

# THE PLACE OF THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION AND THE UNITY OF THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION: AN AFRICAN SOLUTION TO THE LITURGICO-SACRAMENTAL PROBLEM OF CONFIRMATION

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## Abstract

The practice of the separation of Sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) is not faithful to the authentic teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. The reason for this separation or delay in the conferment of the Sacrament of Confirmation is reviewed together with a theological misconception of the sacrament of confirmation. Hence a better understanding via biblical foundations and the African understanding of the rites of initiation is proposed.

**Keywords:** Sacrament, Confirmation, Initiation, Africa

## Introduction

It is common to hear, in contemporary Sacramentology, that the sacrament of Confirmation is a sacrament in search of theology. Two major crisis plague this sacrament: 1) is it an indissociable/inseparable part of the Sacraments of Initiation - Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist? 2) What is the specificity of the sacrament of Confirmation? Given the page limitation for this article, only the first of these aporia will be addressed in this article, the second will be left to an opportune time. We will argue in three stages: 1) we will present the problematic in relation to the place of the sacrament of Confirmation within the Sacraments of Initiation; 2) followed by attempted theological panaceas argued, then, 3) we will propose an Afro-centric vision using Apostolic Constitution, *Divinae Consortium Naturae*, 1971, as a spring board.

## Confirmation or Chrismation: How and Why do we receive the Holy Spirit?

The theological determinations of the North Atlantic find its ripple effects in the global south through missionary and colonial impacts. What seems missing is the realization that the global south imports an inculturated theology that needs historical consciousness for its hermeneutics - whatever happens in the global north becomes the affair of the entire Catholic world. The sacrament of Confirmation, in Roman Catholic parlance, provides an example of one sacrament that defies a unilateral North Atlantic view; Orthodox Churches, Eastern Christianity and North African Churches have retained vestiges of its beginnings and evolution; hence, the different shades of meaning of the sacrament of Confirmation, through which the Holy Spirit is given and received, are still discernible today.

The Western legal/canonical<sup>1</sup> insistence that the conferment of the sacrament is an exclusive of a bishop meets with the Eastern reservation of the sacrament to Presbyters.<sup>2</sup> While the West argues for sacramental unity through power<sup>3</sup> – bishopric, the East does so through the medium of conferment of the sacrament – oil of Chrism.<sup>4</sup> The Catholic roving moments for the celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation opposes its non-Roman Catholic fixity with the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Eucharist. What this article attempts to do is to emphasize, 1) the importance of "origins" for the right understanding of the sacrament of Confirmation, from the Old and New Testaments' perspectives, in order to argue against the idea that Confirmation is a sacrament of maturity, hence, separable from Baptism and Eucharist; 2) to underscore the New Testament biblical contexts of the giving and receiving of the Holy Spirit as valuable motifs for retaining the unity of the sacraments of Initiation in Roman Catholicism, and 3) that African rituals of initiation contain valuable hermeneutics for the understanding of the sacrament of Confirmation as a sacrament of Christian Identity, in continuity with the intuitions of Pope Paul VI's ritual perspective on the sacrament of Confirmation.

### **Is Confirmation the Sacrament of Maturity?**

Just to mention three, a French and two American liturgists, Pierre-Marie Gy,<sup>5</sup> Liam Walsh<sup>6</sup> and Paul Turner<sup>7</sup> have succinct articulations of the present quagmire in which current Roman Catholic theology of Confirmation is entrenched. The crux of the matter is whether the sacraments of Initiation<sup>8</sup> - Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist - must be retained at one ceremony and in that order or not.

At this juncture, Turner's insightful question is worth repeating: "if original sequence [Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist] is so important, why differ Confirmation at all."<sup>9</sup> Turner asks this question because the Catholic Church teaches that the sacraments of Initiation are Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, yet differs the sacrament of Confirmation at infant baptism, but confers all three in danger of death as well as at adult baptism. On account of this type of practice,

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<sup>1</sup> 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 882. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1313.

<sup>2</sup> *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 13.

<sup>3</sup> St. Jerome, *Dialogue Against the Luciferians*, 9 (New Advent translation). See, Jerome, *Dial. adv. Lucifer*, 6-9 (P. L., 23, 161-165).

<sup>4</sup> Roman Catholicism also uses Chrism as the matter of the sacrament of Confirmation, but does not derive the name of the sacrament from chrism.

<sup>5</sup> Pierre-Marie GY, "La notion chrétienne d'initiation: jalons pour une enquête," *La Maison-Dieu* 132, 1977, 33-54; *Id.*, "Le problème de la confirmation dans l'Église catholique," *La Maison-Dieu* 168, 1986, 7-13; also, Louis-Marie CHAUVET, "Étapes vers le baptême ou étapes du baptême?" *La Maison-Dieu* 185, 1991, 35-46.

<sup>6</sup> Liam G. WALSH, *Sacraments of Initiation: A Theology of Life, Word, and Rite*, Chicago/Mundelein, IL: Hillenbrandbooks, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Paul TURNER, *Confirmation: The Baby in Solomon's Court*, Chicago, IL: Liturgical Training Publications/Hillenbrand Books Series, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> *Ad Gentes*, 14; *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Paul TURNER, *Confirmation: The Baby in Solomon's Court*, p. 87.

according to Turner, the tendency to consider the sacrament of Confirmation as an "adult sacrament" or "sacrament of maturity" is inevitable; also, he claims that "many individual Catholics disregard it [Confirmation]."<sup>10</sup> So, the Church's desire to "care for teens, and a fear that unassisted teens might choose not to participate in the Church's life,"<sup>11</sup> is not yielding expected fruit. In the words of Turner: "Confirmation marks a glorious moment in the life of a Christian: the giving of the Holy Spirit. But the confusion surrounding the sacrament has created a situation that demands a decision worthy of Solomon."<sup>12</sup>

The present practice, in both North and South<sup>13</sup> Atlantic, *mutatis mutandis*, is the isolation of the sacrament of Confirmation from the other two sacraments of Initiation,<sup>14</sup> namely, Baptism and Eucharist - the sacrament of Confirmation is celebrated after Baptism and Eucharist.<sup>15</sup> Recapitulating the reason for this separation, Gy affirms that there is no hard and fast rule in practice prior to Duchesne's<sup>16</sup> lectures (1878-1883) at the Catholic University, Paris, where the sacraments of Initiation are considered as inseparable. He expresses his surprise that Orthodoxy and Catholics hold a contrary opinion to his.<sup>17</sup> Here, we have an example where *lex credendi* does not add up to *lex vivendi*: pastoral practice diverges from doctrinal position. No wonder Turner says that Confirmation "seems to have found too many theologies."<sup>18</sup>

Walsh's study of the sacraments of Initiation - Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist - from three perspectives, Matter, Form and history, attempts to harmony the sacrament of Initiations on the basis of a thomistic sacramentology. For Walsh, the unity of "matter, form and history" provides a possibility for holding together the sacraments of Initiation, instead of their separation as is the practice today.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xii.

<sup>13</sup> For a Nigerian experience, cf. Most Rev. John Ifeanyichukwu OKOYE (Catholic Bishop of Awgu Diocese), *Confirmation: Sacrament of Empowerment for Christian Life, Service and Mission; Lenten Pastoral Letter*, 2013, Enugu, Nigeria: Snaap Press, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> This is done despite the fact that the Catholic Church teaches the contrary. Cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 71 (huius Sacramenti intima connexio cum tota initiatione christiana - the intimate connection of this sacrament with the whole of Christian initiation [our translation]). Contrary to this initiative of Vatican II, pope Paul VI initiates the idea of Confirmation as the sacrament of "maturity" by authorizing episcopal conferences to decide "aetate maturiore - a more mature age" for the conferment of the sacrament of Confirmation. Cf. *Motu Proprio, Ordo Confirmationis*, no. 11, 1971. According to Gy, pope Paul VI said something similar as a cardinal, in these words: "Conferendum videtur enim ut sacramentum perseverantiae aetate decem vel duodecim annorum - for it seems necessary to confer (Confirmation) at the age of 10 or 12 as a sacrament of perseverance [our translation]" (*Acta Conc. Dec. Apparando. Ser. I, vol. II, pars III, p. 380*). Cf. Pierre-Marie GY, "Le problème de la confirmation dans l'Église catholique," p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> The reason for celebrating first communion/Eucharist on a different date and not on the same day as baptism, in Western Catholicism, is not the subject of this article.

<sup>16</sup> Pierre-Marie GY, "La notion chrétienne d'initiation: jalons pour une enquête," pp. 46-50.

<sup>17</sup> Pierre-Marie GY, "Le problème de la confirmation dans l'Église catholique," pp. 12-13.

<sup>18</sup> Paul TURNER, *Confirmation: The Baby in Solomon's Court*, p. 145.

In sum, arguments for and against the conferment of Baptism, Confirmation and first Eucharist all at once or separating them vacillate between two extremes: 1) the fact that the crafting of these three sacraments as the sacraments of Initiation has its root in Paris, in the 19th century, and not an invention of the early church,<sup>19</sup> and 2) the argument of Orthodoxy that the sacraments of Initiation go back to earliest Christianity. Whatever may be the merits of these two arguments, on tradition (East) and contextual sacramentology (West), a forgotten argument is a biblical grounding principle and semantics of the sacrament of Confirmation/Chrismation, which manifest a polysemy of approaches to the motif and meaning of the Holy Spirit. If rituality is taken seriously, identity-formation trumps the meaning of the Holy Spirit within the sacramentology of Confirmation.

### **What does Scripture Say about the Role of the Holy Spirit in Human Rituals?**

Going by Old Testament evidence, God reaches out to his creation through his Spirit, prior to the Incarnation of his Son. The creation account in Genesis 1 and the activities of Old Testament kings, priests and prophets, including patriarchs, were mediate by God's Spirit. The activities initiated by God's Spirit are both creative and sustaining of creation, communities and individuals. It is in connection with the role of the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God in creating and sustaining individuals and community of Israel that we can talk about "the Holy Spirit in Human Rituals." "Ritual" here connotes the presence of God to his creation leading and guiding it. In this regard, the empowerment role of the Holy Spirit is unmistakably present in the leadership of Israel, beginning with Moses and the chosen elders who governed with him.

Fundamental to Catholic sacramentology is the salvific role of sacraments.<sup>20</sup> From the Council of Trent, up until recently, the distinction is still being made between major (Baptism and Eucharist) and minor (Confirmation, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Marriage and Holy Order) sacraments.<sup>21</sup> The reason is that the major sacraments have clear biblical roots and enunciated by Christ as sacraments of Salvation.<sup>22</sup> Christ, it is argued, makes them indispensable for Salvation. These are the usual passages referenced in this connection:

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:15-16)

Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

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<sup>19</sup> See footnote 14.

<sup>20</sup> Jean-Marie Roger TILLARD, *Le sacrement evenement du salut*, Paris: Pensée Catholique, 1964.

<sup>21</sup> Yves CONGAR, "The Idea of 'Major' or 'Principal' Sacraments," *Concilium* 1/4, 1968, 12-17.

<sup>22</sup> Jean-Marie Roger TILLARD, *Le sacrement evenement du salut*, pp. 7-61.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day (John 6:53-54).<sup>23</sup>

The salvific validity of these two sacraments (Baptism and Eucharist) is indisputable, but an essential part of it is missing - Confirmation. Johannine and Lukan texts make Confirmation a salvific sacrament, alongside Baptism:

Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5)

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

This necessity of Confirmation for salvation is recognized in the 1983 code of canon Law (Can. 889.2, 891), where the Confirmation of children in danger of death is mandated. It follows that the list of the major sacraments should be three, not two: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist!

If the life and death of Jesus Christ was for human salvation, this salvation reaches human beings through sacramental signs and rituals.<sup>24</sup> So, rituals, in Christianity, are not the consequences of Christian copying from Mystery Religions,<sup>25</sup> but, as Paul calls it, it is a "Mystery," that is, a revelation made known by Christ, which previous ages were not aware of (Col 1:26). Consequently, the urgency and inseparability of the sacraments of Initiation is tied to their permanent validity and necessity for salvation. How does one postpone salvation or make salvation a sacrament of maturity beats the imagination hollow! Anyway, let us focus on what the Holy Spirit does in the life of a Christian, so as to delineate its singularity.

### **The Holy Spirit and Old Testament "Charismatics" Called Prophets**

If the argument of chronology is anything to go by, the phenomenon of prophetism, in Israel, is prior to the narrative saga of creation in Genesis 1, where Ruah/Spirit is given pride of place in creation (Psalm 104). However, the Spirit's role in individuals' lives is most conspicuous in Israel's Prophets. The intuitions of Geza Vermes<sup>26</sup> are *ad rem* when he emphasizes the link between prophetic identity with the residency of the Spirit in a prophet. The different manifestations of the

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>24</sup> For the relationship between "rituals" and Christianity, see: Louis BOUYER, *Le rite et l'homme*, Paris; cerf, 1962, chapters 1, 5 and 8.

<sup>25</sup> Louis BOUYER, *Life and Liturgy*, London: Sheed and Ward Stagbooks, 1978, pp. 86-98.

<sup>26</sup> Geza VERMES, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels*, Philadelphia, PENN: Fortress Press, 1973, 22-25, 58-102; *Id.*, *Jesus in His Jewish Context*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003, pp. 1-39.

Spirit provide the categorization of the possessor of the Spirit: they are sometimes called "Man of God," "Prophet" or "healer." These various activities designate the indwelling of the Spirit. This view continues into the New Testament times, according to Vermes. Vermes makes the continuity (Charismatic prophetism) reside in the person of Jesus. For him, Jesus continues, in his ministry, the prophetic circle begun by Elijah and Elisha. The spectacular way in which the Spirit was at work in them gave them the identity they (prophets) had.

One finds the same echoes in James D. G. Dunn,<sup>27</sup> who situates the "ecstatic" and "enthusiastic" manifestations in a Christian's life to the indwelling of the Spirit, revamped in Protestantism, under the auspices of "Baptism in the Holy Spirit." It is worth mentioning that Dunn underscores the Christological connections of the activities of the Holy Spirit rather than buy into the excesses of the "Baptism in the Holy Spirit" group or the Dionysian and Platonic interpretation of a spirit-based frenzy in religious phenomena. The articles of Couturier<sup>28</sup> and Dion<sup>29</sup> summarize the general view of the roles of the spirit/RWH in the Old Testament. In the first seven books of the Old Testament (heptateuch), Dion opines that two categories are evident as regards the function of the RWH: 1) God's principle of life for every created thing, and 2) the spirit of prophecy.<sup>30</sup> The gift of prophecy distinguishes a group from the rest of the society. But what is interesting is Couturier's remark that the prophetic spirit, in Israel, is both a gift and a transient and not permanent spirit.<sup>31</sup>

The third level of meaning concerns directly our subject [prophetic spirit], since it is about a personal intervention of God on an individual or a group of persons in order to modify their action or give them the ability to carry out a particular mission; we may qualify this level as historic [intervention]. If the anthropologic *rûah* is universal, the "historic" *rûah* remains a peculiar gift which is often transitory.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> James D. G. DUNN, *The Christ and the Spirit, Collected Essays of James D. G. Dunn, vol. 2, Pneumatology*, Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998, pp. 62-80 at 62-68.

<sup>28</sup> Guy COUTURIER, "L'Esprit de Yahweh et la fonction prophétique en Israël," *Science et Esprit*, 1990, 129-165.

<sup>29</sup> Paul-Eugène DION, "la RWH dans l'heptateuque: la protestation pour la liberté du prophétisme en Nb 11,26-29," *Science et Esprit*, 1990, 167-191.

<sup>30</sup> Paul-Eugène DION, "la RWH dans l'heptateuque: la protestation pour la liberté du prophétisme en Nb 11,26-29," pp. 171-182.

<sup>31</sup> We provide the original French in the footnote, and insert our personal translation into the body of the article. Our translation is very literal, since our article was returned to us for a fire-brigade-like translation of all the French citations in our article. This said, we bear responsibility for all the translations from French into English.

<sup>32</sup> Guy COUTURIER, "L'Esprit de Yahweh et la fonction prophétique en Israël," pp. 130-131. "Le troisième niveau de sens concerne directement notre sujet [prophetic spirit], puisqu'il s'agit d'une intervention personnelle de Dieu auprès d'un individu ou d'un groupe de personnes pour modifier leur action ou les habiliter à réaliser une mission particulière; nous pourrions donner à ce niveau le

Even though our citation of Couturier's article is on prophetism as a gift, it is worth noticing that Moses, Samuel, Saul and others sometimes exercised the functions of prophet, priest or/and king: our point is that what is prophetic has to be nuanced, for the epoch under review. All that bears the mark of differentiation, we term a gift, while all that is common to all and is permanent, not transient, we consider as identity.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Two Roles of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament: Conferment of Christian Identity and Ministerial Gifts<sup>34</sup>**

Even a superficial glance at the New Testament reveals the preponderance of the nomenclature and activities of the Holy Spirit.<sup>35</sup> In fact, there are biblical scholars who would prefer the "Acts of the Holy Spirit" to the title "Acts of the Apostle"<sup>36</sup> because of the source of the force at work in the apostles in Acts. Our intention is to use scriptural scholarship's conclusions on the understanding of the Holy Spirit, as a springboard for our research, instead of study every pericope where the Holy Spirit is mentioned. James D. G. Dunn and Odette Mainville show these two roles of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

Mainville argues that the annunciation of angel Gabriel to Mary that she will conceive by the Holy Spirit confers an identity on Jesus: he is going to be a prophet, like the prophets of old whose identities were conferred by the Holy Spirit.

The intention of Luke is therefore clear: he intends to place Jesus in the line of the sons who had a preponderant role to play in the history of salvation, whose vocation was determined even before

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qualificatif d'*historique* [sic]. Si la rûah anthropologique est universelle, la rûah "historique" reste un don particulier et très souvent transitoire."

<sup>33</sup> According to Mainville, the Old Testament understanding of the spirit as "force" is Christianized in the New Testament. For some continuity and difference between the Old Testament understanding of the spirit and the New Testament, see: Odette MAINVILLE, "L'Esprit dans l'oeuvre de Luc," *Revue Scriptura* 3, 1990, 31-40; *Idem.*, "De la rûah hébraïque au pneuma chrétien: Le langage descriptif de l'agir de l'esprit de Dieu," *Théologiques* 2, 1994, 21-39 at 39.

<sup>34</sup> Fatehi has a succinct delineation of the different roles of the Holy Spirit in his book. We cite the relevant portion for our purposes. Cf. Mehrdad FATEHI, *The Spirit's Relation to the Risen Lord in Paul: An Examination of Its Christological Implications*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000, pp. 263-274.

<sup>35</sup> In Luke-Acts alone, Mainville counted 77 mention of the Holy Spirit. Cf. Odette MAINVILLE, "Jésus et l'Esprit dans l'oeuvre de Luc: éclairage à partir d'Ac 2,33," *Science et Esprit* 42, 1990, 193-208 at 193; on his part, Dion counts 50 appearances of the word Ruach/spirit in the heptateuch (the first seven books of the Old Testament). Cf. Paul-Eugène DION, "la RWĤ dans l'heptateuque: la protestation pour la liberté du prophétisme en Nb 11,26-29," p. 167; Gourgues counts 163 entries into the New Testament as a whole under the nomenclature "spirit." See, Michel GOURGUES, "Phénomènes païens et dons de l'Esprit: la problématique sous-jacente à 1 Corinthiens 12-14," *Revue Scriptura* 3, 1990, 9-18 at 9.

<sup>36</sup> Jacques GUILLET, "Saint-Esprit --- Actes des Apôtres," *DBS* 60, 1986, p. 184.

his conception (with the exception of Ezechias - Is 7:14) . . . This is why the child to be born will be called Holy, Son of God.<sup>37</sup>

Up front, Mainville separates the role of the Spirit as giver of gifts from its role as conferrer of identity in these words:

Two things are to be noted as regards this intervention of the Spirit [at the announcement to Mary] 1) the Spirit is not the source of prophetic inspiration as is the case in other interventions with secondary personnages f Lk 1-2 (Elizabeth, Zacharia, Simeon and John the Baptist); 2) it does not touch directly the beneficiary of his intervention, Jesus, but his mother. The Spirit, in Lk 1:35, is neither the source of inspiration, nor parent, but the guarantee of protection..<sup>38</sup>

Mainville concludes that the context of the baptism of Jesus, in Luke's gospel, where the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus is followed by the genealogy of Jesus, in order to signify that Jesus is the Son of God,<sup>39</sup> confirms our perspective that the Holy Spirit confers identity in some contexts and spiritual gifts in others. Talbert puts it beautifully: "The formal link between the baptism narrative and the genealogy seems to be that they both end with designation of Jesus as Son. The genealogy thereby defines the Son of God (3:22b) as the Son of Adam."<sup>40</sup>

Racine's perspective completes the views of Mainville by showing that the Holy Spirit is given to the same people multiple times, in his exegesis of Acts 4:23-31.<sup>41</sup> This perspective is important for two reasons: 1) it confirms the Old Testament

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<sup>37</sup> Odette MAINVILLE, "Jésus et l'Esprit dans l'oeuvre de Luc: éclairage à partir d'Ac 2,33," pp. 196, 200: " L'intention de Luc est donc claire: il compte placer Jésus dans la lignée des fils qui ont eu un rôle prépondérant à jouer dans l'histoire du salut et dont la vocation était déterminée avant même leur conception (à l'exception d'Ezéchias - Is 7,14). . . . C'est pourquoi l'enfant qui naîtra sera appelé Saint, Fils de Dieu."

<sup>38</sup> Odette MAINVILLE, "Jésus et l'Esprit dans l'oeuvre de Luc: éclairage à partir d'Ac 2,33," p. 200: " Deux choses sont à noter à propos de cette intervention de l'Esprit [à l'annonce à Marie] 1) l'Esprit n'est pas source d'inspiration prophétique comme c'est le cas dans ses autres interventions auprès des personnages secondaires de Lc 1-2 (Élizabeth, Zacharie, Siméon et Jean le Baptiste); 2) il ne touche pas directement le bénéficiaire de son intervention, Jésus, mais plutôt sa mère. L'Esprit, en Lc 1,35, n'est ni source d'inspiration, ni géniteur, mais gage de protection."

<sup>39</sup> Odette MAINVILLE, "Jésus et l'Esprit dans l'oeuvre de Luc: éclairage à partir d'Ac 2,33," p. 202-206.

<sup>40</sup> C. H. TALBERT, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes and the Genre of Luke-Acts*, Missoula, Montana: Scholars University Press, 1974, pp. 117-118.

<sup>41</sup> Jean-François RACINE, "Une seconde dose d'Esprit: Contribution de Actes 4, 23-31 à l'intrigue des Actes des Apôtres," in André GAGNÉ et al., *Le vivant qui fait vivre: Esprit, éthique et résurrection dans le Nouveau Testament. Mélanges offerts à la professeure Odette Mainville*, Montréal: Médiaspaul, 2011, pp. 281-300.



view of the roles of the spirit as transient and force/power,<sup>42</sup> and 2) it indicates that when the Holy Spirit is given multiple times, it is the gifts<sup>43</sup> of the Holy Spirit that are at stake and not its role as identity maker.

Dunn's overview of the understanding of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament,<sup>44</sup> in addition to listing various pericopes where the Holy Spirit is mentioned, summarizes the roles of the Holy Spirit in these different pericopes. Key texts, according to Dunn, which show the conferment of identity by the Holy Spirit include: Rm 5:5, 8:15-16; 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 4:6.<sup>45</sup>

These references to the conferment of identity is present in John's gospel. The strength of John's testimony underscores the role of the Holy Spirit at the baptism of Jesus as that of identity revealer:

And John bore witness: 'I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, **this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.**' And I have seen and have borne witness **that this is the Son of God** (John 1:32-34).<sup>46</sup>

In order words, subsequent upon the identity of a possessor of the Spirit is the question of the activities of the Holy Spirit. The Synoptics are in agreement with John on this point, especially with respect to the epiphany of the Spirit and the testimony of the Father at the scene of Jesus' baptism.

Inseparable with the biblical giving of the Holy Spirit, as a sign of identity, is the context of its reception - baptism. This is evident in the baptism of Jesus as well as the baptism of Christians. According to Paul, "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See Guy Couturier above.

<sup>43</sup> Racine's view is that Acts 4:23-31 is a prayer for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Cf. Jean-François RACINE, "Une seconde dose d'Esprit: Contribution de Actes 4, 23-31 à l'intrigue des Actes des Apôtres," pp. 286-293.

<sup>44</sup> James D. G. DUNN, "Rediscovering the Spirit," *The Expository Times* 84, 1972, 7-12, 40-44; *Id.*, *The Christ and the Spirit*, pp. 43-61.

<sup>45</sup> *Id.*, *The Christ and the Spirit*, pp. 43-49.

<sup>46</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>47</sup> For the ritual process of aggregation through baptism, in contrast to the role of the Spirit for Christian identity, see: Isaac Augustine MORALES, "Baptism and Union with Christ," in Michael J. THEATE et al. (eds.), *"In Christ" in Paul, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014, pp. 157-179; for the perspectives of Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria, see: Ben C. BLACKWELL, "Two Early Perspectives on Participation in Paul: Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria," in Michael J. THEATE et al. (eds.), *"In Christ" in Paul*, pp. 331-355.

Authentic and deutero-Pauline letters corroborate the idea of John whereby the Holy Spirit's first role is that of conferment of Christian Identity before that of charismata - gifts. Of prime importance, in this regard, is Paul's attribution of the presence of the Holy Spirit as a sign of Christian adoption as son/daughter and heir (Galatians 4:4-7; Romans 8:15-17).<sup>48</sup> The culminating point of this adoption is the ability to call God, *abba*-Father. To confirm that it is really the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God that is dwelling in a person, Paul gives a yardstick for measurement - "Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus is accursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3). Again, identity is prior to confession and consistent with it. The discernment of "spirits" become important in this regard because it is not every activity of "spirits" that could be attributable to the Spirit of God.<sup>49</sup>

Gourgues,<sup>50</sup> writing on the specificity of 1 Cor 12-14, shows that the unique Pauline understanding of the differentiation between the Holy Spirit and pagan spirit is not from the perspective of what they inspire as extra-ordinary gifts, but the congruence between the Christian message and what the spirit inspires.

Thus, the activities, experiences and gifts, even those present elsewhere - especially prophecy and tongues, of which Paul reserved to be mentioned last, could be placed in relation with the Spirit if they are geared towards and the good of the community. Hence, what is placed in first level in Pauline conception of charisms, is the idea of free gift and ecclesial service rather than the aspect [which shows the gifts as] spectacular and extra-ordinary.<sup>51</sup>

The Holy Spirit gives gifts to Christians, gifts which are distinct from one person to another, for the purposes of ecclesial edification. A clear analogy is that of the body which Paul makes allusion to in 1 Cor 12:12-30. It is this one body that the different gifts build up. But amidst this individual gifts is the collective Body of Christ, with a collective doctrine, just like the oneness of the Body of Christ or the

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<sup>48</sup> The identity in question is one that accrues to the Christian from Christ through the Spirit. Cf. Susan G. EASTMAN, "Oneself in Another: Participation and the Spirit in Romans 8," in Michael J. THEATE et al. (eds.), *"In Christ" in Paul*, pp. 103-125.

<sup>49</sup> According to André, discernment of spirits is located in the ambit of multiple gifts of the Spirit. Cf. André MUNZINGER, *Discerning the Spirits: A Theological and Ethical Hermeneutics in Paul*, Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 60-69.

<sup>50</sup> Michel GOURGUES, "Phénomènes païens et dons de l'Esprit: la problématique sous-jacente à 1 Corinthiens 12-14," *Revue Scriptura* 3, 1990, 9-18.

<sup>51</sup> Michel GOURGUES, "Phénomènes païens et dons de l'Esprit: la problématique sous-jacente à 1 Corinthiens 12-14," pp. 13-14: "Ainsi, des activités, des expériences et des dons, même présents ailleurs - notamment la prophétie et les langues, dont Paul garde la mention pour la fin -, peuvent être mis en relation avec l'Esprit s'ils sont ordonnés à la foi et au bien de la communauté. Ainsi, ce qui est mis au premier plan dans la conception paulinienne des charismes, c'est l'idée de don gratuit et de service ecclésial plutôt que l'aspect spectaculaire et extraordinaire."

Church. The oneness of doctrine and oneness of Church speak to the identity of Christians and not to their individuality. Gourgues makes this distinction clear in the following words:

The reflection of Paul in verse 3 [1 Cor 12:3] appears to establish a contrast between these extra-ordinary phenomena [pneumatika] and the very ordinary manifestations [charismata] and the very regular gift of God's Spirit, as the recognition of the Lordship of Jesus, which is found confessed by all believers in the liturgical assembly. At the same time, Paul proclaims a first criterion - the conformity with the contents of the faith - which makes it possible to judge if speaking in tongues is inspired or not by the Spirit.<sup>52</sup>

What should not be lost sight of, from the biblical evidences on the role of the Holy Spirit in assigning a Christian identity to each Christian, is the fact that this Christian Identity is common to all and not private. The individual perspective of the Holy Spirit is experienced on the level of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.<sup>53</sup> A clear example is Paul's statement to the effect that, "[n]ow there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit" (1 Cor 12:4). One needs to read, *in tandem*, three perspectives that Paul crafts into 1 Cor 12: 1) Spirit of confession of faith (1 Cor 12:3), 2) multiplicity of the Spirit's gifts (1 Cor 12:4), and the oneness of the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:14-30). The Pentecostal Spirit, descending on each apostle and Mary, tows the line of the gifts of the Spirit as well as the Lucan prophetic agenda in Luke 4:18-19,<sup>54</sup> which serves to reveal Jesus' role as the expected Messiah. Also, the so-called Johannine second effusion of the Holy Spirit fits the picture of the reception of the gifts of the Spirit (Jn 20:19-23).

What is conclusive, on the one hand, about the indwelling of the Spirit as an identity marker is specified by its context - baptism, a *status quo* which appears irrevocable; on the other hand, the gifts of the Spirit are enunciated in kerygmatic contexts, and in contradistinction to the Holy Spirit as identity, the gifts of the

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<sup>52</sup> Michel GOURGUES, "Phénomènes païens et dons de l'Esprit: la problématique sous-jacente à 1 Corinthiens 12-14," p. 12: "La réflexion de Paul au v. 3 [1 Cor 12:3] paraît bien établir un contraste entre ces phénomènes extraordinaires [pneumatika] et les manifestations les plus ordinaires [charismata] et les plus courantes du don de l'Esprit de Dieu, comme la reconnaissance de la seigneurie de Jesus, laquelle se trouve confessée par tous les croyants dans l'assemblée liturgique. Du même coup, Paul se trouve à énoncer un premier critère - la conformité au contenu de la foi - permettant de juger si le parler en langues est inspiré ou non par l'Esprit."

<sup>53</sup> The "eschatological Spirit," from Old Testament perspectives, is depicted as playing two roles: conferment of Identity as children of God, especially to non-Jews, and the distributor of spiritual gifts. Cf. Finny PHILIP, *The Origins of Pauline Pneumatology: The Eschatological Bestowal of the Spirit upon Gentiles in Judaism and in the Early Development of Paul's Theology*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 194, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005, pp. 33-120.

<sup>54</sup> See Odette Mainville's articles cited above.

Spirit can either be lost or wane: the failure of the Galatians to be faithful to the gift of the Spirit (Galatians 3:1-5) and the ultimate supersession of the gifts of the Spirit by the theological virtue of love (1 Cor 13:13) are instructive.

The faithfulness or unfaithfulness of a Christian, which Paul differentiates as the work of the flesh and the work of the Spirit (Gal 5:16-21),<sup>55</sup> does not negate Christian Identity, since the gifts of the Spirit build on Christian Identity and are distinct from that Identity. To argue, therefore, that Confirmation is the sacrament of Maturity relegates the Identity conferment role of the Holy Spirit to a second fiddle only to the gifts it offers - individualism to the detriment of communalism: though distinct, we need both to form the Body of Christ.<sup>56</sup>

### **The Corroborations of the Fathers of the Church on the Twin Roles of the Holy Spirit**

The biblical arguments outlined above may appear new, but can we find indications from Church Fathers to corroborate our position? It is to this point that we now turn, beginning with the near sarcasm of St. Jerome on the role of a bishop in the celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation, while building on Joseph Lécuyer's monumental article.<sup>57</sup>

Beginning with St. Jerome may surprise serious sacramental theologians because they consider St. Jerome's position to be unserious. What is curious is why will Jerome treat the role of the bishop in the sacrament of Confirmation with levity and are there possible reasons for that? Being a scripture scholar, had he a different way of seeing what happens at confirmation which is different from his contemporaries, because he was a scholar of no mean repute? Here is what he says, which earned him a bad reputation:

But if you now ask how it is that a person baptized in the Church does not receive the Holy Ghost, Whom we declare to be given in true baptism, except by the hands of the bishop, let me tell you that our authority for the rule is the fact that after our Lord's ascension the Holy Ghost descended upon the Apostles. And in many places we find it the practice, more by way of honouring the episcopate than from any compulsory law. Otherwise, if the Holy Ghost descends only at the bishop's prayer, they are greatly to be pitied who in isolated houses, or in forts, or retired places,

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<sup>55</sup> Jean-Noël ALETTI, *Justification by Faith in the Letters of Saint Paul: Keys to Interpretation*, Peggy Manning MEYER (trans.), Rome: Gregorian and Biblical Press, 2015, pp. 101-117.

<sup>56</sup> It is pertinent to note that Baptism and Confirmation both confer characters; therefore, they are distinct from each other. Although it is not possible to argue the importance of the role of "sacramental character" here, it suffices to say that it emphasizes the ecclesial link of the Sacrament of Confirmation to the Church. Cf. Eliseo RUFFINI, "Character as a Concrete Manifestation of the Sacrament in Relation to the Church," *Concilium* 1/4, 1968, 52-28.

<sup>57</sup> Joseph LÉCUYER, "La Confirmation chez les pères," *La Maison-Dieu* 54, 1958, 23-52.

after being baptized by the presbyters and deacons have fallen asleep before the bishop's visitation. The well-being of a Church depends upon the dignity of its chief-priest, and unless some extraordinary and unique functions be assigned to him, we shall have as many schisms in the Churches as there are priests. Hence it is that without ordination and the bishop's license neither presbyter nor deacon has the power to baptize. And yet, if necessity so be, we know that even laymen may, and frequently do, baptize. For as a man receives, so too he can give.<sup>58</sup>

The explicit argument of St. Jerome seems to be the separation between the Holy Spirit at Baptism and the Holy Spirit at Pentecost: "let me tell you that our authority for the rule is the fact that after our Lord's ascension the Holy Ghost descended upon the Apostles." In other words, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost does not negate the presence of the Holy Spirit at Baptism; so, if there are two out pourings of the Holy Spirit, their roles have to be different. This view is consistent with our outline above, about the two roles of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian: conferment of identity at Baptism and empowerment at Pentecost. We think, therefore, that the criticism against Jerome that he does not like bishops<sup>59</sup> is stretched; after all, Jerome says: "For there is no such thing as a Church without bishops. . . Similarly the Church, consisting of many grades, ends in deacons, presbyters, and bishops."<sup>60</sup> This statement does not show that Jerome does not accord importance to the bishopric!

In order to comprehend the positions of Church Fathers on the sacrament of Confirmation, one needs to look at their commentaries on different passages of Scripture where the Holy Spirit is mentioned. The text before them determines their interpretation of the roles of the Holy Spirit. The effect of generalization as a fallacy of composition can be noted in Lécuyer's statement:

But a first observation is imperative: the Fathers of the Church, with quasi unanimity which is impressive, confirm all the other details given the Holy Spirit. It is not surprising if we imagine that the point of departure of their reflection is essentially the book of the Acts of the Apostles, of which two passages make clear the distinction between baptism and the rite which confers the Holy Spirit; it is first the episode of [Acts] chapter 8.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> St. Jerome, *Dialogue Against the Luciferians*, 9 (New Advent translation). See, Jerome, *Dial. adv. Lucifer*, 6-9 (P. L., 23, 161-165).

<sup>59</sup> Joseph LÉCUYER, "La Confirmation chez les pères," pp. 29-30, 33.

<sup>60</sup> St. Jerome, *Dialogue Against the Luciferians*, 21, 22 (New Advent translation).

<sup>61</sup> Joseph LÉCUYER, "La Confirmation chez les pères," p. 24: " Or une première constatation s'impose: les pères de l'Église, avec une unanimité qui ne peut manquer d'impressionner affirment avant toute autre précision *donne* [sic] le Saint-Esprit. On ne saurait s'en étonner si l'on songe que le point de départ de leur réflexion est essentiellement le livre des Actes des Apôtres, dont deux

This citation does not denigrate the quality of Lécuyer's article, since he will demonstrate, subsequently, other Scriptural passages where the Fathers of the Church, like Irenaeus, Augustine, etc. show that there are basically two roles attributed to the Holy Spirit. For instance, St. Augustine says:

when He had said to His disciples, Receive the Holy Ghost, He immediately subjoined, Whosoever sins ye remit, they shall be remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they shall be retained. For that regeneration also, in which there is a remission of all past sins, is wrought by the Holy Ghost, as the Lord says, Unless a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. But it is one thing to be born of the Spirit, another to be nourished by the Spirit; just as it is one thing to be born of the flesh, which happens when the mother is delivered of her child; another to be nourished by the flesh, which happens when she gives suck to her infant, who turns himself that he may drink with pleasure there whence he was born, to have life; that he may receive the support of life from thence, whence he received the beginning of his birth. We must believe then that the first blessing of God's goodness in the Holy Ghost is the remission of sins.<sup>62</sup>

Here, we have St. Augustine admitting the two roles of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian. Lécuyer, without providing his source, considers St. Augustine's *Sermon 71, 19* as based on 1 Cor 12:13. This is what he says:

Yet, should one look closely, they are the expressions of saint Paul himself in the first letter to the Corinthians (12:13): "All, in fact, we have been baptized in one Spirit to form only one body . . . and we have been given to drink of a unique Spirit" Here also the Spirit plays a double role: he is the one in whom we were baptized to form one body; he is the one who showers all the members of the body; and the following verses describe the activity of the different members of the unique body of Christ.<sup>63</sup>

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passages permettent d'entrevoir une distinction entre le baptême et le rite qui confère l'Esprit-Saint; c'est d'abord l'épisode du chapitre 8."

<sup>62</sup> St. Augustine, *Sermon 71, 19* (New Advent translation).

<sup>63</sup> "Or, si l'on y regarde de près, ce sont les expressions de saint Paul lui-même dans la première lettre aux Corinthiens (12, 13): 'Tous, en effet, nous avons été baptisés en un seul Esprit pour former qu'un seul corps ... et nous avons tous été abreuvés d'un unique Esprit.' Ici aussi l'Esprit joue un double rôle: il est celui en lequel on est baptisé pour ne former qu'un seul corps; il est celui qui abreuve tous les membres de ce Corps; et les versets suivants décrivent l'activité de ces membres divers dans l'unique Corps du Christ."

This citation agrees with what contemporary New Testament scholarship thinks of 1 Cor 12:13.<sup>64</sup> If it were possible, for want of page limitation, the different commentaries of biblical pericopes where the Holy Spirit is mentioned by the Fathers of the Church would reveal clearly their different takes on those passages. However, let few citations suffice to make our point. Indeed, St. Basil comes very close to our citation from Lécuyer's:

Through the Holy Spirit comes our restoration to paradise, our ascension into the kingdom of heaven, our return to the adoption of sons, . . . Furthermore, from this too may be apprehended the difference between the grace that comes from the Spirit and the baptism by water: in that John indeed baptized with water, but our Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Ghost. I indeed, he says, baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that comes after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire. . . . God works the differences of operations, and the Lord the diversities of administrations, but all the while the Holy Spirit is present too of His own will, dispensing distribution of the gifts according to each recipient's worth. . . and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which works all in all. But all these, it is said, works that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will. 1 Corinthians 12:11.<sup>65</sup>

St. John Chrysostom argues in like manner in his commentary on 1 Cor 12:13. The reception of the Holy Spirit is post baptismal but before Holy Communion. The Holy Spirit grants us the gift of identity as one body of Christ as well as different gifts to each Christian - the two roles of the Holy Spirit:

'For in one Spirit, says he, were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free.' Now his meaning is this: that which established us to become one body and regenerated us, is one Spirit: for not in one Spirit was one baptized, and another another. And not only is that which has baptized us one, but also that unto which He baptized us, i.e., for which He baptized us, is one. For we were baptized not that so many several bodies might be formed, but that we might all preserve one with another the perfect nature of one body: i.e., that we might all be one body, into the same were we baptized. . . . But to me he appears now to speak of that visitation of the Spirit which takes place in us after Baptism and before the

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<sup>64</sup> Ayodele AYENI, *The Antithesis "Neither Jew nor Greek" in Galatians 3:28a: Its Context, Application, Meaning and Origin*, Frankfurt: Lambert Akademikerverlag, 2012, pp. 130-186.

<sup>65</sup> St. Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 36-37.

Mysteries. And he said, We were made to drink, because this metaphorical speech suited him extremely well for his proposed subject: as if he had said respecting plants and a garden, that by the same fountain all the trees are watered, or by the same water; so also here, we all drank the same Spirit, we enjoyed the same grace, says he.<sup>66</sup>

Instead of quoting *ad nauseam*, we make ours the conclusion of Lécuyer, a conclusion which may be said of his article:

The Fathers of the Church admitted, therefore, two successive interventions of the Holy Spirit, the second being [in new Christians - les régénérés] the source of supernatural activity and growth in the Body of Christ. From there, it was normal that they came to consider Confirmation as act of perfection (un perfectionnement), since the simple baptized person was not yet perfect because he had not yet in him the spiritual virtue which permits him to fully fulfil his function as a member of the Church.<sup>67</sup>

For a complete bibliography on the Fathers of the Church, it suffices to consult Lécuyer's article. Since our preoccupation is not the theology of Confirmation, on the contrary, we want to show the double roles of the Holy Spirit, in order to argue that the proponents of the theology of Confirmation as a sacrament of "maturity" forget the Holy Spirit's role of conferment of identity at Confirmation, they only emphasize the aspect of the gifts of the Holy Spirit for mission and edification of the Church or the Body of Christ. This separation, by post-dating the sacrament of Confirmation, instead of having the sacraments of Initiation all at once, is based on a wrong understanding of the Holy Spirit's function at Confirmation. Therefore, the retention of the sacraments of Initiation as previewed by the Church does not negate some kind of ceremony/initiation into adulthood for Catholics; this is already anticipated in the revival of the catechumenate as a center/context for faith-development.

The difference in nomenclature between the West (Confirmation) and the East (Christmation) is suggestive, once more, of the two roles of the Holy Spirit. The East, since the sacrament for the reception of the Holy Spirit (Confirmation) is not attached to the episcopate calls it Christmation, in order to emphasize the

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<sup>66</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 30 on First Corinthians* (1 Cor 12:13-14).

<sup>67</sup> Joseph LÉCUYER, "La Confirmation chez les pères," p. 34: "Les pères admettaient donc deux interventions successives de l'Esprit-Saint, la deuxième étant dans les régénérés source d'activité surnaturelle et de croissance dans le Corps du Christ. De là, il était normal que l'on en vînt à considérer la confirmation comme un perfectionnement, le simple baptisé n'étant pas encore parfait puisqu'il n'a pas encore en soi-même la vertu spirituelle qui lui permet de remplir pleinement sa fonction de membre de l'Église."



configuration of a Christian who receives the Holy Spirit to Christ. Notice that the ritual is done using the oil of Chrism. By calling this sacrament "Confirmation," the West loses focus on this "identity" question, no wonder Jerome calls it a sacrament which shows the power of the bishop. Cyril of Jerusalem presents the Eastern perspective succinctly in these words, quoted in Lécuyer's article:

Having been *baptized into Christ*, and *put on Christ Galatians 3:27*, you have been made conformable to the Son of God; for God having *foreordained us unto adoption as sons Ephesians 1:5*, made us *to be conformed to the body of Christ's glory*. *Philippians 3:21* Having therefore become *partakers of Christ Hebrews 3:14*, you are properly called Christs, and of you God said, *Touch not My Christs*, or anointed. Now you have been made Christs, by receiving the antitype of the Holy Ghost; and all things have been wrought in you by imitation, because you are images of Christ. He washed in the river Jordan, and having imparted of the fragrance of His Godhead to the waters, He came up from them; and the Holy Ghost in the fullness of His being lighted on Him, like resting upon like. And to you in like manner, after you had come up from the pool of the sacred streams, there was given an Unction, the anti-type of that wherewith Christ was anointed; and this is the Holy Ghost; of whom also the blessed Esaias, in his prophecy respecting Him, said in the person of the Lord, *The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me: He has sent Me to preach glad tidings to the poor* Isaiah 61:1. . . . But beware of supposing this to be plain ointment. For as the Bread of the Eucharist, after the invocation of the Holy Ghost, is mere bread no longer, but the Body of Christ, so also this holy ointment is no more simple ointment, nor (so to say) common, after invocation, but it is Christ's gift of grace, and, by the advent of the Holy Ghost, is made fit to impart His Divine Nature. Which ointment is symbolically applied to your forehead and your other senses; and while your body is anointed with the visible ointment, your soul is sanctified by the Holy and life-giving Spirit.<sup>68</sup>

Here, we see that through the oil of Chrism and Chrismation, conferment of identity is intrinsic to the sacrament and not the minister of the sacrament. Furthermore, the evolution<sup>69</sup> of the name of the sacrament through which the Holy Spirit is given and received demonstrates the importance of the oil of Chrism, which is put in direct link with sacramental Character which comes with the "seal"

<sup>68</sup> *Id.*, "La Confirmation chez les pères," p. 40. Cf. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 21, 1-3, (On the Mysteries III, 1-3, P. G., 33, 1088-1089 [New Advent translation]).

<sup>69</sup> Botte has written an article tracing this evolution. Cf. Bernard BOTTE, "Le vocabulaire ancien de la confirmation," *La Maison-Dieu* 54, 1958, 5-22.

or "mark" of the Holy Spirit on the recipient of the anointing. Some Pauline passages are important in this regard:

But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed (χρίσας) us, by putting his seal (σφραγισάμενος) on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first installment" (2 Cor 1:21-22 NRS).

In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked (ἐσφραγίσθητε) with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit" (Eph 1:13 NRS).

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked (ἐσφραγίσθητε) with a seal for the day of redemption" (Eph 4:30 NRS).<sup>70</sup>

Also, Pauline perspective on the creation of communion ties into one the action of the Holy Spirit and the ritual of baptism. 1 Cor 12:13 clearly shows the inseparable link between baptism and Confirmation. Instead of the need for communion to be created through the ministry of the bishop, to justify the appellation of the sacrament of the dispensation of that Holy Spirit "Confirmation," what seems analogously appropriate as terminology for what is happening is Chrismation - an anointing which configures its recipient to Christ - Identity marker.

### **African Rites of Passage and Initiations, and the Unity of the Sacraments of Initiation**

The liturgical document of Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 65, expressly permits an African inculturation of the sacraments of Initiation when it states:

In mission lands it is found that some of the peoples already make use of initiation rites. Elements from these, when capable of being adapted to Christian ritual, may be admitted along with those already found in Christian tradition, according to the norm laid down in Art. 37-40, of this Constitution.

In line with this express permission, at least, one can provide an African solution to a Catholic-universal problem of the place to be accorded to the sacrament of Confirmation with an appropriate theology to back it up.

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. Bernard BOTTE, "Le vocabulaire ancien de la confirmation," *La Maison-Dieu* 54, 1958, pp.8-14. It is worth mentioning the link between "to anoint" (χρίω) and "to mark" (σφραγίζειν): the conferment of "mark" or "character" is made the consequence of anointing in 2 Cor 1:21-22.

### **An Afro-Vision of Initiation**

There is a clear distinction, for Africans, between the rites of passage and initiation rites.<sup>71</sup> From Uzukwu's use of the rites of passage, as regards the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, they are fundamentally the rituals marking out significant phases of human development within a social milieu. They serve as communal accompaniments of its members and means for reinforcing social cohesion.<sup>72</sup> According to Uzukwu, "In Africa there are periodic rituals to mark the seasons and rituals of transition: passages from childhood through adolescence to adulthood and old age. Any event of life - success or failure, health or sickness, arrival or departure - is marked by ritual."<sup>73</sup>

If rites of passage emphasize an individual's insertion into a given community as its member, and keep alive the individual's link to the group, rites of Initiations, such as circumcision, are identity markers and conferrals of unique identity to members within a given community. The Ibibio's circumcision of children is a gender conferment initiation rite. A non-circumcised child is gender neutral; in order to confer a gender on a child, circumcision is important: a circumcised child becomes a boy or a girl, as the case may be. A circumcised adolescent boy or girl transits into a woman or a man.

The three stages of Initiation rites, pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal are important because of the identities they confer. The individuals who were separated (liminal) from the community were members of the community prior to this separation (pre-liminal); their return (post-liminal) to the same community, after their seclusion, is considered differently to their prior status - they return as new members with new identities and roles which accompany these identities. The "forest of symbols," to use Victor Turner's term, in which the initiands were kept, brought them into contact with three different strata of the community: 1) its initiated members, 2) the knowledge and responsibility of their soon-to-be-acquired identity, and 3) the spirits of the custodians or ancestors of the community.

An important aspect of initiation rites often forgotten is the role of initiation in making the initiates into potential ancestors, those who are expected to keep the customs and practices of the society. In Africa, one becomes an ancestor by being

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<sup>71</sup> Majawa lists a host of rites from his Yao tribal group of Malawi, which includes rites of first pregnancy, childbirth divorce and funerals, among others. Cf. Clement Chinkambako Abenguni MAJAWA, *African Christian Reconciliation in the Light of Yao Traditions*, Nairobi, Kenya: Creations Enterprises, 2009, pp. 10-59.

<sup>72</sup> Elochukwu E. UZUKWU, *Worship as Body Language: Introduction to Christian Worship, An African Orientation*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997, pp. 41-54.

<sup>73</sup> *Id.*, p. 50.

an exemplary member of a community, and initiation rites pave the way for this realization.<sup>74</sup>

At this juncture, it is worthwhile to return to Uzukwu's option to qualify what happens in the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist as rites of passage because of the social incorporation of the sacrament of Baptism and the repetitive nature of the sacrament of the Eucharist.<sup>75</sup> The different stages of life are nourished by the Eucharist, even the moment of death (Viaticum). This shows how the social body takes care of one of its own. However, the conferment of identity, through initiation rites, emphasizes uniqueness and the gifts which define individuals' roles within the community. In this vein, the Greco-Roman Initiation rites, which pope Paul VI copies for the sacraments of Initiation, only qualifies as a rite of passage, because it neglects this distinction between the conferment role of initiations and the accompaniment role of rites of passage.<sup>76</sup>

The criticism of Chauvet<sup>77</sup> is *ad rem*, when he refuses to see the present understanding of the catechumenate to be a continuum of old rites of initiation, but a simple extension of the different stages in the preparations of the sacrament of Baptism. Regrettably, the present understanding of the catechumenate as well as the understanding of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist are only nominally sacraments of initiation, it is better to call them sacraments of passage, because Confirmation is made to be the sacrament of maturity, with the catechumenate preparing adolescents for adulthood through the sacrament of Confirmation.

The ambiguity which still surrounds the theological meaning of "initiation" in pontifical teachings notwithstanding, *Ad Gentes* 14, sees the Catechumenate as a period of initiation into Christianity. This initiation is undertaken by the whole of the local church in which the candidates are being prepared. In the words of *Ad Gentes* 14:

Those who, through the Church, have accepted from God a belief in Christ are admitted to the catechumenate by liturgical rites. The catechumenate is not a mere expounding of doctrines and precepts, but a training period in the whole Christian life, and an apprenticeship duty drawn out, during which disciples are joined to Christ their Teacher. Therefore, catechumens should be

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<sup>74</sup> Bartholomew ABANUKA, *A New Essay On African Philosophy*, Enugu: Snaap Press, 1994, pp. 33-50, esp. pp. 33-35.

<sup>75</sup> Uzukwu dedicates chapter 4 of his book to this reality. Also, his bibliography is a treasure trove.

<sup>76</sup> For a succinct distinction between the rites of Passage and Initiation, in the works of Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner, see: Jean-Yves HAMELINE, "Les rites des passage d'Arnold Van Gennep," *La Maison-Dieu* 228, 2001/4, 7-39 at 12-22.

<sup>77</sup> Louis-Marie CHAUVET, "Étapes vers le baptême ou étapes du baptême?," *La Maison-Dieu* 185, 1991, 35-46.

properly instructed in the mystery of salvation and in the practice of Gospel morality, and by sacred rites which are to be held at successive intervals, they should be introduced into the life of faith, of liturgy, and of love, which is led by the People of God. Then, when the sacraments of Christian initiation have freed them from the power of darkness (cf. Col. 1:13), having died with Christ been buried with Him and risen together with Him (cf. Rom. 6:4-11; Col. 2:12-13; 1 Peter 3:21-22; Mark 16:16), they receive the Spirit (cf. 1 Thess. 3:5-7; Acts 8:14-17) of adoption of sons and celebrate the remembrance of the Lord's death and resurrection together with the whole People of God. . . Finally, the juridic status of catechumens should be clearly defined in the new code of Canon law. For since they are joined to the Church, they are already of the household of Christ, and not seldom they are already leading a life of faith, hope, and charity.

To have cited *Ad Gentes, in extenso*, gives us ample comparisons with African rites of passage and initiation: especially, the roles of the members of the community as well as the kind of knowledge to be transmitted at the Catechumenate. Here, the two sides to what happens in Christian initiation rites and those of African rites dove-tail: 1) initiation into the wisdom and knowledge of a people, and 2) incorporation into the life of the community.

This tangential point between African rituals both of passage and initiations with pope Paul VI's understanding of the rite of initiation is the necessity for every stage in life to be hallowed by God's presence and the presence of a distinctive mark of each initiation rite. Indeed, the Christian understanding of "mystery" is different from the processes of initiations in other religions, nonetheless, the anthropological reality of rituals of initiations could corroborate the need for the Church to accompany Christians through life with teachings and instructions in the faith up until death. The repetitive nature of the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist provides the environment and motif for the constant reminder and animation of Christians' continuous practice of their faith. St. Paul used Eucharistic assemblies as moments of catechizing (Acts 20:7-12).<sup>78</sup> This Pauline practice is close to Fr. Lecuyer's division of Christian initiation into History of Salvation (knowledge) and Community of Salvation (reality).<sup>79</sup>

As it were, the salvific dimension of the sacraments of Initiation is given in its potency, while awaiting its full blossoming at the end of time. The processes of the catechuminate are to enhance adherence and fidelity to the gift of salvation

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<sup>78</sup> Bouyer traces the Christian origins of the catechumenate to apostolic teachings on divine revelation. Cf. Louis BOUYER, *Life and Liturgy*, pp. 99-114.

<sup>79</sup> Joseph LECUYER, "Théologie de l'initiation chrétienne d'après les pères," *La Maison-Dieu* 58, 1959, 5-26.

received and its preservation up until natural death. The journey through life is sustained by the two dimensions of the Word and Body of Christ. The Word of God, the good news preached at every Eucharistic assembly, nourishes the mind; and, the Eucharist or Body of Christ nourishes the soul.

### **Conclusion**

It has been the contention of this article that the sacrament of Confirmation is better administered, as taught by the Catholic Church, alongside Baptism and Eucharist, with no separation (sacraments of Initiation) because, 1) Salvation cannot be postponed, and Confirmation is a sacrament of Salvation; 2) Confirmation confers a distinct "character" from that of Baptism, so it is a unique sacrament of conferment of Christian Identity. This is not a denial that the Holy Spirit also grants charisms, but we should be on guard so as not to confuse its role of conferment of Identity with the role of the Holy Spirit as distributor of charisms/spiritual gifts. 3) Finally, we argued that the need for Christian maturity in the faith is done through catechesis, homilies, family upbringing, and it is never finished with up until death; this reality equals the functions of the rites of passage in African traditions.

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