WALKING ON THEIR HIND LEGS: FEMALE MILLENARIAN PREACHERS, RADICALISM, AND SUBVERSION OF THE SOCIAL ORDER DURING THE ENGLISH CIVIL WAR

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“Sir, a woman’s preaching is like a dog’s walking on his hind legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all.”—Samuel Johnson, 1763

Although Samuel Johnson’s quip was uttered more than a century after the English Civil War, it is a fitting witticism with which to begin this study of female millenarians preaching in the 1640s. Johnson makes very clear that the extraordinary thing about women preachers was not the sermons they gave; rather, it was the fact that they were performing religion in a way in which women traditionally did not. Speaking from 1763, he was able to turn his observation of these women’s social digressions into a non-threatening punch line. One hundred and twenty years earlier, however, one would be hard pressed to find a man in London who could make jokes about women preaching the Word of God in public. On the streets, in the mainstream churches, and on the floor of Parliament, the subject was too new, too dangerous, and too incendiary for humor or insincerity.

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The 1640s brought a new era of religious dissension to England. Archbishop William Laud, whose views were controversially close to Catholicism, had been presiding over the Church of England since 1633. Many English people were becoming dissatisfied with Laud’s religious politics. In fact, his conservative Arminian beliefs led many to associate Laud with the Pope in Rome; his rule over the Church and the episcopacy—the hierarchy of bishops—they said, must be stopped. In order to free themselves from Laud’s oppressive “papist” control and


2 In contrast to Calvinism, which preached the doctrine of predestination, Laudian Arminianism allowed for free will.
further purify the English church, men and women began to break away from the Church of England to form Christian sects which operated without a traditional episcopal hierarchy.

One notable aspect of these new separatist sects was the role that women played in them. By 1640, there were ten separatist congregations in London and a few more in the surrounding areas. In some congregations, women made up the majority of church-goers: one particular congregation in Norwich boasted eighty-three women to a mere thirty-one men in 1645. Perhaps as a matter of necessity, due to the large female contingent to which these sects catered, separatist sects of the 1640s proclaimed that all members of the congregation shared a “spiritual equality.”

Some women, like Katherine Chidley, took their new spiritual equality to the extreme. A strong supporter of religious toleration for sectarians, Chidley not only published texts in which she admonished the famous anti-sectarian leader Thomas Edwards, but also founded her own church. In this separatist environment, in which lay-preaching was the norm, sectarian women soon began to exercise their equal religious positions: like Chidley, they started to preach and prophesy in public. Displaying her freedom to assert her Puritan beliefs, Susan May from Kent reportedly preached inside a barn, stating that “the Devill was the father of the Pope, The Pope the father of those which did weare Surplices [i.e., bishops and ordained clergymen], wherefore consequently the Devill was the Father of all those which did not love Puritans.”

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5 Ibid., 44.
Indeed, a common theme among these new female preachers—and their male counterparts—was their hatred of the Pope and, as an extension, a distrust of the Anglican bishops under Laud. They proclaimed the evil of the Pope and called for the abolition of the episcopacy of the English church in no uncertain terms. To make the need for true church reform immediate, these prophetesses and preachers, including Chidley, May, Mary Cary, and Lady Eleanor Davies, began to situate their pleas for change within a traditional framework of apocalyptic beliefs. This framework, which will be covered in greater depth later in this paper, gave individuals the freedom to prophesy based upon their personal interpretations of Daniel’s and John the Apostle’s prophetic visions of the Apocalypse in the biblical Books of Daniel and Revelation.\(^9\) Cary and Davies, especially, maintained that the millennium was not only on its way, but imminent, and religious and social reforms must be made to prepare accordingly for the event. This school of millenarian thought is termed postmillennialism: it is the belief that, through the efforts of devout Christians on earth, the world will be made ready for the millennium.\(^10\) Only after these efforts will there be deliverance in the form of Christ’s Second Coming.\(^11\)

Women were not the only ones preaching and publishing in the apocalyptic tradition during the 1640s, however. Male religious leaders, like Joseph Mede, Cornelius Burges, Stephen Marshall, and Henry Burton also preached anti-papal (and later, anti-Laudian) sentiments over

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\(^9\) See Daniel 7-12 and Revelation 1-22. Some of the most relevant imagery that Daniel and the Apostle John prophesy includes a great horned beast (Dan. 7:23-4), a seven-headed beast from the sea who “makes war with the saints,” (Rev. 13: 1-7), the Whore of Babylon (Rev. 17:5), the destruction of Babylon (Rev. 18: 10), and the Millennium, in which the Beast, the false prophet, and all who followed them are thrown into the lake of fire, Satan is imprisoned in a bottomless abyss for a thousand years, and the saints live with Christ in the New Jerusalem on Earth (Rev. 19-21).


\(^11\) Ibid., 45.
and over again. In his first sermon preached before the House of Commons after the convening of the Long Parliament on November 17, 1640, Burges—a preacher deemed moderate enough to preach on the floor of Parliament—juxtaposed the biblical city of Babylon and the present Arminian religious state of England: “give me leave briefly,” he said, “to parallel the slow pace of our deliverance out of Mystical Babylon with that of Judah, and some of the remnant of Israel out of old Babylon, which for a long time had held them Captives.”

One of the most distinctive aspects of Revolution-era millenarianism was the way in which male and female preachers identified reflections of the tales of Babylon, the seven-headed Beast, and the Antichrist in the uncertainty, religious upheaval, and political events that were occurring during this period. Lay-preachers of the 1640s saw their fellow Londoners, down-trodden by the years of Babylonian, Laudian control, as the modern-day mirrors to the Israelites. Only a complete “deliverance” (i.e., reformation of the state of the current church) could release them from their “captivity.”

Whether male or female, preachers used the politico-religious climates of Arminian oppression and later, religious reform, as both fodder and evidence for their apocalyptic tracts. Each reasoned through his or her millennial argument by citing chapters and verses from the Books of Daniel and Revelation. Though the source material and evidence for both men’s and women’s sermons were the same, women preachers were perceived to be more radical than their male counterparts. John Taylor believed that Laud had attempted to turn England into a Catholic Babylon.

Yet, the final image in Taylor’s tract entitled Lucifers Lacky depicts a woman wearing traditional Puritan clothes and giving a sermon from inside a makeshift washtub pulpit.

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while men and women look on. Underneath the image, the caption reads, “When Women Preach, and Coblers Pray, The fiends in Hell, make holiday.” But what was it about these *female* preachers sermonizing from washtubs that gave the fiends in Hell their holiday? What set these women apart from their separatist, millenarian male counterparts? Were they really giving more radical sermons or publishing more incendiary texts? Or was their femininity a distraction from their rhetoric, leading spectators and readers to *assume* that these subversive women were expressing more militant ideas?

This paper, while focusing mainly on the religiously-charged period beginning with the convening of the Long Parliament on November 3, 1640 and ending with the abolition of the episcopacy on October 9, 1646, will situate female preachers’ apocalyptic arguments within the broader Christian tradition of millenarian thought. These women, who spouted dramatic apocalyptic prophecies, were simply applying an existing historical framework to a new era of change. Their words and gestures—though extreme—did not make them more radical than the millenarian men who preached next to them. Rather, as Johnson said, it was simply the fact that they were doing something unnatural: the ability the female preachers of the 1640s possessed to subvert a strict social and religious hierarchy made people believe that these women’s radicalism gave joy to the fiends of Hell. Before delving into a comparative study of male and female millenarian thought, however, it will be useful to understand both the moderate social norms against which women like Mary Cary, Lady Eleanor Davies, and Katherine Chidley were rebelling and the millenarian tradition into which these prophets fit.

**Protestant Tradition: Religious Norms of the 1640s and Millenarian Thought**

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While men had the right to become priests or bishops in the Church of England, women “were allowed neither a voice in Church nor State,” according to early modern religious historian Keith Thomas.15 Although women were more likely than men to attend over one sermon each week,16 they were bound by the biblical “law” articulated in St. Paul’s epistles. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes:

Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.17

As was the case with the Books of Daniel and Revelation, the Bible’s word was taken literally. Male leaders within the Church took these verses from 1 Corinthians, as well as another passage from Paul’s first letter to Timothy,18 as justification for women’s complete silence in the congregation.19 Women, too, understood the implications of these biblical verses. Although women were viewed as being more “naturally” religious than men, according to early modern tradition, it was also understood that they should not debate religious beliefs.20 Instead, they should listen carefully to the minister’s sermon, so that they could become ever more committed to Christianity.21

When not worshipping silently in church, women were expected to practice piety devoutly in their homes. The practice of private piety began at an early age; in his 1653 book detailing the holy life and death of Lady Letice, Viscountess Falkland, John Duncon noted that

15 Thomas, 43.
17 1 Corinthians 14: 34-35. Emphasis included in the King James Version of the Bible.
18 1 Timothy 2: 11-12: “Let the woman learn in subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.”
19 Otten, 354.
20 Patricia Crawford, Women and Religion in England, 1500-1720 (New York: Routledge, 1993), 74-75. Crawford goes on to argue that, far from being natural, women’s religiosity in the early modern period was a socially constructed phenomenon that played into the female quest for self-expression, meaning, consolation, and strength in a male-dominated world.
21 Charlton explains that some women would write down notes from sermons after returning home from church. Some women, like Lady Mary Strode, even took notes while listening to the sermon. Charlton 160.
Lady Falkland “came not from her Nurses arms, without some knowledge of the principles of Christian religion.” Before she was old enough to leave the nursery by herself, Duncon suggests, Lady Falkland understood some of the main tenets of Christianity. He goes on to note that her occupations as a child were filled with an “intermixing of prayer, reading, writing, working, and walking.” Religion was part of the daily routine of both young girls and adult women. By placing her prayers first in his list of Lady Falkland’s daily activities, Duncon stressed their necessity: long before she took walks to preserve her physical health, Lady Falkland had to “exercise” by saying her prayers to preserve her spiritual health.

Prayers were, of course, an essential part of a woman’s practice of piety. Truly “godly” women devoted hours each day to prayer. Lady Anne Halkett allotted five hours a day for her devotion. The family of Duncon’s dear Lady Falkland called the hours she spent in prayer “her busy howrs; praiers, her business.” Anything else that had to be done in a day took place in her “spare howrs” when she was no longer “on the job.” Devotion became a woman’s work, her daily occupation, regardless of her social class. Wealthy women were the spiritual guides of their households, but ladies and serving maids alike prayed devoutly. According to Duncon, Lady Falkland’s dutiful maids “came into her Chamber early every morning, and ordinarily she passed about an howr with them, In praying, and catechising, and instructing them.”

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23 Ibid.
24 Crawford, 79.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
Women were also obligated to teach their children to be good, pious Christians. One catechism in particular, published in 1646, was entitled *Milk for babes, or a Mothers Catechism for Her Children.*\(^\text{28}\) It begins with a scripted introduction for the mother to say to her child: “from the tender bowels of a *compassionate Mother*, I desire to inform thee in thy estate by *Nature created*, by *nature corrupted*, and *nature restored*, that, in these things which concern thyself, thou mayst know God.”\(^\text{29}\) Even Lady Eleanor Davies, one of the most controversial and publically prominent prophetesses of the 1640s, combined her penchant for religious prophecy with her motherly instincts in her 1644 blessing to her daughter. Throughout the text, she faithfully interpreted scripture (as a mother should) for her daughter, predicting the forthcoming millennium: “and now ended thus this point of Honour, displaying the *Ancient of dayes his Kingdome your portion* to you dedicated.”\(^\text{30}\) Here, Lady Eleanor is bringing her daughter into her prophecy, interpreting the biblical verses, while promising her—“her alone and sole support under the Almighty”—a portion of the inheritance of New Jerusalem.\(^\text{31}\)

For the most part, then, while male clergymen were responsible for the religious education of the congregation as a whole, women were in charge of educating individual members of the congregation from birth. Whether they were nurses saying prayers for children as they rocked them to sleep, wealthy women teaching their servants to be good Christians, or sectarian mothers instructing their daughters in the prophecies of Daniel, these women were, in fact, preachers. Though silent in the public realm of the Anglican Church, in the privacy of their own homes, they gave mini-sermons to their children and prayed for the family, if their husbands


\(^{29}\) Abbott, 1.


\(^{31}\) Ibid., 38.
were sick.\textsuperscript{32} As religious leaders by the fireside, these women were not subverting the social order: it was only when their religious knowledge became \textit{public} knowledge that women posed a problem.

While the tradition of submissive female piety urged women to be privately religious, the tradition of Protestant millenarian thought provided a reason for them to preach in public. Directly following the Reformation and the establishment of Protestantism, as early as 1536, English Protestants began to express apocalyptic ideas. In that year, Archbishop Cranmer spoke out against the Pope, calling him the Antichrist.\textsuperscript{33} Shortly after this sermon, John Bale published his interpretation of Revelation, entitled \textit{The image of bothe churches}.\textsuperscript{34} With this text, published a century before the Long Parliament convened, Bale crafted the religious and philosophical lens through which the millenarian writers of the 1640s would view apocalyptic events.

Bale originated the accepted concept of the 1640s that said that there were two distinct churches: one over which Christ presided (the Reformed Church), and one subject to the rule of the Antichrist (the Catholic Church).\textsuperscript{35} For Bale, this Antichrist was not just one person; the Beast of Revelation was a compound of all of the true church’s enemies.\textsuperscript{36} In \textit{The image}, he states that the seventh head of the Beast is made up of “all carnall wysdome with all devyllyshe polycyes and craftes and thyss the verye papacye here in Europa whych is the generall Antichrist of all the whole worlde almost.”\textsuperscript{37} This idea of a comprehensive Antichristian Beast was one taken up by the millenarians of the 1640s, as well, as they began to equate Catholicism

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} Crawford, 87.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Christianson, 13.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 14.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 15.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 16.
\end{itemize}
with Laudianism. Finally, Bale set the stage for the swelling of apocalyptic thought, which would take place in a century, by tying biblical events to worldly events. Especially in times of great public desire for religious reformation, this technique would prove useful: by associating current events to the prophecies of John, a sense of urgency could be cultivated through the idea of the imminent millennium.\(^{38}\) Bale’s desire for a complete reformation of the Church and his hatred of anything associated with the Pope laid the foundation for later millenarian Protestants.\(^{39}\) From Bale’s philosophy, a tradition of anti-papal apocalyptic literature sprang, starting with John Foxe’s *Actes and monuments* and leading up to the millenarian thinkers of the English Revolution.\(^{40}\)

**Expressions of Millenarian Belief in the 1640s**

Some historians argue that fervent Revolution-era millenarianism did not flourish until around the time of Charles I’s execution in 1649.\(^{41}\) Interestingly, however, by looking at the collections of George Thomason—the London bookseller who kept copies of contemporary tracts—one can determine that almost 70% of the religious tracts published by ministers in the period from 1640 to 1653 were millenarian.\(^{42}\) Of this 70%, B. S. Capp goes on to say that over a third of the tracts were written by Presbyterians, the more moderate Englishmen of the mid-

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38 Christianson, 21.
39 Christianson, 21. Both Bale and the millenarians of the English Revolution were writing in times when many English people wanted further reform of the Church.
40 Ibid., 40. Christianson notes that, in the preface to Foxe’s work, the author stated that the text would depict the “Image of both Churches,” hearkening directly back to the work of Bale.
42 B. S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-century English Millenarianism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), 38. Capp figures that of the 112 religious tracts published in this period, 78 expressed clear millennial beliefs. Capp’s statistics do not take writings by female millenarians into account, however; the number of millenarian tracts per capita would be even higher if he took these tracts into consideration.
1640s, making it difficult to support the claim that all millenarian preachers—male or female—were radical sectarians.

Joseph Mede was one of these moderate millenarians who followed in Bale’s tradition. Born in 1586, Mede became a fellow at Cambridge’s Christ’s College in 1614, beginning his scholarly career as a divinity teacher and preacher. His most famous texts are his millennial writings, including *Clavis Apocalyptica*, published in 1627 and translated into English in 1643, and *The Apostasy of the Latter Times*, published in 1641. Yet, by 1638, Mede was dead. Who was publishing his works posthumously and why were they publishing them at that time?

In his lengthy study of Mede’s millenarianism, Jeffrey Jue suggests that Parliament was using Mede’s work as convenient propaganda when they needed it most. As mentioned above, the *Clavis Apocalyptica*—a text which had not been re-published in ten years—was translated into English by a member of Parliament and approved for publication by that institution in 1643. In the Parliamentary authorization, Arthur Jackson, the minister of St. Michael’s Church in Woodstreet, claims he found that “the book it selfe gives much light for the understanding of many obscure Passages in that sweet and comfortable Prophecie.” Indeed, Jackson observes that “this Translation is a good work.” Thus, in the same year in which the House of Commons signed the Solemn League and Covenant—a document intended to both alter the national English Church and rally the Long Parliament against the King—Parliament and its religious

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43 Ibid., 39.
46 Ibid., 33-34.
48 Ibid.
expert gave the seal of approval for the publication of a religious work which detailed the future millennium.

Mede was a premillennialist who believed that the thousand-year reign had not yet begun. Premillennialists, in general, were less inclined to advocate for social change than were postmillennialists, because premillennialists believed that “social transformation can only come about by cataclysmic change.”

Regarding the future millennium, Mede wrote that, “when that Angel shall sound that the Romane Beaste being destroyed…the mystery of God shalbe [sic] finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.” In this passage, he is very clear that this time shall come to pass, but it has not come yet. To determine when it would come, in *The Key of Revelation*, Mede created parallels between each event in John’s revelation and a corresponding event in the history of the Christian church. His “chronology” depicts the deliverance from Babylon as the deliverance from Rome and the Catholic Church, a prophecy that would become popular among the millenarians of the 1640s.

He does not focus solely on the Pope, however. Like Bale, Mede maintains that “the Pope by himselfe and alone, though he may be termed a false Prophet, yet he maketh not up the Beast, except his Clergie be joyned with him.” Here, he expresses a clear anti-episcopal sentiment; the Beast of Revelation will not be complete without the bishops. Yet, Mede was not radical in his apocalyptic thought. He never connected the episcopacy of Rome with the episcopacy of the Church of England. He supported Laud and the practices of the Anglican Church under this Archbishop of Canterbury. All in all, he was a study in moderation, proving

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49 Shepperson, 44.
50 Mede, I, 120-121.
51 Christianson, 125.
52 Mede, II, 65.
53 Jue, 35.
that millennialism does not always imply radicalism. The “Father of British Millenarianism,” Mede—the moderate premillenarian, the Arminian, the devout anti-papist, and, most importantly, the man dead before 1640—proved the perfect, scholarly, moderate apocalyptic author for Parliament to take up as its “patron saint” (while twisting his message for the sake of propaganda) in the crusade against the Anglican episcopacy.

Although Mede did not live to see the religious changes that would occur from 1641 to 1646, a new crop of relatively moderate millenarians came onto the scene when the Long Parliament convened. Only two weeks after the Long Parliament began its tenure, Cornelius Burges and Stephen Marshall gave the first fast day sermons to the House of Commons. Burges, who Capp describes as a moderate Presbyterian, heartily called for a true Reformation of the present Church of England under Laud. Burges represented a new decade of “moderates”; while following in Mede’s footsteps, he reflected a growing feeling of the Arminian English Church’s regression toward Catholicism. In his sermon, he implored the Commons to “purge out and cast away…all Idols and Idolatry in particular.” Medean anti-papal thought is extended here to admonish the state of the Laudian church. Thus, conventional Protestant millenarianism had been extended to include Laudians as the co-oppressors of the faithful. To Burges, the Arminians were attempting to reverse all the good that had come from the Protestant Reformation, to pull England back towards the Roman church of “Mysticall Babylon.” Like the old Babylon, the “new” Babylon was a brutal state, which “delight[ed] in no other drink but the bloud of the Saints.” Burges describes the destruction of the new Babylon as a day which will be as happy as that of the old Babylon’s collapse, “when all the people in heaven must sing

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54 Ibid., 21.
55 Capp, 47.
56 Burges, 49.
57 Christianson, 186.
58 Burges, 26. Saints being the followers of the true religion, Protestant Christianity.
Halleluiah.” Though Burges does not discuss the millennium in as much detail as many of the sectarian preachers of the 1640s, his sermons provide a good example of the type of millenarian thought that mainstream ministers were preaching at the same time.

Although Jue is correct in his claim that millenarianism does not always breed radicalism, as is evidenced by the cases of Mede and Burges, some extreme characters saw the world through this special kind of Revolutionary-era millenarian lens, as well. In 1636, on Guy Fawkes Day, Henry Burton preached two controversial sermons which equated all bishops—even those within the Church of England—with the Catholic Church. Unlike Mede or Burges, Burton very clearly set out a chain of succession from the Pope to the English bishops. He argued that the Prelates of the (Arminian) Church of England “have no other claime for their Hierchie, then the Popes of Rome have…and [the] Prelates cannot otherwise assume, but by making themselves the very limbes of the Pope, and so our Church a member of that Synagogue of Rome.” For Burton, there was no difference between the evil Roman Church and the corrupted English Church. In the two sermons, he called out for the destruction of the Arminians in control of the Anglican Church: “For terror of all the enemies of grace, Whither Papists…or Arminians, who hold and teach the Apostacy of the Saints, that they may fall away from grace totally and finally: Surely these men are none of Gods Children.”

In August 1637, after being tried for libel and sedition for these two sermons, Burton was imprisoned for his controversial preaching against the English episcopacy, and sent to Guernsey

59 Ibid., 27.
62 Ibid., 24.
in November. Three and a half years later, he was released with the prominent anti-Laudian, yet devout Episcopalian, William Prynne. The two men received a warm welcome everywhere they went, as they journeyed back to London: “At every Towne the Bells were rung as we passed through, the streets being strowed with people to see our faces,” Burton wrote. Although it is probably true that Burton’s memories of the reception he received upon his release from prison were at least slightly embellished, it was this wonderful day which inspired his first millenarian tract of the 1640s, The Sounding of the Two Last Trumpets.

Published in 1641, shortly after the Long Parliament had convened in November, The Sounding was a work of scriptural interpretation “conceived in [Burton’s] close Prison and Exile.” In it, Burton sets out his understanding of the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters of Revelation. He begins by repeating some of the accepted prophetic tropes of the day, including the direct statement that “all Papists are the Devils vassals.” He relates the sounding of the fifth trumpet and the pouring out of the fifth vial with the resultant Kingdom of the Beast of Revelation, “the throne whereof is chiefly in Rome.” Even the limbs of the Beast—the very same “limbes of the Pope” about which Burton preached in 1636—are affected by the scourges

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63 Gibson, “Henry Burton.” By 1643, with the rise of the Presbyterians in Parliament, the abolition of the episcopacy would become a more accepted course of action; in 1636, however, this belief in the Laudian church as an extension of Catholicism was radical enough—and anti-establishment enough—to send him to prison.


67 Ibid., 11.

68 Ibid., 3. In Revelation, at the sound of the fifth trumpet, a plague of locusts is released upon the Earth, but will only harm those people “which have not the seal of God in their foreheads” (Rev. 9:3-12). The pouring out of the fifth vial is significant because it brings darkness to the Beast’s kingdom (Rev. 16:10).
if they are not marked by the seal of God on their foreheads. Here, in a tract published just after his release from prison, Burton moves from the more widely accepted anti-papist Protestant belief back to his more extreme belief—for which he was imprisoned—that the Anglican episcopacy is an extension of the Roman one. Eventually, he directly addresses the heresy of Laud and the episcopate over which the Archbishop presides:

> What a notorious booke is published of late by the Prelate of Canterbury, wherein he sweats and labours to prove, that the only true Catholike Church of Christ over the world is made up of the many Prelaticall Churches…so as he makes the Church of England and of Rome to be all one church…. So as when the Prelate was so Zealous to bring Scotland to a conformitie with England, and when the Scots read in his book Englands conformities with Rome…might not this…startle and move the Scots to expell and repell…at the Speares point this Conformity?

After reading this quote, one cannot help but be conscious of the combative religious climate in which Burton was living. He addresses the unity he observes between the Churches of Rome and England and expresses the injustice of thrusting English quasi-Catholicism onto the Scottish.

He sides here with the Scottish rebels who, after the Book of Common Prayer (the prayer book of the Arminian Church of England) was forced on them in 1637, rebelled. The Scottish people liked their Presbyterian Church; it provided unification for an otherwise ethnically diverse and disconnected society. When the prayer book was introduced in July of 1637, the Scots saw it as a sign that Laud and Charles I were trying to push Arminianism on them. They rioted against the “popish” bishops who were reading from it; by 1638, Scotland had created the Covenant, an agreement to uphold the Church of Scotland and, implicitly, to resist pressure from the Arminian Church of England. In his sympathetic portrayal of the Scottish Presbyterians and their justifiable use of force to rebel against the spread of Arminianism, Burton reveals a

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69 Ibid.
70 Ibid, 18-19. The book by Laud to which Burton refers is *A Relation of the Conference Between William Laud…and Mr. Fisher the Jesuite*, published in 1639. William Lamont’s article, “Prynne, Burton, and the Puritan Triumph,” in the *Huntington Library Quarterly* from February 1964 was very helpful to me in discerning which of Laud’s writings Burton was critiquing.
72 Ibid., 76-77.
more radical feature of his millennial argument: he thinks that taking up arms to deliver oneself from the Babylon of the English Arminian Church is just.

Perhaps the most interesting section of *The Sounding* is the part inspired by the welcome he received upon his return to London. Burton believed that the celebration given in honor of his release after being imprisoned for preaching against bishops signaled that the end of the episcopacy was coming immediately. Because he believed that his earlier prophecy would come true, he reasoned that he was one of the two witnesses slain and resurrected in the Book of Revelation. He creates a convenient parallel between the length of time that the biblical witnesses were dead and the length of his prison sentence: “by three dayes and a halfe, wee may understand three yeeres and a half.” In this moment, Burton takes on the persona of a true prophet. He attempts to become an empty vessel of God, through which the truth is told.

Female millenarians, especially, used this technique of relating themselves to biblical prophets as a way to give their prophecies credibility. For example, in 1625, Lady Eleanor Davies heard a message from Daniel, the biblical prophet, which said that the Judgment Day would arrive in nineteen and a half years. At that moment, she chose to become the vessel through which Daniel could share this message with the rest of the world. Lady Eleanor discovered a fitting anagram for her maiden name: Eleanor Audelie could easily be rearranged to read “reveale o Daniel.” As Esther Cope argues, Lady Eleanor’s transformation into an intermediary through whom a biblical prophet spoke, made it more understandable that she, as a woman, would publish millenarian, politically-charged tracts. Paradoxically, by performing

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73 Christianson, 181.  
74 Ibid.  
77 Mack, 15. See also Cope, 12.  
78 Cope, 33.
her prophecy according to the rules for the part she must play, Lady Eleanor—like many women—became more believable.

At times, however, Lady Eleanor’s “performance” might have been dangerously overacted for her audience. In 1633, after Laud had burned her prophetic millenarian writings, Lady Eleanor accused this newly appointed archbishop of rape and murder. She, like Burton, was imprisoned for her apocalyptic prophecies; later, in 1637, she was committed by the Privy Council to Bedlam, an insane asylum in London. Still, she continued to write and was eventually released on September 6, 1640, just two months before the Long Parliament convened and her fellow prophet, Henry Burton, was released from prison. During the tense years that followed between 1640 and 1652, Lady Eleanor wrote the majority of her millenarian tracts.

Because she was such a prolific writer during the Revolutionary period, it is useful to study Lady Eleanor’s writing chronologically. A look at her texts from throughout the 1640s will provide a sense of whether she became more or less radical as the decade progressed. She begins the decade without embellishment. In Her Appeal to the High Court from 1641, she related the simple, unadorned prophecy that she received from Daniel. “There is Ninteene yeares and a halfe to the day of Judgement,” she recounted. It is also in this appeal to the High Court that Lady Eleanor revealed her role as Daniel’s mouthpiece. She claimed that she had become the “handmayden of the most high GOD of Heaven.” Months after returning from her stay in Bedlam, Lady Eleanor—first and foremost—had to prove her truth and sanity publicly. By reiterating the divine prophecy, she reminded the High Court that, although she may have been

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79 Ibid., 68.
80 Ibid., 86.
81 Ibid., 34.
83 Ibid., 79.
committed to an asylum, the apocalyptic prediction was true, filtered through her, straight from the mouth of Daniel. Finally, she began to foreshadow the Babylonian parallels she would ultimately flesh out with the articulation that she saw the present days “represented in this Mirror of former times.”

By 1643, however, Judgment Day was two years closer, her *Appeal to the High Court* had been largely ignored, and no religious reformation had occurred; time was of the essence. In *Samsons Legacie*, written in early 1643, Lady Eleanor takes up a more figurative, metaphorical style to express the urgency behind her words, as “every haire of Times head [had] grown precious.” She begins by constructing an allegory, in which King Charles I is represented by Samson and Queen Henrietta Maria—a Catholic—becomes Delilah. For Lady Eleanor, the Queen’s presence was a major reason for the “captivity” of England’s church: if the head of the state was subject to his heretical wife, what could be said about the influence of these Catholics on the state itself? Before he began to “dote” on Henrietta Maria, Charles I as Samson had “The Lord [as] his support,” but after his marriage, “The Philistims [sic] [were] his Lords.” Lady Eleanor goes so far as to say that her king showed “great Imbicilitie in subjecting himselfe to a Womans waywardnesse.” In the year 1625, when Charles I married Henrietta Maria, the country became “Yoak’d” to the Roman Babylon of the Catholic Church. In the mouth of a female prophet, especially, this outward condescension for the king’s power is unexpected; Lady

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84 Ibid., 78.
86 Cope includes this information in her explanatory foreword before the tract. In the Bible, Samson falls in love with Delilah. She exploits his trust in her after he tells her the secret of his strength; he is then punished by the Philistines by being blinded (Judges 14-17).
87 Davies, “Samsons Legacie,” 87.
88 Ibid., 89.
89 Ibid., 99.
Eleanor preys upon Charles I’s weakness and blindness in his love for his queen, placing much of the blame on him for the degenerate, Babylonian state of the kingdom.

Lady Eleanor’s implication of Charles I in *Samsons Legacie* was, of course, influenced by the political climate of the specific moment in which she was writing. In January 1642, Charles I had deserted Westminster after his failed attempt to arrest the Five Members. With the Queen in tow, the King retreated to Hampton Court Palace, away from an angry—and rebellious—Long Parliament. Lady Eleanor disdainfully mentions the King’s foiled Five Members plot, emphasizing the two Houses’ independence: the Houses of Peers and Commons were “charged with a heavie taxe of *Treason,*…first rob’d of their good Name, and then of their Life lastly” by this cowardly king. Throughout the text, she clearly sides with Parliament, “a great meeting of the Prophets,” as she fondly called it, and rejects the King for what she perceives to be his Laudian religion.

By 1645, the year that Daniel had told her would bring Judgment Day, a moderate Presbyterian settlement had been accepted by Parliament, but the episcopacy was still intact. To support the truth of the prophecy, in *Great Britains Visitation,* Lady Eleanor structures parallel biblical and temporal chronologies to rival those of Mede. She interprets Revelation chapter by chapter, emphasizing the similarities between biblical symbols and actual events occurring in England at the time. To Lady Eleanor, the Isles of Great Britain are the manifestation of Revelation’s Isle of Patmos—the place where the prophecies will be revealed. In Chapter 7 of *Revelation,* 144,000 children of the tribes of Israel call out for salvation for God; in

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90 Purkiss, 126. Charles I wanted to arrest the members of Parliament who he perceived to be his greatest opposition. There were actually six members: John Pym, John Hampden, Denzil Holles, Sir Arthur Hesilrige, William Strode, and Lord Mandeville.
91 Ibid.
92 Davies, “Samsons Legacie,” 90.
93 Ibid., 97.
contemporary England, “the Covenant of late sealed” takes on this role.\textsuperscript{95} The Solemn League and Covenant, signed in 1643, established a military alliance between Parliament and the Scots, while changing the official religion of England to Presbyterianism. Here, Lady Eleanor reveals that the Presbyterians are the children of Israel, the symbolic protectors of the true religion. Finally, she ends her tract with the same anti-Laudian discourse that caused her imprisonment in the 1630s: she recalls a recent past in which the “Keys of the AByss” were in the hands of the former Archbishop.\textsuperscript{96} By capitalizing the “AB,” (her abbreviation for Archbishop), Lady Eleanor inextricably links Laud to Satan, as she suggests that the Archbishop holds the key to the bottomless pit which imprisoned the Devil during the millennium.

While Lady Eleanor wrote prophetic tracts against the episcopacy which she publicly disseminated, she was a relatively orthodox Anglican in all other ways.\textsuperscript{97} Her contemporary—and fellow millenarian—Mary Cary, however, was the “most radical woman prophet of the 1640s,” according to Phyllis Mack.\textsuperscript{98} By the end of the 1640s, Cary had become a Fifth Monarchist, one of a group of radical sectarians whose political and religious beliefs were completely based on the concept of millenarianism.\textsuperscript{99} They believed that Charles I represented the Fourth, Antichristian Monarchy; the Fifth Monarchy—the thousand-year reign of the saints—was imminent, but the Fifth Monarchists believed that they were responsible for “purifying the nation” before that time to ensure Christ’s return.\textsuperscript{100} Thus, they advocated for political and religious reforms to continue the process. In her later works, Cary designs a system

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 151.  
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 153.  
\textsuperscript{97} Mack, 100.  
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 117.  
\textsuperscript{99} Capp, 14. Although many other sects believed in the imminent New Jerusalem, the Fifth Monarchists claimed this belief as their core reason for existing.  
of social, economic, and university reforms: she would like to have used colleges to preach to the world.\(^{101}\)

For the most part, Cary was writing later in the 1640s than Lady Eleanor was. Her first real apocalyptic tract, *A Word in Season to the Kingdom of England*, was not published until 1647. After considering this different time period, it is easier to understand Mack’s claim that Cary was the most radical of all Revolutionary-era prophetesses. By the time that Cary was writing, the episcopacy had been abolished, the King was essentially no longer in power, and the New Model Army—fighting battles not only against the King’s army, but also for increased “Liberty of Conscience,” or religious toleration for Independent, puritanical sects\(^{102}\)—had gained authority. Writing on the brink of regicide, Cary, the “radical,” completes this comparative study of male and female millenarian thought, providing a look towards the new era of the 1650s.

In her 1648 tract, *The Resurrection of the Witnesses and Englands Fall from (the mystical Babylon) Rome*, Cary begins by setting forth her argument in the Epistle Dedicatory: “the time is already come, wherein the appointed time prevailing power of the Beast over the Saints, is come to a period; and accordingly Jesus Christ hath begunne... to lift up his Saints out of that low, afflicted, persecuted condition in which they have beene.”\(^{103}\) From the very beginning, then, Cary emphasizes that the time which had always been “coming” during the early 1640s, had finally arrived. For Cary, Christ’s “lifting up” of His saints corresponds to both the New Model Army’s recent successes against the King’s army and the abolition of the English episcopate that had occurred on October 9, 1646. Then, according to millenarian convention, she begins to

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\(^{101}\) Mack, 102, 111.


compare the Beast of Revelation with the Pope. “And hath not the Beast, the Pope, punctually
done as is…spoken of him in opening his mouth in blasphemy against God…?” she asks, “Hath
he not said himself was the head of the Church, and that he could forgive sins, with many other
blasphemies?”104 Here, she expresses her main problem with the Pope, which is that he portrays
himself to be like God; he believes that he has the power to grant absolution for sins, when only
God possesses that power. This theme of exerting power one does not possess becomes a
common theme in the remainder of the tract. Wielding his so-called power tyrannically, the
Pope in Rome/Babylon had become “drunken with the bloud of the Saints, and the bloud of the
Martyrs of Jesus.”105 Cary suggests that the Beast of Babylon actually fed off of the oppression
of the saints and martyrs, becoming stronger as they became weaker. These saints and martyrs—
all the faithful standing by Christ without fail—came to symbolize the two resurrected witnesses
who lived for 1260 years in Cary’s allegory; they “testified the truths of Christ against the Beast,
and sealed their testimony with their bloud.”106

This imagery of a holy war waging between the saints, who spill their blood to protect the
true faith, and the idolatrous, papist tempters is not difficult to apply to the situation in England.
By 1648, when the tract was published, the civil war had been going on for six years.
Englishmen were dying as they fought for their freedom to practice their Puritan beliefs, which
they believed to be the unadulterated beliefs of the “true” Christian church. Most importantly,
however, Englishmen were dying as they fought against their king. Cary, employing the same
imagery as she did to describe the Pope, extends the metaphor of the Beast—the tyrant exerting
authority he does not have—to King Charles I; she refers to the civil war as “the late war made

104 Ibid., 57.
105 Ibid., 58.
106 Ibid., 63-64.
by the Beast against the Witnesses.”  

She points to the horror of the King’s actions by reaffirming God’s faithful English servants’ relationship to the witnesses: Cary measures the length of time from October 23, 1641 (the date when Charles began the war in Ireland) to April 5, 1645 (the day that “Parliaments Army…being new modelled,” stepped in to defend the saints against the Beast) as three and a half years, the same number of days that the witnesses had been dead before being resurrected.  

Indeed, the remainder of the tract becomes a justification based on Revelation of Parliament’s battles against the King in defense of the witnesses. Cary finishes her tract by offering a “speciall encouragement” to Parliament, Lord Fairfax, the general of the New Model Army, officers and soldiers, and all the witnesses in their battles against the Beast King.

Although Cary’s millenarian tract is the most clear and radical attack on the monarchy covered by this paper, the central question is still left unanswered. Was it the substance of these female millenarians’ arguments which led the public to view them as radicals or was it simply the fact that they were women preaching? A final look at female preachers’ public receptions will help make the answer to this question more apparent.

**Public Receptions of Female Preachers**

Contemporary accounts of female preachers emphasize the fact that these women, who could have been at home teaching their children and servants catechisms, were instead out in public giving sermons “in mixt Congregations of men and women, in an insolent way.”

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107 Ibid., 97.
108 Ibid., 97-99. Cary here employs Burton’s understanding of the metaphorical three and a half days for which the witnesses were dead.
109 Ibid., 174.
is that they allowed their women to preach. In fact, the sermonizing of women is number 124 in his “Catalogue of many of the Errours, Blasphemies, and Practises of the Sectaries of the time,” published in *Gangraena*, his seminal work on the heresy of sects: “124. That 'tis lawfull for women to preach, and why should they not, having gifts as well as men? and some of them do actually preach, having great resort to them.” Here, he admonishes not only the women for preaching, but also the separatists for considering women to be men’s equals. For Edwards, the problem was that, by preaching in public atop their overturned washtubs, these women were undermining the existing social order of the orthodox English Presbyterian Church.

Other authors chose to publish anonymously as they cried out against female preachers. The year after *Gangraena* was published, an anonymous pamphlet entitled *Tub-preachers overturn’d* continued Edwards’s train of thought. In a poem regarding “Women-tubbers,” the author compares these women to “Jezabell, that Scarlet Whore.” With their sermons, female preachers bewitched “poor soules” to follow them. According to the author, one such preacher-woman who sold bone-lace in Cheapside, claimed that “there was/More need she edifie [her audience], then sell Lace” and “her zeale, piety, and knowledge,/Surpast the gravest Student in the Colledge.” Finally, to the author’s pleasure, “the tedious, godless, non-sence sermon ended.” The author chides the preacher for her social presumptuousness: he makes her into a fool who preaches nonsense, suggesting that a woman’s attempt to subvert the social hierarchy by leaving her traditional feminine duties would never be accepted by men.

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113 Ibid.
114 Edwards also mentions a “lace-woman” preacher named “Mistris Attaway” in *Gangraena*, 9.
115 *Tub-preachers overturn’d*, 15.
116 Ibid.
This problem of the disturbance of the social order is clearly defined in another anonymous tract from 1646, *A Spirit Moving in the Women-Preachers*. The author says simply that, by preaching, women are “usurping authority over men” in a realm in which they do not belong.\(^{117}\) In the 1640s, everyone expected that a good woman would, at the instruction of her husband, teach religion in the home; nobody expected that a woman would or could preach in the street. Indeed, pamphlets published during this period constantly reminded women that they were bound by 1 Corinthians 14: 34-5.\(^{118}\) This sacred “law” by which men thought that women should live would never be broken by a reasonable person. “By what discretion …or shamelesse impudence dare [these women] be thus contumaciously insolent thus to abuse Religion?” asks the author of *A Spirit*.\(^{119}\) It was against the logic and structure upheld by the religious and social order. One possible solution for these bold, stupid women was put forth by the author of *A Discoverie*: “I suppose that Bedlam or Bridewell would be two convenient places for them.”\(^{120}\)

**Radicals or Not? An Answer**

Katherine Chidley’s claim that the Church of England derived from Rome and, therefore, “her power was derived from the beast with seven heads” is no more radical in its rhetoric than Henry Burton’s statement that the English bishops are the “limbes of the Pope.”\(^{121}\) Lady Eleanor Davies’s belief that she was the Lord’s handmaid is no more far-fetched than Burton’s conviction that he was one of the two biblical resurrected witnesses. Mary Cary, though radical for a woman, was surpassed in her anti-Carolinian and anti-episcopal ideas by outspoken male

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\(^{117}\) *A Spirit*, 3.

\(^{118}\) See *A Spirit*, 5 and *A Discoverie*, cover page.

\(^{119}\) *A Spirit*, 5.

\(^{120}\) *A Discoverie*, 5. As discussed before, Bedlam was a London mental institution and Bridewell was the name of a jail.

Fifth Monarchists, like Hugh Peters.\footnote{Capp discusses Peters’ anti-monarchical thought on page 53.} In fact, female preachers’ beliefs were not often discussed in the pamphlets defaming them in the 1640s. Millenarian thought, especially, was an accepted part of traditional Protestant doctrine, dating back to John Bale, John Foxe, and the Reformation.

What made these women truly radical, however, was their subversion of the social and religious order. Female separatist preachers (and even orthodox Anglicans, like Lady Eleanor) rejected the long-established notion that only men could preach, posing what men saw as a threat to the sanctity of the ministerial profession. In short, women’s new habit of interpreting scripture did not fit in with men’s interpretation of 1 Corinthians. Women had left the domestic security of the home and had brought their religious doctrine with them into the street and into the washtub. To the men whose authority they were usurping, it did not matter what these women said in their sermons. More than a century later, Samuel Johnson said it best: in the 1640s, the “radical” conception of female preaching came not from what they said when they did it, but from the fact that they did it at all.
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