

Confirmation and First Communion

[Leader's Guide for congregational study & Report to the presidents of the LCUSA synods]

by Lyle Lindloff

Reading of "A Word of Introduction" by the Editorial Committee. . .

A New Definition of Confirmation...

"Confirmation is a pastoral and educational ministry of the church that is designed to help baptized children identify with the life and mission of the adult Christian community and that is celebrated in a public rite."

We briefly consider the 10 chapters of the study book, *Confirmation and First Communion*:

Chapter 1: Spotlight on Confirmation

The question is asked, What is confirmation? Among Lutherans there might well be ten answers for every nine people. You are asked to recall your own confirmation and your reaction to it. What do you want confirmation to be for your children? We agree that confirmation is taken for granted. We are conditioned to it without thinking about it. In most Lutheran parishes parents and pastors will do most anything in order that their children have "Confirmation Instruction." We assume that confirmation is basically a way of preparing for first Communion. We assume that confirmation provides a fitting climax to an intense study period based on Luther's Small Catechism. We assume that confirmation is, for all practical purposes, a form of becoming a full member of the church. Underlying these assumptions is the confidence that the whole catechetical confirmation complex punches out dedicated Christian members. "A number of major revisions are necessary to meet present day needs." What do you think? Are you confused?

This chapter intends to confuse. It is intended to arouse curiosity for further questions and study.

Chapter 2: Climate for Change

Sometimes confirmation practices carried on for generations are obscure. There may have been a good reason at one time for their use. Take the matter of age of confirmation. The age level now averages grade level 8.4 Why the particular age level? In many cases it is because of the local school system. In some cases it may be the pastors choice, economic conditions etc. Now is the time for experiment. The three major Lutheran Churches in North America with their broadened threeyear catechetical programs have converged on the developing needs of growing children. The educational emphasis "focuses on youth where they collide with their environments." "One obvious reason for changing ideas about confirmation is that Lutherans in North America are gradually growing closer in their working relationships. Actually, we have been divided more on the basis of Old World traditions than on theology." Our population today is very mobile. We are living in an age that gives the right Climate for Change.

Chapter 3: A Checkered History

This chapter goes back to the early history of the Christian Church. I will not attempt to give a complete history dating to the age of the Apostles. This is a study in itself.

The NT nowhere speaks of confirmation. On the day of Pentecost Peter said, "Repent and be baptized..." This is what was to be done to become a member of the Church and still is. "And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." As the Church grew in the 2nd and 3rd centuries some new methods of instruction etc. were began. With more infant baptisms there arose a need for instruction. In the western Church people were daily instructed for a period of six weeks. Finally, after a long list of things were done they were baptized and allowed to receive the Lord's Supper on Easter Sunday. In the Roman Church we know that confirmation became a Sacrament so declared by the Council of Florence in 1439. Confirmation came to be regarded as a complement to Baptism, an added gift of the Spirit, and then as necessary to salvation. Thomas Aquinas led many to believe that confirmation was more important than Baptism.

Chapter 4: Luther and Lutheranism

Luther rejected the Roman concept of confirmation. Yet he was not opposed to the idea as some were. Luther did not contribute directly to the development of a substitute. Because of his high regard for Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, he emphasized the element of instruction in the use of the Sacraments. This instruction led to a Lutheran type of confirmation. The development follows no pattern. We may speak of six major emphases in the development of Lutheran Confirmation. See the chart:

Catechetical stemmed from Luther's program of instruction. There was no formal rite.

Hierarchical stemmed from Martin Bucer 1538—In many respects he may be called the father of *Lutheran confirmation*. He introduced the vow. The Sacramental tendency again appeared (and we must be careful of this).

The tradition emphasis was an attempt to retain the timehonored elements of the church's practice without the sacramental overtones. Martin Chemnitz was a leader in this emphasis. It had nothing to do with admission to Communion. Neither did the Catechetical or Hierarchical emphasis.

The Pietistic emphasis of the 17th century placed emphasis on a public ceremony where children could express their faith. The Pietist felt that Baptism was not completed until the child himself accepted his role as a child of God. Confirmation was regarded as a personalized conversion experience and emphasized the idea of confirmation and Holy Communion as end products of education. Under this influence Baptism became less important.

The Rationalistic emphasis affected confirmation in many ways. The confirmand was expected to memorize and repeat arguments. Examinations became very academic. Confirmation became a graduation ceremony. Here we find white robes *and* flowers. Children would go to their parents pew and confess their sins. Confirmation grew into a family festival. Gifts were given. The children were allowed to dress as adults. Many pastors of this age said that confirmation was superior to Baptism. Some wanted to do away with infant Baptism. Great importance was attached to where you were confirmed is where you belonged always. At confirmation you were swearing support of Old St. John's-by-the-River. And you had better not leave that congregation.

The last column asks you to mark the emphasis in your congregation.

Chapter 5: Word and Sacraments

Central to all our theology is the doctrine of the Word of God. Here we find much conflict with our LCUSA separated brethren. We agree that confirmation is a way of witnessing the truth of the Word of God. Confirmation must never be considered a means of grace. It reminds us that by Baptism we were made members of Christ's Church. It is our Baptism we must lean on and not our confirmation. Our real question lies with the second Sacrament, Holy Communion. At what age is a person capable of receiving the benefits of Holy Communion? When are you able to examine yourself? There is a growing movement in the Lutheran Church today to admit children to Holy Communion at an earlier age. The basic question is this: "Why should children who are genuinely members of Christ's Church by Baptism be prevented from sharing in Christ's heavenly meal? If the church is serious in its desire to educate its people, then, it will guide its children to understand and participate in the sacrament according to their capacities."

Chapter 6: The Church and Its Mission

This chapter is purely ecumenical. "Ecumenical power comes from common acceptance of our loyalty to Christ and a healthy respect for differences of opinion." This spirit is carried over to confirmation and first Communion. "What do you think confirmation should be? Is it to continue as it is, suggesting a higher level of church membership than Baptism? Is it the only way children can meet the congregation's requirements for admission to the Lords Supper?"

Suggested Changes

1. Admission to Holy Communion should come prior to confirmation. The congregation has the

obligation to prepare young Christians to exercise this right. The demands upon youth today make this suggestion necessary.

2. Later confirmation. This would give more opportunity for education.

Chapter 7: Admission to First Communion

The more the church can help the child feel his “belongingness” to the people of God, the more the church can assist him in accepting and using the spiritual gifts his congregational life can offer. One of these gifts comes through participation in Holy Communion.

“The commission’s final decision was an extensive study of childhood. They explored psychological growth processes to determine the strategic time when the experience of first Communion could become a significant event in his life. “From this study the conclusion was reached that the latter part of the fifth grade is the time. There follows a lengthy profile of a fifth grader. It is recommended that these children have sponsors for their first Communion as in Baptism. A striking note: “The notion of communing membership will have to be reconsidered. Perhaps the church will be able to move away from its use of Holy Communion as a mechanical means of determining congregational loyalty or of measuring faithfulness to Christ.” “This policy change offers the church some fresh and creative ventures in its ministry to its baptized children.” A sample rite is suggested for use.

Chapter 8: Building a Functional Definition

The new definition is on page one. The commission states what confirmation is *not*: It is not a sacrament—Does not in any sense complete Baptism—Is not a ratification of the vows or promises made by sponsors at Baptism—Does not add any special presence or form of God’s gifts—Does not confer special privileges—Is not a prerequisite to Holy Communion—Is not essential to Christian life. This chapter constantly refers to the Christian community and that the child must be able to identify himself with this community.

Chapter 9: An Age for Confirmation

Again on the basis of psychological study the commission suggests the Tenth-Grade as an ideal age for confirmation. There follows a lengthy profile of tenthgraders. The suggested elements in the new rite of confirmation are printed for you on one of the last pages. “For the churches the tenth grade should be a time of private and small group conferences... youth could examine their faith, raise their doubts and confusions, explore workable ways of reconciling their dreams with reality... a time of assisting youth to take their places in the adult Christian community.”

Chapter 10: Evaluations and Decisions

Each congregation will have to decide on the basis of the information provided. This decision will also include some revision in other areas. The Rite of Infant Baptism should include greater participation of the congregation. It is interesting to note the reply the commission gives to those who oppose infant baptism. They state: “Family life and citizenship in his country are conferred upon the child without his sayso. Why should a baby be excluded from the greatest gifts adults can give him, membership in the family of God, citizenship in God’s kingdom?”

The commission suggests no confirmation for adults, only Baptism and then simply by profession of their faith.

All of this means a radical change in the church’s educational program. “Experts say any curriculum is obsolete in about seven years.” “New educational media, classroom methods, insights into the ways people learn, challenge the church to put the message of Gods love in Jesus Christ into new wineskins.” The goal is a unified practice among LCUSA members. And the study ends with the question: What do you think?

That is my question to you.

My personal feeling as I studied this report can be summed up in the following quotation taken from the Study Book:

“At a recent conference on catechetical instruction, a Canadian pastor put his finger on the critical issue: We have been using The Small Catechism, like some kind of vaccination. Doctors use vaccination to protect people against disease. They inject a small amount of disease germs into the persons bloodstream so that his body can build up resistance; then he doesn't get the real thing. That's what we have been doing with The Small Catechism, cramming it into the kids when they are young. Maybe we are helping them to build up a resistance to Christianity so that they won't get the real thing either.”

While it would be well for us to evaluate, to improve our instruction classes etc. and even consider our current practice of confirmation and first Communion, God forbid that it t be done in the spirit of this LCUSA commission. I refer to the LCUSA commission, which in fact it is. The report was prepared by the Boards of Education op the ALC, LCA, and LCMS. If you have had any experience with children who have been instructed according to the new threeyear course of study, you understand what I mean by the spirit of this report.

WORSHIP SUPPLEMENT

(Order of Service)

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD

Introit (Entrance Song) (This may be preceded by a hymn of invocation; The Introit may be chanted or a metrical psalm by the congregation may be sung.)

Kyrie: Three possibilities:

- 1) A short Litany
- 2) Ninefold Kyrie
- 3) Threefold Kyrie

Gloria in E Excelsis (may b e sung antiphonally)

The Salutation and the Collect

The Lesson (O. T.)

The Gradual (actually divided in that at this point the portion up to the Alleluia is spoken or sung; during Lent: to the Tract; from 1st Sunday after Easter through Pentecost the Paschal Verse is to be sung in place of the Gradual.)

The Epistle (This is followed by the Alleluia with its verse or the Tract. It is considered introductory to the Gospel.)

The Gospel (introduced and closed in the usual manner)

Hymn (may be sung)

The Sermon (closed with the Votum)

The Creed (Nicene)

The Hymn of the Week

THE SERVICE OF THE SACRAMENT

The Offering and the Offertory

The Intercessions

The Preface (and the Proper Preface)

Sanctus

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

The Lord's Prayer

The Pax

Agnus Dei (The distribution begins with the Agnus Dei.)

The Distribution

The Thanksgiving

The Collect

The Salutation and Benedicamus

The Benediction