

The Sacrament of Confirmation
Summary of the History and Theology

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- I Biblical Foundations -- After the Resurrection... The early Church explained 2 characteristics of Baptism:
 - 1. Mt 28:19-20: Teach, Confer Baptism, Spread the Message. NB: teaching is pre-supposed before the baptism.
 - 2. Acts 1:1-8: Receive the new baptism in the Holy Spirit *then* testify. After they have received this, they will be able to confer baptism on others.
 - 3. NB: 2 characteristics: Baptism of Water & Baptism of the Holy Spirit
- II Baptism and Confirmation in the Early Church: cf. 2 baptisms of Acts 1:5 & Acts 1:8
 - A. Cf. Acts 11:15 to clarify 2 elements: Peter explains his activity with the pagan house of Cornelius: He received the Holy Spirit just as at Pentecost. Peter subsequently baptizes with water. NOTE: BAPTISM WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT CAN TAKE PLACE WITH OR WITHOUT A RITE.
 - A. Also, double element includes Remission of Sins & Power of the Holy Spirit.
 - A. Acts 2:37-41: baptism in Jesus' name is for remission of sins; baptism in the Holy Spirit is to give testimony.
 - A. Acts 8:4-25: Philip baptizes Samaritans in Jesus' name. Then Peter and John go and impose hands on the baptized and they receive the Holy Spirit. NB: this expresses 2 different rites.
 - A. Practiced with the imposition of hands
 - 1. Cyprian teaches that Mk 10:16 prefigures this action and justifies the sacrament of Confirmation
 - 2. In addition to the imposition of hands, some Bishops also anointed the candidate with oil. These 2 rites were merged into the one rite of signing a cross on the candidate with oil.
- IV Effects of Confirmation.
 - A. Biblical:
 - 1. Holy Spirit is a *gift given* to the faithful
 - 2. Holy Spirit is a person on the divine level
 - 3. Holy Spirit comes with the imposition of hands
 - 4. Relevant texts: Acts 1:8 power for testimony; Acts 2:38, 10:45 Gift; 2 Cor 1:21-22 gives power and certainty; Jn 16:7-13 teaches truth and doctrine (Leads us deeper into the mystery of Jesus in the lives of Christians).
 - B. Early Church Fathers
 - 1. Given with baptism (as the whole initiation rite, including imposition of hands)
 - 2. Greek Fathers of 3rd & 4th centuries held that the Holy Spirit comes with chrism thereby substituting the imposition of hands with the anointing.
 - 3. The fathers explained the double role of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' baptism:
 - A. Descent of the Holy Spirit gives water the power to baptize
 - B. The descent after the baptism shows that a second descent

completes the first rite.

4. Image of battle: Baptism makes us Christian; Confirmation makes us ready to accept the Christian 'fight' against evil in life.
5. Western Church: 3rd & 4th Centuries.
 - A. Cyprian: imposition of hands perfects the work begun with the rite of water.
 - B. "Confirm" means to re-enforce or strengthen
4. 4th & 5th century: two developments
 - A. Ambrose: Gift. We receive the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit because we are inserted into Christ at Confirmation.
 - B. Augustine: Power. On Easter night the apostles receive the power to remit sins; on Pentecost, they receive the strength (power) for testimony and witness.
5. Middle Ages and Modern Time: If baptism is strength for eternal life, why do we need Confirmation? Eusebius Gallicanus (6th century):
Confirmation is for strength in this life; Baptism is for eternal life.
6. Vatican II: Baptism obliges all to confess their faith before others and to live a Christian life; confirmation obliges all to spread and defend that faith.
7. Receiving of the Holy Spirit is to perform the work of Christ. The Holy Spirit has three functions, namely *teaching, governing, and sanctifying*.
8. While Baptism is a perfect incorporation into the death and resurrection of Jesus, there are three moments of incorporation. Therefore, confirmation is neither redundant nor superficial. Rather, Confirmation completes (perfects) the three-fold process of incorporation.
4. Gifts of the Holy Spirit. In Confirmation we receive the *uncreated gift of the Holy Spirit*. The *effects* of that gift are what we know as the created gifts.

V Age of Confirmation. Differing practices in Eastern and Western Churches. The East Confirms with Baptism; the West delays Confirmation.

- A. 1st and 2nd centuries: Baptism and Confirmation were celebrated in a continuous rite (NB: not a single rite but a continuous rite). The environment determined whether adults or children were baptized and confirmed. In pagan environments, adults were baptized and confirmed; in Christian communities, the adults presented their children to initiate them in to the faith with both Baptism and Confirmation. This is deduced from the writings of Tertullian and Hippolytus.
- B. 3rd and 4th centuries: continuous rite continued. However, Cyprian (mid 3rd) pointed out two novelties here:
 1. Baptism of bed *kline*: Those in danger of death were baptized; some recovered and needed Confirmation. They were taken to the Bishop to be confirmed. The Council of Elvira (300-303) describes how this rite of Confirmation took place. For the first time, they were separate rites.
 2. Mid 4th century: The Bishop alone was the administrator of Confirmation while priests could celebrate baptism.
 3. In area around the Alps with invading tribes, travel was difficult. Sometimes it took a Bishop up to two years to reach every village.
- C. 5th - 8th centuries: since the population was mostly Christian, the baptism of

children increased. The limitation of the bishop led to Confirmation being conferred later at the age of one year to fourteen months. Note, this was not a uniform practice.

- D 9th - 12th centuries: some synods, especially under the Carolignian influence, began to require the candidate for Confirmation to know the Our Father and the Creed. Also, there was an encouraged separation of the ages for Baptism and Confirmation. Baptism was to be done before the age of discretion (when a child can tell good from evil) but Confirmation was to be done after the age of reason (when a child had the capacity to reflect on a decision).
- E 13th - 15th centuries: tendency to a later age for Confirmation.
1. Provincial Synod of Cologne (1280) recommended that a child be at least seven years old but did not require such an age.
 2. Gratian (1150) said Confirmation should be conferred at a “perfect age”.
 3. Albert the Great said the perfect age is the age of discernment (7 years).
- F 15th - 18th centuries: Decisive Change! A higher age was widely recommended. Reasons: (from the Council of Cologne, 1536)
1. Confirmation was not necessary for salvation.
 2. Confirmation is useful to admonish us to live the faith we possess
 3. Good instruction is necessary. ****This is a new element!
 4. This decision influenced other councils including the First Council of Milan and the Tridentine Catechism.
 5. Two reasons for lateness of age: The Christian battle requires the weapons received in Confirmation that, in turn, requires a *capacity* for their use (age of reason). Also, instruction in how to use those weapons is necessary.
- G 18th Century -- the Roman Church formally and universally abolished the practice of the Confirmation of infants. Slowly, the age was pushed further back to 12 or 14 years based on the need for instruction.
- F Also 18th Century -- The Rationalists accused the church of taking away a child’s freedom and his capacity to choose religion. The response: Baptism is necessary for salvation but infants would be prepared later and, at the age of reason (Confirmation), the children would ***renew the baptismal promises made for them by their godparents.***