

The greatest sin

By Dennis Prager

<http://www.jewishworldreview.com> | There is one sin that may be worse than all other sins. And it is taking place on a large scale today.

There are some religious people who maintain that one cannot declare any sin worse than any other — that a person who takes an office pen is committing as grievous a sin in God's eyes as a murderer. But most people intuitively, as well as biblically, understand that there are gradations of sin.



Having a background in theology and a lifetime of teaching the Bible from the original Hebrew, I would like to offer evidence for demarcating one sin as worse than all others. Indeed it may be the only sin that God will not forgive: Committing evil in the name of God.

My basis is the Ten Commandments. The Commandment widely translated as "Do not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain," is imprecisely translated. The original Hebrew literally reads, "Do not carry the name of the Lord thy God in vain."

And, the Commandment continues, "for God will not hold guiltless (literally, "will not cleanse") whoever carries His name in vain."

As a strong believer that God (or whomever one credits with authoring the Ten Commandments) has at least as much common sense as I do, it seems inconceivable that God can "cleanse" (implying "forgive") a murderer but not someone who said God's name when he shouldn't have. Therefore, the Commandment about the misuse ("misuse" is the translation of the New International Version of the Bible, my favorite translation) of God's name must be about far more than merely using God's name "in vain."

I admit that I come to this conclusion as a result of my Jewish education. Every yeshiva student learns early in life that the greatest sin is *chillul Hashem*, public desecration of the Name (of God), and conversely, the greatest *mitzvah* (commandment, good deed) is *kiddush Hashem*, public sanctification of the Name. I well remember, for example, one of my rabbis in yeshiva telling us not to go to what were then called "dirty" movies, but if we did go, to take off our yarmulkes first — to enter a dirty movie theater announcing that we were religious Jews would desecrate God's name.

Imagine, then, how bad committing atrocities in God's name must be.

Let me explain this in another way.

When a secular person commits evil, it is surely evil, but it doesn't bring God and religion in disrepute. When a person commits evil in God's name, however, he destroys the greatest hope for goodness to prevail on earth — widespread belief in a God who demands goodness (ethical monotheism). There is nothing as evil as religious evil.

The chanting of "Allahu akbar" ("Allah is the greatest") by militant Muslims as they commit barbaric acts against innocents around the world is the greatest sin a human can commit.

The Nazis were as cruel, and so were the Communists. But they only sullied their own names (though in the case of the Communists not nearly enough), not the name of God. But the immense amount of evil being caused by those Muslims murdering and slaughtering innocents in the name of God is hurting God's reputation. That is probably one reason The New York Times, with its anti-Judeo-Christian agenda, recently decided to print "God" whenever militant Muslims say "Allah." Why allow only Allah to get a bad name, when the Times can give God a bad one, too?

One can only pray that Muslim institutions will realize the immensity of damage done to the name of Allah and to Islam by those Muslims who preach or practice evil in the name of Allah and Islam — and the even greater damage done by the rest of the Islamic world's failure to protest against this evil. If only they realized that they could go a long way in mitigating this damage by publicly announcing over and over that evil preached or committed in the name of Allah and Islam is the greatest sin and its practitioners will go to hell.