CHAPTER FIVE

‘RELICS OF THE AMORITES’: THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE AND RELIGIOUS UNIFORMITY

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 theyn ministeries, and thynkyng it necessarye to haue them knowne to the people, in al places and assemblies, bothe in the Churche and without, and thereby to receaue the hon-our and estyma­tion due to the specyall messengers and mynysters of almyghtie Godde: wylleth and commaundeth that all Archebyshoppes and byshoppes, and all other that bee called or admitted to preachyme or ministerye of the Sacramentes, or that be admitted into anye voca­tion Ecclesiastycall, or into any societie of learning in eyther of the universitis, or els where, shall use and weare suche semely habytes, garments, and such square cappes, as were moost comenly and orderly receyued in the latter yeare of the raygne of kyng Edwarde the vi. Not thereby meanyng to attrbyute any holynesse or special worthynesse to the sayde garments, But as as Saint Paule wryteth: Omnia decenter et secun-dem ordeinem fient. I. Cor. 14. Cap. [Let all things be done decently and in good order.]¹

In the years immediately following the enactment of the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559, the threat of schism loomed over the Church of England with respect to provisions governing uniformity of church ornaments and ecclesiastical dress—the so-called ‘Vestiar­ian Contro­versy’. A number of leading lights of the new Protestant establish­ment—especially among those who had been in exile on the continent during the reign of Elizabeth’s sister Mary, and who had seen first-hand the visible state of religious reform in Strasbourg, Basle, Zurich, Frank­fort, and Geneva—were in doubt about the deliberate policy enunci­ated in the Act of Uniform­ity of 1559 ² which provided for uniformity of

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¹ Injunctions geven by the Quenes Maiestie (London: Richard Jugge and John Cawood, Printers to the Quenes Maiestie, 1559), item 30, Cii recto.
² An Act for the Uniformity of Common Prayer and Service in the Church and Administration of the Sacraments (1 Elizabeth, c. 2) was passed. The first effect of this statute was to repeal the Act of Mary as and from 24 June 1559, and to restore the Book of Common Prayer from that date. The Second Prayer-book (1552) of Edward VI with certain
clerical dress and the retention of the ornaments of the Church which had been in use “in this Church of England, by authority of Parliament, in the second year of King Edward VI,” that is, by implication, consistent with the First Edwardine Act of Uniformity of 1549.³ Were these more traditional vestments and ornaments of worship the equivalent of ‘relics of the Amorites’ whose use was not only evidence of an incomplete reformation of ecclesiastical order, but could be regarded as the very presence of the Antichrist?⁴ Or, alternatively, were the traditional vestments and ornaments to be viewed rather as ‘adiaphora,’ that is ‘things indifferent,’ 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

³ 3 and 4 Edward VI, c. 10, An Act for the abolishing and putting away of diverse books and images. The preamble of the Act recites that the King had recently set forth and established by authority of Parliament an order for common prayer in The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments, and other rites and ceremonies of the Church, after the Church of England (1549). The First Prayer-book was subsequently revised in a more thoroughly Reformed direction and replaced by a new order in 1552 which also received the sanction of parliamentary authority with a new statute, viz. 5 and 6 Edw. VI, c. 1. An Act for the Uniformity of Service and Administration of Sacraments throughout the realm.

⁴ 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 was 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. Jewel refers to the “relics of the Amorites” as Vermigli’s own expression for the “theatrical habits” and “comical dress” of the Romish practice, ZL 1, 52. Vermigli refers to the “mere relics of Popery” in a letter to Sampson of 4 November 1559, ZL 2, 32. See also Thomas Sampson to Martyr, 2 January 1560, ZL 1, 64. Laurence Humphrey refers again to the “relics of the Amorites” in a letter to Bullinger of 9 February 1566 complaining about Archbishop Matthew Parker’s enforcement of conformity in the matter of ecclesiastical habits through his Advertisements. See ZL 1, 151–152.