

Antiapartheid activist Naudé dies at 89: "We mourn the loss of a great African"

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Afrikaner cleric C. F. Beyers Naudé, who died September 7, could have led South Africa's Dutch Reformed Church as well as the Broederbond, the once-powerful Afrikaner secret organization, but he turned his back on them and chose instead a lonely path of opposition to apartheid.

The onetime activist, 89, who died at a retirement home in Johannesburg, was described by former president Nelson Mandela as "a true son of Africa." Mandela said Naudé was "a brave man" who had stood up to apartheid when it was "an unpopular thing for white people to do."

Christiaan Frederick Beyers Naudé was driven out of his church in 1963 and was forced to resign as Southern Transvaal Regional Synod moderator of the Dutch Reformed Church because of his strong stance against apartheid.

When, with Naudé's support, the World Council of Churches issued a statement rejecting apartheid, then Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd led a protest that ended with the Dutch Reformed Church breaking its ties with the WCC. Naudé refused to change his position.

In front of his congregation at Aasvoelkop, near Johannesburg, Naudé condemned apartheid and condemned his church for using Christianity to justify apartheid. Soon afterwards, he was forced to resign from the ministry.

Naudé worked to spread his message throughout the Christian community, saying that "if blood runs in the streets of South Africa, it will not be because the World Council of Churches has done something, but because the churches of South Africa have done nothing."

For 15 years Naudé evoked the ire of the South African authorities through his work for the Christian Institute and its publication *Pro Veritate*, which he edited. In 1977 he was officially banned, an edict which restricted him to his home and severely limited his interactions with the public. The ban stayed in place until 1984.

He succeeded Nobel Peace Prize laureate Desmond Tutu as general secretary of the South African Council of Churches in 1985 and held this post until his retirement in 1987. "We mourn the loss of a great African," said the council in a statement in Johannesburg.

President Thabo Mbeki described Naudé as "an icon of liberty" and said he would live on "in the life of our nation as it draws strength and inspiration from principled people like him."

Archbishop Tutu, the former Anglican leader in South Africa, said from Norway: "This was undoubtedly one of the greatest sons of our soil. His integrity caused him to obey his conscience whatever the cost." -*Ecumenical News International*