

The Westminster Standards

The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter XXVIII, section iii, states:

Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but
Baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling
water upon the person.

James Benjamin Green, Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology and
Homiletics in Columbia Theological Seminary at Decatur, Georgia
(Southern Presbyterian), in his *Harmony of the Westminster Presbyterian
Standards* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1951), states:

The third section relates to the mode of baptism. It says
that dipping of the person into the water is not necessary.
Not necessary for what? For real and valid baptism. It
further says that baptism is rightly administered by pouring
or sprinkling water upon the person. If it is rightly
administered by this mode, then is it wrongly administered
by any other mode?

It is sometimes said that the Westminster Assembly came
within one vote of affirming that immersion is the
Scriptural way of baptizing. The truth is that the
Westminster Assembly refused by one vote to approve
immersion as a Scriptural mode.

In order to assess the importance of this statement, it is necessary to
review the historical situation which actually obtained at the Westminster
Assembly. Edward D. Morris, Emeritus Professor of Systematic
Theology, at Lane Theological Seminary, in his large work, *Theology of
the Westminster Symbols* (Columbus, OH: 1900) gives us an insight into
this knotty problem:

Respecting the use of water as an element, it is a striking
illustration of the state of the question of mode at the time,
and perhaps also of the liberality of the Assembly on
matters regarded as comparatively indifferent, that all three
modes of applying water to the person, known in the early
Church, sprinkling and pouring and dipping or