

## “Poverty and privilege”: Re-hearing sermons of Beyers Naudé on religion and justice<sup>1</sup>

Johan Cilliers  
Stellenbosch University, South Africa  
jcilliers@sun.ac.za

### Abstract

This paper attempts to identify some ethical dimensions in the preaching of Beyers Naudé, as being representative of a structural-contextual-ethical mode of moral discourse. Cognisance is taken in particular of sermons preached shortly before the first general elections were held in South Africa, and sermons preached in the aftermath of this historical event. This is done to determine whether any fundamental changes took place in Naude's thinking on justice during these times of transition. A brief discussion of different theological discourses on restorative justice in South Africa is given. The paper concludes with some observations on the continuous relevance of Naudé for the current debate on restorative justice in South Africa.

### Key words

*Poverty, privilege, justice, Beyers Naudé*

## 1. Introduction

The history and legacy of Beyers Naudé (also affectionately known as “Oom Bey”) has been well documented, and need not be repeated at length here.<sup>2</sup>

---

- 1 Paper delivered at the International Summer School held at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa during 24–26 February 2015 on the theme: *Religion, Law, and Justice*. In collaboration with the Humboldt University, Berlin, The University of Stellenbosch, and the University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- 2 The legacy of Naudé is discussed in for instance Hansen, L. (ed.), *The legacy of Beyers Naudé: Beyers Naudé Centre Series on Public Theology Volume 1* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2005); Hansen, L. & Vosloo, R. (eds.), *Oom Bey for the future: engaging the witness of Beyers Naudé: Beyers Naudé Centre Series on Public Theology Volume 2* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2006); etc.

In broad strokes it could be said that Beyers Naudé grew up in a home where patriotism was the order of the day, and that he was identified at an early age as a possible leader in the Afrikaner community.<sup>3</sup> He studied theology at Stellenbosch University (1932–1937), and served on several student councils, often as chairperson. In due time he became a member of the then powerful and elitist Afrikaner institution called Die Broederbond, and also Moderator of the Southern Transvaal Dutch Reformed Synod. In short: Naudé was positioned to play a leading role in Afrikaner culture.

All of this however changed when Naudé felt his conscience being stirred by what was happening during the time of Apartheid, particularly the massacre at Sharpeville (21<sup>st</sup> of March 1960) resulting in a decisive, and for many, shocking and dramatic breakaway from powerful Afrikaner circles, and identifying with the ideals of the political struggle against Apartheid.<sup>4</sup> Naudé consequently felt compelled to resign as minister from the Dutch Reformed Congregation of Aasvoëlkop in Johannesburg, delivering a moving farewell sermon there on Sunday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September 1963, after much inner struggle.<sup>5</sup>

Some scholars point out that this fundamental decision by Beyers Naudé to practise his theology from within the paradigm of the “option for the poor” ultimately represents a shift away from a race struggle to a class struggle.<sup>6</sup> It is in the light of this shift that someone like Boudewijn Sjollema, former Director of the World Council of Church’s Programme against Racism, could say that Naudé was in fact a global prophet, having an impact far beyond the borders of South Africa: “Beyond, beyond – absolutely! ... In

---

3 *Vreesloos Gehoersaam. 'n Keur uit Beyers Naudé se preke 1939–1997*. Beyers Naudé Centre Series on Public Theology. Red. Murray Coetze, Len Hansen, Robert Vosloo (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2013), vii.

4 “Dr Beyers Naudé would be a good example of someone who could be said to have taken this option for the poor and suffered the consequences ...” Albert Nolan, *The option for the poor in South Africa. Resistance and Hope. South African essays in honour of Beyers Naudé*. Ed Charles Villa-Vicencio and John W. De Gruchy (Cape Town and Johannesburg: Eerdmans/ Grand Rapids, 1985), 189.

5 Beyers Naudé, *My Land van Hoop: Die Lewe van Beyers Naudé* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1995), 68.

6 Murray Coetze, *Die “Kritiese stem” teen apartheidsteologie in die Ned. Geref. Kerk (1905–1974): 'n Analise van die bydraes van Ben Marais en Beyers Naudé*, Unpublished PhD, University of Western Cape, 2010, 517.

that sense Beyers was surpassing, was bypassing the national South African context and was going far beyond. I think that is how the ecumenical movement will recognize him, or ought to recognize him in so far as it hasn't happened.”<sup>7</sup>

As a result of his moral choice against Apartheid, Naudé was treated as a *persona non grata* by the powers that be, jailed and placed under house arrest. In fact, his previous seemingly powerful position within the Afrikaner community was completely inverted – he became a figure of resentment (often called a “traitor”), and was alienated, branded as a collaborator with the “enemy”. During this time, however, he never gave up hope for the achievement of a “new South Africa”, where justice would prevail, as frequently repeated in his autobiography, *My Land van hoop* (My Land of Hope).<sup>8</sup> In the process, Naudé bravely swam against the ethos of fear that permeated a large portion of the Afrikaner community. In his own words: “I would like to mention in explaining the Afrikaner’s traditional attitude to race is *fear* ... for the ordinary Afrikaner his traditional enemy always had a black face or included one – and it is this fear which determined so much of his attitude and policy towards his non-white neighbour in this country.”<sup>9</sup>

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 2015, we celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of Beyers Naudé. He has rightly been hailed as an icon in the struggle against apartheid.<sup>10</sup> He was of course not the only one – joining the ranks of people like Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak.<sup>11</sup> All of these preachers brought a distinctive style of preaching to the struggle against Apartheid.

---

7 *Cultivating Seeds of Hope. Conversations on the Life of Beyers Naudé*. Ed. Murray Coetzee, Retief Muller, Len Hansen (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2015), 307.

8 Naudé, *My Land van Hoop*, 151.

9 Beyers Naudé, “The Afrikaner and Race Relations,” In Hansen, L.D. (ed.), *The Legacy of Beyers Naudé* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2005), 59.

10 *Vreesloos Gehoorsaam*, v.

11 The legacies of Boesak and Tutu are discussed in for instance Johan Cilliers, The Living Voice of the Gospel? Re-hearing a Prophetic Voice from Apartheid South Africa. *Viva Vox Evangelii – Reforming Preaching. Societas Homiletica 9* Hrsg Jan Hermelink und Alexander Deeg (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2013), 161–180; Johan Cilliers, *Predigt als politisches und eschatologisches Ereignis. Wahrnehmungen aus Südafrika. In Erlebnis Predigt*. Eine Veröffentlichung des Ateliers Sprache e. V., Braunschweig (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2014), 123–140; Allan Boesak, *The Finger of*

In my opinion, the different styles of these three preachers could make for interesting discussion, and could be broadly described as follows (although these distinctions are obviously not watertight; rather with elements thereof being present in the sermons of all three): Allan Boesak preached in a rhetorically masterful and often confrontational manner, moving masses and unmasking the powers of the day.<sup>12</sup> Tutu, doing the same, added the inimitable dimension of holy wit, often revealing the insanity of the political structures by means of lampooning, in effect unmasking the status quo by means of the folly of the Gospel.<sup>13</sup> Beyers Naudé contributed to all of this in his unique way, by logically spelling out the consequences of certain actions, within the framework of a specific understanding of ethical responsibilities.

It would indeed be an interesting exercise to plot the styles of these three South African “prophets” against the distinctions made by someone like James Gustafson concerning the variety of moral discourses that are possible.<sup>14</sup> Gustafson refers, *inter alia*, to a moral discourse of indictment that confronts and reveals the roots and effects of moral injustices in society – much like Allan Boesak did and is still doing, speaking in such a manner that a sense of urgency, even crises is evoked. A second mode that Gustafson refers to is the so-called *utopian moral discourse*, using language that not only reveals the defects of the status quo, but creates pictures of a hopeful vision, of a better future – like Desmond Tutu did time and again,

---

*God. Sermons on Faith and Responsibility.* Translated from Afrikaans by Peter Randall (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1979).

- 12 Cf. Dirk Smit, Resisting “Lordless powers”? – Boesak on power, *Prophet from the South: Essays in honour of Allan Aubrey Boesak*. Editors: Prince Dibeela, Puleng Lenka-Bula, Vuyani Vellem (Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2014), 11: “Allan Boesak has always been keenly interested in power... This certainly explains many of his own choices and commitments, his own involvement in many struggles and his own outspoken positions on many issues.”
- 13 When Dr. Piet Koornhof declared boldly during a visit abroad that “apartheid is dead”, Tutu retorted, “Apartheid, we were told by Dr. Koornhof, is dead. Sadly we have not been invited to the funeral, nor have we seen the corpse.” Charles Campbell and Johan Cilliers, *Preaching Fools. The Gospel as a Rhetoric of Folly* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2012), 196.
- 14 Cf. James Gustafson, *Varieties of moral discourse: prophetic, narrative, ethical and policy* (Michigan, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 269ff.

even in the darkest hours of Apartheid, by speaking of a new South Africa where we all, “white and black together”, will be living in justice.<sup>15</sup>

Gustafson also refers to the *ethical or technical mode of moral discourse*, in which precise distinctions and logic, also in explaining the consequences of core concepts like justice and the articulation of the rational grounds for ethical values shared by believers and non-believers, are typical features. Openness for dialogue is a fundamental characteristic of this mode of moral discourse.<sup>16</sup> In my opinion, this could in fact be an indication of Naudé’s preaching style. His sermons could probably not be described as rhetorical masterpieces, perhaps rather as brief and often point-like, in accordance with his logical style of presentation, and in which he repeatedly calls for (ecumenical) dialogue. Many of his sermons are only available to us as sketches – outlining that which was of importance for him.<sup>17</sup> In this paper I limit myself to two of these sermon outlines, particularly in terms of their articulation of Naudé’s convictions concerning justice, and allowing as much of his own voice as possible to be heard.

## 2. “Poverty and privilege”

In a short sermon entitled *Poverty and privilege*, preached at the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa in Pretoria on 9 February 1992 – about two years before the first democratic elections took place in South Africa – Naudé refers to the “astoundingly large number of references in Scriptures to the poor, the widow, the hungry, the foreigner ...”, and confirms his belief that God calls the church to stand in solidarity with these marginalised people.<sup>18</sup> And, true to his logical style of pointing out consequences, he spells out in four points, *in concreto*, what this would entail for the church(es) in South Africa:

---

15 Cf. Desmond Tutu, *Hope and Suffering: Sermons and Speeches* (Skotaville: Johannesburg, 1983), 15 ff.

16 Gustafson, *Varieties of moral discourse*, 269ff. Gustafson also refers to the modes of prophetic, narrative, and policy moral discourses.

17 Cf. Vreesloo *Gehoorsaam*, 207–236.

18 Vreesloo *Gehoorsaam*, 219.

- “Poverty and injustice normally go together. They are not synonymous, but often they are like twin horses pulling the cart of the affluent and the privileged.
- Scripture does not provide a specific economical system for solving the issue of poverty, but it does judge and calls upon the church to judge all economical systems in measuring them against the biblical demands of justice, love and mercy for all God’s creatures.
- As far as South Africa is concerned, the policy of apartheid has been one of the main causes of the economic injustice, which over many decades have been inflicted on millions, especially of our black (African) community. God therefore demands that all those Christians who have been involved and have approved in principle and practice the injustice of apartheid should admit their wrong in this regard and prove their sincerity by some form of restitution.
- This congregation will be a crucial test to the NGKA and the NGSK (Dutch Reformed Mission Church) as well as the NGK of what God demands of all of us in the new South Africa. He will judge all of these churches, not only by our words and resolutions but especially by our deeds and actions.”<sup>19</sup>

It is clear that Naudé views the congregation highly, through a *theological lens*, stating at the beginning of his sermon: “This is an ... unique congregation”, and ending off by stating: “It is also possible that God may use this congregation as a test and a stimulus to prove the need for a united Reformed family where love, justice and mercy may be the hallmarks.”<sup>20</sup> Naudé sees the congregation (church) as playing a fundamental role in the confession of injustice, but also in the restructuring of justice. *As a matter of fact, the whole issue of structural injustice (cf. the metaphor of “twin horses pulling the cart”) and re-structuring of justice forms the background of the four points quoted above.* For Naudé, justice is not only a private matter, but structural, and furthermore contextual, and he challenges his congregation (in effect the whole Dutch Reformed Family) to speak out about, but also to strive to contextually transform structures that could either hamper or foster justice, by means of the power of ideas, values,

---

19 *Vreesloos Gehoorsaam*, 220.

20 *Vreesloos Gehoorsaam*, 219, 220.

transformed relationships, and communication, “not only by our words and resolutions but especially by our deeds and actions.”

In my opinion, this is a golden thread running throughout Naudé’s preaching, namely the call for *structural and contextual justice*. In the light of Gustafson’s distinctions, Naudé’s preaching could, in my opinion, in fact be described as an articulation of a structural-contextual-ethical mode of moral discourse.

### **3. “Priorities at the present moment”**

In a sermon preached on 13 April 1997 at the launch of the Gauteng Provincial Council of Churches, almost three years after the dawn of the new democracy in South Africa, Beyers Naudé articulates his deep concerns about certain disturbing events in the new South Africa:

Many South Africans ... experience these changes as a time of confusion, lack of clarity and direction, especially where increasing criminal violence, serious abuse of women, conflict in many educational institutions, chaos in some state hospitals, shocking revelations about fraud and corruption, all tend to strengthen the impression that our country is slowly moving towards a state of anarchy. Our newspapers, our radios, our televisions are full of reports about bank robberies, police killings, car hijackings, mugging of people amidst rising unemployment and the hopelessness of thousands of people.<sup>21</sup>

The ongoing relevance of these words, uttered eighteen years ago, is perhaps more evident today than ever before. Sensing the urgency of the situation, Naudé asks the Gauteng Provincial Council of Churches; “What should be your priorities at the present moment?”, and again spells out the logical consequences and challenges of this state of affairs for the churches in a few brief, even terse points:

1. “Strengthening of the ecumenical witness;
2. To further, wherever possible, the goal of Christian unity;

---

21 Vreesloos Gehoorsaam, 237.

3. To confront the serious economic needs of the majority of our people: poverty, unemployment, homelessness and the evils that flow from such poverty, unemployment and homelessness we find in a concentrated way in Gauteng;
4. To challenge increasing fraud, corruption and self-enrichment in our community;
5. Spirituality.”<sup>22</sup>

Again, the contextual and structural dimensions of Naudé’s understanding of justice and injustice – “and the evils that flow from such poverty” – can clearly be discerned, and many other post-apartheid sermons of Naudé could be quoted in this regard.<sup>23</sup> The consistency in Naudé’s preaching before and after the demise of Apartheid is evident; the golden thread of a structural-contextual-ethical mode of moral discourse connects these epochs of his prophetic witness.<sup>24</sup> It is therefore not surprising that in this post-apartheid sermon we again hear the call to the (ecumenical, united) church to contextually address (“confront … challenge”) those structures that threaten justice. In my opinion, it remains an open question to what extent these churches and the Dutch Reformed Church in particular, have in fact acted upon this challenge.

#### 4. Restorative justice or tragicomedy?

Obviously, different churches and theologians in South Africa have all contributed in many ways to the dawn of the new South Africa, being instrumental in the formation of new and meaningful theological paradigms.<sup>25</sup> The fact that glaring economic inequalities between poverty

---

22 *Vreesloos Gehoorsaam*, 237–238.

23 For instance in a sermon preached in Alexandra on 20 October 1996: “There are many good and positive things which have been established and of which we should constantly remind ourselves. But it is also true that there are things happening that deeply worry us …” Naudé then refers to a variety of societal-structural problems like corruption, the “gravy train”, etc. *Vreesloos Gehoorsaam*, 233.

24 This is not to say that Naudé did not undergo changes of conviction. For a discussion of the different phases of his theological development, cf. Coetzee, Coetzee, *Die “Kritiese stem”*, 592.

25 What follows is an excerpt from Johan Cilliers, *Between Remembrance and Restitution: a practical theological investigation into the impact of the Truth and Reconciliation*

and privilege lie at the root of many of South Africa's societal problems, and the view that the church should urgently take part in this debate, have been acknowledged many times before.<sup>26</sup> In essence, what is needed is a theological paradigm that does not shrink from this debate, but rather helps to set the agenda and provide relevant content.<sup>27</sup>

It is, however, not easy to describe this (new) paradigm. It has, for instance, been called a theology of reconstruction, as opposed to the paradigm of liberation theology.<sup>28</sup> According to Mugambi the period of political liberation, with its concomitant liberation theologies, should now be complemented by a theology of reconstruction, in which the issue of *systemic poverty* is tackled head-on.<sup>29</sup> This theology of reconstruction, however, is not an elitist enterprise – it encompasses, and is nurtured within, the community.<sup>30</sup> The *pedagogic of reconstruction* is aimed at harnessing the energies and resources of the communities in a collaborative effort to rebuild society. It takes a hard look at the *root causes* of injustice, especially also in its economic and systemic modes of appearance.<sup>31</sup> In short, a theology of reconstruction demands a new form of discourse, which is in principle open to other disciplines and strives to address the

Commission (TRC) within the South African context of religion, diversity, and conflict. *In Religion, Diversity and Conflict* (New Jersey, USA: Transaction Publishers, 2011), 187–198.

- 26 Cf. Dirk Smit, *Wat beteken status confessionis?* In 'n Oomblik van waarheid. *Opstelle rondom die NG Sendingkerk se afkondiging van 'n status confessionis en die opstel van 'n konsepbeliedenis*, ed. Cloete D; Smit D, 14–38 (Kaapstad: Tafelberg Uitgewers, 1984), 71.
- 27 According to Finca, "Restitution is not a political issue. It is moral and ethical. It lies at the centre of moral theology." Bongani Finca, *Restitution Imperative in a Fragile Democracy*. Paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Foundation for Church-led Restitution (Cape Town: Unpublished Document, 2007), 4.
- 28 Charles Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction. Nation-Building and Human Rights* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1998), 2ff.
- 29 According to Mugambi, liberation and reconstruction represent different socio-political processes within specific cultural contexts, requiring different theological paradigms. Jesse Mugambi, *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publishers, 2003), 61.
- 30 Mugambi, *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction*, 74.
- 31 Charles Elliot, *Comfortable Compassion? Poverty, Power and the Church* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1987), 181–182. The challenge is therefore not to return to old modes of doing theology, but to work with all relevant partners in constructing an innovative theology that builds on the humanity and dignity of life. Cf. also Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, 2.

issue of poverty within a different paradigm than just alleviation through “compassionate hand-outs”.<sup>32</sup>

Other authors, such as Maluleke, prefer to talk about a theology of restitution, especially in the light of the fact that the notion of restorative justice can be misunderstood, misappropriated and softened.<sup>33</sup> It is furthermore important to understand that a theology of restitution should not be confused with charitable acts.<sup>34</sup>

Swart takes this further and states that the South African churches, like their NGO counterparts in post-apartheid South Africa, are faced with the challenge to move beyond conventional welfarism and local project-centred modes of intervention in poverty, towards more sophisticated modes of development intervention, in other words to “look beyond the individual community and seek changes in specific policies and institutions at local and national levels.”<sup>35</sup> In this regard churches as faith communities can play an important role because of their “politics of ideas”, i.e. to contribute towards “change to be brought about by the power of ideas, values, transformed relationships, and communication.”<sup>36</sup> In this way restitution can become a truly people-orientated movement, not only towards “poor people”, but also as a double movement “in which the imperative of renewal, conversion, and change should as much be directed to the life-worlds of the economically rich and privileged.”<sup>37</sup>

---

32 Ignatius Swart, “Community-centred congregational ministry in South Africa: a plea for renewal.” *NGTT Supplementum*, 2004/Deel 45 Nommer 2: 328–339.

33 Ignatius Swart, “Meeting the Challenge of Poverty and Exclusion: The Emerging Field of Developmental Research in South African Practical Theology.” *International Journal of Practical Theology*. Volume 12, 2008. Issue 1: 104–149.

34 Tinyiko Maluleke, “Justice in post-apartheid South Africa: Towards a Theology of Restitution.” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 2008/29 (3): 681–696.

35 Swart, *Meeting the Challenge of Poverty and Exclusion*, 123, 126.

36 Swart, *Meeting the Challenge of Poverty and Exclusion*, 128.

37 Swart, *Meeting the Challenge of Poverty and Exclusion*, 134. It is of course impossible to talk about restorative justice in South Africa without also touching upon the issue of *land restitution* – recently again emotionally debated in parliament and the media. This remains a sensitive and complex challenge. There are many theories underlying the *modus operandi* of land restitution, for instance, the so-called special-right-based (SR-based) argument for private property, which justifies private property as being necessary for the protection of property rights that have been legitimately acquired by, or transferred to, the holder. The general-right-based (GR-based) approach, in contrast, justifies private property as essential to the development of individual freedom.

Whatever route one chooses to follow, it should indeed be all about “reconciliation restoring justice”, or in the words of De Gruchy: “... to recover the full meaning and rich texture of reconciliation, and to demonstrate its inseparable connection with the restoration of justice.”<sup>38</sup>

The Reformed Family of Churches has also been struggling with the issue of restorative justice. One of the relatively recent developments within the Reformed Church Family in South Africa has been what is called a rediscovery of the so-called “missional church”. It is not possible to do justice to the history and development of this movement within the limitations of a paper like this. A few broad strokes must therefore suffice: the original intention of this movement was *highly contextual*, striving to answer the question: what does the Gospel mean for this specific context (“culture network”) within which we find ourselves – a culture in which the Gospel has been effectively domesticated?<sup>39</sup>

Willem Saayman makes the point that although there are no significant terminological differences between *missional* and *missionary* – “as an Afrikaans proverb says, choosing six of the one and half a dozen of the other” – the concept missional was not originally chosen simply to function as a synonym for missionary, but is rather part of a thoroughly contextual North Atlantic or Western missiology.<sup>40</sup> The context of the missional movement (also the context against which it reacts) is therefore the phenomenon of so-called “emerging churches” within postmodern settings.<sup>41</sup>

---

The South African endeavour to restore land ownership leans strongly towards the principle of rectification of injustice, which permits state interference to re-legitimize the property rights order. Roux suggests that we revisit the notion of land restitution by removing the artificial time limit imposed on the finalization of the land restitution process; by brokering deeper and more meaningful settlements; by involving current landowners in the search for settlement solutions (in other words: by bringing people together in safe spaces for negotiation and collaboration); by investing more resources in monuments and museums (thus rekindling remembrance); and by calling for an apology from white South Africans for apartheid forced removals, therefore re-inviting reconciliation into the process. Cf. Theunis Roux, *Land restitution and reconciliation in South Africa*. In *Justice and Reconciliation in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, ed. Du Bois, F; Du Bois-Pedain A, 144–171. (Cambridge: University Press, 2008), 147; 168–171.

38 John De Gruchy, *Reconciliation Restoring Justice* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 2.

39 Cf. Willem Saayman, Missionary or missional? A study in terminology. *Missionalia* 38:1 (April 2010), 5–16.

40 Saayman, Missionary or missional?, 9, 13.

41 Saayman, Missionary or missional?, 15.

This contextual thrust can be seen in the works of the founders of the movement, in particular in the classic works of Lesslie Newbigin and George Hunsberger, who contributed fundamentally to the question about the relationship between the *Gospel and our Culture Network*.<sup>42</sup> Exponents like Darrel Guder (working in the *Gospel and our Culture Project*) have popularised the idea of a missional church, particularly in North America, – a project not necessarily acclaimed positively by everyone.<sup>43</sup> According to Willem Saayman, the main concern of this project “is a desire to bring the World Council of Churches’ discussions of *missio Dei* (“the mission of God”) and Lesslie Newbigin’s missionary insights to bear on North America.”<sup>44</sup> As a matter of fact, it has even been called a “Trojan horse through which the (unassimilated) ‘American’ vision was fetched into the well-guarded walls of the ecumenical theology of mission.”<sup>45</sup>

It is therefore a legitimate question whether the missional paradigm could be transplanted to South Africa, “lock, stock and barrel without any further ado.”<sup>46</sup> Saayman pertinently asks whether the exchange of these two terms (missional for missionary) is not simply an effort to *rebrand* the latter, which has fallen into (anti-colonial) dispute? But, he states:

“The definitive question is: Is that what we really want to do? Is that what we really need to do to overcome our problem? ... If we choose for *missional*, we choose at the moment unavoidably for emerging churches in postmodern contexts. How useful is such a choice for the theological discourse in the Third World in general and Africa in particular? ... We will have to re-indigenise or re-contextualise the concept to make it really useful.”<sup>47</sup>

42 From a large corpus of literature, only the following: Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (SPCK/Eerdmans/WCC, 1989); George Hunsberger, 1995. “Cutting the Christendom Knot.” In *Christian Ethics in Ecumenical Context: Theology, Culture, and Politics*. Eds. Shin Chiba, George Hunsberger, and Lester Edwin Ruiz (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995).

43 Cf. Guder’s popular books, to name but one: Darrell Guder, et. al., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

44 Saayman, Missionary or missional?, 9.

45 David Bosch, quoting Rosin, David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991) 392.

46 Saayman, Missionary or missional?, 14.

47 Saayman, Missionary or missional?, 15, 16.

It is interesting to note that when the renowned South African missiologist, David Bosch, posed the question as to what mission means in South Africa, he was in line with the original intention of the movement, namely, to translate the Gospel in terms of contextual issues, but then indeed strongly (re)indigenised and (re)contextualised. In his *magnum opus* he writes, for instance, movingly on “mission as contextualization”, “mission as quest for justice”, “mission as liberation”, etc.<sup>48</sup> One could perhaps state that his whole theology hinges on the commitment to transform the plight of the poor and marginalised, taking his cues from orthopraxis, not orthodoxy.<sup>49</sup> As a matter of fact, a whole book has been written on, and dedicated to this *praxis* of Bosch’s missiology, which is said to be “unmistakably and consciously contextual”, and addresses issues like racism, nationalism, economics, gender, etc.<sup>50</sup>

The notion of a missional church has also been widely debated within the Dutch Reformed Church, with many articles and conferences and synodic declarations resulting from this endeavour. In the official synodic report, entitled *Framework Document on the Missional Nature and Calling of the Dutch Reformed Church* (2011),<sup>51</sup> the emphasis falls on the word “new” – new thinking about God, the Incarnation, the Kingdom of God, the world, the church, the offices in the church, the formation of faith in the church, the liturgy, the theological training, etc. In short, just about every item that could be connected to the church and theology is seen through the lens of being “new”. One could in fact say that the notion of a missional church in effect becomes a type of container concept that is set up to carry all that is “new”. In the process, inspiring and creative theological frameworks are drawn up, which are to be commended.

---

48 Cf. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 400ff; 420ff; 432ff.

49 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 424.

50 David, J Bosch. *Prophetic integrity, cruciform praxis*. Ed JNJ Kritzinger and W Saayman (Dorpspruit: Cluster Publications, 2011), 167; 167–173.

51 In what follows, I quote from the abovementioned report, as published in the *Document Folder. Supporting Documents: Dutch Reformed Church. Re-enactment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Faith Hearing with a specific focus on reconciliation in a post-TRC South Africa*. 8–9 October 2014, Stellenbosch. Also see: Botha, J. & Forster, D.A., 2017, ‘Justice and the Missional Framework Document of the Dutch Reformed Church’, *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38, no. 1, a1665. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v38i1.1665>

Although the document starts out by referring to the challenges facing the Dutch Reformed Church “within the South African context”, the few, general comments made on the calling to be missional within specific contexts, i.e. practising “public theology” within a new understanding of the “world”, in my opinion begs for further explication (cf. paragraph 8 of the document). Although the document explicitly states that it “does not spend time on the development of comprehensive practical steps – it is for each congregation to create its own” (paragraph 1.5), and although one surely should not judge a movement on the grounds of a single document, this official document in my opinion still lacks a specific analysis of urgently relevant issues in the current South African context, issues directly related to structural injustices that still prevail, even twenty years after Apartheid. Although there are a few direct references to South Africa (e.g. paragraphs 10 and 13), this document could as well have originated in North America, or any other country, for that matter.<sup>52</sup>

---

52 Could there be a theological *ratio* behind this way of describing the missional church? Perhaps it hinges, *inter alia*, on the way the *relationship between creation and salvation* is understood. Although the reality of creation is celebrated (paragraph 8.2), and seen as a “blessing”, the dominant understanding of *missio dei* is soteriological in nature. Relatively little space is given to the fact that creation as such could indeed also be seen as *missio dei*, and that creation itself stems from *missio dei*, for *missio dei*. Cf. Rudolf Bohren, *Mission und Gemeinde. Theologische Existenz heute*. Neue Folge Nr. 12 (München: Kaiser Verlag, 1962), 4. Perhaps this lack of contextual analysis could be traced back to the way in which Calvin has been interpreted within the Dutch Reformed tradition in South Africa. It has been noted by some scholars that this interpretation, while being solid in soteriological content, indeed lacks a *mature theology of creation*. Perhaps the lack of a mature theology of creation can indeed be attributed to a dominant, and often exclusive theological focus on *ecclesiology* in ministerial training; the countering of a natural theology associated with apartheid with a strong contrasting emphasis on *Scripture*; and a narrow *pietistic notion of salvation* as personal sanctification. As far as the latter is concerned it is well known that the Dutch Reformed Church always had a certain pietistic component in its theological make-up, dating back to the times and undeniable influence of the Scottish ministry in South Africa, the most prominent figure being Andrew Murray. Cf. Ernst Conradie, *Creation and salvation in the Wake of Calvin: Some reflections from within the South African context*. *NGTT* 51/2010, 357–369. Cf. also Johan Cilliers, *Das Klingen des Lebens: Liedübertragungen als Transfer religiöser Kulturpraxis: Das Kirchenlied zwischen Sprache, Musik und Religion. Veranstaltung zu Ehren von Prof. Dr. Jürgen Henkys anlässlich seines 80. Geburtstages*. *Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift* 28, no. 2 (2011): 279–299. It is, however, important to note that the Scottish influence in South Africa had many faces, distinguishing it from what is often understood under the term *pietism*. Although there was the puritan dimension in the Scottish tradition, that in effect led to an ethical vacuum as far as social issues were concerned, one could also state with Murray Coetze that it was in fact this Scottish tradition, with its assertion that all

Are we missing the point? We might not be the first people to do so. The Netherlands has also seen its drive towards a missional church, with concomitant critical voices. Marcel Barnard, for instance, after giving an extensive overview of the countless activities that have been initiated to fuel this drive, of money being invested and personnel being appointed, expresses his misgivings, as follows:

After eight years we have discovered that nothing has come of these ideals. The Protestant Church in the Netherlands consists of spectacularly waning communities ... Particularly in the years that the church claimed a new missional identity, she did not even come close to retain her dwindling numbers. The missional project has failed, or we should give a different meaning to the word “missional”... Against the backdrop of the waning church, missional language and pretences have become laughable. We are playing in a tragicomedy ... Let us agree: from now on we will no longer be “missional”. We call a halt to the missional activism. We rather return to the inner chamber. The inky night. The void. The great silence. The judgment of God. There, not visible to any outsider, we bend over the Scriptures and search whether we may not again, perhaps softly, hear the foolish voice of the Gospel ... Here we gather around a table and share a tiny piece of bread and take a tiny sip of wine. And then we say (and we believe it ourselves): This is a sign of the great feast of all nations, with the best food and the best wines. And we inconspicuously walk an extra mile with those who need it – the refugee, the vulnerable elderly, and the abused child. Maybe a few people might ask themselves: what is it with those Christians? Then we will have little to say. Perhaps stutter: “You know, we belong to an executed criminal, crudely hung up on a piece of wood.” That is it. Let us simply be. Our God works in secret. That is his mission.<sup>53</sup>

---

people are equal, that influenced Beyers Naudé, together with his understanding of the so-called Utrecht School, to become more and more critical of the Apartheid ideology. Cf. Murray Coetze, “Eertydse Nederduitse Gereformeerde teologiese denkstrome ten grondslag van Beyers Naudé se kritiek op apartheid”. *NGTT*, 54 no. 3 en 4 (2013): 1-15.

53 Marcel Barnard, “De missionnaire tragikomedie”. *Woord en dienst* 62, no. 9 (2013), 34. Translated and paraphrased from Dutch by Johan Cilliers.

## 5. Between silence and struggle

Speaking from his context, Barnard calls upon the churches in the Netherlands to bring a halt to the missional activism; to rather go back into the silence of the void, even into the judgment of God. From his context, Beyers Naudé calls upon the churches to step out of the silence of the void, in order to grapple with the realities of structural injustices in South Africa. Perhaps our calling lies somewhere in between the *ethical tension of silence and struggle*; of going back to the sources of our identity – being followers of an executed Criminal – and going out (whether missional or missionary) into the realities of South African societal structures. Perhaps our ethical “priorities at the present moment” are constituted by two movements. First, a *centripetal movement*, back to the poor and marginalised, to the preferential option for the poor; back to the orthopraxis of listening to the poor and allowing our theology to be formed within their spaces, following in the footsteps of Beyers Naudé and David Bosch and others like them. Second, a *centrifugal movement*, against the grain of our fear for the “other”, into the hard realities of injustices in everyday life in South Africa, and against the grain of all structures that lie at the root of these injustices.

How exactly we are to go about this ethical calling will be an ongoing debate, hopefully in the form of an open dialogue. In this regard, it is clear that the life and sermons of Beyers Naudé still challenge us to revisit the role that religious communities *can* play within the South African context. His passion for justice and his structural-contextual-ethical mode of moral discourse remind us that religion *can* in fact contribute towards political processes. His legacy calls upon people – also religious people – to develop stronger bonds with their political systems, hopefully resulting in the (public) re-shaping of a just society.<sup>54</sup>

---

54 According to Herfried Münkler we can discern three dimensions when we talk about the concept of politics: *Polity* in the sense of a formal structuring, which includes questions concerning the order of political systems, its norms, judicial arrangements, institutions, and organisations; *Policy*, which entails the formative and educational processes of politics, inclusive of specific aims and problem-solving mechanisms, understood within a specific framework of values, and *Politics* as the actual processes of communication of interests, of confrontation with other political systems, and the quest for building consensus within its own ranks. The specific contribution of religion might be linked particularly (but not exclusively) to the notion of *Policy*, in the sense that it can contribute towards the necessary dialogue about, and formation of ideas and values, and acting as a conduit in the search for problem-solving mechanisms. Cf. Herfried Münkler, *Politik*, in: TRE Bd. 27, Berlin/New York 1997, 2.

In my opinion, Beyers Naudé made a sterling contribution towards the restoration of justice in South Africa. We honour him for that, and celebrate not only his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, but in particular his belief in his – our – land of hope. He should have the last word:

South Africa is a microcosm of the contemporary world. Here white and black, East and West, rich developed First World and poor developing Third World meet as in no other country in the world: this sets a tremendous challenge, but it is also a unique privilege. In the melting-pot of this meeting Christians who want to live out their faith have an incomparable opportunity to witness to justice, love of neighbour, truth and compassion.<sup>55</sup>

## Bibliography

Barnard, Marcel. *De missionnaire tragikomedie*. In: *Woord en dienst* 62/9 (2013), 34.

Boesak, Allan. *The Finger of God. Sermons on Faith and Responsibility*. Translated from Afrikaans by Peter Randall. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1979.

Bohren, Rudolf. *Mission und Gemeinde. Theologische Existenz heute*. Neue Folge Nr. 12. München: Kaiser Verlag, 1962.

Bosch, David. *Prophetic integrity, cruciform praxis*. Edited by JNJ Kritzinger and W Saayman. Dorpspruit: Cluster Publications, 2011, 167–173.

Bosch, David. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995.

Botha, J. & Forster, D.A., 2017, Justice and the Missional Framework. Document of the Dutch Reformed Church, *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38(1), a1665. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v38i1.1665>

Campbell, Charles; Cilliers, Johan. *Preaching Fools. The Gospel as a Rhetoric of Folly*. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2012.

---

<sup>55</sup> Translated from *Pro Veritate*, 15 January 1972, pp. 5-7, 20. Quoted from Len Hansen and Robert Vosloo, *Oom Bey for the Future*, 1.

Cilliers, Johan. Das Klingen des Lebens: Liedübertragungen als Transfer religiöser Kulturpraxis: Das Kirchenlied zwischen Sprache, Musik und Religion. Veranstaltung zu Ehren von Prof. Dr. Jürgen Henkys anlässlich seines 80. Geburtstages. *Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift* 20911; 28 (2): 279–299.

Cilliers, Johan. Between Remembrance and Restitution: a practical theological investigation into the impact of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) within the South African context of religion, diversity, and conflict. In: *Religion, Diversity and Conflict*. New Jersey, USA: Transaction Publishers, 2011.

Cilliers, Johan. *Predigt als politisches und eschatologisches Ereignis. Wahrnehmungen aus Südafrika*. In *Erlebnis Predigt. Eine Veröffentlichung des Ateliers Sprache e. V.*, Braunschweig. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, (2014), 123–140

Cilliers, Johan. The Living Voice of the Gospel? Re-hearing a Prophetic Voice from Apartheid South Africa. *Viva Vox Evangelii - Reforming Preaching. Societas Homiletica* 9 Hrsg Jan Hermelink und Alexander Deeg. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsansalt, 2013, 161–180

Coetzee, M; Hansen, L; Vosloo, RR (Red). *Vreesloos Gehoorsaam. 'n Keur uit Beyers Naudé se preke 1939–1997*. Beyers Naudé Centre Series on Public Theology. (Eds.) Murray Coetzee, Len Hansen, Robert Vosloo. Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2013.

Coetzee, M; Muller, R; Hansen, L (Ed). *Cultivating Seeds of Hope. Conversations on the Life of Beyers Naudé*. (Eds.) Murray Coetzee, Retief Muller, Len Hansen. Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2015.

Coetzee, Murray. *Die "Kritiese stem" teen apartheidsteologie in die Ned. Geref. Kerk (1905–1974): 'n Analise van die bydraes van Ben Marais en Beyers Naudé*, Unpublished PhD, University of Western Cape, 2010.

Coetzee, Murray. Eertydse Nederduitse Gereformeerde teologiese denkstrome ten grondslag van Beyers Naudé se kritiek op apartheid. *NGTT*, 2013/54, 3 en 4: 1–15.

Conradie, Ernst. Creation and salvation in the Wake of Calvin: Some reflections from within the South African context. *NGTT* 51/2010, 357–369.

De Gruchy, John. *Reconciliation Restoring Justice*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002.

*Document Folder. Supporting Documents: Dutch Reformed Church. Re-enactment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Faith Hearing with a specific focus on reconciliation in a post-TRC South Africa*. 8–9 October 2014, Stellenbosch.

Elliot, Charles. *Comfortable Compassion? Poverty, Power and the Church*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1987.

Finca, Bongani. *Restitution Imperative in a Fragile Democracy*. Paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Foundation for Church-led Restitution, Cape Town: Unpublished Document, 2007.

Guder, Darrell et. al., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

Gustafson, James. *Varieties of moral discourse: prophetic, narrative, ethical and policy*. Michigan, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.

Hansen, L. & Vosloo, R. (eds.), *Oom Bey for the future: engaging the witness of Beyers Naudé: Beyers Naudé Centre Series on Public Theology Volume 2*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2006.

Hansen, L. (Ed.). *The legacy of Beyers Naudé: Beyers Naudé Centre Series on Public Theology Volume 1* Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2005.

Hunsberger, George. "Cutting the Christendom Knot." In *Christian Ethics in Ecumenical Context: Theology, Culture, and Politics*. Eds. Shin Chiba, George Hunsberger, and Lester Edwin Ruiz. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995.

Maluleke, Tinyiko. "Justice in post-apartheid South Africa: Towards a Theology of Restitution." *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 2008/29 (3): 681–696.

Mugambi, Jesse. *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction*. Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publishers, 2003.

Münkler, Herfried. Politik, in: TRE Bd. 27, Berlin/New York 1997, 2.

Naudé, Beyers. "The Afrikaner and Race Relations," In Hansen, L.D. (ed.), *The Legacy of Beyers Naudé* Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2005.

Naudé, Beyers. *My Land van Hoop: Die Lewe van Beyers Naudé*. Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1995.

Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. SPCK/Eerdmans/ WCC, 1989.

Nolan, Albert. The option for the poor in South Africa. *Resistance and Hope. South African essays in honour of Beyers Naudé*. Ed Charles Villa-Vicencio and John W. De Gruchy. Cape Town and Johannesburg: Eerdmans/ Grand Rapids, 1985.

Roux, Theunis. Land restitution and reconciliation in South Africa. In *Justice and Reconciliation in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, ed. Du Bois, F; Du Bois-Pedain A. Cambridge: University Press, 2008.

Saayman, Willem. Missionary or missional? A study in terminology. *Missionalia* 38:1 (April 2010), 5–16.

Smit, Dirkie. Resisting “Lordless powers”? – Boesak on power, *Prophet from the South: Essays in honour of Allan Aubrey Boesak*. Editors: Prince Dibeela, Puleng Lenka-Bula, Vuyani Vellem. Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2014

Smit, Dirkie. Wat beteken status confessionis? In *’n Oomblik van waarheid. Opstelle rondom die NG Sendingkerk se afkondiging van ’n status confessionis en die opstel van ’n konsepbelidenis*, ed. Cloete D; Smit D, 14–38 Kaapstad: Tafelberg Uitgewers, 1984.

Swart, Ignatius. “Community-centred congregational ministry in South Africa: a plea for renewal.” *NGTT Supplementum*, 2004/Deel 45 Nommer 2: 328–339.

Swart, Ignatius. “Meeting the Challenge of Poverty and Exclusion: The Emerging Field of Developmental Research in South African Practical Theology.” *International Journal of Practical Theology*. Volume 12, 2008. Issue 1: 104–149.

Tutu, Desmond. *Hope and Suffering: Sermons and Speeches*. Skotaville: Johannesburg, 1983.

Villa-Vicencio, Charles. *A Theology of Reconstruction. Nation-Building and Human Rights*. Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1998.