

The Age of Communion and Confirmation in Light of Recent Trends in Lutheranism

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Foreword

It was the purpose of this writer in beginning this study to ascertain what are the current trends in regard to age level for first communion and confirmation and the rationale behind the various recommendations now being placed before the Lutheran bodies in America. As a pastor deeply concerned with placing into the hands of our youth the necessary spiritual equipment for life in a secular society, this study has been most thought provoking.

Upon investigation of the area of confirmation within the Lutheran Church, it has been deemed necessary to limit the scope of this paper to a primary goal of creating an awareness of the various thought processes in regard to age now current in this country. Thus the intent of the author is introductory in nature and in no way pretends to be an in depth historical or theological study with resultant conclusions. It is hoped that in depth studies of the various areas herein touched on will be forthcoming in future conferences.

The research for this paper was conducted at our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library, through correspondence, and concentrated examination of the three major studies presently being circulated among Lutheran circles: *Confirmation a Study Document* prepared by the Commission on Education of the Lutheran World Federation, *Confirmation and First Communion* by Frank W. Klos, and Arthur C. Repp's *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church*.

PART I - The Problem Defined

The very word "problem" used in conjunction with our confirmation practices may seem to unfairly bias our thinking. After all confirmation has become a way of life within our churches, the "sine qua non" of congregational life. It has become the principle tool used by pastors for the instructing of the young in the basic doctrines of Christianity. It is a method for preparing young people for reception of the Lord's Supper, It is a process of equipping young saints with the spiritual tools necessary for a life with Christ. It is one of the principle tools which we use to fulfill our Lord's command not only to Baptize, but to teach "them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" and thus feed the faith begun at Baptism.

The question being raised today and one which every faithful pastor must constantly ask himself is, are we achieving our objectives. The concerns which have led to the present re-evaluation of confirmation in Lutheranism are not all, as some might think, motivated by the present spirit of ecumenicism. To be sure, the desire to obtain a uniform code of confirmation among the Lutheran Synods for the purposes of orderly administration and reduction of confusion on the part of laymen is part of the ecumenical scene. But much more important to the Church are the pastoral concerns which flow out of the continued secularization of our society with the accompanied reduction in the family's role in Christian education.

What pastors are seeing time and time again is the disappearance of confirmed youth from the life of the church. Not that this has not been a problem in times past, Satan worked then too. But today the nose count has

risen to astronomical proportions. Now much of this loss can perhaps be laid at the feet of the spiritual bankruptcy that marks life in many Lutheran churches, but even in our own circles, the loss has been on the rise. A quick check of our statistical yearbook for the past couple of years shows a differential between confirmed members and actual communicant growth rate of approximately 3,500 per year, if one deducts loss by death. If we would add the many members who join us by profession of faith, this loss figure looms even larger. Most of this loss is in the 14-25 age bracket.

This loss is reflected most deeply among the educated young. In my work as a campus pastor this has become very evident. On many of our campuses where our students are enrolled, our campus pastors are lucky if they see 5% of those students of our synod enrolled at their institutions. In Brookings we are seeing about 50%. When I first began work in this state, I used to salve my conscience with the old saw that those not seen were in large going home on weekends and thus keeping faithful to their Lord in their home congregations. Intensive contact work since has shown this to be a false assumption. Better than 25% of our students that go to South Dakota State University graduate to no church at all.

Loss is not the only concern of those raising questions about our confirmation procedures. Confirmation is supposedly one portion of what is to be a life-long catechumenate of the Christian. All too often though, it has become for our people the end point of their Christian education except for Sunday morning sermons. In a time and era when Satan is attacking the Church from within with a viciousness almost unparalleled in this country, we find very few of our people seeking a continued education in the only defensive weapon available, God's Word.

A look at how well we are succeeding in keeping our people involved in a longer period of study of God's Word lifts a very big warning flag for our Synod. In looking through the 1969 statistical yearbook, I came up with the following figures on the Dakota-Montana District. We list 72 congregations. Of these, 47 stated they had some form of Bible study for either youth, adults, or both. In these 47 congregations, 259 are enrolled in a high school age study and 660 in the adult bracket. But when we consider that there are 7,843 communicant members in our district, these 919 continuing their Bible education do not seem very big. Synodically the situation is even worse. Out of the 256,776 communicants listed, only 15,237 were listed as involved in any form of continued study. Such wholesale neglect of the priceless Word is a dangerous game that can only end in lost faith and lost souls.

We can in no way lay these problems at the feet of our Lord and simply wash our hands of any responsibility for these phenomena by saying the seed we have sown, the increase is the Lord's. Though this is a truth of God's Word, it is also a truth, as seen from church history, that the way the seed is sown can make a difference. We recognize this truth when we train our pastors and teachers in teaching and preaching methodology. The question then looms, are we doing all we can and in the best way possible to fulfill our responsibility toward our youth? Are our confirmation practices, as now extant, fulfilling our goals for such instruction?

These questions have now been answered by the Lutheran Church in America and the American Lutheran Church with a resounding "no!". Following the recommendations of the Joint Commission on Theology and Practice of Confirmation, these church bodies have agreed to the following six changes: 1.) The central purpose of confirmation is to help baptized children "identify with the life and mission of the adult Christian community"; 2.) Grade 10 is the best time for confirmation; 3.) Admission to the Lord's Supper should come before confirmation; 4.) Grade 5 is the best time for admitting children to their first communion; 5.) Adults should not be confirmed; 6.) There should be unity among all Lutheran church bodies on the age for confirmation and the age for first communion.¹ Though the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has rejected these proposals along with all the procedures developed to go with them, they, too, may in the end become a part of this procedure.

One might think that the common man might rise in horror at such suggestions. On the contrary, it is just the opposite. Of those questioned most preferred the change. One of the questions on the Post study

¹ Frank W. Klos, "Lutherans Look at Confirmation." *The Lutheran*, p. 22.

Questionnaire asked respondents to check “yes”, “no”, or “uncertain” to the statement “Admission to the Lord’s Supper should come at an earlier age than the rite of confirmation.” In the ALC 52.4% said “yes”, while only 28.4% said “no”, and 19.3% were uncertain. In the LCA 54.6% said “yes”, 27.5% said “no”, and 18% were uncertain. In the Missouri Synod 43.5% said “yes”, 37.7% said “no”, and 18.7% were uncertain. Overall, more than 50% of those questioned voted for earlier communion and later confirmation.²

The recommendations of this commission stem mostly from the counter pull of the desire to offer all the means of grace to a child as soon as he is able to meaningfully make use of them, and the desire to keep children enrolled in a longer period of instruction.

The definition of the problem does not yet end. The question of age and all that relates to it in confirmation practice is enlarged when we discover that there never has been since the Reformation a working uniform definition of what confirmation is. The term was not even used for the first two centuries after Luther. Since then, it has suffered under the misconceptions of the various theological winds that have blown through Lutheran theology.

The LACUSA Commission has formulated this definition: “Confirmation is a pastoral and educational ministry of the church that is designed to help baptized children identify with the life and mission of the adult Christian community and that is celebrated in public rite.”

Down through history the emphasis has rested elsewhere. For a while confirmation’s sole purpose was a preparation for communion. Then came the emphases of the rite of confirmation as a renewal of the Baptismal vow, as a granting of the Holy Spirit, as entrance into church membership, as a commitment to one particular church—just one more element and function piled onto another and, depending on the particular period, the age ran from age 5 to age 21 as the time of confirmation. In many churches confirmation was done on an individual level with no set age as a guideline. Today, even within our Synod, we are lacking a uniform definition of confirmation, its function, goals and practice.

Thus the problem of age in respect to communion and confirmation stems from 1.) a practical concern for loss and spiritual weakness among the constituency of the churches, 2.) the changes accepted by the two largest bodies and, 3.) an historical and current lack of definition concerning “confirmation.”

PART II - Historical Background

In order to more fully realize the status of present practice and some of the questions it raises toward our ministry, we need to see their derivation.

For Luther, the question of confirmation was not much of an issue. His interest took a different tack. He was concerned primarily with catechetical instruction. We remember that the practice common in Luther’s time was to give the rite of confirmation sacramental qualities. This he rejected with vehemence. Luther’s first concern was with the need of the new born faith granted in the initial rite of Baptism. If that faith was to be kept alive and grow, it would have to be fed with the Word. His second concern was that the child be instructed in such a way that he would be able to partake in the Lord’s Supper in a worthy manner. These goals were carried out primarily through his emphasis on the use of the Small and Large Catechism in the home. The latter purpose for “confirmation” was Luther’s distinct contribution. Before this, the only association that confirmation had was with Baptism. The need for instruction arising out of both sacraments was quickly recognized and practiced,

Here the similarity of practice ended. Age was not much of a factor. The ability to recognize the difference between the bread and wine of the sacrament and ordinary bread and wine coupled with a basic understanding of sin and grace was all that was required.

Out of the tangled mass of influences and counter-influences which affected the practice of confirmation in succeeding years, six major emphases may be discerned: catechetical, hierarchical, sacramental, traditional, pietistic, and rationalistic.³ The first four made their appearances in the 16th century, while the last two appeared

² *The Lutheran*. Vol VIII, No. 3, Feb 18, 1970.

³ Arthur Repp, *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church*, p. 21.

in the 17th and the 18th centuries. In no case were any of these forms found in a pure state. In most cases several strands of these concepts were found in one rite.

The so-called catechetical type of confirmation in its initial state was actually only a prototype of confirmation for there was no conscious thought of developing a rite. The primary emphasis in this type was instruction as preparation for communion. Luther was the prime mover behind this approach. Children were instructed principally in the homes and, when they were thought ready for communion by the parents and/or sponsors, they were brought to the church where the pastor or elders would examine the child to ascertain whether he was ready. This examination was in most cases not public. At such times the prayers of the congregation were requested for those children. After the children were accepted for Holy Communion, it was understood that they would continue to attend the “catechismus” even though they were regarded as “confirmed Christians.” Attendance usually stopped at age 21 or when you became married. This was the method most widely used in the Lutheran Church during the 16th and the greater part of the 17th century.

The hierarchical type was introduced by Martin Bucer in 1538 in Strassburg, later in Hesse. The emphasis here was on disciplinary control. This type received its name because of Bucer’s insistence that the individual should vow his allegiance to Christ through the church. In this addition to the catechetical method then was added a vow by the person confirmed wherein he was asked to publicly testify that he was surrendering himself to Christ, and that he was likewise willing to submit himself to the church’s rule for his life. This was introduced mainly to counter the Anabaptists’ claim that he was encouraging moral laxity with his teaching concerning infant Baptism.

In this particular step we see the influence of Desiderius Erasmus who, under the influence of the Renaissance humanists, wanted to emphasize the role of man rather than that of God’s gifts. Consequently he encouraged the church to concentrate on education to prepare the children for making an act of allegiance to fulfill the obligations of discipleship. What was important then in confirmation was the commitment of man, not the gift of God. This same pressure is again being exerted today by those in the school of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bucer also added a formal admission to the Lord’s Supper as part of his rite.

Bucer, frequently called the father of the Lutheran confirmation, thus skillfully fused the views of Luther and Erasmus. When you examine his order for confirmation this can be seen:

1. Renewal of the baptismal vow (Erasmus), following instruction and examination (both Luther and Erasmus).
2. Intercessory prayers and blessings of the congregation calling attention to the mighty acts of God (Luther).
3. Laying on of hands as an act of the church’s blessing.
4. Admission to Holy Communion (Bucer).
5. Acceptance of the discipline of the congregation (Erasmus).⁴

Thus we see that those who trace Lutheran 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.”⁵ 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 it back to this hierarchical type for its essential features.

The third form was termed sacramental. In this form certain sacramental accents were retained in reflection of Roman Catholic tradition. One of these was the implication that the Holy Spirit was given in the laying on of hands or that this was needed to complete Baptism. The second stress was that confirmation conferred a new or at least fuller membership not previously given in Baptism. This tended to confuse the doctrine of the Church and churches. We see this influence in “The Lutheran Agenda” pages 25-26 where in confirmation the pastor lays his hands upon each of the confirmands and says “God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, *give thee His Holy Spirit... (emphasis mine)*”. Then the pastor says, “Upon this your voluntary profession and promise, I, in the name of the Church of Christ, invite and welcome you, as a member of the

⁴ Frank W. Klos, *Confirmation and First Communion*, p. 60.

⁵ Repp, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

Evangelical Lutheran Church and of this congregation, *to participate with us in all the rights and privileges of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.* (Emphasis mine)”

The fourth form was called traditional. The leaders in this form were Philipp Melancthon and Martin Chemnitz. Basically it differed little from Luther’s form with the exceptions of the addition of admonition to remain faithful and the separation of confirmation from a relationship with first communion. Its primary concern was to develop a purely Lutheran form of confirmation.

This then covers in brief the developments of the 16th century, The most striking feature is the almost total lack of uniformity. Some generalizations can be made at this point, however. 1.) The Lutherans universally rejected the Roman Catholic doctrine of confirmation as a sacrament. 2.) All Lutheran confirmation forms assumed and/or specified Christian instruction before the catechumen was presented for confirmation or first communion, the home being considered the primary agency for the instruction implied in Baptism with the pastor serving primarily in the area of review and examination before communion. 3.) Except in the case of the traditional type, confirmation was directly associated with both sacraments. 4.) The usual age was quite young and not considered important criterion.

Repp summarizes the findings on age during this period in this way:

Almost invariably the church orders used an expression such as “when the children have come of age.” According to German law, this was at age 12; according to Roman canon law, it could be interpreted variously as from 7-12.

Where a reference to confirmation age appears, the age is rarely higher than 12. Thus Hohenlohe, 1577, and Ansbach, 1564, specify 12. The same age is suggested by Allstedt, 1533, and Lindow in Pomerania, 1571. The former states that persons over 12 are to be subject to a personal tax, while the latter requires 12 year-olds to contribute to the pastor’s support. In both instances, it may be assumed that the age was set at 12 because persons were normally confirmed or communicants by that time. Lower Austria, 1571, sets a range between 10 and 15. Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach, 1556, indicates that the age for first Communion was to be 12 or over. Braunschweig, 1542, suggests that the former custom of confirming at 10 or 11 be retained. The Church Order of Sweden, drawn up by Laurentius Petri (1499-1573) in 1571, states that no child younger than 9, or 8 at the least, should attend the Lord’s Supper. “For younger children can have little exact knowledge of the Sacrament.” During the 16th Century the children in Denmark were often admitted to Communion when they were only 6 or 7.⁶

This brings us to the 17th century Period of Orthodoxy and the pietistic and rationalistic influences that followed it. During this period a vow to remain faithful to the Lutheran Church was included after elector of Saxony defected to the Roman Catholics (Frederick August II - 1670-1733). Also noted during this period is the development of catechisms into which as many theological ramifications as possible were worked.

The pietistic emphasis came next. Philipp Spener became the movement’s dominant figure. The emphasis here was on a shift from the objective to the subjective. He was disturbed by the casualness with which many took the Lord’s Supper and sought to find some way to assure himself that parishioners were converted. Though he did not outrightly deny the power of Baptism, he did minimize its continuing power. It seemed to him that the faith created by the Sacrament of Holy Baptism had in most instances died or at least become exceedingly weak during the ensuing years. “For him the value of Baptism lay primarily in its covenant which the Christian needed to renew regularly.”⁷ This thought he introduced into confirmation, and with it he gave the vow once introduced by Bucer a new meaning. Instead of speaking about remembering the Baptismal covenant, he emphasized a “renewal of the covenant,” to which he added a solemn promise. Reu’s remarks on the Pietistic emphasis of confirmation are worthy of note. The Pietists regarded

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56-57.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

confirmation as a renewal, on the part of God and man, of the baptismal covenant, as a result, the instruction of confirmands, completely overshadowed all other forms of religious instruction; moreover, the catechist was expected to lead the catechumens through the several states of the way of salvation in such a manner that they actually experienced conversion and regeneration, and on the basis of their experience vowed henceforth to be God's own.⁸

Due to the increased objectives of confirmation under the Pietistic influence, the age of the catechumen increased to the 14 to 16 year old bracket, and Baptism was lowered to a status below that of confirmation.

The last type or emphasis that can be distinguished is that of rationalism. When the age of modern science came careening into the world of thought, the capability of the human mind was elevated. God was pushed back into the wings. Man now demanded explanations, logical and plausible. The effect this had on confirmation was to continue the decline of the role of Baptism and increase the importance of confirmation. Under this influence confirmation became the "coming out" event for young people—that day on which they achieved Christian maturity and were now granted "full membership status." The concentration in the teaching area of confirmation fell upon being able to defend the faith. Long written and oral exams became part of the curricula. The time of confirmation in congregations under this influence shifted to coincide with graduation from school. With such an exalted view of confirmation it soon began to be called "the most important day in a child's life," "a day on which a child became a new co-citizen of the Kingdom of God."

It was under this influence that the concept of "graduation" developed. When you were confirmed, your formal religious education was completed. Other by-products included: a separation of examination, confirmation and first communion; the dressing of confirmands in white robes to signify the purity of the one who had now completed his baptism; and the carrying of flowers by the girls. With this emphasis on confirmation as a graduation, the confirmation day grew into a family festival with home dinners and a gathering of the clan—all to congratulate the confirmand on his graduation into full membership in the church and the adult world. This was when the knickers were stowed and long pants were permitted.

What happened then when all these influences hit the "melting pot" of America? Well, you can guess. They all ran together. Take a good look at our agenda and see how many of these six influences can be found? How many of them are understood properly by our people? How many actually correct and Scripturally tenable? How many show up in our confirmation practices? A Scriptural evaluation of our rites and practices would be a good subject for a future paper at our pastoral conference.

One of the most evident findings that comes from a survey of confirmation practice and thought is that Lutherans have never really settled the question about what is confirmation. But this is essential. How we define confirmation, what goals we ascribe to it, what part it is to play in the overall life-long catechumenate of a Christian, will determine for us the question of age. If confirmation is to be defined as a period of instruction to prepare a Christian for the reception of the Lord's Supper, then age will be determined by the Scriptural guidelines for reception of this sacrament. Then the only question is at what age is a person able to discern the Lord's body and blood, examine himself and able to distinguish truth from untruth. This, as we have seen, has been answered usually in the age range of 9-14 with some both higher and lower.

If we were to define "confirmation" in terms of its root meaning of "strengthening" and place our main emphasis on feeding the faith begun in Baptism, that is, trying to equip our children with the spiritual weaponry they need to face an increasingly secularized society—to arm them with the Word of God, then the age of confirmation would most likely need be placed even later than it presently is for the sake of a longer period of instruction. Perhaps the age here would run all the way through high school as was commonly practiced by some of the churches in Luther's time. In such a case, entrance to the Lord's Table could without violating Scriptural principles be granted at some point along the way. Thus age must be determined by a definition of confirmation as to its purpose, goals and function, a uniform definition which we are presently lacking on a Synod-wide level. It was this definitional deficiency with all its practical and doctrinal ramifications that

⁸ J. M. Reu, *Catechetics or Theory and Practice of Religious Instruction*, p. 136.

prompted the joint commission of the three largest Lutheran organizations to search for a possible solution which then resulted in a change from one age for both communion and confirmation to a separation.

PART III - Toward a Working Definition

In trying to take a step toward a working definition it would be well for us to examine in part some of the thinking of the tri-church commission. This will serve the dual purpose of gaining for us an understanding of their logic (information) and enable us to more meaningfully evaluate their conclusions (analysis). Their initial line of argumentation runs along these lines.

They have reasoned, and I believe correctly, that youth today must be educated in the doctrines of the Scriptures more thoroughly than ever before. This is due to the lack of Bible training in the home, the pressures of science and the evil of our age. Therefore, they have proposed that confirmation be moved from the 8th grade to the 10th grade. This proposal has, however, raised still another question. Are we asking too much of a young person before allowing him to go to Communion? If a young person can correctly examine himself and rightly discern the true body and blood of our Lord in the Sacrament, have we any right to keep him from it for such a long period of time? Furthermore, if confirmation is simply an instructing and a strengthening in the Word of God, does it bear any connection with Baptism and the Lord's Supper? If not, then there is no reason why confirmation and entrance to the Lord's Supper cannot be separated; the one moved up and the other moved back.

Their argument for recommending this age change runs then as follows and this comes directly from the commission's report:

The simple act of Baptism, which the church performs in obedience to its Lord's command, is indeed a stupendous miracle in His name. In this sacrament God lays his claim upon the sinner and makes him his. By this act God establishes a new relationship: the old man of sin who is under the wrath and judgment of God dies, and the new man of faith who is under grace and forgiveness is born (Romans 6:4).

Holy Baptism imparts the grace of God. It is a means to awaken and sustain life. It is "a washing of regeneration" (Titus 3:5). It imparts forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38, 22:16), It saves (Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:2), It incorporates fully into the church(sic) and makes the baptized one fully a member of that church (sic), the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13), and it bestows the gift of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).

Thus, Baptism is complete in itself. Confirmation may, therefore, in no sense be regarded as a completion of an unfinished act. To assert or even to imply that the saving power of Baptism is in any way contingent on any subsequent event is to deny its status. It is, therefore, theologically indefensible to elevate confirmation to a position in which it either complements or supplements the sacrament of Holy Baptism. It can be properly regarded neither in the pietistic sense of a conversion experience and an act of decision nor in the rationalistic sense of a free choice. At the same time, however, there is a relationship between confirmation and the saving nature of Baptism. For in the public rite the confirmand, in company with the congregation, recalls his Baptism together with the benefits given him in the sacrament. This remembering is not a one-time response but a celebration of what is actually taking place regularly in the life of each baptized child of God.

Closely related to the saving power of Baptism is the covenant which God here establishes. This is in every sense of the word a covenant of grace and therefore outside the ordinary covenant concept. It is a unilateral covenant, an act of God that is complete in itself, solely prompted by his mercy and grace. It is therefore not conditioned by an act or promise of man whether it be by his parents, sponsors, or in later years, by himself, through a rite or a vow.

Man merely accepts the promises and gifts of Baptism and thereby enters into a covenant relationship. Even this acceptance is the result of the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, this baptismal covenant cannot be broken by man. God alone made the covenant; he alone can negate it. But God never breaks his covenant and therefore it needs no renewal. He never withdraws his promises. As Luther said, "Baptism remains forever. Even though we fall from it and sin, nevertheless we always have access to it so that we may again subdue the old man." (The Large Catechism, IV, 77).

In this covenant it is God who holds the child in a new relationship in which he is the son and heir possessing all the blessings of salvation. There is thus an unconscious, hidden relation, the depth of which no man can plumb.

Thus the function of the confirmand with respect to the covenant of Baptism is not to reaffirm a possible contractual agreement he has made with God. Any vow committing the confirmand to a lifelong faith in Christ and loyalty to him may contradict the nature of the faith relation which is in constant need of renewal. Where included in the rite of confirmation, the promise should not be regarded as a condition of the covenant but as part of the covenant relationship in response to the God who keeps the covenant.

In the Great Commission the Lord commands Baptism and then adds the command to teach the baptized. To every baptized Christian God says, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (II Peter 3:18). The life bestowed in Baptism needs to be nurtured by the Word. The nature of the baptized person is such that he requires instruction in the significance of that sacrament and in the Word of God in order that he know who he is and what he may become. In this process confirmation makes a distinct contribution, not in a terminal sense, but as part of the lifelong process in which the believer is to grow in Christ.⁹

Basically the same line of argument is used in conjunction with communion. After pointing out in depth that the spiritual and eternal gifts of God are received and appropriated exclusively by faith and not conditional upon a measure of achievement in the performance of His will or a period of probation in His service or a level of membership in a church, they state the relationship between Baptism and Communion as being collateral, the one granting sonship and the other carrying it forward. The only conditions are the Scriptural prerequisites. They conclude with a discussion of the benefits of the Lord's Supper in terms of the individual and his faith, pointing to the need of young people to have this added strengthening.

This then in short is the theological basis as seen by the commission for their recommendations concerning changes in format and age.

By these considerations they are taking steps toward a definition by defining out what does not properly belong there. In working toward a definition that would consider confirmation an instructional period, they feel constrained to raise the question whether postponement of first Communion for so long a portion of the child's life can be theologically justified. Again, what they hope to gain by this separation is a more faithful and informed laity.

Moving from the theological to the practical arena in taking steps toward a definition, we come down to the matter of age. Age 10 for first communion and age 16 for confirmation is the proposal.

In support of the fifth grade first Communion, they point out on the basis of educational findings that a person in this age group can be characterized as one who possesses an agreeable balance of his emotional self, is happy to be what he is, friendly, agreeable, amenable, cooperative, sincere, poised, unselfconscious, easy going, quick to admit his errors. He likes to assimilate facts and to memorize. He acquires some of the time concepts needed for the study of history. The child is therefore capable of appreciating the historic facts on which the Christian faith and, specifically, the celebration of the Lord's Supper is based. The child of this age is more aware of what is wrong than what is right, and, therefore, needs help in making ethical decisions in the

⁹ Klos, *op. cit.*, p. 193-194.

face of his impulses. The proper preparation for participation in the Lord's Supper, they contend, would provide occasion for such help. All of this, they maintain, shows that the child at this level, while not understanding all the tenets of Christianity, does understand the basics required for Communion and, after proper instruction, should be permitted to come.

As regards the arguments for confirmation in the 10th grade, they point to the increased awareness that this age bracket has of the needs of others, the increased awareness of the grown-up world coupled with a growing sense of independence and appreciation for the opposite sex. A person of this age has an alert mind, and his intellectual capacities for thinking and reasoning are reaching new heights. Confirmation at this age offers splendid opportunity for stimulating discussions. Both boys and girls are intensely interested in achieving a personal religion. They are very sensitive to an atmosphere of worship and usually respond deeply to a liturgical form of service. If we follow the definition of the commission for confirmation, the conclusion for a later confirmation could be warranted.

Dr. Repp proposes still another age level for confirmation, age 12. He deems this suitable because the children are not yet into the problems of puberty but still under a stronger influence from home than those two years later. He also notes that confirming a child two years before graduation from elementary school or three years before graduation from junior high school would certainly help to diminish the "graduation complex," the faulty assumption that confirmation is terminal. In his definition, confirmation carries the primary responsibility of preparation for participation in the Lord's Supper. Thus we see again how definition of confirmation determines definition of age.

Part IV - Practical Considerations

The goal of achieving a more faithful and instructed laity is certainly a goal which we as pastors are always seeking to achieve. The loss of our youth is a grave problem and the need for continuing education is frighteningly evident. A change, however, could cause a considerable number of problems. To name a few that must be considered: 1.) Since confirmation as we now have it is so firmly ingrained into the lives of our people, any change in past practice will meet resistance because of the fear that the Lutheran church will thereby lose values which will be difficult to replace. Confirmation as now structured has served many very well. 2.) There are serious ecumenical considerations at stake if we were to conform to the commission's recommendations at this time when we are trying so hard to establish our confessional position as a known entity. 3.) A later confirmation may make it difficult to keep pupils in instruction classes once they have been admitted to Communion. Such a change would have to face the possibility that the practice of confirmation could disappear entirely and Christian education be confined for most persons to early childhood. It might also open the door to legalistic methods for maintaining continuing education. 4.) The practical difficulties involved in continuing instruction beyond the present age are real especially in view of the greater demands made by the high schools upon the student's time and interest. Add to this the loss of strong parental discipline, and the church will have even greater difficulty in holding the teenager in instruction. 5.) An early Communion may create a possibility in which children will participate in the Lords Supper without proper appreciation, understanding and awe, and without being capable of the necessary serious self-examination. 6.) By allowing earlier Communion there is danger the Lord's Supper will become the center of Christian worship instead of the life-giving Word of God itself in the many forms which it takes. 7.) The proposed separation of first communion from confirmation will result in a confusing diversity of practice throughout the church precisely at a time when the mobility of population demands greater uniformity. 8.) A re-definition of church membership, the basis for many administrative procedures, will be required, thus adding confusion to the already exiting statistical turmoil.

For us in the Wisconsin Synod there is an added practical problem now that the LCA and ALC have accepted these recommendations of the commission. In this time when we have any number of individuals and families coming to us from other Lutheran church bodies where the Gospel is falling into disuse, what are we going to say to the 12 year old who has been partaking of the Lord's Supper for two years when he is transferred into one of our congregations? Are we going to tell him he cannot partake until age 14, two years

hence? This could place an irreparable stumbling block in the way of his faith at a time when it needs strengthening most. These questions are beyond the scope of this paper, but are questions that will have to be answered by us in the not too distant future.

Also of practical consideration for us is the problem to which these new movements are addressing themselves. There are elements in our present confirmation procedure that do not appear to be consistent with our theological understanding either by their actual existence or by implication. We cannot simply dismiss these matters from the vantage point that this is how we have always done it. Tradition does not make right, not Scripturally right nor practically right.

The whole notion for instance of confirmation as a graduation of any kind should be reduced to ashes. The prominence which it has taken in many of our churches has overshadowed both Baptism and Communion in the eyes of too many of our people. I would agree with Arthur Repp when he says:

Since confirmation has been subject to so much buildup through dramatic effects, the tendency to exaggerate its importance has become all the greater. The Christian's baptism and his first attendance at Holy Communion are rarely regarded as highpoints in his life, but confirmation nearly always is. Every overemphasis of confirmation is at the expense of God's means of grace. Instruction in the Word becomes terminal, Baptism is thought to need some completing act or further confirmation, and preparation for worthy participation in the Lord's Supper tends to become an intellectual exercise.¹⁰

The rite of confirmation needs to be humbled. Our children cannot afford these misconceptions in this troubled age. As the "Apology to the Augsburg Confession" states, "Confirmation and extreme unction are rites received from the fathers, which however, the Church never requires as necessary to salvation." To raise it to such a level as to create the impression, no matter how intended, that it is necessary for salvation is to part from God's Word.

The question of age is not something that should be thrown out lightly. There is no Scriptural or historical warrant for such a thought. Age 13 and 14 do have some very severe drawbacks with which each of us struggles every Saturday. It is the age of puberty and as such comes at a time of life when the child is going through some emotional struggles that tend to make instruction more difficult. It is an age of transition. We do want to instruct them at a time when they are most receptive to the priceless message which we bring.

The need for more and real in depth instruction in God's Word for our youth is a fact which I live with every day at S.D.S.U. Too many of our young people have given their Savior the cold shoulder even before they enter an institution of higher learning. Even the ones who by the Lord's grace continue in His Way find themselves frequently far short of the spiritual equipment necessary to meet their foe.

PART V - Concluding Remarks

The issue of age as pertains to first communion and confirmation can be settled only when we settle on a definition of what confirmation is to be in our churches. The issue of age is going to be a problem in our congregations whether we so desire it to be or not due to the decisions of other Lutheran bodies. Hence our own definition is in urgent need of coming into existence.

Though we too are faced with the increasing loss of our young people and the need for ever and ever better trained laity, though I do feel that we are long overdue for a careful examination of our educational procedures in Light of our Scriptural obligations, I do not necessarily feel that the solution proposed by the joint commission is the only solution to the problem, or even a solution at all. I do give them much credit, however, for recognizing the existence of a problem and seeking to find ways of correcting it in the interest of our Lord's Kingdom. My own personal inclinations are at this time toward lowering the age of first communion to around

¹⁰ Repp, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

the age of 12 and defining confirmation as having the primary purpose of preparing our children for the reception of the Lord's Supper. Confirmation study would then start at age 11. The rite as such should then be lowered in status to its rightful position of being a public remembrance of Baptism and confession of faith in which the prayers of the congregation are sought on behalf of the confirmands as they continue their study of God's Word. Meaningful Bible study and study of the confessions should follow in order to lay the foundations for a life-long study. The theological barnacles that have become attached to our present confirmation should be removed wherever present.

If these age changes are not deemed feasible, then some form of continued education on a planned and regular basis must be implemented to supplement our present system. Our present systems seem in most cases to be inadequate and misleading at best, leaving our children with a false sense of having run "the race" before it is really well under way.

Admittedly this study raises more questions than it answers, but it is my prayer that out of it will come the beginning of a re-examination of our educational procedures with an eye to better quipping the souls which the Lord has entrusted into our care.

PART VI - Areas for Future Study

1. A scriptural Evaluation of our Rite and Practice of Confirmation.
2. A Scriptural Study of the Relationship of Baptism to Confirmation.
3. What is Confirmation? In Search of a Working Definition.
4. An Evaluation of the Confirmation Service Proposed by Prof. Repp and Found in His Book, *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church*.
5. Are Current Methods of Catechetical Instruction Meeting the Spiritual Needs of our Youth? Taking into consideration:
 - a. Length of instruction
 - b. Role of memory work and how much
 - c. Teaching aids
 - d. Teaching methodology (cf. "ON MARS HILL" Lutheran Sentinel, May 22, 1969)
 - e. Order of study in the catechism
 - f. Total content of course
6. The Ways and Means of Reaching More of our People with Continuing Education in God's Word.
7. Helping our Families to Instruct Their Young at Home.
8. Present Confirmation: Is the Church Fulfilling her Scriptural Obligations?

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