

‘RELICS OF THE AMORITES’ OR ‘THINGS INDIFFERENT’?
PETER MARTYR VERMIGLI’S AUTHORITY AND THE THREAT
OF SCHISM IN THE ELIZABETHAN VESTIARIAN
CONTROVERSY*

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Abstract

In the years following the enactment of the Elizabethan Settlement, the threat of schism loomed over the Church of England with respect to provisions governing uniformity of ecclesiastical dress. Were the traditional vestments and ornaments of worship ‘relics of the Amorites’ whose use was inconsistent with a truly Reformed ecclesiastical order? Or were they rather ‘adiaphora’ and therefore to be tolerated? Numerous appeals by both parties to the dispute were made to Peter Martyr Vermigli, now settled in Zurich, for his judgement of the matter. Although Vermigli’s authority was cited by both sides, he emerges a staunch defender of the Settlement. Consistent with his intervention of 1550 in John Hooper’s brief period of resistance to the Edwardine vestments rubric, Vermigli counselled conformity with careful nuance. Vermigli’s stance in the vestiarian controversy in turn raises important questions about the ‘Reformed’ identity of the Elizabethan Church.

Royal Injunctions

Item her maiestie beyng desyrous to haue the prelacye and cleargye of this Realme to bee hadde as well in outwarde reuerence, as otherwyse regarded for the worthynesse of theyr ministeries, and thynkyng it necessarye to haue them knowen to the people, in al places and assembles, bothe ini the Church and without, and thereby to receaue the honour and estymation due to the specyall messengers and mynysters of almyghtie Godde: wylleth and commaundeth that

* For an explanation of the abbreviated terms OL, ZL 1, and ZL 2, refer to the Abbreviations list at the end of this article.

all Archebyshoppes and byshoppes, and all other that bee called or admitted to preachynge or ministerye of the Sacramentes, or that bee called or admitted into anye vocation Ecclesiastycall, or into any societie of learning in eyther of the uniuersities, or els where, shall use and weare suche semely habytes, garmentes, and such square cappes, as were moost comenly and orderly receyued in the latter yeare of the raygne of kynge Edwarde the vi. Not thereby meanyng to attrIBUTE any holynesse or special worthynesse to the sayde garmentes, But as Saint Paule wryteth: *Omnia decenter et secundem ordeinem fient*. I. Cor. 14. Cap. [Let all things be done decently and in good order].¹

In the days and months following the accession of Elizabeth Tudor to the throne of England, correspondence exchanged between Peter Martyr Vermigli and various disciples of his among the Marian exiles reveals the spectre of schism looming within evangelical ranks of the Church of England. In letters to Vermigli, Thomas Sampson articulates the uncertainty felt by many of the returning exiles concerning the eventual shape of the expected new religious settlement. Sampson, who in exile had visited both Zurich and Geneva before his return to England in 1559, was a clear candidate for appointment to the bench of bishops.² Yet he bemoans the prospect and asks for the great man's advice on how to proceed.³ Vermigli advises a cautious and moderate course, and encourages Sampson not to 'let go any opportunity of directing things in a proper manner'.⁴ A year later, after the enactment of the Settlement statutes, John Jewel, close associate of the Italian reformer from his Oxford days, fellow

1. *Iniunctions given by the Quenes Maiestie* (London: Richard Juggle and John Cawood, Printers to the Quenes Maiestie, 1559), item 30, Cii recto.

2. Surviving correspondence reveals that he was in fact considered for the See of Norwich.

3. In a letter to Vermigli dated 17 December 1558, just a few weeks after the accession, Sampson expresses doubt whether an Episcopal appointment can be accepted in good conscience: 'I cannot take upon myself the government of the Church until, after having made an entire reformation in all ecclesiastical functions, she [i.e. the Queen] will concede to the clergy the right of ordering all things according to the word of God, both as regards doctrine and discipline...' [ZL1, 2-3]

4. ZL1, 2-3, Vermigli to Sampson, 15 July 1559, ZL 2, 25-27. In a subsequent letter to Sampson of 4 November 1559, Vermigli writes: 'But although I have always been opposed to the use of ornaments of this kind, yet as I perceived the present danger of your being deprived of the office of preaching, and that there will perhaps be some hope that, like as altars and images have been removed, so this resemblance of the mass may also be taken away, provided you and others who may obtain bishopricks, will direct all your endeavours to that object, (which would make less progress, should another succeed in your place, but would rather defend, cherish, and maintain them;) therefore was I the slower in advising you rather to refuse a bishoprick, than to consent to the use of those garments'.

exile in Zurich, and soon to be appointed bishop of Salisbury, writes to the master lamenting the continued use of the 'scenic apparatus of divine worship' and the 'theatrical habits' of the clergy: 'These are indeed, as you very properly observe, the relics of the Amorites...and I wish that sometime or other they may be taken away, and extirpated even to the lowest roots'.⁵ In another letter to Vermigli of 2 January 1560, Sampson sounds the alarm: 'O my father!' he writes,

What can I hope for, when the ministry of Christ is banished from court? While the crucifix is allowed, with lights burning before it? What can I hope, when three of our lately appointed bishops are to officiate at the table of the Lord, one as a priest, another as deacon, and a third as subdeacon, before the image of the crucifix, or at least not far from it, with candles, and habited in the golden vestments of the papacy... What hope is there of any good, when our party are disposed to look for religion in these dumb remnants of idolatry, and not from the preaching of the lively word of God? I will propose this single question for your resolution... Should we not rather quit the ministry of the word and sacraments, than that these relics of the Amorites should be admitted? Certain of our friends, indeed, appear in some measure inclined to regard these things as matters of indifference: for my own part, I am altogether of opinion, that should this be enjoined, we ought rather to suffer deprivation. (ZL 1, 63)

In his response of 1 February 1560, Vermigli exhorts Sampson very firmly against schism 'for if you, who are as it were pillars, shall decline taking upon yourselves the performance of ecclesiastical offices, not only will the churches be destitute of pastors, but you will give place to wolves and anti-Christ's' (ZL 2, 38-39). Vermigli is hopeful that some of the defects of the Settlement may be corrected, though perhaps not all. With an echo of an argument made by

5. ZL 1, 52. Jewel reports to Peter Martyr in November 1559 that 'religion among us is in the same state which I have often described to you before. The doctrine is every where most pure; but as to ceremonies and maskings, there is a little too much foolery. That little silver cross, of ill-omened origin, still maintains its place in the Queen's Chapel'. ZL 1, 55. The expression 'relics of the Amorites' is an allusion to Joshua 7 which recounts the transgression of the covenant by Achan. Israel, under the command of Joshua, has just been defeated in battle by the Amorites, and it emerges that the source of this loss is the secret possession of 'an accursed thing', i.e. spoils previously taken from the Amorites against Yahweh's command. 7.20, 21: 'Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and thus have I done: When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them...' The strength of Israel is thus linked with the avoidance of all contact with these relics. Joshua punishes Achan with death by stoning and he, the relics, and all his property are burned in the valley of Achor. Vermigli refers to the 'relics of Popery' in a letter to Sampson of 4 November 1559, ZL1, 51.

Thomas Cranmer during the Edwardine vestiarian disputation between John Hooper and Nicholas Ridley, Vermigli urges Sampson to conform to the vestments rubric: 'As to the square cap and episcopal habit in ordinary use, I do not think that there is need of much dispute, seeing it is unattended by superstition, and in that kingdom especially there may be a *political reason* for its use'.⁶ Among the bishops present at the liturgy in the Chapel Royal so vividly described by Sampson were the recently consecrated Marian exiles Edmund Grindal, Richard Cox, and Edwin Sandys.⁷ Together with them, many returned exiles of evangelical persuasion, including Jewel, affirmed their decision to conform to use of the 'Babylonish garments' required by the Act of Uniformity despite the objections many had made in the early days of the new regime. Others, including Sampson, remained in dissent.⁸ Throughout the mounting controversy over the continued use of distinctive clerical attire and traditional forms of ceremonial, the so-called 'relics of the Amorites', Peter Martyr Vermigli was frequently consulted by both sides of the dispute, and appeals to his authority, as we shall see, continued by members of both the conformist and non-conformist parties long after his death in 1562.

By 1563, the divergence of views is plainly reflected in the tone of two letters sent to Heinrich Bullinger by Jewel and Sampson respectively. According to

6. Vermigli to Sampson, 1 February 1560, ZL 2, 39. In a letter written to Martin Bucer concerning Hooper's non-conformity, Cranmer puts the question 'Whether he that shall affirm that it is unlawful, or shall refuse to wear these vestments, offends against God; inasmuch as he says, that that is unclean which God has sanctified; and against the magistrate, inasmuch as he violates the *political order*?'

7. Parker, Grindal, Sandys, and Cox were consecrated on 19 and 21 December 1559.

8. According to John Strype, 'Cox, Grindal, Horne, Sandys, Jewel, Parkhurst, and Bentham [all of them returned exiles and appointed bishops under the Settlement of 1559] concluded unanimously after consultation not to desert their ministry for some rites that were but a few, and not evil in themselves, especially since the doctrine of the gospel remained pure and entire'. See *Annals* I.i. 263. In a letter to Heinrich Bullinger dated 10 July 1560, Thomas Lever writes: 'The same order of public prayer, and of other ceremonies in the Church which existed under Edward the sixth, is now restored among us by the authority of the Queen and Parliament; for such is the name of our great council. In the injunctions, however, published by the Queen after the sitting of Parliament, there are prescribed to the clergy some ornaments, such as the mass-priests formerly had and still retain. A great number of the clergy, all of whom had heretofore laid them aside, are now resuming similar habits, and wear them, as they say, *for the sake of obedience*... Many of us English, who lived together in the same house at Zurich, are now of necessity dispersed all over England, and at a great distance from each other. It is, however, impossible but that we shall all of us retain a grateful remembrance of that exceeding hospitality and beneficence, which Zurich exhibited to us under your patronage, with so much comfort and benevolence and friendly regard.

Jewel, things 'are going on successfully both as to the affairs of religion, and of state'⁹ while to Sampson, writing just a few months later, 'affairs in England are in a most unhappy state; I apprehend worse evils, not to say the worst: but we must meanwhile serve the Lord Christ'.¹⁰ By the mid-1560s, controversy over the provisions of the Elizabethan Act of Uniformity had begun to reach a higher pitch. In 1564 the Queen wrote to Archbishop Parker deploring that 'diversity, variety, contention, and vain love of singularity, either in our ministers or in the people, must needs provoke the displeasure of Almighty God, and be to us, having the burden of government, discomfortable, heavy, and troublesome; and finally must needs bring danger of ruin to our people and country'.¹¹ Elizabeth chastises the Primate that 'these errors, tending to breed some schism or deformity in the church, should have been stayed and appeased'. Perceiving that the causes of schism have begun to increase, Elizabeth declares her royal purpose:

We, considering the authority given to us of Almighty God for the defence of the public peace, concord and truth of this his Church, and how we are answerable for the same to the seat of his high justice, mean not to endure or suffer any longer these evils thus to proceed, spread, and increase in our realm, but have certainly determined to have all such diversities, varieties, and novelties amongst them of the clergy and our people as breed nothing but contention, offence, and breach of common charity, and are also against the laws, good usages, and ordinances of our realm, to be reformed and repressed and brought to one manner of uniformity through our whole realm and dominions, that our people may thereby quietly honour and serve Almighty God in truth, concord, peace, and quietness...

The controversy over vestments and the ornaments rubric proved to be a breaking point for English Protestantism largely because the Queen's

9. 5 March 1563, ZL 1, 123-25.

10. 26 July 1563, ZL 1, 130-31.

11. See *Correspondence of Matthew Parker* (Parker Society; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1853), pp. 223-27. The Queen further charges her metropolitan with the task of ensuring that 'the clergy observe, keep, and maintain such order and uniformity in all the external rites and ceremonies, both for the Church and for their own persons, as by laws, good usages, and orders, are already allowed, well provided, and established. And if any superior officers shall be found hereto disagreeable, if otherwise your discretion or authority shall not serve to reform them, We will that you shall duly inform us thereof, to the end we may give indelayed order for the same; for we intend to have no dissension or variety grow by suffering of persons which maintain dissension to remain in authority; for so the sovereign authority which we have under Almighty God should be violate and made frustrate, and we might be well thought to bear the sword in vain'.

insistence upon conformity prompted prominent figures like Sampson openly to question their submission to the Supreme Governor of the church and to propose seeking further reforms by other means.¹² By March 1566, with the publication of Matthew Parker's *Advertisements* in direct response to the Queen's reprimand, the threat of schism had become considerably more palpable. In a letter to Bullinger, Sampson puts the question of the Elizabethan Vestiarian Controversy with great clarity.¹³ He begins by alluding to the Edwardine 'contest about habits, in which Cranmer, Ridley, and Hooper, most holy martyrs of Christ were formerly wont to skirmish' and follows up with twelve key questions. In the final two questions the immanent threat of schism comes to the fore. Sampson contemplates separation with a summary inquiry:

- (1) Should a distinctive clerical habit be required in a truly reformed church?
- (2) Is such prescription consistent with Christian liberty?
- (3) Are 'things indifferent' subject to coercion and
- (4) May new ceremonies be introduced?
- (5) Were Jewish 'sacerdotal' practices not abolished by Christ;
- (6) Can rites be borrowed from idolaters for use in the reformed church;
- (7) Can conformity to such rites be a matter of necessity?
- (8) What if the ceremonies occasion offence?
- (9) What if they are unedifying?
- (10) May such ceremonies be prescribed by the Prince without the assent of the clergy?
- (11) 'Whether a man ought thus to obey the decrees of the church; or on account of non-compliance, supposing there is no alternative, to be cast out of the ministry?'
- (12) 'Whether good pastors, of unblemished life and doctrine, may rightfully be removed from the ministry on account of non-compliance with such ceremonies?'

Bullinger's reply landed like a bomb-shell.¹⁴ In response to every one of Sampson's twelve questions, and to another similar set of questions put by

12. See Scott Wenig, *Straightening the Altars: The Ecclesiastical Vision and Pastoral Achievements of the Progressive Bishops under Elizabeth I, 1559–1579* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), p. 111 ff.

13. Sampson to Bullinger, 16 February 1566, ZL 1, 153–55.

14. Heinrich Bullinger to Laurence Humphrey and Thomas Sampson, 1 May 1566, ZL 1, 345–55. For a full discussion of the letter see Walter Phillips, 'Henry Bullinger and the Elizabethan Vestiarian Controversy: An Analysis of Influence', *Journal of Religious History* 2 (1981), pp. 363–84.

Sampson's colleague Laurence Humphrey, President of Magdalen College, Oxford, Bullinger sided with Parker and the Queen, both in his own name and also on behalf of Rudolph Gualter. He affirms that clerical habits are 'things indifferent', acceptable 'for the sake of decency, and comeliness of appearance, or dignity and order', that they are allowable as 'civil matters', agreeable with 'the light of nature', and that the Queen's majesty has complete authority in the matter.¹⁵ Bullinger dismisses any suggestion that separation or schism might be justified on the grounds of opposition to the provisions of the Act of Uniformity:

Though I would rather no ceremonies, excepting such as are necessary, should be obruded upon the church, yet I must confess in the mean time that regulations respecting them, though possibly not altogether necessary, and sometimes, it may be, useless, ought not forthwith to be condemned as impious, and to excite disorder and schism in the church; seeing that they are not of a superstitious character, and also that in their very nature they are matters of indifference... For if the edifying of the church is the chief thing to be regarded in this matter, we shall do the church a greater injury by deserting it than by wearing the habits... I exhort you all, by Jesus Christ our Lord, the Saviour, head, and king of his church, that every one of you should duly consider with himself, whether he will not more edify the church of Christ by regarding the use of habits for the sake of order and decency, as a matter of indifference, and which hitherto has tended somewhat to the harmony and advantage of the church; than by leaving the church, on account of the vestiarian controversy, to be occupied hereafter, if not by evident wolves, at least by ill-qualified and evil ministers.¹⁶

For Bullinger, certainly no friend of popish ceremony and other such 'relics of the Amorites', the necessary requirement of preaching the gospel nonetheless takes unconditional priority over the retention or abolition of things 'of themselves' indifferent. Separation is a greater injury than the burden of conformity.

At several points in his letter, Bullinger appeals directly to the authority of Peter Martyr. Indeed the arguments mounted are for the most part derived from a letter written by the Italian reformer to John Hooper sixteen years earlier.¹⁷ During the crisis stemming from his refusal to be consecrated Bishop

15. ZL 1, 353 'I can easily believe that wise and politic men are urgent for a conformity of rites, because they think it will tend to concord, and there may be one and same church throughout all England; wherein, provided nothing sinful is intermixed, I do not see why you should oppose yourselves with hostility to harmless regulations of that kind'.

16. ZL 1, 351, 353, 355.

17. Vermigli to Hooper, 4 November 1550, MSS of John More, Bishop of Ely, Cambridge University Library, Mm 4.14, Art. 2. See also Petri Martyris *Epistolae Theologicae*, London 1583, fol. 1085; translated by Anthonie Marten in Peter Martyr, *Divine Epistles*,

of Gloucester according to the prescribed ceremonies and wearing the canonical dress, Hooper had himself requested Martyr's counsel on the question of his nonconformity.¹⁸ It should be remembered that Hooper had lived at Zurich in the late 1540s where he became a friend of Bullinger. After returning to England, where he was hailed as 'England's future Zwingli', Hooper was made chaplain to Protector Somerset and nominated to the bishopric of Gloucester in 1550.¹⁹ After engaging in an extended disputation with Nicholas Ridley on the lawfulness of 'those Aaronic habits' and being confined for almost three weeks in the Fleet Prison by order of the Privy Council, Hooper submitted unconditionally and was duly consecrated to his See.²⁰ In a letter to Martin Bucer, Vermigli relates how he had met with Hooper on three separate occasions at Lambeth Palace and how he 'exerted every effort to break down his determination' in order to secure his conformity.²¹ Against this background of Edwardine vestiarian strife antagonists on both sides of the Elizabethan debate of the mid-1560s honed their polemics.

Vermigli's importance in all of this is underscored by the wider use made of his writing on the vestiarian question by proponents on both sides. In *The Unfolding of the Pope's Attyre*, the first salvo in a furious spate of polemical tracts published in response to Parker's *Advertisements*, Robert Crowley invokes the

London 1583, fo. 116, col. 2. See also John Strype, *Memorials of Archbishop Cranmer* (3 vols.; Oxford: Combe, 1848–54), I, pp. 304–307. The text of the letter in English translation is also printed in Goreham 187–196.

18. See Hooper to Bullinger, 29 June 1550, OL 87, where he explains his refusal 'both by reason of the shameful and impious form of the oath, which all who choose to undertake the function of a bishop are compelled to put up with, and also on acct of those Aaronic habits which they still retain in that calling, and are used to wear, not only at the administration of the sacraments, but also at public prayers'. For a full account of the episode see J.H. Primus, *The Vestments Controversy: An Historical Study of the Earliest Tensions within the Church of England in the Reigns of Edward VI and Elizabeth* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1960), Chapter 1.

19. Letter from Micronius to Pellican, Simler Collection of MSS, S. 70, 136, Zentralbibliothek Zurich. See Primus, *The Vestments Controversy*, p. 5.

20. Hooper was committed to the Fleet on 27 January 1551 'Upon a letter from tharchebusshop of Canterbury, that Mr. Hoper can not be brought to any conformytie, but rather persevering in his obstinacie coveteth to prescribe order and necessarie lawes of his heade, it was agree he shulde be committed to the Fleete'. *Acts of the Privy Council*, 199–200. Nearly three weeks later Hooper wrote a letter of submission. See Bishop Hooper to Archbishop Cranmer, 15 February 1550, in George C. Gorham, *Gleanings of a Few Scattered Ears, During the Period of the Reformation in England and of the Times Immediately Succeeding; AD 1533–AD 1588* (London: Bell & Daldy, 1857), pp. 233–35.

21. Vermigli to Bucer, 10 January 1551, Gorham, *Gleanings of a Few Scattered Ears*, pp. 231–33.

Florentine's authority in a full-frontal assault on the ceremonies.²² Crowley points out quite correctly that Vermigli was willing to endure the 'remnants of the Amorites' for a season, but nevertheless looked forward to their eventual abolition.²³ Crowley even cites Ridley and Jewel in support of his nonconformity. In a tract published shortly afterwards intended to refute Crowley, both Martyr's and Bucer's letters to Hooper of 1550 are reprinted.²⁴ On 3 May 1566, just two days after the reply to Sampson and Humphrey, Bullinger and Gualter had sent a blind copy of the letter to Bishop Robert Horne and asked that it be sent on to Grindal, Jewel, Parkhurst, Sandys, and Pilkington, all of whom had been Bullinger's guests as exiles in Zurich, and all of whom were now sitting side by side on the Elizabethan bench of bishops.²⁵ The letter was

22. Robert Crowley, *A briefe discourse against the outwarde apparell and Ministring Garmentes of the Popishe Church* (1566). See sig. Cii verso: 'And Peter Martyr, whose iudgement hath in this matter bene oftentimes asked, dothe more than once in his writings call [the ceremonies] *Reliquias Amorraeorum*, leavings or remnants of the Amorites. And although he do in some case thinke that they maye be borne with for a season: yet in our case, he would not have them suffered to remaine in the Church of Christ'. See Strype, *Annals*, I.ii.163.

23. This argument for a 'temporizing' solution is characteristic of Vermigli's letters to Sampson in 1559 and 1560. See, e.g., Vermigli to Sampson, 4 November 1559, ZL 2, 32-33: 'Though I have always been opposed to the use of ornaments of this kind, yet as I perceived the present danger of your being deprived of the office of preaching, and that there will perhaps be some hope that, like as altars and images have been removed, so this resemblance of the mass may also be taken away, provided you and others who may obtain bishopricks, will direct all your endeavours to that object, (which would make less progress, should another succeed in your place, who not only might be indifferent about putting away those relics, but would rather defend, cherish, and maintain them...'

24. The tract, attributed to Archbishop Matthew Parker himself, appeared under the title *A brief examination for the tyme, of a certaine declaration, lately put in print, in the name and defence of certaine Ministers in London, refusing to weare the apparel prescribed by the lawes and orders of the Realme...* (London: Richard Jugges, 1566): 'In the ende is reported, the judgement of two notable learned fathers, M. doctour Bucer, and M. doctour Martir, sometime in eyther universities here of England the kynges readers and professours of divinitie, translated out of the originals, written by their owne handes, purposely debating this controversie. Paul. Rom. 14, I besech you brethren marke them which cause division, and geve occasions of evyll, contrary to the doct which ye have learned, and avoyde them: for they that are such serve not the Lorde Jesus Christ, but their own bellies, and with sweete and flattering wordes deceive the hartes of the Innocentes'.

25. See Bullinger to Horne, ZL 1, 356-57: 'We send our letter on the vestiarian controversy, written by us to the learned men, and our honoured godly brethren, N. and M. [viz. Sampson and Humphrey]. And we send it to you that ye may understand that we would not have any private communication with the brethren, without the knowledge of you, the principal ministers'.

published, in some degree to the consternation of its authors, who had been compelled to take sides in a confrontation between their mutual friends.²⁶ As Walter Phillips has argued, from this point forward Bullinger and Gualter were cast in the role of defenders of the Elizabethan Settlement while the opponents of conformity, such as Sampson and Humphrey, were ‘compelled to look more and more to Geneva’ for succour.²⁷

Appeals to the authority of Vermigli were by no means restricted to supporters of the Establishment. His name appears on the masthead of two more counter blasts in the pamphlet war of 1566, one on either side of the dispute. The letter to Hooper appears once again in a conformist tract titled *Whether it be mortall sinne to transgresse civil lawes which be the commaundementes of civill magistrates*, which bears all the marks of government approval, published by Richard Juggé, the Queen’s printer and, like *A brief examination for the tyme*, may even have been composed by Parker himself.²⁸ The tract reprints both Bullinger’s letter to Sampson and Humphrey and the letter to Bishop Horne as well as a number of tracts related to the Edwardine controversy of 1550, including Vermigli’s letter to Hooper. The latter, nonconformist tract, is addressed anonymously to ‘all such as unfainedly hate (in zeale of a Godly love) all monuments, and remnauntes of Idolatrie’ and follows the now well established model of an assemblage of ‘gleanings’ from various ‘learned men’, Vermigli included.²⁹ That Vermigli’s authority was of considerable consequence in the Elizabethan vestiarian debate there can be no doubt.

What does remain something of a puzzle, however, is the apparent ease with which Vermigli is cited as an authority on either side of what is undoubtedly the bitterest clash of ecclesiological principle to face the Church of England in the first decade following the enactment of the Elizabethan Settlement. Let us look more closely at the argument of his letter to Hooper. From the outset Peter Martyr expresses his agreement with Hooper’s main purpose:

26. See Grindal and Horn to Bullinger and Gualter, ZL 1, 175, which announces the publication of Bullinger’s letter.

27. Phillips, ‘Henry Bullinger and the Elizabethan Vestiarian Controversy’, p. 382.

28. *Whether it be mortall sinne to transgresse civil lawes which be the commaundementes of civill magistrates. The judgement of Philip Melancton in his Epitome of morall Philosophie. The resolution of D. Henry Bullinger, and D. Rod[olph] Gualter, of D. Martin Bucer, and D. Peter Martyr, concerning thapparel of Ministers, and other indifferent things* (London: Richard Juggé, Printer to the Queenes Maiestie, 1566).

29. *The Fortresse of Fathers, earnestlie defending the puritie of Religion, and Ceremonies, by the trew exposition of certaine places of Scripture: against such as wold bring in an Abuse of Idol stouff, and of thinges indifferent, and do appoinct th’authority of Princes and Prelates larger then the trueth is.* (Translated out of Latine into English for there sakes that understand no Latine by I.B. 1566).

at first I took no small pleasure in your singular and ardent zeal, with which you endeavour that the Christian religion may again approach to chaste and simple purity. For what ought to be more desired by all godly men, than that all things may by little and little be cut off which have scarcely anything or nothing that can be turned to solid edification, and which by godly minds are rather considered to be redundant, and, in a manner, superfluous? To speak, indeed, about myself, I take it ill to be torn from that plain and pure custom which you have known that we all for a long time used at Strasburgh, where the distinctions of vestments as to holy services had been taken away, even as I ever most of all approved that custom as the more pure, and mostly savouring of the apostolic Church.³⁰

Yet for all his agreement with Hooper on 'the chief and principal point', Vermigli refuses to allow that the use of traditional vestments and ceremonies is 'fatal' or contrary to Scripture on the grounds that they are of themselves 'altogether indifferent'. Vermigli is careful to distinguish personal judgement and sensibility from the expression of public will.³¹ Furthermore, vehement contention leads to a dangerous confusion of the 'necessary points' of salvation with matters indifferent and merely accessory. 'Sometimes in these indifferent matters some things, although they be grievous and burdensome, are to be borne so long as it is not permitted by law to deviate from them; lest, if we content for them more bitterly than we ought, this may be a hindrance to the advancement of the Gospel, and those things which are in their nature indifferent may, by our vehement contention, be represented as ungodly'.³² For

30. *Epistolae Theologicae*, 1085; Gorham, *Gleanings of a Few Scattered Ears*, p. 188; see also *Whether it be mortall sinne*, 61. For an account of a Reformed church purged of all images, statues, altars, ornaments and music see Ludwig Lavater's description of the practice of the Church of Zurich in *De Ritibus et Institutis Ecclesiae Tigurinae* (Zurich 1559), Art. 6, fol. 3: 'Templa Tigurinorum ab omnibus simulachris & statuibus repurgata sunt. Altaria nulla habent, sed tantum necessaria instrumenta: veluti, cathedram sacram, subsellia, baptisterium, mensam quae apponitur in medium quando celebranda est coena, lucernas, quarum usus est hyemne quando contractiores sunt dies) in antelucanis coetibus. Templa non corruscant auro, argento, gemmis, ebore. Haec enim non vera sunt templorum ornamenta. Organa & alia instrumenta musica, in temples nulla sunt, eo quod ex eorum strepitu, verborum dei nihil intelligatur. Vexilla quoque & alia anathemata ex temples sublata sunt' (quoted Primus, p. 4).

31. 'Although, as I said, I do not think a diversity of vestments ought to be maintained in holy services, nevertheless I would by no means say it was ungodly (impious), so as to venture to condemn whomsoever I should see using it. Certainly, if I were so persuaded, I would never have communicated here with the Church in England, in which a diversity of this kind has been maintained to this day'. Gorham, *Gleanings of a Few Scattered Ears*, pp. 188-89.

32. Gorham, *Gleanings of a Few Scattered Ears*, p. 189.

Vermigli opposition to the ornaments rubric is simply bad strategy from an evangelical standpoint. 'Since a change is being introduced in necessary points of religion, and that with so great difficulty, if we should also speak of those things as ungodly which are indifferent, the minds of almost all men would be so turned away from us, that they would no longer shew themselves to be attentive and patient hearers of sound doctrine and necessary sermons'. Moreover, opposition to the *adiaphora* as ungodly leads to a condemnation of many Churches 'not alien from the Gospel'.

Vermigli proceeds to address Hooper's several arguments against the adiaphoristic principle. First is the contention that the Gospel abolishes the ceremonies of the Law. Vermigli assents to the replacement of the Aaronic sacraments by the Eucharist, but adds that certain acts, 'agreeable to the light of nature', are nevertheless continued, such as the payment of tithes, the singing of psalms, the custom of prophesying, and the observance of feast days in commemoration of the nativity, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. 'Should all these things be abolished, because they are traces of the old law? All things of Aaron's priesthood have not been so abolished, that none of them can be retained or used'.³³ For Vermigli, extreme opposition to the ceremonies imperils Christian liberty.³⁴ In the spirit of this liberty pagan cultic practices were taken over by the early Christians and use of vestments such as the pallium affirmed by the Fathers long before the establishment of the 'papal tyranny'. Even verses of the pagan poets 'dedicated to the Muses and to various gods' were employed by Church writers 'when they were profitable, beautiful, and true'. The detested vestments are indeed a human invention, yet all human inventions, Vermigli argues, are not at once to be condemned.³⁵ On the contrary, symbols and signs are appropriate to Christian worship. 'The

33. Gorham, *Gleanings of a Few Scattered Ears*, pp. 191.

34. Gorham, *Gleanings of a Few Scattered Ears*, p. 192: 'Doubtless we must take care, that we afflict not the Church of Christ with undue bondage of being able to adopt nothing which is of the Pope. Certainly our forefather received the temples of idols, and turned them into holy mansions in which Christ should be worshipped. And the revenues that were consecrated to the gods of the heathen, to theatrical plays, and to vestal virgins, they took for maintaining ministers of the Church; whereas these things had formerly served, not merely Antichrist, but the devil. Moreover, even the verses of the poets, which had been dedicated to the muses and to various gods, or to the acting of fables in the theatre, to appease the gods, when they were profitable, beautiful, and true were used by Church writers; and that by the example of the Apostle, who did not disdain to cite Menander, Aratus, and Epimenides, and that in the holy Scripture itself which he delivered; and those word which otherwise were profane he adapted to Divine worship'.

35. Gorham, *Gleanings of a Few Scattered Ears*, p. 194.

Church's ministers are the angels and messengers of God, as Malachi testifies; and the angels have almost always appeared clothed in white vestments. How shall we deprive the Church of this liberty', Vermigli asks, 'of being able to signify anything by her actions and ceremonies?' He goes on to compare this symbolic function to the sacraments themselves: 'To this end the symbols of sacraments seem to be devised, that even by the very sight and sense we may be drawn to think on Divine things. Neither do I think that tyranny is instantly brought in, if any indifferent thing be appointed to be done in the Church... indifferent things cannot defile those who live with a pure and sincere mind and conscience'.³⁶

Vermigli's staunch support of vestiarian conformity is all the more remarkable for being in a profound sense contrary to his personal inclination and sensibility. Given that the principle of Christian liberty was itself at stake in this controversy, the theologically reasonable course demanded a thorough defense of Cranmer's policy. Vermigli's position is grounded in his interpretation of the first principles of Reformed ecclesiological orthodoxy, especially with regard to the crucial distinction between matters 'necessary' and matters merely 'accessory' to salvation. By keeping these two matters in clear and evangelical distinction, he allows himself to be led by what might be described as a 'theological necessity' to a conclusion which came to epitomize the very substance of the Elizabethan Settlement. Diarmaid MacCulloch and Scott Wenig have recently restated the old Tractarian canard that the Elizabethan Church of England sought to achieve a middle way between Rome and Geneva, the so-called Anglican *via media*.³⁷ According to MacCulloch, the Settlement of 1559 represents a 'theological cuckoo in the nest'. That is to say, the Church of England was an essentially 'Catholic' structure operated by a 'Reformed' clerical leadership. On this view of the matter, 'the story of Anglicanism, and the story of the discomfiture of Elizabeth's first bishops, is the result of the fact that this tension between Catholic structure and Protestant theology was never resolved'.³⁸ In this interpretation of the Elizabethan Settlement, the criticism levelled against the Establishment by such radical critics as Thomas Sampson, Laurence Humphrey, and Robert Crowley are simply

36. Gorham, *Gleanings of a Few Scattered Ears*, p. 195.

37. Wenig, *Straightening the Altars*, p. 10: 'Forced by their own theologically-based Erastianism to submit to Crown's will, the bishops' drive for an authentically Reformed English church was undermined at the national level'.

38. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Later Reformation in England, 1547–1603* (New York: Macmillan, 2nd edn, 2000), p. 29.

assumed to be representative of 'Reformed orthodoxy'. On our reading of Vermigli's and Bullinger's contribution to the vestiarian controversy, however, the question is raised whether the claim to orthodoxy may in fact lie more plausibly with the Queen and her loyal bishops. Vermigli's letter to Hooper, along with Bullinger's to Sampson and Humphrey, suggests that far from intruding an evangelical cuckoo into a Romish nest, the architects of the Elizabethan Settlement may have succeeded in framing an order of the most impeccable ecclesiological orthodoxy approved by the two pre-eminent divines of the *Schola Tigurina*.

Abbreviations

- OL *Original letters relative to the English reformation: written during the reigns of King Henry VIII, King Edward VI, and Queen Mary: chiefly from the archives of Zurich* (translated from authenticated copies of the autographs, and edited for the Parker Society, by the Rev. Hastings Robinson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1846).
- ZL1 *The Zurich letters (first series): comprising the correspondence of several English bishops and others, with some of the Helvetian reformers, during the early part of the reign of Queen Elizabeth* (trans. and ed. for the Parker Society by Hastings Robinson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1842).
- ZL 2 *The Zurich letters (second series): comprising the correspondence of several English bishops and others with some of the Helvetian reformers, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth* (translated from authenticated copies of the autographs, and edited for the Parker Society by the Rev. Hastings Robinson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1845).

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