Religious Pluralism in Struggles for Justice[1]

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I am one of many people of faith active in the African National Congress and the Mass-Democratic Movement in South Africa. What I propose to do in this paper is to make you party to a discussion about religious pluralism which presently exercises people of faith like myself in the ranks of the ANC and the Mass-Democratic Movement. As part of a discussion in progress, conducted in a context which values collective work and the achievement of consensus, it is deliberately rough-edged, tentative and open-ended, intended to facilitate the extension of the discussion rather than to say the last word in it.

Religious Pluralism and the ANC's Experience

What Hick calls 'the universe of faiths'[2] is well-represented in the ranks of this liberation movement. In it people of different faiths are united in a common struggle for justice and peace in their land. People of faith involved in the struggle for justice and peace do not lead lives in which the religious and the political are split one from the other. On the contrary, the political and the religious come to form a seamless whole in the lives of people of faith involved in the struggle. If I may borrow a phrase from Albert Nolan, the struggle is experienced in a religious mode by people of faith[3], and this religious modality of the struggle for unitary non-racial democracy is a common feature of the experience of comrades of different faiths. But struggling for fundamental change in a country makes theological demands upon people of faith, not the least of which concerns religious pluralism. It is not uncommon for religious believers in the struggle to discover that they have more in common, theologically speaking, with comrades from very different religious traditions than they have with many members of their own communions who are not involved in the struggle. This religious commonality in the struggle demands a theological framework which can give it expression and explain it.

This experience of commonality should *not* be dealt with syncretistically. Syncretism does violence to the rich diversity and distinctiveness of religious traditions. Another route is the radical religious relativism proposed, *inter alia,* by Hick[4]. This takes religious variety seriously enough, to be sure, but it demands an Olympian

377

vantage-point outside the universe of faiths, which might be available to
Hera and Zeus, but is inaccessible to mere mortals like us. What is
required is a framework which, while making place for diverse theologies
of struggle which are not reducible to one another, and allowing each to
be viewed in its own distinctive terms, nonetheless captures their
commonality.

A Taxonomical Framework

Level-0 Theology: A framework which offers a way of doing this
comprises a number of what I shall term 'nested theologies'. The thought
is that theologies for struggle are in some ways like Chinese boxes, which
contain a series of increasingly tiny boxes nested within one another. At
the centre of the framework is a core-theology, to some sense of which[5]
all theists[6] involved in the struggle can assent. We might refer to this
core-theology of struggle as a 'level-0 theology'.

Level-1 Theologies: The level-0 theology, in turn, is nested within an
array of theologies of struggle which, while not shared by all theistic
believers involved in the struggle, are acceptable in some sense or other to
adherents of cognate theistic tradition. We might refer to such
theologies—for example, a Judeo-Christian theology and what my
comrade Cedric Mayson once called an 'Abrahamic' theology,
acceptable to Jew, Christians and Muslims involved in the struggle—as
'level-1 theologies'.

Level-2 Theologies: Level-1 theologies are themselves to be thought
of as nested within an array of theologies of struggle which, while
peculiar to particular religious faiths, cut across denominational
boundaries. A level-2 theology underpins the *Kairos Document*[7], and
such a theology is enunciated in Albert Nolan's recent book, *God in
South Africa*. At this level, the integrity of different faiths is recognised,
but common ground is found within each faith. It should be noted that
level-2 theologies need to be rich enough to enable members of any one
faith sympathetically to understand the theological perspectives of any
other faith.

Level-3 Theologies: Level-0, level-1 and level-2 theologies are
themselves nested within denominational theologies of struggle located
firmly within their respective theological traditions. It should be
understood that these are not absolutely exclusive, for they are bound to
overlap with some of the other theologies at this level. At level-3 we will
also find certain perspective-specific theologies of struggle which are also
bound to overlap with particular denominational theologies. Examples
of these might be black theologies, feminist theologies, Jewish-Christian
theologies[8] and the like[9].

Dynamics of the framework: If this conception of nested theological
structures is to be workable, it is important to bear in mind the fact that
378

there is an hierarchy of truths[10]. Some truths are more fundamental to faiths than others, and it is crucial to have a sense of the relative positions of different theological claims within this hierarchical structure (or network) if one is correctly to understand the relationship between and within the different levels of the framework sketched out above[11].

It also needs to be said that while a given level-n theology is in one sense more fundamental than the level-$(n + 1)$ theology in which it is nested, and while a type-identical level-n theology might be nested in different level-$(n + 1)$ theologies, fundamental doctrines of the higher-level theologies of struggle will fix the sense of the lower-level theologies of struggle nested within them. The lower-level theology of struggle shared by adherents of different religious or denominational traditions cannot be univocal in this context.

Prima facie, the impossibility of a low-level theology of struggle which is accepted *in the same sense* by followers of different theological traditions means that the common ground in the struggle which is so readily apparent is like a mirage, all appearance and no substance. This would indeed follow were it the case that the plurality of senses in which a given low-level theology was held by followers of different faiths rendered the low-level theology straightforwardly equivocal in the way that the term 'bank', which may be used both of Barclays and of the land immediately adjacent to the Orange River, is equivocal.

The comparison with the sense of words is instructive since there are words which, while not univocal in sense, form a family of senses in which each member significantly resembles some other members. Such words are more that equivocal; following Aquinas, we might say that such terms are *analogical*[12]. Equivocal words have no more in common than phonetical value and spelling: the different senses of such terms are radically incommensurable. Analogical terms, by contrast, have commensurable senses. We must say, *mutatis mutandi,* that low-level theologies of struggle nested within different high-level theologies are used analogically rather than equivocally, and that they therefore *do* have enough in common to warrant the claim that they are shared by comrades of different faiths. The fact that they are manifested in a shared practice, the religious mode of struggle for unitary non-racial democracy in South Africa, is itself evidence of a significant degree of theological sharing despite the non-univocal senses of the putative common theologies[13].

The argument from shared practice to a core-theology which is shared in a significant sense raises another question, for many people who are party to the struggle do not profess to be religious, and some emphatically reject religious claims. If the move from shared practice to shared core-theology is warranted, a similar move must be open to us in regard to non-believing comrades in the struggle; but theists and non-theists patently do not share a *theology*. What is shared might be called 'a core-ethic', common fundamental ethical intuitions, especially

379

concerning certain questions of justice; and our discussion of univocality and analogy applies to this core-ethic as well. Such a core-ethic will itself be nested in the core-theology and in higher-order ethics.

Examples of different theologies

I for one find it difficult to look at frameworks in the abstract without examples of the type of thing which they might delineate. I have therefore written sketches of the type of theology we might find at each level up to and including level 2, or have pointed to a source of such a theology. My failure to sketch theologies for level 3 is because it seems clear that the burden of confessional theology is borne by level 2. The features which distinguish level-3 theologies from others which encapsulate the same type of level-2 confessional theology are more peripheral in the hierarchy of doctrines confessed as true than are level-2 doctrines. Christian fundamental theology is level-2 theology, theology that is simply Christian rather than denominational; and the same surely applies, *mutatis mutandis,* to other faiths.

These sketches are meant to be no more than summary remarks, samples of what might count as a 'filling' for a slot in the framework I have introduced, and I add them as an appendix of sorts to the taxonomical framework.

Sketch of a level-0 theology of struggle[14]: All theistic traditions can admit the notion of divine creation and sustenance in some form or other. We are created to be properly human creatures. This involves the conscious and communal effort to be properly human in a properly human environment. Flourishing humanity includes community based on fundamental equality and justice, and the open mutuality, propriety and dignity of relationships which we call love. A world in which proper humanity can flourish is a world at peace. Peace is active, the fruit of the struggle to make things whole[15].

Proper humanity and the conditions which are necessary to its development are 'built-in' ends towards which we strive. In obeying our innate tendency to seek this end and by working within structures which pursue this end, we cooperate with the divine work of creation and conform ourselves to the will of God. Work within structures which subvert the achievement of this end, and failure to challenge such structures if one is capable of doing so, amounts to a refusal to be proper creatures, a refusal to conform to God's will for us. The history of humankind struggling to achieve human flourishing is part of God's work of creation. It falls under God's providence, and God is intimately present in the way it is worked out.

The structures and practices of Apartheid are fundamentally subversive of human flourishing. Apartheid is itself an implicit denial of humanity and a rejection of God's will for us. Collaboration with

380

Apartheid, by word, deed or by the failure of the self-styled 'non-political' person to challenge the system, is an act of grave disobedience. By contrast, the vision of the Freedom Charter[16] —united, non-racial democracy in South Africa—embodies the end for which we are created. Active struggle against Apartheid within structures which struggle for a human social order in South Africa acceptable to the majority of its people shows God to be present and displays the creating and sustaining Divine will in and for us.

Sketch of a level-1 theology: The following is a rough sketch of an 'Abrahamic' theology of struggle, to which Jew, Christians and Muslims might assent. If the level-0 theology sketched above is used as a base, the notion of creation will be a central feature of this level-1 theology based upon it.

The notion of revelation—through the Torah, gospels and the Qur'an—is common to the 'Abrahamic' faiths, as is the notion of prophecy. Prophecy is intimately connected with the staunch criticism of injustices and a call to repentance. These faiths are all eschatological in orientation[17], and this affords theological purchase as well. In addition, all three faiths deprecate idolatry, and this should also feature.

Our struggle is the expression of a movement towards our eschatological end, realised humanity. Structures and people are subject to judgement—the achievement of flourishing humanity is its own reward, perhaps, and alienation from proper humanity is its own punishment. The struggle comes as a *crisis*, and it should be remembered that 'crisis' is derived from the Greek word for 'judgement'. The struggle is our judgement, it presents us with a crucial moment of decision, a *kairos,* and the matter for judgement is our position in relation to the struggle and to structures of struggle, on the one hand, and of oppression on the other.

Work with democratic structures in the struggle, that is to say, active support for the liberation-struggle, is obedience to the revealed will of God and reveals God in our world. The people in struggle are revealers of God's word and will. It follows that the ministry of people who struggle for liberation is a prophetic one, whether all these people are religious believers or not. Those who oppose the struggle deny God's word and will in practice. The people in struggle and their structures are the people of God, those who submit to the divine will. Those, on the other hand, who struggle against liberation implicitly set themselves up in place of God and are guilty of idolatry.

The above, in conjunction with the model of a level-0 theology sketched above, should suffice to suggest what a level-1 theology might look like in outline. It is not intended to be a complete schema.

Summary remarks on level-2 theologies: The theology of Albert Nolan's book *God in South Africa* is a paradigm of level-2 Christian theology and I shall not recapitulate what he says. It is worth noting that the theology he presents is *incarnational,* though it is not couched explicitly

381

in these terms. God is revealed, and is in a real sense incarnate in our struggle; we, through our struggle, share in the very life of God. Our suffering is inextricably linked with the redemptive suffering of Christ and Christ is present in our struggle. This incarnationalism is fundamental to level-2 Christian theologising.

Albert Nolan's theology is not the only level-2 Christian theology available. It is possible to construct alternative theologies which overlap with his theology to a greater or lesser degree, but which also differ from it in significant respects. I shall sketch the outline of such a theology, based on Christian Trinitarianism.

Albert Nolan's theology appears to assume that God is mutable in some sense, and this is not something that all Christians (or theists) are able to accept. It is possible to construct a theology for struggle which does not depend on this assumption. It might well assume that God is immutable and timelessly eternal. God the Creator, the Father, creates all our history timelessly. In our struggle, we discover and reveal his eternal will, manifesting it before the eyes of our world.

In our suffering, Christ is crucified. In our struggle, the hope of the resurrection is displayed. Christ risen from the dead is seen in our life in the struggle.

All those who join in the struggle and its structures live in the Spirit, which binds us together, making us revealers of God's Word, Christ, who is crucified with us and in whose rising and exaltation we are given strength to struggle for the realisation of our God-given humanity which is fulfilled in him. Our struggle is itself active, living faith, it is waged in hope, and is informed by the spirit of love. The vision of the Freedom Charter displays these three theological virtues.

It is not for me to talk on behalf of Muslims, but I would guess that a Muslim level-2 theology is bound to involve revelation in the Qur'an as a centrepiece, the absoluteness of Allah's justice and the Qur'anic preference for the oppressed of the earth as part of the particular content of Allah's revelation, and the condemnation of Apartheid as *shirq*[16]. A Jewish level-2 theology might refer to the seven Noachide commandments and the way in which Apartheid disobeys them[19]. It would be bound to refer to the preference for the poor and oppressed which is so conspicuous in the Torah, Written and Oral, and would argue that struggle against Apartheid is a legitimate expression of the righteous obedience to which God calls all.

Concluding Remarks

The purpose of the framework sketched above is to display what unites the theologies of theists involved in the struggle while not seeking to lose sight of the distinctiveness of theological traditions. The framework suggests that the theologies of adherents of different religious traditions
382

committed to the struggle are intelligible to other comrades, religious and non-religious, and that common engagement in the struggle is *prima facie* evidence of common theological, or at least core-ethical, ground. What we still need to do with the framework is to see how it enables comrades who share a confessional theology to view comrades from other religious traditions.

Analytical philosophers sometimes appeal to a distinction between explicit and implicit knowledge, between knowing *that* and knowing *how*[20]. A person might know *how* to ride a bicycle without being able propositionally to explain what one needs to do in order to cycle. Such a person implicitly or practically knows the rules of bicycle-riding though he or she lacks explicit, propositional knowledge of the rules. He or she does not know propositionally *that* one does thus-and-so. In spite of this person's lack of explicit knowledge, such a person displays the knowledge necessary for bicycle-riding, which is a practical activity. By way of contrast, someone who can give discourses on the physics and rules of cycling but who has not got the knack of keeping his or her balance on a bicycle does not really have the knowledge needed to cycle.

There is perhaps an analogy to be made in the domain of theological confession: we might distinguish between explicit and implicit adherence to a theology. There are people of good faith whose actions conform to the demands of Christ's commandment of love, but who are not Christian believers; a Christian might well say that such people display implicit acceptance of the good news of Christ. The thought is that Christ is visible to Christians in the lives and fundamental ethics, at least, of such people. If we bear in mind the fact that it is primitive to the framework sketched in this paper that the core-ethics and theologies under discussion are inextricably connected with commitment to the practice of struggle against the injustice of Apartheid and for unitary non-racial democracy in South Africa, it becomes possible to say that, from the perspective of Christian comrades, the gospel is proclaimed implicitly in the lives and work of non-Christian comrades. It also needs to be said for Muslim comrades, the participation of non-Muslims in the struggle implicitly displays the obedience to Allah which is at the heart of Islam, and that equivalent perspectival moves can and should be made by comrades of other faiths[21]. What talk of implicit proclaimers of the gospel, servants of Allah, Buddhists, and of 'observant Noachites' expresses is commonality of core-ethic at least and, in the case of theists, of core-theology.

The framework proposed here seeks to give full-blooded expression to the 'unity in diversity', the Catholicity-with-a-capital-'c', which characterises the people in struggle for justice in South Africa. This Catholicity is central to the vision of the Freedom Charter, which declares to all South Africans and to the world at large 'that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white', is of a unitary, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa which protects, cherishes

383

and encourages all that is not intrinsically racist in the rich diversity of languages, cultures and confessions which form the fabric of that country. This diversity is not something which threatens either the unity already apparent in the ANC and in the Mass Democratic Movement or the single national identity of post-Apartheid South Africans which will be fostered by the victory of the forces which struggle for justice in that land. It is already apparent in the ANC and the Mass Democratic Movement, post-Apartheid South Africa in microcosm, that our unity is enriched by the diversity of those who are united. Threads of differing texture and hue make a rich tapestry when woven together. It is hoped that the framework set out in this paper shows how this spirit of unity-in-diversity carries over into the theologies of people of faith committed to the struggle[22].

1   This article is a slightly modified version of a paper entitled 'Theology, Religious Pluralism and the ANC Experience' presented at a Conference in July 1989 at St John's College, Cambridge on 'Issues in Contemporary South African Theology'. As such, it was written before the unbanning of the African National Congress on 2 February of this year. The direction taken by South African politics in the last few months has, if anything, made the question of pluralism in the struggle for change more important than before.

2   See John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths* (Glasgow, 1977).

3   See Albert Nolan, *God in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1988), pp. 192—194.

4   See Hick, ibid.

5   This qualification is important, and will be explained later.

6   It should be noted that I have restricted the core-theology to theists, and that this is in fact a bit more restrictive than one might have thought. There are some Buddhists in South Africa, and Buddhists (or Theravāda Buddhists, at least) are not theists. The overwhelming majority of religious people in South Africa are theists of one sort or another, and a line needs to be drawn somewhere if the very notion of a core-theology is not to be impossibly vague. In any case, the term 'theology' itself implies a concern with *theism*. The forms of theism with which I am concerned are all monotheistic in some sense, which excludes Hinduism as it is popularly construed. There are many Hindus in South Africa, and 'Hinduism' as it is popularly construed is polytheistic. That said, the *advaita* monism of Shankarācharya is highly influential among observant Hindus in South Africa. The framework does need to take account of the involvement of non-theists in the struggle and the patent goodness of their actions; and a way of doing so will be suggested.

7   *The Kairos Document: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (London, 1986). The *Kairos Document,* the product of the collective deliberations of many Christian theologians and believers involved in the struggle in South Africa, was publicised as a challenge to the Churches after the declaration of a state of emergency and the promulgation of draconian emergency regulations in South Africa in 1985.

8   Level-3 Jewish-Christian theologies, that is to say, theologies espoused by Jewish-Christians, must be distinguished from level-1 Judeo-Christian theologies, theologies acceptable to Jews and Christians.

9   I am not in fact sure whether such perspective-specific theologies should be at this level or not. The thought behind putting them in at level-3 is that members of different denominations can share perspective-specific theologies while sharing a level-2 theology and while also sharing major areas of level-3 denominational theology with other members of their own denominations. One way around this

384

would be to type perspective-specific theologies as higher-level, that is to say, level-4 theologies. This move would have strong disadvantages. It would suggest, for example, that there are absolutely distinct Catholic and Lutheran black theologies, and I do not wish to argue that each perspective-specific theology is quite so divided along denominational lines.

10   See Vatican II, *Unitatis Redintegratio* 2, 11, in Austin Flannery, OP (ed.), *Vatican Council II: the Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Dublin, 1980), p. 462. I am using this notion in a somewhat more general sense than that found in *Unitatis Redintegratio,* which uses it in a purely intra-Christian sense. The sense of the notion with which I am operating in this paper also owes a great deal to Quine's 'web of belief' metaphor. For an account of this metaphor, see W.V. Quine and J.S. Ullian, *The Web of Belief* (N.Y. 1978).

11   I do not wish to suggest that distinctively Christian doctrines such as the Incarnation and the Trinity and their Jewish and Muslim functional equivalents among others are less fundamental *in Christian, Jewish and Muslim terms* than level-0 doctrines. It is consistent with this to argue that such level-2 doctrines are not foundational in the way that level-0 doctrines are. Christian belief in the Trinity, for example, presupposes belief in a Creator, but the converse is not necessarily true. Of course, Christians cannot divorce their belief in a Creator from their Trinitarian theological commitments, and the same is true, *mutatis mutandis,* of other level-0 doctrines and other faiths. What this means is that a level-0 theology is accepted in different senses, the senses being functions of the particular higher-order theologies in which they are nested, as I shall explain.

12   This discussion of 'family resemblance' depends heavily upon Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford, 1958), 66—71. Aquinas discusses the analogical uses of terms in *Summa Theologiae* 1a, 5 and 6. I am greatly indebted to lectures given by Fr Herbert McCabe OP which made the connexion between Aquinas' analogical terms and Wittgensteinian 'family resemblance' terms clear to me.

13   The debate between W.V. Quine and Donald Davidson about indeterminacy of translation and the incommensurability of different conceptual schemata, which exercises philosophical logicians, philosophers of language and of science among others, has some bearing upon the discussion in this paragraph. Quine argues that different and incommensurable conceptual schemata operate in different languages and areas of discourse, which results in an inherent indeterminacy of translation. Davidson, by contrast, while accepting that radical interpretation involves indeterminacy, argues that Quine's position, if correct, would mean that language was not possible. The fact that we do communicate with one another defeats the claim that different and incommensurable schemata are at work in the way that Quine suggests. I think that Davidson's position is more compelling than Quine's, and that it has implications for the issue discussed in this paper. A statement of Quine's position can be found in W.V. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, Massachussetts, 1960), chapter 2; while Davidson's counter to this claim is most clearly stated in Donald Davidson, 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme', in Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford, 1984). See also Steven Lukes, 'Some Problems about Rationality' and Martin Hollis, 'The Limits of Irrationality', both in Bryan R. Wilson (ed.), *Rationality* (Oxford, 1970), and W. Newton-Smith, 'Relativism and the Possibility of Interpretation', in Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes (eds), *Rationality and Relativism* (Oxford, 1982).

14   I hope that the influence of Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* and Aquinas will be apparent in this sketch.

15   *Shalom,* the Hebrew word for peace, is cognate to the word *shalem,* which means 'whole'. The state of *shalom* is not mere passivity; it is a state of completeness and fulfilment, something which is the fruit of labour and commitment.

16   The Freedom Charter was produced by the 'Congress of the People', to date the

385

most representative gathering of South Africans, which was held in Kliptown, South Africa, in 1955. It was attended by 3000 delegates from all over South Africa, and the Freedom Charter was promulgated just before police dispersed the gathering. The Charter guides the actions of the ANC and of its allies. For the text of the Charter and an account of its history and contemporary influence, see Raymond Suttner and Jeremy Cronin, *30 Years of the Freedom Charter* (Johannesburg, 1986).

17 Readers of Albert Nolan's *God in South Africa* might have noted certain passages which appear to argue that eschatological theologies and theologies of struggle cannot co-exist. The target of his attack is in fact the *deterministic* eschatology of apocalyptic literature, and he made it clear to me in conversation that he does not reject eschatology as such. To the contrary, his book seeks to construct a prophetic eschatology for South Africa. Nolan's eschatology is heavily influenced by Gerhardt von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets* (London, 1968).

18 My summary remarks about Islam owe much to a paper, unpublished as far as I know, by Maulana Faried Essack.

19 On the Noachide Commandments see T 'Abodah Zarah 8.4, b Sanhedrin 56a—60b, b Hagigah 11b, Bereshit Rabba 16.9, 24.5, Moses Maimonides, *Mishne Torah* Hilkhot Melakhim 8.10—11 and 10.12, and Moses Nahmanides. *Perush ha-Torah* on Gn 34.13. According to Maimonides, one who observes these commandments in practice ought not to be deemed righteous unless they are observed in the belief that God commands their observance. Maimonides does not deny that the judicious use of reason might lead the wise to behave in a way that is consonant with these commandments though it is not believed that they are divinely commanded, but he wishes to say that moral behaviour guided by reason alone cannot justify. There are Rabbinic authorities who disagree with Maimonides and hold that the *consonance* of actions with the Noachide commandments justifies gentiles.

20 See Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of the Mind* (Harmondsworth, 1963), pp. 28—32, and Michael Dummett 'What do I know when I know a language?', Stockholm, 1978, pp. 1—4. A number of Dummett's papers on the philosophy of language explain this distinction very clearly.

21 Without this qualification, talk of implicit proclamation of the gospel would be rather patronising and dismissive of the claims of non-Christian religious traditions. With this qualification, it amounts to the recognition that our Christian commitment is fundamental to our appreciation of and sympathy for non-Christian religions, just as Muslim or Buddhist, or Jewish commitment is fundamental to the Muslim's, Buddhist's or Jew's appreciation of other religions. It recognises that we have no vantage-point other than some tradition or other from which we can survey the 'universe of faiths'.

22 I am greatly indebted to my comrades in the U.K. Religious Affairs Committee of the ANC, especially Cedric Mayson and John Lamola, with whom the issues presented here have been discussed over a long period of time, to my brother in St Dominic Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP, and to Professor Maurice Wiles who kindly looked at a rough outline of the framework presented here and offered encouraging and perceptive comments.