

CHAPTER TWO

STRASBOURG: VERMIGLI AND THE SENIOR SCHOOL

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I

When Peter Martyr Vermigli received the invitation from Martin Bucer in mid-October 1542 to come to Strasbourg with a view to a teaching position in that city, he was gratified, but can hardly have imagined the role Strasbourg would play throughout the next fourteen years of his life.¹ His nearly eight years of teaching in the Senior School²—late 1542 until autumn 1547, and again from late 1553 until mid-summer 1556, with the six intervening years as Regius Professor at Oxford—represent a central period in his adult life. In Strasbourg he experienced the life of an evangelically reformed city on a daily basis both as a resident and increasingly as an accepted religious leader. There too he came into immediate relationship with Bucer, a tie he valued and maintained by correspondence during their respective exiles in England. In Strasbourg he met and married Catherine Dammartin, a former nun from Metz in Lorraine; she joined him eventually in Oxford, and was honoured

¹ Martyr reports this in his letter of 25 Dec 1542 to his fellow-evangelicals at Lucca. It is in fact not clear whether this was a direct letter to Martyr, or an invitation sent indirectly in response to Oswald Myconius' letter to Bucer concerning Martyr. Jean Rott does not include such a letter in his register: *Correspondance de Martin Bucer. Liste Alphabétique des Correspondants* (Strasbourg: Association des Publications de la Faculté Protestante de l'Université des sciences humaines de Strasbourg, 1977).

² It is customary in Strasbourg writings to refer to this institution, which will be a central part of this paper as the Haute-Ecole, French rendering of the older Hochschule. English 'High School' carries too many unhelpful connotations to be useful. Bucer himself referred to it as the 'ludus literarius': to Calvin, 28.10.42, CR 11, #430. Although directly analogous to the Genevan Academy, the Strasbourg school only received that official status from the emperor Maximilian II in 1566; prior to May 1567 the term is therefore anachronistic. Schindling in his study refers to the early period as Gymnasium (*Humanistische Hochschule und Freie Reichstadt. Gymnasium und Akademie in Straßburg 1538–1621. Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz 77*, (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1977), a term also fraught with potential misunderstanding for North American readers in particular. I have preferred therefore to use the term 'Senior School'.

upon her death in 1553 by a prominent, if temporarily disturbed burial in Christ Church Cathedral.³ Vermigli's acceptance of the English invitation was formally blessed by the Strasbourg city magistrates, a fact which probably facilitated his successful release from the hostile religious environment of Marian England, and enabled his return to his old post at the Strasbourg School. Most important of all, however, Vermigli arrived in 1542 with a reputation for learning as yet largely untried beyond the walls of his Augustinian priories. The five years of his first Strasbourg period enabled him to explore and develop his method within an already well-established context of evangelical biblical interpretation, such that he has since been regarded, through his published commentaries and the doctrinal compendium assembled from them, the *Loci Communes*, as a pillar of Reformed biblical exegesis and teaching. Within this volume, the task of this paper is to examine Vermigli's relationship to the Strasbourg school and to its exegetical tradition in particular.

The term 'Strasbourg School' has in fact an ambivalence which this paper will exploit in order to engage two dimensions of the Martyr-Strasbourg connection. I shall speak, first, of the context of Martyr's Strasbourg years in terms of the Senior School and his place in it. Here I acknowledge with appreciation the work of earlier researchers, building upon their studies and setting these more firmly within the Strasbourg context.⁴ Klaus Sturm's examination of Martyr's first Strasbourg period was primarily focused upon Martyr as theologian.⁵ Subsequent to Sturm's work, Anton Schindling has given us a study of the origins and functioning of the 'Gymnasium und Academy', the early pages of which are directly related to our work here.⁶ In 1988–9, celebrations of the 450th anniversary of the founding of what became the Strasbourg university gave rise to both a history of that school part of which today is called the Gymnase Jean Sturm, and a series of papers exploring different facets of the School, published in the *Bulletin de*

³ Simler reports the degradation of her remains during the Marian period, and their subsequent restoration to a place in the tomb of St. Frideswide, Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford: *LLS* 31–2; see McLelland, *Visible Words*, 15.

⁴ See the still useful Johannes Ficker, *Die Anfänge der akademischen Studien in Straßburg*. Rede gehalten am 1. Mai 1912 (Strasbourg: Heitz, 1912).

⁵ *Die Theologie Peter Martyr Vermigli während seines ersten Aufenthalts in Straßburg 1542–1547*, Beiträge zur Geschichte und Lehre der reformierten Kirche 31, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1971).

⁶ *Humanistische Hochschule*, see supra n. 2.