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APPENDICES TO THE REPORT ON THE VALIDITY OF CERTAIN BAPTISMS

1. The Action of the General Assembly, Old School, of 1845, (Minutes, 1845, pages 34-37).

The Committee appointed to draw up a minute expressive of the views of the Assembly, presented a report, which was read and adopted, and is as follows, viz.

"The Committee appointed to prepare a minute expressive of the view of this Assembly, in returning a negative to Overture No. 6, leave to report.

"The question presented to this Assembly by Overture from the Presbytery of Ohio, 'Is Baptism in the Church of Rome Valid?' is one of a very grave character, and of deep practical importance. The answer to it must involve principles vital to the peace, the purity, and the stability of the church of God.

"After a full discussion carried through several days, this Assembly has decided, by a nearly unanimous vote, that baptism so administered, is not valid.

[Please note that there is a typographical error in the 1993 edition and in the 1997 reprint of the PCA Digest, Volume 2, that occurs on page 89 at this point, where the print edition reads "not invalid" and should instead read "not valid". We also note that the web version has here been corrected as of Monday, 19 September 2005.]

"Because, since baptism is an ordinance established by Christ in his Church, (Form of Gov., chap. vii; Matt. xxviii. 19, 20,) and is to be administered only by a minister of Christ, duly called and ordained to be a steward of the mysteries of God, (Directory, chap. viii, sec. 1.) it follows that no rite administered by one who is not himself a duly ordained minister of the true Church of God visible, can be regarded as an ordinance of Christ, whatever be the name by which it is called, whatever the form employed in its administration. The so-called priest of the Romish communion are not ministers of Christ, for they are commissioned as agents of the papal hierarchy, which is not a Church of Christ, but the Man of Sin, apostate from the truth, the enemy of righteousness and of God. She has long lain under the curse of God, who has called his people to come out from her, that they be not partakers of her plagues.

"It is the unanimous opinion of all the Reformed churches, that the whole papal body, though once a branch of the visible church, has long since become utterly corrupt, and hopelessly apostate. It was a conviction of this which led to the reformation, and the complete separation of the reformed body from the papal communion. Luther and his coadjutors, being duly ordained presbyters at the time when they left the Romish communion, which then, though fearfully corrupt, was the only visible church in the countries of their abode, were fully authorized by the word of God, to ordain successors in the ministry, and so to extend and perpetuate the Reformed churches as true churches of Christ: while the contumacious adherence of Rome to her corruptions, as shown in the decisions of the Council of Trent, (which she adopts as authoritative,) cuts her off from the visible Church of Christ, as heretical and unsound. This was the opinion of the Reformers, and it is the doctrine of the Reformed churches to this day. In entire accordance to this is the decision of the General Assembly of our Church, passed in 1835, (See Minutes of General Assembly, vol. 8, p. 33) declaring the Church of Rome to be an apostate body.

"The decision by the Assembly of 1835 renders the return of a negative to the inquiry proposed by the Presbytery of Ohio indispensable on the ground of consistency; unless we be prepared to admit, in direct contradiction to the standards of the Presbyterian Church, that baptism is not an ordinance established by Christ in his Church exclusively and that it may be administered by an agent of the Man of Sin, an emissary of the prince of darkness; that it may be administered in sport or in blasphemy, and yet be valid as though administered by a duly commissioned steward of the mysteries of God.

"Nor can it be urged that the papal hierarchy is improving in her character, and gradually approximating to the scriptural standard. She claims to be infallible; her dogmas she promulgates as the doctrines of heaven; and she pronounces her heaviest anathema against any and every man who questions her authority, and refuses to bow to her decisions. She cannot recede from the ground she has assumed. She has adopted as her own, the decisions of the Council of Trent, which degrade the word of God; which claim equal authority for the Apocrypha as for the New Testament; and which declare the sense held and taught by holy mother church, on the authority of tradition and of the Fathers, to be the true and only sense of Scripture. All who deny this position, or who question her authority, she denounces with the bitterest curses.

"She thus perverts the truth of God; she rejects the doctrine of justification by faith; she substitutes human merit for the righteousness of Christ; and self-inflicted punishment for gospel repentance: She proclaims her so-called baptism, to be regeneration, and the reception of the consecrated wafer in the eucharist, to be the receiving of Christ himself, the source and fountain of grace, and with him all the grace he can impart. Is this the truth? Is reliance on this system, true religion? Can, then, the papal body be a Church?

"The Church, (i.e. the church visible,) as defined in our standards, is the whole body of those persons, together with their children, who make profession of the holy religion of Christ, and of submission to his laws. (Form of Gov. chap. ii, sec. 2) As certainly then, as the dogmas and practices of papal Rome are not the holy religion of Christ, must it be conceded, that the papal body is not a Church of Christ at all; and if not, then her agents, be they styled priest, bishops, archbishops, cardinals or pope, are not ministers of Christ in any sense; for they have no connection with his true visible Church; and not being true ministers of Christ, they have no power to administer

Christian ordinances, and the rite they call baptism, is not, in any sense, to be regarded as valid Christian Baptism.

"Further, by the perverted meaning they affix, and the superstitious rites they have superadded to the ceremonies they perform under the name of baptism and the eucharist, the symbolical nature and true design of both the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper are lost sight of and utterly destroyed, - so that, could we by any possibility assign to her the name of a church, she would still be a church without the two grand ordinances of the gospel: she neither administers Christian baptism, nor celebrates the supper of our Lord.

"Moreover, since, by the 11th canon of the Council of Trent, she declares the efficacy of her ordinances to depend upon the intention of the administrator, no man can know with certainty that her form of administration in any ordinance is not a mere mockery: no consistent papist can be certain that he has been duly baptized, or that he has received the veritable eucharist: he cannot know, that the priest who officiates at his altar is a true priest, nor that there is actually any one true priest, or any one prelate rightly consecrated in the whole papal communion. The papal hierarchy has by her own solemn act shrouded all her doings in uncertainty, and enveloped all her rites in hopeless obscurity. Even on this ground alone, the validity of her baptism might safely be denied.

"Nor is the fact that instances now and then occur of apparent piety in the members of her communion, and of intelligence, zeal, and conscientiousness in some of her priests, any ground of objection against the position here taken by this Assembly. The virtues of individuals do not purify the body of which they are members. We are to judge of the character of a body claiming to be a church of Christ, - not by the opinions or practices of its individual members, but by its standards and its allowed practices. Bound as he is by the authority of his church, - and that on pain of her heaviest malediction, - to understand the Scriptures only in the sense in which his church understands and explains them, a consistent papist cannot receive or hold the true religion, or the doctrines of grace. If he does, he must either renounce the papacy, or hypocritically conceal his true sentiments, or he must prepare to brave the thunders of her wrath. True religion and an intelligent adherence to papal Rome are utterly incompatible and impossible. The Church and the papacy are the repelling poles of the moral system.

"Difficulties may possibly arise in individual cases. It may not be easy at all times to say whether an applicant for admission into the Church of Christ has, or has not been baptized: whether he has been christened by a popish pastor or not. In all such doubtful cases the session of a church must act according to the light before them. But it is safer and more conducive to peace and edification, to embrace a well established principle for our guidance, and act upon it firmly in the fear of God, leaving all consequences with him than to suffer ourselves, without any fixed principles, to be at the mercy of circumstances.

"While some other churches may hesitate to carry out fully the principles of the Reformation, in wholly repudiating popish baptism, as well as the popish mass, we, as Presbyterians, feel bound to act on the principle laid down by our Assembly, so long ago as 1790, (see Digest, pp. 94, 95,) that, so long as a body is by us recognized as a true church, are her ordinances to be deemed valid, and no longer.

"In 1835 the Assembly declared the papacy to be apostate from Christ, and no true church. As we do not recognize her as a portion of the visible Church of Christ, we

cannot, consistently, view her priesthood as other than usurpers of the sacred functions of the ministry, her ordinances as unscriptural, and her baptism as totally invalid."

2. The central portion of the report relating to Roman Catholic and Unitarian baptism (Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U.S., 1871, p. 30).

Our Church has always held, agreeably to the Scripture, that the administration of baptism may present irregularities or imperfections which are not to be approved, but the sacrament may still have substantial validity. It is plain from Scripture, that baptism has by the Lord Jesus Christ been given to His true visible Church catholic (see Matt. XXVIII, 19, 20; Acts ii, 41, 42; I. Cor. xii, 13; Book of Government, Chap. VII; Directory for Worship, Chap. VII, Sec.1), and cannot be out of her pale. The administration of this sacrament may be in two ways invalidated; either by the apostasy of the body wherein it is exercised, so that this society is no true part of Christ's visible Church; or by the utter change of corruption of the element and doctrine of the sacrament. And our Assemblies have correctly held, that the form called by the Popish communion "Christian baptism" has ceased, for both reasons, to be valid; because that society is declared in Scripture to be antichrist, and Babylon, and apostate, out of which the Lord requireth His "people to come, that they may not be partakers of her plagues;" and because she hath, with superstitious design, substituted a mixed element in place of water, which Christ ordained to be used as the emblem, and hath utterly corrupted the doctrine of holy baptism into an incantation working ex opere operato.

In other societies, as the Unitarian, their rites may have due regularity of outward form, and yet be no valid baptism, because their bodies are not true parts of Christ's visible Church. The validity of such cases therefore depends upon the claim of the communion in which they are administered to be true churches of Jesus Christ. But the scriptural mark of a true church is its holding forth the Word of God. (See Rom. iii. 2; 1 Tim. iii. 15; Book of Government, Chap. II, Sec. II; Confession of Faith, Chap. XXV, Sec. III.)

In view of the fact that several churches hold grave errors in connection with much saving truth, and that perhaps no church receives in everything the exact mind of the Spirit, it may be asked with what degree of strictness or liberality this mark of a true visible Church is to be applied. It seems to us consonant with the Scriptures and the judgment of charity to answer, that so long as any communion so retains the essential truths of God's Word and the aids of the Holy Ghost as to save souls by its ministrations, it shall be held a true, though imperfect, member of His visible body. Though it may omit or impugn some principles which we have received from God, and may even deny to our ordinances all recognition, and to our communion all church character, yet we may not imitate its uncharitableness; so long as Christ visibly entrusts it with His saving Word and Spirit, we are bound to recognize it as His visible body, notwithstanding its errors, and to pray for its attainment of a more peaceable unity in the bonds of the truth. But in judging the tendency of its ordinances to save souls, it is obviously proper that we shall estimate those ministrations as a consistent whole, as set forth by this communication. If their only tendency as a whole, taken as it expounds them to its members, is destructive to souls, then we cannot admit that it is a pillar and ground of saving truth, merely because of some disjointed fragments of the gospel verities, mixed with heresies which, if heartily accepted by the people as taught, must be fatal to souls; or because a few persons, through the special teaching of God's Spirit,

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leading them to select the spiritual meat and reject the poison, actually find Christ under those ministrations; for the proper function of a visible Church is instrumentally to communicate to its disciples spiritual discernment, and not to presuppose it; and the happy escape of these souls from damnable error is due to the special grace of God shielding them against the regular effect of these ministrations, rather than employing and blessing them. If this rule of judgment be denied, then might a valid church character possibly be established for an association of infidels investigating parts of God's Word only for purposes of cavil, since the Almighty Spirit might, against these purposes, employ those parts of the Word to awaken and convert some member.