

# South Africa Silences Prophetic Voice

By RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE

When the government of South Africa, in its recent crackdown on opposition to its racial segregation policies, proscribed the Christian Institute of South Africa (CISA), it silenced one of South Africa's most effective Christian voices.

Silenced, also, was the voice of the Rev. Christian Frederic Beyers Naude, 62, director of the interracial, interdenominational organization, who has come to be regarded by many at home and abroad as the most insistent and dogged critic from within the church of South African racism.

Founded in 1963 by Dr. Beyers Naude and a small group of other dissident Dutch Reformed clergymen, the CISA soon became ecumenical in membership and interracial.

Though condemned as "an heretical movement" by the Synod of the all-white Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK), the largest and most powerful of the Dutch Reformed Churches, which has consistently supported the government's racial policies, the CISA has been championed by Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Lutheran and other Christian church leadership.

Dr. Philip A. Potter, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, has lauded the CISA as "a body of deeply concerned Christians of all races and denominations with the aim of working for racial justice in a society bedeviled by apartheid."

"Over the years," said the black Methodist clergyman, "it has struggled hard to sensitize the consciences of South Africans, working for fundamental, peaceful change, in the face of growing oppression and violence by the apartheid regime."

"Archbishop Donald Coggan of Centerbury, spiritual head of the worldwide Anglican Communion, expressed his 'deep distress and shock' at the proscription of the CISA and its leadership. In a telegram, he urged Prime Minister John Vorster to 'reconsider' an action 'which can only weaken the chances of a peaceful resolution of the racial problem in the South African Republic and strengthen the hands of those who regard the use of violence as the only means of bringing about change in southern Africa.'"

Cardinal Owen McCann, Archbishop of Capetown, South Africa, pointing out that the CISA advocated the same "social teachings" promoted by the Roman Catholic Church, has long urged Catholics to give it their support.

In a pastoral letter in 1975, after the government had declared the CISA an "affected organization," and so ineligible to receive funds from abroad, the cardinal flatly contradicted the government charge that the organization was working against the welfare of the state or people of South Africa.

"On the contrary," insisted the Catholic prelate, "its purpose is to bring about a change for the better in South Africa, a change based on Christian principles."

Cardinal McCann noted that the institute was pledged to non-violence, opposed discrimination, and sought Christian standards in social, economic, cultural and political life. "In these respects, he added, the CISA echoed the teachings of the late Pope John XXIII and of Pope Paul.

Dr. Mikko Juva, president of the Lutheran World Federation, has said: "The Christian Institute has acted reasonably and effectively to find a peaceful solution (to South Africa's race problem), and it has also been able to unite forces to combat racism in a way which is, in such an inflamed situation, rather exceptional."

According to the Institute's stated purposes, its aims are:

— "To seek deep and radical change in Christ's name, to combat all forms of racism, and to help in the building of a more just and humane society.

— "To work for reconciliation on all levels of society and among all groups of people. The CISA seeks the unity of all in believing, worshipping and serving.

— "To work for equal opportunities for all in the fields of education, economics, politics, law and the church."

The institute insists that it is not "a political movement," and, the record shows, it has been adamantly opposed to the use of violence in any form.

The CISA operated through discussion and study groups, produced carefully documented reports on the situation in South Africa, and published "an independent Christian monthly," Pro Veritate, the unofficial mouthpiece of the CISA "which witnesses for justice, unity and service."

The silencing of the CISA and the regulation of its top leadership to a kind of netherworld existence was accomplished by a simple, devastating and quite legal maneuver.

Acting under the Internal Security Act of 1976 and the earlier Suppression of Terrorism Act, Minister of Justice James T. Kruger ordered the institute, along with 17 other organizations and two black newspapers, "banned."

At the same time, in addition to "detaining" at least 200 black persons, including two clergymen, he ordered five other persons, all white, "banned" for five years. All but one were CISA officials: Dr. Beyers Naude; the Rev. Brian Brown, a Methodist minister; the Rev. Theo Kotze, another Methodist clergyman; and the Rev. Cedric Mayson, editor of Pro Veritate.

Banning orders, imposed without a court hearing, let alone a trial, are served when the Ministry of Justice deems an organization, a newspaper, or an individual to be "dangerous to the state" or "a threat to peace and law and order."

Kruger said the government had acted to suppress dangerous persons and organizations which, "despite their sweet-sounding names," had been fomenting "a revolutionary atmosphere and racial hatred."

The "banning" of persons — a form of punishment unique to South Africa — has been described by South African author Alan Paton as "a kind of living death."

"It is one of those things," he once said, "that I cannot write about without pain and anger."

Though less harsh than the more frequently used measure of detention without trial, banning, with its extension into the recesses of private lives, makes it an especially harrowing experience.

A form of house arrest, with loss of the rights of free speech and assembly, banning "is the closest thing any modern state has devised to George Orwell's '1984,'" in the opinion of a member of the Institute of Race Relations, a South African organization that monitors the operation of state security laws.

"On a sociological level," he said, "it's almost an effort to turn someone into a non-person, to expunge him, to pretend he doesn't exist."

It is directed mainly against clergymen, writers, teachers and other prominent individuals whose imprisonment might be an embarrassment to the government.

Some banned persons are restricted to their homes. Others may be permitted to go to and from work within certain hours of the day, but may not leave the house on weekends. None is ever permitted to travel beyond the local judicial district.

No banned person may visit schools, factories, or premises where printing is done. Entering an office that contains so much as a mimeograph machine is a technical violation of the law.

Banned individuals are forbidden to speak on radio or television or to publish anything. No word a banned person has ever written or spoken may be quoted in any newspaper or journal or on any radio or television program.

Those under banning orders may not communicate with one another, nor may they have more than three visitors to their homes at any one time or meet anywhere with more than three persons. If someone pays a social call on a banned person, the other members of the family must withdraw to another section of the house.

Violation of a banning order can bring a prison sentence of up to three years.


The banning orders mean that Dr. Beyers Naude's "prophetic voice" is silenced publicly within South Africa, says an editorial in the Christian Century

magazine. "He can no longer address a crowd or preach a sermon, attend any organization meeting, write an article," or even be quoted.

The government's obvious intention is to stop the Christian witness of the South African churchman, who, in 1974, was co-recipient of the Reinhold Niebuhr Award at the University of Chicago.

But, says the editorial, the government "miscalculates the force of Christian witness. What Naude so courageously witnessed to over the past 15 years (he did not break with his Afrikaner tradition (or his Dutch Reformed Church policy ... until he was 45 years of age) did not originate with himself; it belongs to the universal voice of God ...

"The word of God will not be silenced."



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