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THE REFORMATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF RADICAL POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN 17TH CENTURY BRITAIN

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Abstract: This paper examines the emergence of radical political and religious groups in 17th century England, tracing their origins, beliefs, and impacts on both religious and political landscapes. The Reformation, initiated by Henry VIII and furthered by Elizabeth I, created a religious environment that fostered dissent and reform. This study explores how groups such as the Puritans, Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists, and Quakers developed in response to the religious upheaval and in pursuit of political control over the church. Key doctrines and practices of these groups are analyzed, highlighting their diverse approaches to faith and governance. The interactions between these radical groups and the established Church of England are scrutinized, revealing the challenges and conflicts that shaped their development. The paper underscores the complex interplay between religious reform, the period's social dynamics, and political power. This nuanced perspective demonstrates how religious diversity and dissent significantly influenced English society during a transformative period in England's history.

Keywords: Reformation, radical religious groups, Puritans, Church of England, 17th century Britain

Rezumat: Acest studiu analizează apariția grupărilor politice și religioase radicale în Anglia secolului al XVII-lea, urmărind originile, convingerile și impactul acestora asupra peisajului religios și politic. Reforma, inițiată de Henric al VIII-lea și continuată de Elisabeta I, a creat un mediu religios care a favorizat disidența și reforma. Studiul explorează modul în care grupuri precum puritanii, presbiterienii, independenții, baptiștii și quakerii s-au dezvoltat ca reacție la frământările religioase și a luptei pentru controlul politic asupra bisericii. Sunt analizate doctrinele și practicile-cheie ale acestor grupuri, evidențiindu-se abordările lor diverse față de credință și guvernare. Interacțiunile dintre aceste grupuri radicale și Biserica Angliei sunt examinate, în încercarea de a se identifica provocările și conflictele care le-au modelat evoluția. Studiul subliniază interacțiunea complexă dintre reforma religioasă, dinamica socială și puterea

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politică. Această perspectivă nuanțată demonstrează cum diversitatea religioasă şi disidența au influențat semnificativ societatea engleză în această perioadă de transformare care a marcat istoria Angliei.

Cuvinte cheie: Reforma, grupuri religioase radicale, puritani, Biserica Angliei, Britania secolului al XVII-lea

I. Introduction

The Reformation in England during the 16th and 17th centuries was a period of profound religious upheaval that significantly shaped English society. This study aims to explore the emergence of radical political and religious groups in 17th-century England, examining their origins, beliefs, and impact on both religious and political landscapes. The research questions guiding this paper are: How did the Reformation influence the formation of radical religious groups, such as the Presbyterians, Baptists, Mennonites, Levellers, Diggers, Ranters, Fifth Monarchists and Quakers? What were the key religious doctrines and practices of these groups? How did these groups interact with and challenge the establishment, including the government and the Church of England?[1]

To address these questions, the research methodology combines primary and secondary sources, including contemporary writings and scholarly analyses. Primary sources such as religious texts and personal writings of key figures provide direct insights into the period. For example, *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion* of the Anglican Church and Robert Browne's *A Treatise of Reformation without Tarying for Anie* provide direct access to the reformed political and religious ideologies of the period. Additionally, works by influential figures like John Knox and Mary Cary Rand offer perspectives on the theological and political motivations behind various movements.

Secondary sources, including historical critiques and analyses, offer contextual understanding and interpretations of events and movements. For example, the works of John Coffey and P.C.H. Lim help contextualize the Puritan movement within broader historical trends. Angela Anderson's work on the English Civil Wars and Douglas Wilson's study of John Knox's contributions to the Reformed Church of Scotland provide detailed historical narratives and interpretations. Additionally, Max Weber's analysis of the Protestant ethic and its impact on capitalism offers a sociological perspective on the period's religious transformations. By situating the topic within the broader

[1] Aspects concerning this topic were previously also considered in Mihaela Mona Bolocan, "Religious Sects in Seventeenth-Century England", *Romanian Journal of Literary Studies* 32 (2023): 911-919.

historiography[2], this analysis contributes to the understanding of how radical religious groups (Baptists, Mennonites, Levellers, Diggers, Ranters, Fifth Monarchists and Quakers[3]) emerged as a response to the religious and political changes of the time. The study highlights the complex interplay between religious reform, social dynamics, and political power, offering a nuanced perspective on the transformative impact of the Reformation on English society.

II. The English Reformation

English society at the beginning of the 17th century was significantly shaped by the upheavals of political life as well as the tensions arising from numerous religious minorities coalescing into distinct groups at this time. The profound transformations in the religious sphere can be traced back to the first half of the 16th century, during the reign of Henry VIII, who orchestrated the

[2] For the Romanian historiography on early modern England see Adrian Nicolescu, *Istoria civilizatiei britanice*. Vol. 2, *Secolul al XVII-lea: 1603-1714* [Eng. trans.: *The History of British Civilization. The 17th Century*] (Iaşi: Institutul European, 2000); Corneliu Nicolescu, *Anglia şi spiritul englez* [Eng. trans.: *England and the English Spirit*] (Cluj-Napoca: CA Publishing, 2010); Camil Mureşan, *Revoluția burgheză din Anglia* [Eng. trans.: *The Bourgeois Revolution in England*] (Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică, 1964); Costel Coroban, "Presbyterian And Jacobite 'Spirits' in Early Modern Scotland", *Analele Universității Ovidius din Constanța - Seria Istorie* XII, no. 12 (2015): 13-26; Costel Coroban, *Mișcarea iacobită din Marea Britanie 1688-1746* [Eng. trans.: *The Jacobite Movement in Great Britain 1688-1746*] (Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2011); D. Percec, Andreea Şerban, and Andreea Vertes-Olteanu, *Anglia elisabetană. Ghid de istorie culturală* [Eng. trans.: *Elizabethan England. Cultural History Guide*] (Timişoara: Editura Eurostampa, 2010) and D. Percec, Andreea Serban, and Andreea Vertes-Olteanu, *De la Anglia la Marea Britanie. Vol. 1, Anglia Elisabetană* [Eng. trans.: *From England to Great Britain. Elizabethan England*] (Timişoara: Editura Universităţii de Vest, 2020); D. Percec, Andreea Şerban, and Andreea Vertes-Olteanu. *Anglia elisabetană. Ghid de istorie culturală* [Eng. trans.: *Elizabethan England. Cultural History Guide*] (Timişoara: Editura Eurostampa, 2010).; A. Mărăşescu, *The History of England and Its Reflection in Literature* (Craiova: Editura Universitaria, 2018). For the Western historiography translated into Romanian see G. M. Trevelyan, *Istoria ilustrată a Angliei* [Eng. trans.: *The Illustrated History of England*], translated by Dan Hurmuzescu (Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică, 1975); André Maurois, *Istoria Angliei* [Eng. trans.: *The History of England*] (Bucureşti: Editura Orizonturi, 2006); Angela Anderson, *Războaiele civile (1640-1649)* [Eng. trans.: *The Civil Wars (1640-1649)*] (Bucureşti: Editura All, 2002); Borislav Pekic. *O istorie sentimentală a Imperiului Britanic* [Eng. trans.: *A Sentimental History of the British Empire*], translated by Constantin Ghirdă (Bucureşti: Editura Historia, 2008); Antonia Fraser, *Cromwell (Vols. I-II),* trans. Mihai Livescu and edited by Camil Mureşan (Bucureşti: Editura Politică, 1982); J. Hawes, *O scurtă istorie a Angliei. De la Cezar la Brexit* [Eng. trans.: *A Short History of England. From Caesar to Brexit*], translated by Ondine-Cristina Dăscăliţa (Bucureşti: Editura Trei, 2022); and H. Clout, *Istoria Londrei* [Eng. trans.: *The History of London*], translated by Maria Micaela Neculai (Bucureşti: Editura Corint, 1999).

[3] Mainstream political groups such as the Whigs and Tories are not treated here. For these see Costel Coroban, "Whigs, Tories and Jacobites during the Reign of King George I (1714-1727)", *Analele Universităţii „Ovidius" Seria Istorie* 5 (2008): 9-26.

Volume 14 (2025): 7-24
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break between English Catholics and Rome, thus laying the foundations of Anglicanism. Since his wife, Catherine of Aragon, widow of his brother, had failed to provide a male heir, the king sought to have his marriage annulled by the Pope in order to marry Anne Boleyn, whom he hoped would bear him the long-awaited successor[4]. However, opposition came from Emperor Charles V, the Queen's nephew, who pressured the Pope into denying Henry's request. This impasse led the king to act independently of Rome.

On January 25, 1533, Henry VIII secretly married Anne Boleyn, in a ceremony officiated by Thomas Cranmer, the newly appointed Archbishop of Canterbury[5]. This act triggered Henry's excommunication and formalized the English Church's break from Rome. In the period that followed, Parliament approved all the king's measures against the Catholic Church. The most significant was the *Act of Supremacy*, passed in 1534, which declared the king the sole and supreme head of the Church of England, demoting the Pope to the status of "Bishop of Rome"[6]. This religious reform ushered in sweeping changes: the number of lay clergy increased, Latin was replaced by English in religious services, ecclesiastical courts were abolished, and the groundwork was laid for the printing of prayer books in English. Catholic priests and monks who resisted these measures were accused of treason. Between 1536 and 1539, Catholic monastic institutions were dissolved[7], their properties sold, and their lands were redistributed to loyal nobles. The clergy associated with these institutions left England[8]. One concrete consequence of this redistribution of church wealth and land was the strengthening of the gentry – a class that would come to be prominently represented in the House of Commons[9].

Despite the sweeping transformations, the new religion did not undergo profound structural changes. The Anglican rite closely resembled the services conducted in Catholic churches, and the organization of the Anglican Church remained rooted in an episcopal hierarchy. However, within this framework, the episcopate was entirely subordinate to the crown and served the interests of the monarchy, effectively functioning as a key institution of the state. This religious evolution facilitated the spread of Protestantism in England, though it developed with its own distinct characteristics and was marked by numerous internal divisions. These divisions arose primarily from the diverse interpretations and readings of the Bible by various groups[10]. Although Catholic persecution defined much of the period, Protestant groups also faced harsh

[4] Maurois, *Istoria Angliei,* 294.
[5] John Miller, *Early Modern Britain, 1450-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 120.
[6] Ibid., 121.
[7] Anderson, *Războaiele civile,* 2.
[8] Maurois, *Istoria Angliei*, 300.
[9] Anderson, *Războaiele civile,* 3.
[10] Ibid.

measures as in the case of one early English reformer, William Tyndale, who was burned at the stake for translating and printing the Bible in English[11].

Religious reform continued under the reign of Elizabeth I. Shortly after ascending the throne in 1559, Parliament once again passed the *Act of Supremacy*, which abolished papal authority, along with the *Act of Uniformity*. The latter redefined the monarch's title from "Supreme Head of the Church" to "Governor of the Church"[12]. These acts also legitimized the use of the vernacular in religious services and prayer books[13]. Queen Elizabeth aimed to establish a middle path between Catholic and Protestant doctrines, appealing to English subjects who valued Catholic rituals but rejected papal authority and the Latin language. These individuals were more loyal to their sovereign than to any religious institution. Nonetheless, the queen also imposed penalties on those who continued to recognize papal supremacy, chief among them being the confiscation of property[14].

In 1563, the *Forty-Two Articles*, originally drafted in 1553 by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer under King Edward VI, were revised and reissued as the *Thirty-Nine Articles*. This document formally defined the core liturgical and doctrinal principles of the Anglican Church[15]. However, the text only partially fulfilled the expectations of the Puritans, who demanded the complete abolition of episcopal hierarchy and its accompanying cathedrals[16]. Puritanism represented the English expression of Calvinism and advocated for a purification of Anglicanism by removing all remnants of Catholic doctrine, liturgy, and church structure. Central to Puritan theology was the concept of predestination, the belief that salvation or damnation in the afterlife is determined by a divine decree from birth and cannot be altered by human actions. According to this doctrine, the success or failure of one's earthly endeavors served as evidence of divine favor or disfavor.

During Elizabeth I's reign, the Puritans succeeded in introducing legislative proposals in Parliament aimed at thoroughly reforming the Anglican Church. Their objective was to shift church authority to parish ministers elected by their congregations, following the model established by John Calvin in Geneva and already implemented by John Knox in Scotland[17]. In response to this pressure to purge the Church of England of all Catholic elements, the queen resisted firmly. Determined to preserve the monarchy's control over the church, Elizabeth rejected such initiatives and maintained the episcopal system, as

[11] Maurois, *Istoria Angliei*, 301.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., 321.
[14] Ibid., 325.
[15] Geta Dumitriu, *Puritani și puritane, noi începuturi pe pământ nord-american* (Oradea: Editura Ratio et Revelatio, 2020), 57.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Anderson, *Războaiele civile,* 31.

Volume 14 (2025): 7-24
https://www.doi.org/10.61801/AUOC-SP.2025.01

bishops were appointed by the crown. This policy was later continued by James I, despite his Calvinist education that raised Puritan hopes in the early stages of his reign[18].

The adoption of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* prompted the return of some Protestant exiles who had fled England during the reign of Mary I (1553–1558), also known as "Bloody Mary". Among them was the Protestant cleric John Foxe, author of *Actes and Monuments*, a work that documented the martyrdoms of English Protestants and helped shape national identity around the idea of England as God's chosen nation[19]. This belief would later be carried across the Atlantic by Puritans who left England for the American continent half a century later, bringing with them the notion of divine election to the New World[20]. An analysis of these developments reveals that at the beginning of her reign, Queen Elizabeth did not pursue a forceful policy against the Catholics; she neither aggressively suppressed them nor made significant concessions to the Calvinists[21]. However, her stance toward the Catholics hardened considerably after her excommunication by the Pope in 1570. In the aftermath, she became equally uncompromising with radical Protestants, imposing severe penalties to silence their dissent[22].

Subsequently, when James I Stuart ascended the throne, several petitions were submitted calling for reform within the Anglican Church. The king initially responded with tolerance to the more moderate requests. However, James took a firm stand against radical demands, especially as he increasingly viewed extreme Puritans as a threat to political stability and actively sought to diminish their influence[23]. Against the backdrop of the religious tensions marking the 17th century, numerous religious sects emerged across England, both in rural and urban areas. Many of these sects operated outside the established parish system, some defined themselves by strict doctrines, while others were named after their charismatic leaders[24]. Frequently, these groups sought to assert their beliefs not only spiritually but also politically.

Amid these disputes, several distinct religious minorities began to establish themselves in England. One such group was the Presbyterians, the Scottish variant of Protestantism. This denomination, often characterized by a somewhat utopian vision, emphasized the need for a uniform ecclesiastical

[18] Ibid.
[19] Dumitriu, *Puritani și puritane*, 58.
[20] Ibid., 59.
[21] Ibid., 60.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Tom Webster, "Early Stuart Puritanism", in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and P.C.H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 50.
[24] John Morrill, "The Puritan Revolution", in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and P.C.H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 77.

structure and for magistrates to wield greater authority[25]. A defining feature of Presbyterianism was its vigorous opposition to bishops and cathedrals, though it did not completely reject ecclesiastical hierarchy. Instead, it proposed a system in which local pastors represented territorial units within a collective governing body, thus preserving an organizational structure, albeit one exercised through shared leadership[26]. Presbyterians were known for their austerity and simplicity. They dressed modestly, typically in black garments with white collars and wore wide-brimmed, pointed hats, which they famously refused to remove as a sign of politeness or deference.

Notably, John Knox had begun preaching the Reformed faith in Scotland as early as 1547. However, his mission was interrupted when he was captured and imprisoned in France[27]. Following his release, secured through English intervention, he continued his ministry in England, though this attempt was once again disrupted by the accession of the notorious Mary I Tudor[28]. Facing renewed persecution, Knox fled to Geneva, where he published a polemical work titled *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. In it, he fiercely criticized the tyrannical rule of Mary Stuart, but his views also provoked discontent among other female monarchs of the time, including Elizabeth I and Catherine de' Medici[29].

Knox's efforts were instrumental in the establishment of the Reformed Church of Scotland, known as the *Kirk*, which around 1560 had become the dominant faith in the country[30]. Its position was officially cemented in 1567, when the Scottish Parliament passed legislation recognizing it as the national church, complete with a well-defined organizational structure[31].

While Presbyterianism found legitimacy and wide acceptance in Scotland, its spread into England was met with resistance as the Anglican Church regarded its followers with deep suspicion and hostility[32]. Nevertheless, certain social groups, particularly the rising gentry and the urban bourgeoisie, welcomed Presbyterianism. They viewed its structure as a challenge to the monarchy's authority and appreciated its simplified rites, which translated into lower church-related expenses.

Another significant religious minority that emerged between 1580 and 1590 was the *Congregationalists*, also known as *Independents*. This movement was founded by preacher Robert Browne (c. 1550-1633) and Robert Harrison (d.

25 Ibid., 69.
26 Dumitriu, *Puritani și puritane*, 69.
27 Coroban, *Mișcarea iacobită din Marea Britanie,* 58.
28 Ibid., 58.
29 Ibid.
30 Douglas Wilson, *For Kirk and Covenant. The Stalwart Courage of John Knox* (Moscow-Idaho: Blog & Mablog Press, 2020), 79.
31 Coroban, *Mișcarea iacobită din Marea Britanie,* 59.
32 Ibid.

1585), who established the first separatist church in Norwich in 1581 and held services in private homes[33]. Facing persecution in early 17th century England, many Independents fled to the Netherlands. Some later returned and, in search of religious freedom, boarded the *Mayflower*, eventually settling in New England[34]. Far more radical than the Presbyterians, the Independents rejected both the Anglican and Presbyterian churches[35]. They denied all hierarchical systems, asserting that each congregation should remain autonomous and not be subordinate to any larger religious institution[36]. In their view, a true church could not be modeled on existing institutions but had to emerge through a voluntary act of separation, a deliberate break by believers united solely by the fellowship of the Gospel[37]. Despite rejecting hierarchy, the Independents were not devoid of authority given that their clergy exerted substantial influence over congregations, derived from their deep dedication to daily preaching and rigorous study of the Bible[38]. Consequently, the governance system of Independent churches, led by representatives elected solely by the congregation, was in fact highly authoritative and its decisions were considered binding.

III. Emerging Political and Religious Movements

Doctrinal rivalries between the Independents and the Presbyterians also spilled over into the political arena, particularly during the mid-17th century, in the time of the English Civil War. Despite being fewer in number and less popular overall, the Independents managed to distinguish themselves by leveraging personal prestige and demonstrating effective administrative strategies, which enabled them to gain control over the most influential parliamentary counties[39]. This political and religious ascendancy of the Independent Church laid the groundwork for the rise of Oliver Cromwell[40].

During the same period, a variety of new religious sects began to emerge across England, both in rural and urban areas, operating outside the traditional parish system. Some, like the Baptists, were doctrinal in nature, while others took their names from their charismatic leaders[41]. Many of these groups also sought to assert their beliefs in the political sphere.

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33 Robert Browne, *A Treatise of Reformation without Tarying for Anie* (Middleburgh: 1582, republished in London: Congregational Historical Society, 1903), 6.
34 Maurois, *Istoria Angliei*, 367.
35 Ibid., 366.
36 Dumitriu, *Puritani și puritane*, 70.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., 74.
39 Coroban, *Mișcarea iacobită*, 82.
40 Ibid.
41 Morrill, "The Puritan Revolution", 77.

The *Baptists* formed a distinct religious minority, likely founded by John Smyth (c. 1554 - c. August 28, 1612), who famously baptized himself in 1609. This group practiced adult baptism and regarded the church solely as a fellowship of reborn believers[42]. Around 1640, there were approximately forty Baptist congregations in England, ten of which were located in London alone. Their numbers grew rapidly, and by 1660, around 250 congregations were recorded, comprising roughly of 25,000 members, or about 0.47% of the total English population[43].

The *Mennonites* in England were a branch of the Anabaptist movement, a radical Protestant sect that rejected infant baptism and championed the separation of church and state. They took their name from Menno Simons (c. 1496 - January 31, 1561), a former Dutch Catholic priest who became a key figure in the Anabaptist tradition. While the Mennonites themselves never gained widespread traction in England, their theological principles significantly influenced the formation and evolution of the Baptist denomination.

Another influential group that emerged during this tumultuous period was the *Levellers*, who formed a political movement in 1647. The Levellers advocated for political equality, asserting that all men are born free and should be governed only through their own consent[44]. The group's most notable leaders, John Lilburne (c. 1614 - August 29, 1657), Richard Overton, William Walwyn, and John Wildman, were also prolific political pamphleteers, widely known for their writings and activism[45].

The *Diggers,* also known as the "True Levellers", were organized into a community led by Gerrard Winstanley (baptized October 19, 1609 - September 10, 1676). They emerged from the Baptist church, though their beliefs aligned more closely with those of the Anabaptist movements than with Mennonite teachings[46]. The Diggers championed absolute equality among all people, arguing that no material distinctions should exist. Accordingly, they believed that property should be held in common and used collectively by the entire community[47]. The Diggers have often been regarded as forerunners of the communist ideology, after all, Winstanley himself is the eighth figure listed on Moscow's "Revolutionary Column", a monument commemorating ideological precursors to socialism. However, the philosophical roots of the Digger movement are more accurately traced to the harsh aftermath of the English Civil War, marked by widespread poverty, economic collapse, disease, and

[42] Max Weber, *Etica protestantă și spiritul capitalismului* (București: Editura Antet Revolution, 2012; orig. *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, 1905), 79.
[43] Arriel Hessayon, "Early modern Communism: The Diggers and the Community of Goods", *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 3, no. 2 (2009): 15.
[44] Coroban, *Mișcarea iacobită,* 83.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Hessayon, "Early modern Communism," 32.
[47] Coroban, *Mișcarea iacobită,* 83.

general deprivation[48]. Furthermore, the Diggers' message emphasized that only those spiritually transformed – "enlightened", in their terms – were capable of renouncing worldly possessions and embracing communal life[49].

The *Ranters* were another radical and controversial millenarian group whose very existence has been subject to debate, due to the scarcity of verifiable historical records. Nonetheless, they appear to have emerged as a rebellious reaction to the prevailing Puritan order of English society, whose strict values they openly rejected. Composed largely of the lower social classes, the Ranters had no cohesive doctrine and were often poorly educated. Their worldview was shaped more by instinct than by structured theology or logic[50]. The Ranters claimed to be liberated from all societal constraints and were notorious for behaviors that scandalized contemporary England as drinking, smoking, blasphemy, adultery, and offensive speech were among the charges laid against them. Some even declared that one could not be freed from sin until one had committed every sin[51]. Their provocative conduct suggested that they either embraced or were indifferent to their social marginalization, considering themselves above conventional norms[52].

Between 1645 and 1660, the Ranters were active in London, where they reportedly held gatherings in taverns, and in various regions including Lancashire, Yorkshire, Warwick, Leicester, Norfolk, Suffolk, Sussex, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Bristol and Dorset[53]. While their exact numbers remain unknown, estimates suggest they never exceeded a few thousand. The group's most notable figures included Joseph Salmon, Jacob Bauthumley, Lodowicke Muggleton, Laurence Clarkson, and Abiezer Coppe, the latter perhaps the most infamous, known for his provocative sermons delivered in the nude.

In response to the Ranters perceived threat, the authorities took harsh measures. In 1648, for example, Parliament ordered the public burning of two Ranter publications: *A Fiery Flying Roll* by Abiezer Coppe and *A Rout, A Rout* by Joseph Salmon[54]. Politically, both texts rejected established authority, including church and state, advocating instead for a spiritual and social upheaval grounded in divine inspiration. Coppe's *Fiery Flying Roll* fiercely denounced wealth inequality, property ownership, and the oppression of the poor, promoting radical egalitarianism and spiritual liberty. He used blasphemous and prophetic language to shock readers into questioning religious and moral conventions. Salmon's *A Rout, A Rout* similarly attacked religious hypocrisy and legalism,

[48] Hessayon, "Early modern Communism," 32.
[49] Ibid.
[50] G. F. S. Ellens, "The Ranters Ranting: Reflections on a Ranting Counter Culture", *Church History* 40, no. 1 (1971): 94.
[51] Ibid., 91.
[52] Ibid., 98.
[53] Ibid., 92.
[54] Ibid., 94.

presenting a vision of spiritual warfare where traditional institutions were overthrown in favor of direct, personal communion with the divine. He emphasized liberty of conscience and millenarian hopes, suggesting the imminent arrival of a new spiritual age. Both authors saw inner enlightenment as the true source of authority, rather than law, clergy, or scripture. Their works reflect a broader frustration with the failure of the English Revolution to bring about genuine change, expressing a deep desire for not just political reform but a total transformation of society, grounded in divine justice, equality, and freedom from external control.

Another sect that emerged during this period was the *Fifth Monarchists*, a millenarian movement that appeared during the Republic and continued to exist throughout the Protectorate, until 1660. The beliefs of these millenarians were deeply rooted in biblical prophecy, particularly in Chapter 7 of the Book of Daniel and Chapter 12 of the Book of Revelation. They interpreted these texts to identify the four beasts of Daniel's vision with four ancient empires: Babylon, the Persian Empire, the Macedonian Empire, and the Roman Empire[55]. Moreover, their prophetic calculations suggested that the beast would reign for 1,260 years, starting from 396 AD, a year they regarded as marking the end of paganism. This led them to predict that the Fifth Monarchy – the thousand-year reign of Christ and the kingdom of the saints – would begin in 1656, following the fall of the Babylonian beast[56].

Among all Puritan sects, the Fifth Monarchists stood out for the profound political implications of their beliefs. They aspired to transform the Stuart-ruled kingdom into a holy kingdom governed directly by Christ. As a first step towards this goal, they supported the summoning of the Nominated Assembly – also known as the Barebones Parliament, after one of its members – which was established in June 1653. This assembly consisted of 140 members appointed by independent church congregations. However, the assembly will be dissolved after only two months due to the radicalism of its members[57].

For the Fifth Monarchists, the dissolution of this parliament represented a betrayal, both on the part of Oliver Cromwell and of the New Model Army. They later denounced Cromwell's assumption of the title of Lord Protector, and their pamphlets and sermons, aimed at discrediting the Protectorate, ultimately worked against them and, soon, their activities attracted increased surveillance[58]. Repeatedly, due to their radical political views, members of this sect were arrested and regarded as a threat to state security. Charismatic leaders such as John Rogers, Christopher Feake, and Thomas Harrison spent long periods in

[55] Leo F. Solt, "The Fifth Monarchy Men: Politics and the Milennium", *Church History* 30, no. 3 (1961): 315.
[56] Ibid., 318.
[57] Coroban, *Politică și alegeri în Anglia,* 24.
[58] Solt, "The Fifth Monarchy Men," 318.

prison. They were even accused by John Thurloe, Secretary of the Council of State, of plotting to seize political power[59].

One notable figure within the ranks of the Fifth Monarchists was a woman, Mary Cary Rand (c. 1621-1653), a writer and pamphleteer who argued that prophetic gifts were not reserved solely for men. Her works reflect many of the key ideas of the movement, among them the belief that the Church of Rome, along with its successor, the Anglican Church, had reached their end, and that political power should be exercised by an elite group predestined to rule[60]. In her *Epistle to the Reader*, which prefaces her 1648 work, *The Resurrection*…, Cary asserts that God's promise of deliverance had been fulfilled during the Civil War. She claims that a true understanding of these events – grasping their biblical significance – would lead to genuine faith. However, Rand acknowledges that this deeper meaning is difficult to access unless one is among the saints; nevertheless, through dedicated study and great effort, one could reach such understanding and, in doing so, achieve sanctity[61]. Even John Bunyan, the renowned Baptist preacher, appears to have shared some of the views of this sect at one point, as evidenced by certain passages in his work *The Advocateship of Jesus Christ*[62].

The *Quakers*, also known as the Society of Friends[63] – sometimes referred to as "tremblers" because their whole bodies would shake in moments of religious ecstasy as they awaited the descent of the Holy Spirit[64] – represented another significant nonconformist group. For them, faith was an intensely personal, inner experience, and they rejected many practices of the established church, including the ordination of priests[65]. Quakers advocated asceticism, discipline, hard work, sobriety, and pacifism, refusing to live in submission to earthly authorities and instead forming free, self-governing communities[66].

During the Protectorate, the Quakers became the most widespread sect, but their beliefs and behavior led them to be perceived as rebellious and, as a result, they faced persecution. They refused to participate in warfare, denied all ecclesiastical authority, would not swear oaths[67], and rejected outward signs of deference by refusing to remove their hats, kneel, bow, or address anyone in the formal second-person plural[68]. Even wealthier Quakers instructed their children

[59] Ibid., 319.
[60] Alfred Cohen, "The Fifth Monarchy. Mind, Mary Cary and the Origin of Totalitariansm", *Social Research* 31, no. 2 (1964): 200.
[61] Ibid., 201.
[62] Richard L. Graves, "John Bunyan and The Fifth Monarchists", *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 13, no. 2 (1981): 83–84.
[63] Coroban, *Mișcarea iacobită,* 84.
[64] Weber, *Etica protestantă,* 122.
[65] Maurois, *Istoria Angliei,* 429.
[66] Coroban, *Mișcarea iacobită*, 122.
[67] Maurois, *Istoria Angliei,* 367.
[68] Weber, *Etica protestantă,* 243.

to pursue education and learn a trade, though not for material gain, but in the service of ethical ideals. They permitted only a few forms of recreation, such as visiting friends, reading history books, conducting scientific experiments, gardening, or engaging in business-related conversations[69].

Many of those who joined the Quakers had previously been Levellers, Diggers, Baptists, or adherents of the Fifth Monarchy movement[70]. They published their ideas openly, signing their pamphlets with their real names, despite the risk of persecution or even arrest for their beliefs[71]. Faced with increasing repression, many of them sought refuge in North America, settling primarily in New England, where they continued to preach their anti-clerical ideology, a practice they refused to abandon, even after four of their missionaries were executed in 1659[72].

The founder of this millenarian sect was George Fox (July 1624 - January 13, 1691), a preacher of humble origins, who – at a time when religion had become highly theoretical and abstract – brought forth a new vision of faith, grounded in a practical ideology that spoke directly to a society searching for an alternative path. In this context, Fox proclaimed that the Day of the Lord was near, and that Christ would return to instruct his disciples personally. Therefore, believers no longer needed external teachings, for divine wisdom was being directly instilled within them by God; they could rely on their inner spiritual experiences to guide them in perfect harmony with the divine will[73].

This idea granted each Quaker a vital, individual role in the spiritual and moral evolution of humanity (their "day-to-day cross"[74]) and explained Fox's contempt for earthly authorities, his constant criticism of them, and the promotion of the belief that the world would be far better governed if power were held by his followers[75]. Guided by spiritual experience, Fox used the religious convictions that animated the Quakers as a means to accuse and judge his political opponents, whom he admonished in his pamphlets, warning them that failure to abide would lead only to ruin, ignorance, and ultimately to destruction in a lake of fire. In his view, only God's laws could govern effectively in such times, while the laws of the state were of no real value[76]. His criticism spared no one, not the soldiers engaged in military service, neither the inhabitants of other Western European countries, nor the wealthy, whom he condemned for adorning themselves with gold and wasting their lives on what

[69] Ibid., 244.
[70] Morrill, "The Puritan Revolution", 79.
[71] Ibid., 83.
[72] Solt, "The Fifth Monarchy Men", 302.
[73] Larry H. Ingle, "George Fox, Milenarian", *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 24, no. 2 (1992): 263-268.
[74] Coroban, "The Quakers", 290.
[75] Ingle, "George Fox, Milenarian", 264.
[76] Ibid., 267.

he considered frivolous and useless activities. Fox proclaimed that such practices would cease once the Quakers came to power and would govern the world[77].

A notable case is that of one of George Fox's most prominent disciples – William Penn (October 24, 1644 - August 10, 1718). At the age of 22, Penn embraced the Quaker movement, and for the next twelve years he dedicated himself to publishing numerous pamphlets in which he criticized the political system, the laws of the land, and the hierarchical structure of the Church, while fervently promoting the ideals of the sect. His outspoken views led to repeated arrests and imprisonment, including time spent in Newgate Prison and the Tower of London. During these incarcerations, Penn challenged the legality of his trials and denounced the abuses and violations of his rights, rights which, he argued, had been guaranteed since the drafting of the Magna Carta[78]. In 1676, as King Charles II owed William Penn's father, a distinguished admiral, the sum of £16,000, the monarch granted Penn a vast tract of land west of the Delaware River, in the territory that lies today between New York and Maryland. Penn had originally wished to name this land New Wales or Sylvania; however, the king insisted on calling it Pennsylvania, in honor of Admiral Penn, his loyal servant[79]. A year later, a group of six Quakers, including William Penn himself, signed a letter declaring that in this new land they had finally found peace and religious freedom. In 1681, William Penn would formally establish an English colony there, a community rooted in the principles of tolerance, equality, and liberty of conscience[80].

IV. Conclusion

The Reformation in England during the 16th and 17th centuries was a catalyst for the emergence of radical religious groups, profoundly influencing the religious and political landscape of the time. This analysis explored the origins, beliefs, and impact of these groups, seeking to address the research questions posed in the introduction. The Reformation's influence on the formation of radical religious groups was multifaceted. The break from Rome initiated by Henry VIII and the subsequent establishment of the Church of England created a religious environment ripe for dissent and reform. The introduction of the *Act of Supremacy* and the *Act of Uniformity* under Elizabeth I further solidified the Anglican Church's dominance but also alienated those who

77 Ibid., 268.
78 William Wistar Comfort, "William Penn's Religious Background." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 68, no. 4 (1944), 344.
79 Ibid., 346.
80 Ibid., 347.

sought more radical reforms. This environment of religious upheaval and state control over the church provided fertile ground for the emergence of groups such as the Puritans, Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists, and Quakers, each seeking to purify or radically alter the existing religious structures.

The key religious and political doctrines and practices of these groups varied significantly. Puritans, for instance, emphasized predestination and sought to eliminate remnants of Catholicism from Anglican practices. Presbyterians advocated for a church governed by elected elders rather than bishops, reflecting their desire for a more democratic ecclesiastical structure. Independents, or Congregationalists, rejected all hierarchical systems, insisting on the autonomy of each congregation. Baptists introduced the practice of adult baptism, emphasizing personal faith and rebirth. The Quakers, or the Society of Friends, focused on inner spiritual experience and rejected formal sacraments and clergy, advocating for pacifism and equality.

These groups interacted with and challenged the established Church of England in various ways. The Puritans, through their legislative efforts in Parliament, sought to reform the church from within but faced resistance from the monarchy. Presbyterians and Independents often found themselves in direct conflict with the Anglican establishment, leading to periods of persecution and exile. The Baptists and Quakers, with their radical beliefs and practices, faced significant government opposition and were often marginalized or persecuted. Despite these challenges, these groups persisted, contributing to the rich tapestry of political and religious diversity in England.

By situating the topic within the broader historiography of 17th century Britain, this study has highlighted the complex interplay between religious reform, social dynamics, and political power. The emergence of radical religious groups was not merely a reaction to religious changes of the period but was deeply intertwined with the social and political transformations of the time. This study offered a nuanced perspective on the transformative impact of the Reformation on English society and politics, demonstrating how religious dissent and diversity shaped the course of English history.

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