

SWINGING BETWEEN BILLIGERENCE AND SERVILITY: JOHN DUBE'S STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM(S) IN SOUTH AFRICA

Simanga Kumalo

Ministry Education and Governance Program, School of Religion and
Theology, University of KwaZulu Natal, Scottsville, South Africa

Abstract

John Langalibalele Mafukuzela Dube left an indelible legacy in South Africa's political, educational and religious spheres. He was a church leader, veteran politician, journalist, philanthropist and educationist. He was the first President of the African National Congress (ANC) when it was formed in Bloemfontein on January 8, 1912 as the South African National Native Congress (SANNC). Dube was also the founder of the first Zulu newspaper *ILanga laseNatali* through which he published the experiences of African people under white rule. As the first president of what was to become Africa's most influential political and liberation movement, Dube served as an ordained minister of the Congregational Church. This important connection helped Dube define church-state relations in colonial South Africa, thus forging the role that African clergy would later need to play in the struggle for South Africa's freedom and democracy. Although his work influenced various aspects of African people's lives such as the social, political, educational and economic, he firmly located himself in the church as a pastor and Christian activist whose vocation was to struggle for all the freedoms that were denied to his people, including freedom of religion. This study offers a brief profile of John Dube as a political theologian and highlights his contribution to the struggle of African people for the freedom from colonial and white rule.

1 INTRODUCTION

On April 27, 1994, the leader of the election campaign of the African National Congress (ANC), Dr Nelson Mandela descended on Inanda,

a township located on the fringes of the coastal city of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal. He had come to cast his vote at a chapel of the Ohlange Educational Institution that had been specially converted into a voting station. After casting his vote, Mandela went outside the chapel and stood in front of John Dube's tombstone located in the grounds of the school and in a moment of solemnity could state, "Mr. President I am here to report that today South Africa is free" (*The Natal Witness* 1994). There will always be a few questions about why Mandela chose to vote at Ohlange Institution, as well as about who this president that he was ostensibly reporting to, was, and what his contribution to the freedom of South Africa was? What was the significance of the conversion of the chapel into a voting station? Why not use a local community hall or school classroom? Such questions may only be responded to adequately through an analysis of the life and work of the Rev. Dr John Langalibalele Dube. His legacy as the first president of the ANC and founder of the first black educational institution in South Africa not only demonstrates the hard work that he did, but also highlights the important role played by religion and *some* Christian missionaries in the struggle for freedom. By the time of his death on 11 February, 1946, Dube had firmly established himself as one of the leading pioneers and veterans of a struggle waged from a religious platform. He had continued the tradition begun by Nehemiah Tile, Tiyo Soga, Mangena Mokone and others. He had become an influential figure in political and ecclesiastical circles because of his ability to hold these two roles in creative tension. It would later be taken over by people such as Zachariah Mahabane, Albert Luthuli, Alan Boesak and Desmond Tutu. It is therefore not surprising that President Mandela saw fit to cast his first vote in Dube's chapel and also to report to him about South Africa's freedom that was about to be born.

This article seeks to critically examine the life and work of John Dube in the broader struggle for freedom(s), including freedom of religion. It contends that during the missionary era and especially during the early years of the 20th century, freedom of religion was one of the many freedoms that disenfranchised African had been denied. Although people were free to worship and follow the teachings of the colonial missionaries, they were expected to follow the scripts of their colonial masters under the guise of religion and religious freedom. The colonial government expected and sometimes dictated to the missionaries the necessity to convert Africans to a pro-government

understanding of the Christian gospel. Religion was used to promote the vision of the imperial colonial powers regarding such as matters as industrialisation and Westernisation which were seen to be compatible with true Christian conversion.¹ Any form of religion that seemed to detract from the dominant form of religion which was Christianity centred on a Eurocentric view, was frowned upon and viewed with intense suspicion.

The establishment of the *kholwa* communities around mission stations was an attempt to form communities that would break away from traditional life and religion. This would then separate the *Amakholwa* the Christianised, civilized and educated from *Amaqaba* unchristianised, uncivilized and superstitious people. These were categories created by the missionaries with the support of the administration aimed at dividing the African people so that they could be easily ruled. Dube bridged the gap between the two communities by working closely with the chief of Amaqadi tribe Mqhawe and king Dinuzulu, whilst at the same time standing on religion as his foundation to work for the freedom of his people. His life was constantly swinging between belligerence and servility as far as his relationship with both the missionaries and colonial masters were concerned.²

He is best remembered as a proponent of racial accommodation and political gradualism. For him, religion was not for the purposes of domesticating and taming the African, whereby African culture was purposefully discarded in favour of the adoption of a western Christianity and western view of civilisation as promoted by the colonial missionaries and the government of the day.³ Rather, it was aimed at enabling the African to reach a state of freedom and political independence, both socially and economically. In theological terms, Dube's approach epitomised what colonial missionaries wished to produce: an African Christianity that was able to bring synergy between faith and daily life.⁴ As a result, Dube's struggle against the oppression of black people by whites was characterised by his mediation between two, as yet unequal, societies: black and white. In regard to white people and the church, his role was to swing between attitudes of belligerence and servility.⁵

When we explore Dube we are likely to discover some key insights into the importance of religious freedom which can enable Christians to contribute constructively to the improvement of democracy in post-1994 South Africa.⁶ As a result, I have structured

this article into four sections: first, I introduce the subject of the study. Second, I discuss the research methodology that was used in this study. Third, I briefly discuss John Dube's biographical notes. Fourth, I discuss the main points of his legacy in the light of the broader struggle for freedom.

2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this article is based on archival and oral history retrieved through interviews and data collected during symposia held in Pietermaritzburg during 2007.

2.1 Archival historical material

Although much is written on the role of the church, missionaries and early mission-educated African elites in the struggle for South Africa's liberation, minimal work has been done on the life and work of John Langalibalele Dube. Apart from some biographical pieces here and there, two important articles are those by R Davis, H John and L Dube: A South African exponent of Booker T. Washington. *Journal of African Studies* 4, 1975, and S Marks, The ambiguities of dependence: John L Dube of Natal, *Journal of African Studies* 2, 1987. There is also Joan Millard's chapter on Dube in her 1997 book *Malihambe: Let the word spread*. The 2001 article by Heather Hughes entitled, Double Elite: Exploring the life of John Langalibalele Dube. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27(3), 443-458 was also consulted for the purpose of understanding the perspectives from which academics have explored the somewhat enigmatic Dube. Hughes argues that Dube's struggle was primarily shaped by his emergence from an elite family of the *Qadi* tribe and also by the *kholwa* missionary educated class of the *kholwa* community to which his family belonged. I have also read a number of articles from the Zulu-language newspaper, *ILanga laseNatali*, (*Natal Sun*), founded by Dube in 1903. A large volume of written material was also consulted. In addition, I have made use of online material on the World Wide Web.

2.2 Interviews

Five interviewees were selected for the purpose of this research: Ms Lulu Dube (Dube's daughter); Zenzele Dube (grandson); Langa Dube (grandson); Cherif Keita (J Dube film producer); Musa Xulu (academic), and Jabulani Sithole (historian). The interviews conducted with these individuals were evaluated in order to provide us with a glimpse of how they understood Dube.

2.3 Symposia

Two symposia on John Dube were conducted at the School of Religion and Theology, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg between 2005 and 2007. The purpose of these was to learn from other people how they view John Dube's legacy. During the first symposium, held 13 October, 2005 a presentation was made by the Rev. Musa Zondi on the life and work of John Dube. This was followed by discussion from the floor chaired by me, the researcher. The second symposium was held on 10 October, 2007 where I made a presentation on Dube and again chaired discussions from the floor. During these discussions, the participants, comprising clergy, students and academics shared how they viewed Dube's struggle for freedom and what it meant for the freedom of religion and church-state relations in post-1994 South Africa. What follows are the fruits of the literary research, interviews and symposia.

3 THE MAKING OF A POLITICAL THEOLOGIAN: FROM INANDA TO TUSKEGEE AND BACK

John Langanibalele⁷ Mafukuzela⁸ kaJames kaDabeka kaDube kaSilwane Ngcobo was one of nine children born to Rev. James and Mrs. Elizabeth Ngcobo (umaShangase) on 22 February, 1871 at Inanda Mission in Natal. It must be explained that his surname Dube does not mean he belonged to the Dube people; no he was a Ngcobo, but Dube was because he took his father's name, Dube, as his surname at a later stage.⁹ He came from a Christian family where the first person to be converted to Christianity in his family was his grandmother Mayembe (baptised Dalida). She had been one of the foremost converts of Rev. Daniel Lindley, an American Board missionary who was the first missionary to the *Amaqadi* tribe who lived in the area of Inanda. Daniel and Lucy Lindley founded the Inanda mission station in 1847. The *Amaqadi* were a tribe under

Chief Dube, a minor chief under the Ngcobo chieftaincy. Dalida had been the wife (*undlunkulu*) of the Qadi minor Chief Dube, whose family upon his death organised for Dalida to be inherited *ukungenwa* by one of his brothers. Dalida refused and took her children, who included James and Dabeka. She committed herself to raising them as Christians rather than according to the Qadi tradition. Dube recalls how she was treated after accepting Christianity:

Many times they tried to kill my grandmother, many nights she was forced to sleep in the bushes out of the way of her would be assassins.¹⁰

Dalida sought refuge at the Inanda mission station under Rev. Daniel Lindley who welcomed her as his first and most important convert. In 1849, Lindley founded the Inanda Church for the protection of Mayembe. Her son would grow to be ordained as a Christian minister and succeed Lindley as the first black circuit minister of the Congregational Church in Inanda, an important mission of the American Zulu Mission (AZM).¹¹ It was from this deep and interesting background of defiance and rich Christian heritage that John Langalibalele Mafukuzela Dube was born. He was named “Langalibalele” after the Hlubi king who impressed his father with his resilience and innovativeness in his struggle against oppression.¹²

The church played a large role in grooming John Dube, beginning with Sunday school and continuing through to tertiary level education. He was educated at Inanda and later attended the American Board Theological School, (later to be named Adams College), near Amanzimtoti. In 1887, at the request of his mother umaShangase he went to America with the Rev. William C Wilcox (who was one of his teachers at Adams College) and studied at the Oberlin College, Ohio where he earned a teacher’s qualification. He returned to South Africa in 1890. In 1894, he married Nokutela Madima a teacher and member of an elite Inanda family.

The Dube’s had ambitions of starting their own mission station along the lines of that established by Daniel Lindley, but one that would be independent of American Zulu Mission (AZM) supervision (Hughes H 2001:456).¹³

With the help of the Amaqadi Chief Mqhawwe, he set up mission work at a farm called Incwadi. Here, with the help of his brother-in-law John and his wife planted two churches and three schools. These

schools were the forerunners of the Ohlange Industrial Institution which Dube later established in 1901 with the help of Mqhawe who became a member of the board of trustees. In 1895 Dube applied to assume the pastorship of Inanda but did not succeed in his bid because he was not an ordained member of the clergy. The current missionary, Rev. Stephen Pixley was unhappy with Dube's bidding for the pastorship for two reasons: Dube was not ordained and was unwilling to be placed under white tutelage. Secondly, and most importantly: Dube had decided to work very closely with the traditional leadership under Mqhawe who was seen as a rival by the missionaries (especially Pixley). In 1897, Dube went back to the United States of America to raise funds for his industrial school project. After completing his seminary training as a Congregational minister at the Union Mission Seminary in America, he was ordained (Millard 1997:15).¹⁴

While studying in America, he became fond of Booker T. Washington, the African American leader who was struggling for the freedom of the African-American people from slavery. Dube identified with Washington's work as relevant and important in the African context, thus committing himself to learning more from him, so that he could serve his people in the same way. He sought to meet Washington and established a friendship with him which became very useful when he came back to South Africa to work among his people. Referring to Washington as his mentor he could say (Walshe 1970:13):

He is to be my guiding star (would that he were nigh to give us the help of his wise counsel). I have chosen this great man, firstly because he is perhaps the most famous and the best living example of our Africa's sons; and secondly because, like him, I too have my heart centred mainly in the education of my race. Therein, I think, lies the shortest and best way to their mental, and moral, material and political betterment.¹⁵

Booker T. Washington had established the Tuskegee Industrial School for black Americans with the aim of educating his people. He was popular for propagating racial accommodation, political gradualism and economic independence, all of which were adopted by Dube (Franklin & Meier 1982).¹⁶ By the time Dube returned to

Inanda in 1899 he was an ordained minister. Assuming the pastorship of the Inanda mission, he occupied the position until 1908 when he resigned in protest against the way the missionaries took sides with the oppressive law of rentals for land occupied by native peoples. In 1901, John Dube pioneered and established the first native-owned education institution in South Africa, the Zulu Industrial School of Ohlange.¹⁷ He became active in politics in Natal and was the co-founder and leader of the Natal Native Congress (NNC).¹⁸ In March 1909, Dube became the vice-president of the South African Native Congress (SANC). When the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) was formed on 8 January, 1912, Dube was elected president, thus becoming the first president of what is today called the African National Congress.¹⁹

It is worth noting that Dube was also the first clergyman to hold the position of president in the ANC. He would later be followed by a number of ordained ministers who would hold political office at the regional and national structures of the Congress (Meli 1988:82).²⁰ Dube led a deputation that included Sol Plaatjie and Walter Rabusana to London to protest against the 1913 Land Act. He was ousted from the presidency of the SANNC in 1917, being accused of political gradualism and accommodation.

Dube held in creative tension the quest for justice from both the missionaries and the colonial regime. After the presidency of the SANNC, Dube concentrated on the education of the African people so that they could become both Christians and civilised citizens of South Africa. For him, the two belonged together, providing a better life for African people. Dube also continued to work for church groups and with white philanthropists who were committed to the upliftment of black people. Continuing as an advisor to Chiefs and the Zulu King, he concentrated on the politics of Natal. For example, Ohlange introduced the Mafukuzela week where songs, drama and education in his honour were conducted as a way of conscientising succeeding generations.

During the Bambatha Rebellion he sympathised with the leaders of the rebellion and was arrested and accused of being an Ethiopian.²¹ When King Dinuzulu was victimised for the Bambatha Rebellion, Dube supported him and raised money to provide his bail from jail. Dube also concentrated on the editorship of his Zulu language newspaper, *ILanga laseNatali*, which he used as a mouthpiece for the Zulu people, through which they could voice their

experiences of oppression. He explained its aim thus (*ILanga laseNatali*, Centenary Supplement 2003):

It is aimed at enlightening and enhancing the lives of our people. It reports on the current news. It reports on what torments our people. It is aimed at advancing the course of our nation.²²

Articulating their plight and aspirations, not only to the government that dictated oppressive laws, but also to the missionaries who complied with the laws of government, *ILanga* was also an important means of discussing and responding to the oppressive laws passed by the colonial government. Through its pages, these laws were translated into the language of the masses, who were then encouraged to discuss them and make their input. In this sense it became an important tool of conscientisation in Natal. It provided the means for a political education that empowered the masses to fight against white colonial oppression.

In recognition of his work in the advancement of the education of African people, he was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of South Africa. He continued to work for the African National Congress (ANC) and for the church, attending conferences both locally and overseas, on matters of church polity and social politics. He died on 11 February, 1946. In his reflection, the poet and author B W Vilakazi, could declare Dube as, “a great, if not the greatest, black man of the missionary epoch in South Africa”.²³

4 THE LEGACY OF JOHN DUBE

In this section we look at the legacy of John Dube and the lessons he leaves us for continuing the struggle for religious freedom in post-liberation South Africa.

4.1 Holding tradition and religion together

James Dube was in the line of chiefs of the *Amaqadi* tribe but could not take the throne when his mother converted to Christianity and wanted a clear separation from traditional Qadi life to convert to a Christian way of life characterised by freedom, education and civilisation.²⁴ When James Dube became a minister, he assumed the

important leadership of the *Amakholwa* section of the *Amaqadi* tribe. This was parallel to, if not better than, the position of the traditional chief of the “outsiders” as the traditionalists who rejected Christianity were called by those in the mission stations *Amakholwa*.

As already mentioned above, John Dube’s family were from an important elite of the Amaqadi tribe ruled by the Ngcobo clan. As a result, the Dubes still regarded themselves as an important part of the Ngcobo elite clan of Inanda.²⁵ In spite of the fact that historically the missionaries attempted to create a rivalry between the Dubes and the Ngcobos, the *kholwa* and the “outsiders”, the Dube’s still saw themselves as an important part of the Qadi clan and Ngcobo people. John Dube must be credited for his defiance of the missionaries’ tendency to “divide and rule” the African people, especially when he resisted submission to Rev. Stephen Clapp Pixley, who exercised such “divide and rule” tactics.

Asked if they regretted the breakaway from the traditional way of life of the Amaqadi tribe, Dube’s grandson Zenzele argued that they do not, for as he put it, “this was an attempt to demonstrate the extent of conversion to Christianity, education and civilisation for which his family became pioneers”. For him, the distance from traditional life was a break with the past characterised by heathenism and tribalism while adopting the new faith of Christianity symbolised by a new birth into civilisation and leadership of a new tribe, the *Amakholwa*.²⁶ As Heather Hughes notes, the Dube family enhanced their leadership role when they became Christians, remaining influential among the *Amaqadi* royalty while at the same time becoming leaders of the *kholwa* community.²⁷ That opened their horizons and their world of influence and responsibility (Hughes 2001:450).²⁸ For Dube and most of his colleagues from the colonial missionary establishment, the struggle for freedom was to be fought from the platform of tradition as well from within religion itself while, at the same time, both tradition and religion were used as resources in the struggle for freedom.

4.2 Education as a tool for liberation

One of Dube’s contributions was in the area of education, which he saw as an important tool in establishing the freedom of the African. His efforts in education culminated in the establishment of the Ohlange Educational Institution which, as we have already noted,

was the first black-owned educational institution in South Africa, and the place where Nelson Mandela cast his vote in the first democratic election in South Africa. His aim at Ohlange was to educate Africans in a Christian environment as “skilled craftsmen and those fit for university admission” (Walshe 1970:13).²⁹ Dube emphasised faith and work as the two most important virtues that students must strive towards. Dube embraced missionary education to the extent of inviting missionaries to support the building project of his school. As Karis and Carter (1972) can record:

The Rev. John Dube, writing an appeal to English friends on behalf of his Ohlange Institute, argued that 100,000 whites of Natal could not bear the burden of establishing a civilised European state, but should turn and cooperate with an increasing number of educated Zulus who owed “all that is in their progress to the missions”.³⁰

Dube felt that education needed to be religious, intellectual and practical, if it was to enable the learners to experience true freedom and liberation, not only from political oppression but also in understanding and participating in religion. Learning from the colleges at Amanzimtoti and Tuskegee, both of which shaped his perception of liberatory education, he held the three phases together as the foundation for good education. For the missionaries and colonial government, industrial education was meant to keep African people away from intellectual knowledge and thereby maintain them in a subservient position. In an age when the government was pressing for African people to obtain an inferior education, Dube was a pioneer in providing quality education for the African people. The establishment of the Ohlange Education Institution was a way of providing superior education which was both industrial and intellectual in nature.

For Dube, industrial education was not a substitute for intellectual knowledge. The two had to go together. Both were important if black people were to become fully independent. Ohlange was aimed at providing black people with first-class education, which would be accessible and of a better standard than that received at mission schools which were often sanctioned and dictated to by government to offer inferior education to their black pupils. Consequently, as an educationist, Dube’s approach to education was

built on a culture of independence and dignity towards the learner. At Ohlange, education was viewed as a catalytic process leading towards self-determination and skilled leadership. A significant number of those holding high office in the post-1994 ANC government are products of the Ohlange Educational Institution.³¹

4.3 Religion and the struggle for freedom

Dube's approach to the struggle for freedom was deeply rooted in his convictions as a Christian. He saw the struggle for freedom as part of what God wanted for African people and believed that God would help them in it. In his speech when accepting the presidency of the ANC he observed that, "the hour is come when we, the Native races of South Africa, must be up and doing – for God helps those who help themselves" (Walshe 1970:13).³² Dube found inspiration in his Christian faith and the Bible. For example, it is said that the first meeting of the South African National Native Congress (SANNC) in Bloemfontein, Mangaung township was like a revival. It was opened with Enoch Sontonga's hymn *Nkosi sikeleli Africa* ("God Bless Africa"), (Shillington 1987:150)³³ and there was a constant singing of religious hymns such as Tiyo Soga's *Lizalisi dinga lakho* ("Fulfil Your Promise Lord"), as well as Knox Bokwe's "Breath a Prayer for Africa".³⁴ In fact, Dube's election to the presidency of the South African National Native Congress had a lot to do with the fact that he was a "religious man" (Walshe 1995:35).³⁵ His struggle against oppression was not divorced from spirituality. He believed that the whites who, in taking the land originally given by God, had dealt with the Zulu people unfairly (Karis & Carter 1972:4):

They, the Boers and the British took it from us, the land of my birth. That little spot of God's earth which Providence had given us to be our own, our native land, the home of our fathers, they annexed to the British Empire.³⁶

The struggle against the oppression of the Zulu people therefore came from the quest for freedom of the African peoples for the return of their land given to them by God and stolen by the white colonialists. In this sense it was a just and Christian struggle. It is also noteworthy that the committee of the South African National Native Congress (SANNC) included the position of a chaplain general.³⁷

This gives us a glimpse into the understanding that the struggle was not only secular but also religious.

Although Dube had a complete conversion to Christianity, his understanding of the Christian faith was not one that was removed from the realities and daily experiences of African people. Having grown up in the era of Ethiopianism, Dube became a proponent of this ideology. For him, Christianity needed to adapt and relate itself to the social challenges that were faced by his people.³⁸ He saw the responsibility of Christianity as enabling liberation and freedom to his people and Africa as a whole:

Oh how I long for that day, when the darkness and gloom shall have passed away, because the "Sun of Righteousness has risen with his healing hand." This shall be the dawning of a brighter day for the people of Africa. Christianity will usher a new civilisation, and the "Dark Continent" will be transformed into a land of commerce and Christian institutions. Then shall Africa take her place as a nation among the nations: then shall her sons and daughters sing aloud: "Let us rise and shine, for our light has come. The glory of the Lord has risen upon us." May the day speedily come when "Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands unto God?"³⁹

Dube's involvement in the struggle was also accompanied by a strong commitment to freedom of religion for the African people, as a result of which he was often identified as an Ethiopian by his detractors. As with his mentor, Booker T Washington, Dube emphasised racial pride, education and self-help. His tendency to emphasise the freedom of Africans is remembered in the famous phrase he used to express the coming freedom of African people from white domination: *lapho amanzi ake ema khona ayophinde eme*. (lit: a spot where water once stopped water will stop again). In so doing, he was reminiscing about the old days when Africans were free to rule themselves and did as they liked, free from the strictures of colonial domination.

4.4 African nationalism beyond tribalism

Dube's spirituality was shaped not only by his Christian faith but also by his cultural background as a Zulu and as an African. He navigated between his Christian spirituality and his Zulu ethnic roots. As mentioned above, his father was a minor chief of the Ngobo clan, so he had intimate knowledge of Zulu tradition. Reflecting on his father, Dube wrote:

Because my father was the leader of his people, a great protest went up from the Dube tribe against my grandmother, because she had allowed him to come in contact with his new religion and be drawn from the practices of his people.⁴⁰

Dube drew a lot of strength from his Zulu culture, norms and values. Over and above his Christian faith and education, he was conscious of his nationality. This inspired him to embark on his political career with a vigour that went beyond Zulu nationalism. His respect for African nationalism was displayed in 1906 when he protested bitterly against the arrest and trial of Dinuzulu in connection with the 1906 Bambata Rebellion. His radicalism was particularly evident when he wrote in support of the rebellion, an action which led to his arrest as an Ethiopian.

Dube went to the extent of raising funds for the defence of the King. For him, Dinuzulu was, as with most of the African chiefs and kings, a symbol of past independence and their identity as a people. Dube felt that the denigration and humiliation of King Dinuzulu by the colonial government was a continuation of the humiliation of the African people at large. By supporting Dinuzulu, he believed he was furthering the resistance against colonial domination. However, it must be understood that he did not allow himself to be trapped in ethnic pride. Dube strongly believed in racial unity, justice and African unity, norms and values which were present in Christianity. Through education such norms and values lead to the cultivation of civilisation (Walshe 1995:15).⁴¹

4.5 Racial and religious accommodation

Dube's contribution to the democratisation of South Africa stems from his moderate and peaceful approach to the struggle. Hence, he once stated (Karis & Carter 1972:125):

The Africans were approaching government not with assegaes but respectfully as loyal subjects, with the intention of airing their grievances and removing obstacles of poverty, prejudice and discriminatory legislation.⁴²

The emphasis on peaceful means came from the lessons he learnt from Washington who emphasised a non-violent approach to the struggle for emancipation. But it also emanated from the pioneering work of Dube and his contemporaries who shifted the struggle from primary resistance (resistance through war) to secondary resistance (resistance through the pen and ideas). This was seriously misunderstood by Dube's detractors. Indeed, Dube's interest was firmly in the unity between blacks and whites, a position he believed Christianity demanded. In 1912, he argued that their demands were to breakdown the adamant wall of colour prejudice thereby making the colonial enemies their admirers and friends (Karis & Carter 1972:125):

The path was onward! Upward! Into the higher places of civilisation and Christianity.⁴³

Dube saw the struggle for liberation as an important part of the message of Christianity and argued that Christianity should have concentrated on teaching political issues such as colour and freedom as seen from a Christian perspective.

A product of colonial white missionaries and an ordained man, Dube had constant conflicts with the church. For example, he was one of the first to attack the "Mission Reserve rent and went further to challenge the social aloofness of missionaries and their lack of trust for the Africans" (Karis & Carter 1972:126).⁴⁴ He went as far as blaming the missionaries for their failure to defend African interest. His conflict with the colonial missionaries over their complicity with government led to his resignation from the parish of Inanda. This is was a clear example of his direct struggle for religious freedom even from within the church!

Even though most mission-educated Africans were constantly disappointed by the attitude of the missionaries and the white government, Dube remained convinced of the need to establish racial harmony. He took part in activities such as the Smuts Conferences

established under the 1920 Act, as well as many other missionary conferences.

A further evidence of his spirituality that crossed boundaries is his identification with the struggle of independent church movements. Inanda is the same place where the Zulu Prophet, Isaiah Shembe, began his church *Amanazareth*. Dube was a close friend of Shembe and their friendship culminated in Dube writing his biography (Dube 1936).⁴⁵ Shembe was viewed with suspicion and disdain by missionaries and government officials alike, who regarded him as an Ethiopian. For Dube, taking sides and recognising Shembe as a religious leader demonstrated his respect not only for African religious freedom, but also for African Indigenous Churches. Inanda is also adjacent to the Phoenix communal Settlement where Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was located for many years. Indeed, not only did he befriend Gandhi, but he was also a deep admirer of his spirituality and the principle of Satyagraha or non-violent resistance in the struggle against oppression.

4.6 A spirituality relevant to the church in a democratic South Africa

A few points have emerged from the above discussion to which I would like to turn by way of summary. Each of these has an impact on a new and relevant spirituality for the church in a democratic South Africa.

Taken together, how can the beliefs, interventions and approaches of John Dube as discussed above, contribute to a deepening of democracy in post-liberation South African society?

The contribution of this leader was influenced by two factors: First was his position in the church; second was his transcendent understanding of freedom.

Dube emerged when the missionary enterprise was at its peak. His commitment to the church gave him many platforms from which to stand and speak with a more credible voice, in a society where political organisations were still emerging and growing. The fact that he spoke as a leader of the church, and thus belonged to a particular class of people (the *Amakholwa*) thus having a captive audience for whom he spoke and whose struggle he interpreted, was an added advantage to his role as a politician and pastor. The contemporary church also stands as a powerful institution that can nurture a new spirituality of resistance against any form of injustice in a democratic

society. In the contemporary South African church there is a need again for the emergence and development of a radical spirituality to nurture prophetic theology.

Linked to this is the need for a church platform from which leaders can stand and proclaim God's prophetic message on behalf of those who find themselves poor and marginalised, even in a democratic society. This, for example, would include people like those who are fighting for the delivery of basic services such as sanitation, water, housing and jobs and the roll-out of medication for those infected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Other problematic policies of the government relate to the roll-out of antiretroviral drugs as demanded by the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), and the slow pace of the redistribution of land as called for by the Landless People's Movement (LPM). There have been numerous mass actions by the labour movements and unions in protest against unemployment and economic exploitation. In all these protests, the church has been, as Trevor Huddleston once put it, "sleeping although it sometimes speaks in its sleep" (Huddleston 1957:20).⁴⁶

The approach that has been taken by some mainline churches is that of an uncritical acceptance of the current government. This has within it several inherent problems. There is great need for the development of a church leadership that will be critical toward both the church for the lack of democracy in its own structures, and the government for the way that it deals with corruption and the slow pace of service delivery of essential resources. As Nelson Mandela once observed (Asmal 2003:327):

The church like all other institutions of civil society must help all South Africans to rise to the challenge of freedom. As South Africa moves from resistance to reconstruction and from confrontation to reconciliation, the energy that was once dedicated to breaking apartheid must be harnessed to the task of building the nation.⁴⁷

The church through its educational activities needs to create spaces for educating for democracy. As much as we have a legitimate government, we do need to develop leaders who are going to jealously guard against the abuse of power, alleviate poverty and protect and promote a culture of human rights. The church can provide an education for democracy that is built upon principles of

God's household. This implies the need to examine the form of theological education that the church is offering at its seminaries.

Furthermore, Dube interpreted the struggle for democracy not only on social, political and economic grounds, which was the tendency of most protagonists of liberation. He also interpreted it on theological terms, seeing God's will and interventions in it. He brought to the attention of both the oppressors and the oppressed the fact that this was not simply a human quest and ideology of liberation; it was also a spiritual quest and God was involved in it. Two contributions come from this: first, that it helped people to realise that the struggle against *apartheid* and its laws was much bigger than a human struggle. Rather, it was part of the mission of the church and enjoyed the engaged participation of God. Second, Dube's spirituality reminds the contemporary church that the building and protection of democracy in South Africa is not simply for political reasons and ideology. It is also part of the church's response to and engagement with the *Missio Dei*. The church cannot afford to be silent and neutral because, by its silence, it is complying with the injustices seen when human rights are violated and corruption escalates. By bringing the church to the struggle for liberation, people like Dube redeem the church from its ambiguous and contradictory tendencies when faced with a situation of injustice.

The product of the church and its education, Dube also shaped and influenced the church to come out into the open and take sides with the oppressed. He urged the church to confess its complicity with the oppressive white colonial government of the day and make the church declare *apartheid* a heresy. The contemporary church in South Africa boasts of having been a site of struggle during apartheid. This was only made possible by people like John Langalibalele Dube who developed a spirituality that was concerned with the socioeconomic and political situation of its day.

The challenge for the church's involvement in education in a democratic South Africa is to develop a holistic spirituality in a democratic society. Such spirituality will instil a culture of democracy and freedom so that ordinary people can be taught to live and participate in democratic processes as integral parts of their lives. South Africa is an infant when it comes to the culture of democracy; people still need to be taught what it means to be democratic from the family level up to the societal level. The church can draw on its rich theological resources such as sharing, community, servant-hood,

forgiveness, reconciliation and mutual care and teach its members from a Christian perspective to become a true nation. Over and above this, the church can offer theological methodologies such as socio-ecclesiastical analysis to use for the entrenchment of a spirituality of democracy. All these can be learnt from the spirituality of those who were pioneers in holding faith and politics together and who brought South Africa to democracy, one of whom is John Langalibalele Mafukuzela Dube.

5 CONCLUSION

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, I have raised a number of issues that face the post-1994 church in South Africa as it seeks to do mission in a democratic society. I hope that by focusing on the spirituality of pioneers of church and politics such as John Langalibalele Dube, the church can retrieve valuable resources for its work. When looking at the work that Dube did in the struggle for freedom, it is not surprising that President Nelson Mandela saw it fit to stand on top of his tombstone and report that ultimately South Africa was free. This action brought honour to a man who fought for freedom both outside the church and within it.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Xolela Mangcu in his book, *To the brink: The state of democracy in South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2007, 2. laments the denigration of African culture by the missionaries who were in cahoots with the colonial administrators.
- 2 Article on Dr Dube in the *ILanga* Centenary Supplement *ILanga laseNatali*, (referring to an article in which he defended himself which appeared in *ILanga* on 5 February, 1915), op. cit., 2.
- 3 In Nokuthula Dlomo, John Langalibalele Dube's position in South African literature. In Lehmann, E, Reckwitz, E., Vennarini, L. (Ed) 2000. *Constructing South African literary history*. Essen, Germany Blaue Eule.
- 4 Willem Saayman echoes the same sentiments in his article Subversive and subservience: ZK Mathews and Missionary Education in South Africa. *Missionalia* 30(1), 1992.

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- 5 Francis Meli, *South Africa belongs to us: A history of the ANC*. (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House 1988), 81. I am indebted to Frances Meli for the title of this article.
- 6 By the second liberation, I am referring to economic development and self-reliance. See also, John W. de Gruchy, *Christianity and democracy*. (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1995); Larry Diamond, *The second liberation. Africa Report 37/6*, (November-December 1992), 4.
- 7 Langalibalele was the name of a popular Hlubi chief, whom Dube's father admired so he decided to name his son after the chief.
- 8 Moses Hadebe explains the name Mafukuzela by noting that *Fukuzela* (a verb) means: lift the head up continually, as a person bobbing along under a heavy load; hence be heavily laden, with a burden, load of ornament, passion, be strenuous, exert, oneself to do anything ... Hadebe, Musa 2003. A contextualization and examination of the *impi yamakhanda* (1906 uprising) as reported by J.L. Dube in *ILanga laseNatali*, with special focus on Dube's attitude to Dinuzulu as indicated in his reportage on the treason trial of Dinuzulu. Unpublished thesis completed through the University of Natal, Durban.
- 9 The Americans preferred to identify him as John, the son of the Rev. James Dube (Ngcobo) so he became John kaDube (his father's second name) but this was then used as his surname because it was easier for whites to pronounce than Ngcobo. Then he became John Dube.
- 10 <<http://www.oberlin.edu/external/EOG/Dube/Dube.htm>>. Accessed: 10 April 2006).
- 11 The name given to the field of mission of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in Natal, founded in 1810 in Boston.
- 12 The main street in Pietermaritzburg where the house of the Provincial Parliament and the Premier's Offices are located has been changed from Longmarket to Langalibalele in honour of the Hlubi king who was arrested and humiliated in this street by the colonial authorities of the day.
- 13 Heather Hughes, Doubly Elite: Exploring the life of John Langalibalele Dube. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27(3), 2001, 456.
- 14 Joan Millard, *Malihambe: Let it spread*. Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 1997, 15
- 15 Walshe, Peter. 1970. The rise of African nationalism in South Africa. London: Hurst, 13.
- 16 Franklin, J & Meier, A. (ed.) 1982. *Black leaders of the twentieth century*. Illinois: Illini Books.
- 17 Ohlange means union of nations
- 18 With the end of the Anglo-Boer war in 1902 Africans became more aware of the destiny-less situation. They realised that as long as they lived under white rule, they were going nowhere. In Natal, Africans took the important step of forming a new political movement, free of traditionalism, one which would provide new opportunities for the oppressed black masses. After a meeting between Martin Luthuli, Saul Msane, Josiah Gumede and Harriet Colenso the Natal Native Congress was formed in 1900. Harriet Colenso, the daughter of the Anglican Bishop of Natal, J W Colenso, was a strong

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- supporter of King Dinuzulu and of the black cause for freedom. The first chairperson of the Natal Native Congress was Martin Luthuli, an uncle of Chief Albert Luthuli who in 1903 was replaced by Skweleti Ngongwana. Dube was also the president of the NNC when he was elected to the presidency of the SANNC when it was founded.
- 19 The man behind the founding of the SANNC was Pixley Isaka Seme, a Zulu lawyer who also hailed from Inanda. Another protégé of missionaries of the American Board Mission, he later became General Treasurer in Dube's executive committee.
- 20 Later, Zechariah R. Mahabane a Methodist minister, who became president of the ANC in the 1930s, followed him. See, Meli, *South Africa belongs to us: A History of the ANC*, 82.
- 21 Ethiopians were those church leaders who broke away from mission-initiated churches in the quest for self-governance and leadership.
- 22 Article on Dr. Dube in Ilanga Centenary Supplement, 7 April 2003, 2.
- 23 <<http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/people/dube.html>> Accessed: 10 April 2006.
- 24 C. Zondi, *Izingwazi zase-Africa umqulu -1*. Pietermaritzburg: Reach Out Publishers, 1996, 132.
- 25 Interview with Lulu Dube, 2005, Inanda.
- 26 Interview with Zenzele Dube, 23 January 2008, Pietermaritzburg.
- 27 James Dube was the first black person to pastor the Inanda Zulu Mission when Daniel Lindley left in 1873.
- 28 Hughes, *Doubly Elite*, 450.
- 29 Peter Walshe, *The rise of African nationalism in South Africa*. London: Hurst, 1970, 13.
- 30 Karis, T & Carter, G. *From protest to challenge: A documentary history of African politics in South Africa, 1882-1964*. California: Hoover Institution Press, 1972, 8.
- 31 The current deputy president attended school and also taught at Ohlange.
- 32 Walshe, *The rise of African nationalism*, 13.
- 33 K. Shillington, *History of Southern Africa*. London: Longman 1987, 150.
- 34 The same would happen at the Congress of the people in 1955, which was like a revival, dominated by the singing of religious songs and prayers led by progressive pastors.
- 35 Peter Walshe, *Prophetic Christianity and the liberation movement in South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 1995, 35.
- 36 In Karis and Carter, *From challenge to protest*, 4.
- 37 R. H. Davis, John. L. Dube: A South African exponent of Booker Washington. *Journal of African Studies* 4, 1975/1976, 497.
- 38 Karis & Carter, *From protest to challenge*, 24.
- 39 <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/early/native_land.html>. Accessed: 10 April 2006.
- 40 <<http://www.orbelin.edu/external/EOG/Dube/Dube.htm>>. Accessed: 10 April 2006.
- 41 Walshe, *Prophetic Christianity*, 15.
- 42 Karis, T & G Carter. 1972. *From protest to challenge*, 125.

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- 43 Karis, T & G Carter. 1972. *From protest to challenge*, 125.
- 44 Karis, T & G Carter. *From protest to challenge*, 126.
- 45 Dube, JL. 1936. *UShembe*. Pietermaritzburg: Shutter and Shooter.
- 46 Trevor Huddleston, *Naught for your comfort* (London: William Collins, 1957), 20.
- 47 Kadar Asmal, *Nelson Mandela: From freedom to the future* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers 2003), 327.