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CONFIRMATION!

**HOW
COME?**

Trinity Booklet No. 5



LANCE R. SHILTON

CONFIRMATION! HOW COME?

An Address by

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"CONFIRMATION! HOW COME?"

Confirmation should be one of the most inspiring occasions in a person's life. When handed your Confirmation Certificate at the conclusion of the Confirmation Service, after years in the Sunday School and months of special preparation, you are not being handed your "Leaving Certificate". Unfortunately, that is the case with some who approach this important service in the wrong way. They leave the Sunday School, or they leave the Study Courses, and eventually they leave the Church. But Confirmation is like signing the matriculation roll of a university. It is the beginning of new responsibilities and privileges, requiring disciplined application in learning more and more until graduation at the Judgment Day.

Confirmation is a significant landmark which a baptized, converted Christian passes on his spiritual pilgrimage to heaven. Most are confirmed in their early teenage years, and it represents their first responsible decision as they emerge out of childhood

into the new, wide, exciting world of adulthood. Others are confirmed much later and approach it with adult seriousness. Perhaps there have been little or no connections with the Church, but they have found later in life the Christ of whom they had been ignorant. Some come to Confirmation because previously they have belonged to denominations where this ordinance was not administered.

I trust that this address will be helpful to those anticipating their Confirmation in the near future, and preparing for it now; those who were Confirmed recently and are now prepared to think more deeply about what it meant, and those who are older whose Confirmation took place many years ago, and who want to refresh their memory.

What is meant by Confirmation? There is a God-ward aspect and a man-ward aspect. God confirms and strengthens through the power of the Holy Spirit. The candidate confirms the promises which were provisionally taken by him or by his godparents at his baptism. God confirms and the confirmer confirms.

1. AT CONFIRMATION YOU FOLLOW THE SCRIPTURAL EXAMPLE

The Prayer Book calls the service, "The Order" (not sacrament) "of Confirmation or Laying on of Hands upon those that are Baptized and come to Years of Discretion." THE LAYING ON OF HANDS is an ancient symbolic act, used in four different ways in the Bible.

(a) A SIGN OF GENERAL BLESSING. Jacob in the Old Testament, shortly before his death, laid his hands on his two grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh, praying that God would "bless the lads", and Jesus in the New Testament took the children "in His arms and blessed them, laying His hands upon them."

(b) A COMMISSION FOR SPECIAL TASKS. The people of Israel laid their hands on the Levites to dedicate them to the service of the tabernacle. Moses laid his hands on Joshua and appointed him to be his successor. The Apostles laid their hands on the seven men in ordination, whom he had chosen to help them in practical social work in

which the Church was involved. The Church at Antioch laid their hands on Barnabas and Saul as they sent them out from their congregation as missionaries on the first missionary journey. St. Paul and some presbyters "laid their hands on Timothy, who was himself to lay his hands on others.

(c) A TOUCH OF HEALING. Christ laid His hands on the sick, sometimes on their head, and sometimes on the affected part of their body.

(d) AN ACT OF CONFIRMATION. When the Samaritans first believed, the Apostles at Jerusalem sent Peter and John to investigate. When they had satisfied themselves that they were genuine converts, they lay their hands on them, as did St. Paul also on some Ephesian disciples after he had baptized them in the Name of the Lord Jesus (Refer J. Stott: "Your Confirmation"); also Gen. 48:14-16, Mark 10:16, Num. 8:10, 27:15-23, Deut. 34:9, Acts 6:1-6, 13:1-3, I Tim. 4:14, 5:22, II Tim. 1:6, Luke 4:40, Acts 8:14-17, 19:1-7.

John Stott remarks "This act of laying hands on newly converted

Christians does not seem to have been performed in every case. . . . When a convert was baptized and confirmed, the one rite no doubt immediately followed the other. As the years passed, however, the Christian parents brought their children to baptism, and confirmation became gradually separated from baptism. Baptism took place in infancy, but confirmation was reserved for a later age when the candidate could speak for himself.

What, then, does confirmation signify? It is a sign or pledge certifying God's gracious favour and goodness to the candidates as indicated in the Bishop's prayer in the Confirmation Service. However, no candidate receives this sign or certificate until he has first publicly declared himself a repentant believer in the Lord Jesus.

2. AT CONFIRMATION YOU DECLARE YOUR PERSONAL FAITH

This provides a magnificent opportunity of personally declaring your faith in Christ as Saviour. At your baptism your Godparents promised on your behalf to renounce what is wrong,

to believe what is true, and to follow what is right. Then the Bishop asks you a very personal question:

"Do ye here, in the presence of God and of this congregation, renew the solemn promise and vow that was made in your name at your Baptism; ratifying and confirming the same in your own persons, and acknowledging yourselves bound to believe and to do all those things which your Godfathers and Godmothers then undertook for you?" The candidate's answer is "I DO."

Although many may answer at the same time, it is still a personal statement. You answer for yourself by saying "I do". No one else can do it for you now. You must say it and mean it yourself. To be confirmed without having first accepted Christ personally is a mockery. You may not know the exact time when you received Him. That is not important, but it is essential that you should know Christ as your personal Saviour now. To receive Christ means that you acknowledge that you are a sinner in need of God's forgiveness, that you believe that Jesus Christ died on the Cross to take away

your sin, that you have considered carefully what total commitment to Him as Lord means, and you come to Him with a prayer like this:

"Lord, I now admit that I am a sinner. I realise that You died to take away the guilt of my sin. I come to You now and accept you as my Saviour. Help me to declare your salvation before others. Amen."

In the biography of Bishop George Chambers, first pioneer Bishop of Central Tanganyika, entitled "Dare to Look Up", the author states that when the Bishop was 14, he was prepared for Confirmation. Many years later, George Chambers wrote, "Confirmation places before me the alternative to live for myself or to live for others. As I knelt before the Bishop a real dedication of my life took place . . ." This lad knew Christ as Saviour, and at his Confirmation acknowledged Him as Lord.

3. AT CONFIRMATION YOU MAKE A PUBLIC PROFESSION

First it is in the presence of the congregation, which should be the easiest place to witness to your faith. We need

the help of each other as Christians because of the severe battles which are before us. We have strong adversaries in the world, the flesh and the devil. Because your standards are not necessarily the latest opinions of men who do not recognize Biblical morality, you may be ridiculed for your beliefs or be considered narrow-minded, old fashioned or "square", or "fuddy duddy".

Malcolm Muggeridge, the well-known British commentator, said at the end of a 2½ hour debate at Latrobe University in Melbourne, "God knows I don't mind being disagreed with, but the shallowness and sheer tenth-rateness of their attitude was deeply distressing . . . This has been an unhappy experience for me; deeply unhappy, in fact, because the things that seem to be the really serious things in life have been the subject of derision and fatuous giggles."

You may not have the experience to face a hostile audience like that, but you have the same Holy Spirit to strengthen you in your public profession, wherever it may be.

The world in which you will have to make your witness will become increasingly difficult. The moral and spiritual issues will not be so clear cut. A pornographic book on sex which, when it first appeared in 1961, was complained about to the police, has sold some 12 million copies, and according to a newspaper article recently ("The Australian"), Danish parents not infrequently give a copy to their children as a Confirmation present. Confirmation in Lutheran Denmark is at around 15.

Remember, you have been signed with the sign of the Cross, in token that hereafter you shall never be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ Crucified, and manfully fight under His banner against sin, the world and the devil, and continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant until your life's end. You begin that confession of faith in the presence of a Christian congregation, but you go from the four walls of the church into the world at large, not in your own strength, but in Christ's. Confirmation has been called "the ordination of the laity". When the Bishop lays his hands on your head, it is not only

to assure you of God's blessing, but to commission you to go out into all the world as a witness to Jesus Christ.

We admire the courage, vision and endurance of the astronauts who are pioneering the way to the moon. You will need all these qualities to venture into the unknown for Christ. Just as thousands of people throughout the world will be watching the astronauts do the seemingly impossible, so the world in which you live will be watching your public profession of Christ. What will they see—victory or defeat? That will largely depend upon your communications.

4. AT CONFIRMATION YOU ENTER INTO FULL CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

As well as regular prayer and systematic Bible study as a basis of your fellowship with others, at Confirmation there opens up for you another avenue ordained by Christ Himself, known as Holy Communion. It is the fellowship meal of Christians by invitation of the Lord Jesus. The Lord's Supper as it is also called, has other meanings apart from fellowship.

1. REMEMBRANCE. It commemorates the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross. Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of Me." The Catechism says that it was ordained "for the continual remembrance of the sacrifice of the death of Christ, and of the benefits we receive thereby."

2. PARTICIPATION. Jesus not only said, "This is My Body" and "This is My Blood", but "Take, eat" and "drink this". The disciples were not merely to watch and listen, but they must eat and drink.

Two questions arise:

(a) IN WHAT DO WE PARTICIPATE? The Church of England does not believe in transubstantiation, which is the supposed change of the substance of the bread and wine into the substance of the Body and Blood of Christ. Article XXVIII clearly states the Biblical teaching: "The Supper of the Lord is . . . a Sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death, inasmuch that to such as rightly, worthily and with faith, receive the same, the bread which we

break is a partaking of the Body of Christ, and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the Blood of Christ . . . The Body of Christ is given, taken and eaten in the Supper, only after a heavenly and spiritual manner. And the means whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is FAITH . . .”

3. THANKSGIVING. The Lord’s Supper from very early days has been called by some the Eucharist, which is a Greek word for ‘thanksgiving’. In this sense the Lord’s Supper includes a ‘sacrifice’. It is this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. The Lord’s Supper is not a sacrifice of Christ. We remember Christ’s sacrifice; we partake by faith of its benefits, we enjoy together the fellowship it made possible, but we do not in any sense repeat Christ’s sacrifice or represent it. That is why in the Church of England it is wrong to call the Holy Table an “altar”, because an altar is a place of sacrifice. The Reformers carefully and deliberately excluded the use of the word, and put in its place the words “the Holy Table”, “The Lord’s Table”, “The Communion

Table”, and “The Table”. The minister at the Holy Communion Service is not a priest sacrificing at an altar; he is a minister or presbyter serving at a table. He administers a sacrament to the people; he does not offer a sacrifice to God. But in thanksgiving to God, minister and people alike offer themselves in sacrificial service in the words, “Here we offer and present unto Thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and lively sacrifice unto Thee.”

Each confirmed person should approach Holy Communion REGULARLY (the Acts of the Apostles suggests that every Sunday the early Christians met to break bread). REVERENTLY, with careful preparation; PENITENTLY, admitting our failures; EXPECTANTLY, waiting upon the ministry of God’s Word; PRAYERFULLY, aware of the needs of others; FAITHFULLY, remembering Christ’s death on the Cross, and THANKFULLY, surrendering ourselves to Him in dedicated service.

At Confirmation your full fellowship with other believers in the Church of England is recognized. The rubric at the

end of the Confirmation Service says, "And there shall none be admitted to the Holy Communion until such time as he be confirmed, or be ready and desirous to be confirmed." While this is a domestic rule for these who claim membership of the Church of England, it does not historically and scripturally prevent others who are communicant members of other Christian denominations partaking of the Holy Communion in the Church of England on occasions, but naturally if they continue to do so, they would need to consider how far this rule of Confirmation applies to them, too.

5. AT CONFIRMATION YOU COME FOR PRAYER SUPPORT

When the Bishop lays his hands on your head at the Confirmation Service, he prays, "Defend, O Lord, this Thy servant with Thy Heavenly Grace, that he may continue Thine for ever, and daily increase in Thy Holy Spirit more and more, until he come unto Thy everlasting kindom."

There are five important emphases in this comprehensive prayer:

DEFEND: How much each Christian needs the defence of God. How can we hope to fight the battle of life on our own? The world, the flesh and the devil are too great; we need God's strength, and the power of the Holy Spirit is promised.

THY HEAVENLY GRACE. This is not something which comes automatically by simply "going through" the Service on Confirmation. The Service itself, without prayer and faith, is simply empty words. But the Heavenly Grace is available, not because we deserve it, or have earned it, but because we need it.

CONTINUE THINE FOR EVER: Having once put our faith in Christ as Saviour, we may depend upon His Heavenly Grace to enable us to continue for ever, because success does not depend upon our own resources, but upon the power of God, as stated by the Apostle Paul: "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

DAILY INCREASE IN THY HOLY SPIRIT:

Notice that the prayer is for the INCREASE of the Holy Spirit, not the receiving of Him for the first time. The Holy Spirit's regenerating work began at the time of conversion, which may have been prior to the actual Service of Confirmation, but there is the daily necessity for INCREASE in the Holy Spirit. Certainly, too, the Holy Spirit may be pleased at Confirmation to endow the candidate with some special gift or gifts, as when Paul laid his hands on Timothy (II Tim. 1:6): "Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands." Just as we pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit every time we read the Scripture, so we need to pray for the increase of the Holy Spirit at the time of Confirmation, and continue such a prayer daily.

UNTIL HE COME UNTO THY EVERLASTING KINGDOM:

What a wonderful note of assurance on which to conclude. Your Confirmation is a beginning leading to an end. It is the opening of the gateway into the road leading to the eternal Kingdom. Some

will remember in November, 1942, just after the successful conclusion of the Battle of El Alamein, when Rommel and his troops had been routed and 30,000 prisoners taken, Sir Winston Churchill was invited to speak at the Lord Mayor's luncheon banquet at the Mansion Home to mark the first great victory of the War. The Prime Minister said, "Gentlemen, this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is perhaps the end of the beginning."

Your Confirmation is not the end, nor the beginning of the end—it is the end of the beginning which will continue until you come unto Christ's everlasting Kingdom.

PERSONAL PRAYERS

PREPARING TO BE CONFIRMED

HEAVENLY FATHER, I come to Thee through Thy Son, Jesus Christ, in simple repentance, faith and surrender. Grant that what I personally believe I may openly profess, so that having received Thy Holy Spirit through faith, I may be assured thereof by the laying on of hands, and go forth strengthened by Thy Grace to serve Thee in the fellowship of Thy Church; for Christ's sake.

AMEN.

APPRECIATING HOLY COMMUNION

LORD JESUS CHRIST, we humbly thank Thee that Thou didst choose bread and wine to be the emblems of Thy sacred body and blood, given on the cross for the sins of the world, and didst command us thus to remember Thee. Deepen our repentance, strengthen our faith and increase our

love for the brethren, that, eating and drinking the sacrament of our redemption, we may truly feed on Thee in our hearts with thanksgiving, for the sake of Thy great and worthy Name.

WITNESSING IN THE WORLD

O GOD OUR FATHER, who didst not spare Thine only Son, delivering Him up for us all, save us from our sinful selfishness and fears. Constrain us by Thy love to present our bodies a living sacrifice unto Thee, which is our reasonable service. Strengthen us never to be ashamed to confess in the world, the faith of Christ Crucified, through Him Who loved us and gave Himself for us, Thy Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour. AMEN.

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