

## **The Two Hands of God in South Africa: A Review of Albert Nolan's God in South Africa by Dr. M.B. Ramose**

My purpose here is to consider Nolan's reflections on "God in South Africa". We note that it is the God of Christianity upon whom Nolan's reflections are focussed. (NOLAN:1988:29) Furthermore, Nolan's reflections are intended specifically for South African Christians. Those Christians who happen not to be South African must, according to Nolan, regard themselves as listening to a conversation when they read his "God in South Africa." (NOLAN:1988:xi)

Nolan disclaims the intention to engage in academic theology. He considers that the pursuit of theology in this fashion is precluded by the seriousness as well as the urgency of the situation that prevails in South Africa today. Thus his reflections remain theological except that the mode of theologising is not to be construed as academic. A rather old disclaimer since the term theology itself already purports to be scientific or academic. Nevertheless, Nolan concedes that "rigorous and critical thinking" even in his theological context remains indispensable for a proper understanding of the situation in South Africa. (NOLAN:1988:xi) It is precisely this criterion of "rigorous and critical thinking", clearly preferred by Nolan, that we shall adopt and use in our consideration of Nolan's reflections on God in South Africa. A pertinent consideration in this connection is that we will proceed by way of comparing and contrasting Nolan's reflections on God in South Africa with similar reflections by his fellow Roman Catholic priests in Latin America especially those by Boff and Sobrino. This procedure is by no means arbitrary as Nolan himself makes explicit reference to these theologians of liberation in his "God in South Africa". In particular he makes reference to Clodovis Boff's *Theology and Praxis*; (NOLAN:1988:28) Leonardo and Clodovis Boff's *Salvation and Liberation* (NOLAN:1988:184) and lastly, Sobrino's *Jesus in Latin America*. (NOLAN:1988:122) The procedure that we propose here then is aimed at putting to the test—with the aid of his fellow priests—Nolan's preferred criterion of "critical and rigorous thinking" and to determine whether or not that will characterise his own thinking ultimately becomes "a genuine theological reflection upon what God is doing in our country today." (NOLAN:1988:4)

Indeed Nolan's aim is to present "the Christian community with an articulate and systematic account of its faith." (NOLAN:1988:xiii; emphasis added) This aim is underlined by the contention that "the gospel for us today is the good news about what God is doing in South Africa today in the light of what God has done in the past." (NOLAN:1988:22)

It goes without saying that we assume that in the pursuit of his aim as well as in the substantiation of his contention Nolan will adhere to his self-imposed criterion of critical and rigorous thinking and so render his reflections genuinely theological with regard to what God is doing in South Africa today. However, it is of crucial importance for our purposes to validate this assumption. Accordingly, we posit the thesis that:

Nolan's reflections on God in South Africa are seriously vitiated by a lack of honesty about the real, a reluctance to confront history and open-minded about it; to let history be history so that it may declare its own truth whatever that truth may be. The lack of honesty about the real reveals simultaneously infidelity to the real; the desire to conceal the truth and thus stand against the truth. This latter precludes the cultivation of the proper relationship between the human subject and objective reality. Objective reality consists of a "more" which may be construed as and indeed be converted into a mediation of a human relationship with God. The concealment or denial of such mediation either by design or default is tantamount to the denial of salvation or liberation. Accordingly, Nolan's reflections on God in South Africa do not wholly satisfy the criterion of "critical and rigorous thinking" nor do they issue in a doubtlessly "genuine theological reflection".

Our thesis rest on the fundamental consideration that the prevailing situation in South Africa demands of us a spirit of quest for truth. The demand, in other words, is the recognition that:

We find ourselves simply facing a new history, and therefore facing a new word from God. ...we must have a pure spirit, pure eyes, a pure heart, which will not cling to the truth "we've always known, but will seek in truth the will of God". (SOBRINO:1988:8) This by no means relegates past history (things of the past) to irrelevance in the face of present realities. On the contrary, it means that the truth of the historical past is the light that illuminates our ongoing search for truth in the present circumstances. Accordingly, it is essential to portray and present the history of South Africa honestly and faithfully if we are to discover and hear the "new word from God" in the present.

Before we substantiate our thesis by way of critical textual analysis we turn to a clarification of specific terms. By honesty about the real we mean a mode of knowing which recognises, apprehends and understands objective reality as it is. This is the quest to know things-in-themselves. It is a positive, though no less ideal, manner of knowing because its specific and peculiar starting point is the disregard of the interest of the self in the quest for truth. Put negatively: it is a manner of knowing that neither arises from nor

is shaped by a concern to defend oneself against the real. (SOBRINO:1988:16) Fidelity with the real means persisting in honesty about the real even though such persistence and steadfastness might sometimes lead us to the unexpected.

The “more” that is latently present in objective reality refers to the implicit recognition that God may be disclosed or might erupt from such reality. No doubt this presupposes faith in God on the part of the human being. But God is Mystery par excellence. As such God is always present and near to humankind and yet cannot be completely accessible. Thus humankind cannot possess God. Humankind can relate to God only in a spiritual way. But the spiritual is not divorced from or completely independent of its subject. ON the contrary, the spiritual stands in a relationship with concrete reality. Accordingly, to say of humankind that it has a spiritual kinship with God means:

initiating in history the holiness of God as God has been revealed in self-revelation — not as distant from the secular and profane world, but as absolute salvific nearness. ....to know God is to practice right and justice toward the poor and the helpless. (SOBRINO:1988:40)

Discovering and hearing the new word of God in present-day South Africa means for us, then, being in and maintaining a spiritual kinship with God. This kind of relationship is necessarily salvific or liberative. It is worth noting that this theological, that is, kinship or relationship with God is possible and even open to those human beings who do not profess to be Christians.

Theology is not the only source of knowledge of God in the church. For that matter, not only the church is the only locus of God’s manifestation. (SOBRINO:1988:77)

It may be useful to keep in mind what Nolan calls his qualifications for saying anything about real suffering. Indeed Nolan acknowledges that his qualifications are “limited”. (NOLAN:1988:50) However, it is still valid to ask why Nolan finds it “necessary” in this instance to declare his qualifications, more so, because he does not explain this necessity except by wondering if those who have not experienced real suffering can “say anything worthwhile about it”. (NOLAN:1988:ibid) Having recognised the limitation of his qualifications in this regard, Nolan declares:

Of real suffering I can only say that I have seen it, I have touched it and I have become marginally sensitive to it. Nothing more. (NOLAN:1988:51; emphasis added):

Suffice it to state in this connection that the present author is a South African and Christian by upbringing. But unlike Nolan, the present author is one of those millions in South Africa who are at the receiving end of "real suffering", who are objectively the primary victims of structural sin, of oppression and exploitation. In this sense the present author is not only sensitive to "real suffering" but, like the majority of his kind, he lives and experiences real suffering. Accordingly, we are not at the periphery of "real suffering". We are at the centre of "real suffering". For whatever reason Nolan might have considered it "necessary in this instance" to declare his "qualifications", it is so that his acknowledged marginality in this instance means that he represents the outsider's view whereas the present author will represent the insider's view.

### **1. THE EUROPEAN AND THE AFRICAN**

Already at page one of his book Nolan, perhaps despite his intention, introduces the crucial question of the distinction between European and African. The question is not only crucial but vital because its resolution has in present-day South Africa and will have in the future a very direct bearing on the nature and character of human relations in the country. Nolan introduces this issue obliquely in these terms.

The original preachers of the gospel in South Africa were of two kinds: chaplains and missionaries. The chaplains were those who came to preach and minister to the colonial officials, soldiers and settlers. The missionaries were those who came to evangelise the indigenous and colonised people in this part of Africa.

The European settlers in the four British dependencies came together without any reference to the indigenous people of the country, to form what they called the Union of South Africa. (NOLAN:1988:1-2; emphasis added):

It would appear that for Nolan there is a clear synonymy between being an indigenous South African and being colonised. Only the indigenous South African people can be and, in fact are, historically, the colonised people. Our concern here is not to become engaged in an in-depth historical discussion aimed at determining who the indigenous people of the South African soil are. No doubt this is an issue that has been of serious concern especially to those whites who, in the name of scientific objectivity, have pursued the narrow, limited and one-sided aim to justify the continuing European settler occupation of South African soil by virtue of the so called right of conquest. (KEKANA:1980:12ff)

The Europeans, however, with their guns, their more efficient organisation, their lust for gain and the insatiable demand for labour

of the new plantation colonies of Portugal, and later those of Britain, Holland and France, gave the trade a dimension that changed the face of Africa.

Khoikhoi sued for peace, and tried to regain rights to their pastures, "standing upon it" that we (the Dutch) had gradually been taking more and more of their land, which had been theirs since the beginning of time ....Asking also, whether, if they came to Holland, they would be permitted to do the like.

The Commander argued that if their lands were restored there would not be enough grazing for both nations. The Khoikhoi replied "Have we then no cause to prevent you from getting more cattle? The more you have the more lands you occupy. And to say the land is not big enough for both, who should give way, the rightful owner or the foreign invader?" Van Riebeeck made it clear "that they had now lost the land in war and therefore could only expect to be henceforth deprived of it. ....The country had thus fallen to our lot, being justly won in defensive warfare and....it was our intention to retain it. (TROUP:1988:33 and 53)

The so called right of conquest, then, has from the very beginning established and shaped the nature and character of human relations in South Africa. The same so called right has determined the course of the history of South Africa until today. It is worthwhile noting that Van Riebeeck claims that the land of the indigenous people was acquired in a just manner by the foreign invaders. Furthermore, Van Riebeeck claims that the warfare which the foreign invaders waged against the indigenous people could rightly be defined as "defensive". For the present we will avoid but certainly postpone a detailed discussion of these claims. Suffice it to note, therefore, that these claims touch upon a fundamental question of justice, which, in the nature of things, must precede and is indeed paramount to any construction of human relations between the people of European origin in South Africa and the indigenous people of African soil. However, we wish to note in parenthesis that any resolution of this fundamental/question of justice — the land question — must include the twofold "exigency of restitution and reparation." (SOBRINO:1988:108)

Apart from the synonymy between being and indigenous South African and being colonised, it is also apparent that Nolan draws a distinction between "European settlers" and the "indigenous people of the country". This latter must mean, even in the wildest stretch of imagination, the rightful owners of the country. On this distinction, two questions arise, namely:

1. who is the rightful owner of the soil, of the land of South Africa?
2. Who is a South African?

We now turn to a consideration of the first question. If history is anything to go by and, not only that, but if we may also be guided by Nolan's conception of the synonymy between being an indigenous people and being colonised as well as his distinction between "European settler" and "indigenous people of the country" then the only answer to the first question must be that the indigenous people, that is to say, the people who pre-existed and inhabited the land of South Africa before the intrusion of the people of European origin, are the rightful owners of the land of South Africa. These are the Khoisan and the Bantu-speaking peoples of South Africa. (SCHAPER:1930:STEPEN:1982) In spite of this, the fundamental question of justice — the land question — appears to be a non-issue for Nolan. Indeed the present author has not been able to find in any page of Nolan's book, a distinct and explicit problematisation of the land question as a question of fundamental justice. Instead, what there is, is a cursory and somewhat superficial reference to the "history" of the struggle in South Africa.

The struggle in South Africa has a long history. We can trace it back to the colonial wars or even further back to the struggles of the Khoikhoi and the San in early days of colonial settlement in the Cape. But the struggle as we know it today, as a national struggle, began in 1912 with the formation of the South African Native National Congress, which was the forerunner of the African National Congress or ANC. (NOLAN:1988:161; emphasis added):

We note that it is not enough to express the possibility that the struggle in South Africa can be traced back to colonial wars and even further back to the struggles of the Khoikhoi and the San peoples. It is not merely a question of tracing back as if history as the reconstruction of the past is only and simply the acquisition of knowledge in the strict sense, that is, for its own sake. On the contrary, we hold that history must simultaneously be regarded as knowledge qua social function, that is, and instrument through which we can understand, interpret and most importantly change or proceed towards changing our present reality. Our contention here is that history, as one of the modes of accession to objective truth, should provide us with a truthful knowledge of the past so that we can discover our present truth in the light of the past.

We submit that the land question is of vital importance and may therefore not be overlooked or trivialised by those who seek the truth of history about present-day South Africa. Of course, Nolan is not solitary along his path of historical superficiality and unwarranted trivialisation of the land question in South Africa. He is supported

for example by Thomas Karis. In his essay motivated by what he terms “issues posed by the importance of the ANC”, Karis criticises the PAC’s stand on the land question in these terms: While sharing the ANC/s nonracial aims, the PAC rejected the Freedom Charter and insisted with mystical overtones that Africans were the indigenous owners of the soil (KARIS:1983:380 and 382). For a person of Karis’ South African experience and stature especially insofar as he co-edited the four volume historical documentary, *From Protest to Challenge* it is, to say the least, surprising that his supposed mine of historical knowledge would delude him into thinking that the PAC’s position on the land question was “mystical”. The truth of the matter is that only wishful thinking can lead to the untenable conclusion that prior to the European intrusion on South African soil there were — as far as historical knowledge has thus determined — other known indigenous people of South Africa apart from the Khoisan and the Bantu-speaking peoples.

The core of our submission that the land question is of vital importance is that land is the indispensable resource for the fulfilment of basic human needs. There can be no question that an organic relation between the human being and land is the precondition for the preservation and continuance of human life. Land is essential to life itself, at least, in the most fundamental sense, that is, the biological sense. Thus he who forcibly deprives another of ownership of land that originally belong to the one so deprived is in a real sense depriving the other a meaningful exercise of the right to life. Because of its inextricable interconnection with life itself the land question ought to remain central to any move aimed at resolving the conflict in South Africa on a just basis. The centrality of the land question ought not to be rendered trivial by Christians like Nolan who are supposed to be familiar with the theory of the just war. The principle of recoverability upheld by the Christian doctrine of the just war, holds that the ownership of land or private property which is directly and immediately linked to the preservation of life itself justifies the use of force to the point of killing in order to recover land lost as a result of defeat or on an unjust basis. There is nothing “mystical” about the fact that to date the posterity of the European colonisers have not yet returned the land to the indigenous owners or their posterity. Instead the grand grand-children of the European colonisers have forcibly occupied 87% of South African territory and overcrowded the indigenous majority population in the remaining 13%. In these circumstances it would not only be the height of folly but it would also be fatal for the posterity of the land question at the mystical altar of nonracial and democracy. While these latter ideals cannot be overlooked they may not be more important than the search for a just solution to the land question.

If as Nolan puts it “the gospel for us today is the good news about what God is doing in South Africa today in the light of what God has done in the past” then for the forcibly dispossessed and landless the present reality in South Africa today must be understood in light of past history with regard to the interaction between the indigenous peoples of South Africa and the “European settlers. This means that the struggle in South Africa today is the real suffering, oppression and exploitation lived through and experienced by the indigenous majority population as the primary victims, as a result of and in the light of a historical process initiated by the colonisers of European extraction in the past and continued in the present by the posterity of the colonisers of European origin. For this reason we reject Nolan’s cursory, superficial and passing reference to the “long history” of the struggle in South Africa firstly because it conceals the fundamental question of justice revealed by objective historical truth, namely, the land question. Secondly, Nolan’s casual reference to the past is also rejected because it undermines the organic and vital link that exists between the indigenous people and their land. (RAMOSE:1983:226) In effect it throws into oblivion and decentralises the critical fact that the hallmark of the land question is by every test a question of life and death; the death that is on occasion violent and sudden as well as the frequent death arising from the structural poverty that is maintained by the posterity of the colonisers of European extraction. In this connection we hold that the question of life and death is pre-eminently a theological as well as a theological question at the same time. Here we concur with Nolan’s insight concerning the former that:

Jesus message was designed to be good news for all the people of his time but only by being in the first place good news for the poor. (NOLAN:1988:11; emphasis added)

It must be recognised as a first step in our theological thinking that the forcible expropriation of the land of the indigenous people of South Africa meant thenceforward and actually is the systematic and ongoing material impoverishment that results in the miserable deaths of the poorest of poor in South Africa. The structures of poverty and death that prevail in South Africa represent a denial of human life, in the first instance: they represent the refusal to respect human life, the reluctance to share in the bestowal of life to others: a life that is a gratuitous gift from God. The point we are making here is that:

In order to recognise the truth of creation today, one must take another tack in this first, basic moment, a moment of honesty ...Humanity” today is the victim of poverty and institutionalised violence. Often enough this means death, slow or sudden. In theological terms: God’s creation is being assaulted and vitiated

...Further: because this reality is not simply natural, but historical—being the result of action taken by some human beings against others — this reality is sinful. As absolute negation of God’s will, this sinfulness is very serious and fundamental. (SOBRINO:1988:15; emphasis added)

In the light of the foregoing we suggest that Nolan’s disregard of the land question, as a matter of historical (objective) truth and as a moment of singular theological significance does not satisfy his self-imposed criterion of critical and rigorous thinking nor it is doubtlessly a “genuine theological reflection”. Nolan displays the tendency to situate in disparate manner insights that otherwise belong together. This disregard for coherence negatives the criterion of “critical and rigorous thinking. More importantly, however, is the fact that this sprinkling of insights manifests a predilection for discourse by way of ellipsis. The pertinent question here is not only why resort to ellipsis but it leads to the observation that apart from its vagueness and corresponding uncertainty, this manner of discourse with regard to the situation in South Africa today, is not, to borrow from Nolan himself “honest, bold and consistent”. (NOLAN:1988:214) Such lack of honesty, boldness and consistency with regard to the explicit problematisation of the fundamental question of justice — the land question — means that objective historical truth on this point becomes concealed. Accordingly, the questions that we raise regarding objective reality in present-day South Africa might be off course. In this way the responses that we get from such questioning will clearly be half-baked and unauthentic. But if it is the new word of God that we seek to hear and listen to in present-day South Africa then we must realise that God’s word is always first foremost the authentic voice. So it is that the unauthentic voice that we will hear and listen to as a result of inadequate and superficial questioning will clearly not be the voice of God. Instead, it will be our own voice masquerading as the voice of God. This mode of knowing is defective and as such incapable of leading to a truly theological relationship between the human subject and God. In a word, it precludes the possibility for a spiritual relationship with God.

This dishonesty issues in a practical denial of God, inasmuch as God is no longer recognised as the foundation both of the real and of the very spirit of the subject. And so because this dishonesty precludes the absolutely basic “right relationship” between subject and object, between agent and reality, spirituality itself is precluded. Spirituality, then, must begin with exactly the opposite attitude: with an act of profound honesty about the real the recognition of things as they actually are.

...There is no spiritual life without actual, historical life. It is impossible

to live with spirit unless that spirit becomes flesh. (SOBRINO:1988:14-15;4; emphasis added)

This then is our theological reason for urging that history should be allowed to declare its own truth concerning the land question while we remain open to whatever consequences that may ensue from our acknowledgement of such truth. Conversely, this is precisely the reason why we regard Nolan's superficial and cursory reference to the "long history" of the struggle in South Africa as a far cry from what he calls "genuine theological reflection". We maintain that the land question is not only a matter of historical truth simpliciter but it is also theologically a singular moment of "metaphysical density" since the latent spirituality of this moment may result in the disclosure or eruption of God leading, therefore, to a theological relationship with God. (SOBRINO:1988:67) After all, spirituality is not just a question of the opposition between the visible and the invisible; the antithesis between incorporeality and corporality. On the contrary,

"Spirituality is constituted ...in the antithesis of life and death." (SOBRINO:1988:53)

Nothing could be the source, the fountain of the spirituality of liberation that the fact that the poor of the poorest in South Africa always yearn for and hunker after liberation from structural sin that perpetuates their impoverishment and so ensures their absorption into the ever-present existential black hole called death.

This means that the poor are the authentic theological source for understanding Christian truth and practice and therefore the constitution of the Church. The poor are those who confront the Church both with its basic theological problem and with the direction in which the solution to the problem is to be found. For the poor pose the problem of seeking God without presupposing that the Church possesses him once and for all. At the same time they offer the Church the place for finding him. (SOBRINO:1984:93)

In the light of the foregoing our basic argument then is that the land question in South Africa must be thematised on theological grounds. This is an imperative of both the theology of history and the spirituality of liberation. We hold that despite his contention pertaining specifically to the theology of history, Nolan fails to sustain this contention through his failure to raise the land question as a fundamental problem of justice, and, as we have seen, a question that is by every test central to any spirituality of liberation. It is precisely upon this specific failure that we base our contention that there are legitimate grounds upon which we can doubt if Nolan's reflections in this context are or remain "genuine theological reflections". If

his position, which is clearly an oblique reference to Marx, is true, namely, that "The purpose of the gospel is not to explain the world but to save it" (NOLAN:1988:193) then what we are saying is that his disregard of the land question is a real gospel that is silent about the salvation of the dispossessed, disinherited and the poor indigenous majority population.

### **1.1 THE LAND QUESTION: A LIBERATION THEME**

We have already seen that right from the days of the indigenous Khoikhoi and the San people of South Africa, the colonials invaded South African soil. The Khoikhoi people had raised the question in unambiguous terms: in the name of justice who must give way when there is no longer enough grazing land, the rightful owners of the land or the alien European invaders? This insight has since become an integral part of the unfolding history of the liberation struggle in South Africa. We therefore wish to take issue with Nolan's claim that "the struggle as we know it today, as a national struggle, began in 1912 with the formation of the South African Native National Congress, which was the forerunner of the African National Congress or ANC. With regard to this claim we make the following preliminary observations:

1. The claim is historically arbitrary.
2. Regardless of the specific use of the term "we, the suggestion that "We, meaning all, know the struggle to be a national struggle since 1912 is unwarranted.
3. The "we, backed by the tenor or the passage as a whole, is unduly restrictive and reductionist. It is false to suggest that the struggle in South Africa "as we know it today" can be reduced to the national question. This is not to deny the nationalist element in the liberation struggle of South Africa.
4. The word "national" is ambiguous. Does it refer to the struggle of the indigenous majority population in the first instance, in search of nationhood or does it refer to the struggle of humankind in South Africa in search of South African nationhood? The author of the preface to Nolan's book *Malusi Mpumlwana* brings the question into sharp relief in these terms: Is the God of 'Die Stem' and of 'Nkosi Sikelela' one and the same God?" (NOLAN:1988:ix) 'Die Stem' in full, 'Die Stem van Suid-Afrika' is widely known as the national anthem of the Afrikaner people in South Africa whereas 'Nkosi Sikelela' in full, 'Nkosi Sikelala Afrika' is the accepted national anthem of the indigenous majority population of South Africa in the first place.
5. The ordinary meaning of the word 'Native' in the name of the organisation mentioned in not only indigenous but also belonging to one by right of birth. Here the question is, since at the time when this organisation was formed the representatives of

the people of European extraction were also gathering to form their exclusive Union of South Africa, what is it that the indigenous majority population regarded as belonging to them by right of birth? The sure answer to this question is that land was that which the indigenous majority population have regarded as belonging to them by right of birth. This answer is ironically reminiscent of Mary Benson's book *The struggle for a Birthright*. The land question was therefore thematised in the very first organisation which brought together all segments of the indigenous majority population of South Africa.

6. Was there any reason or reasons for the change of name of the original organisation, and, more specifically, on what grounds was the term "Native" dropped in favour of the new name, notably, African Nation Congress?

Article 16 of the Constitution of the South African Native National Congress reads as follows:

To acquire land by purchase, lease exchange, gift or otherwise for erection of halls and other public buildings for the use and purpose of the Association. (KARIS;CHARTER, Vol. 1:1972:78; emphasis added)

The land question, as we have claimed, has never ceased to be an integral part of the unfolding history of the liberation struggle in South Africa. We will continue to illustrate this by way of self-explanatory citations.

Having regard to the breaches of the aforesaid Royal proclamations and apart from the Natives Land Act 1913, this Congress urges Parliament to take the bold step of restoring the status quo in Zululand by proclaiming it a territory and a permanent place for the original owners thus securing an act of justice where it is due.

We submit there should be no interference with the existing conditions and vested rights of the Natives, and there should be no removal or ejection of them from their ancestral lands or from lands they have occupied for generations past: but they should have unrestricted liberty in every Province to acquire land wherever and whenever opportunity permits. (KARIS:CARTER, *ibid.*, 87; emphasis added)

In this address entitled "Bridging the Gap Between White and Black in South Africa" delivered at the Conference of European and Bantu Christian Students Associations at Fort Hare in July 1930, Xuma made the following observation and we lay special emphasis on the words, "Native" Land" and "African.

Section 7 of the Native Administration Act of 1927 on "Land Registration and Tenure" makes land tenure for the individual African extremely insecure and yet, as Mr. A.G. Fraser has said, "Land is to the African (he might as well have said to every race of mankind) what the sea is to the fish; it is essential to his life... More harm has been done to African life and morals, except in West Africa, by European land hunger than any drink trade. (KARIS:CARTER, *ibid.*, 221-222; emphasis added)

That land is essential not only to the life of the African but also to that of any and every human being is beyond dispute. It is precisely this unique and special character of land as an essential of life that brings it to the fore as the fundamental theme of the struggle for liberation in South Africa. As previously argued, we find it not only incomprehensible but it is also unacceptable that on the interests of objective historical truth and genuine theological reflection, Nolan should find his cursory and superficial reference to the "long history" of the struggle adequate without specific and explicit focus on the land question.

The land question has been thematised, albeit obliquely, even within the ranks of the South African Communist Party more specifically with regard to the so called thesis of the Black Republic. Document 43 of the text, *South African Communists Speak*, states:

The new PARTY PROGRAMME was debated for over a full day. The point that raised most discussion was the "Native Republic" slogan. The chairman ruled any motions involving its rejection or modification were out of order under the CI statutes, but welcomed discussions tending to explanation. In the result it was understood that it implies, by whatever stages, a workers and peasants Republic, but with the necessary stress on its over-whelmingly native character; for practically all natives are workers and peasants, and again, probably only a workers' and peasants' victory can achieve such a republic. After further discussions the clause "Selfdetermination of the African peoples" was adopted by 11 votes to 4. (1981:99; emphasis added).

There is apparently synonymy between Native and African. Document 42 in the same text underlines the importance of the land question in these terms.

South Africa is a British dominion of a colonial type. The country was seized by violence by foreign exploiters the land expropriated from the natives, who were met by a policy of extermination in the first stages of colonisation, and conditions of semi-slavery established for the overwhelming majority of the natives. It is necessary to tell the native masses that in the face of existing political and

economic discrimination against the natives and ruthless oppression of them by the white oppressors, the Comintern slogan of a native republic means restoration of the land to the landless and landpoor population.

Apart from its clarity on the forcible expropriation of the land from its rightful owners — the indigenous peoples of South Africa, (the “natives”) — the citation is equally unambiguous on the need to abide by the principle of recoverability which will be realised only when land is restored to the “landless and land-poor population. It is interesting to note that even those who do not profess to be Christian do nevertheless understand and recognise that the return of the land to its rightful owners is an imperative demand of justice. One can even appreciate the sense of justice of the protagonists of the “native republic” since they are alive to the wider demands of justice in the South African situation. Thus the citation continues:

This slogan does not mean that we ignore or forget about the non-exploiting elements of the white population. On the contrary, the slogan calls for “full and equal rights for all races. The white toiling masses must realise that in South Africa they constitute national minorities, and it is their task to support and fight jointly with the native masses against the white bourgeoisie and the British imperialists. The argument against the slogan for a native republic on the ground that it does not protect the whites is objectively nothing else than a cover for the unwillingness to accept the correct principle that South Africa belongs to the native population. (1981:94-95; emphasis added)

It is tempting to digress and to compare and contrast the statement “South Africa belongs to the native population” with the claim that “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, contained in the Freedom Charter.

Similarly, the distinction between European and South African has been maintained and reference to the “Native” was made from within the ranks of the same Party in spite of the preferred appellation, “comrade. Thus in his letter calling for Africanisation in the Communist Party of South Africa dated February 23, 1934, Moses Kotane stated:

What I have learnt from my recent study has further strengthened my old conclusions (known only to a few leading elements in our Party) that our Party has and is suffering owing to being too Europeanised.... If one investigates the general ideology of our Party members (especially the whites), if sincere, he will not fail to see that they subordinate South Africa in the interests of Europe, in fact, ideologically they are not South Africans they are foreigners who

know nothing about and who are the least interested in the country in which they are living at present, but are valiant “servants” of Europe.

We must learn from our European brothers but we should not lose sight of the fact that Europe differs historically, politically and economically with South Africa.

My first suggestion is that the Party become more African’s or African’s, that the CUPS must pay special attention to South Africa, study the conditions in this country and concretise the demands of the toiling masses. From first hand information, that we must speak the language of the Native masses and must know their demands. (SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNISTS SPEAK:1981:120-122; emphasis added)

### 1.1.2 RACISM

In his unsatisfactory discussion of “Racism” Nolan leaves no doubt about his preference for the “non-racialism” that he attributes to the ANC. Nolan declares his rather concealed preference in these terms:

Racism has been taken to such lengths by the system that it has produced a deep thirst for its opposite: non-racialism... Even multiracialism is now rejected... But the non-racial ideal that has developed and spread and really taken root among the people of South Africa, in opposition to the system, is an ideal of a society in which race, color or ethnicity is totally irrelevant. According to the Freedom Charter, “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white”... (NOLAN:1988:141)

Lest there be any doubt that our suggestion that Nolan prefers not only the “non-racialism” but also the ANC, then we refer to the above excerpt as well as to another text in which Nolan makes the following claim:

The new phase in the struggle is characterised by non-racialism and co-operation with whites. The ANC has always maintained a non-racialist stand. (NOLAN:1988:15)

The bulk of Nolan’s reflections following upon this brief citation constitute and eulogy for the ANC. No doubt this is done by way of criticism of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania and the Azanian People’s Organisation. It must be said, however, that the criticism has three bases. The first basis is wishful thinking. (CARTER:1973:300-301 and 328) The second is, at face value, the yearning by whites to secure the “co-operation of the indigenous majority population, in the first instance, in the struggle for libera-

tion. Much more fundamental, however, is the ingrained, deep-seated belief on the part of the majority of the so called good liberal whites that the indigenous majority people can never attain majority and grow into adults capable of making independent and responsible decisions. Left to themselves, so the belief goes, these people can never do the right thing and thus they require the “co-operation” of whites. Of course, the word co-operation is a euphemism for white guidance and control over these people who are supposedly destined to be perpetual minors. Co-operation” then is clearly the concealed need as well as a design to preserve and maintain white domination over the indigenous majority population. Whenever the latter rejected this in the name of African nationalism, critics and supporters alike have tended to describe this as racism in reverse. But even here the critics yearning for unprincipled “co-operation” with whites have been forced to admit that,

it remains true that for the moment the mainspring of the conflict is black liberation, with the African majority as the main force. It involves among other things a stimulation and deepening of their national confidence, national pride and national assertiveness. (DAVIDSON:SLOVO:WILKINSON:1976:132)

Left to speak for itself African nationalism

Insists that a condition for inter-racial peace and progress is the abandonment of white domination, and such a change in the basic structure of South African Society that those relations which breed exploitation and human misery will disappear. Therefore our goal is the winning of National freedom for African people, and the inauguration of a people’s free society where racial oppression and persecution will be outlawed. (CARTER:KARIS:1973:328)

The abandonment of white domination does not necessarily mean domination by the indigenous majority population. Instead, it means genuine and meaningful participation by the indigenous majority population (Africans) in the leadership of the struggle for liberation in South Africa. Without this co-operation not only with whites but also with the Indians — and Coloureds will have failed to translate into practice “the correct principle that South Africa belongs to the native population. Seen from this perspective, the quest for white “co-operation” is no more than an imperative of self-preservation which is unlikely to be genuinely beneficent to the cause of the indigenous majority population.

With these preliminary remarks in mind we now turn to consider the excerpt cited first. In the first place it is misleading to cite only the advertent that “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black

and white. The point is that it is essential that this averment be understood in the context of the thought as a whole. Seen from within the context of the thought of the preamble as a whole the averment gives rise to the following considerations

- (a) There is a vital distinction between to live in a country and to be born in it. It is a widely accepted norm of international law that those who live in a particular country do not necessarily belong to it in the sense that they are citizens or nationals of that country. Conversely, those who are born in a country are widely regarded as belonging to it by right of birth. It needs to be said, however, that international law is not uniform on this point. But those who live in any given country may belong to that country in the sense of being citizens or nationals thereof provided they comply with the naturalisation requirements stipulated by the law of the country concerned. On what grounds, then, does South Africa belong to those who live in it black and white?

Assuming that the term “black” is used in the narrow sense, why does “all” appear to restrict the population of South Africa to “black and white” whereas we have Asiatic and so called Coloured population groups which are not necessarily either black or white? For a supposedly “rigorous and critical” thinker like Nolan it should be clear that his preferred phrase, “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white” cannot be sustained either in logic or in fact. From a logical point of view “all” means everything/everyone without exception. Yet the qualification “black and white” makes an exception by excluding the Coloureds and the Indians. This exception means that the “all” here is restrictive. It is not all-inclusive as it should be. Such restrictiveness is all the more surprising in the light of the fact that historically the Coloured people have existed in South Africa probably as early as ten months after the arrival of Van Riebeeck on South African soil whereas the Indian people were in South Africa for ninety-five years by the time the restrictive “all” was declared. In addition, the Coloured and Indian people were not only present when the restrictive “All” was adopted in Kliptown but they also were active contributors — as they indeed continue to be — to the ongoing struggle for liberation in South Africa. How, then, could they have been forgotten and excluded when the reality is “that South Africa is a country of four chief nationalities, three of which (the Europeans, Indians and Coloureds) are minorities, and three of which (the Africans, Coloureds and Indians) suffer national oppression.” (CARTER:KARIS:1973:329) Although the reality of “four chief nationalities” still remains, the suffering “national oppression”

on the part of Coloureds and Indians has slightly been altered by former President Botha through the 1983 constitution. The 1983 constitutional dispensation—Republic of South Africa Act, No. 110 of 1983 — provides, inter alia, for a “racial federation” (BOOYSEN:1984:45) governed by clauses pertaining to “own” and “general affairs” and the President’s role in that regard. While expert opinion on constitutional matters has described the 1983 constitution as a “racial federation” popular opinion internally and internationally has been highly critical of the racial element in the 1983 constitution. It is well-known that internally criticism of the racial element led to the birth, among others, of the United Democratic Front. The core of the criticism was that the 1983 constitution excluded the indigenous majority population of South Africa. In other words, it was almost unanimously agreed that former President Botha could not validly claim either in logic or in fact that “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, white, Coloured and Indian. By parity of reasoning the Freedom Charter appears to be comparably worse than the 1983 constitution because its “all” includes only two of the “four chief nationalities” of South Africa. On what grounds then does Nolan consider the claim that “South Africa belong to all who live in it, black and white” to be “non-racial? It must be remembered that at the time the term “black” was synonymous with “native” or “African. It therefore cannot be construed to have had the meaning attached to it by the Black Consciousness philosophy, namely, an existential index pointing at people who are dominated, exploited and oppressed as a group regardless of race, colour, creed or sex. Nolan himself does not use the term black in the Black Consciousness philosophy sense. (NOLAN:1982:12)

With regard to Nolan’s preferred phrase it is clear that the basic question is: to whom does the land belong? The fundamental antithesis then is not that between “racism” and “non-racism” but it is the opposition between the rightful owners of the land and those who occupy the land by virtue of the so called right of conquest.

- (b) That our insight is correct with regard to the fundamental opposition is borne out by the averment that follows just after the one cited by Nolan. The averment reads as follows: “that our people have been robbed of their birthright to land, liberty and peace, by a form of government founded on injustice and inequality.

Firstly, this is an acknowledgement that some people have been and are disinherited and dispossessed of land. Secondly, who

are "our people" in this context, and, when, how and against whom did the "form of government" execute the act of robbery? Against the background of the historical truth we have already referred to with regard to the land question, it is clear that the "injustice" referred to here must ultimately mean that the source and foundation of such "injustice" and "inequality" does not merely pertain to "a form of government" but is pre-eminently the fact of colonial conquest by armed force over the indigenous majority population of South Africa. At issue then as now is the land question. It follows then that we shall submit that (i) it is illicit and dishonest to equate the struggle against racism with the quest to achieve a just and lasting solution to the land question, according, at least, to the canons of natural justice, notably, restitution and restoration. (ii) It is dishonest and illicit to dissolve the land question into the ideal of "non-racialism. The salvation or liberation of the forcibly disinherited and poor indigenous majority does not lie in a "non-racialism" that hardly bothers to take into account that which is essential to the life of the poor, namely, the land.

- (c) Nolan's predilection for both the statement that "South belongs to all who live in it, black and white" and the ideal of "non-racialism" is echoed, significantly, by an American who was not only attached to the American Embassy in Pretoria in the late 1950's but is co-editor of a book from which we have been quoting some of our excerpts. According to this American, Thomas G. Karis, the "most important feature of the (Freedom Charter) was its categorical declaration that 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white'. (KARIS: 1983:381-382)

In the light of the questions we raised in (a) and (b) above including our comments thereto, we wish to note some of the pertinent observations which Karis makes.

In the face of mounting government repression, ANC leaders reassessed in 1950 the need for non-African allies. They welcomed the formation of a multiracial congress alliance headed by the ANC and including congresses representing Indians, Coloureds and whites.

Tambo and Mandela initially opposed cooperation with communists and with non-Africans. (KARIS:1983:381; emphasis added)

Some ANC Youth Leaguers, who lacked the experience of close co-operation with whites and Indians, had remained in the ANC as an "Africanist" faction. They were finally to split in 1959, forming the Pan Africanist Congress under the leadership of Robert

Sobukwe. While sharing the ANC's nonracial aims, the PAC rejected the Freedom Charter and insisted with mystical overtones that Africans were the indigenous owners of the soil. (KARIS:1983:382; emphasis added)

Our comments to this have already been made. Suffice it to state once again that Nolan is not a loner in his less than critical reflections on racism in South Africa.

Nolan builds up his uninformed and unfair accusation that the Black Consciousness Movement is racist by resort to the following claims

Black Theology is an explicit, articulate and scholarly reflection upon the Christian significance of black suffering and oppression in South Africa ... I say explicit theology because much of what Black Theology articulated was already implicit in the preaching of the black Churches whether they were independent or not. Black Theology articulates a decidedly prophetic gospel.

Today Black Theology is faced with the dilemma of what is called ideological split between Black Consciousness and the non-racialism that is associated with the Freedom Charter. Black Theology has been a theological reflection upon the meaning of Black Consciousness. If the majority of people have now adopted the non-racialism of the Freedom Charter, what does this mean for Black Theologians? (NOLAN:1988:3-4)

Nolan clearly associates, and correctly, Black Theology with the Black Consciousness. Further, he implies by reference to "dilemma" that Black Consciousness is racist whereas the Freedom Charter is not. Our previous reflections on this point apply with equal force here. Finally, he makes the hypothetical claim that the "majority of the people have now adopted the non-racialism of the Freedom Charter." The hypothetical nature of this claim still means that Nolan must prove it. Yet a critical and rigorous thinker of his caliber scarcely furnishes proof of this claim anywhere in the book.

In South Africa today, despite this onslaught upon human dignity, many people have recovered their pride and self-worth; indeed some have never lost it. In recent times it was the Black Consciousness movement that developed this self-assertiveness and recovery of dignity. Today people can laugh at the arrogance of white supremacy and see it for the foolishness, the stupidity and childishness that it is. White arrogance can be seen as degrading to whites rather than to blacks. (NOLAN:1988:52)

It is worth noting here that Nolan prefers euphemistic phrases,

phrases which tend to conceal rather than reveal the truth. These phrases are, "the arrogance of white superiority" and "white arrogance. Why not use the much more simple and direct phrase, white racism since this reveals the truth immediately? Of course, Nolan should be aware that the use of the phrase "white racism" is likely to suggest that if there is black racism in South Africa then it is not abstract or imaginary but springs from the concrete experience of living under the yoke of white racism.

Nolan's preference for elliptic language is once again an expression of his lack of fidelity to the facts.

If Black Consciousness is faced with the supposed "ideological split" how is it that according to Nolan's evaluation the Black Consciousness movement can unintentionally achieve a non-racial effect, namely, a "laugh at the arrogance of white superiority? For a rigorous and critical thinker like Nolan this is not particularly consistent; consistency being one of the tract demands of "rigorous and critical thinking.

It must be underlined, however, that non-racialism has been one of the aims of the Black Consciousness movement right from its very beginning. A less than cursory look at the Black Students' Manifesto appearing in many documents such as SASO Newsletter Vol. 2 No. 4, Sept./Oct. 1972, will bear out our claim. Similarly, a careful study of the minutes of the Black Peoples' Convection held at the Lay Ecumenical Centre, Edendale, Pietermaritzburg from 8th-10th July 1972 will show that one of the main aims of the Black Consciousness movement was to annul or conquer the effects of white racism in south Africa. Nowhere in the documents cited can one validly infer that the Black Consciousness movement entertained racist aims. Indeed the "Policy of Black Consciousness" contained in the Black Peoples' Convention December 1975 Conference Report is explicit on the non-racial aim of the Black Consciousness movement.

Black Consciousness shall strive to achieve the following goals:

- (a) To inculcate amongst Blacks a sense of pride in themselves and a desire and eagerness to analyse their problems and offer solutions.
- (b) To break the stranglehold that white society has on privileges, wealth and opportunity and to create a truly open plural society in which all persons shall be treated as equal before the law.
- (c) To eradicate racial prejudice in all its forms and to promote proper understanding amongst the various peoples in the open society to be established.

Apart from the above documents of the Black Consciousness movement, informed opinion on the movement's position with regard to racism holds that:

The BCM has always held that its own existence would be irrelevant and unnecessary in a non-racial, non-exploitative society. But racism is institutionalised and blacks are politically oppressed and economically exploited in South Africa. In black consciousness thinking, the history of South Africa can be interpreted according to a dialectical process. From the thesis of white racism and the antithesis of black solidarity a synthesis will emerge: true humanity without regard to race or colour. (LEATT, et al.:1986:107)

The same authors whose book was published in South Africa before Nolan's book under consideration here note further that:

Education and training were thus used extensively by the BCM to instill in people a sense of self-reliance, initiative, and solidarity. It sought to examine critically white racism and capitalist exploitation, and the roots of psychological servitude, which have emasculated blacks during years of oppression...

From the beginning the BCM asserted that social and political change in South Africa would mean little unless there was a corresponding change in the economy of the country. Real change required a fundamental redistribution of wealth and resources in a land where these were skewed in favour of whites. A change in the colour of government as such might not necessarily affect the maldistribution of wealth. (LEATT, et al.:1986:109-110; emphasis added)

Having noted the philosophical affinity between AZAPO, the National Forum and the Black Consciousness movement, the same authors make the following observation.

Can the NF and the UDF resolve their ideological differences which first emerged nearly two decades ago when the PAC broke away from the ANC over the wording of the Freedom Charter? What is clear is that those who subscribe today to an Africanist philosophy within AZAPO and the NF are using an explicit class analysis, and identify the root problem in South Africa not as racialism but racial capitalism. (LEATT, et al.: 1986:115; emphasis added)

In the light of the foregoing it is difficult to locate the source of Nolan's claim that Black Consciousness is faced with a dilemma arising from his imaginary "ideological split. Granting that Nolan might not have had access to the above information as "much of the research had to be done alone" (NOLAN:1988:xiii), it is still

legitimate to enquire how this has come about. There are at least two reasons for directing the enquiry in this way. Firstly, Nolan claims in the same page just cited that “the content of this book is the result of doing theology with people in thousands of meetings, discussions and arguments...” It is strange that none of these “thousands” of occasions appears to have stimulated a rigorous and critical thinker of Nolan’s caliber engaged in “research” to begin to suspect that his claim about the “ideological split” in Black Consciousness could be unfounded. Secondly, the author of the foreword to Nolan’s book, M. Malusi Mpumlwana is a well-known stalwart of the BCM even though he might have changed affiliation by now. That Malusi was a BCM stalwart is born out by Nolan himself in his rather mysterious recollection of “a conversation between Steve Biko and Malusi Mpumlwana. (NOLAN:1988:30) We note in parenthesis that a trend seems to be emerging to have former BCM stalwarts author forewords to books by whites or those whites who apparently support the liberation struggle. For example, the foreword to a book on Beyers Naude entitled Not Without Honour is written by Nyameko Barney Pityana. The apparent innocence of this emergent trend is by no means beyond question. We refer to Mpumlwana’s BCM credentials in order to show that it was possible for Nolan not only to request Malusi to write the foreword to his book but also to check with him if his accusation that the Black Consciousness movement is racist were fair and informed. That Nolan appears not to have explored this possibility suggests that his “research” on this point was not particularly geared towards discovering the facts and let the facts speak for themselves. This, we submit, shows lack of fidelity to the truth.

### **1.1.3 NOLAN’S APPENDIX: The Freedom Charter**

Nolan’s book contains two appendices, namely, The Freedom Charter and The Women’s Charter. The latter might have been included to keep up with the current trend on the woman’s question. With regard to the Freedom Charter, however, its inclusion is far from fashionable. A careful reading of Nolan’s God in South Africa reveals the subtle suggestion that if God were to come physically to South Africa today He — or shall we say she — would approve of the Freedom charter. This, we submit, is the fundamental thesis of Nolan’s theology in God in South Africa. We are thus presented with the image of a God who holds the gospel in one hand and the Freedom Charter in the other. It is uncertain whether it is the gospel or the Freedom Charter which is held in the right hand of God. Nolan’s depiction of God in this way is far from convincing.

In the first place it is misleading to suggest that faith in God is almost the same as uncritical loyalty to the Freedom Charter. It is therefore of fundamental importance to recognise that the basic content of

the act of faith is "surrender to Jesus in life and death. (SOBRINO:1987:27) Bearing in mind the human and the divine nature of Jesus Christ, it follows that the gospel cannot be the substitute for God nor can God be reduced to Jesus. The point here is "to safeguard the mystery of God as mystery, even after the appearance of Jesus, indeed, to safeguard the truth that, precisely in Jesus, God is fully uninvested and remains mystery, that is, abides as absolute origin—origin without origin — and as absolute future... God's self has been uttered in Jesus; but God has not thereby ceased to be the ultimate mystery." (SOBRINO:1987:50) Accordingly, from the point of view of faith God precedes and transcends the Freedom Charter. Consequently, the kingdom of God which Jesus Christ proclaimed is historically "near but not yet. As such God's kingdom cannot be contained once and for all in the Freedom Charter as Nolan would like us to believe. We therefore underline, again from the point of view of faith, that "the genuinely ultimate, that which gives meaning to Jesus' life, activity, and fate, is the kingdom of God" (SOBRINO:1987:84) and not the Freedom Charter. No doubt we do not query Nolan's obvious choice of the ANC. But we deny that such choice can be validated by recourse to history and theology in the way that Nolan has done, all in the name of "rigorous and critical thinking."

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