

# Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses



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TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Child-Naming Ceremonies

Dear Brothers:

The January 1, 2005, issue of *The Watchtower* included the article "Beware of Customs That Displease God." This article warns Christians against observing customs that could stumble other Christians or give outsiders the impression that we share their pagan beliefs. One of such customs discussed was the "outdooing," or "child-naming," ceremony.

Since the January 1, 2005, issue of *The Watchtower* was published, some have asked whether it would be appropriate for Jehovah's people to organize or attend a child-naming ceremony. While some, after reading that information, have stopped attending these ceremonies, others believe that there would be nothing wrong with the naming ceremony if the pagan practices were removed. Since this custom has been practiced for many years in Ghana, we would like to provide clear direction to the elders on how this ceremony should be viewed in line with Bible principles.

**TOUCH NOTHING UNCLEAN:** The above-cited issue of *The Watchtower*, pages 28 and 29, gives us insight into the various pagan teachings and practices associated with the child-naming ceremony. It shows, for example, that many people in Ghana believe that the newborn child is a visitor passing over from the realm of its spirit ancestors to earthly life. The days following the birth are seen as a danger period during which the child could die and return to the world of the spirits. If the child survives this waiting period, then it is introduced to the community and its name announced through an outdooing, or naming, ceremony that often includes the pouring of libations, prayers offered to the ancestral spirits, and other rituals. For good reason, the article exhorts us: "*Christians who want to please God are careful to avoid any customs or ceremonies that give the impression that they are in agreement with the view that the newborn child is a 'visitor' passing from the spirit world of the ancestors to the world of the living community.*"

Many in our congregations may never have understood the ritualistic meaning behind the naming ceremony. What should we do, however, when we become aware of the false religious significance that is attached to a certain custom? The same article explains: "In ancient times, Jehovah strictly commanded his people to separate themselves completely from any custom or ritual that was associated with the belief that the dead are conscious and are able to influence the living." (Deut. 18:9-13; Isa. 8:19, 20) Love for righteousness should move us to abandon anything that would offend Jehovah, the God of truth. Second Corinthians 6:17 provides fine counsel: "'Get out from among them, and separate yourselves,' says Jehovah, 'and quit touching the unclean thing.'" When we do this, we demonstrate our determination to give exclusive devotion to Jehovah.—Ex. 20:5; see the *Bible Teach* book, page 159, paragraphs 11-12.

Still, some may ask: 'What would be the harm in organizing a "Christian" gathering at which a child is named if the pagan rituals were removed and replaced with Kingdom songs, a Scriptural talk, and prayers for the well-being of the newborn child?' While it is true that Jehovah's people do not accept the superstitious beliefs connected to the outdoor ceremony, it must be acknowledged that people in the community do attach deep spiritistic significance to the custom. Since there appears to be a clear link between the child-naming ceremony and the belief that spirits of the dead influence the lives of the living, elders should help the congregation to think seriously about whether they would want to be involved in any activity that would even resemble a child-naming ceremony.

**AVOID THE APPEARANCE OF COMPROMISE:** Appreciating that we "cannot be partaking of 'the table of Jehovah' and the table of demons" helps us to realize that it is not possible to sanitize traditional pagan ceremonies by removing certain aspects of false worship and replacing them with elements of true worship. (1 Cor. 10:21) Some in Jesus' day "set aside the commandment of God in order to retain [their] tradition." (Mark 7:9, 13.) We, however, are determined not to compromise pure worship! Jehovah's Witnesses are well-known for teaching the Bible truth that the dead are not conscious and are not able to help or harm the living. (Eccl. 9:5) Could participation in the naming ceremony confuse others who know what we believe and teach about the dead? What would people in the community assume if one of God's people were to perform a naming ceremony for their newborn child? No matter how "theocratic" we may try to make it, would they not conclude that Jehovah's Witnesses have their own version of the outdoor ceremony? Giving such an impression may make it difficult for us to convince others that we do not agree with the spiritistic beliefs associated with this custom, thus possibly hindering them from accepting the Kingdom message.—Rom. 2:21-24.

**PROVIDE LOVING ASSISTANCE:** What position would the congregation take toward someone who attends or conducts a child-naming ceremony where there is no evidence that false worship or spiritistic practices were involved? The body of elders would want to provide loving and clear Scriptural counsel, striving to "readjust . . . in a spirit of mildness." (Gal. 6:1) Two elders could be assigned to help those involved to understand why true Christians avoid any custom or ritual that is connected to or resembles false religious beliefs. They may reason on the principles explained above and also in *The Watchtower* of January 1, 2005, pages 27-30. When giving counsel, elders would not want to simply tell someone that "*the organization no longer allows child-naming ceremonies.*" The point is not what the organization "*allows.*" The important thing is that Jehovah is not, and never has been, pleased with those who dedicate themselves to him yet continue to follow pagan customs. Hence, the main concern should be to help the person see how Jehovah views matters and the need to stick closely to the laws and principles he has outlined in the Bible.

If one were to participate in false worship or spiritistic practices at child-naming ceremonies, then judicial action would be needed. (Rom. 16:17) However, before proceeding to handle these matters, the elders should first write for further direction from the branch office, providing a detailed description of what had taken place and the counsel that has been given.

**SET A PROPER EXAMPLE:** How would the elders help an appointed man or a pioneer who participated in a naming ceremony? Those appointed to responsible positions in the congregation are expected to be "examples to the flock." (1 Pet. 5:3) Anyone in a responsible position who took part in such a ceremony would be failing to set a fine example and could lose

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

July 7, 2008

Page 3

his freeness of speech. The individual's qualifications for special privileges in the congregation would have to be reviewed. In this time of the end, there is a 'distinction between the righteous one and the wicked one, between those serving God and those not serving him.' (Mal. 3:18) We are sure that you mature appointed shepherds in the congregation will continue to take the lead in making this distinction clear and discernable for all to see. The fine example you set before the brothers will encourage others to imitate your willingness to make changes and adjustments when the faithful slave class brings such matters to our attention.—Heb. 13:7.

Truly, Jehovah has called us "out of darkness into his wonderful light." May our strong desire to do what is right and our deep love for Jehovah God always move us to "go on walking as children of light." (1 Pet. 2:9; Eph. 5:8) When we do this, we will never allow ourselves to be spiritually contaminated by unchristian customs, which displease God.

We are happy to work with you brothers in behalf of Kingdom interests. May Jehovah continue to bless the work you do in behalf of the flock of God.—1 Pet. 5:2.

Your brothers,

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