

## **Christian Ubuntu: Empowerment over entitlement**

“A person is a person through other people!”

“It takes a village to raise a child!”

“No man is an island unto himself!”

And Freddie Mercury sang of the “pain of isolation”!!!

These statements point us to what we know in Africa as “Ubuntu”.

Nelson Mandela understood this so well. He believed his freedom would not be complete while his brother was still in bondage.

This is a direct challenge on the jungle law of the “survival of the fittest”. Or, in political terms, the abuse of power.

It calls for the healthy recognition of our common humanity. Jesus used the parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate neighbourly love. The parable points to three ways of thinking:

### **Me only**

Robbers who live by “what is yours is mine and I am going to take it! Me only”.

Our current commissions of inquiry into corruption are uncovering such robbers. All such corruption is a violation of ubuntu.

Leaders who look to their own enrichment without regard for those they lead are robbers. Xenophobic corruption and selfishness likewise fall into this category of selfishness.

### **Me first**

The Religious who live by “what's mine is mine and I am going to keep it! Me first”.

Carelessness about the suffering around us, or ready recourse to blameshifting or apathy, along with pseudo spiritual ministries, all fall into this category.

Ministries that abuse or mislead people, often for their own personal material gain, do not alleviate the suffering of others, but aggravate them. This is not ubuntu.

### **It is mine**

The Good Samaritan who believed that “what is mine is yours and I am going to share it!”.

This man crossed barriers to help. He sacrificed convenience. He ignored ethnic and cultural differences. He covered costs to offer a hand up for a fallen fellow man. He cared for the man to the point of empowerment and restoration. This is positive ubuntu.

Christian Ubuntu declares that we should “bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ”. (Gal 6:2). It goes on to include the empowering declaration that “everyone should carry his own load”. (Gal 6:5)

By all means, give a needy person a fish. He will eat that day. Yet if you teach and equip him to fish he will eat every day and be able to give fish to others.

That's constructive visionary Christian Ubuntu. The “Christian” part of this is the truth that Christ-centred lives are compassion motivated for the greater good of others rather than fear-driven greed and the selfishness of hyper individualism.

It is the power of choice. It frees people from the victim trap. It moves far beyond the snare of entitlement thinking. It deals with the Now with compassion and the Not Yet with hope.

It is energized by inspiration not obligation.

Jesus told His early disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they had been filled with the Holy Spirit and that they would then be empowered witnesses of the Gospel that changes lives.

So after the experience of Pentecost they were emboldened in tangible love, in Ubuntu. “No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had”.

(Acts 4:32)

Here are some guidelines to Christian ubuntu:

**Recognize our common humanity.**

Break from prejudice. The social constructs of race are simply evil. They were evil under apartheid. They are still evil today. Racism is wrong.

Paul says “we no longer consider any man from a worldly point of view.... Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation”. (2 Cor 5:16-17)

All references to colour thereby perpetuate racism. These include references by political leaders.

**Heal the wounds of fatherlessness.**

Fathers are designed to give identity, provision, protection and affirmation. By far the greatest common characteristic of delinquent people is fatherlessness.

Jesus Himself received the affirmations of His heavenly Father when He was baptized. A voice spoke over Him: “This is My beloved son. Listen to Him”.

Mistakes that earthly fathers make include permissiveness or otherwise being overly strict; thinking things can replace love and presence; and passivity.

Direct, personal, positive involvement in the lives of others will go a long way toward helping to re-father them.

**Provide training**

This is the most responsible, proactive policy toward improving the lives of all people.

Training and equipping should be readily and affordably available to every person without regard to economic status, gender, or any other classification.

**Celebrate choice.**

The power to choose, to take responsibility, should be declared and celebrated constantly.

Ubuntu should be energized by this. Our response to adversity is always our responsibility. We can choose to see ourselves as victims or victors.

**Exercise positive leadership**

So much stands or falls on leadership.

Good leaders live the change they want to see in others. People lean into what their leaders are. The contagion of leadership works by the power of influence. As the leaders are, the people will become.

Paul said “Be imitators of me as I also am of Christ”. (1 Cor 11:1)

Leaders who run on inspiration rather than obligation, help to internalize the empowerment of those they lead. People change more sustainably by inspiration than by obligation.

The fuel and effect of such leaders is Hope. They inspire Hope.

**Celebrate diversity**

Our differences can be expressions of creativity. They can be tools to grow us not threats to diminish us. They can be assets not liabilities.

Jesus said “By this shall all men know that you are My followers” (John 13:35).

Love and unity are essential to Christian Ubuntu.

Unity is not necessarily in uniformity. It can be, like our Rainbow Nation, enjoyed in diversity.

Christian Ubuntu celebrates this kind of unity, of camaraderie.

South Africa needs Jesus!

Thank God for the Cross and the Resurrection of Jesus!!!!

Keep these thoughts in your prayers as you prepare to vote on Wednesday.

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