

## ***The Contemporary Theological Project***

# **Timeboundness and Prophetism in the Theology of Albert Nolan<sup>1</sup>**

Philippe Denis

### **ABSTRACT**

The name of Albert Nolan is closely associated with the theological movement variously known as prophetic theology, Kairos theology and contextual theology. A member of the Dominican Order, Nolan worked as student chaplain before becoming a staff member of the Institute for Contextual Theology in 1984. He played an important role in the drafting of the Kairos Document in September 1985. From the time of his first book, *Jesus before Christianity* (1976) to the years of his last major writing, *Jesus today* (2006), he showed that the gospel of Jesus Christ, universal as it is, is always linked to a particular time and a particular context. It is necessarily situated. Theology responds to the 'signs of the times'. It is in that sense that it can be called prophetic. Precisely for that reason Nolan developed new theological and spiritual themes, the need for personal liberation for example, as the social and political situation of South Africa evolved.

The name of Albert Nolan, a South African Dominican known for his role in the struggle against apartheid, is closely associated with a spiritual and theological movement variously described as prophetic Christianity, prophetic theology or prophetic preaching.<sup>2</sup> In South Africa these terms have a very specific meaning which this article will try to elucidate. The Kairos Document, a declaration of faith adopted by a group of anti-apartheid Christian activists, including Nolan, in September 1985, played an important role in the genesis of the movement. Elsewhere, especially in evangelical circles, prophetic preaching is used in a

1 Revised version of a paper read at the 'Dei Verbum' Congress, Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas Angelicum, Rome, 25-27 February 2016.

2 Peter Walshe, 'Prophetic Christianity and the Liberation Movement', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 29, no. 1 (1991), 27-60; Stuart Bate, *Evangelisation in the South African Context* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1991), 15-24; Vuyani Vellem, 'Prophetic Theology in Black Theology, with Special Reference to the Kairos Document', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 66, no. 1 (2010); Nico Koopman, 'Public Theology as Prophetic Theology: More than Utopianism and Criticism', *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 134 (2009), 117-130.