

Newsletter 18 – Beyers Naudé

July 2013

Dear friends,

Writing about my friend and comrade Beyers Naude is not meant to 'monumentalise' him, - to make him into a feel-good icon. I have thought about commemorations and the recalling of history and how such invocations invariably seek association with hero's of the past as a means to justify or mollify present society without critique. Put another way, Beyers' courage and the risks he believed he had to take to advance the cause of justice and equality is a matter that requires an equal measure of courage and risk from those who, for good reason, commemorate him. If Beyers was a human rights activist his memory should motivate activists today! If Beyers' voice was prophetic his example should inspire prophets at this time!

Beyers Naude came from the heart of Afrikaner nationalism but in 1960 he rose up and fought the inequality the apartheid system imposed on the majority population. Beyers died in 2004, aged 89. He witnessed the first decade of majority rule in South Africa. Despite his age and ill health during his last years, he warned that corruption in our post apartheid Government undermined the prospect of dealing with inequality in our society.

On 10 May (2013) I addressed the Beyers Naudé School of Public Theology. The School is part of the Theology Faculty at the University of Stellenbosch. The Faculty commemorates Beyers' birthdate every year.



Beyers in his garden of his home during the time he was banned

I was privileged to work for Oom Bey¹, Rev Theo Kotze, Rev Cedric Mayson, Rev Brian Brown, Oshadi Phakhathi and Peter Randall – all of them at least a decade older than me - from 1972 – 1977. I was already in exile when on the 19th October 1977 these colleagues were all served with banning orders. To boot our organisation, the Christian Institute was banned². Personal banning

¹ We called him affectionately Oom Bey. Oom is Afrikaans for uncle.

² Even more devastating than to outlaw the Christian Institute was the banning of 18 Black Consciousness organisations and their leadership, on that day in October 1977.

orders (a form of house arrest) lasted for five years but often were re-imposed for a second and third term. If the President chose to issue a banning order there was nothing you could do about it. He gave no reasons and those affected could not appeal.

From 1978, in secret, we kept on working for our goals, with me, and later after they left South Africa Theo, Brian, Oshadi and Cedric supported Beyers and our work from exile. There was no shortage of people who took the places we had vacated inside the country.



Theo and Helen Kotze in exile in the Midlands, UK in the 1980's.

Bans on organisations were eventually lifted in 1990 when President F.W. de Klerk signalled that he would pursue negotiations with the majority population rather than rule them by decree.

My lecture below is a glimpse into our past that has not as yet been recorded. It shines a light on the little corner I have personal knowledge of. My allocated time of twenty minutes could not do adequate justice to the subject matter and requires further research and study.

At the event in Stellenbosch in May other speakers recalled their knowledge or experiences of Beyers and the Christian Institute. Most prominent was Prof Douglas Bax. He and Beyers, in the mid 1980's when South Africans were subjected to a state of emergency, they sponsored a resolution at a South African Council of Churches gathering in Hammanskraal (near Pretoria) that provided theological grounds why young white men were justified in refusing to serve in the apartheid army. In scholarly terms Prof Bax dealt with the theological underpinnings for such defiance that caused many young white men, as a matter of conscience, to rather serve imprisonment or go into exile than join apartheid's army. After Bax, the Rev Moses Ntlha spoke movingly how he was ready to turn against the Christian faith as a youngster because all he could see was that Christ and the Christian Church served the white man and no one else. He did not know Beyers at the time but read about him in the newspapers. Beyers words and actions made him see who a real Christian was. He became a Minister of religion himself. After Moses Ntlha, Di

Oliver from the Black Sash organisation eloquently spoke of Beyers' support for the white women's organisation, the Black Sash, part of that handful of organisations in white South Africa that stood up against apartheid. Then Johan, the oldest son of Beyers spoke lovingly of his remembrance of his father and how he, Beyers, stunned the family when he told his children and his wife on a Sunday afternoon family Bosberaad (gathering) in 1960, that family issues would not be discussed any longer but be replaced with discussions about his intended response to the police shootings at Sharpeville.

Prof Russel Botman, Vice Chancellor of Stellenbosch University addressing us over dinner after the meeting in the residence hall where Beyers resided some eighty years earlier, asked: If the Wilgenhof Residence served to plant the seeds that produced a great humanitarian leader then the challenge to the students today is to stand up, like Beyers did, and to challenge that which is wrong in our society today.

Your feedback and comment is, as always, much appreciated and welcome.

Kind regards,

Horst

Horst Kleinschmidt

(At the bottom of my contribution to the 2013 commemoration of Beyers Naude are biographical notes about Beyers and his family.)

Actual size of mages of one piece of microfilm smuggled into South Africa, to Beyers Naude.



May 2013

I titled my talk:

Beyers Naude's prophetic message today.

Thank you Prof Koopman and Dr Coetzee for inviting me to speak on this occasion to remember Beyers Naude.

I joined the staff of the Christian Institute (CI) in April 1972. I was to work for the implementation phase of the Study Project of Christianity in Apartheid Society (SPRO-CAS), which was co-sponsored by the CI and the South African Council of Churches. In 1975 I was appointed as assistant to Beyers Naude but my work was cut short when I was detained under the Terrorism Act in September of that year. In 1976 I fled South Africa and was given

political asylum in The Netherlands. Though I was in exile Beyers appointed me to represent the Christian Institute abroad. I did so for a mere eighteen months because on 19 October 1977 the CI was banned. After the banning I worked with the senior CI staff and notably Beyers, in secret, for thirteen years, until the unbanning of the CI in 1990.

Recently I re-read the last copy of Pro Veritate issued before the bannings of 1977. The radical tone in Pro Veritate resulted from the growing authoritarian rule in South Africa. It is also indicative of the CI's growing awareness that apartheid could not be reformed. I had the privilege of watching Beyers develop over these years and luckily I have a written record that traces his steps after the banning. He argued ever more forcefully that for racism to be countered it required an end to inequality rooted in exploitation, poverty and landlessness.

The way I see it, the radicalisation of the CI did not detract from Beyers' Christian foundation. In this period the implications of his faith grew. As I observed him, he was applying his faith more truthfully with each step he took forward. I make this observation because I wish to dwell on an element of his radicalisation process that is not fashionable today. Beyers challenged the fundamental inequality that colonialism and apartheid imposed, a challenge the post apartheid ANC Government appears not to have the stomach to tackle. From a race based society we are now a class based society with a growing gap between rich and poor. Idle words by politicians to the contrary are no longer convincing. The exploitation of one class over another remains fundamentally in place.



Cedric and Penelope Mayson with their seven-month-old daughter, Judi, in England in December 1978. Cedric was banned but was given special permission to visit his ailing mother.

That last edition of Pro Veritate appeared just days after Steve Biko was murdered and moments before the CI, and all the Black Consciousness organisations, were banned. The contents are uncompromising especially for that period. It includes Beyers' report to the last Annual General Meeting the CI was able to hold. Once more Beyers called for an end to oppression and to *dispossession*. The Beyers I knew wanted dispossession to translate into meaningful *possession*, but how? In another article in the same Pro Veritate American academic, Prof Bruce Douglass of Georgetown University, questions capitalism and argues for a socialism that is not authoritarian.

So, how strong was the CI thrust for a re-think on the way capitalist society functions?

More than a year earlier, on 3 June 1976, only 13 days before the school students of Soweto rose up, Beyers had addressed the students at UCT on the topic “The South Africa I Want”. He raised the question of a just dispensation for South Africa and said: “The South Africa I want is one where we as Whites take seriously the criticism and feelings of the Black community toward the present capitalist system and where an in depth study is participated in by Black and White on capitalism, socialism (with special emphasis on African socialism) and the concept of economic justice. It is not enough to praise the system of capitalist free enterprise or to warn against a Black socialist (or even Marxist) system. It has to start with an admission of failure of the capitalist system ... and [for there] to evolve a system which will bring about a more equitable sharing in economic wealth and distribution of goods than has been the case up till now”. He ends with, “nothing less could meet successfully the legitimate demands for economic justice for all”. The context should be understood: Beyers’ audience at UCT at that time was white and when he uses the words ‘Black Community’ he meant the poor, dispossessed and exploited.

In May 1977 Beyers addressed the Transvaal United Teachers Association and once more implored his audience, “... it would be foolish of us to ignore the increasing interest in communism – especially for the ideas of economic justice as proclaimed by Marxism”. He also observes how “the Christian faith [has] inextricably linked [itself] to capitalism and racism”.

Beyers was not alone in making remarks like this. In March 1977 Peter Randall, the head of the SPRO-CAS³ programme debated with Harry Oppenheimer of Anglo-American Corporation fame, the alternatives for South Africa. Backing up Beyers, Peter’s topic was: “Only Socialism can satisfy South Africa’s future”.

In the letter Beyers’ smuggled to me abroad after he was banned his demands are no less radical. Beyers saw inequality as inherent in capitalism and that capitalism was incompatible with the scripture that demanded Gods Kingdom on earth and that demanded that you love your neighbour as yourself.

Beyers, I add never joined or toyed with the idea of joining the SA Communist Party.

These statements by Beyers and other CI leaders must not be trivialised or treated as quirky political add-ons that can be ignored. No, they represent Beyers’ deep and passionate Christian principles and they are a logical consequence if pious words are to be made real.

³ SPRO-CAS – Study Project of Christianity in Apartheid Society.

Beyers' resolve is clearly revealed in a seven-page hand-written letter to me, dated 27th October 1977 barely a week after the CI was banned. Coded language first arises in this letter. He wants to know whether the courier who smuggled the letter out of the country was able to hand it over safely and was not searched when leaving from Johannesburg International Airport. He asks that I phone him and say, "The church conference in Sweden is taking place", thus signifying safe receipt.

About himself he says, "As I indicated ... I'm willing to serve wherever my presence could make the greatest and most meaningful contribution. In view of the situation created by the recent events it seems to me to be clear that for the foreseeable future my task is to remain where I am".

On page four he defiantly notes that whilst the CI can no longer organise the Study Project on Capitalism, Socialism and the Christian Faith but that "we are busy seeing whether another agency is willing to take over" the project.

Further on in the letter he encourages me to explain the gravity of the new situation in South Africa to the churches across Europe and that they should heed the calls made by the CI for more pressure to be brought on the apartheid rulers. Somewhat rhetorically, because I was due to address gatherings in Rome, he asks, "Would it not help the CI if the Pope would publicly express support for the CI's stand and witness?" Sadly I was granted no access to the Pope or anyone near him.

In another letter that he wrote on 25th November 1977 Beyers informed me that the study project on capitalism, socialism "and the Christian evaluation thereof" was handed to the EDA (Environmental Development Agency) with possible help from Prof H.W. van der Merwe of the Abe Bailey Institute at University of Cape Town. Unfortunately the EDA collapsed when it was discovered that one of its two directors, Carl Edwards, was a spy working for the Security Police.

As Beyers' letters reveal the bannings of October 1977 caused turmoil amongst the core CI members. Time does not allow for the issues to be elaborated here, but let me summarise what the important ramifications of the banning were:

1. It demonstrated how immensely difficult it was to move from a middle-class, legal, above ground organisation into something illegal and clandestine. Beyers grappled with two issues: Is it a tenable Christian position to support all the liberation organisations of the oppressed and for such Christians thus in practice being one step behind those who fight for freedom? Such a formulation was what the previous legal CI had espoused. The second question follows from the former. If you, as a Christian, decide to join those in the trenches, you cannot join all of them but must choose one organisation over others. - And if this choice meant support for the ANC, what was the Christian attitude toward violence? This is not the place to explore these matters but I suggest that they call for further study.

2. To read Beyers' letters might lead the un-inducted to conclude that there were crippling squabbles within the *Inner Circle*. The Inner Circle was the loose name used by us who collaborated in the secret network. Merely to see tensions would be superficial. The tensions reveal the problems of new alignments. Some individuals did not feel they could join underground work whilst those who did chose different underground directions. Some preferred the ANC whilst others wanted to create a third liberation movement with Black Consciousness as its driver. There are questions of both Theology and strategy that need careful attention and this matter also deserves further study.
3. In subsequent years Beyers' efforts were directed toward helping build broad unity between the Black Consciousness Movement internally, and the ANC and PAC abroad. He believed that in so doing he was pursuing the aim of Steve Biko. In reality this approach was doomed because of the cold war politics that dominated the world at the time, with an incredibly hostile West to real change in South Africa on the one hand and the deep ties the ANC had with the USSR on the other. A further complexity that weighed on this situation is the historical situation that Beyers had close working relationship with Black Consciousness whilst his knowledge of the ANC and PAC was virtually non-existent in the early period after the 1977 bannings.
4. As best he could, Beyers continued for the next decade and more to straddle the divide between internal and external struggle, between BCM and ANC, and between church representatives who supported the struggle in the legal terrain and those like him, who worked with underground structures.
5. Beyers' letters record meticulously how he became a massive conduit for funds to people and organisations that operated illegally or semi-legally. It is remarkable how much those whom he worked with in secret, trusted him. This also justifies a closer look.

Moving on,

I would like to give you a glimpse of how Beyers and I communicated, he living in Greenside, Johannesburg and whilst I had by now moved to London. Our communication happened in two ways:

One:

We exchanged letters but never used the postal services. We knew the SB's monitored whatever went through the post. So we used the very many travellers, often tourists, to act as our couriers. Either they knew what dangerous cargo they carried for us or, others, whom we could not be certain of, were asked to carry gifts. Into harmless books or transistor radios or tourist trinkets we planted letters, documents and bank notes that the unobservant eye could not see. To reduce the volume of paper involved we availed ourselves of the only technology that existed at the time. It was called microfilm, which made detection much harder. (See example below)



The second way we communicated:

I had a long list of tickey box telephone numbers (street corner pay phone call boxes) throughout Braamfontein, Hillbrow and downtown Johannesburg. Next to each number was a date and time. As a rule I spoke to Beyers once a week from abroad throughout the seven years of his banning. Because we did not trust the UK police under Thatcher I did not use a landline phone because our fear was that British police might monitor us and hand over possible evidence to the SB's in South Africa. So I phoned Beyers who was waiting for a designated pay phone in Johannesburg to ring, from a pay phone somewhere on a London street. Feeding a London pay phone with 50 pence pieces to call South Africa was quite a challenge.

In this process Beyers became integrated into secret and underground work – the only option when legal aboveground work was snuffed out.

At one point Beyers asked that he be sent new insights about alternatives to capitalism. He said he now had the time to study what he never had time for in previous years. I recall putting on to microfiche, literature that emanated from Latin America, the primary engine of liberation theology. Much of it was never translated from Spanish into English, but some of it appeared in German. Beyers read and spoke German and thus I sent him texts that friends of mine in Vienna, Austria published in a magazine with the title *Kritisches Christentum* (Critical Christianity).

Beyers's great quality was that he listened to the most humble among the oppressed. Although he was only allowed to meet one person at a time, his home in Johannesburg often looked like a doctors waiting room. Tannie Ilse could be seen serving tea to a motely line of rich and poor, local and foreign all waiting to gain access, one by one, to Beyers in his study.

Beyers's voice still challenges and demands our response today. Two issues, both in our own backyard, here in the Western Cape, are pertinent:

1. The labourers in the Hex River valley rose up recently because the burden of poverty had become too heavy to bear. Politicians from across the board, the media and employers, assisted by the police, all colluded in enforcing a calm and a return to the status quo. The new wage was set at R105 per day. It was acknowledged this was not a living wage but with a shrug of the shoulders the collective establishment walked away, saying that farmers could not afford more. But how can it be that a living wage cannot be afforded? Who is tackling the UK supermarkets that take half of the value the British

consumer pays for our grapes? Beyers, I think would ask very searching questions.

2. Last week (May 2013) a new place named Marikana came into existence. It is in Philippi East, named after the Marikana where on 16 August 2012, 44 striking workers were killed and a further 78 injured. Unemployed and homeless people invaded a piece of land to erect shacks. They are the people organised by Abahlali baseMjondolo. They invaded on the day the rest of us called Freedom Day. They dubbed it UnFreedom Day when the police and Anti-Land Invasion Unit, instructed, not by the ANC but by the DA's Patricia de Lille, demolished shacks and shot at them with rubber bullets. Beyers might well have been with those people and be asking why the poorest are being shunted, just like under apartheid, further and further out of the cities, out of sight.

In conclusion:

An essay published in the Cape Times on 22 April 2013 on how the holocaust might be remembered impressed me. In it Professor Shirli Gilbert, a South African academic working at Southampton University, says: "unavoidably, inescapably, necessarily – [the past] belongs to us, and it is our responsibility not just to remember it, but to choose how we remember it to our children, and to our children's children after them". She implores us to be: "... mindful of what it means to subjugate, deprive and dispossess a people ... on the basis of the colour of their skin?" And she warns of the recurrence of forms of "racism whatever form it takes, and the need to teach our children the necessity of tolerance and open-mindedness, both towards the familiar and that which has been designated different to us"

If we remember him today, we should remember how Beyers acted and lived to counter the otherness white people saw in black people. He sought an end to racism and white prejudice, but he wanted more. He wanted an end to inequality. That takes the debate right into today's society. The struggle is not over and Beyer's disciples may not, nine years after his passing, ignore the challenge he left us.

To remember Oom Bey without remembering and without acting in a way so that our children know why we remember is simply not an option. It is, I submit, also not an option for the Beyers Naude School of Public Theology. You cannot remember Beyers by simply looking into the past. The society Beyers wanted for the poor and downtrodden has not come to pass. If we seek to honour him we will pick up the baton that he left for us. It is the baton to action.



Beyers with Prof Walter Sauer and Elfriede Pekny, founders of the Anti Apartheid Movement in Austria, in Vienna, October 1985.

Biographical notes on Christiaan Frederick Beyers Naudé (1915 – 2004)

He was known either as Ds (Dominee, the Afrikaans word for Reverend) Beyers Naude or mostly just as Oom (uncle) Bey.

His family can be traced back to a French Huguenot refugee named Jacques Naudé who came to the Cape in 1718.

Beyers was named after General Christiaan Frederick Beyers, under whom his father had served as a soldier and unofficial pastor during the second Anglo-Boer War (1899 – 1902).

Jozua Naudé, Beyers' father, was an Afrikaner Dutch Reformed (Calvinist) cleric. He helped found and was the first chairperson of the *Broederbond* (Afrikaans, "Brotherhood" or "League of Brothers"), the powerful Afrikaner men's secret society that played a dominant role in apartheid South Africa. The *Broederbond* became synonymous with the Afrikaner-dominated National Party that won power in 1948.

Beyers studied theology at the University of Stellenbosch and lived at Wilgenhof men's residence. He graduated in 1939 with an MA in languages and a theology degree. His sociology lecturer was the future prime minister and chief-architect of apartheid, H.F. Verwoerd but Beyers credited Stellenbosch theologian Ben Keet with laying the groundwork for his own theological dissent.

Beyers was ordained in 1939 as a minister in the South African Dutch Reformed Church and he joined the *Broederbond* as its youngest member. For 20 years he served various congregations.

In 1940 Beyers married Ilse Weder, whose father was a Moravian missionary where they spoke German at home. The couple had three sons and a daughter. Beyers' active opposition to apartheid started in 1960 after the Sharpeville massacre when his children were already in their teens. Sharpeville is a black residential town in the industrial heart of South Africa. In 1960 the South African police killed 69 black demonstrators protesting against restrictions on their freedom of movement – the infamous pass laws – in Sharpeville.

In response to Sharpeville, the World Council of Churches (WCC) sent a delegation to Johannesburg to meet with clerics. Beyers, by then the moderator of his church district (the Southern Transvaal Synod), helped to organize a consultation between the WCC and eighty South African church delegates in Cottesloe, a Johannesburg suburb. The consultation's resolutions rejected race as the basis of exclusion from churches, and affirmed the right of all people to own land and have a say in how they are governed. Naudé alone among his church's delegates steadfastly continued to reject any theological basis for apartheid. Prime Minister Verwoerd forced the DRC delegation to repudiate the consultation and the Dutch Reformed Church later left the World Council of Churches.

In 1963 Naudé founded the Christian Institute of Southern Africa (CI), an ecumenical organization with the aim of fostering reconciliation through interracial dialogue, research, and publications. The DRC forced Naudé to choose between his status as minister and directorship of the CI. He then resigned his church post, left his Aasvoëlkop congregation in Northcliff, Johannesburg, and also resigned from the *Broederbond*. As a result, he lost his status as minister in the Dutch Reformed Church. His last sermon to his congregation noted that "We must show greater loyalty to God than to man". Stoically anticipating the enormous pressure by the Afrikaner political and church establishment that was to come, he told his wife: "We must prepare for ten years in the wilderness."

In 1967 Naudé and Prof Albert Geysler won a libel case against conservative Pretoria Professor Adriaan Pont, who had called them communists.

In 1970 Naudé was among few white South African Christian leaders "who openly called for understanding of the WCC decision" to provide financial support for liberation movements in southern Africa. "If blood runs in the streets of South Africa it will not be because the World Council of Churches has done something but because the churches of South Africa have done nothing," Naudé said. In response, the state formed the Schlebusch Commission in 1972 to investigate anti-apartheid Christian organizations. When Naudé refused to testify, he was tried and imprisoned. After a night in the cells, a DRC minister paid his fine.

During a 1972 trip to Germany and Britain, Naudé preached at Westminster Abbey, "the first Afrikaans theologian to be so honoured". In 1973 the state withdrew his passport, but temporarily returned it in 1974 so that he could travel to the University of Notre Dame, Chicago, to receive the Reinhold Niebuhr Award for justice and peace.

The state eventually forced the CI and all Black Consciousness organisations to close in 1977.

From 1977 to 1984 the South African Government "banned" Beyers Naudé — a form of house arrest with severe restrictions on his movements and interactions. For example, he could not be in the same room with more than one other person. Other leaders of the Christian Institute suffered the same fate, including Theo Kotze, Brian Brown, Cedric Mayson, and Peter Randall.

In 1980 Naudé and three other DRC theologians broke with the DRC and was accepted as clergy by the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa, the black African denomination established by the white Dutch Reformed Church as the missionary branch, subsidiary to its white parent body.

After his unbanning in 1985, he succeeded Archbishop Desmond Tutu as secretary general of the South African Council of Churches. In this role he called for the release of all political prisoners and negotiation with the African National Congress.

In 1990 he was invited by the African National Congress to be the only Afrikaner member on their delegation in negotiations with the National Party government at Groote Schuur. Despite his association with the ANC, for instance, he maintained ties with the black consciousness movement.

In 2000 he signed the Declaration of Commitment by White South Africans, a public document that acknowledged what apartheid had done to black South Africans.

After his death at 89 on 7 September 2004, Nelson Mandela eulogized Naudé as "a true humanitarian and a true son of Africa." Naudé's official state funeral on Saturday 18 September 2004 was attended by President Thabo Mbeki. Naudé's ashes were scattered in the township of Alexandra, just outside Johannesburg.

Despite being persecuted by his own ethnic group, Naudé "never outwardly expressed spite for his former opponents. 'I am an Afrikaner,' he said. 'I saw myself never as anything else but an Afrikaner, and I'm very grateful for the small contribution which I could have made.'"

In 1993 he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by the American Friends Service Committee.

In 2001 the city of Johannesburg, where he had lived most of his life in the suburb of Greenside, honored Naudé in several ways. Naudé received the Freedom of the City of Johannesburg while DF Malan Drive, a major road in Johannesburg, was renamed Beyers Naudé Drive. The Library Gardens in downtown Johannesburg also bears his name.

Naudé received fourteen honorary doctorates during his lifetime.

Biographical detail is based on the Wikipedia entry on Beyers' life.