CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

PRAYERS AND SERMONS

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Peter Martyr’s *Sacred Prayers—Preces sacræ ex Psalmis Davidis*¹—are not very original. Prayers based on the Psalms, in both prose and poetry, were a popular literary genre in the sixteenth century.² The *Preces sacræ* is probably the least important of all his major works, except for his commentary on Lamentations. Still, we should not downplay the *Preces sacræ*. Aside from his massive and famous *Loci Communes*, which had fourteen editions, the *Preces sacræ* was his most popular work; it had nine editions and was translated and published in English, French, German and Czech, and hence was available in more different languages than any other of Vermigli’s works. Truman State University Press told me it has outsold the other volumes in the *Peter Martyr Library*. That did not surprise me since spirituality always outsells theology. Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* has been published in more than 5000 editions in dozens of languages. Thomas à Kempis’s *Imitation of Christ* has attracted more readers than Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae*. Most Reformation scholars have read at least part of John Calvin’s *Institutes*. But I suspect many of them have never heard of Luis de La Puente’s *Meditaciones de los misterios de nuestra santa Fe*;³ the first English translation of 1619 was in six volumes, longer than Calvin’s *Institutes*. There have been more than 400 editions, considerably more than *The Institutes*. Again, spirituality outsells theology.

Vermigli was primarily a theologian. The *Preces sacræ* is his only work of spirituality. The first edition was published in Zurich by

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¹ Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Sacred Prayers Drawn from the Psalms of David*, translated and edited by John Patrick Donnelly, SJ (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 1996) [cited hereafter as *SP*].

² I suspect Professor Kirby requested me to deal with Vermigli’s prayers and sermons because I had previously edited and translated *Sacred Prayers* for the third volume of the *Peter Martyr Library*, as well as *Life, Letters, and Sermons*, vol. 5 (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 1999) [cited hereafter as *LLS*]. Inevitably this essay draws on those two books, especially their Introductions, but it adds new material.

³ (Valladolid, 1605).
Froschauer in 1564, two years after his death. Vermigli’s disciple and successor at Zurich, Josiah Simler, probably edited the manuscripts; at any rate he wrote the Introductory Letter which is our main source of information about the prayers. He tells us that as he was going through Vermigli’s library after his death he found a mass of tiny sheets of paper in Vermigli’s autograph which contained his prayers on the psalms. He sorted them out and decided to have them published, even though Vermigli himself never intended them for publication. Simler fills in the context of their first use: the Council of Trent had just begun and war over religion had broken out in Germany. ‘Martyr had read these prayers in public at the end of his lectures at the Strasbourg Academy.’

At first glance, this seems to make it easy to assign them a date. But all three of the events Simler sites are ambiguous. Vermigli had two periods at Strasbourg, December of 1542 to October of 1547 and November 1553 to July 1556. Simler says the prayers were written shortly after the Council of Trent began. The Council of Trent had three phases: the first at Trent from December of 1545 to March 1547, then the Council moved to Bologna for almost a year. The second phase of the Council at Trent was May 1551 to April 1552. The third phase was 1561–1563 when he was at Zurich. Simler also links the date of the prayers to religious war in Germany, but there were two Schmalkaldic Wars: the first in 1546–1547 and the second in 1551–1556. The two Schmalkaldic Wars overlap Vermigli’s two Strasbourg periods. In my translation of the *Preces* I assigned the prayers to Vermigli first Strasbourg period. Why? The *Preces* contain some references to war and have a distinctly sad tone, which fits better with the Protestant defeat during his first Strasbourg period than his second when the Protestant princes allied with Henry II of France and defeated the Catholics and Charles V. This led to the Emperor’s abdication, the Peace of Augsburg, and the legalization of Lutheranism in the Empire—*cuius regio, eius religio*. The most insightful article on the *Preces* is Emidio Campi’s ‘Le Preces sacræ di Pietro Martire Vermigli.’ He agrees that Simler meant that

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4 *SP* 3.
5 *SP* xix.
6 Charles V declared Protestants rebels on 16 June 1546; he won a decisive victory at Mühlberg on 24 April 1547.