RETHINKING CONFIRMATION AS AN INITIATION SACRAMENT: A HISTORICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND RITUAL APPROACH

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Abstract

There is no denial of the fact that the idea of many contemporary Catholic Christians about confirmation is shaped by the definition in the Catechism of Baltimore that Confirmation is a sacrament through which we receive the Holy Ghost to make us strong and perfect Christians and soldiers of Christ (no. 166). This definition tends to emphasise confirmation as a sacrament of Christian maturity. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, however emphasizes that confirmation, together with Baptism and Eucharist are sacraments of initiation whose unity must be safeguarded (CCC. 1212, 1285).How can we possibly consider the notion of Confirmation as a sacrament of Christian maturity and one whose unity with baptism and eucharist must be kept? Is our present ritual practise reflective of the initiation character of the sacrament? When and how did this differentiation in the primary role of the sacrament emerge? This essay responds to these, and some other pertinent questions regarding the true character of the sacrament of Confirmation. It assumes that the survey of the historical, theological, and ritual understanding of the sacrament can help to put in right perspective the true character of the sacrament and thus affect the present practice.

Keywords: Confirmation, Sacrament, Baptism, Initiation, Catechism.

Introduction

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explicitly stated that the Sacraments of Christian initiation are Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, they lay the foundations for every Christian life, and their *unity* must be safeguarded (CCC 1212, 1285). This affirmation understands 'initiation' as a unitary process by which an individual comes to full membership in the Christian community. However, the practice of Confirmation today reflects little of the initiation character, and consequently raises question about its meaning.

When the question is asked about the meaning of Confirmation, the most likely answer will be something relating to the Holy Spirit and not basically initiatory. It may be said to be the sacrament that gives us the Holy Spirit with all his gifts. Or as the *Catechism of Baltimore* defines it: a sacrament through which we receive the Holy Ghost to make us strong and perfect Christians and soldiers of Christ (no. 166). This notion of Confirmation with its link to the Holy Spirit and strengthening has been over emphasised at the detriment of its initiatory character. But this attitude attracts myriad of questions: Is the Holy Spirit not given in Baptism? If it is (and indeed is), is the Holy Spirit given in Baptism different or in little measure to the one at Confirmation? Are those who have not received Confirmation not capable of living the life in the Spirit and manifesting the gifts of the Holy Spirit? Do those who receive Confirmation always manifest the gifts of the Spirit? Is it necessary to wait till adulthood to receive the Holy Spirit and his gifts? If it is a sacrament of Initiation, are those who have not received Confirmation full member of the Church? How and why are those who are not fully initiated, partaking in the Eucharistic meal? If it not for its initiation character, why is the request for Confirmation of Catholics before Marriage (CIC 1065 §1)? Why should those from other Christian traditions being received into full communion with the Catholic Church be confirmed (CCC 1312; CIC 884 §2)? And the question can go on and on. One thing that these questions reveal is that Confirmation is not as easily understood as it sometimes seems to be. It is a Sacrament with complexities and this

calls for a rethink about what the Sacrament is in its history, theology and ritual.

Confirmation: A Sacrament with Complexities

One of the recurrent features in the writings on Confirmation is the acknowledgement that it has multiple complexities in its history, theology and ritual practice. It is arguably one of the most difficult and complex questions in the history of the Church.[1] For Gerard Austin, "no other Sacrament has had such a checkered history. No other sacrament has changed so frequently in ritual, prayers, and meaning through the centuries."[2] As a liturgical act, there is no other sacrament that has generated so much theological controversy and as a result attracted variety of interpretations.[3] Regarding its history and origin, "it is one of the most obscured chapters in the origin of Christian worship."[4] It is a sacrament shrouded in much ambiguity, not just in its history and theology but also in practice. Frank Quinn considers it as "one of the most vexing issues in contemporary theology, liturgical reform and practice".[5] Both the development and the reform of the rites of the sacrament seem to consistently generate more questions than they hope to clarify.

Confirmation: A Definition

To avoid ambiguity, it is important to give a working definition of the object of our discourse – Confirmation.[6] Maxwell Johnson gives a comprehensive definition thus:

> Confirmation is the second of the three sacraments of Christian Initiation in the Roman Catholic Church, the 'seal of the Holy Spirit' completing baptism and connected to the hand-laying prayer for the seven-fold gifts of the Holy Spirit and an anointing with Chrism, both usually performed by a bishop (or by presbyters in the case of adult initiation), leading to the fullness of Christian initiation signified by participation for the first time in the Eucharist.Post-baptismal 'chrismation' for both infants and adults, in the Eastern orthodox and eastern Catholic

> Churches is often viewed as equivalent to confirmation.
>
> In various Protestant traditions, however, the rite of confirmation is not part of 'initiation', properly speaking, but is, rather, a rite having to do with a public affirmation of one's baptism after catechesis, usually during adolescence, with baptism itself understood as constituting the fullness of initiation into Christ and the church. And like Chrismation in the Eastern Rites, so confirmation in the Roman Catholic rite is also used as part of the rites of reception into full communion with the church for those baptised in other Christian traditions.[7]

From the above definition, we can deduce key terms like Holy Spirit, hand-laying, anointing or chrismation as characterising what Confirmation is. In discussing confirmation therefore, these features are the pointers or markers for tracing its history, discussing its theology and shaping its ritual.

Historical Approach to Confirmation

Confirmation is closely linked to Baptism both in history and in practice. As such, any attempt to trace the history and development of Confirmation, inevitably discusses the practice of Baptism as a (perhaps, *the*) means of Christian initiation. The scriptures attest to this link between Baptism and Confirmation especially in reference to ritual-bath, hand-laying and anointing. While I acknowledge that there are references to Spirit of God, ritual bath, hand-laying and anointing in the Old Testament (cf. Gen 1:1-2, Is. 11:1-6, 32:15-18, 61:1-2; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:25-27), they are often in relation to renewal, commissioning and foreshadowing of messianic era. Therefore, our attention will be more on the New Testament which inaugurates the messianic era and provides a clearer foundation for Confirmation.

New Testament foundation for Confirmation

The event of the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan (Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3: 21-22) furnishes us with much to say about Baptism and Confirmation. This baptism of Jesus was not the same as other baptisms by John because something particularly unique accompanied it – descent of the Holy spirit and sonship of Jesus.[8] The evangelists emphasise these two important elements that have marked the understanding of Baptism down the history – possession by the Holy Spirit and adoption as sons and daughters of God. Thus, "just as Jesus was anointed with the Spirit, so his followers will be given the same Spirit. Just as Jesus was declared to be the 'beloved son', so his followers will be declared to be sons and daughters of God."[9]

The Acts of the Apostles that narrates the activities of the early Church, including how new converts were initiated into the Christian fold, also offers insights into the foundation for the origin of Confirmation. The events of Acts8:14-17 and 19:1-7 are often employed to buttress this point. In these instances, the Samaritan converts (Acts 8) and others who have received the baptism of John the Baptist (Acts 19) received the Holy Spirit through a post-baptismal hand-laying. One will be safe to say that these texts show that the post-baptismal rite of imposition of hand was a sacramental context of the gift of the Holy Spirit.[10] While traditional scholarship sees these texts as *the* foundation for Confirmation, Joseph Martos cautions that "recent scholarship underscores their exceptional contexts and situations rather than interpreting them as indicative of a singular or nominative practice in the apostolic Churches."[11]Also, J.D Crichton added that while considering these texts as 'proof text' for Confirmation, they are to be seen as acts of the Jerusalem church to establish and maintain the unity of the church.[12] It was an *ad hoc* gesture to solve an abnormal situation.[13] Rather, baptism and reception of the Holy Spirit should have come together as suggested in Acts 2:38.

The Pauline and Johannine literatures give another trajectory into the understanding of the relation of the Holy Spirit to the baptized. While Acts suggests that the Holy Spirit is imparted through post-baptismal hand-laying, for Paul and John the Holy

Spirit is conferred by baptism itself and there is no mention of any post-baptismal ritual. John interprets baptism as being born by 'water and spirit' (John 3:5). For Paul, the stages of proclamation and conversion (the earlier stages of initiation) is regularly consummated by a water birth *that was itself* the anointing and sealing of one's adherence to Christ in the same Spirit (e.g. 2 Cor. 1:21-22).[14] Amidst these different views, "the only thing that the biblical evidence is certain of is that while the water-bath and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are in some way distinguishable, they can never be totally separated."[15]

As much as we do not have testimonies to the mode of initiation and impartation ofthe Holy Spirit in the immediate century after the Apostolic era, we turn to the patristic era in tracing the development of confirmation.

The Origins of Confirmation

In discussing the origins of Confirmation, one must note that the term 'confirmation' was not used until the mid-fifth century. Prior to this time, terms such as *perfectio*or *consummatio* were used for those final rites of baptism which were associated with the bishop. The terms do not refer so much to specific rites as to the perfecting or completing of baptismal initiation by the bishop.[16] As a technical term, *confirmatio*first appears in the fifth century, in documents reporting practices in southeast Gaul. But as with *perfectio*and *consummatio, confirmatio*did not refer directly to any particular rite or to the bestowal of the Holy Spirit. Instead, it was juridical, referring to the personal intervention of the bishop in baptismal initiation, especially when the bishop had not been present at the baptism itself.[17] The councils of Orange and Riez used it in the context of hand-laying on heretics and neophytes respectively. We should however be careful not to imply that post-baptismal rite of initiation and admission of heretics are the same, though they both follow the same line of development.[18] The initial term that has a link to bestowal of the Holy Spirit in 'the seal.'[19] Gregory Dix, captures the essence of the change in terminology thus:

> Hitherto, the Latin name for baptism of the Spirit had been the scriptural term 'the Seal' – *signaculum*, *consignatio*, corresponding to the *sphragis* which the Greeks and the *rushma* which the Syrian Churches still retain. In the fifth century the Latins begin to use the term confirmation. …. The change of term has its own significance. A document which needs 'sealing' is not valid until the seal has been affixed. The 'confirmation' of a document, though it may add to its authority, implies that it was already operative before it was 'confirmed'. [20]

Confirmation is thus seen as 'completion of baptism.' This connotation will eventually have implications for the theology of confirmation, especially in its relation to baptism, in the subsequent era.

Stages of historical development

The historical development of Confirmation can be outlined in stages.Though the development is not fine-cut, as there are series of overlaps, Marsh recognises three stages which I shall adopt in this work.[21] These are: a). The early centuries (2nd to 4thcenturies) b). the early medieval period (5th to 11th centuries), and c). The central medieval to modern times and recent developments.

The Early Centuries (2nd to 4th Centuries)

As Paul Turner rightly noted, as much as we may not say that Confirmation had been in existence since the second century, it suffices to say that the second post-baptismal anointing or/and hand-laying "by the bishop, attested in many documents, became the forerunner of Confirmation. The term 'confirmation' still did not occur, but the ritual was beginning to take shape after Baptism and before Eucharist."[22] Most scholars believe that the *Apostolic Tradition* (AT) - a long thought to be an authentic, authoritative and dependable witness to early third-century Roman liturgical practice, composed by Hippolytus of Rome - is the first text in which what we consider as confirmation first appeared.[23] The document outlines

a ritual celebration of baptism for Christian initiation. What is relevant for our discussion here is the post baptismal rituals of hand-laying and double anointing:

> Afterward, when they have come up out of the water, they shall be anointed by the elder with the Oil of Thanksgiving, saying, "I anoint you with holy oil in the name of Jesus Christ." Then, drying themselves, they shall dress and afterwards gather in the church. The bishop will then lay his hand upon them, invoking, saying, "Lord God, you who have made these worthy of the removal of sins through the bath of regeneration, make them worthy to be filled with your Holy Spirit, grant to them your grace, that they might serve you according to your will, for to you is the glory, Father and Son with the Holy Spirit, in the Holy Church, now and throughout the ages of the ages. Amen. After this he pours the oil into his hand, and laying his hand on each of their heads, says, "I anoint you with holy oil in God the Father Almighty, and Christ Jesus, and the Holy Spirit." Then, after sealing each of them on the forehead, he shall give them the kiss of peace and say, "The Lord be with you."[24]

Though the model of initiation mentioned in the AT referred to double post-baptismal anointing and hand-laying, a common practice in Rome, there was no common consensus about the point when people receive the Holy Spirit during their initiation. The common agreement was that by the conclusion of the ceremony, Christians had received the Spirit.But for some of the Patristics,"this happened during baptismal washing, for others it happened afterward. Some did not specify when it happened but only spoke of the anointing or the imposition of hand as a sign that it happened."[25] Tertullian, for instance, in *De Baptismo*sees the imposition of hand as a rite of inviting and welcoming the Holy Spirit.[26]

Unlike in Rome where there was both post-baptismal and hand-laying, the Eastern Churches only had post baptismal anointing for giving the Holy Spirit. Cyril of Jerusalem, for instance recognised the anointing, not just as the moment of imparting the Holy Spirit, but that the anointing is the Holy Spirit.[27] For him, post-baptismal anointing is to 'instil Divinity' in the one anointed.[28] The *Apostolic Constitutions* requested that: "you shall anoint with holy oil, then you shall baptize with water, and finally you shall seal with Chrism, so that the anointing may be the partaking of the Holy Spirit, the water the symbol of the death (of Christ), and the chrism, the seal of the covenants."[29] The *ApostolicConstitution* however added that: "but if there be neither oil nor chrism, the water is sufficient both for the anointing and for the sealing, and for the confession (of faith) of him who is dying, or rather is dying together (with Christ)."[30] J.D Crichton captured the implications and the sentiments of the compiler of the document so well when he says "the compiler certainly believed that the Spirit was given but evidently did not see either hand-laying or anointing as essential. For him, both 'anointing' and 'seal', which he regarded as important, did not need physical gestures for them to take place."[31]

Moreover, this period witnessed the separation of confirmation (as expressed in anointing and hand-laying) from baptism (water-birth). This separation is closely linked to the prevailing practice that the second post-baptismal anointing and hand-laying are reserved for the Bishop. It gradually became practically impossible for bishops to be present at every baptism as Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Partly, the prevailing teaching of Augustine about original sin of which baptism was necessary for its remittance influenced the increased infant baptism at that time.More people request for baptism and dioceses enlarged. Also, as missionaries move towards the Alps, only few bishops went with them. Because of these, so many were baptised but only few were consigned.[32]

The Early Medieval Period (5th to 11th Centuries)

In Gaul, the fifth century was marked by some developments which will have long effect on the understanding of confirmation. In 416,

Pope Innocent I decreed that priest could anoint with chrism but the rite of consignation with chrism is reserved to the bishop since it is only the successor of the Apostles that can give the Holy Spirit. Through the Council of Orange in 441 however, the Gallican bishops allowed the priest who celebrated baptism to anoint the people with Chrism if it was consecrated by the bishop. Also, as noted earlier, this was the first time the term 'Confirmation' was used for the post-baptismal hand-laying or/and anointing. In 460, Faustus of Riez delivered a popular Pentecost Homily which was meant to encourage the people to approach the bishop for confirmation.[33] Faustus emphasised that confirmation gives graces different from what baptism gives. He preached that through baptism we receive new life through the Holy Spirit, but we are strengthenedonly in Confirmation to battle with sin and evil. Though this preaching didn't yield much positive effect at the time, it doubtlessly will about 400 years later. Lastly, though the term 'confirmation' was used in the Councils of Riez and Orange in 439 and 441 respectively, and in the Pentecost homily of Faustus, it was not until 750 that it came to refer to baptismal episcopal rites in rubrical text – Ordo Romanus XI.

Moreover, this stage of the development of confirmation was strongly influenced by the Germanization of the Roman liturgy.[34] The Roman practices eventually found its way into Gallican territory when Pepin III and later Charlemagne established the 'Holy Roman Empire' in the West. During their reign, they sought to end the rivalry between the Roman and Gallican liturgies and at the same time "wanted to be in closer contact with the porter of heaven, Saint Peter, with his tomb, with his city, and with his liturgy."[35] At this time, the Roman custom of episcopal confirmation was extended "through all the countries of Europe (except Milan and some Spanish dioceses), and the French explanation for confirmation became the accepted Catholic view."[36]

Though the Roman rite was imposed, it met with resistance with the Gallican people. Several efforts were made to safeguard the Gallican autonomy, both politically and liturgically. These

efforts invariably led to the emergence of false decretals, which was an ingenious piece of forgery combining a collection of letter and decrees from Popes and councils with the opinions of the forgers, and given the purported credibility by attributing it to Isidore of Seville in early 600s. Parts of the decretals stated that "…all the faithful must receive the Holy Spirit after baptism through the imposition of the hand of the bishop so that they may become fully Christians." It taught that "at the baptismal font the Holy Spirit bestow absolutely all that is needed to restore innocence, but in confirmation he provides an increase of grace. In baptism we are born to new life; after baptism we are confirmed for combat. In baptism we are washed; after baptism we are strengthened." And "that the sacrament of the imposition of hands was to be performed by no one but the successors of the apostles."[37]

This forgery was so successful, accepted as genuine, attained the force of law and became foundational for the theology of confirmation championed by the scholastics.

The central medieval to modern times and recent developments.

Much of what was done during this period was the theological explanations of Confirmation and its effects. Theologians of this period are largely influenced by the Pentecost homily often credited to Faustus of Riez. This period witnessed the emergence of the use of military imagery with its defensive connotations for, an imagery which hitherto had been restricted to the pre-baptismal anointings. Hence, Confirmation is foremost considered as the sacrament of being strengthened or empowered by the Holy Spirit. This was the idea projected by many theologians of the time including Alcuin, Rabanus Maurus, Peter Lombard, Nicholas Claivaux and Thomas Aquinas.

There are some other notable pronouncements that shaped the practice of confirmation during this period. Based on the teachings of Peter Lombard in his treatise that Confirmation is a sacrament, the second Council of Lyon (1247) recognizes confirmation as one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church. The Council of Cologne (1280) declared that children under the age

of seven were too young for confirmation and various episcopal and conciliar bodies opted for between twelve and fourteen. It was however the Council of Florence (1439) that canonized the medieval practice and theology of confirmation. It declared that there are seven sacraments, define the form and matter of confirmation, the ordinary minister is the bishop and priest can be delegated provided that the chrism blessed by the bishop will be used.

The medieval teachings about Confirmation however met with opposition during the modern era. The modern era was the period of the Reformations and the understanding and practice of confirmation was so much attacked by Martin Luther and other reformers. For Luther, that confirmation gives the Holy Spirit is a superstition. At best, confirmation is for him a sacramental at par with ritual of blessing of water. In his 1520 treatise, *Babylonian Captivity of the Church,* Luther rejected confirmation as a sacrament on the ground that it does not have a biblical foundation. Calvin on the other hand argues that baptism on its own is perfect without confirmation as against the teaching of the scholastics that confirmation perfects baptism.[38]The Council of Trent responded to these accusations, but only by mostly reaffirming the teachings of the scholastics especially, Aquinas.

In recent times, the reform of the Second Vatican Council has been responsible for the development in the understanding and practice of confirmation today. The conciliar Fathers proposed the revision of the Rite of Confirmation. The revision was done in 1971 and was accompanied by an Apostolic constitution, *Divinae consortium naturae*. The new Rite sought to respond to the questions of the age for confirmation, the matter and form of the sacrament, the minister of the sacrament and the relationship of the sacrament to baptism. Paramount in the task of the reform was to situate confirmation back into the context of Christian initiation *preceded by baptism and followed by the Eucharist.* The reform has led to the emergence of different models of confirmation in the Roman Catholic Church: the confirmation of infants, children, adolescents and adults. Arguably, the most popular today is the

adolescent confirmation. In the opinion of Turner, this growing practice was enhanced by the "evolution of catechetical theory – or the theory of how people best learn and grow in the faith."[39] He argues that the late twentieth century has experienced a principal shift in theory of learning from being abstract learning to experiential learning, from learning from books to learning for experience, from learning by memorization to learning by reflecting on personal experience. These eventually became the foundation upon which teen or youth catechesis was built. The method is highly productive in fostering spiritual growth and commitment to the faith. But the question remains: does it reflect the theological and ritual meaning of confirmation?

Theological Approach

What has mostly engaged the mind of liturgical theologians about confirmation is its theological relationship with baptism. Though Kavanagh argues that such relationship is more of structure than theology,[40] the theological relationship should not be undermined. Schmemann argues from the Eastern understanding of the 'seal of the Holy Spirit' with which confirmation is celebrated. He argues that Confirmation is both the fulfilment of Baptism and a new mystery taking the neophyte beyond baptism. In Confirmation, Christ's own Spirit is given as *gift.* Thus, "prepared and made possible by Baptism, which is fulfilled in it, it takes man beyond Baptism, beyond 'salvation': by making him 'christ' in Christ, by anointing him with the Anointment of the Anointed One, it opens to man the door of *theosis*or *deification.*"[41] It is with this understanding that Turner says: "sequence alone does not make confirmation initiation; its conjunction with Baptism in the same ceremony drives the point home."[42] For Maxwell, problem only arises when confirmation is not connected to baptism at all but added as a separate and self-sustained rite.[43]

Confirmation, together with Baptism and Orders are regarded as sacraments that impart permanent character and as such cannot be repeated (CCC 1317). While this is an ecclesiastical statement, it constantly begs for theological explanation. Theologians differ on what this means. For Schmemann, the

question of character is more of the understanding of the relationship of the Holy Spirit with the confirmand. One is to ask what is received when we say Confirmation bestows the gift of the Spirit. Schmemann pointed out the scholastic problem when he says that "instead of 'receiving' the meaning of the sacrament from liturgical tradition, theologians created, so to speak, their own definition of sacraments and then, in the light of such definitions, began to interpret the liturgy of the Church, to 'squeeze' in into their own *a priori* approach."[44] For him, "the sacramental formula is and has always been in the singular, 'the gift' (*dorea*), theologians while 'defining' this sacrament almost without exception speak of 'gifts' (*charismata*) in the plural; the sacrament, they say, bestows on the neophyte 'gifts of the holy Spirit'. To them the two words, one in the plural and the other in the singular, seem to be interchangeable."[45] For Schmemann, the gifts needed for man's preservation in Christian life is given in Baptism, the sacrament of regeneration and, confirmation "bestows on man not any particular gift or gifts of the Holy Spirit, but *the Holy Spirit Himself as a gift* (*Dorea*)."[46] While the reflection of Schmemann seem to have corrected the scholastic idea, one cannot but ask if it is possible to have the gifs (as in Baptism) without having the Spirit as a gift (as in confirmation)?

Moreover, apart from the theological relationship of Confirmation and Baptism, reflections on the various themes of confirmation have contributed to a better theological understanding of the sacrament. Among these are initiation, strengthening, more Christ-like and witnessing. When the conciliar Fathers requested for the revision of the Rite of Confirmation, it was foremost to situate it in the context of initiation.[47] It was observable that the imagery of strengthening that was initially attached to pre-baptismal anointing in the early centuries soon became transferred to the post-baptismal anointing (that grew to be confirmation). The Rite of Confirmation (RC) in its euchologies constantly pray that those confirmed are conformed *more* to Christ (Cf. RC, 9, 22, 24, 58) and to be his witnesses in the world (RC 33, 59).

Ritual Approach

Just as the historical and theological approach to Confirmation are complex and difficult, so also is the case for the ritual approach. The difficulty in the ritual approach is largely due to the complex history and varying theologies of Confirmation. Nevertheless, the Rite was set forth to address the relationship of Confirmation with Baptism and Eucharist, and then how this relationship is to be understood and celebrated. Annibale Bugnini, the Secretary of Congregation for Divine worship (1969-1976), the commission that worked on the reform of the Catholic Liturgy following the Second Vatican Council wrote: "the path of reform of the Rite of Confirmation was a long and difficult one because of the many problems connected with the sacrament, the uncertainties and the adversity in theological and pastoral thinking about it."[48]

The present Rite of Confirmation, promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1971 and revised at the direction of Pope John Paul II, provides a theologically rich resource in its content. In structure, the Rite consists of the Apostolic constitution *Divinae consortium naturae*of Paul VI. The Apostolic constitution offers a synopsis of the history and theology of Confirmation. The Rite contains an introduction and five chapters. Chapter one contains the order for the conferral of Confirmation within mass. The second chapter deals with the order of conferral of confirmation without mass. It was the third chapter that discusses those things to be observed when confirmation is conferred by the extra ordinary minister. Chapter four considers the Confirmation to be administered to a sick person in danger of death. The final chapter offers texts to be used in the conferral of confirmation. The structure of the rite in all cases follow the order of liturgy of the Word, homily, renewal of baptismal promises, laying on of hands, chrismation, general intercessions, and at the end solemn blessing.

Though the Roman Church has often been accused of not emphasizing the pneumatic dimension of liturgy like the Eastern churches, the Rite centralizes the role and position of the Holy Spirit in the celebration of the sacrament. Firstly, the rite keeps the two traditional ways of imparting the Holy Spirit: anointing and hand-laying. The Apostolic Constitution decided to keep the two "in order

that the revision of the Rite of Confirmation may, as is fitting, include even the essence of the sacramental rite."[49] Secondly the euchology is filled with pneumatic themes, and the suggested scripture readings relate directly with the Holy Spirit and the Pentecost experience. Strikingly, the Alleluia verses included two options that are not taken from the scriptures but from traditional hymn to the Holy Spirit (RC. 64).[50]

Furthermore, the centrality of the Holy Spirit also serves the purpose of linking Confirmation to Baptism and the Eucharist. The Apostolic constitution opened by affirming that it is by the same Spirit by which the faithful are born anew in Baptism that they are strengthened in Confirmation and will be fed by the bread and wine transformed by the Holy Spirit into the Eucharist. Also, we see the expansion of the renewal of baptismal promises.The usual threefold questions preceding baptism (RCIA 316) is expanded into four to accommodate the theme of the Holy Spirit relating Confirmation to Baptism: "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who today through the Sacrament of Confirmation is given to you in a special way just as he was given to the Apostles on the day of Pentecost?" (RC 23)

Moreover, the former ritual practice of taking a new (or additional) name at Confirmation was dropped in the revised rite. The custom which originated from the imitation of baptismal ritual and signifying a new direction in the life of a Christian was now considered unrelated with Confirmation. This is largely because the Rite emphasises the link of Baptism and Confirmation as one initiation process. The omission thus "argue for the importance of the baptismal name throughout one's life, and against the belief that Confirmation begins a new decisive moment in the life of the Christian."[51]

The Rite also sheds light on the minister of the sacrament. Leaning on the historical evidence of the celebration of the sacrament, the Rite acknowledges the bishop as the 'ordinary' (or Primary or original) minister of the sacrament.[52] Like the Rite of ordination, the Rite of Confirmation also provides a provisional

homily that can serve the celebrant as an outline. However, unlike that of ordination, the Rite has an intriguing part to emphasise the role of the bishop. It reads: "When Confirmation is conferred by an extraordinary minister, whether by concession of the general law or by special indult of the Apostolic See, it is fitting for him to mention in the homily that the Bishop is the ordinary minister of the Sacrament and to explain the reason why even Priests receive the faculty to confirm from the law or by an indult of the Apostolic See." (RC, 18).

The Rite also addresses the 'matter' and 'form' of the sacrament through the ritual description. The Rite acknowledges that Rome has the two traditions of anointing and hand-laying and the two are to be kept together though they are different ritual acts. This seems to resolve the medieval practice where the hand-laying is *presumed* by the anointing on the forehead. The bishop invites the people to pray to God that "he will graciously pour out the Holy Spirit upon them to confirm them with his abundant gifts." He then lays hand on each of the candidates and says another prayer that God may send them the Holy Spirit and his seven gifts. After this, the Bishop goes to the candidates for the anointing with Chrism. "The Bishop dips the tip of the thumb of his right-hand in the Chrism and, with the thumb, makes the Sign of the Cross on the forehead of the one to be confirmed, as he says: N., BE SEALED WITH THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT." (RC 27). Through the prayers, the Rite seamlessly unites anointing and hand-laying. We should note that there is no specific prayer for the anointing. The prayer that precedes it is the prayer after laying on of hands. Yet, the content of the prayer is in the context of anointing. In this way, the Rite shows that the ritual actions are distinct, yet performed to the same effect: impacting the Holy Spirit with His gifts. Thus, while the Rite has borrowed the Byzantine chrismation ritual, it remains faithful to Rome's hand-laying.

Furthermore, the change in the sacramental formula in the new Rite - BE SEALED WITH THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT - captures the meaning of Confirmation. Though Kavanagh regards this move as 'Byzantinization' of the Roman Rite,[53] it was seen by the committee in charge of the revision as the best formula to

express the 'mind of the church' regarding Confirmation. It expresses external action of signing, that is sealing the initiation, and at the same time the effect of the sacrament, which is the giving of the gift of the Holy Spirit.[54] Hence, Johnson remarked that "never before had the Roman confirmation anointing been this explicitly pneumatic in language and orientation, and with the omission of the postbaptismal anointing in the RCIA in favour of this confirmation anointing alone, an interesting new parallel between Roman confirmation and Byzantine postbaptismal chrismation has been decidedly established."[55]

Evaluation

The survey of the historical and theological development of Confirmation enables us to arrive at some considerations regarding the ritual and pastoral practice of the sacrament in the Roman Catholic Church today. One thing that is persistent, as noted at the beginning of this work, is that there are complexities and ambiguities in the history and theology of confirmation. The most popular reason for the observable liturgical crisis that results from these complexities and ambiguity is the separation of what used to be one single celebration of 'double sacrament'. The separation is twofold: separation-in-time and separation as distinct sacraments.

Several scholars argue that the separation-in-time for the celebration of Baptism and Confirmation is the source of the ambiguity surrounding the Sacrament. Presently, there are different models for the celebration of the Sacrament based on the separation in time. We have the confirmation of baptized Children, which often come up while they prepare for their first Holy Communion. This is an attempt to rescue the supposed harm caused by the 1910 document of Pope Pius X, *Quam Singularis* that decreed that children should receive communion at the age of seven. Those who are faithful to the sequence of the sacrament thus celebrate confirmation with the First communion in the same Mass. The second model is the adolescent/adult Confirmation which is very popular today. Its origin lies in the practical experience where those

who were baptized as infants desire to personally affirm their faith or the Christian community desires a reflection of a rite of passage to adulthood (in faith). It takes place after a period of catechetical program aimed at faith growth and commitment to faith, and at the end, "Confirmation ritualized their own commitment".[56]

On the other hand, there are other scholars who believe that the liturgical crisis of confirmation goes deeper than their separation in time. Yarnold, holds this different view that even when Baptism and Confirmation are brought together into the same celebration, the crisis will still not dissolve. He contends that there will still be question of the effects of the different sacraments. Hence, he concluded that the problem lies in the recognition of Baptism and Confirmation as two distinct sacraments. As long as they are held as two distinct sacraments and are both understood as giving the Holy Spirit, the rite will keep raising different questions.[57]

Marsh maintains that the deeper problem of the Sacrament of Confirmation lies in the New Testament theologies of the Holy Spirit.[58] In Luke-Acts' theology the Holy Spirit is imparted after Baptism while Pauline and Johannine theologies uphold that the Holy Spirit is given at Baptism. For Marsh, to maintain the unity of the Sacraments, their liturgical expression must recognize, accept and incorporate this scriptural foundational duality. "Not to do so is to commit oneself to a bad methodology which offers little hope for a sound solution."[59]

Furthermore, we may question further if the problems around confirmation is not imbedded in our understanding of sacrament? Andrew McGowan rightly observed that the Catholic Church's unequivocal recognition of seven sacraments has "caused confirmation to attract more meaning than it would if there were more (sacraments)."[60] This is obviously an eye opener for us to discover that we may actually be 'seeing' problem where virtually there is no problem. Possibly, we have created problems by spending time theologizing about something else (perhaps another sacrament) *in* or *with* the name of 'confirmation.' Could it be that if from the early centuries, different terms (like *perfectio, consumatio, orconfirmare*) have been retained for the hand-laying in reconciling, penitents, heretics and schismatics, or the postbaptismal anointing

of infants and children or the hand-laying, and anointing of very sick adults, we might be speaking of different sacraments all together? As much as I don't intend to reduce the complexity to semantics, the problem might possibly not have existed if the use of the same term does not apply to several ritual events.

Call To Return To A Unified Rite

It is obvious that the problems that the Rite of Confirmation sought to resolve are still there. It is a sign that the responses are not either satisfactory or confusing.As many as those who identify problems in the theology and practice of confirmation, so are attempts to proffer solutions. But in all, it is almost a chorus that there should be a return to the practice of the early centuries, a 'unified rite' where Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist are celebrated together in one liturgy. Proponents of this view argue that this is the only way to restore the sacramental dignity of Confirmation. While they recognise that there are two main dominant theologies in the practice of confirmation today – as sacrament of initiation and as sacrament of maturity, commitment and mission – they insist that the former is the real essence of confirmation. However, they also recommend that there should be repeatable moments in which to ritualize maturity, commitment and mission. Such ritualization does not necessarily need to be a sacrament or *the* sacrament of Confirmation.[61] With this, liturgical theologians might stop seeing adolescent confirmation as a misuse of the sacrament of confirmation as a catechetical device, a utilitarian purpose which makes a mockery of the Catholic sacramental system.[62]

For the unified rite to be effective, this will necessarily involve allowing priests to celebrate confirmation along with Baptism, especially where the Rite of Christian Initiation of adults (RCIA) takes place. It may suffice to presume that the office of the Bishop, as the ordinary minister of the sacrament, is not usurped since the oil of Chrism to be used would be one that is blessed at the Chrism Mass presided over by the Bishop. The ceremony for the blessing of the oil on Holy Thursday invariably emphasises the

ecclesiastical bond that the reservation of the sacrament to the Bishop envisaged (cf. CCC. 1318). It is however unfortunate that even in some situations where the Bishop celebrates the Baptism of adults, Confirmation is still deferred to later date. This attitude keeps one wondering what our understanding of Confirmation as initiation sacrament is.

To better appreciate Confirmation as an initiation sacrament, efforts should be made to restore the order of initiation – Baptism, Cnfirmation and Eucharist. We must note that the Latin rite recognises that the practice in the East of administering Confirmation after Baptism and followed by the Eucharist highlights the unity of the three sacraments of initiation (CCC 1318), and this is the foremost reason for the reform of the rite of Confirmation (*LumenGentium*, 71). It is worth rethinking if our practice today reflects the mind of the conciliar fathers. Also, bearing in mind that the Church is disposed to priests administering confirmation (cf. CCC 1313, CIC, 884§1), giving faculty to priests to administer Confirmation neither usurps the bishop's authority nor diminishes the strengthening of ecclesiastical bond envisaged by the *catechism* (CCC 1318). On the contrary, it better signifies Confirmation as an initiation sacrament, and thus approached for the right reasons.

Conclusion

In conclusion, though the issues considered above presents us with liturgical crisis around confirmation, they also present us with pastoral possibilities as we seek to understand the mission of the Church.[63] One thing that is certain is that we cannot totally separate the work of the Holy Spirit from the Gift of the Spirit. The themes of strengthening and witnessing that are closely linked with the mission of the Church should always be kept in view as members are initiated into the Church.

ENDNOTES

[1] Thomas Marsh, "Confirmation" in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd., 1990), 260.
[2] Gerard Austin, *Anointing With the Spirit: The Rite of Confirmation: The Use of Oil and Chrism*, (New York: Pueblo Publications, 1985), ix.
[3] Alexander Schmemann, *Of Water and Spirit*, (London: SPCK, 1976), 76.
[4] Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), 114.
[5] Frank C. Quinn, "Confirmation Reconsidered: Rite and Meaning," *Worship* 59, no.4 (July 1985): 354.
[6] It is striking that the Catechism of the Catholic Church does not really define what the sacrament of confirmation is but makes several allusions to the effects of the sacrament (See CCC. 1285 – 1305)
[7] Maxwell Johnson, "Confirmation" in *The New SCM Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, ed. Paul Bradshaw, (London: SCM Press, 2002), 126.
[8] See Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1974), 12-13.
[9] Austin, *Anointed with the Spirit*, 4.
[10] Thomas Marsh, "A Study of Confirmation II," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 39 (1972), 319.
[11] Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (Ligouri: Ligouri/Triump, 2001), 187.
[12] J. D Chrichton, *Christian Celebration: Understanding the Sacraments* (New York: Geoffrey Chapman, 1993), 102.
[13] Marsh, "A Study of Confirmation," 320.
[14] Kavanagh, *The shape of Baptism*, 25 (emphasis mine).
[15] Austin, *Anointed with the Spirit*, 7.
[16] Quinn, "Confirmation Reconsidered," 360.
[17] Paul Turner, "The Origins of Confirmation: An Analysis of Kavanagh's Hypothesis" in *Living Water, Sealing Spirit: Readings on Christian Initiation*, ed. Maxwell Johnson (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 360-61.
[18] Austin, 16.
[19] For in depth analysis of 'the Seal' see the chapter on 'The Sphragis' in Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 54-69.
[20] Gregory Dix, *The Theology of Confirmation in Relation to Baptism* (London: Dacre Press, 1946), 25.
[21] Marsh, "Confirmation," 260-261.
[22] Paul Turner, *Confirmation: The Baby in Solomon's Court*, (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2006), 28.
[23]See Paul Bradshaw, Maxwell Johnson and L. Edward Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 1-6.

[24] E.C Whitaker, *Documents of Baptismal Liturgy* (Revised and Expanded edition), ed. Maxwell Johnson (London: SPCK, 2003), 7-8. [I will henceforth refer to as DBL].
[25]Martos, *Doors to the sacred*, 190.
[26] DBL, 9.
[27] DBL 32.
[28] Paul Turner, *Sources of Confirmation: From the Fathers Through the Reformers*, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 30
[29] DBL 37.
[30] DBL 37
[31] J. D Crichton, *Christian Celebration*, 89.
[32]Martos, 192.
[33] Gabriel Winkler, "Confirmation or Chrismation"*Worship* 58 (January 1984): 13.
[34] Edward Foley, *From Age to Age: How Christians Have Celebrated the Eucharist*, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2008), 133-184.
[35] Theodore Klauser, *A Short History of the Western Liturgy: An Account and Some Reflections*, Transl. John Halliburton, (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 73.
[36]See Martos, 194.
[37]Martos, 193.
[38] Gregory Dix, 33-34.
[39] Turner, *Confirmation*, 101.
[40] Kavanagh, "Confirmation: A suggestion from Structure," *Worship* 58:5 (September 1978):386 & 394.
[41] Schmemann, 80.
[42] Turner, *Confirmation*, 87.
[43] Maxwell Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 252-253.
[44] Schmemann, 76-77.
[45] Ibid., 78.
[46] Ibid., 79.
[47]*SancrosanctumConcilium*, 71.
[48]AnnibaleBugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948-1975*, Transl. Matthew J. O'Connell (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 613.
[49] Apostolic Constitution no.9
[50] "Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in them the fire of your love." And "Holy Spirit, Lord of Light, from the clear celestial height, thy pure beaming radiance give."
[51] Turner, *Confirmation*, 80.
[52] The English translation of ICEL opted for 'ordinary'- a juridical term - to keep with Canon 882 and Catechism of the Catholic Church, no.1313. However, Bugnini argued that the term '*originarius'* better translated as 'natural' or 'primary' is used in Lumen Gentium 26 and shows that the bishop's office makes

him the 'natural' minister of the sacrament. Cf. Bugnini, *Liturgical Reform*, 621 (footnote 20).
[53] Kavanagh, *Confirmation: Origins and Reform*, 93
[54]Bugnini, 625.
[55] Johnson, 400.
[56] See Turner, *Confirmation*, 98-103.
[57] Edward Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rite: The Origins of RCIA*, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1994), 35.
[58] Marsh, "A Study of Confirmation," 335-336.
[59] Marsh, "A Study of Confirmation," 150.
[60] McGowan, 131.
[61] See Geoffrey Robinson, "Confirmation: A Bishop's Dilemma", *Worship* 78 (2004): 53-58. Nicholas E. Denysenko, *Chrismation: A primer for Catholics* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2014), 156, 171.
[62] Frank C. Quinn, "Confirmation: Does it Make Sense?" *Ecclesia Orans*(1988): 322
[63] Liam Bergin, "Anointed to Proclaim the Kingdom" in *Catholic Sacraments: A Rich Source of Blessing*, ed John Baldovin and David Farina Turnbloom, (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), 48.