



## **Beyers Naudé (1966–1977): Between Western ideals and black leadership<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines public lectures of Beyers Naudé from 1966 until his banning in 1977, tracing on the one hand his critique on apartheid shortly before his engagement with black consciousness, and then his reception of black consciousness. Working from a 1967 lecture mostly ignored in literature to the present, *Freedom in South Africa*, onwards, the article illustrates how Naudé equates a particular normative understanding of Western emancipatory thought with the work of God in order to reject apartheid, and how Naudé employed an anti-communist rhetoric into his critique of apartheid. The second part of the article then turns to his reception of black consciousness, illustrating some of the limitations in his early interpretation of black consciousness, and concluding with his shifting perspective on where the voice of liberation and freedom will emerge from in South Africa.

### **Keywords**

*Beyers Naudé; black consciousness; anti-communism*

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- 1 An earlier version of this was presented at the June 2019 meeting of the Transatlantic Roundtable on Religion and Race in Nairobi, Kenya. This article, with minor revisions, previously formed part of my PhD *In Search of Repair*, from the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, and the University of South Africa (Van Wyngaard 2019:185–208).
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## Introduction

This article analyses key public lectures of Beyers Naudé in the period 1966 until his banning in 1977, some of which only became accessible through the more recent archival work of the Beyers Naudé Archive at Stellenbosch University. This period is of particular interest since it spans the period from his participation in the 1966 Church and Society meeting through his engagement with black consciousness. The first and longest section of the article focuses on Naudé's critique of apartheid in the last years of the 1960's, illustrating how Naudé draws upon a particular Western ideal as normative for African liberation while employing a Western anti-communism in his rejection of apartheid. Key to the first section is a reading of a 1967 lecture *Freedom in our Society*. This lecture has received very little attention thus far<sup>3</sup>, yet provides one of the most pertinent and detailed lenses on some of the limitations in Naudé's earlier critique on apartheid.

This in part provides background for the second part which asks how Beyers Naudé interpreted and was transformed through his engagement with black consciousness. That such a transformation occurred is often noted, and usually associated with Naudé's growing "radicalisation."<sup>4</sup> In interpreting his reception of black consciousness I highlight the conceptual difficulty Naudé illustrates in reading black consciousness through an Afrikaner ethno-national analogy. The article concludes with the key transformation that does occur in his approach as a result of his interaction with black consciousness and with noting the fundamental shift that this implied in response to questions on where we turn to in listening for a vision of freedom and liberation.

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3 Coetzee (Coetzee 2010), in one of the most detailed analyses of Naudé's thought, for example does not refer to this lecture at all, despite an in-depth engagement with Naudé's other unpublished works. Van der Riet (Van der Riet 2013) does provide an overview of the lecture but does not discuss the problems illuminated below.

4 Different interpretations are given to such a radicalisation. It is considered positively as a break with liberalism (Ryan 1990:124) or an opening up towards broader black leadership and a growing economic critique (De Gruchy 1985:21–26) or negatively as a perceived break in solidarity with Afrikaners and a contribution to growing polarisation (Heaney 2004:263–269).

## Rejecting apartheid in search of a “Western” ideal

On 1 June 1967 Naudé delivered a lecture at the University of Cape Town’s “Day of Affirmation of Academic and Human Freedom.” The lecture provides a detailed analysis of the problem with apartheid in terms of the notion of “freedom.” In this section I work from this lecture to illustrate a particular line of critique against apartheid and then indicate the continuity on some of the themes in this lecture in the ensuing decade. My main concern is with the way in which Naudé draws upon a normative understanding of a particular form of Western Christendom in order to reject apartheid and Afrikaner ethno-nationalism. Furthermore, I indicate how Naudé’s argument, in the process of rejecting apartheid, perpetuates an attempt at binding African people into a Western imagination of civilisation.

To illustrate the problem, I turn first to a lecture delivered a few months later, in December 1967. *The Afrikaner and Race Relations* was presented in Johannesburg and published by the South African Institute of Race Relations. Naudé identifies the well-known narrative of Afrikaners describing themselves as “a chosen people” on a “special God-given mission,” with a “special purpose of being the torchbearers of the Gospel to the millions of heathens in dark Africa.” He notes that this was not just “analogy,” but eventually became “a divinely ordained command,” and he rejects this theologically in no uncertain terms – not just due to the effect it was having, but for in itself revealing a questionable theological conviction based on a “distorted exposition” of the Bible. It reveals “ignorance with regard to the true meaning of the Incarnation and the nature of the church” and is based on a “false identification of himself and his people with that of Israel.” The “main blame rests on the Church and the clergy for lack of sound theological insight and for their misleading Biblical interpretation” (Naudé 1967b:4–5).<sup>5</sup> On the one hand, in December 1967, Naudé rejects

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5 Fourie (Fourie, 2018:122) notes how this shift in Naudé’s message started occurring somewhere between the 1958 and 1959 Day of the Vow services. In his 1958 sermon in Potchefstroom he was still comparing Afrikaners to Israel, while by 1959 he preached that we should be cautious of such a comparison. However, this caution does not in itself bring an end to all elements of his *volksteologie* (ethnic theology). The rejection of this Afrikaner identification with Israel was also a theological rejection of the particular theology of Naudé’s father Jozua (Fourie 2018:150).

apartheid and Afrikaner Christian nationalism (as well as its similar British, German or American examples) as a distortion of the gospel due to the way in which it makes itself into a new ethnic chosen people, taking over the place of Israel. On the other hand, in the earlier *Freedom in our Society*, Naudé will give a similar divine sanction to a particular form of Western Christendom – *albeit* quite specifically opposed to such crude ethno-nationalism as that of apartheid Afrikaners.

Naudé opens *Freedom in our Society* by taking care to position his argument as one born not of relational formation or political evaluation, but of Christian conviction; meaning his views did not come about through interaction with fellow-South Africans or study in philosophy or social science, but “from my insight in the Christian faith” (Naudé 1967a:1).<sup>6</sup> The claimed insight of his Christian faith is however what leads him to commit to “our Western concept of freedom as it has expressed itself through the ages and been embodied in Western civilization.”<sup>7</sup> This notion of freedom builds on three sources: biblical concepts, Greek philosophy, and Roman legal principles. Speaking at the University of Cape Town, he in fact, in spite of his claim that his own insight was formed through his Christian faith, goes on to argue that Greek philosophy (which becomes “Stoic religious thought” a few sentences later) and Christian faith both provide the concepts of “the equal rights of man... and the equal dignity of man,” made concrete and growing in influence thanks to the Roman legal system.

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6 It should be noted that while this argument might have had an important rhetorical function, Naudé’s arguments throughout his career were always formed exactly by listening to people. As Cedric Mayson famously noted, “There is a beautiful, apocryphal story that drifts around the hazy, sentimental, religious world of Europe, which says that Beyers studied his Bible and there he discovered that his inherited attitude to blacks was wrong. This is absolute nonsense ... A central theme in everybody who made that change, including Beyers, was that they got to *know black people*” (Ryan 1990:124).

7 The copy of the lecture only references direct quotations, but one of these is from Barbara Ward’s 1954 *Faith and Freedom* – a book which also contained multiple arguments that Naudé would use in this lecture, and sometimes beyond. Ward was an English Roman Catholic Economist and an important guest participant at the 1966 World Council of Churches Church and Society meeting in 1966 (Crawford 1995:194–195) which Naudé also attended. De Gruchy notes that this particular meeting was “of particular importance for Naudé’s own development and that of the Christian Institute” (De Gruchy 1985:20). At this meeting the decision denouncing racism and racial superiority was taken, leading into the later WCC Program to Combat Racism (PCR) (Coetzee 2010:491).

And South Africa, Naudé insists, must be “rightly claimed to be part of Western civilization” (Naudé 1967a:2).

If such a Western freedom born of Christian-Greco-Roman contribution can however be drawn from either Christian faith or Greek philosophy – after all, he argues, the two teaches the same thing – Naudé nonetheless insists that theologically it is God who gives such freedom. What in one breath Naudé assigns to the effect of Roman legal systems, in the next becomes the result of the sovereign work of God. For, Naudé argues, Scripture is not about “the freedom of man but the rule of God over man,” and the freedom received must be understood as a gift of a “Sovereign God.” God inscribed certain primal rights into the orders of creation. The implication is that only God may take away this freedom: no “states can rob the Christian of this freedom” (Naudé 1967a:2–4). The way in which this freedom finds a life of its own, preceding Western civilisation and “express[ing] itself” (Naudé, 1967a:2) through this Western civilisation is fully in line with his commitment to the sovereignty of God. On the one hand, God retains God’s place as sovereign over Western civilisation, but on the other hand Western civilisation is drawn into the place where God is revealed in our times – or specific to this lecture, where God’s freedom which should be given to all is concretely revealing itself.

In contrast, there are two places which Naudé identifies as in opposition to this freedom: communism (equated with totalitarianism) and apartheid.

Naudé in 1967 is unwavering in his opposition to communism. It is a philosophy with “evil and injustice inherent in its aims and practices” (Naudé 1967a:12), “its ideology is totally unacceptable, its methods rejectable and its successes illusionary” (Naudé 1967a:13). In a gesture of generous universalism he implores students to “choose a faith to live by,” and remain open that such a choice need not lead to Christianity, but he is quite clear that such a choice may not be communism (Naudé 1967a:14).<sup>8</sup>

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8 While Naudé here seems to indicate a certain openness towards “other religions,” this doesn’t happen consistently. In a different context – speaking to a teachers union – 10 years later Naudé would include “other religions” in the same category as “Marxist philosophy” and “materialist hedonism” – these three being that to which a choice for Christianity would be an alternative, a choice which he suggests black theology would in future get the credit for as far as the majority of South Africans are concerned (Naudé 1977b:14). One way of reading the 1967 lecture would be to note that what

In communism, Naudé sees a danger which should draw all “religions who share a common faith in a living, just and loving God” (Naudé 1967a:13) together in opposing it. While not unchanged, the general thrust of Naudé arguments on communism remains the same in the coming 10 years.

In speeches during the 10 years before his banning, one of the key themes emerging is Naudé’s rejection of communism. It is clear that Naudé’s repeated rejection of communism cannot be disconnected from the context of the apartheid South Africa 1950 Suppression of Communism Act, often used in banning of apartheid critics<sup>9</sup>. In this context Naudé employs a rhetorical ploy of turning the National Party anti-communist argument against the National Party and apartheid government itself, naming the National Party as embodying the worst traits of communist governments<sup>10</sup>, and as itself being the most significant contributor to the growth of communism in Southern Africa.<sup>11</sup>

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Naudé is mostly attempting to do is to allow an openness towards Judaism – but at least in part based on the idea that Judaism forms part of the formation of the Western notion of freedom. Where Naudé can make a strong theological claim of reading Greek Philosophy and Roman law fully inside the work of the sovereign God, he is quite clear (see further discussion below) that communism and Marxist philosophy would not only be outside but fundamentally opposed to Christianity and God’s work in this world, and places like the 1977 lecture to teachers also reveal an ongoing struggle to allow for such a generosity in relation to other religions – at least if not drawn inside a Christian identity.

- 9 The way Naudé recollects the symbolic importance of communism, and of the possibility that he himself might be a communist, among his mother and the broader Afrikaner public reminds of the important role the stigma of communism played in the Afrikaner imagination, and of Naudé’s sense that he needed to defend himself against such an accusation. For example, when recounting the case of libel, he himself and Albert Geysers instituted against Adrian Pont in the 1960s, it is Pont’s accusation of their communist involvement in particular that he recalls (Naudé 1995:75–78).
- 10 Anti-communism is a notoriously broad label, during the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century applied in relation to a broad range of ideological positions. The anti-communism of the early 20th century National Party has been described as primarily focused as focused on curbing communisms agitation towards revolution (Van Deventer & Nel, 1990:70). Naudé’s anti-communist rhetoric is however more inclined towards rejection of the communism of the Soviet Union in the name of “freedom” (see (Fayet 2014:12–13)). In both cases, however, anti-communism functions as a part of a believe system not necessarily connected to actual communisms (Fayet 2014:8–9)
- 11 In perhaps the strongest argument illustrating this point Naudé reminds his audience that “As a student of the Marxist philosophy put it to me: ‘If I were a Communist in South Africa the easiest and perhaps quickest way to achieve my goals would be to give my full and enthusiastic support to the implementation of the policy of separate development.’” (Naudé 1971:3–4). But the reminder that the route to opposing communism is through

However, reducing Naudé’s argument to some strategic political move does not adequately explain this theme in his speeches. His anti-communist arguments reflect that of one fully committed to the struggle against communism as much as the struggle against apartheid.<sup>12</sup> In fact, these become two sides of the same coin.

Apartheid is the immediate focus of Naudé’s critique in *Freedom in our Society*. Apartheid, with its racial laws, is the embodiment of a rejection of the Western and Christian notion of freedom that Naudé insists on. Naudé’s critique on apartheid is at this point fundamentally that it does not uphold the values of Western Christianity. Rather, what Naudé argues repeatedly here and throughout the entire decade before his banning, is that apartheid should, in fact, be placed on the same level with communism – that other force of “opposition to Western civilisation.”

When describing apartheid as anti-gospel in 1966 (Naudé 1966), he invokes two arguments which will resurface repeatedly, in spite of deeper changes in his analysis and proposal. The one concerns Christian unity and the other that apartheid is totalitarian. On the first, he argues that the gospel calls for fellowship among diverse people, rather than segregation, but on this point, Naudé is still open to the possibility that some practical aspects of apartheid might be accepted based on our weaknesses<sup>13</sup>, as long as it is

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opposing apartheid is found throughout his lectures (ex. (Naudé 1975a:5–6; Naudé 1977a:7). In one of his last lectures before his banning he places black theology and ‘communism’ (here using other words) over against each other: “I am convinced that when our history is evaluated, the emergence of black theology will be seen to have been one of the most crucial and powerful spiritual and political forces in preventing millions of people from turning from the Christian faith to seek their salvation in Marxist philosophy, materialist hedonism or other religions.” (Naudé 1977b:14).

- 12 To draw on an example of one of the later lectures, again at the University of Cape Town, but now in 1976, days before the Soweto uprisings and massacre, the first point he makes on the South Africa he ‘does not want’, is that it should not be based on authoritarian rule, and therefore that he “reject in the strongest possible terms any community rule for our country as totally unacceptable” (Naudé 1976:3).
- 13 He doesn’t use the exact phrase “the weakness of some,” but the argument is not dissimilar to the infamous compromise introduced by Andrew Murray at the 1857 synod of the Dutch Reformed Church. Apartheid is not the ideal, but if applied within limits and as a result of peoples sinful struggle to live together with those “different,” it isn’t necessarily “anti-gospel,” but definitely not the gospel ideal either and should be accompanied with the prayer “Tolerate and forgive it, o Lord, for the sake of our weakness” (Naudé 1966:5). The distinction Naudé here invokes, without expanding

recognised that these are not biblical principles.<sup>14</sup> His strongest rejection is however based on the argument that apartheid is totalitarian – implying that it pretends to be a system of faith that requires religious obedience. He insists that beyond what apartheid says, the way it calls forth obedience would in itself make it an anti-gospel:

But – and it is on this point that Christians who might concede the relative right to existence of “apartness” recoil from it with dismay – there is only one Gospel in which, for South Africa also, the salvation for time and eternity is revealed. Every other idea of salvation which wants to lay claim to this power of salvation is not the Gospel but an anti-Gospel (Naudé 1966:5).

This early rejection of apartheid as a heresy, based on a particular soteriology it displays, will be reproduced in less explicitly theological forms repeatedly: apartheid is totalitarian just like communism is totalitarian. It wants to present itself as a route to salvation. But in this apartheid is in fact in opposition to a normative understanding of Western Christendom, which is equated with an idea of Europe, where it is God at work in drawing Greek philosophy, Roman law, and the Bible into a single force for the expansion of God’s freedom.

Naudé’s argument made both within South Africa as well as in Western Europe, is that the most important way to assist a fight against communism in South Africa is to end apartheid. Even more, Naudé presents his own vision of a united society as more anti-communist than the apartheid anti-communists. Apartheid is in fact what would make Southern Africa communist, while, at least before his contact with black consciousness and the transformation of the Christian Institute in the 1970s,<sup>15</sup> he propagates

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on it, is between sin which can be forgiven, and that which is against the gospel – an alternative faith or a heresy – which must be rejected wholly.

- 14 Here the early Naudé is also a clear example of what Durand (Durand 1985) would later identify in the relation between pietism and Afrikaner dissidents. Exactly because Naudé comes from the pietistic rather than Kuyperian trajectories at work in the Dutch Reformed Church, he can reject the idea that all policies should be biblically founded and can therefore make a distinction between gospel and political realism. As Durand would also argue, this did not provide a theological model which was strong enough to counter apartheid theology, but it did allow a certain level of dissidence.
- 15 One way in which Naudé in the last years before his banning seems to bring his anti-communist trajectory in line with the growing critique on capitalism from black South



a vision of Western freedom that will draw African people and emerging African nations into the Western world.<sup>16</sup>

Naudé's particular Afrikaner commitment is often commented upon, but what he does here is to place his critique of apartheid within the trajectory of an idea of a Christianised West, arguing that in apartheid Afrikaners are in fact breaking with that trajectory. It is the hope for the expansion of the universal values of the "civilised West" that he urges these white students at the University of Cape Town to commit themselves to. A few months later he makes clear that (part of) the problem within the Afrikaner community was exactly its failure to keep up with the developments in the West (Naudé 1967b:7).

This discourse will continue into the 1970s. In 1971 he would contrast South African with all "civilised communities" who have rejected racial concepts (Naudé 1971:8), with civilised here seemingly retaining its synonym with "Western" and "Christian," thus referring to the movements away from certain forms of scientific and explicit racist laws and ideologies in Europe, and to a lesser extent the United States, after World War II. In another speech delivered *in absentia* at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, he will again point out what he considered to be the inconsistency in South Africa of a "civilized, Western" country with "Christian" leaders denying

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Africans, and within the Christian Institute, is to make a distinction between African socialism/communalism and communism, to argue that the former is really what the majority or black South Africans would vote for (Naudé 1975a:11; Naudé 1975b:4).

16 I do not propose to have the work of Barbara Ward, mentioned earlier, bear more of an influence on Naudé's thought than can be rightly argued – indeed, the arguments made reflect ideas popular in the spirit of the times and could well draw from beyond her work. However, her own vision of how Western ideals of freedom relates to the struggle against communism and the development of Africa resonates so clearly with Naudé's arguments after 1966 that it does warrant mention: "In this contest with the attractions of Communism the Western world cannot rely on the momentum of past achievements and relationships. It has to reassert its vision of a free and just society, of a humanity united as brothers under the Fatherhood of God. The reason for bringing the great vitalities of nationhood and of material possessions under rational control is not only that survival demands a reordering of Western institutions. It is, above all, because new experiments in international and social relations will show to the world at large – to the young, to the students, to the new voters in Asia and Africa, to the natural leaders of the world's masses – that the traditional faith of the West is strong enough to remould society, strong enough to fulfil the promise of brotherhood which, whatever the blindness of nationalism or the selfishness of property, remains imbedded in our society as a judgement and a challenge" (Ward 1954:296).

“basic human rights” (Naudé 1975a:4). What Naudé continues to employ is a discourse of a “civilised Christian West,” and contrasting apartheid to this Western ideal. While the strategic political place of such an argument presented to his majority or exclusively white audiences can be understood, it continues to reinforce whiteness (in the guise of “Western,” “Christian,” and “civilised”) as moral norm against which all actions, including apartheid South Africa, should be measured.

Naudé’s vocal opposition to apartheid was in part made possible by his participation in ecumenical gatherings from the organising committee for Cottesloe onwards. Without assuming a singular definition of the term, the WCC representative tasked with visiting South Africa after the Sharpeville massacre, Robert Bilheimer’s, description of Naudé as a “genuine liberal” is telling (Fourie, 2018:126). Naudé found his public voice against apartheid by more and more speaking the mind of a so-called “liberal” ecumenical tradition.<sup>17</sup> Beyers Naudé, the former Afrikaner Dutch Reformed Church ministers, became the voice of an organisation which from 1966 onwards more and more represented the so-called “liberal” tradition in South African theology, associated mostly with the English speaking churches (Thomas 2002:166–167; 177–187).

The message communicated is quite often one of hastening a process of gradual change. This implied insisting on the urgency of allowing a growing number of black South Africans (with a primary emphasis on those in urban areas of “white South Africa”) to be drawn into the political and economic life of what was demarcated as “white.” In 1967 he frames the debate among white South Africans as being between those who argue for “the moral responsibility of the white electorate to increasingly involve non-whites in the political, economic and social life of the country” and those who insist on a final solution of “separate but equal development,” with apartheid then being the required interim measure for the latter (Naudé 1967a:7–8). In 1975, in a paper sent to the British Royal Society, he speaks of the need for giving black South Africans a “meaningful share”

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17 As Fourie (Fourie 2018:142) indicates, the way the choice around his involvement in Pro Veritate was handled in 1963 already indicated that Naudé was now more deeply rooted in his ecumenical convictions that in the theology and ideology of the Dutch Reformed Church.

in political power and economic wealth – yet “meaningful” remains undefined (Naudé, 1975a:7–8). Yet in this same year, speaking locally, he notes the tension between Helen Suzman’s Progressive Party and black consciousness proponents, since the latter are insisting on a country with “one man one vote” (Naudé 1975b:7).

Against this background, it should come as no surprise that Naudé, in fact, has to re-evaluate everything (Ryan 1990:143) after being confronted with black consciousness. It was some of the very arguments that Naudé presented in opposition to apartheid that were slowly being questioned and confronted. It was the generosity of white people who wanted Africa to be drawn into a narrative of Western universalism that was being named as a perpetuation of the very same white logic that was underlying apartheid. While Naudé’s broadening of the world from Afrikaner nationalism to an ecumenical and global commitment is often noted, it was not only Naudé, the recovering Afrikaner nationalist that heard the challenge of black consciousness, but it was a white Westerner committed to expanding the best in Western tradition – and rejecting apartheid as fundamentally opposed to Western Christendom – who had to re-evaluate his thoughts.

### **Responding to black consciousness: realigning the source of an alternative vision**

The impact of black consciousness on Naudé’s own political development should not be underestimated. However, his reading of black consciousness also requires a critical evaluation. Naudé first met Steve Biko in 1971 (Walsch 1983:135). As he begins to describe the sea-change that he observed in black consciousness (in his view from 1969 onwards), he initially jumps between a variety of adjectives: black awareness, black power, black anger, or black bitterness (Naudé 1971:10). While convinced of its significance, a coherent description and response would take time to develop. But when in 1972 Naudé receives an honorary doctorate from the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam,<sup>18</sup> it is the challenge of black consciousness that he places at

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18 Berkelaar recounts the history of how Naudé was finally chosen to receive an honorary Doctorate. Objections to this were presented from both more conservative as well as Marxist groups, and Berkouwer’s awarding speech focused exclusively on Naudé

the centre of his acceptance speech argument on the responsibility of the church.

On the one hand, Naudé uses his acceptance speech to emphasise that the award is a voice affirming the work of the Christian Institute and thus rejecting the ongoing opposition to the Christian Institute from both the mechanisms of the apartheid state, but most specifically from the three Afrikaans churches of Dutch descent. The heart of what he wants to communicate to his Dutch audience is however what he is hearing from black consciousness. He describes the change happening within South Africa with references to a movement through three points of hope for change within the black community. First, he says, this hope was on a change of heart from the white community in South Africa and, when this failed, on international support. Both these hopes were in vain (although he considers his honorary doctorate to be a sign of international support). The contemporary change is therefore towards a conviction that liberation will come from the black community itself (Naudé 1972:76–77).<sup>19</sup>

The implications for the (white) Church and Christians<sup>20</sup> then becomes that of taking a supportive or secondary role: supporting the political

commitment to the gospel, without giving any hint that the award could be read as a support of the struggle against apartheid (Berkelaar 2007:21; 86–90).

19 The problems with this simplistic line of argument should not be dismissed: the overview Naudé sketches skips over decades, even centuries, of social and political developments within African politics in which people in Africa, including what would later become South Africa, were building the movements and institutions working for liberation among themselves, not to mention the earlier kingdoms which were at war with colonial empires before being conquered. By way of example, in 1922 Davidson Don Tengo Jabavu made the very same argument – that black South Africans initially placed their hopes on the “essential goodness of Englishmen” but after 1910, in response to younger voices, have been taking a more “independent” stance (Thomas 2002:89). Again, the removal of Africans from the Cape voter roll in 1936 caused a break between some streams of black political opinion and white liberalism (Thomas 2002:128). So, the idea that black liberation will be the result of black organisation is not altogether new in the 1970s. Such a reminder was also not impossible in the 1970s. Peter Walshe, for example, in 1977 already recognised that the Christian Institute, even while a prophetic voice in the church, in fact only at a late stage joined a “century of African political protest” (Walshe 1977:478). However, within Naudé’s argument his phases become a testimony of his own further conversion as well a call towards his international audience for a changed relationship to the struggle for liberation in South Africa.

20 Whether intended or not Naudé here risks reproducing an assumption of the Church and Christians as white and making a distinction between “Church and Christians” on

aspirations of the black community and the positive work of black consciousness on the one side, and turning to the white community and assisting them to better understand the fundamental change which black consciousness brought about (Naudé 1972:77). Here Naudé is explaining to his international audience what the main focus of SPRO-CAS 2<sup>21</sup> will be, even while not naming it.<sup>22</sup>

A tension, however, remains within his response. Here, and elsewhere, he commits himself without reservation to the leadership of the black consciousness movement, and to the responsibility given to white people in response to it. But his interpretation of black consciousness remains one of an inevitable mirror of white racism and apartheid.

Die eis om erkenning van swart identiteit volg op die oorbeklemtoning van wit identiteit, swart bewuswording groei uit die miskennis van swart menswaardigheid; swart apartheid, swart solidariteit en swart mag, groei as noodwendige psigologiese verweer teen wit apartheid, wit solidariteit en wit mag.

[The claim for recognition of black identity follows from the over-emphasis of white identity, black awareness growing out of the disregard of black human dignity; black apartheid, black solidarity and black power, grow as a necessary psychological defence against

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the one hand and the “black community” on the other. What he describes as the task of the Church and Christians is clearly referring to the white Church and Christians, which he contrasts with the work of the black community, but this church is not named as white.

- 21 The proposed second round of the Study Project on Christianity in an Apartheid Society. The initial project which ran from 1969–1972 produced a wide-ranging set of reports on required changes to South African society. The second iteration of the project among other took up the challenge of black consciousness for which South Africans to focus on “white work” while also partnering with developments around black community projects to bring concrete change.
- 22 When tracing this history, Walsch (Walsch 1983:138–139) indicates that during 1971 there were still reservations around black consciousness within the Christian Institute. For Peter Randall, who led the SPRO-CAS process, it was only during the second half of 1971 that a break was made from a “predominantly white initiative designed to help blacks” to a committed support for black consciousness and black community programs instead. This shift was announced in January 1972, and the majority of the funding for SPRO-CAS was coming from The Netherlands. Convincing Dutch supporters of this new vision would therefore have been important.

white apartheid, white solidarity and white power.]<sup>23</sup>(Naudé, 1972:77).

Elsewhere Naudé would describe black consciousness as the Frankenstein creation of apartheid (Naudé 1971:11).

He would also make such a comparison in the positive. In his autobiography, more than 20 years after his acceptance speech at the *Vrije Universiteit*, Naudé draws parallels between the early Afrikaner Broederbond (before it became a secret society) and black consciousness, since both were born out of the need to work against the sense of inferiority over against their English-speaking counterparts. On these grounds, he argues that Afrikaners (the clear primary audience of the autobiography) should be able to have empathy with black consciousness (Naudé 1995:76–77). This particular idea is already present in the 1960s, when Naudé draws on this argument as motivation for a general white, but particular Afrikaner, empathy with the struggle against apartheid – as well as a warning to his audience that others will have as much commitment to their own liberation as Afrikaners had after the experience of British supremacy (Naudé, 1967a:8). We should not ignore the ambiguity inherent in Naudé’s evaluation, nor the fact that there is some overlap with a broader white liberal conviction reigning during this time that black consciousness was “apartheid in reverse” (Thomas 2002:203).

In Naudé’s drawing on an idea of Afrikaner empathy for black consciousness, there seems to be a conceptual divide that remains uncrossed. Naudé reads black consciousness into an imagination of ethnic nationalism, and if there is at times signs of hesitancy towards the developments within black consciousness, it is this image of similarity with early Afrikaner nationalism that is underlying it. Reading black consciousness as a search for a new understanding of humanity for all, a new humanism (Gibson 2011:70) on the other side of racism and colonialism, remain difficult within Naudé’s interpretation. In this Naudé however reflects an interpretation of black consciousness which Shannon Hill eloquently described with the words “Their rejection of race and difference continues to be read as a promotion

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23 Author’s translation of the Afrikaans original.

of these very things because too much emphasis is placed on the color that consciousness names” (Hill 2015:xiii).

Noting this illuminate two aspects of Naudé’s response to black consciousness during these years. On the one hand, Naudé’s response to black consciousness is quite specifically focused on the question of social and political leadership, and on white commitment to black leadership within the struggle against white racism. Naudé might be the most important white church leader of the 1970s embodying this particular shift in both reflection and organisation within that part of the white church opposing apartheid. Such a shift is however but one part of a response, with questions of social analysis and epistemological orientation partly outside of this. On the other hand, it is exactly by noting this that the shift which occurs within Naudé’s approach comes into focus: the conviction that white South Africans should accept black leadership in the struggle against apartheid and white racism does *not follow on being convinced of all aspects of black consciousness social analysis and epistemological reorientation*.<sup>24</sup> This is a fundamental break with earlier ideas on “trusteeship” common among white liberals. In brief, Naudé steps away from the position of eternal pedagogue evaluating black agents and supporting that which he can integrate into his own theological and political framework.

By 1976 at the latest Naudé’s earlier hopes for a gradual expansion of black political and economic participation was over, and his conviction was clear that the only solution would be that the white government be urgently removed, and black political leaders take over. In a media declaration following a court order indicating that he is not allowed to enter Soweto following the 16 June 1976 protests he wrote:

Dit behoort nou onomwonde duidelik te wees dat die Regering nie langer in ’n posisie is om die koers van politieke gebeure, nie net in Soweto nie, maar ook in die hele Suid Afrika te bepaal nie; hy is ook nie in staat om die inhoud of die rigting of pas van veranderinge in

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24 The point here is not that it implies a rejection of black consciousness social analysis, but rather that the order is important when interpreting Naudé’s change of mind on this point. It is not a process of first coming into agreement, which is then followed by an acceptance of the guiding role of black consciousness leaders. Rather, he becomes convinced about where leadership should emerge from, and accepts this in spite of the fact that he is not yet convinced of the social analysis being put forth.

op enige wyse te lei nie. Geringe politieke en sosiale veranderinge is eenvoudig ontoereikend om die krisis van hierdie oomblik op te los. Gevolglik is dit 'n saak van groot dringendheid en van die hoogste prioriteit dat die swart gemeenskap toegelaat sal word om werklik erkende swart leiers uit hul midde te kies, wat diegene insluit wat uit die tronk vrygelaat is en wat vanuit ballingskap teruggekeer het, om aan 'n nasionale konvensie deel te neem met die oog op die aftakeling van die onregverdigde politieke en sosiale strukture van ons land in die kortste moontlike tyd, en aan ons land 'n politieke leier van bevryding, wat op vryheid en geregtigheid vir almal gebaseer is, aan te bied.

[It should now be unequivocally clear that the government is no longer in a position to determine the course of political events, not only in Soweto, but also throughout South Africa; it is also unable to guide the content or direction or pace of change in any way. Minor political and social changes are simply insufficient to solve the crisis of this moment. Consequently, it is a matter of great urgency and of the highest priority that the black community be allowed to truly choose recognized black leaders from among them, including those released from prison who have returned from exile, to take part in a national convention with a view to abolishing the unfair political and social structures of our country in the shortest possible time, and to offer the country a political leader of liberation, based on freedom and justice for all.]<sup>25</sup>(quoted in Naudé 1995:105).<sup>26</sup>

We should not make too much of Naudé's commitment to black consciousness during the 1970s. This does not imply questioning that commitment, but rather noting that working out the theological implications for white Christians would take a far longer time. Rather, Naudé was perhaps the key white church leader recognising and then communicating the need for a particular shift: that white South Africans need to recognise that their role in the struggle for a more just society rejecting white supremacy in

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25 Author's translation of the Afrikaans original.

26 In contrast to this, as late as 1975 he still publicly expressed his belief in the sincerity of the then Prime Minister John Vorster's and the National Party's commitments to reform and normalization of relations in South Africa (Naudé 1975b:4, 7).



principle requires a commitment to and support of the leadership and initiatives of black South Africans. The speeches of the 1970s increasingly reveal a white theologian and religious leader attempting to work out his role within the struggle from within such a commitment.

## Conclusion

One aspect of Naudé's earlier critique on apartheid was to critique apartheid from within the logic of a Western ecumenical theology which interpreted the liberation of Africa fully within an explicitly Western conceptual framework. In the arguments illustrated above this involves theologically identifying Western moral tradition fully with God's freedom and evaluating liberation from apartheid out of this explicitly Western legal and moral vision. On the other hand, Naudé continues to read the liberation from apartheid and the broader struggle against colonialism fully within a Euro-American cold war logic where the priority of drawing Africa into a Western "civilization" as opposed to communist rule at times inform his rhetoric far more than the actual rejection of European colonialism and white racism per se. Important is that Naudé's critique of apartheid assumes a liberation that is dependent on subsuming a postcolonial Africa within his vision of a Western civilization.

Yet, in spite of the limitations noted a distinct shift occurs during the 1970's. The language of "radicalization" often used to describe this shift in Naudé might say more about the norm in white South Africa than about Naudé political positioning, but what does happen is that Naudé shifts his vision on where liberation will come from. It is a growing awareness and recognition that the oppressed must determine the contours of liberation, made concrete in his increasing commitment to black leadership in the struggle against apartheid, that makes visible a shift in perspective. Without implying a Damascus-like conversion<sup>27</sup>, the political shift implies a critique

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27 Villa-Vicencio argues against reading a Damascus-like conversion in Naudé after Cottesloe (Villa-Vicencio, 1985:4). I would add that in similar way his later conversion under tutelage of black consciousness should not be seen as a Damascus-like conversion either, but rather as a slow, often struggling, attempt at incorporating a fundamental challenge to his earlier thoughts into an emerging critique.

on the Western-centric logic visible in the years prior to his engagement with black consciousness.

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