

Optimist from the Karoo

When a farmer in the Karoo speaks, you can be sure that what he says comes from experience in the business of survival, rather than theory.

When that farmer is Roly Kingwill, who lives near Graaff Reinet, the inclination to listen is all the greater due to his now international reputation as a pioneer conservationist, educator and entrepreneur.

In the last great drought and depression in the 1930s he was the first person to voluntarily reduce his sheep by one third and to have seen the sheep and the animals flourish as a result. He was also the first to build his own farm school and sports teams. And, now in his 80s, he and his wife Moira have established a wool-spinning, weaving and garment industry employing 32 people.

His farm, Gordonville, has long been a national focus for the way it has demonstrated the advantages of conservation and harmonious human relations.

There is a clarity in the night air of the Karoo that defies description and there is something of that clarity and sparkle in the vision that Roly Kingwill has of our present problems.

He sees little difference between the choices and responsibilities of a Karoo farmer and those confronting other people, even in the cities. All of us have the choice whether or not to try to get more out of life than we are prepared to put in; whether to over-exploit our natural and human resources or to kraal ourselves with intolerance and opposition.

Mostly, says Roly Kingwill, we have locked ourselves in on such words as "apartheid" and "liberation" and indulge in what he calls "blame-throwing" in a destructive war of words which does nothing to resolve the problems.

He quotes Thoreau (1817-1862) as

Antony V Trowbridge (right) meets a remarkable man who believes that the cause of South Africa's problems lies not in apartheid but in several hidden and deep-rooted attitudes which have to be dug out.



saying: "There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil for one who is striking at the root."

To Kingwill, apartheid is not the root of our problems — it is rather the fruit of some deeper hidden and deep-rooted attitudes which have to be dug out. From his own humbling experience and commitment, he has identified what he believes as the six major origins of our social sicknesses.

Arrogance: From British descent, he has to acknowledge that this has been a peculiarly Anglo-Saxon affliction with regard to other races and it has reduced respect on both sides.

Bitterness: Every group builds up its own stores of bitterness and resentments which calls for retribution, even revenge — and perpetuates feuding. Forgiveness has to be the first step towards reconciliation.

Fear: The quest for domination is an ever-present cause of fear and antagonism between groups. The greater the fear and mistrust between peoples, the greater the ten-

dency to build walls instead of bridges.

False pride: This is an inability to own up to past errors in the belief that this is a weakness which can be taken advantage of.

Control: The urge for power in order to survive is both a threat and an illusion. In nature the paradox reveals that the most dominant are always most at risk, a lesson we still have to learn. The call for the "sharing of power" has to be replaced with a will to share responsibility, knowledge and development.

Greed: When the urge to grab becomes greater than the urge to serve, then the door is opened to all forms of human deviousness and dishonesty.

What Roly Kingwill sees as necessary in these times is a national sense of restoration of essential personal values and responsibilities and to stop "blame-throwing". He sees three major areas for restoration.

● To restore our ideals of a pioneering caring people, for without vision the people perish, for the

whole continent awaits the skills and ideas which can turn back the deserts of sand and despair.

- To restore to each individual a sense of self-worth and capacity to enrich their own lives and those around them
- To restore the leadership of God in all things. "There are no atheists in the Karoo," says Kingwill. "There one learns the hard way to both trust and be dependent upon God for survival. We have two choices, either to survive at the expense of others — or in co-operation with them."

Roly Kingwill is one of God's optimists. He believes that if we have the courage to face up to the roots of our social illness within ourselves first, then we will see a healing of our nation and make a lasting contribution to the future of Africa.

● Antony Trowbridge is a Johannesburg architect and futures researcher.

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