

“A groundbreaking work about a sacrament that is important pastorally yet whose theology and practice are often debated, not to say controverted. The author’s modest and respectful tone belie the brilliance and depth of this book. Both pastorally poignant and pertinent, this is a must read for pastoral ministers interested in deepening their appreciation of what is often a misunderstood sacrament.”

—Rev. Msgr. Kevin Irwin
Ordinary Professor of Liturgical Studies and Sacramental Theology
The Msgr. Walter J. Schmitz, S. S. Professor of Liturgical Studies
The Catholic University of America

“Timothy Gabrielli’s study of confirmation and U.S. culture in the twentieth century is a welcome addition to the literature on this sacrament ‘in search of a theology.’ This book explains why we think about confirmation in the different ways that we do and it encourages those charged with preparing others for this sacrament always to keep in mind that the Catholic faith and its sacramental practices occur in a cultural context that always has an impact on how the Gospel is understood and lived. I highly recommend this book for religious educators or anyone who wants a deeper understanding of the interplay between culture and sacramental theology/practice.”

—Timothy Brunk
Associate Professor of Theology
Villanova University

“Timothy Gabrielli jumps with both feet into the ‘ongoing conversation’ about the meaning of Confirmation. . . . He writes clearly and insightfully. As one who has participated actively in this conversation for several decades, I recommend this book to all who play a role in helping young Catholics to develop and deepen a relationship with the indwelling Person of the Holy Spirit.”

—Sister Kieran Sawyer, SSND
Confirming Faith, Ave Maria Press

“Anyone discussing confirmation must bring to the conversation hefty amounts of courage and wisdom, and Timothy Gabrielli does bring both. His survey of theological, psychological, charismatic, and humanist motifs—which, since Pius X’s 1910 *Quam Singulari*, have been used to explain the meaning of confirmation—highlights how different understandings of the sacrament have been influenced by the evolving relationship of Catholics to the American culture. Emphasizing that confirmation confers the gift of the Person of the Holy Spirit, *Confirmation: How a Sacrament of God’s Grace Became All about Us* is a worthy contribution to our study of the sacrament many consider still to be ‘in search of a theology.’”

—Fr. Kurt Stasiak, OSB
Professor of Sacramental-Liturgical Theology
Saint Meinrad Seminary

“Timothy Gabrielli is to be commended for having navigated with great balance and skill the complexities regarding the theology and practice of the Sacrament of Confirmation, positing his exploration within the increasingly diverse cultural reality that is the twenty-first century Church in North America. The historical, theological, and pastoral depth of this work, written in a clear and accessible style, will make this book a very useful resource for scholars and pastoral practitioners alike.”

—Keith F. Pecklers, S.J.
Pontifical Gregorian University
Pontifical Liturgical Institute
Rome, Italy

Confirmation

*How a Sacrament of God's Grace
Became All about Us*

Timothy R. Gabrielli



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Dedicated to
My mother, Amy Gabrielli (1955–1998),
who saw to it that I was formed in the womb of the church
&
To my daughters, Sofia and Lidia Gabrielli,
may you be continually formed in its womb

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Foreword

Confirmation, according to a classic strain of Catholic tradition, is the sacrament that both signifies and effects a grace-filled strengthening by the Holy Spirit.

Tim Gabrielli has written a book that explores the meaning and practice of this sacrament in twentieth-century United States as well as today. Such an exploration, Gabrielli explains, requires also a simultaneous exploration of how Catholics have experienced the relationship between their faith and the U.S. culture. One cannot understand the first without simultaneously understanding the second. Gabrielli articulates a sophisticated but accessible narrative as he analyzes various catechetical and liturgical approaches to what some have called “the sacrament of choice” and what others have called “the sacrament of exit.”

Is the book primarily a history? Is it primarily a systematic theology? Is it primarily a guide for thought for pastoral ministers? Yes. Yes. And Yes.

Gabrielli belongs to a generation of young Catholic theologians who want to get beyond various divisions and to offer intellectual support for the everyday living of the faith. He transcends these divisions not by ignoring them but by understanding them within their own historical context. His book offers an integrated vision of the history, theology, and practice of confirmation. He approaches his subject descriptively and even-handedly, though he also issues clear criticisms as he points to the strengths and weaknesses of a wide variety of positions.

Paradoxically, confirmation had become the sacrament of engagement with the world before that famous council made engagement with the world a key Catholic theme. Paradoxically, a strong focus on engagement with the world has encountered the danger of becoming swallowed up in a culture that somehow manages to overvalue (or perhaps to improperly

define) the extremely valuable human capacity for individuality and autonomy. In the end, concerning questions such as the most proper mode of theological understanding for confirmation, or the appropriate age of reception, or the ordering within the sacraments, Gabrielli does not offer one fixed position that would simply take its place along the spectrum of warring factions. Instead, he offers wisdom designed to lead us beyond the polarized camps as we struggle to live out the meaning of the sacraments.

Dennis M. Doyle
University of Dayton
April 14, 2013

Acknowledgments

In one of its many meanings, to confirm something is to lend support to it. *Confirmation* would not be possible without quite a bit of support! Indeed, it is remarkable that such a short book could rest on the hard work of so many, without whom it likely would not have seen the light of day. The following people are some of those who have so worked on its behalf.

Dennis Doyle, who helped to see this project through from its infancy. His patience, wisdom, and prodding were invaluable to me.

Kelly Johnson, who read the manuscript and exercised much grace and charity in discussing its contents with me; William Portier, who also read the manuscript, made helpful suggestions, and offered many exhortations along the way; Sandra Yocum, who provided encouragement as well as a particular insight about Catholic Action literature; Tim Brunk, who without my asking (!) read the entire manuscript and commented; Deb Wilson, who consistently reminded me of the importance of this work for those working in confirmation prep; numerous theologians and diocesan directors of religious education, who provided me with syllabi and information regarding confirmation in their dioceses, respectively; Janet Benestad, who gave me the opportunity to teach teens in the diocese of Scranton; Michael Lombardo, who listened to many a germinating idea, offered incisive comments and much support.

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My father and sister, who offered consistent enthusiasm for my work. My brother, Karan Singh, who kept me inspired over numerous cups of coffee and lots of delicious food.

Most importantly, my wife, Jessica, whose love, patience, insight, commitment, and joy constitute a daily gift to me.

Introduction

My interest in the sacrament of confirmation began while teaching religious education for postconfirmation Catholics in the Diocese of Scranton, Pennsylvania from 2001 to 2004. This diocesan-centered program was inaugurated because of a shortage of parish-level postconfirmation catechetical and general religious education programs. In many of the diocese's parishes young people were deprived of ongoing religious education after confirmation. As far as I know the diocese had no centralized mandate regarding the age of confirmation's celebration, but most of the students who entered this program were in grades seven through twelve, so it is safe to assume that confirmation was often celebrated in early adolescence. My colleagues and I taught the students everything from the Pauline Epistles to the Christian tradition of prayer.

There was, however, seemingly constant pastoral strife over the students' involvement with the program. While the diocesan central offices kept trying to drum up support for the program, some pastors were reluctant to recommend their young people because such a recommendation seemed effectively to serve as an indictment of their own failure at the parish level. It seemed, however, that what failed at the parish level was widespread interest from Catholic young people: even parishes that tried to get a program off of the ground were unable to do so because of lack of student interest. The same fate befell the diocesan program: funding was cut off after the numbers failed to increase over several years.

Aside from diocesan politics, there seemed to be a deeper issue here that gave rise to a series of questions. Questions such as: What is it that is so challenging about continuing religious education for teens? Why is it that confirmation serves as a fulcrum for participation in religious education—that is, it is the moment when things seem to change for

youth involvement in parish life? Are there theological factors that have contributed to this particular educational phenomenon? What are we doing when we confirm people in adolescence?

These questions and others regarding pneumatology and sacramental theology drove my initial interest in this project in which I had hoped to find the problem and offer a solution. My naïveté was broken by the spectrum of interesting developments of confirmation in twentieth-century America alone. As I dove into the research, I began to discover that confirmation stood as a symbol, a flagship, a cornerstone, a mode of appeal, and a sacramental legitimation of various movements and renewals central to the development of Catholicism in the United States during the last century.

Further research on this particular score led me to the thesis that I defend throughout this short book, namely, that Roman Catholic approaches to the sacrament of confirmation throughout the twentieth century in the United States reflected Catholics' changing self-definition in terms of, or in contrast to, the wider American society. Confirmation, then, serves as a reflection of the relationship between Catholics and the culture.

This thesis has important ramifications for confirmation theology and practice as well as Catholic identity. While theologies of confirmation are anything but uniform throughout the century, there are, nevertheless, some periodic themes that arise. Early in the century, confirmation was widely identified as the sacrament of Catholic Action; it was therefore the sacrament in which Catholics moved from being inward-focused to being outward-focused and were thereby attuned to "see, judge, act" (the motto of Catholic Action) in order to "restore all things in Christ" (the motto of Pope St. Pius X). During the 1960s, while U.S. Catholics saw a large-scale social integration into the wider culture, some theologies of confirmation took on individualistic overtones, even as the dominant theology of the Second Vatican Council rejected the more individualistic bent of neoscholastic sacramental theology. In the next decade, some in the Catholic charismatic renewal adopted confirmation as equivalent to the more Pentecostal "baptism in the Spirit," which, at times, embodied this individualism. In the eighties and following, some theologies of confirmation further developed confirmation as a time for a Catholic's individual choice of his or her religion. More recently, some catechists and theologians lament the results of these theologies and programs of choice, which give rise to such elations as "I memorized everything" or "I got my sacraments," to the detriment of the ongoing relationship

between the church and the person. In the past decade or so, voices have arisen that both endorse and decry the many forms, and therefore theologies, that confirmation takes in the church.

While much maligned and hotly debated, the story of confirmation in twentieth-century America also seems to be the story of the ongoing struggle of Catholics to find their identity and place and to create an identity and place for younger Catholics within both American society and the transnational church. I hope that one of the unique contributions of this book is that it foregrounds this struggle in its analysis of confirmation.

As it works across four main periods in the twentieth century, the book takes the form of a theological and catechetical survey of the decades of the twentieth century rather than a strictly narrative history. I attempted to place thinkers, pastors, and teachers in dialogue with one another, so that the reader may observe the general trajectory of the conversation, which I argue is largely influenced by the changing relationship between Catholics and the wider culture. My hope is that the format clearly shows places of overlap between different works as well as making clear references to the works themselves. Insofar as it was practically possible, I have quoted directly from primary sources in order to maintain their integrity and exact language, especially because in many places that language is crucial to understanding the author's approach.

While the cultural influence on theology and pastoral work has been duly noted in many places, the uniqueness of the cultural impact on confirmation is that culture does not seem to have affected the other seven sacraments as drastically. One reason for this seems to be the way the following factors and influences progressively came together in the twentieth century: Pope Pius X's lowering the age of First Eucharist, the Catholic Action movement, advances in psychological and educational theory, Vatican II, the dissolution of the immigrant subculture in America, and the Catholic charismatic movement. Confirmation's particular place in the midst of the transition to adulthood left it susceptible to theological and pastoral adaptation.

Each chapter of the book treats a particular period in the twentieth century. The periodization grew out of the sources and is based upon developments in confirmation conversations, especially as they pertain to specific developments and movements in Catholic life.

While many historians have divided the first half of the twentieth century into smaller periods, for the purposes of studying confirmation,

I have decided to mark 1910 to 1959 as one large period, not because I wish to assert that all theology leading up to the Second Vatican Council was flatline, but rather because the shifts that do occur throughout this period fit, in some sense, under the Catholic Action umbrella, which dominated the consciousness of Catholics in terms of their relationship to the wider transcontinental church and to the wider society. The liturgical renewal, also a driving force in the confirmation conversation, was itself connected to Catholic Action and confirmation in interesting ways. The end of this period coincides with Debra Campbell's end mark for what she calls the "Heyday of Catholic Action."¹

The 1960s seemed tumultuous enough to merit an entire chapter. William Portier cites the 1960s as the time in which Catholics moved out of Catholic neighborhoods and into the suburbs. By the end of this decade Portier says, Catholics were virtually statistically indistinguishable from other citizens.² In addition to this "dissolution of the subculture," this period saw *ressourcement* theology at its apogee, the Second Vatican Council, and the beginnings of the interplay of psychological theory and sacramental theology. All of these had their effects on both confirmation and Catholics' self-definition. These stories, of confirmation and Catholics' self-understanding in the twentieth century, should not be isolated but rather considered in light of one another. Taken together, the events and movements of the sixties serve as a turning point insofar as they set the stage for confirmation's development after 1971.

The Catholic charismatic renewal formally began at Duquesne University in 1967. Its major influence on the theology of confirmation, however, did not bubble up until the following decade around the time of and following the promulgation of the revised rite of confirmation by Pope Paul VI in 1971. Therefore, I consider the charismatic renewal's impact on confirmation in a chapter dedicated to the years between 1971 and 1980. In addition to bearing the marks of the charismatic renewal and the revised rite, confirmation in this decade continued to serve as the canvas upon which the relationship of U.S. Catholics to their wider pluralistic culture was painted. As Catholics continue to become less distinct from their fellow U.S. citizens, confirmation becomes a time for younger Catholics to choose the church from among an increasing number of religious options offered by a pluralistic society.

In the final period after 1981, the charismatic renewal takes a back seat to the confirmation question while confirmation begins to absorb the characteristic individualist emphasis of American culture in a particular manner. What drives this period is a growing sense of individualism

among Catholics, noted by many American Catholic historians. In line with the argument made throughout this book, confirmation theology and pastoral reflections seem to match this growing individualism with a strong emphasis on confirmation as the time of individual choice. During this same period, many catechists and pastoral associates begin to recognize, and criticize, young people's exodus from parish life after confirmation, what they come to call "confirmation as graduation." The chapter suggests that these two tendencies—to theologize confirmation as a time of individual choice and to exit parish life following it—are deeply related.

The development of this particular approach to confirmation and its accompanying problems grows to be something of a major subtext of this work. If confirmation theology reflects, in some measure, Catholics' relationship to the wider culture, by the end of the twentieth century that influence has reached a level at which confirmation has unintentionally begun to undercut Catholic identity. The conclusion, then, makes some general suggestions about the direction of the confirmation conversation and points to some particular approaches to confirmation that hold promise for addressing the contemporary context.

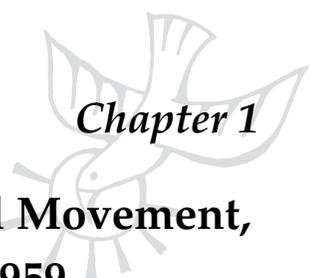
Some, especially in the later twentieth century, deem confirmation "the forgotten sacrament." While such a designation proves accurate from one angle, from others confirmation appears to be absolutely central to numerous important Catholic movements in the United States. Scratching the surface a bit, it quickly becomes clear that confirmation received no shortage of attention from theologians and catechists in the United States throughout the twentieth century. Certainly in some cases, this attention betrays the lack of attention given it by Catholics in the pews and serves as a sort of rallying cry for the importance of the sacrament. There are, however, also cases, such as the Catholic charismatic movement, where the excitement over confirmation is much more organic and is even a gesture of revitalizing the recognition of the Spirit's presence in the life of the church at large.

A few words are necessary, then, about the sources that built this project. I have made no attempt to be comprehensive in composing the bibliography, but tried to be reasonably representative of all the major themes and developments of confirmation in the twentieth century. I have included a number of sources generally absent from strictly theological writings about confirmation—pamphlets, letters to editors, educational manuals and textbooks, and articles in catechetical periodicals—in addition to some major theological books and articles. I have also

made use of selective historical studies that address the issues pertinent to the development of confirmation in the United States.

I hope that with this unique collection of sources, the book contributes something valuable to the ongoing conversation. I also hope that my work shows the importance of the work that already has been done on confirmation. Many have been tempted to throw up their proverbial arms in theological and pastoral frustration with all that has been written and said about confirmation over the past century. Yet, the theology of confirmation has been at the center of the relationship between Catholics and the wider culture in the United States. This work shows that confirmation, unlike any other sacrament, has served as a cipher for Catholics' place in the wider American context and as a location for working out that identity. This has important implications for the present. We need to discern, as a church, what sort of relationship between Catholics and the wider culture the sacrament of confirmation is instilling in the mostly younger Catholics who receive the sacrament in the twenty-first century. We need, then, to ask important questions about that relationship, which this book only begins to ask. In other words, we need to be more self-reflective about the interplay between the church's place in the culture and sacramental/catechetical practice. In still other words, we should think deeply about the ways that Catholicism has been inculturated in the United States along with the challenges and opportunities unique to the American church, and this reflection must be connected to our sacramental and catechetical practices.

In Louis-Marie Chauvet's discussion of initiation in his magnum opus *Symbol and Sacrament*, he speaks of a series of paradoxes that must remain in an "unstable equilibrium" if Christian initiation is to be able to function well. Among these paradoxes he lists, "the necessity of setting an end to the initiation process, an end which, however, never truly arrives in Christianity."³ In some ways this study may be seen as an attempt to exhort Catholics to do a better job of "holding up both ends of the chain," to use the words of Henri de Lubac, of this paradox. The development of confirmation in the American context has, largely because of the wider individualism of the culture, too heavily emphasized the former aspect of this initiation paradox such that the latter has largely been obscured. It is the sagging of that latter end of the chain, among other things, that I experienced firsthand and inspired me to write this book.



Chapter 1

Confirmation, the Liturgical Movement, and Catholic Action: 1910–1959

Quam Singulari

The age of discretion, both for Confession and for Holy Communion, is the time when a child begins to reason, that is about the seventh year, more or less. From that time on begins the obligation of fulfilling the precept of both Confession and Communion.¹

With these words of August 1910, the Sacred Congregation of the Discipline of the Sacraments under Pope Pius X laid bare the troubled underbelly of confirmation without even mentioning it. The congregation clearly identified the oft-cited and variously interpreted “age of reason or discretion” with the seventh year. Prior to the decree, First Eucharist was not permitted before age twelve and was sometimes received as late as sixteen.² Confirmation was normally celebrated around age seven, sometimes as late as twelve, but nearly always before First Communion. As such, it rested between the two more highly regarded sacraments of baptism and First Eucharist and escaped any distinction as the last in the regular order of sacraments received by school-age Catholics. Along with his encyclical *Acerbo Nimis*, which canonically established the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) in every parish,³ this shift in the time of reception of Communion was one of the primary reasons why St. Pius X would later be popularly referred to as “the pope of little children.”⁴

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Initially, however, the decree was not entirely well received in the United States, as those in pastoral roles quickly became concerned about the depth of catechesis children would attain by age seven.⁵ Parents, they worried, would have no good reason to continue to bring their children to catechetical classes if the children had already received Communion.

Over the years, concerns over the first reception of Communion transformed into devotion to St. Pius X, who had brought communion to the children,⁶ and new pastoral issues would emerge on the horizon. The Holy See's well-intentioned move to indicate the normal age for the

reception of First Eucharist had opened the door for delaying confirmation to the teenage years (the years during which young Christians had first approached the Communion rail prior to the decree) as a sort of sacramental carrot on the stick of catechists.

The challenges of proper catechesis paired with the theological questions that arose out of confirmation's new position in the order of reception opened up the sacrament to a variety of applications. In the following decades, confirmation would be given a prominent place in two key movements in the early twentieth-century church: Catholic Action and the liturgical movement. Indeed, confirmation was one major point of contact between these two movements.

During this period, in particular, the work of Thomas Aquinas on confirmation served as both a benchmark and a theological paradigm out of which approaches to the sacrament were often developed and discussed. The neo-Thomistic paradigm places certain themes foremost in confirmation theology throughout this period: the strengthening of the confirmand, the more perfect indwelling of the Holy Spirit, transition into ecclesial adulthood, a distinction between active and passive characters, and the relationship between baptism and confirmation. Though it is most explicit in this particular period, the discussion throughout the entire century can be characterized, in one sense, as an ongoing attempt to reconcile these categories with new developments. For example, with the injection of psychological theory into confirmation theology and catechesis in general, new questions are raised about maturity that St. Thomas

While many scholars describe how delaying confirmation became widespread across the decades following *Quam Singulari*, another reading understands *Quam Singulari* as a response to one particular aspect of the liturgical renewal—the practice of giving Communion to children at a younger age during Mass—that had arisen in nineteenth-century France amid increasing emphasis on the connection between the celebration of the Mass and the eucharistic elements.⁷

did not address. Most of those writing about confirmation as it pertains to the liturgical movement and to Catholic Action are working within the neo-Thomistic categories that they have inherited and are applying them to the new socio-political situation.

Loyal church reformers championed the liturgical movement, while Catholic Action became Pius X's and Pius XI's prescription for Catholics' primary mode of engagement with the European political climate. The call for Catholic Action would continue to grow throughout the coming decades. Stateside, the largely immigrant Catholic population existed primarily in Catholic "ghettoes," which were not generally considered part of larger American society, fueling an uneasy, somewhat unique relationship with "the world" in the U.S. church. When, as we will see, confirmation becomes the sacrament of Catholic Action, Catholics in the United States see it particularly through the lens of this social situation. Catholic Action and the liturgical movement were major components of the Catholic revival in America and both had a marked impact on confirmation's early twentieth-century shape.⁸

Confirmation and the Liturgical Movement

In the decades immediately following *Quam Singulari*, Pius X's push for increased reception of the Eucharist spurred lay involvement in the liturgical movement, particularly in Europe.⁹ Inspired by the zeal he encountered on a trip to Europe in 1925, Virgil Michel, a Benedictine priest from St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, "launched the journal *Orate Fratres* [later, *Worship*] to popularize

Pope Leo XIII's 1899 condemnation of "Americanism" stifled much American theological creativity and even as that creativity began to take new forms during the period under discussion, fears lingered. For those reasons, theology in the United States leaned heavily on European developments that had themselves been severely chastened in 1907 by Pius X's condemnation of "Modernism" in *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*. St. Thomas was seen as the bedrock theological source for the Catholic tradition largely because of Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris* (1879), which had become even more important in the post-*Pascendi* context. *Aeterni Patris* designated the Angelic Doctor's thought normative for all Catholic theology and philosophy, hence, the rise and near dominance of Catholic neo-Thomism. *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907) was, along with *Lamentabili Sane Exitu* (1907), one of two curial documents condemning Modernism. There is, of course, much debate about the extent to which neo-Thomist appeals to St. Thomas are indeed accurate articulations and legitimate developments of his thought.

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the liturgical movement that he had encountered in Europe the year before, and it soon became a primary catalyst in the American Catholic liturgical movement."¹⁰ Michel also made the theology of the Mystical Body of Christ integral to the vision of *Orate Fratres*, which boasted an unusually high number of lay subscribers.¹¹ Confirmation occupied the pages of *Orate Fratres* quite soon after its inception. In the years that followed, *Orate Fratres* became a veritable chronicle for the development of reform-minded pastoral and theological thought on confirmation.

In 1928, after fellow Benedictine Basil Stegmann published a piece entitled "Confirmation, the Armor of the Soul," in which he argued that confirmation should be celebrated "soon after the years of infancy" in line with present practice,¹² Michel published a three-part article on confirmation extended over the next three issues of *Orate*

Fratres.¹³ Michel's work echoes Stegmann's in some ways, but also offers some different emphases. Reflecting on the chrism signed on the confirmand's head, Michel notes that confirmation "is the one time in the life of every faithful that he comes in direct contact with the power of Christ in its Apostolic abundance."¹⁴

The language of "soldier for Christ" and its corresponding warfare imagery, having deep roots in the tradition, was common throughout this period.¹⁵

Prima facie Michel's assertion might seem to deny the encounter with Christ in the other sacraments, yet the uniqueness of confirmation is indicated in the final two words—"Apostolic abundance." The encounter with the bishop, the successor of the apostles, in confirmation confers apostolic responsibility on the confirmand; it is "the coming of age of the Christian soul."¹⁶ This apostolic responsibility would be a clear link for Michel and others when articulating points of contact between liturgical celebrations and the active Christian mission to the world. It is evident from his work that Michel swims in rising theological currents, pushing increased lay participation in the church and the world. Indeed, Catholic Action was also known as "the lay apostolate."

The phrase "soldiers for Christ" and its attendant imagery of warfare were widespread and official in the tradition during this period. Both Stegmann and Michel heavily rely on such imagery in their theologies. Stegmann uses the imagery in a passive manner and Michel in a more active one. Evident from his subtitle, for Stegmann, the strengthening of confirmation is that of protection or "armor." For Michel, confirmation is an impulse, a spur toward the active Christian life, evident in his third subtitle, "Call to Battle."

The different uses of the imagery are reflected in the *Baltimore Catechism*. There is a shift from the more internally focused verbs of the 1885 edition, which stress submission, “We are called soldiers of Jesus Christ to indicate how we must *resist* the attacks of our spiritual enemies and secure our victory over them by *following* and *obeying* Our Lord,” to the verbs of the 1949 edition, which stress action, “A confirmed person is called a soldier of Christ because, through confirmation, he is especially deputed to *profess* the faith *strongly* and to *fight* for it.”¹⁷ Michel is thus a precursor to the more official revisions that would come with the new, revised edition of the *Baltimore Catechism* (1949) and, before that, the pontificate of Pius XI (1922–39).

Michel places striking weight upon the sacrament of confirmation. Following Aquinas, he elaborates an ontological distinction between baptism and confirmation, endorsing St. Thomas’s position that baptism is movement from nonbeing to being and confirmation movement from being to perfect being.¹⁸ “Perfect” here is meant in the traditional sense of “being essentially complete” rather than in its contemporary popular sense. The implications of this ontological distinction are again active ones. Michel argues that baptism initiates the possibility of living supernaturally and perhaps lessens its difficulties, whereas confirmation nearly eradicates these difficulties by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ This assumes, however, cooperation with the supernatural powers received at confirmation. Michel writes, “Now that we have received the grace of Confirmation, *what are we going to do about it?* Forget it? Or remember it as a festive event of our past lives and nothing more?” and further, “The graces of Confirmation will therefore come to full effect only if put to active use in life; and only if thus put to use, will the fruits of the Spirit come into actuality.”²⁰ Without concrete Christian action, these graces of the sacrament are not fully realized.

In the liturgy Michel saw an educative remedy to American individualism and materialism.²¹ His theology of confirmation was clearly of a piece with his pursuit of liturgical renewal in the U.S. church as well as his Thomistic theological tones. To this end, Michel encourages parishes to celebrate confirmation as an event for which the *entire parish* prepares extensively and identifies the home as a place of continued encouragement to live out the graces of confirmation.²²

With his emphasis on the apostolic gift to the laity in confirmation, Michel’s articles display the undercurrents of lay involvement in the church that rise to the fore following the Great Depression and are supplemented by the American church’s reception of Pius XI’s *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931). Debra Campbell writes:

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The depression was [an] important catalyst in the changing self perceptions of the Catholic community. It reawakened the social consciences of the laity, prompting what Donald Thorman described as the rebirth of the lay apostolate, virtually dormant (as a mass movement) since the demise of lay congresses in the 1890s. . . . This new impulse toward a more strenuous effort to promote social justice among the urban poor was reinforced by the appearance of the social encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* in 1931.²³

This new-found fervor for social action would become more explicit about a decade later in theologies of confirmation emphasizing the socio-political implications of the sacrament, beyond the internal, spiritual ones. Indeed Pius XI's social encyclical was written to combat the "evil individualist spirit of the age,"²⁴ a spirit against which Michel and the liturgical movement in the United States vigorously fought.

In 1931, the same year that *Quadragesimo Anno* was promulgated, the Pontifical Commission for Authentically Interpreting the Canons of the Code dashed the hopes of some catechists who wished for a later confirmation by reaffirming canon 788 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law, which found age seven most suitable for the celebration of confirmation.²⁵ The reaffirmation resulted in a pastoral conundrum. For catechists and pastors who strove to uphold both *Quam Singulari* and the Code of Canon Law, it was improper to confer confirmation after First Communion, as was a growing trend, and it was impossible to confer confirmation beforehand, as had been common practice prior to *Quam Singulari*, because confirmation could not be celebrated before age seven and the reception of Eucharist was to begin at age seven.²⁶ It seemed that the only available option was to celebrate confirmation and First Eucharist concurrently or at least in the same year, an option seemingly not widely taken. What was solidified, it seems, was the link between confirmation and responsibility.

Confirmation understood as Christian responsibility took on a decidedly social cast. H. A. Reinhold, for example, drawing explicitly on *Quadragesimo Anno*, argues that the "responsibility" of confirmation requires Christians to invest in a socially conscious manner and "to tackle this modern scourge of capitalism . . . in the name of the sacramental life of the Church."²⁷ In an epigram to the article, Reinhold cites the cardinals of Milan and Malines who write that Catholic Action must be liturgical or will cease to exist; Reinhold himself connects sacramental worship to social responsibility via confirmation. Thus, confirmation

works as the buttress for this all-important link between lay social action and the liturgy.

Confirmation and Catholic Action

The social encyclicals, the misery of the Great Depression, and the uneasiness of the interbellum period gave added urgency and vigor to the Catholic Action movement. Historian Debra Campbell defines Catholic Action: “From the ’30s through the ’50s, the terms ‘Catholic Action’ and ‘lay apostolate’ were extensively used by Catholic bishops, priests, and lay people to refer to the laity’s recently rediscovered responsibility to take action on the Church’s behalf.”²⁸ Increased lay involvement in the life of the church, both internally and externally, was encouraged since the beginning of the twentieth century and continued to grow throughout the next fifty years under the designation “Catholic Action.”

Five years prior to *Quam Singulari*, Pius X had described the goal of Catholic Action in his encyclical *Il Fermo Proposito*—“the restoration of all things in Christ.” Campbell explains, “Pius X declared that he needed ‘the cooperation’ of both the clergy and the faithful in fulfilling his pastoral office. He added that ‘in truth, we are called . . . to build up that unique body of which Christ is the Head, a body which is highly organized . . . and well coordinated in all its movements.’”²⁹ Pius X’s encyclical, paired with the mandate that every parish implement a CCD program in the same year (1905), furthered Leo XIII’s overtures toward lay activism and set the stage for “the Catholic Action pope” Pius XI. Theodore Hesburgh discusses Pius XI’s emphasis on Catholic Action:

From his first encyclical letter, *Ubi Arcano* [1922], which sounded a general call to the lay apostolate, to his last encyclical, *Con Singular Complacentia* [1939], published on the day of his death, exhorting the hierarchy of the Philippines to strengthen their organization of Catholic Action, his writings and addresses are ever insistent on this one point [Catholic Action]. . . he takes care to remark many times over that this apostolate of the laity is not an innovation but a *re-emphasis of what is traditional in the Church*.³⁰

In 1934, Pius XI referred to baptism and confirmation as the sacraments of Catholic Action—baptism insofar as it makes one a member of the Mystical Body of Christ and confirmation in a more obvious way,

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making confirmandi "*Iesu Christi milites*": soldiers for Jesus Christ.³¹ In so doing, Pius fomented connections between the active work of the laity and the apostolic character of confirmation. The link between Catholic Action and confirmation became more explicit and more widespread.

In 1941, *Orate Fratres* reprinted an article from *New Blackfriars* by English Dominican Gerard Meath.³² Meath's article explores the connection between confirmation and the lay apostolate:

The nature and the degree of . . . sharing in the Priesthood of Christ varies considerably in the different grades within the Church; but it is a reality even in the lowest grade and gives an almost unbelievable quality and value to even the most commonplace participation in the liturgical life of the Church; and the source of this sacerdotal power throughout all the hierarchical grades is to be found in the Sacraments. Moreover, as far as Catholic Action in the modern sense is concerned, there is a particularly important source to be recognized in the Sacrament of Confirmation.³³

Meath associates "layman's Holy Orders" with public witness, full membership in the church, and spiritual maturity.³⁴ The seed that had been planted by Michel was bearing fruit in the form of confirmation's association with Catholic Action.

Benedictine Damasus Winzen, without calling confirmation the sacrament of Catholic Action, discusses the apostolic mission of the laity inaugurated at confirmation. He writes, "Knowing the catechism is no more than knowing the ABC's. You must become a teacher, a missionary, an 'apostle'! As a confirmed Christian you have an official mission and therefore also a definite responsibility towards the 'hundred millions' in our country who do not know Christ and towards the many more millions all over the world who are ignorant of God."³⁵ Winzen's understanding of the lay apostolate is shaped by the post World War II context; he laments that even though Catholics outnumber Communists in the United Nations, there is no mention of God in its proceedings.³⁶

Like St. Thomas, Winzen draws a clear distinction between baptism and confirmation, describing the years after baptism as the beginning stage of the Christian life during which Catholics remain self-focused, but the character of confirmation, he argues, "transcends the narrow circle of personal salvation and authorizes to actions that have reference to the Church as a whole."³⁷ Displaying some of the period's contentiousness of Catholics in the United States with the Protestant majority, Winzen blames Protestants' rejection of sacramental confirmation for their "[inability] to

develop a really Christian civilization," since "confirmation is the sacrament of the *plenitude* of Christ."³⁸ This plenitude, Winzen asserts, can be found in the symbolism of chrism, for "the material which is used in confirmation . . . is a mixture of olive oil and balm. The mixture itself indicates the inner wealth of the Spirit who, being one, is manifold in His works."³⁹ Winzen continues by discussing the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit's indwelling in the Christian person, and the fragrance of the chrism which, emanating from the confirmandi, fills the entire church like the Holy Spirit. The chrism, consecrated by the bishop, also symbolizes the confirmandi's apostolic mission as they are "made co-workers of the clergy in a special way."⁴⁰

Writing in 1947, the same year that Pius XII greatly encouraged the liturgical movement via his encyclical *Mediator Dei*, Dominican James R. Gillis notes a shift toward ecclesial responsibility in the way that confirmandi see themselves, "Today the confirmed are less inclined to see their consecration merely in the terms of their own private matter against the world, the flesh, and the devil, and are more inclined to recognize their responsibility to the Church."⁴² Gillis is at pains to broaden the emphasis on the internal "battle of the soul" that confirmation helps to fight. The individual's interior life in the Spirit, Gillis argues, is not merely a precursor for Catholic Action, but constitutive of it. In conjunction with making adults out of "spiritual children," confirmation is, for Gillis, the sacrament of the lay apostolate.⁴³ He writes, "the real case for confirmation will be written by a living apostolate made fresh by the breath of the Holy Ghost" and, in turn, "Catholics will not heed this call [to take their place in the apostolic mission of the church] until they begin to find it necessary to call upon that strengthening grace of confirmation frequently and fervently."⁴⁴

Deeper reflections on the Mystical Body of Christ theology, tied to the liturgical movement and to Pius XII's encyclical *Mystici Corporis* (1943), prompted some to reconceive the sacraments as "the vital functions of

In 1946, Anglican Benedictine Gregory Dix published a groundbreaking study based on patristic texts, in which he argued that confirmation is of superior importance to baptism in that baptism has a negative effect (cleansing from sin) and confirmation a positive one (the grace of the Holy Spirit). Dix's work precipitated new conversation on the relationship between the two among Anglicans and non-Anglicans alike, conversation which would endure throughout the following decades. For Catholics, the significant questions coming out of this debate concerned the character of confirmation in relation to that of baptism and how to understand the workings of the Holy Spirit in each of the sacraments.⁴¹

that Body."⁴⁵ George Smith's article in 1952 is indicative of this move. Like those considered previously, Smith continues to stress the distinction between baptism and confirmation in terms of childhood and adulthood. He emphasizes, quoting St. Thomas, that children are naturally individualistic; therefore, baptism helps them in the realm of individual spiritual growth. The responsibility to bear witness, to reach outside of oneself, comes with "spiritual maturity" in the church, brought about by confirmation.⁴⁶ Bearing witness further corresponds to one's place "in the organism of the Mystical Body."⁴⁷ The Spirit, Smith argues, guides the church, but in confirmation comes upon the individual Christian to make witness possible over and against the world, whose spirit is inimical to the church.⁴⁸

While Smith's emphasis on witness according to one's role in the Mystical Body of Christ is novel, his understanding of the active and social implications of confirmation are in line with the growing emphasis of the previous few decades.

The tensile relationship between the church in the United States and the wider culture will prove deeply influential in the theologies that will develop throughout the remainder of the twentieth century. The traditional distinction between the inimical "world" and the Christian life takes on a specific tone and a tangible reality among the predominately immigrant Catholic population struggling to be legitimate citizens of the United States. Confirmation, as with Smith and many who follow, becomes emblematic of the Catholic attempt to negotiate the gap between Catholic culture and "the world." The boundaries of "the world" and Catholics' posture toward it are in no way univocal and neither is confirmation theology.

To sum up, from 1910 to 1959, theologians and pastors associated confirmation with both Catholic Action and the liturgical movement in the United States—both movements that dealt with the relationship between Catholics and "the world." Both movements strove to awaken the laity to their role in evangelizing the world through witness, and social and political action. As such, confirmation has found a place, following *Quam Singulari*, as the sacrament of Christian responsibility. For American Catholic movers and shakers, Catholics became active and attentive to the tensions between their church and their culture following their reception of confirmation.