

# Theological and Ethical Reflections on Care for Widows from an African Christian Perspective



Isaac Boaheng<sup>1</sup>  & Samuel Boahen<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lecturer in Theology and Christian Ethics, Christian Service University College, Kumasi-Ghana; Research Fellow, University of the Free State, South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Ministerial Student through Theological Education by Extension, Trinity Theological Seminary, Accra-Ghana; Theology Student, Christian Service University, College, Kumasi-Ghana.

## ABSTRACT

This paper is a literature-based study that offers a critical analysis of widowhood from biblical and traditional African socio-cultural perspectives. The paper analyzed Scriptures on God's standards for caring for widows and books, journal articles, and dissertations on widowhood in Africa and found that widowhood in most African societies is characterized by unethical rituals, mandatory remarriages, harassment, denial, solitude, impoverishment, loss of social status, and depression as well as financial, sexual and social exploitations. Having offered theological and ethical reflections on the care for widows from the African Christian perspective, the paper suggested that the church must allocate a substantial part of its income to help the needy in general, more so widows. Traditional authorities are also encouraged to eliminate/modify unethical widowhood practices. The paper contributes to the ongoing scholarly discourse on African cultural transformation and female empowerment from an African Christian perspective.

Correspondence

Isaac Boaheng

Email: [revisaacboaheng@gmail.com](mailto:revisaacboaheng@gmail.com)

Publication History

Received 4th February, 2022

Accepted 28th March, 2022

Published online 12th April, 2022

**Keywords:** *Africa, Christianity, Ethical, Theological, Widows, Widowhood*

© 2022 The Author(s). Published and Maintained by Noyam Publishers.

This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## INTRODUCTION

In Africa, widowhood rites are a very important part of death and funeral rituals. A widow is a woman who has lost her husband through death and has not married again. Widowhood rites refer to the rituals and customs that are performed for a woman when her husband dies, to ward off evil spirits and to sever the relationship between the deceased and the living spouse.<sup>1</sup> Widowhood rites begin right after the death of a spouse.<sup>2</sup> Though widowhood/widowerhood is prescribed for both widows and widowers, the latter go through less stringent rituals as compared to the former.<sup>3</sup> A widower is a man who, after losing his wife through death, has not married again. In many African societies, the concept of widowerhood is not well known either because there are other wives available to the widower (if he is polygamous) or because there is

<sup>1</sup> Abanga as cited in Samuel Atindanbila et al., "Effects of Widowhood Rites on the Psychosocial Well-being of Women in Nadowli district (Upper West Region-Ghana)," *The International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention* vol. 1, issues 6, (2014): 430 -436, 430.

<sup>2</sup> Wuraola C. Adeyemo, "Widowhood and its practices: Causes, effects and the possible way out for widows and women folk," *World Journal of Education Research*, volume 3(2), (2016): 1-8, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Dolphyne as cited in Atindanbila et al., "Effects of Widowhood Rites on the Psychosocial Well-being of Women in Nadowli District (Upper West Region-Ghana)," 430.

an expectation that he will soon marry.<sup>4</sup> According to African traditions and practices, a widow who wishes to remarry after the death of her husband would have to wait for at least a year before being allowed to do so. However, African customs allows for a widower to marry only after six months.<sup>5</sup> One of the reasons for making the widow wait for not less than one year before marrying is that she may unknowingly be pregnant for the deceased husband; therefore, should she marry early after the demise of her husband, she might mistakenly “give” the pregnancy to the wrong man. After waiting for a year, and not showing any sign of pregnancy, everyone is now sure that she did not carry any baby for the deceased husband.

Widowhood rites have some positive consequences on women. G.I.K. Tasié asserts that “... primarily, widowhood rites in Africa were not intended to de-womanise African womanhood, or impoverish and oppress women; nor are they part of the so-called male chauvinism. Instead, by and large, widowhood rites are basically intended for the general well-being of the widow.”<sup>6</sup> The widowhood rites help the widow to sever her relationship with the late husband. For example, among the Akan of Ghana, the widow is made to shave her hair to signify that the *tire adeε* or *tire nsa* (the money that the deceased husband paid on the day of their marriage for the “wife’s hair”) is no more there; therefore, the deceased husband has no right over the widow’s hair when it starts growing again.<sup>7</sup> On the day of burial, the widow uses the hair in a ritual which not only severs her relationship with her deceased husband but also indicates to the ancestral world that her late husband was a responsible person who paid her bride price.

Also, a padlock with a black thread running through it is put around the widow’s waist to hang directly over her “womanhood.” This tradition seeks to convey to the widow that it was only her late husband who had unlimited access to her “private part” and so she should temporarily close it (now that the husband is no more alive).<sup>8</sup> This is meant to keep the widow sexually pure during the period of widowhood. In addition to keeping the widow sexually pure during her widowhood, the “private-part-locking ritual” serves to protect the widow any sexual interference from the spirit of her deceased husband.

Also, widowhood rites prepare widows to recover emotionally and strengthen them for the life ahead. For example, the financial support received from sympathizers may also provide resources for the widow after the period of widowhood. Widowhood is the time to learn many things in preparation for life beyond widowhood. The following quote by Fosua Comfort who is a widow explains this point: “I was taught a great lesson from the women caretakers who took care of me during the widowhood rites. ...The rites performed on me during widowhood were enough to prepare me to be able to live an independent life. I may be so sad, lonely and broken, yet when I remember what they taught me I become much encouraged to move on.”<sup>9</sup> Widows learn to adjust to normal life as they go through widowhood. Counselling is therefore very important during this period. Traditionally, people around the widow offer the needed counselling services. However, the church may also play an active role in the process.

Furthermore, widowhood rites also have therapeutic value in that it prevents “perpetual negativity in the widow, and rather let the deep sorrow have its place in its time.”<sup>10</sup> More often than not, before the

<sup>4</sup> Flora Kessy, Iddy Mayumana and Yoswe Msongwe, *Widowhood and Vulnerability to HIV and AIDS-related Shocks: Exploring Resilience Avenu* Research Report 10(5) (Dar es Salaam: REPOA, 2010), 12. Retrieved from [https://www.repoa.or.tz/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/10\\_5%2030july%202010.pdf](https://www.repoa.or.tz/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/10_5%2030july%202010.pdf) [Accessed on 23rd December, 2021].

<sup>5</sup> Lesiba Baloyi and Molebogeng Makobe-Rabothata, “The African Conception of Death: A Cultural Implication,” In L. T. B. Jackson, D. Meiring, F. J. R. Van de Vijver, E. S. Idemoudia and W. K. Gabrenya Jr. (Eds.), *Toward sustainable development through nurturing diversity: Proceedings from the 21st International Congress of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology* pp. 260-272 (Melbourne, FL: International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology, 2014), 264.

<sup>6</sup> G. I. K. Tasié, “African Widowhood Rites: A Bane or Boom for African Women,” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 3(1), (2013): 155–162, 156.

<sup>7</sup> Isaac Boaheng and Ebenezer Asibu-Dadzie Jnr., *Essays in the Old Testament & African Life and Thought* (Accra: Noyam Publishers, 2020), 73.

<sup>8</sup> Emmanuel Asante, *Theology and Society in Context: A Theologist’s Reflections of Selected Topics* (Accra: SonLife Press, 2014), 3.

<sup>9</sup> As cited in Boaheng and Asibu-Dadzie, *Essays in the Old Testament & African Life and Thought*, 74.

<sup>10</sup> Anna Spilling, *The role of the church in supporting people who are bereaved: A cross-cultural comparison between Norway and Kenya* (Master’s Thesis: Norwegian School of Theology, 2011), 17. Spilling paraphrased Mwoye’s idea which we have quoted above.

period of widowhood ends, most widows recover from the shock they experienced due to the demise of their husbands. Also, widowhood cleanses the widow ritually and reunites her with the entire society, thus “healing” the widow from stigmatization. Among the Frafras of Ghana, for instance, the purification rite comprises shaving and ritual bathing meant to prepare the widow for re-integration into the life of the society.<sup>11</sup>

In spite of the potential benefits of widowhood rites, these rites sometimes lead to infringement on human rights. Yet, widows are compelled to religiously observe the rites; else they incur the wrath of the ancestors. Widows are among the people who need help from the society. Africans look up to religion to provide solutions to their life challenges. Since Christianity is the largest religion in Africa, it has the highest responsibility in providing solutions to the problems that widows face. Over the years, Christianity, the state and traditional institutions have made various efforts in addressing the challenges associated with widowhood; yet, this socio-cultural and religious problem still persists. The recent surge in cases pertaining to abuses of widows has prompted this study which critically examines widowhood from both the African and biblical contexts and then provides recommendations for the African Church.

### Challenges Associated with Widowhood in Africa

Though widowhood rites differ from one society to another, there are some commonalities. E. Kotzé, L. Lishje and N. Rajuili-Masilo interviewed a number of widows and concluded that “[d]espite their different cultural affiliations, the women’s experiences of mourning practices in their communities share a number of similarities.”<sup>12</sup> Widowhood in most African societies is characterized by ordeals. Writing about Efik widows in the Cross River State in Nigeria, Rosemary N. Edet states, “As soon as a husband dies, the wife or wives are taken through a period of solitary confinement and hostility. Though the practice may not be out of bitterness, women suffer and are exposed to ranging health hazards that are heart-breaking in almost all cases.”<sup>13</sup> In Ghana, Nigeria and many other sub-Saharan Africa societies, following the demise of a husband, the widow is accused of having contributed to or being single-handedly responsible for the passing on of her husband.

Traditionally, Africans have the belief that whatever happens physically has a spiritual antecedent; therefore, a person’s death (for example) is usually considered as having a spiritual cause. There is the belief in the existence of a myriad of malevolent forces which hinder people’s progress in life and also cause disasters in their lives. Africans are keenly aware that one can seek help from these malevolent forces to harm or kill another person. The reasons for which people will use supernatural forces to kill others include seeking wealth, fame, and power, among others. In the case of the widow, she is accused of killing her husband with the ulterior motive of having access to the deceased husband’s properties. Consequently, widows are subjected to several forms of abuse which are inimical to modern civilization. Some are made to spend a couple of nights with the corpse; others are abused (physically, verbally or both) for allegedly killing their husbands. A widow may be coerced to sit on leaves or the bare floor half-naked for a couple of days.<sup>14</sup> An ant bite during this period is used as proof that she is responsible for the husband’s death. Some are coerced to drink concoctions that are threatening to their health.<sup>15</sup> Widows in a couple of Yoruba communities (Nigeria) are expected to use broken pots in cooking while eating from broken plates for at

<sup>11</sup> Boaheng and Asibu-Dadzie, *Essays in the Old Testament & African Life and Thought*, 78.

<sup>12</sup> Elmarie Kotzé, Lishje Els and Ntsiki Rajuili-Masilo, “‘Women ... mourn and men carry on’: African women storying mourning practices—A South African example,” *Death Studies* 36(8), (2012): 742–766, 744. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2011.604463>. [Accessed on 4th December, 2021].

<sup>13</sup> Rosemary N. Edet, “Christianity and African Women’s Rituals,” *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa* edited by Mercy A. Oduyoye and Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro pp. 25-39 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), 31.

<sup>14</sup> Widows and Orphans Movement, “Issues of discrimination in widowhood in Ghana that require addressing in the context of the CEDAW,” 1. Retrieved online from: [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/GHA/INT\\_CEDAW\\_NGO\\_GHA\\_18596\\_E.pdf](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/GHA/INT_CEDAW_NGO_GHA_18596_E.pdf) [Accessed on 31st January, 2022].

<sup>15</sup> Widows and Orphans Movement, “Issues of discrimination in widowhood in Ghana that require addressing in the context of the CEDAW,” 1.

least seven days before finally having their hair shaved to ritually sever the bond between them and their dead husbands.<sup>16</sup> Despite the advent of human rights advocates in contemporary times, it is pathetic and surprising to observe that these inhumane treatments still do exist in a good number of African societies.

Widows also go through social exclusion. Africans have a communal sense of life and so people find it difficult to live in isolation. One's existence is inextricably tied to the existence of others. People live in compound houses to enjoy the company of others. The African communal sense of life fosters interdependence, interconnectedness, sharing of resources, caring and solidarity, all of which are necessary ingredients for the survival of the individual. Unfortunately, most widows are deprived of their social life due to the ritual requirement to be isolated from the public. In indigenous African societies, widows are not allowed to attend public gatherings unless the period of widowhood rites is over. Lesiba Baloyi and Molebogeng Makobe-Rabothata observed that among the Bapedi tribe of the province of Limpopo (South Africa), "when a husband dies, his widow has absolutely no right to arrive home after sunset, visit neighbors, or attend social gatherings."<sup>17</sup> This is similar to the Bono (Ghana) tradition that prohibits the widow from staying outside till sunset. With these restrictions, widows inevitably become lonely and bored. Widows also experience social exclusion because some people have the mindset that if a married woman gets too close to a widow, the married woman's husband will die soon. With this mindset, some men sternly warn their wives not to have any form of association with widows; disobeying this order may lead to divorce.<sup>18</sup> Again, in some societies, the widow's children who could have served as a great source of comfort are taken away from her.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, the widow experiences social stigma and becomes an outcast.

Widowhood in many African communities is also associated with depression and psychological trauma. According to Atindanbila et al., the psychological effects of widowhood are more intense on younger widows than older ones.<sup>20</sup> Younger women feel more lonely and depressed upon the death of their husbands. Widowhood rites among the Efik people require the widow to loosen her hair and keep it untidy. Immediately after the demise of one's husband, the widow "is made to put on tattered clothes. She is forbidden to take a bath during this period. Verbal abuses put her in a state of wailing all the time and tradition requires that she cries three times a day for her husband, publicly and audibly, at dawn, noon and evening.... the widow is forbidden to eat."<sup>21</sup> Some widows are made to drink part of the water used to bathe the corpse of their deceased husbands.<sup>22</sup> Keeping untidy hair, wearing rugged clothes, not bathing and not eating for days have serious health consequences on the widow. No wonder some women fall sick and also die not long after the demise of their husbands. At the same time, the examples cited above underscore the psychological trauma associated with widowhood. Consequently, the widow wails not only for the departed but also because of her traumatic experience.

Widowhood often leads to economic deprivation, even if the widow receives financial support from sympathizers. The patriarchal nature of most African societies forbid women, especially widows, from inheriting economic properties left by their husbands. For instance, in Yoruba society, it is "illegal" for a widow to inherit the husband's property; rather, the relatives of the deceased husband are to inherit her as part of the estate to be inherited.<sup>23</sup> Since she has no right of inheritance, the widow starts life all over again (from scratch). In most cases, the widow's predicament is also worsened by the fact that she is left alone to cater for the children without any support from the deceased husband's family. If these children are not old enough to fend for themselves they become a burden to the widow and the society. Sometimes, people who show interest in assisting them tend to abuse them verbally, physically, emotionally, and sexually, to mention but a few.

<sup>16</sup> Fasonranti as quoted in Adeyemo, "Widowhood and its practices," 2.

<sup>17</sup> Lesiba and Makobe-Rabothata, "The African conception of death: A cultural implication," 265.

<sup>18</sup> Widows and Orphans Movement, "Issues of discrimination in widowhood in Ghana that require addressing in the context of the CEDAW," 1.

<sup>19</sup> Edet, *The Will to Arise*, 32.

<sup>20</sup> Atindanbila et al., "Effects of Widowhood Rites on The Psychosocial Well-being of Women in Nadowli District (Upper West Region-Ghana)," 434.

<sup>21</sup> Edet, *The Will to Arise*, 32.

<sup>22</sup> Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics* (Nairobi: WordAlive, 2008), 261.

<sup>23</sup> Bamgbose as cited in Adeyemo, "Widowhood and its practices," 2.

In Nigeria and other parts of Africa, widowhood rites comprise a “socialization processes that condition women to passivity and dependence.”<sup>24</sup> Traditional customs often do not permit most African widows to undertake any social or economic activity throughout the period of widowhood. For example, with a good number of ethnic groups (particularly in Northern Ghana and Akan communities of Ghana), as soon as the final funeral rites of the deceased husband are over, a relative is selected to inherit all the deceased’s properties including the wife who is seen as one of the properties.<sup>25</sup> In most African cultures, relatives of the deceased man, out of poverty and greediness, see the departure of their beloved as an opportunity to enrich themselves.<sup>26</sup> In some societies, the in-laws quickly demand a list of the man’s properties and bank account, even before the widow begins the rites and ritual practices to mourn her late husband.<sup>27</sup> In some instances, the bank account of the deceased is emptied in the name of organizing befitting final funeral rites for the dead while a greater percentage of the money lands in the pockets of these poor-greedy kinsmen and kinswomen.<sup>28</sup> It is a common practice in Africa that, a relative of the deceased, normally a female, goes to stay with the widow. Out of greediness and poverty, this so-called helper of the widow insists on lavish meals and in some instances goes there with her children who are fed from the deceased’s account. Some go to the widow with “hidden spoons in their bags” to feed themselves. All these contribute to the economic woes of the widow.

Furthermore, the nature of widowhood rites may lead to loss of job. Imagine a worker who is given one-week emergency leave because of her husband’s demise and is expected to attend work after this short leave. However, her state of widowhood also requires her to avoid public appearance, to undertake any economic venture, for some months, which may even last sometimes up to one year. Consequently, she may end up losing her job. Widows working in formal employment often get frustrated with these “stringent” rites and are pushed to the wall in choosing between their belief system and cultural practices as against their work (organizational demands).

The traditional African setting makes provision for everyone through the extended family system. The extended family system encourages people to cater for others who are not part of their immediate family. Unfortunately, globalization and urbanization have weakened the extended family system in contemporary Africa. The advancement of technology and modernization have resulted in the building of houses with walls which do not even give the society access to children to impart discipline in them like before. The nuclear family system is gradually taking over the traditional extended family system. Even though the nuclear family system is alien to traditional African society, most people have embraced it due to urbanization and globalization. As a result of the weakening traditional family ties, widows that used to be catered for by members of the extended family nowadays receive little or no attention from the extended family. According to McCalley, family members tend to support their aged widows (those above 60 years) as a result of their inability to meet their material needs.<sup>29</sup>

Traditional African societies practice levirate marriage which comes with its emotional, health, religious and economic implications. The health implications of levirate marriage are evident in a report from Tanzania which indicates that, “the practice of inheriting widows may cause a surge in the number of HIV cases involving the inheritor and his co-wives..., and there is also the risk of infecting widows who have earlier tested negative to the virus.”<sup>30</sup> In some societies, the children born out of the levirate

---

<sup>24</sup> George Akwaya Genyi, “Widowhood and Nigerian Womanhood: Another Context of Gendered Poverty in Nigeria,” *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 3(7) (2013): 68–73, 68.

<sup>25</sup> Widows and Orphans Movement, “Issues of discrimination in widowhood in Ghana that require addressing in the context of the CEDAW,” 1.

<sup>26</sup> Adeyemo, “Widowhood and its practices,” 4.

<sup>27</sup> Adeyemo, “Widowhood and its practices,” 1.

<sup>28</sup> Adeyemo, “Widowhood and its practices,” 4.

<sup>29</sup> McCalley as cited in Atindanbila et al., “Effects of Widowhood Rites on The Psychosocial Well-being of Women in Nadowli District (Upper West Region-Ghana),” 431.

<sup>30</sup> Kessy, Mayumana and Msongwe, *Widowhood and Vulnerability to HIV and AIDS-related Shocks: Exploring Resilience Avenu*, 6.

marriage belong to the dead man as in the biblical levirate marriage system in ancient Israel (Gen. 38:10).<sup>31</sup> The new husband subsequently becomes reluctant in taking responsibility of caring for these children who do not bear his name. The Luo of Kenya require their widows “to get a ‘backup’ husband within the family of the late husband through *ter* (culturally-sanctioned ‘re-marriage’), a tradition that has normally been controversially labelled as ‘wife inheritance’ or ‘widow inheritance.’”<sup>32</sup> The surrogate husband is responsible for the welfare of the widow and her children. The peculiarity of the Luo practice is that the widow remains the wife of the deceased rather than the inheritor or the surrogate husband.

The practice requires ritual cleansing of the widow from her uncleanness (due to the death of her husband) in order to restore her to normalcy.<sup>33</sup> The ritual cleansing has a sexual component which endangers the widow and the sex partner because of the possible contraction of infectious diseases (eg. HIV/AIDS, gonorrhoea, syphilis). A professional cleanser may be hired to perform this sex-ritual-cleaning activity if the family of the deceased suspects the widow of any sexually transmitted disease. The professional cleanser is taken to the widow’s residence to perform the ritual (sometimes under the supervision of the deceased husband’s family).<sup>34</sup> It is only after this ritual that the inheritor or the guardian may take over the widow. Refusal to accept such an arrangement may result in serious problems such as the refusal of the deceased husband’s family to give the widow a share in the husband’s property. These practices increase the predicaments of widows.

### Widows in Biblical Context

Throughout the Old Testament, Israel was tasked to ensure the survival of widows and orphans in such an act that may be considered as befitting a redeemed people who are entrusted with the character and standards of their Redeemer. According to Peggy L. Day, the term “widow” (Hebrew: *almanah*) represented a woman without a son whose husband and father-in-law were both dead in ancient Israel.<sup>35</sup> So as to adapt this definition to biblical texts that point to *almanah*, the expression “having no son” has been qualified as the absence of an adult son with the financial ability to support his mother (2 Sam. 14:4-8; 1 Kings 17:8-24).<sup>36</sup> In the patriarchal Jewish community, “widows were often put in positions where they were entitled not to an inheritance but merely to maintenance by their larger family, and even when they did have the possibility of inheriting, the males in the family had first claim on the inheritance.”<sup>37</sup> God is much concerned about the proper treatment of the marginalized in society of which widows are classical quintessence. In view of this, manifold passages of Scripture, from both the Old and New Testaments address the plight of widows.

The concern for the widow and the poor is permanently woven into the fabric of those crucial sections dealing with the covenant made between God and his people (Israel) both in the covenant code of Sinai and its renewal before entering the land of Canaan.<sup>38</sup> For example, Exodus 22:23-24 says “You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry onto me, I will surely heed their cry; my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children orphans” (NRSV). The likelihood that one would abuse widows and orphans is high given that these groups of people have no one to defend them. God, therefore, prohibits such acts of abuse and injustice against the marginalized. In the text cited above, God makes the point that he will listen to the prayer of the oppressed and then kill oppressors to make their spouse and children widows and orphans so that they (those now made

<sup>31</sup> Widows and Orphans Movement, “Issues of discrimination in widowhood in Ghana that require addressing in the context of the CEDAW,” 1.

<sup>32</sup> Samson O. Gunga, “The politics of Widowhood and Re-Marriage among the Luo of Kenya,” *Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya (PAK)* 1(1), (2009): 161-174, 169.

<sup>33</sup> Gunga, “The politics of Widowhood and Re-Marriage among the Luo of Kenya,” 169.

<sup>34</sup> Gunga, “The politics of Widowhood and Re-Marriage among the Luo of Kenya,” 170.

<sup>35</sup> Millicent Yeboah Asuamah, *Widowhood Care and Employment in 1 Timothy 1:3-16: A case Study of the Evangelical Methodist Church of Christ as a Paradigm for African Instituted Churches* (Masters Theses: Luther Seminary, 2012), 12.

<sup>36</sup> Asuamah, *Widowhood Care and Employment in 1 Timothy 1:3-16*, 12.

<sup>37</sup> Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 248.

<sup>38</sup> Richard D. Patterson, “The widow, orphan, and the poor in the Old Testament and the Extra Biblical Literature,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1973): 224-234, 228.

widows and orphans) can acknowledge the plight of widows and orphans. This means that each one's family (including at least spouse and children) has the responsibility of ensuring that their counterparts treat the marginalized well so as to avoid God's wrath and eventual death.

Again, God demonstrated his concern for the poor (including widows and orphans) when he commanded that no one should take a widow's garment in pledge (Deut. 24:17). God does not want the widow to be deprived of her source of warmth. God also commanded the Israelites to leave remnants of their harvest in the fields for widows and other needy people to glean (Deut. 24:19). The gleaning law was meant to ensure the survival of the needy of which widows formed a major part. God also commanded the Israelites to bring the full tithe of their produce for the year and store it within their towns in order for widows and other needy people such as aliens and orphans to eat from it to their fill (Deut. 14:28-29). This tithe was collected every three years. These laws were provided so that the landless such as widows, aliens and orphans may have enough food for their satisfaction.<sup>39</sup> Obedience to these commandments attracted divine blessings and disobedience brought judgment (curses): "Cursed is he who distorts the justice due an alien, orphan, and widow" (Deut. 27:19). Another prohibition against the abuse of widows and orphans is found in the commandment "You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you afflict him at all, and if he does cry out to me, I will surely hear his cry" (Exod. 22:22-24).

The Psalms also underscore God's concern for the needy and down-trodden in society. The protection from the community was to flow from God's own protection and care, "The LORD protects the strangers; he supports the fatherless and the widow, But He thwarts the way of the wicked" (Psa. 146:9). Psalm 82:3-4 declares God as the righteous judge who prescribes justice for all the downtrodden: "Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked" (NIV). Proverbs 22:17-24:22 (especially 22:22-23; 23:10-11) depicts God as the champion of the poor (including widows) and the orphan.

The prophetic books also underscore God's concern for the needy such as widows. Oppression, exploitation, and mistreatment of widows and orphans attracted God's attention in both the major and minor prophets. In Isaiah 10:2-4, for example, God cursed the leaders of Israel (including judges and magistrates) for abuse, oppression and injustice against the needy (widows and orphans). This situation had demotivated some of the poor from taking their cases to court for redress because they viewed the system as unfair (Isa. 10:2). This echoes Psalms (e.g. 94:20; 82) where the righteous poor finds "no human redress in the society" and then, "appeals only to God." God's point was that the laws of Israel were meant to protect the needy, not to exploit them. The leaders unfortunately were taking what rightfully belonged to widows and orphans, something that contradict Israel's socio-economic laws. The leaders were accused of "making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless" (Isa. 10:2c NIV). Isaiah's use of the word *shelalam*—"to draw out," "to strip," "to spoil," "to plunder" or "to make [something] a prey"—underscores the seriousness of the leaders' attack on the widows.<sup>40</sup> Here, Isaiah draws on the hunting imagery to make the point that the leaders have trapped the poor in a similar way that hunters trap their prey (cf. Psa. 10:9). If one translates *shelalam* as "to plunder" then a war imagery comes to mind to underline the helpless situation of the widows and orphans who were maltreated by their leaders in taking from them their (the widows' and orphans') rightful inheritance. From Malachi 3:5 one can deduce that to oppress the widow and orphan amounts to having no reverence for God and this attracts divine punishment. To mistreat widows and orphans (according to the above text) attracts God's wrath while caring for them leads to God's blessings (cf. Jer. 7:5-7). The care for the poor continued in the intertestamental period where one reads of some money that was given to widows from the temple treasury (2 Macc. 3:10).

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament also classifies widows among the poor class of people. In the Greco-Roman world of the New Testament, the term "widow" was used exclusively to distinguish between "wives of deceased husbands from those who were bereft of support, particularly meal support."<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 158.

<sup>40</sup> William Wilson, *Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, n.d), 326.

<sup>41</sup> Asuamah, *Widowhood Care and Employment in 1 Timothy 1:3-16*, 30.

The New Testament term *chera* implies a woman left without a husband.<sup>42</sup> In the Greco-Roman world the status and social identity of females was “embedded” in males (“first her father, and then passing from his household and that ‘embedding’ to “embedding” in her husband and his family”).<sup>43</sup> The right of widows in the ancient Greco-Roman world varied greatly from culture to culture, age to age, and within the same historical period, from place to place.<sup>44</sup> For example, women in Egypt or Rome had greater legal rights than those in Athens and “in traditional Athens, women did not take part in public life but kept homes and nurtured legitimate children for the husband.”<sup>45</sup> Customarily, the city-state in the Roman society was responsible for the provision of financial support for needy widows, it was however of first priority to care for the needs of one’s family.<sup>46</sup> The widow mostly depended on the support of her children.<sup>47</sup>

Jesus Christ demonstrated care and concern for the poor throughout his ministry. In Luke 4:18-20, he clearly stated that his mission was “...to proclaim good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free...” (NIV). Here, Jesus makes the point that his mission had both spiritual and social ramifications. He did not come only to deal with the spiritual needs of his people but to deal with their physical needs as well. Through his ministry, the oppressed (including widows and orphans) were to be freed. In Luke 7:11-16, Jesus empathized with a widow of Nain who had lost her only son and was about to be buried. Without being invited to offer help, his heart was filled with compassion which made him bring the boy back to life. Jesus’ timely intervention did not only bring the boy to life but resurrected the widow’s hopes of meeting her daily needs since sons in biblical times were the ones who usually catered for their widowed mothers. Jesus did not like the scribes who “devour widows’ houses” (Luke 20:47). In the widow’s mite story in Mark 12:41–44, the widow, who offered two small copper coins of very little value, was praised by Jesus because she sacrificed “all she had to depend on” (NIV). The story highlights not only Jesus’ appreciation for the widow’s sacrificial service to God but also the plight of poverty that widows often faced.

Care for widows was one of the special ministries in the early church (Acts 6:1-7; 9:39). Soon after the establishment of the church, God’s people became family to those who had no family. Widows formed a considerable number of the needy in the early church. The church had special people dedicated to their care. They were provided with their basic needs since they had no one to cater for them. The practice of caring for widows draws on the Jewish practice called *tamhuy* named after the tray on which foodstuffs were placed for distributing among the needy (cf. Exod. 22:22; Deut. 10:18; 14:29; Psa. 146:9).<sup>48</sup>

As the church “was advancing in number” (Acts 6:1), Greek-speaking Jewish-Christian widows felt overlooked during the distribution of food or money and this came to the attention of the leaders of the church. These widows had come from the Diaspora to Jerusalem so as “to die in the Holy City,” and they might have been left vulnerable because their family members were not leaving in Jerusalem.<sup>49</sup> The church’s resolution to choose seven men of exceptional character to attend to widows underscores the significance that the church leadership attached to such a vital ministry.

In 1 Timothy 5:1-16, Paul gives different categories of widows. He talks about those who are “widows indeed” (vv. 3-5, 9-10, 16) in reference to widows who really need assistance because they have no relatives to help them. These are godly widows of over sixty (60) years (v. 9) who have been left alone after the death of their husbands. They either have no children and grandchildren or their children and grandchildren are so far away that they are not able to render aid to them. Such women fix their hope on God (v. 5) and dedicate themselves to prayer. Anna, the godly old woman in the Temple who held the baby Jesus (Luke 2:36-38), is an example of such widows. Such widows are to be honored by the church (v. 3) through financial assistance.

<sup>42</sup> Thurston as cited in Asuamah, *Widowhood Care and Employment in 1 Timothy 1:3-16*, 30.

<sup>43</sup> Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 334.

<sup>44</sup> Asuamah, *Widowhood Care and Employment in 1 Timothy 1:3-16*, 31.

<sup>45</sup> Asuamah, *Widowhood Care and Employment in 1 Timothy 1:3-16*, 31.

<sup>46</sup> Asuamah, *Widowhood Care and Employment in 1 Timothy 1:3-16*, 31.

<sup>47</sup> Asuamah, *Widowhood Care and Employment in 1 Timothy 1:3-16*, 31.

<sup>48</sup> Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 248.

<sup>49</sup> Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 248.

The second category comprises of widows who have relatives (like children and grandchildren) (1 Tim. 5:4, 8, 16). From 1 Timothy 5:16, it seems that the family of some widows tried to shift their responsibility on the shoulders of the church. This prompted the assertion that those who had widows in their homes should cater for them so that the church may use her resources to cater for those (widows) who really needed help from the church. For Paul, the children and grandchildren of these widows have the moral responsibility of stepping in and helping their widowed mothers or grandmothers. Supporting widows is not only a mark of godliness but of obedience to the Lord. God commands believers to make some return to their parents. The expression “this is pleasing to God” (1 Tim. 5:4 NIV) (or “this is right/pleasing/acceptable in the sight of God”) reminisces Exodus 20:12 and underscores the fact that every child of God must prioritize care for their parents. The responsibility of children to cater for their parents is expressed in the African saying “when one caters for you to have your teeth grow, you must also cater for the person to have their teeth removed [in old age].” According to the Greek law of the time, “It was both morally and legally the obligation of sons and daughters to assist their parents. Anyone who refused that duty lost his civil rights.”<sup>50</sup> Parents cater for children (in terms of clothing, feeding, housing, supporting and nurturing them) until there are grown-ups and can survive on their own; children are expected to reciprocate this act by also taking care of their parents in their old age. There are also younger widows, who may remarry (1 Tim. 5:11-15). Paul advises the young widows to get married to raise children. He warns them to avoid taking the vow of chastity too early; rather than joining those who have vowed to be part of the enlisted widows, they should marry and raise up children. The vow associated with widowhood suggests an official order.

Moreover, there are wanton widows, that is, self-indulgent widows who live for pleasure rather than for the Lord (1 Tim. 5:6). These widows who care only about themselves have no concern for others. Such widows are dead even while they live; they are insensitive to the things of God. Obviously, these widows are not the type who need assistance from the church. There are also enlisted widows (vv. 9-10) who seem to have been recruited by the church to serve their fellow widows. Qualification for enlistment into the order of widows (5:9-10) is similar to those of bishops and deacons (3:1-13). The term “enlistment” or “enrollment” suggests the existence of an order or sisterhood of widows at that time.

Another passage worth considering is James 1:27 where James stresses the fact that genuine godliness is to be seen in demonstrated activity. It reads “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (NIV). In this text, James’ concern is what constitute(s) true and authentic Christianity. The Greek noun *threskos* (lit. ritualism) translated “religion” refers generally to “fearing or worshipping God”; the verb *threskeia* means “fear of the gods; religious worship, especially external, that which consists in ceremonies.”<sup>51</sup> From this understanding, it seems that James’ original audience understood Christianity as the mere performance of rituals. They probably behaved like the Pharisees who “relied on the forms of ritual righteousness to keep themselves undefiled, but they were full of moral defilement within...”<sup>52</sup> James addresses Christians who profess the Christian faith but fail to practice it. Solomon Andria asserted that “Without action, good doctrine is useless. Pure religion shows itself in behavior.”<sup>53</sup> Christianity that does not cause one to do good works is unacceptable. One of such good works is looking after orphans and widows. Such social work should not be left to the government alone; Christians must take an active part in it to reduce the plight of those suffering. Andria summarizes the verse in his assertion: “the word [of God] must produce in us the acts that prove our relationship to God and a way of life that glorifies Him.”<sup>54</sup> Looking after orphans and widows alone is not enough; one has to stay away from spiritual pollution, moral filth. One has

<sup>50</sup> William Barclay, *New Daily Study Bible - The Letters to Timothy, Titus & Philemon* (Edinburg: Saint Andrew Press, 2003), n.p. <https://books.google.com.gh/books?id=J2emDwAAQBAJ&pg=PT161&dq=>

<sup>51</sup> J. H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* 5th edition (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002), 292.

<sup>52</sup> Francis D. Nichol (Ed.), “James 1: 27,” In *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7 (Washington: Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1978), 515.

<sup>53</sup> Solomon Andria, “James,” In *African Bible Commentary* edited by Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nairobi: WordAlive Publishers, 2006), 1537.

<sup>54</sup> Andria, “James,” 1537.

to be pure, blameless, or undefiled. James' point then is that God's emphasis is not on religious rituals but on right living.

### Theological and Ethical Reflections

Christianity, since its birth, has been known for social activities such as caring for the needy and the down-trodden. In Africa, widows constitute a major category of the needy and marginalized. This section offers theological and ethical considerations regarding the care for widows from an African Christian perspective. In this regard, the following points are worthy of note. First of all, the Christian practice of caring for widows is rooted in God's nature and purpose for the world. God made a covenant with Israel to make them a nation through which others will be blessed. Israel became God's ambassador and they were expected to demonstrate God's will and purpose to the world. A key aspect of the covenant was the care for the needy and the marginalized. God is the defender of widows because of their defenseless state. It is for this reason that he made laws to demand justice for widows (as well as orphans and aliens). In the post-resurrection era, Christians are God's nation who are mandated to make the world know him. Honoring God's concern for widows was and is an intrinsic element in the keeping of the covenant.

Secondly, God hates the exploitation of the socially and economically weak.<sup>55</sup> Widows are among the weak class of people in the society. Taking advantage of the vulnerable is a sin against God and humanity. God requires justice among his people. Family members who take advantage of the vulnerability of widows and do all sorts of things to them must put a stop to that. "Doing justice" is at least partly measured by the way one treated widows (Isa 1:17). Therefore, a society cannot be just without appropriate care for widows.

Thirdly, care for widows is a key aspect of godliness. One's vertical relationship with God must have a corresponding impact on the person's relationship with other humans and with the environment. The African communal sense of life is important in dealing with the challenges that widows go through. The extended family system is meant to ensure sharing of resources, independence, solidarity and brotherhood, all of which ensure the survival of the needy. The African communal worldview is expressed in "compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity and mutuality in the interest of building and maintaining communities with justice and mutual caring."<sup>56</sup> The Bono maxim "*honam mu nni nhanao*" ("humanity has no boundary") underscores the unity of the human race—all humankind is one species. The Bono saying "*nipa nua ne nipa*" ("human is related to human") underlines that a human being can relate to a human being, not to a beast. In this light, the African church must develop a theology of family life based on the communal worldview of life and promote it throughout all African societies. In this regard, the church together with traditional authorities must endeavor to check the Western individualistic worldview that is gradually creeping into the African culture. Individualism, though not biblically grounded, may be suitable (though not the ideal) for advanced societies where each one has the minimum resources for survival. In Africa, where the Bono saying "*biaa nni ho a ne ho nsuo so no adwaree*" ("there is no one who alone has enough water for bathing himself/herself") is true, sharing of resources is a non-negotiable responsibility. People should readily assist others with resources. Again, the church as a community is expected to mobilize itself to meet the needs of widows and orphans who have neither private means nor family to care for them.

Fourthly, widows who are capable of working must find something to do to cater for their needs. They must work under the guidance of God to improve their status in life. In this regard, traditions that prohibit widows from working or inheriting economic properties must be revised. The period of widowhood is important in helping the widow to overcome the grievous situation. The period of widowhood is also important to ensure that the widow does not knowingly or unknowingly "give" a pregnancy that belongs to the deceased husband to another man. However, it must not be too long and should not prevent the widow from engaging in economic ventures. Widowhood should be as short as possible so that widows can engage themselves with economic activities in order that they do not become a burden to their families. By engaging in gainful employment, widows will help relieve the church of its financial strain caused by

<sup>55</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, 170.

<sup>56</sup> Lovemore Mbigi and Jenny Maree, *Ubuntu: The spirit of African transformation management* (Randburg: Knowledge Resources, 1995), 17.

supporting increasing numbers of widows and orphans. On this matter, the church and traditional leaders are encouraged to team up to come out with modalities regarding how to respect tradition and at the same time allow widows to pursue economic ventures.

Fifthly, ethical issues surrounding some African widowhood practices need to be noted and addressed. It is dehumanizing and ethically unacceptable to have a widow sleep with the corpse of her late husband or to drink part of the water that was used to bathe the corpse. Levirate marriage is ethically unacceptable because it is incestuous. Again, the act of ritual cleansing done among the Luo people of Kenya and other similar practices in other places is unchristian. All these point to the need for cultural transformation among Africans. The church together with traditional authorities must work toward a positive cultural change. The church is encouraged to take charge of widowhood rites, ensuring that all forms of unchristian rituals are discouraged. There is the need to study and understand every aspect of widowhood practices in order to be able to state whether or not they contradict the gospel.

Another antidote to the problems associated with widowhood rites is female development/empowerment. Research has shown that the widow's economic status and level of education inform the period and nature of the rites.<sup>57</sup> Widowhood rites performed on illiterate widows are more severe, degrading and inhumane than those performed on their literate counterparts. Since the literate ones are usually of the working class, they spend just a few weeks and return to work and they are unable to perform most of the rituals associated with widowhood. The literate ones also know their fundamental human rights and sometimes gather the courage to resist certain attempts to abuse them. In this light, Okonkwo pointed out that, the illiteracy of widows in South-Western Nigeria has put them in a disadvantaged position.<sup>58</sup> He further added that, it takes only illiteracy to make a widow go naked and be coerced into lying with the late husband's corpse in a final embrace as a mark of disconnecting all sexual relationships with the dead man and with the hope that this love-making between the widow and her dead husband will soothe the spirit of the dead man.<sup>59</sup> Given this understanding, women's capacity development can help reduce the ordeal that widows go through in Africa. The expression "capacity development" (or "capacity building") as used here refers to "the enhancement of the competency of individuals, public sector institutions, private sector entities, civil society organizations, and local communities to engage in activities in a sustainable manner for positive development impacts."<sup>60</sup> Capacity development is expected to bring about "change and transformation at the individual, institutional, and societal levels."<sup>61</sup>

Both the church and the state must make conscious efforts at educating and empowering women to raise their social and economic status. In this regard, the popular Ghanaian saying, "If you educate a man, you simply educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a nation"<sup>62</sup> serves as a great motivation for educating women and empowering them for sustainable development. An educated woman contributes immensely to the education of her children and hence contributes to national development. Children spend more time with their mothers and so acquire a lot of knowledge from them. An uneducated mother has just a little to offer; a woman's education, therefore, is not only for herself but for her entire family. Women who can climb the academic ladder to great heights must be supported; those who must learn a trade must equally be supported in both their training and in setting up their own enterprises. The society must encourage women's participation in the decision-making process of the nation. All these will contribute to emancipating women from dehumanizing cultural practices.

<sup>57</sup> Adeyemo, "Widowhood and its practices," 4.

<sup>58</sup> Okonkwo as quoted in Adeyemo, "Widowhood and its practices," 4.

<sup>59</sup> Okonkwo as cited in Adeyemo, "Widowhood and its practices," 4.

<sup>60</sup> Kempe Ronald Hope Sr. *Poverty, Livelihoods, and Governance in Africa: Fulfilling the Development Promise* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 157.

<sup>61</sup> Hope, *Poverty, Livelihoods, and Governance*, 157.

<sup>62</sup> Aggrey cited in John Samuel Pabee, *Giving Account of Faith and Hope in Africa* (Eugene, OR: Wipf&Stock, 2017), 209.

## CONCLUSION

The paper has shown that in many African societies, widowhood is characterized by rituals, forced remarriages, harassment, rejection, loneliness, poverty, loss of status, fear of the future and depression as well as financial, sexual and social exploitations. Another finding is that God's heart for widows and other needy people is a consistent theme throughout the Bible. Therefore, the care for widows is a non-negotiable task for the church. It is recommended that the church allocates part of its resources to cater for the needy in the community, more so widows. The church must also show solidarity with widows by visiting them regularly. In addition, the church must offer counselling services to widows to help them overcome depression and loneliness, among other challenges. Furthermore, the church in collaboration with traditional authorities should help eliminate traumatic widowhood practices. God requires believers to show concern for the common good of the society. This biblical/theological principle can be developed and promoted using the African concepts of humanity, hospitality, interdependence and interconnectedness.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adeyemo, Wuraola C. "Widowhood and its practices: Causes, effects and the possible way out for widows and women folk." *World Journal of Education Research*, volume 3(2), (2016): 1-8.
- Andria, Solomon. "James." *African Bible Commentary* edited by Tokunboh Adeyemo. Nairobi: WordAlive Publishers, 2006.
- Asante, Emmanuel. *Theology and Society in Context: A Theologist's Reflections of Selected Topics*. Accra: SonLife Press. 2014.
- Asuamah, Millicent Yeboah. *Widowhood Care and Employment in 1 Timothy 1:3-16: A case Study of the Evangelical Methodist Church of Christ as a Paradigm for African Instituted Churches*. Masters Theses: Luther Seminary, 2012.
- Atindanbila, Samuel et al., "Effects of Widowhood Rites on the Psychosocial Well-being of Women in Nadowli district (Upper West Region-Ghana)." *The International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention* vol. 1, issues 6, (2014): 430-436.
- Barclay, William. *New Daily Study Bible-The Letters to Timothy, Titus & Philemon*. Edinburg: Saint Andrew Press, 2003. <https://books.google.com.gh/books?id=J2emDwAAQBAJ&pg=PT161&dq=>
- Baloyi, Lesiba and Molebogeng Makobe-Rabothata. "The African conception of death: A cultural Implication." In L. T. B. Jackson, D. Meiring, F. J. R. Van de Vijver, E. S. Idemoudia and W. K. Gabrenya Jr. (Eds.). *Toward sustainable development through nurturing diversity: Proceedings from the 21st International Congress of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology*. pp. 260-272. Melbourne, FL: International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology, 2014.
- Boaheng, Isaac and Ebenezer Asibu-Dadzie Jnr. *Essays in the Old Testament & African Life and Thought*. Accra: Noyam Publishers, 2020.
- Edet, Rosemary N. "Christianity and African Women's Rituals." *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa* edited by Mercy A. Oduyoye and Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001.
- Genyi, George Akwaya. "Widowhood and Nigerian Womanhood: Another Context of Gendered Poverty in Nigeria," *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 3(7) (2013): 68-73.
- Gunga, Samson O. "The politics of Widowhood and Re-Marriage among the Luo of Kenya," *Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya (PAK)* 1(1), (2009): 161-174.
- Hope, Kempe Ronald Sr. *Poverty, Livelihoods, and Governance in Africa: Fulfilling the Development Promise*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Kessy, Flora Iddy Mayumana and Yoswe Msongwe, *Widowhood and Vulnerability to HIV and AIDS-related Shocks: Exploring Resilience Avenu* Research Report 10(5). Dar es Salaam: REPOA, 2010. Retrieved from [https://www.repoa.or.tz/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/10\\_5%2030july%202010.pdf](https://www.repoa.or.tz/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/10_5%2030july%202010.pdf) [Accessed on 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2021].

- Kotzé, Elmarie Lishje Els and Ntsiki Rajuili-Masilo, “‘Women ... mourn and men carry on’: African women storying mourning practices—A South African example.” *Death Studies* 36(8), (2012): 742–766.
- Kunhiyop, Samuel Waje. *African Christian Ethics*. Nairobi: WordAlive, 2008.
- Lovemore, Mbigi and Jenny Maree. *Ubuntu: The spirit of African transformation management*. Randburg: Knowledge Resources, 1995.
- Nichol, Francis D. (Ed.). “James 1: 27.” *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7. Washington: Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1978.
- Patterson, Richard D. “The widow, orphan, and the poor in the Old Testament and the Extra Biblical Literature.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1973): 224-234.
- Pobee, John Samuel. *Giving Account of Faith and Hope in Africa*. Eugene, OR: Wipf&Stock, 2017.
- Spilling, Anna. *The role of the church in supporting people who are bereaved: A cross-cultural comparison between Norway and Kenya*. Master’s Thesis: Norwegian School of Theology, 2011.
- Tasie, G.I.K. “African Widowhood Rites: A Bane or Boom for African Women.” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 3(1), (2013): 155–162.
- Thayer, J.H. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon* 5th edition. fifth edition. Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002.
- Towner, Philip H. *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006.
- Widows and Orphans Movement. “Issues of discrimination in widowhood in Ghana that require addressing in the context of the CEDAW.” Retrieved online from: [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/GHA/INT\\_CEDAW\\_NGO\\_GHA\\_18596\\_E.pdf](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/GHA/INT_CEDAW_NGO_GHA_18596_E.pdf) [Accessed on 31st January, 2022].
- Witherington III, Ben. *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998.
- Wright, Christopher J. H. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*. Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004.
- Wilson, William. *Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, n.d.

## ABOUT AUTHORS

Isaac Boaheng holds a PhD in Theology from the University of the Free State, South Africa, a Master of Theology degree from the South African Theological Seminary, South Africa, a Master of Divinity degree from the Trinity Theological Seminary, Ghana and a Bachelor of Science degree in Geomatic Engineering from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana. He is a lecturer in Theology and Christian Ethics at the Christian Service University College, Ghana, and a Research Fellow at the Department of Biblical and Religion Studies, University of the Free State, South Africa. Boaheng has over sixty publications in Systematic Theology, Ethics, Biblical Studies, Translation Studies, African Christianity, Linguistics, Pentecostalism and Christian Mission, among others. He is an Ordained Minister of the Methodist Church Ghana serving the Nkwabeng circuit of the Sunyani Diocese.

Samuel Boahen is a minister-in-training through Theological Education by Extension (TEE) at the Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon-Accra and a Theology student at Christian Service University College, Kumasi. He is a member of the Ebenezer Methodist Society, Techiman. Boahen’s research interest lies in Biblical Studies, Systematic Theology and Missiology.