Anthony Milton. *England's Second Reformation: The Battle for the Church of England, 1625-1662.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. 450 pp. $44.99, cloth, ISBN 978-1-107-19645-2.

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Published on H-Albion (June, 2022)

Commissioned by Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth (Red Deer Polytechnic)

There is a long-standing tendency in scholarship on English religion during the mid-seventeenth century to interpret developments in teleological terms. Many scholars, mostly sympathetic to the established Church of England and its perceived plight during the 1640s and 50s, have been dismissive of the "failed" programs of reformation advanced during the Civil War and Interregnum as aberrations in the continuous development of a distinctively "Anglican" identity, understood in terms of continuing allegiance to both episcopacy and Prayer Book. For other scholars, the English reformation reached its culmination in the pronounced antiformalism of the Society of Friends and other nonconformist "sectaries" during the Interregnum. Unsurprisingly, in this narrative the religious "radicals" of the period, those who rejected not only episcopacy and Prayer Book but also any set forms of worship in favor of a more intimate, personalized, and often mystical religious experience have played an outsized role.

Anthony Milton's ***England's Second Reformation: The Battle for the Church of England, 1625-1662*** is a welcome corrective to both narratives. In this magisterial study Milton demonstrates that the established church, its formularies, doctrines, ceremonies, and practices were subject to a multiplicity of "readings" and rereadings before, after, and during the conflagrations of the mid-seventeenth century. Milton's central argument is that the debates that marked the upheavals of the 1640s and 50s occurred in continuity with earlier readings of the established church and its history. Furthermore, in spite of the growth of sectaries during this period, and Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell's own hostility to a settled national church with set forms of worship, the idea of a national church survived throughout the period. Many clergy of not only Episcopal and Presbyterian but also Independent leanings continued to see themselves as part of a national English church community, or "Church of England," even during the supposed wilderness years of the Protectorate. Accordingly, like the polemicists of previous generations, they framed their arguments both in continuity and conscious discontinuity with the established church and its past doctrinal and ceremonial pronouncements. Of particular note are the Thirty-nine Articles of 1563, which, unlike the Jacobean Canons (1604), had received parliamentary approval in 1571 and remained, at least de facto, established doctrine throughout the period. Individual polemicists, however, took considerable liberty with these pronouncements, frequently applying glosses to particular articles as well as truncating and even outright dismissing the authority of some of them in order to support their reading

of what a true, reformed Protestant church should look like.

Milton is a historian who handles his concepts carefully, understanding their porous boundaries and avoiding absolutes. His treatment of "Laudianism" is exemplary here. Contemporary critics denounced Archbishop William Laud's reforms of the 1630s as "Popish innovation," but Milton defines and situates Laudianism in its own terms, as part of a "reforming" movement and not an attempt to "re-Catholicize" the Church of England. Milton's Laud is clearly a reformed figure and rightfully so. Laud and his immediate circle understood themselves as undertaking the reform and restoration of the English church, developing their own distinctive, albeit selective reading of the church's past, in particular that of the Elizabethan church, seeking to rid it of its accretion of corrupt practices. Laud and his closest followers saw themselves as restoring the church to its former grandeur, blaming the recent poverty of the church and its clergy on "sacrilegious" practices such as the lay impropriation of tithes, the alienation of church property, and an overemphasis on preaching at the expense of the sacraments and the "beauty of holiness." For Laud and his followers, the dilapidation of the Church of England was a shameful state of affairs badly in need of reformation. Unsurprisingly, during the Civil War period the identification of the Long Parliament and "Puritanism" with "sacrilege" became a staple of royalist polemic.

Allegiance to episcopacy, Prayer Book, and ceremonies were, however, not a monopoly of Laud's immediate followers but were shared by avowedly Calvinist and anti-Laudian members of the Episcopate. These included, most notably, John Williams, James Ussher, Thomas Morton, Joseph Hall, and later, Daniel Featley. This "Abortive Reformation," as Milton terms it, began during the early months of the Long Parliament and took concrete form in the proposals developed by the Lords committee chaired by Williams. These called for a "reduced" episcopacy where bishops would administer their offices in close cooperation and consultation with presbyters and called for the further reform of the Prayer Book. Although with the rise of popular pressure for the extirpation of episcopacy "root and branch" in 1641-42 and the proceedings against the twelve bishops (including Williams) these proposals were never implemented, the substantive recommendations of the Williams Committee had a long afterlife. They subsequently reemerged in negotiations between Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Independents at a number of junctures throughout the Civil War and Interregnum, right up until the eleventh hour before the Stuart Restoration.

Milton's account of the work of the Westminster Assembly (1643-48) is also enlightening. Erastian lawyers in the Long Parliament such as William Prynne, Oliver St. John, and his cousin Samuel Browne may have kept the Assembly on a tight leash, but they also relied heavily on the assembled divines who produced new catechisms, confessions of faith, and a liturgy manual (the Directory of Public Worship), while ensuring that parliamentary authority always trumped clerical authority. Furthermore, the Long Parliament usually enacted the Assembly's proposals, albeit shorn of their accompanying theological and scriptural rationales. Pride's Purge on December 6, 1648, effectively ended the work of the Westminster Assembly, although there is evidence that it continued to sit after that. In spite of their continuing influence in the Presbyterian churches of the former British Empire where they have been adopted with revisions, the Fifteen Articles of the Westminster Confession never received parliamentary approval, leaving the Thirty-nine Articles as the only available comprehensive statement of the established church's doctrine and discipline. Its work cut short, Milton concludes, "the parliamentarian Church of England was thus a hybrid one that was always (like the Edwardian Church) a work in progress" (p. 259).

Milton gives the Interregnum and the Cromwellian church a fresh redo as well. Rather than a period in which conformist traditions of formal religious worship were completely in the wilderness, Milton argues that the Interregnum was an unusually creative period of thinking about the Church of England, its doctrine and discipline, its past and its future. This was true not only for Independents, Sectaries, and "Radicals," but also for Presbyterians and Episcopalians who remained committed to a national church settlement. For example, Episcopalian writers, freed of the 1628 injunctions against openly discussing the theology of grace, entered a period of unprecedented doctrinal speculation with Laud's former chaplain Jeremy Taylor questioning the authority of Article Nine of the Thirty-nine Articles ("Of Original or Birth-Sin), revealing "his readiness effectively to abandon the doctrine of original sin" (p. 423). In Milton's interpretation, the Interregnum, and in particular the Protectorate were not "anomalous." The years 1649-60 were instead a period of rich intellectual experimentation when conformist divines of all stripes sought to reimagine what the Church of England was, and what it should become.

Similarly, the "Caroline Settlement" of 1662, as Milton characterizes it, was not simply a re-creation of the Laudian church but reflected the debates and intellectual ferments of the previous two decades. Things had changed significantly and permanently. Unlike 1604 and 1640 when Convocation made canons independently of Parliament, the Restoration saw the Cavalier Parliament exert a clear authority over the ecclesiastical assembly not unlike that exercised by the Long Parliament over the Westminster Assembly. Although the church courts were restored, the ecclesiastical authorities no longer had the High Commission at their disposal to punish "sacrilegious" acts (p. 499). The Restoration Church was not simply a reestablishment of the Laudian church but clearly reflected the debates of the previous two decades (pp. 498-99). This church was even more intolerant than the church of 1633-40 as evidenced by the mass ejections of August 24, 1662, but at the same time some Restoration bishops like John Gauden and Edward Reynolds still professed and sought to practice the kind of reduced episcopacy for which they had long advocated (p. 504).

This is a nuanced and subtly textured book. Milton's emphasis is on the multivocality of the English church in this tumultuous period and the diversity of its traditions, the ways that polemicists were able to fashion novel arguments from familiar materials, and their open willingness to appropriate the arguments of erstwhile opponents whenever it suited their purposes. At 513 closely argued pages the book is definitely not for the faint of heart, but it is a deeply rewarding read that will challenge both new students and longtime scholars of the period to reimagine their past approaches.

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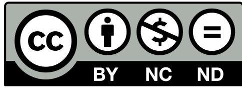
Citation: D. Alan Orr. Review of Milton, Anthony. *England's Second Reformation: The Battle for the Church of England, 1625-1662.* H-Albion, H-Net Reviews. June, 2022.

URL: https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=57308



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