

Some Aspects of Seminal Historical Factors that led to the Redress Process in Old Testament Scholarship in South Africa

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Abstract

This article considers certain seminal historical markers of how South Africa arrived at the current state of Old Testament scholarship in South Africa. Taking a lead from Ramantswana's recent denouement of the development of this discipline in South Africa, this article considers the tasks that lie ahead with due regard to Mosala's (1986:119) recognition that for liberation theology to be effective, the lingering ideologies that confuse the issue need to be dismantled. Mosala saw the necessity for a methodological framework to undertake a "de-ideologising" hermeneutical project. For instance, the current political clamour for de-colonisation portrays the contribution of the missionaries as negative because, having arrived with colonialism, there is a perception that they colluded in the imperialist exploitation of the indigenous peoples of South Africa. One aspect of "de-ideologising" the lingering social damage is the re-assessment of the positive aspects of the missionary endeavour in the face of the Colonialist drive. Not only did the missionaries bring "knowledge of our high birth-right ... We belong to the human family, and are heirs of eternal salvation", but William Wilcox for instance, facilitated the resistance to the notion of racial and intellectual superiority. It was this resistance which eventually culminated in a peaceful transition to democracy in South Africa.

Keywords: Old Testament Scholarship; Colonialism; American Board Missionaries; Congregational Church; John L. Dube; William Wilcox; Natal; ANC.

Introduction and Methodology

"In time we shall be in a position to bestow upon South Africa the greatest gift possible – a more human face" (Steve Biko 1976/2004:108).

This article is in part a response to a recent article by Ramantswana on the "blackening" of Old Testament Scholarship in South Africa, and in part also to Thuli Madonsela's concept of "denial of voice".¹ Having arrived with colonialism, there is a perception that the bringers of the Bible to South Africa colluded in the imperialist exploitation of the indigenous peoples. The prevalent view that "Christianity has too often aided and abetted white power and domination in South Africa" witnesses to the complexity of the social

¹ Ramantswana (2020:1–19) suggests that Old Testament Scholarship in South Africa is in a redress process of "blackening" in order to reflect the continent in which it has to thrive; Madonsela was a participant in an online U.S. Crest Talk: *COVID-19 vaccines: Mandate or choice*. Accessed Tuesday, 19 October 2021.

situation in South Africa today, but masks the positive aspects of the introduction of the Bible.² Yet both the first president of the liberation movement that was to become the ANC and the president under whose leadership the goal of democracy was finally achieved publicly stated that the leaders of the African National Congress would not have been able to achieve freedom without the missionary input.³ The missionary endeavour in Africa cannot be separated from colonisation, nor from the endogenous development of African societies (Peel 2000:2).⁴ The approach of this article takes its lead from Ramantswana's introduction; if we do not know how we arrived at this situation, we will not know how to go forward into the future.

Methodology

This article selects certain seminal markers of how we arrived at the perception of the need for the "blackening" of Old Testament Theology in South Africa. Ramantswana's assessment of the tasks that lie ahead are discussed with due regard to Mosala's (1986:119) recognition that for liberation theology to be effective, the lingering ideologies which obfuscate the already complex so-called rainbow nation need to be dismantled. Mosala saw the necessity for a methodological framework to undertake a "de-ideologising" hermeneutical project (West 2016:330–39). One aspect of "de-ideologising" the lingering social damage brought about by the colonialist drive is the re-assessment of the positive aspects of the missionary endeavour in the face of certain negative aspects of British colonialism. The selection of examples of how personalities and circumstances played into the outcome of the current cultural context in South Africa is necessarily eclectic. In no way is it intended to minimise the very important role that other personalities and political developments, good and bad, played in contributing to the current social situation.

"Evangelical Dissenting Politics" and the American Board Missionaries in Natal

By the early 1800s's in Britain, the emergence of evangelical dissenting politics in the so-called "free" churches claimed independence from state interference (Rutz 2011:108–109). Rutz notes that among these evangelicals, Congregationalists in particular believed that intellectual freedom makes for spiritual progress and regarded the church as a "spiritual democracy". The Congregational principles of respect for every person's conscience and for all forms of Christian faith, and the lack of articles of faith left people free to accept such new truth as may be offered, e.g. by biblical scholarship or by natural

² Cf. Alan Paton's observation in the foreword of De Gruchy (1979/2005:xii): "... many black radicals regard Christianity as a white exploitative religion. They see the Christian missionaries as responsible for the destruction of the ancestral beliefs, a destruction which has left too many black people rudderless, faithless, purposeless, lost to the cause of liberation".

³ "The churches bought the land, built the schools, equipped them, appointed and employed people. Therefore, when I say we are the product of missionary education, I recognize that I will never have sufficient words to thank the missionaries for what they did for us." (Nelson Mandela's address to the World Council of Churches, Harare, 13 December 1998: wcc-coe.org, accessed 5 Sept, 2018). Cf. John L. Dube's statement that "The missionaries ... brought us to the knowledge of our high birth-right ... We belong to the human family, and are heirs of eternal salvation." ("A Zulu point of view on the missionaries in Africa." Lecture delivered by John L. Dube in Durban in 1911, quoted by Kumalo 2012:155–161).

⁴ Please note that the racial terminology in this article is used as it appears in the historical sources consulted and is in no way intended to be derogatory.

science (Price 1924:25–45).⁵ It was perhaps these more intellectually free Christian precepts (and thus more easily adaptable to the local cultures) that furthered the missionary outreach and dissenting politics as practiced by the American Board missionaries.

The American Board missionaries who were sent to Natal and Zululand from the ABM in 1835 brought the gospel, health care, and primary education (Booth 1999:80–92), but in some cases they brought more. For instance, Aldin Grout, who was a Hebrew and Greek scholar, transcribed the vernacular Zulu into a written language. In this way, the first Zulu Bible was translated from the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. This tradition of scholarship was continued at Inanda and Adams missions.⁶ An outstanding example of those who sowed the mustard seed that eventually culminated in a peaceful transition to democracy in South Africa is William Wilcox, the “cowboy turned renegade missionary”. By employing a Bible-critical exegetical reading, he brought scholarship to bear on the attitude of the colonialist missionaries and Natal Colony’s settlers. He took the side of the poor and oppressed, aiming at an empowering ministry, and challenged those who were trying to justify their belief in the inferiority of the natives (Kumalo 2012: 81, 88–90).

In the Cape Colony, there had been a limited franchise for natives under certain circumstances. However, when the British annexed Natal in the early 1840s, Shepstone developed a system of segregation whereby in Natal, Africans were governed by “native law” and were not eligible for the franchise (Odendaal 2012:18, 159).⁷ The British settlers in Natal were strongly opposed to any kind of power-sharing and integration. The Dutch and English settlers alike resented the missionaries because they not only evangelised the indigenous peoples but took their side in the struggle for justice, rights, and land.

Wilcox happened to be at Amanzimtoti in 1887 when a rebellious but intellectually gifted Zulu youth, the son of one of the first converts to Christianity at the Adams mission, was about to undergo corporal punishment. Apart from other prior naughtiness, the sixteen-year-old John Langelibale Dube had been involved in a fight and responded

⁵ Congregationalism regarded creeds as unnecessary and, indeed, harmful. As tests of church membership or of fitness for ministerial office, they could lead to mental reservation, equivocation and insincerity (Price 1924:27; cf. Deist 1978/2007:89–92).

⁶ The earliest American Board missionaries “came when the land was rent by war and rapine. It was the time of the Great Trek, the massacre of Piet Retief, Dick King’s ride, and the attempt to rule the Boers of Maritzburg under the Union Jack ...” (Ferguson (1940:172). An example of their impartial sensitivity to the social context is demonstrated by Daniel Lindley’s response in 1838, when a dangerously adversarial situation developed. The trekboers had just arrived. When the local Zulus stole their cattle, the trekboers retaliated viciously. Lindley averted burgeoning disaster by realising that “the cheapest, speediest, easiest way to convert the heathen here would be to convert the *white ones* first ... Consequently, he served the trekboers and provided schooling for their children for seven years before returning to his original mission ... His caliber was such that even President Kruger is reported to have said that if he had stayed with us we would have been a wiser nation (Ferguson 1940:185). Briggs & Wing (1970:81, 82, 97) affirm that had Lindley stayed “some of the worst excesses of the next few years, which with the utmost kindness can only be described as the worst kind of narrow puritanism might have been avoided”.

⁷ De Gruchy (1979:27) states categorically that “the roots of segregation as a political policy to ensure white supremacy and survival were part of British policy as developed by Sir Theophilus Shepstone in Natal”. The first Anglican bishop in South Africa, John Colenso (d. 1883), also participated in a bitter struggle against the injustice of colonial rule. Bishop Colenso had been excommunicated ostensibly because of his argument that the Bible could not be the literal word of God. His far-sighted and scholarly brilliance has only recently been acknowledged.

to remonstrance with cheekiness. Hughes (2011:39) reports that John claimed that the other boy had started it, so Wilcox, knowing that John had previously indicated that he wanted to be a Christian, read Matthew 5:23–24 to him (“Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift”). Wilcox suggested that John ought to show humility and apologise. John eventually surrendered and achieved reconciliation with his adversary.⁸ The conversion of John Dube set his lifelong course as a pacifist, but his religious turning point was an educational one too. In that same year, Wilcox decided to return to the United States to accept a post at Keene Valley Congregational Church in New York State. Dube’s mother pleaded with John’s spiritual mentor to take her son with him, and so it came about that Wilcox engineered John Dube’s registration at the prestigious Oberlin College in Ohio where Wilcox himself had studied (Hughes 2011:439–41).⁹ Whilst studying at Oberlin, as a result of contact with the erstwhile slave Booker Washington, Dube resolved to put Booker’s principles of education towards economic independence into practice in his own country.

When Wilcox returned to Adam’s Mission in Amanzimtoti in 1891 to further his “Faith Plan”, he set up missionary settlements based on industrial activity that could be self-supporting from the start, such as trades, milling or farming. He stated that “the only way to encourage people to industry and self-dependence is to give them motives for work and one of the strongest and purest motives I know of is the interest in a home, a place where one can live in security with his family” (Kumalo 2013: 404). Wilcox based his work on three main principles:¹⁰

1. The Bible must be translated into the people's languages. He recognised the significance of the African languages and symbols and the importance of using them in theological discourse.
2. The church needed to assist in the liberation of oppressed black people by offering an empowering ministry. It should promote a gospel that leads to ownership of land and self-reliance rather than a paternalistic gospel.
3. The church should be a site of struggle against any form of oppression. It needs to create a space where people can discuss the policies that undermine their freedom and their opportunity to experience abundant life. He encouraged people to participate in processes that would promote their sense of freedom and human dignity.

⁸ Cf. Louw’s (2017) definition of Practical Theology as the intervention of the gospel message in terms of “the more excellent way”: constructive (healing and peace) rather than destructive (hatred and resistance).

⁹ Oberlin was the first American college to open its doors to women and people of colour. The seventeen-year-old John did remarkably well there, and participated in Wilcox’s lecture tours in 1889 which were aimed at raising money for educational projects in Zululand. In spite of his difficulty with the English language, with his sonorous voice and commanding stage presence, John was very well received. The friendship of Eliza Foster, the wife of the professor of English at Oberlin Institute, who was the daughter of a missionary from Natal and could speak Zulu, was also a great help to him (Hughes 2011:40). John had the opportunity to help Wilcox with a printing press, which gave him valuable experience which he was to apply later in Natal.

¹⁰ Kumalo 2012:88–90.

When Wilcox returned to Natal in 1891, John Dube followed. Within two years of returning to Natal, Dube was appointed superintendent of the industrial school that Wilcox had started at Adams Mission. However, John's father insisted that he study for the ministry, and so in 1897 Dube returned to the Congregational church seminary in New York. While John studied for the pastorate his musically gifted wife Nokutela (née Mdimba) had singing lessons and studied housewifery. By presenting concerts together they raised funds for the work they envisaged for when they returned home. Dube was ordained as a Congregational Church minister in 1899, and he and Nokutela immediately returned to Inanda. As minister at Inanda Dube achieved his first goal with the founding of Ohlange Christian Industrial School, opened during the Congregational Church Assembly in 1900 (Hughes 2011:120).

Political developments after the Boer War in 1902

Unfortunately, recession set in as soon as the Boer war ended. The Natal Colony's settlers began to evict black tenants with the intention of putting their land to more productive use. Consequently, social distress and land hunger intensified in most African locations, but the Minister for Native Affairs, George Leuchars, also a midlands farmer, was completely unresponsive to their plight. John Dube saw the need for a public mouthpiece and established the *Ilanga Lase Natal* in 1903. One of the contributors to the *Ilanga* newspaper described Leuchars as "a good for nothing Whiteman ... harsh, cruel and remorseless". Not surprisingly, the authorities were provoked into keeping *Ilanga* under close surveillance (Hughes 2011:121–124; Odendaal 2012:290). By entering the Colony's public debates, Africans were regarded as agitators. Dube was constantly spied upon, even at his church services, but as editor he was to emerge as a dominant political figure in Natal and a national leader.¹¹

British control of "Bantu Development" and Education.

The moderate Natal Native Congress (NNC) was founded in July 1900, conforming to "the program of Christianization and civilization articulated by missionaries and colonial officials over the previous half century".¹² However, after the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886, the racial politics that had come to dominate British attitudes toward the colonised in Southern Africa recast the humanitarian program of missionaries as misguided and counterproductive. In 1903, Lord Milner appointed Sir Godfrey Langden as chairman of the South African Native Affairs Commission. Two years later this body of ten white men recommended that the black South Africans were to be separated from white South Africans both as occupiers of land and as voters (Hancock 1968:114).¹³ The repeal of the Victorian policy of Christianity and civilisation established by the moderate NNC resulted in the severe limitation on black ownership of land. The perception arose that the natives were to be educated as "drawers of water and hewers of stone".

¹¹ Hughes, narrating in the video by Cherif Keita: "Oberlin – Inanda. The Life and Times of John L. Dube"; Odendaal 2012:292.

¹² This organisation was later regarded as the precursor to the South African Native National Congress established in 1912, later renamed the ANC (Rutz 2011:201:55).

¹³ See n. 25 for De Gruchy's (1979:27) opinion.

Unsurprisingly, the leaders of the *kholwa* (mission educated) Christians resisted this travesty. In the same year, John Dube made a speech to the seventy-fifth annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science held in South Africa. He expressed regret at the lack of understanding between Africans and their colonial rulers and talked of the higher ideals of which Africans were capable. He explained that he had founded his school to educate the young boys to “the idea of nobility of work”, making a plea that if whites supported such initiatives rather than burdening Africans with all sorts of taxes, there would be no need to import Indian or Chinese workers – Africans were perfectly capable of similar discipline.¹⁴ In his speech, Dube reiterated his emphatic protest against

“the unjustifiable attempts of the people of South Africa, as revealed by the legislative Acts of the Government, to prevent the Native for all time from having access to the ranks of skilled labour. It is unsportsmanlike, un-Christian, and in my humble opinion, contrary to the best interests of South Africa” (John Dube. 1905. Speech made at the 75th Annual Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science held in Durban, South Africa. Report in the Natal Mercury, August 24. 1905).

Dube’s speech was very well received by his audience, which included Ghandhi and Charles Darwin’s son George.¹⁵ It records the essence of the lingering problem: the denial of human dignity and “voice”, and quality education, for the indigenous peoples of South Africa.¹⁶

The Colonialist Onslaught intensifies

The next step towards preventing Black independence occurred in 1906, when the poll tax Act No. 61 was passed. A new annual rent was imposed on every hut on the reserves and on all unmarried male natives. Hughes (2011:122) observes that there was “clearly a concerted effort not only to squeeze Africans for more revenue but also to clip the wings of the African middle classes”. One of the bitterest grievances expressed by many tribal leaders that Hughes notes is particularly significant is that they felt they were “treated like nobodies” – they had not been permitted any opportunity to deliberate on and reply to the government on the subject of the new poll tax.

Flying in the face of Dube’s pacifist advice, the tribal leaders rebelled. The Bambatha rebellion was ruthlessly put down. The rebellion was attributed to the influence of Christian preaching, so immediately a campaign to suppress all unsupervised black evangelism was launched (Rutz 2011:58, 66).¹⁷ The American Zulu Mission Reserves

¹⁴ Reading between the lines, it is obvious that the mines needed unskilled and therefore cheap labour.

¹⁵ At the formal lunch after the meeting, Nokutela Dube and the Inanda Native Singers entertained the visitors. Her “particularly clear soprano voice” attracted frequent applause (Hughes 2011:113).

¹⁶ Black Consciousness as a movement was only officially established by Steve Biko in South Africa in 1970s. Similarly, the term Liberation Theology was coined as a result of social concern for the poor and politically oppressed a decade or two earlier in Latin America. However, the reasons for and roots of both these movements had arisen earlier and were more widespread.

¹⁷ Odendaal (2012:289) reports that between 3500 and 4000 Africans were killed, in contrast to some two dozen whites, and that Ghandi, who led an ambulance brigade of Indian stretcher bearers, observed, “this was no war but a man-hunt”.

were targeted, and total control was given over to the governmental Natal Native Trust. The earlier policy of settling African people on Reserves with central freehold glebes with churches and schools in the Reserves had been based on the idea that establishing the missionaries in the central areas that bring peace and stability. Now black striving for recognition as equal human beings was connected with evangelism and seen as a threat.¹⁸ To add insult to injury, the authorities went so far as to destroy churches on reserve lands that were not under the direct control of white missionaries.

After the Bambatha Rebellion, the mission reserves, which had once offered the prospect of individual land ownership, were seized by the state, resulting in eighty percent of the population having access to only twenty percent of the land (Sales 1999:113). The shortsightedness of this response to the highly emotional issue has expanded exponentially to become a major political problem today. Wilcox recognised that the government's policy of taking land away from the people was reducing the once free and proud Zulu people into near slaves. He believed that the land belonged to the African people and they should not be forced to live on it as tenants by newcomers.¹⁹

The complexity was compounded by the denial of black access to first class secondary and tertiary education. Dube, in his paper *Ilanga lase Natal*, recognised that the clamp-down on African evangelism had a larger political object: "the real object is to deter the civilization of our race ..." (Etherington 2012:74). It took Steve Biko to establish black consciousness officially in South Africa half a century or more later, but with hindsight, the growing realisation of the necessity for such a movement is clearly discernable at this stage. The following telling entry in the 1911 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* explains the cultural context in which Dube saw the necessity of entering the Colony's public debates:

*A longer experience of all the African negroid races has led to a considerable modification in the view originally held in regard to them. The black man is not simply a morally and intellectually underdeveloped European, and education, except in rare instances, does not put him on an equality with the European.*²⁰

Not surprisingly, the negative attitude of the British government and the majority of Dutch and English settlers had the counter-productive effect of galvanising the black leadership into action. They realised that they could not depend on the white-dominated churches (De Gruchy 2005:47).

¹⁸ The rapid rise of the separatist church movement identified as Ethiopianism, which had spread from the influence of Tiyo Soga throughout Southern Africa in the 1890's, offered independence from white control, but it was regarded as "a mold into which all sorts of aspirations flowed" (Hughes 2011:122; Odendaal 2012:74, 193, 198). Towards the end of the 19th Century, Ethiopia was the only part of Africa not colonised by Europe. The independent churches regarded *Ethiopianism* as a symbol of black revolt against European spiritual and cultural domination (on the basis of Ps 68:31 – "Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God"). This growing phenomenon of pride in African consciousness and identity was perceived as sedition which threatened a loss of control by the government (De Gruchy 2005: 47; Etherington (2012:55–76).

¹⁹ Kumalo (2012: 81, 88-90) notes that Wilcox was later at odds even with the American Zulu Mission's policy of charging rent from its tenants. He started the Zulu Industrial Improvement Company in 1908, using it to mobilise the Africans to pool together their resources and buy back land. In this way, they established two communities in Estcourt that still constitute a contentious land issue today (Cousins 2021).

²⁰ Published in *Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., United States, 1911*, quoted by Rutz (2011:144).

The founding of the South African Native National Congress in 1912

The brilliant young Pixley Seme, who had been mentored by John Dube and subsequently educated overseas as a lawyer, galvanised black unity.²¹ He took the initiative and organised a nation-wide congress of black representatives “for the purpose of creating national unity and defending our rights and privileges” (Rive & Couzens 1993: 9, 10). Thus it came about that the South African Native National Congress (SANNC), later to become the African National Congress (ANC), was established in March 1912, with William Wilcox’s protégé John Langalibalele Dube of Inanda as founding president. At this historic meeting, the following claim was agreed upon: “Full and equal rights and privileges, subject only to the conditions and limitations established by law and application also on all citizens without distinction of clan, colour or creed”. Dube’s gravitas was such that he was appointed first president *in absentia* in spite of the fact that he was primarily an educationist, and heavily committed at the Ohlange Industrial School.

The Land Act of 1913

The very next year, a major blow to Native aspirations was felled. The Land Act of 1913, which was clearly meant to stop black people from purchasing land from white farmers, was passed. Dube immediately led a delegation to London to represent their grievances and hopes, with the aim of establishing black political and land rights in any new constitution for a united country, but to no avail. Dube and other leaders, with Solomon Plaatjie as secretary, repeatedly represented their grievances and hopes before the British authorities and local commissions, but without success (De Gruchy 2005:26). The futility of their efforts can be partly explained by the complexity of underlying political cross currents in the newly formed Union of South Africa.²²

Unfortunately, by 1916 the highly talented Seme’s political ambition and self-interest had led to open hostility between himself and Dube, and in 1917 Seme engineered the ousting of the moderate Dube from the SANNC (soon to be renamed the ANC). Rather than standing for re-election, Dube decided to focus on his major goal of education towards independence for his people at Ohlange school at Inanda. In his identification with Booker Washington, Dube stated: “I too, have my heart centered mainly in the education of my race. Therein, methinks, lies the shortest and best way to their mental, moral, material and political betterment”. Dube fully understood “the critical role that education plays towards the total liberation of the whole person” (Dolamo 2017:1), but Dube was very much a son of his own cultural tradition and valued it, as can be seen in his novel, the very first to be written in Zulu.²³ Recent studies have been critical of Dube,

²¹ The American Board missionary Steven Pixley arranged for his study overseas. In honour of him, Seme took his name as a first name.

²² Cf. De Gruchy (1979:27): “the roots of segregation as a political policy to ensure white supremacy and survival were part of British policy as developed by Sir Theophilus Shepstone in Natal”. General Smuts was acting as advisor to the British Government on this matter, but they were preoccupied by the looming World War (Walshe 1973:7, 10–13). By the 1920’s, Smuts recognised the Natives’ claim “to a share in the political rights of South African citizenship” (Hancock 1968:237).

²³ Kunene 1976, referring to *Jeje, the Body Servant of Shaka*, Durban: Marianhill Mission Press, 1930. Dube’s novel is a subtle critique of the ruthlessness of the Zulu king Shaka, but also portrays traditional Zulu culture as good, gentle, and considerate of others. Kunene (1976) describes Jeje as “the alter ego for a conscience that constantly – even though of necessity secretly – questions Shaka’s anti-social actions.” Interestingly, Dube’s

who as a *kholwa* Christian never wavered in his pacifism and tried to remain on good terms with his colonialist overlords (Hughes 2011:260). The complexity of Dube's role as mediator between his own cultural tradition and his position as *kohlwa* Christian, pastor and educationalist, is tragically reflected in his later personal life.²⁴

Discussion

Hancock (1968:237) notes that by the 1920's Smuts acknowledged the Natives' claim "to a share in the political rights of South African citizenship", but the crisis of the two world wars provided the distraction which allowed more of the same tragic political short-sightedness which Dube passionately decried. In 1959, the Apartheid government passed the Extension of University Education Act, which banned blacks from receiving higher education at the same universities as whites (Ramantswana 2020:8). Ramantswana (2020:8-9) points out that although the education minister of the Apartheid regime who was tasked with appointing senior academic and administrative staff appointed highly competent academics "judged by the standards and requirement of Western universities", none of them had "any existential knowledge of what it is to be a black man in a white racist South Africa". He reasons that because few, "if any, of them have any first-hand experience of either black communities or parishes in their living or work situation", this "makes it impossible for them to think theologically from the basis of this human experience common (in varying degrees) to all South African blacks."

As with the founding of the ANC, it was the necessity of dealing constructively with the "dehumanizing and debilitating" social injustice that led to black theologians such as Mosala (1989) and Masenya (1991) to see the necessity to "delink" from colonialism and develop their own theology of liberation on an academic basis.²⁵ Ramantswana

grandfather, a prominent chief, was murdered by Shaka in much the same way as Piet Retief was by Dingaan, in spite of his brilliant legal mind and "extraordinary vision and intellect". The kind of fruit that Dube's decision to concentrate on education bore is to be seen in the first African Nobel Prize winner and one of the greatest of the later ANC presidents, the Congregationalist lay preacher, Chief Albert Luthuli. Another witness to Dube's passion for education is Richard Gugushe, who became head of Vista University Soweto Campus. This centenarian started his education at Ohlange at age eleven and says of Dube, "He was the man who shaped my life ... We all loved him, he was a wonderful man who encouraged us to take our studies seriously" (*Sunday Times* 18th November 2017). Dube's giftedness as mediator between his traditional culture and Christianity was already evident at Oberlin when he was in the process of ordination: "The Zulu's believe that God created the world and all things in it, but when he came down to earth and saw man, and how wicked he was, he flew up into the clouds and no man has had communication with God since. I want to teach my people that man can communicate with God through Christ" (Hughes 2011:87).

²⁴ When it eventually became clear that his beautiful and gifted wife Nokutela was unable to bear children, Dube turned elsewhere for the vital element of procreation in his traditional culture. When he fathered a child out of wedlock, they divorced. A suitable wife was chosen for him and he subsequently fathered six children. Perhaps presciently, in an essay written when she was only eleven years old, Nokutela had commented: "If a person had no children, he troubled very much ..." (Hughes, *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*). Nokutela deserves far more recognition than she has thus far received for the hugely supportive role that she fulfilled in her marriage, and for her pioneering contribution to African church music. She was buried in Brixton cemetery, simply identified as grave number CK 9763. (Hughes 2011:196 notes that CK denotes "Christian Kaffir", i.e. *kholwa* Christian). Fortunately, in 2014 Cherif Keita produced a video on her life; "Remembering Nokutela", which records some of her remarkable achievements in her own right. Pixley Seme was eventually removed from office, apparently because his excessive ambition led to arrogance and personal self-aggrandisement (Ngqulunga 2017:242), and was succeeded as president of the ANC by Albert Luthuli.

²⁵ Ramantswana (2020:9) quoting Ntwasa (1972:181). Ramantswana (2020:12) describes how Masenya's voice "began to rock the boat of white Old Testament scholarship".

(2020:11–13) points out that in order to resist the notions of “racial superiority and knowledge superiority” it was essential to recognise the “provinciality and limitations of Euro-Western paradigm” and to move beyond the confines of Western hermeneutical practices. He (Ramantswana 2020:11) sees the possibility of this approach in the potential of the communities described in the Bible to be relevant to the struggles of oppressed people. Ramantswana (2020:13) recognises that by using historical-critical tools to investigate the world behind the text, and by paying attention to the materialist and ideological conditions of the text, Mosala and Masenya brought about a hermeneutical shift among black theologians in South Africa, and placed black theology on a sound academic footing (Ramantswana 2020:12). This shift facilitated the recognition of the fallacy of racial and knowledge superiority in academic Old Testament scholarship in South Africa.²⁶

Conclusion

It is ironic that there is a fundamental affinity between the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa and the Afrikaner Nationalism that arose after the Anglo-Boer war – both arose as a result of the pervasive feeling of social and cultural inferiority.²⁷ The recent civil unrest and looting in KZN brings the following excerpt from Dube’s speech a century ago to mind: “be sure of this ... the Black Peril is but barbarism run wild. Education that is moral, industrial and scholastic is the remedy”.²⁸ A sense of self-worth is essential for education to be effective. Moving with the times, to build on the legacy of John Dube and his wife Nokutela, biblical scholars must find ways to work in an interdisciplinary field to inform, educate and enlighten lay people.²⁹ Ultimately, to remain relevant, theological scholarship must pursue the education of all children of South Africa towards Steve Biko’s hope and legacy: “the greatest gift possible – a more human face”.³⁰

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²⁶ See for instance Masenya’s *bosadi* approach of engaging with the patriarchal context of biblical texts by expressing/voicing the “sweet African mother’s milk” (Ramantswana 2020:12, 13).

²⁷ Leopold Scholz “Sake van die dag”, *Die Burger*, 10 November, 2018. As De Gruchy (2005:26) noted, “British Imperialism has a great deal to answer for: it helped spawn a nationalism whose racial policies have become as hideous to the world at large as the war Britain waged against the Afrikaner”.

²⁸ “A Zulu point of view on the missionaries in Africa.” Address delivered at the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Natal Missionary Conference, quoted by Kumalo (2012:155–161).

²⁹ Cf. Gericke (2021), who recently suggested possible new directions for the discipline of Old Testament Scholarship.

³⁰ Biko 1976/2004:108.

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