

**PROPOSITION OF THE CONFIRMATION COMMITTEE  
UP-TO-DATE DECISIONS AND CLARIFICATION WITH RESPECT TO BAPTISM AND CONFIRMATION**

The Confirmation Committee, assigned by the Collegium Doctorum, unanimously supports the following points, proposed by Professor Ferenc Szűcs, to be considered by the Synod of RCH:

1. The forefront of the investigations concerning baptism and confirmation has so far been focused on such church-sociological changes that followed as the result of secularization in the people's church setting. The most prominent feature of this is the double practice where, beside infant baptism, the number of adults who wish to undergo baptism and confirmation, is increasing. The latter case often results in liturgical confusion, as it is found difficult to handle the confirmation of those who undergo baptism as adults. One such case is when the two are separated in time, unjustified, that is, the adult receives quasi-infant baptism despite having confessed their faith and taken an oath in front of the congregation. Thus, the baptised adult may undergo confirmation together with the teenagers at a later time, or, if not baptised yet, receives baptism on the day before the confirmation, or at the beginning of the confirmation service.

Obviously, the confusion reflected in this practice follows from the lack of clarification: *what is actually considered confirmation*. It is well known that the reformers themselves refrained from the use of the term itself, as they rejected the exegesis of the events described in Acts 8, 14-17 which implies an apostolic confirmation by those who received baptism through Philip, widely practiced by the bishop successors of the apostles today. In any case, the emphasis lies with the fact that baptism as a sacrament does not need to be supplemented, especially as confirmation is not considered a sacrament. By maintaining the practice of infant baptism, however, the reformers considered it necessary that children take an exam as a closure of the catechism, then being authorized to participate in the holy communion. Bucer's Strassbourg practice, however, included laying on the hands, following apostolic patterns.

As our present confirmation practice comprises three well-separated parts, it could exactly be defined from a liturgical view, which one the adult baptism could fit into. Catechetical preparation and its examination are assignments shared by baptised children and adults preparing for baptism, even if, for practical reasons, not necessarily in the same group. Similarly to infant baptism, there is no difference in the order of confessing their faith and taking the oath. That is to say, if baptism takes place during the confirmation service, the confirmation liturgy should be interrupted at this point by the baptism, followed by the blessing of confirmation and the authorization to rights and obligations of the church members, first and foremost the invitation for communion. Thus, if it is a mixed group undergoing confirmation, the order of liturgy should be as follow:

- a) question referring to voluntary confession of faith, by nature including the exposition that it applies not only to the oath taken by parents and godparents, but also to the conscious decision of the individual
- b) Creed
- c) question concerning the reformed faith
- d) oath to follow Christ and be members of the Reformed Church
- e) baptism of the unbaptised in the name of the Holy Trinity
- f) blessing, authorization, etc.

At this point, regardless of confirmation, the age limit until which infant baptism may be consigned, shall be clarified. Our present practice of confirmation is at the age of 13-14, that is, it should be considered whether a separate infant baptism should be consigned above the age of 10.

Should we not, instead, encourage their involvement in catechesis or confirmation preparation, which leads to baptism as described above? In my view, in order to put an end to the heterodox practice, the Synod should rule an unambiguous resolution concerning both the order of the liturgy and the age limit.

2. The above mentioned church sociological situation gives rise to further questions both in the seriousness of baptism and confirmation. We should pay attention to two extrem views. One of these tries to validate strictly the criteria for church membership and discipline, while the opposing view represents the cheap consumer-friendly church, satisfying the parental demands without conditions. Moreover, the latter practice overrules the strict conditions of the former, as those rejected in one congregation can easily get hold of church service at another congregation – sometimes coming from a different denomination, with no reformed church background at all.

A unified, legally regulated solution could be created, however, both the individual situations and the mission command of baptism require a more sophisticated theological judgement. If we the mission of the church is indeed our starting point, then it is worth considering the advantageous momentum of our inheritance as a people's church, namely that it has not been us who went to the end of the earth, but those seeking baptism came to us. The primary question, thus, is not how great their knowledge or commitment is, but how seriously we take the sacrament of baptism. That is, if our starting point is the commission of teaching and making disciples, we need to clarify merely from the point of the future, what we expect from parents and godparents along with baptism, and also that we take their promise one hundred per cent seriously.

A practical task here, beyond a discussion with the parents before the baptism, could be handing out a simple, 8-10 page publication (may be combined with the memorial certificate), which interprets the baptism oath, includes a few prayers and basic information on our church, an interleaf about the local congregation, and a register form - to be used in case of moving places. This practice could show that our conditions are not so much connected to the past as to the future of the child and the family. Strict conditions facing those who wish to join contradict Jesus's missionary approach of the great supper – it is not about conditions, but consequences.

In this process it is imperative that the third question, addressed to the congregation, is taken seriously. The dates of birth and addresses of children baptised could be registered in a calendar, the promise of „keeping them in love and prayer“ could be put into practice once a month in a Bible study or prayer meeting, and a card could also be sent to the family. This could be delivered by the missionary co-worker or an elder who lives nearby.

3. At a time when roots and traditions are lost, we, protestants, should also take the advantage of the sacred rites and ceremonies more seriously, and do so without falling into the trap or under the spell of ritualism or „ex opere operato“. Yet it is also worth knowing that even this latter is not exclusively a Roman Catholic or Orthodox proprium (property). As members of the Reformed Church, our confession is that neither baptism, nor communion is ex opere operantis, that is, depending on the aptitude of the consigner, but truly ex opere operato, valid on the basis of Jesus's promise connected to the consigned sacred act. Sign, mark, seal and token, as Calvin said – it is not our promise, not even our conversion or confession of faith (cf. view of „free church“), but the reality of salvation in Christ that is sealed and made personal.

This is why we are not allowed to apply the words of John the Baptist in reference with Christian baptism: we baptise with water only, but, hopefully, we will be followed by the One who baptises with fire and Holy Spirit. Doing so would mean that we only consign the baptism of John the Baptist. We, however, baptise our children commissioned by the One who promises and gives His Holy Spirit. (The practice of the Orthodox Church follows from this idea – they consign baptism directly followed by confirmation. As confirmation is not a separate sacrament for them, they do not require any supplement to baptism. Bringing up children in faith and confession of faith is, naturally, required.)

This consideration should free us from concerns such as whether confirmation should wait until the individual comes to personal faith and then have a confession of their faith as an adult. We do not argue that this approach is well-grounded, but a personal testimony could not substitute the church order, baptism should be followed by the confession of faith and involvement in the holy communion. We confess the faith of the Church in the most personal voice of the Apostles' Creed. For this reason, it is good to practice a personal testimony with new converts, yet we do not leave confirmation, exactly because of its strong ties to infant baptism.

Naturally, at this point we should omit several practical points, concerning the urgent issue how our youth could indeed be integrated into our churches' lives. Even though we could not address specific methods here, this is exactly the most crucial question, one that affects all else that is worth talking about. Let us only note here that we should refrain from statistical optimism just as from pessimism. It would be worth, however, in the interest of reality, to prepare an analysis in terms of 13-15 years, comparing the ratio of those baptised and confirmed in the respective years. The material provided by Calvin Calendar, going back to decades may imply a degree of optimism, along with those youth conferences and festivals attended by reformed youth in impressive numbers. We do not have surveys on the drop-outs and the marginalized youth. Despair would not be an attitude worthy of our faith, however. We must believe that broken personal ties may strengthen again at any time. But this is not the mathematics of „1x1“, but that of the „I believe“ – quoting Endre Gyökössi.

From the view of developmental psychology, the timing of confirmation could be debated. Effective arguments could be listed both for earlier or later time. Yet, an argument of socio-psychology should also be considered in this list, namely the one that acknowledges the rites of coming of age in every culture. These had greater significance in old rural tradition, but they are still worth considering nowadays, whether the church should intentionally destroy such traditions that mean significant landmarks in young people's lives. All the more so, if, with no better alternative, we have only seen dubious attempts. This argument is, of course, not aimed at speaking against preparation or more effective methods for deepening personal faith – including an ever more up-to-date catechism and more useable handbooks of adult catechesis.

As far as adult confirmation material is concerned, demands should be assessed precisely, along with the tried and tested guidelines. Here one simple model is not sufficient. The style of methods and guidelines should be aimed at various different target groups, from the world view-apologetic educated demands to the simple, straight sketches of Christianity and the reformed faith.

In the – often frightening – plethora of school textbooks of our days our catechetical material provides both schools and other catechesis with a rather limited supply. The great pool does not always strengthen the reformed tradition, what is more, a „nihil obstat“ („no obstacles“) censor sign would sometimes do good service. As far as I am concerned, I would not be happy to stamp this sign e.g. on that millenarist table of the history of salvation that I have seen on the walls of numerous Religious Education classrooms, or even on the walls for reformed church schools.

Let me close these thoughts by saying that for us, the locus classicus of confirmation is not in Acts 8, but in 2 Corinthians 1, 21. Here Paul writes: „*Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us,*“ The literal translation of *bebaión hümasz szün hümin* in Latin is *con-firmatio*. It expresses: being confirmed together in Christ. This sentence shows the christological and ecclesiological depths and connections of confirmation. It is not an isolated ceremony, but the strengthening of the loosened tenons and weakened connections of the church, improving its backbone and cohesion. Confirmation is something we all need at all times, which we cannot receive in isolation, only together with others, in the community of Christ's body. At the times of all our weaknesses and falling apart this is the comforting message of Paul's words, that it is not us doing the confirmation, but God, of whom this we may expect and ask.

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