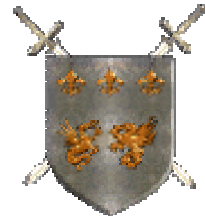


THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION (Knighthood in the Kingdom Family of God)

The following study of the Sacrament of Confirmation is the result of much research into the Church's continued teaching on the Sacrament over the past 2000 years, as well as my experience as a Confirmation Coordinator for 3 years at St. Cyprian Parish in the Diocese of Los Angeles. It is in no way an exhaustive explanation nor is it a complex theological thesis. It is simply a summary of the many hundreds of hours of research and study in my own journey to discover the meaning of the Sacrament of Confirmation. It is written in laymen terms for the understanding of lay people.



I think it is true to say, that the Sacrament of Confirmation is probably the least understood and most under-rated sacrament of them all. And for this reason, I will begin our investigation by first looking at the Biblical framework of the family of God, then with this as background, review the Church's teaching on the meaning of Confirmation, the strict obligation that comes with Confirmation, and the indescribable gift that God bestows on the one confirmed.

From there I will attempt to deal with current misconceptions about the Sacrament of Confirmation; what it IS and, what it IS NOT; the current confusion over the age of confirmation; and finally, some practical suggestions for religious education programs in our country.

INTRODUCTION

The magnitude of this sacrament can be grasped somewhat when one looks at what the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship stated in its 1971 Rite of Confirmation:

"One of the highest responsibilities of the people of God is to prepare the baptized for Confirmation." (DOL. 2512)

What is it about the Sacrament of Confirmation that puts such a high degree of responsibility on the people of God to prepare the baptized for this sacrament? This question and others will be answered as we go on.

The Sacrament of Confirmation has been known by many different names over the centuries:

- A. Mystical Chrism. (St. Cyril of Jerusalem, 350 A.D.)
- B. Sanctification by Chrism. (Pope St. Leo the Great, 440-461)
- C. Laying on of the Hand. (Innocent III, 1198-1216)



- D. The Anointing of the Forehead with Chrism.(Innocent IV, 1243-1254)
- E. The Holy Chrism of Confirmation. (Council of Trent, 1545-1563)
- F. Rite of Confirmation. (Vatican Council II, 1962-1965)
- G. Rite of Chrismation. (Eastern Rite Churches)
- H. Sacrament of Christian Maturity. (Modern Times)

But regardless of by what name the sacrament has been called, the official teaching of the Church has never changed in terms of what the sacrament confers upon the baptized. Now, there are many aspects to Confirmation, all of which result from this sacrament. But the primary aspect from which all the others originate is the fact that Confirmation makes us "*Soldiers of Christ*", Knights and Warriors for the Kingdom of God, and "*strictly obligates us to spread and defend the faith by both word and deed.*" (See attached quotes for historical proof of statement.)

In order to better understand what Confirmation really is, we must first understand who, and what, the family of God is. And this understanding cannot be in 20th century (modern day), social structural terms. We must understand the family of God in the terms that God chose to use when He identified Himself as our Father and we became His children. So to begin this, we must refer to the written Word of God, Sacred Scripture, and see just how God fathered His chosen family, Israel, and learn from the example they set for us.

Old Testament Background

If we were out in space looking down on the world of the Old and New Testaments, we would have a bird's eye view of how God structured His family. One of the first things we would notice is that God's chosen nation, Israel, has a king (or ruler). (Deut 17:14-17/1Sam 8:1-9) Israel did not have a president or any other official elected by the people, as do we in this country. A king assumes the throne he inherits from his father. This is known as dynastic succession. Initially, God established His kingdom under the kingship of David; and, we refer to it now as the Davidic Dynasty. The next thing we notice is that Israel is not only a nation but also a kingdom, a kingdom of priests, prophets and kings. A kingdom is different from our society because it is a monarchical form of government, meaning that the solemn rule of authority rests in one person: A king or a queen.



The next point that must be made is that every king who reigned over Israel, beginning with King Solomon, had his mother seated next to him on the throne (1Kings 2:19 - 2Kings 15-13). She was known as the Queen Mother, and was considered the mother to all of Israel, to all those in the kingdom as long as her son was on the throne. A kingdom

is also hierarchical in structure with various offices established, and men were appointed by the king to fill these offices. They were not voted in by the people as we do in this country (2Sam 8:15/1Kings 4/Isaiah 22:19-22).

Another aspect of a kingdom is that it has warriors, or soldiers that defend and spread the kingdom (1Sam 17/2Sam 8/2Sam 18). A kingdom is helpless without soldiers to protect the king, the queen mother, and the members of that kingdom from being attacked. The soldiers of a kingdom play a crucial role in the survival of the kingdom. In our country, we only read about these soldiers in our history books and know them as "knights in shining armor." We recall some of these knights: Sir Lancelot, Sir Galahad, Joan of Arc, and many others. The term "knight" also has another meaning as well as that of soldier, and that is "one who is devoted to the service of a lady as her attendant or champion." (Webster's Collegiate Dictionary)

Now you might be wondering how all of this has anything to do with Confirmation. Well, we will have to look at all the facts first. Then we will tie them all together.



The concept of a kingdom and knighthood may be a bit difficult for us 20th century Americans to identify with and really understand because, as Americans, we are not accustomed to this kind of rule. As a matter of fact, over two hundred years ago this country rebelled against a king, King George of England, and the American Revolution in 1776 resulted. We established a government known as a Republic, which has an elected president as its leader. The president's son does not inherit the presidency.

Given all this as a historical backdrop, let's move ahead now and try to understand our role and obligation in the Family of God as sons and daughters of the supreme King, the King of Kings, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, and most importantly, sons and daughters of Our Father who is in Heaven.

New Testament Background

We've taken a very brief look at the Old Testament and have seen the background to understanding what a kingdom is. Now let's turn to the New Testament and see how Jesus uses this knowledge of how God's family is set up and how He applies it to Himself, and to you and me.

JESUS AS KING, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AS THE NEW ISRAEL, THE KINGDOM AND FAMILY OF GOD

In the New Testament, we read how Jesus was ultimately crucified for claiming to be a king. When Jesus was being questioned by Pilate, He made it clear that He was a king and that He had a kingdom. But He also clearly stated that His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:33-38). So Jesus is a king, and He has a



kingdom. But remember what we said earlier, that a king received his throne from his father. So, if Jesus received His throne from His father, then His father must also have been a king. Look at 1Samuel 8:4-7. You will notice that God was the King over Israel, and when the people of Israel rebelled against Him, He allowed them to have an earthly king to govern them. This is made clear when God tells Samuel, "It is not you they reject, they are rejecting me as their king." But it would be God who appoints the king; only He keeps the people of Israel as His own (1Sam 9:16-17). So Jesus being the Son of God, the King of Israel, truly was the heir to the throne and was definitely a king. He reinforces His kingship when He states "all things have been handed over to Me by my Father" (Matt 11:27). So we see here that Jesus is a true King over the Kingdom of God, His Father.

Now the second thing we must look at in our attempt to understand the idea of the Kingdom of God is the term "kingdom." We saw in the Old Testament that the nation of Israel was God's kingdom. But in the New Testament, Jesus said that His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:33-38). Jesus' kingdom is of heaven and He came to establish His kingdom here on earth and expand God's kingdom to all the nations of the earth, not just the nation of Israel (Rev 7:9). Jesus began His public ministry by proclaiming that "the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matt 4:17). Later, we see that the people entered this kingdom by means of baptism with "water and the spirit" (John 3:3-6). Notice also what St. Basil the Great said in this regard.

Basil the Great, 329-379 A.D. Treatise on the Holy Spirit



"Through the Spirit, we became citizens of heaven, we are admitted to the company of the angels, we enter into eternal happiness, and abide in God."

So now we have another brick in the building of our understanding of the family of God and how the Sacrament of Confirmation fits into this picture. The Kingdom of Heaven established by Jesus is a kingdom composed of those who believe and are baptized with water and Spirit... i.e. Baptism and Confirmation.

Let us now direct our attention to the queen mother seated at the right hand of the King of Israel. We have already determined that Jesus is a King. So we must now focus on His mother, Mary, and see if she is in fact the queen mother over the Kingdom of Heaven, like the queen mother over the Kingdom of Israel. In John's Gospel, we see that when Jesus is on the cross, His mother and the disciple whom Jesus loved were there with Him. Jesus then said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son," and to the disciple He said, "behold your mother" (John 19:25-27). We have to ask a question here. Who was the disciple that Jesus loved and gave His mother to? The answer is that, Jesus loves all His disciples. The ones who followed Him then, and the ones who would follow Him in the future. So these words of Jesus have a symbolic meaning as well as a

literal one. Jesus is giving His mother to all those who follow Him, to all those who are part of His Kingdom where He reigns as king and His mother as Queen Mother. We can see this better if we look again at the Book of Revelation and John's vision on the Lord's Day. John sees a woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars (Rev 12:1). Notice this woman is wearing a crown like a queen. Then she gives birth to a son, a male child, destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod. Then her child was caught up to God and His throne (Rev 12:5). After this, John sees a war break out in heaven and the dragon is thrown to earth and pursues the woman but to no avail. Then, because the dragon could not get to the woman, he went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring.

Now who is the woman? Who gave birth to a male child who would rule all nations and was taken up to God and His throne? The answer is Mary. But the real understanding of Mary as the queen mother over this kingdom, and we as her children, is at the end of Chapter 12. "Then the dragon became angry with the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring, those who keep God's commandments and bear witness to Jesus" (Rev 12:17). So Jesus' mother is, in fact, the Queen Mother over His kingdom and Mother to all those "who keep God's commandments and bear witness to Jesus" (Rev 12:17).

Let's look now at the hierarchy of the kingdom. We have already determined that Jesus is the king of the kingdom. But as we saw in the Old Testament, there were other offices instituted by the king so that in his absence, someone in the kingdom or palace would have his authority. It is important that we look at Isaiah 22:15-22 before we go any further, because we will see this imagery when we look at the hierarchy that Jesus established in the Kingdom of God.

In Isaiah, we see that there is a wicked steward, or master, of the palace named Shebna, who is a disgrace to his master's house. God is saying that He will throw Shebna out of his office and replace him with Eliakim, who is the servant of God. God also says that He will place the keys to the kingdom of David on the shoulders of Eliakim, so that when he opens, no one will shut, and when he shuts, no one will open. Keeping this Old Testament passage in mind, and looking at Matthew 16:17-19, we see Jesus instituting this identical office upon one of His disciples as He prepares to depart. When speaking to His disciples, Jesus asks, "Who do people say that I am?" After a series of answers, Peter speaks up and says that, Jesus, is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus then changes Peter's name from Simon to Peter, which means rock, and says, "Upon this rock I will build my Church and the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give to you the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt 16:17-19). Here, Jesus instituted the office of Steward of the Kingdom with the keys of His Kingdom being placed in that office. This parallels the Old Testament passage from Isaiah perfectly.



Then, after Jesus rose from the dead, He appeared to the disciples and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are

forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained" (John 20:20). So Jesus gave authority to the apostles as well as Peter, but it would be Peter alone who would hold the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. This wasn't something the apostles missed. They understood what Jesus was doing. This is evident from the account of when the apostles saw the need to choose a replacement for Judas who betrayed Jesus and later hung himself. Peter stands up among the disciples and quotes from the Old Testament Book of Psalms, "Let his encampment become desolate, and may no one dwell in it. And may another take his office." They then proceed to draw lots to fill the office held by Judas as one of the apostles (Acts 1:15- 26).

So here also we see how Jesus instituted hierarchical offices and gave the keys of His Kingdom to Peter. The authority of King Jesus would rest on the office of Peter in the absence of the King. Jesus also instituted offices that the other apostles would hold as well. These offices would be those of the first Pope, entrusted to Peter, and the first body of bishops, entrusted to the remaining apostles. Jesus has now begun the establishment of His kingdom here on earth, and that Kingdom is the Catholic Church.

Now we will look at the soldiers of the kingdom. Everything up to this point has been background information, laying the groundwork to understanding the Sacrament of Confirmation and just what it means for you and I to have received this awesome Sacrament of Knighthood in the Kingdom Family of God.

Every member of the Kingdom of God is called to be a Soldier of Christ. We saw in the Old Testament how the nation of Israel was also a kingdom, and the kingdom had warriors, or soldiers, who would defend the kingdom. They would not only defend the kingdom - they would also spread it. It is at this point that we must now look at the constant teaching of the Church of what the Sacrament of Confirmation is all about.

The Sacrament of Confirmation

Does the Church really believe that She is a kingdom as described above? And, is there a real need for soldiers who are to engage in battle by defending and spreading the Kingdom of God here on earth that She alone claims to be? To answer this, let us examine two quotes.

Hugh of St. Victor On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith 1140 A.D.



"For the Incarnate Word is our king, Who came into this world to war with the devil; and all the saints who were before His coming are soldiers as it were, going before their king, and those who have come after and will come, even to the end of the world, are soldiers following their king. And the king Himself is in the midst of His army and proceeds protected and surrounded

on all sides by His columns. And although in a multitude as vast as this, the kind of arms differ in the sacraments and observance of the peoples preceding and following, yet all are really serving the one king and following the one banner; all are pursuing the one enemy and are being crowned by the one victory."

General Catechetical Directory 1974

"Since the life of Christians, which on earth is warfare, is liable to temptations and sins, the way of the Sacrament of Penance is open for them, so that they may obtain pardon from the merciful God and reconcile themselves with the Church" (General Catechetical Directory, 11 April 1971).

By this, we see that Christians are called to warfare, but it is a spiritual warfare, a warfare in which we can be wounded by sin, and this sin could eventually lead to our spiritual death as well (Mortal sin.) We also see that the Sacrament of Penance is also the spiritual Red Cross and medic on the scene of the battle to heal our wounds and revitalize us when we are mortally wounded.



The next question that a good soldier needs to ask is, "Who is the enemy that I will be going into battle against?" The answer to this question, which should already be obvious, will come from St. Cyril of Jerusalem.

In 350 A.D., St. Cyril of Jerusalem gave a series of lectures during Easter week to the newly initiated members of the Church. He spoke on the liturgical ceremonies of the three sacraments which they had received during the Easter Vigil. When speaking on Confirmation, he stated: *"Just as Christ, after His baptism and the coming upon Him of the Holy Spirit went forth and defeated the adversary, so also with you. After holy Baptism and the Mystical Chrism, having put on the full suit of armor of the Holy Spirit, you are to withstand the power of the adversary, and defeat him, saying, 'I am able to do all things in Christ, Who strengthens me.'"*



Here, St. Cyril tells us two things. The first is the answer to our question. The enemy with whom we will do battle is none other than the one whom our king Himself defeated in the desert - Satan. But before any soldier can go into battle, he must first be fully trained, fully armed, fully strengthened, and fully protected. On this point, St. Cyril tells us that it is through this

Sacrament of Confirmation that we will put on the full suit of armor that is the Holy Spirit Himself. Hence you become a "knight in shining armor." And the armor that you will be clothed with shines with the glory of God Himself, and it will be our King who strengthens us in this sacrament.

The Church can speak for Herself in the remaining part of this overview. But before She does, let us answer one question that was raised earlier. Recall that the term "knight" also has another meaning as well as that of "soldier", and that is, "***One who is devoted to the service of a lady as her attendant or champion***" (Websters Collegiate Dictionary).

What does this have to do with Confirmation? Well, the lady we are talking about is the Church. The Bride of Christ that He will come and unite with Himself at the end of time. Turn to the Book of Revelation, chapter 21, verse 2, "***I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, behold, God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be His people and God Himself will always be with them [as their God].***" The Book of Revelation goes on to say, "***Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb. He took me in spirit to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. It gleamed with the splendor of God***" (Rev. 21:9-11).



God is among us, His body, blood, soul, and divinity in the tabernacle of every Catholic Church in the world. The Catholic Church is the New Jerusalem that came down from heaven and She is the Bride of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. And we are all called to be Her "***knight in shining armor,***" Her champion, and defend Her until the Lamb comes for His bride. What an awesome task is at hand. But our King has given us all that we need. Recall St. Cyril of Jerusalem on Confirmation: "***I am able to do all things in Christ, who strengthens me.***"

We can see this strengthening taking place when the Apostles received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. They were all together in the upper room in fear of the Jews, and obeying Jesus' instructions to wait for the promise of the Father before they go to Jerusalem. At Pentecost, the Apostles received the Holy Spirit as promised and went out into the town and converted three thousand people that day. This is the example of the strength that is poured out on the one confirmed (John 20:19 & Acts 1- 2:47).

Let us conclude this first section on the Biblical framework of the family of God, the meaning of Confirmation, the strict obligation that comes with Confirmation, and the indescribable gift that God bestows on the one confirmed, with a trip back through time and see what the constant teaching of the Church has been as viewed through the eyes of the Church Fathers, the Popes, the Saints and the Church Councils.

Biblical Origins and Implicit References



"Now when the Apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. They then laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:14-17 RSV).

"And Paul said, John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is Jesus. On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them..." (Acts 19:4-6 RSV).

"But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has commissioned us; He has put His seal upon us and given us His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee" (2Cor 1:21 RSV).

Tertullian - 197-212 A.D.



"The flesh is washed that the soul may be made stainless. The flesh is anointed that the soul may be consecrated. The flesh is sealed that the soul may be fortified. The flesh is overshadowed by the imposition of hands that the soul may be illuminated by the Spirit."

Tertullian also tells how the devil imitates the rites of Christian initiation, sprinkles some and signs them as his soldiers on the forehead (De resurr. canis n.8 Catholic Encyclopedia, 1908, pg. 218).

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, 347-350 A.D.



During his series of Easter week lectures to the newly initiated members of the Church in 350 A.D., St. Cyril of Jerusalem spoke on the liturgical ceremonies of the three sacraments which they had received during the Easter Vigil. When speaking on Confirmation, he stated: *"But beware of supposing that this is ordinary ointment. For just as the Bread of the Eucharist after the invocation of the Holy Spirit is simple bread no longer, but the Body of Christ, so also this holy ointment is no longer plain ointment, nor, so to speak, common, after the invocation. Rather, it is the gracious gift of Christ; and it is made fit for the imparting of His Godhead by the coming of the Holy Spirit. This ointment is symbolically applied to your forehead and to your other senses; and while your body is anointed with the visible ointment, your soul is sanctified by the holy*

and life-creating Spirit."

"Just as Christ, after His baptism and the coming upon Him of the Holy Spirit, went forth and defeated the adversary, so also with you. After Holy Baptism and the Mystical Chrism, having put on the full suit of armor of the Holy Spirit, you are to withstand the power of the adversary, and defeat him saying, 'I am able to do all things in Christ, who strengthens me.'"

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, 347-350 A.D.

(continued)



"Forget not the Holy Spirit," he says to the catechumens, "at the moment of your enlightenment; He is ready to mark your soul with His seal.... He will give you the heavenly and divine seal which makes the devil tremble; He will arm you for the fight; He will give you strength" (Seventeenth catechesis on the Holy Spirit. Catholic Encyclopedia, 1908).

St. Ephrem Syrus, Circa 373 A.D.



St. Ephrem Syrus speaks of *"Chrism and Baptism; oil also for a most sweet unguent, wherewith they who already have been initiated by Baptism are sealed, and put on the armor of the Holy Spirit"* (Serm 27, Catholic Encyclopedia, 1908, p. 218).

Pope St. Leo the Great, 440-461 A.D.



"All those who are reborn in Christ, the sign of the cross makes kings; the Holy Spirit's anointing consecrates them priests" (Aeterna Dei Sapientia, Encyclical Letter of Pope John XXIII on St. Leo the Great).

Hugh of St. Victor On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith, 1140 A.D.



"For the Incarnate Word is our king, who came into this world to war with the devil; and all the saints who were before His coming are soldiers as it were, going before their king, and those who have come after and will come, even to the end of the world, are soldiers"

following their king. And the king himself is in the midst of His army and proceeds protected and surrounded on all sides by His columns. And although in a multitude as vast as this the kind of arms differ in the sacraments and observance of the peoples preceding the following, yet all are really serving the one king and following the one banner; all are pursuing the one enemy and are being crowned by the one victory."

**St. Thomas Aquinas
Summa Theologiae, 1225-1274 A.D.**



St. Thomas Aquinas explains that the confirmed give witness to the name of Christ and perform the acts of good Christians in the defense and spread of the faith, in virtue of the character's "*special power*" inasmuch as they are entrusted with a special function and mandate (Summ Theol., III, q.72,a.5, L'osservatore Romano, 15 Apr 92).

**St. Thomas Aquinas
Summa Contra Gentiles, 1258-1261 A.D.**



"The perfection of spiritual strength consists properly on a man's daring to confess the faith of Christ in the presence of anyone at all, and in a man's being not withdrawn therefrom either by confusion or by terror, for strength drives out inordinate terror. Therefore, the sacrament by which spiritual strength is conferred on the one born again makes him in some sense a front-line fighter for the faith of Christ. And because fighters under a prince carry his insignia, they who receive the Sacrament of Confirmation are signed with the Sign of the Cross by which He fought and conquered. This sign they receive on the forehead as a sign that without a blush they publicly confess the faith of Christ."

Catechism of the Council of Trent



The Catechism of the Council of Trent says this about Confirmation: "If ever there was a time demanding the diligence of pastors in explaining the Sacrament of Confirmation, in these days certainly it requires special attention, when there are found in the holy Church of God many by whom this sacrament is altogether omitted; while very few seek to obtain from it the fruit of divine grace which they should derive from its participation." It goes on to say, "*Their instructions should so treat the nature, power, and dignity of this sacrament, that the faithful may understand not only that it is not to be neglected, but that it is to be received with the greatest piety and devotion.*" It goes on

to say this about the name of the sacrament, "*...this sacrament is called by the Church 'Confirmation' because, if there is no obstacle to the efficacy of the Sacrament, baptized persons, when anointed with the sacred chrism by the Bishop, with the accompanying solemn words..., becomes stronger with the strength of a new power, and thus begins to be a perfect soldier of Christ.*"



Pope Pius XII

"By the chrism of Confirmation, the faithful are given added strength to protect and defend the Church, their Mother, and the faith She has given them" (Mystici Corporis, 1943).

Vatican II



There are many aspects to Confirmation. The Second Vatican Council said that, "*By the Sacrament of Confirmation, they [the baptized faithful] are more fully bound to the Church and the Holy Spirit endows them with special strength, so that they are more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith, both by word and deed, as true witnesses of Christ"* (Lumen gentium n.11).

"The laity derive the duty and the right to the apostolate from their very union with Christ as head. Incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ by baptism, and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation, they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord Himself. They are consecrated to form a kingdom of priests and a holy people, so that by all their actions they may offer spiritual sacrifices and bear witness to Christ throughout the world" (Vatican II, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People 1965).

Pope Paul VI



"Through the Sacrament of Confirmation, those who have been born anew in baptism receive the ineffable (indescribable) gift, the Holy Spirit Himself, by which 'they are endowed with special strength' and by the character of this sacrament 'are bound more perfectly to the Church' and 'are more strictly obliged, as true witnesses of Christ, to spread and defend the faith by word and deed...'"(Apostolic

Constitution Divinae Consortium Naturae, 1971)

"In the Sacrament of Confirmation the Apostles and the Bishops, who are their

successors, hand on to the baptized the special gift of the Holy Spirit, promised by Christ the Lord and poured out upon the Apostles at Pentecost. Thus the initiation in the Christian life is completed so that believers are strengthened by power from heaven, made true witnesses of Christ in word and deed, and bound more closely to the Church" (S.C.D.W., Decree Peculiare Spiritus Sancti donum, 1971).

Cannon Law



Canon Law 879 states, "*The Sacrament of Confirmation impresses a character and by it the baptized, continuing on the path of Christian initiation, are enriched by the gift of the Holy Spirit and bound more perfectly to the Church; it strengthens them and obliges them more firmly to be witnesses to Christ by word and deed and to spread and defend the faith.*"

Pope John Paul II



Pope John Paul II in his weekly catechesis said, "*The grace conferred by the Sacrament of Confirmation is more specifically a gift of strength. This gift corresponds to the need for greater zeal in facing the 'spiritual battle' of faith and charity in order to resist temptation and give the witness of Christian word and deed to the world with courage, fervor and perseverance. This zeal is conferred by the Holy Spirit*" (L'osservatore Romano, 8 Apr 92. Summa Theol. III, q.72, a.5).

The Holy Father went on to say, "*Since the Middle Ages, theology - which developed in a context of generous commitment to 'spiritual combat' for Christ - has not hesitated to highlight the strength given by Confirmation to Christians who are called 'soldiers for God'.*"

Catechism of the Catholic Church

#1285



"*Baptism, the Eucharist, and the sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the "sacraments of Christian initiation," whose unity must be safeguarded. It must be explained to the faithful that the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace. For "by the sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched*

with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed."

**Catechism of the Catholic Church
#1302 - 1303**



"It is evident from its celebration that the effect of the sacrament of Confirmation is the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost.

From this fact, Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace:

- it roots us more deeply in the divine filiation which makes us cry, "Abba! Father!";*
- it unites us more firmly to Christ;*
- it increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us;*
- it renders our bond with the Church more perfect;*
- it gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross:*

Recall then that you have received the spiritual seal, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence, the spirit of holy fear in God's presence. Guard what you have received. God the Father has marked you with his sign; Christ the Lord has confirmed you and has placed his pledge, the Spirit, in your hearts."

OK, are you beginning to get the picture? If so and you want to continue to develop your understanding and obligation God has bestowed upon you as one of His Knights, Soldiers, Warriors etc...

THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION (Knighthood in the Kingdom Family of God) PART II

In the second part of our investigation on the Sacrament of Confirmation, I want to address the misconceptions many people have about the Sacrament. What it IS, and what it IS NOT. Then I would like to move into the question of the appropriate age of Confirmation, and finally some practical suggestions for the restructuring of the religious education program as it pertains to the age of Confirmation.



MISCONCEPTIONS

- As I stated in the opening paragraphs of part I of our investigation, "The Sacrament of Confirmation is probably the least understood and most under-rated sacrament of them all." And it is precisely because of this lack of understanding that many people today have so many misconceptions about the Sacrament.

As a Confirmation Coordinator and religious educator, I read and heard many references to the Sacrament of Confirmation as something other than what I discovered it really was. Terms like:

- 1. The Sacrament of Christian Maturity
- 2. The Sacrament of Adulthood in the Church
- 3. The Sacrament of Choice,
- 4. The Christian bar mitzvah

By the term "Sacrament of Christian Maturity" was meant that a person being confirmed has reached an age where they have now become a mature Christian in their faith and as a result of the successful completion of the Confirmation program, are now mature enough to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation and become full members of the Church.

The similar term, "Sacrament of Adulthood in the Church" was meant that through Confirmation, you are now ready to assume positions in the Church like lector, usher, and other ministry positions. One National Catholic publication compared the Sacrament of Confirmation to a Jewish bar mitzvah, where the one confirmed passes into adulthood and Confirmation is the ceremony that celebrates that.



And then the ever famous word, "Choice." By the term, "The Sacrament of Choice" was meant that the person being confirmed, makes an adult choice to be Catholic, and "confirms" that they choose the Catholic faith

for themselves. This view I found most common among the students and parents of these students.

But rarely, if ever, (except in Church teaching) did I ever hear the Sacrament called, "The Sacrament of Strengthening", which is exactly what it is by name. The word itself, "Confirmation" means "strengthening" as the Church has made so clear. The gifts that we received at Baptism are strengthened by the Holy Spirit. We are not the ones doing the confirming, God does the confirming (strengthening) in us.

WHAT THE SACRAMENT IS, AND IS NOT



- The previous list of misconceptions spells out for us what the Sacrament of Confirmation is not. It is not the Sacrament where we become mature Christians in our faith. Remember, we are speaking of Spiritual maturity; Physical maturity comes with the nourishment and growth of the body, spiritual maturity comes with the nourishment and growth of the spirit which is accomplished through the reception of the sacraments. As you may recall from part I of our investigation, St. Thomas Aquinas said,

"The perfection of spiritual strength consists properly on a man's daring to confess the faith of Christ in the presence of anyone at all, and in a man's being not withdrawn therefrom either by confusion or by terror, for strength drives out inordinate terror. Therefore, the sacrament by which spiritual strength is conferred on the one born again makes him in some sense a front-line fighter for the faith of Christ." (Summa contra gentiles, vol. 4).

So Confirmation is not the authenticating of Christian maturity of an individual. Nor is it the celebration to acknowledge a person reaching the level of a spiritually mature Christian, and therefore deserves to receive the sacrament as some kind of recognition. Again let me state, we are not speaking about physical maturity when dealing with the sacrament of Confirmation, but what we are speaking about is the strength that is provided by the Holy Spirit through the Sacrament of Confirmation, to enable the process of spiritual maturity to begin and to grow on an ever continuing journey toward Christian maturity, until the day when one can "confess the faith of Christ in the presence of anyone at all, and in a man's being not withdrawn therefrom either by confusion or by terror..." To say that the spiritual maturity of a person is required before the strength of the sacrament is imparted, is putting the cart before the horse. And to say that a person must be mature enough to receive the sacrament is fostering and promoting continued misconceptions.



The Sacrament of Confirmation is not "The Sacrament of Adulthood in the Church." If it were, the valid Rite of Confirmation in the Eastern Branch of the Catholic Church would be invalid, which it is not. In the Eastern branch of the Catholic Church, Confirmation takes place at the same time an infant is baptized, and as receives Communion: all just perfectly valid and licit. The idea that Confirmation is like a Jewish Bar mitzvah is altogether missing the purpose and theology of the Sacrament. A Jewish Bar mitzvah is the ceremony celebrating a physical reality, the passing from childhood to adulthood (puberty if you will). The physical reality takes place first, then the celebration. The celebration does not make the young child now an adult. If it did, it would be an actual sacrament, (an outward sign, [instituted by Christ] that gives grace.)

The problem again with this idea that Confirmation makes us adults in the Church is mixing a physical reality with a spiritual reality. I will deal with this more in just a moment.



The final misconception for our discussion is that Confirmation is "The Sacrament of Choice" where one chooses to be Catholic and confirms their choice of Christian faiths in the Sacrament. As I stated earlier, we do not confirm anything in the sacrament of Confirmation: it is the Holy Spirit who confirms (strengthens) us. As for making the choice to be Catholic, that choice was made by the parents when the child was baptized. The parents made the decision for the child to be born into this world, the human family, without first discussing it with the child. They also made the decision to have the child baptized (reborn) into God's family. Parents have this God given authority to see to the proper rearing of their children. By the simple fact that God has entrusted parents with the souls of these children to lead them on the road to heaven and to present these children back to Him, clothed in their white robes that have been washed clean in the blood of the Lamb, is a responsibility that can not be taken lightly. Even if the society we live in does not recognize an objective truth and reality. That objective truth I am speaking of was summed up clearly by the Second Vatican Council:

"All men are called to belong to the new people of God. This people therefore, while still remaining one and only one, is to be spread throughout the whole world and to all ages in order that the design of God's will may be fulfilled: he made human nature one in the beginning and has decreed that all His children who were scattered should be finally gathered together as one (cf. John 11:52). It was for this purpose that God sent His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things (cf. Heb. 1:2), that He might be teacher, king and priest of all, the head of the new and universal people of God's sons. This, too, is why God sent the Spirit of His Son, the Lord and Giver of Life. The Spirit is, for the Church and for each and every believer, the principle of their union and unity in the teaching of the apostles and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and prayer" (cf. Acts 2:42 Gk.) (Lumen Gentium 13)

The Catholic Church is the fullness of the family of God on earth, and Baptism is the means by which a person is regenerated or reborn as a child of God. For parents as well as religious educators to neglect giving this eternal gift of life to these children by listening to a school of thought that is found in the Protestant objection to infant Baptism that says, "They must be old enough to make a mature decision for themselves", is to completely negate the parental responsibility that God entrusted to them to form and teach these children who their Father really is and what He has intended for them. St. Paul says, quoting from Isaiah 64:3,

"But as it is written: 'What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him'" (1 Cor. 2:9)

Also, the Sacred Congregation of Divine Worship, in its "Rite of Confirmation" tells us, "The initiation of children into the sacramental life is ordinarily the responsibility and concern of Christian parents. They are to form and gradually increase a spirit of faith in the children and, at times with the help of catechism classes, prepare them for the faithful reception of the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist. The role of the parents is also expressed by their active participation in the celebration of the sacraments" (Rite of Confirmation, DOL 2513)



So to say that the Sacrament of Confirmation is making a mature decision and choosing to be Catholic is again misplacing and clouding the true meaning of the sacrament.

So what then IS Confirmation if it IS NOT any of the above? As you may recall from part I of our investigation, Pope Paul VI summed it up this way,

"Through the Sacrament of Confirmation, those who have been born anew in baptism receive the ineffable (indescribable) gift, the Holy Spirit Himself, by which 'they are endowed with special strength' and by the character of this sacrament 'are bound more perfectly to the Church' and 'are more strictly obliged, as true witnesses of Christ, to spread and defend the faith by word and deed...'"(Apostolic Constitution *Divinae Consortium Naturae*, 1971).

Now to elaborate our understanding as well as to illustrate what exactly the Sacrament of Confirmation is, we need to once again draw from St. Thomas Aquinas in his "Summa Contra Gentiles." Here St. Thomas gives us a very clear illustration of the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist and how it is that they are so closely tied together. In speaking about the sacraments, St. Thomas says the following.

- "[1] However, since the spiritual remedies of salvation have been given to men under sensible signs, it was suitable also to distinguish the remedies provided for the spiritual life after the likeness of bodily life.
- [2] Now, in bodily life we find a twofold order: for some propagate and order the bodily life in others; and some are propagated and ordered in the bodily life.
- [3] Now, in a bodily and natural life three things are necessary of themselves, and a fourth incidentally. For first, by generation or birth a thing must receive life; second, by growth it must arrive at its due size and strength; third, both for the preservation of life acquired by generation and for growth, nourishment is necessary. And these are of themselves necessities for natural life, because without these bodily life cannot be perfected; wherefore, one assigns to the vegetative soul which is the principle of life the three natural powers: that of generation, that of growth, and that of nourishment. But, since there can be an impediment to natural life from which the living thing grows weak, a fourth thing is incidentally necessary; this is the healing of the sick living thing.
- [4] Thus, then, in the spiritual life, also, the first thing is spiritual generation: by baptism; the second is spiritual growth leading to perfect strength: by the sacrament of confirmation; the third is spiritual nourishment: by the sacrament of the Eucharist. A fourth remains, which is the spiritual healing; it takes place either in the soul alone through the sacrament of penance; or from the soul flows to the body when this is timely, through extreme unction. These, therefore, bear on those who are propagated and preserved in the spiritual life" (Summa Contra Gentiles vol.4).

So St. Thomas is showing us that since a human person consists of both body and soul, there is an undeniable parallel between the physical development of the person and the spiritual development of that same person. Just as a person is born into this life as an infant, a child in the human family, Baptism is the rebirth into the spiritual life as an infant, a child in God's family.

Second he points out that, just as the physical body grows until it reaches "its due size and strength", Confirmation is what enables "spiritual growth leading to perfect strength." Notice that he says "leading to perfect strength." He doesn't say that confirmation is the declaration of strength already attained. Confirmation is what makes it possible for the reborn, infant soul to begin its growth processes toward becoming a mature Christian.

Third, St. Thomas shows, just as "for the preservation of life acquired by generation and for growth nourishment is necessary", the Eucharist is that which provides the necessary spiritual nourishment for the soul as well.



This point is also made in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "The sacraments of Christian initiation - Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist - lay the foundations of every Christian life. The sharing in the divine nature given to men 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 receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life. By means of these sacraments of Christian initiation, they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of the divine life and advance toward the perfection of charity." (Catechism of the Catholic Church #1212)

So in the three sacraments of initiation we have, birth (Baptism), growth and strength (Confirmation) and nourishment (Eucharist). Now what would happen if you withhold any of these three basic "necessities of natural life" from the physical body? Well, if you withhold birth you have death or a lack of life. If you withhold growth and strength, you have a baby who will never be able to even hold up his/her head or grow any bigger than their birth weight. A baby who will never do anything more than be helpless. If you withhold nourishment from the body you have degeneration and eventually death.

Now apply this same sequence of events to the spiritual life. If you withhold Baptism (birth) you have spiritual death, i.e. Original/Mortal sin. If you withhold Confirmation (growth and strength), you have a soul who will never be able to even hold up his/her head or grow at all toward spiritual maturity. They will not grow or mature any further than their Baptismal rebirth weight. A baby soul who will never be able to do anything more than be helpless against the snares and temptations of this world. If you withhold the Eucharist (nourishment) from the soul you have degeneration and eventually death (i.e. Mortal sin). Of course, I must make clear at this point that, this is not to rule out the extraordinary means in which God can work in a persons soul, I am speaking strictly about the ordinary means that God has provided for our salvation, namely the sacraments.

With all of this now as background, I would like to move our investigation into the area of a very disputed question. What age should the Sacrament of Confirmation be administered?

THE AGE OF CONFIRMATION

This question has been ravaging the religious education world as well as the ecclesiastical establishment in our country for many years. But I think if Confirmation is seen in the light of our investigation and through the eyes of the Church, I think the question becomes a moot point.

The first thing we need to do is to look at the age in which the Church, in her wisdom, has set for those receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation. To find this, we will first look at Canon Law section 891, the Rite of Confirmation and finally, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). Canon Law, section 891 states: "The Sacrament of Confirmation is to be conferred on the faithful at about the age of discretion unless the conference of bishops determines another age or there is danger of death or in the

judgment of the minister a grave cause urges otherwise (Canon 891, emphasis is mine).

But at what age is "the age of discretion"? Well if we turn to "Rite of Confirmation" we see here the age of discretion being defined for us. Here we read, "With regard to children in the Latin Church the administration of Confirmation is generally delayed until about the seventh year."

So "the age of discretion" is the same as saying, "the age of seven." But is this really the mind of the Church? Is the Church really saying that the sacrament of Confirmation should be administered to children? The answer to this question is, yes. We see this being highlighted in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, RCIA. Section 14 of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults states the following:

"The priest who baptizes an adult or a child of catechetical age should, when the Bishop is absent, also confer confirmation...".

So children who have parents entering the Catholic Church are not only Baptized, but also receive Confirmation and Communion. Now I don't want to focus on what this may be telling life long Catholic parents who live in a diocese where the sacrament of Confirmation is being withheld from their children until their adolescent years, while the "new kid on the block" feasts on the fullness of spiritual birth, strengthening and nourishment, all the while the Catholic children are being deprived of this same gift, but it does have to make us stop and think a moment. Kind of like a Rockefeller or a Trump child living in deprivation or poverty wouldn't you say?

But, to stay with our theological reasoning, why do you suppose that the Church would set the norm for receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation at this particular age? To answer this question we must look at what it is that Confirmation strengthens us against. As you recall from part I of our investigation, the General Catechetical Directory stated the following,

"Since the life of Christians, which on earth is warfare, is liable to temptations and sins, the way of the Sacrament of Penance is open for them, so that they may obtain pardon from the merciful God and reconcile themselves with the Church" (General Catechetical Directory, 11 April 1971).

This statement tells us that our life here on earth is a spiritual warfare. And in this warfare we are liable and wounded by sin. But at what age are we capable and liable for committing sin?. The answer is "the age of discretion" or "the age of seven." How appropriate it is then, that the Church in her wisdom has provided a means to counter the seductive forces of this world on our young people with this most glorious Sacrament of Confirmation. To provide the spiritual strengthening needed, to counter the spiritual attacks, the outcome of which each person is now held accountable for at this young age of seven.

God has not left us orphaned. He has not sent us up a creek without a paddle. In this

warfare of the Christian life that we must fight, God has made it possible for those entering this spiritual warfare through their baptism to receive this spiritual strengthening. Without this strength, the children at this age cannot fight off the attacks of sin effectively. It is like the infant baby that we referred to earlier, who has not grown nor gotten any stronger since its birth, trying to fight off the neighborhood dog. It is a losing battle.

But, like those in the natural realm of this world who go into military service, they must first go through a basic training process. We call it Boot Camp. But does this make them seasoned soldiers, mature and perfected in combat? No, it is only the beginning for them, they receive their uniforms, their battle gear, their weapons, and learn how to use them in the heat of battle. And so it is with the Sacrament of Confirmation. Confirmation is the strengthening provided by God Himself for every Baptized person to begin their growth and strengthening process in the spiritual warfare that this life is for Christians. Here in this Sacrament, the newly confirmed "Soldiers of Christ" receive the "Breastplate of Righteousness... the Gospel of Peace... the Shield of Faith... the Helmet of Salvation...and the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (Ephesians 6:13-17).

Again, it is only the beginning, like a new recruit fresh onto the battlefield. But what would happen to a soldier if he enlisted in the military and instead of going to Boot Camp where he would receive his physical conditioning, his uniform, weapons, his battle gear and the like, he sent straight into the heat of the battle with no weapons, no protective gear, and no physical training? He is just a kid off the street. When all of a sudden he is caught-up in the midst of the most ferocious battle of all created history that has as its prize, his/her very soul? It would be like that infant baby and the neighborhood dog we mentioned earlier.

But that is exactly what we are doing when we choose to postpone the Sacrament of Confirmation, past the age where children become capable and liable for sins they commit (the age of seven or the age of discretion). The battle begins personally for them, whether or not they receive the Sacrament of Confirmation (strengthening). They are personally held accountable for how well they fight the fight in this spiritual battle. This battle will begin just as surely as we will one day die.

But the personal spiritual battles that these children are held accountable upon entering "the age of discretion" or "the age of seven", does not have to be so one sided. God has provided the answer in the Sacrament of Confirmation and the Church in her wisdom has advised us of the appropriate age.

To summarize the above imagery and statements in just a few simple sentences. As a result of many hundreds of hours of study into the Sacrament of Confirmation, which are so briefly summarized in our investigation, I believe the Sacrament of Confirmation should be administered to every Baptized Catholic, at about or before the age of reason. I think the Church has wisely placed Confirmation at the age of seven, but I would also not hesitate to see it administered at a younger age either.

Every person's spiritual growth is directly linked to the continued religious instruction they receive over the course of a lifetime. Religious instruction and education is not something that is only needed for the preparation of a sacrament. But is in fact necessary for the preparation for our entry into eternal life.

If you recall earlier in our investigation, St. Thomas Aquinas showed us that since a human person consists of both body and soul, there is an undeniable parallel between the physical development of the person and the spiritual development of that same person. Looking now at the physical development of a person in society, let's see what we can learn in regard to their spiritual development.

When a person is of "school age" (in our society today, it is about the age of 5) they begin a secular education process, learning the very basics of what they will one day need in the future to be a productive, healthy, positive member of society. They will learn how to read, write, workout mathematical problems, study and memorize events in history so as to make a personal connection with that history so as to call their own. "I am an American and proud of my country and the freedom it stands for." So, the education process of a person in society is not centered-around any one thing or event in life. It is to be a well-rounded education of all areas needed to function positively in society.

As a person continues to progress in life into their teenage and high school years, they begin to advance their studies, going beyond the basics of subjects they have been studying. At this age they also begin to experience new social behavior, and learn how to interact with other members of society. They begin to form their own identity as a member of society and begin to personalize their own relationship with who and what they are in the society they are about to enter into on an adult level.

Upon completion of the high school years, a person then begins to narrow their focus of education to a specific field of study. A field that would best-serve society as well as the individual person. That person then spends the rest of their life continuing to work at getting proficient at the field of work they have chosen. This happens through individual study, schooling and seminars provided by the employer, hands on experience and a continued personal drive to better ones self in society so as to be the very best they can be in this short 60 - 80 years of life we have here on earth.

Now let's take what we have said about our physical development and apply it to our spiritual development. Let me say right now, that the following scenario is not necessarily how the present education program works, but how it could work if we put the same amount of time, energy, and importance into has we do our physical development.

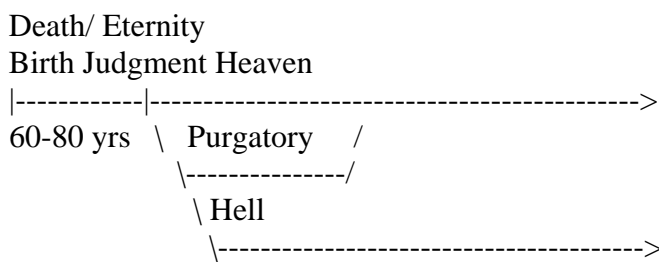
When a person is of "catechetical age" (in the Catholic Church it is about the age of 5) they begin a religious education process, learning the very basics of what they will one day need in the future to live a just and holy life, and to become an eternal member of the society in Heaven we know as the saints. They will learn about the Ten Commandments, the beatitudes, morality, love, kindness, forgiveness, study and memorize events in

salvation history so as to make a personal connection with that history and call it their own. "I am a child of God and proud of my Judeo/Christian heritage and all that it stands for." Like society, the spiritual education process of a person in society is not centered round any one thing or event in life. It is to be a well rounded catechetical education of all areas needed to function positively as a Christian, a child of God in this life, but it also serves as the road-map for living happily forever in the next.

As a person continues to progress in life into their adolescent years, they begin to advance their catechetical studies, going beyond the basics of the Ten Commandments, and other areas of Christian doctrine they have been studying. At this age they also begin to experience new social behavior tailored by their spiritual formation, and learn how to interact with other members of their Christian Community. They begin to form their own identity as a member of that community and begin to personalize their own relationship with God, the Church and the universal people of God, the Communion of Saints.

Upon completion of the adolescent phase of their life, a person then begins to narrow their focus of education to a specific field or vocation. A field that would best-serve the family of God, as well as the individual person in answering God's call on their life. That person then spends the rest of their life continuing to work at getting proficient in the vocation God has called them to, whether it be the religious life, the priesthood, marriage or the celibate life. This continuing spiritual formation happens through individual study, prayer, adult education classes and seminars provided by the Church as a whole, but specifically, through each local parish.

Now before we go any further, let's take a look at the following diagram to try and help put things in perspective. Sometimes when we see things, it becomes clearer than just reading or hearing about them.



Notice the duration of time between "Birth" and "Death/Judgment". Then look at the duration of time between "Death/Judgment and "Eternity".

Now think about everything we have just talked about as well as the current situation with our present Religious Education programs in most parishes. Have we done an adequate job of preparing the faithful for this life in eternity? Have we put the same effort into the spiritual formation of the faithful that we put into their secular education?

This is the perspective I believe we should have in approaching the issue of Religious Education. It is equally as important if not more important than a secular education and yet in most places, it is almost non-existent.

Moving the sacrament of Confirmation to about the age of reason or before, should have no effect on the structure of the religious education program. A catechetical program should be in place to teach the faith from K - 12 and continuing on with an Adult Education program for those who go on from the 12th grade as well as those who have completed RCIA and are looking to continue their spiritual development within the bounds of the family of God.

As I said earlier, most parishes should already have a K - 8 CCD or Religious Education program already in place. Nothing here would need to change, accept possibly, to accent the connection between Baptism and Confirmation when the sacrament of Baptism is being taught. This is usually taught in the first grade with most Religious Education programs.

This would also mean that the sacrament of Confirmation would be received prior to First Communion. This inadvertently restores the order of the sacraments with the completion of Christian initiation being the sacrament of the Eucharist where the now, fully initiated member of the Church, joins our Lord in the Eucharistic Banquette, the wedding feast of the Lamb.

However, looking ahead to the higher grades, there would need to be an additional approach. Along with the catechetical program for these age groups, their social development needs also must be addressed. This I believe can be accomplished by a combination of "Youth Group " activities combined with classroom instruction specifically focused on apologetics and evangelization.

The classroom instruction for these higher grade levels, must be geared to meet the demands of our young people at this stage in their life. What I mean by this is that during the adolescent years of our young people, there are many struggles that they are going through. They no longer want to believe things told to them by an older person just because the older person says so. They now want to see the truths of things being taught, demonstrated to them, so that they can make that truth their own. Have you ever heard a young person say, "Prove it!?" Well, that is exactly what we must do if we are to pass the Catholic faith onto these young people and foster a true understand of what it means to be a child of God.

To say, "That is just the way it is and you must believe it" will never hold any weight in the minds or hearts of our young people at this age. We must respond to the command given to us by St. Peter, to "make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is within you..." (1Peter3:15).

This command given to us by our first Pope, St. Peter, applies not only to non-Catholics

or non-Christians challenging the Catholic faith, but also to the catechist to "prove it" to our young people who are now in the stage of their lives where they are questioning everything, even the existence of God. Offer the students a reasonable explanation, and they will embrace the truths of the faith and make it their own. It is at this age level that the catechetical program must be focused on the Church's art of "Apologetics."

Giving a reasonable explanation and defense to our young people about the Catholic faith, is imminently necessary for the successful passing on of the faith in a world that seeks the spiritual destruction of our youth, where sex and MTV seem to rule the minds of our young people.

Fr. William Most once wrote a book for teens titled "Catholic Apologetics today". The following is an extensive quote from that book explaining exactly what we are trying to deal with here.

"A strange phenomenon appears in most young people sometime near the end of high school. It starts then, and lasts varying lengths of time--sometimes for years--and is of varying severity.

The symptoms? The young person finds his formerly solid religious beliefs beginning to wobble. He is no longer sure of them; and he is hesitant to ask an older person, for he is definitely inclined not to trust the opinions of any, older person. So he is forced to be miserable all by himself, unless of course he talks to others of the same age and finds them in the same quandary, but equally without any way to get out.

We said the length of time this trouble lasts is varying; some never fully emerge from it. That brings us to see the first of the reasons for the problem. When we were children, we simply believed what older people told us. Really, that is all that could be done at an early age. But then as we grow up, we begin to want to know for ourselves, to be able to give a reason for what we believe.

This process is not only quite normal; it can even be a good thing, provided that it is carried all the way to its conclusion. If not, a person may lack stability indefinitely, perhaps for the rest of his life. This process is, then, the normal changeover from the child to the adult pattern of beliefs. It is proper, because adults should not act like children and should be able to give a reason for their beliefs.

No one can be quite comfortable between the shore of childhood belief and the shore of solidly grounded adult faith. For, there one is neither fish nor fowl. He lacks both kinds of security and so he flounders. Eventually he may just give up trying, but yet never achieve the solidity he reasonably wants. Worse, if some great test of faith comes, he may not have the solid basis on which to endure.

Obviously, the rational thing for a young, even older person to do in such a quandary is to ask for help from those who are able to give it. Sadly, this is not so often done. First, the young persons are disinclined to think older persons could possibly know anything; second, many older persons never completed the rational process themselves, and are really in no position, to help.

There is a second very potent reason for this "at-sea" condition. Young people are apt to have their somatic resonance in a state of flux. Somatic resonance is a common term in psychology. It is not hard to understand. A major psychologist of our times, T. V. Moore, told in his last book of a case he met when he was a practicing psychiatrist in Washington, D.C. A patient came in for help who suffered from manic-depressive psychosis. He told Dr. Moore he was losing his faith. Moore reported that the man really was not losing his faith; instead, the process of the disease was interfering with his somatic resonance to faith.

Here is the way it works. We are, of course, made up of body and soul, matter and spirit. These elements are so closely joined as to add up to one person. As a result of that union if we have a condition on either side, body or soul, then for smooth running (not for mere survival of the condition) we ought to have a parallel condition on the other side. That parallel is called a resonance. When the resonance is on the side of the body--the more common combination--then it is called somatic resonance, from a Greek word meaning "bodily."

So, then, faith is obviously on the side of the spirit. But faith needs--not for mere survival, but for normal function--a resonance on the bodily side. The process (probably bad biochemistry) of the disease in Moore's patient interfered with the somatic resonance to faith. [The result was that faith was not rejected, but neither could it function normally.] Hence, the poor man thought he was losing his faith.

Now, young people can have a parallel problem. They enter a time of life when there are great bodily changes in the glandular system, especially at the start of sexual functioning. They have not yet had time to learn to live with these changes, to come to terms with them. As a result, their somatic resonance to many things is in a state of flux, so that faith lacks its normal resonance. No wonder faith tends to wobble, to seem to have no foundation.

Obviously, if a young person could only realize what is going on inside him and see that he is being hit by a dramatic changing process, he would be very relieved. We do not say he would quickly find everything easy. But he could step outside himself and see himself objectively. Then at least he would not be so mystified by what he cannot help feeling.

The two conditions we have just explained are clearly part of the process of growing up. As such, they have always affected people, not just in our day. But today, young and old alike are affected by still a third influence: the immense upheaval in the Church and the many claims that everything has changed. It is no wonder many are uncomfortable with their Faith."

We see here how Fr. Most not only identifies what is going on with our young people, but also provides reinforcement for our suggestion above: give our students a reasonable defense and explanation of the faith, and focus the catechetical curriculum in the junior high and high school levels on "Apologetics and Evangelization".

In summary let me just say this. If the sacrament of Confirmation were placed at the age of reason or before, it would allow the Holy Spirit and the Catechist to work together hand in hand. The Catechist providing the knowledge and external intellectual stimulation and the Holy Spirit, through the Sacrament of Confirmation, strengthening the seven gifts received at Baptism; Knowledge, Wisdom, Understanding, Right Judgment (or Council), Courage (or Fortitude), Reverent Love (or Piety), and Holy Fear (or Fear of the Lord), working from within the individual, assisting that person to understand and embrace the truths the Catechist presents in the name of Jesus Christ.

What a combination this could be, but it must be done correctly. Our faith is a living, breathing faith. It cannot be reduced to a textbook, or a series of memorized questions and answers. These things are important, but our faith is far more than this. We are children of the Eternal and Almighty God Himself, and all that God has done in Salvation History is our heritage and our history.

We are heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven and the creator of the Heavens and the Earth is none other than our Father! Isn't this enough to make us scream from the roof tops to anyone who would listen? Have we done our best to convey this to our youth of today? Lets enter back into the partnership with the Holy Spirit in the religious education of our young people, and stop trying to do it all ourselves.

If Confirmation were received at or before the age of reason, the Holy Spirit would not be left to work on His own as He is today. We are trying to teach our youth today, heavenly truths without the heavenly strengthening to understand these truths. We need to stop placing the cart before the horse. A child cannot walk until its leg muscles are first strong enough to support its weight. Let the Holy Spirit strengthen the individual in the sacrament of Confirmation, and then watch the spiritual and catechetical formation bloom as they continue their walk on the road to our heavenly homeland.