

Confirmation :

Recent Theological Trends

BY THE EDITOR

TODAY the theology of confirmation is in the melting-pot. The conflicting views now striving for acceptance are symptomatic of the theological confusion which, unfortunately, is all too characteristic of the present situation in the Church. At the same time it must be acknowledged that the subject is not without its perplexities. In the time at my disposal it will be impossible for me to do more than to sketch in the perspectives of the contemporary scene and suggest briefly the way that I think we should follow in the days that lie ahead.

In the first place, I propose to glance back at the theology of confirmation as it has unfolded from the sixteenth century onwards in the Church of England; and as our starting-point, we may take an interesting event which took place in 1533, when, at the tender age of three days, the future Queen Elizabeth I was baptized (by Stokesley, Bishop of London) and at the same time confirmed (by Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury). By the time of the appearance of the first Book of Common Prayer, Cranmer and his colleagues had reconsidered the whole question of the doctrine of confirmation. They made their attitude perfectly clear. Baptism was viewed as the fully adequate sacrament of Christian initiation, and every implication that without confirmation it was in some way deficient or incomplete was rejected. Accordingly, marking with the sign of the cross, as a symbol of Christian sealing, was retained in baptism but discarded in confirmation, and the 1549 rubric gave the assurance that to defer confirmation until years of discretion were reached was no detriment to salvation in the case of those who died before being confirmed.

The essence of confirmation was displayed as twofold: (1) the public ratifying and confirming, "openly before the Church", by the confirmands, "with their own mouth and consent", of the promises made for them in baptism; and (2) the prayer, with laying on of hands, by the bishop for the strengthening with the Holy Spirit of these candidates, already regenerated "by water and the Holy Ghost".

Midway through the sixteenth century the Council of Trent pronounced certain anathemas against the Reformed doctrine, but Bishop Jewel reaffirmed the Reformed position by declaring that confirmation "is so called because that which was done on our behalf in baptism is ratified and confirmed". The papists "said he was no perfect Christian that was not anointed by the bishop with this holy oil. This was another abuse. For whosoever is baptized receiveth thereby the name of a perfect Christian, and hath the full and perfect covenant and assurance of salvation: he is perfectly buried with

Christ, doth perfectly put on Christ, and is perfectly made partaker of His resurrection. Therefore they are deceived that say no man is a perfect Christian that is not marked with this oil". Again, the papists held that "confirmation was more honourable than baptism, because any priest may baptize, but confirmation is given only by a bishop or a suffragan. So do they give a greater pre-eminence to confirmation, which is devised by man, than to the holy sacrament of baptism, which Christ Himself ordained" (*A Treatise of the Sacraments*, in *Works*, Vol. II, pp. 1125 ff.).

Three-quarters of the way through the sixteenth century, Whitgift replied to the complaint of Thomas Cartwright that confirmation was without scriptural warrant and should be discarded by insisting that "confirmation, as it is now used, is most profitable, without all manner of superstition, most agreeable to the Word of God, and in all points differing from the papistical manner of confirming children" (*Works*, Vol. III, pp. 358).

In the closing years of the same century we find Richard Hooker propounding a doctrine of confirmation as the perfecting of what was done in baptism. "The ancient custom of the Church," he writes, "was, after they had baptized, to add thereunto imposition of hands with effectual prayer for the illumination of God's most Holy Spirit to confirm and perfect that which the grace of the same Spirit had already begun in baptism". In Hooker we meet not so much with a change of doctrine as with a shift of emphasis, whereby a grace of the Holy Spirit, additional to that imparted in baptism, is accorded to confirmation, "to assist us in all virtue and arm us against temptation and sin" (*Eccl. Pol.*, V, lxvi, lff.). Hooker, in fact, adopted the concept, found in certain of the fathers, of confirmation as "an augmentation of further grace". No depreciation of baptism was intended. In this respect it is significant that at the Hampton Court Conference of 1604, Archbishop Whitgift firmly repudiated the Puritan charge that it was the teaching of the Church of England that baptism apart from confirmation was imperfect or that confirmation added to the virtue and strength of baptism (Cardwell, *History of Conferences*, p. 172).

Some years later, John Cosin repeated Hooker's doctrine in terms which appear to be more extreme, declaring that "the proper effect of baptism is to make a man a Christian, but the proper effect of confirmation is to give him the Holy Ghost" (*Works*, Vol. V, pp. 144f.). He expressed his meaning more guardedly, however, when he explained that many things were needful after baptism, the chief of which was "to be confirmed and to receive a more perfect power of the Holy Ghost for the resisting of the temptations of Satan" (*Ibid.*, p. 147).

Of the other important works that appeared in the seventeenth century I will mention only two, those, namely, from the pens of Richard Baxter and Jeremy Taylor. It will be remembered that from 1642 to 1660 the Book of Common Prayer was abrogated, and that during this period the service of confirmation became illegal. 1658 saw the publication of a plea for its restoration written by Baxter with the title *Confirmation and Restauration: The Necessary Means of Reformation and Reconciliation* (*Practical Works*, ed. W. Orme, Vol. XIV, pp. 401ff.). In this work Baxter described confirmation as, on

man's part, a solemn personal profession of faith and renewal of the covenant vows of baptism, and, on God's part, the conferring of " corroborating grace " (p. 451), maintaining that in Scripture " the Holy Ghost is in a special manner promised to believers, over and above that measure of the Spirit which caused them to believe " (p. 456), and that this " eminent gift " of the Spirit " carrieth us higher than the first grace of faith and repentance, to those fuller degrees which were not ordinary " (pp. 458f.).

Following the Savoy Conference of 1661, at which the Puritan objections to the Book of Common Prayer were ventilated, the revised Prayer Book was published in 1662. In it the confirmation rite remained essentially unchanged. Jeremy Taylor's work *Χρῆσις Τελειωτικῆς* : *A Discourse of Confirmation* appeared during the next year, 1663. He propounds the doctrine of baptism as being " the consummation and perfection, the corroboration and strength, of baptismal grace " (*Works*, Vol. III, p. 25). He holds that " until we receive the Spirit of obsequation or confirmation, we are but babes in Christ, in the meanest sense, infants that can do nothing, that cannot speak, that cannot resist any violence, exposed to every rudeness, and perishing by every temptation " (p. 6). In baptism the Spirit gives us " the principles of life ", but in confirmation " He is the Spirit of strength and motion " (*Ibid.*). " In confirmation we receive the Holy Ghost as the earnest of our inheritance, as the seal of our salvation " (p. 26). Here, then, we have a fully developed doctrine of the incompleteness of baptism. Baptism is regarded as virtually static in its effects. And the concept of the seal of our salvation is associated with confirmation rather than with baptism.

Of the eighteenth century authors I will allude only to Bishop Thomas Wilson, who very properly insisted on the necessity of a prior experience of grace if anything effectual was to be expected from confirmation : " If the confirmation of the heart does not precede that of the laying on of the hands, or confirmation of the bishop, the person confirmed has no reason to expect the graces of God's Spirit thereby conferred " (*Works*, Vol. II, p. 326).

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The modern period of the theology of confirmation may be said to have started with the appearance in 1834 of Pusey's *Scriptural Views of Holy Baptism* (*Tracts for the Times*, 1840, Vol. II, Pt. 2). Pusey, who was intent on defending a radical doctrine of baptismal regeneration, in his consideration of the scriptural evidence finds it significant that our Lord was anointed with the Holy Spirit at His baptism. He held, moreover, that " it is unquestionable that the primary use of the word ' seal ', both among the Fathers . . . and the Liturgies . . . relates to baptism ", and that " it is plain also that those passages of the fathers which speak of the gift of the Spirit as belonging peculiarly to confirmation are to be understood (as indeed their words convey) of an especial strengthening and confirming grace (which our Church holds), not as though baptism conferred simply remission of sins, and the gift of the Spirit were altogether reserved for confirmation ; both because they hold baptism to be ' the birth of

water and the Spirit ' and themselves repeatedly affirm the Spirit to be given in baptism " (pp. 153f.).

Pusey's high view of baptism is apparent in his definition of it as " the instrument whereby God communicated to use the remission of sins, justification, holiness, life, communion with the Son and with the Father through the Spirit, the earnest of the Spirit, adoption of sons, inheritance of heaven, all which our Lord obtained for us through His incarnation and precious blood-shedding " ; from which he deduces that " it is obvious that all these gifts, and whatever else is included in the gift of being made a ' member of Christ ' , must be spoken of as having been bestowed upon Christians, once for all, in *past* time at their baptism. It remains ", he adds, " for those who have ceased to regard baptism as the instrument of conferring these blessings to account for the Apostle's language upon *their* views " (p. 172). None the less, he recognized " the close connection of confirmation with baptism ", which he found " remarkably attested by the very fact of the extension of the word ' seal ' to the gifts of the Holy Spirit in confirmation " (p. 152).

Despite Pusey's championship of baptism, however, the theology of Tractarianism, of which he was one of the original apostles, developed in a manner which exalted confirmation at the expense of baptism. This was bound up with the particular doctrine of episcopacy as the essential apostolic ministry which has become characteristic of Anglo-Catholic theology. If the bishop is the channel of " apostolic " grace, then it is understandable that baptism, which is administered by the ordinary parson in his parish, must take a back seat, while confirmation, which is administered by the bishop, advances to the position where it is praised as the sacrament by means of which a man becomes a real Christian and takes his place, episcopally " ordained " as a layman, among the *laos* of God. In a word, confirmation now becomes the essential rite of Christian initiation, to which baptism is no more than a preliminary or a preparative.

At this point it may perhaps be instructive to pause and hear the following excerpt from the *Collection of Tenets extracted from the Canon Law* of the unreformed church which was compiled by Cranmer, probably while he was still at Cambridge : " Confirmation, if it be ministered by any other than a bishop, is of no value, nor is no sacrament of the church ; also confirmation is more to be had in reverence than baptism ; and no man by baptism can be a Christian man without confirmation " (*Works*, Vol. II p. 74).

An extreme doctrine of confirmation was given expression in a booklet by F. W. Puller entitled, *What is the Distinctive Grace of Confirmation?* which was published in 1880. He denied that confirmation involves the increase or completion of a gift already imparted in baptism, contending that, " although in baptism the Holy Ghost operates and works on the soul by His purifying, consecrating, and regenerating influence, yet . . . He does not impart His indwelling Presence until He is given in a new way by the laying on of hands " (pp. 11f.). He postulated two stages of initiation : " Paschal " and " Pentecostal ", comparable to the experience of the apostles, and concludes from Acts 8 and 19 that the indwelling Presence of the Holy

Spirit was, in the Church of the New Testament, the consequence of confirmation, not baptism. An analogy is assumed between, on the one hand, our Lord's "conception and birth of the Holy Ghost and Mary" and "His reception of the substantial inhabitation of the Comforter on the banks of the Jordan", and, on the other hand, "our birth of water and the Spirit in baptism" and "our anointing with the personal indwelling of the same blessed Spirit in confirmation". He summarizes his position in the following way: "In baptism the Holy Ghost pours down gifts of grace, which, as coming from Him, may be called gifts of the Spirit; but in confirmation He imparts, not merely gifts of grace, but Himself. In baptism the Holy Ghost refashions the person, whom He is regenerating, into a holy temple, meet to be the dwelling-place of God; and then, in confirmation, the Shechinah, the tabernacling presence of God's glory, comes to take possession of the shrine which has been prepared for Him" (p. 25).

On such a theory, the deferment of confirmation over a period of years is a distinct embarrassment, for it means withholding from the child all that is fullest and best in the Christian life. It is not surprising, therefore, to find Puller appealing for the restoration of infant confirmation in the Church of England. (There is no emphasis on the necessity for the ratification of baptismal vows.)

Puller's thesis received extensive development at the hands of A. J. Mason. In his book *Faith of the Gospel*, published in 1888, he urged that baptism and confirmation should be regarded as complementary parts of a single sacrament. He held that "only part of the baptismal grace is bestowed when the baptized stops short of confirmation", that "to be born of the Spirit" (that is, in baptism) is not the same thing as "to receive the Spirit" (that is, in confirmation), that, although "we are quickened into new and eternal and Divine life by the first act which ushers us into the Body of Christ", yet "not immediately does the Spirit of Christ take possession of us and flood our inward selves with His penetrating presence". Mason observed that "even Christ Himself, whose Nativity corresponded in some degree to our regeneration, did not receive the complete unction of the Spirit till many years later" (pp. 298ff.). It might have been thought that this analogy from the life of Christ would be seized on as affording justification for sanctioning a considerable interval of time between baptism and confirmation. Like Puller, however, Mason favoured the temporal unification of the two rites as a single sacrament. Unlike Puller, he proposed that baptism should be postponed rather than that confirmation should be advanced. In his book *The Relation of Confirmation to Baptism as taught in Holy Scripture and the Fathers* (1891), Mason explained that "the most characteristic purposes for which the Holy Ghost enters into souls appear to be chiefly connected with full age, and with the taking of the appointed station in the Christian polity", and that "many of the Spirit's gifts would be of little use to the babe". Accordingly, in his view, it would seem "not unreasonable to defer the bestowal of them till they are actually wanted" (p. 480).

The teaching of Puller and Mason was strongly criticized by William Bright in his book *Morality in Doctrine*, which appeared in 1892, the year after the publication of Mason's volume on the relation of

confirmation to baptism. "A theory," wrote Bright, "which (1) admits that baptism involves 'regeneration' and the 'quickening touch' of the Spirit, and 'in a sense' a reception of Him by reason of 'incorporation into Christ', yet (2) denies to the baptized, as such, that personal indwelling of the Spirit which is the 'great prerogative of the Christian dispensation', forbids them to consider themselves as 'temples of the Holy Ghost', confines the 'baptism with the Holy Ghost' to confirmation, and even speaks of the rite performed at the font as baptism only 'in the modern sense', can hardly be said to commend itself by consistency, and would seem to require a serious alteration in the pastoral teaching of the clergy, in the practice of the Church, and in the text of the Prayer Book offices and Catechism" (p. 91).

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Another book on this subject, published in this same decade, was A. T. Wirgman's *The Doctrine of Confirmation considered in relation to Holy Baptism*, which came out in 1897. Wirgman relied on a method of exegesis which revolved very doubtfully around the inclusion or omission of a Greek article. "It is significant", he says, "that St. Peter on the day of Pentecost connected Holy Baptism with the Personal Indwelling of the Spirit"—Acts 2 : 38 : "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost". Wirgman maintained that "the significant use of the article points to the Personal Indwelling of the Spirit in contradistinction to the subsequent gifts of endowment expressed by the phrase Πνεῦμα Ἅγιον, which constitute the grace of confirmation" (pp. 64f.).

Commenting on Wirgman's theory shortly afterwards (1898), Darwell Stone stated that, although he was unable "to attach to the use of the article all the significance which it has in Dr. Wirgman's eyes", yet he could not think that St. Peter referred in Acts 2 : 38, "to any less gift than that of the Pentecostal Indwelling, or that he dissevers it from baptism" ("The Relation of Confirmation to Baptism", in the *Church Quarterly Review*, Jan., 1898, p. 367). Mason had maintained that Peter in making this exhortation had in mind the two parts of baptism, the forgiveness of sins being conveyed, according to his hypothesis, through water-baptism, but the reception of the Holy Spirit through what we now know as confirmation (*Op. cit.*, p. 37). Stone's rejoinder to this teaching, however, was that a comparison of the bestowals of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the four passages, Acts 2 : 38, 8 : 17, 9 : 17f., and 19 : 6, suggested "that both in the sacrament of baptism and in the sacrament of confirmation there is a communication to the soul of the Personal Indwelling of God the Holy Ghost" (p. 368); and, further, that "it is an unquestionable fact that great and representative writers both of the East and of the West speak of the Holy Ghost being given in baptism" (p. 370). In his judgment, "the belief that those who are baptized and not yet confirmed are the temples of the Holy Ghost filled by His Presence" was supported by the teaching both of Scripture and of the Church, and there were "grave objections to supposing that those who have been

made members of the Body of Christ in baptism remain until confirmation without the inner presence of the Holy Spirit which is in Christ's Body". Besides, in the Book of Common Prayer it is "very distinctly implied that the baptized receive the Holy Spirit Himself" (pp. 377f.).

Unfortunately for Darwell Stone, the force of his objections against Mason's theory of an outward and inward action of the Holy Spirit at baptism and confirmation respectively was neutralized by his own suggestion that the presence of the Holy Spirit is indirect in baptism and direct in confirmation—a supposition no less obscure and confusing than that put forward by Mason.

In his book *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament*, first published in 1909, H. B. Swete spoke of the laying on of hands as baptism's "complementary rite" (p. 308; cf., p. 325). An examination of the New Testament evidence led him to conclude that it was "a natural if not a necessary inference that the Laying On of Hands became the ordinary complement of baptism both in the Jewish and the Gentile churches of the apostolic age, and was the means of imparting to the baptized certain spiritual gifts over and above the new birth by which they passed at their baptism into the life of faith" (p. 92). According to Swete, it is baptism which in its significance is determinative of all that is essentially Christian. Confirmation is but an increase of what is already there. "In the act of baptism", says Swete, "the 'old man', i.e., the former self, was crucified together with the Lord, that a new self, a risen Christ, might take its place within him. It was his *palingenesia*, his second birth, his renovation by the Spirit of Christ, giving the promise of a new life. The baptized man might by his subsequent conduct grieve the Holy Spirit, outrage Him, and even extinguish the Divine fire in his heart; but from that moment he could never again be in the position of one to whom the Spirit had not come; he had been *made partaker of Holy Spirit and had tasted the good word of God and the powers of the coming age*. From that moment, with that great sacramental act, the life of the Spirit began" (p. 343 Cf., Tit. 3: 5f., Eph. 4: 30, Heb. 10: 29, 1 Thess. 5: 19, Heb. 6: 4ff.).

Mason's theory that at baptism the action of the Holy Spirit is external and, so to speak, negative, effecting the remission of sins, whereas in confirmation it is internal and positive, effecting the divine personal indwelling, has called forth further criticisms over the past thirty years or so. Writing in 1930 (on "Confirmation and South India", in *Theology*, Jan. and Feb., pp. 28ff., 71ff.), Dr. A. E. Morris, now Archbishop of Wales, contended that we cannot be members of Christ (as our Prayer Book teaches we are through baptism) unless His Spirit dwells in us, and objected that Mason's theory "exalts confirmation, which the New Testament does not *certainly* trace back to Christ's ordinance, at the expense of baptism, which it does trace back to Christ" (p. 37). He refused to countenance any supposition that to postpone confirmation is thereby to "deprive us of grace for a few years" (p. 73).

Two years later, in a further article (on "The Grace of Confirmation", in *Theology*, March 1932, pp. 132ff.), Dr. Morris pointed out that the New Testament can speak of a "coming" of the Spirit upon Christ "from whom we cannot allow that He was ever for a moment absent",

and that the language of the Church also speaks of a succession of "comings"—as at baptism: "Give Thy Holy Spirit to this infant"; at confirmation: "Strengthen them . . . with the Holy Ghost"; in the ordinal: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost"; in the Quinquagesima collect: "Send Thy Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity"; and in the collect of the Sunday after Ascension Day: "Send us Thine Holy Ghost to comfort us". (He might have added the opening collect of the Communion Service: "Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit".) "Thus," Dr. Morris explains, "the Prayer Book as well as the New Testament can speak of a 'coming' of the Spirit without meaning it to be inferred that the Spirit has hitherto been absent from the persons concerned" (p. 135).

He held, moreover, that the "subjective indwelling of the Spirit obviously may take many forms and may be mediated in many ways" and that "even the unbaptized often display it to a remarkable extent". He properly observed, however, that the fact "that God is not bound by His sacraments . . . is not a sufficient justification for disuse of them" (p. 138). He urged that baptism and confirmation should be understood as "occasions of the more effective subjective indwelling of the already objectively indwelling Spirit". The increase *in* the Spirit, which is prayed for at confirmation, "is not an increase of the Spirit, who is wholly present already, but an increase of His subjective indwelling". Dr. Morris proceeded to define the grace of confirmation as "the releasing of the activity of the indwelling Spirit in us through our admission to full membership in the Church. To experience it to its fullest extent we must make the completest possible response to the demands which this membership makes upon us, when we shall find that this grace is sufficient for us" (pp. 139ff.).

The late Dean of Winchester, Dr. E. G. Selwyn, spoke much to the same effect (in his Editorial in the same issue of *Theology*) when he wrote that "the previous interaction of the Holy Spirit and the human soul—an interaction which may well be prior to baptism, and, indeed, in the case of adults desiring it, must be so (for it is He who gives them the desire)—is no bar to the bestowal of particular gifts of the Spirit at particular times or for particular purposes. And there is a further point to be remembered. It is not so much 'awareness' of the Spirit's presence, but *obedience* to Him which confirmation evokes. The will—or what the Scriptures call 'the heart'—rather than the consciousness is the true sphere of His operations. And this responsive obedience of the heart is itself a gift of the Holy Spirit" (p. 123). While agreeing that obedience is essential, I would only ask, by way of comment on this view, how it is possible not to be aware of the Spirit's presence when He is powerfully active in one's life. The experience of the effective indwelling of the Holy Spirit was certainly not unconscious on the part of the first Christians.

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The appearance of the 1944 Report entitled *Confirmation Today* stimulated further debate. At the end of that year the late Dr. K. E. Kirk, who was then Bishop of Oxford, reasserted the doctrine of

confirmation as the moment when the Holy Spirit is imparted. Any possibility of a reception of the Holy Spirit prior to confirmation must be ascribed to an operation of the Spirit which he termed "uncovenanted". Bishop Kirk described the confirmation theology of the Prayer Book (that is, that confirmation involves no more than strengthening with and increase in the Holy Spirit) as "a modernism of a dangerous kind" (*Oxford Diocesan Magazine*, Nov. and Dec., 1944).

In 1945 our present Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. A. M. Ramsey (at that time a professor in the University of Durham), rallied to the defence of the Prayer Book, pointing out that the phraseology of the Prayer Book rite of baptism, as well as the teaching of many Anglican divines, indicated that baptized children participate in the Holy Spirit (writing on "The Theology of Confirmation" in *Theology*, Sept. 1945, pp.194ff.). Dr. Ramsey adduced evidence to show that the "dangerous modernism" which Bishop Kirk lamented was not only "the doctrine of a long line of Anglican theologians" but also found support in the writings of the fathers. He inquired, wisely, whether there was any harm "in a frank eschewing of precise definition, and in an avowal that the purpose of confirmation is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the candidates without any denial that baptized Christians are already partakers of Him in virtue of their baptism".

Referring to the 1944 Report's definition of confirmation as "the ordination of the laity" whereby, "those who receive it are 'sealed' and set apart for a life-long vocation and ministry," Dr. Ramsey said that "to introduce the notion of 'ordination' to a priesthood is to become involved in very doubtful doctrine". He reminded his readers that "the priesthood of the laity is not a priesthood bestowed upon those who are not clergymen in contrast with that bestowed upon the clergy, nor is it an office given to individuals", but rather "the common priesthood of the whole *laos* of God or body of Christ"; and he recalled Jerome's saying: "*Sacerdotium laici, id est baptismum*": it is baptism which, by admitting us to the Church, "makes us partakers of the Church's common priesthood in Christ". He, therefore, warned that "the phrase 'ordination of the laity' is mistaken and ought to be discouraged". "Can we say more," he asked, "than that in confirmation we are strengthened and consecrated for the tasks and privileges which our membership in the Church entails, including the fulfilment of that priesthood in which, as members of the people of Christ, we share?"

The next to enter the lists was Professor C. F. D. Moule, of Cambridge (writing on "Baptism with Water and with the Holy Ghost" in *Theology*, Nov. 1945, pp. 246ff.). He expressed himself as being "increasingly inclined to believe that the writers of the New Testament regarded the *reception of the Spirit*—not water-baptism—as the distinctive and essential badge of Christianity", and that "water-baptism, though regularly practised by the Church from the outset, was regarded only as the negative preliminary—the emptying of the vessel, preparatory to its positive filling," and "corresponded, in fact, to the mission of the Baptist, who was the forerunner pointing forward to the greater One". Professor Moule pleaded that the biblical account of the total

experience of conversion can be satisfactorily represented only by "baptism plus confirmation", as an indivisible whole: not that he wished to abandon or belittle infant baptism, but that a proper distinction should be made between the *water*-baptism of *infants* and the *Spirit*-baptism of responsible adults.

The laying-on-of-hands he sees as "a very big question". Apart from our Lord's healing miracles, which form the majority of instances in the New Testament, he finds that "the evidence points to its being connected with *spiritual strengthening* ('confirmation', in fact) *for a task*—whether the specific and temporary task of relief organization (Acts 6: 6), or an evangelistic tour (Acts 13: 3, cf. 14: 26), or the lifelong and general task of Christian witness in the power of the Spirit".

Shortly afterwards Dr. Sherwin Bailey (in an article on "Baptism and the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit" in *Theology*, Jan. 1946, pp. 11ff.) urged that only the children of "baptized and fully practising parents" should be baptized in infancy, and that such children should be admitted to Holy Communion as soon as they had received "simple instruction in its meaning"; and later, "on attaining years of discretion (sixteen to nineteen?)", they would be "required to make a solemn and public affirmation of the baptismal vows, after a full preparation and instruction in the Faith".

1946 also saw the publication of Dom Gregory Dix's Lecture on "The Theology of Confirmation in Relation to Baptism". Dix charged the concept of confirmation as an increase of baptismal grace and a strengthening for Christian warfare with being a medieval corruption of the teaching of the primitive Church, and regarded the 1552 rite as "the final triumph in England of the medieval theological distortion" (pp. 29, 35). He stressed "the importance of the fact that . . . baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ and the pentecostal baptism of the Spirit are not one thing but two, both of them necessary and inseparably connected, but not the same". He saw significance in the fact that it was only *after* our Lord's baptism that the Spirit descended upon Him. Confirmation, or the reception of the Holy Spirit, is the sealing unto the day redemption of him who has been baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ (pp. 36f.). Again, defining his position two years later (writing on "'The Seal' in the Second Century" in *Theology*, Jan. 1948, pp. 7ff.), Dix affirmed that "in Holy Baptism we receive regeneration, forgiveness of sins, original and actual, and incorporation into Christ and His Mystical Body the Church", and that baptism is "a most mighty operation of God's grace", but, for all that, "radically incomplete without its positive complement of confirmation and its fulfilment in the communion". Confirmation, he insisted, "is a *necessary* part of initiation, since it is the sacramental bestowal of the *positive* principle of Christian life, the gift of the Holy Ghost".

In 1950 the order of service for confirmation in the Church of South India appeared—to be administered, be it noted, "by the Bishop *or* a presbyter". It did not follow the Mason-Dix line, as the three necessities "to make the act of confirmation complete" listed in the Foreword indicate: namely: (1) "Each candidate accepts for himself

in public God's promise, of which baptism is the effective sign, and dedicates himself to Christ as his Lord and Saviour"; (2) "All pray that God may increase in the candidates the gift of the Holy Spirit, by whom He makes us His own unto the day of redemption and enables us to live in Christ"; and (3) "The congregation receive the candidates into the full fellowship of the Church, especially the fellowship of the Lord's Table".

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During the following year, 1951, Professor G. W. H. Lampe's book *The Seal of the Spirit* saw the light of day. It was a reassessment, impressive in its erudition, of the whole baptism/confirmation question.

Dr. Lampe launched a sustained attack against the views propounded by Dix and others. He described their assertions as "highly controversial and unproven" and their doctrine as "entirely strange to traditional Anglican teaching" and containing "the most startling implications", and also as being "flatly contrary to all experience". "The consequences of its acceptance," he held, "... would be grave in the extreme. Christian baptism would be reduced to the level of the baptism of John, a preparatory cleansing in expectation of a future baptism with Holy Spirit; confirmation would become ... the great sacrament without whose reception no man could call himself a Christian; ... and at a stroke the whole basis of the ecumenical movement for the unity of Christendom would be shattered" (pp. xiif.). He affirmed that "Pauline thought affords no ground whatever for the modern theories which seek to effect a separation in the one action and to distinguish a 'Spirit-baptism' and a 'water-baptism', not as the inward and outward parts of one sacrament, but as independent entities". He charged the propounders of these theories with having "totally misunderstood the Christological heart of the Pauline teaching, which is simply that baptism effects incorporation into Christ. If we are *in* Christ, we are in the Spirit, or the Spirit is in us" (p. 57f.). With regard to the use of the terms "baptism" and "baptize" in the New Testament, Dr. Lampe maintained that there is "absolutely no evidence" to support the interpretation that they stand for an entire initiatory rite which includes the imposition of hands, or that "the etymology of the words was ever so far strained as to admit of a wider significance than that of dipping in water" (p. 68). He held, further, that "the laying on of hands described in Acts has little or no direct connection with the use of the same sign in confirmation today, nor has it anything to do with the Pauline 'seal of the Spirit'" (p. 80), and that "the patristic teaching on 'sealing' is inconclusive and can afford no adequate ground upon which to base a precise doctrine of the bestowal of the Holy Spirit in relation to baptism and confirmation" (p. 306). And he advised that "we must avoid the attempt to isolate the workings of the Spirit from each other; otherwise we shall be in danger of depersonalizing the Holy Spirit. We are concerned not with 'fuller' or 'lesser' 'outpourings', but with the gracious dealings of a Person" (p. 317).

What, then, is Dr. Lampe's understanding of confirmation? He

sees it as " a ceremony of laying on of hands accompanying prayer, by which a man is constituted a sharer in the apostolicity of the apostles of Christ ; it is a sign by which he receives a special endowment of the Holy Spirit who guided and directed the Church's activity in carrying out the Lord's command to bear witness to the Gospel throughout the world. It is a commissioning for active service in the missionary enterprise " (p. 78). " That the bishop"—as the representative leader of the Church—" should be its minister is obviously highly fitting and appropriate, although, as the history of confirmation compels us to believe, it is in no way essential " (p. 315 ; cf. pp. 80f.).

A rejoinder to Lampe came from the pen of the late Dr. L. S. Thornton, whose book *Confirmation : Its Place in the Baptismal Mystery* was published in 1954. It is an interesting attempt to justify on scriptural grounds the theology which Professor Lampe had criticized so severely, maintaining that Dr. Lampe's treatment of the scriptural revelation was " the Achilles' heel of his entire position " (p. 188). Important as this work is, the argument, in my judgment, is too frequently incapacitated by Dr. Thornton's method of exegesis, which, characteristically, is esoteric and allegorical to a degree that would have filled J. N. Darby with envy. " Christian baptism," wrote Dr. Thornton, " is for the neophyte his entry into the new birth of the world through death and resurrection, whereas confirmation constitutes his participation in the pentecostal gift of the Spirit ". The Spirit is indeed engaged in baptism. Thus it is explained that " through membership of the Body we enter at baptism into a Spirit-dwelt sphere. We are now at least ' in the Spirit ' " (p. 180). This sounds very much like a variation of the theme of the external and internal operations of the Spirit at baptism and confirmation respectively. Thornton drew an analogy between Christ and the Christian whereby he postulated two distinct operations of the Spirit, the former (corresponding to Christ's incarnation) referring to *being*, and the latter (corresponding to Christ's anointing with the Spirit at His baptism) referring to *mission*, that is, the fulfilment of the particular vocation to which we are called (pp. 173f.).

The Report or Schedule entitled *Baptism and Confirmation Today* which appeared in 1955 strongly reaffirmed the traditional Anglican position. The " recent tendency to make a distinction between ' water-baptism ' and ' Spirit-baptism ' " was deprecated, especially as " the New Testament makes no such distinction " but rather distinctively defines baptism as " the means whereby the individual is made a partaker of the gift of the Spirit " (pp. 36f.). Particularly valuable was the admonition of this Report that " salvation cannot come to the Church (or to the people through the Church) merely by a reform of its ordinances or by a multiplication of pastoral devices ; but only by the operation of the Holy Spirit, bringing renewal to the Church. When the Church is thus renewed, the administration of baptism will be more truly and more universally recognized as the effective entry of God's child into the family of Christ where he belongs, and the act of being confirmed will betoken a real confession of faith consequent upon conversion " (p. 29).

Despite the deprecations of the 1955 Report, however, the new

services proposed in the 1959 Report on Baptism and Confirmation were quite plainly constructed around the presupposition that the distinction to be made between baptism and confirmation is that between "water-baptism" and "Spirit-baptism" (see D. W. B. Robinson: "The New Baptismal Services" in *The Churchman*, June 1960, pp. 71ff., and P. E. Hughes: "Confirmation in the Church Today", *ibid.*, pp. 84ff.). The theological confusion of our day could hardly be thrown into greater relief than by the conflicting theologies of these two successive official Reports.

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And so the conflict sways back and forth. How are we to assess the situation in which we find ourselves? The acceptance of the doctrine of Thornton, Dix, and company, and the compilers of the 1959 Report, would mean, as Donald Robinson has pointed out (in *The Churchman*, as above, p. 79), that "baptism is no longer a sacrament of the whole of salvation, as it undoubtedly is in the New Testament". As most of its exponents recognize, the logic of this doctrine would require that baptism and confirmation should be administered simultaneously—either to infants, as Puller desired, which, except on an extreme *ex opere operato* view, makes nonsense of confirmation; or to those who have reached the age of responsibility, as Mason suggested, which, though preferable, would leave our young children in a position no different, theoretically, from that of pagans. Much of the confusion today is due to the fact that the Church has mislaid the biblical theology of baptism. It is urgent that we should recover the doctrine of God's covenant of grace, which is the compelling justification for the baptism of the infant children of Christian parents. At the same time, however, the Church should set its house in order by withholding baptism from the children of parents who are not practising Christians. Such children, if they can be brought under the instruction of the Church, and also adult converts, should be carefully prepared prior to their public initiation and commissioning in a single service of baptism with confirmation in some suitably modified form.

Above all, we need to rethink our doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This is, I believe, the first essential for the Christian Church today. The Holy Spirit is the neglected Person of the Holy Trinity. We affirm our belief in Him when reciting the Creed, but we do so with little comprehension of what we are saying. When we compare the quality of our church life in England today with that so graphically portrayed in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, we ought to be shocked and ashamed at the contrast. We are in grave peril of being stifled with our own respectability and complacency. The most outstanding feature of our church today is its powerlessness—and that means that we have lost the secret of *the power of the Holy Spirit*, which was the great dynamic of New Testament Christianity. We are in the midst of a twofold danger: on the one hand, of playing down the Holy Spirit and persuading ourselves that He is quiescent and that we must be satisfied with small things; and, on the other hand, of blank formalism, of forcing ourselves to believe that the performance of the prescribed rites ensures the bestowal of the Spirit in His fulness, despite the

barrenness of the results. Virtually all the writers on confirmation, whatever their particular viewpoint, assure us that the extraordinary results of the outpouring of the Spirit in the apostolic Church must not be expected in the Church of our day. I believe that we ought to question this assumption. I suggest that it is because we do not question it that the quality of our Christianity falls so far short of that of the New Testament. Can it be right to accept the religion of the New Testament as normal in all points except in this one thing?

Of course, the Holy Spirit is *sovereign*. He is not bound to any one pattern of manifestation any more than he is bound to our ecclesiastical ceremonies. This is apparent in the New Testament itself. The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit not only on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 4) but again a few days later when they were praying together (4: 31), without laying on of hands. The converts in Samaria received the Holy Spirit *after* Peter and John had laid their hands on them (8:17), as did the dozen men in Ephesus whom Paul baptized and laid his hands on (19: 5f.). Ananias, the man who laid his hands on Paul, was not an apostle, nor even, it would seem, a presbyter, but an "ordinary" Christian, and this was done *before* Paul was baptized (9: 17f.). The Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius and his household as they were listening to the preaching of the Gospel, without laying on of hands, and *before* they were baptized. There is certainly no liturgical pattern here. Surely, then, the vital lesson for us to learn is that what matters supremely is the experience of this fulness of the Holy Spirit's power, not the precise manner of its communication.

Nothing would be more thrilling than to *see* the manifestations of the fulness of the Spirit as the result of the laying on of the bishop's hands in confirmation—manifested not necessarily (though quite conceivably) in the gifts of tongues and prophecy and healing, but definitely in irrepressible love, joy, devotion, prayer, witness, and fellowship, which would make our poor imitations seem very paltry and threadbare. But if we truly wish to see this, then we must pray that we and our bishops may indeed be filled with the Spirit; for fulness can come only from fulness, and we must do everything in our power to ensure that the candidates we present for confirmation are genuinely committed to Christ as their Saviour and Lord. And this means, in turn, that we must hold inflexibly to the priority, always the priority, of Divine Grace.
