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John Bale, Imperial Monarchy, and the Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Ireland

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Abstract

The episcopal mission of Englishman John Bale to Ireland in 1553 provides historians with a unique window into the interconnected British and Irish histories of the early English Reformation. Scholarship on Bale has long explored his life and theology in all European theatres of the Reformation in which he was involved. Yet, key features of his mission and theology remain underappreciated. Building on recent work that has contextualized Bale's Irish mission and ecclesiology within the imperial outlook of the Edwardian regime and Reformation, the article examines Bale's mission against the worlds of English evangelical and continental Protestant political theology he inhabited, and the mingling of Henrician and Edwardian 'reformist' energies in Ireland with which it intersected and clashed. It argues that, under conditions of English colonial rule and empire in Ireland, Bale expressed a political theology that, imperial by circumstance and implication, turned his spiritual vocation modelled on Christ into a receptacle for divine and princely sovereignty that set rival conceptions of royal authority, idolatry, and Anglo-Irish constitutional relations against each other. Evangelical political theology thus acquired different hues on either side of the Irish Sea, with important implications for how we understand the early English Reformation across England and Ireland.

In stark contrast to England, the Reformation in Ireland under Edward VI was something of a fire that never sparked. The agenda and pace for 'reform' in England under the Boy King was set by an evangelically dominated government's radical campaign to build the 'true church' – an effort that, while enjoying but pockets of regional support, was accompanied by an explosion of evangelical print culture that the regime had difficulties containing.[1] In

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[1] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: a life* (2nd edn, New Haven, CT, and London, 2016), chs. 9–12; idem, *Tudor church militant: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation* (2nd edn, London, 2001); Catharine Davies, *A religion of the word: the defence of the Reformation in the reign of Edward VI*

Ireland, a divided land of disputed English and Irish territories, Henrician efforts to subjugate the island acquired new dimensions and problems as the Reformation took an evangelical turn – but to comparatively limited effect. With a handful of evangelicals on the ground and a kingdom over which the seat of English power, Dublin Castle, exercised little control, historians have argued that the crown's capacity to enforce its policies amidst an indifferent or hostile population, while suggestive of the possibility of future success, made so little headway as to be largely inconsequential.[2] This article re-evaluates the early Reformation in Ireland. Narrowing in on the period's most effective evangelical campaign, John Bale's mission to Kilkenny in 1553, it suggests that a reassessment of its place within wider European Protestant thought can recast our understanding of mid-Tudor evangelical political theology, Anglo-Irish relations, and the legacies of the crown's break with Rome.

Scholarship on Bale has long explored his life and thought as an ex-Carmelite friar turned zealous evangelical reformer, polemicist, and early Renaissance playwright.[3] Known for his vituperative polemical style, historians and literary scholars have extensively studied his role and theology in all theatres of the Reformation in which he was involved – whether in England as a controversial preacher and Cromwell's stage propagandist, whether in exile on the continent in the 1540s and 1550s, or whether in Ireland from January to August 1553, where, as new bishop of Ossory, he laboured to build the 'true church' in Kilkenny against widespread lay and clerical hostility. Indeed, Bale's time in Ireland was short but eventful. A reformer of marked Swiss Reformed inclination and awash in apocalyptic thinking and expectation, Bale unabashedly saw himself as a new evangelical-style saint doing God's work at the End of Days as he frequently challenged clergy and magistrates for their 'idolatry' and disobedience. He was a zealous but isolated preacher: his 'lack of pragmatism' ensured he would encounter much hostility. But since he appears to have attracted a following, his ministry also presents compelling evidence for counterfactual meditations on successful Reformation had the regime succeeded in organizing a robust preaching ministry across the island.[4]

Historians of Ireland, in short, have largely been concerned with Bale's character, the progress of his ministry, and the causes of its limited success and overwhelming failure. Yet, key features of his mission and theology remain underappreciated. As Stephen Tong has recently argued, moreover, existing scholarship has not sufficiently contextualized Bale's mission in Ireland within the broader imperial designs and outlook of the Edwardian regime and Reformation.[5]

It is the central contention of this article that John Bale's life and thought provides historians with a unique comparative window into the early English Reformation as a British *and* Irish phenomenon.[6] As such, new perspectives on his brief but eventful mission to Ireland in 1553 can foster greater dialogue between historians of the Reformation on either side of the Irish Sea who unfortunately remain unequally conversant with each other's work. What follows examines Bale's mission in Kilkenny against the wider world of English evangelical and continental Protestant political theology he inhabited, and the mingling of Henrician and Edwardian 'reformist' energies in Ireland with which it intersected and clashed. I focus on four interrelated concepts that defined evangelical duties to God, king, and flock: vocation, episcopacy, and ministry, and God's spiritual and civil swords. For English evangelicals, the pastor, by the authority of his vocation as called by God, claimed via Christ a spiritual power distinct from all worldly dominion but which harmoniously balanced the spiritual and civil domains of Christian life and governance: the two swords, one wielded by kings and magistrates, the other by God's spiritual spokespersons, were finely delineated in a holistic vision of lay and clerical ministerial order. But Bale's Irish ministry was different. Ignoring that Ireland was an independent dominion under the English crown, Bale saw himself as a subject of the imperial crown of England, an agent of the royal supremacy in a dominion that was but a mere extension of England's jurisdiction.[7] Deepening the period's evolving conditions of English colonial rule and empire in Ireland, Bale by force of circumstance expressed a political theology with imperial valences that turned his episcopal vocation modelled on Christ's ministry into a receptacle for divine and princely sovereignty that set rival conceptions of royal authority, idolatry, and Anglo-Irish constitutional

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or reforming zeal? John Bale as first Church of Ireland bishop of Ossory (1552/53–1563)', in Vincent P. Carey and Ute Lotz Heumann, eds., *Colonial and confessional mentalités in early modern Ireland (essays in honour of Karl S. Bottigheimer)* (Dublin, 2003), pp. 42–60; Murray, *Enforcing the English Reformation*, pp. 201–2; Jefferies, 'Why the Reformation failed in Ireland', pp. 157, 169; idem, *The Irish church*, pp. 99–102.

[5] Stephen Tong, 'An English bishop afloat in an Irish see: John Bale, bishop of Ossory, 1552–3', *Studies in Church History*, 54 (2018), pp. 144–58; idem, *Building the Church of England: the Book of Common Prayer and the Edwardian Reformation* (Leiden, 2023), pp. 212–13.

[6] For exemplary studies that adopt a complementary transregional perspective, see Christopher Maginn, *William Cecil, Ireland, and the Tudor state* (Oxford, 2012); Brendan Kane, *The politics and culture of honor in Britain and Ireland, 1541-1641* (Cambridge, 2010); Rory Rapple, *Martial power and Elizabethan political culture: military men in England and Ireland, 1558-1594* (Cambridge, 2009); Jane Dawson, *The politics of religion in the age of Mary, queen of Scots: the earl of Argyll and the struggle for Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2002).

[7] Tong, 'An English bishop afloat', pp. 144, 149, 151, 158.

relations against each other. Evangelical political theology thus acquired different hues on either side of the Irish Sea, with important implications for how we understand the early English Reformation across England and Ireland.

I

Episcopacy was central to the English Reformation.[8] But very few bishops in England and Ireland were committed to 'reform' along the lines envisioned by the regime under Henry VIII or Edward VI: heads of the church on earth under Christ English kings may have been since the repudiation of Rome, but obstacles remained.[9] Limited, therefore, was the evangelical ideal of Christ's true preachers purging the land of 'superstition' and 'idolatry' under the jurisdiction of the crown. But if often unrealized or betrayed, the ideal remained a prominent fixture of the English Reformation on both sides of the Irish Sea.

The ideal of a godly ministry owed much to the medieval – and especially Franciscan – pastoral heritage that both Ireland and England shared: the reinvigoration of clerical responsibilities through emphases on the spiritual duty and benefits of preaching. While this shared heritage fractured considerably by the reign of Henry VIII – Ireland saw none of the humanist and other 'reform' that in England since the late fifteenth century had gradually redefined the ideal of the preacher and the form, content, and delivery of his sermons – a notable change in the 1530s affected preaching culture in both Tudor dominions: the reinvigorated public significance imparted to homilies, which became an instrument to consolidate royal power.[10] From 1535, the imperative to preach the Word of God not only inflected calls for 'reform' but was actively promoted by the regime. The period from 1532 to 1553 witnessed the same recurring challenges involving the licensing of amenable preachers, periodic censorship, and the disputes, dangers, and confusion precipitated by the preaching of conflicting doctrines.[11] Ireland, however, saw little of this activity. Indeed, Bale was in his fiery zeal a 'new breed of bishop' in Ireland.[12] Prior to his arrival, there had been in 1538 one officially sanctioned preaching campaign led by the archbishop of Dublin, George Browne, to enforce the royal supremacy across the lordship, a series of sermons by Browne and the bishop of Meath, Edward Staples, in the Pale, and an expression of interest by John

[8] Patrick Collinson, 'Episcopacy and reform in England in the later sixteenth century', in *Godly people: essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London, 2003), pp. 155–89; Marcus K. Harmes, *Bishops and power in early modern England* (London, 2013).

[9] MacCulloch, *Cranmer*, pp. 125–34; idem, *Tudor church militant*, p. 59; Ryrie, *The gospel and Henry VIII*, pp. 213–22; Jefferies, *Priests and prelates*.

[10] Susan Wabuda, *Preaching during the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 23, 33–7, 89–99; Lucy E. C. Wooding, 'From Tudor humanism to Reformation preaching', in Peter McCullough, Hugh Adlington, and Emma Rhatigan, eds., *The Oxford handbook of the early modern sermon* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 328–47; Colmán N. Ó Clabaigh, *The Franciscans in Ireland, 1400–1534: from reform to Reformation* (Dublin, 2002).

[11] Susan Brigden, *The Reformation in London* (Oxford, 1988), chs. 4–8; MacCulloch, *Cranmer*, chs. 4–8; Wabuda, *Preaching*, pp. 41–8.

[12] Ellis, 'John Bale', p. 286.

Butler, archbishop of Cashel, to acquire evangelical books from England to use in his sermons. Another short-lived bout of evangelical sermons followed in late 1548 in Dublin and Meath by Browne, Staples, and a recently arrived Scotsman, Walter Palatyne. Possibly at least one more, a funeral sermon in the form of the late king's auditor in Ireland, Richard Brasier's last will and confession of faith, was delivered at St Patrick's Cathedral in January 1551 against apostates. Meanwhile, enforcement of the 'book of reformation' in 1548 (which likely included the Edwardian injunctions of 1547 and some of Cranmer's Homilies) was met with a mixture of acquiescence and hostility, as were efforts to promote the 1549 Prayer Book, a slightly modified version of which was printed in Dublin in 1551. By 1551–2, after years of efforts to implement the changes in Dublin, Meath, Kilkenny, Limerick, and Galway came to little and were to some extent side-lined by the exigencies of defence against English and Irish lords in the marches, the new lord deputy and committed evangelical, Sir James Croft, lamented the lacklustre zeal of the bishops on whom he depended to promulgate the new settlement. It was in this context that Bale was appointed bishop of Ossory in the autumn of 1552.[13]

We know the details of Bale's ministry from his own account, *The vocacyon of Johan Bale*. A 'retrospective sermon' and 'homily to true believers', Bale's treatise was a highly polemic piece of writing printed swiftly after he departed Ireland in September 1553, shortly after Catholic Mary I became queen of England and Ireland. Its ultimate purpose: to provide beleaguered English evangelicals an antidote to despair by unveiling the providential deliverance of all those who struggled for the gospel. It was by no means, in other words, a transparent account of conditions in Ireland.[14] Yet, despite its polemical provenance, it does provide important evidence of the hopes and challenges reformers encountered in Ireland in the early 1550s. Perhaps most importantly, it also speaks to Bale's own sense that there existed a real prospect for the Reformation's success in Ireland. Notably, only a year prior to his appointment as bishop of Ossory, Bale had recommended as both desirable and urgent Scripture's translation into Welsh and Irish.[15] The man whom Alec Ryrie has rightly characterized as belonging to a group of exiles caustically uninterested in preaching to the non-converted clearly also had a more

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[13] Bradshaw, 'The Edwardian Reformation', pp. 83–5, 89–93; Murray, *Enforcing the English Reformation*, pp. 105–12, 199–200; Henry A. Jefferies, 'Elizabeth's Reformation in the Irish Pale', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 66 (2015), pp. 524–42, at pp. 538–9; idem, *The Irish church*, 89–97; Ellis, 'John Bale', 285; Canice Mooney OFM, 'The first impact of the Reformation', in Patrick J. Corish, ed., *A history of Irish Catholicism* (Dublin and Melbourne, 1969), pp. 6, 11–12, 21–2; Richard Brasier, *A godly wil and confession of the Christian faythe, made by Rychard Brasier, late auditour to the kings maiestie in Ireland* (London, 1551), sig. A2r. On warfare and defence, see Ciaran Brady, *Chief governors: the rise and fall of reform government in Tudor Ireland, 1536-1588* (New York, NY, 1994), pp. 46–60. On episcopal appointments, see Bradshaw, 'The Edwardian Reformation', pp. 87, 89, 93; Jefferies, *The Irish church*, pp. 91, 93–6, 98.

[14] Ellis, 'John Bale', pp. 283, 286, 297; J.-A. George, '*The vocacyon of Johan Bale* (1553): a retrospective sermon from Ireland', in Alan J. Fletcher and Raymond Gillespie, eds., *Irish preaching, 700-1700* (Dublin, 2001), pp. 94–107, at pp. 97–8; Happé, *John Bale*, pp. 17–18; Tong, *Building the Church of England*, pp. 185–6, 223.

[15] John Bale, *The apologye of Johan Bale agynste a ranke papyst* (London, 1550), fos. 79v–80r.

outward-looking zeal.[16] Indeed, this missionary drive was central to Bale and his co-religionists' understanding of the spiritual vocation of the earthly shepherd spreading the truth of Christ's gospel in a hostile world. As Bale's account makes clear, his vocation was providentially guided, rooted in obedience to God and king, it partook in the ministry of Christ, and its primary function was to spread God's Word. This, after all, was what evangelicals had been arguing for the better part of a decade: that the life of a bishop and preacher was wrapped up in a Christological conception of vocation.

According to such evangelical stalwarts as John Hooper, Hugh Latimer, Thomas Lever, Robert Crowley, and others, and bearing clear affinities with Luther's notion of a calling, vocations were the crucible of life and salvation.[17] It encompassed all the activities of one's livelihood, status, and purpose as a godly task and responsibility that, performed in obedience to God, defined one's life: God appointed all to their vocation, and through it, the earthly path by which they would be saved. Humans could not sustain 'the office of ony uocacion be it pollicicall, Eclessiasticall, or domesticall with out a singulaer ayde of god'. All must pray to God to be governed in their vocation in obedience to the divine will. Neglecting 'the worckes of oure vocacion' incurred the loss of God's grace and the punishment of the Lord.[18] By conducting themselves charitably in their 'degree and vocation, as Gods minister', all laboured against the devil's guile and ensured that God's grace was not received in vain.[19] And the model of all Christian vocations and callings – to live in patience and suffering – was Christ.[20]

The duties and responsibilities of a pastoral vocation, particularly an episcopal one, were therefore high: the figure of the 'ideal bishop', as Patrick Collinson long ago observed, was 'an image which continued to haunt the English Church from the earliest years of the Reformation to the days of the Long Parliament'.[21] A few in the 1520s and 1530s attacked the principle of clerical hierarchy. But all Henrician and Edwardian proclamations, formularies of faith, and most

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[16] On the attitude of English exiles in the 1540s, see Ryrie, *The gospel and Henry VIII*, p. 125.

[17] On Luther's concept of calling, see Max Weber, *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (1905), trans. Talcott Parsons (New York, NY, 2003), pp. 79–92. On the Lutheran legacy in England, see Alec Ryrie, 'The strange death of Lutheran England', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 58 (2002), pp. 64–92; Carl R. Trueman, *Luther's legacy: salvation and English reformers, 1525-1556* (Oxford, 1994).

[18] John Hooper, *An oversight, and deliberacion upon the holy Prophete Jonas* (London, 1550), fos. 17v, 99v–100r; idem, *A declaracion of Christe and of his offyce* (Zurich, 1547), sigs. K1r –K2r, K5v, M5r; idem, *An answer unto my lord of wynchesters booke* (Basel, 1547), sig. N3r; Robert Crowley, *The voyce of the laste trumpet, blowen by the seuenth angel (as is mentioned in the eleuenth of the Apocalips) callynge al the estates of menne to the right path of their vocation* (London, 1549), sigs. A2r–A3r, B1v, B4v, C6r; idem, *Pleasure and payne, heauen and hell* (London, 1550), sig. D5r; idem, *The way to wealth* (London, 1550), sig. B7v; Hugh Latimer, *A notable sermon* (London, 1549), sig. C2v; idem, *Sermons and remains*, ed. G. E. Corrie (2 vols., Cambridge, 1844, 1848), II, pp. 27–43, 94, 119–22, 151, 154–5, 159, 201.

[19] Thomas Lever, *A sermon preached at Pauls Crosse* (London, 1550), sigs. B6v–B7r, B8r; idem, *A fruitfull sermon made in Poules churche at London in the shrouds* (London, 1550), sigs. B4v, E5v, E6r; Thomas Cole, *A godly and fruteful sermon made at Maidstone* (London, 1553), sigs. E1r–E2v.

[20] Roger Hutchinson, *Works*, ed. J. Bruce (Cambridge, 1842), pp. 313–40, esp. pp. 314–18, 320–2, 339.

[21] Collinson, 'Episcopacy and reform', p. 156.

evangelicals endorsed episcopal supervisory powers over other clergy and respected episcopacy as a venerable institution with a scriptural pedigree.[22] And all, in line with Erasmus, Luther, and Zwingli, defined priestly and episcopal responsibilities in the same way: the preacher's vocation consisted of boldly wielding the authority of God to minister the sacraments, discipline the faithful, provide for the poor, and study and preach Scripture.[23] Most importantly, they modelled the episcopal office and preaching ministry on the ministry of Christ. 'Christ is the preacher of al preachers', Latimer declared at Paul's Cross in 1549, 'the patrone and the exemplar, that all preachers oughte to folowe'.[24] The true bishop, like all pastors, was self-effacing as he walked with Christ, called by God to his vocation, just as Christ and St Paul had called preachers. Ministers in Christ reigned not as lords over the clergy: this was the defining characteristic of 'false' preachers, or the minions of the papacy, which for evangelicals was a worldly monarchy and the very embodiment of Antichrist – a favourite theme of Bale's.[25] Rather, Christ's true ministers killed their fleshly lusts and turned away from the world's vanities and pleasures to teach the gospel for the salvation of all.[26] The 'office of a Christen byshopp', Bale observed in his *A dysclosynge or opening of the manne of synne*, 'were rather to preache than to ponnyshe, rather to fede than to famyshe, rather gentlylle to allure than curryshely to rebuke before the worlde, were he after the ordre of Christ and hys apostles'. To spread the gospel and bring all to repent and amend 'their former lyfe', he later wrote, was a 'speciall election of God'.[27] Although Bale frequently compared himself to

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[22] Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan movement* (London, 1967), pp. 59–70, 101–8; idem, 'Episcopacy and reform', pp. 157–8, 161–5; Davies, *A religion of the word*, pp. 104–6, 116–17; Harmes, *Bishops and power*, ch. 1; Gunther, *Reformation unbound*, pp. 44–51.

[23] On Erasmus, see Wabuda, *Preaching*, pp. 66–8, 70, 86–7. See also Collinson, 'Episcopacy and reform', pp. 159–60. On the English translations of Zwingli's and Luther's tracts on true bishops and pastors, see Gunther, *Reformation unbound*, pp. 32–5; Carrie Euler, *Couriers of the gospel: England and Zurich, 1531–1558* (Zurich, 2006), pp. 148–54.

[24] Hugh Latimer, *The fourth sermon of Maister Hughe Latimer* (London, 1549), sig. K6v. See also his *A notable sermon*, esp. sigs. A2v, A4v, B3r, and his sermon of 21 Feb. 1552, *Sermons and remains*, II, pp. 209–16.

[25] Latimer, *A notable sermon*, sigs. B4–B6r; John Hooper, *A godly confession and protestacion of the christian fayth* (London, 1550), sig. G2r–v; Richard Tracy, *A supplication to our moste souereigne lorde Kyng Henry the Eight* (Antwerp, 1544), sigs. C3v–C5r; John Bale, *The epistle exhortatorye of an Enmglyshe christiane unto his derely beloued contrey of Englande* (Anwerp, 1544), fo. 22v; Bernardino Ochino, *A trageoedie or dialoge of the unjust usurped primacie of the bishop of Rome*, trans. John Ponet (London, 1549).

[26] William Tyndale, *The obedience of a christen man* (Antwerp, 1528), fo. 54v; idem, *The practyse of prelates* (Antwerp, 1530), sigs. A5v–A6r; John Bale, *A dysclosynge or openynge of the manne of synne* (Zurich, 1543), fos. 31v, 37r; Lever, *A sermon*, sig. B5r; Tracy, *A supplication*, sigs. A5r, C5r; Huldrych Zwingli, *The ymage of bothe pastoures*, trans. Jean Veron (London, 1550), sigs. B8r, C2v–C5v, D1rv; Martin Luther, *The images of a verye christen bysshop, and of a couterfayte bysshop*, trans. William Marshall (London, 1536), sigs. B1r, B3v–B4r, M4r; Peter Pickering, *A myroure or glasse for all spiritual ministers to beholde them selues in* (London, 1551), sigs. A3r, A7r, A8r–B1r; Roger Hutchinson, *The image of God* (London, 1550), sig. L8r.

[27] Bale, *A dysclosynge*, fo. 31v; idem, *A declaration of Edmonde Bonners articles* (London, 1561), fo. 28r–v; idem, *The vocacyon of Ioha[n] Bale to the bishoprick of Ossorie in Irela[n]de his persecucio[n]s I ye same, & finall delyueraunce* (Antwerp, 1553), fos. 2v–6v, 9r.

Christ's apostles, especially St Paul, this remained the Christological model of episcopal vocation that defined his ministry in Ireland.

Leaving England on 21 January 1553, the new bishop of Ossory arrived in Waterford three days later. He was very dismayed by what he encountered. Bale reckoned that Christ had no bishop and the king no faithful minister in the city. Idolatry was everywhere, as were 'Epicurish priests' (clergy who were of the flesh and ruled by their belly, or 'beastly belly goddess', as he frequently put it elsewhere).[28] At least some reprieve was had in Dublin, where Bale happily met his English companion, Hugh Goodacre, just appointed archbishop of Armagh, along with an old friend, David Copper, a parson at Calais. 'Much of the people' allegedly rejoiced at their coming. Trouble, however, quickly surfaced. The dean of Christ Church Cathedral, Thomas Lockwoode, refused to consecrate Bale according to the Reformed 1552 Prayer Book, arguing 'that it was not as yet consented to by acte of their parlement in Irelande'. Bale was unequivocal in his response: 'If Englande and Irelande be undre one kinge / they are both bounde to ye obedience of one lawe undre him. And as for us / we came hither as true subiectes of his / sworne to obeye that ordinaunce'. The lord chancellor, Thomas Cusack, conceded to Bale's wishes, after which Archbishop Browne proceeded with the ordination.[29] Bale subsequently preached every Sunday and holy day until Easter. He preached an additional twelve sermons the week after, during which he thought he had 'established the people' in 'true' doctrine and devotion. Friends of Bale, however, warned him of potential dangers after Thomas Goodacre was poisoned in Dublin. Little deterred, Bale went on preaching in Kilkenny, first on Ascension Day and then on Trinity Sunday and St Peter's Day. Meanwhile, he conceded that only a few priests had probably repented for their errors, with many refusing to observe the 1552 Prayer Book. In this, he claimed they emulated their metropolitan superior, Archbishop Browne, excusing themselves on the grounds that they lacked books and the consent of their own justices and lawyers – an argument Bale found especially egregious since he reckoned it elevated lawyers over the king.[30]

II

What should we make of such disputes? And what do they tell us about Bale's episcopal vocation and the Edwardian Reformation in wider British and Irish context? To answer these questions, we must first delineate what a spiritual vocation modelled on Christ looked like in practice. Key, here, were the doctrine of the two swords, and the duty of preaching as a forum for godly counsel. Evangelicals deployed a Christological model of spiritual power that harmoniously balanced the worldly and the spiritual, and the domain of princes and that of preachers. By speaking from 'Christ's chair', godly ministers

[28] Bale, *The vocacyon*, fos. 17v–18r; idem, *A christen exhortacyon vnto customable swearers* (Antwerp, 1543), fos. 21r–22r; idem, *A dysclosynge*, fo. 87v; idem, *The epistle exhortatorye*, fo. 22r.

[29] Bale, *The vocacyon*, fos. 18r–19v, 20v.

[30] Ibid., fos. 21v–22r.

in their vocation channelled the sovereignty of God, curried the sovereignty of princes, and built the 'true church'.

In the reign of Henry VIII, evangelicals viewed their sovereign like he saw himself since the break with Rome: an Old Testament-style king who combatted sin and rid the world of idolatry, superstition, and the rule of Antichrist.[31] Even with the Six Articles of 1539 and the intermittent persecution of the 1540s, their obedience remained but it acquired new forms – especially for the small group of exiles, of which Bale figured prominently. Faith in the regime's 'reformist' credentials for those in England became the starting point for what Ryrie has called 'a short-lived but strikingly eirenic form of evangelicalism' that in matters of doctrine favoured calm, persuasive dialogue over caustic polemic. Exiles, by contrast, were less sanguine and the room for bold rebukes of the king and his 'papistical' counsellors grew just as their impression of impending apocalypse galvanized their sense of being 'the outcast prophets of a cause which would be rescued by God against all worldly expectation'.[32] Things changed, however, under Edward VI. Evangelicals continued to view kings as accountable solely to God and conscientiously bound to promote and defend God's Word. In fact, such were the ingredients of English imperial political theology: after all, the realm of England had by parliamentary act been formally declared an empire in 1533, and for Bale and others who extolled the virtues of godly kingship in eulogies to imperial monarchy, Edward VI was 'our present Constantine', the first Christian Roman emperor who established peace in the church and suppressed all foreign tyrannies.[33] But something of the prophetic boldness of the less irenic became entangled in constructions of godly monarchy when through high-profile sermons the Boy King was 'exposed to the duties, obligations, implications, and historical and providential dimensions of his own kingship'. 'This was kingship', Stephen Alford writes, 'at its most complex, absolute but accountable, unlimited but underpinned and informed by the written Word of God (Scripture) and by the spoken (the preacher)' who spoke from 'Christ's chair'.[34]

Preachers, as Catharine Davies observes, boasted a 'considerable spiritual and moral autonomy in their chosen role as prophets, interpreting the law of God to the relevant human authorities'.[35] Such autonomy was a function of their adaptation of the medieval distinction between the two swords by which God governed the world.[36] Although separate, the two swords were

[31] Alec Ryrie, 'Divine kingship and royal theology in Henry VIII's Reformation', *Reformation*, 7 (2002), pp. 49–77; Davies, *A religion of the word*, pp. 146–58.

[32] Ryrie, *The gospel and Henry VIII*, pp. 58–72, 84–8, 106–34, quotes at pp. 69 and 120–1.

[33] John Bale, *An expostulation or complaynte agaynste the blasphemyes of a franticke papyst of Hamshyre* (London, 1552), sigs. A5v, A6rv; idem, *The vocacyon*, fo. 10v.

[34] Stephen Alford, *Kingship and politics in the reign of Edward VI* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 37, 43; Ryrie, *The gospel and Henry VIII*, pp. 145–56, 250.

[35] Catharine Davies, '"Poor persecuted little flock" or "commonwealth of Christians": Edwardian Protestant concepts of the church', in Peter Lake and Maria Dowling, eds., *Protestantism and the national church in sixteenth-century England* (London and New York, NY, 1987), p. 89.

[36] On the medieval swords, see John Watt, 'Spiritual and temporal powers', in J. H. Burns, ed., *The Cambridge history of medieval political thought, c. 350 – c. 1450* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 367–423.

complementary. By his civil sword, the king – or more precisely, God through him – punished transgressors of divine and human law.[37] The spiritual sword, by contrast, was, in Peter Pickering's memorable phrase, a 'ministerie of exhortation': a power to govern churches and 'people in there uocation', untainted by force or compulsion and exercised solely through persuasion, admonishment, and education.[38] It opened one's heart to God and converted one away from the sins magistrates were obliged to punish. Kings certainly paved the way for their subjects' salvation by appointing upright ministers to preach, providing them with a living, and removing those who hindered the gospel. But the more effective Christ's ministers, the less kings required punishing offenders: the state of the commonwealth partially depended on bishops and others diligently pursuing their vocation. As Bale put it in his *Vocacyon*, while in Ireland he 'treated at large both of yᵉ heauenly & political state of yᵉ christen churche' and 'preached the Gospell of yᵉ knowledge & right inuocacion of God / I mayntened the political ordre by doctrine / & moued the commens always to obeye their magistrates'.[39] Preachers, too, had a unique access to the heavenly kingdom, not as absolvers of sin, as Rome taught, but as the conveyors of God's Word in the world. For Bale, heaven was an empire and spiritual kingdom at the right hand of a God that the true ministers of Christ embodied in him.[40] Christ's ministers were given the keys to the celestial kingdom by the Lord. 'The kingdome of heauen', declared Latimer in 1549, echoing William Tyndale's exact words from 1528, 'is preaching of the Gospel'. For God's true ministers, as Bale put it, had the 'poure to marke hys faythfull seruauntes unto saluacion'.[41] But just as preaching was but a vehicle for God's grace and the Holy Ghost in the hearts of the penitent and contrite, so the Herculean task of ridding the world of Antichrist remained that of God alone.[42] By thus working together through God's Word, a prince and his pastors ensured order in the spiritual and civil domains.

But what maintained this equilibrium? Kings, Hooper explained in Lent 1549, must properly judge whether bishops 'do true seruice to God'. Bishops, for their part, must knowledgeably and soberly admonish their prince when they commanded anything contrary to God.[43] Indeed, as a form of admonishment and persuasion, spiritual power was a species of counsel. A ruler had a natural

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[37] John Hooper, *Godly and most necessary annotations in the xiii. chapyter too the Romaynes* (Worcester, 1551), sig. C5v.

[38] Pickering, *A myroure*, sigs. A4r, B2r, B5v; Hooper, *An answer*, sigs. G2v–G3r.

[39] Hooper, *An oversight*, fo. 45v; Tracy, *A supplication*, sig. B5r–v; Hutchinson, *The image of God*, sig. M1v; Bale, *The vocacyon*, fo. 20r–v.

[40] Bale, *A dysclosynge*, fo. 9v; idem, *The apologye*, fos. 70r–v, 76r.

[41] Hugh Latimer, *A sermon of Master Latimer, preached at Stamford the.ix.day of October, anno. M.cccc. and fyftie* (London, 1550), sigs. A6r, C1r; Tyndale, *The obedience of a christen man*, fo. 22r; John Bale, *The image of bothe churches* (London, 1548), sig. M8v. On the keys as a declaratory power that announced, rather than determined, who was saved or damned, see Hutchinson, *The image of God*, sigs. B3r, B4v, F5r, L2r–M5r; Hugh Latimer, *The thyrde sermon of Maister Hughe Latimer* (London, 1549), sig. G7v.

[42] Hooper, *Annotations*, sigs. C4v–C5r; idem, *A godly confession*, sigs. F2v–F3r; Latimer, *A sermon*, sig. E7v; Tracy, *A supplication*, sig. B5v; Bale, *A dysclosynge*, fo. 7v; idem, *The vocacyon*, fo. 15v.

[43] Hooper, *An oversight*, fo. 110r–v.

right to rule with or without counsel. But a counsellor had the duty to ensure the governance of the realm aligned with reason, justice, and the laws of God and nature.[44] Preachers as godly counsellors tasked themselves with advising the regime on further reformation, insisting that the prince and his council should listen while they castigated their failures and prophesied on the providential destruction to come if further 'reform' were stifled; they did not always listen, of course, and counsel – spiritual or otherwise – was limited in what it could achieve.[45] Most importantly, though, godly counsel throws into relief the unique status of the spiritual sword. If a godly preacher's admonishments were accepted, one embraced God's grace; if rejected, one spurned God.[46] That the episcopal office was self-effacing meant that Christ, the Holy Spirit, and God spoke *through* the preacher: the minister 'is ye mouth of god for the time he preacheth'. This could take on different rhetorical forms, in print and at the pulpit, though all agreed that the preacher's counsel was God's counsel and should thus be followed. While providing counsel to kings required caution, deference, and humility, for Latimer – and echoing Bullinger – rulers and magistrates were bound not only to obey God, but also God's ministers on all matters pertaining to the moral law (the Decalogue) and the gospel.[47] This was clearly bold – but as Latimer insisted in a later sermon and by referencing Prophet Ely's admonition of Ahab, it was not seditious: it was merely to convey

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[44] John Guy, 'The rhetoric of counsel in early modern England', in Dale Hoak, ed., *Tudor political culture* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 292–310; Jacqueline Rose, 'The problem of political counsel in medieval and early modern England and Scotland', in eadem, ed., *The politics of counsel in England and Scotland, 1286-1707* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 1–42; eadem, 'Kingship and counsel in early modern England', *Historical Journal*, 54 (2011), pp. 47–71.

[45] Patrick Collinson, 'If Constantine, then also Theodosius: St Ambrose and the integrity of the Elizabethan Ecclesia Anglicana', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 30 (1979), pp. 205–29; Susan Doran, 'Elizabeth I and counsel', in Rose, ed., *The politics of counsel*, pp. 151–69; Paulina Kewes, 'Kingship, counsel and early Elizabethan drama', in Rose, ed., *The politics of counsel*, pp. 171–92. On tensions between royal power and counsel, see Richard Rex, 'Councils, counsel and consensus in Henry VIII's Reformation', in Rose, ed., *The politics of counsel*, pp. 135–50; Alford, *Kingship and politics*, pp. 46–64, 159–71.

[46] Hooper, *An oversight*, fos. 42v–44r.

[47] On the preacher's counsel as God's counsel, see Cole, *A godly and fruteful sermon*, sig. A4r. See also John Mardeley, *A declaration of thee power of Gods worde* (London, 1548), sig. D1r; John Ponet, *A notable sermon concerninge the ryght use of the lordes supper* (London, 1550), sigs. B5v–C5r. On Bullinger, see Euler, *Couriers of the gospel*, pp. 46–7. On the unity of the laws of nature, Moses, and Christ amongst English Protestants, see Jonathan Willis, *The reformation of the Decalogue: religious identity and the ten commandments in England, c. 1485-1625* (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 20–8, 76, 81. On the cautious and humble delivery of counsel, see Latimer, *The thyrde sermon*, sigs. E6v–E7r; idem, *The seuenth sermon of Maister Hughe Latimer* (London, 1549), sig. Dd3r–v; idem, *The fyrste sermon of Mayster Hughe Latimer* (London, 1549), sig. C2r; Thomas Lever, *A sermon preached the thyrd Sondaye in Lente before the kynges majestie, and his honorable counsell* (London, 1550), sigs. A7r, B2v, B6r, E7v–E8r; idem, *A fruitfull sermon*, sigs. B7v–B8r, C1v–C3r; idem, *A sermon*, sigs. C5r–C6v; Crowley, *The voyce of the laste trumpet*, sig. B7r; idem, *Pleasure and payne*, sig. A6r. On princely obedience to preachers, see Latimer, *The fyrste sermon*, sigs. A6r–A7r; idem, *The sixte sermon of Maister Hughe Latimer* (London, 1549), sig. T1v; Hooper, *A godly confession*, sig. F1r; idem, *An oversight*, fo. 6r; B. Gilpin, *A godly sermon preached in the court at Greenwich the firste Sonday after the ephianie, anno domini. 1552* (London, 1581), fo. 26.

God's Word as called to do so by one's vocation.[48] Indeed, in their role as godly counsellors, and just like Zwingli and especially Bullinger, English evangelicals often posed as Old Testament prophets, warning their audiences of God's imminent wrath if they failed to repent.[49]

Such, then, was the spiritual power Bale and his co-religionists wielded as Christ's ministers: a power of exhortation and admonition, the gateway to salvation as a conveyor of God's most sacred Word, participating through their vocation and by divine election in the life and ministry of Christ. Wielded by prophets who occupied a self-effacing ministerial office, it was a power categorically distinct from the coercive force of the temporal sword, and one that even kings were obliged to submit to – but *only* in their accountability to God and *only* out of being called 'to the obedience of the fayth'.[50] Unlike the ideal humanist counsellor of Erasmus, More, Castiglione, Starkey, and Elyot, neither the godly counsellor's boldness nor the kind of obedience he was due risked elevating counsel above command – *but it did* similarly assume that a king must be governed by it.[51] Evangelicals had the advantage of defining their counsel via a spiritual power distinct from all involvement in civil affairs. Rather than appealing to any classical, institutional, or aristocratic authority or privilege, they rooted their lawful capacity to wield such a power in their spiritual vocation as called by God and in the scriptural example of Old Testament prophets, New Testament apostles, and Christ himself.

But did evangelicals always maintain such a harmony between the swords? Especially problematic were those bishops who were also members of the king's council. Evangelicals did not forbid bishops from becoming royal advisers, but they did warn against them overstepping or neglecting their office and vocation as a result.[52] In addition, not all supported the Old Testament models of ecclesiastical and royal governance and punishment to which many evangelicals appealed. A legacy of the Erastian subjugation of the church to the civil domain, it was ecclesiastical discipline that here proved the flashpoint of controversy. Evangelical understandings of the spiritual sword left the regulation of all outward discipline to the magistrate: any clerical claim 'to a jurisdiction over the laity (other than that exercised in the pulpit)', as Davies notes, was equated 'with popery'.[53] John Foxe, however, disagreed. Between

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[48] Latimer, *A faythful sermon*; idem, *A moste faithfull sermon preached before the kynges most excellente majestye, and hys most honorable councell, in hys courte at Westminster, by the reverend Father Master Hughe Latimer* (London, 1550), sigs. B8v–C1r.

[49] Torrance Kirby, *The Zurich connection and Tudor political theology* (Leiden, 2007), p. 28; Euler, *Couriers of the gospel*, p. 47; Davies, *A religion of the word*, pp. 187–97; Joy Shakespeare, 'Plague and punishment', in Lake and Dowling, eds., *Protestantism and the national church*, pp. 103–23.

[50] Cole, *A godly and fruteful sermon*, sig. A2r.

[51] On the humanist view, see Joanne Paul, *Counsel and command in early modern English thought* (Cambridge, 2020), chs. 1–2, esp. pp. 39, 65. On the complementary relationship between godly counsel and the royal supremacy, see Rose, 'Kingship and counsel', pp. 53–6; Patrick Collinson, *The religion of Protestants: the church in English society, 1559–1625* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 12–35.

[52] Hooper, *An oversight*, fo. 45r–v; Crowley, *Pleasure and payne*, sig. D2v; Davies, *A religion of the word*, p. 105.

[53] Davies, '"Poor persecuted little flock"', p. 89; eadem, *A religion of the word*, pp. 94–106. On the problem of the church's autonomy, see Margaret Bowker, 'The supremacy and the episcopate: the

1548 and 1551, and in a debate with George Joye, he moved toward a Pauline model of church-building that eschewed appeals to Old Testament prophets calling on kings to enforce the Decalogue and reduced the magistrate's role in church discipline while promoting greater church autonomy. As a clash between rival ecclesiologies and conceptions of the royal supremacy, the debate revealed how the Edwardian Reformation was slowly departing from its Henrician predecessor.[54] The period in fact did see new faces of obedience that foreshadowed Elizabethan nonconformity, the central point of strife being definitions of *adiaphora* (things indifferent for salvation), the use of 'idolatrous' ceremonies and paraphernalia, and the pace at which the dismantling of godless idolatry should be pursued to minimize offending weaker consciences and to secure the highest number of converts to the gospel. Most notable was the delay of Hooper's consecration as bishop of Gloucester in 1550–1 over his refusal to subscribe to Cranmer's Ordinal.[55] Yet, while evangelical political theology underwent important shifts in England, in another Tudor jurisdiction under the same Erastian shadow, the evangelical arrangement between the two swords was more profoundly destabilized. We return now to Bale's 1553 mission to Ireland.

III

Bale considered it his pastoral duty to fearlessly fulfil his vocation and calling, and to reprimand others for their sin and error. He understood his sermons and writings as publicizing obligations and duties to God and king, seeing any deviation from the Christian life he lived and counselled others to follow as evidence of devilish idolatry. But the regime's imperial designs and Bale's own perspectives modified his otherwise conventional evangelical outlook. Together, these consolidated in unprecedented – if incomplete – ways what were in this period nascent forms of English empire and imperial monarchy, and they precipitated subtle though significant transformations of early English evangelical political theology and conceptions of a spiritual vocation.

Consider, first, Bale's attitude to idolatry. When news of Edward VI's death arrived in early July, one of the two lords justices, Thomas Rothe, entered the cathedral church in Kilkenny and commanded the priests to have a communion in honour of St Anne. The priests responded that Bale, as bishop, had forbidden them from performing the said ceremony, after which Rothe allegedly discharged them of their obedience to their bishop. Not only was Rothe for Bale an 'ydolatour of Christes institucion'. He was also a 'contempner of his

struggle for control, 1534–1540', *Historical Journal*, 18 (1975), pp. 227–43; Collinson, *The religion of Protestants*, pp. 3, 12–14.

[54] Catharine Davies and Jane Facey, 'A Reformation dilemma: John Foxe and the problem of discipline', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 39 (1988), pp. 37–65, esp. pp. 37–50; Davies, *A religion of the word*, pp. 103, 158–9, 217–18. On early evangelical advocacy for church discipline, see Gunther, *Reformation unbound*, pp. 26–42.

[55] On Hooper, see MacCulloch, *Cranmer*, pp. 465, 471–84. See also Karl Gunther and Ethan Shagan, 'Protestant radicalism and political thought in the reign of Henry VIII', *Past & Present*, 194 (2007), pp. 35–74.

princes earnest commaundment / and a prouoker of the people by his ungra-
ciouse example to do the lyke'.[56] Instead of participating in their procession,
Bale, in line with Protestant didactic practices across Europe, performed
three plays – *God's Promises*, *John the Baptist's Preaching*, and *The Temptation of
our Lord* – at the Market Cross in Kilkenny.[57] Later, on 20 August, Lady Mary
was proclaimed queen of England, France, and Ireland in Kilkenny, 'with the
greatest solempnyte that there coulde be deuysed / of processions / musters
and dsigysinges / all the noble captaynes and gentilmen there about beinge
present'. Bale recounted how, upon being compelled to participate by his preb-
endaries and priests, he boldly declared that he 'was not Moyses minister but
Christes'. Instead, with his Bible in hand, he strove to the town's Market Cross,
and there preached on Paul's Roman 13, the authority of 'worldly powers &
magistrates', and 'what reuerence & obedience' they were due. Several weeks
later, after five of his servants were murdered by hired Irish kernes for labour-
ing – presumably on Bale's orders or example – in the fields on the holy day of
Our Lady's Nativity, Bale collapsed the purported 'superticyon' of the priest
and chaplain behind the murders into their ostensible misunderstanding of
what had and had not been statutorily abolished: 'Ye had kepte the daye
much holyar in my oppinyon if ye had in the feare of God obeyd the com-
maundment of your christen Kynge.' Finally, on Thursday, 31 August the clergy
of Kilkenny in Bale's absence and on the authorization of the other lord justice,
Thomas Howth, 'blasphemously resumed agyne the whole papisme / or heape
of supersticions of the bishop of Rome / to the utter contempt of Christe and
his holy wurde / of the kinge and counsell of Englande / and most of all
Ecclesiasticall and politike order' – all of which, according to Bale, proceeded
'without eyther statute or yet proclamacion'.[58]

Bale's charge, here, is rather ironic: as noted earlier, he succeeded in getting
Archbishop Browne to ordain him according to the rite proscribed in the 1552
Prayer Book, despite the latter having no statutory standing in Ireland. His
refusal to be ordained in Dublin according to any other rite amounted to an
argument about which parliament had authority in Ireland,[59] though Bale
probably did not view himself as advancing such arguments. Still, that his
claim had such implications is clear enough: the cathedral clergy's arguments
that the Prayer Book was not sanctioned by the realm's lawyers and parliament
and could thus not lawfully be used were not incorrect. Neither then nor later
in Kilkenny could Bale fathom that the clergy were lawfully either adhering to
or resuming what remained the statutory law of Ireland as promulgated by
parliament in 1536–7.

Bale's opponents' arguments, in fact, had an important precedent in
England, and a comparative perspective helps make sense of what Bale shared

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[56] Bale, *The vocacyon*, fos. 22v–23r.
[57] On Protestant plays across Europe, see Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the culture of persua-
sion* (Cambridge, 2006), ch. 4.
[58] Bale, *The vocacyon*, fos. 24r, 29r, 27r.
[59] Tong, 'An English bishop afloat', pp. 150, 154–6; idem, *Building the Church of England*,
pp. 217–18.

with his co-religionists elsewhere while unravelling what was uniquely imperial, if only by implication, about the bishop of Ossory's own vocation. Consider the bishop of Winchester, Stephen Gardiner's, case against the regime in 1547–8 when the council proceeded without parliamentary sanction. A doctrinally conservative supporter of the royal supremacy and bane of evangelicals, Gardiner's argument was simple but effective.[60] Erecting his case on the statutory authority of the *King's book* of 1543, Gardiner argued that, in the words of Alford, 'Homilies and Injunctions underpinned by the authority of Edward as supreme head of the Church were no match for an act of parliament – until they were themselves enshrined in statute.' The move effectively pitted two lively conceptions of monarchy against each other: 'Put simply', writes Alford, 'Gardiner deployed the counter-thesis of king-in-parliament against the thesis of unassailable Protestant imperial monarchy.'[61] Bale's opponents should thus be seen as an Irish counterpart to Gardiner, with Bale himself constituting the mirror-image of the bishop of Winchester – but with an Irish twist: not king-in-parliament against imperial monarchy, but the English imperial crown over statutory order in Ireland.

Clearly, reformers in both England and Ireland behaved in similar ways in response to similar challenges raised by the Reformation and the royal supremacy in particular, and most involved thorny problems of obedience and ecclesiology. The royal supremacy had been officially justified and celebrated by its supporters in England and elsewhere as a restoration of the crown's sovereignty long usurped by the pope; Bale had at least since his polemical play of the mid-1530s, *King Johan*, officially endorsed this view, and similar ones were expressed in Ireland: in 1540, a year before the medieval lordship of Ireland was declared a kingdom, officials proposed elevating Henry VIII from lord to king of Ireland as a way of luring the allegiance of the Irish away from the pope.[62] Spiritual ministers, too, played an important role in this process, and in this respect, Bale's position aligned full well with mainstream English political theology that saw royal sovereignty almost *depend* on God's grace as channelled through ministerial activity. As Henry Brinklow argued in 1543, so 'as the kyng was before but a shadow of a kyng, or at the most but halfe a king, now he doth wholly raygne thorow their preaching, writing and suffryng'.[63] But the relationship between preaching and royal sovereignty was unstable. Many evangelicals endorsed the regime's position that all preaching was to be restricted to those officially licensed to do so.[64] This blurred the distinction between being called by God and being called by the crown, and there were clear echoes of this in Bale's *Vocacyon*, which presented his mission to Kilkenny as called by God and 'facilitated

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[60] Michael Riordan and Alex Ryrie, 'Stephen Gardiner and the making of a Protestant villain', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 43 (2003), pp. 1039–63.

[61] Alford, *Kingship and politics*, pp. 57–60.

[62] Walsh, 'Deliberate provocation or reforming zeal?', p. 45; *State papers published under the authority of his majesty's commission, King Henry the Eighth* (11 vols., London, 1830–52) (*SP Hen. VIII*), III, p. 278. See also Bale, *The epistle exhortatorye*, fo. 21v.

[63] Henry Brinklow, *The complaynt of Reryck Mors* (Strassburg, 1542), sig. E8r–v.

[64] Ryrie, *The gospel and Henry VIII*, pp. 240–1.

by the king'.[65] This also raised difficult questions concerning the identity of the visible church and how it was to be reformed. Indeed, the same tension in evangelical ecclesiology between conceptions of the church as visible, institutional, and national in scope, and as invisible, spiritual, and embodied in a persecuted or godly minority, persisted in Ireland. Bale's mission continued efforts in England to provide the 'true church' with a visible form via what distinguished it from its false counterpart: preaching and the proper administration and use of the sacraments.[66] Consider, too, how royal commissioners campaigned across England in 1547–8 to enforce the royal injunctions while at their own discretion moving far beyond what they endorsed.[67] Bale himself had earlier run into trouble in Suffolk for preaching against idolatry in ways not sanctioned by the Ten Articles (1536) or Cromwell's injunctions (1537).[68] In this respect, he merely continued in Ireland what 'reformers' in England had been doing since the 1530s and what crown officials in Ireland had been doing since the autumn of 1548: it was not just the 1552 Prayer Book that had no parliamentary sanction in Ireland but the entire Edwardian Reformation.

The biblical injunction to 'obey God before man', so important across Europe, remained for many English evangelicals the barometer for pursuing this or that activity and it remained the standard for determining what one was willing to do without offending their conscience. Bale's steadfast refusal to participate in any form of idolatry was not exceptional: a common refrain amongst evangelicals, it was a hallmark of the understanding of true Christian obedience they shared especially with the Swiss Reformed, according to which godly suffering in the name of the gospel was the 'ultimate test' of obedience, as Bale himself made clear in his account of Anne Askew's martyrdom at the hands of the regime.[69] Certainly, the mass Bale ferociously attacked had for more than a decade been a lightning rod of controversy in England; in Ireland, although less of an issue, it could still provoke debate, dissent, rivalries, and, in the case of the archbishop of Armagh, George Dowdall, flight from the country in 1551 over his refusal to minister in a church where the mass was abolished.[70] Accusations of idolatry, moreover, just like in England, were now wielded against the Henrician vanguard of the Reformation in

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[65] *A copie of a letter sent to preachers, whiche the kynges maiestie hath licensed to preache* (London, 1548), sigs. A3v, A5r; Cole, *A godly and fruteful sermon*, sig. C8r; Crowley, *The way to wealth*, sig. A4v; Latimer, *Sermons and remains*, II, p. 30; Tong, 'An English bishop afloat', p. 149; idem, *Building the Church of England*, pp. 211–12.

[66] Tong, *Building the Church of England*, pp. 218–20. See also Davies, '"Poor persecuted little flock"'.

[67] Duffy, *Altars*, pp. 460–3; MacCulloch, *Tudor church militant*, pp. 72–4; Peter Marshall, *Heretics and believers: a history of the English Reformation* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2017), pp. 309–11.

[68] Fairfield, *Mythmaker*, pp. 42–7.

[69] Reeves, *Evangelical obedience*, chs. 1–3, pp. 62, 81–94. See also Kirby, *The Zurich connection*, ch. 3.

[70] Isham to Bellingham, 22 Dec. 1548, The National Archives (TNA), State Papers (SP) 61/1, fo. 276r; Staples to Bellingham, Dec. 1548, TNA, SP 61/1, fo. 277r; St Leger to Cecil, TNA, SP 61/3, fo. 9v; Browne to Warwick, TNA, SP 61/3, fo. 130v; James Murray 'The "absenting of the bishop of Armagh": eucharistic controversy and the English origins of Irish Catholic identity, 1550–51', in Oliver Rafferty, ed., *Irish Catholic identities* (Manchester and New York, NY, 2013), pp. 92–109.

Ireland for whom idolatry described not the mass but adherence to the pope, false prayers and worship of images, and undue reverence for friars.[71] And they retained their connotations of disobedience. Such questions were of enormous importance in the reign of Mary I, when evangelicals in England, for whom Bale wrote his *Vocacyon*, could choose whether or not to defy the queen's will, participate in the restoration of Roman doctrine and devotion, or exile themselves to avoid persecution or death; most conformed, some disobeyed and paid a high price, others chose exile.[72] From this angle, the only thing potentially unique about Bale's circumstances in Ireland is that he was lucky enough to have been appointed bishop at a time when the laws of England aligned with his interpretation of the laws of God. If evangelicals everywhere behaved similarly and confronted similar challenges, how can we say that Bale's vision and spiritual vocation had acquired imperial hues?

First, note that Bale's position was not only about God's law and idolatry: it concerned how subjects of the same king should live under the same law. This erasure of Ireland as a separate dominion was built into his very *Vocacyon*, which began with an account of the history of the church in England – which was then called Britain, Bale points out – and how it received the faith not from Rome but from the 'schole of Christe hymselfe'.[73] His move paralleled the ambiguity with which, for many Englishmen in this period, the ancient British past related to the Tudor Welsh and English present: his view of *England* as an independent empire drew on ideas of an ancient *British* church and empire, and was therefore troubled by similar kinds of elisions that could make him equivocate between, as he elsewhere put it, this 'Englyshe or Bryttyshe nacyon'. Thus, in his hands, the history of Ireland was subsumed within that of the ecclesiastical history of England as an imperial nation ambiguously articulated between a British imperial past and an English imperial present.[74]

A similar anglocentric pull was at work elsewhere. For centuries, the English lordship of Ireland had formed its own polity and community with its own parliament and statutory tradition.[75] That tradition, however, underwent important changes in the 1530s and 1540s: with the Reformation and Act of

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[71] For Henrician examples, see *SP Hen. VIII*, II, p. 562; Butler to Henry VIII, 31 Mar. 1538, TNA, SP 60/6, fo. 76r; *SP Hen. VIII*, II, p. 570; *SP Hen. VIII*, III, p. 103; Butler to Brabazon, 17 Apr. 1544, TNA, SP 60/11, fo. 122r; Wise to St Leger, 22 Apr. 1544, TNA, SP 60/11, fo. 123r.

[72] Gunther, *Reformation unbound*, chs. 3, 5; Andrew Pettegree, *Marian Protestantism: six studies* (Aldershot, 1996).

[73] Bale, *The vocacyon*, fos. 13rv.

[74] On ideologies of an ancient British empire and Bale's ambivalent constructions of nationhood, see Stewart Mottram, *Empire and nation in early English Renaissance literature* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 11–30; Philip Schwyzer, *Literature, nationalism, and memory in early modern England and Wales* (Cambridge, 2004), ch. 2; Andrew Hadfield, 'Translating the Reformation: John Bale's Irish *Vocacyon*', in Brendan Bradshaw et al., eds., *Representing Ireland: literature and the origins of conflict, 1534-1660* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 43–59.

[75] James Lydon, 'Ireland and the English crown, 1171–1541', *Irish Historical Studies*, 29 (1995), pp. 281–94; Robin Frame, *Ireland and Britain, 1170-1450* (London and Rio Grande, 1998), pp. 131–50; Peter Crooks, 'The structure of politics in theory and practise, 1210–1541', in Brendan Smith, ed., *The Cambridge history of Ireland*, I: *600–1550* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 441–68.

Kingly Title in 1541 that saw Ireland's status change from a lordship to a king-dom with its own 'imperial crown', Ireland was being subordinated to England and an anglocentric vision of 'reform' in new ways. Crucially, these directly reflected the growing weight of a Roman-style unitary sovereignty (*imperium*) in Anglo-Irish affairs. In the words of Brendan Bradshaw, just like 'unitary sov-ereignty dictated that the colony be governed as an extension of the realm of England', so too the church 'was to be treated as part of the Ecclesia Anglicana'.[76] Thus, in 1536, Archbishop Browne of Dublin disregarded local ecclesiastical jurisdictions as he zealously pursued clerical conformity in the Pale based on an inflated understanding of his authority, the same he had wielded two years prior as a royal commissioner in England tasked with ten-dering the oath of supremacy to the realm's monks.[77] Indeed, Browne's atti-tude was the first in Ireland to exemplify the Erastian impulses of post-supremacy English monarchy; that Bale and many other Englishmen on either side of the Irish Sea subsequently saw the Church of Ireland as a mere exten-sion of the English one continued the trend.[78] This principle of unitary sover-eignty then found its fullest expression in the Act of Kingly Title and Lord Deputy Anthony St Leger's programme of dual civil and spiritual 'reform' in the 1540s that sought to make real the Act's claims to create an integrated kingdom and island-wide church of English and assimilated Irish subjects loyal to the English crown.[79] In short, around the same time as imperial fan-tasies suffused English attempts to conquer Scotland and Boulogne,[80] renewed efforts to reduce an overwhelmingly non-English population to obedience and 'civility' in the newly minted Kingdom of Ireland gained traction – and they mobilized the imperial terms of sovereignty enshrined in the royal supremacy.

Enforcing the royal supremacy in Ireland, therefore, often carried different implications than in England, despite the considerable overlap, including pre-vailing views that the realm of England was an empire independent from Rome. By way of one last illustration, consider the central place of that ubiqui-tous Tudor device for enforcing conformity across its dominions, oaths of

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[76] Brendan Bradshaw, *The Irish constitutional revolution of the sixteenth century* (Cambridge, 1979), ch. 5, quote at p. 157.

[77] Murray, *Enforcing the English Reformation in Ireland*, pp. 109–11.

[78] There was a marked tendency on either side of the Irish Sea to refer to the churches or con-gregations of England and Ireland in the singular: *SP Hen. VIII*, III, p. 323; licence for export, 20 May 1544, TNA, SP 60/11, fo. 140Br; William Turner, *Huntyng and fyndyng out of the Romishe foxe* (Basel, 1543), sig. C2r; Edward Walshe, *The office and duty in fighting for our country* (London, 1545), sig. C2; Brasier, *A godly wil and confession*, sig. A2r; Hutchinson, *Works*, pp. 295, 313; Tong, *Building the Church of England*, pp. 213–14. Although Bale subordinated the Irish church to its English counterpart, he appears since 1550, however, to have referred more often to the 'churches' of England and Ireland. Bale, *An expostulation*, sig. C2r; idem, *The apologye*, fos. 2r, 6v.

[79] Bradshaw, *The Irish constitutional revolution*, chs. 6–9; Murray, *Enforcing the English Reformation in Ireland*, chs. 3–4; Christopher Maginn, 'The Gaelic peers, the Tudor sovereigns, and English multiple monarchy', *Journal of British Studies*, 50 (2011), pp. 566–86.

[80] Lorna Hutson, *England's insular imaginary: the Elizabethan erasure of Scotland* (Cambridge, 2023), chs. 1–2; Neil Murphy, *The Tudor occupation of Boulogne: conquest, colonisation and imperial monarchy, 1544–1550* (Cambridge, 2019); David Armitage, *The ideological origins of the British empire* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 35–48.

allegiance, in Bale's political theology. As Jonathan Michael Gray has shown, oaths were not only central to how the English Reformation was enforced; they were pivotal instruments through which its very theology was forged.[81] Similarly, Bale's oath to Edward VI provides the key to his political theology and the imperial sovereignty his ministerial vocation mobilized. We have already seen how his refusal to be ordained according to any other form than that prescribed in the 1552 Prayer Book was underpinned by his oath to the king. Having sworn to adhere to the Book, Bale's oath took precedence over the statutory laws of the Irish realm. His very vocation, modelled on Christ and serving as a vessel for the sovereignty of a godly king, thus hinged on the superior power of an oath of allegiance over the laws of the land. When Bale later appealed to his oath again, Edward VI was dead, and Mary was queen. And now, that same oath of allegiance allowed him to manoeuvre the parameters of obedience.

Bale recounts how he was tempted – like Satan had tempted Christ in the wilderness – by priests and his church's treasurer who declared their intentions to perform solemn 'exequies' for the late Edward VI like there had been in England. Bale asked how and by whom they would be performed, to which they responded with a Requiem Mass and Dirige, and that he, as their bishop, was bound by duty to do so. Bale retorted by dismissing the mass as an office appointed by Antichrist and instead volunteered to preach as Christ had commanded. His clerics refused and reiterated that a solemn mass would be had like the queen had ordered and performed in England. It was then that Bale requested that they defer to others 'tyll such tyme as I sende to ye Quenes commissioners at Dublyne / to know how to be discharged of the othe which I made to ye Kynge and his counsel for abolyshement of that popish masse, ffor I am loth to incurre ye daunger of periurie'. Buying his time, Bale, in other words, appealed to his prior oath to Edward to circumvent his obligation to Mary. He was saved by the following day's royal proclamation, which announced – like a similar proclamation had in England – that all who wanted to attend mass could do so, and those who did not, could not be compelled.[82]

Of course, and like other similarities highlighted above, there was nothing in his fear of perjuring himself that could not have been articulated by a bishop in England. The salient point here is that his imperial disregard for the statutory laws of Ireland was itself built into this very oath: the revised oath of supremacy of the 1552 Prayer Book did not mention the Church of Ireland, but it did stipulate that its taker 'shall never consent nor agree, that the Bishop of Rome shall practice, exercise, or have any manner of authority, jurisdiction, or power within this realm, *or any other the King's dominions*'.[83] Bale's

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[81] Jonathan Michael Gray, *Oaths and the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2012).

[82] Bale, *The vocacyon*, fos. 30–31r. For an account of similar developments in England, see A. G. Dickens, ed., 'Robert Parkyn's narrative of the Reformation', *English Historical Review*, 62 (1947), pp. 58–83, at pp. 79–80. I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for this reference.

[83] Emphasis added. Rev. Joseph Ketley, ed., *The two liturgies, A.D. 1549, and A.D. 1552: with other documents set forth by authority in the reign of King Edward VI* (Cambridge, 1844), p. 339.

oath to Edward VI, therefore, not only pitted two conflicting definitions of idolatry enshrined in the metropolitan and colonial forms of the royal supremacy against each other: more consequentially, since the duties to God and king it prescribed contained his view that subjects under the same king should live under the same law, his oath ensured that rival models of Anglo-Irish constitutional relations wrapped in competing conceptions of idolatry clashed on other bases than just God's law. That Bale subsumed Irish history within an imperial British historical framework, in effect grafting the history and origins of true Christianity in England onto Ireland, is, again, significant. The authorities which underlay this oath – God and king – authorized his vocation not just as a minister of Christ but *also* as an agent of the Tudor imperial crown.

We can say, therefore, that Bale's political theology was imperial in circumstance and implication: regardless of his intentions, we confront in his episcopal ministry a life that, as the vessel for an expansionist English *imperium*, unleashed the full imperial force of the royal supremacy in Ireland without losing any of its Christological or apostolic hues. His conscientious objection to idolatry and support for the king's godly reformation were not incidental to but substantively affirmed the dependent status of the crown's Irish dominion. Statutory law in Ireland, idolatrous as Bale perceived it, was washed away by the dictates of a higher law: that of God and king as enshrined in royal proclamations and the parliament of England. His position had the unique privilege of both affirming and denying royal power under God, affirming it in its metropolitan form while denying it in its colonial one – and it was in his oath to Edward VI that such a triangulation of divine and human authority with his episcopal vocation found its fateful abode. Ultimately, then, Bale's Irish ministry raised not the challenges of nonconformity, *adiaphora*, or discipline as we saw with Hooper and Foxe in England. Nor was it identical to the predicament of English evangelicals under Mary I. We confront instead a political theology of colonial silencing that, in the name of a royal *imperium* buttressed by an oath of allegiance and the gospel's power over idolatry, rendered irrelevant and invisible local structures of crown authority in Ireland.

IV

When we evaluate Bale's Irish ministry against the wider world of English evangelical political theology, a new contrast between the English Reformation's English and Irish theatres comes into relief, one less related to the causes and conditions of the Reformation's progress than to the relation between Christian life and sovereignty that it prescribed.[84] The Edwardian Reformation in England was 'a movement of hope and moral fervour' and a 'revolution on the march'.[85] It saw a distinct symbiosis of the two swords that harmonized the stark delineation of spiritual and civil jurisdiction with

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[84] Henry A. Jefferies, 'Tudor Reformations compared: the Irish Pale and Lancashire', in Christopher Maginn and Gerald Power, eds., *Frontiers, states and identity in early modern Ireland and beyond: essays in honour of Steven G. Ellis* (Dublin, 2016), pp. 71–92.

[85] MacCulloch, *Tudor church militant*, pp. 126, 196.

an abiding support for the royal supremacy and a dependence upon civil magistrates for the enforcement of ecclesiastical discipline. We have examined evangelicals' Christological conception of Christian life as a vocation or calling that conveyed clear moral parameters for the character and duties of kings and pastors. We have also observed that, for evangelicals, the spiritual sword was enforceable not as a juridical, coercive, or disciplinary power but only as a declaratory power that sought to persuade via God's Word and by stoking fears of God's righteous vengeance. As a power to which all were subject and obliged to obey by virtue of their accountability to God, it was a power of governing at a distance, a power that governed receptive kings without ever diminishing or laying claim to their sovereignty. Within such folds, the spiritual vocation of the godly preacher thrived in intimate, albeit occasionally tense, connection with the Magisterial Reformation as a potent vessel for God's Word in the world.

But English evangelical political theology in Ireland imparted a different character to the Edwardian Reformation. With Bale in Kilkenny in 1553, an episcopal vocation modelled on the ministry of Christ and impeccable in its evangelical credentials became the receptacle of what was simultaneously a spiritual, civil, and colonial Tudor *imperium*. Regardless of Bale's intentions, his position intervened in an already strained set of constitutional relations and extended the pretensions of English imperial monarchy in Ireland. It blurred the distinction between the sovereignties of God and king not simply by denying the legitimacy of laws and institutions deemed idolatrous – which evangelicals and Protestants across England and the continent similarly did – but by doing so in a manner that affirmed Ireland's subordination to England's imperial crown. Bale thus continued as a minister of Christ to govern at a distance: he certainly neither claimed nor wielded a coercive power of punishment. But this distance was modified by his vocation's entanglement with the colonial character of Anglo-Irish relations and 'reform' as these amplified the Erastian impulses of mainstream Henrician and Edwardian evangelical political theology and imperial monarchy.

Bale's unique position in the English evangelical world of the period thus highlights a crucial wedge that both bridged and divided Tudor political theology in its different manifestations across England and Ireland. The intimate link between constitutional ideas, idolatry, and vocation as the matrix in which ideas of obedience were articulated and disputed were common to both England and Ireland. But with Bale we see kernels of later, distinctly imperial trajectories of Tudor political theology in Ireland. As Nicholas Canny has recently argued, Bale's *Vocacyon* confirmed later Protestant officials' prejudices against the Catholic colonial elite by offering evidence of their efforts to thwart the spread of the gospel amongst the receptive population of the 'Anglicized areas of Ireland'.[86] Whatever his differences with Elizabethan Protestant visions of Reformation in Ireland, moreover, the bishop of Ossory *did*, like them, consider all idolaters to be disobedient – which, by his

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[86] Nicholas Canny, *Imagining Ireland's pasts: early modern Ireland through the centuries* (Oxford, 2021), pp. 14–18, at p. 16.

reckoning, was almost everyone. Nor did he on this front straightforwardly distinguish between the English and the Irish: to be obedient to the king was to faithfully subscribe to the 1552 Prayer Book.[87] Indeed, although Bale targeted the 'wickedness' of the English and the Irish in ways that belied unambiguous assertions of Englishness, the ultimate 'equation of Englishness and Protestantism in the *Vocacyon*', as Andrew Hadfield notes, 'paved the way for later interpretations of the Irish as irredeemably Catholic and, perhaps even more crucially, attempts to forge an English identity in Ireland'.[88]

Bale's short-lived Irish ministry thus makes clear the necessity of a broader Tudor framework for examining the intertwined *early* evolution of English colonial-imperial rule, imaginaries, and Reformation. That tensions in evangelical ecclesiology were more pronounced in Ireland than in England is surely significant: Bale's episcopal mission provides, in Tong's words, 'a clue about just how far the Edwardian reformers could imagine the temporal institution as synonymous with the spiritual True Church'. For 'it was in Ireland that the ecclesiological tension between theory and practice was tested most tangibly during Edward's life'.[89] That this was so was partially because Bale's Irish ministry contained in embryo the same kind of confessionally ladened crisis in Anglo-Irish constitutional relations that would under Elizabeth I culminate in the Tudor reconquest of Ireland.

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[87] On Reformed conceptions of obedience in later Tudor Ireland, see Mark A. Hutchinson, 'The question of obedience and the formation of confessional identity in the Irish Reformation', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 111 (2020), pp. 143–69; idem, *Reform, Calvinism, and the absolutist state in Elizabethan Ireland* (London, 2015).
[88] Hadfield, 'Translating the Reformation', p. 54.
[89] Tong, *Building the Church of England*, p. 185.

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