

David de Boer, *The Early Modern Dutch Press in an Age of Religious Persecution: The Making of Humanitarianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023, 224 pp., ISBN 9780198876809).

This book, based on a PhD dissertation completed at Konstanz and Leiden Universities, is a contribution to the growing literature on religious persecution and migration in early modern Europe which has seen a number of important studies emerge over the past two decades, including, among others, work by Benjamin Kaplan, Ole Peter Grell, Susanne Lachenicht, Alexander Schunka and Nicholas Terpstra. Yet, it is also a study of the contemporary press and growing mass media through the lens of persecuted ‘religious minorities and their advocates’ (3). Unlike his predecessors, De Boer therefore does not focus so much on the religious refugees themselves, but on the way in which a relatively free Dutch press was employed by the persecuted and those who stood up for them to appeal to a wider transnational public in an attempt to raise solidarity and, at times, to get foreign governments to intervene on their behalf. In doing so, De Boer argues, writers used an ‘inclusive language of compassion’ which went beyond mere support for their own oppressed co-religionists (8), but instead employed a universalism which stressed the ‘common humanity’ of all victims of persecution (5). Thus, ‘opinion makers spurred people and their governments into action’, using print for humanitarian purposes as they appealed to an international audience (8). The crucial shift in the argumentation of pamphleteers from a strictly partisan towards a non-confessional rhetoric, De Boer argues following David Trim, occurred around the mid-seventeenth century, when some ‘opinion makers began to decry persecution as inhumane, without dwelling on the religious quality of the victims’ (36).

In five chronological chapters the book covers a period from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century, addressing concrete events or instances of persecution and their media response, with each example adding to the argument in different ways: the massacre of the Waldensians in Piedmont in 1655, the persecution of the Huguenots in France both before and after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, the so-called War of the Camisards in Cévennes, and finally the so-called Bloodbath of Toruń and the expulsion of the Jews from Prague in 1754.

De Boer’s argument is ambitious in crossing period boundaries constructing a bridge between an age of persecution and an age of enlightenment in which confessional conflicts were still present and clearly visible, but in which it also became possible for those advocating compassion to draw on more universal arguments for reason, justice, humanity and

the rule of law which transcended their own confessional identities. These arguments can be found in texts ranging from first-hand witness accounts of the persecuted to official documents cited by De Boer, including published and unpublished letters by clergymen, diplomatic correspondences, resolutions, edicts and other legislation, as well as histories, topical pamphlets, newsletters and early newspapers. All these sources are analysed meticulously and appropriately contextualised to create a bigger picture which shows the many entanglements of refugees' lives and the obstacles they had to negotiate.

This is a thought-provoking book which speaks not only to debates of the past by inviting us 'to reconsider the rhetoric of solidarity before modernity' in a Europe 'where religious tolerance dominated everyday life, but where deep confessional antagonism prevailed as an ideology' (169) – it also bears relevance to the present day in its attempt to understand when a state of affairs was seen as sufficiently serious to justify an international response. The work holds what it promises, showing the impact of print media, in particular the Dutch press, on the discourse of persecution and an emerging humanitarianism in Europe. It is also an impressive example of European transnational history which employs both primary and secondary sources in English, Dutch, French and German with ease – with some Italian material thrown in for good measure – while the author commands multiple historiographies as he creates an engaging and seductively clear and convincing narrative.

Nevertheless, De Boer's focus on the Dutch press makes it hard to assess how far we can really push the argument for universalism and inclusivity, as his examples – with the exception of the expulsion of the Jews from Prague – are almost exclusively Protestant. It comes as little surprise that Protestants would use the Dutch press to defend other Protestants. Besides, this scenario might also allow for an alternative interpretation of the sources, namely that the pamphlets' appeal to universalism might first and foremost be part of an irenicist attempt to unite Protestants of all shades across Europe and call for their solidarity as religious refugees sought a new home elsewhere. Alas, the subject of irenicism is only addressed relatively late in the book (149), although the question to what extent different kinds of Protestants – or indeed the whole of Western Christendom – might be (re)united in one body influenced much of the contemporary debate about persecution and toleration and would certainly benefit from further exploration in this context. We might also wonder to what extent Protestant appeals to 'shared political norms of rule of law, reason, and humanity' (96) really were primarily an attempt to universalise the experience of persecution to appeal to a common humanity, rather than intending to make Catholics look unreasonable in comparison. The focus on Protestant sources as well as the subtitle 'The Making of Humanitarianism' thus runs the risk of making the book look like a Whiggish narrative of progress, even though the author

explicitly distances himself from providing 'a linear history of political secularization' (169).

At the end of the book, De Boer suggests several ways to explore his subject further: first, to look at contemporary perceptions of the potential reach of printed works to get a better sense of the 'imagined audiences' publishers and writers aimed to address; and secondly, to extend his study backwards to a time before the rise of the printing press (171). I would add at least two more. It might be worthwhile asking how his argument for universalism might apply beyond the Protestant world to groups such as Catholics and Jews, who, as the author points out, 'did not have easy access to the Dutch press' (170). Did they have alternative channels of communication, and if so, what where they? And finally, it would be interesting to see how De Boer's argument might relate to debates in intellectual history. As the author himself points out, his book has only 'occasional references to canonical philosophers' (9), notably Hugo Grotius, who developed a concept postulating a natural duty to offer hospitality to strangers in the wider context of international law. It would be interesting to see De Boer pursue this path further to join up the political history of persecution and refuge reflected in print with a broader conceptual history of political and legal thought. In this way, we might get a sense to what extent academic debate and the popular press spoke to each other. Overall, then, De Boer offers us interesting insights into the uses of the press by religious minorities, but he also opens up new avenues for research at the intersection of social and intellectual history.

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