

Of the Validity of Baptism

The Most Reverend Ordinary S... has reported to this Sacred
Congregation:

To the ecclesiastical tribunal of this Diocese has been introduced a certain case concerning the validity of a marriage, which validity derives from the validity of a baptism. Already indeed the baptism has been thus brought about. A pool was present: a non-Catholic minister offered the words *I baptize you*, according to the rite of the Church; but he himself did not pour out the water, nor did he submerged the bride; but, with these words having been offered, the bride herself descended into the pool and passing through the water, she submerged herself.

Hence, he has requested that he be deemed worthy to respond to the Holy Congregation: whether the baptism in this case could be termed valid.

Annotations - I, No difficulty can arise in this matter from the part of the minister, since assent is given to non-Catholic sects. Nor even is it in question concerning its permissibility, but merely concerning the valid union of the sacrament.

II. Just as here it certainly is presupposed that the non-Catholic minister offered the whole form: *I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*. This is plainly enough to give assent from the report of the Ordinary himself, affirming that the minister offered the words: *I baptize you* according to the rite of the Church. Indeed, the rite of the Church prescribes [this] as often in Latin as in Greek, as the essential form of the baptism, the aforementioned formula with the invocation of the three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity, which has been passed down directly from Christ the Lord; thus, unless the minister has offered the words: *I baptize you*, the baptism certainly would be invalid.

III. The case, exactly as it is explained, clarifies, after the pronouncement of the form the application of the matter follows: *after the words have been pronounced, the bride submerged herself*. Common doctrine holds that the physical union of matter and form is not required for the validity of a baptism, but that a moral union suffices, which is considered as often as if ablution happens immediately before the form is brought to an end, so often if it happens immediately afterwards. This moral union seems to exist in the case that is laid out [before us], since the immediate succession between the pronouncement of the words and the descent of the woman into the pool is signified. Hence from this summary there appears to be no reason for invalidating the baptism.

IV. But the even stronger and inevitable difficulty against the validity of the baptism in this case has arisen out of the application of the matter, which least has been done by the minister.

Catholic doctrine most certainly holds that the matter ought to be placed by one and the same minister at the same time as the form of the baptism is offered; just so, for instance, the form: *I baptize you, I wash you* would serve a falsehood. St. Thomas [Aquinas] (*Summa Theologiae*, III p., q. 67, a. 6 to 3) states: "it must be stated that the integrity of baptism consists in the form of the words and the use of the matter. Consequently, he who only pronounces the words does not baptize, nor he who immerses. Wherefore if one pronounces the words and the other immerses, no form of the words can be fitting."¹

The Roman Ritual (tit. 2, cap. 1, n. 10), summarizing in a few words the Catholic doctrine around the aforementioned union that must be done by one and the same subject, prescribes: *let the same man be the one applying the water and pronouncing the words.*

But in the case laid out [before us], by no reason is it signified that any minister outwardly acted in order that the matter be applied merely by any subject, on the contrary the opposite is expressed. Namely, it is said: *[the minister] himself has not poured out the water, nor submerged the bride, but, after the words have been spoken, she submerged herself.* It is therefore clear that the baptism, from this summary, ought to be considered invalid.

Most Eminent and Reverend² Fathers of this Holy Congregation, with these matters having been considered properly, and in a plenary meeting held on the 17th of November 1916, with this proposed question: *whether a baptism could be said to be valid in this case,* they have decreed a response: just as it is laid out, negative.

F Aloisius Capotosti, Archbishop of Thermae Basilicae, Secretary

¹ For this quote I relied on [this website](#) for most of this translation from *Summa Theologiae*, with some edits for clarity. Evidently it was translated by the "Fathers of the Dominican Province" and published first in 1911 by Benziger Brothers Press.

² This phrase is abbreviated in the original Latin: "Emi ac Rmi." I believe, but am not totally sure, this stands for "Eminentissimi ac Reverendissimi." Regardless of the literal meaning, it is some kind of honorific title.