

Elliot Vernon, *London presbyterians and the British revolutions, 1638–1664* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021).

The London Presbyterians were central religious and political actors from the rise of Caroline non-conformity to the restoration of Charles II. But they have never been subject to a monograph-length enquiry. Elliot Vernon's work on this significant movement in British history provides an excellent remedy to this neglect.

Vernon considers that failed movements are often the most interesting and rewarding subjects of historical study. The monograph follows the Presbyterians as an evangelical movement within the Church of England for further religious and political reformation. In chapter 1, we encounter the conformist clergy of the 1630s as they navigated opposition to Laudian religious policies. This sparked a burgeoning religious and political movement and led to rejection of their former conformity in pursuit of new ecclesiological forms. Chapter 2 examines the influential Smectymnus group and anti-episcopal movement centred on Edmund Callamy's Aldermanbury House in 1640–1641. The group was tied to parliamentary criticisms of Charles I's personal rule. Scholars generally cite political reliance on Scotland as a source for the rise of Presbyterian ideas in England. But the shape of these early efforts to replace Laudian structures show that versions of presbyterian ideas were already present before political reliance on the Scottish Covenanters became necessary.

Chapter 3 covers the movement's emergence in 1642–1643 as it formulated and spread its political foundations of limited monarchy, mixed constitutions, the right to bear defensive arms, and the obligation of the three kingdoms to the Solemn League and Covenant. These points would form the ideological backing for their agenda of religious and political reform in the coming years, supported by dominance in institutions such as Sion College and the Westminster Assembly. Following the collapse of censorship, the movement's concern for new regulation was sharpened by the explosion of print and the threat of public conflict between the varying agendas of the godly. Chapter 4 builds on Hunter Powell's work in examining the collapse of the congregational-presbyterian accord in 1644–1645. While ideas of presbyterian polity coalesced at the Westminster Assembly, the developing two-kingdom account of ecclesio-political relations was less welcome in Parliament. With the splitting of Parliamentary factions and rejection of the Scottish alliance, Vernon argues the London Presbyterians represented a "Scotified" grouping. This identification came to undermine

their goals in the shifting political environment. Chapters 5 and 6 analyze their role in 1645–1647 during Parliamentary struggles to outline the goal of the Civil Wars. Presbyterian desire for settlement with the king backfired, and the resultant political ascendancy of the New Model Army ended hopes of a presbyterian religious and political settlement.

Departing from a strictly chronological approach, chapter 7 views the attempt at presbyterian government within London between 1646–1660 more broadly. Despite the national vision's collapse, Vernon argues that great personal commitment produced efforts to build a voluntary presbyterial government. Chapter 8 suggests that the war goals of a tempered monarchy and church reform meant the Presbyterians almost achieved their political aims through the 1648 Treaty of Newport. Facing an increasingly radical Army, their willingness to trust themselves to the king ultimately left them out in the cold, as the purged parliament began Charles I's trial. Chapter 9 examines the movement's struggle with the reality of the new republic from 1649–1651. It had no political foothold at Westminster and was uncertain of how to respond to the new authorities in the Engagement Controversy. Along with the execution of Christopher Love for resisting the invasion of Scotland, the Covenanters' defeat at Worcester brought the end of English presbyterian resistance to the Commonwealth. This proved the path to rehabilitation.

In chapter 10 from 1653–1659 the Presbyterians worked in positions of authority alongside magisterial congregationalists, such as John Owen, to protect Reformed orthodoxy against sectarianism and calls to abolish state-established religion. Chapter 11 examines the presbyterian role in the restoration of Charles II, in which they hoped for a return to the plans of the 1640s. But the final chapter finds the movement outside of the national church. For the Act of Uniformity 1662 solidified the defeat of Presbyterianism as an evangelical reform movement within the Church of England. There would be no second reformation, and the movement was left to the old dilemma of conformity or separation.

The book highlights many important themes. The variety and plasticity found in Presbyterian belief and practice of the period appears clearly throughout. This is an important corrective to broader historical discussions of Presbyterian religious identity, polity, and accounts of church-state relations. These have tended to conflate Presbyterianism with a Scottish variety. It is also helpful for confessional historical theologians discerning the theological context and parameters of their own confessional and denominational histories.

Another major aim is to demonstrate the fusion of politics and religion across the common distinction between high versus popular politics. This mobilization required the effective building of institutions, including commercial and aristocratic patronage. The effective use of oral networks in coffee houses, clerical clubs, and local councils provided key hubs of communication. Deployment of media through the explosion of print culture was a major strategy. While they controlled the elite publishing world of the 1640s, Presbyterians engaged religious and political adversaries at every level of print, including anonymous works.

Lastly the development of a two-kingdoms theory—a state supported church but each with separate spheres of jurisdiction—demonstrated the deep connection between theology and politics. This view was a continuous source of friction, Parliament highlighting the porous divide between theology and politics in this period.

Vernon's meticulously researched and engaging book deserves wide reading and will serve as a necessary foundation for any future work on the religious and political history of the Civil Wars and Interregnum. It also deserves close reading by contemporary Presbyterian scholars interpreting their confessional heritage.

—Adam Quibell

*PhD Candidate, Queen's University Belfast*⁴

4. Produced with the support of the Northern Ireland Department for the Economy Research Studentship in partnership with Queen's University Belfast, School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics.