Sacred Prayers Drawn from the Psalms of David
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The Peter Martyr Library
Volume Three

Sacred Prayers

Drawn from the Psalms of David

Peter Martyr Vermigli

Translated and Edited by John Patrick Donnelly, S.J.

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General Editors’ Preface

The Peter Martyr Library presents a series of English translations of the chief works of Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562). This influential Reformer, neglected until the recent revival of scholarly interest, was a major player in the sixteenth-century Reform movement in Italy and northern Europe. His stature rivaled that of John Calvin among those known as Calvinists; his teaching is reflected from the Heidelberg Catechism to covenant theology; Puritans admired him and brought his works with them to North America. Yet he is not himself easily labeled, as simply Calvinist or—more controversial—as Reformed Aristotelian, or by his former colleagues in his believed Italy, as heretic. He regarded himself as primarily a biblical commentator, and indeed most of his works are just that, laced with numerous scholia which disciples gathered after his death into the famous commonplace book, Loci Communes. This gathering of topics gave later generations the impression that he wrote it himself in scholastic manner. In fact he handled topics suggested by the biblical narrative he was treating. The Loci, arranged in four sections, bears comparison with Calvin’s more familiar Institutio, the model which Robert Masson had before him when preparing the first edition of the Loci in 1576. In turn, Calvin can be read best with Martyr as foil, as John T. McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles recognized in their modern edition of the Institutes. If our PMV Library series helps correct the image of Martyr as scholastic, and if our work introduces the variety of topics so well considered by this most erudite of Reformers, our aims will have been accomplished.

The third volume of the Peter Martyr Library shows Martyr as he leads his students at the Strasbourg Academy in prayer before his lectures on the Pentateuch. Their prayer had a special urgency because war and the possible religious persecution were threatening. These prayers were discovered after Martyr’s death by his friend Josiah Simler and published in 1564 at Zurich. They must have struck a responsive chord in many Protestant communities since they were republished more often than any of Martyr’s individual works and were translated from Latin into English, French, German, and Czech.

John Patrick Donnelly, S.J. and Joseph C. McLelland
General Editors
About the Translator

John Patrick Donnelly, S.J., received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 1972, where he wrote a dissertation on Peter Martyr Vermigli under the direction of Robert M. Kingdon. Since 1971, he has taught at Marquette University in Milwaukee, where he is professor of history. His research has centered mainly on the Jesuits and on Peter Martyr Vermigli. In addition to six articles and chapters in books dealing with Vermigli, he has published Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigli’s Doctrine of Man and Grace (Leiden: Brill, 1976), and with Robert M. Kingdon, A Bibliography of the Works of Peter Martyr Vermigli, Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies, XII (Kirksville, Mo.), 1990. He has previously translated from Latin various works of Thomas More (1982), Robert Bellarmine (1989), and Girolamo Savonarola (1994). He has held various offices in professional societies, including President of the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference (1977) and President of the Society for Reformation Research (1990–1991). He currently serves on the editorial boards of The Sixteenth Century Journal and Archive for Reformation Research. He is cogeneral editor of the Peter Martyr Library.
This is the second volume that I have prepared for The Peter Martyr Library. The first was an edition and translation of Peter Martyr Vermigli’s *Dialogus de utraque in Christo natura*, which was published as volume 2 in 1995. The contrast between that work and this translation of Martyr’s *Preces sacrae de Psalmis Davidis desumptae* (Sacred Prayers Drawn from the Psalms of David) is striking. The *Dialogus* was a work of enormous erudition, rich in references to Scripture, ancient philosophers, medieval scholastics, and especially to the Church Fathers. The *Dialogus* contains 689 footnotes for the text, not counting the introduction. The *Preces* contains only fourteen notes, mostly dealing with readings of the Latin text. In this respect and many others the *Preces* stands apart from Vermigli’s other works and therefore deserves a place in The Peter Martyr Library. All of Vermigli’s other major works take two literary forms: they are commentaries, usually on Scripture but also one commentary on Aristotle, or they are polemical works. The *Preces* precisely as prayers might seem to give us a glimpse into Martyr’s heart and his intimate dealings with God, but we must be cautious. The *Preces* were written to be read at the end of lectures and strive for an elevated, formal tone that lacks the personal touch that might bare Vermigli’s soul. What they lose thereby as biographical source, they gain as prayers that can still be of use to Christians in all ages. The translator is a Jesuit priest who disagrees with many points of Vermigli’s theology and lives in a world very different from his, but he did not find any sentiment in these prayers from the Psalms that he could not address to God. The more the study of the Reformation moves away from theology and especially from polemics into treatises on spirituality and into devotional works, the more the common Christian heritage comes to the fore. Several years ago I published a translation of Saint Robert Bellarmine’s *The Mind’s Ascent to God*. Three of the four previous English translations of that work were made by Protestants.

In preparing this translation, I had help from many sources, most importantly from the series co-editor, Joseph C. McLelland, and from the publisher, Robert V. Schnucker of Truman (formerly Northeast Missouri) State University. Without their encouragement I would not have taken on the
project. My research assistant at Marquette University, Andrea Brown, helped me weed out errors from the first draft of the manuscript. Thomas Caldwell, S.J., of Marquette's Department of Theology reviewed the Introduction. John Treloar, S.J., of Marquette's Department of Philosophy checked over the whole of the second draft and suggested modifications. Roland Teske, S.J., of the same Department helped me with several sticky passages. Lowell Zuck of Eden Seminary, Ulrich Kopp of the Herzog Augustus Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, and Oliver Olson of Marquette's Department of Theology helped me in checking Latin editions for alternative readings different from my base text. The photograph of the Præces title page is printed with the permission of the Zentralbibliothek of Zurich.

John Patrick Donnelly, S.J.

Marquette University
Introduction

The Psalms and Reformation Piety

No book of the Old Testament approaches the importance of the Psalms for Christianity. The Psalter has been called the microcosm of the whole of the Old Testament. Since the Middle Ages the Divine Office, which monks and friars recited daily in choir, was drawn mainly from the Psalms and until recently usually involved the recitation of the whole Psalter each week. The reason for the prominence of the Psalms in Christian worship is obvious enough. They make up not only the longest book in the Bible, but they are easily the largest collection of prayers in the Scriptures. There are many other prayers scattered through the Scriptures, most notably various canticles and the Lord’s Prayer, but all of the other prayers of the Bible combined fall far short of Psalms in length.

The Reformation, with its emphasis on scripture alone, involved a considerable shift in the prayer and piety of Protestant Christians. Because many old Catholic prayers and religious practices were no long acceptable, the Psalter took on still greater importance in the prayer of Protestants. Both Luther and Calvin wrote commentaries on the Psalms. Many leading Protestant theologians, several of whom were Peter Martyr Vermiglio’s friends, such as Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Bucer, John Calvin, and Immanuel Tremellius,

published their own Latin translations of the Psalms. Partly this was because the translation of the Psalms was perhaps the least satisfactory part of the whole Vulgate Latin Bible. The most famous Psalter of the Reformation was undoubtedly the French verse translation of Theodore Beza, who became Vermigli's close collaborator and friend at the Colloquy of Poissy in 1561. Beza's translation of the Psalms became the most popular hymnal in French Protestant churches, and Huguenot armies spontaneously chanted them before going into battle during the French Wars of Religion.

The country whose use of the Psalms for prayers has been examined most closely and recently is England. Rivkah Zim's *English Metrical Psalms: Poetry as Praise and Prayer, 1555-1601* studies ninety English translations of the Psalms from the time of Henry VIII's break from Rome until the death of Elizabeth I. Although Zim's emphasis is on metrical translations, often by famous poets and churchmen such as Philip Sydney, Edmund Spenser, and Matthew Parker, he gives details on a number of largely forgotten collections of prayers and meditations based on the Psalms that parallel Vermigli's *Piae sacræ.* A similarly careful examination of Psalm translations and paraphrases in continental countries where Protestantism was strong would undoubtedly yield results similar to Zim's examination of England. It is hoped that this translation of Vermigli's *Piae sacræ* based on the Psalms will give modern readers a handy example of this very considerable literature, most of which is available only in rare book collections.

**Peter Martyr Vermigli and the Psalms**

During his more than twenty years as an Augustinian Canon Regular Peter Martyr sang the daily Divine Office in choir along with the other Augustinians. Given his retentive memory, he probably came to know most or all of the Psalms by heart. In Martyr's last years in Italy, 1540 to 1542, he was a semi-Nicodemite, increasingly Protestant in his inward convictions but compelled

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2Garrett Mattingly, *The Armada* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), 156, describes how at the outset of the Battle of Courtrai, when the Huguenot army started to sing Beza's metrical version of Psalm 118, a young Catholic took it as a sign of cowardice. A veteran corrected him: "When the Huguenots make those noises, they are ready to fight hard!"

3The authors whose works came close to Vermigli's *Piae sacræ* were Robert Fylles and John Bull. Bull's work in fact contains sections translated from Vermigli's *Piae sacræ*; see Rivkah Zim, *English Metrical Psalms: Poetry and Prayer, 1555-1601* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 236–237. The verse translation by Matthew Parker, Elizabeth I's second Archbishop of Canterbury, contains a short verse argument at the beginning of the translations and a prose prayer at the end. See items no. 14, 44, 46, 52, 58, 59, 61, 63, and 66 in Zim's appendix, pp. 220–247, for examples of prayers based on the Psalms.
by his duties as a canon and later as prior at San Frediano’s in Lucca to celebrate the Roman Catholic liturgy. The text of the Mass, with its many references to the Mass as a sacrifice, must have weighed heavily upon his conscience, but omitting or changing texts during public Masses would instantly have given rise to suspicions. Singing the Divine Office would have been less a burden since the texts were overwhelmingly drawn from Scripture and the Church Fathers, and the Psalms may have been a keen source of consolation for Martyr since he could sing them with a sincere heart.

Martyr fled Italy late in August of 1542 and went to Zurich, where he was warmly received, but there was no appropriate position for him in Zurich. The death of Wolfgang Capito left the post of professor of Old Testament open at Strasbourg, and Vermigli took up the position in December 1542. He obviously made a strong impression on Martin Bucer and the other leaders of the Strasbourg church since he was entrusted with such an important post within months of his open conversion to Protestantism. Martyr continued to teach at Strasbourg until his departure for England in October 1547. As will be argued later, Martyr wrote or at least began the Preces toward the end of his first stay at the Strasbourg Academy. While at Strasbourg he lectured on Lamentations, the minor prophets, Genesis, Exodus, and part of Leviticus. 4 We know less about the events of Martyr’s first years in Strasbourg (1542–1547) than about the other three periods of his career as a Protestant theologian. His reputation as a scholar was spreading only gradually, and initially he was overshadowed by Martin Bucer, who lectured on the New Testament. Unlike the later periods of his life, he did not become involved in theological controversy, an activity that often produced biographical material. He was diligent in preparing his lectures on the Old Testament, but most of them from this period have not survived. We have only his Genesis commentary (which breaks off abruptly at Gen. 42:25), some theses for his students to dispute based on his lectures on Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus, the fairly short commentary on Lamentations, and the Preces. There are also some letters and a short explanation of the creed in Italian, the only work that Martyr published.


5Martyr was in England, where he held the chair of Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford, from November 1547 to October 1553. He returned to Strasbourg after the accession of Mary Tudor to resume teaching from November 1553 until July 1556. Disagreements with the Lutheran pastors in Strasbourg led to his departure for Zurich, where he lectured from July 1556 until his death in November 1562.
(1544) during these years. All the other works from this period were published posthumously from his notes.

Even though he was a foreigner and learning the ropes (his Genesis commentary from this period is probably the least distinguished of his major biblical commentaries), Martyr gradually eclipsed the great Martin Bucer in his popularity as a teacher. He was clearer, better organized, and less prolix than Bucer. Josiah Simler, who was Martyr’s friend, biographer, successor as professor at Zurich, and editor of the Preces, tells us that Martyr “pleased the minds of his hearers, not only for the gravity of the things themselves but also for the sweetness and elegance of his style.” Simler goes on to note, possibly with reference to the Preces, that his lectures “sometimes exhorted to godly life, … stirred up repentance …” and joined excellent doctrine and eloquence “with singular piety.”

When were the Preces written? The prayers make only vague allusions to contemporary events and contain no direct evidence for dating their composition. The best evidence is from the prefatory letter to the Preces provided by their editor, Josiah Simler. In the years immediately after his death nobody knew more about Martyr’s whole life than Simler, except Martyr’s longtime personal servant Giulio Santerenziano, and Simler was in a position to question Santerenziano. In his prefatory letter to the Preces, which begins this edition, Simler tells us three things about their composition: “when the Council of Trent had just begun and a serious and internecine war had broken out in Germany over religion, Martyr read these prayers at the end of his lectures at the Strasbourg Academy.” Since Simler gives three coordinates, fixing the date might seem an easy task. But Vermigli had two sojourns in Strasbourg, there were two Schmalkaldic Wars in Germany over religion, and two of the three periods of the Council of Trent took place during Vermigli’s lifetime. Three earlier scholars have addressed themselves in passing to the question of when the Preces were written. They do not agree. Charles Schmidt does not list the Preces among the works written during Vermigli’s first stay at Strasbourg, but later he definitely links them to the First Schmalkaldic War, which broke out in 1546. Klaus Sturm also suggests that the Preces were written during Martyr’s first sojourn in Strasbourg but says that “The dating is questionable.” Marvin Anderson puts the composition of the Preces during Vermigli’s second

6McLelland and Duffield, Life … of Martyn, 53.
7Charles Schmidt, Peter Martyn Vermigli: Leben und ausgewählte Schriften (Elberfeld: R.L. Friederichs, 1858), 58, 72.
term as professor at Strasbourg. I am convinced that the Preces must be dated toward the end of Vermigli’s first stay in Strasbourg, December 1542 to October 1547. Simler says that the Preces were written shortly after the Council of Trent had begun. The Council met at Trent itself from December 1545 to March 1547, then was transferred to Bologna from March 1547 to February 1548. That fits perfectly. Moreover, the First Schmalkaldic War started in 1546 and reached its climax in a crushing defeat of the Protestant forces by Charles V at Mühlberg on April 24, 1547. The Preces contain a few passing references to war and ubiquitous lamentations over the calamities afflicting God’s Church. Martyr returned to Strasbourg in November 1553 and stayed till July 1556. The Second Schmalkaldic War was 1552 till 1556, but the renewed warfare went in the Protestants’ favor from the beginning, largely because they had Henry II of France as an ally. It would be difficult to square the doleful tone of the Preces with the course of the Second Schmalkaldic War. Moreover, the second set of sessions at Trent, May 1551 to April 1552, does not coincide at all with Vermigli’s second sojourn in Strasbourg. When all that is taken into account, a difficulty remains: Simler says that Vermigli read the prayers at the end of his lectures, but the Preces contain 297 prayers (counting the nineteen parts of the prayer on Psalm 119 as only one prayer). It may be doubted that Vermigli gave 297 lectures between the opening of Trent and his departure for England. He may well have written them then and used many of them later or simply put them aside.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE PRECES:

The Preces contain 297 prayers based on 149 of the Psalms. There is no prayer for Psalm 87; if Vermigli wrote one, which seems likely, it is lost. The prayer for Psalm 119 does not fit the usual pattern; at first glance Vermigli wrote only one prayer for it, but that prayer is broken into nineteen parts, each of which is in fact an independent prayer and is subtitled by two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The majority of the Psalms have either two prayers (79 Psalms) or one prayer (39 Psalms) based on them. Psalms 68 and 78 have four prayers, and Psalms 18 and 105 have five. The others have three prayers. Most of the prayers run about a page in the Latin text of the three first editions.


10At the end of the Preces proper Simler appended a prayer of Vermigli against “Bread worshippers.” This prayer does not seem related to the Preces and does not come into consideration here.
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