

Andrzej Megger

Confirmation - is it still the sacrament of Christian initiation?

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KS. ANDRZEJ MEGGER

Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski Jana Pawła II

CONFIRMATION – IS IT STILL THE SACRAMENT OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION?

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1. INTRODUCTION

Tertullian, the teacher of faith of North African origin from the second century, says that “Christians are made, not born”¹. These words indicate that for everybody who has believed in Christ as the Son of God and the only Saviour of man a long process of learning the already known Gospel and formation of “the new self” (Eph 4:24) has just began. The aim of this process is to attain complete similarity to Christ (cf. Gal 4:19). This task, however, exceeds human abilities and therefore in the Church God gives us means which are indispensable for salvation, namely sacraments. The first three of them are known as the sacraments of initiation and constitute the foundation of the entire Christian life. “[T]he 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” (CCC 1212).

The aim of this study is not the entire process of initiation (in a broader sense) but the concrete place and role of the sacrament of confirmation in it. The formulation of the title provocatively questions the teaching of the Magisterium, which seems clear in this respect. It also indicates some difficult aspects concerning this sacrament. Suppose that confirmation is not the sacrament of Christian initiation. What is it then? What is the essence of this sacrament? Relying on the conversations

¹ <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/t/tertullian.html> [dostęp: 20.12.2016].

with both pastors and young people it may be assumed that it is not clear what confirmation is. Therefore there exist numerous solutions in the pastoral practice which are principally limited to more or less attractive forms of preparation for the sacrament. The deepening of the theology of the sacrament of confirmation appears to be a necessary prerequisite to look for concrete pastoral solutions.

At the beginning it is important to emphasize that the twentieth century witnessed a very intensive search for the identity of this sacrament. Numerous terms, such as “the sacrament of Christian initiation,” indicate it. It is frequently interpreted in such a manner so that the sacrament should confirm maturity which has been achieved confusing the spiritual maturity with the psychological maturity. This form of understanding is rejected by the Catechism of the Catholic Church (see CCC 1308). There are, however, theologians who view confirmation from such a perspective². All those views present only a fragment of the reality of the sacrament of confirmation, however, all of them are exposed to the danger of one-sidedness.

It cannot be ignored that those and other doubts associated with confirmation as the sacrament of initiation are justified and result, among others, from the division of the unity of these sacraments on the ritual level. Confirmation received by 16-year-old candidates who have already been baptized and received the Eucharist implies for both the faithful and pastors the separation of confirmation from baptism and the Eucharist. In this case, the words of the Catechism that “the holy Eucharist completes (*concludit*) Christian initiation” (CCC 1322) are not only unclear but also contradict liturgical practice. In this context, confirmation is indeed the crowning of the entire initiation, the sacrament of maturity. It has to be emphasized that despite this situation the unity of the sacraments of Christian initiation does exist on the historical and theological level and the liturgy of confirmation itself indicates it.

In such a situation the point of departure is the rereading of the conciliary documents, especially the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, which postulates the renewal of signs, gestures, texts and rites “so that they express more clearly the holy things which they signify; the Christian people, so far as possible, should be enabled to understand them with ease and to take part in them fully, actively, and as befits a community” (SC 21)³. In this key, the typical liturgical book *Ordo confirmationis* (1971, Polish edition in 1975) was prepared and published.

Relying on this text the term “Christian initiation” will be first defined and discussed and subsequently confirmation as the sacrament of initiation in its historical,

² See M. Zachara, *Bierzmowanie: drugi sakrament wtajemniczenia chrześcijańskiego*, in: *Życ w Chrystusie według Ducha. Teologia sakramentów wtajemniczenia chrześcijańskiego*, ed. by K. Porosło, Tyniec 2014, 124–125. The author refers to other current descriptions of confirmation, such as the sacrament of the Church communion (Jean-Paul Bouhot) or the sacrament referring to the worship and prayer (Luis Ligier). Adrien Nocent maintains that it is confirmation not baptism that imparts the participation in the common priesthood of the faithful. Aidan Kavanagh relying on his own research states that “confirmation was born not as the sacrament of conferring the Holy Spirit which, according to him, happens during baptism but as a baptismal *missa*, the rite of dismissal.” Pietro Dacquino argues that “confirmation is a kind of sacramental delegation to apostolate.”

³ *Konstytucja o liturgii świętej „Sacrosanctum Concilium”*, in: Sobór Watykański II, *Konstytucje – Dekrety – Deklaracje. Tekst polski. Nowe tłumaczenie*, Poznań 2002, 48–78 (further: SC).

theological and liturgical aspect will be presented. The final part of the article will be devoted to the assessment of the current pastoral situation in this respect and to the presentation of perspectives for development, the theme undertaken by recent popes.

2. INITIATION

The term “initiation,” from Latin *initiatio*, from *ineo* to enter, to introduce, is polysemous and its understanding is determined by a broad context of applications. It is used in various fields of the humanities, such as ethnology, history, religion and sociology, referring it to social, cultural and religious life. In primitive religions, initiation denotes “a set of rites and oral teachings whose aim is the principal transformation of the situation of the initiate on the religious and social level”⁴. Such a process encompasses several stages: exclusion, trial and return after which the candidate is a completely new person. The transformation occurs on an existential level. There might be many positive features of such an initiation, for example passing on social values, strengthening bonds, building solidarity and contributing to the integration within a group. In the religious context, initiation generally denotes revealing the doctrine and inclusion in the religious community. Thanks to it, man may not only participate in (celebrate) worship but also start a new moral life, and broadly understood salvation. In our Christian initiation there are two elements which are important, namely entering the community and the world of spiritual values in the perspective of a new life and mission. It is worth mentioning that each model of religious initiation includes a certain kind of dying which is necessary to start a new life.

In this context, Christian initiation is similar, however, its essence constitutes a radical *novum* as it is the beginning of human participation in the life of a personal God. The notion of “initiation” does not appear in Sacred Scripture but indirectly it is possible to indicate the passages which are associated with initiation in a religious sense. Apostles introduced new members to the Church preaching the Good New first, which led to faith, and later baptized them (cf. Act 2:38–42). In this context initiation is the beginning of a new life through faith in the community of the Church. Although first Christians were familiar with the term “initiation” it was not used because it was associated with pagan practices. The first authors that started applying it were apologists who debated with pagans in defence of Christian rites against accusations of imitating mystery religions⁵. The term “initiation” did not appear either in the teaching of the Magisterium or on the level of celebrations and theology from the Middle Ages to Vatican II.

The first mention of initiation in conciliary documents is associated with the liturgical renewal of the sacrament of confirmation in order to show “the intimate

⁴ See Cz. Krakowiak, *Bierzmowanie. Sakrament inicjacji chrześcijańskiej*, Lublin 2005, p. 17. See also: S. Janeczek, *Inicjacja*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 7, ed. by S. Wielgus, Lublin 1997, col. 211–212.

⁵ See Cz. Krakowiak, *Bierzmowanie. Sakrament inicjacji...*, *op.cit.*, 23; Krakowiak, *Katechumenat chrzcielny dorosłych w Kościele posoborowym*, Lublin 2003, 201.

connection which this sacrament has with the whole of Christian initiation” (SC 71). In *Lumen Gentium* three sacraments are enumerated (11) but it is the Decree *Ad Gentes* on the Mission Activity of the Church that calls them the sacrament of Christian initiation (14).

Moreover, initiation is very precisely defined in liturgical books, especially in “Rite of Baptism for Children”⁶ and “Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults”⁷. According to them, Christian initiation occurs gradually in the Church community through liturgical rites typical of these three forms of sacramental participation in the Paschal mystery of Christ present in the Church liturgy. Baptism introduces into the mystery of death and resurrection of Christ, in confirmation the faithful receive “the Spirit of sonship” so that in the Eucharist they will be able to celebrate with the whole Church the mystery of death and resurrection of the Lord⁸. Individual sacraments create an internal unity and each of them has its own place in the process of Christian initiation. The first two, which are unrepeatable, incorporate the faithful into the death and resurrection of Christ and grant participation in the gift of the descent of the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist, the last sacrament of initiation, is repeatable, seals the inclusion in the Body of Christ and as the spiritual food strengthens the entire Christian life⁹. The unity mentioned above has its source in the unity of the Paschal mystery and in the close relation between “the mission of the Son and the descent of the Holy Spirit and the unity of the sacraments in which these two Holy Persons together with the Father descend on the baptized”¹⁰.

Strictly speaking, the initiation is the first sacramental sharing in Christ’s dying and rising¹¹. In a broader context, relying on the whole body of the Magisterium of the Church initiation is a sacramental experience of faith through which the full internal transformation of man takes place. Through the participation in the Paschal mystery of Christ, man receives a new life and is included into the Church community until the final day of meeting with the Resurrected.

3. THE HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF CONFIRMATION AS THE SACRAMENT OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION

The ritual origin of confirmation is intrinsically linked with baptism. Until the sixth century the sacraments of Christian initiation were received mostly by adults. It was during the solemn liturgy of the Paschal Vigil that people were baptized, received confirmation and the Eucharist during one rite. After the sixth century

⁶ *Obrzędy chrztu dzieci dostosowane do zwyczajów diecezji polskich*, Katowice 2013 (further: OChD).

⁷ *Obrzędy chrześcijańskiego wtajemniczenia dorosłych*, Katowice 2007 (further: OChWD).

⁸ See *Christian Initiation*, no. 1–2.

⁹ See Cz. Krakowiak, *Sakrament bierzmowania w reformie liturgii II Soboru Watykańskiego*, Lublin 2012, 354–355.

¹⁰ OChWD, 34

¹¹ See OChWD, 8.

infants were more commonly baptized but the rite was the same as in the case of adults¹². Children were baptized by a bishop (presbyter) and deacons. Directly after a baptismal cleansing the presbyter anointed children's heads with chrism using the appropriate prayer. Next, the children were brought to a bishop who gave them baptismal garment and prayed for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, namely administered confirmation and anointed the forehead of each baptized reciting the trinitarian formula. Confirmation was understood as strengthening and was not ignored. In documents there are frequent admonitions not to postpone confirmation which was associated with the absence of bishop during the liturgy of sacraments and as the result *consignatio* was administered later¹³. Later, the Eucharist was celebrated during which baptized children received the Holy Communion.

Until the thirteen century the characteristic feature of the Western Church concerning the practice of administering the sacraments of initiation was the fact that in the Latin Rite confirmation was reserved for a bishop. These sacraments were administered together during one celebration. Only the absence of the bishop led to the postponement of confirmation for later. It was related with the fact that the Latin Rite spread further (especially to the north of the Alps) and this resulted in bigger distances between bishoprics than in Italy. In this way, the separation of confirmation from baptism and the Eucharist took place. It was not an intentional action but a forced necessity which resulted from the Latin discipline concerning the minister of confirmation¹⁴.

The Council of Trent ordered the medieval chaos concerning confirmation, postponing it to the age of discretion. This decision formally sealed the separation of confirmation from other sacraments. The liturgical books and documents of the Council of Trent do not mention that baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist are the sacraments of initiation. This state of affairs lasted until the fifties of the twentieth century. The focus of researchers, theologians and historians was on the evolution of given rites of baptism, confirmation or the Eucharist rather than on the initiatory significance of them. It was only later that the representatives of the liturgical movement: P. Guéranger (1805–1875), L. Duchesne (1843–1922), and especially O. Casel (1886–1948) discovered again that since the beginnings of Christianity initiation had encompassed the celebration of the first three sacraments introducing man into the mystery of salvation¹⁵. “One of the principal reasons for this imbalance was that baptism and confirmation had, in the practice of most churches, generally been relegated to the status of ‘pastoral offices’ – rites performed more or less in private for individuals as they were not perceived as the part of the main current of liturgical life of the Church”¹⁶.

¹² See Cz. Krakowiak, *Katechumenat chrzcielny...*, *op.cit.*, 95.

¹³ See *Ibidem*, 119.

¹⁴ It must be emphasized that despite such a situation medieval rituals as well as local synods obliged parents, even under the threat of Church punishment, to make every effort so that their newly baptized children receive confirmation. See M. Zachara, *Bierzmowanie...*, *op.cit.*, 120.

¹⁵ See Cz. Krakowiak, *Katechumenat chrzcielny...*, *op.cit.*, 202–203.

¹⁶ Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship. Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, OUP 2002. (Polish translation: *W poszukiwaniu początków kultu chrześci-*

The Second Vatican Council inspired by the spirit of liturgical renewal undertook the question of initiation in the context of confirmation, indicating the necessity of correcting the rites of this sacrament. The Council instructed to restore the catechumenate for adults, comprising several distinct steps (cf. SC 64). Adults always receive baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist in one rite, which clearly demonstrates the unity of Christian initiation.

4. THE THEOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF CONFIRMATION AS THE SACRAMENT OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION

The unity of the sacraments of Christian initiation, especially confirmation is clearly visible in the theological perspective. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* presents it in a broad context. It results from the fact that all sacraments have the common aim, namely to sanctify men, to build up the Mystical Body of Christ and to give worship of God. To fulfil this task effectively baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist not only require faith but “by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it” (SC 59). Similarly, they nourish the entire Christian life. The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World enumerates sacraments in the traditional order and emphasizes the necessity of faith to which they should lead and which they should strengthen (cf. CC 11;14). Baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist grant participation in the salvific mission of the Church and as the unity are the source of apostolate (cf. CC 33). Documents of the Polish Second Plenary Synod referring to the Catechism repeat the teaching on the unity of the sacraments of initiation. Thanks to these sacraments, Christians, by the power of the Holy Spirit, are equipped to offer their entire life in sacrifice as the worship of God “in spirit and truth.” They are the foundation of “Christian novelty,” namely bringing the faithful into the life of the Holy Trinity¹⁷. They build the Church, the Body of Christ and together lead to Christian maturity.

Two important aspects of confirmation as the stage of Christian initiation are Christological and ecclesial perspective¹⁸. All the sacraments are the sacraments of Christ and the very act of celebrating them disposes the faithful to unite with Him and contribute to the building of the Church (cf. SC 59; CCC 114–116). Through baptism and confirmation as Paschal sacraments man partakes in the death and resurrection of Christ. Through baptism man is reborn and creates a new bond with Christ (cf. CCC 1212). This close bond is formed through participation in the Paschal mys-

jańskiego. *Źródła i metody badań wczesnej liturgii*. Kraków 2016, 259) To underline the significance of the sacrament in Catholicism it is necessary to add that in the Anglican Church confirmation is a sacrament in a secondary sense and has only a catechetical role. It affirms the baptismal covenant. It is similar in Protestant communities where confirmation is the first independent and conscious proclamation of faith and its affirmation. See S. Nowosad, *Moralne konsekwencje wiary. Szkice anglikańskie*, Lublin 2016, 90–92.

¹⁷ *II Polski Synod Plenarny (1991–1999)*, Poznań 2001, 144, no. 5. See E. Mateja, *Sakramenty inicjacji w przygotowaniu do II Polskiego Synodu Plenarnego*, in: *Sakramenty inicjacji w liturgii i w praktyce duszpasterskiej*, ed. by R. Pierskała, H. Sobeczko, Opole 1996, 49–52.

¹⁸ The pneumatological aspect has been discussed in a separate article.

tery of the Saviour (cf. CCC 1239). St Paul says that “all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death” (Rom 6:3) and “were reconciled to him through the death of his Son” (Rom 5:10). In further consequence, being united with Christ in his death results in the fact that “we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Rom 6:5). This is a fundamental and ontological link which makes the new lifestyle of Christians dependent on participation in the death and resurrection of Christ¹⁹. This is the actualization of the Paschal mystery of Christ where man is born from death to life. The ritual of uniting with Christ is manifested by, for example, the sign of cross, immersion in water and anointing with chrism. The faithful receive the indelible spiritual mark (character) of their belonging to Christ and His Body (cf. CCC 1272).

Conformity with Christ initiated during baptism is perfected through confirmation. Pope Paul VI speaks about this process and the rite itself in the Apostolic Constitution on the Sacrament of Confirmation. *Ordo confirmationis* emphasizes that in the sacrament of confirmation the faithful through the gift of the Holy Spirit are conformed (*conformantur*) to Christ, strengthened to give testimony and to build the Church in faith and love. It is expressed through calls to the prayer before the imposition of hands, the prayer over the gifts which includes the request for participation in the Sacrifice of Christ through which He won the Holy Spirit. It contributed to a more perfect conformity with the Son of God and the continuing giving witness about him²⁰. The working of the Holy Spirit through the sacrament of confirmation aims at such a conformity with Christ so that with his help Christians could imitate Christ in his absolute obedience to the will of God to the extent of being willing to give the sacrifice of their lives. This conformity should be expressed in active love and service for those in need.

Full unity with Christ happens during the Eucharist which “is the efficacious sign and sublime cause of that communion in the divine life” (CCC 1325). The Catechism calls it even “Holy Communion, because by this sacrament we unite ourselves to Christ, who makes us sharers in his Body and Blood to form a single body” (CCC 1331). Christ himself expressed it in the words: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them” (J 6:56). Therefore the Eucharistic banquet is the foundation of life in Christ: “As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me” (J 6:57) (cf. CCC 1391).

As it has been said, the aim of all sacraments, apart from worshipping God, is sanctification of man and building the Mystical Body of Christ (cf. SC 59). The sacrament of baptism is not an individual event which leads to the ontological transformation in the personal life of an individual. Baptism has a communal and ecclesial dimension. It is a sign of grace, it does not only signify it but also expresses it in a visible manner and grants it. It makes us all members of one body of Christ (cf. Eph 4:25) and incorporates us into the Church (cf. CCC 1267). There is no other way to become the member of the Church but through baptism. A concrete and

¹⁹ See Cz. Krakowiak, *Z mistagogii celebracji chrztu dzieci w świetle Katechizmu Kościoła Katolickiego*, Roczniki Teologiczne 45 (1998), fasc. 8, 173.

²⁰ *Obrzędy bierzmowania dostosowane do zwyczajów diecezji polskich*, Katowice 2007, no. 58.

visible expression of the ecclesial dimension of baptism is its administering in the parish, especially on Sunday. It is a true sign of incorporation into the People of God because it is celebrated in the faith of the Church which is embodied and represented by the parish community present during the liturgy²¹.

Ecclesial and Christological bond of the confirmed is expressed through the sacramental character of it (cf. CCC 1304). The spiritual mark is a sign of conformity and belonging of the faithful to Christ and His Church. A deeper incorporation in His Body obliges the faithful to give witness in the world about the Paschal mystery of Christ and building the Church. It happens by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Vivifier (cf. Rom 8:11) who empowers the faithful to act for the good of the Church. Openness to the gift of the Holy Spirit and submission to his guidance serves to build the new People of God²².

The Bishop is the original minister of Confirmation in the Latin Church, the fact which expresses the apostolic unity of the confirmed with the Church (cf. CCC 1312)²³. In this context, the affirming of the full Church communion is the sign of peace given by him. When it comes to the time of celebrating confirmation it is emphasized that “care will be taken that a festive and solemn quality be given to the sacred action which expresses its significance for the local Church. (...) Indeed the entire People of God represented by the families and friends of those to be confirmed and members of the local community will be invited to participate in the celebration”²⁴. The formation of the confirmation candidate and the liturgy of the sacrament takes place in a given parish which is a part of the universal Church and it reveals her to some extent (cf. SC 42). Sacramental experience of incorporation into the Church through baptism and confirmation should result in a greater involvement in the life of the local Church community.

The Eucharist creates the Church and is at the centre of the process of the Church’s growth. The Last Supper clearly indicates that there is a casual link between the Eucharist and the beginnings of the Church²⁵. Celebrating the Sacrifice of the Cross and receiving the Holy Communion the faithful not only closely unite with Christ but also with each other in the Mystical Body. In this way, Christian initiation is completed. “Communion renews, strengthens, and deepens this incorporation into the Church, already achieved by Baptism. In Baptism we have been called to form but one body. The Eucharist fulfills this call: ‘The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread’”(1 Cor 10:16–17) (CCC 1396).

²¹ OChD, 10.

²² See M. Kluz, *Dynamizm sakramentów chrztu i bierzmowania w służbie budowania Kościoła jako domu*, *Liturgia Sacra* 18 (2012) 1, 71–83.

²³ In the Eastern Churches the minister of confirmation is the presbyter, regardless of the fact whether the sacrament is administered together with baptism or not. The blessing of “myron” (holy anointing oil) is, however, reserved for the bishop. See M. Pastuszko, *Biskup jako szafarz sakramentu bierzmowania (kan. 882)*, *Kieleckie Studia Teologiczne* 2 (2003), 279–302.

²⁴ OB, 4.

²⁵ See John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Vatican 2003, no. 21–25.

5. THE LITURGICAL ASPECTS OF CONFIRMATION AS THE SACRAMENT OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION

Underlining the integral character of sacraments of Christian initiation it is important to indicate that the liturgy of the sacrament of confirmation presents them as the further stage of Christian initiation. The bond with baptism is expressed in many ways. The direct reference is the renewal of baptismal promises by confirmation candidates and homily whose proposal is included in the book and which refers to baptism and its consequences four times²⁶. Next, this close relation is indicated by the call before the prayer of laying on of hands. The minister of confirmation encourages all the congregation to pray so that God's adopted children already born again to eternal life in baptism are strengthened (*confirmet*) with abundant gifts, and through anointing conformed (*conformes perficiat*) more fully to Christ²⁷.

Other elements of liturgy deepen even more the mutual relation of baptism and confirmation. Such an element is, for example, the fact that godparents may be confirmation sponsors²⁸ and the candidates may use their baptismal names. In Poland an old tradition has allowed to choose a new patron²⁹. Nowadays both the Pontifical and the Code of Canon Law do not mention anything concerning this practice. The exception is the Instruction of the Episcopate on Confirmation (1975) which relying on the old Polish tradition allows candidates to choose a new name without any broader explanation³⁰. Later documents of the Polish Second Plenary Synod clearly maintain that "confirmation candidates should keep their baptismal name. If they do not have a saint patron of baptism, they can choose the name of the saint who will be an example of mature Christian life for them"³¹. In this way, the close bond with baptism is stressed again which initiates a new life and gives the baptized participation in the divine act of creation of the ordered world. In such a world every creature has its name and man receives his name which brings in itself a new vocation of being incorporated into the People of God. The preservation of the baptismal name indicates the continuity of the initiation in divine reality of the same person, which was especially visible when sacraments were administered during one celebration. H. Sobeczko observes that a new name given during the sacrament of confirmation

²⁶ OB, 12; 22–23.

²⁷ OB, 24.

²⁸ OB, 5.

²⁹ See W. Schenk, *Liturgia sakramentów świętych*, Cz. I: *Initiatio Christiana. Chrzest. Bierzowanie. Eucharystia*. Lublin 1962, 77.

³⁰ See Konferencja Episkopatu Polski, *Instrukcja duszpasterska dotycząca sakramentu bierzowania (16 I 1975)*, in: *Dokumenty duszpastersko-liturgiczne episkopatu Polski 1966–1998*, ed. by Cz. Krakowiak, L. Adamowicz, Lublin 1999, 35, no. 11.

³¹ *II Polski Synod Plenarny (1991–1999)*, Poznań 2001, 209, no 113. M. Falk observes that only one lesson of religious education is devoted to this question. Sometimes even there are no lessons addressing the choice of confirmation names. Therefore many young people choose the confirmation name relying on emotional reasons, trends or other aspects which are not of a religious nature. See M. Falk, *Przygotowanie do sakramentu bierzowania w katechezie szkolnej w oparciu o wybrane podręczniki do religii*, in: *Dzisiejszy bierzmowany. Problemy i wyzwania*, ed. by J. Stala, Kielce 2005, 202.

belittles the position of baptism and decreases the consequences of it³². The early Christian tradition also supported appropriateness of keeping the baptismal name when the sacraments of initiation were celebrated together.

Similarly, rites of baptism of children also refer several times to confirmation and the Eucharist, which will be next stages of Christian life. In the Prayer of the Faithful there is an invocation so that the children through baptism and confirmation would be faithful followers and witnesses to the Gospel and could take part in the joys of the Sacrificial Banquet³³. In the introduction to the Lord's Prayer (in the rite of baptism outside of the Holy Mass) the minister stresses the unity of three sacraments indicating their consequences: "These children have been reborn in baptism. They are now called the children of God, for so indeed they are. In confirmation they will receive the fullness of God's Spirit. In Holy Communion they will share the banquet of Christ's sacrifice"³⁴. Moreover, "confirmation should be usually administered during the Holy Mass in order to show clearly the close relation of this sacrament with the entire Christian initiation which has its culmination in receiving the Body and Blood of Christ"³⁵.

6. THE CURRENT PASTORAL SITUATION AND PERSPECTIVES

The presented analysis of the sacrament of confirmation from the historical, theological and liturgical perspective allows us to state that confirmation is the second sacrament of Christian initiation. Although the chronological unity on the ritual level has been severed (confirmation is administered after the Eucharist), it does not question the internal integrity of the first three sacraments.

However, the problem of unity of the sacraments of Christian initiation is still current, especially in contemporary pastoral practice. The lack of integral understanding of the theological principle of unity of baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist in pastoral care results in the fragmentation of the continuity of the process of Christian initiation. It proves detrimental to the development of supernatural life of a Christian who may treat sacraments as single events independent from each other. Many misunderstanding might be observed today in the parish preparation for each sacrament. It is especially visible in confirmation formation. Many candidates and their parents believe that sacraments are for everyone who requests them forgetting the basic principle which is a living faith. Therefore requirements of pastors in preparation for confirmation are interpreted as hindering access to the sacraments³⁶.

³² See H. Sobeczko, *Z problematyki teologiczno-pastoralnej sakramentu bierzmowania*, *Studia Pastoralne* 4 (2008), 39.

³³ OChD, 47A; 47E.

³⁴ OChD, 68.

³⁵ OB., 13.

³⁶ See Cz. Krakowiak, *Formacja kandydatów do sakramentu bierzmowania*, in: *Przeżać mojemu ludowi, co mówi Bóg*, ed. by K. Klauza, Lublin 2007, 222.

The proper nomenclature is another vital question as it allows candidates to understand the sacrament in the right manner. As it has been said, confirmation cannot be regarded as the sacrament of Christian maturity as maturity is not associated only with confirmation but with the three sacraments of initiation (cf. CIC Cann. 842 §2: “The sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and the Most Holy Eucharist are interrelated in such a way that they are required for full Christian initiation.”) This statement is justified only in the sense that it is the Holy Spirit that makes it possible for a Christian to reach mature faith and love. *Actuosa participatio* in the Eucharist constitutes the source and summit of the entire sacramental life (cf. CCC 1324). The analysis of the Rites of Confirmation and the Magisterium starting from the Second Vatican Council also indicates that confirmation is not described as the sacrament of Christian maturity. This fact is confirmed by the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

Although Confirmation is sometimes called the “sacrament of Christian maturity,” we must not confuse adult faith with the adult age of natural growth, nor forget that the baptismal grace is a grace of free, unmerited election and does not need “ratification” to become effective. St. Thomas reminds us of this: Age of body does not determine age of soul. Even in childhood man can attain spiritual maturity: as the Book of Wisdom says: “For old age is not honored for length of time, or measured by number of years. “Many children, through the strength of the Holy Spirit they have received, have bravely fought for Christ even to the shedding of their blood” (CCC 1308).

Relying on this it might be stated that confirmation should not be postponed until reaching maturity but according to the tradition of the Latin Church it should be administered after baptism at approximately seven years of age³⁷. The teaching and practice of the recent popes develop in this direction and this should constitute an essential pastoral perspective. Although confirmation administered after the First Communion is a very common practice nowadays and does not give rise to concern, it should be the subject of deeper reflection. The last three popes consistently promote the traditional order of administering sacraments of initiation which is baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist.

John Paul II repeatedly addressed this theme both in various forms of his teaching and in liturgical practice. It always resulted from the integral vision of theology of the three first sacraments. The summary of this view is the passage from his last encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. The Holy Father, undertaking the theme of the pneumatological dimension of the Eucharist, observes that “by the gift of his body and blood Christ increases within us the gift of his Spirit, already poured out in Baptism and bestowed as a “seal” in the sacrament of Confirmation”³⁸. The awareness of practical consequences of such an approach accompanied him all the time. In 1987, during the *ad limina* visit of bishops from the south of France the Pope said that the principle of chronological succession of the sacraments of initiation possessed a binding status and the original practice which survived in the Eastern rites should

³⁷ See OB, 11. Theological-pastoral introduction suggests the age of discretion but local Conferences of Bishops, guided by pastoral needs, may determine a different, more appropriate age.

³⁸ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Vatican 2003, no. 17. See also CCC1322.

not be overlooked” (cf. CCC 1233)³⁹. M. Zachara quotes a private conversation with Cardinal S. Rylko from which he learnt that “in 1998, in preparation for the Great Jubilee, John Paul II administered confirmation of twelve candidates who were deliberately chosen on the grounds that they had not received the Eucharist yet”⁴⁰.

Similarly Benedict XVI in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis* appeals to reflect on the question of the order of the sacraments of initiation so that “our pastoral practice should reflect a more unitary understanding of the process of Christian initiation”⁴¹. Such conclusions are the result of the realization of the principle of theological unity of sacraments where both the baptized and confirmed are subordinated to the Eucharist. The Pope advocates the revision of the existing practices because the current variations of celebration are not of the dogmatic order, but are pastoral in character and the aim achieved in this manner should help Christians (also in the ecumenical dimension) in understanding their own identity and in maturing to the fullness of mankind in Christ (cf. Eph 4:13)⁴².

Pope Francis continues the thought of his predecessors and maintains the teaching on the unity of sacraments of Christian initiation not only in the theological but also celebratory aspect. He calls them “the one great sacramental event” which conforms to Christ and makes the faithful the living sign of his presence⁴³. The sacrament is not the work of people but God who fills the person with the Holy Spirit and permeates them. In the encyclical *Lumen fidei* the Pope describes the sacrament of baptism as the sacrament of rebirth (new life) and faith which marks a certain orientation (the Pope speaks of the Paschal Way) strengthened in the sacrament of Confirmation with the seal of the Holy Spirit. The reception of the sacraments of initiation is an experience of the sacramental character of faith which finds its highest expression in the Eucharist⁴⁴.

An urgent task of the Church in the context of new evangelization is the search for such a model of formation and celebration of the sacrament of confirmation that it would express unity and continuity of sacraments in Christian life and at the same time lead the baptized to conversion and personal encounter with Christ. Liturgy plays an important role there in which God in Christ turns to the gathered congregation and grants his love⁴⁵. Therefore the bishops gathered in 2007 at the 5th General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean in the Concluding Document ask for pastoral conversion and evangelizing activity underlining that.

³⁹ L'Osservatore Romano 8 (1987), no 3, 1,

⁴⁰ M. Zachara, *Bierzmowanie...*, *op.cit.*, 122.

⁴¹ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, Vatican 2007, no. 17. The example of the realization of this postulate is the Archdiocese of Liverpool where according to the instruction since September 2012 the sacrament of confirmation has been administered to children before first Holy Communion. http://liverpoolcatholic.org.uk/userfiles_rcaol/file/pfm/Sacrament%20Leaflet%20final.pdf (accessed: 18.10.2016).

⁴² *Sacramentum caritatis*, no. 18.

⁴³ See L'Osservatore Romano 35 (2014), no 2, 46; 49–50.

⁴⁴ See Francis, *Lumen fidei*, Vatican 2013, no. 43; no. 44.

⁴⁵ See S. Dyk, *Nowa ewangelizacja. Konkretnie wyzwanie*, Gubin 2015, 221–224.

Christian initiation, which includes the kerygma, is the practical manner of putting people in contact with Jesus Christ and initiating in discipleship. It also gives us the opportunity to enhance the unity of the three sacraments of initiation and delve deeper into their rich meaning. Christian initiation, properly speaking, has to do with the first initiation in the mysteries of the faith, whether in the form of baptismal catechumenate for the non-baptized, or in the formal post-baptismal catechumenate for the baptized who are not sufficiently catechized. This catechumenate is intimately connected with the sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, solemnly celebrated in the Paschal Vigil. It should therefore be distinguished from other processes of catechesis and formation that can presume Christian initiation as their foundation⁴⁶.

Thus the post-baptismal catechumenate (secondary) is promoted, which was earlier advocated by the Catechism of the Catholic Church⁴⁷ referring not only to the catechesis of the baptized but also to the necessary development of baptismal grace in personal growth. Similarly, other documents of the Church (for example CC 14; 17; 20–21) do not limit catechumenate only to the preparation for sacraments but also indicate its important role in shaping the entire Christian life in the community of the Church⁴⁸. A “repeated catechumenate” is also emphasized in *Catechesi tradendae* (cf. 44; 53). Relying on these guidelines there is a suggestion to apply catechumenal method in preparation for confirmation⁴⁹.

7. CONCLUSION

All the sacraments, but each in its own way, sanctify and build the Mystical Body of Christ. They are the sacraments of faith because they require and multiply it. Although confirmation is not necessary to salvation, it is the second sacrament of Christian initiation and an integral part of it. Thus it cannot be reserved for a chosen group of the baptized and it should not be neglected. “The reception of the sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace” as “by the sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to Christ and the Church” (CCC 1285). As it is administered at the beginning of Christian life and conditions its further growth, confirmation is not the sacrament of Christian maturity. Therefore, the departure from a punctualistic treatment of sacraments and especially confirmation is necessary. The aim of confirmation is not to form a fully

⁴⁶ *Aparecida. V Ogólna Konferencja Episkopatów Ameryki Łacińskiej i Karaibów. Dokument końcowy*, trans. K. Zabawa, K. Łukoszczyk, Gubin 2014, no. 288, 146.

⁴⁷ CCC 1231: “Where infant Baptism has become the form in which this sacrament is usually celebrated, it has become a single act encapsulating the preparatory stages of Christian initiation in a very abridged way. By its very nature infant Baptism requires a post-baptismal catechumenate. Not only is there a need for instruction after Baptism, but also for the necessary flowering of baptismal grace in personal growth. The catechism has its proper place here.”

⁴⁸ In the post-synodal exhortation on catechesis the Pope says that the baptized who have not received suitable Christian formation need catechesis. See John Paul II, *Catechesi tradendae*, Vatican 1979 no. 44; no. 53.

⁴⁹ See Cz. Krakowiak, *Wykorzystanie metody katechumenalnej w przygotowaniu do sakramentów*, in: *Słowo. Liturgia. Wspólnota. Dynamika współczesnej parafii*, ed. by Cz. Krakowiak, P. Kulbacki, Kraków–Lublin 2006 pp. 39–80.

mature Christian and apostle but to open a sacramental perspective. The completion of Christian initiation is the third sacrament of initiation, the Eucharist which “is the heart and the summit of the Church’s life, for in it Christ associates his Church and all her members with his sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving offered once for all on the cross to his Father; by this sacrifice he pours out the graces of salvation on his Body which is the Church” (CCC 1407).

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CONFIRMATION – IS IT STILL THE SACRAMENT OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION?

Summary

The sacrament of confirmation is an integral part of Christian initiation. It is not necessary for salvation but together with baptism and the Eucharist forms unity which is the foundation of life in Christ and which should be preserved. Historical and theological reasons confirm it and despite the interruption of chronological order of celebration, liturgical practice also supports this claim. Baptism is incorporation in Christ, in his Mystical Body, confirmation enhances the grace of baptism through the gift of the Holy Spirit, whereas the Eucharist completes and crowns the initiation giving food which is the pledge of eternal life. Facing disquieting phenomena of punctualistic understanding of confirmation in terms of both preparation and mystagogy, the author indicates the criteria of the unity of the sacraments of Christian initiation. In this context, confirmation is not the sacrament of Christian maturity but opening sacramental perspective offers indispensable means of achieving it.

Key words: confirmation, baptism, Eucharist, Christian initiation, initiation, sacrament

BIERZMOWANIE – JEST JESZCZE SAKRAMENTEM CHRZEŚCIJAŃSKIEGO WTAJEMNICZENIA?

Streszczenie

Sakrament bierzmowania jest integralną częścią wtajemniczenia chrześcijańskiego. Nie jest konieczny do zbawienia, lecz razem z chrztem i Eucharystią tworzy jedność, która jest podstawą życia w Chrystusie i która powinna być zachowywana. Wskazują na to racje historyczne, teologiczne oraz, pomimo zerwania chronologicznej kolejności celebracji, także praktyka liturgiczna. Chrzest jest wszczępieniem w Chrystusa i Jego Mistyczne Ciało, bierzmowanie udoskonala łaskę chrztu przez dar Ducha Świętego, a Eucharystia dopełnia i wieńczy wtajemniczenie, udzielając pokarmu, który jest zadatkiem życia wiecznego. Wobec niepokojących zjawisk punktualistycznego rozumienia bierzmowania zarów-

no w przygotowaniu, jak i mistagogii, autor wskazuje na konkretne kryteria jedności sakramentów inicjacji chrześcijańskiej. Bierzmowanie w tym kontekście nie jest sakramentem dojrzałości chrześcijańskiej, ale, otwierając sakramentalną perspektywę, daje niezbędne środki do jej osiągnięcia.

Słowa kluczowe: bierzmowanie, chrzest, Eucharystia, wtajemniczenie chrześcijańskie, inicjacja, sakrament

Nota o Autorze

Ksiądz **Andrzej MEGGER** – prezbiter diecezji pelplińskiej, doktor liturgiki, asystent Katedry Teologii i Duchowości Liturgicznej w Instytucie Liturgiki i Homiletyki na Wydziale Teologii KUL, wykładowca w Wyższym Seminarium Duchownym w Pelplinie. Adres do korespondencji: amegger@kul.lublin.pl.

*

Rev. **Andrzej MEGGER**, PhD – a research assistant in the Department of Theology and Liturgical Spirituality in the Institute of Liturgics and Homiletics of the Faculty of Theology, Catholic University of Lublin; e-mail address: amegger@kul.lublin.pl.