

Background to Modern Theology

Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach

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1. Some New Age beliefs talk about the god we find in ourselves. They encourage people to discover the god or goddess within. It appears that the god they seek is actually the ideal of what we could be at our best. This belief has been indirectly drawn from the East, but also from a German theologian called Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach.

2. In 1963, the English Bishop, John Robinson wrote 'Honest to God' which sold over 1 million copies. It tried to commend the Christian faith to modern man by reinterpreting the gospel away from its traditional form. This bishop openly questioned the faith and expressed his major doubts about God. How can a bishop not believe, yet stay a bishop? Part of that answer comes from the work of Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach.

3. To the psychologist Sigmund Freud religion was '*the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity.*' As we struggle with conflicting views of wanting yet not wanting to do something, our mind tries to repress those feelings by projecting or exteriorising the human father into God. He claimed our brains cope with our own inner tensions by a conjectured device called God. He drew this idea from Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach.

4. The prophet of communism, Karl Marx, stated that all ideology should be drawn from the material realm, not the spiritual realm. He drew on Feuerbach's ideas of life, and then pushed them further into economics.

In religion, medicine and economics, Feuerbach has had a major influence, yet he often remains unknown. Who was he? What did he say about God to impact the 20th century?

Feuerbach was born in 1804 and died in 1872. He studied philosophy in Berlin and in 1824 taught philosophy at Erlangen. However, he quit teaching, convinced he was a failure. He remained a philosopher, but engaged in nothing but theology (the study of God). He wrote three books. 1841 The Essence of Christianity. 1843

The Philosophy of the Future. 1853 The Essence of Religion. The books were not very popular with the public, but they were devoured by academics.

Feuerbach did not believe in a personal God who was a self-existing ultimate Being in heaven. He strongly felt the need and desire for a god, so he called himself an anti-theist, not an atheist. He claimed that people need a god, in order for them to be sure that they exist. He claimed that early societies develop gods which focus on what that society think are the most important human characteristics. In 1841 he wrote '*The knowledge of God (is) nothing else than a knowledge of man!*'

He claimed we project the images of what we want to aspire to, and make them our gods. Therefore the study of God (theology) is really the study of humanity (anthropology). As you discover a people's gods, you discover more about their ideals and hopes, not, he claimed, because the god revealed it, but rather because the society projected that ideal into their god.

For instance, the Norse god Odin was the god of war. He was a god of war because the vikings aspired to be warriors.

Greek gods were strong and beautiful, because he claimed, these qualities were most important for the Greeks.

Christians wanted honesty, mercy, justice and integrity. Therefore their god reflected these aspects of humanity.

Feuerbach also claimed that as a society matured, philosophers replaced gods with ideals. Yet the gods are necessary because, to him, gods are the aspirations of humanity.

He could talk about God being out there, but what he meant by that was that God is the symbol of what Mankind should be. Jesus can be called God, simply because Jesus fulfilled what Mankind aspires to be.

If he came to church here, he could say '*Yes I*

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believe in God. Yes I believe Jesus is divine. Yes I believe in the HS.'

But he would not believe what 2000 years of Christians have accepted as truth. His statements actually meant: *'I believe in the potential of Mankind. I believe Jesus matched that potential. I believe that mankind is groaning to aspire to climb to a better position than what we are in now.'*

It is no wonder that Christians called him an atheist, for he did away with the true God, but kept the language. He reinterpreted the language into a true humanism.

This opened the tiger's cage and let Marx, Freud and others in.

Feuerbach himself knew that many types of atheism led to human despair as hope was destroyed. However he claimed that his views should not cause despair. Instead if people truly understood, they would be encouraged in the potential of mankind. He thought that a god directing humans was very belittling to humans. Instead of a heavenly intelligence giving purpose and intelligence to nature, he claimed that intelligence sprang from nature. In Essence of Christianity, he wrote *'Consciousness develops itself only out of nature'*. It is a testimony to the nobility of humanity. We are the pinnacle of nature.

We create gods to be the aspirations of what we could become.

It was a very triumphalistic view which reflected the growing triumphalism in the church. More and more Christians believed that the world was getting better. Traditional Christians thought that as the world became more Christian, Jesus would then return. It was a time when the world was like an Amway convention. Everyone talked up the power of the positive. It only took the devastation of World War 1 to shatter these widespread views.

However, Feuerbach helped to transform our world from a predominantly God-centred world,

to atheism being very widespread. By using the same terms, he gutted their meaning.

Yet there is a lot of wisdom in his views. For how do we explain the wide ranging views of gods and goddesses? We can say that the devil has misled people, which is also true. But maybe part of the process that the devil used was to encourage people to project their ideals into divine beings. The Bible affirms this in Romans 1:21-23 and 25.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen.

Feuerbach began by believing there is no heavenly being called God, and then re-interpreted all religion into positive thinking and wishful desires with a projected ideal called 'god'. Professing to be wise, he exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and encouraged generations to follow suit.

Do not exchange the true God for a lie. Stay firm in God.