CHAPTER THREE

OXFORD: READING SCRIPTURE IN THE UNIVERSITY

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‘AN ELOQUENCE MOST CONSTANTLY TO DEFEND THE TRUTH’

As the political situation became increasingly difficult in the German Empire, with the Protestants more under threat, Peter Martyr Vermigli made the decision to accept the offer of refuge in England, proffered by Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, and communicated by an English mission to Strasbourg in October 1547.1 Accompanied by his fellow Italian refugee, Bernadino Ochino, Vermigli arrived on London on 20 December, and stayed for several weeks with Cranmer at Lambeth Palace.2 Although he seems very soon to have travelled on to Oxford, where his name first appears in the Christ Church battels book in early 1548, he may not have moved there until February or March,3 when he took up the post of Regius Professor of Divinity, the first holder of the post, Richard Smith or Smyth, having been ousted from it to create this vacancy. This was a prestigious post, which placed Vermigli in what was potentially a key position in an institution which had until then—notoriously—been somewhat adverse to reform. Taking up his duties in Oxford, Vermigli made the decision to lecture on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, which he did, perhaps from March 1548, possibly as late as January 1549.4 In spring 1549, the famous disputation on the Eucharist took place, drawing most probably on

4 The earlier date is proposed by Joseph C. McLelland, OTD, xix; the later by Anderson, ‘Rhetoric and Reality,’ 455.
Vermigli’s lectures on 1 Corinthians. In March 1550, Vermigli began to lecture on the Epistle to the Romans, discussing further controversial topics including justification and predestination. During this period he also prepared his lectures on 1 Corinthians for publication; they were printed in Zurich in 1550. His Romans lectures were not to be published for almost a decade after he was permitted to leave England on the ascent of Mary I, after his brief and unhappy return to a now essentially Lutheran Strasbourg and his final move to Zurich.

During his time in England, Vermigli was importantly a protagonist in the Disputation on the Eucharist at Oxford in the course of the Royal Visitation of 1549, and was caught up in the Prayer Book riots later that year. He also played an important role as advisor and supporter of Thomas Cranmer, in particular in matters relating to the vestments controversy of 1550; the theology and content of the 1552 Book of Common Prayer, and particularly its eucharistic theology; and on questions of the revision of canon law including the drawing up of the *Reformatio Legum Ecclesiasticarum* and the Forty-Two Articles in 1552.

His reception in Oxford, however, was mixed, in part because he was appointed as a Reformer to a university which has come to be known for its conservative opposition to Reformation theology, but also—and perhaps particularly—on account of the resistance of Richard Smyth to the man who had supplanted him and whose theological position he

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5 McLelland (OTD, xix–xx) points to the difficulty in establishing what Vermigli was actually lecturing on in spring 1549. Did he take nearly two years to complete his lectures on I Corinthians, or was he giving a separate set of lectures on the Eucharist? In view of the expectations of lectures on theology (see below), the former seems more likely, and McLelland himself has previously pointed out that it was Vermigli’s ‘custom when lecturing to give extended comment on special subjects at appropriate points’. See *The Life, Early Letters, and Eucharistic Writings of Peter Martyr*, J.C. McLelland and G.E. Duffield, eds. (Oxford: Sutton Courtney Press, 1989), 112. Anderson argues that Vermigli had prepared his lectures on I Corinthians before he arrived in Oxford, ‘Rhetoric and Reality,’ 455.