

begins to worry about the effect on the choice of evidence of such deeply-held and hotly-argued convictions. In this respect, two features of the book risk giving the reader the impression of special pleading: the author's constant delight in thumbing his nose at supposed Western claims to intellectual or moral superiority, and his inveterate tendency to stress the prescience and virtue of the East, with hardly ever a hint of any critical reservation. One can readily sympathize with the tone of these addresses when one remembers that they come from a man deeply versed in China's past

and present, who finds this past and present drastically misunderstood in the West. But one would, nevertheless, hesitate to use his book as the chief ground for making up one's own mind on the difficult and pressing issues involved. This is a pity, for the West is unlikely for quite a while to find as learned a guide to China as is Dr Needham. But perhaps he has done the essential thing by challenging our ignorance of a culture that quite certainly will play a large role in shaping the future of our world.

ERNAN MCMULLIN

KONTAKION FOR YOU DEPARTED, by Alan Paton. *Jonathan Cape*, London, 1969. 142 pp. 25s.

This book can be read in two ways. Firstly, as the outline of an autobiography, in the manner suggested by the excellent summaries on the inside flaps of either dust-cover—the life of a school-master who then in turn completely transformed the Diepkloof Reformatory for 700 African boys, became the author of the world best-seller *Cry, the Beloved Country*, and finally took a leading role in the Liberal protest movement against the government's policy of apartheid. Or, alternatively, it can be read as what its title evokes: *Kontakion*, we are told, is a word used by the Greek Orthodox Church to mean a hymn to a saint. And the saint in this case—a warmly, flawedly human saint—is his deceased wife, to whom this book is his own personal tribute. In fact, of course, the book is both, in intimate compenetration.

This comes through in many ways, both direct and more subtle. Directly, we have avowals and confidences of a simple loveliness, which will long linger in the memory. 'The joy of physical reunion. It was to me one of the greatest of all human joys. When I had been so long away from you in 1946–7, I wrote to you, *I want you to know that I have been faithful to you*. I landed in Cape Town. . . . Lanky drove us to the house, and the moment that he left us, we were in each other's arms, loving and wordless. I think I whispered to you, *shall we have a bath?* and you nodded your head. And so we made love, after all those many months. . . . I wish to write down here, that of all the beauties of creation, there is none more beautiful than the spirit and flesh of a chaste

and loving woman' (p. 80).

Then there is the style of the book: so obviously written under the strong impulse of emotions intensely felt, emotions of love recalled and grief gradually redeemed by and transformed into gratitude in the very process of writing the book. The rising and falling rhythms, the swelling periods and the snatches of pungent direct speech, are therefore peculiarly revealing of Alan Paton's own soul, both alike of a direct candour and simple nobility not unworthy of the Bible which is their common source. When the Bible has imprinted itself so much on the very cadences and turns of speech of so honest a man, the person who has been so touched, one feels, breathes a certain holiness.

And this is again the message of the mere structure of the book: it is composed predominantly in a kind of counterpoint between the reminiscence of the gradually unfolding past of their lives together and the journal-like jottings of the present after his wife's death. And this technique, uncontrived as it may be, becomes symbolic, insofar as the gradual merging of these two currents at the end is an apt signal of the new life which, on the penultimate page, the author acknowledges to be re-awakening in him, as 'from long sleep'. For the new life with which the book closes in a mood of grateful acceptance before the chastening mystery of life is now no longer one life only, but the two lives rejoined in one spirit: the *Kontakion* for one departed has insensibly become a celebration of conjugality resurrected.

PASCAL LEFEBURE, O.P.