OOM BEY FOR THE FUTURE
Engaging the witness of
Beyers Naudé
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In 1972 a series of articles appeared in Pro Veritate entitled “Die Toekoms en...” (The Future and...). As part of this series Beyers Naudé wrote in an article called “Die Toekoms en ...kleur, kolonialisme en kommunisme” (The Future and...colour, colonialism and communism):

“South Africa is a microcosm of the contemporary world. Here white and black, East and West, rich developed First World and poor developing Third World meet as in no other country in the world: this sets a tremendous challenge, but it is also a unique privilege. In the melting-pot of this meeting Christians who want to live out their faith have an incomparable opportunity to witness to justice, love of neighbour, truth and compassion.” (Pro Veritate, 15 January 1972, pp. 5-7, 20.) (Translation – eds)

Has this situation changed in our country since he wrote these words more than thirty years ago, and, if so, how? What are the challenges facing South Africa and Africa today, and how are we to respond to these challenges? Most importantly, what can we as South African Christians learn from the life and example of Beyers Naudé in light of these challenges? These, broadly speaking, are the questions this publication wants to address. This is not the first time these questions will be reflected upon. In fact, this was already done to some extent in the first publication by the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology, The Legacy of Beyers Naudé (SUN PRess, 2005). Such reflection will also, in all likelihood, be done again in future. This is not only because ongoing reflection and the promotion of knowledge about the role, task and responsibility of public theology is one of the main objectives of the Centre. It is also because of the nature of the life and message of Beyers Naudé, which seems to demand such ongoing reflection. As Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane, Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, commented in his foreword to The Legacy of Beyers Naudé (pp. 3, 5-6), which was simultaneously the foreword to the whole series of publications to follow, including the current one:

“Beyers Naudé was a remarkable man, and he has left us a remarkable legacy. This book and those to follow in the series on public theology will help ensure that this legacy is not lost, but instead remains a firm foundation on which we can build...Now that political change has come, we cannot afford to become complacent...we too must make a conscious choice about the road we wish to follow. The life of Beyers Naudé and the work of Beyers Naudé will be one of our best guides to the road ahead.”
If this volume, then, will also reflect on the life and legacy of Beyers Naudé, how does it hope to differ from the first volume in the series? The difference lies, firstly, in a characteristic shared by the majority of the contributors. Secondly, it lies in the difference in emphases between the two publications. It is to these differences that the title of the publication allude. The idea for this publication came from a mini-conference hosted by the Beyers Naudé Centre at Stellenbosch on 24 August 2005 under the title *Oom Bey for the Future*. For the conference a number of younger voices from the theological community – as well as one young philosopher – were invited to reflect, with reference to their own interests, research and experiences of living in South Africa and Africa today, on the challenges that the life and thought of Beyers Naudé still presents for Christians in this country and further afield. The title *Oom Bey for the Future* therefore firstly points to the fact that most of the contributors, should they have met Beyers Naudé, would have addressed him, as they often refer to him in their contributions, with the respectful Afrikaans “Oom” used by young people when speaking to or of an older man. While all the contributors to *The Legacy of Beyers Naudé* knew him well, some having had the privilege of experiencing his friendship for years, even decades, and could all speak on the basis of their personal relationship with the man and his work, the latter is true of only one of the contributors to this volume. Only Stephen Hayes had known Oom Bey for a long time – we are sure that he will not object if we do not include him in the category of “younger voices.” Of the remaining contributors who met Oom Bey, most had done so only once or twice. However, even if the majority of contributors did not have the privilege of meeting Oom Bey, we think that this publication is important since it can be seen as a first exercise, undertaken under the auspices of the Beyers Naudé Centre, in reflecting on his life and work and their relevance by a generation who will increasingly have to do so without the benefit of having known the man personally or having had a personal relationship with him; they thus have recourse only to what has been written by him, or on him, by those who did know him. The title *Oom Bey for the Future* also refers to the specific emphasis of this volume. Contributors to *The Legacy of Beyers Naudé* mostly referred to past events and experiences, albeit also with the future in mind. The current volume will specifically be geared towards the future challenges set by Oom Bey in his long and turbulent career. A prerequisite, therefore, for inclusion in this publication was that contributions had to reflect on one of its two themes, with reference to the legacy of Beyers Naudé: either aspects related to the future of our country and the world in general or, more specifically, on aspects of the future with a special emphasis on its *youth*, or both.

Finally, before we give an overview of the specific contents of the publication, the reader will also notice that, as was the case in *The Legacy of Beyers Naudé*, we have again endeavoured “to let the man speak for himself.” We therefore inserted between the contributions a selection of writings by Oom Bey under the heading
FROM THE ARCHIVES. As was to be expected, the selection of this material was again a difficult task, but it was done with this publication’s themes of the future and the youth in mind. Amongst these articles, which cover a period of 44 years of Oom Bey’s life, are previously published articles as well as never before published addresses and sermons, or notes for these that Beyers Naudé himself made and delivered at a great variety of occasions and to diverse audiences. The material from the archives also includes, for the first time in print, an interview with Oom Bey in 1996. Finally, regarding the arrangement of this material, this was not done chronologically but again placed as close as possible to contributions to which we felt they might be relevant.

The first contribution is an article by Christoff Pauw entitled “Beyers Naudé, the Secular Christian.” In his article Pauw searches for possible explanations for “Naudé’s remarkable ability to strike a balance between his evangelical roots and his sense of realism.” Pauw not only gives a possible interpretation of Beyers Naudé’s theological identity and spirituality – which he describes as that of “a secular Christian” – but also reflects on the possible sources for this spirituality of Oom Bey’s. At the same time Pauw’s article serves as an important orientation to the most important events and influences in the life of Oom Bey. In accordance with the themes of this publication he also explores the relevance of a spirituality such as Oom Bey’s, which combines “a keen social awareness coupled with a desire ‘to obey God rather than men,’” for young people in South Africa today. The earliest of the material from the Beyers Naudé Archives published in this volume follows Pauw’s article. “The Land of Promise” is an address to the Kerkjeugverening by Naudé from 1952 and can be read against the background of Pauw’s observations on Naudé’s spirituality, especially evident in the close relationship between the hunger for food and for salvation. In the address, years before what he later termed his ‘conversion’ to the cause of the oppressed, but only days before the celebration of the three hundredth anniversary of the coming to South Africa of Dutch settlers and the Reformed faith, one already notices his conviction that Christians not only need a God-inspired vision of the future, a vision that is in accordance with the Kingdom of God, but that the youth also have a role to play in fulfilling this vision.

In “Oom Bey and the Youth: Three Challenges for the Future,” Len Hansen endeavours to show that “Beyers Naudé undeniably had a heart for the youth of South Africa” and that “Oom Bey had a message for the youth is equally undeniable.” By making extensive use of material from the archives of the Beyers Naudé Centre, Hansen identifies “three challenges to which Beyers Naudé rose: to see, to judge and to act, in that order”, and argues that “[a]lthough these challenges are applicable to all South Africans today, ...Oom Bey confronted and still confronts the youth of today with these same challenges.” One of Beyers Naudé’s earliest statements on the importance of the youth for the life of the Church was written as an editorial for Pro Veritate in 1963, to which Hansen also
refers. In “The Churches Answer Young People’s Questions,” Oom Bey appeals to churches to inform and instruct their youth regarding their political responsibilities and decisions in the light of their faith. He also admonishes churches for the “glaring discrepancy between creed and life, theory and practice, which is driving people away from the Church and from Christianity.” In keeping with Christoff Pauw’s earlier comments on Oom Bey’s spirituality, one also notes here that Oom Bey warns against “[a] Christianity which retreats into a personal piety with a faith divorced from life in all its aspects” as this will “not only lose its power to witness to the outside world, but it also stands in danger of losing its youth – and thereby its whole future.”

We were all very gratified when Dr Stephen Hayes offered to donate material to the Beyers Naudé Archives in 2005. Dr Hayes not only had first-hand experience of the life and work of Beyers Naudé and the Christian Institute, of which he was also a member since 1963, the year of its inception, but even shared Oom Bey’s experience of being banned. He also participated in local Bible study groups started by the CI, and, at the urging of Oom Bey, started CI youth groups in Durban and also tried to start similar groups among the rural Zulu speakers in the Natal midlands in the late 1960s and early 1970s. At our request, and with the theme of our publication in mind, Dr Hayes has written an eyewitness account of these turbulent times and trying events as well as of his experiences of Oom Bey, experiences that also clearly show the latter’s concern with the youth. The editorial, “South Africa Tomorrow,” written by Beyers Naudé for Pro Veritate, also reflects the situation in South Africa during the turbulent 1970s of which Stephen Hayes writes. In this editorial Oom Bey warns of the growing resentment against the political dispensation in South Africa, of the danger in ignoring the findings and recommendations that SPROCAS (Study Project on Christianity in an Apartheid Society) had made under the auspices of the Christian Institute. One also reads in the editorial the special, albeit slightly different, messages that Oom Bey had at the time for Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking South Africans in the face of these storm clouds gathering on the country’s political horizon.

Godwin Akper focuses on the theme of resistance and hope in the life of Beyers Naudé – resistance to “forces that were put in place to suppress any attempt…to liberate people of colour in South Africa” and the hope “that there is a future…for South Africa and for Southern Africa, beyond struggles and liberation.” With this resistance and hope in mind, Akper describes two possible futures, one positive and one negative, that Oom Bey foresaw for the country. Finally, Akper takes stock of the state of church and society today and identifies factors within it that still threaten the realisation of the positive future Oom Bey hoped for and promote the negative future against which he warned decades ago. Akper’s article is followed by one its primary sources, Beyers Naudé’s address to the graduates of the Edendale Theological Seminary at Pietermaritzburg in 1977, which was later published in Pro Veritate as “Christian Ministry in a Time of Crisis”. On that
occasion Naudé sketched South Africa’s possible futures, while at the same time warning of the demands this would make on the ministry of the young graduates, but he also encouraged them to rise to these challenges.

In “The Confession of Belhar: Embodying the Future in the Light of Oom Bey’s Legacy,” Anlené Taljaard describes Naudé as “a figure of resistance, solidarity and hope.” She reflects on these three defining characteristics of Beyers Naudé, especially with regard to his resistance to a heresy, his solidarity with the oppressed and his hope for a changed society. These three elements lead her to pose the difficult questions to her own generation as to what they resist, with whom they are in solidarity and what they hope for today? She explores possible answers to these questions by drawing on the example of Oom Bey and relates this to the demands for unity, reconciliation and justice in the Confession of Belhar. Given the topicality of the issue of the Confession of Belhar for the future of unification of the Dutch Reformed Church and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, it seemed appropriate to place next a sermon on Mat. 16:13-23, “Does the Church still have a Future?”, which Oom Bey delivered in 1960 at the Aasvoëlkoop Congregation. According to him, not only the future of our country, but especially that of the Church, should in the first place be determined and was being determined by Christ alone. Secondly, this future is closely connected to and determined by, not the pronouncements or actions of church hierarchies, but foremost by the witness of the lives of every Christian. In her contribution to this volume, Dr Mary-Anne Plaatjies-Van Huffel gives “an exposition, done against a post-structuralist background of the question of women in the theological anthropology of Beyers Naudé.” While not ignoring the importance of his unique contributions to the struggle for liberation, she shows by means of a critical, close reading of three of the most important and most widely known sources of his thought exactly with how much circumspection we must approach what and how we speak or write. In looking at these three sources, Plaatjies-Van Huffel argues that one can say that even Naudé was in certain respects a child of his time and a product of his upbringing. While she laments the fact that “women’s issues were for the most part ignored during the struggle for social justice,” Dr Plaatjies-Van Huffel gives some guidelines, with a view to the future, for the deconstruction of women in traditional, patriarchal theological anthropology that might help to address shortcomings in our perceptions, portrayals and language with regard to women. One finds one of the clearest accounts of Beyers Naudé’s hopes and fears for the future of South Africa in “The South Africa I Want,” an address to the students of the University of Cape Town on 3 June 1976, a mere 13 days before the Soweto Student Uprising, one of the turning points in the struggle for liberation in South Africa. In the address Oom Bey gives his own summary of the deplorable state of injustice and oppression in the country and reiterates one of the most important themes of his message to the country in general and to the youth specifically: the need for every person to decide what kind of future South Africa
he or she wants, taking responsibility for that decision and remaining committed to seeing it realised in the face of adversity. This is what Oom Bey himself did, secure in the conviction that “[a] new South Africa is being born – a South Africa in which I wish to live, a South Africa in which I wish our children to live, a South Africa in which I wish to give myself to all the people of our land.”

Recalling his experiences as a student of the hospitality he and many others received from Beyers and Ilse Naudé on visits to their home in Johannesburg during the late 1980s, Robert Vosloo calls attention to yet another aspect of Oom Bey’s character. He argues that hospitality, which he defines as “the welcoming openness towards others, the other and otherness” as exemplified by the Naudés, is also related to one’s “willingness to open one’s identity to the other, and also to see oneself as other.” With reference to the communities who welcomed the Naudés after they were ostracised by the Afrikaner community and their reaction to it, the Naudés also serve as exemplifications of the fact that “hospitality is not only about welcoming, but also...about being welcomed, about receiving hospitality.” Finally Vosloo makes the connection between hospitality and truth-telling which for him form two key aspects of the witness and legacy of Oom Bey. It is also this legacy which still challenges us “to embody these concepts in a new and creative way in our complex and changing world.” Vosloo’s reflections, which begin with his telling of his visit to the Naudés in Johannesburg while a theology student at Stellenbosch, are followed by a sermon that Oom Bey preached to the student congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church on that campus some years afterwards, in 1992. In this sermon, on the eve of the creation of the new South Africa, one again hears Oom Bey urging young people to take responsibility for the future of their country, urging them to make their political voice heard, but, as always, to do this in accordance with the demands of the Kingdom of God.

Yvonne Malan also comments on the importance of Beyers Naudé, the magnitude of his sacrifices for the plight of the oppressed in South Africa and, given his background, their extraordinary nature. She does, however, remind us of a fact often forgotten in publications like these, namely that Oom Bey was not the only white Afrikaner from a traditional background who suffered for his convictions. Malan compares the lives and trials (literally and figuratively), and the vindication or lack of vindication, of Beyers Naudé and Bram Fisher. In the light of some public responses to efforts to vindicate them, this account also shows the extent to which deeply seated prejudices still exist within sectors of society. This in turn serves as a challenge to those who wish to be guided by the legacy of justice and equality left by these two exceptional men. The question of exactly how crucial the criterion of the political affiliation of people like himself, Breyten Breytenbach, Van Zyl Slabbert and – one should surely add – Bram Fisher is in identifying oneself as an Afrikaner is one of the questions Oom Bey considered in an address in 1985 entitled “Being an Afrikaner and the Afrikaner’s Alternatives for the Future”. Unfortunately we do not have the complete address at our disposal, but
only the cryptic notes that Oom Bey made for it. Nevertheless, what makes these notes even more important for the purposes of this publication is that, besides the fact that Oom Bey here gives his own definition of what constitutes an Afrikaner, he was speaking to a gathering of the Junior Rapportjwyers and therefore to a young audience, and in the address sketches some possible future scenarios for South Africa. This he did in the light of the choice that faced white South Africans at the time between the homelands policy, gradual political reform, peaceful coexistence or emigration from South Africa.

The final contribution comes from Maria Ericson, who reflects on her visits to South Africa and her meeting with Beyers Naudé in 1996 while a doctoral student. She gives an account of this doctoral research in which she compared the situations in post-apartheid South Africa and in Northern Ireland with regard to the challenge of reconciliation. In it she specifically addressed the necessary processes that would “bridge the divide of negative attitudes, stereotypes and images held by people in a context of conflict – in order to build mutual trust and new relationships across their divisions” and would “deal with the past by healing the damage caused in the course of the conflict, looking at the needs of victimised persons and groups, as well as those of the perpetrators of violence, and seeking to build, restore or transform the relationship between them.” Ericson also emphasizes that for both these processes to succeed there is a need for “safe and challenging spaces.” Returning the focus to Beyers Naudé, she shows how he was also challenged in his life to “bridge the divide” and rose to it by his willingness to leave his own “safe space” and enter that of others and in his efforts to create similar opportunities for fellow South Africans.

We decided to let Oom Bey have the final word in the publication. It is with much gratitude to Dr Keith Clements that we are able to publish an interview he had with Oom Bey after Oom Bey had the privilege of experiencing some aspects of mainly the positive – but, alas, also of the negative – future, that he had foreseen, hoped for or warned against so many times in his career. We share with readers Dr Clements’s regret, communicated to us via e-mail, that “no transcription on paper, however verbally accurate, can adequately express that wonderful sense of thoughtfulness, conviction and humility which even his pauses and quietness of speech convey to the ear.” However, despite this shortcoming, we are pleased that this publication can end with Oom Bey’s words of warning against apathy and lack of concern, his words of gratitude for the privilege of living in a new South Africa, and his words of encouragement to face up to the challenges that this presents to us all today.

As always, a publication of the nature of Oom Bey for the Future is always a team effort. Running the risk of inadvertently leaving out someone, we would like to thank the following persons for making this volume possible. Firstly, we express our appreciation to all the contributors for their willingness to share their insights
on Oom Bey’s witness and its ongoing relevance for our country and its people, especially its youth. On the technical side, we are grateful to Wikus van Zyl, publisher at AFRICAN SUN MeDIA for his work, advice and, above all, his patience in the compilation of this volume. Also, we want to offer a special word of gratitude to Dr Hans Snoek and Dr Bert Kling of Kerkinactie/Global Ministries of the United Protestant Church in the Netherlands, whose generous financial assistance made this publication possible. Finally, we would also like to thank everyone who, through their donations to the Beyers Naudé Archives, made these reflections and future encounters with Oom Bey possible. In this regard we would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Naudé family, especially to Tannie Ilse Naudé, who entrusted to the Beyers Naudé Archives a treasured collection of a lifetime of sermons, addresses and notes by Oom Bey.

Len Hansen & Robert Vosloo
Stellenbosch, June 2006
1. Introduction

The title of this paper is taken from a description that Charles Villa-Vicencio gave of Beyers Naudé in the festschrift Resistance and Hope. South African essays in honour of Beyers Naudé (1985). He speaks of Naudé’s remarkable ability to strike a balance between his evangelical roots and his sense of realism. Villa-Vicencio writes that, for Naudé, a person’s understanding of the Scriptures …

“… must be tested within a community of people of goodwill, including both Christians and those who care not to be known as such. It must be concretised in relation to ongoing political and economic analysis, and ultimately verified in a deeply personal inner conviction. [Naudé] is today at once a deeply spiritual and a profoundly secular person. … His is a worldly Christianity, but one deeply grounded in a very traditional understanding of theological identity.” (Villa-Vicencio, 1985: 8, 13)

Being a ‘secular Christian’ refers here to this kind of social and historical awareness which is an integral aspect of one’s spirituality. The question that I would like briefly to explore is the following: how did someone who came from a very traditional, Afrikaner background change to become this secular Christian that Beyers Naudé was?

2. Beyers Naudé’s secular Christianity: possible sources

One possible answer to the above question might be found by referring to Naudé’s particular family background. His father, Jozua Naudé, was also a freedom fighter of sorts, having fought side-by-side with the famous Boer general Christiaan Frederik Beyers against the British in the South African War (1899-1902). After the war Jozua decided to study theology at Stellenbosch. Upon completion of his theological training in 1909, he received calls from various congregations, but he chose to become superintendent of a work colony for poor byavoners (dispossessed white tenant farmers) in the then Orange Free State. This commitment to helping dispossessed Afrikaners, impoverished by the war, remained as strong as his anti-imperialist stance. These convictions were

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1 Paper read at the mini-conference entitled “Oom Bey for the Future” hosted by the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Stellenbosch on 24 August 2005.

2 Christoff Pauw is a doctoral student at the Faculty of Theology of the Free University of Amsterdam and a researcher at the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology.
instrumental in the founding of the Afrikaner Broederbond (AB), of which he was elected the first president in 1918.

Could his father’s convictions give a clue to Beyers’s own sense of resistance against injustice? Did he inherit from his father a pastoral heart for the downtrodden and dispossessed? This may be, but why then were there so few other Dutch Reformed ministers’ sons who could relate a similar concern as the one that their parents had for poor Afrikaners in the 1920s to the plight of poor blacks a generation later? On its own, this reason does not seem to provide sufficient cause for Beyers Naudé’s decision to leave his congregation in 1963 and minister to the oppressed of apartheid. Other reasons must therefore be sought.

A second possibility may be the simple fact of Oom Bey’s personality. Friends, colleagues and even critics have described Naudé as a very lovable and charismatic person with a grit-like determination in the fight for justice. His leadership capabilities had already proved strong at an early age – as primarius (head student) of the Wilgenhof residence at the University of Stellenbosch and chairperson of the University’s Students’ Representative Council - not to mention the fact that he was at one time the youngest member of the Broederbond. His devotion to principle – sometimes attributed to his Afrikaans culture – is often cited as one of his most prominent characteristics. One can agree that his personality was decisive for his very influential role in the struggle against apartheid. But even so, personality as such does not explain the bold steps that he took – otherwise why were there so few other head students of Wilgenhof and ex-Broederbonders in the struggle?

Therefore, an even more decisive source must be sought for Oom Bey’s secular Christianity. Some of the various other possibilities are his character and virtues, specific influential role models in his life, or mere historical coincidence. An interesting route to take might also be to explore Beyers Naudé’s theological identity. The renowned South African theologian David Bosch once identified three theological currents that had fed into Afrikaner religion and particularly in the DRC (1984: 25-32). An understanding of Naudé’s position with regard to these three currents might throw some light on his particular religious identity.

2.1 Beyers Naudé’s theological identity

The three major forces that shaped Afrikaner civil religion between the late 18th and early 20th century that Bosch identified were, firstly, Reformed evangelicalism (as introduced by Andrew Murray, Jr.), secondly, Kuyperian neo-Calvinism, and, thirdly, neo-Fichtean romantic nationalism. The first was the oldest, whereas the influence of neo-Calvinism and German Romanticism was only really felt by the 1930s and 1940s. The latter influences coincided with the rise of Afrikaner nationalism, which had accelerated after the defeat against the British and the subsequent restoration of Afrikaner power in 1910 with the formation of the