

CHRISTIANITY and ATHEISM

7. Un-Christian Actions

Introduction

Many critics of Christianity support their rejection of the faith by pointing out examples of Christian hypocrisy. James A. Haught, in his book *Holy Horrors*, shares this vivid account of one of the crusades:

In the Rhine valley of Germany, a throng of crusaders followed a goose they thought had been enchanted to be their leader. This group joined the army of Emich of Leisingen, a leader who said a cross miraculously appeared on his chest as a holy sign. Emich's group decided that, before marching 2,000 miles to kill God's enemies in Israel, their first religious duty was "to slay the infidels among us," the Jews of Mainz, Worms, and other German cities. They swept in unstoppable waves through Jewish quarters, chopping and burning thousands of defenseless men, women and children. Many Jews, trapped and doomed in barricaded quarters, tearfully killed their children and themselves before the mob broke in. (p. 20)



The list of past Christian abuses is long and varied: Crusades, Inquisition, Anti-semitism, Missionary Exploitation, Salem Witch Trials, etc. How do Christians respond when these abuses are cited?

Development of the Argument

Two Aspects - On the one hand people point to large-scale examples of Christian abuse. Others may point to their own personal experience with abusive Christians. Either way atheists have in this argument an emotional case that can be difficult for Christians to defend.

Logical Response

Root Causes - One response to these criticisms is to ask, "Were the people who committed these crimes true Christians and/or were they acting according to Christian principles?" In most cases we could successfully defend a negative answer.



Hypocrisy, A Universal Problem – Any noble endeavor will eventually suffer from the problem of hypocrisy. Do the past abuses of slavery, exploitation of native Americans, or the incarceration of Japanese during World War II call us to forsake the ideals of our constitution?

However, perhaps the most important question to ask is "Will such a defense do any good?" The only fact that seems to matter to the atheist is that these crimes occurred, and they were associated with Christians.

Biblical Response

1. Should Christians Apologize for the Hypocrisy or Inconsistency of Their Forebears?

Pope John Paul II apologized for the excesses of the Inquisition and Crusades.

It is important to condemn the past errors, but should we apologize for the sins of others?

2. The Scriptures Address Hypocrisy - Both the prophets and Jesus reprove hypocrisy and misguided zeal.

Ezekiel 34:2 ² "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?"



Matthew 23:27-28 ²⁷ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ "Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

John 18:10-11 ¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. ¹¹ So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?"

3. Condemning Past and Present Errors – One of the most important things we can do is to expose and condemn abuses of anykind. The way we deal with our internal sins speaks volumes to those on the outside.

In 1983 the LCMS adopted a resolution which said *we deplore and disassociate ourselves from Luther's negative statements about the Jewish people, and, by the same token, we deplore the use today of such sentiments by Luther to incite anti-Christian and/or anti-Lutheran sentiment.*

4. Church Discipline – A Tool of Evangelism? Concealing sin only creates distrust and disgust for those who observe us. Although we know it is impossible to avoid the problem of sin, we must...

- A. Address the spiritual welfare of each soul with the Law and Gospel. But also...
- B. Recognize that the behavior of Christian leaders and Christians in general is an important witness.



1 Timothy 3:7 ⁷ Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 ¹¹ that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, ¹² that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.

- C. Therefore a Christian may need to step down from a position of leadership if their actions (even though forgiven) create an offense to those on the outside.