

Interview with Brian Brown by Håkan Thörn, 3 March 2000, reproduced on the Anti-Apartheid Movement Archives Committee Forward to Freedom project website <http://www.aamarchives.org/>

Håkan Thörn: Can you tell me when and where you were born?

Brian Brown: I was born in Cape Town in 1938.

HT: Can you tell me briefly what organisations, groups or activities associated with the struggle against apartheid you participated in, and when, and say a few words on how you came to be involved in them?

BB: The initial organisation through which I sought to express opposition to apartheid was of course the Methodist Church in South Africa. After Sharpeville in 1960, the Methodist Church appointed its first ever black president, the Reverend Seth Mokitimi. Looking back 40 years later, that doesn't appear to be a greatly significant moment in South Africa. Within Methodism it was seen as divisive, causing some white people to leave the Methodist Church for churches which were not committed to a multiracial stance. So as a young Methodist Minister, in training at the time, my mind was obviously brought to bear on why it was that this relatively innocuous, unthreatening, action should be seen to be so unacceptable to people who professed to be in allegiance to Jesus. So you might say that within the church I got my first understanding, not of what apartheid was, but as to what organised opposition to apartheid might be, and my opposition was expressed in church circles.

The second structure in which I found myself expressing opposition to apartheid was the movement known as the Christian Institute of Southern Africa. I joined its staff in 1970, and I was soon appointed to be deputy to the Director of the Christian Institute, the Reverend Doctor C. F. Beyers Naude. I think that I am right in saying that that name became one of the foremost names in the context of church-organised resistance to apartheid. It was while I was deputy to Beyers, in fact on 17 October 1977, that the Christian Institute was declared an illegal organisation by government decree and I, in common with four other staff members in the Christian Institute, found myself served with a five year banning order. In essence, a banning order sought to withdraw the dissident from exposure to the wider society, just as banning withdraws a book from circulation. We were meant to be withdrawn from public circulation, and the most stringent of the rules which curtailed our freedom was the denial of access to any gathering of more than two persons. I won't go into all the details as to what being banned meant, but as a Minister of the gospel of Jesus, I felt that no government was entitled to withdraw my right to proclaim, to preach Christ. Because that was a calling which the apartheid regime had sought to violate, I chose to ignore my banning order, so that I became, I think, the first person to be prosecuted for the crime of preaching in South Africa. Significantly, it wasn't the content of what I was saying, which would be understandable – any person who is subversive can be expected, I suppose, to be acted against by the State – but it was simply the fact of speaking in a church to more than one person that was the illegal action. The case was withdrawn, because the government found itself being

ridiculed, and of course it deserved to be ridiculed far more than it was. Its way of reacting to the apartheid struggle was so ridiculous that ridicule was no bad thing.

After the charges were dropped I found that a very dear friend of mine was acted against with viciousness by the Security Police, and they then told me that that was how they could get at me. My friend happened to be a black Methodist, who had identified with me at the time of my banning, although I had asked him to keep away because I felt that he could be victimised, but he chose to continue to visit me and was then viciously dealt with. At that point I said to my wife and my young family, 'Let's leave South Africa', because I felt that not only did I have a very limited role, but that I was positively injurious to those who loved me and who sought to stand by me, particularly if they were black and thus more vulnerable. So I came into exile, and after a couple of years as a Methodist Minister ...

HT: Sorry, which year did you come here?

BB: In 1978 and I did a couple of years as a parish minister, what we call a circuit minister in Methodism, and then in 1980 I began as Africa Secretary for the British Council of Churches. So I started my role as Africa Secretary just as Mugabe's Zimbabwe was coming to independence, and that obviously heightened the sense of expectation within South Africa. My brief as Africa Secretary of the BCC was to engage with 22 countries, but particularly Southern Africa, given, I suppose, my expertise, and of course given the reality that the international focus was on Namibia and South Africa at that time. I had then the opportunity of seeking to, with others, give some direction to the British churches as to what ought to be their policy vis à vis the South African apartheid society. I also had the privilege of being able to network with a whole variety of anti-apartheid activities, and particularly of course with the Anti-Apartheid under at the time Trevor Huddleston and as Secretary, Mike Terry.

The networking developed in the 1980s to bring into being a body called the Southern Africa Coalition. And it was a very unusual coalition, because you had working together, in reasonable harmony, your trade union movement, your British political parties, with the exception of the governing Conservative Party under Thatcher, your mainline churches represented within the British Council of Churches, of which I was a servant, your Anti-Apartheid Movement as such, your development agencies, and your other bodies that had specific commitment to liberation in the Southern African context, some of which were like the Namibia Communication Centre, others of which were like the International Defence and Aid Fund, based in London as an exile body at the time. So that coalition was remarkable, both in the diversity of its representation, and also in the almost unprecedented ability of bodies working together who in the context of much of British society might have felt estranged. It also meant that we had to find a consensus which at times was respectful of some divergency of viewpoint in the context of the overriding consensus.

Let me illustrate: the AAM, from way back in its history had the slogan and the policy: 'Comprehensive Sanctions Now'. The British churches, at the beginning of the 1980s, had a policy of seeking to make the Code of Conduct of the European Union more effective. In other words, that South African companies, and more particularly

British subsidiaries in South Africa, would operate with a kindlier disposition towards their work force: give the blacks educational opportunities, give them training opportunities, give them black advancement in the hierarchical structure of the work force, pay them living wages, in the rare moments of equality of black and white responsibility think about paying comparable wages, have crèches for the workforce. All these were commendable things, but in terms of having a dynamic which would alter the apartheid society and bring about fundamental change, there was not the remotest possibility of fundamental change coming about resultant upon the full implementation of the EU Code of Conduct. So I was engaged with people in the totality of networking outside of Britain; with people like Leon Sullivan of General Motors in the USA, who brought into being the Sullivan principles, which ran parallel with the European Union's Code of Conduct. This became an international debate. And when then it became clear to the churches that the Code of Conduct was less a tool for change and more of a legitimising of British and European business interests to remain on in South Africa, that policy was no longer endorsed by the churches. We talked about corporate camouflage, we talked about codes of misconduct, and we moved into the realm of targeted sanctions, working, strangely enough, in conjunction with the Anti-Apartheid Movement, who would have felt discomforted by the cautious response of the churches towards apartheid in South Africa, would have wanted us to go public with a call for "comprehensive sanctions" now. But in a very commendable way, the AAM refrained, in the public domain, from criticising our stance; being aware, I suppose, that we needed one another and that ultimately our goal of a liberated South Africa was the same, even if the means to the end might vary. So the churches moved in the 1980s into a stance of targeted sanctions, not comprehensive, mandatory, all-embracing, but targeted, selective sanctions. Why did we do that? We did it because, in the world of realpolitik, which also impinges even on an idealistic church, we wanted to act in the realm of the possible; and it would not have been possible for the churches of Britain to embrace comprehensive sanctions in the mid-1980s. We also had a difficulty with our constituency in South Africa. A church like my Methodist Church was not willing or able – and it would be a debate whether it was willing or able, but it was neither willing or, in its self-perception, able – to declare itself in favour of mandatory sanctions. It had to be conscious of economic treason, it also had to be conscious as a church which was white-funded in the main, though black in the majority of membership, not to offend its white constituency. Now that is an appalling statement I have just made. It hints at a compromise of the gospel truth. But they too were working in what they perceived to be the realm of the possible, or the necessary, so they could not give us a mandate in Britain to go the full hog – for comprehensive sanctions. But they were able to say that if sanctions could be targeted, so that they would not be injurious or harmful to blacks generally and of course that was the argument of anti-sanctions lobby, including Margaret Thatcher, who said: "You will harm the blacks". So we called for targeted sanctions, which might be acceptable. The obvious one was the sports boycott and the more difficult one, which we came to embrace as one of the main targets, was the call for no further investment, for no further capital to be put into the South African economy, and that also meant no fresh loans to South Africa.

When, in common with the Anti-Apartheid Movement, we had come to a call for sanctions – for us it was targeted and for them mandatory – we found that we shared a common platform in seeing that the most vulnerable aspect of the apartheid society

was obviously its inability to repay its loans, the call for a moratorium on loan provision. When implemented, the apartheid regime could not repay, interest or capital, its loans leading to a capital flight from South Africa, a weakening of the Rand, and suddenly the strong South African economy, strong in African terms, was seen to be an economy under siege. And once there came a questioning of the capacity of the white apartheid regime to repay its indebtedness, the South African government was under siege in a way that hitherto had not been. Economic sanctions were crucial in affecting change. The Southern African Coalition brought together this full spectrum of anti-apartheid causes in a way which I don't think always prevailed in the rest of Europe: we were able to hold together the anti-apartheid cause. I have spoken to friends in Scandinavian countries, and in Holland, where of course the anti-apartheid movement was very strong, and there seems to be, to use religious parlance, a Jew/Samaritan dichotomy or separation between the secular anti-apartheid forces and the church anti-apartheid voice. You will, in your own research, be able to test whether that is true or not. But here in Britain in a strange way, the head of the Southern African Coalition was the deeply spiritual Bishop of Coventry, and of course you had an equally spiritual but far more politicised figure like the Archbishop of the Indian Ocean, as he had been, Trevor Huddleston, heading up the secular movement. So here (UK) there were these clerical figures.

We were also hugely strengthened by the fact that the Church of England in England, for all its increasing weakness as a prophetic voice in a secular society, was beholden to the voice of its sister Church in South Africa. Archbishop Desmond Tutu was the most radical of these church voices. Even though, presumably, there were a lot of conservative Church of England bishops who secretly wished that Tutu would go to kingdom come, they had to be in solidarity, in Christian solidarity, with this stormy prophet in South Africa. That is why I, as a servant of the British Council of Churches, was able to move the Church of England, of course very much together with others, to adopt stances against the white apartheid regime which would not have been possible without their reflecting, as an ally, the voice of Tutu and other black clergy in South Africa. Within the BCC we were also very much strengthened by the radical voice coming out of the South African Council of Churches at the time. The man to whom I had been deputy in the CI, Beyers Naude, was now the General Secretary of the SACC. When he was replaced by Frank Chikane as SACC General Secretary, again we had a strongly prophetic figure. Before having this interview with you, I was engaging with Zimbabwean friends who bemoaned to me that there is now no prophetic figure of that kind of stature, not remotely so, in the context of their church society. How can the church mobilise its resources internationally against the tired corrupt regime of Mugabe, when the voice of the Zimbabwean church is seen to be the discredited Abel Muzorewa, who was in unholy alliance with the forces of Ian Smith decades ago?!

In common with the anti-apartheid world in Britain, I was hugely helped by the prophets in South Africa. We had to acknowledge that the South African church was not always keeping in line with what its prophets were saying. There was, I believe, a huge credibility gap between the social practice of Christianity in South Africa in the 1980s, and the prophetic utterances of Tutu and his like. But we chose, strategically, to proclaim the voice of the prophets as the representative voice; and in fact I believe

it was the representative voice, representing ultimately not the more cautious white Christians in South Africa, but the mass of the Christian disenfranchised. And when, in 1994, that prophetic voice was tested at the ballot box, this was thoroughly affirmed.

HT: I want to get back to the personal side. In terms of personal experience, is there anything in particular you can mention that made you become a man in opposition? It was not obvious, even though you are a Christian, that you, living in South Africa, should be opposed to apartheid. Were there any particular personal experiences, in terms of people or reading or whatever?

BB: I think that one of my most formative experiences as a young man was when I was at university and training for the ministry, in the years 1959–61. In that period two decisive things happened to concentrate my mind as to the nature of the society in which I was living. The first was that the sister university of Rhodes University where I trained in Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape, Fort Hare (the university to which Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and others had gone), was changed from being an institution with its own governance to become what was called a Bantu ethnic college. It became less than a university, it was to be an ethnic college, a tool of the apartheid society. Apartheid professors, those who backed that policy, were installed into the Chairs. So my friends – they had become friends – just down the road in the Eastern Cape were no longer being trained in a relatively free university environment, but were being trained through apartheid studies. That of course was anathema to all of us, and so the churches in South Africa had to establish an alternative institution where black clergy of the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational churches could study. Because this happened when I was at university and because, together with hundreds of others, I became part of the street protesters who went through to Fort Hare to declare the inequity of this action, this was – to use the jargon word in South Africa – “a conscientising moment”, an awareness-raising moment for me. I saw my own black Methodist friends academically disadvantaged.

But of course an even more significant moment came with the Sharpeville tragedy. When that happened I, in common with some others at my university, organised a protest march which was deemed to be unlawful by the government. We still went ahead and marched; commendably, some of the professors who were in the Divinity Faculty at Rhodes marched with us – by no means, sad to say, all of them – but some of them did. And because that was a physically threatening or intimidating moment, again the nature of the beast became apparent. Here was a government which was not only implementing vicious laws, but was itself going beyond the rule of law to bolster its power base. I suppose that those twin forces made me realise that apartheid was vicious and totalitarian.

Then when I was in practical ministry in the 1960s, it was soon apparent to me that I was the inheritor, the recipient, of all manner of privileges which were automatically denied to my black fellow clergy. Again, this is something of a self-criticism. I was conscious that my colleague down the road from me in my first appointment to the ordained ministry, was somebody whose lifestyle was circumscribed, was limited by innumerable laws that applied to him and which didn't apply to me. So on the basis of

what constitutes neighbourly love, loving my neighbour, Rev Samuel Ngwenga, as I loved myself, I had to aspire for him to receive the freedoms and the respect and the protection under the rule of law which I had, by right, as a white citizen of South Africa. In that neighbourly love, knowing that he was denied the things which I accepted as mine by right, I had to declare, in Christian proclamation, that my black neighbour was not the recipient of the rights which I enjoyed and thus the Gospel of Jesus was being denied by apartheid society. I started to theologise and declare that apartheid was evil, but I was not clear enough in my thinking or profound enough in my insight to see that apartheid was actually a heresy. I was then invited by the Christian Institute to join its staff. I suppose this was because I had been seen as a very tiny voice, and a young voice (as I then was) in the context of opposing apartheid through the church's structures. It was in the context of serving in the Christian Institute that I started to come up against the evil of apartheid, not essentially as bad law or as something which was a denial of neighbourly love, but as something which was violent and murderous. In other words, the institutionalised violence of apartheid was not apparent to me in the 1960s. But in the context of being in the Christian Institute, I was not sharing with fellow clergy who were black and disadvantaged: I was sharing with grassroots black people, who were being banned or relocated, who were being dispossessed, interrogated, tortured and killed.

When in the 1970s, FRELIMO came to power in neighbouring Mozambique, that gave a great impetus to the black membership of the Christian Institute, who saw that their time was drawing nigh. Many of my black Christian Institute friends were tortured. I was warned but never tortured; I was interrogated but never brutalised. I was working with black colleagues, and within the context of the Christian Institute "racial injustice" prevailed. I was protected by my white skin, and was the recipient of a greater justice than my black colleagues, who were treated as the more "expendable" and who were the recipients of violent injustice. So in a strange way, even my brothers and sisters in the Christian Institute, who were black, were far more viciously dealt with than could ever happen to me. Even when I was banned, I was given kid glove treatment by the security police, or the Special Branch as we called them, because I had a protection conferred by virtue of my whiteness. It sounds strange to say that, but it was true.

And here I am judgemental; I might sound holier than thou. In retrospect it makes me ask: where were the white Christian people in South Africa in prophetic terms in the years of struggle? If they say that they would have been at risk, I say that's rubbish. If you took the really radical stance of the Christian Institute (vilified as terrorist and communist and violent by the propaganda machine) you couldn't have been more radical than that – if you took this stance which allowed that image to be conferred upon you, you still walked relatively free. I did, for all those seven years from 1970 to 1977. It should have been the whites, who were protected in so many ways, who were in the vanguard of declaring the evil of the state. (Incidentally, we weren't violent, communist or terrorist, but that was the perception of us created by state propaganda.) Even when I was banned, a far greater danger was inherent for the black Christian Institute community. The fact that as whites we were inevitably the recipients of all the privileges of the apartheid state, caused us to be desperately compromised.

A final influence, through my belonging to the multiracial family called the Christian Institute, was that I was able to rub shoulders with giants of the black liberation movement like Robert Sobukwe, and also with unknown heroes of the resistance movement. To start with the latter. When Doreen came to me, as a staffer of the Christian Institute, and said that electrical shocks were put through the penis of her son the night before in John Vorster Square [police station], and that he was traumatised, in a condition which defied description, and Doreen was a woman I prayed with every morning in the Christian Institute, I became enraged. Part of my motivation in opposing apartheid was righteous anger. The churches still have to get to grips with what constitutes righteous anger. We still shrink back from it, as if anger is something intrinsically, inherently evil. But how could you be other than bloody angry – and I am not given to swearing – but how could you be other than enraged by that kind of action against your neighbour, whom you know and love with intimacy and trust. So that was the human encounter across the racial divide. And when I tried to tell my white congregation about what had happened, when I faced them on Sunday, I had to be careful not to take my anger out on them. I had a wife who often, and helpfully, said to me – and she was in the forefront of the struggle – “Brian, be careful what you say this morning, they haven’t been where you have been this week.” And, of course they hadn’t been with Doreen. (I also had a black congregation, you can condemn me for having two racially divided, but that was our reality at the time.) If I tried to tell the story, they would be so discomfited, so guilty, that they would listen once, but if I told a similar story next week, they would say, ‘Brian we haven’t come here to be harangued on Sunday with stories of atrocities. We have come here to be comforted, to be uplifted. Stop this.’ Or they wouldn’t say that, they’d just stay away, go across the road to the thousand and one churches which would never have said a word about the atrocities within their society, but were providing a nice safe escapist religion. So that was the constraint upon myself. I would be restrained in a self-censoring way, because I could only go so far. I didn’t want to offend and I wanted to be loved. That was my selfish instinct for self-preservation. I couldn’t push people too far, or they wouldn’t love me, and I desperately needed their affirmation. So that was the tension, the compromise I lived with. There was the daily rubbing of shoulders with black people who were being brutalised. But unless you moved in the rarefied atmosphere of bodies like the Christian Institute, you didn’t know at first hand what was going on. More particularly, you were able to pretend that you didn’t know, for you weren’t confronted with the harshness of having to know. You could walk by and be comforted in the knowledge that you would not really look, and by not really looking, you wouldn’t have to know, and by not really knowing, you wouldn’t have to act, and by not acting, you wouldn’t then be faithless to Christ. That was the “cop-out” which the apartheid society, in its racially structured way, allowed white people, unless they chose an alternative, non-racial, multicultural experience, which few did.

I talked about rubbing shoulders with Robert Sobukwe, one of the great Methodist leaders and one of South Africa’s great political leaders. I know his movement, the PAC, was ultimately discredited, and it deserved to be discredited. It did a lot of stupid things after Sobukwe’s death. But Sobukwe was a giant. Once you had sat at his feet, as I was privileged to do – (I couldn’t do it after I was banned and soon after that he was dead with cancer) to sit down with Sobukwe was to have all the propaganda demythologised. Here was not the black man, communist, terrorist who

supposedly wanted to drive the whites into the sea – here was a man passionately committed to a non-racial South Africa, to black consciousness, who saw black consciousness as a necessary tool for blacks to determine their self-worth and self-esteem; and perhaps only able to do that if they distanced themselves from whiteness, both whiteness in its oppressive and in its liberal tendency to control in a paternalistic way. So the going it alone was understood as necessary at a moment of time. There was no anti-whiteness in his attitude, there was graciousness towards white people, forgiveness and pardon beyond our deserving as whites. He helped me to demythologise the liberation movement and see how so many whites were preparing to die for a lie, which has always been for me the ultimate stupidity. These two sources of heroes sung and unsung enabled me to be a privileged person; if I moved in a liberation direction, it wasn't because I was spiritual, it wasn't because I was smart: it was because of the human encounters, which enabled me, as a white South African, to see things in a different way.

HT: In relation to church organisations in Britain and internationally, and also in relation to tensions or conflicts connected with ideological differences, what role did the British Council of Churches play in the World Council of Churches? What were the major forces within the WCC? What role did the Scandinavian and, more particularly, the Swedish churches play there? When I say conflicts, I mean that in Sweden, as I think here, one problem with cooperating with the Anti-Apartheid Movement was that some voices in the churches said that you were really cooperating with the ANC which was allied to the Communist Party.

BB: I would say that within the BCC, in our response on South Africa – this is not an answer to your question but I am keeping it in mind – we soon found that we could not deal with South Africa alone. There was also Namibia, a UN mandated territory, unlawfully occupied by South Africa, and really a stepping stone which one had to step upon to get to liberation in South Africa. There were the stones of Zimbabwe and Mozambique – we touched on those – and the big stone of Namibia. So the BCC would very often speak of our response to liberation in Southern Africa, seeing the two nations as almost indivisible.

The leader of the African National Congress liberation movement, Oliver Tambo, was seen by the British government, by Thatcher, as a terrorist. As long as he and his movement were projected in that way (and remember, during the whole of the 1980s you had the Thatcher Government) as long as she projected this image of a terrorist movement, it was difficult for the churches to see the ANC differently. So we had to use the Namibian constituency, I think, in a very strategic way, to help the British churches see that the iniquity of apartheid was not alone that it oppressed its people, but that it was destabilising a subcontinent. They had to be made to see that it was the South African government that was the violent terrorist body, that it was controlling Namibia through terror, and violating the territorial integrity of Angola and Mozambique. So we were trying to turn the argument on its head, and present, through the Namibian interpretation, the South African liberation movement as a movement which was respectable both in terms of its representativeness, and of its being a victim of institutional and primary violence; respectable from a church perspective, in that it saw commitment to violence as the last resort and in which it engaged with less than full enthusiasm, because it saw the non-violent way as a

better way. So Oliver Tambo was brought in from the cold, within church circles, and came to address a number of meetings of the BCC's church leaders and representatives. Oliver Tambo, with his Anglican background, could say how he had come to a meeting of church leaders after taking communion in St Paul's. Now in one way he was playing his cards right, but he wasn't manipulating his faith, he was a committed Anglican Christian. He chose to talk about how he had a crisis as a young man, either of becoming Mandela's co-leader in the liberation movement or of becoming an Anglican priest. He said that with some reluctance he went into the liberation movement at the cost of the priesthood.

So in countering Thatcherism and the South African regime, who conspired together to demonise the liberation movements, we started with the Namibian insight, where the Namibian church was helpful in demythologising its liberation movement and presenting it as representative and non-terrorist. Then we were able to project that image upon the South African liberation movement, the ANC. And then we were able to give a platform to Tambo, who with great competence and sensitivity presented the ANC as committed to violence with huge reluctance and with a yearning to bring Umkonto we Sizwe to an end, because that was not the best way. This allowed the churches to come out with statements that were very much at variance with the British government and its estimate of where the ANC stood. That does not mean that we were able with the same enthusiasm to endorse the PAC. We had a rather hypocritical stance, or I had, in pretending to be all things to both movements, while in effect giving greater prominence to the ANC, with which I was more comfortable and in which I had more confidence. The PAC at that time had tremendous leadership squabbles and was in disarray. I think that the WCC had the same problem, because they recognised, in common with the UN, two liberation movements. They knew, as I did, that the ANC was better mobilised, more truly representative, and more reliable, but they couldn't publicly discredit the PAC, or even distance themselves from it in terms of grant making. Within the BCC we could be, if you like, more selective, so introductions to British church leaders were never given by myself to the PAC.

We also found ourselves, through Christian Aid, then a wing of the BCC, able to give modest grants to the ANC school in Tanzania, as we had given funds for cooking pots to people in SWAPO. Both these grants caused condemnation in right-wing political circles, because the church was now seen as aiding terrorists. Those moments of mini-solidarity were viewed, I think, by the liberation movements as significant out of all proportion to the actual money involved. The most significant thing that we did in the British churches was when the headquarters of the ANC [in London] were bombed, as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has now publicly declared, by the South African security forces. At the time we "knew" this was so, but we didn't know how to prove it. I was able to ask the BCC if the ANC could come into our building near Sloane Square in London and share offices for its Communications Department. So for some time, not years, but for some time, the ANC Communications Department was housed in the BCC building. That was the most marked moment of identification with the liberation movement. Gill Marcus, who is now Deputy Finance Minister in the ANC government, was the head of that department at the time. In such ways – symbolic ways – we sought to identify with the liberation movement. But we were always having to be, I suppose, unduly

cautious, and we were not as forthright in backing the WCC Programme to Combat Racism as, for instance, the Scandinavian churches.

One of our denominations in the BCC was the Methodist Church, to which I belonged. We did agree to give grants to the Programme to Combat Racism and that brought all hell upon our heads when the right-wing press got hold of the story and made all their accusations (which you can guess at) about Methodism. After a while we stopped making the grants, because our church was terribly divided. So we said that we would no longer make the grants from central funds, but individual churches could make grants. We didn't receive them into our central fund, because some churches might say they wouldn't give to our central fund if we were receiving tainted money. Individual churches sent their money to Geneva [the WCC's head office] – not big sums. But other churches felt that giving financial support was too far to go, because the argument was that support for philanthropic and social purposes released funds for the movement to buy guns in order to shoot nice white people in Johannesburg! It was a very prolonged, tedious debate, and we were somewhat compromised on the British scene. The churches did not make as fullsome a response to the liberation movement as, say, the Anti-Apartheid Movement, for whom the question of supporting the ANC was never in doubt. Having used the word hypocrisy of myself, in one regard the AAM were more hypocritical in that they solidly supported the ANC and consistently ignored the PAC. I don't blame them for that; it was strategically wise. The AAM never said that publicly: its policy was consistently to lift up the one movement, but it could never come clean about it.

In regard to the BCC's relationship with the other churches – I don't know what you are going to do with this material! – my German colleagues had a very tough time. They were beholden to the problems that come from having a church tax – you know about that from your Scandinavian perspective. In dealing with Namibia they had a terribly tough time with the German cultural tradition in Namibia. But if we were then in advance of our German friends, as we unquestionably were, we were often challenged by Swedish friends for not going far enough. It was a legitimate challenge and a legitimate condemnation of our stance. Why were we more resistant to taking a radical stance? Perhaps because we are less noble, and perhaps we are less gospel inclined, than Swedish Christians! But some complementary – and perhaps realistic – considerations were that we had a greater investment, as British people, than Swedish business had in South Africa. Of course Scandinavia had interests, but not nearly as proportionately high in business terms as the British investment in South Africa. Again, the perception was that the status quo was good for business – that changed in the late 1980s. So the business lobby was far more prevalent in Britain; and Christian people are often business people, and business interests are strong in church circles.

And secondly, there was the whole kith and kin thing. For 15 years I wandered around Britain speaking at meetings until I would wish to stop in the middle, saying 'I've said this before to you, haven't I?' And at those meetings, at the end, like clockwork, someone would say, 'Reverend Brown, I don't want to call you a liar, but I have got my Aunt Matilda who lives in Johannesburg, and she would contradict everything you said'. And I would say, 'Yes, I am sure she would, she would see things from a different perspective'. The question of kith and kin was all-determining.

I mean – who are the white migrants in South Africa? Fifty per cent of them are good English-speaking Brits. Many of the most vocal voices declaring that apartheid should continue were recent immigrants to South Africa. They would be, wouldn't they. If you just sold up everything to start a new life, and went with your eyes open to start a new life in a country called apartheid South Africa, what are you other than the most fervent advocate of apartheid? Your destiny is bound up with it.

Those two factors were things that we had working against us more than you [the Swedish anti-apartheid movement] did. The other factor we had working against us was a Conservative government, with a prime minister who was on TV last night, saying 'good old Pinochet'. If that is the state of mind of your prime minister for the whole of the 1980s, a lot of that rubs off on the British population. The discrediting of Thatcher was a '90s phenomenon, in a remarkable way, but it was never a '80s phenomenon.

HT: A last question: can you define solidarity from your point of view?

BB: Yes, I think I can define solidarity. I would say it is standing alongside, an entering into the existential experience of someone else, in as far as one is able. Total solidarity is a nonsense. I can never stand in your shoes: only you can. But in as far as empathy and sensitivity and love and knowledge and identification allow, I can get alongside you to be in solidarity. And solidarity, which is walking with and empathizing with, feeling with and struggling with, is something that I think is part of our Christian calling. In its observance for the Christian, he or she ends up discovering that he or she is not reaching out so much to the oppressed alone as to the Christ in the oppressed. That is a whole depth of theological dimension which we haven't properly articulated within the church of Christ. It is essentially a theological thing but I include it here because in my reaching out to the young black Methodist, Moremi, who was brutalised by the apartheid regime because he loved me, I am not just reaching out to him in solidarity; not just to him and his wife in solidarity. (I am not just trying to stand alongside them, which I can never fully do because he is black and I am white) Rather, I am also reaching out to a Christ who suffers in him. I am expressing my love of Christ as much as my love of him. I don't know where the one begins and the one ends, and I don't care. It's not a valuable distinction to make. It's my love of the Christ in him which makes me seek to be in solidarity. When I try to define solidarity, I try to include the Christian dimension of Matthew's Gospel Chapter 25: 'Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my children you did it to me' says Jesus, which is an incredible statement if you take it seriously. 'As much as you have fed the hungry you fed me and as much as you have befriended the oppressed you befriended me, because I am there, suffering.' OK, so that incarnational theology is important for me in identifying in solidarity.

But the final thing to say is that I also want to be in *critical* solidarity, and there is another dangerous thing – yes you can quote me but people will dislike me for saying so – my friends in the AA Movement will. With my church constituency I was in more critical solidarity with the liberation movements than perhaps some of my friends in the AAM were. I would be cautious about eulogising and praising this wonderful body of ANC or Swapo people, because this wonderful body of people were people like me; we shared flaws and weaknesses, and to use the religious word, sins, and so I

always wanted to be in critical solidarity. I wanted to say 'Yes, this is true, of course, but let us not deify the liberation movement any more than the Thatcher Government wants to demonise it'. If Thatcher was demonising, the Mike Terrys were deifying them. That is not said against Mike – that was his role – to present this flawless, spotless movement of the people. Whereas I knew that it was a movement with its own inherent tensions. I had people who would come to me and say, 'Bad things are happening that shouldn't be happening'. 'The ANC or Swapo is doing some things in excessive ways, or even in brutal ways.' And, yes, those victims of the liberation movement were victims of a liberation struggle. I can spend half an hour justifying – not justifying but understanding – why that happened. If somebody seems to be a traitor and is going to sell your people to the apartheid regime, what do you do with that person? In Swedish society you have a court and a prosecutor and a jail. In a camp in Angola or Tanzania, what do you do – perhaps you put him in a hole? So what I am saying is that the critical solidarity thing is something that I always want to be espousing, just as I want to be in critical solidarity with my church. I have said very many things that are critical about the church: where we should have done so much more, and where a lot of the glory that we take is not because of what the church did, but because of a few prophets who did some things in the church. Suddenly, we like to remember the prophets, because they make us feel good and righteous and virtuous, whereas we were generally pathetic.

HT: Thank you very much for giving me your time.

BB: My pleasure.