



Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism

Paul C. Vitz

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In this updated, expanded edition, starting with Freud's "projection theory" of religion - that belief in God is merely a product of man's desire for security - Professor Vitz argues that psychoanalysis actually provides a more satisfying explanation for atheism. Disappointment in one's earthly father, whether through death, absence, or mistreatment, frequently leads to a rejection of God.

A biographical survey of influential atheists of the past four centuries shows that this "defective father hypothesis" provides a consistent explanation of the "intense atheism" of these thinkers. A survey of the leading defenders of Christianity over the same period confirms the hypothesis, finding few defective fathers. Vitz concludes with an intriguing comparison of male and female atheists and a consideration of other psychological factors that can contribute to atheism.

Professor Vitz does not argue that atheism is psychologically determined. Each man, whatever his experiences, ultimately chooses to accept God or reject him. Yet the cavalier attribution of religious faith to irrational, psychological needs is so prevalent that an exposition of the psychological factors predisposing one to atheism is necessary.

Vitz offers a radical new thesis about the psychological origins of atheism. By studying the lives of numerous famous atheists, from the old atheists Nietzsche, Sartre, and Freud to the new atheists Hitchens, Dawkins, and Dennet, Vitz discovers a startling common pattern: atheism arises in people with dead, absent, or abusive fathers. By contrast, prominent defenders of religious belief-including Blaise Pascal, John Henry Newman, and G.K. Chesterton-were blessed with attentive, loving and caring fathers. Vitz's provocative book raises important questions about psychology, religious belief, and the importance of fathers.

- **Christopher Kaczor**, Author, *The Seven Big Myths about the Catholic Church*

Quite simply, Paul Vitz's *Faith of the Fatherless* is a minor classic, a book that should be on the short list of all those who want to understand, in the deepest terms, the ill effects caused by the failures of fatherhood. *Faith of the Fatherless* should function as a gateway book to research in all fields examining our current, highly-secularized culture, a culture marked deeply by both unbelief and hostility toward the family and especially fatherhood.

- **Benjamin Wiker**, Author, *Architects of the Culture of Death*

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Harry Barnes:

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