

Confirmation: Maturity or Initiation?

By Msgr. William H. Shannon

Today in the Church there are two different theologies of Confirmation. One sees Confirmation as the sacrament of adult commitment. Those who defend this theology want to push the time of Confirmation to the later years of adolescence or to the time of young adulthood. Their reason for later Confirmation is based on the conviction that one has to be approaching adulthood before he can seriously make a personal commitment of faith.

But there is another theology of Confirmation that is emerging from the liturgical documents that have been published since Vatican II and which finds its roots in the practice of the early Church.

This theology sees Confirmation not in isolation but as an integral part of Christian initiation. Confirmation is part of a total process whereby an adult person is initiated into Christ and into the Christian community.

I say, "an adult person," for Christianity is fundamentally a religion for adults. In the ideal order, then, Christian initiation is the experience whereby an adult

responds in faith to God's call and is initiated into the Christian community in a single rite that includes Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. When an adult person becomes a Christian, he is not to be baptized without being confirmed, and he is to be baptized and confirmed at a Mass where he joins the community in eating for the first time at the Eucharistic table.

The Church is adamant that the initiation experience of an adult must not be broken up into three separate sacramental ceremonies, but is to take place in a single rite whereby he is baptized, chrismated and eucharistized. The initiation of adults, therefore, means Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist — in this order and without a time-span between them.

The problem we have to face in the Church is that it is not adult baptism but infant baptism that is the practical norm today. Confirmation is administered at a much later date and usually after Holy Communion has been received. As a result the position of Confirmation in the initiation process has become unclear, and First Communion is hardly seen as the

climax of the process of initiation which it is intended to be.

One of the problems we have to face in the Church is the problem of how to carry out effectively the full initiation into the Church of those who are baptized as infants. How can we achieve the proper order of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist? A large number of liturgical scholars are suggesting that we can do this by returning to the ancient practice — still retained in the Eastern Church — of infant Confirmation.

Briefly put, these are the two views of Confirmation in the Church today: (1) Confirmation as the sacrament of adult commitment and (2) Confirmation as part of the rite of Christian initiation. Much of our practice in recent years has been based on the first view. The recent Vatican liturgical documents seem strongly to favor the second view.

St. Mary's May Lose Lunch Room

Bath — St. Mary's School plans to close its cafeteria at the end of this school year unless a way is found to make the operation economically solvent.

Shirley Sheils, president of the St. Mary's School Board, spoke with an official from the Steuben County Economic Development Program (SCEOP) about a "few possibilities" for a cooperative arrangement that would keep the cafeteria open but nothing definite was decided.

The school itself will remain open and no classes will be dropped. More than 90 students are enrolled in kindergarten through fourth grade. There also is a nursery school.

New Center Named for Otto Shults

The new \$4 million College Community Center scheduled to open this fall at Nazareth College will be named after the late Otto A. Shults, former chairman of the college's board of trustees. The announcement was made by Supreme Court Justice Emmett J. Schnepf, present chairman of the board.

The new center is designed to enrich both the college and the community," Judge Schnepf said. "It is fitting that it should be named for a man who spent a lifetime serving the community and 35 totally dedicated years enriching the life of Nazareth College as a counselor and benefactor."

The center will include a student union, a life activities and physical education wing and an interfaith religious center interconnected in one 67,000 square-foot complex centrally located behind the college's administration building.

Dr. Alice L. Foley, Nazareth president, said the center will provide a nerve center for the recreational, social and spiritual needs of Nazareth's rapidly changing student population which has been expanded by increasing numbers of men, part-time and commuting students.

WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mt. 28: 16-20; (R1) Dt. 4: 32-34, 39-40; (R2) Rom. 8: 14-17.

What was the greatest revelation of the Old Testament? It was monotheism — that God is one God. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one God!" What was the greatest revelation of the New Testament? It was that of the Trinity — that this one God is a community of Persons, three to be exact. The Church proclaims this mystery rather than explains it. She tells us God is bigger than we think, and better!

The significant term in dealing with the mystery of the Trinity is "person." We won't go into a philosophical explanation of it. Suffice it to say that Boethius (c. 500 A.D.) defined "person" as a unique thinking being. He discovered that what made a person a person was not so much his ability to think, which every man has, as the fact that a person is unique, like one's own mother. That he is so totally different from everybody else that he can say, "I, me and nobody else, and nobody else is exactly like me. Therefore my name is proper — proper to me, my own property, and it is personal, like a personal pronoun, which applies either to me or you or him or her, nobody else." Hence we get personal when we call somebody by name. It is one of the signs of God's infinity that in creating billions of persons, God never once repeated Himself. Such individuality constitutes true personality.

Because each person is unique, each person is irreplaceable, invaluable, sacred. We can replace a light bulb, but never a person — there is no other just like him in the whole wide world. The monstrous crime of kidnapping rests on the universal conviction that a person is worth any amount of money, that there is just no one else exactly like the victim. Every person has a marvelous completeness: a mind, a will, everything needed to live a

human life. That was why the Hebrews were so fiercely against idol worship. For them, God was not a stick, a stone, a senseless thing, as were the gods of heathendom. Their God was a Person, and their religion a person-to-person relationship.

Then came Jesus, the Son of God. He not only seized upon the realization that God is a Person, but He exalted and completed it. God is a Person — true, but God is more — He is Persons, a community of Persons.

Thus modern psychology was able to add to Boethius' definition of person the further notion drawn from revelation of the Trinity, namely otherness. A person is somebody related to others. Every person starts life tied to another by an umbilical cord. And all through life, he can never cut that cord.

Thus in the Trinity, each Person is unique: the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is neither Father nor Son. They are distinct Persons. Yet each Person is related to the other.

In fact, in the Trinity the Persons are relations! For instance the Father is Father because He has a Son, and the Son is Son because of His relationship to the Father, and the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit because He is the love between Father and Son.

Correlative, therefore, to the concept of person is that of community. Thus to become fully persons we must not only be ourselves, do our own thing, but we must also relate to others. Every man must preserve in himself his identity, his uniqueness, by being truly himself, being what God meant him to be. Yet at the same time he must not become a promethean rebel, flaunting all mankind in the realization of his rugged individualism. Rather he is also called to build community, to relate to others. He must become bonded to other persons. And that bond between him and others must be the same bond that exists among the Persons of God — the bond of love.

INSIGHTS On Pastoral Liturgy

The purpose of this article is not to resolve the dilemma we face in both the theological and practical order regarding Confirmation, but simply to surface the dilemma, so that it can be given more serious thought by those who are involved in Confirmation programs in our diocese. We cannot take steps to resolve the dilemma until we understand the issues at stake. This article is, therefore, intended to open up dialogue on this important question. We invite response from interested readers.

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Beginning 2:30 at St. Mary's - Dansville. Will then proceed to Sacred Heart Church - Perkinsville. 4:30 at St. Joseph's - Wayland. Former parishioners invited to participate to honor the longest continuous resident of this area, Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

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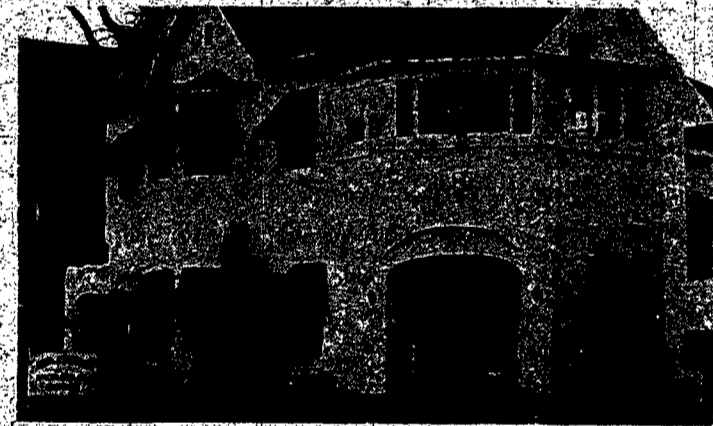
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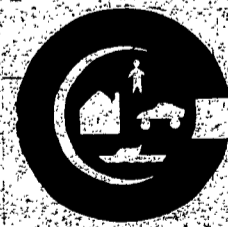


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