A Case for Christian Communalism: Overcoming Individualism and Racial Segregation in an Ubuntu-Infused South African Catholic Parish

Jordan R. Layton
Jeremy Grimshaw

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/fhssconference_studentpub

Part of the Anthropology Commons

The Annual Mary Lou Fulton Mentored Research Conference showcases some of the best student research from the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences. The mentored learning program encourages undergraduate students to participate in hands-on and practical research under the direction of a faculty member. Students create these posters as an aide in presenting the results of their research to the public, faculty, and their peers.

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation
https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/fhssconference_studentpub/3

This is brought to you for free and open access by the Family, Home, and Social Sciences at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in FHSS Mentored Research Conference by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
A Case for Christian Communalism:
Overcoming Individualism and Racial Segregation in an *Ubuntu*-Infused South African Catholic Parish

Jordan Layton  
Department of Anthropology  
Mentor: Jeremy Grimshaw

Geographic, linguistic, and economic divisions between ethnic groups linger from Apartheid; but recent concerns also include divisions *within* ethnic groups due to Western-influenced individualism and a decline in communal values known as *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* is a spiritual concept; thus, Christianity seems to be the ideal context for its reinforcement. But most theorists would argue that the physical and figurative walls being constructed between and within ethnic groups could not be overcome through Christianity, which is itself considered to be individualistic “self-serving redemptionism”—the theoretical opposite of *ubuntu*.

However, one East London Catholic parish creates an anomalous interracial community by promoting communal *ubuntu* values, and thus defies theoretical arguments of Christian individualism and the actual segregations and divisions prevalent in East London.

A parishioner said, “You know, we pray together. We believe that it’s better to worship together than to worship in private.” His wife added, "If you choose to be a Catholic, then...," and her husband finished, "...then you must be part of the community, and the community of worship, and the communalism of the church. The Catholic Church doesn’t allow for a lot of individualism. You can’t be a Catholic and not go to church. Yeah, well, I pray at home, I worship at home—it’s not going to be acceptable. The Catholic Church does not allow for that kind of individualism.”

*Ubuntu* was locally defined as including both “bringing people together” and “sharing.”

- “Bringing people together” occurs through highly structured and controlled worship, which seeks to unify parishioners into a universal church culture.
- “Sharing” and interaction occur through hand-holding, hand-shaking, call-and-response music, participation in extra-Mass “ministries,” and a sharing of ethnic cultures.

**CHRISTIAN COMMUNALISM**