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REFORMATION, HISTORY, AND ESCHATOLOGY IN ENGLISH PROTESTANTISM

AVIHU ZAKAI

When describing the impressive growth and revival of learning during the sixteenth century, Francis Bacon suggested that the source for this important cultural and intellectual transformation—what later came to be known as "Renaissance" and "Humanism"—should be seen in the context of the Protestant Reformation. More specifically, he argued that it all began with Martin Luther, who out of his struggles against the bishop of Rome and the degenerate traditions of the church . . . was enforced to awake all antiquity, and to call former times to his succours to make party against the present time: so that the ancient authors, both in divinity and humanity, which had long slept in libraries, began generally to be read and revolved.¹

Impressed by the coincidence between the pursuit of religious reformation and the advance of learning and knowledge, Bacon had no other way of explaining this singular concurrence than to see it as clear evidence of God's providence: when it pleased God to call the Church of Rome to account for their degenerate manners and ceremonies . . . at one and the same time it was ordained by the Divine Providence, that there should attend withal a renovation and new spring of all other knowledges.²

Bacon's depiction of the relationship between religion and the revival of learning in the sixteenth century reveals clearly that in the ecclesiastical and theological controversies surrounding the forces of Reformation and Counter-Reformation, Protestants turned increasingly to history, to the study of past events and the interpretation of their significance, in order to find meaning for the Reformation in sacred, providential history. The entire attitude toward profane, secular history was changed in Protestant historiography from what had traditionally been accepted in Christianity. Protestant historiography based itself upon an historical interpretation of prophecies and regarded the Apocalypse as the guide to history. Within this scheme the Reformation was situated at the end of time and history, as an eschatological event preceding that moment when the whole mystery of providential history is resolved.³

From the outset of the Reformation, the Protestants were exposed to Catholic

2. Ibid., 42.
charges concerning the validity of their theological assumptions and the historical warrant for their efforts at ecclesiastical reform, namely, "where was this church of yours" before the time of Luther." The entire historical justification of the Protestant Reformation within the context of sacred ecclesiastical history hinged upon the answer to this question. Indeed, it was their attempt to provide an historical basis for the break with the Church of Rome, and to demolish thoroughly the historical foundation upon which the Papacy built its claim to exclusive power, that led the Protestants to stress the study of history, an emphasis that became a major dimension of the Reformation itself and gave rise to a new form of historical consciousness — Protestant historiography based upon an apocalyptic interpretation of history, or upon an apocalyptic mode of historical thought.

So it is not surprising that especially in England "increasingly, after the 1530s, scholars and statesmen turned to history to justify the ways of church and state to Englishmen." Furthermore, the Reformation in England served as a national movement aiming to free both state and church from papal usurpation, and thus ecclesiastical controversies in England "became more consciously historical" as the Protestants "had made purposeful use of history for specific polemical ends."  

The English historical, apocalyptic tradition became important especially from the time of Queen Elizabeth's accession to the throne in 1558 through the Puritan Revolution of the seventeenth century. Rather than commenting on its well-known importance for an understanding of the religious and political developments in England during that period, I shall describe the formation of the


apocalyptic tradition in England as a unique mode of historical thought and explore its significance for the Christian sense of time, or view of history.

However, before dealing with the Protestant apocalyptic tradition in England, we must first examine Protestant historiography in Europe during the sixteenth century. During the periods of the Henrician and Marian Exiles, many leading English Protestant historians were among those who took refuge in Protestant centers in Europe. There they worked in close association with other Protestant scholars and historians, forming an integral part of an intellectual Protestant community, and it was there that the foundations of Protestant historiography were laid.

As the Protestants strove to restore God to the center of religious life and experience, so also they endeavored to restore God's glory in a theocratic universe and return to him His direct role within history. By viewing history as the proper domain of "the theatre of God's judgement," as that dimension of time which is the subject of divine revelation, the Reformation gave rise to a new historical consciousness based upon close reading of Scripture and its correlation to historical events. Directed by the literal rather than the allegorical interpretation of divine prophecy, the Protestants turned to history in order to explain the historical process in the light of God's word, endeavoring to prove that it was the force of God's hand which directed the course of events.

In their attacks against Rome, Protestant reformers were initially far more interested in proving their position through Scripture than they were in appealing to any historical arguments, a preference which reveals something about the Protestants' early view of history. "The pagans called history the mistress of life," wrote Calvin, but he was firmly convinced that indeed "scripture alone deserves that high position." However, as the struggle between the forces of Reformation and Counter-Reformation intensified during the course of the sixteenth century, the Protestants gradually changed their attitude and came to appreciate the study of history and its possible uses in refuting the historical foundations of Rome and the Papacy. As Luther acknowledged in 1535, "though I was not at first historically well informed, I attacked the papacy on the basis of Holy Scripture. Now I rejoice heartily to see that others have attacked it from another source, that is, from history," and he joyously noted "how clearly," through the work of Protestant historians, "history agrees with Scripture," so that what he had "learned and taught from Paul and Daniel, namely, that the Pope is An-

10. According to Philip Melanchthon, "all the world is God's theatre in which he displays examples of all our duties." This quotation is from A. G. Dickens, The German Reformation and Martin Luther (London, 1974), 205. See also Thomas Beard, The Theatre of Gods Judgements (London, 1612). Beard was Oliver Cromwell's schoolmaster.
lichrist, that history proclaims, pointing and indicating the very man himself." 13 Luther had come now to regard history as "the mother of truth," and "refused to recognize any conflict between the Bible and history properly understood." 14 This particular relationship that Protestant historiography established between prophecy and history had the further consequence that secular, profane history—the domain within which God's providence revealed itself through the fulfillment of prophecies—became integrally linked to sacred, ecclesiastical history.

Carion's Chronicle, 1532, the first major historical work of Protestant historiography, established precisely this intimate relationship between history and prophecy. For the first time using prophecies—the Prophecy of Elias and the Book of Daniel—to explain the course of history, this work by Philip Melanchthon and other Protestant scholars "set a precedent for sixteenth-century historical writing with a theological content and purpose," 15 and in fact became "an historical textbook in Germany for some two hundred years." 16 "God hath given us al maner of prophecyes," wrote the authors, so "that of the accomplishment of their chaunce, we myght have wyntnesse," and this in order "that we shuld be warned when Christ must come, and when the ende of the world is to be loked for." The point was reiterated in the argument "that all thynge spaken on in the prophets are come to passe, that we may believe, that those shall happen also, the which holye scripture sayeth shall befal." 17 Thus history and prophecy were inextricably bound to one another, with prophecy placed within the historical dimension, and history—as the realization of prophecy—situated within the prophetic dimension. With history and prophecy so closely joined, a knowledge of history becomes necessary for the understanding of prophecy, and familiarity with prophetic writing becomes indispensable to the interpretation of history: "to understande prophecyes arighte it is greatlye necessary to know the order of kingdomes, the nombre of the yeares, and many other thynge," for this historical knowledge "is chiefeely necessarye for Chrysten men, that they may the better understane the prophecies, and have better judgment of them." 18 Indeed, it was Melanchthon's deep conviction that "history forms a succession of divinely predestined events and patterns." 19

Carion's Chronicles did more than mark the creation of a Protestant ideology of history. It adapted the historical periodization in terms of the four great monarchies—Babylonian, Assyrian, Persian, and Roman—so as to set history in a predestined, apocalyptic direction. This in turn placed the Reformation within a well-defined historical context whereby it could be regarded as the final stage

15. Thompson, I, 527, 529–531; Firth, 6, 15.
16. Fitzsimons, 121; Thompson, I, 528.
17. Firth, 16.
19. Dickens, The German Reformation and Martin Luther, 205.
before the end of time. In addition, Melanchthon succeeded in erasing the bound-
aries between sacred and secular history and uniting both into one history evolving
along a special dimension of time in which promise leads to fulfillment, and
prophecy to its realization. These were two major achievements which to a large
extent determined the future course of Protestant historiography.

The extent to which Protestant historiography influenced the conception of
the relationship between history and prophecy is nowhere more clearly seen than
in Luther's change of opinion in his exegesis of Revelation, from an allegorical
interpretation of prophecies to a literal interpretation and a tendency to perceive
them in historical terms.

In his "Preface to the Revelation of Saint John" of 1522, Luther frankly admits
that he "missed more than one thing in this book," and therefore "hold it to be
neither apostolic nor prophetic." "First and foremost," he declared, "the apostles
do not deal with visions, but prophecy in clear, plain words." Not knowing how
to interpret the "visions and figures" which were the main content of the Apoca-
lypse, Luther argued that "no one knows what is" [the Book of Revelation], "to
say nothing of keeping it," and he gave serious thought to letting "everyone think
of it as his own spirit gives him to think." Yet, as for himself, "My spirit cannot
fit itself into this book," he wrote, because "Christ is not taught or known in it."21

In Luther's second "Preface," which appeared in 1545 as the last work to be
supervised by the great reformer himself, a remarkable shift in view occurs. Referring
to the Apocalypse, one particularly notable passage in this edition contains
the essence of the new approach, which had now emerged as the Protestant his-
torical interpretation of the Apocalypse:

Since it is intended as a revelation of things that are to happen in the future, and espe-
cially of tribulations and disasters for the Church, we consider that the first and surest
step toward finding its interpretation is to take from history the events and disasters that
have come upon the Church before now and hold them up alongside these pictures and
so compare them with the words. If, then, the two were to fit and agree with each other,
we could build on that, as a sure, or at least an unobjectionable interpretation.22

Thus Luther appears to have accepted the method of correlation between "text"
and "chronicle," or prophecy and history, which had been suggested and de-
veloped by Protestant historians, a method of Protestant historiography according
to which historical "events" were compared with "pictures" or visions of the Reve-
lation, and placed in a coherent mesh based on the "words" or interpretations.23

Applying this technique, Luther associated the Sack of Rome by the armies
of Charles V in 1527 with the destruction of "Babylon the Great" (Rev. 18); the
Turks' invasion of Europe with "Gog and Magog" (Rev. 20); and the Papacy with
Antichrist.24 He was thus able "to place the Reformation in the final years of

20. Firth, 15–22; Thompson, I, 527–528.
21. Martin Luther, "Preface to the Revelation of Saint John," 1522, Works of Martin Luther, VI,
488–489.
23. Ibid., 480.
24. Ibid., 486, 484.
history." 25 Furthermore, by interpreting history in terms of the terrifying prophetic revelations of the Apocalypse, he succeeded in imbuing the Reformation with major apocalyptic significance.

Among the works of Protestant historiography, none can be compared to the monumental historical study known as Magdeburg Centuries, 1559–1574. Composed by Matthias Flacius and his colleagues with the aim of demolishing the historical foundation of the Church of Rome, the Centuries traces the history of the Church from the birth of Christ up to the thirteenth century. Refuting the authenticity of documents upon which the Catholic Church based its claims to exclusive power in the world, the work is filled with accusations that the Pope is Antichrist and the Catholic Church his empire, and it is outstanding in its attempt to demonstrate the endurance through the centuries of the true Church with its pure Christian faith and doctrine, and the decline of the Church under the Papacy. 26 Here, too, history was regarded as the dimension of time along which an apocalyptic struggle was waged between the true and false Church, or between Christ and Antichrist. The mark of history, stressed the Centuries, "is the warfare between good and evil, between evangelical truth and the intrigues of Anti-Christ." 27

The revolutionary nature of this Protestant apocalyptic ideology of history becomes clear in light of earlier orthodox Christian attitudes toward time and history. Prior to the Reformation, Christian philosophy of history was largely founded upon the legacy of the Fathers of the Church, most notably St. Augustine of Hippo, who removed eschatology and apocalypse from history such that the entire culmination of the redemptive process was placed beyond time. "The two cities, the earthly and the profane," declared Augustine, "which are mingled together from the beginning to the end of their history," would be "separated by the final judgment, and each receives her own end." 28

According to Augustine, divine providence is concerned with salvation, not with history as such, and therefore the intrinsic dualism characterizing the historical process—the struggle between the heavenly and profane cities—would be resolved only beyond time and history. 29 History, devoid of all human progress, was therefore regarded by Augustine as without meaning, and his attitude toward history, and hence the world, was thus based upon alienation from it, and not upon reconciliation. A permanent pilgrimage upon earth—this essentially is the state of Christian life in the world as "resident strangers," or "resident

25. Firth, 12; Luther, 487–488.
27. Thompson, I, 530; Fitzsimons, 122.
28. St. Augustine, City of God, transl. J. O'Meara (Middlesex, 1984), 842; Alfred Braithwaite, Salvation and the Perfect Society: The Eternal Quest (Amherst, 1979), 146.
aliens. Nor, believed Augustine, did sacred, providential history lend any significance to profane history. As R. A. Markus puts it:

Since the coming of Christ, until the end of the world, all history is homogeneous, that it cannot be mapped out in terms of a pattern drawn from sacred history, that it can no longer contain decisive turning-points endowed with a significance in sacred history. Every moment may have its unique and mysterious significance in the ultimate divine tableau of men’s doings and suffering; but it is a significance to which God’s revelation does not supply the clue.

Protestant historiography returned eschatology, the apocalypse, and the millennium to time and history. Considered within the context of the pre-Reformation Christian philosophy of history, it imbued secular history (what Augustine referred to as the saeculum) with divine significance, thereby negating the dualistic view of history such as was adhered to by Augustine.

As a movement aimed at demolishing the historical foundations of the Church of Rome and exposing the Papacy’s sinful and unwarranted usurpation of ecclesiastical and regal powers, Protestant historiography tended to be increasingly nationalistic in tone. As the Reformation movement spread across Europe, it stimulated a strong interest in national history in countries such as Poland, Bohemia, Hungary, France, Denmark, and Sweden. Many of the contemporary historiographical works in Protestant countries emphasized their respective nations’ role in the struggle against the Church of Rome. At the same time, they stripped Rome and the Catholic Church of all historical significance and sought to fill the resulting vacuum with national-historical contents.

Thus, armed with a new critical awareness and historical consciousness, Protestant historians set out to examine past national experiences in light of the struggle with Rome. This held true particularly for England, all of whose history was described solely in terms of that of the Church of England. In keeping with this approach, expectations ran high that the Reformation in England would reveal the full significance of the English nation in providential history. It is this final development which reveals most clearly the revolutionary implications of Protestant historiography.

Adapting Protestant historiography to the English historical context, English reformers claimed that pure apostolic Christianity had been transferred intact to England well before the intrusion of the Church of Rome. Thus, in a sophisticated interpretation of English history, they implied that it was the Church of England that was founded upon apostolic origins, and that Rome was the harmful usurper. From this point of view, English history appeared as an endless struggle of the English Church and monarchy to resist Rome’s appropriation of regal and ecclesiastical powers. This argument became the core of Protestant historiog-

raphy, primarily through the writings of John Bale, John Foxe, and Thomas Brightman, the leading exponents of Protestant apocalyptic tradition in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was largely as a result of their works that Protestants regarded the English Reformation as central to English history; and later it was their writings which gradually nourished the upsurge in eschatological visions and millennial expectations characterizing the Puritan Revolution.

The Protestant historiographer John Bale (1495–1563), forced to leave his native country after the fall of his patron Thomas Cromwell, fled to the continent and settled in Germany in 1540. Earlier in his career, after his conversion to Protestantism and as an advocate of Reformed doctrine, Bale did no more than write some historical and miracle plays, most notably among them *King John* (c. 1536). Once secure on the continent, however, and part of that “afflicted family” of “believing brethren” whom the Lord “hath exiled” from the “realm of England,” Bale took upon himself a mission of such proportions as would transform him from minor playwright into a major figure in English Protestant historiography. “I have considered it no less than my bound duty, under pain of damnation, to admonish Christ’s flock” in England by exposing the “present revelation of their perils past, and the dangers to come for the contempt of the gospel.”  

The outcome of this self-imposed charge eventually took shape as the *Image of Both Churches* (1541–1547), an ecclesiastical history of universal scope, yet singularly adapted to England, and modeled after Augustine’s *City of God* (“either we are citizens in the new Jerusalem with Jesus Christ, or else in the old superstitious Babylon with Antichrist the vicar of Satan”). It was, essentially, a history based upon “the most wonderful heavenly Revelation of Saint John the Evangelist,” or the Apocalypse.

Addressing himself in this work to the relationship between history and prophecy, Bale declared the Apocalypse to be “full clearance to all the chronicles and most notable histories which hath been wrote since Christ’s ascension, opening the true natures of their ages, times, and seasons.” He further argued, “Yet is the text a light to the chronicles, and not the chronicles to the text.” And indeed, the rallying cry of Protestant historiography was for a literal, figural, and historical reading of the Scripture, with strict correspondence between prophecy and history.

Having established the connection between prophetic text and historical event, between prophecy and history, Bale then turned to the reconstruction of ecclesiastical history based upon an apocalyptic mode of historical thought. A struggle takes place within history and time, stated Bale, between the true and false churches, between Christ and Antichrist. Like Augustine, Bale described history as the space of time within which a struggle is waged between two oppo-
site powers. Here, however, the powers were Christ and Antichrist, or "the true Christian church, which is the meek spouse of the Lamb without spot," and "the proud church of hypocrites, the rose-coloured whore, the paramour of antichrist, and the sinful synagogue of Satan." Moreover, Bale described an apocalyptic struggle that was played out and resolved within time—an approach that contrasted sharply with Augustine's pessimistic view of history as devoid of any sacred or human progress. It is in history (now redefined as "providential history"), Bale argued, that "the two churches" receive their due fate: "the one turned over into most fearful and terrible destruction, under the title of the old whorship Babylon, the other obtaining a most glorious raise, under the name of the holy new Jerusalem."

Bale gave rise to no great eschatological visions of millennial expectation of the final conflagration, for he did not expect God's mysteries to be revealed during his lifetime. Rather, he saw his time and the Reformation in general as the period of the sixth seal, or as the sixth and penultimate age in the history of the world. "Since Christ's ascension hath the church continued by six other ages . . . comprehended in the six seals, in the latter end of whom we are now." From the time of "creation," history continues within "the space [of] six ages, till the coming of Christ, which brought with him the sabbath of the Spirit," or the seventh age.

Within Protestant apocalyptic tradition in England, Bale's importance lies mainly in his interpretation of the origins of the Church of England. The Church of England was founded, he believed, not by St. Augustine of Canterbury (d. 604 or 605), who was sent by Pope St. Gregory the Great to England in 597, but rather by St. Joseph of Arimathea, "the counsellor," who after the Crucifixion buried the body of Christ (Luke 23.53, Matt. 27.60, Mark 15.46). A notion first suggested by William of Malmesbury in the twelfth century, the claim that St. Joseph came to England with the Holy Grail and established the first church there, served as a basis for Bale's argument that the Church of England was virtually apostolic in its origins, having appeared well before the rise of Rome. Bale could then proceed to say that "Gregorye" sent "a Romyshe monke called Augustyne, not of the order of Christ as was Peter" to England in 596, "there to sprede the Romyshe faythe and relygon," yet "Christes faythe was there longe afore." This mission, claimed Bale, signified the entrance of "monks & Italynes" who were "wele armed" with "Aristotles artyleye, as with logyk, Phylosophy, and other crafty scences, but of the sacred scriptures, they knew lyttle or nothyng." Thus, just as the apostolic church in general was corrupted by the evils and superstitions of the Roman papacy, so was the Church of England, whose fate Bale perceived as reflecting that of the true church.

Indeed, Bale gave prominence to English history by presenting it as an unending course of resistance to the pope's usurpation of regal and ecclesiastical

36. Ibid., 251.
37. Ibid., 514, 566–567, 584–588, 587.
38. Ibid., 449.
40. Idem.
powers, or as an ongoing apocalyptic struggle between Christ and Antichrist. Bale anticipated that the current king of England would rise to the task and fight the papacy. Accordingly, he offered his “daily prayer” that “the most worthy minister of God, king Edward the sixth,” who “hath so sore wounded the beast,” after his accession in 1547 to the throne, would continue to “throw all” the “superstition” in the Church of England “to the comfort of his people.”⁴¹ So far, the Reformation in England “by the gospel-preaching” led to “the suppression of monasteries, priories, convents, and friars’ houses. . . . But be of good comfort and pray in the meantime,” Bale advised, “for the Holy Ghost promiseth here they [the bishops] shall wither away, with all that the heavenly Father hath not planted.” For it was Bale’s firm belief that the time had come for God’s judgment: “Now is the axe laid to the root of the tree, to hew down the unfruitful branches, the withered reserved to unquenchable fire.”⁴²

In the hands of Bale, English history had truly become a mirror of providential history, a nation in which — within time — two churches were fighting for predominance. The English Reformation was in this context a pinnacle of English history.

It was left to Bale’s young friend and fellow exile, John Foxe (1516–1587), to define the Reformation in England as a national reformation, significantly helping “to create a national faith that was shared by the English Reformers at large.”⁴³ Foxe made explicit in his writings, most notably in his Acts and Monuments, what was merely implied by Bale: that is, he took “the grand scheme evolved by John Bale and developed it into a fully articulated church history.”⁴⁴

Moreover, whereas the fact of Elizabeth I’s accession to the throne was never fully utilized by Bale, Foxe presented this event as a clear indication of the advancement of the Reformation in England and the triumph of Protestantism. “By now by revolution of years we are come from that time of 1501,” the time in which “the Lord began to show in parts of Germany wonderful tokens, and bloody marks of his passion” — to “the year now present 1570. In which the full seventy years of the Babylonish captivity draweth now well to an end.”⁴⁵ In this time, Foxe continued, “the Lord sent his mild Constantine to cease blood, to stay persecution, to refresh his people.” Thus, for the magnitude of her role, Elizabeth was in Foxe’s eyes comparable to Constantine the Great who made Christianity the religion of the empire.⁴⁶

Like Bale before him, Foxe began his historical writings while still in exile, with the intention of writing an ecclesiastical history that would place the Protestant Reformation in the context of providential history. Above all, his work

⁴¹ Bale, 640.
⁴² Ibid., 485.
⁴³ V. Norskov Olsen, John Foxe and the Elizabethan Church (Berkeley, 1973), 38, 40.
⁴⁴ Levy, 194.
⁴⁵ John Foxe, Acts and Monuments, 1, 520.
⁴⁶ Ibid., 504, 520; Christianson, Reformers and Babylon, 41.
came as a response to the Catholic charge against the Protestant Reformation: “where was this church,” the Reformed Church, “before these fifty years?” 47 He accordingly set about to prove that “the same form, usage, and institution of this our present reformed church, are not the beginning of any new church of our own, but the renewing of the old ancient church of Christ,” and in order to do so, he divided “the whole tractation of this history into five sundry diversities of time.” The first period extended from the apostles to Constantine the Great; the second, from “the flourishing time of the church” until the year 600; the third period marked “the declining or backsliding of the church” and continued “until the loosing out of Satan, which was about the thousandth year after the nativity of Christ”; the fourth period “followed the time of Antichrist, and the loosing of Satan or desolation of the church, whose full swinge containeth the space of four hundred years.” (Foxe correlated this period with the predominance of the papacy in the world.) “Fifthly and lastly, after this time of Antichrist reigning in the church of God by violence and tyranny, followeth the reformation,” signaling the final battle, the historical apocalyptic struggle with Antichrist and “his church decreasing.” 48

In this apocalyptic scenario, England played a singular part, almost to the point where English history and ecclesiastical history were inseparable. Given the important role which Foxe gave to that country, it is not surprising that his book became highly influential there. “It became almost the Bible of Protestant England, and was ordered by Convocation to be placed in churches where everyone might have access to it.” 49 While the Acts and Monuments commenced with a general description of “the first primitive age of Christ gospel,” the work as a whole, divided by major events in English history, concluded with an historical event exclusive to the English Reformation—namely, “the end of queen Mary” and “the beginning of this gracious queen Elizabeth.” 50 Like Bale, but with more historical ability, Foxe depicted English history as revolving around that of the Church of England, and he envisaged the reformation of the English Church as a climactic event that would finally reveal England's special role in providential history.

Indeed, the purpose of the Acts and Monuments was to demonstrate to the English readers that theirs was a chosen nation that had received the pure faith during the time of the apostles, that had struggled to preserve it undefiled against Rome and the papacy, and that finally had initiated the Protestant Reformation. Foxe spared no efforts toward these ends. Among the many arguments he used to prove the pre-Augustinian origins of the Church of England is the story about Joseph of Arimathea who “after the dispersion of the [early church by] Jews, was sent, by Philip the apostle, from France to Britain, about the year of our

47. Foxe, I, 3–4, 9, 513–514.
48. Ibid., I, 4–5, 9.
49. Thompson, I, 615; Foxe, I, 504.
50. Foxe, VIII, 753–754.
Lord 63: and here remained in this land all this time; and so with his fellows, laid the first foundation of Christian faith among the people of Britain.\textsuperscript{51}

Foxe made it clear that the true faith was preserved in England throughout its history. At the same time, he stressed that it was the great fourteenth-century English reformer John Wyclif who inaugurated the Protestant Reformation. After the triumph of Constantine the Great and the establishment of Christianity as the religion of the empire, wrote Foxe, "according to the pre-ordinate counsel of God . . . it pleased him to show mercy again, and to bind up Satan, the old serpent, according to the twentieth chapter of the Revelation, for the space of thousand years: that is, from the time of Licinius," in the year 324, "to the time of John Wickliff and John Huss.\textsuperscript{52} During the fourth period (according to Foxe's division of ecclesiastical history), there occurred the loosing again of Satan and the time of Antichrist—a time in which "all the whole world was filled and overwhelmed with error and darkness." Just then, by "God's providence" Wyclif "sprang and rose up, through whom the Lord would first waken and raise up again the world.\textsuperscript{53}

Foxe regarded the accession of Elizabeth to the throne and the consequent triumph of Protestantism as the climax in England's unique role in providential history. He was convinced that under "so good, godly, and virtuous a queen," the Church of England would become God's glorious church: "of this I am sure, that God, yet once again is come on visitation to this church of England, yea, and that more lovingly and beneficially then ever he did before. For in this visitation he hath redressed many abuses, and cleansed his church of much ungodliness and superstition, and made it a glorious church.\textsuperscript{54}

The question still remained, when and how the Last Act in providential history would take place. To this, Foxe, like Bale, had no answer: "but so it is, I cannot tell how, the elder the world waxeth, the longer it continueth, the nearer it hasteneth to its ends, the more Satan rageth.\textsuperscript{55}

Foxe's \textit{Acts and Monuments} reflects the supreme achievement of Protestant historiography: the shaping of English history to its own ends and the creation of a new historical consciousness among Englishmen. Through this work, Foxe succeeded in imparting to Englishmen a national ecclesiastical history unique to England, a Protestant view of English history centered exclusively on the Church of England from its early apostolic origins until the time of Elizabeth. In "this account of Church history," wrote William Haller, Foxe showed that a "long succession of the native rulers down to Elizabeth" owed "their authority directly to divine appointment" and "made plain that by all the signs to be found in scripture and history the will of God was about to be fulfilled in England by a prince

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., I, 152, 306; IV, 131, 144–145; II, 324–342.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., I, 5, 249–250, 292.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., II, 793, 796; III, 580.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., VIII, 601; I, 94.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., VIII, 754.
perfect in her obedience to her vocation, ruling a people perfect in their obe-
dience to her authority.”

A comparison of Foxe and Bale may facilitate a greater understanding of the
contribution of the former to Protestant historiography. Foxe's attempt to reveal
the apocalyptic dimension of history and the historical dimension of prophecy
indicates that he had adopted Bale's apocalyptic interpretation of English his-
tory, and it was in keeping with this scheme that he looked exclusively to the
Church of England for the clue to English history. Yet there is a crucial difference
in the works of these two great Protestant scholars. Bale in his *Image of Both
Churches* supported his apocalyptic interpretation of history with no more than
a handful of examples from English history; but Foxe provided a fully articu-
lated historical interpretation of England, presenting the entire course of En-
GLISH history in terms of prophetic revelations.

Protestant apocalyptic historiography implied that a point in time would come
when prophecy and history would be irrevocably joined. This was to be the es-
chatological day of judgment, Christ's second coming, or the millennium. Fore-
told in Revelation, this final providential event was to occur in the period of the
"seventh seal," with the sounding of the "seventh trumpet" signifying the mo-
ment when "the mystery of God should be finished" (Rev. 10:7): for when "the
seventh angel sounded," then "the kingdoms of this world are become the
kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever"
(Rev. 11:15). Had either Bale or Foxe taken Protestant historiography to its final
conclusion, he would have provided an historical interpretation for this eschato-
logical event. Bale, however, believed his era to be that of the sixth seal, very
close but not yet belonging to the seventh; while Foxe also believed that "this
seventh trumpet certainly is not far off," yet, again, not immediate. Neither
of them, therefore, gave the last and ultimate prophetic revelation in providential
history the encompassing historical interpretation that was called for. This task
was left to Thomas Brightman (1562–1607), whose great contribution to English
apocalyptic tradition lies in the historical interpretation he offered concerning
the seventh trumpet, an interpretation which enabled Englishmen to look upon
their time as the period of the millennium at hand.

In the English apocalyptic tradition of the sixteenth and seventeenth cen-
turies, Thomas Brightman holds a prominent spot. His exegesis of the Book of
Revelation had a tremendous influence on the course of the Puritan movement
in England before and during the Puritan Revolution, and the revolutionary so-
olution he offered in terms of the relation between prophecy and history singu-
larly inspired radical Puritans, in England as well as New England, to attempt
to realize through their own actions their millennial expectations and eschato-

209–224.
logical visions. Brightman's historical interpretation of the Apocalypse constituted a unique philosophy of history which supplied the Puritans with coherent perceptions concerning both the meaning of their time in providential history and the crucial role of the saints in the time of the millennium at hand.

Brightman's basic assumption was that through time and history the Kingdom of God would rise on earth, and that in this world and not the next the mystery of the great providential drama would be revealed. This view created a new sense of religious and political obligations among Puritans regarding their own role in the cosmic battle between Christ and Antichrist. Raising a new historical consciousness in England during the first half of the seventeenth century, Brightman's work created a sense of the imminent fulfillment of prophecy within time and history, as well as a deep-seated conviction within each individual that his was the time of the millennium at hand and that it was thus the duty of the saints to aid Christ in transforming the world into the Kingdom of God. For as Brightman declared: "now is the time begun when Christ shal raigne in all the earth, having all his enemies round subdued unto him and broken in peeces." 58

In order to appreciate fully Brightman's contribution to English apocalyptic tradition, we must first regard his achievement in light of the premises of Protestant historiography. As noted earlier, Protestant historiography stressed the literal, historical interpretation of divine prophecy. From this historical viewpoint, history was not merely a field of human action, but was a domain situated firmly along the dimension of prophecy leading to the ultimate revelation of God's providence. History, then, by its very nature is predestined to reach the moment of eschatological salvation. However both Bale and Foxe in their apocalyptic historical interpretations stopped short of identifying this crucial, ultimate moment in providential history in which the mystery of God's providence would be revealed. Brightman, on the other hand, offered his contemporaries an historical interpretation of the time of the seventh trumpet of Revelation, which he correlated with Elizabeth's accession to the throne in England, declaring that it was unto England "which Christ sent our most gracious Elizabeth to be Queene at the first blast of the seaventh Trumpet in the yeare 1558." 59

The difference between Brightman and Foxe should be seen against the background of changing historical circumstances in England, especially concerning the state of the English Reformation during the latter half of the sixteenth century. To Foxe, as to many other Protestants of the time, the early years of Elizabeth's reign offered renewed evidence of England's destiny as a chosen nation in providential history: the true reformation in England would come to fruition through the imperial instrument, the prince, who was leading the fight against Antichrist in the world. This divine mission did not succeed, however, for despite all Protestant efforts, the prince failed to achieve the long-expected refor-

58. Thomas Brightman, Apocalypsis Apocalypseos, or a Revelation of the Revelation (Leyden, 1616), 491, 502. On Brightman's influence in England during the first half of the seventeenth century, see Lamont's important study, Godly Rule.
59. Brightman, 490.
mation of the Church of England upon which depended England's unique place in providential history. With the Puritan failure under Elizabeth, this "orthodox" relationship among the Church of England, the prince, and the millennial prospect, which is most fully exemplified in Foxe's writings, underwent a radical reassessment, and the Protestants' millennial expectations of the prince began to wane and disperse. Centrifugal millenarianism replaced centripetal millenarianism.60

It is important to note here, in the context of English apocalyptic tradition, Brightman's celebrated book Apocalypsis Apocalypseos, or a Revelation of the Revelation (1609). This work serves as evidence of the Puritan failure to reform the Church of England under Elizabeth. Brightman, as William Lamont notes, "argued against expecting too much from a Godly Prince," because for him, "the Godly Ruler frustrates, not advances, Godly Rule."61 Therefore, rather than look upon the prince as the main instrument in the realization of England's singular role in providential history, Brightman exhorted the believers themselves to work toward advancing the reformation. Yet the main significance of this work, which constitutes Brightman's unique contribution to English apocalyptic tradition, is that it presented a revolutionary solution concerning the relation between prophecy and history, or between the prophecies of Revelation and the Puritan experience in England at the turn of the seventeenth century.

The essence of Brightman's radical solution is his contention that the Book of Revelation not only described events to come but also contained prophecies with actual historical substance. Events depicted in the Apocalypse, he argued, or the Epistles sent to the Seven Churches or Cities, correspond to actual periods of ecclesiastical history, past and present. "These seaven Epistles," wrote Brightman, "respected not onely the present condition of the seaven Cities, but do . . . comprehend the ages following for a long time."62 Thus he associated the Church of Ephesus in Revelation with the apostolic church until Constantine; Smyrna, with the period of time from "Constantine . . . until Gratian, about the year of our Lord 382"; the Church of Pergamos to the sinful Roman church, "from the yeare 380 . . . until about the yeare 1300"; and the fourth church, Thyatira, with "the tyme from the yeare 1300, until the yeare 1520." According to this scheme, the last three churches of the Revelation, and hence their historical periods, were within the era of the Protestant Reformation. Sardis corresponded to the German Reformation, Philadelphia to the most reformed Protestant churches of "Constance, Basil, Strasburgh, Geneu and others." And finally, the church of Laodicea, upon whom the Lord had promised to pour his wrath, was correlated with England.63 Consequently, if the churches in Revelation, barring Philadelphia, moved from the ancient purity of the apostolic age into decline, they also moved in time toward history's climax and the apocalyptic events

61. Lamont, 51.
63. Ibid., 74, 84, 97, 118-122, 140, 158-159.
surrounding Christ’s second coming. The gulf between secular and providential history was thus finally bridged, as history and prophecy became one.

Brightman’s interpretation allowed for an historical, earthly unification of the visible and the invisible Church. Neither Bale nor Foxe, not daring to interpret their age as the last period in the realization of eschatology, attempted to propose such a union in their apocalyptical historical interpretations. It was only Brightman who, advancing one significant step forward, boldly claimed his age as the historical stage upon which the realization of eschatology would take place. “For now is the last Act begun,” he averred, “of a most long & doleful Tragedy, which shall wholly overflow with scourges, slaughters, destructions, but after this Theatre is once removed, there shall come in roome of it a most delightful spectacle of perpetuall peace, joined with abundance of all good things.”

Brightman was certain that the blast of the seventh trumpet in Revelation had already sounded in time and history. Following the Book of Revelation, which states that with the sounding of the seventh trumpet “the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 10:7; 11:15), Brightman believed himself alive “in these last ages” when “Christ shall reigne in all the earth,” and specifically, “in these last times from the yeare 1558, wherein the seventh Trumpet blew.”

The period of the sounding of the seventh trumpet is portrayed in Revelation as that time in which the entire dualistic structure of the universe is broken: a war, begun in heaven, extends to earth, so that the earth becomes the ultimate scene of the cosmic drama from which emerges the Kingdom of God. This is the period then, in which the millennium is finally at hand after many apocalyptic events, including the destruction of Babylon. And it was the historical event of Elizabeth’s accession to the English throne that Brightman perceived as its commencement. Thus, wrote Brightman, “the time is at hand; the Event of things immediately to be done . . . the things to come are no lesse certaine; But for us, who have seene the consent between the event and Prophecy for the space of a thousand & five hundred yeares, that is, ever since the days of John, we can not possibly doubt, any longer touching those few events, which yet remaine to be accomplished.”

Brightman’s pressing sense of the millennium at hand stems largely from the historical perspective in which he placed the prophecies of the Apocalypse. According to Brightman, “the Divell was bound . . . for thousand years” during the rule of Constantine, who made Christianity a church state in the Roman Empire. He went on to maintain that the Devil or Satan escaped from captivity in 1300 and began to wage war on Christ and his saints. And he placed the end of Antichrist in the late seventeenth century: “the last end of Antichrist shall expire at the year 1686.” It was between these two periods, then, that the battle

64. Ibid., preface “To the Holy Reformed Churches of Britany, Germany & France.”
65. Ibid., 497.
66. Ibid., 490-491.
67. Ibid., 1135.
between Christ and Antichrist occurred, when the saints gathered around the Lord in his wars on Mount Sion as described in the Apocalypse. Throughout this period, the Church paraded as the Militant Church, gradually spreading the kingdom of Christ on earth through religious reform against Satan and Antichrist. Since Satan and his agents were to battle Christ for only 390 years, according to Revelation, Brightman calculated that at the end of the seventeenth century, after the final destruction of Antichrist, the saints together with Christ would rule on earth. Then, “all the nations shall be at the Churches command, & that at a becke, requiring & taking lawes and ordinances from it, whereby they may be governed.”

With Brightman, therefore, the millennium was immersed in time and history. According to his interpretation, from 1300 onward, Christ and the saints were engaged in the apocalyptic drama foretold by Revelation, and from that time on world history revealed the spreading of God’s kingdom on earth, culminating in the sounding of the seventh trumpet and the approach of the millennium. By calculating that the blast of the seventh trumpet proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom of God upon earth occurred in the year 1558, Brightman infused a strong eschatological impulse into early seventeenth-century Puritan millennial discourse.

Three decades after Brightman, Thomas Goodwin could write: “This is the last time because it is the perfection of the other . . . and therefore seeing these are the last days, the nighe the day approacheth, the more shall we endeavour to do God service.” And Milton, who in his ecstatic vision saw England as “a noble and puissant Nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks,” or as “an Eagle muing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazl’d eyes at the full midday beam; purging and unsacing her long abused sight at the foundation it self of heav’nly radiance”—he, too, was convinced that “thy Kingdom is now at hand, and thou standing at the dore. Come forth out of thy Royall Chambers, O prince of all the Kings of the earth, put on the visible roabes of thy imperial Majesty, take up that unlimited Sceptor which they Almighty Father hath Bequeath’d thee; for now the voice of they Bride calls thee, and all creatures sigh to bee renew’d.”

By insisting upon the strictest correlation between prophecy and history, Brightman transformed the millennium into an attainable, historical goal to be realized in an immediate future by the saints and Christ under some terrestrial reign; and it was through his historical interpretation of prophecy—that his correlation of events described in Revelation with historical events and periods—that he instilled new meaning into the search for reformation in early seventeenth-century England.

68. Ibid., 519, 569, 852, 1119.
When he identified the sixth church of Revelation, Philadelphia—God’s one truly reformed church and that to which Christ promised that he “will write upon [her] the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem” (Rev. 3:12)—not with the English church, but rather with “the Church of Helvetia, Suevia, Geneve, France, Scotland,”71 Brightman broke radically from the prevailing apocalyptic tradition in England. Since the Puritans had failed to reform the Church of England, Brightman drastically altered England’s role in providential history from that of Foxe’s Elect Nation to the part of Laodicea, the sinful church in Revelation which rejected God’s word and was therefore warned by the Lord that He would “spue thee out of my mouth” (Rev. 3:16).

If Laodicea was England, a special punishment awaited it in addition to the general destruction decreed by God in Revelation to all who refused to acknowledge him. For in the end, all churches but Philadelphia would be destroyed in the final judgment, while Laodicea faced a double specter: it would be cast from Christ’s mouth to Satan, before being consumed in the general conflagration along with other churches failing to implement full reformation. In terms of the Puritan movement, the correlation between England and Laodicea created a deep sense of crisis concerning England’s role in providential history. For with the Puritan hopes in the reforming zeal of the monarch fading rapidly during the reign of James I and Charles I, and with the Church of England becoming increasingly corrupt, there emerged a terrible fear that England would soon be called to account.

Just how successful Brightman was in transforming England’s role in providential history from that of the Elect Nation to doomed Laodicea is suggested by the frequency with which England is associated with Laodicea in Puritan writings. Indeed, to a large extent, the entire course of the Puritan movement up to and during the Puritan Revolution was determined by this correlation. It was with the aim of saving themselves from doomed Laodicea or England that thousands of Puritans emigrated to New England during the 1630s.72 Moreover, the Puritan Revolution in a sense constituted an attempt to bring England back to the center of providential history, from corrupted Laodicea to Philadelphia and consequently to build in England the New Jerusalem.

With Brightman, Protestant historiography in England reached its culmination. The entire import of Protestant apocalyptic tradition, the attempt to correlate to the utmost prophecy and history, had been developed in Brightman’s thought into a revolutionary apocalyptic interpretation of redemptive history in which eschatological revelations, such as the millennium and the Kingdom of God, were not only considered to be within time and history, but, most important, were conceptualized as a feasible historical goal to be attained within the lifetime of that generation. For the seventh trumpet, according to Brightman,

71. Brightman, 139, 140, 142–145, 155.
had already sounded in time and history, proclaiming the approach of that eschatological end when God's mystery would be revealed and Christ with his faithful would reign on earth. This was the sense of the imminent fulfillment of prophetic revelations within the boundaries of time and history, a sense of the millennium at hand, that Brightman infused into English apocalyptic tradition in the early seventeenth century. His was a revolutionary apocalyptic interpretation of history which boldly proclaimed the moment in time when the mystery of sacred, providential history would come to its final consummation and realization.

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