

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

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

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

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.

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

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 outward 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 ceremo-

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 & statuīs 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 (impius), 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

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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).

