

The Telegraph

Pope rails against rise of un-Christian names

The Pope has warned parents against giving children celebrity-inspired names and urged them to turn to the Bible for inspiration instead.



Pope Benedict XVI has called for a return to traditional names Photo: EPA

By Nick Squires, Rome

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While names such as Sienna and Scarlett have become fashionable in recent years, Pope Benedict XVI called for a return to tradition.

During Mass at the Sistine Chapel, he said: "Every baptised child acquires the character of the son of God, beginning with their Christian name, an unmistakable sign that the Holy Spirit causes man to be born anew in the womb of the Church." He added that a name was an "indelible seal" that set children off on a lifelong "journey of religious faith".

According to the Office for National Statistics, celebrity names such as Ashton – after the actor Ashton Kutcher – and Lily – after the singer Lily Allen – are among the most popular in England and Wales. The names celebrities give their own children can be even more exotic.

Sir Bob Geldof has daughters named Pixie and Peaches, while Victoria and David Beckham called their first son Brooklyn, after the district of New York. Katie Price, the glamour model, named her daughter Princess Tiaamii.

In Italy, the name of a child has particular significance. Children are often named after saints, who are considered a guiding force in their life.

The tradition, however, is increasingly under threat. Francesco Totti, the footballer, recently decided to call his daughter Chanel, while Flavio Briatore, the Formula One boss, named his newborn son Falso Nathan.

Cristina Odone, a former editor of The Catholic Herald who grew up in Italy, said: "There are so many of the church's traditions which we have come to ignore and which are actually meaningful and have a big spiritual significance. To deprive our children of that sense of having a protecting saint is to rob them of something very significant. Many of today's names are not just un-Christian but they are also crass and consumerist."

According to official statistics, the most popular name for newborns in Britain is Mohammed, after the Islamic prophet. A total of 7,549 newborns were given variations of the name last year. It overtook Jack, which topped the list for 14 years.

Monsignor Andrew Faley, the assistant general secretary to the Catholic Bishops' Conference, said: "The name is not just a label but it moves us into a deeper significance of what it means to be human as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

"Naming children after perfumes, bicycles and countries is putting a limit on their potential. They are not merchandise or commodities.

"When I was a parish priest, if I didn't agree with the name I'd suggest they should give the second name of a saint."

In 2008, Italy's highest court banned a couple from naming their son Venerdi – Friday – saying it was

"ridiculous" and would expose him to mockery from his classmates.

Judges from the Cassation Court in Rome ordered that the boy instead be christened Gregorio, after the saint's day on which he was born. The parents, from Genoa, had drawn inspiration from Robinson Crusoe's manservant.