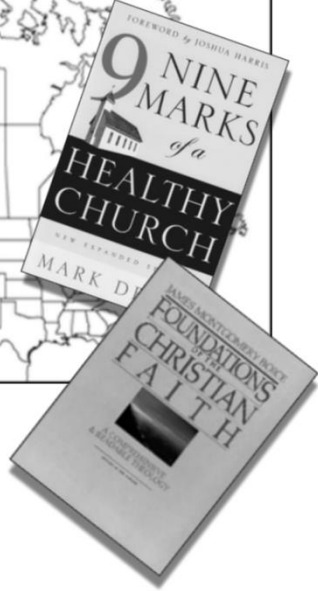


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Reformed Identity and *Semper Reformanda* as Applied to Discussions on Ecclesiology in North America*

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Introduction

It is an honour to speak briefly on an aspect of Reformed identity as it relates to North America. I thank the organizing committee of this conference for the privilege of speaking and also commend them for their vision in organizing this event.

The theme I have selected is one of the critical aspects of Reformed identity, namely *semper reformanda*, or always reforming. Some may view this as an overworked theme, but I would contend that it is at the heart of much of what constitutes Reformed doctrinal and spiritual identity. I am going to take this theme of *semper reformanda*, then apply it to ecclesiology or the doctrine of the church, and finally give some examples of how it is being both discussed and reinterpreted in many circles in North America. I propose three chief points to my paper:

- 1) Reformed Identity and *Semper Reformanda*,
- 2) *Semper Reformanda* and Ecclesiology, and
- 3) Three Examples from North America of Discussions on Ecclesiology and the Marks of the Church.

1. Reformed Identity and *Semper Reformanda*

As Reformed Christian believers we stand by the great *sola* of Scripture alone. We thus affirm that we have a “fixed standard”, the Word of God, the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, by which all things are to be measured and judged in each generation. This applied in the generation of the Reformers just as it does today, and we continue to stand upon the conviction that “all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17, NIV). As Kirk

Wellum recently wrote, “We do not formulate our doctrines based on the shifting sands of public opinion . . .” and, “The scriptures, then, are the standard or touchstone against which we measure our ideas and the ideas of others.”¹

Therefore, the reality is that in each generation there is a need for ongoing reformation in order to bring all thoughts and practices under the scrutiny and the authority of the Word of God. Wellum sees a logical outworking of the concept *semper reformanda* in Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 13:12 (NIV), “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” We are finite creatures, and we do not see all things as we ought. Thus, there is ever a need for reformation by the fixed standard of the Word of God.²

At the time of the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church had the saying *semper idem*, or in English, “always the same”. This goes so contrary to the complete tenor of the whole of the Scriptures, as God’s people were and always are in need of reformation. The Reformed expression in full was “*ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei*” or in English, “the church reformed and always reforming according to the Word of God”, which is generally shortened to, *semper reformanda*, or “always reforming”. I take great encouragement that this Reformed expression is in accord with the Scriptures and is central to our Reformed identity. It is not my purpose here to now develop a full biblical theology of this conviction.

However, before proceeding we must deal briefly with the issue of attitude as it relates to *semper reformanda*. As Reformed Christians, we should cultivate an attitude of humility mixed with our boldness of confession of faith.³ Often our history asserts our boldness to state the truth and confess the truth as founded upon the Word of God, yet perhaps our tradition has not always cultivated the attitude of humility in the practice of *semper reformanda*. Are we afraid of giving the impression of weakness? Confession of Reformed truth must never ignore the virtue of the attitude of humility. As Wellum states so well:

We should be thankful for what God has revealed and yet at the same time be ready to learn and grow in our understanding of His truth, if that is what the Bible teaches. We have not arrived, nor do we understand everything. God continues to instruct His people and through the Holy Spirit, He shows us how to apply His Word to our situation today.⁴

¹ Kirk Wellum, “Semper Reformanda”, *The Gospel Witness*, November 2008, 4.

² Wellum, 4-5.

³ I concur with Wellum that attitude is important.

⁴ Wellum, 5.

In conclusion then on my first point, our Reformed identity affirms the fixed standard of Scripture alone. Our Reformed identity affirms that we must apply it to today under the leading of the Holy Spirit in ongoing reformation, because we desire to deepen our understanding, nuance how we understand or practice our faith on an issue or matter, and address aspects of the truth today. *Semper reformanda* calls for an attitude of humility, and it should not fall into “change for the sake of change”⁵ but build upon the strength of our Reformed heritage.

2. *Semper Reformanda* and Ecclesiology

Now I want to take this critical aspect of our Reformed identity, *semper reformanda*, and discuss it as it relates to the doctrine of the church within our Reformed heritage. I cannot touch on all aspects of ecclesiology but will be very focused. I have selected the aspect of the “marks of the church”. This aspect has been taken up by almost all strands of Reformed theologians and is found in many of the Reformed confessional statements.

Please indulge me for a moment as I give some historical sketches on the marks. As the Reformed reformers emerged in the sixteenth century, they basically affirmed the Lutheran, (or should I say Martin Luther’s) perspective of the two marks, namely the gospel as central from the Word of God and the use of the two sacraments.⁶ This teaching underwent certain refinements whereby Calvin’s two marks were more cogently expressed as preaching and hearing the Word of God, thus implying the formation of a “community” (to draw upon Edmund Clowney’s phraseology),⁷ and the right use of the two sacraments. Technically, Calvin did not assert the third mark as discipline, even though his two marks come close to affirming such. Calvin’s understanding of the marks of the church continues to intrigue us. In the recent and first English translation of Calvin’s sermons on Acts (2008), Calvin makes this statement in the sermon on “The Three Marks of the

⁵ A. T. B. McGowan recently wrote: “At one end of the theological spectrum, some have invoked *semper reformanda* in order to justify abandoning the core of Reformation theology and departing from received orthodoxy. At the other end of the spectrum, some have forgotten about *semper reformanda* in their progress towards a rigid confessionalism, giving the impression that the final codification of truth has already taken place and that there is no further need for reformation. Between these two extremes, there is a vital task to be performed by the church in every generation; namely, to subject its beliefs and practices to the renewed scrutiny of Holy Scripture” See A. T. B. McGowan, introduction to *Always Reforming*, ed. A.T.B. McGowan (Leicester/Wheaton: IVP, 2006), 13.

⁶ For further discussion on the complexities surrounding the three marks, see my book, *Continental Calvinian Influences On the Scottish Reformation: The First Book of Discipline (1560)* (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009).

⁷ Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church, Contours of Christian Theology*, gen. ed. Gerald Bray (Downers Grove: IVP, 1995), 103.

Church”: “By what he [Luke] tells us we know the three marks which constitute God’s church, namely, the proclamation of the word of God among us, the Lord’s Supper, and our communion together in true love.”⁸ The reality is that Calvin is much more complex than we have sometimes admitted. Some of the Reformed confessions clearly assert three marks; namely, the Scots Confession and the Belgic Confession. Yet other Reformed Confessions, such as the Westminster Confession of Faith, do not use the terminology “marks of the church”. Universally and historically the whole Reformed community of churches has retained an important place for discipline, although it has not been elevated universally as a distinctive mark. Yet all would affirm it as vital, important and descriptive of the well-being of healthy Christianity. I might also add that all would view such discipline as an essential aspect of what could be argued constitutes Reformed spirituality.

I now ask my rhetorical questions. Do the classical Reformed formulations of the two/three marks and language close to this say everything that is essential concerning not only where we find the true church but also where we find living, healthy Christian congregations? While none of us would want to “throw out” the matter of the implications behind the marks of the church, yet do we not also see that now is the time in our Reformed identity, *semper reformanda*, to humbly listen and discuss a fuller biblical ecclesiological formulation on healthy local ministries and denominations? We are often good at discussing our past, but we are not as good at looking at our present and humbly acknowledging that the outward appearance of the two marks or three marks can keep us from a proper biblical examination of the true health of our local congregations or denominations. Obviously, even a fuller formulation cannot prevent the tendency to reduce the marks to mere outward appearances, but perhaps such a formulation would set forth a deeper challenge to the heart. I am thinking here of the principle Jesus taught in Matthew 15:1-9.

Allow me to sketch some discussions which have taken place over the last twenty-five years on this aspect of Reformed ecclesiology and the “marks” as found in the United States and Canada in the Reformed and Presbyterian community of churches. I use the word “discussion” in a very loose sense here. As I survey the field, as I invite you to as well, I feel very convicted that so little has been said in Reformed ecclesiology concerning the marks of the church as they relate to a vital and healthy church life expressing itself in a holistic manner for the well-being of the community of the Lord.

⁸ John Calvin, *Sermons on the Acts of the Apostles: Chapters 1-7*, trans. Rob Roy McGregor, original Latin edition 1994 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2008), 58.

3. Three Examples From North America of Discussions on Ecclesiology and the Marks of the Church

I realize that I could have selected many other examples; but, for the sake of brevity and also for the purpose of surveying the 1980s, 1990s and into the twenty-first century, I have been highly selective.

Example Number One: *Dr. James Montgomery Boice, Foundations of the Christian Faith*

The late Dr. James Montgomery Boice was the pastor of the historic Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, and was an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church in America. He authored *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive and Readable Theology*, which appeared as three separate volumes in 1978, 1979 and 1981 respectively and finally as one complete, revised edition and volume in 1986.⁹ Boice openly stated that his text corresponded to the four books of Calvin's Institutes. In Boice's work, Book 1 is "The Sovereign God"; Book 2, "God the Redeemer"; Book 3, "Awakening to God"; and Book 4, "God and History".¹⁰ He went on to say,

. . . It is an attempt (a) to cover the same ground in highly readable language yet at the same time (b) to introduce themes which Calvin did not treat but which call for treatment today and (c) to seek to relate all doctrine to contemporary rather than ancient views and problems.¹¹

In Boice's Book 4, he deals with the church and the meaning of history and says, "[In] my discussion of the doctrine of the church, I have been helped immeasurably by others who have explored the nature of the church and its ministry in recent days – Ray C. Stedman, Gene A. Getz and Elton Trueblood. I have also been helped by older thinkers such as James Bannerman. . . ."¹²

In Book 4, Boice has a chapter entitled "The Marks of the Church". Here he lists six marks of the church based upon John 17. The six marks are: joy, holiness, truth, mission, unity and love. It does not appear that Boice is slavishly following Calvin or other Calvinian sixteenth century formulations. Yet, even if one were to argue that Boice is not using the word "marks" in the sixteenth century "classical" sense, one still cannot say that he is rejecting the past because of what he wrote as to who had helped him "immeasurably". As one reads through Boice, one could argue that his marks of holiness and

⁹ James M. Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive and Readable Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1986).

¹⁰ Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 7, 12.

¹¹ Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 12.

¹² Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 12.

truth do come close to the Calvinian formulations of the sixteenth century.¹³ However, his inclusion of the mark of mission arguably looks beyond Calvin to the concept of the healthy church. More will be said about this mark of mission in my concluding remarks. Boice's mark of unity appears to return to the ancient attributes of the church, but again it is not an organizational unity nor conformity but rather a spiritual unity.¹⁴ It is doubtful that Cyprian would agree with this.

Boice makes his most brilliant statements when he comes to his last mark of the church – "love":¹⁵

Subtract love from holiness. What do you find then? You find self-righteousness, the kind of self-contentment that characterized the Pharisees of Christ's day. . . . Take love from truth and you have bitter orthodoxy. . . . Take love from mission and you have imperialism, colonialism in ecclesiastical garb. Take love from unity and you soon have tyranny. Tyranny develops in a hierarchical church where there is no compassion for people or desire to involve them in the decision-making process.¹⁶

Discipline is not excluded by Boice, yet perhaps Boice is really formulating his marks of a "healthy" church. Boice's formulations are rooted in Scripture and use the classical language of Reformed theology, yet at the same time they are cast and shaped in a fuller ecclesiological framework.

Example Number Two: *The Christian Reformed Church of North America's 1995 working paper, "Rethinking Ministry: From Church-Shaped Missions to a Mission-Shaped Church"*

The Christian Reformed Church of North America's 1995 working paper "Rethinking Ministry: From Church-Shaped Missions to a Mission-Shaped Church" created much discussion in the 1990s. Regrettably, it has been eclipsed in many ways in recent years by other topics. If one reads the *Calvin Theological Seminary Journal* for the year following this working paper, one will read two fascinating papers. The first is by Craig van Gelder and Dirk Hart, "The Church Needs to Understand its Missionary Nature: A Response to John Bolt and Richard Muller". The second article is by John Bolt and Richard Muller, "For the Sake of the Church: A Response to Craig van Gelder and Dirk Hart". Of course, at the centre of this 1990s discussion in the Christian Reformed Church, and I must add not limited by any means to

¹³ Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 577-580.

¹⁴ Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 582-584.

¹⁵ With Boice's mark of love, the parallel to Bucer's mark of love for the church is echoed. See William S. Barker, "Marks of the Church", *The Presbyterian Journal* 40, no. 23 (1981): 1.

¹⁶ Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 584-585.

this one Reformed denomination, was the Reformed ecclesiological language of the three marks.¹⁷

Van Gelder and Hart posed questions about how we are to understand the three marks: “Do these define the nature of the church? Do these state all that the Bible presents as being the ministry of the church? Do these provide an adequate framework for understanding the organization and polity of the church?” They concluded with this comment: “A view of the church developed on the foundation of the three marks tends to function in a reductionistic manner. The point is made that although these marks are absolutely necessary, they are not sufficient to understand fully the church’s nature, ministry, and organization.”¹⁸

Writing on this topic has continued to come forth from these men and other authors associated with them. Some of this discussion can at times appear contradictory since “party lines” are often crossed. I think we must engage it more seriously and sort our way through. I found an article by Jonathan Leeman entitled, “What is the Missional Church?”¹⁹ This article is a helpful point of contact and contains some very fascinating conclusions. The wider evangelical constituency is also wrestling with ecclesiological issues and formulations. Evidence of this is seen in the new book edited by Mark Husbans and Daniel Trier entitled, *The Community of the Word: Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology*.

The discussion I have selected from the 1990s takes me back to the beginning of my paper. We can remain entrenched in the confessionalism of our ecclesiological formulations, we can adopt a “change everything” approach, or we can take the way which will reflect our identity as a Reformed community, *semper reformanda*. Have we mined the Scriptures? Have we listed and considered what is being said within and without? Yes, we can ignore these things and assert our confessional identity. Yet we cannot ignore the common query that is emerging, whether from the 1980s and Boice or the 1990s onwards in the CRCNA: Is there now a need to express our ecclesiological formulations in a more full-orbed way concerning the spirituality and health or well-being of local congregations in terms additional to those of the “marks” in much of confessional Reformed ecclesiology? Can we ignore confessionally matters of the missional nature

¹⁷ Craig van Gelder and Dirk Hart, “The Church Needs to Understand its Missionary Nature: A Response to John Bolt and Richard Muller”, *Calvin Theological Journal* 31, no. 2 (1996): 504-519; and John Bolt and Richard Muller, “For the Sake of the Church: A Response to van Gelder and Hart”, *Calvin Theological Journal* 31, no. 2 (1996): 520-526.

¹⁸ Craig van Gelder and Dirk Hart, “The Church Needs to Understand its Missionary Nature”, 517-518.

¹⁹ Jonathan Leeman, “What in the World is the Missional Church?”, http://www.9marks.org/partner/Article_Display_Page/0,,PTID314526_CHID598014_CIID2265778,00.html (assessed Jan.23, 2009).

of the church, the place of the laity, etc.? Perhaps this is precisely where much of our division is occurring, and in part this is tied to our identity, *semper reformanda*, and our ecclesiological formulas.

Example Number Three: From the Reformed Baptist Nine Marks Movement

This example comes from the Reformed Baptist community of North America. Three books have now popularized it:

- Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Founders Press, 1997, then Crossway, 2000 and 2004),
- Mark Dever, *What Is a Healthy Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), and
- Thabiti Anyabwile, *What is a Healthy Church Member?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008).

Though this may appear to be coming primarily from the Reformed Baptist community, it is much wider than that. Very prominent names from within the Presbyterian Church in America are public endorsers of many of these 9Marks resources. J. Ligon Duncan III, a former Moderator of the PCA General Assembly, wrote: “The future of biblical Christianity in the Western world is inextricably bound to the future of the local church. Mark Dever knows this, and his *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* is a biblical prescription for faithfulness.” Philip Graham Ryken, pastor-successor at Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, wrote, “*Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* is one of the very best, most readable, and useful books for learning how to lead a church into spiritual health. Its focus is not on church growth but on church health.” And R.C. Sproul, a prominent PCA minister and author/theologian, wrote: “This book [Anyabwile’s] provides an excellent and much-needed focus on the individual church member.” Though beginning within the Reformed Baptist community of North America, many Reformed and Presbyterian churches, pastors and ministries are using this material across North America and beyond. A prominent interview conducted by Peter Hastie with Mark Dever appeared in the October 2005 *Australian Presbyterian* magazine. The fact that a five page interview appeared in this Presbyterian magazine reveals that the discussion with the concepts of 9Marks is not an isolated matter within Reformed circles. Interestingly enough, in that interview there was considerable discussion on the “traditional” Reformed marks of the church. Dever’s response was parallel to his published books and is worth quoting at length:

[Hastie:] In what ways do unhealthy churches affect Christians, particularly Christians who may not be very strong?

[Dever:] First, let me say again that I am not talking about the distinction between a true church and a false one. I am talking about the distinctions among true churches. Some are healthier than

others. What happens, I think, when a Christian goes along to an unhealthy but true church? The problem is that they are not challenged and shaped formatively as they should be by Scripture. In these congregations the Bible seems disconnected from life. The result is that people are left stunted in their discipleship because they are not fully called to follow Christ as should happen in a normal healthy congregation.

[Hastie:] You have written a book called *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*. The Protestant reformers spoke only about two, or at the most, three. Why nine?

[Dever:] I deal with that exact question in the book's introduction where I talk about the history of the two marks of the churches – the right preaching of the Word and the right administration of the sacraments. My nine marks are practical out-workings of those two.

The first mark that I draw attention to is actually the first mark that the reformers talked about. I'm more specific in that I am talking about expositional preaching. And then, in marks two and three, where I speak about biblical theology and a biblical understanding of the gospel, I am simply tightening up what "right" preaching is. So, my first three marks are really expansions of the first mark that the reformers referred to – the right preaching of the Word of God.

Then marks four to nine are really expansions of that second mark, the right administration of the sacraments. How is it that the church is distinguished from the world? The signs that set the church apart from the world are water baptism and the continual participation of the congregation in the Lord's Supper. This is what distinguishes the church from the world, in a formal sense. What does that look like in our daily lives? Those are the things I talk about in marks four to nine.²⁰

I will not survey all that is associated with 9Marks Ministries, as much of this can be gleaned from their website: <http://www.9marks.org/>. I will just list the nine marks so that we all know what is being spoken about:

Mark One: expositional preaching

Mark Two: biblical theology

Mark Three: the Gospel

Mark Four: a biblical understanding of conversion

¹⁹ Peter Hastie, "Mark Dever talks to Peter Hastie", *Australian Presbyterian* (October 2005): 5. Available at: http://media.salemwebnetwork.com/CComMinistries/media/ace/pdf/ace_20051201_fc2a2bb5-e255-439b-9f3e-45079625a46b.pdf.

Mark Five: a biblical understanding of evangelism

Mark Six: a biblical understanding of church membership

Mark Seven: biblical church discipline

Mark Eight: a concern for discipleship and growth

Mark Nine: biblical church leadership

As quoted above, the main writer, Mark Dever, does not formally discount the Calvinian marks. He writes, “I accept the traditional Protestant understanding of the true church being distinguished or marked off from the false by the right preaching of the Word and the right administration of the sacraments. What I am about in this book [*Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*] is attempting to speak to some marks that set off healthy churches from true but more sickly ones.”²¹

Interestingly, Albert Mohler connects it with the call for reformation and states that “clear evidence of this fact is seen in the loss of a biblical ecclesiology in so many sectors. Reformation is always directed to the church -- and we must pray to see the church reformed in our age.”²² Even a quick analysis of these nine marks points out that Christian spirituality or sanctification, healthy church life, evangelism, missions and the role of the laity are all being spoken of – none of which are removed from preaching and discipline. I am not saying everything is presented in a balanced ecclesiological manner in the 9Marks, nor do those involved make that claim. Perhaps vocation, race, word and deed, and holistic mission are points not stressed enough, but what is stressed is very good. At the very least, there is an effort to move us forward with a healthy Reformed spirituality in local churches. Thus 9Marks is another discussion point, similar to the other two examples briefly noted. Certainly the last word has not been spoken.

Conclusion

We have a Reformed identity, which is to reform all things by the fixed standard of the Word of God – *semper reformanda*. We have great Reformational confessions expressing the essence of the church which is true, and we have excellent mature nuances in our overall confessional heritage at this point. However, the three examples taken from the past thirty years in North America tell us that many continue to wrestle seriously with the Word of God, to apply all it teaches to their ecclesiology, and to hope and pray that this will lead to healthy, organic church life. Most of these discussions are not Rome-directed. Rather, within the context of our generation, they are modern efforts to wrestle with biblical theology, with application to the local church community, and with the earnest prayer that this will lead to a full-orbed presentation on a healthy church.

²⁰ Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, new expanded edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 22-24.

²¹ Mark Dever, *Marks of a Healthy Church*, 2.

At some point, those who engage in discussion on Reformed ecclesiology must discuss the church as missional. It was mentioned earlier that Boice, in his six marks, lists mission as one. Again, we are thinking beyond the sixteenth century formulations to a fuller ecclesiology that impresses upon us the reality that out of a healthy church will flow missions. Missions and evangelism are not “worked up” to demonstrate health; rather, they are produced precisely because of good health. Mature Christians involved in a loving, caring body of believers will draw others by the attractiveness of love and will send forth workers because of a deep sense of the mercy and love that they themselves have received in Jesus Christ.

Rather than placing the burden of developing a fuller ecclesiology on one theologian’s shoulders, let us place it on our shoulders collectively. Can we come to a united understanding of a healthy Reformed ecclesiology for the local church which considers humbly and concurs respectfully with our confessional documents yet breathes with unity for the churches today? Can we provide a healthy biblical ecclesiology which is Reformed and always reforming in our generation? I believe we can, and I believe it is at the heart of our Reformed identity to consider such a new affirmation or declaration. We need such a statement drafted today as a testimony to *semper reformanda* and as a means of clarifying biblical ecclesiology and uniting us. I am thinking of something more modest than a full confessional document, perhaps a new united and collective statement regarding Reformed ecclesiology.

The above mentioned discussions never deny the marks of the Word, the sacraments and discipline; rather, they mine deeper for more of the revelation given. I will close with a short example which will serve as a question for you to answer. There is a local Reformed church which is true to Scripture in its preaching. The sacraments are taken seriously. Discipline is taken seriously. For example, there was a member who committed adultery and was disciplined. Yet here is the dilemma. There is no evidence of concern for the lost world in that local church. There is also very little evidence of members understanding their gifts and exercising them. By listening to the singing and observing the number of non-singers, one might also conclude there is very little joy. The reformational marks are in place, but is this church healthy or as healthy as it could be in the ongoing reformation to which we are called?

Part of the difficulty in addressing our confessional heritage comes from trying to locate the content of our modern discussions within our own confessions, which can often prove fairly trying. For example, when I look at my own confessional tradition, Westminster, I find several aspects about the nature of the church in chapter 25, but it is in a somewhat different language from the previous century’s discussion on the marks. Then when I look at chapter 26, I find many aspects of local body life, gifts, mercy, etc., under the topic of the communion of the saints. The theme of missions is muted, yet in

the Larger Catechism under the Lord's Prayer and the petition "Thy kingdom come", there is a clearer missional perspective. It seems reasonable to conclude that a declaration that would pull together many of these ecclesiological aspects of healthy churches would at least bring clarity for modern readers. I cannot help but think it would move towards greater unity as well. The path to get there will not be easy. Such endeavours never are, and they require a great deal of humility. Yet by the grace of Christ, the King and Head of the Church, we can be led by the Spirit away from a rigid *semper idem* toward a greater fullness in our ecclesiological understanding. This is *semper reformanda*.