Why Doesn't *Widespread* Christian Hypocrisy Lead to More Doubt?

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

Christianity is a religion that is ideally suited for hypocrisy. – Gore Vidal

There have always been Christian hypocrites. But they used to be in the minority and easy to write off. I am not writing about Christians that, like all of us, are fallible. I am talking about those that, for the most part, talk the talk but cannot walk the walk. The great writer and debater Melvin B. Tolson used to refer to them as "mouth Christians." (For great examples of Tolson's writings, see my first book *African-American Humanism: An Anthology*, pp. 122-145.)

It is easy to now look at the Religious Right and see hypocrisy of the lowest sort. The die-hard supporters of President Donald Trump excuse the most despicable, un-Christian behavior one can imagine. (Interestingly, their Christian behavior is even worse – bigotry, sexism, intolerance, and so on.) The best, most influential White evangelical *leaders* are supporting Trump. Black Christians are shocked and appalled by this hypocrisy.

But perhaps they should not be too shocked. They are every bit as hypocritical as their White Christian counterparts – only in different ways. For example, Black Christians have just helped Snoop Dogg go to number one on the g*ospel* charts! The hardcore foul-mouthed gangsta rapper has glorified violence, the use of guns, illicit drug use, drunk driving, misogyny, pimping and all kinds of other lowdown behavior. Yet even some established gospel artists have supported his latest musical release. Snoop now has gospel street cred.

White evangelicals have made it clear that they their real God is political power, or at least close proximity to it. Many young Black Christians have demonstrated that their real God is hip-hop culture. "Satan is winning the battle for souls."

There are some Christian sects in which most serious adherents are not hypocrites. They include the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (aka the Mormons.) Most serious members of such sects attempt to follow the dictates of their religion on a consistent basis.

Conversely, most US Catholics seem to be completely out of step with their Church on numerous moral and social issues. They believe in using birth control, for example. They get divorced and remarried in droves and think nothing of it. In fact, they differ with the Church on so many issues it often seems as though they are not Catholics at all.

Today's mainstream Christians engage in all kinds of un-Christian behavior. They drink to excess, use illicit drugs, engage in premarital and extramarital sex, make and have children out of wedlock, and so on. Yet, in many cases, their church attendance is exceptional, and many of them know their Bible very well. And they are absolutely certain that they are going to Heaven after they die.

Some hypocritical Christians are so pious that they have tattoos of biblical passages on their bodies, even though tattoos are condemned in Leviticus 19:28. Many of today's Christians are so confused I would hardly be surprised to find one with a tattoo with the words from Leviticus 19:28!

Back in the day, elderly people hoping to get into Heaven soon used to strive their best to live good Christian lives. However, today, many elderly mainstream born-again Christians are hard drinkers, curse a lot, engage in extramarital sex, and so forth.

If I were still a born-again Christian, I would have some serious doubts about the Christian faith. Anytime the *majority* of serious practitioners of your faith are hypocrites, something just might be wrong with the faith itself. Perhaps it is outdated. Perhaps its expectations of human beings are hopelessly unrealistic.

Theism is primarily based on faith, not evidence. As the late Christopher Hitchens remarked, "it's called faith because it isn't evidence." Because there are so many hypocrites in the Christian faith, perhaps it is time to give reason a chance. Perhaps it is even time to cast doubt on theism altogether. (Indeed, could it be that many of the hypocritical Christian *ministers* are closet atheists that know that it is all a religious sham?)

If the majority of serious, self-professed humanists were not even trying to live up to their ideals, I could not help but to suspect that something might be wrong with humanism itself. However, such does not appear to be the case. It is not my

contention that humanists are morally superior to Christians. Rather, I maintain that humanists seem to more seriously believe what they profess, and that they strive to live out their beliefs. Regardless of what one thinks of humanist ethics, most serious, self-professed humanists strive to live up to most of their ethical principles. I just wish that more mainstream born-again Christians would once again strive to do the same. Those that don't should certainly begin to doubt the relevance of their faith, and perhaps they should doubt the very existence of God.