain Christian faith and love. Rather, he naturally applies the Bible to his own social context. His "rediscovering" process of the Gospel implies the recovery of humanity in South Africa. Paton clarifies the social dimension of Christian faith in *Instrument of the Thy Peace* where he argues that "to be the instrument of God's peace is not to confine oneself to the field of personal relationship, but to concern oneself also with the problems of human society, hunger, poverty, injustice, cruelty, exploitation, war."²⁶

Furthermore, Paton discusses the notion of church as follows:

I have no higher vision of the Church than as the Servant of the World, not withdrawn but participating, not embattled 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.²⁷

If looking at Paton's theological tendencies, they can be seen as strongly sociopolitical. For Paton, love and justice are practiced in one's own particular context and Christian faith is thus expressed in a most practical way. In the context of South Africa, Paton devoted his life to affirming human dignity and rights to his fellow black countrymen and strove to "promote a common society in opposition to the polarization of apartheid."²⁸ Alexander evaluates Paton as a person who "glorified God in loving his fellows." Paton can also be referred to as a Christian who "hated the power-hungry, exercised intelligence and independence, and had faith in the decency, tolerance, and humanity of the common man."²⁹ From a liturgical viewpoint, Paton's view is that true worshippers must genuinely balance prayer and faith in their given circumstances. For him, *Lex Orandi* was *Lex Credendi*.

Lex Vivendi-Paton's Work for Peacemaking

Finally, any discussion of Paton's life and work must take into account his activism in social and political justice. In Paton's view, Christian love was not to be practiced within the boundaries of personal piety. Rather, Christian love was necessarily realized in the context of the society at large. In his case, this meant that faith required active participation in issues such as racial injustice. Callan notes: "In general, it has not seemed possible, or desirable, to separate Alan Paton the lit-

26. Paton, *Instrument of Thy Peace*, 20.

27. Paton, *Instrument of Thy Peace*, 20.

28. Alexander, *Alan Paton*, 434.

29. Alexander, *Alan Paton*, 434-35.

erary artist from the creative social reformer and man of affairs whose humanitarian spirit is deeply rooted in Christian principles.”³⁰

Moreover, Paton’s liturgical confession was communal. Faith required action for the sake of others. Paton’s life clearly witnessed to this conviction. In his “Eight Signposts to Salvation,” Paton illustrated his ideal society, which overcomes all sociopolitical problems. He rejected all practices based on racism and emphasizes political independence for all South Africans.³¹

Paton wrote many works deeply embedded in the actual experiences of his social and political milieu, including his own experience as an anti-apartheid activist and as president of the South African Liberal Party during the 1950s and 1960s. Paton’s 1981 novel, *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful*, is a good example of the strong historical element of his work in that it contains both real and fictitious characters and even actual historical archives and records. Paton freely noted this, declaring that some of the events actually happened and some were invented.³² For that reason, as Scholz indicates, his novel *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful* is a “blend of history and fiction” and more “a literary mosaic than a novel.”³³ One can feel more of Paton’s informed and compassionate perspective on the South African situation through the blurring of fact and fiction where his beliefs seeped into both his art and his life.

Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful, describes well his concern on his country, South Africa. In the following excerpt, the tragedy, beauty and pains of South Africa, the historical setting of all of Paton’s novels, is lyrically encapsulated:

Ah, but the land is beautiful. It is the land where Sister Aidan met her un-speakable death, and fourteen-year-old Johnnie Reynders hanged himself in his bedroom because the white high school turned him away, although his brothers and sisters had been there before him. It is also the land where white fisherman Koos Karelse of Knysa jumped overboard to save the life of black fisherman James Mapikela; the black life was saved and the white life was lost.

30. Callan, *Alan Paton*, 7.

31. Paton, *Knocking on the Door*, 272-73. For example, the first agreement of salvation is “The days of white domination is over” and second is “The days of unilateral White political decisions are over.” The seventh agreement is “The offer will not be made if ‘White’ South Africa is not prepared to begin the dismantling of the machinery of apartheid.”

32. See Author’s Note in Alan Paton, *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1981).

33. Myra Heerspink Scholz, “Waiting for the inevitable—Sounding in recent South African fiction,” *Reformed Journal* 33 (May 1983): 21.

There is talk of another land too, where the tears have been wiped from every eye, and there is no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor any more pain, because all those things have passed away. But here in the land that is so beautiful, they have not passed away.³⁴

Paton's second novel, *Too Late the Phalarope*, written in 1953, continues with the South African setting and the themes of racism, but focuses on a plot that involves banned inter-racial marriage and sexual relations.

Paton also wrote many poems from of despair and anguish over the tragedy of South Africa's racist policies. In his poem, "No Place for Adoration,"³⁵ Paton cried out: "And crying my Lord and my God, so that the whole city laughed. This being no place for adoration." It is a critical judgment on the social problems of the city of Johannesburg

In addition to describing the tragic state of South Africa, Paton's writings also often contain a prophetic element. According to Gallagher, the novels evince Paton's religious conviction, and therefore paint "a vivid picture of the injustices caused by *apartheid* " well as give forth "a prophetic call for change and repentance."³⁶ Paton places emphasis on the "need for a change of heart, for a personal commitment to justice, that will then inform and prompt the necessary social changes."³⁷ For example, on June 16, 1976, when student riots for justice broke out in the city of Soweto, Paton called on White South Africans to "repent of our wickedness, of our arrogance, of our blindness"³⁸

Paton explains the social change from the Christian view. "But the full truth is that we must try both to change man and to change society, and that there are some changes in man that cannot be achieved without some changes in society. The front is wider than that of pure evangelism."³⁹ However, he believes that love is the basis for all such social activities. Paton proclaims t his message in his novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country* when Kumalo says that "A man who fights for justice must himself be cleansed and purified, ... love is greater than force."⁴⁰ In his *Instrument of Thy Peace*, Paton declares that "For Love makes Might and Wisdom full meek to us."⁴¹

34. Paton, *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful*, 27.

35. Paton, *Knocking on the Door*, 84.

36. Susan VanZanten Gallagher, "Alan Paton (1903-1988)," *Reformed Journal* 38:5 (1988): 6-8.

37. Gallagher, "Alan Paton (1903-1988)," 8.

38. Alexander, *Alan Paton*, 399.

39. Paton, *Instrument of Thy Peace*, 20.

40. Paton, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, 208.

41. Paton, *Instrument of Thy Peace*, 34.

Paton's decision to become involved in politics was caused mainly by the exigency of the South African situation. As Gallagher indicates, circumstances compelled him to be in charge of the liberal party.⁴² In his political activity, Paton well demonstrated his idea of nonviolent reform. Due to his Christian faith, Paton maintained his position of non-violence, which was notably distinct from that of the South African Communist Party.⁴³

In brief, according to Paton, Christian life is a means of peace making and social reform. It should be based on love and faith. Paton himself actively practiced in his belief in the sociopolitical context. As a politician, he wanted to realize Christian love in this world. In his passionate participation in social activities he demonstrates his commitment in "faith in action" throughout his life. *Lex Vivendi* is Paton's vision for authentic Christians.

Conclusion

Throughout his life, Paton viewed himself as a novelist who had become involved in social issues because of the exigencies of the South African situation. Christian faith played an important role on this process. His religious belief was the basis for the active participation in the politics. He emphasized the vision of community love and justice through his writings. He affirms, in *Cry, the Beloved Country*, the vision of a Black priest who asserts, "I see only one hope for our country, and that is when white men and black men, desiring neither power nor money, but desiring only the good of their country, come together to work for it." Paton quoted a verse from the book of Isaiah to express his vision: "They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa 11:9). This passage can be found in his 1980 autobiography, *Towards the Mountain*, in which he outlines his explicitly Biblical and faith-based personal vision. Working for this vision, Paton refused to hide in his inner heart and ignore the shocking realities of life in South Africa. It is evident from his own words that he was truly devoted to carrying out his Christian faith in his literary works and social activities. Through his life, his dream was that "Heaven be realized on this earth."⁴⁴ He argues that our duty to making this dream come true was to "be obedient to

42. Gallagher, "Alan Paton (1903-1988)," 7.

43. Noll, "Midwives of South Africa's Rebirth," 34.

44. Alan Paton, *Christian Unity - A South African View* (Grahamstown: Morija Printing Works, 1951), 12.

the law of love" with Christ our Lord in this process. According to Paton, "There is no other way for a Church."⁴⁵

Even though he devoted his life for the realization of justice and peace of South Africa, Paton told his younger son before death, "I'm a sinner. I'm a terrible sinner."⁴⁶ He died a humble Christian. As Noll notes, Paton found "in the person of Christ and the ministrations of the Anglican Church balm for his soul and direction for his public life."⁴⁷ He rediscovered the meaning of scripture and tradition according to his own context. His own sociopolitical experiences enriched his Christian faith and love. As a great model liturgical Christian, he had practiced his Christian love and faith for God's people.

For Korean Christianity, Alan Paton's life and works are great resources for those who seek the balance among prayer, belief, and life as Christians. Doctrinal confessions cannot be separated from corporate work for social justice. Personal faith should encounter the cries of those in the troubled world. God's kingdom is realized not only in each person's heart, but also in much wider communities. In this sense, Alan Paton's insights and faith are eschatological and prophetic.

If one defines him from a liturgical perspective, he can be regarded as a Christian who well demonstrates the tripartite basis of liturgical theology; *lex orandi*, *lex credendi*, and *lex vivendi* through his faith journey. Sincere meditation forms his faith, and his faith became reality. Prayer, faith, and life are closely related and support each other. His writings (*lex orandi*) truly were the genuine expressions of his faith (*lex credendi*), and his faith is produced good fruit in his life (*lex vivendi*). His life witnessed his faith and love. This positive liturgical circulation can become a powerful resource for emulation for those who seek genuine peacemaking.

45. Paton was very interested in Christian unity in South Africa, writing, "How magnificent it would be to achieve Christian unity in South Africa, and how important! How magnificent it would be, if with our social arrangements, we could achieve the Divine arrangement!" See Paton, *Christian Unity - A South African View*, 12.

46. Interestingly, Paton mentioned this in his other books. See Alan Paton, *Instruments of Thy Peace*, 7.

47. Noll, "Midwives of South Africa's Rebirth," 34.