
Pro Rege

Volume 8 | Number 2

Article 5

December 1979

Naude. Prophet to South Africa (Book Review)

John C. Vander Stelt
Dordt College

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege

Recommended Citation

Vander Stelt, John C. (1979) "Naude. Prophet to South Africa (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 8: No. 2, 28 - 29.
Available at: http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol8/iss2/5

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at Digital Collections @ Dordt. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Digital Collections @ Dordt. For more information, please contact ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu.



A quarterly faculty publication of
Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa

Book Reviews

by John M. Zinkand

Naudé. Prophet to South Africa, by G. McLeod Bryan. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978. 153 pages, \$5.95. Reviewed by John C. Vander Stelt, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Theology.

Just as Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Germany, Helder Camara in Latin America, Daniel Dulci in Sicily, and Martin Luther King in the U.S.A. have tried to withstand various forms of oppression in their respective countries, so today F. C. Beyers Naudé in South Africa is taking a prophetic stance against the suppression caused by apartheid.

In the first half of his book, Bryan accurately describes the main events that compelled Naudé to make the radical shift from staunchly defending the ideology of *Afrikanerdom* to religiously criticizing that idolatry and emphasizing the love-anchored freedom of the kingdom of God. The second half of the book consists of two helpful appendices, a three-page "Events in the Life of Beyers Naudé," and a sixty-nine page reproduction of (twenty-one) original "Documents Crucial to the Crises."

Beyers Naudé was catapulted into (inter) national prominence because of pressures brought to bear upon him by his own denomination, the *Nederduits Hervormde Kerk*, and by the South

African government. As a capable pastor and highly respected moderator of the most powerful branch of his church, he rose to great ecclesiastical prestige and promise. When he questioned the basic ecclesiastical and political premises of apartheid, however, he suddenly plummeted, in the eyes of his former friends, to the low level of traitor and (since the government banned him on October 19, 1977, to his home) outcast.

At first, Naudé walked in the footsteps of his father. As a chaplain to the Boer troops under General Christian Frederick Beyers, his father was so deeply impressed by this General that he named his son, born in 1915, after him. In 1918 his father was co-founder of the secret and powerful *Broederbond*. Three years later, he became the first South African pastor who dared to preach a sermon in the *Afrikaner* language, and shortly thereafter he established the first *Afrikaner* school. In 1939 F. C. Beyers Naudé joined the *Broederbond*, from which he resigned twenty-four years later in 1963.

As early as 1957 the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, meeting in Potchefstroom, caused Naudé to question the validity of apartheid. He was shocked three years later by the Sharpville massacre and profoundly affected by the challenge of the World Council of Churches at its Consultation at Cottesloe (near Johannesburg) during that same year. Because of strong disagreements with the thrust of this Consultation, the *Nederduits Hervormde Kerk* withdrew its membership in the World Council of Churches, creating a predicament for Naudé, who the year before had become editor *Pro Veritate*, a journal known for its anti-apartheid stance.

After resigning from the *Broederbond* and becoming Director of the Christian Institute, Naudé terminated his role as preacher and pastor in his church by preaching on Acts 5:29: "Obey God, Rather than Man" (cf. pp. 85-91).

Despite bombings and buggings, office raids and staff detentions, repeated seizure of his passport and the banning of *Pro Veritate* and the Christian Institute, Naudé kept advocating a position of nonviolent resistance. Between 1950-1976, the government enacted fifty-nine laws to protect the security of the state, the most infamous of which is perhaps the Internal Security Act of 1976 which, under Section 6 entitled "Terrorism Act," allowed for solitary confinement and possible interrogation (under torture) of detained citizens. All of these laws Naudé has opposed consistently and has sought to provide pastoral help for all those who were directly or indirectly victimized by these laws. He openly defended the victims of Soweto — an acronym for South West Township, where all the blacks who work in Johannesburg are compelled to live. During the last several years, he has criticized South Africa's militarism and capitalistic economy and has joined the black consciousness movement.

From all the pages of this book, especially the twenty-one original documents at the end, one can clearly hear the echo of Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948). But this time the form of the critique of *Afrikanerdom* is not aesthetic or fictional but political and existential, turning the "Cry" into a shrill and frightening scream.

Bryan is correct when he writes that Naudé was "ill-suited as an office manager or program technician" (p. 67). Naudé's strength lay elsewhere:

His personal buoyance under pressure, his radiant spirituality and his courageous devotion to following Christ, all made him a charismatic leader.

This strength critics of Naudé have regarded as his weakness. Aware of this, Bryan made the following keen observation:

At the same time, this intensity of purpose, this singlemindedness in pressing for the conversion of culture, could be misinterpreted as prophetic madness, the paranoid delusion of an excessively egotistic and introverted personality. This is exactly how many of his countrymen, and some of his friends, viewed him, and interpreted his often times singlehanded blows to straighten them out (pp. 67, 68).

Dr. Gatscha Buthelezi, Chief of the Zulus, is a close associate of Naudé. On March 10, 1976, they published a joint statement entitled "Foreign Investment in South Africa," and four days later Buthelezi gave his famous speech, "In This Approaching Hour of Crisis" (cf. pp. 29, 148-149).

When I met Naudé on September 17, 1975, in his office at the Christian Institute in Johannesburg, two days after the government had detained and imprisoned his assistant, Horst Kleinschmidt, Naudé showed no bitterness and appealed to love as the only thing that could rid South Africa of the devastating and disintegrating spirit of fear. Naudé concluded his "Easter Message, 1977" as follows:

Therefore our hearts rejoice and we celebrate Easter in S. A., because we know: The heavy oppression and the approaching storm is the necessary way of suffering which precedes the joy of Easter where we as Christians of all races will experience the glorious truth: "to me is given all power in heaven and on earth" (p. 152).

He who reads this excellent book will begin to understand why F. C. Beyers Naudé, presently banned as a prophet in the Republic of South Africa, has received honorary doctorate degrees from the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa and from the Free University in Amsterdam, and an honorary doctorate in the form of the Reinhold Niebuhr Award from the University of Chicago.