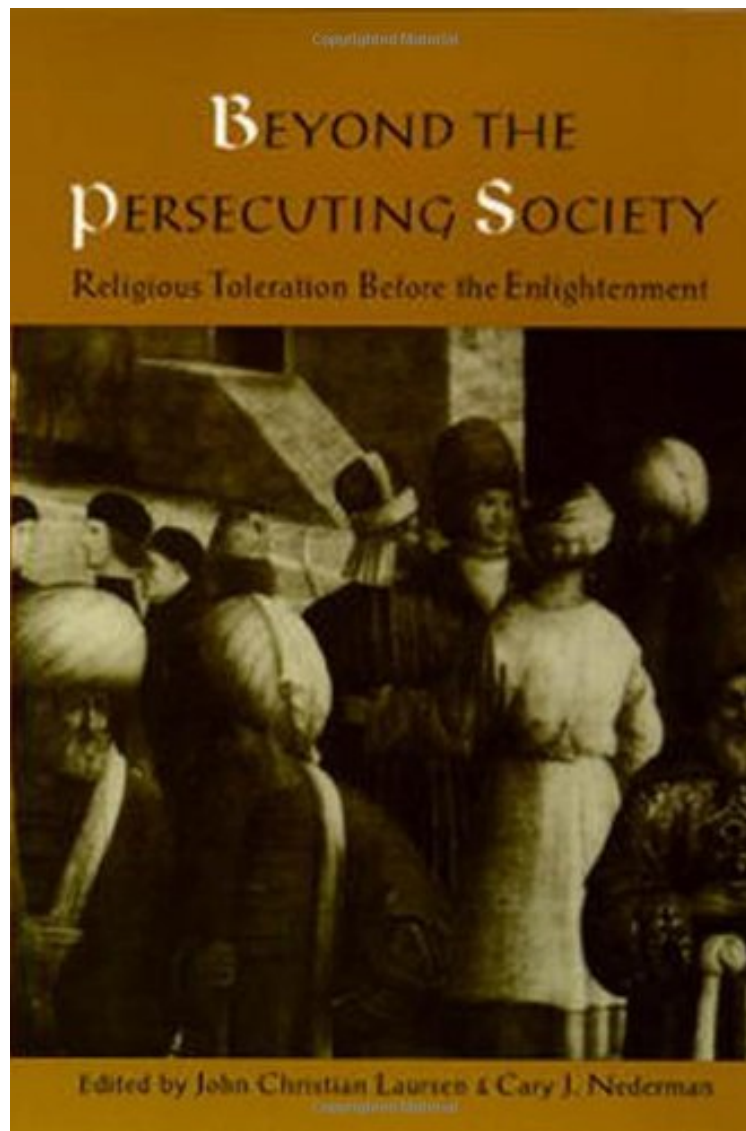


(Free) Beyond the Persecuting Society: Religious Toleration Before the Enlightenment

Beyond the Persecuting Society: Religious Toleration Before the Enlightenment

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From Brand: University of Pennsylvania Press : Beyond the Persecuting Society: Religious Toleration Before the Enlightenment before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Beyond the Persecuting Society: Religious Toleration Before the Enlightenment:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Religious Tolerance By the the Religious. Insights into Moses Maimonides and Menahem Ha-Meiri By Jan Peczkis This work consists of a series of essays on the subject of religious

tolerance. It refutes the argument that religious tolerance began in the Enlightenment, or that religious tolerance had been the creation of atheist or agnostic thinkers. (e. g, p. 5). I focus on Gary Remer's article (pp. 71-91), which is titled, Ha-Meir's Theory of Religious Toleration. Gary Remer is currently an Associate Professor of Political Science at Tulane University. Much of his article is based on the work of Yaacov Katz. Please click on, and read my review, of *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Studies in Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times* (Scripta Judaica, 3).

HOW JUDAISM BECAME NON-PERSECUTORY One of the main reasons that Jews did not persecute non-Jews was the simple fact that Jews were a minority group, and were unable to do so. Remer quips that, (quote) In contrast, Judaism, despite its unity of realms, was not as actively intolerant as Christianity. IT COULD NOT be, because Jews, since the destruction of the Second Commonwealth in 70 C. E., lacked the coercive apparatus of the state that Christianity had. The Jewish community had no legitimate means of coercion to punish gentiles for religious crimes. (unquote). (Emphasis in original). (p. 76). However, some Jews did contemplate Judaism becoming a persecutory religion if Jews became a majority. For instance, see my discussion, below, of Maimonides on idolaters, in a resurrected Jewish state.

What about Jew-on-Jew persecution? Remer notes that, compared with Christianity, Judaism placed less emphasis on orthodoxy and more on orthopraxy. He adds that, (quote) For Judaism, toleration relates more to forbidden actions than to heretical ideas. (unquote). (p. 75). Even so, Judaism did pay attention to heresy. However, Jews did not usually impose harsh penalties on Jewish heretics within their community, even though such penalties were prescribed for certain heresies. According to Remer, this did not owe to a Jewish spirit of toleration. It owed to the following: As a minority group, Jews felt that they could ill-afford to present a picture, to the gentiles, of a divided community. (p. 82).

MOSES MAIMONIDES AND HIS AMBIVALENCE ON JEWISH UNIVERSALISM This famous medieval Jew had an ambiguous attitude towards universalism. He sometimes taught that salvation could be attained by those gentiles who had proper knowledge of the Creator and who acted ethically. (p. 87). At other times, however, Maimonides (1135-1204) taught that the gentiles' obedience of the Noahide laws was, by itself, insufficient for salvation. Gentiles also had to recognize that the Holy One had revealed the Torah to the Jewish people, through Moses, in order to be saved. (p. 87).

MOSES MAIMONIDES ADVOCATED PUNISHING CHRISTIANS AS IDOLATERS Moses Maimonides believed that Christianity was clearly idolatrous. (p. 77, 78). Therefore, the Talmudic statements on idolaters applied to Christians. (p. 78). Earlier, I had noted that medieval Jews were in no position to persecute gentiles. What if the tables had been turned? Remer, quoting from the *MISHNEH TORAH* on Maimonides, comments, (quote) Had there been a Halakhic Jewish state during the Middle Ages, some gentiles might have been subject to persecution. Maimonides writes that, when Jews have achieved political power in the Holy Land, it is forbidden to tolerate idolaters in our midst. (unquote). (p. 87).

HA-MEIRI ON THE TALMUD'S DUAL MORALITY The following paragraph describes the antigoy portions of the Talmud which Rabbi Menahem ben Solomon Ha-Meiri (1249-1316) reinterpreted as referring not to gentiles in general (including Christians), but only to ancient pagan peoples. The works of Ha-Meiri, as quoted by Remer (p. 89), generally identify the tractate of the Talmud but are not more specific. The author describes the dual morality of the Talmud as follows, (quote) According to the Talmud, the legal and personal status of gentiles is inferior to that of the Jews. [Remer adds that, Many of these laws could not be applied in the Middle Ages because they presuppose Jewish sovereignty. (p. 89)]. For example, gentiles are obligated to compensate Jews fully for any damage their animals cause to Jewish property; Jews, however, are exempted from compensating gentiles from the same type of damages. Other laws in which the Talmud vests Jews with superior legal status include the obligation to return lost property [BAVA MEZIA]; the obligation to save lives [AVODAH ZARAH]; the prohibition against overcharging [BAVA MEZIA]; punishment for murder [SANHEDRIN]; permission to break the Sabbath laws in cases where life is endangered [YOMA]; permission to teach children and to lodge animals [AVODAH ZARAH]; and permission to sell weapons. Finally, according to the Talmud, it is forbidden to show [idolaters] grace [AVODAH ZARAH 20a, based upon Deuteronomy 7:2] which includes praising any of their qualities or giving them presents. (unquote). (p. 79). The Talmud [AVODAH ZARAH 26b] allows for the death penalty for apostates. (p. 91). Ha-Meiri reinterpreted "apostate", so that it would not refer to a Jew who converted to Christianity, but only to a Jew who had discarded all religion. (p. 83).

Author Gary Remer sees a fundamental difference between the approach of Christian advocates of religious tolerance, and that of Ha-Meiri. The Christians thought of finding common ground with other religions in terms of shared metaphysical truths. In contrast, Ha-Meiri could not think this way, because he then would be forced to abandon the belief that Christians are idolaters. Instead, Ha-Meiri sought common ground with Christians in terms of the building of a peaceful and orderly society. (p. 84). [This sounds like a utilitarian move rather than a fundamental change in Jewish attitudes towards Christians.][I have searched, and, if I am not mistaken, Ha-Meiri's writings are not available in English. If they were, I would study them in order to form my own opinion of Ha-Meiri. I hope that such an English-language translation soon becomes available.]

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. One of the best books on this topic! By A Customer Many don't realise that the freedom we experience today is due to the long development of an attitude of toleration. This book gives an excellent account, through a variety of essays on how this move was made possible. It is very readable, and is suitable for the beginner who has an interest in the subject, or the more advanced student/lecturer who appreciates the accuracy and depth that this book has to offer. Please give this book a go - it is a highly fascinating

subject, and you will not be disappointed. I strongly recommend everyone develop an understanding of such important subject matter. Many today argue that morality be enforced by the law - without understanding the complexity and history behind the move to remove it. It is through toleration that the quality of our lives today are made possible. If you want a better understanding of this development, I have read an abundance of material, and I can honestly say, that this title is one of the best. Give it a go.

There is a myth easily shattered that Western societies since the Enlightenment have been dedicated to the ideal of protecting the differences between individuals and groups, and another too readily accepted that before the rise of secularism in the modern period, intolerance and persecution held sway throughout Europe. In *Beyond the Persecuting Society* John Christian Laursen, Cary J. Nederman, and nine other scholars dismantle this second generalization. If intolerance and religious persecution have been at the root of some of the greatest suffering in human history, it is nevertheless the case that toleration was practiced and theorized in medieval and early modern Europe on a scale few have realized: Christians and Jews, the English, French, Germans, Dutch, Swiss, Italians, and Spanish had their proponents of and experiments with tolerance well before John Locke penned his famous Letter Concerning Toleration. Moving from Abelard to Aphra Behn, from the apology for the gentiles of the fourteenth-century Talmudic scholar, Menahem ben Solomon Ha-Meiri, to the rejection of intolerance in the "New Israel" of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, *Beyond the Persecuting Society* offers a detailed and decisive correction to a vision of the past as any less complex in its embrace and abhorrence of diversity than the present.

"*Beyond the Persecuting Society* confronts the myth that there was no general conception or practice of religious toleration before the Enlightenment. . . . It is the great strength of this collection that the diversity and richness of the often tentative allowance for confessional pluralism can be documented at times when unity of faith was seen as no less necessary than unity of obedience." *About the Author* In addition to the editors, contributors are Detlef Dering, Arlen Feldwick, Randolph C. Head, Marion Leathers Kuntz, Thomas F. Mayer, Constant J. Mews, Richard Popkin, Gary Remer, and H. Frank Way. John Christian Laursen is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Riverside, and author of *The Politics of Skepticism in the Ancients, Montaigne, Hume and Kant*. Cary J. Nederman is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Arizona and author of *Community and Consent: The Secular Political Theory of Marsiglio of Padua's "Defensor Pacis."*