

**SYSTEMATIC  
THEOLOGY  
502  
DISTANCE**

**CONFIRMATION  
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# CONFIRMATION

Confirmation is a strengthening of the gift of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands. The scriptural basis for confirmation can be found in Acts 8:15, 19:2, 5-6. In Acts 8:14-17, Peter and John lay hands on those who have been previously baptized. In Acts 19:2, 5-6 Paul lays hands on those who have already been baptized and the Holy Spirit comes upon them.

- Confirmation is usually described as a 'strengthening' of the confirmand with the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit in Anglicanism, not to be confused with the gift of the Spirit in Baptism
  - The Eastern Orthodox Church performs chrismation at baptism and thus have no sacrament of confirmation
  - The '79 BCP gives the option of chrismation at baptism following the early Church practice
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- The Form and Matter
    - 'The form of confirmation is the prayer for the gifts of the Spirit (Acts 8:15).'
    - The matter of confirmation is the laying on of hands
    - Anglo-Catholic dioceses both lay on hands and anoint with chrism (*sacrum chrisma*)
    - The oil of catechumens (*oleum catechumenorum*) is used before Mass prior to the start of confirmation classes by Roman Catholics generally



# CONFIRMATION & BAPTISM

The case of the Samaritan Believers and Ephesian Disciples brings with it the problem of the relationship between baptism and confirmation.

- The Samaritans receive the gift of the Spirit by Philip the evangelist through the laying on of hands (Acts 8:5-17)
  - The Ephesian disciples say 'we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit' (Acts 19:2)
  - The Ephesians were baptized for repentance by John the Baptist, but not baptized into Christ (Acts 19:3-4)
  - Both the Samaritans and Ephesians show that John the Baptist baptism for repentance differed from baptism into Christ who baptizes with the Holy Spirit
  - John the Baptist even said, 'I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit' (Mark 1:8)
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- The Separation of Baptism and Confirmation
    - Historically, confirmation developed as a second rite alongside baptism with the rise of the Monarchical Episcopacy
    - As the bishop left the local church and became the overseer of many congregations in a diocese, the rite of chrismation remain with the bishop in the western Church and became a separate sacrament whereas in the east chrism, although blessed by the bishop, remained with the local priest
    - A separate rite of anointing with chrism following baptism called confirmation became the norm in the Western Church as evidenced in the writings of Tertullian (de. bapt. 7:1, 8:1), and Cyprian (ep. 37:9), and especially in Hippolytus's *Apostolic Tradition* (21), and in St. Augustine
    - Throughout the medieval period the rite of confirmation began to receive its current form. Along with this the practice of communing infants gradually died.



# HISTORY OF CONFIRMATION

Traditionally, confirmation in the western Church has been the job of the bishop, although even today, this is not always the case.

- The Council of Toledo (400) forbade anyone but the bishop to make chrism, but allowed presbyters to use it.
- The Council of Orange (441) permitted presbyters to use chrism on heretics in danger of death.
- In Italy in the 6th century there is record of presbyters confirming those in danger of death.
- In Spain in the 6th century presbyters were forbidden to anoint only if a bishop was present.
- In Great Britain, Bede says that Augustine asked local converts to have their baptism “completed,” implying that confirmation was not being performed.
- Several missals from the end of the 7th century to the ninth omit any reference to confirmation by the bishop suggesting that it was omitted.
- A Spanish ordinal from 1072 has the presbyter anointing the baptized on the forehead with chrism
- Only at the Council of Chesea in 787 was it required that a bishop confirm (canon 3).
- Even as late as 1929 Pope Pius the XI gave Latin American bishops authority to appoint some priests to confirm.
- In 1947 missionary priests were given authority to confirm in some places.
- Some former Roman Catholic students of mine have been confirmed by priests



# CONFIRMATION IN ANGLICANISM

- The Confirmation Debate in Anglicanism: Dix and Thornton vs. Lampe and MacQuarrie

The is a debate in Anglican theology about when the “seal of the Spirit” is given

- G. W. Lampe and John Macquarrie asserted that the seal of the Spirit is given in the Sacrament of Baptism, not Confirmation
- Dom Gregory Dix and L. S. Thornton asserted that the seal of the Spirit is given in the Sacrament of Confirmation completing the Sacrament of Baptism
- The 1979 BCP tried to allow for both views but leans toward Baptism being complete initiation
- The 1928 BCP views Confirmation as the completion of Baptism but also teaches baptismal regeneration

- Confirmation & Catechesis

- Confirmation is the primary opportunity for Catechesis

- Age of Confirmation

- The age of confirmation differs from diocese to diocese
- Originally, confirmation was postponed until seven years of age, the age of reason in the west
- ‘The English Prayer Book requires all children to have learned the Catechism before confirmation, which is to be given when the child reaches years of discretion—that is, when he is able to distinguish right from wrong.’
- ‘Queen Elizabeth was confirmed by Archbishop Cranmer when she was a week old’
- John Wesley was confirmed at eight (1711) which was usual at the time
- ‘The modern custom of postponing confirmation till the sixteenth year is due to Lutheran influence’

- Confirmation and Receiving Communion

- The practice of withholding communion from an infant developed in the medieval time with the solidification of confirmation as the second half of the rite of Christian initiation in the West
- While this is not the Patristic practice, in favor of this practice is the idea that the child only communes knowingly
- In favor of infant communion is the fact that it is a Patristic practice and many children have as much if not more and a truer faith than many adults

