

Cry, the Beloved Country (1995)

Reprinted from the May 1996 VP

Rated PG-13. Running time: 1 hour 46 min.

Our content ratings (1-10) Violence 4; Language 2; Sex/Nudity
-1.

Our star rating (1-5): 5

*But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and
had
compassion, and ran and embraced him ...*

Luke 15:22

*From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point
of view...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old
has
passed away, behold the new has come.*

2 Cor. 5: 16-17

It has been almost 50 years since we walked with Stephen Kumalo down the “lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills, but Alan Paton’s great lyrical novel seems as fresh as ever – even if the dawn that he wrote about at the end of the novel has begun to penetrate the darkness. This second film version, fittingly directed, produced and adapted by South Africans, serves the novel well. How could it not with two such great actors portraying the anguished fathers victimized by a cruel system that hurt its supporters almost as much as its victims, though in less obvious ways?

There have been many presentations of Mr. Paton’s version of

the Prodigal Son story, set in the oppressive milieu of Apartheid, and Director Darrell James Roodt's is as good as any of them – the 1949 adaptation for Broadway by Maxwell Anderson, *Lost in the Stars* with Kurt Weil's hauntingly beautiful music; the play performed by so many amateur groups in the 1950's, along with the 1951 British film version (See "Morearticle below).

The story is one of journeying/questing. Like most such tales, on two levels – the anxious search of Pastor Stephen Kumalo (J.E. Jones) for his wayward son that leads from the hills of his Ndotsheni parish to the squatter's slums, brothel and prison of Johannesburg, and finally to the courtroom where his son Absalom is sentenced to hang for shooting Arthur Jarvis during a burglary – and his questioning of his faith when assaulted by so much human misery cruelty. James Jarvis (R. Harris) also from Ndotsheni, when he learns that his son been murdered, and he too is engaged in a spiritual quest when confronted by his son's papers espousing love and cooperation with "the natives. It is a difficult quest, for the elder Mr. Jarvis had strongly disagreed with his son on how to regard and treat "the natives- but when he visits the Boys Club for black youth, where his son had been the chief benefactor, and, later encounters Stephen and learns that he is the father of the murderer of his son, we see the process working that leads to what St. Paul called "the new creation.

Memorable/preachable scenes:

1. The Reverends Kumalo and Theophilus Msimangu, after hearing John Kumalo, a rising but unscrupulous protest leader, give an impressive speech, talk about him. Stephen is upset that his brother has forsaken the church because it seems powerless and ineffectual. The younger priest confesses that there is some truth in what the speaker has said. "But how can there be truth, Stephen objects, "when God is not on his side? His friend's reply is good food for thought – "Perhaps God *is* on his side – and he doesn't know it.

2. James talks with his wife about an essay their son had written, one that stabbed his conscience, apparently. "He said we taught him nothing. He said we were Christians, and cared nothing for Christians who are hungry ... When we say we are Christians, we mean we are white.³

3. Jarvis encounters Stephen when the old man is going up the mountain to wait for the rising sun, announcing the execution of Absalom. Joined by their common grief, they are reconciled, Jarvis promising to build a new church to replace the present crumbling, leaky-roofed one.

For a powerful parable of grace and reconciliation, "Cry, the Beloved Country is not to be missed!

More Films on South Africa

10. *Cry, t. Beloved ...* The 1951 B & W version featured Sidney Poitier as the young priest who aids Stephen during the search for Absalom.
11. *Lost in t. Stars* (1974), as title suggests, stresses Stephen Kumalo's anguish to the point of losing his faith, only Jarvis's reconciliation bringing him back. Great Kurt Weil music!
12. *A Place of Weeping* (1986), made by the same S. A. team as the current *Cry...* is the story of a black woman's courageous struggle for justice and dignity.
13. *Sarafina* (1992) The film version of t. musical stage play about a black high school girl, influenced by a charismatic teacher, deciding whether or not to accept violent means of resisting Apartheid. Excellent!
14. *Bopha!* (1993) Morgan Freeman directed Danny Glover & Alfre Woodard in this tragic story of a black policeman & his family, t. former torn by loyalty to his white superior & t. freedom struggle of his people.
15. *Mandela* (1987) also stars Danny Glover & Alfre Woodard as Nelson & Winnie Mandela, from t. founding of t. NAC through his trial and the first part

of his long imprisonment.

16. *A World Apart* (1988) Barbara Hershey in t. true story of journalist Diana Roth, whose part in t. fight against Apartheid comes between herself & her teenage daughter.
17. *A Dry White Season* (1989) The story of t. awakening of a white teacher to the evils of Apartheid is distinguished mainly by Marlon Brando's small role as a trial lawyer.
18. *Cry Freedom* (1987) Richard Attenborough's is a sweeping tale of martyr Steve Biko's friendship with the white journalist Donald Woods.
19. *Gandhi* (1980) The great Indian leader develops his non-violence philosophy and techniques in S.A.