

# Freudian Slip

## His “True Enemy”

In 1937, shortly before World War II, a Jewish doctor had a colleague who urged him to flee Austria for fear of Nazi oppression. The doctor replied that his “true enemy” was not the Nazis but “religion,” the Christian church. What inspired such hatred of Christianity in this scientist?[\[1\]](#)

His father Jakob read the Talmud and celebrated Jewish festivals. The young boy developed a fond affection for his Hebrew Bible teacher and later said that the Bible story had “an enduring effect” on his life. A beloved nanny took him to church as a child. He came home telling even his Jewish parents about “God Almighty”. But eventually the nanny was accused of theft and dismissed. He later blamed her for many of his difficulties, and launched his private practice on Easter Sunday as (some suggest) an “act of defiance.”

Anti-Semitism hounded the lad at school. Around age twelve, he was horrified to learn of his father’s youthful acquiescence to Gentile bigotry. “Jew! Get off the pavement!” a so-called “Christian” had shouted to the young Jakob after knocking his cap into the mud. The son learned to his chagrin that his dad had complied.

In secondary school, he abandoned Judaism for secular science and humanism. At the University of Vienna, he studied the atheist philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach and carried his atheism into his career as a psychiatrist. Religion for him was simply a “wish fulfillment,” a fairy tale invented by humans to satisfy their needy souls.

This psychiatrist was Sigmund Freud. He became perhaps the most influential psychiatrist of history, affecting medicine, literature, language, religion and culture. Obsessed with what

he called the “painful riddle of death,” he once said he thought of it daily throughout life. His favorite grandson’s death brought great grief: “Everything has lost its meaning to me...” he wrote. “I can find no joy in life.” He called himself a “godless Jew.” In 1939, he slipped into eternity, a willful overdose of morphine assuaging his cancer’s pain.

What factors might have influenced Freud’s reaction to Christianity? Have you ever been discouraged about life or angry with God because of a major disappointment or the way a Christian has treated you? In the next section, we’ll consider Freud’s encounter with bigotry.

## **Anti-Semitism**

Have you ever observed a Christian acting in un-Christlike ways? How did you feel? Disappointed? Embarrassed? Disgusted? Maybe you can identify with Sigmund Freud.

When Freud was about ten or twelve, his father Jakob told him that during his own youth, a “Christian” had knocked Jakob’s cap into the mud and shouted “Jew! Get off the pavement!” Jakob had simply picked up his cap. Little Sigmund found his father’s acquiescence to Gentile bigotry unheroic. Hannibal, the Semitic general who fought ancient Rome, became Sigmund’s hero. Hannibal’s conflict with Rome came to symbolize for Freud the Jewish-Roman Catholic conflict.[\[2\]](#)

In his twenties, Freud wrote of an ugly anti-Semitic incident on a train. When Freud opened a window for some fresh air, other passengers shouted for him to shut it. (The open window was on the windy side of the car.) He said he was willing to shut it provided another window opposite was opened. In the ensuing negotiations, someone shouted, “He’s a dirty Jew!” At that point, his first opponent announced to Freud, “We Christians consider other people, you’d better think less of your precious self.”

Freud asked one opponent to keep his vapid criticisms to himself and another to step forward and take his medicine. “I was quite prepared to kill him,” Freud wrote, “but he did not step up...{3}

Sigmund’s son Martin Freud recalled an incident from his own youth that deeply impressed Martin. During a summer holiday, the Freuds encountered some bigots: about ten men who carried sticks and umbrellas, shouted “anti-Semitic abuse,” and apparently attempted to block Sigmund’s way along a road. Ordering Martin to stay back, Sigmund “without the slightest hesitation ... keeping to the middle of the road, marched towards the hostile crowd.” Martin continues that his “...father, swinging his stick, charged the hostile crowd, which gave way before him and promptly dispersed, allowing him free passage. This was the last we saw of these unpleasant strangers.” Perhaps Sigmund wanted his sons to see their father boldly confronting bigotry rather than cowering before it, as he felt his own father had done.{4}

Jews in Freud’s Austria suffered great abuse from so-called Christians. No wonder he was turned off toward the Christian faith. How might disappointment and loss have contributed to Freud’s anti-Christian stance?

## **Suffering’s Distress**

Have you ever been abandoned, lost a loved one, or endured illness and wondered, “Where is God?” Perhaps you can relate to Freud.

Earlier, I spoke about Freud’s Catholic nanny whom he loved dearly, who was accused of theft and was dismissed. As an adult, Freud blamed this nanny for many of his own psychological problems.{5} The sudden departure—for alleged theft—of a trusted Christian caregiver could have left the child with abandonment fears{6} and the adult Freud with disdain for the nanny’s faith. Freud wrote, “We naturally feel

hurt that a just God and a kindly providence do not protect us better from such influences [fate] during the most defenseless period of our lives.”{7}

Freud’s daughter, Sophie, died suddenly after a short illness. Writing to console her widower, Freud wrote: “...it was a senseless, brutal stroke of fate that took our Sophie from us . . . we are . . . mere playthings for the higher powers.”{8}

A beloved grandson died at age four, leaving Freud depressed and grief stricken. “Fundamentally everything has lost its meaning for me,” he admitted shortly before the child died.{9}

Freud’s many health problems included a sixteen-year bout with cancer of the jaw. In 1939, as the cancer brought death closer, he wrote, “my world is . . . a small island of pain floating on an ocean of indifference.”{10} Eventually a gangrenous hole in his cheek emitted a putrid odor that repulsed his beloved dog but attracted the flies.{11}

Like many, Freud could not reconcile human suffering with a benevolent God. In a 1933 lecture, he asserted:

*It seems not to be the case that there’s a power in the universe which watches over the well-being of individuals with parental care and brings all their affairs to a happy ending. On the contrary, . . . Obscure, unfeeling, unloving powers determine our fate.*{12}

Freud’s suffering left him feeling deeply wounded. Could that be one reason he concluded that a benevolent God does not exist? Do you know people whose pain has made them mad at God, or has convinced them He doesn’t exist? Intellectual doubt often has biographical roots.

## **Spiritual Confusion**

Hypocritical Christians angered Sigmund Freud. The deaths of

his loved ones and his own cancer brought him great distress. His loss and suffering seemed incompatible with the idea of a loving God. So what did he think the main message of the Christian faith was?

In the book, *The Future of An Illusion*, his major diatribe against religion, Freud outlined his understanding of Christianity. He felt it spoke of humans having a “higher purpose”; a higher intelligence ordering life “for the best”; death not as “extinction” but the start of “a new kind of existence”; and a “supreme court of justice” that would reward good and punish evil.{13}

Freud’s summary omits something significant: an emphasis on human restoration of relationship to God by receiving His free gift of forgiveness through Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross for human guilt.

Discussions of the biblical message often omit or obscure this important concept. I used to feel I had to earn God’s love by my own efforts. Then I learned that from a biblical perspective, no one can achieve the perfection necessary to gain eternal life.{14} Freud’s view of Christianity at this point seemed to be missing grace, Jesus, and the cross.

Two years after he wrote *The Future of An Illusion*, he seemed to have a clearer picture of Christian forgiveness. He wrote that earlier he had “failed to appreciate” the Christian concept of redemption through Christ’s sacrificial death in which he took “upon himself a guilt that is common to everyone.”{15}

Freud also attacked the intellectual validity of Christian faith.{16} He objected to arguments that one should not question the validity of religion and that we should believe simply because our ancestors did. I don’t blame him. Those arguments don’t satisfy me either. But he also felt the biblical writings were untrustworthy. He shows no awareness of

the wealth of evidence supporting, for example, the reliability of the New Testament documents or Jesus' resurrection.[{17}](#) His apparent lack of familiarity with historical evidence and method may have been a function of his era, background, academic pursuits or profession.

Perhaps confusion about spiritual matters colored Freud's view of the faith. Do you know anyone who is confused about Jesus' message or the evidence for its validity?

## Freud's Christian Friend

Freud often despised Christianity, but he was quite fond of one Christian. He actually delayed publication of his major criticism of religion for fear of offending this friend. Finally, he warned his friend of its release.[{18}](#) Oskar Pfister, the Swiss pastor who had won Freud's heart, responded, "I have always believed that every man should state his honest opinion aloud and plainly. You have always been tolerant towards me, and am I to be intolerant of your atheism?"[{19}](#) Freud responded warmly and welcomed Pfister's published critique. Their correspondence is a marvelous example of scholars who differ doing so with grace and dignity, disagreeing with ideas but preserving their friendship. Their interchange could well inform many of today's political, cultural and religious debates.

Freud's longest correspondence was with Pfister. It lasted 30 years.[{20}](#) Freud's daughter and protégé, Anna, left a glimpse into the pastor's character. During her childhood, Pfister seemed "like a visitor from another planet" in the "totally non-religious Freud household." His "human warmth and enthusiasm" contrasted with the impatience of the visiting psychologists who saw the family mealtime as "an unwelcome interruption" in their important discussions. Pfister "enchanted" the Freud children, entering into their lives and becoming "a most welcome guest."[{21}](#)

Freud respected Pfister's work. He wrote, "[Y]ou are in the fortunate position of being able to lead . . . [people] to God."[{22}](#)

Freud called Pfister "a remarkable man a true servant of God, . . . [who] feels the need to do spiritual good to everyone he meets. You did good in this way even to me."[{23}](#)

"Dear Man of God," began Freud after a return home. "A letter from you is one of the best possible things that could be waiting for one on one's return."[{24}](#)

Pfister was a positive influence for Christ. But in the end, so far as we know, Freud decided against personal faith.

People reject Christ for many reasons. Hypocritical Christians turn some off. Others feel disillusioned, bitter, or skeptical from personal loss or pain. Some are confused about who Jesus is and how to know Him personally. Understanding these barriers to belief can help skeptics and seekers discern the roots of their dilemmas and prompt them to take a second look. Examples like Pfister's can show that following the Man from Nazareth might be worthwhile after all.

## Notes

1. Much of this article is adapted from Russell Sims Wright, *Belief Barriers and Faith Factors: Biographical Roots of Sigmund Freud's Reaction to the Christian Faith and Their Relevance for Christian Ministry*, unpublished M.Th. dissertation, University of Oxford (Westminster College), May 2001.

2. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1900. In James Strachey (Gen. Editor/Translator), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volumes IV and V (London: Hogarth, 1953-1966), pp. 196-197. Subsequent references to this Standard Edition are here abbreviated "S.E.", per professional convention.

3. Sigmund Freud; Ernst L. Freud (ed.); Tania and James Stern (translators), *Letters of Sigmund Freud 1873-1939* (London: Hogarth, 1961[1970 reprint]), pp. 92-94.
4. Martin Freud, *Sigmund Freud: Man and Father* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1983), pp. 68-71.
5. Sigmund Freud, Letters 70 (October 3-4, 1897) and 71 (October 15, 1897) to Wilhelm Fliess. In *S.E., Volume I*, pp. 261-265.
6. Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, 1901. In *S.E. Volume VI*, pp. 49-51.
7. Sigmund Freud, Leonardo da Vinci and a memory of his childhood, 1910. In *S.E. Volume II*, pp. 136-137; quoted in Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *Why Did Freud Reject God? A Psychodynamic Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 241-242. The bracketed word is apparently Rizzuto's.
8. Ernst Freud, Lucie Freud, and Ilse Grubrich-Simitis, eds., *Sigmund Freud: His Life in Pictures and Words* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1978), p. 220.
9. Sigmund Freud, *Letters of Sigmund Freud*, ed. Ernst L. Freud, trans. Tania and James Stern (New York: Dover, 1960 [1992 unaltered reprint of 1960 Basic Books edition]), pp. 343-344.
10. Max Schur, M.D., *Freud: Living and Dying* (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1972), p. 524.
11. Ibid., pp. 526-527.
12. Armand Nicholi, Jr., M.D., "When Worldviews Collide: C. S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud: A comparison of their thoughts and viewpoints on life, pain and death," Part One, *The Real Issue* 16:2, January 1998, p. 11.
13. Sigmund Freud, *The Future of An Illusion*, ed. and trans.



James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961 edition of the 1928 work), pp. 23-24.

14. Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 1-5.

15. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961 edition of the 1930 work), pp. 99-100.

16. Sigmund Freud, *The Future of An Illusion*, p. 33.

17. See, for instance, Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999).

18. Heinrich Meng and Ernst L. Freud, eds., Eric Mosbacher trans., *Psycho-Analysis and Faith: The Letters of Sigmund Freud and Oskar Pfister* (London: Hogarth Press/Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1963), pp. 109-110.

19. Ibid., p. 110.

20. Nicholi, loc. cit.

21. Meng and E. Freud, op. cit., p. 11.

22. Ibid., p. 16.

23. Ibid., p. 24.

24. Ibid., p. 29.

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# The Social and Historical Impact of Christianity

*Probe founder Jimmy Williams examines the charge that Christianity has been detrimental to society, providing evidence for the contrary—that it has been a force for good.*

## Introduction

W.E.H. Lecky has commented on the Enlightenment that “The greatest religious change in the history of mankind” took place “under the eyes of a brilliant galaxy of philosophers and historians who disregarded as contemptible an Agency (*Christianity*) which all men must now admit to have been . . . the most powerful moral lever that has ever been applied to the affairs of men.”[\[1\]](#)

And yet, the West is in the process of abandoning its Judeo-Christian base which was the very source of this social development (Is this good or bad? Can we even ask such questions of history?).

## The Negative Charge: Christianity has been a repressive force against the advancement of civilization.

A. Karl Marx termed Christianity an opiate of the masses, a tool of exploitation.

B. Sigmund Freud called Christianity an illusion, a crutch, a source of guilt and pathologies.

C. Bertrand Russell: “I say quite deliberately that the Christian religion, as organized in its churches, has been and still is the principal enemy of the moral progress in the world.”[\[2\]](#)

D. Arnold Toynbee: "When the Greco-Roman world was converted to Christianity, the divinity was drained out of nature and concentrated in a single, transcendent God. Man's greedy impulse to exploit nature used to be held in check by his awe, his pious worship of nature. Now monotheism, as enunciated in Genesis, has removed the age-old restraint." [\[3\]](#)

E. Gloria Steinem observed that human potential must replace God by the year 2000.

F. Lyn White: "Christians, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions, not only established a dualism of man and nature, but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends." [\[4\]](#) "The crisis will not abate until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man." [\[5\]](#)

Summary: Christianity. . .

1. Is a crutch
2. Impedes science
3. Is a source of bigotry
4. Causes wars
5. Causes pollution and animal extinction
6. Contributes to the population explosion
7. Causes inflation.

## Analysis of the Charges

(Unfortunately, *some* of the charges are true.)

A. The church, as an institution, has not always been a positive influence for social change.

1. Two major errors:

**Platonism** – The spiritual sphere is the real world. Matter is evil. Thus, the body is the prison of the soul. This sacred/secular distinction has resulted in the "pie in the sky" religion which has at times not been concerned about

social reform.

**Humanism** – Views the physical and social needs of man as the only importance. The institutional church has, at times, failed at preaching regeneration.[\[6\]](#)

2. Jesus was concerned for the *total* man. Should we put a “new suit” on the man, or a “new man” in a suit? Jesus would have done both—put a new suit on a new man! (See the Gospels).

B. When the church is assimilated by the culture in which it finds itself, it loses its cutting edge. Example: Under Constantine in the 4th century, “The church became a little worldly and the world became a little churchy.”

C. The institutional church and true Christianity are not always synonymous. Professing Christians many not live up to the ideals and practices of its Founder (“Faith without works is dead,” James 2:26).

1. Renaissance popes are *not* Christianity; St. Francis of Assisi *is*.

2. Pizarro and Cortez are *not* Christianity, Bartolome de Las Casas *is*.

3. Captain Ball, a Yankee slave captain, is *not* Christianity, Wilburforce *is*.

D. Jesus Himself foretold that “tares” would be won among the “wheat.” (Matt. 13:25-39 ff).

## **Christianity's Positive Impact**

A. The Rise of Modern Science

1. Science rose in the West, not in the East. Why?

2. Whitehead and Oppenheimer insisted that modern science

could not have been born except in a Christian milieu.

3. Many pioneering scientists were not only theists, but Christians: Newton, Pasteur, Kepler, Paschal, Fleming, Edwards.

4. Concepts conducive to scientific inquiry were expressly Christian:

- a. Positive attitude toward the world.
- b. Awareness of order (i.e. cause/effect, cf. Rom. 1:20).
- c. Views of man as a superintendent of nature.
- d. Positive attitude toward progress ("Have dominion . . ." [Gen. 1:28ff])

#### B. The Development of Higher Education

- 1. The Puritans were 95 per cent literate.
- 2. The University movement and the quest for knowledge (Berkeley, Descartes, the British Empiricists, Locke & Reid).
- 3. 100 of the first 110 universities in America were founded for the express purpose of propagating the Christian religion.
- 4. The American university emerged from American Seminaries (Witherspoon, Princeton; Timothy Dwight, Yale).

C. Christianity and the Arts: the influence has been so broad as to be inestimable.

#### D. Social Change

##### 1. Means of Social Change

- a. Reform—moderately effective, but slow. Not always good.

b. Revolution—more rapid, but usually bloody.

c. Regeneration—Changing persons changes society. Jesus said, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. . . That which is born of flesh is flesh: that which is born of spirit is spirit” (John 3:3,6). Paul spoke of the Christian rebirth in this way, “Do not be conformed to this world-system, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind . . .” (Romans 12:2).

d. There is a difference between *professing* Christianity and *possessing* a personal relationship with Christ.

## 2. Examples in the Early Church

a. In 252 A.D., the Christians of Corinth saved the city from the plague by responding to the needs of those who were simply dragged into the street.

b. In 312 A.D., half of the Roman Empire came under the political and social influence of Christianity under the rule of Constantine.

c. Early Christians stood in opposition to infanticide, degradation of women, gladiatorial combats, slavery, etc.

## 3. Examples in the Middle Ages (Consider the Monks, not the knights.)

a. Monasteries served as hospitals, places of refuge.

b. Monastic schools trained scribes to preserve manuscripts.

c. Monasteries also developed agricultural skills and knowledge.

d. The Scholastics remain a pivotal period of intellectual growth.

e. A time of major artistic development: architecture, music, literature.

#### 4. Examples during the Reformation

a. A myriad of forces were at work in the vast social and religious shift known as the Reformation (i.e. Luther, printing, Gutenberg Bible).

b. Calvin and the other reformers must not be ignored. Says Fred Graham in *The Constructive Revolutionary*, "Economic, scientific, and political historians . . . generally know little about Calvin's own secular ideas. They assume that it was simply the rupture with tradition made by Calvinists which produced certain changes of life-styles which, in turn, affected society in Protestant countries in later centuries. But the heart of this study shows clearly that Calvin himself was aware of the epochal character of his own (social and economic) teaching and of the transforming implications of the Genevan pattern which he had a hand in forming" (11).

#### 5. Examples in Colonial America.

a. The First Great Awakening (1725-75) raised up many American universities. 100 of the first 110 American universities were founded expressly founded for the purpose of training men to propagate the Christian faith.

b. American educational and political systems, Christian influences.

1) Colonial education was classical and Christian, with the Bible and its principles primary to all learning. The New England Primer appeared about 1690 and was almost universally adopted. It was the chief beginning reading book for American schools for over 100 years. The contents clearly show its religious character and purpose which included forty pages containing the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

2) Framers of the Constitution and Declaration of

Independence. The vast majority at the Constitutional Convention (55 delegates) were members of Protestant churches: 28 Episcopalians, eight Presbyterians, seven Congregationalists, two Lutherans, two Dutch Reformed, two Methodists, two Roman Catholics, three Deists, one unknown.

c. The Wesley-Whitefield revivals resulted in millions of Christian conversions. Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was converted after hearing the preface of Luther's commentary on Romans read at Aldersgate: "About a quarter before nine, which they were describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, and Christ alone, for my salvation, and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine."

d. Wesley preached the social responsibilities of Christian piety:

1772 – Slavery was judicially excluded from England, 14,000 freed

1792 – Conditions aboard slave ships were regulated by law

1808 – The English slave trade was abolished.

1831 – All European slave trade abolished. England spent 15 million pounds for enforcement, even making payments to Spain and Portugal to stop the trade.

1833 – Slavery abolished in British Empire: 45 million pounds paid in compensation to free 780,933 slaves. Wilberforce, along with Buxton, Macaulay, and Clark . . . all evangelicals who were converted under Wesley's ministry, were the top leaders in ending slavery (This British action in the 1830's profoundly affected American



attitudes which resulted in the Civil War).

e. Prison reform: John Howard, Elizabeth Fry (England); Fliedner (Germany). Florence Nightingale, the mother of modern nursing, was trained in one of Fliedner's schools in Kaiserswerth.

f. Labor reform: Anthony Ashley Cooper (Earl of Shaftesbury, self-described "Evangelical of the Evangelicals" pioneered child-labor laws, prohibited women working in the mines, established mental health sanitarium, built parts and libraries).

g. Harriett Beecher Stowe. Daughter of a preacher, married to a preacher; all her brothers were preachers. Her book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* ignited the minds and imaginations of people in both North and South. "So this is the little lady who made this big war," said Abraham Lincoln upon meeting her for the first time. Her book was the first great American bestseller. (Initial print run was 300,000 copies. Sold three million copies in America, then 40 million worldwide in 40 languages).

h. The Third Great Awakening (1858-59) produced a rash of missionary and philanthropic organizations in the U. S. and England:

- Barnardo's Homes (world's largest orphanage system)
- William Booth's Salvation Army
- Henri Dunant, a student evangelist in Geneva, founded the Red Cross in 1865
- YMCA was founded in 1844 and grew greatly
- The missionaries from William Carey on:

–CMS (Christian Missionary Society) taught 200,000 to read in East Africa in one generation

–Secured the abolition of widow-burning and child sacrifice

–Brought medicine to the world

–Actually founded the educational systems in China, Japan, and Korea.

i. Today: World Vision, Wycliffe Bible Translators, Mission agencies, Parachurch groups, Denominational missionaries, medical personnel, teachers, and volunteers.

## Conclusion

“It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the coming of Christianity. It brought with it, for one thing, an altogether new sense of human life. For the Greeks had shown man his mind; but the Christians showed him his soul. They taught that in the sight of God, all souls were equal, that every human life was sacrosanct and inviolate. Where the Greeks had identified the beautiful and the good, had thought ugliness to be bad, had shrunk from disease and imperfection and from everything misshapen, horrible, and repulsive, the Christian sought out the diseased, the crippled, the mutilated, to give them help. Love, for the ancient Greek, was never quite distinguished from Venus. For the Christians held that God was love, it took on deep overtones of sacrifice and compassion.” – R. R. Palmer (standard college history text)

“The history of Christianity is inseparable from the history of Western culture and of Western society. For almost a score of centuries Christian beliefs, principles, and ideals have colored the thoughts and feelings of Western man. The traditions and practices have left an indelible impress not only on developments of purely religious interest, but on virtually the total endeavor of man. This has been manifest in art and literature, science and law, politics and economics, and, as well, in love and war. Indeed, the indirect and unconscious influence Christianity has often exercised in avowedly secular matters—social, intellectual, and institutional—affords striking proof of the dynamic forces that have been generated by the faith over the millennia. Even those who have contested its claims and rejected its

tenets have been affected by what they opposed. Whatever our beliefs, all of us today are inevitable heirs to this abundant legacy; and it is impossible to understand the cultural heritage that sustains and conditions our lives without considering the contributions of Christianity.”

“Since the death of Christ, his followers have known vicissitudes as well as glory and authority. The Christian religion has suffered periods of persecution and critical divisions within its own ranks. It has been the cause and the victim of war and strife. It has assumed forms of astonishing variety. It has been confronted by revolutionary changes in human and social outlooks and subjected to searching criticism. The culture of our own time, indeed, has been termed the most completely secularized form of culture the world has ever known. We live in what some have called the post-Christian age. Yet wherever we turn to enrich our lives, we continue to encounter the lasting historical realities of Christian experience and tradition.”[\[7\]](#)

In contrast to the Christian system, modern materialistic philosophies do not provide a strong basis for reform. Humanism is, in effect, a philosophic smuggler; it has borrowed the “dignity of man” from Christian precepts and has not bothered to say, “Thank you.”

## Notes

1. W. E. H. Lecky, *History of European Morals*, NY: Appleton, 1905, Vol. I, 28-29) (explanatory insert mine).
2. Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian*, p. 21.
3. Arnold Toynbee, *Horizon* magazine, 1973).
4. Lyn White, *Science Magazine*, 1967.
5. *The Environmental Handbook*, p. 25.
6. Alan Menninger: *Whatever Became of Sin?*
7. Roland H. Bainton, Professor Emeritus, *Ecclesiastical History*, Yale University. *Horizon Magazine*, Marshall B. Davidson, et. al., American Heritage Publishing Co., Inc.: New

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# Freudian Slip: When Christians Drop the Ball

The Jewish doctor, urged to flee Vienna during 1937 Nazi advances, is said to have replied that his “true enemy” was not the Nazis but “religion,” the Christian church. What inspired such hatred of Christianity in this scientist?

His father Jakob read the Talmud and celebrated Jewish festivals. The young boy developed a fond affection for his Hebrew Bible teacher and later said the Bible story had “an enduring effect” on his life.

A beloved nanny took him to church as a child. He came home telling his parents about “God Almighty.” But eventually the nanny was accused of theft and dismissed. He later blamed her for many of his psychological difficulties and launched his private practice on Easter Sunday as an “act of defiance.”

Anti-Semitism hounded the lad at school. Around age twelve he was horrified to learn of his father’s youthful acquiescence to Gentile bigotry. “Jew! Get off the pavement!” a “Christian” had shouted to the young Jakob after knocking his cap into the mud. The son learned to his chagrin that his dad had complied.

In high school he abandoned Judaism for secular science, humanism and Charles Darwin. At the University of Vienna he studied atheist philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach and carried his atheism into his career as a psychiatrist, distrusting the biblical documents. Religion was simply a “wish fulfillment,” he taught, a fairy tale invented by humans to satisfy their needy souls and to avoid responsibility for their actions. The doctor was Sigmund Freud.

Freud became perhaps the most influential psychiatrist of history, affecting medicine, literature, language and culture. A recent survey of the nation’s leading journalists and

historians listed the top 100 news stories of this century. Prepared for the Newseum, a journalism museum in Arlington, Virginia, the poll rated Freud's 1900 publication of *Interpretation of Dreams* as number 86. He ranked higher than the U.S. entry into World War I, John Glenn's first earth orbit, the Berlin Airlift, Microsoft's founding and the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

Obsessed with the "painful riddle of death," Freud once said he thought of it daily throughout life. His favorite grandson's death brought great grief: "Everything has lost its meaning to me... I can find no joy in life." In 1939 he slipped into eternity, a willful overdose of morphine assuaging cancer's pain.

As an adult, Freud had encountered at least a few credible Christians, notably a professor, a pastor and a physician. Perhaps by then he was too set in his ways. Suppose that instead of bigotry and presumed dishonesty, the young Freud had met still more intelligent, honest and compassionate believers who welcomed him, respected his Jewish heritage and showed God's love, who could tactfully explain the faith's rational roots and its message of forgiveness. Would psychology—and history—be different?

There are many reasons why people reject faith, including intellectual doubt, emotional confusion and anger over life situations. Nonthinking or hypocritical Christians can make matters worse. Some (many?) people who claim to be "Christians" but don't have a genuine relationship with God can do the same. Not everything done in the name of Christ is an example of people following Jesus.

The racist or anti-Semitic hate group that quotes Scripture, the philandering minister, the abusive parent or spouse, the church leader with his hand in the till—all can breed scorn and skepticism.

Yet along with the hypocrites are many faithful followers of Jesus who feed the hungry, clothe the poor, aid disaster victims and help the hurting find comfort and spiritual life. "Christians aren't perfect," reads a popular bumper sticker, "just forgiven."

These faithful seek to emulate their Leader who, according to the Bible, "committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth." The not-so-faithful believers would do well to follow their example, seek spiritual help and clean up their acts. Then maybe some future Sigmund Freuds would warm up to the message that faith can bring true meaning and hope even in life's most difficult circumstances.

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