

Critical Perspectives on Beyers Naudé as Post-colonial Theologian

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Abstract

Beyers Naudé (1915 - 2004) was the foremost anti-apartheid and liberation theologian that emerged from the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa during the twentieth century. In his early life and early years as a minister, he was formatively influenced by his family's anticolonial (read 'anti-British') loyalty in the wake of the Anglo-Boer war, and commitment to a pro-Afrikaner ideology. With his growing knowledge of the impacts of the apartheid ideology on the black majority population in South Africa, he started inter-denominational Bible Study groups, founded the pro-liberation inter-denominational and inter-racial journal *Pro Veritate* (1962) as well as the well-known Christian Institute (1963). He became committed to and developed an inclusive ecumenical Christian message as confessing public theologian. This was formatively influenced by his knowledge of the German *Kirchenkampf* and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In his own lectures and sermons Naudé developed his own distinct analyses of the apartheid system, and an own distinct post-apartheid theology. Due to the analogy between the effects of British colonialism on South Africans and apartheid on black South Africa, Naudé's theology can rightly be labelled a post-colonial theology.

Keywords: Beyers Naudé, apartheid, *Pro Veritate*, the Christian Institute, public theology, German *Kirchenkampf*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, post-colonial theology

Already on 23 March 1952, just before the 300 year commemoration of settler colonialism by the apartheid regime, Beyers Naudé gave an address to Afrikaner youth, making reference to the Christian calling, attitudes and faith

in African context (Naudé [1952]2006:17-19)¹. This is one of the first instances where it is evident that for him, the church is more inclusive than that recognised by the official DRC² of the time. With inputs from Naudé himself, scholars deduce that it was roughly during the period 1952/ 1953 – 1963 that he experienced a growing unease with apartheid and how it was supported by the Afrikaner-dominated National Party and the mainly white Afrikaner DRC. His growing unease came to a head in his contribution to and unwavering support of the Cottesloe resolutions (1960)³, his subsequent alienation from the DRC, and his resignation of his position as minister of the DRC Aasvoëlkop congregation on 22 September 1963 – with final meeting 3 November 1963. In my article I provide some seminal perspectives that give insight to Beyers Naudé as post-colonial theologian. As such, I deal with the marked discursive influences on him and how these in their own ways contributed to him becoming the foremost ecumenical originating from the

¹ It is significant that Naudé in this early address already refers to both ‘liberation and salvation’, and that his ecclesiology is inclusive – where he refers to the future ‘flourishing of all nations’ vis-à-vis that of a ‘single nation’ in African context. More markedly, his more conscious statement about the Christian’s moral obligation to concretely give expression to the inclusive nature of the church (with regard to ‘rasse- en volksverhoudinge’ [‘race- and national relations’]) vis-à-vis the view of ‘total apartheid, in all spheres of life’ – a view propounded by a Dr. G.D. Scholtz in his book *Het die Afrikanervolk ‘n Toekoms?* [*Does the Afrikaner People have a Future?*] and an Afrikaner ecclesial conference in Bloemfontein – is made in 1954. The rationale is that those who propagate apartheid have not completely thought through the consequences of this position. Metaphorically and in the light of the text of Luke 14:28-30, they are busy building a building that will remain incomplete vis-à-vis embracing the truth of the gospel with regard to the unity of the church. (Bosch [1985:68] mentions that Naudé already mentioned his concerns about apartheid to him and Nico Smith in 1950 while they assisted him in his congregation in Potchefstroom as young theologians.)

² If Naudé was concerned about three hundred years of settler colonialism, he was also convinced that there will be change to this history in South Africa in the fourth century.

³ Cf ‘Cottesloe Consultation Statement’ in de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio (1983: 148-153).

DRC, the notion of him being a ‘public theologian’, and a selection of his theological contributions from post-colonial perspectives.

Post-colonial Theory and Leadership

Much of post-colonial discourse does not deal with concrete leadership in post-colonial contexts. It deals mostly thematically with the post-colonial condition, and asks questions related to colonialism – the ‘conquest and control of other people’s lands and goods’ (Loomba 1998). Such post-colonial discourses are often available in an array of the critical study of different genres of literary representation⁴, and how to move beyond them (or not). These contributions are often dealt with theoretically but in some cases, also as to how they impact empirically on people – especially on colonised, or formerly colonised people(s). Such theorising may engage and expose the inbuilt racism, sexism, exclusionary and exploitative economic and labour relationships (since the time of slavery), and a general collusion of the production of knowledge and colonising power. Recognising the discursive contributions post-colonial theory has made to scholarship, it has though also been criticised, not least, that it mainly functions as a discourse by scholars in the Western academe for consumption by students in modern classrooms in the Western world. In distinction to such an approach, and in African context, though, the article departs from a different premise.

The founding assumption of the article is that in African contexts, post-colonial discourse is (or should be) characterised by anti-colonial and anti-apartheid discourse, discourses of resistance and liberation, and a discourse that embraces humanitarian values and human rights focused on the values of equality, the human dignity of all and social justice beyond the colonising and apartheid paradigms. Needless to say, such discourse also focuses on the contributions of not only anti-colonial institutions and organisations, but also individuals who have provided leadership in this context. Such individuals could be linked to Hegel’s ‘great men [people!] theory’, because they have not only ‘made a formative contribution to life’ but also ‘personified the spirit of the times and anticipated the spirit which

⁴ Cf. especially Fanon (1961; 1986); Young (1990a:119-126); on Spivak cf. Young (1990c:175); on Said (1978) cf. Young (1990a:126-140) and on Bhabha (1983) cf. Young (1990b:141-156). Cf. also Loomba (1989).

was yet in the process of birth’ (cf. Villa-Vicencio 1985:12; cf. also Hegel n.d. ¶32-36). Naudé in his role as anti-apartheid – and by implication, anti-colonial – public prophetic theologian and activist, and propagator of the Christian ecumenism of the church internationally fits this description. He and others like him formatively contributed not only to the critique of apartheid (and by implication colonialism) but also to a new discourse which paved the ways for new forms of social existence in peace and justice beyond colonialism and apartheid. As such, his discourse is future oriented because it is on the one hand critical of the then current colonial or colonising dispensation, but on the other hand also looks forward via the development of a future discursive formation and dispensation to a future that would transcend the current situation. Focusing on religion, Bosch’s (1985:62) analysis is apt, where he says that if a religion (or a denomination for that matter) does not have ideological legitimacy in a society, such a religion or denomination should continuously strive to make a contribution toward humanising that society. Such an approach is future oriented and a continuous challenge, i.e. to make a contribution towards ‘social change’. He also points out that at the time of writing (mid-1980s), black South Africa interpreted its context as ‘one of injustice and oppression’ and that here religion was used as a challenge to the apartheid ideology.

It is my contention that it is in both these senses that Beyers Naudé can be understood as a post-colonial theologian. Not only did he emerge as a fierce critic of apartheid in his own time and context – throwing his life into the fray existentially – but he also substantially contributed to a future-oriented post-colonial and post-apartheid confessing Christian theological discourse⁵.

⁵ As will become clear, my contention is that Naudé should first and foremost be seen as post-colonial theologian – ‘post-colonial’ in a historical sense of ‘coming after colonialism’ (and not just in terms of the ‘condition of postcoloniality’). This is evident in his numerous references and assumptions about his rejection of British colonialism, and his attempt in his ecumenism to not only reconcile or unite white and black but also the Afrikaner community impacted on by the Anglo-Boer War – and which has been used as critique of Britain in Afrikaner ideology – and English speaking South Africans. This was part of the ideology in terms of which he grew up, but in his dramatic and radical historical re-positioning as national and

Early Influences on Beyers Naudé

Beyers Naudé came from a family with deep roots in Afrikaner South Africa (Villa-Vicencio 1985:3f; Ryan 1990:4-39; de Gruchy 2015:81). Born in an Afrikaner family in the shadow of the Anglo-Boer War, he was named after one of the Boer generals, a close friend of his father's. His father was a very influential minister in the DRC (cf. Ryan 1990:4-19), and it was under his influence that Naudé had an evangelical conversion and decided to study for the ministry (Durand 1985:47; de Gruchy 2015:82). Given the close links between the then National Party and the DRC, his family shared the vision of the National Party, which was pitted against British colonialism, and also propagated forms of racial segregation. Significantly, he also came to the fore as a leader amongst his peers, eventually serving as *primarius* of his hostel, and SRC president at Stellenbosch University (Ryan 1990:20f). In terms of Naudé's theological studies at Stellenbosch, de Gruchy (2015:82f) informs us that Naudé studied under professors who were committed Afrikaner nationalists and 'strict neo-Calvinists (Kuyperians⁶)'. They not only opposed 'liberal theology' and 'evangelical missionary piety' but also the theology of Karl Barth. They defended 'conservative theological and political positions' and did not engage apartheid and nationalism critically. Professor B.B. Keet in Systematic Theology though, was not only critical of apartheid but also propagated Barthian discourse as an alternative Reformed theology.

Other formative theological influences were Johannes du Plessis, 'a former professor of missions, who had been sacked from the post for heresy, but clearly on political grounds'⁷ and G.B.A. Gerdener professor in church history and history of missions. Similarly, it was especially a strong commitment to the 'missionary calling of the church, a commitment nurtured by the pietist and evangelical impetus of the Van Lier, Vos and Huet tradition

international ecumenical theologian, this focus remained part of his call for an ecumenism that is based on social justice and the human dignity of all.

⁶ As is well-known, Abraham Kuyper founded the Dutch Free University in Amsterdam in 1880.

⁷ It needs to be noted that Keet supported Du Plessis and has not supported the apartheid ideology. Significant is especially his short book, *Whither South Africa?* (1955) in which he destroyed biblically-based theological arguments in support of apartheid. He already criticised the theological propagators of apartheid in his writings in the DRC *Kerkbode*, dated from 1939.

in the Dutch reformed Church' that impacted Naudé in the pre-Cottesloe years⁸ (Durand 1985:48). Another influence on him was Dr. Ben Marias, a senior minister in one of the congregations Naudé served. Marais was famous for his anti-apartheid stance⁹ – 'he condemned racial segregation' (de Gruchy 2015:85) – and especially for his book, *Die Kleurkrisis en die Weste*. [*The Coloured Question and the West*.] (1952) (cf. Ryan 1990:36f)¹⁰.

Once Naudé entered the ministry, he took on leadership positions in the church (cf. Ryan 1990:36f), not as an academic, but specialising as pastor, 'whose well-constructed sermons, preaching and biblical teaching was widely acknowledged and influential' (de Gruchy 2015:84; cf. also Ryan 1990:31). He eventually became a member of the secret Afrikaner organisation, the

⁸ This tradition stood over and against the neo-Calvinist Kuyperian tradition as it was developed in South Africa by DRC nationalist-oriented theologians (Durand 1985:47f). Durand (1985:40) points out that the Afrikaner theological interpretation of the Kuyperian tradition, especially hinged on Kuyper's cosmological theology. It combined with a very conservative Reformed Christology and as such prevented critique from a sound and inclusive Christology.

⁹ Marais was a student of B.B. Keet and already wrote against apartheid in the DRC *Kerkbode* during the 1930s as a student. This continued during the 1940s and culminated in his book of 1952 (cf. Durand 1985:46).

¹⁰ This book was significant in that it included questionnaire responses on apartheid by internationally acclaimed theologians such as Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, J.H. Bavinck, H. Berkhof and Franz Leenhardt, who all rejected racial segregation unanimously (cf. Ryan 1990:37). In an interview Naudé commented that the book made an immense impact on him with regard to its 'biblical understanding of church, of race, of human dignity, of the unity of the church, of the whole pattern and structure of the [DRC]'. This generated much doubt in Naudé, especially with regard to his toeing the line of the secret organisation, the Broederbond. It was also during this time that he started with some serious theological studies outside those of his student days – to which he was not seriously committed. He focused on the 'interpretations of the Bible, church history in South Africa and other countries, and on the role of race in the Christian church'. For the first time he also seriously studied Barth and the works of other modern Dutch theologians (cf. Ryan 1990:37).

Broederbond (of which his father was a founder-member), and was elected to the leadership of one of the synods of the DRC (de Gruchy 2015:81; Ryan 1990:31f). He served in six DRC congregations, with Aasvoëlkop his last. He delivered his last sermon as Dutch Reformed minister in 1962, left the church, and took up the full-time editorship of *Pro Veritate*. In 1963, he also collaborated with fellow Christians to found the ecumenical organisation, the Christian Institute. He was forty-eight years old.

Prior to these events though, we can trace at least three important formative influences on the life of Beyers Naudé, that brought him to the decision to resign from the DRC and to take up the editorship of *Pro Veritate*. *First*, one of the most significant influences on him was certainly the struggle of the Afrikaners to rebuild themselves as an ethnic group following the Anglo-Boer War. In this context, de Gruchy (2015:81) refers, to the post-war experience of ‘the defeat of [the Afrikaner] and ... years of economic depression ... [and] hardship’. He says that the war generated much resentment among Afrikaners – which included the Naudé family. In their response, they supported Germany during the First World War and were ‘sympathetic’ to Germany during the Second (de Gruchy 2015:81; cf. also Ryan 1990:6-8; 32f).

It was his family’s response to the Anglo-Boer War¹¹, coupled to their commitment to the DRC and the then National Party, together with his own leadership roles, that Naudé would later draw on for his empowering work for the liberation of South Africa. de Gruchy (2015:81f) points out that it was quite ironic that ‘Naudé would later use the values in support of

¹¹ Durand (1985:43,39) elaborates pointing to the post-war period as a period of the ‘awakening of Afrikaner nationalism’ and Afrikaner ‘civil religion’, i.e. the fusion of ‘Scottish evangelicalism, Kuyprian so-called neo-Calvinism, and secular romantic nationalism’ as expounded by Moodie (1975; cf. also Bosch 1985). Bosch (1985:63-65) shows that, even though the Cape Church did not support the so-called Great Trek (c. 1838), Afrikaner disaffection of the British government goes back to this period. What is significant for our purposes though, is that following the Anglo-Boer War, the white church did recognise the horizontal or socio-economic dimensions of the gospel (Durand 1958:43f). The church engaged the upliftment of so-called poor whites. The problem was that this concern did not include members of other race groups. Durand (1985:49f) labels this the DRC’s ‘schizophrenia’.

Afrikaner liberation from British oppression in his rejection of Afrikaner Nationalism and support for black liberation’.

On the one hand, then, and similar to the Afrikaner critique of the British colonising and imperial forces¹², he would be an outspoken critic of white Nationalist-inspired apartheid and foster a Christian resistance of the apartheid ideology – as it functioned in both church and society. On the other hand, he would dedicate his life to the promotion of the ecumenical movement and the ecumenical understanding of Christianity. Given his background and that of his family, the analogy here certainly holds true for his phenomenal contribution to the critique of the racist apartheid ideology and governments throughout his life (especially since 1963 to his death in 2004) and his life-long dedication to develop an alternative Christian ecumenical confessing discourse.

Second, in 1953, Naudé was part of a youth study group visiting the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Holland, France, Italy, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland over a six month period (cf. Ryan 1990:38). It was during this trip that he encountered numerous questions about apartheid, the DRC’s race policies and injustice in South Africa’s political dispensation, but also the ecumenical church movement. It included his exposure to the significance of the German *Kirchenkampf* [Church Struggle] during the Second World War, that came into being as a response to the established church in Germany’s support of National Socialism and Hitler. On his return, he took up ministry at Potchefstroom, and attended a meeting of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod – an ‘ecumenical body albeit one critical of the World Council of Churches but also of liberal theology’ (de Gruchy 2015:85). de Gruchy (2015:85) points out that, even though theologically conservative, this body rejected apartheid. Another influence on Naudé was his learning from white Dutch Reformed missionaries working in black

¹² It needs to be borne in mind that this critique escalated into the Afrikaner rebellion against the Union government’s decision to support Britain against Germany in the First World War (cf. Bosch 1985:65f). Beyers Naudé was named after one of the Boer generals and close friend of his father. With reference to Albertyn’s (1947) critique of the exploitation of Afrikaner labour due to industrialisation and the urbanisation of the Afrikaner, Bosch (1985:67) calls this developing anti-British theology an Afrikaner ‘liberation theology’.

congregations about the injustices and hardships apartheid policies caused in black communities.

In addition, and prior to the Cottesloe Consultation, Ryan (1990:46-52) traces a number of events during the 1950s which conscientised Naudé about the true nature of the impacts of apartheid on South Africans, as well as the dire poverty in which many people lived – Black, Coloured and Indian, in terms of the racial categories of the time. During this period he also engaged members of the Boederbond, as well as fellow ministers from the DRC about moving beyond the apartheid ideology (cf. Ryan 1990:45,47,48,49). He realised though that these as well as ordinary Afrikaner Christians would not accept his position. He also knew that if he would break with the church, it would be at considerable cost to him and his family. Even so, it prepared him for his role in the Cottesloe Consultation and his leadership of young Afrikaner dissident theologians and ministers, especially missionaries¹³.

A *third* influence, and jointly so, was the Sharpeville massacre (1960) and the Cottesloe Consultation organised by the World Council of Churches from 7 to 14 December 1960.

On 21 March 1960, a crowd of black South Africans descended on the police station of Sharpeville near Vereeniging to hand in their passbooks in protest against the apartheid government. In response police opened fire on the crowd and killed sixty nine people. Some were women and children and some were shot in the back as they were fleeing. There was world-wide condemnation of this event. The South African government justified the event and declared a state of emergency (cf. Bosch 1985:69). This was a very important event, in so far as that it drew a response from the World Council of Churches (WCC). The WCC sent Dr. Robert S. Bilheimer to South Africa to consult with the WCC member churches, the DRC churches of the Cape and Transvaal as well as the Nededuitsch Hervormde Kerk. The outcome –

¹³ Apart from Naudé's critical leadership in the break with Kuyperian theology, as it was influenced by especially the *Kirchenkampf*, Bonhoeffer and the black experience of apartheid, at a more general level, Durand (1985:50f) points to the impact of Barth on the young Afrikaner theologians of the early 1960s, and later Berkouwer. On this point Durand differs from Vorster (1984) who argued that there was no significant paradigm break with the DRC Kuyperians but only a new development of a more critical anti-apartheid theology derived from a new value system.

after numerous discussions and visits, was the organising of the Cottesloe Consultation. Naudé was one of the DRC delegates (cf. Ryan 1990: 52 - 59).

The Cottesloe organising committee decided to request submissions from the participating churches on the following topics (cf. Ryan 1990:56):

- the factual situation in South Africa;
- the Christian understanding of the gospel for relationships among races;
- an understanding of contemporary history from a Christian viewpoint, particularly with regard to rapid social change;
- the meaning of the state of emergency in South Africa; and the
- witness of the church in respect of justice, mission and cooperation.

During the consultation – which generated a substantial communal spirit among delegates from the different race groups – it was decided to prepare a Cottesloe resolution, that member churches could take back to their different church structures for discussion and approval. Even though some representatives from the English speaking churches felt the resolutions did not go far enough, in DRC circles it was perceived to be revolutionary and against the apartheid policies of the government of the day. The most significant to be noted here are:

... that all races had equal rights to share in the privileges and responsibilities of their country, that no Christian could be excluded from any church on the basis of race, that there were no scriptural grounds for prohibiting mixed marriages but that ‘due consideration would be given to certain factors which may make such marriages inadvisable’, that the migrant labour policy was unacceptable, that the policy of job reservation for whites should be replaced with a more acceptable equitable system, that South Africans of all races had the right to own land wherever they were ‘domiciled’, that a policy which permanently denied such people the right to partake in government was not justifiable, and that there was no objection to

direct representation of Coloured people in parliament¹⁴ (cf. Ryan 1990:60).

During the formulation of these resolutions, the Hervormde Kerk representatives withdrew from the consultation. And following the adoption of the resolutions, virtually all the DRC representatives withdrew their support due to pressure from the then Prime Minister, H.F. Verwoerd, and the Broederbond. Beyers Naudé stood firm (Bosch 1985:69-71; Ryan 1990:63f).

Following this event, Naudé was systematically marginalised in the DRC structures, he resigned from the Broederbond, left the DRC, and founded both the ecumenical journal *Pro Veritate* (1962) and the Christian Institute (1963). Reflecting on this chain of events, he points out that it dawned on him, that change in the DRC would only be possible, if he and others like him would leave the church and ‘to be the voice of prophecy and to challenge the church and prepare the way for renewal’ (cf. Ryan 1990:71).

I now turn to three seminal perspectives on Beyers Naudé as public theologian.

Beyers Naudé as Public Theologian

In order to come to an understanding of Beyers Naudé as public theologian, we can draw on the contributions by Ackermann (2003; 2005), and de Gruchy (2005; and 2015).

Beyers Naudé as Connected Critic

In her contribution Ackermann (2003; 2005) draws on a paper by Ronald Thiemann (2003). Having referred to a number of explanations of the term¹⁵,

¹⁴ Though still moderate, these resolutions were nevertheless against all forms of scriptural and theological justification of apartheid. It also spelled out a critique of key apartheid ideological constitutional and legal tenets.

¹⁵ Ackermann (2005:68) points to the fact that the use of the term ‘public theology’ is of recent origin. She then briefly reviews a selection of scholarly views on ‘public theology’, quoting (Koopman 2003), Hollenbach (1979), Marty (1986), and Simons (1995).

Ackermann gives her own definition in practical theological context. Regarding all theology as ultimately also public, she mainly highlights the fact that ‘theology lives in the tension between theory and praxis, between what we believe and what we do about what we believe’. If public theology is practiced in the interests of serving the kingdom of God, it should also include a ‘critical consciousness informed by social analysis, a concern for justice, the creative use of human imagination and the willingness to risk actions that express our hope for a better world’ (Ackermann [2003] 2013:69). Such a public theology also assumes that the church is ‘sensitive’ to the ‘public order’ in which it exists and operates (Ackermann 2013: 69).

Furthermore, Ackermann (2005:74) draws on views of Ronald Thiemann (2003). She points out that his understanding of ‘public theology’ is closely related to the notion of the ‘public theologian as connected critic’ and that churches understand themselves as ‘public theological institutions’. ‘Connected criticism’ he says:

... oscillates between the poles of critique and connection, solitude and solidarity, alienation and authority. Connected critics are those who are fully engaged in the very enterprise they criticize, yet alienated by the deceits and shortcomings of their own community (Thiemann 2003, in Ackermann 2005:69).

Ackermann then uses Thiemann’s notions of *connected critic*, *solitude and solidarity*, and *alienation and authority* as heuristic devices to provide an understanding of Beyers Naudé as public theologian. For the *first*, she refers to his change from his nationalist, Afrikaner household and his ministry in the DRC to his becoming a critic of this same discursive complex while remaining an Afrikaner in heart and soul so to speak. As such, he functioned within the space of ‘loyalties to one’s family, friends, church and people on the one hand, and the injustice and suffering caused to the majority of South Africans on the other’ (Ackermann 2005:70). Similarly, she then also refers to Naudé’s critical connection to the DRC and his commitment to the Christian Institute (CI) and his broader understanding of the church in the international ecumenical movement. Quoting from *Pro Veritate* of May 1976, she enlightens on Naudé’s purpose with *Pro Veritate*: ‘... bringing every facet of life into obedience to Christ [which] means rejecting the heresies of

racism, apartheid and “Christian Nationalism”¹⁶ (Ackermann 2005:71). Since the founding of the Christian Institute (CI) on 15 August 1963, it was especially the black population that found itself increasingly drawn to the CI and Beyers Naudé¹⁷.

On the *second*, Ackermann (2005:72f) refers to the years of Naudé’s banning and house arrest (1977 – 1984). These are generally referred to as his ‘lean years’. Even so, he could see individuals and made the most of it – with a constant stream of black Christians and black leaders visiting him, especially members of the Black Consciousness Movement. In this latter focus, and also in his assistance of young black people who wished to join the ANC, lies his solidarity with the liberation movement during this time.

Third, having started on his own path and commitment to the liberation of South Africa in 1963, Naudé’s progressively and increasing alienation from his own people on the one hand and his authority in the international ecumenical movement on the other could only grow. His alienation from the white Afrikaner church increased with his support of the World Council of Churches’ Programme to Combat Racism, and his writing of ‘The Parting of the Ways’ in *Pro Veritate*. In his view, and with its support of the abhorrent racist ideology, the DRC has been continuously separating and isolating itself from the world Christian community. On the other hand, he increasingly became one more voice among the many voices of the number of white but especially black leaders (from Nxele to Bhambhata,

¹⁶ Significantly, de Gruchy (1985:15) adds that the early issues of *Pro Veritate* ‘also show how much the editor and authors were influenced by the Confessing Church struggle in Nazi Germany, and especially by the Barmen Declaration of May 1934’. In this sense, *Pro Veritate* was connecting with and drawing on the response of the church to oppression and injustice in the past, for inspiration in the present.

¹⁷ Where initial statements in the press about the work of the CI reflected theologically on its aims – ‘to serve Christ’; to believe in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and foster the unity of believers, it progressively developed to encapsulate ‘the centrality of the black viewpoint for the future of Christianity and of justice in South Africa’. The CI and Naudé’s writings represent ‘a prophetic voice’ that also laid the foundations for ‘a prophetic ecumenical movement’ (cf. de Gruchy 1985:16; and Walshe in de Gruchy 1985:17). In these senses, Naudé and the CI became voices of the future.

Plaatje and Dube; Luthuli; Mandela; and Biko to mention just a few) (cf. also Ackermann 2005:74f).

Beyers Naudé as Ecumenical, Confessing Theologian in Solidarity with the Other

With regard to de Gruchy's contribution to this topic, we can refer to his chapter focusing on Beyers Naudé as public theologian (2005).

In his analysis, de Gruchy (2005) refers to Naudé's and the CI's participation in the drafting of the *Message to the People of South Africa*¹⁸ (1968) and then thematises three shifts in his career, the shift from DRC minister to the *ecumenical* church, the shift from *confessional* to *confessing public theologian*, and his *solidarity with the other*. Discursively, *The Message to the People* declared apartheid 'a false gospel, a false ideology' and called upon South African Christians 'to reject [apartheid] unequivocally'¹⁹. This sent shockwaves through the white Afrikaner and white Christian establishments. Even so, it was in this atmosphere that Naudé *first*, functioned as ecumenical public theologian. He regarded the international church as 'one', and called on the church to proclaim 'the gospel of salvation and liberation' as well as the 'transforming of human beings in society' (de Gruchy 2005:83). In this regard – as was already evident in his constructive contribution to the Cottesloe Declaration, Naudé embraced the World Council of Churches, The Reformed Ecumenical Synod, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and the Catholic Church – relationships which were rejected by the white Afrikaner DRC, especially after Cottesloe. In terms of the latter, de Gruchy (2005:84) says Naudé was 'a

¹⁸ Cf. 'South African Council of Churches', 1968 in de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio (1983:154 - 159).

¹⁹ de Gruchy (2005:83) comments that *The Message* was compared to the Barmen Declaration in Germany. He also quotes from the Message: 'that the apartheid ideology could not be squared with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Similar to the impact of the Barmen Declaration that the German Confessing Church produced, *The Message* challenged the Christian conscience. Different from the Barmen Declaration though, it was an overtly 'political document' though (cf. de Gruchy 1985:20f).

Reformed theologian to his fingertips; he was Catholic in his breadth, in his commitment, in his vision, and in what he was doing'. Empirically, for instance, his ecumenical views found expression in his organising of multi-denominational bible study groups – which were rejected by the DRC.

With regard to the *second*, de Gruchy (32005:85) distinguishes between a 'confessional' and a 'confessing' theologian. Whereas the 'confessional theologian' subscribes to the confessions of a church – such as the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and the decisions of the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) to which the DRC subscribed – the 'confessing theologian' shifts from this position by publically saying what is meant by these confessions 'in terms of the issues of the day'. Rather than being a 'false patriot' and propagating a 'false gospel' as *The Message* says, what was needed, was reconciliation that embraced the engagement of the gospel with society – i.e. how the gospel impacts 'education, ... social structures, ... health policy, ... economics, law, and so forth' (de Gruchy 2005:86)²⁰. In order to give expression to this vision, Naudé set up SPROCAS, the Study Project of Christianity in Apartheid Society with six country-wide commissions in South Africa²¹.

The *third* theme, *solidarity with the other* is exemplified in Naudé's third shift – from white to black. This relates to his numerous published views that there can be no 'reconciliation' in South Africa without 'justice',

²⁰ In propagating this focus, Naudé was certainly influenced by his missiological background, especially as it was informed by the contextual engagement of not only the 'spiritual welfare' of the black people of South Africa, but the 'appalling suffering of the blacks under the apartheid system' (cf. Durand 1985:49).

²¹ This would also put the CI on a road where it would not primarily be concerned about converting white views to an anti-apartheid stance, but that it would wholeheartedly commit to the 'black struggle for justice and liberation'. In this regard Sprocas-2, that mainly focused on the black community, played a vital role (de Gruchy 1985:22-24). On the international stage de Gruchy (2005:87) also refers to Naudé's engagements with famed Johannes Vercuyl from the Netherlands, and Dorothea Sölle in a discussion on liberation, the environment and peace. de Gruchy comments: 'This notion of a confessing church that would confess faith publicly around these issues remained with him throughout'.

the embracing of ‘liberation theology’ and the ‘option for the poor’. Institutionally there were three important events in Naudé’s life that impacted on his ministry. These are the SAAC conference on racism (1974) – that lead to the adoption of the resolution on conscientious objection to military service – the 1976 Soweto uprising and the death of Steve Biko. All these also impacted on the CI’s ‘anti-apartheid stance’ in defining ways²² (cf. de Gruchy 2005:88f).

Beyers Naudé, South Africa’s Bonhoeffer?

It is very significant that someone like John de Gruchy, the author of *The Church Struggle in South Africa* (1979) has recently published an article in which he compares Beyers Naudé and Dietrich Bonhoeffer (de Gruchy 2015). Without going into detail, we can point out that it is possible that Naudé already encountered the significance of Bonhoeffer during his visit to Germany in 1953 (de Gruchy 2005:85).

In his article, de Gruchy also refers to Eberhardt Bethge’s statement during his visit to South Africa in 1973 that Naudé was South Africa’s Bonhoeffer. Following his painstaking comparison with regard to this statement, de Gruchy (2015:89) concludes:

Both Bonhoeffer and Naudé became involved in the church struggles in their respective countries against racist ideologies; both ran foul of their respective church authorities because of the stand they took; and both had a remarkable influence on younger theologians and pastors,

²² de Gruchy (1985:17) comments on the fourteen years of the existence of the CI, saying that ‘there was ‘a gradual shift in theological orientation. It was always ecumenical in emphasis, but for most of the sixties its theological orientation was Reformed and its main source of inspiration was the Confessing Church struggle in Nazi Germany. Towards the end of the sixties until its demise, its orientation was more influenced by black and liberation theology’. So the CI would move from an initial propagator of the Confessing Church movement that criticised the institutional church’s failure to play a prophetic role against apartheid to a movement that cultivated church unity in the face of racism and injustice.

not in the formal academic setting, but through biblical expositions, lectures and sermons. Both also risked their lives in solidarity with the oppressed; both were accused of treason and banned from speaking by the state; and both were secretly involved with those who were seeking to overthrow their respective governing regimes.

As Christians, both functioned as ‘faithful witnesses to the gospel against the tyrannies of oppression that confronted their nations’.

Thus, Naudé’s notion of the ecumenical movement was thoroughly impacted by the German confessing church. As such, it was especially after Cottesloe and as editor of *Pro Veritate* and Director of the Christian Institute, that Naudé became internationally well-known in international ecumenical circles. His ecumenical understanding was however not confessional in the sense above, but he functioned as an engaged and confessing public theologian – which in the context of apartheid – had parallels with the confessing church of Second World War Germany. de Gruchy (2015:88) argues that Naudé’s ecumenism grew as he continued to visit the ecumenical church internationally, because he was continuously called on to address audiences in the church and the work of the CI in South Africa, and that he often ‘drew parallels between the church struggle in South Africa and the German *Kirchenkampf*’. During these visits he also referred to the Barmen Declaration and Bonhoeffer’s²³ role. In his mind, the main role of the CI was to establish a South African confessing church movement.

Theological and Contextual Contributions

Naudé himself as well as his peers stated that he was not a very dedicated student of theology during his student years. This changed though with his

²³ Cf. especially de Gruchy’s ‘Beyers Naudé: South Africa’s Bonhoeffer? Celebrating the Centenary of the Birth of Beyers Naudé – 1915-2015’ (2015). Amongst others, he points out that the fact that Naudé was the only South African that attended the first Bonhoeffer Congress in Kaiserwerth in 1971, is an indication of Naudé’s high esteem he had for Bonhoeffer and his legacy in his own life and work. It is also significant that attending Bonhoeffer scholars regarded Naudé as ‘the leading voice in the church struggle against apartheid’.

rising consciousness of the immoral, unjust and iniquitous nature of the apartheid system. In addition to his own immersion in theological studies in response (cf. footnote 7 above), what stands out is his organising of ecumenical Bible Study groups (since the late 1950s); his organising of contextual study groups (though SPROCAS) and his own commitments to deliver lectures and to preach an inclusive biblical ecumenical gospel. What stands out for me here – in addition to his numerous editorials and articles in *Pro Veritate*, lectures and sermons – are the two sermons he preached when he left the DRC and his inaugural address when he took up the full time Directorship of the Christian Institute published as *My Decision* (c. 1963); his Edgar Brookes Lecture at the then University of Natal, titled *Black Anger and White Power in an Unreal Society* (1971); and three sermons from *Vreesloos Gehoorzaam* [*Fearlessly Obedient*] (2013).

My Decision

In this publication by the Christian Institute, Beyers Naudé's three sermons were titled with texts as follows and delivered on the following occasions.

- 'Obedience to God', Acts 5:29: 'We must obey God rather than men'; DRC Congregation Aasvoëlkop 22 September 1963; on the occasion of his announcement that he would take up the directorship of the Christian Institute in permanent capacity (*My Decision* pp. 3-11).
- 'Flame of Fire and Sledgehammer', Jeremiah 23:29: 'Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?' Farewell sermon to the DRC Congregation Aasvoëlkop 3 November 1963 (*My Decision* pp. 12-20); and;
- 'Reconciliation', 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 on reconciliation. Inaugural address on Sunday 15 December 1963, in the Methodist Central Hall, Johannesburg (*My Decision* pp. 20-27).

The first two sermons can be taken as part of his farewell to the DRC – even though he was still hoping at the time that he would retain his ministerial position in the DRC. (This was eventually declined by the DRC commission to consider his application.) After some initial exegetical comments of these

two texts, he applies the *first text* to his own decision to leave the DRC, and the decisions the congregation, the DRC, ministers in the DRC and ‘other churches’ in South Africa need to make in response to Acts 5:29. On his own decision, he says that he could not leave *Pro Veritate* and the Christian Institute and continue with his pastoral work as if nothing is wrong in South Africa. This was because this text had great significance for him – it meant a choice, to ‘obey God rather than man!’ He could only choose to obey God and he therefore had to go²⁴ (‘Obedience to God’ pp. 7f).

He then challenged his congregation that he was leaving, the DRC, ministers in the DRC and ‘other churches’ in South Africa to make a choice ‘to witness to the truth of God’s Word in the spirit of the prophets and the reformers’; to make a choice between ‘obedience in faith and subjection to the authority of the Church’; ‘to live by [God’s] word’; to make a choice between ‘the Kingdom of God, or our people’ (‘Obedience to God’ pp. 7-9). He continued to say that the church needs to develop greater Scriptural illumination on the ‘burning questions of Church and state, of kingdom and people, of race and colour’. It was called on to respond to these issues and ‘not to remain silent’ (‘Obedience to God’ pp. 9f).

From ecumenical perspective, it is significant that Naudé opposes the choice between the kingdom of God and ‘people’ [*volk*], the Afrikaners. He also challenges believers to recognise and critically engage ‘injustice where injustice has occurred (also against the Afrikaner)’. His inclusive call to transcend natural exclusionary social systems is also evident in his challenge to all ‘churches and peoples and languages and races’ (‘Obedience to God’ p.11).

In the *second text* on Jeremiah, Naudé again provide some exegetical comments and then proceed to apply the text. Significantly he says about Jeremiah – and this is the contextual analogy – that ‘He was called upon by God to pronounce some of the most searing judgements against his own people that we have ever heard from the lips of a prophet’. This was during a time that Israel’s own existence as a people was challenged (‘Flame of Fire and Sledgehammer’ p.12).

²⁴ The DRC, who ironically elected Naudé as moderator of the Southern Transvaal synod on 26 March 1963, asked him to resign as editor of *Pro Veritate* at the same synod (cf. Ryan 1990:74-76). In terms of his own conscience, he could only make one choice.

Reflecting on ‘the Word of God’ in Jeremiah, he also said that it does not only function like a hammerblow, but also as a word that ‘continually reconciles, recreates, renews’. As such it is the ‘light of ... life, the hope of ... existence, the power for ... struggle for each community, each group, each nation, each country’ (‘Flame of Fire and Sledgehammer’ p. 14).

He then talks about how people, including believers, tend to evade the prophetic challenge, by following false prophets, following tradition rather than the Word, do not follow through with the demands of the Word during the working week. This however leads to destruction. In South African context, the consequences are that people at the time have been writing about this in the newspapers. This, Naudé sees as good, because it impacted on the church, so that the church can engage the crucial issues in society, such as ‘marriage and family life, labour and technology, disease, prayer and healing, race relations, the threat of the atomic bomb, the vocation of the church with regard to the state, the whole question of moral values’ (‘Flame of Fire and Sledgehammer’ p. 18).

He concluded the sermon by referring to his leaving the congregation for good. And that he can only hope that they will remember him as someone sent by God and someone who ‘continually tried to summon [them] and bind [them] to the obedience to God’s Word’ (‘Flame of Fire and Sledgehammer’ p. 19).

In the *third text* on ‘Reconciliation’, Naudé again makes some exegetical comments, especially on the issue that this theological principle is unique in religion – i.e. the Christian message of reconciliation. It ‘means ... the supreme act of sacrificial love of God to restore the true relationship between God and [humanity] and vice versa’ (‘Reconciliation’ p. 21).

Central related concepts are ‘forgiveness’; that the offer of reconciliation was made to the world – characterised by ‘people and nations gone astray, lost in their hatreds and strifes, their fears and prejudices, their selfishness and waywardness, their disunity and bitterness’; that God’s gift is based on the ‘incarnation of the Word; it impacts on relations to all human beings’ (‘Reconciliation’ pp. 21-23). Naudé concludes by saying that no reconciliation is possible ‘without conversation’ and an acknowledgement of the ‘deep-rooted prejudices of the past still keeping Afrikaans- and English-speaking people apart, as well as the baseless fear of many whites toward [blacks] and the senseless hatred of many blacks toward whites’. In terms of the Christian message, a ‘new mutual trust [can] be built’ between people

beyond their prejudices and exclusionary practices ('Reconciliation' p. 24f). In Christian context this calls for a 'new commitment' to the kingdom of God though. This message he regarded as more important for social unity than any secular political, educational, economical or social message ('Reconciliation' p. 26).

Black Anger and White Power in an Unreal Society

This text was Naudé's 1971 lecture as part of the Edgar Brookes Lecture series at the University of Natal. Naudé says that the lectures derives from the eruption of violence at the Gelvandale Coloured township in Port Elizabeth. This was followed by pronouncements of black leaders on the 'frustrations, bitterness and anger' about apartheid and police brutality among black people. Reflecting on the nature of the 'social system of cultural and racial separations which the Whites have built', Naudé says he cannot but term it an 'unreal society maintained by White power and now being threatened by Black anger' (Naudé 1971:3).

Naudé (1971:3-8) then expands on this view by providing critical perspectives thematically on why this is an 'unreal society'. It is unreal, he says: 'morally'; 'politically'; 'economically'; 'educationally'; and 'socially'. He explains this diagnosis as follows.

- *The morally unreal society:* Naudé regards the claims that South Africa is a Christian country, with a Christian government as mockery. The reason is that it does not adhere to the basic Christian command of 'love to God and love of one's neighbour'. He also points to nearly a hundred legal acts on the basis of which so-called 'separate development', and 'separate freedoms' are enforced.
- *The politically unreal society:* Naudé points to the so-called homeland policies of the apartheid regime, indicating that they are both 'unrealistic and unrealizable', i.e. that it is a political system that claims full racial and ethnic equality of people living in the so-called homelands. This claim to equality is a mockery too as twenty three years after the related laws were promulgated, it is 'a political system and structure where a much larger number of people have less political rights than at any time of the history of our country'. Claims with regard to South Africa being a democracy, are also a mockery.

Rather we have an ‘oligarchy practiced and controlled by a small White minority with the deliberate and intentional exclusion in political participation of four-fifths of the population’.

- *The economically unreal society*: The society is unreal in that the economy, the laws that protect it, and economic privileges remain in the hands of a ‘small white minority’. In contrast, he argues for a system which would allow all to share ‘more equally’ in it.
- *The educationally unreal society*: Naudé regards the ‘separate schools’ system as ‘irrational’ and that it has been evolved and implemented to the detriment of the majority of the inhabitants of South Africa. This is so not only with regard to the educational separation between Afrikaans and English, but also White and Black. The claim for education for ‘separate languages and cultures with separate identities [that] require separate facilities’ is a mockery because it does not treat people equally. He also criticised so-called Bantu education, because it derives from ‘pseudo-educational (but in fact purely ideological) presuppositions’. Moreover, it is not supported by black people, is ‘educationally unsound, economically wasteful, culturally harmful, and politically distasteful’.
- *The socially unreal society*: Here Naudé reflects on the structure the White minority developed for the ‘social separation of people from different races and colours’ even in the same geographical area. He also singles out the mixed marriages act as ‘twisted’, as ‘serving ideological ends’, and distorting of ‘the Biblical concept of sex and marriage’.

Reflecting on these perspectives on South Africa’s ‘unreal society’, Naudé says that this has been ‘rejected by all civilized communities as not in keeping with the ethical values, cultural norms and economic demands of the world to-day’ (Naudé 1971:7). Reflecting then on the black response and the apartheid suppression of resistance and retaliation, he singles out five factors which provide hope in the then current depressing circumstances (cf. Naudé 1971:8-10). These are:

- The completion of the forces of decolonisation on the African continent, but then still excluding South Africa;

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- The world's recognition of the 'dangers which racialism in any form constitute to sound human relations and to world peace'.
- The crucial role of the 'black labour force in the South African economy, and the fact that the large and evergrowing lack of White skilled labour necessitated the relaxation of job reservation laws and the training of many Blacks for skills.
- The discovery of the 'serious and ever enlarging gap between the affluence and economic development of the First (Western White) World and the poverty and economic backlog of the Third (Non-Western Black) World.
- Finally, the emergence of Black Power consciousness and 'a new call for Black Power and Black Identity'.

With the rising tide of Black criticism of White apartheid and privilege, Naudé asks what could be expected in the near future. 'He provides six 'prophetic' perspectives (Naudé 1971:11-13).

- The political awareness of all Black communities in South Africa is going to gather increased momentum.
- Existing Black organisations will be gaining more support and new all-Black movements will emerge. Everywhere voices will arise to africanise
- Increasingly there will be an organisational and/ or psychological link-up with Black organisations in other parts of the world.
- If the pace of change towards full political, economic and social participation on a basis of justice is not substantially increased in the near future for all Black groups it is inevitable that the existing bitterness and emerging anger will lead to the eruption of violence.
- The architects and protagonists of the concept of separate development will very soon discover ... that the hope of voluntary full acceptance of apartheid by the Blacks as envisaged and idealised by the Whites, is turning into disillusionment.
- The position of organisations usually described in the terms of 'White liberal' or 'White controlled' will increasingly become unenviable – meaning that there will be an inevitable Black withdrawal from such organisations, in order to go-it-alone.

Looking back at history, at 1971 when Naudé gave this lecture, with his own prophetic forecasts, we can just marvel at how right he was. This also applies to his statement that: ‘Under such conditions and in such a climate the task of reconciliation will become increasingly difficult’ (Naudé 1971:13). This is so, because he sees an ever greater danger of an escalation of the situation in South Africa to violent engagement – White versus Black and Black versus White. Rather than going this route, he argues that violence should be rejected, and that the country should rather follow a path towards peace. Central to this, is the quest for justice for all. He also says: ‘To meet Black anger with duplicity or delay is dangerous. To try and meet it with brute White force is fatal’ (Naudé 1971:14).

Naudé (1971:15) concluded his lecture by saying that the initiative is now in the hands of those who attended the lecture – ‘... to heed and to act to build a responsible society where there will be freedom and justice for all’.

Fearlessly Obedient

The third section under this heading on Naudé’s theological and contextual contributions comprises my selection of three sermons from Naudé’s collection published as *Vreesloos Gehoorsaam [Fearlessly Obedient]* (2013:185-187; 199-202; 203-206). These are:

- ‘A Valid Christian Ministry’ in which he answers the question: ‘How would you summarise the goals and aims of the Christian Institute?’, sermon based on 2 Corinthians 5:1-6:9, at Yeoville Anglican Church, 22 February 1976.
- ‘God’s Message for his Church’ delivered at the time of Naudé’s house arrest, the suspension of the DRC from the Reformed Ecumenical Council, and some statements that would eventually lead to the Belhar Confession. The sermon is based on 2 Chronicles 7:11-20; 1 Peter 2:4-9; and Matthew 21:12-16, delivered at St. George’s Anglican Parish, Parktown, Johannesburg on 17 October 1982.
- ‘An Authentic Confessing Church’, focusing on the three features love, unity and justice – including gender. The sermon is based on Acts 2:42-47; and Isaiah 59:21-60:5 – delivered at St. Alfred’s Anglican Church, Pretoria on 6 May 1984.

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In his *first sermon*, his exposition of the goals and aims of the Christian Institute, Naudé divides his tripartite answer into two sections each – a theological reflection followed by an application to the Christian Institute. The theological reflections deal with the themes of:

- A prophetic ministry;
- A reconciling ministry; and
- A liberating ministry.

On *prophetic ministry*, his exposition is contextual in that he regard the Old Testament prophets as examples as to how to ‘proclaim and interpret the course of [historical] events in the light of God’s will for his people’. This means that the prophets have taken ‘cognisance of all current events in the life of the people of God, especially as they related to social evils deeply affecting the life and witness of the People of Israel’; and an involvement in the relationship between ‘church and state as it was called upon to interpret political events and actions in the light of God’s will for his people and when necessary, to pass divine judgement on actions of both political and church leaders’. This meant political action, but this is so because ‘religion and politics can never be fully separated’. Third, the prophets and prophetic schools ‘were called upon to pass judgement and grace upon leaders and people in both state and church. Whenever there were glaring situations of injustice, exploitation, spiritual and moral decay, there the voice of the prophets were heard (‘A Valid Christian Ministry’ p. 185). In these senses, the Christian Institute, *Pro Veritate*, SPROCAS and various of his public statements, have all engaged in the prophetic ministry.

On the *reconciling ministry*, Naudé (‘A Valid Christian Ministry’ p. 186) points out that all societies internationally experience ‘forces of separation, division, estrangement leading to tension, bitterness and enmity’. In such contexts, in a ‘situation of conflict and estrangement between [person] and [person], group and group, culture and culture, race and race, religion and religion, nation and nation’, the Christians worldwide are called on to engage the difficult task of ‘bridging divisions, recovering unity and creating true community’. With regard to the CI, Naudé says that it fostered reconciliation on the basis of justice – the two cannot be separated – and ‘solidarity with the oppressed’, both White and Black.

On the *liberating ministry*, his theological reflection turns on the fact

that the central tenet of the Christian faith is the belief ‘Christ frees and liberates, [that] Christ is busy restoring his Kingdom of love, peace and justice on earth and he calls upon [all] to pray for the coming of that Kingdom’. This, he argues should impact on the international realities of ‘oppressed groups and communities, [who are] suffering because of economical injustices, political exploitation and the denial of their basic human rights and a lack of opportunities, people crying out for liberation from intolerable conditions’. He then asks that Christians should reflect on how the Christian message – liberation in the Christian sense – impacts not only on ‘personal, spiritual experience’, but how it impacts ‘the social, economic, political spheres of life’ (‘A Valid Christian Ministry’ p. 186). The CI includes both these senses – ‘personal liberation’, as well as how this impacts on the liberation ‘blacks are seeking’ and ‘whites need’ (‘A Valid Christian Ministry’ p. 187).

In his *second sermon* on ‘God’s Message for his Church’, Naudé (‘God’s Message for his Church’ p. 199) first reflects on the notion of the physical building of the St. Georges Anglican Church in Parktown, on the significance of Israel’s temple and the fact that such buildings signify the divine presence among people. He points to the fact that St. Georges was built in 1904 – ‘two years after the end of the Anglo-Boer War which brought so much bitterness between Boer and Britton in South Africa’ – and this building as well as the Israelite temple should signify God’s life, love, comfort and justice in ‘obedience to Christ’. However, if the believers do not adhere to these values, ‘the people will be uprooted from the land, its witness will be rejected, its life will be destroyed; but equally, if [the church] obeys God’s purpose, it will flourish and prosper, it will become a source of life, of justice expressed, of liberation and reconciliation for all people of the land’ (‘God’s Message for his Church’ p. 199). Naudé also reflects on the suspension of the DRC and the NHK from the Reformed Ecumenical Council – a body that declared apartheid a heresy – and the irony that the DRC at one point declared the CI as heretical. But now, a body representing seventy million Christians worldwide has done this. He regarded this as a ‘moment of truth’ for the DRC and NHK. He then continued to challenge the congregation – as well as all Christians – to engage in the challenge as to how ‘faith relates to the political, the social and economic policies of our country’. The problem is that many churches in South Africa continue to refuse ‘to speak out’ and ‘to act’. It is because of the evasive action by the church in

South Africa that the crisis in South Africa is ‘deepening’ and the conflict is ‘sharpening’. Rather, if the church engages these challenges, he says, that he is convinced that there will be a ‘new life ... a new unity, a new recognition of the dignity of the person will be discovered as we again make clear to the world that God’s image is to be discovered and to be honoured in every person, regardless of culture or race or colour or creed and a new authentic expression will be found in true reconciliation that will come about in and thorough Christ’ (‘God’s Message for his Church’ p. 201). With regard to the statements that would lead to the Belhar Confession later on, Naudé provides a brief statement of the main themes²⁵ and then points out that it forms ‘the basis of a united non-racial Reformed Church of South Africa. A church with its arms wide open to people of widely-diverging cultures, races and social standing as the church, the Body of Christ’ (‘God’s Message for his Church’ p. 201).

In his *third sermon*, ‘An Authentic Confessing Church’, a sermon on Acts 2:42-47 and Isaiah 59:21-60:5, Naudé (‘An Authentic Confessing Church’ p. 204) reflects on the notion of the ecumenical. He starts off by referring to where the word appears in the Bible, viz.:

- The Roman Empire (Luke 2:1);
- The world in general (Luke 4:5; 21:24)
- The inhabitants of the world (Acts 17:6,31); and
- The cosmos (Hebrews 2:5).

In his interpretation though, he regards the ‘ecumenical’ as ‘God’s purpose for the whole world’ (‘An Authentic Confessing Church’ p. 204). His sermon is divided into two parts, each reflecting on the three main characteristics he has identified for what ecumenical stands for. These are that the church constitutes:

- A community with a new dimension of love;
- A community with a new experience of unity; and

²⁵ These themes are: 1) God’s concern for his church; 2) the true unity of all believers; 3) the meaning of reconciliation; 4) the challenge of justice; 5) and the price of obedience.

- A community with a new understanding of justice.

He mentions these three in addition to others such as: ‘respect for human dignity, humility, purity’. Reflecting then on these characteristics, he says that *love* stands for the Pentecost event, that it is not related to the ordinary concept of ‘goodwill, sentimental attachment or purely human ties of friendship’ but ‘love ... offered to every human being regardless of religion or class or race or sex ... [that drives] out all fear towards any person’ (‘An Authentic Confessing Church’ p. 204).

With regard to *unity* he says that the coming of the Spirit ‘transcended the existing divisions of class, of culture, of tribe and neighbour, of race and sex’. This does not mean a denial of differences, but rather ‘an acceptance of [the] ... rich diversity of human society on condition that these differences were not made a principle of separation or division among believers’. Such unity should find visible and concrete expression in the church, or ‘otherwise could lead to division, separation and conflict’ (‘An Authentic Confessing Church’ p. 204).

With regard to the community’s new understanding of *justice*, it is significant that he says that the outpouring of the Spirit caused the Christians to start ‘... to break bread from house to house, to share their income and possessions, to extend this care for people’s material need to new Christians and thus to make available in love the resources of the rich for the needs of the poor’. And referring to the appointment of deacons for the Greek-speaking widows, he points out that this gesture means that the Christians ‘... discovered the real meaning of justice in distribution and freedom of each individual believer to give or withhold as he/ she felt urged by God’s Spirit and of a deep concern for truth and justice in all their dealings with each other’ (‘An Authentic Confessing Church’ p. 204).

Having provided a description of the characteristics that should characterise the ecumenical, he then proceeds to elaborate on the implications these characteristics have for the Christian faith. In other words, what does it mean to live in love; to live in unity; and to live in justice? On *love*, he says:

- It uncovers and brings into the open deep-seated forms of prejudice and bias towards people of other groups, class, races, or religions and removes them not by force, but [embraces them in] love;

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- It creates a new sensitivity for the needs of all human beings, a new concern for all who are suffering for whatever reason; and
- It strengthens the urge to reconcile opposing individuals and groups as well as conflicting interests and systems ('An Authentic Confessing Church' p. 205).

On living in *unity*, Naudé points to the fact that such unity is a crucial issue facing the church as whole in South Africa. He elaborates as follows:

- That it confronts the DRC with the declaration of apartheid as a heresy; and the statements by the NG Sendingkerk;
- That it challenges the multiracial churches supporting the ecumenical movement and their members to move beyond mere verbal declarations on church unity towards real unity in which all are included - Black, Coloured, Indian and Afrikaans.
- That it challenges all churches to be unified, regardless of their cultural or language backgrounds as well as political policies or laws forcibly separating people ('An Authentic Confessing Church' p. 205).

Coming to the community as a new grouping with a new understanding of justice, he argues that the justice the church proclaims does not include only Christians, but that it is 'undividable'. Similar to the Christians at Pentecost who were challenged to share income and possessions, Christians are challenged to share their wealth, especially where we have an affluent minority. They are challenged to constructively engage 'the black poverty of millions in our land'. Reflecting on the realities of the 1980s he also asks for the critical Christian engagement of the 'serious discrimination in education between white and black' and 'the policy of forced removals and resettlement of millions of people' ('An Authentic Confessing Church' p. 205).

When he summarises his notion of the ecumenical in South Africa he says there is a need for Christians of all denominations to:

... become part [in] South Africa of a confessing movement, a confessing community proclaiming the Lordship of Christ and living

out the life of the Kingdom of God in obedience to Christ (‘An Authentic Confessing Church’ p. 206).

Critical Perspectives

Against the background of the argument above, we can deduce and proffer a number of critical perspectives on Beyers Naudé as post-colonial theologian.

1 Throughout Naudé’s *oeuvre*, there are indications that his growing up in the shadow of the Anglo-Boer War, impacted on the analogies he drew between the Afrikaner discontent against the British and that of Black resistance and critique of apartheid. There is one difference though – and this is typical of the values embedded in post-colonial criticism – that namely the diversity and pluralism of the post-colony is to be strived for (and not merely acknowledged) and not that of single ethnic resistances and oppressions. In Naudé’s case, this took on the character of his all-inclusive ecumenism that includes Afrikaner, English, Black, Coloured, and Indian, into a single multiform unity.

2 In his role as public theologian Naudé was exemplary in his commitment to be a connected critic. He always formed part of the existential issues of his day, took an existential decision to leave the DRC, and start afresh on a new ecumenical road. In this it is apt to describe him as an ecumenical, confessing theologian in solidarity with the other. Foundationally influenced by the German *Kirchenkampf* and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, his own resistance against apartheid and his prophetic propagation of the end of apartheid as well as a prophetic justice for all, placed him on a road of confrontation with the apartheid security state. This did not lead to his death – as in the case of Bonhoeffer – but severe marginalisation by his own church and people, and ultimately house arrest for seven years (1977 - 1984).

3 Throughout his ministry – and starting with his questioning of the legitimacy of the apartheid ideology in the early 1950s – Naudé practiced as confessing theologian. In post-colonial contexts, this stance and positioning is similar to the anti-secular postmodernist scholarly discourse that acknowledges the realities and challenges posed by people’s religious

commitments. In post-colonial contexts, the significance of Christianity – as in Naudé’s case – but also the equitable recognition of fellow religious people to their own religious commitments, must be acknowledged and accepted in the public sphere. In this sense, the question must be asked as to the message of the leaders in the religions on this point. Judging from Naudé’s sermons, his own stance was accommodatory and inclusive of all people despite their diversity. As we know, he also worked hand in hand with the South African Communist Party since the 1980s – whom he criticised earlier in his career – but without relenting on his commitments to social and cultural justice. What stands out though is his relentless commitment to values such as the human dignity of all, social justice, equity, and religious ecumenism.

Conclusion

In this article, I have tried to provide an overview of some of the seminal perspectives that may give us some insight into us appreciating Beyers Naudé as post-colonial theologian. I have overviewed some discursive influences on him, how these contributed to his choices and commitments to the ecumenical movement, his life as a ‘public theologian’, and a brief selection of his theological contributions mainly derived from sermons.

One cannot disown one’s own history, upbringing and often, the parameters and constraints that set the framework(s) for live. Yet, as is evident in Naudé’s life and commitments, one can make choices that transcend such backgrounds. Given his own background and his early decision to become a minister in the DRC, these did not neutralise his own conscience-based decisions. As he came to understand the true inhuman nature of the apartheid system and its scholarly paradigm, he finally did not waver to take the decisions to start *Pro Veritate*, the Christian Institute, and to dedicate his life to the fostering of a local Christian ecumenical movement that impacted internationally. That he did this as confessing public theologian, as someone who continued to spread the message of the gospel irrespective of humanly-made systems of exclusion and human denigration, makes him a truly constructive contributor to liberation, freedom and social justice. In this sense his message also transcends his own time and context. It was not only relevant in his own time but is also relevant today in all race, tribal, religious, gender, class and social systems contexts characterised by a variety of forms of marginalisation and oppression.

As is evident from his own prophetic ministry, this did not only derive from the critical voice of the prophets – to ‘judge’ or ‘pronounce grace’ as he said – but to also provide pointers to the future. In this Naudé was exceptional, and it is also this future-oriented message that needs to be heard today. If exclusionary and oppressive regimes continue to impact society without a critical account to justice, reconciliation and peace, the world will increasingly become a worse and not better place to live in.

Finally, it is significant that Naudé’s ecclesiology derives from Pentecost, the paradigm and dispensation of the Spirit. Ultimately, it is this context in which the prophetic voice and ministry of the church internationally must be understood – in terms of the dimensions of love, unity and social justice inclusive of all humanity. As such, Naudé’s theology provides important insights for post-colonial contexts still characterised by humanly-made exclusionary and repressive socio-economic systems and academic paradigms. These, in addition to his message of the equitable human dignity of all, constitute some of his most seminal contributions to theology in his capacity as post-colonial theologian.

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