

- 6.6 pray to your Father who is in the secret place;
 6.18 seen . . . by your Father who is in the secret place;
 6.4,6,18 and your Father who sees what you are doing in the secret place
 will reward you.

PAUL ELLINGWORTH

**Popular explanations of the meaning of names:
 what to do about them?**

There are many popular etymologies (explanations of the meaning of names) in the Bible. For example, “. . . ‘By the Lord’s help I have acquired a son.’ So she named him Cain” (Gen 4.1); “She said to herself: ‘I pulled him out of the water, and so I name him Moses’ ” (Ex 2.10). In each case there is a word-play involving the sounds of the name and the event that surrounds the name-giving. And each time the GNB gives a footnote to that effect. But do we always need to do that? In Africa, and in some other parts of the world too, it is quite normal to give names that relate to particular events surrounding the birth of a child. Many children are called “Sunday”, for obvious reasons. Others may be called such names as “Father came back” (because the son was born shortly after the death of a grandfather, for example). So there will not be the slightest surprise to hear that Eve, or Pharaoh’s daughter, gave a child a particular name, because of the event surrounding its birth or discovery. The exact link may be explained in a footnote, of course, like those in the GNB – but is this really necessary? The African reader will, in fact, guess that there must be some such kind of link, since otherwise that name would not have been chosen; and maybe he will even think unconsciously that the name refers linguistically to the event described. But even if he does not, it is probably sufficient for him to know that a child was given a particular name because of a special event surrounding his birth. After all, not all persons in the Bible got special names. And once Ex 2.10 is known, all readers know that Moses was called by that name because of the way Pharaoh’s daughter pulled him out of the Nile. And that may well be sufficient!

JAN STERK