

De Membris Ecclesiae (*On the Members of the Church*)

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Homo constituitur membrum Ecclesiae per baptismum validum

Latin

S. Robertus Bellarminus tenet sufficere baptismum putative validum ad hoc ut quis membrum Ecclesiae fiat : « Respondeo ad hoc ut aliquis sit de corpore Ecclesiae non requiri characterem, sed externum baptismum, nec externum baptismum requiri ut quis censeatur et sit de Ecclesia, sed tantum ut admittatur... Unde Innocentius III... iudicavit presbyterum non baptizatum vere fuisse in Ecclesia, et iussit pro eius anima offerri sacrificium, ut pro aliis fidelibus » [^1].

Cum *S. Roberto Bellarmino* alii idem sentiunt, ut Wirceburgenses [^2], *Dominicus Palmieri* [^3], *C. Pesch* [^4], *Ant. Straub* [^5] ; sed fere unanimiter ab aliis hoc reicitur, et ipse *S. Bellarminus* non complete adhaerebat huic sententiae ; subiungit enim : « Posset et tamen etiam responderi et *melius*, eos qui non sunt baptizati... esse de Ecclesia secundum apparentiam exteriorem tantum, id est putative, non vere » [^6].

Imprimis notandum est *S. Scripturam*, *Patres*, *Concilia*, cum loquuntur de incorporatione, loqui de baptismo simpliciter : ergo baptismum validum intelligere debemus. Nam in re tanti momenti contrarium probari deberet, non

English

Saint Robert Bellarmine holds that putatively valid baptism suffices for someone to become a member of the Church: “I respond that for someone to be of the body of the Church, the character is not required, but external baptism, nor is external baptism required for one to be considered and to be of the Church, but only to be admitted... Hence Innocent III... judged that an unbaptized priest had truly been in the Church, and ordered that sacrifice be offered for his soul, as for other faithful” [^1].

With *Saint Robert Bellarmine* others hold the same view, such as the Würzburg theologians [^2], *Dominicus Palmieri* [^3], *C. Pesch* [^4], *Antonius Straub* [^5]; but this is rejected almost unanimously by others, and *Saint Bellarmine* himself did not completely adhere to this opinion; for he adds: “It could nevertheless also be responded, and *better*, that those who are not baptized... are of the Church according to external appearance only, that is putatively, not truly” [^6].

First of all, it should be noted that *Sacred Scripture*, the *Fathers*, and *Councils*, when they speak of incorporation, speak of baptism simply: therefore we must understand valid baptism. For in a matter of such great importance, the contrary ought to be proved, not merely affirmed without qualification.

tantum simpliciter affirmari.

Revera actus invalidus est nullus, et semper talis erit. Ita matrimonium invalide contractum, nullum erit semper, etiamsi ab omnibus retineatur validum ; et si postea vitium detegatur, necessaria erit vel separatio coniugum vel sanatio in radice, vel renovatio ipsius matrimonii.

Adde quod per baptismum homo acquirit capacitatem ad bona socialia quae sunt in Ecclesia, praesertim ad sacramenta et ad participationem vitae spiritualis. Haec capacitas habetur proprie propter characterem. Clarum est per baptismum invalidum, nullum characterem imprimi : proinde neque ius acquirit homo ad illa bona. Unde, quia gratia non confertur et character non imprimitur, concludere debemus per baptismum invalidum non haberi incorporationem corpori mystico.

Auctoritas Innocentii III non infirmat nostrum assertum, quia ille Summus Pontifex non affirmat talem presbyterum fuisse membrum Ecclesiae, sed tantum dicit illum potuisse salvari « quia in Sanctae Matris Ecclesiae fide et Christi nominis confessione » mortuus erat ; per votum nempe, per desiderium pertinendi ad Ecclesiam potuit salvari [^7] ; et hoc est secundum quod superius diximus, nempe ut quis salutem consequi possit requiritur saltem votum implicitum pertinendi ad Ecclesiam : ergo ille presbyter potuit salvari quia habebat votum hoc explicitum.

Hic bene notandum est, ex hoc quod requiratur baptismus validus, non perire visibilitatem Ecclesiae.

Distintuere debemus inter visibilitatem et visibilitatem. Nos dum dicimus Ecclesiam esse visibilem nolumus affirmare hanc visibilitatem seu cognoscibilitatem extendi ad singula membra, ita ut error infallibiliter excludatur circa omnia et singula membra.

Ecclesia Christi notas certas habet quibus cognosci potest ut vera inter omnes alios similes coetus. Sed ex hoc non licet

Indeed, an invalid act is null and will always be such. Thus a marriage invalidly contracted will always be null, even if it is held by all to be valid; and if the defect is later discovered, either a separation of the spouses or a sanation in radice [healing at the root], or a renewal of the marriage itself will be necessary.

Add to this that through baptism a person acquires the capacity for the social goods that exist in the Church, especially for the sacraments and for participation in the spiritual life. This capacity is possessed properly on account of the character. It is clear that through invalid baptism, no character is impressed: therefore neither does a person acquire the right to those goods. Whence, because grace is not conferred and character is not impressed, we must conclude that through invalid baptism there is no incorporation into the mystical body.

The authority of Innocent III does not weaken our assertion, because that Supreme Pontiff does not affirm that such a priest was a member of the Church, but only says that he could have been saved “because he had died in the faith of Holy Mother Church and in the confession of Christ’s name”; namely, through a vow, through the desire to belong to the Church he could have been saved [^7]; and this is according to what we said above, namely that for someone to be able to attain salvation there is required at least an implicit vow of belonging to the Church: therefore that priest could have been saved because he had this explicit vow.

Here it should be well noted that from the fact that valid baptism is required, the visibility of the Church does not perish.

We must distinguish between visibility and visibility. When we say that the Church is visible, we do not wish to affirm that this visibility or recognizability extends to individual members, such that error would be infallibly excluded concerning each and every member.

The Church of Christ has certain marks by which it can be recognized as the true Church among all other similar assemblies. But from this it is not

concludere omnia in Ecclesia esse visibilia. Ecclesia enim visibilis est tota, sed non secundum totum ; sicut homo visibilis dicendus est, quia quamquam habet partem invisibilem, haec tamen manifestatur per actus visibiles.

Insuper Ecclesia Christi constare debet membris valide baptizatis, quia Christus instituit baptismum ut medium aggregationis : ergo in Ecclesia plerique sunt certe et valide baptizati. Certitudo — ut apparet — non respicit individua membra, sed totum corpus : possibile est aliquod membrum non esse nonnisi apparenter christianum ; impossibile vero est totum corpus constitui ex non vere christianis, quia sic non haberetur amplius Ecclesia Christi.

Certitudo quae habetur circa visibilitatem seu cognoscibilitatem Ecclesiae Christi est certitudo omnino firma, certitudo fidei : altera quae respicit singula membra, est tantum moralis, excludens nempe prudens dubium, quae sufficiens est, hoc in casu, ad regulariter et ordinarie iudicandum de isto vel illo membro, quamvis, absolute loquendo, possit accidere ut aliquis homo tantum apparenter sit membrum Ecclesiae.

Quapropter non est difficultas circa hoc, nisi forsan circa illos qui praesunt in Ecclesia.

In hac quaestione semper memoria tenendum est Ecclesiam esse societatem supernaturalem cuius caput, dux, gubernator est Christus, qui permittere nequit ut in Ecclesia plerique sint invalide baptizati, aut plerique sacerdotes careant potestate ordinis ; hoc a fortiori dicimus de Episcopis. Circa hos S. Robertus Bellarmine habet : « ...dico in Episcopis duo considerari. Primo quod locum Christi teneant.... Secundo quod habeant potestatem ordinis et iurisdictionis. Si primo modo considerentur, certi sumus certitudine infallibili quod isti quos videmus, sint veri Episcopi et Pastores nostri. Nam ad hoc non requiritur nec fides,

permissible to conclude that all things in the Church are visible. For the Church is visible as a whole, but not according to its totality; just as a man is said to be visible, because although he has an invisible part, this nevertheless manifests itself through visible acts.

Moreover, the Church of Christ must consist of members who are validly baptized, because Christ instituted baptism as the means of aggregation: therefore in the Church the majority are certainly and validly baptized. This certainty—as is evident—does not regard individual members, but the whole body: it is possible that some member may be only apparently Christian; but it is impossible that the whole body should be constituted of those who are not truly Christians, because thus one would no longer have the Church of Christ.

The certainty which is had concerning the visibility or recognizability of the Church of Christ is an altogether firm certainty, the certainty of faith: the other certainty which regards individual members is only moral, namely excluding prudent doubt, which is sufficient in this case for regularly and ordinarily judging concerning this or that member, although, speaking absolutely, it could happen that some person might be only apparently a member of the Church.

Therefore there is no difficulty concerning this matter, except perhaps concerning those who preside in the Church.

In this question it must always be kept in mind that the Church is a supernatural society whose head, leader, and governor is Christ, who cannot permit that in the Church the majority would be invalidly baptized, or that the majority of priests would lack the power of orders; we say this *a fortiori* concerning Bishops. Concerning these, Saint Robert Bellarmine states: "...I say that in Bishops two things are to be considered. First, that they hold the place of Christ.... Second, that they possess the power of orders and jurisdiction. If they are considered in the first way, we are certain with infallible certitude that those whom we see are true Bishops and our Pastors. For this does not require

nec character ordinis, nec legitima electio, sed solum ut habeantur pro talibus ab Ecclesia.... Si secundo modo considerentur, non habemus certitudinem nisi moralem, quod isti sint vere Episcopi, quamquam certum est certitudine infallibili quod aliqui saltem sint veri, alioquin Deus Ecclesiam deseruisset : sed ad hoc ut teneamus Ecclesiam certam et conspicuam, quantum ad capita et membra, sufficit prima consideratio » [^8].

De Summo Pontifice autem minime potest admitti aliquem invalide baptizatum, ascendere posse ad Cathedram Romanam : mens nostra neque cogitare hoc potest : Iesus est enim qui Ecclesiam suam adstitit usque ad finem mundi. « Nam — dicit Card. Billot — ad infallibilem Dei providentiam pertinebit procurare ut nulli falso capiti integra adhaereat Ecclesia, et ex consequenti ut nemo recipiatur in pontificem summum qui non habeat omnes membri conditiones » [^9].

[^1]: {org. 1} *De Eccles. milit.*, III, c. 10.

[^2]: {org. 2} Cf. HENR. KILBER, *De principiis theologicis* (1852) n. 93.

[^3]: {org. 3} *De Romano Pontifice, cum proleg. de Ecclesia*, p. 45.

[^4]: {org. 4} *Instit. propaed.*, n. 329.

[^5]: {org. 5} *De Ecclesia Christi*, n. 1304-1308.

[^6]: {org. 6} Op. cit., III, c. 4.

[^7]: {org. 1} Cf. Epist. « *Apostolicam Sedem* » ad Episcopum Cremonensem ; DENZIN.-BANNW., 388.

[^8]: {org. 1} *De Eccl. milit.*, III, c. 10.

[^9]: {org. 2} Cf. Card. BILLOT, *De Ecclesia Christi*, p. 279.

either faith, or the character of orders, or legitimate election, but only that they be held as such by the Church.... If they are considered in the second way, we have only moral certitude that these are truly Bishops, although it is certain with infallible certitude that at least some are true, otherwise God would have abandoned the Church: but for us to hold the Church as certain and conspicuous, as regards both heads and members, the first consideration suffices” [^8].

Concerning the Supreme Pontiff, however, it can by no means be admitted that someone invalidly baptized could ascend to the Roman Chair: our mind cannot even think this: for it is Jesus who assists His Church until the end of the world. “For — says Cardinal Billot — it will pertain to the infallible providence of God to ensure that the entire Church does not adhere to a false head, and consequently that no one is received as Supreme Pontiff who does not possess all the conditions of membership” [^9].

[^1]: {org. 1} *On the Church Militant*, III, c. 10.

[^2]: {org. 2} Cf. HENRICUS KILBER, *On Theological Principles* (1852) n. 93.

[^3]: {org. 3} *On the Roman Pontiff, with Prolegomena on the Church*, p. 45.

[^4]: {org. 4} *Propaedeutic Institutes*, n. 329.

[^5]: {org. 5} *On the Church of Christ*, n. 1304-1308.

[^6]: {org. 6} Op. cit., III, c. 4.

[^7]: {org. 1} Cf. Epistle “*Apostolic See*” to the Bishop of Cremona; DENZINGER-BANNWART, 388.

[^8]: {org. 1} *On the Church Militant*, III, c. 10.

[^9]: {org. 2} Cf. Cardinal BILLOT, *On the Church of Christ*, p. 279.