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THREE DISPUTED VERMIGLI TRACTS

This article attempts two tasks: it will show that Peter Martyr Vermigli wrote three tracts whose authorship has been disputed for over a century, and it will suggest how these tracts fit into his life and the life of the Swiss Reformed Church.

Peter Martyr Vermigli was among the most prolific, respected and influential Italian Reformers. After fleeing Italy and the Inquisition in 1542, he spent the remaining twenty years of his life as writer and professor of theology at Strasbourg, Oxford and Zurich. His best known and most influential work is the posthumous *Loci Communes*, a massive theological summa of which fifteen editions were published. Robert Masson, pastor of the French church in London, compiled the first edition (London, 1576) by arranging extracts from Martyr's previously published works according to the systematic order of Calvin's *Institutes*. The second edition, published at Zurich in 1580, added a mass of new materials drawn from Martyr's unpublished writings, sermons and letters. These new materials were included in all the subsequent editions of the *Loci Communes*. Scholars have accepted Vermigli's authorship of all this material except three short tracts entitled *De libero arbitrio*, *De providentia et praedestinatione*, and *An Deus sit causa et author peccati?* These Rodolph Gualther found unsigned among Vermigli's papers and included in his 1580 edition of the *Loci*.¹ The Zentralbibliothek at Zurich possesses a manuscript copy (Msc. Car III 206d, formerly Car III 206g) of these tracts, which is definitely not in Martyr's hand but which clearly contains marginalia in the hand of Heinrich Bullinger. These circumstances and the similarity of the titles of the three tracts with certain Bullinger titles have led most scholars to attribute them to Bullinger or at least to doubt Vermigli's authorship. Among older scholars Alexander Schweizer,² M. A. Goos-

ens,³ Walther Kohler,⁴ and Otto Ritschl⁵ attributed the tracts to Bullinger. So did a number of Vermigli specialists: Charles Schmidt stated that Bullinger wrote the tracts in 1553;⁶ Joseph McLelland followed Schmidt's judgment,⁷ as did my dissertation.⁸ Bullinger's authorship was decisively disproved by Peter Walser, who carefully compared the teaching of the tracts with Bullinger's certain works and showed that he could not have written the three tracts. He urged Martyr's authorship and pointed to several parallels in them with Martyr's other works.⁹ Without offering new evidence Thomas Brassel acclaimed Walser's solution in a short note in *Zwingliana* and asserted that the tracts were certainly by Martyr.¹⁰ Brassel's contribution was immediately criticized by Joachim Staedtke who pointed out several of its shortcomings and concluded that the question of the real author was not answered but only posed anew. He noted that the manuscript Car III 206d is a clean copy and that even positive identification of its handwriting (he cautiously suggests Gualther) would not reveal the author of the original. This is especially true since Peter Martyr frequently employed others to copy his writings.¹¹

Clearly only a careful examination of the internal evidence of the tracts is likely to reveal their author. In revising my dissertation for publication, I reread the three tracts and was struck by the close similarities of certain passages to those in Martyr's certainly authentic writings. This led to a full-scale comparison of the tracts with Martyr's treatment of the same doctrines, which in turn made his authorship of the disputed tracts clear beyond reasonable doubt.¹² The close correspondences in both wording and doctrine can be best presented by a parallel printing of excerpts.

Disputed *De providentia et praedestinatione*

Vermigli's *Loci Communes*

1. Dei providentia est eius ordinata, immobilis et perpetua universarum rerum administratio et ea potissimum omnia quae condidit ad suos fines dirigit. Non est utique simplex intelligentia sed etiam voluntas ei adiecta est quae cuncta pro suo arbitrio dirigit.

1. Sic definiri potest providentia: est Dei ordinata, immobilis et perpetua universarum rerum administratio. ... hoc habet (praedestinatio) commune cum providentia, quod utraque requirit notitiam et referatur ad voluntatem ... III, 1, 10.

2. Quae videntur fortuita, a providentia gubernantur. Iosephus inquit, Deus me praemisit in Aegyptum. Deus ait se misisse Saulem ad Samuelem, quamvis fortuito videri venisse. Et Christus inquit, Occuret vobis homo portans hydriam aquae.
2. Multo autem minus (a providentia) excludenda ea quae videntur agi fortuito ... Josephus fratribus suis, non vos, inquit, vendidistis me in Egyptum, sed Deus praemisit me. Saulem ad Samuelem, quamvis ille videretur fortuito ad illum divertisse. Ita Christus ait Apostolis, Accuret vobis quidam portans hydriam aquae. I, 13, 11.
3. Praedestinationem aliqui dicunt esse praeparationem gratiae, aut praescientiam aut praeparationem donorum Dei, quibus certo liberantur qui liberantur, caeteri vero in massa perditionis relinquuntur. Aliqui dicunt esse propositum miserendi. Alii praeparationem gratiae in praesenti et gloriae in futuro. Ego vero dico esse sapientissimum Dei propositum, quo ante omnem aeternitatem constanter decrevit, eos quos dilexit in Christo, vocare ad filiorum adoptionem, ad Iustificationem per fidem et tandem ad gloriam per opera bona, quo conformes fiant imagini filii Dei, utque in illis declaretur gloria et misericordia creatoris.
3. Augustinus de Praedestinatione sanctorum capite duodecimo praedestinationem sic definit, ut eam dicat esse praeparationem gratiae: capite duodecimo ait, eam esse praescientiam et praeparationem donorum Dei, quibus certo liberantur qui liberantur: alibi appellat propositum misericordiae. Magister Sententiarum in primo, distinctione quadragesima, definit esse praeparationem gratiae in praesenti et gloriam in futuro. ... Dico igitur, praedestinationem esse sapientissimum propositum Dei quo ante omnem aeternitatem decrevit constanter eos quos dilexit in Christo vocare ad adoptionem filiorum, ad iustificationem ex fide, et tandem ad gloriam per opera bona, quo conformes fiant imagini filii Dei, utque in illis declaretur gloria et misericordia Creatoris. III, 1, 11.
4. Praedestinatio est immutabilis, Firmum stat Dei fundamentum. Novit Dominus qui sunt sui.
4. His verbis docemur Dei praedestinationem esse immutabilem. Paulus enim ait in poste-

- Hinc est certitudo salutis. Unde Paulus cum egisset de praedestinatione, inquit: Quis nos accusabit? Quis damnabit? quis nos separabit a charitate Dei. Ego sum Dominus et non mutuo.
5. Reprobatio est sapientissimum Dei propositum, quo Deus ante omnem aeternitatem decrevit constanter absque ulla iniustitia eorum non misereri quos non dilexit sed praeteriit, quo iusta illorum condemnatione iram suam erga peccata, potentiam et gloriam declaret.
6. Peccata non sunt causa reprobationis, quod videlicet aliqui a dilectione Dei praetereantur et reliquantur, quamvis causae sint damnationis. Unde si Patres aliquando dicunt: Peccata esse causam reprobationis, id intelligunt quoad extremam damnationem, quae prorsus ob peccata infligitur.
7. Christus est primus et praecipuus effectus praedestinationis, illum dedit Deus, ut praedestinos per eum servaret. Per illum enim seu per canalem caetera effecta praedestinationis in nos derivantur ex Dei misericordia.
- riori ad Timotheum, Firmum stat fundamentum, novit Dominus qui sunt sui ... Quis nos separabit a charitate Dei ... Et apud Esaiam Deus clamat, Ego sum Deus et non mutuo ... III, 1, 11.
5. Sit igitur reprobatio, sapientissimum Dei propositum, quo ante omnem aeternitatem decrevit constanter absque ulla iniustitia eorum non misereri quos non dilexit, sed praeteriit: quo iusta illorum condemnatione iram suam erga peccata et gloriam declararet. III, 1, 15.
6. ... peccata causae quidem sunt cur damnemur, non tamen cur a Deo reprobemur ... Quod si Augustinus dicat, nomines iuste reprobari propter peccata, una cum reprobatione sumit extremum eius exemplum, vicelicet damnationem. III, 1, 16.
7. Primum igitur praedestinationis effectum est ipse Christus, quia nihil donorum Dei possunt habere electi, quod non per servatorem nostrum non fuerit transmissum. III, 1, 37.¹⁴

The source of the disputed tract on providence and predestination is obviously Vermigli's treatise on predestination originally contained in his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, which he wrote at Oxford, probably in 1552, and published at Basel in 1558. The

treatise was reprinted in all editions of the *Loci Communes*. A great many more parallels between the two-page disputed tract and the long Romans treatise could be added;¹⁵ in fact the disputed tract brilliantly summarizes the key doctrines of the thirty-one folio page treatise; at no point does the short tract depart from Martyr's previous teaching.

The disputed tract *De libero arbitrio* covers three folio pages and summarizes the eighteen-page lecture dealing with free will that Martyr gave at Zurich on January 25, 1560. To print all the parallels would be pointless; a comparison of the opening and closing passages of each suffices.

Disputed *De libero arbitrio*Vermigli's *De libero arbitrio* of 1560

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| <p>1. Est vis quaedam voluntatis quae dum sequitur partem cognoscentem, aliquid ultro, aut repudiat aut expedit. ... Magister sententiarum lib. 2. distinct. 25. dicit esse facultatem rationis et voluntatis qua deligitur bonum assistente gratia, vel malum desistente gratia.</p> <p>2. Inter impios tamen et regeneratos hoc est discrimen, quod illi sibi placent in peccatis, non dolent, imo in eis volentes et ultro versantur. Renati vero deflent, gemunt, suspirant, dolent, et perpetuo clamant, Remittas nobis debita nostra. Et cum primitias spiritus habeant, optant extremam manum sibi imponi. Atque haec de libero arbitrio.</p> | <p>1. Possumus igitur sic definire liberum arbitrium, quod sit facultas quaedam voluntatis quae dum sequitur partem cognoscentem aliquid repudiat aut expedit ultro. ... Magister Sentent. in distinct. 25. lib. 2 Sentent. illi sibi placent in peccatis, non ... dicit liberum arbitrium esse facultatem rationis et voluntatis qua deligitur bonum, assistente gratia Dei, aut malum desistente gratia. <i>Loci</i>, 971.</p> <p>2. Discrimen tamen est inter impios et renatos, nam illi delectatur et exultant in peccatis: pii vero dolent, gemunt et quotidie precantur, Remittas nobis debita nostra. ... Cumque ... primitias tantum spiritus habere, optant sibi manum extremam imponi ... Et haec de arbitrii libertate sufficient. <i>Loci</i>, 989.</p> |
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The third disputed tract, *An Deus sit causa et author peccati?*, is

not quite a folio page in length. It is based on a similar treatise entitled *An Deus sit author peccati?*, which was included in Vermigli's commentary on the Second Book of Samuel and was reprinted in the *Loci Communes*. The verbal parallels are not quite so striking as in the previous cases, but they suffice to show derivation. The teaching of the disputed tract as a whole agrees entirely with Martyr's doctrine on the subject, which he develops in several places.¹⁶

An Deus sit causa et author peccati? *An Deus sit author peccati?*

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| <p>1. Tertio, peccata ipsa regit et gubernat, non enim sinit grassari quanta mala hominum voluntas cupit. Refrenat, cohibet, nec sinit in quoslibet saevire, atque omni tempore.</p> | <p>1. Deus tamen ipsum peccatum regit et gubernat ... Deus non patitur ut quovis tempore grassentur nec quamdiu pravi velint: fraenat peccata, interrupt aliquando. <i>Loci</i>, I, 14, 12.</p> |
| <p>2. Quarto, Deus immittit aliquas occasiones, quae si inciderent in bonos homines, provocarent eos ad bona: quia vero in malos incidunt, eorum vitio arripiuntur in malam partem et fiunt occasiones peccati.</p> | <p>2. Deus ipse aliqua suggerit, quae natura sua bona sunt, attamen quia pravos incidunt, arripiuntur in malam partem et occasiones fiunt peccandi. <i>Loci</i>, I, 14, 13.</p> |

Clearly, the three treatises derive in some way from Peter Martyr's authenticated writings. Could they have been written by a disciple rather than by Martyr himself? I think it unlikely. The three tracts are connected historically, dogmatically, and stylistically so that any explanation must consider them as a unit. The treatises must have been written before Bullinger's death in 1575 since the manuscript copy at Zurich contains marginalia in his hand. They contain verbal borrowings from Martyr's commentaries on Romans, Samuel, and Genesis, first published in 1558, 1564, and 1569 respectively. An author other than Martyr could have had access to these sources easily enough. More difficult, he would also have needed a copy of Martyr's 1560 lecture on free will, which remained in manuscript until 1580. This is possible but somewhat unlikely. The tracts themselves offer a more telling argument against authorship by a disciple. Some of the borrowings from Vermigli's works are

almost word for word, and this sort of copying would be easy enough, but often the modifications are free adaptations which almost always condense, clarify, and improve on the original. The disputed tracts bear the mark of a mature thinker who has long reflected on their subject and is now summarizing his convictions and teaching. Clarity, straight-forwardness, and orderliness of thought and expression are everywhere the hallmarks of Vermigli's writings, but the three tracts have a precision, coherence, and confidence that reveal the hand of a master at the height of his power rather than the second-hand cribbing of a disciple.¹⁷ Finally, the three tracts can be assigned a distinct place in Martyr's career that explains their content, style, and the reason for their composition.

When Vermigli fled Marian England in 1553 to take up his old chair at Strasbourg, he found the city dominated by strict Lutheran pastors led by Johann Marbach, who objected to his teaching on the eucharist and predestination. He therefore accepted a call in July, 1556, to Zurich, where his eucharistic doctrine was entirely acceptable, even though his Calvinist doctrine of predestination went beyond the teachings of the Zurich divines, particularly those of the rather Erasmian Theodore Bibliander, a veteran professor at the academy. In his inaugural address Martyr went out of his way to praise Bibliander,¹⁸ but soon the two professors fell out on the crucial question of predestination. Martyr reports to his warm friend John Calvin in a letter of July 1, 1557, that Bibliander had attacked his teaching and that he would use his lectures on the Book of Samuel to reply.¹⁹ The Calvinist doctrine of predestination lay open to two classic objections, that it robbed man of his freedom and that it made God responsible for sin. The controversy quickly spread to these questions.²⁰ Twice Martyr diverted from his verse by verse commentary on Samuel to devote extended treatment to God's authorship of sin.²¹ His treatment makes a special point of showing that his position on providence and predestination is in conformity with Zwingli's *De Providentia*, clearly implying that Bibliander, despite his twenty-eight years on the Zurich faculty, stood outside the authentic Zwinglian tradition.²² The controversy reached a climax at the end of 1559. According to one dubious tradition, Bibliander even challenged Martyr to duel with doubleheaded axes.²³ On January 25, 1560, Martyr defended his teaching in a long lecture on free will, whose opening sentence refers obliquely to the controversy, although

his polemics never mention Bibliander by name.²⁴ Several times in the lecture he stressed that his doctrine agrees with that of Zwingli and Johann Oecolampadius.²⁵ In the aftermath, the Zurich pastors supported his teaching, as did the directors of the Zurich academy. On January 30 the affair was brought before the civil magistrate, and on February 8 Bibliander was discharged from his teaching post and pensioned off. On that day, Joachim Staedtke claims, Zurich decided for Geneva and the Calvinist doctrine of predestination.²⁶ In the following year Vermigli's presence by the side of Theodore Beza at the Colloquy of Poissy symbolized the unity of the German Swiss and the French Reformed Church. During the last months of his life Vermigli helped Bullinger prepare the drafts that finally matured into the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566 and welded the Zwinglian and Calvinist traditions together in a lasting bond.²⁷

This background makes the occasion and reason for Vermigli's writing the three disputed tracts obvious. They deal with the three disputed points of his controversy with Bibliander and present a summary of his teaching. They have a distinctly polemical cast which results partly from the abrupt way they state their position, partly from the way they heap up scripture quotations to buttress that position. Perhaps a third of each tract consists of these chains of scripture quotations. Vermigli almost certainly wrote these position-papers to present his case to the Zurich clergy, and this would explain Bullinger's marginalia, but the tracts may also have been used by the directors of the academy and possibly even by the officials of the city government.

The longest of the three tracts, *De libero arbitrio*, derives from the long lecture Martyr gave on January 25, 1560. It is hard to attribute a distinct purpose for their composition after Bibliander's dismissal on February 8. Therefore Martyr almost certainly wrote the three tracts in late January or early February, most likely sometime after the lecture on the twenty-fifth and before the thirteenth of January when the controversy came before the Bürgermeister. The three tracts were clearly successful in their purpose and mark a turning point not only in the life of Peter Martyr Vermigli but also in the history of the Swiss Reformed Church.

¹ Peter Walser, *Die Prädestination bei Heinrich Bullinger* (Zürich: 1957), p. 203, and Joseph McLelland, *The Visible Words of God* (Grand Rapids: 1957), p. 264, seem to assume that the three tracts were included in Robert Masson's London edition, but in fact they first appeared in Gualther's 1580 edition.

² *Die protestantischen Centraldogmen* (Zürich: 1854), I, pp. 267, 285.

³ *Heinrich Bullinger en de strijd over de Praedestinatie* (Rotterdam: 1909), p. 83.

⁴ *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, XX, 1910, p. 630.

⁵ *Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus* (Göttingen: 1926), III, p. 249.

⁶ *Peter Martyr Vermigli: Leben und ausgewählte Schriften* (Elberfeld: 1858), pp. 107, 215, 216.

⁷ McLelland, p. 264.

⁸ "Peter Martyr on Fallen Man: A Protestant Scholastic View", Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Department of History, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1972; pp. 244, 256.

⁹ Walser reviews the history of the dispute, pp. 24, 200, 207-210, and gives his solution, pp. 201-210.

¹⁰ "Drei umstrittene Traktate Peter Martyr Vermigli's", *Zwingliana*, XI, 1962, p. 476.

¹¹ "Drei umstrittene Traktate Peter Martyr Vermigli's", *Zwingliana*, XI, 1962, pp. 553-554. John Jewel, later Bishop of Salisbury, was responsible for the fair copies of Martyr's commentaries on Judges and Aristotle's *Ethics*; *The Works of John Jewel*, edited for the Parker Society by John Ayre (Cambridge: 1850), IV, xiii.

¹² Subsequent to my own investigation I found that Walser, pp. 202-205, had briefly noted the similarities between the definitions of election, providence, predestination, reprobation, and free will given in the disputed tracts and those found in Martyr's certain works. Neither Brassel nor Staedtke advert to this decisive aspect of Walser's argument.

¹³ I have used the 1583 London edition of the *Loci Communes* in which the three disputed tracts cover pp. 990 to 995. For references within the body of the *Loci Communes* I will use the internal divisions of the *Loci* since these are uniform to all fifteen editions. For the new material added by Gualther, I will have to refer to the pages of the 1583 edition. As far as possible I will restrict my references to the material reprinted in the *Loci Communes*, although I must sometimes note the original provenance of this material in Vermigli's earlier works, because occasionally the context or date of publication bears on the argument.

¹⁴ All these paragraphs come originally from Martyr's commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, except the second which comes from his Genesis commentary.

¹⁵ Additional parallels to *De providentia et praedestinatione* can be found in the *Loci*, III, 1; 18, 23, 30, 50, 51, 56, 58.

¹⁶ For additional parallels see the *Loci*, I, 14; 7, 22, 33.

¹⁷ The fullest study of these aspects of Vermigli's theology is my *Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigli's Doctrine of Man and Grace* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), pp. 101-169.

¹⁸ *Loci*, 1064: "doctissimum et exercitatissimum habetis D. Bibliandrum, de quo dubites an eruditione an sanctitate magis excellat ... mihi sit futurus collega charissimus, quodque vos illi me voluisse video ut Barnabam Paulo adiungere".

¹⁹ Curiously this letter is not printed in the *Calvini Opera*. I have used the text in J. H. Hottinger, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae Novi Testamenti* (Zürich: 1667), VIII, p. 829.

²⁰ The best account of the controversy is by Joachim Staedtke, "Die Züricher Prädestinationsstreit von 1560", *Zwingliana*, IX, 1953, pp. 536-546. Also Schmidt, pp. 215-218, and Joseph McLelland, "The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination according to Peter Martyr", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, VIII, 1955, pp. 255-271.

²¹ *In Duos Libros Samuelis Prophetiae ... Commentarii ...*, (Zürich: 1564), ff. 19r-24r, 275r-285r. Most of this matter is reprinted in the *Loci*, pp. 97-117. Martyr also treats the question in his commentaries on Romans, Judges, and Kings.

²² *Loci*, pp. 103, 111, 112.

²³ Staedtke, "Prädestinationsstreit", p. 544.

²⁴ *Loci*, pp. 971-989.

²⁵ *Loci*, pp. 975, 976, 979.

²⁶ Staedtke, "Prädestinationsstreit", pp. 545-546.

²⁷ André Bouvier, *Henri Bullinger: le successeur de Zwingli*, (Paris: 1940), pp. 314-318.