

FROM FLORENCE TO ZURICH VIA STRASBOURG AND
OXFORD: THE INTERNATIONAL CAREER OF PETER
MARTYR VERMIGLI (1499-1562)

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I. VERMIGLI IN ITALY

According to his contemporary and biographer, Josiah Simler, Peter Martyr Vermigli »was no vulgar Diuine or of the common number of learned men, but he was of so great wit, of so excellent learning, and therewithall of such godlinesse, modestie, and courteous behauiour, that both he was acceptable, beloued and reuerenced among them with whom he liued, and was euen of the aduersaries also reckoned among the excellent men, and was had of them in great admiration.«¹ Vermigli was born into a modest household in Florence and was named for Saint Peter Martyr of Verona who, according to legend, was killed by Manichean heretics for his defense of the orthodox faith.² At the age of 16 he was sent a short distance up the hill from his home in Florence to the Augustinian canons of Fiesole where he read *litterae humaniores*. His school chums were young Florentines bearing such names of the Florentine nobility as de Medici, Ricci, and Stuphas. From thence he went to the University of Padua where, for eight years, he was immersed in liberal studies, and chiefly Aristotle. Here he must have acquired his thorough grasp of Aristotelian method and logic which was to become the acknowledged hallmark of his mature writing. By the age of 26 he had mastered Greek and offered lectures on Homer. Around 1525 he was appointed Deputy Prior of his order in Bologna and, being required to preach on the scriptures of both Tes-

¹ Josiah Simler, An Oration of the life and death of that worthy man and excellent Diuine d. Peter Martyr Vermiglius, professor of Duimite in the Schoole of Zuricke, in Another Collection of certeine Diuine matters and doctrines of the same M. D. Peter Martyr, translated and partlie gathered by Anthonic Marten, London 1583, 2r. The narrative that follows is largely drawn from Simler's account.

² Born at Verona, 1206; died near Milan, 6 April, 1252.

taments, he applied himself to the study of Hebrew with the aid of a private tutor, a Jewish physician known to us only by the name of Isaac. This was a decisive event, for Vermigli – like both Luther and Calvin – came to devote the bulk of his scholarly energy to commentary on the Old Testament. Moving swiftly up the ladder of preference, he went on to become Abbot of Spoleto for three years, and then Prior of the College of S. Pietro ad Aram in Naples where he met the great Spanish mystic Juan de Valdés, then leader of the movement known as the *alumbrados* or *spirituali*. Here Vermigli first met Bernardino Ochino who was to become his close associate in both his migration to Protestantism and his eventual flight from Italy. In the company of the *spirituali* Vermigli was introduced to the writings of Martin Bucer and Huldrych Zwingli. Building upon this new theological bearing he offered lectures debunking the traditional doctrine of Purgatory.

On the path of his preference he had already acquired numerous powerful friends in Rome: Gonzaga, Cardinal of Mantua, Gasparo Contarini, Peter Bembo, and Henry VIII's cousin Reginald Pole who went on to become Cardinal and Archbishop of Canterbury under Queen Mary and Vermigli's nemesis. Meanwhile Vermigli was promoted Visitor General of the entire Order of Augustinian Canons, elevated to the Priory and bishopric of San Frediano in Lucca, and was by now clearly marked as one on the path to becoming a prince of the Church. At Lucca he set up a trilingual College (Hebrew, Greek, and Latin) based upon the Erasmian principles of Christian humanist education which had recently inspired the foundations of St John's College, Cambridge and Corpus Christi College, Oxford. At Lucca Vermigli entertained both the Emperor Charles V and Pope Paul III; he conferred daily with Contarini on matters theological, and had even begun to persuade this powerful Cardinal of the validity of Martin Luther's objections to the Church's teaching on purgatory, indulgences, and the doctrine of grace in general. At Rome, theological dispute had reached a crisis in 1542, the year in which the Inquisition was established and decisive moves made to call a General Council of the Church. Accusations of heresy were leveled directly against Vermigli. As his protector Cardinal Contarini lay dying in Rome, Vermigli's situation had become so untenable that he fled to Zurich. Eighteen of his former students at Lucca followed him, and he thus contributed to the establishment of an enduring community of Italian

protestants in exile, which included such distinguished reformers as Ochino, Emmanuel Tremellius, and Jerome Zanchius. Heinrich Bullinger received Martyr warmly on his arrival in Zurich, but there was no post for him then in the *Schola Tigurina*.

2. STRASBOURG

Shortly thereafter Martin Bucer invited him to become professor of Hebrew at Strasbourg, and it was here that his reputation as a biblical commentator was well and truly launched. At Strasbourg he outshone even his distinguished host with his »exact method« and his »pure and plain stile«. Vermigli had the ability much admired in the Renaissance to instruct and to delight in equal measure: »he pleased the minds of his hearers, no one for the grautie of the things themselves, but also for the sweetness and elegancie of his stile: And moreover euen in the lectures themselves he with a singular grauties sometime exhorted godly life, sometime by a sharp rebuking he stirred vp to repentance, so that his lectures, being as it were sauced with all these things, and shewing an excellent doctrine and eloquence, ioyned with singular pietie, procured him great glorie in the iudgement of all men.«³

Following Bucer's and Luther's example, Vermigli took the position that marriage was an honourable estate for a clerk, and proceeded to marry Katherine Dampmartin. She spoke no Italian and he very little German, so we are left to conjecture about domestic discourse – not to mention pillow-talk – conducted in Latin.

3. OXFORD

After five years as professor at Strasbourg, Vermigli's reputation as a leader of Protestant Reform had grown to such an extent that he and his host Bucer were jointly invited by King Edward VI through the offices of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer to take up senior positions at Oxford and Cambridge respectively. Both were appointed to the prestigious Regius chairs in Divinity.

³ *Simler*, Oration, 6v. *Horae*, Ars poetica, v. 333: »prodesse et delectare».

Once installed at Oxford Vermigli began to lecture on Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians and very swiftly became embroiled in a bitter dispute over the doctrine of the Eucharist. His initial opponent was the conservative Richard Smith, who had just been sacked from the Regius chair to make way for Vermigli. Smith, however, fled to Louvain to join other Catholics in exile before the disputation was fully underway. The ensuing formal debate became an event of national significance. Richard Cox, Chancellor of Oxford, presided along with Henry Holbeach, bishop of Lincoln, and the great humanist scholar and Gentleman of the Privy Chamber, Sir Richard Morison. (Later, during the Marian exile, both Cox and Morison would visit Vermigli in Zurich as guests in the house of Heinrich Bullinger. Such were the vagaries of fortune in the mid-sixteenth century.) In this debate Vermigli formulated what came to be recognized as both his single most significant contribution to Reformation thought and also, though much less recognized, his lasting influence upon the liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer.⁴ Vermigli's formulation of the doctrine of the eucharist was praised by John Calvin as the clearest, best formulated orthodox statement of the Reformed position. Known technically as »instrumental realism«, this doctrine seeks to reconcile the conflicting positions of Zwingli's anti-realist sacramentarian memorialism and Luther's hyper-realist consubstantiation, the conflict which caused the deep and lasting rift between the two main Protestant camps, i.e. the Lutherans and the Reformed. Vermigli's eucharistic position is set out in his »Discourse on the Sacrament of the Lordes supper« published in 1550. This formulation became the touchstone of the great liturgical revision which resulted in the second Prayer Book of Edward VI of 1552. Of special significance for the measure of Vermigli's influence on the English Church is the fact that the 1552 Prayer Book sets the standard for all subsequent authorised revisions of the liturgy, including the two most important revisions of the Elizabethan Settlement (1559) and the Restoration Settlement (1662).

⁴ See: A discourse or treatise of Petur Martyr Vermilla Flore[n]tine, the publyque reader of diuinitee in the Vniuersitee of Oxford: wherein he openly declared his whole and determinate iudgemente concernynge the sacrament of the Lordes supper in the sayde Vniuersitee, London: Robert Stoughton at the signe of the Bysshoppes Miter, 1550. See also the critical edition by Joseph C. McLelland, *The Oxford Treatise and Disputation on the Eucharist*, Kirksville 2000 (The Peter Martyr Library 7 / Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies 56). For a discussion of Vermigli's influence on Cranmer's revision of the Prayer-Book liturgy, see Joseph C. *McLelland*, *The Second Book of Common Prayer*, in: idem, *The Visible Words of God: An Exposition of the Sacramental Theology of Peter Martyr Vermigli*, Edinburgh 1957, 28-40.

Shortly after the Oxford Disputation on the Eucharist, there was a popular uprising in Devonshire and Cornwall focussed on resistance to the recent imposition of the vernacular liturgy at Pentecost in 1549. Although the object of this conservative popular protest was the liturgy of the First Edwardine Prayer Book, of which both Vermigli and Bucer were critical as being insufficiently Reformed in its theological assumptions, Vermigli was nonetheless singled out by the rebels as among those responsible for the 1549 book and was the subject of death threats.⁵ During the Western Rising, sometimes referred to as the »Prayer Book Rebellion«, Vermigli was forced to remove himself from Oxford. He was conducted safely by his friends to London, was received enroute by the King at Richmond, and resided for a time with Cranmer at Lambeth. On his return to Oxford, Vermigli was formally installed as a Canon of Christ Church and created a Doctor of Divinity of the University. At some point during or shortly after the suppression of the western uprising, Vermigli wrote »A Sermon concerninge the tyme of rebellion« in which he addresses the grievances of the rebels, and offers a measured defence of the government's proceeding against sedition. The text of this sermon in Peter Martyr's own hand is in the Matthew Parker collection of MSS at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.⁶

During this unsettled period Vermigli was appointed by the King to a committee charged with the revision of the Canon Law of England. Initially the committee consisted of 24 members, but it was later reduced to a working group of just four members, which included Cranmer, Vermigli, Walter Haddon, then Regius Professor of Civil Law at Cambridge, and Rowland Taylor, Chancellor to Bishop Nicholas Ridley and, according to John Foxe, one of the first of the Marian martyrs, probably owing to his open support of the Lady Jane Grey.⁷ Vermigli contributed extensive emendations to the 1552 text of the »Reformatio legum ecclesiasticarum«, a thorough reformation of the Canon Law which was brought to completion just prior to the death of Edward VI; although printed in 1571 by John Foxe, it was abandoned after the accession of Elizabeth.⁸ At the death of Edward, Vermigli was in an

⁵ See *Smiler*, *Oration*, Qqzv.

⁶ MS 340, no. 4.

⁷ James C. Spalding (ed.), *Reformatio legum ecclesiasticarum: The Reformation of the Ecclesiastical Laws of England, 1552*, Kirksville 1992 (Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies 19). (Includes Vermigli's emendations to text of the »Ecclesiastical Laws«).

⁸ Tudor church reform: the Henrician Canons of 1535 and the Reformatio Legum

awkward position. Both Cranmer and Taylor were soon to be executed, and there were certainly many old adversaries at Oxford who would doubtless have been happy to see the Florentine consigned to the flames as well. Before receiving permission to depart the realm, Vermigli courageously consented to join Cranmer and other Protestant divines in a public disputation with representatives of the new Catholic establishment in defence of »doctrine and order of religion appointed« by Edward VI.⁹ Cranmer, however, was imprisoned and nothing came of the proposed disputation. Vermigli was allowed a passport, and departed for Strasbourg where he was reinstalled in his former chair.¹⁰

4. VERMIGLI'S SECOND STAY IN STRASBOURG

At Strasbourg he wrote his most important work of political theology in the form of a »Commentary on the book of Judges«,¹¹ and began a »Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics« which was recently published for the first time in English translation.¹² He also wrote a lengthy reply on Cranmer's behalf to Stephen Gardiner's attack on the Archbishop's »Treatise on the Lord's Supper«.¹³ This alone is indica-

Ecclesiasticarum, ed. by Gerald Bray, Woodbridge 2000. According to Bray, Foxc's text was based on a lost 1552 final version of the »Reformatio«, so that it represents the conclusions of Cranmer, Vermigli and their colleagues rather than a later revision, supposedly supervised by Matthew Parker. Bray also considers why the revised Canon Law was not adopted under Elizabeth, and concludes that it was abandoned by its friends rather than defeated by its enemies.

⁹ *Sinier*, Oration, Qq3r.

¹⁰ Concerning his safe conduct Simler observes, »his friendes scarcelie beleueed, that although he had had received the Queens Letters, that he could depart away safe. For his aduersaries said, that so great an enemye of the Popes Religion should not be suffered to scape out of their hands, but should be plucked euen out of the ship to prison and punishment.« Oration, Qq3r.

¹¹ The commentary on Judges was first published in a Latin edition at Zurich under the title »In librum Iudicum D. Petri Martyris Vermilij Florentini [...] commentarij doctissimi (Zurich: Christopher Froschauer, 1561) and three years later in English translation by John Day under the title »Most fruitfull [and] learned commentaries of Doctor Peter Martir Vermil Florentine, professor of deumitie, in the Vniuersitye of Tygure: with a very profitable tract of the matter and places« (London: John Day, 1564).

¹² In Primum, Secundum, et Initium Tertii Libri Ethicorum Aristotelii ad Nichomachum. Zurich: Christopher Froschauer, 1563; Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, ed. by Emidio Campi and Joseph C. McLelland, Kirksville 2006 (The Peter Martyr Library 9 / Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies 73).

¹³ Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Defensio doctrinae ueteris et apostolicae de sacro sancto*

tive of Cranmer's great trust in Vermigli's theological judgement. After a short second stint at Strasbourg, Vermigli became embroiled in further eucharistic controversy between the Lutheran establishment and the minority of those who adhered to his own Reformed position. Owing, however, to the recent death of Conrad Pellican, biblical scholar and exegete of the *Schola Tigurina*, Vermigli finally realised his hope of being appointed to succeed in Pellikan's place as Professor of Hebrew in 1556.

When Vermigli left England he was followed shortly afterwards by John Jewel. At the accession of Queen Mary Jewel was charged not only with having preached heretical doctrine, but also with having been a diligent hearer of Vermigli's lectures and of refusing to attend mass. He was expelled from Corpus Christi College, and after serving as notary to Cranmer and Ridley during their public disputation in 1554, fled to Frankfurt where he joined Richard Cox, the exiled Dean of Christ Church, Vermigli's former College, and thence to Strasbourg at Vermigli's invitation. Jewel assisted Vermigli as his secretary, and both he and Cox eventually accompanied Vermigli to Zurich.

5. ZURICH

Vermigli's great stature as a reformer is indicated by some of the events in the final years of his career at Zurich before his death in 1562. While Professor of Hebrew he was invited by Calvin to take up an appointment at the Geneva Academy, and after the death of Mary was invited most cordially by Elizabeth to return to his Regius Chair at Oxford.¹⁴

Eucharistiae sacramento [...] In quatuor distincta partes aduersus Stephani Gardineri [...] librum [...] sub titulo [...] Confitutio cavillationum, Zurich: Christopher Froschauer, 1559.

¹⁴ John Jewel to Peter Martyr Vermigli, 28 April 1559. The Zurich Letters, comprising the correspondence of several English bishops and others, with some of the Helvetian reformers during the reign of queen Elizabeth, transl. [...] and ed. by Hastings Robinson, vol. 1, Cambridge 1842 (Publications of the Parker Society), 20: »The Queen both speaks and thinks most honourably of you: she lately told Lord [Francis] Russell that she was desirous of inviting you to England, a measure which is urged both by himself and others, as far as they are able.« See also Sir Antony Cook's effusive letter to Vermigli of 12 February 1559, Zurich Letters, vol. 2, Cambridge 1845-13. Vermigli was formally invited to return to his post as Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford in 1561, but excused himself for reasons of health and his obligations to the Senate of Zurich. See Vermigli's response to Earl Russell in »Letter to the Right honourable the Duke [sic] of Bedford«, Divine Epistles, transl. Antonie Marten,

At the news of Elizabeth's accession Vermigli penned an effusive panegyric to the young Queen containing both fulsome praise and some fairly pointed advice.¹⁵ In an almost hyperbolic invocation of the »Song of Zechariah« from the Gospel of Luke, Vermigli evokes a striking comparison of Elizabeth's accession to the scriptural trope of redemptive kingship. By means of an appeal to a host of Old-Testament and early-Church examples of kingship he goes on to advise Elizabeth on her duty of religious reform in England. Vermigli extends the metaphor of anointed kingship to the point of identifying England as an »elect nation«, a concept which was destined to become a commonplace of Reformation historiography. As God's anointed it is Elizabeth's divinely appointed task to »redeem« the nation through the restoration and establishment of her »godly rule«.

With respect to Vermigli's international stature perhaps most telling of all is his appointment by the Senate of Zurich as principal representative of the Church of Zurich, along side Theodore de Bèze, Calvin's successor at Geneva, at the Colloquy of Poissy convoked by Catherine de Medici, mother of King Charles IX and regent of France. Attended by Charles of Guise, Cardinal of Lorraine leading a contingent of several dozen Cardinals and bishops representing the French Church, the conference was a desperate bid to bring about reconciliation between Catholic and Protestant factions, but it foundered on the critical question of the manner of the »real presence« in the Eucharist. Vermigli was able to address the Queen as a fellow Florentine, and she is recorded as having asked him frequently and cordially what counsel he could give for bringing about a peaceful resolution to the

London: H. Denham, 1583), 164–165: »Truelie if I might haue mine owne will I woulde no lesse serue the church of Englande than before tyme I haue doone: howbeit neither mine age nor the strength of my body wil any longer indure the same, being not able to indure a viage solong, so diuers and not altogether easie [...] it seemeth better for me that I remaine where I am.« See also his reply »to a verie honourable Prince in Englands«, Divine Epistles, 127–128: »it standeth thus with mee, that I am appointed to the citie and Church of Tigure, and therefore I am not at my owne libertie.«

¹⁵ Peter Martyr Vermigli, *To the Most Renowned Princess Elizabeth, by the grace of God Queene of England, France and Ireland*, published in: *Martyr's Divine Epistles*, an appendix to the English edition of *Common Places*, transl. Anthony Marten, London: John Day, 1583, part V, 58–61. For the original Latin version of the letter, see: *Martyris Epistolae Theologicae*, appended to *Loci communes*, ed. Robert Masson, London: Thomas Vautrollerius, 1583, 1121–24; first edition London: John Kingston, 1576. For an excellent modern English translation, see Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Life, Letters, and Sermons*, transl. and ed. by John Patrick Donnelly, Kirksville 1999 (The Peter Martyr Library 5 / Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies 42).

religious differences which were soon to engulf France in a bloody conflict that would last into the next century. Here we see Vermigli as an international religious leader, courted by and giving advice to princes. In the key disputation of the Colloquy, once again concerning the Eucharist, Vermigli takes the lead among the Protestant representatives. After the inevitable failure of Poissy, Vermigli returned to Zurich where, within a few months, he died. His portrait, painted by Hans Asper as one of a series of the leading figures of the *schola Tigurina*, now hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in London.

Throughout the Elizabethan era Vermigli's influence can only be said to have grown. Several of his biblical commentaries were translated from Latin into English and published by John Day, the Queen's Printer. The title pages are festooned with royal iconography – lions and unicorns, dragons and phoenixes, Tudor roses and crowns, and always the knotted letters ER – all conveying evidence of Establishment approval. The *scholia* from these commentaries were collected and published in a four-volume folio edition by John Kingston in 1576, and later in English translation by Anthony Marten, under the title of »The Commonplaces of Peter Martyr«.¹⁶ The »Commonplaces« were organised into four parts corresponding to the principal divisions of Calvin's »Institution of the Christian Religion« (1559). Over the next fifty years the commentaries and the *Commonplaces* went through multiple editions in both Latin and English and the latter, together with Bullinger's equally famous »Sermonum Decades«, became a standard theological textbook in both universities. Prior to the 1590s, Vermigli's theology was arguably more influential in both Oxford and Cambridge than Calvin's. In the major disputes in the earlier part of Elizabeth's reign – in the Vestiarian Controversy of the mid-1560s and the Admonition Controversy of the 1570s – Vermigli's authority was constantly invoked.

¹⁶ *Loci communes: Ex variis ipsius auctoritis et libris in unum volumen collecti, and quatuor classes distribute*, ed. Robert Masson, 3 vols, London: John Kingston, 1576 and *The Commonplaces of the most famous and renowned Duine doctor Peter Martyr*, divided into foure principall parts, translated and partly gathered by Anthoine Marten, one of the Sewers of hir Maesties most Honourable Chamber, London: H. Denham, 1583.

6. INFLUENCE

Although much neglected by historians and political theorists after 1600 (and only very recently having become a subject of scholarly interest), in Edwardine and Elizabethan England Vermigli was regarded by his contemporaries among a preeminent leaders of international Reform throughout his career, and his »auctoritas«¹⁷ was unmatched by any other continental reformers, Calvin included, among the Elizabethan establishment. Vermigli's decisive contributions to the formation of the Elizabethan religious and constitutional settlement are only beginning to receive due acknowledgement by modern critical history of the English Reformation.¹⁸ In particular, Vermigli exerted considerable influence on English political theology during the mid-Tudor period, i.e. from the accession of Edward VI in 1547 to the period of consolidation of the Elizabethan Settlement in the early 1570s. This influence calls for a reconsideration of the underlying historiographical assumptions and interpretations of the English Reformation, with a view to demonstrating that the principles and aims of the religious settlement of 1559 were in accord with ideas prevalent on the continent, and that Vermigli himself was arguably one of the principal figures involved in forging this link. The received interpretation of the Elizabethan Settlement as the work of political exigency and pragmatic compromise *rather than* any clear view of Reformed theological principles – as a »settlement of religion« but not a genuinely »religious settlement« – becomes more difficult to sustain the more closely the influence of this clear-thinking theologian is addressed. Patrick Collinson observed that »the accession of the Protestant Elizabeth

¹⁷ In his dedication of his 1583 edition of Vermigli's »Commonplaces« to Queen Elizabeth, Anthony Marten – also sewer in the Queen's chamber – observes as follows: »I cannot but call to mind with ioye and reuerence, that this our native countrie did first of all kingdoms in the world, faithfullie receiue, and publicklye professe the religion of Christ. And it reioiseth me much more, that after so long and so foule a fall of the house of God, this of all other kingdoms did first openlie indeuour to repaire the ruines thereof: a principall labourer in which worke was D. Peter Martyr, who long sustained upon his owne, and almost onlie shoulders the greatest weight of this burthen [...]« See The *Commonplaces* of the most famous and renowned Diuine doctor Peter Martyr, divided into foure principall parts, translated and partly gathered by Anthonie Marten, one of the Sewers of hir Maesties most Honourable Chamber, London: H. Denham, 1583. A3v-A4r.

¹⁸ See W. J. Torrance Kirby, *The Zurich Connection and Tudor Political Theology*, Leiden / Boston 2007 (Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 131).

at once revived deeply rooted notions of the Church as a great public corporation, one with the commonwealth and presided over by royal governors.«¹⁹ Was this »Constantinian« or »Erastian« impulse a merely pragmatic compromise, or was it reconcilable with the Church of England's claim to adhere to the essential tenets of Reformed Protestant orthodoxy? Were the doctrine and the institutions established in the Settlement of 1559 at some underlying level in mutual contradiction? Was the Settlement really tantamount to what Diarmaid MacCulloch has likened to a »theological cuckoo in the nest«, that is, the embrace of a reformed evangelical teaching within an unreformed conservative institutional setting at odds with the first principles proclaimed?²⁰ Such a conflict of principle and practice on the part of the Elizabethan Church was certainly the common view taken by the Settlement's Puritan critics just as it currently is of the promoters of the English exceptionalist interpretation. A closer examination of the substantive contributions of Peter Martyr Vermigli to the formulation of the doctrine and order of the Church of England provide a corrective to the hitherto usual response to this question.

¹⁹ Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, London 1967, 24.
²⁰ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Later Reformation in England, 1547–1603*, New York 2000, 29.