

# *Vergerio's Anti-Nicodemite Propaganda and England, 1547–1558*

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Deceit is normally held in low esteem; pointing as it does to an evil disposition; there are, nonetheless, countless instances when it has reaped obvious benefits and deflected all manner of harm and ill report and mortal perils. For our conversation is not always with friends in this earthly life: Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, canto 4, i

A common response to the enforcement of religious conformity in the sixteenth century was deceit, either by silence or dissimulation. Contemporaries called people who chose this evasion Nicodemites, after Nicodemus who came to Christ by night. The propaganda campaign conducted against them by anti-Nicodemites stressed the necessity of individual witness, supported by scriptural references.<sup>1</sup> Virtually all the major reformers made their contribution – Calvin, Viret, Bullinger – even Bucer after an earlier more easy-going phase.<sup>2</sup> Prominent among the

*ARG* = *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*; *PS* = Parker Society; *SCJ* = *Sixteenth Century Journal*

I should like to record my thanks to Dr Anthony Wright of the University of Leeds, and to Dr Bill Sheils of the University of York, for reading the draft of this article and for unfailingly good advice, and also to the Open University for the award of a research travel grant.

<sup>1</sup> Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, trans. Guido Waldman, London–Oxford 1974, 30. Of the many accounts of the personal dilemmas created by enforcement Diarmaid MacCulloch's *Thomas Cranmer: a life*, New Haven–London 1996, captures well the profound confusion and inner conflict. For individual Italian experience see Massimo Firpo, *Inquisizione Romana e Contrariforma: studi sul Cardinal Giovanni Morone e il suo processo d'eresia*, Bologna 1992, and Dermot Fenlon, *Heresy and obedience in Tridentine Italy: Cardinal Pole and the Counter Reformation*, Cambridge 1972. For reference to Nicodemus in the Gospels see John iii. 1–10; vii. 50; xix. 39, and for standard anti-Nicodemite references 1 Kings xviii. 21; Matt. x. 26–33.

<sup>2</sup> Carlos M. N. Eire, 'Prelude to sedition: Calvin's attack on Nicodemism and religious compromise', *ARG* lxxvi (1985), 120–45 (lists of Calvin's and Viret's most important anti-

lesser lights were Italian exiles who had personal experience of Nicodemite dilemmas after conformity began to be enforced in Italy in the early 1540s. Peter Martyr Vermigli, Francesco Negri and Caelio Secondo Curione all wrote on the subject, but Pier Paolo Vergerio, who left his Italian bishopric for exile in 1549, was by far the most outspoken and prolific.<sup>3</sup>

Reformers perceived the struggle against Nicodemism as crucial, because they believed (or seemed to believe) that by individual refusal to conform in Catholic territories, Protestantism could be saved. Anti-Nicodemite literature was the propaganda arm of a great international crusade which Protestants were fighting and which, by the 1540s, they believed they were in danger of losing.<sup>4</sup> Most anti-Nicodemite writers were themselves exiles, publishing from positions of relative safety to demand courage from waverers faced by complex political situations. Experience in one European context was regarded as conferring authority to comment on all. However, anti-Nicodemism has been portrayed as a far more unified and coherent polemic than in fact it was. It came in many forms from profound theological reflection to violent personal attack, according to the situation and temperament of the writers and the several contemporary European crises which they addressed. Peter Martyr Vermigli's views, rushed into print during the Marian exile, had a speculative, theological tone, Calvin's polemic addressed to French Protestants, 'Messieurs les Nicodemites', was tougher, more topical. Although he characterised types of dissemblers, Calvin consistently avoided dragging in individual actions and dilemmas, so much so that it

Nicodemite works at pp. 120, 142); Heinrich Bullinger *De origine errorum circa invocationem et cultum deorum ac simulachrum*, Zurich 1539; Peter Matheson 'Martyrdom or mission: a Protestant debate', *ARG* lxxx (1989), 154–72.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Martyr Vermigli, *A treatise of the cohabitation of the faithful with the unfaithful* [Strasbourg 1555] (*RSTC* 24673.5) (this was incorporated into Vermigli's *Loci communes* at II. iv: *The common places of... Peter Martyr translated and partlie gathered by A. Marten*, London 1583 [*RSTC* 24669], 309–23); Francesco Negri, *Tragedia... intitolata libero arbitrio*, n.p. 1546, and *Certain tragedy entitled freewill* trans. H. Cheke, London 1573 (*RSTC* 18419). Caelio Secondo Curione's *An excellent admonition [against] papisticall services* was translated and published with Wolfgang Musculus' *The temporysour* [Wesel 1555] (*RSTC* 18312). For a balanced biography of Vergerio before the flight from Italy see Anne Jacobson Schutte, *Pier Paolo Vergerio: the making of an Italian reformer*, Geneva 1977, now in an unrevised Italian translation, with a new preface and revised bibliography: *Pier Paolo Vergerio e la riforma a Venezia, 1498–1549*, Rome 1988. For Vergerio's years in exile see Angelika Hauser, *Pietro Paolo Vergerios protestantische Zeit*, Tübingen 1980.

<sup>4</sup> Delio Cantimori, *Prospettive di storia ereticale italiana del cinquecento*, Bari 1960, 37–49. Carlo Ginzburg, *Il nicodemismo: simulazione e dissimulazione religiosa nell' Europa del '500*, Turin 1970, sees Nicodemism as a coherent philosophy. Others stress its situational character and its variety: Albano Biondi, 'La giustificazione della simulazione nel cinquecento', in *Eresia e riforma nell' Italia del cinquecento: miscellanea*, I, Florence–Chicago, 1974, 3–68; Carlos Eire, 'Calvin and Nicodemism: a reappraisal', *SCJ* x (1979), 46–69, esp. pp. 67–9; P. Zagorin, *Ways of lying*, Cambridge, MA 1990, 63–83.

is impossible to identify any real life Nicodemites from his writings.<sup>5</sup> Pier Paolo Vergerio did not share this restraint. His campaign hinged on individual stories and exposure of those he regarded as deceivers.<sup>6</sup>

From 1549, when his exile began, Vergerio moved restlessly around Swiss and German Protestant centres. He never followed his fellow countrymen Vermigli and Bernardino Ochino to England although it seems likely that he tried to do so.<sup>7</sup> His publications were known there, however, and England figures large in his writing. He set his sights on that distant country for three reasons. First, between 1549 and 1553 he joined in the general Protestant encomia of the young Josiah, Edward VI; later, after Mary's accession he, like others, registered shock at the suddenness of the persecution; lastly he brooded over English events because his chief living target, Reginald Pole, was appointed, and in November 1554 arrived, as cardinal legate. In Vergerio's view, Pole was the greatest Nicodemite in Europe.<sup>8</sup>

Vergerio gave absolutely no quarter to Nicodemites and yet by any reckoning England had plenty of them. Whilst he insisted that all must be revealed, the capriciousness of English Reformation events helped to keep much concealed.<sup>9</sup> An adiaphoric sense had developed from the Lollards 'surviving by silence', through the dilemmas of the 1530s when Latimer advised Bainham against heroics over non-essentials: 'Let not vain glory overcome you in a matter that men deserve not to die.' As Pearse points out, 'Hooper debated with the Anabaptists who flocked to his sermons in 1549; he did not send for the constables.' All this helps to explain John Foxe's willingness to gloss over embarrassing details in the biographies of waverers, provided they were 'good soldiers after'. English Protestantism

<sup>5</sup> Vermigli, *Common places*, II. iv. 309–16; J. P. Donnelly 'The social and ethical thought of Vermigli', in Joseph C. McLelland (ed.), *Peter Martyr Vermigli and Italian reform*, Waterloo, Ontario 1980, 108–19, 110–11; Eire, 'Prelude to sedition', 124–5.

<sup>6</sup> Salvatore Caponetto, *La riforma protestante nell'Italia del cinquecento*, Turin 1992, 176. There is no complete modern bibliography of Vergerio's work, but see Friedrich Hermann Hubert, *Vergerios publizistische Thätigkeit nebst einer bibliographischen Übersicht*, Breslau–Grass–Barth, 1893. See also the bibliography of the Italian edition of Schutte, *Vergerio*, 1988, although this contains only works cited in the text.

<sup>7</sup> Vermigli to Bullinger, Oxford, 26 October 1551, in *Original letters relative to the English Reformation*, ed. Hastings Robinson (PS, 1847), II. 499–500.

<sup>8</sup> Paolo Simoncelli, *Il caso Reginald Pole: eresia e santità nelle polemiche religiose del cinquecento*, Rome 1997; Fenlon, *Heresy and obedience*, 220–69.

<sup>9</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The stripping of the altars: traditional religion in England c. 1400–c. 1580*, New Haven–London 1992; Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The later Reformation in England 1547–1603*, Basingstoke–London 1990; Christopher Haigh, *English reformations: religion, politics and society under the Tudors*, Oxford 1993. An excellent recent account is 'Nicodemism and the English Reformation', in Andrew Pettegree, *Marian Protestantism: six studies*, Aldershot 1996, 86–117. See also Nicholas Tyacke, 'Introduction: re-thinking the "English Reformation"', in Nicholas Tyacke (ed.), *England's long Reformation*, London 1998, 1–33.

had shown itself circumspect as well as brave.<sup>10</sup> Members of the Family of Love, although stereotyped as dangerous dissemblers, were protected by their neighbours. Christopher Marsh thinks it possible that 'early modern English society – despite its martyrs and its exiles – possessed considerable resources of religious tolerance'.<sup>11</sup>

The most telling fact of all is that when Mary Tudor's government did all in its power to enforce conformity, about a thousand people suffered exile 'and the number who witnessed boldly in England... was even smaller'. The dramatic suffering of the martyrs has tended to obscure the likely indifference or Nicodemism of the rest. Modern revisionist historians, however, have shown that large numbers of English people had obeyed the law but had never been persuaded by the new religion, whilst others just survived the dramatic religious changes by keeping quiet. Some were clergy, Haigh's 'liturgical hermaphrodites', with survival skills like Edward Crome's; some, noble *politiques* who took to their country estates when trouble was brewing; some, ordinary literate folk who knew what was going on but were unable or unwilling to lose livelihoods by being on the 'wrong' side.<sup>12</sup>

English readers must have been aware of continental literature which forbade these survival techniques and condemned all collaboration with the opposition as idolatry. Initially under Edward, but later to a greater extent under Mary, they came to know anti-Nicodemite publications in translation: Calvin's *Certain homilies concerning profitable admonition*, Musculus' *Temporysour* or Vermigli's *Cohabitation of the faithful with the unfaithful*. But these were mild – in Musculus' case quite forgiving – by comparison with Vergerio's outpourings. Even Calvin did not pursue actual living Nicodemites, nor speculate about their future in hell. Vergerio, by contrast, pointed to the suicidal states which followed dissembling and defined every uncertainty as evil self-seeking. He manipulated guilt in a way that was unfamiliar in England.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Haigh, *English reformations*, 187; Latimer to Bainham, 1532, BL, MS Harley 422, fo. 90 r–v, cited in Susan Waduba, 'Equivocation and recantation during the English Reformation: the subtle shadows of Dr Edward Crome', this JOURNAL xlv (1993), 224–42 at p. 240; M. J. Pearce, *Between known men and visible saints*, London–Toronto 1994, 223–4; John Foxe, *Acts and monuments*, London 1563 (RSTC 11222), 674.

<sup>11</sup> Christopher Marsh, *The Family of Love in English society*, Cambridge 1994, 93–4, 250.

<sup>12</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the altars*, 520–3, 591–3; Pettegree, *Marian Protestantism*, 87, 100–3; Haigh, *English Reformations*, 194–202, 253; Waduba, 'Equivocation'. For a challenge to the revisionist interpretation especially of the later Reformation period see Michael C. Questier, *Conversion, politics and religion in England, 1580–1625*, Cambridge 1996, 176–7, 205–6.

<sup>13</sup> John Calvin, *Certain homilies concerning profitable admonition for this time*, [Wesel] 1553 (RSTC 4392); Vermigli, *Cohabitation*, 1555. Musculus' emphasis on pardon for erring Nicodemites ('the Lord will safely pardon the sinner') was rare in anti-Nicodemite literature: *The temporysour*, G iii. English readers first encountered Matteo Gribaldi's version of Vergerio's story of Francesco Spiera's suicidal state in *Historia de quodam*

The encounter between his vituperativeness and English readers negotiating mid-Tudor religious change has never been examined. It is the intention of this study to assess the reception of his extreme kind of anti-Nicodemism in an often Nicodemite England.

Vergerio came from a respected but impecunious family. One of his ancestors was a famous humanist and poet in the early fifteenth century and both Vergerio and his brother (who also became a bishop) received a wide humanist education. Pier Paolo attended the University of Padua in the 1520s where he was a contemporary of Peter Martyr Vermigli, Reginald Pole and a large number of *spirituali* who were later connected with Italy's reform movement. Padua in the twenties was seething with discussion of ideas subsequently identified as Protestant and it remained the one Italian university to continue to receive Protestant students until the late 1550s. Pole's household at Viterbo and Vermigli's Augustinian priory at Lucca later became nurseries of Italian *spirituali* who were reading Protestant books when such activities were still safe (although suspect) because doctrine had not been defined.<sup>14</sup> Vergerio, however, had no theological training; he read law and was appointed to a lectureship in jurisprudence at Padua. Diplomatic service in the employment of Pope Clement VII and of Ercole, Cardinal Gonzaga, gave him a wide European vision which influenced his later career as Protestant exile propagandist and encouraged in him the gentle art of flattery.

In 1536 he was made bishop of Capodistria. Vergerio's correspondence in the 1540s is angled at possible sources of patronage and switches emphasis dramatically according to the likely views of the recipient. For instance, in a letter to the reforming queen of Navarre of early 1543 there are references to his need to protect common people from superstition and idolatry and feed them with the word of God, yet at the same time he asked Scipio Constanzo to delete from his writing every minor deviation from the intention of the Church. He was as gifted in telling people what they wanted to hear as most hard-up humanists of his day. Without doubt, however, he was involved with the two most significant groups of *spirituali* in Italy – Valdés's circle at Naples and later Pole's household at Viterbo – as an occasional acquaintance, but his knowledge of the Protestant ideas being read, written and discussed there gave him ammunition to be used subsequently in damaging polemic against Pole.<sup>15</sup>

(*F. Spera*) *quem hostes evangelii in Italia coegerunt abiicere ognitam veritatem*, n.p. 1549, trans. and publ. in England as *A notable and marvailous epistle*, trans. E. A. [Edward Aglionby], Worcester 1550 (*RSTC* 12365).

<sup>14</sup> Schutte, *Vergerio*, 21–45; Fenlon, *Heresy and obedience*, 25; Philip McNair, *Peter Martyr in Italy: an anatomy of apostasy*, Oxford, 1967, 86. See also McNair's updated biographical introduction to Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Early writings: creed, Scripture, Church*, trans. Mariano Di Gangi and Joseph C. McLelland, ed. Joseph C. McLelland, Kirksville 1994.

<sup>15</sup> Schutte, *Vergerio*, 46; *Nuovo libro di lettere de rari autori in lingue volgare*, Venice 1543, 128v, 153v; Fenlon, *Heresy and obedience*, 70–2.

During the early 1540s the Venetian state did not enquire too closely into the opinions of her many crypto-Protestant or just plain muddled, subjects. From 1547, however, its intensiveness moved up a gear. After the battle of Mühlberg, it looked as if twenty years of ideological struggle in the empire might end in Catholic and imperial victory. The Council of Trent had begun in 1546 and the crucial doctrinal issue of justification was defined in January 1547. Pole withdrew from the council's deliberations, and other *spirituali* began to retreat from crypto-Protestantism to obedience. It was prudent for Venice, that most devout and yet unreliable of Catholic states, to modify her independent stance and check up on her Protestant subjects – especially if, like Vergerio, they were also bishops. The Venetian Inquisition dated from the same year and Venice's obstructive attitude to papal orders was checked. Vergerio was on his own. The inquisition began to seek evidence. Vergerio became wanted for formal hearings.<sup>16</sup>

In this highly charged context he witnessed the illness of Francesco Spiera, at Padua in Venetian territory in 1548. Spiera was also a lawyer who had Protestant opinions which he recanted during an inquisition proceeding. Then he regretted the recantation, fell into depression, convinced he was damned, and died in despair in his home town of Cittadella. Vergerio was at his bedside during his illness attending to his spiritual needs but also stage-managing the scene and its aftermath. From exile in Basle in 1550, two years after Spiera died, Vergerio made his famous comment to Martin Borrhaus: 'I would not be here had I not seen Spiera.' But this was not completely true. In the early months of 1549, after Spiera had died, Vergerio was still trying to stay in Italy by pressing for a more favourable place for the inquisition's hearing against him. He failed, then fled. Vergerio's flight had as much to do with the withdrawal of powerful support, and with his own understandable fear, as with the dictates of his conscience on seeing Spiera's anguish.<sup>17</sup> He arrived in the tolerant Rhaetian Republic in 1549 and ministered to a community of Italian Protestants as Vicosoprano. But this world was too small for the one-time well-travelled diplomat and bishop. He proclaimed himself 'Bishop of Christ', identified a special mission to preach to the unlearned,

<sup>16</sup> Paul Grendler, 'The circulation of Protestant books in Italy', in J. McLelland (ed.) *Peter Martyr Vermigli and Italian reform*, Waterloo 1980, 5–17; Antonio Santuosso, 'Religious orthodoxy, dissent and suppression in Venice in the 1540s', *Church History* xlii (1973), 476–85; Antonio Santuosso 'The moderate inquisitor: Giovanni della Casa's Venetian nunciature, 1544–1549', *Studi Veneziani* n.s. ii (1978), 119–210; John Martin, *Venice's hidden enemies: Italian heretics in a Renaissance city*, Berkeley 1993, 66–70, 125–33. For reform groups in Vicenza, also in Venetian territory, see Achille Olivieri, *Riforma ed eresia a Vicenza nel cinquecento*, Rome 1992.

<sup>17</sup> Vergerio to Martin Borrhaus, 1550, cited in Giuseppe de Leva, *Degli eretici di Cittadella*, Venice 1873, 43; Schutte, *Vergerio*, 273–5; M. A. Overell, 'The exploitation of Francesco Spiera', *SCJ* xxvi (1995), 619–37, 629.



bringing the Gospel, ‘as milk to nourish and instruct those who are still poor and rough’. In 1551 Beccadelli, the nuncio at Venice, believed that Vergerio was still continuing ‘to spread his poison’ into Italy, crossing the border in disguise. His main activity however was not as Protestant secret agent but as propagandist.<sup>18</sup>

In the four years after he fled from Italy, Vergerio published about forty books and pamphlets. It was a phase of frenetic activity and virtually all of it had anti-Nicodemite objectives, to make the *spirituali* in Italy and secret Protestants elsewhere declare themselves. His single most famous work was the story of Spiera’s last illness and death. Vergerio inserted Spiera into the vociferous anti-Nicodemite campaign and claimed that his own courage, and that of others, could be fired by contemplation of Spiera’s desperation. He endowed Spiera with totemic significance for all who were tempted to deny their beliefs, by turning him into a negative pattern, an anti-Nicodemite anti-hero.

Dating is a problem. Vergerio claimed he had dictated his account at Spiera’s bedside before his death. He dated his *Historia di M. F. Spiera* ‘from Padua November 1548’, but it was not published until 1551, after he had fled from Italy. However, it was known in England before that, since one English translation of another version, that of Matteo Gribaldi, was published at Worcester in 1550. Gribaldi’s and all other accounts were based on Vergerio’s and Vergerio’s personal significance as the Master of Ceremonies is very obvious in all versions. When English readers encountered Spiera they were also made aware of the Italian bishop at the bedside who had himself become a Protestant.<sup>19</sup>

There is little doubt that all the accounts were tendentious rather than factual – full of the theatrical elements which the *ars moriendi* had established as deathbed expectations for Protestants as for Catholics; visions, proud stoicism, final speeches full of scriptural quotation. There was no other anti-Nicodemite literature quite like it. Readers had the dramatic possibility of identification with the damned, and this Faustian element ensured its popularity and its survival for over three centuries in several European countries. Vergerio’s Spiera proved exportable and relevant to the many contemporary situations where there was a stark choice between deceit and persecution.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Schutte, *Vergerio*, 247, 264–5; Caponetto, *La riforma protestante*, 176; Ludovico Beccadelli to Dandini, 16 May 1551, cited in Pio Paschini, *Venezia e l’Inquisizione Romana da Giulio III a Pio IV*, Padua 1959, 75–6. Beccadelli’s suspicions are borne out by Vergerio’s authoritative comments on the religious situation in Italy until well into the 1550s, for example Vergerio to Bullinger, 8 Oct. 1553, in *Calvini opera*, xiv, (*Corpus Reformatorum*), ed. William Baum, Edward Cunitz and Edward Reus, Brunswick 1893–1900, xlii. 636.

<sup>19</sup> *La historia di M. F. Spiera, il quale per havere in varii modi negata la conosciuta verita dell’ Evangelio casco in una misera desperatione*, ed. P. P. Vergerio, Basle 1551; Gribaldi, *Historia de quodam*; Overell, ‘Exploitation of Spiera’, 627–31.

<sup>20</sup> Michael MacDonald ‘“The fearful estate of Francis Spiera”’: narrative, identity

For the time being, Protestants in England under Edward VI did not face such choices but they certainly knew the story. Peter Martyr Vermigli, lecturing on the *Epistle to the Romans* at Oxford, made a lengthy and confident reference to it, noting that Spiera was so desperate 'that he would never afterward receive any consolation, though he were assisted even by notable and religious men'. This was as near as Vermigli came to acknowledging the presence at the bedside of Vergerio, his one-time fellow student at Padua. It is likely that even at this early date suspicion made him doubly cautious.<sup>21</sup>

Italian Protestantism had something of a vogue at Edward VI's court in the early 1550s which resulted in increased enthusiasm for Vergerio's Spiera. Vermigli and Ochino were Archbishop Cranmer's honoured guests, the *Beneficio di Cristo*, the movement's most famous work, was translated and the king's manuscript annotations prove that he had read just enough of it to misunderstand the theology. In such an atmosphere, Latimer's reference to Spiera in a sermon before the court in 1552 seemed natural, perhaps expected, by a group well-versed in Italian events, following them with detached interest:

I know now that Judas had sinned against the Holy Ghost, also Nero, Pharaoh and one Franciscus Spira; which man had forsaken popery and done very boldly in God's quarrel; at the length he was complained of...he contrary to that admonition of the Holy Ghost denied the word of God and so finally died in desperation; him I may pronounce to have sinned against the Holy Ghost. But I will show you a remedy for sin against the Holy Ghost. Ask remission of sin in the name of Christ and then I ascertain you that you sin not against the Holy Ghost.

Latimer was not impressed by the anti-Nicodemite message of damnation for those who denied. As the above extract illustrates, he specifically contradicted it, cutting through all the drama with the cooling antidote of Christian theology. Vergerio, who was no theologian, had met his match.<sup>22</sup> He had used the Spiera story in his usual opportunist way but

and emotion in early modern England', *Journal of British Studies* xxxi (1992), 32–61; John Stachniewski, *The persecutory imagination*, Oxford 1991, 37–9, 229–30, 300–1; Overell, 'Exploitation of Spiera', 632–7; Lily B. Campbell, "'Doctor Faustus": a case of conscience', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* lxxvii (1952), 219–39.

<sup>21</sup> Vermigli's account of Spiera is part of the 'Treatise of Predestination' placed at the end of *Romans ix* in Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Most learned and fruitful commentaries... upon the Epistle to the Romans*, London 1568 (RSTC 24672), 288–312 at p. 301. For Vermigli's time in England see Philip McNair, 'Peter Martyr in England', in McLelland, *Peter Martyr Vermigli*, 85–105, and M. A. Overell, 'Peter Martyr in England 1547–1553: an alternative view', *SCJ* xv (1984), 87–104.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 87. Edward Courtenay's translation of the *Beneficio de Cristo* (1548), is Cambridge University Library, ms Nn. iv. 43, fos 4v, 93r. See also Benedetto de Mantova, *Il beneficio di Cristo*, ed. Salvatore Caponetto (Corpus Reformatorum Italicorum), Florence 1972, 157–206, esp. pp. 157–8; Hugh Latimer, *Works*, ed. George Elwes Corrie (PS, 1844–5), i. 425.



it appears that he had not thought it through. Spiera's death was not a Christian one – any more than Faust's. It could not survive Latimer's leisured examination in the light of Christian theology during England's Protestant peace. Things were to be different in face of persecution; when the Marian repression began, Protestants were to seize on the Spiera deathbed story in the hope of avoiding his fate.

Meanwhile Vergerio had been angling for an invitation to come to England in person – to follow in Vermigli and Ochino's footsteps in fact. He deliberately kept his name well-aired in English circles through a series of minor works dedicated to Edward VI although never translated, notably *Copia di una lettera* (1550) and the *Al Serenissimo Re Eduardo Sesto* (1550). For Vergerio as for Cranmer and countless other European Protestants, Edward's accession seemed to herald a local reversal of the Protestant demise in other parts of Europe in the mid sixteenth century: 'For God has given it a King who although only fourteen is most admirable and amazing and in addition to his other virtues and blessings has this one... that he appreciates the gentleness and beauty of the Gospel and will not lend his ear to the bitterness and vulgarity of pharasaical teachings.' At about the same time, he seems to have urged Bullinger to persuade Vermigli to pull strings for him in England. On 26 October 1551 Vermigli wrote to Bullinger explaining why it was not possible for him to advance Vergerio's cause:

The affair of the bishop Vergerio cannot now be undertaken or promoted by me because I am a long way from court and from persons in power: for I am residing, as you know, at Oxford where I have no intercourse with any but students. In the next place some great commotions have been raised in the state... but when an occasion shall be afforded I will not be unmindful of this duty.

Compared to the crisis which resulted in the duke of Somerset's arrest on 14 October, Vergerio's interests cannot have been a priority. However, even in the last two years of Edward's reign, when relative calm was restored and Vermigli was at times in touch with 'persons in power', he still did nothing.<sup>23</sup>

Vergerio had used the works dedicated to Edward VI to mark the death of Pope Paul III – and to hope for 'lesser evil' from the next pontiff. He threw in references to the silent *spirituali* in Italy, claiming that the new pontificate had caused them 'to think again and to acknowledge that on

<sup>23</sup> 'Perché Dio le ha dato un Re, il quale in una età di quattordecì anni e meraviglioso et stupendo, et oltra le sue altre belle virtù e felicità, ha questa, che egli gusta la dolcezza et bellezza dell' Evangelio, et non puo sentire la amaritudine e la bruttezza delle dottrine farisaiche': Pier Paolo Vergerio, *Copia di una lettera scritta a iiii di gennaio 1550 nella quale sono alcune nuove di Germania e d'Inghilterra*, n.p n.d.; *Al Serenissimo Re d'Inghilterra Eduardo Sesto, della creazione del nuovo Papa Giulio terzo et ciò che di lui sperare si possa*, n.p. 1550, in several versions including Latin, French and German translations, cited in Simoncelli, *Il caso Reginald Pole*, 78–9; *Original letters*, ii. 499–500.

some points we [Protestants] were right'. He wanted to believe that 'some Cardinals and bishops and generals [religious superiors] would now want to make up for it and admit their mistake'. To initiates used to the coded language by which the *spirituali* in Italy regularly conveyed their meaning, this would have appeared as a jab at Cardinal Reginald Pole. But for the time being it was oblique.<sup>24</sup> By contrast his pasquinade against Paul III was blatantly personal and vulgar; English readers were treated to his extremist anti-papalism when a rare translation appeared in 1552 as *Wonderful news of the death of Paul III*. The translator, William Baldwin, was wary and embarrassed but neatly left his Italian author to take the blame for possible libel: 'I know no man would have been so shameless so to make report except he were sure.' So Paul III's supposed deeds are noted: 'the giving of his sister to be abused of one that was pope before him, the poisoning of his mother and of his sister because she loved another better than him, the abusing of his own daughter and his persecuting of Christians'.<sup>25</sup>

The narrative of Paul III's descent into hell is pure pasquinade but important details emerge about Vergerio's method and his self-image. Here, as in the Spiera account, he fixes on the personal and the individual as a means of conveying general truth. English readers were treated to moments of soap opera as the pope's son and daughter became his chief and most unrelenting accusers in hell. This manipulation of popular voyeurism was part of Vergerio's journalistic method and he never altered it. Pole in fact made his appearance here – but again only obliquely. He appears in the apocalyptic battle of good and evil, on the wrong side of course: 'They which fought with swords and common weapons had to their Captain a certain Cardinal, the bishop's legate, a young man, desirous of vainglory.' These evil forces are ranged against others who 'held up against their strokes with one hand a pen, in the other a book'. The author's perception of his own role is obvious and towards the end the two Vergerios, Pier Paolo and his brother, get clear and honourable mention. Christ had called Pier Paolo, 'as it were another S Paul...for many commodities of his Church. For thou knowest in how little time he set forth many excellent, godly works. Inasmuch as this man appear-

<sup>24</sup> 'Quei di Roma cominciano a risentirsi et a concedere che in alcuni articoli noi habbiamo ragione.... Et voglio credere che alcuni Cardinali et Vescovi et generali et altri... hora voranno risarcire et emendare il fallo': *Copia di una lettera scritta a iiii di gemaio 1550*, cited in Simoncelli, *Pole*, 79–80; 'they communicated among themselves in a sort of coded language'; Silvana Seidel Menchi, 'Italy', in Bob Scribner, Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (eds), *The Reformation in a national context*, Cambridge 1994, 181–96 at p. 186.

<sup>25</sup> *L'Epistola de morte Pauli Tertii Porit. Max. deque iis quae ei post mortem eius acciderunt a firma di Aesquillus* [Pasquillus, Pasquino] 1549, trans. into English as *Wonderful news of the death of Paul III. written in Latin by P. Esquillus and englyshed by W B[aldwin]*, London [1552] (RSTC 10532), translator's preface at sig. Aii.

eth... to have been stirred up by the Lord to be the teacher and light of our country Italy'. This was as exalted as Vergerio's other self-image, 'Bishop of Christ'. Both belong to early days of his exile before the real state of his relations with the Protestant community had become clear. Even in 1552, when the English translation appeared, he may well have still been hoping for an invitation to Edward VI's court. For him, as for many, the young English king brought hope of wider European victory. The English translator was quite clear about Edward's role; he thought this work was written 'principally for princes', that readers might thank God for delivery from 'so stinking a Head' and 'better love and obey our sovereign Lord'.<sup>26</sup>

In less than a year Mary was queen and pasquinades had ceased to be published in England. The persecution of Protestants had begun. There was no longer leisure in England for Vergerio's outpourings, only time for Protestants to grasp at the one work of his which spoke to their present condition. Spiera's trials, like theirs, related to the questions of conformity to a Catholic state, of the possibility of Nicodemism and of individual courage. John Bradford made the connection in the very early months of the reign. In July 1553, when Lord Francis Russell was taken into the sheriff of London's custody, Bradford wrote: 'Remember Lot's wife which looked back, remember Francis Spira.'

Bradford himself was imprisoned in August 1553 and put to death on 1 July 1555. Sometime after November 1554 he wrote in his *Exhortation to the brethren throughout the realm of England*: 'Oh let us not so run down headlong into perdition, stumbling on those sins from which there is no recovery... as it chanced to Lot's wife, to Judas Iscariot, Francis Spira and to many others.' Coverdale borrowed Bradford's exact words and his Spiera reference. Later Foxe claimed that Lady Jane Grey, before her execution, used Spiera to try to dissuade her chaplain, Thomas Harding, from accepting Marian Catholicism: 'Remember the horrible history of Julian of old, and the lamentable case of Francis Spiera of late, whose case (me think) should be yet so green in your remembrance, that being a thing of our time, you should fear the like inconvenience seeing you are fallen into the like offence.'<sup>27</sup> In persecution, English Protestants were finding the dying Spiera all too 'green in their remembrance', but by the mid 1550s his journalistic image maker had moved on to a living Nicodemite.

<sup>26</sup> *Wonderful news... of Paul III*, Biii–Ciii (irregular pagination); *Confessione della pia dottrina, la quale in nome dello illustrissimo principe e signor Cristoforo duca di Würtemberg... fu... presentati nel Concilio di Trento*, 1552, Tübingen [1553], sig. L8r, cited in Schutte *Vergerio*, 265; *Wonderful news*, translator's preface at sig. Aiiff.

<sup>27</sup> John Bradford, *Writings*, ed. Aubrey Townsend (PS, 1848–53), ii. 80; i. 433; Myles Coverdale, *Works*, ed. George Pearson (PS, 1854–6), ii. 276; John Foxe, *Acts and monuments*, London 1576 (RSTC 11224), i. 1351 (misnumbered as 1341). Foxe's confident, brief reference here suggests that he assumed his readers knew the Spiera story.

Reginald Pole was Vergerio's obsession. To explain why, it is necessary to recap on Pole's activities. Having been deeply involved with the *spirituali* in Italy, he had urged the Council of Trent not to condemn the Protestant theology of salvation because it was Protestant, and had then withdrawn from the proceedings in a state of breakdown variously described as 'catarrh' or 'an illness of body and mind'. His position was different from Vergerio's. Pole's difficulties were theological: he had a reputation for personal sanctity and his institutional loyalty to the Catholic Church was never seriously in doubt. He took refuge from the theological storms in 1547, then emerged as a very strong imperial candidate for the papacy on Pope Paul III's death in 1549 and was at one point within one vote of obtaining it. But suspicions of his unorthodoxy were fuelled by the inquisition's co-ordinated attack, Cardinal Caraffa's open accusations and Vergerio's propaganda references.<sup>28</sup> His candidature failed and his position became intensely difficult during the new pontificate of Julius III. Many of Pole's associates were arrested and questioned by the inquisition but he survived by silence and by the occasional piece of skilled self-defence, even for a while restoring good relations with Caraffa, his enemy and the most furiously reactionary of the College of Cardinals. In 1553 he withdrew from the turmoil of curial politics to the Benedictine monastery of Maguzzano on Lake Garda. It seemed he had achieved the solitude for study and contemplation which he had always sought. Within a few months, however, Edward VI had died, Mary was queen and Pole was made legate to England. Then imperial and papal political considerations intervened to create his famously delayed journey between Italy and England. He was first required to undertake the daunting task of making peace between the French King Henry II and the Emperor Charles V. Papal face-saving may have inspired the commission but Cardinal Pole was certainly thrust into the diplomatic limelight.<sup>29</sup>

The English cardinal seemed to be a survivor and it was probably that element which Vergerio could not stomach. Pole had retained his usefulness as a diplomat whilst he, Vergerio, also once a diplomat, had entered the ranks of wandering Italian reformers who sought acceptance in vain in the Protestant courts and cities of Europe. Calvin's mockery and criticism of the Italians shut many doors in areas influenced by the Reformed. By an ironic contrast, in the same October of 1553 as Pole

<sup>28</sup> Fenlon, *Heresy and obedience*, 131–6, 200–4; Massimo Firpo (trans. John Tedeschi), 'The Italian Reformation and Juan de Valdés', *SCJ* xxvii (1996), 360–1; Simoncelli, *Reginald Pole*, 62–76. The Vergerian propaganda which probably did most damage to Pole in 1549 was his tongue-in-cheek publication of Giovanni della Casa's Venetian Index, with his own commentary: *Il catalogo de' libri... da M. Giovan della Casa*, n.p. 1549, quoted in da Mantova, *Il beneficio di Cristo*, 433–44.

<sup>29</sup> Fenlon, *Heresy and obedience*, 234–50; Simoncelli, *Reginald Pole*, 77, 95–6.

began his frustrating but high profile journey for peace, Vergerio was forced to accept the relatively modest post of adviser to the Lutheran duke of Württemberg, justifiably described as ‘a fighter’ on the Protestant side.<sup>30</sup>

Personal jealousy undoubtedly had much to do with the new, furious phase of Vergerio’s attacks on Pole which began in 1553. Anti-Nicodemite literature had never been so blatantly and bitterly personal. Paolo Simoncelli regards 1553 as the point when Vergerio’s attack underwent a radical change of emphasis, with the publication of the *Consilium episcoporum Bononiae congregatorum*, where Pole’s departure for England is noted with great acrimony. The target shifted from Pole’s supposed concealment of his Protestant theological convictions to his open, anti-reform stance as persecutor of Protestants – and not just in England, for his diplomacy was seen as an attempt to unite the Catholic powers of Europe. Simoncelli’s case is carefully made but perhaps overstated. Vergerio’s work after 1553 continued to allude to Pole’s earlier Nicodemism and the way he had encouraged secrecy in others. ‘Pole the Nicodemite’ gave way only in part to ‘Pole the Persecutor’. Paradoxically, both accusations were probably true. Pole had sympathised with the Protestant theology of salvation, and was known for his ‘facilitas’ towards the private expression of unorthodox views. Equally, he had always discouraged wilful *curiosità*. His peace programme of the mid 1550s aimed at ‘united action against the “mal fideli” by the pacified Christian princes’ and events in England proved him ‘not especially merciful towards English heresy when he found it obstinate’. Vergerio had had time and motivation to unravel the complex personality of his chosen victim and he had extracted two separate elements of partial truth, ‘Nicodemite’ and ‘persecutor’.<sup>31</sup>

In 1553, then, the battle lines were drawn. Pole was supposed to be

<sup>30</sup> Calvin used his preface to the Spiera story to take issue with Italian psychology in general. Italy was a place ‘without sense and feeling’, where ‘they despise God’: Calvin, ‘Praefatio in libellum de Francisco Spiera’, *Calvini opera*, ix (*Corpus Reformatorum*, xxxvii), 855–8. The quotations are from the 1551 English translation of Gribaldi’s *Epistle* (RSTC 12365) which was printed with Calvin’s preface. English readers were therefore familiar with Calvin’s anti-Italian prejudice: Hauser, *Vergerios protestantische Zeit*, 183; Lewis W. Spitz, ‘Particularism and peace: Augsburg 1555’, *Church History* xxv (1956), 110–26, 117.

<sup>31</sup> Simoncelli, *Reginald Pole*, 96–7, 111; *Consilium quorundum episcoporum Bononiae congregatorum, quod de ratione stabiliendae Romanae Ecclesiae Iulio III Pont. Max. datum est*, Tübingen 1553, 94v–104v at 104r–v, cited in Simoncelli, *Reginald Pole*, 97; Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience*, 95–7, 200, 247; Heinrich Lutz, ‘Cardinal Reginald Pole and the peace conference of Marcq’, in E. I. Kouri and Tom Scott (eds), *Politics and society in Reformation Europe*, Basingstoke 1989, 329–53 at p. 348; Rex H. Pogson, ‘Reginald Pole and the priorities of government in Mary Tudor’s reign’, *Historical Journal* xviii (1975), 3–20 at p. 10. For a recent study of Pole’s complexities see Thomas Mayer, ‘A test of wills: Cardinal Pole, Ignatius Loyola, and the Jesuits in England’, in Thomas McCoog sj (ed.), *The reckoned expense: Edmund Campion and the early English Jesuits*, Woodbridge 1996, 21–39.

peacemaking on a long journey through Europe. Vergerio, based in Württemberg, was in the employment of Duke Christoph, a most determined opponent of peace, who tirelessly pointed out to other Protestant princes that they had everything to lose from an accord between the empire and France.<sup>32</sup> Vergerio hated Pole, as Nicodemite, as high profile diplomat, as peace negotiator and as representative of a potential Catholic recovery. Thus his last campaign began.

In 1554 he announced to Bullinger his intention of publishing parts of Pole's *De unitate*. This work was written in 1536 – almost twenty years previously – to justify Pole's departure from England during Henry VIII's reformation. Expressing himself with the vehemence that characterised much early Reformation polemic, Pole called Protestants 'the seed of the Turks', and urged the emperor to take up arms against them. Pole appeared an enemy of all reform, who cared not a jot for reconciliation. When Vergerio published the damaging excerpt in 1554 as *Oratio R. Poli* he omitted to explain that it originated from almost twenty years earlier, had been written against Henry VIII not the German Protestants, and had never been published. He could scarcely have touched a more sensitive nerve. The peacemaker of Europe was undermined. Pole's own awareness of the danger was shown by his plan to respond by publishing his own version with a correct account of its origins – though he never did.<sup>33</sup> The full edition of the work *Reginald Poli...pro ecclesiasticae unitatis defensione* appeared in Strasbourg the following year. Despite Vergerio's name on the bitter preface, Pole refused to believe that Vergerio, his fellow student at Padua, his one time visitor at Viterbo, had published it. Pole showed the book to Roger Ascham and Alvise Priuli, one of Pole's closest friends, asked Ascham whether he thought the name Vergerio was a pseudonym for Johannes Sturm. Ascham's account to Sturm in September 1555 is important: 'I confirmed that not only was his very wordy style different from yours but that to have done such a thing was very far from your attitudes and intentions. I do not want you left in ignorance of this.' Humanist contemporaries, then, thought polemic had gone too far;

<sup>32</sup> Spitz, 'Particularism and peace', 117–21.

<sup>33</sup> Fenlon, *Heresy and obedience*, 258. A long extract from Vergerio's letter is reproduced in Simoncelli, *Reginald Pole*, at pp. 114–15. For the full text see Hubert, *Vergerios publizistische Tätigkeit*, 135 n. 361, and *Oratio R. Poli, qua Caesaris animum accendere conatur et inflammare...cum scholiis Athanasii*, [Augsburg?] 1554. 'Athanasius', who added the notes, was Vergerio, who also was very probably 'the German' from whom Pole received an anonymous letter in the spring of 1554: Pole to Truchess, Brussels, 20 June 1554, in *Epistolae Reginaldi Poli S.R.E. Cardinalis*, ed. A. M. Quirini, Brescia 1744–57, iv. 150–8 (excerpts printed in Simoncelli, *Reginald Pole*, 121–2). Cardinal Morone, too, refers to a letter from 'a German', one of those 'unable to control their tongues and pens': Morone to Pole, Rome, May 1554, in *Epistolae Reginaldi Poli*, iv. 149f. On the separate question of the reliability of the original *De unitate* of 1536 see Thomas Mayer, 'A fate worse than death: Reginald Pole and the Parisian theologians', *EHR* ciii (1988), 870–91.



Vergerio had broken the rules. Ascham was a temporary collaborator with Mary's government, who had strong Protestant sympathies – a Nicodemite. Whereas Pole and Priuli had registered only disbelief in Vergerio's authorship (possibly a measure of their political naivety), Ascham's disapproval was public and he was warning others. Sturm was most closely involved but it is likely that Ascham's views were shared with like-minded Englishmen.<sup>34</sup> The winter of 1554–5 was the high point of Pole's success; he arrived to reconcile England where 'uncertainty was the chief legacy of the schism'. His peace efforts were supported by the queen's influential consort Philip II and by the Lord Chancellor, Stephen Gardiner. Vergerio's attacks risked being counter productive – but he persisted.<sup>35</sup>

The *Giudicio sopra le lettere di tredici huomini illustri* and the *Epistolae duae duorum amicorum* were both published in 1555. Both continued the double-pronged attack on Pole as Nicodemite and Pole as Persecutor. *Le lettere di tredici huomini illustri* emphasises how Pole taught others to 'keep quiet, dissimulate, escape' and how his followers explained his actions by saying that he was 'awaiting the time'. Then he had returned to England where pure doctrine had been restored and 'a flourishing Church' had existed under Edward VI, he had made the nobility kneel to him, he had absolved those who had once believed in 'justification by faith in Christ alone'.<sup>36</sup>

Only the second letter of the *Epistolae duae* relates to Pole and it was Vergerio's final attack. He insisted that Pole had previously believed in salvation by faith, and that therefore he had now lapsed from his beliefs or he had never been serious about religion. He had imprisoned Cranmer,

<sup>34</sup> *Reginaldi Poli, cardinalis Britanniae, pro ecclesiasticae unitatis defensione, libri quatuor*, Strasbourg 1555, dedicated to John Frederick, duke of Saxony; Roger Ascham to Johann Sturm, 14 Sept. 1555, 'Hic perquisivit a me, an non putarem Praefationem Vergerii praefixam libro Poli a te fuisse scriptam. Aperte affirmabam non solum illum stylum longissime discrepare a tua scriptione, sed tale etiam factu, valde abhorrere a tuo animo e cogitatione': Roger Ascham, *Epistolarum libri quatuor*, Oxford 1703, 53, cited in Simoncelli, *Reginald Pole*, 131. For Ascham's involvement with the Cambridge Protestant group which supported Italian reformers see Winthrop Hudson, *The Cambridge connection*, Durham, NC 1980, 58, 134.

<sup>35</sup> Rex H. Pogson, 'The legacy of the schism: confusion, continuity and change in the Marian clergy', in Jennifer Loach and Robert Tittler (eds), *The mid-Tudor polity, c. 1540–1560*, London 1980, 117–36 at p. 117; Thomas M. McCoog SJ, 'Ignatius Loyola and Reginald Pole: a reconsideration', this JOURNAL XLVII (1996), 257–73; Glyn Redworth, "'Matters impertinent to women": male and female monarchy under Philip and Mary', *EHR* cxii (1997), 597–613.

<sup>36</sup> [P. P. Vergerio], *Giudicio sopra le lettere di tredici huomini illustri pubblicate da M. Dionigi Atanagi et stampate in Venetia nell' anno 1554*, n.p. 1555. This was Vergerio's sequel to the anthology of letters published as D. Artagni, *De le lettere di tredici huomini illustri, libri tredici*, Venice 1554. He accused Pole of having led Flaminio and others astray: 'il Polo havrebbe voluto dar ad intendere, che havremmo potuto farci avanti con la pura dottrina, tacendo, dissimulando et fuggendo.... I suoi devoti rispondevano che egli aspettava tempo' (cited in Simoncelli, *Reginald Pole*, 142–3).

and sent others like Hooper, Rogers and Rowland Taylor to their deaths. John Ponet, 'the real bishop of Winchester and real servant of Jesus Christ' had been forced into exile and Stephen Gardiner had replaced him. Vergerio's message to the Protestants of England and of Europe was clear. Pole was a Nicodemite but not a fellow-traveller. He was willing to persecute those whose doctrine he had seemed to share. Vergerio's final sentence was dramatic, anti-Nicodemite stock-in-trade: 'I say to you, one of you has betrayed me.'<sup>37</sup>

Nemesis intervened. Pope Julius III died, his successor Marcellus II lasted three weeks and on 23 May 1555 Cardinal Caraffa, Pole's arch enemy, became pope as Paul IV. He accused Pole of Protestantism and years of dissimulation and on 9 April 1557 withdrew his legatine authority and summoned him to Rome. Quite suddenly, in the case against Pole, Vergerio found himself on the same side as this most reactionary of popes. Equally suddenly, his attack on Pole stopped. There was no further point; he would only be doing the pope's work for him. Instead his polemical fire was turned on the pope himself and on the last session of the Council of Trent.<sup>38</sup>

In so far as it had direct links with England, Vergerio's campaign had come to a close. Usually loosely categorised as 'anti-Nicodemite', it was in fact very different from other European anti-Nicodemite polemic and did that European campaign no service. It was more intensely personal, anti-Pole as well as anti-Nicodemite and the charge of personal jealousy stuck to it. Its objective seemed to be not the restoration of Pole's Protestant beliefs but the destruction of his career as peacemaker and as cardinal legate. It focused on the past rather than present or future. Vergerio was lambasting Pole for having been a Nicodemite without serious expectation that he would consequently cease to be one. Ultimately the attack was arid because there was no hope of resolution. Pole might be shocked and damaged but he could not be shifted to Protestantism after the crisis of 1547 and realistically there had never been much chance.<sup>39</sup> The more personal Vergerio became, the less attractive any declaration of long-held, secret Protestantism must seem.

This applied to others as well as to Pole. English Nicodemism had become institutionalised, practised but hardly ever preached. Ascham

<sup>37</sup> *Epistolae duae duorum amicorum, ex quibus vana flagitiosaque Pontificum Pauli Tertij et Iulij Tertij et Cardinalis Poli et Stephani Gardineri pseudoepiscopi Vuintoniensis Angli, eorum adulatorum sectatorumque, ratio, magna ex parte potest intelligi*, n.p. n.d. but [1555], sigs B1v, B3r-v, B4v. The text is printed in full in Simoncelli, *Reginald Pole*, as appendix 1, 243-52, esp. pp. 251-2. See also Glyn Redworth, *In defence of the Church Catholic: the life of Stephen Gardiner*, Oxford 1990, esp. pp. 316-18.

<sup>38</sup> McCoog, 'Ignatius Loyola and Reginald Pole', 265-6; Simoncelli, *Reginald Pole*, 144-5, 158, 175-9.

<sup>39</sup> Fenlon, however, dates the point by which Pole had finally accepted the Tridentine doctrine of salvation as late as 1554: *Heresy and obedience*, 204-5.

must be counted more than a Nicodemite, a collaborator, but his reaction was probably typical. English gentlemen – Protestant or uncommitted – should dissociate themselves from the whole sorry business. Pole was, after all, an Englishman and to be the victim of unfair play can make a person more popular. As the several English reformations proved, the links among the noble and governing classes of England were stronger than religious divisions. It is even arguable that some of the English Nicodemites drew strength for their own difficult position from Pole's complicated double-mindedness. Certainly there appears to have been a movement to protect Pole in the last year of his troubled life. The queen and her consort sided against the pope and with Pole. Philip decided to ignore the advice of Fresneda, his confessor, on this as on other issues. The English nobility, when forced to choose between a paranoid (and possibly mad) pope and an inscrutable English cardinal, definitely chose the latter. Pole was never popular but he seemed to have won a victory. The Count de Feria's analysis of his character may have summed up a more general view: 'The cardinal is a good man but very lukewarm; and I do not believe the lukewarm go to Paradise even if they are called moderates.'<sup>40</sup>

English Protestants in exile, while clearly not for Pole were definitely against Vergerio. The *Zurich letters* show their total impatience with a fellow Protestant 'in other respects well qualified to contend with the power of popery'. The majority of the English exiles, for all their divisions, veered towards a Reformed theology and Vergerio was in the employ of the Lutheran duke of Württemberg. They thought he was stirring up some parts of Germany against the teaching of à Lasco and Utenhove and for Lutheran doctrine. Ironically Utenhove complained, in 1558, of dissimulation and deceit from one who had spent ten furious years exposing what he regarded as deceit in others: 'While he [Vergerio] was here, however, he conformed himself to us and asserted and pretended that he entirely agreed with us.' In the same year Burcher told Bullinger that Vergerio had promised that he would not introduce the Confession of Augsburg but was none the less teaching Waldensian doctrine 'corrupted by Luther'. Moreover, he had given up 'his certain and manifest calling...in search of worldly employment' and had 'not conducted himself with becoming moderation'.<sup>41</sup> The gossip of the exiles is notorious

<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, the careers of Sir William Cecil, Sir Walter Mildmay and Sir Nicholas Throckmorton under Mary: Pettegree, *Marian Protestantism*, 103, 107, 110–11. Cecil was given the compromising task of escorting Pole to England and was subsequently a beneficiary of the cardinal's will: *ibid.* 104; Simoncelli, *Reginald Pole*, 175–9, 223–4; *Calendar of letters, despatches and state papers relating to the negotiations between England and Spain*, ed. Royall Tyler, London 1862–1954, xiii. 370.

<sup>41</sup> John Utenhovius to Henry Bullinger and Peter Martyr, Wladislaw, 23 June 1557, in *Original letters*, ii. 603; John Burcher to Henry Bullinger, Cracow, 1, 16 Mar. 1558, *ibid.* 693–5. The charge of worldly ambition was recurrent throughout Vergerio's life, but see Schutte's modification in *Vergerio*, 47.

but the whole of Vergerio's previous history was on their side. There is a sense of *déjà vu*; Vergerio seemed bound to end up on the wrong side, having antagonised everyone.

A year later, after Elizabeth's accession, John Jewel wrote with obvious embarrassment to explain to Peter Martyr Vermigli (then in Zurich) why the Protestant queen had not immediately recalled him to guide her Reformation as he had her brother's. Someone, said Jewel, was plotting to make the queen introduce Lutheranism. There is a note of weariness, allusive, mocking, annoyed in Jewel's reference to him: 'who this person is, – if I tell you that he was once a bishop, that he is now an exile, an Italian, – a crafty knave, – a courtier, – either Peter or Paul, – you will perhaps know him better than I do'. Of course Vermigli knew him – and so did countless European readers. Bayle commented that 'few books were read with more enthusiasm than the writings of Vergerio'.<sup>42</sup>

Bayle's famous bias undoubtedly operated in favour of Vergerio but there can be little doubt that in terms of European publication, he was right. Vergerio's output was vast and rapid and his works were published in most of the major European Protestant centres. His language was exceptionally violent but booksellers were businessmen: we have to assume that they were certain his name sold.<sup>43</sup> But Vergerio's English list was far less impressive. With a sympathetic Protestant government in power in Edward's reign and Vergerio frequently addressing the king or commenting on English affairs, only two English translations had appeared. Compared to the translation and publication of other Italian reformation literature in Edward's reign, it was a mediocre record. In Mary's reign, Vergerio obviously had no chance of acceptance, since he was lambasting the cardinal legate. The exiles' presses would probably have produced many more translations of continental anti-Nicodemite works had not Mary's unexpected death intervened. As it was, Vergerio's works did not appear in their much more mainstream list – Calvin, Vermigli and Musculus.<sup>44</sup>

There was an important difference between Vergerio and these

<sup>42</sup> John Jewel to Peter Martyr Vermigli, 28 Apr. 1559, in *Zurich letters* (PS, 1846), 31; Pierre Bayle *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, Paris 1820, xiv. 363.

<sup>43</sup> For European publications see Hubert, *Vergerios publizistische Tätigkeit*. On the real effects of violent language in sixteenth-century Europe see Bob Scribner, 'Preconditions of tolerance and intolerance in sixteenth-century Germany', in Ole Peter Grell and Bob Scribner (eds), *Tolerance and intolerance in the European Reformation*, Cambridge 1996, 46.

<sup>44</sup> For instance Edward Courtenay's manuscript translation of the *Beneficio di Cristo*; Bernardino Ochino, *Tragedy... of the bishop of Rome*, London 1549 (RSTC 18770); *Six sermons*, trans. Richard Argentine, Ipswich 1548 (RSTC 18765); *Sermons five of Barnardine Ochine*, trans. Anne Cooke, Lady Bacon, London 1548 (RSTC 18764); *Fourteen sermons concerning the predestination and election of God*, trans. Anne Cooke, Lady Bacon, London 1551 (RSTC 18767); John Calvin, *Profitable admonition* (RSTC 4392); Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Cohabitation* (RSTC 24673. 5); Wolfgang Musculus, *Temporysour* (RSTC 18312).

mainstream anti-Nicodemite writers. He had reduced the argument to individuals, to ‘real life’ stories and, in the case of Pole, to personal diatribe. They, on the other hand, dealt in general precept and scriptural references for communal purposes. They sought to prevent the cohabitation of *groups* of the faithful, ‘the people of God’, with unfaithful regimes. When Calvin battled to persuade French Protestants not to bow down to Catholic idols, the good of their individual souls was secondary to the survival of Protestantism in France. The subtext of it all was an international crusade. Vergerio explicitly identified his own work as part of that crusade, defending Protestantism ‘with in one hand a pen in the other a book’. He envisaged the spectacle of Spiera ‘carried from land to land’. But it was hard for other Protestants to see the universal or international significance of his personalised dramas and close-ups. Calvin gave up trying and warned of his ‘unstable showing off’. When the Genevan founder of anti-Nicodemism dismissed him from the ranks, English opinion was bound to turn against him.<sup>45</sup>

The passage of time, however, was probably the chief reason why Vergerio’s polemic never had much chance in England. The English reception of his writing came late in the brief heyday of anti-Nicodemite literature which can be dated from the mid 1530s to the late 1550s. The anti-Nicodemites had never had it all their own way – ‘merciless and very severe’, one correspondent called Calvin’s position. Their stance became less convincing as experiences of Reformations multiplied. By 1550 it was already clear that individual decisions to ‘go public’ could change neither the legitimacy nor the religious affiliation of governments.<sup>46</sup> By the time of the anti-Pole polemic, Vergerio’s most likely readers had all left England for exile. Many who remained were as likely to empathise with the cardinal’s alleged duplicity as to condemn it.

Time played a further trick. The advent of resistance theory undercut anti-Nicodemite attacks on individuals whilst Vergerio was still stalking his prey. Passages implying that if true religion were persecuted, the godly would fight can be found in Protestant literature from the earliest days and became more frequent from the Torgau Conference of 1530 onwards. But until the later 1550s such ideas were not widely advertised and were often expressed very tentatively. This reticence changed with the experience of Catholic recovery in the 1550s. Although Calvin continued to preach only passive resistance, his comments became more and more

<sup>45</sup> Carlos Eire, *War against the idols: the reformation of worship from Erasmus to Calvin*, Cambridge 1986, 272, 309–15, and ‘Prelude to sedition’, 133, 141; Vergerio, *Death of Paul III*, Biiiff, and *Historia di F. Spiera*, 12r; Overell, ‘Exploitation of Spiera’, 630; John Calvin to John à Lasco, 1556, cited in *Original letters*, ii. 603 (‘Non dubito quin jam expertus sis quam parum tibi profuerit ventosa hominis ostentatio’).

<sup>46</sup> Antoine Fumée to John Calvin, late 1543, *Corpus Reformatorum*, 11. 646, cited in Eire, ‘Prelude to sedition’, 120. For a clear and positive analysis of the anti-Nicodemite stance see *ibid.* 140–1.

vehement. Carlos Eire argues that Calvinist anti-Nicodemism provided arguments so uncompromising that resistance was the next step. Calvin proposed a 'politics of purity', whereby the disaffected group distanced itself from the state because it would not tolerate the pollution of false worship, identified as idolatry. The justification for this distancing was religious, but the separation it entailed was an overtly political act. Although Calvin himself was determined to go no further than passive disobedience, Eire thinks his uncompromising tone provided 'a blueprint for social, political and ecclesiastical strife'. The resistance theorists had only to take a short step to justify active resistance to tyrants in precisely the circumstances Calvin had delineated, the enforcement of idolatry. Once they had done so, 'the issue of Nicodemism faded into the background'.<sup>47</sup> Resistance theory was a logical progression yet also a seismic shift, fundamental to the justification of the wars of religion fought by succeeding generations. God's lonely witnesses, the abiding image of Vergerio's close-ups, were to be replaced by God's rebel armies.

It was no accident that the three unequivocal resistance theorists in the late 1550s were English and Scottish exiles envisaging continuing Catholic triumph. John Ponet, the one-time bishop of Winchester, was the first to come out with such sentiments. His *Short treatise of politic power*, printed in Strasbourg in 1556, stressed that the covenant between ruled and ruler could be broken. Should a ruler become a tyrant, he could be overthrown by force. Two years later Christopher Goodman's *How superior powers ought to be obeyed* and John Knox's *Appellation...to the nobility of Scotland* both appeared in Geneva and shifted the justification for resistance from covenant theory to Scripture, especially as it applied to idolatry. For reasons of idolatry and persecution, ungodly rulers could, even should, be overthrown. There can be no doubt that in the late 1550s these were minority voices, preaching from the wilderness of a frustrating exile, to which they saw no likely end unless more radical action were taken.<sup>48</sup> But in the hardening confessional divide, their voices were those of the future, leaving Vergerio fixed in an individualist past typical of his Italian humanist roots.

Future generations in both Protestant and Catholic camps looked seriously at the work of Goodman and Knox whenever they faced persecution. John Milton so approved of their views that he described them as 'the true Protestant divines of England'. On the Catholic side, William Allen quoted Goodman's phrase 'Wyatt did but his duty' to

<sup>47</sup> Q. Skinner, *The foundations of modern political thought*, Cambridge 1978, 199–228; Eire, *War against the idols*, 274–5, and 'Prelude to sedition', 141–5.

<sup>48</sup> John Ponet, *A short treatise of politic power*, Strasbourg 1556 (RSTC 20178); Christopher Goodman, *How superior powers ought to be obeyed*, Geneva 1558 (RSTC 12020); John Knox, *Appellation...to the nobility and estates of Scotland*, Geneva 1558 (RSTC 15063); Skinner, *Foundations of modern political thought*, 221–7.



polemic effect. It followed that Catholics were only doing theirs in deposing, even possibly murdering, Elizabeth. Extreme reasoning of this sort appeared on both sides at moments of deepest persecution. Wyatt's battlefield became the proper place of witness, not Spiera's lonely cell, nor even Pole's council chamber. Resistance thinkers were interested in the larger scale and, above all, in political results. Their writings gave no licence to the mob; 'inferior magistrates' were charged with the decision to resist.<sup>49</sup> But they needed a mob to back them. Had all those fearing persecution taken the lonely, courageous path which Vergerio and other early anti-Nicodemites seemed to advocate, there would have been no mob and no possibility of resistance. The availability of fifth columns and rebel troops was assumed by resistance writers and this required a ready supply of disaffected and dissembling Nicodemites.

There exists an obvious objection to the view of anti-Nicodemism as virtually burnt out before the end of Mary's reign and within Vergerio's lifetime. Recusant writers later in Elizabeth's reign often sounded as if they were resurrecting precisely the same ideas. They borrowed the anti-Nicodemites' scriptural passages in support of the view that individuals (in this case usually church papists) must witness and give up all practice of occasional conformity. Sometimes they even raided the writings of their Protestant enemies. Robert Southwell's *Epistle of comfort* explicitly cites Calvin, Melancthon, Bucer and Vermigli in favour of the view that Catholics must not conform. As Alexandra Walsham points out, 'the abhorrence of conformity constituted a region of ideological common ground'. Such common ground was especially evident in the 1580s in the struggle to turn the clock back on the widespread practice of churchgoing by prominent members of Catholic households and to provide irrefutable 'reasons for refusal'. But the point at issue here is that this common ground which seemed like anti-Nicodemism revisited was only ideological. It was not necessarily a reflection of what was said or done in the circumstances of real-life Catholic dilemmas. Peter Holmes's study of the Douai and Rheims (1578–9) and Allen–Persons (c. 1582) cases used for the training of seminary priests bound for England proves a degree of Nicodemism practised under a cloak of propaganda anti-Nicodemism,

<sup>49</sup> *The works of John Milton* ed. Frank Allen Patterson and others, New York 1931–8, v. 52, cited in Leo J. Solt, *Church and State in early modern England: 1509–1640*, New York–Oxford 1990, 166; Christopher Goodman, *How superior powers ought to be obeyed*, ed. Charles McIlwain, New York 1931, 204, cited in Robert Kingdon, 'William Allen's use of Protestant political argument', in Charles Carter (ed.), *From the Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation: essays in honour of Garrett Mattingly*, New York 1965, 165–79 at p. 173. For William Allen's justification of armed resistance see Eamon Duffy, 'William, Cardinal Allen, 1532–1594', *Recusant History* xxii (1995), 265–90. For Persons's condonation of plots to murder Elizabeth see John Bossy, 'The heart of Robert Persons', in Thomas M. McCoog sj (ed.), *The reckoned expense*, Woodbridge 1996, 141–159, and Kingdon, 'William Allen's use of Protestant argument', 169.

which has very little in common with Vergerio's determination to make people declare themselves at all costs. There is flexible compassion towards the situation of the laity: 'Just fear, although it does not actually stop one being a schismatic, nevertheless excuses one from all censure.' The Allen–Persons cases faced squarely the question whether an interrogated priest must confess his faith. They answered, 'he is bound not to deny his faith... he may delude'. Holmes argues that these were mere 'casuist footnotes' to a generally recusant and anti-conformist position. Walsham, however, sees a greater disparity, 'so fundamental a gap' between practice and polemic, which arose in part from the pressures of the printed propaganda controversy and the need to outface the opposition.<sup>50</sup>

In this case, the appearance of revived anti-Nicodemism was not reality. Whilst Allen proclaimed in public both anti-Nicodemite and full-blown resistance arguments, it was reliably asserted that in 1581 he tried to sway both theological and papal opinion towards limited occasional conformity. In the careers of both Allen and Persons there is inconsistency and variation according to time and place which illustrates, in Duffy's words, 'the dilemmas and deviousness forced upon good men in an age of religious violence'. There is general agreement among historians that Catholics had not returned to an extreme and invariable anti-Nicodemite stance. Whereas Vergerio seemed really to expect individual self-sacrifice, there was among Catholic 'recusant' writers a willingness to make excuses, to argue for exceptions to the rules and a reluctance to hound individuals, all of which did much for the survival of English Catholicism.<sup>51</sup>

Vergerio's anti-Nicodemism was of a personal and intrusive kind, which exploited individual dilemmas and abused private crises of conscience. Its reception in England had been preponderantly negative: critical (Latimer), wary and nervous (William Baldwin), disbelieving (Pole and Priuli), repudiating (Ascham), outraged (John Utenhove and the exiles), finally mocking (Jewel). At a time of great desperation Bradford was deeply impressed by the story of Spiera but in most cases even this was used to strengthen the resolve of the converted, not to recall errant

<sup>50</sup> Robert Southwell, *An epistle of comfort*, London 1587–8 (RSTC 22946), 172v–3r; Robert Persons, *A brief discourse containing reasons why Catholics refuse to go to church*, East Ham 1580 (RSTC 19394), 35r, cited in Alexandra Walsham, *Church papists*, Woodbridge 1993, 29, 37–8; Peter Holmes, *Elizabethan casuistry* (Catholic Record Society, 1981), 49, 77, and *Resistance or compromise: the political thought of the Elizabethan Catholics*, Cambridge 1982, 101; Walsham, *Church papists*, 70–1. For a related debate amongst the Puritans see Patrick Collinson, 'The cohabitation of the faithful with the unfaithful', in Ole Peter Grell, Jonathan Israel and Nicholas Tyacke (eds), *From persecution to toleration: the Glorious Revolution in England*, Oxford 1991, 51–76.

<sup>51</sup> Walsham, *Church papists*, 68–9; Duffy, 'William, Cardinal Allen', 265–6; A. D. Wright, 'Catholic history: north and south', *Northern History* xiv (1985), 126–51.

Nicodemites. Once Vergerio moved on to the attack on Pole after 1553 the anti-Nicodemite purpose, although still operative in that Pole was a prime Nicodemite suspect, was debased. Vergerio could never capture the same level of attention in England as he managed to gain on the continent.

Nicodemites did not leave many historical records; their silence was their safety. But it seems that constant religious transformations in England were sufficient to make deceit and reserve merge with indifference and confusion as parts of life's rich pattern. By the beginning of Elizabeth's reign it was often best not to enquire who thought what – as Richard Alington of London recognised when he addressed the onlookers at his deathbed in 1561: 'And masters, I cannot tell of what religion you be that be here, nor I care not.'<sup>52</sup> Vergerio had 'cared' far too much for English tastes. His absolutist refusal to countenance any foggy compromises made him alien to a generation of wistful survivors.

<sup>52</sup> Latimer, *Works*, i. 125; Vergerio, *Wonderful news*, translator's preface at sig. Aii2; Ascham, *Epistolarum libri quattuor*, 53; *Original letters*, ii. 603, 693–5; *Zurich letters*, 31; Bradford, *Writings*, i. 433; ii. 80; Stow, *Memoranda*, 117–21, cited in Susan Brigden, *London and the Reformation*, Oxford 1989, 631.