



THEATRICAL THEOLOGICAL BREAKTHROUGH: (left to right) Martin Rayner as Dr. Sigmund Freud & Mark H. Dold as C.S. Lewis in the brilliant one-act drama *Freud's Last Session*, about a possible meeting between the celebrated psychiatrist & the Oxford professor & Christian author in London during World War II. Photo: Kevin Sprague

Theater Review

Stellar acting, crisp dialogue

make *Freud's Last Session* a must-see

Freud's Last Session

Written by Mark St. Germain

Suggested by *The Question of God* by Dr. Armand M. Nicholi, Jr.

Directed by Tyler Marchant

Open run

The Marjorie S. Deane Little Theatre

10 West 64th Street (at Central Park West)

(866-811-4111), www.FreudsLastSession.com



By Scott Harrah

This 75-minute one act is based on a question posed by Dr. Armand M. Nicholi, Jr. in his book *The Question of God*: “Did Freud and Lewis ever meet?” After renowned psychoanalyst Dr. Sigmund Freud emigrated to England, he reportedly met with an Oxford professor. Was the man with whom Dr. Freud allegedly met actually C.S. Lewis, the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia* fantasy novels and the classic theological book *Mere Christianity*?

That is the basis of Mark St. Germain’s fascinating play, now back off-Broadway after a brief hiatus. Dr. Freud’s theories are considered flawed and obsolete by many today, but it is provocative to even imagine that the Moravian-born Jewish psychoanalyst, renowned for being an atheist—and known for then-shocking views such as “everyone is bisexual”— would have even met with C.S. Lewis, a born-again Anglican Christian intellectual whose book, *Mere Christianity*, has been required reading for most Protestants for decades.

The story, set in 1939 London as the British people brace themselves for Nazi air raids, centers on the 83-year-old Dr. Freud (Martin Rayner) near the end of his life as he suffers from the agonizing pain of oral cancer and an ill-fitting prosthesis. When the 41-year-old Professor Lewis (Mark H. Dold) appears for a meeting with the doctor (supposedly to discuss why he satirized the psychoanalyst in a book), the proverbial sparks instantly ignite. Dr. Freud, despite being in cancer pain, is riveted to BBC radio broadcasts updating the British people about Hitler’s hostile invasion of Poland. Being a Jewish exile dying of cancer as the Nazis threaten to annihilate England, Dr. Freud has little reason to believe in God.

If God truly exists, Dr. Freud wonders, why would He allow a madman such as Hitler to exist and wield such evil power over not only Jews but all decent, innocent people throughout Europe?

One does not have to be interested in theological arguments for and against the existence of God and Jesus Christ to enjoy the show, for playwright Mark S. Germain does not intend to preach or convert anyone here. What truly makes this outstanding theater is the crisp dialogue and the fact that these men are polar opposites in many senses, but both are intellectuals who must face the grim reality of war. They both share a bond of mortality as they listen in horror to an air raid siren.

Mr. Rayner is outstanding as Dr. Freud, giving the character the right mix of cynicism, cantankerousness, and fear. Mr. Dold is equally genius as C.S. Lewis, unveiling multiple layers of both kindness and logic. Much of the story is a cerebral wrestling match, with Dr. Freud dismissing Mr. Lewis's views of God and Christ as inane, but as portrayed by Mr. Rayner and Mr. Dold, they both have a reserved sense of respect for each other. Tyler Marchant directs the two actors with fast-paced precision, giving what could have been a talky tale all the excitement and intrigue of a first-rate thriller.

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