

*The Quest for Power: Religion and Politics*, by Samuel Slipp, M.D. Pitchstone Publishing, Charlottesville, VA, 2010, 199 pp., \$24.95

This is a fascinating, informative, and timely book, written from an interdisciplinary perspective, which addresses our grave concerns about the global rise of violence fuelled by religious fervors, a recurrent phenomenon which Slipp studies and analyzes from a historical perspective. He is a passionate scholar who examines his subjects in the context of their time, only to be excited by his discoveries, which invariably open up new paths of investigation. His delight and excitement in his writing journey infect his readers. Reading the book is very rewarding. We not only experience the events in historical time, but also converse with similar events as they have recurred throughout time: Jesus' egalitarian attitude to women leads to Paul's unquestioned view of women as inferior to men, to Freud's ambivalence about women, and Simone de Beauvoir, who was in the vanguard of the movement for women's liberation.

Extreme fundamentalist religious beliefs are again entering the world stage of power politics. At home the religious right seems to be gaining momentum and we have to fight over issues of abortion, marriage, teaching evolution, and other anti-humanistic prejudices. Slipp delves into these historically ever-present phenomena by focusing on Jesus Christ and Sigmund Freud. Though living one thousand years apart, they both were healers and in their different ways tried to stop the abuse of power when religion and politics were joined. Freud tried to undermine the legitimacy of religion by regarding it as an illusion. He favored the development of a secular government. Jesus hoped that by becoming the Messiah, he could bring about the apocalypse, the end of the days, the coming of the kingdom of God and thus universal justice.

The second chapter, "The Impact of Context on Social Belief," reflects a major quality of the author's perspective, namely the vital importance of context, be it historical, cultural, social, familial, personal, or biological. His style of writing is given momentum by recurrent questions of context, such as: "What motivated me to write this book?"; "What were the factors that created this complete turnabout of the very core of Jesus' teaching?"; "What can be said about Freud and his lifelong struggle with the oppression of Jews?"; "How is it that the Romans were so militaristic and brutal?"; "How could the Jews flourish despite being conquered, persecuted, and killed over the centuries?"; "What was the probable origin of the frightening concept of the cataclysmic end of the days?"; and "What are some of the factors that made Hitler the most evil man in the twentieth century?"

What influenced Jesus' teaching? Slipp elaborates on the patriarchal Jewish society, which consisted of two powerful groups, the Sadducees and the Pharisees, on the cult of the Essenes, on the Roman domination, as well as on the teachings of the Sage Hillel who stated: "What is hateful to you do not do unto your fellow man: that is the whole Law, the rest is commentary." The focus on Freud leads to many facets, among them the anti-Semitism of his time, his attachment to his father, his ambivalent relation to his mother, his theoretical disregard of the mother-infant dyad as well as the infant's need of a psychological nourishing environment.

Slipp's psychoanalytic activity embraced individuals, family, groups, and neurological research. His research established the importance of emotional bonding in adults, leading to his hypothesis that the original synchrony between mother and infant is internalized and replicated in the synchronous group activities and rituals of adults. This appreciation of the value and power of rituals reflects Slipp's appreciation of the bonding power of the rituals of religions. The survival of the Jews was due to the ritual of reading the Torah to acquire knowledge, an egalitarian and meritorious ritual that helped them survive their dispersion and persecution.

The titles of the chapters reflect their main themes but not the free associative elaborations. The chapter, "Maintaining the Illusion of Power by Using Anti-Semitism," speaks of many things: Of the widespread expectation of the coming of a messiah, of the Essenes cult, of the Dead Sea Scrolls, of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, of Bion's illuminations of group behavior.

The chapter, "Jesus Seeking Freedom by the Power of Religion," gives us insight into various aspects of the legitimate gospels. Slipp's question as to the probable origin of the concept of the cataclysmic end of the days, which the Pharisees, the Essenes, and Jesus believed in, leads him to its likely origin in the benign Zoroastrian Religion in the 6th century B.C. The Gnostic Christians were against the joining of religion and power and thereby challenged the hierarchical power of the emperor and the Orthodox Christian Church. They emphasized knowledge and would not submit to authority. They did not believe in the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus. To them, the story of the resurrection had symbolic meaning, suggesting the resurrection of the spirit of Jesus.

The next three chapters, "Paul's Creation of Christianity: A Religion about Jesus," "Emperor Constantine: Christianity Used for Power," and "Maintaining the Illusion of Divine Power," bring to our attention the many lesser-known details of the radical transformation of Jesus' original teaching. Paul's attitude of intolerance and righteousness caused divisiveness between the Gentiles and the Jewish community.

Paul condemned homosexuals, adulterers, masturbators, thieves, and drunkards, who he claimed would not inherit the Kingdom of God. Constantine infused the Christian religion with Roman class hierarchy and militarism. He separated the Jewish and the Christian religion. Jesus was no more seen as a Jew. Constantine made the crucifixion into a major symbol of the Christian religion. Constantine used the Christian belief to consolidate his power. He not only established Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire, but his laws excluded Jews and pagans from civil rights. Jews were not allowed to marry Christians. He blamed the Jews for killing Christ to divert blame from the Romans who had persecuted and killed them. Constantine launched anti-Semitism. Power and Religion remained joined throughout the Middle Ages by the alliance of the Christian religion and the nobility. The Enlightenment, by way of the philosophic and scientific writing of Isaac Newton, Benedict Spinoza, René Descartes, and many others, undermined the assumption of the king's divine right to rule. Spinoza was a strong advocate of the separation of state and religion, though mind and emotion could not be separated. "Passion," he stated, "without reason is blind and reason without passion is dead" (p. 104). While the French and the American revolutions sponsored the equality of men, endemic anti-Semitism surfaced in the Dreyfus affair in France and later with vengeance in Hitler's Germany.

The chapter, "Freud as Conquistador: Power through Science," reviews how Freud experienced political anti-Semitism during his life and how he responded. He had an enormous influence on the culture of his time, but not through political means. He aimed at changing individuals by resolving their subconscious illusions and myths. His theories of finding roads to the unconscious appealed to the artists as well as to creative writers and they changed the cultural atmosphere. Slipp is intrigued with Freud's motivations in writing *Moses and Monotheism* in his old age. He concludes: "He was an elderly terminally ill man, yet still fighting against being a helpless victim" (p. 133).

The book ends on a note of hope that, maybe, some day people will learn to respect diversity and find non-violent ways to solve conflicts. Erich Fromm called this dynamic or paradoxical hope. We do not know when our hopes may be realized, but it could be at any minute. This hope is given some substance in the last chapters, "Individual Power or Compliance to Power" and "Power from the Bottom Up or Top Down," which highlight the wisdom and inspirational power of humanistic leaders like Mohandas Gandhi, Reverend Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Rabbi Abraham Herschel. Herschel wrote a book called *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*. He spoke of God being in need of man to be an active partner to help redeem other human beings. God's need of man to make the

world a better place sums up the spirit of Slipp's hope. It stresses the importance of social action, not only belief. Herschel was chosen to negotiate with the leaders of the Second Vatican Council and was able to influence Pope Paul VI. Slipp greatly admires the writing and actions of the psychoanalyst Vamik D. Volkan, who is known internationally for his skills to create a spirit of communication between hostile political parties and bring about resolutions of conflicts. Volkan was the ideal person to endorse this fascinating book with a very pertinent Foreword.

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