HISTORIAN OR PROPHET? JOHN BALE'S PERCEPTION OF THE PAST*

by SUSAN ROYAL

The late medieval prophetic tradition played a significant role in how John Bale (1495–1563), England's first Protestant church historian, formulated his ideas about the nature of revelation, which would become a contentious issue in the course of the Reformation. It is the goal of this essay to examine this first-generation evangelical's views, which will bring us closer to understanding prophecy and its legitimacy in Reformation-era Europe. In an influential essay, Richard Southern illustrates the important role of the prophetical tradition in premodern historical writing: 'Prophecy filled the world-picture, past, present, and future; and it was the chief inspiration of all historical thinking.'[1] But while its significance is easy to pinpoint, the varied nature of prophetic revelation does not make for easy delineations or definitions. Southern names four types of prophecy in the Middle Ages: biblical (Daniel, Revelation); pagan (sibylline); Christian (such as that of Hildegard of Bingen); and astrological (stars and celestial events). Of course, even these are not clearly distinct categories; Southern notes that Merlin is 'half-Christian, half-pagan'.[2] Lesley Coote points out that the 'subject of political prophecy is king, people and nation',[3] separating this from theological, apocalyptic prophecy, though she also asserts that the two are closely related.[4] Bernard McGinn remarks that in the later Middle Ages, prophecy is 'seen as a divinatory or occasionally reformative activity – the prophet as the man who foretells the future, or the one who seeks to correct a present situation in the light of an ideal past or glorious

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1 R. W. Southern, 'History as Prophecy', *TRHS* ser. 5, 22 (1972), 159–80, at 160.

2 Ibid. 168.

3 Lesley A. Coote, *Prophecy and Public Affairs in Later Medieval England* (York, 2000), 14.

4 Ibid. 4.

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future'.[5] This notion of the prophet as reformer is also illuminating for the Reformation context. Robin Bruce Barnes writes:

> Lutherans conceived of the Reformation not as an unveiling of new truths but as a return to old ones. The essence of divine revelation, once preached openly, had been obscured for centuries; Luther had simply rediscovered it. Yet by the same token, the question now arose whether this recovery could blossom in further prophetic clarity among the faithful.[6]

The idea of prophecy as a direct personal revelation from God was problematic for most evangelicals, for whom *sola scriptura* had become one of the few shared tenets of their inchoate confederation. The reluctance of magisterial reformers to compose commentaries on the Book of Revelation reflects this unease: following Erasmus's concerns about the book's authority and authenticity, Martin Luther was originally sceptical of the work, until his growing belief in the pope as the Antichrist led him to explore the text.[7] John Calvin did not refer to it often and never offered a commentary.[8]

Mutual reticence about the book of Revelation was one of the few areas of agreement regarding this contentious topic. As first-generation reformers sought to demarcate the identity of the true church, the role of prophecy within it became an important focus. Luther identified two types of prophecy. The first explicated the words of the Old Testament prophets, and was 'the most necessary kind', because it taught the word of God; Luther wrote that it 'rules, preserves, establishes, and performs the preaching ministry'.[9] The prophecies of Revelation and of individuals affected by the Holy Spirit constituted a second, less significant, tier of prophecy,

[5] Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End* (New York, 1998), 4; see also Robert E. Lerner, 'Medieval Prophecy and Religious Dissent', *P&P*, no. 72 (1976), 3–24.

[6] Robin Bruce Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis: Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation* (Stanford, CA, 1988), 95.

[7] Kevin Sharpe, 'Reading Revelations: Prophecy, Hermeneutics and Politics in Early Modern Britain', in idem and Steven N. Zwicker, eds, *Reading, Society, and Politics in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2003), 122–63, at 127; see also Irena Backus, *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse* (Oxford, 2000), 3–36.

[8] Jaroslav Pelikan, 'Some Uses of the Apocalypse in the Magisterial Reformers', in C. A. Patrides and Joseph Wittreich, eds, *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought* (Manchester, 1984), 74–92, at 75.

[9] Martin Luther, *Preface to the Revelation of St John*, in *LW* 35, 399–400.

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which was 'concealed and mute'.[10] While Luther's opinions on prognostication were largely based on Scripture and centred on preaching, Philip Melanchthon believed in personal prophetic gifts and astrological augury (in which he had a longstanding interest, having studied it at Tübingen in the early 1510s).[11] Melanchthon also took an interest in biblical prophecy; an English translation of his exegesis of Daniel (Wittenberg, 1543) was included in George Joye's *The exposicion of Daniel* (1545).[12] *The exposicion of Daniel* was one of many texts in which prophecies pertained not merely to the past but to an increasingly imminent apocalypse. Francis Lambert's Marburg lectures on Revelation, published in 1528, offered a reading of St John's Apocalypse that directly reflected the course of church history.[13]

Calvin was more cautious about the value of prophecy, believing that Christ's Incarnation had ended the era of prophecy. His view of the prophetic office reflected the Erasmian and Zwinglian view of a prophet as one whose remit was restricted to the interpretation of Scripture.[14] Calvin went one step further, claiming that these interpreters could also apply their understanding of Scripture to their contemporary times, but he excluded predictive powers completely.[15] John Knox, on the other hand, held a more inconsistent theology that allowed him simultaneously to promote the notion of *sola scriptura* and to declare himself endowed with prophetic

[10] Ibid. 400.

[11] Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*, 96–9; Euan Cameron, 'Philip Melanchthon: Image and Substance', *JEH* 48 (1997), 705–22, at 711; Sachiko Kusukawa, *The Transformation of Natural Philosophy: The Case of Philip Melanchthon* (Cambridge, 1995); Charlotte Methuen, 'The Role of the Heavens in the Thought of Philip Melanchthon', *JHI* 57 (1996), 385–403.

[12] George Joye, *The exposicion of Daniel the prophete gathered oute of Philip Melanchton, Iohan Ecolampadius, Chonrade Pellicane & out of Iohan Draconite. &c.* (Antwerp, 1545), fol. 5v. It is likely that Joye knew Bale and that Bale would have been familiar with his work: Joye's printer, Antonius Goinus, also published Bale's works (including the *Brefe Chronycle*) until 1546 in Antwerp, and although Bale's movements during his first period of exile remain obscure, it is believed that Joye was actually living in Antwerp and not editing from afar – so a direct personal connection is probable. On Bale's movements, see Peter Happé, *John Bale* (New York, 1996), 11; for Joye, see Charles C. Butterworth and Allan G. Chester, *George Joye 1495?–1553: A Chapter in the History of the English Bible and the English Reformation* (Philadelphia, PA, 1962), 205.

[13] Fairfield, *John Bale*, 73–5.

[14] Max Engammare, 'Calvin: A Prophet without a Prophecy', *ChH* 67 (1998), 643–61, at 648.

[15] Ibid. 644.

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powers – a divisive position.[16] All reformers could agree, however, on the notion of preaching as a calling to prophesy the word of God.[17] It should also be noted that the reformers' reluctance to call themselves prophets did not extend to their followers: Theodore Beza bestowed this title upon Calvin;[18] Nicholas Bernard's biography of James Ussher placed him in this tradition;[19] and Augustine Bernher cast Hugh Latimer in this light in the introduction to his 1562 edition of Latimer's sermons.[20]

Against this background of Reformation-era views of prophecy, we can explore its place in the polemical works of John Bale. When he converted to the evangelical faith around 1536, Bale turned his back on his Carmelite vows but maintained the interest in historical matters that the brotherhood had nurtured for centuries.[21] Historical manuscripts, including records of heresy trials kept by his erstwhile order as a record of their efforts against heterodoxy, now served as vital sources for Bale's enterprise to reclaim England's historical record from the 'corrupt' clerical chroniclers of the medieval past, and also served to recast former heretics, the Lollards, as spiritual exemplars.[22] To retrieve England's 'true' historical narrative, Bale used Scripture to determine the significance of past events, declaring about the Word: 'Yet is the text a light to the cronicles and not the cronicles to the texte.'[23] The key

[16] Dale Johnson, 'John Knox, Scripture, and Prophecy', in Helen Parish and William G. Naphy, eds, *Religion and Superstition in Reformation Europe* (Manchester, 2002), 133–53, at 147.

[17] Ibid.; Ute Lotz-Heumann, '"The Spirit of Prophecy Has Not Wholly Left the World": The Stylisation of Archbishop James Ussher as a Prophet', in Parish and Naphy, eds, *Religion and Superstition*, 124. The relationship between preaching and prophesying in the early Reformation is underscored by the establishment of the Prophezei in Zürich, where Scripture was interpreted and sermons were prepared: see Gottfried W. Locher, *Zwingli's Thought: New Perspectives* (Leiden, 1981), 27–30.

[18] Engammare, 'Calvin', 643.

[19] Lotz-Heumann, 'Archbishop Ussher', 119–32.

[20] *Sermons by Hugh Latimer*, ed. George Elwes Corrie (Cambridge, 1844), 320–1. I am grateful to Alec Ryrie for this reference.

[21] See Andrew Jotischky, *The Carmelites and Antiquity* (Oxford, 2002).

[22] For Bale's manuscripts, see James Crompton, 'Fasciculi Zizaniorum', *JEH* 12 (1961), 35–45, 155–66; W. T. Davies, 'A Bibliography of John Bale', *Oxford Bibliographical Society: Proceedings and Papers* 5 (1936–9), 201–79; Honor McCusker, 'Books and Manuscripts formerly in the Possession of John Bale', *The Library* ser. 4, 16 (1935–6), 144–65; John Bale, *Index Britanniae Scriptorum*, ed. Reginald Lane Poole and Mary Bateson, intro. Caroline Brett and James P. Carley (Woodbridge, 1990).

[23] John Bale, *The image of bothe Churches* (London, 1548), sig. Aiiiiv.

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to the English past lay in the correct interpretation of Scripture, and in particular the prophecies therein.

Bale's closely intertwined relationship between prophecy and history lies at the centre of this essay. Scholars have rightly emphasized the prophetic elements in Bale's historical works, citing his self-proclaimed affinity with John of Patmos (the exiled author of the Book of Revelation) and his belief that he was living in the 'latter days';[24] however, historians have largely overlooked the way Bale handled the medieval prophetic inheritance. By examining this element of Bale's writings and its place within his historical framework, this essay seeks to demonstrate that Bale's own prophetic voice rings clear through his characterization of medieval prophets – in particular, Sir John Oldcastle, the Lollard knight executed ignominiously for treason and heresy in 1417, who was the subject of Bale's martyrology, *A brefe chronycle concerninge the examinacyon and death of the blessed martyr of Christ syr Johan Oldecastell* (1544). Bale's influence on England's chief Protestant martyrologist, John Foxe (1516/17–87), was 'like a torch touched to dry kindling'.[25] Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (1563) placed the Marian martyrs in a historical chronology that stretched from the early church to Elizabeth's succession, and Bale's emphasis on prophecy was often echoed in Foxe's work.[26]

As scholars have shown, Bale constructed his historical framework by mapping episodes in English history onto his reading of the Book of Revelation, which he saw as prophesying the struggle

[24] Leslie P. Fairfield, *John Bale: Mythmaker for the English Reformation* (Eugene, OR, 1976), 71; John N. King, *English Reformation Literature* (Princeton, NJ, 1982), 63; Gretchen E. Minton, '"Suffer Me Not to be Separated, and Let my Cry Come unto Thee": John Bale's Apocalypse and the Exilic Imagination', *Reformation* 15 (2010), 83–97.

[25] Elizabeth Evenden and Thomas S. Freeman, *Religion and the Book in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2011), 39.

[26] For instance, Foxe incorporated Bale's martyrology of Oldcastle nearly verbatim in the first edition of his *Acts and Monuments*: see John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online or TAMO* (1563 edn) (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011), 313–33, <http//www.johnfoxe.org>, accessed 1 July 2011. Foxe's characterization of Oldcastle, based on Bale's *Brefe chronycle*, caused polemical controversy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: see Susannah Monta and Thomas S. Freeman, 'Holinshed and Foxe', in Paulina Kewes, Ian Archer and Felicity Heal, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Holinshed's Chronicles* (Oxford, 2012), ch. 13. I am grateful to the authors for allowing me to see the manuscript prior to publication.

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between two churches, true and false.[27] Bale interprets the true church, the remnant of Christ's apostolic congregation, as his fellow reformers and their theological predecessors, beleaguered throughout the ages by a dominant false church headed by the Antichrist; Bale understood this as the Roman church, led by the pope. By appropriating the Lollards, whose admonitions to the Roman church mirrored those of the reformers, as co-religionists, the reformer located England as an important battleground in the war between the churches.

Bale believed that England's history, like that of Israel in the Old Testament, was characterized by a series of sinful lapses that had come about because the people of the nation had not heeded the words of a prophet. Bale's understanding of the role of prophets was closely tied to history, implying that the roles of historian and prophet were not dissimilar, and his emphasis on the prophetic quality of historians was closely related to the medieval understanding of history as inseparable from the moral actions of its people. Bale certainly saw the prophetic quality of the historian in his fellow countryman Gildas, writing of the sixth-century cleric, 'in hys dayly preachynges, both agaynst the clergye and layte, concernynge that vyce and soche other ... [he] prophecyed afore hande of the subuersyon of thys realme by the Saxons for yt, lyke as yt sone after folowed in effect'.[28] Divine punishment proved necessary again in the fifteenth century; in the *Brefe Chronycle*, Bale interpreted the turbulence of the Wars of the Roses as retribution from God for not heeding Oldcastle's call to a purer spirituality.[29] In the history of his own country, then, Bale saw direct parallels with the disobedience of the Israelites, whose 'abohminacions' forced God to send prophets such as Elijah to the Israelites on account of their idolatry and wickedness.[30] His narrative of the English past depicted a nation bound to God on a cyclical yet

[27] Richard Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse* (Abingdon, 1978), 38–90; Katharine R. Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain, 1530–1645* (Oxford, 1979), 32–68; Fairfield, *John Bale*.

[28] John Bale, *The actes of Englysh votaryes comprehendynge their vnchast practyses and examples by all ages* (Antwerp, 1546), Cvir.

[29] John Bale, *A brefe chronycle concerninge the examinacyon and death of the blessed martyr of Christ syr Johan Oldecastell* (Antwerp, 1544), Aviiir–Bir.

[30] John Bale, *The Vocacyon of Johan Bale* (Wesel, 1553), sig. Biv; see also Fairfield, *John Bale*, 110–11.

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teleological path, revealed to Englishmen through the exegetical tool of Scripture.

Bale's exegesis of the opening of the seven seals recounted in the Book of Revelation shows clearly that he saw the increasing corruption of the church as concurrent with the rise of extra-biblical ceremonies in the liturgy. He interpreted the seven seals as the seven ages of the world, and believed that he was living in the sixth and penultimate age; he recognized this seal's opening as fulfilled in the dissemination of John Wyclif's teachings, the basis for Lollard belief. He interpreted the earthquake at the opening of the sixth seal (Rev. 6: 12) as a reference to the 'Earthquake Synod' of 1382, which condemned twenty-four propositions of Wyclif. The reformer noted that this latter age would bring on a renewal of martyrdom, and characterized the martyrs of his own day as fulfilling that prophecy.

Bale, then, read the Lollards' place in history as an essential step in the progression toward the end times, heralding the last age of tribulation on earth before the Antichrist's defeat. Investing Lollards with a special historical role was not without its problems, however; the sect had been tainted with heresy since Wyclif's day, and Oldcastle's own condemnation as a heretic only served to reiterate the reprobation. Undaunted by his task, Bale set out to demonstrate that the Lollards, in particular Wyclif and Oldcastle, had been condemned unjustly by a false church, and that they were not heretics but representatives of Christ's true flock. One way he tied the Lollards to his own movement, the true church manifest, was to interpret prophecy.

Before examining how Bale employed this tool in Oldcastle's case, it will be helpful to understand the way in which Bale saw the medieval prophetic inheritance and how he adjusted these ideas to fit into a reformed theological framework. Given Bale's dichotomous understanding of history and the place of the true and false churches within it, it is unsurprising that prophets were regarded throughout his writings as being either true or false. This view of prophecy adhered to a nearly comprehensive endeavour of history-rewriting by Protestants, which called into question mira-

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cles of the medieval era, in particular those associated with the cults of saints.[31]

Bale set about demonstrating the deceitful nature of some medieval prophets. He exhibited several approaches to this problem in his *Actes of the Englysh votaryes* (1546), which told the history of the English church (or rather the long history of papal interference with it). First, he associates the late medieval notion of prophecy as false prognostication with Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury (602–90), whose school at Canterbury was celebrated by Bede. Bale wrote: 'For hyther than brought he all vayne & craftye sciences, of countinge, calkynge, measurynge, syngynge, rymynge, reasonynge, arguynge, dyffynynge, shauinge, oylynge, exorcysynge, incantynge, & coniurynge.'[32] Later in the text, Bale attempted the same association of false prophets and magic, writing:

> Ethelstanus a monke, at one tyme takynge presthode with Dunstane and Ethelwolde, within a whyle after left all hys orders and toke hym to a wyfe. Wherfor they prophecyed of hym that hys ende shulde be myserable. And bycause they wolde apere no false Prophetes, they inchaunted hym, charmed hym, and changed hym in to an ele, and so he lyued in the water euer after with a great sort more of hys companye. Wherupon (they saye) that monasterye and towne hath euer sens bene called Elye.[33]

Here we see the taint of the miraculous with regard to false prophets. Through this story, Bale argued that both miracles and false prophecy were tools of the false church to deceive true believers. In another example, the reformer recalled Paul's prophecy that the latter days would see false prophets. When describing the synod of Thetford in Norfolk, where the reformer claimed that Hadrian of Canterbury (d. 710) published a book of Roman ordinances, Bale asked rhetorically: 'If this were not the departynge that Paule prophecyed to come … where shall we loke for any?'[34]

[31] Helen L. Parish, *Monks, Miracles and Magic: Reformation Representations of the Medieval Church* (Abingdon, 2005), 45–70.

[32] Bale, *The actes of Englysh votaryes*, E2v–3r; cf. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* 4.2, ed. and transl. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, OMT (Oxford, 1969), 332–5.

[33] Bale, *The actes of Englysh votaryes*, Gviv.

[34] Ibid., Eivr; cf. 2 Thess. 2: 1–12.

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Of course, since Bale's sense of history was dichotomous, the examples of the false prophets were made to seem even more deceitful in light of their true counterparts. He urged people to read Gildas's writings alongside William Tyndale's *The obedience of a Christen man* (1528), thereby associating a Reformation martyr and translator of the English Bible with a medieval true prophet.[35] In other places, true prophets were those who lauded clerical marriage and who, in the latter age, had fought against the Antichrist, men such as Martin Luther, Francis Lambert and Philip Melanchthon.[36]

Bale's examples of true and false augurs were glossed with biblical passages that described the role of a prophet. It is noteworthy that these were drawn from both Testaments, offering continuity and a biblical basis by which believers should judge so-called prophets. Numbers 24 showed Balaam stressing his inability to articulate words of his own accord; rather, he was merely a vessel of the Lord;[37] in Micah 3, the Lord warned of prophets who would lead his people astray;[38] and in the New Testament, Paul warned the true church in 2 Thessalonians 2 about those who would prophesy falsely.[39]

Bale applied the prophecies of these men, and of others such as Hosea and John, retrospectively to English history. What is interesting in *The actes of the Englysh votaryes* is how Bale handled authoritative 'prophets' from the medieval era. For instance, Bale included Merlin's prediction that the Diadem of Brutus would one day be restored to the British kings; although elsewhere Bale cast Merlin as a false prophet, here the words were given authority by association with Balaam, who predicted Jesus's coming – and who also, as shown above, stressed that it was the message of God and not the vessel that counted.[40] Bede, a 'verye true prophet', served as another source of extra-biblical revelation.[41] In *The first examinacyon of Anne Askewe* (1546), Bale recalled Bede's predic-

35 Ibid., Cvir.
36 Ibid., Bir.
37 For a reference to this passage, see ibid., Fir.
38 Ibid., Diiir.
39 Ibid., Eivr.
40 See Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. Michael D. Reeve, transl. Neil Wright (Woodbridge, 2007), 148 (Book VII).
41 John Bale, *The first examinacyon of Anne Askewe* (Wesel, 1546), Aiir.

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tion of persecution in the coming ages, but tempered the monk's authority with instruction to read Bede's predictions with the aid of Scripture.[42] We see, then, Bale's acceptance of part of the medieval prophetic tradition, but with elucidation and in conjunction with biblical authority.

Bale's accommodation of certain medieval prophets and rejection of others reflects the larger Reformation process of history-rewriting, in which some medieval tropes and beliefs were accepted, others eschewed, and yet others re-presented – it appears that prophecy was no exception. Ultimately, Bale's attempt at identifying and categorizing medieval prophecy served as another example of his tireless correction of what he saw as the increasing evil of the pope and his false church, as characterized by fake miracles and false prophets. Additionally, he accommodated medieval prophetic notions to biblical precepts in an endless attempt to stress the tenet of *sola scriptura*.

From the general medieval prophetic tradition, we can now turn to examine how Bale used prophecy as one way to rehabilitate Oldcastle's reputation.[43] This was not a simple task: Oldcastle, condemned for his rejection of papal authority and disbelief in transubstantiation in 1414, then led a failed rebellion against Henry V, earning him the title of traitor in addition to that of heretic. In order to validate his membership in the true church, Bale painted Oldcastle as both a prophet and a fulfilment of prophecy.

The prophetic ability that Bale bestowed upon Oldcastle did not exhibit the hallmarks of medieval augury, as it was firmly rooted in Scripture and was conservative with regard to claims to direct personal revelation from God. During Oldcastle's interrogation, according to Bale, the knight claimed that he could know who was included in the true church (and, implicitly, who was excluded), citing Jesus's warning that an evil tree could be recognized by its ill fruit, and a false prophet by his works.[44] Later in his interrogation, he referred again to biblical prophecy:

[42] Ibid., Aiijr; see Bede, *The Reckoning of Time* 68, ed. Faith Wallis, TTH 29 (Liverpool, 1999), 240–1.

[43] Bale also sought to mend John Wyclif's reputation: see Margaret Aston, 'John Wycliffe's Reformation Reputation', in eadem, ed., *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval England* (London, 1984), 243–72, at 244–6.

[44] Bale, *Brefe chronycle*, Dviv.

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> Both Daniel and Christ prophecyed, that soche a troublouse tyme shulde come, as hath not been yet sens the worldes begynnyng. And this prophecye is partlye fulfilled in youre dayes and doynges. For manye haue ye slayne alredye, and more will ye slee here after yf God fulfill not his promes. Christ sayth also, if those dayes of yours were not shortened, scarslye shuld anye fleshe be saued. *Therfore loke for yt iustlye, for God will shorten youre dayes.*[45]

Through this passage, Bale made two important points. Firstly, by rooting Oldcastle's revelatory powers in correct scriptural interpretation, Bale gave readers an example of a 'reformed' prophet, antithetical to the deceitful prognosticators of the medieval era. Secondly, by tying Oldcastle to Daniel, Christ and the apostles, Bale – as a correct interpreter of Scripture – cast himself in the light of a latter-day true prophet, bound through biblical revelation to exemplars of the true church. Thus, through prophecy Bale tied the Lollards to his own cause, bolstering the evangelical movement with historical legitimacy.

Bale also portrayed Oldcastle as a fulfilment of prophecy. In a passage where the Lollard was given divine help to answer his accusers, he referred to Revelation 6: 12, where John prophesied that darkness will block the sun, which Bale interpreted as the dawning of the penultimate age. In this age, the false church would be recognized as such, and the reformer highlighted Oldcastle as part of that historical process. Bolstering this point, Bale showed that Oldcastle's persecution had been prophesied by peppering the text with biblical references to the increased persecution of the last days. Even the title page of the *Brefe Chronycle* cited the most apocalyptic book of the Old Testament: 'In the latter tyme (sayth the Lorde vnto Daniel), shall manye be chosen, proued, and puryfyed by fyre', thus reinforcing his own historical framework through the medium of prophecy.[46]

Another paratextual element of the *Brefe Chronycle* further underscored the association between Oldcastle and prophecy. The apocalyptic tone of the work was mirrored in an addendum at the end of the piece, the 'Prophecyes of Joachim Abbas', which acted as a postscript for read-

[45] Ibid., Eir (my italics).
[46] Ibid., Giir.

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ers.[47] These Joachimite predictions of the earth's end were printed on the verso side of the last leaf of the main text, leaving readers of Oldcastle's narrative with the final impression of a medieval true prophet. They came from a hostile source in Bale's possession, the *De Haeresibus* of Guido de Perpignan, a Carmelite bishop of the fourteenth century who advocated papal infallibility and condemned Joachim of Fiore's works. The prophecies announced that a law of liberty would be declared in the latter days; that the church of Rome was the synagogue of Satan; and that 'the holye ghost shall more perfyghtlye exercyse his domynyon in conuertynge peoples by the preachers of the later tyme, than by the Apostles'.[48] As Bale had set Oldcastle up as a prophet – which among the godly in the Reformation era was synonymous with 'preacher' – readers may have associated Oldcastle with one of these 'preachers of the later tyme'; they might also have understood the strong implication that Bale, as an accurate interpreter of Scripture and thus an apt historian, was a prophet as well.

Ultimately, the way Bale handled the medieval prophetic tradition can be seen as one part of a larger historiographical agenda of the Protestant movement, with the same concern to eradicate the deceit shown by the established church and the same emphasis on *sola scriptura*. That Oldcastle was a significant player in this process shows that, for Bale, Lollardy was a potential avenue to historical and theological validity. Although prophecy would prove yet another point of contention for Protestants, its value in terms of providing historical and theological legitimacy made it worth employing. Perhaps Bale's mediating position regarding this phenomenon (exhibited in his use of Balaam to show that it is the *word* and not the *vessel* of God that matters) reflects his knowledge of its contentious nature; still, there is an unmistakable implication that Bale thought of himself as a prophet. Nevertheless, prophecy, even in its modified form, proved to be a powerful polemical tool in the Reformation era.

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[47] The same type of paratextual component is also evident in an example from the Wittenberg press of Nickel Schirlenz, in which a work from the medieval prophetical tradition is appended to an evangelical text: a German translation of the Magdeburg prophecy serves as an appendix to pseudo-Pflaum's *Practica* (1532): see Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*, 57; Robert E. Lerner, *The Powers of Prophecy: The Cedar of Lebanon Vision from the Mongol Onslaught to the Dawn of the Enlightenment* (Ithaca, NY, 2009), 166.

[48] Bale, *Brefe chronycle*, Gviiir.

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