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The Interface Between the Christian Concept of the Common Good, the African Concept of Ubuntu, and Politics

Paul Abudulai Yelinje
pabudulai@yahoo.com

Department of Religious Studies, Savannah College of Education, Daboya,
Ghana

Abstract

The subject of Christianity and politics has generated numerous debates with varying scholarly strands. This centuries-long contention has resulted in three main perspectives on how Christians should engage in politics. One viewpoint advocates total involvement of Christians in politics (the involvement view), another supports a complete separation between Christianity and politics (the separation view), and the third promotes transformation (the transformation view). This work does not cover these main strands, as the paper aims to avoid entering into existing controversies. Instead, this paper explores the intricate interplay between the Christian concept of the Common Good, the African philosophy of Ubuntu, and their intersection within the realm of politics. Both concepts emphasize communal well-being, social harmony, and ethical responsibility towards others. The Christian understanding of the common good highlights the importance of promoting justice, solidarity, stewardship, and the well-being of all members of society. Ubuntu, deeply rooted in African tradition, stresses interconnectedness, compassion, and the intrinsic value of every individual within the community. This paper delves into how these philosophical frameworks converge and diverge in their approaches to addressing societal challenges and shaping political discourse. It examines how Christian teachings on love, justice, and service can inform political

decision-making and policy formulation to advance the common good. Likewise, it explores how Ubuntu's emphasis on empathy, inclusivity, and human dignity can influence governance structures and foster a sense of shared humanity in political processes.

By analyzing the compatibility and tensions between these ideologies within political contexts, this paper sheds light on how combining Christian principles and Ubuntu philosophy can contribute to more ethical, inclusive, and people-centered governance practices. Ultimately, this exploration seeks to inspire dialogue and reflection on how diverse cultural and religious perspectives can enrich political theory and practice, towards building more just and compassionate societies. The paper advances four points to enhance a holistic integration of these concepts to mitigate tensions between religion and African politics. Although the context of this paper is Ghana, the author views it as applicable across Africa and the globe, primarily within jurisdictions experiencing conflict regarding Christian involvement in politics.

Introduction

For many years, debates have arisen regarding Christians' involvement in politics within both academic and theological circles. The discourse about Christians' participation in politics has resulted in three divergent perspectives: separation, involvement, and transformation (Asante 2014:61-66). Some advocate for a strict separation between Christianity and politics, others promote complete involvement of Christians in politics, and yet others call for Christians' participation in political leadership to transform politics, as they believe politics is inherently corrupt (Ayankeye & Odeleye 2017:3-4; Tshaka & Senokoane 2020:4). However, an African perspective is notably absent in these arguments, which is the focus of this paper.

This paper primarily proposes a fourth perspective termed "Holistic Integration," which aims to incorporate an African perspective into the discourse on Christian involvement in politics. It seeks to unite politics, Christianity, and the African anthropological philosophy of Ubuntu. The holistic integration approach is distinct from the current approaches, although it may have some overlaps with the transformation view. Unlike the transformation

view, which strongly regards politics as malevolent, holistic integration does not view politics as inherently evil. Instead, it perceives politics in Africa as a domain that should operate with the Christian notion of the common good alongside the African concept of Ubuntu.

This paper discusses the Christian concept of the common good, Ubuntu, and how these two concepts can be integrated with politics for more beneficial political engagement. This inquiry is especially significant for Christians in the West Gonja Municipality of Ghana, who have desired to engage in political leadership but have had limited understanding of the process. Christians, being in the minority in the West Gonja Municipality, face a dilemma as the notion of 'politics is evil' appears dominant among them. This sentiment is evidenced by the few Christians who attempted to engage in politics being disowned by their denominations and labeled as carnal (Mohammed 2023). Therefore, this paper also aims to provide a better perspective regarding Christians' involvement in politics. The usage of religion in this work is limited to the Christian faith, defined as the religious persuasion that follows Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, with the Bible as their scripture.

A general observation of politics and religion (Christianity) reveals a prominent claim that both seek the best for humanity. Beneath this claim lies a yearning for human well-being, whether temporally or eternally. For instance, politics targets the here and now, while "religion (Christianity), apart from worshipping God, also emphasizes individual salvation attainable in the afterlife as its second most important purpose" (Swinburne 2005:177). Swinburne further posits that "The Christian doctrine, like that of various other religions, is that salvation after this life is to be found in Heaven; 'the good' will go to Heaven where they will have an everlasting life" (Swinburne 2005:177). He asserts that the life of Heaven offered by the Christian religion is greatly worth pursuing and will bring immense happiness to those who attain it.

Scholars such as Galek et al. (2015:2) affirm the aim of religion by stating that "among other goals, an explicit religious goal concerns life after death. Christianity and other religions frame life experiences in the context of future spiritual salvation, which provides a sense of purpose in life." This suggests that while religion may have other aims, the afterlife stands out as the ultimate goal and focus since it is eternal. Thus, religion may present many benefits to its

adherents, but every benefit short of eternity is considered vanity (Ecclesiastes 2:18-21). This implies that the way of life and actions of religious adherents are motivated by the rewards they anticipate in the afterlife, as everyone has an appointment with death (Hebrews 9:27).

Furthermore, Galek et al. (2015:2) posit that all religions, including Christianity, believe in a certain spiritual reality where salvation will be attained, a belief that gives hope and meaning to the lives of adherents. To substantiate the view that religion's main aim is the afterlife, this paper references several biblical texts. For example, Mark 8:36 states, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (KJV). These words of Jesus Christ to his followers were meant to discourage them from pursuing worldly things and instead focus on the well-being of their souls. Moreover, in Matthew 6:19-20 (repeated in Luke 12:33-34), Jesus Christ stated,

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

As indicated in the cited biblical text above, the Lord did not place any value on earthly possessions or efforts that lead to a so-called "fulfilled" life on earth. For Jesus Christ, all the achievements individuals may attain on this earth are useless compared to what will be obtained in the afterlife. Consequently, He admonished His followers to focus and aim at selling all they possess, including their political positions and ambitions, to pursue eternal ambition, as this is the ultimate reason for following Him. On this earth, thieves and moths destroy all achievements, so why chase after them? Therefore, their hearts should be in heaven, where their treasures of eternity are stored, rather than on earth.

This reality is evident in contemporary Africa, where political upheavals and widespread destruction of lives and property occur frequently. People are often robbed at gunpoint of their possessions, with numerous incidents resulting in deaths in some African cities. Such incidents are not peculiar to

Africa but occur globally. Moreover, it is a truth that whether humans like it or not, they will someday die, leaving behind all their possessions. This fact can be denied but not escaped when the time comes. To this end, Jesus Christ mentioned in another context that He was going to prepare a place in His Father's house, where there are many mansions, and would return to take His followers there (John 14:2-3). As a matter of fact, all true followers of Christ daily anticipate the Lord Jesus's return to take them to occupy these mansions prepared for them, because the hour of His return is unknown. Why then should they be preoccupied with building houses and acquiring possessions on earth, which will eventually be destroyed? Hence, religion advocates that humans must acquire assets with eternal value, rather than focusing on things that will be left behind on earth. In simple terms, religion fundamentally aims at saving a person's soul by cultivating eternal virtues. From the religious perspective, humans will eventually attain a certain level of bliss beyond this earth.

Politics, on the other hand, is more centered on the earthly well-being of human beings within the polis. The term "politics" is derived from the Greek word "polis," which means city-state (Mar Athanasius College, n.d.). According to Cherry (2012:12), Aristotle teaches that "the primary purpose of 'politics' is pursuing the good life" in the polis. Moreover, the general view holds that politics aims to preserve life, as handled by duty-bearers in the state. In this context, life refers to human life, and it is basic knowledge that life exists on earth where humans live. It implies that politics is to preserve human life on earth by those entrusted with state power. This means that the main aim of politics is earthly. Politics concerns itself with all that happens to humans in the earthly realm without concern for the afterlife, as religion explicitly holds. Politics aims to ensure that humans are well taken care of while they live in the city-state. Essentially, the point being made here is that whatever happens to humans after death is not a concern of politics. Instead, what happens to humans in this lifetime is the focus of politics, with efforts to ensure that humans live well in the polis.

From this discussion, the paper highlights the primary purpose of religion (Christianity) and politics. Admittedly, both religion and politics focus on the well-being of human beings. However, it is unfounded to see severe tension between these two domains (politics and religion) with diverse stands,

although they both primarily claim to have the well-being of humankind as their focus. The tensions with divergent strands are not the focus of this paper. The existing tension between the domains of politics and religion calls for an inquiry aimed at a peaceful integration of religion and politics, as the well-being of humankind is the focus of both. Such integration means that the human being, who is at the center of both religion and politics, will have the best on earth provided by politics and the best in the hereafter as provided by religion. This is particularly relevant in the context of Africa, where religion intersects with all aspects of human life, just as governance and politics do.

Moreover, politics and religion occur within a context, and in this paper, the context is African; thus, religion and politics in Africa cannot exclude African culture, particularly the notion of Ubuntu. Ubuntu is an African anthropological philosophy that simply means, 'I am because you are' (Ifejika 2006). Politics and religion are integral aspects of daily life in Africa and, therefore, cannot be separated from African culture. Any form of politics and religion in Africa that disregards African culture cannot be accepted by Africans. This implies that any form of politics and religion must be imbued with the African value of Ubuntu on the foundation of the common good to be fully accepted on the continent. According to this paper, this is the sole way to resolve the tensions between religion and politics.

The paper proposes a new approach that can serve as a universal foundation upon which Christians' involvement in political leadership can revolve, particularly in Africa. This approach is especially intended for Christians in similar jurisdictions, such as the West Gonja Municipality of Ghana, which is the focus of this paper. Unlike the current approaches that address the issue from the top down, this new political-religious framework, termed 'holistic integration,' takes a bottom-up approach. The approach considers the grassroots by examining it from an African worldview perspective. This is accomplished by engaging the thoughts of ordinary Ghanaian Christians who wish to be involved in political leadership and need to learn how to do so.

Christians, especially those in the West Gonja Municipality of Ghana, face numerous uncertainties and misinformation about Christian involvement in politics. The notions that politics is evil, meaning Christians should completely abstain, or that Christians should be involved with the skepticism of changing

politics, and that politics is acceptable, implying Christians should engage without question, will be addressed by this paper.

The Christian Concept of the Common Good

This section of the paper discusses the Christian concept of the common good by first highlighting its foundations in Christian theology, specifically through the thoughts of Thomas Aquinas and the influences on his work. The section concludes by drawing meaning from the Bible, which forms the basis of Christian doctrine.

Thomas Aquinas, a 13th-century Dominican friar, is notable for propounding a comprehensive Christian perspective on the common good. As a Christian theologian, Aquinas saw the aim of the common good in God's universal redemption plan and divine providence (Garland 2013). Aquinas' concept of the common good is central to his political philosophy and ethical thought. He defines the common good as a singular good that is shared by many without being diminished, emphasizing that it is a common end pursued by the community (Hollenbach 2002:4). Goyette (2013:137) notes that his understanding is deeply rooted in both Aristotelian philosophy and Christian theology. The influence of Aristotle on Aquinas' thoughts on the common good is evident in Hollenbach (2002:4).

Besides Aristotle's influence, it is worth highlighting some biblical foundations that the paper believes influenced Aquinas' teaching on the common good. This position is supported by examining works such as "The Summa Contra Gentiles," "The Summa Theologica," Hollenbach (2002), Keys (2006), and Goyette (2013). After studying these works in light of the scriptures, it is conclusive that Aquinas' teachings on the common good have a strong Christian basis, rooted in biblical principles.

Firstly, Aquinas saw the common good as an expression of the greatest commandment to 'love God with all your heart' and 'love your neighbor as yourself' (Matthew 22:37-40). He believed that the universal love of God must be demonstrated by all and for all, regardless of race. For Aquinas, God Himself is the common good, and He expresses that to humans through love in Christ. In the "Summa Contra Gentiles," Aquinas posits that "the very goodness that

is in God is no other than His own very self, and hence the scriptures say none is good but God alone" (Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19). This implies that if God is the origin of all good, then God's people must be good and demonstrate the same to others unconditionally, as God has done through Christ.

Secondly, Aquinas built upon Augustine's concept of the City of God, where the common good is pursued in the light of God's eternal kingdom. This means that humans on earth must pursue the common good with eternity in mind. Eternity must be the goal of people who dwell in the city of man, outside of the city of God, since God dwells there with absolute perfection (St. Augustine, "Confessions," Book I). Aquinas believed that God is the Alpha and Omega, enthroned on an eternal throne, and will judge all humans (Revelation 1:8; 21:6; 22:13).

Nonetheless, Aquinas viewed the earthly city as a necessary structure for human governance, emphasizing that while humans live in the City of Man, they are ultimately oriented toward the City of God. This perspective allowed Aquinas to argue for a harmonious relationship between faith and reason, suggesting that secular authority should align with divine will (Hatch 2023).

Aquinas also believed that natural law, inscribed on human hearts (Romans 2:15), guides us toward the common good. This means that every human has an innate awareness of the common good, regardless of their religious beliefs. Therefore, no one has an excuse not to express or uphold the common good. Everyone has the intrinsic ability to both express and receive the common good. Aquinas believed that by following natural law, humans participate in God's purpose for them in the Eternal Law (Dimock and Fisher 2017). He further held that Divine Law, derived from God, guides humans to perform acts that lead to their ultimate end, which is 'eternal happiness.' Divine Law includes the Scriptures, which reveal elements of the Eternal Law to humanity (Romans 1:20). Aquinas argued that man's natural inclination is toward virtue or goodness, and by acting according to reason, man acts in accordance with virtue (Vieru 2010).

Furthermore, Aquinas applied the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matthew 7:12), to social and political life. Thus, whatever treatment you desire to receive from others, you must first be willing

to offer to them. This aligns with the principle in physics that actions and reactions are equal but opposite. Jesus Christ further emphasized this point in another context, stating that the measure you give is the measure you receive back in full (Luke 6:38).

By integrating these Christian principles, Aquinas developed a comprehensive understanding of the common good, emphasizing the importance of promoting the flourishing of all members of society in harmony with God's will. For Aquinas, it is God's perfect will for all humans in the polis to flourish and be treated well without discrimination (Hosea 14:5-6, 3 John 1:3). These convictions have influenced and provided a basis for contemporary theological reflections held by the church today.

While Aquinas' theology is grounded in Scripture, he also incorporates Aristotelian philosophy to explain and defend Christian doctrine. Aquinas was drawn to Aristotle's philosophy because it acknowledged the reality of the material world, which Aquinas found useful in validating Christian doctrine (Vieru 2010). Aristotle's ideas on causality, substance, and the soul provided conceptual tools for Aquinas. For example, Aquinas uses Aristotle's distinction between potentiality and actuality to explain how the human soul is perfected by grace. He also employs Aristotelian logic to demonstrate God's existence and attributes through philosophical arguments. To prove the existence of God, Aquinas posits that God's existence cannot be inferred from any concept but rather from some other existence (Liu 2024:9). Thus, Aquinas abandons Avicenna's metaphysical proof by the concept of the existent and returns to Aristotle's cosmological proof by causality. Aquinas follows the Aristotelian pattern of inferring cause from effect in his five-way proof of the existence of God in *Summa Theologiae* I (Liu 2024:9).

However, Aquinas does not merely adopt Aristotelian concepts; he critically appropriates them to serve theological ends. His synthesis of biblical and Aristotelian thought is a hallmark of his theological method. After examining the works of Aquinas, such as "The Summa Contra Gentiles" and "The Summa Theologica," and reviewing literature by Hollenbach (2002), Goyette (2013), and Vieru (2010), this paper concurs that Aquinas propounded an ever-effective religious and Christian explanation of the common good by drawing from the ideas of both Aristotle and Cicero. Following Aristotle, Aquinas

argued that pursuing self-interest leads to a deviant form of rule (Padarsov 2021). For Aquinas, a tyrannical government is unjust because it is directed not to the common good (*bonum commune*) but to the private good (*bonum privatum*) of the ruler (Padarsov 2021). However, Aquinas was not only concerned with the flourishing of particular political societies; he also conceived of humans as part of a universal moral order. Aquinas, as a theologian, maintained a consistent universal view of humans influenced by his belief in a universal God who desires the common good for all of creation.

In contrast to Greek and Roman theorists who did not necessarily have monotheistic persuasions, Aquinas united the concept of the common good with God. In his understanding, Christian believers could, through divine revelation, have access to the common good (Padarsov 2021). Aquinas believed that God comprehends the good of the entire universe, being the Maker and Governor of all things (Bouchard 1999). This implies that for Christians, the motivation for the common good must originate from a divine burden for the holistic transformation of the universe. It further signifies that the common good reflects God's vision and heart for His creation. This context includes the responsible and sustainable exploration and usage of natural resources, with no exception to the environment, in light of the alarming rate of global warming and geopolitical tensions in recent times.

From this perspective, this work defines the common good as the recognition and response to the truth that all humans are created in the image of God (*imago dei*) (McNair & Nichols 2018), as stated in the scriptures (Genesis 1:26-27). All humans, therefore, deserve equal opportunities and treatment, with the well-being of all deemed paramount. By implication, whatever is done in society by anyone at any level, the primary motive must be how that engagement benefits everyone, including in the realm of politics and all aspects of public life for Christians. It stands to reason that the common good does not discriminate but recognizes every human being as equal, regardless of color or creed.

The discussion on the common good presented in this work points to two main perspectives: a secular conception and a religious conception, primarily led by Christian theologians, with Aquinas being a prominent figure. In the context of this paper, it is crucial to note that all notions of the common good originate

from the supreme good, which is the God of the Bible, the creator of all things (Colossians 1:16-20). According to the Bible, all good and perfect things come from God (James 1:17). Furthermore, God demonstrated His universal unconditional love to the entire world by giving His only begotten son for the common good of humanity (John 3:16). He did this because humans are created in His image, and He is determined to restore this image, which was corrupted by sin (Genesis 1:26-27, 3:6-24). Throughout the scriptures, God is shown as the source of all good concerning humans, culminating in the sacrificial death of His only son on a Roman cross (John 19:30). God demonstrated His love selflessly, for the benefit of all humans without exception (Acts 10:34-35; Romans 5:18; 1 Timothy 4:10). The apostle Paul admonishes Christians to do good to all people without discrimination (Galatians 6:10), and various scriptural texts show that God's goodness is intended for all humans, not just a select few.

As emphasized by this paper, the critical point is that any conception of the common good should be for the benefit of all. Whether derived from secular or Christian conceptions, it should aim for the general well-being of society. For Christians, pursuing general well-being brings glory to God, the Creator of society, as the scriptures enjoin them to demonstrate their good works so that others will glorify God (Matthew 5:16 and John 10:32). This does not mean that everyone must necessarily realize this fact, but their good works should be visibly geared towards the general well-being of all humans, regardless of their background (1 Timothy 3:12, 5:15).

The African Concept of Ubuntu

This section of the paper examines the concept of being human, which is significantly influenced by the African anthropological concept of Ubuntu. It will highlight the views of several African authors on the subject of Ubuntu. To begin with, it is worth pointing out that Gade (2011:306) notes that the term 'Ubuntu' "was first used in South African writing in an address to a conference held in Durban in 1960." Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013:199) observe that "during colonialism and the apartheid era, black people and their values were greatly undermined. The discourse on Ubuntu was therefore aimed at restoring human dignity and the values of humanness." Although Ubuntu is

rooted in Southern Africa, it lies at the heart of the entire African way of life and impacts every aspect of people's well-being (Bhengu 2019).

Ubuntu refers to the soul force that drives almost every facet of societal life in African communities, creating relationships within the African community (Masuku & Mathe 2022). In the African context, Ubuntu means being human, caring, showing sympathy, empathy, forgiveness, and other values of humanness toward others. Ubuntu is a capacity in African culture that expresses compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony, and humanity to build and maintain a community with justice and mutual caring (Senokoane 2014).

The fundamental conceptual understanding of Ubuntu means "I am because you are" (Ifejika 2006). According to Ifejika (2006), Ubuntu is part of the Zulu phrase "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu," which means a person is a person through others. Furthermore, some hold that Ubuntu has its roots in humanist African philosophy, where the idea of community is one of the building blocks of society (Fotherby 2008; Ifejika 2006). Ubuntu embodies the concept of a common humanity and oneness: humanity, you, and me (Fotherby 2008; Ifejika 2006). Since the advent of democracy in South Africa, there has been a concerted effort to revive the notion of Ubuntu (Matolino & Kwindigwi 2013:197). Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013) believe that Ubuntu is an authentic African ethical concept, a way of life, an authentic mode of being African, an individual ideal, the appropriate public spirit, a definition of life itself, and the preferred manner of conducting public and private business.

Shutte (2001) views Ubuntu as an ethic for a new South Africa, attempting to marry European and African ethical thinking. Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013:199) maintain that, for Shutte, the idea is not just an explanation of the ethic of Ubuntu but that Ubuntu must give direction and inspiration in contemporary South Africa. For him, Ubuntu could fill the moral vacuum that threatens South African society and serve as a remedy for the increasing levels of callous and gratuitous violence, corruption in public office, and materialistic consumerism. At the core of Ubuntu is the idea that 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,' meaning a person depends on others to be truly human (Matolino & Kwindigwi 2013:199). Although Shutte's context addresses South Africa, his ideas are equally relevant and applicable to the entire African continent, including Ghana in West Africa, which is the context of this paper.

Similarly, Dandala (1996:71) asserts that Ubuntu is a statement about being and cannot be reduced merely to a methodology of doing something. Ubuntu is about what qualifies a person to be a person. Mkhize (2008:36), affirming Karenga (2004), sees Ubuntu as a process of becoming an ethical human being, which means it is the process by which balance or 'orderedness of being' is affirmed. This orderedness is realized through relationships characterized by interdependence, justice, solidarity of humankind, respect, empathy, and care (Mkhize 2008:36).

Furthermore, Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013:199) posit that the Moral Regeneration Movement, launched in 2002, has Ubuntu as its foundation. This movement advocates for moral revival, envisioning a society whose moral fabric is fully restored, where selfishness and greed give way to the promotion of the common good. In this Ubuntu-renewed society, mutual respect, respect for life, respect for the elderly, respect for fellow citizens' property, and sound work ethics are shared values and driving forces. In this instance, Ubuntu is invoked for the reconstruction of moral values and the reconceptualization of society and its morals (Matolino & Kwindingwi 2013:199). This vision of regenerating Ubuntu in society aligns closely with the objectives of this paper.

Moreover, Ubuntu values are deeply embedded in the attitudes and subjectivity of individuals in Africa. A symbiotic relationship exists between individual agency and the social institutions that enhance adherence to Ubuntu's ethical guidance. Metz (2007) contends that the Ubuntu ethic, which emphasizes communal and harmonious relations among human beings, is fundamentally incompatible with individualism that prioritizes the individual over the community. Another definition worth considering is, "Ubuntu, a human engagement that allows for critical thinking, non-domination, and the optimal development of human relationships" (Mbigi 2011:13, quoted in Bhengu 2019:46; see also Letseka 2013). From these conceptions, Ubuntu means that each individual's humanity is manifested in relationships with others. Ubuntu thus calls for awareness of individual being and individual duties toward one's neighbor.

From this background, Ubuntu can be defined as an individual's life lived and celebrated through meaningful relationships and actions that bring well-being to all members of society. For this paper, a person who lives according to the

principles of Ubuntu must add value to society and positively impact everyone they encounter in their daily lives. This paper, therefore, agrees with Dandala (1996:70) and Mthembu (1996:218) that Ubuntu rests on core values such as humaneness, caring, sharing, respect, and compassion. Furthermore, this paper asserts the understanding that:

- The spirit of Ubuntu is essentially about being humane and ensuring that human dignity is always at the core of one's actions, thoughts, and deeds when interacting with others (Nakiso Borehole Drilling 2022).
- Having Ubuntu means showing care and concern for one's neighbor, lending a helping hand, and displaying an understanding of the dignity with which human beings should treat one another because they are human (Nakiso Borehole Drilling 2022).
- Simply put, Ubuntu exists because human beings exist and seek to provide a code of conduct for the co-existence of human beings (Nakiso Borehole Drilling 2022).

This understanding is echoed by Tutu (1997: Chapter 8), who expounds on this “human connectedness” in his definition of Ubuntu. He defined Ubuntu as “my humanity being caught up, inextricably bound up, in what is yours” (Tutu 1997; Nakiso Borehole Drilling 2022). This means that humans are interconnected, and in this network of interdependence and togetherness, what happens to one, in an authentic sense, happens to all. Therefore, in Ubuntu, your pain is my pain, your success is mine, and your failure is my failure, and vice versa. It suggests that if one is driven by Ubuntu, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to do harm to one's neighbor in any aspect of life. Every wrong done to my neighbor also affects me. The notion of Ubuntu further underscores the African concept of community and communalism, resonating with both political and social dimensions. Before integrating the concepts of the common good, Ubuntu, and politics for a better perspective, the paper will deliberate on the concepts of community and communalism.

The Concept of Community and Communalism as They Resonate With Politics and the Political

One of the most vital features of African heritage is the sense of community. The community has a religious foundation and goes beyond its visible members to include God, who is often regarded as the first grand ancestor or the overlord or chief (Uzukwu and Omenka 2006), the ancestors who are forebears of the community and uphold communal unity and cooperation, as well as those yet to be born. The divinities, who sustain social institutions as part of their responsibilities from the Creator, also form part of the community (Opoku 1990; Uzukwu and Omenka 2006).

The invisible members of the community wield a sacred influence in guiding every living person towards righteousness and justice (Opoku 1990). Traditional education prioritizes personal relationships, emphasizing that to be human is to be in relation not only with one's family, ethnic group, clan, or community but also with the spiritual beings and realities in the community and nature (Opoku 1990). In Africa, relationships are vital because each person shares common familyhood with others, including the dead, the living, and those yet to be born (Opoku 1990).

The community is thus an integrated entity underpinned by extended relationships aimed at enhancing unity and promoting greater cooperation. The community's structure is divinely given, and community loyalty has a religious dimension. Everyone is obliged to be loyal to their family or clan, and this loyalty has significant social implications.

For example, the Gonja people of northern Ghana and the Akan in southern Ghana emphasize cooperation, mutual helpfulness, generosity, and concern for group welfare as fundamental virtues of the community ideal and worthy of pursuit. These values are instilled in the individual, as it is assumed that life's meaning is realized through membership in a group (Nbonwura 2023). Busia aptly stated: "The individual [in Africa] is brought up to think of himself in relation to his group and to behave consistently in such a way as to bring honor and not disgrace to its members. The ideal set before him is mutual helpfulness and cooperation within the group of kinsfolk. Each member should help the

other in health or sickness, success or failure, poverty or plenty" (Busia 1962:33; see also Sarbah 2010).

According to Opoku (1990), the ideal person reaches beyond himself, moving from self-interest to selflessness to impact the lives of other community members. The quality of a person's life is measured by what they do for others rather than what they do for themselves. A person fulfills their obligation not by what they accumulate for themselves but by what they give to others (Bhusumane 2007). The emphasis is clearly on group life and what each member can do for the community (Opoku 1990). This focus on group life may seem to threaten individualism, suggesting that individual interests are subordinate to group interests. Nevertheless, in the African worldview, communalism best addresses the needs and interests of all community members and promotes the general welfare. Promoting group interests does not necessarily negate individual interests; the Gonja and Akan people of Ghana believe that individual well-being is intertwined with that of the group.

From these discussions, it is evident that African communalism and community concepts are imperative for politics, particularly in Ghana and Africa. In contemporary African politics, individualism, greed, and selfishness have supplanted the African spirit of communalism. Consequently, politics often fails to meet expectations. Ghana and the broader African continent frequently grapple with allegations of corruption, as individuals misappropriate public funds without guilt. This mismanagement affects ordinary citizens, leading to a high cost of living and lack of access to quality education, electricity, healthcare, and other public services.

Ironically, Ghana boasts an abundance of natural resources such as gold, diamonds, iron, bauxite, manganese, timber, cocoa, arable lands, and oil. However, these resources are not adequately harnessed to benefit the citizens and communities, evidenced by much of the population still living in abject poverty. For instance, about 5,400 schools in Ghana lack proper classrooms and desks, forcing children to attend classes under trees (Welsing 2021); preventable diseases claim the lives of children, and mothers die during childbirth due to lack of access to proper medical facilities (World Bank 2000-2003).

The paper found that many of the challenges confronting a country like Ghana stem from the abandonment of the African concept of community and communalism in relation to politics. Instead, concepts and ideologies alien to African society have been warmly embraced. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a retrospective look, especially in light of the Christian concept of the common good. It seems that politics in contemporary Africa has adopted foreign ideologies to the detriment of the ordinary African. This phenomenon necessitates that politics in Africa be stripped of its current alien elements and be given an African foundation, whereby politics in Africa will serve all people in the community, not just a privileged few.

The paper established from the discussions that, fundamentally, politics seeks the public good, the common good aims for the well-being of all in society, and Ubuntu, in tandem with the African concepts of community and communalism, emphasizes interdependence and collective well-being. This means that all these domains—common good, Ubuntu, and politics—are focused on the well-being of the human person. If this is the understanding, then there should be no reason for tensions among these domains. The question then is: how can these three concepts be integrated for more beneficial political leadership in Ghana and Africa? This question forms the discussion of the next section.

Common Good, Ubuntu, and Politics: a Path of Reconciliation and Integration

This section of the paper seeks to answer the question: Can the common good, Ubuntu, and politics be integrated? This work responds affirmatively, terming this reconciliation "holistic integration." An analysis of Aristotle's concept of the common good yields the same result as studying his idea of a social whole. From this, one can surmise that Aristotle's endorsement of the service conception of political authority posits that political authority exists for the well-being of its subjects. As highlighted in this paper, Aristotle, unlike Aquinas, did not approach the common good from a religious perspective. However, his thesis maintains that politics exists to serve the common good, which resides among the people in the polis. Similarly, the African concept of Ubuntu interweaves the truth that a person lives for others in the community, meaning that one person's life impacts another's.

Therefore, these three concepts—common good, Ubuntu, and politics—converge on the well-being of the human being, who is central to the polis. This paper adopts and describes these three concepts as rooted in secular, Christian, and traditional/cultural perspectives. Despite their different origins, there is no fundamental conflict among these concepts when considering their core spirit, which promises a better life for human beings. For the religious person (Christians), this better life is conceived as the hereafter, while the secular perspective focuses on the here and now without considerations of eternity.

This paper posits that these differing perspectives need not cause tension, as evidenced by centuries of Christian involvement in politics. Tension arises when politics and religion are seen as irreconcilable enemies, as argued in the separation view. Tension also occurs when religious individuals engage in politics without questioning its excesses, as the involvement position suggests. Additionally, there is tension when religious individuals believe they must transform politics from an inherently evil practice into something holy, as held by the transformation view. This view, often driven by fundamentalism, leads religious individuals to think they should take over politics to make it holy, given the perception that politics is corrupt.

The question then is how to mitigate these existing tensions. This paper proposes an approach called holistic integration. This approach recognizes that politics, like all human institutions, is imperfect and might have excesses, but this does not mean it should be entirely replaced by religion, as the transformation view suggests. Nor should it be ignored and left to exist independently, as the separation view suggests. Neither should Christians engage in politics uncritically, as the involvement view suggests. Instead, there should be a method to address and prune the excesses in politics so that it can become beneficial to all members of society. In Africa, this integration can be achieved by exposing the limitations of both politics and religion and uniting them on the African anthropological platform of Ubuntu. Hence, this fourth approach is termed holistic integration.

To achieve this, the paper advances four propositions: First, every Christian entering politics must recognize that human beings are central to all politics. This central human has needs that must be met on Earth to enhance their well-

being in anticipation of the hereafter, as the religious person believes. Similarly, the secular mind must acknowledge that since the human being is central to politics, every aspect of the human must be considered, not in isolation from other humans in the polis, as seen in modern liberal democracies. The human being exists because of, and in relation to, others in the polis, as Ubuntu suggests. Without others, an individual's existence loses its worth—no person is an island. This belief hinges on the fundamental Christian notion that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). Therefore, every Christian entering politics should use this core Christian belief as a guiding principle. The virtue of God's love is manifested in the common good of all humans (John 3:16).

Second, Christians involved in political leadership must accept that all resources originate from God for the benefit of humanity. If the essence of political leadership is to ensure that the polis' resources are managed prudently for the benefit of all, then a Christian politician should see themselves as a steward entrusted with the state's resources for the common good. The fundamental function of politics is to utilize resources for the common good. Furthermore, Ubuntu teaches us that what affects our neighbor in the community affects us and vice versa. Therefore, a Christian involved in politics must realize that prudent management of state resources will directly impact their neighbors. Consequently, they owe it to the community to fulfill the common good in the spirit of Ubuntu, with their eyes fixed on eternity in their management of state resources.

Third, Christians involved in political leadership must understand that their role is not to serve the interests of their political party or any other party, which has traditionally been the norm in Ghanaian political engagement. Partisanship must be discouraged at all political levels to achieve holistic integration. Christian politicians must avoid promoting their party or personal agenda over the common good. By implication, the purpose of politics cannot be achieved without reference to the virtues of Ubuntu. Politics, like Ubuntu, is tied to human well-being and the common good. If politics does not serve the common good in the spirit of Ubuntu, then it is meaningless in the African context. Unfortunately, contemporary African politics often sees individuals entering the political arena to serve parochial party interests rather than the public interest, despite their campaign promises. Therefore, to achieve holistic

integration where all people, regardless of background and status, can participate freely in political leadership, the practice of entering politics to promote party agendas must be eradicated. The goal should be to recalibrate the sense of political engagement from individualistic purposes to a sense of communalism.

Finally, every Christian has a calling and duty from God to fulfill on Earth. For some, this calling may be as evangelists, pastors, or apostles. Among these callings are also those called to serve in political leadership as part of their duty to God. This means that one enters politics with a divine mandate to be a voice for the unheard. This perspective is supported by Opuni-Frimpong (2015:8), director of Alliance for Christian Advocacy Africa (ACAA), who argues that there are several dimensions to the Christian calling and ministry. As God provides diverse gifts, He also assigns different services, including church-planting, prayer, and advocacy (Opuni-Frimpong 2015:9). Advocacy is an important ministry that God calls Christians into, and it should be embraced as fully as other callings (Opuni-Frimpong 2015:9). Such advocacy is especially needed in the political arena, where Christians can be a voice for the unheard and provide sight for those blinded by the polis. Simply put, every Christian entering politics must see it as a call to serve and not to dominate, which is often the case in contemporary Ghanaian politics.

This paper strongly agrees with Opuni-Frimpong and further asserts that the Church must create an environment where Christians who feel called to political leadership can pursue this calling without fear or uncertainty. Christians who understand their divine calling can serve more effectively in political leadership by following these four principles outlined in this work.

Conclusion

This paper explored the intricate interplay between the Christian concept of the common good, the African philosophy of Ubuntu, and their intersection within the realm of politics. It discussed the concepts of the common good and Ubuntu, their relationship to politics, and the potential for their integration and reconciliation for beneficial political involvement by Christians. The paper proposed "holistic integration" as a fourth stand regarding Christian political involvement.

To achieve this without the usual tensions between religion and politics, the paper advanced four key points toward achieving holistic integration of politics, the common good, and Ubuntu. This fourth approach—holistic integration—is imperative because it brings politics and the common good onto the platform of Ubuntu, making it uniquely different from other approaches in this discourse. It is important that politics in Africa be infused with the spirit of the common good and the spirit of Ubuntu, as demonstrated in this work. An embrace of these concepts by Christians entering politics would greatly revolutionize contemporary African politics, which has often been marred by greed, self-interest, and corruption.

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