

A COMMENTARY ON THE REVISED ORDER OF CONFIRMATION

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Under the date of August 22, 1971 the Sacred Congregation of Divine Worship published a new order for the sacrament of Confirmation, prefaced by the Apostolic Constitution "Divinae consortium naturae" of Pope Paul VI on the same sacrament. The old rite may be used until the end of the year 1972. From January 1, 1973 on all have to use the new order, unless the bishops' conference sets an earlier date.

INFANT CONFIRMATION?

The introductory guidelines of the revised order of Confirmation state that the liturgical celebration should be festive and solemn. Its significance for the whole parish should not be lost on the faithful. The whole people of God, represented by the families and the friends of the candidates, but also other representatives of the local community should be present (art. 4).

This exhortation seems to be out of place for us, because in the case of infant Confirmation such a communal celebration is impossible. Our present custom to confirm infants, however, is based on our former missionary situation. It was more expedient to confirm the infants soon after their baptism, before they were brought back to their remote barrios, or just when a bishop was present. The high mortality rate of infants equally suggested infant Confirmation. At present the Philippines is one of the very few countries in the Latin Church where infant Confirmation is still retained.

But the Constitution on the Liturgy had stated that "it is fitting for candidates to renew their baptismal promises just before they are confirmed" (art. 71). This remark presup-

poses that the candidates for Confirmation are no longer infants.

Though Confirmation is, together with Baptism and holy Communion as "sacrament of initiation" and should, therefore, come early in life, it is at the same time the sacrament of initiation into Christian *adulthood*, the sacrament that entitles the Christian to God's help to grow up as a member of the Church. Hence, it should pastorally come at a time when it helps this growth best, at a time when it can be understood what this growth means.¹ Therefore, with regard to children in the Latin Church, this sacrament is generally postponed until about the age of seven. The new guidelines add that episcopal conferences have the power to choose an age for Confirmation which appears more appropriate, that is to say, an even more mature age (art. 11).

Here we have the reasons why in their meeting of February 1971 our bishops agreed to eliminate gradually confirming infants below the age of reason. Some dioceses have already implemented this policy. But as to the modalities of phasing out the Confirmation of infants, no clear consensus could be reached among the bishops. The matter is left to the discretion of the individual local Ordinary.

This means that in a number of dioceses the praxis of infant Confirmation will continue to prevail, at least in the near future. The financial situation of many of our recently founded dioceses is a very precarious one. Both the bishops and their seminaries depend heavily on the stole fees from Confirmation. The new praxis implies that new sources of income have to be found both for the bishop and the seminary, at least for that period of time when there will be no Confirmations until these children have grown up and reached the age foreseen for Confirmation. This is no easy task.

"ORIGINARY" MINISTER — EXTRAORDINARY MINISTER

In line with many earlier statements of the Church magisterium the new guidelines of the order for Confirmation state that the bishop is the "originary" minister of Confirmation

¹ C.J. Marivoet, Age for Confirmation, *Liturgical Information Bulletin of the Philippines*, March-April 1971, p. 47

(in Latin "originarius" not "ordinarius"). The sacrament has its origin in the bishop, so to say. This is not only a Latin or Roman conviction but that of the oriental Church as well, where every priest who administers the sacrament of Baptism also confirms the newly baptized infants. Also the Orientals are convinced that the priest is not the "originary" minister of Confirmation, because he has to use for the administration of this sacrament "myron" or, as we call it, chrism, consecrated exclusively by the bishop, or in some of these Churches even exclusively by the patriarch.

This shows that Confirmation has a special relationship to the bishop. He has to prepare the "materia remota" and thus enters also, indirectly, into the "sacramentum tantum". While the new guidelines for the blessing of holy oils (Dec. 3, 1970) foresee the possibility that simple priests bless the oil of catechumens and the oil of the sick in the case of true necessity, they forbid simple priests the blessing of chrism. This remains exclusively reserved to the bishop.²

But in case of true necessity, for example, if a larger group of persons is to be confirmed, the bishop may now associate with himself other priests in the administration of this sacrament (art. 8). This case of true necessity exists very frequently in the Philippines. Here we are confronted, generally speaking, by an enormous disproportion between the number of "originary" ministers of Confirmation and the number of candidates of this sacrament.

In this manner the Pope gave in to a petition brought to him above all by the Council for the implementation of the Constitution of the Liturgy. This Council had asked the Holy Father to grant to bishops "de iure" the faculty, to delegate simple priests to administer Confirmation.

The faculty to confirm have now the following "de iure": in addition to local Ordinaries who are not bishops, priests who in virtue of an office which they lawfully hold (a parish priest, for example) baptize an adult person or a child old enough for catechetical instruction. Equally "de iure" have this faculty those who admit validly baptized adults to full communion with the Catholic Church. In danger of death — provided a

²Ordo Benedicendi Oleum . . . , n. 6: "Consecratio chrismatis soli Episcopo competit."

bishop is not easily available or is impeded — pastors and their assistants, and in absence of them any priest in good ecclesiastical standing, have the same faculty.

In addition to these cases, the "ordinary" minister or the extraordinary minister designated by papal indult or by law, may associate to himself — in case of true necessity and special reason — other priests in the administration of Confirmation. These priests should have a particular function or office in the diocese (vicar general, district or regional vicars, etc.) or should be the pastor of the place. The bishop may also ask those priests to join him in Confirmation who prepared the candidates for Confirmation in catechetical instruction.

This last concession implies that this sacrament — as well as baptism — does not only consist of the liturgical rites in the strict sense. In a certain sense, the sacrament begins — since it is a sacrament of *faith* — in the catechetical instruction which the candidates receive.

Will the simultaneous administration ("concelebration") of this sacrament by bishop and simple priests together, not create eventually difficulties in the mind of simple people, especially of older children who receive Confirmation? Will they not start to question the "value" of confirmation administered by a simple priest? Has Confirmation, if administered by one with mitre and staff, not a higher dignity and effectivity in the mind of these children?

THE RITE OF CONFIRMATION WITHIN MASS³

1. THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

The service of the word prepares the congregation for the celebration of the sacrament. It is, therefore, an introduction to Confirmation. Even if Mass is not celebrated, the service of the word has always to precede the celebration of the sacrament. For this service of the word the lectionary offers a number of different readings from which one may freely choose. The homily, however, is to be preached later in the course of the celebration.

³ The Missal of 1970 has two Mass formularies "In conferenda Confirmatione" with the presidential prayers of a third formulary (pp. 736-738).

If the number of those to be confirmed is not so great they are called by name in about the same way as the candidates for ordination. If the candidates for Confirmation are children ("pueri") they are led to the bishop by one of their sponsors.

2. THE PRESENTATION OF THE CANDIDATES

If possible the godparent of baptism should also be the sponsor for Confirmation. Canon 786,1 of the Code of Canon Law has been abrogated. This new concession wants to demonstrate the intimate connection between Baptism and Confirmation. This connection is explicitly mentioned during infant Baptism. Toward the end of the celebration, in front of the main altar, the celebrant addresses the congregation, before they recite in common the Lord's Prayer, saying: "These children have been reborn in baptism. They are now children of God. In Confirmation they will receive the fulness of the Holy Spirit. In holy Communion they will share the banquet of Christ's sacrifice, calling God their Father in the midst of the Church."⁴ With other words: Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Communion are the three sacraments of Christian initiation.

The obligation of the sponsor of Baptism to provide for a Christian education does not cease with the first years of schooling. If the sponsor of Baptism is also the sponsor of Confirmation, this duty is once again called to his mind. Parents, however, have the main obligation to give their children the necessary instruction for a truly Christian life. This is the reason why they may now assume even the role of sponsor of the sacrament of Confirmation. If these changes are not easily understood by the people, the local Ordinary should issue regulations and clarifications in this matter.

When many children are to be confirmed in the same celebration they cannot be called and brought to the bishop individually into the sanctuary. In this case the children should have, right from the beginning of the celebration, a suitable place, where they can easily participate and have equally easy access to the bishop for the essential act of the sacrament.

⁴ Infant Baptismal Rite, art. 68

3. HOMILY OR ADDRESS

The word of God read in the first part of the celebration has to be explained in a special homily or address given by the bishop or one of his helpers. If grade school children are to be confirmed the bishop should accommodate his address to their mental capability. The model homily of the new ritual contains high theology and seems to be unsuited for this purpose. One should change eventually this text for another, before the new ritual is published in the vernacular. Here, but also elsewhere in the ritual, the bishop should observe the guideline which says that he "make appropriate accommodations" in the existing texts, for example, by expressing them in a kind of dialogue, especially (therefore not exclusively) with children (art. 18).

4. RENEWAL OF BAPTISMAL PROMISES

The term "renewal" in this context is not entirely correct. In the celebration of infant baptism the children do not profess their faith, not even the parents and sponsors in the children's name. Parents and godparents profess their own faith, the faith in which they promise to educate the children. The profession of faith which the children make is therefore, in all probability the first one, they make in public.

Unlike the celebration of Baptism, the rite of Confirmation knows of only *one* renunciation of Satan. Among four questions concerning their faith, the third is entirely new: "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who came to the apostles on Pentecost and who comes to you today in the sacrament of Confirmation?"

All children who are confirmed at an age when they can publicly confess their faith, need a proper catechetical preparation before they receive this sacrament. It is the task of the episcopal conference to determine the pastoral means for the preparation of these children.

After the profession of faith, the bishop directs the attention of the congregation to the importance of the content of faith which the children just professed. It is the faith of the whole Church, of which we are proud to hold it. Like St. Paul we are not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for

anyone who has faith (Rom 1:16). Also Confirmation is a sacrament of faith. The people present give their assent to this acclamation of the bishop in their "Amen".

5. IMPOSITION OF HANDS

Now the bishop invites all present to pray with him for the descent of the Holy Spirit on the candidates. He asks God that the Gift of the Spirit may strengthen them in their faith and anoint them so that they become ever more like Christ.

After this silent prayer of the congregation, the bishop, together with the priests present, imposes his hands on the candidates. According to the former ritual the bishop was to stretch out his hands over them. The new text, however, speaks of an imposition of hands.

How is this to be done? If there are only relatively few candidates for Confirmation, the individual boys or girls come to the bishop who places his hands on their heads in silence. Only after this imposition he pronounces the epicletical prayer.

If many are to be confirmed the bishop simply stretches out his hands over the candidates and pronounces at the same time the prayer in which he asks for the descent of the Holy Spirit and his seven gifts on the candidates, who remain during this time in their places.

It was always a point of doubt whether this imposition of hands together with its epicletical prayer belonged to the essence of the sacrament. Did not Peter and John "pray for the converts, asking that they might receive the Holy Spirit" at Samaria? They "laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:14,17; 19:6). Nothing is said in the Acts of the Apostles of an anointing with oil. In his Apostolic Constitution, however, Pope Paul VI, using the fulness of his authority, states that this imposition of hands does not belong to the essence of the sacramental sign; nevertheless, it is an integral part of the sacrament.

In the epicletical prayer the repeated "Amen" of the former rite have been eliminated, so that this prayer maybe said or sung in an uninterrupted manner by the minister of the sacrament.

6. THE ANOINTING

It is a rather general trait of the new sacramental rites that they try to establish some personal contact between the minister and the recipient of the sacrament. There should be a short dialogue between the two. Such an initial dialogue takes place in the distribution of holy Communion. When he answers to the priest's words: "The Body of Christ!" by saying "Amen", the communicant professes his faith in the true sacramental presence of Christ. Also the Eucharist is a sacrament of faith.

The sponsor places his right hand on the shoulder of the candidate and gives the candidate's name to the bishop, if the candidate cannot yet speak for himself. Addressing the candidate with his Christian name, the bishop anoints him with chrism on the forehead, saying, for example: "Miguel, receive the seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit!" While he anoints the forehead with the thumb, the hand of the minister rests on the head of the candidate. The newly confirmed responds to the words of the sacramental form with "Amen." The bishop offers him then the sign of peace, saying: "Peace be with you," to which the newly confirmed answers, "And also with you."

During the last years the rite of anointing with its words and gestures has been greatly simplified. After the anointing the bishop had to make the sign of the cross three times over the newly confirmed, saying: ". . . in the name of the Father, ✠ and the Son, ✠ and the Holy ✠ Spirit." In 1964 this had been reduced to one single sign of the cross.⁵ Now there is none.

7. THE SACRAMENTAL FORM

As the Pope states in his Apostolic Constitution, a new form of the sacrament has been sought during the last years. It had to be shorter and more meaningful than the one which had been in use in the Latin Church from the 12th century on. Since a better formula could not be found in the Latin liturgical tradition it was decided to adopt, with some changes, the formula which has been in use in the Antiochene rites from the fourth century on. It has been retained in the Byzantine liturgies ever since.

⁵ Instruction "Inter oecumenici", of Sept. 26, 1964, no. 67.

Now the bishop says: "Accipe signaculum Domini Spiritus Sancti." Since the word "Donum" is capitalized it implies that the Holy Spirit himself is the Gift, bestowed on the candidates when they receive the sacrament.

This Gift is symbolized in the anointing with chrism (Lk 4:18,21; Acts 10:38). It is to remain permanently in the confirmed. This is the reason why the rubric which ordered formerly one of the assisting priests to wipe away the chrism immediately after the anointing, has not been retained in the new ritual.

Also this sacrament is to be celebrated in the mother tongue. Once again we are confronted with the problem how to translate the new sacramental form. "Receive the seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit" is a literal translation in English. A good translation has to preserve, if ever possible, as much of its biblical wealth (Eph 1:13; Acts 2:38; Lk 24:49; Acts 1:4) as can be carried in a simple and short formula. In its provisional translation the International Committee for English in the Liturgy (ICEL) proposes: "Receive the seal of the Holy Spirit, the Gift of the Father." This is a rather long formula and brings into the text words which are not at all found in the original Latin. Another proposal is, "Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit."⁶

8. CONCELEBRATION OF CONFIRMATION

As we stated earlier, the bishop may associate with himself other priests to help him in the administration of Confirmation if many are to be confirmed. In order to make clear that he is the "ordinary" minister of the sacrament who has prepared the "remote matter" for the anointing, the bishop personally gives to each one of the "concelebrants" the vessel with the perfumed⁷ chrism. If Confirmation is celebrated during Mass these priests should also concelebrate in the eucharistic celebration with the bishop.

During the anointing suitable hymns should be sung in order to bridge the time. One may choose songs known from the liturgy of Pentecost, especially the hymns "Veni, creator

⁶ *Worship* 45 (1971) 556.

⁷ *Ordo benedicendi oleum, Praenotanda, n. 4.*

Spiritus" and "Veni, sancte Spiritus" in one of the many translations available.

Intercessions in the form of a prayer of the faithful for the newly confirmed, their parents and sponsors, for the Church and the whole world, conclude the celebration of the sacrament proper.

9. THE MASS

The Credo is always omitted in this Mass; the profession of faith, which is part of the rite, takes its place. Duplications are to be avoided in liturgical celebrations.

Some of the newly confirmed bring the gifts for the eucharistic celebration to the altar. Thereby they demonstrate that they participate actively in the eucharist, exercise their royal priesthood which has been deepened in the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation. If they go to holy Communion in this Mass — perhaps even for the first time — their Christian initiation is complete.

Adults who have been confirmed, their sponsors, parents, wives and husbands and catechists may receive holy Communion under both kinds in this Mass (art. 32). This concession, granted to "adults" should be interpreted in a wide sense, including as adults also children who eventually receive this sacrament at the end of their years in elementary school. Is this sacrament not also the sacrament of initiation into Christian *adulthood*?

It is fitting that the special blessing formula, foreseen for this Mass, is actually used instead of the usual blessing.

GETTING WHOLE AGAIN

"Getting whole again — this is our problem today. It is not renewal. The word renewal is not found in the New Testament in relationship to any kind of structure or dress. It is found only in relationship to two things: one, Be Infants; and secondly, Become a new creature. We do not need renewal. We do not need renovation, We have got to get whole again. We are like Nicodemus who said, How can I be born? We have to be born again, not just renewed."

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