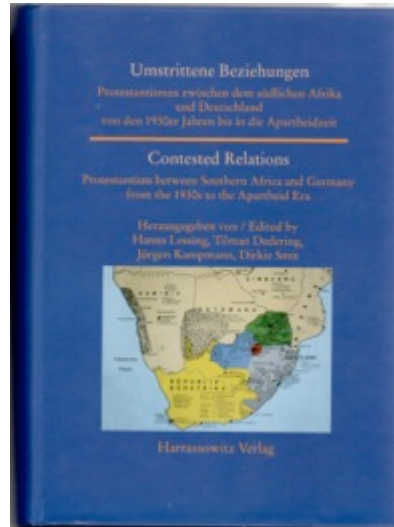


Address delivered on 17 June 2015, at the University of the Western Cape, to launch the book: ***Contested Relations – Protestantism between Southern Africa and Germany from the 1930s to the Apartheid Era***¹. The event was organised by the Desmond Tutu Centre for Spirituality and Society, the Dutch Reformed Church of Southern Africa, the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa and the German initiated 'Study Process' involving the Protestant and Reformed churches of Germany. The launch coincided with a meeting to discuss: *Constructive Legacies of the Reformed churches – resources for South Africa today*.



SKN 26.4.
By Horst Kleinschmidt.
2 July 2015.

“As long as God gives me the necessary strength, I shall continue. I have no intention of withdrawing or ‘retiring’ or discarding the task in which I am involved ... with the full awareness that a moment may arrive where I may find it impossible to continue” – Beyers Naudé.²

History is contested – the further we are from it, the more we can sift fact from ideology, and rely less on ‘the victor is always right’. The book before us tonight contributes significantly toward re-writing the impact of the German Protestant Churches on Southern Africa. Two years ago, Hans Lessing and his team offered us an equally hefty volume on the history prior to 1930. The two volumes are impressive and of major importance. I commend Hans and his team for this excellent work.

The ‘Sleepwalkers’ is the title of a book that rethinks the causes of the First World War³. It describes how European rulers from London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, and St Petersburg allowed a single event, the assassination of an Archduke during a visit to Serajevo, to exacerbate existing

¹ Contested Relations, in German ‘Umstrittene Beziehungen’ appeared both in English and German. The book is edited

² Quote from a letter Beyers wrote on 9th October 1978 and smuggled out of South Africa to the writer. See more on page 3.

³ *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*, is Prof Chris Clark's study of the outbreak of the First World War. It appeared in English in 2012.

tensions with the result that a full-scale world war broke out, until then the worst war in history. Diplomacy and an alert civil society might have averted the war.

WWI took place 100 years ago and historians still analyse its causes. The events dealt with in the book this evening concern matters 85 to 20 years into our past. The authors in this book reflect on the role of German churches in Southern Africa against the backdrop of black oppression and exploitation, eventually leading to wars of liberation. The last word on the subject has not yet been written. We can be sure of that.

I borrowed the term 'Sleepwalkers' for a specific reason. My concern is that history is there to teach something. Maya Angelou, the American writer said, "History, despite its wrenching pain cannot be unlived. But, if faced with courage, need not be lived again." These are compelling words. She calls on us to remember but equally to stand vigil lest what happened before happens again.

These threads - interpreting and re-interpreting history and either learning from history or sleepwalking - lead me to reflect on the 100th anniversary of the birthdate of Beyers Naudé. His active life as dissident Protestant minister of religion covers the period on which the book before us tonight comments. Much has been written and said about the significance of Beyers Naudé. My interest lies in his prophesy and in his stand in the face of apartheid rule. He opposed the rulers of his day. He used the knowledge of his people's history to prevent them from doing to others what had been done to them. He tried to wake the sleepwalkers.

Bishop Jo Seoka, from the Catholic Church, has stood up for the victims of the Marikana when he identified the inhuman conditions the mine owners imposed on its workers, long before the massacre took place. It is a travesty that the body of the Church has left him standing alone.

Are we sleepwalking into a new darkness in South Africa? How is it that we did not learn from our own recent past? Why does organised religion, once again, remain silent? Or will the churches do what many Southern Africans expect? Will they eventually pronounce on the impending dangers only long after injustices and oppression became institutionalised?

Beyers Naudé's quest for liberty based on egalité was fundamental and applies today as it did under apartheid. It applies in South Africa as it applies around the world. Beyers did not only help lead us out of apartheid, his prophecy includes a demand for a just and equal society today.

If Beyers were with us today, he would be warning those who live in sumptuous comfort or have control over ill-gotten gains, in and outside of Government. He would warn politicians and private sector leaders, white and black, that our social order will fail if it is based on inequality, especially on the vast scale we have in South Africa. He would raise fundamental questions about the economic order and ask why there is such deafening silence from the churches and others. The growing gap between the haves and the have-nots is, he would say, once more reaching breaking point.

He would probably not be abstract in his analyses. He would point his finger at the near total failure by the church to challenge theologically the economic model the ANC, the DA, the market speculators, and those with too much money, have made into a false God. The absence of analyses and grasp of history lies at the root of this social malaise.

Slowly, very slowly it dawns on collective South Africa that the right to cast our vote, since 1994 did not result in what the vast majority hoped for and expected. 1994 did provide significant gains for those who most needed freedom from the racial dispensation, but it has left, 21 years after our freedom it has left the majority:

- without a better education,
- desperate and in grinding poverty,
- and handicapped in systemic inequality.

Let us always be thankful that the advent of democracy outlawed racist conduct, gave us an exceptional constitution, an independent judiciary and a Bill of Rights to be proud of.

However, the transformation project remains substantially deficient and is floundering. This is because of failings by those who promised change in the name of revolution. Their poor decisions and choices, their vulgar indulgence in wining and dining, their attachment to ostentatious fashion shows in Parliament and glitzy cars, and now the rise of a new bigotry within their own ranks, combine to threaten the gains of 1994. Our current rulers have it in them to take us into a new darkness – I don't mean the darkness caused by our power utility, Eskom. The ANC's detachment from the poor happened at lightning speed. Some would argue that the exiled movement was primarily an elite more concerned with attaining power. It paid only lip service only to the eradication of poverty and inequality. We must ask: are the churches sleepwalking today? Our country is now at the bottom of the inequality rankings globally.

We have a problem! The new political elite is in a tight embrace with the old white moneyed elite, who in turn are, in cosy cahoots with a sprinkling of indebted black capitalists. They are stunningly unconcerned about the plight of the poor and rely, like apartheid, on the police to quell unrest. In suppressing the revolt, the guarantees in our Bill of Rights are already regularly being transgressed by the police. As protest escalates, we should anticipate states of emergency, as under apartheid. I believe that it is not premature to ask whether this massive political failure opens the gates for a Julius Malema, leader of the Economic Freedom Fighters, to become a demagogic ruler whose breaches of what the Constitution, the courts and the Bill of Rights demand, would trump President Zuma's breaches.

Where would Beyers Naudé be in all of this if he were with us today?



Ilse and Beyers in their garden during the years of Beyers' banning.

Let me explain:

Oom Bey was out of view from 1977 until his house arrest (banning) was lifted in 1984. But he did not sit and do nothing. In the seven long years Beyers' commitment led to new radical thought and action. His Christian concern was for inclusion of all the people and not for an elite who have shut the door on the majority, notwithstanding the rhetorical promises that routinely get made for eventual inclusion. He knew that this brought him into conflict with the politics of the day. For him this was a fundamental human and thus Christian obligation.

The thread throughout is that Beyers implores us never to drop the baton of struggle for the realisation of the fundamental right to equality for all the people.

In a letter dated 27th October 1977, a week after the Christian Institute, Beyers himself, and many others were banned, he wrote, "... I'm willing to serve wherever my presence could make the greatest and most meaningful contribution." A few weeks later in 1977, Beyers briefly but seriously, considered leaving South Africa to make common cause with Oliver Tambo and the ANC, and with Mangosutho Buthelezi in exile in Lusaka. The idea was to break the stalemate that apartheid had produced in Southern Africa. But, a year later, in a letter dated 9th October 1978, Beyers wrote: "My future position and role: I want to make it quite clear that as long as God gives me the necessary mental and physical strength, I shall continue with the work of the CI. I have no intention of withdrawing or 'retiring' or discarding the task in which I am involved.

This is how I see my position here in SA and, however difficult it may be, I hope to continue to provide the leadership here in our country with the full awareness that a moment may arrive where I may find it impossible to continue.” These extracts are taken from letters smuggled out of the country. They, and many more, exist in his distinctive handwriting. They speak of his willingness, in extreme conditions, to work illegally, take exceptional risks, and accept the consequences.

In the early months of 1978 Beyers and the ‘group’ (insiders, mostly former staff members of the CI) were involved in drawing up a policy paper, the intent of which was to build a framework and role for an illegal underground Christian Institute. The document, in his handwriting:

- debates how and on what basis to work with the ANC, the Black Consciousness Movement and possibly with Inkatha,
- deals with the role and task of individual Christians and of the Churches in South Africa,
- explains the need to provide on-the-spot analyses of the situation as a tool to challenge the churches’ ambivalent stand towards apartheid, inside South Africa and in Europe and North America,
- foresees promoting reconciliation and unity between “liberation groups”,
- hopes to provide pastoral care to exiles and training opportunities for those apartheid was failing,
- examines the possibility of establishing a “Steve Biko Institute”,
- calls for internal popular mobilisation,
- affirms co-operation with the OAU and the UNO
- explores up-scaling non-violent struggle methods, without seeking to replace the armed struggle pursued by the ANC and PAC.

Although such a structure could not be formally established, Beyers and his trusted friends, lived and acted by this programme.

In May 1990, he was invited to the first Groote Schuur talks as a negotiator on the side of the ANC. His signature appears on the minutes of the meeting.



Beyers Naudé, back row, 4th from the left.

However, he was not seen in any subsequent negotiations. Was he dropped because his moral Christian socialism - as I would name it - did not fit into the modalities of what the parties to our new dispensation had in mind? I don’t know the answer to this question. In 2000, when he was already confined to a wheelchair he warned against the ease with which the new ruling party immersed themselves into comfort and luxury, and then sunk into corruption on an unprecedented scale. Was it that Beyers was already a step ahead and could not be part of the compromises the incoming order was busy making?

In another action that involved both Ilse and Beyers, they raised very considerable financial resources to change the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) from within. Through travel and exposure to the ecumenical developments in Europe and elsewhere, they had gained perspective and they wanted to expose others to a similar experience. Later this year, I believe we will see a new publication that details how Ilse and Beyers, very quietly ran the Christian

Fellowship Trust. From 1965 to 1995, for thirty years, they sent over 400 persons overseas to experience what had opened their own eyes. It was Beyers' intention in this way to change the DRC from within.

The above lifts the lid, every so slightly, on the secret, the subversive, political, deeply Christian and far-sighted, Beyers Naudé. He changed our narrative when other voices remained silent.

Beyers should be celebrated for what he was and did and we must guard against attempts to sanitise him. To honour Oom Bey, we should have his voice disturb our consciences today as he disturbed those yesterday.

Beyers' roots in the struggle for Afrikaner economic rights under British Imperial dominance got him to think deeply about class. As the South African crises deepened in the 1970's Beyers spoke, wrote, and sought to better understand the system of exploitation of one class by another. His efforts to understand Black Consciousness and its uneasy relationship to class occupied his mind. He searched for a political order that did not cause and then compound the distortions capitalism creates. He was not content merely to oppose corruption and authoritarian trends whether before, or after 1994. He was concerned with the deeper systemic fault-lines.

Beyers' respect and recognition of every single individual, irrespective of their station in life is well known. So is his far-sightedness. But there is another side of Beyers that, in my view, warrants consideration. It is this: his concern and care for those on the wrong side of history. He condemned no one and went to incredible lengths to redeem those condemned for whatever reason. Beyers knew ostracism. He spoke with pain about his Christmas holidays in Onrust, Southern Cape, when his morning walk, to buy the Afrikaans and the English newspapers felt like walking a gauntlet. For historic reasons a number of top Afrikaner leaders bought their papers at the same shop during the holidays. Despite Beyers knowing them from the time before he broke ranks, they ignored him.

I want to take Beyers' concern for the ostracised to another level. Those who voted for apartheid, those whom the white English, but not they alone, conveniently and gratuitously refer to as 'those Afrikaners' are still today, in many instances considered near pariahs. The term Afrikaner or Boer is very often used in a loaded way. The antipathy toward the apartheid proponent may have justification, but I think Beyers would want to reach out to them. I have always felt it scandalous how the last apartheid President, FW de Klerk and his elite gang walked away from their most loyal constituency and took none of the blame. Much worse than that, de Klerk et al made virtually no effort to re-educate his people and lead them out of the darkness the National Party has led them into. It cannot be right that we leave tens of thousands of apartheid adherents to smoulder in their isolation, with nearly no effort undertaken for them to be redeemed from their own past. Nation building cannot happen when one sector of our people is designated to a ghetto of finger pointing. The former apartheid leaders, politicians and church leaders alike, stand accused of having left their former adherents stranded. I submit that Beyers would not have been blind to this aspect of the incomplete transition we are in today. Beyers would not be seen amongst the legions of victors, through the ages, who self-righteously, point accusing fingers at them.

In an interview with Beyers not yet published, Beyers, true to character asks: "What is there that I can do to share in building a new and just society?" These are his words spoken not prior to 1994 but just before the year 2000. Beyers' quest for egalité has not remotely been achieved.

Unrest in this country will grow because of deepening poverty and continued exploitation. This will lead to increasing violations of our fundamental rights. States of Emergency may well be decreed. The ruling party will flout the Constitution and the laws when it affects their insular interests. Whole ministries stand to implode – worse than is already the case. Corruption will empty state coffers, as the unproductive elite grows greedier. When the social structure begins to fail en masse, the rich will leave South Africa, with their money.

We need contestation of where we come from and where we are going. Where political forces are failing, as they do right now, the churches should speak out. There is no shortage of critical comment in our country but it seems to me that individual denominations and the South African Council of Churches are sleepwalking into social disaster in the way most did under apartheid. I wish not to detract from notable exceptional people.

Guard against honouring Beyers in an annual ritual to provide a warm, fuzzy feeling about a hero of the past. Live and act in the knowledge that Beyers endured, even in the worst of times. Beyers' life is an inspiration to endure, never dropping the baton of the struggle for equality.
