*Sex Please, We're British: Exempla, Polemic, and History in John Bale's* Actes

of the Englysh Votaryes

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## Introduction

In 1551, the English reformer John Bale published the second edition of his history of English monasticism. To the first edition, published in 1546 (one year before Edward VI's accession to the English throne), Bale added a preface dedicated to the young Protestant king. We can only guess as to whether or not Edward read the *The first two partes of the Actes, or vnchast examples of the Englysh votaryes* but the text that would have confronted him demonstrated a profoundly bizarre and illuminating example of sixteenth-century historiography. Bale's *Votaryes* chronicles in vivid detail the lecherous actions of British monks throughout history. Bale relates countless exempla of monastic perversion and Catholicism's corrosive effect the British faith. The result is a text rich in anecdotes that point to the theological corruption of Roman Catholicism and to the historical legitimacy of the Protestant faith.

Bale structures his lewd history so as to reveal his argument. The highly sexualized nature of the historical details Bale provided sought to emphasize how the presence of unmarried and licentious monks had perverted, quite literally, the religious faith in England. The theme of sexual impropriety drives Bale's narrative and also his larger goal. As a protestant writer, Bale wanted to uncover a decidedly reformed past, a historical vision of Britain, in other words, which demonstrated the primacy of a non-Catholic faith in Britain and showed how the arrival of Roman Catholic theology, in the physical presence of mendicant orders, had corrupted this pristine faith. On a visceral level, Bale's sexual anecdotes permeate the *Votaryes* so as to prompt the reader to grasp the corruption of Catholicism in England. They also drive Bale's broader goal—the construction of a British Protestant history based on the premise of Catholic misconduct in English history. Bale

traces an English history that makes use of particular points of sixteenth-century English Protestantism. Bale makes use of the promiscuity of English monastics to stress the apocalyptic structure of history, monarchical authority, a British national consciousness, and clerical marriage and their importance to an English faith.

This thesis considers the specific past that Bale constructs in the first part of the *Votaryes*. The second edition of the text, containing the dedication, deals explicitly with the function of secular authority because Edward VI had not ascended to the throne in 1546, when Bale printed the first edition, and Bale perceived new opportunities to discuss the religious and political influence of an English king. The later edition presents a better opportunity to consider more completely Bale's conception of the Protestant past amid the context of the English Reformation.

Henry VIII's reformation of the church and the rhetorical battles that ensued profoundly altered the discursive practices of the early-modern or Renaissance period in England. Writers, both Catholic and Protestant, sought to respond to the religious changes and they did so using literary tactics particular to the reformation context. John Bale, who grew up as a Catholic friar and then converted to the reformed cause, wrote about the events of his time with a unique mindset. Influenced both by medieval Catholicism and by the growing perception of an English national consciousness, Bale understood and wrote about the events and conflicts of the English Reformation by traversing through both of these mentalities.[1]

Sixteenth-century Europeans and Britons in particular often chose to respond to the conflicts of their time through historical writing. These historians, including Bale, appropriated the examples of the past in order to illuminate the present. Bale wrote history

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[1] Shrank, "John Bale and reconfiguring the 'medieval,'" in *Reading the Medieval*, 179.

in order to uncover the vestiges of Protestantism in ancient Britain and to link them to the

sixteenth-century. He also attempted to find, in British history, proof of the theological

corruption of the Roman faith. English historians worried over the status of their fledgling

church, much like continental Protestants in Germany and elsewhere, and in order to bolster

its legitimacy they turned to history in order to find a lineage for their evangelical, or gospel-

based, faith in the distant past.[2] John Bale, as Cathy Shrank argues, articulated a specific

"rhetoric of chronological difference," with which he saw a distinction between the

enlightened nature of his own time and the dark corruption of the past. Bale also, however,

looked for the vestiges of true Christianity in the ancient past before the dominance of

Roman Catholicism caused the onset of darkness.[3]

Tudor historians used the past to instruct their readers about the importance of the

past for the present. Historical examples spoke to readers directly about the present and

suggested specific solutions to present problems. In fact, what mattered to sixteenth-century

histories was not the narrative but the lucidity of the message.[4] Historians used examples

from the past to create such a lesson. John Bale exemplifies this tendency as his works of

history and textual antiquarianism (such as the *Illustrium maioris Britanniae scriptorum*) collected

and organized historical examples in a specific structure.[5]

Although the explicitly didactic nature of Tudor historiography distances itself from

what we call modern historical writing, scholars have nonetheless looked at the Tudor period

extensively. Because Tudor historians wrote prolifically about the past and used historical

examples in innovative ways, modern scholars have investigated these writers in order to

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[2] Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought,* 79. He argues that, in its justification, the English Reformation was the most historically based reformation.

[3] Shrank, "John Bale and reconfiguring the 'medieval,'" in *Reading the Medieval*, 179.

[4] Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought,* ix, 7.

[5] Fairfield, *John Bale*, 29.

probe their histories for the beginnings of modern historiography. We understand the English Reformation and the ensuing literary works to have occurred at the time when English historians began scrupulously to examine evidence, to deal with the authenticity of sources, and to conceive of history as a special discipline. Often, modern historians point to a break with the medieval practices of chronicle writing and suggest instead a more modern insight into the practices of historiography.[6]

Many scholars have also suggested that Bale's own life and work represent a conflict between the later medieval period and the early modern period[7]. They argue that his medieval worldview juxtaposes itself against the more modern writings and context of the religious change in England. Such absolute divisions point to a progressive and teleological understanding of the past, with which historians have sought to understood the work of scholars such as Bale as occupying a certain space in prearranged historical schemata. Although it does not label him a medieval holdover, Bale's Carmelite worldview does indicate that Bale pursued his earlier writings with a different historical mentality than he later did as a reformer. Of course, there are myriad connections between these two mentalities—Bale as Carmelite and Bale as evangelical polemic. Bale's writings as a reformed man contain many of the same interests, such as in the chronicles and hagiographical stories that he pursued and developed as a Catholic friar. Part of the goal of this thesis is to explore those connections and the changes in them and allow them to create Bale's own unique mentality, which influenced his specific historical practice.

I aim, in my thesis, to address John Bale's practice of history in his *The first two partes of the Votaryes, or vnchast examples of the Englysh votaryes*. I argue that in his *Votaryes* Bale

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[6] See for example: Ferguson, *Clio Unbound,* x; Levy*, Tudor Historical Thought,* 8; Levine, *Humanism and History,* 9.

[7] See for example: McCusker, *John Bale: Dramatist and Antiquary*, 1.

chronicles examples of sexual immorality in order to illustrate the historical presence of decadent Roman Catholicism. By tracing and analyzing Bale's sexual anecdotes and by contemplating how Bale arranged these stories in particular ways, we can understand better how Bale used these examples to fashion a specific narrative, one which argues for a Protestant and British history. Like medieval chronicles, Bale's *Votaryes* forms only a tentative narrative and concerns itself far more with the lesson imparted than with the arrangement of the examples. In chronicle texts, medieval authors would provide a series of historical examples in some order that attempted to impart a lesson to the reader. By scrutinizing this text and by connecting it to Bale's sixteenth-century world, I elucidate the specific ancient past that for Bale illustrated the nature of the crisis of the English faith.

What is intriguing and complicating about this text is not the existence of evidence for a teleological historiographic scavenger hunt but the opportunity to explore John Bale's specific historical and polemical consciousness—how he perceived of and wrote about the past and the religious controversies of the sixteenth-century. To explore what went into the *Votaryes* and what questions are implied in its construction we must illustrate the nature of the *Votaryes'* historical framework—the means by which Bale sought to convince his readers of a Protestant history of Britain. In order to create a reformed vision of the past, Bale did not just chronicle the lewd misdeeds of monks but he used those examples to point to identifiable traits of the reformed faith. Bale chose to emphasize examples from his texts that dealt with themes to which Bale' reformed readership—for Bale did not seek to convert readers but to strengthen those whose faith was already pure—could relate. In exploring Bale's historical vision, I follow Bale's thread of sexual impropriety and consider how it connects to Bale's arguments about reformed theology.

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The *Votaryes* presents a fairly straightforward structure. In the dedication to Edward VI and in the introduction, Bale introduces his subject: the corruption of apostolic Christianity in Britain by Roman Catholic monks who arrived throughout the island's early history. In the first part of the four intended sections Bale chronicles numerous examples drawn from Catholic sources, which he uses to demonstrate the presence of a pure faith in Britain and the perversion of this faith at the hands of mendicants.

Bale wrote the *Votaryes* as a history structured and ordered by the apocalyptic message of the Book of Revelation. Bale's work is subordinate to a clear schema and the key to unlock that schema is Revelation.[8] Bale chronicled the evil acts of English monastics as fulfilling the steps laid out in Revelation for the Second Coming, which Bale associated with the rise of Protestantism as the true Christianity. Bale points often to the satanic purpose of the corruptive deeds of Roman missionaries to ancient Britain so that he can argue by example for the perseverance of the apostolic faith. In the first section, I describe briefly the apocalyptic thinking that influenced Bale's writing and then follow carefully how Bale's historical examples in the *Votaryes* follow this schema and how they suggest that English monks carried out the works of the Antichrist.

In my second section I look at how Bale's history addresses the nature of monarchical authority and its potential uses for religious change. English reformers, because Henry VIII began their reformation, debated how a monarch might improve religion. Many reformers looked to the Tudor monarchs to initiate religious reforms. Some, including Bale, expected Henry VIII to radicalize the Reformation farther than he did and there was conflict when Henry remained staunchly traditional in several key aspects of dogma.[9] Because they perceived Edward VI as a staunch Protestant even before he rose to the throne, evangelical

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[8] Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought*, 89.
[9] See especially: *Walker,* "The Exile literature" in *The Education*, 112-13.

writers such as Bale sought every opportunity to impress upon the monarch the need for further reform.[10] For Bale and for many others, a king independent from Rome represented the best possible source of religious reform. Bale therefore sought to demonstrate a historical precedent that would show how the early kings of Britain made religious and political decisions independent of Rome.

The third section will address how the *Votaryes* makes use of the national consciousness that began to appear in Tudor writing during Bale's lifetime. Aspects of a shared national past do occupy a prominent place in Tudor writings and Bale's *Votaryes* illustrates specifically how such themes could be traced through history in order to demonstrate a Britain that was independent from Roman control. Importantly, Bale sought to speak of a British, not an English, past. Bale believed that the greatness of the ancient faith stemmed from the single British ruler. It was with the arrival of Roman Catholicism that the British dominion split, and the corruption of the faith began to take place.

The final construction of Protestantism, I deal with, which figures prominently throughout the *Votaryes* and closely links itself to sexual immorality, is that of clerical marriage. Reformed theologians all over Europe split with Rome on the issue of this sacrament; Luther himself took a nun as his wife. Bale, then, sought to present this crucial feature of his theology, although not of King Henry's, in the British past and to illustrate the unforgivable Catholic resistance to it.

In the *Votaryes*, John Bale intended to fashion his own specific Protestant history—indeed his own British past. In doing so, he arranged historical examples in order to emphasize certain specific aspects of reformed theology so as to prove the continuity of evangelical Christianity from ancient Britain to the sixteenth-century. My path in exploring

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[10] Ibid., 112.

how Bale accomplished this goal will be first to outline briefly Bale's life. Bale's interesting career can tell us much about the conceptions with which he approached his historical projects. Next, I examine the *Votaryes* closely and consider the motifs specific to Bale's reformed theology that function so critically in the *Votaryes*. In closing this thesis, I may hope to point to some broader trends and aspects of sixteenth-century historiography.

**Biographical Sketch**

John Bale's early life as a Carmelite friar gives little impression that Bale would become a Protestant polemicist famous for brandishing his bilious pen against Catholic supporters. The details of his life do, however, bring to light influences—Bale's interest in textual antiquarianism and saints' legends among others—visible in his *Votaryes*. Bale was born in the town of Covehithe, Suffolk in 1495. At age eleven, in order that he might escape an agricultural life, Bale's parents sent their oldest child to the local Carmelite convent in Norwich, where Bale received schooling, primarily in the rudiments of Latin. Although the Carmelite order had long existed in England, it was neither the wealthiest nor the most powerful. It did, however, offer Bale his one chance at advancement by his own merit and connections—through the hierarchies of the English church.[11]

After receiving an education at the convent in Norwich, Bale went to Cambridge to study for his doctorate in theology. Many future reformers including Erasmus, Thomas Cramner, and William Tyndale attended Cambridge at this time. Although Bale admitted to knowing at least Cramner, he left no record to suggest that the ideas of Lutheranism or Humanism moving through Cambridge influenced his theology and indeed he looked with disgust on the few Lutheran works he read.[12] While pursuing his doctorate, in the midst of studying theology and scholasticism, Bale also had duties to fulfill as a Carmelite friar. He often traveled to different houses of the order and found the time to visit their libraries. Bale occupied much of his time reading and taking notes on manuscripts in the Carmelite collections, preserving their hagiographies as well as stories about the Carmelites' history.

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[11] Fairfield, *John Bale: Mythmaker*, 1-49 provides the information for much of this biographical sketch.
[12] Fairfield, *John Bale: Mythmaker,* 13-14; Harris, *John Bale: a study,* 16-17 argues that Bale, by his proximity to these reforming men, must have come into contact with some of them and hence suggests that Bale would have absorbed some reformed thought while at Cambridge.

Bale often traveled to the continent—particularly to the universities at Toulouse and Louvain—in order to find monastic libraries to read and record.[13]

With the notes and stories he recorded, Bale fashioned his own chronicle, the *Chronica seu fasciculus temporum ordinis Carmelitarum*. Bale used the collection of literary artifacts he gathered in order to piece together a history of the Carmelite order beginning with the founding by Elijah and carrying on up to the fifteenth-century. Bale did not privilege the more factual sources of the fifteenth-century over the popular legends of the early Carmelite past—both suited him in creating his Carmelite narrative. Similarly, in the *Votaryes*, Bale would use both canonical texts as well as more informal records to trace the actions of English monastics. The *Chronica* belongs firmly in the genre of medieval chronicles, which typically relied on a variety of sources to create a collection of didactic exempla. Bale's text emphasized saints' miracles and argued historically for the glory of the Carmelite order. Although the *Chronica* suggests Bale's place in a medieval reference frame, it also points to many aspects of the friar's thought that remained crucial aspects of Bale's later historical writing. His habit of collecting and annotating manuscript sources, common among monks of the period, assisted Bale in writing the history of the Carmelite order and it also laid the foundations for the historical method he would later employ. The Protestant history constructed in the *Votaryes*, and other works, relied similarly on the collation of various English texts. Bale later repudiated much of faith of his years as a Carmelite friar, but the relationship with texts that he developed as a monastic influenced his practice of history in the *Votaryes*.[14]

After receiving his doctorate in 1531, Bale lived and worked in Carmelite convents at Maldon, Ipswich and Doncaster. At some time in the 1530s, Bale converted to the reformed

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[13] Fairfield, *John Bale: Mythmkaer,* 8-9; Harris, *John Bale: a minor study*, 18-19.
[14] Fairfield, *John Bale: Mythmaker* 16.

faith. In his own autobiographical sketches he named Thomas Wentworth, who was his

patron for a time, as the person who introduced him to many reformed viewpoints.

Wentworth was a patron of young intellectuals and, as a Protestant nobleman, he had much

opportunity to introduce his young clients to the reformed faith.[15] Perhaps Henry VIII's

edicts establishing the royal supremacy caused Bale to ponder his status as a mendicant when

the authority of Rome no longer officially held sway in England.[16] The increased difficulty

Bale found in being a Carmelite combined with the pressures and suggestions of Wentworth

may have combined to influence his conversion.

Whatever the specific cause, Bale was preaching radical sermons supporting the royal

supremacy in 1534 in Doncaster. He sparked controversy with his attacks from the pulpit

against conservative preacher Thomas Kirkby. Archbishop Lee investigated the controversy

but there is no record of the result.[17] After preaching extensively in favor of the reformed

faith, Bale finally left the Carmelite order in Doncaster in 1536 and travled south to the royal

court at Greenwhich, hoping for patronage. It was here that he composed a more thorough

history of the Carmelite order, the *Anglorum Heliades*.[18] After moving to a preaching post in

Suffolk, Bale was arrested in early 1537 as a radical preacher in the aftermath of the

Pilgrimage of Grace.[19] He did not spend long in prison, however, before John Leland,

another antiquary and respected at court, put in a good word for Bale to Cromwell and Bale

was released. Cromwell's protection of Bale required that Bale function as a playwright and

propagandist for the new faith. Bale wrote plays in order to support the royal supremacy and

the religious break from Rome. In his play *King John***,** Bale positioned John I as a proto-

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[15] Ibid., 33-34 ; Harris, *John Bale: a minor study,* 22.
[16] Fairfield, *John Bale: Mythmaker,* 35-36.
[17] Ibid., 36-37.
[18] Ibid., 40.
[19] Ibid., 42.

Protestant who had rebelled against the tyranny of the Roman church. Bale's search for Protestant heroes in the distant British past surfaced in his dramatic writings before Bale explicitly treated the subject in his *Votaryes*.

Cromwell fell from power and was executed in July of 1540. Bale continued to support his former patron, composing a tract against Thomas Smith, one of Cromwell's leading detractors.[20] Bale feared that his defense of Cromwell and radical Protestantism as well as his marriage would make it difficult to remain safely in England and he fled with his family to Germany in 1540.[21] Bale continued to publish while abroad, living in Germany and Switzerland at various times and becoming better acquainted with continental Lutheranism. His association with continental reformers likely contributed to his more radical theology; many English reformers viewed Lutheranism with profound skepticism. Bale sensed, with the death of Henry VIII and the rise of Somerset to power, that England might become more fully Protestant. Bale returned to England in 1547, near the time of the *Votaryes*' first publication.[22]

For the first part of Edward's reign, Bale lived and preached in England while scouring the libraries of the country in search of manuscripts and books. In 1552, he was appointed, against his will, as the Bishop of Ossory, in hostile Ireland. He preached vigorously but when Mary Tudor rose to the thrown in 1553, Bale tried in vain to stop the ceremonies and processions of the Catholic faith. Barely escaping hostile Catholics surrounding his house, Bale boarded a shape to Scotland. Unfortunately, pirates captured the

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[20] Harris, *John Bale: a minor study*, 29.
[21] Ibid., 31.
[22] Ibid., 37.

ex-bishop, and after the loss of his library of books, Bale went at last into exile for a second time until he returned, shortly before his death, upon the coronation of Elizabeth.[23]

The contours of Bale's life reveal first that from his early writings he collected and assembled texts in an effort to give the past a specific shape. Bale continued the effort his entire life, though the purpose changed when he converted to the reformed faith. He used texts in order to speak didactically about the present. As a Carmelite, Bale composed the *Chronica* to argue for the heritage of his order and later, as a Protestant, he similarly crafted the *Votaryes* to reveal the Protestant past in Britain and stress its importance for the present. Second, Bale's Protestant life shows a complicated relationship with authority. Often the former friar found himself on the wrong side of Henry VIII when it came to doctrinal issues. It should come as little surprise, then, that Bale carefully articulates in the *Votaryes* how exactly the king should manage English religion. In short, the broad outlines of Bale's biography tell us that much about the specific issues that informed upon his Protestant writings.

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[23] Ibid., 43-49.

## Apocalyptic Schemata Explored

When John Bale wrote the *Votaryes*, he understood the history of the Church and of ancient Britain according to a specific apocalyptic pattern. Protestants across Europe came to perceive a link between history and prophecy and to read and interpret Revelation in ways that spoke meaningfully about the present. Reformed scholars, including Luther himself, looked to Revelation and the apocalyptic tradition for eschatological visions that accorded to historical events. Protestants succeeded in linking the signs of the apocalypse in Revelation to specific historical moments that would demonstrate the legitimacy of Protestantism and associate the Roman Church with the Antichrist and his work.[24] The association of the Papacy with the Antichrist largely defined Protestant readings of the apocalypse and allowed reformers to connect the revelatory seals to the historical actions of the Roman Church and its pontifical head. When it was first written, Revelation spoke to a generation of Christians who believed the end of the world was imminent and sought therefore to find real-life representations of the events and personages depicted in the sacred book. Gradually, most religious scholars took a more allegorical stance on Revelation, particularly as it became clear that Christ was not returning instantly.[25] Writers such as Augustine removed history from Revelation—arguing that the end of the world would take place beyond time.[26] Protestant theologians, however, returned to a literal interpretation of the Revelation and used it to ascribe apocalyptic importance to the events of the Reformation.[27]

As a model for history, Revelation was particularly useful to Bale because it allowed him to examine the consider the historical progression of the false Church, the Roman

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[24] Zakai, "Reformation, History, and Eschatology," *History and Theory* (1987): 301-304.

[25] Fairfield, *John Bale: Mythmaker,* 61-63.

[26] Zakai, "Reformation, History, and Eschatology," 305-06.

[27] Ibid., 305.

Papacy, and of the true Church, the Protestant Church in Britain. Bale laid out his

apocalyptic pattern in *The Image of bothe Churches*—an exegesis of Revelation in which he

clearly delineated the church of the Antichrist and its believers, Roman Catholics, from the

true and apostolic church, which had come to be the British faith. Bale examined the

portentous omens of the book of Revelation and took them to point to the presence and

actions of wicked men in history.[28] Clearly, as he suggests in the *Votaryes*, the agents of the

Antichrist had operated since the beginning of time. Indeed, for Bale, sixteenth-century

conflict between Rome and England represented just one battle in the ongoing struggle

between the true church and the false one.[29]

Part of Bale's goal in the *Votaryes* was to illuminate the ongoing conflict between the

Antichrist and the true church in Britain. In order to describe the progression of history in

Britain, Bale relied on the apocalyptic material of Revelation. Bale conceived of the past as a

time when real personages and events embodied the abstractions from apocalyptic scripture.

He divided history into seven ages based on the seven seals of Revelation. He believed, in

contrast to many reformers who saw the Reformation as the end of the world, that the

seventh seal had not yet been opened. Bale did not concern himself overtly with the future

but rather with how the past illustrated the apocalyptic tradition.[30] Specific historical events,

outlined in the *Image*, connected to the beginning of each of these seven ages. The *Votaryes*

demonstrates how Bale traced the historical progression of Revelation's themes by

associating them with various concrete figures in English history.[31] In *The Image*, Bale

explicitly outlined the progression of church history as a fulfillment of divine prophecy.

Historicizing Revelation allowed Bale to trace the conflict of true Christianity and the

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[28] Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse*, 60-61.
[29] Ibid., 61.
[30] Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition*, 42.
[31] Ibid., 70.

Antichrist through history and to include, for the benefit of English Protestants, figures such as John Wyclif as having represented the true faith in the eternal battle of the two churches.[32]

The *Votaryes* presents a specific British example of how Revelation could influence understandings of the present. The *Image* fits snugly among the standard Protestant works on the apocalypse whereas the *Votaryes*' focus on England considers how Revelation could provide an order for English secular history. Bale chronicles the Roman corruption of faith in Britain as part of the Antichrist's work on earth and specifically relates how the improper sexual activity of Roman monks and prelates in Britain advanced the mission of the Antichrist as well as fulfilled the markers of Revelation, destining the coming of the true faith. Bale stresses the importance of sexual misconduct and the lack of celibacy among Catholic monks throughout the *Votaryes*. The issue allows Bale to point to the theological corruption of Catholicism as well as to highlight the importance of clerical marriage, an issue upon which Protestants did not all agree, to Bale. His focus on sexually illicit monks precisely illustrated how the Antichrist took hold in England. Bale linked strongly sex and the Antichrist for two reasons. First, Bale and many others argued that the Church failed to recognize marriage's divine status and that it had even failed to enforce the demands of celibacy that it had made. Reformers used the Church's failings to stress the theological corruption of Catholicism. Second, Revelation and apocalyptic literature often depicted the Antichrist as the Whore of Babylon and so Bale could emphasize the lasciviousness of English monks, the Antichrists agents.[33] Bale's disclosure of monastic immorality advances his argument that by acting immorally and contrary to the gospel, both by not being married

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[32] Ibid., 71.
[33] Parish, "'Beastly is their living and their doctrine,'" in *Protestant History and Identity*, 139.

and by having sex outside of marriage, the monks' behavior contributed to the corruptive

influence of the Catholic faith.

Bale makes explicit the apocalyptic structure of the *Votaryes* in the dedicatory preface

of the work. Discussing his aim in the chronicle, he writes:

> How the great aduersary of God Antichrist hath sens Christes ascensyo[n] wrought
> in hys wycked course, to depraue these ij. mynystracyons of God, and to cause them
> to serue his moste blasphemouse and fylthie affectes, the fyrste. ij. partes of my
> Englyshe votaryes here presente, dothe plenteously shewe.[34]

Here, Bale outlines his aim in the *Votaryes*: to show how the deeds of the Antichrist, the

Catholic Church through its monks, and his "fylthie" deeds corrupted the two divine offices

of priest and king. Bale indicates the importance that apocalyptic history has in his text; he

points to the "wicked course," of the Antichrist in England and so suggests the importance

that the apocalyptic schemata will have in ordering his chronicle of English monks.

Connecting the work of Catholicism in Britain to the Antichrist and hence to the fulfillment

of an apocalyptic schema, Bale highlights for his contemporary readers in a vivid manner

how the actions of the papacy in Britain continually perverted the ancient religion. By

understanding the historical progression of English Catholicism as the fulfillment of

apocalyptic steps, Bale defines the Roman mission in England as antithetical to the true

church and suggests that the historical deeds of the Roman Church in England functioned

only to suppress the true British faith.

Throughout the *Votaryes*, Bale chronicles examples of incidents that for him

represent the outline of history presented in Revelation. For example, he writes that: "For by

that time they [Roman Catholics in Britain] had crepte into the seate of the Serpent, Apoca.

13. and obtayned full autoryte to dyspense wyth all pactes, professions, promyses, vowes,

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[34] Bale, *Votaryes*, n.p.

athes, oblygacyons, and sealynges to the Beastes holy seruyce. Marke alwayes the tymes."[35] This quotation is just one example of the numerous instances in the text where Bale draws attention to the evil nature of the monks' work. In this particular incident, Bale highlights how the religious establishment in England gained the authority to deal with the secular authority as they saw fit and increase the false church's power, which Bale sees as being for "the Beastes holy seruyce." Bale constantly tries to connect the actions of monastics in England to an apocalyptic progression. Here he explicitly tells the reader of the connection to apocalyptic scripture (Apoc. 13) and also urges them to "[m]arke alwayes the tymes"—thereby suggesting to his Protestant readership that the history of England had millenarian meaning—and that the depravity of English monks clearly illustrated this meaning.

The arrival of Augustine of Canterbury in Britain represents a particularly offensive episode for Bale of the arrival of Roman rule in the physical embodiment of Augustine and his fellow monks, sent from by the Papacy to make sure of the orthodoxy of the British people. Bale highlights Augustine's role in the Antichrist's plan: "The labour of Augustyne with his monkes, from the forsayd yeare of our Lorde DC. was to prepare Antichrist a seate here in Englande, agaynst the full tyme or his perfyght age, of 666."[36] Bale presents Augustine's role not as the saintly conversion of Britain to Christianity but as the preparation for the Antichrist's complete domination in England. Bale's intent is not only to evoke the past horror of what monks sent from Rome had imposed upon the British faith but to suggest that the English king should not trust advisors sent from Rome and that the purpose of such Catholic schemes was only further evil.

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[35] Bale, *Votaryes,* 23r.
[36] Bale, *Votaryes,* 25v-26r.

Bale continues to describe the work of the Antichrist, particular as the age of the Antichrist approaches the year 666, an apocalyptically significant number. At this point, Bale writes of Boniface as Satan's "great stewarde:"

> IN the yeare of our lord (as I sayd afore). DC. &. vij. Antichrist fast approchyng to the fulnesse of hys age, grewe into a vniuersall fatherhode … Then obteyned Bonifacius the third of that name, of the sayd Phocas for money, in the middes of all scysme, stryfe, myschefe, & murther, to be Sathans great stewarde here, and the deuils leftenaunt. For in his power it was not to make hym Christes vicar, nor yet sait Peters successour. Thus gaue the Dragon, then his autorite & power to the beast with. vij. heades, that arose out of the sea, or from the supersticiouse wauerynge multytude, Apoca. xiij.[37]

In this quotation Bale directly links the Papacy to the Antichrist and to an apocalyptic model of history. When the Antichrist matures, Bonficace secures his authority in England. Bale's examples serve to illustrate that the Antichrist and the congregation of the false church grows older and stronger as the Roman church in Britain increases its hold on the native people. Bale presents Boniface, the chosen representative of the Papacy, as "Sathans great stewarde here." Bale carefully emphasizes that Boniface is not of the church of Christ or Peter, but his appointment is rather accompanied by the apocalyptic beast, rising out of the sea. In other words, Bale stresses that the actions of the Roman Church in England have advanced the mission of the Antichrist and the bringing about of the foretold apocalypse.

Bale structured the chronology of the *Votartyes* around an apocalyptic understanding of history. He read apocalyptic texts and interpreted them so that they provided a pattern of ecclesiastical history, which Bale could then apply to the British past. His constant references to providential times and to omens do more, however, than simply provide an order for the history he constructs in the *Votaryes*. The looming presence of Revelation and of the Antichrist throughout Bale's past advances Bale's denigration of the Catholic faith. He links the movements of the Antichrist's forces to the doings of the Roman Church. Protestants

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[37] Bale, *Votaryes,* 28r.

throughout the sixteenth-century understood that visions of the end times could speak emphatically about the present. Bale linked Roman Catholicism and its history to the portents of the apocalypse. Because the Roman faith then carried this eschatological association, Bale's history argues that the pristine British faith held the earliest traces of Protestantism. The corruption of this proto-reformed faith caused the fulfillment of key apocalyptic moments in history. By connecting the Roman faith to readings of Revelation, Bale further pointed to the theological failings of the Catholic Church and to the legitimate beginnings of sixteenth-century Protestantism in the British past.

## Monarchs as Holy Rulers

Bale's *Votaryes* foregrounds the role of the monarchical authority in England's past and present. Bale links the corruptive influence of the clergy in the *Votaryes* to the growing power of the Antichrist. Bale, like other Protestant writers, identified the Roman church and the Papacy with the Antichrist, while identifying the king with Christ.[38] The battle then, between the English king sand the Papacy, formed part of a struggle between the true and false churches and hence the role of the secular monarch assumes a significant importance in the *Votaryes*. Bale considers examples of the interactions between king and Church throughout British history. He focuses on how the power of the Roman faith insidiously corrupted the guiding authority of the king. These examples, then, argue that the corruption of the Roman church infected the ancient British state. With these historical anecdotes, Bale warns his dedicatee, Edward VI, about the danger of Roman influence in sixteenth-century England and the need to extirpate that influence. In the dedication, Bale relates his history of ancient Britain to the sixteenth-century—stating his hope that Edward will use it to learn of Catholic heresies and then drive them out of England.[39]

Not all English reformers agreed about how to involve the monarch in religious change. As Bale created his particular vision of the past, sixteenth-century Protestant concerns about the king's authority played out in Bale's text. Reformers debated whether to support Protestant theology or a king who could better implement that theology, even though these two sides were often in conflict. The *Votaryes*, then, proposed Bale's own response to the contemporary debates about the nature and role of kingly authority in the

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[38] Ryrie, *The Gospel and Henry VII*, 81-82.
[39] Bale, *Votaryes*, n.p.

English reformation. I argue that, by means of his history, Bale constructed a particular vision of how the monarch should rule. The exempla of the *Votaryes,* in other words, carefully illustrate how an English king should rule: namely that he should stand up against Roman oppression and make religious decisions for his nation.

Henry VIII's decision to break away from Rome and form the Church of England had the support of religious reformers. English evangelicals snatched up the opportunity to participate in the new Church of England but, at the same time, they were uncertain of how much the king's political maneuver would lead to genuine religious change. Many reformed writers, realizing that the fate of their nascent reformation was in Henry's hands, supported the monarch in their polemical writings and considered him their best hope for preserving the reformed faith.[40] Other Protestants, however, worried about the reforms of a king who appeared staunchly traditional in many aspects of faith and they feared that the monarchy would implement a Catholic settlement with Rome.[41] Early English evangelicals struggled amongst themselves about how best to deal with the monarchy now heading the English church. Literature by Bale, among others, reflected the discordant views among Protestants about how to deal with the stubborn English kings.

Bale's views on monarchy appear to vary throughout the reformer's life. Bale went to prison in 1537 because of his radical views, which he expressed in opposition to Henry's middle ground. After Cromwell released Bale from prison, however, the former friar wrote plays supporting the regime and the royal supremacy. Bale also supported the monarchy and wrote persuasively about the importance of royal power[42] Certainly, Edward's accession provided an opportunity for Bale to argue for how the king ought to continue and to further

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[40] Walker, "The Exile Literature of the early Reformation," in *The education of a Christian*, 112.
[41] Ibid., 112-13.
[42] Ibid.; see also Hadfield, *Literature, Poltiics, and National Identity*, 51-52.

the reformation. The new king had received a Protestant education and there was hope that he would prove a strong ally for the reformers. In the *Votaryes*, Bale argues that the monarch should guide the country on the correct religious path, although the historical actions of the clergy often prevented this ideal. When Edward VI, educated by reformed tutors and poised to implement widespread change throughout the land, ascended the throne in 1547, Bale returned to England from exile. Bale wrote the *Votaryes* in 1546 before his return but he republished it four years later with a dedication to Edward. The explicit dedication and instruction for Edward combined with the didactic exempla of past British monarchs reveal Bale's argument for monarchical leadership of the English church.

In the dedicatory preface of the *Votaryes*, Bale introduces the historical and religious importance of the monarch. Bale understood history, particularly biblical history, as containing people and events that were directed by God. Often these events and actions contained signs of God's promised future to his people. In other words, by reading the past one could see patterns and types that would reveal how God's plan for history would play out in the future.[43] Bale saw the biblical history he described as presaging the rise of a new divinely inspired monarch, one who would deal effectively with the corruptive Roman faith in England. Bale describes how from the beginning God ordained two "necessary functyous or administracyons."[44] These functions were the "godly office of a preacher" and the "high governaunce, autorite, & power o[f] a king."[45] God instituted the priest and the king, then, as the most important offices. Importantly, Bale argues that these two functions were first united in God and then in Adam and his descendants. Not until Saul and Samuel, when the tribes of Israel demanded a king, did the two functions divide themselves between two

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[43] Fairfield, *John Bale: Mythmaker,* 24.

[44] Bale, *Votaryes,* n.p.

[45] Ibid.

different people. Bale makes this argument in order to stress to Edward the importance of one man as king and priest. Obviously, such an argument had great importance during the Reformation. Reformers, especially in England, looked to princes and to kings to guide their respective nations on the path to Protestantism. English Protestants, especially, believed that their king could unite secular and religious power and remove the need for the pernicious influence of the Roman Church.

Describing the function of these two offices in biblical history, Bale writes of Adam, who exercised both functions, that, "He instructed his posteryte in the ryght rules of fayth for that age, and prudently vsed theyr politique regyment."[46] Bale's conclusion is that faith is religiously stronger and politically more secure when in the hands of one capable man, as under Adam and his descendants. In contrast to such stability, Bale describes how after the two offices ceased to be performed by one man "the false worshyppynges or execrable ydolatryes began to increase by the deuylyshnesse of false prestes" and "the hygh gouernance clerely decayed."[47] Soon after, however, the "sonne of God the eternall father, called Iesus Christe, than entered into the fleshe at hys tyme appoynted, and became our hygh kyng and preste euerlastynge."[48] Soon after Christ's ascension, however, the Antichrist's work spread again. Bale proposes to write about the rise of the Antichrist's power, through the actions of the supposedly celibate English monks, in the *Votaryes*. Bale presents Edward as a quasi-messianic ruler who has the chance to restore England to the pure faith and to maintain and improve upon the reformation that Henry VIII began. Bale reminds Edward of his father's work, declaring that, "your noble father of famouse memory, ded ronne for hys tyme a most profytable course to the christen comen welthe, whan he

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[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.

fyrste ouerthrewe that most odyble monstre of Rome wyth hys vncleane generacyon."[49]

Although Bale may have wished the Henrician Reformation to be more radical, he

nevertheless recognized the importance of the break that Henry had made and wanted

Edward to act similarly, or perhaps more forcefully, in his dealings with the Papacy.

Bale looked to Edward not only to reform the corrupt religion in England but also to

authorize a new and true religion.[50] Bale's texts continually demonstrate that he viewed the

monarchy as a guiding force for religious change and that Bale sought to discover examples

of this kind of monarchy in the ancient British past. He believed that the king had always

possessed the ability to guide religious faith but that conflict between Roman authority and

the native British rulers in the ancient past had led to the establishment of corruptive Roman

rule. The *Votaryes* chronicled the actions of English monastic orders but in so doing it also

clearly noted the struggles between ancient British rulers and the Roman papacy and

suggested how these struggles had corrupted English faith and rule and necessitated the

unprecedented actions of Henry VIII.

Bale, amongst other evangelical writers, conceived of the ancient British people as

having practiced a pure and apostolic Christianity, brought to the island by Joseph of

Arimathea. Bale writes that, "in the yeare from Christes incarnacion. lxiij. was Ioseph of

Armathe and other Disciples sent ouer of the sayed Philip to preache Christ, and entered

bothe with their wyues and children."[51] This faith was true to the gospel and free from any

of the impurities brought about by the church of St. Peter, which impiously demanded

celibacy.

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[49] Ibid.
[50] Shrank, "Reconfiguring the 'medieval,'" in *Reading the Medieval*, 189.
[51] Bale, *Votaryes,* 14r.

Christianity came to Britain from Rome twice more. Once when Lucius was king and again when the Pope sent over Augustine of Canterbury from Rome. In these instances Bale carefully constructed the role of the British monarch as well as highlighting the sexual immorality of the Roman delegations. Both of these themes had profound meaning for Bale's construction of a Protestant history. The monarch, as Henry VIII had demonstrated, could have the power and the will to bring about religious change. Bale sought to illustrate historical examples of how ancient British monarchs had acted when faced with Roman Catholicism. The sexual immorality of the monks of the English Church before the Reformation is, of course, how Bale directly seeks to unite the *Votaryes*. Whenever Roman characters enter the historical actions Bale seeks to demonstrate their immorality in order to demonstrate both their corruption and their sinful opposition to clerical marriage. Bale personally, as well as many English reformers, sided with the Lutherans in believing that clerical marriage was acceptable and Bale sought to show, again through his historical examples, that the Roman church had always scorned such holy (in Bale's mind) practice even though the Roman Church did not officially ban clerical marriage until the twelfth-century.

The first of these two conversion stories occurs during the second century, during the reign of King Lucius. At this time, according to Bale, the British faith was still an apostolic one based on the gospels and the uncorrupted practices of the ancient church. Describing the Christian faith in Britain before Lucius' time, Bale writes:

> That the Brytaynes toke the christen faythe at the verye sprynge or fyrst goynge forth of the Gospell, whan the churche was moste perfyght, and had moste strengthe of the holye ghost. All that tyme and a longe season after, the ministers helde their wyues, accordyng to the fyrst ordre of God, without, vowynge or yet professynge of virginite, and so contynued to the dayes of Lucius.[52]

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[52] Bale, *Votaryes,* 14r.

Bale characterizes the faith with two important principles. First, the ancient Britons practiced the Christianity carried out of Judea by the apostles themselves, not by Roman missionaries. The Christian faith "at the verye sprynge or first goynge forth of the Gospell" was precisely the faith that sixteenth-century reformers sought to promote—a faith that in individual priests and laypeople might read and understand for themselves in the texts whereas the Papacy wished to interpret these texts for others. If the ancient Britons had practiced the correct faith *sola scriptura* in this manner than it was possible for evangelicals such as Bale to point to the ancient past in support of the break from Rome. The early people of faith had survived with the scripture alone and without the guidance of the Roman establishment. Surely, then, thought reformers, sixteenth-century Protestants could do likewise.

Second, these ancient priests married—they lived chastely while being married. Bale notes that they "helde their wyves, accordyng to the fyrst ordre of God." Not only, then, did the ancient British faith permit clerical marriage but it also recognized it as part of God's commandment. Bale highlights the presence of clerical marriage in the ancient past and also seeks to illustrate its sanctity. In this short description, then, we see Bale's conception of the true faith and his vision of the faith from which Protestantism traced itself. If Bale could discover the beliefs of sixteenth-century Protestantism in the British past then he could not only argue, by historical example, for their validity but also point to the long heritage of the reformed faith. Such a historical construction would both bolster the convictions of lukewarm reformers as well as strengthen the arguments of the Henrician break from Rome—answering those Catholics who argued that Protestantism had appeared suddenly and did not contain a tradition of doctrine as the Roman claimed to do.

Bale moves on to describe how the reign of Lucius, for both good and ill, changed the nature of this apostolic faith. Bale describes King Lucius as "a good man, and began wele

to inclyne to the Gospell."[53] Bale therefore understands Lucius' actions, which altered the

form of British Christianity, to have been grounded in the holy scripture. Continuing his

description of the king, Bale states that:

> yet was he worldlye mynded, and thought that it [Christianity] wanted dewe
> aucthorite so longe as it was ministred but of symple and poore laye marryed men.[54]

Bale suggests that the Lucius believed in the importance of structuring a proper hierarchy to

control the Christian community. He desired that rich and educated men, rather than poor

parish priests, should have dominance over the faith. The Roman priests Lucius called upon

happened, of course, to be unmarried and to shun the married simpletons who officiated

over the English faith. Again, Bale puts marriage into the foreground by suggesting that the

Roman priests who were more authoritative would be unmarried.

Lucius beseeched Rome and received two missionaries in response, who converted

the king and his nobility, thereby making England an officially Christian nation. Bale

chronicles the incident:

> Anon therfor he [Lucius] sent vnto Rome. ij. of those ministers called Eluanus and
> Meduinus vnto Eleutherius the Byshop (for they had then no pope) to haue some
> aucthorite from then. And thys was done in the yeare of oure Lorde. C. lxxix.
> Wherupon Marcus Sabellicus sayeth, Enneade. 7. lib. 5. That of all prouinces
> Brytayne was the first that receyued the Christen fayth with publique ordinaunce.[55]

Lucius decision to convert his nation to a Romanized Christian faith is complicated. Bale

likely did not intend to denounce wholeheartedly the actions of the king. Importantly, this

event provides the first example in the *Votaryes* in which a monarch uses his own royal

authority to make a religious decision. Certainly, Lucius's conversion of ancient Britain had

ill results as it introduced the Roman form of the Christian faith that would later be more

completely installed by Augustine. On the other hand, however, it is important to notice that

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[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.,14r-14v.
[55] Ibid., 14v.

Bale emphasizes the responsibility of the monarch in bringing Christianity to England. Bale

likely means to emphasize that it was a British king and not a Roman missionary who made

the first decision to convert the English nation to Christianity. Lucius founded Christianity

in the isle very early and he did so with royal will and not by the order of the papacy,

although Romans presided over the physical conversion.[56]Clearly, Bale suggests that Henry

VIII, many centuries later, did have the authority, historically, to make religious decisions on

behalf of Britain and to break away from Rome. Bale's use of the Lucius story indicates that

he wanted the British monarch to have religious as well as political authority and to make

decisions designed to promote Christianity in Britain.

 If Lucius first spread the Roman Catholic faith in Britain, Augustine's arrival in

Britain in the sixth-century represented the true beginnings of the Roman Catholic

supremacy in England. Bale relates the beginning of the story as such:

> He [Pope Gregory] sent vpon the aforesayd occasyon, into England in the yeare
> from Christes in carnacion. CCCCC.xcvi. a Romysh monke called Augustyne, not of
> the ordre of Christ as was Peter, but of the supersticiouse secte of Beuet, there to
> sprede abrode the Romishe faythe and religion, for Christes fayth was there long
> afore.[57]

Three important parts of Bale's historical vision stand out from this statement. First, as

opposed to the tale of King Lucius, when the British king took the initiative of asking for

Roman authority, Pope Gregory himself sent Augustine from Rome in order to ascertain the

orthodoxy of the faith in Britain. There is no mention of the British king at all and the will to

dominate British religious life rests solely upon the papacy in Rome. Secondly, Bale clearly

indicates Augustine's status as a monk, the group of men whom Bale has described as

fulfilling the work of the Antichrist and whose illicit activities in England Bale has named as

the subject of the *Votaryes* itself. Augustine's attempted conversion of England to the Roman

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[56] Heal, "What can King Lucius do for you?," *English Historical Review* (2005): 597.
[57] Bale, *Votaryes,* 23v.

faith is immediately questioned because of Augustine's mendicant status. Bale has chosen

mendicants and questionable professions of chastity as two of the marks of a the corrupt

Roman church as opposed to the Protestant faith, which Bale wishes to read backwards into

events such as the Augustinian conversion. Bale indirectly condemns the Catholic monks of

sixteenth-century England by so describing Augustine of Canterbury. Bale seeks to link

Augustine and his monks in order to connect their corruptive influence with the actions of

the sixteenth-century Catholic Church in England. Finally, it is to be noted that Bale clearly

differentiates between "Christes fayth" and the "Romishe faythe." For Bale as for other

evangelical writers the ancient faith presented the best example of the uncorrupted gospel-

based faith that Protestantism across Europe was seeking to connect itself to. He wants his

readers to identify with this faith of Christ, rather than a faith of Rome, and hence the

reformers in England might

At the time of Augustine's arrival King Ethelbert, as Lucius did, plays an important

role. In what it is likely a lesson intended for Bale's sixteenth-century audience, the king

allowed Augustine's mission into England but, "couenaunted thus wyth them, and very

wysely. That hys people shuld always be at lyberte, and no man constrayned to their newe

founde Relygyon, sacrifices, and worshyppynges."[58] Bale presents, in the words of the

English king, the reformed viewpoint that the king had the potential to defend the religious

liberty of his people by standing up to Roman domination. The King attempts, although

unsuccessfully in the end, to prevent the new Roman religion from oppressing the British

people or, importantly, from preventing the old forms of worship in variance to what was

prescribed by Rome. Bale clearly means to point to this attempt by the monarch as a proper

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[58] Ibid., 24v-25r.

exercise of royal authority. Even if it failed, this ancient king demonstrates for Bale the proper historical example of using secular authority to benefit Christ's faith.

Augustine's mission to convert the English people to the Roman faith continued unabated. Augustine was made archbishop of Canterbury by a bishop in France and he called a synod of English bishops where the Roman monk presented his request that:

> if they wold consent vnto hym in these. iij. poyntes. That is to saye, to baptyse after the Romysh maner, to celebrate the feast of Easter as they do there and preache to the Englyshe Saxons as he should appoynte them, he would wel beare with them in all other causes.[59]

In other words, Augustine and the Roman church wanted authority over the manner of rites performed in the English church and over the appointment of priests and bishops at the expense of the English king who would lack the power to appoint clergy in his own country. This demand echoes the very real difficulties that medieval and early modern English kings had with the Papacy, which ideally (though not always successfully) demanded the right to appoint bishops and make religious decisions without any say from the monarch. In Bale's example, however, the English bishops resisted Augustine and responded that, "In no case would they graunte vnto hym, nor yet accept him for their archebyshop but sayd playnelye, they would styl hold their auncient tradicions, whiche they perfyghtlye knewe to be agreable to the holy Apostles doctrine."[60] Crucially, the bishops object that Augustine's demands are in no ways part of the gospel tradition, which they follow as part of their ancient faith. By agreeing to follow a new set of guidelines, the bishops would be moving away from the pure faith of ancient Britain and towards a Christian faith defined and enforced by the corrupt and morally questionable Roman church. Again, the parallels here to Bale's sixteenth-century world are striking. When Henry VIII broke from the Roman church, it was partly the right

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[59] Ibid., 26v.
[60] Ibid., 26v-27r.

to make decisions about his marriage and other matters traditionally overseen by Rome that motivated the monarch to separate the English Church from the yoke of the Papacy. Bale, then, uses this historical example to illustrate how Rome sought to gain dominance over the British faith and to point to the reaction of the English monks towards Augustine as how an English ruler and his native Church might deal with the impositions of Roman Catholicism.

After Augustine had successfully instituted Roman Catholicism in the Church of England, a long period follows, which Bale chronicles, taking care to note the times when Roman-influenced monks manipulated British kings and made their rule less effective. For example, Bale notes of Sebba, "kyng of the East Saxo[n]s," that he:

> was so by wytched of the Byshop of Londo[n] and his calkyng collygeners there for hys substaunce, that he had made hymselfe a monke, leauynge vnto them both hys wyfe and possessyons, yf she had bene no wyfe then he nor more godly dysposed.[61]

Although the original author of the source from which Bale takes this incident probably intended Sebba's decision to take vows as a sign of royal piety. For Bale, however, it is a disastrous example of how the Roman establishment might "bewitch" royal authority and cause the weakening of secular authority. By becoming a monk, the king of the East Saxons submitted his royal power to the care of the Church, which of course for Bale represented not holiness but rather a sinful influence on the Britons. This example may even have held personal meaning for Bale who spent thirty years of his own life under the spiritual authority of Rome, a time he later lamented. Bale's point here is that a British monarch such as Henry VIII or Edward VI should deal forcefully with the wickedness of Rome by politically and certainly should not throw themselves under the yoke of Roman oppression in order to appear more religious in the eyes of the papacy.

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[61] Ibid., 32r.

Bale also cites an example of how supposedly saintly figures had perverted the proper role of secular rule. Discussing how English monks had spread their particular evil on the continent, Bale writes of how one Wenefride:

> BY suche autorite as he receyued of pope Zachary, he afterward deposed kyng Hylderyck of Fraunce, dysheretynge in hym for euer the moste laufull successyon of kynge Merouens, whiche first receyued the true christen [fa]yth there, as witnesseth Sabellicus, & admittinge in hys rowme Pypyne with hys aduonterouse stocke, for receyuynge their false faythe by othe, to reigne there euer after for their carnall commodyte.[62]

Bale emphasizes how the sinful nature of the British monks had become so great that they even disrupted the secular authority of other kingdoms. Importantly, although this quotation deals with France and not Britain, Bale here treats many of the issues that were so important in his larger point about Britain. By "suche autorite as he receyued of pope Zachary," Wenefride deposes the French king and disinherits him from lawful and hereditary succession of French monarchs. Bale is seeking to point not only that the influence of the Roman papacy has acted in the past to corrupt the political authority of worldly rulers but he also notes that the succession interrupted was one of long lineage. France, like Britain, had a long tradition of independent kings who sought to establish the authority of the Gallican church despite encroaching Roman influence. The papacy meddled in the affairs of a deeply rooted kingdom and for no holy purpose other than to replace the original Christian faith as it was received in apostolic times with "their carnall commodyte." Here the link to Britain becomes obvious. The presence of an ancient and evangelical faith is precisely what Bale means to demonstrate in Britain in the *Votaryes*. Through this example, he lays out the historical danger of what can happen when the papacy interferes with pristine religions, guarded by strong secular kingship, and implants immoral Roman Catholicism in its place. The contemporary point of the example can hardly have been invisible to Bale's sixteenth-

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[62] Ibid., 46v-47r.

century audience. The Roman Church, for Bale, had long been attempting to pervert the kings of Britain to its own devilish purposes and in so doing had undermined the presence of the evangelical faith in Britain. It was up to Edward, as the Protestant would-be-hero to act and to eliminate such pernicious Catholic authority.

A final extended example illustrates Bale's specific use of historical examples about the interaction of British kings and Catholic servants. Bale spends a great deal of time describing the evil deeds of Saint Dunstan, who was Archbishop of Canterbury in the tenth-century. In introducing Dunstan to the reader Bale writes that: "By hys sorceryes, he awayes made the Kynges fytt for hys ghostly purpose, as wyll apere herafter, specyally by Kynge Edmonde that was Ethelstanes brother, whom by hys necromancye he broughte to the poynte, inuysyblye to haue bene torne in peces."[63] The association of a Catholic agent with necromancy, an association mentioned periodically in the *Votaryes,* has particularly force here as Bale is able to connect it to the manipulation of the British king for Dunstan's "ghostly purpose." The necromancy emphasizes the connection between nefarious men such as Dunstan and the Antichrist, a link that Bale stresses throughout the text. The magical and evil nature of Dunstan's dealings with Edmond not only suggest that Dunstan, and hence the Church in England, are the Antichrist's army in England but also that Edmond, the king, is less to blame for falling prey to Dunstan. In chronicling historical examples, Bale seeks to highlight the positive actions of British monarchs as well as explain away their manipulation by the papacy.

Bale tells us how upon the crowning of Edmond, many nobles complained about the actions of Dunstan. Bale relates that:

> Wherupon he toke suche dyspleasure with him, that not onlye he depryued him of offyces (whiche he had there) but also vtterlye bannished him the courte. The thyrde

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[63] Ibid., 55r.

> daye after, as it chaunced the Kynge in a parke to ryde on huntynge, and to folowe hys game among rockes and bushes, he sodenlye happened into a most parelouse place, where as he neyther coude go forewarde nor yet turne backe agay|ne. The harte whyche he folowed was before hys face torne in small peces, so were the houndes most terryblye to beholde, nothynge there perceyued that shuld do yt. The Kynge so sore laboured to returne wyth hys horse, that he brake both brydell and sterruppes, and yet coude in no wyfe preuayle, nor yet lyght from hys backe. Than called he Dunstane to remembraunce, and (he beynge absent) before God there axed hym forgeuenesse.

In this intriguing story Bale again expands upon his interpretation of the Dunstan episode. The first thing to note is that the king does take action and banishes Dunstan from the royal court. Such decisive action is the very sort that Bale wants to impress upon Edward VI, his ideal audience, as what ought to be taken against Roman opposition in sixteenth-century Britain. Here, however, the king's banishment does not avail him as he becomes entrapped by some magic spell while out hunting which only the forgiveness of Dunstan can remedy. Again the apocalyptic necromancy of the Catholic prelate prevents the British monarch from maintaining effective political control over his kingdom. Hence, Bale highlights the cunning measures that the Church in Britain in the past took in order to maintain its influence on the British monarchy. Obviously, Bale as reformer in the sixteenth-century describes these examples in order to demonstrate not only the wickedness and corruption of the Catholic Church in Britain but also to suggest implicitly the decisive action needed by a monarch to put British religion on the correct and Protestant path.

Bale also turns to Dunstan's immorality in an effort to describe the saint's corrupting influence upon the British kingdom:

> DVnstane was excedyngly beloued with Cadina Kynge Eldredes mother (these are the playne wordes, of the history) and he loued her excedyngly agayne. And whe[n] he ones became the kynges corectour & mastre, yea rather his kynge & Emperour (sayth the text) by her meanes he was elected Byshop of wynchestre.[64]

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[64] Ibid., 57r-57v.

Here, Bale suggests a sexual connection between the Archbishop and the king's mother, which places Dunstan in the middle of the narrative of sexual immorality upon which Bale has based the *Votaryes*. He also gestures at the lengths to which Catholic figures might go to gain some semblance of control over British affairs. Both points point to the historically destabilizing presence of the false Roman faith in Britain and the need for a strong monarch such as Edward to finish Henry VIII's work in removing it.

John Bale, as he wrote in exile on the Continent and when he returned to write in England under Edwardian rule, must have noticed the impact that secular monarchs had upon the English Reformation. It was the politically motivated action of Henry VIII that started the reforming process in England. As an evangelical writer, Bale understood the dilemma of such a powerful secular authority: should reformers hope for the king to guide the implementation of the true faith or, understanding the dangers of relying on a king who was not righteous enough, should British evangelicals oppose the king when he deserted the true cause? Bale came down strongly for the former. He conceived of royal power as the perfect vehicle to remove Roman influence from Britain and reform the corrupted Catholic faith. As Bale chronicled the early history of Britain in his *Votaryes*, he naturally related various episodes in the ancient past that demonstrated the interaction between the British kings and the Papacy. Bale selected episodes that might illustrate to his audience, English reformers, the insidious and manipulative nature of the Catholic faith in England from its very origin. Not only that but Bale also indirectly instructed Edward VI, whom he placed as his addressee, about how the monarch might avoid the mistakes of British monarchs in the past and root out the Roman problem while advancing the cause of the true faith. The conversion stories of Lucius and Augustine of Canterbury as well as the later episodes of Saint Dunstan reveal Bale's very specific and Protestant response to the religious crisis of

sixteenth-century Britain. If the Anglican faith was to be secure, it must have a long heritage and Bale sought to show, through his use of historical examples, that British kings had long attempted to advance the cause of the apostolic faith but that Catholic monks and bishops from Rome had corrupted the British religion.

## *National Consciousness: Creating Britishness in the Ancient Past*

John Bale created in the *Votatryes* a specific British past, which made use of the idea of a national consciousness. The past evoked in Bale's text does not describe the history of the Church or even of proto-Protestants across Europe. It discusses a national past because Bale was English as was his audience and both parties, as Protestants, were interested in a history that would show the privileged nature of British religion. Scholars have shown that Protestant polemicists of the period wrote with a particular, national, audience in mind.[65] The idea of a British consciousness, for I argue that it was a British identity Bale fashioned, increasingly manifested itself in the writings of sixteenth-century reformers. Although we often think of the nation, or the doctrine of nationalism, as an invention of the nineteenth-century, it is possible to see in the sixteenth-century an awareness of England as a nation. While nationalism as a political ideology did not appear in the sixteenth-century, the consciousness, as I call it, of the nation as a community with shared language, customs, and, importantly, religion, did permeate Tudor writing.

For this national consciousness to appear throughout literature, English authors had to recognize a "boundless inclusiveness." In other words, they had to understand that the people who had lived long before, even in pre-Saxon times, were the same Englishmen as they were.[66] For John Bale, this understanding formed the basis for works such as the *Votaryes*. Stories of Saxons fighting against Roman oppression could not resonate with Bale's sixteenth-century readership unless both Bale and the readership understood that the long-dead resisters partook of the same "Britishness" as they did. Bale, therefore, had to fashion

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[65] See for example Hadfield, *Literature, Politics and National Identity*, 1-22.
[66] Schwyzer, *Literature, nationalism, and memory*, p. 51.

the ancient "nation" in his literature, and he also had to fashion his audience as a modern English "nation," one which would share in the tradition he created.[67]

Early-modern English writers, particularly in light of the religious break with Rome, often sought in their writings to separate their nation from the rest of Europe. In literature, as many scholars have pointed out, the late-Tudor and Elizabethan periods saw the rise of distinctly English writing. Bale, writing before the Elizabethan literary flourishing, nonetheless recognized a distinct national identity—one that fit well with his model of history.[68] As a Protestant during the reformation period, Bale understood English religious identity to be distinct from Roman identity. The English Reformation necessitated a national consciousness because the separation of Rome and nagging questions of legitimacy encouraged Protestants to consider the history of their identity as a religious and national group separate from Rome. This consciousness sought to evoke the nation and to separate it, both in the ancient past and in the sixteenth-century, from the Catholic identity of the Roman papacy. Bale's creation of a particular British identity in ancient history contributed to his focus on the unique status of ancient British religion. Bale's history sought to show that Protestantism had existed in Britain before Catholicism and by creating a national past, a British history, Bale emphasized the differences between the ancient religion and the usurpation of Roman Catholicism.

The historical identity that Bale seeks to construct and connect to the sixteenth-century is British rather than English in focus. Schwyzer has claimed that this Britishness is apparent in the works of sixteenth-century writers such as Shakespeare and Bale, too, does not confine himself to an English identity but seeks to promote a national identity that

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[67] Andrew Hadfield, *Literature, politics, and national idenity: Reformation to Renaissance*, p. 1.
[68] For discussion of the complexities of the nation and its relevance to the early modern period see the introductions of Hadfield, *Literature, Politics and National Identity* ; Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism and Memory*; and Shrank, *Writing the Nation*.

reaches back to the ancient realm of Britain, when the entire island was ruled by ancient

British kings. These kings also linked to Protestantism as Bale wanted to see in their

historical examples the proper British rule for Edward VI.[69]

Bale's historical exempla in the *Votaryes* evoke a British consciousness, with which he

constructs the ancient past, both in the apostolic faith and in ancient secular authority. He

then connects this consciousness to the sixteenth-century mentality of Protestant England.

By fashioning a British, rather than English, identity, Bale connects his present to the ancient

British past and imagines a united Britain, rather than simply England, capable of standing

apart from Rome.

Bale uses stories about the origins of Britain as a means to illustrate how apostolic

Christianity was introduced to the island. These myths, often used to support a legacy for

Christianity in Britain, appear in the beginning of the *Votaryes* where Bale posits a British

faith before the arrival of corruptive Roman monks. Some of the stories Bale relates do not

in fact refer to Christianity but rather suggest that ancient Britons had some semblance of

the true faith, even if it was not Christian. Speaking of the flood for example, Bale writes

that: "After the said flood, was it agayne inhabiteth by the of sprynge of Iapheth the thyrde

sonne of Noe. For of them (sayeth Moses) were the Iles of the Gentyles sorted out into

regions."[70]  In this quotation, then, Bale makes it clear that Jews, followers of sorts of the

pure faith, settled Britain before it was settled by Christians. The point is that Britain had a

distinct history before Roman influence and Bale wants his readers to understand that

history to be applicable to the sixteenth-century present.

The Druids present Bale with an opportunity to contrast the priests of Roman

Catholicism with the ancient British priests. Bale relates how Brutus, the legendary Trojan

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[69] Ibid., 3.
[70] Bale, *Votaryes,* 9v.

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founder of Britain, conquered the land of Albion and that the priests of this realm, now

called "Brytayne" after Brutus, were known as Druids. Bale writes of these priests that:

> What their rule was concerninge women, we shall not nede to seke farder then to the syxt chapter of Baruch, and the fourtene chapter of Daniel in the Byble. Baruch sayeth there, that their custome was to decke their whores with the yewels and ornamentes of theyr Idolles. Daniel sayeth, that they with them deuoured vp the daylye offerynges and sacryfyces of Bel. Yet Hector Boethius wryteth in the seconde boke of his Scottysh Chronycle, that there were some amonge them, whiche taught one euerlastynge God alone to be worshypped, without Image made or other similitude els.[71]

Here, Bale argues that at least one ancient text suggested that that some Druids professed a

monotheistic faith. This proto-monotheism implicitly points to the Druid's chastity.

Exempla from the ancient past permit Bale to link his vision of a united sixteenth-century

Britain to the properly chaste Druids of the British past. Bale illustrated an ancient British

identity, one which was independent of Roman influence. He intended that sixteenth-

century readers of the *Acts* would understand that ancient Britain to be connected to current

British Protestantism.

Another aspect of British identity that concerned Bale in the *Votaryes* was the

expulsion of Roman oppression by a restored, British, monarch. In this case, Bale does not

simply let his readers infer that Edward ought to take action against Rome to stop this evil

influence. He states directly, referring to Henry VIII, that:

> Euer sens hath yt bene to hym obediente in all blasphemouse errours and doctrynes of Deuilles, by the space of. DCCC. and. xliiij. yeares, tyll the yeare of our Lord. M. CCCCC. and. xxxiij. wherin at our noble kynges moste wholsome request, we vtterlye by othe renounced that odyouse monstre. Nowe is it Gods owne kingdome agayne, and our King his immedyate ministre.[72]

In Bale's vision of the British past, the rule of Rome effectively commanded obedience to its

sinful purposes until, at the "request" of Henry VIII, the English people "vtterlye by othe

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[71] Ibid., 11v.
[72] Ibid., 40r-40v.

renounced that odyouse monster." Bale does not directly describe Henry VIII as a British, rather than English monarch, but he does state that England has become "Gods owne kingdome agayne" and so clearly links the ancient realm of Britain with Henry. The Welsh and British, in fact, both looked to the ancient figure of Brutus as their founder and so many Welsh saw the Tudors as the restoration of a truly British kingdom.[73]

Elsewhere in the *Votaryes*, Bale again emphasizes the role of a king who would unite the realm. In one instance Bale describes a prophecy of Merlin which he tells us says that: "That after the manyfolde irrupcions of straungers, the kinges of thys realme shuld be ones agayn crowned wyth the Dyademe of Brute, and beare his auncyent name, the new name of straungers so vanishinge awaye."[74] Bale puts Henry or Edward, whom he hopes will continue the work, in the mythical position of the king who will drive out the many strangers in the land. We are in no doubt that Bale means the removal of heretical Catholic beliefs and the reference to Brutus (Brute), the ancient king who first ruled Britain and from whom Bale believes the name Britain to have come from, clearly points up that this king will be a ruler of all "thys realme." But in case the point is not clear enough Bale reveals that:

> The Diademe of Brute is the pryncely power of thys whole region, immediatly geuen of God without any other meane mastry worker to Antichristes behoue. Fre was that power from the great whores domynyon (which is the Rome churche) tyll the violent conquest of the English Saxons, which they had of the Brytaynes for their iniquities sake. And now (prayse be vnto that Lorde) it is in good waye to that fredome agayne, and would fullye attayne therunto, were here heythnysh yokes in religion ones throwne a syde, as I doubt it not but they will be within short space.[75]

The ruler who will command the crown of Brutus is granted the authority of God to drive out the works of the Antichrist. Bale also posits that such a king will remove the yokes of Roman faith in Britain and return the land to the faith it contained in the ancient past.

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[73] Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism and Memory*, 6.

[74] Bale, *Votaryes,* 40v.

[75] Ibid., 40v-41r.

Apart from linking ancient Britain with the sixteenth-century, Bale also points to the deleterious effects that Catholicism had upon British identity throughout the past. He notes about the arrival of Roman monks in England that:

> Sens these lecherouse locustes crepte first into Englande, neuer throne that kingedome of the auncyent Brytaynes whose spyrituall heade was God alone: but euerye daye more and more decayed, tyll it was fullye ended. Marke it hardelye from the fyrste comminge hither of the seyd Augustyne, tyll the yeare of our Lord. DC. lxxxix.[76]

Bale clearly states that the monarchy of ancient Britain served only God. The arrival of monks from Rome, however, began to decay the status of this British kingship until the arrival of Augustine completely destroyed the monarchy's independence. With the dissolution of that monarchy, however, Bale argues that Catholicism through its monks was able to turn the English church and state to its own decadent uses. The "kingedome of the auncyent Brytaynes" is precisely the national past that Bale seeks to create in the *Votaryes*. Bale, like many English Protestants, attempts in his writings to point to the long and established legacy of his faith in the history of the island so as to bolster the authority of Protestantism. Interacting with the national consciousness that we can see beginning to flourish in the sixteenth-century, Bale made his past explicitly British and explicitly Protestant.

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[76] Ibid., 40r.

## Monks and Marriage

When John Bale describes the improper sexual behavior of English monks, he connects it to the issue of clerical celibacy and marriage. Many of the priests and all of the monks whom Bale discusses in the *Votaryes* are unwed and Bale seeks to connect this absence of marriage to the sexual impropriety in the historical English Church. For Bale, God had ordained marriage and so the sexual actions of the English monastics represent hypocrisy: the monks refuse marriage ordained by God but continue to enjoy sex outside of marriage despite vows of chastity. Bale seeks to uncover this hypocrisy throughout the text and he stresses heavily the unmarried status of monks in his examples of sexual immorality.

The sixteenth-century upheaval witnessed reformers argue amongst themselves as well as with Catholics about the status of clerical marriage. Luther took a wife as a sign of his renunciation of Catholicism as did Bale when he left the Carmelite order but some more tepid reformers in England, including Henry VIII himself, looked more skeptically at the issue. Alec Ryrie notes that many reformers chose to ignore the issue because it would not arouse mass support, particularly among laypersons and instead to concentrate on issues that would attract more converts.[77] Clerical marriage also functioned as a crucial issue during Henry's negotiations with Lutheran delegations from Germany in 1539, though the Lutherans expressed disgust at the Act of Six Articles and its treatment of clerical marriage.[78] As a more radical reformer and a monk who had chosen to wed, Bale would benefit if clerical marriage became approved by the English king. Uncertainty over which direction Henry would go and then the hope that Edward VI might prove more favorable prompted

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[77] Ryrie, *The Gospel and Henry VIII*, 37.
[78] Heal, *Reformation in Britain and Ireland*, 136.

Bale to stress clerical marriage in the *Votaryes* as an important part of his Protestant theology. He wanted to make clear to Edward that marriage was one of the theological issues that English Protestantism could trace back to the first apostolic faith in Britain. Clerical marriage, then, was sixteenth-century theological issue but Bale made it into theme of the British past as well. Not only does the *Votaryes* thereby show that clerical marriage had existed before the corruption of Catholicism but it also demonstrates how the Catholic faith's refusal to accept the marriage of priests points to the theological and moral corruption of the Roman Church in Britain.

Bale sought to demonstrate the precedent of priestly marriage in the *Votaryes* by pointing to the existence of marriage in ancient Britain as well as to the hypocritical attitude of the Catholic Church towards clerical marriage. Bale first illustrates how God instituted marriage in the beginning and how the first Britons, even pagans, treated the issue. He then illustrates the Catholic Church's hostility to marriage and the immorality practiced by monks who professed unmarried chastity. Bale's exempla support this argument as he traces anecdotes that illuminate both the Roman disdain for clerical marriage and the lewd actions of the monks who refused marriage. Other English Protestants articulated the argument that Bale made. Matthew Parker, for example, a contemporary of Bale's, used Old English texts to support a position in favor of clerical marriage.[79] Exempla, of course, drive Bale's larger argument throughout the *Votaryes* and they do not relate only to the issue of clerical marriage but he uses them to great effect in order to construct a Protestant past in which clerical marriage was accepted as part of the true faith before Roman religion scorned the sacrament.

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[79] Kleist, "Monks, Marriage, and the Manuscripts," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* (2006): 312-327.

In order to make his point, Bale must argue that the Catholic faith in England did in fact denounce clerical marriage and scorn married priests. Bale describes the Church's views on the marriage of priests with harsh language, writing that they:

> Neuer reckened they wedlock anye Godlye estate of lyuynge, thoughe yt were an onlye ordre instytuted of God in the begynninge, yea, for hys prestes also. Commonlie they haue dyswaded bothe men and women from yt, as from a most pernycyouse euyll, or from a myschefe of all myschefes, callynge yt folyshnesse, fylthynesse, beastlynesse….[80]

Bale emphasizes that the religious orders in England did not recognize the holiness of marriage and that they sought to dissuade priests and laypersons from it. For Bale's argument, he wants to focus his critique on how the Catholic Church did not ever support clerical marriage and so he describes their views on it so starkly so as to contrast the Church's dismissive regard towards marriage with the freedom to marry that Bale sees in the apostolic church, precursor to the Protestant English church.

In fact, the Catholic Church did not mandate clerical celibacy until the twelfth-century. The First and Second Lateran Councils in the twelfth-century first explicitly legislated on the issue of clerical celibacy, forbidding priests of any sort to have wives or concubines.[81] In the first centuries of its history, the church generally agreed that priests and bishops should avoid sex, although they commonly married. Importantly, the church argued for an absence of sexual relations in marriage but not for celibacy itself.[82] Bale does not explicitly contradict this historical ambiguity over marriage but he does assume a particularly virulent distaste for clerical marriage by the Roman Church, which he may have exaggerated some in order to separate more the ancient faith he wants to praise from Catholicism. The

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[80] Bale, *Votaryes,* n.p.
[81] Beaudette, "In the World but no of It," in *Purity and Piety,* 23.
[82] Ibid., 24-40.

*Votaryes* assumes that the Catholic faith in ancient Britain sought always to denounce married clergy.

In the opening chapters of the *Votaryes*, Bale lays out the holy status of the sacrament of marriage. Before he can illustrate the heretical Catholic renunciation of clerical marriage, Bale must define marriage as an acceptable practice ordained by God and practiced by the early church. He writes that God himself decreed marriage to be blessed:

> In paradyse our eternall and mercyfull father instituted marryage immedyatly after mannys fyrste creacion, and lefte yt wyth hym as an honeste, comely, wholsome, holye, and nedefull remedye agaynst all beastlye abusyons oft he fleshe, that shulde after happen, and graunted thervnto hys eternall blessynge…[83]

Bale argues that scripture shows that marriage is a godly institution and that chastity without marriage, what the British Catholics practice, stems rather from the devil. Bale is constructing a past for his sixteenth-century audience, beginning with the use of the scripture, that supports marriage. Bale states directly that matrimony is a defense against the sorts of immoralities, the "beastlye abuysons oft he fleshe," which he argues the Catholic monks practiced. After relating marriage's divine ordination, Bale reminds his readers the Virgin Mary was married and that "though hys mother were alwayes a mayde, and that he left vnto hys Apostles marryage in lyberte euermore yt were in vayne also."[84] In other words, despite Mary's virginity, she still could be married and Christ, recognizing this fact, allowed his apostles the liberty to choose whether or not to marry. Bale expands this thought and argues that Christ:

> [N]euer commaunded, nor yet exacted the vowe of virgynyte in all hys whole Gospell, but left all men in lyberte to marrye if they lyst, forbyddynge all men fyrmelye, to make anye lawe of coaccion or of separation, where God hath set fredome in marryage.[85]

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[83] Bale, *Votaryes,* 7v.

[84] Ibid.,  9r.

[85] Ibid., 13r-13v.

Again, Bale stresses that Christ did not order his apostles not to marry and he also goes further and adds that Jesus decreed that no men should make a law intruding upon "fredome in marryage." These lines would have sent a clear message to Edward VI. It was the monarch's duty as protector of the faith to ensure that marriage was not prohibited among anyone, including priests. In order to argue for the sixteenth-century permissibility of clerical marriage, Bale reaches back to the time of Christ and so frames his argument in the scripture and also in a time before the Papacy existed. Bale also describes how the first apostles, according to Jesus' and God's command, did not remain chaste but had wives and families when they spread Christianity abroad. It was Joseph of Arimathea, a married man, who first spread the faith of Christ to Britain and Bale comments that "All that tyme and a longe season after, the ministers helde their wyues, accordyng to the fyrst ordre of God, without, vowynge or yet professynge of virginite."[86] The first priests in England married according to God's order and they did not profess virginity in the impious and frequently false manner of the Catholics.

Bale continually denigrated the Catholic saints of early Christian Britain because they failed to lead lives based on the gospel. They also did not, however, marry and Bale stresses that this reason figured largely in their canonization. Speaking about some of the most well known English saints, Bale writes that the Catholic Church had:

> set vs vp a sorte of lecherouse Goddes to be worshypped in oure temples, to be our aduocates, and to helpe vs in our nedes. In stede of Iupiter, Saturne, Mercurye, Mars, Iuno, Proserpina, Diana, and Venus, whiche ded all their feates in whoredome, as the poetes verefyeth, they haue geuen vs Wenefryde, Cuthbert, Dunstane, Oswalde, Anselme, Btket, Brigyde, Audrye, Modwen, Edith, Osith, Ethelburge, and a greate sort more of vnpure workers out of marryage.[87]

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[86] Ibid., 14r.
[87] Ibid., 2v.

In this quotation, Bale connects ancient and pagan Rome to the later Christian Rome. He evokes images of the promiscuous gods of Greco-Roman religion and suggests that as the Roman Empire once set up statues of these gods and goddesses in Britain so later the Roman Papacy bestowed upon Britain the saints, all of whom were "vnpure workers out of marryage." Not only, then, does Bale suggest that the traditional English saints were profane objects to be venerated, something sixteenth-century Protestants largely disdained, but he also links the saints to the pagan deities, who as he reminds us, "ded all their feates in whoredome." Bale defines the saints of England by their status as unmarried and implies that they must have achieved their recognition by similar "feates in whordome." It is interesting that Bale strongly unites the ancient Roman Empire with the Roman Church. Some Protestant Englishmen separated the ancient Roman empire, seeing it as part of revered antiquity, from the medieval Rome of the papacy. Some reformers such as Bale, however, clearly displayed hostile attitudes towards ancient Rome, attitudes which linked the ancient imperialist ambitions of classical Rome to the far-reaching dominance of the Roman Church.[88] Bale fashions the holy saints, long revered by medieval English faith, into pagan-like relics, marked by their celibate status and by alluding to their whorish lives, makes them into examples of the heretical Catholic faith. The advice to Edward and Bale's readers must have been plain: to recognize the pernicious influence of these Catholic icons and remove it.

The celibacy of English saints emerges throughout the *Votaryes* and Bale brings it up repeatedly to support his assertion that the Catholic faith was set against clerical marriage. Bale writes about saints who may have had wives that:

> If anye were maryed that wolde nedes be sayntes, they were anon compelled by othe, or by the waye of penaunce, to leaue their makes to the occupieng of others, the man his wyfe, and the woman her husbande, as ye shal beholde in this boke by most plentuouse examples. For matrimony hath euer bene suche a blacke bugge in their

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[88] Curran, Jr., *Roman Invasions*, 15-16.

sinagoge and churche, that neuer wolde canonysacyon serue yet, where as was in place.[89]

The quotation suggests Bale's view that saints were canonized only if they were unmarried and that the Church compelled men to leave their families if they "wolde nedes be sayntes" Bale demonstrates that the saints of the English Church had to be unmarried in order to drive home his picture of the Catholic faith as irrevocably opposed to clerical marriage. He explicitly exemplifies this argument when he describes matrimony as "a blacke bugge" and he further speaks to the heresy of the Catholic faith by calling it a "sinagoge." Bale often pointed also to the irony that most of the saints who could not marry were born of mothers who were unmarried or who denied a father. For example, Saint Dubrice "had a mayde to his mother, called Eurdila, but neuer wold she confesse hym to haue any father" and "Saynt Cuthbert the great God, of the Northe, and he that was wonte to defende vs from the Scottes, was a misbegotten also, for his mother was vnmarried."[90] Therefore, the very saints whom the Church compelled to be unmarried came from out of wedlock parents, pointing to the hypocrisy of the Roman faith in demanding chastity without marriage. Bale's construction of the British past attempted to portray a particular view of the two churches: the persecuted true Church and the heretical Roman church. By refuting that the saints had any pious qualities, Bale illuminates the faults of the English Church to his sixteenth-century audience and points to the suppression of a true Christian faith, linked with the sixteenth-century reforms.

Another type of example that Bale often chronicled discussed men who forsook their families in order to become chaste monks. For the Catholic Church, as Bale stressed, such a decision was pious. Bale, however, seeks to promote the sanctity of marriage and

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[89] Bale, *Votaryes,* 3v-4r.
[90] Ibid., 16v, 17v.

especially to point out that monks had a corrupting influence on early Britain. He gives the

pertinent example of Saint Iltute, "which had bene alwayes a moste valeaunte captayne

amonge the Brytaynes, at the suggestion of saint Cadoc an Hermite, put from him his moste

vertuouse and chast wyfe, leauyng her nothing els to lyue vpon, but barly breade and water

on homelye repast for her that hadde bene a lady and tenderly brought vp."[91] Bale notes that

Saint Iltute had been a "moste valeaunte captayne amonge the Brytaynes," suggesting that to

give up a secular position of authority in order to become a monk and to desert one's family

to become chaste did not follow the Christian faith as laid out in the gospel. Bale places

more importance on secular ability, though with faith of course, and the divinity of marriage

than he does on the oft-pretended chastity of monks.

Bale's most forceful support for his argument that the traditional faith

misunderstood the sanctity of marriage related the immoral actions of monks. Bale argues

that the monks' vows of chastity become meaningless when viewed in light of their lewd

sexual activities. It is marriage, for Bale, which ensures that corruptive actions do not take

place while the oaths of chastity simply suggest to Bale hypocrisy because the monks

continue to act promiscuously. Bale at one point argues directly that monastic chastity was

pretence. He states that: "To entre more depely into the peoples opinion, a chastyte was

pretensed anon after in that monkerye, but not yet solempnelye vowed, and in manye places

of the realme were monasteries builded bothe of men and women."[92] As one example of this

hypocrisy, Bale tells of Saint Cuthbert's relations with women. He writes:

> So cruell was this Cuthbert vnto women after he became a Saynt of theirs, that non
> might come wythin hys sayntuaryes (they say) at Doilwem, Cornen, and Mailros in
> Scotlande, nor yet at Durham, Tymouth, and Lynde farne here in Englande, vndre
> payne of soden death, their chambers and selles exempted alwayes. Yet was the seyd

[91] Ibid., 19r.
[92] Ibid., 16v.

Cuthbert verye famylyar in his time wyth Ebba. Elsteda, and Verca iij holy abbasses, and builded for his pleasure, a solempne uondry at Carliell.[93]

This anecdote effectively sums up Bale's argument against the Catholic monks. Cuthbert properly appeared to disdain women, in keeping with distaste for clerical marriage and his vow of chastity, but Bale points to Cuthbert's familiarity with several abbesses during his lifetime and clearly suggests that the saint undertook improper activities with the nuns. Bale obviously exaggerates his point by connecting familiarity as evidenced by sources to improper sexual behavior, but for Bale, it is enough to show his readers that often enough in the ancient British past, monks who vowed chastity had questionably improper relations with women, thereby refuting their stand against chastity, a stand which they based on the necessity of their chastity. By calling into question this chastity, Bale directly attacks the existence of monasticism in England, at a time when Henry VIII had already dissolved many monasteries (although Bale struggled with the implications of that decision, which destroyed many manuscripts) and to many Protestants monks represented the epitome of the traditional Roman religion in England. In other words, Bale's attack on the hypocrisy of monks supports his general renunciation of the Catholic faith.

As a text that purports to demonstrate the false morality of British monkery, it is hardly surprising that clerical marriage forms an integral part of Bale's historical narrative in the *Votaryes*. Bale is constructing a past in the text, a specifically Protestant past that draws attention to the persecution of the true church and the heretical deeds of the false Roman Church. Bale's use of historical exempla, which relate numerous anecdotes of the immoral actions of monks in Britain, often make reference to the sacrament of marriage. While Bale does not always directly discuss marriage among priests, he points to the general contempt felt for marriage by the Catholic faith. By demonstrating that marriage in fact formed a part

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[93] Ibid., 38v.

of the apostolic faith that early Britons practiced it, Bale causes the later Roman

denunciation of clerical marriage to appear all the more heretical. Bale integrates the

marriage of priests into his historical chronicle as part of his larger goal—to illustrate the

true faith as it appeared in ancient British history and to show through historical exempla

how Catholicism corrupted that faith.

## *Conclusion*

When Bale reaches the end of the first part of his *Votaryes*, he sarcastically declares to his readers that he has revealed the "chast, holy co[n]secrate, and spritual acts of your Englyshe votaryes."[94] Bale adds that he wrote his chronicle of the treachery of Roman Catholicism so that: "ye maye knowe what chere hath bene amonge them, what occupyenge they haue had, what masteryes they haue played, & what miracles they haue done."[95] As Bale's statement reveals, the *Votaryes* set out to tell the early history of English monasticism and to illuminate the corruptive actions of the Roman faith in Britain. Bale's text appropriates numerous exempla, often from Catholic sources, and fashions them into a narrative of the British past. Bale does not attempt an unbiased account of English monasticism but rather specifically writes an argumentative history—a history in which Bale's selected examples of the past importantly speak to the present. The *Votaryes* did not seek only to relate the doings of monks in England. Bale intended for his work to create a specific English and Protestant past, which would rhetorically secure the foundations of English Protestantism in the ancient past.

The precise nature of Bale's historical craft, how he went about constructing his own telling of the English past, both reveals Bale's complex argument and points to the discursive importance of particular issues in the sixteenth-century religious debates. The past Bale creates in the *Votaryes* makes use of Protestant arguments in order to demonstrate historically the veracity of the reformed faith and to expose the Roman Catholic Church in Britain as a corruptive and immoral influence. He physically embodies the corruption and

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[94] Bale, *Votaryes,* 74v.
[95] Ibid., 74v-75r.

immorality of the Catholic monks in England by stressing throughout his history their false chastity and sexual misconduct. Bale makes his argument by weaving throughout the text themes that had particular importance in sixteenth-century Britain. He structures his narrative with an apocalyptic understanding of history, which he also uses to connect the actions of Catholicism with the Antichrist. By reading and interpreting Revelation, Bale further strengthened, with scripture, his English history so as to demonstrate the pernicious power of the Roman Catholic church in England. Bale's addition, to the first edition of the *Votaryes*, of a dedication to Edward VI necessitates an understanding of Bale's conception of the secular authority of a monarch. The dedication, as well as numerous exempla in the narrative, makes clear that Bale's specific past argues that the king should, and in the past has, take the lead in enacting religious reform and eradicating Roman control in England. The national consciousness of the land that Bale states the king should rule functions throughout the *Votaryes*. Interacting with the developing national consciousness of the sixteenth-century, Bale fashions his text for a British audience who would look for examples of historical British unification in the face of Roman oppression. He also deals forcefully with the status of clerical marriage in British history. The theological debate over marriage between priests divided English reformers and Henry VIII. The history constructed in the *Voatryes* carefully articulates Bale's position on the issue. The Catholic Church's corruption is blamed on their disavowal of clerical marriage and Bale points to the presence of married priests in ancient British Christianity. These four themes contribute to the creation of Bale's Protestant past for England, a past that also makes strong claims about the present.

Bale's *Votaryes* creates his own particular past, using many important themes from sixteenth-century religious discourses, to argue specifically about how to carry out the English Reformation. Bale's history, though exuberant in its verbosity, functioned similarly

to many Protestant polemics of the sixteenth-century. Discourses about apocalyptic texts, the monarchy, national identity, and clerical marriage abounded in the midst of the English Reformation and Bale's *Votaryes*, on the most straightforward level, is simply a radically anti-Catholic polemical text. What makes the *Votaryes* fascinating and worthy of study, however, is Bale's particular construction of a British past and his use of that past to make explicit arguments about the English Reformation. We seldom imagine today (though we no doubt should) that history seeks so obviously to construct the past it portrays. Bale, though, consciously fashioned the history he wanted to write so as to create his own historical England, which would support Protestant resistance to Catholics in the Tudor period. Amongst Protestants across Europe who turned to historical writing to support their side against Catholic writers, Bale's method of history gives us a close look at how sixteenth-century historiography might function. Disturbing as it may seem to modern readers, Bale's specific construction and appropriation of the past suggest a fascinating conception of sixteenth-century England and how it perceived the past.

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