In 1560, at the pinnacle of his distinguished and varied career as a reformed theologian and biblical scholar, Peter Martyr Vermigli sat to have his portrait painted in Zurich. The painting now hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in London. The presence of Vermigli's likeness in the Gallery stands as testimony to his distinction as the first Protestant reformer to occupy the Regius Chair of Divinity in the University of Oxford. While the portrait is unsigned, the evidence suggests strongly that Hans Asper (1499-1572), the leading portrait-painter of mid-sixteenth-century Zurich, was the artist. Asper's authorship has not stood unchallenged. In his catalogue of the Gallery's Tudor and Jacobean portraits, Roy Strong refrains from ascribing the painting of Vermigli to Asper and characterizes the piece as of "workshop quality, perhaps once part of a set of reformers." More recently, however, Asper's title to authorship has been reaffirmed by Marianne Naegeli, Urs Hobi and their collaborators in a thorough and scholarly survey of Asper's paintings. In their catalogue to an exhibit of art in Zurich after the Reformation held in 1981, the iconography of the Vermigli portrait is shown to be decisive in establishing authorship.

I acknowledge with gratitude the contributions made toward the research for this paper by Kurt Jakob Rüetschi, Joseph McLelland and Frank A. James III.
In the course of his career as Stadtmaler of Zurich, Asper painted as many as thirty known portraits of leading personalities of the city. Perhaps the most famous is his small portrait of Huldrych Zwingli, painted shortly before the reformer's death on the field at Kappel in 1531. It has often been observed that Asper's portraits show a marked similarity of style to those of Hans Holbein the younger. The portrait of Vermigli resembles the others in this respect as well. Dated 1560, the painting exhibits a remarkable iconographical resemblance to a series of portraits painted by Asper during the previous decade. In a letter to Rudolph Gwalther dated 4 March 1550, a young Englishman named Christopher Hales had commissioned Asper to paint six portraits of prominent Zurich reformers: 'I request you, my dear Rudolph, to procure your Apelles to paint for me the following portraits, those namely of Zuinglius, [Konrad] Pellican, Theodore [Bibliander], master [Heinrich] Bullinger, and yourself... And if the artist can paint a good likeness of Oecolampadius, I would have it in addition to the other five.' Hales does not mention Asper by name in his correspondence but also refers to the artist as 'your Zeuxis'; both are references to notable Greek painters of the fourth century BCE. Between September 1549 and February 1550, while recover-
I am greatly surprised that Burcher should persist in thinking that portraits can nowise be painted with a safe conscience and a due regard to godliness; since there is not a single letter in the holy scriptures with appears really to sanction that opinion. For, if I understand aright, images were forbidden in the sacred books for no other reason, than that the people of God might not be drawn aside from the true worship of one true God to the vain worship of many false gods. And if there be no danger of this, I do not see why pictures may not be painted and possessed, especially when they are not kept in any place where there can be the least suspicion of idolatry... Who bows himself before your Charles placed on the top of the tower? Who is so useless, as to worship a painting or picture deposited in the library? But it is said that times may occur, when there will be danger lest encouragement be given to idolatry by their means. Well then, it may in the same manner be argued, that no image or likeness ought to be made of anything whatever! Indeed my worthy friend, if I thought it possible that the worship of idols could be re-established by such means, believe me, that if I had the pictures, I would tear them into a thousand pieces with my own hands.14

The portrait of Bibliander was apparently executed by Asper in secret without a sitting, owing to the great linguist's firm opposition to the production of images15. Sometime after the original commission Hales seems to have requested an additional portrait for the series, one of Peter Martyr himself. Although resident in Oxford at the time of the original commission of the portraits, the death of King Edward VI in 1553 compelled Vermigli to flee England and return to the continent. By 1556 Vermigli had been appointed to succeed Konrad Pellikan in the chair of Hebrew at Zurich. Thus Vermigli himself had come to be numbered among the eminent Zurich divines, which probably accounts for the extension of the commission to a seventh portrait16. The best evidence of this is the very close iconographical resemblance the National Gallery portrait bears to the others in the series commissioned by Hales. In his original commission Hales had been quite specific about the iconography: each portrait was to be inscribed with a text set in the form of a tetraestich17. Vermigli's portrait is no exception. Like the other reformers, he is depicted in the current academical dress of a learned divine—cap, gown and tippet. He is shown seated at half-length and facing right with a three-quarter profile. His right hand is extended with the index finger pointing emphatically to a book with a crimson binding. The book rests on his left knee and is held upright by his left hand. His eyes are brown, hair white, and he wears a heavy moustache and a forked beard, the latter an especially distinctive characteristic that is faithfully reproduced in subsequent derivative images of the reformer. Missing from the picture of Vermigli, however, is Asper's monogram "HA" which is plainly visible in the portraits of Zwingli, Regula and Anna Gwalthr-Zwingli, Oecolampadius, Bibliander and Pellikan. It should also be noted that Asper portrayed Bibliander, Bullinger, Pellikan and the earlier of two versions of Oecolampadius with a table-top in the foreground whereas this particular feature of the iconography is missing in the Vermigli portrait18.

A prominent feature of the iconography of the series is a verse inscription that appears together with the subject's name at the top of each likeness. The tetraestich inscribed above Vermigli's head in gold capitals reads

HVNC GENVIT FLORENTIA, NVNC PEREGRINUS OBERRAT
QVO STABILIS FIAT CIVIS APVD SVPEROS
ILLIVS EFFIGIES HAEC, MENTEM SCRIPTA RECONDYNT
INTEGRITAS PIETAS PINGIER ARTE NEQVIT.

• Florence brought him forth, Now he wanders as a foreigner / That he might forever be a citizen among those above. / This is his likeness; the writings conceal his mind; / Integrity and piety cannot be represented by art. • It has been suggested that the tetraestich was probably composed by Gwalthr. The tetraestichs on the paintings of Bibliander, Bullinger, Oecolampadius and Pellikan have been definitely identified as Gwalthr's19. In the middle of the right-hand edge of the Vermigli portrait there is another inscription "ANNO DNI: MD: LX / AETATIS LX."20 The latter reference may shed light on the long-held but mistaken view that Vermigli was born in 150021.

14 Zurich Letters, pp. 191-192. The south tower of the Grossmunster at Zurich is called Charles' Tower, named for a statue place there which is supposed to represent Charlemagne. The original statue is now to be found in the crypt of the Grossmunster.
15 Zurich Letters, p. 193: "I entreat you, my worthy friend, that should I not be able to obtain all the portraits, I may at least obtain the two others, namely that of Theodore, which you tell me was taken without his knowledge, and as it were by stealth, also your own; for I am well assured that you are of quite the contrary opinion [viz. Concerning the supposed idolatry of portraits], unless you have lately very much changed it, or else you would never have had the portraits taken of your wife and little girl." See «Malerei,» Zürcher Kunst nach der Reformation, nr. 26, pp. 64, 65.
16 «Katalog,» Zürcher Kunst nach der Reformation, p. 69 (Fig. 1).
17 Zurich Letters, pp. 185-186.
18 Zürcher Kunst nach der Reformation, plates 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, and 28; see also plates 29 and 30, portraits of Heinrich Brennwald (1551) and Alexander Peyer (1554); pp. 62-68. Hales remarks that his commissioned portrait of Oecolampadius was taken from a copy in Bullinger's possession. Zurich Letters, p. 194.
19 For Gwalthr's manuscript drafts of the verses see Zurich Zentralbibliothek, MS D 152, 85v-86r. I am grateful to Kurt Jakob Rüetschi for this reference. See also Wüthrich, «Die Zürcher Malerei im 15. Jahrhundert,» p. 13.
20 In the year of our Lord, 1560, 60 years old.
21 Philip McNair notes that Vermigli himself probably did not know that he was born in 1499 rather than 1500. See McNair, Peter Martyr in Italy: An Anatomy of Apostasy (Oxford,
Walter Hugelshofer observes of the portrait that Vermigli appears a weary, prematurely aged man and that the reformer looks "dried-up, torpid, and even distinctly petit-bourgeois"! The overall impression of the picture is indeed disappointing. In this respect it somewhat ironic that Hales should have referred to Asper as "Zeuxis Tigurinus." The Vermigli of this portrait does not sparkle with vitality. Hugelshofer remarks that "the sun of Grace" does not illuminate this likeness, and concludes that the painting must consequently be relegated to the status of a merely historical rather than genuinely artistic representation of the reformer. This is no idealised "type" of the reformer, no "improvement on the actual," as Aristotle put it; indeed quite the contrary. While Hugelshofer's analysis is, on the whole, fairly convincing, it is nonetheless worth noting how remarkably fitting the second distich is to such a lacklustre image: "This is his likeness; the writings conceal his mind / Integrity and piety cannot be represented by art." Hugelshofer goes on to suggest that the book held by Vermigli is most likely the Bible. This interpretation does not fit very well, however, with the inscription of the distich. The verse intimates that while the painted figure represents Vermigli's effigies, that is his merely external appearance, his mentem remains concealed in the writings, presumably beyond the power of aesthetic representation. If we accept the guidance of the tetrastich in the interpretation of the painting, then the book which "conceals" the reformer's mind is more likely to be representative of his commentaries and treatises than the Bible itself. Whatever the painter's intention may have been, the author of the verse, at any rate, suggests that the most significant qualities of the reformer cannot be conveyed by the merely outward representation of the effigies. On this view, the true "icon" of the great theologian cannot be found in daubs of paint, but must be sought altogether elsewhere. Hugelshofer's interpretation proceeds from a classical aesthetic assumption that the external image properly ought to convey the underlying substantial reality of the subject. On this assumption the marked absence of spiritual and intellectual vitality in the likeness of Vermigli would seem to render the painting a failure. The hermeneutic implied by the inscription, on the other hand, nevertheless holds out the possibility that the painting may at some level succeed precisely by virtue of its failure to represent Vermigli's widely acknowledged intellectual and spiritual qualities.

1967), pp. xvi, 53. Coincidentally Asper and Vermigli were born in the same year. For the life of Hans Asper see Marianne Naegeli and Urs Hobi, "Catalog," Zürcher Kunst nach der Reformation, Katalog no. 258, p. 208 (Fig. 2).


25 He died in the year of our Lord 1562, aged 63. Here the age is given correctly.


30 The absence of the second distich is no doubt owing to the restricted space for a legible inscription on the face of the medal. More importantly, however, the reduction of the figure with the consequent removal of both the book and Vermigli's gesturing hand renders the second distich iconographically superfluous.

-- "INTEGRITAS PIETAS PINGIER ARTE NEQVIT." The later interpretation might be described as a "negative iconography," that is an interpretation of the portrait on the assumption of the essential hiddenness of the subject -- Vermilius Absconditus. Have the suspicions of idolatry which surrounded Hales's commission from the outset informed the iconography of Asper's final portrait? Both distichs of the inscription appear to point the viewer beyond the effigies of the reformer to a hidden reality beyond mere images, apvd superos.

Asper's portrait of Vermigli provides a pattern for numerous subsequent depictions of the reformer. In 1562, the year of Vermigli's death, a silver medal was struck in Zurich to commemorate the death of the great reformer. Designed by the Zurich artist and craftsman Hans Ulrich Stampfer II (1534-1580), the round medal bears the image of Vermigli on the obverse with the inscription, "Petrus: Martyr: Vermi1ius: Flor(entinus)." The image on the medal is a bust quite plainly derived from the portrait by Asper. The head is portrayed in the identical three-quarter profile facing right with the same detail of moustache, forked beard, academic cap and tippet. On the reverse of the medal is the first of the two distichs which appear on the portrait: "HVNC GENVIT ... APVD SVPEROS." Underneath the distich is added "OBIIT ANNO DOM. MDLXII. AET. 63." The absence of the second distich is no doubt owing to the restricted space for a legible inscription on the face of the medal. More importantly, however, the reduction of the figure with the consequent removal of both the book and Vermigli's gesturing hand renders the second distich iconographically superfluous.

Within less than a year after Vermigli's death Josias Simler's Funeral Oration was published in Zurich by Christoph Froschauer the younger. A woodcut portrait of the reformer is printed as a frontispiece to the folio. It...
bears the signature mark of Jos Murer (1530-1580), Glass-painter to the Council of Zurich, on the inner band of the oval border. Like Stampfer, Murer has based his design on the original portrait, once again omitting the lower portion of the painting along with the iconographically relevant second distich. In Murer's adaptation of Asper, however, the likeness is reversed. Although still in three-quarter profile, Vermigli is now looking to the left rather than to the right. Curiously each and every letter “S” of the inscription in the oval-shaped band which surrounds the likeness is also reversed in the print — perhaps a subtle, self-referential allusion by the sculptor to his reversal of the original portrait? Murer certainly displayed no similar evidence of dyslexia in the carving of the letter “S” in other, similar portraits. The oval perimeter of the portrait is inscribed “PETRUS MARTYR VERMILIUS FLORENTINUS ANNO AETATIS SUAE LXIII.” In the lower portion of the oval, underneath the image, there is the further inscription “OBIT ANNO DNI/ MDLXII. PRI: DIE IDVS NOV/ EMBRIS.” Aside from the reversal of the image, the iconographical detail once again closely resembles the oil portrait. The effect of the sharp contrast between dark line and white background in the woodcut suggests a somewhat younger man, perhaps owing to a heightened sharpness of detail with respect to the hair and beard. Murer has somehow succeeded in conveying a spark of intensity in the reformer's gaze wholly lacking in the oil portrait.

The Murer woodcut firmly establishes the iconographical pattern for subsequent images. The most well-known portrait of Vermigli, published in the Icones of Theodore de Bèze in 1580, follows Murer closely, although the derivative is a somewhat less refined and exact image. It too shows a three-quarter profile looking to the left. The same iconographical notae are present: the academical cap and tippet, full moustache and forked beard. The brow is pensively knit. Like Stampfer's medal Beza's icon of Vermigli shows just head and shoulders. Like the Murer woodcut, the icon is presented in an oval shape though without an inscription. Surrounding the oval-shaped portrait is an elaborate rectangular Jacobean-style frame with fanciful gargoyles at the four corners.

Yet another early portrait of Vermigli — a hand-coloured, copperplate engraving — was shown at a recent exhibit devoted to the Schola Tigurina and held at the Zurich Central Library from May to July 1999. The engraving closely modelled on Murer's woodcut and depicts Vermigli in three-quarter profile facing left with the same full moustache and forked beard. The detail of the visage follows the woodcut closely but the gown's appearance of richness, even elegance evokes the oil portrait directly. In the engraving the reformer is depicted clasping a quarto-size volume in both hands; this pose manages to convey a distinctly pious demeanour. As with the oil portrait, medal and woodcuts, this likeness of Vermigli impresses the viewer with a curious air of remoteness. A great deal more is concealed than revealed by the external effigies. No doubt Vermigli himself would have been pleased to refer the viewer to the contemplation of those things that are apud superos.