

Owen Stanwood, *The Global Refuge: Huguenots in an Age of Empire*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. xii + 295p. Maps, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$36.95 U. S. (hb). ISBN 0-19-026474-8.

Review Essay by S. Amanda Eurich, Western Washington University

The global turn in history has been a boon to scholars of early modern Catholicism. For more than two decades, the obvious connection between Spanish imperial ambitions and Catholic missionary activities has inspired a rich body of historical scholarship.[1] Only more recently have students of early modern Protestantism embraced the global challenge.[2] “Few buzzwords,” writes Philip Benedict, “circulate more among historians than ‘global’ or ‘transnational,’” (p. 152) but Reformation research, he laments, still operates chiefly within the boundaries of nationalist paradigms.[3] Owen Stanwood’s ambitious new book, *The Global Refuge: Huguenots in an Age of Empire* represents a welcome change by bringing French Calvinist exiles into a larger global story and weaving together the disparate histories of Huguenot settlements (those imagined and those realized) from South Africa to North America, the Caribbean, South America, the Indian Ocean, and Australia. In the process, he transforms the narrative of victimization that has long dominated histories of the Huguenot diaspora into a fascinating tale of agency and invention.[4] In Stanwood’s hands, Huguenots figure less as persecuted and beleaguered refugees than as merchant venturers, colonial promoters, foreign spymasters, and intrepid settlers, eager to embrace the imperial dreams of their benefactors, or fashion their own, in the emergent overseas empires of the British and Dutch.

Over the course of seven chapters, Stanwood explores how Huguenots exiles became increasingly invested in colonial projects beyond Europe as hopes of an eventual return to their homeland faded and relations with local communities in their European *pays d’adoption* soured. While first-generation refugee ministers, such as Pierre Jurieu and Henri de Mirmand, nourished dreams of a transnational network of Huguenot communities functioning as semi-autonomous entities within Protestant Europe, other Calvinist divines and visionaries were feverishly recasting the “special destiny of Huguenots” (p. 4) by promoting economic opportunities and religious freedom in exotic new utopias around the world. As the baron Henri Duquesne who championed the establishment of a Calvinist republic on the island of Réunion would argue, it was far better for his co-religionaries to create their own states rather than live in the states of other monarchs.

From the very beginning of the massive Huguenot exodus from France in the 1680s, Stanwood argues that Calvinist refugees insinuated themselves into imperial schemes and colonizing programs by shrewdly manipulating tropes of French identity and expertise, most strikingly, perhaps, by promoting French skill at wine and silk production. Stanwood connects the enduring colonial appeal of these two luxury items to emerging mercantilist obsessions with profitable balances of trade. Within the imperial context, Huguenots could easily position themselves as ideal colonists: “a chosen people,” Stanwood writes, “in economic as well as religious terms” (p. 4).

In the first half of his book, Stanwood analyzes the disconnect between the worlds imagined by Calvinist promoters, such as Henri Duquesne, Charles de Rochefort and others, and the sobering realities of life as an imperial subject. As Stanwood argues, the freedom to create new Calvinist Edens abroad proved elusive. Like generations of colonists before them, Huguenots found themselves in unforgiving climes, both human and environmental. In Virginia and South Carolina, for example, the indigenous grape varieties that promised the possibility of developing vibrant viticultural regions in the New World to challenge French hegemony in the old yielded checkered results. Huguenot colonists struggled to produce wines that matched the claret-bound tastes of British. Even in the Cape of Good Hope, where winemaking flourished, Stanwood asserts that it was largely German and Dutch colonists who monopolized the trade (local names like Franschoek, or Frenchman's Corner, notwithstanding) by leveraging their connections with the Dutch East Indies Company.

Being French was not without its drawbacks, especially as continental and colonial rivalries with the Sun King and his successors intensified over the course of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although Huguenots, particularly those with military experience, were heavily recruited to serve as strategic allies and informants in the wars against the French on the continent and in the Americas, their political loyalties were often suspect. Moreover, few exiles settled in the virgin territories promised by Henri Duquesne. Instead, they had to insert themselves into already settled landscapes, where they struggled to navigate complex political and institutional arrangements that only underscored their status as strangers. From Cape of Good Hope in South Africa to British holdings in New York, Virginia, and South Carolina, Huguenot settlers faced the "centralizing pressures" of empire (p. 142). Huguenots in the Cape of Good Hope, for example, enraged local governors and agents of the East India Company over demands to establish their own churches and church councils, even though their Dutch neighbors were fellow Calvinists. In Manakintown, Virginia, Huguenots experienced anew the political, cultural, and religious marginalization they had traveled so far to escape. Over time, Stanwood asserts, the "spotty record of productivity in their colonies meant that fewer and fewer people sought to defend them" (p. 142).

Is it surprising, then, that by the eighteenth century, many Huguenots started to follow classic patterns of assimilation, adapting to the economic, linguistic, and religious communities around them, or as Stanwood puts it, "disappearing to survive" (p. 136)? Economic motivations and political ambitions loomed large in decisions to assimilate, especially among a younger generation who associated retaining connections to their French roots with a desire "to remain poor" (p. 136). Increasingly, they severed links with their ancestry, or at the very least, relegated their French selves to their private lives, to pursue more prosperous, naturalized identities. As Stanwood demonstrates, however, the transformation was complicated, especially since the international networks that Huguenots had created continued to have a certain utility in the developing global economy.

Embracing Anglicanism, Stanwood argues, was the ultimate act of assimilation. In their bid to make their colonial empires Protestant, the British seized upon another special skill set associated with the Huguenot exiles, one more aligned with their religious experience than economic expertise. Gifted controversialists and veterans of the catholicizing campaigns of the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries were recruited by the Society for the Propagation of the

Gospel in Foreign Parts to evangelize enslaved African and indigenous communities in North America. The great irony, Stanwood suggests, is that these Francophone missionaries also became agents of Anglican conformity among dissenting communities of Baptists, Quakers, and even Presbyterians with whom they shared a painful history of religious persecution and exile. In emphasizing how readily Huguenots embraced the Church of England, Stanwood adheres to historiographical conventions that have been considerably nuanced by scholars in the last couple of decades. Paula Carlo, for example, has underscored the diversity and hybridity of religious practice in colonial North America, demonstrating that Huguenots found common cause with Presbyterians and Puritans in New York and Massachusetts and easily insinuated themselves into the congregations of their fellow Calvinists when French-speaking churches dissolved.[5] Neil Kamal has pointed to a certain affinity for Quaker quietism among Huguenot artisans and significant rates of intermarriage between the two communities.[6] In South Carolina, Bertrand van Ruymbeke asserts that Huguenot elites resisted the Anglicanism proper, although they were highly Anglicized by other standards, while smaller, rural congregations struggles to recruit French-speaking pastors pushed them into the Anglican fold.[7] Scholars, too, have detected examples of adaptations of Anglican practice in Huguenot communities, such as the rejection of ritual gestures too conspicuously close to Catholicism for comfort.[8]

As Stanwood asserts, colonial dreams died hard. The allure of new world colonies as utopian solutions to old world problems persisted into the late eighteenth century. Louis de Menil de Saint-Pierre revived projects for a vast viticultural and sericultural region, extending as far north as the Saint Lawrence River. In South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, and Nova Scotia, Jean-Louis Gibert, Jean-Pierre Purry and others rejuvenated dreams of wine and silk. Hopeful colonists in South Carolina called their settlement, “New Bordeaux.” In the wake of the Calas affair in France, these Huguenot-backed ventures fused with visions of secular utopias championed by Enlightenment philosophes searching for solutions to persistent religious intolerance, prompting one last wave of migration before the French and American revolutions transformed the political landscape.

Remarkable in its breadth of geographic and chronological coverage, *The Global Refuge* reconfigures the grand story of the Huguenot diaspora in significant ways. One of the most striking features of Stanwood’s analysis is the extent to which Calvinism itself often plays second fiddle to more secular identities and interests. The distinctive habits of mind and practice that Max Weber identified as the essence of Calvinist identity, and the economic transformations these wrought in various *pays d’exil*, are seemingly less important to the makers of empires than mercantilist projections of economic potential. In some cases, Weber’s Calvinist work ethic appears to have been inverted all together. In South Africa, for example, Stanwood reveals how Dutch East Indies agents defaulted to the kinds of classic character slurs (laziness, indolence, and entitlement) leveled against immigrant populations by modern neoliberals and far-right parties. In other ways, too, Stanwood challenges the Weberian paradigm by revealing how many colonial ventures teetered on the edge of failure or failed completely. *The Global Refuge* also points to new and fruitful direction in Reformation and early modern studies by emphasizing the integral nature of migration and mobility in the early modern world. As Nicholas Terpstra, Jesse Sponholz, Susanne Lachenicht among others have shown, the religious splintering of Europe triggered a refugee crisis, exacerbated by confessionalization and the centripetal forces of state-building.[9] Stanwood takes this important work further by demonstrating how Huguenots functioned as engines of empire in the largely agricultural economies of new worlds as well as the proto-industrial economies of the

old. Finally, Stanwood is no doubt right to suggest that the French and American revolutions mark the end point for the age of empires and for Huguenots as global actors. While the next chapter in the Huguenot story is not one that he needs to write, how French Protestants became key players in these new republics deserves more than a postscript. Values, such as the love of liberty, which had so often been an obstacle to assimilation became, as he notes, the foundation of new national myths. In much more consequential ways, too, Huguenots were central to the creation of a new world order where the institutionalization of religious toleration opened new political opportunities for “outsiders,” to use Lynn Hunt’s terminology, to influence the destiny of nations.[10]

## NOTES

[1] See, for example, Luke Clossey, *Salvation and Globalization in Early Jesuit Missions* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Antje Flücher and Rouven Wirbser, eds., *Translating Catechisms, Translating Cultures: Catholic Missions in Europe and the World* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017); Kimberly Lynn and Erin Rowe, *The Early Modern Hispanic World: Transnational and Interdisciplinary Approaches* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017). Even Nicholas Terpstra’s recently edited volume, *Global Reformations: Transforming Religion, Societies and Culture* (Brunswick, N.J., Routledge University Press, 2019), which avoids narrow confessionalization, gives Protestantism scant coverage. Only two of the fourteen essays focus on Protestant involvement in the global Reformation.

[2] Among them, Charles Parker’s *Global Calvinism: Conversion and Commerce in the Dutch Empire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2022); Ulinka Rublack, *Protestant Empires: Globalizing the Reformations* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Raymond Mentzer and Bertrand Van Ruymbeke, eds., *A Companion to the Huguenots* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), especially the later essays in the volume.

[3] Philip Benedict, “‘Global’: Has the Reformation Even Gotten ‘Transnational’ yet?” *Archiv für Reformationgeschichte* 108 (2017), p. 52.

[4] On the memorialization of Huguenot victimhood, see David van der Linden’s thoughtful essay, “Histories of Martyrdom and Suffering in the Huguenot Diaspora,” in *A Companion to Huguenots*, eds. Raymond A. Mentzer and Bertrand van Ruymbeke (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), pp. 348-370. Since the 1980s, van der Linden suggests that historians have begun to read Huguenot memoirs and martyrologies with a more critical eye, influenced by post-modern theories of narrative, identity construction, and self-fashioning.

[5] Paula Carlo, *Huguenot Refugees in Colonial New York: Becoming American in the Hudson Valley* (Sussex Academic Press: Brighton, 2005).

[6] Neil Kamil, *Fortress of the Soul: Violence, Metaphysics and the Material Life in the Huguenots’ New World* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

[7] Bertrand Van Ruymbeke, *From New Babylon to Eden: The Huguenots and their Migration to Colonial South Carolina* (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 2006).

[8] Paula Carlo, “Huguenot congregations in Colonial New York and Massachusetts: Reassessing the Paradigm of Anglican Conformity,” in *A Huguenot Companion*, Raymond A. Mentzer and Bertrand Van Ruymbeke eds. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), pp. 379-381.

[9] Nicholas Terpstra, *Religious Refugees in the Early Modern World: An Alternative History* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Jesse Sponholz, *Ruptured Lives: Refugee Crises and Historical Identities* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Susanne Lachenicht, *Huguenotten in Europa und Nordamerika: Migration und Integration in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2010).

[10] See, for example, Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).

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