

Examining Beyers Naudé's witness in apartheid South Africa as an embodiment of Belhar confession

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Beyers Naudé's witness from 1963 to the end of the apartheid government in 1994 reflects the principles of the Belhar Confession. He was originally an ardent supporter of apartheid theology, having been part of its most influential structures at the time. Some of them were the Dutch Reformed Church, the *Afrikaner Broederbond*, and Stellenbosch University, where he studied theology, which was also regarded as a factory for influential apartheid leaders such as John Vorster, a prime minister and later fourth state president of the apartheid regime as well as HF Verwoerd, the architect of apartheid. In the early 1960s, long before the birth of the Belhar Confession, he 'converted' from being an apologist of apartheid theology. He thus became a true servant of Christ who, in the wording of Black Theology, advocated a life of justice for all with God as understood to be of the side of what Mofokeng calls the 'non-persons' or the oppressed. Drawing on existing literature by way of a qualitative review, the author analytically links the life and witness of Beyers Naudé with the message of the Belhar Confession to examine the witness of Beyers Naudé within the parameters of the Belhar Confession after his 'conversion' in 1963 until 1994. In addition, the aim of this is to further explore and determine whether he could serve as an example of living the message of the Belhar Confession. The essay concludes that he succeeded in being an epitome of the message of the Belhar Confession in the apartheid context and that he remained a reliable role model for the lived experience of the Belhar Confession.

Contribution: This study argues that Beyers Naudé's witness in apartheid South Africa succeeded in enacting the message of the Belhar Confession. While it falls within the scope of Systematic Theology, it also has interdisciplinary implications for disciplines such as Missiology, Church History, Sociology and Anthropology.

Keywords: Beyers Naudé; Belhar Confession; Broederbond; unity; reconciliation; justice; *Stigmata* of the cross.

Introduction

The Belhar Confession may be regarded as one of what Mofokeng (1989:42) calls 'epistemological explosions and ruptures', when he refers to 'explosive' incidents that occurred during the fight against apartheid. The birth of the Confession in 1982, as adopted by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) in 1986, can further be seen as a *kairos* moment as was defined in the Kairos Document. The latter was issued in 1985 by a group of (mainly black) South African theologians, referring to the correct moment to act against prevailing injustices that necessitated it. It was conceived in a crucial moment in history that required suitable Christian witnesses. The Confession was born in the complex political context of South Africa (SA). It was meant as a Christian theological and ethical stance in this context, guiding interactions towards unity, reconciliation and social justice.

Beyers Naudé lived two lives when one applies the yardstick of Christian ethics. The first part of his adult life was dedicated to being an apologist for apartheid theology, a life condemned in the Belhar Confession. The second part of his adult life was one supported by the Belhar Confession. Therefore, the author drawing on existing literature through a qualitative review method, while also employing what Plaatjies-Van Huffel (2013:10) coined the 'three central themes' of the Confession being a call towards unity, reconciliation, and justice (Articles 2–4) to which the author adds preparedness for suffering or *stigmata* of the cross¹ (Article 5), argues that the witness of

1. The doctrine of *stigmata of the cross* is used within the scope of Mofokeng's Christological anthropology, his doctrine of *Christus praesens* arguing that it creates a sense of identification between Christ and the oppressed (Africa 2024:30; Mofokeng 1987, 1989; Reddie 2016:17). The presence and identification of Christ's suffering, (the Good Friday story) with that of the oppressed is linked with the reality of his presence in their daily situation of suffering because of apartheid. Thus, the *stigmata of the cross* that touches on, 'the capture, torture, humiliation and crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth' (Mofokeng 1989:47) relates to the oppressed. He thus addresses the oppressed as the 'cross bearers' who continue to suffer an extended Good Friday (*stigmata of the cross*) for the rest of their lives. Mofokeng could therefore argue: 'The crosses of the oppressed people cannot but remind us of the cross of Jesus at Calvary' (Mofokeng 1989:46).

Naudé's life embodied the Belhar Confession. To achieve this, the following structure will be followed: exploring the SA political context covering the period of his activism against apartheid from 1963 to 1994, giving a brief background to Naudé, examining the message of the Belhar Confession, and analysing Naudé's witness in the light of the Confession. In the process, some possible lessons learned from the example of Naudé for the benefit of the church and society will also be explored. A conclusion will be reached indicating that Naudé succeeded in being an epitome for the message of the Belhar Confession in the difficult apartheid context. It will further demonstrate that he will stand out for many years to come as a reliable role model for the lived experience of this confession.

The South African political context giving meaning to Beyers Naudé's activism: 1960–1994

The scope of this context extends from 1960 to 1994. As such, it covers two decades before and some years after the birth of the Belhar Confession. This period prepares the ground for understanding Naudé's most significant theological and political activities. The Belhar Confession was adopted in 1986, while Naudé's 'conversion' from supporting apartheid and rejecting it occurred in 1963. Naudé's witness, therefore, extends from this year through to the birth of the Confession and beyond.

In the period between the 1960s and the end of the 1980s, one finds a mixture of strong state repression and related response from the oppressed. Although the 1960s were relatively quiet in terms of black political resistance because of the strong hand from apartheid forces and the imprisonment of black political leaders, the 1970s was marked by youth activism that climaxed in 1976 and the release of some activists who were imprisoned during the 1960s. This led to regrouping and resumption of political activism that was suppressed in the 1960s. The 1980s was marked by the continuation and intensification of resistance via mass action and the formation of (new) political structures such as the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983.

How could one describe the context of the 1960s? Political resistance was short-lived as it was limited to the first quarter, ending with the imprisonment of black political leaders in 1964. The hand of the apartheid government against black political resistance became stronger. Williams (2015:84) acknowledges that 'the government's determination to squash opposition appeared successful in 1963, when 19 members of the High Command of the military wing of the ANC were arrested'. Williams (2015:85) further indicates that it seemed these anti-government groups had been dealt a fatal blow. From Williams (2015:82), it could be understood that this period started earlier with tensions in the African National Congress (ANC) in 1958, which led to a split that gave birth to the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). Beinart (2001:165) confirmed the same view when he indicates that in

1959, the PAC broke from the ANC 'espousing a militant Africanism, attempted to inject new urgency into campaigning and upstage the ANC in mass mobilisation'. The PAC organised an anti-pass protest in March 1960 at Sharpeville during which 69 protesters were killed by the security forces. This tragedy was commonly called the Sharpeville massacre. This had rippling effects as protests spread countrywide. The quietness of political activism during the 1960s did not affect students at English-speaking universities. According to Guest (2019:367), widespread and vocal student protest and unrest did characterise SA English-speaking universities from the mid-1960s to mid-1970s.

The above actions led the government to respond harshly, among others, declaring a 5-month state of emergency in 83 magisterial districts in 1960. Chisholm (2025:652) correctly characterises the 1960s as 'a watershed for South Africa in many ways ... the South Africa's ruling white Nationalist Party acted ruthlessly to suppress African nationalist opposition'. Williams (2015) captures this ruthlessness as:

[T]he government introduced legislation that severely limited or destroyed basic human rights within the society. The freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, association, and movement, and even the right to life, were all stripped away from those who opposed the government. Moreover, any individual or group seen as a threat to the state found the full repressive arsenal of the government – such as banishment, tortures, bannings, trial, imprisonment, exile even death-directed at them. (p. 82)

Flames of resistance and the harsh hand of the apartheid government were also seen within university grounds. It is from this background that Guest (2019:347) refers to large-scale detention across the country that also affected students and staff at university campuses.

How did the oppressed respond on this regime's harsh hands? Chisholm (2025:652) argues that as many leaders were imprisoned, the 1960s created an opportunity for regrouping in exile. It further afforded liberation movements space to continue their struggle from outside. As a result of these efforts, Chisholm (2025:652) further confirms that 'by 1965 offices had been established in London, Algiers, Cairo, Lusaka and Dar es Salaam'.

What was the context of the 1970s? According to Williams (2015:93) 'during the 1970s, the ANC began to slowly rebuild support inside South Africa and internationally'. Younis (2000:122) correctly states that '[a] resurgence of resistance in the 1970s and a decade later by the full-scale uprisings that would shift the momentum of the ANC from exile into South Africa'. This marked youth activism that culminated in the Soweto uprising of 1976, resulting in a large-scale influx of youth mainly into other African countries and elsewhere globally. Chisholm (2025) indicates that:

[I]t is estimated that about 4000 young people left South Africa and passed through Botswana or Swaziland to Mozambique, Zambia and other countries to the north, and about three quarters of them joined the ANC. (p. 653)

Younis (2000:125) further acknowledges the labour strike he called 'the biggest to hit the country since the Second World War'. This was part of the so-called Durban Moment. It was referring to a period in the early and mid-1970s when Durban became the centre of new strong activism against apartheid through mass labour action. Two brains behind this moment were Steve Biko (Black Consciousness Movement) and Richard Turner (Trade Union Movement). Younis (2000:125) indicates that it rocked Durban and surrounding areas in 1972–73. Parallel to this, during this period, black university students, not by design, also initiated action. Van Zyl-Hermann (2021) also brings another perspective over and above mass labour action. This includes an element of community protest action against apartheid policies countrywide. Van Zyl-Hermann reports on the eruption of African labour unrest in 1973 and national community demonstrations against apartheid. These when combined with the 1976 Soweto student protests and slowdown in world production and trade, demonstrated the dysfunctionality of apartheid's economics.

The 1980s was characterised by the formation of political structures, which saw the division of the apartheid government. Williams (2015:95) observes that 'In 1985, the formation of the Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU) with 500 000 members ready to support the political struggle against apartheid further strengthened internal opposition'. Van Zyl-Hermann (2021) indicates marked ideological division in apartheid regime, which led to the split of the National Party in 1969, resulting in the formation of the Conservative Party in 1982. The divide was between what Younis (2000:121) called 'The *verligte* or "open-minded" wing in government', which opposed the *verkrampes* [ultra-conservative].

Theologically, the 1980s was also characterised by what Mofokeng (1989:42) termed epistemological ruptures. The following were identified; the Alliance of Black Reformed Christians in South Africa, which declared apartheid a heresy in 1981. The South African Council of Churches (SACC) adopted this declaration in 1982. The Belhar Confession of the DRMC also appeared in this decade. Another rupture was the appearance of the *Kairos Document* in 1985 (Mofokeng 1989:42–44). The emergence of trade unions in 1985, such as COSATU (see above), marked another onslaught on apartheid (Williams 2015:95). Mofokeng (1990a:37) refers to 'the tear-gassing of people in churches and funeral services and the brutal shooting of unarmed school children' during this time. Masuku (2014:154) also reports that in 1986, cracks begun to be seen in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). This was seen at the 1986 General Synod where a division was experienced resulting in the birth of the conservative Afrikaans Protestant Church after the DRC adopted open membership to other races. Over all of these years, Beyers Naudé was active as minister, theologian and political pariah to his own people. The following section turns to Naudé's introduction, which will pave the way towards better understanding of his witness.

Beyers Naudé the man

Naudé was born on the night of 10 May 1915 at Roodepoort, Johannesburg into a conservative Afrikaner nationalist family (Naudé 1995:11). His father Jozua is described by Nash (2005:32) as a die-hard Afrikaner who was a founding member of the *Afrikaner Broederbond* and its first president in 1918. This body aimed at promoting Afrikaner interests and brotherhood (Pauw 2005:9). In 1932, Naudé enrolled at Stellenbosch University to study theology to become a pastor in the DRC, as his father was. At university, he was active in student politics and participated in leadership roles (Pauw 2005:9). He studied at the same time with conservative Afrikaner leaders such as, later Prime Ministers Hendrik Verwoerd (1958–1966), and John Vorster (1966–1978). He joined the ministry of DRC on 27 July 1940 as a minister of the Wellington congregation and served several congregations thereafter and was elected to senior leadership positions (Naudé 1995:32). In 1958, he was elected vice-chairman of the Transvaal Synod of the DRC (Pauw 2005:12) and in 1963 a moderator of the Southern Transvaal Synod (Ackermann 2005:66).

In the 1960s Naudé and few of his contemporaries began questioning the DRC theology that legitimised apartheid. According to Pauw (2005):

[M]any of these dissident voices were strongly shaped by Reformed evangelism – a theological current that has been dominant in the DRC since the 18th century, and through a commitment to mission, contact with the so-called 'daughter' churches of the DRC. (p. 10)

Other influences were from liberal professors of theology such as Ben Marais and B.B. Keet who supported Marais (Pauw 2005:11).

The most significant turning point in the life of Naudé that resulted in what came to be known as his 'conversion' was the Sharpeville massacre of 21 March 1960. Consequently, the English churches vehemently attacked DRC on apartheid, The World Council of Churches (WCC) sent delegates to meet SA churches, and a weeklong conference at Cottesloe was organised in December 1960 (Pauw 2005:13). This was an eye-opener for Naudé because for the first time in this conference he came into contact with English-speaking churches and black ministers. The conference issued a statement condemning apartheid. The DRC rejected this statement and Naudé stood by it. This gave Naudé an opportunity to echo his theological concerns. After consulting some representatives of the WCC and few like-minded ministers of the DRC who were in his Bible Study group, he pioneered the establishment of a journal called *Pro Veritate*, the first issue appearing on 15 May 1962. The aim was to address apartheid theological violation of the gospel. Unexpectedly, he was elected moderator of the Southern Synod in March 1963. Thereafter, the ecumenical organisation called the Christian Institute (CI) to cater for Christians from different churches and races was established in August 1963 and Naudé was director (Pauw 2005:15).

The DRC was not happy. The synod requested Naudé to resign from the editorship of the *Pro Veritate* and the directorship of the CI, which he refused. He then left the DRC. He was, therefore, at this stage out of the ministry of the DRC into the broader ecumenical ministry in SA. Most of Naudé's work was carried out after the founding of CI until 1994. Taking into cognisance that more details of his work will be performed at an appropriate section below, at this stage Naudé's work until 1994 will be highlighted. The CI became his vehicle to execute most of his duties. It became his tool for ecumenism, broadly for churches in SA and where he also had a special focus on unity within DRC family churches. Other channels for his work were the journal, *Pro Veritate*, the Study Project of Christianity in Apartheid Society (SPROCAS) and the SACC. In the process, he endured suffering as he was rejected by his people, church and apartheid government. However, Naudé, as a result of his commitment, was loved and accepted by the victims of oppression. Thus, he was part of the negotiations for the democratic dispensation in the early 1990s, which led to the dawn of democratic government in April 1994. Having introduced Naudé, the message of Belhar Confession is introduced in the following section.

The message of Belhar Confession

The message of the Belhar Confession could be located from the context of its origin, which is apartheid. Its origin is located by Plaatjies-Van Huffel (2013:1) in a draft authored by the DRMC in 1982 rooted in the struggle against apartheid. Beukes and Plaatjies van Huffel (2016:224) indicate that it was adopted on 26 September 1986 by the DRMC responding to theological justification of apartheid. They also confirmed its five subsections they termed Articles (Beukes & Plaatjies van Huffel 2016) which are as follows:

The first Article repeats and confirms the ancient Christian belief in the triune God, who establishes the Church. The following three Articles, namely Unity, Reconciliation and Justice, deal with the church and her role in the world. The fifth Article calls the church to do what is confessed, even if it means persecution. (pp. 224–225)

The elements of 'unity, reconciliation or justice' in relation to this confession, is also acknowledged by Plaatjies-Van Huffel (2013:1). Mouton (2024) adds that these three:

[R]eflect both the heart of a caring God and the heart and essence of being a church, providing an important lens through which the identity and calling of the church may be understood. (p. 3)

Van Der Merwe (2021:7) also locates the core message within the same lines when he contends that 'The Belhar confession addresses three critical areas in the South African context, namely church unity, reconciliation and justice'. Beukes (2021:6), having divided this confession into five subsections above, which he terms Articles, further divides its core message broadly into three categories that are relevant to all churches. He therefore divides it as follows: 'the unity of the church and unity among all people, reconciliation within the church and society, and God's justice'.

What context triggered the message of this confession? Beukes (2021:2) locates the trigger being: 'the struggle against apartheid, law enforcement brutality and a time of racism in Southern Africa'. Plaatjies-Van Huffel (2013) correctly captured the wrath of apartheid when she contends:

Apartheid in its application through racist structures, led to exclusive privileges for the white section of the population at the expense of blacks. Apartheid created a situation of injustice and oppression, large-scale deportation to racially segregated groups and caused havoc to family life and suffering to millions of South Africans. (p. 1)

Beukes (2021:2) further indicates that this confession is a Christian voice on racism, natural division and suffering from the context of the victims of oppression, which Mofokeng (1990b:179) termed 'the nobodies of this world'.

The global significance of the Belhar Confession is that it cuts across different contexts and churches today. Plaatjies-Van Huffel (2013:1) confirms that 'it is a confession for the whole church seeking to be faithful to God who stands in the midst of suffering of any and all expression'. It touches on different issues that are a concern of the Word of God. As racism persists, this confession becomes even more important. It has a guiding message for the church with regard to racism. Beukes (2021:5) correctly argues 'the Belhar Confession, which was born in the southern African struggle against apartheid and racial structure, can contribute to the role churches have to play in denouncing racism'. Because of persistent acts of racism in post-apartheid SA, one could therefore agree with Beukes and Plaatjies van Huffel (2016) that:

[T]he Belhar Confession is now more than ever relevant and should therefore be the basis and motivation for the church to serve and be involved in the fight against poverty in South Africa. (p. 224)

How relevant is the message of the Belhar Confession in changing political contexts? The message remains relevant more especially in contexts that are marred by injustices, which include violations of human dignity. For instance, in a post-apartheid SA, marred by poverty and other forms of injustices, Article 4 becomes relevant for it 'concedes that God is especially the God of the poor, and the church of God should stand where God stands. Liberation theology emphasises the preferential option for the poor' (Modise 2019:10). According to Mouton (2024:3) 'it implores the church to speak out on behalf of and care for those in need'. To address the above context, the witness of Naudé becomes relevant. Having unpacked the core message of this confession, the following section will outline Naudé's witness.

Naudé's witness as a lived experience of the Belhar Confession

The analysis of Naudé's witness regarding the Belhar Confession, in addition to Article 5, will be based on Articles, 2, 3, and 4. This section confirms Adonis' (2005:126)

observation: 'Dr Naudé practised what he believed and confessed it in his service as a minister, as director of the Christian Institute and as secretary of the SACC'.

Naudé's ministry praxis on church unity (Article 2)

Naudé embraced unity in his life through actions and speeches as demonstrated in his ministry praxis. On unity through speeches regarding the DRC family churches, Adonis (2005) writes:

Dr Naudé spoke and wrote on the subject of church unity in the family of Dutch Reformed Churches on various occasions. The mouthpiece of the Christian Institute, *Pro Veritate*, published numerous of his contributions on this theme over many years. (p. 118)

Naudé (2005c) further echoes:

Our church is irrevocably estranging the affections of our 'daughter' churches of Africa. If our church continues with this conscious and fear-inspired process of isolation, with its tragic withdrawal from the Holy Catholic Church in South Africa and Africa, we shall, spiritually, wilt and die! (p. 29)

On church unity in general, Naudé (in De Gruchy 2005) argues:

Without the united church or the united standing of the Christian community there was no possibility of making any impact on the world with regards to our message or our mission. It was the mission of the whole church to the whole world, not one church to a small number of people around them. The church had to look at the needs of the world and say: If we are truly the people of God proclaiming the gospel of salvation and liberation, transforming of human beings in society, then the church has to be one. (p. 83)

Accepting his new role in the CI he uttered:

Also in the new work to which God calls me, I would do more and no less than to summon Christians of different churches, and, in God's name, to challenge them to take his Word with all seriousness, to challenge them to think through and discuss, with honest and whole-hearted commitment, the burning questions with which life faces us. (Naudé 2005g:45)

His concern after the DRC was dismissed from ecumenical bodies became apparent from his utterances:

The withdrawal of the major Dutch Reformed Churches from the Christian Council of South Africa as well as from the World Council of Churches has had a very disruptive effect on the whole ecumenical movement as well as on the Afrikaner people with regards to their relations with the English-speaking population, and it will take a long time before this breach is healed. (Naudé 2005f:60)

The Unity Agency of Naudé was also observed in action. In the DRC family churches, Adonis (2005:117) indicates that already, early in his ministry, Naudé had contacts with ministers from the black, racially divided so-called daughter churches. The message of his last sermon in his congregation, based on Acts 5:29 (Obedience to God alone than to man) foregrounded unity from his emphasis:

Finally: this text has meaning for the other churches in South Africa and for the Christians in those churches (white as well as non-white). You who with us confess faith in Christ and his word: Is your first obedience and your highest loyalty to Christ? Are you prepared to call on your people to seek this obedience and set it above all else? (Naudé 2005c:29)

Pauw (2005:10) noticed that '[i]n Naudé's case, an emerging ecumenical awareness also brought him to question the DRC's growing self-isolation'.

After his banning, Naudé continued to promote church unity. Pauw (2005) provides some hints on this matter:

It was during this period that Naudé decided he could no longer remain a member of a church that resisted the Christian calling for unity with its 'daughter' churches on grounds of race or colour. He quit the DRC and applied for membership in the Alexandra congregation of the black Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA). (p. 20)

Naudé was also part of the discussion team representing the DRCA in the unity meetings with the DRMC that was constituted in 1986 (Adonis 2005:122). Pauw (2005) explains that Naudé:

[P]layed a leading role as DRCA representative in the process of unification between the DRCA and the coloured DRMC. When the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa was finally established in April 1994, Naudé shared in the joy and gratitude of the delegates. (p. 20)

Naudé's unity mission outside the DRC was also observed. Pauw (2005) opines that with the establishment of the CI, he:

Envisaged an institute that would 'organise and initiate courses, conferences, Bible study weeks and discussions' between Christians from different churches and races, as well as 'the creation and building of ecumenical study groups in various centres [and] the distribution of factual information on the ecumenical movement'. (p. 15)

The CI was thus conceived from ecumenical grounds as Pauw (2005) observes:

But for Naudé, an ecumenical body was vital for the church and he pressed ahead. After a number of preparatory meetings over the course of a year with a wide range of church leaders, the Christian Institute of Southern Africa was finally established in August 1963. (p. 15)

Tutu observed some of the contributions of the CI in terms of unity. The relationship of the CI with BCM and Black Theology was highlighted. It was underlined from the fact that the CI 'supported Black Consciousness Movement of a Steve Biko and the Black Theology of such as Itumeleng Mosala and others'. The CI further supported theological training for the pastors of the so-called African Independent Churches. The relationship with churches in general also featured in the activities of the CI and this further soured its relationship with the apartheid government (Tutu 2005:50).

Pauw (2005:17) was convinced that 'The CI can thus be characterised as a prophetic and ecumenical movement in the light of the Afrikaans churches' failure to address racism and injustice in South Africa'. The ecumenical character of the CI was also observed by Pauw (2005:18; Nash 2005:36) from the point that it has been bound with the struggle of the church in SA. This ecumenical link could also be seen from the message the CI jointly issued with the SACC in 1968. The message was titled, *The Message to the People of South Africa*. The message asserted that the Gospel of Christ and the ideology of apartheid do not mix. It called on Christians to reject apartheid theology in the light of the demands of the imminent Kingdom of God within history, and to seek justice for all people. The SPROCAS 1 was established in 1968 as a vehicle to put the message into practice. This happened through six independent commissions that addressed various themes. Naudé's ecumenical character has been observed by Pauw (2005:7) who describes him as; 'an Afrikaner with a broad ecumenical vision and an uncompromising global perspective on life'.

Naudé's ministry praxis on reconciliation (Article 3)

That Naudé was an agent of reconciliation in church and society can be found particularly clearly in his speeches. One of his major reconciliatory speeches is recorded by Adonis (2005:118) as part of his inauguration into CI. Pauw (2005:17), too, refers to it: 'His inaugural address on 15 December was delivered in the Central Methodist Church in Johannesburg. It was entitled *Versoening* (Reconciliation)'. His preferred biblical text is 2 Corinthians 5:14–21. In his interpretation of this text, he warns that reconciliation is more than being a biblical term. He adds that over and above this, it also carries the weight of biblical truth. He further indicates that it is a New Testament, which we as Christians should grasp and apply honestly and in humility. He concludes by advising that reconciliation is a Christian property, which the world knows nothing about (Naudé 2005d:139). He adds:

This reconciliation could only be realised through a supreme act of sacrifice such as became reality when the Son of God became man in the fullness of time. This was the true meaning of the Incarnation to demonstrate to the whole world through all ages that in Christ Jesus, God had become the great Reconciler. (Naudé 2005d:139)

He further contends that conversation and communication are central to reconciliation. He further argues that God took the lead in this as he started a conversation with human beings through Christ. God thus paved a way for us to start a conversation with fellow Christians regarding matters that divide us. He further advises that Christ must be our starting point for conversation, looking at him as a reliable example to humanity Naudé (2005d:141).

Naudé (2005f) is concerned that:

The majority of the Afrikaners ... seemingly believe that only in separate development can true reconciliation, peace and harmony be found. They regard this as the only basis for a just and orderly settlement of our racial problems. I do not hold that

view, as I am convinced that this policy is morally indefensible and incapable of implementation. (p. 61)

He thus issued the following warning:

In view of the potentially dangerous and explosive situation in which we find ourselves at present, as I have sketched it above, it is of utmost importance that all South Africans who have the peaceful development of our country at heart should urgently seek practical and effective solutions in a new direction. (Naudé 2005h:96)

Naudé while addressing the so-called The Citizen's protest meeting a week after Steve Biko's death on 19 September 1977 in Johannesburg, echoed the following about him (2005e:77): 'But above all, he was a person with deep respect for every human being regardless of race, a Christian with deep concern for all his fellow men'. This was a huge gathering organised by the Citizen newspaper as part of a broader movement seeking to mobilise the public against apartheid and called for change.

Apart from Naudé speaking for himself, other observers appreciated his reconciliatory abilities. His reconciliatory agency could be understood from Masuku's (2025:2) employment of the concept called 'encounterology' which he describes as; 'a missiological encounter based on the *mission Dei* that sees others as equal, regardless of race, gender, economic class, religion, culture, among others'. Pauw analysing Naudé's reconciliatory witness echoes:

Naudé's name had come to stand for the process of reconciliation in a formerly divided country. Under apartheid he won the trust of many blacks and became for them a symbol of hope for the peaceful transformation of society. The vision that he had for just society and for an ecumenical church captured the hope of many people across the boundary of race and ethnicity. (Pauw 2005:21)

After his banning order was lifted in 1984 and serving as SACC General Secretary, Ackermann (2005) observes that:

Beyers Naudé continued to speak, teach and preach about the need for confession, reconciliation and unity among the churches. He pleaded ceaselessly for the DRC to become one united church. Ecumenism, economic justice, love and the value of human person were his binding themes. He led protest marches and visited sites of struggle, suffering and conflict. I have an abiding memory of him at the funerals of young black activists – often the only white face. (p. 68)

Ackermann (2005) summarises Naudé's work to the people of SA as:

[A] man whose integrity and personal charm, whose courage and honesty and above all whose prophetic humility set him apart from his contemporaries. Suffice to say that the moving homage paid to 'Oom Bey'² after his death by the South African nation speaks volumes for the high regard in which he was held. (p. 68)

Naudé lamented the attitude of the apartheid government that opposed reconciliation. He thus argues:

2. Ackermann (2005:68) correctly explains the name 'Oom Bey' as literally meaning 'Uncle Bey'. He further explains that it was the name by which he was affectionately known by the many South Africans who loved him.

Although the political leaders of the African and Indian racial groups have tried for many years to bring about political change, the increasingly repressive actions of the government through increased discriminatory legislation, constant bannings, harassments and intimidation by the Security Police, buttressed by the widespread system of paid informers, succeeded in crushing or suppressing temporarily and effectively all black political opposition. (Naudé 2005g:91)

Naudé (2005a) was also inspired by the prayer of John Harriott, a British Jesuit priest:

Let us open the clenched fist and extend the open palm, Let us mourn till others are comforted, weep till others laugh, Let us be meek till all can stand up in pride, Let us be frugal till all are filled, Let us make no claims till all have had their due, Let us be slaves till all free, Let us lay down our lives till others have life abundantly. (p. 115)

Naudé on Black Theology praxis in the quest for social justice (Article 4)

Naudé (2005b) defined the SA of his time in unjust terms:

Which SA are we talking about? ... Or are we talking about the South Africa of Sun City, of Sol Kerzner- ... or are we talking of the unknown millions who are desperately struggling to find a platform or their call to justice being heard? Are we talking about the South Africa of the overcrowded match-box homes, empty schools, protesting students, teargas and bullets, injury and death? (p. 127)

From the CI position, Tutu (2005) understood Naudé positioning God as follows:

Beyers Naudé and his associates founded the Institute in 1963 which helped people to realise that the living God was a God who was notoriously biased, always choosing to side with the voiceless, those without clout, the hungry and homeless. This was the same liberator God of the Exodus who had led a rabble of slaves out of bondage to freedom, who was engaged in the fray to set free all God's children from the bondage of injustice and oppression. (p. 50)

Although the CI approach was initially at times criticised by both the left and the right of the political spectrum, Naudé, through his contact with black political leaders and BC, transformed it accordingly. That is why Pauw (2005:19) could indicate that 'he became personally involved in assisting younger people to flee the country and in spreading ANC literature such as the *Freedom Charter*'. Study Project of Christianity in Apartheid Society II was established to align SPROCAS I with the socio-political needs of the oppressed. At the height of the struggle through to youth action in 1976, the CI remained supportive of the BCM and political struggle.

The Black Theology aspect of Naudé could be located from Masuku (2024:6), who listed him among some prominent black theologians such as Rev Frank Chikane, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Dr Allan Boesak, and Dr Brigalia Bam. These theologians' minds place them within the camp of those who subscribe to 'non-dichotomous perspective of *ubuntu*' which sees non-separation between church and politics. This is

observable from Naudé's (2005b) argument in locating the type of confession relevant for addressing an unjust context:

Authentic confession of faith, I believe can never be made in a political, social or economic vacuum, in a situation unrelated to the life and struggle in which Christians find themselves from day to day. In order to make the confession of one's faith meaningful, it has to be done in the context of a specific situation with a clear understanding of how one sees and interprets the community to whom the faith has to be proclaimed. (p. 127)

He supported apartheid fighting organisations from the NG church family, such as the *Broederkring*³ [Brotherly Circle] (BK), from his expression:

The *Broederkring*, brought into being with two main goals; to seek the organisational unification of the family of four NG Churches in South Africa and to express its total rejection of the policy of apartheid as unchristian, immoral and dehumanising ... That did not imply that the members of the *Broederkring* wanted to limit the confession of their faith only to these two issues and areas of life. (Naudé 2005b:128)

It went beyond this scope.

Naudé (2005b) supported the view that the BK:

[H]as discovered that the whole issue of riches and poverty, of wages and employment, of the relationship between management and labour, of worker rights and responsibilities are all part of the Christian witness which we need to understand and to address. (p. 128)

His advice to the BK is clear from his argument:

If the BK want to wish to make meaningful confession of its faith in South Africa today, part of that confession will inevitably imply our becoming more deeply involved in the struggle of millions of young people to achieve some form of justice for their educational needs and problems. (Naudé 2005b:130)

Naudé during his banning, participated in social development through his symbolic presence. When the UDF was launched in 1983, he was named one of its patrons. After the restricting order was lifted, he became once more SACC secretary where he strengthened its international ties. He also supported the Institute for Contextual Theology,⁴ which was also instrumental in drafting the *Kairos Document* in 1985 and the Durban-based pastoral centre Diakonia⁵ (Pauw 2005:21–22). On the fight for justice, Naudé was described as 'a "very lovable" person with a "grit-like determination" in the fight for justice (Pauw 2005:23).

3. An organisation that was established in 1974 by a small number of ministers in the Dutch Reformed 'family' of churches to foster organisational unification in these churches and to oppose apartheid as unchristian. In order to be gender relevant, this name was changed to *Belydende Kring* [Confessing Circle].

4. The Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT), a form of prophetic theological praxis, was formally established in 1981 in Johannesburg after the banning of the Christian Institute (CI) as a disguise to avoid harassment from apartheid government. Hence, on the name, terms such as 'liberation' or 'black' were avoided. As a disguise for the CI, the originators worked from a point of an organisation, 'which would carry on, in a different way, some of the goals of the CI' (Denis 2013:33).

5. The Diakonia Centre, originally known as Diakonia Council of Churches based in Durban, was established in 1998. It is a home of social agencies committed to justice, peace and development. It operates on the basis of the Christian ethos. Diakonia Centre took it over from the Ecumenical Centre Trust, which used it as an ecumenical centre since 1983.

Naudé's preparedness of suffering in pursuit of justice (Article 5)

In his pursuit for justice, Naudé went through the *stigmata* of the cross. The same experience could be seen from Masuku's (2024) description of Rev Frank Chikane when he said that he is:

[A] committed Christian who lived according to his spiritual beliefs as a faithful servant of Christ and as a result felt the *stigmata of the cross* from his church and apartheid state. (p. 8)

It seems Naudé (2005a) was aware of this painful journey from his warning:

Man's search for truth is a long and tortuous one and discovery thereof has usually been perceived by much agony and struggle of mind, body and spirit. In fact, when looking at history, it seems such discovery and expression of truth is inseparable from a measure of sacrifices, greater or smaller, according to the nature and duration of the struggle. (p. 111)

Adonis (2005:118) describes these as traumatic events in Naudé's life. He acknowledged that Naudé went through trying times.

His own Afrikaner people turned against him. Adonis (2005) further reports:

Initially he received support from a number of Afrikaners also, but with time this became all the more problematic for them. He discovered here what it means to stand alone before God. It was however, also during this period that he experienced the meaning of solidarity with another community, especially with the black community. (p. 118)

Naudé was made to resign from his editorship of the *Pro Veritate* where on 15 May 1963, he announced his refusal (Pauw 2005:16). His own congregation also requested him to resign from both CI and *Pro Veritate*. His brother-in-law, Dr Frans Geldenhuys, also requested him to resign. Naudé's application for the retention of his status after he took a position in the CI was rejected by the DRC without reason. His resignation from the Aasvoëlkop congregation in Johannesburg also meant the end of his ministry in the DRC (Pauw 2005:17). The first copies of the *Pro Veritate* appeared on 15 May 1962 and were rejected by DRC ministers, especially *Broederbond* members. The reaction from *Die Kerkbode* and the Afrikaans secular press was also hostile (Pauw 2005:15).

The government also focused on the CI and black political organisations. For this reason, in 1972, the state launched a commission of enquiry into certain organisations including the CI (Pauw 2005:19). Pauw contends that 'Security Police raided the CI offices, confiscated passports and CI workers were increasingly being detained and banned' (Pauw 2005:19). Ackermann (2005:76) indicates that in 'In 1976 the security police continued their harassment of the CI, regularly searching its offices, while political rhetoric against the CI heated up'. In 1976 Biko was murdered and CI and seven other mainly Black Consciousness organisations were

banned, the CI offices were closed down and its documents confiscated. This also marked the end of the *Pro Veritate*. It is further indicated that:

Beyers Naudé was subjected to a banning order that restricted him to his home, cut him off from attending meetings of any kind, whether social, political or religious, did not allow him to speak in public and made it unlawful to quote him. (Ackermann 2005:67)

According to Ackermann (2005:66–67; Tutu 2005:50–51), the CI was banned in October 1977. Pauw (2005) explains the process as follows:

On the morning of 19 October 1977, Naudé received a call from Hellen, wife of his Cape Town colleague Theo Kotze, informing him that 'They were here; be prepared'. He and his wife Ilse drove to the Braamfontein offices where the Security Police awaited him. The Christian Institute and with it *Pro Veritate* had come to an end. (p. 19)

Ackermann further states that 'Beyers Naudé's passport was confiscated; ties between the Reformed churches in the Netherlands and those in South Africa were broken, and the Soweto riots of 1976 shocked the world' (Ackermann 2005:66).

Government action also had a negative personal meaning for Naudé, especially with regard to the banning orders that were imposed on him. For this reason, Pauw indicates that 'Naudé describes his banning period as his seven lean years, but in many respects, they were enriching and rather peaceful years after the preceding tumult' (Pauw 2005:19). Ackermann (2005) further describes the pain this period had to Naudé and family:

This period was of intense frustration and very hard on Beyers Naudé, his wife Ilse and his family. Originally banned for five years, his banning order was subsequently extended for a further three years and then, to his surprise, lifted after a total of seven years on 26 September 1984. (p. 67)

Ackermann (2005) analyses the uniqueness of Naudé as follows:

What set Beyers Naudé apart is the fact that he was compelled to take up a stance against his very own community and to pay the particular price that such action demands. (p. 63)

Lesson learnt from the witness of Naudé for church and society

Taljaard (2006:96) correctly locates the presence of the reality of Naudé's witness in the Belhar Confession. The life of Naudé with regard to living the Belhar Confession stands out as a testimony that the message of this confession could be lived. The author, therefore, agrees with Pauw (2005:21–22) in his analysis of the contribution of Naudé on three fronts: Firstly, that 'his life demonstrates that it is often in the real encounter with the other that comes with questioning one's own position'. The experience was his encounter with the living conditions black communities and black ministers especially from the so-called daughter churches of the DRC, the Sharpeville massacre, his zeal for mission and the emerging black voices in post-colonial Africa. Pauw (2005:21) is therefore correct when he argues that 'Naudé's life shows that the open

encounter with others is not simply an exposure of the self to the other but it also exposes the self to the self'. Secondly, is his theology. He read Karl Barth's critical theology and commitment to ecumenism as well as liberation theology and applied it in his encounter with others. Thirdly, there are the outcomes of his participation in the struggle against apartheid. He contextualised the activities of the CI from theoretical and scholarly approach to being contextual in embracing Black Theology of liberation and Black Consciousness.

Naudé's commitment to the liberation of the oppressed as a white person and Afrikaner questioned the view of those in the left political spectrum, who do not trust the commitment of white people in the liberation struggle of the oppressed. Banda (2009:111) is therefore correct while analysing the role played by some whites, whom he termed as one of 'solidarity with victims', when he concluded that Biko's adage 'Black man you are on your own' (if it meant exclusion of all white people from black political struggle) it was thus considerably challenged. His contributions to church unity remain a lesson for ecumenism in SA context that is infested with different and conflicting voices from churches and where they are still divided along racial lines. The mark he left as an agent for reconciliation becomes an important asset in the context of race, gender, class, and many divides today, going into the future. His perseverance in his pursuit for justice despite challenges from both the apartheid government and the DRC, remains a lesson for many today, of never giving up in the fight for justice. His integrity in his ministry and his clean management of institutions such as the SACC and CI as well as the *Pro Veritate* is important as a guideline in the world marred with corruption, greed, and laziness today. The hope he had in plunging himself into the unknown and uncharted territories when he chose a new route outside the DRC in 1963, is important in taking risk in pursuit for justice. His preparedness to go through the *stigmata* of the cross, including the pain exerted by his own people, the DRC and state should give comfort and an encouragement for never allowing suffering to deter people from doing a good course.

In support of the above personality traits, Koopman's (2005:154–164) characterisation of Naudé is attractive to me when he describes him as a 'man of virtue and character'. Among others, he embraced the following in his character and virtue: justice, temperance, discernment, courage, faith, hope, and love. All these have been tested in his life. These are some of the lessons from Naudé today and beyond. Koopman (2005) correctly summarised his virtue and character as follows:

The character and virtuousness of Beyers Naudé was expressed in private and public life. It was demonstrated in responsible and hazardous action in the world. In various works that has been written in his honour ... people acknowledged this fact. (p. 62)

Conclusion

This study succeeded in indicating that Naudé was a person of his word as observed by Adonis (2005:126); 'Dr Naudé practised what he believed and confessed it in his service'.

This personality trait was also identified by Koopman (2005:162), who looked at him as a person of virtue and character. These virtues enabled him to blindly enact the message of the Belhar confession successfully in his life, despite challenges he encountered from the apartheid government and DRC, although the latter apologised later in his life. Naudé was seen to be a unifier, reconciler, and agent for justice, using the lens of Black Theology and Black Consciousness. He demonstrated courage despite the *stigmata* of the cross he went through. From all these, his legacy is observable. Koopman (2005) is therefore correct:

Beyers Naudé is no longer with us, but in a sense, he lives on ... Beyers Naudé lives on in his legacy of character and virtue that still guides us and inspires those who knew him. And the same will happen as we remember him, as we keep on making him a member again, with future generations. (p. 168)

It could therefore be concluded that Naudé succeeded to be an epitome for the message of the Belhar Confession in difficult apartheid context. This further means that he will stand out for many years to come as a reliable role model for the lived experience of this confession.

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Mnyalaza T. Masuku: Conceptualisation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Visualisation, Writing – original draft. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication, and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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