

## APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION ON THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

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The sharing in the divine nature received through the grace of Christ bears a certain likeness to the origin, development, and nourishing of natural life. The faithful are born anew by baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of confirmation, and finally are sustained by the food of eternal life in the eucharist. By means of these sacraments of Christian initiation, they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of divine life and advance toward the perfection of charity. It has rightly been written: "The body is washed, that the soul may be cleansed; the body is signed, that the soul too may be fortified; the body is overshadowed by the laying on of hands, that the soul may be enlightened by the Spirit; the body is fed on the body and blood of Christ, that the soul may be richly nourished by God."<sup>1</sup>

Conscious of its pastoral charge, the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council devoted special attention to these sacraments of initiation. It prescribed that the rites should be revised in a way that would make them more suited to the understanding of the faithful. Since the Rite of Baptism for Children, revised at the mandate of the Council and published at our command, is already in use, it is now fitting to publish a rite of confirmation, in order to show the unity of Christian initiation in its true light.

In fact, careful attention and application have been devoted in these last years to the task of revising the manner of celebrating this sacrament. The aim of this work has been that "the intimate connection of this sacrament with the whole of Christian initiation may stand out more clearly."<sup>2</sup> But the link between confirmation and the other sacraments of initiation is more easily perceived not simply from the fact that their rites have been more closely conjoined; the rite and words by which confirmation is conferred also make this link clear. As a result the rite and words of this sacrament "express more clearly the holy things they signify and the Christian people, as far as possible, are able to understand them with ease and take part in them fully, actively, and as befits a community."<sup>3</sup>

For that purpose, it has been our wish also to include in this revision what concerns the very essence of the rite of confirmation, through which the faithful receive the Holy Spirit as a Gift.

The New Testament shows how the Holy Spirit was with Christ to bring the Messiah's mission to fulfillment. On receiving the baptism of John, Jesus saw the Spirit descending on him (see Mk 1:10) and remaining with him (see Jn 1:32). He was led by the Spirit to undertake his public ministry as the Messiah, relying on the Spirit's presence and assistance. Teaching the people of Nazareth, he showed by what he said that the words of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," referred to himself (see Lk 4:17-21)

He later promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit would help them also to bear fearless witness to their faith even before persecutors (see Lk 12:12). The day before he suffered, he assured his apostles that he would send the Spirit of truth from his Father (see Jn 15:26) to stay with them “for ever” (Jn 14:16) and help them to be his witnesses (see Jn 15:26). Finally, after his resurrection, Christ promised the coming descent of the Holy Spirit: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; then you are to be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8; see Lk 24:49).

On the feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit did indeed come down in an extraordinary way on the apostles as they were gathered together with Mary the mother of Jesus and the group of disciples. They were so “filled with” the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4) that by divine inspiration they began to proclaim “the mighty works of God.” Peter regarded the Spirit who had thus come down upon the apostles as the gift of the Messianic age (see Acts 2:17-18). Then those who believed the apostles’ preaching were baptized and they too received “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). From that time on the apostles, in fulfillment of Christ’s wish, imparted to the newly baptized by the laying on of hands the gift of the Spirit that completes the grace of baptism. This is why the Letter to the Hebrews listed among the first elements of Christian instruction the teaching about baptisms and the laying on of hands (Heb 6:2). This laying on of hands is rightly recognized by reason of Catholic tradition as the beginning of the sacrament of confirmation, which in a certain way perpetuates the grace of Pentecost in the Church.

This makes clear the specific importance of confirmation for sacramental initiation, by which the faithful “as members of the living Christ are incorporated into him and configured to him through baptism and through confirmation and the eucharist.”<sup>4</sup> In baptism, the newly baptized receive forgiveness of sins, adoption as children of God, and the character of Christ by which they are made members of the Church and for the first time become sharers in the priesthood of their Savior (see 1 Pt 2:5, 9). Through the sacrament of confirmation those who have been born anew in baptism receive the inexpressible Gift, the Holy Spirit himself, by whom “they are endowed... with special strength.”<sup>5</sup> Moreover, having been signed with the character of this sacrament, they are “more closely bound to the Church”<sup>6</sup> and “they are more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith, both by word and by deed, as true witnesses of Christ.”<sup>7</sup> Finally, confirmation is so closely linked with the holy Eucharist<sup>8</sup> that the faithful, after being signed by baptism and confirmation, are incorporated fully into the Body of Christ by participation in the eucharist.<sup>9</sup>

From ancient times the conferring of the gift of the Holy Spirit has been carried out in the Church through various rites. These rites have undergone many changes in the East and the West, but always keeping as their meaning the conferring of the Holy Spirit.

In many Eastern rites it seems that from early times a rite of chrismation, not yet clearly distinguished from baptism,<sup>10</sup> prevailed for the conferring of the Holy Spirit. That rite continues in use today in the greater part of the Churches of the East.

In the West there are very ancient witnesses concerning the part of Christian initiation that was later distinctly recognized to be the sacrament of confirmation. There are directives for the performance of many rites after the baptismal washing and before the eucharistic meal- for example, anointing, the laying on of the hand, consignation<sup>11</sup>- contained both in liturgical documents<sup>12</sup> and in many testimonies of the Fathers. Consequently, in the course of the centuries, problems and doubts arose as to what belonged with certainty to the essence of the rite of confirmation. Worth mentioning, however, are at least some of the elements that, from the thirteenth century onward, in the ecumenical councils and in papal documents, cast considerable light on the importance of anointing, but at the same time did not allow the laying on of hands to be forgotten.

Our predecessor Innocent III wrote: “The anointing of the forehead with chrism signifies the laying on of the hand, the other name for which is confirmation, since through it the Holy Spirit is given for growth and strength.”<sup>13</sup> Another of our predecessors, Innocent IV, mentions that the apostles conferred the Holy Spirit “through the laying on of the hand, which confirmation or the anointing of the forehead with chrism represents.”<sup>14</sup> In the profession of faith of Emperor Michael Palaeologus read at the Council of Lyons II mention is made of the sacrament of confirmation, which “bishops confer by the laying on of hands, anointing with chrism those who have been baptized.”<sup>15</sup> The Decree for the Armenians, issued by the Council of Florence, declares that the “matter” of the sacrament of confirmation is “chrism made of olive oil... and balsam”<sup>16</sup> and, quoting the words of the Acts of the Apostles concerning Peter and John, who gave the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands (see Acts 8:17), it adds: “in the Church in place of that laying on of the hand, confirmation is given..”<sup>17</sup> The Council of Trent, though it had no intention of defining the essential rite of confirmation, designated it simply by the term “the holy chrism of confirmation.”<sup>18</sup> Benedict XIV made this declaration: “Therefore let this be said, which is beyond dispute: in the Latin Church the sacrament of confirmation is conferred by using the sacred chrism or olive oil mixed with balsam and blessed by the bishop, and by the sacramental minister’s tracing the sign of the cross on the forehead of the recipient, while the same minister pronounces the words of the form.”<sup>19</sup>

Taking account of these declarations and traditions, many theologians maintained that for valid administration of confirmation only the anointing with chrism, done by placing the hand on the forehead, was required. Nevertheless, in the rites of the Latin Church a laying of hands on those to be confirmed prior to anointing them with chrism was always prescribed.

With regard to the words of the rite by which the Holy Spirit is given, it should be noted that already in the primitive Church Peter and John, in order to complete the initiation of those baptized in Samaria, prayed that they might receive the Holy Spirit and then laid hands on them (see Acts 8:15-17). In the East the first traces of the expression *seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit* appeared in the fourth and fifth centuries.<sup>20</sup> The expression was quickly accepted by the Church of Constantinople and still is a use in Byzantine-Rite Churches.

In the West, however, the words of the rite that completes baptism were less settled until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. But in the twelfth-century Roman Pontifical the formulary that later became the common one first occurs: "I sign you with the sign of the cross and confirm you with the chrism of salvation. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."<sup>21</sup>

From what we have recalled, it is clear that in the administration of confirmation in the East and the West, through in different ways, the most important place was occupied by the anointing, which in a certain way represents the apostolic laying on of hands. Since this anointing with chrism is an apt sign of the spiritual anointing of the Holy Spirit who is given to the faithful, we wish to confirm its existence and importance.

As regards the words pronounced in confirmation, we have examined with the consideration it deserves the dignity of the respected formulary used in the Latin Church, but we judge preferable the very ancient formulary belonging to the Byzantine Rite. This expresses the Gift of the Holy Spirit himself and calls to mind the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:1-4,38). We therefore adopt this formulary, rendering it almost word for word.

Therefore, in order that the revision of the rite of confirmation may, as is fitting, include even the essence of the sacramental rite, by our supreme apostolic authority we decree and lay down that in the Latin Church the following are to be observed for the future.

THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION IS CONFERRED THROUGH THE ANOINTING WITH CHRISM ON THE FOREHAND, WHICH IS DONE BY THE LAYING ON OF THE HAND, AND THROUGH THE WORDS: BE SEALED WITH THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.<sup>a</sup>

But the laying of hands on the elect, carried out with the prescribed prayer before the anointing, is still to be regarded as very important, even if it is not of the essence of the sacramental rite: it contributes to the complete perfection of the rite and to a more thorough understanding of the sacrament. It is evident that this prior laying on of hands differs from the later laying on of the hand in the anointing of the forehead.

Having established and declared all these elements concerning the essential rite of the sacrament of confirmation, we also approve by our apostolic authority the rite for the same sacrament. This has been revised by the Congregation for Divine Worship, after consultation with the Congregations for the Doctrine of the Faith, for the Discipline of the Sacraments, and for the Evangelization of Peoples on the matters that are within their competence. The Latin edition of the rite containing the new sacramental form will come into effect as soon as it is published; the editions in the vernacular languages, prepared by the conferences of bishops and confirmed by the Apostolic See, will come into effect on the date to be laid down by each conference. The old rite may be used until the end of the year 1972. From 1 January 1973, however, only the new rite is to be used by those concerned.

We intend that everything that we have laid down and prescribed should be firm and effective in the Latin Church, notwithstanding, where relevant, the apostolic constitutions and ordinances issued by our predecessors, and other prescriptions, even those worthy of special mention.

<sup>1</sup>Tertullian, *De resurrectione mortuorum* 8, 3: CCL 2, 931.

<sup>2</sup>SC art. 71.

<sup>3</sup>SC art. 21.

<sup>4</sup>AG no. 36.

<sup>5</sup>LG no. 11.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid. See also AG no. 11.

<sup>8</sup>See PO no. 5.

<sup>9</sup>See *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>See Origen, *De principiis* 1, 3, 2: GCS 22, 49ff.; *Comm. In Ep. ad Rom.* 5, 8:

Pg 14, 1038. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* 16, 26; 21, 1-7, PG 33, 956; 1088-93.

<sup>11</sup>See Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 7-8: CCL 1, 282ff. B. Botte, ed., *La tradition apostolique de Saint Hippolyte: Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen* 39 (Munster, W., 1963) 52-54. Ambrose, *De Sacramentis* 2, 24; 3, 2, 8; 6, 2, 9; CSEL 73, 36; 42; 74-75; *De mysteriis* 7, 42; CSEL 73, 106.

<sup>12</sup>Mohlberg/LibSacr 75, H. Lietzmann, ed., *Das Sacramentarium Gregorianum nach den Aachener Urexemplar: Liturgiegeschichtlich Quellen* 3 (Munster, W., 1921) 53ff. M. Ferotin, ed., *Liber Ordinum: Monumenta Ecclesiae Liturgica V* (Paris, 1904) 33ff. Mohlberg *MissGall* 67C. Vogel and R. Elze, *Le Pontifical Romano-Germanique du dixieme siecle: Le Texte II; Studi e testi* 227 (Vatican city, 1963) 109. M. Andrieu, *Le Pontifical Romain du XIIe siecle* in *Le Pontifical Romain au Moyen-Age* v. 1: *Studi e Testi* 86 (Vatican city, 1938) 247ff., 289; *Le Pontifical de la Curie Romaine au XIIIe siecle, ibid.* v. 2: *Studi e Testi* 87 (Vatican City, 1940) 452ff.

<sup>13</sup>Innocent III, Ep. "*Cum Venisset*": PL 215, 285. The profession of faith that the same Pope imposed on the Waldenses has these words: "We regard confirmation by the bishop, that is, the laying on of hands, to be holy and to be received with reverence": PL 215, 1511.

<sup>14</sup>Innocent IV, Ep. "*Sub Catholicae professione*": Mansi 23, 579.

<sup>15</sup>Council of Lyons II: Mansi 24, 71.

<sup>16</sup>*Epistolae Pontificiae ad Concilium Florentinum spectantes*: G. Hofmann, ed., *concilium Florentinum* v. 1, ser. A, part II (Rome, 1944) 128.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>18</sup>CT 5, Act. II 996.

<sup>19</sup>Benedict XIV, Ep. "*Ex quo primum tempore*" 52: *Bullarium*, v. 3 (Prati, 1847) 320.

<sup>20</sup>Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* 18, 33: PG 33, 1056. Asterius, Bishop of Amasea, *In parabolam de filio prodigo*, in the "Library of Photius," Cod. 271: PG 104, 213. See also *Epistola cuiusdam Patriarchae Constantinopolitani ad Martyrium, Episcopum Antiochenum*: PG 119, 900.

<sup>21</sup>M. Andrieu, *Le Pontifical Romain du XIIe siecle* in *Le Pontifical Romain au Moyen-Age*, v. 1: *Studi e testi* 86 (Vatican City, 1938) 247.

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