

Before his book about New Amsterdam, Mr. Shorto, not a theologian, biblical scholar, scientist, or psychiatrist, had previously written popular surveys (*Gospel Truth: The New Image of Jesus Emerging from Science and History and Why It Matters* [New York: Riverhead, 1997]; *Saints and Madmen: Psychiatry Opens its Doors to Religion* [New York: Henry Holt, 1999]) as well as numerous wide-ranging articles published in the *New York Times*. I think it reasonable to use the word “journalistic” to describe his writing. His book I mention bears the grand title, *The Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Forgotten Colony that Shaped America* (New York: Doubleday, 2004). No historian has forgotten the colony of New Netherland, so the book must be aimed at non-historians. In *The Island at the Center of the World*, Mr. Shorto contrasts convivial variety in that colony with what he calls a “grim theocratic monoculture” in other colonies. This oversimplification is what I mean with the word “jingoism”—a denial of the complexity of other colonies in order to claim unique exceptionalism for Manhattan.

Mr. Shorto views my criticism of his presentation of Adriaen van der Donck as a forgotten hero of religious toleration as a straw-man argument. He writes this about van der Donck in his book: “The colony’s legacy revolves around . . . a man named Adriaen van der Donck, who has been forgotten by history but who emerges as the hero of the story and who . . . deserves to be ranked as an early American prophet, a forerunner of the Revolutionary generation” (9). “He would bring the seed of the best and noblest aspect of seventeenth-century European civilization to fresh soil a world away, where something remarkable would grow. He would play a decisive role in the creation of a great city and a new society” (94).

Mr. Shorto says that van der Donck’s vision of a new government for New Netherland, “would definitively establish Manhattan Island as the free-trading hub of the Atlantic. It would guarantee its place as gateway to the North American continent for generations of Europeans. It would be modeled on ‘the laudable government’ of the home country, with personal guarantees of freedom of conscience deriving directly from the Union of Utrecht (‘. . . each person shall remain free, especially in his religion . . .’), . . . which . . . codified the nation’s adherence to ideas of tolerance” (245–46). He writes that the “Dutch provinces had broken new ground in writing into their 1579 de facto constitution the guarantee that ‘each person shall remain free, especially in his religion, and that no one shall be persecuted or investigated because of their religion.’ This sentence became the ground on which the culturally diverse society of the seventeenth century was built. . . . In the 1620s a debate on the meaning and wisdom of tolerance had raged through the Dutch provinces. . . . Out of this struggle came an elaborate written rationale for tolerance of religious diversity. Its climax—really a watershed in human thought—came with Arminius’s follower Simon Episcopius declaring . . . that the strength of a state derived not from maintaining a single, firmly held faith, . . . but from allowing its citizens freedom of worship and intellectual inquiry. It is impossible to imagine how revolutionary this was, how intoxicating it felt to those who championed it, and how deeply it affected Adriaen van der Donck and his generation of scholars” (96–97).

Mr. Shorto states that I declare “with seeming decisiveness that in his published writings van der Donck showed little interest in tolerance.” Then he asks, “But why would he have?”

What I declared with decisiveness is that “one cannot discover in the words of van der Donck any interest in religious toleration. . . . he does not write about toleration at all.” I appreciate Mr. Shorto’s seeming acknowledgment that van der Donck nowhere discusses religious toleration. If revolutionary, intoxicating ideas about religious toleration indeed deeply affected van der Donck, I think he would have mentioned them.

In the absence of any evidence to indicate that van der Donck played “a decisive role” in bringing “freedom of worship and intellectual inquiry” to America, one might assume instead that he either was indifferent or should be counted among the growing number of Dutchmen who agreed with the arguments in favor of coercion of conscience and killing of heretics put forth at this time by the Calvinist theologian Willem Teellinck. (Against Calvin, Beza, and Teellinck, see the 1633 book by a truly forgotten champion of religious liberty Cornelis Adriaensz. Boomgaert, *Merck-teycken, Om te komen tot kennisse vande ware ende valsche Religie, Kerck, ende Leeraren, uyt hare woorden ende wercken . . . Tot vertroostinghe van die om de Religie vervolginghe lyden* [*Indication for recognizing true and false religion, church, and teachers, from their words and actions . . . for the comfort of those who suffer from persecution because of religion*]). Boomgaert synthesizes the work of his friend Coornhert with that of Twisck and others, especially Castellio. Boomgaert published Coornhert and translated and published Castellio. He had no known direct influence in America and is thus omitted from my article [whose original title included the final phrase, “in Early America”]. Besides my copy, Boomgaert’s posthumously published book is found in the British Library, and in the libraries of the University of Amsterdam and the Theological University of Kampen.)

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