The Final Judgement:  
John Bale’s Apocalyptic Justification of English Protestantism

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Introduction

In 1547, the English Protestant John Bale regretfully reflected on his Catholic path: "Yea (I axe God mercy a thousand times) I haue ben one of them myself." Bale recorded these fears of divine judgement on his past in his book, *The Image of Both Churches*, an apocalyptic commentary on the Book of Revelation. Bale's pause for self-reflection in this text is telling of the greater theology espoused by the English Protestant writer. In this book, Bale recorded his belief that the end of the world loomed and its end would finally vindicate the Protestant movement sweeping across Europe as God’s true Church. Despite Bale's willingness to disparage his Catholic past, he was still unable to escape the influence of Catholic beliefs entirely. His apocalyptic theories, specifically his belief that a proper understanding of ecclesiastical history would inform predictions about future events, remained rooted in Catholic tradition.

Bale's remembrance of his own past strikingly captures the nuance of his apocalyptic theology, a theology that embraced the new movement of Protestantism throughout Europe but still drew from the Catholic ideas regarding the nature of history and the imminence of the apocalypse. Bale's blend of Protestant and Catholic ideas produced an apocalyptic framework that was unique to the English theologian. As such, this thesis explores the role of apocalyptic thought in John Bale's understanding of the struggle between Catholic and Protestant groups of his own time. Bale saw his interpretation of the Book of Revelation as solid evidence that Antichrist had long since corrupted the Catholic Church and that God therefore favored Protestants breaking with the Catholic Church. In essence, Bale employed apocalyptic thought to prove the legitimacy of the Protestant movement throughout Europe.

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John Bale was born in 1495, before the Protestant Reformation, into a family of modest means near the coast of Suffolk. Despite his poor background, the Carmelite order accepted him at the young age of eleven. After spending seven years living and studying in the Carmelite convent in Norwich, Bale transferred to Cambridge around the year 1514 and there pursued a doctorate in divinity. While at Cambridge, Bale likely traveled to the continent and studied at other universities, including one in Toulouse. Finally, in approximately 1534, Bale supposedly received his doctorate from Cambridge, although there is no surviving record in Cambridge.2

Bale's time at Cambridge as a Carmelite monk belied his future as a Protestant writer. Understanding his conversion to Protestantism is a difficult task, as most of Bale's own writings about his life as a Catholic are retrospective after his conversion and during the tumultuous events of the English Reformation, which attempted to eradicate the presence of the Roman Catholic Church in England. While at Cambridge, there is little evidence that Bale's faith was shaken or that he would go on to become a highly influential Protestant figure. He shied away from Lutheran circles in his early time at Cambridge and expressed enthusiasm for Catholic beliefs, expressing his devotion towards the saints and trust in their ability to intercede for him to God. In addition to trusting in the power of saints to plead to God on his behalf, Bale also believed that God regularly acted in everyday affairs.3

Bale likely abandoned his Catholic beliefs sometime in the 1530s, during which he became firmly entrenched in the Protestant camp.4 After converting to Protestantism, he enjoyed the support and patronage of Thomas Cromwell while writing in support of

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3 Fairfield, *John Bale: Mythmaker for the English Reformation*, 13, 14, 19, 20
Protestant ideas. Following King Henry VIII's execution of Cromwell and return to more traditional religious ways, Bale fled England for the Continent and continued to pen numerous tracts promoting Protestant ideas.

Bale’s apocalyptic ideas developed in this context of religious upheaval. This thesis examines how his understanding of the End Times informed his understanding of the chaos of the Protestant Reformation and helped him prove that Protestants across Europe practiced a more ideal form of Christianity than did Catholics. Bale expounded on his ideas regarding the ultimate direction and purpose of history. The first chapter investigates the role that Bale's overall theology of history played in his efforts to prove that Protestants understood the true practice of Christianity. Bale also understood the vivid imagery of Revelation as condemnations of certain practices that had been added to the orthodox Catholic faith after the time of the Apostles on earth. In particular, the second chapter addresses Bale’s attack on Catholic practices of clerical marriage and orthodox belief in purgatory. This chapter specifically handles how Bale applied apocalyptic imagery to attack these beliefs. Finally, Bale did not necessarily view all Protestants equally. Indeed, Bale afforded the English Church a special place in ecclesiastical history and believed that the English Church would play a fundamental role in the apocalyptic events of the future. The third chapter explores the role of English identity in Bale’s theology of history. It shows that Bale not only worked to prove Protestants more generally inherited the true practice of Christianity from the early Church, but also attempted to show that the English people held a special place in bringing about the events of the End Times.

By discussing Bale’s overall interpretation of history and his application of apocalyptic thought, this thesis addresses problems with existing literature on this figure. In particular, two problems arise with the existing research on Bale’s worldview and understanding of
Protestantism. First, there is simply a lack of research into Bale, despite his status as an important figure in the English Reformation. Second, the inquiry into John Bale that does exist fails to fully appreciate the significance of apocalyptic thought as an avenue for understanding Bale’s thought and the English Reformation as a whole. Leslie Fairfield’s book *John Bale: Mythmaker for the English Reformation* only explores John Bale’s apocalyptic thought in the context of influencing Bale’s understanding of history itself. That is, Fairfield fails to consider apocalyptic thought as an end unto itself in understanding Bale’s opinions regarding the relationship between Catholics and Protestants. Katharine Firth’s *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain: 1530 – 1645*, does appreciate the significance of apocalyptic thought, but fails to fully investigate the full range of Bale’s historical thinking. Firth focuses mainly on Bale’s *Image of Both Churches*, but does not cite another important apocalyptic work, Bale’s *The Pageant of the Popes*, which describes Bale’s view of the history of the papacy and traces its fall from an untainted leader of the true Church to an evil institution led by Antichrist. Finally, Oliver Wort’s book *John Bale and Religious Conversion in Reformation England* focuses heavily on the act of Bale’s conversion from Catholic traditions to Protestantism, rather than on his apocalyptic thought as a whole.

In addition to these books, several other scholarly works deal with Bale’s apocalyptic views. Susan Royal’s article "Historian or Prophet? John Bale’s Perception of the Past" is particularly important for this thesis. In her article, Royal outlines the role of medieval prophetic traditions on Bale’s understanding of history. In particular, Royal highlights how Bale’s interpretation of the past was fundamentally important to his prediction of apocalyptic

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events to come and argues that, despite his Protestant beliefs, medieval attitudes towards history and prophecy heavily influenced Bale. Additionally, Gretchen Minton's article "John Bale's Apocalypse and the Exilic Imagination" explores the role of Bale's exile from England on his understanding of apocalyptic events to come and argues that John Bale's situation as an exile fundamentally shaped his interpretation of certain passages in Revelation. Finally, Avihu Zakai's article "Reformation, History, and Eschatology in English Protestantism" examines efforts by English thinkers to legitimize the English Church through certain interpretations of history.

This thesis fully appreciates the significance of Bale’s thought and examines Bale’s goals in developing such sophisticated apocalyptic ideas. Furthermore, it considers the role of the dramatic religious upheaval of the English Reformation on his apocalyptic expectation. Finally, this thesis studies apocalyptic thought as a means through which the reader can understand Bale’s perception of the world. These inquiries will augment existing research by unifying aspects discussed in the articles mentioned above and provide a more complete picture of Bale’s theology of history, interpretation of apocalyptic imagery, and understanding of the English nation all in a single work. This discussion contributes to larger dialogues regarding perceptions of the English Reformation, the creation of Protestant apocalyptic thought, and helps to investigate an important component of Bale’s life.

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It is important to understand the historical and conceptual context of Bale’s writing to fully grasp the significance of his apocalyptic reasoning. Bale was writing during the

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8 Gretchen Minton, “Suffer me not to be separated / And let my cry come unto thee: John Bale’s Apocalypse and the Exilic Imagination,” Reformation 15, no. 1 (2010).
Protestant Reformation, in which numerous offshoots of Christianity developed from the Catholic Church. One of these was the Church of England, which was created by the events of the English Reformation. The English Reformation refers to the events of the sixteenth century in which the Catholic Church was banished from England and the new Church of England became the dominant form of Christianity on the island. Prior to the English Reformation, few signs indicated that England would forsake its Catholic heritage and join the ranks of Protestant nations. In 1521, Pope Leo X granted King Henry VIII the title "Defender of the Faith" after Henry penned the book *Defense of the Seven Sacraments*. Eamon Duffy's classic *The Stripping of the Altars* paints the picture of a pre-Reformation England firmly entrenched in Catholic tradition. Duffy points out that the calendar of late medieval England was intrinsically tied to the liturgical calendar of the Church, and that English laypeople could turn to no alternative calendar. The king's commitment to the Roman Church and importance of Catholic tradition demonstrate the extent to which Roman Christianity was ingrained in English life.

Despite the monumental importance of traditional Roman Christianity to life in late medieval England, Henry VIII broke with the Roman Church during the late 1520s and early 1530s. In 1527, King Henry VIII, frustrated with his lack of male heirs and infatuated with Anne Boleyn, began his quest to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. In pressing his argument for an annulment, Henry argued that his marriage to Catherine, which Pope Julius II sanctioned, was invalid due to a passage in Leviticus that forbade one man marrying his brother's widow—Catherine had previously been married to Henry's brother Arthur before Arthur's untimely death. Despite pressure from Henry, Pope Clement II remained steadfast in his denial of an annulment. As the ordeal dragged on, Henry denounced the papacy and even

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praised Martin Luther’s stand against it in Germany. The English king eventually began
gathering evidence to support his own supremacy over Rome.¹¹

Eventually in 1533, Henry VIII secretly married Anne Boleyn. After this clandestine
wedding, Henry quickly hunted for support from English officials in recognizing his marriage
to Anne Boleyn as valid and his previous marriage to Catherine of Aragon as void. In the latter
half of 1533 and start of 1534, Henry sought oaths from certain bishops and important subjects
to reject papal authority in England and acknowledge his marriage to Anne Boleyn. The
culmination of Henry's search for support was the 1534 Act of Succession, in which Parliament
declared Anne Boleyn to be Henry’s wife and that their male children would be the heirs to
the English throne, as well as officially declaring Henry’s previous marriage to Catharine of
Aragon in violation of divine law.¹²

On November 3, 1534, Parliament passed a piece of legislation titled “An act
concernynge the kynges hyghnes, to be supreme heed of the church of Englande, and to haue
auctoritie to refourme and redresse errours, heresies, and abuses in the same.”¹³ This famous
1534 Act of Supremacy asserted that King Henry VIII of England was to be the head of the
English Church, and thus represented the culmination of his efforts to free himself of papal
authority. Despite the insistence of this act that Henry was indeed the head of the English
Church, implementing such a monumental shift in the religious landscape of England
remained another matter altogether.

The English people did not unanimously accept such a radical change in religious
doctrine. An uprising in the north of England, known as the Pilgrimage of Grace, rebelled
against the religious modifications promoted by Henry. John Bale was horrified to learn that

natives of Suffolk refused to accept certain changes to religious doctrine promoted by the King such as reciting prayers in English and even went so far as to participate in the Pilgrimage of Grace.\textsuperscript{14} In response to the turbulent years of religious disunity following the Act of Supremacy in 1534, Henry VIII passed the Act of Six Articles in 1539, marking a return to some of the more traditional facets of Christianity that radical reformers had sought to purge from England after 1534 and marked the beginning of the end of these reformers’ influence in government.\textsuperscript{15}

This thesis considers two Catholic beliefs that Bale criticized, the first of which was the doctrine of purgatory. In Christian theology, purgatory is an intermediate step between heaven and hell where one’s soul is purified prior to going to heaven. In essence, one’s soul is purged of all blemishes caused by minor sins committed during this life, cleansing the eternal soul. Although this belief does not have any explicit basis in Scripture itself, its roots go all the way back to the early Church of the third century.\textsuperscript{16} Early Church Fathers Clement and Origen planted the earliest foundations of belief in purgatory in the third century, drawing on traditional Greek pagan traditions as well as exegesis on the Bible. In the late sixth and early seventh centuries, Pope Gregory I provided more theological antecedents to purgatory and his discourse served as a model that later theologians would expand to officially define purgatory.\textsuperscript{17} Official acknowledgements of purgatory also led to the expansion of other Catholic beliefs heavily criticized by Protestant reformers. In particular, medieval theologians

\textsuperscript{14} Duffy, \textit{The Stripping of the Altars}, 399.
\textsuperscript{15} Duffy, \textit{The Stripping of the Altars}, 399, 423
claimed that Masses could be said for the souls of those departed, thereby lessening the amount of time they were required to spend in purgatory. More famously, the Church also allowed for indulgences to reduce the time one would have to spend there after death.\textsuperscript{18} The English Church itself, after years of skirting the issue of purgatory, categorically rejected it in the middle of the sixteenth century under King Edward VI. After a brief return to officially acknowledging purgatory under the reign of Queen Mary, her successor Queen Elizabeth again rejected the belief as part of the Anglican Church.\textsuperscript{19}

Debates on whether or not members of the Christian clergy should be permitted to marry have been present throughout much of ecclesiastical history. While efforts were made periodically to restrict priests’ ability to marry under the Roman Church, such efforts were by and large ineffective until the era of church reform around the year 1000. After this, clergy in the Roman Church were more strictly forbidden to marry, a restriction Protestant figures heavily criticized during the Reformation. Well-known Protestant figures like Martin Luther married during this time. Clerical celibacy was officially ended in England in 1549, under the reign of King Edward VI.\textsuperscript{20}

As Europeans wrestled with these dramatic changes in religious life, some of them turned to the Book of Revelation and other prophecies about the End Times to make sense of their world. Apocalyptic thought, a mainstay of Christianity, had the potential to incite

revolution and promise a future of peace. Indeed, Christ’s message on earth was not only an instruction manual on how to live a proper life, but also a promise that sometime in the future he would return to Earth to usher in the events of the End Times and bring true Christians into Paradise. By the Middle Ages, a distinctly Christian tradition of apocalyptic belief had developed. Christian theologians invoked apocalyptic history to predict their place in time and to await the advent of Antichrist, the incarnation of evil.

Several significant components of apocalyptic are particularly important to understand for this thesis. The figure of Antichrist has loomed large in the Christian imagination for centuries as the incarnation of evil. Interpretation of the Book of Revelation led to vivid apocalyptic imagery and contributed to theories regarding the end of time. Belief in Antichrist is neither unique to premodern Christian society nor discussed in fringe circles. Furthermore, Bernard McGinn, in his book *Antichrist*, claims that “the Antichrist legend can be seen as a projection, or perhaps better as a mirror, for conceptions and fears about ultimate human evil.” Although the Bible contains little mention of Antichrist (save for a crucial passage in 2 Thessalonians), Christian theologians wasted no time in developing a rich tradition regarding this apocalyptic figure—theories began emerging as early as the first century AD. Given his status as the reflection of all human evil, various figures throughout history have been identified as Antichrist, such as Nero, Muhammed, and Mussolini.

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25 McGinn, *Antichrist*, 4. McGinn further makes a distinction between Antichrist *language* and Antichrist *application*. Antichrist language is simply identifying someone with Antichrist as a way to attack their character, without any real theological justification—in short, an apocalyptic smear tactic. Antichrist application, on the other hand, is using theological justification to prove someone to be Antichrist. For more, see McGinn, *Antichrist*, pp 120 – 121.
Another key piece of the Antichrist legend is his ability to hold power over all earthly rulers and through his rule over the whole world, convince many to turn away from Christianity and instead worship him.\textsuperscript{26} In short, the Antichrist represents the epitome of all human evil condensed into a single figure.

Another essential part of Christianity and Christian apocalyptic thought in particular is Christian eschatology, beliefs regarding the nature and ultimate direction of history. Bernard McGinn distinguishes a particular form of eschatology, apocalyptic eschatology. In apocalyptic eschatology, the end of history "can be discerned in the events of the present through the revealed message found in the sacred book."\textsuperscript{27} Interpreting the direction of history is a crucial segment of John Bale's apocalyptic thought, as well as Christian apocalypticism as a whole.

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This work combines all aforementioned themes into a thorough examination of John Bale's apocalyptic convictions. It studies how Bale's interpretation of the Antichrist legend influenced his view of the Catholic Church and how his overall understanding of history interpreted the events of the English Reformation. Furthermore, it examines how Bale's interpretation of the Book of Revelation also contributed to his understanding of beliefs peculiar to the Catholic Church. In short, this thesis presents how apocalyptic thought colored Bale's view of history, the world around him, and religion as a whole.

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{26} Brett Edward Whalen, “Antichrist as (Anti)Charisma: Reflections on Weber and the 'Son of Perdition,'” \textit{Religions} 4, no. 1, 89 – 90.
\item \textsuperscript{27} McGinn, \textit{Antichrist}, 13.
\end{itemize}
Chapter 1: John Bale’s Historical Justification of Protestantism

Introduction

In 1382, Archbishop of Canterbury William Courtenay called a synod at London to discuss the teachings of John Wycliffe, the English theologian famous for his critiques of the Roman Church. During this meeting, the assembled clergy condemned many of Wycliffe’s beliefs as heretical, such as Wycliffe’s rejection of transubstantiation and questioning of the Mass.\(^1\) In what must have been a dramatic moment, an earthquake shook the city of London during the proceedings of the synod. For John Bale, looking back at this event, he saw this earthquake to be a providential sign that the long oppressive reign of the Roman Church was drawing to a close and that Christendom was emerging into a new era of purity, basing this belief off a passage in Revelation 6:12 depicting a cataclysmic earthquake.\(^2\)

For Bale, history itself was inherently apocalyptic in nature. Despite the admonition of Christ that no one knew the time of his second coming, Bale nonetheless attempted to determine his precise location on an apocalyptic timeline that would culminate in the end of the world and the second advent of Christ.\(^3\) One of the most fundamental parts of Bale’s interpretation of history is his understanding of the Book of Revelation, the final book in the Christian Bible. This book, attributed to John of Patmos, who wrote the text while exiled on the island of Patmos, describes a series of visions he experienced, which some Christian theologians have since understood to represent the future events of the End Times. Bale viewed one passage of Revelation, the opening of the seven seals in Revelation chapters 6 through 8, as particularly instrumental.\(^4\)

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\(^3\) Matthew 25:13.
\(^4\) In this passage, John of Patmos views a book bound with seven seals, and upon seeing each of these seals open, John saw a vision. For Bale, interpreting these visions was fundamental to his apocalyptic beliefs.
Bale exiled himself from England in 1540 following the execution of Thomas Cromwell, one of the key figures in Henry VIII’s efforts to enlist Parliament to help further the Reformation in England, and he used this time to begin to formulate his ideas regarding his greater theology of history. During this time, he noticed the striking similarities between his life and that of John of Patmos, most notably the fact that they both found themselves exiles from their native lands while describing the events of the apocalypse.\(^5\) Indeed, Bale viewed himself as a modern version of the author of Revelation.\(^6\) During his time in exile, he wrote his exegesis on the Book of Revelation, *The Image of Both Churches*, in 1547. In this text, Bale described his interpretation of the meaning and ultimate direction of history.\(^7\) In essence, *The Image of Both Churches* traces the path of the true Church, composed of righteous Christians expressing a particularly pure brand of Christianity, and the false Church, a group of people professing themselves to be Christian, but promoting false beliefs and practices. As this thesis will show, this binary division between good and evil gave Bale the basis from which he could claim the ultimate victory of the true Church over the forces of evil.\(^8\)

To this end, Bale divided history into ages based on the seven seals in Revelation, with each seal describing a particular age in history.\(^9\) While this division of history was a central facet of Bale’s apocalyptic eschatology, others used this idea before him. During the High Middle Ages, Christian theologians first experimented with a seven-fold division of history based upon the seven seals.\(^10\) Bale’s seven ages of the world can be grouped into three main periods, the first of which ran roughly from the time of Christ’s time on earth to the Edict of

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\(^5\) Gretchen Minton, “‘Suffer me not to be separated / And let my cry come unto thee’: John Bale’s Apocalypse and the Exilic Imagination,” *Reformation* 15 no. 1 (2010): 87 - 88.
\(^7\) Minton, “John Bale’s Apocalypse and the Exilic Imagination,”: 87.
\(^8\) Royal, “Historian or Prophet? John Bale’s Perception of the Past,”: 160 – 161.
\(^10\) Whalen, *Dominion of God*, 77.
Milan in 313, an official proclamation calling for religious tolerance in the Roman Empire. Importantly, the Edict of Milan did not exclusively allow for the legal practice of Christianity, nor did it make Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. This first period of Bale’s division of history covered his description of the first three seals in Revelation. The underground nature of Christian society under pagan Roman rule forced Christianity to remain pure, and as a consequence the more orthodox Church hierarchy remained free from any sort of corruption. In *The Image of Both Churches*, Bale wrote that “lyke as the payned woman in all hir agonies, is much comforted by the hope of a childe, so are Gods faithfull witnesses trustyng that by their pacient and glad sufferaunce, Christ should bee receyued & rightly fashioned in many. Yea, this causeth them to reioyce in all aduersitie, and little to esteeme their paines.”\(^\text{11}\) In this quote, Bale asserted that Christian suffering kept the early Church pure and helped to spread the pure form of the religion. Furthermore, Bale applauded the efficacy of Church officials in combatting early outbreaks of heresy. Despite the purity of the Church, the English Protestant did not view early Christianity as some form of paradise—he also highlighted the persecution of innocent Christians by the pagan Romans.\(^\text{12}\)

The purity of the early Church eventually came to an end, however, and Bale articulated a decided transition in the nature of Christian society following its official toleration in the Roman Empire. With the threat of persecution removed, Bale wrote that the Church hierarchy descended into corruption, focusing more on earthly wealth than heavenly virtue, and even going so far as to persecute those who clung to the pure traditions of the early Church. Bale identified this corruption of the Church beginning under the time of the fourth seal and lasting until the present, which Bale believed to be the sixth seal. This fall

\(^{11}\) Bale, *The Image of Both Churches II*, 34.

\(^{12}\) Despite Bale’s view that persecution was important to keeping the Church pure, the early Church in all likelihood never experienced the level of oppression under Rome that he described.
represented a switch in the origin of religious persecution for pure Christians. In the first era, the persecution had been entirely external—pagan Roman authorities sentenced Christians to gruesome deaths because they followed an entirely different religion. However, in this second era, Bale described the persecution of true Christians as originating within the Roman Church itself. Thus, Bale concluded that the insidious influence of Antichrist corrupted the Church hierarchy itself, a belief he explained in his book titled *The Pageant of the Popes*. Indeed, Bale believed that Antichrist himself eventually took control of the entire papacy.

According to Bale, the Catholic persecution of true Christians could not last forever, as he believed that the second coming of Christ would bring the ultimate triumph of good over evil. Bale articulated this in his description of the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation. He happily viewed the emergence of Protestant traditions across Europe as symbolic of the previously oppressed true Christians throwing off the yoke of Antichrist. For Bale, although Church persecution of true Christians persisted under the sixth seal, the same seal nonetheless represented the beginning of the pure Protestants emerging from under the oppression of the Roman Church.

This chapter will further explore the role of John Bale’s apocalyptic vision of history in condemning the Catholic Church as an evil entity and thus delegitimizing it as a valid denomination of Christianity. By tracing Bale’s opinion of the Roman Church throughout history, this chapter will discuss how Bale also promoted the belief that some Christians had persisted in the ideal practice of the religion throughout history, despite heavy persecution. In short, by tracing the decline of the Roman Church and the presence of true Christians throughout history, Bale established a clear historical foundation for Protestants in Europe.

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Apostolic Purity

Christianity began with the teachings of a handful of followers of Jesus Christ in the province of Judea during the time of the Roman Empire and later blossomed to encompass the entire Roman world. Miraculous and sometimes violent stories of early Christians facing extreme persecution from Roman authorities fill accounts of the early spread of Christianity. Stories like the apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla idealized these early Christians and depicted them performing incredible feats such as taming wild lions to the amazement of onlooking Romans. Others, like the story of Perpetua, glorified the martyrdom of early Christians and asserted that, despite the ability of the Roman authorities to kill the physical bodies of Christians, their eternal souls remained eternally pure. Following the Edict of Milan in 313, figures like Augustine of Hippo, a famous Egyptian theologian writing during the late fourth and early fifth centuries, developed an early Christian foundation of ideas that would prove influential throughout Christian history. Augustine himself wrote one of the most influential Christian texts of all time, the City of God. The Egyptian bishop also discussed the apocalypse and acknowledged the eventual end of the world but admonished those who attempted to predict the End Times as particularly imminent through interpretations of history.

For John Bale, this image of an early Church filled with true believers working miracles in the name of God and being persecuted for following Jesus represented an ideal he

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18 Whalen, Dominion of God, 76 – 77.
strove to replicate in his own time. The first of the three major eras in John Bale's theology of history was this idealized period. Bale himself described the early Church as a pure entity free from the perversions it would later suffer during what we might now popularly call the medieval Church.  

Indeed, Bale's belief that the early Church was in some ways the purest expression of Christianity had a great deal of significance for his later interpretation of the role of Protestants in apocalyptic history, as well as the grave danger posed by the institution of the Roman Church. For Bale, the early Church was a time of purity, a time before the insidious meddling of the papacy into the affairs of kings and lay rulers and a period prior to the infiltration of idolatrous beliefs. In short, many Protestant reformers, including Bale, wanted to emulate this time of early purity in the Church.  

In *The Image of Both Churches*, Bale articulated his understanding that the years immediately following Christ's time on Earth were free from idolatrous beliefs and instrumental in spreading the faith from a small pocket of believers in the area around Jerusalem to a massive community of believers in Europe.  

His interpretation of the first three seals of Revelation's seven seals show this belief. The first seal depicted a white horse holding a bow who conquered all before him. The English Protestant believed the rider to represent Christ himself and the vision associated with the opening of this seal to indicate the spread of Christianity following Christ's crucifixion. Bale also described the willingness of early Christians to die for their beliefs and explained the red horse of the second seal to represent the persecution of the early Church under certain Roman emperors such as Nero and Domitian. However, he associated martyrdom with the third seal in particular. He wrote: "Under trope or secret misterie of the thyrd seale opening, is spcifyfied the estate generall of 

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the chrystian church, after the tyme of the martirs and strong witnesses of Jesu, which were most cruelly afflicted and slayne for confessing hys name and trueth."21

While Bale idealized the beliefs and mentality of the early Church, he nonetheless acknowledged that early bouts of heresy plagued it. In response to early questions of Christian orthodoxy, he celebrated the ability of the early Christians to remain pure from the sinister influence of heterodox belief. Later, in explaining the meaning of the third seal in Revelation, Bale declared that "then arose heresies and scisms, sectes, and deuisions, and were spred the world ouer." He particularly applauded the willingness of early Christians to combat these heresies, mentioning many early Christians he believed to have been particularly instrumental in preserving the purity of the early Christian faith, such as the Greek theologian Origen and Augustine of Hippo.22

Bale's association of early Christianity with an ideal form of the religion was crucial to his attacks on the Church that were based upon ecclesiastical history. In describing the early Church, Bale refrained from painting the Roman Church as the successor to the faith of the Apostles for the rest of time. The Catholic Church relied upon the tradition of apostolic succession, the belief that Jesus Christ himself gave authority over all Christians to St. Peter, and that Peter then passed that authority on to his successors, the popes. However, Bale refrained from any language suggesting that Peter had been able to pass on his authority over the Christian community, and instead openly attacked that belief in another text he wrote, the Pageant of the Popes. In the introduction to the first book of the Pageant of the Popes, Bale attacked this view, and asserted that the Catholic Church could, in reality, derive no authority at all from Peter himself.23

22 Bale, The Image of Both Churches I, 75 - 76.
23 Bale, The Pageant of the Popes, fol. 1.
Bale’s description of the early papacy showed his respect for the early Church and an ideal for Christian life. Despite Bale’s flat denial of papal primacy, he nonetheless acknowledged that the early bishops of Rome were, in his words, “godly and faithfull pastours, farre from all worldly pompe and glory, either in pride of attier, as miter and pall, or of hawty ambicious title of Christes generall vicar, but paynfull preachers of the Gospell, with all humilitie and constant martyrs in the end.” In this, Bale idealized the role of humility in Church leaders, in stark contrast to the papal office of the medieval period. He emphasized that these early bishops of Rome rejected earthly wealth and lofty titles to instead focus on spreading the Gospel. Furthermore, Bale’s *Image of Both Churches* also described the early papacy in relatively benign terms. Bale simply described the divisions in the early papacy as such: “In the church of Rome were many alterations about the election, much strife, & diuision was for the Papacie, betwixt Liberius and Felix, Damasus & Urcisinus...” In describing this strife between early Popes and Antipopes, Bale refrained from passing judgement on whether either side represented the true Church. When describing the vices of those early Popes, Bale simply wrote “In the which some were noted of heresie, some accused of incontinency, some called insolent, some Rustical, some rude.” Bale refrained from describing the papacy with such ambivalence following the third seal. In *The Pageant of the Popes*, Bale attributed the end of persecution to “Constantine and other Christian princes,” but claimed that the popes after this period started to transform the papal office into the seat of Antichrist. This indicates that he understood the early Church hierarchy to not be an

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26 Bale, *The Image of Both Churches I*, 75.
inherently good or evil entity, but rather that it had the potential for keeping the Church pure but could also succumb to the nefarious influence of Antichrist.

Bale’s discussion of the early Church in his writing emphasized the purity of the nascent Christian religion, and he portrayed it as an ideal towards which his contemporaries should strive. He saw the early Church as a group of Christians committed to practicing their religion as it was meant to be practiced, free from all earthly concerns and possessions and unencumbered by the perceived arrogance of the medieval Church to create new beliefs with little theological justification. To Bale, his contemporary Christians were emerging from an era of oppression and needed to take inspiration from the lives of the early Christian living under Roman oppression as the model for their own lives. They needed to shake themselves free from the idolatrous beliefs appended to the pure fundamentals of the early Christians, and Bale’s discussion of early Church history in *The Image of Both Churches* and *The Pageant of the Popes* demonstrates this notion. While Bale idealized the apostolic life of the early Church, he believed the mainstream Church of the Middle Ages to have fallen away from this model and to have instead embraced a new life of worldliness.

*Roman Oppression*

Bale viewed the Middle Ages as a time when the true faith was suppressed and true Christians persecuted for their beliefs. For Bale, this was a time in which evil reigned supreme and those who stood up to the nefarious power of the Roman Church were to be held up as evidence that the true practice of Christianity persisted despite the institutionalization of a bastardized practice of the religion in the form of a powerful papacy with growing resources. In *The Image of Both Churches*, Bale described the time heralded by the opening of the fourth seal to represent the beginning of the forces of evil infiltrating the Roman Church. During this
time, Bale claimed that the Roman Church "builted ... monasteries, auaunced Images, inuented purgatorye, not without many strange reuelacions."\textsuperscript{28} In this passage, Bale described his belief that the Christian religion began to develop many beliefs he considered to lack any proper basis in Scripture. Perhaps most tellingly, he wrote that the Roman Church \textit{invented} purgatory, implying that they simply promoted a belief in something that did not even exist, basing their theory on more or less contrived evidence.

In the winter of 1077, the German Emperor Henry IV undertook a perilous journey from his own kingdom in Central Europe over the snowy Alps to Canossa, a castle in northern Italy in a desperate attempt to convince Pope Gregory VII to lift his excommunication. Gregory had stopped here during a trip to Augsburg, and upon arriving at the castle, Henry begged for an audience with the pope for three days before finally being granted a chance to plead his case. Eventually, Gregory agreed to lift Henry's excommunication after Henry demonstrated a year of good behavior. This entire conflict between the papacy and emperors is now referred to as the Investiture Controversy and represented somewhat of the zenith of papal authority.\textsuperscript{29} Several hundred years later, this conflict still resonated in John Bale's understanding of the European past. In \textit{The Pageant of the Popes}, Bale lamented the papacy of Gregory VII and described it in apocalyptic terms. He wrote that "now was the Scripture in him [Gregory] fulfilled prophesyinge of the warre of Gog and Magog, which this Gregorie broched so perillouslye to all Christendome, as the like neuer happened."\textsuperscript{30} In this passage, Bale referenced a passage in Revelation 20:7 describing a cataclysmic final battle in the events of the apocalypse, adding some eschatological significance to his understanding of this event.

\textsuperscript{28} Bale, \textit{The Image of Both Churches I}, 79.
\textsuperscript{29} The Investiture Controversy was a dispute between popes and emperors over who had the right to give bishops their signs of office.
\textsuperscript{30} Bale, \textit{The Pageant of the Popes}, fol. 83.
It is important to consider the shift in Bale’s perception of origin of negative influences on the true Church. In the first major period he described, the early Church, he argued that all corrupting influences on the true practice of religion were external to the Church itself. As an example, the pagan Roman Empire, a group removed from the fold of the official Church, was responsible for persecuting early Christians. Furthermore, while certain heretics promoted false beliefs, they were not members of the official Church hierarchy, and indeed the Church hierarchy was responsible for combatting these heresies. In both of these cases, the persecution of the early Church came from groups outside of the official community. However, after the period Bale identified as beginning with the fourth seal in Revelation, the attacks on Christianity came from within the Church itself. Belief in purgatory was not a heretical belief warded off by the official Roman Church, but rather a belief that evolved internally and was promoted by the very institution that had kept Christianity pure in the previous period. This shift has two important consequences for Bale’s overall theology of history. First, it solidified his claim that the Catholic Church of his day was a fallen entity and that true Christians owed no loyalty towards it. Second, Bale also used this to prove his claim that true Christians were present throughout all of history regardless of how heavy the persecution they faced was.

Bale’s identification of the papacy with Antichrist is an integral component of his larger theology of history. By tying the Roman popes with the epitome of evil, he argued that Antichrist led the Roman Church as a whole and as such it could not be the true Church. Bale pulled no punches in attacking the Roman Church and condemning it as an evil branch of Christianity. He portrayed the growth in papal power as a move that was inherently opposed to the Christian religion and even went so far as to tie it to other religions opposed to Christianity. In *The Image of Both Churches*, Bale described the fall of the Roman Church
during the time of the fourth seal as such: “Thus out of ye corrupted & depraved scriptures tooke ye Jewes their Talmud, ye Saracens their Alchorane, and the Byshops their popish lawes and decrees.”31 This willingness to associate the Catholic Church with the other monotheistic religions, specifically Islam, was a particularly interesting element of Bale’s apocalyptic ideology and one of his ideas that had very little basis in existing apocalyptic tradition.

Furthermore, this links back to Bale’s willingness to link the Jews, Catholic Church, and Islam in his interpretation of the fourth seal, and his willingness to lump together all those outside what he perceived to be the true Church as a single evil entity. In The Pageant of the Popes, Bale claimed that the popes from Sylvester I’s successor Mark to Pope Boniface III “began by litle and litle to add their own deuices to Gods seruice … and sowe in Rome the seade of Antichriste, which afterwarde grewe vp to so great pride and abhomination.”32 This period ran from roughly the year 336 to 607, and Bale declared later that by the papacy of Benedict III, around the year 855, “Antichrist appeareth to come toward fulnesse of hys wickednes specified in the 17. Chapter of the Revelation.”33

Now that Bale had established the Roman Church to be an evil branch of Christianity led by Antichrist, he also made sure to highlight the existence of true Christians throughout the Middle Ages. Bale primarily identified true believers by portraying those persecuted by the Roman Church for heresy as true Christians who the Church hierarchy wrongfully condemned as heretics for clinging to the beliefs espoused by the early Church. For example, Bale praised one particular heretical group, the Cathars, who rejected many pieces of

31 Bale, The Image of Both Churches I, 79.
32 Bale, The Pageant of the Popes, fol. 25.
33 Bale, The Pageant of the Popes, fol. 55. Revelation 17 contains a description of the Whore of Babylon and the seven-headed, ten-horned beast upon which she sat.
orthodox Church doctrine such as the sacraments and belief in purgatory. Indeed, Pope Innocent III famously called for the Albigensian Crusade in the early thirteenth century to purge these heretics from southern France. Bale himself praised the Cathars as adherents to the pure Christian faith who were willing to die for their beliefs and simultaneously attacked the villainous Roman Church for their efforts to kill them. In addition to using heretics as examples of true Christians living in the Middle Ages, Bale also acknowledged the existence of some members of the Church itself who managed to remain pure in their beliefs. In The Image of Both Churches, Bale wrote that some medieval clerics were “illumined with some knowledge, and leading a high conversation in the church.” Bale also listed several individuals he believed to fit this mold, such as Joachim of Fiore and Savonarola. Thus, by also highlighting the existence of true Christians living under the persecution of the Roman Church, Bale continued to trace the continuity of pure Christianity from the time of the early Church to his own time.

In discussing the medieval Church, Bale highlighted the descent of the official Church hierarchy into evil. Bale did this in his interpretation of the fourth seal of Revelation, reading it as a time when the Church became focused less on spiritual affairs, thus leading to the deterioration of its beliefs. Additionally, he associate this with Antichrist himself taking charge of the papacy, meaning that the Roman Church transformed from a pure institution

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34 Catharism is a Christian dualist heresy that believed all material things (including the world itself) to have been created by Satan and therefore inherently evil. Furthermore, Catharism proposed that Satan was equal in power to God. Given the radical nature of these beliefs, it seems ironic that Bale would have praised such figures, given that their beliefs flew in stark contrast to his own. (Jennifer Kolpacoff Deane, A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition, New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2011, 30 – 32.).


36 John Bale, The Image of Both Churches I, 82.


38 Ibid. Joachim of Fiore was one of the most influential apocalyptic thinkers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries who described an exceedingly intricate vision of history divided into ages based upon the Holy Trinity. Savonarola was a Florentine Dominican friar who lived in the fifteenth century. Both of these figures predicted a future age where Christendom would be cleansed from its faults (Whalen, Dominion of God, 100, 227).
during the early Church into a purely evil institution by the Middle Ages. Despite this, Bale highlighted how the true Church persisted, maintaining its underground nature from the early Church.

Protestant Redemption

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, John Bale viewed the synod called to examine the beliefs advanced by John Wycliffe with a certain apocalyptic expectation. In *The Image of Both Churches*, Bale associated the great earthquake prophesied in the sixth seal of Revelation with the earthquake that rocked London during the council discussing Wycliffe’s writings. Bale wrote: “Most liuely was this [the earthquake in Revelation] fulfilled such tyme, as William Courteney the Archbishop of Caunterburie with Antichristes sinagoge of sorcerers sat in consistorie against Christes doctrine in John Wycleve,”39 His description of the Earthquake Synod reflects his greater attitude towards the Protestant Reformation as a whole. That is, that the time of Catholic oppression over the true Christians during the Middle Ages was at an end. Furthermore, by placing this event in the sixth of seven ages of history, Bale implied that he was living towards the end of history and that the Protestant Reformation was the beginning of the end of the world.

Bale forged explicit links between the purity of the early Church and Protestants of his day as another way to argue that the nascent Protestant movement of his day represented the true Church. By making this connection, Bale portrayed Protestants as the heirs to the purity of the early Christians and persecuted heretics of the Middle Ages. Thus, as somewhat of a foil to the papacy’s claim of authority based upon an unbroken line of succession from St. Peter to the current pope, Bale traced a direct link between early modern Protestants and Christians

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during the time of the Apostles. The English Protestant articulated this view in *The Image of Both Churches* when expounding on the vision associated with the seventh seal. In an effort to forge a connection between the early Church and contemporary Protestants, Bale described an angel coming from God. He wrote “With a stoute power came thys Angell from God to withstand the furious beastes in thys first age of Christes church, wherein they rage so sore. God hath raysed some godly persons now, by whom many things are opened that afore were hidde, accept it were to a fewe poore soules in corners.”40 This excerpt from Bale juxtaposed the virtues of the early Church and Protestant reformers, showing the link between the two groups.

Bale also linked the early Church with the Protestants in the case of Anne Askewe, an English Protestant woman who converted from Catholicism to Protestantism, a decision that would later come to cost her life. Askewe’s refusal to renounce her beliefs following several interrogations and torture earned her the respect of John Bale, who wrote an account of both her questionings in London. Bale himself likened her to St. Blandina, a young girl who was killed in 177 AD under the reign of the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius. At the time of her death, Blandina was only 15 years of age.41 Bale’s *The first examinacyon of Anne Askewe* explicitly described the parallels he perceived between the early Christian martyr and the Englishwoman killed for her beliefs.42 For example, Bale wrote that “Blandina had iii. ernest companyons in Christ … So had Anne Askewe iii. fyre fellawes,”43 drawing a parallel between a relatively inconsequential part of the martyrdom of both figures – the number of companions they had. He also drew a parallel in the courage of Blandina and Askewe. Bale

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40 Bale, *The Image of Both Churches I*, 140.
wrote “Prompt was Blandina, and of most lustye corage, in rendering her lyfe for the liberte of her fayth. No lesse lyuely and quyck was Anne Askewe in all her enprivsonynges and tormentes,”\textsuperscript{44} indicating that both figures were zealous in their faith and steadfast in their desire to cling to their faith, even under the threat of imminent death. Bale’s effort to draw such specific parallels between an early Christian martyr and a contemporary English Protestant further suggests that the English Protestant was keen to depict the Protestant reformers of his own time as the heirs to the pure Christians of the early Church. Bale’s interest in martyrdom fit into greater trends within early modern Europe. The religious upheaval of the sixteenth century brought with it many religious zealots, both Protestant and Catholic, who were killed for embracing their faith. In addition to this, various authors described accounts of these martyrs in books idealizing the martyrs’ devotion to their faith.\textsuperscript{45}

Bale’s use of early Christian figures as points of comparison for his fellow Protestants served two purposes. First, as discussed above Bale had already established the early Church to be uniquely pure—this foundation allowed the English Protestant to employ examples from the early Church as incontrovertible examples of Christian piety. Thus, by likening Protestants to the primitive Christians, Bale made a strong statement regarding the piety of the present-day Protestants. In short, he viewed Protestants throughout Europe as the heirs to a long tradition stretching all the way back to the early Church, a tradition of purity and piety that the Roman Church had long since forsaken.\textsuperscript{46} Second, Bale identified the Roman Church as the origin of the persecution against Protestants, maintaining some level of continuity from

\textsuperscript{44} Askewe and Bale, \textit{The first examinacyon of Anne Askewe}, 8.
\textsuperscript{46} This link to the early Church is an interesting foil to the claim that the Roman Papacy existed as an unbroken succession of popes going all the way back to St. Peter. Indeed, this claim of continuity from Peter to the current pope provided the foundation for papal power. It is possible that Bale was intentionally playing off this notion to counter Catholic claims of having an unbroken link to the purity of the early Church.
his description of the Middle Ages. However, when explicitly likening the current-day
Protestants to early Christians, Bale then implicitly linked the Roman Church to the pagan
Roman Empire. That is, he also drew a parallel between the Roman Empire and the Roman
Church, as the Roman Empire was responsible for the death of St. Blandina, while the Roman
Church was responsible for the death of Anne Askewe. Thus, Bale used his entire theology of
history to understand and interpret the events of his own day, and he used history to come to
the conclusion that the true Church, which had persisted throughout history, existed in his
own time in the form of the Protestant churches springing up across Europe.

Conclusion

Bale interpreted history in such a way as to build a legitimate past for the Protestant
movement, while simultaneously condemning the history of the Catholic Church. For Bale,
the Book of Revelation provided a prophecy recorded shortly after Christ’s time on earth that
predicted all future events leading up to the eventual end of the world and cataclysmic battle
between God and Satan. Thus, he could sift through the prophecies in Revelation and
determine what predictions had already happened and those that were yet to pass. By doing
this, Bale came to the conclusion that he was living in the sixth of seven ages of history,
meaning that he understood the End Times to be very near indeed.

Furthermore, Bale understood there to be a true Church present from Christ’s time on
Earth to the present day, although it experienced many persecutions throughout history. In
the early Church, Bale equated the orthodox church with the true Church, even praising the
efforts of the early Church hierarchy in keeping it pure from heresy. Indeed, in this age he
viewed heretics as a strong danger to Christians of the day and praised the efforts of figures
like Augustine of Hippo in combatting heresy. However, following the official toleration of
Christianity in the Roman Empire, Bale described the fall of the orthodox Church hierarchy, engineered by the insidious influence of Antichrist. As a result of this, Bale saw the presence of true Christians shift from members of the Roman Church to groups outside of it, such as the Cathar heretics who were actually persecuted by the Roman hierarchy. Finally, in interpreting the events of his own day, Bale viewed Protestants as the heirs to the early Christian communities of the early Church.

Although it may sound counterintuitive, Bale’s understanding of history was not limited to the past. The former Carmelite friar believed that the future was already written in the Book of Revelation, and thus could be known through careful reading of the book. Naturally, Bale used this to predict the eventual triumph of the Protestant cause over what he perceived as Catholic idolatry. As a result, Bale added a sense of inevitability to the reforming movement in Europe and stated that the Protestants were destined to be the ultimate winners of history, while the Catholics would be forever sentenced to eternal damnation.47

Bale’s understanding of history represented an understanding that all of the Christian past, present, and future progressed continually from Christ’s time on earth to his eventual return and rescue of his true Church. Thus, Bale’s belief in history as a timeline of the struggle between a true and a false Church allowed the English Protestant to weaponize history as a way of tying the Protestant cause with the true Church and also employ it as a polemic against the Catholic Church.

47 Bale, The Image of Both Churches I, 106.
Chapter 2: An Apocalyptic Basis for Belief

Introduction

In 1549, the English Church no longer required lives of celibacy for its priests, marking a major victory for Protestants in the country. The question of clerical celibacy had been hotly debated at various stages throughout ecclesiastical history—church reform in the eleventh century mandated that priests live celibate lives. This topic was part of the greater issue of the Gregorian Reforms of the eleventh century that sought to free the Church from the influences of lay secular rulers. This question of allowing priests to marry resurfaced during the Protestant Reformation and represented one of the many points with which the reformers differed with the orthodox faith of the Roman Church. Indeed, Martin Luther himself famously married after he left the orthodox faith at the outset of the Protestant Reformation, and John Bale followed this trend, marrying after he left the Church in favor of the Protestant movement. Thus, the question of allowing marriage was more than a theoretical question for some Protestants and held a personal impact on the lives of many reformers.

During the Protestant Reformations, theologians on either side debated matters of faith other than whether or not priests could marry. Debates raged over issues large and small, from the very nature and number of the sacraments to seemingly small issues over whether or not one could effectively express one’s piety by fasting. Fundamental to this debate was the question of what constituted a proper basis for Christian belief. Many Protestants claimed that Scripture alone provided a proper justification for the tenets of the religion. Consequently, Protestant reformers deemed a large number of beliefs seemingly integral to the Catholic tradition as unjustified. Perhaps the most famous example of this is
Martin Luther’s 95 Theses, a set of 95 complaints he had about the Catholic Church.¹ Luther specifically targeted the Church practice of selling indulgences, essentially allowing one to bypass time spent in purgatory through financial investment in the Church.² Additionally, the question of marriage was particularly central to the English Reformation, as King Henry VIII’s desire for a divorce from his first wife, Catharine of Aragon, catalyzed it.³

This chapter will examine the role apocalyptic rhetoric played in Bale’s argument that certain Catholic beliefs were simply contrived, lacking any proper basis in Scripture, and therefore not permissible in the true form of Christianity. In particular, it will examine how Bale employed apocalyptic thinking as a way to justify his opinion that all Christian beliefs necessarily must be grounded in Scripture to be considered valid, and how also Bale showed that many Catholic beliefs were false with evidence grounded in his interpretation of Revelation. Next, this chapter will focus on how Bale weaponized apocalyptic rhetoric to attack two particular beliefs: clerical celibacy and belief in purgatory. He mercilessly attacked both of these fundamental pieces of orthodox Catholic doctrine in his writing. In short, this chapter will examine how Bale’s idea that Scripture alone provided a proper basis for Christian belief fit in with his use of apocalyptic rhetoric to attack the Catholic Church and thus vilify the Church. As a result of this campaign to quite literally demonize the Roman hierarchy, Bale implicitly argued that the Protestants represented the true Church.

¹ The focus of the 95 Theses was the Church practice of selling indulgences, which reduced the time one’s soul would spend in purgatory after death. Luther’s publication of these theses sparked a larger debate about papal authority and eventually resulted in Luther being charged with heresy (Johnson, The Protestant Reformation in Europe, 19 – 22). For more information regarding the Protestant Reformation, see Andrew Johnston, The Protestant Reformation in Europe (New York: Routledge, 2014).
³ Heal, The Reformation in Britain and Ireland, 117.
Basis for Belief

Christianity has historically been filled with debates regarding the interpretation of the written word and whether or not certain beliefs have enough basis in Christian writings to be considered valid. Alec Ryrie astutely makes this point in the introduction of his book *Being Protestant in Reformation England* and highlights the inherently intellectual nature of Christianity itself, specifically the immense emphasis placed on interpretation of the written word. Throughout history, debates over the meaning and correct interpretation of the written word have raged. Heretics promoted beliefs that were at odds with those espoused in orthodox Christianity and intellectuals like Peter Abelard labored in cathedral schools to reconcile the seeming contradictions within Christianity itself. This debate naturally continued to rage on in the context of the Protestant Reformation, and indeed rose to an even higher level of intensity due to the fundamental differences between Protestant and Catholic theology. One particular staple of Protestant confessions was the emphasis placed upon the primacy of Scripture when justifying certain beliefs. This tenet, known as *sola scriptura*, was particularly important in John Bale’s writings in favor of Protestantism, and he defended this belief with apocalyptic themes.

The rejection of Catholic doctrine grounded on centuries of authoritative commentary on the Bible stood as one of the hallmarks of the Protestant Reformation. The fundamental basis for the Protestant rejection of these Catholic beliefs was the Protestant conviction that Scripture and Scripture alone provided a sound basis for constructing Christian beliefs. Thus, one could dismiss any Catholic tenet lacking a proper justification in the Bible. Martin Luther famously promoted *sola scriptura* in his break with the Catholic Church in the sixteenth

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century, and this remained a belief peculiar to the Lutheran Reformation and an innovation in Christian theology.⁶ Although Protestant theologians did, by and large, dismiss broad swathes of Catholic tradition as unjustified, the Church Fathers writing during the early Church occupied a special place in Protestant thought, and their commentary on Scripture was given more credence than that of any medieval theologian.⁷

John Bale himself believed in the applicability of sola scriptura in declaring certain beliefs agreeable to the true Church. Bale’s interpretation of the measuring of the Temple, a passage in the eleventh chapter of Revelation in which John of Patmos was given a rod with which he was instructed to measure the temple of God, speaks to this. Bale described the rod John received as “The reede which god deliuered me [John of Patmos] was lyke unto a rod. For his worde is the rod, of right order, and ye scepture of his kingdome,” which implies that Bale understood the Bible to be the foundation upon which all Christian must be grounded. Furthermore, he continued to describe the measuring of the Temple as symbolic of separating the true Christian beliefs from heretical beliefs and wrote that John of Patmos was instructed to “Proue all beleeues whether they be right or no. Examine their works, whether they spring of Gods commaundements or of mens tradictions. And in so doing try by the scriptures the corne from the chaffe.”⁸

In addition to attacking individual beliefs such as clerical marriage and purgatory, Bale dismissed large swathes of Catholic ideology as lacking proper justification. Bale’s The Image of Both Churches is rife with lists of such beliefs that Bale considered to be heretical or idolatrous. For example, in the same passage of the measuring of the Temple, Bale attacked

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⁸ Bale, The Image of Both Churches II, 7 – 8.
the Catholic Church’s “sacrifices, their ceremonies, their obseruations, their holy dayes, their vigils, fastings, prayings, kneelings, and all other usages, contrarye to the admonishment of Christe,” all in a single sentence. While this does not amount to an extensive explanation of why exactly Bale held these beliefs to be wrong, it nevertheless underscores the importance to Bale of determining the true tenets of Christianity. Furthermore, its appearance in a commentary on the Book of Revelation, as well as in Bale’s interpretation of a specific passage of Revelation forges a tight link between apocalyptic thought and the testing of specific Christian beliefs to determine their validity. This shows that Bale viewed not only the parts of Scripture describing ecclesiastical history from the creation of the world to the actions of the early apostles, but also predictions regarding the end of the world to be a proper basis from which to judge Christian beliefs. He understood that the apocalyptic imagery of Revelation served as a scriptural foundation for belief just the same as the sayings of Christ himself. That said, Bale’s application of Revelation did not necessarily amount to careful exegesis on the text, but rather served as an expedient way to provide a proper justification for his critique of Catholic rites.

In short, Bale used his interpretation of the apocalyptic imagery in Revelation as a way to attack certain Catholic beliefs while still holding true to his conviction that all proper Christian ideas must fundamentally be grounded in the Bible. In *The Image of Both Churches*, Bale again referenced the importance of the Bible in his interpretation of the woman clothed with the sun, which he interpreted to represent the true Church, a scene depicted in Revelation 12. Bale claimed that “onyly reygnethe the true Christian churche by the worde of God, by the sincere scriptures, by the doctrine of the Apostles, and neyther superstitious nor

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cere monies, neither by councelles or customes.”

Here, Bale demonstrated his belief that the true foundation of the church lay in scripture alone, not in other traditions derived by the medieval Church. In addition, Bale claimed that the true Church’s “bewtie consisteth onely in faith, and in the obseruation of Gods holy commaundements.”

He also used this passage as a way to attack the worldliness of the Catholic Church. Bale also denied that any authority could come from “shrines, nor gilte Images,” which shows that Bale denied the possibility that physical signs could truly denote one’s piety. The Protestant theologian described his perception of the difference between Protestant and Catholic preachers by claiming that Protestant ministers “sheweth foorth his glorie to the edification of other, and not their owne Pompe and magnificence,” as opposed to the self-centered Catholic priests.

Clerical Marriage

Examining John Bale’s opposition to a prohibition on clerical marriage is important given the nuanced history of the practice. While priestly vows to forgo marriage are considered a staple of the modern Catholic Church, the Church did not always require them. Indeed, the Catholic Church did not establish the prohibition on clerical marriage until the eleventh century, and even then it generated a great deal of public debate, as shown by Leidulf Melve in his article “The Public Debate on Clerical Marriage in the Late Eleventh Century.” After this ban on priestly marriage was enacted, it again came under fire by the reformers of the Protestant Reformation. Married Protestant priests looked back to the purity

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11 Bale, The Image of Both Churches II, 33.
12 Bale, The Image of Both Churches II, 33.
14 Bale, The Image of Both Churches II, 33.
of the early Church as an example of when priests lived as married men and cited scriptural justifications for allowing priests to marry. Furthermore, debates over marriage were not limited to the role they played in the lives of clerics, but whether or not marriages could be dissolved, as most famously demonstrated in King Henry VIII’s split with Rome following his inability to procure an annulment for one of his marriages. Thus, we can see that clerical marriage was not an issue that concerned only a few Protestant reformers, but rather an issue with a long history that touched the daily lives of many individuals.

After the Parliament of King Edward VI had officially sanctioned clerical marriage in 1549, Bale dedicated his attack on the practice of priestly marriage, the Apology of John Bale, to Edward VI. In addition to that entire book, Bale expounded on his opposition to the tradition in other works, such as The Actes of English Votaryes and The Image of Both Churches. In the former, Bale included a lengthy description of what he perceived to be a close relationship between the immoral behavior of priests and the likelihood for priests to fall from the practice of true Christianity. In this text, Bale claimed that the Roman Church imposed a new class of English saints on Britain, whom Bale condemned as not adhering to a true form of Christianity. Within this critique, Bale claimed that these figures “neuer reckened ... wedlock anye Godlye estate of lyuynge, though yt were an onlye ordre instytuted of God in the begynnynge, yea, for hys prestes also.” Here, Bale employs his understanding of the ultimate purpose and direction of history to attack the practice of clerical celibacy. He associated the coming of Roman Christianity to Britain, a time he linked with the rise of Antichrist within the

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16 Helen Parish, Clerical Celibacy in the West: c. 1100 – 1700, (New York: Routledge, 2016), 161, 165, 166
17 Heal, The Reformation in Britain and Ireland, 117.
19 Helen Parish, “‘It Was Never Good World Sence Minister Must Have Wyves’: Clerical Celibacy, Clerical Marriage, and Anticlericalism in Reformation England”, Journal of Religious History 36, no. 1 (March 2012), 54.
Church, to the veneration of figures who remained chaste. Given Bale’s opposition to clerical celibacy, he believed the veneration of these figures to be contrary to God’s will.

Bale’s *The Apology of John Bale* contains his full attack on the practice of clerical celibacy, a position he spent nearly 100 pages defending. On the very first page of the text, Bale cites his inspiration for the book from a conversation he had “a fewe monethes ago” regarding whether or not the 30th chapter of the Book of Numbers provided a valid foundation for the vows of priests to forgo marriage.\(^{21}\) The former Carmelite took the stance that the specified chapter did not support the case for clerical celibacy.\(^{22}\) Bale continued the book as a series of objections to his position and his responses to them and argued that the contents of the Book of Numbers applied only to the Jews about whom the book was written: “those vowes wer of thynges than present and so fourth contynuyng, tyll Christes comynge in the fleshe, concernynge the onely nacyon of the Jewes.”\(^{23}\) Furthermore, Bale’s attack on clerical celibacy also hearkened back to his romanticized picture of the early Church. In describing the early eremitical Christians, Bale claimed that they “were neuer acquainted wyth this kynde of vowing,” and that they “frelye lyved they after the rules of the Gospell, marryed or unmarryed.”\(^{24}\) However, Bale’s association of the papacy with Antichrist influenced his view of clerical celibacy, as he claimed that vows of chastity were enforced to “further maytenaunce of that myghtye monarchy of Antichriste, as it was in dede by the practyce of hypocrytyshe monks.”\(^{25}\) Thus, Bale blended his theological justification that the Book of Numbers only applied to the Israelites about whom the book was written and his apocalyptic convictions that vows of chastity were inherently tied to Antichrist. Another interesting note touching on

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the personal interest this issue may have held for Bale is a slight digression he made into the founding of the Carmelite order. The former Carmelite himself claimed that the founders of the order did not initially require any vow of chastity, but that a papal legate forced such a vow upon them.26 This implies that he may have been laboring to absolve his soul of any vows of celibacy he took in his previous experience as a monk that he considered to be sinful, as well as another example of his belief that the Roman Church actively forced these false beliefs on pockets of true believers. Bale himself compiled a history of the Carmelite Order titled the Cronica seu fascicula temporum ordinis Carmelitarum prior to his conversion to Protestantism, but he later revised this work after his conversion in the mid-1530s to append material proving that Protestants now practiced the purest form of Christianity.27

Bale’s attack on clerical celibacy included apocalyptic tropes. The full title of The Apology of Johan Bale makes this link explicit: “The Apology of Johan Bale agaynste a ranke Papyst, aanswering both hym and hys doctours, that neyther their vowes nor yet their priesthode are of the Gospell, but of Antichrist.”28 This overt link to Antichrist in the title of Bale’s book forges a strong connection between Bale’s beliefs on the matter of priestly marriage and his convictions regarding the end of the world. His use of apocalyptic thought here demonstrates that he attacked beliefs espoused by the Catholic Church with apocalyptic rhetoric, in this case the Church’s emphasis on priests and monks living lives of celibacy. Furthermore, Bale continued to write similar language throughout the Apology, signaling that he most probably did not only include a reference to Antichrist in the title simply to add a sense of importance to his writing, but that he saw a strong link between the Church and

28 Bale, The Apology of John Bale, fol i.
Antichrist and wished to explore that through his discourse on clerical celibacy. As mentioned above, Bale’s association of the papacy with Antichrist and further association of the papacy with forcing vows of chastity onto the clergy shows that the Protestant theologian viewed clerical celibacy as a belief promoted by Antichrist. Furthermore, Bale attacked the monastic rule of the Franciscan Order by claiming that its founder, Francis of Assisi, swore obedience to “pope Innocent the thyrde and to his successours canonicallye admitted byshoppes of Rome, as is written in regula Minorum, which is not the Gospell of Iesus Christ, as the seyd rule affyrmeth, but a contrariouse doctrine of Antichrist his great enemy.”

In short, Bale condemned the Rule of the Franciscan Order to be inextricably linked with Antichrist.

Additionally, *The Image of Both Churches* also contains references to forcing priests into lives of chastity as a practice indicative of the false Church. In discussing the opening of the fourth seal, the time at which Bale considered the institutions of the Catholic Church to have fallen from grace, the English Protestant wrote that “Than were ... marriage and meates inhibited.” This appeared in a longer litany of beliefs that entered into the Catholic Church at this time that Bale considered unfounded and heretical. In this, Bale also applied the apocalyptic imagery of this text to his interpretation of *sola scriptura*. His willingness to view the imagery associated with the opening of the fourth seal as indicative that certain beliefs developed by the medieval Church were idolatrous underscores Bale’s acceptance of the Book of Revelation as a basis for Christian belief. Thus, by including a mention of the issue of clerical celibacy in this passage, Bale placed his understanding of the issue in a specific time in apocalyptic history.

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30 Bale, *The Image of Both Churches I*, 79.
Purgatory

The belief in purgatory, a realm in which one’s soul remained before heaven until the sins of one’s life were purged, formed another part of Catholic doctrine with which many Protestants, including John Bale, disagreed. One can even see the doctrine of purgatory as a belief representative of the late medieval Church. Protestant theologians linked belief in purgatory to other beliefs that Protestants opposed, perhaps most notably the selling of indulgences. In his famous ninety-five theses, Luther condemned the selling of indulgences, but nonetheless accepted the belief in purgatory. However, around 1528, an exiled English lawyer published a book in Antwerp titled *A Suppli-cacyon for the Beggers* which asserted that purgatory did not exist. Copies of this book made their way to England and may even have been seen by King Henry VIII. In addition to being an issue attacked by high profile Protestant theologians, perceptions of purgatory touched the everyday lives of average Christians. Everyday people in Reformation Britain had concerns regarding the state of their eternal souls in the afterlife, and much of their interaction with Christianity emphasized the role of purgatory in the religion.

John Bale bolstered more traditional Protestant arguments against purgatory with apocalyptic rhetoric linking belief in purgatory to forces of evil and ultimately the false Church. While Protestants did oppose purgatory, theirs was a nuanced view of the issue. These reformers opposed Catholic understandings of purgatory based on their belief that the Catholic Church used purgatory as a way to expand papal authority past this life and into the next. Despite this opposition, several Protestant confessions generally accepted the possibility

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of some intermediate state for one’s soul after death between heaven and hell where the sins of this life are expiated prior to entry into heaven. In fact, Luther’s original 95 Theses most likely assumed the existence of purgatory, instead condemning the belief of the Roman Church that they could sell indulgences to lessen the time one spent there. Bale was somewhat more steadfast in his opposition to this belief as he decried it as a belief instilled into the Roman Church by Antichrist and made no acknowledgements that some intermediate stage between heaven and hell could exist.

Following his conversion to Protestantism in the early 1530s, John Bale preached about the topic of purgatory in 1534, almost certainly a controversial topic at the time. In her book *John Bale: Mythmaker for the English Reformation*, Leslie Fairfield claims that Bale concerned himself somewhat less about purgatory than he was about other issues. However, while Bale may not have considered the existence of purgatory to be an issue of the utmost importance, he nonetheless considered it important enough to discuss in several of his books. The English Protestant used belief in purgatory as a hallmark of the false Church in *The Image of Both Churches*. In addition to Bale’s references to purgatory in the *Image of Both Churches*, he also discusses the belief in a book *The Pageant of the Popes*. His references to purgatory in this text contain veiled attacks on the belief and associations of it with the rising influence of Antichrist within the papacy. Therefore, while Fairfield argues accurately that purgatory never held the same level of importance to Bale as other issues, the Protestant theologian nevertheless attacked belief in purgatory through his writing.

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Within *The Image of Both Churches*, Bale viewed purgatory as one of many beliefs indicative of the false Church. In the same passage where he attacked clerical marriage as a belief that the Church simply invented, Bale also claimed that the fallen Church “builded they monasteries, auounced Images, inuented purgatorye, not without many strange reuelacions.” Later in *The Image of Both Churches*, Bale launched another criticism of purgatory laden with apocalyptic imagery, this one somewhat more nuanced than his association of the belief with the opening of the fourth seal. When Bale expounded on the Beast rising from the sea, in Revelation 13, he described the difference between the Beast (Antichrist) and the Dragon (Satan). Bale wrote that “Wher as he [Satan] doth but easely moue, they [Antichrist] may by rigorous auctoritie constrain. Whan he hath propounded an errour, they may by their powre establish it for an infallible truth & make of it a necessary article of the christian beleue, as they have done of purgatory.” In this case, Bale claimed that Antichrist, which he associated with the Roman Church, had the power to enforce beliefs created by Satan such as the doctrine of purgatory.

Bale also decried doctrines of purgatory in *The Pageant of the Popes*, tying teachings of purgatory to a belief instilled into the Roman Church by Antichrist. Bale described the purpose of this book as “in the which is manifestly shewed the beginning of Antichriste and increasing to his fulnesse, and also the wayning of his power again, accordinge to the Prophecy of Iohn in the Apocalips[Book of Revelation].” This shows an inherent link in the contents of the book with apocalyptic imagery, as he clearly linked the papacy to Antichrist. When discussing the papacy of Pope Gregory I, Bale wrote that “he made foure bookes of
Dialogues, to bolster up Purgatorie." Bale also wrote in a description of the popes from Pope Sylvester I to Boniface III that these popes began to sow the seeds for Antichrist to take root in the Church by advancing false doctrines. By associating the popes who gave rise to Antichrist in the office of the papacy with development of ideas regarding purgatory, Bale attacked the doctrine of purgatory with his apocalyptic rhetoric.

In conclusion, belief in purgatory touched many people’s lives during the Reformation—concerns regarding the state of one’s everlasting soul following this life deeply worried many people. While purgatory was a fundamental tenet of Catholicism, many Protestants took a more nuanced perspective of it, viewing it on one hand as an extension of papal power, but on the other refusing to entirely discount a “middle-ground” between heaven and hell where one’s soul was purged of all sins from this life before being admitted into heaven. Bale, however, discounted the belief as an entirely contrived notion, a notion that had entered into the Church during the time when the Roman Church was falling from grace and being overtaken by Antichrist. In this way, Bale used apocalyptic imagery to attack belief in purgatory, identifying it as a belief essentially invented by Satan and advanced by a series of popes whom he identified with Antichrist.

Conclusion

John Bale’s apocalyptic thought extended past simply interpreting history in such a way as to advance the Protestant cause in England. Bale also used apocalyptic imagery as a way to substantiate his belief in sola scriptura and to build legitimacy for that piece of Protestant thought. In particular, Bale believed that the passage in Revelation in which John

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45 Bale, The Pageant of the Popes, fol. 43.  
46 Bale, The Pageant of the Popes, fol. 25.
of Patmos is ordered to measure the temple was emblematic of true Christians being
responsible for ensuring that their beliefs had a solid foundation in Scripture. In this way,
Bale also used apocalyptic imagery to advance his belief in *sola scriptura*.

Bale also used apocalyptic imagery as a way to attack Catholic beliefs. We have seen
how he used references to apocalyptic figures in his attacks on clerical marriage and
purgatory, identifying them as beliefs that were added to the Christian canon during the time
under the fourth seal, thus making them beliefs that were advanced by the false Church.

Bale also used the imagery of Antichrist in attacking purgatory, as he linked the popes who
advanced that particular belief with the figure of Antichrist.

In conclusion, Bale found another way to employ apocalyptic thought as a means to
justify the Protestants in England over the Catholics. He saw in Revelation and his apocalyptic
convictions more generally a way to condemn views unique to the Catholic Church as false,
and thus build the case that the Protestant movement he championed was free from those
beliefs that he identified as false, and therefore inherently a more pure and legitimate form of
Christianity than that practiced by the Catholic Church. In short, Bale saw Catholic beliefs as
another avenue for his attack on the Church with apocalyptic imagery.

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Chapter 3: Triumph of the English

Introduction

The first two chapters of this thesis have established that Bale deployed his apocalyptic convictions and his theology of history in universal manner, promoting the nascent Protestant movement as a whole in opposition to the perceived tyranny of the Roman papacy. However, Bale also believed that he could apply the Book of Revelation specifically to the history of the English and to support the validity of the English Church above all other churches. Bale turned to apocalyptic rhetoric as a way to promote and build English identity, even at the expense of other Protestant confessions. This chapter will examine the method through which Bale bolstered the English nation and English Christianity through apocalyptic thinking as well as investigating Bale’s attitude towards the role of the English state in religion. Bale’s theology of history focused on English history, and he found in the English past signs that the English Church was God’s true Church. In this history, the English Protestant found evidence that the Roman Church had meddled in English affairs since the sixth century and continued to do so up until Bale’s time. Bale therefore viewed the English monarchy, rather than the Catholic Church, as the best hope for preserving the purity of the English Church. Finally, Bale asserted the unique place of the English in apocalyptic events by exploring the role the English had in bringing about the End Times.

While Bale’s efforts to craft English identity are certainly noteworthy, they operated within a tradition of apocalyptic prophecy supporting specific identities. Frances Kneupper’s book, *The Empire at the End of Time*, provides an excellent examination of the role popular apocalyptic prophecy played in creating German identity in the Late Middle Ages. The prophecies she examines in her book have many similarities with those written by Bale and thus provide an interesting comparison for Bale’s work. Kneupper argued that prophecies
regarding the End Times were popular in the burgeoning urban centers of Germany and coincided with calls for church reform, bearing a striking resemblance to the importance of Bale’s prophecies to sixteenth-century England. Furthermore, Kneupper’s examination of the Gallorum levitas and Gamaleon prophecies showed that these texts exalted the purity of German identity and lamented the Romans as fallen.¹ The depiction of Rome as a fallen entity also bears similarities to the message of Bale’s apocalyptic writings. The Roman Church had fallen and the Protestants, specifically the English Protestants, represented God’s true Church on Earth. Thus, Bale’s theology of history and apocalyptic notions regarding the end of the world were not without precedent but nonetheless are significant in examining the growth of English identity and the course of the Reformation in England.² Apocalyptic prophecy sparked an interest in the national history of other countries during Bale’s time. Writers in countries like France and Sweden examined their own national histories in an effort to emphasize their breaks with Rome. However, this interest in national history in the context of apocalyptic prophecy was particularly strong in England and English Protestants believed that the Church of England was afforded a place of honor in the End Times. Indeed, Avihu Zakai argues in “Reformation, History, and Eschatology in English Protestantism” that Protestants, particularly English Protestants, deployed history as a means to legitimate

¹ The Gallorum levitas prophecy was originally written in the thirteenth century and circulated for two centuries following its creation. It prophesied the eventual fall of Rome and the eventual triumph of the Germans. This prophecy proved to be hugely popular and was eventually translated into German. The Gamaleon prophecy another popular prophecy was written in the early fifteenth century that portrayed the Roman Church as a threat to German identity and predicted an eventual victory of the Germans over the Roman Church. (Kneupper, The Empire at the End of Time, 41 – 42, 149 – 150).
Protestant Christianity, specifically to prove that Protestantism was the true form of the religion despite its nascent status in Europe.³

Bale held that Joseph of Arimathea brought Christianity to England and that the English practiced a pure version of the faith until the Roman pope sent Augustine of Canterbury to force the Roman brand of Christianity upon the English.⁴ Furthermore, Bale viewed the fate of the English Church as representative of that of the true Church as a whole.⁵ The huge popularity of his *Image of Both Churches* in England signified an intense interest among the literate English population in understanding the purpose and direction of history, and even the place of the English within it.⁶ Thus, Bale could build an English sense of identity and emphasize the integral role the English Church was to play in the events of the apocalypse through his interpretation of history.

In addition to maintaining that the Church of England was God’s true Church on Earth, Bale viewed the English state as playing a crucial role in bringing about the End Times. Bale hoped that King Edward VI would hold fast in opposition to the papacy and assert the supremacy of London over Rome.⁷ Bale’s dedication of his *Apology of Johan Bale against a ranke Papyst* to Edward VI expressed his vision for the model of a true king. In his exposition, Bale argued that an ideal king would attack false prophets, indicating that he believed the king had a very active role to play in maintaining the purity of the Church of England.⁸ Furthermore, Bale expressed his fear that Catholic clerics exercised undue control over more secular rulers

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⁵ Zakai, “Reformation, History, and Eschatology in English Protestantism,” 308.
by claiming spiritual authority over them. That is, Roman clerics succeeded in convincing secular rulers that they had authority over their souls and therefore could dictate the policies espoused by kings and princes. Bale believed that the future of the true Church lay squarely in the island of Great Britain in the hands of the English monarch.

Bale's favoritism towards the English Church during the Reformation shows a nuance in his understanding of the nature of Protestant churches during the Reformation—not only were those who rejected the authority of the Roman hierarchy in the right, but, out of all the nascent Protestant confessions, the English Church in particular represented God's chosen people.

*The Pure Foundation*

The first chapter demonstrated Bale’s theology of history as a way to give Protestants legitimacy—he sought to prove that they had deeper roots than the Roman Church that claimed to be directly descended from the Apostles. However, Bale also had another use for interpreting the direction of history. While still condemning the Catholic Church as espousing contrived beliefs that Protestants rejected, Bale also claimed that the English Church clung to a particularly pure form of Christianity. As mentioned above, Bale believed that Joseph of Arimathea brought Christianity to the island of Great Britain, establishing a pure practice of Christianity in England until the arrival of Augustine of Canterbury.

The traditional Catholic narrative of Christianity in Britain holds that Pope Gregory I sent a Benedictine monk by the name of Augustine to Great Britain and Augustine later became the first Archbishop of Canterbury and established Christianity on the island.

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10 Bale, *The Pageant of the Popes*, fol. 35.
Indeed, Bede famously described this story in the eighth century in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. However, the narrative certainly favors the Roman hierarchy, as it contextualizes Augustine as one to bring the true faith to a previously non-believing location. Despite this narrative, Christianity was nonetheless already present in England—the Anglo-Saxon king Æthelbert was already married to a Christian at the time of Augustine’s arrival.\textsuperscript{12} In the *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede described a fierce debate between Augustine, representing the orthodox faith of Rome, and the native British bishops regarding the correct date of Easter. Bede wrote “certain other of their customs were at variance with the universal practice of the Church. But despite protracted discussions, neither the prayers nor advice nor the censures of Augustine could obtain the compliance of the Britons, who stubbornly preferred their own customs to the universal in use among Christian Churches.”\textsuperscript{13} Bede depicted Augustine’s conversion of the English as a way of unifying all of Christendom—his narrative of the event stressed the Roman tradition of Christianity as the one true faith and the British version as a poor imitation. Bede’s underlying assumption in this depiction was that the Roman Church promoted the purest version of Christianity; that no other practice of the religion was valid.

John Bale naturally rejected this view that the papacy brought the true practice of Christianity to England and instead espoused the belief described by Geoffrey of Monmouth that Christianity had been practiced in England prior to the arrival of Augustine. In *The Pageant of the Popes*, Bale included a lengthy description of the reign of Pope Gregory I, and within that description expounded on Augustine of Canterbury’s mission to England. Bale wrote that “Gregorie ... sent Augustine a Romaine Monke, and other his compaignions, to the

Englishemen, Anno. 596 not to preache Christe unto them, whose doctrine the Brytaines had received more sincerely of Ioseph & the churches of Asia, But to thrust upon them the Romain religion, patched up with mans diuices and tradicions.”¹⁴ This interpretation highlights two components of Bale’s theology of history. First, it provides evidence for his belief that the English already practiced Christianity prior to the intervention of Rome. Second, it underscores Bale’s suspicion of the papacy—in this case he does not applaud the Roman Church for attempting to spread the Christian faith, but rather criticizes them for spreading false doctrine. Bale further explained his understanding that the English had always held onto the true faith: “The Britaynes had always the preaching of the truthe, sincere doctrine, and the liuely faith and such seruice as was deliuered to the Apostles by Gods commaundenient”¹⁵ Thus, Bale explains that the British had not only received the true practice of Christianity from Joseph, but that they also actively followed the true faith that was delivered to the early Church and that the Roman Church had corrupted.

Bale also described the early history of Christianity in Britain in his critique of monasticism in England, The Actes of Englysh Votaryes. In describing the history of religious life in Britain, even before the advent of Christianity, Bale wrote that Christianity was first preached on the island during the time of the Apostles. The English Protestant wrote “By whose occasion this realme than called Brytayne was converted unto the Christen beleue for in the yeare from Christes incarnacyon lxiii was Joseph of Arimathe and other dyscyples sent over of the seyd Philip to preache Christ.”¹⁶ Bale’s insistence that the English had always practiced true Christianity even before the arrival of Augustine of Canterbury underscores his greater belief in that the Church of England was, in fact, the true Church.

¹⁴ Bale, Pageant of the Popes, fol. 35.
¹⁵ Bale, Pageant of the Popes, fol. 35.
Bale’s claim that the English retained the true form of Christianity is significant for the fundamental reason that it obviated the need of the Roman papacy to maintain the purity of Christianity in Britain or to even bring the pure practice of Christianity to the British Isles. Bale’s account belief that Joseph of Arimathea brought Christianity to England stands in stark contrast to the narrative of Augustine’s mission to England recounted in Bede’s hugely influential *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Bede himself wrote that the English already knew about Christianity, but that their interpretation of the religion was imperfect and had to be purified with the teachings from Rome. Thus, Bale categorically rejected that notion, claiming instead that the Church spread false doctrine and the English state was best equipped to maintain the faith.

*Roman Intrusions*

Much like his pattern for the history recorded in the *Image of Both Churches*, Bale’s description of English history followed a similar pattern. While the English did cling to a pure form of Christianity, they nonetheless faced heavy persecution after the arrival of the Roman Church. Indeed, Bale understood the papacy as meddling in English affairs and thus asserting the control of the Church over English matters. Following Pope Gregory I’s effort to bring the Roman Church to England, Bale saw in history a series of efforts by medieval popes to assert their supremacy over English life and make the English monarch subservient to the papacy. Bale viewed Pope Urban II, who reigned during the late eleventh century and famously called for the First Crusade, as one pope who tried particularly hard to meddle in English activities. More importantly for Bale, the English Protestant lamented the attempts of Pope Innocent III to assert control over English politics both in the *Pageant of the Popes* and in his play *Kyng Johan*. Naturally, Bale found these unwanted intrusions by the papacy into English affairs to
be antithetical to his belief that the English state was supreme and required no outside intervention from Rome. Despite this belief, Bale understood the medieval period to be one in which the evil papacy was so powerful that the well-meaning English monarchs were simply too weak to protect England from papal influence.

Pope Urban II, elected to the office of pope in 1088, is perhaps best known for the rousing sermon delivered in the year 1095 at Clermont, and eventually resulted in the series of military expeditions to the Holy Land now referred to as the First Crusade. Though the exact contents of Urban’s speech have been lost, his call for an expedition eastward was nonetheless successful and represented a dramatic instance of the power held by popes in the Middle Ages. In the Pageant of the Popes, Bale accused members of the Church of being exempt from the laws in England. While describing the papacy of Pope Urban II, Bale wrote “In the time of this Urbane, William Rufus kinge of England was sore combred with the proude prelate Anselmus archbishop of Canterbury, who when he was commanded to aunswere to his misbehauioir, did auoide it in appearing to the Courte of Rome.”¹⁷ In this passage, Bale lamented the fact that Church clerics could escape the courts of England by appearing in Roman courts, thus undermining the authority of the English king and asserting the authority of the papacy over the English government. In his critique of Urban II, Bale did not limit himself to simply examining the influence of Urban over English affairs. He also commented on Urban’s effort to assert his control over Spain and France. Bale even condemned Urban II’s famous call for the First Crusade and attacked it as simply a ploy by Urban II to consolidate his own power rather than a true effort to bring the Holy Land back under Christian control.¹⁸

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¹⁷ Bale, Pageant of the Popes, fol. 87.  
¹⁸ Bale, Pageant of the Popes, fol. 87.
One of Urban’s successors little over a century later was the dynamic Pope Innocent III. Innocent took on a more universal view of the responsibilities of the papacy and took an aggressive stance on the authority of popes over secular rulers. A clash between Innocent and the English king John exemplified this. Following John’s rejection of Innocent’s favored candidate for the vacant archbishopric of Canterbury, the pope excommunicated the English king, thereby releasing English nobles from their bonds of loyalty to John. John eventually caved to this growing pressure and accepted Innocent’s candidate as archbishop of Canterbury. This particular episode loomed large in Bale’s mind, and for him represented the epitome of the insidious power of the Roman papacy. Bale also attacked Pope Innocent III as another pope who sought to impose his authority over the English people during the reign of King John. Although modern observers today may consider John to be a relatively ineffective English king, Bale instead considered the thirteenth century monarch to have been a perfectly capable ruler who was shackled by a power-hungry pope. In the Pageant of the Popes, Bale wrote that “This mischeuous Innocent did mischeueouslye contriue many cruell tragedyes against king Iohn of Englaonde.” Bale continued to describe a litany of offences committed by Innocent III against the king of England. The first wrongdoing that Bale identified with the pope was that he “even in despite and defiance of the kinge, did thrust (an enemye to the Realme called Steuen Langton a Cardinall) into the bishopricke of Canterbury, and encouraged threescore and four monkes to worke seueral treasons against him.” Bale naturally applauded John’s attempts to resist this imposition of papal authority on England, but described the sheer power of the papacy to force John to submit to its will. In response to John’s attempts to resist the pope’s authority, Innocent III excommunicated John and

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20 Bale, Pageant of the Popes, fol. 106
21 Bale, Pageant of the Popes, fol. 106.
declared him to be an enemy of the Church and placed the Kingdom of England under
interdict for six years. Indeed, as Bale described, this punishment for John was not enough, for
Innocent III went further and absolved all English subjects from the former king’s authority
and instead placed the French king at the head of English government. Finally, this
punishment sufficed, and John “beinge dismayed with these stormes and being otherwise a
noble and valiant Prince ... submitted himself full sore against his hart to ye Popes
obeysaunce.”22 Thus, Bale described not an incapable and ineffective king, but rather a fully
capable monarch who attempted to stand up to the papacy and was forced into submission
through the awesome power of the papal office.

Bale also wrote an entire play entitled King Johan regarding John’s reign in England,
which conveyed much the same message as his description of Innocent III in the Pageant of the
Popes. In addition to simply pointing to the English Church as God’s true Church, Bale also
established the supremacy of the English state and wrote that John worked to submit the
English people to the will of God.23 Indeed, the play itself portrays John as a noble king
striving to protect his kingdom from the insidious forces of the papacy. One exchange
between King John and the character of Sedition is particularly revealing. John asks Sedition
“what doeste thow here / in England?” to which Sedition replies “I hold upp the Pope / as in
other places many / For his ambassador / I am contynwally.”24 To this, John orders Sedition to
“Gett the hence, thow knave / and moste presumptuows wreche, Or as I am trew kyng / thow
shalt an halter stretchel / We wyll thow know yt / owre power ys of God.”25 This short
exchange highlights several crucial points. First, it demonstrates again Bale’s negative attitude

22 Bale, Pageant of the Popes, fol. 106.
23 Andrew B. Chrichton, “Kyng Johan and the Ludus de Antichristo as Moralities of State,” The Sixteenth Century
25 John Bale, King Johan, 35.
towards the papacy—the institution of the evil character Sedition upheld the papacy. Second, this text crucially shows Bale’s belief that the King of England was responsible for protecting the faith.

**English Victory**

Another fundamental part of Bale’s apocalyptic understanding of English history was the role of the English people in purifying the Christian community from the negative influence of the Catholic Church. While Martin Luther is commonly credited with starting the Protestant Reformation with his publication of the 95 Theses, Bale instead opted to attribute the Reformation to a figure closer to home—John Wycliffe. Wycliffe was a fourteenth-century English theologian and academic at Oxford who eventually came under fire for heretical beliefs. In 1377, representatives of the Roman Church summoned him to a council to answer for beliefs critiquing the wealth of the Church, and Pope Gregory XI eventually commanded ecclesiastical authorities in England to order Wycliffe to confess to heresy. Wycliffe espoused many beliefs commonly associated with the Reformation in his critiques of the Church, which also punished him for these beliefs. Eventually, Wycliffe came to criticize the doctrine of transubstantiation, the Catholic belief that the bread and wine of the Eucharist are physically changed into the body and blood of Christ after consecration. Eventually, during the famous Earthquake Synod in London on May 17, 1382, Archbishop of Canterbury William Courtenay and the assembled ecclesiastical leaders condemned a swath of Wycliffe’s views as heretical, including his suspicions of the basis of papal authority. In addition to discussions

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27 Lahey, *John Wyclif*, 23
of the nature of the sacraments and papal authority, Wycliffe also pondered the apocalypse and his place in history. He associated the rising wealth and temporal authority of the Church with the rise of Antichrist and consequently placed himself towards the end of all history. Given his critiques of the Church, Wycliffe presented an easy opportunity for Bale to employ as evidence that the Reformation began in England rather than Germany or elsewhere on the Continent.

Bale explained his belief that Wycliffe represented the start of the purification of Christendom in *The Image of Both Churches*. He interpreted the opening of the sixth seal in Revelation to mark the beginning of the end for the Roman Church and noted that, despite the intense persecution of true Christians during this time, the rule of the Catholic Church was beginning to crumble. Bale wrote that “the Lambe Christ disclosed the sixte seale to manifest the clernessee of this truth, to shewe the estate of his church, anon I beheld a merueylous earthquake arise.” This shows that Bale understood the sixth seal to represent the end of the Catholic Church and he further explained how this end started: “Most liuely was this fulfilled such tyme, as William Courteney the Archbishoppe of Caunterburie with Antichristes sinagoge of sorcerers sate in consistorie against Christes doctrine in John Wycleue.” Thus, Bale not only situated the start of the Protestant Reformation within his overall scheme of apocalyptic history, but also placed the English squarely at the center of this Reformation. Rather than associating it with a foreign figure, Bale instead continued his trend of identifying the English Church with the true Church and thus identified an English figure as the spark to start the Protestant Reformation. In addition to presenting Wycliffe as the first

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Protestant to critique the Church, Bale also believed in the power of the English monarch to maintain the purity of Christianity within Britain. In his play *King Johan*, Bale also drew a parallel between the Hebrew figure of Joshua, who led the Israelites out of Egypt and into Canaan, claiming that “that duke Josue / whych was our late kynge Henrye / Clerely brought us in / to the lande of mylke and honye.”33 In this section, Bale makes it clear that he believed the responsibility of defending Christianity in Britain lay firmly in the hands of the English king, rather than the seat of the papacy in Rome.34

Despite Bale’s triumphant attitude towards Wycliffe, he nonetheless realized the sinister power of the papacy to infiltrate English events and sway the English state into accepting the false doctrine of the Church. In his *Epistle exhortatorye*, Bale lamented the passage of the Six Articles in 1539 and viewed them as a destructive influence on the English Church. The Six Articles asserted the validity of certain Catholic doctrines in the Church of England. Among these was the ban on clerical marriage, which is discussed above as a belief specifically targeted by Bale as invalid. He wrote “you [the Church] subtilly bewitched you the parlament house, whan the vi. blasphemouse artyclcs collected out of the Popes wicked decreees were there enacted and estabylshed with more tyrannie than euer undre the Romishe Pope, Mahomete or anye other tyraunt afore.”35 However, he tempered this attack on the deception of the papacy by praising the work of William Tyndale in combatting this false doctrine by providing a vernacular translation of the Bible to the English. Bale claimed that these books “made the kynges grace more faythful frends in those dayes than you Bishoppes and Prestes were well contented with.”36 In this description, Bale expressed his view that

33 Bale, *King Johan*, 58.
Roman influence served only to undermine the practice of true religion in England and that the English people themselves, as in the case of William Tyndale, could preserve Christianity on their own.

Furthermore, Bale demonstrated his trust in the English monarchy to defend the true Christian faith in the entry of the Pageant of the Popes for Pope Julius III, the pope when Queen Mary attempted to restore Catholicism to England following the brief rule of Edward VI. In his description of Mary’s decision, Bale maintained his faith in the monarchy, but despaired that Mary’s unfamiliarity with Scripture led her to be deceived into allowing the influence of the papacy back into England. Bale wrote that the “noble Queene being otherwise of great wisedome, and godly minde, yet ouermuche deceyued by ignorance in scripture, and putting too great a confidence in the Popes autoritie.”

Bale’s description of this event showcases his nuanced view of the English monarchy—while it had the capacity to act as a supreme defender of the true faith, as in the case of King John, Antichrist could still mislead it and usher in the forces of evil, as was the case with Queen Mary.

Conclusion

In 1563, fellow English Protestant John Foxe published his famous Book of Martyrs, a book similar to John Bale’s Image of Both Churches. In this book, Foxe described the highly influential role played by England in apocalyptic history and inextricably linked English history and the history of Christianity. Bale strongly influenced Foxe himself and Foxe’s description of history owes much to that pioneered by Bale. This shows that the theology of history espoused by Bale was not that of a raving lunatic disregarded by his fellow

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Englishmen, but rather that of a respected figure whom younger Protestants emulated in their own works. Even later, Thomas Brightman built upon the foundation of Bale and Foxe, and offered his opinion that the time of the seventh trumpet was at hand and the end of the world was imminent. In some ways, then, Bale was the forefather of a breed of distinctly English apocalyptic thought, apocalyptic thought that unfailingly afforded England a special place in apocalyptic history and portrayed the Church of England as the purest of all churches.

Thus, Bale established a special place for the English in ecclesiastical history. To do this, he asserted two fundamental truths regarding the history of the Church. First, Bale posited that the true form of Christianity existed in Britain since the time of the Apostles and that this practice of the religion had remained from that time until the time of his writing. However, Bale believed that the advent of Roman Christianity corrupted this pure form of the religion for nearly a thousand years. Indeed, Bale’s history of the papacy, the Pageant of the Popes, is filled with critiques of the papacy’s attempts to spread its influence over the lay rulers of Europe. Two particular critiques of Bale’s are the papacies of Pope Urban II and Pope Innocent III. The English Protestant accused both of them of using their power to undermine the power of the English monarch and assert the supremacy of the Church over the Kingdom of England. Second, Bale placed the English front and center in the history of the Reformation. Eschewing a more traditional narrative of Martin Luther sparking the Protestant Reformation, Bale instead pointed to the English theologian John Wycliffe as the one to start the monumental event of the Protestant Reformation. For him, Wycliffe’s attacks on the Church represented the beginning of the end of a long period of persecution by the Church and thus Wycliffe, an Englishman, was instrumental in purifying the Church from the perceived idolatry of the Roman Church.

Thus, Bale’s interpretation of English history rejects a more universal narrative of true Christians around Europe throwing off the shackles of an oppressive papacy and instead regarded the Reformation as an event started by the English, thereby building an English identity around the role of the English in the Protestant Reformation. Furthermore, by claiming that the English had always possessed the pure practice of Christianity, Bale continued to build a sense of English identity by portraying them as a particularly holy people. In this way, Bale manipulated both English history and the history of Christianity to construct a specifically English identity of a people resistant to the nefarious plots of the papacy and pious adherents to the true brand of Christianity.
Conclusion

John Bale’s belief in the imminence of the apocalypse provides insight into his view of the events surrounding him. The centuries-old order instilled by the Roman Catholic Church was being ripped asunder by the Protestant Reformation, and Bale turned to apocalyptic theory as a way to interpret this shift in the religious landscape. In particular, he used his predictions regarding the End Times as a shield against claims that Protestants practiced a misguided form of Christianity. As the previous chapters have shown, Bale’s understanding of history was inherently focused on the present. That is to say, he believed that a thorough interpretation of history could help him to comprehend the significance of contemporary events and their relationship to the apocalypse. Additionally, he also explained how the apocalyptic imagery in the Book of Revelation proved certain Catholic beliefs to be idolatrous. In short, apocalyptic theory was both an important tool Bale used to defend Protestantism against attacks and also a weapon to attack Catholic beliefs.

Bale’s association of the earthquake imagery in Revelation with the beginning of the Protestant Reformation provides an analogy for the monumental impact of the Reformation on European society. The strong commitment of late medieval English society to the Catholic tradition made for a particularly turbulent religious landscape during the time in which Bale was writing. Events like the Pilgrimage of Grace showcase the conflict between Protestant and Catholic parties in Reformation England and help show why Bale viewed his contemporary events with an apocalyptic significance. For him, debates over Protestant and Catholic were not only quibbles about whether or not priests could marry, but rather they encompassed an all-important battle between good and evil. In addition to the instable world Bale operated in, he was also influenced by earlier Christian thinkers in his own apocalyptic thought. Figures like Joachim of Fiore attempted to predict the end of the world in the thirteenth century, and
Bale himself acknowledged the importance of Joachim’s thought. In essence Bale’s all-encompassing apocalyptic convictions fit neatly within the tempestuous nature of the world around him and the theological foundation in which he was raised.

Through his holistic expression of apocalyptic thought, Bale was able to substantiate his claims that English Protestants possessed complete knowledge of Christian doctrine and that their expression of Christianity was remarkably pure. Granted, at the same time that he was writing, some segments of the English population clung to traditional Catholic beliefs, while others like Bale embraced a more radical form of Protestantism. Bale himself dismissed those retaining Catholic beliefs in England as practicing a Roman Christianity, while those practicing the newer English faith were members of the true Church. To prove this claim, Bale drew two conclusions from ecclesiastical history. First, Bale traced the Protestant faith back to the time of the apostles, thereby suggesting that the reformers expressed Christianity in the same way as the Apostles of the first century, while the Roman Church was an idolatrous offshoot from this faith. While this claim was more universal by applying to reformers throughout Europe, Bale’s second claim of historical analysis was more specific to the English Church. Bale’s understanding of history also held a special place for the English people, viewing them as the guardians of the true Christian faith that was brought to England after Jesus’ death by Joseph of Arimathea. In addition to looking backwards at events which had already occurred, Bale also looked forward to the future, believing that it contained the imminent end of the world and second coming of Christ. For Bale, these events would finally vindicate his claim that Protestants embracing new beliefs were, in fact, practicing Christianity as it was meant to be practiced. Through these perspectives, Bale saw himself as living very close to the end of the timeline, thusly giving his events an inherently apocalyptic significance.
Apocalyptic theory and interpretation of history did not disappear after John Bale. Bale himself proved to be hugely influential for subsequent English apocalyptic thinkers like John Foxe and Thomas Brightman. Foxe himself built upon Bale’s work in building an English identity through historical interpretation in his hugely popular Book of Martyrs.¹ The Book of Martyrs came to be one of the most important works in English Protestantism, regarded by its readers as nearly as important as the Bible itself.² Bale himself contributed to Foxe’s masterpiece, and Bale’s influence can be seen in the book’s description of the English King John, which describes him similarly to Bale’s play King Johan. Additionally, Foxe’s description of clerical celibacy and early English history have roots in Bale’s original description of these issues.³ Thomas Brightman went even further than Bale in predicting the imminence of the End Times and viewed his time as nearer to the end of the world than Bale did. Brightman’s work was grounded in the work of Bale and Foxe, drawing specifically from Foxe’s Book of Martyrs and Bale’s Actes of English Votaryes.⁴ In addition, Brightman also continued the tradition of placing the English people in the midst of apocalyptic affairs, and even identified contemporary individuals of his own time with figures found in Revelation and described how the English people fulfilled the events depicted in Revelation.⁵ However, while Foxe and Brightman did promote their own apocalyptic theology, their foundation drew from Bale’s work and can be traced back to his ideas.

³ King, Foxe’s Book of Martyrs’ and Early Modern Print Culture, 33 – 36.
⁴ Firth, The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain, 1530 – 1645.
Theories regarding the end of the world are not phenomena restricted to premodern and early modern societies. For example, the figure of Antichrist has remained with us since early theories developed in the primitive Church. In particular, there are two examples of this that exemplify this point. First, the famous mathematician and physicist Isaac Newton theorized about the coming of Antichrist. In addition to his work pioneering the development of calculus, he also attempted to precisely calculate when Antichrist would arrive on earth.\(^6\) Additionally, a quick online search for the term “Antichrist” returns an article published online titled “4 Signs of the Antichrist,” which instructs the reader how to identify this apocalyptic figure when he arrives.\(^7\)

Another example of an apocalyptic trope that remains present today is a continued fascination with the ultimate pattern and direction of history. A salient example of this is a book published in 1997 titled The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy, which was hugely popular and became a national bestseller. Similar to Bale’s view of the turbulent nature occurring during his own time, the book opens with the bleak line “America feels like it’s unraveling.”\(^8\) Continuing on, The Fourth Turning paints an idealized picture of the American past but portrays the present as somehow fallen from that pure history. Authors William Strauss and Neil Howe lamented that “Not long ago, America was more than the sum of its parts. Now, it is less.”\(^9\) Furthermore, they not only critiqued current society as a shell of an idyllic past but also predicted a nation-wide crisis around the mid 2000s and that “before the year 2025, America will pass through a great gate in history, commensurate with the American

\(^6\) McGinn, Antichrist, 1.
\(^8\) Strauss and Howe, The Fourth Turning, 1.
\(^9\) Strauss and Howe, The Fourth Turning, 1.
Revolution, Civil War, and twin emergencies of the Great Depression and World War II.”

The crux of Strauss and Howe’s argument is that history is inherently cyclical, and that by understanding the past, one can predict the future. While *The Fourth Turning* is not overtly religious like Bale’s works were, the belief that historical events serve as evidence to predict future events remain a common element between the two.

Given the continued popularity of works claiming to predict the future by interpreting the past, Bale’s apocalyptic interpretation of the events of his own time seems somewhat less farfetched. He operated in a succession of apocalyptic thinkers and supports the claim that studying prophecy and apocalyptic claims is one way to view how individuals understood the events of their day. For Strauss and Howe, the discontent they believed to exist in American society in the 1990s implied a cataclysmic event in the following decade, which would eventually result in a rebirth of society. For Bale, the events of his day signaled the imminent approach of the End Times, and consequently both the justification that he supported the true Church as well as an increased sense of urgency to resist persecution by Catholic forces and to even try to rally more people to his cause. Despite the vast gap in time between these two interpretations of history, they nonetheless share the common faith that understanding history serves as a prediction of future events.

Thus, while John Bale was only a single person predicting the events of the apocalypse in a long line of others, others expounded on his belief that the coming of the apocalypse represented the ultimate triumph of Protestant forces over Catholics. Bale believed the ultimate ending of the world would vindicate the reformers of Christianity and prove that their stripped-down version of the religion was the pure form of Christianity and that beliefs

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10 Strauss and Howe, *The Fourth Turning*, 6

peculiar to the Catholic Church were idolatrous—he did indeed believe that the Final
Judgement would acquit the Protestant reformers. His apocalyptic thought was a crucial part
of Bale’s effort to contextualize the tumultuous events of the English Reformation within a
larger scheme of history. Bale’s view of the apocalypse was not just as a future event that
would eventually prove his views correct, nor was it simply a way to understand his place in
history. It was a framework through which he saw and understood the world, a framework for
motivating his actions, interpreting contemporary events, and conclusively proving that
English Protestants practiced the purest form of Christianity.
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