

# The Fifth Monarchists

The Fifth Monarchists, who I will refer to in this text as FM, were a religiously radical group or movement which emerged in 1649. This seemed to be common at the time, with the majority of the population predicting revolution as Britain would be without a Monarch, which provoked ideas of how the country should now be governed and therefore resulted in religious and political sects, groups or movements. Firstly the term "Fifth Monarchy" or "Fifth Kingdom" refers to interpretations by Puritans of individual prophecies in the book of Daniel and Revelation where after the millennium Jesus will return in physical form and reign for a thousand years. It is "fifth" because this is seen in the Bible as being the "fifth" era of the modern world, the four previous being the Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman Empire. The main leaders behind the Fm's were preachers such as John Carew, John Jones and Vavasor Powell.

The reason for their sudden appearance in 1649 is because the events in England confirmed their beliefs, and related it to Daniel "breaking off the horn of the beast", which would allow Jesus to reign. As a religious movement, their main concern was the church, but with their specific beliefs of "getting the world ready for Jesus", their policies would have to intervene with the government and certain social standings to purify the nation. This then immediately linked the group with the Levellers, as they shared similar government, social and economic aims. It is widely argued that a large number of levellers who after Cromwell's oppression of the group in the New Model Army, decided to join the FM's as they saw a religious movement more liable to bring about change than a political group as it was not as radical. The overlying difference between the two groups was how to achieve their similar goals, saints or suffrage?

The FM's, because of their beliefs, were strong supporters of Cromwell, enough to name him a saint and the second Moses, as they saw him as the man who brought down the monarch and would open the path for Christ at the millennium. Another conformation of their beliefs was Cromwell's introduction of the "Rule of the Saints" which directly represented their prophecies of saints in parliament. The FM's now thought Cromwell was a FM and believed he would purify England for Jesus' coming. Such was the genuine belief in Cromwell that they <sup>were</sup> said to be betrayed by him when he abruptly dissolved the "Nominated Assembly" which in FM eyes would start the rule of the saints. This began the downward spiral for the fifth monarchists, with their prophecies beginning to take the path they shouldn't, the group decide to take

Belief

Emergence

+  
Levellers

+  
Cromwell

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action. Throughout the 1650's the FM's denounced Cromwell and plotted takeover of the government. For denouncing Cromwell, three of the FM's leaders were imprisoned and a plot to overthrow Cromwell was discovered and many FM's were imprisoned including Thomas Venner, the figurehead of the movement. FM action was subdued at this point but was quickly brought back to life after Venner's release in 1659, where again soon after he led a revolt which resulted in 40 deaths in the fighting, and after capture, Venner and other leaders were hanged. This brought about the end of FM action, and parliament made sure of this by passing legislation to oppress all radical religious sects.

Threat

I think the group were, if not dealt with swiftly, a potential threat to Cromwell and parliament. This is because, many Levellers joined the FM cause after Cromwell oppressed the group in the New Model Army, and this led to a large following, maybe not completely convinced of the prophetic ideas, but campaigning to change parliament completely with the FM. Secondly Cromwell's introduction of the Nominated Assembly, which to the FM's took as the start of the "rule of the saints", gave the movement huge belief and impetus to carry on believing. This in many ways caused the revolts and deaths in 1659 because the prophecy seemed true and Cromwell was jeopardizing it, and he had to be stopped. Realistically the FM's could not have overthrown Cromwell, but if Cromwell had keep throwing them crumbs to believe their continuing prophecy, their numbers would have multiplied and the movement would have posed a threat to the commonwealth.

Adam Marchant

Well presented Adam - stylistically I would have preferred bullet headings for the clarity of others, but this is a well written piece, clearly integrating a variety of sources and one in which you understood the issues. clearly well done

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