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Widowhood Care and Empowerment in 1 Timothy 1:3-16: A Case Study of the Evangelical Methodist Church of Christ as a Paradigm for African Instituted Churches

Millicent Yeboah Asuamah
Luther Seminary

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WIDOWHOOD CARE AND EMPOWERMENT IN 1 TIMOTHY 1:3-16:
A CASE STUDY OF THE EVANGELICAL METHODIST CHURCH OF CHRIST
AS A PARADIGM FOR AFRICAN INSTITUDED CHURCHES

by

MILLICENT YEBOAH ASUAMAH

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

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This thesis may be duplicated.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ESV	English Standard Version
NAS	New American Standard
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The care of widows is emphasized in the Bible, yet it seems difficult in practice. This thesis considers the way New Testament writings, and especially 1 Timothy 5:3-16, and other biblical passages deal with the care of widows in the biblical community. The writer of 1 Timothy recognizes that widows are an important concern for the community at Ephesus and the community has a responsibility for them, and yet he realizes that the community cannot assume the burden of caring for all of them. The question is how the message of 1 Timothy deals with the situation of widows in the early church and its implications in African Instituted Churches (AICs) in Ghana. Did the church encounter certain limitations or difficulties in the process of supporting the widows? How does the church's support for widows in the context of the early church inform the way in which the church in Ghana should care for widows today?

This thesis finds out how the author of 1 Timothy developed a way to ensure that widows were properly cared for to meet their needs in line with the resources, which the community could offer. Some New Testament passages teach us to take good care of the widows, but the question remains whether they empower the widows or make them dependent. This thesis specifically finds out how the author of 1 Timothy dealt with the problem of dependence and whether the recommendations made in 1 Timothy and in other New Testament writings create dependence or might provide insights into ways of developing and empowering widows in the Ghanaian context.

The Approaches

This thesis has, therefore, a two-fold purpose. The first is to see how 1 Timothy deals with the practical issues of the care of widows in a specific context. In order to understand the author's approach, we will also look at how it compares to traditional Jewish approaches in the Greco-Roman context, as well as early Christianity. Second, to explore ways in which the instructions given in 1 Timothy can inform efforts to care for widows in Ghana today. We will ask how the situation in Ghana is similar to and different from that of 1 Timothy, and explore the way the biblical message can be helpful today.

We will use several key questions to explore each context: the role of the community, the role of the family, and the role of widows. For instance, the biblical community was mandated to support the fatherless, the widow and the sojourner by giving food and clothing (Deuteronomy 10:18). Again, the community was instructed to allow the widow to depend upon the standing grain corners or borders of fields, as well as dropped stalks and left-behind sheaves (Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19). Moreover, poverty-stricken widows and the provision for their help was specific: "every three years the widow is to receive a portion of the tithe of produce: her garment is not to be taken in pledge" (Deuteronomy. 14:28-29; 24:17-18). Furthermore, the Deuteronomic law made provision for a widow who has no children to remarry the brother of the deceased husband (levirate marriage), "in order to ensure male heirs in his line" (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). We will focus on the situation of the barren widow, since the law seems not to make provision for her. For instance, Exodus 20:12 made provision for widows who have children to honor their parents. The word "honor" means to treat

someone with proper respect due to the person and his or her role. With regard to parents, this means providing for them and looking after them in their old age (cf. Proverbs 3:9-10). Perhaps the barren widow would depend upon the standing grain corners or borders of fields, as well as dropped stalks and left-behind sheaves (Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19).

This thesis further concentrates on how the writer of 1 Timothy developed a way to ensure that widows were properly cared for in the ways that fit the widow's needs and the resources of the community. This thesis specifically explores how 1 Timothy 5:3-16 dealt with the problem of dependence and whether the recommendations made in 1 Timothy and other New Testament writings create dependence or might offer insight into ways of developing and empowering widows. This thesis also focuses on the situation of widows in the 1st century and Paul's response to issues concerning Christian widows at that moment. This thesis explores issues such as remarrying of the younger widows and widows serving in faithful community. The concern for widows in 1 Timothy chapter 5 was that families were to take good care of their needy widows. In addition, the young widows in the church were encouraged to remarry their fellow Christian men. This thesis explores Paul's instructions to Timothy to enroll the elderly widows into service and prayer ministry.

Moreover, this thesis considers how the early church handled the problem introduced by the neglected widows concerning daily distribution of food (Acts 6). We realize that the decisions on care for widows by the church in Jerusalem were different from those in 1 Timothy. Furthermore, this thesis also investigates more about the importance of 1 Timothy 5:3-16 and how it is meant to develop and empower widows in

Ephesus. In explaining this topic, the thesis explores the cultural and traditional values of how widows were cared for in the Jewish and Greco-Roman context. Further, we assume that Paul's instructions to Timothy can better improve the life of widows in the array of African Instituted Churches (AICs).

The final chapter will focus on the context in Ghana. According to Thomas Asante Oduro, the acronym "AICs" has various definitions, which include African Indigenous Churches, African Instituted Churches, African Independent Churches and others.¹ This thesis focuses on those churches, which identify as African Instituted Churches, churches that established by the local people without any relationship with or affiliation to European or North American churches. From my observation, the AICs and some Christian families of AICs do not offer adequate support for widows during and after their bereavement. While economic hardship on widows in Ghana would depend on the available resource left by the deceased husband, Ghanaian husbands are often not salaried workers; some depend on the family cocoa farms and fishing, others are self-employed with little income to provide for a family. Based on this, the deceased husband cannot leave any property for his family, since he may not own property. Moreover, a majority of widows are deprived of their marital homes, since they are accused of being the cause of their husbands' death.² The reason is that some women are blame for killing their husbands with their witchcraft powers. As a result, widows have no access to the property of the deceased husband.

¹ Thomas Asante Oduro, "Christ Holy Church International (1947-2002): The Challenges of Christian Proclamation in a Nigerian Context" (Ph.D. diss., Luther Seminary, 2004), 3.

² Marie-Antoinette Sossou, *Widowhood Practices in West Africa: The Silent Victims* (Malden: Blackwell, 2002), 203.

The most significant aspect on care of widows in 1 Timothy for the Ghanaian context is that Paul's passion for the widow and community set a good precedent for the community in Ghana. As the most significant facet of the thesis, concerns for the widow in the New Testament serves as a guide to heal the physical, emotional and spiritual life of the widows in the EMCC. Again, God's instructions on support and protection of widows help to build a better relationship between the widows, the husband's family and the community as a whole.

Summary of Previous Scholarship

Biblical Scholarship

This next section of the thesis shall reveal some of the meaningfully discussions concerning care of widows in the New Testament world. Scholars such as Bonnie Bowman Thurston teach me that any wrong done to the unprotected widow and the orphan would obtain a wrathful Yahweh as their avenging relative. Thurston explains that this instruction seeks to help the people of Israel recognizing that their call was beyond keeping the basic rules for civil society, to embodying the character of the Lord in caring for those who easily oppressed and even those who may be predisposed against them. Thurston stresses that through the prophets, the Lord will repeatedly denounce the mistreatment of the widow and the fatherless in Israel and Judah (Exodus 22:22). She reported that in the Law, the Prophet and the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, God is the defender of the legally defenseless; God will "hear their cry" (Exodus 22:23) and punish those who oppress them. In addition, God is the "protector of widows" (Psalm 68:5); God "tears down the house of the proud, but maintains the widow's boundaries"

(Proverbs 15:25).³ In addition, the Bible cautions, “You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan” (Exodus 22:21). In the above passages, Thurston helps to understand God’s kindness and compassion for widows in the community of Israel. Daniel Sinclair affirms that the obligation to provide for the widow and orphan continues the biblical theme, and the punishment of the one who mistreats a widow is pronounced in the extreme (Exodus 22:21). For instance, the community of Israel was mandated to support the fatherless, the widow and the sojourner by giving food and clothing (Deuteronomy 10:18).⁴

Another meaningful contribution on the side of Jewish widows deduced from J.K. Davies. Davies emphasizes that widows play a secondary role in the commandments, thus, the obligation of a brother-in-law to marry the widow of his brother if the brother died without leaving any children.⁵ Thurston also helps to understand that “to remain unmarried or to have no offspring in was a bitter misfortune in the early Hebrew tradition.”⁶ In addition, to be a widow was a fate most feared and bewailed by women. The reason is that a husband’s sudden death was considered a retribution for his sins, “and this retribution was apparently incurred also by the wife. Therefore, to be left a widow was a disgrace.”⁷ For example Naomi, Ruth’s mother-in-law accepted to be called Mara (bitter) because the Almighty had dealt bitterly with her (Ruth 1:20-21).⁸

³ Bonnie Bowman Thurston, *The Widows: A Women’s Ministry in the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 14.

⁴ Daniel Sinclair, “Widow,” in *Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, ed. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder (New York: Oxford University, 1997), 721.

⁵ J. K. Davies, “Widow,” in *Brill’s New Pauly Encyclopedia of the Ancient World*, ed. Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, English ed. Christine F. Salazar (Boston: Brill, 2010), 5:632.

⁶ Thurston, *The Widows*, 13.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

This next section of the thesis turns to the meaningful contributions on care of widows in the New Testament. Research helps to learn more about ways in which the disciples solve the conflict between the Hebrews and the Hellenists. Scholars have contributed differently toward the social and economic situation of the daily distribution in Acts. Some scholars assume that in Acts there was a situation where the community shares property, therefore, the church agreed to provide for all members, including the widows (2:44-45). Others also believe that Luke presented the conflict to support Jesus' positive idea toward widows. According to Finger, Spencer asserts, "widows represent the most vulnerable and powerless class of people in the ancient world, and Luke wants to highlight Jesus' attention and concern for them."⁹

Further readings reveal meaningful lessons from scholars who write about widowhood care in the Greco-Roman world. Davies affirms that in the Greco-Roman world, widows permitted to function legally, if they were financially sound. Davies added that in the Roman society the state was to provide financial support for needy widows; it was of first priority to care for the needs of one's family."¹⁰ Although Paul seems to apply some of the Old Testament and Greco-Roman laws on care of widows, his teachings also help to develop and empower illiterate and underdeveloped widows in the community. In 1 Timothy 5:9, Paul instructed Timothy to enroll widows at the age sixty who do not have adequate support from their family into prayer and serving ministry. This verse helped to solve the helpless and dependent situation in the life of a needy widow.

⁹ Reta Halteman Finger, *Of Widows and Meals: Communal Meals in the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 87.

¹⁰ Davies, "Widow," 5:632.

African Scholarship

Further readings help to learn more widows in three specific countries in West Africa such as Ghana, Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire. The thing to consider is the sorrowful and disgusting experiences some widows endure in these three countries. According to Gaylord Aidoo-Dadzie, among the Fante people of Ghana, the families' care of widows embodied in "dead and widowhood rites (kunayε)"¹¹ because most families believe that the dead can pose danger to the living if rites did not performed.¹² Marie-Antoinette Sossuo also affirms that in West Africa people believe that death brings corruption and the dead still have contact with the living, especially their closest partners in life. This is one of the reasons used for subjecting widows to inhume and humiliating customary practices. For example, in northern Ghana, where polygamy is practiced, a man may die leaving many widows and numerous children. After a man dies his wife or wives must all stay inside, sitting alone, stripped naked with leaves on their private parts. They cannot go out of the house unless they carry a calabash, which is the symbol of the deceased husband. An old woman takes them out naked, escorted to drink a special brew (made up fermented millet and corn). Among the Baule tribe of Côte d'Ivoire, the surviving spouse must fast during the day and weep each day at sunrise and sunset for the three months period of mourning. She is to remain in confinement in the conjugal compound and abstain from contact or conversation with any person but a widowed.¹³

¹¹ Gaylord Aidoo-Dadzie, "The Widowhood Rites of the Fante," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 4, no. 1 (2001): 33.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Sossou, *Widowhood Practices in West Africa*, 204.

Sossuo added that the people, due to supernatural beliefs, misinterpret these practices with the argument that they protect the widows from their deceased husband.¹⁴ Scholars have observed that reports from many regions of the Third World indicate that widows of all ages and from different backgrounds and cultures are likely to be subject to multiple forms of discrimination, neglect, cultural and psychological oppression and abuse. Among the Baule of Côte d'Ivoire, after the period of bereavement, the widow must return to her own kinsmen or be returned by her deceased husband's elders. She is supposed to take with her any young children and probably one or more unmarried daughters. Hence, the maintenance of the widow and her children becomes the responsibility of her relative. Any property belonging to deceased husband should submit to his family.¹⁵

Findings show that scholars' contributions have tilted towards a limited scope of study on this topic. The majority of scholars have contributed extensively against the neglecting of widows and widowhood rites, yet no scholarship so far on widowhood care and empowerment has conducted within the African Instituted Churches in Ghana.

Thesis Statement

In this thesis, the author turns to the New Testament, and specifically 1 Timothy, since care of widows demonstrated by the church at Ephesus can serve as a guide to the AICs in Ghana. In this thesis, the author shows that 1 Timothy promotes a holistic approach to the care of widows, which the family, the church, and the widow herself are involved. This thesis also recognizes that 1 Timothy takes need and available resources

¹⁴ Ibid., 207.

¹⁵ Ibid.

into account. The goal is to ensure that widows are care for in body; mind and in spirit in order not to make, needy widows overly dependent. Such holistic approach is what needed in the life widows among the AICs in Ghana.

Factors that motivated me include my personal experience as a widow's daughter and the condition of the needy widows among the AICs, especially those in my church, the Evangelical Methodist Church of Christ (EMCC). I have realized that the powerless and poor condition of widows and orphans in the EMCC can be minimized if the community consistently applies the biblical teachings on care and empowerment of widows. These factors have motivated me to undertake this research, which will contribute greatly towards the care of widows in the context of the EMCC and the Ghanaian Christian community as whole. While it would have been preferable to interview the widows and the pastors in the EMCC to find out the extent of widowhood care in the community, the time, scope, analysis, and syntax of the thesis did not permit me to accomplish this significant task.

The care of widows in the New Testament cannot be fully understood without reference to the significance of widowhood care in the Old Testament. Historically, the Old Testament reveals God as the helper and savior of widows, including strangers, orphans and the poor (Exodus 22:21-24), since they represent the most vulnerable in the ancient world. Theologically, this passage reveals God's care, protection and passion for widows. The purpose of this passage is to warn that if Israel failed to care for the widows of others, their own people may become widows. This passage also helps to understand Israel's position as a people chosen to serve as a revelation to other nations (Deuteronomy 7:6-9). In Exodus 19:6, the Lord calls Israel a kingdom of priests and a

holy nation. This implies what Israel's life as whole is to represent among the nations, thus, to practice God's holistic approach toward humanity so that other nations can learn from them.

Therefore, the word of God made it known that the community of Israel should "render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another and do not oppress widows" (Zechariah 7:9-10). Since widows were counted among the poor, they would possibly endure all forms of oppression in the community of Israel. We assume that moneylenders exact interest from them and neighbors took their cloaks in pledge and never returned them. According to Harold V. Bennett, oppression therefore, hinders the widow from gaining and maintaining personal dignity.¹⁶ Further, the word of the Lord says "Uphold the rights of the orphan; defend the cause of the widow" (Isaiah 1:17). This implies that the people of Israel should practice God's care and passion for the widows in their community. From the biblical viewpoint, people who believe to be called by the God of Israel should practice God's instructions on care for widows. We can rightly assume that Christianity originated from the Jewish tradition and widows represent the most vulnerable, and powerless class of people in the ancient world, there is the possibility that the early church would continue providing for the needy widows in their community. There is, therefore, a need for the African Instituted Churches and especially the EMCC to continue practicing care of the needy widows in their community, which was initiated by the God of Israel.

¹⁶ Harold V. Bennett, *Injustice Made Legal: Deuteronomic Law and the Plight of Widows, Strangers, and Orphans in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 110.

CHAPTER TWO
WIDOWS IN THE BIBLICAL WORLD

Widows in the Old Testament and Later Jewish Writings

This section explores the background of widowhood in the biblical world by surveying the Old Testament material and later Jewish writings. In biblical and traditions, “widow” referred to a woman whose husband had died.¹ However, Peggy L. Day argues that the term “widow” (Hebrew *almanah*) in ancient Israel referred to a woman whose husband and father-in-law were both dead, and who had no son. In order to adapt this definition to biblical texts that talk about *almanah* having no son has been qualified as the lack of an adult son with the economic means to support his mother (2 Samuel 14:4-8; 1 Kings 17:8-24).²

Traditionally, many widows would fall into this category because of their husband’s death, but others who could rely on the support of a new husband by levirate marriage, an adult son or father-in-law, would not. Thus, the widows as a class in Israelite society in biblical time, were mostly considered as comprised not only of women whose husbands had died, but rather, once-married women who no longer had means of financial support.

¹ “Widow” in *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, ed. Jacob Neusner and William Scott Green (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1996), 2:670.

² Peggy L. Day, “Widow,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1377.

Beginning with the Bible, Judaism has always recognized the special needs of the widow. A married woman whose husband has died often was considered someone helpless in the society.³ As much as scholars have dealt extensively with widowhood in the Jewish community, this section of the thesis will concentrate on God's passion for widows, the role of the community, the role of the family and the role of the widow herself as recorded in both the Old Testament and later Jewish writings.

God's Concern for Widows

Historically, the God of Israel is the helper and savior of widows, including strangers, orphans and the poor (Exodus 22:21-24). Theologically, this passage reveals God's care, protection and passion for widows, warning that if Israel failed to care for the widows of others, their own people may become widows. Therefore, any wrong done to the unprotected widow and the orphan would call for wrathful Yahweh as their avenging relative. This instruction seeks to help the people recognize that they are called beyond keeping the basic rules for civil society to embodying the character of the Lord in caring for those who easily oppressed and even those who may be predisposed against them. Through the prophets, the Lord will repeatedly denounce the mistreatment of the widow and the fatherless in Israel and Judah (Exodus 22:22).

Thurston reported that in the law, the prophetic and the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, God is the defender of the legally defenseless; God will "hear their cry" (Exodus 22:23) and punish those who oppress them. In addition, God is the "protector of widows" (Psalm 68:5); God "tears down the house of the proud, but maintains the

³ "Widows and Orphans," in *The New Encyclopedia of Judaism*, ed. Geoffrey Wigoder (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 798.

widow's boundaries" (Proverbs 15:25).⁴ Further, the Bible cautions, "You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan" (Exodus 22:21). However, Israel disobeyed God's commands as recorded in Zechariah 7:11, "But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears might not hear." The above passages show that the community of Israel humiliated and failed to provide legal protection for needy widows in their community. The passages also help to illustrate God's love and mercy toward the needy.

The Role of the Community

With reference to the decree given in Proverbs 15:25, as quoted above, the people of Israel were expected to emulate God's passion for widows and take good care of them. As stated earlier, the word of God made it known that the people of Israel were to be kind to orphans and widows and to stop oppressing them. For example, the word of the Lord says "Uphold the rights of the orphan; defend the cause of the widow" (Isaiah 1:17). It indicates that justice was not prevailing in the life of the needy among the people of Israel. Thurston emphasized that the cause of the widow was a special example of the poor and powerless (Malachi 3:5). Similarly, Isaiah and Jeremiah used the widow as a metaphor for Israel as lost in a powerless state without God (Isaiah 47:9; Jeremiah 22:3-10 cf. Rev. 18:7). Apart from that, "the widow was an image of 'the remnant,' the desolate few destined to receive God's promise."⁵ The Psalmist cries to God for punishment from the wicked, for "they kill the widow and stranger; they murder the

⁴ Thurston, *The Widows*, 14.

⁵ Bonnie Bowman Thurston, "Widow," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 5:846.

fatherless” (Psalm 94:6-7). In addition, special legislation was enacted for their protection, since they represented the most vulnerable in the land (Deuteronomy 24:17).⁶ This implies that the blessings of the land are for the people as a whole to share. After receiving such instructions, the people of Israel should emulate and practice God’s concern for the widows in their families and in the community as a whole.

The first practical step for the people of Israel which Thurston mentions is that God instructed the Jews to allow widows to reap in their fields and to share in the tithes and meals at public festivals (Deuteronomy 14:28-29). An additional tithe every third year was for the benefit of the landless that were potentially poor. It was to be given to them within their towns and not in the sanctuary. The obligation to provide for the widow and orphan continues the biblical theme, and the punishment of the one who mistreats a widow is pronounced in the extreme (Exodus 22:21).

The second practical step was directed to the public, which was mandated to support the fatherless, the widow and the sojourner by giving food and clothing (Deuteronomy 10:18).⁷ These are the main categories of landless people in addition to the Levites (Deuteronomy 14:29). The purpose of this law is to recall Israel’s experience in Egypt. The third practical step was that, historically, poverty-stricken widows and the provision for their help was specific: “every three years the widow is to receive a portion of the tithe of produce: her garment is not to be taken in pledge” (Deuteronomy. 14:28-29; 24:17-18). Widows and orphans were the most vulnerable in the land of Israel; as a

⁶ “Widows and Orphans,” 798.

⁷ Thurston, *The Widows*, 14

result, the laws made provision for their support by Jewish society. Israel should understand that the blessings of the land were for the people as a whole.

The third practical step regarding a widow was that, “she is to be invited to meals at public festivals and she is allowed to glean in the vineyard and fields” (Deuteronomy. 16:11, 14; 26:19-24; cf. Ruth 2:17-18). The rule concerning the harvest is in tune with the generosity that God expected from the people on this occasion. God commands Israel not to forget the less fortunate during celebration of abundance. It implies God’s care and kindness toward the needy among the people of Israel. Moreover, provision for the poor, sojourners, orphans and widows allowed them to gather standing grain corners or borders of fields, as well as dropped stalks and left-behind sheaves (Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19).

Through these instructions, Naomi empowered Ruth to go out and glean among the ears of grain after Boaz in whose sight Ruth found favor. After she had become a widow, Ruth had the opportunity to utilize these laws to “glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers from early morning until now, except for a short rest” (Ruth 2:7). The story of Naomi and Ruth helps us to understand that some of the Old Testament laws empower widows in the Jewish community. At this point, the widow has opportunity to glean among the sheaves for her own benefit. Prior to that, the widow may not depend on anyone; rather, she can feed her children from gleaning.

On the other hand, the plight of the widow was often miserable, as with Elijah’s encounter with the starving widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-24). After her encounter with Elijah, the widow appears to have been convinced of the truth of Elijah’s religion by the demonstration of God’s power in her life. Elijah concurs with her view about who is

the ultimate cause, but he makes no comment in his prayer as to whether the widow's sin was the human cause. This is an indication of a world where there is only one God; everything in the end lies in his power. This is the final illustration that only the Lord is God because it demonstrates when death faces the God of Israel, the Lord, unlike Baal, does not need to submit (1 Kings 17:21). He can cross the border from Israel in Sidon to bring life out of death. The Lord cannot hide even from a place such as the underworld (Psalm 138:7-12). Truly speaking, our concern for widows could introduce the love of God to those who do not believe in him. After Elijah had raised her son, the widow believed that the God of Elijah was the only true God. She confessed, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and the word of the Lord in your mouth is true" (1 Kings 17:24). Evidently, God used Elijah to provide social, emotional and spiritual needs for the widow.

Moreover, to be a widow was the fate most feared and bewailed by women. A husband's death before old age considered retribution for his sins, and the wife apparently incurred this retribution. As Naomi lamented, why call her Naomi, when the Lord has testified against her and the Almighty has brought calamity upon her (Ruth 1:21b). This implies that the Lord brought destitution, childlessness and widowhood upon her. Again, Naomi sees her suffering as God's testimony, thus, as proof that God condemns her for some sin of which she is unaware. However, her troubles will provide the means to God's bounty, as Ruth stays with her and gleans in Boaz's field. We conclude that God's expectation is that the people of Israel be kind to the widows in the society so that Israel will be blessed.

The Family's Responsibility

This part will vividly discuss the family's responsibility in Old Testament writings and the later part of the work will summarize some family concerns on care for widows in the later rabbinic writings. Thurston explained that after the death of her husband, a widow has opportunity to return to her family only if the husband's family paid her dowry to her. According to Thurston, "otherwise, she was forced to remain in a low position in her husband's family. She could be sold into slavery for debt."⁸ Evidently, Yahweh did not introduce this kind of humiliation and mistreatment on the side of the widow, since Exodus 22:22-23 introduces Yahweh as the defender of the widow, sojourner and fatherless.

Evidently, God used Elisha to redeem a widow from her debt, though her two sons were supposed to be taken into slavery by her creditors (2 Kings 4:1-7). The background information of this story helps to understand that indebtedness was a common problem throughout the ancient Near East and could lead to the loss of property, home, fields and ultimately the freedom of the debtor (Nehemiah 5:4-5; Amos 2:6; 8:6). Fortunately, persons and property ending up in the hands of the creditors could be redeemed, and among the responsibilities of the kinsman-redeemer in an extended Israelite family was the maintenance or redemption of the person or dependents of the kinsman in debt (Leviticus 25:35-55). In the apparent absence of a true relative of the widow in this story, Elisha as a leader of the prophetic communities effectively takes on this kind of role for her. In my opinion, godly leaders should practice Elisha's example.

⁸ Ibid., 13.

Care for the needy, especially the widows and orphans in our families as well as the communities, should be our prime focus.

Further, the Deuteronomic law made provision for a widow who has no children to remarry the brother of the deceased husband (levirate marriage), “in order to ensure male heirs in his line” (Deuteronomy 25:5-10).⁹ Moreover, levirate marriage was considered as a source of protection and comfort for the widow and her children in the Jewish family. As stated earlier, the Jewish widow had no access to her deceased husband’s property if she did not have children. Therefore, her marriage to the dead husband’s brother would enable the widow to benefit from her husband’s property. The question is what would become the situation of the barren widow, since the law does not make provision for her. Perhaps the widow would depend upon the standing grain corners or borders of fields, as well as dropped stalks and left-behind sheaves (Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19). Another issue to consider in the life of the barren widow is her old age, since she might not be able to glean for herself. At this point, the widow needs self-encouragement or support to her life. Although the Bible seems not to mention the situation of the barren widow, the situation of barren women in the Old Testament implies the uncomfortable fate of widows who do not have children.

Since some of the issues are vividly discussed in the later Jewish writings, this next part of the thesis summarizes some the concerns of care for widows in the later rabbinic writings. According to Ben-Zion Benno Schereschewsky, the Jewish law does not allow the widow to inherit from her husband, but she can claim her ketubbah (the marriage contract) the rights due to her by virtue of the provisions, which the husband’s

⁹ Ibid., 13.

family must meet out of the estate; the most important of these provisions relate to her maintenance. The widow can claim the said rights by virtue of her being widow, “it is therefore unimportant whether and to what extent she possessed property during the marriage.”¹⁰ In either case, there should be income from her dead husband’s estate to provide for her needs “until she either remarried or accepted full payment of her dowry and jointure.”¹¹ This sum could be demanded from any of the estate’s assets, even her own property, which the widow had opportunity to sell in order to claim her due. The widow’s claim upon the estate proceeded to that of the other creditors.¹²

Additionally, the sages show a similar lack of protection regarding the widow and the orphan. R. Yosé asserts, “Anyone who robs a widow or an orphan, it is as if he robbed God” (Ex. R., Mishpatim 30:8). Moreover, the sages proposed a variety of laws, which benefit the widow and the orphan. Since the widow does not inherit her deceased husband’s property, the rabbis found it necessary to save the widow financially and established the ketubbah (the marriage contract), which served as an insurance policy paid to the wife after the death of her husband (Ket. 4:2). As a result, “if the deceased husband was owed money, the debt was to be paid to the widow” (Ket. 9:2).¹³ These could be issues affected some widows in the ancient world that may have contributed to the difficult situation of widows in the New Testament World.

¹⁰ Ben-Zion (Benno) Schereschewsky, “Widows: In Jewish Law,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* ed. Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 2007), 21:42.

¹¹ “Widows,” 2:671.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “Widows and Orphans,” 798.

The Widow's Responsibility

Throughout the Old Testament and the later Jewish writings, care for widows was not only the burden of the community and the family members, but rather, some of the responsibilities placed on the widow herself. Beside the community and family's role in the life of the widow, the widow was also responsible for herself and her children as well. In the Old Testament period, a Jewish widow could choose to go back to her family only if her bride price was refunded to her husband's heirs. A childless widow could decide to be subject to levirate marriage in order to produce children to carry on her husband's name (Deuteronomy 25:5-7). However, the widow had to wait for the public refusal of a brother of her husband before she could remarry outside her husband's family (Deuteronomy 25:9). In addition, a childless widow could return to her father or mother's house until she could remarry (Genesis 38:11).

Tamar is one example of this Deuteronomic law. After the death of her husband, Judah, her father-in-law, asked that she return to her father's house, for Judah feared that his only remaining son would meet the fate of his two brothers. Though Judah actually failed to apply this family law, Tamar empowered herself as she tricked her father-in-law to have intercourse with her in order to receive her husband's property. According to Chayin Cohen, when Tamar realized Judah's deceitful decision preventing her from marrying to her son Shelah, she managed to deceive Judah by underhanded means for her own benefit. Unfortunately, Judah could not recognize her because of her veil; as a result, he became her customer. When he later learned that his daughter-in-law was pregnant, Judah at first commanded that she be burned (Genesis 38:24). Tamar, however, secretly proved to him that he fathered her child and he openly announced that not she, but he,

was at fault, since her conception through him was justified by failure to give her to Shelah. This story motivates widows deprived from their husbands' property to fight for their right and discourages cheating and any form of mistreatment done the widow by the in-laws and the family of the deceased husband.¹⁴

We can also learn from the story of these two widows (Naomi and Ruth) that Naomi empowered Ruth to raise the family of Elimelech (the deceased husband of Naomi) through her intimate relationship with Boaz. Others, such as the widow of Zerephath, empowered herself through God's word spoken to her by Elijah, and therefore, her poverty was eliminated and her son too, was brought back to life. Some widows, especially the wealthy, did as they pleased, either to remarry a man of their choice or enter into levirate marriage, yet others returned to their family homes. For example, Abigail chose to follow David after the death of her husband, Nabal, and later became David's wife (1 Samuel 25:42). After seven days of mourning Bathsheba, the widow of Uriah, also became the wife of David, though the thing he did displeased the Lord (2 Samuel 11:27). The mourning was probably seven days (Genesis 50:10). In addition, the Jewish tradition allowed the wife to hold her own property during marriage and, when widowed, she kept part of her dowry. Although marriage is the source of income generating funds for the widow in Jewish family, some of them made good use of the Deuteronomic laws to support themselves and their families.

We can infer from the findings that widows without children would be the most vulnerable in the Jewish society, since they are not capable of taking their deceased's husbands property. It could also be possible for the deceased husband to leave behind

¹⁴ Chayin Cohen, "Widow: Biblical Period," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* ed. Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 2007), 21:42.

children by a different deceased woman since polygamy was permissible, therefore the widow may not share the property with the stepchildren. However, a childless widow would be more vulnerable after the death of her husband; hence, she might not have someone to depend on. With the exception of the issue of the childless widow, rules governing care for widows in both Old Testament and later Jewish writings help the present generation to be kind to widows among them. However, we should consider the disadvantages of women in the Jewish community, for instance, lack of women's education, since this might be the cause of the impoverished situation of widows in the ancient world. Marriage should not be the only source of income for both women in the Jewish world and women across the board.

Widowhood in the Greco-Roman Context

Different writers have discussed the situation of widows in the Bible in different ways, yet few authors have responded to the issue of widows in the Greco-Roman world. This part of the thesis will consider some of the writings on care for widows in the Greco-Roman context. The reason is that the New Testament churches were established in the Greco-Roman world; therefore, it will be appropriate to figure out families, state, and the widow herself in the Greco-Roman culture. Although, many scholars have already defined the term "widow" several ways in both Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts, biblical period the term was used to differentiate between "women whose husbands have died but who do not have some means of support, specifically meal support."¹⁵ Thurston emphasized that the New Testament term *chera* implies a woman left without a husband. Thus, the more passive and needy status of women meant that a

¹⁵ Schereschewsky, "Widow: In Jewish Law," 40.

Greek woman who was left without a spouse was left a “widow, a ‘person without a source of support.’”¹⁶ The term “widow” in this thesis will therefore referring to a woman who has not remarried after the death of her husband.

The Role of the State

The attitude toward widows in the ancient world differed widely from culture to culture, age to age, and within the same historical period, from place to place. For example, women in Athens mostly had fewer legal rights than those in Egypt or Rome and “in classical Athens women did not participate in public life but kept homes and raised legitimate children for the husband.”¹⁷ Thurston emphasized that before the Antonine Constitution of 212 A.D “a woman needed her father or husband to witness any public act.”¹⁸ However, the educated women were the ones who provided intellectual conversation or recreational sex for men. Thus, a marriage contract limits the use of concubines and the husband is to return his wife’s dowry if he cheats.¹⁹

Although, in the Roman society the city-state was to provide financial support for needy widows, it was of first priority to care for the needs of one’s family. The widow mostly depended on the support of her children. Davies affirms, “Her maintenance was generally assured by her acceptance into the household of a married son.”²⁰ Even wives had to seek permission from their husbands, “on matters of public policy to intercede

¹⁶ Thurston, *The Widows*, 10

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 11

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Davies, “Widow,” 5:632.

with him on behalf of individuals and undertake building projects in her own name, and at her own expense.”²¹

The Family’s Responsibility

Davies asserts that upon observing all the rules on single marriage in a woman’s lifetime in Rome, widows did often remarry and there was no stigma involved. Davies added that during the period of the Augustan marriage laws (*lex Julia*), divorced women and widows were more or less encouraged to remarry in order to ensure the continuance of the noble families. However, the Julian Marriage Law permitted widows and divorcées a period of only one and one half years respectively to remarry and sanctions were to be imposed on unmarried women.²² The *lex Papia* increased the deadlines to two years and eighteen months respectively.

Moreover, financial motivations were often conclusive factors affecting the remarriage of widows and divorcées. Although they had their dowry at their disposal after the end of the first marriage, it sometimes served as a means of maintaining life, the reason being that “there was no labor market for free women, and so marriage was often the only source of provision for them.”²³ Her maintenance generally assured by her acceptance into the household of a married son.²⁴

Thurston further narrated that property was handled differently in the Greco-Roman world. The death of her husband made the widow subject to the executor of his

²¹ Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: Appearance of New Women and Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 35.

²² Davies, “Widow,” 5:632.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

estate. Thurston affirms that widows seem to have looked after the husband's property until a family member was established or the guardian of the children had taken charge. Like Jewish widow, Roman law did not permit a widow to inherit property if she did not have children with the deceased.

W. Hulitt Gloer stated that in the Roman world there was a legal requirement to pay a dowry to the husband upon marriage.²⁵ Winter added that Greco-Roman world sought to make sure that a widow had security by giving her shelter with her dowry in the household (Greek, *oikos*) of her oldest son or her father. Moreover, the husband was responsible for the care and provision of his wife. Upon his death, the wife could remain in her husband's home. If a will was made, she only inherited from her husband in the absence of any blood relation. Moreover, spouses could provide for one another by a will, but the testator's children took precedence.²⁶ The purpose of this law was to encourage young widows who had not reached menopause and therefore capable were of bearing children to remarry.²⁷

Again, Winter emphasizes that the *lex Julia* punished unmarried women as well as those who were divorced or widows between the ages of 20-50 who failed to marry or remarry.²⁸ Furthermore, remarriage was permitted in the life of the Athenian widows and was accepted by public opinion. Athenian tradition testifies on a number of occasions to widows marrying a second time. This attitude ascribed to the fact that women married

²⁵ Hulitt W. Gloer, *1 & 2 Timothy-Titus*: Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2010), 182.

²⁶ Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 125.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

very young in the ancient world and that the age difference between spouses was large. The Athenian laws did not even identify an obligatory period of mourning. Widows, like women in general, had limited time to choose their spouse. Additionally, the father was responsible for finding a husband for the widow and “also morally obliged to provide her at remarriage, with a dowry equal in value to the first.”²⁹ Legally, the father or a brother as head of the house “would deal with the reimbursement of the dowry.”³⁰ Even though the Greco-Roman law made provision for the family pay less attention to needy widows in the state. Again, the vulnerability of widows in the state was as result of male subordination of women in the society.

The Widow’s Responsibility

Further readings reveal that if there were children from the first marriage, these counted among the family of their father, and passed to the custody of a guardian. There were cases in which a woman’s children from a first marriage brought into the family of the second husband, who would then also act in the interest of the child towards the guardian. The mother could choose whether to remain with her children or to return to her original family. If she remained with her children in the household of the deceased husband, her dowry also remained there, co-administered by the husband’s guardian until the son was of age, and obtained power over it. At this point, he also incurred the obligation of caring for his mother’s accommodation and sustenance. The mother had lost

²⁹ Davies, “Widow,” 5:632.

³⁰ Ibid.

her claim on the dowry, but in return, she had a claim for maintenance enforceable against her children.³¹

Now we have noticed that in the Greco-Roman context the widow upon the will of the husband authorized to inherit the husband's property, regardless of her state as a childless widow. Therefore, some widows in the Greco-Roman world may have fewer financial difficulties than widows in the Jewish community. In addition, with the help of the father or a brother, widows had the opportunity to select the husband of her choice. However, Greco-Roman law imposed sanctions on widows who failed to remarry. Although the state played a vital role in the life of the widow through social assistance, the state seems to have refused to make a long-term budget for the unmarried widows. Consequently, the widow was punished should she fail to find herself a husband within the period of two years and eighteen months. Apart from the help of the state, the widow in the Greco-Roman world seemed to have nothing to support herself if the husband did not make her a will. As time went on, "the Christian Church took over and began to regulate the care for widows in the congregations."³² According to Winter, 40 percent of women at the time between the ages of 40-45 were widows and as group, they comprised about 30 percent of women in the ancient world.³³

³¹ Ibid.

³² Davies, "Widow, 5:634.

³³ Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 124.

Widowhood in the Early Christian Context

Jesus's Attitude Toward Widows

The next section of the thesis discusses issues concerning care for widow in the early church. Jesus' positive attitude toward widows is seen in the Gospels. Thurston recorded that widows play an important role in only two of the Synoptic gospels: in Mark, and in the special Lukan material. Jesus' examples of widows in Mark are largely for symbolic purposes. In Mark, the widow used is as a "symbol of unselfish, generosity and trust: her total giving presupposes total trust in God and his provision" (Mark 12:41-44; cf. Luke 21:1-4).³⁴ The point of this story is that God measures gifts not by their size but based on how a sacrifice it was to give them and how sincere and selfless the heart was gave the gift. Jesus did not only praise the widows, he also provided for their needs. Moreover, Jesus parable about the persistent widow and unjust judge indicates, God primarily recuing his people from suffering and injustice in the world (18:1ff).

Again, Luke mentions "Jesus restored life to a widow's son" because he had compassion for her (Luke 7:11-16).³⁵ Kathleen S. Nash added that widows "appeared in the parables as embodiments of generosity and persistence."³⁶ In Luke 18:2, Jesus used the parable of the persistent widow to represent the poor, needy and oppressed. We can learn that persistence is her asset in seeking justice from the unjust judge. Moreover, if an unjust judge finally grants the widow's prayer, how much more will God hear the prayer of his elect? The solution to this question is that from God's perspective, justice will

³⁴ Thurston, *The Widows*, 22.

³⁵ "Widow," 2:671.

³⁶ Kathleen S. Nash, "Widow," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 200), 1378.

come to his elect speedily (verse 7). Nevertheless, from a human point of view, of course, justice may seem to be a long time coming. I, therefore, suggest that God's people should persist in prayer, as the widow persisted until she received justice.

Furthermore, Luke introduced Anna a figure who serves as an example for the later order of Christian widow (Luke 2:36-38). The first reason is she did not have a very long marriage, but continued as a widow for over eighty years. In Luke the word 'till' draws attention to the length of her widowhood. Her abstinence from a second marriage reflects in later Christian teaching (1 Corinthians 7:8-9, 39-40; 1 Timothy 3:9-16) and in fact, it was soon held to be honorable, indeed exemplary, not to remarry. He assumes that Anna's asceticism, which was later required of "enrolled" widows, also included fasting and prayer.³⁷ Tertullian later wrote, "Monogamy is a custom of the highest honor."³⁸

Moreover, Thurston cited Luke portraying a widow's spiritual task as waiting and praying for the fulfillment of God's promise. As a devout Jew, Jesus was compassionate toward those about whom God was concerned. For example, Jesus felt compassion for a widow in Nain whose only son had died and, like Elijah and Elisha, he renewed the young man to life (Luke 7:11; 1 Kings 17:8-24). Jesus cited a widow's constant prayer as a positive example, an activity with which widows are associated in the New Testament (Luke 2:36-37). Again, Jesus talked about a widow's generosity (Mark 12:41-44) and he attacks those who "devour widows' houses" (Luke 20:46-47).³⁹

³⁷ Thurston, *The Widows*, 23.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Thurston, "Widows," 846.

Jesus used these statements to criticize the negative attitude of the scribes against widows. Moreover, scribes received payment for legal aid to widows, even though such payment was forbidden. Additionally, scribes collect large sum of money from credulous old women as a reward from prolonged prayer that they professed to make on women's behalf.⁴⁰

The Community's Responsibility

The positive attitude of Jesus about widows has been noted in existing literature. There will be further elaboration on how the early New Testament community responded towards atypical or unusual issues concerning the Hellenistic widows of the Jerusalem church. Historically, the gospel of Luke depicts a unique picture of how the members in the Jerusalem church sold their possessions and shared among themselves. As a result, there was no needy person among them (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32). The purpose of this adjustment seems to connect with the church's daily corporate activity described in Acts 2:46, which contrasted with the weekly synagogue gatherings and distributions. Thurston, however, mentions that months or years later, cracks began to show in the earliest community, as Hellenists complained that their widows were being overlooked or neglected in daily distribution (Acts 6:1).

Many scholars have interpreted this conflict differently. Some claim that Luke's narrative in Acts makes it clear that the first major crisis in the life of the Jerusalem church was not a matter of theology, but of the failure to care for the needs of the

⁴⁰ Alan R. Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 9:393.

Hellenistic widows.⁴¹ Other scholars interpret that as conflict developed between the Jews and followers of Jesus so did discrimination in financial matters. Widows who, had been taken care of by the temple were denied access to care when they became Christians. Other scholars also emphasize that the increasing number of Christians meant that there were more poor people to accommodate, and this necessitated the new development reflected in this passage. Some scholars argues that the Hellenic widows were not in need and discusses that Hellenic diaconate was instituted for “official ministry or service developed around the Galilean women who had followed and served the Lord, his Apostles and his church. He claims that these women deserve special honor, as did the twelve themselves.”⁴²

Additionally, as the church grew, it became detached from its Judaic origins, and Hellenic widows joined the ecclesial institution of widows. If this view is accurate, it is not surprising those Aramaic women who served the Lord given special recognition in the daily distribution. Thurston agrees with Jackson Lake that there is no reason to go beyond the ordinary meaning of widows here. They note, however, that this passage regards the widows as receiving regular support, and this implies some organization of their members. A different pattern of organization is evident in 1 Timothy 5:9-16.⁴³

Joseph Addison Alexander claims the issue of widows in (Acts 6:1) is just the tip-of iceberg, stating that there existed serious theological frictions between these two groups in the Jerusalem church, and that they had major differences over the observance

⁴¹ Gloer, *1 & 2 Timothy-Titus*, 181.

⁴² Thurston, *The Widows*, 29.

⁴³ Paul begins to explain what qualifications a widow must meet to in other to warrant financial support from the church. Having been the wife of one husband (Greek, *henos andros gyne*) is the feminine form of the phrase in the requirements for overseers and deacons (1 Timothy 5:9; cf. 3:2-3).

of the Old Testament law and proper role of the Jerusalem Temple. However, the text itself indicates just the opposite, for several places demonstrate the essential unity in doctrinal understanding among the apostles and their followers (Acts 15:1-35; Galatians 1:18-19, 2:1-10). Alexander emphasizes that widows are always specified in Scripture as peculiar objects of compassion, both divine and human, and as a result are said to represent the whole group of helpless sufferers. He further explained that there is no doubt that the complaint was a specific one respecting widows in the proper sense. He emphasized that the term “neglected” (Greek, *paretheopunto*) literally “overlooked,” not necessarily suggesting ill will or contempt, but such neglect might arise from their being less known than the natives.⁴⁴

According to Finger, the Hellenists were Greek-speaking Jews from the diaspora, “dispersed” Jews living outside Palestine. Their primary language was Greek. The Hebrew was the native Palestine Jews who spoke Aramaic as their primary language and attended the Hebrew-speaking synagogues. Not as fluent in Greek, they seem to have overlooked the Hellenist widows unintentionally. She included that “*Hellenistse* meant no more than *Hellen* a Greek because it a derivative of *hellinizo* which means to leave as a Greek, not to speak Greek.”⁴⁵

We suggest that the problem may not be that the Hellenist women not served at the meal because it was more acceptable in the Diaspora than in Palestine for women to eat with men at social gatherings. On the other hand, Robert W. Wall sees the episode in Acts as a pattern for resolving congregational conflict, since it repeated as a strategic

⁴⁴ Joseph Addison Alexander, *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956), 242.

⁴⁵ Finger, *Of Widows and Meals*, 181.

element of the church's mission (c.f. 11:1-18; 14:27-15:29; 21:17-26).⁴⁶ He uses narrative analysis to place the story in a series of six stories about widows that includes, from Anna in Luke 2 through the widows at Joppa in Luke 9. Spencer asserts, "Widows represent the most vulnerable and powerless class of people in the ancient world, and Luke wants to highlight Jesus' attention and concern for them."⁴⁷ However, Finger said that it is very difficult for us to find the meaning of this problem, since the word "overlooked" or "neglected" not used in the LXX or in the New Testament.⁴⁸

According to Finger, Conzelmann and others think that Luke constructed the story in Acts 6 seem not to present authentic argument about the conflict because there was a history of public support of the poor, mostly widows in both Jewish and Greco-Roman Contexts. For example, the law made provision for the Jewish society and the family to take good care of the widows among them. Some scholars have reported that in Jerusalem, alms not given directly to widows, but were collected by temple officials and put into a basket. Therefore, no one who had as much as a week's supply of food at home could make a claim on these donations. Again, "in the synagogues, weekly distributions from the money chest were made every Friday to the poor, and among the recipients were widows."⁴⁹

Throughout the readings, we have learned that concern for widows in the early was initiated by God and was carried on by the church in Jerusalem. We assume that

⁴⁶ Robert W. Wall, "Acts of the Apostles," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 10:111.

⁴⁷ Finger, *Of Widows and Meals*, 87.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 127.

Luke presented accurate information in the early church and did not create the problem between the Hebrew widows and Hellenistic widows. The most important thing to learn is to correct the administrative procedures of the early church in order to take good care of the needy widows today.

The Widow's Responsibility

Findings concerning care for widows at that period of the early church indicate that their relatives and the society did not properly support widows. We were told that the family and society in general rejected the early converts because the family rejected Jesus' lordship. This implies the Christian widows would be the most vulnerable since some of them depended solely on the alms collected by the temple officials. Therefore, the community had to interfere on behalf of the most vulnerable. The daily distribution includes food items and all material needs for the comfort and relief of others. Based on Acts 2:45 we assume that the report on daily distribution was beneficial to everyone in the community; especially the needy widows. However, some women contributed positively toward the welfare of the needy widows. Dorcas was one example in the Acts; she was renowned for good works and charity. The widows of congregation cried out to Peter, showing him clothes she made for them (Acts 9:39). Her loss was keenly felt because of the community's responsibility for the welfare of its needy widows. Other Christian women such as Lydia a seller of purple goods opens her home for Paul, Timothy and Silas in Philippi (16:14) and Priscilla a tentmaker by trade whom Paul visited in Corinth (Acts 18:3). The point here is that the community's decision on daily distribution seems not to create problem of dependency for the widows, since some women in the Greco-Roman world were self-employed.

We can conclude that the daily distribution was not meant as a source of neither dependency on the side the needy widow nor conflict between Hebrew and Hellenists Christians; rather it was a practice from the Jewish culture as a way of offering alms to the most vulnerable in the society. However, the administrative procedure for the daily distribution of aid to widows in Jerusalem created problem for the community, since the community cared for all widows among them. I suggest that Christians the AICs in Ghana emulate these significant practices in 1 Timothy 5:3-16 in order to release economic hardship from the church.

CHAPTER THREE

INTRODUCTION TO 1 TIMOTHY

This chapter explores the situation and care of widows in the community at Ephesus and the implications for the AICs in Ghana. By so doing, the author looks at the historical background of the city of Ephesus, the context of 1 Timothy, and specifically the author's concern for the widows in the community. 1 Timothy is one of the three pastoral letters (including 2 Timothy and Titus) that the Paul sent to those who would continue to do the work of God. Timothy had been assigned to lead the church at Ephesus, a church needing order in worship as well as doctrinal correction, plagued as it was by false teachers. The letter, probably written about A.D. 62- 64, counseled Timothy on matters of church leadership, from proper worship, to detailed qualifications for church elders and deacons, to advice on confronting false teaching and how to deal with various individuals within a congregation.

The authorship of the Pastoral Epistles has been widely questioned for more than a century and a half. This is mainly because a majority consensus of scholarship has been convinced since then that the letter as not written by Paul, but by a later hand. Yet, others like Luke Johnson argue that in a process of writing his letters, Paul also involved others with him as co-sponsorship. For example, Paul wrote some letters together with Timothy, Silas, Sosthenes and all the brethren with him.¹ Although we acknowledge arguments

¹ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, 35A (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 58.

concerning the authorship, we will discuss the arguments regarding the authorship in our further studies. The important thing now is to look at the situation of the congregation at Ephesus and the author's holistic approach toward the community.

Additionally, the author urged Timothy to nurture his gift and teach by example (1 Timothy 4:6-16), introducing instructions for elders on how to admonish elder men and women on which widows be acknowledged and supported (1 Timothy 5:2-16). The author further instructed Timothy to support male elders and not to show fair judgment among them. The letter mentions other instructions such as submission to both unbelieving and believing slave masters and on Timothy's health.²

James D. G. Dunn says that the letter helps implement 'the faith,' 'the truth' and 'sound doctrine' as the standard and defense by which to judge ward off false teaching and heresy.³ The letter also helps to keep Paul's theology within the New Testament canon. For example, instructions on leadership qualifications in chapter 3:1-13 and instructions for church in chapter 5:1-22 that, the church lived and ordered its life.⁴

Literary Context

1 Timothy seem to be one of Paul's letters that presents a holistic message to the community at Ephesus and the Church across the board. The early part of the epistle describes Timothy as having been left behind in Ephesus as Paul's delegate "in order to confront false teachers with heartfelt love, a good conscience, and authentic faith (1

² Ibid.

³ James D. G. Dunn, "First and Second Letters to Timothy and the Letter to Titus," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 11:775.

⁴ Ibid.

Timothy 1:3-5).”⁵ Although not much information is given to determine exactly what the false teaching was, the author describes Hymenaeus and Alexander as those whom he handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme (1 Timothy 1:20). Again, the author refers to “certain ones” (Greek *tines*,⁶ “certain peoples” ESV, “some people” NSRV, “some” NIV) in 1 Timothy 1:3, 6; 4:1 as he often does elsewhere when speaking about opponents. We also assume that the multiple religious systems such as Judaism, Artemis, and emperor worship in the ancient world have influenced some the teachers, therefore, they introduced doctrines contrary to Christian teachings. For example in 1 Timothy 1:6, the author described some people as teachers of the law. The NSRV states, “Some people have deviated from these and turned to meaningless talk, desiring to be teachers of the law...” The author further referred to others as hypocritical lairs and teachers of demons (4:1,2). Perhaps, the author sees a fulfillment of Jesus’ teachings on the last days in the community at Ephesus (Mark 13:6).⁷

Having denounced the idle speculations of the false teachers, author turns to expounding in specific terms what gospel living should look like. In other words, Paul turns toward the holistic notion of Jesus’ ministry. Dunn emphasizes that the letter helps to establish classic patterns of ministry and church structure, such as bishops, presbyters and deacons, which were crucial in the success of the early Universal Church “over severe challenges from Marcionites and Gnosticism, and which have enabled the church

⁵ Raymond F. Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 18.

⁶ Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 145.

⁷ Many will come in my name, saying, “I am he! And they will lead many astray.

to endure for nearly two millennia.”⁸ Accordingly, this letter provides the most complete summary in the Bible of a pastor’s ministry and spirituality.

The author further calls for prayer and addresses hindrances to prayer, qualifications for overseers and qualifications for deacons. There are also lists of spiritual qualifications for officers in the church as well as advice about caring for people with special needs, such as older men, widows and slaves.

Moreover, we observe that Paul’s concern for widows in the letter creates opportunity for the community, family and widows at Ephesus to understand the holistic ministry of Christ Jesus. The reason is that neglecting widows who were among the most vulnerable in the Greco-Roman world creates a vacuum in the church at Ephesus. Widows were among the most vulnerable because the state seems to have had less assistance for them. Further, families of the deceased husband prevented widows from inheriting their husbands’ property. However, there was no labor market for women in the Greco-Roman world, simply because women were not empowered to participate in public activities. Therefore, the author continues to present God’s passionate approach toward widows and to correct the administrative procedures of care for widows in the life of the community. By so doing, the author empowers widows emotionally, physically and spiritually as he expects Timothy to enroll some of them with special qualifications into serving and prayer ministry.

⁸ Dunn, “First and Second Letters to Timothy and the Letter to Titus,” 775.

The Historical Situation of the Book

Historically, Androclus, son of Condrus, king of Athens, was said to be the founder Ephesus. The city was formerly located on the south side of the Cayster River, but through centuries of silting is now located 10 kilometers (6 miles) inland. Strabo describes Ephesus as the largest commercial center with an “important port”⁹ in Asia. Scholars assume that the population of Ephesus during Roman Empire had about 40 thousand male citizens, with an estimated total population of about 200 to 225 thousand. After series of attacks, Ephesus came under the control of several Hellenistic rulers.¹⁰

The civic structures during the time Paul included the state agora (marketplace) with its stoa (basilica). This spilled out into Curetes Street, which contained several monuments to important citizens such as Pollio and Memmius. Curetes Street led to the commercial agora neighboring the theater. This large market square could be entered through the Mazaeus and the Mithradates Gates, erected in honor of their patrons Caesar Augustus and Marcus Agrippa. On the way to the Artemis temple from the theater, one would have passed the huge stadium renovated or built under Nero A.D. 54-68.

Ephesus was an important center for early Christianity and is frequently mentioned in the New Testament. Paul probably founded the Christian community in Ephesus. Moreover, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus, where he had experienced the ready acceptance of the gospel (1 Corinthians 16:8-9) and he mentions the fact that he had “fought with beast of Ephesus” (1 Corinthians 15:32). In his second visit, Paul spent more than three years at Ephesus (Acts 20:31). Acts 20:17-38 narrates a meeting at

⁹ David E. Aune, “Ephesus” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 413.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 413-14.

Miletus between Paul and elders at Ephesus where he predicts that after his departure, “fierce wolves will come in among them, not sparing the flock...”

We can begin where Paul complains that the opponents promote speculations rather than “faithful to God’s way of doing things (1 Timothy 1:4).” Therefore, Paul assigned Timothy to lead the community that needed order in worship as well as doctrinal correction, an issue introduced by false teachers. Additionally, some scholars maintain that during the period of Timothy, the church has already attracted both Jews and Gentiles in Ephesus, and especially the most vulnerable, including widows. Since widows were not always cared for in the ancient world, they probably found it much more comfortable to associate themselves with the church. Moreover, support for widows by an institution was unprecedented in the Roman world, except for those who were Jewish.¹¹ Consequently, some Jewish widows “would have expected to be supported by a community that had its origin in Judaism.”¹² We suggest that at the period of Timothy, the church’s administrative procedures for the distribution of aid to widows in Jerusalem had simply been taken over by the Ephesian congregation; therefore, problems arose because all the widows seem to qualify for the distribution.¹³

Considering Paul’s instructions in 1 Timothy 5:3, the church actually did not have sufficient financial resources to support those who were real Christian widows. Based on this, the community, families and widows (including real widows and young widows) were instructed to maintain order in the church.

¹¹ Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 127.

¹² *Ibid*, 128.

¹³ *Ibid*.

1 Timothy 5:3-16

(3) Honor widows who are really widows. (4) If a widow has children or grandchildren, they should first learn their religious duty to their own family and make some repayment to their parents; for this is pleasing in God's sight. (5) The real widow, left alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day; (6) but the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. (7) Give these commands as well, so that they may be above reproach. (8) And whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

(9) Let a widow be put on the list if she is not less than sixty year old and has been married once; (10) she must be well attested for her good works, as one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the saints' feet, help the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way. (11) But refuse to put younger widows on the list, for when their sensual desires alienated them from Christ, they want to marry, (12) and so they incur condemnation for having violated their first pledge. (13) Besides that, they learn to be idle, gadding about from house to house; and they are not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not say. (14) So I would have younger widows marry, bear children and manage their households, so as to give the adversary no occasion to revile us. (15) For some have already turned away to follow Satan. (16) If any believing woman has relatives who are really widows, let her assist them; let the church not be burdened, so that it can assist those who are real widows.

Interpretation

This section introduces us to different interpretations and translations of Paul's instructions and the community's responsibilities for the care of those most vulnerable in Ephesus. However, there will be an exegetical work on different translations including the Fante version in order to make a good connection between New Testament world and Ghanaian context.

Verse 3, the NIV instructed the community at Ephesus to “give proper recognition to those who are really in need”, but the NRSV says, “honor widows who are really *widows*.” However, the Fante Bible writes, “*Ekunafo a woye Ekunafo ampara no, dzi hon nyi*,” meaning, Widows who are truly Widows, respect them. Considering these translations, the Greek word “*time*” (noun, singular feminine) meaning, “honor,” “respect,” and “recognition,” applied to the above translations, yet scholars interpret the term “*time*” differently.¹⁴

Thomas C. Oden explains that “honor,” suggested not only respect but also payment of support. Oden added, “When he says, ‘honor widows,’ he means, ‘support’ them in all that is necessary.”¹⁵ Although the term “honor” suggested support, in verse 16 Paul did not repeat the term “*time*,” instead he uses another term “*eparckeo*,” meaning, “to assist,” “to help,” “to care” or “to support” in his instructions to the women who have widows in their families.¹⁶ In verse 16, we assume that Paul encourages the believing women with widows in their household to follow the good work of Dorcas, one who

¹⁴ Barbara Aland and Kurt Aland, eds., *The Greek New Testament*, 4th ed., rev. (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 2008), 182.

¹⁵ Thomas C. Oden, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*. Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), 158.

¹⁶ Aland, *The Greek New Testament*, 66.

provided for the widows in Joppa (Acts 9:39b). The most significant point deduced from verses 4 and 16 is that Paul urges the members at Ephesus to continue practicing God's holistic approach toward widows by honoring and assisting them. Therefore, Oden should have helped us to understand that Paul expects the congregation not only to support "real widows," but also to treat them as children of God.

Raymond F. Collins classified the "real widows" as women over sixty whom the community was to register and take care of on the basis that these widows decide to live an acceptable Christian life and continue in their prayerful life.¹⁷ Seemingly, the community should honor and support the rest of the "real widows" who do not qualify to be enrolled into the serving ministry. Paul considers a "real widow" as one left all alone, (not having other family), who has set her hope on God and continues in supplication and prayer night and day" (verse 5). We assume that there would be needy widows in the congregation whom Paul might not allow Timothy to put them on the list, since they may not have good reputation in the society. Based on this, Collins' interpretation on the term "real widows" seems not to fit in Paul's qualifications for widows who be put on the list in verse 9. For Paul, the ministry of God calls for people with high dignity and self-control.

Verse 4 indicates that Paul instructed the family to take good care of their widows "for this is pleasing in the sight of God ESV, NIV, NRSV, "for this is acceptable in the sight of God NAS" and Fante Bible "na iyi na oso enyi wo Nyankopon enyim," meaning for this is acceptable in the presence of God. It implies that children or grandchildren who care for their parents are holy, pure and blameless before God. Paul helps the families in

¹⁷ Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, 18.

the community to recognize that parental care is one of the hallmarks in Christianity.

Paul's expectation was that widows who had adult children or grandchildren should care for their parents.

In verse 8, Paul made it clear to the family that if no one provides for his relative he has denied or turns away from the "faith" (Fante *Gyedzi*) "and is worse than an unbeliever." The Fante Bible relates Jesus to *Gyedzi*, therefore, relatives who renounce the *Gyedzi* totally rejected of Jesus as their Lord and Savior. It implies that care of widows helps relatives to be partakers of Jesus' kingdom.

In verse 9, Paul did not only encourage the community to put some names of widows over sixty years on the list; he also commanded widows to offer themselves to be enrolled into the church's ministry. It indicates that widows over sixty years with good reputation (not all "real widows" over sixty years) in the community be put on the list of those who receive their sustenance from the church. We assume that the community at Ephesus has recorded the number of all the members, yet the community should recognize the number of widows who have been added into the serving ministry. Therefore, enrolling them or putting them on the list gives widows permission to participate fully in the serving ministry. Knowing the number of enrolled widows helps the community to assign them specific ministerial duties and provide for their needs.

In verse 11, Paul told the community to refuse enroll younger widows, "for their passion draws them away from Christ, they desire to marry," This instruction may first appear to condemn remarriage, however, verse 14 encourages it, and another more specific concern must be in view here. The issue is that widows supported by the church have pledged to remain unmarried; as a result, to remarry would be to renounce this

pledge, or that these younger widows might be tempted by their desire to marry unbelievers. Moreover, concerning principles of marriage, Paul clarifies, “For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy” (1 Corinthians 7:14). The term holy (Greek *hagios*) has already been used earlier in chapters 1, 3 and 6 for God’s separation of Corinthian Christians from their pagan environment as his special people. Therefore, this association does not save the unbelieving spouse and the children in a family with a believing spouse and so, Paul notes, they are much more likely to be saved in due course through their own faith.

Another concern was that the wife would take the religion of the husband, as was usual in that culture. The writer’s possible solution was for the younger widow to remarry. Based on this, she would be able to meet her needs and make good use of her time. Oden concludes that the danger is not simply that they will do no “constructive work but more so that under conditions of demoralization and low self-esteem they become positively destructive.”¹⁸

In addition, Paul did not allow young widows be put on the list, because some young Christian widows were remarrying with pagans. Now, Paul was not preventing the church from recording the names of the young widows, rather he prevents them from enrolling into prayer and serving ministry. For young widows may not be consistent in the ministry of Christ. Paul interprets this as abandonment or alienation from faith in Christ (verses 11-12). Probably the Fante translation on the phrase “na se Chirst ho fon hon a, (verse 11b)” meaning, if they are fed-up with Christ and therefore, willing to

¹⁸ Oden, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, 159.

marry, gives different meaning to the community in Ghana. The term “ho fon” (fed-up), if used in marital sense, gives an impression that the person who is fed-up in the relationship has noticed a serious weakness (especially on finance) in the life other partner, as a result, the person decides to end up that relationship. The point is, if Paul clearly stated that young widows would be fed-up with Christ therefore, they should not accept them into serving ministry, and he is revealing to them a serious weakness in the ministry of Christ.

However, Paul uses this celibate analogy to indicate that Christ is the bridegroom to whom the widow pledges her love and to whom she would become unfaithful if she decides to marry. Additionally, Paul implies that “young widows do better to marry in the Lord, should they wish, than to bound up in pledge of chastity that might make their lives all the more miserable.”¹⁹ I think the NRSV has better translation than the Fante version, since the verse uses the term “alienation,” meaning being completely separated from God. This translation supports the argument that young widows would spiritually separate themselves from the salvific knowledge of Christ and follow Satan (verse 15). As the widow attached herself, to the pagan husband she becomes an unbeliever and allows her spirit, soul and body ruled by the devil. By so doing, the young widow gives the adversary, the accuser, the devil or Satan opportunity to speak against the church. I agree with Paul that a religion that speaks against immorality should correct its members before the message can be applied in any of the societies. Therefore, the AICs in Ghana should help educate young widows who would desire to marry unbelievers to hinder the adversary opportunity to speak against the church.

¹⁹ Ibid., 158.

Problem and Responsibility

The Community's Problem

This section describes Paul's concern for widows in the community at Ephesus during the first century. We assume that Paul recognizes that widows are an important concern for the community and the community has a responsibility for them, and yet he realizes that the community cannot assume the burden of caring for all of them. The reason might be that the Converts at Ephesus practiced the institution of widows' ministry, which the community may overburden by taking good care of all the widows. I suggest that the church in Ephesus tried to follow the administrative procedures for the distribution of aid to widows in Jerusalem, as a result, problems arose because all the widows qualified for the distribution. If this were the case, then it would not be possible to discriminate against Gentile widows. Perhaps the Ephesians did not make local adjustment to the Jerusalem church's distribution system. Therefore, Paul issued instructions to cover the wellbeing facet of the widows and the community as whole.

The community's first major concern for widows addressed in verses 3-16 rests upon the fact that the issue is not primarily one of age but of need. Based on this, Timothy was instructed to advise the church not to dishonor and abandon their widows who have set their hope on God, since they do not have anyone to depend on for support or material help, the "real widows" (1 Timothy 5:5). The word of God clarifies, in this state of defenseless, she has "set her hope on God," that is, she has totally trusted in God and "depended upon God alone as evidence by a life of continuous prayer."²⁰ An example

²⁰ Thurston, *The Widows*, 41.

of such widows may be found in Luke's description of the prophet Anna, who greeted the infant Jesus in the temple (Luke 2:36, 37).²¹

The second major concern was sustainability of widows from multiple cultures. Thus, Jewish Christian widows, Gentile Christian widows and Hellenistic Christian widows. Traditionally, some people in almost all the cultures in the ancient world rejected Christianity; as a result, their family members may reject some Christians including widows in the Ephesus. Among Jewish society, a widow without children is permitted to return to her family or enter into levirate marriage.²² Research shows that, widows in the Greco-Roman world can return to the home of their adult son. We assume that the message of the early church attracted the vulnerable in the society including widows who were rejected by their families. Therefore, the church took it upon itself to take care of the most vulnerable; of which widows were the majority in order to provide emotional, physical and spiritual support for the needy widow in the community. Dunn further explained that the vulnerability of the widows made it all the more significant that a church that found itself in direct community with the assembly of Israel should take particular measures to ensure that widows were properly cared for.²³ Therefore, the community has to learn new possibilities of approaching widows in order not to deprive them from the fellowship. The community at the initial stage seems to embrace all cultures norms and later resolve to the possible means of correcting and sustaining people from different contexts.

²¹ Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 182.

²² Bennett, *Injustice Made Legal*, 32-33.

²³ Dunn, "First and Second Letters to Timothy and the Letter to Titus," 775.

The third major concern is lack of enrollment of widows in the community. Perhaps the community allowed widows willing to serve in both prayer and serving ministry. Moreover, the community seems not to have actual number of ministering widows and their individual gift, hence it may not be able to empower widows to achieve their God-giving talent.

The fourth major concern is lack of marriage principles on the side of young widows in the community. Paul's instruction to the community indicates that young widows had liberty to select a husband of their choice. The community was less concern about the marital life of young widows. The children of widows need a God-fearing stepfather to provide proper training in order to become a responsible child of God.

New Responsibility

The community's primarily responsibility is to honor real widows; the admonition includes not only respect but also material support to provide for them and enrolls them into the ministry. Dunn mentions, the church initially used communal funds only for those in genuine need such as "real widows," and elders who rule the church to fulfill author's instructions as stated in 1 Timothy 5: 3, 17.²⁴ The term translated, "honor" (Greek *time*) perhaps carries the idea of "provide financial support."²⁵ He affirms that the term "honor" implies not only respect but also payment of support. Oden cites, the payment of support implied more than payment of money. It signifies genuine regard, sympathy, and recognition of their service and their personal dignity, especially those

²⁴ Honor widows who are truly widows (verse 3). Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching (verse 17).

²⁵ Dunn, "First and Second Letters to Timothy and the Letter to Titus," 819.

most truly needy and godly.²⁶ They must be properly cared for in order not to tarnish their image in the community in which they live. Paul begins to explain what qualifications a widow must meet in order to receive financial support from the church. Having been the wife of one husband (Greek, *henos andros gyne*) is the feminine form of a phrase in requirements for overseers and deacons (verse 9).

The second major responsibility is to support widows who cannot be categorized as “real widows.” According to Collins, Paul speaks to the community to support elderly widows whom both have lost their husbands and sons.²⁷ We believe that Paul tried to help the community direct its resources to widows in greater needs. However, Paul instructed the families in the community to care for their widows in order not to overburden the church. Since widows were the most vulnerable in the ancient world, the community should consider them as God’s people with special needs. The community should welcome the needy widows and let them participate in all public activities. By so doing, the community learns to empower and helps widows to live independent life, and not only provide for their financial needs. Prior to this, widows would be able to concentrate on their ministerial duties in order for them to improve the emotional, physical and spiritual life of the community. My expectation is that both widows as well as the community focus on God’s holistic approach in each other.

The third major responsibility is not just to provide financial assistance, but to sustain the widows in the community. For example, some widows can be assigned to take care on orphans in the community, wash the feet of the saints and care for the afflicted in

²⁶ Oden, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, 155.

²⁷ Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, 137.

the community (verse 10), since they already possessed these qualities. By so doing, both widows and the community work positively toward the holistic approach of God in humanity because both of them contribute positively toward the emotional, physical and spiritual life of God's people.

The fourth responsibility based on the principles of marriage in the life of young widows. The community should encourage young widows to marry Christian husbands. Based on this, the community is responsible to teach young widows to seek God's direct them select husbands who can improve the wellbeing of young widows. Since some of the young widows have children with deceased husband, the community should be able to educate the young widow and her newly husband to take good care of the deceased husband and children of the new husband. Moreover, the community should empower young widows to become women capable of keeping their household.

The Family's Problem

Further readings show the first major problem of widows for widows in Ephesus was a bit different from the issue raised in Acts. In the Jerusalem community, there seems to be an issue of the neglected widows from the daily distribution of food items. However, the first major problem at Ephesus was the families' lack of support for widows who were real widows. David C. Verner emphatically discusses, "just as the household was the basic unit of the church, the church was a social structure model of the household."²⁸ He gave detail account on the household in the Hellenistic-Roman world

²⁸ Thurston, *The Widows*, 39.

and ends, ““social tensions related to the household in this period appear to have centered on the changing position of women in the society.””²⁹

The second major concern has to do with women’s subordination in the ancient world. In almost all the cultures, both the society and the family are not, kind to women particularly widows. For example, in both Jewish and the Greco-Roman world women were not allowed to participate in public activities. Scholars affirm that education was granted to the boys in the ancient world. Moreover, there was no labor market for women in the Greco-Roman world. Even, widows in the biblical world widows were not permitted to inherit their deceased husbands’ property if they remain childless. For example, Tamar was denied from her deceased husband’s property, though some scholars assume Genesis 38:8 leaves open the possibility that she was sonless not childless.³⁰

The third major concern is the lack of mutuality between the family and the widow. In 1 Timothy 5:4, Paul instructed the nuclear and extended families not to neglect their widows. Since the biblical commandment made provision for parents, children who do not support their needy widows do something that is not pleasing to God. We also believe that almsgiving is one the hallmarks of the community of the early church; therefore, children who failed to give to their needy widows disobey the will of God.

New Responsibility

Timothy is told to ensure that children and grandchildren “learn their religious duty from their families (verse 4).” According to Gloer, “learn” (Greek *manthanetosan*) in this context means “to practice,” or “to become proficient in,” and “religious duty”

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Bennett, *Injustice Made Legal*, 33.

(Greek *eusebein*) derives from the verb form of the word “godliness,” a central theme in the Pastoral Epistles. As a verb, it can mean both “to honor” the deity appropriately, that is, “to worship,” and, in an ethical sense, “to fulfill one’s obligations to the deity.” In this case, the religious obligation is to the family and it is of first importance. It should include some payment to their parents. In many cultures, “the idea of repaying parents is prominent, since it is believed that the children owe their lives to their parents.”³¹

Gloer further affirmed that fulfilling their obligation to their parents is part of fulfilling their obligation to God, and “this is pleasing in God’s sight (verse 4).” Gloer writes that this idea might not borrow only from the Hebrew culture but also from the Roman province system. Paul is obviously concerned with those who have fallen through the cracks. Therefore, Timothy was obliged to educate the church in Ephesus, especially the families of the widows, to take good care of their widows. However, Gloer explained that in 1 Timothy, widows primarily were the responsibility of the family.³²

In the earlier discussions, Thomas C. Oden asserted that there is a clear difference between widows with families (those who deserve support from their families) and widows without families (those that the church should care for). Oden added that those deprived of all support systems were termed by Paul as “widows in real need” or “real widows” (1 Timothy 5:16), to whom the greatest honor is due (verse 3).³³

³¹ Gloer, *1 & 2 Timothy-Titus*, 182.

³² Ibid.

³³ Oden, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, 155.

The Widow's Problem

This section deals with the issues pertaining to the widow herself. The first major problem addressed by Paul has to do with the widow dependency on the community and family. Since the widow has no property or no source of income after her husband's, the widow depends on both the community and the family. The lack of labor market on the side of the widow makes her depend more on the community or the family. Lack of women's formal education in the ancient world, most women could not assist themselves financially.

The second major concern is on the widow's quality life in the ministry. Widows enrolled into serving and prayer ministry should learn to consider herself as a minister of God. Prior to this, the widow should observe all the qualifications stated in 1Timoth 5:9-10. She should not have been a wife of many husbands and not have bad reputation for work of God. Another concern on the widows' was her family life. She should not be the one incapable of nurturing children of her own children and others. Moreover, the widow should be the one who do not refuse to wash the apostles' feet or reject the afflicted in the community.

The third major problem is the issue of celibacy in the life of the widow. The church, in order to preserve its standard in the community began to conform to the community's social norms. In fresh look at 1 Timothy 5:3-16, Jouette Bassler depicts exactly this pattern. She notes that women turned to celibacy to find freedom from the inequalities imposed by marriage. According to Bassler, celibacy was required in the widows' circle, but again like the vestal virgins, under special restrictions, women were thereby freed from patriarchal norms. Although, the widows of the Pastoral Epistles were

under special restrictions, these restrictions were not those binding ordinary women. Indeed, widows were remarkably free of these ordinary restrictions. Bassler suggests that as the church became more willing to adapt to society's norms, the number in the widow's circle increased as women sought a degree of freedom.

The fourth concern is the issue of younger widows. The community seems to prevent young widows as group that have nothing to do and fill their time in inappropriate ways as indicated in verse 13. First, the young girls beyond puberty were often married to much older men, and mortality rate would be often be high among men in military service. The second stage is the vulnerable situation of the widow. Thurston reports, unless well-to-do in her own right through inheritance, a widow's lack of legal status made her more vulnerable; her legal guardian (male) might covert her wealth or abuse his authority. Thurston added that younger widows bring into focus the problems of the position of the entire society toward the church. For instance, in 1 Timothy 5:12-13 Paul mentions that "widows learn to be idlers going about from house to house, not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies saying what they should not." Prior to this, E. F. Scott identifies that no charges against the church were more efficient than those regarding the identity of its women.³⁴ Having spoken of the community's need to support the needy and destitute aged widows, Paul turns to younger widows. He finally explained that there are still young widows who can marry.³⁵

³⁴ Thurston, *The Widows*, 42.

³⁵ Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, 135.

New Responsibility

The widow's, first responsibility is to appreciate the community's material support in her life. The widow should recognize that the writer is not solely liberating "real widows" from poverty; rather he was empowering her to lead a life that is acceptable to God. The widow should be content and appreciate the financial support from the community so that she can contribute toward others. She should learn to support others with the provision made to her by the community.

The second responsibility to consider is the qualifications of the enrolled widows. The widow is expected to leave above reproach. She should learn to control her sexual desire as she marries to one husband. The widow is expected to have good reputation as she continues to do good works. She should learn to be a mother of all children in and outside the community. As a minister of God, the widow should be hospitable, able receive visitors in the fellowship as well as her home.

In 1 Thessalonians 3:1-12, Paul encourages the members to work for themselves. The enrollment of widows into serving and prayer ministry would help develop a better life of the widow in the community. Therefore, the community has to encourage widows in order to respond positively toward the ministry, which, they are called to serve. John Patton emphasized that if the message of Christian care is to be heard and remembered, the person receiving the message is a major element in conveying it.³⁶ With the help of the community, widows should respond positively toward all forms of ministerial duties. By so doing, enrolled widows should examine and devote themselves to their calling as people determine to serve in God's vineyard. Due to inequalities imposed by men in the

³⁶ John Patton, *Pastoral Care in Context: An Introduction to Pastoral Care* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 112.

biblical world, the enrolled widows should be well equipped so that they can be used as vessels of God.

The widow's fourth responsibility is the issue regarding celibacy. The following instructions may first appear to condemn remarriage, however, verse 14 encourages it, and another more specific concern must be in view here. The issue is either that these widows who are being supported by the church have pledged to remain unmarried; as a result, to remarry would be to renounce this pledge, or that these younger widows might be tempted by their desire to marry unbelievers, thus turning away from the "faith" and "some have already stayed with Satan" (1 Timothy 5:15). Thomas C. Oden depicts that some young Christian widows of Ephesus were marrying to Pagans.³⁷ With remarriage to an unbeliever, the concern was that the wife would take the religion of the husband, as was usual in that culture. The writer's possible solution was for the younger widow to remarry (verse 14). Based on this, she would be able to meet her needs and make good use of her time. Oden concludes that the danger is not simply that they will do no "constructive work but more so that under conditions of demoralization and low self-esteem they become positively destructive."³⁸

³⁷ Oden, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, 157.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 159.

CHAPTER FOUR

PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS

Now we have described the attitude toward widows in the biblical period, Greco-Roman world, 1 Timothy 5:3-16 and other New Testament writings. This last chapter of the thesis will describe the differences and similarities between care of widows in 1 Timothy 5:3-16 and care of widows in AICs, specifically the EMCC in Ghana. Prior to this, a brief history of the EMCC will be given. Although the situation addressed by 1 Timothy is different from Ghanaian context, I will try to develop a model for making a good connection between the biblical world and modern Ghana. This chapter will consider the best way to bring the biblical message in Ghanaian context. Moreover, the family's inadequate financial support and new possibilities for encouraging changing the family's attitude toward widows in Ghana by the EMCC will be discussed.

Furthermore, the work will investigate the community's negative attitude toward "real widows" and how the needs of such needy widows be provided. In addition, there will be deliberations on the lack of pastoral care and a better way of providing spiritual and emotional support for all widows in the community. Prior to this, we will look at the situation of pastoral care in the Christian tradition, and specifically its influence in the widow's life. Charles V. Gerkin asserts, caring leadership of a community should not only have a clear vision of what a community should be, but also the capacity to think of

what a community can give.¹ Therefore, we will look at Paul's concern for widows in the letter; hence, it creates opportunity for the community, family and widows to understand the holistic ministry of Christ Jesus. The reason is that neglecting needy widows in the ministry creates a vacuum in the church at Ghana. The final section of the chapter will look at the helpless and dependent situation of "real widows" and make recommendations as to how the church can provide training in basic skills for widows and means of involving them in ministry. The question is who is considered as a "real widow" in the Ghanaian context. In this thesis, I include aged widows left all alone with health issues and young widows without adult children into Paul's definition of "real widows" in 1 Timothy 5:5, "She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God..." My passion is to witness God's holistic ministry in the life of needy widows in Ghanaian society, which EMCC is chosen to be the point of contact.

Problem and Responsibility

The Family's Problem

This part of the thesis describes the attitude toward widowhood care in the contexts of three West African countries such as Ghana, Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire. Among these specific groups, "widowhood is determined by cohabitation, customary marriage, and marriage of ordinance."² The marriage of ordinance applies to the Western type of monogamous marriage in a magistrate court, in a church or by Islamic laws. In cohabitation, a woman could live with a man for several years without getting married

¹ Charles V. Gerkin, *An Introduction to Pastoral Care* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 121-22.

² Sossou, *Widowhood Practices in West Africa*, 201.

either customary or legally. This relationship could produce children or no children but upon the death of the man, “the woman is expected to perform widowhood rites even though she may not be recognized as a ‘proper wife’.”³ Among the Fante people of Ghana, the families’ care of widows embodied in “dead and widowhood rites (kunaye)” because most families believe that the dead can pose danger to the living if rites are not performed.⁴ The Fante is a group of the Akan people, located in the Central Region of Ghana. The first issue concerning widowhood rites is that some of the Fante believe that the spirit of the departed might bring either blessings or curses to the living, therefore, some people, and especially widows, submit themselves to rites to avoid any evil influence. Marie-Antoinette Sossuo affirms that in West Africa people believe that death brings corruption and the dead still have contact with the living, especially the closest partners in life. This is one of the reasons used for subjecting widows to inhume and humiliating customary practices. I agree with Sossuo that the people, due to supernatural beliefs, misinterpret these practices with the argument that they protect the widows from their deceased husband.⁵ Scholars have observed that reports from many regions of the Third World indicate that widows of all ages and from different backgrounds and cultures are likely to be subject to multiple forms of discrimination, neglect, cultural and psychological oppression and abuse.

The second major problem in the life of widows in the community identifies in the work of Gaylord Aidoo-Dadzie. According to Aidoo-Dadzie, the belief in the power

³ Ibid.

⁴ Aidoo-Dadzie, “The Widowhood Rites of the Fante,” 33.

⁵ Sossou, *Widowhood Practices in West Africa*, 207.

of the spirit of the deceased generated from people's concept of death. For those who think solely in secular terms, death is an end of all vital functions, and a dead person cannot in anyway affect the lives of the living. Some Christians believe that death is the separation of the spirit from the body. During death, the spirit returns to God who gave it, and the body, when buried, goes back to the earth from which it was formed (2 Corinthians 5:6-8; Philippians 1:23). Others believe that those who are alive at time of resurrection will be transformed so that their bodies become spiritual and immortal bodies of those who are resurrected from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:51-53; cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Like Christians, traditionalists also assert that death is a separation of the spirit from the body. On the other hand, they accept that the spirit of the dead person who led a good life on earth moves around until the final funeral rites are held, before he or she is officially ushered into ancestral realm. Traditionalists believe that if these rites not performed, the spirit of the dead may disappear or perpetually live in the earthly realm. Therefore, people (widows) offer themselves to these rites in order to avert any evil influence. In addition, widowhood practices aim at guarding against any harm inflicted by the spirit of the deceased upon the living spouse.⁶ However, a majority of the practices are not beneficial to the widows.

As part of the practices, the widow is supposed to return to the deceased's room after burial ceremony to begin the rites. Now, two or three elderly women from the dead husband's family with good reputation advanced in the traditional rites selected to attend to the widow during the period of confinement. The widow "is then held with her back close to the wall at the end of the bed and she is gently pushed against the wall three

⁶ Aidoo-Dadzie, "The Widowhood Rites of the Fante," 34

times.”⁷ Each time she is told by one of the elderly women “wo kun ewu na afei na wo ye kuna,” meaning your husband is dead and are now begins widowhood rites.”⁸ During this period, the family of the deceased husband is responsible for feeding the widow. The family provides her food during the first eight days, after which the head of the deceased husband provides money to her relatives for her upkeep. The feeding arrangement continues until the end of the twelve-week confinement period and it is an indication of continued physical care of the husband for the wife.⁹ Again, the family provides six yards of black cloth, a headscarf, earrings, a necklace, sandal and a mat. The widow is supposed to use these items for a year as symbols of mourning her deceased husband. The widow has a twelve-month period to mourn for her dead husband.

The widowhood practices among Fante people seem to play two significant roles in the life on the widows, thus, to provide both moral and emotional protection. First, the family makes it a taboo to have sexual relationship with a widow who has not finished her widowhood rites. The purpose is to secure the widow from anyone who might take advantage of making any excuse of comforting her. There is a belief that the loss of a life partner calls for certain discomforts such as mourning and weeping. For example, “the looming responsibility of the care of the children and home and other allied issues” can take charge of the widow and provoke her emotional stress.¹⁰ This section of the practices seems to protect the Fante widows emotionally from fear, sorrow and loneliness, yet some families members, mainly women, intimidate the widows to accept every

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

instruction impose on them. At this point, the Fante people should notice that Christian widows do not need to go through widowhood confinement to maintain a state of holiness. Although God wants humanity to be holy, our holiness does not depend on any religious rituals. In the Old Testament God is revealed as the protector and defender of the widow (Psalm 145:9; Exodus 22:22-24).

The apostle Paul also encouraged young widows to remarry as a way of preventing possible immoral behavior (1 Timothy 5:14). Paul might have introduced the idea of remarriage since there was no labor market for women in the Greco-Roman world and so marriage was often the only source of provision for them. However, remarriage must be entered into with a great caution and restraint because of the cultural differences between and Greco-Roman world and Ghanaian context. Although Paul's teachings on remarriage can provide moral protection for Christian widows, such marriage may not benefit some of the needy widows in Ghana. There is a possibility that men entering into first marriage would be discouraged to marry a needy widow with children because of the economic hardships in Ghana.

In some West African countries, action is taken against Christian widows who refuse the rites. Among the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria, "the patrilineal sisters of the deceased husband usually insist on establishing that the wife has not come from another family to kill a member of their family in order to carry the wealth from their family over to her own."¹¹ For example, an Igbo family of Nigeria invoked the spirit of the dead

¹¹ Sossuo, *Widowhood Practices in West Africa*, 204

husband on a Christian widow who refused to perform the widowhood practices. The family sometimes insists that nobody communicate in any way with the widow.¹²

The third concern is violation of women's rights by their male counterpart. According to Sossuo, women in general are gradually and consequently subject to a wide range of violating their human rights simply because they are female. She considered, "no social group has suffered greater violation of its human rights in the name of culture than women have."¹³ Apart from family humiliation, the economic survival of the widow after the death of the husband is another crucial point of discussion. From my observation, almost all the families in Ghana (both Christians and non-Christians) seem to support the widow until end of the twelve-week period of confinement. The widow then begins a new life by herself or with her children without the deceased's family support if she decides to go back to her family. Family care depends on love from the dead husband's brother or if the widow has good relationship with the dead husband's family. Like the Old Testament period, a childless widow (some families in Ghana include widows with disabled children) perhaps has no support from any of the deceased husband's family. The reason is that a barren widow or a disabled child has nothing good to contribute to the family, therefore, provision for their welfare considered as waste of resources. Although scholars have confirmed the economic self-reliance of women through their immense contribution to their household economy, "many widows are

¹² Ibid., 206.

¹³ Ibid., 207.

reduced to poverty as a result of being evicted from their matrilineal homes and losing of property to often ruthless in-laws.”¹⁴

The fourth concern is the issue of employment in the life of the widow.

Throughout all three societies in West Africa cited in the thesis, agriculture and trading are the main activity for women. Unfortunately, women’s lack of control over the land and its resources poses a disadvantage for continuous sustenance after the death of the major landowner. Among the Igbo of Nigeria and (Akuapem Kyerepon of Eastern Ghana), although a widow cannot inherit land, most widows can gain some kind of access to their husband’s land as long as they have sons and continue to live with their husband’s family. Generally, the land allocation is regarded as temporary since the land belongs to the children as a right. Although women or widows are not prevented by customs from buying land, they can do this only through a male assistance or their adult sons.¹⁵

The fifth major concern is the patriarchal norms against widows in Nigerian context. In the Igbo practice of widow inheritance, whereby the heir or successor enters into the deceased kin as regards the deceased’s rights and obligation to his wives, was once considered as an effective method of providing for widows in the traditional society. In the past, the widow and her children increased the labor pool of the successor and he was responsible for their maintenance. These arrangements have become unattractive and

¹⁴ Ibid., 206.

¹⁵ Ibid.

burdensome, and most people are no longer interested in widow inheritance or levirate marriage in which a widow remarried to her husband's brother or other male relative.¹⁶

The sixth concern for widows is the problem of inheritance. In Ghana, the inheritance of the deceased's properties by his widows is also problematic. Among the matrilineal families of the Ashanti, his sister's sons or nephews inherit properties of the deceased husband, while the widows and their children left to fend for themselves or to seek support from their own matrilineal clan. Among the patrilineal groups of the Anlos of south and Gonjas of northern Ghana, inheritance passed on to the male relatives of the deceased. The widows could only benefit from the properties if they have grown-up sons or forced to remarry into their deceased husband's family again. Among the Baule of Côte d'Ivoire, after the period of bereavement, the widow must return to her own kinsmen or be returned by her deceased husband's elders. She is supposed to take with her any young children and probably one or more unmarried daughters. Hence, the maintenance of the widow and her children becomes the responsibility of her relative.¹⁷ Any property belonging to deceased husband must turned over to his family

Among the Fante of Ghana (including Kyerepon Akuapem), the next of kin of the deceased husband is asked to remarry the widow, whether he has a wife or not. Such a marriage among the Fante is called *Ayetsew*. Similar to the Old Testament teachings on a relative's marriage, the notion behind this marriage is that the relative of the deceased might care for the widow and children. However, this is by mutual consent and neither the widow nor the next of kin is under obligation to accept that marriage proposal. If the

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

widow does not wish to remarry, her deceased husband is next of kin; her liberty is to marry anyone of her choice. In that case, the elders of the deceased husband's family have to hand her over to her own family. This signifies the cessation of her commitment to the husband's family.¹⁸ In fact, this is not the end of her marriage, widows with children or young widows who are in process of childbearing are encouraged to marry or can be given to another man by their fathers approval. However, majority of the Luos of Tanzania believe that if a widow could not remarry the brother-in-law he should be responsible for the care of the widow and her children because the "he is like her husband."¹⁹ The idea behind the unwillingness of widows' remarriage among the Luo depends on their understanding of the term widow. The technical term for a "widow" is *chi liel*, meaning "a wife of grave." This implies that the widows are still wives, and hence, are not free to remarry.²⁰

The three social systems of Ghana, Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire decide what widows can do or cannot do in the economy through customary laws on inheritance and remarriage. However, the support system, which formed the basis of the widow up-keep in the past, has given way to more individualized support systems. However, the customary laws and rules, which decide the system of inheritance of assets and property, have not changed so much. Traditional laws of inheritance and right to use property have positioned the widows in a very difficult situation. Therefore, trading and paid employment have become an important supplementary source of income for widows'

¹⁸ Aidoo-Dadzie, "The Widowhood Rites of Fante," 36.

¹⁹ Michael C. Kirwen, *African Widows: An Empirical Study of the Problems of Adapting Western Christian Teachings on Marriage to the Leviratic Custom for the Widows in Four Rural African Societies* (Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1979), 38.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

survival, mostly the literate widows and those who have sufficient money to establish their own business.

The seventh main concern to consider is the support system from the widows' nuclear family, since widows without children have no access to their dead husband's property. From the biblical viewpoint, God had compassion and love for widows who were neglected by the families (Exodus 22:22-24). The prophet Isaiah was used to caution the people of Israel to "plead the widow's cause" (Isaiah 1:17). Again, God demonstrated his passion through Elisha to settle the debt of a widow who's "creditor has come to take her two children to be his slaves" (2 Kings 4:1-7). Paul also instructed Timothy to teach families to take good care of their widows "if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and make some returns to their parents..." (1 Timothy 5:4). One may bear witness that the situation at hand calls for a positive change, which the church and the family should be encouraged to take drastic measures in favor of the widow. This does not necessarily mean that the church and the family should provide financial support for the widow in the rest of her life. Rather, the church and family can help widows by training them so that they can better provide for themselves and their children.

New Responsibility

The family's attitude toward care of widows in Ghana and other African countries can be improved if Christians constantly teach their members about God's passion and concern for widows and orphans. The reason is that both the widow and family are indoctrinated by certain superstitious beliefs. Apart from God's concern for the widows, the church can also educate the families about the law, which spells out how the

properties of spouse disposed of if the spouse happens to die intestate, since majority of the families do not read these laws.

The first major responsibility is to expose the families to all biblical teachings concerning care of widows. As much as God requires the Jews to be kind to their widows, there is therefore the need for the EMCC community to approach issues of custom and culture with a positive attitude, which encourages them to embrace the objectives and meanings behind traditional practices. In a more holistic approach, the EMCC should be introduced to God's care as demonstrated in "prophetic acts of leadership and confrontation with the implications of the will and purpose of God for the mutual care of all human affairs and for the earth itself."²¹ Furthermore, Jesus' positive attitude toward widows in the Gospels should be expatiated to the families. In Luke 7:11, Jesus cares of the widow at Nain by raising her only son from death. Moreover, James' practical Christian living on widows imbedded in the family teachings (1:27). I am in agreement with Aidoo-Dadzie that "an open mind would provide a way for biblical truth to interpret the traditions and begin the process of change."²²

The second major responsibility is to assist the families to disbelieve that the widow is still married to the deceased husband, since that is the fundamental traditional belief underlying the widowhood practices. The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:6-8, tells us that at death the spirit goes back to Christ who gave it. Paul means that when he dies, though his physical body will be buried here on earth, he expects that his spirit or soul with a transformed body will go immediately into the presence of Christ, and will be

²¹ Gerkin, *An Introduction to Pastoral Care*, 24.

²² *Ibid.*, 36.

present with Christ in that condition until the day of resurrection (cf. Luke 23:43; Philippians 1:23; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Hebrews 12:23). Therefore, there is no possibility that a ghost or spirit can be married to a living spouse. It is written in 1 Corinthians 7:39 that “A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she chooses to remarry whom she wishes, only in the Lord” (Romans 7:9; 2 Corinthians 5:6-8). However, we have to note that the issue of evil spirits oppressing people and the fundamental claim to their victims as spiritual husbands is not a point of discussion. Such people cannot be husbands or wives of those spirits, but victims of spiritual attack who need to be delivered by the word of God and prayer (Mark 9:14-29).

Based on this, the EMCC has to give the families sound biblical teachings on the basic beliefs of Christian faith to cover areas such as death, the after-life and ancestors. During a Christian education week celebration, the EMCC can encourage men’s, women’s, and youth ministry to organize conferences and seminars on death, the after-life and ancestors for the relatives of the dead, as practiced traditionally and as also revealed in the Scripture. During these programs, the EMCC should place emphasis on the 1994 constitution of Ghana, which makes specific provision concerning rights all, including women. The EMCC can refer to “an Intestate succession law, PNDC Law 111 of 1985 (People’s National Democratic Congress) which spells out how the properties of a spouse should be disposed of if the spouse died without making a will.”²³ Moreover, the EMCC should encourage all married couples, mainly those in traditional marriages, to register their married in their local and municipal councils in order to protect themselves and their children from disinheritance upon the death of the partner.

²³ Sossuo, *Widowhood Practices in West Africa*, 207.

As indicated earlier, widowhood practices are traditionally recognized as a means of spiritual, moral and emotional protection for the living partner. Those in favor of widowhood practices consider them a means preventing bad influences from the evil spirits. The Fante, as do many African tribes, “believe that the ancestors are the custodians of family law and have the right to punish those who disobey the law and reward the law-abiding.”²⁴ The belief is that if a widow failed to observe the laws, the ancestral spirits will be offended and will cause varied unforeseen problems to interfere with the normal life of the surviving spouse as a punishment. For example, the Fante believe that the widow’s business may have little profit or even decline, or she may have afflicted with strange deceases, or may experience some form of spiritual attack. These might explain as caused by the spirits of the ancestors and the *abosom* (the sons of Supreme Being) because of the failure to follow with traditional widowhood practices. These beliefs introduce fear and force people to yield to the pressure performing widowhood practices. However, the Christian should not fear of what other people fear, “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba! Father!” (Romans 8:15; cf. 1 John 4:4).

Research shows that God’s concern for widows is a repeated theme in the Scripture. The Prophet and the wisdom literature in the Old Testament reveal God as the defender of the widow (Exodus 22:23; Psalm 68:5; Proverbs 15:25). For this reason, the EMCC must provide adequate support for widows by educating the families to discern the actual causes of the problems they face. Last of all, the church can make necessary

²⁴ Kirwen, *African Widows*, 36.

efforts to protect Christian needy widows and not leave them in the hands of the relatives by choosing elderly people from different families in the church, including those who have already lost their spouses. These members form a ministry of care for widows. The church can authorize them from day one of the death the partner. This is really a difficult assignment since it needs a lot of guidelines and attention due to the overwhelming influence of the family during funerals. On the other hand, these groups should notice their role as people “to offer physical help, to give words of encouragement, to give counsel and to pray.”²⁵

The Community’s Problem

The well-being of widows should be a concern for both the Christian community and families of the widows. This section deals with issues regarding widows in the community of the Evangelical Methodist Church of Christ (EMCC). The Evangelical Methodist Church of Christ was founded, since 30th October 1986, by Koniba Badu Micah Edu-Buandoh and officially inaugurated with its headquarters at Cape Coast, Ghana on 26th July, 1987. The EMCC believes that the route to its response is co-operation and personal evangelism, in the traditions of the Lutherans and Wesleyans. The EMCC also believes to obtain adequate knowledge in matters of economics, politics, the socio-religious conditions of society, custom and culture will help making meaningful contribution and impact in solving both rural urban problem of society.²⁶ Although, the constitution made provision on social help, the community of EMCC pays little attention

²⁵ Ibid., 37.

²⁶ The Board of Trustees, *The Constitution and the Standing Orders of the Evangelical Methodist Church of Christ*, n. p., 2010, 15.

to widowhood care, development and empowerment. It could be possible that the community has misinterpreted this section of the constitution therefore; the community seems not to consider the issue of the needy widows as part of the problems in the society. We believe that the EMCC community is responsible for the well-being of widows in Ghanaian society and societies across the board, the EMCC community cannot assume all responsibilities of widows across the board. Therefore, the EMCC should start looking at the issues concerning widows in their congregations so that other denominations can learn from them.

The first major concern is neglecting of all widows in the community. The cause of neglecting the widows could be the idea of HIV AIDS infection and the stigma attached to the decease. About a decade ago HIV AIDS used to be the cause of the death of many spouses which the Ministry of Health has educated Ghanaians to abstain themselves from sexual immorality to increase life expectancy among spouses. Again, like other developing countries, nearly every death in the first instance, is attributed to witchcraft. Therefore, some members in the EMCC who hold on to conservative ideas would not associate themselves to the widow, since she might contribute to the death of the husband. From my experience, most members of the EMCC are ignorant about health issues; as a result, they associate sudden death to supernatural beliefs, which some widows are mostly victimized. It could also be that the EMCC community does not have sufficient resource to support widows, yet financing is not the only support needed in the life of the widows. The prayer support and words of encouragement from the visiting team could be beneficial to widows in the community.

Although Paul instructed the community at Ephesus to care for widows without children, the EMCC has to include widows without adult children, they share similar problems with widows already mentioned. The first problem to consider is the of the EMCC community's lack of visitation and continuous care of the widows without children or support and widows over sixty. The community visits such widows at the time they are about to celebrate the first anniversary of the deceased husband. Otherwise, she finds herself in the hands of people who might take advantage of making any excuse of comforting her or she follows her husband to eternity. The community's lack of visitation can affect physical, emotional and spiritual lives. The community's lack of visitation demoralizes the widows' sense of belonging, which contributes to the detriment to her continuing fellowship with the church.

The second major concern is lack of visiting the aged needy widows in the EMCC community. Thus, a widow above sixty years without children and with health issues such as dementia, Alzheimer's, blindness, stroke and other mental difficulties. Some aged widows have chronic wounds, which range from bedsores to surgical incisions that do not heal. As a result, they cannot fellowship together with the community. Therefore, the community's lack of visitation would prevent them from hearing the word of God and partaking of the Lord's Supper.

The third issue is the community's lack of financial support on the basic needs of the needy widows. With reference to 1 Timothy 5:9, Timothy can enroll the widows who do not have adequate support from the family at the age of sixty into prayer and serving ministry. We deduced from verse 9 that widows over sixty years should be enrolled and receive a kind of stipend from the church, since their family members will not support

them financially. This suggestion seems not to be applicable in the EMCC because the church is not able to meet its financial obligations of the current ministers. The EMCC community has to look at the possible means of supporting these needy widows in the church. Additionally, provision for widows by the children or grandchildren in the Ghanaian context seems to be difficult to accomplish, since most of the children are low-income generators.

Further, the issue of remarriage of the younger widows is the fourth major problem in the community. Like men in Tanzania, some men in Ghana would not be able to bear all the responsibilities of a widow and her children, since some are financially handicapped. These and many other reasons are why the community should make a point to set up new possibilities to improve the life of widows in their congregations.

New Responsibility

This section explores new responsibilities from the biblical tradition and the constitution of Ghana on care, development and empowerment of widows. In contrast to 1 Timothy, the EMCC needs adequate biblical teachings in order to encourage the congregations to improve the life of the needy widows. Based on this the community can use Paul's instructions to the community at Ephesus on care of widows as a yardstick to establish a better ministry for the widows in the congregations. Both the Old and the New Testaments set good precedents before the community to provide better roles on taking good care of the widows.

The first responsibility is to introduce God's passion, protection and provision for the Jewish widows to the community. In the Old Testament God instructed the people of Israel to be kind to widows and orphans. For example, widows were permitted to glean

from the ends of field and allowed to participate in public festivals where foods are served. The people were obliged to assist the widow in all facets of life. Upon the instructions, the community can set up a hospitality committee in charge of all donations, both cash and in kind in render social services to the needy widow. For example, members can donate food items, clothes, household material and cash to the neediest widows and their families. The community can appeal to the non-governmental organizations to support the widows on their basic needs. Moreover, the community should set up a committee of care and counseling to help heal the emotional and spiritual life of all widows in the community.

The second responsibility to be explored by the community is that it has had a very good lesson to learn from the problem started in the early church as to how the church at Ephesus failed to separate those without children and grandchildren from those who have. Perhaps, the disciples at Ephesus did not have enough time to visit those widows at home to know their family background. Probably, the multiple crowds who responded to the daily gospel distracted their attention from these family issues. The community can set up a committee of discernment within the ministry of widows to visit the at home and communicate with them periodically in order to identify the needy widows. Additionally, the community should encourage wealthy and generous women in the congregations to provide material support for the needy widows. Lessons can be drawn from the life of Dorcas in Acts 9:39, Lydia Acts 16:14 and Priscilla Acts 18:3.

The third responsibility is to identify new models for the care of widows with children and grandchildren. For example, the community should hold programs to encourage the children and grandchildren who are capable of supporting their parents. As

much as the community visits the widows, the community would be able to identify the needy children and grandchildren of the widows who need financial support from the community to continue their education or be trained in vocational skills such as carpentry, sawing and basket weaving. This should be the practical issue between the leadership of the community and the widows themselves, since some of them may find it difficult to talk about their personal problems. The reason is that the economic situation in Ghana hinders Christian denominations such as AICs from sponsoring needy people among them; hence, she might not be able to depend on the community on a responsibility, which must be performed by her or the family of the deceased husband.

The fourth responsibility to consider is Paul's instructions of care for "real widows." Although Paul did not mention the source of income of the Church at Ephesus on how widows are to be supported, the EMCC can start running businesses such as batik print for African wear and agricultural. These business sectors should serve as a source of income generating fund for the EMCC. Based on this, the church can meet the financial needs of the ministers as mentioned earlier and needs of "real widows in their community. James mentions, "religion that is pure and undefiled before God is to visit the orphans and widows in their affliction ..." (1:27). This portion of the scripture should be a stepping-stone for the community to provide the basic needs of the neediest widow. The leadership should be able to comprehend the emotional and spiritual need of real widows in the community so that both widows with families and those without families are cared for.

Moreover, Timothy was advised to enroll widows into prayer and serving ministry in order for them to receive material support from the church. Based on this, the

EMCC community should participate in social activities such as visitation to hospitals, prisons, orphanages, foster homes and schools in order to assign specific duties to the enrolled widows. Additionally, the church can employ some young needy widows with little into the batik and agricultural business. In this case, the community should continue to educate the children or grandchildren travel abroad or any other member who is responsible for the needy widows in the household to support their widows. This will release some of the financial burdens from the community. Upon all these suggestions, 1 Timothy 5 and other passages in the Bible help provide better opportunities for both helpless and dependent widows in the EMCC community.

The Widow's Problem

The state and condition of women, and especially widows, in some West African countries show that majority of widows in Ghana lead difficult lives after the death of the husband. The first major concern is acceptance of widow's rites on the side of the widow. Among the Fante people, the widow does not hold money until she comes out of the confinement. The widow is re-introduced to money after the widowhood rites are performed. If the widow allows herself to go through a period of one-year confinement then she would not have access to money until she fulfills the rites. At this point, the widow chooses to live with deceased husband's family or goes back to her family. The widow chooses to give her children to the relatives of the deceased if she has nothing to provide for the family. This situation normally happens in the life of the needy and illiterate widows. The widow's children turn to leave a life on their own, since some mothers have nothing to feed on. The level of illiteracy among women prevents many

widows in the community from employment; therefore, the death of their husband creates a vacuum in their financial life.

Remarriage is the second major problem of the widow. The idea of remarriage in the biblical tradition seems to be unhelpful to pregnant widows and widows with little children in the community. Since the death of a spouse introduces emotional stress on surviving partner, the widow will not be able to find a suitable partner with that short period. We therefore, suggest that the EMCC should build a rehabilitation center with resource personnel to care for needy pregnant widows for the first two week of delivery. The EMCC should employ traditional birth attendants among widows ministry to increase labor market of widows in the community.

Among Ghanaian people, pregnant women are not permitted to enter into a man's house during pregnancy. The economic hardship on the widows in Ghana would depend on the available resources left by the deceased husband. Most Ghanaian husbands are not salaried workers; some depend on the family cocoa farms and fishing. Others are self-employed with little income to provide for a family. Based on this the deceased husband cannot leave any property for his family, since he may not own property. Therefore, a church neglecting the ministry of widows is a church without responsibility. It is time for Ghanaian churches to provide for the needy among them and stop soliciting from the Western countries.

The third major problem of the widow is lack of job opportunities. In Ghana lack of job opportunities deprive many of the educated widows from employment. However, the EMCC community has no social services to support the unemployed widow and her children. Like the biblical world whereby law makes provision for helpless widows to

depend on gleaning in the field of the Jewish people. Most helpless Ghanaian widows have no alternative than to return to their matrilineal homes to depend upon on a family member who is willing to accept her and her children. Again, the helpless and dependent situation of some widows is as result of non-governmental benefits such as social security benefits for unsalaried husbands. Moreover, a majority of salaried husbands do not recognize the importance of making a will simply because most salaried husbands have given birth to children with different mothers. Furthermore, some have involved themselves in polygamous marriages, which make it difficult to will his property to two separate families. One of the most challenging, hopeless and helpless situations is that children of widows who spend their lives in urban areas have no access to better education if the widow has to leave her marital home for the village. Worst of all, most widows become helpless and dependent because some siblings of the deceased husband, especially the elderly women from the matrilineal family, deprive their fellow women of their marital homes.

New Responsibility

Although, there are many suggestions as to how the community can make positive changes in the life of Christian widows, yet widows avail themselves to the teachings and the assistance of the community. The first responsibility is to empower the needy widows by introducing them to the life of widows in the Bible who supported themselves and their fellow widows. For example, Tamar was bold enough to empower herself in order to retrieve her husband's property, though her approach was decisive (Genesis 38).

Additionally, widows in the EMCC community can learn from the hard work of Ruth for them to provide for other needy people in the community. We were told that as

she gleaned from Boaz's field, Ruth carried some food for her mother-in-law, Naomi. Moreover, the role of the widow in the parable of Jesus on the unjust judge sets a good precedent for widows in the EMCC community to seek for justice in the patriarchal society, (Luke 18:3). Furthermore, Anna's prayer life helps the widow to community with God in all her endeavors.

According to Sossou, empowerment as a process is a means through which people reduce their powerlessness and alienation and gain greater control over all facets of their lives and their social environment. Scholars refer to empowerment as "a series of attacks on subordination of every description such as physical, cultural, sexual, legal, political, and technological."²⁷ The process includes psychological, cultural and spiritual development. The widow can help her fellow widows who are oppressed and to take steps to overcome it.

The second responsibility is the enrolment of the widow into God's ministry and other job opportunities. Widows who will be enrolled into the ministry should exhibit all the qualifications as mentioned in 1 Timothy 5:9-10. The pastor healer should be able to support and help the widow to be trained in basic vocational skills. For example, the community can support in small groups to learn produce bee-honey, snails, mushroom, earrings and necklaces. The family and community can support widows who are interested in agricultural projects such as fish and portray farms. Others who will be interested in home economics can learn preparing food and nutrition for people on special diet. In Ghana, many people suffer chronic deceases such as high blood pressure and diabetes because of bad eating habits. The community can set up bakery centers to teach

²⁷ Sossuo, *Widowhood Practices in West Africa*, 208

widows in bread making. Some widows can be trained in decorating auditoriums for parties, wedding ceremonies, conferences and other special events. For those who wish to continue their education, the community can set up scholarship funds to enable them improve their educational background. This is an indication that the family and community from the biblical viewpoint do not the make widow the helpless, powerless and dependent, but rather, develop, encourage, protect, defend and empower the widow to recognize her God-giving talent in order to assist her fellow widow in the near future. With the help and support of the community and the family, the widows can be healed emotionally, physically and spiritually. We anticipate that the cordial relationship between the family, community and widows will help accomplish God's holistic ministry in humanity and in the universe as a whole.

Conclusion

God's concern for widows is vividly revealed in the Bible, but the African Instituted Churches (AICs) in Ghana and specifically the Evangelical Methodist Church of Christ show little concern regarding the wellbeing of widows in their community, since most of them are dependent on their spouse when they are alive. The thing to consider is sorrowful and disgusting experiences some widows endure. The reason why the AICs are unresponsive appears to be its lack of awareness of the biblical ethic regarding care of widows as practice in the early church. Furthermore, theologians and biblical scholars seem not to equip the AICs to make appropriate intervention, which this thesis aims to solve.

Additionally, the ecclesiastical communities overseas and in Africa have been silent about the care of widows in the various denominations. To mention a few,

Christian philanthropists and Christian organizations have not made any provision for widows in their various centers. It is also surprising to know from the internet research conducted by the author shows that Christians have failed to write on widowhood care.

The author's observation is that most AICs in Ghana seem to neglect the New Testament teachings on the care of widows. As a result, this work is not serving as a command to the AICs in Ghana, but will rather serve as an appeal to everyone or every church that may have interest in the plight of widows in the church across the board, especially the AICS in Ghana. Therefore, the author intends to present the instruction in 1 Timothy regarding the role of the community, the role of the family and role of the widow herself to AICs in Ghana. By so doing, the author explores God's holistic approach toward care, empowerment and development of widows the AICs.

Although the situation addressed by 1 Timothy was somewhat different from Ghanaian context, the author develops a model for making a good connection between the biblical world and modern Ghana. The first thing to consider is to develop teaching materials on care, development and empowerment of widows in the EMCC. These teaching materials should include topics such as God's instructions on widows for the community, family and the widow herself.

Furthermore, workshops and seminars organized to train the illiterate and underdeveloped widows in basic vocational skills and service to the ministries in the community. For example, widowhood ministry will be organized to help new widows to recover from their physically, emotional and spiritual needs. Such ministry can also help the aged widows with health issues such as dementia, Alzheimer's, blindness, stroke and other mental difficulties. Some aged widows also have chronic wounds, which range

from bedsores to surgical incisions that do not heal. As a result, they cannot fellowship together with the community. Finally, the author intends to encourage the EMCC and other AICs to build resource centers in order to provide better training in basic vocational skills for the needy widows.

Findings reveal that God demonstrated his compassion toward widows in order that his people may have compassion for widows among them. Again, God's concern for widows has been one of the major areas stressed in both the Old and New Testaments, since they were the most vulnerable in the biblical world. Likewise, needy widows in the AICs of Ghana are facing physical, emotional and spiritual difficulties, which need to be addressed by the community. This does not necessarily mean that the church and the family should provide financial support for the widow in the rest of her life. Rather, the church and family can help the widows by training so that they can better provide for themselves and their children. The widow should accept all assistance that makes positive impacts in her life and the life of her children.

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