

The Reformed Churches and Roman
Catholic Baptism:
an Anthology of Principle Texts

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Introduction

How should Presbyterian and Reformed churches relate to those individuals and congregations who maintain communion with the Bishop of Rome? The Reformation of the 16th Century highlighted serious doctrinal problems in late medieval theology. But instead of heeding the call for reform, the greater part of the Western Church dug in her heels at the Council of Trent and insisted all the more vigorously in maintaining numerous and serious errors. Among other things, Trent vigorously denied, in the decrees and canons on justification from the sixth session (Henrici Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* 792-843), that justification before God is a forensic act in which God declares one to be righteous, based solely on the imputed righteousness of Christ, received by faith alone, apart from works. This, as well as other issues (such as viewing the Eucharist as a propitiatory sacrifice for the living and the dead, prayer to and veneration of images and saints, common worship only in Latin, and refusal to publish the Bible in the vernacular for the laity) not only became huge barriers to communion, but also led to a widespread denunciation of the Roman communion as officially apostate.

If it is indeed the case that Rome remains apostate until she disavows the teaching of the Council of Trent, then how should Presbyterian and Reformed churches relate to Roman churches? Specifically, how should we view Roman baptism? In many parts of the Presbyterian and Reformed world, this remains largely a moot question. Throughout much of the Southern US, for example, one rarely comes

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into contact with a Roman Catholic. Rarer still does a baptized Roman Catholic convert and seek membership or communion in a Presbyterian church. Those in such a context have the enviable luxury of expressing their views, without the bother of having to put them into practice. Let one begin laboring as a missionary however, in (say) Latin America, and the question ceases to be merely academic. What should one do when nominal Roman Catholics begin coming to Christ in large numbers? They hear the gospel clearly for the first time in their lives; they intelligently profess faith in Jesus Christ, rejecting every other intermediary and every other hope of salvation; and they desire communion with a Presbyterian church. What should be done?

Peru Mission, a Presbyterian team working in northern Peru, faced exactly this question, and found it to be the source of no small amount of consternation. We were keenly aware of the importance of Holy Baptism: it is the means of grace, instituted by Christ, for bringing converts and their children into the Church, outside of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. Christ has commanded us in the Great Commission to make disciples by baptizing and teaching them. But we also recognize that baptism is a one-time event. It is Christ who ultimately performs the work of baptism.¹ To repeat it, then, is to show

¹ Just as Christ is the voice we hear when the Gospel is rightly preached (Eph 2.17); and just as He is the Cantor leading the Holy Assembly in worship (Heb 2.11-12); and just as He is the host at the Lord's Supper who gives us His body and blood that we might have life (1 Cor 11.24-25; John 6.51-58), so in like manner, it is He who performs the act of baptism, no matter whose hands might actually pour the water. Calvin's comments on John 4.1-2 are appropriate here: "He gives the designation of Christ's Baptism to that which he conferred by the hands of others, in order to inform us that Baptism ought not to be estimated by the person of the minister, but that its power depends entirely on its Author, in whose name, and by whose authority, it is conferred. Hence, we derive a remarkable consolation, when we know that our baptism has no less efficacy to wash and renew us, than if it had been given by the hand of the Son of God. Nor can it be doubted that, so long as he lived in the world, he abstained from the outward administration of the sign, for the express purpose of testifying to all ages, that Baptism loses nothing of its value when it is administered by a mortal man. In short, not only does Christ baptize inwardly by his Spirit, but the very symbol which we receive from a mortal

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great disregard not only for the Sacrament itself, but it is also to deny the action and ministry of Christ who is the Author of every valid baptism. Further, it is important that a validly baptized person not be rebaptized, because to do so would be a schismatic act. It would be to effectively deny that the person was a visible Christian, or that the church to which he belonged was *in any sense* a part of the visible Christian church.

In our efforts to grapple with the question, we of course sought wisdom and instruction from God in the Holy Scriptures. But we also sought to honor the teachers Christ has given His church in past ages and to glean wisdom from their study of the Word of God. We were aware of the controversy in the early church between bishops Cyprian and Stephen. Cyprian argued that all heretics should be rebaptized. Stephen took the view that it was only necessary to lay hands on them, acknowledging their repentance. Later, the Donatists in North Africa followed Cyprian and insisted on rebaptizing all heretics. Augustine and the First Council of Nicea both opposed this in the case of heretics who still maintained the doctrine of the Trinity and the proper words of institution. This position won the day until the time of the Reformation, when the Anabaptists rejected all infant baptisms, and later, baptisms not administered by full immersion. All of the Reformed and Lutheran Churches, however, continued to hold the Augustinian position, accepting, as we shall see, even Roman Baptism, until the Southern Presbyterian, James Henley Thornwell in the 19th Century squared off against Charles Hodge in an extensive debate that started on the floor of the Presbyterian (Old School) General Assembly and spilled over later into the *Princeton Review*, the *Watchman and Observer*, and the *Southern Presbyterian Review*. Thornwell rejected Roman Baptism, while Charles Hodge accepted its validity. Since then, the Northern Presbyterian Church has largely followed Hodge with the

man ought to be viewed by us in the same light as if Christ himself displayed his hand from heaven, and stretched it out to us. Now if the Baptism administered by a man is Christ's Baptism, it will not cease to be Christ's Baptism whoever be the minister.”

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Southern Church similarly favoring Thornwell.

The object of this volume is to gather together the dominant testimony of the Reformed tradition on this subject (most of which has remained locked away in dusty libraries) in one small volume. Here we present a brief statement from the *French Confession of 1559* as well as statements by John Calvin from his *Institutes* and commentaries, and part of a short essay by John Knox. Then we have two short pieces, from Theodore Beza and William Perkins, which nevertheless present complete, self-contained arguments. Next is an excerpt from Samuel Rutherford, who is actually arguing for the validity of Roman *ordination*, but part of the basis for this argument, he says, is the validity of Roman baptism. We then have a short examination of the *Westminster Confession* (1647), concluding that, though the issue is not raised explicitly, the Divines in several key statements clearly assumed the validity of Roman Baptism when they insisted that rebaptism was unlawful. From there, we have two longer discussions by Richard Baxter and Francis Turretin, and finally, two longer essays by Charles Hodge. All of these authors accept the validity of Roman Baptism. In fact, we do not find a single author from the Reformed tradition who rejects Roman Baptism, until Thornwell pled his case in the mid 19th Century. We did not include his work in this volume, first, because of its great length, and secondly, because it, unlike the other texts collected here, has been readily available from the Banner of Truth Trust for nearly forty years.

Our prayer is that the availability of these texts will assist ministers and sessions who face this dilemma, and that it will give Presbyterian and Reformed brethren an appreciation of the broader Reformed tradition on this complicated question.

1. French Confession of 1559

The French Reformed Church, under intense persecution, sought help from Geneva in persuading the French authorities to protect, or at least tolerate them. They submitted to the Genevan ministers a copy of the confession they planned to present to the rulers in France, asking for advice and help in perfecting it. Calvin and two other men worked up a detailed revision and sent it back to them. Then, with only a few more changes, it was approved as the confession of the French Reformed Churches. The confession grants that Rome, as an institution, cannot be considered a true church of Christ. This data by itself, however, is still insufficient (they suggest) to determine the question of Roman baptism. A church may very well be apostate and still have a valid baptism. The French Confession argues that this is in fact the case with Rome. This excerpt is from paragraph 28 of the translation found in the appendix to William Henry Foote's The Hugonots; or the Reformed French Church (Harrisonburg, VA: Springle Publications 2002 [1870]).

XXVIII In this belief we protest that when the word of God is not received, and when there is no professed subjection to it, and where there is no use of the sacraments, if we will speak properly, we cannot judge that there is any church. Wherefore we condemn those assemblies in the papacy, because the pure word of God is banished out of them, and for that in them the sacraments are corrupted, counterfeited, falsified, or utterly abolished, and for that among them,

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all kinds of superstitions and idolatries are in full vogue. We hold thus that all those who meddle with such actions, and communicate with them, do separate and cut themselves off from the body of Christ Jesus. Yet nevertheless, because there is yet some small trace of a Church in the papacy, and that baptism as it is in the substance, hath been still continued, and because the efficacy of baptism doth not depend upon him who doth administer it, we confess that they which are thus baptized do not need a second baptism. In the meanwhile, because of those corruptions which are mingled with the administration of that sacrament, no man can present his children to be baptized in that Church without polluting his conscience.

2. John Calvin

John Calvin was the great reformer of Geneva. He followed men like Luther and Bucer, and through his Institutes, his commentaries, and his extensive correspondance he guided and shaped the Reformed Churches throughout the following centuries. His view of Roman Baptism is well known from the Institutes, however, it is often objected that he held this favorable opinion of its legitimacy before the Council of Trent officially denied the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Only after the publication of the decrees and canons of its sixth session did Rome became officially apostate, and thus (we are told), her baptism invalid. There is an obvious problem with this interpretation, however, when we note that the decess and the canons on justification from the sixth session were published by the Council in January 1547 (Henrici Denzinger, Enchiridion Symbolorum 792-843), while the final Latin edition of the Institutes was published in August 1559, over twelve years later. Calvin was well aware of the codification of Rome's views on justification and even responded to them in print in the same year they appeared. This in no way caused him to change his views on the legitimacy of Roman baptism. Below, we have excerpted a discussion from this 1559 publication, as well as two passages from his Commentaries on the Minor Prophets, published in the same year.

From *Institutes* (1559) IV.15.16-17 (Beveridge translation, 1845).

Moreover, if we have rightly determined that a sacrament is not to be

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estimated by the hand of him by whom it is administered, but is to be received as from the hand of God himself, from whom it undoubtedly proceeded, we may hence infer that its dignity neither gains nor loses by the administrator. And, just as among men, when a letter has been sent, if the hand and seal is recognized, it is not of the least consequence who or what the messenger was; so it ought to be sufficient for us to recognize the hand and seal of our Lord in his sacraments, let the administrator be who he may. This confutes the error of the Donatists, who measured the efficacy and worth of the sacrament by the dignity of the minister. Such in the present day are our Catabaptists, who deny that we are duly baptized, because we were baptized in the Papacy by wicked men and idolaters; hence they furiously insist on anabaptism. Against these absurdities we shall be sufficiently fortified if we reflect that by baptism we were initiated not into the name of any man, but into the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and, therefore, that baptism is not of man, but of God, by whomsoever it may have been administered. Be it that those who baptized us were most ignorant of God and all piety, or were despisers, still they did not baptize us into a fellowship with their ignorance or sacrilege, but into the faith of Jesus Christ, because the name which they invoked was not their own but God's, nor did they baptize into any other name. But if baptism was of God, it certainly included in it the promise of forgiveness of sin, mortification of the flesh, quickening of the Spirit, and communion with Christ. Thus it did not harm the Jews that they were circumcised by impure and apostate priests.¹ It did not nullify the symbol so as to make it necessary to repeat it. It was enough to return to its genuine origin. The objection that baptism ought to be celebrated in the assembly of the godly, does not prove that it loses its whole efficacy because it is partly defective. When we show what ought to be done to keep baptism pure and free

¹ Notice that when Calvin makes the analogy with OT circumcision he acknowledges that the leaders who administered the sacrament were apostate. By using this analogy Calvin seems to assume that the Roman priesthood is apostate, and yet, like later authors we shall see below, he still viewed baptism at their hands as valid.

JOHN CALVIN

from every taint, we do not abolish the institution of God though idolaters may corrupt it. Circumcision was anciently vitiated by many superstitions, and yet ceased not to be regarded as a symbol of grace; nor did Josiah and Hezekiah, when they assembled out of all Israel those who had revolted from God, call them to be circumcised anew.

17. Then, again, when they ask us what faith for several years followed our baptism, that they may thereby prove that our baptism was in vain, since it is not sanctified unless the word of the promise is received with faith, our answer is, that being blind and unbelieving, we for a long time did not hold the promise which was given us in baptism, but that still the promise, as it was of God, always remained fixed, and firm, and true. Although all men should be false and perfidious, yet God ceases not to be true (Romans 3:3, 4); though all were lost, Christ remains safe. We acknowledge, therefore, that at that time baptism profited us nothing, since in us the offered promise, without which baptism is nothing, lay neglected. Now, when by the grace of God we begin to repent, we accuse our blindness and hardness of heart in having been so long ungrateful for his great goodness. But we do not believe that the promise itself has vanished, we rather reflect thus: God in baptism promises the remission of sins, and will undoubtedly perform what he has promised to all believers. That promise was offered to us in baptism, let us therefore embrace it in faith. In regard to us, indeed, it was long buried on account of unbelief; now, therefore, let us with faith receive it. Wherefore, when the Lord invites the Jewish people to repentance, he gives no injunction concerning another circumcision though (as we have said) they were circumcised by a wicked and sacrilegious hand, and had long lived in the same impiety. All he urges is conversion of heart. For how much soever the covenant might have been violated by them, the symbol of the covenant always remained, according to the appointment of the Lord, firm and inviolable. Solely, therefore, on the condition of repentance, were they restored to the covenant which God had once made with them in circumcision, though this which they had received at the hand of a covenant-breaking priest,

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they had themselves as much as in them lay polluted and extinguished.

From Calvin's Comments on Hosea 9.4 (1559)

But it may be asked, can the impiety of others pollute us, when we afford no proof of companionship, nor by dissimulation manifest any consent? when we then abstain from all superstition, does society alone contaminate us? The answer is easy: The Prophet does not avowedly discuss here how another's impiety may contaminate men who are clean; but his object was to show in strong language how much God abhors the ungodly, and that not only he is not pacified with their sacrifices, but also holds them as the greatest abominations. But with regard to this question, it is certain that we become polluted as soon as we consent to profane superstitions: yet when ungodly men administer either holy baptism or the holy supper, we are not polluted by fellowship with them, for the deed itself has nothing vicious in it (page 317 in the Calvin Translation Society edition).

From Calvin's Comments on Amos 5.26 (1559)

Now then we see that the Prophets speak in various ways of Israel: when they regard the people, they say, that they were perfidious, that they were apostates, who had immediately from the beginning departed from the true and legitimate worship of God: but when they commend the grace of God, they say, that the true worship of God shone among them, that though the whole multitude had become perverted, yet the Lord approved of what he had commanded. So it is with Baptism; it is a sacred and immutable testimony of the grace of God, though it were administered by the devil, though all who may partake of it were ungodly and polluted as to their own persons. Baptism ever retains its own character, and is never contaminated by the vices of men (page 295 in the Calvin Translation Society edition).

3. John Knox

John Knox was the fearless reformer of Scotland. His curriculum vitae includes such notable facts as the following: friend and associate of the Scottish reformer and martyr George Wishart; French galley slave for 19 months; chaplain to Edward VI of England; pastor to Marian exiles in both Frankfurt and Geneva; friend and associate of John Calvin; author of The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women, which was aimed largely at Bloody Mary, but unhappily, came forth from the press just in time to offend the protestant Elizabeth as she ascended the throne of England. Knox then returned to Scotland and faced down Mary, Queen of Scots, the Roman Catholic regent; helped write the Scots Confession and the First Book of Discipline which consolidated and more firmly established the Reformation in Scotland. Knox was a tireless crusader against the Roman Church. The vigor of this opposition, however, only serves to make his view of Rome's baptism even more noteworthy. For Knox, Roman Catholic apostasy was not sufficient in itself to invalidate her baptism. This excerpt comes from The Works of John Knox (Edinburgh: 1855), volume fourth pp119-128. Spelling and punctuation have been modernized.

The baptism now used in the Papistry is not the true baptism which Christ Jesus did institute and command to be used in his Kirk; but it is an adulteration and profanation of the same, and therefore is to be avoided of all God's children. . . .

“Shall we baptize again,” do some demand, “that in our infancy were polluted with that adulterate sign?” I answer, “No,” for the Spirit of regeneration, which is freely given to us by Christ Jesus, our whole sufficiency, hath purged us from that poison which we drank in the days

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of our blindness. The fire of the Holy Ghost hath burned away whatsoever we received at their hands besides Christ Jesus' simple institution. . . . And in very deed, the malice of the devil could never altogether abolish Christ's institution, for it was ministered to us "in the name of the Father, of the Son, and the Holy Ghost." And yet for that time, I confess, by reason of our blindness, it did not profit us, because it was adulterated, and mixed with men's dreams and fantasies. I confess, for the time it did not profit us; but now, as said is, the Spirit of Christ Jesus, illuminating our hearts, hath purged the same by faith, and maketh the effect of that sacrament to work in us without any iteration of the external sign.

Hereof I know may two doubts arise: former, that to the regenerate man the sacraments are not necessary greatly; secondly, that it is all one whether our children be baptized with the papistical baptism, or with Christ's true institution. The first I answer, that no man is so regenerate, but that continually he hath need of the means which Christ Jesus, the wisdom of his eternal Father, hath appointed to be used in his Kirk: to wit, the word truly preached, and the sacraments rightly administered. Christ hath ordained and commanded the word and the sacraments to be used in his kirk; therefore ought not the bold presumption of man to separate the same. If the regenerate man hath never received the sacramental sign of baptism, he is bound to receive the same. And that did Peter perfectly understand, seeing the Holy Ghost visibly descend upon Cornelius and his household, which he perfectly understood could not be without the Spirit of regeneration; and yet doth he contend and obtain that they should not be forbidden to be baptized. And Paul also, after his conversion, and after Christ Jesus had promised that he was a chosen vessel to him, yet was commanded to wash away his sins by baptism. Whereof it is evident that regeneration doth not so exempt man, but that once he ought to be baptized.

But the question is, whether a man baptized in Papistry ought to be rebaptized when he cometh to knowledge? And I answer, he ought not: first, because Christ's institution, as said is, could not be utterly

abolished by the malice of Satan, nor by the abuse of man; secondly, because the Spirit of Christ purgeth and removeth from us all such venom as we received of their hands, and superstition makes not the virtue of Christ's institution to be ineffectual in us. . . . The seal once received is durable, and needeth not to be iterated, lest by iteration and multiplication of the sign, the office of the Holy Spirit, which is to illuminate, regenerate, and to purge, be attributed unto it

Hereof I suppose that it be proved, that Baptism once received suffices in this life, but that the use of the Lord's Table is oftentimes necessary: for the one, to wit, baptism, is the sign of our first entrance; but the other is the declaration of our covenant, that by Christ Jesus we are nursed, maintained, and continued in the league with God our Father. The sign of our first entrance needeth not to be iterate, because the league is constant and sure; but the sign of our nourishment and continuance, by reason of our dullness, infirmity, and oblivion ought oft to be used. And, therefore, whosoever yet [should] object that, if the Papistical baptism can in no sort seal in our hearts the league of God's mercy, [it] seems that they, as apostates and traitors, have declined from Jesus Christ, refused his justice, and established their own. In few words, I answer, that so was [the] whole [of] Israel under Jeroboam, and yet did none of God's prophets require, of those that were circumcised by the priest of Bethel, and by others in that confusion and idolatry, to be circumcised again; but only that they should turn their hearts to the living God, that they should refuse idolatry, and join themselves with the sanctuary of the living God, which was placed at Jerusalem, as in the days of Ezechias and Josias is evident. No more ought we to iterate baptism, by whomsoever it was ministered unto us in our infancy; but if God of his mercy [should] call us from blindness, he maketh our baptism, how corrupt that ever it was, available unto us, by the power of his Holy Spirit. . . .

4. Theodore Beza

Theodore Beza was Calvin's associate and successor in Geneva, and one of a handful of men chiefly responsible for consolidating the work of the early reformers and facilitating the transition into the period known as Reformed Orthodoxy. He defended the Reformed Churches in debates with Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Socinians, and others, and was greatly admired by the early Puritans in England. The following excerpt is a new translation, by the editors, from: Questionum et Responsum Christianarum, pars Altera, Quae est de Sacramentis (1577).

130. Question:

I have heard what you think about the children of Turks and Jews. Now, would you [also] put the children of those who follow the Bishop of Rome into this category?

Answer:

No, not at all.

Question:

But you all say that the Pope is another Antichrist, and that therefore those who are called Papists are properly fallen from Christ.

THEODORE BEZA

Answer:

I grant this. However, admitting that the Papacy is not Christianity, but rather anti-Christianity, nevertheless, Christianity has remained and does remain, as it were, buried in the Papacy.

131. Question:

I do not yet sufficiently perceive what you mean.

Answer:

I say that our Lord Jesus Christ both has willed, and yet will will, that his Church should lie hidden in the very bowels of the Papacy itself.

Question:

How do you arrive at this conclusion?

Answer:

From the consequent, for I say, that wherever there is a proper note of the Church, there the Church is.

132. Question:

But do you see how miserably it has been defiled, whether you [consider] the doctrine itself, or its characteristic note of baptism?

Answer:

One may admit that it is so defiled that it may not be recognized by any but the most skillful, nevertheless, it appears in that mark of Jesus Christ, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

Question:

What do you gather from this?

Answer:

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I infer that, Popery is by no means Christianity, but rather, it is such a great aberration, that the one who embraces and abides in it actually falls from Christianity. I say the same about Greek Orthodoxy, which also itself is such a great deviation from Christianity that no man today may truly be a Christian and Greek Orthodox [at the same time]. I say however, that the Gentiles (who now are generally comprehended in these same two factions and are inclined to that same excision of which Paul manifestly foretold) are not, for all that, to be considered as cut off, as long as the outward note of baptism should endure there; and further I say that the Church is gathered out of the midst, and in the midst, of Popery.

Question:

Can you prove that, by any suitable example from times past?

Answer:

Yes, absolutely. For what do you think Pharisaism, Saducism, and in short, Judaism, were in the time of Christ? Surely, it was such that no man was a Jew (if you consider the generality of the people) who did not covenant with the Lord in vain. And yet true religion was, for a time, in the midst of Pharisaism and Saducism, and indeed in the most corrupt Judaism, as long as circumcision, the seal of the covenant, flourished among that people. But after circumcision was abolished, and the note of Christianity was rejected, the Jewish people are now rightly said to have been cut off. The same may not be affirmed about Popery itself, but rather of Christianity, as it were, drowned in the midst of Popery, and yet notwithstanding, still standing firm.

* * * *

THEODORE BEZA

142. Question:

But is it not the case that private persons and those who are not lawfully called, should be considered to hold the same place and degree? Thus, if this is true, then baptism administered by Popish priests must be invalid and serve no purpose.

Answer:

Here I will not hesitate to borrow from the lawyers, something very much to the point. The fault may be in the person, as when a magistrate is corruptly made, who in any case (as Varro testifies in his fifth book on the Latin language) is no magistrate. But the lawyers more subtly distinguish between the one who is a magistrate, (that is, a legitimate one) and the one who is in the magistracy; as when they dispute that it is one thing to be proconsul, and another thing to be in the proconsulship, or that to be praetor is different than to exercise the office of the praetorship, as is related of Barbarius Philippus, or, that to be tutor is different than to exercise the office of tutorship. This is so, such that sometimes he who is a magistrate (as, for example, if he is insane) may be a magistrate in fact, and yet he cannot execute the office of a magistrate. The fault is in the act when it is not ordered rightly, that is to say, when such things are omitted which are of the nature of the act itself. Now in Popish Baptism, the fault is not in the act, in which that defining formula is observed, which foreign and superfluous things cannot prejudice. Rather, the fault is in the person, for it is indeed annexed to the Bishops and to the Elders. This fault, however, cannot hurt the act. For (to come nearer to our theologians) [consider] those who are not legitimately called to the ministry, and who nevertheless sit in the chair of the ministry by the consent of some men (though deceived). Though with respect to the persons themselves they are not true pastors, nevertheless they must be considered in a category distinct from those who have neither a lawful nor an unlawful calling. Caiaphas indeed was not the legitimate *Pontifex Maximus*, because entered into his

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pontificate by paying money. Nevertheless, sitting in the pontifical chair (albeit unaware) he uttered a prophecy. And before this sitting pontiff, the Lord goes to the temple and observes those divine ceremonies that were not yet abolished. Likewise the Pharisees, since they sat in Moses's chair, [the Lord] commanded that they be listened to. Nevertheless, most of them ascended to the chair by ambition and evil means. Finally, in the same way, those things that a supposed magistrate commands are considered legitimate commands, even though he may have been promoted to the position by evil endeavors. This is certain to have happened with one Barbarius Philipus, a servant, who nevertheless, through error was made Praetor of Rome. In conclusion, a faulty calling may hurt the conscience of the one who invades that office, but it does not defile those things that are done by him as though he were lawfully called.

143. Question:

But that same baptism, administered by sacrificing priests, has been defiled with many blemishes.

Answer:

You speak truly. But, by the singular goodness of God, the essence of the baptism of Christ has remained in it, whose truth cannot be hindered by any added inventions.

144. Question:

Should that not be considered true baptism, then, unless the pure word of the institution is used?

Answer:

Without a doubt, it is not, for the form gives the thing [i.e., in this case, baptism] its essence.

5. William Perkins

William Perkins was born in 1558 at Marston in Warwickshire, England and only lived to the age of forty-four years, dying in 1602. It seems quite appropriate that the life of this great Puritan, who labored so diligently for the reformation of the Elizabethan Church, should correspond almost exactly to the reign of the Queen. Perkins was a man small of stature, and subject to some physical infirmities. In spite of this, he was quite a giant among the early Puritans. Daniel Neal tells us that “he was one of the most famous practical writers and preachers of his age.” Neal also notes that he was “a favourer of the discipline, for which he was once or twice brought before the high-commission.” This “discipline” refers to the Genevan liturgy and church order. However, Neal adds, “his peaceable behaviour, and great fame in the learned world, procured him a dispensation from the persecutions of his brethren.” In the following excerpt from his, A Treatise of Conscience Perkins explains why it is possible for an illegitimate minister to administer a valid baptism.

CHAP. VIII

Of the Sacraments in general, the Receiving, and use of them.

In the next place, follow the questions of conscience touching the third part of God’s outward worship, namely, the sacraments; and these concern either the administration or the receiving of them. The

¹ Daniel Neal, *History of the Puritans* (1979 [1732]) 1.378.

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administration I will here let pass, and handle those questions only, that concern the receiving and use thereof, both in general and in particular.

Touching the receiving of the sacraments in general, there is one only question: *Whether the sacraments ministered by heretics, idolaters, and insufficient ministers be sacraments or no?*

For answer hereunto, we are to know [that] there be three sorts of men that may administer the sacraments. Some are true & lawful ministers, lawfully called by God & men to that function, keeping the right form of the sacrament according to the institution. Some again, are more private persons, that have no authority at all to administer, whom we may oppose to the room of lawful ministers by the acceptation & consent of men, or by custom, though corrupt, and these are in a mean between the two former sorts. Of the first there is no question. But the sacrament administered by the second is in truth a mere nullity; because they have no calling thereto, neither can they doe it of faith: forasmuch as they be not indeed lawful pastors; yet being in the place of such, by the consent, allowance, and custom of men, though corrupt; their action is of force, and the sacrament which is administered by them, is in deed a true sacrament; which I prove by these reasons.

First, the preaching of the word, and administration of the sacraments are all one in substance. For in the one the will of God is seen, in the other heard. Now the word preached by heretics, is the true word of God, and may have his effect. The Scribes and Pharisees, great Doctors of the Jews, were not all of the Tribe of Levi, but descended from other tribes. Again, even the principal of them lived by extortion and bribery, and were wicked men, yea heretics and Apostates, deposed & excommunicated persons. And yet because they occupied the places of good teachers, and sat in the chair of Moses, that is, read the doctrine of Moses Law, Christ bids his disciples to hear them. Matt. 23.3. Provided only that they took heed of the leaven of their false doctrine and wicked life. Now if the word taught by their ministry was powerful, why may not the sacraments ministered by the heretics standing in the room of true ministers be true sacraments? In the days of Paul, (Phillip. 1.15) *some preached Christ through envy and strife,*

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and some of good will; what was the Apostles judgment in this case? Himself answers (v. 18), What then? Yet, Christ is preached all manner of ways, whether it be under a pretence or sincerely, and I therein joy, yea and will joy.

Secondly, this point is plain by examples. The Levitical priests under the Law, were heretics, and taught after a sort the breach of the moral law. Yea they held justification by works (Rom. 10.3) and yet circumcision by them administered, was in force; neither was the Passover, celebrated by them, or the sacrifices which they offered, any other then the true Passover and true sacrifices. Judas was a very hypocrite, yea Christ calls him a devil (John 6.70) and yet he preached the word at Christ's commandment, and baptized with the rest of his disciples (John 4.1-2).

Thirdly, the sacrament, if it be administered in the name, and by the power of Christ, is the ordinance of God, being received by faith, yea a true sacrament of Christ; and the force and the efficacy thereof, doth not depend upon the worthiness of the minister, but upon Christ. The letters or epistles sent from one man to another, are authentic, and serve fully to express the mind of the author, though the messenger or carrier be wicked or naughty man. And in like manner, the sin of any man that stands in the room of a lawful minister, doth not nullify the sacrament, and therefore not heresy, or insufficiency. S. Cyprian who lived 300 years after Christ, was of this opinion, that sacraments administered by heretics were no sacraments. But the churches of Africa in those times concluded the contrary against him, according to the doctrine that hath been delivered.

The use. I. By this doctrine they are justly to be blamed, who would have their children rebaptized, which were before baptized by Popish priests; because the sacrament, though administered by a Papist, if he stand in the room of a true pastor; & keep the form thereof, is a true sacrament. II. Others by this doctrine come to be reprov'd, that refuse to receive the sacrament at the hands of nonpreaching ministers. For though the minister be insufficient, & preach not, yet if he be called by

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the Church, he hath the place of a lawful pastor, his administration is warrantable, and the Sacrament by him administered, a true Sacrament.

If it be said, that then the true sacraments may be out of the true church, as in the church of Rome at this day; because heretics and such like ministers are not of the church. I answer, that there is in the church of Rome, the hidden church of God, and the Sacraments are there used, not for the Romish church, but for the hidden church which is in the midst of Papacy; like as the lantern bears light not for itself, but for the passengers: yet hence it follows not, that we should communicate with idolaters, heretics, and wicked persons.

And so much of the administration of the sacraments in general. I come now to the particular sacraments.

6. Samuel Rutherford

Samuel Rutherford (or “Rutherford” as he spelled it) lived from 1600-1661. He was, for a time, Professor of Divinity at the University of St. Andrews, and one of four commissioners of the Church of Scotland to sit at the Westminster Assembly. He was one of the most illustrious Reformed theologians of his day, and along with Robert Baillie and George Gillespie, was a tireless defender of Presbyterianism. The Scottish Kirk in the 1640s greatly feared that the rise of Independency, Anabaptism, antinomianism, and other forms of “sectarianism” in Cromwell's Army, would wreck the train of reform before it even got up a full head of steam. Sectarians were calling for a complete rejection of the established church, pointing out that a chain of ordination linked current ministers back to Rome. This seemed to them to imply that “real” Christians could not stay in the established church because ordination by Rome had invalidated her ministry. In the excerpt included here, Rutherford specifically addresses this charge. Rome may be greatly deformed, he says. She may even be antichristian, but she still has a valid ministry. Our interest, of course, is not with the question of Roman ministry, per se. Rather, what we find most interesting is the way that Rutherford argues his point. His case for the validity of Roman ministry depends almost entirely on the assumption that Roman baptism is valid, which Rutherford takes to be the position of all Reformed Christians of his day, including the most vociferous separatists. Grant her baptism, Rutherford says, and one must also grant the validity of her ministry. Grant the validity of her ministry, and it follows that ordination by Rome cannot, by itself, invalidate the ministry of the established English church. Rutherford's argument sheds much light on how we should understand the Westminster Confession's statements about lawful calling and rebaptism (28.iii, vii), as well as passages like 25.vi which refer to the Pope as “that antichrist, that man of sin, that son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church” (emphasis added).

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This excerpt is taken from a book published in London in 1644 as The Due Right of Presbyteries, or a Peaceable Plea for the Government of the Church of Scotland (pp. 237-41). We have not tried to track down the authors or passages Rutherford cites, and many of the citations are incomplete. We have transcribed his marginal notes as they are found in the 1644 edition, though, they are here converted to endnotes. Rutherford's writing is at times torturous. He seems to have had little opportunity for revising his manuscript. We have slightly modernized the spelling and punctuation, made minor editorial clarifications within brackets, and broken some longer paragraphs into smaller ones.

The Validity of Roman Catholic Ministry

Though Luther and Zwingli had their whole calling from the Pope and his Clergy, yet think we not that calling [to be] no [true] calling, but that it hath that which essentially constituteth a minister:

1. *Caiaphas* entered most corruptly to the Priesthood, by the favor of men, and to be high-priest for [only] one year contrary to the Law, which ordained the high-priest to remain for his lifetime. But as *Josephus*¹ said, [also] *Toletus*,² *Caitan*,³ *Maldonat*,⁴ *Iansonius*,⁵ yea and [even as] our own writers *Calvin*,⁶ *Marlorat*,⁷ *Musculus*,⁸ *Rollock*,⁹ [and] *Bullinger*¹⁰ observe, all was done by the will and lust

¹ Josephus, *Antiq* lib.15.c.3.

² Tolet, *Com. in Ioan* 1.12.

³ Cajetan, *ib.*

⁴ Maldonat.

⁵ Ianson. *can.*

⁶ Calvin.

⁷ Marlorat.

⁸ Muscul. *com. in Ioan.*

⁹ Rollocus.

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of men; yet Caiaphus was the high-priest and prophesied, which is a specific act of a called prophet, John 11.51-52. It is said, [that] he prophesied as high-priest.

2. The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses's chair, and are to be heard, Mat 23.1, in so far as they teach God's truth, and yet their entry to their calling was corrupt, if it be true [as] diverse say, that Christ, [in] John 10.7-9, calleth the Scribes and Pharises, *Thieves and Robbers*, because *they came not in by the door, but climbed up another way*. But however there [may have been] corruption in the way of their coming to the chair, [and given that] they leavened all [the] other Ordinances of God, and the High Priest [himself] entered a false way, [therefore] the rest of the Rules could not come, but in a corrupt way. But though *Augustin¹¹ and Clemens Alexan¹² expound the place, [in] John 10, of such as lack a lawful calling, but [if we should interpret it that way] then the place cannot agree with the Scribes and Pharisees, which seemeth to fight with the course of the text. But our interpreters Brentius,¹³ Beza,¹⁴ [and] Rollock,¹⁵ expound the place [as referring to] those who preach not Christ soundly, [as] the door and the foundation, but [rather they are those who preach] human traditions, and yet [who still] had a calling. And the text saith so much, where [in] v. 9 salvation is promised to every one who entereth in by Christ the door. Now salvation is not promised to a man, because he hath a lawful calling to the ministry; he may have that and yet be a Child of perdition.*

We are nowhere forbidden in God's Word to hear teachers sent and called, but only wolves in sheep skins, void of all calling, and intruders. For pastors may be antichrists in [1.] the manner of the entry, as Caiaphas, [or 2.] in the matter of the Doctrine, teaching some of men's traditions, in place of God's Word as [the] Scribes

¹⁰ Bullinger.

¹¹ Augustinus *contra. advers. leg. & c pro. lib .3. c .4*, venerunt a seipsis, non missi.

¹² Clem. Alex. *Strom* . 1. Non missi a Deo.

¹³ Brentius, *humanorum traditionum doctores* .

¹⁴ Beza, *in loc*.

¹⁵ Rollock, *com. ib*.

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and Pharisees, [or 3. by tolerating an] antichristian calling, as *prelates* do and have done in Britain. And yet their Ministry [may still] be valid, and his Ministerial acts not [be] null. It is sufficient [simply] that the governing Church give him a calling, either by themselves, their express call, their silence, or tacit calling, or their approbation, communicating with him in his Ministry, [either] by those to whom the Church resigned her power, or by those who stand in place of the Church. Though prelates invade the place of the Church, yet because [1.], they themselves be pastors and have power to teach and baptize as pastors called of Christ, Mat. 18.19, [and 2.] because they stand for the Church, approving, or some way by silence consenting (as in the case of *Caiaphas* entry to the priest-hood) there[fore], these who are baptized by them, are not re-baptized, and those who are ordained pastors by them are not re-ordained, but have a calling to the Ministry and do validly confer a calling upon others.

Yea, many of great learning think that at the beginning of Reformation, thousands being under popery baptized by midwives and private persons were never re-baptized. [It is] not that they think such baptism valid, but where the Sacrament is lacking, *ex invincibili ignorantia facti*, (out of an invincible ignorance of a fact), such [who are] that way baptized do indeed lack the Lord's seal. But we cannot for that [reason] say that they are no better than infidels and unbaptized *Turkes* and *Jewes*, because [1.] their being born in the visible Church giveth a federal holiness, as all of Jewish parents had a federal right to circumcision, and were, *eatenus* [in this way] separated from the womb. [2.] Because their profession of that covenant whereof baptism is a seal, separateth them sufficiently from infidels, though they lack the seal external. But our Divines esteem (and that justly) baptism administrated by women, or such as have no calling, to be no baptism at all; for which let the reader see *Calvin*,¹⁶ *Beza*,¹⁷ [and] the learned *Rivet*.¹⁸ *We stand not for what Bellarmine*,¹⁹ *Maldonatus*,²⁰ *Gretferus*,²¹ and other papists say on the

¹⁶ Calvin, *Inst . lib . 4. c .15. Sect . 20. Epist 326.*

¹⁷ Beza, *lib. quest. de baptism.*

¹⁸ Rivetus, *in Catbol.Orthod. tom. 2. tract. 2. q. 7.*

¹⁹ Bellarmine, *de baptism . c.7.*

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contrary, and also Cajetan,²² and Toletus.²³

[John] Robinson [the Separatist] and our brethren acknowledge that the Church of Rome hath true baptism, even as the vessels of the Lord's house profaned in Babylon may be carried back to the temple. But if these vessels were broken and mingled with brass and iron, and cast in another mould they could not obtain their former place in the temple. Baptism is a vessel profaned in Babel, but not broken; but the ministry and priesthood of Rome is like the new melted and mingled vessel, and [is] essentially degenerated from the office of pastorship.²⁴ But I answer, if baptism be valid in Rome [then] so are the ministers baptizers. For if the ministers and priests be essentially no ministers, then baptism administered by the Romish priests is no Ministry,²⁵ and all [the same] as [that] administered by midwives and private persons, who therefore cannot administer the sacraments validly in the essential causes, because they are essentially no ministers. If therefore, Robinson will [insist] that [the] Romish priesthood [is] essentially no ministry, [then] by that same reason he must say [that] baptism administered by Romish priests is no baptism. The contrary whereof he confesseth: otherwise he must say [that] baptism administered, a non habente potestatem, even by women and private men, is valid, and cannot be but esteemed lawful in the substance of the act. Those have a ministry, essentially entire, who have power under Christ to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments, Matthew 28.19. The Romish priests have this, and are called to this by the Church.

But saith Robinson, how can England forsake the Church of Rome, and forsake the ministry, which is in the Church, as in the subject, especially, seeing you teach that a true ministry maketh essentially a true Church?

²⁰ Maldonat. *Com. in Ioann* . c . 6 . v . 33.

²¹ Gretser, *cas. Conscien* . q . 4 . *de baptism* . p . 17-18ff.

²² Cajetan, *Com in Ioan* . 3.

²³ Toletus, in 3. *An* . 3.

²⁴ Robins. *Iustific* . p . 276-77.

²⁵ It is possible that the word "Ministry" is a printer's error and should read "baptism."

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Answer: [1] England may well separate from Rome [as Rome turns away from] the fundamental parts of Faith, and [yet] not separate from Rome's baptism, or ministry, in so far as they be essentially the ordinances of Christ. And I retort this argument: how can Separatists separate from both us and Rome, and yet retain the baptism in both our church and Rome. [2] A ministry true in the essence may make a Church true *kata ti*, in so far; but because of many other substantial corruptions in Rome, it is a Church which we ought to forsake.

But, saith Robinson,²⁶ apostates in the 10 tribes [of Israel] leaving the Church which was radically at [i.e., had its center in] Jerusalem, upon their repentance were readmitted to enter into the Temple, into which no uncircumcised person might enter. But any of the priests following idols, were never readmitted to be priests, though they should repent; therefore the ministry and baptism are not alike.

I answer [1] that [if] the true Church were only at Jerusalem radically, as you say, [this] would [imply] that the 10 tribes revolting from David's house ceased to be a Church, which is false. Israel, [as] all the land was in Covenant with God, had circumcision and the Passover, and so was a true visible Church, even when they met in their synagogues. The altar, sacrifices, [and] temple, are not the essentials of a visible Church. There was a Church, and the Church did pray toward the temple even in Babylon, and [they] were to profess the true God before the heathen, Jer 10.11. [2] There [are] typical reasons to hinder men why they cannot be capable of the priesthood, that did not exclude them from Church state. But this hindereth not [that] if the seals administrated by a minister be true seals, then is the minister thereof *eatenus* [in this way] a true minister.

He addeth,²⁷ a minister may leave off to be a minister, and be justly degraded and excommunicated, but none ever attempted to unbaptize one who was baptized, nor *can* he be unbaptized who is baptized.

²⁶ Robinson, *Justific* . p. 316.

²⁷ Robinson, *Justific* . p. 317.

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I answer: That proveth a difference between the ministry and baptism, which is not the question at issue; but it [still] proveth not this to be false: if Rome's baptism be lawful in its essence, so is Rome's ministry.

7. Westminster Confession of Faith (1647)

The Westminster Confession nowhere comments explicitly on the question of the validity of Roman baptism. However, given the consensus that we have seen among Reformed theologians up to the time of the Assembly, that should not surprise us. From all the evidence that we have, it seems that the Reformed Churches were unanimous in preserving the traditional anti-Donatist formula that had reigned throughout the medieval church. Rutherford, who surely is a reliable judge, insists (see above) that no one in those days, not even the most radical separatists, rejected Roman baptism. In this context, therefore, one would need an explicit statement to the contrary to justify any doubts about the Assembly's position. In this light 28.vii, seems quite straightforward:

The sacrament of Baptism is but once to be administered to any person.

Without any other qualification this must be understood to forbid rebaptizing those who have received Roman baptism. When Calvin, the French Reformed Church, Beza, Knox, Perkins, Rutherford, and Baxter (see below) affirm the legitimacy of Rome's baptism, there is simply no reason to assume that the Divines rejected this. What's more, when Rutherford (a member of the Assembly) insists that not

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even separatists like Robinson rejected it, we have all the confirmation we need for this *prima facie* interpretation of 28.vii.

We might wonder, however, whether the Confession has anything further to say on the matter that might add confirmation to this reading. Indeed it does. Thus 27.iii:

The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments, rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them; neither doth the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth administer it, but upon the work of the Spirit, and the word of institution, which contains, together with a precept authorizing the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers.

Here we see the standard formula that legitimacy depends on the work of the Spirit and the words of institution. It does not depend on the piety or even the intention of the one who administers. The minister may be a hypocrite and the sacrament still valid. The minister may lack all sincerity, yet the result is still valid. It was a standard qualification, however, as we have seen in Beza and Perkins, to note that it must also be administered by a person recognized in the Church as a minister (whether with a legitimate calling or simply a *de facto* office). In fact, we see this qualification in 27.iv:

There be only two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the gospels, that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord: neither of which may be dispensed by any but a minister of the Word, lawfully ordained.

As long as one, then, is a lawfully ordained minister, even though he is hypocrite or heretic, the baptism he performs is valid. One might argue, however, that if Rome is not a true church, then her priests cannot be “lawfully ordained.” Here again though, it is important to note the standard distinction between a lawful minister and a true minister. Like a tyrant who usurps the throne, one may not be a “true” minister, in the sense of fully pleasing God, and yet, as the tyrant still rightly fills certain civil functions (like performing marriages, arresting

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thieves and murderers, or raising an emergency defensive army) so the usurping minister may lawfully perform the functions of the ministry. In fact 25.vi recognizes this standard Reformed formula, for example, when it recognizes that the Pope of Rome is not a “true” minister.

There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ; nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the Church against Christ, and all that is called God.

He “exalts himself . . . against Christ, and all that is called God.” He can hardly be considered a “true” minister of Jesus Christ. However, the Confession notes that he exalts himself “in the Church.” This acknowledges that *in some sense* Rome is still part of Christ’s fold and that God’s elect are still to be found in her, but this flock is subject to a tyrannical, usurping hierarchy. This corresponds almost exactly to the argument we saw in Beza and Perkins above. The hierarchy may not be “true” ministers, but given that they are the *de facto* ministers over at least some of Christ’s sheep, they are the ones who nevertheless must perform necessary functions for those sheep.

The Westminster Confession does not address our question explicitly, nevertheless, when read in its historical context, and in the context of its broader ecclesiological assumptions, it shows itself to be solidly within the Reformed tradition on this question. The Assembly assumed the validity of Roman Baptism and thus would most certainly include Roman Catholics among those in 28.vii who should not be rebaptized. Presbyterians who do so are thus, out of accord with their own standards.

8. Richard Baxter

Richard Baxter lived from 1615 until 1691, spanning one of the most tumultuous centuries in British history. He was a noted preacher in a generation of noted preachers. His tireless labors as a parish minister, his extensive writings on Christian life and piety, and his exhaustive “counseling manual” (The Christian Directory) mark him out, however, as an equally noteworthy pastor. What is not always recognized about Baxter’s writings on spirituality and pastoral care is that they were part of his larger vision for a renewal of Christendom in Britain.ⁱ Much like the Scottish divines at the Westminster Assembly (particularly, Samuel Rutherford and Robert Baillie), he saw two ominous threats to the nation’s stability. On the one hand, he opposed the radical sectarians who had been unleashed by Cromwell’s policy of toleration (i.e., antinomians, millenarians, “fanatics,” and “enthusiasts”), while on the other hand he opposed Roman Catholicism, both as a form of idolatry and as a political threat from a foreign power. He considered both of these to be grave political and religious dangers.ⁱⁱ His opposition to Rome, however, was not simply reactionary. Baxter’s opposition was a subtle and principled one that kept him from automatically embracing the opposite extreme of sectarianism. In the following excerpt from his Christian Directory, Baxter argues for the traditional Reformed position on Roman Baptism, acknowledging how and to what extent Rome may be considered a true church, and how and to what extent her baptism may be considered valid baptism.

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Quest. II. *Whether we must esteem the church of Rome a true church? And in what sense some divines affirm it, and some deny it.*

Want of some easy distinguishing hath made that seem a controversy here, which is so plain, that is can hardly be any at all but to protestants, if the question had been but truly stated. (d)

Remember therefore that by a church is meant, not a mere company of Christians, anyhow related to each other; but a society consisting of an ecclesiastical head and body, such as we call a political society. 2. And that we speak not of an accidental head (such as the king is, because he governeth them *suo modo* by the sword); for that is not an essential constitutive part; but of a constitutive ecclesiastical head and body. 3. That the question is not, whether the church of Rome be a part of the church, but whether it be a true church? And now I answer.

1. To affirm the church of Rome to be the catholic or universal church, is more than to affirm it to be a true catholic church, that is, a true part of the catholic church: and is as much as to say that it is the whole and only church, and that there is no other; which is [an] odious falsehood and usurpation, and slander against all other churches.
2. The church of Rome is so called in the question, as it is a policy [i.e., polity] or church in a general sense; and the meaning of the question is, Whether it be a divine, or a human or diabolical policy [polity]; a lawful church.
3. The church of Rome is considered, 1. Formally, as a church or policy [polity]. 2. Materially, as the singular persons are qualified. It is the form that denominateth. Therefore the question must be taken of the Roman policy [polity], or of the church of Rome as such; that is, as it is one ruler pretending to be the vicarious, constitutive, governing head of all Christ's visible church on earth, and the body which owneth him in this relation.

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4. Therefore, I conclude (and so do all protestants) that this policy [polity] or church of Rome is no true church of Christ's instituting or approbation, but a human, sinful policy [polity], formed by the temptation of Satan, the prince of pride, deceit, and darkness. The proof of which is the matter of whole loads of protestant writings. And indeed the proof of their policy [polity] being incumbent on themselves, they fail in it, and are still fain to fly to pretended false tradition for proof, in which the sophisters know that either they must be judges themselves, and it must go for truth because they say it; or else that if they can carry the controversy into a thicket or wood of fathers and church history, at least they can confound the ignorant, and evade themselves. Of this see my "Disput[ation] With Johnson," and my "Key for Catholics," &c.
5. The bishop of the English papists, Smith, called bishop of Chalcedon, in his Survey, c.v. saith, "To us it sufficeth that the bishop of Rome is St. Peter's successor; and this all the fathers testify, and all the catholic church believeth; but whether it be *jure divino* or *humano*, is no point of faith." The like hath Davenport,^m called Franc. a Sancta Clara more largely. By this let the reader judge whether we need more words to prove their church to be such as Christ never instituted, when the belief of their divine right is no part of their own faith.
6. If the church of Rome in its formal policy [polity] be but of human institution, it is, 1. Unnecessary to salvation. 2. Unlawful; because they that first instituted it had no authority so to do, and so were usurpers. For either the makers of it were themselves a church or no church. If no church, they could not lawfully make a church. Infidels or heathens are not to be our church makers. If a church, then there was a church before the church of Rome, and that of another form. And if that former form were of Christ's institution, man might not change it; if not, who made that form? And so on.

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7. Our divines therefore that say that the church of Rome is a true church, though corrupt, do not speak of it formally as to the papal policy [polity] or headship, but materially. 1. That all papists that are visible christians are visible parts of the universal church. 2. That their particular congregations considered abstractedly from the Roman headship may be true particular churches, though corrupt; which yet being the only difficulty shall be the matter of our next inquiry.

Quest. III. *Whether we must take the Romish clergy for true ministers of Christ? And whether their baptism and ordination be nullities?*

I join these two distinct questions together for brevity.

I. As true signifieth *regularly called*, so they are commonly irregular and not true ministers. But as true signifieth *real* opposed to a *nullity*, so it is now to be further considered.

The doubt lieth either of the sufficiency of his call, or of somewhat that is supposed to destroy it by contradiction or redundancy. 1. Whether he want any thing of absolute necessity to the office who is called in the church of Rome? Or, 2. Whether there be any thing in his office or entrance which nullifieth or invalidateth that which else would be sufficient?

For the first doubt, it is not agreed on among papists or protestants what is of necessity to the being of the office. Some think real godliness in the person is necessary; but most think not. Some think that visible, that is, seeming professed godliness, not disproved by mortal sin, is necessary; and some think not. Some think the people's election is necessary, and that ordination is but *ad bene esse* [for its well being]; and some think ordination is necessary *ad esse* [for its existence], and election *ad bene esse*, or not at all; and some think both necessary *ad esse*, and some neither. Some think the election of the people is necessary, though after election by others; some think it must be the consent of all the flock, or near all; and some only of the major part; and some of the better part, though the minor. Some think the

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ordination of a diocesan bishop necessary *ad esse*, and some not. Some think the number of two, or three, or more ordainers to be necessary, and some not. Some think it necessary to the validity of the ministry that it come down from the apostles by a true succession of truly ordained bishops, and some think not. Some few think that the magistrates' command or license is necessary, and only it, and most deny both. Johnson, alias Terret, the papist, in his *Disputation* against me, maintaineth that consecration is not necessary *ad esse*, nor any one way of election, by these or those, but only the church's reception upon such an election as may give them notice, and which may be different, according to different times, places, and other circumstances.

In the midst of these conditions, what is to be held? I have opened the case as fully and plainly as I can, in my second "Disput[ation] Of Church Government," about ordination, to which I must refer the reader: only here briefly touching upon the sum.

1. There are some personal qualifications necessary to the being of the office, (of which anon,) and some only to the well being.
2. The efficient conveying cause of power or office, is God's will signified in his own established law; in which he determineth that such persons so called shall receive from him such power, and be obliged to such office administrations.
3. Any providence of God which infallibly or satisfactorily notifieth to the church, who these persons are, that receive such power from God, doth oblige them to submit to them as so empowered.
4. God's ordinary established way of regular designation of the person, is by the church's consent, and the senior pastor's ordination.
5. By these actions they are not the proper donors or efficient of the power, or office given, but the consent of the people and the ordination do determine of the recipient, and so are regularly *causa sine qua non* of his reception. And the ordination is moreover a solemn investiture in the office, as when a servant is

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sent by delivering a key to deliver possession of a house, by his master's consent, to him that had before the owner's grant; and so it ceremoniously entereth him into visible possession; like the solemnizing of marriage, or the listing of a soldier, &c.

6. The people's consent (before or after) is not only by institution, but naturally necessary, that a man become a pastor to those persons (for no man can learn, obey, &c. without consent): but it is not of necessity to the being of the ministry in general, or in the first instant; a man without it may be authorized as a minister to go preach the gospel for conversion, and baptize and gather churches, thought not to be their stated pastor.
7. When death, distance, corruption, heresy, or malignity of pastors within reach, maketh it impossible to have ordination, God's choice of the person may be notified without it: as by, 1. Eminent qualifications. 2. The people's real necessities. 3. And the removal of impediments, and a concurrence of inviting opportunities and advantages. 4. And sometimes the people's desire. 5. And sometimes the magistrate's commission or consent; which though not absolutely necessary in themselves, yet may serve to design the person and invest him, when the ordinary way faileth; which is all that is left to man to do, to the conveyance of the power.

The case being thus stated, as to what is necessary to give the power or office, we may next inquire whether any papist priest have such power, by such means.

And, 1. We have sufficient reason to judge that many of them have all the personal qualifications which are essentially necessary. 2. Many among them have the consent of a sober christian people (of which more anon). And Mr. Jacob, who was against bishops and their ordination, proveth at large, that by election or consent of the people alone, a man may be a true pastor, either without such ordination, or notwithstanding both the vanity and error of it. 3. Many of them have ordination by able and sober bishops, if that

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also be necessary. 4. In that ordination, they are invested in all that is essential to the pastoral office.

So that I see not that their calling is a nullity through defect of anything of absolute necessity to its being and validity; though it be many ways irregular and sinful.

II. We are next therefore to inquire whether any contradicting additions make null that which else would be no nullity. And this is the great difficulty. For as we accuse not their religion for having too little, but too much, so this is our chief doubt about their ministry.

And, 1. It is doubted, as to the office itself, whether a mass priest be a true minister, as having another work to do, even to make his Maker, and to give Christ's real flesh with his hands to the people; and to preach the unsound doctrines of their church; and these seem to be essential parts of his function.

The case is very bad and sad; but that which I said about the heresies or errors which may consist with christianity, when they overthrow it but by an undiscerned consequence, must be here also considered. The prime part of their office is that (as to the essentials) which Christ ordained: this they receive, and to this they sew a filthy rag of man's devising; but if they knew this to be inconsistent with christianity or the essentials of the ministry, we may well presume (of many of them) they would not receive it. Therefore as an error which consequentially contradicteth some essential article of faith, nullifieth not his christianity who first and fastest holdeth the faith, and would cast away the error if he saw the contradiction, (as Davenant, Morton, and Hall have showed, Epist. Conciliat.) so it is to be said as to practical error in the present case. They are their grievous errors and sins, but, for aught I see, do not nullify their office to the church. As a mass priest, he is no minister of Christ (as an anabaptist is not as a re-baptizer, nor a separatist as a separater, nor an antinomian, or any erroneous person, as a preacher of that error); but as a christian pastor ordained to preach the gospel, baptize, administer the Lord's supper, pray, praise God, guide the church, he may be.

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The same answer serveth to the objection as it extendeth to the erroneous doctrines which they preach, which are but by consequence against the essentials of religion.

2. But it is a greater doubt, Whether any power of the ministry can be conveyed by antichrist, or from him? And whether God will own any of antichrist's administrations? Therefore seeing they profess themselves to have no office but what they receive from the pope, and Christ disowning his usurpation, the same man cannot be the minister of Christ and antichrist; as the same man cannot be an officer in the king's army and his enemies'.

But this will have the same solution as the former. If this antichrist were the open, professed enemy to Christ, then all this were true: because their corrupt additions would not by dark consequences, but so directly contain the denial of christianity or the true ministry, that it were not possible to hold both. But (as our divines commonly note) antichrist is to sit *in the temple of God*, and the pope's treason is under the pretence of the greatest service and friendship to Christ, making himself his vicar-general without his commission. So they that receive power from him, do think him to be Christ's vicar indeed, and so renounce not Christ, but profess their first and chief relation to be to him, and dependence on him, and that they would have nothing to do with the pope, if they knew him to be against Christ. And some of them write, that the power or office is immediately from Christ, and that the pope, ordainers, and electors do but design the person that shall receive it (because else they know not what to say of the election and consecration of the pope himself, who hath no superior). And the Spanish bishops in the council of Trent held so close to this, that the rest were fain to leave it undetermined; so that it is no part of their religion, but a doubtful opinion, Whether the power of bishops be derived from the pope, though they be government by him?

But as to the other, the case seemeth like this: if a subject in Ireland usurp the lieutenancy, and tell all the people that he hath the king's commission to be his lieutenant, and command all the submit to

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him, and receive their places from him, and obey him; and the king declareth him a traitor, (antecedently only by the description of his laws,) and maketh it the duty of the subjects to renounce him; those now that know the king's will, and yet adhere to the usurper, though they know that the king is against it, are traitors with him: but those from whom he keepeth the knowledge of the laws, and who for want of full information believe him to be really the king's lieutenant, (and specially living where all believe it,) but yet would renounce him if they knew that he had not the king's commission; these are the king's subjects, though in ignorance they obey a usurper. And on this account it is that Archbishop Usher concluded, that an ignorant papist might be saved, but the learned hardly. But when the learned, through the disadvantage of their education, are under the same ignorance, being learned but on one side but to their greater seduction, the case may be the same.

The same man therefore may receive an office from Christ, who yet ignorantly submitteth to the pope, and receiveth corrupt additions from him.

But suppose I be mistaken in all this, yet to come to the second question,

III. Whether baptism and ordination given by them be nullities? I answer, no, on a further account, 1. Because that the ministry which is a nullity to the receiver, (that is God will punish him as a usurper,) may yet perform those ministerial acts which are no nullities to the church. Else how confused a case would all churches be in! For it is hard ever to know whether ministers have all things essential to their office. Suppose a man be ignorant, or a heretic against some essential article of faith, or suppose that he feigned orders of ordination when he had none; or that he was ordained by such as really had no power to do it; or suppose he pretended the consent of the majority of the people, when really the greater part were for another: if all this be unknown, his baptizing and other administrations are not thereby made nullities to the church, though they be sins in him. The reason is, because that the church shall not

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suffer, nor lose her right for another man's sin! When the fault is not theirs, the loss and punishment shall not be theirs. He that is found in possession of the place, performeth valid administration to them that know not his usurpation, and are not guilty of it. Otherwise we should never have done re-baptizing, nor know easily when we receive any valid administrations, while we are so disagreed about the necessities of the office and call; and when it is so hard in all things to judge of the call of all other men.

2. And as the papists say, that a private man or woman may baptize in extremity, so many learned protestants think, that though a private man's baptism be a sin, yet it is no nullity, though he were known to be no minister.

And what is said of baptism, to avoid tediousness, you may suppose said of ordination, which will carry the first case far, as to the validity of the ministry received by papists' ordination, as well as of baptism and visible christianity received by them. For my part, God used Parson's "Book of Resolution corrected," so much to my good, and I have known so many eminent christians, and some ministers, converted by it, that I am glad that I hear none make a controversy of it, whether the conversion, faith, or love to God be valid, which we receive by the books or means of any papist?

ⁱ A glimpse of this agenda may be seen in his book *Holy Commonwealth* published in 1659. Though it was repudiated by Baxter under pressure after the restoration of the monarchy, scholars have noted that it's key ideas remained important for Baxter throughout his life. It has recently been reprinted in the *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* series, with a very helpful introduction by William Lamont.

ⁱⁱ Of course, Baxter would not have acknowledged this very modern distinction. For him, "secular politics" and "non-political religion" were equally unthinkable.

ⁱⁱⁱ System. Fidei.

9. Francis Turretin

Francis Turretin (1623-1687) was a Reformed theologian of (as his name suggests) Italian descent. His grandfather (also named Francis) originally came to Geneva as a Protestant exile and was given citizenship in 1627. The family rose to great prominence in the city, where the junior Francis's father, Benedict, became a noted pastor and professor of theology in the Genevan Academy until his death in 1631. Francis succeeded him many years later and became one of the most esteemed Reformed theologians of the day. He was later followed by his son Jean Alphonse Turretin, who likewise became a noted (if somewhat less orthodox) theologian holding the same chair in Geneva. Francis Turretin's magnum opus, Institutio Theologiae Elencticae (Institutes of Elenctic Theology, P&R Publishing 1992-97) became the standard textbook in theology throughout much of the Reformed world. Jonathan Edwards highly recommended Turretin in the 18th Century (Works, Yale University Press 16:217), and the Institutio in Latin was the chief text during the 19th Century both at Union Seminary in Virginia under R.L. Dabney, and at Princeton Seminary until the publication of Charles Hodge's Systematic Theology . Through his place in these seminaries (as well as indirectly through the ongoing legacy of Hodge), Turretin has played an inestimably important role in the development of the North American Presbyterian tradition. Turretin's treatment of the question of Roman Baptism is reprinted here with permission from P&R Publishing.

Fourteenth Question: The Lawful Ministry of Baptism

I. The question is necessary on account of the Romanists who defend baptism by laymen; yea, even by women. They do indeed teach that it is not lawful for laymen to baptize publicly and statedly; or even privately when a priest is present; or even when he is absent, except in a

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case of necessity. But they maintain that where there is danger of death, it is lawful for any layman (whether baptized or unbaptized) to baptize, provided he is acquainted with the rite. Yea, they grant this power even to women, an error flowing from that other concerning the absolute necessity of baptism.

II. On the other hand we contend that the baptism by laymen (of whatever sex they may be) is a nullity and think that it cannot be rightly administered by anyone except by a pastor lawfully called, whether in a case of necessity or not.

III. The reasons are: (1) the right to baptize belongs only to those to whom was given by Christ the right of preaching the gospel. For these two attend each other as parts of the public ministry and are indissolubly joined together. Now Christ gave this right to the apostles alone and their lawful successors (Mt. 28:19, 20). And that it does not belong to others is evident from v. 16, where the eleven apostles are said to have departed into Galilee. But although many others had been present besides the apostles when Christ spoke, it does not follow that these words (“Go, teach all nations, baptizing them”) do not belong to the apostles alone, because there was nothing to hinder the command of Christ being given to the apostles alone in the presence of many witnesses. It is certain that Christ here addresses the sacred ministers whom he was calling to the preaching of the gospel. Therefore, as no one ought to have preached by public authority unless he was sent and had a peculiar call to it, so neither ought he to baptize. Therefore, a woman ought not to teach in the church (1 Tim. 2:12).

IV. Second, no one can meddle with the seals of a king, except he who in a special manner obtains this office and performs the functions of a chancellor. Now the sacraments are the seals of the King of kings, whose custody and dispensation therefore belong to none except sacred ministers.

V. Third, it is no more lawful for a private person or a woman to baptize than to administer the Lord’s Supper. Nor ought it to be said that they hold dissimilar relations, because baptism is a sacrament of confirmation. Adults indeed are renewed when they cannot use the

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Supper by the desire for it and the promise of the gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. But to infants no other means of regeneration and salvation is left besides baptism. They both do hold the same relation; for if we are bound to enter into the church, we ought also to be nourished in it. And if we can be nourished by the word alone in case of necessity, why could we not be received into the internal communion of the invisible church without baptism through the grace of God?

VI. Fourth, because baptism by laymen and women is grounded upon the erroneous foundation of the absolute necessity of baptism. This being once overthrown, that must also necessarily be overthrown.

VII. Fifth, the ancients agree as to woman-baptism (*gynaikobaptismon*), that it is unlawful. Epiphanius gives it as one of the errors of the Marcionites (*Panarion* 42 [trans. F. Williams, 1987], p. 275; PG 41.699-700). Tertullian says, “A woman is not permitted to speak in the church, nor to baptize, nor to offer” (*On the Veiling of Virgins* 9 [ANF 4:33; PL 2.901-2]). In the Clementine Constitution, the title of a chapter is: “Women ought not to baptize; for it is wicked and contrary to the teaching of Christ” (*Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* 3.9 [ANF 7:429]). Canon 100 of the Council of Carthage (IV) is: “Let not a woman presume to baptize” (Helege, 2:417). False is the addition by Lombard (*Sententiarum* IV, Dist. 6*.1 [PL 192/2.852]) and Gratian, “unless necessity compels” (“Decreti,” Pt. III, De Consecratione, Dist. IV. 20, *Corpus Iuris Canonici* [1959], 1:1367) because this clause is found neither in the canons of the African Church, nor in Balsamo.

VIII. The office of teaching is either public and from authority, or private from charity. The latter can be exercised by private persons, but not the former. Now the sacraments as seals of the king are acts of authority which cannot be dispensed by private persons, not even out of charity. Thus instruction and doctrine have a wider scope than baptism. For although no one but a baptized person teaches, still everyone teaching does not baptize. Besides there is one necessity of doctrine,

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which is absolute and of the means to salvation; another of the sacraments, which is hypothetical and of command.

IX. The example of Zipporah circumcising her son cannot render woman-baptism (*gynaikobaptism*) lawful (Ex. 4:24-26). (1) We must live by laws, not by examples; and that example neither can nor ought to be imitated, not only because drawn from a woman unwilling and intensely excited and hardly sane on account of her rage (v. 25). (2) There is a difference between circumcision and baptism. The former could be administered by private persons and nothing peculiar is ascribed to it; but the right to baptize is given to those alone who have the right to teach. (3) The consequence does not hold good from what was done before the establishment of the Jewish polity to what was done afterwards; otherwise we would have to say that the intermission of circumcision in the wilderness ought to have been tolerated in Canaan (which is absurd). (4) The prophetess did this in the presence of her husband. Now the Romanists do not allow women to baptize when priests are present. (5) Nor if God was on this account reconciled to Moses does it follow forthwith that this act pleased God in all respects or that there was no sin in it, because God is appeased from his own mercy and not from the dignity and merit of our works. The thing could have been approved by God, but not the mode of the thing; as what the Scripture narrates of the humility of Ahab (1 K. 21:29), also how by the worship which the nations introduced from Assyria into Samaria exercised in worshipping the true God with false gods, they were delivered from the lions (2 K. 17:25-41).

X. They were neither private persons nor merely laymen who are said in Acts to have baptized. Philip was not only a deacon, but also an evangelist (Acts 21:8). Ananias was one of the seventy disciples, pastor of the church of Damascus, who did this by command of God, to whom, moreover, Paul was sent. It is not said that Cornelius and his friends were commanded to be baptized by the brethren who were with Peter (Acts 10:48); but only that they were commanded to be baptized or that Peter commanded them that they should be baptized. Hence it no more follows that they were baptized by the companions of Peter

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than by Peter himself. Otherwise it would follow that laymen can baptize in the presence of ministers, which the Romanists deny.

XI. The three thousand men who are said to have been baptized by the apostles might have been baptized conveniently by them by sprinkling, if not by immersion. Besides, there might have been many of the seventy disciples to whom this power belonged.

XII. They who administered baptism by the command and authority of the apostles are not to be considered as private persons, for a calling could not have been wanting to him who did anything by the authority of the apostles, especially since they did not seem to baptize as much as the apostles by them, even as Christ baptized only by the apostles (John 4:1, 2*).

XIII. As to baptism by laymen, nothing certain can be gathered from the fathers. For although it is not to be denied that many allowed it—Tertullian (*On Baptism* 17 [ANF 3:677]), Jerome (*Dialogue Against the Luciferians* [NPNF2, 6:324]), Augustine (*Contra Epistolam Parmeniani* 2*.13 [PL 43.69-73]) and the Council of Elvira (Canon 38, Hefele, 1:152)—it is certain that others did not approve of it. Basil judges it “to be wrong for laymen to baptize” (*Letter 188 [1]*, “To Amphilochius, (”) 1 [FC 28:10-11; PG 32.670]). Ignatius (Pseudo-Ignatius, “Ad Heronem” 3.2, *Patres Apostilici* [ed. F.X. Funk, 1913], 2:311) and Epiphanius (*Panarion* 79.3 [PG 42.743]) are so averse to the administration of baptism by laymen that they do not allow even deacons to baptize.

XIV. Since a sacrament is a public act, it ought to be publicly administered in the church by public ministers and no necessity or sufficient reason can be given why a sacred and public act should be privately performed. The ordination of God is our highest law, the supreme necessity, which must be obeyed, rather than indulge popular ignorance and weakness.

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Fifteenth Question: Is baptism administered by heretics lawful? We distinguish.

I. The question was long ago agitated in the time of Cyprian and Stephen, Bishop of Rome, with great spirit; some contending that baptism administered by a heretical minister was lawful and valid, others however denying it and maintaining that all such should be rebaptized. For Cyprian and his fellow African bishops decreed that baptism administered by heretics and schismatics was not true baptism and that on this account they should be rebaptized who approached the Catholic faith; as is evident from the various epistles of Cyprian to Januarius (Letter 72, "To Januarius" [ANF 5:375-77]), to Quintus (Letter 70, "To Quintus" [ANF 5:377-78]), to Stephen (Letter 71, "To Stephen" [ANF 5:378-79]), to Jubaianus* (Letter 72, "To Jubaianus" [ANF 5:379-86]) and others, and from the Acts of the Council of Carthage ("Seventh Council of Carthage" [ANF 5:565-72]) over which Cyprian presided, Still they so affirmed these things as not to conduct themselves say in the opening of the Council, *ibid.*, p. 565). In this respect, they differed much from the Donatists, who derived this error from them. They defended it with great zeal, deserting the communion of believers of those who disagreed with them. Hence the error merged into heresy and from a discord arose a schism, concerning which Augustine is to be consulted in his books, *On Baptism, Against the Donatists* (NPNF1, 4:411-514) and *De Haeresibus* 69 (PL 42.43-44).

II. Stephen, the Roman bishop, in accordance with the ancient custom of the Catholic church, affirmed that those baptized by heretics should be received without a new baptism; as appears from the epistolary discussion of Stephen and Cyprian, where he gives his opinion, the sum of which is: "If anyone comes to us from any heresy, nothing new should be done, except what is customary, that the hand be placed upon him for repentance." In the following century in the First Nicene Council, this question was decided when it was said of those who style themselves Cathari: "If at any time they come to the Catholic church, it pleased the holy and great Council that receiving the imposition of

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hands, they should thus continue among the clergy” (*hoste cheirothetemenous autous menein houtos en to klero*, Canon 8, Council of Nicea, cf. tanner, 1:9). Hence it is evident that this great synod esteemed valid not only the baptism, but also the clerical ordination received under the ministry of heretics. Still the Paulianists or Samosatians, are excepted by Canon 19, whom the synod determined should “be baptized over again” (*anabaptizesthai ex apantos*, Tanner, 1:15) because they did not acknowledge the Trinity. Hence it is evident that Cyprian and Stephen erred through an excess of counterpoise (*ametrian tes antholkes*): the former when he held that those baptized by any heretics should be rebaptized, the latter when he thought that no one of them ought to be rebaptized, but that all should be received without a new baptism. Both ran into extremes. But here the mean is the safest, regard being held to the distinction between heretics.

III. Here therefore we think the question can be solved by distinguishing between heretics. For there are some who corrupt the substance of baptism and omit or change the form of institution; such as were the ancient Arians, who denied a Trinity of persons in unity of essence, and the modern Socinians. Others, while they retain substantial and defend the true doctrine of the holy Trinity contained in the formula of baptism, “err on the other heads of doctrine”; as the ancient Novatians and Donatists, and the modern Romanists and Arminians. As to the former, we judge that baptism administered by them is null, and so they are not properly to be rebaptized, but baptized, who have been baptized by such heretics, because they evidently corrupt the essential form of baptism, to which the invocation of the Trinity belongs. For this reason, the baptism of the Arians, who baptized “in the Father, the only true God, in Jesus Christ, the Savior and a creature, and in the Holy Spirit, the servant of both” (according to the testimony of Jerome, *Dialogue Against the Luciferians* 9 [NPNF2, 6:324;PL 23.172] and Athanasius, “*Contra Arianos, Oratio tertia*,” *Opera omnia* [1627], 1:430-31). Still a distinction must be made here again. For either the minister alone was infected with that

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heresy or the whole church with him. If the latter, we deny it to be a true baptism. If the former (to wit, if the church thinks rightly, notwithstanding the error of the pastor, if he is a secret heretic), provided the formula of Christ be retained, we believe the baptism to be valid and that it is not necessary to rebaptize those who have been once baptized. The sacrament is the property of the church, which is administered in her name and in her faith. On this account, the hidden error of the minister detracts nothing from the integrity of the baptism, provided the essentials are observed and nothing is changed in the word or element. Hence it is evident what reply should be made to the question which can be put, whether the baptism administered in an orthodox church by a minister imbued with Antitrinitarian or Jewish errors (but not detected) is valid. Undoubtedly, the public faith of the church is here to be considered, into which he (who is baptized) is introduced and the promises made to him by Christ. Since these do not depend upon the minister, he (however deeply tainted with secret heresy) cannot render them useless and void.

IV. However, if heretics retain the fundamentals of baptism (which constitute its essence) and do not change or corrupt its form, we hold that baptism administered by such is valid, although they may err on various articles of faith, and their baptism may be mixed up with various extraneous rites in accidentals.

V. The reasons are: (1) the essentials remain there as much as to form as to matter (to wit, the word with the element and the formula prescribed by Christ—that it be administered in the name of the Trinity). (2) Neither the prophets, nor Christ, nor the apostles ever reprehended circumcision as void which had been performed in the Jewish church by idolatrous and heretical priests, such as the Pharisees were. (3) The example of Zipporah teaches that an invalid circumcision as to men is valid with God. (4) We do not read of any who were baptized by heretics having been rebaptized by the apostles.

VI. Although heretics are not true members of the invisible church, that does not hinder them from administering true baptism provided they retain its essentials; for they accommodate the tongue and hand only in

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this act to God. It is God who baptized and who is efficacious through the minister; as God through a corrupt ministry can gather a church from adults, so through baptism administered by heretics from infants. For although they do not belong to the orthodox church, still they can belong to the external but impure church. In them, the infidelity of men does not make void the faith of God, because baptism is not of men, but of God, which he wishes sometimes to be conserved in an impure church; as we find that God still preserved a remnant under Ahab in the time of Elijah (1 K. 19:18), however much the church had been corrupted in other ways.

VII. Now if it is asked whether it is lawful in any case to seek or to receive baptism of this kind, the reply should be made with a distinction. From heretics of the first order, who tear away the foundations of Christianity and of baptism, it should be sought in no case because there can be no true baptism among them. But as to others who retain the essence of baptism, but err in other things fatally (whether as to doctrine or as to worship), although we think their baptism ought not to be repeated, still we do not judge that it can be sought or received without guilt. The reception of such baptism shows our communion with them and participation in their errors, from which the Scriptures command us to flee. Also we are a stumbling block to the weaker brethren contrary to the precept of the apostle. What has been said in general of the baptism of heretics ought to be applied in particular to the baptism of the Romanists. Although we think it ought to be retained in those who come from them to us because the essentials of baptism remain with them; still we deny that it can rightly be sought or received from them, as will be proved more fully when we come to that subject.

10. Charles Hodge: *The Validity of Romish Baptism*

The name Charles Hodge is almost synonymous with “old Princeton.” After graduating from the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) in 1815 he enrolled at Princeton Seminary, where he graduated in 1819, and became an instructor in 1820. From 1826-1828 he did further studies in France and Germany. In 1840 he assumed the chair of theology at Princeton, where he labored until his death in 1878. During these years as a professor, editor of the Princeton Review (under its various names), and as a churchman, he exercised an enormous influence on the Presbyterian and Reformed churches in the US and abroad. He was known for his irenic spirit and iminent piety. His published works include: The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (two volumes, 1839-40), Way of Life (1841), Biblical commentaries on Romans (1835), Ephesians (1856), 1 Corinthians (1857), and 2 Corinthians (1860), Systematic Theology (three volumes) 1871-73, What Is Darwinism (1874), and three poshumous volumes of essays and reviews. The essay included here was his follow-up to the action of the 1845 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA (Old School) in which Roman baptism was declared invalid. It appeared first as part of “The General Assembly” in the Princeton Review 1845, pp. 444ff. It is published here as it appeared in Hodge’s posthumously published Church Polity, pp. 192-215.

The question as to the validity of baptism as administered by a Roman Catholic priest was brought before the Assembly, by an overture from

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the Presbytery of Ohio, which gave rise to a long and interesting debate. Drs. Junkin and N. Rice, Professor Thornwell, Dr. McGill, and others advocated the negative of the question; Dr. Lord, Mr. Aitken, and a few others the affirmative. In favour of returning a negative answer to the question, the votes were 169, against 8, *non liquet* 6. We feel almost overwhelmed by such a vote. Any decision of the General Assembly is entitled to great respect, but a decision sustained by such a majority, almost imposes, silence on all dissentients. And yet we believe it will take the Church by surprise. Men will be disposed to ask what new light has been discovered? What stern necessity has induced the Assembly to pronounce Calvin, Luther, and all the men of that generation, as well as thousands who with no other than Romish baptism have since been received into the Protestant Churches, to have lived and died unbaptized? The suddenness with which this decision has been made will add not a little to the surprise and regret with which it will be received. The judgment has come before the argument. We do not doubt that the brethren who urged the course adopted by the Assembly, have examined the subject, but we are very sure the Church has not. We question whether one in twenty of our ministers have ever given it more than a passing consideration. Yet as the Assembly professes to speak in the name of the whole Church, it would seem proper that no decision so important and so deeply affecting the character of the whole body in the eyes of Christendom, should be pronounced, until means had been taken to ascertain the views of the Church generally. The Assembly has indeed the right to resolve all questions of casuistry, regularly presented, and to give advice to the lower courts when requested. We do not question the right. We only venture to question the wisdom of giving an answer suddenly, in opposition to all previous practice, and to the principles of every other Protestant Church. The fact that the answer is new, creates a reason for being slow to pronounce it. Had a judicial case been presented involving such a question, the Assembly would have been bound to give judgment according to its conscience. But we conceive the cases to be rare, in which it can be right to take up a question *in thesi*, and to enunciate a dictum at variance with all previously adopted principles

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and usage. We are very sure the United States court would be very slow to enunciate, without necessity, a principle of law in opposition to all precedent in that and all similar courts.

We shall very briefly and respectfully state the reasons, which constrain us to dissent from the decision that Romish baptism is invalid. We could do this, to our own satisfaction at least, by simply asking: What is baptism? "It is a sacrament, wherein the washing of water, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, doth signify and seal our engrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagements to be the Lord's." There are three essential points included in this definition.

1st. Baptism is a washing with water. Hence a washing with sand, wine, oil, or milk is not baptism. Instances are recorded in which men baptized in the desert with sand, have been re-baptized; and great surprise was expressed at Beza's declaration; *Ego quovis alio liquore non minus rite, quam aqua baptizarem, Epist. II. Ad Tillium*. Water, however, by common consent is essential to the ordinance, because it is commanded, and because it belongs to the significance of the rite.

2d. But not every washing with water is the Christian ordinance of baptism, it must be a washing in the name of the Trinity. Hence washing with water by an anti-trinitarian, is not baptism. When the controversy first arose in the Church about the baptism of heretics; there were two extreme opinions. Cyprian, and those African bishops who were under his influence, took the ground that the baptism of all those who separated from the outward communion of the Catholic Church, whether for heresy or schism, was null and void. In this view the bishops of Asia Minor generally coincided; a fact easily accounted for as all the heretics with whom they were in conflict denied the very essentials of the gospel. Stephen, bishop of Rome, went to the opposite extreme, admitting the baptism of all kinds of heretics to be valid. Both parties soon settled down upon middle ground. In the council of Arles, A. D. 314, when nearly two hundred bishops were present, it was determined; "If any one return from his heresy to the Church, let the Catholic priest question him about the creed; and if

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they perceive that he was baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, only the imposition of hands shall be given him, that he may receive the Holy Ghost. But if upon examination, he answers not the Trinity, (that is, that he was not baptized in the name of the Trinity,) let him be re-baptized.” To the same *effect* was the decision of the great council of Nice, which directed that the Novatians should be received without baptism, but required a repetition of the rite in the case of the disciples of Paul of Samosata. There was subsequently a dispute whether baptism by those Arians who retained the orthodox formula was valid or not. “The more general and prevailing interpretation of the Nicene canon was, that the baptism of all heretics and schismatics, who did not reject the Catholic form of baptizing in the name of the Trinity, was to be received, however they might be heterodox in their faith and opinions. This was certainly the sense of the council of Laodicea, of the second general council of Constantinople, and the second council of Arles and Trullo; as also of St. Austin, St. Jerome, Gennadius, Ursinus Afer, Siricius, Leo, Innocentius, the author under the name of Justin Martyr, and the generality of the ancients.”¹

Protestants have not gone to this length, as they require a professed faith in the doctrine of the Trinity, in order to the validity of baptism, because it is from its nature an act of worship of the Triune God. With one accord, however, they have acquiesced in the judgment of the ancient Church, that the baptism of heretics is not void on account of heresy, provided they retain the doctrine of the Trinity, and baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit. This is the doctrine of the Lutheran Church, see Gerhard's *Loci Communes*, vol. 9. L. 21. c. 4., where he sustains the practice of his Church, by quoting the words of Auselm: “*Baptisma a quocunque datum fuerit, sine a bono sine a malo, sive a Catholico, sive ab haeretico juxta morem ecclesiae in nomine Patris, Filii et Spiritus sancti, tantundem valet.*”

The same doctrine as to baptism by heretics was held by the French

¹ See Bingham's *Scholastic History of Lay Baptism*, c. I. in his *Origines Ecclesiae*, and Neander's History, vol. I. pp. 565-577, German edition.

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and Geneva Churches. See Turretin, vol. iii. p. 442. "Some heretics," he says, "corrupt the very substance of baptism, as the ancient Arians, modern Socinians, rejecting the doctrine of the Trinity; others, retaining the essentials of the ordinance and the true doctrine of the Trinity, err as to other doctrines, as formerly the Novatians and Donatists, and now the Papists and Arminians. The baptisms of the former class are to be rejected; those of the latter are retained, although they err as to many doctrines, and their baptisms, in circumstantialia, are polluted by various ceremonies." See also Pictet, *La Theologie Chretienne*, Lib. xv. c. 13. The Church of Holland adopted the same view; see Morus, *Commentarius Perpetuus, &c.*, vol. v. p. 448. *Docetur esse distinguendam haeresin; a. abditam et professione externa expressam; b. retinentem essentialia baptismi, et evertentem eadem: adeo ut baptismus administratur in nomen Dei Triunius veri agniti vel fiat luto, quo perit analogia inter signum et rem signatam aut non fiat in nomine Dei Triunius, sed in coetu antitrinitario. In posteriori casu baptismus repetendus censetur, non in priori.* No one questions this being the doctrine of the Church of England, since her practice on the subject has been uniform, and sustained by the highest judicial decisions. It is, therefore, the doctrine of the universal Church, that baptism administered in the name of the Trinity, by one professing faith in that doctrine, is not void on account of heresy. Such is the doctrine of our standards which declares baptism to be a washing with water, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The ground of this universally received view of the subject is obvious. The validity of baptism depends upon the appointment of God, and not upon the character or faith of the administrator; and therefore, any baptism which is administered according to His appointment; the Church has felt constrained to admit to be baptism.

3. There is, however, a third particular included in this definition of baptism; it must be with the design "to signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking the benefits of the covenant of grace and our engagements to be the Lord's." There are two things included in this statement; participation of the benefits of the covenant, and the avowal of our purpose to be the Lord's. No washing with water, even if in the

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name of the Trinity, is Christian baptism, unless administered with the ostensible design of signifying, sealing and applying the benefits of the covenant of grace. This is what the ancient Church meant by “intention” as essential to this ordinance; and which the papists have characteristically perverted. By intention, they mean the secret purpose of the priest; against which view of the doctrine, all Protestants protested, as one of the devices of the man of sin, to make the people dependent on the priesthood. The ancient and true doctrine is that intention refers to the ostensible and professed design of the administration. No washing with water, in the name of the Trinity, therefore, is baptism, if done in sport, or mockery, or with the professed design of healing the sick, or raising the dead. It must be with the professed, ostensible intention of complying with the command of Christ, and of doing what he requires to be done, by those who accept the covenant of grace. From this it follows, that no baptism administered by a Jew, a pagan, a child, or an idiot, can be valid, because in all such cases, the requisite design must be absent. A Jew cannot, being such, join in an act of Christian worship, for he would thereby cease to be a Jew. As baptism includes the invocation of the Trinity, as a religious act, no man who does not profess to believe in the Trinity, can profess to join in such act.

The doctrine of our standards, therefore, is the precise doctrine of the ancient Church, viz., that there are three things essential to baptism; the matter, form, and intention. The matter, is the washing with water; the form, washing in the name of the Trinity; the intention, not the popish notion of the secret purpose of the priest, but the professed ostensible design of the act. When these three things are found, there, according to our standards, and the common doctrine of the Church, is baptism.

Such being the formal and authoritative definition of the rite, in order to determine in any given case, whether any particular baptism is valid, all we have to do is, to ask whether it has these essential characteristics.

Is it a washing with water? Is it administered in the name of the Trinity? Is the professed design of the rite to signify, seal and apply the benefits of the new covenant? If so, then, by our standards,

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it is baptism. To determine the question before us, we must, therefore, ascertain whether,

1st. Romish baptism is a washing with water? The Romish catechism defines baptism to be “The sacrament of regeneration by water with the word. In answer to the question, What is the matter of baptism? the Romish theologians answer; *Est omnis et sola aqua naturalis, seu elementaris, “any and only natural water.”* One of their favourite *dicta* is the saying of Augustine: *Quid est baptismus? Lavacrum aquae in verbo: tolle aquam, non est baptismus; tolle verbum, non est baptismus.* Water, therefore is, according to the Romish Church, essential to baptism, and as far as “the matter” is concerned, nothing else is. The water may be marine, or rain, or river, or from a spring, or mineral; it may be clear or turbid, warm or cold, but it must be water. Baptism with mud, wine, milk, oil, saliva, tears, &c., the Romish theologians pronounce invalid.² Their doctrine on this point is identical with our own.

We were therefore greatly surprised to see that it was stated on the floor of the Assembly that Romanists did not baptize with water, but with water mixed with oil. Suppose this to be true, water with oil thrown on it is still water. How many things are mixed with the wine we use at the Lord's supper? Is wine adulterated with water no longer wine? Did not our Saviour call the paschal cup wine, though mixed with water? This objection is trivial. So long as the element used is water, and so long as the significancy of the rite is made to consist in washing with water, the matter of the ordinance is retained. But, as far as we know, the objection is unfounded in fact. There are various ceremonies which precede, attend and follow the rite as administered in the Romish Church; among which is Chrism, or anointing with oil; but these ceremonies are not represented as entering into the nature

² In answer to the question, what kind of water may be used in Baptism, “*R. Talis est aqua marina, pluviialis, fontana, fluvialis, mineralis; sive turbida sit sive clara, frigida vel calida sive benedicta sine non. . . . E contra invalidus est Baptismus collatus in luto, vino, pingui cerevisia, lacte, oleo, saliva, sudore, lacrymis,*” &c.—Dens’ Theology; tom. v. p. 158.

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of the ordinance, or making any part of it.³ They are treated of and explained separately. First, Baptism is declared to be a washing with water; and then the ceremonies accompanying this washing are stated and explained. In treating of the “matter of baptism,” not one word is said of oil or anything else, but water *vera et naturalis* is declared to be necessary and sufficient. As far therefore as the first point is concerned, Romish baptism is baptism. It is a washing with water.

2. Is it then correct as to the form? Is it administered in the name of the Trinity? The form prescribed by the council of Trent, is in these words, “*Ego te baptizo in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti.*” The form therefore is identical with our own. It is not in words, merely, that this form is scriptural, the avowed sense in which they are used is correct. There is not a Church on earth which teaches the doctrine of the Trinity more accurately, thoroughly or minutely, according to the orthodoxy of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches, than the Church of Rome. The personal and official relations of the adorable Trinity, are also preserved. The Father is represented as the author of the new covenant, the Son as redeemer, the Spirit as sanctifier. There is no such thing as baptism in the name of the Trinity in any Church, if Romish baptism is not.

3. Then as to the third essential part of the ordinance, the design, in this also their baptism agrees with that of Protestants. According to our standards the design of the Sacrament is to signify, seal and apply to believers the benefits of the new covenant. This is the precise doctrine of the Romanists, so far as this. 1. They say it is essential to a sacrament that it should be a sensible sign of spiritual blessings. 2. That it should be instituted by Christ. 3. That it should have a promise of grace.⁴ Hence the sacraments signify, seal, and apply the

³ The preceding ceremonies are, *exorcismus, signum crucis, salis gustus, et linitio salivae; Concomitantes, abrenunciatio, unctio baptizandi oleo catechumenorum, catechismus, et inquisitio voluntatis suscipiendi Baptismum; Subsequentes, unctio baptizati per chrisma vestis candidae; donatio, et cerei ardentis traditio.* Dens. vol. v. p. 205.

⁴ Cardinal Tommere, *Institutiones Theologicae, vol. III. p. 276.*

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benefits of redemption. According to both parties, by baptism we are formally constituted members of the visible Church, and partakers of its benefits. The great difference relates not to the design of the ordinance, but to the mode and certainty with which that design is accomplished, and the conditions attached to it. In other words, the difference relates to the efficacy, and not to the design of the ordinance. The design on either side is stated to be to initiate into the visible Church and secure its blessings. But how and to what extent, and under what conditions these blessings are secured by baptism, there is a great difference of opinion. As to the efficacy of the sacraments there are these three general views. First, that of the Zuinglians who make them mere naked signs. Secondly, that of those who teach that they certainly convey to all infants the blessings signified, and to adults if rightly disposed; and third, the middle doctrine maintained by our Church, and the Reformed generally. Speaking of baptism, our Confession of Faith says: “By the right use of this ordinance the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited (i.e. conveyed) and conferred by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the council of God’s own will, and in his own appointed time.” According to our doctrine then, baptism does not uniformly convey the benefits which it signifies, and secondly its efficacy is not limited to the time of its administration.⁵ With regard to adults, the

⁵ In the old Scots Confession it is said, “And thus we utterlie damne the vanities of they that affirm Sacramentes to be nothing ellis bot naked and baire signes. No, wee assuredlie beleeve, that be Baptisme we ar ingrafted into Christ Jesus, to be made partakers of his justice, be quhilk our sinnes ar covered and remitted.” In the Book of Common Order, “approved by that famous man John Calvin, and received and used by the Reformed Kirk of Scotland,” this idea is expressed with some limitation. “The venomous dregs” of sin, it is said, remain in the flesh, “yet by the merites of his death (they) are not imputed to us, because the justice of Jesus Christ is made ours by Baptisme; not that we think any such virtue or power to be included in the visible water, or outward action, for many have been baptized, and yet were never inwardly purged; but our Saviour Christ, who commanded baptism to be administered, will, by the power

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difference between us and Romanists is much less. According to our standards the sacraments are made effectual as means of grace to believers, or “to worthy receivers”; and Romanists say, that in adults to the profitable use of baptism, there are requisite, the influence of divine grace, the act of faith, of hope, of love, and of penitence or contrition.⁶

The error of the Romanists concerning the absolute necessity and uniform efficacy (in the case of infants) of baptism, is very great, but it cannot invalidate the nature of the ordinance. It is out of all reason to say that the rite is valid, if it is supposed to be effectual to some and at an indefinite time, and invalid, if supposed to be always effectual when there is no opposition. Besides, if baptism is null and void when administered by those who hold the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, what shall we say to the baptism in the Church of England, in the strict Lutheran Churches, and in all the Churches of the East? On this plan, we shall have to unchurch almost the whole Christian world; and Presbyterians, instead of being the most catholic of Churches, admitting the being of a Church, wherever we see the fruits of the Spirit, would become one of the narrowest and most bigoted of sects. Indeed we cannot but regard this sudden denunciation of Romish baptism, as a momentary outbreak of the spirit of Popery; a disposition to contract the limits of the Church, and to make that essential to its being and sacraments, which God has never declared to be necessary.

We have now shown that Romish baptism fulfills all the conditions of valid baptism, as given in our standards. It is a washing with water in the name of the Trinity, with the ostensible and professed design of making the recipient a member of the visible Church, and a partaker

of the Holie Spirit, effectually worke in the hearts of his elect, in time convenient, all that is meant and signified by the same.”

⁶ *Quaenam (dispositio) requiritur ad fructuosam hujus Sacramenti susceptionem? R. Illam late describit Conc. Trid. sess. 6. c. 6. ut videre est: Summatim dicimus ex eo requiri motum divinae gratiae, actum fidei, spei et amoris ac paenitentia seu contritionis.* Dens, vol. v. p. 187.

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of its benefits. On what grounds then is it declared to be null and void? The grounds are two. First, it is not administered by ordained ministers of Christ; second, the Church of Rome is not a true Church, and therefore its ordinances are not Christian sacraments. The former of these arguments stands thus: No baptism is valid unless administered by a duly ordained minister of Christ. Romish priests are not such ministers. Therefore Romish baptism is invalid.

It may be proper, before considering this argument, to ascertain the precise point to be proved, or what is meant by the words valid and invalid in this connection. They seem often to be used in the sense of regular and irregular. Christ has appointed a certain class of men to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments. For any one not belonging to this class, to perform either service, is irregular, and in that sense invalid. Valid, however, properly means available, (able to effect). A thing is valid when it avails to its appropriate end. Thus a deed is valid which avails to convey a title to property; a marriage is valid, which avails to constitute the conjugal relation. Sometimes the validity of a thing depends upon its regularity; as a deed if not regular, if not made according to law, does not avail for the end for which it was made. Very often, however, the validity of a thing does not depend upon the rules made to regulate the mode of doing it. Many marriages are valid, which violate the rules of decorum, order, and even civil society. When Romish baptism is pronounced invalid, it is not declared simply irregular, in the sense in which lay-preaching is unauthorized; but it is said not to avail to the end for which baptism was instituted; it does not avail to make the recipient a professing Christian. Though a sincere believer should be baptized by a Romanist, such baptism would not signify or seal to him the benefits of the new covenant, nor express his purpose to obey Christ. Such is the declaration. The first argument in support of this position is founded on the assumption that no baptism is valid, in the sense just explained, unless administered by a duly ordained minister of Christ. We do not mean to contest this proposition, and must not be understood as denying it, but we say its truth ought to have been proved and not taken for granted. Our standards do not affirm it. They say indeed

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that “neither sacrament may be dispensed by any, but by a minister of the word lawfully ordained.” Con. of Faith, c. 27, § 4. But they say the same thing of preaching. Larger Cat. ques. 158. Both are irregular; but irregular and invalid are very different things. Again, this proposition is not contained in the definition of baptism. That ordinance is declared to be a washing with water, in the name of the Trinity, to signify our ingrafting into Christ. To say, it is a washing with water, *by a minister duly ordained*, in the name, &c., is to give a new definition, essentially different from the old one. The insertion of this clause may be authorized, but the authority ought to be given. Again, the principle in question, cannot be inferred from the nature and design of baptism. Baptism was instituted to constitute or declare the recipient a disciple of Christ, and to signify and seal to him the benefits of the new covenant. It does not necessarily follow from this statement, that it does not avail to this end, unless administered by an ordained man. If ordination did, as Puseyites say, convey grace and impart supernatural power, it would be more apparent, why baptism by unconsecrated hands should fail to have any efficacy. Puseyites, therefore, are very consistently anabaptists, both here and in England. Again, the principle assumed is contrary to the belief and practice of the great body of the people of God in all ages. The common doctrine of the Church has been, that baptism and teaching belong properly to ministers of the word; in cases of necessity, however, baptism by unordained persons, was regarded as not only valid, but proper; in all other cases, as irregular and censurable, but still as baptism and not to be repeated. At the time of the Reformation this doctrine was retained by the whole Lutheran Church, and by the Church of England. Calvin, Beza, the French Church, and the Church of Holland rejected it, and so we presume did the Church of Scotland. Though, therefore, the Reformed or Calvinistic Churches have generally maintained the position assumed by the Assembly, as to the invalidity of lay-baptism, yet, as it is not asserted in our book, and has been denied by so great a majority of Christians, it ought not to be made the ground of an argument, without some exhibition of the grounds on which it rests. This is a subject to which we presume less attention has been paid in

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our Church, than it merits. We repeat the remark, that we are not to be understood as denying that baptism must be administered by an ordained man, in order to its validity; we are willing to concede that point in the argument, the conclusion however utterly fails, unless the minor proposition above stated can be proved. Admitting that baptism must be administered by ordained ministers of Christ, it must be proved that Romish priests are not such ministers, before it can be shown that their baptisms are invalid.

Let us inquire then what is an ordained minister, and then see whether the Romish priests come within the definition.

According to the common doctrine of Protestants, an ordained minister is a man appointed to perform the sacred functions of teaching and administering the sacraments in any community professing Christianity. There is a right and a wrong way of doing this; there is a way agreeable to scriptural precedent, and there are many ways that have no such sanction. Still whether it be done by a prelate, a presbytery, by the people, or by the magistrate with the consent of the people, if a man is recognised by a Christian community as a minister, he is to be regarded as having due authority to act as such. It does not follow from this that we are bound to receive him into ministerial communion, or to allow him to act as a minister in our churches. That depends upon his having the qualifications which we deem requisite for the sacred office. Should a prelate or presbytery ordain an ignorant or heretical man, we should be under no obligation to receive him to the sacred office among ourselves. And if the people should elect a man to that office, we are not bound to receive him on the ground of that election, since we believe that ordination by the presbytery ought to be required. Since, however, Christ has not made the ministry essential to the Church, much less any particular method of inducting men into that office, we have no right to say that a body of Christians are no Church, and have no valid sacraments, because they differ from us as to the mode of ordaining ministers. It is one of the Popish principles which have slid into the minds of some Protestants, and which was openly avowed upon the floor of the Assembly, that the

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ministry is essential to the Church. Such a sentiment is directly opposed to our standards, and to the word of God. According to the Scriptures, a church is a congregation of believers, or of those who profess to be believers; according to the hierarchical system, it is “a congregation of believers *subject to lawful pastors.*” An intrusive element, which is the germ of the whole hierarchical system, is thus introduced into the idea of the Church, which changes and vitiates the whole thing. Bellarmin has the credit of being the first writer who thus corrupted the definition of the Church. The being of a Church does not depend upon the ministry, nor the being of the ministry on the rite of ordination. Any man is a minister in the sense of the proposition under consideration, who is recognised as such by a Christian community.

The soundness of this principle appears, 1. From the consideration already referred to, that we have no authority in this matter to go beyond the Scriptures. If Christ or his apostles had said that no man should be recognised as a minister, nor his official acts accounted valid, unless ordained in a specified manner, we should be bound by such rule. But the Scriptures contain no such rule, and we have no right to make it. All that the Bible does, is to make known the fact, that ministers were examined and authenticated as teachers by other teachers, but that it must be so, they nowhere assert.

2. This doctrine flows from what is one of the distinguishing principles of the evangelical, as opposed to the hierarchical system, viz.: that all Church power belongs originally to the Church as such. The original commission, the promises and prerogatives were given, not to the Church officers as their *peculium*, but to the people; and they may exercise those prerogatives not regularly, not orderly, or wisely, it may be, but still validly under any form they see fit. They ought, indeed, to follow scriptural examples, as to the mode of making ministers, but still as the power to make them was involved in the original commission granted to the Church, we cannot deny it.

3. To reject the principle in question is to involve ourselves in all the difficulties, absurdities and assumptions of the doctrine of apostolical

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succession. Every Church would have to prove that its ministry had been regularly ordained in a specific manner from the apostles to the present time. This, from the nature of the case, can no more be done, than a man can prove that all his ancestors were regularly married from the time of Adam. It may be assumed, but it cannot by possibility be proved. And since there is in Scripture no promise of any such unbroken succession of ordinations, to assume it, is gratuitous; and to make such assumption the basis of ecclesiastical claims, or of religious hopes, is absurd and ruinous.

4. We all act upon this principle. What Presbyterian feels called upon to trace up historically to the apostles, the ecclesiastical genealogy of every minister whose act he is called upon to recognize? Or who ever thinks of inquiring whether every candidate for the admission to the Lord's supper, if from among the Methodists or Baptists, was baptized by a man ordained in a particular way? It is always considered enough if the applicant was baptized by one having public authority in the body whence he came, to administer the sacraments.

5. All Protestant Churches have recognised the same principle. The language of the twenty-third Article of the Church of England may be taken as expressing the general sense of the age of the Reformation on this subject. That article says: "Those ought to be judged lawfully called and sent, who are chosen and called to this work by men who have public authority given unto them, in the congregation, to call and send ministers into the Lord's vineyard." This asserts the necessity of a call, without prescribing any particular mode as essential to its validity. Accordingly, the validity of the orders which many of the reformers received in the Romish Church, was universally admitted; while at the same time, no objection was made to the vocation of those who had received nothing more than election by the people. It was held, indeed, that under ordinary circumstances, no one should assume the sacred office to himself, and that besides election by the people, there should, in a regular state of the Church, be an examination and imposition of hands by the presbytery. But it was denied that these things were essential.

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Do, then, the Romish priests come within this wide definition of ordained ministers? Are they appointed by public authority to teach the Christian religion, and to administer its ordinances? The question is not whether they are good men, or whether they do not assume sacerdotal and other powers to which they have no claim? or whether they are correct in doctrine? but simply, whether in a body professing to hold saving doctrine, they are appointed and recognized as presbyters? If so, then they are ministers within the sense of the received Protestant definition of the term.⁷ The only ground on which this can be denied is, that they do not in any sense profess the Christian religion any more than Jews or Pagans, and therefore this argument, though presented first and separately in the minute adopted by Assembly, really resolves itself in the second presented in that document, viz: That the Church of Rome is in no sense a Christian Church. Without anticipating that point, however, we maintain that as the Romish priests are appointed and recognized as presbyters in a community professing to believe the Scriptures, the early creeds, and the decisions of the first four general councils, they are ordained ministers in the sense above stated; and consequently baptism administered by them is valid. It has accordingly been received as valid by all Protestant Churches from the Reformation to the present day.

Calvin, in his Institutes, Lib. iv. c. 15 and 16, after saying that baptism does not owe its value to the character of the administrator, adds: "By this consideration, the error of the Donatists is effectually refuted, who made the force and value of the sacrament commensurate with the worth of the minister. Such are our modern Katabaptists, who strenuously deny that we were properly baptized, because we received the rite from impious idolators in the papacy; and they are therefore

⁷ This is the ground on which the Reformed Churches defended the validity of the orders received from the Church of Rome. "Talis autem est," says Turretin, "*episcoporum et presbyterorum vocatio in ecclesia Romana, quae quoad institutionem Dei bona fuit, sed quoad abusum hominum mala facta est. Unde resecatio errorum et corruptelarum ab hominibus invectarum, non potuit esse vocationis abrogatio, sed correctio et restitutio.*"—Vol. iii. p. 265.

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ferocious for re-baptism. We shall, however, be sufficiently guarded against their nonsense, if we remember we were baptized not in the name of any man, but in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and therefore baptism is not of man, but of God, no matter by whom it was administered.”

The first canon of the chapter on baptism, in the Book of Discipline of the French Church, declares, “Baptism administered by an unordained person is wholly void and null”; yet the twenty-eighth article of their Confession of Faith declares Romish baptism to be valid. In the National Synod of 1563, John Calvin presented, in the name of the pastors and professors at Geneva, a letter in reply to reasons pronounced by them “very feeble and impertinent,” in behalf of lay-baptism, one of which was derived from the assumption that Romish priests were not true ministers, and yet their baptisms are valid. To this the reply made was: “Popish baptism is grounded upon the institution of Christ; because the priests as perverse as they are, and utterly corrupt, are *yet the ordinary ministers of that Church* in which they so tyrannically demean themselves.”⁸ To this view the French Church steadily adhered long after the council of Trent, whose decisions were assumed by some of the members of the Assembly, to have wrought such a change in the character of Romanism. The illustration used by Calvin, derived from the fact that those circumcised by apostate priests under the old dispensation, were never recircumcised, or treated as not having received that rite by the inspired prophets, we find repeated by all subsequent writers.

The Church of Holland agreed with the French Church in regarding the Romish priests as authorized to administer baptism.⁹ Such, too,

⁸ Quick’s Synodicon, vol. i. p. 48.

⁹ Morus, tom. v. p. 449. *Hinc passim judicant Nostrī rebaptizandos esse qui ad nos transeunt ante in coetu Socinianorum antitrinitario baptizati. . . . De baptizatis in ecclesia Romana hodierna mitius judicium Nostrī ferre solent, ob retentam illic cum elemento visibili aquae baptismatis, fidem Trinitatis et administrationem baptismi in Dei triunitus nomen.* He quotes the acts of the Synod of Dort, which forbid Romish baptism to be repeated where “the form and

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has been the constant doctrine of the Lutheran Church,¹⁰ and of the Church of England. Indeed, we know of no Church that has ever taken different ground. The Assembly, therefore, has taken a position on this subject in opposition to the principles of the whole Protestant world. A fact which of itself creates a presumption almost overwhelming against their doctrine.

The second great argument in favor of the decision of the Assembly, which indeed includes and supercedes the one just considered, is: The Church of Rome is not a true Church of Christ, and therefore its sacraments are not Christian ordinances. This is a very plausible argument, and has the advantage of being short and syllogistic. To its influence we doubt not is principally to be referred the decision in question. To us, however, it appears to be only another of the innumerable instances of fallacy and false reasoning founded upon the ambiguity of the word Church. We know of no subject in theology on which it is more difficult to attain and preserve distinctness of thought, and precision of language, than this. The word Church has meanings so allied and yet so different, so well authorized and yet so indefinite, that it is almost impossible to avoid using the term in one sense in the premises of an argument, and another in the conclusion. Almost every treatise on the Church which it has been our lot to read, has been more or less a saying and unsaying, affirming and denying the same things of the same subject. This is the fault not so much of the writers as of the vagueness of the terms. You may, with equal truth, affirm or deny that a given body is a Church; you may say that the Church is a congregation of saints, and yet composed, in great part, of sinners; that it is infallible as to matters of faith, and yet may fatally

substance” of the rite have been retained. Doubts, it seems, were entertained as to baptisms performed by vagrant priests, as a question relating to that point was presented to the French Synod of 1581, who replied: “Since authority to baptize belongs to them according to the order of the Romish Church, baptism administered by them is not to be repeated; but baptism by monks, to whom no such authority belongs, is void.”

¹⁰ Gerhard, vol. x. p. 93.

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apostatize; that all its members shall be saved, and yet that many of them will be lost. The whole system of Popery and Puseyism owes its logical powers to an adroit management of this word. To the Church are promised in the Scriptures the continued presence of Christ, and influence of his Spirit, by which it is certainly guided into the knowledge of saving truth, preserved from fatal errors, and effectually prepared for heaven. But, according to our standards, the Church consists of the professors of the true religion; therefore, to professors of true religion is promised this continued presence of Christ and the saving guidance of his Spirit. This argument is just as good as that used by the Assembly; and yet, unless it is false, the whole doctrinal system of Romanism is true. It is obvious, therefore, that extreme caution is necessary in constructing any argument, the validity of which depends on the idea attached to the word Church.

The question whether the Church of Rome is a true Church? cannot be intelligently answered without previously fixing the meaning of the term. The word *ekklesia* in its application to Christians, is in the New Testament a collective term for *kletoi*. The called are the Church. Any number of "the called" collectively considered, are a Church. The Church, as such, is not an organization; any more than the human race, as such, is a society. Men must organize and live in society; but their organizing does not make them men, nor members of the human race. In like manner the Church, or the called, as such, are not an organized body, though it is their duty to organize. But organization does not make them a Church, but being members of the Church, i.e. *kletoi*, they associate for certain prescribed purposes. It seems to us that a large portion of the false reasoning connected with this whole subject, arises from the erroneous assumption that organization enters into the very idea of the Church. An organized body may be a Church, but it is not their organization that makes them so; because any number of the called, or the whole body of them as a Church, are the Church, in the scriptural sense of the term. When Christ is said to love, Paul to have persecuted, or we labor for the Church, the word does not designate an organized body. It is merely a collective term for the people of God. Since "the called" are, according to the

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uniform usage of the epistles of the New Testament, the effectually called, or true believers, it follows that the Church is a collective term for true believers. We therefore find that whatever is affirmed of believers is affirmed of the Church, and whatever is promised to believers is promised to the Church. If the Christians of Rome, Corinth, or Ephesus are addressed as the Church in those cities, they are at the same time addressed as believers, as saints, as those who are in Christ, as led by the Spirit, and as heirs of eternal life. As however no man can look upon the heart, we do not know who is a true believer; and therefore we cannot tell who is a member of the Church or body of Christ. We are therefore bound to do as the sacred writers did, that is, to regard and treat every man as a believer who makes a credible profession of faith in Christ; and of course we are bound to regard and treat any body of such men as a Church. If a man makes no profession of faith, we cannot regard him as a believer; nor can we so regard him if he makes any profession inconsistent with the existence of saving faith. And consequently if a body of men make no profession of faith, they cannot be a Church; nor can they be so regarded, if they make a profession which is incompatible with saving faith in Christ. Every man, therefore, who has true faith, is a member of Christ's body, which is the Church; and every man who professes such faith is a visible or professed member of his Church; and any number of such men collectively considered is a branch of the Church. If, therefore, we deny to any man the character of a Christian, on account of the profession which he makes, we must be prepared to show that such faith is incompatible with salvation. For, if possessing such doctrines (or professing nothing more than certain doctrines), he may be saved, he may be a true believer, and of course a member of the Church. And in like manner, if we deny to any body of men the character of a Church, on account of its creed, we thereby assert that no man holding that creed can be saved. To determine, therefore, whether a man or a Church is to be denied the Christian character, we must ascertain what is the minimum of truth that can save the soul. For to deny that a man is a Christian on account of his ignorance or errors, and yet admit he may be saved, is to contradict

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ourselves. And to say that a body of such men is no Church, is no less a contradiction. It is therefore evident that the question, What is a true Church? resolves itself into this: How little truth may avail to salvation? This is a question we are hardly competent to answer, and there is no need of answering it. We can tell what is a pure Church; and with that standard we can compare our own and all others, and regulate our intercourse with them accordingly. The course, however, commonly pursued is to give a definition of a pure Church, and then to declare any community not embraced in that definition, to be no Church. Thus it is said, a Church is a congregation of believers in which the pure word of God is preached; the pure word of God is not preached in Rome, therefore Rome is not a Church. By the same argument the whole world may be unchurched, save our own particular sect, no matter how narrow that sect may be. This method of reasoning is just as unreasonable as it would be to say, a Christian is one who believes the doctrines and obeys the precepts of Christ, therefore no man who is erroneous in doctrine or practice can be a Christian; which would be to go beyond even Perfectionists, for they do not make a perfect faith essential to the character of a Christian. We cannot take a definition of a perfect Christian as the rule of decision whether any particular man is to be treated as a brother; nor can we take the definition of a pure Church as the criterion of the being of a Church. Any man who professes truth enough to save his soul, is not to be denounced as no Christian, simply for his faith's sake. And any body of men that professes truth enough to save men, cannot on the ground of heresy be denied the character of a Church.

The correctness of this exposition of what is necessary to the being of a Church, is plain, 1. From the express declarations of scripture. The Bible teaches that whosoever is a true worshipper of Christ, no matter how ignorant or how erroneous he may be, is a true Christian. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Son of God, is born of God." Such is the explicit declaration of the Bible. Whoever, therefore, professes to be a worshipper of Christ, i.e., to love, reverence and serve him as God, does thereby profess to be a Christian; and any body consisting of those who profess to worship Christ, is a body of

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professed Christians, that is, a Church. Paul, in his epistle to the Corinthians, addresses himself to the Church of God in that city, i.e., to those “who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Any body of men, therefore, that retains the doctrine of the incarnation, or that Jesus is the Son of God, that sets him forth as the object of religious worship and confidence, retains the vital principle of Christianity. Nothing can prevent the saving power of that truth, when it is really embraced. 2. Again, according to our standards, there is no salvation out of the visible Church. It is a common saying of Protestant theologians, “No man has God for his father, who has not the Church for his mother.” This is only saying, with the Scriptures, that there is no salvation out of Christ. But if these premises are correct, the conclusion necessarily follows, that any religious body in communion with which men may be saved, is a part of the visible Church; otherwise men are saved out of that Church. The visible Church, therefore, according to our standards, consists of all those who profess saving truth. 3. This point is so plain, that it was repeatedly conceded on the floor of the Assembly. The question, whether the Romish Church is a true Church, was admitted to turn on the previous question: Does she retain truth enough to save the soul? One of the speakers did, indeed, say that although there were true believers in the Church of Rome, they were not members of the visible Church; which is a contradiction in terms, since the visible Church consists of *all* who profess the true religion, or saving doctrine. The mere fact of their having faith, and avowing it in their conversation and deportment, makes them members of the visible Church, in the true, scriptural, and Presbyterian, though not in the Puseyite, sense of the term.

If these principles are correct, we have only to apply them to the case in hand, and ask, Does the Church of Rome retain truth enough to save the soul? We do not understand how it is possible for any Christian man to answer this question in the negative. They retain the doctrine of the Incarnation, which we know from the infallible word of God, is a life-giving doctrine. They retain the whole doctrine of the Trinity. They teach the doctrine of atonement far more fully and accurately than multitudes of professedly orthodox Protestants. They

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hold a much higher doctrine, as to the necessity of divine influence, than prevails among many whom we recognize as Christians. They believe in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and in eternal life and judgment. These doctrines are in their creeds, and however they may be perverted and overlaid, still as general propositions they are affirmed. And it must be remembered, that it is truth presented in general propositions, and not with subtle distinctions, that saves the soul. Protestants, says Bossuet, cannot deny that we admit the fundamentals of religion. "If they will have them to consist in believing that we must adore one only God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and that we must put our trust in God alone through his Son, who became man, was crucified, and rose again for us, they know in their conscience that we profess this doctrine; and if they add those other doctrines which are contained in the Apostles' Creed, they do not doubt that we receive them all without exception."

Having quoted an admission to this effect from Daille, he adds: "But though M. Daille had not granted thus much, the thing is manifest in itself; and all the world knows that we profess all those doctrines which Protestants call fundamental."¹¹

¹¹ An Exposition of the Doctrines of the Catholic Church, by the Right Rev . J. B. Bossuet, London, 1685, p. 2. On Justification, Bossuet says: "we believe, in the first place, that our sins are freely forgiven us by the divine mercy, for Christ's sake. These are the express words of the council of Trent Seeing the Scriptures explain that remission of sins, by sometimes telling us that God covers them, and sometimes that he takes them away and blots them out by the grace of his Holy Spirit, which makes us new creatures; we believe that to form a perfect idea of the justification of a sinner, we must join together both of these expressions. For which reason we believe our sins, not only to be covered, but also entirely washed away by the blood of Jesus Christ, and by the grace of regeneration; which is so far from obscuring or lessening that idea which we ought to have of the merit of his blood, on the contrary it heightens and augments it. So that the righteousness of Christ is not only imputed but actually communicated to the faithful, by the operation of his Holy Spirit, insomuch that they are not only reputed, but rendered just by his grace." p. 12. It is easy to see here the unhappy blending of justification and sanctification together; but it is a far better statement of the truth than is to be found in multitudes of Arminian writers; and unspeakably better than that, which

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It is further evident that the Church of Rome retains truth enough to save the soul, from the fact that true believers, who have no other means of instruction than those therein afforded, are to be found in that communion. Wherever the fruits of the Spirit are, there is the Spirit; and wherever the Spirit is, there is still the Church. It is one of the worst features of Puseyism, that it takes such a view of the Church, as to force its advocates to deny those to be Christians who exhibit the Spirit of Christ. Instead, therefore, of loving them as brethren, they cast out their names as evil; which is not only a great sin, but a great detriment to their own souls. We shall not less sin against God and our own best interests, if we reject as reprobates any of the real followers of Christ no matter in what external communion they may be found. We rejoice, therefore, that the Assembly freely admits, in their Minute, that there are true believers in the Church of Rome. Indeed, we are not sure that truth would not demand the admission that there were more of evangelical doctrine and of true religion in that Church, than were to be found in the Church of England, or in some of the Protestant Churches of the continent of Europe, notwithstanding their orthodox creeds, during their long declension in the last century. We have heretofore had the misfortune to be held up as the friends of drunkenness, and the advocates of slavery, because we could not

for a hundred years, was preached from the great majority of the pulpits in the Church of England.

Romanists teach that Christ is the meritorious ground of our justification. Thus the council of Trent, *sess. vi. c. 7*, says: *Meritoria (causa) est dilectissimus Dei unigenitus, qui cum essemus inimici, per nimiam caritatem, qua dilexit nos, sua sanctissima passione in ligno crucis, nobis justificationem meruit.* And in *c. 8*, the council say: “*Christum sanctissima sua passione in ligno crucis nobis justificationem meruisse, et pro nobis Deo Patri satisfacisse, et neminem posse esse justum, nisi cui merita passionis Domini nostri Jesu Christi communicantur.*” In like manner, Bellarmin, *de Justificatione, ii. c. 2*, says: “We are justified on account of the merits of Christ;” and in *c. 7*, he says, “If Protestants only mean that the merits of Christ are imputed to us, because they are given to us by God, so that we can present them to the Father for our sins since Christ undertook to make satisfaction for us, and to reconcile us to God the Father, they are right.” Which is precisely what we do mean.

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believe that alcohol is sin, and every slaveholder a thief; and we fear that even good men may now regard us as the apologists of Popery, because we cannot think that a community who believe that Jesus is the Son of God, who worship the Trinity, who hold that we are justified by the merits of Christ, and are sanctified by his Holy Spirit, are to be placed in the same category with Pagans and Mohammedans. And we are constrained to say, that as the cause of temperance and the interests of the slave, suffer greatly from the extravagance of their advocates, so we fear the cause of Protestantism suffers materially from the indiscriminating denunciations heaped upon the Church of Rome, and from transferring the abhorrence due to her corruptions, to her whole complicated system of truth and error.

The view presented above of the Church of Rome is sustained by the authority of the Reformers, and of all Protestant Churches. We have already remarked, that the question whether the Church of Rome is a true Church, may be affirmed or denied, according to the sense attached to the terms. Accordingly, it is both affirmed and denied, by the parties referred to. They use the strongest terms of denunciation of the whole papal system; its perversion of the truth, its false doctrines, its corruption in worship and morals; its tyranny and persecuting spirit. They declared that Church to be antichristian and apostate, the mystical Babylon, from which the people of God are commanded to withdraw. All this is said not only by the Reformers, but by Churches and theologians down to the present day. At the same time, and in the same breath, they said that viewed in a different light, the Church of Rome is still a Church, just as the apostate Israelites were still the covenant people of God. If the Israelites were denominated from the character of their rulers, or of the mass of the people, from their authoritative declarations and acts, they were apostates and idolaters. If denominated from the relation which they still sustained to God, from the truth which they continued to profess, or from the real saints who were to be found among them, they were still the Church, and were so addressed by the prophets, and their circumcision regarded as the seal of God's covenant. Thus Calvin says: "If the Church be considered as the body whose judgment we are

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bound to revere, to whose authority we must defer, whose instructions we must receive, to whose discipline we must submit, whose communion we must religiously and in all things cultivate, we cannot concede the papacy to be the Church, as though the obligation to obedience still continued. Yet we willingly concede to it what the prophets conceded to the Jews and Israelites. . . . Since then we are not willing to concede the title Church unconditionally to the papists, we do not thereby deny that there are churches among them, but only contend for the true and legitimate constitution of the Church, with which communion is required in sacraments and doctrine.” Lib. iv. c. 2. §§ 10-12. To the same effect Turretin denies that the modern Church of Rome can, without qualification, be called a true Church of Christ; but to explain his position he says: “The Church of Rome may be viewed under a two-fold aspect, as Christian in reference to the profession of Christianity, and of the evangelical truths which it retains; and as it is papal, in reference to its subjection to the Pope, and to its corruptions, as well in manners as in doctrine, which it has mixed up with those truths and built upon them, contrary to the word of God. In the former aspect, we do not deny that there is some truth in that Church; but in the latter, under which she is contemplated when we deny her to be a true Church, we deny that she is Christian and apostolical, but affirm her to be antichristian and apostate. In this view, *impropiè et secundum quid*, we admit the Church of Rome to be a Christian Church in three respects. 1. In respect to the people of God, the elect, still remaining in it, who are commanded to come out. 2. In respect to the external form, in which we discover some of the elements of a Church, in respect as well to the word of God and its preaching, which though corrupted, still remain, and as to the administration of the sacraments, especially baptism, which, as to the substance, still remains entire. 3. As to Christian and evangelical doctrines, as concerning the Trinity, Christ as mediator, his incarnation, death and resurrection, and others by which she is distinguished from pagans and infidels.”—vol. iii. p. 135.

We admit that it is a very unfortunate method of speaking, to say a body is a Church *secundum quid*, and *secundum quid* is not a

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Church. Still this is an inconvenience we have to submit to on almost all subjects, and in the present instance, it expresses a great truth. It must be remembered that these were holy men; who trembled at the word of God. Christ had commanded his disciples to hear the Church, to remain in her communion and to submit to her discipline.

To admit, therefore, without qualification; that the Church of Rome was a true Church, seemed to include an admission of an obligation to receive her doctrines and submit to her authority. This they could not do. They therefore denied that the Church of Rome was a Church in any such sense as to require communion and obedience. They thereby intended to deny that the supremacy of the Pope, the hierarchy, transubstantiation, the sacrifice of the mass, worshipping of saints, and the other numerous corruptions of popery, belong to the Church of God; that they are Christian or apostolical; and as such to be received and submitted to. While they admitted that the reception of the Scriptures as the word of God, the profession of saving doctrines, the sacraments, the presence of the elect, are characteristics of the Church, and consequently that any body of which these things can be affirmed, cannot consistently with the truth of God, be simply and without qualification, declared to be no more a Church than a company of pagans. The necessity of making these distinctions, of affirming and denying the same proposition, shows the impropriety of the question. Instead of asking, What is a Church? we should ask, What is a pure Church? All the definitions given in our books, tell us what a pure Church is. And when Protestants deny the Church of Rome to be a Church, they deny that she comes within their definition of a pure Church, though they admit her to be a corrupt and apostate Church. The whole foundation, therefore, of the argument of the Assembly, seems to us to be false. It assumes that the Church of Rome is in no sense a Church; which is to assume that she does not admit the Scriptures to be the word of God, that she does not profess that Jesus is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world, that she does not profess saving truths, and that she does not bring forth children unto God; all which assumptions are notoriously and confessedly false, and therefore the conclusion which is derived from

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these assumptions, must be unsound.

Long as this article has become, there is one other view of this subject we must be permitted to present. It matters not whether the Papacy as an organization is a Church or no, as far as the present question is concerned. The contrary assumption is founded upon the idea that baptism is an act of a Church; or that the administrator so acts in the name of the organized society to which he belongs, that those whom he baptizes thereby become members of that society. It was hence argued that the recipients of Romish baptism, are made Romanists, and are baptized into a profession of all the heresies of popery. This appears to us an entirely wrong view of the subject, and to be founded on the Puseyite doctrine of the Church as a corporation, or organized body, into which men are admitted by the ordinance of baptism. It is however the admitted doctrine of Protestants, that the Church Catholic is not an organized society. It is also admitted among Protestants that baptism does not initiate the recipient into any particular Church, but into the Church catholic. The eunuch when baptized by the road side, Paul was baptized in his chamber, the jailor at Philippi, and the thousands of scattered believers baptized by the apostles were not made members of any particular Church, or organized body, by their baptism. After they were baptized, and thus introduced into the Church catholic, they associated or organized themselves into particular Churches. So at the present day, no man is made an Episcopalian, Presbyterian, or Methodist by his baptism, but after baptism, he joins what particular denomination he sees fit. No man therefore is made a papist by being baptized by a papist. It follows from this that the validity of baptism does not depend upon the character of the particular denomination to which the administrator belongs; because he does not act in the name of that denomination, but as a member of the Church catholic. And every man who professes saving truth is a member of that Church. It matters not, therefore, whether the Quakers as a society come within the definition of a Church; individual Quakers, if they have the faith of God's elect and profess it, are members of his Church. And so, too, it matters not whether the Papacy comes within the definition of a church; individual

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papists, if they profess that Jesus is the Son of God, are within the pale of the Church catholic, and, if they have public authority, may baptize in the name of Christ.

Baptism, therefore, not being an ordinance of any particular Church, but of the Church catholic, and every man who professes saving truth being a member of that Church, Romish baptism, if administered by a man professing such truth, is Christian baptism. It is baptism administered by a member of the visible Church, having public authority in that Church, which is all that can be said of baptism administered by the Archbishop of Canterbury, or by the moderator of our Assembly.

We maintain, therefore, Romish baptism to be valid; that is, that it avails to make the recipient a member of the Church catholic, because it is a washing with water, in the name of the Trinity, with the design to signify, seal and apply the benefits of the covenant of grace. It is administered by ordained ministers; for a Romish priest is a man publicly called to the office of a presbyter. It is administered by a member of the visible Church; for every man who confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, is a member of that Church. It is only by adopting the hierarchical or Puseyite doctrine of the Church, and of orders, that the opposite conclusion can be sustained. We must restrict the Church to miserably narrow limits, within which the truth and Spirit of God refuse to be confined; and we must claim an authority and virtue for specific forms of ordination, which the Scriptures nowhere sanction. We are, therefore, constrained to regard the decision of the Assembly as in direct conflict with our standards, and with the word of God; and as incompatible with Protestant principles, as well as with the practice of the whole Protestant world. We have no scruple in saying this. For in protesting against the decision of one hundred and sixty-nine members of the Assembly, we can hide ourselves in the crowd of 169,000,000 of faithful men who, since the Reformation, have maintained the opposite and more catholic doctrine.*¹²

¹² We have heard it repeatedly objected that this whole discussion attributes too

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If the Church of Rome is antichrist, a synagogue of Satan, how can its ordinances be Christian sacraments? This, we doubt not, is the difficulty which weighs most with those who reject Romish baptisms as invalid. We would ask such persons whether they admit that a Roman Catholic can be a child of God? If he can, how can a man be a member of the synagogue of Satan and of the body of Christ in the same time? Is there no inconsistency here? If not, then there is no inconsistency in declaring that the Romish system, so far as it is distinguished from that of evangelical Churches, is antichristian, and yet that those who are groaning under that system are in the visible Church. The terms antichrist, synagogue of Satan, &c., refer not to the mass of the people, nor to the presbyters of that communion, nor the word of God, nor the saving truths which they profess, but to the Popish hierarchy and its corruptions. That hierarchy, with its usurpations and errors, is the mystery of iniquity, the man of sin, which in the Church catholic, the Temple of God, exalts itself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped. If Roman Catholics are

much importance to baptism. What is the harm, it is asked, of declaring a particular kind of baptism to be invalid? or of repeating the ordinance? We have also heard brethren say, they left the matter to the decision of the applicant for admission to our communion. If he wished to be rebaptized, they rebaptized him; if he was satisfied with the baptism received in the Church of Rome, they did not insist on a repetition of the ordinance. We have no superstitious feeling on this subject, but we object to such repetition. 1. Because it involves a declaration of what is not true. It declares that to be no baptism which has all the essential characteristics of that sacrament. It declares that the recipient had never before avowed himself a Christian, when the fact is not so. 2. Because we have neither scriptural authority nor example for the repetition of the rite; and such repetition is forbidden by our Confession of Faith, and is contrary to the usage of the whole Christian Church. 3. Because it is contrary to the very nature of the ordinance. *Baptismus est signum initiationis*. It is a declaration that the recipient now for the first time takes upon him the obligations, and claims the privileges of a professing Christian. If a man is installed into a particular office, it is a declaration that he was not before publicly invested with the office. If he presents himself to be married to a particular woman, it is a declaration that she is not already his wife. And if he presents himself for baptism, he declares that he has not been washed with water in the name of the Trinity, in order to his initiation into the visible Church.

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no part of the visible Church, then the Romish hierarchy is not “the man of sin” spoken of by the apostle, for he was to rise and rule in the Church. It is, therefore, one thing to denounce the Romish system, and another to say that Romanists are no part of the Church catholic. And if they are in the Church, their baptism being a washing with water in the name of the Trinity, is Christian baptism; just as the word of God, when read or preached by them, is still his word, and is to be received and obeyed as such.

11. Charles Hodge: *Is the Church of Rome a Part of the True Church?*

After Hodge's essay on the validity of Roman Baptism was published (included as chapter 10 above), responses were not long in coming. He notes that two series of articles were begun in the Watchman and Observer and Presbyterian. The first of these was not yet far enough along to merit a reply. The second, Hodge says, was in its tenth installment, with the author, Theophilus, only then ready to begin his argument. It is to the preliminary points made in this series that Hodge responded. He published the following essay in the Princeton Review in April 1846.

It is very plain that our remarks, in our number of July last, in favor of the validity of Romish baptism, have not met the approbation of a large portion of our brethren. This, though a matter of regret, is not a matter of surprise. The large majority of the last Assembly by which the resolution pronouncing such baptism null and void was carried, as well as other indications of the public mind in the church, made it plain from the beginning that we should be for the present, at least, and probably for some years, in a small minority on this question. Our confidence, however, in the correctness of our position, has not been shaken. That confidence rests partly on the conviction we cannot help feeling of the soundness of the arguments on which our conclusion rests; and partly on the fact that those arguments have satisfied the minds of the vast

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majority of the people of God from the Reformation to the present time. We have, however, waited, with minds we hope open to the conviction, to hear what was to be said on the opposite side. The religious papers early announced that full replies to our arguments would speedily appear. Providential circumstances, it seems, have prevented, until recently, the accomplishment of their purposes thus early announced. All that we have seen in the shape of argument on the subject, are two numbers of a series of articles now in the course of publication in the *Watchman and Observer*, of Richmond, and the essays of Theophilus, in the *Presbyterian*. Our respect for the writer in the *Watchman*, and for the thoroughness and ability which distinguish his opening numbers, imposes on us the duty of silence as to the main point in dispute, until the series of articles is completed. It will then be time enough to decide whether the discussion can with profit be further continued in our pages. We are also as yet without any light from Theophilus. After writing ten weeks he is but approaching the subject. He closes the tenth number with saying: "We are now prepared to begin the argument." All that precedes, therefore, is not properly, in his judgment, of the nature of argument; though doubtless regarded as pertinent to the discussion. Under these circumstances it is obvious that the way is not open for us to attempt to justify our position. We gave the definition of baptism contained in our standards—and then endeavored to show that Romish baptism falls within that definition. Neither of these points has, as yet, been seriously assailed. This is what the writer in the *Watchman and Observer* proposes to do, and we respectfully wait to hear what he has to say. In the meantime the topic discussed by Theophilus in his eleventh and twelfth numbers, is so important in itself and so intimately connected with this whole subject, that we have determined to devote a few pages to the consideration of the question, Whether the church of Rome is still a portion of the visible church of Christ?

Those taking the negative of this question, have every advantage of an adventitious kind in their favor. They have no need of definitions, or distinctions, or of affirming in one sense and denying in another. The round, plump, intelligible "no," answers all their purposes. They make no demand upon the discrimination, or the candor of the public. They deal in what is called plain common sense, repudiating all metaphysical niceties. They have in this respect the same advantages that the ultra temperance man and the

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abolitionist possess. The former disembarasses himself of all need of distinctions and qualifications by affirming that the use of intoxicating liquors as a beverage is sinful; not sometimes right and sometimes wrong, according to circumstances, which implies the necessity of determining what those circumstances are which give character to the act. He takes the common sense view of the case; and asserts that a practice which produces all the drunkenness that is in the world, and all the vice and misery which flow from drunkenness, is a sinful practice. He therefore hoots at those who beg him to discriminate between what is wrong in itself and universally, and what is wrong only in certain circumstances; and cries them down as the friends of publicans and sinners. The abolitionist is still more summary. Slavery is a heinous crime; it degrades human beings into things; it forbids marriages; it destroys domestic relations; it separates parents and children, husbands and wives; it legalizes what God forbids, and forbids what God enjoins; it keeps its victims in ignorance even of the gospel; it denies labor its wages, subjects the persons, the virtue, and the happiness of many to the caprice of one; it involves the violation of all social rights and duties, and therefore is the greatest of social crimes. It is as much as any man's character for sense, honesty or religion is worth, to insist that a distinction must here be made; that we must discriminate between slavery and its separable adjuncts; between the relationship itself and the abuse of it; between the possession of power and the unjust exercise of it. Let any man in some portions of our country, in England, in Scotland, or Ireland, attempt to make such distinctions, and see with what an outburst of indignation he will be overwhelmed. It is just so in the present case. Rome is antichrist, the mystical Babylon, the scarlet woman, the mother of harlots, drunk with the blood of the saints. What room, asks Theophilus, is there for argument here? Is Babylon Zion? Is the synagogue of Satan the church of Christ, the scarlet woman the bride of the Lamb? Woe to the man who ventures to ask for definitions, and discrimination; or to suggest that possibly these antagonistic designations are not applied to the same subject, or to the same subject under the same aspect; that as of old the prophets denounced the Hebrew community under the figure of an adulterous woman, and almost in the same breath addresses them as the beloved of God, his chosen people, compared to the wife of one's youth; so it may be here. The case is pronounced too plain for argument; the appeal is

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made at once to the feelings of the reader, and those who do not join in the cry are represented as advocates of popery, or at best very doubtful Protestants.

We do not mean to complain of anything of this kind we may have ourselves experienced. We gratefully acknowledge the general courtesy of Theophilus and the Christian spirit and gentlemanly bearing of the writer in the Watchman. Our object in these remarks is to call attention to the fact that there is very great danger of being carried away by the mere sound and appearance of argument in all such cases, and that while an easy triumph may be gained for the moment by taking things in the gross, and refusing the trouble of determining accurately the meaning of terms we use, yet that the evils which flow from this course are often serious and lasting. We have seen churches rent asunder by the anti-slavery agitation, when it is probable, if the different parties had calmly sat down to compare their views and define their terms, it would have been found they were substantially of the same mind.

It is neither by research nor argument the question whether Romanists are members of the visible church to be answered. It is a simple matter of definition and statement. All that can be done is first to determine what is meant by the word church; and secondly what is meant by Rome, church of Rome, Romanists, or whatever term is used, and then see whether the two agree, whether Rome falls within or without the definition of the church.

By a definition we do not mean a description including a specification of attributes which properly pertain to the thing defined; but an enumeration of its essential attributes and of none other. We may say that a Christian is a man who believes all that Christ taught, who obeys all that he commanded, and trusts all his promises. This, however, is a description of an ideal or perfect Christian. It is not a definition which is to guide our judgment, whether a particular individual is to be regarded and treated as a Christian. We may say that a church is a society in which the pure word of God is preached, the sacraments duly administered, and discipline properly exercised by legitimate officers. This, however, is a description of a pure and orderly church, and not an enumeration of the essential attributes of such a body. If we use that description as a definition, we must exclude all but orthodox Presbyterians from the pale of the church. The eastern churches, the church of England, the

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Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists would without exception be cut off. Every one of these classes of Christians fails, according to our standard, in some one or more of the above specifications. They are all defective either as to doctrine, or as to the sacraments, or as to the proper exercise of discipline, or as to the organs through which such discipline is exercised. This distinction between a description and definition, between an enumeration of what belongs to a pure church, and what is necessary to the being of a church, is often disregarded. We think Theophilus overlooks it. He quotes largely from Turretin as sustaining his views on this subject; whereas Turretin is on precisely the opposite ground; affirming what Theophilus denies, and denying what Theophilus affirms. Turretin expressly makes the distinctions between “a true church,” i.e., a church which conforms of the true standard of what a church ought to be, and a heretical, corrupt, and apostate church. True, in his use of the term, corresponds to orthodox or pure; not with real. A body, therefore, according to him may be a church, and yet not a true church. We adverted to this fact in our former article, and referred so distinctly to the statements of Turretin that we are surprised to find Theophilus quoting from him as he does. “Since the church of Rome,” says Turretin, “may be viewed under a twofold aspect, either in reference to the profession of Christianity and of the evangelical truths which she retains, or in reference to her subjection to the pope, and to her corruptions both in matters of faith and morals, we can speak of her in two different ways. Under one aspect, we do not deny she retains some truth; under the other we deny that she is Christian and apostolical, and affirm her to be anti-christian and apostate. In one sense, we admit she may be still called a **CHRISTIAN CHURCH**. 1st. In reference to the people of God, or the elect, who are called to come out of her even at the time of her destruction, Rev. xviii. 4. 2d. In reference to external form, or certain elements of a dispersed church, the vestiges of which are still conspicuous, as well as regards the word of God and the preaching thereof, which she still retains, although corrupted, as the administration of the sacraments, especially baptism, which as to its substance is there retained in its integrity. 3d. In reference to the evangelical truths, as concerning the Trinity, Christ the mediator, God and man, by which she is distinguished from a congregation of pagans or infidels. But we deny that she can be properly and

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simply (i.e., without qualification) be called a true church, much less the only and the catholic church, as they would wish to have her called.”

In the next paragraph but one, he explains what he means by *verity* as affirmed of a church, when we say she is *vera ecclesia*. It includes “verity in faith,” or freedom from heresy; purity, or freedom from all superstition and idolatry; liberty in government, freedom from servitude and tyranny; sanctity of morals, as opposed to corruption of manners; and certainty and consolation, or freedom from doubt or diffidence.

Again, in answer to the objection that if Romanists have true baptism they must be a true church, he says “True baptism does indeed suppose a true church, as far as Christianity in the general is concerned, as opposed to a congregation of infidels; but not as it relates to pure Christianity, free from heretical errors; since true baptism may be found among heretics, who are not a true church.” – p. 151.

It is very evident, therefore, that Rome, according to Turretin, is to be viewed under two aspects; under the one she is a church, i.e., a body in which the people of God still are; which retains the word of God and the preaching of it, though corrupted, and the sacraments, especially baptism. Under the other aspect, i.e., as a papal body, she is not a church; i.e., her popery and all her corruptions are anti-christian and apostate. She is not therefore a *true* church, for a *true* church is free from heresy, from superstition, from oppressive regimen, from corruption of manners, and from doubt or diffidence. Whether Theophilus approves of these distinctions or not; whether he thinks that the English word *true* can be used in the latitude which Turretin gives the Latin word *verus*, or not; still he ought to give the Geneva professor the benefit of his own statements and definitions; and not represent him as denying that the church of Rome is a church, when he denies that she is a *true*, i.e., a pure church. Turretin says that Romish baptism is valid. Theophilus says it is not. Both however agree that if Rome is in no sense a church, her baptism is in no case valid. It is obvious, therefore, that Turretin admits her to be a church in the sense in which Theophilus denies it.

Professor Thornwell very correctly remarked, in his effective speech before the General Assembly, that it is very plain that though the Reformers denied Rome to be the true church, they admitted her to be in some sense a church.

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The fact is, they used the word *true* as Turretin does, as implying conformity with the true mode or standard. They made a distinction between a description of a church including all the excellencies such a body ought to possess; and a definition including nothing but what is essential to the being of a church. It is to the danger of confounding between these two things, that the foregoing remarks are directed.

The real difficulty in the case, is that it is impossible to give any one definition of a church, except in the most general terms, which includes all the established uses of the word. Among Congregationalists a church is a number of persons giving credible evidence of regeneration, united by a covenant for the purpose of Christian worship and mutual watch and care. It is not to be denied that such a body is a church; it falls within the legitimate sense and wider definition of the term. This narrow sense has gradually diffused itself through our common modes of speech. We talk of man's being admitted to the church, or excluded from it, meaning by the church the body of communicants, to the exclusion of the great body of the baptized. To those accustomed to this use of the term, no body larger than a single congregation can be a church, and none composed in great part of those who give no evidence and make no profession of regeneration. Men possessed with this idea of the church, and unable to get a wider conception of it, ask with confidence, can a corrupt, wicked, persecuting body be a church? Of course not. No such body falls within their definition of the church; and if they can prove that that definition of the church is the only proper one, there can be no further dispute about the matter. But the *usus loquendi* neither of the Bible nor of the English language is determined by Congregationalists. It is an undeniable fact that we speak and speak correctly of the Reformed Dutch church; of the Episcopal church, and of the Presbyterian church, without intending to affirm that the several bodies thus designated are composed of persons giving credible evidence of regeneration, and united by covenant for worship and discipline. It will not do therefore to conclude that the church of England or that of Scotland is no church, because it does not fall within the New England definition of a church.

When we turn to the Scriptures and to the common language of Christians, we do not find the word church used in senses which admit of being

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embraced under one definition. In other words, the essential attributes of the church, in the established sense of the term, are not its essential attributes in another equally authorized sense. Thus we are told that the church consists of the whole number of the elect who ever have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof. In this sense of the word, it is essential to the church that it consist of the elect only, and that it should include them all. That this definition is sustained by scriptural usage cannot be disputed. It is in this sense the church is the body of Christ, the fullness of him that filleth all in all. It is by the church, thus understood, God is to manifest to principalities and powers his manifold wisdom. This is the church which Christ loved, and for which he gave himself that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church. It would of course be absurd to contend that no society is a church which does not come under this definition.

Again the word is often used as equivalent with saints, believers, the true people of God, existing at any one time on earth, or in any one place. The word is used in this sense when Paul exhorts us to give no offence to the church, i.e., the people of God; and when he says he persecuted the church. In like manner, when we pray for the church, either in the whole world, or in a particular country, or city, we surely do not mean the Presbyterian, or Episcopal, or Methodist church, or any one organized body. We have in our mind the true people of God, scattered abroad it may be, existing in every Christian denomination. In this sense of the word it is essential to the church that it consist of true believers.

A third sense of the word is that in which it is used when we say the church consists of all those throughout the world who profess the true religion, together with their children. This is a legitimate established meaning of the term. In this view of the church, nothing is essential to it but the profession of the true religion; and in this sense every individual making that profession is a member, and every society composed of such individuals is a portion of the church or is included in it.

Theophilus expresses great surprise that we should venture the assertion that organization is not essential to the church. He ridicules the statement, and appeals to the language of the Psalmist when he bids us walk about Zion and

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tell the towers thereof, as sufficient refutation of it. By organization we meant, and it is very evident he means, external ordered union. We presume Theophilus himself will not maintain that in either of the three established senses of the word above stated, organization is among its essential attributes. It is not enumerated in the definitions as given from our standards and from Scripture; nor is it necessarily included in the complex conception which we give the name church. When we conceive of the whole body of the elect, which have been or are to be gathered into one under Christ, it is not as an external organized body furnished with ministers and sacraments, but simply as the great body of the redeemed united to Christ and to each other by the indwelling of the Spirit. So too when we speak of the church as consisting of true believers, we do not conceive of them as an external organized body. We pray for no such body when we pray for the church of God throughout the world. The word is equivalent to the true Israel; Israel *kata pneuma* as distinguished from the Israel *kata sarka*. In like manner, when the word is used for all those throughout the world who profess the true religion; the idea of organization is of necessity excluded from that of the church. The visible church catholic is not an organized body on any but Romish principles. We are therefore surprised that Theophilus should be thrown off his balance, by a remark so obviously true, and of such constant recurrence in the writings of Protestants.

There is a fourth established meaning of the word church, which has more direct reference to the question before us. It often means an organized society professing the true religion, united for the purpose of worship and discipline, and subject to the same form of government and to some common tribunal. A multitude of controversies turn upon the correctness of this definition. It includes the following particulars. 1. A church is an organized society. It is thus distinguished from the casual or temporary assemblies of Christians, for the purpose of divine worship. 2. It must profess the true religion. By the true religion cannot be meant all the doctrines of the true religion, and nothing more or less. For then no human society would be a church unless perfect both in knowledge and faith. Nor can it mean all the clearly revealed and important doctrines of the Bible for then no man could be a Christian and no body of men a church, which rejects or is ignorant of those doctrines. But it must mean the essential doctrines of the gospel, those doctrines without which

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no man can be saved. This is plain, because nothing can be essential, as far as truth is concerned, to a church, which is not essential to union with Christ. We are prohibited by our allegiance to the word of God from recognizing as a true Christian, any man who rejects any doctrine which the Scriptures declare to be essential to salvation; and we are bound by that allegiance not to refuse such recognition, on account of ignorance or error, to any man who professes what the Bible teaches is saving truth. It is absurd that we should make more truth essential to a visible church, than Christ has made essential to the church invisible and to salvation. This distinction between essential and unessential doctrines Protestants have always insisted upon, and Romanists and Anglicans as strenuously rejected. It is, however, so plainly recognized in Scripture, and so obviously necessary in practice, that those who reject it in terms in opposition to Protestants, are forced to admit it in reality. They make substantially the same distinction when they distinguish between matters of faith and matters of opinion, and between those truths which must be received with explicit faith (i.e., known as well as believed) and those which may be received with implicit faith; i.e., received without knowledge, as a man who believes the Bible to be the word of God may be said to believe all it teaches, though it may contain many things of which he is ignorant. Romanists say that every doctrine on which the church has pronounced judgment as part of the revelation of God, is a matter of faith, and essential to the salvation of those to whom it is duly proposed. Anglicans say the same thing of those doctrines which are sustained by tradition. Here is virtually the same distinction between fundamental and other doctrines which Protestants make. The only difference is as to the criterion by which the one class is to be distinguished from the other. Romanists and Anglicans say that criterion is the judgment of the church; Protestants say it is the word of God. What the Bible declares to be essential to salvation, is essential: what it does not make absolutely necessary to be believed and professed, no man can rightfully declare to be absolutely necessary. And what is not essential to the true church, the spiritual body of Christ, or to salvation, cannot be essential to the visible church. This is really only saying that those whom Christ declares to be his people, we have no right to say are not his people. If any man thinks he has such a right, it would be well for him to take heed how he exercises it. By the true religion, therefore,

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which a society must profess in order to its being recognized as a church, must be meant those doctrines which are essential to salvation.

3. Such society must not only profess the true religion, but its object must be the worship of God and the exercise of discipline. A church is thus distinguished from a Bible, missionary, or any similar society of Christians.

4. To constitute it a church, i.e., externally one body, it must have the same form of government and be subject to the same common tribunal. The different classes of Presbyterians in this country, though professing the same doctrines and adopting the same form of government, are not all members of the same external church, because subject to different tribunals.

Now the question is, Is this a correct definition of a church? Does it omit anything that is essential? The only things which we can think of as likely to be urged as omissions, are the ministry and the sacraments. Few things in our July number seem to have given Theophilus more pain than our saying that the ministry is not essential to the church. With regard to this point, we would remark. 1. That we believe the ministry to be a divine institution. 2. That it was designed to be perpetual. 3. That it has been perpetuated. 4. That it is necessary to the edification and extension of the church. But we are very far from believing the popish doctrine that the ministry is essential to the being of a church, and that there is no church where there is no ministry. Officers are necessary to the well-being of a nation, and no nation can long exist without them. But a nation does not cease to exist when the king or president dies. The nation would continue though every civil officer was cut off in a night; and blessed be God, the church would still live, though all ministers should die or apostatize at once. We believe with Professor Thornwell, and with the real living church of God in all ages, that if the ministry fails, the church can make a ministry; or rather that Christ, who is in his church by the Spirit, would then, as he does now, by his divine call constitute men ministers. It strikes us as most extraordinary for a Presbyterian to say the ministry is essential to the church, and that it must enter into the definition; when our own book makes provision, first, for the organization of a church, and then for the election of its officers. A number of believers are constituted a church, and then, and not until they are a church, they elect their elders and call a pastor. Every vacant church is a practical proof that the ministry does not

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enter into the definition of the church. Theophilus amuses himself at our expense for our venturing to say, “Bellarmine has the credit of being the first writer who thus corrupted the definition of the church,” that is, by introducing subjection to lawful pastors as part of that definition. We were well aware of the danger of asserting a negative. We knew that we had not read every writer before the time of Bellarmine, and that we could remember very little of the little we had read. We were, therefore, wise enough not to say that no man before the popish cardinal had perpetrated a like interpolation into the definition of the church, but contented ourselves with the safe remark that he has the credit of being the first who was guilty of that piece of priestcraft. That he has that credit among Protestants can hardly be disputed. Dean Sherlock says: “I know indeed of late the clergy have in a great measure monopolized the name of the church, whereas, in propriety of speech, they do not belong to the definition of a church,” any more than a shepherd to the definition of a flock, which is his illustration. “The learned Launoy,” he adds, “has produced texts of Scripture for this definition of the church, viz.: that it is the company of the faithful; and has proved by the testimony of the fathers in all ages, even down to the Council of Trent itself, that this was the received notion of the church, till it was altered by Canisius and Bellarmine,” the former “putting Christ’s vicar into the definition,” the later, subjection “to lawful pastors.” “Whereas,” continues the Dean, “before these men, neither pastor nor bishops, much less the Pope of Rome, were ever put into the general definition of a church.”¹ Very much the same complaint is uttered by Dr. Thomas Jackson, against “Bellarmine, Valentia, Stapleton, and some others,” for troubling the stream of God’s word as to the nature and definition of the church.² It surely does not become Presbyterians to exalt the clergy beyond the place assigned them by these strong Episcopalians, and make them essential to the being of the church, and of course an element in the definition of the term.

Very much the same remarks may be made in reference to the sacraments. We of course believe, 1. That the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are of divine appointment. 2. That they are of perpetual obligation. 3.

¹ Preservative against Popery, vol. 1, tit. iii., ch. i., p. 36.

² See treatise on the church, p. 50, Goode’s edition.

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That they are signs and seals of the covenant, and means of grace. 4. That the observance of them is a high duty and privilege, and consequently the neglect or want of them, a great sin or defect; but to make them essential to the church is to make them essential to salvation, which is contrary to Scripture. If baptism made a man a Christian, if it communicated a new nature which could be received in no other way, then indeed there could be no Christians and no church without baptism. But such is not the Protestant or scriptural doctrine of the sacraments. The Hebrew nation would not cease to be Hebrews, if they ceased to practice circumcision. They did not in fact cease to be the church, though they neglected that rite for the forty years they wandered in the wilderness, until there was not a circumcised man among them, save Caleb and Joshua. Yet far more is said of the duty and necessity of circumcision in the Old Testament than is said of baptism in the New. It is the doctrine of our church that baptism recognizes, but does not constitute membership in the church. Plain and important, therefore, as is the duty of administering and observing these ordinances, they are not to be exalted into a higher place than that assigned them in the word of God. Though the due celebration of the sacraments may very properly be enumerated, in one sense, among the signs of the church, we do not feel authorized or permitted by the authority of Scripture, to make such celebration essential to salvation or to the existence of the church. If any of our brethren should differ from us as to this point, it would not follow that they must reject the definition above given. For as the sacraments are a means and a mode of divine worship, the due celebration of them may be considered as included in that clause of the definition, which declares that a church is a society for the worship of God.

We revert therefore to the question, Is the definition given above correct? Is a church an organized society professing the true religion, united for the worship of God and the exercise of discipline, and subject to the same form of government and to common tribunal? It certainly has in its favor the common *usus loquendi*. When we speak of the church of England, of Scotland, the Free church, the Secession church, the Protestant Episcopal church; or when we speak of a single congregation as a church, as the church at Easton, or the first, second, or third Presbyterian church in Philadelphia; or if we take the term in the New England sense, as distinguished from parish or congregation, still all these cases fall under the definition. By the word church, in all such

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cases, we mean an organized society professing the true religion, united for the worship of God and the exercise of discipline, under the same form of government and under some common tribunal. That common tribunal in a Congregational church, is the brotherhood; in a Presbyterian church, the session; in the Presbyterian church in the United States, our General Assembly; in the episcopal church, the general convention; in the Church of England, the reigning sovereign; in the evangelical church of Prussia, the king. In all these cases it is subjection to some independent tribunal that gives unity to a church, in the light in which it is here contemplated.

2. This definition is substantially the one given in our standards. “A particular church consists of a number of professing Christians with their offspring, voluntarily associated together for divine worship and godly living agreeably to the Holy Scriptures; and submitting to a certain form of government.³ “Professing Christians” is here used as equivalent to “those professing the true religion,” the form of expression adopted in the Confession of Faith and Larger Catechism. It is obvious that the definition suits all the cases mentioned above, applying equally well to a single congregation, and to a whole denomination united in one body.

3. This definition suits the use of the term as it occurs in many passages of Scripture. When we read of the church of Corinth, of Antioch, of Rome, the word is universally admitted to designate a number of persons professing the true religion, united for religious worship and discipline, under some common tribunal.

4. This definition is one to which the principles laid down on this subject in Scripture necessarily lead. The Scriptures teach that faith in Christ makes a man a Christian; the profession of that faith makes him a professing Christian. The true, or invisible church consists of true believers; the visible church, of a society of such professors, united for church purposes and separated from other societies by subjection to some one tribunal. These seem to be plain scriptural principles. If any thing else or more than faith in Christ is absolutely necessary to union with him, and therefore to salvation; then something more than faith is necessary to make a man a Christian, and something more than

³ Form of Government, ch. 2, sec. 4.

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the profession of that faith to make him a professing Christian, and consequently some other sign of a visible church must be necessary than the profession of the true religion. But we do not see how consistently with the evangelical system of doctrine, and especially with the great doctrine that salvation is by faith, we can avoid the conclusion that all true believers are in the true church, and all professing believers are in the visible church.

5. Did time permit, or were it necessary, it could easily be proved that in all ages of the church, this idea of the church has been the prevailing one. We have already quoted the testimony of Sherlock against the Romanists in proof of this point, and it would be easy to fill volumes with quotations from ancient and modern writers to the same effect. "Church," says Hooker in his Eccles. Polity, vol. ii, 17, "is a word which art hath devised thereby to sever and distinguish that society of men which professteth the true religion from the rest, which profess it not, whereupon, because, the only object which separateth ours from other religions, is Jesus Christ, in whom none but the church doth believe, and whom none but the church doth worship; we find that accordingly the apostles do everywhere distinguish hereby the church from infidels and Jews, accounting them which call upon the name of the Lord Jesus to be his church." And again, B. 3, § 1, "The visible church of Jesus Christ is one by outward profession of those things which supernaturally appertain to the essence of Christianity, and are necessarily required in every particular Christian man." Barrow, in his Discourse on the Unity of the Church says, "It is evident that the church is one by consent in faith and opinion concerning all principal matters of opinion." Bishop Taylor, in his Dissuasive against Popery, says, "The church (visible) is a company of men and women professing the saving doctrine of Jesus Christ." This is but saying what Tertullian, Augustin, Jerome, Hilary, Chrysostom and the whole line of God's people have said from the beginning.

6. Finally, we appeal in support of the essential element of the definition of a church given above, to the constant testimony of the Spirit. The Scriptures teach that the Spirit operates through the truth; that we have no right to expect his influence (as far as adults are concerned) where the truth is not known, and that where it is known, he never fails to give it more or less effect; that wherever the Spirit is, there is the church, since it is by receiving the Spirit,

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men become members of the true church; and wherever the true or invisible church is, there is the church visible, because profession of faith; and, therefore, where these true believers are united in the profession of that truth by which they are saved, with a society or community—then such society is within the limits of the visible church, i.e., is a constituent portion of that body which embraces all those who profess the true religion. All we contend for is that the church is the body of Christ, that those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells are members of that body; and consequently that whenever we have evidence of the presence of the Spirit, there we have evidence of the presence of the church. And if these evidences occur in a society professing certain doctrines by which men are thus born unto God, it is God's own testimony that such society is still a part of the visible church. It strikes us as one of the greatest absurdities of Ritualism, whether among Romanists or Anglicans, that it sets up a definition of the church, not at all commensurate with its actual and obvious extent. What more glaring absurdity can be uttered than that the Episcopal church in this country is here the only church, when nine tenths of the true religion of the country exists without its pale. It may be man's church, but God's church is much wider. Wherever, therefore, there is a society professing truth, by which men are actually born unto God, that society is within the definition of the church given in our standards, and if as a society, it is united under one tribunal for church purposes, it is itself a church.

The next step in the argument is, of course, the consideration of the question, whether the church of Rome comes within the definition, the correctness of which we have endeavored to establish? It was very common with the reformers and their successors to distinguish between the papacy, and the body of people professing Christianity under its dominion. When, by the church of Rome they meant the papacy, they denounced it as the mystical Babylon, and synagogue of Satan; when they meant by it the people, considered as a community professing the essential doctrines of the gospel, they admitted it to be a church. This distinction is natural and just, though it imposes the necessity of affirming and denying the same proposition. If by the church of Rome, you mean one thing, it is not a church; if you mean another, it is a church. People will not trouble themselves, however, with such

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distinctions, though they often unconsciously make them, and are forced to act upon them. Thus by the word England, we sometimes mean the country, sometimes the government, and sometimes the people. If we mean by it the government, we may say (in reference to some periods of its history), that it is unjust, cruel, persecuting, rapacious, opposed to Christ and his kingdom: when these things could not be said with truth of the people.⁴

Though we regard the above distinction as sound, and though we can see no more real contradiction in saying Rome is a church, and is not a church, than in saying a man is mortal and yet immortal, spiritual yet carnal, a child of God yet sold under sin; yet as the distinction is not necessary for the sake either of truth or perspicuity, we do not intend to avail ourselves of it. All that we have to beg is, that brethren would not quote against us the sweeping declarations and denunciations of our Protestant fore-fathers against popery as the man of sin, antichrist, the mystical Babylon, and synagogue of Satan, as proof of our departure from the Protestant faith. In all those denunciations we could consistently join; just as our fathers, as Professor Thornwell acknowledges, while uttering those denunciations, still admitted Rome, in one sense, to be a church. Our present object is to enquire whether the church of Rome, taking

⁴ “The church of Rome,” says Bishop Sanderson, “may be considered, 1. *Materialiter*, as it is a church professing the faith of Christ, as we also do in the common points of agreement. 2. *Formaliter*, and in regard to what we call Popery, viz., the point of difference, whether concerning the doctrine or worship, wherein we charge her with having added to the substance of the faith her own inventions. 3. *Conjunctim pro toto aggregato*, taking both together. As in an unsound body, we may consider the body by itself; the disease by itself; and the body and the disease both together, as they make a diseased body.” Considered in the first sense, he says, it is a church; considered in the second sense or “formally, in regard of those points which are properly of popery, it has become a false and corrupt church; and is indeed an anti-Christian synagogue, and not a true Christian church, taking truth in the second sense.” He had previously said: “the word truth applied to any subject is taken either absolute or respective. Absolutely a thing is true, when it hath *veritatem entis et essentia*, with all those essential things which are requisite to the being and existence of it. Respectively, when over and above these essentials, it hath also such accidental conditions and qualities, as should make it perfect and commendably good. A thing may be true in the first sense, and yet not true in the second, but false. As a man may be a true man (*animal rationale*) and yet a false knave.” *Treatise on the Church*, pp. 214 and 219.

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the term as Bishop Sanderson says, *Conjunctim pro toto aggregato*, just as we take the term, church of England, falls within the definition of a church given above.

That it is an organized society, is of course plain; that it is united for the purpose of worship and discipline is no less so. That is, it is the professed ostensible object of the society, to teach and promote the Christian religion, to convert men to the faith, to edify believers, to celebrate the worship of God, and to exercise the power of the keys, i.e., the peculiar prerogatives of a church in matters of doctrine and discipline. This is the ostensible professed object of the society. That its rulers have left its true end out of view and perverted it into an engine of government and self-aggrandizement is true, and very wicked; but the same thing is true of almost all established churches. It has been palpably true of the church of England, and scarcely less obviously true of the church of Prussia, as well as the Greek church in Russia. When a church is perverted by its rulers into an engine of state, it does not cease to be a church, because it is by the church as such, i.e., as a society designed for the worship of God and the edification of his people, such rulers endeavor to secure their own secular ends.

The only point really open to debate is, whether the Romish church as a society professes the true religion. In reference to this point we would remark, 1st. That by true religion in this connection, has ever been understood, and from the nature of the case must be understood, the essential doctrines of the gospel. Men may enlarge or contract their list of such doctrines; but it involves a contradiction to say, that those who hold the essentials of the gospel, do not hold the gospel. This would be saying that the essence of a thing is not the thing itself, but something else. By the essential doctrines of the gospel we mean, and Protestants have been accustomed to mean, those doctrines which, in the language of Hooker, “are necessarily required in every particular Christian man.” The question, therefore, as correctly stated by Professor Thornwell, really is, Whether Rome as a society still teaches enough to save the soul? 2. Our second preliminary remark is, that in determining what are the essential doctrines of the gospel, we cannot consent to bow to any other authority than the word of God. We cannot with Romanists and Anglicans, on the one hand, consent to make the judgment of the church the criterion of

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decision on this subject; nor on the other, can we submit to the judgment of individuals or sects, some of which would close not the church only, but heaven itself, against all Presbyterians, others against all Calvinists, others against all Arminians, others against all who sing hymns. 3d. A third remark is, that we must distinguish between what is essential to the gospel, and what is essential for a particular individual to believe. The former is fixed, the other is a variable quantity. The gospel in its essential principles is now what it always was and always must be. But what is essential for a man to believe depends upon that man's opportunities of knowledge. A poor Hottentot may get to Heaven though he knows nothing about, or should unintelligently reject many doctrines which it would argue an unsanctified heart in a man nurtured in the bosom of a pure church, even to question. 4. We must interpret language according to the *usus loquendi* of those who use it, and not according to our own usage. If a man defines justification so as to include sanctification, and says that justification is by works as well as faith, we must understand him accordingly. We may say a man is sanctified by love, hope, and other Christian graces and works; meaning that all these tend to promote his conformity to God; when we could not say, that he is justified, in our sense of the term, by these things.

It is then impossible to give any list of essential doctrines of the gospel, if so doing were to imply that all doctrines not included in such list might be safely rejected by men, no matter what their opportunities for knowledge might be. By essential doctrines we mean, as already stated, those which no man can be saved without believing. We shall not undertake the delicate task of giving a list of such doctrines, but content ourselves with remarking that the Scriptures adopt a twofold mode of statement on the subject. First, they give certain doctrines which, they declare, if any man believes he shall be saved. And secondly, they state certain doctrines which, if a man rejects, he shall be lost. These two modes of statement must be consistent, i.e., they cannot lead logically to contradictory conclusions, even though the Bible arranges under the one head some doctrines which it does not place in the other. One reason why more particulars are found under the latter head than the former, no doubt is, that the rejection of a doctrine implies a knowledge of it. And the rejection of a doctrine when known may be fatal, when the knowledge of it, as a distinct proposition, may not be essential to salvation. These essential

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doctrines therefore may be learned both from the affirmative and negative statements of the Bible. For example, it is said, whosoever believes in Christ shall be saved; whosoever believes that Jesus is the Son of God is born of God; whosoever believes and confesses that Christ is Lord, does it by the Holy Ghost; on the other hand, it is fatal to deny God, for he that cometh unto God must believe that he is the rewarder of those that diligently seek him. He who denies the Son, the same hath not the Father; he who denies sin, or that he is a sinner, the truth is not in him; he who rejects the sacrifice of Christ, has only a fearful looking for of judgment; he who seeks justification from the law has fallen from grace, and Christ shall profit him nothing; he who denies the resurrection of Christ, makes our preaching and our faith vain; he who denies holiness, and the obligation of holiness, has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel; so he who says that the resurrection is past already, has made shipwreck of the faith. The denial of these doctrines is said to forfeit salvation; but it does not follow that they must all be clearly known and intelligently received in order to salvation. It is a historical fact, as far as such a fact can be historically known, that men have been saved who knew nothing of the gospel but that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. The Scriptures do not warrant us in fixing the minimum of divine truth by which the Spirit may save the soul. We do know, however, that if any man believes that Jesus is the Son of God, he is born of God; that no true worshipper of Christ ever perishes. Paul sends his Christian salutations to all in every place, theirs and ours, who shall call upon the name of the Lord Jesus, their Lord and ours.

That Romanists as a society profess the true religion, meaning thereby the essential doctrines of the gospel, those doctrines which if truly believed will save the soul, is, as we think, plain. 1. Because they believe the Scriptures to be the word of God. 2. They direct that the Scriptures should be understood and received as they were understood by the Christian Fathers. 3. They receive the three general creeds of the church, the Apostle's, the Nicene, and the Athanasian, or as these are summed up in the creed of Pius V. 4. They believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. In one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the

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Father, by whom all things were made. Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man. And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, suffered and was buried. And the third day rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end. And they believe one holy catholic apostolic church. They acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins, and look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

If this creed were submitted to any intelligent Christian without his knowing whence it came, could he hesitate to say that it was the creed of a Christian church? Could he deny that these are the very terms in which for ages the general faith of Christendom has been expressed? Could he, without renouncing the Bible, say that the sincere belief of these doctrines would not secure eternal life? Can any man take it upon himself in the sight of God, to assert there is not truth enough in the above summary to save the soul? If not, then a society professing that creed professes the true religion in the sense stated above. 5. We argue from the acknowledged fact that God has always had, still has, and is to have a people in that church until its final destruction; just as he had in the midst of corrupt and apostate Israel. We admit that Rome has grievously apostatized from the faith, the order and the worship of the church; that she has introduced a multitude of false doctrines, a corrupt and superstitious and even idolatrous worship, and a most oppressive and cruel government; but since as a society she still retains the profession of saving doctrines, and as in point of fact, by those doctrines men are born unto God and nurtured for heaven, we dare not deny that she is still a part of the visible church. We consider such a denial a direct contradiction of the Bible, and of the facts of God's providence. It was within the limits of the church the great anti-christian power was to arise; it was in the church the man of sin was to exalt himself; and it was over the church he was to exercise his baneful and cruel power.

The most common and plausible objections to the admission that the church of Rome is still a part of the visible church are the following. First, it is said

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that she does not profess the true religion, because though she retains the forms or propositions in which the truth is stated, she vitiates them by her explanation. To which we answer, 1. That in her general creeds, adopted and professed by the people, no explanations are given. The doctrines are asserted in the general terms, just as they were presented and professed before the Romish apostasy. 2. That the explanations, as given by the Council of Trent, are as stated by Theophilus, designedly two-sided and ambiguous; so that while one class of Romanists take them in a sense consistent with their saving efficacy, others take them in a sense which destroys their value. It is notorious that the thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England are taken in a Calvinistic sense by one class of her theologians; in a semi-Pelagian sense by another class; and in a Romish sense by a third. 3. While we admit the truth of the objection as a fact, viz., that the dominant class of theologians do explain away most of the saving doctrines of her ancient creeds, yet we deny that this destroys the argument from the profession of those creeds, in proof that as a society she retains saving truth. Because it is the creeds and not the explanations, that constitute the profession of the people.

Secondly, it is objected that Rome professes fundamental errors. To this we answer, 1. That we acknowledge that the teaching of many of her most authoritative authors is fatally erroneous. 2. That the decisions of the Council of Trent, as understood by one class of Romish theologians, are not less at variance with the truth; but not as they are in fact explained by another class of her doctors. 3. That these decisions and explanations are not incorporated into the creed professed by the people. 4. That the profession of fundamental error by a society retains with such error the essential truths of religion. The Jewish church at the time of Christ, by her officers, in the synagogues and in the sanhedrim, and by all her great parties professed fundamental error, justification by the law, for example; and yet retained its being as a church, in the bosom of which the elect of God still lived.

Thirdly, Rome is idolatrous, and therefore in no sense a church. To this we answer, 1. That the practice of the great body of the church of Rome is beyond doubt idolatrous. 2. That the avowed principles of the majority of her teachers are also justly liable to the same charge. 3. That the principles of another class of her doctors, who say they worship neither the images

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themselves, nor through them, but simply in the presence of them, are not idolatrous in the ordinary meaning of the term. 4. That it is not necessary that every man should be, in the fatal sense of that word, an idolater in order to remain in that church; otherwise there could be not true children of God within its pale. But the contrary is, as a fact, on all hands conceded. 5. We know that the Jewish church, though often overrun with idolatry, never ceased to exist.

Fourthly, it is objected that the people of God are commanded to come out of the church of Rome, which would not be the case were she still a part of the visible church. To this we answer, that the people of God are commanded to come out of every church which either professes error, or which imposes any terms of communion which hurt an enlightened conscience. The non-conformists in the time of Charles II, were bound to leave the church of England, and yet did not thereby assert that it was no longer a church.

Fifthly, it is said we give up too much to the papists if we admit Romanists to be in the church. To this we answer, Every false position is a weak position. The cause of truth suffers in no way more than from identifying it with error, which is always done when its friends advocate it on false principles. When one says, we favor intemperance, unless we say that the use of intoxicating liquors is sinful; another, that we favor slavery, unless we say slaveholding is a sin; and a third, that we favor popery unless we say the church of Rome is no church, they all, as it seems to us, make the same mistake, and greatly injure the cause in which they are engaged. They give the adversary an advantage over them, and they fail to enlist the strength of their own side. Men who are anxious to promote temperance, cannot join societies which avow principles which they believe to be untrue; and men who believe popery to be the greatest modern enemy of the gospel, cannot co-operate in measures of opposition to that growing evil, which are founded on the denial of what appear to be important scriptural principles. It is a great mistake to suppose popery is aided by admitting what truth it does include. What gives it its power, what constitutes its peculiarly dangerous character, is that it is not pure infidelity; it is not the entire rejection of the gospel, but truth surrounded with enticing and destructive error. Poison by itself is not so seductive, and therefore not so dangerous, as when mixed with food. We do not believe that

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those of our brethren from whom we are so unfortunate as to differ on this subject, have a deeper impression than we have either of the destructive character of the errors of popery, or of the danger to which religion and liberty are exposed from its progress. We believe it to be by far the most dangerous form of delusion and error that has ever arisen in the Christian world, and all the more dangerous from its having arisen and established itself in the church, or temple of God.