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THE SCRIPTURAL PLAYS OF JOHN BALE:
A CRITICAL EXAMINATION
AGAINST THE BACKGROUND
OF THE
MEDIEVAL MYSTERY CYCLE

by

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Thesis presented to the Faculty of Arts
of the University of Ottawa through the
Department of English in partial fulfil-
ment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

John Bale is well known as the writer of the controversial King John, a new kind of chronicle play. As a public figure he was known not only as a playwright who followed the strong antipapal line of Henry VIII's court but also as the Bishop of Ossory in Ireland, fiercely antipapal in his oral and written propaganda.

Bale's greatest effort was the promotion of the antipapal cause along official lines by means of his plays.¹ His religious plays have often been spoken of and described, but they do not seem to have been carefully read, even by modern critics who label and categorize them. While one group of critics frankly admits that his gift was for polemical writing, others continue to speak of his religious plays as "Protestant cycles". It is the purpose of this study to examine his religious plays to see what their nature is. But in order to be clear as to what the plays are, we have to take note of the unsubstantiated claims of those who state what they are not.

¹ John S. Farmer, ed., The Dramatic Writings of John Bale Bishop of Ossory (1907; rpt. Guilford, England: Charles W. Traylen, 1966). This edition of Bale's plays is used throughout the thesis.

As we all know, the beginning of the Renaissance in England saw a great upheaval and turmoil in the Church and in the relations between the Church and the King, or, to put it another way, between the Church and State. When King Henry VIII set himself against the papacy and made himself Head of the Church, he was setting up an entirely new relationship. Originally the King saw himself as a subject of the Church, but with the new idea of sovereignty the King strove to make the Church subject to the national will. The kings and queens who followed Henry used all available means to enforce their own particular type of national or international church. Every possible agency was used by Henry VIII and Cromwell to promote their ideas. Among these agencies were found certain dramatists who used their talents to argue dramatically for the new politics or the new religion.

The old-cyclic drama was universal in its outlook: a king was merely a subject of God as any other Christian was. Nationalism had no place in religion, but it assumes a place when the king commands the Church. John Bale's King John, then, marks a change in writing history plays. The mystery cycle presented the history of man's salvation; King John presented the salvation of England with the king, as it were, taking the place of God. Miss Catherine Dunn writes that:

...the essential material of the play [Kynge Johan] is analogous to the mystery plays, viz., the transfer

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of the Biblical destiny of the chosen people to a new group - to the people of England.²

Robert A. Potter considers that King John is an apology for the Reformation:

To Bale,..., the Reformation appears as the cleansing time of national repentance....[Bale's] innovation was to couch his apology for the Reformation in an historical figure....³

Stanley J. Kahrl writes that Bale in his King John uses methods adapted from the cycles to interpret history for his polemical purposes:

...instinctive example of the figural use of history to interpret secular rather than sacred events, is Bale's King Johan. John himself is a figura for Henry VIII; both are antagonists of Antichrist!... of the two uses of history, the cyclic rather than the exemplary dominates Bale's thinking....Bale's adaptation of older methods of interpreting history for his own polemical purposes.⁴

Leslie P. Fairfield, who calls John Bale a mythmaker for the English Reformation, distinguishes between Bale's conservative historical views as a Carmelite and his advanced ideas as a playwright against Rome:

When one turns to consider the verse-plays which he wrote as part of Cromwell's campaign against superstition and the papal supremacy, one realizes that

² E. Catherine Dunn, "The Medieval 'Cycle' as History Play: Approach to the Wakefield Plays", Studies in the Renaissance, 7 (1960), 86.

³ Robert A. Potter, The English Morality Play, pp. 89 and 94.

⁴ Stanley J. Kahrl, Traditions of Medieval English Drama, pp. 130, 131.

his ideas on the decay of the Church were much more advanced and complex than the Carmelite works reveal.⁵

During John Bale's lifetime (1495-1563), plays were written defending and attacking the Roman Catholic Church, especially the papacy.⁶ King John was both political and antipapal, but John Bale during the 1530s and 1540s wrote, as he attests in his antiquarian texts (Anglorum Heliades, Summarium, and Catalogus), twenty-four scriptural plays. Five of the twenty-four plays are extant, and are directed against the Catholic Church.⁷ These extant plays, except for King John, have not been well known; critics have vaguely described them as Protestantized mystery cycles and some have noted that they were also antipapal propaganda.

⁵ Leslie P. Fairfield, John Bale Mythmaker for the English Reformation, p. 55.

⁶ Philip Walsh, "Christopher Marlowe and the Anti-Catholic Climate of Elizabethan England", Unpub. Diss. Ottawa 1977, ch. 3.

⁷ Anglorum Heliades (British Museum Harleian 3838, folios 111b, 112a, 112b). It is a history of the English Carmelites, 1536 says Fairfield, p. 50.

Illustrium Maioris Britanniae Scriptorum Summarium (Wesel, 1548) [STC 1295].

Scriptorum Illustrum Majoris Britanniae Catalogus (Basle, 1557).

Thora Blatt, The Plays of John Bale (Copenhagen, 1968), pp. 20-24. "To the 22 plays listed should be added the two which appear only in Anglorum Heliades, so...total ..., translation included, is 24." (p. 23)

It is important to notice that among the critics there is a vagueness about the manner in which these plays resembled the older cycles. A quick run through of several representative critics would help to demonstrate this point.

For instance, Hardin Craig, Glynne Wickham and Tucker Brooke claimed that Bale's plays were Protestantized cycles:

Bale's titles reveal two purposes. One is the Protestantizing of the mystery plays....The other purpose, is anti-Catholic controversy,...⁸

Bale himself, under Cromwell's patronage, seems to have revised the normal Miracle Cycle on Protestant lines:...⁹

...Bale has curiously blended the mystery and the morality form into a vehicle for the exposition of his antipapal doctrine.¹⁰

None of these critics shows how Bale's plays use the approach and method of the mystery cycles. Craig bases his conclusion on the titles listed in the Catalogus; Wickham reports that Bale "seems" to have written a Protestant mystery cycle; and Brooke does not explain how Bale "curiously blended" the

⁸ Hardin Craig, English Religious Drama in the Middle Ages (Oxford, 1955), p. 370.

⁹ Glynne Wickham, Early English Stages 1300-1660, I (London, 1959), p. 116.

¹⁰ C. F. Tucker Brooke, The Tudor Drama (London, 1911), p. 87.

mystery and morality. Other critics, David Bevington,¹¹ Edwin Miller,¹² W. W. Greg¹³ and Jesse Harris,¹⁴ repeat the

¹¹ David Bevington, Tudor Drama and Politics (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), pp. 97-98: "Since they were commissioned directly by the Reformation government, such plays naturally reflect official policy in detail....Bale's fragment of a mystery cycle in God's Promises, John the Baptist, and The Temptation of Our Lord, intended to replace the Catholic cycles in popular esteem, stresses salvation through faith rather than Pharisaical ritualism and portrays Christ as supreme exemplar of virtue rather than as vicarious bloody sacrifice." Bevington does not support his claim and shows how Bale's "fragment of a mystery cycle" resembles a mystery cycle.

¹² Edwin S. Miller, "The Antiphons in Bale's Cycle of Christ", SP, 48 (1951), 629: "...served Cromwell's Protestant policy and his own conviction....To convey his propaganda... he chose form and content known and perhaps dear to an audience...like Corpus Christi plays." Miller gives no examples as to how Bale's form and content is like that of the Corpus Christi plays.

¹³ W. W. Greg, "Notes on Some Early Plays", Library, 4th Series, 1930, p. 54: "Perhaps it is too much to speak of these four plays as forming a cycle, but at least the Preaching and Temptation are closely related alike in subject and structure." Greg speaks with caution but does not demonstrate why Bale's spiritual plays do not form a cycle and whether the Preaching and Temptation are part of a cycle or not.

¹⁴ Jesse W. Harris, John Bale, A Study in the Minor Literature of the Reformation (Urbana, 1940), pp. 77, 102, 103: "...Whether or not these surviving works are merely the fragment of a great cycle of the life of Christ cannot be ascertained with absolute certainty, but this would seem to be a reasonable conclusion....The purpose of Bale...was that of the evangelist. He preached to his audiences under the guise of dramatic entertainment. It seems, therefore, probable that the whole list of Bale's plays, in its revised form, may be considered a part of the campaign of Thomas Cromwell to popularize the religious ideas of the new order." Based on the list of John Bale's plays Harris conjectures on Bale's "cycle" without testing how the extant spiritual plays were part of a whole cycle.

conclusions of these three critics without demonstrating how Bale's so-called cycles operated.

A more recent critic, Margaret Simpson, judges that Bale wrote dramas to convey polemic content, that three of his extant plays formed a cycle, that these plays differed from earlier biblical drama in their propagandizing, that Bale used the form of the medieval cycle play, that anti-Catholic statements were not over-intrusive, and that Bale insisted on Scripture and Faith as the only means to salvation:

...Bale's dramaturgy ... [conveys] his polemic content....The three extant plays,...are in themselves a cycle, interdependent and unified, differing from earlier Biblical drama only where propagandistic goals required....Bale has not made any startling departures from the form of the medieval cycle play. Statements of anti-Catholicism...are not greatly intrusive...more obvious is Bale's Protestant insistence on the Scripture and on Faith as the only means to man's salvation.¹⁵

On the other hand, among those who speak of John Bale as a Protestant polemical writer are Lily Bess Campbell, Honor McCusker, and Jesse Harris:

The converting of Biblical plays to polemic is most fully demonstrated in the plays of John Bale...¹⁶

Their chief value lies in the fact that they are a late survival of a form which even in 1538 was very

¹⁵ Margaret Ann McCullough Simpson, Doctrine through Dramaturgy: A Study of Bale's Plays as They Relate to Tudor Polemic Literature and to the Evolution of English Drama. (Ann Arbor, 1971), pp. 12, 137 and 164.

¹⁶ Lily B. Campbell, Divine Poetry and Drama in Sixteenth Century England (London, 1959), p. 226.

nearly outmoded,¹⁷ and (what is still most important), are the earliest instances of a completely new use of that form. Their purpose is not the inculcation of ethical or religious principles; but to attack a specific institution, the Catholic Church and, more specifically still, the papacy.¹⁸

...playwright of the Cromwellian Reformation....a dramatic innovator, an adaptor who aroused a school of controversial drama into being....first dramatist to represent God as a religious partisan....All these plays have retained the essential quality of the morality, namely, the struggle between good and evil for the soul of man, or an equivalent virtue. But now the virtues are Protestant, the vices are Catholic.¹⁹

Thomas Warton and Jules Jusserand, two of the older critics, thought Bale's plays were virulent. The former, an eighteenth century critic, considered the plays deplorable because of their abusive burlesque and virulence; the latter saw in Bale's attack on the papacy a spirit of vengeance and an inexhaustible hatred:

What shall we think of the state, I will not say of the stage, but of common sense, when these deplorable dramas could be endured? Of an age, when the Bible was profaned and ridiculed from a principle of piety? ...A low vein of abusive burlesque, which had more

¹⁷ Harold C. Gardiner, Mysteries' End (New Haven, 1946), pp. 44, 83. Contrary to McCusker's claim is Father Gardiner's: "...The pageants were growing in popularity throughout the century [sixteenth]...as far as existing records go, 1575...the closing year of the history of the Chester Corpus Christi plays."

¹⁸ Honor McCusker, John Bale Dramatist and Antiquary (Bryn Mawr, 1942), pp. 77-78.

¹⁹ Jesse W. Harris, John Bale, A Study in the Minor Literature of the Reformation (Urbana, 1940), pp. 11, 65, 66.

virulence than humour, seems to have been one of Bale's talents:...²⁰

John Bale se jette tout entier dans la lutte, tout ce qu'il est, tout ce qu'il sait: philosophie, théologie, histoire, servira à battre en brèche le pouvoir du pape. Dans tous ses écrits, l'évêque d'Ossory garde le même esprit de vengeance; sa haine est inépuisable; protestants et catholiques l'appellent le "biliaux Bale".²¹

Among the critics Sir Edmund Chambers claims that Bale in three of his plays Protestantized the miracle play:²²

In God's Promises, John the Baptist, and The Temptation, Bale was simply adapting and Protestantizing the miracle-play.²³

On examination, these plays, even John the Baptist, scarcely bear comparison with a miracle play.

²⁰ Thomas Warton, The History of English Poetry from the Close of the Eleventh to the Commencement of the Eighteenth Century, III (London, 1824), p. 362n.

²¹ Jules Jusserand, Le Théâtre en Angleterre depuis la conquête jusqu'aux prédécesseurs immédiats de Shakespeare (Paris, 1878), pp. 208, 209.

²² The term miracle-play often, but not in this instance, is used by various critics and students of medieval literature synonymously with "mystery cycle" or "mystery play". Here, however, Sir Edmund is using the term in its true sense, saint's play.

Adolphus W. Ward, A History of English Dramatic Literature to the Death of Queen Anne, I (London, 1875), p. 208. Ward wrote that Bale was "the author of our last miracle-play". Like the other critics this is a bald statement unsupported by a demonstration of how and why it is a miracle-play.

²³ E. K. Chambers, The Medieval Stage, II (London, 1903), p. 447.

Two critics, Sir Edmund Chambers and Honor McCusker, partly fill us in on the scope of John Bale's dramatic efforts:

In his Scriptores he enumerates, under twenty-two titles, some forty-six of them [plays]. The five extant ones were probably all 'compiled' about 1538 while he was vicar of Thorndon in Suffolk....though not without classical elements, they were probably intended for popular performance, and approach more closely to the medieval structure than to that of the contemporary interlude.²⁴

...his triple career: controversialist, dramatist, and antiquarian....his reputation rests chiefly on his single chronicle play, King Johan, a landmark in the development of the English drama for students who will never be interested in his other achievements.... Bale's plays, crude and unlearned as they are compared to his historical collections, have an important place in stage tradition because, like Bale himself, they are links between an old world and a new.

All these plays except King Johan purport from the colophons to have been "compiled" in the year 1538. ...All the plays are admirably adapted for presentation in a market place, church porch, or any other unadorned space.²⁵

Many of these critics, we may conclude from an examination of their examination of Bale's plays, are unaware of the difference between Bale's spiritual plays and those of a Corpus Christi cycle. For example, Edwin S. Miller, as noted before, concludes that Bale "chose form and content known... to an audience...like Corpus Christi plays".²⁶ The critics cited so far assume that Bale's extant spiritual plays

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 223-224.

²⁵ McCusker, pp. 72-73.

²⁶ Miller, p. 629.

followed the pattern of the cycles and try to force the pattern of the cycles onto them without really looking at them. Our study will show there is no similarity between what Bale wrote and a Corpus Christi cycle.

At no time does Bale call his plays miracle or mystery plays, or even morality plays. He dissociates himself from the Catholic Church and will have nothing to do with saints, the Mother of God, or the cycles.²⁷ To advertise the break with the cycles, John Bale called his plays comedies and tragedies.²⁸ To emphasize the break even further, Bale, using the fashion of the time, called three of the four spiritual plays "interludes".²⁹

Many critics were led astray, or did not see the nature of Bale's scriptural plays. They erred: first, in not seeing that Bale's four spiritual plays were not more spiritual than the simple Bible stories of the cycle plays; and secondly, in being blind to Bale's charge that

²⁷ Blatt, p. 130.

²⁸ In his Anglorum Heliades, 1536, Bale wrote of all his plays: "Edidi etiam in idiomata vulgari diuersas comedias atque Tragoedias Sub diuerso metrorum genere..."

Brooke, p. 87: Brooke suggested that Bale: "claims the distinction of having first domesticated in English drama the terms 'comedy' and 'tragedy' is also one of the earliest writers to introduce the Latin division of plays into acts;..."

²⁹ Blatt, p. 186: "the term 'interlude' was meant to indicate the circumstances and mode of performance of the plays thus described." The genre is discussed later in Chapter II of this thesis.

Catholics neglected the Scriptures. With the exception of two critics, Thora Blatt and Lily Bess Campbell, the greatest error of most of the critics is their failure to see that Bale's spiritual plays were hardly dramas at all, but polemics, and that no matter what the title pages of the individual plays stated it was the same polemical information being propagated in a dramatic form, which, as Lily Campbell wrote, had little action.³⁰

Two critics come closer to the truth that Bale is writing a new kind of play. The first, Thora Blatt, skims a bit deeper than the other critics to the truth, but it is the second critic, Lily Bess Campbell, who discovers that John Bale is writing in a genre which she calls the "new Bible play":

My contention is that they are not survivors of the miracle play at all but pioneers of the new Bible play...an attempt to use a new form, the interlude, then growing into acceptance in the secular drama.³¹

Thora Blatt claims that Bale used the dramatic techniques of his contemporaries, but that similarities between miracles, moralities and interludes and his plays were superficial:

...Bale availed himself of the theatrical medium common to his day. But the superficial similarities with miracles, moralities, and interludes are small...³²

³⁰ Lily Campbell, p. 230.

³¹ Ibid., p. 226.

³² Blatt, p. 11.

Miss Blatt also pointed out that Bale scorned the spectacular and amusing in the cycles to concentrate upon the message of the Bible:

...scorning the spectacular and amusing incidents which often enlivened the cycle plays, he concentrated on dramatic representations of the message of the Bible with nothing to distract attention from the spoken word.³³

Far from being positive in giving the message of the Gospel, Bale uses the negative, destructive approach of burlesque invective.

Furthermore, Miss Blatt deduced from the titles of his lost series of plays on Christ's life that Bale compared the struggle of the sixteenth century reformers to Christ's struggle with the Jewish authorities:

If we may judge from the titles of his lost series of plays on the life of Christ, he was also concerned to show Christ's conflict with Jewish authorities as a background to the struggle of reformers in the 16th century.³⁴

Lily Campbell contended that Bale's plays were not survivors of the miracle play with 'a completely new use of that form',³⁵ but pioneers of the new Bible play; argued that the titles of Bale's lost plays were theological or biblical and indicated his effort to supply religious rather than

³³ Ibid., p. 233.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ McCusker, p. 78.

secular dramatic fare;³⁶ asserted that Bale's plays conformed to current secular dramatic usage in being printed as interludes; discovered that like the interludes of Sir Thomas More's circle, Bale's plays were mostly dialogue and little action; reckoned that Bale's plays were organized according to their content rather than dramatic theory; considered Bale's biblical plays as based, not on the miracles, but on simple stories usable as background for religious or theological instruction; and qualified Bale's plays as extensions of the sermon:

...not survivors of the miracle plays but pioneers of the new Bible play and present not 'a completely new use of that form'...Most of Bale's lost plays were, as their titles indicate either theological or Biblical, and his dramatic efforts seem to me to indicate that he was trying to do what others on the continent were doing: offer religious rather than secular fare in the drama....In conformity with the current usage in secular drama, all four of the plays were printed as interludes....Like the interludes written by the Sir Thomas More circle, Bale's plays had little action, consisting mostly of dialogue...nature of the material determined the organization of his plays rather than any dramatic theory....The three Biblical

³⁶ Blatt, pp. 23, 24: In his Catalogus, 1557, Bale lists the following plays: *Vitam D. Ioannis Baptistae*, *De Christo duodenni*, *De baptismo et tentatione*, *De Lazaro resuscitato*, *De consilio pontificum*, *De Simone leproso*, *De coena Do. et pedum lotionem*, *De passione Christi*, *De sepultura et resurrectione*, *Super utroque regis coniugio*, *De sectis Papisticis*, *Erga Momos et Zoilos*, *Proditiones Papistarum*, *Contra adulterantes Dei uerbum*, *De Ioanne Anglorum rege*, *De imposturis Thomae Becketi*, *De magnis Dei promissionibus*, *De praedicatione Ioannis*, *De Christi tentatione*, *Corruptiones legum diuinarum*, *Amoris imaginem*, *Pammachij tragoedias transtuli*.

plays of Bale are clearly not built around miracles but about simple stories that can be used as a background for religious and theological instruction. They seem like extensions of the sermon.³⁷

Despite Lily Campbell's analysis of Bale's plays as a new kind of Bible play based on simple Bible stories, she, as we have seen above, has already stated (p. 226) that Bale leavened his biblical plays with polemic. But what is unique about Lily Campbell's critique is that she alone of the critics does not lean on the mystery cycles as a pattern for Bale's plays; she sees the missing plays not as parts of a cycle but Bible plays "to supply religious rather than secular dramatic fare." Furthermore, Miss Campbell states that Bale's plays, printed as interludes, were like the interludes of Sir Thomas More's circle, mostly dialogue and little action, which is true. The mystery cycles, on the other hand, were crammed with action from Creation to Doomsday.

Summing up, then, we find that critics have not agreed on their description of John Bale's religious plays; some call them Protestant cycles, others consider them polemics in the guise of biblical drama. To understand the tone and content of Bale's religious drama it is essential to take a look at the politico-religious background of the time in which he wrote.

³⁷ Lily Campbell, pp. 226, 229, 230, 233.

During his lifetime (1495-1563) Bale was influenced by the political-religious background and actions of five reigning Tudors. Born under Henry VII "on Sunday, November 21, 1495 in the village of Cove, not far from Dunwich in Suffolk",³⁸ Bale gained prominence under Henry VIII about 1532, went into exile on the demise of Thomas Cromwell in 1540, returned under Edward VI, who appointed him Bishop of Ossory in 1552, departed for the continent again on Mary's accession in 1553, and returned under Elizabeth, who preferred him in 1559 to the prebend of Canterbury, where he died November 1563.

Thora Blatt pieces part of Bale's early life story together from his various writings:

From the age of twelve...educated in the Carmelite monastery in Norwich...By 1514...a member of Jesus College Cambridge, and apart from a sojourn at Louvain and Toulouse, where he was in 1527, he stayed at Cambridge till about 1529, when he took his...B.D.... By 1536...had been prior of the Carmelite monasteries at Maldon, Ipswich, and Doncaster...states he was a Carmelite for 24 years...conversion must have taken place about 1533...became a secular priest, held the curacy of Thorndon in Suffolk probably as late as 1536, had trouble with his papistical parishioners as well as with ecclesiastical authorities, and preached not only from the pulpit, but also from the stage. It seems likely that he was associated with a troupe of players, but he never alludes to this though he includes a list of plays in Anglorum Heliades from 1536...³⁹written "Presertim...Ioannem Ver. Oxonie Comitatem".

³⁸ McCusker, p. 1.

³⁹ Blatt, pp. 11-12.

In 1976, Fairfield, having examined Bale's notebooks and writings, adds details of and makes judgments about, Bale's life, which, seemingly, were unavailable to, or unresearched by Blatt, McCusker and the editor of Volume III of the Dictionary of National Biography in 1885, Leslie Stephens:

During the 1520s Bale seems to have spent [much] time away from Cambridge, indulging a passion that now emerges as a central facet of his personality: the study of Carmelite antiquities,...the history of the Carmelite order now became Bale's first love--not the study of scholastic theology or disputation in the schools at Cambridge. His notes show no interest whatsoever in Wycliffite beliefs, and certainly no hint of approval....Humanist influences seem to have left Bale's traditional piety quite unscathed....clear from Bale's notebooks that during the 1520s he was marching to a traditional drummer, quite out of step with the evangelical circle at the university....Bale's plan of action, after he became a Protestant in the 1530s, was simply to assert the futility of medieval theology, using Scripture and chronicles as evidence....⁴⁰

After tracing out Bale's conversion and subsequent beliefs, Fairfield claims that Bale shaped the "myth of the 'beleaguered isle'":

The fervor of his early commitment to the Carmelite life helps one see why his humor turned so bilious when his first love disappointed him....Bale...attributed his conversion to two causes. One...the persuasion of Thomas Lord Wentworth of Nettlestead in Suffolk⁴¹...a second influence...Henry VIII...

⁴⁰ Fairfield, pp. 8, 14 and 15.

⁴¹ Leslie Stephen, ed., Dictionary of National Biography (London, 1885), Vol. III, p. 41: "converted to Protestantism by the teaching of Lord Wentworth...escaped punishment by the powerful protection of Thomas Cromwell, Earl of Essex."

"through his ministration...I am a partaker of God's Gospel kingdom,...before his edict against the Roman Pontiff, I was a very obstinate papist."...He confined himself [1536] to arguing that when preaching of the Word was neglected, and the spiritual meaning of the ceremonies not made clear, the common people would continue to worship superstitiously....Bale fully concurred in the traditional belief that the meaning of history was to be sought not in experience, or in chronicles and histories themselves, but in the Bible....Revelation offered Bale...a key to understanding the decline of the Roman Church. ...From the reign of Constantine onward..., the light of the Gospel in the Roman Church had gradually faded....What Bale did...was to shape the myth of the "beleaguered isle," that epic view of the nation's past in which England had striven heroically...down through the centuries to keep out Romish spiritual corruption and political subversion.⁴²

Fairfield sees John Bale as a mythmaker in the English Reformation, a hagiographer who held himself to be "a Protestant saint":

Bale's role in the English Reformation was to be a mythmaker...for his disoriented age, craftsman of a past which could give Englishmen a point d'appui in a threatening world....By 1548 Bale's role as intermediary between the late medieval and the Protestant tradition of hagiography had been largely fulfilled. ...[In] 1553 he published...The vocacyon of Johan Bale to the Bishoprick of Ossorie in Irelande. Bale had been promoted [more likely deported] in August 1552 to the see of Ossory--the Tudor equivalent of a Siberian salt-mine, and a post which Edward VI had been having difficulty filling....Bale cast himself as a Protestant saint, and he drew on his own experience for examples of good and evil.⁴³

While Bale was at Cambridge, Henry VIII became involved with Anne Boleyn. Unable to obtain a divorce from

⁴² Fairfield, pp. 18, 35, 45, 52, 76, 81 and 94.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 119, 136 and 144.

Rome, Henry had himself installed as supreme head of the Catholic Church in England. Thomas Cranmer declared the marriage invalid and that Henry was free to remarry. The dissolution of the monasteries followed, not because of their scandalous immorality, of which a few instances existed, but because Henry needed funds and the monks opposed Henry's religious supremacy.⁴⁵ Although Henry was head of the Catholic Church in England, the Church of England became Protestant only under Edward VI mainly through the use of Cranmer's new prayer book with which the government imposed uniformity of observance on the people.

The booke of the common prayer and administration of the Sacramentes, and other rites and ceremonies of the Church after the use of the Churche of England combined in one volume three of the old liturgical books, Breviary, Missal and the Ritual. Cranmer's Breviary reduced the eight divisions of the Catholic daily office to the familiar two Matins and Evensong. The Missal became the Book of the Communion, and the new service, while retaining large portions of the Mass, began the transformation of what had been a sacrificial act into a commemorative one.⁴⁶

Geoffrey Elton traces part of the Edwardian Reformation:

The second phase of the Edwardian Reformation began with three acts of 1549-50. One was purely destructive. He ordered the suppression of all service-books

⁴⁴ Jasper Ridley, Thomas Cranmer (Oxford, 1962), p. 63.

⁴⁵ Owen Chadwick, The Reformation (Harmondsworth, 1964), pp. 104-105.

⁴⁶ Stanley Thomas Bindoff, Tudor England (Harmondsworth, 1976), p. 154.

other than the Prayer Book and Henry VIII's Primer, and the destruction of all remaining religious statues, and paintings....the [second] provided for the reform of the canon law....The [third] produced the Ordinal, the new code governing the structure and functions of the hierarchy.⁴⁷

The counter-reformation launched under Paul IV (1534-1549) began to appoint to church office men known for their sanctity and learning rather than for family position or money. And the reforming zeal of the counter reformers was buttressed by the council of Trent (1545-1563). Owen Chadwick noted this quest for an incorruptible and adequate clergy:

If we seek a single theme running through the reforming endeavours of the Catholic Reformation, it would be the quest for a more adequate clergy....priesthood incorrupt and incorruptible, educated and other-worldly.⁴⁸

But the Act of Supremacy in 1534 closed the door to Rome to the Catholic hierarchy. W. E. Campbell describes the condition of religious instruction, preaching, and exposition of the scriptures in England during the lifetime of Sir Thomas More, 1478-1535:

Preaching, then, and religious instruction at the universities had reached a very low ebb, and, as a direct consequence, almost everywhere else in England. ...The sermon was an exception rather than the rule, because a timid policy brought about by the active

⁴⁷ Geoffrey Rudolph Elton, England Under the Tudors (London, 1974), p. 161.

⁴⁸ Chadwick, p. 253.

preaching of the Lollards had encouraged its decline. ...Rare as was the sermon, a simple exposition of the Scripture was rarer still.⁴⁹

It was claimed with some truth, as W. E. Campbell demonstrates in the above quotation, that the Catholic Church neglected the Scriptures. But when the reformers began to use private interpretation, the Bible was then used against the Catholic Church. John Bale was immersed in all these changes both at Cambridge, and as a pastor at Thorndon in 1536, and for the rest of his life.

A more recent critic, James McConica, confirms this lack of instruction by the Roman Church in the England of Bale's day:

[In prefaces to translations More and Erasmus published in 1506...] The application to contemporary religious decay is quite explicit, and the targets are identified as falsehood and pretence, both learned and popular. The vulgar pieties in the preaching friars, like the pretentious vacuity of over-subtle scholastic theologians, are decried as a corruption of that central deposit of Christian truth which needs no human assistance to prevail. To prevent this dangerous mingling of human and divine, of the fallible as the true, we must return to the original fount of all truth and piety, Scripture, lest truth itself be discredited.⁵⁰

McConica also points out that Erasmus explained to Colet that he wrote his Handbook of a Christian Knight to allay the

⁴⁹ W. E. Campbell, Erasmus, Tyndale and More (Milwaukee, 1950), p. 59.

⁵⁰ James Kelsey McConica, English Humanists and Reformation Politics Under Henry VIII and Edward VI (Oxford, 1965), p. 16.

practice of relating religion to ceremonies instead of piety:

...to combat the common error of those who make religion consist in ceremonies; to the neglect of true piety. It is simply a manual of lay piety.⁵¹

Chadwick finds that Erasmus (like John Bale, as we shall see), is angry with the "superstitions of the people":

...Erasmus and his fellows were impatient, contemptuous, angry with the superstitions of the people. ...The people cultivated a religion of external acts and substituted a pilgrimage, an indulgence, a relic, for a genuine change in heart and life.⁵²

John Bale never explicitly stated the specific sources for his Protestant dogmas. Yet he adhered to the main dogmas of Tyndale: justification by faith, divine right of kings, the Mass a mockery. It is this turbulent world of religious ferment in England, and of hatred for the Roman Catholic Church that forms the background of Bale's religious plays.

Miss Blatt suggests that Bale's politico-religious beliefs stemmed from St. Augustine for Bale envisaged a sixteenth century civitas dei and considered the domination of Rome and Mary Tudor's interregnum as a civitas diaboli:

...at the basis of Bale's politico-religious creed we find St. Augustine...from his reading of De Civitate Dei. He envisages a 16th century English civitas dei ...when the reformation begun by Henry VIII has been fully carried out by Edward VI, his son, and by Elizabeth, his daughter." Likewise he considers the long dominion of the papacy and Mary Tudor's brief

⁵¹ McConica, p. 17.

⁵² Chadwick, p. 38.

interregnum...its opposite, the civitas terrena or civitas diaboli.⁵³

Furthermore, Miss Blatt reasons, Bale would have been drawn to St. Augustine's concept that the secular state is instituted by God to effect law, order, and punishment; and thus Bale envisaged a theocracy with the king master of church and state:

The aspect of his thought which would have appealed most to Bale would be that St. Augustine...regards [the secular state] as instituted By God to effectuate law, order, and punishment....

What Bale envisages is a theocracy in which the servants of state and church work together in their appointed fields, with the king as master of both.⁵⁴

Karl Dannenfeldt, in his discussion of Luther's doctrine of justification by faith, gives us an insight into the kind of theological thinking that may have persuaded John Bale to embrace that same tenet, which is prominent in his four spiritual plays:

...probably in 1514 while he [Luther] was studying the meaning of Rom. 1:17, "For therein [in the Gospel] is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, The just shall live by faith,"....that God loves sinners and judges the believer in mercy, acquitting him from his sin and imputing to him by pure grace the righteousness of Christ. That is, God justifies the believer for Christ's sake and by faith alone. Man's moral deeds play no part in it. Faith, i.e., trust in God, is

⁵³ Blatt, pp. 59-60.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 60.

the "receiving hand" which enables man to accept God's mercy; it is the instrument of his justification.⁵⁵

Furthermore, in tracing Luther and Calvin's debt to St. Augustine and listing their tenets, Dannenfeldt outlines the main tenets of John Bale, which Bale used positively, as will be seen, in the thesis:

Both [Luther and Calvin] were much in debt to St. Augustine in their assertions that man is morally helpless and entirely dependent on God's grace for salvation. Both accepted Scripture as the sole source of Christian doctrine, and both discarded as unscriptural purgatory, papacy, Mariolatry, the cult of the saints and of relics, the Mass as sacrifice, monasticism, the celibacy of the clergy, and many other medieval developments....Man was saved only by God's grace through faith; good works were ineffective for salvation.⁵⁶

Like Erasmus, as McConica writes, John Bale believed that a return to Scripture and the early sources of Christianity would provide a remedy for the spiritual decadence about him:

In the whole body of Erasmus's writing this conviction was the constant theme: a return to Scripture and the early sources of Christianity would provide a sovereign remedy for contemporary decay.⁵⁷

From the observations made above, it is clear that there has been no real examination of Bale's "scriptural"

⁵⁵ Karl H. Dannenfeldt, The Church of the Renaissance and Reformation (St. Louis, 1970), pp. 32 and 33.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 73 and 74.

⁵⁷ McConica, p. 9.

dramas. It has been suggested that a new Bible play has been created. Some critics claimed that he wrote polemical dramas. Many critics thought that these plays were Protestant cycles. This, we claim, is misleading, and, therefore, in order to determine the nature of Bale's religious plays, we examine these plays and the cycles, and make comparisons between them.

The purpose of this study then, will be to examine minutely Bale's approach and method in his scriptural plays against the background of the medieval cycle play, as well as the contemporary politico-religious background. Bale also draws upon the method of the morality play. But inasmuch as he goes to Scripture and salvation history for his general theme or orientation, it is important to examine closely the way in which he deviated from, or made use of, the method of the craft cycle, to which the people had become accustomed. Other critics have examined his life and his plays at some length but this specific exploration has not been made.

CHAPTER II

MYSTERY CYCLES

Our plan, then, is to examine the spiritual plays of John Bale in order to see whether they do form a cycle at all; and if so, whether they are in any way similar to the traditional cycles. As we have seen in Chapter I, certain critics spoke of Bale's four spiritual plays as either a Protestantized cycle, or a mixture of cycle and morality plays, or a new kind of Bible play, or polemic. Not one of the critics studied the extant spiritual plays to see if they, indeed, formed a cycle or how far they were influenced by the tradition of the mystery cycle. This chapter, then, treats of the mystery cycles in order that their characteristics, their approach and manner may be understood, and then used as a basis against which to compare Bale's spiritual plays.

Medieval mystery cycles recounted the story of the Christian faith from creation to doomsday in a pattern that was as rhythmic as the seasons and as chronological in their progression as the Bible on which they were based. The term "mystery"¹ denoted not only that the contents of the plays

¹ That the mystery cycles can be accepted as serious drama was proven by F. M. Salter and Eleanor Prosser: F. M. Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester (Toronto, 1955), pp. 83-4; Eleanor Prosser, Drama and Religion in the English Mystery Plays (Stanford, 1961), p. 15.

were the mysteries of the Faith, but also that the craftsmen who produced them each represented a particular craft or mystery as, for example, the Tanners in the Chester Plays² produced the Fall of Lucifer³.

The Chester bannmaster uses the word "misterie" in apposition to "occupations, artes, craftes":

....by twentye fower occupations, artes, craftes or misterie these pagente shulde be played after breeffe rehearsal, for everye pagente A carriage to be provyded withall, in which sorte we porpose this whitsontyde our pageante into three partes to devyde.
(Chester, Part I, p. 4, 1.59-63)

Rosemary Woolf considered liturgical drama to be the model for the mystery cycles:

...the liturgical drama, rather than literary sources, provided an abiding authoritative model for the mystery cycles....of the four cathedral cities known to have had Latin drama, York, Lincoln, Lichfield and Norwich, three also had mystery cycles...⁴

The concept of the liturgy is essential to the understanding of the cycles, because the cycles in nature and

² Dr. Hermann Deimling, ed., The Chester Plays, Part I (1892; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 4.

³ Salter, p. 8: "The French word mystère (modern métier) signified a craft; and the word mystery as signifying a craft or occupation is common in England as early as 1375. When the religious plays have been taken over by the mystery or craft guilds, they are called Mystery plays."

⁴ Rosemary Woolf, The English Mystery Plays (London, 1972), p. 22.

impulse are liturgical.⁵ The centre of the liturgy, which is the worship of God by His people in the Mass, is God the Father. As the Church presents the whole story of the Redemption during the liturgical year, the Christian relives this mystery through the liturgy.⁶ The primary aim of the liturgy is worship, giving glory to God; only secondarily, may it teach.⁷

The analogy of the liturgy and the mystery cycle is almost perfect. God is the centre of the cycles; Christ His Son is the way to the Father; and the Holy Spirit is He Who moves the faithful to the Father. Both the liturgy and the cycles are inspired by the Scriptures. Each replays, and in each the auditors relive, the history of salvation.⁸ Most

⁵ See A. P. Campbell, "The Mediaeval Mystery Cycle Liturgical in Impulse", Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 33, Jan.-Mars 1963, 25.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., p. 24.

⁸ In that the liturgy and the mystery cycles are both, in their way, vehicles for worshipping God, then, in so much, both are liturgical. That does not mean that the liturgy is drama; it is not. Karl Young in The Drama of the Medieval Church (Oxford, 1933), I, pp. 79-81, 84-85, stated the distinction clearly: "A play is...above all else, a story presented in action, in which the speakers or actors impersonate the characters concerned...It follows, then, that the dialogue and physical movements of those who participate in the liturgy will be transformed from the dramatic into drama whenever these persons convey a story and pretend to be the characters in this story...The celebrant remains merely the celebrant, and does not undertake to play the part of his Lord. He is only the instrument through which Christ acts...the liturgy itself, in its ordinary observances, remained always merely worship."

certainly each teaches. But above all, in each, the faithful concelebrate the glory of God. Each presupposed in the medieval faithful, Christian faith.

The religious purpose of the mystery play must, then, be fully established. Canon Purvis described what the 1951 audience saw at the York Festival of Britain presentation of his version of the York Cycle of Mystery Plays:

They saw, not a Passion Play, but something on a plan far more majestic...-the whole story of mankind, sub specie aeternitatis.⁹

In an age of unfaith for a pluralistic audience to sense the clutch of eternity on the soul is proof indeed of the cycle's religious power.

Timothy Fry found that the unity in the *Ludus Coventriae* followed from theological doctrine, that the Old Testament plays anticipated the Redemption, and that the Passion scenes were dramatically and doctrinally climactic.¹⁰

E. Martin Browne showed how the mystery cycles originated "from the liturgy of the Church's year",¹¹ and how the folk built great popular festivals of plays from elements dealing with particular scenes in the Bible to form in the

⁹ J. S. Purvis, ed., The York Cycle of Mystery Plays (London, 1957), p. 7.

¹⁰ Timothy Fry, "The Unity of the '*Ludus Coventriae*'", SP 48 (1951) 527-570.

¹¹ E. Martin Browne, Religious Drama 2 (Mystery and Morality Plays) (New York, 1958), p. 8.

medieval way a pattern of human history which was the working out of God's plan:

...gradually great popular festivals of plays,...grew up in which elements dealing with particular scenes from the Bible were gathered together to form a pattern of human history....characteristic of the Middle Ages to arrange events in patterns. Order was the foundation of life....when they dramatized the history of the world, it was as the working out of God's plan.¹²

Harold Gardiner observed that for five hundred years the only serious dramatic art in the Western World was religious:

For 500 years, from the beginnings of the liturgical plays in the tenth century to the advent of the modern drama in the sixteenth, the only serious dramatic art of the Western World was religious....The fact that the drama had a cultural and social influence in England comparable to that which it exercised in France cannot be doubted if we consider the cold statistics that, in no less than 114 towns and villages in England in the Middle Ages, the religious stage poured its message and its entertainment in the ear and heart of the people.¹³

Gardiner argued that, furthermore, in the sixteenth century the pageants were growing in popularity when the authorities adopted the steady undermining of the old stage as one means "to shatter contact with the life and thought of former Catholic times".¹⁴ For, Gardiner declared, "it was the

¹² Ibid., p. 9.

¹³ Harold C. Gardiner, S.J., Mysteries' End (New Haven, 1946), pp. ix and x.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 44 and 48.

Reformation and it alone, as principal cause, which killed off the religious stage in England".¹⁵

Holy Scripture is the universal history of the unfolding of God's plan for His people;¹⁶ a mystery cycle is a representation in miniature of this universal religious history. The bannmaster of the Chester Cycle leaves us no room for doubt on this point; a monk of Chester abbey, versed in the Scriptures, devised a set of pageants from the Old and New Testament:

The devise of one done Rondall, moonke of Chester abbe
 This moonke - moonkelike in Scriptures well seene,
 In pagentes set fourth apparently to all eyne
 the old and newe testament with liuelye comfort,
 (Chester, p. 2, 11.7-11)

The first vexillator or bannmaster of the Ludus
Conventriae cycle or The Plaie called Corpus Christi proclaims
 after the opening prayer that entertainment is the aim of the
 players:

Now gracyous god groundyd of all goodnesse
 as thi grete glorie nevyr be-gynning had
 So thou socour and saue all tho that sytt and sese
 and lystenyth to oure talkyng with sylens style and sad
 Ffor we purpose us pertly style in this prese
 the pepyl to plese with plays ful glad.
 (Ludus Coventriae, p. 11, 11.1-6)

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. xii and 72. Ironically, it is John Bale (whose spiritual plays form a cycle, according to the critics noted in Chapter I), who is in part responsible for the mystery cycles' dissolution during the Reformation in England.

¹⁶ E. Catherine Dunn, "The Medieval 'Cycle' as History Play: An Approach to the Wakefield Plays", Studies in the Renaissance, 7(1960), 76-89.

Like the Chester bannmaster the third vexillator adds that the plays are from the Scriptures:

Of holy wrytte this game xal bene
(Ludus Coventriae, p. 16, 1.520)

Both the Chester bannmaster and the Ludus Coventriae vexillatores tick off and describe the pageants as they will occur: Chester's next Monday in the "Citie" and Ludus's "Sunday next" in "N. town":

As in this Citie divers yeares the haue bene set out,
soe at this tyme of penticoste, called whitsontyde,
Allthough to all the Citie followe labour and coste,
yet god giuinge leave, that tyme shall you in playe,
ffor three dayes together, begynninge one mondaye,
see these pagentes played to the beste of their skill,
wher to supply all wantes, shalbe not wantes of good will.
(Chester, p. 3, 11.29-35)

Now haue we told you all be-dene
the hool mater that we thynke to play
whan that ye come ther xal ye sene
this game wel playd in good a-ray
now god them save from trey and tene
ffor us that prayth upon that day
And qwyte them wel ther mede
A sunday next yf that we may
At vj of the belle we gynne oure play
In N. town wherfore we pray
That god now be youre Spede. Amen.
(Ludus, p. 16, 11.516-519, 522-528)

In the five complete mystery cycles that survived the Reformation the pageants are broken into Old Testament and New Testament stories. Each cycle differs in style, in the number of pageants, and in the artistic treatment of salvation history. The Chester cycle (24 pageants) differs from the others in containing a play of Antichrist. Furthermore,

in that very play expositors explain the prophecies and the commandments; didacticism is introduced dramatically. In the Ludus Coventriae (42 pageants) a teacher, Contemplacio, appears frequently to introduce the next pageant, to fill in background information. Also unique to the Ludus is its two Passion Plays, one of which is played in alternate years. The York (48 pageants) has the most graphic crucifixion scene in the cycles; and gives much prominence to Mary, the Mother of God. Famous as the Towneley cycle (32 pageants) is for the Second Shepherd's play, it is renowned for retelling the crucifixion by eyewitnesses and in drawing lots for Christ's cloak. The Cornish cycle (38 pageants) is the only cycle treating of the legend of the Rood.

Glynne Wickham has noted that drama appeals to the eye and ear simultaneously, for the emotions are "open to assault through two senses at once", and the imagination is expanded, "to a point where the mind may perceive truth, meaning, reality, unobtainable by processes of the intellect alone".¹⁷ In a similar way, prayer, too, is a raising of the heart and mind to God. And the liturgy, the public worship of God, is a prayer. The cycles, being liturgical, are prayers and dramas at the same time. What is more logical,

¹⁷ Glynne Wickham, Early English Stages I (London, 1959), p. 310.

then, than the fact that religion and art, which are both in "search of truth, meaning, reality"¹⁸ are combined in the Mass and in the cycles?¹⁹

The art of the cycle led to man's seeing and seizing in his imagination God, His mercy and His justice operative throughout time, and to his feeling eternity in his very bones. This momentary suspension of rationalization, this handing of ourselves over to the entertaining diversions of the actors and this momentary glimpse, through art, of idealistic vistas of glory recreate man in the image of God.

Having outlined the Old and New Testament "storye" (1.164, p. 8), the Chester bannreader after noting the end of the New Testament with The Sending of the Holy Ghost play, advertised the plays of the Prophets and Antichrist (1.169, p. 8), and "The Coming of Christ to Geue Eternall Iudgement", (1.178, p. 8) or "Domesday". Then, after a prayer (11.185-188, p. 9) the Chester bannreader sums up his function, and ends in a trenchant warning against the plays' maligners:

The some of this Storye, Lordes and ladies all,
I have breiflie repeated and how they must be played;
of one thing warne you now I shall:
that not possible it is those matters to be contryued

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 310.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 310 states: "What is religion if not the search for truth, meaning, reality, through the gifts of imaginative perception and faith? At least religion and art have this search and these means of search in common."

in such sort and conyng and by such players of price,
as at these dayes good preserve and ffyne wittes cold deuise.
(Chester, p. 9, ll.189-194)

From the prayers of the bannmasters, their recital of Old and New Testament stories, and their deportment and caveats it is clear that the cycles are indeed religious in intent, substance and effect.

R. T. Davies saw that the mystery cycles used "many of the characteristic methods of the sermon and homiletic literature as G. R. Owst has shown".²⁰ Those methods were realism, entertainment, affectiveness (devotion), celebration, and joyfulness.²¹

Sacred history, R. T. Davies noted, in the Corpus Christi play (and by extension in the other cycles) is taking place right now, as did the preaching of the friars, in the language of the audience, in the presence of God:

Sacred history is treated as contemporary, sublime mysteries are presented through the immediate. Redemption is here and now. The Incarnate Son is crucified, rises and ascends in York or Lincoln, and, moreover, gives the impression of speaking the language of ordinary men....Theirs [The Friars' preaching], too, was a popular art, they, too, belonged to the open air and brought the sublime events of man's Redemption into the medieval marketplace as they strove to open men's hearts to the immediate presence of God.²²

²⁰ R. T. Davies, The Corpus Christi Play Of The English Middle Ages (London, 1972), p. 45.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

Saint Luke²³ (23.33) simply says:

When they reached the place called The Skull,
they crucified him there and the two criminals also,
one on the right, the other on the left.

The York playwright(s) is(are) much more realistic
and detailed:

- ii Mil. 3is, certis, I hope I holde þis hande.
 - iii Mil. and to þe boore I haue it brought,
Full boxumly with-uten bande.
 - iv Mil. Strike on þan harde, for hym þe boght.
 - i Mil. 3is, here is a stubbe will stiffely stande,
Thurgh bones and senous it schall be soght.
This werke is well, I will warande.
 - ii Mil. Saie, sir, howe do we þore,
Þis bargayne may not blynne.
 - iii Mil. It failis a foote and more,
þe senous are so gone ynn.
 - iv Mil. I hope þat marke a-misse be bored.
 - ii Mil. Þan muste he bide in bittir bale.
 - iii Mil. In faith, it was ouere skantely scored;
Þat makis it fouly for to faile.
 - i Mil. Why carpe 3e so? faste on a corde,
And tugge hym to, by toppe and taile.
 - iii Mil. 3a, þou comaundis lightly as a lorde.
Come helpe to haale, with ille haile.
- (York, p. 352, ll. 97-116)

Can realism be any subtler? Christ-God, surely unnerved by
His passion to this point, has now to have His hand stretched
into place over an ill-fitting hole on the cross. And
the irony is that the indifferent third Knight adds to the
overall realism by sulkily suggesting that the first Knight
do a little work. This cycle and the others are immediate,
as well as realistic, because they are above all

²³ All biblical quotations in the thesis are taken
from The Jerusalem Bible (London, 1966).

universal in time and place.

Besides realism the mystery cycles entertained (as the bannleaders of Chester and the Ludus informed us) much as did the medieval sermon about which R. T. Davies says:

...the medieval preacher knew how important it was to sweeten the pill, and, in order to drive home his point, to disarm his listener in advance with matter arresting or entertaining.²⁴

Genesis tells of Cain's slaying Abel. Yahweh forces Cain to lead the life of an unproductive nomad, and Cain's reply is full of anguish:

Now be accursed and driven from the ground that has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood at your hands. When you till the ground it shall no longer yield you any of its produce.. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer over the earth. Then Cain said to Yahweh, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear. See! Today you drive me from this ground. I must hide from you, and be a fugitive and a wanderer over the earth. Why, whoever comes across me will kill me!'

(Genesis, 4.11-14)

Deus in the Chester Cycle chastized Cain with the same forthrightness as God in Genesis; but the Chester playwright sweetens the pill, for we, too, are fallible like Cain and the playwright's portrayal fills us with penitence and contrition for we must avoid this singular despair of our brother Cain. The playwright has arrested our thoughts and entertained us, for we have been taken out of ourselves and have

²⁴ R. T. Davies, pp. 45-46.

identified ourselves with Cain and compassionate with him
without condoning his sin:

Deus Cayne cursed on earth thou shalt be aye
for his dede thou hast done to daye;
earth warried in thy work shall be aye
that wickedlie hast wrought.

And for thou hast done this mischeife,
to all men thou shalt be unleife,
Idle and waved like a theefe,
and over all set at naught.

Cayne Out! alas! where may I be?
sorrow on each syde I se;
for if I out of land flee,
from mens companye,

Beastes I wot will werry me;
and if I leng, by my lewtye!
I must be bound and nothing free,
And all for my follie.

For my synne so horrible is,
And I have done so much amisse,
that unworthy I am, I wis,
forgevenes to attayne.

Well I wot, wherever I goe,
Who so meetes me will me sloe,
and ech man will be my foe,
no grace to me maye gayne.

(Chester, Part 1, pp. 44-45, 11.625-648)

Affectiveness, making us devout, is, R. T. Davies
points out, the third medieval characteristic of a sermon
used in the mystery cycles. Davies enlarged on this aspect
and showed it as partly didactic, a schooling of the heart,
which the plays share with other religious devotions:

The Corpus Christi plays have also an affective
function....one that cannot in reality be distinguished
properly from the didactic since religious teaching
must be largely a schooling of what we might call the

heart. Their intention is to orientate the will and convert the soul to draw tears of penitence and to warm the audience into love. This intention they share with meditations and lyrics, devotions and pictures in a profoundly important tradition of European Christianity...²⁵

The early critics tended to neglect the solid religious content of the cycles.²⁶ For example, one pageant that was very popular was the Towneley Second Shepherd's Play. Those critics admired its fun. Humorous it is in part but they missed the best example of palpable devotion in all the cycles.²⁷

Secundus pastor. Hayll, lytyll tyn mop / rewarder
of mede!

hayll, bot oone drop / of grace at my nede;
hayll, lytyll mylk sop! / hayll, dauid sede!
Of oure crede thou art crop / hayll, in god hede!

This ball

That thou wold resaue,--
lytyll is that I haue,
This wyll I vowche saue,--
To play the with all.

(First Shepherd's Play, p. 115, 11.467-475)

primus pastor. hayll, comly and clene! / hayll, yong
child!

hayll, maker, as I meyne. / of a madyn so mylde!
Thou has waryd, I weyne / the warlo so wylde;
The fals gyler of teyn / now goys he begylde.

lo, he merys;

oo, he laghys, my swetyng,

A welfare metyng,

I haue holden my hetyng;

have a bob of cherys.

(Second Shepherd's Play, p. 139, 11.710-718)

²⁵ R. T. Davies, p. 45.

²⁶ Prosser, p. 15.

²⁷ Craig, p. 4: "Its life-blood was religion, and its success depended on its awakening and releasing a pent-up body of religious knowledge and religious feeling."

The simplicity of these devout men is a minor wonder. In their poverty and utter shamelessness in the presence of Christ, utterly childlike simple men make obeisance to Mary's Child, "david sede" "crop...in god hede", "maker", Prince of Peace. In the world's eyes, uncouth clods; but they realized they were in the presence of God and acted accordingly with joy and thanksgiving.

F. M. Salter said of this scene of the Shepherds' adoration that love was manifest in the sacrificing, that it had the true medieval touch, that the author saw these shepherds from the inside and sensed their reverence which is a feature foreign, he claims, to Chaucer who saw his characters from the outside:

The virtue of a gift is that it should mean something to the giver, include the element of sacrifice and the element of love. No modern writer could possibly have imagined that most obvious and simple scene: it has the true medieval touch....Geoffrey Chaucer...does show us the widow's cottage, and he shows us a few other humble characters, but he sees them, as we see them with him, from the outside. The mystery author saw these shepherd boys from the inside, and felt their reverence.²⁸

A fourth characteristic of the medieval sermon that R. T. Davies finds in the mystery cycles is "its celebratory function" which he thinks is inseparable from its didactic and

²⁸ F. M. Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester (Toronto, 1955), p. 99.

affective functions:

Again, it is not, in reality, possible to separate this properly from its didactic and affective functions, but by its celebratory function I mean that, as a species of both worship and self-realization, it acted out the destiny of mankind under God.²⁹

Not only do the humble poor extol the Kingship of Christ but the humble rich, the Magi, likewise, celebrate the birth of their Lord:

primus rex Heyle be thou kyng Cold clade
 heyll with maydynnys mylk fade
 heyll I cum to thee with gold glade
 As wise wrytyng here it record
 gold is the rycheste metall
 And to weryng most ryall
 gold I gyff Thee in this hall
 And know thee for my lorde.
 (Ludus, p. 159, 11.235-242)

tertius rex Lord I knell down be thy bede
 in maydyns fleshe thou arte hede
 Thy name shall be wide rede
 And kyng over all kynggys
 Byttyr myre to Thee I brunge
 ffor bytter dentys on Thee they shall dyng
 and byttyr deth shall be thy endyng
 And therfor I make mornyng.
 (Ludus, pp. 159-160, 11.251-258)

Note how the solemm praises of these two Magi celebrating the birth of God the Son are free of politics and polemics. As with the shepherds in the Chester cycle the writer feels the reverence of the Magi, as well as their humility.

The mystery cycles not only entertain, affect us to be devout, and celebrate the glory of God, but they are also

²⁹ R. T. Davies, p. 47.

joyful. Mary H. Marshall corroborates this fact: "The characteristic emotion of the liturgical drama is joy."³⁰ St. Paul claimed that since Christians live in the hope of the Resurrection their habitual emotion should be one of joy.³¹ The reason for the joyfulness may be based on three factors. They sprang from the faith which was a living reality in England at that time. The authors who lived in sight and sound of the Church which taught them their Bible, exhorted them in sermons to eternal life hereafter, and surrounded them with art, music and entertainment which bespoke God's power, majesty, justice and mercy. The folk were joyful, even though living in a civilization that was physically harsh, because they lived in hope of the Resurrection; the mystery cycle reflected and was part of that spiritual milieu and was joyful in its turn. Where there is life there is hope. But where that hope is a virtue, that virtue flourishes in joy.

The enthusiastic Chester bannleader heartily echoes the joy within him in a prayer which sums up the be-all and end-all of the mystery cycles, the practical result of the Redemption if the prescriptions of God are followed:

To which rest of wayes and selestiall habitation
grante us free passage, that all together wee,

³⁰ Mary H. Marshall, "Aesthetic Values of the Liturgical Drama", in English Institute Essays 1950 (New York, 1951), p. 98.

³¹ Romans 12.12; 15.13

Accompanied with Angells and Endlesse delectation,
maye Continually laude god and prayse that King of glorye!
(Chester, p. 9, ll.185-188)

A second factor for the joyfulness in the cycles may be found in a quotation from R. T. Davies who himself quotes from Dives et Pauper:

...provided that they do not keep men 'from God's service, nor from God's Word-hearing and that there be no error meddled in such miracles and plays against the Faith of Holy Church, nor against good living', then on a holiday when joy and ease are the order of the day, anticipating their full enjoyment in Heaven, religious plays may be performed 'for devotion, honesty and mirth, to teach men to love God the more'.³²

The mystery cycles are anticipatory of the "full enjoyment in Heaven" of "joy and ease". In other words the spectators take or receive of the joys of heaven now while the plays are being acted. This enjoyment could not be possible if the mystery cycles were not joyful and joy-giving. In this active anticipation R. T. Davies declared:

...it was oneself and one's friends who were retelling the tale, whether by watching or taking part, and in so doing bringing within compass and making manageable in one's own town and one's own being the whole mysterious and eternal process of God's marvellous dealings with men.³³

The third factor infusing joyfulness and a sense of continual buoyancy and uplift in the mystery cycles is the medieval sense of humour that runs through them. There is

³² R. T. Davies, p. 48.

³³ Ibid.

no doubt that the medieval spectator of the Towneley Second Shepherd's Play would have laughed at Mak's Baby. But that is laughing at the risible, the incongruous. True humour is deeper. It flows from a sense of humility: from the depths of man's knowledge of his relationship to God. Consequently, the medieval playgoer found the ranting, pompous Herod humorous, though fearsome, for he is absurd in the light of God's kingship and man's fealty to Him:

herodes. Stynt, brodels, youre dyn / yei, euerychon!
 I red that ye harkyn to I be gone,
 ffor if I begyn I breke ilka bone,
 And pull fro the skyn the carcas anone,
 yei, perde!
 Sesse all this wonder,
 and make vs no blonder,
 ffor I ryfe you in sonder,
 Be ye so hardy.

(Towneley, p. 168, 11.82-90)

In the nineteenth century critics were slow to occupy themselves with the study of the genuine nature of the cycles and seized upon the humour which sprang from their warm humanity and glorified it as the essentially meritorious quality of these plays, so much so that the one universally familiar pageant is the Second Shepherd's Play, which is loved by many because it is so funny and "satirical" of the Church.³⁴

V. A. Kolve corroborates the celebratory mood of the

³⁴ Cf. Prosser, p. 15.

mystery cycles:

The other major source of the cycle-drama's uniqueness is its mood of celebration. This intrinsic joyfulness is due in part to the Corpus Christi feast-day occasion, ordained as a time in which Christians specifically rejoice at God's greatest gift; and it is also due to the fact, . . . , that the Christian story is staged entire, building to an ultimate triumph and joy.³⁵

Moreover, Kolve reasons this mood of celebration is the key to harmonizing the disparate actions in the mystery cycles:

Its subject was triumph, its mood celebration, and this is perhaps the key to its success in harmonizing a large number of actions widely different in tone and rhythm: the savagery of the tortures and the comedy of Mrs. Noah are united into a single affirmation of God loving man even in his sin, and redeeming him from that sin's just punishment.³⁶

Salter described the medieval sense of humour in the cycles, the appreciation of the absurd and ridiculous, the lack of puritanism, the homogeneity between living things, religion as a living force, its merriness:

...in the Middle Ages God himself had a sense of humour and fully appreciated the absurd and ridiculous. Between that God and us, Puritanism has intervened and dissolved the merriment of Merrie England.

Merry England it was, in spite of daily hardships and privation and terrible scourges such as modern men may imagine, but cannot know. And this is the England you will find in the mystery plays. It is an England with the gift of naturalness which has rarely appeared in our literature since the Reformation; it is an

³⁵ V. A. Kolve, The Play Called Corpus Christi (Stanford, 1966), p. 268.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 269.

England with artistic instincts of a high order,
 an England with a deep sense of the homogeneity of
 man and beast and fowl, and of all living things;
 an England deeply devout, into every moment of whose
 life religion entered as a living force;...³⁷

That merriment, that happiness, that joy in the cycles resulted from medieval man's belief and hope in the Redemption and his humility. The spirit of the cycle is always fresh and honest; it did not fail to condemn sin but inculcated love. So this medieval sense of humour resided in men and women who were at peace with themselves and the rest of God's creatures. It was a spiritual gift that weathered vicissitude. It did not leave the people reeling in laughter at all times as some of the critics expect to find in the mirror of their actions, the mystery cycles. This sense of humour is all encompassing and does not vanish in the face of evil; it turns evil into good. Thus the torturer's report of his assault on Christ saddened the hearer but, being basically happy and knowledgeable in his faith, he turned this into love (If Christ suffered this for me then how deeply He must love us.):

At caluery when he hanged was,
 I spuyd and spyt right in his face,
 when that it shoynd as any glas,
 so semely to my sight;
 Bot yit for all that fayr thyng,
 I loghe hym vnto hethyng,
 And role of his clethyng;
 To me it was full light.
 (Towneley, p. 281, 11.81-88)

³⁷ Salter, p. 104.

This sense of humour, this abiding happiness is also consistent with penitence.. St. Peter in the York cycle has fallen but the audience overcome with his sorrow felt with him and repeated their own "mea culpa".

Jesus. Petir, Petir, þus saide I are,
When you saide you wolde abide with me,
In wele and woo, in sorowe and care
Whillis I schulde thries for-saken be.

Petrus. Alas! þe while þat I come here!
That euere I denyed my lorde in quarte,
The loke of his faire face so clere
With full sadde sorowe sheris my harte.
(York, p. 260, 11.164-170)

The overall tone of the mystery cycles is that of a prayer for the cycles have all the prerequisites of prayer. The shepherds', and the audience's, souls are elevated to God; He is adored, blessed, praised, and offered gifts in thanksgiving, and asked for necessities of soul and body. This prayerful tone is consistent with the fact, as A. P. Campbell noted, "there ~~never~~ was a break in the liturgical intention of the plays, from the Latin plays of the Church building proper, to the complete cycles".³⁸ Also buttressing this tone is the lyrical quality and the liturgical singing that is evident especially in the Towneley and York cycles:

...tone of the York Cycle is one of wonder, praise, reverence and thanksgiving....a strongly lyrical quality about the plays and the stage direction points to a pretty generous quantity of liturgical singing.³⁹

³⁸ A. P. Campbell, p. 31.

³⁹ Ibid.

The affective tone of the cycles, their prayerful aspects, carried over into craft guilds which had a religious basis; and where toil was a devotional exercise, and patron saints and chapels gave them identity and locales:

...craft guilds...had a religious basis....regarded toil as itself a devotional exercise, a return of thanks to the Creator for the endowments of skill and bodily wealth,...in the service of a Patron Saint as well as for the better conduct of trade and the regulation of employment...a guild chapel was de rigueur and also the provisions of funds to pay a priest to serve its users.⁴⁰

What more logical move, then, as the liturgical drama moved from the Church proper that the guilds with their craftsmen would literally put the cycles on wheels. They were already living a life of prayer. They were a community in themselves involved in the larger community of the whole of mankind which the liturgy served. Wickham observed that the cycles reflected this sense of community:

...medieval thinking is characterized by a sense of community: not only in the here and now, but in relation to time-past and to time-future. The cosmic drama of the Miracle Cycles is the theatrical reflection of this thinking.⁴¹

The theories on the genesis and evolution of the mystery cycles are many and are not relevant here. But since the cycles are not a formal prayer, as the Mass is, it is

⁴⁰ Wickham, p. 127.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 153.

necessary to point out, as Wickham does in his hypothesis on their origins, two of their chief aspects, ritualistic and realistic:

...likelihood of two dramas of single Christian origins of independent motivation: the drama of the Real Presence within the liturgy and the imitative drama of Christ's Humanity in the world outside. The one is a drama of adoration, praise and thanksgiving: the other is a drama of humour, suffering and violence, of laughter and sorrow. Where the former remains ritualistic, the latter carried within it the germs of tragedy and comedy.⁴²

The mystery cycles were performed for four reasons:

1. To give worship, praise, and thanksgiving to God
2. To encourage devotion
3. To inform, to educate⁴³
4. To give enjoyment.

The reasons listed show that the devotional impact was the most important reason for their performance.⁴⁴

Since the tone of the cycles is that of a prayer surely the argument cannot be gainsaid. Moreover, the affective prayer

⁴² Ibid., p. 314.

⁴³ Dunn, pp. 80-81. From this critic's article on the Wakefield Cycle the educative focus of the cycles can readily be conceived. "The vernacular cycle plays, such as that of Wakefield,..., should be placed in the category of history, universal history,...a theological concept becomes the foundation of an aesthetic design, the scope of which is vast enough to encompass the entire cycle and rich enough to permit a fictive imaginative texture of details to be woven around its basic elements....the coherence of thematic design is apparent,..., only when the plays are read in succession from beginning to end,...as the medieval audience witnessed them."

⁴⁴ Wickham, "Miracle Plays" in Early English Stages, I, 112-178.

of the cycles is contemplation, a much higher form of prayer according to the masters of prayer like St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila and St. Ignatius of Loyola, because the whole being of man, soul and senses, are elevated to God in adoration.⁴⁵ In informing the illiterate viewers the cycles had the ability to demonstrate moralitas or sentence by using examples, but without primness for the dialogue and acting arrested and entertained.

It was the complete cycle from the creation of the angels to the general judgment which was the religious.

⁴⁵ It is a coincidence that the Ludus playwright chose the title Contemplatio for his expositor. He is like a retreat master whose function is to keep the retreatants in the spirit, the atmosphere of prayer free from distractions and concentrated on God. (See Ludus, p. 62)

Dunn, p. 81. Miss Dunn in the same vein writes: "Again and again the Old Testament plays of the Towneley... present God the Father in soliloquy, musing upon His creatures and their destiny, or in dialogue with one of the patriarchs, instructing, counselling, or testing him. These expository passages are so frequent and so lengthy that they indicate more than a didactic purpose on the part of the author(s). They must have been intended for recapitulation, occurring, as they usually do, at the beginning of the successive pageants, after the audience might have been distracted or absorbed by the narrative particularity or the boisterous action of the preceding play. Moreover, each exposition reveals more of God's design than the previous one had done, so that a series of 'epiphanies' or clarifications grows into a progressive revelation of the eternal wisdom." The same or similar topics chosen from the Old Testament were those "most concerned with God's intervention in the history of His people... They are also the incidents appearing prominently in the church's liturgy, and their principal actors, prefigurative types of Christ the Redeemer or they are the prophets who foretell his coming."

dramatic and artistic unit, just as Milton's Paradise Lost in its total number of books is a unified epic. Too often individual pageants have been lifted out of the cycle and given undue prominence as if they had been written, as isolated playlets. A cycle, however, had a beginning, a middle, and an end; a chronological narrative dramatic account of man's destiny beginning with God, proceeding through a period of testing here on earth, and ending in judgment before God. Wickham summed up the impact of the cycles: they exploded in the imagination, drama's seat of action in the human being, as a result of divine forethought and left secular minds with a perception of the way to salvation:

Let us recognize...the deliberate challenge that was issued to a secular world by the injection into it of a sacred drama, which, far from taking acceptance for granted, assaulted the emotions with sufficient intensity to cause an explosion in the imagination: an explosion that would result in perception of the path of salvation prepared by divine grace.⁴⁶

Kolve concludes that the Corpus Christi cycles satisfy two of the audience's deepest needs: its need to criticize and to say 'yes' to human life:

The Corpus Christi cycles satisfy two of the deepest needs any audience brings to an experience of theater: they embody both a criticism and an affirmation of human life.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Wickham, p. 314.

⁴⁷ Kolve, p. 272.

The purpose of this study is to examine Bale's plays in order to discover their content, method, and manner--to see whether they are, in fact, a "cycle" or whether Bale has seized upon a new method and manner for his particular end. The four extant spiritual plays will be studied in the order in which John Bale listed them in two of his antiquarian volumes, Summarium, 1548, and Catalogus, 1557: God's Promises (De magnis Dei promissionibus), Preaching of John Baptist (De praedicatione Ioannis), Temptation of Christ (De Christi tentatione), and Three Laws (Corruptiones legum divinarum).⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Blatt, pp. 22-24.

CHAPTER III

GOD'S PROMISES

God's Promises will be studied to find out what its nature is. It will be shown to be neither a sermon adopted for the stage, a tragedy or an interlude, a morality, a chronicle or history play, a Bible play, nor a mystery cycle play. The prophecies, antiphons and dogmas of faith present in God's Promises¹ will also be studied in order to see what effect they have on the play's nature.

As Thomas Cromwell's dramatist in furthering the Protestant Reformation in England, Bale wrote God's Promises to instruct the faithful in the tenets that man is justified by faith alone, and that only certain chosen ones are saved. Since these tenets are woven into the play, and since the Church of Rome is the antagonist, teaching that faith without good works is dead, then, the nature of the play is that

¹ John S. Farmer, p. 311: "It is taken from the only known copy of the first impression, now in the British Museum (C. 34, c. 2), the title-page of which is mutilated. From the date, 'Anno Domini MDXXXVIII.', only words and parts of words are left, viz., the ord of 'word,' the w of 'which,' and the words 'of God.' The rest has been supplied...Another impression appeared in 1577, by which time so entirely forgotten had the 1538 edition become that the later edition was earmarked 'now fyrst imprynted.' The title-page of this edition...runs as follows:--'A Tragedye or enterlude manifesting the chefe promyses of God vnto man by all ages in the olde lawe, from the fall of Adam to the incarnacyon of the lorde Jesus Christ. Compyled by John Bale. An. Do. 1538, and now fyrst imprynted 1577.'"

of a polemic.

It is polemical not only in the general sense of exhorting mankind to virtue or denouncing man's evil practices, but also in the apologetic sense of promoting one approach to God over another. The method of the play is to denigrate one set of doctrines, those of Rome, and promote the tenets of the Protestant reformers.

At the end, Bale assembles the other tenets, especially the tenet of faith, which, for Bale, justifies man and opens the gate of the kingdom to the chosen:²

For one saving health in Christ all they (the seven
protagonists) confessed.
In the woman's seed was Adam first justified;
So was faithful Noah; so was just Abraham--
The faith in that seed in Moses forth multiplied;
Likewise in David and Esay, that after came;
And in John Baptist, which showed the very lamb.
Though they see afar, yet all they had one justice,
(Baleus Prolocutor, final, p. 124)

It is not part of a chronological whole like a mystery cycle play, but is a polemical play dealing with a particular set of arguments involved in Bale's confrontation of Rome.

Although God's Promises is less fiery than some others of Bale's religious plays such as the Three Laws, yet it does have a fiery liveliness in Pater Coelestis' sevenfold denunciation of infidelity in each act. For instance, in the

² John Bale, God's Promises, Baleus Prolocutor, initial, p. 86: "God will show mercy to every generation, / And to his kingdom of his great goodness call / His elected spouse or faithful congregation".

dialogue with David Pater Coelestis speaks sadly of mankind's infidelity:

Pa. Coel. Still so increaseth the wickedness of man
 ...he regardeth me no more than doth an hound.
 My word and promise in his faith taketh no ground;
 (Act IV, p. 103)

Lively also, with promise of further greater vigour, is His denunciation of idolatry, fasts and solemnities:

Pa. Coel. I cannot abide the vice of idolatry,
 Though I should suffer all other villany.
 When Joshua was dead, that sort from me did fall
 To the worshipping of Ashteroth and Baal.
 Full unclean idols, and monsters bestial.
 (Act V, p. 109)

Pa. Coel. Discontent I am with you, beasts of Gomorrah,
 And have no pleasure when I your offerings see;
 I abhor your fasts and your solemnity;
 For your traditions my ways ye set apart;
 Your works are in vain, I hate them from the heart.
 (Act VI, p. 113)

Bale called the play God's Promises clearly because he treats of seven promises God gave to His chosen people. To Isaias and to us in extension and John the Baptist, in turn, Pater Coelestis promised:

Pa. Coel. A rod shall shoot forth from the old stock
 of Jesse,
 And a bright blossom from that root will arise.
 (Act VI, p. 116)

Pa. Coel. I promise thee, sure, thou shalt wash him
 among them
 In Jordan, a flood not far from Jerusalem.
 (Act VII, p. 121)

On these promises as the skeleton of his play Bale hangs his

tenets, and has his protagonists demonstrate, in dialogue with Pater Coelestis, how mankind can fall into infidelity and be saved by faith in God, for, as Bale says, it is God's grace, which makes all things possible:

The will of the flesh is proved here small treasure;
And so is man's will, for the grace of God doth all--
(Baleus Prolocutor, final, p. 125)

The promise, in each instance, is only a proof that God can perform the impossible, but faith is possible for mankind; all that is necessary is to believe.

Structurally, this play consists of a prologue, an epilogue, and seven acts, all of which begin with God displeased with man, turn into debates in which, in chronological order, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Isaias and John the Baptist (one in each of the acts) intercede for man. The intercessor invariably wins a promise from God to befriend man and God grants a sign as a pledge of this goodwill towards his wayward creature; the protagonist then breaks into a burst of praise and thanksgiving and ends the act in an antiphon.

The play is, at first sight, a sermon conditioned for acting. Bale, as the first speaker, introduces the theme of the play: man falls into sin but God in His mercy promises to call the faithful into His kingdom:

...of man the first creation:
The abuse and fall, through his first oversight
And the rise again through God's high grace
and might--
By promises...--
.....

God will show mercy to every generation
 And to his kingdom of his great goodness call
 His elected spouse or faithful congregation,
 (Baleus Prolocutor, p. 86)³

After the presentation of the theme, the exempla follow, seven of them, and each ends with the organ playing and the choir in song. The exempla over, the prolocutor, the preacher, pieces out the essential message from the exempla: justification for them (the prophets) and for us is in Christ's sacrifice:

all they had one justice
 One Mass (as they call it), and in Christ one sacrifice.
 A man cannot here, to God, do better service
 Than on this to ground his faith and understanding.
 For all the world's sin alone Christ paid the price;
 In his only death was man's life always resting,
 (Baleus Prolocutor (2), p. 124)

To contend that the nature of Bale's play is a sermon in verse, if only the two prolocutor speeches are considered, seems valid until the exempla are examined. The actor representing Pater Coelestis in Act I, after explaining the Trinity, chastizes man for his infidelity:

Which will compel me against man for to make
 In my displeasure, and send plagues of correction
 Most grievous and sharp, his wanton lusts to slake
 By water and fire; by sickness and infection
 Of pestilent sores molesting his complexion;
 (Act I, p. 87)

Although Pater Coelestis delivers a theological summary along

³ The Baleus Prolocutor explains the significance of the passage or play as the Expositor does in the Chester Plays or the Doctor of Divinity in Everyman.

with a review of man's early works in offending God, and God's means of punishment--the sort of thing that was managed dramatically in a medieval cycle for example--the whole work is not homiletic, but springs into drama with the speech of Adam:

Adam primus homo. Merciful father! thy
pitiful grace extend
To me, careful wretch, which have me sore abused,
Thy precept breaking. O Lord! I mind to amend
(Act I, p. 87)

Baleus Prolocutor here explains part of the Christian doctrine before and after the play proper, along with the sung antiphons, and thus gives this part of the play a hortative and homiletic flavour.

Lily Campbell suggested that this is a new breed of play, a new genre, a Bible play, in the form of the interlude:

...pioneers of the new Bible play...an attempt to use a new form, the interlude, then growing into acceptance in the secular drama. Most of Bale's lost plays were, as their titles indicate, either theological or Biblical, and his dramatic efforts seem to me to indicate, that he was trying to do what others on the continent were doing: offer religious rather than secular fare in the drama.⁴

Is God's Promises⁵ then, "a tragedy or interlude"?

⁴ L. B. Campbell, p. 226.

⁵ Ibid., "...probably first printed by Dirik van der Straten in 1547-48 at Wesel...not printed (in England) until 1577."

Collier, p. 159.. Collier claimed that John Bale was the first to apply the terms tragedy and comedy to drama in England: "John Bale was the first to apply, or, perhaps, misapply the words 'tragedy' and 'comedy' to dramatic representation in English..."

The announcement, on the back of the title page, reads:

A Tragedy or Interlude manifesting the chief promises of God unto man by all ages in the old law, from the fall of Adam to the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Compiled by John Bale, Anno Domini MDXXXVIII. In the word (which is now called the eternal son of God) was life from the beginning, and that life was the light of men. This light yet shineth in the darkness, but the darkness comprehendeth it not.--John I.

(Farmer, p. 84)

In the light of Christian revelation, to call this play a tragedy seems anomalous. Bale perhaps reasoned that since man has not understood God's word or accepted it, then surely that is a tragedy. E. E. Jones points out that:

Although Bale calls his play a "tragedye or interlude", these terms afford no indication of its real character; for while characterizing "God's Promises" as a tragedy, he names his "Temptation" and "John the Baptist" comedies. The treatment of the three plays is the same, and if he used the terms "comedy" and "tragedy" in the classical sense he should name our play a comedy, for the end must certainly be regarded as prosperous.⁶

Thora Blatt traced the medieval meaning of tragedy and comedy and applied them to God's Promises with the same result as Emrys Jones:

...Chaucer defines tragedy as "a dite of a prosperite for a tyme that endith in wrecchyndnesse"...Lydgate explains about tragedy that "it begynneth in prosperite, And endeth even in adversite. And it also doth the conquest trete Of riche kynges and of lordys grete". Comedy "hath in his gynnynge, A pryme face a maner complaynyng, And afterworde endeth in gladnesse"....The Chefe Promyses of God, which is a tragedy, may have a sad beginning of each individual act, but certainly operates with a happy

⁶ Emrys E. Jones, John Bale's Drama God's Promises (Erlangen, 1909), p. xiv. Jones also noted (p. xiv): "Neither are the terms used in the modern meaning. Although Bale was not the first to apply them to the drama, yet he was the first to popularize them, although,...he makes no accurate distinction between them."

ending for the just within the acts, and for mankind at the end of the play.⁷

Lily B. Campbell and Thora Blatt agreed that calling God's Promises a tragedy in the face of the triumph of divine grace must rest on Bale's belief that it is a tragedy that man's sin required the Redemption:

One may wonder with Lily B. Campbell "why God's Promises should constitute a tragedy" considering the salvation promised through Christ. She suggests that "perhaps the sins of men which made such redemption necessary seemed to Bale tragedy".⁸ If a thoroughly sad conclusion is made the chief criterion of the genre of tragedy, no play treating of divine grace will ever qualify.⁹

Blatt argued that Bale could have acquainted himself with the distinctions between the two categories, comedy and tragedy, from the works of Erasmus or Melanchthon. Furthermore, Blatt claimed, sixteenth-century commentaries on those categories were based on Evanthius' De Fabula:

...in comoedia mediocres fortunae hominum, parui impetus periculorum laetique sunt exitus actionum, at in tragoedia omnia contra, ingentes personae, magni timores, exitus funesti habentur; et illic prima turbulenta, tranquilla ultima, in tragoedia contrario ordine res aguntur; tum quod in tragoedia fugienda uita, in comoedia capessenda exprimitur; postremo quod omnis comoedia de fictis est argumentis, tragoedia saepe de historia fide petitur.¹⁰

⁷ Blatt, pp. 183-184.

⁸ L. B. Campbell, p. 231.

⁹ Blatt, p. 185.

¹⁰ Evanthius De Fabula, IV 2 (Aeli Donati Commentum) Terenti ed. P. Wessner, Leipzig 1902, (I p. 21).

Bale's "tragedy" follows Evanthius' description in so far as illustrious persons in fear of eternal damnation flee their former lives, but fails in that it has a happy ending, since divine mercy ransoms them from eternal fire. Still if Bale thought he was constrained to label his play due to continental and Cambridge influences on him, "tragedy" is an approximate description because his tale is "de historia fide" and by his own admission "de fictis...argumentis" are eschewed:

...ye may look to have no trifling sport
In fantasies feigned,...

(Baleus Prolocutor, p. 85)

Bale also calls this play an interlude. In fact he states that it is "A Tragedy or Interlude" as if the reader might call God's Promises one or the other. The force of the "or" is surely, however, that of an "and" in the sense of "This play is both a Tragedy and an Interlude". Blatt wrote that "Chambers thinks that interlude means a ludus inter performers, a play in dialogue".¹¹ Except for the prolocutor speeches in the play this "dialogue" definition is applicable, since each act is a dialogue between Pater Coelestis and a famous biblical character. Blatt added a further notion of interlude as an entertainment sandwiched in between other diversions. But a quotation like the following, "At eis thay eit with interludis betwene" (ISOI, Douglas, Pal Hon.

¹¹ Blatt, p. 183.

II 410) seems to point to an entertainment in between other pastimes or occupations.¹² Blatt suggested furthermore, that Bale used the term for his three short plays because they served as dramatic entertainment in connection with his preaching.

In Bale's description of the performance at Kilkenny he mentions the three plays which in the printed editions are called "interludes", and it is evident that they function as dramatic entertainment in connection with Bale's preaching.¹³

L. A. Cormican in defining the term interlude describes the milieu in which it developed and in which John Bale himself was involved; the interlude was interjected between other entertainments, a departure from the medieval practice, and it drew on national and non-religious sources:

...their name suggests short pieces between other entertainments....a departure from medieval practice...began to reintroduce the notion...of England as part of the European cultural community...The Mysteries and Moralities had,..., shown typically English traits, especially the good-humoured satire of which there is relatively little in Continental literature, but the Interludes were drawing more exclusively on non-religious and national sources.¹⁴

The interlude, Cormican asserts, had a professional scholarly touch, for the playwrights, usually university dons, were

¹² Ibid., p. 183.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ L. A. Cormican, "Morality Tradition and the Interludes" in The Age of Chaucer I (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1961), pp. 194-195.

introducing the classics and seeking themes and techniques from Latin comedy to entertain the learned and cultivated:

The playwrights...often professional scholars from the universities, which were introducing the Classics and paying more attention to music; not only were they experimenting with the use of song in drama...but they were going to Latin comedy for themes and treatment. Their presentation in colleges and in the dining-halls of the nobles indicates the new purposes of the plays--the study of declamation and the Classics, and the catering to learned and aristocratic taste.¹⁵

Bale had ample opportunity as a child, an adolescent, and a Carmelite, to draw his knowledge of music and song from the mystery cycles as well as from the professors he met or studied under at Cambridge. Conceivably, Bale merely followed the fashion of the time and called God's Promises an interlude; the term was popular and Bale, wanting to be accepted as a playwright, and to have God's Promises accepted as a play, dubbed it an interlude. One feature of the interlude that Bale may have learned is its anti-clericalism:

Lastly, Henry VIII encouraged a new bitterness in anti-clericalism which, while leaving many religious doctrines untouched, was focusing attention much more on religious abuses than on beliefs, and thereby lessening (though not killing) interest in the themes of the Moralities.¹⁶

Save that God's Promises consisted of dialogues and was offered, supposedly, between Bale's sermons as Blatt has suggested, the characterization of the play as an interlude

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 195.

¹⁶ Ibid.

is dubious. But whatever John Bale called his play(s), the aim of this study is to find the true nature of God's Promises, in comparison with the mystery cycle.

Perhaps, then, God's Promises falls into the morality genre, like The Castle of Perseverance, Everyman, and Mankind, which are religious moralities. Two modern scholars shed light on the nature of the morality play: Robert A. Potter and O. B. Hardison.

Robert A. Potter sees the pattern in moralities as being not one of combat between vices and virtues, but as a sequence of innocence, fall and redemption.¹⁷ Furthermore, Potter states that medieval religious drama is a totality, that the morality and the Corpus Christi cycle perform the same ceremony and both use the technique of illumination:

...medieval religious drama...a totality, in which the morality play performs the same ceremony in the microcosm of the individual human life as that of the Corpus Christi cycle in the macrocosm of historical time.

The technique in both kinds of medieval religious drama is illumination: to make visible the invisible truths of time and the universe.¹⁸

For Potter the ultimate action in a morality play is the forgiveness of sin:

If we are to understand the plays, we must clearly understand the action which they promulgate and

¹⁷ Robert A. Potter, The English Morality Play (London, 1975), p. 8.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

ultimately represent. It is the acknowledgement, confession, and forgiveness of sin, institutionalized in medieval Christianity as the sacrament of penance.¹⁹

Insofar as God's Promises recounts sequences of innocence, fall and redemption in the life of mankind, and insofar as Bale's play illuminates his listeners with divine truth, the play is a morality. If one takes Potter's recipe that a morality play must deal, among other topics, with the forgiveness of sin, then Bale's play is lacking in this ingredient. For, as Bale puts it so well, Christ paid the price for the world's sin once and for all, and no forgiveness is, therefore, necessary:

For all the world's sin alone Christ paid the price;
In his only death was man's life always resting,
And not in will-works, nor yet in man's deserving--
(Baleus Prolocutor, final, p. 124)

Christ died on the cross and removed everyman's sin is a truth evident in the morality play, but along with this truth was the individual's desire and action toward obtaining forgiveness of sin. That latter action is not depicted in God's Promises.

Hardison reasons that the morality play differs from the cycle play in being a fiction based on doctrine, and

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 16.

having characters which are personified motives:

The morality play is not history but fiction.... based...on fidelity to doctrine, and its episodes are invented and arranged to illustrate this doctrine....the characters in the morality play are personified motives,...²⁰

God's Promises is not a morality because its characters are historical not abstract and fictional. The characters in God's Promises are biblical characters such as Adam, Noah, Moses and Abraham, who enter into dialogue with Pater Coelestis, and display very little dramatic action.

If Bale's play, God's Promises, is neither tragedy, interlude or morality how may it be defined? Thora Blatt leads us to the answer. Bale, she reminds us, used the Bible as a chronicle, considered that right-minded chroniclers utter gospel truth, saw that the Old Testament foreshadowed the New, and that events in both had their sequel in the new age of faith:

All Bale's plays are historical as well as biblical in the sense that he uses the Bible as a chronicle, and considers right-minded chroniclers to utter gospel truth. The Old Testament foreshadows the New. The events of both have their sequel in the new age of faith.²¹

Bale wanted, Blatt wrote, to teach history with his specific viewpoint, and chose a form that appeared well-known

²⁰ Hardison, p. 289.

²¹ Blatt, p. 63.

to his audience, who were acquainted with mystery plays and moralities:

Bale wants to teach history, either biblical or national, and to put across his specific view of this history. For that reason he chooses a form that appears well-known, and would seem familiar to the audience acquainted with miracle plays and moralities.²²

Ernest Mardon outlines the medieval concept of history based on Augustine's seven ages of the world:

The major stages of history, which commenced with the creation and fall, reach their climax with the redeeming incarnation and end with the second coming of the Lord, were included in most religious histories of salvation during the Middle Ages... This concept of universal history as the unfolding of God's plan for his people is present in Holy Scripture itself, but it was made the subject of explicit analysis little by little in the patristic era. St. Augustine... first to expound the theory that just as the world was created in seven days, so there would be seven ages of the world itself (The City of God xxii, 30 (N.Y., 1950), p. 492). These divisions of history are biblical in origin.²³

Bale followed St. Augustine's seven ages of the world scheme in God's Promises selectively according to the divine promise chosen in each act: Act I covers the first age, the Creation to Noah; the Creation is alluded to in Pater Coelestis' first speech when he speaks of Christ with the other divine partners as a co-creator:

In the beginning, before the heavens were create,
In me and of me was my Son sempiternal,
With the Holy Ghost, in one degree or estate

²² Ibid.

²³ Ernest G. Mardon, The Narrative Unity of the Cursor Mundi (Glasgow, 1970), pp. 20-21.

Of the high Godhead, to me the father coequal
 All things were create by him, in each degree
 In heaven and earth, and have their diverse workings.
 (Act I, p. 86)

But the act is exclusively devoted to Adam's fall, forgiveness, gift (promise from Pater Coelestis), sign, and rejoicing. Act II deals entirely with Noah the Just, the second age of the world stretching from Noah to Abraham, although Pater Coelestis refers to Cain slaying Abel which occurs in the first age. The third age, Abraham to Moses, Bale incorporates in Act III where Pater Coelestis and Abraham together hold the stage. Within the fourth age, from Moses to the Prophets, Bale includes the biblical stories of Moses and David in Acts IV and V respectively. Augustine's fifth age, from David to Christ's baptism, Bale exemplifies by Isaias the prophet in Act VI. Bale in Act VII echoes Augustine's sixth age only insofar as Pater Coelestis promises that John the Baptist will baptize Christ; the death of Christ is obliquely mentioned. The seventh age of Augustine, judgment day and Antichrist, is not even suggested in God's Promises.²⁴

The matter Bale chose is biblical and in using such Bale wrote what Lily Campbell calls a Bible play.²⁵ In each

²⁴ Blatt, pp. 90-91.

²⁵ Lily Campbell, p. 226.

act John Bale traces the infidelity of mankind; man's disobedience to God; God's wrath at man's idolatry; and God's promise (and sign as token of that promise) to those who are faithful to Him. God's Promises is a play in the form of a dialogue between biblical characters. But the dialogue in each act is that of a trial with only the judge and advocate present. With Adam and David (Acts I and V) the advocate and defendant are the same person:

Adam Merciful father! Thy pitiful grace extend
 To me, careful wretch, which have me sore abused,
 Thy precept braking.

(Act I, p. 87)

David In three great battles, of threescore thousand and five
 Of this thy people, not one was left alive.
 Have mercy now, Lord! and call them to repentance.

(Act V, p. 109)

David O Lord! it is I which have offended thy grace;
 Spare them and not me, for I have done the trespass.

(Act V, p. 111)

Since Bale is making dialogue for the stage from the Bible and follows it carefully, the wrath of God the Father lessens as the play nears the birth of Christ. In Act I *Pater Coelestis*, because of man's refusal to partake of Christ's grace, threatens man with plagues, floods, fires, wars, arduous life and loss of immortality in this life:

...of wilful heart his liberal grace forsake.
 Which will compel me against man for to make
 In my displeasure, and send plagues of correction

 By water and fire; by sickness and infection . . .
 Of pestilent sores molesting his complexion;
 By troublous war, by dearth and painful scarceness

And after this life by an extreme heaviness.

Most terrible death shall bring him to his end
To teach him how he his Lord God shall offend.

(Act I, p. 87)

To Noah, Pater Coelestis is even more severe, as becomes

Bale's following of Scripture, for mankind has become brutish:

Mankind is but flesh in his whole dalliance.

My heart abhorreth his wilful misery,
His cankered malice, his cursed covetousness,
His lusts lecherous, his vengeable tyranny,
Unmerciful murther, and other ungodliness.
I will destroy him for his outrageousness;
And not him only, but all that on earth do stir,
For it repenteth me that ever I made them here.

(Act II, p. 93)

This pattern of threat, pleading, promise, sign and rejoicing continues through to the end of Act V. Instead of a threat of plagues, Pater Coelestis, in His opening speech, asserts that He is provoked to hatred and hates the works of the Gomorrites:

...Israel will not know me nor my conditions.

Provoketh me to hate by their idolatries.
Take heed to my words, ye tyrants of Sodoma;
In vain ye offer your sacrifice to me.
Discontent I am with you, beasts of Gomorrah,

Your works are in vain, I hate them from the heart.

(Act VI, p. 113)

In Act VII Pater Coelestis announces that even though the hard and soft approaches in turn have not brought amendment from man He will, since the Word has become flesh, no longer contend with man's abuse but set out to educate man by the

example of Christ, to win man, not lose him in his iniquities:

I have sent sore plagues when he hath me neglected;
 And then, by and by, most comfortable sweetness.
 To win him to grace, both mercy and righteousness
 I have exercised; yet will he not amend;
 Shall I now lose him, or shall I him defend?
 In his most mischief most high grace will I send,
 To overcome him by favour, if it may be.
 With his abusions no longer will I contend.
 But now accomplish my first will and decree.
 My word being flesh, from hence shall set him free,
 Him teaching a way of perfect righteousness,
 That he shall not need to perish in his weakness.
 (Act VII, p. 118)

E. S. Miller observed the repetition of the pattern and thought that the variations startled the audience:

...repeated often enough for the audience to expect it again. But in it are variations, which...twist it in unexpected ways, so that the audience, perceiving a different and strange thing in the same thing, are startled....Five times God opens the scene angry. His anger accumulates, overreaching any mitigation in previous promises, appearing to go towards wiping out the race.²⁶

On the whole, the play is the work of a homilist building up his arguments to support his theme. Even though this homiletic element makes the play hard to classify, the play may be defined best by calling it an historical play, because Bale follows his biblical source so faithfully. Blatt observed that the pattern modifications follow his source, not his invention; especially is this true in acts VI and VII, where

²⁶ E. S. Miller, "The Antiphons in Bale's Cycle of Christ", SP, 48(1951), 634.

the tone is conciliatory rather than damning:

...Bale adheres faithfully to his primary source. I therefore suggest that when the scene pattern is modified, the variations are due to Bale's source, and not to his invention. The suggestion of a change and the reversal of events with the withdrawal of impending doom in acts VI and VII stem from the promises given in the Bible. In Isaiah I, of which the introductory speech of act VI is a faithful though condensed rendering, a more conciliatory tone is introduced, and with the advent of Christ the Old Testament threats and rebukes fall away.²⁷

Mercy and compassion, which became the God of the Mystery Cycles, are absent in God's Promises, where covenants are drawn up between Pater Coelestis and man's representatives. Pater Coelestis never exhibits the approachableness of the God of any mystery cycle. Note, for instance, this dialogue between Isaias and Pater Coelestis:

Heavenly Lord! therefore send them the consolation
Which thou hast covenanted with every generation.

Pa. Coel. May the wife forget the child of her own body?
Isaias. Nay, that she cannot in any wise, verily!

Pa. Coel. No more can I them which will do my commandments.
But must preserve them from all inconvenients.
(Act VI, pp. 115, 116)

The Bible, the Chester Cycle and God's Promises all treat of the need for man's obedience to God. In Genesis

²⁷ Blatt, p. 91.

Bale's ambiguous term 'compiled' may mean selected and joined together in the sense that the episodes he as an historian selects from the Bible are pieced together to form a play.

God admonished Adam:

'You may eat indeed of all the trees in the garden, Nevertheless of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you are not to eat, for on the day you eat of it you shall most surely die.'

(Gen. 2.17)

In the Chester Plays, God told Adam:

Of all the trees that be here in
thou shalt eate and nothing synne,
but of this tree for wayle or wynne
thou eate not by no waye.
What tyme thou eats of this tree,
death thee behoves, leeve thou me
therefore this fruite, I will, thou flee,
and be thou not so boulde.

(II. The Creation, p. 25, 11.117-124)

And in Act I of God's Promises, Adam tells Pater Coelestis,
Who has shown him pity and mercy, that he owes him as a result:

...my heart and obedience.

(God's Promises, Act, I, p. 91)

The cycles use concrete words and any abstractions
are blended in at once with the concrete words expressed before and after them.

The sexte day my werk I do
And make thee man Adam be name
In erthelech paradys with-owtyn wo
I graunt thee bydyng lasse thou do blame.

Fflesch of thy fflesch. And bon of thy bon
Adam here is thy wyf and make
both ffysche and foullys that swymmyn and gon
to everych of hem a name thou take

(Ludus Coventriae, p. 19, 11.96-103)

In the first of Actus Primus, Pater Coelestis treats Adam
like an abstraction, not a flesh and blood creature, as does
the Ludus Coventriae author. This heavy handed rationalization

of his every move by the actor on the boards strains the attention and must tire the auditor as it does the reader. Bale is writing in the vein of a homily; with constant moralizing, scholastic dissertations that lead to continual tract writing:

I will first begin with Adam for his lewdness;
Which, for an apple, neglected my commandment.
He shall continue in labour for his rashness;
His only sweat shall provide his food and raiment.
Yea, yet must he have a greater punishment;
Most terrible death shall bring him to his end
To teach him how he his Lord God shall offend.
(Act I, p. 87)²⁸

Secondly, Bale is not speaking in the idiom of the audience. Compare Adam's first address to Pater Coelestis and Adam's answer to God in the garden in Ludus Coventriae:

Adam primus homo. Merciful father! thy pitiful
grace extend
To me; careful wretch, which have me sore abused,
Thy precept breaking. O Lord! I mind to amend
If thy great goodness would now have me excused,
Most heavenly Maker! Let me not be refused,
Nor cast from thy sight for one poor sinful crime--
Alas! I am frail, my whole kind is but slim.
(Act I, pp. 87-88)

Adam
Lord I haue wrought ayens thy wyll
I sparyd not my sylf to spylle

²⁸ Bale's audience since he was commissioned to write by Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII's secretary, may be the general population of England or the court. It is more logical to suppose that he wrote for the general population of England and the pale in Ireland since three of the plays were produced in the market at Kilkenny where a court audience would be improbable.

The woman that thou toke me tyll
sche brought me ther to
It was here counsell and here reed
sche bad me do the same deed
I walke as werm with-outyn wede
Awey is schrowde and sho.

(Ludus Coventriae, p. 25, 11.285-292)

Polite, politic, pragmatic the speech may be but the audience would not be fooled, even a court audience; it is not Adam and besides even if they spoke that way Adam wouldn't be expected to.

On the other hand, Adam in the Ludus speaks directly to God and audience in their voice, their rhythms, their words. The author has entered into Adam and, seeing himself mirrored there, has written this piece which rouses us to compassion, to sorrow and to a feeling of responsibility. And characteristic of us who have sinned he blames someone else for his misdeed. Adam, like us, in sin is a worm, unclothed, unshod, crawling, with no way to turn. The audience shudders at the thought that if Adam, my alter-ego, fell would I not have done the same?

In examining each act the reader will find that although the Bible story is alluded to, the Bible is not rigorously followed, and that although Bale is dealing with virtue and vice abstractly as in a morality, what he is actually doing is writing a dialogue that follows, proposes, and inculcates a thesis: faith alone justifies. Consequently the speeches of the dialoguers are so fashioned as to lead to and

support the thesis, to teach the tenet Bale has been commissioned to promote.

In summary, then, God's Promises is a religious play that teaches in seven different dialogues that the Protestant tenet of faith justifies the sinner eternally with God. Each of the seven promises is a promise of salvation from God to the believer. Bale is the playwright of the English Protestant Reformation. God's Promises exposes his position, and his tenets.

But since he did not write a medieval cycle, did he then not write a Protestant Reformation cycle? Bale is definitely writing a new kind of play as we are agreed. It is based on the Bible but the dialogue is Bale's: dogmatic and didactic. In a broad sense it is a morality in that it is a dialogue between good and evil, between a sinner and God. In a narrow sense it is a sermon with an introduction, a body full of exempla, and a conclusion.

John Bale, compiler of plays, especially in the first speech of *Pater Coelestis* is, if we abstract from the form in which the words appear before us, writing an essay on the Trinity angled particularly at the Son of God.

In the beginning,...
In me and of me was my Son sempiternal,
With the Holy Ghost, in one degree or estate
Of the high Godhead, to me the father coequal,
And this my Son was with me one God essential,
Without separation at any time from me--
True God he is, of equal dignity.
Since the beginning my Son hath ever be

Joined with his Father in one essential being.
All things were create by him, in each degree,
In heaven and earth, and have their diverse working--
(Act I, p. 86)

Having proved that the three divine Persons are all part of the divine triumvirate, Pater Coelestic scholastically knits this divine power of the Son into the woof of "All things were create by him" and threads out the abstract thought further by speaking of "each degree" of these "things", each of which has its specific ("diverse") work "in heaven and earth". And to ensure that you have the point Bale, like a homilist, reminds you that

Without his power was never made anything
That was wrought; but, through his ordinance,
(Act I, p. 86)

Thus Bale places Adam and ourselves in Christ's care but the introduction is intellectual and not theatrical. John Bale uses this meeting of Adam, Christ and ourselves to preach the Protestant tenet of faith. Christ is the light of faith and He must shine on us in the shadow of the bushel of unfaithfulness.

A comparison of the entrance of Almighty God in the Chester Cycle with the entrance of Bale's Pater Coelestis reveals that John Bale is not using the manner of the mystery cycle. Instead of the disquisition on infidelity, the creation scene in the Chester cycle begins with the first person singular, is alive with power, and the accent is on the

essence of drama; action.

I God, most in maiestye,
in whom beginning none may be,
endles alsoe, most of postye,
I am and have bene ever.

Now heaven and earth is made through me,
the earthe is voyde onely I see,
therefore light, for more lee,
through my crafte I will kever.
(Chester, Pagina Secunda, 11.1-8)

Here the audience finds echoes from the liturgy that it has heard time after time from the pulpit. A personal God in Whom they believe is speaking to them in mitre and chasuble and in the quick-silver imagination of that moment before the staging they are in His presence and He "most of maiestye" and "most of postye" is about to give them "light". Before giving them the light of faith as Bale's God does, this God, close to the heart of man, gives His creatures physical light.

The directness of the cycles is further evident in the scene in which the hapless Adam is discovered by God:

Ah! lord, I hard thy voyce right now;
I am naked, I made a vowe,
Therefore nowe I hyde me.

Deus

whoe tolde the, Adam, thou naked was,
Save onelie thyne owne trespasse
that of the tree thou eaten hase
that I forbade thee?

(Chester, Pagina Secunda, 11.282-288)

Adam is full of the emotions of shame and fear, aware of God's goodness as never before. The audience will grasp all that, since this is the manner of the cycles to be close to the

heart of man even in his sin, in his choice of what he wants rather than what God wants him to want.

God does not didactically point out to Adam, as Bale does so frequently, how he has erred and what he must do, but indirectly He leads Adam farther into his depths to discover that he is the author of his own degradation. Another mannerism of the cycles is apparent here, God's personal judgment of each man and man's knowledge of its supreme justice and the clarity with which it is and will be present to our minds. The simplicity of the scene, the forthrightness of approach, and the sublime and illuminating epiphany of the unassailable truth of Adam's sin, man's choice of his will to God's, is awesome.

Another bit of dialogue from the first act of God's Promises in which Pater Coelestis and Adam are chatting or in dialogue. Adam in a longish speech has just told Pater Coelestis that:

Lord! now I perceive what power is in man,
And strength of himself, when thy sweet grace is absent.
He must needs but fall, do he the best he can,
And danger himself, as appeareth evident.
For I sinned not too long as thou wert present,
But when Thou wert gone I fell to sin by and by,
And thee displeased. Good Lord, I axe thee mercy!
(Act I, p. 88)

In the reply that follows, which may be the quickest piece of verbal fencing in the play, Adam begs the adamant Pater Coelestis for mercy. The reversal of Pater Coelestis at

Adam's claim of heavy hearted sorrow is hardly credible.

Pa. Coel. Thou shalt die for it, with all thy posterity.

Adam. For one fault, good Lord! avenge not thyself on me,
Who am but a worm, or a fleshly vanity.

Pa. Coel. I say, thou shalt die, with thy whole posterity.

Adam. Yet mercy, sweet Lord! if any mercy may be.

Pa. Coel. I am immutable; I may change no decree,
Thou shalt die, I say, without any remedy.

Adam. Yet, gracious Father! extent to me
Thy mercy,

And throw not away the work which thou hast create
To thine own image, but avert from me thy hate

Pa. Coel. But art thou sorry from bottom of thy heart?

Adam. Thy displeasure is to me most heavy smart.

Pa. Coel. Then will I tell thee what thou shalt stick unto,
Life to recover, and my good favour also.

Adam. Tell it me, sweet Lord! that I may thereafter go.

(Act I, p. 89)

This dialogue of Adam's in which he begs Pater Coelestis for mercy is repeated by Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Isaias and John the Baptist in different words. The words vary but the request is the same, mercy for the protagonist or those for whom he is interceding. Pater Coelestis' answer is invariably the same, the person or persons will not be shown mercy but granted justice only insofar as an agreement is lived up to. This toughness of Pater Coelestis to his creatures is entirely foreign to Almighty God in the mystery cycles. Murray Roston saw Bale's characters being helpless before God, but since he was writing in the Renaissance his characters addressed God with rational self-confidence and thus challenged a cruel God and demanded justice:

...sinful man's helpless protestation before the divine throne, Bale's characters speak with the rational

self-confidence of the Renaissance humanist, challenging the apparent cruelty of God and demanding justice.²⁹

The protagonists in God's Promises do speak up more than they do in the cycles yet this is not because of their "rational self-confidence" as Renaissance humanists, but rather because John Bale is writing a play which is basically a scholastic disputation.

Inspead of the donnish speeches of Adam above, both Holy Scripture and the Chester cycle treat the scene simply and succinctly. In the Book of Genesis God has just asked Adam if he has eaten "of the tree I forbade you to eat?"

Adam replied:

...'It was the woman you put with me; she gave me the fruit, and I ate it'. Then Yahweh God asked the woman, 'What is this you have done?' The woman replied, 'The serpent tempted me and I ate'.

(Genesis 3.12-13)

The Chester Plays following God's Word casts the conversation in this scene:

Adam

Lord, this woman that is here
that thou gave me to my fere
gave me part: I did att her prayer,
of it I did eate.

Deus

Woman, why hast thou done soe?

Eva

This adder, Lorde, shee was my foe,
and sothelie deceived me thoe,
and made me to eate that meate.

(Chester, Pagina Secunda, 289-296)

²⁹ Murray Roston, Biblical Drama in England (Evanston, 1968), p. 63.

This conversation in the Garden from the Chester cycle rivets the attention which wanders when reading Bale's dialogue between Pater Coelestis and Adam.

Still to be examined in God's Promises are three intertwining factors (one of which established beyond a doubt the essence of this play of Bale's and allows us to categorize it): the prophets, the antiphons and Bale's stated tenets of faith. E. S. Miller stated that Bale's play is an adapted processus prophetarum which prophesy Christ's coming:

God's Promises, introducing his cycle, must have seemed clearly an adapted processus prophetarum.... essentially prophecies of Christ. The play is like Corpus Christi prophet plays in having in part the same prophets, prophecies, and signs. Abraham in York; Moses in Towneley; David in Chester, Ludus Coventriae, and Towneley; Isaiah in Chester, true Coventry, and Ludus Coventriae; and John in York.³⁰

The difficulty with Miller's thesis is that only four of the five so-called prophets Bale employs prophesy Christ's coming: Abraham does not. The mystery cycles do not include John the Baptist in their processus nor are their processus used to foretell Christ's coming alone. For example, in the Chester Play of Balaam and Balak, only after Moses presents the ten commandments, does Balaam foretell Christ's birth:

Now one thinge I will tell you all,
hereafter what shall befall:
a starre of Iacob springe shall,
A man of Israell.

(Chester, V, p, 97, 11.289-292)

Then follows in the Chester cycle the procession of prophets,

³⁰ Miller, p. 632.

Isaias, Ezechiell, Jeremias, Jonas, David, Joel and Micheas.

After each the Expositor explains the prophecy and sums the prophecies up:

Moe prophetis, lordinges, we might play,
but yt wold tary much the daye;
Therefore six, sothe to say,
are played in this place.
Twoo speakes of his Incarnation,
an other of Christe passion.
The fourth of the resurrection

The fiftē speakes expreslie
How he from the highest heavenly
light into earth us to forby

The sixt shewes, you may see,
his goste to man send will he
(Chester, V, p. 101, ll. 409 ff.)

Immediately after that play in the Chester cycle follows a Nativity play.

Miller's words are well-chosen. The play might be called "an adapted processus prophetarum" but it is not a processus prophetarum as in the Corpus Christi plays.³¹ Only Isaias and John the Baptist are prophets and John the Baptist is not a prophet in the sense of even the minor prophets like Joel and Micheas, nor is he from the Old Testament, as Bale announces in the title that the play will manifest the "chief promises of God unto man by all ages in the old law". Rather

³¹ The Towneley Processus Prophetarum contain only one prophet (a prophetess, Sybil) and three patriarchs Moses, David and Daniel who are given the roles of prophets: all foretell Christ's coming. The play precedes the Nativity play.

is Bale's play a processus of promises, some of which bespeak Christ's coming. In Bale's play his purpose is not, as in the processus, to use up all the stage time with the prophecies, but to show by debating that faith is all. However it is in Bale's use of antiphons that the prophetic or processus prophetarum aspect of the play may be partly realized.

As Thora Blatt points out God's interlocutor leaves the stage after beginning the antiphon in joy at his or mankind's promise of deliverance from sin or the promise of Christ's coming (Moses, David, Isaias and John Baptist). The antiphons and their disposition are described by Blatt and Miller:

Each act introduces a new antiphon: O sapientia, O oriens splendor, O rex gentium, O Emmanuel, O Adonai, O radix Jesse, and O clavis David. They belong in the special group called Antiphonae majores de O. These are double antiphons, sung before and after the Magnificat in the week immediately preceding Christmas Eve, at Vespers. Bale has not kept to the liturgical order, but uses first 1 then 5, 6, 7, 2, 3, 4. The reasons for the change,...have been demonstrated by E. S. Miller: In liturgical position, 2 would have made Noah refer to the burning bush and Ten Commandments, 3 made Abraham refer to Jesse's descendants, and 4 made David refer to himself; but, at the end, they made David refer to the prophet before him and Isaiah say his own prophecy.³²

Each of these antiphons refers to Christ our Lord, whose advent is imminent. And since they are sung from December 17

³² Blatt, p. 92 (Miller, p. 636 n. 25).

to 23 inclusively at vespers before and after the Magnificat in which Our Blessed Mother extols the greatness of God (Luke 1.47-55) Who, she says, is Saviour, holy, merciful, powerful to the humble of heart, and ties in the antiphons with her paeon of joy in the final lines:³³

He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his mercy--according to the promise he made to our ancestors--of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.

(Luke 1.54-55)

In none of the accounts of the Magnificat recited or sung in the mystery cycles do the Advent O's occur. John Bale imitates the cycles in so far as he uses music and singing in God's Promises, but his use of antiphons is entirely new since the Ludus Coventriae, for instance, uses singing in Latin but the verses are usually from the missal (p. 108) or hymns like *Veni Creator Spiritus* (p. 82).

Jackson J. Campbell relates that the Advent antiphons were chosen to tell us the story of Christ's birth and also

⁴³ Bale made no allusion to Mary's Magnificat. She who is as omnipresent in the cycles as in the Bible is totally absent in Bale's plays which some critics insist are part of a cycle based on the biblical story. In the Chester cycle (p. 107 following line 64) at the meeting of Elizabeth and Mary the stage directions indicate that Mary sings the Magnificat in snatches through one of her speeches. In the Ludus Coventriae (pp. 118-119) Mary sings or recites the whole of the Magnificat in Latin while Elizabeth translates it for the audience. In the York cycle (pp. 84 and 85) Mary at the end of the visit to Elizabeth in Zacharias' house sings the Magnificat. In the Towneley Cycle (Xi. The Salutation of Elizabeth, pp. 98-99) Mary says or intones the first line of the Magnificat in Latin then translates it and paraphrases the rest of it in English.

to prepare the Christian spiritually for his participation in the full meaning of Christmas.³⁴ The over-all emotional tone of Advent, Campbell informs us, is a mixture of joy at Christ's coming and our redemption later and sadness for our sins:

...over-all emotional tone of the Advent season... mixture of joy and sadness....a consciousness of mankind's evil and the need of repentance for it, but... rejoicing that Christ's incarnation provided the means of redemption.³⁵

Bale in a way has captured the sadness and the joy; sadness at man's transgression (Adam and David, especially) and joy each time God offers man a new beginning. But Bale effects these emotions in spite of the Church's liturgical reasons for the Advent O's. Why Bale uses the Advent O's we can only conjecture. Perhaps it was a heritage from his liturgical life with the Carmelites, for, as J. W. Harris suggests, the play may have been a rewrite of a play he had written as a Carmelite:

The present versions of God's Promises, John the Baptist, and the Temptation all date from 1538, according to the title-pages; but they, like the extant King John, may be revisions from more elaborate ones of an earlier phase of the author's career. The cycle fragments of God's Promises, John the Baptist, and the Temptation may likewise represent versions revised from some older plays in the list [Anglorum Heliades], plays which in their earliest forms were not practical for acting by a small troupe of professional players. Since with the exception

³⁴ Jackson J. Campbell, The Advent Lyrics of the Exeter Book (Princeton, 1959), p. 4.

³⁵ Ibid.

of King John, none of the plays has survived in manuscript, it is probable that these printed editions, considering the author's continual rewriting of King John, differ somewhat from the original plays.³⁶

Whatever Bale's purpose for the use of the Advent O's, the play is not a traditional Christmas play nor is it like a processus prophetarum. Bale's ability to echo the joy and sadness of the protagonists over mankind's fall and redemption is superb. Each Advent O is well chosen to suit the protagonist concerned. Each is a paean of praise and thanksgiving to God for His bounty. Each is delivered in joyful song, and each is tempered with an edge of sadness. Thus Adam, believing he will be saved and will live again after death as God promised, breaks into song but the antiphon is joyful and sad:

Adam And shall die the death,
... through his high influence,
At a certain day again to be revived.
From ground of my heart this shall not be removed.
I have it in faith; and, therefore, I will sing
This anthem to him that my salvation shall bring.
(Act I, p. 92)

The antiphon, O sapientia, which Adam begins to intone begins with a paean of joy but ends with a bittersweet request: "come now and instruct us the true way of thy godly prudence". Adam hardly belongs to the rest of the human beings on earth after his declaration of salvation before his song.

³⁶ Harris, pp. 128 and 129.

Isaias exemplifies the same marriage of joy and sorrow. Immediately before Isaias breaks into song he speaks to the audience of the Son of the Lord:

He is thy savour and thy life everlasting;
Thy release from sin and thy whole righteousness--
Help me in this song to acknowledge his great goodness.
(Act VI, p. 117)

But in the following antiphon, O radix Jesse, the joy of having this sign of contradiction confounding the worldly is balanced by humanity's sinfulness and need to be delivered from their sins--which need is urgent: "delay the time no longer". There is no involvement for Isaias here; he is heady with joy; sadness is far from his mind.

Bale, in using the antiphons, then, is departing from the manner of the mystery cycles which do not use them for Advent. At that point in each of the acts of God's Promises a song of thanksgiving is called for. The mystery cycles would use Veni Creator Spiritus or the Te Deum. But John Bale's use of the antiphons is appropriate as a reflection of the whole act that precedes it, since there is sorrow at man's sin and joy at God's aid; or as J. J. Campbell writes there is "rejoicing that Christ's incarnation, provided the means of redemption".³⁷

John Bale's God's Promises is a religious play. Comparisons already made in this chapter between it and the

³⁷ J. J. Campbell, p. 4.

mystery cycles and moralities current in Bale's day show that it is neither of those genres. Although John Bale called this collection of dialogues a play, it is more a disputation written for the study rather than the stage. Proof of this disputatious nature of the play lies not only in the analysis of the give-and-take of the dialogues between Pater Coelestis and the protagonists but in the dogmas that Bale introduces during the whole series of disputations. And an analysis of the tenets³⁸ leads the reader to realize that overall the disputations are parts of a whole: a tract. Finally, although not mentioned by name, the butt of the tract is the Roman Catholic Church, "the hipocrites [sic]" who "commend" "free-will" (p. 124).

God's Promises is in essence a religious tract. The butt of the tract is the Church of Rome. The characters

³⁸ "To rejoyce in God for your justification,
And alone in Christ to hope for your salvation." (p. 86)

"His elected spouse or faithful generation." (p. 86)

"Of thy mere goodness, and not of my deserving,
In my faith I trust shall so established be
By help of thy grace." (p. 90)

"Thy promise in faith is over justification." (p. 98)

"Long ere I made thee I thee predestinate,
Before thou wert born I thee endued with grace.
In thy mother's womb wert thou sanctificate." (p. 120)

"The will of the flesh is proved here small treasure;
And so is man's will, for the grace of God doth all--" (p. 124)

Though they [the seven protagonists in the seven acts]
see afar, yet all they had one justice,
One Mass (as they call it), and in Christ one sacrifice.
A man cannot here, to God, do better service
Than on this to ground his faith and understanding.
For all the world's sin alone Christ paid the price;
In his only death was man's life always resting,
(Baleus Prolocutor, final, p. 124)

...in will-works...in man's deserving--
...the practice of other experiment.
Where is now free-will, whom the hypocrites commend?
Whereby they report they may, at their own pleasure,
Do good of themselves, though grace and faith
be absent,

And have good intents their madness with to measure!
(Baleus Prolocutor, final, pp. 124-125)

John Bale in God's Promises, which is a polemical play, is gentle in his polemicizing, compared with the next play to be studied, John Baptist's Preaching in the Wilderness. In both polemical plays, Rome is the butt; Protestant tenets are upheld, and papal doctrine is discredited.

CHAPTER IV

JOHN BAPTIST'S PREACHING

In this chapter, John Bale's spiritual play John Baptist's Preaching will be studied, and shown to be a polemic, in which the biblical story of John the Baptist is only the background against which the controversy is conducted.

Thora Blatt states that the "original edition of Johan Baptystes Preachynge cannot be traced"¹ and that the original and the other three spiritual plays "have come down to us in printed editions from 1547-48".² The title page for John Baptist's Preaching reads: "A brefe Comedy or Enterlude of Johan Baptystes preachynge in the wyldernesse, openynge the craftye assaultes of the hypocrytes with the gloryouse Baptyme of the Lorde Jesus Christ. Compyled by Johan Bale. Anno M.D.XXXVIII."

Bale outlined the contents and purpose of the play in his prefatory speech. John the Baptist will come preparing for the public life of Christ by preaching repentance. The publicans will repent and accept Christ, but the "froward sects" will not. Christ, is, then, baptized by John. Couched in a gentle admonition to "follow him / Whose lowly doctrine

¹ Blatt, p. 20.n.

² Ibid., p. 20.

the hypocrites despise" (Baleus Prolocutor, p. 130) is Bale's purpose, which, Simpson states, is:

not an audience involvement which will lead to a better understanding of baptism or of the good life, but rather a conscious effort to turn audience reaction against figures such as the villains.³

In the previous chapter the terms tragedy and interlude were discussed, and the conclusion was drawn that, in God's Promises, the terms were applied only because it was fashionable. The same reason applies to Bale's use of the terms comedy and interlude for John Baptist's Preaching, for, as in God's Promises, he wants to have the work recognized as a drama.

In God's Promises the seventh act ends, if we ignore the antiphon, with a sermon by John the Baptist which could be used in place of John the Baptist's first speech in John Baptist's Preaching (in the Wilderness). Doubtless, the three plays, God's Promises, John Baptist's Preaching and The Temptation of Our Lord may be played in that sequence. And Bale did present them together at the Kilkenny market cross.⁴

³ Simpson, p. 155.

⁴ John Bale, The Vocacyon of Johan Bale to the Bishoprick of Ossorie in Irelande, 1553, Folio 24a-b, STC 1307. "The yonge men in the forenone played a Tragedye of Gods promises in the olde lawe at the market crosse with organe plainges and songes very aptely. In the afternone agayne they played a Commedie of sanct Johan Baptistes preachinges of Christes baptisyng and of his temptacion in the wilderness to the small contentacion of the prestes and other papistes there." (Quoted in Blatt, p. 33)

Miller,⁵ McCusker⁶ and W. T. Davies⁷ consider them a trilogy. Thora Blatt authoritatively asserts after her search of the literature on Bale that the three plays are customarily considered a trilogy:

It is customary to regard The Chefe Promyses of God, Johan Baptystes Preachynge, and The Temptacyon of Our Lorde, as a trilogy.⁸

Bale adds a further connection between God's Promises and John Baptist's Preaching in the opening stanzas of his Praefacio to the latter, where he announces the kingdom of Christ coming in the guise of gospel preaching and the harbingering of John the Baptist:

The kingdom of Christ will now begin to spring,
Which is the preaching of his New Testament.
Now shall Messias, which is our heavenly king,
Appear to the world in manhood evident.
Whose wholesome coming John Baptist will prevent.
(John Baptist's Preaching, p. 129)

Furthermore, in the same Praefacio Bale declares that the Old Testament and the Prophets are about to give way to

⁵ Miller, p. 631: "Bale lists the plays together and says they were acted together."

⁶ McCusker, p. 77: "The Promises, Preaching, and Temptation are clearly intended as a trilogy....All three were performed under Bale's direction in Kilkenny on August 20, 1553...."

⁷ W. T. Davis, p. 213: "It has not been recognized that these three works, written together in 1538, published together in a uniform edition about 1547, and acted together at Kilkenny in 1553, constitute a trilogy."

⁸ Blatt, p. 32.

Christ's arrival:

The law and Prophets draweth now fast to an end,
Which were but shadows and figures of his coming.
(John Baptist's Preaching, p. 129)

The evidence points to a link between the two plays, but this need not mean that John Bale has written a cycle or even a trilogy; each of these plays can stand on its own. The dovetailing of God's Promises and John Baptist's Preaching, the instrumentality of John the Baptist in bringing the prophets and other historical characters of the Old Testament together with Christ in the New Testament should not blind us to the fact that John the Baptist in John Baptist's Preaching is now operating in a separate play. That statement immediately begs the question: Does any episode in the mystery cycle stand alone? And the answer is no, each play in the mystery cycle is based on the Bible story and is part of the whole history of salvation and aims at entertainingly reminding the listeners that salvation is gained through living in and as part of this history. God's Promises is about God's promises and John Baptist's Preaching is on the surface, about what occurred while John the Baptist was preaching, but the Bible story is not told as the matter of the play. Both of John Bale's plays progress chronologically, as do the cycle plays, one into the other, but what separates them is that in one Bale preaches faith and in the other he exhorts the auditor to follow the Gospel.

The two "Baleus Prolocutor" speeches in each of God's Promises, John Baptist's Preaching, the Temptation, and the Three Laws, one before and the other after, like a Shakespearean prologue and epilogue, indicate that Bale himself considered each of these plays complete in itself. And no critic has found evidence, nor does John anywhere declare, that he set out to write a cycle.⁹

Thora Blatt conjectured that eight of John Bale's plays which he listed consecutively in his Catalogus, 1557 (published 1558) "form a cycle of the life of Christ": De Christo duodenni, De baptismo et tentatione, De Lazaro resuscitato, De consilio pontificum, De Simone leproso, De coena Do. et pedum lotione, De passione Christi and De sepultura et resurrectione. De magnis Dei promissionibus is listed eight plays later. And three plays later again Bale lists his Corruptiones legum diuinarum. The so-called cycle plays are all called comedies, the others Liber.¹⁰ But at the beginning of his enumeration Bale noted "In idiomate materno, comoedias sub uario metrorum genere".¹¹ That statement is confusing in the light of the facts: God's Promises (De magnis Dei promissionibus) in the 1538 version

⁹ Blatt, pp. 24-25.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 23-24.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 23.

is called a tragedy, and the Three Laws (Corruptiones legum diuinarum) is called a comedy.

The only indication we have as to the contents of these non-extant plays is the suggestion, usually rather general, contained in Bale's own list of titles. To say, as Blatt does, that they "...deal with crucial moments in the life of Christ, particularly such as show Christ correcting and admonishing, or with the machinations of his enemies"¹² cannot be more than simple conjecture, and can hardly be used as a basis for critical statement.

Blatt in her next sentence dispels once and for all the theory of Bale writing a cycle in the medieval manner, in so far as content is considered; Bale's choice of stories from the Bible is so selective that many themes revered in the mystery cycle tradition are absent: "Themes dear to the miracle tradition, for instance the Annunciation and the events attending upon Christ's birth, are conspicuously absent here and in the rest of the lists."¹³

¹² Ibid., p. 24.

¹³ Ibid.

Bunched together near the bottom of Catalogus, 1557 are the four extant spiritual plays, which are sandwiched in between plays entitled De imposturis Thomae Becketi, and Amoris imaginem. Other titles following the "cycle of the life of Christ" include Super utroque regis coniugio, De sectis Papisticis, Erga Momos et Zoilos, Proditiones Papistarum, and Contra adulterantes Dei uerbum.¹⁴

What becomes evident on examination of Catalogus, 1557 assuming Blatt's supposition is right, that Bale did write a cycle of Christ's life, and despite J. W. Harris's suggestion (p. 129) that "The cycle fragments of God's Promises, John the Baptist, and the Temptation may likewise represent versions revised from some older plays..." is that Bale could well have written a cycle of Christ's life. The plays in the cycle, however, were of a piece and distinct from the seemingly (as the titles suggest) controversial plays in which the four surviving spiritual plays are nested. That the plays were written while he was a Carmelite seems highly uncertain since the Mother of God, to whom Carmelites are especially devoted, is absent, as the titles of the "cycle" imply (Blatt's and Harris's "cycle fragments"), and the infancy plays of the mystery cycles are totally absent.

Furthermore, except for the Three Laws, he called them

¹⁴ Blatt, p. 24.

interludes and could thus interject any one of them on any occasion where time allowed for its playing. At Kilkenny time was found for playing the three interludes, God's Promises in the forenoon and the other two in the afternoon. Bale's calling one of them a tragedy (God's Promises) and the rest comedies separates the plays as distinct units not as parts of a whole cycle. To call, for instance, the "Second Shepherd's Play" of the Towneley cycle a comedy would be a distortion; it cannot be separated from that cycle as a unit any more than a patch can form a patchwork quilt: both are pieces from the whole.

It might be argued here that since Bale at the end of his final prolocutor speech in God's Promises states, "More of this matter conclude hereafter we shall" that then John Baptist's Preaching is part of a cycle (or trilogy). But it is this matter that is the sermonizing raison d'être of God's Promises and the other plays; the biblical story line is only the weak thread which John Bale strengthens with the strands of his tenets. In John Baptist's Preaching the reader will find a litany of lines that echo and re-echo Protestant doctrine, the "new learning" full of animosity towards the traditions of the Roman faith, an equating of Roman Catholics with Sadducees and Pharisees, the inefficacy of good works and the absolute justification by faith alone, the private

interpretation of the scriptures; the papists' ways are men's ways: God's way is his word; fruition is through following Christ's Gospel:

The kingdom of Christ will now begin to spring,
Which is the preaching of his New Testament.

(John Baptist's Preaching, p. 129)

With their baptism by John the Baptist the publicans put their faith in Christ and His Gospel, and, Bale adds, this is the point over which the bold sects, the Pharisees and Sadducees (the Roman Catholics), battle:

Till John Baptist come, with clearer expositions.
The publicans then leave their ill dispositions
Unto Christ to come, and his most holy Gospel,
Where the froward sects continually rebel.

(John Baptist's Preaching, p. 130)

Moreover, Bale adds, the hypocrites, the "froward sects" despise Christ's humble tenets of faith; and he then exhorts the elect to shun their fiendish ways and turn their minds to the godly witness of the Gospel:

Whose lowly doctrine the hypocrites despise.
Follow him, therefore, and shun their devilish practice;
Be gentle in heart, and bear your good intent
Toward his Gospel and godly testament.

(John Baptist's Preaching, p. 130)

John Bale, in the quotations from his introductory Baleus Prolocutor speech above, lays the foundation of the dialogues to follow in the play. From their gist one gathers that the play will be Protestant. From the style of the prolocution the auditor is warned implicitly to be wide awake in order to follow the argument. More prominence is given to the

controversial topics of faith and the preaching of the Gospels than to the introduction of John the Baptist. At once the contrast between John Bale's play, which is not a simple portrayal of the Bible, and the mystery cycle is clear:

John Bale puts the auditor on the defensive and keeps the mind occupied, but the Towneley author's introduction is a prayer:

God, that mayde both more and les,
 Heuen and erth, and his awne wyll,
 And merkyd man to his lyknes,
 As thyng that wold his lyst ffulfyll,
 Apon the erth he send lightnes,
 Both son and moyne lymett thertyll
 He saue you all from synfulnes,
 And kepe you clene, both lowd and styll.

(Towneley, "John the Baptist", 11.1-8, p. 195)

And with that prayer the gap between Bale's play and the mystery cycle widens, for the mystery cycle is liturgical and religious, worships God and lifts the hearer up to God. Bale cannot do what the medieval cycle writers did: he cannot rouse the imagination to hope and the heart to joy as the Towneley playwright has in this short prayer of introduction in which he impersonates John the Baptist.

John Bale exhorts his listeners, Turba Vulgaris, Miles Armatus and Publicanus, to beware men's traditions, be justified by faith in the laws of God found in God's word, avoid the Pharisees' justification by outward works; the lowly shall be exalted and the spiritual Pharisee detested,

the seven deadly sins overcome by the rule of God's word:

Flee men's traditions, and God's high laws fulfil.

Seek God, your father, in spirit and verity.

But not in shadows, as doth the Pharisee

Which by outward works looketh to be justified;

And neither by faith nor by God's word will be tried.

Meekness will arise, and pride abate by the Gospel:

The simple fyther shall now be notable;

The spiritual Pharisee a wretch detestable;

Abjects of the world in knowledge will excel

The consecrate rabbis by virtue of the Gospel.

All that, aforetime, untoward did remain,

The rule of God's word will now make straight and plain.

The covetous juror shall now be liberal;

[and so for the rest of the seven deadly sins]

(John Baptist's Preaching, pp. 132-133)

Through John Baptist, Bale assures us that baptism is a preparation for faith in Christ which endows salvation:

Then take my baptism, which is a preparation

Unto faith in Christ, wherein rest your salvation.

(John Baptist's Preaching, p. 134)

In these exhortations to his three listeners Bale has departed far from the Bible account since he is using John the Baptist to propagandize anti-Catholic tenets. As the play continues the controversy heats up, and consequently we are into polemics, and well outside the pale of the Bible. None of the cycles containing plays of John the Baptist, the Towneley, the Ludus Coventriae and the York, engage in controversy. In each of them the play of John the Baptist, like the biblical account, is short compared with John Bale's John Baptist's Preaching. The nature of this play is a polemic, and Bale

has built his case up for his side to this point; now we are to meet the opposition.. And Bale is immensely entertaining in the encounter between John the Baptist and the two vulgarians, Pharisaeus and Sadducaeus.

Margaret Simpson notes how Bale has won the audience to identify with the first sinners, so that he can now turn them in anger against the Pharisee and Sadducee, and discredit them by their diction and use of vulgar terms:

The audience is given an opportunity to identify with the first sinners and to partake in their confession and remorse. Thus, they can listen in righteous anger to the arrogance of the Pharisee and Sadducee.

Bale also seeks to discredit the two by their use of low terms in contrast with the more stately and formal diction of the rest of the play.¹⁵

As Miles Armatus exits, a Pharisee and a Sadducee join the group. John Baptist turns to the crowd and describes the difference between the efficacy of baptism by himself and by Christ: he, John the Baptist, terrifies the conscience; Christ gentles the soul:

The baptism of me is the baptism of repentance;
His baptism in faith bringeth full recoverance.

I fear the conscience, with terror of the Law;
He, by the Gospel, man's soul will gently draw.

Forgiveness by faith will be hereafter preach.
(John Baptist's Preaching, p. 137)

This excerpt as well as the next are, except for being written

¹⁵ Simpson, p. 155.

in the form of dialogue for a play, tractarian.

The Pharisee, whose ears have been alerted by the word Gospel, and the phrase "forgiveness by faith" speaks to the Sadducee of the new learning (see p. 137): "As is said abroad, this fellow preacheth new learning." John Bale wastes no time in labelling the Pharisee and Sadducee as hypocritical, unholy and false interpreters of the Scriptures, and sectarian sowers of discord:

Ye show to the world as though ye could do no ill;
But the Lord doth know what ye have in your hearts,
And secretly how ye play most wicked parts.
Whereas sects remain the spirit of God cannot be,
Whose kind is to knit by a perfect unity.

An outward pretence ye have of holiness
(John Baptist's Preaching, p. 138)

The next four excerpts are polemical and are included here only to allow the auditor to be informed of some of the Protestant tenets Bale espoused.

Thus to pinpoint the opposition, Bale has Pharisaeus describe their function, interpreting the Scriptures and teaching God's laws to their followers, and has John Baptist castigate them as corrupters who fashion pestilential traditions and falsely expose the Scriptures to live high in the

dining room:

Phar. As the laws of God, to his people doth devise.
 We Pharisees are those which sit in Moses' seat
 As interpreters, the holy Scriptures to treat.
 J. Bapt. And then ye corrupt with your pestilent traditions;
 For your belly's sake have you false expositions.
 (John Baptist's Preaching, p. 138)

Bale holds to his tenet of faith without works and accuses the Pharisee and Sadducee of lack of spirituality, dependence upon good works, attention to the letter of the law, and rates them as no better than sodomites; and, furthermore, Bale judges them guilty of one of the ultimate sins, intransigence in untruth (obstinacy in sin or impugning the known religious truth) for which God will punish:

...your observations are carnal;
 Outward works ye have, but in spirit nothing at all.
 Ye walk in the letter like painted hypocrites;
 Before God ye are no better than sodomites.

...where he findeth resistance
 Against the plain truth, there will he punish most,
 For a wickedness that is against the Holy Ghost;
 And that reigneth in you which never hath forgiveness;
 For enemies ye are to that ye know righteousness.
 (John Baptist's Preaching, p. 139)

Against the tenets of the old faith Bale is solidly aligned; as Sadducaeus points out that John Baptist practises new laws and teaches new learning:

Sad. Our worthy decrees the knave doth not regard;
 But practiseth new laws, such as were never heard.
 By whose authority doest thou teach this new learning?
 (John Baptist's Preaching, p. 139)

Bale warns the Sadducee and Pharisee that unless they die to their unfaithfulness, their Roman practices of fastings,

long prayers and holy works will not justify them and save them from eternal damnation:

How can ye escape the vengeance that is coming
Upon the unfaithful which will admit no warning?
Neither your good works, nor merits of your fathers,
Your fastings, long prayers, with other holy behavers,
Shall you, afore God, be able to justify
Your affections inward, unless ye do mortify.
(John Baptist's Preaching, p. 140)

In the final prolocution Bale sums up his tenets--
Christ's Gospel alone is to be the way to heaven, Christ
Jesus Himself is to be preached and believed, not men's tra-
ditions; faith purifies the heart, not the wearing of hard
clothing, reciting long prayers, wandering in the desert or
eating locusts; God's way is His word; penance is forsaking
your old life and following Christ's Gospel; men's justice
is an hypocrisy, faithless and thus a vanity; and Bale
sharply underlines who the enemy is, Rome, "the painted
Pharisee", the monastic orders, the Pope, and the priests:

John was a preacher--note well what he did teach:
Not men's traditions, nor his own holy life,
But to the people Christ Jesus did he preach.
Willing his Gospel among them to be rife;

But who received it? The sinful commonalty--
Publicans and sinners, but no painted Pharisee.

The way that John taught was not to wear hard clothing,
To say long prayers, nor to wander in the desert,
Or to eat wild locusts. No! he never taught such thing.
His mind was that faith should purify the heart.

Man's ways are all things that are done without faith;
God's way is his word, as the holy Scripture saith.

If ye do penance, do such as John doth counsel:
Forsake your old life, and to the true faith apply.

Wash away all filth, and follow Christ's Gospel.
 The justice of men is but an hypocrisy;
 A work without faith, an outward vainglory.

Hear neither Francis, Benedict, nor Bruno,
 Albert, nor Dominic, for they new rulers invent;
 Believe neither Pope, nor priest of his consent;
 Follow Christ's Gospel, and therein fructify.

(John Baptist's Preaching, pp. 148-149)

John Bale's John Baptist's Preaching may be read, or listened to, on two levels. As a running enlargement, the first level, of Matthew 3.1-22 or Luke 3.1-22, the audience may follow the single, straightforward Bible narrative. The second level, as the illustrations drawn above from the play testify, is polemical, propagandist and political, in the sense that John Bale is, as some of the critics informed us in Chapter I, promoting the new learning for the aristocracy, who are debasing the monarchy and looting the monasteries. In fact, Bale's final prolocution is more a summary of his polemical arguments than of his religious tenets.

To apply, therefore, the name, mold or tone of a mystery cycle, on John Baptist's Preaching is a misclassification. Consider the barbers' play of John Baptist in the York cycle, where the intimacy of man with God, God with man and their mutual respect and love, are expressed immediately, even though John Baptist is complaining to God about man's supineness, his thick headedness:

Almighty god and lord verray,
 Full woundyrfull is mannys lesyng,
 For yf I preche tham day be day,

And telle tham, lorde, of thy comyng,
 Pat all has wrought,
 Men are so dull bat my preching
 Serues of noght.
 (York, p. 172, 11.1-7)

The medieval dramatist composes plays about the sacred word with inventiveness and freshness. God is so approachable, so personal, and the auditor senses that the folk are involved in this spring ritual, this annual renewal of spirit on the way to eternity, and John Baptist's link in this chain of being is precisely to do penance and prepare for Christ's coming. On the other hand, Bale's John Baptist hurls himself into action, the opposite of the contemplative, subdued opening of the York Baptist play just quoted above. And although Bale follows the writing of Isaias closely¹⁶ he introduces his own gloss on holy scripture:

Joannes Baptista. As a messenger I come, to give you warning
 That your Lord, your king, your saver and redeemer,
 With health, grace and place, to you is hither coming.
 Apply ye therefore; delay the time no longer;
 But prepare his way, making the rough paths smoother.
 Strike down the mountains; fill up the valleys again;
 For all men shall see their merciful saver plain.
 The seat of David--....
 He cometh to possess as a ruler spiritual;..
 And in Jacob's house to reign continually;
 Which is, of his church, the number universal,
 Not only of Jews but faithful believers all.
 That congregation will be evermore defend;
 And of his kingdom shall never be an end.
 (John Baptist's Preaching, pp. 130-131)

Though John Bale warned the audience that ulterior motives were

¹⁶ Isaias 40.3-5.

afoot in the play, it is in John Baptist's initial speech that the first intimation appears. An audience with a nodding acquaintance with the Bible expects a play on John Baptist to follow the story line at least in spirit. What is expected is the story of the connection between penance, baptism, and God's presence in the soul:

Penitentenciam nunc agite
 Appropinquabit regnum celorum
 ffor your trespas penaunce do 3e
 and 3e xall wyn hevyn dei deorum
 In hevyn blyse ye xall wyn to be
 Among the blyssyd company omnium supernorum
 ther as is all merth joye and glee
 Inter agmina angelorum
 In blyse to abyde
 Baptyme I cowncell yow for to take
 And do penaunce for your synnys sake
 and for your offens amendys 3e make
 your synnys for to hyde.

(Ludus Coventriae, p. 188, 11.14-26)

John the Baptist prepares the hearts of men for the coming of Christ, symbolically washes sin from hearts in the Jordan and, when Christ comes, baptizes Christ and insists that Christ will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire; and as Luke tells us "while Jesus after his own baptism was at prayer, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily shape, like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you.'" (Luke 3.21-22)

In the York Cycle John the Baptist follows the Bible more carefully in spirit than John Bale, when the final reckoning is taken, for that partisanship is never present.

For the essence of the Baptist's story is that God does not live in a soul that is like an unclean house, and He will re-enter that soul only when cleansed by penance.

'Loke pou make þe redy,' ay saide I,
 'Vn-to oure lord god most of myght,
 Þat is þat pou be clene haly,
 In worde, in werke, ay redy dight
 Agayns oure lord,

For if we be clene in leuyng,
 Oure bodis are goddis tempyll þan
 In the whilke he will make his dwellyng,
 Ther-fore be clene, bothe wiffe and man.
 þis is my reed;

And if ȝe sette all youre delyte
 In luste and lykyng of þis liff,
 Than will he turne fro yow als tyte
 By-cause of synne, boyth of man & wiffe,
 And fro ȝou flee,
 For with whome þat synne is riffe
 Will god noght be.'

(York, p. 173, 11.29-33, 36-40, 43-49)

The York author is kind and gentle, like a father confessor to a penitent, advising and exhorting. The audience examines its conscience while it listens to John Baptist speaking to God. In contrast Bale is full of another message besides that of the Bible. The tone as in holy scripture becomes accusatory when John Baptist turns upon the "brood of vipers", whom Matthew identifies as Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 3.7-8) {

In the Ludus Coventriae mystery cycle John Baptist speaks directly to the crowd of the need for sinlessness in order to live with the angels:

fforsake all synne that werkyth woo
 And turne to vertu and holynese

Beth clene of levying in your sowle also
 Than xall 3e be savyd from peynfulnese
 Of fyere brynnyng in hell
 If 3e for-sak synne
 hvyn blysse xall 3e wyne
 Drede 3e not the devylls gynne
 with Angellys xall yow dwell.

(Ludus Coventriae, pp. 188, 11.5-13)

As in the York John Baptist, the Ludus Baptist is compassionate, fatherly and accents the message of the Gospel accounts: God does not abide in a sin-filled soul.

In the Towneley plays John the Baptist is gentle and quietly persuasive:

I wyll go preche both to more and les,
 As I am chargyd securly;
 Syrs, forsake youre wykydnes,
 Pryde, envy, slowth, wrath, and lechery.
 here gods seruice, more & lesse,
 Pleas god with prayng, thus red I,
 Be war when deth comys with dystres,
 So that ye dy not sodanly.

(Towneley, XIX John the Baptist, 11.273-280)

It would be unfair to accuse John Bale for not using the attributes of the mystery cycles in his spiritual plays, when his purpose is polemical and naturally different from that of the liturgically oriented cycles. Despite the polemical aspect of the play, the denigration of Roman tenets and disparagement of the Roman priesthood, Bale is sincere in his compassion for the three sinners in the opening scenes, and is sincere in his belief that the Protestant tenets of the Reformation in England are valid and should be embraced by the audience. It should be considered that he lived in a

time of theological controversy when invective was a legitimate weapon against those you wished to crush or correct, a position which Bale took with regard to the Roman Catholic priesthood.

John Bale's failure to write plays in the penitential tone, which one finds in parts of the cycle plays, follows naturally from his rejection of penance as a sacrament. He held, rather, that penance was a "work" and, therefore, unnecessary for salvation:

...faith should purify the heart
 My ways (saith the Lord) with men's ways have no part--
 The justice of men is but an hypocrisy;
 A work without faith, an outward vainglory.
 (John Baptist's Preaching, p. 149)

As a consequence of Bale's play being by nature a polemic, we find a sharp edge in the play. Even as early as the first scene Bale attacks the tenets of Rome while in the midst of exhorting John the Baptist's converts to faith:

J. Bapt. ...
 Knowledge your trespass, and cease from doing ill;
 Flee men's traditions, and God's high laws fulfil.
 Seek God, your father, in spirit and verity,
 But not in shadows, as doth the Pharisee
 Which by outward works looketh to be justified;
 And neither by faith nor by God's word will be tried.
 (John Baptist's Preaching, p. 132)

The difference between the denunciatory polemical style of John Bale in these plays and that of the mystery cycle may be seen, for example, in a passage dealing again

with the disciples of John the Baptist, in which John the Baptist himself exhorts his followers to repentance and the performance of good works, a tone and attitude that permeate the Ludus cycle:

ffor your trespas penaunce do 3e
And 3e xall syn hevyn dei deorum

Baptyme I cowncell yow for to take
And to penaunce for your synnys sake
And for your offens amendys 3e make
Your synnys for to hyde.

My baptym is but sygny fure . . .
Of his baptym

ffor he xall baptyze as seyth scryptour
that comyth of hem all euery-chone
In the holy goost

Be-holde the lombe of god is this
that comyth now here be-forne
the with xall wasch the worldys mys
And saue all that that was for-lorne

Shamfull deth this lambe i-wys
xall suffer for us and be all to-torne
And rent on a roode

hys bake xall be bowndyn to a stake
And betyn owt all his bloode.

(Ludus Coventriae, pp. 188-189)

On the other hand, Bale wrote passages free from polemic, in which full of the enthusiasm of all Christians for the Gospel, he saw the power of the Gospel in remaking the world:

J. Bapt. Meekness will arise, and pride abate by the Gospel:

The rule of God's word will now make straight and plain.
The covetous juror shall now be liberal;

.

The wrathful hater shall now love earnestly;
 To temperate measure men will change gluttony;
 Pride shall so abate that meekness will prevail;
 Lechery shall lie down, and cleanness set up sail;
 Slothfulness shall slide, and diligence arise
 To follow the truth, in godly exercise.
 Prepare ye, therefore, so fast as ever ye can
 To this lord, which will renew ye every man,
 In case ye repent the folly that is past.
 (John Baptist's Preaching, pp. 132, 133)

Thora Blatt remarked that movements were rare in Bale's play John Baptist's Preaching; that it is all talk, and only once was stage machinery involved, the Holy Spirit appeared as a dove:

Apart from stage directions indicating the few movements necessary when John baptizes the repentant sinners, the play is all talk. Only one episode demands any kind of machinery:¹⁷

Since his aim is persuasion and controversy, and since the nature of his plays is polemic, Bale must always debate and confront. This naturally slows the movement of the players, and lessens the religious impact of what, some of the critics like Craig¹⁸ suggested, was part of a new Protestantized mystery cycle, and what Lily Campbell¹⁹ classed as a new type of Bible play.

With the entrance of Jesus Christ, Bale orchestrates

¹⁷ Blatt, p. 151.

¹⁸ Craig, p. 370.

¹⁹ Lily Campbell, p. 226. Miss Campbell wrote that Bale's spiritual plays were "pioneers of the new Bible play ...an attempt to use a new form, the interlude...."

a fine dialogue between Himself and John the Baptist which ends up in John the Baptist bursting into a rapture of joy. This comes after the following speeches by Christ:

I am become flesh for mine own promise sake;
 Without man's seed born his kind to sanctify;
 Of sinner's lineage the sinners quarrel to take;
 Poor, that ye should think my kingdom nothing worldly;
 In flesh, to the spirit, that the Gospel should ye bring,
 Believing by me to have the life everlasting.
 Ye worldly people! learn gentleness of me;
 Let this example be grafted first in your wit,
 How I, for baptism, to John myself submit.

(John the Baptist's Preaching, pp. 143-144)

Bale, even during these magnificent speeches does not let us forget he is writing a polemic, for Christ says that He will be baptized to teach humility to the Pharisees:

Why should I disdain this time to be baptised?
 The Pharisees abhor to be of the common sort;
 But I may not so, which come for all men's comfort.

(John the Baptist's Preaching, p. 145)

Christ echoes St. Paul in faith justifying us:

The man which have faith lacketh no sanctification
 Necessary and meet for his health and salvation--

(John the Baptist's Preaching, p. 146)

After the Holy Spirit descends upon Christ as John the Baptist baptizes Him, Pater Coelestis makes this speech--polemical in part as becomes the nature of the play--but superbly wrought:

This is mine own Son, and only heart's delight;
 This is he which hath procured grace in my sight
 For man that hath done most wilful traitory.
 Alone it is he that me doth pacify;

For his only sake with man am I now content,
To be for ever at a full peace and agreement.
I charge ye: to him give diligent attendance;
Hear his monitions; regard his heavenly doctrine;
In men's traditions look ye have no affiance;
Nor in Moses' law, but as he shall define.
Hear him, believe him, draw only after his line;
For he alone knoweth my purpose towards you,
And none else but he--hear him therefore only now.
(John Baptist's Preaching, p. 147)

John the Baptist gazes up to heaven, bends his knees,
and breaks into a speech of sheer joy:

J. Bapt. O time most joyful! day most splendiferous!
The clearness of heaven now appeareth unto us.
The Father is heard; and the holy Ghost is seen;
The son incarnate to purify us clean.
But this we may see, the Gospel once received,
Heaven openeth to us, and God is highly pleased.
Let us sing, therefore, together with one accord.
Praising these same three, as one God and good Lord!
(John Baptist's Preaching, p. 147)

Then, with his hands stretched out towards heaven,
John the Baptist sings:

Glory be to the Trinity,
The Father, the Son, and Spirit living,
Which are one God in persons three;
To whom be praise without ending.
(John Baptist's Preaching, p. 148)

Such a song, along with the great O's in God's Promises,
might be considered semi-liturgical in practice, even a
relic of the liturgical drama.

Bale's John Baptist's Preaching is, unlike his other
tracts, not written at white heat--perhaps because the play
is handled in a more historical manner than his other tracts
in which you often have contests with almost personal

opponents. The play, being argumentative and didactic, is lacking in action, set in a form closer to a débat or disputation than a play. The very format of the play involves the auditor in the contest between the papists and the reformers rather than in hearing the ancient story; the Bible has been submerged in rhetoric.

CHAPTER V

THE TEMPTATION OF OUR LORD

The title page of an extant copy in the Bodleian announces "A brefe Comedy or enterlude concernynge the temptacyon our lorde and sauer Jesus Christ by Sathan in the desart Compyled by Johan Bale Anno M.D. XXXVIII".¹ Like all of the extant spiritual plays, the Temptation of Our Lord opens and closes with a Baleus Prolocutor elocution. Sandwiched in between are one dialogue and one trialogue. The dialogue between Jesus Christ and Satan follows the scriptural accounts of Matthew 4.1-11 and Luke 4.1-13. The trialogue at the play's end is between Christ and the two angels who break into song at the finale. In sacred scripture the account is about temptation and Christ's rebuffing each of Satan's three temptations. In John Bale's account of the tempting of Christ by the devil the scriptural version is expanded into a debate and the simple reference made by Matthew to the angels, "angels appeared and looked after him" (Matt. 4.11), is expanded into a trialogue.

Margaret Simpson found, in 1971, that:

Bale complicates each of the temptations with issues more peculiar to his own doctrinal ends....difficult

¹ Bodl. Douce V. subt. 164.

to identify with characters who talk too much and leave nothing to our empathy....attempting to create a unified community of faith by molding and directing attitudes....[no] startling departures from the form of the medieval cycle play...content to re-shuffle his points of emphasis, to realign the figural significance of characters, to filter out all the Marian and sacramental allusions...

Statements of anti-Catholicism...are not greatly obtrusive...more obvious is Bale's Protestant insistence on the Scripture and on Faith as the only means of man's salvation.²

In 1879, John Payne Collier noted that Bale called this play a comedy and that the prologue, spoken by Bale himself, connected the Temptation of Our Lord with Bale's previous play, John Baptist's Preaching:

...he calls...his Christ's Temptation a comedy....

The prefatio, or prologue, to Christ's Temptation purports to have been spoken by the author himself, and it connects the 'Temptation' with the previous play of the 'Baptism' of the Saviour.³

Emrys E. Jones, in 1907, painstakingly traced links between the Temptation of Our Lord, God's Promises and John Baptist's Preaching:

...in the prologue...a reference...made to its predecessor (John Baptist's Preaching)....Christ...expresses his faith in "God's promyse"--reminding us of lines 121, 128, 509 etc. in (God's Promises), and especially of the seventh promise--to John Baptyst. Christ further, in his temptation, tells Satan that the neglect of God's word caused Adam first to

² Simpson, pp. 159, 163 and 164.

³ John Payne Collier, The History of English Dramatic Poetry to the Time of Shakespeare: And Annals of the Stage to the Restoration (London, 1879) II, pp. 159, 161.

fall, and made his offspring miserable and mortal, and that God's word sustained Moses and fortified Helias; clearly proving that "God's Promyses" had not been forgotten when Bale wrote the "Temptatyon". In its motive it again bears a likeness to "God's Promyses"--we meet subtle attacks upon Rome throughout the play; for example, Satan tempts Christ in the habit of a hermit, and after the failure of the temptation, betakes himself to the Vicar of Rome,... He [Bale] also attacks the vows of celibacy of the priests, and advocates the dissemination of the scriptures among the masses in the Epilogue.⁴

W. W. Greg, in 1930, wrote that John Baptist's Preaching and the Temptation of Our Lord were alike in subject and structures:

...the Preaching and Temptation are closely related alike in subject and structure.

Honor McCusker, in 1935, noted that only in his shortest play, the one-scene Temptation of Our Lord did Bale indicate a locale, and that the play made use of an organ; and judged that the play was naïve, like a miracle play, and that it was ingenuous in one place and bathetic in another:

...he never indicates any specific background, except in the Temptation,...laid in a desert...a small organ of the portative type then common for private use... The naïveté of the miracle play is more apparent in this than in the other interludes, perhaps because of its simplicity. The guarded politeness of Christ's colloquies with Satan is remarkably ingenuous even

⁴ Emrys E. Jones, pp. ix and x.

⁵ W. W. Greg, p. 54. Greg on the basis of his examination of the original addition of the Temptation of Christ (Dance collection at the Bodleian) supposed that John Baptist's Preaching preceded the Temptation of Christ.

for Bale, who never achieves a high standard of dignity. And the easy logic of one passage is a fine specimen of bathos:⁶

Jesse W. Harris, in 1940, saw that Bale in three of his scriptural plays argued that salvation came through faith alone; free will, good works and good intentions led only to damnation. All, he claimed, retained the essential quality of the morality:

In God's Promises, John the Baptist, and the Temptation, Bale makes the point that salvation comes through faith alone, whereas the notion of free will, good works, and good intentions, leads only to damnation. All those plays have retained the essential quality of the morality, namely, the struggle between good and evil for the soul of man, or an equivalent virtue. But now the virtues are Protestants, the vices are Catholics.⁷

E. S. Miller, in 1951, suggested that God's Promises, John the Baptist's Preaching and the Temptation of Our Lord were consecutive and their didacticism was cumulative:

...consecutive. The first ends, "More of thys matter, conclude hereafter we shall." In the second, Christ appears, fulfilling the prophecies of the first, and is baptized, keeping its last promise, and signified by the dove, showing its last sign. The second could be called almost an added "actus" of the first. ...John beginning the body of the second play by picking up his sermon exactly where he dropped it at

⁶ McCusker, pp. 77 and 84. On p. 84 Miss McCusker quoted her example of bathos:

Satan. If ye do believe that ye are the son of God, Believe this also: if ye leap down here, in scoff, From this high pinnacle, ye can take no harm thereof; And, therefore, be bold, this enterprise to jeopard-- If ye be God's son cast down yourself here backward.

⁷ Harris, p. 66.

the end...of the first...the didacticism is cumulative. The dialogue, characterization, action, and epilogue operating together advocate chiefly faith, humility, and the Bible unmediated. Faith in the "one iustyce" of all the prophets in the first play...and the foundation of the epilogue, where Bale tells the audience they have witnessed justification by faith, not works, by grace, not volition....The epilogue of John the Baptist and all of the Temptation identify with Protestantism...⁸

In 1959, Lily B. Campbell asserted that in the play the Temptation of Our Lord Bale made a more sustained attempt at the characterization of his principals than in any of his other plays:

...a more sustained effort to make real the characters of Christ and Satan than appears in the characterization of the principals in his other plays.⁹

Murray Roston asserted in 1968 that sectarianism was absent from Bale's Temptation of Our Lord and lamented the lack of dramatic advance over the mystery plays:

Apart from Satan's assurance that 'Thy vicar at Rome, I think, will be my friend', the final play drops all sectarianism and offers a refreshingly simple dramatization of the temptation scene....the simplicity of the play is achieved at the expense of dramatic tension; for in the medieval tradition Jesus opens the play by recounting the lessons to be learned from the subsequent scene. There is, as yet, no possibility of bringing the play to life by suggesting an inner struggle, and the dramatic advance over the mystery plays remains minimal.¹⁰

⁸ E. S. Miller, pp. 629, 630.

⁹ L. B. Campbell, p. 231.

¹⁰ Roston, pp. 66, 67.

This play, despite some of the above critics' demonstrations of allusions and connections between the three plays, God's Promises, John the Baptist's Preaching and the Temptation of Our Lord, lives by itself in the chamber and on the boards. Greg, Harris, Miller note the constant refrain of Protestant dogma that runs through the three plays. Both McCusker and Roston think its simplicity robs it of dramatic life; McCusker because it is naïve like the "miracle play", and Roston because it lacks dramatic tension.

The play as Murray Roston noted is "a refreshingly simple dramatization of the temptation scene".¹¹ It is much more than that, for below the mellow surface of this play, which is a debate between Christ and Satan, is the array of tenets prominent in God's Promises and John Baptist's Preaching. Roston did write that:

Apart from Satan's assurance that 'Thy vicar at Rome, I think, will be my friend', the final play drops all sectarianism...¹²

But the sectarianism was not dropped.

Bale himself may have been influenced to write simply by Matthew's portrayal of the temptation. Matthew's account is simple, graphic and Christ scores three telling hits on Satan as Satan fences to discover who Christ is by thrice

¹¹ Roston, p. 67.

¹² Ibid., p. 67.

tempting Him to sin. Similarly, Bale may have been led to use a quiet tone by Matthew's example, for the Bible story line neither allows for nor requires the thunder Bale invokes in his other plays against the malefactors of Rome. But above all Bale may have used the subtle approach, rather than the blunderbuss, in this play since the Devil's suggestions to Christ are subtle. For example, Satan knows that a human being after forty days and nights of fasting is hungry, and, if this human being is also God then not only is He hungry but He can create food from desert stones.¹³ Furthermore, Satan in his subtlety knows that he can defame this Son of God forever if he can have Him commit a sin so basically human that no human being for the rest of time will resist the temptation to so sin should He fall. And John Bale undoubtedly shouted with joy at the majestic reply, eternally subtle and glorious, which puts all the power of Almighty God on the side of man pitted against the tempter.¹⁴

Having seen Bale's tenets traced in God's Promises and John Baptist's Preaching, the reader will not be surprised to see them reappear in Bale's Temptation of Our Lord. In the Praefatio, Bale warns his followers to beware the fantasies of man and be guided in Christ's paths by the Holy Ghost; the

¹³ Matthew 4.1-3.

¹⁴ Matthew 4.4.

purveyors of these fantasies will persecute us:

Learn first, in this act, that we, whom Christ doth call,
Ought not to follow the fantasies of man,
But the Holy Ghost, as our guide special,
To persecution let us prepare us than;
For that will follow in them that seek the truth;
(Baleus Prolocutor, pp. 153, 154)

Bale then declares that Satan's tempting of Christ is precisely what Satan and his cohorts, "the rulers" will do to them for taking Christ's side:

Mark in this process what troubles to Christ ensueth.
Satan assaulteth him with many a subtle drift;
So will he do us if we take Christ's part.
And when that helpeth not, he seeketh another shift,
The rulers among, to put Christ unto smart.
(Baleus Prolocutor, p. 154)

And as in the other two plays examined above Bale returns to his remedy for the machinations of Satan, holy scripture; and the burden of the comedy will be to teach this lesson:

For assaults of Satan learn here the remedy:
Take the word of God; let that be your defence;
So will Christ teach you, in our next comedy;
Earnestly print it in your quick intelligence.
(Baleus Prolocutor, p. 154)

In the beginning of the play, Jesus Christ announces that the Holy Ghost has sent Him to instruct men, who through their imbecility, even though they have received "God's holy spirit", are led astray by Satan. If a man falls into that peril, then Christ will be his guide:

...to instruct of man the imbecility
That, after he hath God's holy spirit received,
Diversely he must of Satan be impugned;
Lest he, for God's gift, should fall into a pride;
And that, in peril, he take me for his guide.
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 154)

John Bale then states that the word of God protects the faithful against Satan's mischiefs. He makes it clear, through Christ's own words, that He does not want us to fast, for His use of fasting was but a ruse to attract Satan to tempt Him so that He might teach us how to prevent his solicitations:

Think not one to fast because I would have you to fast;
 For then ye think wrong,...
 But, of my fasting, think rather this my cast--
 Satan to provoke to work his cursed intent;
 And to teach you ways his mischiefs to prevent
 By the word of God, which must be your defence
 Rather than fastings, to withstand his violence.
 (Temptation of Our Lord, pp. 154-155)

Bale here professes his belief in the efficacy of faith in God's word, rather than in fasting, to ward off Satan's temptations. In condemning fasting, Bale is striking at an ancient Christian custom, for Christ Himself by word and actions proclaimed the value of fasting. Bale's unusual condemnation of fasting may be a natural reaction to what seemed to be too great a reliance on the formality of fasting.

Satan parodies the Roman clergy, and tells Christ that if He were to preach the truth the bishops of the Roman Church would murder Him:

Satan tentator....
 A godly pretence, outwardly, must I bear,
 Seeming religious, devout and sad in my gear
 I put case: ye be God's son--what can that further?
 Preach ye once the truth the bishops will ye murther.
 (Temptation of Our Lord, pp. 155, 156, 157)

Bale, who insists and insists again that the Romanists neglect the scriptures, turns Satan's request that Christ turn rock into bread as a neglect of scripture, and a blasphemy:

Here ye persuade me to recreate my body,
And neglect God's word, which is great blasphemy.
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 158)

The teaching, the repetitions of the doctrine that scripture is the source of salvation continues, and Bale, through Christ's mouth, reduces God's word to a rule:

J. Christ. ...it is not the bread that doth a man uphold;
But the Lord of Heaven, with his graces manifold.
God's word is a rule for all that man should do:
And, out of that rule, no creature ought to go.
He, that it followeth, cannot out of the way,
In meat nor in drink, in sadness nor in play.
(Temptation of Our Lord, pp. 158, 159)

Bale deftly exposes Satan in a speech wherein Satan pleads ignorance of the scripture saying that, since he is a pious hermit, he spends his time in contemplation not in study:

Satan. Scriptures? I know none; for I
am but an hermit, I.
I may say to you, it is no part of our study;
We religious men live all in contemplation:
Scriptures to study is not our occupation;
It longeth to doctors.
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 159)

Satan failed in his first attempt to prove Christ is God and accused by Christ of ignorance of the Scriptures quotes scripture in his second baiting of Christ. Bale, through Christ, accuses Satan of mangling scripture to suit his purpose in order to corrupt the innocent:

Satan. When ye were hungry, I did ye first persuade
Of stones to make bread; but ye would none of that trade.

Ye laid for yourself that scripture would not serve it--
That was your buckler; but now, I am for ye fit,
For the suggestion that I now shall to ye lay,
I have scripture at hand; ye shall it not deny.

For, it is written how God hath given a charge
Unto his angels; that, if ye leap at large,
They shall receive ye in their hands tenderly,
Lest ye dash your foot against a stone thereby.

J. Christ. In no wise ye ought the scriptures
to deprave;

But, as they lie whole, so ought ye them to have;
No more take ye here than serve for your vain purpose,
Leaving out the best, as ye should trifle or gloss.
Ye mind not, by this, towards God to edify:
But, of sincere faith, to corrupt the innocency.

(Temptation of Our Lord, pp. 160, 161, 162)

Bale attacks the Roman clergy on a strange note.

Having himself abandoned celibacy and married, he now attacks
the Roman clergy for what he calls a presumptuous temptation
of the Lord in taking a vow of celibacy, which, he implies,
they cannot keep:

Those also tempt God that vow presumptuously,
Not having His gift to keep their continency.

(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 163)

Satan, seeing that he may never gain advantage of
Christ until he sends Christ to His Father within the next
four years, warns Christ that he will still win since the
Pope worships him and leads the papists to destroy the Gos-
pels and slay his followers:

Satan. ...

So long as thou livest I am like to have no profit:

Ere four years be past I shall you to your father send
If Pharisees and scribes can do anything thereto--

False priests and bishops, with my other servants mo.
 Though I have hindrance, it will be but for a season;
 I doubt not thine own, hereafter, will work some treason;
 Thy vicar at Rome I think will be my friend:
 I defy thee, therefore, and take thy words but as wind.
 He shall me worship, and have the world to reward;
 That thou here forsakest he will most highly regard.
 God's word will he tread underneath his foot for ever;
 And the hearts of men from the truth thereof disserver;
 Thy faith will he hate, and slay thy flock: in conclusion,
 All this will I work to do thee utter confusion.
 (Temptation of Our Lord, p. 166)

In his concluding prolocution Bale reiterates the tenet of salvation by faith, adding that faith overcomes temptation; Bale also interjects, against the Catholic belief, that Christ never taught the need for fasting to overcome Satan's temptations:

For Christ's victory is theirs that do believe;
 Where faith takes rooting the devil can never grieve.
 Resist (saith Peter), resist that roaring lion,
 Not with your fastings--Christ never taught ye so--
 But with a strong faith withstand his false suggestion;
 (Temptation of Our Lord, pp. 169, 170)

The rest of the final prolocution is dipped in fire. Bale, the tractarian, castigates the Romans, who send souls to hell by preventing them from using the weapon Christ left them to save them, His Scriptures. For the Scriptures, the Romans, friends of the beast, substitute fasting; for God's golden word, the papists prefer chalk:

What enemies are they that, from the people, will have
 The Scriptures of God, which are the mighty weapon
 That Christ left them here, their souls from hell to save,
 And throw them headlondes into the devil's dominion?
 If they be no devils I say there are devils none.
 They bring in fasting, but they leave out Scriptum est;
 Chalk they give for gold, such friends are they to the beast.
 (Temptation of Our Lord, p. 170)

Lest he be reproved for opposing fasting, Bale, in what seems like an afterthought, adds that the report is false, he believes that fasting is a fruit of faith, but it is God's word that subdues Satan.¹⁵ Finally Bale exhorts the audience to follow Christ and to ignore the voice of the Roman strangers:

Let none report us, that here we condemn fasting,
For it is not true; we are of no such mind.
But this we covet: that ye do take the thing
For a fruit of faith, as it is done in kind,
And only God's word, to subdue the cruel fiend.
Follow Christ alone! for, he is the true shepherd;
The voice of strangers do never more regard.
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 170)

Although Bale claims on p. 170 that he is not condemning fasting, he, in fact, is condemning it. While using the Bible story as his vehicle, Bale also lengthens Matthew's account of each of Satan's temptations and Christ's corresponding rebuff into a debate.

¹⁵ R. Morris, ed., The Blickling Homilies (Oxford, 1967), pp. 26, 28, 36: "It is needful...for us to fast, because we are often tempted by the devil after our baptism. The Lord admonished us by his fasting and by all his works, that we should serve him and overcome the devil, and gain for ourselves eternal life...Let no man believe that this fast sufficeth him for eternal salvation, except he add thereto other good deeds; and he who desires to present his abstinence (fasting) as an acceptable offering to the Lord, must perfect it with alms and with works of mercy." This translation of the Anglo-Saxon text of A.D. 971, presents the Catholic doctrine. Incidentally, the homily was delivered on the first Sunday of Lent on the temptations of Our Lord.

After the opening pleasantries and sallies, the speeches of Christ have an edge to them, for example:

J. Christ. Your pleasures is it to utter your fantasy.

Satan. A brother am I, of this desert wilderness,
And full glad would be to talk with you of goodness,
If ye would accept my simple company.

J. Christ. I disdain nothing which is of God truly.
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 156)

Bale's villains are likeable and his heroes are a bit stiff. Here Satan has the silky sincerity and urbanity of a confidence man, and Christ is slightly sarcastic as, a little later, this conversation shows:

Satan. ...it is joy of your life
That ye take such pains; and are in virtue so rife
Where so small joys are to recreate the heart.

J. Christ. Here are, for pastime, the wild beasts of
the desert;

With whom much better it is to be conversant
Than with such people as are to God repugnant.
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 156)

Bale, temporarily, puts Christ on the defensive in order to lengthen the debate, to allow him to interject Protestant doctrine and polemicize. Compared with Matthew's version (Mt. 4.1-11), Bale's debate shows inventiveness and polemic skill.

Bale ably captures the subtlety and smoothness of Satan in the first temptation. After the flattering introduction, Satan gently presses Christ to work a miracle to prove He is God's son, as the rumour goes, and to feed Himself, for surely, he implies by his tone, you must be

starving and weak:

Satan. Well, to be plain with you, abroad the rumour doth run,
Among the people, that ye should be God's son.
If ye be God's son, as it hath great likelihood,
Make of these stones bread, and give your body his food!
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 157)

Christ's rebuttal is masterfully written. Bale succeeds in blocking Satan's attempt to discover, by a simple and original expedient, if Christ is God's Son.

No offence is it to eat when men be hungry;
But, to make stones bread, it is unnecessary.
He which, in this fast, hath been my special guide,
Food for my body is able to provide.
I thank my Lord God I am at no such need
As to make stones bread, my body so to feed.
When I come in place where God hath appointed meat,
Giving him high thanks I shall not spare to eat.
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 157)

Satan, all solicitude, urges Christ to take care of His bodily health because preaching, the vocation which His Father directed Him to take on, is debilitating; the voice you heard, even if it came from God, believe it not, for it will lead to trouble, the office is beyond your capability:

At the Father's voice ye took this life in hand,
Minding now to preach, as I do understand.
In case ye do so, ye shall find the office hard,
My mind is, in this, ye should your body regard;
And not, indiscreetly, to cast yourself away:
Rather take some ease than ye should so decay.
Therefore, believe not the voice that ye did hear,
Though it came from God; for, it is unsavoury gear,
Beyond your compass: rather than ye so run,
Forsake the office, and deny yourself God's son!
(Temptation of Our Lord, pp. 157, 158)

Bale shows his debating skill¹⁶ in Christ's reply, in which he neatly turns Satan's points to Christ's advantage. Again Satan is foiled in his attempt to learn if this Man is the Son of God. Christ, here, speaks with feeling and majesty. Bale's poetry has the sound of precision as Christ explains the text from Deuteronomy that refutes Satan's feigned solicitude for Christ's hunger. Christ ends this speech by telling Satan that He will enter His public life of preaching to do God's bidding with meekness.

Ye speak, in that point, very unadvisedly.
 For, it is written, in the Eighth of Deuteronomy:
 Man liveth not by bread, or corporal feeding, only,
 But by God's promise, and by His scriptures heavenly.
 Here ye persuade me to recreate my body,
 And neglect God's word, which is great blasphemy.
 This caused Adam from innocency to fall;
 And all his offspring made miserable and mortal.
 Whereas is God's word, there is both spirit and life;
 The strength of God's word mightily sustained Moses
 It fortified Helias; it preserved Daniel.
 And helped, in the desert, the children of Israel;
 For no persuasion will, therefore, neglect
 That office to do which God hath me commanded.
 But, in all meekness, it shall be accomplished.
 * (Temptation of Our Lord, p. 158)

Satan denies Christ's argument and in return attacks His

¹⁶ The difficulty is that in keeping the debate going Bale, it seems, rather than put down the devil soundly, succinctly and expeditiously dallies and in doing so allows the adversary to appear strong. Bale also uses the debate to slip in Protestant tenets; but only the main arguments of the debate and their rebuttal interest us at the moment.

physical condition:

I had rather nay, considering your feebleness;
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 158)

Christ repeats His argument in slightly different words and Satan counters with an ad hominem argument:

Ye are stiff-necked; ye will follow no good counsel.
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 159)

In His rebuttal Christ gives Bale an opportunity to show the Roman Church up, as in the hermit speech of Satan's discussed above among Bale's tenets. Bale's transition from the desert to the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem is smooth but Christ allows Satan to take the initiative. Bale has the authority of Matthew 4.5 ("The devil then took him to the holy city and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple.") for Satan's initiative, but Christ is not careless, lackluster or as weak as Bale's dialogue depicts:

Well, shall it please ye any farther with me to walk?
Though I little profit, yet doth it me good to talk.

J. Christ. To tarry, or go--it is all one to me.
Satan. Let us then wander into the holy city

Of Jerusalem, to see what is there ado.

J. Christ. I shall not say nay, but am agreeable thereto.
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 159)

Satan sums up what has happened to Christ and Christ's reaction; that someone told Him He was God's Son and that as a consequence He has been leading a life of perfection; consequently, Satan argues that he will fill Him with holiness since He is God's Son:

...a voice in your ear did ring
That ye were God's son, and well-beloved darling;

And you believe it;...

...upon that voice, ye are given to perfectness;
Not else regarding;

What, holy, quoth he? Nay, ye were never so holy
As I will make ye, if ye follow handsomely.
Here is all holy; here is the holy city;
The holy temple, and the holy priests here be.
Ye will be holy: well, ye shall be above them all
Because ye are God's son; it doth ye so befall.
(Temptation of Our Lord, pp. 159, 160)

Christ feigns ignorance:

What mean ye by that? show forth your fantasy!
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 160)

Satan replies that Christ would not make bread of stones
since scripture disapproved, but now he has scripture to sup-
port his next move:

When ye were hungry, I did ye first persuade
Of stones to make bread; but, ye would none of that trade.
Ye laid for yourself that scripture would not serve it--
For the suggestion that I now shall to ye lay,
I have scripture at hand; ye shall it not deny.
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 160)

John Bale is masterful here and adds to the suspense
of the debate with Christ's statement:

Keep it not secret, but let it then be hod.¹⁷
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 160)

It is fine to quote scripture, Christ tells Satan,
but it is better to heed the word of God.

¹⁷ The O.E.D. (Oxford, 1967; pp. 320-321)
has no record of hod as the past participle of heed. Bale
seems to have used it for the sake of rhyme. This was an
age of introducing new words, especially in drama. Bale
counted on his audience knowing what it meant.

Satan unveils his second temptation:

If ye do believe that ye are the son of God,
Believe this also: if ye leap down here, in scoff,
From this high pinnacle, ye can take no harm thereof;
If ye be God's son cast down yourself here backward.¹⁸
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 160)

As in the first temptation Christ does not demolish
Satan's request with a scriptural quote but temporizes by
seizing upon the practical and common-sense:

Truly, that need not; here is other remedy
To the ground to go than to fall down foolishly.
Here are gresings made, to go up and down thereby--
What need I then leap to the earth, presumptuously?
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 161)

Satan suggests, furthermore, that it is not presumptuous if
the intention is valid:

Say that ye did it upon a good intent.
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 161)

To this Christ answers stiltedly that be the intent
good or convenient the danger is apt to be there if the pre-
sumption is foolish:

That were neither good nor yet convenient:
Dangers are doubtful where such presumption is.
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 161)

Gleefully, Satan counters with scripture, using
Psalm 91.11-12 ("He will put you in his angels' charge / To
guard you wherever you go. / They will support you on their
hands / In case you hurt your foot against a stone;"), to

¹⁸ Neither Matthew nor Luke record whether Christ is
to jump off the pinnacle forward or backwards.

prove Christ will be unscathed; for if Christ be injured then God's word is false, and Christ can say goodbye to Him:

Tush! scripture is with it; ye cannot fare amiss.
For, it is written how God hath given a charge
Unto his angels: that, if ye leap at large,
They shall receive ye in their hands tenderly,
Lest ye dash your foot against a stone thereby.
If ye do take scathe, believe God is not true;
Nor just of His word. And then, did him adieu!
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 161)

Christ immediately accuses Satan of quoting scripture to suit his own purpose:

No more take ye here than serve for your vain purpose,
Leaving out the best, as ye should trifle or gloss.
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 161)

The debate then centres on this accusation of Christ, with Satan protesting that he quoted faithfully what was in the scriptures, and Christ arguing that what Satan quoted was twisted out of context:

Satan. Why, is it not true that such a text there is?
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 161)

J. Christ. Yes, there is such a text, but ye wrast
it all amiss--
As the Psalm doth say: God hath commanded angels
To preserve the just from dangerous plagues and perils.
Satan. Well then, I said true, and as it lieth in
the text.

J. Christ. Yea, but ye omitted four words which
followeth next,

As: in all thy ways--19

Their ways are such rules as God hath them commanded
By his living word, justly to be observed.
If they pass those rules the angels are not bound
To be their safeguard; but, rather them to confound.
To fall down backward, of a wanton peevishness,
Is none of those ways that God ever taught, doubtless.
(Temptation of Our Lord, pp. 161, 162)

Christ has scored a debating point on Satan and gained the ascendancy over him--the weakness noticed during the first temptation has vanished--and the tone becomes homiletic:

Then, if I did it, I should tempt God very sore;
And deserve to have his anger evermore.
I will not so do; for, their fathers in the desert
Did so tempt him once, and had the hate of his heart.
The clause that ye had maketh for none outward working
If ye mark the Psalm thoroughly from his beginning.
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 162)

Christ asks Satan why he omitted the next verse:

But what is the cause ye went not forth with the next verse?
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 162)

Satan replies that he didn't need it but that Christ may quote it if He likes; Satan, after Christ makes the quotation, demurs

19 Psalm 91.10-13 (Jerusalem Bible) reads: No disaster can overtake you, / no plague come near your tent: / he will put you in his angels' charge / to guard you wherever you go. / They will support you on their hands / In case you hurt your foot against a stone; / you will tread on lion and adder, / trample on savage lions and dragons.

The Douai translation has "in all your ways" for the Jerusalem version's "wherever you go".

St. Jerome in the Vulgate wrote (90.11) "Quoniam angelis suis mandavit de te, ut custodiant te in omnibus viis tuis."

It made not for me; if ye will, ye may it rehearse.
J. Christ. Thou shalt (saith the Psalm) subdue the
cruel serpent,
And tread under foot the lion and dragon pestilent.
Satan. No nigher (I say), for there ye touch freehold.
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 162)

For it is written, in the Sixth of Deuteronomy:
Thou shalt in no wise tempt God presumptuously.
(Temptation of Our Lord, pp. 162, 163)

Nor is the second temptation over yet, for Bale the homilist continues the catechesis with a question-and-answer session between Satan and Himself on the meaning of

temptation, and who can tempt:

Satan. What is it to tempt God, after your judgment?
J. Christ. To take of His word an outward experiment
Of an idle brain; which God neither thought nor meant.
Satan. What persons do so? Make that more evident!
J. Christ. All such as forsake my grace or remedy
Appointed of God, for their own policy:
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 163)

Christ then excoriates the Roman clergy as tempters of God by living on the fat of the land and doing no work, by denying the efficacy of the Bible, by vowing continency presumptuously and, in general, by disregarding God's commandments.

Bale then moves on to the third temptation; Satan finds this indoctrination is doing him "little good" and desires that Christ allow him to show Him a mountain nearby to which Christ assents. Satan, then, like a circus barker ticks off the delights of the world as seen from this mountain from which Arabia, Africa, Europe and Asia are all visible:

...Ye may have here all the world's delight.
Here is to be seen the kingdom of Arabia;
With all the regions of Afric, Europe, and Asie;
And their whole delights, their pomp, their magnificence,
Their riches, their honour, their wealth, their concupiscence.
Here is gold and silver, in wonderful habundance;
Silks, velvets, tissues, with wines and spices of pleasance.
Here are fair women of countenance amiable.
With all kinds of meats to the body delectable.
Here are camels, stout horses, and mules that never will tire;
.....
(Temptation of Our Lord, pp. 163, 164)

With Christ's reply, Bale deflates Satan, and shows that Christ is in the ascendancy over Satan:

J. Christ. Well, He be praised which is of them the giver.
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 164)

Bale expresses Satan's disbelief that a mortal should reject the delights of the world, sums up the debating points and returns to Satan's first ploy, that Christ is weak, as well as poor and needy:

Alas! it grieveth me that ye are such a believer.
Nothing can I lay but ever ye avoid me
By the word of God; leave that point once- I pray ye!
If I bid ye make of stones bread for your body,
Ye say man liveth not in temporal feeding only.
As I bid ye leap down from the pinnacle above,
Ye will not tempt God, otherwise than you behove.
Thus are ye still poor; thus are ye still weak and needy.
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 164)

Christ asks Satan how his neediness can be remedied-- a good debating thrust that goes to the heart of Satan's concern: Is this Christ the Son of God?:

And what, suppose ye, will that need remedy?
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 164)

Satan's answer gives away the reason for his concern and builds up, after diabolic denunciations of God the Father and unsubtly exhorts Christ to leave his foolishness behind and be a man, seize these pleasures which he can give Christ, forsake His Father, acknowledge him as the head of this world and then Christ will possess all those kingdoms, no longer be desolate and hungry and receive the obeisance of all the

world--all at the price of kneeling down and worshipping him:

Forsake the belief that ye have in God's word,
 That ye are His son, for it is not worth a turd!
 Is he a father that see his son thus famish?
 If ye believe it, I say ye are too foolish.
 Ye see these pleasures--if you be ruled by me,
 I shall make ye a man: to my words, therefore, agree.
 Look on these kingdoms, and incomparable treasure;
 I, the lord of them, may give them at my pleasure.
 Forsake that father which leaveth thee, without comfort
 In this desolation; and, henceforth, to me resort.
 Knowledge me for head of this world universal,
 And I will make thee possessor of them all.
 Thou shalt no longer be desolate and hungry;
 But have all the world to do thee obsequy.
 Therefore, kneel down here, and worship me this hour:
 And thou shalt have all with their whole strength and power.
 (Temptation of Our Lord, pp. 164, 165)

This is the best written passage in the debate so far.
 If this is only a man Satan is attacking, then Bale has skillfully laid out Satan's plan of capturing him by the temptation of enormous power. But Christ, in an equally splendid speech, is not the famished recluse Satan says He is but an opponent of mettle--if not verily the Son of God. Christ calls Satan a blasphemer, offering that of God's which he cannot give. Here when Christ quotes Deuteronomy²⁰ Satan's challenge and

²⁰ Bale refers to Deuteronomy 10.20 which reads: "It is Yahweh your God you must fear and serve, You must cling to him; in his name take your oaths." St. Jerome's translation in the Vulgate reads: "Dominum Deum tuum timebis, et ei soli servies; ipsi adhaerebis, jurabisque in nomine illius." Matthew in 4.10 quotes Deuteronomy 6.13: "You must fear Yahweh your God, You must serve him, by his name you must swear." This passage in St. Jerome appears as: "Dominum Deum tuum timebis, et illi soli servies, ac per nomen illius jurabis."

Christ's answer are more simultaneous than in Bale's accounts of the first two temptations. Consequently, Christ's rebuttal has more strength, point and application; the audience seizes the logical connection at once as the reader or auditor does of Matthew's version (4.9-10); as in Matthew's version Christ attacks Satan majestically:

Avoid thou, Satan! Thou devil! Thou adversary!
 For now thou persuadest most damnable blasphemy.
 As thou art wicked, so is thy promise wicked;
 Not thine is the world, but His that it created;
 Thou canst not give it, for it is not thine to give.
 Thus didst thou corrupt the faith of Adam and Eve;
 Thus didst thou deceive both Moses and Aaron,
 Causing them to doubt, at the lack of contradiction
 Get thee hence, thou fiend and cruel adversary!²¹
 For it is written in the Tenth of Deuteronomy:
 God thou shalt worship and magnify alone;
 Hold Him for thy lord, and make to Him thy moan.
 He is the true God; he is the lord of all--
 Not only of this, but the world celestial.
 Thy persuasion is, I should not His word regard--
 O venomous serpent! damnation is thy reward!
 Provide will I so that thy kingdom shall decay;
 God's word shall be heard of the world though thou say nay.
 (Temptation of Our Lord, pp. 165, 166)

Satan, as in Matthew 4.11 ("Then the devil left him,..."), leaves Christ, but not before Bale uses him to blast a broadside at the bark of Peter. Peter's successor, Bale insists, will "tread underneath his ~~foot~~" God's word as was noted in the analysis of the Protestant tenets above.

²¹ If Christ's speech were to begin here, its force would be greater than it is, but John Bale has a penchant for homiletic exposition and Old Testament examples. Whatever faults John Bale has he never forgets that he is teaching and preaching; the directness of St. Matthew the evangelist is not his style.

As man's nature is, both feeble, faint, and weary;
Weak after labour, and after fasting hungry.
Forsooth! heaven and earth, yea, hell may be astonished
The Godhead to see to so frail nature joined.
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 167)

In the concluding scene three people speak but they do not speak to one another except for the time Christ asks the angels to come closer to Him: "Come nigher to me!" (p. 167). All the other speeches are directed to the audience. But between the two angels and Christ, except for that gentle command, conversation does not occur. Certainly Christ, as in Matthew and Luke, is, and should be, the focus of attention and Bale uses the angels as a vehicle to recount and recall to the audience what they already know and have heard about Christ but the person-to-person touch is missing. But that one speech of Christ's to the angels and God the Father is resonant with human feeling:

Come nigher to me! Sweet Father! thanks to thee
For these gracious gifts of thy liberality.
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 167)

As the analysis of the play so far shows, Bale has been conducting a debate between Christ and Satan, and since the debate has been like a scholastic disputation, little room is left for emotion. The play is, therefore, unlike a mystery cycle where only the simple Bible tale is told and the purpose, as here, is not an attack on Rome. Comparisons with the cycle plays of the temptations will bear this out.

Euere haue I mustered me emell
 emonge manne-kynde,
How I in dole myght gar tham dwell
 per to be pynde.
And certis, all þat hath ben sithen borne,
Has comen to me, mydday and morne,
And I have ordayned so þam forne,
 none may þame fende;
Pat fro all likyng ar They lorne
 withowten ende.

Each tempter has heard of Christ, Satan from a voice at the Jordan, the Devil from some men who "speak of a swain, / How he shall come and suffer pain, / And with his death to bliss again / They should be bought."; both promise they will find out Who He is. The York Devil comes on much stronger than Bale's Satan and with quick directness tells us that since Christ and he will be alone at last he will get Him to sin, and the opportunity is promising since, being famished after fasting, gluttony should be His undoing for should He do what

24 Bale's play is over three times as long as the York cycle's Lökk Smythy temptation play.

(York, p. 179, 11.39-41, 43-51)

(York, p. 180, 11.55-57, 61-66)

25 In Bale's play the word sin is not mentioned until page 166, when Bale refers to sin obliquely as if sin is below the elect who are like Christ Who is "without sin" (p. 169). But in a mystery cycle sin is a reality of life.

for not remembering his scriptures, and by denying the Devil the overcoming of His will through the weakness of His famished Body:

Jesus. My Fadir, þat all cytte may slake,
 Honnoure evere more to þe I make,
 And gladly suffir I for thy sake
 And þus temptacions for to take
 ou weried wight! þi wittes are wode!
 For wrytyn it is, whose vnderstande,
 A man lyvis noght in mayne and mode
 But goddis wordis are gostly fode
 Iff I have fastid oute of skill,
 Wytte þou me hungris not so ill
 at I ne will wirke my fadis will
 i biddynge will I noȝt full-fill,
 in all degre,
 þat warne I þe.
 (York, p. 180, pp.67-84)

In the *Ludus Coventriae* Temptation the author introduces Satan in council with his counsellors who advise him that the easiest way to prove Who the Father of Christ is, and thus test whether He is divine, is to tempt him with the three sins which mankind falls into most frequently:

Belsabub The best wytt I hold it be
 hym to tempte in synnys thre
 the whiche mankinde is frelte
 doth ffalle sonest Alway.
 (Ludus Coventriae, p. 195, ll.49-52)

The first of those medieval sins was gluttony.²⁶

²⁶ The seven deadly sins have been with man since Adam and Eve stepped out of paradise. In medieval times the faithful was fully aware of them; contemporary, for example, with Bale were plays like *Everyman* in which God spoke of His people as using "the seven deedly synnes dampnable". (Adams, *Everyman*, l. 36, p. 289), and the *Castle of Perseverance* in which Mankind first rejoices in the seven deadly sins and later seeks protection from them. Bale does not mention them by name.

The York playwright showed the results of the devil's solicitation of Christ with that sin above. The second of the three sins by which man readily falls is vainglory. In the Ludus Temptation as in the York Temptation the action is vibrant, ongoing and follows the Gospel according to St. Matthew (4.5-7):

Sathan . . .
 now to the temple com forth with me
 and ther xal I shewe the a praty gynne
 Vp to this pynnable now go we
 I xal the sett on the hygest pynne
 Ther I preve what that thou be
 Or that we tweyn part a-twyne
 I xal knowe what myght thore have.

Now If thou be goddys ssonne of myght
 Ryght down to the erth anon thou ffalle
 And save thi-sylf in every plyght
 Ffrom harm and hurte and Scappys alle
 Ffor it is wretyn with aungelys bryght
 that ben in hevyn thi faderys halle
 The to kepe both day and nyght
 xul be ful redy as thi thralle
 hurt that thou non have
 that thou stomele not a-geyn the ston
 and hurt thi fote as thou dost gon
 Aungell be redy all everychon
 in weys the to save.

(Ludus Coventriae, pp. 196, 197, 11.107-113, 118-130)

Jesus' reply is according to holy scripture and consistent with the medieval practice of giving the devil no advantage, for he is not to be dallied with but to be damned. In Bale the devil is treated much more carelessly, the help of God against Satan is assumed almost presumptuously as this final passage of the Temptation of Our Lord with the devil

shows before the angels appear:

J. Christ. Thy cruel assaults shall hurt neither me nor mine,
Though we suffer both, by the providence divine.
Such strength is ours that we will have victory
Of sin, death, and hell, and of thee in thy most fury.
For God hath promised that His shall tread
Underneath their feet, with the fierce roaring lion.
(Temptation of Our Lord, pp. 166, 167)

The third sin, the third temptation, alluded to by Belsabub in *Ludus Coventriae* is "covetyse" (*Ludus*, p. 198, line 150: "...in covetyse oure syre I xal a-sayle"). In the Chester Temptation play of the Butchers guild the playwright is almost as chary of words as St. Matthew in his portrayal of the third temptation:

Sathanas Alas! woe is me to-day!
twise have I fayled of my pray,
was I never rowted in such aray,
ne so fowle reproved.

But yet if it be thy will,
goe we play us upon this hill;
an other point thou must fulfill,
for ought that may befall.

Looke about thee now and see
of all these realmes the royalty,
for to kneele downe and honour me
thou shalte be lord of all.

Iesus Goe furth, Satan! goe furth, goe!
it is wrytten and shall be soe,
God, thy Lord, thou shalt honour oo
and serve hym though it thee noye.
(Chester, p. 222, ll. 125-140)

In the three cycles containing the Temptation each ends optimistically in joy for as Christ overcame the chief temptations of men so can we. The Chester Expositor explains

the parallel between Adam and ourselves, that it is we who sin.

Expositor ...
...our forefather overcomen was
by three thinges to do evill:

Gluttony, vayne glorie there be twooe
Covetuousnes of highnes alsoe
by these three thinges, without moe,
Christ hath overcome the Devill.

Thus overcome Christe in this case
The devill, as played was in this place,
with those three synnes that Adam was
of wayle into woe wayued

But Adam fell through his trespas,
and Iesu withstood hym through his grace,
for of his godhead Sathanas
that tyme was cleane deceyved.

(Chester, The Temptation, pp. 224, 225, 11.163-168, 201-208)

The Expositor in the Chester cycle and Contemplacio in the Ludus Coventriae cycle appear when the author wishes to teach a lesson, as he does here, or sum up a section and introduce what follows. Bale, too, sums up the essence of the play in the epilogue (as well as in the prologue):

Let it not grieve you in this world to be tempted,
Considering your Lord, and your high bishop, Jesus,
Was here, without sin, in every purpose proved;
In all our weakness to help and succour us;
Furthermore, to bear with one frailty thus.

(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 169)

But John Bale, being a first rate polemicist, believes in repetition: the audience must not forget the main themes. In this final prolocution

Bale after this summary adds: a worthy member of the faith will suffer persecution with Christ; man undergoes a life full of temptation as Job and Paul assert; then a repetition of the first five lines, for despite the devil's wiles:

Yet, have no despair, for Christ hath got the game;
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 169)

The summary continues with an oft-repeated Balean belief:

...Christ's victory is theirs that do believe;
Where faith take rooting the devil can never grieve.
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 169)

The tenor of the opening remarks of the prolocution is then entirely lost by an aside on fasting to the effect that Christ never taught that the roaring lion was to be subdued but by strong faith. And as a corollary Bale adds his doctrine:

And with the Scriptures upon his ever go:
Then shall he no harm be able you to do.
Now may ye be bold; ye have Christ on your side
So long as ye have his verity for your guide.
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 170)

Bale continues with an excoriation of the hierarchy of Rome who take the Scriptures of God from people and hurl them to hell and leave them to fast but not to learn the Scriptures in the hands of the beast's friends:

What enemies are they that, from the people, will have
The Scriptures of God, which are the mighty weapon
That Christ left them here, their souls from hell to save,
And throw them headlonges into the devil's dominion?
If there be no devils I say there are devils none.
They bring in fasting, but they leave out Scriptum est;
Chalk they give for gold, such friends are they to the beast.
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 170)

This diatribe ushers in what appears to be Bale's fear of being

denounced by some of his coreligionists for condemning fasting. Bale extricates himself from this by an appeal to faith; fasting is but a fruit of faith, and instead of returning to the temptations and their significance and application to man's spiritual and eternal life, Bale then warns his audience against Rome:²⁷

Let none report us, that here we condemn fasting,
...take the thing
...
For a fruit of faith,...,
And only God's word to subdue the cruel fiend.
Follow Christ alone! for, he is the true shepherd;
The voice of strangers do never more regard.
(Temptation of Our Lord, p. 170)

In the two summaries, of Bale, and the Chester Expositor, Bale's is full of directives which cancel out the main effect of the play's story; the Expositor's clearly follows the biblical story, draws the parallel between "our forefather", Adam, and Christ, drives home to our imaginations and intellects that Christ has overcome the devil in three of the ways that he usually seduces mankind: to gluttony, vain glory and avarice. The mystery cycle has two added features that Bale lacks: it rouses our emotions and allows us to meditate. John Bale preaches and seems capable only of arousing partisan contempt, sarcasm and hatred.

²⁷ Surely the reader must wonder if this play is not a tract in a form of a play; at least a sermon in the form of a play for it is so easy, when writing of the play, to slip into expressions like "warning his congregation" as if John Bale were there preaching from a pulpit.

From this comparison with the mystery cycles which follow the Bible story closely, Bale's Temptation of Our Lord can be seen more clearly not to be for entertainment as J. W. Harris pointed out,²⁸ not to be a true biblical play, but a series of simple stories used as background for religious instructions which were like extensions of the sermon within an interlude form:

The three Biblical plays of Bale are clearly not built around miracles but about simple stories that can be used as a background for religious and theological instruction. They seem like extensions of the sermon. Nevertheless, Bale used the interlude form.²⁹

John Bale called the play a comedy or interlude. Neither name connotes the essence of the play. It isn't a comedy as described by students of the theatre in a previous chapter, and as to its being an interlude, the word is meaningless, a useless appellation which does not arrive at designating what the play is.

It is peculiar that Roston in 1968 considered this play, which on analysis proves a polemic on the stage, to have dropped "all sectarianism and offers a refreshingly simple dramatization of the temptation scene".³⁰ If it be considered a morality with Christ representing good and Satan

²⁸ Harris, p. 11.

²⁹ L. B. Campbell, p. 233.

³⁰ Roston, pp. 66, 67.

evil, the analogy does not hold first because of the polemical tenets running through the play; secondly, because the principals are biblical personalities not abstractions (although John Bale may be thought to equate them with the abstractions Westminster, Canterbury, and Rome). A comparison of Bale's Temptation of Our Lord with "similar" passages in Mankind (Tityvillus, arrayed like a devil is about to tempt Mankind, and Satan will tempt Christ), a morality, will show that Bale's play cannot be classified as a morality:

Tityvillus.

To speke with Mankynde I wyll tary here this tyde,
 Ande assay hys goods purpose for to sett a-syde.
 The goode man Mercy xall no lenger be hys gyde;
 I xall make hym to dawnce a-nother trace!

Ever I go invysybull--yt ys my jett;
 Ande be-for hys cy, thus I wyll hange my nett
 To blench hys syght. I hope to have hys fote mett,
 To yrke hym of hys labur I xall make a frane:
 Thys borde xall be hyde wndur the erth prevely;
 Hys spade xall entur, I hope, oues redyly;
 Be then he hath assayde, he xall be very angry,
 Ande lose hys pacyens, peyn of ochame.
 (Adams, Mankind, p. 315, 11.518-529)

Satan tentator.

...I am Satan, the common adversary,
 An enemy to man, him seeking to destroy
 And to bring to nought, by my assaults most crafty.
 I watch everywhere; wanting no policy
 To trap him in snarl, and make thim the child of hell.

.....
 I will not leave him till I know what he is,
 And what he intendeth in this same border here:
 Subtlety must help; else all will be amiss;
 A godly pretence, outwardly, must I bear,
 Seeming religious, devout and sad in my gear.
 If he be come now for the redemption of man.
 As I fear he is, I will stop him if I can.

Hic simulata religione Christum aggreditur.

It is a great joy, by my halidom! to see
 So virtuous a life in a young man, as you be;
 As here thus to wander; in godly contemplation,
 And to live alone in the desert solitary.
 (Temptation of Our Lord, p. 155)

The Temptation of Our Lord is as much a polemic as are the other three spiritual plays of Bale. Various phrases tip the auditor off, as to who the butt of the play is; for example, "Thy vicar at Rome" (p. 166), "They bring in fasting, but they leave out Scriptum est;" (p. 170). Careful attention to the text, however, discloses that the debate between the two principals is as much about his controversy over faith and good works, as any one of his other plays. It is the tempo that is different here. Bale has adroitly fitted the pieces of the debate together. He is proficient at promoting his polemic, using the Bible story as background, enlarging the conversations between Christ and Satan into the thrust and parry of a debate. Within this framework Bale has repeatedly balanced Romish doctrine and practice against the words of Christ and found the former wanting. Undoubtedly, the lesson Bale wished to infer here--a lesson which is constantly repeated throughout his plays--is that the papists are devils:

If they be no devils I say there are devils none.
 (Temptation of Our Lord, p. 170)

CHAPTER VI

THREE LAWS

The title page of the Bodleian copy reads "A Comedy concernynge the lawes, of nature, Moses, & Christ, corrupted by the Sodomytes, Pharysees and Papystes. Compyled by Johan Bale, Anno M.D.XXXVIII."¹ As in his other spiritual plays, John Bale begins with a Baleus Prolocutor speech but ends with what he calls "A Song upon Benedictus" which, upon examination, is a virtual Baleus Prolocutor finale. And added to the play is a brief summary of the Ten Commandments. In between the introductory and final remarks, the play is skilfully-laid out in five acts in which the three laws are maimed by Infidelity and restored by Deus Pater. In Act I Deus Pater introduces each of the laws, outlines their jurisdictions over man, sums up the religious history of the world, and directs the laws to raise and save man to His glory. The Natural Law falls victim of Infidelity and Infidelity's agents, Sodomy and Idolatry in Act II, and ends up a leper. Act III depicts Moseh Lex blinded and lamed by Infidelity and by two of Infidelity's other vices, Ambitio and Avaritia. In Act IV Infidelity and his aids, ~~Pseudodoctrina and~~

¹ The only other known copy of the first edition lacks a title page and is in the British Museum (C.34.a12). Farmer uses the text from this copy.

Hypocrisis, burn Christi Lex, or the Law of the Gospel, as a heretic. Vindicta Dei, an attribute of Deus Pater, banishes Infidelity to hell in Act V. Deus Pater restores the three laws, and instals Christian Faith as preserver of God's Church and the Christian congregation.

In 1824, Thomas Warton wrote that this comedy proved so popular it was reprinted, and that though considered to be a "Mystery", it was doctrinal and a satire on popery, an impious parody:

The Comedie...printed by Nicholas Bamburgh in 1538: and so popular, that it was reprinted by Colwell in 1562....is commonly supposed to be a Mystery, and merely doctrinal: but it is a satirical play against popery, and perhaps the first of the kind in our language...Bale,...ought to have known, that this profane and impious parody was more offensive and injurious to true religion than any part of the missal which he means to ridicule.²

Jules Jusserand in 1878 wrote that the Three Laws was a kind of bizarre morality play in which the antagonists revive the three laws in the minds of the auditors, and that Bale's animosity ~~battered~~ all religions:

C'est une sorte de moralité bizarre où les vices, jouant les principaux rôles, viennent nous montrer comment les trois lois...furent successivement méconnues avant d'être rétablies par la Réforme. Bale est là tout entier, emporté, aveugle dans sa colère, frappant de tous côtés sans remarquer qui reçoit les coups.... chaque crime est classé, étiqueté, expliqué; elle [Sodomie] divise les passions...par catégories, avec le sang-froid d'un chirurgien...Bale se plaît dans les

² Warton, III, p. 362, IV, p. 22n.

images hideuses; c'est un aliment pour sa colère....
c'est la religion tout entière qu'il bat en brèche, et
qu'en apprenant à se moquer des orems catholiques.³

Leslie P. Fairfield, who in 1976 carefully studied
Bale's plays, concluded that Bale's mood had turned bilious
when he became disappointed in his vocation to the Carmelites:

When in the 1530s Bale began to denounce the religious
orders as "beastlye belly goddes"...he was uprooting
an institution that was as deeply planted in his own
life as it was in the English past. The fervor of
his early commitment to the Carmelite life helps one
see why his humor turned so bilious when his first
love disappointed him....in a biographical history
of the early Carmelites [about 1539]...among the
"Carmelites" in the first century A.D., Bale said,
"monasteries were not then the way they are now,
brothels full of lazy scoundrels." This begins to
sound like the mature bilious Bale.⁴

C. F. Tucker Brooke in 1911 considered the Three Laws
more artistically developed than the other three polemical
plays, a carefully composed controversial Tudor interlude,
attempted to date the play, and found Bale's concern to be
the papists, who are the fruits of Infidelity and whom Bale

³ Jusserand, pp. 203, 204, 205.

⁴ Fairfield, pp. 18 and 54.

garbs papistically:

A fourth play with the same polemical bent shows considerably higher artistic development. "...thre lawes, ..." claims to have composed like the rest in 1538, but references to King Edward, Queen Katherine, and "the noble lorde protectour"...may indicate that the piece was published on the Continent during Bale's second exile....perhaps the most vigorous, as it is certainly one of the most carefully composed of all the Tudor controversial interludes....Bale's concern is exclusively with the Papists,...responsible (for the corruption of the three laws). The six corrupting agents, "vyces or frutes of Infydelyte," are all exponents of Romish wickedness, and Bale is careful that their garb shall betray their character to the spectators.⁵

W. Roy Mackenzie, in 1914, suggested that this comedy had ~~an~~ allegorical plot, though its prime purpose was to attack the Roman Catholic Church, and saw little action but interpreted the action to be neither on the stage nor in the hearts of men but in the country at large:

...allegorical plot; but its purpose is first and foremost a vicious attack on the Roman Catholic Church.... the struggle goes on in the land at large, and, allegorically, is not to be interpreted as raging within the heart of man.

The play is almost devoid of action, and is taken up chiefly with gleeful speeches on the part of the different Vices, to show their popularity in the Catholic Church.⁶

Mackenzie in his outline of the play judged that it applied to mankind generally and not to papists specifically. (John Bale in his opening prolocutor speech and in the first few

⁵ Brooke, p. 87.

⁶ Mackenzie, pp. 43, 44.

pages of Act I gives a like summary, omitting any mention of the papists.):

God has framed three laws for the guidance of man,-- the law of nature to lead him in the paths of virtue, and the laws of Moses and of Christ to instruct him in true religion and to bring him at last into heaven. ...proclaimed among men so that they may understand them. But the people are unfaithful to these laws. They practise unnatural vices and give themselves over to idolatry, thus perverting the law of nature; they are greedy and ambitious, and render the law of Moses to no avail; and by their hypocrisy and their leaning toward false beliefs they are led to forget the teachings of Christ. But eventually God will appear in his wrath and will sweep away this unbelief...; and then his beneficent laws will be used for the guidance of the people.⁷

Honor McCusker, in her doctoral thesis at Bryn Mawr in 1935 called the Three Laws a morality, noted its invective against Rome, the heavy and often obscene satire, the didacticism, the reverence for the divine right of kings, and the quick rhyming lines in the vice scenes:

...a morality...All the puritan's resentment of religious laxity; all the Englishman's revolt against the intrusion of a foreign power; perhaps...the poor man's rebellion against extortion and injustice...make Bale's invective in his plays as bitter as any of the vituperation in his prose works....attacks the church in its organization, its rites, its beliefs, the superstitions of its laity, and the immorality of its clergy....By indulging his splenetic temperament to the limit, with complete disregard for fairness or good taste, he produces in the reader only weariness,...Bale's intent is still to preach, in spite of his satire. His prologues and epilogues are always didactic in style,...deliver...homilies in true morality fashion...[last lines] indicative of a new spirit in England - reverence for the divine right of majesty,

⁷ Mackenzie, p. 45.

a devotion to the state...The vice scenes...enlivened with action, heightened by the effect of the short, quick rhyming lines which Bale has not used elsewhere, ...The satire is heavy and often obscene, but not ineffective.⁸

Jesse W. Harris in 1940 said that the Three Laws was the first extant controversial play in English,⁹ called it an uncorrupted morality, and the "most violently controversial" drama in English literature:

...The first extant controversial play in English ...of the five [Bale's plays] now extant, only one is an uncorrupted morality.

In substance, the Three Laws is the most violently controversial drama in English literature.¹⁰

W. T. Davies in 1940 wrote that in Three Laws Bale anticipated Oliver Cromwell's apocalyptic Commonwealth as his King John anticipated Elizabethan nationalism, pitted the authority of scriptural revelation against the authority of Rome and its traditions, and had the Three Laws in mind when he wrote the other three spiritual plays in the same year 1538:

...written in 1538...an anticipation of Commonwealth apocalypticism as King John is of Elizabethan nationalism. Now he tried to pit the authority of scriptural

⁸ McCusker, pp. 77, 78, 79, 80, 81 and 84.

⁹ John Bale, A franticke papyst of Hamshyre, Camden Society, Vol. 77, 315 ff.: Bale described the Three Laws, [J. W. Harris reported this reference on page 64 of his book] as "suche a comedie as myghtely rebuked the abomynacyons of fowle fylthie occupienses of the bishopp of Rome".

¹⁰ Harris, pp. 65, 85.

revelation against the authority of ecclesiastical tradition. Allusions to the laws of Nature, Moses, and Christ in Bale's next three plays show that he had Three Laws in mind when he wrote them...in 1538...¹¹

Hardin Craig in 1955 referred to Chambers, who found allusions to Edward VI and Thomas Cromwell in the Three Laws, and therefore judged it had been revised; considered it a morality in form, anti-papal and influenced by contemporary German Latin drama, since Bale spent some years of his exile after 1542 in Germany:

Chambers (i, p. 449) calls attention to the fact that the Three Laws contains allusions to King Edward VI and to the Lord Protector and must therefore have at least been revised after 1547....practically a morality in form....far advanced in anti-papistical controversy, and seems to show the influence of the contemporary Latin drama of Germany, particularly perhaps of Pammachius....since he was in exile in Germany for some years after 1542...¹²

Lily B. Campbell in 1959 claimed that the Three Laws was revised, called the play a bitter polemical drama, thought that the nature of Bale's material determined the organization of the play, and assessed the closing Benedictus as an anathema:

The Three Laws certainly must have been revised, for the concluding prayer mentions Queen Katherine and the Lord Protector, and when it was printed in England in 1562, the prayer was for Queen Elizabeth,...a bitter polemical drama, its characters personified abstractions, ...the nature of the material determined the organization

¹¹ W. T. Davies, pp. 212, 213.

¹² Craig, p. 370.

of his plays rather than any dramatic theory....the closing Benedictus is composed in the spirit of an anathema.¹³

David Bevington in 1968 dated the writing of the Three Laws as early as 1530 and listed the falls from grace of Catholic prelates in the play and underlined Bale's insistence on clerical marriage:

[about 1530-1538]...does not content itself with recounting historically the moral crimes of the Catholic Church, like sodomy, legalism, and superstition. Bale's program systematically touches upon the points of rite, doctrine, and church government that were being suppressed by ecclesiastical visitations to the English parishes: paxes, images, ave marias, crossings and kissings, censings, candles, ear confession, beads, rings, cream, oil, relics, transubstantiation, justification by works versus faith, purgatory, masses for the dead, pilgrimages, pardons, simony, monasticism, and the like. Bale particularly urges clerical marriage in order to avoid children's graveyards behind the convents, stews in Rome of both sexes, and such lurid abuses as papal homosexuality or fornication behind the altar during confession.¹⁴

Murray Roston in 1968 remarked that Bale's denunciation of the sexual mores of convent and monastery in the Three Laws was vicious:

...vicious and open denunciation of sexual licence within the convents and monasteries...pervaded his Thre Lawes...¹⁵

¹³ Lily B. Campbell, pp. 231 and 233.

¹⁴ Bevington, pp. 97, 98.

¹⁵ Roston, p. 66.

Margaret Simpson, in 1971, wrote that:

The play represents God's creation of the three laws: ...It traces their corruption...evil forces led by the Vice Infidelitas, and God's eventual judgment of the evil and restoration of the laws...Bale...included both the traditional scurrilous attacks on Catholic ritual and clerical life and far more subtly wrought attacks on Catholic doctrine and the papal hierarchy as inimical to the welfare of the State. The laws are...different facets of God's grace sent down to man. All three are necessary to man's salvation and all three are restored...
...Infidelity is the corrupting force in all ages and though his agents change from act to act all are clearly identified as papists...The play moves toward judgment and restoration rather than toward salvation...¹⁶

Margaret Simpson's shrewd observation, that Bale's play tends to judgment and restoration, fits in very well with other characterizations of his plays as polemic, and not as were the medieval cycles, liturgical and salvational.

Fairfield, in 1976, stated that the Three Laws dealt with the spiritual and moral corruption into which the Roman Church had beguiled Christendom.

...three lawes dealt...with the spiritual and moral corruption into which the Roman Church had beguiled Christendom....Bale was searching for some way to understand, to view in historical perspective, the attacks by conservatives in the England of the Cromwellian Reformation. He needed to see that it had all happened before, and that nevertheless the true faith had persisted. The pattern he chose for illustrating this...was the ancient division of history into three ages....In each of these periods, Bale demonstrated,....Enemy...had sought to draw men from obedience to God....But the future held out high hope: God would not permit the perfect law of Christ to be twisted and perverted forever, but would appear in

¹⁶ Simpson, pp. 190, 191, 192 and 194.

His time to defeat Satan once and for all and restore the three laws to their proper function in the Christian's life.¹⁷

The critics above agree that the play is an attack on the Catholic Church (Warton and Jusserand suggest that the play besides mocking Rome denigrates all religion.); and though divided on its genre they strike a consensus with Hardin Craig, who sums up the given classifications by calling it "a morality in form". Only C. F. Tucker Brooke noted that the Three Laws showed "considerably higher artistic development" than the other three spiritual plays "with the same polemical bent".

John Bale, the Prolocutor, begins the play by a deft and clear explanation of the need for law, and defines the term law:

Where is no law can no good order be
 In nature, in people, in house, nor yet in city.
 The bodies above are underneath a law--
 Who could rule the world, were it not under awe?

 Law is a teacher of matters necessary,
 A knowledge of things, both natural and divine;
 Persuading all truth, dissuading all injury;
 A gift of the Lord, devoid of all opprobry,
 A wholesome doctrine of men discreet and wise;
 A grace from above, and a very heavenly practice.
 (Baleus Prolocutor, p. 3)

Having discussed the idea of law, Bale then announces that the laws of Nature, Bondage and Grace, which God made to direct men on this earth in the path of righteousness, have been shackled by Infidelity: the law of Nature through idols and sodomy; the law of Moses (Bondage) by avarice and ambition; and the law of Christ (Grace) by hypocrisy and false

¹⁷ Fairfield, pp. 57, 58.

doctrine:

Our heavenly maker, man's living to direct,
The laws of Nature, of Bondage, and of Grace,
Sent into this world with viciousness infect,
In all righteousness to walk before His face.
But Infidelity so worketh, in every place,
That under the heavens no thing is pure and clean,
So much the people to his perverse ways lean.

The law of Nature, his filthy disposition
Corrupteth with idols, and stinking sodometry;
The law of Moses with avarice and ambition
He also polluteth. And ever, continually,
Christ's law he defileth with cursed hypocrisy,
And with false doctrine, as will appear in presence,
To the edifying of this Christian audience.

(Baleus Prolocutor, pp. 3, 4)

So far Bale's introductory remarks are those of a sermon.

The audience was rendered benevolent and attentive with the discussion on law, was made aware of the application of the three laws to them and then given the solution: to the downfall of the three laws and the audience's hazardous state of soul: God will overcome Infidelity, command the homage of the faithful, and restore and commit the laws to faith:

Of Infidelity, God will Himself revenge
With plagues of water, of wild fire and of sword.
And, of His people, due homage He will challenge.
Ever to be known for their God and good Lord,
After that He hath those laws again restored
To their first beauty, committing them to faith.
He is now in place, mark therefore what He saith.

(Baleus Prolocutor, p. 4)

From Bale's summary of the Three Laws, the reader may reason that, unlike Bale's other spiritual plays, the play will scarcely be based on the Bible. And the surmise is correct, for a reading of the play proves Bale's précis is to the point. It is an allegory, as W. Roy Mackenzie suggests (but does not make clear), of man's struggle against

the devil (Infidelity), except that mankind here does not appear on the stage but the auditor reasons that the clash of Infidelity and Vindicta Dei is for the benefit of man, who is fighting for the Faith in the world at large.¹⁸ The prolocution is a summary of the play except that it omits mentioning the denigration of the papists; but, even so, the plot is outlined succinctly. The Three Laws, then, is independent of the other three spiritual plays. But is it written in the manner of a mystery cycle play, as some of the critics, John Payne Collier,¹⁹ Glynne Wickham²⁰ and Edwin Miller,²¹ suggest? The burden of this chapter is to show that both in content and manner the Three Laws does not resemble a mystery cycle, in whole or part.

The Baleus Prolocutor speech of the Three Laws is analogous to the bannmaster's and the vexillators' speeches in the Chester and Ludus Coventriae cycles. All introduce their respective plays; all synopsise salvation history (the Three Laws only in part). But there the analogy ends. The cycles are involving, immediate, with the patina of the stage rather than the study or the debating platform or even the

¹⁸ Mackenzie, pp. 43, 44.

¹⁹ Collier, pp. 160-161.

²⁰ Wickham, p. 116.

²¹ Miller, p. 629.

pulpit. Bale, on the other hand, is abstract, deals with the audience at a remove; he so concentrates on the concepts that he ignores the audience, despite his use of "Our" in "Our heavenly maker", and his oblique reference to the audience, and gentle reminder to it to pay attention (In medieval plays the first speaker usually asked for silence.):

...as will appear in presence,
To the edifying of this Christian audience.

He is now in place, mark therefore what He saith.
(Baleus Prolocutor, p. 4)²²

Compare the bannmaster of the Chester cycles' exhortation to the dyers and hewers with Bale's prolocution (quoted above):

And then you diers and hewsters, Antechrist bringe out,
ffirst with his docter that godly maye Expounde,
who be Antechristes the worlde aboute,
and Enocke and Hely, persons walkinge one grounde.
in partes set you well out, the wicked to confounde,
which beinge understood Christes worde for to bee,
Confoundeth all Antechristes and sectes of that degree.
(Chester Plays, p. 8, 11.171-177)

In Bale's prolocution the reader, let alone the auditor, must

²² Bale, as a polemicist, is so intent on crushing an absent enemy that the audience is almost forgotten, or, at least, Bale assumes that the audience is fully on his side. W. Roy Mackenzie would concur, for he writes: "it is too often indicated, in general terms, that the Morality was a purely religious production, and that the frowning author had but one desire in life, to herd his ignorant flock of listeners together on the straight and narrow path to Heaven.... Bishop Bale,..., went farther than that: he narrowed the path till it could accommodate none who did not start in it from the Protestant fold." (Mackenzie, p. 185.)

have all his wits in action to capture the philosophic and cryptic outline. In the Chester announcement the concrete ideas are immediately intelligible. The audience feels entertained as well as enlightened and edified, and the speech is friendly. Bale must be speaking to his intellectual peers, for the majority of a medieval cycle audience would miss his message.

Similarly the second vexillator of the Ludus Coventriae in announcing the seventh pageant draws the audience to himself in language that is readily intelligible, involving and pacifying:

Off the gentyl Jesse rote
 the sefnt pagent for sothe xal ben
 out of the which doth sprynge oure bote
 as in prophecye we redyn and sen
 Kyngys and prophetys with wordys fful sote
 Schull prophesye al of a qwen
 the which xal staunch oure stryff and moote
 And wynnyn us welthe with-outyn wen
 In hevyn to Abyde
 they xal prophecye of a mayde
 All ffendys of here xal be Affrayde
 here sone xal saue us be not dismayde
 With hese woundys wyde.

(Ludus Coventriae, p. 4, 11.105-117)

Again the simplicity of the cycle announcement draws the audience empathetically and enthusiastically to goodness and entertainment. The imagination, as well as the intellect, is stirred. In Bale's prolocution the abstract philosophic arguments appeal to the intellect but hardly to the heart and the imagination.

Deus Pater's entrance in Act I of the Three Laws is similar to God's entrance in the Chester Plays:

Deus Pater. I am Deus Pater, a substance invisible,
All one with the Son, and Holy Ghost in essence.
To angel and man I am incomprehensible;
A strength infinite, a righteousness, a prudence,
A mercy, a goodness, a truth, a life, a sapience.
In heaven and in earth we made all to our glory,
Man ever having in a special memory.

(Three Laws, Act I, pp. 4-5)

Ego sum Alpha et Omega,
primus et nobilissimus;
It is my Will, yt sholde be soe,
yt is, it was, yt shall be thus:

I am greate god gracious which never had beginninge.
The wholle foode of parente is set in my essencion;
I am the tryall of the trynitie that neuer shall
be twynninge;
Peareles Patron Imperiall and Patris Sapientia.
My beames be all beatytude; all blisse is in my
buyldinge;
All myrthe is in my Mansuetude Cum Dei Potentia.
(Chester Plays, p. 9, 11.1-9)

On close examination the similarity disappears. Bale's Deus Pater speaks in abstractions like a debater wheeling out his arguments. The Chester Deus Pater mixes the concrete and the abstract. Above all, it is the tone that gives the cycle play its uniqueness. Bale's God is as cold as an abstract symbol. The Chester author's God is warm, compassionate and loving, "gracious", with gentleness muting His power. It is this note of loving solicitude that Bale fails to show throughout his spiritual plays, that stamps them as being different from the cycle and religious morality plays.

Bale's Three Laws is unique in that nothing like it

appears, no explicit reference to the three laws or periods of history, in the mystery cycles although the kernel is there since the three laws are implicitly part of any account of salvation history. Medieval historians in their concept of history divided sacred history into the Old and New Testaments and the Apocalypse. In turn these writings covered two times: the time of misdoing and the time of grace. The Old Testament was the time of introduction of the Natural Law, which alone existed for the first three ages of the world (Creation to Joseph inclusive); and the Written Law (of Moses), which included the fourth and fifth ages of the world (Moses to the end of Christ's childhood), a time of justice. The New Testament was the time of the introduction of the Law of Charity (Christ) encompassing the sixth age of the world (Christ's baptism to today). The Apocalypse, which represented the fulfilment of the law, described the seventh age of the world (Christ's coming until Doomsday) a time of mercy.²³

Both in God's Promises and as we shall see, in the Three Laws, it is clear that John Bale, as an historian, was aware of the medieval concept of history; that it was universal, a record of God's acts in the history of man, that it conceived of

²³ This breakdown is from a chart in Ernest Mardon's The Narrative Unity of the Cursor Mundi (Glasgow, 1970), p. 19. Blatt, p. 68: Using a quotation from Speculum Sacerdotale, explaining the Three Laws and this time frame, Miss Blatt suggests that the subject of Three Laws was well known to the faithful who had heard of them in many sermons.

time as linear ending in a goal, of history as centripetal, with Christ in the centre, and that Christ's incarnation and redemption of the world turned history into a record of salvation.

Medieval history was universal because it was the record of the acts of God in the human story. The Biblical conception of time is not a cyclical one, based on the periodic renewal of events, as with the Greeks and Romans, but a linear one, made up of a succession of once-and-for-all actions directed towards the final goal of history. The centre of both the revelation and fulfilment of the plan of human salvation is Christ. The major stages of history, which commenced with the creation and fall, reach their climax with the redeeming incarnation and end with the second coming of the Lord, were included in most religious histories of salvation during the Middle Ages.²⁴

John Bale in Act I of the Three Laws first has Naturae Lex categorize this medieval concept of history, as it affects man, into four time periods: innocence, transgression, affliction, and redemption or pleasure, exile, punishment and reconciliation.

Naturae Lex. ...as concerning man,
Four several times are much to be respected.
Of Innocency first; of his transgression than;
Then the long season wherein he was afflicted;
Finally the time wherein he was redeemed.
Of pleasure is the first, the second of exile,
The third doth punish, the fourth doth reconcile.
(Three Laws, Act I, p. 6)

The Law of Moses then recounts how God on making angels and men gave them laws to follow, the angels to serve

²⁴ Mardon, pp. 20-21.

Him, man (during the time of innocency) to eat not of the forbidden fruit, and how both on breaking their laws lost "their first freedom". And the Law of Christ states that man learned by obeying Satan's command "Eat, ye cannot die; as gods ye shall be than", that God's laws were true. Deus Pater then says His love will not allow Him to lose man despite the fall and importunes Naturae Lex to teach man during his exile, a span of three ages (St. Augustine's first three ages except for the Creation to Moses):

Lose man we will not, though he from us doth fall;
 Our love towards him will be much better than so.
 Thou, law of Nature, teach thou him, first of all,
 His Lord God to know, and that is right to do;
 Charge and enforce him, in the ways of us to go.
 (Three Laws, Act I, p. 7)

At the same time Deus Pater urges Moseh Lex and Christi Lex to in turn raise and save man to God's perpetual glory:

Thou, Law of Moses, and Christ's law finally,
 Raise him and save him, to our perpetual glory.
 (Three Laws, Act I, p. 7)

After Deus Pater draws up a time frame for each of the laws, each law asks where he should stay during his stewardship, and, as in God's Promises, where Pater Coelestis labels each promise with a sign, here Deus Pater to underline the focus of activity interprets it by a sign and guarantee of grace:

Nat. Lex. Where must I remain for the time I shall be here?
 Deus Pater. In the heart of man, his conscience for to steer
 To righteous living, and to a just belief;
 In token whereof, this heart to thee I give:
Hic pro suo signo cor ministrat--
 Thou shalt want no grace to comfort him withal,
 If he to the faith of my first promise fall.
 (Three Laws, Act I, p. 7)

Deus Pater outlines Moseh Lex's three ages of operation²⁵ during the time of man's punishment and answers Moseh Lex's query as to where he shall stay and presents him with a sign of his ministry and promises rewards to those who keep the laws inviolable:

Moseh Lex. Then my course is next for time of his punishment?
Deus Pater. For three ages more, to thee must he consent--
From Moses to David; from thence to the Jews' exile;
And so forth to Christ which will man reconcile.

Moseh Lex. Where shall I, sweet lord, for that same season dwell?

Deus Pater. With such hard rulers as will the people compel
Our minds to fulfil, without vain gauds or fables.
For a sign of this, hold these same stony tables:

Hic pro signo lapideas dat ei tabulas--

All they that observe our laws inviolably
Shall everywhere prosper, increase and multiply.

(Three Laws, Act I, pp. 7-8)

Christi Lex maintains He is the third law and the last in time; and Deus Pater places Him in the equivalent of Augustine's sixth age (Christ's baptism to the end of time).

Christi Lex.I perceive well, my course is last of all.

Deus Pater. What though it be so? yet art thou principal!

O'er all the world thy beams shalt thou extend.

And still continue, till the world be at an end.

(Three Laws, Act I, p. 8)

When Christi Lex asks where He is to stay during that interval of time Deus Pater says that Christi Lex must remain with the faithful, reconcile them to his grace (Redemption)

²⁵ St. Augustine contained these three ages of Bale's within his Fourth and Fifth ages of the world. Despite this trifling difference Bale is still within the framework of, and abides by, the medieval concept of history.

and gives Christi Lex the "living testament", the New Testament, as a token, and warns that those who do not believe its contents will sorrow in their unbelief while the faithful will live eternally.

Christi Lex. Where shall I, Father, for that time persevere?
 Deus Pater. With the faithful sort must thou continue ever;
 Thou shalt my people return from far exile;
 And, for evermore, to my grace reconcile.
 Take this previous book for a token evident,
 A seal of my covenant, and a living testament:
Hic pro signo dat ei novum testamentum--
 They that believe it shall live for evermore.
 And they that do not will rue their folly sore.
 (Three Laws, Act I, p. 8)

Bale's approach to the audience in Act I, his capsule presentation of medieval history with its three laws which guide man towards his end, differs from that of the mystery cycles. Even the blessings and maledictions predicted by Deus Pater in His closing speech find no similar speech or fragments of speeches in the mystery cycles--for Bale's approach is that of a homilist and an historian while the author(s) of a mystery cycle follow the Bible closely:

Blessed shall he be, that you my laws will keep
 In city and field, whether he do work or sleep;
 Cursed shall they be that will not our laws fulfil;
 Never shall they be without bile, botch, or blain;
 (Three Laws, Act I, pp. 8-9)

After Deus Pater's opening speech in Act I, Bale underlines the attitude of the three laws towards God in neat, matter-of-fact statements which profess their allegiance and ours. The tone is that of teachers who appeal to their students'

intellects rather than their emotions:

Nat. Lex. Of duty we ought always to be obeisant
 To your commandment, for just it is and pleasant.
 Mos. Lex. Your precepts are true, and of perpetual strength,
 On justice grounded, as will appear at length.
 Chr. Lex. Proudness ye abhor, with like inconvenients--
 All they are cursed which go from your commandments.
 (Three Laws, Act I, p. 5)

In Act II Naturae Lex introduces himself as solemn,
 abstract, practical, shrewd and dutiful:

A knowledge I am whom God in man doth hide,
 In his whole working to be to him a guide,
 To honour his God and seek his neighbour's health--
 A sore charge I have mankind to oversee,
 And to instruct him, his Lord God to obey.
 That Lord of Heaven grant I may so do my duty
 That He be pleased, and man be brought to a stay.
 (Three Laws, Act II, p. 10)

Into this atmosphere of puritanism bounces Infidelity.

Broom, broom, broom, broom, broom! Buy broom, buy, buy;
 Brooms for shoes and pouchrings;
 Boots and buskins for new brooms;
 Broom, broom, broom!
 Marry! God give you good even;
 And the holy man Saint Steven
 Send ye a good new year.
 I would have brought ye the pax,
 Or else an image of wax
 If I had known ye here.
 (Three Laws, Act II, p. 10)

Bale, by this whirlwind in words, brings the play to life, and
 keeps it alive by keeping the contrast between the literal-
 minded Naturae Lex and the nimble-minded antagonist, Infidelity.
 Interspersed between Infidelity's torrent of abuse and fun the
 starchy Naturae Lex demurs.

Nat. Lex. That might have done ye smart.
 Why dost thou call me knave?

Thou art disposed to mock;
 Why dost thou me blaspheme,
 And so ungodly deem?
 Ye are disposed to dally,
 To leap and oversail
 The compass of your wit?
 I counsel ye yet, in season,
 Somewhat to follow reason,
 And gnaw upon the bit.

(Three Laws, Act II, pp. 11-12)

Infidelity asks Naturae Lex why he is here. Naturae Lex replies, and Infidelity swears that he will prevent him personally by means of idolatry and sodomy:

Nat. Lex. Man always to exhort
 To seek all health and comfort
 Of the only God of grace.
 First, in their hearts rejoice;
 And then, with open voice,
 To worship Him alone;

Infidelitas. From causing of mankind
 To give to God his mind,
 Or his obedience.

Infidelitas. Yet will I do the best I can
 To trouble ye now and than,
 That ye shall not prevail.
 I will cause idolatry
 And most vile sodomy
 To work so ungraciously,
 Ye shall of your purpose fail.

(Three Laws, Act II, p. 15)

Naturae Lex declares that God suggested that he leave Infidelity's presence as if he were the devil:

Nat. Lex. I defy thee, wicked fiend!
 With thy whole venomous kind
 God putteth now in my mind
 To flee Thy company.

Avoid! thou cruel enemy;
 I will none of thee, truly!
 But shun thy company
 As I would the devil of hell. Exit

(Three Laws, Act II, pp. 15-16)

Until Naturae Lex appears later in the Act, most of the rest of Act II consists of the techniques whereby Infidelity and his servants Idolatria, a witch, and Sodomismus, a monk, poison the law of nature:

Infidelity. ...
 Now will I work such mastery,
 By crafts and subtle policy,
 The law of nature to poison
 With pestilent idolatry,
 And with most stinking sodomy,
 (Three Laws, Act II, p. 16)

And almost at once a new feature is introduced into the play by Bale. So far the play followed Bale's announcement in the prolocution and the audience is ready for the corruption of Naturae Lex by "idols, and stinking sodometry".²⁶ But suddenly a Hail Mary becomes a charm; and the ritual of auricular confession, almsgiving and the Mass are used as magic and superstitious practices:

Sodom. [referring to Idolatria]
 She can, by saying her Ave Mary,
 And, by other charms of sorcery.

 And help men of the ague and pox,
 So they bring money to the box

 Idolatria.
 Young children can I charm;
 With whisperings and wishings,
 With crossings, and with kissings,
 With blasings, and with blessings,
 That sprites do them no harm.
 (Three Laws, Act II, p. 17)

²⁶ John Bale does not allude to Infidelity's costume on the Dramatis Personae page--Infidelity may be dressed as a clerk since Sodomismus refers to him as such. (Act II, p. 16) The audience would then realize--knowing Bale's predilection--that the papists are to be beleaguered.

Idolatria is a witch who uses the sacramentals and practices of the Roman Catholic Church to work sorcery:

Idolatria. With holy oil and water,
I can so cloin and clatter
That I can, at the latter
Many subtleties contrive.

I can make corn and cattle
That they shall never thrive.

I can make stools to dance,
And earthen pots to prance.

(Three Laws, Act II, p. 18)

Sodomismus, a monk, Bale insinuates, has relations with Idolatria "Though she be somewhat old". Bale does not hesitate to so belittle the Roman Catholic clergy as to have Infidelity warn Sodomismus not to have intercourse before the audience:

Sodomismus.
And by her gear can sit,
Though she be somewhat old
It is mine own sweet bully,
My muskin and my mully,
Yea, mine own sweetheart of gold.

Infidelity. I say, yet not too bold!
Idolatria. Peace, fondling! tush, a button!
Infidelity. What! wilt thou fall to mutton?
And play the hungry glutton
Afore this company?

(Three Laws, Act II, p. 19)

The old witch Idolatria not only uses sacramentals to cast spells but daily says Our Lady's psalter, recites the rosary and attends Mass; fasts and recommends relics of the

saints as medicaments:

Idolatria. I never miss, but palter
Our Blessed Lady's psalter
Before Saint Saviour's altar,
With my beads once a day.
And this is my common cast,
To hear mass first or last;
And the Holy Friday fast--

A dram of-a sheep's turdle,
And good Saint Francis's girdle,
With the am'let of an hurdle,
Are wholesome for the pip.

(Three Laws, Act II, pp. 19-20)

Sodomismus admits to being totally depraved, equal
to the vice God punished in Sodom, a panderer of concu-
piscence:

Sodomismus. Myself I so behave,
And am so vile a knave,
As nature doth deprave
And utterly abhor.
I am such a vice, truly,
As God, in His great fury,
Did punish most terribly.
In Sodom, and in Gomor.
In the flesh I am a fire,
And such a vile desire,
As bring men to the mire
Of foul concupiscence.

(Three Laws, Act II, p. 21)

Among his clients Sodomismus numbers popish hypocrites who
pretend he is a spiritual good; and gives instances of his
deeds from the Bible and secular history:

...the popish hypocrites
Embrace me everywhere.
I am now become all spiritual,
For the clergy at Rome, and over all,
For want of wives to me doth fall--
To God they have no fear.
The children of God I did so move

That they the daughters of men did love,
Working such ways as did not behove,
Till the flood them over went.

In the Gomorites I also reigned
Till the hand of God them brent.

As Paul to the Romans testify,
The Gentiles, after idolatry,
Fell to such bestial sodomy
That God did them forsake.

We [Idolatria and Sodomismus] made Thalon and Sophocles,
Thamiras, Mero, Agathocles,
Tiberius and Aristoteles,
Themselves to use unnaturally;
I taught Aristo and Fulvius.
Semiramis and Hortensius,
Crates, Hyliscus, and Pontius,
Beasts to abuse most monstrously.²⁷

(Three Laws, Act II, pp. 21-22)

After all this accounting of Sodomismus's qualifications, Bale pauses to allow for an allusion by Idolatria and Infidelity to Sodomismus's sexual prowess:

Infidelity. Marry! thou art the devil himself!
Idolatria. If ye knew how he could pelf,
Ye would say he were such an elf
As none under heaven were else.
Infidelity. The fellow is well decked,
Disguised, and well necked,
Both knavebald and piepicked:
He lacketh nothing but bells.

(Three Laws, Act II, p. 23)

Sodomismus continues his panegyric on himself saying that in the very first age of the world he began his attack on man and that he will persevere as long as man, monks and

²⁷ Note Bale's allusions to classical literature which are not found in the mystery cycles, where all references are to the Bible. This is a Renaissance cachet.

popish priests exist because they belong to his retinue:

Sodomismus. In the first age I began,
And so persevered with man
And still will,...
So long as he endure.
...monkish sects renew,
And popish priest continue
Which are of my retinue,

(Three Laws, Act II, p. 23)

Since the papist monks and priests are celibate, Sodomismus implies that celibacy, especially among the clergy in Rome, is as rank as ants, and exemplifies his point by the homosexual conduct of Pope Julius II:

Clean marriage they forbid,
Yet cannot their ways be hid:

Oft have they buried quick
Such as were never sick.

In Rome to me they fall,
Both bishop and cardinal,
Monk, friar, priest, and all:
More rank they are than ants
Example in Pope July,
Which sought to have, in his fury,
Two lads, and to use them beastly,
From the cardinal of Nantes.

(Three Laws, Act II, p. 23)

Infidelity specifically directs his two emissaries to corrupt the law of nature written in man's heart. Sodomismus is to attack the flesh and Idolatria the soul; to Idolatria he supplies beads, rings, a purse full of relics, rags, bones and sticks to deceive men; he advises Sodomismus to use sacramentals, to sing dirges and Gregorian masses, to study the Pope's decretals and mix them with buggery, and

provides a stool for hearing confession and a box of creams
and oil for administering some of the sacraments:

Infidelity. ...
Leave never a point behind
That may corrupt in man
The law writ in his heart;
In his flesh do thy part; Ad Sod.
And, his soul to pervert, Ad Idol.

Here have I pretty gins,
Both brooches, beads, and pins,
With such as the people wins
Unto idolatry.
Take thou part of them here, Ad Idol.
Beads, rings, and other gear.

To deceive man properly.
Set thou forth sacramentals, Ad Sod.
Say dirge and sing for trentals,
Study the Pope's decretals,
And mix them with buggerage.
Here is a stool for thee,
A ghostly father to be,

A box of cream and oil.
Here is a purse of relics, Ad Idol.
Rags, rotten bones, and sticks.

(Three Laws, Act II, pp. 23-24)

Just before Idolatria and Sodomismus leave, the three
conspirators sing a song after which Infidelity in a high
voice probably parodying the recto-tono rhythm of a Gregorian
chant:

Let us pray.
Almighty and Everlasting God, who has formed the laity
in our image and likeness; grant, we beseech thee,
that as we live by their labour, so by their wives,
their daughters, and their maid-servants we may obtain
perpetual delight. Through our lord the Pope.²⁸

²⁸ John S. Farmer, ed., The Dramatic Writings of John Bale Bishop of Ossory (Guilford, England, 1966), p. 343. This is the English translation of Bale's Latin version in the text.

If the audience had missed, the point that the play so far was more than a morality in which Naturae Lex will come a cropper at the hands of Infidelity and his allies, they have been now totally informed. This play is a tract spoken on the stage, a polemic at the expense of the Roman Catholic Church.

Infidelity sums up the purpose of the missions of Idolatry and Sodomy, and lists those who are now under their sway; crowned heads, their lords and subjects under Idolatry, and the clergy of Rome under Sodomy and subject to Anti-Christ:

Idolatry hath kings,
With their nobility;
Both dukes, lords, knights, and earls,
Fair ladies with their pearls,
And the whole commonalty.
Within the bounds of Sodomy
Doth dwell the spiritual clergy;
Pope, cardinal, and priest,
Nun, canon, monk, and friar.
With so many else as do desire
To reign under Antichrist.

(Three Laws, Act II, pp. 25-26)

John Bale has Infidelity repeat the charge of lust against the papist clergy and relates some lubricious gossip from Rome.

Detesting matrimony
They live abominably,
And burn in carnal lust.
Shall I tell ye farther news?
At Rome, for prelates, are stews
Of both kinds.

(Three Laws, Act II, p. 26)

Naturae Lex in a soliloquy at the end of Act II, after recalling his efforts to provoke man to love God, emphasizes Sodomy's corruption of the clergy:

I abhor to tell the abusions bestial
That they daily use which boast their chastity;
Some at the altar to incontinency fall;
In confession some full beastly occupied be;
Among the close nuns reigneth this enormity;
Such children slay they as they chance for to have!
And in their privies provide them of their grave.
(Three Laws, Act II, p. 27)

Bale then, since he is employed by Thomas Cromwell as a dramatist of the new learning, appeals to Christian rulers to allow priests to marry to avoid sodomy, and to ignore the Pope the master of Sodom and Gomorrah:

Permit priests rather God's lawful remedy
Than they should incur most bestial sodomy.
Regard not the Pope, nor yet his whorish kingdom;
For he is the master of Gomor and Sodom.
(Three Laws, Act II, p. 27)

The Act closes with Naturae Lex imploring God to have mercy on him. Act II is like a morality play insofar as it is a struggle between Naturae Lex (good) (virtue) and the three conspirators (evil) (vices). But it is a morality in which mankind is no longer the chief attraction:

The English moral play in its first form took mankind as its hero, and when that one plot had been treated adequately by dividing mankind into its inevitable partitions, for example, into infancy, youth, manhood and old age,...., the genre could go forward only by further subdivisions at the expense of universality, such as man engaged in trades and occupations or individual men affected by environment, fortune, or creed....The result was that the

English morality play almost..., lost its original distinctive feature of representing generalized humanity on the stage.

It retained the practice of introducing allegorical figures of virtues and vices on the stage...²⁹

Bale's protagonist is the new learning or the Protestant faith and the antagonist is the Catholic Church--neither character appears on the stage but the virtues and vices do. In Act II Infidelity plans the downfall of Naturae Lex not mankind, and Naturae Lex, although professing a proprietary interest in mankind, is primarily concerned in producing a married clergy as an antidote to Infidelity and his auxiliaries. In fine the natural law in man has been cast into a leprosy by the papist hierarchy, who are idolators, sodomists, unfaithful to Christ and faithful to Anti-Christ. But the actual agent of Infidelity is the Roman Catholic Church, which Bale clearly implicates in the Act as corrupting mankind "with idols, and stinking sodometry" (Baleus Prolocutor).

Moseh Lex at the beginning of Act III smoothly shifts the audience's attention from the corrupted natural law to himself and outlines what he is and what he does:

Mos. Lex. The Lord, perceiving his first law thus
With unclean vices, sent me, his law of Moses, ^{corrupted}
To see him for sin substantially corrected.

²⁹ Craig, p. 378.

And brought in again to a trade of godliness.

...I am a law of rigour and of hardness:

To God I require a perfect obedience,

I show what sin is; I burden sore man's conscience;

To him am I death when his life is infect.

Yet, if he take heed, to Christ I him direct,

Forgiveness to have, with light, health, and salvation,
Lest he should despair and fall into damnation.

(Three Laws, Act III, p. 28)

Naturae Lex spoke much more abstractly than does Moseh Lex here. No doubt this is because Moses lived in the mind of John Bale and the audience and is easier to assimilate mentally even as an abstraction. Moseh Lex, as he describes himself, is both stern and gentle; his aim is twofold: to restore Naturae Lex to his "trade of godliness" and to direct man to Christ.

John Bale follows the same pattern here as in Act II: the protagonist is introduced and then attacked by Infidelity, who orders two of his minions to prevent the protagonist effecting good in mankind. Even without his minions, Infidelity, by placing the chanting of two psalms out of context, attacks Moseh Lex by regaling him with the bawdy tale of an old nun and an old friar. Moseh Lex finally chastises him:

Infidelity. At the Minories, sir! Late yesternight at
compline.

...it was their dedication,

And thither, in God's name, came I to see the fashion.

An old friar stood forth, with spectacles on his nose.

Beginning this anthem...

Lapides preciosi.

.....

Then came Dame Isbel, an old nun and a Carm,
Crowing like a capon, and thus began the Psalm.

Saepe expugnauerunt me a iuventute mea.
Moseh Lex. And what includeth this mystery?
Infidelity. A simple problem of bitchery.

When the friar began,
Afore the nun,
To sing of precious stones--
From my youth, said she,
They have comfort me,
As it had been for the nones.

Moseh Lex.
Thy usage shows thee to be brought up among bauds.
(Three Laws, Act III, p. 29)

Infidelity then recites (probably sings) a long piece of
doggerel in which he relates the scandalous acts of the
papist monks and clergy:

Infidelity. It was a good world when we had
such wholesome stories
Preached in our church, on Sundays and other feries.

...the priests might walk,
And with young wives talk--
Then had we children plenty;

When the monks were fat,
And rank as a rat,
With bellies like a boar--
Then all things were dear;
Both beef, bread, and beer

When bishops might burn,
And from the truth turn
The silly simple soul--

(Three Laws, Act III, pp. 29-30)

Bale now touches the nub of all his arguments: Rome
has suppressed the Scriptures and kept them from the people
and the new learning has made them accessible to all. Not
only did the bishops burn the faithful at the stake for
reading of Christ and Paul, Infidelity states, but the

Catholic Church, and Bale, now explicitly places Infidelity in the Roman camp whereas in Act II Infidelity was not fully implicated as a confederate of Rome:

Then durst no man creak,
Open mouth, nor speak
Of Christ, nor yet of Paul.
Now are the knaves bold
With Scriptures to hold,
And teach them everywhere--

We are now like to fall:
If we do not fight
For the church's right,
By the mass! we shall lose all.

(Three Laws, Act III, p. 30)

Moseh Lex informs Infidelity that he is the law of Moses, that he intends to reform mankind, and alludes to the condition of the Catholic Church:

The common people have thought it commodious
Diverse gods to have, with rites superstitious.
My commandment is to seek one God alone;

(Three Laws, Act III, p. 31)

Moses then recites the ten commandments. Infidelity reacts saying that they completely curtail liberty especially the commandments that say that he must worship God alone and may not love adulterously:

Infid. We may do nothing if we be pinned in thus--

We must have one God, and worship Him alone?

For company's sake, ye say we may not love?

(Three Laws, Act III, p. 31)

Already Bale in Act I has accused the papistical clergy of idolatry to false gods and adultery and here continues the

insinuations. Moreover, on being asked by Infidelity what the tables are which Moseh Lex holds in his hand, Moseh Lex explains their meaning:

Three thing I declare: the first are the precepts moral;
Next, the laws judicial; and last, the rites ceremonial..
The moral precepts are God's commandments ten,

The laws of Nature the moral precepts declare.

They stir man to faith, and provoke him also to love.
To obey, to serve, and to worship God above.

In two stony tables God wrote them first of all,

The first hath but three, which tend to God's high honour;
Seven hath the second, and they concern our neighbour.

In sprite is the first, that we should God honour and love;
To outward working, the second doth us move;

(Three Laws, Act III, p. 33)

Infidelity then asks for an explanation of the laws judicial. Moseh Lex explains both the laws judicial and the laws ceremonial:

Mos. Lex. Such things to command as are civil or temporal.
From vice to refrain, and outward injury,
Quiet to conserve, and public honesty.

Ceremonial rites are also commendable,
In holy days, garments, temples, and consecrations.
Sacrifices and vows, with offerings and expiations.

(Three Laws, Act III, p. 33)

Peculiarly Bale's outline here is that of a Christian and Catholic society, the ceremonial part of which he demolishes in the following lines where the Protestant tenet--later made explicit by Bale--of salvation by faith in the New Testament alone without the intermediary of a Catholic Church and

hierarchy:

Which are unto Christ as figures, types and shadows,

 No man is perfect by such dark ceremonies
 Only pertain they unto the third commandment
 Of the Sabbath day, till Christ the Lord be present:
 In his death ending the whole judicial priesthood.
 (Three Laws, Act III, pp. 33-34)

Infidelity reveals himself to Moseh Lex as Infidelity, who may be dressed as a grey friar, though he vehemently denies he is such (p. 34). Moseh Lex orders Infidelity to leave; Infidelity refuses and Moseh Lex exits to fetch judges and kings to shackle Infidelity, who then announces that he will overcome the law of Moses with the help of two more "of my children" Ambition and Covetousness (Act III, p. 35). In his preamble Bale suggests that Avaritia (Covetousness) be dressed "like a pharisee or spiritual lawyer" and Ambitio "like a bishop". The two are saucy to their mentor, Infidelity, but united in their guile, fleecing the rulers and the commoners as Infidelity states and both Avaritia and Ambitio give examples:

Infidelity. . . .
 . . . for advantage, in this we all agree--
 To blind the rulers and deceive the commonalty.
 Avaritia. . . .
 Yet, of our knaveries, the fools will never take heed.

 We love so much our ease.
 We must live by their sweat,
 And have good drink and meat
 When they have not to eat
 The substance of a pease.
 We lead them in the dark,
 And so their conscience mark
 That sturdy they are, and stark
 In every wicked evil.

We teach idolatry;
And laugh full merrily
To see each company
Run headlong to the devil.

We look for commendations,
And lowly salutations
In temple, house, and street.

(Three Laws, Act III, pp. 36-37)

And to alert the audience to the perpetrators of these hypocrisies Bale refers to the monastic hours (Bale has dressed Avaritia as a clerical pharisee; Ambitio dressed as a prelate, a bishop.):

Our lousy Latin hours,
In borows and in bowers,
The poor people devours.
And tread them under feet.

Ambitio. . . .
I gape for empire,
And worship desire

I look up aloft,
And love to lie soft,
Not caring for my flock.

Lucifer I made
So highly to wade,
To God he would be equal.

To lead men to hell
Is my most common usage.

I am such an evil
As bring to the devil,
Without any contradiction.

(Three Laws, Act III, pp. 37-38)

Bale's evil characters in this Act are his best limned. Except for Moseh Lex, who is a strong character, most of his virtuous characters, like Naturae Lex, are wooden and ineffective. Moreover, these speeches of Avaritia and Ambitio are

alive with concrete terms and allusions. Bale has skilfully blended references to classical and biblical characters who have succumbed to the wiles of these two evils (pp. 37-39).

Ambitio sums up his role: The bishop who will close heaven, using the seven deadly sins, and open hell by advising his flock to live in vice:

With vices seven
I close up heaven,
And spear up paradise.
I open hell
By my counsel,
Maintaining every vice.

(Three Laws, Act III, p. 39)

Avaritia, the "spiritual lawyer" is equally convinced of his role:

For silver and gold
With falsehood I hold,
Supporting every evil.
I have it in awe
For to choke the law.
And bring all to the devil.

(Three Laws, Act III, p. 39)

Infidelity, on asking how the two clerics are to belittle the law of Moses, the ten commandments, is answered first by Ambitio:

We must poison them with works and good intents
Whereas God doth say, No strange gods thou shalt have:
With saints worshipping that clause we will deprave;
And though He command to make no carved image,
For a good intent yet will we have pilgrimage.

No Sabbath will we with God's word sanctify.
But with lip labour, and idle ceremony.

Though we do not slay, yet may we heretics burn,
If they will not soon from holy Scripture turn.

Though theft be forbid, yet will we continually
 Rob the poor people, through prayer and purgatory.
 God hath inhibited to give false testimony,
 Yet we will condemn the Gospel for heresy.

Of men make we swine by the draff of our traditions,
 And cause them nothing to regard but superstitions.
 As dogs unreasonable on most vile carren feed.
 So will we cause them seek idols in their need.
 And always their ground shall be, for a good intent.
 (Three Laws, Act III, pp. 40-41)

The reader of Bale's other spiritual plays is already familiar with the tenets expressed there and the vagaries attributed to Rome in opposition to them. Here Rome's perfidy, according to Bale, is spelled out, and Ambitio, the bishop, adds a new element not explicit in the other plays, namely, these nefarious actions of Rome should always be done "for a good intent".

Avaritia, the spiritual lawyer, then regales Infidelity with his stock in trade of charms and frauds for off-setting Moseh Lex:

With superstitions the Jews' ceremonial laws
 I will so handle--they shall not be worth two straws.
 The laws judicial, through cautels and delays,
 I will also drown, to all righteous men's decays.
 To set this forward, we must have sophistry,
 Philosophy and logic, as science necessary.
 The bishops must hold their priests in ignorance,
 With long Latin hours, lest knowledge to them chance.
 Let them have long matins, long evensong, and long masses;

 That they shall never be able to prophesy.
 Or yet preach the truth, to our great injury.
 Let the cloisterers be brought up ever in silence,
 Without the Scriptures, in pain of disobedience.
 See the lay people pray never but in Latin:
 Let them have their creed and service all in Latin,
 That a Latin belief may make a Latin soul--
 Let them nothing know of Christ, nor yet of Paul.
 If they have English let it be for advantage,

For pardons, for dirges, for offerings, and pilgrimage.
I reckon to make them a new creed in a while,
And all in English, their conscience to beguile.
(Three Laws, Act III, pp. 41-42)

Infidelity wants to know what the "articles of that creed" are and Avaritia ticks them off--a congeries of external good works and acts of the will that Avaritia persuades the audience are charms and superstitions which, if the faithful believes in them, will mean money in the coffers of the clergy whom Avaritia represents:

Avaritia. ...
First, they shall believe in our holy father Pope:
Next, in his decrees, and holy decretals
Then in holy church, with censer, cross, and cope,
In the ceremonies, and blessed sacramentals;
In purgatory then, in pardons and in trentals,
In praying to saints, and in Saint Francis's hood,
In Our Lady of Grace, and in the blessed rood.
They shall believe also in relics and religion,
In Our Lady's Psalter, in free will and good works;
In the ember days, and in the Pope's remission.
In beads and in bells, not used of the Turks;
In the golden masses against such sprites as lurks,
With charms and blessings. This creed will bring in money:
In English therefore, we will it clerkly convey.
(Three Laws, Act III, pp. 42-43)

Infidelity orders that those who will not believe in the creed be burned. Ambitio warns that the Bible readers should be condemned since they may condemn the clergy for their actions. Infidelity likens Ambitio's mitre to the mouth of a wolf: the mitre lying on its side is like the mouth of a wolf ready to devour the lambs. Moreover, Infidelity promises Ambitio to make him a Pope, "a captain of all pride", to hide his wolfishness, his gaping ambition, under

the triple crown, the tiara, so that when he slays disbelievers Ambitio may say it is the powers of the canon and civil laws that condemned them.

Before the song that precedes the going forth of Infidelity's two emissaries to attack Moseh Lex and reduce him to a hobbling blind man, the two worthies, as did Idolatry and Sodomy in Act II, recount successful instances of their trades. Avaritia tells of the Pope taking a bribe of 3,000 ducats from the grey friars in order that Franciscus de Pola be called St. Franciscus de Pola, a second bribe bought another grey friar a cardinal's hat. For his papacy, Avaritia boasts, Clement VII paid 300,000 ducats which monies Clement earned by poll taxes, shedding Christian blood and selling bishoprics. Ambitio maintains that the Pope from the running of brothels in Rome and Viterbye realizes: "Of gold and silver a wonderful substance yearly!"; and in England some bishops profit from brothels more than from "the readers of Christ's Gospel". In Act II the accent was on the lubricity of the Roman Catholic clergy, here it is on their covetousness, but the result of this covetousness, Avaritia insists, is "all too little to maintain their pomp and vice".

After their little song Ambitio and Avaritia depart to blind and cripple Moseh Lex, and Infidelity sums up what his two missionaries and he have discussed. The common thread woven by Bale through these long detailed speeches of

Ambitio, Avaritia and Infidelity is that the Roman Catholic Church keeps the faithful ignorant of the scriptures and fleeces them to allow the clergy to live in luxury and debauchery. Also, note that in Act III the identification of Ambitio and Avaritia as Catholic priests is much clearer than Idolatria's and Sodomismus's identification as such in Act II. Furthermore, Bale in this Act makes the audience, in his heavy-handed scuttling of the "bark of Peter", realize that this insistence on things and the repression of the Word is taking place now in England. Bale's Ambitio and Avaritia are confidence men, representing the Roman Catholic clergy, who are ambitious and avaritious and who con the faithful, to their spiritual and material disadvantage.

The act ends in a soliloquy by Moseh Lex, who in Renaissance fashion, appeals to our pity, since Ambitio and Avaritia have reduced him, a "sometime...guide" "to Christ", to a blind cripple.. Moseh Lex also appeals to Christian princes to act. No similar appeal occurs in the medieval cycles.

Ye Christian princes! God hath given you the power.
With sceptre and sword all vices to correct.
Let not Ambition, nor Covetousness devour
Your faithful subjects, nor your officers infect.
(Three Laws, Act III, p. 47)

Moseh Lex continues to invoke the princes to curb the Roman clergy, who corrupt the laws of God and his law, and ends the Act invoking Christ to restore him to greater

perfection:

Have to your clergy a diligent respect.
And see they do not corrupt the laws of God;

...the Pharisees corrupted me anon,

Now will I to Christ, that He may me restore
To more perfection than ever I had afore.

(Three Laws, Act III, p. 47)

A good example of the difference between Bale's handling of scriptural material and the way the same material is handled in the Ludus Coventriae, for example, may be found in the two quotations above dealing with Moses and his propounding of the laws of God. In the Ludus the historical Moses is found expounding to the people the laws by which they may be saved:

The iijde comaundment of god as I rede
doth bydde the halwe well thin haly day.
kepe the well ffro synfull dede
and care not gretly ffor rych a-ray
A ryght pore man this is non nay
of symfyl astat in clothis rent
may-be bettyr than rych with garmentys gay
Oftyn tyme doth kepe this comaundment.

(Ludus Coventriae, p. 54, 11.99-106)

In a completely different, but nonetheless skilful manner, Bale makes his play contemporary. Instead of Moses we have the abstract character, Moseh Lex, exhorting the people, not simply explaining the law, but warning them against the obstacles to Christian living, Bale's opponents, the Roman clergy.

In Act IV, the corruption of the law of Christ which Evangelium or Christ's Gospel, states Bale's contention, near

the beginning of the play, that the world is saved from decay, Naturae Lex and Moseh Lex are in disarray, by himself, Christ's Gospel, who saves all who believe in it, no matter what sin they have committed; all sinners will be justified by loving Christ's Gospel; and all sinners will be saved by believing Christ's Gospel.

I am Christ's gospel,....
 Such a power of God as saveth all that believe,
 In the blood of Christ I am a full forgiveness,
 I require but love for man's justification:
 With a faith in Christ, for His health and salvation.
 (Three Laws, Act IV, pp. 47-48)

Infidelity baits Evangelium with a tale of a cod fisherman who told him about Evangelium and his wife. Evangelium clears the record by stating that his wife is the church, the Christian congregation, but not the church of the hypocritical papists:

My wife is the church, or Christian congregation,
 This is not the church of disguised hypocrites,
 Of apish shavelings, or papistical sodomites;
 ...a livish building, groundd in faith alone,
 On the hard rock, Christ,...
 (Three Laws, Act IV, p. 49)

Evangelium continues to piece the description of the Church of Rome together in further speeches contrasting it with the church of the Reformation:

Their worshippings are in outward ceremonies.
 That counterfeit church standeth all by men's traditions.
 Without the Scriptures, and without the heart's affections.
 My church is secret, and evermore will be;

Adoring the Father in sprite and in verity.
 By the word of God this Church is ruled only,
 And doth not consist in outward ceremony.
 This congregation is the true Church militant;
 Those counterfeit disards are the very Church malignant,
 ...enemies to Christ's blood,
 As put salvation in shaven crown, mitre, or hood.
 (Three Laws, Act IV, p. 50)

Under harassment by Infidelity, Evangelium sketches the birth and development of the Protestant Church from "the beginning"; Infidelity says Evangelium (as Christi Lex or Protestant Church) is a cuckold who has forsaken holy church for wiving; Evangelium retorts, accusing the Catholic Church of buggery:.

Evang. Since the beginning; and now is in Christ renewed.
 Adam had promise of Christ's incarnation;
 So had Abraham, with his whole generation;
 Which was unto them a preaching of the Gospel
 Into salvation, and deliverance from hell.

In Christo Jesu, per Evangelium vos genui.³⁰
 I have begot you in Jesus Christ, saith Paul,
 By the Gospel preaching, to the comfort of your soul.
 Infid. Then are ye a cuckold, by the blessed holy mass!

Ye saith that Saint Paul begat your wife with child!
 Evangelium. By misunderstanding thou art ungraciously
 beguiled;

That he therein did was by the Gospel preaching
 His mind is the Gospel to have done that operation:

Infidelity. Marry! so they say, ye fellows of the new
 learning:
 Forsake holy church, and now fall fast to wiving.
 Evangelium. Nay, they forsake whoredom, with other
 damnable usage,

³⁰ 1 Corinthians 4.15-16. You might have thousands of guardians in Christ, but not more than one father and it was I who begot you in Christ Jesus by preaching the Good News.

And life with their wives, in lawful marriage,
 Whilst the Pope's oiled swarm reign still in their old
 buggerage.

(Three Laws, Act IV, pp. 50-51)

(These salvos for and against marriage do not appear in Bale's other three plays.) Evangelium points out that St. Paul prophesied that "a certain company" would arise hating marriage and by means of lies and hypocrisy inhibit marriage. By his fruits, Evangelium reasons, Infidelity must be Infidelity. Infidelity happily says he is. Then Evangelium before leaving the stage warns the audience of the eternal loss of those who resist the truth and do not profit by the word of God--the great sin against the Holy Ghost--and sums up the three attempts of the Blessed Trinity (and thus recaps Acts II, III and IV) to direct mankind to God:

...to those cities that resist the verity
 At the suggestions of Infidelity.
 That people will be for ever and ever lost,
 For it is the great sin against the Holy Ghost.
 In the old law first, the Father his mind expressed;
 Then came his son Christ and made it more manifest.
 And now the Holy Ghost is come to close up all--
 If He be not heard extreme damnation will fall

To them that no profit of the word of God will win--
 (Three Laws, Act IV, pp. 52-53)

Infidelity left alone quickly summons his clerical aids, Pseudodoctrina (False Doctrine) dressed, John Bale suggests, as a "popish doctor"--whatever uniform that is, the audience can immediately identify him as a Roman Catholic clergyman--and Hypocrisis, garbed as a grey friar. Bale begins the recital of the depravity of the Roman Catholic

clergy at once. (In the previous two acts the libidinousness of the Roman clergy was examined only before the maimed law returned to the stage for the finale of the Act.) Hypocrisis by Bale's account is but a papal pimp who will provide any woman for "the holiest of us". Bale's point is that though Pseudodoctrina says "Our orders permit us not to have them in marriage" the Roman Catholic clergy hypocritically enjoys the pleasures of marriage. The stories of the sexual prowess and proclivities of the Roman clergy continues from pages 53 through 55, a series of tales beyond the realms of good taste and the dignity of religion, as both Warton and Jusserand suggested.³¹

The disparagement of monk, abbot and pope continues until Infidelity sums up the complaints of the people--by whom John Bale means the Protestants of the Reformation. Here Infidelity charges that the people accuse his henchmen, Pseudodoctrina and Hypocrisis of teaching superstition, claim that priests preach these superstitions to papists, and compare papists to dogs and to swine, and say that the friars' order is sprung from hell:

Infidelity. They say thou teachest nothing but lousy traditions
And lies for lucre, with damnable superstitions.
And thus they conclude, that the draff of popish priests
Is good enough for swine, by whom they mean the papists.

³¹ Vide supra, p. 158-159.

Yea, and they say also, the diet of men is all--
To most vile carrion the dogs will soonest fall.

Pseudodoctrina. Then, do they compare the papists unto dogs?
Infidelity. Marry! that they do; and to such swinish hogs
As, in swill and soss, are brought up all their life--

They say of thee, also, that thou art a naughty knave;
By prowling and lying ye friars would all have.
Thine order, they say, is sprung even out of hell,
And all this knowledge, they have now of the Gospel.

(Three Laws, Act IV, pp. 57-58)

During this long harangue Evangelium has been forgotten and Infidelity reminds his aids of him in the last line: the Gospel, Evangelium, has informed the believers in the new learning of the irregularities in the Church of Rome. The two clerical conspirators of Infidelity plan to eradicate Evangelium as they once did Christ. Pseudodoctrina describes how they eliminated Christ:

Pseudodoctrina. ...we followed him from place to place,
To trap Him in snare, and His doctrine to deface.
Then found we the means to put Him so to death,
Lest He, against us, should open any more breath.
And we set four knights to keep Him down in His grave,
That He, never more, our living should deprave.
And thus must we serve the Gospel; no remedy:
Else will he destroy our living perpetually.

(Three Laws, Act IV, pp. 58-59)

This intrigue is worthy of the Pharisees and Sadducees of Christ's time, but Bale increases its malice since these learned doctors of the law are Roman Catholic clerics who despise the Gospel. The pope is again painted as an enemy of the Gospel, since he, Infidelity states, commands kings

to undermine the Gospel and Pseudodoctrina adds a few more examples of papal hypocrisy and malpractice.

At the end of the previous two acts, the protagonists, Naturae Lex and Moseh Lex, appear in their turn on the stage maimed. At the end of Act IV the law of Christ, Evangelium, enters as Infidelity departs and begins a trialogue with Pseudodoctrina and Hypocrisis. Their arguing pivots on the Protestant tenet of preaching the word of God "without the authority / Of pope or bishop" (Pseudodoctrina, p. 61). Evangelium accuses them of creating the mass and the whole ritual of the Catholic Church for lucre and to dishonour God; their strange learning in a strange language is a blind popish doctrine:

Evangelium: I say they are the fruits of your imaginations
To bring in lucre, and darken God's high glory.

Christ never sent his to show significations.
But his living word to all the Christian nations.

No man willeth Paul to speak in the congregation
In a strange language, without interpretation.

Be not led about, (saith Paul), by any strange learning--
What else is your doctrine but a blind popish thing?

(Three Laws, Act IV, p. 62)

Bale now pieces together a clever satire of the papist cause. Infidelity enters with a pardon, and a wing of the Holy Ghost, and a bell to ward off disease in hogs. With these inducements Infidelity invites the audience to subscribe and receive scrolls showing they belong to this holy new

fraternity and receive the indulgence:

Infidelity. Good Christian people! I am come higher, verily,
 As a true proctor of the house of Saint Antony.
 Of clean remission I have brought ye indulgence--
 A pena and culpa--for all your sin and offence,
 By the authority of Pope Leo and Pope Clement,
 Pope Boniface, Pope Pius, Pope John, and Pope Innocent.
 And here I bless ye with a wing of the Holy Ghost,
 From thunder to save ye, and from sprites in every coast.
 Lo! here is a bell, to hang upon your hog,
 And save your cattle from the biting of a dog.
 So many as will come to this holy fraternity,
 Come, pay your money, and ye shall have letter of me.
 (Three Laws, Act IV, p. 64)

Both assistants readily seek admission.

The satirical speech capsulating the chicanery of the Roman clergy leads naturally to condemnation of the "most deceitful papists" by Evangelium:

O damnable leading of Babylonical sodomites,
 Yourselves ye declare to be shameful hypocrites.
 Ye count it a game to lose that Christ hath brought
 With his precious blood, and here most dearly sought.
 Oh, ye are wretches, and pestilent Antichrists;
 Ministers of Dagon, and most deceitful papists!
 Woe, Pharisees, woe! ye make clean outwardly.
 But inwards ye are full of covetousness and baudry.
 ...within ye stink, and have thoughts very shameful.
 (Three Laws, Act IV, pp. 64-65)

This censure of the papists brings an immediate charge of heresy by Pseudodoctrina. Evangelium retorts he is not a popish Antichrist, for he receives his orders from Christ and is anointed by the Holy Ghost. Pseudodoctrina and Hypocrisis seize him for a schismatic and prepare him for burning. Evangelium refuses to recant and his parting words do not

belie his vocation:

Evangelium: Though you, for my sake, imprison men cruelly,
Famish them, stock them, and them with faggots fry,
Hurt me ye shall not, for I can never die;
And they, for my sake, shall live perpetually.
(Three Laws, Act IV, p. 66)

Infidelity, after his agents march Evangelium off the stage, gloats over his success in bringing the "three laws to confusion" (p. 67). Suddenly, out of character, Infidelity warns Christian rulers to uphold the three laws, or their civil laws will not influence their subjects to orderliness in the commonwealth.

On these same three laws all other laws depend.
And cannot prevail, now these are at an end.
If Christian governors do not these laws uphold,
Their civil ordinances will soon be very cold.
(Three Laws, Act IV, p. 67)

As becomes his impish character, Infidelity closes Act IV by calling for drink and concubine.

By the end of Act IV, evil, or Infidelity, is in the ascendant and good, or the Three Laws, is in the abyss. Bale, to reverse these fortunes at the beginning of Act V, The Restoration of the Divine Laws, calls upon the vengeance of God, Vindicta Dei, as the instrument of Deus Pater's, to restore the three laws by punishing Infidelity with water, sword and fire:

The blood of innocents to Him for vengeance call;
And, therefore, this hour must I fiercely upon thee fall.
Whom God sendeth higher, for thy abomination?
.....

I am Vindicta Dei, in punishment most fierce,
With water, with sword, and with fire I must thee pierce.
(Three Laws, Act V, p. 68)

Infidelity tries to bribe Vindicta Dei who, after listing the many times he has resisted a bribe and fulfilled God's directives in the days of Noah, Abraham and Moses, insists that in destroying these enemies of God he was striking down Infidelity:

Vindicta Dei. By filthy rewards thou canst not me entreat:
But that I will do, as God hath me commanded.

For, I never strike but for thee, Infidelity!
(Three Laws, Act V, pp. 68-69)

Infidelity warns Vindicta Dei not to press him too hard or he will fight. Vindicta Dei replies that he has more than met his match--the weaker must fall to the stronger. On Vindicta Dei's charging Infidelity with infecting Naturae Lex with leprosy, Infidelity lays the blame on Idolatry and Sodomy, but Vindicta Dei counters by showing that Infidelity is the source of their perfidy:

Vindicta Dei. All that will not help Thy wicked workings now;
When the stronger come, the weaker must needs bow.
The law of Nature infected thou hast, with a leprosy.
Infidelity. Nay, it was not I, but that witch Idolatry;
And that polled, shorn knave that men call Sodomy.
Vindicta Dei. Of whom sprung they first but of Infidelity?
Therefore, thou shalt have that plague of penalty
Which they first tasted, for their iniquity.
For those two vices I drowned the world with water;
In token whereof, I plague thee with the same matter
Hic Infidelitatem lymphæ percutit.³²
(Three Laws, Act V, p. 70)

³² Farmer the general editor translates (p. 345) this as: Here he souses Infidelity with water.

Infidelity, unsubdued, claims that even after the flood he persisted with Cham until Moses' law began. Vindicta Dei accuses Infidelity of corrupting Moseh Lex with Avarice and Ambition, and as the unfaithful Israelites were put to the sword so shall he do to Infidelity. Furthermore Infidelity will be banished to give place to Christ's Gospel:

Vindicta Dei. And him thou corruptedest with Avarice
and Ambition.

Thou shalt have, therefore, that than to them was due.
Most terrible battle the Israelites untrue
That time did suffer, for their infidelity;
Wherefore, with this sword I justly banish thee
Because thou shalt here give place to Christ's Gospel.
Gladio Infidelitatem denuē cedit.³³

(Three Laws, Act V, p. 70)

Infidelity still unperturbed persists in staying as he had once with Judas, and now remains with the papists, teaching their "shorlings" to be Antichrists:

Infidelity. Yet will I not hence, but against once rebel.
Did not I remain with Judas and other more
When Christ preached here and taught them, to vex him sore?

And now I persevere, among the rank rabble of papists,
Teaching their shorlings to play the Antichrists.

(Three Laws, Act V, p. 71)

Vindicta Dei accuses Infidelity of sending Pseudodoctrina and Hypocrosis, to kill many for believing in the Gospel, and sentences him to be consumed by fire:

Vindicta Dei. The innocent blood of saints continually
Doth call unto God, to revenge their injury

³³ This Farmer translates (p. 345) as: Here again he strikes Infidelity with a naked sword.

Against false doctrine and cursed hypocrisy.
 Whom thou hast raised the glory of the Gospel
 To darken, and his friends most miserably to quell.
 Wherefore thou shalt have, like as thou hast deserved
 For thy wicked doings,....
 Ignis ipsum precedet, the prophets David saith thus,
 Atque inflammabit in circuita inimicos ejus--
 A consuming fire shall run before the judge,
 His enemies consuming--they shall find no refuge.
 ...for the wickedness of thee
 The earth to ashes by fire shall turned be.
Ignis flamma Infidelitatem locum exire coget.³⁴

And as the Latin stage direction, the last line in the above quotation, suggests: Infidelity screaming "Credo!" at the tip of the searing flame rushes off the stage:

Credo, credo, credo! I say, Credo, credo, credo!
 To the devil of hell, by the mass! I ween I go.
 (Three Laws, Act V, p. 71)

John Bale never claims that Infidelity is a devil, but his span of activity from the days of Adam and Eve up to the present (1538, the date John Bale published the play),³⁵ and the nature of his activity mark him out as a member of Lucifer's band. Whatever Bale may consider Infidelity to be, the false impression he leaves with the audience is that Infidelity's wiles are harmless and ludicrous. In his first contacts with Naturae Lex and Moseh Lex Infidelity acts the clown, and his approach to Evangelium is also light. It is

³⁴ Farmer translates this (p. 345) as: The flame of the fire forces Infidelity to leave the place.

³⁵ Blatt, p. 83 says 1547.

only in the presence of Vindicta Dei that Infidelity is wary, sober and fearful from their first contact onward. But it is in Infidelity's final speech that the difference between Bale's devil and the mystery cycle devil appears. His final cry is a mockery of the Roman Catholic Mass, but the cry is not one of excruciating pain--it is half joking, half mocking. Infidelity is not recanting but telling the audience, as lightly and gaily as if he were baiting Naturae Lex for the first time selling broom, that "I'm off to hell". And with that sally he implies that he'll be back the instant he is able, to perpetrate more evil among men in the spirit of devilish fun.

I dede hem all this velony
ffor I am ful of gret envy
Of wreth and wyckyd hate
That man xulde leve above the sky

and now I am cast to helle sty

(Ludus Coventriae, Fall of Man, p. 26, 11.318-323)

Infidelity leaves the play lighthearted but a medieval devil never did.³⁶ Thus the devil who tempted Adam and Eve, after being warned by God that a woman shall tear his head to pieces, laments:

At thi byddyng ffowle I falle

.....

³⁶ T. W. Craik, The Tudor Interlude (Leicester, 1962) p. 52: "(It is worth noting that whereas the vice's language is always jocular and usually obscene, the devil's is neither of these.)"

I ffalle down here a ffowle freke
 ffor this ffalle I gynne to qweke
 with a ffart my brech I breke
 my sorwe comyth ful sone

(Ludus Coventriae, Fall of Man, p. 27, 11.349-356)

Deus Pater after reminding the audience that He has stricken the vice Infidelity with fire warns that He will do the same to all sects that follow the dictates of Infidelity, delivers a homily on St. John the Apostle's verses in the Apocalypse.³⁷

That heaven is man's faith, that earth his understanding,
 The old cankered earth exiling with the sea,
 Which is superstition, and infidelity.

Our true faithful church is that same fair city,
 Whom we have cleansed by the power of our right hand
 As a spouse to Christ, in every Christian land;
 Banishing the sects of Babylonical popery.

(Three Laws, Act V, p. 72)

Each law is restored by Deus Pater, but a special ictus is given to the law of the Gospel, since it is to be the counter against the "papistical line":

Thou, law of the Gospel, though thou be last of all,
 In operation yet thou art the principal.
 From thee I exile hypocrisy and false doctrine;

³⁷ Revelations 21.1-2: Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; the first heaven and the first earth had disappeared now, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, and the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, as beautiful as a bride all dressed for her husband.

With all that depend upon the papistical line.
 Reserve the same book for a sign of heavenly power,
 For that book thou art, that John from heaven did devour.
 (Three Laws, Act V, p. 73)

Deus Pater pursues this theme of eradicating the papistical influence in a further speech and introduces Christian faith, the surrogate for Infidelity and the Catholic Church, who within the framework and with the aid of the three laws is to lead God's people to Him without "popish dreams":

Deus Pater. Now have we destroyed the kingdom of Babylon,
 And thrown the great whore into the bottomless pit,
 Restoring again the true faith and religion
 In the Christian church,...

The old popishness is past which was damnation:
 We have now renewed our Christian congregation.
 Stand forth, Christian faith! and take own advertisement:
 We here appoint thee to govern our congregation.
 See thou do nothing without the admonishment
 Of these three laws here. Enprint their declaration
 Of my sweet promises; and then, make thou relation
 To my folk again, that they may walk to me
 Without popish dreams, in a perfect liberty.

Take heed, Christian Faith! to the teachings of these three,
 And move our people to walk in the verity.
 The promises we made in all these three are Gospel,
 We would thou shouldst so to our congregation tell--
 (Three Laws, Act V, pp. 74-75)

Fides Christi, after Deus Pater's exit, defines his position as governing God's church and Christ's congregation and asks advice of the three laws which, each in turn, readily delivers, with a barb against Rome:

Fides Christi. It hath pleased God to put me in this office,
 To govern His church and Christian congregation;

...I will be glad to take your advertisement

Naturae Lex. The effect of me is for to know the Lord

To keep covenants made, and love true matrimony--

Moseh Lex. The effect of me is for to worship the Lord
As one God alone, and to flee from Idolatry;

Christi Lex. The effect of me is for to love the Lord
In the inner spirit, and to favour friend and enemy;

To preach remission, to save and to justify:
In Christ all to seek: life, justice, peace, and mercy--
(Three Laws, Act V, pp. 75-77)

Having received advice from each of the three laws,
Fides Christi promises to see them observed in Christian
nations so that popish dreams will vanish:

Now will I forward to all the Christian nations,
And see, in effect, these laws observed all,
To the abolishment of the dreams papistical.
(Three Laws, Act V, p. 77)

Turning to the audience, Fides Christi then exhorts
them to apply the three laws (and gives a fine three line
summary of the laws) by knowing, honouring and worshipping
God, and to obey God's representative, the king, and the
king's laws which protect the Christian commonwealth, and to
avoid the ways of Reginald Pole. These direct allusions to
the state (king and Pole) are never found in a mystery cycle.

Each law again works over the ground that has been
cultivated in the play. Naturae Lex reminds the audience
that:

We have also showed how they [the laws] have been corrupted
By foul idolaters and sodomites; polluted
By covetous priests and by ambitious prelates,
Hypocritical friars, false doctors, and false curates.
(Three Laws, Act V, p. 78)

Moseh Lex stamps the restoration of the laws as the work of Henry VIII.

Who hath restored these same three laws again
 But your late Josias, and valiant King Henry?
 No prince afore him took ever yet such pain
 From England to banish idolatry and foul sodomy,
 Covetousness, ambition, false doctrine, and hypocrisy.
 It was he that brought Christ's verity to light
 When he put the Pope, with his filthiness, to flight.
 (Three Laws, Act V, p. 78)

With the introduction of Henry VIII as head of the Church in England, Bale is writing an historical play. Both Christi Lex and Fides Christi in their final speeches, of which Fides Christi's is a prayer, reinforce this historical perspective and extend the time span to include the reign of the present monarch, Edward VI (1547-53) and the dowager, Queen Catherine (1547-48):

Christi Lex. ...
 And left them [his subjects] he hath, the same way still
 to fortify,
 His noble son Edward, such a king of God's elect
 As questionless, will perform it, in effect.
 Fides Christi. Pray all to the Lord, for the long
 continuance
 Of his grace's life in this world's habitation;
 And that, of his nobles, he have true maintenance
 In the principles of this most worthy foundation;
 That he may to Christ bring us from desolation.
 Pray for Queen Katherine, and the noble lord protector
 With the whole counsel, that God be their director.
 Amen.

(Three Laws, Act V, pp. 78-79)

The other spiritual plays of John Bale end with a Baleus Prolocutor speech but the Three Laws ends with A Song

upon Benedictus.³⁸ Save that it is based upon the Latin translation of Zachary's prophecy³⁹ after the birth of John the Baptist, the contents and the tone of the "song" are those of a final Balearic prolocution: the tone is one of denunciation and the matter is an excoriation of the Church of Rome:

Benedictus dominus Deus Israel
 Which hath overthrown the mighty idol Bel,
 The false god of Rome, by power of the gospel;
 Whose bloody kingdom diminisheth apace,
 By the word of God, . . .
 That Romish Antichrist is like to have a fall.
 With his whole rabble of sects diabolical;
 The enemies of Christ with him doth witness bear:
 Forsaking the Pope, with his damnable store,
 To men in darkness, and in the popish mire.
 Let not his baggage thy faithful servants tire,
 (Three Laws, Act V, pp. 79-82)

³⁸ Farmer in his Note-Book and Word-List, pp. 345-346, suggests that: "This is to some extent a transcript of the Song of Zacharias, . . . Bale, however, has left out some words in the middle of each verse, and inserted words of his own. For example, the first verse runs thus: 'Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel, [quia visitavit et fecit] redemptionem plebis suae' . . . Bale omits the words included in brackets, and inserts a diatribe against Rome in their place. And similarly throughout all the verses."

³⁹ The tone of Zachary's Benedictus (Luke 1.68-79), a hymn of thanks, is both that of thanksgiving and of hope and joy. Consider, for example, the last three lines: "To give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins; this by the tender mercy of our God who from on high will bring the rising Sun to visit us, to give light to those who live in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Continuing in his contemporizing, in the so-called spiritual play, Bale introduces Edward VI as a parallel to John the Baptist:

IX. Et tu puer propheta, elected of the Lord.
 King Edward the Sixth, to have God's law restored,
 Followest Josiah, thereof to take record.
 In all thy doings, and in God's holy word
 Parare vias eius.
 (Three Laws, Act V, p. 81)

This will be recognized as a kind of parody of Luke 1.76:

And you, little child, you shall be called
 Prophet of the Most High, for you will go
 before the Lord to prepare the way for him.
 (Luke 1.76)

Our final comment on the nature of the play might be taken from one of Bale's own tracts,⁴⁰ in which he characterizes it as:

A Comedie concerning the iii lawes; of nature, Moyses, and Christ, etc. Therein is it largely declared, how the faythelesse Antichrist of Rome with his clergie, hath been a blemyscher, darkener, confounder, and poysener of all wholsom lawes. And that wyth ydolatricall Sodometrie he hath defyled nature, by ambytyouse Auarice he hath made Gods commaundements of non effecte, and with hypocrytycall doctryne peruerterd Christes moste holye Gospell.⁴¹

J. W. Harris conjectured that Bale's King John and the trilogy plays were revisions of older plays; and since

⁴⁰ Blatt, p. 255. Miss Blatt cites the tract as being written after October 11, 1551.

⁴¹ John Bale, An expostulation of complaynte ag. the blasphemyes of a franticke papyst of Hampshyre, J. Daye, STC.1294. This tract was published January 16, 1547 at Marburg, in the land of Hessen.

Bale revised King John so often and no extant copies of the 1538 trilogy exist, the 1547 copies are probably revisions:

...may be revisions from more elaborate ones of an earlier phase of the author's career. The cycle fragments [the trilogy] may likewise represent versions revised from some older plays in the list [Anglorum Heliades], plays which in their earliest form were not practical for acting by a small troupe of professional players.

Another fact...is that the printed editions date not earlier than 1547. Therefore with the exception of King John, none of the plays has survived in manuscript, it is probable that these printed editions, considering the author's continual rewriting of King John, differ somewhat from the original plays.⁴²

Analogously, therefore, the Three Laws may also have been revised. And the hypothesis suggested above of the introduction of Rome as the butt in a revision of an old manuscript becomes more probable.

Thora Blatt observed his zeal in reforming morals, and noted also his contemporizing bent:

...Bale's energy is expended not on the heavenly ideal nor on the purely political state, but...on the point in which the two meet, in the devotional life of the social body, and in the political aspects of religious leadership. The former is dealt with in Thre Lawes, the latter [in] Kynge Johan, while the three biblical plays aim at imparting the proper understanding of the religious history of mankind.⁴³

Furthermore, says Miss Blatt this conflict is woven into the play with two other levels of argumentation,

⁴² Harris, p. 129.

⁴³ Blatt, pp. 58-59.

contemporary satire and historical perspective:

The three levels of argumentation are cleverly interwoven. The contemporary satire is rife in allusions to popular superstitious beliefs, images, and the ritual of the Roman Catholic Church changed into witchcraft or distorted through parody. The historical perspective is given through lists of victims who have succumbed to evil in past and present ages. Uniting these two, we have the perennial conflict between good and evil, begun at the fall of man and continuing till Henry VIII and his son took the matter in hand.⁴⁴

Miss Blatt notes that Bale is argumentative, and that the three levels of argument are skilfully intermeshed. But this argumentative jostling and, as Miss Blatt suggests, optimistic implication that peace arrived with Henry VIII and Edward VI, is absent in the cycles. Bale's purpose in using his vehicles in this morality-like play, is to present and promote the new faith as virtue and denigrate the old faith as vice.

Bale, ex-Carmelite prior, in the Three Laws wrote five sermons which he connected together. Each begins with an introduction, each contains exempla, each has its exhortations, each ends in a summary, and the fifth ends in a prayer followed by a hymn (A Song upon Benedictus).

Bale is writing scholastic argument in which his historical, biblical and dogmatic ideas are so important to himself and the in-group for which he writes that dramatic affectiveness is unnecessary: his arguments and his purpose, are

⁴⁴ Blatt, p. 86.

forces which move his play. As a polemicist Bale writes with a searing white fire, so that his arguments appear apodictic and apocalyptically absolute. And Bale places these beliefs, these facts, wrapped up in the form of a play, before the audience for their persuasion. As a polemicist, too, Bale is relentless, persistent and clawing. The victim is never left alone, and is so patently hated by Bale, that the audience loathes his name. Bale in the Three Laws wrought a scintillating polemic true to its nature, and alive with his sincere, confessional beliefs.

CHAPTER VII

† CONCLUSION

In the beginning we learned that many critics judged that John Bale's four scriptural plays formed a cycle, without ever indicating whether or not it was considered to be like a medieval mystery cycle. This thesis has examined those Balean plays to discover their exact nature and structure. The study consisted in minutely examining the texts of God's Promises, John Baptist's Preaching, the Temptation of Our Lord, and the Three Laws, both against the content and tradition of the medieval cycles, and against the background of the times. Our study concluded that the plays fell into the genre of religious and political controversy. Not only were they not pageants in a mystery-cycle fashion, but they were self-contained non-chronological plays approximating a morality or interlude.

Following the chronology of the plays as listed in his Catalogus, 1557, the examination disclosed that the spirit of John Bale began to show an increasing venom against the Roman Catholic Church as it progressed from play to play; God's Promises' belittling of Roman Catholics is mild compared with the savage attack on the Roman Clergy in the Three Laws. In each of the plays, Bale, repeatedly emphasizes a Protestant viewpoint. In God's Promises Bale stresses that the Christian

is justified by faith; in John Baptist's Preaching Bale preaches that God's way is the word of the Gospel; in the Temptation of Our Lord Bale enjoins the faithful to follow Christ in the Scriptures, and to ignore those who preach fasting and forget the Scriptures; and in the Three Laws Bale preaches that salvation is merited by belief in the New Testament.

Under scrutiny, the plays soon divulge their debating form. No matter who the protagonist, or who is the butt on the stage, the protagonist is always the Church of the Reformation versus the Church of Rome. This is true even though the protagonist is Pater Coelestis, John the Baptist, Christ or Vindicta Dei. For John Bale, despite Lily Campbell's suggestion that he is writing a new genre of Bible play, is engaged, throughout the four plays, in polemicization, and his aim is the destruction of the Roman Church in England. That Bale's characters have enough life to live upon the stage cannot be denied.

In these four plays the method and motif never change: no matter what scriptural event or philosophical argument opens the play, the general drift, plot and conclusion are all unchanged--the evil, the error, the sinfulness and the damnation of the Roman Catholics. No matter how the plot is worked out, the conclusion is always the same--the papists are depraved, lecherous sodomites who are on the road to hell

while the Protestant reformers are on the way to heaven.

We have examined carefully the question of the genre or subgenre these plays belong to, and have concluded that they belong to what we might call dramatized polemics. It is true they approach the morality play in the use of abstract characters but while the good or the typical morality play deals with principles involving unified mankind (such as Everyman or Mankind), Bale's principles and conclusions are not universal but particular, dividing man into bad, papists, and good, Protestants. *Naturae Lex* and *Moseh Lex* are shown to be outdated and replaced finally by *Christi Lex*, exemplified by Bale's principles and tenets.

From the purely dramatic point of view, it should be said that although many of Bale's protagonists are generally apt to be mechanical and preachy, the abstract characters resembling vices and representing the Catholic Church and its officers are, in the spirit of Elizabethan comedy, often delightful and humorous.

1

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ABSTRACT

The four spiritual plays of John Bale are examined with a view to discovering their essential nature, whether cycle, morality or other genre. Content, style and manner are examined against the background of the historical and theological temper of the time in which they were produced.

Chapter I examines the critics' judgments, and outlines the religious temper of the age in which Bale wrote. Chapter II studies, as a method of comparison, the spirit of the medieval cycle, where many critics have referred to these plays as forming a Protestant cycle. Subsequent chapters examine minutely the texts of the four plays, that is, God's Promises, John Baptist's Preaching, Temptation of Our Lord, and the Three Laws.

The conclusion of this thesis is that examination shows these plays not to be linked as a kind of chronological cycle, as was the case of the craft plays, but that each of these plays was, in fact, a self-contained polemic aimed in most cases not only at certain historical, biblical enemies of Christ, but most particularly against the contemporary opponents of John Bale's Protestant persuasion, the Roman Catholic Church, the Roman clergy and the papacy. The link between the past and the present was achieved by a subtle and continuous thread of parallelism and identification.