

## Approaches to the Study of English Forename Use

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The study of forenames is one of the divisions of the science of anthroponomy, itself one of the many branches of onomastics. Writers concerning themselves with forenames within the context of Christianity have largely concentrated on four aspects: (a) prescriptive, i.e. suggesting what names or types of names ought to be used or avoided; (b) exploring the socio-cultural and anthropological facets of names; (c) considering their psycho-cultural dimension; and (d) describing the historical, etymological or philological origins of particular names. Some writers have dealt with several or all of these areas at the same time. Perhaps this is not surprising since these aspects are inter-related. For the purposes of discussion, however, they will be distinguished. The review below is not exhaustive, but is representative. To a certain extent, this paper treats of the early modern period. This era is the focus of the author's PhD thesis, nearing completion, on the naming practices of Christian communities. The material presented here draws on some aspects of that research.

### **The prescriptive approach**

Writers concerned with the spiritual dimension of names advocated the use or avoidance of certain types of forenames regularly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Protestant writers disliked any names which might be considered Catholic or which had a long association with Rome, such as the names of non-Scriptural saints and those of the Apostles and Mary.<sup>1</sup> Thomas Cartwright, a Calvinist, in his *Directory of Church Government*, published in 1565, gave the following advice about baptism which encapsulates the Protestant approach at the time:

They which present unto baptism, ought to be persuaded not to give those that are baptized the names of God, or of Christ, or of angels, or of holy offices, as of baptist, evangelist, etc., nor such as savour of paganism or popery: but chiefly where of there are examples, in the Holy Scriptures, in the names of

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<sup>1</sup> L. A. Dunkling, *The Guinness Book of Names*, 2nd edn (Enfield, 1983), p. 41.

those who are reported in them to have been godly and virtuous.<sup>2</sup>

A change in the Catholic approach can be seen from the injunctions delivered by the Council of Trent (1545–1563) which absolutely required Catholics for the first time to use the names of angels or canonised saints in baptism rather than the many and varied pagan names which had crept into use.<sup>3</sup> This was partly a reaction to pronouncements on naming by Protestants, Calvinists in particular, and should be regarded as an attempt by the Catholic Church to seize the moral high ground and to reinforce their claims to govern all aspects of daily life. The Council disapproved of heathen names and echoed St John Chrysostom's call for imitation of the virtues and holiness exhibited by earlier holy men and women and his suggestion that saints and angels chosen as role models could intervene on behalf of the baptised in spiritual affairs.<sup>4</sup> However, it went against Chrysostom who had advised against ascribing any efficacy to such names.<sup>5</sup>

During the seventeenth century advice on forenames was given by Puritan preachers and writers such as Arthur Hildersam (1563–1632), an Anglican, and William Jenkyn (1613–1685), who was ejected in 1662 because of his Presbyterian views and later became an assistant to William Gouge (see below). Hildersam considered that 'a good name is to be chosen above great riches', and advised his readers to esteem such a name.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of such a name was seen by Jenkyn 'as a thread tyed about the finger, to make us mindful of the errand we came into the world to do for our master'.<sup>7</sup>

William Gouge advocated the use for Christians of 'holy, sober and fit names' which led their bearers to imitate their role-models' lives and virtues.<sup>8</sup> He suggested that the names given by God in the Old Testament

<sup>2</sup> T. Cartwright, *Directory of Church Government*, (London(?), 1565), pp. 2–3, quoted in D. Neal, *History of the Puritans*, 5, Appendix, (London, 1822), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> E. G. Withycombe, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1977), p. xxvi.

<sup>4</sup> See J. Moffat, 'Names (Christian)', in *Encyclopaedia of Religion & Ethics*, edited by J. Hastings, 9 (Edinburgh, 1917), p. 146.

<sup>5</sup> *The Catechism of the Council of Trent published by command of Pope Pius the Fifth*, translated by J. Donovan (London, 1829), p. 192.

<sup>6</sup> A. Hildersam, *CVIII Lectures upon the Fourth of John* (London, 1647), p. 86.

<sup>7</sup> W. Jenkyn, *Exposition of the Epistle of Jude* (London, 1652), p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> W. Gouge, *Of Domestic Duties, Eight Treatises: VI Treatise, Of Parents Duties*,

should be used, also the names of persons guided by the Holy Spirit. This, in effect, was a conscious call for a pro-active view of God. Gouge was looking, as had writers before him, at the conscious aspects of naming. Unlike some other churchmen he also saw fit to permit family and 'usual names of the Country', that is traditional English ones. Purely prescriptive writers have not emerged since this time, but similar attitudes persist still and occasionally have been made explicit by writers since that time.

In more recent years the 'appropriate', that is sensible, choice of a forename has been emphasised, for example by Partridge and Spence.<sup>9</sup> However, there has always been a problem in times of change and conflict over exactly what is a 'fit' or 'appropriate' name: for an example see Waters.<sup>10</sup> In a slightly different context, Christian Africa, Ongong'a advocates

careful instruction in the meaning and background of Christian names before they are given to people. This will help people to be proud of their new name and its symbolism, and will prevent them from unnecessarily rejecting these names, which happens when they do not understand the true meaning of their given names.<sup>11</sup>

In a similar vein, Castle has recently compiled a book for the British market.<sup>12</sup>

### **The sociological approach**

The sociological approach considers the use of names as indicators of social processes whilst the descriptive approach considers the effect of society on names in their historical context. Vinel suggests that the manner of naming reflects the organisation of a particular society.<sup>13</sup> A century ago Hubbard

2nd edn (London, 1626), pp. 7294–95.

<sup>9</sup> E. Partridge, *Name This Child: A Handy Guide for Puzzled Parents* (London, 1959), p. 5; H. Spence, *The Modern Book of Babies' Names* (London, 1988), p. 73.

<sup>10</sup> J. J. Waters, 'Naming and kinship in New England: Guilford patterns and usage, 1693–1759', *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, 138 (1984), 161–81 (p. 161).

<sup>11</sup> J. Ongong'a, 'African names and Christian names', *African Ecclesial Review*, 25 (1983), 114–18 (pp. 117–18).

<sup>12</sup> T. Castle, *Christian Names for Boys and Girls* (London, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> A. Vinel, *Le livre des Prénoms selon le nouveau calendrier* (Paris, 1972), p. 34.

wrote that:

Names portray the mind of the age that gives them birth. Every nation has had its peculiar nomenclature, and that nomenclature has been created, modified and developed by the circumstances of the national growth. It has been affected by varying degrees of intellectual culture; but intellect has not been the only modifying force. Names bear the impress of social and political movements also. And even religious developments have stamped themselves upon the popular names.<sup>14</sup>

From an opposite angle, Miller was one of the first writers to suggest that 'culture theory' could be used to look at the social determinants of naming practices and thus provide insights into 'the organisation, history and ways of thought of ... people.'<sup>15</sup> Clark was also interested in looking at names in an historical context from a socio-cultural viewpoint.<sup>16</sup> She suggested that personal names, such as forenames, are dateable both at an individual and societal level. These names reflect the social composition and attitudes of their environment through their variety and evolution. The effects of teaching and particularly reading have to be included in the equation.

With regard to trend-setters, Dauzat suggests that the lead of nobles and gentry families was imitated by the bourgeoisie, which was in turn copied by the villeins; the provinces followed the capital, and the countryside the towns.<sup>17</sup> Whilst Schnapper generally accepts a vertical model of diffusion, i.e. starting with the upper classes who are the first to adopt a new style, followed by the middle and popular classes, she limits it to certain types of name, new forenames, where the choice was not being made by godparents, and where double or multiple forenames were given. She, too, reckons that

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<sup>14</sup> G. H. Hubbard, 'History in names', *New Englander (and Yale Review)*, 49 (13 new series) (August 1888), 122–31 (p. 123).

<sup>15</sup> N. Miller, 'Some aspects of the name in Culture Theory', *American Journal of Sociology*, 32 (1927), 585–600.

<sup>16</sup> C. Clark, 'The early personal names of King's Lynn: an essay in socio-cultural history', *Nomina*, 6 (1982), 51–71.

<sup>17</sup> A. Dauzat, *Les Noms de Personnes. Origine et évolution, etc.* (Paris, 1934), p. 9 [1925 was first edition]. See also M. Gresset, 'Les prénoms dans le monde judiciaire cantois au XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles', in *Le prénom, mode et histoire: les entretiens de Malher 1980*, edited by J. Dupâquier, A. Bideau, and M. -E. Du Creux (Paris, 1984), pp. 209–22 (p. 219).

diffusion is from town to country, and in that sense geographical and social diffusion are linked and similar to the way in which fashions for consumer goods spread.<sup>18</sup>

Support for this theory is provided by Besnard and Desplanques, whose statistical study corroborates the classical model of vertical social diffusion.<sup>19</sup> First names spread from the top of the social scale downwards. 'Senior executives and professionals' are the quickest off the mark in the pursuit of fashion, followed, in this order, by the 'intermediate professions', 'craftsmen and shopkeepers', 'salaried employees', 'blue collar workers', and last of all 'farmers'.<sup>20</sup>

However, allowance also has to be made for a horizontal flux stemming from the frequency of contacts with other people. Where social position is comparable, the degree of sociability produces a sizeable difference. In the past, 'social divisions were essentially expressed in the form of a time-lag in the adoption of the same first names; now[adays] they tend to be revealed by different choices of first name'.<sup>21</sup>

Liebertson rightly points out that diffusion and imitation are different mechanisms:

If there is imitation, then there will be diffusion. But, if there is diffusion, it does not follow that it is caused by imitation. In other words, diffusion is not sufficient evidence that imitation occurs. This is because diffusion can be non-random (in the sense that one segment of the population may adopt a name earlier than another segment) without it being caused by imitation. The diffusion will occur because of a central stimulus ... that influences the choices of others.<sup>22</sup>

Established naming patterns can be introduced into new geographical

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<sup>18</sup> D. Schnapper, 'Essai de lecture sociologique', in *Le prénom*, edited by Dupâquier *et al.*, pp. 13–21 (pp. 15–16).

<sup>19</sup> P. Besnard and G. Desplanques, *Un prénom pour toujours. La Côte des prénoms hier, aujourd'hui et demain* (Paris, 1986).

<sup>20</sup> P. Besnard, 'A Durkheimian approach to the study of fashion. The sociology of Christian or first names', translated by H. L. Sutcliffe, in *Debating Durkheim*, edited by W. S. F. Pickering and H. Martins (London, 1994), pp. 159–73 (p. 170).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>22</sup> S. Liebertson, 'Reply to Philippe Besnard', *American Journal of Sociology*, 100 (1995), 1317–24 (p. 1319).

locations, reflecting the cultural values of the original name-giving communities. Thus, for instance, in seventeenth-century New England patterns of naming reflected the religions and regions of origin in England of the settlers.<sup>23</sup>

Browder notes Zelinsky's view that whilst traditional names are given during periods of social conservatism new ones denoting individualism and diversity are popular at times of rapid social change.<sup>24</sup> Bernet points out that the absence of new forenames in the stock of forenames used can be interpreted in various ways: hostility, reserve, indifference or simple weight of customs or habits.<sup>25</sup>

Waters regards past names as cultural documents, parts of 'an elaborate social code'.<sup>26</sup> Names can be used to provide us with invaluable information as to our ancestors' mentality, enabling some measure to be made of 'past patterns of opinion and emerging currents of thought and belief'. Dauzat sees them as relics of beliefs or defunct superstitions, symbolising the joys and sentiments, as well as the hopes, of parents for their children.<sup>27</sup> Smith goes further than Waters in suggesting that at a common-sense level the giving of names to children is not usually random in nature but conforms to societal norms. Since a child's name sets it up in a relationship with other individuals it can provide 'clues as to the cultural values of the population, as, for example, in showing the changing use of biblical names and alterations in the list of the most popular names'.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, information from child naming enables the dating of

<sup>23</sup> D. H. Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 93–97.

<sup>24</sup> S. Browder, *The New Age Baby Name Book*, revised edn reissue (New York, 1995), p. ix; W. Zelinsky, 'Cultural variation in personal name patterns in the eastern United States', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 60 (1970), 743–69.

<sup>25</sup> J. Bernet, 'Les prénoms républicains sous la Révolution française: l'exemple du district de Compiègne, 1793–1795', in *Le prénom*, edited by Dupâquier *et al.*, pp. 247–53 (p. 252).

<sup>26</sup> J. J. Waters, 'Naming and kinship in New England', at 162.

<sup>27</sup> A. Dauzat, *Dictionnaire Étymologique des noms de famille et prénoms de France*, revised and augmented by M.-T. Morlet, (Paris, 1978), p. v.

<sup>28</sup> D. S. Smith, 'Child naming practices, kinship trees, and change in family attitudes in Higham, Massachusetts, 1641 to 1880', *Journal of Social History*, 18 (1985), 541–66 (p. 542); Waters, 'Naming and kinship'.

change and the rate of change over time to be delimited. Shifts, both in attitudes and behaviour, of parents' actions can thereby be distinguished: actions, i.e. child-naming, directly reflecting the values they held concerning religion. Dumas echoes this approach in stating that 'a culture's naming practices may reveal shifts in its value system as clearly as, if not more accurately than, articulated statements of value'.<sup>29</sup> In any event, finding articulated statements regarding name giving is very problematic. Values have to be imputed from parents' actions, that is, their children's names.

It is also suggested by Smith that the dating of alterations in the pool of names from which parents chose and the identification of their cultural sources can give rise to measures of change in attitude.<sup>30</sup> For example, various religious parties sought to extend their sphere of influence in people's lives to encompass baptismal names. Smith suggests that the proportion of biblical names used in a community may be used as an index of radical Protestantism.<sup>31</sup> Dupâquier argues that 'the spread of certain forenames can help to unravel the means and forms of renewed religion at certain periods: one can measure the impact of preaching, the spread of new devotions, the strength of new religious currents, the resistance shown by local or regional customs'.<sup>32</sup>

Wilson notes the lack of a comprehensive anthropological account of the historical development of naming systems in Europe.<sup>33</sup> Although much work has been done by historians and sociologists in France since the 1950s, comparatively little has been done in England. Wilson sought to fill part of the jigsaw by looking at the ways in which individuals were named and their meaning in such contexts. Wilson argues, 'all names have a penumbra of connotations. It is these which are significant in guidance choice and not the literal meaning of the name'.<sup>34</sup> The meanings of names

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<sup>29</sup> D. W. Dumas, 'The naming of children in New England, 1780–1850', *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, 132 (1978), 196–210 (p. 196).

<sup>30</sup> D. S. Smith, 'Child-naming practices as cultural and familial indicators', *Local Population Studies*, 32 (1974), 17–27 (p. 17).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> J. Dupâquier, 'Introduction', in *Le prénom*, edited by Dupâquier *et al.*, pp. 5–10 (p. 6).

<sup>33</sup> S. Wilson, *The Means of Naming. A Social and Cultural History of Personal Naming in Western Europe* (London, 1998).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi.

are complex, multiple and shifting, but only have meaning in the context of other names—that is, they are part of naming systems. These need to be described, analysed and understood as such systems and the categories within them change and develop.

Smith-Bannister questions the validity of previous writings on English naming in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He argues, correctly, that 'much of this work has been based on biased sampling and on an approach which eschewed a more accurate, quantitative study in favour of the inappropriate use of example and counter-example'.<sup>35</sup> However, statistics relating to forenames are becoming more commonplace. The relative popularity of forenames has been charted in recent years by various popular editions of 'baby-name' books, the *Guinness Book of Names*, and the annual compilation of birth announcements in *The Times*. Official Government bodies are cashing in on the act. 1996 saw the publication of national statistics derived from birth registrations in the preceding fifty years by the Office for Population Censuses and Surveys (now part of the Office for National Statistics), and the General Register Offices for Scotland and Northern Ireland, with annual updates.

The use of a statistical approach to naming enables a particularly important phenomenon to be examined which would not be revealed by a phenomenological or ethnomethodical examination—fashion. This is even truer in the context of historical research since the parents who named their children are no longer available for interview so that their reasons can be ascertained.

### **The psychological approach**

Whilst the descriptive and sociological approaches concern themselves primarily with conscious and external processes, the psychological (and to a lesser extent the prescriptive) approach is concerned with subconscious or internal processes.

Flugel noted that psychologists first became really interested in names in the period immediately prior to World War I.<sup>36</sup> He observed that Claparède, following on work done by Kollarits, 'suggested that a name tends to call up

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<sup>35</sup> S. Smith-Bannister, *Names and Naming Patterns in England 1538–1700* (Oxford, 1997), p. 152.

<sup>36</sup> I. Flugel, 'On the significance of names', in *Men and their Motives: Psychol-Analytical Studies*, edited by J. C. Flugel (London, 1934).



the image of a person of a definite type and that this type is more or less constant for all who hear the name ...'.<sup>37</sup> Whilst agreeing with this general argument, English<sup>38</sup> found that the interpretation of any given name varied differently between individuals.<sup>39</sup> Variation could be accounted for, according to Alspach, by such factors as 'nationality, known persons of similar name, auditory-verbal associations ..., and the sound of the word'.<sup>40</sup>

At around the same time, psychoanalysts such as Stekel, Rank and Abraham had drawn attention to 'the other unconscious significance of names in determining conduct and emotional attitude'.<sup>41</sup> Flugel himself noted that instances of the unconscious influence of name on conduct fell into three main categories: (a) general influence on character and behaviour; (b) choice of profession or occupation; and (c) choice of the love object.<sup>42</sup> Flugel further observes that 'sometimes, however, names have certainly a contra-suggestive effect; the person refuses to take the character his name indicates, and develops rather the opposite qualities'.<sup>43</sup>

A person's given name is the most important anchor point of an individual's self-identity;<sup>44</sup> indeed it can be seen as 'a determining factor in the development of personality, acquisition of friends, and, in all probability, in his success or failure in life'.<sup>45</sup> Andersen states that:

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215; E. Claparède, 'Sur la représentation des personnes inconnues', *Archives de Psychologie*, 15 (1914), 301; J. Kollarits, 'Observations de psychologie quotidienne', *Archives de Psychologie*, 15 (1914), 225.

<sup>38</sup> G. English, 'On the psychological response to proper names', *American Journal of Psychology*, 17 (1916), 430–34.

<sup>39</sup> Flugel, 'On the significance of names', p. 216.

<sup>40</sup> E. M. Alspach, 'On the psychological response to unknown proper names', *American Journal of Psychology*, 28 (1917), 436, quoted in Flugel, 'On the significance of names', p. 216.

<sup>41</sup> W. Stekel, 'Die Verpflichtung des Namens', *Zeitschrift für Psychotherapie und Medizinische Psychologie*, 3 (1911), Heft 2; O. Rank, *Das Inzestmotiv in Dichtung und Sage* (Leipzig, 1912), p. 93 fn.; K. Abraham, 'Über die determinierende Kraft des Namens', *Centralblatt für Psychoanalyse*, 2 (1912), 133; Flugel, 'On the significance of names', p. 216.

<sup>42</sup> Flugel, 'On the significance of names', p. 217.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>44</sup> G. W. Allport, *Personality. A Psychological Interpretation* (New York, 1937).

<sup>45</sup> W. E. Walton, 'The affective value of first names', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 14 (1937), 396–409 (p. 396).

psychologists and other students of human behavior ... have uncovered a new aspect to the science of onomatology. They have discovered that we are all affected in our business, family, social and sexual relationships by the connotations our names carry.<sup>46</sup>

One classifies someone else when that person's name is given to him. Every Christian name has a conscious or sub-conscious cultural association which parades the images others form of its bearer, and has an influence on shaping the personality in a positive or negative way.<sup>47</sup>

Lévi-Strauss argues that proper names can be regarded as a continuum; at one end acting as an identifying mark which establishes the named as a member of a pre-ordained class e.g. a social group, whilst at the other end it is a free creation within the gift of the namer and thus expresses 'a transitory and subjective state of his own by means of the person he names'. Frequently one classifies both someone else and oneself.<sup>48</sup>

Writing in 1934, Flugel noted that little attention had been given up to that time to the reasons for naming children. He suggested that it would be instructive to study cases where there were departures from family tradition.<sup>49</sup> Much recent work has focused on the use of naming as a means of examining the process of how individuals understand their own identity. Joubert has recently reviewed empirically based research on the effects of given names: themes examined include 'general preferences for personal names, liking of one's own given names, unusual names, stereotypes regarding names and their consequences, gender-appropriate names, the effects of being named for someone else, nick naming, and presentation of the self by means of personal names'.<sup>50</sup>

Mary Seeman examines the psychological purposes (both conscious and subconscious) that names serve.<sup>51</sup> She argues that they fulfil several

<sup>46</sup> C. P. Andersen, *The Name Game* (New York, 1977), p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> C. Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage* (Paris, 1962), published in English as *The Savage Mind* (London, 1966), p. 185.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>49</sup> Flugel, 'On the significance of names', p. 222.

<sup>50</sup> C. E. Joubert, 'Personal names as psychological variable', *Psychological Reports*, 73 (1993), 1123–45 (p. 1123).

<sup>51</sup> M. V. Seeman, 'The unconscious meaning of personal names', *Names*, 31

purposes: commemorative (after a dead ancestor), connotative (where the name gives information about genealogy and social standing), and inductive (wished for qualities). Lieberson suggests that the choice of name can also be regarded as an interaction between the images that the names hold for parents, and the latter's expectations for their children at the time of their first appearance in society.<sup>52</sup>

Another purpose of names, especially a *Christian* name, is as an outward sign of inner faith, as a sign of church membership. Ramsey touched upon the significance of forename naming practices in conjunction with religious ceremonies.<sup>53</sup> His approach deals with internal or even spiritual dimensions. He argues that 'naming only has a religious significance when the name is disclosed to us and not when we ourselves choose the name'.<sup>54</sup> Ramsey regards baptism as

no more than labelling, and indeed the word uttered is not the child's Christian name until it has been suitably qualified, associated ... with a worshipful situation, with the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, whereupon we speak of the child as a 'child of God' ... a label becomes a name when it has been brought into a worshipful situation by virtue of which there is already a 'disclosure'.<sup>55</sup>

Ramsey's approach is a theological one and needs to be understood as such. Like other writers using this approach, he is not concerned with the history of naming practices.

Both Denny and Grainger suggest that names and naming activities are essential ingredients in being human.<sup>56</sup> To name and be named enables people to possess full being as a human and have the ability to relate to other

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(1983), 237–44.

<sup>52</sup> S. Lieberson, 'What's in a name? .... some sociolinguistic possibilities', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 45 (1984), 77–87.

<sup>53</sup> I. T. Ramsey, *Religious Language. An Empirical Placing of Theological Phrases* (London, 1957).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>56</sup> F. M. Denny, 'Names and naming', in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, edited by M. Eliade (London, 1987), pp. 10 and 300–07 (pp. 300–01); R. Grainger, *The Message of the Rite. The Significance of Christian Rites of Passage* (Cambridge, 1988).

people in meaningful ways. Names are powerful because not only do they exist in the reality named but also give—

definition and identity to that reality. That is, name and named exist in a mutual relationship in which the power of the former is shared with the being of the latter. Being without name has a very marginal status in the world of phenomena.<sup>57</sup>

According to Browder, in some traditions such as some North American Indian tribes, a child's name is considered to be part of its soul and thus is of great personal significance.<sup>58</sup> Niceforo pointed out that in primitive societies names are so inseparable from and part of the being they designate that individuals' real names are hidden from strangers so as to prevent the latter harming them.<sup>59</sup> Browder notes that because of the notion that to know some one else's name is to control them, nicknames were employed.<sup>60</sup> A good example of this is to be found in the German fairy tale of a vindictive dwarf called Rumpelstiltskin. Belief in protection from harm can be seen in the use of patron saints' names in Christianity. By the same token, in order to prevent a jealous God being offended by seeing His name given to a mere mortal, linguistic taboos evolved so that names such as *YHWH* were avoided in Judaism, *Jesus* in medieval Christianity and even *Mary* (up until recent times in Spain).

Dalfovo considers names to have at least two levels of meaning—literal and real.<sup>61</sup> The literal meaning is the one the word(s) making up the name have; whereas its real meaning is the actual meaning it has for its bearer. The latter reveals the specific motivation that suggested the real meaning, being derived from the particular social and psychological environment in which a child was born. Dauzat reminds us that a name can have an influence on a child.<sup>62</sup> The Romans, for example, would name a boy *Fortis*, not because the newborn appeared courageous but so that he would become

<sup>57</sup> Denny, 'Names and naming', p. 301.

<sup>58</sup> Browder, *The New Age Baby Name Book*, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> A. Niceforo, *Le Génie de l'Argot* (Paris, 1912), p. 209.

<sup>60</sup> Browder, *The New Age Baby Name Book*, p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> A. T. Dalfovo, 'Logbara personal names and their relation to religion', *Anthropos: International Review of Ethnology and Linguistics*, 77 (1982), 113–33 (pp. 115–17).

<sup>62</sup> Dauzat, *Les Noms de Personnes*, p. 7.

so. In a similar vein, Browder suggests that:

some parents believe (perhaps subconsciously) that they can instil certain positive traits in a child by giving their baby such a name as Grace, Hope, Prudence, or Ernest. The Puritans, of course, carried this practice to extremes...<sup>63</sup>

Not only are hopes but also joys and feelings expressed in the names of children.

Brender suggests that psycho-social motives, needs or values underlie the choice of an infant's name.<sup>64</sup> However, many factors may influence the final choice—family tradition, religious or ethnic custom, current fashion, and desire to display uniqueness. The image that a name has depends upon what groups in society have employed it and how intensively. In the final analysis, however, each individual has their own personal perception of a name that is derived from their life experience.<sup>65</sup>

Naming can be seen as part of the socialisation of children. This is particularly evident when one considers the effect of gender. For instance, boys were more likely to be named after kin or family members than were girls. In a patriarchal society, such a practice expresses the role of sons as perpetuators and symbols of family continuity, and were thus longer lasting.<sup>66</sup> Names given to girls, on the other hand, were a mechanism whereby values tied to maternity and family life could be transmitted, together with virtues thought appropriate to their role as carers. Consequently, female names were treated as relatively more decorative and thus open to fashion, innovation and unconventionality.<sup>67</sup> Many of these

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<sup>63</sup> Browder, *The New Age Baby Name Book*, p. 89.

<sup>64</sup> M. Brender, 'Some hypotheses about the psychodynamic significance of infant name selection', in *Names and their Varieties. A Collection of Essays in Onomastics*, edited by K. B. Harder (Lanham, 1986), pp. 125–34 (p. 125).

<sup>65</sup> L. A. Dunkling and W. Gosling, *Everyman's Dictionary of First Names* (London, 1983), p. ix.

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, E. Weekley, *Jack and Jill. A Study in Our Christian Names*, 2nd edn (London, 1948); A. S. Rossi, 'Naming children in middle-class families', *American Sociological Review*, 30 (1965), 499–513; and R. D. Alford, *Naming and Identity. A Cross-Cultural Study of Personal Naming Practices* (Newhaven, Connecticut, 1988), p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> S. Lieberson and E. O. Bell, 'Children's first names: an empirical study of social

factors can also be seen playing a role in the search by members of a religious movement not only for a personal or familial identity but also for a collective one. (Browder notes that Gordon Allport `contended that a child's name is the focal point around which he organizes his self-identity...'<sup>68</sup>) Rites of passage, particularly baptism, are good examples of these, arguably nowhere better demonstrated than by the Church of the Latter Day Saints. In connection with this, Wilson writes:

Mormonism includes a strong emphasis on baptism, and part of the duty of a good Mormon is to ensure that those who died in ignorance of the truth, before the church was restored by Joseph Smith, should posthumously receive proxy baptism, with living substitutes undertaking the ceremony. The search for one's ancestors, in order to give them prospect of salvation, is strengthened by the idea that the salvation of the living depends on the salvation of the dead ... Scientific activity ... joined to mysticism in manifestation of faith and the performance of good works. Charity, solidarity with the church [identity], reinforcement of kinship identity, and ... scholarship are all encompassed in this activity which ... reflects the early preoccupation with the need for identity and the assertion of continuity with the past.<sup>69</sup>

### **The descriptive approach**

It was not until the seventeenth century that attention was given to describing the origins of English forenames. However, descriptive writers such as William Camden and Edward Lyford reveal a prescriptive current running through their work.<sup>70</sup> Lyford wrote the first English book about Christian names. Both he and Camden regarded the forename naming practices of their contemporaries as not being appropriate to Christians in much the same way as had Chrysostom. They collected instances of names in use and gave their etymologies so that parents could be better informed about the names they selected for their children. Smith-Bannister makes a

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taste', *American Journal of Sociology*, 98 (1992), 511–54 (p. 521).

<sup>68</sup> Browder, *The New Age Baby Name Book*, p. 7; Allport, *Personality. A Psychological Interpretation*.

<sup>69</sup> B. Wilson, *Religious Sects. A Sociological Study* (London, 1970), p. 202.

<sup>70</sup> W. Camden, 'Christian names', in his *Remaines of a Greater Work Concerning Britaine* (London, 1605), pp. 28–88; E. Lyford, *The True Interpretation and Etymologie of Christian Names* (London, 1655).

very valid point when he says that the first works on names, such as Camden's, appear

to have coincided with some of the more significant shifts in the incidence of name-sharing between godparent and child whilst ... later works may have been produced in response to the growing number of children who were not named after someone else. Thus contemporary commentaries on the names which children should be given must be seen in the context of the potential audience for those views.<sup>71</sup>

Charlotte Yonge, the novelist, looked at the history of forenames from an etymological viewpoint.<sup>72</sup> Her understanding of philology was, however, weak. Withycombe considered that Yonge adopted her sources (dictionaries, books of travel, histories and popular tales) uncritically. From an etymological point of view 'her book is to-day almost valueless, but it contains a mass of anecdotes and facts about the history of names, which are still of interest value'.<sup>73</sup> Partridge is not so critical of Yonge's work, regarding as mostly correct her Classical and Romance etymologies. He does concede, with respect to Teutonic etymologies, that she 'sometimes said "German" when "Scandinavian" (especially ("Norse")) would have been more accurate, or "Gothic" for "Frisian", and so forth, but she did at least keep the faults within the family—the Common Teutonic sub-family of languages'.<sup>74</sup>

The etymology of forenames was also the concern of Bardsley.<sup>75</sup> He looked at Puritan nomenclature from his perspective as a clergyman. Bardsley's approach was at an anecdotal level rather than an empirical one, borrowing from the vast mass of material he had collected during his research on surnames. His book is still the standard work on Puritan forenames.

The twentieth century saw writers more concerned with an empirical approach to their work. Both Weekley and Withycombe used a range of

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<sup>71</sup> S. Smith-Bannister, 'Names and Naming Patterns in England 1538–1700' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford, 1990), p. 318.

<sup>72</sup> C. M. Yonge, *History of Christian Names*, new rev. edn (London, 1884).

<sup>73</sup> Withycombe, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names*, p. vi.

<sup>74</sup> E. Partridge, *Name Your Child. A Handy Guide for Puzzled Parents* (London, 1968), p. 7.

<sup>75</sup> C. W. Bardsley, *Curiosities of Puritan Momenclature*, 2nd edn (London, 1888).

sources: earlier writers such as Camden, Yonge, and Bardsley; dictionaries; medieval administrative documents; *The Times*; parish registers, other ecclesiastical records, and legal documents.<sup>76</sup> These they employed to describe the history of English forenames and to provide their etymology. Withycombe's introduction, originally written in 1945, is empirically based (especially for the medieval period), and arguably the dictionary part of her book is sound both philologically and etymologically. She was perhaps the first British researcher to look empirically at the popularity of specific names using parish registers. Her book has replaced Yonge's as the standard work on English forenames. It is possible her book was aimed at a class-conscious audience in that she deals extensively with upper class names and makes explicit judgements about the class connotations of different names.

The above-mentioned nineteenth- and twentieth- century writers do not exhibit an explicit prescriptive approach. From Bardsley onwards their use of better developed etymological and philological theories results in a more soundly based approach.

### **What a study of personal naming may reveal**

Plutschow argues that, especially in pre-modern times,

by being given names, people received a soul, that is, an identity vis-à-vis god and society. By virtue of this identity, people came to be controlled by their names which integrated them into a social order and even a behavioural pattern... This religious dimension made it possible for names to assume their symbolic associations and also provided their holders with an identity that combined individual, group, institution, and the state as a whole... Names were potent means of social and political control. It is doubtful that names could have assumed this function were it not for their religious, symbolic potential of reference.<sup>77</sup>

Naming is a process which reflects a combination of factors, such as—  
the imagery associated with each name, the notions parents have about the

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<sup>76</sup> Weekley, *Jack and Jill*; Withycombe, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names*.

<sup>77</sup> H. Plutschow, *Japan's Name Culture. The Significance of Names in a Religious, Political and Social Context* (Folkestone, 1995), p. 3.



future characteristics of their children, estimates of the response of others to the name, the awareness and knowledge of names..., parents' beliefs about what are appropriate children's names for persons of their status, and institutionalized norms and pressures. As the role of the extended family, religious rules and other institutional pressures decline, choices are increasingly free to be driven by factors of taste.<sup>78</sup>

The names of individuals can be examined in terms of 'who', 'where' and 'when'. A name as an indicator of social processes can be viewed from two perspectives. Firstly, by the application of a rule, it can establish the person *named* as belonging to a predefined class, that is, as a member of a social group within a system of groups, or having a status by birth within a system of statuses. Secondly, however, a name can be the wilful invention (whether positive, for example, imitation or remembrance, or negative, for example, avoidance) on the part of the person *naming* and as such reveal a temporary subjective state of mind through the person named. If a person is named because of their own characteristics then the giver of the name is classifying that person whereas if the name-giver freely names an individual—that is, according to the name-giver's own character—then it is the name-giver who is being classified.<sup>79</sup> In societies with finite classes of proper names, forenames always signify membership of an actual or virtual class, whether of the named or of the person giving the name.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, where the stock of forenames is defined and fairly static, cycles of consumption can be studied: innovation, diffusion, divulgation (disclosure), abandonment, and rehabilitation.<sup>81</sup>

Names are thus a means whereby groups in society can be identified, despite their excessive simplicity in comparison with other symbolic identification materials. The giving of names to children attests to an identification, implicit if not explicit, on the part of those giving them with a particular group.<sup>82</sup> Since the naming of children is carried out by parents or their representatives—for example, sponsors and godparents—from all

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<sup>78</sup> Lieberson and Bell, 'Children's first names', 514.

<sup>79</sup> Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage*, p. 181.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>81</sup> P. Besnard, 'De la sous-exploitation des prénoms dans la recherche sociologique', in *Le prénom*, edited by Dupâquier *et al.*, pp. 51–59 (p. 58).

<sup>82</sup> S. Weitman, 'Prénoms et orientations nationales en Israël, 1882–1980', *Annales—Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 42 (1987), 879–900.

walks of life, the examination of naming patterns provides a useful means whereby social, cultural and religious currents can be investigated for periods and places for which it is impossible to conduct conventional sociological studies.<sup>83</sup>

Horsley rightly points out that it is `not permissible to claim that name-change is in every case an indication of a shift in religious allegiance; for other factors—cultural, political, and social—may be at work, either singly or in concert.<sup>84</sup> However, one can concur with his opinion that:

Yet where a religious motive is involved it is not to be doubted that the change is of great personal significance to the individual, reflecting the person's perception of the relationship with the god he/she worships, or of the religious heritage with which he/she now wishes to identify [both for themselves and their children].<sup>85</sup>

A further caveat is noted by Bagnall:

It should always be kept in mind that to the extent that names are evidence for religion, they are evidence for the religion of the parents at the time of the children's birth, not of the children. Generally speaking, however, it is not likely that in an environment where a population is increasingly converted to a new religion, there will be much movement in the reverse direction, from the new religion to the old (although there will surely be a few).<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> R. W. Bulliet, `First names and political change in modern Turkey', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 9 (1978), 489–95 (p. 489).

<sup>84</sup> G. H. R. Horsley, `Name changes as an indication of religious conversion in antiquity', *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions*, 35 (1987), 1–17 (p. 12).

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>86</sup> R. S. Bagnall, `Religious conversion and onomastic change in early Byzantine Egypt', *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists*, 19 (1982), 105–24 (p. 109).