

EUROPEAN HUMANIST FEDERATION

HATE LANGUAGE

The EHF wishes to call your attention on the fact that hate crimes are always preceded by hate language which, in its turn, precedes and feeds prejudice and stereotypes. We all have in mind the sad example of the plight suffered by the Jews in Europe. The widespread use of hate language and stereotypes have justified centuries of persecution and made the holocaust possible.

We believe that the smear campaign that has been going on for over 20 centuries against atheists and agnostics in Western Europe is being grossly underestimated. Here are a few instances, starting with the Bible that is still being widely read nowadays:

- *Cursed is the man who trusts in man*, Holy Bible, Jeremiah 17
- (Atheism is a)... *pestilent disease*, Pius VI, Encyclical *Inscrutabile divinae*, 1775
- *Atheism, therefore, is not a liberating force, but a catastrophic one*. Paul VI, Encyclical *Ecclesiam suam*, 1964
- *The atheistic solution...deprives man of one of his basic dimensions, namely the spiritual one*, John Paul II, Encyclical *Centesimus annus*, 1991
- *Where God disappears man does not become any greater but loses his dignity, he becomes the fruit of a blind evolution and for this he can be used and abused. If God is missing the contrasts become irreconcilable*. Pope Benedict, August 2005
- *Agnosticism...can equally express indifferentism, a flight from the ultimate question of existence and a sluggish moral conscience. Agnosticism is all too often equivalent to practical atheism*. 2127, Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1997.

This is all the more serious as in some countries Catholic religion is taught in state schools; this is the case in Italy where, to top it all, religion teachers are vetted by their diocese although their salary is paid out of public funds.

The following are the sort of stereotypes of atheists and agnostics that are circulating in Italy:

- *I met the rich atheist and the poor atheist: I wanted to dialogue with both of them, but they were incapable of any logical reasoning: they stank of wine and drugs*. *Il Calendario del Frate Indovino 2002*, Franciscan Monks Publishers (6 million copies sold).
- *Atheists who do not believe in the next life are content with overeating and overdrinking in this one*. Don Daniele in the the Parish Gazette of Buja (Udine).

At the High-level Conference held in Bucharest last June the following recommendation was submitted:

We encourage the participating States to seek to enable citizens and groups to challenge prejudices, stereotypes, denigration and hate speech expressed against all persons and communities, whatever their religion and deeply held ethical beliefs. In this context, particular attention should be paid to the media, the public discourse of political and social leaders as well as state officials, and public training and educational programmes.

The European Humanist Federation recommends that OSCE/ODIHR should devote particular attention to the discourse of religious leaders as well.

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