CONFIRMATION AND BEING CATHOLIC IN THE UNITED STATES:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SACRAMENT
OF CONFIRMATION IN THE
TWENTIETH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the development of the Catholic sacrament of Confirmation in the United States across the twentieth century. It argues that as United States Catholics’ relationship to their wider culture changes, Confirmation theology and practice changes to reflect that relationship. In order to illustrate the thesis, the work is broken into four periods—1910-1959, 1960-1971, 1972-1980, 1981-2006—each of which represents a different stage in the evolution of Confirmation in U.S. Catholic discourse and practice. At different points in its twentieth century history, Confirmation becomes the sacrament of: Catholic Action, the Liturgical Renewal, and the Charismatic Renewal. In the final period, there is a strong emphasis on Confirmation as the sacrament of choice, that is the time when young Catholics are accorded the opportunity to choose Catholicism from among the religious options presented to them. Such an emphasis makes sense from an historical perspective, as this final period is characterized by what Catholic historian Jay Dolan has called “a rage for pluralism” among Catholics. The
demands of pluralism seem to beg for a time when a young Catholic can choose Catholic Christianity as his or her particular religion. Some of the negative results of this “theology of choice” include: Confirmation understood as “graduation”; excessive pressure laid upon confirmandi to make a definitive choice at the moment of Confirmation; often unfulfilled expectations of a profound experience to occur on the day of Confirmation; a sacramental reinforcement of the dominant consumer model of religion and a voluntaristic understanding of the Church; and increased individualism among Catholics. In light of the dominance of this theology and the problems associated with it, the conclusion calls for a renewed emphasis on the Gift of the Holy Spirit received in the context of the Church.
Dedicated to

My daughter Sofia

May you be continually formed in the womb of the Church
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

My interest in the sacrament of Confirmation began while teaching religious education for post-confirmation Catholics in the Diocese of Scranton, PA from 2001-2004. This diocesan-centered program was inaugurated because of a shortage of parish-level post-confirmation catechetical and general religious education programs. In many of the diocese’s parishes, young people were deprived of ongoing religious education after Confirmation. As far as I know the diocese had no centralized mandate regarding the age of Confirmation’s celebration, but most of the students who entered this program were in grades 7–12, so it is safe to assume that Confirmation was often celebrated in early adolescence. My colleagues and I taught the students everything from the Pauline Epistles to the Christian tradition of prayer.

There was, however, seemingly constant pastoral strife over students’ involvement with the program. While the diocesan central offices kept trying to drum up support for the program, some pastors were reluctant to recommend their young people, as such a recommendation seemed effectively to serve as an indictment of their own failure at the parish level. It seemed, however, that what failed at the parish level was widespread interest from Catholic young people. Even those parishes who tried to get a program off the ground, where unable to do so because of lack of student interest. The same fate befell the diocesan program too: funding was cut from it after the numbers failed to increase over several years.
Aside from diocesan politics, there seemed to be a deeper issue here that gave rise to a series of questions. Questions such as: What is it that is so challenging about continuing religious education for teens? Why is that Confirmation serves as a fulcrum for participation in religious education? What are we doing when we confirm people in adolescence? Are there theological factors that have contributed to this particular educational phenomenon?

These questions and others regarding pneumatology and sacramental theology drove my initial interest in this project in which I had hoped to find the problem and offer a solution. My naïveté was broken by the spectrum of interesting developments of Confirmation in the twentieth century U.S. alone. As I dove into the research, I began to discover that Confirmation stood as a symbol, a flagship, a cornerstone, a mode of appeal, and/or a sacramental legitimation of various movements and renewals central to the development of Catholicism in the United States during the last century.

Further research on this particular score led me to the thesis of this project, namely that in the United States throughout the twentieth century, Roman Catholic approaches to the Sacrament of Confirmation largely reflect Catholics’ changing self-definition in terms of, or in contrast to, wider American society. Confirmation, then, serves as a reflection of the relationship between Catholics and the wider U.S. culture.

This thesis has important ramifications for both Confirmation theology/practice and Catholic identity.

While theologies of confirmation are anything but uniform throughout the century, there are, nevertheless, some periodic themes that arise. Early in the century, Confirmation was widely identified as the sacrament of Catholic Action; it was therefore
the sacrament in which Catholics moved from being inward-focused to being outward-focused and thereby attuned to “See, judge, act,” the motto of Catholic Action in order to “restore all things in Christ,” the motto of Pope St. Pius X. During the period of the Second Vatican Council, while U.S. Catholics saw a large-scale social integration into the wider culture, some theologies of Confirmation took on individualistic overtones. Some in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal then adopted Confirmation as equivalent to the more Pentecostal “Baptism in the Spirit,” which, at times embodied this individualism. In the eighties and following, some theologies of Confirmation further developed Confirmation as a time for a Catholic's individual choice of his or her religion. More recently, some catechists and theologians lament the results of these theologies and programs of choice, which give rise to such elations as “I memorized everything” or “I got my Sacraments,” to the detriment of the ongoing relationship between the Church and the person. In the past decade or so, voices have arisen both endorsing and decrying the many forms, and therefore theologies, that Confirmation takes in the Church.

While much maligned and hotly debated, the story of Confirmation in twentieth century America seems also to be the story of the ongoing struggle of Catholics to find their identity and place and to create an identity and place for younger Catholics both within American society and the transnational Church. This thesis is unique in the regard that it explores this relationship and the development of Confirmation through this lens.

As it works across four main periods in the twentieth century, the thesis takes more of the form of theological and catechetical survey throughout the decades of the twentieth century, rather than a strictly narrative history. I attempted to place these thinkers, pastors, and teachers in dialogue with one another, so that the reader may
observe the general trajectory of the conversation, which I argue is largely influenced by the changing relationship between Catholics and the wider culture. My hope is that the format provides for clearer places of overlap between different works and also for clearer references to the works themselves. Insofar as it was practically possible, I have quoted directly from primary sources in order to maintain their integrity and exact language, especially because in many places that language is crucial to understanding the author’s approach.

While cultural influences on theological and pastoral work have been duly noted in many places, the uniqueness of this cultural influence is that it doesn’t seem to affect any of the other seven sacraments as drastically. One reason for this could very well be the way that all of these factors and influences progressively came together in the twentieth century: Pope Pius X’s lowering the age of First Eucharist, the Catholic Action movement, advances in psychological and educational theory, Vatican II, the dissolution of the immigrant subculture in the U.S., the Catholic charismatic movement…etc. Particularly, Confirmation’s placement in the midst of the transition to adulthood left it largely susceptible to theological and pastoral adaptation.

As is evident by the bibliography, the sources of this study are not limited to the strictly academic. I hope that one of its major contributions is that it draws together theological, pastoral, and catechetical work on Confirmation to present a kind of survey of its theology and practice in the twentieth century U.S., even as it develops its argument.

Each chapter of the thesis is identified with a particular period in the twentieth century. This periodization grew out of the sources and is based upon developments in
the Confirmation conversation especially as they pertain to specific developments and movements in Catholic life.

While many historians have divided the first half of the twentieth century into many smaller periods, for the purposes of studying Confirmation, I have decided to mark 1910-1959 as one large period not because I wish to assert that all theology leading up to the Council was flat-line, but rather because the shifts that do occur throughout this period fit, in some sense, under the Catholic Action umbrella, which dominated the consciousness of Catholics in terms of their relationship to the wider trans-continental Church and to the wider society. The Liturgical Renewal, also a driving force in the Confirmation conversation, was itself connected to Catholic Action and Confirmation in interesting ways. The end of this period coincides with Debra Campbell’s end mark for what she calls the “Heyday of Catholic Action.”

The 1960s seemed tumultuous enough to be treated in one chapter. This is not only common practice, but William Portier cites the 1960s as the time in which Catholics moved out of Catholic sub-cultural neighborhoods and into the suburbs. By the end of the this decade, Portier says, Catholics were virtually statistically indistinguishable from other citizens. In addition to this “dissolution of the subculture,” this period saw reossourcement theology at its apogee, the Second Vatican Council, and the beginnings of the interplay of psychological theory and sacramental theology. All of these had their effects on both Confirmation and Catholics’ self-definition. These stories, of Confirmation and Catholics self-understanding in the twentieth century, cannot be

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isolated, but are rather best considered in light of one another. Taken together, the events and movements of the sixties serve as a turning point insofar as they set the stage for Confirmation’s development after 1971.

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal formally began at Duquesne in 1967. Its major influences on the theology of Confirmation, however, did not bubble up until the following decade around the time of and following the promulgation of the revised rite of confirmation by Pope Paul VI in 1971. Therefore, I consider the Charismatic Renewal and its relationship to Confirmation in a chapter dedicated to 1971-1980. In addition to the Charismatic Renewal and the Revised Rite, Confirmation in this decade continued to serve as the canvas upon which the relationship of U.S. Catholics to their wider pluralistic culture was painted. As Catholics continue to become less distinct from their fellow U.S. citizens, Confirmation begins to be a way of marking Catholics’ choice for the Church in a pluralistic culture.

In the final period, 1981-2006, Confirmation absorbs the characteristic individualist emphasis of American culture in a particular manner. By 1981 the Charismatic Renewal has taken a back seat in the Confirmation question. What drives this particular period is a growing individualism among Catholics, noted by many American Catholic historians. In line with the thesis of this project, Confirmation theology and pastoral reflections seem to match this growing individualism with a strong emphasis on Confirmation as a time of individual choice, but also a growing critique of the pastoral results of this emphasis on choice.

The development of this particular approach to Confirmation and its accompanying problems grows to be something of a major sub-thesis of this work. If
Confirmation theology reflects, in some measure, Catholics’ relationship to the wider
culture, by the end of the twentieth century that influence has reached a level at which
Confirmation has unintentionally begun to undercut Catholic identity. The conclusion,
then, makes some general suggestions about the direction of the Confirmation
conversation and points to some particular approaches to Confirmation that hold promise
for addressing the contemporary context.

Some, especially in the later twentieth century, deem Confirmation “the forgotten
sacrament,” while such a designation proves accurate from one angle, from others
Confirmation appears to be absolutely central to numerous important Catholic
movements in the United States. Scratching the surface a bit, it quickly becomes clear
that Confirmation received no shortage of attention from theologians and catechists in the
United States across the twentieth century. Certainly in some cases, this attention betrays
the lack of attention given it by Catholics in the pews and it serves as a sort of rallying
cry for the importance of the sacrament. There are, however, also cases, such as the
Catholic charismatic movement, where the excitement over Confirmation is much more
organic and even a gesture of revitalizing the recognition of the Spirit’s presence in the
life of the Church at large.

A few words are necessary, then, about the sources included. I have made no
attempt to be comprehensive in composing the bibliography, but tried to be reasonably
representative of the all of the major themes and developments of Confirmation in the
20th Century U.S. context. I have tried to include a number of sources not often
considered in theological writings about Confirmation—pamphlets, letters to editors,
educational manuals and textbooks, and articles in catechetical periodicals—in addition
to major theological books and articles. I have used selective historical studies that address the issues pertinent to the thesis, giving preference to U.S. Catholic historical studies, while acknowledging other historical arguments where necessary.

I hope that with this somewhat unique collection of sources, the thesis contributes something valuable to the ongoing conversation, without grand illusions of having “resolved the question.” I hope that the thesis displays how important the work that has been done on Confirmation is. Many have been tempted to throw up proverbial arms in theological and pastoral frustration with all that has been written and said about Confirmation over the past 100 years. Yet, the theology of Confirmation has been at the center of the relationship between Catholics and the wider culture in the United States. This work shows that Confirmation, unlike any other sacrament, has served as a canvas on which Catholics have striven to find their self-identity. This has important implications for the present. We need to discern, as a Church, what sort of relationship between Catholics and the wider U.S. culture the sacrament of Confirmation is instilling in the mostly younger Catholics who receive the sacrament in the twenty-first century. We need, then, to ask important questions about this relationship, which this thesis only begins to ask.

In Louis-Marie Chauvet’s discussion of initiation in his magnum opus Symbol and Sacrament, he speaks of a series of paradoxes that must remain in an “unstable equilibrium” if Christian initiation is to be able to function well. Among these paradoxes he lists, “the necessity of setting an end to the initiation process, an end which, however,
never truly arrives in Christianity." In some ways this study may be seen as an attempt to exhort Catholics to do a better job of “holding up both ends of the chain,” to use the words of Henri de Lubac, of this paradox. The development of Confirmation in the United States’ context has, largely because of the wider individualism of the culture, too heavily emphasized the former aspect of this initiation paradox such that the latter has largely been obscured. It is the sagging of that latter end of the chain, among other things, that I experienced first-hand in the Diocese of Scranton.

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CHAPTER I

CONFIRMATION, THE LITURGICAL MOVEMENT, AND CATHOLIC ACTION,
1910–1959

This first chapter will explore Confirmation’s place in Catholic theology and practice in the United States across the fifty years following the curial document *Quam Singulari*. 1910 is a significant starting point because *Quam Singulari*, promulgated in that year, opened up new possibilities for theologies of Confirmation by lowering the age of First Eucharist and thus placing it before, instead of after, Confirmation. In the years that follow, theologians and catechists work to articulate a theology for Confirmation, which is now regularly celebrated after First Eucharist. With its now more malleable theology, Confirmation takes on a striking importance among the sacraments. Proponents of the liturgical movement in the United States celebrate it as the sacrament in which Catholics move from passive to active Christianity. It even becomes, in turn, *the* sacrament of Catholic Action, which can be considered a movement of social/political engagement. Both of these movements concerned, in large part, Catholic laity and their involvement as Catholics in the Church and the world. Confirmation, placed at the heart of these two important early twentieth-century movements, serves as the sacrament of Catholic social/political action in the world. That is, Confirmation is largely understood as the sacrament in which Catholics acquire the graces to take on a more pronounced,
mature, or complete Catholicism—a Catholicism that takes seriously and actively the call for social reform.

In this period, Confirmation acquires a high level of attention among theologians and catechists that will continue across the twentieth century. Nevertheless, while the level of attention Confirmation receives is maintained, the purposes for which it receives that attention will fluctuate. This chapter will set the stage for the drama of Confirmation to play out throughout the rest of the century—a drama in which Confirmation will remain at the intersection of Catholics and the wider U.S. context, shifting as this relationship shifts.

**QUAM SINGULARI AND ITS PASTORAL RAMIFICATIONS**

The age of discretion, both for Confession and for Holy Communion, is the time when a child begins to reason, that is about the seventh year, more or less. From that time on begins the obligation of fulfilling the precept of both Confession and Communion.4

With these words of August 1910, the Sacred Congregation of the Discipline of the Sacraments under Pope Pius X laid bare the troubled underbelly of Confirmation without even mentioning it. The Congregation clearly identified the oft-cited and variously interpreted “age of reason or discretion” with the seventh year. Prior to the decree, first Eucharist was not permitted before age twelve and was sometimes received as late as sixteen.5 Confirmation was normally celebrated around age seven, sometimes
as late as twelve, but nearly always before First Communion. As such, it rested between the two more highly regarded sacraments of Baptism and First Eucharist and escaped any distinction as the last in the regular order of sacraments received by school-age Catholics. Along with his encyclical Acerbo Nimis, which canonically established the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) in every parish, this shift in the time of reception of Communion was one of the primary reasons why St. Pius X would later be popularly referred to as “the pope of little children.”

Initially, however, the decree was not entirely well-received in the United States, as those in pastoral roles quickly became concerned about the depth of catechesis children would attain by age seven. Parents, they worried, would have no good reason to continue to bring their children to catechetical classes if the children had already received Communion.

Over the years, concerns over the first reception of Communion transformed into devotion to St. Pius X, who had brought communion to the children, and new pastoral issues would emerge on the horizon. The Holy See’s well-intentioned move of the normal age for the reception of First Eucharist had opened the door for delaying Confirmation to

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Confirmation Needs Its Own Quam Singulari” in When Should We Confirm? The Order of Initiation (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1989): 85-93, which discusses the impact of the decree and places the origins of teenage reception of the Eucharist in the seventeenth century.


8Ibid., 75. Avella and Zalar cite as an example the diocese of Detroit in which bishop and priests were notably unenthusiastic about the shift.

9Ibid., 75-7. Avella and Zalar discuss the change in the images on First Communion certificates – from Old Testament typologies of the Eucharist (such as Melchizedek and the sacrifice of Isaac) to portraits of Pius X.
the teenage years (the years during which young Christians had first approached the communion rail prior to the decree) as a sort of sacramental carrot on the stick of catechists.\textsuperscript{10}

The challenges of proper catechesis paired with the theological questions which arise out of Confirmation’s new position in the order of reception opened the sacrament up to a variety of applications. It would not be long before the rise of Catholic Action and of the liturgical movement converged on Confirmation, one of the movements’ major points of contact.

With the 1899 papal condemnation of “Americanism” still smoldering, theology in the United States leaned heavily on European developments, which, however, had themselves been severely chastened in 1907 by Pius X’s condemnation of “Modernism” in \textit{Pascendi Dominici Gregis}. Largely because of Leo XIII’s \textit{Aeterni Patris} (1879), which had become even more important in the post-\textit{Pascendi} context, the work of St. Thomas Aquinas on Confirmation serves as both a benchmark and a theological paradigm out of which approaches to the sacrament are often developed and discussed.\textsuperscript{11} The neo-Thomistic paradigm places certain themes foremost in Confirmation theology throughout this period: the strengthening of the confirmand, the more perfect indwelling of the Holy Spirit, transition into ecclesial adulthood, a distinction between active and passive

\textsuperscript{10}Turner, \textit{Confirmation}, 98-99. According to Turner and others, delaying Confirmation in this manner became widespread across the decades following \textit{Quam Singulari}. For a different emphasis see Martos, \textit{Doors to the Sacred} who reads \textit{Quam Singulari} as a response to an aspect of the liturgical renewal – the practice of giving Communion to children at a younger age during Mass that had arisen in nineteenth-century France as a result of the growing emphasis on the connection between the celebration of the Mass and the Eucharistic elements (200).

\textsuperscript{11}Leo XIII’s 1879 encyclical \textit{Aeterni Patris} designated the Angelic Doctor’s thought normative for all Catholic theology and philosophy. \textit{Pascendi Dominici Gregis} (1907) was, along with \textit{Lamentabili Sane Exitu} (1907), one of two curial documents condemning modernism. There is, of course, much debate about the extent to which neo-scholastic appeals to St. Thomas are indeed accurate articulations and legitimate developments of his thought.
characters, and the relationship between Baptism and Confirmation. Though it is most explicit in this particular period, the discussion throughout the entire century can be characterized, in one sense, as an ongoing attempt to reconcile these categories with new developments. For example, with the injection of psychological theory into Confirmation theology and catechesis in general, new questions are raised about maturity that Thomas did not address. Most of those writing about Confirmation as it pertains to the liturgical movement and to Catholic Action are working within the neo-Thomistic categories that they have inherited and are applying them to the new socio-political situation.

Also following Pascendi, loyal Church reformers championed the liturgical movement, bubbling in France, Belgium, and Germany very early in the century, while Catholic Action became Pius X’s and Pius XI’s prescription for Catholics’ primary mode of engagement with the European political climate. The call for Catholic Action would continue to grow throughout the coming decades. During this period, the largely immigrant Catholic population in the United States existed primarily in Catholic “ghettoes,” which were not generally considered part of larger American society, fueling an uneasy, somewhat unique relationship with “the world” in the U.S. Church. When, as we will see, Confirmation becomes the sacrament of Catholic Action, Catholics in the U.S. see it particularly through the lens of this social situation. Catholic Action and the liturgical movement were major components of the Catholic Revival in the U.S. and both had a marked impact on Confirmation’s early twentieth-century shape.12

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12 By “Catholic Revival,” I mean “the creating, defending, and spreading of a vibrant Catholic culture in the United States—making Catholicism a way of life.” This is Anne Klejment’s definition from “Catholic Digest’ and the Catholic Revival, 1936-1945,” U.S. Catholic Historian 21, no. 3 (Summer 2003): 94-5.
In the decades immediately following *Quam Singulari*, Pius X’s push for increased reception of the Eucharist spurred on lay involvement in the liturgical movement, particularly in Europe.\(^\text{13}\) Inspired by the zeal he encountered on a trip to Europe in 1925, Virgil Michel, a Benedictine priest from St. John’s Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, “launched the journal *Orate Fratres* [later, *Worship*] to popularize the liturgical movement that he had encountered in Europe the year before, and it soon became a primary catalyst in the American Catholic liturgical movement.”\(^\text{14}\) Michel also made the theology of the Mystical Body of Christ integral to the vision of *Orate Fratres*, which boasted an unusually high number of lay subscribers.\(^\text{15}\) Confirmation occupied the pages of *Orate Fratres* quite soon after its inception. In the years that followed, *Orate Fratres* became a veritable chronicle for the development of reform-minded pastoral/theological thought on Confirmation.

In 1928, after fellow Benedictine Basil Stegmann published a piece entitled “Confirmation, the Armor of the Soul” in which he argued that Confirmation should be celebrated “soon after the years of infancy” in line with present practice,\(^\text{16}\) Michel published a three-part article on Confirmation extended over the next three issues of...

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\(^\text{14}\)Ibid. Campbell notes the liturgical movement’s emphasis on lay participation in the Eucharist and its flourishing at European abbeys, 223.

\(^\text{15}\)Ibid., 226. Campbell also notes here that the audience shaped both the tone and subject matter of the journal.

\(^\text{16}\)Basil Stegmann, “Confirmation, the Armor of the Soul,” *Orate Fratres* 2 (March 1928): 135. Stegmann points to the practice of the early Church here in which Confirmation was celebrated “in connection with, or soon after, Baptism” to support his position. The language of “soldier for Christ” and its corresponding warfare imagery, having deep roots in the tradition, was common throughout this period. For a pastoral example of the imagery and of catechetical method during the period, see Sister M. Chrysantha, “Becoming Soldiers of Jesus Christ: A Unit for the Upper Grades,” *Journal of Religious Education* 2 (May 1932) 810-29.
Michel’s work echoes Stegmann’s in some ways, but also offers some different emphases. Reflecting on the chrism signed on the confirmand’s head, Michel notes that Confirmation “is the one time in the life of every faithful that he comes in direct contact with the power of Christ in its Apostolic abundance.”

Prima facie Michel’s assertion might seem to deny the encounter with Christ in the other sacraments, yet the uniqueness of Confirmation is indicated in the final two words—“Apostolic abundance.” The encounter with the bishop, the successor of the apostles, in Confirmation confers apostolic responsibility on the confirmand; it is “the coming of age of the Christian soul.” This apostolic responsibility would be a clear link for Michel and others when articulating points of contact between liturgical celebrations and the active Christian mission to the world. It is evident from his work that Michel swims in rising theological currents, pushing increased lay participation in the Church and the world. Indeed, Catholic Action was also known as “the lay apostolate.”

The phrase “soldiers for Christ” and its attendant warring imagery were widespread and official in the tradition during this period. Both Stegmann and Michel rely on such imagery heavily in their theologies. Stegmann uses the imagery in a passive manner and Michel in a more active one. Evident from his subtitle, for Stegmann, the strengthening of Confirmation is that of protection or “armor.” For Michel, Confirmation is an impulse, a spur toward the active Christian life, evident in his third subtitle, “Call to Battle.”

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19 Ibid., 169.
The different uses of the imagery are reflected in the *Baltimore Catechism*. There is a shift from the more internally focused verbs of 1885 edition stressing submission, “We are called soldiers of Jesus Christ to indicate how we must *resist* the attacks of our spiritual enemies and secure our victory over them by *following* and *obeying* Our Lord” to the verbs of the 1946 edition, stressing action: “A confirmed person is called a soldier of Christ because, through Confirmation, he is especially deputed to *profess* the faith *strongly* and to *fight* for it.”

Michel is thus a precursor to the more official revisions that would come with the new, revised edition of the *Baltimore Catechism* (1949) and, before that, the pontificate of Pius XI (1922-1939).

Michel places striking weight upon the sacrament of Confirmation. Following St. Thomas Aquinas, he elaborates an ontological distinction between Baptism and Confirmation, endorsing St. Thomas’s position that Baptism is movement from non-being to being and Confirmation movement from being to perfect being. “Perfect” here is meant in the traditional sense of “being essentially complete” rather than in its contemporary popular sense. The implications of this ontological distinction are again active ones. Michel argues that Baptism initiates the possibility of living supernaturally and perhaps lessens its difficulties, whereas Confirmation nearly eradicates these difficulties by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This assumes, however, cooperation with the supernatural powers received at Confirmation. Michel writes, “Now that we have received the grace of Confirmation, *what are we going to do about it?* Forget it? Or

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remember it as a festive event of our past lives and nothing more?” and further, “The graces of Confirmation will therefore come to full effect only if put to active use in life; and only if thus put to use, will the fruits of the Spirit come into actuality.” Without concrete Christian action, these graces of the sacrament are not fully realized.

In the liturgy Michel saw an educative remedy to American individualism and materialism. His theology of Confirmation was clearly of a piece with his pursuit of liturgical renewal in the U.S Church as well as his Thomistic theological tones. To this end, Michel encourages parishes to celebrate Confirmation as an event for which the entire parish prepares extensively and identifies the home as a place of continued encouragement to live out the graces of Confirmation.

With his emphasis on the apostolic gift to the laity in Confirmation, Michel’s articles display the undercurrents of lay involvement in the Church that rise to the fore following the Great Depression and are supplemented by the American Church’s reception of Pius XI’s *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931). Debra Campbell writes:

>The depression was [an] important catalyst in the changing self perceptions of the Catholic community. It reawakened the social consciences of the laity, prompting what Donald Thorman described as the rebirth of the lay apostolate, virtually dormant (as a mass movement) since the demise of lay congresses in the 1890s…. This new impulse toward a more strenuous effort to promote social justice among the urban poor was reinforced by the appearance of the social encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* in 1931.

This new-found fervor for social action would become more explicit about a decade later in theologies of Confirmation emphasizing the socio-political implications of the sacrament, beyond the internal, spiritual ones. Indeed Pius XI’s social encyclical was

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written to combat the “evil individualist spirit of the age,” a spirit against which Michel
and the liturgical movement in the U.S. vigorously fought.

In 1931, the same year that Quadragesimo Anno was promulgated, the Pontifical
Commission for Authentically Interpreting the Canons of the Code dashed the hopes of
some catechists who wished for a later Confirmation by reaffirming canon 788 of the
1917 Code of Canon Law, which found age seven most suitable for the celebration of
Confirmation. The reaffirmation resulted in a pastoral conundrum. For catechists and
pastors who strove to uphold both Quam Singulari and the Code of Canon Law, it was
improper to confer Confirmation after First Communion, as was a growing trend, and it
was impossible to confer Confirmation beforehand, as had been common practice prior to
Quam Singulari, because Confirmation could not be celebrated before age seven and the
reception of Eucharist was to begin at age seven. It seemed that the only available
option was to celebrate Confirmation and First Eucharist concurrently, or at least in the
same year, an option seemingly not widely taken. What was solidified, it seems, was the
link between Confirmation and responsibility.

Confirmation understood as Christian responsibility took on a decidedly social
cast. H. A. Reinhold, for example, drawing explicitly on Quadragesimo Anno, argues that
the “responsibility” of Confirmation requires Christians to invest in a socially conscious

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27Quoted in William T. Cavanaugh, Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the
Body of Christ, Challenges in Contemporary Theology, ed. Gareth Jones and Lewis Ayers
(Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 137. See Pius XI, Quadragesimo Anno, 88, 109 in David J.
O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage
28Paul Turner, Ages of Initiation: The First Two Christian Millennia with CD-ROM of
Source Excerpts (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2000), CD-ROM Chapter 12, section 6. See also, A.
63-5.
29On this difficulty see [Letter to the editor and response] “Confirmation Before First
manner and “to tackle this modern scourge of capitalism… in the name of the sacramental life of the Church.”30 In an epigram to the article, Reinhold cites the cardinals of Milan and Malines who write that Catholic Action must be liturgical or will cease to exist; Reinhold himself connects sacramental worship to social responsibility via Confirmation. Thus, Confirmation works as the buttress for this all-important link between lay social action and the liturgy.

CATHOLIC ACTION AND CONFIRMATION

The social encyclicals, the misery of the Great Depression, and the uneasiness of the interbellum period gave added urgency and vigor to the Catholic Action movement. Historian Debra Campbell defines Catholic Action: “From the 30s through the 50s, the terms ‘Catholic Action’ and ‘lay apostolate’ were extensively used by Catholic bishops, priests, and lay people to refer to the laity’s recently rediscovered responsibility to take action on the Church’s behalf.”31 Increased lay involvement in the life of the Church, both internally and externally, was encouraged since the beginning of the twentieth century and continued to grow throughout the next fifty years under the designation “Catholic Action.”

Five years prior to Quam Singulari, Pius X had described the goal of Catholic Action in his encyclical Il Fermo Proposito—“the restoration of all things in Christ.” Campbell explains, “Pius X declared that he needed ‘the cooperation’ of both the clergy and the faithful in fulfilling his pastoral office. He added that ‘in truth, we are called…to build up that unique body of which Christ is the Head, a body which is highly

organized…and well coordinated in all its movements.” Pius X’s encyclical, paired with the mandate of parish CCD in the same year (1905), furthered Leo XIII’s overtures toward lay activism and set the stage for “the Catholic Action pope” Pius XI. Theodore Hesburgh discusses Pius XI’s emphasis on Catholic Action:

From his first encyclical letter, *Ubi Arcano* [1922], which sounded a general call to the lay apostolate, to his last encyclical, *Con Singular Complacentia* [1939], published on the day of his death, exhorting the hierarchy of the Philippines to strengthen their organization of Catholic Action, his writings and addresses are ever insistent on this one point [Catholic Action]… he takes care to remark many times over that this apostolate of the laity is not an innovation but a *re-emphasis of what is traditional in the Church.*

In 1934, Pius XI referred to Baptism and Confirmation as the sacraments of Catholic Action—Baptism insofar as it makes one a member of the Mystical Body of Christ and Confirmation in a more obvious way, making confirmandi “*Iesu Christi milites*”: soldiers for Jesus Christ. In so doing, Pius fomented connections between the active work of the laity and the apostolic character of Confirmation. The link between Catholic Action and Confirmation became more explicit and more widespread.

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32 Ibid. All quotations from *Il Fermo Proposito* are from Campbell’s text.
33 Theodore Hesburgh, “The Relation of the Sacramental Characters of Baptism and Confirmation to the Lay Apostolate” (Ph.D. Diss., Catholic University of America, 1946), 12, 16.
34 Pope Pius XI, *Ex Officiosis Litteris: Apostolic Letter to Cardinal Cerejeira Concerning Catholic Action in Portugal. Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 25 (1934): 629. Pius writes, “*Ac revera, modo quisquis rem attente consideret, ipsa Baptismatis Confirmationisque sacramenta in variis, quae imperantur, officiis, apostolicum etiam studium praecipiunt; voluntatem videlicet proximis cuiusque suis spirituali operi ferendi. Confirmatione nempe Iesu Christi milites efficimur; atqui militi cuique non tam pro suo quam pro ceterorum bono elaborandumque esse nemo est qui non videat. Quod quidem officium. Baptismatis etiam sacramentum suadet, quamvis id profanis non aequo pateat. Indidem enim Ecclesiae veluti membra evadimus, hoc est mystici Iesu Christi corporis.*” Yves Congar cites the document in *Lay People in the Church*, trans. Donald Attwater (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1965), 207, although it is mistakenly titled *Ex Officiosis Libris*. See also Victor White, “The Apostolate of the Laity through Catholic Action” in *New Blackfriars* 15 (September 1934), 578 who translates the passage and attributes it to the Holy Father, without citation. White argues that there is strong connection between the Liturgical Movement and Catholic Action in that both are oriented toward increased active participation of the laity in the life and work of the Church. He agrees that Confirmation is rightly called “the Sacrament of Catholic Action.”
In 1941, *Orate Fratres* reprinted an article from *New Blackfriars* by English Dominican Gerard Meath written three years prior.  

Meath’s article explores the connection between Confirmation and the lay apostolate:

> The nature and the degree of... sharing in the Priesthood of Christ varies considerably in the different grades within the Church; but it is a reality even in the lowest grade and gives an almost unbelievable quality and value to even the most commonplace participation in the liturgical life of the Church; and the source of this sacerdotal power throughout all the hierarchical grades is to be found in the Sacraments. Moreover, as far as Catholic Action in the modern sense is concerned, there is a particularly important source to be recognized in the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Meath associates “layman’s Holy Orders” with public witness, full membership in the Church, and spiritual maturity. The seed that had been planted by Michel was bearing fruit in the form of Confirmation’s association with Catholic Action.

Benedictine Damascus Winzen, without calling Confirmation the sacrament of Catholic Action, discusses the apostolic mission of the laity inaugurated at Confirmation. He writes, “Knowing the catechism is no more than knowing the ABC’s. You must become a teacher, a missionary, an ‘apostle’! As a confirmed Christian you have an official mission and therefore also a definite responsibility towards the ‘hundred millions’ in our country who do not know Christ and towards the many more millions all over the world.”

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36 Ibid., 457. See also Hesburgh, “The Relation of the Sacramental Characters of Baptism and Confirmation to the Lay Apostolate,” 182. Drawing on Thomas Aquinas, Hesburgh describes Confirmation as “midway between the characters of baptism [primarily passive and ordained for one’s individual good] and holy orders [primarily active and ordained for the sanctification of others].” The character of Confirmation, then, is both passive (spiritual protection) and active (apostolic and oriented toward others), yet Hesburgh is clear that the participation in Christ’s priestly munus through Confirmation is significantly less in degree than holy orders.  
world who are ignorant of God.” Winzen’s understanding of the lay apostolate is shaped by the post World War II context; he laments that even though Catholics outnumber Communists in the United Nations, there is no mention of God in its proceedings.

Like St. Thomas, Winzen draws a clear distinction between Baptism and Confirmation, describing the years after Baptism as the beginning stage of the Christian life during which Catholics remain self-focused, but the character of Confirmation, he argues, “transcends the narrow circle of personal salvation and authorizes to actions that have reference to the Church as a whole.”

Displaying some of the period’s contentiousness of Catholics in the U.S. with the Protestant majority, Winzen blames Protestants’ rejection of sacramental Confirmation for their “[inability] to develop a really Christian civilization,” since “confirmation is the sacrament of the plenitude of Christ.” This plenitude, Winzen asserts, can be found in the symbolism of chrism, for “the material which is used in confirmation… is a mixture of olive oil and balm. The


40 Ibid., 390. See Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae III.72.4, rep. obj. 3.

41 Ibid., 389, n. 1. In same year that Winzen writes, Anglican Benedictine Gregory Dix published his groundbreaking study, The Theology of Confirmation in Relation to Baptism (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1946) in which he argues, based on patristic texts, that Confirmation is of superior importance to Baptism in that Baptism has a negative effect (cleansing from sin) and Confirmation a positive one (the grace of the Holy Spirit). Dix’s work precipitated new conversation on the relationship between the two among Anglicans and non-Anglicans alike, conversation which would endure throughout the following decades. For Catholics, the significant questions coming out of this debate concerned the character of Confirmation in relation to that of Baptism and how to understand the workings of the Holy Spirit in each of the sacraments.
mixture itself indicates the inner wealth of the Spirit who, being one, is manifold in His works.”

Winzen continues by discussing the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit’s indwelling in the Christian person, and the fragrance of the chrism which, emanating from the confirmandi, fills the entire Church like the Holy Spirit. The chrism, consecrated by the bishop, also symbolizes the confirmandi’s apostolic mission as they are “made co-workers of the clergy in a special way.”

Writing in 1947, the same year that Pius XII greatly encouraged the liturgical movement via his encyclical *Mediator Dei*, Dominican James R. Gillis notes a shift toward ecclesial responsibility in the way that confirmandi see themselves, “Today the confirmed are less inclined to see their consecration merely in the terms of their own private matter against the world, the flesh, and the devil, and are more inclined to recognize their responsibility to the Church.” Gillis is at pains to broaden the emphasis on the internal “battle of the soul” that Confirmation helps to fight. The individual’s interior life in the Spirit, Gillis argues, is not merely a precursor for Catholic Action, but constitutive of it. In conjunction with making adults out of “spiritual children,” Confirmation is, for Gillis, the sacrament of the lay apostolate. He writes, “the real case for Confirmation will be written by a living apostolate made fresh by the breath of the Holy Ghost” and, in turn, “Catholics will not heed this call to take their place in the

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43 Ibid., 341.
45 Gillis, “The Case for Confirmation,” 166.
apostolic mission of the Church] until they begin to find it necessary to call upon that 
strengthening grace of Confirmation frequently and fervently.”

Deeper reflections on the mystical body of Christ theology, tied to the liturgical 
movement and to Pius XII’s encyclical *Mystici Corporis* (1943), prompted some to 
reconceive the sacraments as “the vital functions of that Body.” George Smith’s article 
in 1952 is indicative of this move. Like those considered previously, Smith continues to 
stress the distinction between Baptism and Confirmation in terms of childhood and 
adulthood. He emphasizes, quoting St. Thomas, that children are naturally individualistic; 
therefore, Baptism helps them in the realm of individual spiritual growth. The 
responsibility to bear witness, to reach outside of oneself, comes with “spiritual maturity” 
in the Church, brought about by Confirmation. Bearing witness further corresponds to 
one’s place “in the organism of the Mystical Body.” The Spirit, Smith argues, is the one 
who comes upon the Christian to make witness possible over and against the world 
whose spirit is inimical to the Church which is guided by the Holy Spirit.

While Smith’s emphasis on witness according to one’s role in the Mystical Body 
of Christ is novel, his understanding of the active and social implications of Confirmation 
are in line with the growing emphasis on the previous few decades.

The tensile relationship between the Church in the United States and the wider 
culture will prove deeply influential in the theologies that will develop throughout the 
remainder of the twentieth century. The traditional distinction between the inimical

46Ibid., 184, 182.
48Ibid., 385-9.
49Ibid., 389. Smith draws out the implications of this witness in a world where it is 
unpopular. He even makes the connection with accepting martyrdom if necessary, presumably 
drawing on the Greek root of the word martyr, “witness.”
50Ibid., 392.
“world” and the Christian life takes on a specific tone and a tangible reality among the predominately immigrant Catholic population struggling to be legitimate citizens of the United States. Confirmation, as with Smith and many who follow, becomes emblematic of the Catholic attempt to negotiate the gap between Catholic culture and “the world.” The boundaries of “the world” and Catholics’ posture toward it are in no way univocal and neither is Confirmation theology.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has analyzed the major developments and currents in Confirmation theology and practice from 1910-1959. We have seen that theologians associated Confirmation with both Catholic Action and the Liturgical Movement in the United States—both movements that dealt with the relationship between Catholics and “the world.” Both movements move to awaken the laity to their role in evangelizing the world through witness and social/political action. As such, Confirmation has found a place, following Quam Singulari, as a sacramental point of contact between Catholics and the wider culture. The next chapter shall analyze the developments of Confirmation as Catholics’ place in the U.S. culture shifts rather dramatically.
CHAPTER II

If the first half of the twentieth century had been characterized by movements aimed at awakening the laity to their role in the Church and the world, the period from 1960 to 1971 was characterized by a reconfiguration of the way in which the very terms “Church” and “world” functioned in American Catholic discourse. No longer was it so clear that “the world” stood entirely outside of the Catholic subculture in which many U.S. Catholics had been formed. As the first generations of Catholics began to be raised beyond this subculture, “the world” now penetrated every aspect of Catholic life. Catholic formation changed from a mode in which Catholics lived and breathed Catholic culture to one in which Catholics lived and breathed American cultural and religious pluralism. While Catholic Action and the liturgical movement had made strides in rallying the Catholic laity, though not always in the way the popes and bishops had imagined, the terms according to which they operated were not directly transferable to the new socio-political situation of Catholics in the U.S. Theological developments, too, disqualified the Catholic Action ecclesiological framework which had made too firm distinctions both between both the laity and the clergy and between the Church and the

51For an example of this tension, see Pecklers, The Unread Vision, 118-22. The Grail Movement, a women’s movement that had connections to both Catholic Action and the liturgical movement, upset Archbishop Samuel Stritch of Chicago in 1942 by their failure to emphasize that the laity take their cues from the hierarchy.
world. The fragmentation of American culture—in the form of separations between political action, charity work, worship/private prayer…etc.—began to undercut the hope of the liturgical movement to unite liturgy and social action.

Combined with developments in sacramental theology and the work of the Second Vatican Council, the dissolution of the subculture had marked effects on Confirmation. As Catholic Action lost steam and the liturgical movement reached a new stage in the work of the Second Vatican Council, it became necessary for Confirmation to find a new theological/pastoral home. This chapter will demonstrate how Confirmation shifted from its place as the sacrament of Catholic Action and of the liturgical movement to the sacrament in which a Catholic proclaims Catholicism as her religion of choice. The latter theology appears in some texts at the very end of this period, but will reach its height a decade later, after some other approaches rise to the fore in the later 70s. The major shift in Confirmation theology and practice that occurred during this period is due to at least four factors, which will each be considered in turn: (1) the theological paradigm shift leading up to the Second Vatican Council; (2) the promulgation and reception of Vatican II’s Constitution on Sacred Liturgy; (3) the “dissolution of the Catholic subculture” in the United States; and (4) the assimilation of psycho-social anthropological theory into catechetical and theological thought.

A “NEW” THEOLOGY

Leo XIII’s encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879) cemented neo-scholasticism as the Catholic theology, a very rare phenomenon in the history of a Church that has always had a plurality of theological sensibilities and methods (for example: Pauline/Johannine;
Alexandrian/Antiochene; Dominican/Franciscan/Ignatian). Dissatisfied with the methods and results of neo-scholastic theology, some mid-twentieth century Dominicans and Jesuits began to rediscover the myriad riches of the Church’s theological heritage and to bring those riches to bear upon contemporary questions. *Nouvelle théologie*, as it was known by its detractors, was a somewhat heterogeneous movement guided by the principle that theology should be done in service of the Church’s engagement with the contemporary milieu via a *ressourcement*, or a creative “return to the sources.”

These sources begin with Scripture and extend across the tradition, with a particular focus on Patristic texts; these theologians also undertook a careful re-reading of St. Thomas’s writings that had been filtered through various modern Thomistic commentators throughout the neo-scholastic period.

Edward Schillebeeckx, though not part of the *nouvelle théologie* movement precisely defined, received his doctorate from *Le Saulchoir* in Etoilles, France, the Dominican bastion of *nouvelle théologie*. Schillebeeckx caught the attention of many by his methodological fusion of Thomistic theology and phenomenology. One of the first fruits of Schillebeeckx’s work was in the area of sacramental theology. Joseph Martos explains:

Schillebeeckx was instrumental in showing that Catholicism could develop a theology of the sacraments which was both faithful to the insights of Thomas Aquinas and free of the minimalistic tendency of late scholasticism. Like Aquinas he attempted to recapture the religious experience within the sacramental ritual and then to speak about the experience in philosophical terms, but the basic terms

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he chose came not from Aristotelian philosophy but from contemporary existentialism.\footnote{Martos, \textit{Doors to the Sacred}, 110. For example, Schillebeeckx found that “\textit{ex opere operato},” the phrase used to express distance between the sacrament and its minister that had too often lead to sacramental mechanism, is actually used sparingly by Thomas and serves as a building block in a much larger, nuanced sacramental theology. See Schillebeeckx’s seminal work on the sacraments, \textit{Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God} (Franklin, WI: Sheed Ward, 1963), 82-9.}

Along with Karl Rahner and Henri de Lubac, Schillebeeckx ushers in the well-known revolution in sacramental theology which, reacting against neo-scholastic approaches, marks the sacraments as “milestones” in a broader Christian sacramental way of life.\footnote{Schillebeeckx, \textit{Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God}, 200-15.}

He identifies Christ as the primordial sacrament of God and the Church as the sacrament of Christ, connecting the sacraments to Christ via the Church in a real, but less mechanical way than had been conceived. Schillebeeckx uses the phenomenological term “encounter” to describe the sacraments; through these encounters, the faithful enter more deeply into the mystery of Christ, and in turn, grow in their relationship with God.\footnote{See ibid., esp. 133-5. See also Karl Rahner, \textit{The Church and the Sacraments}, Quaestiones Disputatae Series, vol 9, trans. W. J. O’Hara (Freiburg: Herder, 1963).}

In light of Schillebeeckx’s work in the late fifties and early sixties, sacramental theology generally became less focused on the specific graces and characters of the sacrament and more oriented toward the formative character of these “encounters.”\footnote{In addition to Schillebeeckx and Rahner, Henri de Lubac also contributed to this sea change in sacramental thought. See for example, Henri de Lubac, \textit{Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man}, trans. Lancelot Sheppard and Sister Elizabeth Englund, OCD (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988; French original, 1947), 82-111, where de Lubac emphasizes the role of the sacraments in upholding the unity of the Church.}

This renewal of the historical depth of theological work seriously challenged the close association between Catholic Action and Confirmation. In the United States, Ursuline sister Marian Bohen offers an example of the influence of \textit{ressourcement} theology on Confirmation. Identifying the wide range of Confirmation theologies at play,
including those of important contemporary European theologians such as: Louis Bouyer, Charles Journet, Karl Rahner, and Schillebeeckx, Bohen notes that she began her in-depth study of Confirmation with the conviction that Confirmation is best understood as the sacrament of Catholic Action, an association that developed during the previous decades and extended into this period particularly in catechetical/pastoral pamphlets. After serious historical study, Bohen abandons this position in favor of a theology that proposes Confirmation as the mystērion of the Holy Spirit. The narrow association of this age-old sacrament with the modern Catholic Action movement seemed to betray its theological richness. Instead, Bohen draws upon the Greek root, mystērion, from which “sacrament” is ultimately derived, in order to highlight the revelation of “mystery” in the sacrament, a sense which Bohen argues has been lost in identifying Confirmation primarily as the sacrament of Catholic Action. Drawing on Schillebeeckx’s theology of the Church as the sacrament of Christ, Pius XII’s Mystici Corporis, and numerous New Testament texts, Bohen asserts that “Christ and the Church are one by quasi-identity,” leading her to conclude that the sacraments are mysterious (in the sense of mystērion) encounters with Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection. Of Confirmation she writes:

The reality which is called the Holy Spirit is Charity, and so it is he who pours forth this reality, this power from on high, this “Godliness” into Christian hearts. To this reality does the Spirit bear witness before the world as he purifies,

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58 Bohen, Mystery, 47. For an example of a European thinker who also jettisons the “sacrament of Catholic Action” position because it does violence to the sources, see Pierre-Thomas Camelot, “La théologie de la Confirmation à la lumière des controverses recentes,” La Maison-Dieu 54 (1958): 79-91.

59 Bohen, Mystery, 59-63.
enlightens, strengthens, and perfects the children of God. In reflecting and radiating this reality, confirmed Christians are mystēria of the Church in Christ… The sacrament of confirmation is the mystērion of the Holy Spirit. This sacrament is, then, the revelation in symbol of that power of God in man which is most radically opposed to ‘world’ and ‘flesh’.

Bohen recovers the understanding of the Holy Spirit as love from the annals of Patristic and scholastic Trinitarian theology to describe Confirmation as the “seal of Love.” She finds this theology able to address problems that cannot be addressed by Catholic Action theology, such as why the Church confirms in danger of death. She also argues, based on her theology of the Holy Spirit, that the anointing of Confirmation deepens that of Baptism in degree, but not in kind.

Bohen’s investigation of the Fathers also led her to re-emphasize Confirmation as a “sacrament of initiation” and its connection to Baptism and Eucharist; she writes: “According to the earliest liturgies and patristic testimony, baptism-confirmation-eucharist formed one ‘rite’ of Christian initiation, and it is only in this framework that the signifying mysteries of baptism and confirmation can be understood.” She describes Confirmation as the second stage of initiation, in which the Holy Spirit completes the Christian’s death and rebirth in Christ begun in Baptism. The Eucharist is the third and culminating stage of Christian initiation. Bohen draws out the catechetical implications of her revised theology, arguing that “reasoning power is not an essential requisite for confirmation. Therefore, the argument that the soldier of Christ must know the faith he is defending and thus should not be confirmed unless he shows sufficient knowledge of the

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60 Ibid., 184.
61 Ibid., 185-7. See also Karl Rahner, The Church and the Sacraments, Quaestiones Disputatae Series, vol. 9, trans. W. J. O’Hara (Freiburg: Herder, 1963): esp. 87-93. Rahner holds a similar position on the relationship between Baptism and Confirmation, describing them as degrees of one sacrament, akin to the diaconate, presbyterate, and episcopate of Orders.
62 Bohen, Mystery, 63.
content of the catechism is not a valid one.”^63 She further distills the catechetical implications of her position a year later in an article in *Worship*:

Confirmation is of a piece with baptism and the Eucharist, so that to separate it from these two sacraments is to lose something vital to its meaning….

The catechesis of confirmation, therefore, should necessarily follow on baptism and precede the child’s first reception of the bread of the Eucharist….

Catechetical preparation on confirmation itself should naturally center on the person of the Holy Spirit, and the best way of communicating some realization of the reality of his personality would be through the use of biblical and liturgical images.64

Bohen’s work elicits three conclusions indicative of the theological shift in the first half of the decade. First, influenced by the “return to the sources,” Bohen identifies Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist of a kind as “sacraments of initiation,” terminology which became official at the Second Vatican Council. Second, and connected to the first, she argues that the “soldier for Christ” theology tied to Catholic Action and prominent throughout the first half of the twentieth century cannot hold water in light of early Church practice and Patristic theology.65 Third, she mines some of Confirmation’s theological richness in light of patristic and scholastic theologies of the Holy Spirit,

^63 Ibid., 145.

^64 Bohen, “Confirmation Catechesis,” *Worship* 38, no. 11 (January 1964): 88. The catechetical conversation is largely connected to the order of the sacraments of initiation and their identification as such. See Charles Connors, C.S.Sp., “Sacrament as Weapon?” *The Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 62, no. 5 (February 1962): 417-18, where Connors notes his impression that most U.S. dioceses delay Confirmation beyond first Eucharist for catechetical reasons – so that young people continue attending religious education classes into the teenage years. Like Bohen, Connors laments the shift in emphasis from the grace of the sacrament to the knowledge gained prior to its reception.

^65 Bohen’s move in this regard is significant and unique not because all previous theologies of Confirmation were centered on Catholic Action, but because she rejects the theology on historical grounds. At the turn of the decade there were theologians avoiding Confirmation’s direct association with Catholic Action apart from such Patristic exegesis. For example, see J.P. Kenny, S.J. “The Age for Confirmation,” *Worship* 35, no. 1 (December 1960): 14-5. Kenny argues that Confirmation should be considered “the sacrament of perseverance” because the Holy Spirit comes to the individual’s aid to maintain personal faith following the critical choice properly made at the age of reason.
associating Confirmation with “seal” and the mutual love between the Father and the Son. This ressourcement will shape the questions surrounding Confirmation across the next few decades.

**SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM AND ITS WAKE**

Promulgated in 1963, the same year as Bohen’s book was published, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, lent official support to the designation “sacraments of initiation” for Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. The council fathers called for revision to the Confirmation rite “so that the intimate connection of this sacrament with the whole of the Christian initiation may more clearly appear.” The nature of this “intimate connection” among the sacraments of initiation and how it is best illustrated would become a key question in sacramental theology following the Council.

*Sacrosanctum Concilium* also called for the restoration of the catechumenate, a practice of preparation for initiation widely employed in the early Church in which those preparing to enter the Church are mentored as they move toward readiness for initiation in distinct steps of prayer and catechesis. This early Church practice informed the promulgation of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) (1972), which established an ordinary ritual in which adults receive all three sacraments of initiation on a single occasion. In the years following its promulgation, many point to the RCIA as the norm for Christian initiation and, therefore, a model for all other celebrations of the

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67 Ibid., no. 64.
sacraments of initiation. *That* the RCIA was to serve as a model for initiation in the Church was not generally disputed, but *how* that is to be understood garnered much discussion. Some pointed to the celebration of all three sacraments on one occasion as the norm, some pointed to adult initiation as the norm, and some pointed to the order, Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist, as the norm established by the RCIA.\(^6^8\) These different emphases would prove to be central in the Confirmation discussion over the decades to follow.

*Sacrosanctum Concilium* did not quell the debates about Confirmation but it did reconfigure the terms of the discussion. The council fathers did not mention Catholic Action with regard to Confirmation, notably not reiterating Pius XI’s direct correlation of the two in 1934. They simply call for the clearer expression of unity between Baptism and Confirmation. The precise nature of this unity became a central theological question in the Council’s wake, especially after many years had been spent contrasting Baptism and Confirmation in order to distinguish the manner of grace received in each.\(^6^9\)

As if she were immediately responding to the concerns of the Council, Benedictine professor of religious education Mary Charles Bryce writes about the “isolation” of Confirmation both from Christ’s saving action in the world and from the other sacraments as the cause of Catholics’ inadequate theological treatment of


\(^{69}\)See Chapter I, n. 37.
Confirmation. More specifically, she perceives Confirmation’s isolation from the other two sacraments of initiation problematic. Bryce writes:

There is a hierarchy of sacraments with baptism and eucharist in positions of pre-eminence. While all sacraments must be studied in relation to these two, confirmation has a special affinity to them. Together with baptism and the eucharist it forms a triad—‘the sacraments of initiation,’ as they are called today. The lack of emphasis on this relational role contributed perhaps more than any other factor to the confusion regarding the function and purpose of the sacrament. Until more light is thrown on this issue, tangential inquiries or peripheral searchings for the distinctive grace effect of this sacrament will continue.

Bryce finds in Sacrosanctum Concilium discouragement of “the longstanding practice,… at least in this country, of administering the rite [of Confirmation] outside a eucharistic celebration,” a practice, along with the propensity to delay Confirmation for “too long a time after Baptism,” which is indicative of sacramental “isolation.”

Despite the tension and widespread disagreement brought about by considering Confirmation in isolation, Bryce finds three constants “appearing early in an historical investigation and enjoying an unbroken tradition down to the present” in Confirmation theology and practice: 1) Confirmation is the completion and perfection of baptismal initiation; 2) in Confirmation, the Holy Spirit is bestowed in a special manner; 3) Confirmation effects what the Holy Spirit does. Citing Schillebeeckx and Hans Urs von Balthasar, Bryce offers the redemptive mystery of Christ as a corrective to the confusion over Confirmation; she associates Baptism with Easter (death to life) and Confirmation

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71Ibid., 288. Emphasis added.
72Ibid., 287.
with Pentecost (the descent of the Holy Spirit). In this way, the two sacraments constitute one mystery, intertwined with the one mystery of redemption.\(^\text{74}\) This move leaves her with the question of the Holy Spirit’s work in Pentecost.

Working out of the third “constant” —that Confirmation effects what the Holy Spirit does—Bryce pursues Confirmation via the Holy Spirit’s action. She writes, “the work of the Spirit is to effect the divinization of man.”\(^\text{75}\) For Bryce, divinization happens primarily on the individual level, albeit in the context of the Church. While she mentions the Spirit’s (and therefore love’s presence) in the Church as a whole, Bryce’s considerations focus on the Spirit’s indwelling in the individual Christian. Of divinization she writes:

A gift freely given, love elicits, hopes for a free response. Unregenerate man is incapable of response in the fullest Christian sense. But one filled with the Spirit is capable. Freedom then, a certain liberation of the person, is likewise a fruit of the Holy Spirit’s presence in the community and in the individuals in that community. The Holy Spirit informs and enflames man bringing him to a true discovery and realization of himself.\(^\text{76}\)

Here, Bryce mentions the Spirit’s dwelling in the community and the individual, but she explains divinization primarily as individual—“liberation of the person,” “a true discovery and realization of himself.” Confirmation serves as the locus for this personal interrogation and introspection. Bryce’s theology purposely avoids “isolating” Confirmation from Baptism and Eucharist; it does, however place a strong emphasis on

\(^\text{74}\)Bryce, “Confirmation,” 289.
\(^\text{75}\)Ibid., 291-2.
\(^\text{76}\)Ibid., 292. See also Francis Buckley, S.J., “What Age for Confirmation?” *Theological Studies* 27, no. 4 (December 1966): 656, 661. Buckley also discusses the Holy Spirit’s work in Confirmation in relation to the Pentecost event and Acts of the Apostles in general. He writes, “The special characteristics of this gift of the Spirit (as distinct from the prebaptismal, baptismal, and postbaptismal gifts) are visibility, power, a social purpose, and an understanding of the Christ-event to bear effective witness to others.” Like Bryce, the primary place of the Spirit’s dwelling is in the hearts of Christ’s followers.
the individual confirmand. Since Bryce describes the Spirit’s primary dwelling place as one’s heart, the psychological development of the person becomes the natural place to turn to understand the work of Confirmation.

Bryce’s emphasis on the individual receiving Confirmation marks an incipient shift in Confirmation theology in which the sacrament serves the development of individual maturity. This new direction differs from the focus on the grace received in the soul of the confirmand by those elaborating a Catholic Action theology in that the former takes maturity as such as a starting point. More will be said about this shift, which involves the role of the social sciences in Confirmation theology, in the final section of this chapter. Because, however, the application of these disciplines to theology was largely enabled by Catholics’ emergence from the subculture, the next section will address that emergence.

A SUBCULTURE DISSOLVING

As the sixties rolled on, many Catholics in the United States continually underwent a large-scale entrée into the wider culture out of immigrant Catholic “ghettoes” where, from a young age, the Church seemed almost unavoidable. William L. Portier describes this shift as the “dissolution of the subculture”:

Between World War I and the time of the Second Vatican Council, immigrant Catholics voluntarily built an elaborate subculture centered in the urban Northeast but extending to the cities of the Midwest with outposts as far-flung as Butte, Montana and Shawnee, Oklahoma. A network of parishes, schools at every level, hospitals and other agencies served as a buffer between most Catholics and American religious pluralism. Though geographically diverse, the subculture had a distinctive spiritual and intellectual topography. Not all Catholics went to Catholic schools. But whether they lived in New Jersey or Oklahoma, they participated in varying degrees in a shared religious culture. They learned similar practices of praying and thinking that added to their demographic distinctiveness.
This Catholic world was surely not airtight. But it helped to protect generations of immigrants from Nativism and anti-Catholicism even as it schooled them in how to be Americans. As a result, most American Catholics never felt the full effects of their country’s voluntary religious culture. As the twentieth century advanced, American Catholics continued to move up the sociological escalator. But as they did, many experienced the subculture as more of a confine than a haven. By mid-century, Catholic elites could refer to their cultural habitat as a “ghetto.” Many suffered a loss of confidence. Life seemed more real beyond the “ghetto’s” borders. By the 1960s, significant numbers of Catholics had moved to the suburbs. At the end of that decade, demographic differences between Catholics and other Americans became statistically negligible. This dissolution of the subculture is the single most important fact in U.S. Catholic history in the second half of the twentieth century.  

The “dissolution of the subculture” played its role, too, in the reorientation of Confirmation theology in the United States. Throughout especially the later sixties, some theologians began to describe Confirmation theology as obsolete particularly in view of the needs of Catholic youth, who now inhabit full-blown pluralism. 

One such theologian was Francis Buckley. Unlike some respondents to Sacrosanctum Concilium, Buckley did not think that Confirmation should be celebrated closer to infant Baptism. He argues:

[Confirmation] should be given when [those who have been baptized as infants] have sufficient psychological and spiritual maturity. For most Catholics this will occur around the time they leave school and enter the world of business and labor. Some few may mature earlier, just as some Baptists ask for baptism at the age of ten or twelve. Our fellow Christians have much to tell us on this point, if only we will listen. Let the reception of Confirmation come not at some fixed age but when the recipient feels ready and asks for it.

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78 When discussing “pluralism,” I accept Joseph Ratzinger’s definition in The Nature and Mission of Theology: Approaches to Understanding Its Role in the Light of the Present Controversy, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 73-98. Ratzinger notes the initial intent of the term (as used in turn-of-the-century England) to limit the State’s control over its citizens and defines it thusly, “Pluralism means that each individual belongs to a plurality of social groupings and that this plurality gives rise to a multiplicity of social roles, none of which can absorb man entirely,” 73.

He cites Sacrosanctum Concilium’s injunction to celebrate the liturgy with full, conscious, and active participation, a participation which, he argues, is impossible for the infant.80 We see Buckley wrestling with the changing social situation of Catholics in the U.S., even comparing Confirmation to Baptism as celebrated in the Baptist tradition.

Buckley finds official, liturgical, and catechetical arguments for celebrating Confirmation around age seven or before outmoded because they “run counter to recent emphases in sacramental theology and to the findings of sociology and psychology.” The aforementioned canon 788 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law, which marked age seven as the norm for the celebration of Confirmation, Buckley argues was written for “a Catholic, not pluralist, society, especially not for a modern, industrial, urbanized, highly mobile society, in which a set of values must be interiorized in each person.”81 Buckley addresses the world-wide industrial shift and the posture taken by the Church against modernity through the first half of the twentieth century.

Whether Buckley’s arguments are shaped more fundamentally by the “dissolution of the subculture” or by the broader shift in Church-world relations ushered in by Vatican II is debatable. To separate the two might very well be impossible, for “the dissolution of the subculture,” Portier argues, “is the context in which the Second Vatican Council, and its understanding of the church-world relation in modernity, was received in the United States.”82 In any case, there are two key currents running through Buckley’s approach. First, it promises to reckon with the large-scale integration of Catholics into pluralism (or at least dismisses previous positions for not doing so). Confirmation celebrated around the age of seven, he argues, is not suitable for a pluralistic culture in which young people

81Buckley, “What Age for Confirmation?,” 659.
82Portier, “Here Come the Evangelical Catholics,” 39.
are confronted with myriad religious traditions and options and are, therefore, in need of a later ritual to solidify their place in the Catholic Church. Second, Buckley makes many claims based on psychological development. Confirmation should be celebrated, he argues, at the time when a young person needs it, psychologically speaking. Such warrants were exceedingly rare, if not completely absent, prior to this period.

Five years later, Joseph T. Nolan articulates a perspective similar to Buckley’s. Their common concern is for an interiorization of values that were rather recently culturally imbibed. Nolan argues that Confirmation should be reconstructed as the sacrament of commitment instead of a sacrament of initiation, since Catholics now grow up in pluralism. A few short years after Sacrosanctum Concilium emphasized the congruence of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist as the three sacraments of initiation, Nolan already finds the mantle of “initiation” lacking for Confirmation in the U.S. context. He writes:

One can use a whole complex of infant and childhood rites if they take place in a supportive community, as part of an integrated, widely accepted value system (ghetto, clan, village, small community, ethic group, or medieval church). Such a community is able to interpret these signs (sacraments) and to be a source of the spirit and truth that will nourish the recipient as he grows into the reality they signify. Also, in a more vertical society, where bishops are lords, priests are fathers, and learning and power are highly concentrated, people do not grow into religious adulthood. But we do not live in this kind of stability, monopoly, or uniculture. In a pluralist society one has to make a choice among the lifestyles and value systems that are presented. A serious choice of the Christian life, or the ideal of witness or service, or the direction of the gospels, could be a powerful expression for a young adult who is making the other vocational choices that will provide the framework of her future. We have no specific form for adult commitment to our faith… Nor do we have any rite for choosing a parish community to which we then commit ourselves as builders of the local church.  

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Nolan’s approach is aimed at what Portier calls America’s “voluntary religious culture” in which there are many options and those who maintain their Catholicism will have to do so via the “normal processes of human choice.” En route to arguing his position, Nolan does not allow the form of his argument to belie the matter; he tries to find the commonalities between Confirmation and other “rituals of commitment” such as the Buddhist “going out” ceremony, an approach not found in earlier theologies. What operates on one level as ecumenical openness, interreligious dialogue, and engagement with the world, operates on another level as an embrace of the individualism associated with modern culture.

CONFIRMATION AT THE INTERSECTION OF CATHOLICS AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Also evident from Buckley’s and Nolan’s positions is an engagement with contemporary psychological theory.84 While Catholic ghettos dissolved into the American melting pot and open anti-papism softened, American Catholics became more conversant with burgeoning psycho-social anthropology. In conjunction with a general post-conciliar posture of openness to the thinking of “the world,” psychological advances were openly harvested for use in catechetics and sacramental theology in ways which

84By “contemporary psychological theory” I am thinking of its broad implications for considering the very nature of humanity, its emphasis on personal development, the development of the designation “adolescent,” and its characteristic emphasis on the individual’s inward search for identity. See Carl Rogers, On Becoming a Person: A Therapist’s View of Psychotherapy (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), esp. 107-24 which discusses the process of “an individual becoming more open to his experience” (115) and in turn, “developing a trust in his own organism as an instrument of sensitive living... [and] accept[ing] the locus of evaluation as residing within himself” (124).
they had not been before. These changes resulted in a push for wider education among catechists and ministers of all stripes (many of whom were increasingly lay).\textsuperscript{85}

Increasing individualism was one by-product of this sea change in Catholic ministry.\textsuperscript{86} The anthropological focus on the “ego,” American rugged individualist culture, and the empowerment of the individual via educational growth develops quickly into a mutually informing threesome that spirals through ministry beginning in the late sixties. The dissolution of the subculture leads to encounters with psychological theory in education, where individual minds are said to be liberated from the stifling mentality of the “ghetto” and religious voluntarism gains some sway.\textsuperscript{87} Confirmation was not exempt from the effects of this revolution.

Those who appropriated advances in the field of psychology into Confirmation theology did so in two distinguishable ways. Some took the psychological model to be the primary lens through which human development should be seen and then gave Confirmation a role in this development. Others took the Christian tradition as first-order, then employed psychological insights to help understand the context of ecclesial development. Both give way to a type of individualism in Confirmation, albeit in


\textsuperscript{86}Ibid., 314-315. Dolan notes the intensification of this individualism over the next decades, when phrases such as “the me generation,” “doing your own thing,” and “the liberated person” characterized American culture.

\textsuperscript{87}Ibid., 315. Both Dolan and Portier note the impact of religious voluntarism on American Catholics beginning in this period. See Portier, “Here Come the Evangelical Catholics,” 41-2 where he describes the difficulty, presented to contemporary “evangelical Catholics,” of distinguishing between religious freedom and the “culture of choice” both endemic to pluralism. Unlike Portier, Dolan finds the effects of this voluntarism on U.S. Catholics unequivocally positive.
different degrees. This final section will offer some examples of both of these attempts to include the insights of psychology into Confirmation theology.

As an example of the former approach, we return to Mary Charles Bryce’s theology of Confirmation. One of the constants that Bryce found among widely varying theologies of Confirmation in the sixties was that “confirmation does what the Holy Spirit does.” We saw Bryce’s discussion of the Holy Spirit’s work in divinization. Since she understands the Holy Spirit’s work of divinization primarily as an inner grace, psychological anthropology is a natural turn for Bryce. For, to understand the human person is, then, to understand something about the Spirit’s work and, in turn, Confirmation. When Bryce describes the Holy Spirit’s work, she does so in terms of Scripture (quoting John, Acts, and various Pauline epistles). Her anthropological starting point, however, is decidedly general (not Christian-specific), separate from her theology of the Spirit. She writes:

From the discovery of man in his alienation, estrangement from God, from himself, and from others (a point at which theology has arrived from another direction), psychology has assisted theology in realizing that man’s being is a totalness… he attains knowledge and conviction not only through rational judgments and choices, through conscious verbalizations, but through involvement of his total self. Further than this, however, science admits to the deeper mystery of man. “Religion lies at the core and center and substance of the developing ego itself.”18 It is at this depth that man comes to recognize his relation to God.


In Bryce’s work, one sees the beginnings of the psychological shift in considerations of the human person (the same shift in which “anthropology” becomes a theological category or even a sub-discipline). She considers the human person in psychological

88Bryce, “Confirmation: Being and Becoming Christian,” 293.
terms and not primarily in theological terms. Out of this anthropological frame, in which she presumably sees the Christian doctrine of original sin, Bryce argues that it is only God who can draw a person out of this alienation. Hence, Confirmation plays its role in this de-alienating process, inviting “the Spirit to lavish his gifts and fruits with divine abandon” so that the confirmed might transcend natural human alienation.

Bryce adopts a psychological starting point, but her theology of Confirmation remains intricately intertwined with the Holy Spirit and the Spirit’s gifts. She understands Christian maturity and human beings’ free response in terms of the Spirit’s continuing work. She writes, “In his Spirit God himself is engaged in bringing human creation to maturity.” She argues based on Paul that Christian maturity is something that continually develops in the Spirit. With regard to the free response of the Christian person, she writes, “the Spirit will move, inspire, ‘persuade’ but he will not coerce… But on the other hand, [man] cannot attain the fullness of Christianity without Jesus’ Spirit.” Bryce contextualizes human free choice and commitment in the work of the Holy Spirit: “The Christian’s life is not just a once-and-for-all automatic ‘yes’ but a process of commitments which the Spirit assists us in making.”

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89 See also Dorothy Watson, “Confirmation and the Adolescent,” The Furrow 21 (April 1970): 245-6. Watson, a British sister of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus and professor of Religious Education, starts also with the estrangement of adolescents as her launching pad for suggestions about Confirmation. She also writes that for catechetical educators, “a course in elementary psychology is essential to acquire a real understanding of persons”; she recommends no such course in theology. For Watson, Confirmation marks responsibility, a profound stage in personal development.

Ibid., 298.

Ibid., 295.

Ibid., 296.

Ibid., 298. See also Rev. Bernard J. Cooke, Introduction to From Baptism to the Act of Faith, by Jean Mouroux, trans. Sister M. Elizabeth, I.H.M. and Sister M. Johnice, I.H.M. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1964): vi-vii. Cooke’s introduction offers a different emphasis than Bryce; he writes: “Perhaps most important in catechetical impact has been the recent theological understanding of faith. Without in any way denying the essentially intellectual nature
One might contrast Bryce’s work in this regard with Raymond Collins’s theology of Confirmation. Collins presents a contrasting perspective on the relationship of psycho-social maturity and one’s role in the Church. While still beginning with psychological theory, Collins makes a distinction between psychological maturity and ecclesial maturity in which the psychological is a prerequisite for the ecclesial. Collins writes: “it is only the Christian who has reached a certain stage of psycho-social development who can be an active and effective sign of the Church’s prophetic and redemptive mission.”\textsuperscript{94} Collins argues that bearing ecclesial witness requires personal maturity and that Confirmation is the sacrament of ecclesial maturity. Thus, “Normally it should be conferred only upon those who are able to respond to the grace signified by the sacrament, those who are effectively able to participate in the prophetic and redemptive mission of the Church.”\textsuperscript{95} Collins seems aware that his theology seems to exclude Catholics who have mental disabilities or are otherwise unable to attain maturity in the psycho-social sense. He is, therefore, forced to consign them to “extraordinary circumstances” which “call for an extraordinary conferral of the sacrament. Thus confirmation can properly be conferred upon the retarded… Likewise, confirmation is to be conferred even upon dying infants. In this case, the sacrament takes on the character of the end or completion of their

\begin{footnotes}
\item[94] Collins, 607, n. 73.
\item[95] Ibid., 608.
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baptismal initiation into the Church.” 96 Collins waives prerequisite psychological maturity in the case of the dying and those with severe disabilities. In so doing, he accepts the otherwise inadequate initiation theology for Confirmation of “the least among us,” making such occasions exceptions to his theology rather than integral to it.

CONCLUSION

As Catholics in the United States faced new challenges in their sociological stratum and their interaction with wider U.S. culture, Confirmation was appropriated accordingly. Confirmation’s place as the “sacrament of Catholic Action,” was no doubt weakened by fading papal support for Catholic Action itself. This chapter has, nevertheless, illustrated how the advent and development of ressourcement theology leading up to Vatican II poked numerous theological holes in the narrow identification of Confirmation with Catholic Action, preferring instead a broader emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit and the interconnection of Baptism and Confirmation. The gestures of nouvelle théologie toward the connection between Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist were endorsed by Sacrosanctum Concilium, which called them “the sacraments of initiation.” In the U.S., the dissolution of the immigrant Catholic subculture served as the context for reception Vatican II’s reforms. Paired with general theological revitalization, this major shift in the way that American Catholics interact with the larger culture prompted some to decry previous theologies on the grounds that they do not fit the

96 Ibid. This question of confirming those with disabilities became contested amidst the development of theologies of Confirmation as maturity. See also, Rev. Gerard Breitenbeck, “Should the Retarded Be Confirmed?” Liguorian 55 (January 1967): 26-31. Breitenbeck, who is involved in special religious education, argues against those that deny Confirmation on the basis of a lack of mental ability.
current worldly (and American) context. With these responses arise an articulated need for a ceremony in which young Catholics choose Catholicism for themselves among all of the religious opportunities afforded them by pluralism in America’s “voluntary religious culture.” For some, Confirmation fits the bill.

During the latter half of the decade, the “ego” and “id” take precedence, in some cases, to the *imago Dei* and the Incarnation as starting points for Christian studies of the human person because of the growing influence of popular psychological theory. This development, too, had its effects on Confirmation, which becomes interpreted as a time when young Catholics are brought closer to God, away from their alienated selves. This process is primarily an internal one that flowers inside of the human person enabling her to act in the Church in a meaningful and mature fashion. Reinforced by the dominant pluralistic social climate, this theology begins to hold serious sway among proposed theologies of Confirmation.
CHAPTER III

As the Council’s reforms began to hit the ground in the United States and the first generations of Catholic children were raised outside of the Catholic subculture, Catholic identity was unsettled. What it meant to be Catholic was assumed in the subculture, but identity now needed to be asserted and even reconceived in the context of pluralism.97 Battles over the proper interpretation of conciliar documents were intertwined with and largely informed the struggle to find Catholic identity outside of the “ghetto.” The younger generation of Catholics was especially looking for some way to be Catholic that was at once distinctive in society, vibrant, and engaging amidst the jostling of liturgical practice and spirituality in general.

Throughout the decade and following, the Catholic charismatic renewal became a major way in which especially younger Catholics found a way to assert their identity as they responded to both post-conciliar and post-subculture uncertainties. As the renewal grew in popularity, it too became a major part of the story of Confirmation theology in the twentieth century. Some involved in the renewal even adopted Confirmation as its centerpiece. This appropriation of Confirmation was supported by the theologies of commitment that had developed previously and continued to inform the sacrament’s theological and pastoral development in non-charismatic circles. This commitment

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theology fit nicely with both the goals of the renewal and the newfound need to assert Catholic identity.

Some prominent U.S. Catholics cast Catholics’ new relationship to the wider culture as a major step in their “maturation” process. In this view, leaving behind the subculture made Catholics more mainstream, more adult-like, more respected, and greater contributors to U.S. culture. This perspective was bolstered by a similar understanding of the new posture of the Church in its relationship to the modern world articulated in the conciliar documents. Theologies of Confirmation as a rite of maturity paired well with this sense among U.S. Catholics. Young people were no longer stuck in a defensive, immature Church, but grew into Catholic maturity in a pluralistic culture.

During this period, Confirmation also serves as a conduit for the larger ecclesiological questions that emerge from the dissolution of the subculture. Since one’s sacramental theology is often informed by one’s ecclesiology, it is not surprising that Confirmation theology betrays a working ecclesiology. Interestingly, in this particular period, Confirmation is a stage for the struggle between the more voluntaristic ecclesiology of reigning pluralism and the more universal ecclesiology of Catholicism; the intensity of this struggle was heightened due to the dissolution of the subculture.

This chapter analyzes Confirmation following the promulgation of the revised rite of Confirmation in 1971, focusing on the theological, pastoral, and social implications of the Catholic charismatic renewal as well as the realities of pluralism (to which the renewal was partly a response). The chapter will demonstrate that Confirmation theology both changed to reflect the concerns of the charismatic renewal and was employed in a

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variety of different ways to meet the concerns of forming Catholics in a pluralistic setting.

THE REVISED RITE OF CONFIRMATION

Shortly after the turn of the decade, Pope Paul VI oversaw the promulgation of the new rite of Confirmation called for by the fathers of Vatican II. The new rite is emblematic of the continued integration of conciliar reforms into Catholic life: there is a clearer articulation of the connection between Baptism and Confirmation and a renewed emphasis on the Person of the Holy Spirit, an emphasis that permeates the conciliar documents.

The revised rite of Confirmation marks the starting point for this period not because it had a sweeping influence over how Confirmation theology was done, but because it codified some pre-conciliar, conciliar, and post-conciliar theological movements. While many of the contemporary approaches to Confirmation could find expression in the prayers and rubrics of the revised rite, the rite serves as a step further away from the dual emphases characteristic of the Catholic Action period: the distinction between Baptism and Confirmation and the personal strengthening of the confirmandi.

As mentioned in Chapter II, Sacrosanctum Concilium explicitly called for a revised rite of Confirmation “so that the intimate connection of this sacrament with the whole of the Christian initiation may more clearly appear.”99 The revised rite expresses

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99 Sacrosanctum Concilium, n. 71. In his Apostolic Constitution promulgating the rite, Paul VI writes, “Since the Rite of Baptism for Children, revised at the mandate of the Council and published at our command, is already in use, it is now fitting to publish a rite of confirmation, in order to show the unity of Christian Initiation in its true light. In fact, careful attention and application have been devoted in these last years to the task of revising the manner of celebrating this sacrament. The aim of this work has been that ‘the intimate connection of this sacrament with
this unity of Baptism and Confirmation by naming Confirmation as another step on the path begun at Baptism. From the outset, the rite solidifies the unity of Baptism and Confirmation and identifies Confirmation as the sacrament in which Catholics receive the Holy Spirit. In the celebration of the rite itself, the connection to Baptism is further expressed in two major ways—the inclusion of a renewal of baptismal vows and the instruction that the rite normally take place within the Mass, “in order that the fundamental connection of this sacrament with all of Christian initiation may stand out in clearer light.”

Theologians immediately leading up to and following Vatican II had emphasized the Holy Spirit as Gift over the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit as the special grace of Confirmation. The rite responds to this shift. Ralph Keifer, executive secretary for the International Committee on English in the Liturgy, writes in 1972, “If anything is clear from the new rite of confirmation, it is the emphasis it places on the Holy Spirit.” Indeed, the personal Gift of the Holy Spirit is expressed in the celebration of the rite, particularly in the revised formula for anointing with sacred chrism. The rite adopts a fifth century Byzantine formula for the anointing, a formula best translated into English

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100 “Rite of Confirmation,” n. 1 in Rites, 479.
102 See for example Marian Bohen, The Mystery of Confirmation, 184. Bohen had argued that the personal encounter with and reception of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation are paramount to the effects or gifts that the Spirit gives. See Chapter II, pp. 29-31.
as, “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.” These words replace those spoken in the Latin Church since the twelfth century, “I sign you with the sign of the cross and confirm you with the chrism of salvation. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The effect of this change is clearly to emphasize the Holy Spirit as Gift instead of the sign of the cross and the sacred chrism. The new formula also notably uses the singular genitive doni, indicating that there is one Gift, which is the Holy Spirit, from whom all other gifts proceed. The Apostolic Constitution underscores this theology, calling Confirmation the Sacrament “through which the faithful receive the Holy Spirit as a Gift.” Pope Paul’s emphasis on the Holy Spirit as personal Gift reflects reigning currents in Confirmation theology but also seems to gesture ecumenically toward sacramental practice in the East.

Paul VI writes that in both the East and the West, the anointing with chrism holds the most significant place in the Confirmation ritual. Yet the pope stresses the continuity of Confirmation throughout the centuries with the laying on of hands in Acts 8. In

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105 Divinae Consortium Naturae, 477, 477.  
106 Ibid. Paul makes clear allusions to the unity of the East and the West in the anointing with chrism. On a related note, Boniface Luykx, former member of the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, attests to the importance of ecumenical concerns in the revision of sacramental rites. Luykx discloses that while preparing a different rite—that of baptism of adults—a theological expert in Eastern Church relations “told the commission that the consequences of separating confirmation from baptism and administering it at an adult age would be so serious for the future of [East-West] ecumenical relations that the perspectives of reunion would be irrevocably closed” (“On Confirmation” Homiletic and Pastoral Review 73 [November 1972]: 67, n. 4).  
107 “Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who went down and prayed for them, that they might receive the holy Spirit, for it had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them and they received the holy Spirit,” Acts 8:14–17 (NAB).
order to draw these two together, Pope Paul declares that the *anointing itself* “in a certain way represents the apostolic laying on of hands.”

The new rite no longer prescribes that the celebrant place one hand on the confirmand’s head while anointing the forehead with the other, as in the previous rite, yet there is, in the new rite, a separate laying on of hands that the celebrant performs while saying the prayer *prior to* the anointing with chrism. Pope Paul notes that this laying on of hands “is still to be regarded as very important, even if it is not of the essence of the sacramental rite: it contributes to the complete perfection of the rite and to a more thorough understanding of the sacrament.”

Although the pope appears to be drawing on scholastic distinctions to determine what is absolutely necessary for Confirmation to have “happened,” his categories are not entirely scholastic, insofar as what “contributes to the complete perfection of the rite” was not a clear scholastic designation. For this reason, theologians debated the pope’s purposes in making such a distinction. Whereas there was a lively debate about the “essence” of the sacramental rite, for the purposes of this study it is important to note that in the revised rite, such sharp distinctions of sacramental matter

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108 *Divinae Consortium Naturae*, 477. This is a particularly interesting move considering Kenan Osborne’s words: “In the East and the West, over the centuries, a question on the issue of chrism and/or laying on of hands has been argued, with the West leaning toward the laying on of hands and the East leaning toward chrismation” (Kenan Osborne, *The Christian Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist* [New York: Paulist Press, 1987], 111). In this historical light, it seems even clearer that Pope Paul makes an ecumenical gesture here, causing some theological confusion.

109 Ibid., 477-8.

110 For some of the questions and considerations regarding the place of the laying on of hands in the Rite of Confirmation see Austin, “What Has Happened to Confirmation?,” 420-6. Austin critiques the pope for identifying the laying on of hands so closely with the anointing both because it flirts with the irresponsible governing of symbols (the thumb of anointing equals “hands”) and because the pope’s language—distinguishing what is “of the essence of the rite”—tends toward Scholastic juridicism, partitioning the rite into what is absolutely necessary and what is not. See also Barger, 566-8.
and form indicative of the scholastic era are subsumed within the rite’s ecumenical trajectory and emphasis on the Person of the Holy Spirit.

THE CATHOLIC CHARISMATIC RENEWAL

Revivification of the Holy Spirit’s presence animated the Catholic charismatic renewal. The renewal emphasized the continuity of the Church with the Pentecost event and thereby centered on the Holy Spirit’s manifest gifts/effects. The renewal began among a few students and professors at Duquesne University in the mid-sixties and grew to be “one of the most dramatic, ecumenical, long-lasting, and widespread spiritual movements of the postconciliar period, touching millions of Catholics between 1965 and 1990.” Eventually the renewal reached across national borders, but it began and was most popular in the United States. An outgrowth of ecumenical conversations, the movement had a Pentecostal feel, but remained devotedly Catholic.

Since the charismatic renewal and its vast literature had such a far-reaching influence in the Church, I will limit its study to the purposes of this project, namely the

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113 “The Gallop Poll in the Fall of 1977 estimated that ten percent of the Catholics in the United States are involved in the charismatic renewal… Eighty percent of those involved in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal are located in the United States” (Scanlan, *A Portion of My Spirit*, 161).

114 Carey, 137. Joseph Martos also notes the renewal’s “unashamedly evangelical approach to Christianity and its rediscovery of New Testament forms of prayer and ritual” in *Doors to the Sacred*, 133.
appropriation of Confirmation as the sacrament of the renewal in the context of the wider search for Catholic identity in the United States.

The Renewal and Catholics’ Place in Pluralism

In a post-subculture and post-conciliar United States Catholic Church, especially the younger generation of Catholics was in search of some firm grounding to set their feet upon. The outbreak of the renewal gave these Catholics a medium to be Catholic in a Church torn by arguments about Humanae Vitae and liturgical reforms in a society characterized by individualism and pluralism. Reflecting on this era, Debra Campbell writes, “Marriage Encounter, Cursillo, and the Catholic charismatic movement… became popular because they responded to the hunger for community and sanctity that was not being satisfied elsewhere in the American Catholic community.”

Campbell finds fertile soil for the charismatic renewal in the void left by the dissolution of the Catholic subculture, which often included the breakdown of the ethnic and geographical parish structures and broad Catholic entrée into the wider individualized, pluralistic culture. In many cases this shift renders parish membership susceptible to a market mentality with its concomitant consumer decision-making processes. In contrast to shifting parish life, the renewal provided consistent Catholic spiritual relationships. As had Virgil Michel and H.A. Reinhold before them, many leaders of the renewal pointed to the debilitating individualism of the dominant culture; in the words of Franciscan Michael Scanlan: “It is not normal for Christians to live isolated, individualized or alienated lives. One problem today in the Church is that there is so little community—our parishes are so large,

strangers sit next to strangers at Sunday Mass.”\textsuperscript{116} In a wider culture that places large stake on the individual’s achievements, the renewal strives to offer a Catholic sub-community rooted in the Spirit in which the Christian life—its joys and burdens—is shared.\textsuperscript{117}

The renewal found itself at the heart of a cultural struggle that cut to the very heart of the Church’s understanding of what it means to become a Christian. At the 1978 Priests’ Conference on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, Bishop Lucker of Minnesota identifies both an intra- and an extra-ecclesial challenge to which the renewal responds. The former is an over-intellectualization of Catholic life; he laments that Catholics “know about Christ and [do] not know Christ” because “logical instruction is taken to be catechesis and vast numbers of Catholics have never been evangelized.”\textsuperscript{118} The bishop is not alone in his critique.\textsuperscript{119} Charismatics often defined the work of the Spirit in contrast to the rational since the latter often had exclusive priority in religious education. Extra-ecclesially, Bishop Lucker sees the renewal as responding to the cultural pull on

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{116}Scanlan, 89.
\item \textsuperscript{117}The anti-individualistic overtones did not save the renewal from critiques of individualistic spirituality, especially with regard to the workings of grace manifested in the charisms of the Spirit. These criticisms are also connected to the indeterminate relationship between the renewal and the wider Body of Christ. See James F. Breckenridge, \textit{The Theological Self-Understanding of the Catholic Charismatic Movement} (Washington, D. C.: University Press of America, 1980): 105-9.
\item \textsuperscript{118}Quoted in Scanlan, 94.
\item \textsuperscript{119}See also Byrne, \textit{Threshold of God’s Promise}, who notes the tension in the Church between intellectuals and charismatics. He writes, “The Charismatic Renewal is an amazing reality today. It is a powerful force which God seems to have unleashed in our midst. It is a historical and sociological phenomenon which in short time has already demonstrated its power and appeal. It is something which \textit{even its sharpest foes—the intellectual humanists in the Church—are being forced to face and attack}” (22, emphasis added). For an example of such a thoroughly epistemological and theological critique of the charismatic renewal see Breckenridge \textit{The Theological Self-Understanding of the Catholic Charismatic Movement}, esp. 6-11, 115-9. Breckenridge finds the “crisis nature” of charismatic spirituality incompatible with the “progressive nature” of mainstream Roman Catholic spirituality. Whereas Scanlan argues that “Both the growth pattern and the crisis pattern should be looked upon as authentic ways of realizing the graces of initiation at the conscious level” (149).
\end{itemize}
Catholics, which threatens their unique identity. The renewal offers a vibrant way of being Catholic that can perchance stand up to the attractiveness of cultural icons such as Johnny Carson and Las Vegas.\textsuperscript{120}

“Baptism in the Holy Spirit”

In response to this struggle, those involved in the renewal pushed for a thoroughgoing revitalization of the formal sacramental life of the Church. The ritual practice at the heart of this revitalization was “baptism in the Holy Spirit.” In the Catholic Charismatic discussion about the Baptism of the Spirit, many issues arise that mirror issues in the Confirmation discussion, such as: the action of the Holy Spirit, the question of individualism, the role of the laying on of hands, and coming to maturity in the Catholic faith. As the renewal strove to respond to the challenges of the wider culture, it addressed many of the same issues that theologians and catechists were trying to address in Confirmation more generally. It would be a short step to forge a connection between the renewal and Confirmation.

Drawn from Pentecostal traditions, the Baptism of the Spirit is understood by Catholic charismatics to bring the graces received in the sacraments of initiation to full effect. Michael Scanlan describes “Baptism in the Holy Spirit”:

\begin{quote}
What millions of Catholics have discovered in the past twelve years is that they can enter into a deeper level of life in the family [sic] of God and know a new empowering in the Holy Spirit, through making an act of total commitment to the Lord and inviting the Holy Spirit to take over their lives. This action is what is meant by “being baptized in the Holy Spirit” or by “receiving the release of the Holy Spirit.” In one sense, this is not a new dimension of God’s life since it is exactly the intention of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. But, in another sense, it is distinctly empowering and for the great majority of people the most intimate, powerful and transforming spiritual experience in their lives.\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{120}Cited in Scanlan, 94.
lives to that point. The result of being baptized in the Spirit is to know a fullness in the relationship of the Family [sic] of God and, most clearly, to know the empowering of the Holy Spirit to live those relationships.\textsuperscript{121}

Scanlan connects the baptism in the Spirit to the strengthening of the “Family of God,” which jibes with his aforementioned critique of the individualistic culture. Yet, not all renewal leaders, especially those who wrote during its nascence, shared his ecclesial emphasis.\textsuperscript{122}

Pioneers of the renewal at the University of Notre Dame, Kevin and Dorothy Ranaghan, for example, emphasize building a personal relationship with Jesus via baptism in the Spirit. The Ranaghans are clear that there is no prescribed ritual for the baptism in the Holy Spirit, for such uniformity might deny the spontaneous work of the Spirit. Rather, it can happen anywhere, alone, or in community.\textsuperscript{123}

In light of perspectives such as the Ranaghans’, it seems right to conclude that the critiques of individualism in charismatic spirituality that had accrued over the years have some substance and therefore called for a response by Scanlan. This is particularly interesting not only because of the individualistic tones that had begun to be sounded in the Confirmation discussion, but also because the movement, at least in one respect, responds to the isolation or upheaval that especially younger, energetic Catholics were feeling in a pluralistic culture.

\textsuperscript{121}Scanlan, 62-3.
\textsuperscript{122}See Edward D. O’Connor, C.S.C., The Pentecostal Movement in the Catholic Church (Notre Dame: Ava Maria Press, 1971): esp. 221-34, who already in 1971 notes individualism as a potential danger of the movement. See also note 117 above. Another charismatic, James Byrne is an exception. In 1970-1, he writes, “The baptism in the Holy Spirit does not occur in a human void, nor is it an individual experience. It is given in the Church and for the Church and it is generally received in the context of a local prayer community” (50).
\textsuperscript{123}Kevin and Dorothy Ranaghan, Catholic Pentecostals (New York: Paulist Press, 1969): 143.
With the laying on of hands a marked component of the Confirmation rite, there was some question about what seemed to be the same ritual action in the baptism of the Spirit. Holy Cross father Edward O’Connor points to agency as the distinguishing factor—the baptism in the Holy Spirit is God’s interior work in the heart of an individual and the laying of hands can be done by anyone, therefore the baptism of the Holy Spirit does not equal the laying on of hands.\(^{124}\) Even with O’Connor’s distinction, the association of laying on of hands with the charismatic renewal generally, and with baptism in the Holy Spirit particularly, served as a point of connection between the renewal and Confirmation.

The desires that drove commitment theologies of Confirmation during the end of the previous period\(^ {125}\) and especially during this period, were evident too in the discussion about the baptism in the Spirit. For instance, James Byrne, an early renewal leader writes, “It is necessary for every man to make a personal act of faith in Jesus since it is only through him that man can come to the Father. This is done for most Catholics at baptism by sponsors, but it is necessary that when we reach maturity we reaffirm their act of faith and make it our own.”\(^ {126}\) Here, the baptism in the Holy Spirit serves as ratification, a personal acceptance of the baptismal covenant at a mature age. The connection between commitment and maturity theologies of Confirmation and the mature acceptance of Christ in the charismatic baptism in the Spirit was clearly implicit. Some involved in the renewal made these connections explicit.

\(^{124}\)O’Connor, 136.

\(^{125}\)See Chapter II, pp. 35-43.

\(^{126}\)Byrne, 49. Byrne identifies the personal nature of the baptism in the Spirit, while warding off the charge of individualism (See note 122 above).
The Relationship between Baptism in the Holy Spirit and Confirmation

Especially during the renewal’s incipient stages, many involved with the movement strove to keep baptism in the Holy Spirit distinct from the sacraments of initiation in order to bolster, not obstruct or supplant, the official sacramental life of the Church. Others involved in the movement saw obvious connections between the goals of the renewal and some directions in Confirmation theology and practice. There were at least five reasons for this correlation. First, the renewal’s emphasis on the charisms of the Holy Spirit and Confirmation’s articulated connection to the Holy Spirit facilitated a theological point of contact. Second, the widespread disagreement over Confirmation and its place in the sacramental matrix allowed for open appropriation to particular pastoral circumstances—pastorally, the free-floating age of Confirmation fit neatly into the effervescent, revivalist spirit of the renewal. Third, as noted above in Byrne’s description, there is a clear sense of an adult commitment to Christ inherent to the theology of the baptism in the Spirit and those voices articulating Confirmation as a time of commitment were most prevalent during the beginning stages of the renewal. Fourth, both baptism in the Spirit and post-conciliar theologies of Confirmation maintained an explicit connection to the sacrament of Baptism. Fifth and finally, Confirmation and baptism in the Holy Spirit share common Scriptural warrants.

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127 In 1969 the Ranaghans, noting the historical and theological difficulties involved with understanding Confirmation, sharply distinguish between Confirmation and baptism in the Spirit (Catholic Pentecostals, 139-40).

128 Acts 1:4–5; 2:38; 8:14–8, 47; 9; 10:44–7; 19; Eph 4; 2 Cor 1:21–2; and Lk 3:21–2 are a few examples.
The similarities between his parish’s preparation pamphlet for Confirmation and the lived reality of the Charismatic baptism in the Spirit struck Stephen Clark. This experience drove Clark into further reflection on the role of Confirmation. Returning to Scripture, he saw a disjunction between Acts 8 (Peter and John laying on hands in Samaria) and Acts 9 (Paul laying on hands at Ephesus) and Confirmation as currently celebrated. When the Apostles laid hands on new converts, the converts spoke in tongues and prophesied. Clark writes, “if those who were being confirmed actually started speaking in tongues and prophesying like the disciples at Ephesus did, or if they even just experienced a deep filling and strengthening of the Holy Spirit, everyone would be surprised and wonder what had happened.” He concludes that baptism in the Spirit is a renewal of Confirmation, that those receiving it are receiving the effects of Confirmation, and that “There is no good reason why Christians should not receive the baptism of the Spirit at confirmation.”

It turns out that Clark was not the only one suggesting such a connection. In 1971 Robert Wild, a parish priest, published a Confirmation program that he had designed trying to implement some aspects of the renewal. It is not coincidental that Wild’s attraction to the charismatic movement and desire to integrate it into his parish community finds particular, seemingly natural expression in the program. He notes that following Confirmation, he handed out to the students a sheet entitled, “What To Do After Confirmation” adapted from the pentecostal “What To Do After the Baptism (in the

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130Ibid., 5, 11, 13, 20.
Spirit.” Wild explains this connection: “It is a debated theological problem whether this ‘baptism in the Spirit,’ spoken of in pentecostal circles, should be equated with the sacrament of confirmation. Whether it should or not, for practical, pastoral purposes, there is no reason why we cannot use much of the thinking which surrounds the ‘baptism in the spirit [sic]’ and apply it to confirmation.”132 While the theological debate rages on, the pastoral link between the two, specifically the reception of the Spirit and the move to maturity of the young Catholics, seems natural for Wild and Clark.

As these connections became clearer, others argued for a correlation between the two. In another Confirmation preparation program, the authors, “felt it was vital that the teachers [in the program] should have had the experience of the ‘baptism in the Holy Spirit’ because this is actually what Confirmation should be.”133 One would assume that the teachers had received Confirmation itself! This suggestion moves beyond a mere correlation between Confirmation and baptism in the Spirit, to an argument that the latter should be a model for the former, properly celebrated. In one of the sample presentations to the students, the authors explain, “We will speak of Confirmation and baptism in the Holy Spirit—and these will be interchangeable expressions. They mean the same thing.” The authors model Confirmation on the baptism in the Spirit, explaining the purpose and effects of Confirmation as similar to those of the baptism in the Spirit. It is not surprising, then, that they hold that “Confirmation is an introduction to adulthood,” a version of a maturity theology. As adults, participants “are individuals, no longer being carried in by their parents as they were on their baptismal day, but now able to stand and say they want

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132Ibid, 123.
to commit their lives to the way and the truths of Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{134} Those preparing for Confirmation are to choose for themselves whether they are ready to make a firm commitment to living the Christian life. Among these connections between Confirmation and baptism in the Holy Spirit, we also see some of the influence of the vast cultural change that Catholics underwent during the previous decade, as there is a sense here that the mature “individual” must opt out of pluralism and into full membership in the Church.\textsuperscript{135}

The effects that Antekeier and the Vandagriffs ascribe to Confirmation mirror the less “charismatic” effects of baptism in the Spirit.\textsuperscript{136} They discuss a personal and continued encounter with Christ if the confirmandi draw upon the graces of Confirmation, a common emphasis of baptism in the Holy Spirit. The authors also advise the young Catholics to “[open] the scripture at random… to help you in your daily lives.”\textsuperscript{137} Many discuss opening the Bible at random as a Spirit-guided practice of the renewal.

Despite all the fervor surrounding the charismatic renewal, there were, of course, some who were critical of the close association of Confirmation and the renewal. Notably many of those who reacted against the charismatic element in Confirmation also shied

\textsuperscript{134}Ibid., 19, 15, 79. The authors are not alone in their identification of Confirmation as a time of choice for individual young adults; such a pastoral position extends broader than and, as we have seen, even precedes the charismatic renewal. Yet, in such a position, one can see some of the warrants for criticisms such as Breckenridge’s (see notes 117 and 119 above). Similar Confirmation positions will be further discussed toward the end of this chapter and throughout chapter IV.

\textsuperscript{135}See also Michael Scanlan who writes, “The persons involved in the renewal emphasize the necessity of personal commitment. As an adult, one cannot be Christian by proxy. One can only be a Christian by personal commitment” (149).

\textsuperscript{136}Glossolalia and prophecy are examples of more distinctly “charismatic” effects.

\textsuperscript{137}Antekeier, Vandagriff, and Vandagriff, 21, 23.
away from emphasizing Confirmation as a time of mature commitment. Often they do so out of both theological and pastoral concern; for example Kenneth Smits writes, “Individual Christian commitment is important. But it is not the total goal of Christianity. Christian maturity is good. But there is a maturity appropriate to each age and stage of growth.” Smits finds that placing undue weight upon Confirmation as the sacrament of Christian coming of age or as the sacrament of the charismatic renewal is ultimately detrimental to a thorough understanding of the sacrament itself and its role in the context of the entire Body of Christ. Smits argues that an overemphasis on the reception of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit is both theologically shortsighted and intimidating for the typical confirmand. Smits and others critique Confirmation theologies that are too clearly, overtly, and specifically involved in a response to the wider culture either via the charismatic renewal, or the wider move to consider Confirmation as the mature, committed choice for Catholicism in the pluralistic context.

NEGOTIATING THE REALITIES OF PLURALISM

Theologies of Confirmation which emphasize confirmandi’s commitment to, and maturity in, their Christian faith were integral to the appropriation of Confirmation as the sacrament of the charismatic renewal. These theologies, which emerged during the previous period, picked up steam during the period under consideration here. It’s not surprising that they picked up steam in light of this sweeping diagnosis by Anglican liturgist Daniel Stevick:

139 Smits, 22-3.
140 Ibid., 27.
The meaning of becoming a Christian has been influenced by rationalism, romanticism, the rise of psychology, the reshaping of society and the sensibility to industrialism and technology, and, above all, by the general de-Christianization of the West… With the death of Christendom, the inherited liturgy of Christian initiation has come to appear as a series of isolated ritual events.\textsuperscript{141}

Arguably, the immigrant culture in the United States provided a kind of “Christian culture” that placed and unified the sacraments of initiation into a congruent whole. It also mitigated the various modern movements and ideas that Stevick mentions. Confirmation, as one of these three sacraments, underwent serious reconsideration in light of the particular social change in the United States.

As Catholics’ immersion into pluralism widened and deepened, Confirmation theologies and programs continued to reflect the effects of this encounter in a variety of ways, one example being the charismatic renewal’s appropriation of Confirmation. But there were others. Some Confirmation theologies reflected the culture-wide individual and anti-institutional emphasis; some reacted against it. Some, as mentioned above, saw Confirmation as the opportunity for young Catholics to elect the Church for themselves, committing to it among the available options, and a few reacted against this move. These perspectives have, at their root, both ecclesiological and cultural assumptions that cannot be easily separated. As illustrated in Chapter II, the wider pluralistic culture tends to encourage a more voluntaristic ecclesiology and the degree to which a thinker adopts such an ecclesiology is evident in his approach to Confirmation.

Confirmation, Commitment, and the Question of Identity

As Catholic identity became a major concern, especially in a perceived culture of religious indifference, any youthful display of commitment to Catholicism called out for ritual recognition. Often, Confirmation fit the bill. Yet sometimes other young people were left out in the cold, a dynamic aptly discussed by Joseph Cunningham, priest of the Diocese of Brooklyn: “In this era of religious indifference, pastors and educators are eager to utilize any legitimate ritual that will recommit young adults to the faith and provide them with a ritual experience to climax ambitious programs of instruction and apostolic activity.” In response, Cunningham suggests that Confirmation should always be celebrated in the same rite as Baptism since “the present ritual of confirmation cannot possibly sustain the weight of responsibility that recommitment and Christian maturity will demand of it.”142 Cunningham finds the Eastern practice of celebrating the sacraments of initiation in infancy more attractive because it better exemplifies the intimate connection between Baptism and Confirmation expressed in Sacrosanctum Concilium.143 This would only be possible if the ordinary faculty to confirm were given to all priests, yet Cunningham argues that the present alternative is to continue disappointing confirmandi, who come to expect a palpable change in their lives as a result of Confirmation and often notice nothing, or very little.144

It was becoming clear that Confirmation needed something, though; its lack of clear place in Catholic life was only highlighted by Vatican II and the revised rite. There were some who thought a newfound, reinvigorated theology lie in fitting Confirmation

143 Ibid., 165-6.
144 Ibid., 164-5.
with the cultural need for commitment. Not only would this address a catechetical need, but also breathe new life into an antiquated sacrament. Often, however, these efforts sacrificed important Catholic theological maxims. In his book, *Personal Pentecost*, LaVerne Haas argues that Confirmation is the time to celebrate change in the life of an individual. He takes the primacy of the individual person, over and against “any church or institution,” as a starting point for his analysis of Confirmation.¹⁴⁵ Haas describes Confirmation as “a religious event in the life of the individual” which “must confront the person with the presence of the Transcendent.” Haas appeals to the general religious experience of every individual, without tradition-specific discrimination. He writes:

> When Neanderthal man buried food and weapons with the dead at Wadi el Mughara in Palestine, the event was no less relevant than the Resurrection story…. Theologians and churchmen, in religious education, do a disservice to modern religious man when they equate *homo religiosus* with the people of the Old and New Testament. Confirmation today is an example and the result of this short-sightedness.

Instead of a peculiarly Christian focus, Haas argues for a more general understanding of Confirmation rooted in “*homo religiosus.*” In so doing, he shifts the central focus of Confirmation from the Holy Spirit as Gift to the human person receiving the gift. He writes, “As a religious event, Confirmation focuses upon the relationship between man and deity.” He then clarifies, “The structure of Confirmation is really triangular—the Transcendent, the community and the self—and as happens in triangles, personal integrity is at times threatened.”¹⁴⁶ Haas’s proposal for a theology of Confirmation is deeply marked not only by the anti-institutionalism of the times, but also by the ecclesiological voluntarism of a pluralistic culture. His triangular structure places the

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¹⁴⁶Ibid., 67, 28, 13, 19.
baptized individual outside of the community until she decides to become a mature member. One can see the contrast with an ecclesiological image such as the Body of Christ, where each person is a member of the Lord’s body, who nevertheless maintains a particular, important function.

Negotiating the realities of pluralism, especially the push toward a more voluntary understanding of Church membership was difficult. Cultural currents seemed to cry out for Catholics to find some way to mark their official, mature, voluntary commitment to Catholicism. Confirmation seemed to be the perfect opportunity. Some, such as Bishop Charles Buswell, recognized the demand, but tried to avoid making Confirmation the moment of commitment.

In a paper presented to the 1971 Diocesan Liturgical Commission’s National Meeting, the bishop of Pueblo argues that “Confirmation is a most appropriate time to emphasize that belonging to Christ’s church is a matter of personal decision…. This decision, however, must never be relegated exclusively to the sacrament of confirmation.” Buswell wants to unburden Confirmation of the weight it has begun to carry in Catholic formation, while still maintaining that Church membership hinges on a personal decision, emphasized at Confirmation. Buswell responds pastorally to two

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particular culture-wide situations: (1) “many Catholics continue to see the sacrament as the moment of personal decision regarding their own Catholicism” and (2) “the tendency is growing among some Catholics to take their Catholic heritage lightly.”

He describes the predicament of Catholic identity in a pluralistic culture well: identity withers away unless it is strongly asserted. The Catholicism of the subculture, whatever its drawbacks, seemed to form and maintain a Catholic identity without the necessity of a particular moment of individual identity assertion.

In response to this problematic, Buswell calls Confirmation a time to “reaffirm… personal allegiance to the Catholic Church,” symbolized by the presence of the bishop. He calls for a Confirmation ceremony centered on each individual confirmand. In reaction to an “assembly-line” based ceremony, he writes, “During both catechesis and ceremony, our attention must ultimately center on the individual, not on the large group in front of us.” Since Confirmation is a time to celebrate the personal decision of this individual, it follows for Buswell that the focus should center on each individual, instead of the organic action of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

Bishop Buswell’s different starting point—the interconnection of the three sacraments of initiation—leads him to different conclusions than Haas. He strives to making a commitment, but God’s gift to us of his Spirit making such a commitment possible” (Christopher Kiesling, O.P., Confirmation and Full Life in the Spirit [Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1973]: 159).

Buswell, 32. Archdiocese of Chicago associate pastor Anthony J. Brankin takes a different tact in addressing similar problems. He laments the heavy emphasis on action and personal decision in the culture, coupled with amnesia of God’s saving work in the world. He offers Confirmation as witness that God is working (and has worked) in the world in an actual way, to “a world already so smug and confident in its own limitless capabilities.” He continues, “[Confirmation] cautions us not to put such an overwhelming emphasis on the accomplishment of tasks, the doing of projects, the meditating on self and maturity” (“Confirmation: The Mystical Seal of the Holy Spirit,” Homiletic and Pastoral Review 80 [April 1980]: 16).

Buswell, 34.

Ibid., 32.
maintain a certain integrity for Christian initiation, holding that “the eucharist, not confirmation, is the sacrament of commitment, the covenant sacrament.” This important sacramental reality needs emphasis, Buswell argues, in order “to counteract the stress that has been put upon confirmation as the principal sacrament of that precise moment when one decides to be a full-fledged Roman Catholic Christian.” Buswell acknowledges Confirmation as the time of commitment, not a commitment, however, made in isolation from the rest of the Christian life.

Some responses to the challenges of being Catholic in a culture of choice were more critical of any association of commitment or maturity with Confirmation. Ralph Keifer, mentioned above, critiques the growing influence of individualistic pluralism on the practice of Confirmation and on Catholicism in general. Keifer refers to an event in the summer of 1972 of two hundred thousand young people gathered to “affirm their ‘mature commitment to Jesus Christ’,” while exhibiting a lack of concern for social issues. This “curious spectacle” is, argues Keifer, at best dishonest and at worst a betrayal of the Christian tradition.

Keifer diagnoses the difficulty with Confirmation as only a surface symptom of a more serious disease festering in “the primary sacrament, the Church.” Like Debra Campbell, Keifer lambastes Catholic parish life in the early seventies, writing, “The

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152 Ibid., 34, 34.
153 Keifer, “Confirmation and Christian Maturity,” 601. It seems that Keifer is referring to a gathering of mostly Evangelical Christians, but it remains unclear. Recall that Keifer found the Holy Spirit, not commitment or maturity, the clear central focus of the revised rite. Kenneth Woodward offers a similar lament regarding Christian maturity formed by the contemporary milieu: “Today… American Catholics—especially in the suburbs—have become so acculturated that it takes more maturity than most 13-year-olds (or their parents) can muster to recognize the many and often subtle points at which Catholics, if they are to be true to Christ, must courageously part company with their fellow Americans.” (Kenneth L. Woodward, “How to Make Confirmation Signify Something,” U.S. Catholic 41 [February 1976]: 24).
modern parish operates like a filling station, where isolated individuals are supposed to take their sustenance from time to time…. Instead of an invitation to “come, follow me,” we are now urged to “do it yourself.”\(^{154}\)

Keifer jettisons the idea that Confirmation, celebrated as a rite of maturity, will solve the challenge that Catholics face in pluralism. The problem is more fundamentally ecclesial. Without a Church that functions as a vibrant “corporate environment,” holding its own in the public of “a pluralist, secular society,” Keifer argues that Christian maturity is impossible, or at least extremely difficult, to achieve.\(^ {155}\) This palpable lack of “corporate environment” is a void that has not, according to Keifer, been adequately filled since the end of the “old medieval consensus.” The Second Vatican Council “was willing to acknowledge its passing” but still “the church has done little to provide a new ‘corporate environment’ which would allow for a perceptible Christian presence in wider society.” He calls neither for an increase in simple social interaction nor for more “sensitivity sessions.” This “corporate environment,” the establishment of which must precede any serious answer to sacramental questions, must be rooted in concrete, demanding Christian action nourished by prayer. In contrast to Haas and even Buswell, Keifer paints an ecclesiological picture that is “unabashedly sacramental.” It is from

\(^{154}\)Ibid.

\(^{155}\)Ibid., 604. Woodward again echoes Keifer: the West has prolonged adolescence into an “increasingly dysfunctional period of the life cycle.” In response, “the church ought to draw on the richness latent in its own sacramental tradition to restore some dignity, responsibility, and trust to early youth.” Parting from Keifer, Woodward offers Mormonism as an ecclesial, familial model confident that “By rebuilding the parish on the Mormon model of the extended family, American Catholicism can capture some of the closeness and mutual concern which are the most attractive characteristics of a movement; at the same time, the fluidity and pluralism of contemporary American Catholicism should prevent the parish as I have described it from turning into a sectarian ghetto.” Woodward suggests that the pluralistic influence on Catholicism is a positive deterrent to sectarianism (Woodward, 25).
within this corporate environment that Christians can begin to understand maturity and grow into it.\textsuperscript{156}

Beyond his title, one might forget that Keifer’s topic is Confirmation, but his work attests to the deep-seated cultural and ecclesial difficulties that Catholics faced and considered in light of celebrating Confirmation. Keifer argues that before Confirmation can even be rightfully considered, Catholics’ place in the wider-culture needs further clarification and active restructuring.

**Confirmation Preparation and Pluralism**

The wider pluralistic cultural situation also affected Confirmation discernment and preparation. Confirmation not only needed to be oriented toward a personal decision, but needed also to be intelligible to non-Catholics among whom Catholics played, worked, and learned. Another advantage of developing Confirmation as a maturity or commitment rite was its ability to make sense to non-Catholics, and especially non-Christians.

Some Confirmation programs encourage those discerning the “highly personal decision”\textsuperscript{157} of participation in Confirmation to seek the advice of the non-Catholics with whom they associate: “We live in a pluralistic society and the students will lead their lives as confirmed Catholics among people who do not necessarily share their vision of life. Therefore, it would be well if the students would find out what some of their non-Catholic friends and neighbors think about their intentions to think seriously about being

\textsuperscript{156}Ibid., 607-9, 601.

confirmed.”

Here, the program builds in concern for the child’s wider environment, including non-Catholics. The shift here is palpable; in a subculture-centered Catholicism, such concerns did not even demand consideration. The exercise, in this context, pairs nicely with the idea of Confirmation as a maturity or initiation rite akin to other rites of maturity or initiation; for non-Catholics would not be able to comment on Catholic Confirmation unless it were presented and understood in a more generalized fashion. If the authors have in mind a conversation with non-Christians, one would be hard-pressed to make sense of Confirmation as the Gift of the Holy Spirit apart from the gospels, Acts of the Apostles, and the epistles. A maturity rite, however, has myriad secular and religious parallels.

Theologians and pastoral ministers alike debated the role Confirmation could play in the new cultural position in which Catholics increasingly found themselves. Looking for the best response to the many religious options in a pluralistic culture, some built out of Confirmation an opportunity for and a celebration of young people’s “mature” Christian commitment. A few were critical of this move and instead emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation and the ongoing formation in the womb of the Church. The discussion is, though, also deeply ecclesiological. The former group largely adopts an ecclesiology with a voluntaristic tinge, arguing that Confirmation is the time for young Catholics’ voluntary choice of Catholicism for themselves. The latter group, which is clearly in the minority, argues that Confirmation is a celebration of the Holy Spirit, Who animates the universal Church and encourages Christian witness rooted in prayer—

158Ibid., 11.
witness to the wider culture of choice.\textsuperscript{159} The tension between a Catholic ecclesiology in which people are called by God to be members of the Body of Christ and a voluntary association model of church, in which individuals choose to come together in common purpose, would continue in U.S. Catholicism throughout the rest of the twentieth century.

**John Roberto’s Landmark Analysis: Maturity and Initiation**

In 1978 the landscape of Confirmation theology and practice became clear enough (or complicated enough!) for John Roberto to trace out two major theological strains running throughout the Confirmation discussion in the United States. One of Roberto’s schools is “the theological-maturity school” which “view[s] confirmation as a rite of passage, a full commitment to the gospel lifestyle (a recommitment of one’s baptism, but now as an “adult”); a completion of the gift of the Holy Spirit begun in baptism but now brought to its fullness in confirmation.” On the other side of the question stands the “liturgical-initiation school” which “views confirmation as a ‘solemn pneumatic conclusion to baptism that finally equips one for full sharing in the Eucharistic celebration of a people filled with the Spirit of Jesus whom the Father sent as that peoples’ living bond of unity.’”\textsuperscript{160} Roberto’s project was the first of its kind—a book-length inventory of Confirmation theology in the United States. His work is a testament both to the need for a Confirmation “roadmap” and the uniqueness of the situation in the United States. Roberto’s delineation of the “theological-maturity school” and the

\textsuperscript{159} This is the very ecclesiological problematic that Portier finds endemic to Catholic life in a full-on pluralistic culture. See Portier, “Here Come the Evangelical Catholics,” 43, 58.

“liturgical-initiation school” helped clarify the murky waters of Confirmation theology and shape its direction moving into the 1980s.

Many of those examined above would be associated with Roberto’s “theological-maturity” school. Confirmation could be closely associated with the charismatic renewal largely because of its viability as a maturity rite. It was this same viability that enabled Confirmation, in the context of pluralism, to become the time to choose Catholicism over the other religious options available to the religious consumer. But there are also those who try to emphasize initiation and choice at the same time; for them, the path to full Christian initiation requires an autonomous choice for Catholicism.

Roberto’s “liturgical-initiation school” is shaped heavily by RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults), established in the United States only four years prior to his project. Although nothing significant changed in the rubrics, prayers, and gestures associated with Confirmation since the revised rite in 1971, the implications of RCIA influenced the discussion of the sacraments of initiation in general and Confirmation in particular. Many considered RCIA a paradigm for all of Christian initiation. For that reason, three particular aspects of RCIA were significant for Confirmation theology after its promulgation.\(^{161}\) First, the pastor was recognized as the minister of Confirmation for adult initiation (whether catechumens or candidates). For some, this opened the possibility that the pastor, instead of the bishop, could serve as Confirmation minister on other occasions that also were not emergencies. Since RCIA gestured in this direction, the Eastern practice of initiation (celebrating all three sacraments on one occasion in infancy) received more serious theological consideration.

\(^{161}\) Cf. Roberto, Confirmation, 23-7. Roberto identifies some theological concerns and seven different “alterations in initiatory polity” drawn from RCIA. I have attempted to distill the influence of RCIA here in a manner that is both brief and relevant to the purposes of this project.
Second, the order of the sacraments of initiation in RCIA was clear: Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist. If, as supposed, RCIA speaks to Catholic initiation in general, many argued, this order should be universal.

Third, some argued for Catholic initiation to be celebrated in adulthood ordinarily. Since RCIA is rooted in the initiation process of the early Church (pre-Constantine), with its stages of Evangelization, Pre-Catechumenate, Catechumenate, Purification, Enlightenment, and Mystagogy, some argued from an historical perspective that this process should be universalized. In this case, the normal practice would be to enroll children in RCIA instead of baptizing them as infants (this would also require the pastor to be recognized as ordinary Confirmation minister).

Since the source of RCIA lies in pre-Christendom Christianity, some saw it as a particularly apt way to deal with initiation in a post-subculture, post-Vatican II situation. The appeals to a “post-medieval church” grow exponentially in the subculture’s wake, evidence of the increased feeling of a new social situation for U.S. Catholics during this period. Aidan Kavanagh, a representative of Roberto’s “liturgical-initiation school,” finds adult initiation particularly effective in pluralism because “We simply cannot depend on evangelization and catechesis being done on youths baptized in infancy by the culture itself, as could a church in thirteenth century Europe.” The Church’s formation program runs counter to the formation of the culture, which, Kavanagh argues, “dehumanizes and dechristianizes youths baptized in infancy more often than not.” 162 Kavanagh thinks that Christians who have a conscious memory of their baptism sit in much better stead in this hostile environment. Based on the relationship between Catholics and the wider culture,

Kavanagh argues that adult initiation, not infant Baptism should be axiomatic Christian practice. In the face of a “largely non-Christian society,” Kavanagh finds the catechumenate a more fruitful avenue for Christian formation than Baptism followed by catechesis, reaching “commitment” at Confirmation.

Roberto, himself convinced of RCIA as a model, also comments on the cultural influence on initiation, “Sociologically, our current pastoral practice relies upon a predominantly Christian culture. Such culture no longer exists and we live in an age of pluralism; and thus there is an urgent need to reestablish a catechumenal structure in which Christians are made.” He argues that the Church must respond to the pluralistic culture with a more meticulously constructed path for young people, making them into Catholics.

Part of Roberto’s concern with the cultural situation stems from what he argues is the inadequacy of conflating, without nuance, Thomistic Confirmation theology with psychological advances regarding the development of a person. Roberto finds this conflation prevalent in various diocesan regulations who look to the time of “maturity” for the appropriate time of Confirmation. The problem, Roberto maintains, is that contemporary psychology is completely foreign to Aquinas’s understanding of maturation. Since Roberto identifies this amalgam of psychology and Thomism as “perhaps… at the bottom of our confusion,” it is not surprising that he sides with the “liturgical-initiation” school. In order to understand this amalgam more fully, it is necessary to examine the development, in this period, of the approaches to Confirmation that integrate contemporary psychological theory.

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Confirmation and Psychology

As the novelty of psychological theory in catechesis and pastoral ministry began to subside, psychological influences become absorbed into Catholic spirituality and are therefore less explicit in Confirmation theology. As we saw in chapter two, both Mary Charles Bryce and Francis Buckley explicitly cited psychologists, bringing their insights to bear on theologies of Confirmation. During this period, the line between what Roberto calls the “psychological understanding” and the “scholastic understanding” is not as clearly defined, resulting in subtler psychological references. That is, the turn to psychology as a form of reaction to neo-scholasticism was not the aim of thinkers during this period. Also during this period, some voices arose to critique the manner in which psychology was being adopted in spirituality in general and in terms of Confirmation in particular.

Those who find psychological theory a fruitful avenue for thinking about Confirmation and/or catechetical development often argue for Confirmation as a rite of maturity for adolescents. In addition to this theological move, the effects of psychological theory are most clearly seen in the structure of preparation programs. Generally speaking, in these programs there is a clear distinction between one’s own feelings, positions, or values and those of the Church. For example, *Growth in the Spirit* opens with a “value” exercise defined as “something which is important to a person or a community.” The note to the parent reads, “This activity is intended to help the students examine their own ideas and values. It is *not* intended to present the objective values of the Catholic Community.”

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165 Weber, Killgallon, and O'Shaughnessy, 7 (Emphasis in original). The authors quote values expert Sidney Simon, modeling the exercise around his work on values clarification. Also
out as it were. Instead of an explicitly Catholic formation, which would attend to the
shaping-ness of tradition, one aims throughout the program to have the student make his
choice.

The aftereffects of the psychological revolution are evident also in starting points
for Confirmation preparation. Sister Gloriani Bednarski developed her Confirmation
program after interacting with the youth of her urban parish. Bednarski realized that, “For
our young people at this stage in their lives, confirmation could not mean making an adult
commitment to Christ and Church; it could not mean arriving at Christian maturity. What
it could mean, however, is committing themselves to a new beginning as a new stage in
life. What it could mean is the sacramentalizing of a specific ‘moment’—the adolescent
‘moment’.”

Bednarski’s program stands as an interesting approach, especially in light
of Roberto’s study. She pulls apart the mature commitment to Christ theology of
Confirmation from the psychological insights that bolstered its development. Benardski
takes the stages of psychological development as granted and then proposes that
Confirmation “sacramentalize” that moment. In the vicissitudes of the culture that
Catholic young people inhabit, Bednarski has ruled out a maturity theology of
Confirmation as it has been elaborated but, instead of moving to a position in Roberto’s
“initiation school,” she places the work of the Church in formation on a secondary level
and its sacramental life becomes somewhat extrinsic. Confirmation is left as a ritual that
marks adolescents’ commitment to “beginning a new stage in life.” Throughout the

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of note here is the preference for the more general designation “community” over “Church.” See
also Sandy Carrubba, “Confirmation: Becoming Aware of Community,” *Today’s Catholic
Teacher* 13 (March 1980): 20-1. Carrubba also begins with the general notion of “community” in
order to understand the Church.

166Sister Gloriani Bednarski, “A Total Parish Preparation Plan for Confirmation,” *Living
program, Bednarski works with the assumption that in order to understand who one is in terms of the Church, one must first understand who one is, tout court, and the period of adolescence, psychologically.\textsuperscript{167} Speaking ecclesiologically, Bednarski gives preference to a voluntary model in which individuals, already formed, come together in community for a common purpose.

Pastor and historical theologian Paul Turner sums up the impact on Confirmation of this “evolution in catechetical theory”:

An environment [of religious formation] which honors personal experience…provided fertile ground for adolescent confirmation. Teens who reflected on their life experience deepened their personal involvement with faith. This they ritualized in a sacrament. Many theologians believed this put more teeth into the sacramental experience, removing its magical tendencies for those who celebrated sacraments without much interior renewal. And educators reflecting on their experience with teens discerned that this was a new spirit-filled occasion in the church. They argued that even though the confirmation of teens never existed as a general practice in church history, their experience in the late twentieth century led them to believe that this should be the present and future direction of this sacrament.

Turner, of course, describes the position of those in Roberto’s theological-maturity school, positions Turner finds to be often linked to a shift in catechetical theory based on contemporary psychological developments.

It is not difficult to sense the frustration in Turner’s words. There were, even during this period, scholars critical of the psychological turn largely because it threatens Christianity’s particularity. Christopher Kiesling, for example, argues that the move from the general to the specific, that is, from adolescent maturity theory to Confirmation challenges the uniqueness of Christian revelation. He writes, “To present confirmation as a sacrament of maturity comparable to the religious rites of passage for adolescents in

\textsuperscript{167} Bednarski., 129. Consideration of the Church and the Holy Spirit come in this program only after the participants reflect upon “What is the truth for me? What is my life meant to be?” Similarly the concurrent parent program begins with “A Psychology of Adolescence.”
other societies, religious or secular, risks conveying the idea that Christianity is just a religion, or just another religion.”168 If Turner is correct and adolescent Confirmation is intimately connected to this shift in catechetical method based on psychological advances, then Kiesling’s critique is ultimately aimed at the psychological shift. He fears that moving from the general category of adolescent maturity and beginning with general psychological human experience will ultimately render Christianity wide open to the famous Marxist critique of religion. Instead of Christians identified as children of God, called to be “sharers of the divine nature,“169 they will be merely associated with all of those who develop a relationship to God “arising out of man’s needs experienced in personal and social life.”170 The result of such a position is that one chooses one’s religion based upon one’s perceived personal needs, instead of based on a call from God, akin to those of Abraham, the prophets, John the Baptist, and the apostles. One’s perceived personal needs and God’s call may not be at loggerheads (although they may be!), but they certainly are not simply identifiable.

Sociologist and theologian Andrew Greeley lays out a more thoroughgoing critique of the widespread popularity of “pop psychology” in Catholic ministry and spirituality. 171 He laments the sloppiness of integrating psychological insights into ministry in an age thirsting for something fresh, new, and impactful; he writes, “Catholics discovered sensitivity training and pursued it with all the hunger of those who desperately needed an eighth sacrament because their confidence was woefully undermined in the

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169 2 Peter 1:4. Qtd. in Kiesling, 14.  
170 Ibid., 13 (emphasis added).  
other seven.”\footnote{172} As we have seen, in many cases theologians and catechists looked to Confirmation as the sacrament to be adapted to the new needs of the Catholics in the United States because of that sacrament’s own theological homelessness. Pop psychology served as another avenue to pursue Confirmation’s meaning in the contemporary context. In cases where this was pursued without painstaking care, the confusion, identified by John Roberto as arising from the conflation of scholastic theology and psychological theory, resulted.

Greeley offers some examples, “We don’t do penance anymore, rather we, ‘understand what we are doing’; we are not reborn again through the grace of the Holy Spirit, we rather renew our commitment to our life project… Therapy groups replace worship, encounter weekends substitute for retreats, sensitivity training replaces contemplation… Freud has not substituted for Jesus, but Jesus begins to sound very much like Freud.”\footnote{173} He cites the over-zealous cultivation of critical faculties, especially exegetically speaking, in seminaries as one root cause of the turn to pop psychology. Graduate school had alienated priests and pastoral ministers from traditional language and symbols and pop psychology served as a suitable replacement. This substitution made sense because of the hot existential movement in Europe, often received in the U.S. as an emphasis on individual personal growth. Greeley writes:

In the wake of the Freudian revolution, self-conscious pursuit of the personal growth of the individual and the fulfillment of human potentialities became the over-riding concern. Wave after wave of pop psychological fads washed up on the shores of American culture, and the intellectual and cultural elites, instead of

\footnote{172}{Ibid., 226.}
serving their appropriate role as critics of the new fadism [sic.], strove to be one step ahead of the masses in discovering what the latest psychological gimmicks were.\textsuperscript{174}

The Confirmation discussion had spread across a notable number of theologians, catechists, and others during this period and Confirmation preparation became one of the clearest places of pop psychological influence. The primacy of individual personal growth matched with the emphasis on maturity and commitment at the time of Confirmation. Greeley affirms a natural affinity between Christianity and psychology, but calls for a more carefully established harmony between the two.

CONCLUSION

By the end of this period, it was clear that pluralism had changed the context of the Confirmation discussion in general and of catechesis in relation to it, in particular. In a bit of a confused shoulder shrug, the 1979 National Catechetical Directory resigned itself to acknowledge, “Practice in this matter [Confirmation] now varies so much among the dioceses of the United States that it is impossible to prescribe a single catechesis for this sacrament.”\textsuperscript{175} The roots of this deep variation rest in a variety of factors. Quam \textit{Singulari} holds some of the responsibility, but so do the variety of other factors discussed in chapters I and II. In this period, Confirmation is espoused by proponents of the charismatic renewal and opponents of it, elaborated upon by those that welcome the voluntary ecclesiological emphases of a pluralistic culture with open arms and by those who stand deeply critical of it. The nuances and particulars of these positions, however, even extend beyond the helpful twofold diagnosis of John Roberto. The array of

\textsuperscript{174}Ibid., 226.
\textsuperscript{175}Quoted in William J. Freburger, “Confirmation, We Hardly Knew Ye,” \textit{The Priest} 48, no. 6 (June 1992): 28.
strategies for reaching to young people and maintaining theological consistency are illustrated across this period. Nevertheless, we have seen how those who grant too much to psychological categories or to the dictates of life in pluralism jeopardize the very integrity of Confirmation as an act of the Church, which strives to form members in its fold.

This ten-year period can be summarized as a time of searching out a wide variety of options for response to Catholics’ largely new cultural position. What remains intriguing, and has, I hope, been adequately demonstrated, is how Confirmation functions as a sacramental cipher on to which various ecclesiological, pedagogical, and pneumatological concerns can be inscribed. The next, and final, chapter will illustrate how more recent Confirmation theology and practice draws upon the work of previous periods and adopts appreciable individualistic and autonomous tones that had been only moderately perceptible in those previous periods.
CHAPTER IV

A PLURALISTIC THEOLOGY AND A THEOLOGICAL PLURALISM:
CONFIRMATION THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE, 1981-2006

Throughout the first three chapters the study has demonstrated that throughout the twentieth century (at least from 1910-1980), the theology and practice of Confirmation in the United States changed as Catholics’ relationship to the wider culture shifted. The thesis began by investigating the effects of the liturgical reforms and the Catholic Action movement in the United States and how these movements shaped the Sacrament of Confirmation. Chapter II examined how the reception of the Second Vatican Council in the United States, the dissolution of the Catholic immigrant subculture, and Catholics’ appropriation of psychological advances all shaped Confirmation. Then Chapter III showed how recent struggles between Catholic identity and American pluralism play themselves out on the stage of Confirmation in various ways.

As pointed out in other studies, many strains of Confirmation theology are discernable as models within contemporary Confirmation thought and practice.176 This chapter will focus on a particular aspect of Confirmation theology that bridges some of the distinctions of these models, but which is also related to an anthropological undercurrent in many aspects of contemporary U.S. culture—the privileging of individual choice.

176See Turner, *Confirmation: The Baby in Solomon’s Court*. 
Over the past few decades, many strains of Confirmation theology have focused less upon the formative character of the sacrament and more upon the recognition of an individual’s choice and accomplishment. As seventeenth century social contract theories continue to permeate the way that Westerners think about human relationships, Confirmation has reflected the influence of this anthropological vision. Principles such as “individual,” “self-reliance,” and “freedom of choice” heavily shape and characterize the modern Western ethos.\(^{177}\) Practiced in the wider U.S. cultural context, Confirmation has begun to emphasize individual choice and the completion of requirements, giving rise to such exclamations as “I memorized everything” or “I got my sacraments,” to the detriment, I will argue, of the ongoing relationship between the Church and the person.

This influence can most fruitfully be understood against the historical backdrop of Confirmation theology, practice, and catechesis analyzed over the first three chapters. Events that impacted Catholics’ place in the United States have a role to play in the individualism characteristic of many Confirmation theologies. Pope Pius X made possible the postponement of Confirmation to an age more suitable for choice by lowering the age of First Eucharist. Confirmation as the sacrament of Catholic Action had an individualism of its own that often construed the “effects” of Confirmation as narrowly personal and the Holy Spirit’s presence in the soul as distinct from the same Spirit’s presence in the Church. Nevertheless, Catholic Action Confirmation theology

\(^{177}\)Vincent J. Miller has challenged the role of the intellectual in the pervasiveness of these characteristics. Miller locates its perpetuation in the commodification and fragmentation of consumer culture, which, he argues, has nothing to do with beliefs or values. See *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2004). Miller’s concerns about passing on the Catholic Tradition are similar to those reflected throughout this project. It is, however, beyond the scope of my work here to engage seriously the effects of consumer culture on Confirmation throughout this period. Such work is nevertheless ultimately vital to the ongoing Confirmation discussion, especially with regard to voluntarism and choice.
empowered the individual to act on behalf of the Church. Yet, when Catholics’ relationship to the cultural context shifted, this individualism took on a different hue. The reception of the Council and the dissolution of the Catholic subculture in the U.S. propelled Catholics into unfettered U.S. pluralism where they encountered many religious traditions at a young age. In light of the dissolution of the subculture, psychological advances hit Catholic theology and ministry like a tidal wave and Confirmation was no exception. Popular psychology shifted the focus of Confirmation to the individual’s “life project.” Partly in response to the disorientation of Catholics in the 60s and 70s, the Charismatic Renewal arose and developed a unique theology of Confirmation, itself victim to individualistic impulses in some cases.

Chapter IV will focus on this individualism as it manifests itself in the final period of Confirmation theology and practice in the United States (1981–present). In light of the overriding argument of this thesis—that Confirmation theology and practice change to reflect shifts in the relationship between Catholics and the wider U.S. culture—this individualism is not surprising. In a highly individualized U.S. context that is becoming increasingly more so, Confirmation too is becoming dangerously more and more individualized. Theologically the shift is often reflected in identifying Confirmation as the time for the young person to choose Catholicism for herself (among the various religious options available) and by the shift in the agency of the verb “confirm” from the Church via the bishop to the individual confirmand.

In a way this individualizing is a product of the constant search, since the dissolution of the subculture, for ways to form Catholic youth into mature Catholic
adults. This formation process is largely complicated by the discordant ecclesiologies of Catholicism and of American congregationalism.

**CATHOLICS AND THE INDIVIDUALISM OF A PLURALISTIC CONTEXT**

Many U.S. Catholic historians have recently pointed to the individualism that has taken a deep hold on Catholics’ sensibilities. Though divergent in their ideas about its genesis, extent, and value, Catholic historians are largely in agreement about the gravity of its presence as well as its connection to pluralism over the past few decades.

Evaluating the current (1987) situation in which U.S. Catholics live, Jay Dolan identifies economic and educational factors as primary:

> Since the 1930s Catholics have climbed up the educational and economic ladder and now rank alongside or ahead of most Protestants. Such change has produced a large dose of individualism among priests, sisters, and lay people. It has also created a great deal of diversity among Catholics; the homogeneity of the past has vanished, swept aside by a rage for pluralism.\(^{178}\)

In a situation in which Catholics internalize the public/private distinction more deeply with every generation, they are increasingly unable to maintain the interconnectedness of the Catholic imagination over and against the individualism and pluralism necessary to succeed in their public lives.

This individualism, as Dolan notes, goes along with pluralism, but is also partnered with voluntarism. David O’Brien makes this connection explicit:

> Rarely noticed… is the religious culture to which Americans have adapted, perhaps over-adapted. It is marked (1) by individualism, and thus by an emphasis on religious experience; (2) by pluralism and thus by an emphasis on evangelization, “selling God” and personal decisions, consumer choice, and (3) by voluntary communities, congregations, and thus by fragile structures of ecclesiastical authority and theological orthodoxy. This is the religious culture

that was kept partially (and only partially) at bay by Catholic subcultural strategies grounded in the immigration experience. 179

The emphasis on individualistic religious experience, paired with an ecclesial voluntarism leaves the sacramental life of the Church an obscurity. Precisely because “religion must be a matter of personal conviction and free choice… Catholic wisdom about sacrament and liturgy, solidarity and organic social obligation that precedes and grounds personal choice is hard to grasp.” 180

O’Brien clearly assumes that the sacramental life of the Church is not voluntaristic. It is not about an individual’s choice, but the cultural environment renders it arcane.

Yet, at least a part of the sacramental life of the Church has been shaped by the same ethos. Confirmation theology and preparation programs have adopted individualistic and voluntaristic tones partly in order to respond to young people and partly because their authors are convinced by some of their merits. Whereas some of these theologies have emphasized the individual’s choice, others have responded to young peoples’ yearning for a rite in which the community can affirm their mature place within it, not vice versa. As those latter theologies move into this period, they too shift to reflect the very stripe of pluralism that O’Brien points out in which all people need an opportunity, even a formal one, to choose their religion.

The Catholics who were raised in the 1970s and 80s have been particularly affected and formed by this culture. In the whirlwind of choices, decisions, and commitments to be made, these Catholics seem to need a clear occasion to choose their Catholicism. A study published in 1996 describes this generation of Catholics. “Post-


180 Ibid., 97-8.
Vatican II Catholics [those who grew up in the 70s and 80s]... stress the volitional aspects of being in the Church—the need to make a personal decision to be Catholic, and the individual’s need to choose his or her own religious beliefs and lifestyle.”\textsuperscript{181} An even greater emphasis on volition abides in the millennial generation, who seems to pair it with a bit more reticence to make any particular religious choice in favor of an increased religious individualism.\textsuperscript{182}

In this climate, Thomas Zanzig’s attempt to broaden the Confirmation question seems on the mark: “The real issue we are confronting... is the current condition of the Church as it struggles to initiate and then nurture the faith of anyone, regardless of age.”\textsuperscript{183} The young, however, receive particular attention because of their vulnerability, accessibility, and symbolic charge. Catholic parents who have struggled with their own Catholic formation are nevertheless often interested in the Catholic formation of their children, whether out of obligation, nostalgia, a desire for good values, concern for their souls, or wanting for them “what we (never) had.” Yet, they struggle with educating children in Catholicism since the situation in which they were educated was more often than not a version of a Catholic subculture.

Unsure of the sacrament’s ability to stand as a sign of contradiction in the wider culture (O’Brien’s “Catholic wisdom”) and unable to find much catechetical substance in the Catholic family, which is expected to be the primary experience of Church,

\textsuperscript{181}William V. D’Antonio, et al., \textit{Laity, American and Catholic: Transforming the Church} (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1996), 84.
\textsuperscript{183}Thomas Zanzig, “Adolescent Confirmation: Gift to the Adult Community,” \textit{The Living Light} 28, no. 3 (Spring 1992): 241.
theologians and catechists needed to find a way to explain Confirmation in this new context.

CONFIRMATION AS THE CONDUIT FOR PASTORAL AND THEOLOGICAL RESPONSES TO THE CULTURAL CLIMATE

The Confluence of Individualism, Choice, and a Voluntary Church in Pastoral Writings

Many on the pastoral level began to see Confirmation as a way to respond to culture-wide emphases on individualism, which prompt many to designate Confirmation as “graduation” or a “rite of exit.”\(^{184}\) The way that Confirmation could respond, many aver, is by an increased emphasis on the volitional aspects of the sacramental celebration. This often includes waiting until Catholics have reached a certain age and/or a certain level of maturity. If, the argument goes, we are able to give young Catholics real agency in the context of Confirmation, then we will see a blossoming of Catholic practice among them. While trying to avoid an individualism that would prompt an exit from parish life, they often do not address the interconnection between individualism and voluntarism. Narrowly designating Confirmation as the sacrament of choice forces a decision that cannot always be made at a particular time.

When catechist Dan Grippo considers Confirmation in terms of the changing structure of the Catholic nuclear family and the pervading absence of teenagers in parish life, he concludes:

Because they have developed a stronger sense of their own personal identity, teenage Catholics are ready to meet and appreciate the person of Jesus… For those who do stay with their high-school Confirmation program, their

Confirmation would mean a great deal more to them. They would be choosing Confirmation, and their choice would affect the rest of their lives. Their future in the church would be marked by personal conviction, not parental or social expectation. Grippo even shifts the agency of “confirming,” switching its traditional subject and object. It is not Christ, the Holy Spirit, or the Church (via the bishop) that confirms the baptized, but rather the young person who confirms her choice of the Church. Grippo’s is largely connected to the psychological approaches considered in Chapters II and III. The emphases of pop psychology lead him to consider a strong sense of “personal identity” a prerequisite for meeting and appreciating the person of Jesus and the individual’s agency is the conduit for greater commitment to Catholicism.

With Grippo’s solution, and those like it, the Church maintains an agency in education, in preparing young people for the sacrament even though the confirmand is the one who does the “confirming.” Some catechists and pastoral ministers push further in a individualistic direction. In addition to emphasizing individual choice, they, ironically and perhaps in a self-depreciative manner, downplay the role of the Church in religious education in favor of the interior, spiritual choices of the individual.

The aptly titled Confirmation “process,” CHOICE, aids high-schoolers in making a “firm personal choice.” The process

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186 See Ambrose of Milan, *De Mysteriis* (c. 387), VII.42. Accessed online at: http://www.ancienttexts.org/library/latinlibrary/ambrose.mysteriis.html (30 June 2009). For St. Ambrose, Christ is the agent who confirms: *Signavit te Deus Pater, confirmavit te Christus Dominus* (God the Father has sealed you and Christ the Lord has confirmed [or strengthened] you). St. Ambrose was also the first one to use the term “confirmavit” to describe the post-baptismal anointing. Shortly thereafter, the bishop’s completion of the baptismal rite with the final anointing for those baptisms he was not present for became called “confirmation.” “Confirmation” also described the Holy Spirit’s strengthening of the faithful in the anointing. On those last three points see Paul Turner, *Ages of Initiation*, 8, 10, 14.
recognizes the fact that we are dealing with the level of faith of very unique individuals… It recognizes that some young people are at a point where they are able to “confirm” their own baptism and still others may not yet be able to do so… The CHOICE process professes profound respect for the individual young person and his or her capacity and right to make choices relative to faith and spirituality.187

CHOICE outlines a two-year preparation for Confirmation which nobly jettisons sacramental coercion. Yet in order to do so, it espouses a type of individualism in which real spiritual development occurs inside the individual adolescent. The ecclesial dimension, the dimension of the Church’s continual acceptance and nurturing of all of its children (whether they can admit their surety in the lifelong process of consolation and desolation at any particular point or not), is underemphasized. Pinpointing Confirmation as the time for choice undergirds the individualism in Moore’s CHOICE. The title is meant to stress the volition of the young person, but there are hints of a voluntaristic ecclesiology, a church of the choosing, that runs throughout the manual.

In this period, generally, catechists and youth ministers are unsure about how to address Catholic Confirmation ecclesiologically.188 The tensions of cultural voluntarism, Protestant congregationalism, and Catholic universalism pose difficult ecclesial questions that are embedded in Confirmation theology and preparation. The move to emphasize a veritably autonomous choice in Confirmation leans, not surprisingly, toward a heavily voluntary ecclesiology. Yet, many catechists express misgivings about adopting those ecclesiological assumptions full-on.

188See above Chapter II, pp. 39-40 esp. note 35.
Steven R. Hemler is a marked exception, who holds no such misgivings. He is rather explicit about laying out a voluntaristic ecclesiology. Yet, his approach is not uncomplicated. Even while adopting a voluntaristic ecclesiology, Hemler critiques celebrating Confirmation as a pinpointed moment of choice because it often fails in terms of long-term formation:

Given the secular society in which we live, the Church cannot assume that those baptized as infants will grow into faithful, committed adult Christians. There is a real need today for the Church to do all it can to foster and celebrate mature, committed Christian faith. There are too many nominal “Sunday only” and inactive Catholics for the Church to continue business as usual. There needs to be more committed Christians if the kingdom of God is to grow in our secular, humanistic society.

Well made, Hemler’s point puts a finger on the tensions surrounding Confirmation. He confirms Zanzig’s point that the larger question of forming Catholics is played out on the stage of Confirmation. If, however, the burden of the growth of the kingdom of God is placed entirely on catechesis, the danger of Pelagianism is real; room must be made for the efficaciousness of the sacrament and the Holy Spirit’s work in the Church, particularly in the sacraments of the Church.

Trying desperately to find a solution to the problem of formation in a pluralistic context is a common thread across pastoral writings during this period. It is not uncommon to appeal to history in this effort, but the conversation is skewed by many who anachronistically project this particular religious pluralism onto the early Church. Brigid M. O’Donnell finds the practice of adult initiation in the early Church a curiously viable sacramental model to deal with pluralism because “They had searched for a

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religion, a community, whose beliefs and values they could affirm in their own journey of
faith.”\textsuperscript{191} O’Donnell accurately notes that in the early Church, initiation followed the
catechumenate—this is the very process upon which RCIA is based. Nevertheless, early
Christians lived with an entirely different cosmological understanding—one without
Kant’s famous distinction between “facts” and “values” and the heavy modern emphasis
on autonomy—and as such had no conscious experience of the particularly modern
personal search for a “religion” whose “values they could affirm in their own journey of
faith.” Indeed, the very word “religion” does not enter discourse in the sense here used
until the modern period.

In the increasingly individualized cultural context, approaches to Confirmation
that emphasize personal commitment fit all too neatly with its characteristic pluralistic
voluntarism. It seemed only logical for Dominican Frank Quinn to call Confirmation, in
the twentieth century, an “ersatz bar mitvah.”\textsuperscript{192} Quinn means to emphasize the maturity
and adulthood aspects of that analogy. In U.S. culture, though, choice is constitutive of
adulthood or maturity. One is not mature until one can choose for oneself; any distinction
between maturity and choice is ultimately very tenuous. Jewish (sub)culture and practice
are theoretically different. A bar/bat mitzvah occurs at the appropriate age whether a
ritual is celebrated or not. Age, not ritual, enjoins the thirteen-/twelve-year-old
responsibility under the Law. Whether or not bar/bat mitzvahs have been subject to the
same influences as Confirmation is another study, but for Confirmation, a shift to

\textsuperscript{191} Brigid M. O’Donnell, “Confirming Young Adults,” \textit{The Living Light} 28, no. 3 (Spring 1992): 248.
emphasizing maturity during this period is concomitant with a shift to emphasizing choice.

The Centrality of Choice in the Responses of Sacramental Theologians

During this period, book-length analyses of individual sacraments have, in large part, given way to comprehensive treatments of Catholic sacramentality as well as some or each of the seven. When these theologians come to Confirmation, their concerns are not far from those of catechists and pastoral ministers. They recognize the changing historical and cultural milieu and also, in general, emphasize the prominence of the individual and his or her choice in response.

Ray Noll is one of a number who call for a rite of enrollment for children before Baptism for those cases in which Catholic parents want to give children freedom of choice. He argues that this rite would not be established for parents who have no intention of raising their children Catholic, but rather for those “very dedicated Catholic parents, products in many instances of Catholic high school and Catholic university, who explicitly wish to guarantee their offspring a freedom that they themselves did not have, namely the freedom to choose to be baptized and when.” He reflects on the uniqueness of the U.S. cultural situation that informs the desire for this freedom: “In fact, this might not even be an issue in many countries of the world, but for very freedom-conscious Catholics in North American parishes the freedom issue means a lot.”

For Noll, the wide variance of Confirmation practice is a direct consequence of the separation of Confirmation from Baptism in the early Church. Noll identifies two positions on Confirmation in the current conversation that are largely of the same school—both are about commitment—those who think the sacrament should be celebrated in early adolescence and those who think that it should be celebrated some time during the high school years. He thinks that these disagreements “will probably always be with us.” The Confirmation debate has much deeper theological roots than Noll lets on. He reads Confirmation only from one side of its theological spectrum, identifying it as a time of commitment; the confirmandi themselves have the agency of “confirming.” This seems to belie the Gregory Baum-inspired reflection Noll offers at the end of the book in which he describes the Church’s ministry of word and sacrament analogously to a mother forming a child in symbol and language. Confirmation, considered in this manner, does not fit the analogy. A mother never provides for a specific, designated time in which the child can reject or accept her. If the former happens, it happens painfully and often sadly, but not on a prescribed occasion.

Attending also to the experience of Catholics in contemporary culture, Joseph Martos has similar emphases to Noll. Martos’s *Doors to the Sacred* has become standard fare in university courses on the sacraments since its first publication in 1981. Martos finds a deep rift between, on the one hand, the official theology of Confirmation...
(expressed in the rite of Confirmation and in the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*) and, on the other hand, Westerners’ experience. Since this “official” theology is “largely derived from medieval scholasticism,” it “therefore remains somewhat disconnected from experience.”¹⁹⁷ Unlike Noll, Martos gives a thorough appraisal of the wide variance of Confirmation thought and practice in the West. He argues that the predominant understanding of Confirmation is rooted in maturity; it is a “communal recognition that those who are confirmed have personally accepted the faith that was once accepted for them, and it is an ecclesiastical call for them to take up the responsibility of being adult disciples of Christ in the world.”¹⁹⁸ Martos is explicit about the tension between his theology and the “official theology,” but there is a further tension with the *Catechism* that Martos does not explicitly identify. Paragraph 1308, which Martos does not cite, says that Confirmation should not be considered a sacrament of baptismal ratification which renders Baptism non-efficacious.¹⁹⁹ Martos’s reading of Confirmation seems to make it a rite of ratification, at least in practice if not in theory. It does so, however, in the service of the cultural shift that U.S. Catholic historians have identified. Confirmation is a recognition, albeit communal, that the individual has personally accepted the Faith.

Martos identifies the sacramental theology of another prominent theologian of this period, which fits under Martos’s general designation of “doors to the sacred.” His analysis of Bernard Cooke sounds strikingly similar to Martos’s own approach in a 1992

¹⁹⁸Ibid., 202.
¹⁹⁹*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), para. 1308. “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.”
article. He writes, “Psychologists… tell us that there are basic human experiences that we all have, and the meanings we attach to them consciously or unconsciously shape our image of ourself [sic] and our picture of reality… For [Bernard] Cooke, the purpose of the sacraments is to transform the meaning of those fundamental human experiences.” These experiences, Cooke’s starting points, have a flavor that is particularly indicative of U.S. culture.

In *Sacraments and Sacramentality*, arguably one of the most important books of the past twenty-five years in sacramental theology in terms of widespread use, Bernard Cooke develops not only theologies of the seven sacraments, but he does so in light of a theology of sacramentality that shapes life in general. This sacramental world-view is, for Catholics, overlaid onto basic human experiences, transforming them. The seven sacraments, then, are formal, ecclesial instances of this larger sacramental process.

Cooke treats Confirmation in a brief two and a half pages. After noting the liturgical reasons for either placing Confirmation in between Baptism and First Eucharist or for making Confirmation one rite with Baptism, Cooke finds “good pastoral reasons for having confirmation at a later age, when the young person can knowingly and freely choose Christian faith.” He concludes:

There seems to be no reason liturgically, theologically, or pastorally, why more than one liturgy could not be celebrated as confirmation of the baptismal choice—perhaps the age of seven or eight, where children really need to choose among the competing values they are exposed to; perhaps again at the beginning of adolescence, when lifestyle and involvement with one or other peer group can be decisive for the years ahead; perhaps again when the young person stands on the

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201 Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 116.
threshold of adult life. Each of these moments of passage occurs after a period of considerable change in experience and at the beginning of a risky new period. Cooke avoids designating one moment as the time at which a young Catholic chooses his faith for himself. He instead calls for repeated Confirmations “of the baptismal choice,” with, as we have seen before, the subject of “confirm” most clearly identified as the individual confirmand. The “moments of passage” that Cooke finds young people in at various stages in their lives ring clearly of the pluralism and individualism David O’Brien describes. Cooke’s theology of sacramentality sets him up to respond to this cultural shift in a particular way. Young people are having experiences based on their new place in the wider culture; Cooke’s approach to Confirmation, allowing for multiple celebrations, shifts to reflect these new cultural situations.

In the preceding approaches to Confirmation, whether germinated in a primarily pastoral or theological context, “choice” plays a significant role. As many would be quick to note, the emphasis on choice alone does not necessarily give these approaches to Confirmation the individualist, pluralist, or voluntarist edge that Dolan, O’Brien, and others have found indicative of the culture into which Catholics have been fully assimilated by this final period of the twentieth century.

Among the positions here considered, however, a recurring theme has been designating Confirmation as the particular time to make such a choice. Confirmation provides the young person an opportunity, defined narrowly, to affirm or “delay” their choice for the Catholic Faith.

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THE LAMENTS AND WARNINGS OF CATECHISTS, THEOLOGIANS, AND BISHOPS ALIKE

Designating Confirmation as the time of “choice” has, its supporters argue, the advantage of increasing serious commitment among Catholics. Pastoral experience, however, seems to point to the opposite outcome—a drop off in Church participation—when Confirmation is practiced in this manner. After widespread adoption of a Confirmation theology that emphasizes the confirmand’s choice, many catechists voice concerns about keeping contact with young people after Confirmation. It seems that wedding one’s choice for Catholicism to a designated time unwittingly encourages drifting away after the choice is made because, in the perception of the young person, the choice has been made and therefore the hard work has been done. Confirmation programs with this particular emphasis are often situated in the context of a graduation either from elementary school or from high school, contributing to this definitive break. A second problem with celebrating Confirmation as a time of choice is that the practice usually underemphasizes the lifelong development of a relationship with God in the Church. This is connected to what O’Brien identifies as individualistic experientialism. If one has already made a choice for Catholicism, then doubts and crises of faith become not integral to the life of faith, but indications that one has made the wrong choice, or worse that God has not held up God’s end of the bargain.

Many religious educators were left in the wake of Confirmation practiced as a time of choice and scrambling to develop alternative ways to get young people involved. One educator describes his struggle to reinvigorate a parish religious education program after Confirmation marked a decisive break between young people and religious
education. He and his colleagues nicknamed Confirmation “The Sacrament of Exit.”

An assistant DRE in Pittsburgh ruefully looks in the mirror, “Perhaps we catechists have contributed to the “confirmation as graduation” syndrome by preparing candidates as if our program were the last opportunity for them to grow in the faith.”

This latter educator develops pedagogical techniques for integrating Confirmation preparation into the whole of religious education. One wonders, however, if the brunt of this difficulty should be placed on educators’ shoulders. When Confirmation is theologized as the specific time for a young person’s choice, a theology that many catechists are working with, in a pluralistic and voluntaristic context it becomes increasingly more difficult to distinguish this moment of choice from all of the other passing moments of choice which young people encounter in the market. An educational program can only follow that builds toward that one moment of choice. With such a theology, pedagogical adjustments are akin to damage control.

Those who see the difficulties with celebrating Confirmation as a time of choice, are in a difficult position. Catechists who have inherited the practice of Confirmation in its early teen/adolescent form are left to reflect on why young people are no longer involved in the Church after Confirmation. Catechist Thomas Taylor’s lament, “How can we motivate our young people to a serious commitment to their faith?”, in the form of a rhetorical question encapsulates the collective struggle of catechists trying to reach young Catholics.

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The burden of Confirmation as “rite of exit,” however, seems more appropriately placed on the theologies of Confirmation that catechists have inherited, rather than on religious education itself. In the first three periods, these theologies have attempted to negotiate the gap between U.S. culture and Catholicism. In this final period, when by all accounts that gap ceases to exist, Confirmation itself reflects American individualism. Taylor’s solution—making the time of celebration plural and subjective—can only, from this lens, reinforce the difficulties.

Into the nineties many catechists are still trying to address the very same difficulty—young people seem well-prepared for Confirmation, celebrate it joyously, and then disappear. Lenore Danesco, a DRE from Massachusetts, conveys some of the agony:

> Even as we share the joy of confirmation with our young people, there is that nagging question: when will we see them again? We know that confirmation marks a turning point, and that now we must allow our young adults to shoulder responsibility for the faith they have confirmed. But we don’t want them to turn away!

Danesco, as well as many others, fail to address the deeper issue, instead accepting the theology of Confirmation as a time of choice, and developing educational stopgaps. As have others, Danesco identifies the agent of “confirm” as the confirmand. In this schema confirmation is a committed choice that involves a ratification of baptismal promises and therein assumes that fuller participation in Catholic life will follow. Danesco’s educational proposals do not address the individualism that Confirmation reinforces when celebrated in this manner.

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Even those who see a distinction between the vocation of the Christian life and “secular consciousness,” struggle to impart this to their students while presenting Confirmation as the time to choose Catholicism from among the available religious options.207

In 2004, the USCCB issued a resource guide for bishops on Confirmation which warns of approaches to Confirmation celebration that emphasize “appropriating faith for oneself” and preparation programs that set up Confirmation as a “reward” for catechetical involvement.208 The resource guide stands in striking contrast to Bishop Roger Mahony’s 1981 statement209 and expresses different emphases than Bishop William Levada’s 1996 theological piece.210 Where Mahony explains Confirmation as a personal act of faith at an appropriate time, the USCCB warns of understanding Confirmation as a time when young people take on faith for themselves and is wary of celebrating Confirmation at the time when it could be understood as a prize for completing a catechetical program. Levada had suggested that Confirmation might be an appropriate time for young people to express their genuine commitment to the Church. The resource guide seems to paddle against that current. The hesitation of the resource guide makes sense in light of the obstacles faced by catechists. Rather than attributing this hesitation to pressure from Rome, it seems more likely that the bishops were seeing the pastoral results in the U.S. of Confirmation theologized as the time of personal choice.

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The most recent catechetical materials for Confirmation preparation that are recommended by the USCCB offer warnings about the “maturity” approach. Many are explicit about continuing the learning process after Confirmation. Margaret Hanrahan writes in *Celebrating Our Faith*, “For many young people ‘becoming an adult in the Church’ might mean they have completed learning about their faith. In reality, Confirmation should deepen our understanding of and participation in our Catholic faith and community.”\textsuperscript{211} Another catechetical text, after offering a brief historical overview of Confirmation, warns that a theology of maturity does not mean the end of participation in the Church.\textsuperscript{212}

These catechetical materials address the situation in which dioceses find themselves. For example, in a 2005 report to the diocesan presbyteral council, a committee on the age of Confirmation in the Diocese of Lafayette, Louisiana identifies some of the same difficulties in its Confirmation programs. The committee lists the following among “perceived weaknesses of current Confirmation preparation programs”:

- Strong influence of secular culture on confirmands
- Emphasis on Confirmation as “Sacrament of Maturity”; maturity in secular culture arrives in 20’s or 30’s
- Lack of involvement of confirmands and their families in parish life
- Disappearance of confirmands and their families after Confirmation.\textsuperscript{213}

The committee recommends that these problems be addressed in any diocesan restructuring of the Confirmation program.

Critiques of theologies of Confirmation that centered on choice were also articulated by some theologians in the latter part of this period. Some, such as German Martinez, are concerned about the primacy of the pedagogical over and above the sacramental. Martinez argues that, based on the 1971 revision of the Rite, Confirmation’s identity is found in its intimate connection to Baptism as a sacramental expression of the initiation process. Therefore, “Educational aspects are secondary because confirmation is neither tied to adolescence nor a rite of passage or maturity.”\(^{214}\) Martinez’s warnings about the primacy of the educational lend theological support to catechists’ laments of losing contact with young people after Confirmation. If Confirmation becomes a reward or a time of choice at the end of a program of catechesis, it loses its identity.

Confirmation’s connection with baptism seems to preclude it from taking on the role of a “choice” or “commitment” ceremony. Pastor/theologian Paul Turner argues along these lines:

> Asking for commitment raises...problems: Is it too early to ask a teen for a commitment? Or too late? Do we presume that baptized children have no commitment to the church prior to teenage confirmation? If so, why are they coming to communion? And hasn’t experience over the last 20 years shown us that teens fed up with the church frequently give a different spin on confirmation? It’s not a commitment sacrament, it’s a goodbye sacrament.

> If commitment to the church is best made when one has reached a certain age of maturity, the wisdom of baptizing infants comes quickly into question.

> Evaluating and committing to a cause is a human phenomenon that occurs over and over within a person’s life. If confirmation fits with commitment it will need to be repeatable. Otherwise we are raising a generation of soon-to-be-disillusioned adolescents who thought the commitment they once made would stick for a lifetime.\(^{215}\)


\(^{215}\)Paul Turner, “Confirmation: No More Winging It!,” *Modern Liturgy* 18, no. 7 (September 1991): 7. Turner’s argument that infant Baptism comes into question when Confirmation is understood as commitment finds verification in Lawler’s theology of
Undergirding Turner’s argument is both his historical study of Confirmation and his extensive pastoral experience. Turner argues that functionally, Confirmation celebrated as commitment serves as a time that young people see themselves as finished with activity in the Church, but he also stands among several who begin to see the challenge such an approach brings to the practice of infant baptism.

Martinez and Turner represent a shift in thinking about Confirmation and its pastoral applications; a shift which is duly reflected in looking at Mahony’s, Levada’s, and the USCCB’s statements on Confirmation throughout this period. The American Church, in general, is no longer as optimistic about young people making a choice for Catholicism at Confirmation as we saw in the previous period.

“RESTORING THE ORDER”

One of the most organized responses to the pervasiveness of the theology of commitment articulated in terms of “choice,” is those who aim to “restore the order” of the sacraments of initiation.

The discussion about the Confirmation question in the early part of this period was dominated by those who wanted it to be a time of choice. As this approach began to be widely implemented, pastoral experience illustrated its problems and theologians, too, became more critical of it. The shift in John Roberto’s thought is illustrative in this

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regard. Roberto’s 1978 analysis of Confirmation in the U.S. argued that the conflation of Thomistic theology with psychological advances resulted in a confusing amalgam which was most prevalent across U.S. dioceses. In that study, Roberto cited the importance of celebrating the sacraments in the order of Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist, but did not think it was possible to restore it for young people. Based on John Westerhoff’s model of faith development, he implored:

We must give young people the freedom of choice as to when they wish to celebrate the sacrament. This means that Confirmation cannot be locked into one age group or grade level, rather young people will choose to celebrate the sacrament (with the help of their parents and the parish’s pastoral staff) based upon their spiritual readiness.²¹⁷

In 1992 Roberto points to a new trend: “The Roman Catholic Church has an initiation theology and practice that point the way out of the present chaos by restoring the integrity of the sequence, baptism-confirmation-eucharist.” Roberto offers the “restored order” as an alternative to high school Confirmation. He finds the latter underdeveloped and often “a rite of graduation and, in many cases, an exit from the Catholic Church.”²¹⁸ Judging by diocesan analyses and catechetical materials, Roberto’s diagnosis of high school Confirmation is accurate. His proposed solution has gained critical support in the latter part of this period especially by catechists and theologians frustrated with the failures of the Confirmation-as-time-of-choice theology.

This “restore the order” movement approaches the formation problem in a different manner. Instead of responding to the culture-wide emphasis on choice by designating Confirmation as the time of choice, those who want to “restore the order” appeal to various theological precedents in order to combat the “graduation syndrome”

²¹⁷ John Roberto, Confirmation in the American Catholic Church, 50.
that has developed in celebrating Confirmation. They argue that Confirmation has its proper place before Holy Eucharist in the order of initiation, and that it is, therefore, not the proper end of Christian initiation.

Aidan Kavanagh’s 1988 book *Confirmation: Origins and Reform*, did much of the historical/liturgical work necessary to fuel a reaction to the drifting, later and later, celebration of Confirmation. It was Kavanagh who John Roberto had in mind as the exemplar of his “Liturgical/Initiation School.” Kavanagh focuses the beginning of this work on the *Apostolic Tradition* (c. 215-220) which contains the earliest version of a Confirmation prayer, thought by most scholars to be an invocation of the Holy Spirit. Kavanagh discovers that this “confirmation prayer” in the baptismal rite was not epicletic, but rather part of the rite’s dismissal. He argues that “the result [of this discovery] is to shift the emphasis on the giving of the Holy Spirit away from what would later be called ‘consignation’ and ‘confirmation’ toward baptism itself and the eucharist.”219 This shift informs Kavanagh’s assertion that confirmation should remain firmly in between Baptism and First Eucharist and that this order, in whatever form, is the most important aspect of the discussion.220 Kavanagh sees the whole of Confirmation reform following the Council as moving toward this order.221

Considering RCIA, then, as a model for Christian initiation means, most fundamentally, that its order of Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist must be upheld. Kavanagh argues that the matter has Trinitarian import, “To confirm anyone at whatever age apart from the closest possible reference to baptism, or to make a practice of

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220 Ibid., 89-96.
221 Ibid., 97.
confirming only well after the eucharist has begun to be received, is to render less than necessary the relationship between the missions of the Son and the Spirit, to occlude the way in which Son and Spirit come with the Father upon the baptized, and to sunder the paschal mystery.”

Rupturing this Trinitarian form should not be taken lightly, argues Kavanagh, for the order bespeaks what it celebrates.

Constructing an historical narrative is central to one’s position on the order of these sacraments. Kavanagh’s theology of Confirmation is based on his reading of the *Apostolic Tradition*, which points away from the giving of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation and more toward the Spirit’s role in Baptism and Eucharist. Joseph Martos constructs a different story. He challenges whether the “restored order” is really more faithful to early Church practice, arguing that “when examined closely, the early history of confirmation does not strongly support a practice of being confirmed before first Communion.” He argues that “the ‘original sequence’ to which the liturgists point is not found in any Church documents before the third century.” At this time, Martos suggests, the standard was Baptism followed by a first participation in the Eucharistic meal. Yet, “at various places around the Roman Empire the rite of baptism often (but not always) included an anointing with oil before and/or after the immersion and/or laying-on of hands by the bishop. This anointing… was not a separate rite and it did not have a meaning separate from baptism.”

Where Kavanagh emphasizes this anointing as key to understanding Confirmation theology, Martos sees in it no relevant connection to Confirmation:

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222Ibid., 86. Kavanagh thinks even further that the RCIA pushes the Church in the welcome direction of wider adult Baptism.

Liturgical theologians sometimes use these historical facts to argue that the meaning of confirmation is not really different from the meaning of baptism. But the same facts could be used to argue that at this point in history, confirmation as a separate sacramental rite simply did not exist. Therefore, it cannot be said that baptism and confirmation must precede first Eucharist.  

Martos clearly has Kavanagh’s work in mind here.

Martos’s narrative continues through the fourth century, when there is agreement about the development of Confirmation as a distinct rite from Baptism. In the West, he argues, when catechumens became so numerous that bishops could not be present at all local baptisms, “candidates were baptized and they attended their first eucharistic liturgy in their local parish. Later they either went to the cathedral to be anointed by the bishop or they waited until he came to confirm their baptism formally.” During the first centuries, Martos continues, initiation was a process normally undertaken by adults, not children. A comparison, then, between early adult baptism and current infant Baptism rests “on very shaky historical grounds.” With this story, Martos argues that when Confirmation became a rite of its own, it was most often celebrated in the West after Eucharist, since the newly baptized immediately took their place at the Eucharistic table. Since with Baptism, children are members of the Church who can receive Eucharist and the sacrament of Marriage, he sees no need to insist on Confirmation for full initiation. He accuses those who push for a “restored order” to have based their arguments on either “liturgical legalism” or “liturgical magic.” We saw above Martos’s proposal for Confirmation as “ecclesial commissioning” disjoined from initiation.

Paul Turner offers a thorough historical study of the celebration of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist that leads him to argue that the three sacraments should be

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224Ibid., 23.
225Ibid.
celebrated always in the same rite, even with infants—a practice akin to the one that the Eastern Church has passed down throughout the centuries. Throughout Turner’s narrative there are emphases that point more clearly in this direction. For example, Turner suggests that “The New Testament neither proves nor excludes the possibility that infants were baptized, but it is reasonable to assume that they were.”\footnote{Paul Turner, *Ages of Initiation*, 2. Italics in original.} This openness is paired with the same openness to children’s place at the Eucharistic table at the same time. One can see that Turner, employing a hermeneutic of reasonable possibility to indemonstrable historical circumstances around children’s sacramental participation, would be more favorably disposed to infant reception of these same sacraments in the contemporary context. In the second and third centuries Turner finds clear evidence that infant baptism and infant communion were practiced although not unanimously agreed upon. Reading the *Apostolic Tradition*, he emphasizes that the newly baptized receive Eucharist as part of the baptismal celebration.\footnote{Ibid., 6.}

Turner agrees with Martos that when Confirmation or Chrismation arose as a separate rite, the baptized continued to be admitted to the Eucharistic table before their Baptism was confirmed by the bishop.\footnote{Ibid, 11.} This runs as a theme in Turner’s story through the tenth century—any time that Confirmation was deferred, Eucharist never was—after the tenth century the practice of the newly baptized communicating died out rather quickly and was ultimately forbidden by Leo X (1513-1521).\footnote{Ibid., 30.} Throughout Turner’s narrative, the sequence of the sacraments remains widely in flux.\footnote{Ibid, 51-6. Turner identifies fourteen different shapes that the celebration of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist took historically.} For this reason,
veritably all positions find some grounding in history so “History will need the support of theology and a sensible pastoral practice.” Turner argues that celebrating Confirmation with or before First Eucharist is helpful but does not go far enough. Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist celebrated universally in one rite best combines these three aspects—history, theology, and pastoral practice.\footnote{Ibid., 63.} Turner’s position represents a variant of the “restore the order” argument, which finds no particular “order” so strongly embedded in Christian history that it could be restored. Nevertheless, he finds the Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist order most compelling and even argues for celebrating all three in one rite.

Beginning on the pastoral front in the early nineties, and generally in reaction to the negative effects of the practice of teenage Confirmation, several dioceses developed a structure of sacramental initiation, which placed the three sacraments in the “restored order.” Keeping in line with \textit{Quam Singulari} and its effects on Canon Law, First Eucharist is still celebrated around “the age of reason” generally accepted as about seven. Often, the “restored order” places Confirmation in the same liturgical celebration as First Eucharist. In one respect, these moves are attempts to do what Pius X failed to do: to account for Confirmation in the context of Baptism and First Eucharist.

Enrico Hernandez, whose 1997 Master’s thesis is an extended argument for the adoption of the “restored order” in the context of infant Baptism, identifies Columbus, Ohio; Greensburg, Pennsylvania; Sacramento, California; Spokane, Washington; and Saginaw, Michigan among those dioceses that have developed this sacramental sequence. In the same year, Bishop Joseph Gerry of Portland, Maine wrote a pastoral letter highlighting the correspondence of the canonical age for Confirmation with that of First
Eucharist and calling his diocese to integrate Confirmation preparation into the religious education curriculum for second graders.\footnote{Bishop Joseph Gerry, “Confirmation: A Sacrament of Initiation,” \textit{Origins} 27 (6 November 1997): 358-62. See also religious educator Patricia Lawlor’s, “Preparing Families to Celebrate Confirmation & Eucharist,” \textit{Church} 13, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 25-7 in which she argues for the “restored order,” citing the Diocese of Greensburg as an example.}

Since Hernandez’s study, other dioceses have made similar moves including Fargo, North Dakota (2002), Marquette, Michigan (2003), and Phoenix, Arizona (2005); in addition many have “restored the order” at the parish level.\footnote{See also William J. Freburger, “Confirmation, We Hardly Knew Ye,” \textit{The Priest} 48, no. 6 (June 1992): 28, who cites instances of “restoring the order,” suggesting that these dioceses are indicative of a national trend.} Hernandez cites its consonance with historical practice (including \textit{Quam Singulari}) and the 1983 Code of Canon Law as his major reasons for adopting the “restored order.”\footnote{Enrico Hernandez, “Restoring the Order of the Sacraments of Initiation for Children Baptized As Infants,” (M.A. Thesis, Saint Patrick’s Seminary, 1997), 33, 50. Canon 891 set the age for Confirmation at about the age of discretion unless bishops’ conferences determine another age (see note 196 above). In 2001, the USCCB set the age of Confirmation between “the age of discretion and about sixteen years of age.” USCCB Office of Media Relations, “Age of Confirmation Decreed” 31 August 2001 <http://www.nccbuscc.org/comm/archives/2001/01-150.shtml> (accessed 10 June 2006).}

Recalling RCIA as paradigmatic for Christian Initiation, Hernandez could have also cited, as did Kavanagh, the order of the sacraments in RCIA as an argument for his position.

Monsignor Michael Henchal cites similar historical reasons for “restoring the order,” although he does not mention \textit{Quam Singulari}. Henchal adds two significant points about the order of celebration. First, he mentions the ecumenical implications: “The churches of the East have maintained from the very beginning the practice of confirming infants at the time of baptism.” Second, he points out the pastoral failure of the adolescent approach, “an emphasis on personal commitment has exactly the opposite effect from what is intended”; it provides a time for a choice away from the sacrament.
and out of the Church that the adolescent would not normally make. The latter is particularly noteworthy because of the claims to pastoral effectiveness of the adolescent commitment approach emphasized in its development.

During especially the latter part of this final period of the twentieth century many of those involved in “restoring the order” are dissatisfied with the pastoral and theological results of celebrating Confirmation as a time of commitment or choice. This chapter has illustrated that the theology of Confirmation that emphasizes personal choice is a development heavily influenced by a hefty cultural emphasis on choice. As such, its results are disappointing for catechists and pastoral ministers who are interested in the ongoing formation of young people and adults in the Church. The push to “restore the order” of the sacraments of initiation arises later in this period and stands as another warrant for the growing dissatisfaction with the theologies of Confirmation that emphasize the individual choice of the confirmand.

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CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION: A WAY FORWARD FOR CONFIRMATION?

The sacraments are the proclamation of the Church: they show the world what the Church is and what it is called to become; they challenge the Church at the very moment they affirm it.237

Pneumatology should… describe the impact, in the context of a vision of the Church, of the fact that the Spirit distributes his gifts as he wills and in this way builds up the Church.238

[In the practice of infant Baptism], the Church reminds us that particular characteristics—like autonomy and rationality—are unimportant for what it means to be a child of God. The Church reminds us that it is not we who choose God but we who are chosen by God (Galatians 4:9). Faith is not a choice—it is a gift. Identity resides not in the ability to choose. It resides in the fact that before we are able to choose we are chosen. It reminds us that the Church is not simply one more voluntary association; it is rather a community that particularly welcomes into its midst those who are vulnerable, marginalized, those who cannot speak for themselves, those often whose ability to freely exercise their will is compromised.239

The foregoing analysis of Confirmation displays its fluid adaptation based on the shifting relationship between Catholics and the wider United States culture. In the final period, the individualism that had been bubbling under the surface of Confirmation comes to the fore in hyper form with deleterious effects. Many have variously responded

to the pastoral effects of theologizing Confirmation as the particular sacrament of Christian choice. At this point, it is fair to ask how to move forward.

As we have noted, one of the primary conflicts that Catholics in the United States are forced to negotiate is ecclesiological. A Catholic ecclesiology is very difficult to maintain when voluntaristic, Lockean influences blow through with high winds, almost disabling those in the United States from conceiving of the Church as anything but “a voluntary association of men.” If the difficulty at the heart of the confusion over Confirmation is ecclesiological, it is also by association pneumatological. Careful attention to the Confirmation question necessitates careful attention to the Holy Spirit.

That individualism is a problem for ecclesial formation is not shocking. If the argument pursued throughout this study is correct—a changing relationship to the wider U.S. culture heavily impacts Confirmation theology and practice—then it is clearer why the struggles to form young Catholics in the Church brought about by this changing cultural relationship are oft-associated with Confirmation. The relationship is mutually informing. Quam Singulari opened the possibility of inserting Confirmation into the tender and tenuous teenage years and popular psychology encouraged the same. With a theology that was far from crystal clear to start, Confirmation became a suitable beast of burden for various post-subcultural solutions to the problem of making young Catholics adult Catholics.

Conscious of Confirmation’s many faces throughout the past one hundred years, my objective throughout has not been to develop a new theology of Confirmation. Rather it has been to tell the story of Confirmation theology and practice in the United States in a way that highlights generally underemphasized aspects of the conversation—cultural
shifts, individualism, and voluntarism—in view of enriching the theological and historical context of the Confirmation question in the United States. Accordingly, after offering some brief pneumatological reflections in the context of the ongoing conversation about Confirmation and ecclesial formation, I will offer some examples of approaches to Confirmation that emphasize its being situated within a wider ecclesial context and so allow for the sacrament to be part of the larger picture of Christian formation in the Holy Spirit. These approaches, I think, are models for how thinking about the Confirmation question needs to proceed. I deliberately prescind from developing my own approach to Confirmation for at least three reasons. First, precisely because of the sheer multitude of approaches already in print and practice, many of which have real merit. Second, developing a theology of Confirmation has not been the aim of the project as a whole. While the thesis may be unconventional in that regard, it has hopefully begun to address what I perceive to be a general lack in the conversation—a study of the relationship between the Confirmation question and Catholics’ place in wider U.S. culture. Third, as will be clear in the examples, I think there is legitimate room for diversity among approaches to Confirmation; there is a measure of necessary prudential judgment here. I do, however, think the conversation needs to be nudged in the direction of an emphasis on the Holy Spirit, an emphasis on ecclesial formation, as well as a conscious awareness of a certain individualism that can arise when the confirmand’s response of choice is overemphasized. These emphases have already been articulated in various places.

I must say a bit more about what I mean by an emphasis on the Holy Spirit in Confirmation because such an emphasis can take myriad forms. Throughout the study we
have seen various approaches to understanding the Spirit’s role in Confirmation. The Third Person is particularly important in moving forward with the Confirmation discussion because of at least two particular aspects of the Spirit’s presence.

First, as noted in Chapter III, the revised rite of Confirmation makes the person of the Holy Spirit central. “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The Gift here is the Spirit. The Spirit’s gifts have a place in the rite, but their role is secondary. The first impulse here might be to distinguish, in productionist manner, the effects of Baptism from those of Confirmation, which would lead to the protestation that the Holy Spirit has already been received in Baptism. If, instead, we look to Confirmation as a celebration of the Person of the Holy Spirit, the emphasis changes. In Confirmation we celebrate an ongoing relationship with a Person. Unlike the world of production, in which we fully grasp something, in Confirmation we celebrate a relationship with a God who ultimately eludes all of our attempts at narcissistic commodification. The Church never considers its children to have fully encompassed the Spirit, or really to have received the Spirit in the Spirit’s completeness.

The implication of placing more emphasis on the personal indwelling of Holy Spirit than on the effects of that indwelling (which are indeed important manifestations of the Spirit’s presence, as evidenced by their mention in the rite) is anthropological. The personal shift moves us from focusing on one’s “choice” per se to focusing on the person as a temple of the Holy Spirit—always animated by that Spirit since Baptism. This precludes us from making Confirmation the definitive moment for one’s “choice.” The

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240 See above Chapter III, pp. 47-50.
241 On the failure of the language of production, in which things and objects are given and taken, for discussing sacramental grace, see Louis-Marie Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 101-21, esp. 107. Appropriately for present purposes, Chauvet finds the discourse of “gift” best suited to resist the language of production.
Holy Spirit’s continual indwelling dictates this person’s fundamental identity. This does not mean that confirmandi should not try to practice “fortitude,” for example, but rather that one is not determined by one’s measure of fortitude. Likewise, it does not mean that one’s choice is not important, even vital, to the Christian life. But to pin that choice narrowly on Confirmation disallows room for the Spirit’s work throughout the Christian life.

In terms of Confirmation, the Spirit’s indwelling is a more stunning and anthropologically relevant claim than the effects of that indwelling. We are not most fundamentally “consumers,” nor are we most fundamentally “religious persons,” nor are we most fundamentally “thinkers.” We are a confirmed people, most fundamentally both temples of the Holy Spirit and a Temple of the Holy Spirit. This claim is intimately connected to the Christian claim about the Christian life as a process of deification. In Confirmation, the Church recognizes the ongoing process of deification in its members. As St. Athanasius famously said in the fourth century, “The Word of God… assumed humanity that we might become God.”

Second, the Holy Spirit is One who indwells the confirmand but simultaneously, and as one Person non-contradictorily, indwells the Church. The implications of the Spirit’s oneness need to be central in the sacrament of Confirmation. The celebration of Confirmation must be a celebration of the Spirit’s presence in the Church at the very same time that it is a celebration of the Spirit’s indwelling in the person. If this is true, individual choice plays only a contextual role. The Spirit, who grants agency, does so only in the context of the wider sacrament of the Church. The seal is the sacramental admission of the Church, in which the Spirit dwells, that it recognizes the Spirit in this person too.

We might recall here the image of the Church as mother from Ray Noll’s reflection. The gift of the Spirit made possible by the Son makes us children of the Father and sacramentally children of the Church. The presence of the same Spirit in person and Church is analogous to the shared presence of flesh, blood, and genes between mother and children. Pneumatologically and ecclesiologically we can see more clearly why an exaggerated emphasis on choice is incompatible with this ongoing relationship. As mentioned above, a mother does not normally provide for an appointed time at which the child must reject or accept her. If rejection occurs, it happens painfully and often sadly, but not on a prescribed occasion.

With these pneumatological emphases as a lens, we will now turn to several approaches articulated throughout this period that offer fruitful directions in Confirmation theology and practice. In response to the twin problems of individualism and voluntarism, I do not intend to proscribe or prescribe a particular age or even time for Confirmation; such questions have been pursued almost ad nauseam. In general, it is important for local

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243 See Chapter IV, p. 90.
churches to establish a uniform time for Confirmation; such a decision should be made according to how the ecclesial and pneumatological aspects can best be emphasized in the particular diocese. Accordingly, the following three theologians, one pastor/theologian, and two religious educators do not necessarily agree on the question of when Confirmation should ordinarily be celebrated. Yet, they represent a common ecclesial and pneumatological emphasis that consciously challenges, instead of unconsciously reinforces, the hyper-individualism of the current context.

Jesuit Gerard Fourez explicitly defers to the ecclesial context of Confirmation. He argues that Confirmation should be considered less as an individual’s sacramental moment and more as a celebration of the coming of Holy Spirit into the Church. He finds theologies that stringently identify Confirmation as the sacrament of maturity individualistic and “at the least semi-pelagian." He notes the uniqueness of the developmental category “adolescence” in the Western context and ultimately prescribes the age of twelve as the appropriate age “in our culture… to celebrate the fact that we believe the young, like the adults, can also carry the Spirit to the entire community.” His answer to individualism is an emphasis on the Spirit, who dwells in both the person and the Church. He lifts the burden of “choice” from Confirmation, instead looking to the broader pneumatological context of Christian initiation: “The moment of confirmation is not the moment when the Spirit is received but is the moment when we celebrate this reception; and by this celebration, that reception is made more real and effective.”

Fourez emphasizes Confirmation’s character as an ecclesial celebration, while not eradicating the role of the confirmand. He argues that any “sacrament, even when it is

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245Ibid., 206, 202.
related to an individual, is always a celebration of the whole Christian community; sacraments are always celebrations of the church.”246 The Church “confirms,” yet the celebration is not one-sided. Since the Holy Spirit dwells in the Church as in each of its members, growth and formation is mutual and ongoing. In contrast to some of those who sound individualistic notes, Fourez finds in Confirmation a celebration of the entire community: “The symbolic mime of the gift of the Spirit through the Christian community (itself symbolized by the bishop) thus becomes also a celebration of a community that recognizes that the Spirit of God speaks through these new members.”247

Aforementioned theologian German Martinez diagnoses the difficulty of individualism as extending beyond Confirmation, arguing that “For many, the sacraments are individual supernatural commodities, objects of spiritual consumerism, rather than a continuing force that nurtures an experience of conversion and freedom, growth, and transformation.”248 Martinez points to the Holy Spirit as the unifying principle between Church and person. He situates the encounter with the Spirit at Confirmation in the narrative of the Christian people, “The communion in the Holy Spirit at confirmation re-creates the coming of God’s Spirit to the world. It also communicates to the Christian community as a new Pentecost… The Spirit precedes and follows confirmation.”249 Since the Holy Spirit is integral to the whole process of initiation and to Confirmation and Baptism in particular, Martinez argues that “It is imperative that all models [of Confirmation practice] make the relationship with the Holy Spirit in the community and

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246Ibid., 201.
247Ibid., 203.
248Martinez, Signs of Freedom, 6.
249Ibid., 134.
in the heart of the believer the fundamental referent.”250 It is from this fundamental recognition—the Holy Spirit as unifier—argues Martinez, that pedagogical and catechetical concerns should flow. The Holy Spirit’s presence both in the person and the Church is more fundamental to catechesis than psychology and educational theory.

Carmelite theologian Christopher O’Donnell analyzes Thomistic theology of Confirmation in light of twentieth century developments, particularly the revised rite promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1971. O’Donnell stresses the significance of Confirmation theology for ecclesiology.251 He reads Paul VI’s revised rite and Thomas’s theology ecclesially: “it is through considering the role of the confirmed in the Church that one can best explain the teaching of St. Thomas and the new rite.”252 Situating Thomas’s words on Confirmation ecclesially helps to avoid some of the individualistic strains that we saw during the early part of the twentieth century when theologies of Confirmation depended heavily on Thomistic theology. The focus of Confirmation is not the battle within the confirmand’s soul, but the confirmand’s role in the Church.

O’Donnell also steers around the problem that John Roberto found most pressing in 1978—the combination of Thomistic theology and popular psychology, which offered widely variant understandings of maturity. St. Thomas, obviously ignorant of modern psychology, understood maturity in terms of one’s place in the Church, not one’s fully appropriated personal faith commitment. O’Donnell’s reading of the revised rite situates it within a Thomistic framework, which counters attempts to meld the rite with a modern individualized understanding of maturity.

250Ibid., 132.
252Ibid., 115.
Paul Turner’s approach to confirmation is steeped in his extensive pastoral work as a priest. His theology is therefore firmly grounded in parish life.253 His extensive historical work keeps him from a type of “tradition-forgetfulness,” which is, in his opinion, characteristic of too many pastoral theologians. In reaction to the misuse of pastoral claims, he writes, “Pastoral theology encompasses much more than attention to the hapless predicaments of adolescents. It also commands responsible governance of symbols.”254 He sums up his bottom-line position: “The most comprehensive resolution to the issues surrounding initiation is for the West to restore full initiation at one ceremony to all candidates, regardless of age, including infants.”255 Turner argues that such a rite is the only way for Christians to maintain Confirmation as clearly an initiatory sacrament.

Turner’s approach is undergirded by a thick pneumatology evident in his exegetical work on the prayer of Confirmation.256 In examining the prayer, Turner finds the Spirit’s dwelling in the person and in the Church connected through Christ. He acknowledges the clear invocation of the “gift” of the Holy Spirit in order to “strengthen” the candidate. He writes that the gift of the Holy Spirit is traditionally manifested through particular gifts. Drawing on Isaiah 11:1-3, which describes the gifts of the Spirit to be

253Turner’s pastoral sense is palpable. See his Confirmation: The Baby in Solomon’s Court, where Turner writes, “One should not confuse the printed ritual texts with actual pastoral practice…What the ritual book of any church says is not what actually happens in the sanctuary” (56) and later, “Does confirmation really matter to people? Theologically and canonically, yes it does. Practically, however, it often does not” (84)
254Ibid., 106.
255Turner, Ages of Initiation, 63.
256The text of this part of the prayer follows: “Send your Holy Spirit upon them / to be their helper and guide. / Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding, / the spirit of right judgment and courage, / the spirit of knowledge and reverence. / Fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe in your presence. Turner, Confirmation, 8.
bestowed on the ruler from the line of Jesse,\textsuperscript{257} he connects the prayer inextricably with the salvific mission of Christ for all of humanity and with the Spirit’s role in that salvation. Through liturgical usage, the prayer is personalized and as such, “masterfully weaves the role of the Holy Spirit in universal salvation with the Spirit’s role in the individual Christian life.”\textsuperscript{258} Turner’s exegesis of the prayer is itself masterful. He connects the liturgical prayer of the Church with the personal indwelling of the Spirit, acknowledging Christ, the bearer of universal salvation, as the linchpin—“the Spirit which filled Christ will now fill those to be confirmed.”\textsuperscript{259}

Among religious educators, too, there are approaches that emphasize Confirmation’s ecclesial center and therefore prove fruitful in an individualistic context. Many, indeed most, of those who teach religious education at the parish level do not call teaching their primary vocation. Ted Furlow is a general contractor who prepares young people for Confirmation. His article is more of an educational success story than a programmatic approach to Confirmation, but his attention to the formative aspects of life in the Church is notable. His parish in Long Beach, California confirms teenagers. Furlow was thrust into preparing these teenagers for Confirmation in an emergency situation; he even compares it to being thrown into deep water by his father at age six when he was unable to swim. Furlow describes the jaded responses of fellow catechists who continually lamented the disappearance of young people after Confirmation—“the prophecy becomes self-fulfilling as we see them walking out the door. And instead of

\textsuperscript{257}Isaiah 11:1–3. “A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, / and from his roots a bud shall blossom. / The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: / a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, / A spirit of counsel and of strength, / a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord, / and his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.”

\textsuperscript{258}Turner, Confirmation, 9.

\textsuperscript{259}Ibid.
changing what we are doing, out response is, ‘See, I told you so!’”260 Instead of adding to this din, Furlow explores what the Church can learn from younger Catholics, in a word, he tries to see the Spirit’s work in them, in their seemingly odd ways of communicating, in their struggles and off-putting remarks. He writes, “If I wish to teach or communicate the ‘good news’ to them, then I must be able to recognize and adjust to the very unique ‘who’ and ‘what’ they are and adapt to their rhythm.”261

While Furlow’s piece has neither the precision nor nuance of an academic analysis, it gets at the heart of the difficulty—that of a sharp cultural difference between teachers and students—and addresses it head-on. Since Confirmation has changed to reflect the different relationship between Catholics and U.S. culture, adults are too often caught drawing exclusively and uncontextually on their own reception of Confirmation (or what they wished it would have been) in educating young Catholics. Furlow avoids this trap. It is significant that in discussing Confirmation, he discusses the formative process of young Catholics and does not place the pressure of this formation on the shoulders of Confirmation. Instead of offering them a time to choose, he offers them the life of a Church who helps to bear life’s burdens and to carry one’s cross before, during, and beyond the sacrament of Confirmation. He writes, “We did not give our students a two-year course of religious education; we taught them a lifetime, experiential catechesis of faith, a walk through life with the God who loves them and the certainty that they are never alone.”262 He makes the Spirit present to them via his role in the Church—that Spirit that impels us toward continual death to self. Confirmation, then, is neither a

261 Ibid.
262 Ibid.
beginning nor an end. It is a celebration of a relationship with that Spirit who is alive in each person and the Church as a whole.

Joan Eckstein, another educator, situates Confirmation within the overall context of ecclesial formation in the Spirit. In RCIA the three initiation sacraments are celebrated together after a lengthy catechumenate, which, she argues, alleviates some of the formation concerns among those baptized as adults. Among those baptized as infants, however, the formative nature of the sacraments of initiation is paramount. Therefore, she argues, Confirmation is ill-considered if theologized apart from infant baptism. In the light of infant baptism, “Our Christian commitment is the response to God’s initiative. It is for those who discover and accept the invitation and gift of God and allow the gift to transform them into the creatures they are thereby capable of becoming for His glory.”

Eckstein conducted a survey of parishes in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati in 1986 and found that the majority of parishes continued to celebrate Confirmation in the junior high school years. While she acknowledges that there are other trends in different dioceses, she encourages the strengthening of post-Confirmation education programs.

At the center of her concerns is a strong affirmation of ecclesial formation:

The goal of Christian initiation is the formation of a spirit-filled community of deeply committed Christian adults who bear witness to a faith in Christ and glorify their Father. The process of formation is a recurring theme. Thus a program for the sacraments can never divorce itself from the process of formation.

Eckstein was so convinced by her historical study of the intimate connection between Baptism and Confirmation that she “would personally recommend celebrating

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264 Ibid., 38-41.
265 Ibid, 36.
Confirmation at Baptism and developing a repeatable liturgy which could be celebrated at
moments of increased personal commitment.”266 This concern too is centered on, and
attempts to account for, the formation of young Catholics into adult Catholic life.

These theologians and educators have paved a road to follow for the future of
Confirmation celebration. As we ponder Confirmation’s many faces throughout the
twentieth century in the United States searching for clearer ways to communicate to
young Catholics that they have been chosen by God, may we proceed with an emphasis
on the Holy Spirit burning in our hearts thanks to Christ’s gift of His same Spirit to the
Church.

266Ibid., 41.
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