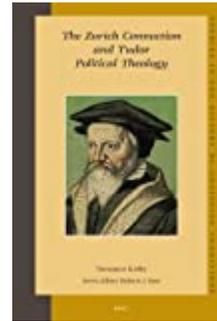




W. J. Torrance Kirby. *The Zurich Connection and Tudor Political Theology.* Leiden: Brill, 2007. xi + 283 pp. \$129.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-04-15618-0.



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Zurich and Tudor Political Theology: A Connection only Partially Substantiated

This book is neither a monograph nor a collection of primary sources, but a hybrid of the two. After an introduction, Kirby presents in English five theological texts, two by the Zurich Reformer Heinrich Bullinger and three by Peter Martyr Vermigli, a Reformed theologian who fled Italy in 1542 and spent time in Strasbourg, England, and Zurich before his death in 1562. All five were originally written in Latin but translated into English in the sixteenth century. One has never been published; three were published in English only in sixteenth- or seventeenth-century editions; and one has seen one previous modern English edition. Kirby introduces each text with an “interpretive essay,” in which he analyzes the document in question and its significance for his larger argument about Zurich and the English Reformation. Overall, the book marks a valuable contribution to the field of Reformation Studies, particularly for those interested in the intellectual history of the Reformation in England and the Reformation as an international event. It is a book for experts, rather than novices, though it might be useful for teaching at the graduate level.

Kirby’s overarching argument is that the political

theology of the Zurich reformers—particularly that of Bullinger and Vermigli—was the dominant continental influence on the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559. Through writings and direct contact with English monarchs and bishops, Bullinger and Vermigli staunchly defended England’s royal supremacy as the embodiment of the Zwinglian unity of the civil and ecclesiastical spheres. Kirby correctly points out that until now, Zurich’s influence has not received recognition in the historiography of the English Reformation, and that such recognition is needed to debunk misguided notions of English exceptionalism and the Anglican *via media*.

Kirby’s analysis of the sources does prove that Bullinger and Vermigli defended the active role of secular rulers in matters of religion, and that they viewed royal supremacy as a valid manifestation of this role. For example, in a sermon by Bullinger on the office of the magistrate (part of his *Decades* [1552], a sermon collection) and in a letter Vermigli wrote to Elizabeth I upon her accession to the throne, both authors held up examples of Old Testament kings to demonstrate their approval of “godly princes” exercising ecclesiastical juris-

diction. Moreover, in an impressive philosophical analysis of Vermigli's commentary on the Book of Judges (later included in his widely published *Loci Communes*[1576]), Kirby demonstrates that by splitting the concept of ecclesiastical jurisdiction into two categories, "spiritual" and "political" subjection, Vermigli was able to employ an Augustinian critique of the hierarchical medieval notion of the *lex divinitatis*, while simultaneously remaining within the framework of Aristotelian political theory. As Kirby explains, "To the extent that ecclesiastical jurisdiction is involved in the 'lawes touching outwarde discipline' it is properly subordinated to the rule of the civil magistrate. At the same time, the magistrate is bound to submit to the jurisdiction of that aspect of ecclesiastical power exercised in matters concerning 'the inwarde motions of the minde'" (p. 70).

At times, however, Kirby takes his arguments about Zurich's influence in England too far. The example of the careful balance between "outwarde" and "inwarde" matters described above is a case in point. While both Bullinger and Vermigli believed that the magistrate or monarch had the final say in matters of religion, they also argued that he or she also had a duty to listen to the clergy and obey them on matters of scripture and sacrament. One could argue that in Zwingli's and Bullinger's Zurich, the clergy—who held regular meetings with magistrates to exhort them on spiritual and moral matters—retained more of this direct authority than they did in England. In this sense, there is still some truth to Helmut Kressner's argument that while Zwingli put forward the idea of a "church-state," England developed a "state-church." [1] Then there is the problem of bishops. Kirby is right to point out that Bullinger and Vermigli did not see the Church of England's episcopal structure as weakening its identity as a truly Reformed church. Yet, in England, through the continuation of the medieval bishops' courts, bishops retained the power of discipline for moral and spiritual crimes; in contrast, Reformed cities like Zurich and Strasbourg developed magisterial courts of discipline, whose members included city councilmen. This contrast suggests an interesting (dare one use the word "exceptional"?) situation; the monarch's role in religion in England was both stronger and weaker than that of the magistrates in Zurich. Thus, it is misleading to assert, as Kirby does, that the Elizabeth and her

bishops may have been closer to "Reformed orthodoxy" than those proto-Puritans (for lack of a better word) who criticized them in the 1560s and 1570s. Instead, the lesson should be that there never was one "Reformed orthodoxy," but that, as Philip Benedict has argued, one of the strengths of the Reformed tradition was its ability to encompass variations in doctrine and ecclesiology. [2]

These matters are debatable. What is not debatable, however, is Kirby's lack of direct evidence that Bullinger and Vermigli actually exerted influence on those responsible for constructing the Elizabethan Settlement. Three things are clear. First, these two men thought about England and applied their ideas to the situation there. Second, they were both acquainted with leaders of the Elizabethan church and engaged in extensive correspondence with them. Third, there were some similarities, but also some differences, in the structure of church-state relations in Zurich and in England. Taken together, these three elements certainly suggest influence, but they do not prove it. For proof, it would be helpful to see writings by English churchmen that demonstrate the direct use of Bullinger's or Vermigli's ideas. This kind of evidence is not easy to come by, but it does exist. For example, Kirby demonstrates direct influence in chapter 3, where he argues persuasively that an important sermon preached by Thomas Cranmer at St. Paul's Cathedral in 1549 was actually written by Vermigli. [3] Other than that single instance, however, this book, while very strong on the side of Bullinger's and Vermigli's assertion of influence, is weak in demonstrating English reception of it. The "Zurich connection," therefore, is only partially substantiated.

Notes

[1]. Helmut Kressner, *Schweizer Ursprünge des anglikanischen Staatskirchentums* (Göttersloh: Bertelsmann, 1953).

[2]. Philip Benedict, *Christ Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

[3]. For more evidence in the pre-Elizabethan period, see Carrie Euler, *Couriers of the Gospel: England and Zurich, 1531-1558* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 2006).

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