The ideas of Peter Martyr Vermigli on ecclesiology and discipline have been brought together in the first six chapters of his *Common Places*. They originally came, to be sure, from his Biblical commentaries, especially on the Pauline epistles, but the version in the *Common Places* was widely used in the training of pastors in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and thus had considerable, separate influence. It is also a convenient place to find these ideas drawn together now.¹

The Church

These chapters begin with an analysis of the *notae* or marks of the true Church of Christ, namely the signs that demonstrated which of the many competing institutions then claiming to be that Church really was truly faithful to Christ.² The established view, of course, was that of the Roman Catholic Church, and it was advanced and developed in the sixteenth century by a number of theologians specializing in controversy. The one against whom Vermigli was most consciously arguing was Stanislaus Hosius, a Polish cardinal, who was the presiding officer at the final sessions of the Council of Trent, which adopted the definitions of doctrines that became authoritative for the Catholic Church in the period of the Reformation. Vermigli wrote in a period before the concluding sessions of Trent. He thus was surely reacting to Hosius’ publications, which in fact went well beyond Trent in defining a variety of Catholic positions, especially on definitions of the church.

¹ References throughout are to the 1583 English translation of the *Common Places*, book, chapter, and section.
² For a more fully documented version of the argument that follows, see Robert M. Kingdon, ‘Peter Martyr Vermigli and the Marks of the True Church,’ in *Continuity and Discontinuity in Church History: essays presented to George Huntston Williams*, ed. by F. Forrester Church and Timothy George (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 198–214.
Vermigli was no doubt thinking of some edition of Hosius’ *Confessio Catholicae Fidei Christiana*, which appeared in multiple editions during their lifetimes. Another Roman controversial theologian of great influence in the period was Robert Bellarmine whose *Controversies* were widely used in the early modern period. They were drafted for the most part after Vermigli’s death, but they still define in a useful and authoritative way positions against which Vermigli was reacting. The works of Hosius, Bellarmine, and others advanced a considerable number of marks of the true church, often about fifteen. The most important were that the true church had to be Catholic, or universal; it had to be Apostolic, or founded by the apostles who were the most immediate followers of Jesus; it had to be led by a man, the pope, who had inherited power by direct descent from the most eminent of those apostles, Peter, bishop of Rome at the time of his death. Vermigli spent some time refuting each of these claims. He insisted that the Church of Rome was neither Catholic nor Apostolic. It was not Catholic, or universal, in that it did not and for centuries had not controlled all of Christianity. It had broken with the orthodox churches of the east hundreds of years earlier and it denied the legitimacy of the Reformed churches for whom Vermigli spoke. It was also not Apostolic in that it no longer taught only the doctrines taught by Christ himself and his apostles. It had added to them a great number of traditions, practices and doctrines that had been invented by the succeeding generations of human beings who made up its leaders. In fact it now taught a good deal of false doctrine and for that reason alone should be repudiated. Christ had not given authority, Vermigli added, to the apostle Peter to found his church. He had said that the church should be founded on the beliefs Peter shared with the other apostles. It was these shared beliefs, not the person of Peter himself that Jesus had selected to be the foundation of his church.

These, of course, were arguments adopted by all Protestants of the period, to justify their secession from the Church of Rome. The leaders of the earliest body of Protestants, the Lutherans, had insisted in response to Catholic arguments that there are only two marks of the true Church of Christ: the preaching of true doctrine, and the correct administration of sacraments. Everything else is unnecessary. Any group of people that hear correct doctrine and practice sacraments correctly is a true church, no matter how recently it has been gathered, no matter how wide a geographic area it covers, no matter how many followers it can claim. A clause to this effect is included in article VII of the Augs-