

A PASTORAL ANALYSIS OF EWE MARRIAGE RITES: CULTURAL INTEGRITY AND CHRISTIAN ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Ewe marriage rites carry layers of meaning that are often lost when viewed only through the lens of modern Christian practice. In my pastoral work among Ewe communities, I have repeatedly encountered couples whose marital tensions were rooted not in doctrinal differences but in misunderstandings of the cultural processes that shaped their families' expectations. This observation guided the present study, which examines Ewe marriage rites as a moral and relational framework, exploring how these practices coexist—with both harmony and tension—alongside Christian teaching on covenant, family, and communal responsibility.

Drawing on interviews with elders, ministers, and married couples, as well as direct observation of traditional ceremonies, the study maps the central stages of the Ewe marriage process: the inquiry (dzidzo), the negotiation of family relationships, the symbolic exchange of gifts, and the ritual blessings offered by both lineages. Each stage reflects values that have sustained Ewe society for generations—respect for kinship, accountability between families, and a public recognition of marital covenant. These values echo several biblical themes on marriage and communal life, suggesting that cultural practice and Christian ethics may reinforce rather than negate one another.

Yet the study also recognizes points of tension. Younger Christians often struggle with rites they perceive as overly tied to ancestral identity or obligations. From my counselling practice, I have seen how some couples experience emotional strain when families insist on rites whose meaning they no longer understand. These conflicts reveal a need for pastoral mediation—an interpretive space where cultural symbols can be explained, and Christian convictions clarified, without dismissing the depth of Ewe tradition.

What emerges from this work is a model for Christian engagement that honours cultural integrity while offering theological guidance that speaks to changing social realities. By reading Ewe rites through both anthropological and pastoral lenses, the study argues that meaningful integration is possible when the church acknowledges the wisdom embedded in indigenous marriage structures. Such an approach allows Christian couples to enter marriage rooted in both faith and identity, strengthening—not weakening—the covenant they make before God and community.

KEYWORDS

Ewe marriage rites; indigenous Ghanaian culture; Christian engagement; pastoral counselling; cultural integrity; kinship and family systems; covenant and ritual symbolism; intercultural theology; marriage negotiation; African traditional marriage; cultural anthropology of Ghana; pastoral mediation; faith and culture integration.

1. INTRODUCTION

Marriage among the Ewe people carries a depth of meaning that extends far beyond the union of two individuals. It is a communal covenant rooted in long-standing customs, social expectations, and spiritual understandings shaped over generations. These rites hold within them a moral logic that ordered family life long before Western Christianity became prominent in southern Ghana. In my pastoral encounters, particularly in Ewe communities where family identity is central to personal flourishing, I have often noted that conflicts in Christian marriages are not always rooted in theological misunderstanding. More often, they arise from a loss of clarity regarding the cultural foundations that once gave marriage its coherence and social stability.

This study explores the major stages of Ewe marriage rites and their underlying values, with special attention to how these practices intersect with Christian beliefs about covenant, family, and community. Ewe customs such as the preliminary inquiries, the negotiated relationship between families, the exchange of symbolic gifts, and the communal blessings offered during the marriage process each carry ethical and relational meanings. These elements reflect an understanding of marriage that is both social and spiritual, binding families together in ways that shape responsibility and belonging. Observing several ceremonies in local communities revealed that each stage functions as a safeguard for the couple and their families, ensuring that marriage is entered with seriousness, accountability, and communal awareness.

Yet, as church communities have grown and adopted new theological frameworks, tensions sometimes emerge. Younger Christians may question—or even quietly reject—rituals whose symbolic meanings they do not fully understand. Families, on the other hand, may insist on these practices as markers of respect and continuity. In counselling sessions, I have witnessed how such misunderstandings create friction between couples and their extended families at the very moment when unity is most needed. These experiences point to a broader challenge: how can Christian pastoral practice honour the cultural integrity of Ewe marriage rites while remaining faithful to the biblical vision of marriage?

This article engages this question through a pastoral and cultural analysis of Ewe marriage rituals. It draws on interviews with elders and ministers, firsthand observation of ceremonies, and reflections gathered from couples navigating both traditional and Christian expectations. By examining these rites through anthropological insight and pastoral experience, the study seeks to illuminate points of harmony and tension between Ewe cultural values and Christian marriage teaching. From these observations, one can see how a thoughtful engagement with indigenous practices may help Christian couples and church leaders recover meanings that strengthen relationships rather than weaken them.

The discussion that follows is not an attempt to romanticize tradition or to dismiss the changing social realities facing young couples today. Instead, it offers a framework for understanding how Ewe cultural wisdom and Christian faith can sit together in ways that enrich marriage, honour family life, and support the pastoral work of the church in Ghana.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is arranged thematically to frame Ewe marriage rites within wider African marriage scholarship and early Christian engagement with indigenous customs. The intention is to situate the Ewe experience within the intellectual currents that shaped scholarly understanding between 1971 and 1986—a period marked by unusually rich cross-disciplinary conversations. Anthropologists, theologians, sociologists, and missiologists were simultaneously probing the meaning of kinship, the symbolic grammar of ritual, and the contested space where Christian faith met long-standing cultural values. Their work provides an interpretive backdrop against which Ewe marital practice can be appreciated not as an isolated ethnic expression but as part of a larger West African negotiation of identity, spirituality, and social order.

During these years, kinship studies matured into a sophisticated discourse that illuminated how family structures, lineage authority, and obligations of reciprocity shaped every stage of African marriage. Scholars such as Goody, Nukunya, and Sarpong emphasized that marriage in African societies functioned as a social covenant linking extended families, not merely as a private bond between spouses. Their insights resonate strongly with Ewe matrimonial expectations, where marriages are understood as alliances carrying moral, economic, and spiritual commitments. In counseling work among Ewe Christians, I have often seen how these inherited kinship patterns surface in pastoral sessions—sometimes subtly, sometimes forcefully—as couples negotiate their duties to two families, two lineages, and the church community.

The period also produced influential reflections on ritual symbolism and African religious worldviews. Thinkers like Idowu and Ray articulated how marriage rituals encode communal cosmologies, embedding the ceremony within a broader moral universe that includes the living, the ancestors, and the spiritual forces believed to guide human flourishing. Their work helps explain why Ewe rites such as ancestral acknowledgements, drink offerings, and public blessings hold enduring significance even among Christian families. In moments of pastoral dialogue, I have listened to young believers who struggle with whether participation in these ceremonies compromises their faith; their questions echo the tensions identified in this scholarship.

At the same time, theologians and missiologists were wrestling with how the Christian message might engage indigenous marriage customs without eroding cultural integrity. Early explorations by Mbiti, Shorter, and Kraft offered frameworks that encouraged discernment rather than rejection. They urged church leaders to respect cultural meaning while addressing elements that required ethical or theological transformation. From this observation, one can see how their writings laid the groundwork for pastoral approaches that neither idealize tradition nor dismiss it, but instead invite thoughtful integration. This theological posture is crucial for interpreting Ewe marriage rites in a way that honours communal heritage while supporting Christian discipleship.

By drawing solely on studies published between 1971 and 1986, this review intentionally anchors its analysis in a formative period when African marriage research was consolidating its major themes. The scholars of this era provided the conceptual vocabulary—the language of kinship, partnership, covenant, ritual, symbolism, and inculturation—that continues to shape how researchers and pastors understand Ewe marriage today.

2.1 African Marriage as a Communal Covenant

African marriage studies during the 1970s and early 1980s consistently describe marriage as a communal institution rather than a private contract between two individuals. Scholars working in this period sought to correct earlier Eurocentric assumptions that treated marriage as a personal arrangement centred on emotional choice. Bohannan (1973) argues that African marriage systems are best understood through the corporate life of the lineage, where marriage creates binding alliances between families and strengthens social order. His emphasis on the lineage as the primary moral and economic unit illuminates the collective obligations embedded in marriage negotiations, from the exchange of gifts to expectations of mutual support. In a similar vein, Schildkrout (1973) shows that marriage rites function as public rituals through which households are reorganized and moral expectations clarified. Her analysis highlights the visibility of marriage in African societies—how ritual performance, public declarations, and the involvement of elders signal the rearrangement of rights, responsibilities, and identities.

These works highlight that marriage in West Africa is not merely about romantic choice but about responsibility, continuity, and the moral economy of kinship. Marriage becomes a mechanism for stabilizing inter-family relations, distributing labour, and safeguarding lineage futures. In pastoral counseling settings, I have observed young Ewe couples wrestling with these inherited expectations. A husband might feel torn between his own aspirations and the weight of extended-family obligations; a wife might struggle to meet the expectations her in-laws place upon her as a custodian of lineage continuity. Such moments confirm what these scholars describe: marriage is lived within a dense network of communal claims and protectors.

Fortes (1975) extends this view by stressing that kinship networks provide the ethical framework that shapes marital expectations, conflict handling, and relational accountability. His work makes clear that marital responsibilities are never understood in isolation; they are interpreted through the values and norms upheld by the wider kin group. The idea of marriage as a covenant lived under communal witness resonates powerfully in many Ghanaian contexts. Among the Ewe, the presence of maternal uncles, *tsiame*, and elders during negotiations signals that the marriage is not owned by the couple alone. Their presence provides the moral backing necessary for the union to be recognized as legitimate, stable, and socially protected.

Such framing is essential for understanding Ewe rites, which place strong emphasis on family negotiation, lineage consent, and public recognition. The formal presentation of drinks, the careful sequence of visits between families, and the ritual blessings offered before elders all reflect the communal understanding of marriage described in the literature. From this perspective, Ewe marriage rites function not only as cultural ceremonies but as social contracts that bind families into long-term relationships of cooperation and accountability.

2.2 Ritual Symbolism and the Moral Meaning of Marriage

A growing number of scholars during this period draw attention to marriage rites as symbolic acts that communicate far more than social pleasantries. Their significance lies not only in the visible sequence of procedures but in the deeper moral and spiritual meanings they convey. Meyer (1974) observes that African family rituals function as “encoded ethics,” serving as a medium through

which the community expresses its convictions about fidelity, respect, mutual responsibility, and the sacredness of relational life. Through ritual, the values that hold a family or lineage together are not merely spoken—they are enacted.

Within this framework, actions such as the exchange of gifts, the pronouncing of blessings, libation rituals, and formal inquiries cease to be decorative customs. They operate as channels of moral communication, translating communal ideals into concrete gestures. A gift offered between families, for example, speaks to goodwill, reciprocity, and the expectation of honourable conduct. Libation, poured in the presence of elders, calls upon ancestral witnesses to uphold truthfulness and covenant loyalty. Even the structured inquiries into a prospective spouse's background serve a moral purpose, confirming the integrity of the union and safeguarding both families from future conflict.

From this perspective, these rites embody the community's ethical expectations in ceremonial form. They are a language in themselves—ritual speech that allows families to declare intentions, acknowledge responsibilities, and affirm the seriousness of the bond being created. The moral weight of marriage thus rests not only on the couple's personal commitment but on the symbolic actions through which the community recognizes, blesses, and safeguards the union.

Sarpong (1974) similarly argues that Ghanaian marriage rites must be interpreted through their symbolic logic, since the meaning of the ritual often outlives the community's ability to offer clear verbal explanations. Over time, people may forget the precise origins of certain acts, yet the gestures themselves continue to bear theological weight. The ritual form becomes a vessel carrying the community's understanding of what marriage is, what it requires, and how it should be sustained. This is particularly evident in Ewe marriage practice, where the sequence of rites is designed not only to unite two individuals but to bind families together in a publicly recognised covenant.

When read with this symbolic attentiveness, the enduring authority of key elements in the Ewe marriage process becomes clearer. The exchange of gifts, for instance, is not a material transaction but a statement of goodwill, reciprocity, and mutual commitment. The active involvement of family elders signals that the union is being received into a lineage whose moral and spiritual oversight gives the marriage a stable foundation. Public acts of confirmation—whether through the acceptance of drinks, the presence of witnesses, or the pronouncement of blessings—serve as communal testimony that the marriage has been rightly and honourably contracted.

Viewed in this way, the rites are not aesthetic ornaments placed around the marriage; they are part of its substance. The ritual actions collectively constitute the covenantal framework within which husband and wife take their place in the community. From this observation, one can see that to understand Ewe marriage, one must attend not only to the couple's personal intentions but to the ritual structure that gives the union its moral depth, communal legitimacy, and theological coherence.

2.3 Kinship, Lineage Authority, and Marriage Negotiation

Another significant theme in the literature concerns the role of lineage authority in shaping the durability of marriage. Busia (1972) describes traditional West African society as one in which the individual's identity is woven into a network of kinship duties, expectations, and loyalties. Within such a social world, marriage negotiation is never an isolated agreement between two people; it is a collective process in which both families participate to ensure that the emerging covenant rests on the strength of the lineage. The presence of elders, the exchange of symbolic gifts, and the invocation of ancestral blessing all function as communal endorsements that anchor the couple within a broader moral community.

Nukunya (1982), writing with particular reference to Ghanaian contexts, notes that marriage attains social stability when families publicly define rights, responsibilities, and boundaries through recognized cultural procedures. These procedures—whether they involve inquiries into family background, the presentation of drinks, or the formal consent of elders—establish a shared understanding of expectations before the couple begins their life together. When these steps are neglected or rushed, the marriage may lack the protective framework that extended families ordinarily provide. From this observation, one can see why couples who bypass lineage protocols often encounter unspoken pressures or relational strain, as families struggle to negotiate their roles without the clarity that traditional processes were designed to supply.

Ebigbo (1986) and Eze (1991) (though the latter falls slightly outside the date window and is therefore not relied on here) point to similar patterns in Nigeria: marriage rites create a social safety net through which the couple is protected and disciplined, and where conflict is addressed through recognized kinship channels. These studies affirm the Ewe understanding of marriage as a union that must first pass through the moral scrutiny of the family before it is publicly confirmed.

2.4 African Spiritual Worldviews and the Sacredness of Marriage

African marriage rites are also rooted in a religious worldview that regards family life as sacred and spiritually consequential. Parrinder (1976) and Opoku (1978) both stress that West African religion profoundly shapes how marriage is conceived—not simply as a social contract between two individuals, but as a spiritual covenant woven into the wider fabric of ancestry, fertility, and communal survival. In many communities, the household is viewed as the smallest unit in which divine order is expressed, and marriage becomes the means through which this order is renewed from generation to generation.

Within such a worldview, the rites surrounding marriage carry a theological function. The blessing of elders, the invocation of ancestors, and the ceremonial gestures marking the transition into married life are understood as channels through which spiritual protection and fertility are bestowed. These acts do more than legitimize the couple before society; they affirm the couple's place within the lineage and secure the spiritual continuity of the family. Marriage, therefore, becomes the doorway into responsible adulthood, marking the individual's acceptance of duties toward past generations, present kin, and future descendants.

Odamtten (1983) observes that indigenous customs frequently present marriage as a sacred trust given to the couple, one that demands honesty, cooperation, and fidelity not merely for personal harmony but for the well-being of the lineage. This sense of sacred duty persists even where Christian communities wrestle with how to interpret ancestral symbolism within their faith commitments. For many, the challenge lies not in rejecting the symbolism but in discerning how the underlying values—commitment, communal accountability, and spiritual responsibility—can be faithfully upheld. From this observation, one can see that African marriage rites cannot be detached from their religious foundations; they embody a worldview in which social stability, spiritual blessing, and lineage continuity are inseparably joined.

This theme is particularly relevant to Ewe marriage rites, which consistently integrate prayer, the invocation of family blessing, and a profound awareness that marriage is entered into under spiritual witness. In many Ewe communities, the presence of elders and ancestors—symbolically acknowledged through prayer, libation, or formal blessing—signals that the union is not a private agreement but a covenant made before both visible and unseen members of the lineage. The couple is therefore understood to stand within a continuum of spiritual oversight, receiving the goodwill of past generations as they assume their responsibilities toward future ones.

Such a worldview frames marriage as a sacred undertaking that requires divine favour, communal legitimacy, and moral integrity. The gestures that accompany Ewe rites—whether it is the invocation of God’s blessing, the call for ancestral support, or the solemn acceptance of family gifts—are meant to sanctify the union and situate the couple within the moral order of the community. These acts are not peripheral; they communicate that the marriage has entered the sphere of spiritual accountability.

Without grasping this underlying worldview, Christian critiques of Ewe marriage practices risk misinterpreting sacred symbols as mere cultural habits or outdated social expectations. What may appear externally as custom often carries theological meaning within the Ewe imagination. To overlook this is to miss the depth with which the community understands marriage, and to read spiritual gestures only as anthropological curiosities rather than expressions of a moral and religious vision. Appreciating this symbolic universe allows for a more faithful engagement between Christian perspectives and indigenous marriage traditions.

2.5 Christianity and Indigenous Marriage Customs in Ghana

The literature from 1971–1986 also reflects early and vigorous debates about the relationship between Christianity and African cultural practices, particularly in areas touching marriage and family life. Odamtten (1983) maintains that the Ghanaian church cannot approach indigenous customs with a posture of automatic rejection, for such an attitude fails to distinguish between forms that embody moral wisdom and those that conflict with Christian teaching. He argues instead for a posture of discernment, recognizing that many cultural practices—especially those concerned with truthfulness, covenant loyalty, and respect for elders—reinforce values already affirmed in Scripture. When these elements are understood rather than dismissed, they can become bridges for pastoral care and Christian formation.

Opoku (1978) makes a similar appeal, warning that Christian communities often create a “cultural vacuum” when they dismiss traditional rites without first understanding their meaning. In his view, this vacuum does more than eliminate ritual forms; it disrupts the moral structures that hold families and lineages together. Rites that once clarified responsibility, legitimized marriage, or invoked communal blessing are replaced with uncertainty, leaving individuals unsure of how to locate themselves within the social and spiritual order. In some congregations, this confusion has led to tension between Christian teaching and family expectation, sometimes producing marital conflict when one partner adheres to customary procedures while the other prefers strictly church-based forms.

In pastoral settings, the effects of this vacuum become especially visible. Couples may struggle to know which rites carry moral weight, parents may resist marriages perceived as culturally incomplete, and young Christians may feel caught between church convictions and family obligations. The confusion is not simply about ritual performance but about the meaning that undergirds those rites. When cultural symbols are discarded without thoughtful engagement, pastoral leaders find themselves addressing conflicts that might have been avoided through a more informed and respectful dialogue between Christian belief and indigenous practice.

Sarpong (1985), though writing specifically about Ashanti nubility rites and family ceremonies, offers an interpretive framework that is broadly useful for understanding indigenous marriage customs throughout Ghana. His model proposes that cultural practices should be evaluated first for their ethical intention and spiritual function, rather than judged quickly on the basis of outward form. By examining what a rite seeks to accomplish—whether it aims to strengthen fidelity, honour communal authority, safeguard lineage continuity, or secure spiritual blessing—the church can make a more informed pastoral judgment. Only after this ethical and theological discernment has taken place can Christian teaching responsibly determine whether a practice should be affirmed, gently reformed, or redirected toward meanings that cohere with the gospel.

This posture, Sarpong argues, prevents the church from approaching culture as an adversary. It invites pastoral leaders to recognize that many indigenous forms carry moral insights rooted in long-standing communal experience. At the same time, the model maintains theological clarity by affirming that not every practice can be uncritically adopted; some require reshaping, while others may need to be replaced entirely. The strength of this framework lies in its balance between respect for cultural wisdom and fidelity to Christian conviction.

Although the Ewe context differs from Ashanti ritual patterns—and the symbolic vocabulary of their rites is not identical—the pastoral posture that Sarpong outlines remains instructive. It encourages a way of engagement that honours the integrity of Ewe marriage customs while allowing the church to speak truthfully into areas where Christian teaching offers needed guidance. From this perspective, pastoral work becomes a dialogue with culture rather than a battle against it, enabling the church to preserve what is morally valuable while offering thoughtful correction where necessary.

2.6 Gaps in the Literature and the Place of This Study

While these studies establish a substantial foundation for interpreting African marriage rites, two noticeable gaps remain. First, Ewe marriage customs are frequently absorbed into broad discussions of “Ghanaian” or “West African” marriage systems, resulting in a generalized treatment that overlooks the distinct sequence, symbolism, and pastoral meaning of Ewe practices. Scholars often describe the Ewe system only in passing—grouped together with Akan, Ga, or northern rites—without attending closely to the theological ideas and communal expectations embedded in its particular stages. This lack of precision leaves pastors and counsellors without a detailed guide to understanding why specific Ewe actions, such as the inquiry process or the acceptance of gifts, continue to carry moral authority within the community.

Second, much of the existing literature approaches marriage rites from either an anthropological or a theological standpoint, but rarely from a blended pastoral perspective. Anthropological studies tend to prioritize social structure, lineage, and cultural continuity, while theological writings focus on doctrinal questions or Christian ethical critique. What is often missing is an integrated view that considers how these customs shape the lived experiences of Christian couples today—couples negotiating tensions between ancestral expectations, church teaching, and modern urban life. Pastoral challenges such as family pressure, confusion over ritual requirements, or disputes between spouses with differing cultural commitments are seldom addressed directly. As a result, the practical needs of Christian families living within evolving social conditions receive limited scholarly attention.

This study responds to these gaps by turning deliberate attention to the particular contours of the Ewe marriage process and the symbolic universe in which it operates. Rather than treating Ewe customs as a regional variation of a general “Ghanaian” pattern, the study examines their distinct stages, gestures, and meanings as moral and relational structures that shape how couples understand commitment, family responsibility, and communal belonging. By interpreting these rites through a pastoral lens, the research seeks to show how the Ewe marriage sequence carries ethical intentions that continue to influence Christian couples, even when the social environment is shifting.

The study also explores how pastoral ministry can assist couples in navigating the intersection between cultural integrity and Christian covenant teaching. Many Ewe Christians find themselves negotiating expectations from extended family, church practice, and personal faith convictions with little guidance on how these worlds can inform one another. By bringing anthropological insight into conversation with theological reflection and pastoral experience, the research aims to provide a framework that honours the moral depth of Ewe tradition while offering resources for Christian discipleship in contemporary settings.

The purpose is not to freeze tradition at a nostalgic moment in history, nor to treat indigenous rites as relics incompatible with Christian faith. Rather, the goal is to offer a way for culture and faith to speak meaningfully to each other in the daily decisions, tensions, and celebrations of Ewe Christian families. Such an approach recognizes that both heritage and faith contribute to the moral formation of the couple, and that pastoral care can help them live out this shared inheritance with clarity, integrity, and grace.

3. METHODOLOGY / APPROACH

This study employed a qualitative, interpretive approach, an approach well suited to examining cultural rites whose meanings resist reduction to fixed categories or numerical measurement. The concern here was not to test a predetermined hypothesis or to fit Ewe practices into externally constructed analytical grids. Rather, the intention was to explore the moral, relational, and symbolic logic of Ewe marriage ceremonies as they are lived, remembered, and negotiated within families and Christian communities. Such an approach allows the researcher to attend to the subtle layers of meaning that emerge in conversation with elders, in the narratives of married couples, and in the reflective practices of pastors who minister within Ewe settings.

Qualitative interpretation is especially appropriate because Ewe marriage rites do not derive their authority from written codes or formal doctrinal statements. Their legitimacy rests in the shared memory of the lineage, the accumulated wisdom embodied in customary practice, and the communal expectations that surround the couple as they move from courtship to marriage. Meaning is carried in gesture as much as in speech: the presentation of gifts, the acceptance of drinks, the presence of witnesses, or the blessing pronounced by elders. These actions cannot be adequately grasped through abstract theorizing alone; they must be understood as lived expressions of communal identity and moral vision.

By engaging participants in their own interpretive frameworks, the study sought to uncover how individuals make sense of these rites today—how they understand their purpose, how they reconcile them with Christian teaching, and how they adapt them within changing social environments. The qualitative method thus provided the flexibility needed to listen to diverse voices and to appreciate the nuanced ways in which culture and faith interact within the Ewe marriage process.

3.1 Sources of Data

Three main sources informed the analysis.

First, I engaged in informal conversations and semi-structured interviews with elders, family heads, and pastors who had participated in, witnessed, or officiated numerous Ewe marriage ceremonies over several decades. These individuals served as custodians of communal memory, and their reflections provided invaluable insight into how particular rites are understood within the moral and symbolic framework of the community. Many of them did not simply describe what is done; they narrated why it is done, drawing from proverbs, lineage histories, and personal experiences that illuminated the ethical logic behind each stage of the process. In several cases, elders traced the origins of the rites through stories they themselves had inherited from parents or grandparents, recounting how specific gestures emerged from moments of crisis, reconciliation, or covenant formation within the lineage. Such depth, conveyed through narrative rather than formal instruction, offered layers of meaning that written sources alone could not have preserved. Their voices helped reveal the lived theology of the rites—how the community interprets sacred responsibility, familial honour, and marital commitment through the language of ritual action. Second, I observed marriage ceremonies in both rural and peri-urban Ewe communities. These observations included the preliminary inquiries, family negotiations, presentation of gifts, blessing

rituals, and the public confirmation of marriage. Witnessing these events allowed me to see how values such as respect, accountability, and communal responsibility are enacted through the behaviour of families and the sequencing of the rites.

Third, I drew on pastoral counselling notes from cases in which couples struggled to navigate the tension between traditional expectations and Christian convictions. These encounters arose naturally in the course of ministry—premarital counselling sessions, family meetings, and follow-up conversations after weddings where misunderstandings emerged. In several instances, young couples expressed uncertainty about the meaning of particular steps in the marriage process. They were willing to respect their families but could not always articulate why a certain gift had to be presented, why a specific elder's blessing carried weight, or why the order of rites mattered. Their questions revealed how cultural knowledge that was once assumed has begun to loosen under the pressures of urbanization, education, and new forms of Christian teaching.

On the other side, some parents and family heads voiced concern that their children were bypassing responsibilities that carried deep moral significance within the lineage. For these elders, the rites were not optional ceremonies but essential acts that protected the integrity of the marriage and honoured the ancestors who had sustained the family across generations. When their children hesitated or declined certain procedures, they interpreted it not as youthful preference but as a weakening of communal bonds and a potential threat to marital stability.

These pastoral narratives enriched the interpretation of the Ewe marriage rites by showing how cultural and Christian commitments intersect—and at times collide—in contemporary households. They demonstrated that the rites are not simply historical practices but living structures that continue to shape expectations, create obligations, and evoke strong emotional responses. In this way, counselling conversations became an interpretive window into how Ewe families today negotiate identity, faith, and tradition within the fragile space where two social worlds meet.

3.2 Analytical Framework

The analysis was guided by an interpretive framework shaped by three mutually reinforcing fields: anthropological readings of ritual, African moral philosophy, and pastoral theology. Anthropological scholarship provided the initial scaffolding. The works of Bohannan (1973), Fortes (1975), and Meyer (1974) were particularly influential in helping me approach Ewe marriage rites not as decorative formalities, but as cultural texts through which a community communicates ethical expectations, lineage identity, and spiritual meaning. Their insights opened space to see ritual action as a kind of social language—one that encodes values through gesture, sequence, and communal participation.

African moral philosophy added another layer of understanding by highlighting the relational and communal foundations of personhood in African societies. Scholars such as Nukunya (1982), Sarpong (1974), and Opoku (1978) provided essential guidance for interpreting Ewe rites within the wider Ghanaian frameworks of kinship, ancestral reverence, social obligation, and spiritual accountability. Their writings reminded me that actions such as gift exchange or the blessing of elders cannot be detached from the moral universe that sustains them; they derive their meaning

from an interconnected system in which identity, family honour, and communal continuity are held in balance.

Pastoral theology contributed a reflective and practical dimension to the analysis. It offered tools for examining not only what rites mean within their cultural setting, but how contemporary Christian couples interpret, question, or struggle with these meanings. Drawing from pastoral insight allowed me to recognize that the tensions observed today are not theoretical disagreements but lived experiences in households where faith commitments intersect with ancestral expectations. This theological perspective helped identify points of resonance—where Christian covenant teaching affirms cultural values—and points of friction—where families feel torn between tradition and church practice.

Together, these three strands formed a lens capable of engaging Ewe marriage rites with both cultural sensitivity and pastoral clarity, allowing the study to move beyond description toward deeper interpretive understanding.

This blended framework enabled the rites to be read on two interconnected levels. On the first level, the rites function as concrete social mechanisms through which families establish the legitimacy, accountability, and expected permanence of the marriage. The formal inquiries, exchange of gifts, and presence of elders are not casual customs; they are structural safeguards that bind two lineages into a relationship of mutual responsibility. These acts help clarify obligations, ensure transparency, and provide communal endorsement, thereby giving the marriage its recognized place within the social order.

On the second level, the rites carry a symbolic depth that speaks to concerns not easily captured by sociological description alone. Each gesture points beyond itself—to questions of identity, belonging, blessing, and continuity. The acceptance of drinks, for example, symbolizes more than agreement; it affirms the moral standing of the couple and signals that the marriage has entered the spiritual and ancestral memory of the lineage. The blessing of elders invokes a continuity that stretches backward to forebears and forward to future generations, situating the marriage within an unbroken chain of communal life.

The pastoral lens added a further interpretive dimension by drawing attention to how these meanings are received, misunderstood, or reshaped by contemporary Christian couples. Many couples embrace the rites with gratitude but lack the explanatory narratives that once accompanied them. Others wrestle with elements they perceive as conflicting with church teaching, or they feel pressured by extended family expectations they do not fully understand. By incorporating these pastoral observations, the study was able to explore how traditional symbolic meanings are being reinterpreted in light of Christian conviction and modern social change, revealing both points of harmony and areas of tension within the lived experience of Ewe Christian families.

3.3 Research Orientation and Ethical Considerations

The inquiry relied heavily on relational trust, a necessary foundation when engaging rites that touch on family identity, lineage history, and spiritual meaning. Elders and family leaders were not approached as research subjects in a formal sense but through existing community networks

where mutual respect had already been established. Participation was entirely voluntary, and individuals were invited only after the purpose of the study was clearly explained and they had expressed a willingness to contribute their knowledge.

Conversations were held in locations chosen by the participants themselves—most often in their homes, family courtyards, or church compounds—places where they felt at ease reflecting on matters that were both personal and communal. These familiar settings helped the discussions unfold naturally, allowing the participants to speak with the freedom and nuance that such topics require. Notes were taken discreetly, with sensitivity to the flow of conversation, and were used only with the explicit permission of those involved. In this way, the research procedure sought to honour the relational ethics that are central to Ewe social life, ensuring that the study did not intrude upon or exploit the very cultural values it aimed to understand.

Although the study does not draw on sensitive clinical material in the strict sense, the cultural and spiritual weight attached to marriage rites made discretion essential. Discussions of marriage processes often touch on matters of family honour, ancestral identity, and deeply held convictions about responsibility and blessing. For this reason, special care was taken in handling any material that emerged from pastoral counselling contexts. The names of couples and families were withheld, and identifying details were removed or adjusted so that their privacy remained intact while the core substance of their experiences could still inform the analysis. In several instances, composite descriptions were used to preserve the integrity of the themes without exposing individuals to scrutiny within their communities. This approach ensured that the study respected both the ethical standards of pastoral practice and the communal sensitivities surrounding Ewe marriage traditions.

3.4 Limitations of the Approach

As an interpretive study grounded in observation, conversation, and pastoral experience, the findings do not presume to capture the full diversity of Ewe marriage practice. Ewe communities are spread across different regions of Ghana and Togo, and each lineage carries its own nuances—variations in the order of rites, the role of particular elders, the symbolism attached to gifts, or the degree of emphasis placed on ancestral invocation. What was observed and discussed in the course of this study reflects the patterns present in the communities consulted, but it cannot be taken as an exhaustive map of all Ewe expressions.

Even so, the variations tend to occur within a recognizable framework. Across regions and families, the core values—respect for elders, the moral seriousness of gift exchange, communal endorsement of the union, and the belief that marriage is both a social and spiritual covenant—remain remarkably consistent. Likewise, the central sequence of the rites, from inquiry to acceptance to final blessing, can be identified in most communities even when particular gestures differ in style or emphasis. For this reason, the insights drawn from the conversations, pastoral encounters, and observed ceremonies offer a reliable foundation for interpreting the essential structure and meaning of Ewe marriage rites.

The intention of the study, therefore, is not to speak for every family or to fix the rites within a rigid template, but to draw out the underlying moral and symbolic logic that gives coherence to

the Ewe marriage process as a whole. These shared patterns provide a trustworthy basis for pastoral reflection and for guiding Christian couples as they navigate their place within both cultural heritage and covenant faith.

4. ANALYSIS OF EWE MARRIAGE RITES

Ewe marriage rites form a coherent and carefully ordered sequence of symbolic actions that mark the transition from courtship to the establishment of a new household. Far from being a collection of isolated customs, the rites operate as a moral and relational pathway through which two families move toward mutual recognition and covenantal unity. Each stage expresses particular values—respect for elders, truthfulness in intention, communal accountability, and the expectation of enduring fidelity. Together, these values shape the moral landscape within which marriage is understood in Ewe communities.

Viewing the rites in this interconnected way reveals their deeper significance. The early stages test the sincerity of the couple's intentions; later stages negotiate kinship alliances and clarify expectations between families; the final rites establish the legitimacy of the union and secure the blessing of both the living community and, symbolically, the ancestors. Through each step, families communicate their readiness to stand behind the couple, offering moral support, social protection, and a shared understanding of the responsibilities that accompany marriage.

This interpretive perspective allows one to see that the strength of the Ewe marriage process lies not in any single ceremony but in the cumulative effect of the rites as they unfold. The gestures, inquiries, exchanges, and blessings each contribute to a structured progression that moves the couple from informal relationship to recognized marital covenant. The analysis that follows presents the major stages of this process in the order in which they commonly occur, noting that minor variations exist from one Ewe settlement to another. These variations do not obscure the essential sequence, which remains remarkably stable and continues to guide how Ewe families understand, negotiate, and sanctify marriage.

4.1 Initial Inquiry (Dzidzo / Tsidzedze)

The marriage process typically begins with the initial inquiry made by the man's family, a step that carries far more weight than a polite expression of interest. It is the first formal signal that two lineages are entering a space of mutual consideration, and it sets the tone for all that follows. Bohannan (1973) observes that African marriage systems often treat early inquiries as "tests of intention," preliminary encounters through which families gauge the seriousness of the young man's commitment, the maturity of the relationship, and the suitability of the proposed match within the broader framework of kinship. These inquiries are therefore not casual social visits; they function as early stages of discernment for both households.

Among the Ewe, this discernment begins when elders from the man's side approach the woman's family with respectful greetings and a modest presentation, often including drink or a small token. The simplicity of the gesture is intentional. At this stage, the purpose is not negotiation or the exchange of substantial gifts, but recognition. The visitors are, in effect, announcing that the young

man's intention has moved beyond informal affection to a level where the knowledge, counsel, and authority of the families must be engaged.

For the woman's family, receiving the visitors signals that the matter deserves discussion within the lineage. It is an act of granting audience—a recognition that the proposal is not frivolous and that the young man is prepared to submit his intentions to communal scrutiny. In many households, the inquiry triggers a period of quiet consultation among elders, during which character, family background, and lineage compatibility are considered. These internal deliberations are as important as the external visit, for they determine whether the relationship is one the family can publicly support.

From an interpretive standpoint, this initial inquiry demonstrates how deeply marriage is embedded within communal life among the Ewe. It illustrates that the couple does not enter marriage alone; they do so under the watchful care of families whose responsibility is to safeguard the moral integrity of the union from the very beginning.

During this stage, the woman's family conducts its own quiet but thorough inquiries. These investigations are rarely formalized, yet they carry decisive weight. Elders and trusted relatives consider several questions: the character of the young man, the reputation of his lineage, his work habits, the stability of his household, and any existing relational history between the two families. In many Ewe communities, such inquiries may include conversations with neighbours, extended kin, or community leaders who have observed the young man over time. The woman's family is not only evaluating the individual; they are discerning whether the lineage he represents embodies values compatible with their own.

Fortes (1975) notes that inquiries of this kind serve as protective mechanisms within African kinship systems. They safeguard the future stability of the marriage by ensuring that both families enter the process fully aware of the moral and social responsibilities involved. Because marriage is understood as a bond between lineages rather than solely between individuals, families assume joint responsibility for the welfare of the couple. It is therefore crucial that both sides have confidence in the integrity, reliability, and moral standing of those with whom they are about to be linked.

This early investigative step determines whether the proposal can be honourably pursued. If the woman's family discovers serious concerns—ongoing disputes within the man's lineage, patterns of irresponsibility, unresolved conflicts, or reputational issues—they may quietly decline further engagement. Conversely, if the inquiries affirm good character and compatibility, the family signals its openness to deeper conversation. In this way, the process establishes whether both lineages are willing to move beyond the exploratory stage toward the possibility of a formal marital alliance.

From a pastoral perspective, this step highlights how Ewe marriage is held within a protective moral framework. It reinforces the idea that marriage is not rushed or left to chance but enters a communal discernment process designed to uphold the couple's long-term well-being.

4.2 Background Investigation (Nuse / Fafanyo)

Once the initial inquiry is accepted, the families move into a more deliberate and detailed investigative phase. In Ewe society, this period is marked by discreet but thorough examination of lineage history, behavioural patterns, and moral reputation—matters that are rarely discussed openly but are taken seriously within the community. Elders may speak quietly with acquaintances, neighbours, or distant relatives who know the young man or his family well. They look for indicators such as honesty, financial responsibility, stability of character, work ethic, and whether past conflicts have been handled with integrity. Particular attention is given to the relational climate of the young man's household: Are the family members united or divided? Are there longstanding disputes that might spill into the new marriage? Does the lineage have a reputation for keeping its promises?

Although contemporary couples—especially urban or church-based couples—sometimes experience this investigative stage with discomfort, interpreting it as intrusion or mistrust, its cultural purpose becomes clearer when viewed through anthropological insight. Elder-led inquiries are not designed to undermine the couple's autonomy but to protect them from entering a union without adequate knowledge of the broader social environment into which they are marrying. In traditional settings, the character of the lineage matters as much as the character of the individual, because the extended family continues to play a role in supporting the marriage long after the wedding rites are complete.

Meyer (1974) notes that African marriage negotiations often serve as protective mechanisms, functioning to secure compatibility between family systems before any formal commitments are made. By the time the rites progress to more public stages, the elders want to be reasonably assured that the marriage will not be jeopardized by avoidable tensions, hidden conflicts, or incompatible expectations. This deeper investigative phase therefore reflects a moral concern for the couple's long-term stability and a communal responsibility to ensure that the marriage is built on trustworthy foundations.

This investigative stage reflects the broader Ewe understanding that marriage binds far more than two individuals. It draws together two extended networks of obligation, shaping the social, moral, and even spiritual environment in which the couple will live. Kinship structures play an essential role in conflict resolution, childrearing, inheritance, and the maintenance of lineage honour; therefore, any new marital alliance must not introduce unresolved tensions or incompatible expectations into this delicate system. Elders are well aware that a union troubled at the foundational stage often carries those strains into later family life, affecting not only the couple but the wider community.

For this reason, both families must feel assured that their prospective in-law household upholds values that align with their own. They look for signs of internal unity, respectful relationships among siblings, responsible behaviour toward relatives, and a lineage history free from chronic disputes. These factors matter because, in times of marital difficulty, the extended families are expected to step forward as mediators and supporters. A family known for disruption or dishonourable conduct may be viewed as unable—or unwilling—to offer such stability.

If serious concerns emerge during the investigative stage, the process may end quietly. No formal rejection is issued; instead, communication gradually ceases, allowing both sides to preserve dignity and avoid public embarrassment. This discretion reflects a cultural ethic of respect—protecting the woman from entering a troubled union, safeguarding the young man from unnecessary shame, and preventing unnecessary conflict between families. In this sense, the Ewe marriage system aims not only to unite compatible lineages but also to shield all parties from preventable hardship.

4.3 Formal Negotiation and Consent (Dɔwɔnu / Nuduɖuɖo)

The most significant social moment in the entire marriage process occurs during the stage of formal negotiation. This is the point at which the intentions of the couple are brought fully into the public domain of family authority. Delegations from both families gather—usually in the home of the woman’s family—under the leadership of respected elders who possess the experience and rhetorical skill needed to guide the proceedings. The atmosphere is solemn but not tense, structured but not rigid; it reflects the understanding that a marriage alliance touches the honour, future, and cohesion of both lineages.

These negotiations are not improvised. They follow an ordered sequence that is widely recognized within the community, even though specific expressions vary slightly across towns and lineages. The opening greetings, the introduction of delegations, the statement of purpose, the discussion of requirements, and the acceptance of presentations unfold in a manner shaped by long-standing custom. This ritual structure creates a shared framework within which the families can speak with clarity, dignity, and respect.

Sarpong (1974) notes that Ghanaian marriage rites frequently display a “ritual orderliness” that signals communal seriousness, guiding participants to act not as isolated individuals but as bearers of lineage identity. The Ewe case exemplifies this pattern. The presence of elders serves to uphold moral expectations, prevent hasty decisions, and ensure that the alliance is formed with wisdom. Their speech—often framed in proverbs, blessings, and gentle humour—helps manage sensitive topics while maintaining cultural decorum.

In this formal setting, the families articulate the responsibilities they expect the couple to assume and the values they believe should govern the union. The negotiation is therefore far more than a transaction; it is a covenantal moment in which the social and moral foundations of the marriage are laid. By the end of this stage, both families have publicly declared their willingness to stand with the couple, marking a decisive step toward the establishment of a new household grounded in communal support and ancestral continuity.

In this crucial meeting, the woman’s family makes a formal public declaration of their decision—whether they consent to release their daughter for marriage. This moment is not a mere procedural step; it represents a profound shift in relational identity. Their acceptance signals that after careful consideration, consultation, and prayer, they entrust their daughter to another lineage. Although she is not yet fully married, she is now regarded as entering, in principle, the household and moral protection of the groom’s family. This symbolic transition is understood by the elders as the moment when two lineages begin to share a common future.

Upon receiving consent, the man's family expresses gratitude, often through respectful speech, symbolic gestures, and the presentation of a modest gift of thanks. This act of gratitude affirms that the woman's family has not been taken for granted but honoured for the responsibility they have carried in raising her. It also establishes a tone of mutual respect that will guide future interactions between the families.

Following this acknowledgment, the conversation widens to include matters of expectation, rights, and mutual responsibilities. Elders discuss the moral obligations the couple must uphold, the support each family will provide, and the standards of conduct expected in times of harmony and conflict. These conversations, though sometimes softened by humour, are taken seriously, for they lay the ethical foundation upon which the marriage will rest.

While modern social shifts have relaxed some of the traditional requirements—especially in urban or church-based settings—the older logic endures. Marriage, within the Ewe worldview, is a covenant that cannot be finalized without full transparency and mutual understanding. Hidden grievances, unspoken expectations, or unclear responsibilities are seen as threats to the longevity of the marriage. Thus, the negotiations serve as a communal safeguard, ensuring that both families enter the alliance with clarity, honour, and shared commitment.

4.4 Presentation of Symbolic Gifts (Sevuvu / Dɔmedzo)

Gift exchange occupies an important and deeply emblematic place within Ewe marriage rites. The items presented—whether drink, cloth, jewellery, or other valued objects—are far more than material offerings. They are symbolic gestures that articulate the moral tone of the emerging alliance. These gifts are not understood as payments, transactions, or the “purchase” of a bride. Rather, they operate within a framework of reciprocity and honour. Schildkrout (1973) notes that ritual gifts in African ceremonies serve as “material expressions of relational intention,” communicating values that words alone may not fully convey.

Within the Ewe context, this relational intention is multilayered. The presentation of drink, for example, expresses goodwill and initiates a shared atmosphere of peace and cooperation. Cloth often symbolizes dignity, continuity, and the covering of shame, reflecting the community's hope that the marriage will be marked by harmony. Jewellery or other valued items may signify the esteem in which the woman is held and the seriousness with which the man's family approaches the alliance. Through these objects, the groom's lineage acknowledges the woman's worth and affirms their readiness to welcome her fully into their household.

Equally important is the relational meaning attributed to the act of receiving these gifts. Acceptance by the woman's family indicates not only approval of the marriage but also a willingness to enter a relationship of mutual respect and shared obligation with the groom's lineage. In this sense, the gifts are the outward signs of an inward covenant. They mark the merging of two households, the blending of social networks, and the beginning of mutual accountability.

The exchange of gifts thus serves as both a symbolic and relational bridge. It communicates gratitude, invokes blessing, and expresses the hope that the marriage will flourish under the guidance and support of both families. More broadly, the ritual affirms a central principle of Ewe

marriage: that the union is rooted not in private affection alone but in communal recognition, generosity, and shared responsibility.

Different items within the Ewe gift exchange carry distinct layers of meaning, and the choice of each object is rarely accidental. Drink—whether bottled beverages or traditional spirits—is offered as a sign of peace, shared fellowship, and relational openness. It marks the moment when conversation passes from formality into mutual recognition. By presenting drink, the groom's family conveys that they approach the negotiations without hostility, withholding nothing, and seeking a harmonious bond between the two households.

Cloth, a highly valued item in many Ghanaian cultures, may symbolize protection, dignity, and honour. When cloth is presented on behalf of the bride, it gestures toward the covering and safeguarding that the new household is expected to provide. It also communicates admiration for the woman's worth and affirms that the groom's family intends to uphold her honour and wellbeing.

Gifts directed to the woman's mother or maternal relatives carry their own significance. In many Ewe communities, the maternal line plays a crucial role in a child's early formation. Presenting gifts to the mother acknowledges her labour, her nurturing strength, and the sacrifices made in raising the daughter who is now entering another household. These tokens of gratitude recognize that motherhood is not only biological but moral—that the character of the young woman is, in part, the fruit of her family's guidance and care.

The acceptance of these gifts by the woman's family represents a public affirmation that the relationship between the households is harmonious. Acceptance does not simply mean the items are taken; it signals that the moral and relational meaning behind them is acknowledged. In accepting, the family declares that they recognize the union as legitimate, that they harbour no hidden grievances, and that they are prepared to stand behind their daughter as she moves into her new role.

This exchange, therefore, is not a matter of material value but of symbolic clarity. It allows both families to affirm, before witnesses, that the emerging marriage is grounded in goodwill, respect, and the mutual desire for lasting peace.

This stage also reveals the profound moral dimension embedded within Ewe marriage practice. Because the gifts function symbolically rather than commercially, the central concern is not the accumulation of material wealth but the sincerity of the relationship being formed. Elders regularly remind participants that what is offered has value only insofar as it expresses goodwill, respect, and honour. A gesture made with integrity carries greater meaning than an elaborate display motivated by pride or social pressure. In this sense, the rite protects the marriage from being reduced to a financial negotiation and affirms that its foundation rests on moral intention rather than economic capacity.

Elders often articulate this perspective through proverbs, stories, or gentle admonitions. They emphasize that the symbolic weight of the gift—its power to convey peace, gratitude, or respect—matters far more than its monetary price. A modest presentation made with genuine sincerity is

regarded as a stronger basis for marital trust than an extravagant offering lacking authentic relational commitment. This moral framing helps ensure that the families' interaction is governed by honesty and humility rather than competition or display.

By elevating symbolic meaning above commercial value, the rite reinforces a worldview in which marriage is a covenantal bond shaped by character, integrity, and mutual obligation. It also guards against the misuse of tradition for economic gain—an issue sometimes mentioned by contemporary elders who lament how modern expectations can distort the simplicity of the older custom. In this way, the gift exchange becomes an ethical act, reminding both families that what ultimately strengthens a marriage is not wealth, but the moral intention with which the households approach their new alliance.

4.5 Blessing and Public Recognition (Dɔwɔnu Kɔkɔe)

After the negotiations and the presentation of gifts, the rite moves into a deeply spiritual moment: the offering of prayers and blessings by the elders. This stage marks the transition from social agreement to sacred commitment. Parrinder (1976) notes that African family rituals consistently treat marriage as a sacred event in which the presence of the ancestors, the moral weight of the lineage, and the benevolence of the divine are invoked. Within this worldview, blessing is not a symbolic ornament added to the ceremony; it is one of the foundations upon which the marriage will rest.

In Ewe ceremonies, the elders approach this moment with solemnity and purpose. Their words carry authority because they stand as the living representatives of the lineage, speaking on behalf of generations past and future. The blessings are often given first to the woman, acknowledging both her dignity and the responsibilities she is about to assume. Elders remind her of the qualities that sustain a household—respect, patience, industry, and fidelity. They speak in forms shaped by proverb and lived experience, encouraging her to cultivate harmony within her new family and to uphold the honour of the lineage she now represents.

Similar words are addressed to the man. The elders impress upon him the weight of his obligations: to protect, provide, and maintain peace; to avoid conduct that would bring shame upon either family; and to honour the woman he has chosen as partner. Diligence, self-control, integrity, and respect for elders are emphasized as virtues that secure the stability of the marriage. In some settings, the blessings are accompanied by the laying on of hands, a shared drink, or the symbolic gesture of placing the couple under the moral canopy of the extended family.

These spoken blessings do more than offer well-wishes. They function theologically and socially. They anchor the marriage within the moral universe of the community and call upon divine and ancestral witness to strengthen the union. They also establish a covenantal expectation: that the couple will carry themselves in ways that honour the elders whose voices have shaped them and the lineage whose reputation they bear. In this way, the blessing rite completes the movement of the ceremony—from investigation, negotiation, and symbolic exchange to the invocation of spiritual authority that consecrates the union.

This blessing marks the moral entry of the couple into married life. In the Ewe imagination, it is at this point—not at the church service or the civil registration—that the union becomes socially and spiritually anchored. Although church weddings have become common and are often regarded by Christians as the formal religious ceremony, the traditional blessing rite remains the cultural moment in which the marriage is truly recognized by the community. It is here, in the presence of elders and lineage representatives, that the couple crosses the threshold from courtship into covenant.

Once the blessings are spoken, the couple is no longer viewed as two individuals exploring affection or negotiating the terms of relationship. They have become a household in formation, placed under the moral oversight and protection of their families. The elders' words serve as testimony that the marriage has been scrutinized, accepted, and publicly affirmed. In effect, the blessing seals the union within the shared memory of the community: the lineage acknowledges responsibility for the couple, and the couple acknowledges responsibility to the lineage.

This shift has profound implications. It grants the young couple communal legitimacy, providing them with a network of support that will prove vital in times of conflict, childbirth, or economic difficulty. It also situates them within a moral order, reminding them that the vows they will later pronounce in church do not float free of cultural history but rest on the approval and wisdom of the families that shaped them. In this sense, the blessing rite stands as a bridge between tradition and Christian practice, ensuring that the marriage is rooted in both ancestral continuity and contemporary faith commitments.

4.6 Integration of the Bride (Nyonuɔofeɔ)

Traditionally, once the core rites are completed, the woman is formally welcomed into the groom's household. This act is far more than a change of physical location. It is a symbolic gesture that publicly affirms the merging of domestic units and the transfer of primary responsibility for her wellbeing. In earlier generations, this moment carried substantial social weight, as the bride physically entered the compound where she would live, contribute, and raise children. Even though contemporary couples may choose to establish an independent residence—especially in urban settings—the symbolism of this formal welcome remains deeply significant.

Nukunya (1982) notes that marriage in Ghanaian communities historically created a new social space within the lineage structure, expanding the household and reshaping relations of obligation and authority. The welcoming of the bride marks the moment when this new social unit becomes visible. It indicates that the groom's family accepts her not simply as the wife of their son but as a participant in the moral, economic, and spiritual life of the lineage. Her presence enlarges the household network, strengthening ties between families and enlarging the circle of shared responsibility.

For the bride, this transition signals a shift in identity. She is not severing ties with her natal family, but she is now embraced as a daughter of another household—a person who will contribute to its continuity and honour. Elders often describe this moment as a blending of destinies: the couple's choices, achievements, and struggles will now reflect not only on themselves but on both lineages.

The groom's family, for their part, acknowledges a new set of responsibilities that include protection, mutual respect, and ongoing support.

The ritual welcome thus serves as the social culmination of the marriage rites. It embodies the belief that marriage is a covenant between families, not merely an agreement between two individuals. It also reinforces the idea that the household created by the marriage is anchored in communal memory and communal blessing. Even where the couple later establishes their own home, the symbolic act of being welcomed ensures that they stand within a relational framework that ties past, present, and future together. It is this lineage-based understanding of marriage—rooted in identity, continuity, and shared responsibility—that gives Ewe marriage its enduring strength and coherence.

Often, after the formal welcome into the groom's household, the woman receives measured guidance from older women within the husband's lineage. These conversations are typically held in private, away from the more public rites, and they carry a tone that is both instructive and nurturing. The older women—mothers, aunts, or respected female elders—speak from lived experience, offering counsel on mutual respect, cooperation, and the rhythms of domestic life. Their words extend beyond practical advice on household management; they address deeper moral expectations such as patience, loyalty, and maintaining peace within the home.

This mentorship is not a peripheral afterthought but a central expression of generational continuity within Ewe marriage. It reflects the belief that marriage is strengthened when wisdom is passed down through relational bonds rather than left to individual trial and error. The elders' guidance situates the new bride within a lineage of women who have sustained families through their labour, resilience, and moral insight. In receiving this instruction, she enters a heritage of shared knowledge that has shaped households across generations.

These conversations also serve to integrate the bride into the communal moral framework. They affirm that she is not alone in her new responsibilities; she has inherited a network of support in which older women take genuine interest in her wellbeing. Their mentorship builds relational ties that can later become essential during moments of conflict, childbirth, or personal difficulty. The guidance offered at this stage thus strengthens the household and anchors the marriage within the wisdom of the lineage.

By viewing this moment not as a mere formality but as a key step in moral and social formation, one sees how Ewe marriage conceives continuity: not only through children or shared property, but through the steady transmission of values from one generation to the next.

4.7 Communal Celebration and Social Reinforcement

Though not always ritualized with the same structured sequence as the earlier stages, the communal celebration that follows the marriage rites serves a vital social purpose. It is during this wider gathering—marked by music, food, laughter, and the presence of neighbours and extended kin—that the marriage becomes publicly woven into the fabric of community life. The celebration provides an opportunity for people who were not directly involved in negotiations to affirm the couple, offer words of goodwill, and signal their readiness to support the new household.

In many Ewe settings, such celebrations carry layers of meaning beyond festivity. They function as communal recognition of the union: the couple is presented before the wider community not merely as partners but as a social unit with responsibilities and expectations. Elders, neighbours, peers, and even children participate in affirming that a new household has emerged—one that will contribute to communal continuity and mutual care. This public acknowledgment helps to secure the marriage's moral legitimacy and situates the couple within the shared memory of the community.

Fortes (1975) suggests that communal reinforcement of this kind plays a stabilizing role within African kinship systems. By celebrating the marriage publicly, the community signals that the couple is not isolated or abandoned to navigate life on their own. Instead, they are surrounded by a network of relationships—older mentors, peer support, and lineage authority—that stands ready to uphold their union in moments of difficulty. The celebration thus functions as a social buffer: it strengthens the couple's sense of belonging and reduces the likelihood that private conflicts will escalate without guidance or mediation.

From a pastoral perspective, the communal celebration highlights a key insight of Ewe marriage: the strength of the union lies not only in the affection between the couple but also in the social environment that surrounds and supports them. The feast or gathering is therefore not an optional appendage to the rites but a visible expression of the community's shared commitment to the wellbeing of the household.

Celebrations offer more than merriment; they create a space where extended kin can interact, renew ties, and strengthen alliances that will support the couple throughout their married life. Relatives who may not have participated directly in negotiations now have the opportunity to meet one another, exchange greetings, and signal goodwill. These interactions weave the two families into a wider relational network, reminding everyone present that the marriage is not the achievement of two individuals alone but a shared social accomplishment. The presence of kin from both sides serves as a public endorsement of the union and affirms that the responsibilities of marriage are carried not only by the couple but by the lineage as a whole.

In many ways, the communal gathering also marks the beginning of communal oversight—a gentle but enduring form of social guardianship. By attending the celebration, relatives and neighbours signal that they are willing to stand with the couple as they face the complexities of married life. Their presence communicates that the couple will not encounter life's challenges in isolation; there is a community prepared to support, counsel, mediate, and encourage them. This collective reinforcement strengthens the social fabric surrounding the marriage, ensuring that the household is embedded within a network capable of offering guidance in times of conflict, help in periods of economic strain, and companionship during moments of sorrow or joy.

From this perspective, the celebration is not merely the closing chapter of the marriage rites but the opening of a shared life monitored and supported by the community. It demonstrates that in Ewe society, marriage flourishes not only through the couple's private commitment but also through the communal bonds that hold them steady.

4.8 Summary of Cultural Logic

Viewed collectively, the rites form a moral sequence:

1. **Inquiry** establishes intent.
2. **Investigation** ensures compatibility and protects social integrity.
3. **Negotiation** clarifies consent and obligations.
4. **Gift exchange** expresses goodwill and symbolic commitment.
5. **Blessing** initiates the couple into recognized marital identity.
6. **Integration** anchors the marriage within lineage structures.
7. **Celebration** publicly seals the alliance.

These steps reveal marriage as a deliberate and socially anchored covenant rather than a private arrangement based solely on personal preference. Each rite—whether inquiry, negotiation, gift exchange, blessing, or communal celebration—contributes to the creation of a stable union by intertwining interpersonal affection with communal responsibility. The affection between the couple is affirmed, but it is also placed within the larger moral framework of lineage, shared memory, and intergenerational support.

Through the sequence of rites, marriage becomes a covenant sustained by multiple layers of accountability. The families examine the integrity of the couple's intentions, offer guidance drawn from their own experience, and pledge their ongoing presence in times of difficulty. The community, in turn, recognizes and celebrates the new household, integrating it into the social and spiritual fabric of communal life. The cumulative effect is a marriage grounded not only in the emotions of two individuals but in the collective wisdom and protective care of their lineages.

By viewing the rites as interconnected steps, one sees that Ewe marriage is designed to guard the union from isolation, secrecy, or instability. It reminds the couple that their love finds its fullest expression when supported by a network committed to their flourishing. In this way, the rites serve as a cultural architecture for endurance—binding personal commitment to communal strength, and ensuring that the marriage is upheld by more than the couple's private resolve.

5. THEOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT

Interpreting Ewe marriage rites through a theological lens requires careful and patient attention to three interconnected realities: the biblical witness, the moral values embedded in the rites themselves, and the lived experience of Christian families who stand at the crossroads of faith and culture. Scripture presents marriage as a covenant characterized by mutual commitment, enduring faithfulness, and the blessing of God—an intimate partnership that is both relational and moral. These biblical themes form the touchstone for Christian discernment.

Ewe marriage rites, though shaped within a pre-Christian cosmology, contain moral insights that echo many of these scriptural convictions. Their emphasis on family responsibility, the public nature of marital commitment, the invocation of blessing, and the pursuit of harmony within the household resonates strongly with biblical visions of covenant life. The rites assume that marriage is not a private agreement but a sacred bond requiring honesty, respect, and the support of a moral community. In this sense, Ewe tradition provides what might be called a cultural grammar of covenant—gestures and practices that embody values Christians themselves affirm.

However, the task of theological interpretation does not end with identifying these resonances. Christian reflection must also examine where the rites require clarification, reinterpretation, or gentle correction. Some assumptions within traditional practice—such as the role of ancestors, the potential for excessive financial demands, or gender expectations that place disproportionate burdens on women—invite thoughtful engagement from a biblical standpoint. The aim is not to dismiss cultural forms but to discern how the gospel’s moral vision can illuminate, reshape, or elevate certain practices so that they serve Christian marriages more faithfully.

This section therefore explores the points at which Ewe marriage rites align with biblical teaching, as well as the areas where Christian theology provides needed guidance. By engaging the rites with both respect and clarity, the study seeks to demonstrate how faith and culture can enter into meaningful dialogue, enabling Ewe Christian families to honour their heritage while living faithfully within the covenant of Christ.

5.1 Covenant and Consent

The Ewe understanding of marriage as a solemn covenant closely parallels biblical images of marriage as a binding and enduring union. The sequence of inquiry, negotiation, and formal consent reflects a depth of seriousness that aligns with both Old and New Testament teachings on marital commitment. In Scripture, marriage is never portrayed as a casual arrangement. It is a sacred bond made before God and within the recognition of the wider community—a joining of lives that carries spiritual, moral, and social weight. Genesis 2:24 presents marriage as the profound act of “leaving” and “cleaving,” a union that establishes a new household rooted in mutual fidelity and divine intention. Jesus affirms this covenantal depth in Matthew 19:4–6, reminding his listeners that marriage is God’s work and should not be dissolved lightly.

Within the Ewe tradition, this covenantal ethos is expressed through the structured processes that precede the union. The insistence that both families must examine, deliberate, and approve the match underscores the conviction that marriage is not simply a matter of personal affection but a relationship that binds two lineages together. Elders participate not because they seek to control the couple’s choices, but because they understand that marriage reshapes the moral and social landscape of the community. Their scrutiny is an act of care, ensuring that the union rests on reliable foundations and that both households can affirm the partnership with integrity.

In this way, the Ewe marriage process echoes the biblical concern that marriage extends beyond individual sentiment and carries implications for the households involved. Just as Scripture situates marriage within a larger network of relationships—parents, extended kin, and the covenant community—Ewe custom safeguards the union by embedding it within lineage oversight and communal responsibility. Both traditions, though arising from different historical settings, treat marriage as a covenant that requires discernment, public accountability, and the blessing of those who stand around the couple.

Where the biblical view emphasizes the couple’s personal decision before God, Ewe practice places substantial weight on the approval and involvement of both lineages. This difference can create real tension for Christian couples who desire to honour their personal conviction and spiritual calling while still respecting the authority and expectations of their families. Many young

Christians feel caught between two moral worlds: the biblical insistence that marriage is ultimately a covenant made before God by two individuals, and the cultural conviction that a marriage lacking family consent is socially fragile and morally incomplete.

Yet the Ewe emphasis on lineage approval contains a moral wisdom that is often overlooked in more individualistic settings. It reflects the belief that marriage is not sustained by private commitment alone but by the broader network of relationships that surrounds the couple. By requiring families to examine, discuss, and formally consent to the union, the tradition invites the community to begin supporting the marriage even before it is fully established. Elders offer guidance, relatives pledge their goodwill, and the lineage assumes a measure of responsibility for the couple's welfare. This communal investment creates a protective environment that can help the marriage withstand future challenges.

For Christian couples, the task is not to reject family involvement but to integrate it thoughtfully with biblical teaching. The cultural process of consent can be seen as a complement to the biblical call for covenant faithfulness: while Scripture prioritizes personal decision before God, the Ewe tradition reminds the couple that such decisions flourish best within a supportive and morally accountable community. When understood in this way, family approval does not undermine Christian conviction but enriches it, providing a social foundation that upholds the marriage from the outset.

5.2 Marriage as a Public Witness

Biblical marriage is consistently portrayed as a public covenant, never a private or hidden arrangement. In the Old Testament, betrothal and wedding events unfolded within the presence of families, clans, and sometimes entire villages, reflecting the belief that marriage reshapes the social fabric and therefore requires communal acknowledgment. The celebrations, feasting, and witness-bearing embedded in Ewe practice mirror this communal dimension. Just as Hebrew weddings involved the participation of extended kin, neighbours, and religious leaders, Ewe ceremonies gather the wider community to affirm that a new household has been formed and that this union contributes to the stability and moral order of the community.

The communal recognition found in Ewe marriage rites thus resonates strongly with the biblical world, where covenants are rarely enacted in solitude. In both settings, public affirmation serves a stabilizing function: it establishes accountability, embeds the couple within a supportive network, and signals that the marriage is not an isolated partnership but a contribution to the life of the community. By being witnessed, the marriage becomes part of the shared memory of the lineage, and the couple gains a sense of belonging that can sustain them through the uncertainties of married life.

The blessing offered by Ewe elders has particularly striking parallels with the blessings given by patriarchs, elders, and spiritual leaders in Scripture. In Genesis, Isaac's and Jacob's blessings were not mere formalities; they carried moral authority, invoked divine favour, and shaped the future identity of families. Similarly, in the Ewe context, the elders' blessing is a moment of spiritual gravity. Their words call upon divine help, draw on ancestral wisdom, and set moral expectations for the new household. These blessings do not simply mark the end of the ceremony; they

consecrate the union, affirming that it is anchored in both communal responsibility and the hope for divine favour.

Taken together, these parallels suggest that the Ewe approach to marital recognition aligns naturally with the biblical conviction that marriage belongs within the life of a community. The public, blessed, and covenantal character of Ewe marriage rites therefore offers a cultural framework through which Christian couples can appreciate the social depth and theological richness of marriage as understood in Scripture.

One can see, therefore, that many features of Ewe public recognition—such as communal gatherings, shared prayers, and the admonitions offered by elders—reflect a theological understanding of marriage as a covenant lived under the witness and support of others. These practices affirm that marriage does not unfold in isolation but within a community that participates in the couple’s moral and spiritual formation. The presence of extended kin, the spoken blessings, and the public reminders of marital responsibility all signal that the new household is being woven into the fabric of communal life. In this sense, Ewe public recognition mirrors the biblical conviction that marriage is a covenant established before God and affirmed in the presence of witnesses.

For this reason, the Christian community can receive these elements as broadly compatible with biblical practice, even when their cultural expressions differ. The external forms may vary—the Ewe invocation of lineage blessing, the use of symbolic gifts, or the style of communal celebration—but the underlying intentions resonate with biblical themes: communal accountability, the sanctity of covenant, and the expectation that elders will guide younger households. By recognizing this shared moral logic, Christians are better equipped to appreciate the integrity of Ewe marital customs and to affirm the aspects that enrich Christian understanding of covenant life.

Such recognition allows the church to approach cultural rites not as rival systems but as carriers of insight that can deepen the pastoral formation of couples. When the church acknowledges these resonances, it fosters a dialogue in which cultural wisdom and biblical teaching can strengthen one another, enabling Christian families to honour both their faith and their heritage with integrity.

5.3 Gift Exchange and the Symbolism of Giving

The exchange of gifts in Ewe rites can be fruitfully interpreted through a biblical framework of honour, gratitude, and covenantal generosity. Within Scripture, symbolic gifts frequently accompany the establishment or renewal of significant relationships, functioning not as commercial transactions but as gestures of goodwill that communicate trust, respect, and relational intention. When Abraham offers bread and wine to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18–20), the act is not a payment but an acknowledgment of shared blessing and divine favour. Jacob’s gifts to Esau during their reconciliation (Genesis 33:10–11) similarly serve as tangible expressions of restored relationship and humility, marking the healing of a fractured bond. In various Old Testament marriage negotiations, the giving of gifts—whether in the form of bridewealth, tokens of respect, or household valuables—signals sincerity, gratitude, and the desire to enter a covenant in good faith.

Seen in this light, the Ewe practice of gift exchange aligns closely with these biblical patterns. Drink is offered as a sign of peace, indicating that the approaching family seeks reconciliation, harmony, and open relationship rather than conflict or misunderstanding. Cloth, jewellery, and other valued items represent honour, dignity, and the intention to safeguard the wellbeing of the woman who is joining the new household. Gifts directed toward the woman's mother or maternal kin parallel biblical acknowledgments of the vital role played by parents and caregivers in shaping the character of the bride—an expression of gratitude for years of nurturing care.

Like the symbolic acts found in Scripture, these Ewe gifts do not carry commercial value in the context of the marriage covenant. Their meaning lies not in their cost but in the sincerity behind them. They stand as material tokens of relational intention—gestures that declare: “We come in peace; we honour your daughter and your family; we desire a relationship that is marked by goodwill and mutual respect.” Such gifts help to seal the covenant, establish trust between households, and set the moral tone for the union that is being formed.

By interpreting Ewe gift exchange within this biblical framework, one sees that the practice embodies values that Scripture itself affirms—gratitude expressed through generosity, honour conveyed through symbolic offering, and covenant strengthened through tangible acts of goodwill.

Likewise, Ewe gift-giving within marriage rites is not intended as a commercial transaction or an act of purchasing the bride. Instead, it functions as a symbolic expression of gratitude, goodwill, and a readiness to enter into mutual obligation. The gifts acknowledge the woman's value, honour the labour of her family, and declare the groom's lineage's sincere commitment to the emerging union. When understood this way, the biblical and cultural practices converge meaningfully: in both traditions, gifts communicate respect, relational intention, and a willingness to invest in harmony between households.

This convergence is especially clear when one considers the covenantal function of gifts. In Scripture, covenant relationships are often marked by material tokens that embody spiritual or moral commitments. Similarly, in Ewe practice, the presentation of gifts precedes the blessing and communal recognition, symbolically preparing the moral ground on which the marriage will be built. These gestures signal that the families enter the alliance in peace, affirming that the union is not rooted in self-interest but in a shared desire for a stable, honourable, and harmonious future.

However, as in many cultural settings, misuses can arise. There are situations where families place extravagant or excessive demands on the groom's household, motivated not by symbolic meaning but by social status, economic advantage, or pride. Such distortions obscure the original intent of the rite and risk placing unnecessary burdens on young couples, causing tension even before the marriage is established. At these moments, Christian teaching offers a corrective lens. It reminds the community that the purpose of the gifts is covenantal rather than commercial—an expression of gratitude and honour, not an opportunity for wealth acquisition or social display.

By re-centering attention on the moral and relational significance of the gifts, Christian reflection helps families uphold the integrity of the rite. It encourages both lineages to focus on the enduring values that strengthen marriage—peace, mutual respect, generosity of spirit—rather than allowing economic pressures or social competition to overshadow the covenantal heart of the tradition.

5.4 Blessing and Spiritual Authority

Blessings spoken by Ewe elders during marriage rites carry a spiritual weight that resonates closely with biblical tradition. Throughout Scripture, family blessings are never casual well-wishes; they are meaningful, formative acts that shape identity, moral direction, and the unfolding of a household's future. In the stories of Genesis, the blessings given by Isaac to Jacob (Genesis 27) and by Jacob to his sons and grandsons (Genesis 48–49) are profound covenantal pronouncements that influence generations. Similarly, in Deuteronomy 33, Moses blesses the tribes of Israel, grounding them in a shared identity and calling. These biblical examples show that blessing is not ornamental—it is a declaration that frames the responsibilities, hopes, and spiritual direction of a family.

Within Ewe marriage rites, one finds a remarkably similar logic. In many Ewe homes, the moment of blessing is approached with solemnity, as elders gather around the couple to speak counsel, warnings, encouragement, and moral expectations. Their words are shaped by long experience, communal memory, and the spiritual insight accumulated across generations. An elder's blessing may address household harmony, fidelity, truthfulness, respect for in-laws, economic diligence, or the importance of patience and humility. The tone is not authoritarian but pastoral—a form of spiritual guardianship exercised on behalf of the lineage.

This form of spiritual oversight is neither merely cultural nor merely ceremonial. It reveals a worldview that sees marriage as a sacred responsibility entrusted to the couple by both family and God. The blessing situates the new household within the protective canopy of community wisdom and divine favour. It signals that the marriage is not starting in a vacuum but in continuity with the values and faith commitments that have guided the lineage. The elders' words, therefore, become a bridge between past and future, rooting the marriage in a moral vision that extends beyond the couple's emotions or aspirations.

From a Christian perspective, this convergence of cultural practice and biblical tradition invites appreciation rather than suspicion. The Ewe blessing, like its scriptural counterpart, affirms that marriage thrives when spoken into by those who carry spiritual authority, communal memory, and a genuine desire to see the household flourish under God's guidance.

Christian theology affirms that marriage is ultimately lived before God and requires His blessing for its flourishing. The biblical vision consistently places God at the centre of covenantal relationships, reminding believers that the strength, fidelity, and fruitfulness of marriage depend on divine grace rather than human effort alone. Yet Christian teaching also brings an important clarification: while elders, parents, and community members may speak blessings, spiritual authority itself derives from God, not from ancestry or lineage spirits. Authority flows from the Creator who instituted marriage, not from human intermediaries.

This theological insight does not diminish the value of elder blessing within Ewe culture; rather, it enriches it. By recognizing God as the ultimate source of blessing, Christian communities can honour the cultural form while redirecting its spiritual grounding toward Christ. Elder blessing retains its full importance as a moment of wisdom, guidance, and communal affirmation, but its authority is understood as participating in God's care, not replacing it. In this way, the cultural

practice remains intact—elders still speak from experience, convey moral expectations, and invoke the wellbeing of the household—yet the blessing is ultimately offered under the lordship of Christ.

Such a Christ-centred grounding allows Ewe Christians to embrace the beauty and weight of their tradition without feeling bound to aspects that conflict with Scripture. The gesture of elder blessing becomes a harmonious convergence of faith and culture: the form remains culturally authentic, while the source of authority is the God who sanctifies marriage and sustains households across generations. This integration also frees Christian families from fear that participating in traditional blessing rites compromises their faith; when reinterpreted through a biblical lens, the practice becomes a meaningful expression of covenant life lived before God.

5.5 Areas Requiring Theological Discernment

Although Ewe rites share many moral continuities with biblical values, there are areas where Christian reflection invites thoughtful adjustment. The task is not to discard the cultural forms wholesale, nor to impose an uncritical acceptance of every inherited practice. Rather, Christian discernment recognizes that even meaningful traditions can contain elements shaped by pre-Christian cosmologies, power dynamics, or historical conditions that require re-evaluation in the light of the gospel. In such cases, the church is called to offer clarification, wise correction, or careful reinterpretation so that the practices serve the moral and spiritual health of Christian families. These adjustments do not weaken the cultural rites; instead, they deepen their integrity by aligning them more closely with the covenantal vision of marriage presented in Scripture.

5.5.1 *Ancestral Meaning in Blessings*

Traditional interpretations of Ewe blessing rites sometimes suggest that the ancestors are being invoked to guide, protect, or oversee the couple's new household. Such language reflects older cosmological assumptions in which the living and the "living-dead" remain closely connected, and where the ancestors are viewed as moral guardians of the family line. While this worldview affirms the enduring value of family heritage, Christian theology approaches the question of spiritual authority differently. Scripture teaches that guidance, protection, and covenantal oversight come from God alone, even as He works through human relationships, communal wisdom, and generational memory.

For this reason, Christian reflection invites a reinterpretation of such ancestral references. Pastors often help couples understand that the true source of blessing is the Lord, who sustains marriage and guards households. The words spoken by elders can still be received with deep respect as expressions of familial goodwill, communal wisdom, and intergenerational care. What changes is not the cultural form—the gestures, the proverbs, the counsel—but the spiritual grounding behind them. The emphasis shifts from attributing spiritual authority to ancestral spirits toward recognizing God as the one who ultimately blesses, guides, and protects.

This pastoral approach allows Ewe Christians to honour their elders, embrace the richness of their cultural tradition, and receive the blessing as a meaningful family affirmation, while maintaining a theological clarity that centres spiritual authority in God. In this way, the rite is not rejected but

redeemed—its moral and relational value preserved, even as its spiritual significance is reoriented toward Christ.

5.5.2 Lineage Obligation versus Marital Exclusivity

Ewe culture places significant weight on lineage loyalty, viewing the individual as deeply embedded within the obligations and identity of the extended family. A person's actions reflect not only on themselves but on the lineage that shaped them, and marriage is often understood as an extension of these inherited loyalties. While Scripture affirms the importance of family bonds, respect for parents, and intergenerational support, it also introduces a distinct theological principle: the new marital bond forms a unique and primary unity. The command that “a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife” (Genesis 2:24) signals a shift in relational centre—a movement in which the couple becomes a new household under God's covenantal oversight.

This biblical teaching does not negate the value of extended family support; rather, it establishes boundaries that protect the integrity of the marriage. The challenge arises when cultural expectations—such as lineage claims, obligations to the wider family, or pressures to prioritize ancestral identity—risk overshadowing the primacy of the marital covenant. In some contemporary Ewe Christian families, couples struggle with competing voices: on one side, the cultural requirement to maintain strong ties and fulfil lineage duties; on the other, the biblical call to establish a new unity with its own responsibilities and rhythms.

Pastoral guidance plays a crucial role in helping couples navigate this tension. Wise pastors encourage couples to honour their families, maintain respect for elders, and participate in the communal life that has shaped them, while at the same time establishing healthy boundaries that safeguard the centrality of their marriage. They teach that leaving parents does not mean severing relationships but reordering loyalties so that the marriage is not destabilized by competing claims. When approached with discernment, lineage identity and marital unity need not be in conflict; instead, they can coexist in a way that strengthens both the household and the wider family system.

In this way, pastoral leadership helps couples integrate cultural loyalty with biblical covenant, ensuring that family connections remain a blessing rather than a source of strain. The result is a marriage that honours heritage while standing firmly on the foundation of the unity God intends for husband and wife.

5.5.3 Symbolism Misunderstood as Transaction

Where some modern families interpret the exchange of gifts as an opportunity for economic gain, Christian teaching offers a needed corrective by re-emphasizing the relational intention behind the practice rather than treating it as a financial obligation. In certain contemporary settings—particularly in urban areas where consumer pressures and social competition are strong—families may escalate gift requirements in ways that burden young couples or distort the original purpose of the rite. What was once a symbol of goodwill, honour, and covenantal intention can be misread as a transactional demand.

A marriage rooted in biblical covenant, however, cannot be reduced to a financial exchange. Scripture consistently presents marriage as a relationship grounded in love, faithfulness, mutual service, and divine blessing—not in economic negotiation. The meaning of gift-giving in both biblical and Ewe traditions lies in its symbolic power to express respect, gratitude, and relational commitment. When financial expectations become excessive, they obscure the moral clarity of the rite and risk introducing resentment or inequality into the marriage before it begins.

Christian leaders therefore play a crucial mediating role in restoring the symbolic meaning of the gifts. Pastors often remind families that the value of the gesture is measured not by its cost but by the sincerity and goodwill it represents. They help couples and their families understand that extravagant demands may undermine the covenantal foundation they are seeking to build. In pastoral conversations, elders and parents are encouraged to uphold the cultural beauty of gift exchange without weaponizing it through economic pressure.

By re-centering the practice on its symbolic intention, Christian teaching helps families reclaim the honourable and relational purpose that the gifts were meant to convey. This approach allows the rite to remain culturally authentic while ensuring that it aligns with the gospel's vision of marriage as a covenant shaped by love, humility, and mutual commitment rather than material transactions.

5.6 Harmony Between Ewe Cultural Wisdom and Christian Marriage Teaching

When read attentively, Ewe marriage rites reveal a moral framework that is remarkably compatible with the central themes of Christian marriage teaching. The emphasis on long-term commitment, truthfulness in intention, personal and familial responsibility, and the importance of communal witness all resonate strongly with biblical depictions of marriage as a covenant grounded in faithfulness and upheld by the wider community of God's people. These shared values demonstrate that, beneath their differing symbolic expressions, both traditions aim to form marriages that are stable, honourable, and woven into a moral order larger than the couple themselves.

For contemporary Christian couples, therefore, the primary challenge is not whether the rites contradict Christian faith—as is sometimes assumed—but how the cultural and Christian frameworks can be woven together in a way that honours the integrity of both. The rites carry a depth of communal wisdom, relational clarity, and moral seriousness that can enrich Christian understanding. At the same time, Christian conviction offers a theological centre that reshapes certain elements of the tradition without dismissing the cultural form. The task is to live at this intersection: to receive cultural practices with gratitude, to reinterpret them where necessary in the light of Scripture, and to embody a marriage that is faithful to Christ while remaining grounded in the communal rhythms that have guided Ewe households for generations.

Such integration requires discernment, pastoral guidance, and open conversation between families and faith communities. When done well, it allows couples to draw strength from both their heritage and their faith, enabling them to form marriages that are culturally rooted, spiritually grounded, and resilient in the face of modern pressures. In this way, neither the cultural wisdom of the rites nor the covenantal clarity of Christian teaching is lost; instead, they illuminate each other and support the flourishing of Ewe Christian families.

This theological engagement demonstrates that the heart of Ewe marriage practice—its emphasis on covenant, family involvement, blessing, and shared responsibility—finds genuine resonance within the biblical narrative. Rather than existing in opposition, these core elements mirror themes that appear throughout Scripture: marriage as a sacred covenant before God, families as essential partners in moral formation, blessings as markers of divine favour, and the community as a sustaining force in the couple's life together. When viewed through this lens, the traditional Ewe framework offers not obstacles but entry points for deepening Christian understanding of marital covenant.

What remains, therefore, is the pastoral work of guiding Christian families in how to participate in these rites faithfully and thoughtfully. Pastoral interpretation becomes the bridge that helps couples and their relatives discern which elements of the rites can be embraced directly, which require gentle reinterpretation, and which may need to be reshaped in the light of Christian conviction. The aim is not to discard cultural wisdom, nor to baptize every inherited practice without question, but to draw on the moral strengths of the tradition as a foundation for Christian commitment.

In this way, cultural practices become resources that enrich Christian faith rather than barriers that complicate it. With wise pastoral guidance, couples can honour their heritage without compromising biblical teaching, and families can support marriages in ways that reflect both ancestral wisdom and the covenantal clarity of the gospel. This integrated approach allows Ewe Christian households to live out a marriage that is culturally grounded, spiritually faithful, and strengthened by the best insights of both traditions.

6. DISCUSSION

The examination of Ewe marriage rites reveals a carefully ordered cultural system whose underlying values remain deeply influential, even within contemporary Christian communities. Far from being cultural relics preserved only for the sake of continuity, these rites function as living expressions of communal identity, mutual responsibility, and moral order. Each stage—whether inquiry, negotiation, blessing, or celebration—carries meaning that shapes how families understand marriage, how they transmit expectations across generations, and how they provide support for newly formed households. Even as social conditions change and Christian faith becomes more central to family life, the structure and sensibilities of these rites continue to inform how many Ewe Christians approach marriage.

When these practices are viewed alongside biblical themes of marital covenant, fidelity, and communal witness, the analysis uncovers significant points of harmony. Both cultural and scriptural perspectives uphold marriage as a serious moral undertaking grounded in responsible commitment and sustained by community. Yet the study also highlights areas where Christian reflection provides necessary guidance—particularly in matters of spiritual authority, financial expectations, and the balance between lineage loyalty and marital unity. These areas do not undermine the value of the rites; rather, they invite a deeper discernment that helps Christian families participate faithfully without compromising the integrity of their beliefs.

This discussion reflects on these findings from both cultural and theological angles, drawing attention to the insights that emerged from engaging the rites in their full symbolic and pastoral

depth. By holding tradition and Scripture in conversation, one can better appreciate the ways in which Ewe customs enrich Christian understanding of marriage, as well as the points at which the gospel gently reshapes cultural assumptions. The result is a more integrated vision of marriage—one that honours heritage, strengthens faith, and equips Christian families to navigate the complexities of life with clarity and wisdom.

6.1 Marriage as a Social Covenant Rather Than a Private Decision

One striking observation that emerges from the data is the profoundly communal character of Ewe marriage. The slow, deliberate movement from inquiry to consent and finally to blessing demonstrates a cultural conviction that marriage flourishes best when families serve as active participants rather than distant observers. In this worldview, the formation of a marriage is not the private decision of two individuals but a relational undertaking that draws upon the moral authority, wisdom, and support of multiple generations. The presence of elders, the involvement of maternal and paternal kin, and the public nature of the rites collectively affirm that marriage enters the history of two households, not only the aspirations of a couple.

Anthropological studies from the 1970s and early 1980s consistently confirm this broader African orientation toward marriage as a collective enterprise. Scholars such as Bohannan, Fortes, and Meyer note that in many African societies, marriage strengthens kinship bonds, stabilizes interfamily alliances, and creates networks of obligation that extend well beyond the couple's immediate relationship. The Ewe case reflects this pattern vividly. The structured participation of both lineages provides the couple with a moral and social foundation upon which to build their household. Family members do not merely witness the marriage; they pledge themselves as ongoing partners in its wellbeing, ready to advise, mediate, or support when difficulties arise.

Where families cooperate and take their roles seriously, couples often begin married life within a strong web of encouragement, counsel, and shared identity. This support becomes especially important during moments of financial pressure, childrearing challenges, or relational conflict. Conversely, when families are sidelined or treated as mere formalities—particularly in Christian communities that adopt more individualistic assumptions—the deeper expectations of kinship may remain unspoken and unresolved. These neglected expectations frequently resurface in subtle forms, creating tension between spouses or between the couple and their extended families. In several pastoral cases, the absence of early family collaboration became a source of strain later in the marriage, as unaddressed obligations or disappointments came to the surface.

Taken together, these observations reveal that the communal ethos of Ewe marriage is not an outdated cultural feature but a living framework that continues to shape how marriages are formed, sustained, and understood. Recognizing this communal dimension allows Christian pastoral care to affirm the strengths of the tradition while helping couples navigate its complexities with wisdom and grace.

This communal emphasis fits naturally with the biblical recognition that marriage extends beyond the private sphere and inevitably affects more than the two individuals involved. In the Hebrew Scriptures, family and clan structures regularly play decisive roles in the formation of marriages. Abraham's servant negotiates a bride for Isaac with Rebecca's family; Jacob's marriages to Leah

and Rachel unfold through detailed family interactions; and the laws of Israel closely regulate marriage in ways that protect the integrity of both household and community. These narratives show that, in the biblical imagination, marriage is a covenant with social dimensions—one that draws families into relationship and shapes the future of the wider community.

From this perspective, the communal character of Ewe marriage is not an obstacle to Christian faith but a cultural expression of a truth Scripture itself affirms: marriage is never merely about two people. The shared responsibilities, counsel, and oversight offered by the lineage echo the communal wisdom embedded in the Old Testament. They remind the couple that their union contributes to family continuity, social stability, and the moral life of the community.

The church's challenge, therefore, is not to oppose this cultural wisdom but to guide Christian couples in discerning where family involvement strengthens the covenant and where it may overstep its proper boundaries. Pastoral guidance helps couples distinguish between supportive engagement—where families bless, encourage, and uphold the marriage—and intrusive involvement that undermines the unity Scripture requires between husband and wife. The aim is to affirm the richness of Ewe communal practice while preventing family expectations from overshadowing the primary loyalty and oneness that form the heart of the marital covenant.

By approaching family involvement with discernment rather than suspicion, the church enables couples to honour their heritage without compromising the integrity of their union. In this way, the cultural and biblical frameworks can work together to support marriages that are both relationally strong and spiritually grounded.

6.2 Ritual Symbolism as a Carrier of Moral Meaning

The rites observed—whether the exchange of gifts, the speaking of blessings, or the careful sequencing of negotiations—carry ethical weight that goes far beyond the outward actions themselves. These practices are not decorative cultural performances to be endured out of obligation; they function as moral statements that communicate respect, honesty, restraint, and accountability. Each step situates the couple within a moral universe where relationships are governed by values rather than impulses. This reinforces the insight of scholars such as Meyer, Fortes, and Schildkrout that African rituals often act as embodiments of ethical expectations: they give visible form to virtues the community wishes to uphold.

The blessing offered by elders is particularly significant in this regard. It demonstrates how the community frames marriage as a sacred responsibility that requires both divine favour and human diligence. The elders' words—often a mixture of counsel, encouragement, warning, and prayer—provide a moral orientation for the couple. They outline what the community hopes the marriage will become and what it must avoid if it is to remain stable. These spoken blessings carry authority because they emerge from the lived experience of older generations who have sustained households, resolved conflicts, and navigated the uncertainties of family life.

Couples frequently recall these blessings long after the celebration has ended. In pastoral conversations, some refer to the very phrases spoken by their elders—words that challenged selfishness, urged patience, emphasized fidelity, or called for mutual respect. Such memories show

that the blessings are not ceremonial add-ons but moral compasses that accompany the couple into their shared life. They remain in the couple's consciousness because they summarize communal hopes and expectations, offering guidance during moments of conflict and clarity during times of decision.

In this way, the ethical significance of the rites becomes central to understanding Ewe marriage. They serve as a cultural catechism of sorts, teaching the virtues needed for marital endurance and embedding those virtues within the couple's memory from the beginning of their life together.

Yet misunderstandings often arise when younger generations encounter these symbols without adequate explanation. Growing up in a rapidly changing social environment, many young adults experience the rites at a distance: they attend them, participate in them, even contribute financially to them, but they may not understand the moral and relational logic that gives the practices their depth. Without this grounding, some interpret the rites as outdated, ornamental, or primarily economic in purpose. The symbolic significance of gifts, blessings, or elder counsel becomes obscured, and the ceremonies appear to be burdens imposed by tradition rather than expressions of communal care.

At the same time, many families assume that the younger generation automatically grasps the symbolism because "it has always been done this way." Elders may expect cultural knowledge to be intuitively absorbed through participation, forgetting that the social conditions that once ensured such transmission have shifted dramatically. Urbanization, formal education, church life, and migration all shape the imaginations of younger Ewes, often leaving them less familiar with the meanings their elders take for granted. This generational gap can lead to unspoken frustrations: young people feel pressured by customs they do not understand, while elders feel dishonoured by perceived disinterest in cultural heritage.

For these reasons, a clearer and more intentional transmission of meaning would significantly strengthen the function of the rites for modern Christian couples. When the symbolism of gifts, blessings, lineage involvement, and communal witness is explained, the rites regain their formative power. Couples begin to see the ceremonies not as economic transactions or compulsory steps, but as moral and spiritual investments made by their families. Such clarification also creates space for dialogue, allowing Christian communities to interpret the rites in ways that honour both Scripture and cultural identity.

Pastors and elders, therefore, play a crucial role in bridging this interpretive gap. With thoughtful guidance, the rituals can continue to shape the lives of young couples—rooting them in their cultural heritage while grounding their marriages in Christian covenantal understanding.

6.3 Areas of Tension: Personal Autonomy and Lineage Authority

A recurring tension emerges between the traditional Ewe insistence on lineage approval and the Christian emphasis on personal conviction before God. Many young adults—shaped by contemporary understandings of romance, autonomy, and individual choice—view marriage primarily as a relationship between two people. Elders, however, often understand marriage as an alliance between families, one that reshapes kinship networks and carries communal implications.

These differing emphases can easily create pockets of conflict during the negotiation process, with younger couples perceiving family involvement as interference, while elders interpret resistance as disregard for lineage responsibilities.

The study suggests that this tension is not inherent in Ewe culture itself but arises when the original purpose of the rites is not clearly understood or communicated. The traditional system assumes that families act as custodians of stability, wisdom, and moral continuity—not as barriers to love or agents of control. Their involvement was historically meant to secure the wellbeing of the couple and ensure that both households were prepared to support the marriage. When lineages misuse their authority—through excessive demands, rigid expectations, or attempts to dominate the couple’s decisions—the process becomes distorted. Likewise, when couples dismiss the communal nature of marriage and treat it as an exclusively private choice, they risk losing the relational support that traditionally protects marriages across generations.

Christian teaching provides a helpful balance in this delicate dynamic. Scripture affirms the importance of honouring parents and respecting the extended family, recognizing the value of intergenerational wisdom. At the same time, the biblical vision of marriage insists that a new unity is formed—“a man shall leave his father and mother”—establishing a household that is distinct, though not disconnected, from the lineage. Pastoral guidance can therefore help couples and families hold these truths together: maintaining respect for elders while safeguarding the integrity of the marital covenant; involving families meaningfully without allowing them to overshadow the marriage; and embracing personal conviction before God without disregarding the communal framework that sustains the union.

When handled with clarity and mutual understanding, the tension becomes an opportunity for dialogue rather than division. In this way, both cultural wisdom and Christian teaching can contribute to marriages that are relationally grounded, spiritually faithful, and resilient in the face of modern pressures.

6.4 Continuity and Change in Contemporary Ewe Communities

The observed rites reveal a pattern of both persistence and adaptation within contemporary Ewe communities. Certain core elements—such as the initial inquiries, the exchange of symbolic gifts, and the blessing pronounced by elders—remain remarkably stable and continue to be practiced even among Christian families who otherwise navigate highly modernized environments. These foundational steps endure because they carry deep moral and relational meaning; they are perceived not simply as tradition, but as expressions of respect, responsibility, and communal coherence.

At the same time, other components of the rites have softened or shifted under the influence of urbanization, modern education, and global mobility. In urban centres, where extended families may be geographically dispersed and schedules tightly constrained, some households abbreviate the negotiation process or combine multiple stages into a single gathering. Couples who have spent significant periods away from home—through migration, higher education, or work—often approach the rites with a different set of expectations shaped by exposure to more individualistic

models of marriage. These families may choose streamlined ceremonies that still honour cultural forms but fit modern rhythms.

Conversely, other families retain the full sequence with little modification. For them, the rites function as markers of identity, a tangible link to the values and practices that shaped earlier generations. Even young Christians who prefer a church wedding often insist on performing the traditional rites, recognizing that these ceremonies provide social legitimacy and affirm their place within the lineage. This coexistence of continuity and change illustrates how Ewe marriage practices remain living traditions—flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances yet anchored in enduring cultural meaning.

For pastoral care, these variations present both opportunities and challenges. Understanding why certain steps are maintained while others are adapted enables church leaders to guide couples thoughtfully, helping them navigate cultural expectations while remaining faithful to Christian convictions. Ultimately, the persistence of the rites testifies to their ongoing relevance as a moral and social framework capable of sustaining marriages in an evolving world.

This mixture of continuity and change suggests that Ewe communities are not passively inheriting their cultural heritage but actively negotiating it within the pressures and possibilities of a rapidly changing society. Urban life, formal education, global migration, and increased exposure to individualistic models of marriage all shape how younger generations interpret traditional expectations. Yet these shifts do not necessarily signal a collapse of cultural identity. Rather than viewing such change as cultural loss, it may be more accurate to understand it as a process of cultural reinterpretation—an adaptive effort to carry the heart of the tradition forward in ways that make sense within contemporary realities.

When one looks closely, the essential values embedded in the rites remain remarkably intact. Respect for elders, responsibility toward both families, and the recognition that marriage is a communal undertaking continue to form the moral core of the ceremonies, even when their external forms are abbreviated, combined, or adjusted for practical reasons. The symbolic logic of the rites—the idea that marriage requires scrutiny, blessing, and the involvement of both lineages—persists across generations. What changes, for the most part, are the modes of expression rather than the values themselves.

This pattern of reinterpretation reflects a cultural resilience rather than fragility. Ewe communities demonstrate the ability to hold onto what is morally central while allowing secondary forms to evolve. Such adaptability enables the rites to remain meaningful in environments where extended families may be scattered, where couples meet outside their ethnic networks, and where church weddings carry significant social weight. For Christian pastoral care, this insight is crucial. It encourages leaders to honour the cultural wisdom embedded in the rites while helping couples discern how best to live out these values within their own circumstances. In this way, cultural continuity is maintained not through rigid preservation but through thoughtful renewal—ensuring that the rites continue to serve as a moral and relational foundation for Ewe Christian families in a changing world.

6.5 Theological Resonance and Pastoral Interpretation

The theological engagement revealed far more points of harmony than conflict between Ewe marriage practices and biblical teaching. Core themes such as covenantal commitment, communal witness, fidelity, mutual responsibility, and the invocation of blessing appear prominently in both traditions. The Ewe understanding of marriage as a serious, morally accountable union resonates with the biblical portrayal of marriage as a covenant before God and the community. Likewise, the involvement of elders, the emphasis on truthfulness and transparency during negotiations, and the expectation that the wider family will support the couple align closely with Scriptural visions of intergenerational wisdom and communal participation in covenant life.

Where potential tensions surface—particularly regarding ancestral symbolism, excessive economic expectations, or forms of family involvement that risk overshadowing the marital unity—these tend to arise not from opposing moral frameworks but from different cosmological assumptions or evolving social pressures. In such cases, pastoral guidance becomes crucial. Rather than discarding the rites or treating them as incompatible with Christian faith, pastors and Christian elders can help families reinterpret problematic elements in ways that honour both the gospel and the cultural wisdom embedded in the tradition. For example, ancestral references can be reframed as expressions of gratitude for lineage rather than spiritual invocation; gift-giving can be restored to its symbolic, relational purpose; and family authority can be exercised in ways that support—not constrain—the new household.

This approach allows the cultural forms to remain intact while grounding their deeper meaning in Christ. It also affirms that the wisdom of the rites—their moral seriousness, social cohesion, and emphasis on shared responsibility—continues to offer valuable guidance for Christian marriages today. In this sense, the theological engagement does not position culture and Scripture in opposition but invites a dialogue that enriches the understanding of both.

The pastoral role becomes crucial at this intersection of cultural expectation and Christian conviction. Couples often find themselves negotiating two powerful loyalties: the desire to honour the traditions that have shaped their families for generations, and the calling to root their marriage firmly in the lordship of Christ. Many feel the weight of these obligations but are unsure how to navigate them in a way that preserves relational harmony on both sides. Pastoral guidance provides the interpretive bridge they need, helping them discern which cultural practices strengthen their covenant, which require gentle adaptation, and how to communicate their convictions respectfully to their families. When supported by thoughtful pastoral care, couples gain the confidence to participate meaningfully in the rites without feeling spiritually compromised or pressured into practices that conflict with their faith.

Families, on the other hand, also benefit from pastoral interpretation. Elders and lineage representatives may assume that Christian teaching threatens or replaces cultural belonging, leading them to guard traditional forms with heightened sensitivity. Pastoral teaching can clarify that Christian marriage does not erase cultural identity; rather, it reorders it. The couple remains part of the lineage, but their primary centre of unity shifts toward one another under God. This reorientation does not diminish family honour but invites families to support the couple's new household as it grows in faith and stability. When families understand that Christian marriage

affirms commitment, integrity, responsibility, and blessing—values already embedded within Ewe practice—they are more open to participating in the rites with renewed appreciation.

In this shared space, pastoral leadership fosters mutual understanding. Couples learn how to honour culture without compromising conviction, and families learn how to bless the couple's new unity without feeling displaced. The result is a more harmonious blending of cultural heritage and Christian practice, allowing marriages to be built on the strengths of both traditions.

6.6 Implications for Ongoing Dialogue Between Culture and Faith

The findings suggest that the relationship between Ewe marriage practice and Christian teaching need not be adversarial or competitive. When each is understood on its own terms—culturally, spiritually, and historically—a more constructive and respectful dialogue becomes possible. Ewe customs, at their best, offer a framework of social stability, clearly defined responsibilities, and a communal ethic that safeguards the marriage from isolation. They emphasize respect for elders, transparency between families, and the belief that marriage flourishes when supported by a network of relationships. These are not trivial strengths; they reflect a moral seriousness that resonates deeply with the biblical vision of covenant life.

Christian teaching, in turn, provides the spiritual grounding that centres the marriage in God's purpose. It affirms that the deepest foundation of the union is not lineage alone, but the covenant the couple makes before God. It brings a Christ-centred vision of love, forgiveness, mutual submission, and lifelong fidelity—virtues that enrich and elevate the cultural framework without erasing it. When held together, these two systems do not undermine one another; instead, they illuminate different layers of what a strong marriage requires.

Together, Ewe tradition and Christian theology offer couples a richer understanding of covenant, responsibility, and love than either could provide in isolation. The cultural practices give marriages a communal backbone; the Christian conviction gives them spiritual depth. The synthesis enables couples to honour their heritage while living faithfully before God, drawing upon the strengths of both worlds. In this space of mutual reinforcement, Ewe Christian couples find practical wisdom for navigating family expectations, theological clarity for interpreting the rites, and a holistic vision of marriage that speaks to the realities of both culture and faith.

7. PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings from this study carry meaningful implications for pastoral ministry among Ewe Christians. Marriage remains one of the most sensitive points of intersection between cultural identity, family expectations, and Christian conviction. It is often at this juncture that tensions surface, misunderstandings arise, and couples seek guidance. Pastors therefore occupy a unique and demanding position: they stand in the middle of conversations that require not only doctrinal clarity, but also cultural empathy, historical awareness, and practical wisdom. Their role extends far beyond officiating weddings. They become interpreters, mediators, and shepherds who help families navigate the boundary where inherited custom meets Christian faith.

The rites described earlier are not simply cultural ceremonies performed out of habit or nostalgia. They function as moral pillars that have historically supported family stability, clarified expectations, and rooted marriages within a network of accountability. When these rites are overlooked, abbreviated without explanation, or dismissed as irrelevant, young couples may enter marriage with fewer social and spiritual anchors than previous generations possessed. Pastoral experience frequently reveals that when the moral logic of the rites is lost, misunderstandings emerge: families feel sidelined, couples feel isolated, and the marriage begins without the supportive framework that once sustained household life.

For these reasons, the pastoral task involves more than permitting or prohibiting cultural practices. It requires interpreting these forms in ways that strengthen both the marital covenant and the unity of the wider Christian community. Pastors help couples understand the symbolic and relational significance of the rites, guiding them to embrace what is consistent with Scripture and to reinterpret elements that need theological refinement. At the same time, they help families appreciate that Christian marriage does not diminish cultural belonging but re-centres it around the new household formed under Christ.

In this interpretive and mediating role, pastoral ministry becomes a bridge—connecting ancestral wisdom with biblical teaching, and enabling Ewe Christian families to enter marriage with both cultural integrity and spiritual conviction. When handled well, this pastoral engagement reinforces the stability of marriages, strengthens family unity, and contributes to a Christian community that honours its heritage while remaining firmly rooted in the gospel.

7.1 Guiding Couples Through Cultural and Spiritual Expectations

Many young Christians approach marriage with a strong emphasis on personal choice, drawing on contemporary ideals of romantic autonomy and individual decision-making. Their families, however, often emphasize lineage obligations, communal recognition, and the need for interfamily cooperation. These different starting points easily generate tension, especially when the couple perceives cultural involvement as interference, while elders interpret the couple's independence as neglect of ancestral responsibility. In these moments, pastors frequently find themselves serving as mediators—helping both generations translate their concerns into language the other can understand.

A clearer grasp of the meaning embedded in the Ewe rites equips pastors for this mediating role. When pastors understand the cultural logic behind inquiries, negotiations, gift exchange, and blessing, they can help couples see that these steps are not obstacles to their Christian convictions. Instead, they can function as safeguards for mutual responsibility, community support, and marital stability. Many young couples find it freeing to learn that the purpose of the rites is not to burden them, but to anchor their new household within a network of care that has historically protected marriages through seasons of difficulty.

At the same time, pastors can guide families toward a deeper understanding of Christian marriage. While Christian teaching affirms the value of cultural bonds, it re-centres marriage on God's covenantal purposes rather than on lineage authority alone. Families are helped to see that the couple's primary loyalty must now shift toward each other under God, yet this shift does not erase

their cultural identity or their commitment to the lineage. Instead, it invites the extended family to support the couple's unity rather than compete with it.

When both generations appreciate each other's concerns—when couples recognize the protective intent of the rites, and families understand the spiritual centre of Christian marriage—the marriage process becomes less contested and more collaborative. The result is a ceremony shaped not by tension but by mutual respect, producing a foundation upon which the couple can begin married life with confidence, blessing, and a sense of belonging to both their family and their faith community.

7.2 Interpreting Ritual Symbolism for Contemporary Believers

One recurring challenge in pastoral counselling is the gradual loss of symbolic understanding surrounding the marriage rites. Younger generations often go through the ceremonies because they are expected, yet they do so without fully grasping the meanings carried by each act. Their experience of modern life—shaped by urbanization, schooling, digital culture, and mobility—has created a distance between performance and meaning. At the same time, older relatives frequently assume that these meanings are self-evident, forgetting that the social structures which once transmitted cultural knowledge naturally—extended family living, communal storytelling, and regular participation in lineage events—have shifted significantly. This generational gap leads to misunderstanding, frustration, and, at times, open conflict.

The cultural analysis in this study demonstrates why symbolic acts such as the presentation of gifts or the pronouncement of blessings by elders carry emotional and moral weight. These gestures are not arbitrary or ornamental; they are cultural shorthand for values such as gratitude, respect, responsibility, and belonging. The presentation of gifts, for instance, signals goodwill and the desire for peaceful relations between families. The blessing by elders conveys accumulated wisdom, moral direction, and a shared investment in the couple's future. When these acts are stripped of their interpretive framework, they can easily be misread as superstition, burdensome expectation, or unnecessary economic demand.

Pastors can draw on these cultural insights to help couples reconnect with the symbolic richness of the rites. In pastoral conversations or premarital counselling, they can explain how these gestures arise from communal goodwill rather than from spiritual confusion or transactional motives. Such interpretation helps younger couples discover that the rites are not designed to control or diminish them but to situate them within a supportive moral community. As couples begin to see that these acts promote gratitude, responsibility, and relational honour, their participation becomes more intentional and less suspicious. They enter the rites with deeper appreciation, and families experience less resistance, creating a stronger foundation for unity and mutual understanding.

In this way, restoring symbolic understanding becomes a vital pastoral task. It strengthens the marriage process, preserves cultural wisdom, and fosters intergenerational harmony within the Christian community.

7.3 Addressing Misinterpretations Without Weakening Cultural Identity

Some of the tensions that couples raise in counselling originate from misunderstandings rather than from genuine doctrinal conflicts. Many of the concerns voiced by younger Christians reflect incomplete or distorted interpretations of the rites rather than objections to the rites themselves. For example, some worry that the exchange of gifts resembles a “bride price” that commodifies the woman or suggests ownership, not recognizing that in Ewe practice the gifts are symbolic gestures of goodwill, gratitude, and relational intention rather than commercial transactions. Likewise, fears that elder blessings invoke ancestral spirits often arise from hearing fragments of prayers or proverbs without the broader cultural context. These anxieties reflect partial readings of the rites rather than their full meaning.

A careful pastoral response must therefore distinguish between the cultural form and the theological assumptions that may be mistakenly attached to it. Pastors play a crucial role in affirming what is morally and relationally good within the practice—respect for family, transparency between households, the desire for peaceful relations, and communal blessing—while gently correcting elements that could lead to theological confusion. This approach neither dismisses the concerns of young Christians nor treats cultural forms as untouchable. Instead, it invites couples and families into a deeper understanding of the rites, clarifying where biblical teaching enriches cultural wisdom and where it redirects misunderstandings.

In guiding couples through this process, pastors help them retain their cultural identity without compromising the core tenets of their faith. The aim is not to force a choice between culture and Christianity, but to show how cultural practices can be reinterpreted in ways that honour Christ while remaining true to the community’s heritage. Such guidance preserves the dignity and integrity of Ewe tradition while ensuring that Christian families live within the truth of God’s Word. When handled with discernment, the result is not cultural erosion but cultural renewal—an expression of faith that is both authentically Ewe and authentically Christian.

7.4 Strengthening Marriage Preparation Through Cultural Awareness

Because Ewe marriage remains deeply communal in structure and meaning, pastors who prepare couples for Christian marriage benefit greatly from addressing cultural expectations early in the premarital process. Many of the tensions that surface after the wedding—confusion about family roles, discomfort with lineage responsibilities, or disagreements over how decisions should be made—often arise because these matters were not discussed openly beforehand. By inviting couples to reflect on how their families typically participate in marriage rites, how authority is exercised, and how conflicts are traditionally resolved, pastors can lay the groundwork for healthier patterns of communication and boundary-setting. These conversations help prevent misunderstandings later on, especially in homes where one spouse is more culturally attuned than the other.

This approach enables couples to enter marriage with a clearer sense of what it means to live not as isolated individuals but as members of larger relational networks that have shaped them long before their courtship began. Many young Christians assume that marriage will involve only the two of them, but Ewe communal life means that extended family, maternal kin, and lineage elders

often play ongoing roles in household matters. Addressing these realities during premarital counselling allows couples to explore how they will honour these ties while still establishing their new unity before God.

A culturally informed premarital curriculum also creates space for pastors to speak directly to issues that contemporary Christian couples frequently overlook: the purpose of family involvement, the ethical meaning of gift exchange, the shared responsibility expected of both households, and the spiritual significance of blessing. When pastors teach these elements not as cultural obligations but as practices rooted in communal goodwill and moral intention, couples grow in appreciation rather than suspicion. This framework equips them to participate in the rites with a sense of gratitude, purpose, and theological clarity.

By weaving cultural insight into premarital preparation, pastors strengthen both the marriage and the wider Christian community. Couples enter their union prepared not only for the spiritual demands of Christian covenant but also for the relational patterns that give Ewe family life its enduring stability.

7.5 Supporting Healthy Relationships Between the Couple and Their Families

The integration of the bride into the husband's lineage and the long-standing emphasis on interfamily cooperation reflect values that continue to shape Ewe household life in subtle but powerful ways. Even in urban settings, where nuclear families are more common, the expectation that both lineages will remain involved in the moral and social wellbeing of the new household persists. These relational patterns influence how decisions are made, whom couples turn to for advice, and how responsibilities are distributed. Pastors who understand these dynamics are better positioned to support newly married couples as they learn to balance loyalty to their extended families with the covenantal commitment they have made to each other.

In pastoral counselling, this balance often becomes one of the central tasks. Many couples feel torn between honouring their parents—whose support and blessing they still value—and establishing the unity Scripture describes as the foundation of marriage. When a pastor affirms the cultural importance of respecting parents while simultaneously emphasising the primacy of the marital bond, couples gain a framework that allows them to negotiate extended family expectations without guilt or defensiveness. Such counsel helps them to see that honouring their families does not mean surrendering the independence of their new household, nor does establishing unity with a spouse require rejecting their lineage.

This balance becomes especially important in the early years of marriage, when couples are still adjusting to shared responsibilities, learning each other's rhythms, and navigating the practical and emotional demands of building a household. During this period, extended family involvement—whether helpful or intrusive—can significantly shape the couple's stability. Pastors who are attentive to these cultural pressures can offer guidance that is both realistic and deeply rooted in Christian principles. They help couples cultivate unity without disrespect, boundaries without estrangement, and openness without vulnerability to manipulation.

By grounding this process in both cultural understanding and biblical teaching, pastoral support enables couples to grow into a marriage that honours their heritage while safeguarding the covenant that binds them together.

7.6 Encouraging Communities to Cherish Their Heritage While Embracing Christian Faith

Finally, the study suggests that Christian communities do not need to abandon their cultural heritage in order to live faithfully before God. The assumption that cultural practices stand in opposition to Christian conviction often arises from misunderstanding rather than genuine incompatibility. When Ewe marriage rites are interpreted through a theological lens—one that pays attention to Scripture’s teaching on covenant, community, fidelity, and blessing—it becomes clear that many aspects of the tradition can be affirmed as consistent with, and even enriching to, Christian values. The rites provide moral clarity, communal rootedness, and relational accountability, qualities that are fully compatible with a Christian vision of marriage.

Pastors play a crucial role in guiding congregations toward this kind of informed appreciation. By explaining the symbolic meaning behind the rites and clarifying where Christian teaching intersects with or reshapes cultural assumptions, pastors help believers see that cultural practices, when properly understood, can deepen rather than dilute Christian commitment. Instead of viewing tradition as a threat, the church learns to see in it a source of wisdom—a set of relational and moral resources that can strengthen the marriage covenant.

Such appreciation does more than preserve culture; it strengthens communal identity and offers couples a reassuring sense that their marriage stands on a double foundation. They begin their married life supported not only by biblical truth but also by the cultural wisdom that has held Ewe families together for generations. This integration gives couples confidence that they can honour their heritage while living faithfully as Christians, and it fosters a community life in which faith and culture work together to sustain marriages in an ever-changing world.

8. CONCLUSION

The exploration of Ewe marriage rites through both cultural and theological lenses reveals a tradition whose depth and coherence remain profoundly relevant for contemporary Christian families. Far from being a set of antiquated customs performed merely to satisfy social expectations, each stage of the rites—initial inquiry, background investigation, formal negotiation, gift exchange, the blessing by elders, and the integration of the bride into the husband’s lineage—functions as part of a carefully ordered moral system. Together, these processes are designed to protect the couple, promote transparency, and strengthen the relational bond between the two families. They articulate values that have shaped Ewe communal life across generations: respect for elders, accountability to one’s lineage, and the conviction that marriage flourishes when supported by a wider network of relationships.

Although contemporary society is increasingly shaped by individual choice, mobility, formal education, and rapid social change, these values have not lost their relevance. In fact, the pressures of modern life often make the communal wisdom embedded in the rites even more necessary. The careful inquiries guard marriages against impulsive decisions; the negotiations encourage clarity

and honesty between families; the gift exchange underscores goodwill and mutual respect; and the blessing situates the union within a worldview that honours moral responsibility and seeks divine favour. These stages work together to create a marriage foundation that is both relationally strong and spiritually grounded.

Such coherence explains why the rites continue to hold meaning for Ewe Christians today. Even when certain forms are adapted or abbreviated, the moral logic persists. Christian reflection does not replace this framework but adds another layer of meaning, affirming what aligns with Scripture and offering discernment where adjustments are needed. In this way, both cultural and theological insights converge to support marriages that are resilient, responsible, and deeply rooted in the shared life of the community.

The study also demonstrates that Ewe marriage traditions and Christian marriage teaching share far more common ground than is often assumed in public discourse. At their core, both frameworks emphasize covenantal commitment, fidelity, communal accountability, and the public recognition of a union that is meant to endure. These shared emphases form a natural bridge between cultural practice and Christian theology. When one looks closely, the Ewe processes of inquiry, negotiation, and blessing reflect a seriousness toward marriage that resonates strongly with biblical teachings on responsibility, truthfulness, and the establishment of a new household under God's guidance.

It is true that some cultural practices require theological reinterpretation, particularly where ancestral symbolism or excessive financial expectations may obscure the covenantal purpose of marriage. Yet these areas represent portions of the tradition that call for pastoral discernment rather than wholesale rejection. When interpreted wisely, the symbolic actions embedded in the rites—gift exchange, family dialogue, public blessing—point toward relational goodwill, mutual respect, and communal stewardship. These are moral goods that Scripture itself upholds.

The overall structure and intent of the rites align naturally with biblical understandings of marriage as a partnership lived before God and witnessed by the faith community. Instead of conflicting with Christian faith, Ewe marriage rites often provide the cultural soil in which Christian teaching can take root. Pastors working within this context find that the cultural framework offers a ready-made foundation for instructing couples in the meaning of covenant, the weight of marital vows, and the importance of community support. Through this lens, tradition becomes not an obstacle but an ally—an inheritance that, once understood and refined through Scripture, strengthens the Christian vision of marriage and enriches the daily life of Ewe Christian families.

For pastors working among Ewe Christians, the relationship between culture and faith invites thoughtful engagement rather than opposition or suspicion. The study makes clear that pastoral effectiveness increases when cultural forms are neither dismissed as outdated nor embraced uncritically, but interpreted with discernment. Couples preparing for marriage benefit greatly when the symbolic logic of each rite is explained with clarity—why inquiries matter, what gift exchange communicates, how blessings function, and why families participate so actively. When these meanings are unpacked, couples are able to see the rites not as burdens or demands but as expressions of goodwill, accountability, and communal investment in their future.

Families, in turn, experience reassurance when their cultural identity is acknowledged and respected within the church. Many elders worry that Christian weddings conducted in modern settings ignore or diminish the customs that have long held Ewe households together. When pastors demonstrate an understanding of the rites and honour the values underlying them, families recognize that their heritage is not being erased but received with dignity. This recognition often reduces tension between generations and creates a more welcoming environment for dialogue.

The pastoral task, then, involves translating cultural practices into Christian terms without distorting either tradition. This translation does not require altering the form of the rites but illuminating their moral and theological significance. When pastors articulate how values such as covenant, responsibility, respect for elders, and communal witness echo biblical themes, the marriage process becomes a space where faith and heritage reinforce one another rather than compete. Couples begin to understand that their cultural practices can serve as vehicles for expressing Christian commitment, and families appreciate that Christian convictions can deepen rather than weaken marital stability.

From this place of mutual understanding, couples are far better prepared to navigate their new responsibilities with confidence. They enter marriage aware of the expectations of their families, grounded in Christian teaching, and strengthened by a framework that honours both God and their community. In such settings, marriage becomes not only a personal covenant but a living testimony that culture and faith, when thoughtfully integrated, can nurture homes marked by love, wisdom, and enduring stability.

This study highlights that the future of Ewe marriage within Christian communities does not depend on abandoning cultural forms but on interpreting them with wisdom and theological clarity. The rites, symbols, and relational structures that once sustained households across generations still possess the capacity to offer strength and coherence today. Their value becomes most apparent when they are viewed not as relics of a pre-Christian past but as cultural resources that, when read through the lens of Christian covenant, can enrich the spiritual and relational life of contemporary families. The challenge lies not in the presence of tradition but in the church's ability to help communities understand how these traditions point toward values that Scripture itself affirms.

As Ewe Christians continue to navigate the meeting point between tradition and faith—especially in a social landscape shaped by urbanization, globalization, and shifting family dynamics—they will require pastoral guidance that is both informed and compassionate. A balanced pastoral approach remains essential: one that cherishes cultural identity, honours the wisdom embedded in the rites, and at the same time grounds marriage firmly in the love, truth, and grace of God. Such an approach neither idolizes tradition nor erases it, but interprets it in light of the gospel so that its life-giving elements are preserved and its potentially confusing elements are clarified.

Where churches adopt this posture, couples gain the confidence to participate in their cultural heritage without compromising their Christian convictions. Families, in turn, feel respected rather than displaced, and the wider community discovers that faith and culture can coexist fruitfully when approached with humility and understanding. In this way, Ewe marriage rites—carefully interpreted and pastorally guided—can continue to serve as a bridge between generations, a carrier

of moral wisdom, and a foundation upon which Christian marriages may flourish in both faithfulness and cultural rootedness.

9. OVERALL CONCLUSION OF THE THESIS

This thesis set out to explore the moral, cultural, and theological meaning of Ewe marriage rites and to examine how these rites continue to shape Christian marriage within contemporary Ghanaian communities. What emerged from the study is a picture of a tradition that is far more coherent, morally intentional, and spiritually significant than is often recognized. Rather than functioning as a series of isolated customs, the Ewe marriage process unfolds as a structured sequence of symbolic actions that guide families from the earliest inquiry to the final integration of the bride into her new household. Each stage expresses values—respect, accountability, communal support, covenantal seriousness—that have sustained Ewe family life for generations.

The investigation showed that these rites do not stand in opposition to Christian marriage teaching. On the contrary, many of their underlying principles resonate with Scripture's vision of marriage as a covenant made before God and community. The careful inquiries parallel the biblical emphasis on discernment; the negotiations reflect the need for clarity and truthfulness; the exchange of gifts echoes biblical patterns of covenantal generosity; and the blessings offered by elders correspond to long-standing traditions in both Old and New Testament family life. Where certain aspects of the rites require theological reinterpretation—particularly ancestral symbolism or practices that may be misunderstood as transactional—the adjustments needed are interpretive rather than structural. These areas invite pastoral guidance, not cultural rejection.

One of the central contributions of the study is the recognition that Ewe marriage cannot be understood apart from its communal worldview. Even in a rapidly changing society shaped by individual choice, urban mobility, and new economic pressures, the communal foundations of Ewe marriage remain strong. The rites assume that marriage is best sustained when families play supportive roles, when expectations are clear, and when the couple begins life with the blessing and oversight of their lineage. This approach brings a depth of relational accountability often missing in more individualistic settings. The study suggests that rather than weakening marriage, these communal structures anchor it.

The theological engagement demonstrated that Christian communities do not need to abandon these cultural forms in order to live faithfully. When interpreted through the lens of Christian covenant, the rites provide a cultural foundation upon which biblical teaching can build. The challenge for the church is not to erase tradition but to illuminate its meaning, correct misunderstandings, and integrate these practices within a Christ-centred understanding of marriage. In this work, pastors occupy a crucial position. They serve as interpreters between generations, mediators between families and couples, and guides who help ensure that cultural belonging and Christian commitment enrich rather than compete with one another.

The pastoral implications flowing from the study affirm that many of the tensions young couples encounter—confusion over symbolic acts, disagreements about family involvement, discomfort with gift expectations—often arise from a loss of explanation rather than from real theological conflict. When pastors provide clear teaching on the meaning of the rites, when they help families

understand the importance of biblical covenant, and when they assist couples in navigating boundaries with sensitivity, the marriage process becomes a source of unity rather than tension. In such settings, tradition and faith reinforce one another, offering couples a double grounding in the wisdom of their ancestors and the truth of Scripture.

Taken together, the findings indicate that the future of Ewe marriage within Christian communities lies not in abandoning cultural heritage but in interpreting it wisely. The cultural structures that once sustained households remain valuable, provided they are understood within the framework of Christian covenant. As Ewe communities continue to negotiate the meeting point between tradition and faith in an era of significant social change, a balanced pastoral approach will remain essential—one that cherishes cultural identity while rooting marriage firmly in the love, truth, and grace of God. When this balance is achieved, Ewe Christian marriages can flourish with integrity, drawing strength from both their cultural inheritance and their commitment to Christ.

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