

THE PRIEST IS THE EXTRAORDINARY MINISTER OF CONFIRMATION

HISTORICAL FACTS

In the traditional practices of the Greek Catholic Church, the minister which can confer the Sacrament of Confirmation has been always anyone, either bishop or priest.

The practice done by the first Fathers of the Church. During the Apostolic era the general administration of the sacraments was the sole duty of the bishop. When, afterwards, the bishop began to be assisted by the priests. The great Doctor of the Church, St. Jerome, speaks about it saying that although ordinarily the Confirmation is reserved to the bishops "this is done more for HONOR due to the bishop, than for true necessity "(Adv. Lucif. 8 and 9; cf. Ep. 146 ad Evang. 1). That is, that the honor of administering this sacrament must be his, for a practical or pastoral reason.

Scholastics generally admit the principle that the ORDINARY minister of the Sacrament of Confirmation is the bishop, due to the fact that Confirmation is the Sacrament of Christian Perfection. St. Bonaventure explains it basing himself on the principle of the PASTORAL mark of the bishop, since he is the one who has the ultimate duty upon each member of his flock to exercising PASTORAL care upon them (Sebt. 4, dist. 7 a. 1, q. 3).

Also in the West, however, simple priests sometimes administered this Sacrament.

In Egypt, we have the testimony of Pseudo-Ambrose, who says that the simple priest can minister Confirmation "when the bishop is absent" (In Ef. 4, 17 and Migne, 17, 288).

San Gregorio Magno sought to compel the priests of Sardinia, who were used to administer Confirmation, to accept Roman use, but allowed to preserve this ancient use, when the bishop could not be had (Epp. Lib. 4, ep. 26, Migne, 17, 696).

Also in Spain and Gaul (now France) we find the same use, of simple priests confirming. Still in the Middle Ages, simple priests, following the custom, conferred Confirmation in the Diocese of Würzburg. That custom was also followed In the Abbey of Einsiedelm, in Constance, in Kempten, in Monte C< sino, and in the Basilica of S. Paul Outside the Walls, in Rome (Schanz op. Cit. Pp. 313 ff.).

There is also a declaration in favor of Confirmation by a simple priest, since the year 300 AD, by the Council of Elvira, in Spain.

The Council of Trent has been declared in the Sacred Canons: "If anyone says that the ORDINARY minister of Confirmation is not only the bishop, but any simple priest, be excommunicated (s. 7 of Confirm. Can. 3, Denz. 873; cf. 690 and 697).

Among the Scholastics this question concerning the Confirmation being conferred by the priest as extraordinary minister was much discussed and resolved:

1 - As for giving Confirmations in the early Church the bishops and priests were equal. Bishops as well, as simple priests, administered Confirmation, and only afterwards, this was forbidden for reasons of discipline. St. Gregory the Great reassured again this fact to some Greek priests, authorizing them to do what they could already do.

2 - According to Canon Law 1917, The Extraordinary Minister of Confirmation is every priest who be authorized by special indult coming from the Holy See, or also as a general right when it is for the salvation of souls (Salus animarum).

The catechism of the Council of Trent teaches that a priest should perform Confirmation on pagan territories where he sees the need of doing so while foreseeing the danger of relapsing into paganism. (NB. Today the danger of modernism is greater than that of paganism).

His Holiness Pius XII, under the form of a "general indult", by the decree of September 14, 1946, grants to any priest who has the care of souls, the possibility of administering to the faithful the Confirmation, in danger of death (Act. Ap. Sed. 1946, pp. 349-358).

Also according to another Decree of December 18, 1947 (ib. 1948, p. 41), the priests of the Latin Rite already authorized to administer Confirmation will do so VALIDALLY but only to the faithful of the Latin Rite, unless otherwise stated by the Papal Indult. Priests of the Eastern rite, who have been baptizing and Confirming children of their Rite, are only forbidden to give the Confirmation to the children of those of the Latin rite. But If it were done, It would be valid, but illicit.

The theological explanation, of the administration of Chrism, on the part of the priests.

A priest either gives the Sacrament of Confirmation by virtue of the power of the Priesthood, or by virtue of the power of Jurisdiction. But since the power of Order is needed to administer this sacrament therefore it cannot be that Confirmation be performed by an act of jurisdiction alone. And since we have already noticed that the Roman Church recognizes the validity of the Sacrament of Confirmation performed by a simple priest in the Greek Church, therefore it must be said that the priest when he confers the Sacrament of Confirmation, he does so by virtue of the power of his priesthood.

(Cfr Benedict XIV, De syn. Dioced. 7, q. 3, and Vitasse in Migne, Cursus compl. XXI, 998 ss.)

Therefore, based on the doctrine of the Sacred Councils, in the understanding of the Doctors of the Church, and according to the infallible Councils in extraordinary times, it is therefore necessary to conclude of the existence of extraordinary ministers of the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Since the Papal indult of Pius XII is based on the principle that if there is not a bishop in the diocese, in danger of death, the priest can give the Confirmation so as not to have to wait for the bishop. And since the present situation of state of necessity causes the Sacrament of Confirmation be of difficult access to our faithful through the Ordinary Ministers, the Bishops, whom we cannot trust due to their heretical doctrine, doubtful powers, and doubtful new Rite of Confirmation. We conclude safely therefore that we have entered into a situation in which, naturally, every priest has the faculty to confirm, since it is necessary to do so.

NB: It is the same situation as that in which the Church found Herself (state of necessity) so as to allow the consecration of Bishops by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. For reasons of discipline, authorization from Rome was necessary to perform the consecrations. But Monseñor had to perform the Episcopal Consecrations appealing to the highest law, the salvation of souls, since he could not wait for an authorization coming from apostate Rome. Only unless we see the authority converting back to the catholic faith, we cannot place in their hands the souls entrusted to us.

It is the Ordinary way to have Confirmations with a bishop, for the honor of his office and because his pastoral care, as Saint Bonaventure says, but if there are no bishops doing their duty anymore, the responsibility to confer the Confirmation falls on the priests as extraordinary ministers of the Sacrament.

We neither can rely anymore for now on the Bishops consecrated by Mons. Lefebvre and Mons. Williamson because there is a well-founded fear that the faithful will be contaminated with their anti-Catholic stances and as shepherds of the faithful we cannot expose the flock to their liberal ideas. This impediment falls into the exceptions mentioned in CANON LAW when it says "IN GRAVE INCOMODO, NON TENETUR" (in the face of a grave inconvenience, the disciplinary laws are not applied).