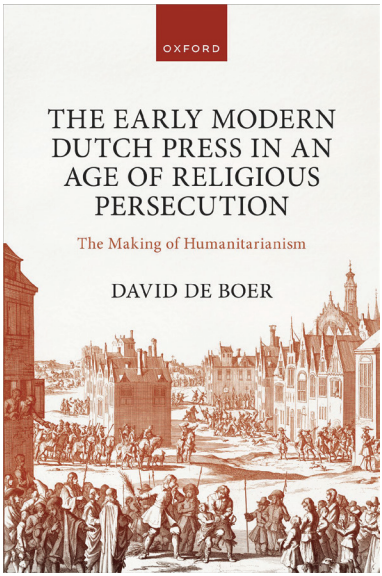
Review

David de Boer, *The Early Modern Dutch Press in an Age of Religious Persecution. The Making of Humanitarianism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2023, 225 pp. ISBN 9780198876809.



In the wake of a growing literature on humanitarianism in the early modern period, David de Boer makes an important contribution to the field by investigating how religious minorities, printers, and opinion makers used the Dutch vernacular press to seek transnational support for the Protestant victims of religious violence in different parts of Europe in the period 1650-1750. Early modern authors taking up the pen realised the potential of the printed word in steering domestic policies and international relations. Their appeal to the rule of law, reason, and human suffering evoked empathy and solidarity. Regardless of whether their calls for aid were based on confessional or human compassion, De Boer argues, they set into motion 'a process of political secularization' (6) and helped shape a humanitarian culture in eighteenth-century Europe. The Dutch Republic was critical in furthering these developments as it frequently offered asylum to religious refugees, lacked extensive censorship, and enjoyed a thriving publishing industry.

The book consists of an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion. The chapters each revolve around an episode of religious persecution. The first chapter addresses the plight of the Reformed Waldensians in Piedmont, part of the Duchy of Savoy, after many were slaughtered by Savoyard troops in 1655. The next three chapters examine the changes in press coverage of the persecuted Huguenots in France. Chapter two addresses the first phase in the late 1670s and early 1680s, when Louis XIV stripped away the Huguenots' rights and privileges granted by the Edict of Nantes (1598). The third chapter focuses on the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685), which resulted in the largest religious exodus in early modern Europe, and the fourth on the War of the Camisards (1702-1710), examining the suppression of the remaining Huguenots in the Cevennes (southeast France).

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Chapter five turns to Torún, a Royal Prussian City in Poland, where in 1724 royal Catholic troops executed ten Lutherans (among whom the burgomaster) and punished the Lutheran community for a riot with Jesuit students that had occurred the year before. The chapter finishes with a comparison to the expulsion of the Jews from Prague in 1745.

In all these cases, De Boer contends, domestic religious strife took on a transnational character when refugees and their supporters sought international aid through the dissemination of the printed word. By the time the executions in Torún took place, the language of the outcries was cast in Enlightenment terms. Authors – even if they had different solutions in mind – discussed religious tolerance as a constitutive part of the international order in Europe. De Boer cautions that this form of humanitarianism, where the international community expresses deep concerns over the religious persecuted in need, did not follow a linear path from propagating religious truths to more secular calls for humanitarian solidarity in the eighteenth century. On the contrary, these two narrative strategies appeared and re-appeared, sometimes intertwined, between 1650 and 1750. In 1655, for example, Waldensian pamphlets spoke of martyrdom but only to show that religious persecution of any faith was wrong. In 1725, an anonymous author hailed Lutheran martyrdom in Torún but in this case to emphasise it resulted from Catholic 'cruelty'. De Boer thus challenges histories of humanitarianism that suggest a secular and progressive evolution, and concludes that confessional fervour impacted European relations long after the Peace of Westphalia supposedly ended international religious wars.

The relationship between religious persecution and foreign intervention is, therefore, an important theme in the book. In early modern Europe, foreign intervention was not the norm because it could undermine the sovereignty of a ruler and, by extension, the European order. This explains why refugees, such as the Waldensians and the Huguenots, initially sought to negotiate their privileges and rights with their sovereign. Only when these negotiations failed did they seek support abroad. Similarly, foreign governments were hesitant to intervene. If prospects of war did not seem opportune, foreign governments limited their support to establishing secret funds or calling for national days of prayer. During the first phase of Louis XIV's suppression of the Huguenots, Dutch authorities remained quiet, careful not to arouse the ire of a powerful and nearby state. When in 1685 the French king revoked the Edict of Nantes, however, his persecution affected many states. An estimated 35,000 Protestants found asylum in the United Provinces, another 115,000 elsewhere in Europe and its colonies overseas. A surge of printed material about the injustice followed. Cross-border religious strife thus propelled a sense of solidarity with co-confessionals and planted the roots of humanitarianism.

Throughout the book, De Boer is thoughtful and articulate. He sketches a nuanced picture of the use of print media – newspapers, periodicals, news digests, and, foremost, pamphlets – by distinguishing the authors, audiences, and narrative strategies as well as the political contexts in which the news output appeared. However, he pays a disproportional amount of attention (three out of five chapters) to the case of the Huguenots. As the remaining two chapters also address Protestant victims of religious violence, namely the Waldensians and Lutherans, his narrative of a rising humanitarianism is predominantly a Protestant one – with Catholic rulers as the culprits. The discussion of the expulsion of Jews from Prague in 1745 affirms the Protestant perspective, but is only one example and

comes across as an afterthought at the end of the book. Incorporating an analysis of the atrocities committed against peoples of other faiths would have been helpful to measure the extent of humanitarianism as a Protestant phenomenon. Also, given the importance of print media in sustaining debates on confessional coexistence, a brief discussion on the diminished role the Dutch publishing industry played in eighteenth-century Europe could provide insights into how this affected publications about religious violence and redefined the public debate. De Boer understands the limitations of the humanitarianism he sees emerging. He has nonetheless laid the groundwork for further investigation into the relationship between religious persecutions, print media, and the emergence of a humanitarian culture in a transnational political setting. Scholars of early modern Europe, and those interested in the histories of public spheres, (consumer) news media, humanitarianism, international relations, and confessionalism will find this a critically important and compelling monograph.

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