

MY SEVEN LEAN YEARS

C.F. BEYERS NAUDÉ*

It was shortly after 5.00 a.m. on Wednesday, October 19, 1977 that the telephone rang in our home. I had been awaiting such a call for days and weeks. It was the voice of Helen Kotze, the wife of Theo Kotze, the Cape Director of the Christian Institute saying in short staccato tone: "They are raiding us! Be prepared!" The phone clicked and the voice was silent. I intuitively knew that the moment which we had expected for some time had arrived. The security police had moved in to destroy the Christian Institute, and my wife and I immediately prepared ourselves for what was to come. We hastily dressed and tried to phone around to ascertain what was happening but without success. After a hurried breakfast we drove in to Braamfontein.

THE BANNING ORDER SERVED

On our arrival at the Christian Institute offices in Diakonia House, we realised that the building was under siege. In the entrance hall security police were standing all around, and they separated me from my wife and from all other staff members. The heads of depart-

ments were allowed to go to their offices, while the other staff members were required to remain in the hall downstairs. I was eventually taken to my office where they notified me that Jimmy Kruger, the Minister of Justice, had decreed that the Christian Institute be declared an illegal organization and that all its assets were to be confiscated and removed. For more than four hours a large contingency of security police with assistants packed all the documents of the CI into boxes and marked them according to the number of the office from which they were removed. They were loaded on to trucks parked in the alley at the back of the building. The clamp down on the Christian Institute was final and firm. Nothing would remain; nothing would be left behind.

For more than four hours I sat in my office watching all these proceedings and assuming that the same action was taking place in our offices in Mowbray, Cape Town, and Pietermaritzburg. Thought after thought raced through my mind: what were they doing to our staff downstairs, how would my wife take all this – she had already experienced so much trauma since 1963 when I took office as director of the Christian Institute? How

* Dr Beyers Naudé, General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches, presented this lecture at the University of Cape Town 8 May 1985

would our children react to this terrible blow which was being inflicted? What was happening to Theo and Helen and to the staff in Mowbray and to Cosmos Desmond and his wife in Pietermaritzburg? What would be the future of us as staff? How would the churches in and beyond South Africa react? All these and many other questions rushed through my mind. One thing I knew – although I had no prior indication or proof: a banning order was awaiting me as surely as the sun was shining on the walls outside my office.

Eventually all the documents, files and books had been packed and all the furniture had been numbered. The moment had arrived: Colonel van Rensburg with another officer, having emptied my office (now no longer mine), produced three documents all signed by Jimmy Kruger as Minister of Justice, and all dated 11th October 1977, which notified me in terms of Article 8 (1), 10 (1) A and 10 (quat) of the Internal Security Act 1950 (Act 44 of 1950) that for a period of five years from the moment of these notices being served until the 31st October 1982 my rights and movements were restricted as prescribed by this Act. I was required to present myself at Parkview Police Station every Wednesday between 8 a.m. and 12 noon – to make sure that I had not escaped from the country. I signed the originals as proof that I had been served with these documents, picked up my empty briefcase, which I had brought with me that morning (the only item which had not been confiscated) and left my office. I stared into the faces of the security police officers who were standing in my room and in the passage; I wanted

to look into their eyes to convey to them my feelings, but they all looked away as I passed by. As I left my office I turned around for the last time and offered a silent prayer. I remember the words: “Thank you, God, for your goodness in allowing me nearly forty years of ministry in your service.” Then feeling compelled by my faith, I added: “Forgive them Father, for they do not know what they are doing.”

As I left the building there was a barrage of photographers and newsmen awaiting me – but only one of them approached me with a simple but significant question: Is it true that you have been banned? At that moment I knew that all the others around also knew that I was banned. If they had not known, they would have rushed around me for comment. My reply was, “Yes, for a period of five years.” I then turned around and walked away into the silence of years to come.

As I drove home my emotions threatened to overcome me, but as I thought of my wife, our children, and our staff, I was sustained. In the meantime Ilse, my wife, had already gone home and when I arrived she was there awaiting me at the front door. She embraced me, took my hand and said, “I am sorry Bey”. There was a long silence between us; a new life was awaiting us for five and possibly more years; a life more difficult than the forty years behind us. How would this affect our children, our friends, our personal relationship? At the same time I was beginning to receive the information on the massive clampdown on the eighteen black organizations, the closure of the black newspaper, the *World*, the bannings of other members of staff: Theo Kotze, Brian Brown, Cedric

Mason and Peter Randall, who, although not a staff member of the Christian Institute, was also included in this brutal suppression of the personal rights of individuals. We also learned of the detention of more than eighty Black Consciousness leaders in Modder B Prison and we realised that the system wanted to ensure that all forms of opposition to its ideology of apartheid had to be crushed, once and for all.

The awareness of my banning. Many people, during the seven years of my banning, had asked me whether I had any premonition of such an action which was contemplated against me or other members of the CI. My answer was always: "Premonition – no: but a gut feeling based on certain veiled threats made a few months earlier by one or more Cabinet Ministers, yes". That is why during the month of June 1977 I once told my wife that I had a funny feeling that the government would start acting against the Christian Institute very soon and that we should prepare ourselves for the possibility of a banning order being served on me. This awareness helped me to prepare myself psychologically for the event. This preparation was aided by having known others who had been banned during previous years, people like Dr Manas Buthelezi, Steve Biko, and others.

Facing the Future. Shortly after I arrived home and before Ilse and I had time to share our feelings, the phone started to ring and it continued ringing until late that night and right through the next day. People were expressing their feelings in many ways: abhorrence, anger, sorrow, distress, concern, support. These emotions were con-

veyed in meaningful ways and we were deeply touched. Bouquets of flowers arrived, our children arrived and friends and acquaintances streamed in to express their sympathy and concern. All of a sudden Ilse and I were confronted with a situation in our own home where we realised that for five years, and possibly more, we would be forced to separate voluntarily in our own home the moment somebody outside of the immediate family arrived – me with one person at a time in my study or in the garden and she with the others in the lounge, kitchen or the bedroom. For many years this ordeal would continue with all the anxiety, tension and uncertainty that this would create – because one never knew at what moment the security police would arrive, knock at the front door and walk in to check up whether I was complying with my banning order or not. Thus I discovered very soon how an unjust law, with arbitrary powers entrusted to a Minister of State, forced banned people to police themselves at all times, day or night. The prospect of a life under a five year banning order had to be faced and faced immediately. What should I do? What *could* I do? There were a number of options and possibilities which I considered: I felt motivated to think about, and possibly write on theology – liberation theology, to reflect on issues of social justice and on the future of South Africa. Secondly, I could start writing a diary or a book about my life, my ministry in the NG Kerk, my theological and political conversion, my involvement in the Afrikaner Broederbond, my participation in the historical Cottesloe Consultation, the history of the

Christian Institute and my unforgettable experiences as director of this organization, my growth in understanding of black aspirations and feelings through my close contacts with leaders of Black Consciousness Movements (SASO, BPC and PBC), as well as my long association with the African Independent Churches from 1965 onwards (both these options would be illegal if it could be proved that they were written with a view to publication). Thirdly, I could continue my ministry in a form of individual pastoral counselling linked to continued study, reading and reflection.

The decision of what in fact would take place during the years of my banning was partly determined by events and developments outside our control – namely the stream of friends and visitors as well as people in need who came to our door, many times unannounced through fear or ignorance of what a banning order and the position of a banned person implied. At times the visitors arrived at all hours of the day or the night. It may sound unbelievable but for the first twelve months after my banning (and beyond that period) the flow of visitors never stopped. At times we had quite a ludicrous situation in our home: a number of people, sometimes three to four at a time, sitting in our lounge (which at times looked more like a doctor's consulting room than the lounge of a private home) waiting to meet me personally in my small study or in the garden if the weather permitted. Ilse was continually interrupted in her work programme, to answer the doorbell or the telephone, or to serve tea or coffee to visitors or friends. During this time she was

still employed in a part-time capacity as the secretary/bookkeeper of the Christian Fellowship Trust, a programme which provided the opportunity for a limited number of people to visit Europe on a short study tour. Very soon we discovered that our house was in fact serving a threefold purpose: it was the office of a pastoral counsellor, it was the office of my wife and it was a private home for the two of us.

BREAKING THE BANNING ORDER

Very soon after my banning on 19th October 1977 I made a shocking discovery: There was no way in which I as a human being could live without breaking my banning order. One of the terms of the order prohibits a banned person from participating in any way in any political discussion, even if such discussion is intended to defend or support government policy! For me the choice was rapidly and readily made: I would under no circumstances allow the expression of my Christian convictions, my Christian concern and my judgment on political matters and events from a Christian perspective to be curtailed or restricted by my banning order. If this would lead to me being charged, I would gladly face such a trial.

It was, in fact, not easy to comply with every aspect of the banning order. I had to study and memorise the long list of the premises I was not allowed to enter (for instance educational institutions, trade union offices, publishing houses or any premise where material was being prepared with a view to publication, factories or industries); I had to memorise the municipal boundaries of the Johannesburg

Magisterial District to which I was restricted in terms of my banning order. My wife and I had to live with the awareness that our letters were regularly opened, our phone was tapped (and of this I had ample proof) and our home was under surveillance. Would we be able to withstand and survive the stress and tension of such a life?

Options for the future. It was during this period of reflection that, without any conscious effort on my part, I discovered that more and more people were coming to our home for personal counselling or advice. Some of them were white, many of them were black; all of them came with serious personal needs and problems. Some of these were related to the political situation of the country which was affecting their lives, and those of their husbands or wives, their sons or daughters. As I listened to their dilemmas and concerns and reflected on them it became clear to me that this was a demand which people were making upon my time and life. This was possibly God's way of telling me that he wanted me to offer my service to these people.

Outside South Africa there was, however, a strong presence of the Christian Institute already established in both Holland and Britain. Many friends felt very strongly that, following the direction which political liberation movements like the ANC and PAC had established by co-ordinating their work as liberation organizations outside the country, the CI should consider a similar action. I was deeply aware of the fact that one of our staff members, Oshadi Phakti, had left the country and was now working in Holland to promote the aims and objects of the CI. What should I do?

Should I, or somebody else, leave? Would my departure serve the cause of Christ, justice and liberation more effectively than staying inside the country? Initially I felt very strongly that I should leave the country and face the future of an exile in promoting the cause of the Christian Institute. It was an agonizing thought which I for a long time feared to share with my wife because I knew that it would cause her increasing distress and suffering. When I eventually did so her response, after careful and considered reflection was: "If you feel that it is your duty to go, Bey, then do so, but do not expect me to follow you. I cannot leave South Africa and our children behind." That, added to other considerations, made it easier to come to the final conclusion that I could not leave the country under these circumstances. Many times during the last number of years of my banning I have asked myself this question: What would have happened if I had left South Africa?

The system of banning and detention without trial. Despite the pressures upon my time and my ministry of pastoral counselling, and despite the serious restrictions which a banning order by its very nature imposes upon one's life, nothing could deter me from continuing to reflect on the system of banning and detention as a method of suppressing the ideas of opponents of an oppressive regime. I had no need to be convinced about the inhumanity, the illegality and the ethical immorality of a system of banning or detention without trial. I was fully aware, through previous experiences of other banned persons, of the tremendous financial problems which every banning

created for the family of the banned person concerned. If it had not been for a number of awards which I had received, and for the continued support being given by churches inside and outside South Africa, it would have been near impossible for us to support ourselves. Ilse continued to work in a part-time capacity and although her monthly income was relatively small, it enabled her to keep her mind occupied with issues beyond our immediate concerns. This was very important. A banning order also creates tremendous emotional problems between husband and wife, parents and children, the banned family and their friends. It is especially in the sphere of relationships between husband and wife that intolerable tensions occur. My wife and I had to work through these. Under normal circumstances such tensions could be shared with close friends and thereby resolved, whereas in our case I soon realised that the only way to resolve such tensions was for us to face them alone, through prayer, reflection, and the honest expression of our feelings. There were times when I deeply pitied my wife for what she had to face up to through my emotional tensions and agonies. At other times we were tremendously enriched by the discovery that we were drawn together through our being forced to face honestly and openly the tensions which had arisen between us.

There are several aspects of a banning order which I believe should be emphasized here. The first is the personal one. People have asked me what I found to be the most difficult aspect of my banning? It is a difficult question to answer. I believe it is the lack of free social inter-

course, the prohibition of meaningful political and theological discussion, and the opportunity to relax in the company of a small circle of friends. These were the most distressing aspects of the banning order. Twice we had the opportunity for a period of quiet, withdrawing to the seaside at Onrust near Hermanus, when we were given permission to go on leave. There was the beautiful scenery of Onrust and Hermanus, the blue sea and the white surf, the long hikes along the beach, the ever changing moods of sea and sky. There were the quiet moments with young Rabie and his wife Marjorie, with Uys Krige, a visit with Gregoire Boonzaier, the visit to my mother-in-law in Caledon where she was fast losing her health. The visits from trusted friends in Cape Town, too many to name. All these reminded me of the fact that my life was in many respects a restricted one.

During this period I had time to reflect on the principle of a banning order as part of the legal system of a so-called democratic country. I discovered personally that a banning was an injustice to every banned person. It is a moral judgment on any system which approves and implements such a practice of banning and detention without trial. It is a fundamental violation of the rule of law and the concept of justice. It cannot work and it is counter-productive. It can never stifle or kill the convictions and opinions which in many respects lead to the banning of such a person. It eventually has a serious detrimental effect on the leaders and the community sanctioning and upholding such an evil and inhuman practice. My thought time and again turned to the Afrikaner

people who had devised and implemented this system and I realised more than ever how they were dehumanising themselves and preparing their own destruction by the justification of such methods in order to maintain their position of political power.

In fact it reflects a sense of deep insecurity on the part of my Afrikaner people, a desperate effort to retain their power and authority, a false attempt to ensure their identity and their ideological chauvinism. Many of them have tried to justify this practice morally, arguing that extreme measures are required in terms of national crisis. My reply to that, takes the form of a simple question: How long must that crisis continue before such a practice is discontinued? I have become increasingly concerned about the fact that our people had in fact adapted themselves to all kinds of facetious arguments in defense of the indefensible, and that this unethical approach has penetrated and affected every relationship and outlook of the Afrikaner volk as a whole. But there was also the practical side of a banning order. It has to do with facing one's feelings of anger, frustration, and vindictiveness which inevitably arise. I soon discovered that I had to make a crucial decision with regard to these feelings: Would I allow these feelings to take root in my life, or would I do everything in my power to ensure that no such feelings would corrode my inner life and freedom? I requested Ilse to be on the outlook for any signs of such expression of anger or bitterness and to help me to discover this immediately she became aware of such expressions. This she faithfully did, and for this I thank God, and as far as I know

both of us have been able to live through this period and to conquer any feelings of bitterness, hatred or revenge which otherwise could have destroyed us.

I consciously refused to allow the banning order to accomplish its intended goal.

1. It would not rob me of the opportunity to think, reflect and plan for the future.
2. It would not rob me from sharing and passing on my insights, analyses, discoveries of new values to other people – even if this could only be done one at a time. Such discovery of precious thoughts and new truths were like small seeds which I was sowing all the time, certain in my faith that the explosive power of truth would let it take root and grow in the heart and minds of many of those with whom I associated during this period.
3. It would not stop me loving people and trying to understand them better, deepening my concern for their hopes, their joys and their suffering and therefore becoming more sensitive to such joys and suffering.
4. It would not stop me from growing as a human being and as a Christian.
5. It would not rob me of my inner freedom, my peace of mind, my joy of living, loving and sharing.

All this brought me to the firm conclusion: Through God's grace I would never allow this banning to break my spirit, to distort my freedom of mind, or my concern for justice.

6. It would never rob me the deep conviction, inspired by my Christian faith and my sense of

justice as I discovered time and again through the pronouncements of the Old and the New Testament that freedom will come to our land, that the system of apartheid will eventually crumble and disappear, and that our country and our people will be free.

Enrichment through counselling and reflection. Through all these years there was a constant contact between myself and others. One by one they came, black and white, old and young, early in the morning and late at night. Many times such visits made it very difficult for Ilse and myself to have any private time for ourselves. But in and through this experience I gained tremendous insight into the life, the needs, the hopes and fears of many different people.

I reflected more deeply than ever before on the rise and crisis of the Afrikaner people: on their sense of joy and satisfaction at having attained their political ideals, but also on the tragedy that they were now inflicting – in many ways, the same injustices on the black community as the British had inflicted on them. Time and again I asked myself: When will the moment arrive when our people will discover that God's justice would not allow injustice to sustain a system of oppression such as the Afrikaner had instituted and was now desperately trying to uphold?

I reflected on the English liberal tradition in our country and saw the agony and confusion in the minds of many English-speaking white South Africans at not being able to understand why they were being viewed with increasing suspicion by blacks and why liberalism was being rejected.

I reflected on the ascendancy of black aspirations, the struggle within the black community to find ways and means of achieving their goals of political liberation, the serious tensions and conflicts within the black society, and the frustration and suspicion among themselves.

I reflected on the situation facing the student community, both black and white, and the struggle of the students to discover for themselves what the future would be that they would have to face. I became increasingly aware of the growing frustration in the black student community which I knew would eventually lead to increasing resistance, rejection and eventual revolution.

I reflected on the growth of black political power and the emergence of black trade unions as an eventual process of change in the situation which we face. To me this was a totally new experience, as my theological training had in no way brought me any knowledge, understanding or interpretation of the position of the worker and of Christian responsibility towards their needs. I tried to read as much as possible about the emergence of the trade union movement throughout the world and of the justification of worker demands in the light of the gospel.

I also reflected on the position of the churches and of Christian faith in our country. I followed with deep interest and concern the events in the South African Council of Churches; with the drama around John Rees, the appointment of Bishop Desmond Tutu, the government onslaught through the appointment of the Eloff Commission, the tremendous response on

the part of the international Christian world and of the victorious outcome for the SACC. I followed the development within the Broederkring, later termed the Belydeniskring, and the increasing urge and longing of many to create a confessing community of Christians, of all confessions, classes and races.

The establishing of Abreca filled me with new hope that in some way the Christian message of unity and social justice would take deep root in the heart and life of the Church. I was encouraged by the consistent witness for justice which the Catholic Church was giving and its deep concern for the position of students, workers and women in our country. I agonized about the future of the three Dutch Reformed Churches, especially the NG Kerk to which I belonged until 1980. In October 1978 the national synod of the NG Kerk met in Bloemfontein and considered an urgent plea from the three young black NG churches to unite with the NG Kerk. This plea for organisational unification was rejected with a large majority and that decision was the final turning point in my resolution to terminate my membership of the NG Kerk and to join the black NG Kerk in Afrika. I could no longer, with peace of mind, and with a clear conscience remain a member of a church which had deliberately rejected the plea of the fruit of its own mission to unite into one non-racial confessional church across all the boundaries of racial and ethnic disunity.

I also followed with increasing interest the growing concern of the ecumenical bodies and councils of churches outside South Africa in what was happening in our country. I was deeply grateful for the increasing involvement of the

World Council of Churches, of the Catholic Church as a world body, as well as of other organisations as they began to discover how seriously the developments in South Africa would eventually affect the peace of the whole of the continent of Africa. Naturally I also followed world events, especially as they affected the future of our country. I was especially interested in the efforts of the Peace Movement around the world in its protest against the danger of nuclear warfare, of destroying the ecological balance of nature, of the growing struggle between capitalism and socialism and the need to determine on which side of these systems justice was to be found.

As the years passed, I discovered that there was a turning of the tide in the struggle for liberation in South Africa. The presentation and acceptance of the new Constitution had brought about a totally new situation. The National Forum was convened and soon afterwards the UDF emerged, as a basis for massive resistance against the new Constitution, led by students, youth, black trade unions, womens' groups, civic organizations and many grassroot people. A new determination to achieve liberation was born; a growing impatience to destroy the present system was emerging; the old sense of resignation on the part of the adult black community was being overtaken by a new determination on the part of the young people to stand up and to initiate new moves towards liberation. This movement was gaining momentum day after day and I became increasingly aware that nothing would stop it any longer. I sensed the tragedy of the majority of whites in South Africa who, having

through all these years excluded themselves through lack of interest or concern, would fail to understand what was happening and would eventually be exposed to one shock after the other. I reflected on the efforts at reform and realised that we were facing a tragic failure because what was undertaken was too little, too diffident, too slow, and too late.

Whilst all these thoughts and feelings were still occupying my mind, Wednesday, September 16 1984 arrived. It was 3.15 p.m. while I was busy discussing the situation in South Africa with three church visitors from Germany, that three figures passed the window in front of the lounge of our home where I was sitting. I could only see the outline of these figures but I immediately knew they were security police. I wondered what I had again done to incur the further displeasure of the government? I had requested my wife not to disturb us as I only had a short time with these visitors, but on the other hand when I realised that they were security police, I did not wish her to experience any unnecessary shocks. By the time I reached the front door she had already invited them in. I accompanied them to my study. There I stood with these three men in front of me. "Is there anything that I can do?" I asked them. "Yes," they said, "we have a letter from the Minister of Law and Order which we are required to deliver to you." "Could I know what the contents of the letter are?" I asked. "Yes," they said, "the Minister is lifting your banning order." I stood there speechless and silent. I thanked them for delivering this letter, greeted them and accompanied them to the door. I turned

around, entered the kitchen and said to my wife: "You won't believe it, my banning order has been lifted!"

My seven lean years were over – the longest and leanest years of my life. No, I am wrong: Upon reflection I realise that in all probability they were the most difficult, but certainly the most enriching experience of my life because this banning brought to fruition many latent insights, feelings, visions and hopes. I thank God for what He was able to convey to both Ilse and myself through this period. I thank Ilse and our children for their tremendous contribution of love in sustaining me through all these years. I thank my friends, the hundreds and thousands of them inside and outside South Africa who through the warmth of their fellowship and faith sustained both Ilse and myself through all these years. I thank all those who in some way shared with us their sorrows, suffering, pain, hopes and joys.

It is now in a new position that I find myself as General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches. I realise that God has prepared me for a wider and more meaningful ministry in the life of the Church and of the community.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The crisis which I have seen grow during the years of my banning order continues. I close with a comment on four interrelated areas within this crisis, areas within which I have been engaged for the larger part of my life.

1. The political crisis of our land intensifies daily. The time has come for the government to lift the banning order on the African National Congress and the Pan

African Congress, allowing these movements to operate as political parties inside the country. At the same time all exiles must be invited to return to the country, and all political prisoners released. This alone will enable meaningful negotiation to deal with the present crisis as a basis for the establishment of a society of justice and peace in South Africa. There is no other way to reduce conflict and enhance peace. There is positively nothing to be gained by anyone in prolonging white minority rule. I appeal to the government to face this reality and to act accordingly.

2. Among those who have been severely exploited in a systematic way in this country, are black industrial workers. Their families have been separated from them by group areas legislation, and exploited by migratory labour practices, while they have contributed in a massive way to the building of the economy. Yet in so doing they have received minimal financial return on their labour. Now as this country stands in a perilous economic situation, those trade unions that represent the rights of black workers must surely be among the most potent forces for peaceful change in our time. I appeal to both the government and the business sector to respond to their demands in a creative and imaginative manner. It is quite clear that if their support is not ensured any attempt to persuade the outside world of industrial reform will rightly fall on deaf ears.
3. Educational institutions have become a target area for political

action and debate. Universities need to respond creatively to this challenge. Universities do not belong to privileged white minorities. They belong to all the people of this land. Academic freedom must become a basis for freedom from injustices both on and beyond the campus. This means that universities which affirm academic freedom are obliged to reach beyond the customary debate on who shall teach, who shall be taught, and on what shall be taught. There is a need for an alliance of freedom to be established between those universities, trade unions, and political groups which affirm justice and equality for all people before the law. I appeal to those universities in this country, such as the University of Cape Town, which have traditionally supported the freedom of association to take the initiative in this regard.

4. The churches of this land are torn apart by political division, ideological conflicts and doctrinal disputes. Now is the time for unity of purpose grounded in the total rejection of the heresy of apartheid. Unless the church is prepared to do this it will be rejected as irrelevant by the people of God who reach out for his gift in Christ of justice, freedom and life. I appeal to the churches of this land – let us practice the faith we confess in a more courageous and meaningful manner.

Where we go from here is the right of all the people of this land to decide. If this right is denied to some it will, I fear, ultimately be taken from all, as the country is plunged into total chaos.



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