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An Alternative History of the Reformation
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INTRODUCTION

One of the harshest realities of the modern world is the plight of refugees. War, brutal dictators, and inter-communal tensions regularly send tens of thousands fleeing for their lives over the nearest border. Race, ethnicity, and religious identity often provide the overt reasons for exile and expulsion. Some refugees settle in camps, hoping to return, while others keep moving from country to country in search of a new life. Families are torn apart, and those who choose not to flee risk being killed by armies, guerillas, or neighbours. The twentieth century saw millions killed, millions flee as refugees, and millions more forced to migrate when war destroyed their homelands. In 2014 the United Nations High Commission on Refugees estimated that the current global total of displaced peoples had risen beyond 50 million. Has it always been this way? When did refugees first become a common phenomenon, and why?

On the Move

European states began using exile and expulsion as deliberate tools of policy about six hundred years ago, in the period known as the late Middle Ages or Renaissance. This was when the religious refugee in particular became a mass phenomenon. Medieval traditions regarding purity, contagion, and purgation took a sharper definition in the fifteenth century. Political and economic realities deeply shaped the many cultural forces and historical events that then spurred institutional religious reformation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Towns, cities, and states had long been concerned with asserting their religious character and spiritual purity. As power began flowing towards monarchs and central governments, French king Henry IV's goal of "one faith, one law, one King" took hold across the continent. Those who fell outside this unity were not just alien, but also

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impure and possibly contagious. Any society that took its responsibilities to God seriously might have to purge itself in order to purify its population and so maintain its own health.

The sharp language of purification and purgation came out of medicine, but was adopted by religious reform movements. The drive to purge and purify reshaped Europe and the globe throughout the early modern period. This book will argue that because purgation was so central a part of religious reform, we should include the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 as one of the critical events marking the start of 'the Reformation' – no less significant than Martin Luther's posting of the Ninety-Five Theses in 1517 or English king Henry VIII's divorce controversy of the 1520s and '30s. Iberian Jews were given the choice to be baptised as Christians or to leave the land that they had lived in for over a thousand years. Iberian Muslims, who had lived in Spain for seven hundred years, were given the same ultimatum in 1502. These were not the first or last threats – Jews had faced similar demands in 1391, and Muslims would face them again in 1609–14. Yet the 1492 decree of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella was the most ambitious in its national scope, numerical scale, and religious focus. To its proponents, it was an exercise in community building and a pious act. It was also the wave of the future. It set membership in the national community on the foundations of religious truth and individual will, rather than on accidents of birth. Within decades, Dutch Anabaptists, Italian Calvinists, English Catholics, and Bohemian Hussites would all be offered the same choice: join or leave.

Mass expulsions did not come overnight. Throughout the course of the fifteenth century, an accelerating wave of expulsions across Europe forced hundreds of thousands of people out of their homes for reasons of religion: 20,000 Jews were expelled from towns across Germany and France throughout the century, before Spain's unlucky 80,000 were given three weeks to leave in 1492. A decade later, the 200,000 who remained of Granada's half-million Muslim population were given the choice of baptism or exile. Anabaptists began fleeing from west and central to Eastern Europe in the 1520s and 1530s; *spirituali* fled Italy from the 1540s; Protestant Marian exiles abandoned England in the 1550s and Catholics left under Elizabeth I. Larger and larger groups were on the move: 10,000 Catholics fled the Netherlands when Calvinists seized power in the 1570s and early 1580s, and then 150,000 Protestants fled from Flanders when Spanish troops retook the region later in that decade. In the 1570s and 1580s, 80,000 *moriscos* were moved from Granada and Valencia into Castile.

The scale of expulsions only increased through the seventeenth century as nations gained a firmer shape and identity, and as governments gained greater

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policing power: 300,000 Muslims fled from Iberia in 1609–14, 150,000 Huguenots from France after 1685, and 20,000 Protestants from the bishopric of Salzburg in 1731–32 in the last large religiously motivated expulsion in premodern Europe. Outside Europe, the British forcibly relocated more than 11,000 French Catholic settlers from Acadie from 1755. They hoped it would be the final solution for a determined guerrilla movement that was resisting absorption into the British Empire. It would be the last time a European colonial power forcibly resettled European settlers for reasons of religion or nationality. Of course, all colonial powers would continue exploiting and indeed inventing religious, tribal, and racial distinctions in their efforts to divide and conquer the various peoples and territories in their American, African, and Asian empires.

Not all exiles were driven out by formal proclamations, and not all migrants fled for their lives. The early modern period also saw 'voluntary' migrations of religious groups with effects that would resonate through later centuries. Some were engineered by governments to secure political control of contested areas, as when English governments moved Protestants into northern Ireland in what were known as the 'Ulster plantations'. In other cases, whole communities relocated overseas, either to have a chance to exercise their own restrictive notions of religious purity or at least to escape interference and persecution from neighbours and officials. The same European governments that persecuted them at home sometimes supported their move to overseas colonies. French Protestants initially moved freely to Brazil and New France with the eager support of Parisian officials who were finding it difficult to persuade other Frenchmen to occupy the newly claimed lands. Yet these same officials soon began to fear that these settlers might become a fifth column of resistance to the crown and so prohibited Protestants from moving to these colonies or publicly worshipping there. Portuguese Jews settled Recife in Brazil and then, when uprooted by the Inquisition, established plantations in Suriname. So many Spanish Jews who had formally converted to Catholicism moved to Mexico in the sixteenth century – more than half of all Spanish settlers by some estimates – that the Inquisition felt compelled to follow them by 1571.

Of course, not all migrants wore their religious convictions so prominently on their sleeves, or even much in their hearts. Many moved to pursue trade or avoid prison, to follow or flee family, or simply to find opportunities not available at home. They could still get caught up in the rhetoric of exile and expulsion. Perhaps the most self-conscious *religious* exiles were the English Puritans, who seized on the name of 'pilgrims' and on the biblical model of the Israelites fleeing Egypt when they left England from the

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1620s–40s in search of a Promised Land in America. Their exile experience led them to see themselves as a Chosen People who were to be a Light on a Hill. That same conviction, without the Puritan creed, informed many of the English Catholics who later followed them to Maryland and Rhode Island. The strong sense of being an exceptional nation with a divine destiny, first framed by religious exiles in the seventeenth century, has since become a fundamental part of American identity, embraced by Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Christians as a secularized civic religion.

In light of these dynamics, the Reformation stands out as the first period in European and possibly global history when the religious refugee became a mass phenomenon. Europe was certainly no stranger to exile, crusade, and heresy hunting. The origins of what has been called its 'persecuting society' lay further back in time. Yet never before had so many people of so many different faiths – hundreds of thousands certainly and perhaps millions – been forcibly relocated by the demands of religious purity. Some, like Iberia's Jews or France's Huguenots, were being pushed out of a nation that was self-consciously purifying itself. Others, like Munster's apocalyptic Anabaptists and Massachusetts Bay's Puritans were being pulled to a Promised Land where they could form their own pure communities. In most cases, push and pull were just two sides of the coin in the new currency of religious community. For many refugee communities, exile was internalized to the point where it became a key element in how its members defined themselves. They embraced it, and even continued doing to themselves what others had done to them. Being exiled sometimes made refugees less rather than more tolerant of others. Persecution and martyrdom pushed some Radical Anabaptists to isolated agricultural communities in central and eastern Europe where they disciplined their own erring or dissident members with the choice of compliance or exile. Refugee status sharpened Calvinists' conviction that they were the Chosen People of God living like latter-day children of Israel exiled from slavery in Egypt. In a series of promised lands from Geneva and Emden to New England and South Africa, the pain of exile became for Calvinists a badge of courage, a mark of election, and a form of discipline. Across the globe, returned refugees or transplanted exiles became some of the most hard-line advocates of religious intolerance and purification.

Exile did not always mean relocation over the nearest border. It could also mean forced removal to some secure or enclosed place within the city or territory. An accelerating cascade of expulsions across Europe through the fifteenth century propelled increasing numbers of Jews into Italy, where by mid-century some preachers began sounding alarm bells about a rising

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'Jewish contagion'. Civic governments, trying to calm these fears without risking the loss of Jewish capital, built walls and gates around Jewish neighbourhoods and thus created the enclosed ghetto as a solution to protect the Christian community from this new 'contagion'. But who did those hastily-erected walls and gates protect? Ironically, the ghettos consolidated Jewish community and reinforced the authority of rabbis and religious councils in the world that the Jews made within the walls. This certainly frustrated those Christian authorities that had built "conversion houses" just outside the ghetto gates in order to draw out Jews into Christendom. Despite these frustrations, enclosure in a walled and gated building or neighbourhood became a common cultural form that was almost like a kind of internal exile. And throughout the early modern period, Christian authorities trusted in enclosures to separate, protect, punish, or convert a wide range of groups. They built many kinds of enclosures for nuns, orphans, the poor, and other marginal people, although it was not always clear whether these marginal groups were being protected from their surrounding communities, or whether those communities were being protected from them.

Even as a mass phenomenon, religious exile had an individual face. It was the common experience of many of the key thinkers of the period, and many worked their experience as religious refugees into their thinking and writing: Isaac Abravanel, Juan Luis Vives, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Menno Simons, Reginald Pole, Lelio Socinio, Fernando Cardoso, Johan Comenius, Mary Ward, and many others. Some, like Michael Servetus and Giordano Bruno, moved back and forth across Europe and finished their migrations only when they were burned at the stake as heretics. Others like Elizabeth Dirks, Janneken Muntsdorp, and Margaret Polley went to the stake before they could hit the road, becoming a cautionary lesson for those who might be slow to flee.

Forced expulsion reshaped Europe's social geography through the early modern period by creating diasporic communities across and beyond the continent. At a time when few Europeans wanted to move to remote overseas colonies, refugees and religiously-driven migrants figured disproportionately as the source of settlers. In some colonies like Portuguese Goa or Angola, they would impose regimes as restrictive as the ones they had fled. In others like Brazil and parts of New England they would develop more open forms of co-existence and hybridity. Some European communities, like Emden and Geneva, became temporary shelters for thousands of transient refugees. Others like Amsterdam and Salonika developed into international entrepots whose open social atmosphere attracted migrants of all kinds and revolutionized economic life. Many of these refugee communities lasted for

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Map 1. Cities of Early Modern Europe & the Mediterranean. Produced by Colin Rose.

centuries, like those of the Mennonites in the Ukraine, the Al-Andalus Moriscos in Istanbul and Algiers, and the Jews in Salonika and Eastern Europe. Diasporic communities established by Jews around Europe and the Mediterranean remained intact until new waves of expulsion, ethnic cleansing, and Holocaust crashed over the twentieth century and swept them into Auschwitz and Bergen Belsen. The twentieth century's religion was a racialized nationalism, but its drive to purge various impure groups and purge the community remained as strong as ever.

Religious exile and forced migration were not limited to Christendom. Greek Orthodox believers fled the steady expansion of Ottoman Turks into the Byzantine Empire. The Ottoman policy of *sürgün*, or resettling, forced criminals, colonists, and immigrants around the Empire according to local need, and was sometimes applied collectively to distinct religious and ethnic groups like the Jews. Jews fleeing Spain or the Holy Roman Empire were steered towards a few specific centers like Istanbul, Salonika, Safed, Edirne, and Izmir. Those same cities received Jews who had been caught up in the Ottoman military advance into central Europe in the 1520s, when thousands fled from Buda and Belgrade. The Ottomans moved fewer peoples around

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the Mamluk empire after conquering it in 1517, but their chief Islamic opponents in the Persian Safavid Empire also created religious refugees. As Persian Shi'ite clergy gained power from the late sixteenth century, they steadily increased pressure on Jewish communities and pushed for forced conversion campaigns which led many Jews to flee to Baghdad by the mid-seventeenth century.

Reformation Histories

What is 'Reformation'? Historians used to describe the period in terms of the search for a purer faith and simpler community in reaction to supposed abuses and corruption in the institutional Catholic Church. Histories of the Reformation were deeply shaped by the religious and national divisions the period created: Catholics and Protestants wrote very different accounts, but so too did French, English, or German historians. For centuries, most historians focused on the lives of particular religious reformers and the development of particular national church institutions. They lionized national heroes and demonized national enemies. From the nineteenth century, many asserted that the period's disputes triggered a series of developments that created the modern age. They found in the Reformation the birth of modern sensibilities about conscience, nation, and political liberty that were grouped together and described as 'modernity' – a cultural and intellectual development that many liberals praised and many conservatives condemned. Martin Luther's intellectual conflicts and refusal to bend to the pope were portrayed as assertions of individual freedom of conscience. Henry VIII's decision to break with Rome so he could break with his wife and secure his dynasty was a firm assertion of state power over the church. The Jesuit missions that accompanied Spanish and French colonists and framed a global Catholicism were confirmations of Catholicism's universality. The Calvinist framing of political responsibility confirmed representative government and the right to resist tyranny. There were few key values of modern Western society that historians could not trace back to the European Reformation, for better or worse.

If our search for origins – itself very controversial – now takes us beyond a theologian's intellectual breakthrough in a German university town and back further to a religious community's forced removal from Iberia, we are acknowledging that the Reformation was not just a movement for intellectual and religious change. It was also Europe's first grand project in social purification. Of course, these two phenomena are still intimately related. We cannot ignore how the period redefined theological doctrines, created new hybrid

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political–ecclesiastical institutions, or experienced economic shifts and social changes. These were both cause and consequence of the broader efforts to create purified communities of faith by means of exile and enclosure. Historians have always framed the chronology of events and movements according to the interests and values of their time. Every period, including our own, must re-evaluate the Reformation according to new priorities. Catholic and Protestant historians of the Reformation and Enlightenment periods saw sex, corruption, money, and possibly the devil at the root of each other's successes. By the nineteenth century, Friedrich Hegel and Thomas Carlyle saw it as demonstrating the catalytic force of a Great Man who could trigger historical change by uniting intellectual innovation with courageous individual will. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels saw the Reformation as a deft manoeuvre by the capitalist mercantile class to wrench economic authority away from the landed aristocracy by undermining a church that had given nobles and kings their land, legitimacy, and power. When twentieth-century social history put the Reformation into a longer *durée*, historians who were curious about the experience of women or of the poor began rewriting the narrative. In each case, changing interpretations were driven not just by what historians discovered in archives and manuscripts but also by the social and political movements swirling outside the archive walls. Those movements helped them read familiar documents in new ways or led them to look for new documents that addressed questions no one had thought to ask before.

The resulting phases of Reformation historiography have not been sequential but concentric in their relations one to the other. New interpretations more often absorb than overturn their predecessors. They also put familiar sources under a new light that may turn up previously hidden meanings or connections. The political realism of the 1960s led historians to reread Luther's inspiring writings about the 'priesthood of all believers' as being in practice the more limited 'priesthood of all qualified burghers' – and male burghers at that. In the same way, a Reformation whose origins are redated to include the Jews' expulsion from Spain, and whose focus expands to include the refugee, the exile, the forcibly enclosed cannot ignore famous texts like the *Twelve Articles of the Peasantry*, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, or the *Edicts of the Council of Trent*. It rereads them. In the process, it highlights how profoundly the language of purity and purgation frame them, and how naturally exile and enclosure flow from them. As societies composed clearer definitions of what was good and normal and holy, they had to decide what to do with those who were now defined as bad and deviant and unholy. This is one reason why the Reformation saw the emergence of more

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efficient state-church institutions that were expected to police new boundaries. The realities of exile and of enclosure put these developments into a different framework and should lead us to question some of the optimism behind earlier interpretations.

Through much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Reformation was seen as a critically important period in the history of western progress and civilization – it was a key initial stage in the story of modernity. Yet faith in modernity collapsed through the last decades of the twentieth century. Gandhi quipped that 'Western Civilization' sounded like a good idea that perhaps ought to be tried, and in that one joke put his finger on the absurdity and hypocrisy of modernity's deeply Eurocentric approach to global history. Historians now are sceptical about the possibility of tracing causality so far back through time. They are also more alert to and critical of the special interests that might be driving the effort. In post-modern historiography, treatments of the Reformation are often more local, individual, and cultural. Our sensitivity to the complicated dynamics of the particular in the past make us wary of finding the birth of anything in the period, let alone our own 'modern age'.

More to the point, we now find more continuities that cross what used to be the sharp boundary of the sixteenth century with its border posts in famous events like Luther's appearance at the Diet of Worms in 1521, Calvin's publication of one edition of *Institutes* after the other from 1536, and the gathering of Catholic churchmen at the Council of Trent from 1547 to 1563. Words like 'corruption' are used less often to describe the period that lies on the medieval side of that boundary, and 'reform' is now not always seen as positive for all those it affected. Current Reformation histories put theology and politics more securely into the contexts of anthropology and sociology to better assess how the period's dynamics interact with gender, class, marginality, ritual, art, violence, and popular culture. The Reformation is like a house with many windows, and each gives a different view on to the life and relationships of those inside.

Approaching the Reformation by looking into the window of religious expulsion and exile puts the themes of purity, contagion, and purgation into the foreground and gives us an angle of vision that allows us to explore the movement for religious reform cross-culturally, across many faiths, and as a global phenomenon. Focusing on exiles and refugees re-arranges our sense of how ideas and institutions relate. We may rethink what influenced what. We may be surprised by the appearance of people and relationships we had not noticed before. Looking at Luther as a refugee may draw out new dimensions of his work, as it has done in recent years for Calvin. None of this negates the

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view we have long had by looking through other more familiar windows. Yet it may lead us to think differently about the house itself.

And that different thinking will happen regardless. Reformation studies continue taking their shape from the lives, concerns, and questions of those who are writing them. Fewer students or scholars are fascinated by the fine shadings of Protestant and Catholic theology and Church Order than they would have been forty years ago. Fewer identify closely with the churches that split apart into warring groups as a result of the upheavals of the sixteenth century. Many are deeply suspicious of institutions generally, and of religious institutions above all. And more now are themselves exiles, immigrants, and refugees, and these personal realities point their historical curiosity in new directions. There is far more interest in what happened at the boundaries of belief and race because there are far more people whose lives stretch across those boundaries. We study, live, and marry across lines of race, ethnicity, or religion that were once heavily policed by familial, social, and national disapproval. That policing acted at every level, delivering both the genocidal holocausts of Armenians and Jews in the twentieth century, and also the mundane regulations that tried to prevent Catholics from applying for jobs in Protestant shops, or Jews from buying property in 'Christian' suburbs. Our recent wars have been described by some as a 'clash of civilizations' between Christianity and Islam, but they have seen equally violent clashes between Shia, Sunni, and Alawite. Such frequent examples of bloody hatred and banal prejudice make us more curious about past times when religious communities either lived together more peaceably or when they decided that co-existence was no longer possible. Our experiences of tension, collaboration, and cross-cultural relations make us more curious about how past cultures fought, co-existed, and mixed.

To acknowledge that the Reformation period was *deeply* about exile, expulsion, and refugees is not to say that it was *only* about them. Nor is it to say that its theologies and religious institutions were universally or necessarily oppressive. Religion was not the only factor behind expulsions, but it often provided the critical justification and language. The forced mass migration of religious minorities became a normal, familiar, and expected feature of a public policy that was oriented towards building a stronger society. If we ask why, we often hear distinctly religious language of purity, contagion, and purgation. These are recurring motifs that we can find in everything from sermons and tracts to plays and songs. They are found in royal decrees, popular ballads, and children's proverbs, sometimes on the surface but more often as a recurring subtext. We need to ask: why do these themes seem to accelerate in the fifteenth century? Why they are so

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