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Confirmation, Catechesis, and Communion: A Historical Survey

Geoffrey R. Boyle

White-robed eighth graders stand before the congregation, donning red stoles. Some read papers they have written, others confess answers to questions from the Catechism—all commune, typically for the first time. Each student receives a certificate, a “life-verse,” possibly even the laying on of hands.

Then there’s the party: the meal, the cake, the excitement, and the gifts. Then, the following Sunday . . . *they’re gone*. So goes the old joke. An old country church was full of horse flies—you know, the big ones that really can leave a welt if they bite. The elders and trustees did everything they could to get rid of them—they were a nuisance, scaring the children and making church unpleasant for all—but no luck. They asked the pastor if he had any ideas on how to get these flies to leave the church. Wisely, he replied, “Well, let’s confirm them.” Sadly, no joke is funny unless there is a bit of truth to it. And that is the point: there is a serious pastoral problem when it comes to confirmation.¹

So what *is* confirmation? Did St. Thomas Aquinas get a confirmation verse? Was Luther examined in the catechism before the congregation? Did St. Jerome commune for the first time at age thirteen or fourteen? And what is with the laying hands on the head of each of these confirmands? Is it a sacrament or not? What about the red stoles and the certificate and the party?

Then there is the problem of how much is enough. Who gets confirmed—those who score a certain percentage in the class, or who reach a

¹ John T. Pless notes: “We have all heard the statistics of the number of youth who drop out of the church after confirmation. We know that confirmation is to be seen in light of Holy Baptism and not vice versa. We know that confirmation is not graduation from catechesis. Yet what pastor has not experienced some degree of frustration and disappointment when it comes to the instruction of the youth and their subsequent confirmation?” John T. Pless, “Catechesis for Life in the Royal Priesthood,” *Logia* 3, no. 4 (1994): 6.

certain age, or who simply attend on a regular basis? Must one memorize the *whole* catechism, questions and proof-texts included? What are the criteria? Are there exceptions? Does anyone get held back? And how does Holy Communion fit in? Frank Klos, who headed up a study of this topic in the 1960s, put it this way:

Confirmation simply has not been defined. Lutheran theologians, particularly, had a way of talking around the subject without coming to grips with it. Lacking a solid, workable definition, the church has suffered ever since. It is not surprising that apples and bananas and oranges got all mixed up, and confirmation became a kind of fruit basket.²

This study has two purposes. The first is to offer a brief overview of what confirmation is, including what it was and how it has been understood by Lutherans since the Reformation. The second is to reflect on what this means for us today, presenting a way forward.

The terrain before us is not uncharted; however, it is full of challenges. Confirmation is a phenomenon unto itself. How can it be so universal among us and yet so sorely misunderstood by many who go through the process and rite? We do well to study the subject carefully before proposing changes. G.K. Chesterton once said,

In the matter of reforming things, as distinct from deforming them, there is one plain and simple principle; a principle which will probably be called a paradox. There exists in such a case a certain institution or law; let us say, for the sake of simplicity, a fence or gate erected across a road. The more modern type of reformer goes gaily up to it and says, "I don't see the use of this; let us clear it away." To which the more intelligent type of reformer will do well to answer: "If you don't see the use of it, I certainly won't let you clear it away. Go away and think. Then, when you can come back and tell me that you do see the use of it, I may allow you to destroy it."³

So why is that wall there? That is, why is there this thing called confirmation? It has become a cliché.⁴ For the most part, we struggle to understand why we do what we do.

² Frank W. Klos, *Confirmation and First Communion: A Study Book* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968), 141.

³ G.K. Chesterton, *The Thing: Why I Am a Catholic*, vol. 3, *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 157.

⁴ I use "cliché" in a technical sense. The authority is Anton C. Zijderfeld, *On Clichés* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979). One might also consult Uwe Siemon-Netto,

It is always difficult to approach the familiar critically. It demands humility and a willingness to test the spirits. The goal here is not to present all the answers but to help ask the questions with faithfulness toward the Scriptures and integrity toward our Lutheran Confessions, the inheritance we have received. Of course, no pastor should simply take matters into his own hands.⁵ Any further action, in light of what we find confirmation to be and to do, ought to be enacted with love. For it is love, Luther says, that bends and suffers for the sake of our neighbor.⁶ Any pastor, however, who has taught a year or two of confirmation has to recognize there is a problem. We are faced with the reality that what should secure our children in the Christian faith and spur on a life of faithfulness is not working. As with most things, however, simply fixing the form will not solve the problem. Form and content go together. We must know what we are doing and why we are doing it.

I. Confirmation's Origins and Development

Frank Senn summarizes the scattered and confused history of confirmation by noting, "It had been a practice in search of a theory."⁷ William Bausch, a Roman Catholic, calls it a "sacrament in search of a theology."⁸ Jean Daniélou, another Roman Catholic, admits, "The history of the origins of the sacrament of Confirmation is one of the most obscure chapters in the origins of Christian worship. There is, first of all, some hesitation about the meaning of the sacrament."⁹ And most recently, Mark Surburg, an LCMS

The Fabricated Luther: The Rise and Fall of the Shirer Myth (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995).

⁵ While we are free towards God in the things neither commanded nor forbidden in Scripture (AC VII; FC SD X 9), we nevertheless, in love towards our neighbor, seek to serve one another in support of the unity of faith. As LCMS President Matthew Harrison notes, "The answer to our liturgical struggles today is not the imposition of sixteenth-century liturgical directives upon our modern church." Matthew C. Harrison, "Liturgical Uniformity and Church Polity in the Augustana and the Formula: the Church Orders as Hermeneutical Key," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 36, no. 2 (2002): 72.

⁶ Martin Luther, "Eight Sermons at Wittenberg" (1522), *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-1986), 51:72; abbreviated AE henceforth.

⁷ Frank Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 292.

⁸ William J. Bausch, *A New Look at the Sacraments* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1983), 92.

⁹ Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), 114.

pastor comments, “It is remarkable that Confirmation exists at all—much less in the Lutheran Church. The history of Confirmation is a weird and wacky story that twists and turns in unexpected ways.”¹⁰ So how did it come to this?

Sphragis, Chrism, and Muron: Post-Baptismal Rites of the Early Church

We start at the beginning in order to get our bearings. Difficulties present themselves from the outset, however, because the word *confirmation* does not seem to appear until the fifth century at several councils in Southern Gaul. We first see it in Canons 3 and 4 of the Council of Riez (AD 439), where a bishop was determined to be illegally ordained and yet retained the power to confirm neophytes.¹¹ Several years later we see the word again at the Council of Orange (AD 529). It then appears a decade later at the Third Council of Arles (somewhere between AD 449–461), where the power of the bishop was clearly delineated from that of presbyter with regards to confirmation. It appears that it was around the middle of the fifth century that the word *confirmation* became a technical term used by the church.

But before confirmation was a technical term, the practice of confirmation had already developed. The first thing to note is that the early church’s baptismal rite was not just water and word. It was that, to be sure, but it was also enlistment, exorcism, catechesis, stripping, anointing, washing, sealing, clothing, and communing. Daniélou writes,

In the Christian initiation which took place during the Easter Vigil, Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist formed *one whole*, constituting the introduction of the new Christian into the Church. And, in the catecheses made to explain to the new Christians the sacraments which they had received, these sacraments are presented as *immediately succeeding one another*.¹²

Of course, as Lutherans, we recognize that Baptism is not an isolated part of a larger sacramental initiation—it is not lacking until completed by

¹⁰ Mark P. Surburg, “The Weird and Wacky History of Confirmation, Part 1: When there was no Confirmation—the Western Church before Nicaea,” <http://surburg.blogspot.com/2015/01/weird-and-wacky-history-of-confirmation.html>. In a series of blog posts over the last year or so, Surburg has traced much of the historical background of confirmation from the early through the medieval church.

¹¹ Gabriele Winkler, “Confirmation or Chismation?: A Study in Comparative Liturgy,” *Worship* 58, no. 1 (1984): 8–9.

¹² Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 127; emphasis added.

either confirmation or the Sacrament of the Altar—but that the water and the word sufficiently deliver the gift of God in its entirety by the forgiveness of sin.

Because these initiation rites of the early church are sufficiently covered elsewhere,¹³ we will limit ourselves to two chief and pertinent parts of the rite: the oil and the hands. Tertullian, one of our earliest sources, writes,

Having come out of the baptismal pool, we are anointed with blessed oil according to the ancient discipline in which it was customary to be anointed with oil spread on the horn to receive the priesthood. It is with this oil that Aaron was anointed by Moses; whence comes his name of the Anointed (*christus*) which comes from *chrisma*, meaning anointing.¹⁴

The imagery of the anointing comes chiefly from the priestly anointing (Exod 29:7, 21; Lev 8:12, 30) and the royal anointing (1 Sam 10:1; 16:12–13; Ps 2:2). Peter draws the two together proclaiming, “But you are . . . a *royal priesthood*” (1 Pet 2:9). Some have so linked this priesthood to baptism that the term “*priesthood of the baptized*” has become somewhat common.¹⁵ St. Peter also connects this baptismal priesthood to the “sprinkling with his blood” (1 Pet 1:2).

But returning for a moment to Tertullian’s *chrism*, *christus*, and the *Christian*, Daniélou says, “This anointing, finally, is called *chrisma*, and he who receives it, *Christos*. In some of these early Christian rites, this constituted a new aspect of confirmation: the oil was the *chrism* by which the baptized became a new *Christos*, or *christianos*.”¹⁶ Tertullian spoke of the oil the same way he spoke of the water, as material things delivering spiritual

¹³ See, for example, Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*; Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1978); G.W.H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit: A Study in the Doctrine of Baptism and Confirmation in the New Testament and the Fathers*, 2nd ed. (London: S.P.C.K., 1967).

¹⁴ Tertullian, “On Baptism,” chap. 7 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, 10 vols., ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 3:672.

¹⁵ Thomas M. Winger, “The Priesthood of All the Baptized: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation” (Master of Sacred Theology thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1992).

¹⁶ Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 116.

realities.¹⁷ So, to be anointed—christened—in the baptismal rite was to be united with Christ and to participate in his kingdom and priesthood.¹⁸

To be fair, the oil in the baptismal rite varies. In the early rites there were three anointings: one, just before the water, where the catechumen was covered from head to toe (sometimes called the “oil of exorcism”); then, after the water, a *seal*, or *sphragis* (sometimes called the “oil of thanksgiving”); and finally, in some parts, a post-baptismal anointing by the bishop when the baptismal party returned to the gathering of the church.¹⁹

The meaning of the oil varied, depending on where it fell in the rite. Cyril of Jerusalem gives the following explanation for the pre-baptismal anointing:

Stripped of your garments, you were anointed with oil that had been exorcised, from the top of your head to your feet, and you were made partakers in the true olive tree which is Jesus Christ. Cut off from the wild olive and grafted on the cultivated tree, you have been given a share in the richness of the true oil. For the exorcised oil is a symbol of participation in the richness of Christ. It causes every trace of the enemy’s power to vanish. By the invocation of God and by prayer, the oil has gained the power, not only to purify you from the vestiges of sin by consuming them, but also to put to flight all the invisible powers of the Evil One.²⁰

¹⁷ Tertullian, “On Baptism,” 7.

¹⁸ “Prefigured by the priestly and royal anointing of the Old Testament, the Christian anointing is, moreover, a participation in the anointing of Christ.” Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 117.

¹⁹ Some rites held this anointing prior to the baptismal rites, even at the enrollment (Pseudo-Dionysius, AD 396–400). Others placed it between the renunciation of Satan and the washing itself (Theodore of Mopsuestia, bishop from AD 392–428). Most common, however, was placing the *sphragis* at the end of the rite, following the washing (Cyril of Jerusalem; Ambrose of Milan). Daniélou makes an important observation when he says, “The importance of the rite appears from the fact that it often serves to denote baptism as a whole, this often being called the *sphragis*.” He then goes on to suggest that “perhaps as early as St. Paul: 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13—and, in any case in the earliest fathers: Clement of Rome, *Epist.*, VII, 6; Shepherd of Hermas *Sim.*, IX, 6:3; 16:4; and Tertullian, *De pudic.*, IX, 9.” Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 54–55. See also Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition*, chap. 22.

²⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments: The Protocatechesis and the Five Mystagogical Catecheses*, ed. F.L. Cross (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995), 60.

Cyril also describes the *sphragis* as an anointing of oil in the form of a cross first on the forehead, then the ears, then the nostrils, and finally on the breast. He says,

For as Christ after His baptism, and the descent of the Holy Ghost, went forth and vanquished the adversary, so likewise, having, after Holy Baptism and the Mystical Chrism, put on the whole armour of the Holy Ghost, do ye stand against the power of the enemy, and vanquish it When ye are counted worthy of this Holy Chrism, ye are called Christians, verifying also the name by your new birth. For before you were vouchsafed this grace, ye had properly no right to this title, but were advancing on your way towards being Christians.²¹

Ambrose adds, "Baptism is followed by the spiritual seal (*signaculum*) because, after the beginning, perfection is still to be achieved. This takes place when, at the invocation of the priest, the Holy Spirit is poured out."²²

From this, we can note a distinction being made between the sealing and the washing—namely, perfection. So how does one attain perfection? For some of the early fathers of the church, it was by the gifts of the Spirit now applied through the seal. This distinction between Baptism and the sealing would later be understood as follows: "in Confirmation [is] the sacrament of spiritual progress, while Baptism is that of spiritual birth."²³

Again, and we cannot emphasize this enough, the Lord does not give his forgiveness piece-meal or in part but always whole and total, according to the sacrifice of his Son. What we need to recognize, however, is that this anointing—this seal, or *sphragis*—was believed actually to do something, making it a sacrament of sorts. Pseudo-Dionysius says plainly, "our masters have called it the sacrament of the anointing."²⁴

²¹ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*, 64–65.

²² Ambrose, *De Sacramentis* III, 8; cited in Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 119. This notion of "perfection" is picked up by Daniélou as a common theme among the early Christians. He notes: "Here also appears the connection between confirmation and the spiritual life, considered as the development of the grace given in seed-form in Baptism. This also is where the idea of confirmation is given its meaning: it is concerned with the strengthening of the spiritual life, which is still weak in the baptized, and which is carried out under the action of the Holy Spirit" (126).

²³ Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 120.

²⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy IV*, in *Patrologia cursus completus: Series graeca*, 162 vols., ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: Migne, 1857–1886), I:484, B–485A; cf. Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 120.

Let us now summarize. For the early church there was an order: Baptism, anointing (chrismation with *muron*), and the Eucharist. If one was not yet baptized, he could not be anointed with the *muron*—an oil uniquely separate from the catechumenate oil, marked by a perfumed scent—nor could he receive the Eucharist. And yet, on the other hand, when he received the first, he received all three. Nothing came individually, at least not as one entered the church's life.²⁵

While confirmation was not the technical term until the mid-fifth century, there was much talk of anointing with oil. Today, this seems a bit strange, but it was not always. In fact, according to Leonel Mitchell, it was commonplace: "To a Roman or Hellenistic Greek anointing would be associated with washing as naturally as we associate soap with water. When a Roman went to the bath he took a towel and oil."²⁶ Bathing in the bathhouses was a standard and assumed mark of civilization in the Roman life. So also was anointing: water and oil, though they don't mix, were certainly never far apart. Interestingly, Jesus also has plenty of water and oil references close at hand. Twice Luke speaks of Jesus' anointing with the Spirit at the Jordan (Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38). What goes for Christ goes also for the baptized (1 John 2:20); our anointing unites us with his.

The anointing of the baptized with the Holy Spirit appears to be synonymous with the sealing of the Spirit, what the early church called the *sphragis* (Eph 1:13; 2 Cor 1:22).²⁷ *Sphragis*, by synechdoche, represented the whole liturgy of Baptism, including the washing and the anointing. It also worked the other way around: to be baptized was to be sealed, *esphragizomai-ed*. This helps explain why the early church was able to distinguish between the various portions of the rite in their explanations while at the same time never separating the rubrics into self-standing rites. They were parts of a whole, not separate activities pieced together—and most often in the early church they certainly were not separated by time or space.²⁸ For instance, Tertullian describes "Baptism" as including washing

²⁵ Thus far, we have only discussed the first two: Baptism and the oil. Later we will consider how the Eucharist should be understood in connection to these two.

²⁶ Leonel L. Mitchell, *Baptismal Anointing* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 26.

²⁷ For a detailed account of the early church's understanding and biblical imagery of the *sphragis*, see Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 54–69. See also Rom 4:11; Col 2:11–12; Gen 4:15; Ezek 9:4; and Rev 7:4.

²⁸ Aidan Kavanagh asserts: "This should alert one to the probability that when the New Testament texts refer, especially in passing, to 'baptism' they mean something ritually larger and increasingly more sophisticated and complex than the water bath alone.

with water, anointing, *sphragis*, and the laying on of hands.²⁹ In fact, Tertullian goes to lengths to point out that it is not the waters that deliver the Spirit but that the waters prepare one for the Spirit, which comes through the laying on of hands and prayer.³⁰ This is not to suggest that Tertullian undermines our baptismal theology but to recognize the weightiness and significance of the oil in the baptismal rite of the early Christians.

East, West, and the Medieval Transition

Why did this common and united practice change? What separated the three rites—*baptism, chrism, communion*—and how did it get to be the way it is today?

This is actually one of the differences between the East and the West: the Eastern churches still hold the three together. For the most part, this is strictly a Western phenomenon. The difference seems to lie in a diverging understanding of clerical authority. The East, for example, always permitted a presbyter to apply the *chrism*. However, already in the fourth century, the West delineated strongly between presbyter and bishop. Paul Turner notes:

According to the [*Apostolic Tradition*], a priest gives a post-baptismal anointing at the font, and then the newly baptized are brought to the bishop for the imposition of his hand and another anointing with chrism. From this text and other sources it seems clear that this ritual of sealing after Baptism was performed by the bishop.³¹

As converts increased and bishops became fewer, there was great difficulty for the bishop to seal all the baptized. The solution in the West was, rather than permitting the local presbyter to perform the entire rite, to

If this is *not* presumed, then it becomes impossible to account for how rites particularly related to the Spirit and in closer ritual contact with the water bath than proclamation prior to it, *suddenly* appear as though from nowhere during the second and third centuries. Nor does it explain why these rites quickly become accepted as traditional in churches obsessed with fidelity to the gospel and apostolic tradition." Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 28.

²⁹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 7–8; *De Resurrectione Carnis*, 8.

³⁰ Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 6.

³¹ Paul Turner, *Confirmation: The Baby in Solomon's Court* (Chicago: Hillenbrand, 2006), 28.

permit the laying on of hands to be delayed. The laying on of hands was reserved for bishops only—in confirmation and in ordination.³²

Not until the beginning of the seventh century, with the second council of Seville, does one find presbyters forbidden to anoint the forehead of the baptized—evidence, surely, of increasing Roman influence. Yet even then the prohibition does not seem to have been taken very seriously, since Bishop Braulio of Saragossa (AD 631–651) allowed his presbyters to perform the anointing as long as the oil was blessed by the bishop.³³ It is this separation, this work of the bishop *after* the baptism, that ultimately paved the way for confirmation.³⁴

These formerly unified rites were so splintered by the Scholastic era that the Council of Lambeth (AD 1281) could rule that unconfirmed persons were not permitted to receive communion. This separation of Baptism and confirmation (and, therefore, Holy Communion) was the regular custom in the West by the time of the Reformation. Practically, we see the widespread practice of separating the rites in the twelfth century.³⁵ It had been practiced previously that even though confirmation came later by the bishop, the children were still communed.³⁶ Frank Senn notes that even after this *official* practice, there were exceptions to the rule:

Of course, it was still possible for a bishop to preside at baptism, perform the anointing at that time, and administer communion to the infant immediately. In England this was done for royal children as late as the time of the birth of King Henry VIII's children, Elizabeth in 1533 and Edward in 1537. But most children, by this time, were not communed until later when they made their first confession or were confirmed.³⁷

It appears royalty were still given a share of the ancient catechumenate, even in the sixteenth century.

³² Turner, *Confirmation: The Baby in Solomon's Court*, 28–29.

³³ Winkler, "Confirmation or Chrismation?" 7.

³⁴ This is Aiden Kavanagh's thesis in *Confirmation: Origins and Reform* (New York: Pueblo, 1988), 70.

³⁵ It was in the thirteenth century that it became officially clear that the unconfirmed were not to commune. This is Peter Browe's argument in his historical survey of first communion in the Middle Ages: "Die Kinderkommunion im Mittelalter," *Scholastik* 5 (1930): 1–45.

³⁶ Cf. David L. Percy, "Infant Communion, Part I: The Historical Practice," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 7, no. 3 (1980): 166–170.

³⁷ Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 226–227.

Encountering the Reformation: From Sacramental Rite to Process of Catechesis

As we approach the Reformation a good *terminus ad quem* is the Council of Trent (AD 1545–1563). Canon 1 states:

If anyone says that the confirmation of the baptized is a useless ceremony and not rather a true and proper sacrament, or that it was at one time nothing else than a certain instruction by which those approaching adolescence confessed the ground of their faith before the Church, let him be anathema.³⁸

But what is confirmation according to Rome in the mid-sixteenth century? Martin Chemnitz defines it, using Rome's own terminology:

Confirmation itself they define as the anointing or besmearing with the consecrated chrism which is performed by the bishop with the thumb on the forehead of the baptized person, not in the act of Baptism itself but later in a special sacrament by means of the form or figure of the cross with the pronouncing of these words: "I sign you with the sign of the cross," etc. However, in that same act also other formal prayers are added, and the words: "Peace be with you" are pronounced. After this first act the bishop strikes the anointed person on the cheek with his thumb, thereupon with his whole hand. Then the forehead, which has been anointed with the ointment, is bound round about with a white cloth, which is taken off on the seventh day thereafter, that the recent anointing may not flow down or be wiped off. Finally, he is committed to his guardians. This is the act of confirmation.³⁹

Chemnitz highlights a consistency in Rome that sets Baptism and confirmation against each other. He says,

They suppose the sacrament of confirmation to be more excellent, worthier, and greater, so that it is to be venerated and held in greater reverence (for these are their own words) than Baptism itself, they take in part from the nature of the minister by whom it is performed or administered, who must be a bishop. But chiefly they take it from the effects, which are superior to those of Baptism itself.⁴⁰

³⁸ Third Topic, Canon I, "Concerning Confirmation" from the Seventh Session of the Council of Trent, March 3, 1547. Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, 30th ed. (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto Publications, 1954), 265.

³⁹ Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 4 vols., trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1978), 2:182.

⁴⁰ Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 2:182.

Pope Urban himself says: "All the faithful must receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands of the bishops after Baptism, in order that they may be found *full* Christians."⁴¹

It was thought that confirmation—through the laying on of hands by the bishop—delivered the seven-fold gifts of the Spirit (Isa 11:2), just as the church sings in the great Pentecost hymn "Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest":

In You, with graces seven-fold,
We God's almighty hand behold
While You with tongues of fire proclaim
To all the world His holy name.⁴²

Admittedly, Rome leaned on the authority of Clement and Cyprian for such an association. However, again, both Clement and Cyprian would only have had a confirmation, or the laying on of hands and the anointing, in conjunction with the Baptism. While distinct, they were not separate. At this point, the rites had been separated even to the point of division.

So what did Luther have to say about all this? His opinion varied, sometimes calling confirmation "monkey business" (*Affenspiel*), other times "a fanciful deception" (*Lügenstand*)⁴³ or "mumbo-jumbo" (*Gaukelwerk*).⁴⁴ Luther's longest foray into the discussion of confirmation comes in his *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, where he especially emphasized confirmation as a sacramental ritual but not a sacrament in its own right as instituted by Christ. There he spoke of the current practice as an invention "to adorn the office of bishops, that they may not be entirely without work in the church."⁴⁵ In 1522 he showed a bit more sympathy towards confirmation, saying that he "would permit confirmation as long as it is

⁴¹ Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 2:182; emphasis added.

⁴² *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006), 499:3. Interestingly, this is also the designated ordination hymn that even Luther recommends. The notion of the seven-fold Spirit of the Lord rushing upon the ordained at the laying on of hands has been a common understanding of the sacramental character of ordination. For this reason the Lutheran Confessions are willing to let ordination be called a sacrament, as long it is understood rightly in this precise way (Ap XIII 11). This seven-fold spiritual gift, however, can be traced to Isa 11:2; and Rev 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6.

⁴³ Martin Luther, "Sermon on Married Life" (1522), AE 45:24.

⁴⁴ Luther, "The Persons Related by Consanguinity and Affinity Who Are Forbidden to Marry According to the Scriptures, Leviticus 18" (1522), AE 45:8.

⁴⁵ Luther, "Babylonian Captivity of the Church," (1959), AE 36:91.

understood that God knows nothing of it, and has said nothing about it, and that what the bishops claim for it is untrue."⁴⁶

The Lutheran Confessions express no necessity for confirmation:

Confirmation and extreme unction are rites received from the Fathers that not even the Church requires as necessary to salvation, because they do not have God's command. Therefore, it is useful to distinguish these rites from the former, which have God's direct command and a clear promise of grace. (Ap XIII 6)

There is no need to discuss the other duties of bishops. It is not necessary to speak about confirmation or the consecration of bells nor other such *delusions* [or, *humbuggery*], which are almost the only things they have kept. (Tr 73)⁴⁷

Chemnitz makes it very clear in his *Examination* that the issue at hand is setting Baptism *against* confirmation, "that whatever effects are ascribed to confirmation are by that very fact denied to or taken away from Baptism."⁴⁸ This is what Luther and the early Lutherans opposed more than anything else, the Roman attack against Baptism.⁴⁹ For such an attack, there is no early church evidence. Any distinction that might have been made between the water and the hands and the oil is a distinction and not a separation. They were all parts of the same whole, and one was not set against the other. When this was lost in the West, the theology was forced to adapt.

Nevertheless, Luther apparently conceded "that every pastor might investigate the faith from children and if it be good and sincere, he may

⁴⁶ Luther, "Sermon on Married Life," 24-25; cited in Arthur C. Repp, *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1964), 15-17.

⁴⁷ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles Arand, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000); emphasis added.

⁴⁸ Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 2:182.

⁴⁹ This defense of Baptism may also be seen both in the recent opinion of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR), "Knowing What We Seek and Why We Come: Questions and Answers concerning the Communing of Infants and Young Children" (October 2014), and the "Theses on Infant/Toddler Communion," which it cites: "4. Arguments for infant/toddler communion bypass the truth that in Baptism, we receive 'victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with his gifts' (LC IV:41-42, K/W, 461) as though the promise of Baptism remained unfulfilled without the Lord's Supper" (6-7).

impose hands and confirm."⁵⁰ Even so, it should be noted that Luther never composed a rite of confirmation. Frank Senn affirms this: "Under Olavus Petri and Johannes Bugenhagen, who were disciples of Luther in this matter, the rite of confirmation was eliminated in the Scandinavian churches."⁵¹ As Senn also notes, "Luther had little interest in a rite of confirmation as such, but a great deal of interest in catechesis."⁵² That would be confirmation's way forward.

Ultimately, it was Martin Bucer who created the practice of confirmation as we recognize it today. Senn notes,

The first evangelical rite of confirmation (as distinct from catechesis leading to first communion) appeared in the Hessian church in 1538, where it was introduced by Bucer . . . [who] developed a rite that was marked by a public profession of faith and a vow of obedience to Christ and the "holy church." This rite was used to mark the completion of catechetical instruction and served as a gateway to the fellowship of the altar.⁵³

The laying on of hands and the invocation of the Holy Spirit were likewise included. Apparently Flacius vehemently opposed Bucer's rite for the laying on of hands, and Brenz agreed that it was no *adiaphoron*. Chemnitz, on the other hand, thought it could be retained, so long as it was done without superstition. Interestingly, the Brandenburg Order of 1540 retained the traditional rite (laying on of hands, invocation of the Holy Spirit, and the examination of the faith for communion). But then again, Luther called the rite *Witzelisch*—referring to Georg Witzel, a Romanizer who ended up defecting back to Rome—similar to today's "That's Catholic!"

While Bucer's practice was rejected by Luther, Bugenhagen was able to win approval in Pomerania. C.F.W. Walther notes how the practice moved from Bugenhagen into the seventeenth century:

Bugenhagen, with Luther's approval, introduced a purely evangelical confirmation in Pomerania, which example was soon followed in the church of Electoral Brandenburg, Strassburg, and Hesse But con-

⁵⁰ Martin Luther, "Predigt am Sonntag Laetare Nachmittags (March 15, 1523)," *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe [Werke]*, 72 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993), 11:66; abbreviated WA.

⁵¹ Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 559. Apparently it was reinstated in 1575 under the *Nova ordinantia ecclesiastica*, but then again abolished by the Uppsala Mote of 1593, when Petri's church order was reinstated (559–560).

⁵² Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 293.

⁵³ Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 350.

firmation was not a universal institution in our church in the sixteenth century. Even though M. Chemnitz recommended it urgently in his *Examen*, it declined through the confusion of the Thirty Year's War [1618-1648] even where it had been introduced. One of the first who called attention to this institution and its blessing again was Dr. J. Quistorp, professor of theology at St. James Church in Rostock. For a more general introduction of the confirmation ceremony after 1666, Spener is known to have been active more than others. Loescher also calls it "a very praiseworthy and edifying ceremony," but adds, "which, however, cannot be introduced everywhere and is also not absolutely necessary."⁵⁴

Confirmation of the Heart: The Influence of Pietism

Under the pietistic likes of Philipp Jakob Spener, whose chief goal in confirmation was conversion, Pietism required the child to be able to examine himself in such a way as to determine whether he was truly a Christian and able to apply Christian doctrine to his life. To accomplish this, the age at which children were confirmed necessarily increased. Arthur Repp notes,

Before Pietism the catechumen was rarely older than 12 and usually a year or two younger. Under the influence of Pietism the church orders gradually required the catechumen to be older. The Luneburg CO [Church Order], 1689, set the age at 15, and the Schleswig-Holstein order required boys to be 16. Generally, however, the age was nearer 14.⁵⁵

Pietism's emphasis on the subjective had a lasting influence on the development of Lutheran confirmation. One highly memorable aspect is the individual *Einsegnungswünsche*.⁵⁶ The later Pietists made every effort to bring forth "holy tears" from the children.⁵⁷ The desire to push the confirmands into making a confession of the faith *in their own words* derives from August Hermann Francke (1663-1727). He did away with the time-tested words of the Apostles' Creed and encouraged a variety of expressions, all intended to reveal the personal faith of the heart.

⁵⁴ C.F.W. Walther, *Walther's Pastoral, that is, American Lutheran Pastoral Theology*, trans. John M. Drickamer (New Haven, MO: Lutheran News, 1995), 187. Repp, by the way, lists Quistorp as a Pietist and Loescher under more neutral terms.

⁵⁵ Repp, *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church*, 75.

⁵⁶ Literally, "confirmation wishes."

⁵⁷ Repp, *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church*, 72.

Pietism brought confirmation into the common framework of Lutherans, though admittedly through great struggle in many territories. Nevertheless, by the middle of the eighteenth century, confirmation was known throughout the majority of Germany.⁵⁸

Confirmation of the Head: The Influence of Rationalism

It is under the influence of Rationalism that we find a focus on examination—not of one's sin but of knowledge. At this point the exams became so long that they were separated from the rite itself, much like we see today, where many confirmands write an exam or are examined at a separate gathering of the church, if not in the Sunday service itself.⁵⁹

Important items such as the wearing of a new suit or dress, special flower arrangements, and timing the rite to coincide with the completion of school (which, at that time would have fallen just before Holy Week, leading confirmation to be practiced on Palm Sunday, with first communion celebrated Maundy Thursday) all were introduced under Rationalism. Here, confirmation became not only the gateway to Communion but was also a requirement for getting married in the church and for serving as a baptismal sponsor. In some places, confirmation even became the necessary step towards high school, serving in the work force, or joining a guild.⁶⁰

Repp nicely summarizes this one-two punch of Pietism and Rationalism in the post-Reformation development of confirmation:

With such an exalted and distorted view of confirmation, extravagant statements naturally followed. In contrast to the casual practice of the sixteenth century, confirmation became "the great festival of youth," *die Kinderweihe*, "the festival of human nature," "the most important day of a child's life," "the festival that cannot be made solemn enough." "Know this day is really your first true baptismal day," said J.F. Schlez. Chr. W. Oemler asserted that confirmation can not be sufficiently recommended, for it is an institution which is never too important for a real servant of Christ. The confirmation day must be like another birthday for children, a holy festival for the congregation, and the beginning of a new spiritual harvest for the teacher. Georg

⁵⁸ Repp, *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church*, 74.

⁵⁹ One of my older shut-ins remembers this well—still with fear!—calling it "Prüfung Sonntag," or "Examination Sunday."

⁶⁰ Repp, *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church*, 81–82.

Seiler referred to the Confirmands in his prayer as “new cocitizens of the kingdom of God.”⁶¹

Further still, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), the theologian of feeling, declared confirmation to be the second half of Baptism—in fact, “its necessary completion.”⁶²

In any case, by the nineteenth century, Lutherans viewed confirmation as a common churchly rite. Most Lutherans, however, carefully distinguished confirmation from the sacraments. For example, Theodore Kliefoth states, “In all these ceremonies God acts through men. In confirmation it is not God but the church that acts. To be sure, God acts through the Word before and after confirmation, but not in the rite.”⁶³

II. Confirmation Today—What Are We Confessing?

In his *Pastorale*, Walther brings up the matter of confirmation while discussing the Synod’s first constitution, saying,

The district synod is to exercise supervision so that its pastors confirm catechumens only when they can at least recite the text of the Catechism verbatim, without the exposition, and their understanding of it has been brought to the point that they are capable of examining themselves according to 1 Cor. 11:28. The synod requires that more capable catechumens, where possible, be brought to the point of being able to prove the doctrines of the Christian faith from the clearest proof passages of Scripture and to refute the erring doctrines of the sects from them. Where possible, a hundred hours should be used to instruct Confirmands. The preacher should also see to it that his Confirmands have memorized a good number of those good, churchly, basic hymns that may serve to accompany them for their whole life.⁶⁴

Compared to the expectations set forth by Walther, our modern practice could be judged lax—at least in some quarters. Memorization, rather than being utilized, is often discouraged in modern educational theory. Hardly anyone sings hymns at home, which makes learning them by heart quite difficult. And while pastors struggle to defend the doctrines of our

⁶¹ Repp, *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church*, 78.

⁶² Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 562.

⁶³ Theodor Kliefoth, “Die Confirmation,” in *Liturgische Abhandlungen*, 8 vols. (Schwerin: Stiller’schen Hof-Buchhandlung, 1856), 3:35; cited in Repp, *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church*, 211.

⁶⁴ Walther, *Pastorale*, 188.

church and refute erring doctrines, how many confirmands are trained in apologetics? How old must or should a Christian be to adequately accomplish all this?

Today, whether it is accomplished or not, most confirmands are thirteen to fourteen years of age. In the thirteenth century, we saw for the first time the phrase: “*anni discretionis* [age of discretion],” which crept in through the Scholastic movement, possibly on account of the rediscovery of Aristotle. This age was relative, as Peter Browe persuasively shows, but ranged from roughly seven to fourteen.⁶⁵ At the time of the Reformation, Bugenhagen suggested age eight or *younger*.⁶⁶

Whatever the “age of discretion” might be, it is important to know its heritage in Scholasticism, Pietism, and Rationalism. The trend since the great Lateran Council has been a steady rise in the age. Benjamin Kurtz (1795–1865) noted that the majority of Lutherans confirmed in the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century were between fifteen and twenty.⁶⁷ And for Roman Catholics, Browe notes that the age was only brought back down to seven in the 1910 encyclical by Pope Pius X, “*Quam singulari*.”⁶⁸ While considering that ten or eleven is better, Löhe adamantly refused to put an age on the practice:

⁶⁵ See Peter Browe: “From these considerations, the ‘age of discretion,’ which the Council [Lateran Council of 1215] had decreed for the reception of both sacraments, became accepted and attempts were made in two ways to determine exactly what it was. The one was understood as the discernment between good and evil and expressed in the Ordinary Gloss: *When the child is able to sin, then he must conform to the command*. This juridical way of determination drew its point of view from the duty of confession and is not exactly taken from communion. Others moved from reception itself and said the child may commune when he has enough understanding and reverence for this Sacrament—he must know what he does.” Peter Browe, “Die Kinderkommunion im Mittelalter,” in *Die Eucharistie im Mittelalter: Liturgiehistorische Forschungen in kulturwissenschaftlicher Absicht*, vol. 1, *Vergessene Theologen* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2003), 101–102; translated by Gifford Grobien.

⁶⁶ See also Bugenhagen’s preface to the Danish edition of the Enchiridion of 1538, where he notes “that after this confession is made, also the little children of about eight years or less should be admitted to the table of Him who says: ‘Suffer the little children to come unto Me.’” Cited in F. Bente, *Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1921), 82.

⁶⁷ Cited in Repp, *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church*, 125.

⁶⁸ See Browe, 114. Cf. Turner, who says, “The origins of this instruction [of a catechetical age of fourteen] seem to come from the Code of Canon Law. Not the current one, but the code of 1917. There, canon 744 suggests that the Baptism ‘of adults’ may be referred to the bishop. The current code expands on this expression: ‘The baptism of adults, at least those who have completed fourteen years of age is to be referred to the

When children have arrived at an understanding of the catechism that they can examine themselves according to the command of the holy apostle, 1 Cor 11:28, then they should no longer be restrained from partaking of the Holy Supper. Not knowledge attained at school but an understanding of the catechism shall be decisive. This does not mean that a high degree of knowledge of the catechism is essential, but rather the minimum essentials necessary for self-examination. Admission to the examination should not be determined by a specified age . . . Not age but the required ability of 1 Cor 11:28 to examine oneself is to be decisive in every case.⁶⁹

Walther held to age twelve, at the earliest, arguing on the basis of Luke 2:41–42, when Jesus went to Jerusalem at the age of twelve.⁷⁰

III. Conclusion—Confirmation, Catechesis, and Communion

As is evident, there are good questions we may ask concerning healthy confirmation practices. Although Paul Turner subtitled his recent book on confirmation, *The Baby in Solomon's Court*, we are free to proceed without cutting the baby in half.⁷¹ Our way forward through the impasse of confirmation may be to consider some such practices that see the reception of Holy Communion to be separate from the rite of confirmation, thus letting the sacrament be understood not strictly on the basis of intellectual achievement and maturity, while at the same time retaining a rite of catechetical formation—though not a sacramental one. Another consideration might be to unite confirmation and Communion but to do so on the basis of catechesis, not strictly age. Considering these approaches allows us to recognize that catechesis is from cradle to grave (regardless of how the rite

bishop.' Where does the notion come from that adults are those who have reached 14 years of age? It comes from early Roman law, which set adulthood at puberty." Turner, *Confirmation: The Baby in Solomon's Court*, 16.

⁶⁹ Wilhelm Löhe, *Agende für christliche Gemeinden des lutherischen Bekenntnisses* (Nordlingen: C.H.Beck'schen Buchhandlung, 1844). Löhe writes: "I generally prefer to admit the children to the sacrament—the fountain of grace—as soon as possible . . . I have, in my twenty-eight years in the office, often been in the situation of wishing that not the age, but the readiness of the person would be the decisive factor." Wilhelm Löhe, "Neuendettelsau Letters, 1858," in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Klaus Ganzert, vol. 3.1 (Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 2008), 226–228. Translated by Jacob Corzine and published on the *Logia* website, October 13, 2014: <http://www.logia.org/logia-online/postid>.

⁷⁰ Walther, *Pastorale*, 188.

⁷¹ Turner, *Confirmation: The Baby in Solomon's Court*.

of confirmation is celebrated). Confirmation then shines best as it extols both catechesis and the Supper.

As Luther taught, we need a full-blown catechesis that accompanies the Christian before, during, and after receiving the blessed sacrament.⁷² Some of the ancients spoke of a mystagogical catechesis: teaching and training in what was received and why. Though Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia implemented this mystagogy immediately prior to the baptismal ceremony—probably beginning on Holy Thursday—others, like Cyril of Jerusalem and Ambrose taught these classes *after* the rite, during the octave of Easter. The idea was that the mysteries are best experienced and later explained.⁷³ The comprehensive approach to catechesis sees no need to set one against another—the faith ought to be created and handed on from the very beginning until the very end. In this way Paul’s admonition might ring true: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col 3:16).

Though confirmation’s history and development ebbed and flowed through various false doctrines and poor philosophies, it need not be discarded simply on the basis of *ad hominem* attacks. The Enlightenment’s move toward a thorough examination, or Pietism’s putting the faith in one’s own words are not wrong *per se*. What we need is a critical examination of what we do and why, and then the ability to use what is good for purposes that best serve the church in the promotion of the gospel. A comprehensive catechesis will best accomplish this.

⁷² Such was argued recently in a presentation by D. Richard Stuckwisch, who outlined a comprehensive view of catechesis as the pastoral basis of joining the Christian to the altar. D. Richard Stuckwisch, “The Pastoral Care of Catechumens and Communicants,” presentation, St. Michael’s Conference—Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, Detroit, MI (September 2014), <http://www.ziondetroit.org/assets/conferences/2014/docs/stuckwischpresentation.pdf>.

⁷³ William Harless notes: “Fourth-century mystagogical catecheses typically wove together three common elements: (1) gestures and words drawn from the liturgies of the vigil, (2) scriptural themes and images, (3) analogies drawn from nature or the local culture.” William Harless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville: MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 71. I have no romantic vision of repristinating this early practice. Even Harless notes some of its downfalls: “The third-century catechumenate, for all its sectarian rigor, did not guarantee high standards or stalwart congregations. During the persecution of Decius (250–251), thousands of Christians lapsed, fomenting a massive pastoral crisis not only in North Africa, but across the empire” (51). And how many times did Origen chastise the Christians for their chit-chatting during the Divine Service, or Chrysostom having to yell in order to be heard over the rabble! Cf. Origen, “*In Genesim Homiliae*,” 10.1-2, in *Fathers of the Church Series*, 127 vols., trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press), 71:157.

Above all, we must remember that we are free—not free to do whatever we want but free to teach our members in a way that best serves them with the gospel. Confirmation is, in this sense, an *adiaphoron*.⁷⁴ It is neither commanded nor forbidden in the Scriptures—in fact, as we have seen, it is not even mentioned. As Walther said in his *Pastoral Theology*, “Confirmation is an *adiaphoron*, not a divine institution, much less a sacrament; but it is a churchly institution which, if correctly used, can be accompanied by great blessing.”⁷⁵ Furthermore, nowhere will you find it prescribed by the Lutheran Confessions. And yet, confirmation has a history, checkered, though it may be; it is tradition. Our unity as a church should not rest simply in the outward practice of a rite neither commanded nor forbidden in the Scriptures (or the Confessions); rather, it should rest on a common and thorough catechesis.

When the joint-synod study on confirmation was released in the late 1960s with the intention that it be reviewed and discussed by the respective church bodies, the LCMS had more pressing issues on the docket. We were in the midst of a civil war, of sorts. And as important an issue as this study was, we were not in a position to address it as it needed. Perhaps we are at that point now, nearly a half century later. Can serious theological and practical dialogue go forth? Can an analysis of our confirmation practice be handled properly? If so, we may also find a more fruitful way forward through the recent issues concerning the proper age of communion.⁷⁶ Of course, such a communion based in thorough catechesis would permit self-examination and signs of reflective faith.

A fruitful conversation must first begin within the congregation and among the local pastors. The Koinonia Project provides a notable model.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ This was Repp’s conclusion: “Because Lutheran confirmation is and will remain an unsolved question, church bodies and larger districts within a synod should be encouraged to experiment in order to find better solutions to meet the varying needs of the Lutheran Church today. Once the clergy and the laity, particularly in the United States and Canada, become more aware that confirmation is truly an *adiaphoron* with an involved history influenced by many trends and tendencies, a more relaxed attitude toward wholesome experimenting will be taken.” Repp, *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church*, 229.

⁷⁵ Walther, *Pastorale*, 185.

⁷⁶ Cf. The Commission on Theology and Church Relations, “Knowing What We Seek and Why We Come: Questions and Answers concerning the Communing of Infants and Young Children,” 1-10.

⁷⁷ Consider the concept paper authored by Herbert Mueller, “The ‘Koinonia’ Project” (June 2013). It can be located on the web: <http://www.lcms.org/page.aspx?pid=1041>.

In love, may we ask one another: “Why do you do what you do?” Admittedly, most of us do what we do because that is what has been done before. Because there is so much to do, we rarely have the time even to ask that question, let alone reflect upon it. The resources are available, so let us figure out what is on the other side of the wall.

We need not tear down the wall of confirmation; rather, we can strengthen and extol it through faithful catechesis, before, during, and after the sacramental rites of Baptism and the Holy Supper. As John Pless describes,

Catechesis is the process of transmitting the word of God so that the mind and life of the one who receives it grows up in every way into Jesus Christ, living in faith toward him and in love toward the neighbor. While catechesis does lead from the font to the altar, culminating in the extolling of the Lord’s gifts and the confession of his name in that churchly rite called confirmation, *catechesis itself is from the womb to the tomb.*⁷⁸

Such is the goal of Luther’s *Small Catechism*, the depths of which are, by his own admission, unfathomable.

But why reconsider this? Why go through the effort? It is clear that there is no formula that leads to the growth of the church—either in strength or in numbers—though that is often what we seek. The reason to reconsider is the obvious problem we face: the confirmed are leaving and no longer coming back. Even the Roman Catholic Church in the 1970s recognized the problem. Turner shows that the move towards adolescent confirmation was a practical move: “Early results demonstrated to many catechists that confirmed teens persevered in their Church membership.”⁷⁹ As we do that, we will everyday learn the gifts of being a sacramental church and what it means to derive our very life from the means by which our Lord bestows life. Then, we will rightly emphasize the completeness of Baptism and simultaneously the rich gift of the Supper, never setting one against another.

⁷⁸ Pless, “Catechesis for Life in the Royal Priesthood,” 3; emphasis added.

⁷⁹ Turner, *Confirmation: The Baby in Solomon’s Court*, 98.