

Religious Refugees in the Early Modern World: An Alternative History of the Reformation

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Exile has long been central to our understanding of certain Early Modern topics. The flight of English Protestants, and then Catholics, to the Continent in the 16th century, or the exodus of Huguenots (many to England and Ireland) after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in the 17th, are perhaps the best known examples to UK audiences. Outside the British context, Spain's expulsion of its Jews, followed by the Moriscos, the Catholic exiles from the Netherlands, and the large numbers of Protestants who left Austria during the Thirty Years' War, also demand our attention.

Exile and migration have long attracted the attention of historians, and scholars like Heiko Oberman, Ole Peter Grell, Katy Gibbons, David van der Linden, Natalie Zemon Davis, Geert Janssen, and Andrew Spicer have all worked to illuminate one aspect of exile or another, and topic continues to attract interest from all quarters. This is surely, in part, due to the growing popular awareness of the crisis of contemporary refugees, including religious refugees, in the Mediterranean. As we head towards the significant anniversaries of Luther's protest against the sale of indulgences, and the departure of the Pilgrim Fathers from Plymouth, the Reformation and the experience of early modern exile will remain important topics for some time to come, and might expect to receive a comparatively high degree of public attention.

It is into this context that Nicholas Terpstra's *Religious Refugees in the Early Modern World* arrives. By placing exiles and refugees at the centre of its argument, it proposes a new approach to the Reformation and the period as a whole, based not only on theology and church history, but on broader cultural and social histories that move beyond the church, and indeed the Christian community. This is a history of the Reformation that, he says, begins with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 and places Jews and Muslims in its centre. It is a history, too, in which questions of social relationships are as important as doctrinal or political decisions.

The book's focus is particularly on the ways in which communities identified and differentiated themselves; as he has put it, there was a change in emphasis in this period from what people did, to who they were. He is as interested in tracing the ways in which these communities moved in parallel, or at least with similar

motivations, as with the specific differences that they displayed. One of the key mechanisms that he sees in operation is that of 'observance': both the late medieval movement within monastic orders towards stricter obedience of the rules, and the broader impulse towards such rigour in society more broadly. The observant ethos, 'with its drive towards separation and a return to original sources' (p. 82), can equally well be found in Protestant and Jewish communities in this period. *Religious Refugees* traces the rise of communities, if not states, defined by their religious confession, and by accompanying cultural signifiers. In this, it fits in with what has been described or so as the 'weak theory' of confessionalization. That is, it brings religion in line with social and political developments, and emphasizes the commonalities between denominations. Indeed, it suggests that the hardening of confessional boundaries during this period was one of the defining features of the early modern period.

Religious Refugees in the Early Modern World, then, is indeed a book about exile and refugees, but they are only the most prominent of its themes. The subtitle is more descriptive of the book's subject matter; this indeed is in many ways: '*An Alternative History of the Reformation*'. Terpstra has described elsewhere how the roots of this project can be found in his work on a school textbook on the Reformation, and his desire to approach the subject in a manner open to a group of students from diverse backgrounds – some of them migrants themselves – which suggested that there were other ways to think about the changes of the period than through the lens of theology and structures. For Terpstra, the key concepts to understanding these relationships are those of purity, contagion, and purgation. Thus, the Reformation as a whole is described as: 'the first grand project in social purification' (p. 7). This pursuit of purity, through separation and purgation of the impure, gave legitimacy to many social developments during this period, from local events like the confining of the poor to hospices, or the confinement of Jews to ghettos, to a national policy of expulsion and tests of faith.

Religious Refugees in the Early Modern World is notable for having no footnotes or endnotes. It concludes with a selected reading list, totalling five pages and 120 items, rather than a fuller bibliography. In many ways, this can seem like a lost opportunity. A reader with a background in the subject may recognize the battles over Genevan baptismal names from William Naphy's work, or the importance of Isaac Israel Suasso to the Jewish diaspora in Amsterdam from the work of Yosef Kaplan and others, but other examples and anecdotes are harder to trace. Despite the lack of this academic apparatus, the book does not present a simple narrative or a simplistic argument. The book's chapters are organized by theme, and divided into a deep array of sections, sub-sections, and case studies. These repeatedly place Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, and sometimes Islamic examples alongside each other, emphasising parallels of reaction and process that are so important to Terpstra's argument.

This book is expansive in time and in space. Given Terpstra's strong grounding in the Italian Renaissance, it is not surprising that many of his examples go back to the 15th and even 14th centuries. The conciliar movement, Jan Hus, and Savonarola are returned to on several occasions as examples of the changes in Western Christianity, and particular emphasis is placed on observant movements within religious orders as a forerunner of reform and separation. It follows events through to the middle of the 18th century, and includes amongst its exiles the Acadians of the 1760s.

Like many histories of the Reformation, *Religious Refugees*'s focus is most strongly on Western Europe. Ottoman and North African territories appear less frequently, as do parts of North America and Eastern Europe. Poland, Bohemia, and Hungary are usually mentioned in those cases where they stand apart from the rest of Latin Europe; the main focus of the book is on England, Spain, France, Germany, the Low Countries, and Italy. This focus is common in histories of the Reformation, especially those that focus on the changes within the Latin Church; it is interesting that despite the new approach and new chronology Terpstra advocates here, the geographic approach has changed less dramatically. I suspect that the reasons for this lie in the connections he has made between (Western) European ideals of community and Catholic metaphors of the body politic, which play an important part in his first chapters.

Perhaps the dominant metaphor in this book is that of the body, and especially that of the 'corpus

Christianum', the body of believers, which provides the central organizing principle of the early chapters. Terpstra dedicates his first chapter to outlining how this description of the community as a body, and often as the body of Christ, helped shape action and rhetoric in the early modern period. He also discusses the power of this metaphor in light of the growing interest, through the medieval period, in the body of Christ as represented by the Eucharist, as seen in the growth of the feast of Corpus Christi, and the series of legends about the power of the Host, often directed against groups of heretics or Jews. Cities, parishes, and religious communities might have sharply defined boundaries, be protected by patron saints, and feature rituals (like Corpus Christi) in which large parts of the population could expect to play a role.

Threats to this literal body politic, which Terpstra divides into external threats (mainly thought to be posed by Islam), and heretics, Jews, and witches from inside, were seen as part of a wider cosmic drama, and interpreted in biblical terms. This idea of the body in turn allowed for metaphors of 'infection', and a discussion of the body's own weaknesses, such as a divided papacy (this division Terpstra argues, 'denied the very concept of the *Corpus Christianum*' (p. 63)) and the division of the clergy into secular and regular (and the division of regular orders into Conventual and Observant wings, as well). The charge of infection was never very far from the persecution of religious minorities, witches, or vagrants, either.

It was these threats, and their perceived effects, that triggered the reactions that make up the second chapter of this book, such as the coming of plague in the 1340s, which in many instances seems to have led to attacks on Jewish communities. Terpstra sees these as falling into a number of categories, which apply throughout the period and in a number of contexts. In this schema, the 'body' could be purified through a programme of: separation, containment or enclosure, prosecution, and purgation. Each of these responses has been divided into subsections; containment, for example, includes not only enclosing nuns and the increasing institutionalization of the poor and sick from the 15th century (a topic on which Terpstra is expert), but also the construction of ghettos and brothel quarters through the 16th century. Throughout the book, Terpstra seeks to draw connections between these different movements that might be lost in a more narrow study of religious disputes only, or of the treatment of the poor. He notes that many of the German cities which participated in the great wave of Jewish expulsions of the late 15th century were early adopters of Protestantism in the 16th, giving rise to a second expulsion of Catholic clergy.

It is in the section on purgation that the book turns its focus to the question of exile, looking at the expulsion of the Jewish and Morisco communities from Spain, and identifying three distinct waves of persecution of Christian minorities from 1520 to 1750, each larger and more permanent than the last. Terpstra also dedicates a portion of this discussion to a number of examples, in order to demonstrate the increasing link between religious and national identities. Terpstra's discussion of 'weak' confessionalization theory is important for much of the book's understanding of the period after 1600. The Holy Roman Empire, England, France, and Hungary and Transylvania, and Austria are each used to demonstrate the trend in each country towards religious conformity or toleration, and the development of the *Corpus Christianum* 'into the body politic of the nation-state'. The short section on Hungary and Transylvania, for example, outlines the move from the official tolerance of the 16th century to the re-Catholicization drive of the 17th, while the much longer one on England (which includes Ireland and the American colonies) continues through the Glorious Revolution and the birth of a 'Protestant dynastic identity' (p. 127) under the Hanoverian monarchs.

Having discussed the ways (exile being one) in which the emerging body politic defended itself against the growth of religious diversity or dissent, Terpstra then focusses on a selection of case studies of exiles and cities which illustrate the range of reactions to exile and purgation. These cases add some welcome specificity. Many of them will also be well-known to readers familiar with the period, including not only some of Foxe's martyrs, and the *converso* humanist Juan Luis Vives, but also Jean Calvin and Al-Hasan Ibn Muhammad al-Wazan al-Fasi, also known to us as Leo Africanus. The places, represented by, Venice, Basel, Munster, Geneva, Amsterdam, Algiers, Massachusetts, and Salonika and Istanbul taken together, are similarly given each short sections of a few pages. These show how exiles left, or arrived, there, and the development in each place of arrangements of toleration or an increasing sense of national identity. Venice, for example, is noted for its development of the Ghetto, but also for the strong Greek confraternity of St

Nicholas, and the *fondachi*, headquarters and warehouses for the German and Turkish merchants. Geneva, following John Knox and others, is seen as a laboratory for Reformed ideas, influential on the refugees who experienced them and then returned to their homelands.

Terpstra then digs deeper into the ways in which conformity, or purity, became central to group identification in this period. Among this chapter's many sections and subsections, the three key themes are those of Initiation, Presence (eg the presence of God in the community) and Authority (again, primarily in a religious sense). The different ways in which these questions were treated helps to define the communities and the ways in which they related to each other, through mechanisms like England's Test Acts or the sometimes-absurd scenes in which Huguenots would attempt to avoid genuflecting to a passing procession, only to find themselves pursued by the priest.

The continuation of this point is a study of faith in action, in particular the application of charity. Again, charitable institutions had an important role to play in defining membership in the community, and had a disciplinary role as well, especially inside the charitable enclosures, like orphanages or Magdalen houses, which became more prominent over this period. The argument here is that reform itself could be a kind of purification, and that we can tie it to the increased interest in purity and observance that Terpstra sees as central to his thesis. Actions like purgation (which Terpstra sees as essential to 'observant' thinking) could operate on the level of the mass expulsions seen in Spain, or the much more local exclusions from confraternities, which might share motivations about policing behaviour or simply one's religious background.

This is where the interest in cultural identity, and its construction, is most clearly approached. Terpstra spends time discussing distinctive behavior around the naming of children, dress, food, and domestic arrangements, many of which were shaped or intensified in minority and exile communities, including those notable groups of returnees (such as the Marian exiles) who retained a special standing within the community.

The final chapter carries the subtitle: 'The world the refugees made', but the chapter discusses the creation of identity and discipline more widely than simply amongst refugee communities. It does so through a number of sub-sections. Most notably, the section on 'Tools' discusses the uses of printing at some length, while 'Personnel' covers the widespread professionalization of the clergy in many confessions. Even the application of historical, and biblical imagination to contemporary events is given its due as shaping the culture and self-identity of communities, including exiles whose identification with the Babylonian captivity, or the escape from Egypt, for example, can be easily understood. These catechisms, confessions, and martyrologies (a particularly popular format, and one which did more than most to draw clear lines of belief and behaviour) were developed in many contexts, but Terpstra argues that they can largely be considered to have been a top-down process, which amounted to one of the major elements of 'early modernity' itself.

Terpstra concludes by following key examples into the 20th century (such as the afterlife of Martin Luther's antisemitic writing) and drawing connections between the last century and the period of the Reformation, arguing that several of the important fault-lines of 20th century can be found in these conflicts and in these ideas. Terpstra argues that many of the important fault-lines of the 19th and 20th centuries were laid down during the Reformation. We can see this both in the existence of communities that existed outside of the borders of nation-states, such as the Sudeten Germans or the Greeks of Turkey, as well as national myths: the lionization of Hus by Czech patriots, or the complicated debates about Protestantism in Third Republic France, explicitly drew on events of the 15th and 16th centuries. The modern world, including nationalism and its particular imagined communities, grew out of this earlier set of identities.

Religious Refugees in the Early Modern World aims to do a great deal more than discuss religious refugees. Certainly, their impact on their host communities, and the circumstances that made their flight necessary, emerge as the clearest example of the dynamics which Terpstra identifies. By aiming to do this as an alternative history, Terpstra aims to make connections, and give new places, for a wider audience to start

thinking about the Reformation and the early modern period. This book will be read and debated by many who are already familiar with the period and some of the key arguments; for them it will likely spark discussion about where we place the Reformation in relation to wider trends in the early modern period. For others, including undergraduate students, this should offer a thought-provoking introduction to the field, as Terpstra intended, and hopefully some new and interesting debates about both the early modern period and our own times.

The author is happy to accept this review and does not wish to comment further.

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