

Traditional and Family Values: A Study of Deut 6:7

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Introduction

We live in a world with very fluid values and this reality has become a huge challenge to the institution of marriage and, by extension, the constitution and survival of the family. So huge are the challenges that the Holy Father, Pope Francis, has decided to convoke a synod on Marriage and Family. Part of the expected outcome of such a synod is the strengthening of the institutions of marriage and family as they are defined traditionally and according to Christian values. Such definitive Christian values have become counter-cultural in our time because of the very relativistic realignment of both institutions by new realities and the challenging demands by these bourgeoning realities.

This paper is an attempt to weigh in on the on-going discussion by proposing a biblical paradigm that has been tested throughout the chequered history of the Israelite people. Reading the *Shema* in its Pentateuchal context, one easily observes that the centrality of *traditioning*, as part of family heritage, has been responsible for the sustenance of Jewish cohesion and national identity through the ages.

What is Tradition?

Tradition is used in this paper in its strictly etymological sense. The word, as we know, is derived from the Latin *tradere* (noun *traditio*), which means to “hand on” or to “pass on” from one generation to another. It necessarily implies a content, which is usually made up of a body of beliefs or a certain heritage that is of valuable import for a particular group of people and meant to be transmitted from one generation to another. Such a transmission process usually lends legitimacy to the particular set of values concerned; values that are often central to the history, life and future of the community or society concerned.¹

What are Family Values?

Values have been described differently, depending on the purpose, source and utility of the definition. As used in this paper, family values are those treasured cultural, social, religious, and moral elements that are upheld for the good of a family and which are usually passed on from parents to their children (therefore, traditional) in order to educate them on the family’s way of life, especially in their relation to one another, to the larger society and to God—thus social and religious in dimension. Characteristically, such ways of life may pertain to, and are often derivatives of, the family's structure, function, roles, beliefs, attitudes, and ideals.

As such, the phrase, family values, has a very simple function in this paper as it naturally tallies with the concept of tradition to study the way of life of the Hebrew people (Israelite or Jews) as it is encapsulated in the *Shema* (Deut 6:4-9), with emphasis on the injunction to transmit the values that ensure the sustenance and preservation of the very fabric and soul of the Israelite family and society (Deut 6:7).

¹ Such a legitimacy is reflected by the dual Pauline use of the Greek equivalent *paradidōmi* in 1 Cor 11:23 and 15:1-3, where he mentions valuable traditions received (*parelabon*) and which he in turn hands on (*paredōka*) to future generations.

Characteristic of the value component of “*the Shema*” are the integral theological principles that are foundational in the formation of the traditions of the Israelites; as well as instrumental to the shaping of Israel’s national identity as a holy people, one nation under one God. These principles emanate from the demands of the *Shema*, beginning with their daily recitation of the declaration of God’s unity, to the acknowledgement of the fact that Yahweh, the Lord, the God of Israel is ONE Lord. This idea of the unity and oneness of God informed and propelled the unity that exists among the Israelites as the people of God. To foster this unity and in keeping with the demands of the *Shema*, which includes writing the Torah in their hearts, soul, minds and on their doorpost and to teach their children diligently the habit of sincerely keeping the observances of Yahweh, the *Shema* became a distinguishing factor of the Israelites’ tradition. Indeed, the *Shema Yiשראל* has arguably been the most important ideological claim of Judaism since early Israelite history.² It serves as the most important expression of the most fundamental belief and commitment of Judaism. As such, there is no other significant affirmation of faith in Israel’s life than the *Shema*. Hence, Joseph Blenkinsopp underscored it as a permanent aspect of Jewish self understanding; such that, the fact that Israel is regarded as a holy people is an expression of their fidelity to the one God in the *Shema*, “Hear O Israel.”³

Deuteronomy 6:7 in its Pentateuchal Context

It is standard practice in biblical exegesis to take note of the literary context of any material that one is working with if the exegetical exercise is to yield valuable meaning. Such a practice, as it is applied in this paper, will survey both the larger Pentateuchal context of our focus text as well as the immediate literary context in order to truly appreciate the place of Deut 6:7 in the Hebrew and Jewish tradition. Within the larger Pentateuchal structure, that is, in the context of the material found from Genesis to Deuteronomy, the subject matter of this paper, Tradition and Family Values, is placed squarely within the body of material that details the evolution of the family of God’s people, beginning with the patriarchal history in Genesis 12-50, through the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and that family in its expanded and evolved tribal units, through the slavery and covenant traditions in Exodus, to the much fuller unfolding of that relationship in the deliverance of that people from slavery and their restoration to the Promised Land. The effort to string the lineage and connections of this family is evidenced in the immergence of the God of the Israelites as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our ancestors, who comes into a covenantal relationship with Israel through the instrumentality of Moses (beginning in Exodus 3).

That relationship, as we know, unfolded in a covenantal structure that yielded the ordinances and terms of the relationship, which make up the Torah. Against the background of the Book of Deuteronomy as a long speech of Moses⁴ that both capitulates all the ordinances of the Law (that is, Torah) and prepares the people for entry into the promised land, Deut 6:7 (in the context of the *Shema*) becomes a succinct summary of the totality of values that made up family life and the established mandate on how throughout history, such values must be handed down from one

² The *Shema* includes Deut 6:4-8; 11:13-21; Num 15:37-41 (Lawrence A. Hoffman, ed. *My People’s Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries*, vol. 1: The Shema and Its Blessing; 1st ed.; Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997).

³ Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Deuteronomy”, R. E. Brown et al. eds. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 95.

⁴ See Thomas L. Leclerc, *Introduction to the Prophets: Their Stories, Sayings, and Scrolls* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007) 62.

generation to the other in order to ensure their survival as well as the survival to the Israelite nation.

Ab initio, the role of the deuteronomistic historian in the shaping of the tradition and values under focus must be recognized and the intent of such an important role is at the heart of the thesis of this paper, namely, the definition, protection, sustenance and projection of the true identity of the Israelites as a people in a covenantal relationship with their God; a relationship that was never to be separated from political, social, moral, communal or individual values and life. That relationship was shaped by the deuteronomistic historians to underscore its deterministic impact on the past, present and future of Israel as a people. To them is credited the strong emphasis on the strict observance of the terms of the covenant and the enduring obedience to the law, which in their theological framework, is a cardinal virtue.⁵

Deuteronomy 6:7 in its Immediate Context

The immediate literary context of Deut 6:7 is the pericopé that has been labelled as “The Central Confession”⁶ of Israel’s religious encounter with Yahweh. An expose of this immediate context, that is, Deut 6:4-9, necessarily leads us into a discussion of the *Shema* and would further shed light on our focus text.

The Shema and its Basic Components

The first word of the section beginning in Deut 6:4, “*Shema*,” which means “Hear,” is an imperative which beckons on Israel and on all to pay attention to the scriptural injunction in the verses that follow (Deut 6:5-9). That includes a call to obey, to understand and even to act in response to what one hears. That very first word (*Shema*) functions as an overture to the other verses and has a much wider point of reference throughout the Pentateuch.

The call to hear, introduces the command that transformed *Shema* into the principal Jewish confession of faith, also fully reflected in Deut 11:13-21 and Num 15:37-41. What follows the invitation is an acknowledgment of the oneness and unity of Yahweh and the demand *to love Yahweh* with all of one's heart, soul, and might (everything that a person is and has).

As a consequence of the injunction to continually observe and be conscious of the imperative in Deut 6:4-5, the *Shema* did not only become part of Israel's morning and evening prayers, it also became an enduring Israelite traditional requirement that it be taught to children as soon as they could learn to speak, in accordance with the demand in 6:7. The family was thus the basic school from which this injunction must be learned by the whole of Israel in her response to the invitation to be loyal to, and to serve, Yahweh wholeheartedly. This call includes the observance, the reflection, and the absorption of the law in the heart. This singular act demonstrates the very necessity of the Torah and the Teachings of God in the formation of the Israelite conscience and nation, marked by an obligation and a responsibility to listen to Yahweh, and to embody His injunctions. Such is the path to true and lasting happiness (cf. Psalm 1).

The *Shema* also functions as a reminder for those upon whom it is binding that unlike the pagan gods who have different guises and localities, the oneness and uniqueness of Yahweh⁷ precludes

⁵ Leclerc, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 67.

⁶ Christoph Bultmann, “Deuteronomy,” *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (eds. John Barton and John Muddiman; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 8:134-58, here 142.

⁷ “*Shema*,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Jerusalem, vol. 14. However, in later development and understanding of the *Shema*, the word *ehad* (one) was understood to mean “unique.” The notion of the uniqueness of God leads also to

the existence of any other object of allegiance; it is therefore expressly opposed to polytheism. As such, Deut 6:4-9 formed the basis of the religious beliefs and practices of every Jew, and even to the point of death: Jewish martyrs often recited it *en route* their death.⁸

Although, the *Shema* is mentioned only once in the Torah (the version in Deut 5:1-21),⁹ its influence on later Jewish interpretation was obvious, Norman Lamm notes that the redactor of the Mishnah, R. Judah the Prince, actually made it the opening *halakhah* for the Talmud.¹⁰ Thus, even if Israel's response was not properly faithful and consistently loyal, they found in the *Shema* a repeated call to total and complete obedience to the terms of the covenant. Accordingly, the midrash (the body of exegesis of Torah texts or rabbinic literature) of Deuteronomy Rabbah (an aggadic midrash on the book of Deut.) 3:11 reinforces the notion that even when Israel failed to "do" (*naaseh*) what it ought by making the Golden Calf, it was nevertheless still responsible to "hear" (*nishma*), to "listen." The *Shema* thus includes both the call to obedience, and to reflect on the meaning of that calling in spite of their infidelity.

For the believer, the *Shema* was thus both an expression of God's loyalty to his promises, as well as the love of God that is central and foundational to Jewish identity and tradition, and the responsibility to do God's will and serve one's neighbours (cf. Mal 2:10). The *Shema* embodies the ideals of Jewish spirituality. With this enormous connotation of the *Shema*, it is no surprise then that Biblical Hebrew and Jewish religious tradition have no specific word for obedience. Rather, words such as *Shema* (i.e., to hear) are used to express the essence and obligation of obedience. Reinforcing the sense of obedience, therefore, the recitation of the *Shema* is more concerned with "understanding" than "hearing." Thus, while the ideal is to announce the *Shema* with intention, nevertheless, even if it is recited inaudibly one can fulfil this halakhic requirement.¹¹ But, obedience is expectedly expressed in heartfelt commitment to the ideals embedded in the action, even when the heart is heavy, or distant.

An examination of some aspects of the history of interpretation of Deut 6:4-7 reinforces the authority of this pericopé in the definition of Jewish national identity and heritage, which is firmly rooted in the oneness and uniqueness of Israel's God and their special relationship with that God as His chosen people. Such a view of the identity of Israel in the context of this identity of Israel's God was a valuable resource for the enforcement of Israelite monotheism and even the

the understanding that God is not just one and not many but totally distinct and not like the pagan gods, which is an affirmation that God is the Supreme Being. Above all, the claim that God is "One" affirms Israel's choice of her God "alone," or "only," and God's own choice of Israel as His people, regardless of the claims of other nations on their gods, or their gods upon those nations.

⁸ L. Moberly, "Toward an interpretation of the *Shema*," in *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs* (eds. Christopher Seitz and Katyryn Greene-McCreight; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1999) 124-44. Ordinarily, the theological provision of Deut 6:4 in its own context is not an attempt to undermine the existence of other gods, but the prescription for Israel to only look to her God (cf. Exod 15:11). For Moberly, this prescription is analogous to a person declaring that a certain mate is the only one for him or herself. Such a proposition does not rest upon denying the existence of other men or women, but affirms, in spite of their existence, that the one in view is singularly of interest to themselves, the one he or she loves like no one else, to whom he or she will be loyal, regardless of the circumstances. Marriage rituals are constructed around just this dynamic. So too is the Israelite conception of the covenant relationship between God and Israel.

⁹ That is in the First commandment in Deut 5:1.

¹⁰ Norman Lamm, *The Shema: Spirituality and Law in Judaism as Exemplified in the Shema, the Most Important Passage in the Torah* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2000).

¹¹ Norman Lamm, *Shema*, 15-16. Halakhic is from *halakha* or *halocho* which is the collective body of Jewish religious laws derived from the Written and Oral Torah.

definition of Israel's social identity, as manifested in the works of Rashi (1040-1105) and Maimonides (1135-1204).¹² It defines group identity and values.

“Shema” in the History of Interpretation

In the early period of the history of Israel, the Deuteronomic injunctions contained in the *Shema* were regarded as the commandments to be read for diverse reasons. For some people, the injunction to hear and recite the *Shema*, especially with recourse to the oneness of God, was in response to the challenge of Zoroastrian dualism;¹³ but later in the Third Century C.E., some averred that the act of reciting the *Shema* is rabbinic and that the verses refer specifically not to the *Shema* but to the “words of the Torah” in general.¹⁴

In the light of this, different Jewish traditions adapted that which is suitable and translatable to their religious and social practices, with each having elements of the *Shema* and the Ten Commandments. For instance, the Nash papyrus, dating from the Hasmonean period, has the Ten Commandments and the first portion of the *Shema*; while the Mishnah has it that in the Temple, all three portions of the *Shema* were recited together with the Ten Commandments. By and large, the *Shema* to this day forms the fulcrum of the prayer corpus of Israel. Thus, the *Shema* is uttered in sacred prayer twice a day in Israel. Jewish children learn it as their first prayer, and Jews hope that it will be the last words on their lips especially on their deathbed. For instance, R. Akiva recited the *Shema* when executed by the Romans as a result of the unproductive Second Revolt against Rome. Hence, in construing what the commandment to loyalty in the *Shema* entails, that is, to love Yahweh "with all thy soul" to mean "even if He takes thy soul," Akiva submissively accepted execution and in like manner the call to martyrdom continued in subsequent interpretive tradition.¹⁵ A Midrashic explanation has it also, that the patriarch Jacob recited the *Shema* on his deathbed when his sons declared their loyalty by reciting the *Shema*.

Through the ages and up until now, the above interpretive traditions and many more have been sustained both in the use and in the transmission of the *Shema*. Such sustenance is not limited to observing Jews, since both in modern Israel and amongst Jewish diaspora, the *Shema* remains one of the most binding injunctions.

The Shema in the Shaping of Israel's Identity and Tradition

In relation to the tradition and the question of Israel's national identity, the *Shema* plays a quintessential role. The basic demands of the *Shema* are responsible for the distinguishing of Israel as the people of God, one nation whose God is one, unique and there is no other. Here, we talk of one nation, one God and one sanctuary. When we consider the theological indices of the *Shema*, we discover that it is as covenantal as the official relationship between Yahweh and his people that we find in Exodus 19 & 20, recapitulates that covenantal relationship, and as such, requires onward appropriation and intergenerational adherence and obeisance. Such an adherence is what is guaranteed by the injunction in Deut 6:7. Let us begin this analysis by considering the “Israel” factor in the *Shema* Israel.

¹² Shema.jewishencyclopedia.com/maimonides

¹³ Zoroastrianism is an ancient Iranian religion which arose in the eastern region of the ancient Persian Empire, when the religious philosopher Zoroaster simplified the pantheon of early Iranian gods into two opposing forces: Spenta Mainyu (Progressive mentality) and Angra Mainyu (Destructive Mentality), under the one God, Ahuza Mazda (Illuminating Wisdom) (cf. Hinnel, J., *The Penguin Dictionary of Religion*, UK: Penguin Books, 1997).

¹⁴ Cf. “*Shema*” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Jerusalem, vol. 14.

¹⁵ Lamm, *The Shema*, 135-40

The word “Israel” in the *Shema*: According to Midrash, the word Israel in the “Hear, O Israel” refers to the patriarch Jacob.¹⁶ Evidently, customary with devout Jews, they often address themselves to their ancestors to declare that they have kept the faith. This, some scholars have understood to mean that each Jew addresses his fellow Jew or as understood in Hasidic thought, that each Jew addresses the “Israel” part of his soul, while speaking to the highest within him.¹⁷ In his lexical analysis of the *Shema*, Abudraham opines that the letter *ayin* of the word *Shema* and the letter *dalet* of the *ehad*, are traditionally written larger than the other letters in the Torah scroll. This he observes is aimed at forming the word *ed* which entails witness: meaning that the Jew in reciting the *Shema* testifies to God’s unity, which, in turn, mandatorily and imperatively defines Israel’s unity.

The Unity of God and the Unity of Israel: The *Shema* underscores a distinguishing character of Israel. The declaration that the Lord God of Israel is one as noted in the *Shema* became a principal element of cohesion and the basic element for shaping Israel’s national identity. The oneness of God as implied, using the Hebrew word *ehad*, can be referred to as unity in diversity (the word for one and only one, i.e., unique, is more often rendered as *yachid*). For instance, in Exodus 26:6 the various parts of the Tabernacle (*mishkan*) were to be constructed so that “it shall be one (*ehad*) tabernacle,” and Ezekiel spoke of two “sticks” (representing the fragmented Israel) as being reunited into one: “and they shall be one (*ehad*) stick in My hand” (Ezek 37:19). It is also noted that Moses, the traditional author of the Pentateuch, also used *ehad* in Gen 2:24 when he wrote, “And they (husband and wife) will become one flesh (*basar ehad*).” From the foregoing, from the notion of the unity of God comes the unity of Israel. The command to love God, therefore, flows from his nature as the only God and the unifying force of Israel.

The Traditional import of the *Shema*: The recitation of the *Shema* requires the performance of certain rituals and other symbolic acts by which the prayers are to be recited. From these rituals, Israel developed some traditional and cultural practices that are regarded as highly necessary in keeping to the demands of the *Shema*. Because God is holy, the Jews became so pious and religious, such that their bid to keep the Torah developed about 613 Laws, which would aid them in observing the commands of Yahweh. Despite the multiple recitation of the *Shema* during the day and in the evening, later development proposed that in addition to the recitation of the *Shema* in the synagogue, it was also meritorious to recite it on the bed as the psalmist noted; “tremble and sin not; commune with your own heart upon your bed and be still” (Psalm 4:5). Apart from these times, the recitation of the *Shema* also permeated various religious strands and practices of the Jews. For instance, the first verse of the *Shema* is recited in the early morning, also when the Torah scroll is being taken from the ark on Sabbaths and festivals, during the *Kedushah*¹⁸; in the *musaf* on Sabbaths and festivals, and on deathbed and at the conclusion of the services on the day of atonement. By this, it can be purported that the recitation of the *Shema* is a life span activity; such that as one continues to live, he is obligated as a devout Jew to recite the *Shema*.

¹⁶ Cf. Deut. 2:35, in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 1373.

¹⁷ “*Shema*”, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 1373.

¹⁸“*KEDUSHAH* (Heb. *kadosh* lit. "holiness"), the third blessing of the Amidah. The blessing's full appellation is *Kedushat ha-Shem*...Popularly, however, the term *Kedushah* refers to the additions and responses recited by the cantor and congregation in the third benediction during the repetition of the *Amidah*. The word *kadosh* ("holy") is the main theme of this doxology, hence the name *Kedushah*.” And “*MUSAF* (Heb. *musaph*), the additional sacrifice or prayer instituted on the Sabbath and the festivals.” http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0012_0_10948.html. Accessed on August 17, 2015.

The importance of the *Shema* in Jewish tradition is further underscored by the variety of traditions regarding its recitation, its liturgical use as well as the observation of that injunction.¹⁹ The particular interpretation (that is, as it relates to Israel) and universal connotation (that is, as it relates to the rest of the world) of the *Shema* and Israel's national identity, mission and destiny would be recurrent in the history of interpretation through the ages, both in rabbinic exegesis and in Christian reinterpretation of the *Shema*. For example, the *Sifre* on Deuteronomy 6:4, especially the discussion on why the Scripture says the Lord is both "our God" as well as "is One." The rabbis often conclude first that the concept "our God", serves to teach us that His name rests in greater measure upon us, that is upon Israel," and then, the rabbis go further to proffer the following interpretation: "The Lord, our God," over us (the children of Israel); "the Lord is one," over all the creatures of the world. "The Lord, our God," in this world; "the Lord is one," in the world to come, as it is said, "The Lord shall be king over all the earth. In that day shall the Lord be one and His name one."²⁰

The universal reinterpretation even takes on an eschatological dimension in the connection of the concept "Our God" with the framework of Yahweh's identity as the God of the nations. The *Shema*, first and foremost represents the special relationship between Israel and the One God. Yet, looming over that relationship is the identity of Yahweh, not only as Lord over Israel, but also, as Lord over all the nations. This notion is undergirded by Norman Lamm's observation that: roughly halfway between the early Christian times and our own, the repetition of "The Name" (*Hashem*, the Name, which is a rabbinic circumlocution for YHWH/Lord) in the *Shema* as follows: "The Lord who is our God now, but not (yet) the God of the (other) nations, is destined to be the One Lord, as it is said, 'For then will I give to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent' (Zeph 3:9). And in like manner, it is said, 'and the Lord shall be king over all the earth; on that day shall the Lord be One and His name One' (Zech 14:9)."²¹ This eschatological expectation explains the confession that Israel makes today, but ultimately that, which all the nations would make later. But they do not do so yet.

Deuteronomy 6:7 and the Shema

"Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise" (*NRSV*)

"You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (*NKJV*).

"And you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise" (*NRSV*, Cath. Ed.).

¹⁹ The recitation of the *Shema* requires total concentration. One does not again recite the *Shema* while walking; but if out of necessity one has to recite it walking, it is highly required that one stands while reciting the first verse; "Hear O Israel." Concentration and focus during recitation are assured by the customary placement of the right hand over the eyes while reciting the first verse. Such a recitation is usually done in fear, trembling and without any interruption since the focus required must preclude winking or gesticulation, it should not be recited in a dirty environment or in front of the naked body.

²⁰ Reuven Hammer, *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986) 58-59.

²¹ Lamm Norma, *Shema*, pp. 31-37

Not surprisingly, the exegesis of Deut 6:7 is correlative with, and builds on, the foregoing extensive discussion on the *Shema*. Exegetically, the two verbs employed in the verse, with the force of the *piel*, reinforce the need to inculcate, and speak into the very being of the future generation, values that have been handed down by Yahweh to his people. The suggestion that the use of the *piel* form also expresses the notion of effecting or causing a state corresponding to the basic meaning of the root verb does apply here.²² The prepositional objects of both verbs are marked by four qualifying states of transmission nuanced in “in your sitting,” “in your walking,” “in your lying down,” and “in your standing up,” which underscore the enduring character of the obligation to ensure the transmission of the said values through an unbreakable string of traditional continuity. This function then must be an integral part of the curriculum for family formation, as well as national formation, amongst the Israelites and their future generations, whether at home or in Jewish Diaspora. Full compliance in and out of season is in view here to ensure the enduring character of these injunctions.

The importance of Deut 6:7 is hinged on the fact that the *shema* would be a static and time-restricted injunction without the mandate to hand on the obligations regarding Israel’s covenantal relationship with Yahweh to future generations, with the family as the proper context for such an endeavour.

If the generations are obedient, they will not only multiply greatly in the Promised Land (6:3), they would also ensure the continued sustenance of that all important relationship between Israel and their God, who is at the same time Israel’s unique and incomparable God and particularly Israel’s own (*our* God) (6:4), not because of what Israel deserves or merits but because of God’s graciousness (cf. 7:7). The uniqueness of God leads to a unique claim upon Israel: the Israelites must love God with heart, soul, and might (6:5). “Love,” in this context, includes an emotional element, as indicated in 7:7-8 where it is said that God set his heart on Israel (Heb. *hashaq*, meaning “to love” or “become attached to”) and chose and loved them. But it also entails loving obedience to God’s commandments, all of God’s commandments, as they are handed down through Moses in the covenant tradition. In the original context of 6:6-8, “these words” refers to all that is to be commanded, and the injunctions about why the words should be recited and where they should be placed are powerful rhetoric stressing the abiding importance of what is enjoined. That the command issued here covers the entire law and customs has been noted by exegetes.²³ That the instructions given in Deut 6:4-9 continue to this day underlines the effective adherence to 6:7 by Jews, irrespective of the strength of their fidelity and the test of time.²⁴

Conclusion

The place of the *Shema* in the history of Israel cannot be overemphasized. It has been the definitive core of the Jewish tradition and the emblem of the national identity and unity through the ages. Such core values, as are enshrined in the *Shema*, strengthen the family and, by extension, the state. And the Jewish nation, home and abroad, owe a great deal of their continued existence to such values.

²² On the various uses of the *Piel*, see Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1989) 396-4417.

²³ See S. Bultmann, “Deuteronomy,” 142.

²⁴ See *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (James D. G. Dunn *et al.*, eds.: Grand Rapids, MI.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003) 157. See also Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11: A New Introduction and Commentary* (The Anchor Bible, Vol. 5; New York: Doubleday, 1991) 341-43 for further details.

This paper is therefore proposing that both the family and the state in present times need such valued traditions in order to survive in the midst of contemporary challenges. The absence of such valued traditions and the obligation to inculcate them in our children and youth would further erode the fabric of our society and increase the level of dysfunctionality already experienced both in the family and in the state. That the family, the smallest unit of society, is a good school and an indispensable starting institution for inculcating and passing on such values has been recognized philosophically, biblically, sociologically, and even politically, right from the days of the ancient Greek philosophers to the present day. Continuing to ignore that special role of the family and weakening the family with new forms of relationships that are *a-family* would just worsen the current state of moral decay. The paper proposes, therefore, the biblical Israelite model discussed hitherto as a paradigm. It has worked for the Jewish nation. It can work for the Christian family and for our country Nigeria as well. The Church must, therefore, not jettison her role in the formation of Christian families (with insistence on a family culture and tradition that is permeated through and through by Christian values) to the social, political and media operatives. Where this has already happened, she needs to act in order to stop the extent and speed of the damage to both marriage and family by constructively engaging all involved in a healing dialogue. Such a need is part of what has necessitated a special synod on marriage and family. If the outcomes are to have any serious impact, then no one must pay lip service to the matter on hand.