

## Sigmund Freud, Hanns Sachs, and the Apostle to the Gentiles

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### Abstract

The study of Jewish approaches to Paul has tended to focus on theological issues. For some Jewish thinkers, however, the apostle was of interest for reasons other than interfaith dialogue or religious polemic. The psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud and Hanns Sachs discovered in Paul's writings support for their own ideological concerns to offer a powerful critique of the place of religion in society. In terms of understanding Jewish-non-Jewish relations in the modern world, the study of how the Apostle to the Gentiles features in the works of these so-called marginal Jewish thinkers is a useful reminder of the complexity of Jewish identity.

### Introduction

[1] Jewish attitudes towards the Apostle to the Gentiles have been the subject of a number of studies in recent years. These have tended to focus on New Testament or Pauline studies, on theologians and religious leaders (see, for example, Langton 2005a, 2005b; Eisenbaum; Meissner; Fuchs-Kreimer; Hagner; Ronning). This is because those conducting the surveys have been interested primarily in interfaith dialogue and the theological issues, not least the question of what to make of Paul's apparent hostility towards the Law. For those interested in Jewish-Christian relations in a wider cultural context, however, this theological bias is unfortunate. After all, by remaining in the realm of interfaith studies, one is very often excluding so-called marginal Jews who, for obvious reasons, are uncomfortable championing their community's received traditions and dialoguing with representative members of the Christian fraternity. There are many ways to define Jewishness, and an exploration of the intellectual worlds of those who regard themselves as Jewish, in some sense, even if they are not committed to any kind of Judaism, is arguably every bit as valuable for understanding the modern history of Jewish-non-Jewish inter-relations. Furthermore, such a restrictive

program automatically excludes those Jewish thinkers who might have alternative reasons for reading Paul's writings and who believe that he has relevance for other kinds of discourse.<sup>1</sup> For example, for two Jewish-born luminaries from the world of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud and Hanns Sachs, the attraction of Paul lay primarily in what they regarded as his profound insight into human psychology. An examination of the role of the apostle in their writings, then, has little to do with Jewish Pauline scholarship or interfaith dialogue. Rather, it will be argued that these secular Jews saw the Jewish founder of Christianity as an (unlikely) ally for their programmatic critiques of the place of religion within society. One way to make sense of this is to understand both their interest in Paul and their development of a psychoanalytical worldview as part of a quintessentially modern Jewish quest to find meaning and identity in a post-Enlightenment, post-Judaic age.

[2] From its inception, psychoanalysis has had a complicated relationship with Judaism. Freud himself was anxious to prevent the association of his new science with the Jews for fear that it would not be taken seriously by an anti-Semitic establishment. And yet, until Jung joined it, the psychoanalytical association was almost exclusively composed of Jews. As one contemporary, a British professor at Harvard, observed:

The famous theory of Freud is a theory of the development and working of the mind which was evolved by a Jew who has studied chiefly Jewish patients; and it seems to appeal very strongly to Jews; many, perhaps the majority of those physicians who accept it as a new gospel, a new revelation, are Jews (McDougall: 127).

It is by no means only those hostile to the therapeutic system who regard it as some sort of Jewish Science (as the Nazis notoriously referred to it). Anna Freud herself once described it as such (148)<sup>2</sup> and the editor of a collection of essays on the subject also makes the link. In *Freud and Judaism*, David Meghnagi suggests that the birth of psychoanalysis should be understood as “a cultural event within Judaism,” as a sublimated answer to the problems posed by secularization, and as a rejection of an authentic integration of Jews into Christian-European society. It is best appreciated when it is set alongside the rise of the socio-political movements of Zionism and the Bund, that is, alongside Jewish nationalism and Jewish socialism. These movements were products of the great process of secularization of culture that had been sweeping through the Jewish world since the seventeenth-century. Psychoanalysis, a German-Jewish synthesis of literature, theory, and science, was therefore one of several new worldviews that promised an alternative “community” for the Jew. The psychoanalytical association promoted a new reality, one that made both Jewish and Christian religion irrelevant (57-58, 63-64). Perhaps it is not so surprising that in their

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<sup>1</sup> One might point to Baruch Spinoza, Leon Shestov, and Jacob Taubes as Jewish philosophers who have written about Paul, in addition to the painter Ludwig Meidner, the playwright Franz Werfel, and the novelists Shalom Asch, and (in unpublished form, at least) Samuel Sandmel (see Langton 2007, 2008a, 2008b).

<sup>2</sup> At the inaugural lecture of the Sigmund Freud Professorship at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1977, Anna Freud's lecture, which was read out in her absence, noted that psychoanalysis “has been criticized for its methods being imprecise, its findings not open to proof by experiment, for being unscientific, even for being a ‘Jewish science.’ However the other derogatory comments may be evaluated, it is, I believe, the last-mentioned connotation which, under present circumstances, can serve as a title of honor” (148).

attempts to convince the wider world of this truth, then, both Freud and Sachs would engage with St. Paul, not only because his complex Jewish identity resonated at a profound level, but because, for Western civilization at least, he was the representative of religious authority *par excellence*.

### Freud and the Apostle Paul

[3] The Austrian founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), wore his Jewishness lightly, even as he readily acknowledged it (1939: 11; 1926: 23).<sup>3</sup> His controversial theories of the unconscious mind have enjoyed immense academic and popular success, constituting the foundation of a psychotherapy still practiced widely in the West and the subject of ongoing intellectual discussion. His approach to religion, for example, as provocative today as when it was first published, remains essential reading in university campuses worldwide.

[4] In *Totem und Tabu*, Freud had outlined a theory in which a psychologically traumatic experience in our distant primate past was held responsible for the emergence of religion. According to the theory, alienated male members of an ancient tribe, jealous of their polygamous leader's sexual monopoly of their mothers, had cannibalized him in a rite that had resulted in guilt-ridden reverence for, and eventually worship of, his power. Subsequently, they had transformed the previously reviled prohibitions of their murdered father-figure into universal taboos and religious tradition. From this foundation,<sup>4</sup> Freud went on to explore the nature of monotheism in the book *Moses and Monotheism*, in which he combined the application of psychoanalytical categories to Judaism and Christianity with a sensational, unsubstantiated account of Moses' Egyptian ancestry.<sup>5</sup> Arguably, the book is almost as much about the apostle Paul as about Moses, for it proposes to explain how the religion of the one logically emerged from the religion of the other.

[5] Fundamental to Freud's theory of the origins of religion is the idea that one can apply lessons learned from individual psychology to mass psychology. For example, just as a

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<sup>3</sup> In *Moses and Monotheism*, published shortly after he had fled Nazi Germany, Freud expresses his concern, as a Jew, in attempting to undermine Jewish tradition's claim on Moses as a Hebrew: "To deny a people the man who it praises as the greatest of its sons is not a deed to be undertaken lightheartedly – especially by one belonging to that people." At the same time, he could be dismissive of some aspects of Jewish thought. Knowing that his theory "lacked objective proof," he accounts for his reluctance to publish it, thus: "it is not attractive to be classed with the scholastics and Talmudists who are satisfied to exercise their ingenuity, unconcerned how far removed their conclusions may be from the truth" (1939: 11, 30. In a speech given in May 1926, looking back at his early career, Freud commented, "[F]or I myself was a Jew, and it always seemed to me to be not only shameful but downright senseless to deny it" (1926: 23).

<sup>4</sup> Freud maintained that since writing *Totem und Tabu*, "I have never doubted that religious phenomena are to be understood only on the model of the neurotic symptoms of the individual, which are so familiar to us, as a return of long-forgotten important happenings in the primeval history of the human family, that they owe their obsessive character to that very origin and therefore derive their effect on mankind from the historical truth they contain" (1939: 94).

<sup>5</sup> In looking for historical traces for Moses, Freud alights upon the story of an Egyptian monotheist Akhenaten. He suggests that it is this Pharaoh, whose Aton religion was a form of monotheism, who actually lies behind the Hebrew legend of Moses in the book of Exodus. Much of *Moses and Monotheism* is taken up with this investigation.

person retains childhood memories into adulthood, whether consciously or not, so too does a human collective. If animal instinct is simply a label for the phenomenon whereby animals “carry over into their new existence the experience of their kind,” Freud asks why this should not also apply to the human animal? Thus he begins with the assertion that humankind “have preserved in their minds memories of what their ancestors experienced” (1939: 160-61). Again, just as an individual neurotic has experienced an event which was repressed in such a way that his subconscious generated obsessive behaviour, so the same process could be said to explain the profoundly obsessive character of religious tradition among the masses, which was not amenable to reason or logical arguments.<sup>6</sup>

[6] When it came to explaining Judaism, a monotheistic tradition famously characterized by its taboos regarding incest and diet, Freud has no difficulty in identifying the Primal Father as Moses. For only if the law-giver had been murdered by the children of Israel would they have adhered so tenaciously to their laws down through the millennia. Consequentially, their collective guilt and veneration of the man who spoke with God had been transformed into an obsessive tradition. Not only Judaism but Christianity, too, could be understood by reference to this ancient episode. In fact, Freud believes that the comprehensive victory of Christianity over Judaism in historical terms can best be accounted for by the way in which the apostle Paul had intuitively taken advantage of the same psychological processes that he himself was now uncovering.

[7] To Freud the amateur historian, the rise of Christianity could be partly explained in terms of timing. The period in question had been a period of widespread unease. The Jewish people had festered in unconscious guilt at the murder of Moses, and the rest of civilization, perhaps reminded of their ancient crime against the Primal Father, also lived in a state of dread. This “precursor of the return of the repressed” ended with the arrival of a certain Jewish “political-religious agitator” in Palestine (1939: 213). His followers eventually came to believe that they should disassociate themselves from Judaism. It was Paul, however, rather than Jesus, who was mainly responsible for this new religion. In recounting the history, Freud cleverly dovetails his own theory with the theology of the apostle.

Paul, a Roman Jew from Tarsus, seized upon this feeling of guilt and correctly traced it back to the primeval source. This he called original sin; it was a crime against God that could be expiated only through death. Death had come into the world through original sin. In reality this crime, deserving of death, had been the murder of the Father who later was deified. The murderous deed itself, however, was not remembered; in its place stood the phantasy of expiation, and that is why this phantasy could be welcomed in

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<sup>6</sup> “A tradition based only on oral communication could not produce the obsessive character which appertains to religious phenomena. It would be listened to, weighed, and perhaps rejected, just like any other news from outside; it would never achieve the privilege of being freed from the coercion of logical thinking. It must first have suffered the fate of repression, the state of being unconscious, before it could produce such mighty effects on its return, and force the masses under its spell, such as we have observed – with astonishment and hitherto without understanding – in religious tradition. . . The term ‘repressed’ is here used not in its technical sense. Here I mean something past, vanished, and overcome in the life of a people, which I venture to treat as equivalent to a repressed material in the mental life of the individual” (1939: 162, 208).

the form of a gospel of salvation (Evangel). A Son of God, innocent himself, had sacrificed himself, and had thereby taken over the guilt of the world. It had to be a Son, for the sin had been murder of the Father (1939: 138-39).

The apparent simplicity of this presentation of Christian history and theology is deceptive, however. It begins by identifying the universal sense of guilt with the familiar Christian doctrine of Original Sin. For Freud, of course, the original sin was the murder of the Primal Father who had later been deified, that is, a kind of deicide. But what did Freud believe that *Paul* had understood to be original sin? Nowhere does he describe that theological conception of original sin traditionally attributed to Paul, namely, the universal condition of sin that had followed Adam's Fall. Rather, the impression is given that Paul also thought of original sin in terms of deicide. This impression is further reinforced when Freud writes,

It was . . . in the mind of a Jew, Saul of Tarsus, who as a Roman citizen was called Paul, that the perception dawned: "It is because we killed God the Father than we are so unhappy." It is quite clear to us now why he could grasp this truth in no other form but in the delusional guise of the glad tidings: "We have been delivered from all guilt since one of us laid down his life to expiate our guilt." In this formulation, the murder of God was, of course, not mentioned, but a crime that had to be expiated by a sacrificial death could only have been murder . . . Original sin and salvation through sacrificial death became the basis of the new religion founded by Paul . . . (1939: 213, 214).

[8] What is not clear from this is how, in Paul's mind, God the Father had been murdered. Was it synonymous with the crucifixion of Jesus? But according to the theory, Jesus had been the Son whose sacrifice was a necessary atonement for the murder of the Father. Did it refer to the killing of Moses? While Freud claims this in the context of Jewish history, yet he does not appear to claim this for Paul's theology. Nor was he suggesting that the apostle's teaching had been pointing to the Primal Father. It seems that for Freud's Paul, the guilt from which mankind and the Jews awaited liberation had been the murder of God the Father, who was himself an amalgamation of several figures, including Moses and Jesus.<sup>7</sup> Freud himself is aware of the confusion implicit here, but argues that the story of Jesus' life and death, the details of which had soon been lost to history, had made this confusion inevitable and was actually an essential factor for understanding Christianity's success.

It can scarcely be by chance that the violent death of another great man [i.e. Jesus] should become the starting point for the creation of a new religion by Paul. This was a man whom a small number of adherents in Judea believed to be the Son of God and the promised Messiah, and who later on took over some of childhood history that had been attached to Moses [i.e. father figure,

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<sup>7</sup> "The awakening . . . of the memory trace [of the murder of the Primal Father] through a recent repetition of the event is of decisive importance [in activating the archaic inheritance]. The murder of Moses was such a repetition, and later on the supposed judicial murder of Christ, so that these events move into the foreground as causative agents. It seems as if the genesis of monotheism would not have been possible without these events" (1939: 162).

law-giver, mediator between God and the people]. In reality, however, we have hardly more definite knowledge of him than we have of Moses. We do not know if he was really the great man whom the Gospels depict or whether it was not rather the fact and the circumstances of his death that were the decisive factor in his achieving importance. Paul, who became his apostle, did not himself know him (1939: 143-44).

In other words, the stature of Jesus had only increased as his memory had become fused with that of Moses. It was even possible that the messianic hope itself had had its origin in the guilt that the Hebrews had felt in killing Moses, and that Jesus should be regarded as “the resurrected Moses.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the way in which Christianity had gone on to resolve the similar confusion or ambivalence between the Father and the Son had proved to be one of the key innovations of the new religion.

Its main doctrine, to be sure, was the reconciliation with God the Father, the expiation of the crime committed against him; but the other side of the relationship manifested itself in the Son, who had taken the guilt on his shoulders, becoming God himself beside the Father and in truth in place of the Father. Originally a Father religion, Christianity became a Son religion. The fate of having to displace the Father it could not escape (1939: 214-15).

Having “burst the confines of Judaism,” then, the followers of Paul came to equate the Son with the Father, and went on to institutionalize the identification of one with the other. While the ritual of Holy Communion, in which the believer partakes of the body and blood of Christ, “repeats the content of the old totem feast,” it also made a virtue out of a necessity by strengthening the conflation of Father and Son through ritual expression (1939: 141).

[9] Freud is prepared to admit that traditions from “Oriental and Greek mysteries” had exerted some influence in shaping this “phantasy of salvation,” but his lip-service to New Testament scholarship is very much secondary to his recognition of Paul’s originality. The apostle’s characteristic emphasis on the Sonship of Jesus is seized upon as evidence of the psychological dynamic underlying the emergence of Christianity. Likewise, his tenet of the shadowy conception of original sin showed him to have tapped into the subconscious (1939: 214). Paul was certainly “a man with the gift of religion,” but his power was by no means miraculous. Rather, “Dark traces of the past lay in his soul, ready to break through into the regions of consciousness” (1939: 138-39).

[10] Paul’s originality lay, firstly, in his doctrine of salvation, the sacrifice of a Son by which he had put to rest the ghost of ancestral guilt. Secondly, he had abandoned the idea of the

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<sup>8</sup> “It is an attractive suggestion that the guilt attached to the murder of Moses may have been the stimulus for the wish-phantasy of the Messiah, who was to return and give to his people salvation and the promised sovereignty over the world. If Moses was this first Messiah, Christ became his substitute and successor. Then Paul could with a certain right say to the peoples: ‘See, the Messiah has truly come. He was indeed murdered before your eyes.’ Then also there is some historical truth in the rebirth of Christ, for he was the resurrected Moses and the returned primeval father of the primitive horde as well – only transfigured, and as the Son in the place of the Father” (1939: 144-45).

chosen people and its visible sign (i.e. circumcision) thereby ensuring the universal nature of the new faith.<sup>9</sup> In so doing, Freud was prepared to admit that Paul had brought about psychological liberation for a large proportion of humankind: “Christianity marked a progress in the history of religion: that is to say, in regard to the return to the repressed” (1939: 143).<sup>10</sup> Ironically, the innovations by the “Roman Jew from Tarsus” had achieved their success at a terrible cost for his ancestral faith; and here Freud returns to the complex relationship between the father and the son.

The ambivalency dominating the father-son relationship shows clearly, however, in the final result of the religious innovation. Meant to propitiate the Father Deity, it ends by his being dethroned and set aside. The Mosaic religion had been a Father religion; Christianity became a Son religion. The old God, the Father, took second place; Christ, the Son, stood in his stead, just as in those dark times every son had learned to do. Paul, by developing the Jewish religion further, became its destroyer. . . From now on, the Jewish religion was, so to speak, a fossil (1939: 141, 143).

Of course, as Freud makes clear elsewhere, religion was itself to be regarded as a fossil. Whatever its evolutionary benefits had been, he believed that this relic from our ancient past had been superseded by rational solutions in the modern age. And if religion was properly interpreted as a wish-fulfilment or a neurosis, then it was surely an undesirable foundation for civilization or culture.<sup>11</sup> What, then, is the place of the Apostle to the Gentiles in this famous critique of society?

[11] Certainly, Freud’s attitude towards Paul is more positive than had been many Jewish commentators before him, but a certain ambiguity remains.<sup>12</sup> On the one hand, Paul is an

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<sup>9</sup> Freud suggests, “this might have been determined by Paul’s revengefulness on account of the opposition which his innovation found among the Jews . . .” (1939: 142).

<sup>10</sup> This recognition was by no means unqualified: “In certain respects the new religion was a cultural regression as compared with the older Jewish religion. . . The Christian religion did not keep to the lofty heights of spirituality to which the Jewish religion had soared. The former was no longer strictly monotheistic; it took over from the surrounding peoples numerous symbolical rites, re-established the great mother goddess, and found room for many deities of polytheism in an easily recognizable disguise, though in subordinate positions. Above all, it was not inaccessible, as the Aton religion and the subsequent Mosaic religion had been, to the penetration of superstitions, magical and mystical elements which proved a great hindrance to the spiritual development of the following two millennia” (1939: 142).

<sup>11</sup> “Our knowledge of the historical worth of certain religious doctrines increases our respect for them, but does not invalidate our proposal that they should cease to be put forward as the reasons for the precepts of civilization. On the contrary! Those historical residues have helped us to view religious teachings, as it were, as neurotic relics, and we may now argue that the time has probably come, as it does in an analytic treatment, for replacing the effects of repression by the results of the rational operation of the intellect” (1928: 72-73).

<sup>12</sup> James Forsyth’s comparison of the Pauline and Freudian systems of thought is suggestive of the approach Freud might have adopted in a dedicated analysis of the apostle’s theology. While not actually examining Freud’s writings on Paul, Forsyth points out that there are real similarities between Paul’s understanding of guilt and death, and Freud’s interest in discontent and the death-impulse, as fundamental to the human condition. “Freud perceived civilisation as Paul perceived the Law – as extraneous authority which promised life but delivered death in the form of guilt.” Yet the value of both Civilization and the Law is recognized by both men, these *apparent* causes actually being understood as providing only the *occasion* for man’s experience of

ally. He can be held up as a key figure in western thought whose most profound teachings (properly interpreted) provided powerful evidence in support of Freudian analysis. He had instinctively understood what Freud had come to recognise, namely, the psychological power of releasing men from the gnawing societal guilt that resulted from their ancestors' murder of the Primal Father. Salvation from original sin equated to liberation from the return of the repressed. On the other hand, Paul is an arch opponent. His invention, Christianity, was not only a religion – and therefore part of the discourse of illusion and an expression of wish-fulfilment – but it was, historically, the most influential religion that had acted upon and shaped western civilization.<sup>13</sup> To convince society that it had grown out of religion, Freud knew that he would first have to convince society of the psychological, rather than divine, origins of Pauline Christianity.

### Sachs and the Apostle Paul

[12] A more comprehensive, and certainly more focused, psychoanalytical treatment of Paul was provided by Hanns Sachs (1881-1947). Born in Vienna of a middle class family “which counted rabbis and merchants in its immediate ancestry,” Sachs eventually gave up his law practise to become instead a practitioner of what he called “the scientific art.” Having been deeply impressed by *Die Traumdeutung* (1900), Sachs met Freud in 1910 and was soon drawn into the inner circle. His interests in art and literature led him to persuade his mentor to found *Imago* in 1912, a journal devoted to the psychoanalytical interpretation of cultural phenomena, which he co-edited with Otto Rank for 20 years. From 1920 he trained scores if not hundreds of psychoanalysts and in 1932 was invited to join Harvard Medical School. Perhaps his best-known publication was *The Creative Unconscious* (1942), which explored the psychological processes involved in artistic creativity (for brief biographies of Sachs, see Roback; Jones).

[13] Originally, Sachs had planned to write a major study of St. Paul, a thorough psychoanalysis of the life and work of the apostle. Ill health made this impossible, but in *Masks of Love and Life* (1948),<sup>14</sup> published posthumously, he was able to dedicate one chapter to the subject. Consequentially, his approach to Paul is part of a more general project to outline a philosophical basis of psychoanalysis that treats a wide range of subjects including

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death (83-93). In fact, the study of Paul by the Jewish psychoanalyst Hanns Sachs makes precisely these connections between psychoanalytical categories and Pauline terminology (1948: 82-107).

<sup>13</sup> Sitting in London, a refugee from Nazi persecution, the world-famous psychoanalyst poignantly reflected on the causes of anti-Semitism. The Jews' status as a weak minority was partly to blame, in that they refused to assimilate and at the same time drew attention to themselves as contributors to civilization. But he also believed that there was a deeper underlying motive, a motive that implicated the apostle Paul. “Through this decision [to refuse the new doctrine of Paul] they [the Jews] are still more sharply separated from the rest of the world than they were before. They had to suffer the reproach from the new religious community – which besides Jews included Egyptians, Greeks, Syrians, Romans, and lastly also Teutons – that they had murdered God. In its full form this reproach would run: ‘They will not admit that they killed God, whereas we do and are cleansed from the guilt of it’” (1939: 215).

<sup>14</sup> The title was changed by the editor from *The People of a Strange Planet*, a title suggestive of Sachs' detached approach to observing the strange and often self-contradictory behaviour of humans, both individually and in wider society.

leadership, appreciation of art, educational theory, sexual fantasies, pleasure, love, happiness, hate and Nazi anti-Semitism, and old age.

[14] As Sachs makes clear early on, the human condition is one of anxiety and longing for inner freedom. Social conventions and prohibitions, “some of them handed down through untold generations from our prehistoric, perhaps even from our hairy ancestors,” have come to dominate our lives. Against our wishes, we suppress and repress a wide range of behaviors,<sup>15</sup> and few of us have the psychological resources necessary to challenge such conventions, even quite unreasonable ones. It is as if all of us live in fear of walking through the open doors that surround us. As his “scientific art” informed him,

The fear of living in [the] face of an open door, the urge of thinking about it as closed – these are signs that occur in the life of every man. It is the function of civilization – and has been from the earliest stages – to see that as few as possible may escape through one of these open doors (1948: 55).

For Sachs, psychoanalysis is the modern scientific method by which one frees oneself from the anxiety that civilization has generated through its myriad impositions; by understanding the often arbitrary nature of social convention and by seeking out the roots for one’s behavior in one’s personal history, one can achieve true inner freedom. Before Freud, however, there had also been individuals who had walked through the open doors, achieving the remarkable feat of a truly autonomous life through their own powers of intuition. Often such men had attracted followers “due to the promise of a new road to inner freedom which they [held] out,” although this promise had never been kept. History showed that these leaders, who included men of action as well as thinkers and dreamers, usually “made their personal inhibitions become general laws; after liberating on one hand, they forged new shackles for the other” (1948: 83). Despite their failings, Sachs suggests, such “tortured spirits” are especially influential when history takes a sudden turning, and perhaps the most important turning in human history has been the transition from the view of the afterlife according to the Ancients to the view of the afterlife according to Christianity. It is in this context that Sachs introduces Paul.<sup>16</sup>

[15] According to Sachs, the apostle’s originality lay in his unique approach to anxiety, which he had expressed as a duality: on the one hand, there was death and, on the other, that which would lead to life, namely absolution from desire (or *Id*) and freedom from the yoke of imposed rules (or *Super-Ego*). (Here Sachs neatly maps Paul’s characteristic teachings about the flesh and the Law onto psychoanalytical categories, implying a considerable degree of overlap between the two systems).<sup>17</sup> For the apostle, salvation from death meant liberation

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<sup>15</sup> Sachs’ charming list includes “cannibalism and nose-picking, adultery and ‘thou shalt not put a knife into thy mouth,’ parricide and flatulence, commandments issued from Sinai and impositions learned in kindergarten . . . [all] grouped together without rhyme or reason” (1948: 55-56).

<sup>16</sup> “In [Paul’s] vain striving after inner freedom this spirit became the originator of a truly world-shaking event, the first and greatest missionary of newborn Christianity. Possessing, like most tortured souls, a profound, intuitive insight into the mind, he aroused forces the existence of which nobody had hitherto suspected” (1948: 84-85).

<sup>17</sup> “He longed for the freedom and the true life with a desire which nothing could weaken and cried out for it with a voice which is still heard over the centuries (for instance: *Romans* VIII:21). In the fire of his frenzy, the

from a complex set of inter-related issues. He felt tremendous guilt that his inner desires frequently conflicted with Jewish Law, leading him to sin, and he intuitively sensed that this guilt was eating away at him, killing him spiritually. As Sachs formulated Paul's insight: "Sin, conflicting with law, fetters the inner life; death is the reward of sin, sin is death" (1948: 93). What solution, then, did the Jewish Apostle to the Gentiles find in order to rid himself of this deep anxiety? The answer that he stumbled upon was a wish-fulfilment or fantasy that modified the *Jewish* conception of the messiah, and the long-awaited hope for national emancipation, with certain features of *Gentile* mystery cults, namely, personal liberation from evil by means of identification with deities who died and rose again (such as Orpheus, Attis, and Osiris). As Sachs put it,

In the crucified Jesus, the two beliefs which appealed most to Paul's emotion and imagination merged and became one: the faith of the Gentiles in the divine youth whose death and resurrection promised eternal life to his believers and the Messianic hope of the Jews (1948: 98).

Unlike Freud, Sachs suspected that this new theology had not actually been the apostle's own creation. But he did think that the apostle had become the foremost proponent of the idea of a dying and rising messiah,<sup>18</sup> and suggested that only an individual with the power of Paul's personality could have had such an impact on world civilization.<sup>19</sup>

[16] Bearing in mind that Freud had attributed Christianity's blurring of Moses' monotheism to Paul, it is interesting that there was never any question in Sachs' mind that the apostle had

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multiform aspects of the problem which confuse the ordinary observer were finally melted down to one pair of opposites. At the one end stood death. . . In *homo sapiens* [and in contrast to other animals] the idea of death became explicit, a part of his consciousness that was steadfastly rejected by his Unconscious. He [Paul] reacted by creating more or less satisfactory fantasies of continued existence. This anxiety, which overshadows the humans, spoiled for Paul everything in life; it became the embodiment of all frustrations . . . it stood as the symbol of every defeat and inhibition, as the way leading to the impassable doors, or, in his language: by drive of desire, the law was turned into the constant threat of sin and sin was identical with death, was in fact the absolute death (*Romans* VII:7, 8). Opposite death stood the absolution from sinful desire and with it the freedom from the yoke of imposed rules and inhibitions. How was it possible to make the pronounced will of God void and superfluous, to see in his Holy Law a snare and a danger, without rejecting him? To live in the tension of this dualism was more than Paul, the monotheistic Jew, could stand. The traces left on his mind by the torment remained plainly visible long afterwards. ('I am the most wretched of men. Who will release me from the body of this death?' *Romans* VII:24)" (1948: 85-87).

<sup>18</sup> "[G]roup of men – probably all of them, like Paul himself, Jews who had grown up in one of the Hellenistic cities outside Palestine – had tasted, directly or indirectly, of the promises of resurrection and immortality, held out by the mystery religion. In their minds, the Jewish Messiah and the crucified and resurrected God were fused into a unity. To these men the person and the teachings of the man whom the Roman authorities had executed was but of secondary interest. Paul doesn't seem to have been the founder of this group, but its leader in the newly opened missionary field" (1948: 101-102).

<sup>19</sup> "The discovery of Jesus as the point where the two separate rivers of religious emotion could join and flow together, the work of coordination and consolidation of elements of different origin was not done by Paul, but by other, or earlier, believers or perhaps by one of them. . . But if ever a man of overpowering personality showed to the world his heart bared and divested of all petty disguises; if ever the suffering, the troubles and conflicts, the consolations, the hopes and the love of a great mind were exposed to the eyes of men, it is to be found in Paul's epistles. Originality is only a very weak term to designate this quality" (1948: 98).

remained a monotheist throughout his life.<sup>20</sup> He explains the Hebrew roots of several terms so as to support this conviction,<sup>21</sup> he accepts the New Testament claims regarding the apostle's authentic Jewish background,<sup>22</sup> and he argues that it is Paul's Jewishness that explains the style and content of his argumentation.<sup>23</sup> The apostle's undiminished commitment to Israel also explained a key characteristic of his thought, namely, the tension between his loyalty to his new Gentile followers and to his fellow Jews. The evidence of this internal conflict could be seen in his frustration at his unsatisfactory attempt to redefine Israel in terms of the Church<sup>24</sup> and in symptomatic mistakes in his theology, such as the famous simile of the grafting the wild olive branch (representing the Gentiles) onto the olive tree (representing Jewish Israel). As Sachs observes,

Here the conflict in the Apostle's mind manifests itself in a mistake (a symptomatic act) which is calculated to warm the cockles of an analyst's heart by bearing out Freud's theory in his *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* . . . No gardener ever grafted a wild branch on a noble stem; it is, of course, always the other way around (1948: 90).

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<sup>20</sup> "The word *Theos* was for Paul the exact rendering of Jehovah (*Yahveh, Elohim*) and nothing else, for Paul was, and remained a pious, zealous Jew, that is: a strict monotheist." Regarding the idea of a dying and rising god of the mystery religions, the pre-conversion Paul must have "rejected it with all the fanaticism of a monotheistic religious zealot." Paul's eventual hope is: "The end of everything, revealed by prophetic outlook into the future, is the return to pure and unalloyed monotheism, God being again 'all in all' (*I Corinthians XV:24-28*)" (1948: 88, 96, 100).

<sup>21</sup> "The Apostle everywhere keeps up (at least in the four authentic Epistles) a sharp distinction between Jehovah, the only and almighty God, and the Messiah. . . He wanted to avoid a misunderstanding for which no possibility existed in the Old Testament. The Jehovah who rises from the dead and the crucified Messiah who rises from his grave have to be distinguished with particular care by their different names and titles, since the old monotheistic prerogative had to be kept intact and yet room made for a Messiah who had little in common with the Messiah of the Jewish tradition." (1948: 91-92).

<sup>22</sup> "The evidence for Paul's considering himself an orthodox Jew is abundant. He calls himself proudly a 'Jew descended from Jews, of the tribe of Benjamin, the seed of Abraham, circumcised in the ordained manner.' At his last, ill-fated stay in Jerusalem he subjected himself to the rite of purification . . . and let it be known, at the Temple, when sacrifice could be offered for him, all this with the purpose of emphasizing that he was a pious Jew (*Acts XVI:26*)." (1948: 88). Information about Paul could safely be gleaned from the "four authentic epistles" (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians) and Acts (1948: 102).

<sup>23</sup> According to Sachs, Paul's favorite arguments are drawn from "the most impressive parts of the Old Testament," including the stories of Abraham, Adam, Jacob and Esau, and the rock in the desert. Later he qualifies this: "All essential arguments are drawn either from the resurrection or from the Old Testament" (1948: 92, 101).

<sup>24</sup> "His intense attachment to the Jews and the Jewish religion caused one of his deepest, apparently endless, conflicts. After he had become the foremost missionary to the Gentiles, defending their equal right to salvation and to the brotherhood of Christ, he tried to soothe his conscience by a curious device. The true Jews, the Jews according to the spirit, were the Christians, whatever they might have been before, since Jehovah had accepted the eater of unlawful food as well as the non-eater (*Romans XLV:3*) whereas the Jews, the real actual Jewish people, were only 'Jews according to the flesh.' Did this ingenious stratagem suffice to end his scruples? By no means. He still feels deeply afflicted. Despair breaks out in his worlds when he declares that in his supreme anguish he would wish to be accursed and separated from salvation for the sake of his brethren according to his flesh (*Romans IX:2, 3*). His ultimate hope still lies with his own people" (1948: 88-89).

As for the Gentile mystery religions, in addition to supplying Paul with the familiar mythic form of a dying-and-rising god, the popular cults also gave the apostle two acts of ritual, namely, baptism and communion. Both of these are, of course, of considerable interest to psychoanalysts, the first being a symbolic repetition of birth and the second being an ancient totemic act of cannibalism.<sup>25</sup> Having been performed within the mystery religions as ways to achieve union with the divine, “both had probably been adopted by all the missionaries of the crucified Messiah, but certainly by none of them more ardently than by Paul” (1948: 102). Even so, Sachs argued that such magical rituals were for Paul “mere accessories” (1948: 104). More effective in unifying with Christ was “the strangest power in which the life instinct embodies itself . . . the power of love” (1948: 104-105). And this is Paul’s unique achievement: for Sachs, the potency of the apostle’s theology lies in his understanding of love as a unifying force – and not, as so often claimed, in his doctrine of faith.<sup>26</sup>

[17] Essentially, Paul’s sophisticated theology works in the following way. Anxiety, which is caused by the believer’s unruly desires and subsequent failure to obey the Law, is dissolved by focusing on one desire, love. Rather than trying to suppress all desires of the *Id*, love is given a monopoly and thus simply eclipses them. With no other desires tempting the believer to sin, the Law or *Super-Ego* also loses its dread. The object of love is, of course, Christ, which is a perfectly natural response for someone who has understood the nature of the sacrifice made. In loving Christ, the believer seeks to become one with him, and, as he increasingly identifies with him, so he longs for the death or extinction of his Ego. Paul thus offers a remarkable theology in which love is used to reconcile us with death, with the result that, free from all anxiety, all the doors swing wide open before us. It is worth citing Sachs’ eloquent summary of Pauline theology at length.

The reason for loving Jesus, and only him, was that his own love made the Messiah, the ‘first born of the sons of God’ . . . willing to die on the cross and to be buried for the salvation of mankind. This love arouses in those to whom it had been given, and who are able to accept and requite it, the longing to die, thus mediating the only way leading to the resurrection and eternal life. Here we have love made free from all anxieties and inhibitions; *before it all doors were springing open*. . . This, to the eyes of an outside observer, is the greatest feat of about-face that has ever been performed: life and death united by love. The law, or as we call it by less forbidding names: *Super-Ego*,

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<sup>25</sup> “Baptism, the coming out of the water after immersion, was the symbolic repetition of the act of birth. The psychoanalysts have learnt this equation by means of the interpretation of dreams, which contain it frequently as a typical element in the language of the Unconscious.” And likewise, “The sacred meal is one of the oldest institutions, going back to times before the development of religion, to the truly ‘dark ages’ of totemism. It is the most naive, but also the most intense, way of identifying oneself with another being, by eating his flesh and drinking his blood. It means being unified with him as the child at the breast becomes one with the mother” (1948: 103-104).

<sup>26</sup> “No teaching or understanding, no hope and no faith can lead to being one with Jesus: love is the only means of identification. On this point Paul is most explicit (106) and emphatic: ‘love is greater than faith and hope’ and ‘even if I have the gift of prophecy and have insight into all mysteries and into all knowledge, and even if I have all the faith so that I can move mountains, but have no love, I am nothing’ (*I Corinthians XIII:2*)” (1948: 105-106).

conscience, loses its power to forbid, to inhibit, to punish. It has no claims and no threat, since its task had become superfluous. The sinful desire which it had to keep in check: to suppress, to annihilate or, when all this had proved beyond its power, at least to repress and keep out of the Ego, this desire had ceased to exist. Relieved from the struggle and reconciled to the *Id*, the *Super-Ego* can now assume . . . and encourage the function which hitherto belonged to the *Id*, and turn, in its own particular way, from an inhibiting and deadening force to a life-giving, and even creative, one. Thus the apostle and saint is born. The Ego does not receive any longer its life-impulses from its instinctual sources in the treacherous guise of desire which the law changes into sin and death. Love, highest and purest of the life impulses alone survives; it retains its purity by giving itself up altogether to this sole aim, to be the way and the open door leading to the final consummation. Life is now no longer life, it is a constant dying in becoming one with the crucified. Death is no longer death for him who became one with the resurrected first-born of God. Paul expressed this complicated process in simple and perfectly clear words: "For I died by means of the law so that I will live to Jehovah. I have been crucified together with the Messiah. I live no longer, but the Messiah lives in me" (*Galatians* II:19) (1948, 105-107).

With this highly original interpretation of Pauline theology, Sachs achieves two things. Firstly, he provides a graceful explanation for the psychological power and longevity of Christianity as taught by the Jewish Apostle to the Gentiles. In stripping bare the psychodynamic problems facing the apostle, we come to see that Paul's theological genius is, in fact, better understood as a psychological genius. Secondly, Sachs suggests that Paul can be held largely responsible for undermining the Ancients' acceptance of the impermanence of life, and for giving western civilization its focus on death and the need to find salvation from it. From this perspective, *Masks of Love and Life* is "an exposé, a critique of civilization," as Sachs' editor observed (Roback: 26). The critique is acute, for Christianity is to be regarded as the fantasy or wish-fulfilment of a "tortured soul," and however insightful that individual had been, it could only be a partial solution to the problem of anxiety. Nevertheless, the study of Paul was a highly profitable exercise, for it illustrated the potential influence of leaders (that is, those who walked through the open doors) in the historical development of the modern world. As Sachs saw it,

The most moving spectacle . . . is to see one of the loftiest and most cruelly tortured of these spirits at work, liberating and enslaving a few humble contemporaries and an indeterminable procession of later generations, the end of which is not yet in sight (1948: 84).

[18] There are important differences in the writings of the two psychoanalysts regarding Paul. While Freud had understood the secret of the apostle's longevity to be his accidental discovery of the dark psycho-dynamics of the father-son relationship and freedom from a universal sense of guilt, Sachs had explained his power in terms of his insights into achieving personal liberation from the anxiety of death. And while both accounts necessitated a radical re-reading of Paul, they did so in different ways: Freud's theory had involved a highly unorthodox interpretation of original sin, which related it to an ancestral murder rather than

an act of disobedience in the Garden of Eden, and Sachs' hypothesis required a revision of the Protestant interpretation of Paul's theological priorities, downplaying his faith in favor of his love. Nevertheless, there were underlying similarities in their approaches, especially regarding the nature of their critiques of society. Freud's use of Paul to fire a powerful broadside against society's irrational attachment to religion was paralleled by Sachs' assertion that, despite his admiration for the way in which Paul had freed himself from the constraints of civilization, such leaders went on to generate new chains for their followers, and that only psychoanalysis offered a real solution. Perhaps most interestingly, both men had been convinced that Paul's teachings and achievements had demonstrated – even proved – important aspects of psychoanalysis and the irrational nature of the unconscious. But all this only begs the question, of course: to what extent should such interpretations of Paul actually be regarded as *Jewish* interpretations?

### Conclusion

[19] Modern Jewish identity is a complex matter. After the Enlightenment and the attendant phenomena of the dissolution of the ghetto and widespread legal emancipation, there was no longer one norm of Jewish existence (if there ever had been). In earlier times, the existence of a Jew who was at odds with his community, who held ideas that were deemed by the religious authorities as heretical, and who was attracted to non-Jewish ways of thinking, was untenable. Over time, as a result of modernity, the “secular Jew” (Yerushalmi: 10) or “non-Jewish Jew” (Deutscher: 25-41) emerged to become a permanent feature of the Jewish landscape. Just why it is that such individuals regarded themselves as Jewish, in some sense at least, is not always clear. Freud himself offers an interesting insight into this puzzle. Writing in 1926, he observed,

That which bound me to Judaism – I am obliged to admit it – was not my faith, nor was it national pride; for I was always an unbeliever, raised without religion, although not without respect for the so-called “ethical” demands of human civilization. And I always tried to suppress nationalistic ardour, whenever I felt any inclination thereto, as something pernicious and unjust, frightened as I was by the warning example of the peoples among whom we Jews live. But there remained enough other things to make the attraction of Judaism and Jews irresistible – many dark emotional forces, all the more potent for being so hard to grasp in words, as well as the clear consciousness of an inner identity, the intimacy that comes from the same psychic structure. And to that was soon added the insight that it was my Jewish nature alone that I have to thank for two characteristics that proved indispensable to me in my life's difficult course. Because I was a Jew I found myself free from many prejudices that hampered others in their use of their intellects; and as a Jew, I was prepared to take my place on the side of the opposition and renounce being on good terms with the “compact majority” (1926: 23-24).

Here, Freud reminds us of two important aspects of modern Jewish identity. First, that Jewish self-consciousness, however difficult to describe or account for, is no less real for having abandoned the two ideological pillars of religion and nationalism. Second, that those Jews who no longer feel at home within the Jewish community continue to feel a sense of

alienation from the wider society – with the result that Freud can boast of his independence from the theologically-derived constraints that characterize western Christian society, and, even more significantly for our purposes, that he credits his Jewishness for his orientation *against* the conventional worldview.

[20] Having considered those writings of Freud and Sachs that drew upon the apostle Paul, it is worth noting that, whilst Jewish-born, both inhabited the no-man’s land of Jewish marginality. They were not religious and even attempted to transcend their Jewishness through the more universal worldview of psychology. In this regard, several of Freud’s observations are born out. Both sought to challenge, even to subvert, a culture that was regarded as dangerously dominated by Christian norms of thought. They found a perspective that offered an alternative, historically unconventional view, namely, psychoanalysis, and both sought to strike at the heart of the sources of power within society, namely, religious belief itself. What is rather remarkable is that Sachs, and, to a lesser extent Freud, asserted that Paul supported their perspectives and stood with them in making their social critique. The question is why the Apostle to the Gentiles assumed such a role in their imaginations. As a figure of great authority within Christianity and Christian culture, who had influenced generations of theologians and leaders and had profoundly shaped the course of Western civilization, it made sense for Jewish writers to engage with and claim the support of the apostle, whom both explicitly categorized as Jewish. But it is also possible to see in their attraction to the complex figure of Paul a reflection of their own complex issues of identity. After all, Paul’s life had been one lived in the borderland between the Jewish and the Gentile communities, distanced from the Jewish people, even as he remained connected to it. And he, too, had been profoundly affected by his engagement with the wider world, having broken through the boundaries of Jewish religion and nationalism. There was surely a degree of identification with the apostle amongst these thinkers, and, perhaps, some cold comfort in finding in this misunderstood Jew an ideological ally.

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