



UBUNTU, THE BIBLE AND

THE SPIRIT OF COMMON HUMANITY



- A Parallel Study Dialogue comparing and contrasting the basics of Ubuntu, discipleship in Jesus, and the spirit of common humanity.

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Scripture Quotations taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. © 1973, 1978, 1984 By international Bible Society. Used by permission.

Section 1: Concepts - Ubuntu and the Bible

An overview look at the slogan concept statements of Ubuntu and a dialogic Bible equivalent:

umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye

Translation:

One is a person through other people.

Concept expression:

I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am. (1)

In a sentence say why you like/dislike this Ubuntu slogan:

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umuntu ungumuntu ngomuntu

Translation:

One is a person through Him who became a person.

Concept expression:

I am, because Jesus is; He renews me, therefore I am. (2)

In a sentence explain how this differs from the Ubuntu slogan?

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Why will there be no real global equivalents for the Jesus version of the Ubuntu slogan?

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What then would you use as a slogan for the 'spirit of common humanity'?

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Section 2: Religious Equivalents, Ubuntu and the Bible

Great religions of the world have their own humanity and spirit of humanity concepts, which are compared with each other, with the Ubuntu concept, and the Bible:

Hebrew/Old Testament:

Love your neighbour as yourself.
Leviticus 19.18; (of Moses, Torah) c.1500-1000BC

Buddhist equivalent:

All living beings are our mother.
Also
*Whoever in this world harms living beings,
once born or twice born,
in whom there is no compassion
for living beings -
know him as an outcast. (3)*

Chinese equivalents:

*What you would not wish done to yourself,
do not do unto others.*

The Golden Rule attributed to Kung Futzu
(Confucius) who is dated from (551-479 BC) (4)

*As he does not oppose himself to anyone,
no one is opposed to him.*

In Tao-Te-Ching attrib. to Lao-Tzu (570-490 BC) (5)

Hindu equivalent:

*A man should raise himself,
and should not himself demean himself;
for he himself is the friend of his self,
and he himself is its enemy.*

Krishna in the Bhagavadgita, (500-300 BC) (6)

Islamic equivalent:

There is no real Islamic equivalent;
perhaps Surah 4.36 or 2.263 or 17.15,
give some reflection. (7)

Bible New Testament Teaching:

Jesus' New Testament equivalent:

*Do to others what you would have
them do to you.*
Matthew 7.12/Luke 6.31

Read John 1.14: Write out the verse below:

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Read Philippians 2.5-11:

This passage gives a Jesus specialisation to Ubuntu. How does this help us to avoid negative ubuntu? (if one is a person through negative people, one is negative).

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Section 3: The “Traditional” Ubuntu

Traditionally, in more cultures than just African, 'ubuntu' the spirit of common humanity has an ancestralist part not often spelt out in constitutional and socio-political literature to avoid conflict of interest. [Scientific Atheist/Agnostic ('Secularist') people, and Biblical Christians, do not accept the traditional assumption that ancestral 'after-life' spirits continue as part of the family, that they are therefore included in 'ubuntu common humanity' considerations and practices, and can rule from the grave.]

The Chinese version is described as follows: **“When the Chinese use the word family, they do not confine the term to those who live under a single roof, or even to all living kindred; they also include their forebears whom they regard as members of the living social group, present and proprietary, vitally concerned with the family heritage. No man's home or property, not even his body, is his exclusive possession, but belongs to his ancestors as well. The fortunes of the living and the dead, moreover, are inextricably intertwined. When an individual dies, he may become – and hopes to become – a good spirit beneficent and helpful to his heirs; but it is also possible that he may join the army of demons. What fate befalls him is determined not only by his own past actions and consequent moral status, but by the solicitude with which his descendants honour his memory.”** (8)

African 'Ancestral Ubuntu' is described as follows: **“But while the departed person is remembered by name, he is not really dead: he is alive, and such a person I would call the *living-dead*. The living-dead is a person who is physically dead but alive in the memory of those who knew him in his life as well as being alive in the world of the spirits. So long as the living-dead is thus remembered, he is in the state of *personal immortality*. This personal immortality is externalized in the physical continuation of the individual through procreation, so that the children bear the traits of their parents or progenitors. From the point of view of the survivors, personal immortality is expressed or externalized in acts like respecting the departed, giving bits of food to them, pouring out libation and carrying out instructions given by them either while they lived or when they appear.”** (9)

For ancestralists, 'a person is a person through others' always includes the ancestors, even if exclusion from constitutional or socio-political literature avoids conflict of interest. Modernists, secularist and Biblical, do not entertain inclusion in any constitutional or socio-political manner. A 'spirit' ruling from the grave - by legal will or in 'legal persona' transaction of any kind, or by 'spirit séance/mediation' instruction or vote or guidance – is not possible. For secularists, the dead have no further existence: there is no after-life. For Christians, resurrection alone is the form of existence of after-life.

Comment on your understanding of the after-life:

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Section 4: Your Opinion on Ubuntu, Religious Equivalents, and the Bible

What do you think of the above UBUNTU equivalents on page 3?

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The Bible also retains a 'God-abandoning' understanding of the 'spirit of common humanity (Gen 11.4; Mk 8.34-36; Rev 13.1-8), so Christian neighbourliness is not guided by the good of common humanity in others, but the new 'born again', regenerated humanity in Jesus Christ. We do not role model humanity from others, but in Jesus ministering, crucified, resurrected and baptising in the Holy Spirit. How successful do you think proper new life in Christ is?

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The weakness of Ubuntu/common humanity philosophy is that if one is a person through negative people, one is negative too - or has taken in the negative. Why should we not think that this is what is called the 'lowest common denominator' measure of humanity?

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