

# Confirmation

## 1. Early Christianity

- What will become Confirmation is part of baptism rite, leads into Eucharist with whole community.
- Expresses that baptism gives the gift of the Holy Spirit. “Seal” of the Spirit.
- Many presbyters and deacons assisted with rites of baptism, bishop of the city or town presided.
- Bishop’s role: prayer, laying on hands, anoint forehead with chrism, kiss of peace.
- Sequence: Baptism, Chrism, Eucharist
- Young children included with adults in initiation rites. All ages are given chrism and communion.

## 2. Confirmation Separates from the Other Baptism Rites in West

- After persecutions cease in 4<sup>th</sup> c., number of Christians dramatically increases. Bishop (pastor of a city) can no longer be present at every baptism.
- Presbyters/priests and deacons are permitted to baptize on their own, apart from bishop, from Easter.
- But Rome’s tradition was that only a bishop could anoint the forehead with chrism for gift of Holy Spirit.
- So presbyters & deacons did all other baptism rites; postpone bishop’s part till later.



## 3. Middle Ages – Now an Interval of Years between Baptism and Confirmation

- Gap between baptism and anointing becomes longer and longer. Many/most are never confirmed.
- Break between baptism & confirmation begins in rural areas, far from bishop in city.
- Because infant baptism has become commonplace and the unintended interval becomes years, confirmation comes to be understood as something meant for older children.
- At first, a maximum age (“Get children confirmed before they are one year! or 3! or 5!”). Eventually becomes a minimum age. By 13<sup>th</sup> century, baptized person cannot be confirmed until at least 7 years old.
- Anointing forehead with chrism acquires its name because with this rite the bishop “confirms” the sacramental ministry of presbyters and deacons. “Confirm” is what bishop does.
- “I sign you with the sign of the cross and confirm you with the chrism of salvation, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

## 4. Middle Ages – A Practice in Search of a Theology

- A theology arises to explain the long interval between baptism and anointing, 5<sup>th</sup> c south Gaul.
  - Baptism is for babies, to remove original sin in case of death.
  - Confirmation is for older children, to strengthen them to live as Christians in the world.
  - If die young, saved by baptism. If survive and grow up, need confirmation for strength, weapons.
- This interpretation is eventually incorporated into official Catholic documents.
- Theology affects practice: 13<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> c. “alapa,” a light slap on cheek. Suffering endured by Christ’s soldiers.
- Lists of 7 sacraments appear by 12<sup>th</sup> c. This version of confirmation is what they knew, accepted.
  - Long after baptism. Gives Holy Spirit for strength. Minister is bishop.

## 5. Christian East

- Never separated anointing with chrism from baptism.
- Allowed priest who baptizes to anoint, with chrism blessed by bishop.
- Orthodox & Eastern Rite Catholics retain sacraments of initiation together regardless of the person’s age.

## 6. Reformation and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

- Luther & early reformers rejected confirmation as a sacrament, no evidence in NT that Christ instituted it.
- Luther: could be useful to examine children's faith, before 1st communion; promotes study of catechism
- In 1910, Pope Pius X lowers age for first communion from 10-14 to 7 years old.
- Not mention confirmation, so it stays at 10-14. Ancient sequence lost. Baptism, eucharist, confirmation.

## 7. Vatican Council II: Show Confirmation's Connection with Baptism

- "The rite of confirmation is to be revised and the intimate connection which this sacrament has with the whole of Christian initiation is to be more clearly set forth; for this reason it is fitting for candidates to renew their baptismal promises just before they are confirmed."

Vatican Council II, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, n. 71

- Note carefully the reason for inserting baptism promises! This is not the meaning of confirmation!

## 8. Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (1972)

- Confirmation and Eucharist restored to baptism, for adults and children over age 7
  - Allows and requires priest who baptizes a person over age 7 to confirm them. RCIA 14
  - This "signifies the unity of the paschal mystery, the close link between the mission of the Son and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the connection between the two sacraments through which the Son and the Holy spirit come with the Father to those who are baptized." RCIA 215
- Initiation culminates in Eucharist -- traditional sequence restored, with confirmation in the middle

## 9. Order of Confirmation (1971, new English in 2016)

- Confirmation still "delayed" until age 7, cannot be part of infant baptism
  - Should confirm *under* age 7 if in danger of death
- Theology: God gives Holy Spirit, to make more like Christ, to strengthen
- Practical:
  - Sponsor should be godparent, if possible: connection with baptism
  - Ordinary minister is bishop
  - Prerequisites: baptized, in state of grace, properly instructed, able to renew baptism promises
- Ritual: Anoint forehead with chrism, laying on hands
  - New formula: "[Name,] Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit."
  - In a Mass, because Eucharist "completes their Christian initiation."

"Those who have been baptized continue on the path of Christian Initiation through the Sacrament of Confirmation, by which they receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit ....

"By this gift of the Holy Spirit the faithful are more fully conformed to Christ and are strengthened with the power to bear witness to Christ for the building up of his Body in faith and charity."

*Order of Confirmation*, 1-2

## 10. A New Interpretation late-1970s USA

- Postponed confirmation acquires a new theology in late 20<sup>th</sup> c. No support for this in history, nor in ritual.
- New meaning derives from addition of baptism promises
  - For adolescents, who "confirm" baptism their parents chose for them
  - A free choice, decision, commitment
- Often long prep, many requirements, delayed to teen years
- No reference to anointing & laying on hands, to God's action

"By signing us with the gift of the Spirit, confirmation makes us more completely the image of the Lord and fills us with the Holy Spirit, so that we may bear witness to him before all the world and work to bring the Body of Christ to its fullness as soon as possible."

*Christian Initiation: Gen'l Introduction*, 1969, 2

## 11. Varied Uses of Confirmation (Same meaning for all?)

- Christian Initiation, with baptism & eucharist
- Children who were under age 7 when baptized
- Adolescents, to "affirm baptism"
- Infants & young children in danger of death
- Reception of baptized Christians into full communion