

Christian Bigotry, Intolerance and the Sources of Morality

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

My girlfriend has an excessively religious Christian friend that believes atheists are nasty, evil people destined for Hell. And why wouldn't that wonderful Christian believe this prejudiced nonsense? After all, the Bible contains passages promoting this idea. For example, Psalm 14 reads, "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good." Christians that have been indoctrinated to believe that everything in the Bible must be true, and that have a holier-than-thou mindset, are going to believe this mindless drivel. They are even more likely to believe this if they are unable to comprehend the simple common logical fallacy known as begging the question. That is to say, if one believes the Bible is the Word of God, she cannot prove it by referring to the Bible itself. She needs sources *outside* the Bible, such as reputable historians, expert, trustworthy non-Christian eyewitnesses, etc.

Some Christians have made progress and become more inclusive with their religion. They now believe that people from other theistic religions can also get to Heaven. More enlightened Christians go even farther and maintain that even atheists can get to Heaven if they lead ethical lives.

Many White Christians had maintained that Africans, Native Americans and others had no moral foundation without Christianity. This mindset led to colonization, enslavement and genocide in the name of God. Like my girlfriend's Christian friend, these self-righteous Christians saw themselves as "truly blessed and highly favored" by God. They believed this and at the same time quoted the Bible to assert that God loves everyone *equally*!

It is sad that so many African Americans disrespect their ancestors by buying into this insulting take on Christian morality. Africans had high ethical systems in ancient Egypt and beyond. South Africans had a secular ethical system, as did the Akan of Ghana. (Kwasi Wiredu, a philosopher who hails from Ghana, has written on "Morality and Religion in Akan Thought" in an article reprinted in my first book *African-American Humanism: An Anthology*.)

Many Christians are quick to point out the fact that Martin Luther King and other Christians were major leaders in the Civil Rights Movement (that came about in response to Jim Crow and the legacy of slavery that resulted from White Christianity.) However, there were many Black and White humanists that were also involved in the movement. They included A. Philip Randolph, the “grandfather” of the movement, James Farmer, James Forman, Lorraine Hansberry, James Baldwin, Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner and numerous others. Moreover, King thanked the “thousands” of humanists that were involved in the movement, and he said that it was better to be a committed humanist than a non-committed Christian.

With the rise of Donald Trump, it is plain to see that the Religious Right is morally bankrupt. Yet they continue to speak as if they have the moral high ground and that they must lead the fight against the forces of Satan (that is to say, liberals and liberal ideas.) In their moral certitude, they are being increasingly separated from even the semblance of moral respectability.

Someone once said that “when fanaticism gets inside you, nothing else can.” Know-it-all Christian fanatics compare the best of Christianity to the worst of atheism. And who do you think comes out on top in that comparison? However, trying to reason with a fanatic is hopeless.

If Christianity is so absolutely necessary for goodness, why are secular nations in Europe and other parts of the world doing so well? Religion seems on the way out in nations such as Norway and Sweden, but those countries are leaders in happiness and quality of life. That also raises the question as to why life is bleak for so many people in America’s Bible Belt (poverty, obesity, crime, and so on.)

For the umpteenth time I am forced to discuss where atheists get their morals. I prefer a “harm-based” system. That is to say, if an action is harmful to innocent people, it is bad. If it is helpful, it is good. Murder, rape, burglary, and theft are wrong regardless of what any God has to say. They have empirically verifiable harmful effects upon innocent human beings. We have a social contract and we must all be bound by the same laws. Conversely, mercy, justice, generosity, empathy, and compassion are good because they have empirically verifiable *benefits* to individuals and society, regardless of what any God might have to say. God is superfluous, unnecessary for determining how we ought to live.

There also appears to be a biological basis for morality. Morality helps us to survive as a species. Moreover, there is evidence of morality among other animal species. There is evidence of other animals sharing, caring, risking their lives for others, etc. And there is obviously no animal god commanding them to be good.

The religious notion that atheists are immoral leads to discrimination, persecution and death for atheists, especially in nations such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. This anti-atheist bigotry must be combatted relentlessly. People from all backgrounds must take a principled stand on this issue.

Unlike my girlfriend's religious friend, I have traveled all over the world and met thousands of good atheists. And this is what it's all about. Rather than believing everything they read in the Bible, Christians need to actually meet and speak with atheists to see what we're really about.

It is unlikely that anything I have written will change my girlfriend's religious friend's mind. However, rather than literally demonizing atheists, blissfully ignorant Christians should do more to improve their own religions and learn how to set much better moral examples for their fellow human beings.