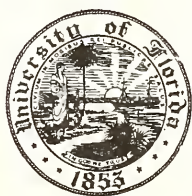


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Psychoanalysis  
and Faith



# Psychoanalysis and Faith



THE LETTERS OF  
SIGMUND FREUD  
& OSKAR PFISTER



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## PREFACE

### I

THIS volume of correspondence with the Swiss pastor Oskar Pfister is the third collection of Freud's letters to be published. The first consisted of his letters to Wilhelm Fliess from the years 1887 to 1902 and appeared under the title *The Origins of Psycho-Analysis*.<sup>1</sup> The second contained a selection of mainly personal letters to 102 addressees extending over Freud's whole life-time.<sup>2</sup>

We had hoped to publish his correspondence with Pfister in its entirety but, though Freud's original letters have survived, Pfister's have not. Some were destroyed by Freud at Pfister's wish (see letter dated 1.6.1927), and others perished in the hazards of emigration. However, surviving shorthand notes of Pfister's have made it possible to reconstruct his letters and hence to fill in a number of important gaps.

The correspondence began in 1909 and ended in 1937, two years before Freud's death. It consisted altogether of 134 items by Freud, of which nearly a hundred, mostly unabbreviated, are reproduced here.

The editors thank Anna Freud for her help in the work of selection; Professor Herbert Meng's Working Party for Psycho-Hygiene in Basle University, and in particular one of its members Christine M. Senn-Duerck, for their assistance in preparing the material for publication; and Frau Pfister, Pfister's widow, who was assisted by Pastor Pfenninger, for their work on his letters.

Ernst L. Freud

<sup>1</sup> Imago, London, 1954; Basic Books, New York, 1954.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of Sigmund Freud*. Basic Books, New York, 1960; Hogarth Press, London, 1961.

## II

OSKAR PFISTER, the youngest of the four sons of a Protestant pastor, was born in Zürich in 1873. He lost his father at the age of three. After attending school in Zürich he studied theology, philosophy and psychology in Zürich, Basle and Berlin. His first congregation was at Wald in the canton of Zürich, and in 1902 he joined the Zürich circuit, of which he remained a member until his retirement in 1939. In 1934 he received an honorary degree from the theological faculty of the University of Geneva.

His first wife, Erika, *née* Wunderli, died in 1929, leaving a son who is now a psychiatrist in Zürich. His second wife was a widowed cousin, Martha Zuppinger-Urner, who already had two children, to whom Pfister was an admirable father.

During the first years of his ministry Pfister wrote a paper protesting against 'the sins of omission towards psychology of present-day theology'. In 1908 he came across the work of Freud, which provided him with the tool for which he had long sought, enabling him to give additional aid to those whom his spiritual aid alone had been insufficient. He made his way to the unconscious and half-conscious sources of anxiety states, doubts of conscience and obsessional ideas of those who sought his help and, in so far as medical intervention was not called for, worked with them in loosening up and dispersing their psychological difficulties, fixations and repressions, and independently laid the foundations of a psychologically oriented system of education and pastoral work.

Between 1909 and his death in 1956 he published numerous books and papers in which he described his work and observations, in particular on psycho-analytic technique, on the aetiological importance of sexuality in the formation of the neuroses, on religion and hysteria, the psychology of art, philosophy and psycho-analysis, analysis in pastoral work, Christianity and anxiety, and related themes.

A matter of especial concern to him was the application of psycho-analytic findings to education, a field of study to which he gave the name of paedanalysis.

It would be a great mistake to assume that because of his work in the field of psycho-analysis Pfister neglected his pastoral work or his spiritual duties. He was a man incapable of doing things by halves, and in his ministry he was wholeheartedly and utterly sincere, radiating warmth and benevolence and helpfulness to all who turned to him. His friend Pastor Pfenninger writes of him: 'As the representative of a free Christianity he was opposed to all dogma, but he met with understanding and love those who held fast to dogma because of inner ties . . . and he was backed by the love of his congregation.'

His relations with Freud continued through all the years of his ministry and were consolidated in numerous letters and occasional meetings. The two men were real friends. Their correspondence demonstrates how close and productive was the bond between them. Their temperaments, and the honesty and integrity which characterised both, often brought them into sharp conflict, but they also always showed true tolerance and mutual understanding.

Pfister's *Illusion of a Future*, written in reply to Freud's *The Future of an Illusion*, illustrates the personal courage, critical ability, practised skill, as well as respect for Freud's greatness, with which his theologically and psycho-analytically trained colleague opposed his master. This controversy is an example of how scientific discussion with Freud should be conducted. Difference from Freud does not mean breaking with him. On the contrary, as Goethe said, differing opinions on a subject need part men only when their basic outlook differs. But in this Freud and Pfister were closely akin. At the roots of both lay love of truth, indeed love itself, as the central factor in obtaining an understanding of mankind, a total lack of compromise in relation to the ultimate and highest values, and incorruptibility by praise or blame.

A number of Pfister's works were stimulated by conversation

and correspondence with Freud, and similarly Freud took suggestions from Pfister for his own work. There is, for instance, no doubt that he accepted the most varied suggestions for the technique of child analysis from Pfister's very concrete communications concerning the psycho-analysis of children and young persons at the stage of puberty.

In accordance with Pfister's calling, it was in the pastoral field that his analytic work was most fruitful. It is interesting to note that Freud, who speaks of himself as a 'secular pastoral worker',<sup>1</sup> has an open ear for the technique and experiences of the religious and spiritual pastoral worker Pfister, while the latter emphasises the objectivity of Freud, who described himself as being devoid of religious feeling. In this connection Pfister quotes the letter Freud wrote him in which he said:

In itself psycho-analysis is neither religious nor non-religious, but an impartial tool which both priest and layman can use in the service of the sufferer. I am very much struck by the fact that it never occurred to me how extraordinarily helpful the psycho-analytic method might be in pastoral work, but that is surely accounted for by the remoteness from me, as a wicked pagan, of the whole system of ideas.

Pfister's contributions to the practice of psycho-analysis are contained in numerous publications. Even more important than the written word was the impact of his personality. His thesis that true religion can be a defence against neurosis was not denied by Freud, though he thought that in this loveless world it was a rarity and therefore not a thing not to be depended on.

When he talked about his correspondence with Freud Pfister was full of gratitude, pride and pleasure at the structure on which the two 'architects' had worked over the years. In 1944 he entrusted joint responsibility for its publication to the undersigned, subject to the condition that he also imposed on Anna Freud, namely that nothing should be published that might give offence to any living person.

Heinrich Meng

<sup>1</sup> *Seelsorger*

### III

IN the totally non-religious Freud household Pfister, in his clerical garb and with the manners and behaviour of a pastor, was like a visitor from another planet. In him there was nothing of the almost passionately impatient enthusiasm for science which caused other pioneers of analysis to regard time spent at the family table only as an unwelcome interruption of their theoretical and clinical discussions. On the contrary, his human warmth and enthusiasm, his capacity for taking a lively part in the minor events of the day, enchanted the children of the household, and made him at all times a most welcome guest, a uniquely human figure in his way. To them, as Freud remarked, he was not a holy man, but a kind of Pied Piper of Hamelin, who had only to play on his pipe to gather a whole host of willing young followers behind him.

It was this overflowing of feelings for psycho-analysis to its founder, and from him to his children, that led Pastor Pfister after Freud's death to leave the correspondence to me, 'the daughter of his great benefactor', as he called me, with permission to make use of suitable material, subject to the reservation that nothing should be published that might give offence to any living person.

Anna Freud





# THE LETTERS

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