

Kritisches Christentum was read underground during the struggle against Apartheid

Two cataclysmic events stand out in the struggle for liberation in South Africa. In 1960 the apartheid regime out-lawed the legal, above-ground and peaceful opposition representing the disenfranchised oppressed majority population. As represented by the ANC and the PAC. Seventeen years later a new wave of above-ground opposition was suppressed. On 19 October 1977 seventeen Black Consciousness organisations and a Soweto newspaper, *The World* were banned. Amongst the organisations outlawed was one that did not easily fit into the mould of those banned: The South African Christian Institute (CI).

The Christian Institute's membership and senior staff consisted of people from both the white and black communities. Its leader was the dissident white Afrikaner clergyman Beyers Naudé. He resigned his positions in the leadership of his church and that of the secret Afrikaner organisation, the Broederbond. The Sharpsville massacre of 1960 moved him to this action. He founded the CI and became part the new wave of opposition the apartheid rulers crushed in 1977.

Through the CI he built a small, effective and legal opposition to apartheid. When Black Consciousness distanced itself from white liberal opposition, Naudé took their message to heart. Within the limited room apartheid left opposition groups, he supported black leaders, notably Steve Biko. Instead of speaking about black people he fought as a white democrat. His institute became an important vehicle of solidarity with Black Consciousness. He won important respect in black communities. Above all he listened to the impatient black voices that contrasted with the white liberal, mostly reformist approach to apartheid. Slowly but decidedly he recognised that foreign investment in the economy and appealing to SA business to improve the lot of the majority had no prospect of succeeding. Instead it had to be seen as reinforcing the apartheid state. He sided with radical change that would lead to majority rule.

His banning order was intended to silence him. But Naudé decided to carry on and join underground operations, no easy task for someone so prominent and in the lime-light of the media. He used the latter as a cover for his secret work. The recent discovery of his reports and letters is now the subject of a book now being written. Walter Sauer (Vienna), Horst Kleinschmidt (Cape Town) and others are writing about the incredible operation Naudé was involved for a decade after he was banned.

During a recent visit to Vienna Horst Kleinschmidt told KC members of the contribution its publications played in informing and shaping the thinking of Naudé and those around him, the small but influential group who could read German. KC, Kleinschmidt explained, dealt with liberation theology from Latin America translated from Spanish into German and it covered the Christian voices from within the former Eastern Europe. The represented profound theological thinking for which no equivalent in the English language existed at the time. KC covered a critical intellectual gap for which a need existed amongst Naudé and his associates. It countered the isolation they were subjected to in the apartheid state. But posting him such material was out of the question. Besides being intercepted by the SA authorities, such publications would add to the burden of evidence the secret police wanted

to implicate him with. During the late 1970's to the late 1980's a secret link existed for communication between Naudé in Johannesburg and Kleinschmidt from his exile location in London. Micro-film was then the latest technology and KC was regularly filmed and hidden in parcels that unsuspected clergy took to Naudé when they visited South Africa. Naudé knew to take the parcels apart until he found the hidden compartment with the film. He'd then take it to be printed and copied at a trusted contact at Witwatersrand University before being able to read the letters and publications, KC amongst them.

In his letters, also smuggled out of South Africa, Naudé repeatedly expresses appreciation for the materials sent to him.