

Milton, Anthony. *England's Second Reformation: The Battle for the Church of England 1625–1662*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

Anthony Milton is Professor of History at the University of Sheffield and the author of books that cover early modern English church history. His latest book, *England's Second Reformation*, explores the years and events where theologians and officials sought to cement the character and nature of the Church of England. In common narratives of the seventeenth-century Church of England, the 1640s and 1650s were a period where a minority of forward-thinking individuals sought to reshape the church while others waited out the storm (509). Milton proposes a different story.

Milton argues that the events of the 1640s and 1650s are far more complex and require contextual history from both before and after these tumultuous decades. There are two chief features of Milton's overall thesis. First, we must set aside notions that participants sought to abolish the Church of England. In the early seventeenth century, English church officials and theologians spoke of "reforming" the church (1–2). Milton therefore proposes the rubric of an English "second reformation" (4). This term might suggest connections with the Dutch *Nadere Reformatie* ("second," or "further reformation"), but he does not employ the term this strictly. Rather, he suggests that the term represents events that chronologically follow the sixteenth-century English Reformation under the various Tudor monarchs (5).

The second feature of Milton's argument rests on the premise that, in spite of the existence of the Thirty-nine Articles and the Book of Common Prayer, there was no clear settled idea of orthodoxy in the Church of England (2). Different parties were trying to reform the church according to their own theological convictions. Milton sets forth the various efforts to reform the church under five different periods: the Laudian (34–100), the Abortive (101–216), the Westminsterian (217–334), the Cromwellian (335–78), and the Carolinian (479–506) (507). Laud sought to change the church by removing its Puritan elements and restoring a liturgy marked by beauty. The Abortive Reformation refers to the series of proposals that did not involve the abolition of Episcopacy. The Westminster Reformation refers to the series of reforms enacted by Parliament (9). The Cromwellian and Carolinian reforms were those efforts to change the church under Cromwell's Protectorate and later under the restoration of the monarch, Charles II.

Milton delivers significant evidence to corroborate his thesis. In short, he paints a detailed account of the political, theological, and ecclesial chaos that marked seventeenth-century England. For example, both Conformists and Puritans co-existed under the auspices of the Thirty-nine Articles and Book of Common Prayer, but they understood and used these documents in different ways. Laud wanted to restore a sense of beauty and holiness in the church and the people and was concerned that Puritan Reformed doctrine was an impediment (64). On the other hand, Reformed Puritans preached against Laud's efforts (69) and launched broadside attacks on Laudian practices and policies (80). What made the difference between the two warring parties? Whoever had the power to implement their beliefs (511). In the 1620s and 1630s, Laud had the power until the tides shifted under the Westminsterian Reformation.

However, power-dynamics marked this phase of reformation as the royalists and parliamentarians, Presbyterians, Erastians, and Episcopacy proponents all vied for their respective convictions. At no point did any one party sit on the sidelines—all sides played a role in the unfolding religious revolution. Moreover, Milton also convincingly demonstrates that upheavals of the 1640s were not an aberration in the Church of England's history. The doctrines and practices of the Westminsterian Reformation were anticipated in the reforms of earlier periods (509).

The strength of Milton's work rests in his exhaustive primary source research. There appears to be no stone left unturned. He rightly roils the waters of earlier historical accounts that present the 1640s in overly simplified terms. He expertly captures the messiness of English church history that shows the compromises, negotiations, and middle-path successes in each period, which helps explain why the attempt to institute Presbyterianism and the Solemn League and Covenant ultimately failed.

There are three minor quibbles, however, with Milton's work. First, in spite of the undesirability of the term *Calvinist*, Milton still opts to employ it. He acknowledges that the term has prompted justified criticisms because it presupposes the normative status of Calvin's writings. He nevertheless opts for the term in its popular meaning (10). *Reformed*, however, seems preferable, especially since Milton often pairs *Calvinist* with *Lutheran*, which gives the impression of their similarity (i.e., Calvin and Luther are the fountainheads of their respective traditions). A second nit is that Milton does not lay out the structure of his argument in greater detail in his introduction so that the reader knows how the specific subsequent sections fit within his overall case. A roadmap to proving his thesis would

help frame his case. A third issue relates to Milton's claims regarding the Westminster Confession's stance on the imputation of the active and passive obedience of Christ. Milton writes, "Justification is by the imputation of Christ's righteousness (while side-stepping divisions over whether it is Christ's active or passive obedience that is involved)" (225). Milton rightly acknowledges that the question of the imputed active obedience of Christ was a matter of debate at the assembly, but he doesn't factor the Confession's statement against the background of theological works of the period. The Confession speaks of the imputed "obedience and satisfaction of Christ" (in 11.1), which before and during the assembly was a common way to refer to the active and passive obedience of Christ in works such as John Downname's *Christian Warfare* (1634), William Perkins's *Cloud of Faithfull Witnesses* (1607), Francis Cheynell's *The Rise, Growth, and Danger of Socinianisme* (1643), George Walker's *Socinianisme* (1641), and James Ussher's *Body of Divinitie* (1645). After the assembly, theologians continued to employ the phrase to this effect, such as in Giovanni Diodati's *Pious and Learned Annotations* (1651), Francis Roberts's *Mysterium & Medullam Bibliorum* (1657), John Owen's *Doctrine of Justification* (1677), and John Brown's *The Life of Justification* (1695). In fairness to Milton, his main point is not to address this specific issue but to give examples where the Westminster divines compromised on various debated points of doctrine. The assembly undoubtedly hammered out concessions but not on this particular issue.

These minor criticisms do not detract from the overall quality and excellence of Milton's work. His book is a considerable contribution that will go a long way to improving understanding of the early modern English church and should be read by anyone with interest in how the English church evolved during the tumultuous decades of the seventeenth century.

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