




Overlapping Values in Christianity and African (Ghanaian) Traditional Culture

Efiinu Kwaku Obiako¹ , John Kwaku Opoku¹ , Eric Manu¹  & Seth Tweneboah² 

¹ Department of Religions and Human Values, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana.

² University of Education, Winneba, Ghana.

ABSTRACT

The study centres on the common moral values of Christianity and indigenous Ghanaian culture, with specific emphasis on the Fante culture. Ghana is considered a very religious country in West Africa; 71.3% of the total Ghanaian population is made up of Christians, according to the 2021 census. However, indigenous culture still influences the daily lives of Ghanaians. The study focuses on critical areas such as chastity, gender roles, fertility, procreation, and family honor to show similarities and differences between the values of the two cultures. The study uses the qualitative research method and comparative analysis to explore the similarities in the moral values of Christianity and indigenous Ghanaian culture. The research reveals similarities in the value of sexual purity. According to the study, the Bible teaches Christians to practice chastity before marriage and fidelity after marriage. Similarly, indigenous Ghanaian culture values sexual purity before marriage through rituals such as Dipo and Bragoro to maintain family honor. Both cultures value marriage as the right place for sex; however, they differ in how they enforce these values. Christianity encourages voluntary practice of these values through sermons from the Bible, while indigenous Ghanaian culture uses coercive traditions such as Trokosi, which is harmful to young girls. The authors of the study recommend that dialogue should be encouraged to bring these values together for the benefit of Ghanaian society today. This study bridges the gap between Christian and Ghanaian indigenous ethics by analyzing how overlapping values impact social cohesion, gender roles, and human rights.

Keywords: Christianity, African Traditional Culture, Values, Children, Sexuality

INTRODUCTION

Like other African countries, Ghanaians are known to be very religious. According to the 2021 population and housing census, 71.3% of Ghanaians are affiliated with the Christian faith, 19.9% and 3% of the population are adherents of the Islamic religion and African traditional religion, respectively.¹ Statistics show

¹ Ghana Statistical Service, “Ghana 2021 Population and Housing Census General Report,” 2021.

CORRESPONDENCE - Efiinu Kwaku Obiako Email: tonyefiinu@yahoo.com

PUBLICATION HISTORY - Received : 6th January, 2026 | Accepted: 21st April, 2026 | Published: 18th June, 2026.

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE – Obiako, Efiinu Kwaku, John Kwaku Opoku, Eric Manu, and Seth Tweneboah. “Overlapping Values in Christianity and African (Ghanaian) Traditional Culture.” *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 12, no.5 (2026): 169 - 181 . <https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.20261252>

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Christianity as a dominant religious force in Ghana. The emergence of Christianity in Ghana has significantly influenced the morals and cultural practices of indigenous Ghanaian communities. This transformation can be understood through various dimensions, including social cohesion, ethical frameworks, and the interplay between traditional beliefs and Christian teachings. Christianity has played a pivotal role in fostering social cohesion among diverse ethnic groups in Ghana by promoting shared values such as honesty, compassion, respect, good family life and sexual sanctity. Christian teachings have served as a moral compass for many Ghanaians. The introduction of Christian moral teachings has led to a re-evaluation of certain indigenous practices. For instance, traditional beliefs once considered acceptable, such as negative perceptions about twins and certain taboos related to fishing, have been challenged by Christian doctrines that promote the sanctity of life and ethical living.² This shift has resulted in a more refined moral outlook among many Ghanaians, aligning their behaviors with Christian values and a modern understanding of ethics.³

Nonetheless, it must be emphasized that before the advent of Christianity in Ghana, indigenous societies, especially among the Akan people, had well-established moral frameworks rooted in their traditional beliefs and customs. These moral systems were deeply intertwined with their religious practices, social structures, and environmental interactions. Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong contended that indigenous Ghanaians had a rich tapestry of spiritual beliefs that permeated all aspects of life. Religion was not merely a component of society; it was the lens through which individuals understood their existence and moral responsibilities.⁴ Each community had its unique deities and ancestral spirits, which guided ethical behavior and societal norms.⁵

This paper aims to examine the various similarities and differences in moral application and reinforcement between Christianity and indigenous African traditional culture. It examines some overlapping values such as chastity, gender roles, fertility and family honour in Christianity and African traditional culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Values in Christianity and African Traditional Culture

Christian values have been studied in-depth in various fields of theology, ethics, and pedagogy as values based on the teachings of Jesus Christ, the Bible, and Christianity as a religion. Christian values are commonly believed to be love, compassion, humility, forgiveness, justice, honesty, serving others, and respect for human dignity, among others. Various researchers have argued that Christian values, are not just individual values but are also public values that shape character, relationships, and social roles. A dominant theme is the identification of love as the fundamental Christian value.⁶ Biblical scholarship repeatedly locates the love of God and love of neighbor as the foundation of Christian ethics (Matt 22:37-40). Hauerwas & Wells argue that Christian morality is rooted in Christian discipleship, or the imitation of Christ, who exemplified self-giving love and concern for others.⁷ Christian values are not abstract concepts but are actualized as practices through worship, community, and obedience to God. Similarly, Wright argues that Christian ethics is rooted in the redemption narrative, in which Christians are called to express God's kingdom through compassionate and redemptive action.⁸

According to the research, basic Christian values include humility, forgiveness, and service. Humility is defined as a Christian virtue that helps to overcome pride and egocentricity, thus promoting true

² Catherine Forson Agbo, "The Parallel of Today's Christian Values To Cultural Values," Modern Ghana, January 19, 2019, <https://www.modernghana.com/lifestyle/13383/the-parallel-of-todays-christian-values-to-cultural-values.html>.

³ Agbo, "The Parallel of Today's Christian Values To Cultural Values."

⁴ Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong, "Akan Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the Christian Faith in Ghana: A Review of the Major Works of Robert Rattray.," *E-Journal of Religious & Theological Studies (ERATS)* 7, no. 8 (2021).

⁵ Opuni-Frimpong, "Akan Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the Christian Faith in Ghana: A Review of the Major Works of Robert Rattray," 107-119.

⁶ John R. Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 79.

⁷ Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

⁸ N. T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 26.

dependence on God.⁹ Similarly, forgiveness has been defined by Bonhoeffer as a unique Christian moral practice based on the forgiveness of the human race by God.¹⁰ These values are important because they promote the process of reconciliation in the family, church, and the larger community.

In academia, Christian values are often linked with moral development and character building. Researchers like Arthur and Groome argue that Christian education should promote virtues that guide behavior and decision-making. Therefore, values education underpinned by Christianity aims to promote individuals who exhibit a sense of responsibility, integrity, and love.¹¹ This is particularly relevant in a plural society, as issues regarding moral disintegration and corruption are acute.

African traditional cultural values have been extensively studied in the academia as the basis of the moral and social order of many African communities. Researchers have described African cultural heritage as spanning history, philosophy, ethics, education, medicine, politics, etc., thus demonstrating the integration of values with everyday life through common community practice. Awoniyi argues that African cultural heritage is rich but underutilized in the discourse on development today.¹² A major theme in scholarly research is communalism, which is sometimes expressed through Ubuntu philosophy. Gumbo's study shows that Ubuntu philosophy places significant emphasis on human relationships, care, generosity, humility, hospitality, and respect for elders, and it is highly different from individualism. Under this understanding, the child is socialized through obligations to other people, especially the elderly, and is judged on the basis of his or her ability to live in harmony with others.¹³ Therefore, it is seen that African traditional culture is relational and not individualistic, and an individual is seen as part of the community.

One recurring concern is the ethical content of African traditional values. In research on African traditional religion, the main cultural values highlighted include honesty, hospitality, respect for elders, the sanctity of life, the communal way of life, liberty, social justice, and the awareness of the divine. Similarly, if we examine the traditional festivals celebrated by the people, it is evident that African people use festivals, sayings, and communal rituals to instill values such as respect for age, honesty, covenant loyalty, industry, forgiveness, harmony, and cooperation.¹⁴ In all these values, there is a sense of how people should behave towards each other. Olasunkanmi asserts that Africa's fundamental cultural values have survived colonialism and westernization challenges and that attempts to replace them hinder development in Africa.¹⁵ In a similar vein, Awoniyi asserts that African values should not be perceived as old-fashioned and irrelevant; rather, they should be viewed as living resources with the potential to sustain development if critically reinterpreted for modern Africa.¹⁶

Overlapping Values in Christianity and African Traditional Culture

This study used a qualitative research approach with a comparative data analysis method to explore common moral values in both Christianity and traditional African societies in Ghana. The data collection process involved a thorough review of existing secondary sources. The study also used the content analysis technique to analyse the main findings during the research.

Christianity and African traditional moral systems are diverse in many ways; however, they also share some common characteristics. Christianity is a worldwide faith made up of many different denominations, each with its own history, doctrines, and practices. Similarly, African traditional moral systems come from a wide variety of indigenous cultures all across the African continent, each with unique customs, languages, and ways of life. Christianity centres on the Bible, emphasising divine revelation, personal salvation, and

⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R.H. Fuller (London: SCM Press, 1959), 45.

¹⁰ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 62.

¹¹ James Arthur, *Education with Character: The Moral Economy of Schooling* (London: Routledge, 2003), 185.

¹² Sunday Awoniyi, "African Cultural Values: The Past, Present and Future," *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 17, no. 1 (2015): 1–13.

¹³ Mishack T. Gumbo, "Elders Decry the Loss of Ubuntu," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5, no. 10 (2014): 67–77.

¹⁴ Gumbo, "Elders Decry the Loss of Ubuntu," 67–77.

¹⁵ Aborisade Olasunkanmi, "A Philosophical Appraisal of Basic Cultural Values in African Tradition," *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance* 6, no. 2 (2015): 1–12.

¹⁶ Awoniyi, "African Cultural Values: The Past, Present and Future," 1–13.

community of believers, with moral teachings often highlighting love, justice, and purity. On the other hand, African traditional moral systems are mostly oral traditions, deeply tied to their indigenes' spiritual beliefs, ancestor worship, and communal living. African traditional morality tends to focus on the well-being of the community, maintaining social harmony, and preserving family lines. The sections examine some differences and similarities in the application and reinforcement of Christian and African traditional cultures.

Chastity (Purity and Sexual Conduct)

Chastity, which comes from the Latin words *castus* (meaning pure) and *castigo* (meaning to chastise or discipline), refers to sexual purity and self-control.¹⁷ Different cultures view it in various ways—for example, Christian traditions and African traditional moral systems both highlight the importance of controlling sexual behaviour, but they approach it differently. In Christianity, chastity is seen as bringing together one's sexuality and spirituality in harmony. For unmarried people, it means abstaining from sex, while for married couples, it is about being faithful and sharing an exclusive sexual relationship with one's spouse throughout life.¹⁸ According to Hayne, early Christian writings, such as the Acts of Paul and Thecla, often celebrated virginity and sexual self-control, linking these qualities closely to salvation and resurrection. She further explains that the Gospel of Thomas, for instance, contains passages that promote celibacy and remaining childless as ideals.¹⁹ This strong focus on celibacy in early Christianity was so prominent, as mentioned in 1 Timothy 4:3 and led to an internal debate among early Christians about whether to embrace extreme asceticism or the importance of marriage.²⁰ This history reveals that Christian views on chastity have never been fixed; instead, they evolved through ongoing theological discussions, trying to balance strict ascetic ideals with biblical support for marriage. This is a great example of how Christian traditions shift and reinterpret their core beliefs in response to internal disagreements and changing cultural contexts.

In the Catholic Church, chastity is defined as refraining from sexual activity outside of marriage; Celibacy, which is an important part of a consecrated life, is a requirement for the clergy to remain unmarried and abstinent since the ruling of the Synod of Elvira in 306 CE. This rule was officially written into the church's law at the Second Lateran Council in 1139 CE.²¹ Interestingly, some Protestants, such as the Bruderhof, also take vows of chastity.²² It is worth noting that in all Christian traditions, marital chastity, which means being sexually faithful to one's spouse, is universally expected. Additionally, abstaining from sexual activity for a time after a spouse dies is recognised as well.²³

In many African cultures, virginity and sexual chastity are highly valued, especially for young, unmarried men and women. In Ghana, rites of passage such as the Dipo and Bragoro ceremonies mark the journey from adolescence to adulthood, shaping how young women approach their sexuality before marriage and reinforcing the expectation that they remain chaste until marriage.²⁴ In some African communities, the strong emphasis on virginity has unfortunately led to harmful beliefs and practices that are harmful to young girls. These include child sexual abuse, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, and harmful rituals such as female genital mutilation (FGM), which involves cutting or damaging female genital organs to stop sexual pleasure, all in the name of purity.²⁵ There are also disturbing reports of forced sex in certain areas in Africa. For example, the Trokosi system, which forces young virgin girls to live in fetish shrines as sex slaves,

¹⁷ M. Mowczko, "Exploring the Biblical Theology of Christian Egalitarianism," 2025, <https://margmowczko.com/chastity-salvation-1-timothy-215/>.

¹⁸ Mowczko, "Exploring the Biblical Theology of Christian Egalitarianism."

¹⁹ Léonie Hayne, "Thecla and the Church Fathers," *Vigiliae Christianae* 48, no. 3 (1994): 209–18.

²⁰ Hayne, "Thecla and the Church Fathers," 209-218.

²¹ Peter Robert Lamont Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (Columbia University Press, 1988), 85-99.

²² Craig S Keener, *Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul*, Grand Rapids (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1992), 119.

²³ Keener, *Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul*, 119.

²⁴ Aziza Naa-Kaa Botchway, "Abolished by Law-Maintained in Practice: The Trokosi as Practices in Parts of the Republic of Ghana," *FIU L. Rev.* 3 (2007): 369.

²⁵ Botchway, "Abolished by Law-Maintained in Practice: The Trokosi as Practices in Parts of the Republic of Ghana."

supposedly to prevent disasters from the family.²⁶ This harsh reality reveals a painful contradiction: Although purity is deeply valued, the way it is enforced causes great suffering and injustice for women and girls. It highlights a critical challenge that balances respect for cultural traditions with the need to protect individual human rights and well-being.

Both Christianity and African traditional moral systems highly value sexual purity, especially when it comes to premarital chastity and faithfulness within marriage. Both see sexual behaviour as having grave moral and social impacts, affecting not just the individual but the entire community. In both traditions, marriage is seen as the proper and rightful context for sexual activity. However, there are important differences in why and how these values are upheld. Christianity emphasises chastity based on spiritual purity, the goal of salvation, and the belief that marriage is a sacred covenant that reflects the bond between Christ and the Church.²⁷ While Christianity acknowledges social consequences for breaking rules on sexuality, it is based primarily on moral teaching, discipline, and personal commitment to enforce them. On the other hand, African traditional moral systems attach sexual purity more directly to family honour, community well-being, maintaining the family line, and preparing individuals, especially women, for marriage and adulthood. Enforcement in some African traditional societies includes enforcement of customs and rites of passage. Unfortunately, some practices involve harsh measures like physical abuse or social exclusion, mainly aimed at women, which is generally not part of Christian methods of promoting sexual morality.

Gender Roles (Complementary, Authority and Equality)

Different Christian denominations and African traditional societies interpret and assign gender roles in diverse ways, but both grapple with questions about how men and women complement each other, share authority, and pursue equality. At the heart of Christian theology is the belief that men and women are created equally in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27) and both have the responsibility to care for the creation. This means that every person, male or female, reflects God's image and has immense value.²⁸ Moreover, Christian teaching stresses that in terms of salvation, all are equal (Gal. 3:28). This is reinforced by 1 Peter 3:7, which describes men and women as "co-heirs of the grace of life."²⁹

Notwithstanding this fundamental theological principle of equality, there are differing perspectives and views in relation to the practical implementation of gender roles. Some of the perspectives on gender roles in Christianity include: Egalitarianism, which contends that God does not assign leadership roles based on gender, means that both men and women are equally called to lead in all areas of life. On the other hand, complementarianism teaches that men and women have equal value but distinct, complementary roles. This perspective often highlights the husband's role as the "head" of the wife, responsible for leading, protecting, and providing, based on passages like 1 Corinthians 11:3 and Ephesians 5:23.³⁰ In many churches that hold this view, some leadership and teaching roles are typically reserved for men, seen not as a result of sin but as part of God's original plan. This approach also recognises the biological differences between men and women, especially when it comes to having children.³¹

In the Catholic Church, only men can be ordained deacons, priests, or bishops. This is because the Church believes that it does not have the authority to ordain women, based on the example of Jesus choosing only men as apostles and consistent practice throughout history. While Pope Francis has opened up more

²⁶ Botchway, "Abolished by Law-Maintained in Practice: The Trokosi as Practices in Parts of the Republic of Ghana."

²⁷ Daniel Dei, "Christian Ethical Perspective on Sexual Orientation and Sexual Behavior," *Qeios*, October 11, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.32388/9FKIVN>.

²⁸ Priscilla Queen Kparevzua and Henry Abaya, "Women Depiction and Traditional Gender Roles in Biblical and Select Christian Communities in Jos," *International Journal of Applied Science and Research* 5, no. 6 (2022): 76–86.

²⁹ Samuel Kwasi Frimpong, "The Role of Religion in Gender Inequality in Ghana: The Christian Perspective.," *E-Journal of Religious & Theological Studies (ERATS)* 8, no. 9 (2022).

³⁰ D. Burk, "The Roles of Men and Women," July 10, 2025, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-roles-of-men-and-women/>.

³¹ Burk, "The Roles of Men and Women."

roles for women in Vatican leadership, he clearly opposes the ordination of women and warns against making them clerics.³²

Although the Orthodox Church prohibits women from being ordained as deacons, priests, or bishops, and generally from minor orders, women have always been vital to the Church's life and mission. Throughout Orthodox history, women courageously served in many capacities, including as catechists, choir members and directors, parish educators and leaders, scholars, and members of church councils.³³

On the contrary, Women's participation in Ghanaian Protestant churches is pervasive, encompassing a wide array of activities that are vital for the daily functioning and spiritual life of congregations. They are observed to be highly active in various church departments, including the Women's Fellowship, singing bands, Sunday school, and evangelism. Their involvement in these areas is frequently described as the backbone of the church, highlighting their indispensable nature. Beyond the immediate congregational sphere, women's ministries are particularly strong in areas of social welfare, community development, and evangelism. They actively participate in initiatives related to health, education, and poverty alleviation, thereby extending the church's influence far beyond its immediate walls and demonstrating its practical relevance to social needs. Furthermore, some churches, particularly within the Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions, offer programs specifically aimed at women's economic empowerment, such as vocational training and microfinance initiatives.³⁴ This reflects a practical, holistic approach to ministry that addresses the socio-economic needs of women, contributing to their overall well-being and that of their families.

In traditional denominations such as the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, women frequently face significant challenges in reaching leadership roles due to deeply ingrained cultural and traditional barriers, as well as the widespread presence of male dominance. Although women constitute the numerical majority, their representation in decision-making bodies and formal leadership structures is often notably limited. In contrast, the Methodist Church Ghana has taken a progressive step by ordaining women, indicating a move towards formal recognition of their pastoral calling. However, even where ordination of women is possible, challenges persist regarding their full acceptance and placement in influential positions, suggesting that policy changes do not always immediately translate into cultural shifts.³⁵

In African traditional societies, men and women usually had different but complementary roles that helped the community thrive. Men often took care of hunting, protecting the community, and leadership, while women took care of household chores, childcare, and cooking. However, these roles were not always static as women often worked in farming, trading, and crafts, playing a big part in supporting their families and communities economically.³⁶ Furthermore, power structures in African societies are varied. While men typically had formal authority as heads of households, clans, or lineages, managing resources and making key decisions, women played vital and diverse roles. Many women gained influence through their positions as mothers, their status growing as they had children and extended their family lines. In some matrilineal cultures, such as the Akan of Ghana, women held substantial political and economic power since lineage and inheritance were traced through the mother's side. Even in places where men dominated formal leadership, women often had strong influence within the household. Some communities, such as the Igbo in Nigeria, even created separate political groups and assemblies where women could come together, voice their concerns, and make decisions independently of men.³⁷ Throughout many African societies, elders, both men and women, were deeply respected and carried a significant weight in decision-making due to their wisdom and life experience.

³² C. Dulle, "How Pope Francis Changed the Place of Women in the Church.," July 21, 2025,

<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2025/04/21/pope-francis-legacy-women-church-leadership-249956>.

³³ C. F. Frost, "Women in the Orthodox Church Group," 2025, <https://iota-web.org/women-orthodox-church-group/>.

³⁴ Solomon Kofi Amoah, Josephine Semanu Safo, and Linda Ama Owusuaa Amoah, "Opposition to Women in Congregational Leadership: A Sociocultural Perspective," *Journal of Advocacy, Research and Education* 2, no. 1 (2015): 3–12.

³⁵ Amoah, Safo, and Amoah, "Opposition to Women in Congregational Leadership: A Sociocultural Perspective."

³⁶ Sylvia Bawa, "Christianity, Tradition, and Gender Inequality in Postcolonial Ghana," *African Geographical Review* 38, no. 1 (2019): 54–66.

³⁷ Bawa, "Christianity, Tradition, and Gender Inequality in Postcolonial Ghana," 1-16.

Akosua Adomako also argued that, although women have played influential roles in many African societies, widespread gender inequality remains a significant challenge, deeply rooted in long-standing customs and traditions. Religion and culture strongly define gender roles, often placing the primary responsibility for the physical and spiritual well-being of the family on women. The expectation that women must be submissive to their husbands and communities greatly restricts their opportunities for personal growth and independence. From the moment a girl is born, she is often seen as belonging to her family, and upon marriage, her *ownership* transfers to her husband, leaving little space for her own choices or desires.³⁸ Traditional gender roles typically saddle women with a heavy workload ranging from extensive agricultural duties to managing family survival, leading to a situation that is akin to domestic servitude. This burden severely limits women's ability to pursue their own goals. Additionally, in some African traditional cultures, women do not have the right to inherit property; instead, they themselves can be inherited by relatives of their deceased husbands, reflecting the deep-seated belief that wives are considered their husbands' possessions.³⁹

Adepuju Olufem posit that Traditional African gender roles are often talked about as if men and women have clearly defined, balanced responsibilities that fit together nicely. But the reality is quite different. In their view, women usually end up carrying a heavier load, especially with agricultural work and taking care of the family.⁴⁰ This often feels more like domestic enslavement, leaving them little time or freedom to pursue their own goals. Although the idea of complementary roles might suggest harmony and teamwork, it actually masks deep-rooted inequalities and exploitation. This imbalance impacts women's financial independence, access to education, and overall quality of life. It is a clear reminder that cultural traditions, even those framed positively, can sometimes reinforce unfair systems and block women from reaching their full potential.⁴¹

From the discourse, it is deduced that both Christianity and African traditional moral systems mix complementary and hierarchical gender roles. In both, men generally have primary authority and leadership in public life, while women's roles are highly valued within the family, especially around nurturing, domestic duties and supporting the community. However, they diverge quite a bit in their core theological or philosophical reasons. Christianity, particularly in modern interpretations, emphasises that all people are equal because everyone is made in God's image and shares equally in salvation (as highlighted in Gal. 3:28). This belief has fueled ongoing debates such as those between egalitarian and complementarian views on gender roles in leadership. These discussions have paved the way for greater gender equality and led to varied practices among different Christian groups. On the other hand, African traditional systems sometimes grant women significant influence, such as through queen mothers or women's councils, but they generally uphold strong patriarchal traditions in which a woman's social status is closely tied to marriage and childbearing. In some situations, women may have limited autonomy or be seen more as property, with deeply entrenched cultural customs, which can slow societal change.

Fertility and Procreation

Both Christianity and African traditional moral systems deeply value fertility and the ability to have children, although the spiritual and social reasons for valuing fertility differ. In Christianity, the command or blessing to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28) is a central teaching that shapes how human sexuality and reproduction are understood. Although some parts of the Old Testament present having children more as a blessing than a strict command, this idea has long influenced the views of the Church on marriage.⁴² By this, the Catholic Church takes a firm and clear position on procreation and contraception. According to its doctrine, every sexual act within marriage should be both a way of uniting the spouses and open to creating

³⁸ Akosua Adomako Ampofo, *Gender and Society in Africa: An Introduction*, Sub-Saharan Publishers, Accra (Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2014).

³⁹ Ampofo, "Gender and Society in Africa: An Introduction," 94-115.

⁴⁰ Adepuju Johnson-Bashua, "African Traditional Religion, Gender Equality, and Feminism," in *The Palgrave Handbook of African Traditional Religion* (Springer, 2022), 303-16.

⁴¹ Johnson-Bashua, "African Traditional Religion, Gender Equality, and Feminism."

⁴² Burk, "The Roles of Men and Women."

new life. The Church considers artificial contraception to be fundamentally wrong and serious against the virtue of marital chastity because it intentionally blocks the possibility of life.⁴³ Sexual acts that close off the chance of procreation are also not allowed. However, natural family planning is accepted because it works with the body's natural cycle and respects how conception happens naturally. The Catholic Church teaches that its position on the immorality of contraception is final and unchangeable.⁴⁴

Today, Christians have a wide range of opinions about using birth control, and these beliefs often depend on which group or tradition someone belongs to. In the past, influential Protestant leaders like Martin Luther and John Calvin were firmly against contraception. They taught that trying to avoid pregnancy was morally wrong. For instance, Luther was extremely critical of those who did not want children, saying their legacy should be erased from memory, while Calvin described attempts to block conception as an unforgivable act.⁴⁵ Things are quite different now among many mainline Protestant and evangelical Christians. For them, the biblical instruction to "have dominion over creation" is understood as a call to manage their families responsibly. This means couples thoughtfully consider when and if to have more children based on practical factors such as their careers, finances, and the needs of their existing family. These Christians also value marriage and sex for reasons beyond having kids; they see it as a way to nurture love, enjoy companionship, and even support their callings as a couple. At the same time, some conservative evangelical Christians hold views much closer to those found in traditional Catholic teaching. They warn that using contraception separates the life-creating and relationship-deepening aspects of sex, which can lead to seeing children more as a burden than a blessing. They believe that this breaks the intended link between love and openness to life in marriage.⁴⁶ Ultimately, much of the debate comes down to how Christians read Genesis 1:28, where God tells humans to "be fruitful and multiply." Some treat this as a direct command to have many children, while others see it more as an invitation or blessing, emphasising the importance of family planning that fits their personal circumstances and the modern world. Simply put, the varied opinions of Christians on contraception come down to greater differences in how they interpret the Bible, weigh tradition against modern ideas, and apply their faith to everyday choices, especially given the size and diversity of the Christian community.

In African traditional moral systems, human sexuality within marriage is deeply tied to the continuation and growth of the family line. Marriage is not just about two people coming together. It is seen as a sacred union closely linked to bringing new life into the world, which ensures the survival of both the family and the larger community. Ancestral beliefs play a powerful role, especially in patrilineal societies where children are considered to belong to the husband's lineage. When fertility issues such as low birth rates, miscarriages, or infertility occur, they are often interpreted as signs of spiritual trouble, such as the ancestors are unhappy or punishing the family. Due to this, the drive to preserve one's family line is strong and guides decisions around having children.

Ancestral spirits are believed to protect and support living family members, and in turn, the descendants honor these spirits through rituals. This close connection turns fertility into more than just a biological process; it becomes a spiritual and social responsibility that shapes the position of a person both in life and after death, as well as the well-being of the whole community. This creates significant social and spiritual pressure to have children. Sadly, those who cannot have kids often face stigma, emotional pain, and exclusion, since their infertility is seen not just as a personal loss but as a spiritual punishment, which can harm their social status and access to community blessings. Marriage itself is more than a union of two people; it is a major event for the families involved, forming strong social and financial ties. The tradition of bride price highlights this connection clearly: it symbolizes that when a woman marries, her role, especially

⁴³ Katie Singer, *The Garden of Fertility* (New York: Avery: Penguin Group., 2004), 226 - 227.

⁴⁴ Singer, *The Garden of Fertility*, 226–227.

⁴⁵ Burk, "The Roles of Men and Women."

⁴⁶ Alexander Izuchukwu Abasili, "The Case of 'Suspected Adulteress': Reading Numbers 5: 11-31 from the Perspective of a Married African Woman," *Old Testament Essays* 34, no. 2 (2021): 385–403.

in bearing children and supporting the family, is now shared with her husband's family. This shows just how central having children within marriage is in these African traditions.⁴⁷

The present discussion unveils that both Christianity and traditional African beliefs place a strong emphasis on having children and continuing the family line. In both cultures, children are considered a true blessing and essential to the purpose and future of the family. Marriage, in both traditions, is regarded as a sacred institution, the rightful and proper avenue for bringing children into the world. While both value procreation, the reasons behind their perspectives differ. In Christianity, having children is often understood as obeying God's command and blessing, honouring the sacredness of life created in God's image, and fulfilling the purpose of marriage. Meanwhile, many African traditions consider fertility as deeply connected to honouring ancestors, with preserving the family line seen as a vital spiritual and social duty. There is often a strong fear that failing to do so could upset the ancestors, adding serious weight to the responsibility of having children. When it comes to contraception, the differences become clear: Catholic Christianity generally opposes artificial birth control because it conflicts with the purpose of marriage, although some Protestant groups are more accepting of it as a responsible choice. In contrast, many African traditions prioritise procreation so strongly that actively preventing children could be seen as disrupting natural and spiritual balance.

Family Honour and Collective Identity

Family honour is of deep moral importance in both Christian and African traditional cultures, shaping how people behave and how communities understand themselves. In Christianity, the idea of honouring one's family comes straight from Scripture. For example, the Ten Commandments say, "Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land the LORD your God is giving you" (Exo. 20:12). This command, reinforced in the New Testament (Eph. 6:1-3), is often called "the first commandment with a promise," connecting respect for family with blessings and well-being. It is the very first commandment that focuses on one's relationships with others.⁴⁸ Back in biblical times, family honour was not just about personal respect; it was also tied to social standing and how the community viewed a family. Take the story of Noah and his sons (Gen 9:20-23): Ham dishonoured his father by showing disrespect, while Shem and Japheth honoured him by covering him. Family honour also reflects personal moral qualities such as integrity, honesty, and righteousness, as Proverbs 22:1 says, "A good name is more desirable than great riches."⁴⁹

According to the Topical Encyclopedia, Joseph's decision to forgive and make peace with his brothers, even after they betrayed him, really shows how strong family honour is when it is rooted in good values (Gen. 50: 15-21). But the Bible also reminds us of the serious fallout when family honour is shattered, like with Absalom's rebellion against his father, King David, which tore their family apart and ended badly for Absalom.⁵⁰ This shows that family honour in the Bible is all about respect, doing what is right, and caring for the wellbeing of both the family and the wider community.

In many African traditional societies, family honour is more than just a value; it is a core part of who a person is and how he/she is seen within the community. Often, protecting the family's reputation is more important than personal freedom or individual achievements, with the needs of the group preceding those of the individual.⁵¹ The idea of honour is deeply tied to gender, especially affecting women in profound ways. Women can shame to their families through disapproved actions, particularly those related to sexuality, leading to social and emotional pressure to maintain the family's reputation. Men also play a crucial role in

⁴⁷ Abasili, "The Case of Suspected Adulteress": Reading Numbers 5: 11-31 from the Perspective of a Married African Woman."

⁴⁸ Ajith Fernando, "We Need to Help New Converts from Non-Christian Backgrounds Honor Their Families," July 24, 2025, <https://www.9marks.org/article/we-need-to-help-new-converts-from-non-christian-backgrounds-honor-their-families/>.

⁴⁹ Fernando, "We Need to Help New Converts from Non-Christian Backgrounds Honor Their Families"; Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 29.

⁵⁰ Topical Encyclopedia, "The Importance of Family Honor," 2025.

⁵¹ Ebenezer Boakye, "Decoupling African Traditional Religion and Culture from the Family Life of Africans: Calculated Steps in Disguise," *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research* 2, no. 3 (2021): 202-12.

maintaining their family's honour. They have the power to raise the respected status of their family. In places where legal authority is weak, honour systems often arise, putting the responsibility on men to protect their families and build a trustworthy reputation. Sometimes, this means using anger or even violence to show that they should not be taken lightly. A person's honour comes from their own actions and those of their family, and failing to respond to insults or wrongs can deeply damage that honour.⁵²

In many African communities, cheating on a spouse is taken very seriously because marriage is viewed as a sacred and unbreakable bond. Sexual faithfulness is deeply related to protecting the family's lineage and honour. Although the rules are supposed to apply to both men and women, women often get hit with much harsher judgment because of traditional patriarchal values.⁵³

Both Christianity and African traditional moral systems place a strong importance on family honour, considering it as a shared value in which one person's actions affect the whole family. In both, honour is tied to good behaviour and reputation in the community, and dishonour can lead to serious social and personal consequences. Respecting elders and parents is also key in both traditions. However, there is a major difference in how they balance individual freedom and group identity. Christianity values family honour but lays more emphasis on personal conscience, a direct relationship with God, and following divine laws, even if that means going against family expectations, such as Jesus' teaching in Matthew 10:34-36 about putting Him before family. African traditions, on the other hand, often prioritise the collective family honour over individual rights or achievements, sometimes limiting personal freedom. Another big difference is how honour is enforced regarding gender. In many African traditional societies, a woman's chastity is central to family honour, which often means women face harsher blame, punishment, and control over their bodies if they are seen to break sexual norms. Examples include practices such as female genital mutilation or strict penalties for adultery. Christian teachings promote fidelity for both men and women, but they generally do not include the severe, gender-specific punishments found in some African cultures.

DISCUSSION

In the sphere of sexual behavior, both traditions place chastity at the heart of their moralities; yet again, their underlying reasons differ. Christian purity is based on spiritual salvation and the idea of the human body as a temple. Moral teachings and personal commitment are Christian approaches to enforcing purity. Traditional purity, on the other hand, is viewed through the lenses of family honor and social well-being. Traditional purity is sometimes reinforced by rigid rites of passage. The critical tension here is when traditional purity enforcements become counterproductive, such as in the case of Trokosi or practices such as female genital mutilation. Such practices are in violation of contemporary human rights standards and individualistic Christian dignity. Similarly, in both traditions, the role of women in society reflects a mix of egalitarianism and hierarchical thinking. While Christian thinking is based on the equality of all humans based on the concept of the *Imago Dei*, in practice, Christian thinking ranges from egalitarian to complementarian thinking. This sometimes limits women's formal leadership. Traditional African societies accord women significant informal power; yet again, women bear a heavy burden in traditional societies in the form of domestic servitude. Finally, the common theme of fertility points to a mutual reverence for procreation. In the Christian case, this is usually based on a divine command to be fruitful. Contrariwise, in traditional society, this is usually premised on a spiritual responsibility to one's ancestors to ensure the continuation of one's lineage. The concomitant stigma of infertility is also a challenge in both cases. However, approaches to modern family planning vary between Catholics/conservatives and Protestants and traditionalists. Ultimately, family honor is the collective identity that unifies these two domains. Both share deference to elders/parents and a view that the individual's behavior reflects on the group. However, in Christian society, this is complicated by the tension between individual conscience and one's primary loyalty to God. In contrast, in traditional society, the group comes first, even at the expense of the individual. This tension suggests that the moral environment of contemporary Ghana is not so much a synthetic addition of two

⁵² Boakye, "Decoupling African Traditional Religion and Culture from the Family Life of Africans: Calculated Steps in Disguise."

⁵³ Abasili, "The Case of 'Suspected Adulteress': Reading Numbers 5: 11-31 from the Perspective of a Married African Woman."

religions but rather a dynamic dialogue. What is also clear is that for a harmonious future in Ghana, there is an urgent need to dialogue on how best to harmonize these values in such a way that cultural heritage is preserved without compromising the inalienable rights and dignity of all people.

CONCLUSION

The paper has examined Christian and African traditional religious values in relation to sexuality. It reveals that both religions share comparable beliefs, teaching methods, and social frameworks. Nonetheless, their interaction can also generate tensions and moral dilemmas that people must navigate in the context of sexuality. It demonstrates that the relationship between Christian and traditional values is not static or merely additive but rather dynamic —shaped by rituals, dialogue, and daily experiences.

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ABOUT AUTHORS

Rev. Efiinu Kwaku Obiako is an ordained minister of the Assemblies of God, Ghana, and currently serves as the Regional Superintendent of Central Region B. He has served the church faithfully in various leadership positions, including Deacon, District Secretary, District Pastor, and Regional Secretary. He is also an adjunct lecturer at the Assemblies of God Theological and Missions Seminary. Rev. Obiako holds postgraduate degrees from the University of Cape Coast and is currently completing his doctoral studies in Religious Studies at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). Through his ministry and academic contributions, he continues to impact the church and society with sound biblical teaching and leadership.

Rev Fr. Prof John Kweku Opoku is a Lecturer and professor of religion and bioethics in the department of religion and human development at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology.

Dr. Eric Manu is a lecturer at the Department of Religion and Human Development, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Ghana. He holds a PhD in Religious Studies from KNUST. His research focus is on contemporary Christianity, with particular interest in African Pentecostal mission and development, ethics, and the philosophy of new religious movements. Eric has published several works on Pentecostal Christianity, among other topics, in reputable journals. His most recent projects explore Neo-pentecostal mission healthcare and poverty reduction in Ghana; Unity and Diversity among Ghana's new Prophetic Churches; The Reception of Prophet of the Old Testament in the New Testament and its Impact on the activities of the Neo-Prophetic Movement in Ghana.

Prof. Seth Tweneboah is an Associate Professor at the Centre for African Studies of the University of Education, Winneba, Ghana. He received his PhD in Religious Studies (with specialization in law and politics) from the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. Seth has an MPhil from the University of Ghana, Legon and an MA from Florida International University, Miami. His research focuses on religious human rights and the religion-law interrelationships in Africa. He is the author of *Religion, Law, Politics and the State in Africa: Applying Legal Pluralism in Ghana*.