

*The Experience of Those Sinned Against***Albert Nolan (b. 1934)**

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Albert Nolan has excelled as one of the major figures in the domain of social ethics in South Africa.<sup>1</sup> In a book written in his honour in 2001, he is acclaimed as a father of liberation theology in South Africa. In his many and varied works, he has discussed the ethics of political and economic structures widely. He has insisted that such an ethical reflection should proceed from the vantage point of the concrete experience of those suffering from, and struggling against, such structures, which often inflict massive pain and suffering and are thus to be considered as sinful. The experience of suffering under such sinful structures is what Nolan has termed 'being sinned against'. He has insisted that the experience of being sinned against should be considered as a serious analytical category. Where an ethical reflection on economic and political structures assumes the experience of being sinned against as its subject matter, the horizon for ethical reflection widens to include elements that are normally excluded from a conventional ethical reflection on the structures of sin.

First, the horizon widens to include a reflection on what God is saying, doing and saving within a particular and concrete experience of being sinned against. Such an ethical reflection cannot but include God within the confines of social morality. Hence, Nolan would argue that, when we engage in an ethical reflection on the structures of sin through the lens of the experience of those sinned against, we 'cannot begin to talk about ethics, morality and the will of God for us today outside of the context of what God is doing in our present situation'.<sup>2</sup>

Second, given that what God is saying and doing is good news, the horizon of reflection widens to include the content of good news for those sinned against at a particular time and place. Those sinned against look for a biblical message that takes the form of good news, for 'news that generates hope, that energizes',<sup>3</sup> for news that makes them 'want to rejoice, to celebrate, to dance on the streets'.<sup>4</sup> Such good news 'has definite moral implications. It is the kind of news that challenges us to act. But the good news is concerned