

This article was written and published seven years ago, long before the birth of the new South Africa. At that time the writer said something which will be wise advice for all of us in this land of democracy: "As a people, black and white, we honour God; but we must go the next step and apply His law of love for the land, community and continent. This will call for courageous decisions by individuals and governments."

Ethics -- the answer for South Africa

South Africa has many problems that must be solved. Many people are seeking a new way. But to attempt to build something of lasting value while ignoring the importance of ethics is like building a house on sand. This is true for soil conservation, social structure and national policy.

Consider soil conservation. Aldo Leopold, American naturalist and conservationist, wrote in 1948: "That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected in an extension of ethics." In this way he defined the land ethic. He said land was like a pyramid - at the base soil particles, micro-organisms, then earthworms, insects, rodents, mammals and finally man. If the soil is used in a way which destroys one part of the pyramid, erosion follows.

This effects everything, including insects and animals. The grass disappears and humus is lost, fine particles are mercilessly blown away in dust clouds, bigger granules are washed down dongas to become silt in dams or mud in the rivers. In South Africa 400 million tons of soil are lost in this way each year. It is true the situation has partly been inherited by this generation. In 1910 farms now reckoned

to have a stocking rate of one sheep to three hectares were carrying double that number. But we must find the answer in our generation. Our Agricultural Department and Extension Office has done much research and many experiments. The Veld Trust has played its part by publishing essential information. But erosion of our land continues. It need not.

EROSION

Forty years ago on our farm in the harsh Karoo there was increasing erosion. We were deeply concerned and at great expense built earth banks and stone weirs in the dongas. We put bushes weighed down by rocks in the footpaths and runnels, in a vain attempt to keep the soil in place. But the tide began to turn only when we decided to put our needs of the soil ahead of our desire for bigger and better profits.

We sold a third of our sheep and began a system of rotational grazing and resting of the camps. We had to tighten our belts and forgo all luxuries. In the Karoo changes come slowly, but after some years the grass began to grow on the bare patches of soil. Humus began to build around the roots; the water no longer rushed away with every light thunderstorm. The sheep, our main source of income, began to produce more wool, and the lambing percentage increased. Cattle could graze where there had been no grass before. We

proved that destruction of the land could be ended.

Though there is still much to be done, we look back with some satisfaction at what has been achieved, but we realise now that the improvement began only when we had, almost unknowingly, applied the land ethic. We had begun to treat our soil with love and respect, and we had been rewarded. Experiments, information, publicity, even subsidies and laws, are necessary, but it is clear that without an extra dimension we will not stop our land from wasting away. The acceptance and application of the land ethic is essential, and by all who depend on the land.

LAND

The care of the land unrelated to the condition of our society, however, does not fulfil all our needs. The land is the foundation on which human society depends. The two are linked, and just like the soil, society is a community, each part depending on the other. Everyone should be able to use his ability to maintain productivity and stability. All must have the opportunity to contribute their share to the common pool and get fair share of the products and conveniences so generated.

Just as with the soil, when ignorance, greed or selfish ambition become dominant motives, erosion in the community occurs and the community can be destroyed. And not only in our country, but in many parts of the world, it seems to me that society is in an advanced state of erosion. It need not be. I have seen the answer at work.

After I apologised to my farm workers for inconsiderate treatment and rough words, my attitude toward them changed entirely. From then there was a positive response. They began to take responsibility and to make constructive suggestions in regard to the work and management of the farm.

LABOUR

Some years later we developed a labour-intensive wool, spinning and weaving project in the town of Graaff-Reinet. Our aim was to reduce the scourge of unemployment in the townships. Many more applied for work than could possibly be accommodated. Those we took on were desperate, dejected and poor. Most had a minimum of education. We taught them the skills of spinning, weaving and knitting by hand. Soon they were producing attractive yarn and garments, and after a time I found they were taking a pride not only in their work but also in their personal appearance. Any newcomers were disciplined by them and were soon coming to work neat and clean. They also began to take responsibility for production and quality. They had found both dignity and purpose.

The change, both on the farm and in Graaff-Reinet, was because we were applying the social ethic: reverence for people. The aim was to value each person and encourage them to make a sound contribution to the community.

Take the analogy further and think about Africa. Just as the land needs all its ingredients to remain fertile and productive, and society needs all to serve and work to remain stable and effective, so Africa needs all countries to work together for maximum production. Our continent is divided,



Mr Roland Kingwill was awarded the prestigious annual Association of the Grootfontein College of Agriculture for the Karoo during the annual Diploma Day at Middelburg. Here Mr Stoney Steynberg, left, Director of the Karoo Farm, presents the award. Mr Kingwill has been a leader in organic farming in the Karoo, and one of the top conservation farmers in the region. He writes about in this article first among his labourers and then he found they worked, he started spreading the message.

wracked by ideological conflict, distrust, fear, domination and starvation, but we need each other. Already Lesotho and South Africa are planning to share water and expertise. There are great water resources on the continent which could profitably be used for power generation, food production and pleasure for millions.

For centuries France and Germany were deadly enemies, but the division between West Germany and France has been healed. That was a beginning. Now the EEC is working toward continental cooperation. If Europe can take these steps, why not Africa? Together we could use the tremendous assets of water, minerals, rich soils, expertise, muscle

- not so that one lot are richer or stronger than another, but in such a way that all can share in the bounty of Africa.

LAND ETHIC

We need the land ethic to improve and preserve the fertility and stability of the soil. We need the social ethic to improve the quality of life and to respect the dignity of people. We need the continental ethic to unite and develop the whole of Africa. Ethics and ideals - such aims, cannot be reached by social, economic and political planning alone. As a people, black and white, we honour God: but we must go to the next step and apply His law of love to land, community and continent. This will call for courageous