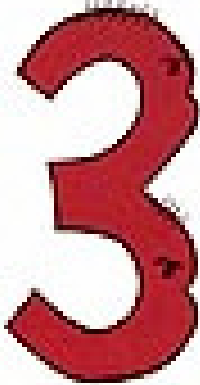


# The Ten Commandments

The third article by Neil Richardson in our year-long series



## 3rd Commandment:

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

To the modern mind the third commandment is probably the least tangible of the ten. It is based on a world which has long gone and which found God and God's purposes in virtually everything around. Modern people have so lost a sense of God that the very phrase "taking God's name in vain" sounds archaic and irrelevant.

Some continue to interpret this commandment to mean that we should avoid saying such phrases as "God bless you" frivolously when someone sneezes, or say "Oh my God" when we are excited or ecstatic. In the Christian era, saying "Christ Almighty" as an exclamation of reaction to some thing we have heard or learned may be understood to be in the same framework, and it is true that we often hear phrases like these, sometimes from family members as well as fellow church members.

The Catholic Church teaches that "this commandment prohibits not just swearing but the misappropriation of religious language in order to commit a crime, participating in occult practices, and blaspheming against places or people that are holy to God." (Catechism 2142-2167)

It forbids the use of false oaths in the name of God, lack of respect for the name of God, and the use of God's name in magic or occult practices.

The truth is that we have become de-sensitised to the finer qualities of language, including religious language. Public usage of language has tended to sink to a lowest common denominator, especially as our culture has become more visual than literary through the influence of television.

This, combined with our loss of the presence of God in our lives has left us either incredulous at the suggestion of misuse or uninterested in the idea of God's name being hallowed and held precious in the first place.

Remember the Lord's Prayer? "Hallowed be thy name" is the first petition in it. Here we sense something of the numinous, a sense of holiness which God represents, and which we are invited to recognise and promote. We live in a world where there is little or no space for such a hallowing of God's name, and in which most people seem to have decided that they don't miss it, either.



by Rembrandt (1659)

Perhaps our worship should be a place where we anticipate meeting God and calling him by name? Perhaps this should be part of our agenda as a Church?