

CONFIRMATION
IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH

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TO MY STUDENTS AND COLLEAGUES

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ABBREVIATIONS

- A Agenda, altar book, church book, formulary, or liturgy.
- BS *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche, heraus-gegeben im Gedenkjahr der Augsbu-
rgischen Konfession 1930.* 4th, rev. ed. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959.
- BC *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. Theodore G.
Tappert in collaboration with Jaroslav Pelikan, Robert H. Fischer, Arthur C. Piepkorn. Philadelphia:
Muhlenberg Press, 1959.
- CO Church Order or *Kirchenordnung*.
- CT *Concordia Triglotta: Die symbolischen Bücher der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche, deutsch-lateinisch-
englisch, als Denkmal der vierhundertjährigen Jubelfeier der Reformation, anno Domini 1917, herausge-
geben auf Beschluss der evangelisch-lutherischen Synode von Missouri, Ohio und andern Staaten.* St.
Louis: Concordia Publishing House. 1921.
- CR *Corpus Reformatorum*.
- Graff Graff, Paul. *Geschichte der Auflösung der alten gottesdienstlichen Formen in der evangelischen Kirche
Deutschlands.* 2d, rev. ed. 2 vols. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1937—39.
- LW *Luther's Works.* American ed. Jaroslav [Jan] Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, general eds. St. Louis:
Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg [later Fortress] Press, 1955—.
- TLH *The Lutheran Hymnal.* Authorized by the Synods Constituting The Evangelical Lutheran Synodical
Conference of North America. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941.
- R-G Rietschel, Georg. *Lehrbuch der Liturgik.* 2d ed., rev. Paul Graff. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht,
1952.
- Rich Richter, Ae[milius] Lfudwig]. *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des 16. Jahrhunderts.* 2 vols. Weimar:
Landes-Industriecomptoirs, 1846.
- ReuC Reu, [Johann] M[ichael]. *Catechetics or Theory and Practice of Religious Instruction.* 2d, rev. ed. Chicago:
Wartburg Publishing House, 1927.
- ReuK ———. *D. Martin Luthers Kleiner Katechismus: Die Geschichte seiner Entstehung, seiner Verbreitung und
seines Gebrauchs.* Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1929.
- ReuQ ———. *Quellen zur Geschichte des kirchlichen Unterrichts in der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands
zwischen 1530 und 1600.* 8 vols. Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1904—35.
- Seh Sehling, Emil. *Die Evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahr-hunderts.* 6 vols. Leipzig: O. R. Reisland,
1902—13. 3 vols. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1955—.
- SBH *Service Book and Hymnal of the Lutheran Church in America.* Authorized by the Churches cooperating
in The Commission on the Liturgy and The Commission on the Hymnal. Music ed. Minneapolis, Minn.:
Augsburg Publishing House; et al., 1958.
- SL *Dr. Martin Luthers Sammtliche Schriften*, ed. Joh[ann] Georg Walch. New, rev. ed. 25 vols. St. Louis:
Lutherischer Concordia-Verlag, 1880—1910.
- WA *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe.* Weimar: Hermann Bohlau and Hermann Bohb.us
Nachfolger, 1883—.

CONFIRMATION
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PREFACE

A book is never the product solely of the person whose name decorates the title page. A book is the result of the interaction of many minds, forces, and experiences with the one who is finally regarded the author. *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church* is no exception. This is no attempt to pass the responsibility for its contents to others, for the final work must remain the sole responsibility of the author. It should serve, however, as an acknowledgment of thanks to the many persons, too many to mention individually, who have directly or indirectly contributed to the making of this book.

Perhaps my first real concern about confirmation may be traced to a superintendents' conference of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in 1950, which suggested that a major study be made on confirmation. In the interest of stimulating someone to take over this task I was asked by the Synod's Board of Parish Education to draw up a prospectus for such a study. This appeared as a brief study in *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XXII (August 1951), 600—607. But no one came forward to volunteer for the assignment. Whether this was due to a lack of interest or because the task was too formidable, I could not tell at the time.

I became more personally involved in the subject by invitations to conduct workshops on confirmation in Austin, Tex. (1953), and St. Louis, Mo. (1954). Still little happened. It was not till August 1954, when I had undergone the stimulating and rigorous experience of the seminar conducted by the Lutheran Intersynodical Committee on Parish Education in Racine, Wis., that I felt I should take up my own proposal and make a serious study of the history and practice of confirmation. Additional requests to conduct workshops at River Forest, Ill. (1955), St. Louis, Mo. (1956), and Buffalo, N. Y. (1957), served to whet my interest and made me realize more fully the general interest in the subject as well as the broad scope of the problem. A fourmonth sabbatical leave from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, served as a welcome opportunity to make this serious study into the historical and theological background of confirmation. In preparation for my leave I received the assistance of a graduate fellow, Mr. Richard G. Maassel, now pastor in Glenview, Ill., who did some invaluable spadework in the Lutheran periodical literature of the United States. Further assistance was given me in the same area some time later by Mr. Harold J. Teuscher, a graduate fellow, now pastor in Milpitas, Calif.

It should be said that from the very start the Board of Parish Education of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, especially its Executive Secretary, Dr. Arthur L. Miller, showed much interest in the study and encouraged me to write this book. The first draft, called "Strengthen Them," completed in 1960, was therefore submitted to the board and to a number of pastors in the field for critical analysis. It was generally agreed that there was too much material for one volume and that eventually two books might be published, one setting forth the general principles and the structure of confirmation, the other dealing with the application, emphasizing

such matters as the curriculum, teaching methods and activities, and evaluation. Meanwhile the section on the theological implications of confirmation appeared in *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XXXI (March and April 1960).

A condensation of the proposed book was presented to the convention of the Iowa District East of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in 1960 and later duplicated under the title “Reconstructing Confirmation for Our Day.” The following year it was presented to the convention of the Western District, which resolved to print and circulate it among its congregations for further study. “Reconstructing Confirmation for Our Day,” or parts of it with some elaborations, has been presented to many conferences, institutes, workshops, and congregations since then, so that by now more than 2,000 pastors, teachers, and laymen have heard major portions of the book. It has been no end of surprise that my basic theses have been so well received and have elicited so much interest. The constructive criticism which these meetings elicited have been an invaluable aid in the revision of the manuscript.

The original manuscript, “Strengthen Them,” has been used as a tentative text for an elective course in confirmation instruction at Concordia Seminary since 1960. This use has given me additional opportunity to evaluate and refine the views expressed.

It soon became evident that the confirmation rite, as commonly found among the Lutherans in America, needed some drastic revisions if my theses were correct. After a presentation to the Commission on Worship, Liturgies, and Hymnology of the Synodical Conference, I was encouraged to prepare a more suitable rite which might be included in a revision of the agenda of the Synodical Conference. A proposed rite was later accepted as a working basis, and the commission arranged to have it appear in a clergy edition of *Advance*, IX (April 1962). The rite was later printed in a separate pamphlet. Many of the pastors expressed their interest in the proposed rite, used it, and made some valuable suggestions for its improvement. As a result of these suggestions and the commission’s own recommendations the rite was revised and has been included in Chapter vii.

One of the most difficult tasks of the study was to draw up a set of objectives for confirmation instruction. Here again the help of others needs to be acknowledged. Because the curriculum commission of the Board for Higher Education was interested in describing what a Lutheran student should be when he enters a synodical high school for its ministerial training program, the commission requested me to submit my objectives for confirmation as a possible contribution to its study. A subcommittee of the commission—Dr. Walter Wolbrecht, Dr. Carl S. Meyer, and myself—carefully reviewed the objectives again. In their revised form they will be found in Chapter vi. In a slightly modified form these objectives were adopted by the commission and later by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to describe what may be expected of freshmen enrolling in one of its synodical high schools.

This brief sketch of the background of this book should show conclusively that when I acknowledge the help of many others in its writing, my acknowledgment is not prompted by humility. It is offered merely in the interest of the truth. It should serve also to explain to my former parish, Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, San Antonio, Tex., why I could not have practiced then what I propose now. The book tries in its own way to make amends to them for making in their midst all the mistakes which I now view with alarm.

The book is dedicated to my students and colleagues for their encouragement and help. A final expression of gratitude must be made to my colleague, Harry G. Coiner, who was always interested in having me address myself to the current situation, or to use his expression, to the spot “where the rubber hits the road.”

ARTHUR C. REPP

ALMIGHTY GOD, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath begotten thee again of water and of the Spirit and hath forgiven thee all thy sins, strengthen thee with His grace unto life everlasting. Amen.

The Postbaptismal Prayer

PROLOG

DISCOVERING THE PROBLEM FOR RECONSTRUCTING CONFIRMATION

Lutheran clergymen generally regard the instruction of the catechumens for confirmation as one of the most important responsibilities of their ministry. However, even the more conscientious pastor is ready to admit that the completed task frequently fails to give him deep satisfaction. The apparent cause often lies in that other concerns in the parish have forced him to neglect this task. The truth may well be that he might not have permitted himself to be forced into neglecting his catechumens if he had not been uneasy about his responsibilities in the first place. He is frequently haunted by a series of questions that in combination leave him with a sense of frustration. What is he really trying to do with his confirmation class? Does he have a clear picture of his purpose? If the curriculum were improved or if the pastor used some of the newer teaching techniques, would the results be more satisfying? Because of questions like these much time and effort has been expended for the improvement of the curriculum and of teaching methods. While the changes have no doubt brought some temporary relief, most pastors soon realize that improvements of this type do not get at the heart of the problem.

What in fact is the problem in the current practice of confirmation? Is there perhaps a basic problem underlying those usually discussed? Can it be isolated from those problems stemming from it? If there is a basic problem, it should be found in the meaning and purpose of confirmation itself. What constitutes the practice of confirmation as it comes to us from preceding generations? What are the theological presuppositions on which our confirmation practice rests? Are we certain of the answers to these questions, at least to some of the more important ones? If not, then we have isolated the problem. If an examination shows that we are not certain what the function of confirmation is and what the goals should be, it should be evident that we cannot begin to solve the secondary but nonetheless important problems related to the curriculum and to teaching methods, to mention only two. This study therefore proposes to make a historical and theological approach to the reconstruction of confirmation for our day. In this approach we will examine the relation of confirmation to the means of grace, the Gospel and the sacraments, and from this relation determine what the function and goal of confirmation should be. The historical examination will further seek answers to important related questions. What has been the development of confirmation during the long history of the Christian church? Has confirmation uniformly served the same purpose in the Lutheran

Church? Are all the emphases and constituent parts as presently observed in harmony with the basic tenets of Lutheran theology? How much of our practice is hallowed by tradition rather than by the Holy Scriptures?

One European theologian has observed: “Confirmation is one of the strongest if not the strongest component of the church’s customs. At the same time confirmation is most seriously burdened by the danger and the reality of being untruthful.”¹ What is “untruthful” in our practice? Is the church untruthful when it requires a vow? Is it untruthful when it speaks of a renewal of the baptismal covenant? an acceptance into membership in the Lutheran Church or in a congregation? or when it practices the laying on of hands? Do pastors unwittingly preach some of this untruth in their sermons or reflect it in their Sunday bulletins and periodicals? Do Lutherans witness untruthfully in their hymns on the day of confirmation? Even the man who is not interested in the history of confirmation, perhaps because he prefers to be rootless and regards tradition as unimportant when discussing practical problems of the parish, needs to know whether his proposed reforms or curricular changes are theologically sound and Lutheran in practice. The historical and theological approach to confirmation will soon isolate the basic problem facing the Lutheran Church and will help it find many of the answers it seeks in reconstructing confirmation for present-day conditions.

¹ Martin Schmidt, “Konfirmation im Lichte von Schrift, Bekenntnis und Geschichte der Kirche,” *Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*, XIII (April 15, 1959), 125.

CHAPTER I

CONFIRMATION IN THE CHURCH OF THE REFORMATION

Confirmation Before the Reformation

Lutheran confirmation is not a continuation of confirmation as practiced in the early church, nor as it is found later in the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. The Lutheran tradition has only the name “confirmation” in common with these churches. In the early church, confirmation was a part of the rite of Baptism.¹ After the candidates were baptized on Easter Eve, they were “confirmed” with chrism, prayers, the sign of the cross, and the laying on of hands, and on Easter morning they were permitted to make their first Communion.² Candidates who for one reason or another could not be initiated at this time were given a second opportunity on Pentecost Eve. A remnant of this early practice of confirmation has survived in liturgical form in the Lutheran Church through Martin Luther’s *Taufbüchlein* (1526). It is found in the prayer offered immediately after the Sacrament of Baptism has been administered.³ We know it as the postbaptismal prayer, which reads in part: “Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath begotten thee again of water and of the Spirit and hath forgiven thee all thy sins, strengthen [confirm] thee with His grace unto life ever-lasting. Amen.”

With the growth of the Christian church and especially with the increased number of infant baptisms, bishops began to delegate their authority to parish priests, permitting them to baptize at any time. In the Eastern churches priests were permitted also to confirm, provided they used chrism which had been blessed by the bishop. In the Western churches, however, Rome forbade the administration of confirmation except by the bishop. Where the Roman liturgy came into use, Baptism and confirmation became distinct and separate rites.⁴ Because of this separation the idea gradually emerged during medieval times that confirmation was a complement to Baptism. At first the rite was greatly to be desired because it gave the Christian the added gift of the Holy Spirit, but later it was deemed necessary for salvation. To summarize broadly, one may say that in the Western churches Baptism was intended for the forgiveness of sins and confirmation for the bestowal of the Holy Spirit, though many Roman theologians believed that the Spirit was bestowed also in Holy Baptism.

Already in the first half of the 12th century Hugo of St. Victor (d. 1114) referred to confirmation as the second sacrament. Similar thoughts were expressed by Alexander of Hales

(d. ca. 1245), William of Auxere (d. 1230), Bonaventura (1221—74), Aquinas (ca. 1224—74), and other medieval teachers.⁵ Therefore when in November 1439 the Council of Florence designated confirmation a sacrament through the papal decree *Pro Armenis* of Eugene IV, the doctrine had already been generally accepted.⁶

Confirmation now became a part of the Roman sacramental system and was said to bestow grace and a “certain spiritual and indelible sign” necessary for salvation, equal in power to all other sacraments. Confirmation was regarded as a complement to Baptism and was accompanied by the sacred chrism and the laying on of hands. It could be conferred only by the bishop.⁷ Considered an objective rite, it was said to be effective *ex opere operato* and was not necessarily associated with a period of instruction.⁸ Later, at the Council of Trent in March 1545, Session VII, the Roman Catholic Church fixed the doctrine while anathematizing the Protestant substitution for confirmation.⁹

Luther and the Confessions

Luther and the Confessions vehemently rejected the Roman concept of confirmation. With his usual vehemence against any teaching which he believed to be contrary to the Scriptures, Luther referred to the sacrament as monkey business (*Affenspiel*), fanciful deception (*Lügentand*),¹⁰ and mumbo-jumbo (*Gaukeliverk*).¹¹ He warned that confirmation must be avoided because it had no Scriptural basis. It lacked both the command and the promise of our Lord. The reformer’s prime concern centered in the Romanists’ denial that the Holy Spirit was given at Holy Baptism and in their insistence that He was given in confirmation through the chrism and the laying on of hands.¹² Since confirmation was said to complete Holy Baptism, Luther could not tolerate it. To him any abridgement of Holy Baptism was blasphemous.

The Lutheran Confessions followed Luther’s lead. The Augsburg Confession rejected the Roman view by implication when it did not include confirmation in the enumeration of the sacraments. The Apology rejected it directly because it lacked God’s express command and clear promise of grace.¹³ Veit Dietrich’s (1506—49) German translation of Philipp Melancthon’s (1497 to 1560) *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* (1537), inserted one of Luther’s invectives, “humbug,” in rejecting this rite.¹⁴

In spite of Luther’s strong judgment against confirmation, we find him ready to permit a reformed type of confirmation if he were assured that it would not infringe on Holy Baptism or be regarded a sacrament. In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520) he thought it “sufficient to regard confirmation as a certain churchly rite or sacramental ceremony, similar to other ceremonies, such as the blessing of water and the like.”¹⁵ In a sermon in 1522 he conceded, that he “would permit confirmation as long as it is understood that God knows nothing of it, and has said nothing about it, and that what the bishops claim for it is untrue. They mock our God when they say that it is one of God’s sacraments, for it is a purely human contrivance.”¹⁶ The following year he said: “Confirmation should not be observed as the bishops desire it. Nevertheless we do not find fault if every pastor examines the faith of the children to see whether it is good and sincere, lays hands on them, and confirms them.”¹⁷

Luther did very little to encourage an evangelical type of confirmation even though he approved Johannes Bugenhagen's Brandenburg Church Order (1540) and later subscribed to the Wittenberg Reformation (1545). While the Brandenburg church prescribed an evangelical type of confirmation, to be discussed more fully later,¹⁸ Luther's approval of the church order was not as wholehearted as one is sometimes led to believe. In a letter to Prince Joachim II of Brandenburg (1505—71), dated Dec. 4, 1539, Luther did approve of the church order in a general way but indicated that he had some misgivings about the Romanizing emphases which he characterized as *Witzelisch*,¹⁹ True, he did not single out confirmation, but in a letter written the following year in response to a pastor who had some misgivings about confirming an adult, Luther advised him to feel free to refuse to confirm if he had conscience scruples. He further expressed the thought that for the time being he would be willing to confirm since the prince had acknowledged that confirmation was not a sacrament.²⁰ From this it appears that Luther's approval of confirmation as prescribed in the church order was a concession he was ready to make for the time being as long as no compromise was involved.

Both Luther and Bugenhagen subscribed to the Wittenberg Reformation which had been drawn up by Melancthon. Among other things, this document suggested an evangelical type of confirmation, though somewhat different from the Brandenburg CO, placing greater emphasis on a promise of loyalty. As will be shown later, the Wittenberg Reformation reflected the views of Martin Bucer (1491—1551) that had influenced Melancthon at the time.²¹

These few references exhaust Luther's views on confirmation. Actually confirmation did not play an important role in his thoughts. His interest took a different tack. He was concerned primarily with catechetical instruction. To understand Luther we must hear what he has to say about Christian instruction. There were a number of reasons for his emphasis. The initial sacrament of Holy Baptism carried with it the obligation for the parents and the sponsors to see to it that the child was instructed, because its faith, generated by the sacrament, needed to be kept alive and nurtured by the Word. "As long as there is no special congregation, this instruction [i. e., the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer] must be given from the pulpit at stated times or daily as may be needed and repeated or read aloud evening and morning in the homes for the children and the servants, if we want to train them as Christians."²² Thoughtful instruction on the part of the parents would result in better understanding of sermons and of Bible reading.

Perhaps of even greater importance was Luther's emphasis that all Christians, young and old, needed to be instructed so that they could partake of the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner. In his Latin Mass, Luther suggested that everyone who desired to commune first be examined and asked to give an account of his faith. He should, in particular, be able to indicate what he believed concerning the Lord's Supper and what he expected to receive from the Sacrament.²³ This same requirement was set forth in the *Instructions to Visitors to Saxony* (1528), which Melancthon drew up under Luther's direction.²⁴

Both catechisms of Luther emphasized the importance of instruction in preparation for the Lord's Supper. "If any refuse to receive your instructions, tell them that they deny Christ and are no Christians. They should not be admitted to the sacrament, be accepted as sponsors in Baptism, or be allowed to participate in any Christian privileges. On the contrary, they should

be turned over to the pope and his officials, and even to the devil himself.”²⁵ While this referred to both young and old, specific directions were included for the instruction of children.

Similarly the Large Catechism emphasized the importance of instruction as a duty to be carried out by the father.

Therefore let every head of a household remember that it is his duty, by God’s injunction and command, to teach or have taught to his children the things they ought to know. Since they are baptized and received into the Christian church, they should also enjoy this fellowship of the sacrament so that they may serve us and be useful. For they must all help us to believe, to love, to pray, and to fight the devil.²⁶

Luther’s emphasis on instruction, especially in preparation for the Lord’s Supper, is his major contribution to a new type of confirmation, for now it was to be associated not merely with Holy Baptism, as it had been in the past, but also with the Lord’s Supper. The place given private confession and absolution underscored further Luther’s concern for proper preparation for the Lord’s Supper. The prerequisite instruction for private confession and absolution became a major element in a Lutheran type of confirmation. Luther’s emphasis became the first step toward a new form of confirmation without, however, actually establishing the rite. Those who regard instruction as the most important element in confirmation consider Luther the founder or at least a cofounder of a Lutheran confirmation.

Such an appraisal of Luther’s contribution can hardly be maintained if the full practice of confirmation is meant. Recent investigations have made it evident that the idea of a catechetical type of instruction culminating in a rite has humanistic roots and stems to a great degree from Desiderius Erasmus (1466 to 1536). In his *Paraphrase of Matthew* (1522) Erasmus proposed that during Lent baptized boys be required to hear catechetical sermons that explained to them their baptismal profession. Thereafter they should be examined to determine how many had properly applied this profession to themselves. Whoever was prepared to assume the duties implied in the baptismal vow was publicly to renew his confession in a solemn ceremony.²⁷

The public ceremony suggested by Erasmus was not to imply a repetition of Baptism but to help all realize what Baptism had done and what it should mean. Similar thoughts were expressed by Erasmus in his *Symbolum sive Catechismus* (1533).²⁸ With this he was not suggesting a reform of the Roman sacrament of confirmation but was proposing an extended rite of Baptism to precede confirmation.²⁹

Erasmus’ views influenced Bucer, and through Bucer both the Lutheran and the Anglican practices were affected.

The Developing Types of Confirmation

From the evangelicals’ universal rejection of the Roman Catholic confirmation, and their felt need for religious instruction to strengthen the faith created by Holy Baptism and to prepare the Christian for a worthy participation of the Lord’s Supper arose a natural situation which in time led to the present rite of confirmation. In some instances it was not a conscious development; for a long time, centuries in some cases, the very name confirmation was an offense to a large section of Lutheranism. In such circumstances the practice arose chiefly out of confession

and absolution and preparation for the Lord's Supper. In other cases there was a conscious effort to establish either a new form of confirmation or a substitute for the Roman sacrament. Therefore the gradual development of confirmation in the Lutheran Church followed no uniform pattern. Local conditions, with their varying theological climates, might permit a type of confirmation to appear at once in full bloom as it happened in Hesse in 1539, or the introduction might be delayed as in Hamburg, where confirmation was not publicly observed until 1832, when it finally appeared in a form quite different in structure from any that appeared in the 16th century.

Out of the tangled mass of influences and counterinfluences one may discern no less than six different major types of confirmation within the Lutheran Church. These may be characterized, for want of better terms, as catechetical, hierarchical, sacramental, traditional, pietistic, and rationalistic. The first four made their appearances in the 16th century, while the last two appeared in the 17th and the 18th century. In practice it is difficult to find these types in pure form, except perhaps in the initial stages. In a given instance it is more likely that a particular practice was influenced by more than one tendency. In the latter part of the 19th and particularly in the 20th century it is not unusual to see the impact of at least five of the six types on confirmation as practiced in a particular area, especially in the United States, which has been a melting pot also in this respect.

The Catechetical Type

For reasons of chronology and extensiveness of practice we may well begin with the catechetical type of confirmation, which originated largely through the personal influence of Martin Luther, Johann Brenz (1499—1570), and Johannes Bugenhagen (1485—1558). Strictly speaking, this form should be regarded not a type but a prototype of confirmation. Where it was practiced, there was at first no thought of confirmation or an accompanying rite of any type. The catechetical form was most common where Luther's pupils were most influential. Far into the second half of the 16th century most of them questioned whether Lutherans should attempt to maintain confirmation even when it was given a new interpretation and form. They believed quite generally that the old rite should be discarded completely.³⁰

The catechetical type arose from the need to prepare Christians for the Lord's Supper. It was not necessarily limited to those contemplating first Communion. Because the average communicant was so poorly instructed, he was to become in effect a catechumen each time he went to Communion. The Goslar CO, 1531, prescribed that persons indicating their intention to partake of the Lord's Supper be examined in the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the words of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Each was to confess his faith, be questioned as to what he desired to receive in Holy Communion, and be examined in respect to his Christian life.³¹

As time went on, several of the church orders stated that a practice of this type should be instituted as a substitute for confirmation, without necessarily implying that it be called confirmation or be practiced with a rite. So great was the fear of a Romanizing tendency, a majority of the church orders that established the practice avoided the term confirmation. Instead the practice was referred to as catechetical instruction (*Catechismus*), confessional examination (*Beichtverhör*), admission to the Lord's Supper,³² profession of Baptism,³³ or some similar name

to avoid using the term confirmation. Till the middle of the 18th century one still spoke not so much of confirmation as of *Beichten* or *Communiciren der Kinder*.³⁴

The catechetical approach was simple and often without liturgical form. Pastors were expected to preach a short series of catechetical sermons several times a year, often four times, perhaps daily or several times a week.³⁵ These sermons were intended for the entire congregation and were part of the general educational program for the parish.³⁶

In addition to the catechetical sermons, the catechism itself was often read from the pulpit, usually before the Gospel for the day, so that the congregation, especially the children, might become accustomed to the text.³⁷ It was partly for this reason that Luther urged pastors to “adopt one form, adhere to it, and use it repeatedly year after year” and to “adhere to a fixed and unchanging form and method” in their instruction of the young.³⁸ Familiarity with the texts was to be cultivated and confusion avoided through pastoral consistency in catechetical instruction.

Congregations were also expected to conduct catechetical instruction for the young people and servants, who were sometimes expected to attend until they were 20 years old or until they married.³⁹ Frequently older persons, especially the unlearned, were also admonished to attend *Catechismus*. This type of instruction was the most important means of keeping alive the spiritual life created by Baptism.⁴⁰

Catechetical instruction was also conducted in connection with confession or preparation for the Lord’s Supper. The catechization might be made annually,⁴¹ whenever the visitor came to the parish,⁴² or at stated intervals during the year.⁴³

As schools were established, they assumed an additional important place in the instruction of children in Luther’s or Brentz’s catechism and the preparation for first Communion.⁴⁴

From these various procedures arose the practice that when a child seemed to have sufficient understanding and to be able to examine himself properly for his first Communion, his pastor declared him ready.⁴⁵ The initiative might also be taken by the parents and sponsors, who then presented the child to the pastor or congregation for an examination to determine whether he was indeed ready. Since parents and sponsors were held primarily responsible for the instruction, they were often given the right to initiate this step.⁴⁶

Before the children were actually admitted to the second sacrament, the pastor took several candidates and gave them a brief review, usually lasting several days or a few weeks (*Beichtwochen*). Georg Karg (1512—70) described such a special preparation in the Preface to his catechism, 1564.

Such an examination and exercise takes place here at Onoltzbach [in Ansbach] on weekdays for the city children at twelve o’clock, one hour each day, between Easter and Pentecost, and for the village children who belong to this parish, on Sundays and the festivals at one o’clock during the period of Reminiscere and Exaudi. In this way all may receive the Lord’s Supper together on Pentecost after each one has made his confession privately on the previous day.⁴⁷

Thereupon the pastor examined the children either privately in his home⁴⁸ or in the presence of the congregation.⁴⁹ When it was done in the parsonage, the parents and sponsors were usually present.⁵⁰

Obviously such a casual procedure could take place several times a year,⁵¹ though in time it was limited to specific seasons of the church year.⁵² The Saxon CO of 1580 prescribed a catechetical type of instruction without any liturgical form. The date for the church order is significant. It was the same year in which the Book of Concord was accepted and, as Weissgerber points out, showed the effect of the crypto-Calvinistic controversy on the one hand and the beginning of the early orthodox influence on the other.⁵³

The emphasis throughout the Saxon CO was on the pedagogical or catechetical. It required pastors annually to preach catechetical sermons. It prescribed that Luther's catechism be used exclusively both in the schools and in the churches. The catechism was to be read without explanation every Sunday in the villages so that all might learn to know it well. The church order further authorized catechetical instruction for young people and servants. The parents and masters were urged to send them to the instruction and were asked to review carefully with them what they had learned and further to instruct them.⁵⁴

Concerning those who had not yet partaken of the Lord's Supper the church order closed the section on the catechism with the requirement:

Fifth, the pastors are diligently to examine in the catechism especially those who are going to the blessed Sacrament of the body and blood of Christ for the first time, to determine whether they have learned the catechism and to inform themselves whether they are in the position to partake of Communion.

Nothing is said as to where the examination was to take place and whether the congregation was to be present.⁵⁵

The Saxon CO had a special section in which it described in detail the annual catechization to be held during Lent. The annual catechization was called "the genuine Christian confirmation," that is, the confirmation of the faith in which the Christian had been baptized. In place of this "the papists had substituted a superstitious spectacle which should be avoided and shunned by all pious Christians."⁵⁶ It must be noted that the confirmation here referred to in the Saxon CO is not the concluding act which admitted a child to his first Communion but the annual catechization which was intended for all communicants.

The catechetical type of confirming without a closing ceremony was the normal practice in all Scandinavian countries for a long time. The church order of Denmark formulated under Bugenhagen's direction became law in 1539, two years after he had been called to that country to establish the Reformation. This church order combined the examination of children and other communicants without a rite.⁵⁷ In Sweden the question of confirmation was not debated till 1528, and the Roman form continued for a short time. In 1529 at the Council of Orebro the anointing with chrism was given a Lutheran interpretation. By 1535 there were no longer any indications that confirmation in any form still took place.⁵⁸ The church order of 1571 gave

directions for the instruction of children but recognized no particular type of confirmation.⁵⁹ For a short time the *Nova ordinantia*, 1575, reintroduced a traditional form of confirmation. When this was canceled in 1593, the last trace of a liturgical rite for confirmation vanished for more than a century.⁶⁰ A purely catechetical type of examination was introduced similar to the one described above. This procedure was called “the admission to the Lord’s Supper.” As orthodoxy became stronger, the catechetical forms also grew in strength.⁶¹

In this stage of the development of the catechetical type, three important elements were present: the instruction, the examination to determine the understanding of the catechumen (also regarded as a profession of faith), and the prayers of the congregation. After the candidates were accepted for Holy Communion, it was understood that they would continue to attend the *Kinderbericht* or the *Catechismus* even though they were regarded as “confirmed Christians.”⁶²

It is important to remember that the catechetical type of preparation for first Communion was the method most widely employed in the Lutheran Church during the 16th and the greater part of the 17th century. It was the normal practice and usually without a closing ceremony, especially among the Gnesio-Lutherans in Germany and in the Scandinavian countries. Where church orders with a decided catechetical pattern had a confirmation ceremony, the orders were drawn up later, and all showed a marked influence from other types of confirmation by way of the Hessian church orders.⁶³ In time the catechetical form was fused with Chemnitz’ views, which gave a stronger emphasis to the confession of a personal faith. Other influences affected it also, especially after Pietism became widespread. But the churches espousing the catechetical pattern during the first two centuries of Lutheranism were reluctant to develop the private examination into a formal religious rite in which a group of children was publicly presented to the congregation in festive manner. However, the catechetical type may nevertheless be regarded as the historic bridge to a distinctively Lutheran confirmation even though it was not an independent act intended to replace the Roman confirmation.⁶⁴

Reluctance to introduce a public ceremony persisted in some parts of Germany, especially in several larger cities, till the beginning of the 19th century. Among those holding off till a very late date were Leipzig, 1803; Regensburg, 1803; Russia (the Lutheran Church), 1805; Gera, 1806; Dresden, 1812; Frankfurt on the Main, 1813, only when conducted on a weekday; Nürnberg and Augsburg, 1813; Lübeck, 1817; and Hamburg, 1832. In a number of these places, private confirmation was permitted at a somewhat earlier date.⁶⁵

The Hierarchical Type

Those who trace confirmation back to Luther through the catechetical pattern do so either by hindsight or by regarding the instruction as confirmation itself, the rite then becoming a sort of unessential appendage. But if the rite is given the importance that it presently has in the Lutheran Church, at least in the popular mind, then it is more accurate to trace confirmation to the Hessian church, where it was first introduced by Martin Bucer in 1538. The form in which it appeared in Hesse may be described as hierarchical or disciplinary because of two elements which were found in the rite but were lacking in the catechetical form even when a public ceremony of some kind was observed. Both elements were disciplinary in nature: a

surrender to Christ in the form of a confession of faith and a vow of obedience to the church.⁶⁶ The Hessian ceremony also had certain sacramental overtones which contributed to the development of still another form of confirmation.

Bucer had served at Strassburg before Philip (1504—67) called him to Hesse. While at Strassburg, Bucer had been seriously vexed by the Anabaptists and the followers of Kaspar Schwenkfeld because they had an entirely different concept of a Christian congregation. Instead of recognizing that sin and grace live side by side in the Christian community, they operated with principles that attempted to create a pure church by eliminating all those who did not measure up to their standards of purity.⁶⁷

The Anabaptists vehemently opposed the doctrine of infant baptism and accused Bucer, among other things, of encouraging moral laxity with this teaching. They maintained that little children were not capable of giving a promise of purity and obedience and that later as adults they were inclined to rely on their baptism without feeling an obligation to live the Christian life. Bucer fought their criticism of infant baptism on Scriptural grounds, but he also recognized that the impact which the Anabaptists made indicated that they were meeting some real need. Consequently he himself looked for means to meet the same need.⁶⁸ He countered Anabaptist arguments by showing that he, too, was concerned about church discipline, for as he said, “Where there is no discipline and no ban, there is no congregation.”⁶⁹ Since the Anabaptists maintained that vows should not be exacted from persons till they had reached the age of discretion and had been instructed, Bucer devised a plan by which children, who had been baptized in infancy and for whom a promise of loyalty had been given by sponsors, were required to take a vow of loyalty to Christ after they had reached the age of discretion. Such a vow was to follow a period of careful instruction. The result was a form of confirmation planned as a polemical device.

The plan was not wholly original. Bucer had undoubtedly gotten some of his ideas from the Anabaptists at Strassburg and from the Bohemian Brethren. The latter had an initiation rite for those who had previously been instructed and examined in private. The rite included a confession of faith and a vow of loyalty, followed by the laying on of hands and a prayer that God would give the necessary strength to maintain such loyalty.⁷⁰ While the right to attend Holy Communion was not mentioned in the ceremony, it may well be assumed, since all members of the brotherhood partook of the Lord’s Supper.⁷¹

Bucer’s views were set forth in *Ad monasterienses*, 1534, in which he urged that confirmation be revived according to the ancient custom whereby “bishops laid their hands on the baptized and thereby gave them the Holy Spirit according to the example of the apostle in Samaria, Acts 8.”⁷²

There is no conclusive evidence that Bucer succeeded in having his plan adopted while he was pastor in Strassburg. Soon after he was called to Hesse in 1538, however, he was able to put his ideas into effect with the Ziegenhain Order of Church Discipline (adopted in 1538 and published in 1539).⁷³ Since the Anabaptists were creating serious disturbances in Hesse, Philip invited Bucer to come to his territory. Bucer’s previous success in Strassburg gave the landgrave a measure of assurance that some semblance of order might again be achieved. Bucer accepted Philip’s invitation, and a synod was called at Ziegenhain soon after Bucer’s arrival. There an

order of church discipline was drawn up with the hope that it would help the Hessian congregations. The Ziegenhain Order of Church Discipline, as the order was called, was designed to regulate the whole life of the congregation, especially its sacramental life. Through a detailed program of church discipline, Bucer believed he could meet the major criticism of the Anabaptists.

Within this purpose the order authorized the first confirmation, in the modern sense, in Lutheran history. According to it the public rite was to be a means whereby baptized children would be received into the *Gottesdienstgemeinde*, that is, the congregation assembled to receive the Word and the sacraments. The ceremony for confirmation as authorized in the order read:

Such children who through catechetical instruction (*Catechismos*) are sufficiently advanced in Christian knowledge to be permitted to go to the Lord's Table shall on a high festival such as Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, at the instance of the elders and preachers, be presented by their parents and sponsors to the pastors in the presence of the congregation in a place designated in the churches for that purpose. The elders and all other ministers of the Word shall stand about the pastor, who shall then examine these children in the chief articles of the Christian faith. When they have answered the questions and publicly surrendered themselves to Christ the Lord and His churches, the pastor shall admonish the congregation to ask the Lord, in behalf of the children, for perseverance and an increase of the Holy Spirit, and conclude this prayer with a collect.

Finally the pastor shall lay his hands upon the children, thus confirming them in the name of the Lord, and establish (*bestetigen*) them in Christian fellowship. He shall thereupon also admit them to the Table of the Lord, adding the admonition that they continue faithfully in the obedience of the Gospel and readily receive and faithfully heed Christian discipline and reproof from each and every Christian, especially from the pastors.⁷⁴

This authorization of a confirmation rite is of interest for a number of reasons. Here Bucer was influenced also by Erasmus in establishing a confirmation rite. But he did not limit himself, as did Erasmus, to a rite in which the youths themselves made a confession of the faith which their sponsors had made for them; under Luther's influence he associated the rite also with first Communion. This is the first formal association of the rite of confirmation with the Lord's Supper. Together with the privilege of partaking of the Lord's Supper, the confirmands voluntarily surrendered themselves to the discipline of the churches.⁷⁵ Such a "surrender" appeared to be an initial act and went beyond that which was implied in the daily repentance and forgiveness growing out of Baptism. The discipline was given a special place of importance and left room for more than the normal church discipline. The vow of obedience to the churches implied a submission also in matters not governed by the Word, i. e., a discipline imposed by the pastor and the elders of the congregation.

Philip hesitated to introduce some of the ideas embodied in the order, especially the parts relating to the ban.⁷⁶ The section on confirmation is nevertheless of great importance because many church orders were later based on it. In fact, the main ideas of the Ziegenhain order were used and formulated experimentally by the pastors of Cassel in the 1539 CO⁷⁷ and therein prescribed the first rite for confirmation as it is known today.

The rubrics of the Cassel CO required every catechumen to be examined publicly by the pastor in the presence of the elders, after which the catechumen was to answer certain prescribed