

Stanislaw Přibyl

The Sacrament of Confirmation : From Being Educated in Faith to Christian Maturity

Ecumeny and Law 3, 217-228

2015

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

STANISLAV PŘIBYL

University in České Budějovice, Czech Republic

The Sacrament of Confirmation: From Being Educated in Faith to Christian Maturity

Keywords: confirmation, sacraments, Catholic Church, Eastern Churches, catechesis, canon law

1. Historical remarks — between Christian East and West

The Zwinger gallery in Dresden exhibits a pictorial cycle entitled *Seven Sacraments* by a Bolognese painter Giuseppe Maria Crespi (1665—1747). In his *Confirmation*, we may notice a remarkable difference to today's practice of conferring the sacrament: the bishop does not anoint an adolescent, but a small boy. What change has come about in the understanding of the sacrament of Confirmation in the meantime?

Eastern Christianity kept the immediate succession of Baptism and Confirmation even after the gradual transition to massive christenings of newborns. The Orthodox Church still feels bound by the call for smearing the Myron just after the Baptism as we find it in can. 48 of the Council of Laodicea (363): “It is appropriate for the illuminated to be anointed with heavenly unction and thus become participants in the Kingdom of God.”¹ The West, however, began to separate Baptism and Confirmation,

¹ *Pravidla všeobecných a místních sněmů i sv. otců pravoslavné církve* [The Rules of General and Local Councils and Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church]. Pravoslavná církev v Československu 1955, p. 95.

and this process was completed in the High Middle Ages. What is more, the more rationally oriented notion of the sacraments in the West presupposed a conscious receiving of the sacrament of Confirmation and the Eucharist on the basis of elementary understanding of their significance. The problem of the expected age became the indicator for understanding the disposition for receiving Confirmation, both on the personal and spiritual levels.²

Baptism itself — partly due to high infant mortality — was to be conferred as soon as possible (*quam primum*). Confirmation then went to be understood in a more ecclesiological sense, as an expression of personal bond between the bishop and the community of the faithful. Therefore, the bishop effectively became the exclusive conferrer of the sacrament, as it was established by the Council of Trent during its 7th session in 1547: “If any one saith, that the ordinary minister of holy Confirmation is not the bishop alone, but any simple priest soever; let him be anathema.”³ As regards the conferrer, the Catholic Church respects the practice of Confirmation in the Eastern churches *sui iuris*, since they are hierarchically united with the Apostolic see. This is confirmed in can. 694 of the CCEO: “According to the tradition of the Eastern Churches, Chrismation with holy myron is administered by a presbyter either in conjunction with Baptism or separately.” The same Code in can. 695 §1 also prefers the immediate time succession of conferring Confirmation after Baptism: “Chrismation with holy myron must be administered in conjunction with Baptism, except in a case of true necessity, in which case, however, it is to be seen that it is administered as soon as possible.”

In the West, the requirement of elementary rational cognition gradually played a more important role. Therefore, in can. 788 of the first Code of Canon Law, CIC/1917, we find the practice of confirming infants only as an exception to the rule: “Although the administration of the sacrament of Confirmation in the Latin church is conveniently deferred until about the age of 7 years, nevertheless, it can be conferred earlier, if an infant is faced with the danger of death or there appear to the minister grave and just causes (*ob iustas et graves causas*) to expedite it.” The age

² “By the 13th century, the practice of conferring the sacrament of Confirmation to the baptised, which were trained in faith after their reasoning had matured, had been established in the Western church. This practice is advantageous in that the sacrament is more revered and thus more beneficial for the recipient when he is more ready for it.” R. ŠPAČEK: *Katolická věrouka. Díl III. — Kniha V.—VII.: O milosti, svátostech a dokonání* [Doctrine of the Catholic church, Volume III, Book V-VII: On Grace, Sacraments and the Fulfillment]. Praha 1922, p. 265.

³ Sessio VII, *Decretum primum* [De sacramentis], *Canones de sacramento Confirmationis* 3. In: *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*. Bologna 2002, p. 686.

of 7 was first fixed by the Roman Catechism published after the Council of Trent (1566).⁴ The canonical jurisprudence later specified that the sacrament of Confirmation “may be conferred earlier, in danger of death or there appear other grave causes, which the conferrer should take into account according to Canon 788, for instance if the parents travel to countries where Confirmation is only seldom conferred.”⁵ As for the permissibility of conferring the sacrament according to can. 786 (in the new Code of Canon Law the corresponding canon is 889 §2, CIC/1983), it was required that the confirnee “be in the state of grace and if he or she can use reason, sufficient instruction should be provided.” The then practice was, nevertheless, critically reviewed.⁶

2. The problem of instructing the confirnees within recent canon law

The new Code of the Latin church in can. 891 refrains from stating the age of the confirnee to about the age of 7 and uses a more general formulation: “The sacrament of Confirmation is to be conferred on the faithful at about the age of discretion (*circa aetatem discretionis*) unless the conference of bishops has determined another age, or there is danger of death, or in the judgment of the minister a grave cause suggests otherwise.” Thanks to the modification of the different bishops’ conferences or the bishops of individual dioceses, the development moved in the direction of raising the age of the confirnees. The relevant norms of the Archbishopric of Prague give reasons for the age of 14 with proper pastoral intentions: “The preparation for Confirmation is a relatively significant occasion to help an adolescent to move from child’s faith to the faith of an adult. It is just as important for him or her to encounter topics, for

⁴ *Catechismus Romanus*, Pars II, c. 3, n. 8.

⁵ M. LEITNER: *Handbuch des katholischen Kirchenrechts. Auf Grund des neuen Kodex vom 28. Juni 1917. Vierte Lieferung. Sakramente*. Regensburg 1924, p. 69.

⁶ “The child was baptised soon after birth. At about seven years of age, it privately received the First Communion and was confirmed generally prior to the age of ten or twelve. This was done hurriedly, if not secretly. This lamentable practice had various reasons. Because the Confirmation was usually administered by the bishop and the solemn First Communion took place between Easter and the summer holidays, bishop’s visits were rescheduled to weekdays and periods, in which it was impossible for the parish community to gather.” P. EICHER (Ed.): *Neue Summe Theologie. 3 — Der Dienst der Gemeinde*. Freiburg in Breisgau 1989, p. 271.

example choosing the state of life or finding his or her own place and task in the Church. The goal of the preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation is that the believer starts living his or her faith out of his or her own volition and accept Jesus Christ consciously as the Lord of his life.”⁷

This understanding of the sacrament of Confirmation somewhat shifts the theological aspect of the grace efficacy for newborns or children who have attained the age of discretion, and becomes a pastoral means of addressing especially the youth. Within the framework of a “popular church” (*Volkskirche*), however, this educational goal can miss its target, as any preparation for the sacraments of initiation.⁸ Of course, the decisive moment is the authenticity of religious practice and spiritual life of their parents.⁹ The effort of some pastors to secure the fulfilment of the duty to be present at the Eucharistic celebration and to receive sacraments by issuing a special “Confirmation certificate” where the pastor signs the confirmer’s presence at masses and sacraments of reconciliation is thus often an idle enterprise.

In fact, already the pedagogical method of Saint John Bosco refused such forced sacramental life.¹⁰ Nevertheless, we still see efforts to justify

⁷ “Směrnice pro udílení svátostí v Arcidiecézi pražské [Guidelines for conferring sacraments in the Archbishopric of Prague].” In: *Sbírka právních norem Arcidiecéze pražské z let 1945—2009* [The Collection of Legal Norms in the Archbishopric of Prague in 1945—2009]. Ed. M. KOLÁŘOVÁ. Praha 2009, pp. 87—106; pp. 94—95

⁸ “The consequence is a troubling phenomenon: the initiation catechesis (which is to introduce a person into an autonomous and regular sacramental life), in fact, does not introduce, but paradoxically rather closes. In other words: for a lot of children who receive the first sacrament of reconciliation or the First Communion is this act (for a long time, if not for the rest of their life) the final one. Similarly, the sacrament of Confirmation is by many youngsters now taken to be the symbolic full stop to the hitherto religious practicing, and for some of them, actually, a ceremonial farewell to the life of faith.” E. ALBERICH, L. DŘÍMAL: *Katechetika* [Catechesis]. Praha 2008, p. 18.

⁹ “A great number of parents who want their children to attend preparation for sacraments are used to receive sacraments as a ‘conscious habit’, which is perceived as a ‘duty’. In these families and in those that lack even such motivations, children soon abandon sacramental practice.” R. MEZULÁNÍK: “Výchova nebo vzdělání? — praktické zkušenosti s katechezí v ČR [Education or Learning? Practical Experiences from Catechesis in the Czech Republic].” In: *Školská a mimoškolská katechéza v evropské vzdělávací struktuře* [Catechesis at School and Outside School in the European Educational Structure]. Eds. M. PETRO, G. PAEA. Prešov 2008, pp. 48—69, p. 56.

¹⁰ “At one of the conferences in Paris, he declared that ‘education is based on two principles: to be always kind and to have a chapel always opened where an easy access to the confession and communion is secured’ [...] In this respect, don Bosco was a son of his period, i.e., post-Tridentine Catholicism, where sacraments were understood instrumentally. On the other hand, since he put emphasis on freedom in relation to receiving the sacraments, we can gather that he was aware of the danger of formalism in sacramental life: ‘Never force young people to receive sacraments, but often encourage

the control over regular sacramental life of the confirmees, if this practice becomes the basis for further catechetical and experiential training.¹¹ Traditionalist Catholic spirituality is inclined to stress lower age for the confirmees and suspects the contemporary practice of insufficient trust in the efficacy of the sacramental grace and of an effort to emulate the practice of Confirmation in reformed churches: “The presently promoted late Confirmation at the age of civil adulthood is more or less a return to protestantising Jansenism [...]. The emphasis is put on the conscious confessing of one’s religion. The meaning of the sacrament, however, is not pronouncing your confession, but receiving grace via the sacramental sign.”¹² The complaint of jansenistic inspiration evokes an excessive stress on the performance of the confirmees who will still feel unfit and will keep postponing the preparation for the sacrament. Their parents may, in fact, even support this kind of attitude. The Code of Canon Law, however, explicitly talks about confirmees as “children” (can. 777, 2°). One of the important duties of the parish priest is to take care “that through catechetical instruction imparted for an appropriate period of time children (*pueri*) are prepared properly for the first reception of the sacraments of penance and the Most Holy Eucharist and for the sacrament of Confirmation.” Nevertheless, in can. 890 the Code makes clear that the obligation of the parents in this respect is primary, that is before parish priests or pastors. The parents should make sure that “the faithful are properly instructed to receive the sacrament and come to it at the appropriate time.” This is one of the practical consequences of the basic responsibility of the parents, found in can. 226 § 2: “Since they have given life to their children, parents have a most grave obligation and possess the right to educate them. Therefore, it is for Christian parents particularly to take care of the Christian education of their children according to the doctrine handed on by the Church.”

them and make it possible for them to receive the sacraments everywhere and readily.” L. DŘÍMAL: *Preventivní systém Dona Boska* [The Preventive System of Don Bosco]. Olomouc 2013, p. 27.

¹¹ “In this respect, Sunday mass attendance and regular confession are particularly stressed (and sometimes even controlled), since the young often lack liturgical practice and spiritual experience. In many parishes the preparation for receiving the sacrament of Confirmation includes weekend sojourns for small groups. During these sojourns the young and their animators can deepen their mutual relationship. This helps to accommodate the building of an easier and more personal relationship with the Lord.” M. POLÁKOVÁ: “Mimoškolská katechéza v přípravě na sviatosť birmovania [Catechesis outside school].” In: *Školská a mimoškolská katechéza...*, Eds. M. PETRO, G. ΠΑΠΑ, pp. 194–205, p. 196.

¹² T. STRITZKO: “Vhodný věk pro biřmování [Suitable age for Confirmation].” *Te Deum* 1/12, p. 19.

The Confirmation preparation of young people must not also be oriented too intellectually, that is, in such a way as to excessively stress the catechetical nature of the instruction: “This formation should not be simply intellectual and doctrinal as it is at school, but it should be more based on experience. It should incorporate the whole path of the youngster’s conversion and faith and cement all the human and religious experience from the life in the church community. The confirmees could be prevented from certain decadent experiences during the period after being confirmees, or such experiences might be reduced, if they found a lively community, into which they could organically integrate and apply their charismas and take on various services: in short, a parish organized into a small apostolic community.”¹³

3. The impact of Protestant practice and the appropriate order of initiation sacraments

The Protestant conception of Confirmation was preceded by Erasmus’s idea of renewal of the Baptismal vows.¹⁴ The Reformation, however, refuted the sacramental character of Confirmation.¹⁵ The meaning of such non-sacramental Confirmation in the reformed tradition is aptly expressed in Komenský’s *Confession of the Brethern*: “We hold this as an absolutely necessary matter for baptised children when they achieve the age of discretion, that their Baptism should be renewed in their minds and serve to its truth, that is that the Christian faith (without which Baptism

¹³ P. GIGLIONI: *Svätosti Krista a cirkve* [Sacraments of Christ and the Church]. Kostelní Vydří 1996, p. 77.

¹⁴ “In 1522 Erasmus of Rotterdam proposed to provide religious instruction to children baptised as infants and to pass a test after whose completion they would renew their Baptismal vows. The proposal was first accepted by Zwingli.” P. MIKLUŠČÁK: *Teológia sviatostí I.* [Sacramental Theology I.]. Spišská kapitula — Spišské Podhradie 1995, p. 68.

¹⁵ “Confirmation is a free creation of the Christian community, and so it is not instituted forever. The theological understanding of Confirmation is determined especially by its association with Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. According to the evangelical conception, Confirmation does not complete Baptism and it also does not mediate any subsequent grace. Rather, Confirmation is the reminder of Baptism, intercession and an act of blessing in a particular phase of life on the basis of Gospel assurance.” G. ADAM: “Konfirmandenunterricht [Instructing the Confirmees].” In: *Handbuch religionspädagogischer Grundbegriffe*. Eds. G. BITTER, G. MILLER. München 1986, pp. 208—213, p. 213.

is nullified) is to be diligently taught and instructed in order to understand the mystery of Baptism (which they received in their infancy). Their faith should be confessed with their own mouths before the church of God and they should voluntarily declare to keep the covenant with God at Baptism and thus sanctify themselves in it, and the obligation of their sanctification (which firstly came through their parents and godfathers) they should renew. This takes place among us at the time when they are to be allowed to access the table by laying hands on them (visibly before the church). Thus they are confirmed in God's grace and the growth of their Christianity."¹⁶ It is clear that the reformed practice kept the gesture of laying hands and, what is more, Confirmation is usually the condition under which one is admitted to the Lord's table, often in a ceremony that follows immediately after that: "Confirmation is thus conjoined with the first receiving of the Lord's Supper."¹⁷ The Czech situation prior to 1989 was specific, because the state administratively complicated the opportunities to teach religious education. However, the Evangelical Church of the Brethren (Českobratrská církev evangelická) organized biblical lessons for the confirmed, which practically substituted religious education for the adolescents, without parents having to enrol their children into such classes under ignominious conditions.

The Catholic Church has always been aware of the priorities in conferring the sacrament of Confirmation to the sacrament of the Eucharist, even though this order has not always and everywhere been kept. This is attested in the *Abrogata* letter of Pope Leo XIII addressed to the archbishop of Marseille (1897), in which the Pope enthusiastically approves of (*laudamus cummaxime*) the archbishop's decision to abolish the local custom of conferring Confirmation to children after the First Communion.¹⁸ Given the situation today, the prior receiving of the communion as opposed to Confirmation leads to major doubts: "First of all, we need to rethink the relation between Baptism and the First Communion. Is it not somehow strange that 12-year-olds are not fit to receive Confirmation while 8-year-olds are ready to receive the Eucharist? This discrepancy practically turns the original succession of the sacraments of initia-

¹⁶ "Bratrské vyznání [Confession of Brethern]," čl. 12,6 — in: *Čtyři vyznání. Vyznání augsburské, bratrské, helvetské a české se čtyřmi vyznáními staré církve a se čtyřmi články pražskými* [Four Confessions. Augsburg Confession, Confession of Brethern, Helvetic and Bohemian Confession with Four Confessions of the Old Church and Four Articles of Prague]. Praha 1951, pp. 156—157.

¹⁷ J. FILO: *Ekumenický dialóg medzi rím. - katolíkami a ev. - luteránmi* [Ecumenical Dialogue Between Roman Catholics and the Lutherans]. Prešov 1997, p. 107.

¹⁸ F.M. CAPPELLO: *Tractatus canonico-moralis de sacramentis. Vol I. — De sacramentis in genere, de Baptismo, Confirmatione et Eucharistia*. Romae 1938, pp. 191—192.

tion (Baptism-Confirmation-the Eucharist according to can. 842 §1) on its head, but also overestimates Confirmation while underestimating the Eucharist.”¹⁹

The reversal of the order of conferring the sacrament of Confirmation and the Eucharist could not be stopped even by the decree *Quam singulari*, issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments under the pontificate of Pope Pius X in 1910. For the First Communion the decree interpreted the age of discretion to be “around seven years of age.” Requirements of age and reasoning for the confirmees and those that receive the First Communion are practically identical. The 1917 Code again confirmed “convenient postponing of conferring the sacrament of Confirmation to approximately seven years of age.” Post-conciliar development of raising the age of the confirmees was later accelerated by the apostolic constitution of Paul VI *Divinae consortium naturae* (1971), which serves as a preface for the new adaptation of the ceremonies of Confirmation for the Latin Church²⁰: “Confirmation of children in the Latin church is generally postponed to the age of about seven years. From pastoral reasons, especially to instruct the faithful to live in full obedience to Christ the Lord and give courageous witness, the ordinaries may collectively decide for an age which seems more appropriate to them. It means to confer this sacrament, after proper preparation, at a mature age.”²¹

The Catechism of the Catholic Church wants to somewhat muffle the consequences of postponing the age of the confirmees: “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.”²² In relation to this, one may remember the argumentation of Saint Thomas Aquinas: “Age of body does not determine age of soul. Even in childhood man can attain spiritual maturity: as the book of Wisdom (4,8) says: For old age is not honoured 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.”²³

¹⁹ S. DEMEL: *Handbuch Kirchenrecht. Grundbegriffe für Studium und Praxis*. Freiburg im Breisgau, p. 227.

²⁰ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 63, pp. 657–664.

²¹ *Praenotanda* n. 11.

²² CCC 1308.

²³ *Summa theologiae* III, 72,5 — ad 2.

4. Conclusion: The need for a systematic catechesis

Especially in relation to changing the order of conferring the sacraments of initiation, the flattening of the meaning of Confirmation as a means of doing catechesis lacks theological basis.²⁴ It is more important not to reduce the catechesis to an instrument for receiving this sacrament or another, but accompany the whole Christian life where the faith is born and consolidated: “For whether people really want to receive the sacrament in the sense, in which the church understands itself, will in the present situation be more obvious after the ceremony, that is, in the degree of their willingness to follow Christ in his Church. Once this becomes clear also from the visible practice in the church, an intense catechesis pays, since it creates a real ‘path’ for the families in the interim between topical solemnities from Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation to marriage, a path along which the Church accompanies them. Without this accompanying along the path of catechesis prior to the ceremony, we can hardly expect more than the school instruction in mathematics brings to someone who needs to pass the school-leaving-exam. Once it is done, the student is happy that it can freely be thoroughly forgotten.”²⁵

²⁴ “Narrow relations sometimes created between catechetical programmes and conferring of the sacraments show that all of the interest lies on the side of catechesis and also that the question of the Confirmation age is not identical with the problem of Christian formation of the youth. It seems as if the bishops often did not avoid the danger of mixing a broad and complex problem of doctrinal and moral formation of young Christians with the question of personal disposition allowing a fruitful receiving of the sacrament of Confirmation. This is the reason why the theological reflection of the bishops on the one hand and the decisions taken over the sacramental practice on the other lack coherence [...]. Mere fixing of the age, whatever it is, cannot solve the grave difficulties of contemporary pastoral work, especially in relation to the young.” B. MOHELNÍK: *Pečeť daru Ducha svatého. Teologie svátosti břmování* [The Seal of the Holy Spirit. The Theology of the Sacrament of Confirmation]. Praha 2012, p. 79.

²⁵ M. KEHL: *Kam kráčí církev? Diagnóza doby* [Where is the Church headed? The time diagnosis]. Brno 2000, p. 104.

Bibliography

Acta Apostolicae Sedis 63 (1971).

ADAM G.: “Konfirmandenunterricht.” In: *Handbuch religionspädagogischer Grundbegriffe*. Eds. G. BITTER, G. MILLER. München 1986, pp. 208—213.

AKVINSKÝ T.: *Theologická summa*. Olomouc 1938—1940.

ALBERICH E., DRÍMAL L.: *Katechetika*. Praha 2008.

CAPPELLO F. M.: *Tractatus canonico-moralis de sacramentis. Vol I. — De sacramentis in genere, de Baptismo, Confirmatione et Eucharistia*. Romae 1938.

Catechismus Romanus Ex Decreto Concilii Tridentini. Nabu Press, USA 2014.

Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta. Bologna 2002.

Čtyři vyznání. Vyznání augsburské, bratrské, helvetské a české se čtyřmi vyznáními staré církve a se čtyřmi články pražskými. Praha 1951.

DEMEL S.: *Handbuch Kirchenrecht. Grundbegriffe für Studium und Praxis*. Freiburg im Breisgau 2010.

DRÍMAL L.: *Preventivní systém Dona Boska*. Olomouc 2013.

EICHER P.: *Neue Summe Theologie. 3 — Der Dienst der Gemeinde*. Freiburg in Breisgau 1989.

FILO J. st.: *Ekumenický dialóg medzi rím. — katolíkmí a ev. — luteránmi*. Prešov 1997.

FISCHELLA R. (direzione e coordianmento): *Catechismo della Chiesa Cattolica. Testo integrale e commento teologico*. Casale Monferrato 1993.

GIGLIONI P.: *Svätosti Krista a církve*. Kostelní Vydří 1996.

KEHL M.: *Kam kráčí církev? Diagnóza doby*. Brno 2000.

KOLÁŘOVÁ M.: *Sbírka právních norem Arcidiecéze pražské z let 1945—2009*. Praha 2009.

LEITNER M.: *Handbuch des katholischen Kirchenrechts. Auf Grund des neuen Kodex vom 28. Juni 1917. Vierte Lieferung. Sakramente*. Regensburg 1924.

MEZULÁNÍK R.: “Výchova nebo vzdělání? — praktické zkušenosti s katechezí v ČR.” In: *Školská a mimoškolská katechéza v evropskéj edukačnej štruktúre*. Eds. M. PETRO, G. PAEA G. Prešov 2008, pp. 48—69.

MIKLUŠČÁK P.: *Teológia sviatostí I. Spišská kapitula — Spišské Podhradie* 1995.

MOHELNÍK B.: *Pečeř daru Duchu svatého. Teologie svátosti biřmování*. Praha 2012.

POLÁKOVÁ M.: “Mimoškolská katechéza v příprave na sviatost birmovania.” In: *Školská a mimoškolská katechéza v evropskéj edukačnej štruktúre*. Eds. M. PETRO, G. PAEA. Prešov 2008, pp. 194—205.

Pravidla všeobecných a místních sněmů i sv. otců pravoslavné církve. Pravoslavná církve v Československu 1955.

STRITZKO T.: “Vhodný věk pro biřmování.” *Te Deum* 1/12, p. 19

ŠPAČEK R.: *Katolická věrouka. Díl III. — Kniha V.—VII.: O milosti, svátostech a dokonání*. Praha 1922.

STANISLAV PŘIBYL

The Sacrament of Confirmation: From Being Educated in Faith to Christian Maturity

Summary

While Eastern churches have kept the practice of Christian Antiquity, that is, to confirm immediately after conferring Baptism, the Western church gradually separated Confirmation and Baptism. Baptism was conferred short after the child's birth, while Confirmation came to be associated with the age of discretion. This development is also mirrored in contemporary codes of canon law in force: while the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches prescribes the Chrismation immediately after Baptism, the (Western) Code of Canon Law presupposes for the candidates of Confirmation the age of discretion. However, particular legal norms of Bishops' Conferences raise the age of the confirmees in such a way that the preparation for this sacrament in fact substitutes catechesis for the adolescents. In this process, one overestimates the role of rational understanding and human maturity as opposed to the conditions used for the sacrament of the Eucharist, where the age for the First Communion is lower.

STANISLAV PŘIBYL

Le sacrement de la confirmation : dès l'éducation dans l'ambiance de foi jusqu'à la maturité chrétienne

Résumé

Alors que les Églises orientales ont gardé l'ancienne pratique de l'Antiquité chrétienne (le sacrement de la confirmation était administré juste après celui du baptême), l'Église occidentale séparait progressivement le sacrement de la confirmation de celui du baptême. Le sacrement du baptême était administré le plus tôt possible (après la naissance de l'enfant) ; par contre, le sacrement de la confirmation a commencé à être associé à l'âge de discernement. Ce sont les codes du droit canonique en vigueur qui reflètent ce développement : tandis que le Code des canons des Églises orientales exige que la confirmation soit administrée directement après le baptême, le Code (latin) du droit canonique exige que les personnes accédant à la cérémonie de confirmation fassent usage de leur propre raison. Cependant, les normes particulières des conférences des évêques augmentent l'âge des personnes accédant au sacrement de la confirmation de façon que la préparation à ce sacrement substitue la catéchèse des adolescents. En l'occurrence, les exigences concernant la connaissance rationnelle et la maturité humaine sont haussées par rapport aux principes relatifs au fait de recevoir l'Eucharistie où l'âge des premiers communiant est plus bas.

Mots clés : confirmation, sacrements, Église catholique, Églises orientales, catéchèse, droit canonique

STANISLAV PŘIBYL

Il sacramento della cresima: dall'educazione nella fede alla maturità cristiana

Sommario

Mentre le Chiese orientali mantennero la vecchia pratica dell'antichità cristiana di impartire il sacramento della cresima subito dopo il battesimo, la Chiesa occidentale separò gradualmente il sacramento della cresima dal sacramento del battesimo. Il sacramento del battesimo veniva impartito il più presto possibile dopo la nascita del bambino mentre il sacramento della cresima iniziò ad essere unito all'età del discernimento. I codici del diritto canonico vigenti attualmente riflettono tale sviluppo: mentre il Codice dei Canoni delle Chiese orientali impone che la Cresima venga impartita dopo il battesimo, il Codice di diritto canonico (latino) esige dai cresimati l'uso della ragione. Le norme dettagliate della conferenza episcopale aumentano tuttavia l'età dei cresimati al punto che la preparazione a questo sacramento sostituisce la catechesi degli adolescenti. In tale situazione viene accresciuto eccessivamente il requisito della cognizione razionale e della maturità umana in confronto ai principi di ricevimento dell'eucarestia dove l'età dei bambini che si accostano alla prima Comunione è più bassa.

Parole chiave: cresima, sacramenti, Chiesa cattolica, Chiese orientali, catechesi, diritto canonico