

Honour the Name of God

Prof Hennie Stander Dept. of Ancient languages, University of Pretoria, writes:

"You shall not take the Name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His Name in vain." (Ex: 20:7).

To properly understand this verse, one needs some background information: In the ancient world the name of a person was connected to and descriptive of his/her character and/or nature and/or personality. That is why we read in the Bible of individuals whose names were changed in recognition of a new relationship or a new phase of life or of their changed status. We read, for example, in Genesis 17, that after the institution of the covenant, Abram's name was changed to Abraham, and Sarai's name was changed to Sarah. We also read in Genesis 32 that after Jacob's all-night

wrestling with a divine being, his name was changed to Israel. To know the name of a person was very important because it also meant that one had power over the person. God's Name therefore carries His Personal Identity.

When one gives one's name to somebody, one establishes a relationship with that person. The fact that God revealed His Name to His people, shows us the intimacy of His relationship with His people. We are very privileged that God allows us to know and to use His Name. But God also set a condition to the use of His Name. He said that we *"shall not take the Name of the Lord our God in vain."* The meaning of the Hebrew word which is translated here with "in vain" is "without reason" or "for a worthless purpose". In the ancient world the name of a deity was often used in oath-taking, curses and sorcery. The

aim of this command is to warn against the insincere and the evil use of God's Name in any matter whatsoever.

This verse is therefore not primarily concerned with what is nowadays called swearing or profanity. **The basis of this prohibition is that we may not use God's Name for our own purposes.** We may use God's Name in prayer, but it is quite possible to use even prayer for personal ends, for example to impress people. Then this command also applies. This command therefore is very general and reaches beyond the sphere of magic, or of profanity. **But it does include swearing as well.** In short, **it forbids any misuse of God's Name for one's personal ends.** It means that one may not use God's name frivolously in everyday conversation just to express your anger, feelings or emotions. On the contrary, one must use His Name to

praise Him and to ascribe honour to Him. To dishonour His Name, means to dishonour God, and therefore we may never take lightly the misuse of God's Name.

The way we use His name shows what we feel about God. We should respect His Name, and this includes that we should not allow other people (including pagans) to dishonour the Name of God. God wants us to be the salt of the earth, and our influence should permeate our society. Therefore Christians will act against any misuse of the wonderful Name of our God and our Lord Jesus.

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(Prof. Hennie Stander is also editor of a Christian lifestyle magazine called *Maksiman*)

Ondersteuning

'n Groot getal gemeentes van verskillende kerke het met groot entoesiasme hul mismoë met die misbruik van die Naam van die Here te kenne gegee. Daar is van onder andere die volgende gemeentes reaksie ontvang:

AGS onder andere: Zeerust, Wonderboom, Hartbeesfontein, Graaff Reinet, Nigel, Koster, Hartenbos, Pinetown, Barberton, Paarl, Vryburg, Upington, Drie Riviere, Coligny,

Krugersdorp-Sentraal, Tzaneen.

Baptist Church onder andere: Nelspruit, Horison, Florida.

APK onder andere: Bethal, Hadison Park, Lebombo, Carletonville, Louis Trichardt, Mosselbaai, Warmbad, Memel.

Ned Herv Kerk onder andere: Marble Hall, Bethal, Klerksdorp-Suid, Bethali, Potgietersrus.

NGK onder andere: Blanco (George),

Moreletta Park, Kimberley - Bakenskop, Wellington-Oos, Kroonstad, Uniondale, Machado Boven, Pretoria-Tuine, Mosselbaai-Suid, Empangeni, Rant en Dal, Rayton, Magaliesfort, Valhalla, Heilbron-Suid, Ontdekkers-Noord, Grasvoëlkop, Virginia, Fauna (Bloemfontein), Migdol, Strand, Westonaria, Villieria, Roodepoort, Riebeeckstad-Erfdeel, Plettenbergbaai, Namibië, Ohrigstad, Paulpietersburg, Parys, Sasolburg, Oudtshoorn, Bredasdorp, Messina, Alberton, Lichtenburg, Potchefstroom, Standerton-Suid, Potgietersrus, Overkruin, Arconpark, Boksborg, Cullinan,

Riversdal, Tsitsikamma, Gamtoosvallei.

Evangelies Geref kerk onder andere: Port Elizabeth, Bethal.

Shalom Prison Ministry, Gemeente op die Rots (Brackenfell), Roodepoort Assemblies of God, Airport Christian Fellowship, Christ Church (Pinetown), Bewaar my Woord (Orania), Methodist Church (Parys), Aanbiddingsentrum (Pretoria-Noord), Good News Church (Brakpan), Eer God in Alles (Tzaneen), Agape Huisgemeente-Kerk (Klerksdorp), Volle Evangelies (Marydale), Lewende Woord (Brummeria), Lede in Christus Kerk (Nelspruit).

Brief aan die staatspresident

Jannie Pelser, organiseerder van die Jesus Projek, het die volgende brief aan die Staatspresident gerig:

Dear Mr State President,

Re: Blasphemy in the media

South Africa is a democratic country in which the rights and preferences of all citizens are respected. One of those rights is the expression of praise and reverence for the deities we worship.

Indeed there are many diverse beliefs in a land such as ours, beliefs that need to be protected. To honour and revere the God of one's choosing should also include the principle that His Name is not used in vain or for despicable purposes.

Believers in this country have been disturbed by the way the Name of God is blasphemed in the media, especially in films and certain television programmes. Explanations and measures undertaken by the Film and Publications Board and the Broadcast Complaints Commission are appreciated, but do not address this issue sufficiently.

A Word from the Gospels is appropriate. One of the murderers crucified with Jesus blasphemes Him. The other

responds "Don't you fear God". We are deeply concerned that we may reap the anger of a living God if we persist in this manner. Your attempts to address important issues such as aids and crime are praiseworthy. However, an approach that embraces the spiritual values of the nation has to be introduced. What we gain on the one hand is immediately lost if the void in the spiritual heart of a nation is not addressed.

On behalf of 65 000 concerned Christians, who have signed a petition requesting the relevant parties to address this issue, I earnestly request you to give this matter your personal attention. Reference to the Constitution serves no purpose if it does not protect the sentiments of the people of a land. I am totally convinced that all believers, irrespective of their particular understanding of God and the world, will support this plea.

Your reply and strategy in dealing with this matter are awaited in anticipation.

Yours
Rev Jannie Pelser
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Reaksie . . .



THE PRESIDENCY: REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
Private Bag X1000, Pretoria, 0001

Ref: P33-5607(tz)

05 September 2002

Rev J Pelser
Jesus Project
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Dear Rev Pelser

I acknowledge with thanks receipt of the fax, which you addressed to the President.

Please be informed that the contents of your letter have been noted.

Warm regards

ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY