

D. C. S. OOSTHUIZEN
MEMORIAL LECTURES

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—
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Rhodes University, Grahamstown

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by

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D. C. S. Oosthuizen was Professor and Head of the Department of Philosophy of Rhodes University from January 1958 until his untimely death at the age of 43 in April 1969. Professor Oosthuizen received his first philosophical and theological training at the University of Stellenbosch. He then studied in Holland, first at the Free University where he read theology, and then at the City (Stedelike) University of Amsterdam. In 1955 he passed his doctoral examinations (cum laude) and in the same year he returned to South Africa to take a post of Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of the Orange Free State. He was appointed to the Chair of Philosophy at Rhodes University in August 1957. He also studied at Oxford University and at Brown University in the United States.

He fought for truth and justice.

Dr. Alan Paton, who is a South African by birth, received a B.Sc. degree at Natal University College in 1924. He subsequently became well-known as Principal of the Diepkloof Reformatory for Africans outside Johannesburg. It was as a writer, however, above all as the author of Cry, the Beloved Country, that he acquired a world-wide reputation.

Both as educator and as writer, Dr. Paton has been involved in the problems of people caught up in the toils of South African race policies. His deep Christian compassion, together with his passionate concern for justice, later drew him into politics. He held high office in the Liberal Party of South Africa from 1956 until its dissolution in 1968, and has also been closely associated with NUSAS, the SCA and the World Council of Churches.

It is my honour tonight to deliver the inaugural Professor D. C. S. Oosthuizen Memorial Lecture, in memory of Daantjie Oosthuizen, until Good Friday of last year Professor of Philosophy at this University; a loving and beloved husband and father; a great teacher: a clear and deep and honest thinker: the guide, philosopher, and friend of generations of students: an Afrikaner who was not bound by any shackles of race and group and nation: a South African whose love of his country was deep and loyal, and was surpassed only by his love of mankind: a Christian whose love of his church was deep also, and was surpassed only by his love of Christ, and of truth, justice and righteousness.

It was in these last three manifestations of personality, as Afrikaner, South African, and Christian, that he could be called a controversial figure. He was no lover of controversy, but he was a lover of truth. He was gentle by nature, but the truth was something that must be proclaimed, sometimes from the housetops.

I kept silence and held myself in check
Now will I cry like a woman in labour
I will lay waste mountains and hills
And shrivel all their green herbs
I will turn rivers into desert wastes
And dry up all the pools
Then I will lead blind men on their way
And guide them by paths they do not know
I will turn darkness into light before them
And strengthen their twisting roads.

How do you know when you possess the truth? How can you be sure that you possess the truth, when your neighbour is also sure

that he possesses it, and his truth is the opposite of yours? In the same week that Mr. Papwa Sewgolum is denied the right to play in The South African Open Golf Championships a South African woman writes to a South African newspaper protesting bitterly against the way in which British Demonstrators are bringing politics into sport. In religious controversy one appeals to the highest authorities. Christians appeal to Christ and after meditation and study of the gospels, one South African church affirms its policy that no non-white person may belong to it, while in Rhodesia a group of churches declares that its members will never obey a law that will debar any person from worshipping in a church building on the grounds of his race. It is not necessary before this audience to multiply examples of this kind. If I did, most of us would smile a bit, and we would be smiling, would we not, to think that this other fellow thought that what he was thinking was the truth?

Yet Daantjie Oosthuizen was trying all his life to discover the truth. For him it was not something about which one could never reach certitude. What was more, although a Christian, he denied categorically that there could be a Christian academic truth and a non-Christian academic truth. Speaking to the University Christian Movement here in Grahamstown in July 1967 he said:

"And so reverting to the question with which we started, I want to maintain that it is not for me to tell you what your duties and obligations are as Christian servants in the academic world. I merely suggest that it may not always be necessary to accord one set of duties to Christians, another set of duties to non-Christians - much as one may distinguish postal-employee's duties from garbage-collector's duties. For what, may one ask, is the nature of Christian Service in the garbage-can collector's world? Surely, to do his job well, honestly and happily. A Christian's duty in the academic world cannot, then, be to undermine intellectual integrity; it cannot lie in the rejection of the common academic's obligation patiently to consider facts and arguments, the obligation to tolerate opposition

but not nonsense, least of all lazy or fearful acquiescence in falsehood. In this world of discipline, tension and danger, it seems to me, the one great temptation is despair, and the other dishonesty; the great virtue, it seems to me, a trust that however vast one's ignorance, or frail one's understanding, there is a Logos or Rule to be discovered; that in the end all will not appear to be dark and evil."

And then he ends up with a quotation from St. John , Ch. 1, v. 5:

"the light shines on in the dark, and the darkness has never quenched it."

That was his faith, that there was a Word that could be discovered. He was saying that in this shifting and bewildering world, where one man's truth is another man's poison, there is an ultimate ground, a rock on which a man could build his house. There is such a thing as falsehood, even if it is the falsehood of a man who is himself deceived. Perhaps we can be forgiven if we allowed ourselves to smile; and be ourselves allowed to tell the legendary story of the stranger who found a black man weeping outside a white church, and asked him why he was weeping. The black man replied, they won't let me into the church, and the stranger said, don't worry, I've been trying to get in there for 1900 years.

You will note that Daantjie Oosthuizen's definition of truth is not wholly intellectual. For him the response to truth was a response of the whole personality. Therefore there are present strong emotional elements. There is nothing to be ashamed of in this. We need only be ashamed when we refuse to subject emotionally held values to the cool scrutiny of the intellect. He poured ridicule - but gentle ridicule - on those disbelievers in evolution who asserted that God had made fossils look older in order to deceive paleontologists.

Therefore, though gentle of nature, he did not shrink from controversy. Allow me to return for a while to the first controversial manifestation of his personality, that of an Afrikaner who would not be bound by any shackles of race and group and nation. That's not an easy thing to do, as you all know. He was rejecting a hallowed doctrine, the doctrine of the group-man, the doctrine that you must first and foremost be a loyal member of the group, that that is where you realise yourself as a person, that you must cherish your own first, before you ever think - if you think it necessary so to think - of cherishing anything that is not your own, such as internationalism, ecumenicity, cosmopolitanism, and television. I'm afraid that I can't quite include Rotary International and Lions International, although I'd like to, because they have received dispensations to be international with qualifications. If you are a good group-man, you need not worry about the universalities, they will sort of happen by themselves. You must not think that I am anti-you; I am only pro-myself. I am not anti-this or anti-that, I am only pro-my-own.

Daantjie Oosthuizen couldn't accept that argument. For just as he had taught others, so had he been taught himself, and his teacher had taught him that he should love his neighbour as himself, and should not be anxious about the morrow, and should be ready to lose the whole world if that were the only way in which he could keep his own soul.

So he left - by what steps I do not know - the safety and security of his own, and embraced a new own, with new kinsmen and kinswomen, and new thoughts and new ideas. It is like a man who is born in a room and has lived all his life in the room. And the room is warm and secure, and in it is all one's treasure, and those whom one loves and everything there is safe and constant. And the room has only one door, and that's the door to the world, to the unknown. There are new sounds out there, and if the door is opened, there are new sights there too, but it is all strange and frightening and exciting. And there grows in the man a stronger

and stronger desire to open the door, and to leave the room so warm and known and secure, and to go out into that strange and exciting world. And one day he does it. And once he has done it, he can almost never go back. Daantjie Oosthuizen did it, and he could never go back. If he had gone back, we should not be here tonight. Beyers Naudé did it and lost all his temporal power. I asked him if he could ever go back and whether he ever wanted to go back, and he said No, he could not and he would not go back. André Brink went through that door, and he can't go back again. There is this to be added, of course, that even if they wanted to go back, no one would let them in. This story of the room and the world can be told in reverse also, and there is one amusing version, thought up by the Quaker Reginald Reynolds, who likened South Africa to a room in which everyone was talking and eating and drinking and smoking, with every window closed against that cold, cold wind. And when he had come in and closed the door behind him, he said to them "Hell, what a fug in here!" And they all shouted at him "How do you know? You've only just come in!"

About Daantjie Oosthuizen's love of South Africa, a love surpassed only by his love of humanity, I need not have much to say, because much of it is what has been said already. But to have a love for humanity surpassing one's love of a particularly loved country is also not an easy thing to do. For some people love of South Africa is shown in clearly defined ways - to abstain from public protest, to reveal no public scandal, to expose no bureaucratic cruelty, to give nothing to the Press, and to be obsequious and patient when dealing, even if it is a matter of life and death with officialdom. Yet to others, to do these things is to show a love of country and a desire to make one's society more just and merciful.

About a month or six weeks ago, a man - Mr. Lubinda Mate, born in South Africa, married to a Zulu woman and the father of nine children - was told by the authorities that he would have to leave South Africa and take his wife and family to Botswana, his

father's birthplace and a country he himself had never seen. The Natal Mercury published an account of this and then went to interview the Bantu authorities, where they were told by the acting Bantu Commissioner in Durban that the affair had nothing to do with any newspaper. It was a matter solely between the Government and Mr. Lubinda Mate. One is very glad to report that the Natal Mercury did not take this lying down, but published a very strong editorial showing that what could happen to a person like Mr. Lubinda Mate was the concern of every South African. Daantjie Oosthuizen was always concerned.

We meet here tonight under a shadow that has been cast over the whole world - certainly over the whole western world - by the killing of four students on the campus of Kent, Ohio. I have their four pictures in front of me. They look young and beautiful. What they were doing when they were shot down, we do not yet know. Were they pure and innocent of all desire to hurt? Were they there crying out because of the intolerable human folly of making war to win peace, of destroying to save, of killing to make alive? Or were they crying out in defence of their own lives, and of their right to use their lives to serve men and not to kill them? Were these young and eager faces contorted by anger and hate, were these young people ready themselves to destroy and kill? Yet these are not the most terrible questions. The most terrible question is how it ever came to be like that? How did it ever happen that the government of a country dedicated to the proposition of freedom should find itself in such bitter conflict with the most highly educated of its young people? At times we are tempted to despair of America, but we must not, for she is our world, in her society all the great problems of our age are seen clear and stark: racism, poverty, war, population, and the destruction of man's earth. If she cannot find answers to these problems, who will? Sometimes, some of us, here in South Africa, are inclined to boast that we have no such problems here, some of us derive a pleasure, not always secret, in the sorrows and tribulations of a great nation which has at times been critical of us.

But there is no room for such boasting and gloating; sooner or later, but surely, these problems will be our own.

Allison Krause, for you this flower
Desert-born in a distant land
Suddenly, in rain miraculous
Flamed into life and lit with orange fire
The arid plain. So may your seed,
Returned untimely to the earth
Bring back the beauty to your desert land.

Sandy Lee Scheuer, for you this flower
Shining and vivid like your life
Which fleeing as it were a shadow
Continued in so short a stay
May your shiningness return
To your dark land.

Jeffrey Miller, for you this flower
A golden eye amidst a field of tares
Yet by the blind machine cut down
We mourn for you, and yet shall mourn
With ever-returning Spring.

William Schroeder, for you this last
From this far country.
Out of this grief come joy
Out of this darkness, light
Out of your dying, life.

America, for you these flowers
Would we could reach out hands to comfort you
But we dare not
We dare not touch those fingers dripping
With children's blood.

Many of you at this University feel deeply the death of four of your fellow-students in a country which is distant no longer. It was in such times that we had in Daantjie Oosthuizen a guide and counsellor beyond compare. We cannot say we shall not see his like again, because we can have no such knowledge, and we do not say it, because we hope to see his like again. That is one thing about a great teacher; he is the surest guarantee that one day we shall see his like again. The things that he gave us cannot be lost. They are part of our heritage for ever.

There is no time here to consider the world-wide rebellion of youth. But one important thing must be said, that the most fatuous thing to do is to condemn it. For then the breach between young and old becomes absolute, and the future is placed in peril. One prays therefore for the well-being of this university, for wisdom in the guidance of its affairs, and courage in the maintenance of those values for which all true universities stand. You too are a community dedicated to the proposition of freedom, and you know that to remain so in the modern world requires both prudence and fortitude. These were outstanding qualities in the man whose life and work we remember tonight.

Allow me now to consider the third controversial manifestation of his personality, the Christian who had a deep love of his church, surpassed only by his love of Christ, and of truth, justice and righteously. This seems unexceptionable. Is that not right, that the love of Christ should be even deeper than the love of the church? But it is not so easy as that. For man cherishes high ideals and principles, and along with other men he establishes institutions for the furthering of these ideals, and for common action, and for the better fulfilment of man's deepest needs, and as the institution grows more powerful, so do its own needs grow more pressing, and these needs are no longer to cherish high ideals and principles, but to keep the institution going by which the ideals and principles may be cherished. So is born a dilemma, sometimes

apparently insoluble; for the one party avers that the maintenance of the institution is eating up men's lives, and is destroying the very values that it was created to preserve; and the other party avers that unless the institution is maintained, these values will be defenceless. So it is that in order to preserve freedom, the rule of law must be eroded, and power given to the police, to hold for ever if need be, those suspected of planning violence against the State or of having knowledge of such planning. But do not criticise authority; exercise true responsibility and open your eyes to see that the rule of law is suspended only to save the rule of law, just as that town in South Vietnam was destroyed in order that it might be saved. May I note here that it is this kind of sophistry, this kind of self-deceit that many of our young people cannot tolerate any longer? I am sometimes asked if I really think that the young people of today can see through hypocrisy and double-speak better than my own generation. My answer is Yes. I do not ascribe it to an inherent superiority to my own generation - naturally that could not be expected of me - I ascribe it in large part to the tradition of free enquiry in our universities. At the moment in South Africa it is more an English-speaking phenomenon than an Afrikaans-speaking one, but I have no doubt that this particular plague is beginning to infect the Afrikaans-language universities. Heaven forbid that it should infect our schools, but we can leave them safely in the hands of the National Council for Education. I should have called it the National Advisory Council for Education, but a sovereign Parliament can do what it likes with words. Alas, however, we may soon have television and our children may be torn limb from limb in the struggle between these two giants. To be serious - it will be interesting to see how far television can be hamstrung. There can be no doubt that television, by bringing war into the living-room, has done more than all the speeches and sermons that were ever delivered, to inculcate in many of the young people of the world a hatred and loathing of this barbaric way of managing the affairs of human society.

I beg your pardon for this digression. We were discussing the ever-present danger that the institution established for the realisation of an ideal may in the end kill the ideal, at least, the ideal expressed in that particular way. It was one of the themes that occupied Daantjie Oosthuizen's mind, in particular as it concerned the church. I quote from his address "The Church in the World" delivered to the Catholic Students' Conference in 1967.

"Now clearly, the sphere where the Church is most likely to speak, where the communion of saints is most likely to express itself in this world, is where we are faced with injustice and unrighteousness in this world. The communion of saints is dispersed into this world, and wherever it is represented even by one single saint, i. e. by any single Christian, there it will speak for justice and righteousness in a particular situation in this world. The Church is dispersed, i. e. it is a mission church concerned with righteousness and justice in social, moral and political spheres, it is a church of action, combating the forces of evil and speaking out for the good. This fight is the basis of its witness. And without it, its witness becomes verbiage: clerical solemnities?

Here in a nutshell we have a first example then of how the Church, by withdrawing from the world, by not being dispersed into the world, by secluding itself from the world, carries the world into the Church. Faced with problems of political, moral and social injustice, the Church may shelve action until such time as unanimity is reached in various Church councils. The Church withdraws within itself to deliberate, to discuss, to consider consequences and costs. Let me say straight out that I do not wish to condemn Church councils, synods and general meetings. I do not wish to suggest that these things are wrong. On the contrary - they are proper and necessary. What I do wish to condemn is the notion that Christian action must follow on, or worse, is confined to pronouncements from the Church hierarchy, and that Christians act because of, or worse through the authoritative statements of the hierarchy and nowhere else. The image of a Church spending its force in venerable delibera-

tion is that of a church withdrawn into itself, of a respected institution in a long tradition, of a church with a beard as long as that of Plato which may be trimmed by the razor of Occam only by synodical permission. It is an objectionable image since it must thwart and obstruct Christian action, the Church's being in the world. And for these reasons. Unanimity in Church councils is often most easily reached on issues that can wait, and because of the difficulties of quickly deciding on contemporary controversial issues, official church pronouncements on critical questions of moral, political and social justice will most often be given after the event. Such decisions, in their practical effect, will state attitudes towards history rather than reflect a burning desire towards fulfilment of a divine mission. Worst of all the lonely, solitary saint will have part in this decision only by proxy. But if this is so, the mission of the Church, its dispersal into the world to witness, is prostituted. By insisting on the necessity of authoritative deliberation, agreement and official pronouncement as a condition for action, the Church seems to forget its mission of going into the world by staying put; and the lonely saint who is out on the frontier of action is cut off from the Church itself."

Who is the solitary saint? In one sense certainly it was himself. As I read his paper, it seems to me that the word "solitary" means in part one who is alone, but that it also means the individual Christian as distinct from the Church. Daantjie Oosthuizen writes thus of the solitary saint:

"I have maintained that the onus of action falls on the solitary individual in all burning issues where righteousness and justice are in dispute. I should like to mention the following considerations in support of this thesis. No individual man may be said to have taken action simply because the Church to which he belongs has chosen to make an official pronouncement, and no individual is excused from taking action merely because his church has failed to make an official pronouncement. Official pronouncements, that is to say, are at most

directives and guides for Christian action, not substitutes for individual action. This I take it is part of the meaning of the saying that the blood of the martyrs has become the seed of the Church. For the history of the Church has indeed shown that the onus for the fulfilment of the moral, social and political mission of the Church has already fallen on solitary individuals, on actions and statements made by men and women in the name of Christ, in the freedom and commitment of their personal responsibility as Christians. History has shown that the burden of action has fallen on people who did not consider that they could shelve their responsibility, and thus the issue, until such time as an organized church had officially given some directive or at least some prudent nihil obstat. Action had been entrusted, as Soren Kierkegaard was wont to say, by Higher Authority to those who could not wait but thought it was their primary duty to exercise and demonstrate the mission of Christianity, and the unity of faith, the fellowship of saints in their own words and deeds. The most they could hope for was some official blessing of the Church, ex post facto."

and again

"Those who stand in the critical hour have pleaded the word of God as the ground of their decision, pleaded that they act and speak in the name of Christ. Their decision has therefore made a nuisance of them to Christendom. They have sounded a clarion call to all Christians to examine themselves and a situation and to decide on spiritual issues and questions of justice in the name of Christ. Neutrality has become impossible and hence, for reasons which should surprise no one at all, their decision and actions are met by grumbling and groans. That is a normal reaction if one is awakened from dogmatic and lethargic slumber."

and again

"The point I have been trying to make may perhaps be illustrated by contrasting the Church fulfilling its mission through its

members dispersed throughout the world, to a church which has secluded itself from the world. We all know the secluded Church. It has a building, consecrated or otherwise, in which those who are its members may meet from time to time: the more often the gatherings the more 'active' the Church is said to be. In this Church the centre of action lies with those in positions of authority: they are there to put into effect - i.e. to communicate to the lower orders and the rank and file - decisions taken at some higher level. And the centre and locus of 'action', now reduced to the act of communicating, remains on the whole in that building. No longer is that building regarded as a place where the Church, i.e. the communion of saints may from time to time gather. The building itself has become the 'Church' so that, the question from the world 'where is the Church' may quite easily be answered: 'It is there, on the Church square - you cannot miss it.' No longer is the communion of saints characterized by their unworldly action in the crises of this world; they are now characterized by the number of times they enter that secluded atmosphere of the Church in Church square. It is no longer the communion of saints who gather - the gathering in that building has become the constitutive act of the community - a communion which, like a university convocation, is dissolved by leaving the sacred portals."

This is powerful argument against what he calls the secluded church, the church that has withdrawn from the world. His judgement is severe. He says "when it comes to the point where men and women are against injustice and unrighteousness, the secluded church has preserved its purity and sanctity by not being there". It is clear that for him justice and righteousness are the chief concerns of the church; churchly things are not the chief concern, and if they are, there is the secluded church.

He ends this magnificent address with these words:

"The world wants to know what difference it makes to men

and women in this world to be Christians, and if it makes no difference at all, we have failed to witness, however much we speak. There is no faith without action we believe; we must not be surprised if the world takes us at our word."

Do you know this book Dying We Live? Letters written by prisoners of Hitler on the verge of execution? And some of them so young. Most of my audience are too young to know what Hitler did to the world, but you will have heard of Auschwitz and Dachau and Treblinka and Belzen. No man in history did more to damage man's faith in himself and in life and in goodness. But this damage was restored by those who died rather than yield to him. This book Dying We Live is to my mind one of the greatest books of this century. I read to you these short passages.

A Farm Boy from the Sudetenland.

February 3, 1944.

"Dear Parents: I must give you bad news - I have been condemned to death, I and Gustave G. We did not sign up for the SS, and so they condemned us to death. You wrote me, indeed, that I should not join the SS; my comrade, Gustave G., did not sign up either. Both of us would rather die than stain our consciences with such deeds of horror. I know what the SS has to do. Oh, my dear parents, difficult as it is for me and for you, forgive me everything; if I have offended you, please forgive me and pray for me. If I were to be killed in the war while my conscience was bad, that too would be sad for you. Many more parents will lose their children. Many SS men will get killed too. I thank you for everything you have done for my good since my childhood; forgive me, pray for me...."

The Munich Student Group.

In 1942 at the University of Munich a small group of students assisted by Dr. Kurt Huber, a professor of philosophy, published

the 'Pamphlet of the White Rose'. In bold language this pamphlet called on the German people to shake off a criminal dictatorship. The members of the student group dropped their pamphlets from the rotunda of the university into the hall below. The chief members of the group were Christoph Probst, aged 23, Alexander Schmorell, aged 25, Hans Scholl, aged 23, and his sister Sofie, aged 21, and Wilhelm Graf, aged 24. After Hans and Sofie Scholl were caught on February 18, 1943 while dropping their leaflets from a gallery into the main lobby of the university, the group was speedily annihilated. They were tried on February 21. Christoph Probst and Hans and Sofie Scholl were executed on February 22, Professor Huber on July 13, Alexander Schmorell on August 13 and Wilhelm Graf on October 12.

I just want to read you two letters written by Christoph Probst - one to his mother, one to his sister. He wrote these letters on the day before his execution. His mother and sister were permitted to read his farewell letters in the presence of the Gestapo but the letters were not handed over to them. The following are some lines set down from memory shortly afterwards.

To his mother:

"I thank you for having given me life. When I really think it through, it has all been a single road to God. Do not grieve that I must now skip the last part of it. Soon I shall be closer to you than before. In the meantime I'll prepare a glorious reception for you all."

To his sister:

"I never knew that dying is so easy.... I die without any feeling of hatred.... Never forget that life is nothing but a growing in love and a preparation for eternity."

I read these passages to you because they are about the church active in the world. They are not about any secluded church. They are about young men and women whose supreme concern was for justice and righteousness. They have never been deluded by the terrible heresy that one's whole loyalty should be to the State. We are not all called upon to die for these things, but it is hardly probable that we can work for them without incurring suffering. That was the kind of faith that Daantjie Oosthuizen practised and expounded, and this lecture is delivered tonight in his honoured memory.