



INTERNATIONAL HUMANIST NEWS

International Humanist and Ethical Union

May 2004
£5



Bioethics: A Humanist Approach
Announcing the IHEU-Appignani Center

INTERNATIONAL HUMANIST NEWS



May 2004

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Front cover image by kind permission of Paul Thiessen, www.chemicalgraphics.com.
Back cover photo by Yemi Johnson.

ISSN: 0929-4589

Views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the viewpoint of IHEU.

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From the Executive Director

Many of the advances that revolutionized medicine from the end of the 18th century, from vaccination, to the use of anaesthetics in childbirth, to the first test-tube babies, were fiercely opposed by sections of the religious establishment. More recently, biotechnology has become a target. At the UN, a disastrous treaty which would have outlawed all cloning of human embryos, whether therapeutic or reproductive, was only narrowly averted. Issues such as abortion and euthanasia are under vigorous debate in many parts of the world, and emerging technology has in some cases combined with traditional prejudice with disturbing consequences (p. 10). The commercial interests of the big multinationals must also be taken into account in any analysis of the impact of biotechnology.

It is in this context that we are delighted to announce the establishment of the IHEU-Appignani Humanist Center for Bioethics at 777 UN Plaza in New York (p. 7). IHEU will develop the center into a resource for Humanist analysis of bioethics issues and for drawing public attention to the Humanist view point(s). This will be one of the most significant directions for IHEU's growth and increased impact in the modern world.

IHEU holds its first African GA in Uganda in May. Africa has immense potential and great need for Humanism (p. 13). Humanist groups have taken root in several African countries, but our success will depend on the ability of international Humanism to formulate answers to Africa's pressing needs. The large number of registrants to the youth events in Africa is particularly heartening (p. 15). While we focus on building Humanism in Africa, continued vigilance remains necessary in Europe, to prevent religious privilege from marring its new political structures (p. 5).

IHEU's voice in support of human rights and human values is being heard clearly and consistently at international meetings – be it the speech of our distinguished representative at UNESCO (p. 22) or our delegation's star performance at the Human Rights Commission hearing in Geneva for the second year running (p. 20).

In this time of significant achievement and great optimism for IHEU, it is with great sadness that we note the death of Justice Tarkunde, the distinguished Indian Humanist, and tireless campaigner for human rights. The vibrant human rights movement he leaves behind him in India is a testament to his life and work.

Babu Gogineni

INVITATION FOR ARTICLES

- *IHN* welcomes original, previously unpublished, non-academic contributions on subjects of interest to the worldwide community of Humanists. Articles should be around 1000 words.
- It is *IHN's* policy to use the word HUMANISM without adjectives or qualifications where the 'secular approach' is intended.
- *IHN* aims to be a source of reliable information – authors should ensure accuracy of facts and figures.
- Articles in *IHN* are widely reproduced or translated in various Humanist magazines all over the world. Articles submitted for consideration may not be submitted to other magazines before a decision is conveyed by *IHN*. A decision will be conveyed generally within three months of submission, but articles cannot be returned.
- Contributions should preferably be word processed and sent via email text, but not as attachments, because of virus complications. Photographs and illustrations are welcome.
- Contributors should include a complete address as well as a telephone and fax number where possible, along with a three-line biographical note.
- Contributors should note that articles published in *IHN* can be freely reproduced, but the *IHN* requires that the source and the author's name be acknowledged.

Contacting IHEU

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IHEU-Appignani Humanist Center for Bioethics, New York

IHEU gratefully acknowledges a US\$150 000 grant from the Louis J. Appignani Foundation to establish a Humanist Center for Bioethics at 777 UN Plaza. Paid over three years, the grant will provide start-up funds to establish a Humanist lobbying programme at the UN and other international institutions, where the conservative agenda of the religious right needs to be countered.

IHEU is pleased that this grant has already attracted other donations to help the Center flourish, and to become an important resource for the Humanist community. A Director will be recruited to advance the work of the Center and to implement a three-year programme of activities.

International Humanist Events in Africa

IHEU is pleased to sponsor and co-organize important Humanist events in Uganda and Nigeria, and to hold its first General Assembly in Africa on 27 and 28 May 2004. Humanists all over the world are invited to participate in the meetings and to make them a grand success!

Uganda

Kampala, Monday 24 to Friday 28 May, 2004

Mon 24 May: **General Assembly of Uganda Humanist Association**

Tue 25 May: **International Conference – Humanist Visions for Africa**

Wed 26 May: **Conference continues + Formal launch of African Humanist Alliance**

Thu 27 May: **IHEU General Assembly**

Fri 28 May: **IHEU General Assembly** (concludes morning)

For regional travel details & accommodation, write to: Mr. Deogratias Ssekitooleko, Chair, Uganda Humanist Association, P.O. BOX 4427, Kampala, Uganda.

Tel. (mobile): + 256-077385068

Email: uhasso@yahoo.co.uk

IHEYO General Assembly and Conference

Kampala, Fri 20 – Mon 24 May 2004.

Details from Gea Meijers (youth@iheu.org; and see p. 15)

Nigeria

Mayflower School, Ikenne, Ogun State

Tue 1 June & Wed 2 June, 2004

International Tai Solarin Commemorative Conference

(organized by Nigerian Humanist Movement and IHEU)

2004 marks the 10th anniversary of Tai Solarin's death. Africa's Godless hero, Tai Solarin is Nigeria's best known Humanist, and founder of the famous Mayflower School.

For regional travel details & accommodation, write to: Mr. Leo Igwe, Executive Secretary, Nigerian Humanist Movement, P.O. Box 25269 Mapo Ibadan, Oyo 200002, Nigeria.

Tel. (mobile): + 234-8033861053

Email: humanistleo@hotmail.com
nskepticleo@yahoo.com

IHEU's New York Office

We are pleased to announce that IHEU has recently acquired office space at the prestigious address of 777 UN Plaza, New York, from which its UN NGO delegation will operate. Based in a building right opposite the UN building complex, this is the heart of NGO lobbying at the UN. The building is occupied by religious and non-religious groups, including IHEU's full member organization, the American Humanist Association. The office space will provide secretarial support as well as conference and computer facilities for IHEU's UN NGO New York delegation.

Hugging Mother vs Srinipattathanam

In 2002, Srinipattathanam, the General Secretary of *Bharatiya Yuktivadi Sangham* (the Kerala State affiliate of the Rationalist Association of India, a full member of IHEU), and Editor of the Malayalam language rationalist monthly *Yukthirajyam*, published a 170 page book in Malayalam on the Kerala godwoman Mata Amritanandamayi, popularly known as the 'Hugging Mother' (for more information, see p. 18).



Mata Amritanandamayi – Divya Kadhakalum Yatharthiarvum (Mata Amritanandamayi: Sacred Stories and Realities, Mass Publications, 2nd Edn) is a pioneering effort which, apart from contending that the godwoman's claims to miracles are bogus, records that there have been many suspicious deaths in and around her ashram which need police investigation. The research contains elaborate references to court records, newspaper reports, and quotations from well-known literary figures, including statements from the Mata's close relatives, as well as an interview with Mata Amritanandamayi herself.

After a previous failed attempt (when IHEU's worldwide campaign led to backtracking by the government), the Kerala State Government is renewing its attempts to harass Srinipattathanam, instead of investigating into the affairs of the Mata which he exposed. In January 2004 the state government, headed by Chief Minister A.K. Antony, an ardent devotee of the godwoman, ordered the prosecution of the author, the publisher, and the printer of the book on the specious grounds that the book is promoting hatred and affecting religious harmony.

IHEU is calling on all its affiliates and associates to write protest letters to Kerala Chief Minister Mr. A.K. Antony at fax + 91 471 2333489 or email cmkerala@vsnl.net, and the Kerala State Governor at fax + 91 471 2720266. For full details of the case and model letter of protest please visit <http://www.iheu.org/kerala.htm>.

A Job Well Done?

Before the invasion of Iraq, Bush and Blair used two key arguments in support of the need for urgent action. They argued that Saddam's possession of weapons of mass destruction posed an immediate threat to world peace, and that Saddam was supporting international terrorism. Both claims were viewed with deep scepticism at the time, and subsequent events have shown that both were untrue. Nevertheless, ordinary Iraqis are delighted that their hated dictator is gone. As more and more mass graves are being discovered, and the Kurds, Shi'as and minority communities are providing lists of their 'disappeared' – with over 250,000 missing already counted – the full horror of the Baathist regime is only now coming to light. So, despite the escalating level of terrorism, the increasingly difficult position of women, and with clouds gathering on the horizon, the mood in Iraq still remains largely positive.

As the two main arguments for the war unravelled, so a third was woven: that the invasion was actually undertaken to liberate the Iraqi people from a brutal regime, and to install democracy – a democracy that will serve as a shining example to the entire region. But this too seems likely to prove an illusion.

After years of repression under Saddam, the Shi'as, representing 60% of the population, were revelling in their new-found religious freedom. So it was primarily their highly visible religious leaders who were selected to represent them on the American-appointed Governing Council. Virtually absent from the Council were any representatives of civil society, of the liberal professions, of academia or the trade unions. The two groups most significantly under-represented were the secularists and women. There was little evidence of any real understanding on the Council of the need for state neutrality in a multicultural society. In the end it was the Shi'ite clerics who prevailed. Under the new interim constitution, no Iraqi law may conflict with Islam. But a society can either be truly democratic or it can be theocratic: it cannot be both. The example of Turkey, often cited as proof that Islam and democracy are not incompatible, only works because under Ataturk's constitution the clerics were stripped of their power and Islam became subordinate to civil society.

Iraq will have elections, and to that extent will have, like Iran, at least a façade of democracy. But even assuming that the majority of Shi'as actually wants an Islamic state, dictatorship of the majority is not democracy. Any fair and equitable constitution must safeguard not only the rights of minorities, but the rights of every individual to freedom of religion and belief – including the right to change their religion, to freedom of thought, and to freedom of expression. Women must be treated as free and equal citizens. But these ideas are in direct conflict with radical Islam, and there now seems to be a real risk that human rights, especially the human rights of women, will be widely ignored. In this, as in much else, America will have failed the Iraqi people.

Turning to the broader picture, the focus on Iraq (what two of Bush's closest former advisors have called



his 'obsession with Iraq') has deflected effort from the real fight against terror. It seems highly probable that had the United States not diverted its efforts and resources from Afghanistan, it could, with the help of a compliant Pakistan and support for international police action from many other Islamic countries, have effectively eliminated Al Qaeda. But according to Richard Clarke, Bush's former anti-terrorism coordinator, the invasion of Iraq has actually damaged the war against terror. Under pressure at home to be seen to 'kick ass', the US administration seemed unconcerned by whose ass it might be as long as it was Muslim. By invading an Islamic country with no obvious involvement in the terrorist attacks on the US, they reinforced the impression that this really was a 'clash of civilizations' and a war against Islam. As a result, millions more young Muslims have been driven into the arms of the fundamentalists. And Afghanistan has been left to the warlords and the Islamists.

In his haste to bring the troops home from Iraq in time for his triumphant re-election, President Bush is echoing the haste with which he ordered the invasion. In one short year, the intervention will have achieved what many would have believed impossible. Not a brilliant victory over a major threat to world peace, not a world made safe from terror, but the real possibility of an Islamist regime in a nation riven by terror and on the brink of civil war. Another domino may well have fallen not to democracy, but to the oppressive power of political Islam.

The invasion of Iraq was illegal and has severely damaged respect for international law. The reasons given for the war have proven to be unfounded. Every Islamic country and most of the non-aligned now believe that the West is engaged in a war against Islam. And far from winning the war against terror, the world, as we saw from Madrid, has become a more dangerous place.

The Bush administration has shown, at best, only a superficial understanding of the threat from world terrorism. The war against terror has been misdirected, confused and inadequate. George W. Bush has frequently preached the need for Americans young and old to accept responsibility for their actions. Perhaps the time has come for him to heed his own advice.

*Roy Brown
IHEU President*

Democracy in Europe

Following the Rally held in Paris on 6 December, 2003, and our letter to the European Heads of Government, many of our supporters forwarded copies of the letter to their MEPs. Of the replies we received, some were supportive, and some, like those from European President Romano Prodi and Dutch Prime Minister J.P. Balkenende, were non-committal. One reply, however, stands out for its sheer awfulness. We reprint this letter below together with the very strong response that it merited, and received. It is from a British MEP and former advisor on ethnic issues to the former Conservative Party leader Ian Duncan-Smith. Some MEPs, it would appear, don't actually understand who they represent, and apparently can't wait for Europe to return to the authoritarian control of the papacy.

The issue of the European Constitution has now been revived. Every European Humanist and Secularist must continue to lobby and press for the elimination of special privileges for religion.

From EU President, Romano Prodi:

Brussels
27 – 01 – 2004

Dear Mr. Brown,
Dear Mr. Gogineni,

I received your e-mail of 9 December 2003 containing your observations regarding the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, and I have studied your contribution carefully.

The failure to reach agreement at the European Council on 12–13 December on the adoption of the European Constitution need not act as a brake. As I emphasised on 15 December “the spirit of the Convention is still alive”. The draft Treaty produced by the Convention will provide the basis for further discussions.

Article 1–51 of the draft Constitution, on the status of Churches and non-confessional organisations, is not intended to prejudice civil society organisations. The provisions of Title VI aim to establish and maintain an open and permanent dialogue between citizens and the European Union's institutions. The consultations to be initiated by the European Commission and the promotion of the role of the social partners at the Union level are measures that will allow all organisations to play a major part in the building of Europe.

Thank you for your interest in the development of the European Constitution.

From Mr Nirj Deva, MEP:

25th February 2004

Dear Mr Morcom

Thank you for your email of 9th December. Please forgive the delay in responding.

I regret to say that I do not agree with you that allowing the Church “to stifle socially progressive legislation [will be a] giant step back towards medieval theocracy”. It is increasingly apparent to me that the 6 million or so abortions since the 1967 Abortion Act was passed are 6 million legalised instances of infanticide: UK law does not recognise the murder of a child under one year old.

If the Church had the control of the State, which you seem to fear is being granted now, back in 1967, we doubtless would not all be under the burden of this terrifying collective guilt.

Really I cannot support your complaint, and I most certainly do not agree with you that “socially progressive legislation” is to be desired. It is to be observed, in fact, that people who advocate such things in practice have no real concern for the poor and underprivileged, but just want to look clever in front of their *Guardian*-reading friends.

I do not see those living in complete poverty of hope on the council estates across my constituency constantly raising their hands in gratitude to the late Roy Jenkins for allowing the easier dissolution of marriages back in 1965. In fact, it has left millions of children in broken homes that are, of necessity, completely dependent upon the provisions of the State.

Atheistic platitudes should be confined to the wine bars of Hampstead. When they enter the statute book as legislation, the irresponsibility towards the vulnerable and voiceless is a negligence that really is criminal.

I do not think that having the Church, whose values through time are eternal, and whose message is unchanging, involved in legislation is a thing to be feared. If it does not talk up at high level for those whose lives really are affected by the decisions of government, who will? It is always the response of the Left in politics, after it has made a mess of things through its meddling, to always try the same balm. If people are poor and deprived of hope, raise taxes and spend money on them. The questions of why people are in such a position are never asked.

And the result of all this “social progression” is to tie everybody, deeper and deeper into ever more dependence on the State. I do not call that progress, and am sorry to not be able to champion your cause on this occasion.

With best wishes,
Nirj Deva

From Rick Morcom to Deva:

Dear Mr Deva

I am writing in reply to your letter of 25th February in which you replied to my concerns regarding Article 51 of the proposed European Constitution. I found your response superficial and quite extraordinarily offensive. You can know nothing of my work among the poor and underprivileged yet presume to lecture me on the subject.

I believe you have been a special adviser for ethnic affairs within your party. In that capacity I am sure you would have become aware of the un-wisdom of stereotyping, yet this is exactly what you are doing in your condescending comments about people who “just want to look clever in front of their *Guardian*-reading friends”. You also appear to be unable to distinguish between support for a secular society, which is common to holders of many beliefs, and what you refer to as “atheistic platitudes” that “should be confined to the wine bars of Hampstead”.

I had understood that you were elected to the

European Parliament to represent the people of South East England, not simply that minority of the Catholic community that accept the deeply conservative Vatican line on social issues. Unlike the late John F. Kennedy, you clearly see adherence to Vatican dogma as a higher duty than representing the people who elected you.

You seem to be unaware – or perhaps uncaring – that Vatican policy has actually been responsible for maintaining high levels of abortion world-wide by restricting the availability of modern contraceptives, and is still responsible for endangering the lives of countless millions by spreading misinformation about the efficacy of condoms in the fight against AIDS.

On the question of divorce, you seem to be ignorant of the evidence from Ireland and South America that where divorce is illegal it does not avoid broken homes; it simply increases the number of couples living in unmarried and less stable relationships. Marriages have always broken down and the breakdown has caused much misery. Trying to force people to remain in deeply unhappy and sometimes violent relationships is not a humane solution.

You suggest that if the Church had had control of the State back in 1967, 6 million abortions would have been avoided. Not so. As evidence from Ireland has also shown, the abortion rate is determined more by the availability of adequate contraception than by legislation. Criminalizing abortion does not save babies, it kills mothers. Had the Church had control of the State since 1500 we would still be burning heretics and forcing scientists like Galileo to recant. Since the Church has always shown itself inimical to democracy, we should no doubt still be living in a rigidly hierarchical and unequal society, with no concept of rights for women.

You also quaintly suggest that the values of the Church through time are eternal. Yet even in the case of abortion, as of much else, the Church has changed its views. Other examples are slavery, once accepted and now condemned, and usury, once condemned and now

accepted. The present Pope has even admitted that the Church made mistakes over Galileo. The history of the Church shows a continuing process of reassessment and reinterpretation. Unfortunately, it still appears to find it supremely difficult to admit that it could ever have been completely wrong about anything.

I have no doubt that you are sincere in your beliefs. You are no doubt able to justify to your own conscience the intolerable suffering for which Vatican policy on AIDS, abortion, divorce and contraception have been, and continue to be, responsible. I am sure you believe that such suffering is justified if it leads to the greater hegemony of the Catholic Church. You will understand that as a Humanist I am unable to support your position. For me, actions must be justified by their outcomes, not by an appeal to some “higher”, papal authority now seen by many as morally bankrupt.

It is the strongly held view of many Humanists and Secularists that democracy would be severely compromised by giving churches and other religious institutions privileged access to pre-legislative deliberations in Europe. We are committed to a secular society that embodies the separation of church and state. This is not an anti-religious stance. Secularism can guarantee freedom and security for all religions with special treatment for none. The proposed European Constitution was a miserable and convoluted document. We should rather take a lesson from the elegant and effective constitution formulated more than two centuries ago by the Founding Fathers of the United States.

I append an extract from a speech made by the late John F Kennedy that I urge you to read.

Yours sincerely,
Rick Morcom

JFK September 12, 1960 – Address to Southern Baptist leaders

“... I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute – where no Catholic prelate would tell the President (should he be a Catholic) how to act and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote – where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference – and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the President who might appoint him or the people who might elect him.

I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish – where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the Pope, the National Council of Churches or any other ecclesiastical source – where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials – and where religious liberty is so indivisible that an act against one church is treated as an act against all...”

“I do not speak for my church on public matters – and the church does not speak for me.

Whatever issue may come before me as President, if I should be elected – on birth control, divorce, censorship, gambling, or any other subject – I will make my decision in accordance with these views, in accordance with what my conscience tells me to be in the national interest, and without regard to outside religious pressure or dictate. And no power or threat of punishment could cause me to decide otherwise.”

Calling all women!

Women interested in organizing a Humanist Women's International Network are invited to volunteer by emailing to women@iheu.org.

The purpose of the network would be:

- To promote women's rights, empowerment, and development within the UN system and the international community
- To challenge women's subservience within the world's religions
- To promote and encourage Humanist women to participate in their national women's lobby and governmental agencies
- To put gender on the agenda of Humanist organizations
- To promote and encourage women to take leadership positions within their national Humanist organizations

The vision is for an international network of individual Humanist women, communicating via the IHEU website. But it could develop into an organization with democratically elected national and/or regional leaders.

Be in at the beginning and influence its development. Register your interest NOW!

IHEU-Appignani Humanist Center for Bioethics

By Babu Gogineni

IHEU recently applied successfully for a grant of US\$150,000 from the Appignani Foundation in the United States to establish a Humanist Center for Bioethics. To be based at 777 UN Plaza in New York, the IHEU-Appignani Center for Bioethics will focus on creating an awareness of issues relating to Bioethics at the UN and also develop a programme for lobbying. IHEU's Executive Director Babu Gogineni explains the rationale and the ideas behind the Center.

Bioethics at the UN

In November 2003, a draft text was introduced at the UN aimed at banning any form of human cloning. The text was sponsored by Costa Rica, Spain, the US, and some 60 other countries. It is claimed that over 100 countries would have supported this resolution if it was put to the vote.

Closely reflecting the views of the Vatican (articulated at the UN by the Papal Nuncio Archbishop Celestino Migliore), the draft text at the UN called for a legally binding Convention which would oblige nation states to prohibit the research, development or application of any technique aimed at human cloning. Human cloning, whether reproductive or therapeutic, was 'unethical, morally repugnant and contrary to due respect for the human person'.

The UN General Assembly's legal committee narrowly voted by a majority of one in favour of delaying any decision to ban for two years. Now the matter will come up for vote in 2005 and Humanists and others must be prepared to meet the threat through appropriate lobbying and mobilization of public opinion so that a religiously inspired doctrine will not decide the fate of future scientific progress in biology.

Not just at the UN ...

Religious doctrine spread by priests, conservative ignorance fired by tabloid newspapers and Luddite paranoia are combining to derail progress through the spread of prejudice and false information. A recent survey shows us that this is a worldwide menace. Historically this lobby battled against the first hybridization experiments, attacked vaccination and other major medical scientific advances like *in vitro* fertilization, still bitterly opposes the theory of evolution, rejects genetically engineered crops, and peddles lies about the spread of AIDS and the 'risks' of using condoms. Now, it has turned its attention to cloning.

All fundamentally new scientific developments will raise important ethical issues which need to be discussed rationally, and with human benefit as the key measure. However, the success of the conservative lobby is such that these important issues cannot receive serious public debate. For example, UNESCO organized a World Conference on Science, 'Science for the 21st Century', in Budapest in 2000. At this Conference, UNESCO deliberately excluded clinical medicine and engineering from its remit in order to keep its science 'pure'! Having failed to open these issues to serious debate, today both UNESCO and Council of Europe Conventions ban both the use of stem cells for reproductive human cloning and the creation of human embryos for research purposes.

Implications

Research into cloning will enable stem cell therapy for the most severe and debilitating illnesses in humans, like cancer, diabetes, spinal cord injury, kidney disease, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease. Any legislation prohibiting or impeding experimental and therapeutic cloning will severely damage prospects of progress in this area.

If genetically engineered or genetically modified (GM) crops are discouraged, the prospect of ending world hunger in the future will recede even further. Opponents to GM crops argue that humans should not 'play God' and that we should not 'interfere' with nature. Infectious GM puritanism has led some starving African countries to reject free gifts of maize from the US because it was genetically modified! GM maize has been consumed in the US for a few decades now without any demonstrable catastrophic effects. The African countries continue to starve.

The Human Genome Project has now decoded all the 30,000 or so genes in human DNA. Soon, it will be possible to identify the predisposition of an individual to various genetic diseases long before they manifest themselves. Preventive measures can now be contemplated, though genetic manipulation is only in its infancy as yet. But such information has serious implications for an individual's privacy, for insurance companies, for employers and even for the police.

Progress in our scientific understanding of life, development of human values, and advances in ethical concepts and morals have enabled us to take liberal views

DIRECTOR

IHEU-Appignani Humanist Center for Bioethics, New York

IHEU is seeking applications from candidates with a thorough knowledge of the latest issues in medical and bioethics as well as a sound grasp of Humanist principles to lead IHEU's newly established IHEU-Appignani Humanist Center for Bioethics.

Based at 777 UN Plaza, the Director will assist IHEU in its lobbying efforts internationally on bioethics themes, help evolve and draft Humanist positions on bioethics, organize workshops and conferences, and represent IHEU's policy positions at public forums.

Ability to run a network, and a record of effective public communication are essential for the post, which will involve working with a voluntary team of experts, and coordination with members of IHEU's UN NGO delegations. Fundraising for further development of the Center will be an essential part of the job. Full job description and other details at www.iheu.org.

Please apply in writing, enclosing an up-to-date CV to:
The Executive Director, IHEU, 1 Gower Street, London WC1E 6HD.

Applications to reach IHEU by 1 June 2004.

of abortion, voluntary euthanasia, and human treatment of other forms of life. However, this has not been uniform or universal. If social attitudes do not change in tune with scientific progress, then the very future and progress of human welfare, of individual choices and other human liberties, will be severely compromised. This is particularly the case where modern biology is concerned.

Bioethics

The debate on many bioethics issues has been dominated by the religious right, and it is absolutely essential that the Humanist perspective be represented properly and that it be heard. At present, while we do the best we can, through the efforts of our colleagues and our partners at the international institutions, our efforts are nowhere near matching the power of the conservative lobby.

In areas such as genetically modified food, the debate has been between the anti-technology environmentalists and Green activists, and corporate business. Bioethics needs input from the rational, scientific, humanist, atheist, ethical perspective. Yet the Humanist voice which alone is capable of providing a human-centred approach and a forward-looking ethical perspective has been largely feeble, and needs strengthening. The crucial developments of today can determine the course and direction for humanity for the next 100 years.

What We Propose to Do

What is needed is the creation of a well-coordinated panel of voluntary, bioethics and legal experts from all over the world to advise IHEU on these issues, which are to be dealt with at the UN. The broad ethical framework for reflection on such issues already exists, and IHEU has long had a Brussels-based Bio Ethics Network.

IHEU can make an important contribution to the evolution of public policy on these matters by reaching out to the general public, and by lobbying policy makers both at national levels through its member organizations in 37 countries and through lobbying at the UN level. This is a tremendous resource for the Humanist community.

As the only umbrella Humanist organization recognized at this high level by the UN, IHEU has the

right to attend all UN Conferences on issues dealt with by ECOSOC, a principal organ of the UN, which will also be dealing with bioethics and other ethical matters. IHEU also has the right to make its viewpoints known through written submissions to ECOSOC Commission meetings, and also the right to speak at the UN's ECOSOC sub-Commission meetings.

The remit of the Center will be to coordinate with the already existing IHEU Bio Ethics Network based in Brussels, work with a voluntary network of experts, produce resources for the media, help provide input for the creation of official Humanist positions, undertake a detailed study of the implications of these developments in the context of existing statements on Humanism (manifestoes and declarations), lobby at the UN, and draft and comment on model legislative proposals as part of lobbying activity. The Center will establish working relationships with organizations concerned with bioethics, such as those involved with the Human Genome Project, and their Ethical, Legal, Social Issues (ELSI) programme. IHEU will identify friendly countries and aim to influence policy decisions by lobbying governments – for example countries like Britain, Argentina, Japan, South Korea, Mexico and Russia – which voted against the American proposal to ban cloning.

Through its web presence and projected activities the Center will raise the awareness of the ethical implications of the developments relating to the human genome, cloning, and stem cell research.

With targets set for three years and within the limitations of a small Center, the IHEU-Appignani Center for Bioethics will attempt to influence policy decisions related to all aspects of modern biological developments and their ethical implications, and to raise awareness about bioethics in a Humanistic way.

IHEU is also seeking input from its member organizations and other associates as regards the work of the Center. Through its role as the umbrella organization of humanist, rationalist, atheist, ethical, cultural and *laïque* organizations across the globe, IHEU can hopefully help to counter the agenda of the conservative lobby, in the interests of human welfare.

The Ethics of Life

By Robert Buckman

Ethics is the process of trying to identify the things that we should do from the wide range of things that we can do. The problem is that human societies have always shown a great readiness to do the things that they can do – and want to do – if they think that they can get away with it. The recent spate of legal cases against certain barons of industry in the US, for example, has shown that the problem with ethics is rarely ignorance of the principles. Most of the people brought to book concerning alleged wrongdoing knew perfectly well what they were doing, but preferred to ignore the ethical and legal restraints, clearly hoping that they would not be called to account. So in areas where the ethical boundaries have been clearly drawn and legally

reinforced and strengthened, the main problem, it appears, is that the urge is strong and the conscience weak. However, when it comes to new areas, including bioethics, we haven't even reached that stage yet. Where there are ethical issues to do with living matter – our biosphere, our biotechnology, our biological science and exploration – the ethical limits are still being drawn, and are currently hotly debated and contested. We are, as the saying goes, venturing into new territory and it is extremely important that we use the right instruments to guide us. For that reason it is worth spending a few moments considering the origins of ethical codes before going on to examine the areas where we need them most.

Ethics by Divine Revelation or Secular Thought?

Over the course of human history, the most commonly used codes of ethics on this planet have been derived from religions – and therein lies a serious problem. Divine revelation is not open to debate or discussion. In general, belief systems that are centred on a supernatural god or gods certainly can provide many benefits for their adherents. Religions are good at giving comfort and reassuring answers for perplexing and threatening phenomena – particularly death (and even more particularly when death appears to be random or arbitrary), adversity, hardship, suffering and so on. Religions also provide codes of behaviour that, if obeyed fully, so it is claimed, would guide believers into a harmonious and peaceful existence. The problem with divine revelation as a source of ethics is that it has never been possible for all humans to agree on what precisely it is that the divine forces are revealing.

Human history is littered with large numbers of religious conflicts in which divine intentions as revealed to one community are regarded as calumny by another community. Sometimes the conflict has been between followers of a different god or gods; quite often it has been over different ways of worshipping or obeying the same god. At all events, it has become clear over the centuries that divine revelation has frequently become a short cut to conflict and war for human societies – which is why, when it comes to devising new ethical codes in unexplored territory, we need to use secular ethics. By ‘secular’ I mean no more than ‘relying on no supernatural belief’ – and I use the word in the same way that it is most often used about the United Nations: a system that recognizes all religions but does not endorse any one religion above the others.

Ethics and the Endpoints of Human Life

Obviously a secular system of ethics is vital in international politics – but it is also important in bioethics. For example, we have all been involved in many centuries of debate about precisely when a human life can be said to begin, and this debate underlies the serious divisions over abortion. If you happen to believe that divine forces breathe life into the foetus right at the moment when the sperm meets the egg (or even that eggs and sperm by virtue of their potential for life are sacred in themselves) then you will always view any abortion as tantamount to murder. The current debates in many countries over abortion often boil down to basic issues over interpretations of divine will, making them, in many situations, almost unresolvable. Similarly, if you believe that the moment of death is solely a matter for God to decide, then you will never accept the idea of euthanasia. In many debates over this issue, people – including some health care professionals – who oppose the option of euthanasia do so on grounds that, when explored, turn out to be rooted in religious belief. Opponents of euthanasia commonly hold the position that a predominantly secular society such as Holland that accepts the use of euthanasia is not only godless but also, by definition, immoral and unethical. As I have seen in my own experience, the right of a dying person to refuse attempts at cardiac resuscitation is a similar issue. Those who oppose the right of a person to determine – to some extent – the moment and manner of their own death, sometimes reveal their belief that there is something fundamentally wrong with humans

usurping or interfering with the divine plan – which is where, in their view, discussions stop and cannot proceed further.

By the same token, if you believe that the mysteries of life itself are so sacrosanct that by definition they must remain undisturbed and impenetrable, then you will close the door on stem cell research. In all these areas, the claims of divine revelation close the door firmly and irrevocably to discussion and examination. (It is worth remembering that a few centuries ago, carrying out a post-mortem examination was regarded as illegal and an act of desecration. Had that view held sway we would never have learned anything about the structure and function of the human body or the myriad ways in which it goes wrong. We owe a great deal to the courageous pioneers – from Vesalius on – who braved condemnations and potential excommunication to study the once forbidden territory.) A basic problem with a supernatural belief is not that it is right or wrong – but that it is unarguable. That, in itself, is problem enough. To make matters worse, divine revelation is often used to fashion behaviours that unite communities and frequently represents aesthetic values rather than ethical ones. Nowhere are these questions more important than in bioethics – the ways in which human foetal tissues are used or disposed of, the issues surrounding a dying person, male circumcision, and many other bioethical issues are often highly coloured by aesthetic considerations and matters of custom and tradition which obscure any underlying ethical issues.

Traffic Lights for Dangerous Crossroads

It is often said that ethical codes are comparable to traffic lights – they prevent accidents (mostly!) not by magic or divine power, but because we all recognize their intended meaning and agree to obey the rules behind them or face the consequences. A red traffic light signifies ‘stop’ not because red is somehow a magical or preordained symbol (although there may be a biological factor at work here in that the sight of blood may have an innate or inborn power to alert animals to danger) but because we all agree that ‘red means stop and green means go’. Ethics – and bioethics particularly – can be thought of as serving the same function.

At this juncture in our development, when many mysteries are becoming accessible and intelligible, we need to be as calm and logical as possible over which activities are permissible and which are not. The muddier the waters, the greater our need for clarity and what Viktor Frankl called ‘thinking through’. The curious and precarious process that we call civilization has always advanced – however intermittently – by a strong recognition that we need to re-examine constantly the things that we can do and think through, with a wide vision of human problems and approaches to their resolution, what we should do. That is why bioethics really matters, and why we need more debate in this area, not less.

Dr Robert Buckman is Chairman of the Advisory Board of the IHEU-Appignani Center for Bioethics. A medical oncologist at the University of Toronto, Dr Buckman is the author of Can We Be Good Without God? (Prometheus Books).

Female Foeticide in India

By Indu Grewal and J. Kishore

Introduction

Some of the worst gender ratios, indicating gross violation of women's rights, are found in South and East Asian countries such as India and China. The determination of the sex of the foetus by ultrasound scanning, amniocentesis, and *in vitro* fertilization has aggravated this situation. No moral or ethical principle supports such a procedure for gender identification. The situation is further worsened by a lack of awareness of women's rights and by the indifferent attitude of governments and medical professionals. In India, the available legislation for prevention of sex determination needs strict implementation, alongside the launching of programmes aimed at altering attitudes, including those prevalent in the medical profession.

Background

The killing of women exists in various forms in societies the world over. However, Indian society displays some unique and particularly brutal versions, such as dowry deaths and *sati*. Female foeticide is an extreme manifestation of violence against women. Female foetuses are selectively aborted after pre-natal sex determination, thus avoiding the birth of girls. As a result of selective abortion, between 35 and 40 million girls and women are missing from the Indian population. In some parts of the country, the sex ratio of girls to boys has dropped to less than 800:1,000. The United Nations has expressed serious concern about the situation.

The sex ratio has altered consistently in favour of boys since the beginning of the 20th century (see Table), and the effect has been most pronounced in the states of Punjab, Haryana and Delhi. It was in these states that private foetal sex determination clinics were first established and the practice of selective abortion became popular from the late 1970s. Worryingly, the trend is far stronger in urban rather than rural areas, and among literate rather than illiterate women, exploding the myth that growing affluence and spread of basic education alone will result in the erosion of gender bias.

Status of Indian Women

The adverse sex ratio has been linked with the low status of women in Indian communities, both Hindu and Muslim. The status of women in a society can be determined by their education, health, economic role, presence in the professions and management, and decision-making power within the family. It is deeply influenced by the beliefs and values of society. Islam permits polygamy and gives women fewer rights than men. Among Hindus, preference for the male child is likewise deeply enshrined in belief and practice. The *Ramayana* and the *Manusmriti* (the Laws of Manu) represent the ideal woman as obedient and submissive, and always needing the care of a male: first father, then husband, then son.

The birth of a son is regarded as essential in Hinduism and many prayers and lavish offerings are made in temples in the hope of having a male child. Modern medical technology is used in the service of this religion-driven devaluing of women and girls.

Religion operates alongside other cultural and economic factors in lowering the status of women. The practice of dowry has spread nationwide, to communities and castes in which it had never been the custom, fuelled by consumerism and emulation of upper caste practices. In the majority of cases, the legal system has no impact on the practice of dowry. It is estimated that a dowry death occurs in India every 93 minutes.

The need for a dowry for girl children, and the ability to demand a dowry for boys exerts considerable economic pressure on families to use any means to avoid having girls, who are seen as a liability. Sonalda Desai has reported that there are posters in Bombay advertising sex-determination tests that read, 'It is better to pay 500 Rs now than 50,000 Rs (in dowry) later'.

Women and Developments in Reproductive Technology

Abortion was legalized in India in 1971 (Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act) to strengthen humanitarian values (pregnancy can be aborted if it is a result of sexual assault, contraceptive failure, if the baby would be severely handicapped, or if the mother is incapable of bearing a healthy child). Amniocentesis was introduced in 1975 to detect foetal abnormalities but it soon began to be used for determining the sex of the baby. Ultrasound scanning, being a non-invasive technique, quickly gained popularity and is now available in some of the most remote rural areas. Both techniques are now being used for sex determination with the intention of abortion if the foetus turns out to be female. These methods do not involve manipulation of genetic material to select the sex of a baby. Recent preconception gender selection (PGS), however, includes flow cytometry, preimplantation gender determination of the embryo, and *in vitro* fertilization to ensure the birth of a baby of the desired sex without undergoing abortion. In PGS, X and Y sperms are separated and the enriched sperms are used to fertilize the ovum. The method was intended to reduce the risk of diseases related to the X chromosome, which are far more likely to occur in boys than in girls (who have two X chromosomes). Ironically, it is being used in India to avoid giving birth to girl children.

Sex Ratio (females per 1000 males), India 1901–2001

Year	Sex Ratio	Sex Ratio in Children (0–6yr)
1901	972	–
1911	964	–
1921	955	–
1931	950	–
1941	945	–
1951	946	–
1961	941	976
1971	930	964
1981	934	962
1991	929	945
2001	933	927

Source: Registrar General of India

Most of those in the medical profession, being part of the same gender biased society, are steeped in the same attitudes concerning women. It is scarcely surprising that they are happy to fulfil the demands of prospective parents. Medical malpractice in this area is flourishing, and bans on gender selection, for example in Maharashtra, have had little effect.

Consequences of Female Foeticide

Given the lower value placed on women in Indian society, prenatal sex determination with the intention of preventing female births must be viewed as a manifestation of violence against women, a violation of their human rights. The pregnant woman, though often equally anxious to have a boy, is frequently pressurized to undergo such procedures. Many women suffer from psychological trauma as a result of forcibly undergoing repeated abortions. More generally, demographers warn that in the next twenty years there will be a shortage of brides in the marriage market mainly because of the adverse juvenile sex ratio, combined with an overall decline in fertility. While fertility is declining more rapidly in urban and educated families, nevertheless the preference for male children remains strong. For these families, modern medical technologies are within easy reach. Thus selective abortion and sex selection are becoming more common.

In rural areas, as the number of marriageable women declines, men would tend to marry younger women, leading to a rise in fertility rates and thus a high rate of population growth. The abduction of girls is an associated phenomenon. The *Hindustan Times* recently reported that young girls from Assam and West Bengal are kidnapped and sold into marriage in neighbouring Haryana.

The impact on society should not be underestimated. According to Chinese estimates, by 2020 there are likely to be 40 million unmarried young men, called *guang guan* or 'bare branches', in China, because of the adverse sex ratio. A society with a preponderance of unmarried young men is prone to particular dangers. More women are likely to be exploited as sex workers. Increases in molestations and rape are an obvious result. The sharp rise in sex crimes in Delhi have been attributed to the unequal sex ratio.

Prevention of Sex Determination

In 1994, the Government of India passed the Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act with the aim of preventing female foeticide. The implementation of this Act was slow. It was later amended and replaced in 2002 by the Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act without ever having been properly implemented.

The Act has a central and state level Supervisory Board, an Appropriate Authority, and supporting Advisory Committee. The function of the Supervisory Board is to oversee, monitor, and make amendments to the provisions of the Act. Appropriate Authority provides registration, and conducts the administrative work involved in inspection, investigation, and the penalizing of defaulters. The Advisory Committee provides expert and technical support to the Appropriate Authority. Contravening the provisions of the Act can lead to a fine of Rs 10,000 and up to three years imprisonment for a first offence, with greater fines and longer terms of

imprisonment for repeat offenders. The Appropriate Authority informs the central or state medical council to take action against medical professionals, leading to suspension or the striking off of practitioners found guilty of contravening the provisions of the Act.

Before conducting any prenatal diagnostic procedure, the medical practitioner must obtain a written consent from the pregnant woman in a local language that she understands. Prenatal tests may be performed in various specified circumstances, including risk of chromosomal abnormalities in the case of women over 35, and genetic diseases evident in the family history of the couple.

Implementation of the 1994 Act

We conducted a study to assess the implementation of the 1994 Act in South Delhi and make recommendations for its improvement. This involved examining the organizational structure, observing 26 clinics, and distributing a questionnaire to patients. The results showed up serious failures in management and implementation, lack of commitment and motivation, widespread corruption, and little knowledge in clinics of the provisions of the Act. The presence of individuals outside the medical profession, in particular those involved with human rights, would have helped to prevent fraternity bias – an unwillingness to bring medical colleagues to account.

The survey of patient attitudes showed that only 40% of male patients and 30% of female patients were aware of the prohibition of sex determination. While 90% purported to agree with the principle of the Act, they nevertheless maintained that a male child was important for the strengthening of the family.

Preventing Female Foeticide

The removal of this practice in Indian society is a serious challenge. It must involve

- A move away from religious teachings and the advocacy of a scientific, rational, and humanist approach.
- The empowerment of women and a strengthening of women's rights through campaigning against practices such as dowry, and ensuring strict implementation of existing legislation.
- Ensuring the development of and access to good health care services.
- Inculcating a strong ethical code of conduct among medical professionals, beginning with their training as undergraduates.
- Simple methods of complaint registration, accessible to the poorest and most vulnerable women.
- Wide publicization in the media of the scale and seriousness of the practice. NGOs should take a key role in educating the public on this matter.
- Regular assessment of indicators of status of women in society, such as sex ratio, and female mortality, literacy, and economic participation.

It is only by a combination of monitoring, education campaigns, and effective legal implementation that the deep-seated attitudes and practices against women and girls can be eroded.

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Empowering Nepalese Women Through Humanism

By Maya Devi Katuwal

Background

Nepalese women are the victims of many forms of discrimination stemming from the patriarchy, fatalism, and superstition nurtured by Hinduism for thousands of years. In Nepal, religion dictates every aspect of life, and regulates the lives of women in particular. The prevalent world view is deeply fatalistic. Caste and untouchability retain a strong hold on society. Superstition is rife. Under such circumstances women become the victims of discriminatory and irrational practices. It is only through a Humanist educational approach that the misogynistic attitudes of Manu's moral code can be challenged and brought to the attention of civil society.

Religious, Social, and Cultural Discrimination

Sons are of greater importance than daughters in Nepalese society for both religious and material reasons. Above all, only a son can light the funeral pyre, allowing the soul of the deceased to reach heaven. The socio-economic importance of sons lies in the perpetuation of the family lineage, and security for the parents in old age. Daughters, once married, are expected to leave the family to serve their husbands and in-laws.

Discrimination in Early Life

Because of the importance attached to sons, daughters have been discriminated against from birth or even before birth. From time immemorial, only the mothers of sons retained the respect of society. Despite modern biology, the belief still persists that women are responsible for the sex of the child. It is hardly surprising that female infanticide occurs in rural areas, and that in towns, couples abort female foetuses (see p. 10).

Education is the most important means for the development of human potential. From an early age, girls and boys are socialized according to the prevailing culture and tradition. Nepalese culture has internalized the norms and values derived from Hindu tradition. Girls learn from an early age that their primary duties are to bear children, to look after the needs of the family, and to obey and respect their elders and male authority, particularly their husbands. Education is considered less important for girls and relatively few make it through high school. Many girls have arranged marriages when they reach 14 or 15 years of age.

Their lack of educational opportunities leaves women with limited avenues for economic independence or for fulfilling their potential. They are left vulnerable and become the victims of irrational and superstitious beliefs and practices.

Marriage, Divorce, and Dowry

The legal age for marriage in Nepal is 16 for women and 18 for men, although child marriage is very common. Most marriages are arranged by parents and relatives. Legally, a woman cannot inherit anything from her parents after marriage, and her property becomes that of her husband. After divorce, a woman receives as settlement a small portion of her husband's property commonly known as *Mana Chamal*, which is barely enough to keep her alive. She also faces the stigma of being a divorcee, with almost no chance of remarriage. Constitutionally, after divorce men and women have

equal rights towards their children, but this is rarely so in practice.

Nepal shares with other South Asian countries the socially vicious practice of dowry.

Reproductive Rights

Regardless of their feelings and needs, women are required to bear children. They need permission to take advantage of the available contraceptives. While male contraceptives are safer and more convenient than those for females, they are not used because men fear a decrease in their libido. If an unmarried woman becomes pregnant, the sole responsibility for the baby falls on her. If she is caught in the process of an abortion, it is she who will be imprisoned, not her partner, until and unless she reveals his name. Fear and submissiveness ensure that only in rare cases is the name of the man revealed.

Women who do not conceive are scorned. If a woman does not conceive after ten years of marriage, her husband is legally entitled to marry again.

Humanist Efforts

To begin to change conditions for Nepalese women, the Women's Wing of the Humanist Association of Nepal (HUMAN) has successfully implemented an 'Empowering Women Through Humanist Education' campaign, supported by the Institute for Humanist Studies (IHS). We have run training courses, and given talks and press conferences. We have provided medical support to the victims of so-called witchcraft practices, and published a report on the 'witch identifying' public rituals held in Mahottari district, Nepal.

The project has had a real impact on the lives of many Nepali women. It is estimated that more than 10,000 rural women have benefited from the project. We have formed sub-committees of women's Humanist groups in Tribhuvan University, Chitwan, Biratnagar, Jhapa and Taplejung. These groups are very active but need lots of moral and financial assistance. At the moment we are involved in follow-up activities. We have more than 150 members throughout the country.

Our future plans include research and dissemination of information on discriminatory practices against Nepalese women, and the preparation of Humanist educational materials. We can inspire young minds with reason and cultivate a scientific temper through our talks and training courses in schools and colleges. But we must also reach out by setting up and guiding Humanist groups in the wider community.

Collaborating with other groups is another critical activity. We, as Humanists, embrace the concept of human rights, freedom, liberty, and the rights of rational choice. It is important that we network with human rights organizations both within Nepal and abroad to realize these aims.

Maya Devi Katuwal works for the Women's Wing of the Humanist Association of Nepal. This article is adapted from the speech she gave at the IHEU Women's Conference in November 2003.

Humanism for Africa

By Leo Igwe

Africa needs a proactive philosophical outlook that accords a central place to humanity rather than divinity, a need that cannot be over-emphasized.

First and foremost, the Humanist world view will help correct many of the misconceptions and misperceptions of Africa and Africans by non-Africans, and sometimes by Africans themselves. Some of these misguided notions include the view that Africa is a dark continent, inhabited by apes and monkeys, and that African people – the blacks – are an inferior race.

For several centuries Africa was portrayed by Western scholarship as a land of primitive humans, natives and pagans. Many people in the Western world still apparently believe that Africans have tails and live in trees. Africa has long been regarded as a continent without history, culture, poetry, science, or civilization. Africans were said to lack the capacity to think in abstract terms, to philosophize, reason, or solve mathematical problems.

Hugh Trevor-Roper, former Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford University had this to say concerning African history: “Maybe in future there will be African history, but at the moment there is none... There is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness and darkness is not a subject of history.” The British philosopher David Hume asserted that among people of colour “are to be found no ingenious manufactures... no arts, no sciences”. According to the German Philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, “Africa is not a historical continent; it shows neither change nor development”, and its black peoples “are capable of neither development nor education. As we see them today so they have always been.” Another prominent intellectual opinion was that of Richard Burton’s London Anthropological Society, which held that the Negro “mentally remains a child” and the related view, popularized by Christian missionaries, of the African as “half devil, half child”, an adaptation of the noble savage of the French *philosophes*.

Yet Africa is the birthplace of humanity. Thanks to the research of the Leakey family and others in East Africa, we now know that this is the place where *Homo sapiens* first emerged. The African continent gave birth to civilizations such as that of Pharaonic Egypt, and kingdoms and empires waxed and waned for millennia until finally eclipsed by the rise of the Roman Empire. What is seen today as Western civilization – science, technology, or philosophy – has African origins and significant African inputs which have gone unrecognized because of racial bias, arrogance, ignorance, and prejudice.

Unfortunately, these mistaken beliefs about Africa have served the interests of the continent’s invaders, missionaries, jihadists and colonizers. They have been used to justify a multitude of atrocities: slavery, racism, colonialism, apartheid, oppression, exploitation, dispossession, deprivation, denudation and the dehumanization of Africans and people of African descent. Humanism is thus needed to help address the lingering legacy of interracial, intercontinental and intergenerational injustice and inequity that have

marked Africa’s relationship with the rest of the world.

Secondly, Humanism will provide a veritable framework for Africans to tackle, resolve and overcome their problems and difficulties. Today, human beings possess the means through science and technology to ameliorate the human condition, and to advance human happiness and well being. But most people in Africa are living and languishing in palpable poverty, hunger, misery, ignorance, and disease. With over 800 million people, Africa contributes only 1% of global Gross Domestic Product and less than 3% of international trade. In spite of its abundant human and natural resources, Africa has remained the poorest region with 49 of its countries classified as least developed. About half of Africa’s population live on less than \$1 per day while the mortality rate of children under five years of age is 140 per 1,000 and life expectancy at birth only 54 years. Only 58% of the African population have access to safe water, and the literacy rate for people over 15 is 41%.

Armed conflicts often with tribal and religious dimensions have claimed millions of lives, disrupting and shattering the livelihoods of tens of millions in Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Congo DRC, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Uganda. Drought, famine and flood have disrupted food production, causing more hunger, starvation and malnutrition. Diseases like malaria, cholera, tuberculosis, polio, and HIV-AIDS are ravaging the continent.



Overwhelmed by crippling debts, most African economies are worse off today than they were during the colonial years. Harmful traditional practices and taboos such as female genital mutilation, ritual killing, 'witch' killing, and the Osu caste system, informed by superstition, occultism, and mysticism, have taken an enormous toll on progress towards emancipation of the African spirit. In the face of problems, Africans invoke the supernatural. They flee from applying their 'unaided' reason and intelligence. They depend on God and rely on the 'powers' of spirits, deities, juju, charms and witchcraft.

Throughout history, religious mercenaries – evangelical Christians and Islamic jihadists who seek to convert Africans to alien faiths – have invaded the black continent. They preach submission to the wills of their gods and salvation in the afterlife as answers to Africa's problems. Yet Africa's problems still remain and in fact have grown and multiplied. Christianity and Islam have remained impotent in the face of Africa's troubles. Instead the two religions have contributed to Africa's woes, to its stagnation, alienation, and general underdevelopment. Indeed Christianity and Islam have thrived and flourished while Africans suffer, starve, and die. Christianity and Islam did not prevent the evils of slavery, colonialism and apartheid in Africa. Christianity did not prevent the genocide in Rwanda, the war in Liberia, Sierra Leone or Congo DRC. A rebel group in Northern Uganda is fighting to overthrow the government of Yoweri Museveni and enthrone a government based on the Ten Commandments. Millions of Africans have lost their lives to holy wars like the Jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio, and to sectarian clashes and religious bloodletting in Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, and Sudan.

All in all, religions have failed Africa. Religions have corrupted Africa. The supernatural faiths have greatly undermined Africa's quest for freedom, emancipation, and progress.

Africa's foremost Humanist, Tai Solarin, echoed the view when he said "The worst bane of African development is chronic dependence on the deity to solve all earthly problems".

The tendency has been for most people to despair for Africa and its future. In pessimism, some have dismissed the continent as a 'basket case' and 'forgetful of the world and by the world forgot'. But it is wrong to despair for Africa. In fact it is wrong to despair for any race, continent, or people. Because where there are human beings, there is hope, there is a future.

There is a lot of hope for Africa. Africa's future is replete with limitless opportunities, possibilities, and promises. But to realize these promises, Africans must cultivate and embrace the Humanist virtues of self-help, self-reliance, courage, and critical thinking. African people must be weaned from their congenital fear and reliance on the unknown – fate, god, spirits, juju, and charms. Instead, they must learn to believe in themselves, given that, quoting Humanist Manifesto II, 'No Deity will save us, we must save ourselves'. Humanists believe that the only way for Africa to ameliorate the human condition and achieve sustainable growth and development is to tackle poverty, ignorance, diseases, and other problems through the use and application of reason, science, critical intelligence and cooperative efforts. Humanism can help Africans achieve



Tai Solarin

the good life, affluence, happiness, and prosperity in the here and now, and not in the hereafter. The Humanist outlook will facilitate the realization of African Enlightenment, intellectual awakening, and renaissance.

So, early in this 21st century the African continent is in dire need of Humanism. And it is against this background that we must commend the decision of the Executive Committee of IHEU to sponsor and co-organize Humanist events in Africa this year. These events will feature meetings and conferences in Uganda and Nigeria. In Uganda, IHEU will be holding its General Assembly, and sponsoring the meeting of the Ugandan Humanists and the inauguration of the African Humanist Alliance. In Nigeria, IHEU will be co-organizing with the Nigerian Humanist Movement an international conference in honour of Africa's Godless Hero, Tai Solarin, who died ten years ago. We must also salute the youth wing of IHEU, the International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organization, for bringing its conference to Africa. Humanism will be of immense benefit to African youth, who want to live a life of purpose, meaning, and dignity.

All these events hold a lot of promise for organized Humanism in Africa and in the world. They are sure to launch a new era in the history of African Humanism and international Humanist cooperation. I am therefore inviting all IHEU member organizations and individual supporters to be part of these history-making events. I look forward to receiving you in Africa.

Leo Igwe is IHEU Growth and Development Representative for Sub-Saharan Africa.

News from IHEYO

IHEYO has started 2004 with intensified energy and effort! The newly elected Executive Committee met in January in dark but beautiful Norway to prepare IHEYO 2004. Here is a brief update.

Activities

Besides improving our constitution and further strengthening IHEYO as a formal organization, we are working on the following activities for 2004:

- 1) Continuation of the IHEYO Internship Programme.
- 2) International Humanist Youth Conference in Kampala, Uganda 20–24 May.
- 3) Having our Second General Assembly.
- 4) Preparing for the 2005 IHEYO Conference.
- 5) Joining the European Youth Forum.
- 6) Strengthening youth Humanism in Europe through the European Planning group.
- 7) Support our affiliated organizations in Africa and Asia with their projects and plans.
- 8) Publishing the regular e-newsletter *Youthspeak*.
- 9) Start planning a secretariat's office with staff supporting IHEYO for 2005.
- 10) Publishing more information and continuing with the online Humanist youth world database.

We expect that our International Conference in Kampala in May will lead to many new plans and initiatives. And we always welcome new suggestions.

One-Day Humanist Youth Workshop in Ghana

Youth leaders, students, human rights activists, and other representatives of organizations concerned with young people met in Ghana for a one-day conference on the theme 'Humanist Visions for Africa' on 3 April. The speakers included Yemi Johnson, IHEYO General Secretary. The day served as an introduction to issues that will be taken up further in the Kampala conference in May (see below), launched Humanist activities in Ghana, considered the particular needs of the region from a Humanist youth perspective, and enabled valuable interchange of ideas between young Ghanaian Humanists and their counterparts from other countries.

IHEYO-UHASSO Conference: Global Humanism for Peace and Social Justice

We are currently busy preparing for the 3rd IHEYO conference, organized in cooperation with the Humanist Organization of Uganda, UHASSO. The Conference will focus on Humanist education, leadership training, peace and social justice. We see Humanism as offering the most hopeful framework for amicable resolution of conflict, and the ending of social injustices suffered by individuals and groups all over the world. Humanist education of youth is very important in this respect. These and related topics will be addressed in workshops and keynote speeches, in training sessions and discussions on concrete projects. At the time of writing, six workshops are planned: Humanist Education; Leadership and Grassroots Work; Humanism and Global Peace; Women and Humanism; Poverty and the Third World; and Secularism and Human Rights. They will analyse the central themes of the conference from different angles.

There will be ample time for practical and theoretical exchanges. And there will also be social activities, a peace rally, and visits to local projects. The conference will bring together 100 young Humanists and young human rights activists from Africa, Asia, Europe, and other parts of the world. The interest so far has greatly exceeded our

expectations and our practical ability to support. We expect the conference to be invigorating and memorable.

Why Join IHEYO?

The second General Assembly of IHEYO will be held at the IHEYO-UHASSO conference in May, and we look forward to receiving applications for IHEYO membership from Humanist organizations. The deadline for applications has been extended up to the Kampala General Assembly. ***We need formal members to support IHEYO and it is beneficial to your organization too!***

By joining IHEYO

- You support us in our role of representing Humanist ideals at the international level, and supporting Humanist youth groups and youth across the world. Such support is very important for groups in countries in which Humanism is not yet strongly developed.
- Your organization will have easy access to Humanist groups and projects around the world concerning youth, and especially to IHEYO's international projects.
- You can benefit from IHEYO's support for your international or local project, by giving it more publicity, and so on.
- You will have a voice in the representation of youth Humanism at the international level.

Membership of IHEYO

There are two membership possibilities for Humanist organizations: *full membership and consultative membership*. There is also the possibility of joining IHEYO as an individual member for no fee.

Full membership is open to youth branches of Humanist organizations and Humanist organizations dedicated to the activities of people under the age of 35. Full members have a right to vote. Consultative membership is open to any Humanist association. Consultative members do not have a vote at the General Assembly, but they do have speaking rights. The General Assembly is the highest decision-making body of IHEYO and meets yearly.

IHEYO offers its members an active network. It offers support to plans and international projects through the volunteer work of its EC and other supporters. Members will receive our e-newsletter *Youthspeak* and introductory free issues of *International Humanist News*. For more information, please visit our updated website.

Supporting IHEYO Financially

It is also possible to support IHEYO financially as a group or individual, so that we may undertake more projects. Donations can be made for a specific project or for IHEYO in general. Such support is much needed to do our activities. This year, for instance, we have been granted financial support by the Institute of Humanist Studies, Hivos (Humanist Development Organization), and the Norwegian Humanist Association. Without such support, our activities would not be possible.

To donate to IHEYO, visit our website (www.iheyo.org) for further information or donate directly to: IHEYO, Coupure-rechts 4; B-9000 Gent, België, account number: 635-1676901-16, IBAN: BE72-635167690116, Swift: BNAGBE BB, Name and address bank: Delta Loyd-bank, Korenmarkt 14, B-9000 Gent, Belgium.

Gea Meijers
IHEYO President

A Backward Glance

By Tom Ferrick

When Babu Gogineni invited me to write a few words about the Humanist Chaplaincy at Harvard, I could not have been more delighted. This is a good news story, and if someone in a different setting should attempt to emulate this work, I would be most pleased. He had just learned that I will be retiring in the next fifteen months, and wanted my thoughts after nearly thirty years on the job.

Generally, we are not supposed to talk about ourselves, but I'm going to because the context requires it. But let me state at the outset that this was never a one person feat – a community was behind me from the first years, warm and loyal friends, appreciative students, and eventually Harvard teachers and alumni by the dozens – constantly encouraging and ready to help.

It all began at a major junction in my life. I had recently resigned from the Catholic priesthood, the last five years of which had been full of doubt and self-examination, and a profound reappraisal of life and its meaning. I had 'parachuted' into the American Ethical Union, where I found safe haven until I could begin my life anew. Many of its members became lifelong friends. I had been a Chaplain at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire and at Boston State College during the wild sixties. I now felt rested and ready to try my hand at Harvard University, no longer as a Catholic advisor, but as a Humanist.

Corliss Lamont, the author of *The Philosophy of Humanism*, and a member of Harvard's class of 1924, lent me his considerable prestige, some sound advice, and financial support. I knocked on Harvard's door, or, more precisely, applied for membership in the chaplains' corps at Harvard, the United Ministry. Perhaps because its president that year was a Jesuit priest who knew of me, perhaps because my Ethical Society credentials won respect and keen interest, I was admitted by the fall of 1975.

The ensuing years were no smooth upward climb. There seemed never to be enough money, enough response from students, enough publicity, but in all three cases, the barest sufficiency to establish a firm foundation. How proud I was to get B.F. Skinner, John Kenneth Galbraith, and Father Robert Drinan among the early speakers at the Humanist Forum. I felt more honoured when students would knock on my office door, on the third floor of Phillips Brooks House, and want to talk.

Harvard University is a most appropriate place to establish a Humanist beachhead. It is a great seat of learning, and a moral player on the world stage. Despite the temptations to power and prestige, it honestly serves the common good of all humanity; take for example, its work on AIDS and its sponsorship of stem cell research. But the United Ministry must seem a curious context for a firm Humanist to ply his talents. I remember Corliss Lamont warning me never to call myself 'a minister'. Here I was, a thorough secular agnostic, dealing on an equal level, and in mutual respect, with clergy from almost all the denominations. That was because all of us put students first, no matter what their faith or lack of it, and because our collaboration was on the level of practicality, on the issues everyone was facing as we sought workable solutions. Sometimes the issue was students and the draft, sometimes racial prejudice,



sometimes sexual orientation, sometimes the harsh and impersonal nature of a highly competitive school. We were (and are) a team of dedicated professionals determined to help if asked and if able. And our collegiality was a boon to us all – I will never forget the cheerful presence and wise counsel of the Presbyterian Chaplain, Larry Hill, whose friendship towards me was heartfelt, and whose social conscience remains unsurpassed since his early death.

Nevertheless, no one for a moment forgot that an unbeliever was in their midst. The group as a whole never assumes that we are all theists, that the supernatural is real for every one of us, or that faith trumps reason in the minds of all of us. We are all acquainted with Modernity, (and with Postmodernity, too) and therefore keep our focus on the welfare of this University community.

I'm sitting in my small book-filled office, beneath that beautiful photograph of the Earth as seen from the surface of the Moon, here in the heart of Harvard Yard, the Memorial Church. To some it may seem idyllic, to others a contradiction. But to me, it's a terribly useful place for a naturalistic philosopher, if I can be so bold, to contend with a pluralistic, harried world, armed mainly with a Humanistic ethic – balancing the two great goods, that of the individual and of all humanity. The telephone rings, or there's a knock on the door, and abstractions fade; a personal relation absorbs maximum attention. On that level, the real level, fallible thinking, tenuous virtue, plain human frailty, achieve middling effects, the best that can be done, and no more. That's what it means to be acquainted with ambiguity. It reminds me of Santayana's great sentence: 'There is only one world, the natural, and only one truth about it; but this world has a spiritual life in it which looks not to another world but to the beauty and perfection that this world suggests, approaches, and misses.'

I've implied a certain predilection for Pragmatism, but in the area of money I am considered a bumbling student. However, I am lucky. In the eighties, a Harvard alumnus of the class of 1932, Alexander Lincoln, Jr., left the Chaplaincy several thousand dollars in his will, and we have an annual lecture in his name. He gave us the boost to formally incorporate, with a board of directors, and a business-like demeanor. We raised more funds,

and sought publicity. An article about this work was published in the *Harvard Gazette* and interest was aroused. One reader, already a major donor to the University, became intrigued and invited me to New York for a visit. His name was John Loeb, 24, a classmate of my long time friend, Corliss Lamont, who had been mentioned in the article. Now, this is not the 'old boy network' idea. The two men were ideological opposites. Lamont was a radical thinker, a civil rights advocate, a thorough leftist and good friend of Fidel Castro. Loeb, who was a Park Avenue banker and friend of American presidents, had seen his Cuban sugar fields confiscated by Castro. The two men had not spoken in years. On reading the *Gazette*, John called Corliss, they chatted like old buddies, and some months later, embraced one another at their 70th Harvard reunion at a luncheon in Phillips Brooks House. In that same period, Mr. Loeb presented the Chaplaincy with a modest endowment which Harvard will oversee, thus firmly linking the Chaplaincy with the University for generations to come.

Accompanying me down through the years has been the Humanist Association of Massachusetts, founded in 1978. Its members are free-thinking, socially concerned citizens of the greater Boston area, and from every level of society. They number 150 and along with an associate group of 100 hold their meetings here at Harvard, thus sharing in this learning environment. My best friends are in their ranks.

Working with students has been my greatest satisfaction, and that's particularly evident when I perform the weddings of some. I'm pleased to report that one of the early students is now a lawyer on our Board of Directors. A present student, about to graduate from the Law School, has been a consistent campus leader from his first day as a freshman seven years ago. The picture is not totally perfect, of course. Many come and go; one, for instance, has become a Buddhist priest. But a thriving organization has emerged, the Harvard Secular Society, whose mailing list is in the hundreds. Its present president is a brilliant young woman studying neuroscience. I have learned so much from all of them.

This Chaplaincy has a long life ahead. It will not be weak or timid, nor will it be grandiose or dominating. It will serve the Harvard Community, with a sharing spirit, and always remain true to its roots: the empirical and compassionate ideals of Humanism.

The last thing Cardinal Cushing told me in 1969 as I bid goodbye to the Priesthood was, "Tom, realize they don't love you out there, here they do." That was true only at the beginning. Bertrand Russell, the wisest of Humanists, gave Kindness the highest rank among the virtues. In my experience, in the giving and the taking that is our lives, I would enthusiastically agree. It is present in Humanism.

And if Kindness is first, the Pursuit of Knowledge is a very close second.

Church and State in Australia

By Max Wallace

There is no effective separation of church and state in Australia. This is true for both Federal and State levels of government but for different reasons. The fact there is no real separation is one of Australia's best kept political secrets.

Australia's Federal Constitution dates from 1901, the time of Australia's Federation, when the independent British states of the continent came together to form one sovereign nation. Prior to Federation there was much debate as to how the churches would figure in Australia's government. Section 116 of the Constitution was drafted:

The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth.

It clearly echoes the intention of the First Amendment of the United States, which their Supreme Court has interpreted to mean a separation between church and state. Hence the heated political debate on separation issues in the US, which does not exist in Australia.

Section 116 was not judicially tested until 1912 when the High Court decided that compulsory military training did not invalidate the free exercise of a believer's religion. Not much happened after that until 1943 when the government felt obliged to raid the offices of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Adelaide on the grounds that they were subverting the war effort. The Court agreed that course of action was reasonable under the circumstances but made no direct comment about

the separation of church and state.

In the 1950s, Sir Robert Menzies, Australia's longest serving Prime Minister, saw a political window of opportunity in granting state aid to Catholic schools. The policy was an electoral winner. It caused a backlash from supporters of public education who had to fight for some 25 years for the legal standing to have the constitutionality of state aid tested in the High Court.

But the plaintiffs walked into an ambush. The Court was staffed by six conservative Knights of the Realm. The Chief Justice was the late Sir Garfield Barwick, a former Attorney-General in the conservative Liberal government. There was only one judge who saw the clear relationship between the US First Amendment, its 'wall of separation' between church and state and Section 116: the late Lionel Murphy. The other six took a black letter approach to interpreting Section 116, and, believe it or not, the preposition 'of' played a key role in delineating Section 116 from the First Amendment, thus no separation.

Their Honours concluded that all Section 116 meant was that no Federal Australian government could 'establish' a national religion, as in the British example with its Church of England. This was an odd conclusion since the Australian states had already had a century prior to Federation to establish state religions if they had wanted to. They had not done so. Clearly no Federal government would contemplate such an outrageous act at a national level. The Court's conclusion piously asserted that an absurdity was a possibility.

The Court also argued that funds given to religious

schools were not intended to advance the cause of the religion but merely to further children's education. The results of this 1981 casuistry led to a slowly evolving decline in Federal funding for state schools which became more pronounced in the 1990s. The incremental effects are being played out now across Australia: state teachers have been abandoning the profession in droves because of poor wages, increasing workloads, and large class sizes. Recently the conservative Howard government has been giving further significant increases in grants to private, religiously based schools. Parents who wish to give their children a chance in life are flocking to the better funded schools while state schools are languishing from lack of adequate funding.

This has been a great benefit for Catholic schools especially, who have seen their enrolments increase dramatically while the number of Catholics attending Mass weekly has dipped equally dramatically. (A 1996 Church survey undertaken prior to many revelations of paedophile scandals found only 18% of Catholic Australians attended Mass weekly. A 2003 survey by a Christian research association now finds that figure down to 13%.)

At the state level, the constitutional situation is different but the result the same. All the states have their own constitutions. As noted, theoretically, any Australian state could 'establish' a state religion. It follows that they can also interfere in religious affairs if they so decide. As of February 2004, a member of the South Australian Legislative Council (Upper House) has introduced a Bill to make mandatory the reporting to relevant authorities the confessions of child abuse in confessionals. It is unlikely to be passed.

What is surprising about all this is that you will search in vain to find the above summary in any Australian history or political science university textbook. Church and state as an issue is off the political radar. However, the facts are all there in the religionist legal literature. Equally striking is the fact that the day after the 1981 state aid decision was handed down, none of the newspapers reporting the case were alert enough to realize that church and state separation had been

effectively eliminated.

The Australian Republican Movement fails to argue that Australia should separate church and state within such a Republic. I suggest that is no accident. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church supports the model of an Australian Republic that keeps separation of church and state out of the picture. If the issue of separation were to arise, the question of the generous grants their schools and their charities receive and the tax exemptions that allow them to accumulate untaxed income indefinitely, with no regulation, might arise. Of course the Catholic Church was stung by French separation in 1905 and they are actively working to undermine the constitutional prohibitions that prevent funding to their schools in 37 American states – unlike the case in Australia. As the main player the Catholic Church knows where their interests lie. They understand the threat of Catholic votes helps to keep already compliant Australian political parties stalemated.

For the blindsided secular majority and the media that feeds them, not even the appointment of an Anglican archbishop, Peter Hollingworth, as Governor-General in 2001 was a clue to Australia's non-separation.

Hollingworth's appointment ended after nearly two years of an 8-year term when his previous handling of paedophile scandals became public, and his remarks concerning a 14-year-old girl in a country school who had been sexually abused by an Anglican teacher, revealed more than he intended. He has retired to his entitlement: a huge office on the 21st floor of a Melbourne office block fitted out at a cost of \$234,000, rented for \$85,000 per annum, a secretary, a chauffeur driven car, a salary of \$184,000 and first class air travel, for life. In 2001 he wrote that 'one is consecrated as a bishop for life'. So now he has the best of both worlds. He continues as a living paradigm of the non-separation of church and state in Australia.

Max Wallace is a Canberra academic and a member of the New Zealand Association of Rationalists and Humanists. His book, The Purple Economy: Secular Essays on Culture and Religion, is nearing completion.

India's Hugging Mother

IHEU is reviving a campaign in support of Sreeni Pattathanam, whose book questioning the claims of the 'Hugging Mother' has resulted in his harassment by the authorities of his Indian state (see p. 3). But who is 'Hugging Mother'? Mata Amritanandamayi (*née* Sudhamani) of Kerala, in South India, has acquired the name from her approach of healing people by hugging: in the process of hugging, she apparently passes on to them 'energy'. She is reputed to have hugged and healed some 20 million people across the world as part of her mission. On Fridays, she declares herself to be the goddess Kali, and on many occasions she has claimed to be the god Krishna himself.

The Mata (her assumed name roughly translates as 'mother of immortal joy') has attracted considerable attention in recent years. She was the subject of a television documentary in the 'Weird Weekends' series on BBC television, presented by Louis Theroux. Like the godman Satya Sai Baba, she too has many devotees

in the political world: BJP leaders such as the Prime Minister of India, A.B. Vajpayee, and the Home Minister, L.K. Advani, as well as the Congress Chief Minister of Kerala State, A.K. Antony.

According to the Home Ministry records of the Government of India, the Mata Amritanandamayi Mission is the second largest recipient in India of foreign funds – in 1998-99 alone Rs. 515 million were received (US\$11.5 million). Educational institutions established by the Mata, a primary school drop out, enjoy Deemed University status. Penguin India published her authorized biography, *Amma: A Living Saint*, by Judith Cornell, in which her miracles and her boundless love are highlighted, and the train Amrit Express (Palghat Town – Thiruvananthapuram) is named after her. Small wonder, then, that any efforts to question her claims and activities should meet opposition.

Babu Gogineni

A Secular Society

By Sheila Ayala

Humanists do not rely on any deity for their morals and codes of conduct. Rather, Humanists embrace a non-religious value system that teaches that we alone are responsible for our actions. We have to depend on our own intelligence to find solutions to human problems. We firmly believe in a secular state in which every Canadian child receives a good, sound education under one school system. We are against religious schools of any kind. We maintain that children from different backgrounds studying together will grow up appreciating the differences. They will be our doctors, our teachers, parents, shop assistants, politicians, our neighbours. Instead of spending their formative years segregated from and ignorant of other cultures, children would experience at first hand the great lesson Canada teaches on tolerance.

Humanists are not anti-religious. We understand that religion is a source of comfort for many, and that they put faith in sacred books to govern their lives.

Humanists acknowledge that right. But we do take a stand against religious excesses. We condemn the Pope's stand on birth control, and are very disturbed that the Catholic Church bans condoms, especially in countries where AIDS is prevalent. We also speak out against stoning and the cutting off of hands under Islamic law.

That is why we are critical of Sharia law being introduced into the Canadian legal system. We find it insulting that Muslims are saying that Canadian law is not good enough for them and they want to be guided by their own set of laws. Muslims have said to us that we don't understand Islam. But I put it to them that they don't understand Canada. Canada fosters a climate where freedom of religion and freedom *from* religion are embraced.

Communities are welcome to build their synagogues, churches, temples, and mosques and share in the opportunities that Canada has to offer. They are free to worship a god or gods in their way and without hindrance. Canada allows a wide latitude on religion but it is not absolute. For example, in some religions, a man can have more than one wife. This is not permitted in Canada, so there are limits to religious doctrines, and so there should be.

Islam is all embracing and affects every aspect of a Muslim's life. Muslims themselves recognize it is difficult to embrace Islam in its entirety in a democratic state like Canada. But that is a situation Muslims must accept in choosing to live in Canada rather than Saudi Arabia or Iran.

For the most part, Muslim communities want to live quiet and respectful lives according to their values. No one can fault them for that. But Muslim communities, and non-Muslims, are ignoring to their peril the fact that among them are the political Islamic fundamentalists who do not share the same attitude. When political Islam becomes involved we should take note. Political Islam will push for Sharia arbitration in other provinces, and

they will gradually impact on other areas of society.

France was forced to take a stand on Islam because political Islamists were insisting on banning women teachers from teaching boys, separating boys and girls in schools and insisting that only female doctors can attend women patients. This was forcing Islamic values on a secular state. The same tendency has been growing in Canada too. Carleton University in Ottawa had to close down a pub because of protest from Islamic students. The students also wanted set aside special prayer rooms. We are quite certain that accepting arbitration tribunals will lead to increasing demands by political Islamists in other areas.

While other arbitration tribunals will base their decisions on a fair and reasonable compromise, Muslims will be subject to judgements according to Sharia law. This puts Canadian Muslims at a severe disadvantage to other Canadians. It will create a two tier-system, something Canadians abhor since Canada believes in equal justice for all.

To illustrate this point, consider the following: According to Sharia law, a husband only has to say three times 'I divorce thee' and the couple are divorced. If the husband later regrets his action, it makes no difference. Under Islamic law, they are still divorced. The only way the couple can remarry is if the wife marries someone else (and this marriage must involve sexual relations) and then the second husband divorces the wife. Following the second divorce, the wife can then remarry her first husband. It is perfectly legal in Canada for a woman to divorce her husband, marry someone else, divorce them and marry her first husband again. The Islamic Institute for Civil Justice states that the courts won't accept anything they deem contrary to public policy. But how can the courts judge when it will not be brought to their attention that the wife was forced to marry the second husband?

There are other problems with the Institute's proposal. Muslim women will be pressured to accept Islamic tribunals and their decisions. Although the extreme measures of Sharia law will not be carried out in Canada, implementing Sharia law even in an attenuated form will give it credibility around the world. Further, since Canadian courts will enforce Sharia rulings, this will lead to the disturbing situation of the Canadian courts and police acting as administrators of Sharia law. Sharia law differs between different Islamic sects, so the law will not be applied uniformly. It is only by keeping religion out of the justice system that all Canadians, including Muslims, are ensured that justice is equal for all citizens.

Adapted from speech given by Sheila Ayala, Humanist Association of Canada, in Toronto to organizations of women's rights, March 2004.

Human Rights and Human Wrongs

To pass through the gates at the Palais des Nations in Geneva is to enter a looking-glass world. For six weeks every spring the nations of the world meet in the Human Rights Commission, many apparently with the sole intention of denying or justifying their human rights abuses, and of abusing and defaming their accusers.

Only 53 of the 195 member nations of the UN are full voting members of the Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR). The voting members are selected in rotation to serve for three years. The rest can, and do attend the sessions of the Commission, but as non-voting observers, although all of them can and many do contribute to the debates. IHEU is attending the current 60th Session of the Commission from 15th March until 23rd April 2004. The IHEU team consists of IHEU President, Roy Brown, Tariq Ismail from France, and Younus Shaikh, recently released from prison in Pakistan.

As an international NGO with consultative status at the UN, IHEU has the right to speak at the plenary on up to six agenda items of our choice out of a total of seventeen. Each agenda item takes one or two days to complete. On each item the full members speak first and are allowed six minutes to make their statement. They are followed by the observer states, each of whom may speak for three minutes. Finally, it is the turn of the NGOs who also get just three minutes to make their point. Timing is rigidly enforced. The NGOs frequently raise cases of human rights abuse in their particular country – and very few states are immune from attack. The national delegations concerned are frequently stung to reply, often accusing the NGOs in scathing terms of mendacity or of pursuing some political agenda. But the accusations, once made, are a matter of record, and many of the replies fail to address the issues raised and can be seen as little more than bluster.

The agenda for each year's session of the Commission is planned months in advance but circumstances can arise that throw the best laid plans off track. On 24 March the agenda was hijacked for an emergency debate. In what was surely a matter for the Security Council rather than the UNCHR, a resolution "strongly condemning the continuing violations of human rights being perpetrated by the Israelis on occupied Palestinian territory, and in particular, the assassination on 22 March by the Israelis of Sheikh Yassin", was passed by 31 votes to 2, with 18 abstentions (mostly the European states). Sheikh Yassin was the 'spiritual' leader of Hamas who planned many of the suicide bombings that have killed hundreds of innocent people. His spirituality is no doubt exemplified by the care with which he sent so many to meet their God. It is significant that the Islamic states were supported in the vote by the majority of developing countries, including India and China. In what has become standard practice, these states – which together form a majority in the Human Rights Commission – vote together in mutual support with the result that few of them are ever censured by the Commission however heinous their abuses of human rights.

The Sudan, for example, has escaped condemnation



Delegates prepare for UNCHR meeting, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

for its ethnic cleansing of non-Arab Muslims involving rapes, murder and the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of people from the country. In one small victory, however, some 370 slaves, mostly Christian or traditionalists being held to ransom in the Sudan and threatened with death, were released following an urgent appeal by an NGO at a plenary and the intervention of the Acting High Commissioner, Mr. Bertrand Ramcharan.

In the debate on agenda item 11, Freedom of Religion and Belief, Roy Brown read a statement on apostasy by the writer Ibn Warraq (see box). Encouragingly, an Iraqi delegate thanked IHEU for the statement, as did, more worryingly, a delegate from the Holy See. In the next issue of *IHN* we will report on our other interventions – on women's rights, the rights of the child, and victims of injustice, and on a two-hour panel discussion co-hosted by IHEU on apostasy.

The IHEU statement on apostasy provoked a bitter response from the Pakistani delegation. In exercising their right to reply their spokeswoman told the Commission that the IHEU statement was 'beneath consideration' and she would not dignify it by exercising her right of reply. In exercising what was therefore presumably her right of non-reply, she expressed surprise "that IHEU, instead of promoting humanism, should choose instead to attack a religion, her religion, a religion of peace", joining the current fashion to treat Islam as a target of abuse. "Are delegates unaware that Human Rights were created by Islam?" But her non-reply failed to address the subject of our statement – the fact that apostasy carries the death penalty in many Islamic countries. She did however remind us of the by now highly dubious Koranic assertion that 'there is no compulsion in religion'. Perhaps she should tell that to the family of Muhammad Taha, executed for apostasy in the Sudan in 1985. We would have liked to point out that this statement actually means rather more than that everyone has the right to become a Muslim, but as an NGO we have no right of reply.

The most interesting quarrels during the first weeks were those between nations, and in particular the US *vs* Cuba, US *vs* China, Morocco *vs* Algeria, and Cyprus *vs*

Turkey. Interventions are rarely greeted by laughter or applause, but Cuba – to gasps of astonishment – admitted to a series of human rights abuses on its territory, pointing out only later that they were referring to Guantanamo Bay. Laughter also greeted the Chinese suggestion that since they had five times the population of the United States they should be entitled to five times the level of human right abuse!

A casual observer who saw only the plenary sessions might well be tempted to dismiss the UNCHR as a waste of time. But the real value of the Commission lies not in the political sparring in the plenaries, but in the quiet, detailed work of the special rapporteurs. Two recent reports in particular have left a deep impression: the report by Andreas Mavrommatis on human rights abuses in Iraq under Saddam Hussein, and a study by Abdelfattah Amor, described as ‘the first major, comprehensive study of discrimination against women based on religion and traditions’. At a panel discussion organized by the women’s coalition, the Women’s United Nations Report Program Network (WUNRN), set up to implement the conclusions and recommendations of his report, Mr Amor said “all religions have a problem with women, especially when the interpretation of religion is in the hands of men – and not often enlightened men”. Another speaker, Mrs Yakim Erturk, UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, said, “There is no conflict between freedom of religion and freedom of

women. The conflict is between individual rights and group rights; between the rights of individuals and those who claim to have absolute knowledge of God’s intentions.”

The WUNRN coalition looks set to become an important new initiative. Their web site (www.wunrn.com) contains links to virtually every relevant human rights document, NGO report, and research report on this issue, as well as information about the members of the coalition, currently numbering about 80.

In his report on Iraq, Special Rapporteur Andreas Mavrommatis spoke of eye-witness accounts of mass murders, of hundreds of men and boys being driven handcuffed into bonfires and burned alive, of over 300,000 Kurds being arrested and forcibly expelled to Iran, while thousands of others, young men and boys, were detained in prison for several years before apparently being executed. He called for an urgent programme of criminal investigation, and a programme to identify and secure mass graves and to identify remains. He also urged the Iraqi authorities to ratify the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Punishment, and to ensure that all laws and practices adopted in Iraq are consistent with the country’s international obligations, in particular those under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Statement by IHEU Representative Roy Brown, Friday, 2 April 2004

Commission on Human Rights: 60th Session. (15 March – 23 April 2004)
Civil and Political Rights, including the question of:
Freedom of expression (11c) and Religious intolerance (11c)
 Chair: Mike Smith

I am privileged, as President of the International Humanist and Ethical Union, to read the statement of Ibn Warraq, author of *Why I am not a Muslim* (1996), and editor of *Leaving Islam: Apostates Speak Out* (2003).

In Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism, apostasy is no longer an issue. Nowhere on earth in any state are there legal sanctions if any individual wishes to change from one of those religions; it is a matter of personal choice, and it has become axiomatic that ‘My conscience is my own’.

But in Muslim countries apostasy is far from a dead issue, as is shown by the fairly recent examples of those tried, imprisoned, forced into exile, or executed, in the Sudan, Egypt, Iran, Yemen, Pakistan, and elsewhere.

Despite the oft-quoted Qur’anic plea for toleration, ‘There is no compulsion in religion’, all the major Muslim theologians have concluded that apostasy should be punishable by death. And the absence of any mention of apostasy in the penal codes of some Islamic countries in no way implies that a Muslim is free to leave his religion. In reality, the lacunae in the penal codes are filled by Islamic Law, as in the case of Muhammad Taha, executed for apostasy in the Sudan in 1985.

Islamic Human Rights Schemes are clearly not

universal since they introduce specifically religious criteria into the political sphere. A Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights is an oxymoron. Such a declaration is either Universal *or* it is Islamic. All such Islamic schemes severely restrict and qualify the rights of individuals, particularly of women, non-Muslims, and those such as apostates who do not accept Islamic religious orthodoxy.

In Muslim countries apostasy is usually linked to the related charges of unbelief, blasphemy and heresy. However these charges, whether upheld or not, clearly contravene several articles in the UDHR of 1948, and the legally binding International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights [ICCPR] of 1966 to which 147 states are signatories. Article 18 of the ICCPR is very clear:

General comment No. 22, adopted by the UN Human Rights Commission at its 48th session (1993) declares:

Article 18 protects theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief. The term ‘belief’ and ‘religion’ are to be broadly construed.

We urge the Commission on Human Rights to call on *all* governments to bring their national legislation into conformity with those human rights instruments to which they are party, and to forbid fatwas or sermons preaching violence in the name of God, against those holding unorthodox opinions, or who have left a religion.

Speech on Behalf of IHEU at UNESCO

Jean-Claude Pecker gave the following speech as IHEU Representative at UNESCO in September 2003. Prof. Pecker is a distinguished scientist and a Member of the French Academy of Sciences. Speech translated by Babu Gogineni.

Mr. President,
Mr. Director General,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU – in French *l'Union Internationale Humaniste et Laïque*), was founded in 1952 by Sir Julian Huxley, Director General of UNESCO. Since then, IHEU has ceaselessly participated in the General Conference, supporting UNESCO's ideals, which it shares.

Scientific Humanism, which IHEU has made its own, imposes on us Humanists an obligation with regard to respect for Human Rights, as defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations. This present century is already three years old and unacceptable violations of these rights persist. In parts of the world women are still born to be slaves; elsewhere, children are forced to become prostitutes; in other places young immigrants are forced into quasi-slavery; and in still others societies try to kill so-called blasphemers. Almost everywhere, deadly hunger exists alongside shameless wealth. And yet, an overwhelming majority of our Member States have adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights... Lamentable it is – especially when several of these same member states fight with each other. Their wars are violent; they are conducted with savagery, and do not respect the Geneva Conventions. Death, life-long disability, pain, new resentments, new threats are accumulating in all corners of the planet.

The world situation is disturbing, and it would be difficult not to point out our fears and worries. And it would also be difficult not to articulate our beliefs.

It is notable that very often it is in the name of God that terror and interminable wars and Manichean combats are being waged ... but which God? Each of the

combatants thinks that his God is the true one. Is it reasonable? Either there is only one God; and why then would He side more with one side than with the others? Or there are several of them, all rivals ... What does this concept of God signify ...? It has no meaning ...

Underlying these wars being waged for three millennia in the name of God and history, it is obvious that God is very often but an excuse. We know that hidden behind the excuses are cocaine, petrol, gold, diamonds, opium, cocoa, and such other things. This is still not reassuring, though. Because even if opium, cocoa, diamonds, gold, petrol or cocaine are the real causes of war, millions of foot soldiers participating in war are animated by religious sentiments, one would even say very real, fanatical religious sentiments.

IHEU affirms that religion should remain in the private sphere. We ourselves affirm that belief in an almighty God is not necessary for a Humanist ethics. Quite the contrary. And Humanism, much more than any religion, can become an agent of peace and unification.

We believe that all of us on this planet are together embarked on the same adventure: men and women, white, yellow or black, believers or non-believers. We are all united in a fraternity and comradeship which goes beyond that limited groupism invoked by groups and communities to reinforce their wars against other groups. All wars, all terrors are, for us Humanists, fratricidal.

Just as unbelief in a God is acceptable, so is whichever kind of belief in a God – so long as the liberty of others is not imperilled.

A concern for universal fraternity must be the only defining mark of actions of organizations such as the UN, and of course of UNESCO. It is to this universal fraternity and its necessary condition of complete separation of religion and state that we are appealing today, as an indispensable condition of the peace to which we aspire.

Thank you for your attention.

Jean-Claude Pecker

Values Caucus Celebrates 10th Anniversary

The Values Caucus, part of the United Religious Initiative at the UN, met on 12 February to celebrate its 10th anniversary, with two speakers on the Ethical and Spiritual Dimension of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Alfredo Sfeir-Younis is Senior Adviser to the Office of the Managing Director of the World Bank. He spoke of the need to resist a materialistic worldview which accepts the existence of poverty and suffering as normal. A change of consciousness is needed, which means taking responsibility so that the necessary efforts can be made.

Carol Zinn is UN Representative for the Congregation of Saint Joseph, an international network of Catholic women working on development issues. She asked the audience to consider 100 people, 94 of whom live on the side of a hill, while the other 6 live in a glass house on

the top of the hill, and own the land and resources of the rest. Much of the money they spend is on guns to protect them from the 94. Our task, Zinn said, is “to hold up a mirror to the glass house”. A sharp comment came from the audience: the task is to comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable.

The ensuing discussion focused on the unabated deterioration of many countries in spite of the MDGs. Yet there were clear signs of progress too in parts of the world. Perhaps the argument to address to the 6 living heavily armed in their glass house is long-term self interest – change your thinking so that if not you, then your children may benefit.

*Sylvain and Phyllis Ehrenfeld
IHEU Representatives to the UN and AEU's National
Service Conference*

The Passing of a Humanist Colossus

With the death of Justice V. M. Tarkunde at the age of 95, a life full of rich achievement and active commitment to Humanism has passed into history. Known as the father of the modern human rights movement in India, Tarkunde was a close associate of the revolutionary and Humanist philosopher M.N. Roy and played a crucial role in India's independence struggle. He was synonymous with the Humanist movement in the Indian subcontinent.



V. M. Tarkunde

After taking a degree in the agricultural sciences, Tarkunde trained as a lawyer, and became a judge of Bombay High Court, earning a reputation for brilliance. But in 1969, he resigned in order to devote himself fully to human rights activism, and the Humanist movement.

Widely admired for his clear exposition of issues through speeches and editorials in the *Radical Humanist*, and for his fearless defence of the oppressed in the subcontinent which is home to one-fifth of humanity and where deprivation and state-sponsored human rights violations are rampant, Tarkunde rendered unmatched services to the cause of human freedom and welfare. He was President of the Indian Radical Humanist Association, Chairman of the Indian Renaissance Institute, and Working President of the People's Union for Civil Liberties and of Citizens for Democracy. Throughout his life, he campaigned for harmony between India's Hindus and Muslims, and promoted contacts at the individual level between people in India and Pakistan.

IHEU recognized Tarkunde's courageous opposition to Indira Gandhi's oppressive dictatorship in India by awarding him its highest honour, The International Humanist Award, which found pride of place in his study along with the Indian nation's high civic honour of *Padma Bhushan*. Tarkunde was President of IHEU's India Congress and a keynote speaker at many IHEU World Humanist Congresses. His book, *Radical Humanism: Philosophy of Freedom and Democracy*, has become essential reading in Humanist circles.

Tarkunde was the member secretary of the Committee of Radical Humanists who proposed the widely circulated and quoted People's Plan II as a new model of development for India. The reports of the various Tarkunde Committees on the problem of Kashmir, on the terrorist problems in Punjab, and on electoral reform, have been a source of inspiration for NGOs and human rights activists. The National Human Rights Commission and State Human Rights Commissions, which are constitutional bodies, owe their establishment to the public pressure created by Tarkunde and his colleagues.

When a team of IHEU leaders visited him in Delhi in January 2004, a lucid Justice Tarkunde reiterated his resolve to help create a viable people's movement to oppose the communal BJP (currently heading the coalition in the Central government) which he declared a decade and a half ago to be his 'public enemy number one'. Tarkunde's last battle was against the fast-growing Hindu right.

A man of immense personal generosity, honesty and integrity, Tarkunde's loss is a personal loss to the many Humanist leaders from various countries who visited him and sought guidance on international affairs. IHEU salutes the life of a giant – a legal luminary, an advocate of democracy, and a defender of human freedoms.

Babu Gogineni

Harvard Humanist Chaplain

The Board of Directors of the Humanist Chaplaincy at Harvard Inc. is seeking an Assistant Chaplain, part-time. The successful candidate will:

- be dedicated to the philosophy of Humanism and be skilled at imparting it both in theory and practice;
- have experience working with young adults and a familiarity with academic life.

As the Assistant Chaplain, he or she will advise humanist students and the Harvard Secular Society, a student group. He or she will also assist the Chaplain in arranging programs, lectures, and seminars.

The annual salary range is \$15–20,000. The position may lead in due course to assuming the post of Humanist Chaplain at Harvard University.

Please send covering letter and resumé to the Humanist Chaplaincy at Harvard, P.O. Box 381125, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 02238.

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