From Oral Tradition to Covenant Instruction: The Relevance of Deuteronomy 6:1–3 in the Tsam (Chawai) Worldview

Rev. Zachariah Bulus Takore, Ph.D.
Ishaya Abdul Bitrus
Dennis Kenedy

Abstract

This study examines the theological and contextual relevance of Deuteronomy 6:1–3 within the Tsam (Chawai) worldview of Northern Nigeria. It argues from a point of resonance with indigenous oral traditions and a framework for their transformation. Drawing on insights from African theologians such as John S. Mbiti and Kwame Bediako, alongside Old Testament scholarship, the paper explores key themes in the text—communal identity, intergenerational transmission of faith, reverence for God, and holistic well-being. These themes are shown to align closely with Tsam cultural values that emphasize oral tradition, community, spirituality, and the interconnectedness of life. At the same time, the study demonstrates that Deuteronomy 6:1–3 does not merely affirm Tsam religio-cultural assumptions but critically reshapes them. The passage redirects religious consciousness toward exclusive covenantal loyalty to Yahweh, challenges the gap between inherited tradition and intentional instruction, and calls for deliberate discipleship within the family and community. Furthermore, it presents a holistic theology of life that integrates spiritual, moral, and socio-economic dimensions of well-being, thereby addressing contemporary African concerns such as moral decline, erosion of traditional values, and weakened family structures. The paper employs exegetical analysis of the Hebrew text alongside contextual theological

reflection. It concludes that Deuteronomy 6:1–3 remains profoundly relevant for African Christianity and the Tsam people in particular, serving as both a bridge and a corrective—affirming indigenous values while calling for a deeper, covenant-centered faith expressed through obedience, justice, and intergenerational continuity.

Key words: Covenant Instructions, Communal identity, Deuteronomy 6:1–3, Tsam (Chawai), Oral tradition Intergenerational transmission

I. Introduction

Deuteronomy 6:1–3 stands as one of the most programmatic texts within the Deuteronomic tradition, articulating the relationship between covenant obedience and life. Situated within Moses' covenantal instruction to Israel, the passage presents obedience not merely as a legal requirement but as the pathway to life, continuity, and flourishing within the community. Its relevance to the African context—and more specifically to the Tsam (Chawai) worldview—is both outstanding and complex. The text engages themes that are deeply embedded within Tsam cultural consciousness: communal identity, reverence for the divine, continuity between generations, and a holistic understanding of life mediated through oral tradition. Yet, beyond mere resonance, the passage also offers a corrective framework that reshapes these values within the demands of covenant faithfulness. As Walter Brueggemann observes, Deuteronomy is fundamentally concerned with "the shaping of a community that lives in disciplined obedience to Yahweh,"[540] highlighting the inseparability of faith, life, and communal identity.

Within African theological discourse, scholars such as John S. Mbiti and Kwame Bediako have argued that African religio-

[540] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 173.

cultural consciousness provides fertile ground for biblical theology, particularly in its communal and spiritual dimensions. Mbiti's well-known assertion that Africans are "notoriously religious" underscores the pervasive role of religion in shaping African life and thought."[541] Bediako further contends that Christianity in Africa finds its vitality precisely in its ability to engage and transform indigenous religious consciousness rather than replace it."[542] Similarly, Lamin Sanneh highlights the translatability of the Christian message within African cultures, arguing that the gospel "takes root in local cultures by inhabiting their linguistic and symbolic worlds."[543] However, as Christopher J. H. Wright insists, the Old Testament must not simply be used to affirm culture but to interrogate and transform it, ensuring that cultural values are brought under the authority of divine revelation."[544]

Despite these rich contributions, there remains a significant gap in scholarship. Much of African theology has been articulated at a generalized continental level, often overlooking the need for engagement with specific ethnic worldviews such as that of the Tsam (Chawai). While broad frameworks are valuable, they risk flattening the diversity of African cultures and failing to address the particularities that shape lived religious experience. Likewise, Old Testament studies frequently remain detached from lived cultural contexts, focusing primarily on historical-critical concerns without sufficient contextual application. As Gerhard von Rad notes, the theological message of Deuteronomy is inseparable from its function within the life of a community, suggesting that its

---

[541] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 1.

[542] Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 109.

[543] Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 51.

[544] Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 18–20.

interpretation must also engage contemporary communities."[545] This study therefore seeks to bridge that gap by bringing Deuteronomy 6:1–3 into dialogue with the Tsam worldview, particularly its reliance on oral tradition as a means of transmitting values.

The contribution of this study is therefore threefold. First, it offers a contextual reading of Deuteronomy 6:1–3 that is rooted in a specific African cultural setting, demonstrating how biblical texts can be meaningfully engaged within local contexts. Second, it shows that oral tradition, often viewed as merely cultural, can be both affirmed and transformed into intentional covenant instruction when brought under the authority of Scripture. Third, it provides a model for integrating biblical exegesis with contextual theology in a way that is both academically rigorous and pastorally relevant. In doing so, it aligns with Kwame Bediako's conviction that theology in Africa must emerge from the interaction between Scripture and the lived realities of African peoples."[546]

It is within this tension—between affirmation and transformation—that Deuteronomy 6:1–3 speaks most powerfully to the Tsam people, calling for a shift from inherited tradition to deliberate, covenant-centered instruction that shapes life across generations. The text invites a re-examination of cultural practices, not with the aim of rejection, but with the goal of reorientation toward covenant faithfulness. In this sense, it offers both continuity and discontinuity: continuity in its affirmation of communal and intergenerational life, and discontinuity in its insistence on exclusive loyalty to Yahweh as the foundation of all life. As Christopher J. H. Wright rightly affirms, the ultimate purpose of Old Testament instruction is to

---

[545] Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 12.

[546] Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 225.

form a community whose life reflects the character and purposes of God."[547]

II. Communal Identity and Covenant Life

Therefore, one of the most obvious points of contact between Deuteronomy and Tsam society is the communal nature of identity. The phrase "you, your son, and your son's son" (Deut 6:2) reflects a multi-generational covenant consciousness in which obedience is not an isolated act but a shared responsibility embedded within the community. This formulation underscores the continuity of faith across generations and highlights the collective dimension of covenant life. Obedience is not merely personal but corporate, involving the entire community in a shared relationship with God. As Christopher J. H. Wright notes, the Old Testament consistently portrays Israel as a "community defined by its relationship with Yahweh," where each generation is responsible for sustaining that relationship through faithful obedience."[548]

This perspective resonates strongly with African communal ontology. John S. Mbiti's well-known assertion, "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am," captures the essence of African personhood as fundamentally relational."[549] Among the Tsam, identity is inseparable from kinship structures, lineage, and communal belonging. Life is understood not in isolation but in continuity with the past, present, and future generations. The individual derives meaning, security, and purpose from participation in the community. As Mbiti further explains, "the individual can only say: I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am," emphasizing that existence itself is grounded in communal belonging."[550] This worldview

---

[547] Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 36.

[548] Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 36.

[549] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed.,106.

[550] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed.,108.

fosters a strong sense of responsibility toward others and reinforces the importance of maintaining social harmony.

In a similar vein, Bénézet Bujo argues that in African ethics, the individual finds meaning only within the community, and moral responsibility is always corporate."[551] Ethical behavior is evaluated not solely on individual intentions but on its impact on the community as a whole. This communal framework ensures that values are preserved and transmitted through shared experience and collective memory. It also reinforces accountability, as individuals are expected to act in ways that promote the well-being of the entire group. Within the Tsam context, this is evident in communal decision-making processes, respect for elders, and the emphasis on maintaining harmony within the clan.

Deuteronomy reinforces this worldview but also deepens it theologically. The covenant community is not merely a social arrangement; it is a people bound to Yahweh through a historical and relational covenant. As Gerhard von Rad observes, Israel's identity is inseparable from its historical relationship with God, particularly the saving acts that established the covenant."[552] This means that community is defined not only by social ties but by a shared commitment to God's commands. The covenant introduces a theological dimension that transcends cultural structures, grounding communal life in divine authority and purpose.

This introduces a critical transformation: community is no longer an end in itself but a means of expressing covenant faithfulness. While Tsam communalism affirms the social dimension of life, Deuteronomy challenges it to recognize divine authority as the ultimate foundation of communal existence. As Walter Brueggemann notes, Israel's communal life is

---

[551] Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 23–25.

[552] Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*, 15.

"constituted and sustained by its covenantal relationship with Yahweh," which calls the community to a higher standard of obedience and accountability."[553] Thus, the Tsam worldview is both affirmed and transformed—affirmed in its emphasis on relational identity and communal responsibility, yet challenged to align these values with the demands of covenant faith. In this way, communal life becomes a theological reality, where social relationships are shaped and governed by devotion to God.

III. Intergenerational Transmission of Faith

The emphasis on generational continuity in Deuteronomy 6:2 reflects a deliberate strategy for preserving covenant faith. The Hebrew verb *lĕlammēd* ("to teach") implies structured and intentional instruction rather than passive transmission, suggesting that the continuity of faith depends on conscious pedagogical effort. Within the Deuteronomic framework, teaching is not incidental but central to covenant life; it ensures that each generation internalizes and embodies the knowledge of God. As Gerhard von Rad observes, Israel's faith was sustained through "continual instruction in the saving acts and commandments of Yahweh," making education a theological responsibility rather than a mere cultural practice."[554] Thus, the text envisions a community in which faith is actively nurtured through disciplined teaching, ensuring that covenant identity is preserved across time.

Tsam society, like many African cultures, has historically relied on oral tradition—proverbs, folktales, rituals, and lived example—to transmit values across generations. These methods are not merely educational but deeply formative, shaping identity, morality, and worldview within a communal framework. John S. Mbiti highlights that in African societies, knowledge is "transmitted through participation in the life of the community," where learning occurs through observation,

---

[553] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 172.

[554] Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*, 64.

imitation, and shared experience."[555] Among the Tsam, elders play a crucial role as custodians of wisdom, ensuring that cultural values are preserved and communicated through storytelling and communal practices. This form of transmission reinforces social cohesion and continuity, embedding moral and spiritual values within the rhythms of daily life.

Kwame Bediako notes that African Christianity thrives where faith is embedded in communal life and passed on through relational networks rather than abstract systems."[556] Similarly, Lamin Sanneh underscores the importance of cultural forms in preserving and communicating faith, arguing that the gospel "takes root in local cultures by inhabiting their linguistic and symbolic worlds."[557] These insights affirm the value of Tsam oral tradition as a viable medium for theological transmission. Faith, in this context, is not merely taught cognitively but lived and experienced within the community, making it both accessible and sustainable across generations.

However, the Deuteronomic model introduces an element that is increasingly weakened in contemporary Tsam contexts—intentionality. While oral tradition often assumes continuity through cultural participation, Deuteronomy commands deliberate and structured instruction. Faith must not only be inherited but consciously taught, articulated, and internalized. As Walter Brueggemann emphasizes, Deuteronomy envisions a community where "memory is disciplined through intentional pedagogy," ensuring that the knowledge of God is neither lost nor diluted."[558] This represents a significant shift from passive cultural transmission to active discipleship, where teaching becomes a deliberate act of shaping covenant identity.

---

[555] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 3–5.

[556] Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 1995), 108.

[557] Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 51.

[558] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 188.

This is particularly significant in light of modern challenges such as urbanization, formal education, globalization, and cultural change, which are gradually eroding traditional mechanisms of transmission within Tsam society. The breakdown of extended family structures and the increasing influence of external value systems have weakened the effectiveness of oral tradition as a sole means of moral formation. In this context, Deuteronomy offers both a challenge and a solution. It calls the Tsam community to move from assumed continuity to intentional discipleship within the family and community, where faith is actively taught, modeled, and reinforced. As Christopher J. H. Wright argues, the continuity of faith depends on "the deliberate passing on of covenant knowledge through teaching and example."[559] Thus, the integration of traditional oral methods with intentional covenant instruction provides a pathway for sustaining faith in a rapidly changing cultural landscape.

IV. Fear of God and Tsam Religious Consciousness

The concept of *yārē'* (fear of the Lord) finds a natural point of contact within Tsam spirituality, where the sense of the sacred permeates everyday life. E. Bolaji Idowu famously described African societies as "incurably religious," emphasizing that religion is not a compartment of life but its very fabric."[560] This observation is particularly applicable to the Tsam (Chawai) people, among whom religious consciousness is deeply embedded in social practices, moral expectations, and interpretations of reality. The awareness of the divine and the unseen shapes how life is understood and lived, making the concept of "fear" not merely an emotional response but a posture of reverence toward the sacred.

---

[559] Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, 121.

[560] E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London: SCM Press, 1973), 52.

Among the Tsam, this religiosity is expressed through reverence for spiritual realities, including ancestors, spirits, and other unseen forces believed to influence daily life. While this demonstrates a profound awareness of the spiritual dimension, it often results in a multiplicity of fears that govern behavior. Fear may be directed toward ancestral displeasure, spiritual attack, or mystical forces, creating a religious environment shaped by caution and appeasement. John S. Mbiti notes that in many African societies, the spiritual universe is densely populated, and human life is lived in constant interaction with these forces."[561] While such awareness fosters moral seriousness, it can also produce anxiety-driven religiosity, where actions are motivated more by fear of harm than by devotion to God.

Deuteronomy offers a necessary theological correction by directing fear exclusively toward Yahweh. The command to "fear the LORD your God" (Deut 6:2) redefines the object and nature of fear, shifting it from a diffuse and fragmented experience to a focused and covenantal response. As Walter Brueggemann argues, the fear of Yahweh is not terror but "a disciplined attentiveness to God that issues in obedience."[562] Similarly, Christopher J. H. Wright explains that the fear of the Lord in the Old Testament is fundamentally relational, expressing loyalty, trust, and reverence within the covenant relationship."[563] This redefinition is crucial, as it moves fear from the realm of superstition to that of theological commitment.

This distinction is profoundly transformative. It reorients fear from a defensive posture against spiritual forces to a relational posture of trust and obedience toward God. Instead of being controlled by anxiety over multiple unseen powers, the believer is called into a covenant relationship with one sovereign God

---

561 John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 74–76.

562 Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 187.

563 Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 110–112.

whose authority supersedes all others. In this way, Deuteronomy liberates individuals from fear-driven religiosity and grounds faith in covenant assurance. As Kwame Bediako observes, the gospel addresses the African fear of spiritual powers not by denying their perceived reality but by proclaiming the supremacy of God in Christ."[564] For the Tsam context, this means that traditional spiritual sensitivity is not discarded but transformed—redirected toward exclusive devotion to Yahweh, where reverence leads not to bondage but to freedom, obedience, and life.

V. Theology of Life and Tsam Holistic Well-being

The promise "that it may go well with you" (Deut 6:3) reflects a theology of life that is both comprehensive and relational. The Deuteronomic understanding of life encompasses prosperity, longevity, peace, and covenant fellowship, presenting life not as a fragmented experience but as a unified reality rooted in relationship with God. The Hebrew concept of life (*ḥayyîm*) goes beyond mere biological existence to include well-being in its fullest sense—spiritual vitality, social harmony, and material sufficiency. Life, therefore, is understood as the outcome of living in right relationship with Yahweh, where obedience becomes the pathway to a flourishing life. This covenantal framework situates well-being within a moral and theological order, emphasizing that true life is sustained by fidelity to God's commands.

This holistic vision resonates deeply with Tsam conceptions of well-being, where life is understood as an integrated whole involving the physical, spiritual, and communal dimensions of existence. Among the Tsam, well-being is not limited to individual success but includes harmony within the family, stability in the community, and balance with the spiritual realm. John S. Pobee emphasizes that in African thought,

[564] Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 230.

salvation is comprehensive, encompassing material provision, social cohesion, and communal flourishing."[565] Similarly, Mercy Amba Oduyoye highlights the interconnectedness of life in African theology, where spiritual health cannot be separated from social and relational well-being."[566] In this regard, the Tsam worldview provides a strong point of continuity with the Deuteronomic vision, as both affirm that life must be understood holistically rather than in isolated categories.

However, Deuteronomy introduces a critical corrective dimension: well-being is not automatic but contingent upon covenant obedience. While the Tsam worldview may associate well-being with communal harmony, ancestral favor, or adherence to tradition, the biblical text redefines the basis of flourishing as faithful obedience to Yahweh. This challenges interpretations that disconnect blessing from ethical responsibility or reduce prosperity to material gain alone. Instead, Deuteronomy calls for a holistic integration of faith and practice, where obedience, justice, and righteousness become the conditions for experiencing true life. In doing so, it confronts tendencies toward prosperity-oriented thinking that neglect moral accountability, and it reorients the pursuit of well-being toward a covenant-centered framework in which spiritual devotion and ethical living are inseparably linked.

VI. Ethical and Social Implications for the Tsam Context

The ethical thrust of Deuteronomy 6:1–3 is particularly significant for contemporary Tsam society, where religious consciousness remains vibrant but is increasingly confronted by moral, social, and cultural challenges. The passage does not merely emphasize belief in Yahweh but insists that such belief

---

[565] John S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 44.

[566] Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986), 23–24.

must find concrete expression in obedience, justice, and communal responsibility.

First, the text calls for a movement from mere religiosity to ethical obedience. While African societies—including the Tsam—are deeply religious, there often exists a disconnect between professed belief and lived ethical practice. Kwesi A. Dickson observes that religion in Africa is sometimes "more a matter of identity than of moral transformation," leading to a situation where spiritual devotion does not always translate into ethical integrity."[567] Deuteronomy challenges this disconnects by insisting that the fear of the Lord must manifest in obedience to divine commandments. In this sense, covenant faith is not validated by ritual observance alone but by a life shaped by righteousness. This has direct implications for the Tsam context, where Christianity is widespread, yet issues such as dishonesty, syncretism, and moral compromise persist. The text therefore calls for a reintegration of faith and practice, where religious commitment is evidenced through ethical living.

Second, the inclusion of *mišpāṭîm* (judgments) underscores the importance of justice as an essential dimension of covenant life. The ethical vision of Deuteronomy is not limited to personal morality but extends to social structures and communal relationships. As Christopher J. H. Wright argues, Old Testament ethics integrates personal piety with social justice, insisting that true obedience to God must address issues of fairness, equity, and responsibility within society.[568] In the Tsam context, this speaks directly to contemporary challenges such as corruption, leadership failure, economic inequality, and the marginalization of vulnerable groups. Justice, in Deuteronomic terms, is not optional but constitutive of covenant faithfulness. Thus, the text calls for a transformation of both individual character and societal systems, urging

---

[567] Kwesi A. Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 112.

[568] Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 200–205.

leaders and community members alike to embody integrity, accountability, and fairness in all aspects of life.

Third, the text calls for renewed moral formation within families and communities, particularly in the face of cultural erosion. Traditional Tsam society has long relied on oral tradition and communal structures for the transmission of values. However, the pressures of modernization, urbanization, and formal education have significantly weakened these mechanisms. Lamin Sanneh notes that while African societies possess strong traditions of cultural transmission, these are increasingly disrupted by rapid social change, leading to a breakdown in moral continuity."[569] Deuteronomy responds to this challenge by emphasizing intentional instruction within the family unit. Moral formation is not to be left to chance but must be deliberately cultivated through teaching, example, and communal reinforcement.

Furthermore, this calls for intentional moral formation aligns with the broader biblical vision of discipleship, where the family serves as the primary context for shaping faith and character. As Walter Brueggemann observes, Deuteronomy envisions a community in which the knowledge of God is "socially embedded and pedagogically sustained."[570] For the Tsam people, this implies a recovery and transformation of traditional structures—where storytelling, proverbs, and communal practices are reoriented toward covenant instruction.

In sum, the ethical implications of Deuteronomy 6:1–3 for the Tsam context are both profound and practical. The text calls for a holistic transformation that moves from religiosity to obedience, from personal piety to social justice, and from passive cultural transmission to intentional moral formation. It challenges the Tsam community to embody a faith that is not

---

[569] Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 98–102.

[570] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 189.

only confessed but lived—a covenantal faith that shapes individuals, families, and society at large.

VII. Transformative Engagement with Tsam Culture

Deuteronomy 6:1–3 exemplifies a dialogical engagement between Scripture and culture. It neither rejects Tsam cultural values nor leaves them unexamined; rather, it brings them into a dynamic relationship with divine revelation, where affirmation and transformation occur simultaneously. This dialogical process is essential for contextual theology within African settings, where culture profoundly shapes identity, morality, and spirituality. Within the Tsam (Chawai) worldview, oral tradition serves as a foundational means of preserving communal memory and transmitting values across generations through stories, proverbs, rituals, and communal practices. These elements provide fertile ground for theological engagement, yet, like all human cultures, they require critical evaluation in light of Scripture. As Kwame Bediako observes, the gospel does not annihilate culture but brings it to fulfillment."[571]

This transformative engagement is first evident in the reorientation of authority. In traditional Tsam society, authority is largely derived from ancestral wisdom and communal consensus, which provide continuity and social cohesion. However, Deuteronomy redirects ultimate authority to Yahweh, whose commands, statutes, and judgments are binding upon the community. Cultural traditions are therefore not rejected but subordinated to divine revelation. As Christopher J. H. Wright emphasizes, biblical faith consistently places culture under the authority of God's word, affirming what aligns with divine purposes while challenging what does not."[572] This shift

---

[571] Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 225.

[572] Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 64–68.

is crucial, as it ensures that culture remains a servant of truth rather than its source.

Second, transformative engagement involves the purification and redirection of religious consciousness. Tsam spirituality reflects a deep awareness of the spiritual realm, often expressed through reverence for ancestors and sensitivity to unseen forces. While this demonstrates a strong spiritual orientation, it can also lead to fragmented loyalties and fear-driven religiosity. Deuteronomy 6:1–3 calls for exclusive covenant loyalty to Yahweh, thereby refining rather than dismissing this spiritual sensitivity. The fear of God is redefined as covenantal reverence rooted in trust and obedience, rather than anxiety toward multiple spiritual powers. In this way, the text critiques and fulfills indigenous spirituality, directing it toward a personal and covenantal relationship with God.

Finally, the passage emphasizes the internationalization of cultural transmission. While Tsam oral tradition effectively preserves communal values, it often assumes continuity without deliberate instruction. Deuteronomy challenges this assumption by commanding intentional teaching within the family and community. As Lamin Sanneh argues, the gospel becomes deeply rooted when translated into the living forms of a culture, yet such translation requires intentional theological direction."[573] Thus, oral tradition is not discarded but transformed into a vehicle for covenant instruction. As Walter Brueggemann notes, the biblical vision entails a community in which knowledge of God is socially embedded and pedagogically sustained."[574] In this sense, Tsam culture becomes not merely a repository of the past but a dynamic instrument for shaping a covenantal future.

VIII. Conclusion

[573] Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 51–54.

[574] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 733.

Deuteronomy 6:1–3 remains profoundly relevant within the Tsam (Chawai) context in southern Kaduna, Nigeria for the reason that it engages the very structures that shape life—oral tradition, community, and spirituality. Its enduring significance lies not merely in its cultural resonance but in its transformative capacity. The passage enters into dialogue with the Tsam worldview at its deepest levels, affirming the importance of communal identity, intergenerational continuity, and spiritual awareness, while simultaneously redirecting these realities toward covenant faithfulness. In this sense, the text functions not simply as a point of contact but as a theological framework through which culture is both understood and reshaped.

By grounding these values in covenant relationship with Yahweh, Deuteronomy 6:1–3 calls for a deeper, more integrated faith—one that unites belief, practice, and communal life across generations. The movement from oral tradition to covenant instruction represents a shift from passive cultural inheritance to intentional theological formation. Faith is no longer assumed to be transmitted automatically but must be deliberately taught, embodied, and sustained within the family and the wider community. This has significant implications for the Tsam context, where traditional structures of moral formation are increasingly weakened by modernization, urbanization, and changing social dynamics.

Furthermore, the text challenges the persistence of religious forms that lack ethical substance. It insists that the fear of God must be expressed through obedience, justice, and integrity in both personal and communal life. In doing so, it addresses contemporary concerns such as moral decline, leadership failure, and the erosion of communal values. The covenantal vision presented in Deuteronomy offers a corrective to fragmented spirituality by integrating devotion to God with ethical responsibility and social justice.

Ultimately, Deuteronomy 6:1–3 provides a model for a contextualized African Christianity that is both faithful to Scripture and deeply rooted in culture. It affirms the richness of Tsam oral tradition while calling for its transformation into a vehicle for covenant instruction. Through this process, culture is not discarded but redeemed, becoming an instrument for shaping a community that lives in obedience to God. Thus, the passage stands as both a bridge and a challenge—inviting the Tsam people, and African Christianity more broadly, into a holistic, covenant-centered faith that sustains life, fosters justice, and ensures continuity across generations.

Sources

Bediako, Kwame. *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997.

Bujo, Bénézet. *African Theology in Its Social Context*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992.

Dickson, Kwesi A. *Theology in Africa*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984.

Idowu, E. Bolaji. *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*. London: SCM Press, 1973.

Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Heinemann, 1990.

Oduyoye, Mercy Amba. *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986.

Pobee, John S. *Toward an African Theology*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979.

Rad, Gerhard von. *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966.

Sanneh, Lamin. *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*. 2nd ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009.

Wright, Christopher J. H. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.