

CHRISTIANITY and ATHEISM

1. Christianity and All Religion Is “Wish-Fulfillment”

Introduction

Many Christians are being confronted with the challenge of atheism. Young people attending college are routinely instructed in the tenets of atheism. Television documentaries and radio talk shows feature proponents of the atheistic world view. In this class we will examine many of the arguments proposed by atheists. Our purpose is to: 1. Try to understand the concerns with which they struggle; 2. Expose the errors of their thinking; and 3. Offer Biblical explanations to the questions that they raise.



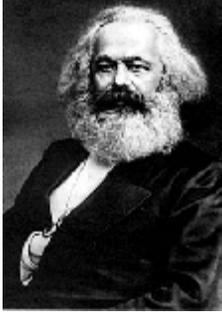
We shall tell ourselves that it would be very nice if there were a God who created the world and was a benevolent Providence, and if there were a moral order in the universe and an afterlife; but it is a very striking fact that all this is exactly as we are bound to wish it to be. And it would be more remarkable still if our wretched, ignorant, and down-trodden ancestors had succeeded in solving all these difficult riddles of the universe.

Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (1927)

1. The personalities behind the argument:

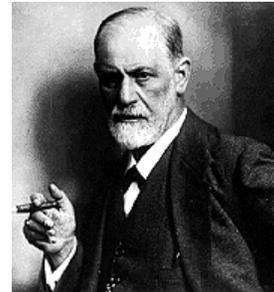
Ludwig Feuerbach – Born in 1804 at the time when Europeans were throwing off old structures of power. He first studied theology and then philosophy. He married into wealth, and that permitted him write. His idea that man invented God was a little ahead of his time. He had a great affect in the intellectual world, and his ideas only waited for those who could make them popular.





Karl Marx – Marx believed that everything in life was determined by our material circumstances. He took Feuerbach's ideas and asserted that religion comes into being because of sorrow and injustice. "It is the *opium* of the people." He asserted that when man's social conditions change, religion will disappear.

Sigmund Freud – Born to an older father and much younger mother, Freud had a "love/hate" experience with religion. His father was an orthodox Jew. But he was taken to Catholic services by his nurse. Although he intensely attacked religion there is a lot of evidence of the influence of religion in his life (especially in his letters). Freud took Feuerbach's ideas and explained that religion is something man imagines because of our relationship to our fathers. Just as children fear and love their fathers, so as adults they need a "super father" to fear and love. Freud believed that religion was psychopathic and dangerous.



2. The basic elements of the argument:

- A. Humanity invented the idea of God as a consolation and a distraction from the sorrow of the world.
- B. The idea of God grows out of the "fear / love" relationship with our fathers.

3. The logical fallacies of the argument:

- A. Marx's ideas have failed. The religion did not die when social structures were changed to provide for man's basic material needs.
- B. Freud's argument is a two-edged sword. On the one hand we love our fathers. On the other we hate them. Such feelings should produce either belief in God *or* *unbelief*. Therefore if Freud's analysis is correct why do we observe a universal need for *belief*?

- C. Freud's idea that religion is dangerous to health and well-being is fully discredited by many studies that have shown religion to be very helpful to the physical and psychological well-being of humans.
- D. Christians, in particular, do not confess a God that they would wish to have. He is not just a "father" figure. The religion is full of paradoxes that man despises such as the Trinity, justification by grace alone, the death and resurrection of Jesus.

4. Biblical responses to the argument:

Psalm 14.1 *The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."*

Psalm 10.4 *The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts.*

Romans 1.28 *And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting.*

In His Word God shows us that He is deeply aware of what it is the heart of man. God's Word shows us that in the fall of Adam and Eve there is a desire to supplant God or at least to live without Him.

Atheism is driven by a strong desire to avoid the reality of God. Freud, in particular, thought often about God and religious matters. He quoted often from the Bible in his letters. C.S. Lewis says that when he was an atheist he had to work hard to avoid God. He considered God to be a great "interference." In many ways atheism is man's desire to be God, or, as in the case of Adam and Eve, "to be like God."