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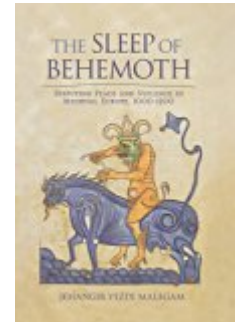
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Jehangir Yezdi Malegam. *The Sleep of Behemoth: Disputing Peace and Violence in Medieval Europe, 1000-1200*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013. 352 pp. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-5132-4.

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Shakespeare's Tybalt, from *Romeo and Juliet*, would fit snugly into Jehangir Malegam's *The Sleep of Behemoth*. When Tybalt, in his fury, declares to Beniolio, "What, drawn, and talk of peace! I hate the word, As I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee," he is voicing the opinion of a considerable number of medieval intellectuals.[1] Peace, an amorphous concept in Malegam's dense, well-written, and eminently readable tome, was desirable but not at any price. Instead it was something that could only be obtained through the complete destruction of intellectual, spiritual, and moral enemies. Peace was an ideal achievement but it was also a threat since it allowed mortal enemies time to lay the seeds of their wickedness. Peace, for Malegam's medieval intellectuals, was the Munich Agreement in 1938; simultaneously achieving "peace in our time" and allowing evil a respite to spread. Malegam does not make any such connections to modern events but it seems clear that reformist popes and striving intellectuals of the 1100s would have appreciated the Cold War West's knee-jerk reaction to Munich, to a Soviet détente, or to any other such agreement with the perceived devil. Such deals brought a cessation of violence but did not bring true, prolonged, universal peace—the harmony of angels on earth.

Malegam's book is important largely because it makes you think deeply. On the surface peace is a self-evident good; to be left alone from violence. Except, change the definition or context and suddenly one wonders about peace. The allies achieved peace in Munich only to begin the bloodiest conflict in human history a year later, Americans are currently celebrating the 150th anniversary of a conflict that could have ended in peace at any point as long as the perpetual evil of human bondage

could continue unabated forever. How many celebrated compromises of Henry Clay achieved just that end? Suddenly, peace is complicated. And this edge, between the self-evident definition of peace and its complicated moral reality is where Malegam's book admirably dances.

A review of this book is consequently wedded to the time period it is written. Fifty years ago, I imagine I would have confidently sided with Malegam's battling thinkers citing Munich, the nuclear arms race, and the Cuban missile crisis. Destroying evil is preferable to a peace allowing it to live (p. 4). If I was writing 150 years ago I would have cited abolitionist arguments against the evils of compromise to slavery. Two hundred years ago, this book would have cited Napoleon as the enemy of perpetual peace. But I live and write in the post-9/11 world and thus this book is about extremism.

Malegam does not hide this theme—indeed it is nearly on every page—yet he does not announce it either. Despite being about thoughts and events from a thousand years ago, it captures the essence of the now. How do we function in a world when people, with the best of intentions, see compromise as the enemy? While the newspapers tell tales of religious, political, moral, and economic extremisms seeking to elevate one group while dominating another? This book reminds the reader that Christianity, despite its founding under "The Prince of Peace," has its own bloody history of extremism and non-compromise. Reading this book, I kept thinking about Barry Goldwater's famous statement at the 1964 Republican National Convention that "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice." He went on to say, "and let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is

no virtue.” Goldwater, just as these monks, priests, popes, and intellectuals a thousand years earlier, saw the uncompromising pursuit of their values to be a moral good. Compromise, allowing heresy to exist, was the enemy. I, being of more pliable steel, can not help but think of Aristotle (or the Buddha in his Middle Way), who argued, “in all things the mean is praiseworthy and the extremes neither praiseworthy or right but worthy of blame.”[2] Malegam shows, perhaps unintentionally, that extremism has always existed, will always exist, and never sees itself as extremist; but instead as the one true and correct belief.

Malegam’s work is well written, well argued, and densely researched. It is pleasing to see the footnotes filling the bottom of every page, the bibliography flowing page after page, the small but readable font. The archival listing goes on for two pages. This is a classic academic book written for a traditional academic audience. No research is hidden, no quotes weirdly left unattributed, and sometimes the Latin is not even translated. The reader is expected to know terms like Lotharingian, Ottonian, and Normans. There are no maps—which can be confusing when discussing eleventh-century Carolingian baronies—and no graphics, pictures, or anything other than text. This is an intellectual history in all its glory and it does not pretend to be otherwise. This is simultaneously its greatest strength and greatest weakness. If you are the audience for this book—a historian or student of medieval intellectual thought—this book is an interesting and important addition to the historiography. If you are a layperson, or even someone—like myself—who is not well versed in the specificity of the topic, then this book will send you to online encyclopedias time and again and will leave you wondering what happened to the *events* of history.

Interestingly, for a book about peace—and the failure to achieve peace in the Middle Ages—there is very little discussion of the *events* of war. The Investiture Controversy comes and goes. The Crusades, the most violent expression of action in the time period and unleashed by a pope in the name of peace—is handled with little more than a shrug, a “yeah, it happened” casualness. Meanwhile, Augustine, who died six hundred years before the book opens, is alive and well in almost every chapter, affecting the thoughts and actions of many popes, monks, and priests. I found this to be anticlimatic. I wanted to see Malegam deal with all this intellectual theory thrown into massive action. How did the events—especially the sack of Jerusalem—fit the theory and the expectations of contemporary intellectuals? Does a Crusade bring

peace? Other readers, of course, will find this work freeing since it does not get bogged down in a recitation of kings, battles, and wars. When viewed through the lens of extremist thought and action, these events become even less significant since there is a litany of them: yeah, bad things happened, this book seems to argue; they also come and go. The thoughts of people like Augustine linger.

These thoughts center on the discussion of the nature of peace from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. Though, given that this is an intellectual history work, Malegam brings in influential works of Augustine, Plato, and Aristotle as well as many pre-eleventh-century thinkers (both Christian and pagan). Given that the Catholic Church was the preeminent spiritual, moral, and intellectual institution at the time this is a discussion between powerful churchmen and religious intellectuals. Peace is defined as “a positive presence achieved through realignment of human desire” rather than an absence of fighting (p. 16). Yet, for a book about the philosophical ethics of peace, there is a whole lot of fighting. The *Pax Romana*, which is nearly universally regarded as the highest achievement of Roman civilization, is seen by some as a “corruption,” bringing schism, martyrs, and idolaters but not real true peace. Instead, the *Pax Romana* allowed for laziness, intellectual sloth, and lapses in behavior; peace permitted the survival of sin. Many viewed actions against immoral behavior and corruption of offices in terms of conflict—simony, immorality among priests, and sexual corruption all had to be resisted with fierce, even violent, determination.

Interestingly, for all the talk of peace this book highlights at least three sets of “wars.” There is the conflict between the popes and the local parishes as the popes try to assert high-minded standards over a lax and vaguely—if not outright—sinful priesthood. There is the conflict between the religious authorities and the secular aristocracies about who really commanded the ship of state. And finally, there is the bottom-up conflict of the poor but pure local parishes and monasteries against the overreaching edicts of imperial popes and princely bishops.

Many of the conflicts fit into an overly apocalyptic concept of the world. The world was going to end soon and the faithful had to be ready. Thus reformist popes fretted about sinful priests corrupting the sacraments. Thus popes made war against the laziness and wealth of peace—priests needed to be intellectually sharp, morally above reproach, and separate from both commoners and the secular political elite. Judas Iscariot became a ma-

per symbol of corruption and disease within the church. Judas was one of the twelve apostles, picked by Jesus himself, and yet he betrayed Jesus to the Romans. Sinful priests could, like Judas, be led astray and would, given their position, lead their flocks astray as well, which is why the early church elite was obsessed with heresies. Many saw the time of Constantine as an ideal. The reign of Constantine combined the armed defense of a Christian territory with a cultural discipline against dissenters.

Yet this same argument was used by purist priests and monks to later attack the princes of the church who seemed to luxuriate in their wealthy bishoprics, associate with dukes and kings as peers, and live lives of tranquility and peace but not of religious rigor or asceticism. In this version of the conflict, the popes who saw themselves as agents of peace were instead the bringers of destruction and conflict. By the end of Malegam's period of study it's the popes, not the priesthood, who are sinful, lax, decadent, and overreaching their authority, leading Christendom astray. Interestingly, the anti-pope factions saw the secular leaders as the true heirs of peace. Again, there is some romanticism of the *Pax Romana* of Constantine, which saw the imperial government as the maintainer of law, justice, and spiritual purity. Fredrick Barbarossa wrapped himself in the language of peace even while he was conquering Germany and Italy. Peace was seen as the union of church and state, of pope and emperor, in a manner vaguely similar to the Byzantine Empire. Instead, the popes were seen as constantly usurping em-

perors using excommunication, bribes to independent-minded dukes, and alliances with anti-imperial kings. Popes, by resisting the imposition of a secular peace, were increasingly seen as the bringers of war and sin by their own priests.

As a piece of a larger historiography this book is an important, necessary addition because none of the three wars are ever concluded. Perhaps popes gain the clearest victory over their priests and are able to impose rules, order, and structure which did not exist in the early church. Yet there were fights between the traditionalists and reformers—the Council of Trent in the 1540s or Vatican II in the 1960s—throughout church history. The kings did win a victory against the pope by pretty much ignoring him, yet the coming of the Reformation, absolutism, and the nation-state ended any chance of universal, true peace in Christendom as Christian kings hammered away at each other for prizes far less idealistic than universal peace, which brings us full circle. Eventually extremism reemerges, using the same imagery and the same language, promoting the same goals of universal peace, justice, and unity, leading more people to more war, violence, and disunity. Why don't we just give peace a chance? Because we have to ask the uncomfortable next question: whose peace?

Notes

- [1]. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, act 1, scene 1.
- [2]. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.7

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