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Predestination and Justification

Peter Martyr Vermigli

Translated and Edited with Introduction and Notes by Frank A. James III

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Abbreviations Used in This Volume

COR  In Selectissinam D. Pauli Priorem ad Corinth. epistolam Commentarii. Zurich: C. Froschauer, 1551.
Predestination & Justification


General Editors’ Preface

The reputation of Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562) rests largely on his role in the Sacramentarian controversies of his time. This partial perception distorts his career as biblical exegete. Volume 6 in our Library, *Commentary on the Lamentations of the Prophet Jeremiah*, presents one of Vermigli’s lecture series presented after he left Italy to join Martin Bucer at Strasbourg. The present volume turns to Vermigli’s next academic appointment, as regius professor of divinity at Oxford. He chose to lecture on Romans to address the ills of church and society, a fitting complement to his lectures on 1 Corinthians.

The present book consists of only two of the treatises contained in Martyr’s large and influential Romans commentary; they are among the longest of his loci—those “commonplace” devices in vogue from the later Middle Ages and used increasingly by Martyr in his lectures, at least in their published form. These two are full-blown tracts, methodically developed and seeking to cover the chief “heads of doctrine.”

The doctrines of predestination and justification are familiar shorthand for the Reformed faith. Each formed the center of a minor war of words and conferences, pitting the Reformed against Roman, Lutheran, and Anabaptist opponents. It is fortunate that in Frank James we have a scholar well acquainted with both topics and with Vermigli’s texts. Dr. James has studied and commented on them through many years and two doctorates; we are proud to introduce his first contribution to our Library through two of Vermigli’s substantive texts on disputed questions. As Dr. James’s introduction makes clear, the polemical context informs Vermigli’s teaching and provides foils for his attack. Here we meet such adversaries as Richard Smith of Oxford and Calvin’s old foe Albert Pighius as well as the Tridentine doctors.

With this volume, series 1 of our Library is two-thirds complete. The remaining books are commentaries, on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and on the biblical books of Genesis, Romans, and 1 Corinthians. Series 2 is in the planning stage. We hope that these translations of Martyr’s writings will encourage scholars to engage this admirable theologian and will show why he is a significant if neglected player on the complex stage of the Reformation.

John Patrick Donnelly, S.J.
Joseph C. McLelland
Predestination and justification are two of the most distinctive doctrines associated with the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. This volume presents Peter Martyr Vermigli’s most extensive discussions on these controversial theological principles, drawn from his monumental commentary on the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans. It has long been my goal to understand the theological dynamics in Vermigli’s ecclesiastical transformation from a Roman Catholic theologian to a Protestant theologian. Two theological loci, one on predestination and the other on justification, provide important avenues by which one may gain insight into that profound transformation.

Not only did these two doctrines play a significant role in Vermigli’s decision to abandon Rome; they also became the theological realms (besides sacramental theology) in which Vermigli made his most important contributions to the theology of the Reformed branch of Protestantism. Having access to these two loci will enable scholars of the sixteenth century to gain additional insight into the theological and biblical thinking of one of the formative thinkers of the Reformation and, perhaps most importantly, allow a glimpse into the theological diversity among the early Reformers. My early scholarly effort on Vermigli, a doctoral dissertation at Oxford University on the historical origins of his doctrine of predestination, brought unconventional conclusions. I expected to find a viewpoint that mirrored Calvin’s, but found instead a theological perspective largely inspired by a fourteenth-century Augustinian, Gregory of Rimini. It seemed that Heiko A. Oberman’s quest for a theological link between the early reformation and the late medieval schola Augustiniana moderna had been found in Vermigli.

My interest in Vermigli was sufficient to inspire yet another doctoral dissertation, this time in theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. The goal was to delve deeply into one of the most distinctive Protestant doctrines—justification—and to measure Vermigli’s understanding against other great theological views of his day—Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed. Again, expectations as to what Vermigli would say on the topic had to be reconfigured. I anticipated that he would be in conformity with the Lutherans and Reformed against the Catholics. Instead, what emerged from the research was a much more nuanced understanding of justification. Vermigli did retain some of the features of the Catholic Reform movement in Italy, especially those of the group associated with Juan de Valdés. It may sound obvious from the distance of nearly five
centuries, but Vermigli, while clearly indebted to Luther, was not a Lutheran on the matter of justification, nor for that matter, were many of his Reformed colleagues such as Calvin, Bullinger, and Bucer. The doctrinal divide that became apparent over time was evident early on in Vermigli’s doctrine of justification.

One of the lasting impressions gained from research into Vermigli’s thought is his profound biblical orientation. In some ways, that is his lasting legacy. If one had asked Peter Martyr how he would like to be remembered, he might have pointed to his Bible and stated that he wanted only to promulgate the teaching of Scripture. More work needs to be done on his theology, especially on his biblical commentaries. To that end, the Peter Martyr Library editorial committee is now focusing on translations of his commentaries.

Special thanks to the managing editor of the Peter Martyr Library, Paula Presley, whose untiring efforts and high standards make this a superb series. Finally, I thank my graduate assistant Kate Maynard for her efforts on behalf of this project and Daniel Timmerman of the Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn for help in identifying obscure references.

I owe a great debt to my colleagues Pat Donnelly and Joe McLelland, who have provided enormous assistance in the preparation of this volume. I am overcome with gratitude for the generosity and support of this American Jesuit and Canadian Presbyterian. I am especially grateful for their assistance in composition of footnote references. This dedication is a small token of my affection and appreciation for these two extraordinary colleagues.

Frank A. James III

Orlando, Florida
Feast Day of St. Nino
15 December 2002
Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562) by Hans Asper (1499–1571), painted 1560.
Courtesy National Portrait Gallery, London
Predestination and Justification: Two Theological Loci

Translator’s Introduction

PROLOGUE

It is a measure of Peter Martyr Vermigli’s influence in England that his regal portrait by Hans Asper is included in the National Portrait Gallery in London. The piercing brown eyes of a rather handsome Peter Martyr look beyond the confines of his gilded frame as he points to his Bible. This portrait captures something of the true spirit of this Italian theologian. It is as if, in full academic regalia, he is instructing his students to concentrate their undivided attention upon this book alone, much as he urged in his Oxford oration: “Let us immerse ourselves constantly in the sacred Scriptures, let us work at reading them, and by the gift of Christ’s Spirit the things that are necessary for salvation will be for us clear, direct, and completely open.”

Vermigli’s fame rested in large part on his erudite biblical commentaries. Wherever his journey led him, he could be found lecturing on the biblical text, whether in his earlier career as a Catholic theologian lecturing monks in Naples and Lucca, or later in Protestant academies in Strasbourg, Zurich, or Oxford. During his lifetime his lectures on 1 Corinthians, Romans, and Judges were published; his lectures on Genesis, Lamentations, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings were published posthumously. Although Vermigli had wide-ranging theological and polemical interests to which he devoted many pages, there is little doubt that his primary calling was as a biblical commentator. Along with Calvin and Bullinger, Vermigli was among the leading representatives of the Reformed tradition of

1Torrance Kirby, Vermiliius Absconditus? The Iconography of Peter Martyr Vermigli," HRR, 295–303; painting is reproduced on facing page.
2From Martyr’s “Exhortation for Youths to Study Sacred Letters,” LLS, 281.
Protestant biblical commentators. To begin to understand Martyr one must appreciate that he was first and foremost a man of the book—a biblical scholar.

**PETER MARTYR VERNIGLI IN ENGLAND**

Vermigli's success in England left a bitter taste in the mouths of Catholics. When his wife, Catherine Dampmartin of Metz, died in Oxford in February of 1553, Catholic hostility directed at her husband unfortunately found its mark in her. Even while alive, Catherine was the brunt of brutal sarcasm, orally and in print. Because she was a corpulent woman, the Catholics at Oxford nicknamed her “flaps” and “fusteluggs.” Shortly after Catherine’s death, Mary Tudor ascended to the English throne, and a widowed Vermigli returned to Strasbourg. However, hatred for Vermigli ran so high among Catholics that they sought to cause him distress by desecrating the body of his late wife. Archbishop Reginald Pole, once a close friend of Vermigli in Italy, had Catherine’s body exhumed and cast upon the city dung heap, ostensibly because she had been buried in close proximity to the grave of St. Frideswyde, the patron saint of Oxford, in the Cathedral Church. But the Catholics did not have the final word on Catherine’s remains. After Elizabeth’s ascension in 1558 and the return of the Marian exiles, Catherine’s bones were recovered from the dung heap and deliberately mingled with the bones of St. Frideswyde. Any desecration thereafter would risk desecrating the bones of St. Frideswyde—a risk most Catholics would be unwilling to take.

The deplorable episode dramatically illustrates the range of emotions the English felt for the Italian immigrant theologian: detractors and advocates alike viewed Vermigli as a particularly important symbol of Edwardian reform. C. H. Smyth writes, “Oxford, which had not taken kindly to the Renaissance, was...
violently hostile to the Reformation. The whole of Peter Martyr’s work was an almost single-handed struggle against overwhelming odds. Whether Vermigli inspired intense animosity or devoted affection, it cannot be doubted that during his nearly six years in England (1547–53), he exercised a decisive influence upon its Reformation.

Of course, the earliest Protestant theological influence was that of Luther, whose books and pamphlets were smuggled into England by German merchants and read in Cambridge by 1520. By March of 1521, Luther’s books were publicly burned for the first time in England. Even before the death of Henry VIII on 28 January 1547, a new kind of Protestant influence began to take root on English soil—a theological outlook more Swiss and Reformed than German and Lutheran. Archbishop Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury had been in correspondence with the Swiss Reformer of Basel, Simon Grynaeus, since 1531, and through Grynaeus, Cranmer became a frequent correspondent of Martin Bucer of Strasbourg. This relationship with the Swiss manifested itself in an abortive plan to form a theological alliance between the English church and the Swiss and South German Protestants on the continent. For some years, Cranmer had desired to improve ties between the English church and continental Protestantism. With much of continental Protestantism in disarray after the victory of Charles V in the Schmalkald war, Cranmer believed England could be the rallying point for a resurgent Protestantism. He even made plans to compose a common doctrinal statement and to hold a “godly synod” of continental and English Protestants to counter the effects of the Council of Trent (1545–63), conferring with such theologians as John Calvin, Philip Melanchthon, and Heinrich Bullinger about the proposal. When Edward VI succumbed to tuberculosis, Cranmer’s dreams were deferred.

10 Smyth, Cranmer and the Reformation, 108.
15 Dickens, English Reformation, 257.
It is almost certain that Vermigli first came to the attention of Cranmer through the archbishop’s long-standing relationship with Bucer. As part of Cranmer’s desire to foster continental associations that would give impetus to a reformation of the English church, he invited Vermigli and his fellow Italian refugee, Bernardino Ochino, to England. Cranmer’s warm welcome to Vermigli in the winter of 1547 was followed by decisive support in the Oxford Disputation and further involvement in formulating English church policy. Of all the continental Reformers, Martyr exerted the greatest influence.

This impression is reinforced by Cranmer’s response to the new Catholic regime. Immediately after Mary’s ascension, when Cranmer’s reformation was under severe attack, he bravely threw down the gauntlet and publicly declared on 5 September 1553: “I with Peter Martyr and … others of my choosing” will defend the Prayer Book as “more pure and more agreeable to the word of God than what has been in England for the past thousand years.” Cranmer and Vermigli began preparing for a public disputation that never happened. Instead, Cranmer was charged with treason and, on 14 September, the two friends shared a last supper, after which the archbishop told his friend that a trial was inevitable and that they would never meet again. Cranmer was soon sent to the Tower, and Vermigli, after entreaties by his famulus Giulio Santerenziano and William Whittingham, was granted permission to leave the country. The last known letter (1555) from the hand of Cranmer, as he languished in the Bocardo jail awaiting martyrdom, was to his dear friend Peter Martyr. The growing scholarly consensus is that

17MacCulloch, *Cranmer*, 381, cites a letter of 28 November 1547 from Paris, Bibliothèque Ste-Geneviève MSS 1458, fols. 173v–75r, which reveals that Bucer specifically recommended to Cranmer the Italian exile Emmanuel Tremelli (1510–80), who arrived the next year (1548) and was appointed king’s reader in Hebrew at Cambridge. If Bucer was recommending scholars to Cranmer, then it is easy to surmise that Bucer also recommended the Italian Vermigli, for whom he had even greater esteem.

18Translated in *OTD*.

19MacCulloch, *Cranmer*, 435–36, points out that Cranmer’s crucial sermon on rebellion at St. Paul’s Cathedral in London on 21 July 1549 was, in fact, the result of a collaboration with Vermigli. More specifically, MacCulloch maintains that Vermigli was involved to a greater extent in church affairs than Bucer. See Diarmaid MacCulloch, “Peter Martyr and Thomas Cranmer,” HRR, 178, 192. This echoes the earlier view of C. H. Smyth, who judged that “of all the foreigners [in England], Ochino had probably the least influence; and Peter Martyr probably the most”; Smyth, *Cranmer and the Reformation*, 117. Two years after Vermigli’s arrival in Oxford and after the 1548 Augsburg interim made life impossible for Bucer, he too accepted Cranmer’s invitation to that city.


21See OL.

Vermigli was one of the most important, if unheralded, theological influences upon Cranmer and, through Cranmer, on the Edwardian Reformation.

When Vermigli left England for good in October 1553, he carried with him not only affection and deep concern for Cranmer and the English church, but an international reputation as a Reformed theologian. When he arrived in Strasbourg to revive his role as a leading Reformed theologian on yet another stage, he deplored in his inaugural address the loss of King Edward and the England that might have been.

A harsh and lamentable death took away Edward, king of England, the bright light among the monarchs of the Christian world, the rightful student of godliness and a stout defender of Christ's Gospel. Light was changed into darkness, ungodliness replaced godliness, and cruel wolves invaded the new and recent church. Good men were wickedly oppressed; I cannot think about, still less recount, how the providence of the one God delivered me from their dangers and troubles.24

Monarchs die and other monarchs, hell-bent on burning heretics, ascend to thrones, but for Vermigli the truth was unassailable. In tribute to the boy-king and his archbishop, Vermigli published his Romans lectures. His dedicatory epistle to Sir Anthony Cooke,25 Edward's tutor and a Marian exile, is in effect a dedication to the English church. In this dedication is a highly developed sense of belonging to a circle of like-minded continental theologians. Vermigli specifically names Melanchthon, Bucer, Bullinger, and Calvin, and indicates that he has not only read their commentaries on Romans, but has been “greatly helped” by them.26 This underscores the growing theological affinity, particularly with Swiss Protestantism, reflected in his own commentary on Romans.

Of the many contributions to the Reformation in England, perhaps the most cherished and natural for Martyr were his lectures at Oxford. After completing his first series of lectures on 1 Corinthians in 1549, Martyr turned to Paul's epistle to the Romans in 1550, as he earlier had promised.27 Martyr's Romans lectures began in March 1550, were completed in Zurich, and finally published in 1558.28

24LLS, 310–11.
26ROM, dedicatory epistle.
27COR, fol. 39r.
About the Editor and Translator

Frank Allison James III was awarded the D. Phil. in history from Oxford University in 1993 for his dissertation on the intellectual and historical origins of Vermigli’s notion of gemina praedestination (double predestination) and the Ph.D. in historical theology from Westminster Theological Seminary in 2000 for his dissertation on Vermigli’s theological doctrine of justification. He received a Lilly Theological Research Grant (1999), was elected by the faculty of Keble College, Oxford University, to membership of the Senior Common Room (1994). Other awards include an Overseas Research Students Award (1991–92), the Isaiah Berlin Bursary, Oxford University (1990–91), the Leonard J. Theberge Memorial Scholarship, St. Peter’s College, Oxford University (1991–93), an Oxford University Research Grant (1991), the Christina Drake Research Award for Italian Studies, Taylor Institution, Oxford University (1991), and the St. Peter’s College Graduate Award, Oxford (1990–92).


James was assistant professor of systematic and historical theology at Westminster College (1987–89); lecturer in philosophy and history, Villanova University (1986–87); and contributing editor at Christian History Magazine (1986–89). Since 1993 he has been professor of historical theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida, and in 2002 was appointed vice president for academic affairs of that institution.
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