

A ray of hope for the dark continent

By PERRY BACKUS

Optimism for a country seemingly to the outside world torn apart by racial strife may be hard to understand.

But not for the native South African family, the Kingwells.

And the message they bring to America doesn't only apply to their native land.

The message is, put your bitterness aside and treat your fellow man as you would have him treat yourself. It's a message as old as the Bible and as universal as the world.

ROLLAND KINGWELL, a farmer from the South Africa outback, the Karoo, along with his wife, Moira and daughter, Janet Gladwin, are traveling throughout our country talking with people. They tell people of their country, its woes and gladness, but mostly they talk of "Moral Re-Armament."

They follow in the footsteps of a widely viewed video entitled "Promise of the Veld" in which Kingwell explains the steps he's taken to make his land, his life and his workers' liberty fulfill a moral ethic.

The video is an international as well as a South African success. It's a story with a message and one easily understood.

Kingwell's farm is located in the Karoo, which is Hottentot for "The Great Dry." Forty years ago he began to notice erosion spread its ugly fingers throughout his lands.

"THE TIDE began to turn only when we decided to put the needs of the soil ahead of our desire for bigger and better profits," he said.

They sold one-third of their sheep and began a rotational grazing system. In time, grass began to grow on bare patches of soil and the water no longer rushed away with every light rainstorm.

His sheep began to produce more wool and more lambs. Cattle could now graze where there was no grass before.

"We had begun to treat our soil with love and respect and we had been rewarded."

ROLLAND TOOK that newly found land ethic one step farther.

"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."

"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."

Rolland saw the answer to problems not only on his farm, but for his country. With his change of attitude toward his staff, came a change from them also.

"FROM THEM there was a positive response. They began to take responsibility and to make constructive suggestions."

A few years later his family

developed a labor intensive wool, spinning and weaving project in the nearest town, 50 miles from his farmhouse.

"Those we took on were desperate, dejected and poor," he said. "We taught them the skills of spinning, weaving and knitting by hand."

"After a time I found they were taking a pride not only in their work but also in their personal appearance... They also began to take responsibility for production and quality. They had found both dignity and purpose."

THE KINGWELLS may be the exception in their country, but change always comes slowly. There are years of fear, arrogance, greed and bitterness to overcome, they said.

"Moral Re-Armament" may be the means to that end.

The concept began with Frank Buchman after World War II in a dialogue between victorious and vanquished nations in the Swiss village of Caux. The message which came out of Caux was without honest, frank dialogue — walls built between countries and peoples are sometimes insurmountable.

The message spread and eventually found its way into the Kingwell home in the distant Karoo.

THE MESSAGE of "Moral Re-Armament" "has certainly touched many people," Moira said. "It's not an organization that you sign up for and pay dues. It's the way you choose to live. It starts with yourself and spreads out to others."

"I deeply believe that the world is at a point of time that people need a new way of thinking and living," Rolland said. "Moral Re-Armament is putting Christian faith into action."

"It's given us a sense of purpose and now instead of just drifting, we are doing what we can to help our country."

Too many of the Kingwells' countrymen look toward apartheid as being the only evil, he said.

"APARTHEID IS the fruit, it's not the root."

The root can be found in fear, he said. "The whites are heavily outnumbered and the blacks are heavily outgunned."

The root is in bitterness. "Every group builds up its own stores of bitterness and resentments which calls for retribution, even revenge. Forgiveness has to be the first step toward reconciliation."

It's in 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."

AND FALSE pride and the desire to control are also roots that must be dealt with before change can come in South Africa, he said.

Through a dialogue and an openness, those roots can be overcome, Rolland said.

There are positive steps in South Africa's recent past and reforms



Rolland Kingwell (center) is pictured with Emma Rogan (left), Moira Kingwell (seated) and Janet Gladwin.

are being made, but there is much more to be accomplished, he said.

Just recently, one of the great walls fell when the Dutch Reformed Church said it could no longer justify the apartheid policy.

THE BLACK people are still bitter and desire political participation in the government, he said, adding there will eventually have to be a new constitution.

And many, even here in the United States, understand how

hard it is to be a white South African these days.

"We weren't sure how we'd be accepted here in the United States," said Moira. "We expected to be insulted when people learned of our nationality."

Instead the opposite has happened.

MOIRA TELLS of stopping to talk to a woman in a busy U.S. airport. A few moments into the conversation the lady asked where

Moira was from, having heard her accent.

"South Africa," was Moira's answer.

Tears welled in the lady's eyes and she replied, "I'm so sorry about what is happening in your country."

Amongst the bustle of a busy airport the two embraced for a country and its people so far away.

"It begins with yourself and it spreads out to others."