

Introduction

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This volume advances a novel framework to understand the nature and impact of the Protestant Reformations. It starts from the assumption that it will be fruitful for the next decades of scholarship to investigate religious change as multi-centric across Western and non-Western worlds. Protestantism during the early modern period is currently predominantly presented as a European story, and, despite a growing awareness of European networks of exchange as well as scholarship on the history of missions, much research remains confined to national boundaries. Further dialogue between scholars of the European Reformations and early Americanists, and scholars of the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa is needed to enrich the way the entire subject is conceived and taught. Historians have adopted the concept of a “long Reformation” during the past decades, but they are only beginning to substantially integrate global Protestant experiences into their accounts of the early modern world created by the Reformations, to compare Protestant ideas and practices to other world religions, to chart colonial politics and experiences, and to ask how resulting ideas and identities were negotiated by Europeans at the time. Through its wide geographical and chronological scope, *Protestant Empires* aims to contribute to this change and showcases selective model approaches on just *how* to think anew.

A Europeanized Reformation

During the past decades, university courses, textbooks, and handbooks have Europeanized the Protestant Reformations and globalized the Catholic Reformations.¹ There are several historiographical and institutional reasons for this development. First among these is the influence of the confessionalization paradigm which newly invigorated Reformation history for three decades after 1980 but focused solely on a European path

¹ For a discussion and new departure, see Ulinka Rublack, “Introduction,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Protestant Reformations*, ed. Ulinka Rublack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1–22.

towards modernity.² This paradigm proposed that Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Catholicism consolidated their confessional profiles in Europe in similar ways during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It argued that this supported state-building processes by enshrining new disciplinary norms among the population. Developed by Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling, the paradigm challenged an entire tradition of segregated scholarship that had focused on either the Protestant or the Catholic Reformations and tended to equate only Protestantism with the features identified with modernity, such as greater rationalization. It also departed from the often intensely local and short-term focus of social historical studies, which had been influential from the 1960s onwards and typically explored the local implementation and impact of the Reformation in specific urban or rural communities as well as territories.

Confessionalization historians were informed by sociological approaches and interested in broad structures and comparisons. This meant that they had little time for the new cultural history that took off during the 1970s and 1980s. New cultural historians were influenced by anthropological approaches which led them to investigate historical belief-systems and identities through the rituals, symbols, and everyday practices which made sense to people at the time. They were interested in tracing the relationship of popular and elite cultures, the transgressions and the conflicts. New cultural historians equipped themselves to study the importance of kinship as well as the household as microorganisms of government, ideas about femininity and masculinity, sexuality and the body. They were fascinated by the way in which ideas about the supernatural and “magic” merged with Christian ideas in idiosyncratic ways long into the eighteenth century. All of their research challenged teleological views of modernity as unilinear processes of rationalization or the decline of familial ties, for instance.³ Inspired by microhistory, such research often deeply mined local archives, contextualized case-stories or focused on one particular theme. It intersected with a new cultural history of the book that studied the reception, circulation, and transformation of ideas through practices of reading, annotating, and communication, which

² For an influential summary in English, see Heinz Schilling, “Confessional Europe,” in *Handbook of European History 1400–1600*, ed. Thomas A. Brady, Heiko A. Oberman, and James D. Tracey (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 205–47, free access on the web www.pro-europa.eu/europe/schilling-heinz-confessional-europe/.

³ For general approaches, see Peter Burke, *What Is Cultural History?*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2018), for the field of religious history more specifically, see Alexandra Walsham, “Migrations of the Holy: Explaining Religious Change in Medieval and Early Modern Europe,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern History*, 44/2 (2014): 241–80.

were rooted in specific life-worlds.⁴ The confessionalization paradigm, by contrast, intended to chart the authoritative standardization of ideas through catechisms, for instance, and to map the social disciplining of entire populations by multiple churches and states. It advanced long-term and comparative perspectives of change, but soon invited sustained debate. This eventually led to comprehensive criticism of its top-down nature, its focus on specific definitions of “modernity,” and of its rigid framework and chronology. This debate was at its most vibrant between 1980 and 2010 and involved scholars on the continent, particularly in Germany and Switzerland.⁵

During the same period, it continued to be a major advance for British Reformation historians to transcend national frameworks in order to research the links between English and continental Reform ideas.⁶ North American history remained a separate field of inquiry that often charted the history of one faith tradition in a specific locale, but its specialists became increasingly interested in popular beliefs and everyday religious practices.⁷ Meanwhile, however, the study of Catholic missions, global encounters, and entanglements attracted enormous interest from the 1990s onwards. The field of Jesuit studies, in particular, began to witness remarkable growth. Such research documented how robust institutions and hierarchical structures, such as the Inquisition and bishoprics, or robust networks, such as the correspondence mandatory among Jesuits, fared in an early modern globalized world.⁸

Europeans felt they could tell no comparable Protestant story, as Protestant powers during the early modern period were less insistent on converting indigenous people than their Catholic counterparts and implemented few of the institutional structures of its main confessions – Lutheranism and Reformed Calvinism – abroad. Protestant powers were primarily interested in trade and settlement. They did not conduct mass

⁴ Here the scholarship of Carlo Ginzburg, Robert Darnton, Anthony Grafton, and Lisa Jardine has led the field. For a summary, see Burke, *Cultural History*.

⁵ For a valuable overview, see Stefan Ehrenpreis, Ute Lotz-Heumann, *Reformation und konfessionelles Zeitalter* (Darmstadt: WBG, 2002), 62–74; for a review of debates since then, see Birgit Emich, “Konfession und Kultur, Konfession als Kultur? Vorschläge für eine kulturalistische Konfessionskultur-Forschung,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 109 (2018): 375–88.

⁶ See the landmark publications by Diarmaid McCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996); *Reformation: Europe’s House Divided 1490–1700* (London: Penguin, 2004).

⁷ For a wide-ranging landmark study, see David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgement: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: A. Knopf, 1989).

⁸ For an incisive discussion, see Simon Richard Ditchfield, “Catholic Reformation and Renewal,” in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Reformation*, ed. Peter Marshall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 152–85.

baptisms, and they worked with far fewer clergymen through a far more dispersed church structure in Europe that furthermore had abolished religious orders. In contrast to Catholicism, Protestant churches also played a less substantial role as property owners and in the credit markets of local societies outside Europe during the early modern period. Hence, Reformation historians have held Protestantism to be primarily interesting as a European phenomenon, sidelining the story of dissenting traditions.

Disciplinary boundaries shaped this research landscape. Most dialogue between European and US historians of the Reformations continued to focus on European history, and early Americanists seemed only rarely to join the conversation. Protestant Reformation historians in the United States were often tasked to teach European history only, while early modern Europeanists based in European universities rarely attended to religious dimensions in the history of the Dutch Empire or of Britain and British America, let alone of other parts of the world.⁹ The history of Protestant “missions” was treated as a separate field and focused on the “modern” period from 1800 onwards.

New Comparative Approaches

Slowly, a new field of inquiry and different approaches began to emerge. In 1995, Natalie Zemon Davis used the lens of a historian trained in micro-history and the analysis of ego-documents to tell the parallel stories of three women. One of them was Glückel von Hameln, a Jewish woman in Hamburg; another Marie de l’Incarnation, a Catholic nun who migrated to Quebec; and the third of these women was Maria Sibylla Merian, a Protestant artist who observed flora and fauna in the Dutch colony of Suriname. Davis explored how a turn to naturalistic observation, movement, and migration shaped novel experiences, practices, and religious ideas, and showed how global travel had become a possibility even for women. Indigenous natives and slaves shared their knowledge about the uses of plants with Merian, who belonged to the Labadists, a radical Protestant faith group centered in the Netherlands. In contrast to father Labadie, Merian never once referred to those she encountered in Suriname as “savages” and she trusted the authority of her “go-betweens.”¹⁰ This approach showed that highly local encounters could reshape views of

⁹ For an excellent insight into these, see Philip Benedict, “Global? Has Reformation History Even Gotten Transnational Yet?,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte – Archive for Reformationhistory*, 108/1 (2017): 52–62.

¹⁰ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1995).

humanity, race, religion, and the imprint of God's nature on the globe that were mediated through Merian's work in Europe.

In 2000, Merry Wiesner-Hanks – initially a historian of Reformation Germany – contributed to the widening scope of comparative research in her landmark account *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World*. This charted how Christianity regulated the sexual and marital lives of both Europeans and their colonial subjects. The book included separate chapters on Catholicism and on Protestantism in early modern Europe as well as on their global impact on North America, Latin America, Africa, and Asia. It highlighted, for example, the ways in which the Dutch Empire could markedly interfere with local attitudes to promiscuity or female animist prophetesses in colonies such as Formosa. The Dutch attempted to establish a society based on male religious experts, married couples, and households. At the same time, Wiesner-Hanks also outlined the problems in staffing that beset the project, and the way in which Protestant messages were adapted in catechisms and altered in response to indigenous ideas.¹¹ Above all, this showed that historians of the Reformation could widen their scope from Eurocentric discussions and think about parallel movements.

The European fear of and debate about old women as witches, for instance, directly related to the ways in which Dutch Calvinist ministers would look at *inibs*, elderly women on Formosa who were associated with greater spiritual power than priests and were tasked with ritually asking for rain through drinking alcohol while standing naked on top of roofs, urinating and vomiting. Chiu Hsin-Hui's 2008 monograph on Dutch Formosa further detailed that by 1651, after twenty years of missionary efforts, 250 of these women were banished, 202 had died, while 48 survived banishment and were placed under the supervision of clergymen. Local elders could collaborate in these policies, but their implementation was often improvised, marked by uncertainty about which spiritual authority to adopt, and resistance to missionary efforts.¹²

As the influence of global and transnational history grew after the 1990s, interest in “connected” histories became ever more marked. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra's influential *Puritan Conquistadors* (2006) argued that the British Protestant expansion shared much in common intellectually with the Iberian Catholic expansion. In search for these

¹¹ Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World: Regulating Desire, Reforming Practice*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon, VA: Routledge, 2010).

¹² William M. Campbell ed., *Formosa under the Dutch: Described from Contemporary Sources with Explanatory notes and a Bibliography for the Island* (Taipei: SMC Publishing, 1992); Chiu Hsin-Hui, *The Colonial “Civilising Process” in Dutch Formosa, 1624–62* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), esp. 212.

similarities, Cañizares-Esguerra particularly focused on ideas about chivalrous conquest as well as on religious idioms in a selection of Puritan sermons and Protestant literary works that equated wilderness with the heretical, for instance by evoking spiritually charged imagery of planting and weeding. This approach sought to newly conceptualize an American Atlantic history as Pan-American, and more broadly investigated the role of religion in US American historical myths of nationhood and Western achievement, which consolidated a patronizing attitude towards Catholic Latin America and its heritage. Cañizares-Esguerra's challenge of narratives of Western supremacy as rooted in Protestant traditions and values of freedom was echoed by many others who highlighted the extent of Protestant people's involvement with colonialism and slaveholding.¹³ David Armitage's groundbreaking *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (2000) meanwhile had already deconstructed the idea that British imperial ideology was underpinned by exclusively Protestant ideas – he pointed to the importance of classical traditions in Catholic and Protestant writers' justifications for empire building.¹⁴

Sir John Elliott's *Empires of the Atlantic World*, also published in 2006, compared practices of state-building and its ideologies in Spanish and British America by scrutinizing the role of religion and churches and by taking a closer look at similarities and differences than Cañizares-Esguerra had done. A shared theological inheritance indeed led to many points of convergence and related imagery – not least in ideas about an omnipotent God and the nature of the demonic. Yet in practice, as Elliott pointed out, malefic magic seemed to have been given greater prominence in New England than in New Spain. The financing of the churches utterly differed – nothing in the Protestant world equalled the massive accumulation of real estate by the church in Spanish America. Protestants, moreover, were bound together by their rejection of papal authority in the name of the superior authority of the biblical word. This meant that diverse interpretations of the Bible led to different Protestant creeds; this “fissiparous character of Protestantism was compounded in British America by the fissiparous character of the process of settlement and colonization.”¹⁵ By the end of the seventeenth century, Elliott concluded, British American religion “stood in a very different relationship to

¹³ Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550–1700* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

¹⁴ David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁵ John Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America 1492–1830* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 207 and especially his chapter 7 on “America as Sacred Space,” 184–219.

both society and the state from that which prevailed in the American territories of the Spanish crown.” Religious diversity was interlinked with political plurality. British America appeared as “an atomized society in a continuous state of political turmoil,” marked by tensions about ideas of liberty. These, in Elliott’s reading, could be resolved to some extent in a shared commitment to a biblical culture that also encouraged greater literacy. Just like Cañizares-Esguerra, Elliott criticized the idealized portrayals of Protestant British America that emerged during the eighteenth-century, linking it to liberty and cultures of ingenuity. These, he remarked, “easily air-brushed” indigenous and African people “out of the picture,” and long remained foundational in accounts of the Spanish Empire as locked in tyranny.¹⁶

While Elliott, nonetheless, admitted to focusing on settlers rather than on the indigenous populations, Carla Pestana’s *Protestant Empire* (2009) broke new ground by asking central questions about the ways in which all religions changed as a result of movement and cultural encounters across 300 years in the British Atlantic – European Christianity no less than Native American or Afro-American spirituality – and how they responded to the coming together of different Protestant, Catholic, and Non-Christian traditions in particular locales. Yoruba and biblical myths of origin, for example, needed to be explored side-by-side, as did ideas of progress. The “act of moving,” she posited, “changed people and their beliefs.”¹⁷ Pestana hence highlighted the importance of give and take through negotiations in religious encounters and explored in detail how different beliefs clashed or blended, for what reasons and with which results. As in her essay for this volume, she underlined the different face of the Church of England in the colonies: church buildings, books, communion plates, and vestments all required a daunting investment. Worship services based on prayer books became its most robust structure. As religious diversity grew between the 1640s and 1660s among different Protestant faith groups, transatlantic radicalism among Quakers particularly flourished from its early centers in Barbados and on Rhode Island and helped to generate key ideas in debates about religious liberty. Millennial ideas actioned social change before the second coming of Christ and the imminent end of the world, and led to connections with European Jews as well as to the growth of Jewish settlements in the English colony of Suriname, Jamaica, and Rhode Island. Hope that missionizing might convert those who belonged to other religious

¹⁶ Elliott, *Empires*, 403–5.

¹⁷ Carla Gardina Pestana, *Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 7.

traditions now also extended to the Indians, who were often categorized as descendants of Jews. The impact of such missions was highly local but stood in marked contrast to the much longer reluctance to Christianize slaves or convert Catholic slaves to Protestantism. Above all, Pestana detailed the extraordinary picture of Protestant colonial diversity in North America, which by 1683 included the Labadist community of “New Bohemia” as a first separatist experiment, alongside Mennonites, French Huguenots, Swedish or German Lutherans, German Pietists, Walloon Calvinists, Dutch Reformed believers, among others. All of them transplanted and transformed their own traditions in ways that could link to contingency and local adaptation as much as to systemic economic interests and political shifts.¹⁸ An emphasis merely on the similarities between these traditions and Catholicism would be insufficient to capture the dynamic of Protestant practices and ideas.

The purpose of this book is to build on Pestana’s and Wiesner-Hanks’s pioneering works. This entails mapping out a wider geography of plural *Protestant Empires* and explains the book’s title. Further, the title is intended to suggest that empires of the mind, or failed and short-lived practices, are as interesting as long-term and politically stable structures. Given the limited amount of comparative research and in order to be able to more precisely map out similarities and differences in relation to Catholic Empires or other faith traditions, it is crucial to sharpen our understanding of the scope and nature of Protestant experiences through their encounter with other faith traditions in the Americas as much as in Asia, the Mediterranean, or the Ottoman Empire from the sixteenth century onwards. In an overview article “The Reformation in Global Perspective,” published in 2014, Charles H. Parker observed that “the study of Protestants in overseas environments” for the early modern period was “not nearly as extensive or theoretically well developed as it is for Catholic missionaries or institutions.” “According to standard narratives,” he elaborated, “Protestants were either uninterested or incapable of converting native peoples outside of exceptional and short-lived episodes in Massachusetts and Taiwan, until the great Pietistic revivals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”¹⁹ Yet Parker also pointed to recent Dutch studies that had argued for far more significant successes given the limited resources available, especially in Batavia and the Molucca Islands. The Reformed Church in Batavia, for instance, is now estimated to have had around 5,000 members by 1700, most of

¹⁸ Pestana, *Protestant Empire*, here 6–7.

¹⁹ Charles H. Parker, “The Reformation in Global Perspective,” *History Compass* 12/12 (2014): 924–34, here 926.

whom were Portuguese-speaking freed slaves who were converted from Catholicism. D. L. Noorlander has recently built on such research to argue that the Dutch Reformed Church was integral to Dutch colonization and that the WIC's religious activities were interrelated with its secular goals: "a deep religious sensibility and social, institutional commitment to the Dutch Reformed Church and its politics permeated the WIC and influenced its plans and activities." Lay clergy supported the small number of paid, ordained ministers. Their ratio in relation to the size of the population was not too dissimilar from staffing in the Dutch Republic.²⁰ Dutch missionary power reached its modest highpoint during the 1640s. It missionized among the Tupi in Brazil as well as among black slaves. In Africa, there "was a new school at Elmina, a few clergy and schoolmasters in Luanda, and a foothold in the kingdom of Kongo."²¹ Parker's contribution in 2014, however, also underlined the importance of looking at Protestant experiences in or through global settings aside from this focus on conversion. As he further explores in his contribution to this volume, major intellectuals, including the Dutch philosopher Hugo Grotius, constructed an "ecumenical and ethical Christianity as a response to both domestic and global points of reference."²² An understanding of how religious knowledge was created in Europe can therefore be globalized.

The most recent research, moreover, continues to turn up new and unexpected aspects of Protestant translations and brokerage that emerged from the remarkable intersections of several cultures and faiths in global locales. The ethnomusicologist David R. M. Irving, for instance, has shown that the Genevan Psalter was translated into several local Asian languages in and for eighteenth-century Indonesia and Sri Lanka. The Psalter with its Swiss musical settings was based solely on the Psalms of David and translated "into Portuguese (a language traditionally associated with Catholicism), Tamil (associated with Hinduism), Sinhala (associated with Buddhism) and Malay (associated with Islam)." It was printed by the presses of the Dutch East India Company in the two major port cities of Java and Sri Lanka for use by Asian and Eurasian communities.²³ The slim and portable Tamil version was printed in Colombo and translated by Philippus de Melho (b. 1723), a Sri Lankan Tamil who was the first native minister of Ceylon's Dutch Reformed Church. The result was a musical hybrid that attributed indigenous

²⁰ D. L. Noorlander, *Heaven's Wrath: The Protestant Reformation and the Dutch West India Company in the Atlantic World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 218, 225.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 180. ²² *Ibid.*, 929.

²³ David R. M. Irving, "The Genevan Psalter in Eighteenth-Century Indonesia and Sri Lanka," *Eighteenth-Century Music*, 11/2 (2014): 235–55, here 235.

syllables to each note. Melho acted as a go-between who knew how to combine European staff notation with South Asian musical *nomenclatura* to further the reach of congregational singing among the indigenous population. For Calvinists, psalm singing provided the most direct communication with God. It was an embodied practice that crucially linked to ideas about measured emotions and civility. The Psalter's melodies were correspondingly measured, and thus regarded by Calvinists as "pure" music in contrast to other types of music they feared as inciting lasciviousness and other ungodly sentiments.²⁴

This volume's principal focus on Protestantism is therefore not directed against attempts to provide more unified accounts of religious change in the age of Protestant and Catholic Reformations or comparisons of the Protestant and Catholic Reformations. These have recently successfully focused on themes such as the greater awareness of normative relativism which emerged from encounters with the Americas, or the importance of exile and social purification. Lee Palmer Wandel's *The Reformation: A New History* (2011) demonstrates how the intellectual dislocation caused by the Reformation ran parallel to the unsettling of European views about the sacred through an encounter with the New World, and was mediated by print.²⁵ Nicholas Terpstra's "alternative history of the Reformation," published in 2015, shows that the Catholic and Protestant Reformations were "Europe's first grand project in social purification." Its account of Christian experiences nonetheless overwhelmingly focuses on how elites enforced exile and how this reshaped European society, rather than integrating, for instance, the history of British America to show how Protestant refugee experiences reshaped wider parts of the globe.²⁶ By using the methodological insights of pioneering studies on the later Protestant missions, this volume seeks to contribute to building better foundations for comparison and for further work interlinking research on the early modern period.²⁷

²⁴ Ulinka Rublack, *Reformation Europe*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 233. The experience in borderlands rather than contact zones could be very different, as Lutheran missionaries in Scandinavia sought to root out Sami traditions of drumming, which they likewise thought of as heathen, see Cat., *Der Luthereffekt* (Berlin: Deutsches Museum 2017).

²⁵ Lee Palmer Wandel, *The Reformation: A New History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

²⁶ Nicholas Terpstra, *Religious Refugees in the Early Modern World: An Alternative History of the Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

²⁷ For an important book series in this area, founded in 2013, see Crawford Gribben and Scott Spurlock eds., *Christianities in the Trans-Atlantic World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013–); as well as Sujit Sivasundaram, *Nature and the Godly Empire: Science and Evangelical Missions in the Pacific, 1795–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).