

## POSITION PAPERS

[ ▼ text begins below ▼ ]

15th General Assembly, 1987, Appendix P, p. 416-422.

### APPENDIX P

#### **THE REPORT OF THE STUDY COMMITTEE ON QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE VALIDITY OF CERTAIN BAPTISMS**

##### PREFACE TO THE REPORT

In accordance with the action of the last General Assembly, the Study Committee is resubmitting its report to this General Assembly.

A key factor involved in the postponement by the last Assembly of action on this report was an awareness of the need for the elders of the denomination to have adequate time to study the report. The Committee therefore thought it wise, now that the Assembly has had adequate time to study the report, to re-focus on that which the Assembly has studied and to continue to postpone introducing another question with its new study material until this most basic question is resolved.

Not only did the Committee think it wise to refocus only on the first and most important question, it was also prohibited from conducting study sessions on the remaining question by the cost restraints placed on it by the Committee on Administration complying with the actions of the last General Assembly. Thus the Committee respectfully re-submits its original report and offers its recommendations for adoption. Work on the remaining question will be aided by knowing the mind of the Assembly on the Scriptural argument undergirding the Committee's recommendations concerning the first main question.

In re-submitting its report and recommendations, the Committee has made some changes which it calls to the attention of the Assembly. Other than these changes, the report and its recommendations are the same as that which was submitted last year. Some revisions have been made to the paragraph reflecting the historical survey of the actions of American Presbyterian Churches. They consist of the removal of reference to a judicial case, because the significance of the action is technically ambiguous, and very slight editorial changes that this removal necessitated.

The major change is the inclusion of another recommendation (numbered in this report as 5). This recommendation was necessitated by the fact that a question, posed by the Western Carolinas Presbytery, has not been answered by the General Assembly as the study had originally assumed. The Committee is recommending the answer

originally proposed both by the Sub-Committee on Judicial Business and the Committee of Commissioners on Judicial Business. This additional recommendation has triggered a partial rewriting of the second introductory paragraph to make reference to the new recommendation and at the same time to clarify the paragraph.

With these words of explanation, the Committee re-submits its report revised as indicated above.

## THE REPORT

The Study Committee has had committed to it certain questions raised by Grace Presbytery and by Western Carolinas Presbytery, and also the proposed answers to these questions offered by the Subcommittee on Judicial Business, a minority of that Subcommittee, and by the Committee on Commissioners. The questions which this committee was asked to deal with can be essentially reduced to two: (I) What, if anything, would make the baptism of a church invalid as a Christian baptism?, and (II) Has one who was presented for baptism or christening by non-Christian parents, or one who was baptized as a supposed convert but without real saving faith, received christian baptism?

The Study Committee adjudged that its task was restricted to these two items and it adjudges that the answer to these two questions will answer all but one of the questions of the two presbyteries. This report addresses itself to the first question and propose three recommendations (1,2,3) to respond to this first question. A subsequent report will address itself to the second question after further study has attempted to reach a consensus on the understanding of what the Scripture says on this question (recommendation 6). The Committee considers the only other two questions raised about baptism to be adequately answered by responses on which both the Committee of Commissioners on Judicial Business and the Sub-Committee on Judicial Business have concurred. The Study Committee is recommending these proposed responses as answers to these other two questions (recommendations 4 and 5).

### I. Is the baptism of certain "church" bodies invalid?

The committee approached this question constrained by the biblical teaching Eph. 4:5; cf. *Westminster Confession of Faith* xxviii, 7) that there is one baptism. Thus it addresses the question of valid or invalid baptism not as one of rebaptism. In approaching the subject of a valid or invalid baptism, the Committee was instructed by the analogy of Acts 19:1-7. In this account, the disciples of John the Baptist are not rebaptized with a second Christian baptism, even though of course one may speak in some sense of a rebaptism, since they had been baptized into John the Baptist's baptism, but when baptized by Paul in the name of the Lord Jesus they were baptized for the first time with Christian baptism. Even though the baptism of John is not regarded as invalid but as not the baptism of Jesus, this passage does provide the church an example, by analogy, of evaluating a previous baptism and then proceeding to Christian baptism if that former baptism is not regarded as Christian. It should thus be agreed that it is an appropriate act to administer Christian baptism if a previous baptism is regarded as invalid, and it should also be agreed that this is not a second Christian baptism or a rebaptism.

## POSITION PAPERS

In conducting its study the Committee sought to be guided by our supreme standard, the Scriptures, and by our subordinate standards, the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, which we have sincerely received and adopted as containing the system of doctrine of the Scriptures. Since the Scriptures do not deal directly with our question, we have followed the hermeneutical rule of our Confession of deducing "good and necessary" consequences (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, I, 6) from the Scriptures in solving this question and have especially utilized these consequences already drawn by our confessional standards.

In addition, we have consulted writers on the subject from various ages of the church, study reports in various presbyteries of our own and sister Presbyterian churches, and we have reflected again on a number of concrete situations ranging from the ancient Donatist controversy up to and including the concrete situations in a local congregation.

In particular, we have been especially constrained to consider the decisions of our spiritual predecessors, i.e., the highest courts of American Presbyterian churches (cf. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, xxxi, 2) who have dealt with the same question. Two considerations guided the historical research. The first was to cite the actions of "spiritual predecessors." Thus later decisions of main-line Presbyterian bodies which the PCA (or the RPCES) had left were not cited. The second was to cite decisions where the assemblies made a judgment on the question since the presbytery had asked for such a judgment and therefore not to cite any postponement or any decision in which the assembly simply referred the matter back to sessions with or without reference to the Standards or earlier assembly decisions.

In its historical survey, the Committee found that with one exception the General Assemblies of American Presbyterian churches where making a judgment on the matter have taken the position of non-validity for Roman Catholic baptism. This was done in 1845 by the Old School Assembly and the reasons given in the report have prevailed until today. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church took the same position in 1876. The United Presbyterian Church in North America, in various actions from 1869 to 1871, took the same position. The Presbyterian Church, U.S., commonly referred to as the Southern Presbyterian Church, had consistently taken the same position of the non-validity of Romish baptism. The Southern Church referred to the action of the General Assembly, Old School, of 1845, but took a full action of its own in 1871. The Assembly of 1884 reaffirmed the action of 1871 and the Assembly of 1914 declined to rescind its action of 1884. The one exception is the action of the 1981 Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, espousing and reiterating the objections of Charles Hodge to the decision of the 1845 General Assembly.

As this historical survey has indicated, the question of the non-validity of baptism has often become the question of the validity or non-validity of Roman Catholic baptism. In the question posed by the presbytery this is the group first named and this group was mentioned on the assembly floor as that which presents to our churches at home and abroad through the conversions of previous members the most pressing pastoral concern. These historical and pastoral concerns, coupled with the unique historical and theological perspective that this church presents, convinced the Committee that its study should focus on the baptism of this group as a test case without presuming to restrict its study or the principles discovered to this group.

The Committee considered it one of its first responsibilities to ascertain what is involved in true Christian baptism. The form comprises water and the name of the

Trinity (Mt. 28:19, sometimes expressed, however, by the name of the Savior Jesus alone as the mediatorial representative of the Trinity; cf. Acts 2:38 and elsewhere in Acts and the New Testament, *Westminster Confession of Faith* xxviii, 2; Larger Catechism 165; Shorter Catechism 94). The basic assumption, intention or design is that the Christian rite or sacrament of baptism is being performed. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (xxviii, 1) summarizes the biblical truths in reference to baptism when it says that it is a sacrament "not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church; but also, to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life" (cf. Larger Catechism 165; Shorter Catechism 94). Thus baptism teaches the doctrine of union with Christ and its implications for the believer and also union with Christ's people, both His spiritual body and the visible Church ("for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church, *Westminster Confession of Faith*, xxxviii, 1, reflecting such biblical passages as Acts 2:38-42, cf. also Larger Catechism 165). Furthermore, baptism is given as a sacrament to Christ's Church to be administered by the Church in its ministry ("which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in His Church until the end of the world" (*Westminster Confession of Faith* xviii, 1 reflecting Mt. 28:19, 20; cf. xxvii, 4, and xxviii, 2, and Larger Catechism 164). With this generally agreed upon conception of what baptism is, according to the Scriptures and the summary of the Scriptural truth provided by the confessional documents, the committee examined the two approaches to the question of the validity of baptism using the Roman Catholic baptism as a test case as previously indicated.

#### A. An Analysis of the Arguments for the Validity of Roman Catholic Baptism.

The committee considered the arguments presented by the RPCES Synod's committee report. In doing so, it followed the advice and urging of that committee to read and consider the arguments of the most vigorous American exponent of that position, C. Hodge. The article by Hodge, written in opposition to the 1845 Assembly's decision on the matter, which Hodge himself felt constrained to note was by a vote of 169 to 8, with 6 abstaining, appeared in the *Princeton Review* of 1845, pp. 444, ff., and has been reproduced in *Hodge's Church Polity*, pp. 191 ff. The writer argues that three things are necessary for there to be a valid baptism, i.e., washing with water, in the name of the Trinity, and with the ostensible professed design to comply with the command of Christ, i.e., intent. The conclusion reached by Hodge was that the three elements are present in Roman Catholic baptism and therefore that it is valid.

The committee was convinced that this case was both inadequate and also at points in error in reference to Roman Catholic baptism. Its inadequacy is seen by the fact that this appraisal or system of analysis would also of necessity declare as valid the baptism of certain professedly Christian but sectarian groups, such as the Mormons. Usually those arguing for the Roman Catholic baptism would agree that these other baptisms are not valid because in the second and third aspects, in the name of the Trinity and with true design or intent, these other baptisms are not really Biblical and Christian in their use of the Trinity or in their understanding of the design or intent of baptism. But it is just this objection with respect to the true design or intent that the committee thinks applies also to Roman Catholic baptism. At this point we see both an inadequacy and an error.

## POSITION PAPERS

Although the three elements are present in Mormon baptism, they are now seen to be inadequate as formal and external items. They may now only function as significant items when they are controlled by and expressions of the overarching truth of the Gospel. Without the truth of the Gospel, there is no true and valid baptism even when these elements are present. It is this larger perspective which is necessary and which is lacking in Hodge's application of the three elements to the Roman Catholic church.

As one step forward to this necessary larger perspective, one can see further the inadequacy and error of this three-element approach by comparing it with our confessional evaluation of the other sacrament, the Lord's Supper, as it is administered in the Roman Catholic Church as the mass. Here also one can devise a formal and external description of the elements necessary for a valid Lord's Supper which is properly analogous to that given for a valid baptism, i.e., the prescribed material, bread and wine, the prescribed formula, the words of institution, and the intent, "with the ostensible professed design to comply with the command of Christ" (Minutes, RPCES, 1981, p. 45). But notice, in spite of the fact that these three analogous elements are present, our confessional standards adjudge the Roman Catholic observance of the Lord's Supper, the mass, to be invalid. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (xxix, 2) says "that the Papist sacrifice of the mass (as they call it) is most abominably injurious to Christ's one, only sacrifice....." The *Confession* (xxix, 6) goes on to say that the doctrine of the mass "overthroweth the nature of the sacrament, and hath been, and is, the cause of manifold superstitions, yea, of gross idolatries" (italics added).

With this question of doctrine we have come to a larger aspect of the question. It is not only the doctrine of the sacrament itself that is in view, but also the question of the doctrine concerning the church as one faithful or degenerate with respect to the Gospel. It is this larger perspective concerning the church which has already brought Presbyterians in fact to recognize the invalidity of Mormon baptism, even when the three elements are present, and the invalidity of Unitarian baptism (Minutes of General Assembly, 1814; Minutes of General Assembly <Southern>, 1871). This brings us then to a consideration of the case for the invalidity of Roman Catholic baptism.

### B. The Presentation of the Arguments for the Invalidity of Roman Catholic Baptism.

Although the arguments for this view have surfaced in part in the preceding section and especially in the immediately preceding paragraph, the committee felt it appropriate to present these arguments given in 1845, and also in 1871, in a compact summary form, and then both evaluate and expand that summary for the benefit of the church. The committee is convinced that the essence of the argument was and is persuasive and should guide the church in its decision. The following is our schematic summary of the report of the committee presented to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (Old School) and adopted by that Assembly in 1845 (Minutes, 1845, pages 34-37). This summary of ours also reflects similar aspects of the 1871 report (Minutes, p. 30). Since these reports are not readily available to the church today, the 1845 report in its entirety and the central portion of the 1871 report relating to Roman Catholic and Unitarian baptism are made available in two appendices at the end of this report.

- (1) The Romish communion is not a true church and therefore its sacraments cannot be true and valid sacraments.
- (2) The Romish priests are not ministers of Christ and therefore the rites administered by them cannot be regarded as the ordinances of Christ.
- (3) The doctrine or meaning of the sacrament of baptism is so corrupted by the Romish communion that it invalidates the sacrament of baptism.

These arguments now need to be set forth in greater detail and evaluated. The force of them is, of course, cumulative, but any one of them, if true, would in itself make the baptism invalid.

(1) The first argument is considered one of the most compelling by the committee. There is an inseparable relationship between the church and the ordinances. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (xxv, 3) aptly summarizes the truth of Matthew 28:19, 20, and other Biblical passages in indicating that "unto this Catholic visible Church Christ hath given the . . . ordinances of God..." Further, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (xxviii, 1) speaks of baptism as ordained by Jesus Christ "for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible church" (cf., e.g., Acts 2:38-42) and as a sacrament "to be continued in His church until the end of the world" (cf. Mt. 28:19, 20). This relationship is further demonstrated by the fact that the confession appropriately indicates that the administration of the ordinances is one of the marks by which one determines the fidelity of a church or its degeneration so that it is no longer a church of Christ (xxv, 4, 5). It is this perspective that has uniformly persuaded our church, and other true churches of Christ, to regard the baptism of the Unitarian church or the Mormon church as invalid even when a trinitarian formula may have been used, and even when a design or intent of relating the person in some way to Jesus Christ and His death is asserted.

The decision of the 1845 General Assembly made reference to the decision of the 1835 General Assembly (Minutes, p. 490) which "Resolved, That it is the deliberate and decided judgment of this Assembly that the Roman Catholic Church has essentially apostatized from the religion of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and therefore cannot be recognized as a Christian Church." The General Assembly of 1879 in reaffirming this decision of 1835 wisely reminded the Assembly that this decision was in accord with the Confession of Faith in its evaluation of the headship of the Roman Catholic Church, and thus of that Church itself. (This evaluation is true for all the variant forms of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, xxv, 6). The decision of 1879 (Minutes p. 630) reads as follows:

Resolved, That this Assembly, in full accordance with the words of our Confession of Faith respecting the Church of Rome and its so-called spiritual head, do now reaffirm the deliverance, upon this subject, of the Assembly of 1835, as applying to that Roman hierarchy headed by the pope, falsely claiming to be the Church; which, opposed absolutely and irreconcilably to the doctrines of Holy Scripture, is corrupting and degrading a large part of Christ's Church over which it has usurped supreme control.

Further evidence for this appraisal of the Roman Catholic Church would be the appraisal of the mass already referred to as "most abominably injurious to Christ's one,

## POSITION PAPERS

only sacrifice," as "contrary to the nature of this sacrament, and to the institution of Christ" and as a doctrine which "over-throweth the nature of the sacrament, and hath been, and is, the cause of manifold superstitions; yea, of gross idolatries" (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, xxix, 2, 4, 6). The committee thinks that this apostasy of the Roman Catholic Church does not need to be further established.

A summary statement in the decision of 1845 states the matter with perceptiveness in regard to the implication for baptism: "As certainly then, as the dogmas and practices of papal Rome are not the holy religion of Christ, must it be conceded, that the papal body is not a Church of Christ...; and if not, then ... the rite they call baptism, is not, in any sense, to be regarded as valid Christian baptism." In making this appraisal, the committee reminded the Assembly that as long ago as 1790 the Assembly had made the correlation between true church and true ordinances with the corollary of a false church and invalid ordinances. Although Hodge vigorously challenged this appraisal of the Roman Catholic Church by the General Assemblies of 1835 and 1845, insisting that even Rome's doctrine of salvation manifested that it was a church of Christ, the General Assembly held to its evaluation of 1845, in the reaffirmation of 1879. The Southern Assembly of 1871 took the same position in regard to the Roman Catholic Church as these other assemblies did.

The study committee turned to the book of Galatians because it dealt with a situation analogous to that of the Roman Catholic Church. The false teachers at Galatia taught that one is saved only by a combination of faith and works (Gal. 3:1-5, 11; 5:1-11; 6:12-15). This is also the teaching of Roman Catholicism as evidenced by the decision of the Council of Trent, decisions still in effect. The Apostle Paul called such a message "a different gospel which is really not another," indicated that they did "distort the gospel of Christ," and said that those who taught and held it were "accursed" by God (Galatians 1:6-9). Paul sought to rid the congregation of their presence and teaching.

The Apostle John says that the false teachers and leaders that he opposed "went out from us ... in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us" (1 John 2:19). John's verdict covering a group existing alongside of his own fellowship as not part of the apostolic fellowship or communion, made us realize such a verdict would also have to be rendered on a group like that of the Galatian false teachers who were adjudged with equal severity by Paul, if and when they existed as a separate entity. The similarity between the false teachers in the book of Galatians and the Roman Catholic Church is so close that the committee was compelled by the Scripture to come to the same verdict on that group that the Apostle Paul had, and also by implication as the Apostle John had, in an analogous situation.

The effect of this Scriptural perspective for the validity of baptism should be evident. If the message is no gospel, indeed, a distortion of the gospel, and they are accursed by God (Gal. 1:6-9), then any such church group would come under the same indictment. John says that those who leave the teaching of Christ "do not have God" (2 John 9); and Paul says of those who embrace the doctrine of the false teachers of Galatia that "Christ will be of no benefit" (Gal. 5:2) and that they are "severed from Christ" and not in the sphere of grace (Gal. 5:4). Would their baptism be valid, even if with water, in the name of the Trinity, and with the intent to comply with Christ's Command? May those who are severed from Christ, from grace, and from God, administer Christ's ordinance of baptism? The committee, on the basis of this consideration of Scripture, joins with the early unanimous verdict of the courts of

American Presbyterianism on the Roman Catholic Church and its baptism. It is constrained to answer in the negative.

One of the problems remaining is the fact that John Calvin resisted the urging of the Anabaptists that he, having been baptized by the Roman Catholics, should be (re-) baptized (Institutes 4.15.16-18). His response must be understood in terms of the uniqueness of the situation and not wrongly generalized. He, of course, resisted the Anabaptists' desire to have him repudiate his infant baptism and receive baptism as an adult believer. The effect that this situation had upon him can be seen in his insisting that Paul did not really baptize the disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus and in his insisting that the baptism of John the Baptist is Christian baptism. This insistence, contrary to the text of the Scriptures, is so that he can assert that those were not "re-baptisms" at all in opposition to the Anabaptists. The denomination in which Calvin was baptized was a church in flux, and coming to but not yet beyond the crossroads (cf., Institutes 4.2.11). It is not yet the church of the counter-reformation, the Council of Trent and its anathemas on the doctrine of justification by faith alone (see H. J. Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, "Sixth Session, Decree Covering Justification" and particularly "Canon 9," "If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification . . . let him be anathema.") That pre-Reformation church in flux is the church in which Calvin and many of the other Reformation believers had been members. Thus Calvin and the church of today stand at different vantage points in evaluating the Roman Catholic Church, i.e., the church of his infancy, the pre-reformation church, and the Roman Catholic church post-reformation and post-Council-of-Trent. The analogy could be drawn between certain congregational churches in New England before and after the transition to Unitarianism.

The study committee is convinced that this first argument is a firm and true principle and should be followed in regard to the Roman Catholic Church as it is followed in regard to such groups as the Unitarian Church and the Mormon Church.

Just as we have not received members by letter of transfer from the Roman Catholic Church because we do not believe it to be a true church, so we should not receive its baptism, which we acknowledge admits one into the visible church (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, xxviii, 1) as a true and valid baptism.

(2) The second reason given by the General Assembly of 1845 was that the Romish priest are not ministers of Christ and the Word, and therefore the rites administered by them cannot be regarded as the ordinances of Christ. Although your study committee acknowledges the truth of this reason, it regards it as a corollary of reason number (1) and an application of that conclusion and not actually an independent argument.

The perspective of our Confession, which reflects the outcome of the early Donatist controversy, when it says that the efficacy of a sacrament does not depend upon the piety of the one that administers it (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, xxvii, 3), is really dealing with a different situation. That earlier Donatist controversy dealt with the question of a minister who succumbed momentarily to the pressure of persecution. The church in which he ministered was more or less pure in upholding the Gospel. His succumbing to the pressure of persecution did not thus invalidate the sacraments he had administered.



## POSITION PAPERS

The situation in view in the Roman Catholic priesthood is not that which our Confession and the Donatist controversy addresses. It is that of a ministry and a church which, in the words of Paul describing the false teachers of Galatia, preach "a different gospel, which is not another," "distort the gospel of Christ" and thus lie under the Apostolic judgment, "let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:6-9). Therefore, inevitably, in this case, Romish church and Romish ministry are evaluated alike.

(3) The doctrine or meaning of the sacrament of baptism is so corrupted by the Romish communion that it invalidates the sacrament of baptism.

The committee is persuaded that this argument like argument number (2) is really a sub-point or corollary of argument number (1). When the Gospel's doctrine of justification is repudiated, then the church, its ministry, and its sacraments, all stand under the judgment of the Apostle Paul of "no gospel," of distortion of the Gospel of Christ and of being accursed by God (Gal. 1:6-9). Although the doctrine of the mass can itself directly challenge the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ and its sufficiency and thus by itself be so corrupting that it invalidates that sacrament, and although there are many erroneous features to the doctrine of baptism in the Roman Catholic Church (e.g., baptismal regeneration and forgiveness solely through the operation of the sacrament), in the case of the sacrament of baptism it is not these errors that invalidate the sacrament but rather the overarching repudiation of the Gospel of grace alone through faith alone that invalidates the Roman Catholic Church, its message, and its sacraments.

The committee is persuaded that our church is not being called on to make a relative judgment here of how theologically and biblically erroneous the Roman Catholic Church's view of baptism may be. Rather, it is at each and every place confronted with the heart question of the Scriptures, the Gospel, and with the Apostle Paul's radical and absolute judgment.

In coming to this conclusion, we are provided a perspective from which to address the specific question of the Grace Presbytery. It raised the question whether "the recipients of so-called baptism, by a religious body, which claimed the sacraments as a part of a process of justification (as in the case of Roman Catholic, Church of Christ, or Lutheran churches) <are> proper recipients of Christian baptism?" This committee would advise the Church to distinguish between unfortunate, indeed, serious, errors and that which is so corrupting that the so-called baptism is invalid. The same could be said for the doctrine of the Lord's Supper in Lutheran churches. The committee would adjudge that the baptism should be regarded as invalid either when the doctrine of the sacrament absolutely and directly contradicts and denies the gospel (e.g. the mass) or when it is administered in a church that denies the gospel. When the erroneous doctrine is "inconsistently" held in correlation with an overarching affirmation of the essence of the gospel, the sacrament of baptism must be regarded in that larger perspective. In short, from that perspective even the misguided "piety or intention" of a true church of Christ should not be regarded as invalidating the validity of its baptism.

The three arguments given are in essence one - is the church a true church of Christ. And that question is finally one of fidelity to the Gospel. Christ's Apostle Paul speaks the verdict of the Head of the Church when he says that those, are "severed from Christ, <who> are seeking to be justified by law" (Gal. 5:4). We are constrained albeit with great sadness, to echo that verdict which of necessity also falls upon the Roman

Catholic Church. And thus we are compelled to admit that its sacraments are invalid and especially that its baptism is invalid.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- (1) That the Assembly adopt the following recommendations with respect to Roman Catholic baptism:
  - A. that the General Assembly counsel that the baptism of those churches that have so degenerated from the Gospel of Christ as to be no churches of Christ (cf., *Westminster Confession of Faith*, xxv, 5; e.g., Unitarian, Mormon, Roman Catholic) is not to be regarded as valid Christian baptism; and
  - B. that converts from those groups be instructed in this matter and be given Christian baptism; and
  - C. that sessions and pastors deal with any of those converts who have difficulties with this matter in the same way that they deal with converts from a non-religious background who have difficulties with baptism for themselves.
- (2) That the Assembly adopt the following recommendation as a further answer to the question of Grace Presbytery:
  - A. that erroneous views of baptism, which do not absolutely contradict and overturn the Gospel, do not invalidate the baptisms in these true churches.
- (3) That the Assembly consider and vote upon the answer given by both the Committee of Commissioners on Judicial Business and the Sub-Committee on Judicial Business to the question of Western Carolinas Presbytery which is now also recommended by the Study Committee with the addition of citations from the confessional standards, as follows:
  - Q. May baptisms properly be administered to individuals making profession of faith, but who do not intend to become members of the requested congregation? If so, under what circumstances?
  - A. Baptism should not be administered to those individuals making profession of faith but who do not intend to become members of the requested congregation ("Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ... for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church..." *Westminster Confession of Faith* xxviii, 1; "Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament ... whereby the parties baptized are solemnly admitted into the visible church . ." Larger Catechism 165; "Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church..." Larger Catechism 166).
- (4) That the Assembly consider and vote upon the answer given by both the Committee of Commissioners on Judicial Business and the Sub-Committee on Judicial Business to the question of Western Carolinas Presbytery, which is now also recommended by the Study Committee as follows:
  - Q. May infant baptism properly be administered to covenant children of persons who are not members of the particular congregation asked? (For personal reasons they have not joined Trinity, but hold membership in the CRC where they formerly resided.) If so, under what circumstances?

## POSITION PAPERS

- A. Ordinarily infant baptism should be administered only to covenant children of persons who are members of the requested congregation. However, baptism is not to be unnecessarily delayed (BCO 56-1); therefore, it would be proper for a minister to baptize the child of members of another church where those members find it impossible or impracticable to return to their home church due to an occupational assignment (military, business, etc.). In every case such baptism should be administered only with the consent of the home Session, with proper notification of the baptism in order that due spiritual oversight may be given and accurate records kept.

Respectfully submitted:  
Frank M. Barker, Jr.  
Carl W. Bogue, Jr.  
George W. Knight, III, Chairman  
Paul G. Settle