CONFIRMATION: THE GENERATIVE SACRAMENT

José Granados

"In Baptism we are received into the space of the communion of the Church, and in Confirmation we are given the power to extend this space, making it fruitful."

"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control" (2 Tm 1:7).[1] According to Catholic doctrine, the consummate reception of this Spirit of power takes place in the sacrament of Confirmation. But in what does this power, which St. Paul associates with love and self-control, consist?

This question is a thought-provoking one in our age. We have been living in an age of weak thinking, which could also be called an age of weak will. Yet now, after a long period in which suspicion of power and strength has been dominant, we are witnessing an increasing acknowledgment of the importance of strong ideals. At the same time, however, it is also an

1. All biblical quotations in this translation are taken from the Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition (RSVCE).—*Trans.*

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age characterized by waves of indignation and violence. Let us examine the present cultural situation in order to see, in turn, what light the sacrament of Confirmation can shed upon it.

1. A CULTURAL CRISIS: HOW SHOULD WE UNDERSTAND POWER?

In the middle of the twentieth century, Romano Guardini published a series of reflections on the theme of power.[2] In the aftermath of the modern era, the thrust of which was the absolute dominion of man over nature, man looks upon power and dominion differently, in Guardini's view. Power is now viewed with suspicion, due to its capacities for destruction and totalitarianism. Our task, for Guardini, is not to reject power, but to understand it differently, basing this understanding on an original gift and placing power at the service of the common good.

In his book *Return of the Strong Gods*, R. R. Reno also considers this suspicion of power, so prevalent in our society, which arose after the Second World War,[3] in light of which liberal society attempts to limit any confrontation between people that leads to the use of force. To do so, it emptied the social world of all absolute "values," which, as absolute, would demand firm adherence. Reno notes that this elimination of strong values in the West has yielded for us a peaceful, albeit empty, form of coexistence.

Along the same lines, Rémi Brague has shown how Western values have come to be rejected today, and this, precisely in the West: because he understands his values as leading to the domination of the world, Western man comes to view himself with a kind of self-hatred.[4] Brague argues that this self-hatred

2. Romano Guardini, *Power and Responsibility: A Course of Action for the New Age*, trans. Elinor C. Briefs (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1961).

3. R. R. Reno, *Return of the Strong Gods: Nationalism, Populism, and the Future of the West* (Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 2019).

4. Rémi Brague, "¿Por qué el hombre occidental se odia a sí mismo?" Fundación NEOS Conferencia, Madrid, Spain, November 18, 2024, available at https://exaudi.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/18-nov-2024_Foro-NEOS_Por-que-el-hombre-occidental-se-odia-a-si-mismo_Remi-Brague.pdf. Regarding the

is actually self-envy: envy is sadness at the good of another that we perceive to have been unearned; it is, for example, what we might feel toward someone who won the lottery. Modern man envies himself in this sense, because the supremacy and power that he has gained over other cultures and time periods seem to him to be a product of mere chance, and thus undeserved. This envy could only be overcome if we were to acknowledge an original giver and to be grateful to him. But the secularized West cannot acknowledge the original, benevolent giver of the gifts that it has received.

The suspicion of power and strength has affected the image of man held by those in the West. What Paul Ricoeur called the "capable man"—one capable of speech, of narration, of making promises, of transformative action[5]—is in crisis today. Contemporary emotivism further promotes the vision of man as weak, by portraying him as being at the mercy of his own emotions and incapable of transforming his immediate desires.

However, this radical mistrust in human capabilities has provoked a strong reaction today. To employ Reno's expression, there has been a return of the "strong gods," which represent the deepest values we hold: family, truth, homeland, faith, and so on. The upshot of this is the restoration of a horizon of meaning to human life. At the same time, this phenomenon is characterized by a certain ambiguity, especially when it includes the return of violence. For example, mass indignation or anger—that of masses of people who have been emotionally manipulated by those in power—has grown more common, leading to what Eva Illouz has termed "explosive modernity."[6]

Thus, the question arises: how do we prevent these "strong gods" from leading us back to the totalitarianisms of the

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cancellation of Western culture, see Frank Furedi, *The War Against the Past: Why the West Must Fight for Its History* (Cambridge: Polity, 2024).

5. Paul Ricoeur, "Devenir capable, être reconnue," *Esprit* 7 (2005): 125–29; Paul Ricoeur, *De l'homme faillible à l'homme capable*, ed. Gaëlle Fiasse (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008).

6. Eva Illouz, *Explosive Emotions: How Modern Society Shapes What We Feel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2026).

last century? How do we guide the use of power, preventing its "explosive" dangers and instead cultivating it in a manner that lends stability and meaning to life? And what response can Christianity give to this difficulty facing our culture?

One possible response is to justify the rejection of all power through an appeal to the Christian virtue of humility. However, this would be a false humility. For such a "humility" is not the abasement of self before an original love, "strong as death" (Song 8:6). On the contrary, such false humility is actually the refusal to acknowledge the strength of such a love.

Consider Martin Scorsese's film *Silence*, where the superlative humility of its protagonist, a Jesuit missionary in Japan, leads him to renounce his faith. Or think of Michel de Certeau, who concludes his book, *La faiblesse de croire* ("The Weakness of Believing"), by referring to "what Christianity has always announced: Jesus Christ has died."[7] It is as if God were so humble that he refused to resurrect himself. However, as Robert Spaemann has observed, if God's goodness were powerless before death, this would not be complete goodness, which alone can be worthily applied to God, since the powerlessness of goodness is not itself a good.[8]

Christianity, then, must speak to our cultural dilemma, not by rejecting power, but rather by revealing another way of understanding it, as Guardini has proposed.[9] The Catholic theology of Confirmation proves to be a suitable channel through which we can recover a true vision of "capable man." For, as we have already noted, our theological tradition understands this sacrament to effect a kind of strengthening that fortifies us for the good fight. Let us begin with the main difficulty at the heart of the theology of Confirmation: what gift of the Holy Spirit does it confer that distinguishes it from Baptism?

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7. Michel de Certeau, *La faiblesse de croire* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), 313.

8. Robert Spaemann, "La ragionevolezza della fede in Dio," in *Dio oggi. Con lui o senza di lui cambia tutto*, ed. Comitato Progetto Culturale Cei (Siena: Cantagalli, 2010), 57–76.

9. Guardini, *Power and Responsibility*.

2. BAPTISM AND CONFIRMATION: ONE SPIRIT, TWO SACRAMENTS?

In order to understand the strengthening that Confirmation bestows, we must first consider the connection between this sacrament and the sacrament of Baptism.[10] The Protestant reformers rejected the notion that Confirmation was a sacrament, holding it to be superfluous with regard to Baptism, and arguing that any attempt to find a gift of the Spirit specific to Confirmation would lead to a diminishment of the spiritual gifts that Baptism conferred.

John Calvin, for instance, asked in what way Baptism is lacking in perfection. He answers with quotations from the Bible to prove that Baptism is given to us that we may fight (Rom 6:6), and that it allows us to profess the faith (Heb 10:22–23). He even cites the Magisterium of the Catholic Church to support his argument: Did not the Council of Milevis in AD 416 condemn the opinion that Baptism grants the gift of forgiveness of sins but does not convey grace? Consequently, he maintains that everything necessary to live a fully Christian life in the love of God is already present in Baptism.

Calvin does not thereby conclude that Confirmation is to be rejected. On the contrary, he praises it, but only insofar as it is regarded not as a sacrament but as a catechetical practice. In Confirmation, according to Calvin, the Christian takes responsibility for the faith that his parents professed on his behalf before the minister who baptized him.[11] This understanding of the sacrament of Confirmation has ended up affecting Catholic practice as well.[12]

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10. For what follows, I am indebted to several conversations with Prof. Manuel Aroztegui.

11. John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2, ed. John T. McNeill, The Library of Christian Classics 21 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), bk. 4, chap. 19, pars. 4–13, pp. 1451–61; see Heribert Schützeichel, "Calvins Kritik an der Firmung," in *Zeichen des Glaubens. Studien zu Taufe und Firmung. Balthasar Fischer Zum 60. Geburtstag*, Herausgegeben von Hansjörg auf der Maur und Bruno Kleinheyer (Zürich: Benziger, 1972), 123–36.

12. Timothy R. Gabrielli, *Confirmation: How a Sacrament of God's Grace Became All About Us* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 49–60.

Against the Protestants, the Council of Trent condemned those who would deny that Confirmation is a sacrament, and who would reduce it to mere catechesis, in which an adolescent would set forth his reasons for holding to the faith of his Baptism.[13] The Council thus summarizes the clear teaching of the Church throughout the Middle Ages.[14] But is this the testimony of the patristic age? The Protestants denied that it was, arguing that in antiquity the rite of Confirmation was part of the rite of Baptism. Adolf von Harnack even went so far as to say that with this pronouncement of the Council of Trent regarding Confirmation, the victory of dogma over history was complete.[15]

However, as Franz Joseph Dölger has shown, a single liturgical celebration need not coincide with only one sacrament.[16] The Church Fathers discerned two different effects for each rite. Alongside the effect of Baptism, which cleanses us from sin and communicates grace, there is the effect of the anointing with chrism and the imposition of hands, which bestows the fullness or perfection of the Holy Spirit. To this basic argument we could add other facts, as Dölger does, such as the difference in the minister of the sacraments or the progressive differentiation of the rites across place and time.[17] For

13. See Heinrich Denzinger et al., eds., *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, 43rd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), par. 1628.

14. See Peter Lombard, Sent. IV, d. 7, cap. 3: "ad robur"; St. Bonaventure, *In IV Sent*., d. 7, a. 1, q. 1, ad 2: "*a*d robur fidei in quantum ad confirmationem in corde et quantum ad confessionem liberam in ore"; *Breviloquium*, pars VI, cap. 8: "tanquam verus pugil unctus ad proelium et tanquam miles strenuus"; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [=ST] III, q. 65, a. 1, co.: "ad robur"; *ST* III, q. 72, a. 2, co.: "ad robur spirituale, quod competit perfectae aetati"; *ST* III, q. 72, a. 4, co.: "ad robur spiritualis pugnae." According to Aquinas, Confirmation corresponds to the virtue of fortitude, and it is opposed to the vice of weakness (*ST* III, q. 65, a. 1, co).

15. Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 7 vols. in 4 (New York: Dover Publications, 1961), vol. 7, p. 46.

16. Franz Joseph Dölger, *Das Sakrament der Firmung: historisch-dogmatisch dargestellt* (Munich: Mayer, 1906).

17. The patristic texts are gathered in Paul Turner, *Sources of Confirmation: From the Fathers Through the Reformers* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993).

example, in the early churches, alongside the *baptisterium* for Baptism there could be found a *confirmatorium*, where the bishop confirmed the baptized Christian by the imposition of hands.[18]

Therefore, the Church Fathers established that there was a difference between the grace of Baptism and the perfection of this same grace received in Confirmation without, however, clarifying the nature of this perfection. In the eighth century, Rabanus Maurus proposed a theory that would subsequently gain prominence in the medieval schools. According to him, in Baptism the Christian becomes capable of the indwelling of God within himself, for in it he is given the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. Confirmation, for its part, communicates the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.[19]

The difficulty with this theory is that it splits the action of the Holy Spirit in two, at the risk of obscuring the Spirit's unified power. For this reason, St. Thomas Aquinas rejected the theory. For Aquinas, the theological virtues and the gifts of the Spirit are always given together, since it is only together that they make sense of that union between God and man that is the heart of the Christian life. Both the virtues and the gifts are given to the Christian in Baptism; the gifts cannot be an effect specifically tied to Confirmation.

Is there another possible way to distinguish the Spirit's actions in each sacrament?[20] If Confirmation is tied to maturity in the Spirit, then the key to understanding this maturity must be related to the temporal stages of man's journey to God. This relation between the Spirit and time is, as it turns out, crucial to the biblical and patristic vision of the world.

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18. Franz Joseph Dölger, "Die Firmung in den Denkmälern des christlichen Altertums," *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und für Kirchengeschichte* 19 (1905): 1–41.

19. Rabanus Maurus, *De clericorum institutione*, bk. 1, caput 30 (PL 107:314). On this theory, see Daniel G. Van Slyke, "Confirmation: A Sacrament in Search of a Theology?" *New Blackfriars* 92 (2011): 521–51.

20. For different explanations regarding the action of the Holy Spirit proper to Confirmation, see Pierpaolo Caspani, "La Confermazione sacramento dello Spirito?" *La Scuola Cattolica* 147, no. 2 (2019): 257–82.

3. THE SPIRIT AND TEMPORAL DYNAMISM

Time is essential to the biblical worldview. For the identity of the People of God is to be found in time, in the thread uniting its history. Israel must remember its *past*, since all the great acts of God for Israel's good were revealed in the past. Moreover, Israel must remain faithful to God's covenant, which binds the distinct moments of its history together into a coherent whole. Finally, Israel looks forward to the *future*, anticipating the superabundant fulfillment of God's promises that will be realized in the birth of the Messiah and in the gift of the Promised Land.

By understanding itself in light of time, Israel is also able to understand *who God is* in time. Time is transfigured into salvific time, which allows man to find his own origin and destiny in God. God is revealed in the *past* as the primordial origin of everything; in the *present* as the faithfulness that holds all ages together, guiding them to their fulfillment; and toward the *future* as the source of the fruitfulness that enables history to reach its goal.

Time is therefore not only a natural part of the world and of man, revealing both as finite beings. It is more properly the occasion for man to open up beyond himself and acknowledge that his identity depends on his relationship to God. For without this relationship to God in time there is no origin, no continuity between one day and the next, and no destiny.

Thanks to time we can experience both our relationship to God and the fact that we are distinct from him. Consider, first, our relationship to God through memory, which allows us to remember that he is the origin of all gifts. By being present in memory, God belongs to each person's core identity. But at the same time, by his presence in memory he does not impose himself on us as something immediately evident, but rather, opens up a space in which we may welcome him freely.

The same could be said of the experience of God that we are given in his *promise* to us, in the covenant that we have with him. Encountering God in the promise means encountering someone intimately close to our very selves, for the promise constitutes our identities, which are forged day by day. At the same time, encountering God in the promise means encountering someone who does not impose himself on us: the promise

transcends us, because the unity of our past, present, and future transcends us.

This also happens when we encounter God in our future through the experience of fruitfulness. Indeed, while both the fruit of the earth and the fruit of the womb are the works of man and woman, at the same time this fruit goes beyond them.[21] We see that, in time, God does not make himself present immediately but rather in the mode of memory, of faithful patience, and of a fruitfulness that is to come.

This understanding of time, as the place that unites us in communion with God without absorbing us into him, links time with the divine Spirit. For the Spirit is also God's presence to his creature, a presence that does not destroy the creature but rather respects it as a created being. This explains why, in the Bible, it is the Spirit who sets human time in motion, who propels man toward his final end in God. The Spirit of God is called *ruah*, which also means "wind," because, in blowing, it revitalizes all creation. The text of Genesis 1:2, in which we see the Spirit moving over the face of the primordial waters, prepares the action of the Spirit in history, when the wind of God makes the waters of the flood subside (Gn 8:1) or divides the Red Sea in two (Ex 14:21; Ex 15:8–10).[22]

Therefore, it is the Spirit's role to weave together each day in the covenant with God, working in every present moment. The covenant, in turn, opens outward in two directions. With respect to its origin, it is a filial covenant, received from God in which he is remembered and given thanks. With respect to the future, it is a generative covenant that moves man beyond his own possibilities until he reaches God.

We find this idea of the presence of the Spirit that moves creation toward God in the theology of the Church Fathers. By creating the world in the Word, God gave it a structure of filial communion, which takes the form of a gift that is bestowed and awaits a response. And by creating the world

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21. José Granados, *Teología del tiempo: ensayo sobre la memoria, la promesa y la fecundidad* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 2012).

22. See Carlos Granados, "El espíritu de Yahvé y el dinamismo de la creación en el Antiguo Testamento," *Anthropotes* 26 (2010): 45–64.

in the Spirit, God rendered that filial communion dynamic so that it might continuously receive itself from the Father and move toward him.[23]

This relationship between Spirit and time implies that it is proper for the Spirit to give himself progressively; and that his progressive presence in man reaches its culmination in the life of Christ. Christ, too, gradually received the Spirit in his flesh, insofar as he took on temporal flesh, so as to save both time and flesh. For this reason, St. Irenaeus of Lyon maintains that the Spirit descended upon Christ, in order to make his dwelling in Christ among men, and then to give himself to them through him.[24]

If this is the case, then it should not be surprising that the Christian tradition has recognized a gradual outpouring of the Spirit in the two sacraments of initiation. If it is the Spirit who brings man gradually closer to God, then it makes sense that there are various outpourings of the Spirit at different times in human life. To use St. John Henry Newman's terminology, one might say there is an "antecedent probability" that there would be more than one sacrament of the gift of the Spirit, in order to manifest the progression in time that is proper to the Spirit.[25] But how do we distinguish the various outpourings of the Spirit? Are we speaking of a continual progression? Or are there differentiated dimensions within this progression that would account for what is unique to each sacrament?

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23. See Antonio Orbe, *La unción del Verbo. Estudios Valentinianos*, vol. 3 (Roma: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1961), 67–82, which refers to St. Justin Martyr and St. Theophilus of Antioch.

24. St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adv. Haer.* III, 17.1 (*Sources Chrétiennes* 211, 330): "[Spiritus] in Filium Dei Filium hominis factum descendit, cum ipso adsuescens habitare in genere humano et requiescere in hominibus et habitare in plasmate Dei." See also Pierre Evieux, "La théologie de l'accoutumance chez saint Irénée," *Recherches de science religieuse* 55 (1967): 5–54.

25. See John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, ch. 2, sec. 1; ch. 2, sec. 3, no. 2. Newman argues for an "antecedent probability" in favor of doctrinal developments and specifically states that "Baptism is developed into Confirmation."

4. THE SPIRIT AND THE DUAL DIMENSION OF HUMAN LIFE

We can respond to this question by examining the various stages of human life, discovering in them the different outpourings of the Spirit. Of course, it is not that these creaturely stages determine the world's growth toward God. The protagonist of any movement of man toward God is the Spirit, for man's approach toward God infinitely surpasses man's own capabilities. But the Spirit, who acts upon man without overshadowing him, respects the natural stages of man's approach to God, transforming them so as to bring them into the dynamism of self-gift that is proper to God.

This respect for the human pattern within which God's redemption is received is at the basis of the Thomistic ordering of the sacraments according to the stages of man's life.[26] Aquinas connects Baptism to birth and Confirmation to growth and maturity. Can we state more precisely what distinguishes these two stages?

Today, the attainment of maturity in life is viewed from two distinct perspectives: the life span and the life cycle.[27] The former considers the person as an isolated individual: he is born and grows, reaching the fullness of his strength toward the middle of his life. This is then followed by old age, when his capacities decline. For the latter perspective, the key is not the isolated individual, but the relationship that obtains between him and both the previous and subsequent generations. Man goes from living receptively, as a son educated by his parents and teachers, to another phase in which his horizon shifts toward the generation that will succeed him.

The thesis of Erik Erikson could be said to fall within the latter perspective of the life cycle.[28] According to him, the key to human maturity lies in *generativity*, which is concerned with begetting the next generation and bequeathing to it an

26. See, e.g., *ST* III, q. 65, co.

27. Stephan Kampowski, "Midlife: A Time of Crisis, a Time for Generativity," *Anthropotes* 38 (2022): 185–203.

28. Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1968), 138–39.

inheritance. For Erikson, the progression of life into maturity is not measured by the powers that each person holds within himself. Rather, it is measured by the place that each person occupies in the tapestry of the generations, and by the extent to which he receives or gives within the community with which his identity is intertwined.

According to this thesis, we can distinguish two key stages in human life. On the one hand, there is the receptive stage; on the other hand, there is a stage that, without ceasing to be receptive, is also generative. Man begins life by being received into a communion that welcomes him and within which he is begotten as a son; he then moves to expand that communion, generating it anew by taking the marital vow within which he can receive children and educate them. This second stage comes into play at the age of reason, the beginning of which traditionally has been understood to be the age of seven.

This schema has the advantage of presupposing a relational understanding of the person, which is characteristic of the biblical anthropology of man made in the image of God. Man is made in the image of God above all insofar as he receives his own being from God in a filial way; then, in the nuptial covenant, man brings this imaging of God to consummation insofar as he himself is capable of entering into a covenant of faithfulness and fruitfulness, imaging the work of the Creator.

This structure of creaturely existence, which reflects the image of God as a love that gives and receives, is assumed by Christ in his earthly life. He has been sent by the Father, and he is returning to the Father (Jn 16:28). His return to the Father is realized when the Son lays down his life for men (Jn 10:17–18), communicating eternal life to all flesh (Jn 17:2). In other words, the Son gives glory to the Father when he becomes capable of giving life to others because of the gift that the Father has given him (Jn 17:22).

This is why Christ receives the Spirit in two ways: for himself, and in order that he may give it to those who are his own. When he cries out in the Temple in reference to the Spirit, he speaks of drinking to quench thirst, but he also makes himself the wellspring from which water comes forth (Jn 7:37–39). Drinking to quench thirst is the receptive and filial dimension

of Christ's life; becoming a wellspring of water for others is the generative dimension of his life.

At the same time, Christ gives the Spirit in two ways: he gives so that the Spirit may fill us, and he gives so that the Spirit may flow out from us. This is why, at the Last Supper, after Christ tells the disciples that the Spirit bears witness, he adds, "you also are to testify" (Jn 15:26–27). And in his priestly prayer, he speaks of those who "will believe in me through [the Apostles'] word," then alluding to the Spirit, who is the glory that Christ has received from the Father and whom he gives his disciples so that the world may come to believe (Jn 17:18–22).

From this perspective we can distinguish the two sacraments of the Holy Spirit. The key for contemplating Baptism lies in the realities of birth and of the reception of the divine gifts. The Spirit is given fully inasmuch as he fully and fruitfully makes the one who receives Baptism into a child of God. The baptized Christian is welcomed into the body of Christ and becomes part of the relational fabric of his body, which allows that Christian to recognize himself as a son and brother in Christ.

In Confirmation, this gift is completed insofar as the confirmed Christian is able to communicate the gift that he has received, such that he can now build upon and increase the relational fabric into which he was welcomed at Baptism. For that reason, that which distinguishes the grace of Baptism from the grace of Confirmation has to do, not with the person himself, but rather with the capacity of the confirmed to be made into a wellspring of the Holy Spirit for others. Confirmation does not give "more" of the Spirit, but rather gives the Spirit in a different way, in a way that is communicable to others.

We could say that in Baptism we are received into the space of the communion of the Church, and in Confirmation we are given the power to extend this space, making it fruitful. Both sacraments correspond to the two decisive stages of life—though, rather than "stages," it would be better to speak of two dimensions of the Spirit's action within the human person's lifetime, which allow one to recognize in the Father both one's origin and one's end.

These two parts of a man's life reflect the dynamism of the relationship between Father and Son in the Spirit. On the one hand, the Spirit is the bond of unity between the Father and

the Son, in which the Father gives himself to the Son and the Son receives this gift. On the other hand, the Spirit expands this bond of unity into a "we" that then extends the love between the Father and the Son, opening up a space for creation.[29] If the role of the Spirit as the bond in the reception of a gift is emphasized in Baptism, in Confirmation the role of the Spirit comes to be seen as the overflowing superabundance of that gift.

St. Thomas identified the maturity conferred by Confirmation with the acquisition of the capacity to generate. He highlights the matter of Confirmation: chrism, which is oil mixed with a fragrant balsam. He draws a connection between the pleasant aroma diffused by the balsam and the confirmed Christian, who is now charged with transmitting the fragrant aroma of Christ to others. For the difference between infancy and maturity lies in the capacity to transmit life: "And when man reaches full maturity, he begins to engage others through his own actions; before that, however, he lives for himself alone, as it were confined to himself."[30]

This is the sense of fullness or perfection that Aquinas ascribes to Confirmation. Following Aristotle, he holds that one possesses a form of life perfectly when he can communicate it to others. Therefore, Confirmation brings Baptism to the perfection of its own form, not because Baptism lacks any aspect of the fullness of life, but because Confirmation allows us to transmit that fullness to others. The confirmed Christian possesses the perfection of baptismal grace because he can communicate to others the faith that he has received.[31]

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29. Joseph Ratzinger, "The Holy Spirit as Communio: Concerning the Relationship of Pneumatology and Spirituality in Augustine," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1988): 324–27.

30. *ST* III, q. 72, a. 2, co.: "Homo autem, cum ad perfectam aetatem pervenerit, incipit iam communicare actiones suas ad alios, antea vero quasi singulariter sibi ipsi vivit." See also Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiis* IV, d. 7, a. 1, co.: Confirmation stamps a character "ut spiritualia quis in notitiam ducat per eorum fortem confessionem." (Translator's note: the translation given here varies from the one available from the English Dominicans. It follows more closely in fact the Spanish translation of St. Thomas in the text of Fr. Granados's original article, which for its part parallels the Latin quite closely in structure and terminology.)

31. B. T. Mohelník makes this point well in "*Gratia augmenti*." *Contribution au débat contemporain sur la confirmation* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005), 227–34.

This public transmission of the faith takes place within the context of ecclesial communion. This is so because no one can generate on his own; to generate, it is necessary to participate actively in a communion that envelops us and propels us beyond ourselves. Therefore, the confirmed person transmits life within the communion of the Church and in her name. St. Thomas thus affirms that the sacrament of Confirmation confers an office, which allows us to distinguish more precisely between Confirmation and Baptism.[32] If the baptized Christian is also obliged to profess the faith, and receives the strength to do so, the difference is that the confirmed Christian professes the faith by ecclesial mandate, so that his action may expand the space of the Church and make that space fecund.

This relation between Confirmation and the ecclesial call to transmit the faith explains the special place of the bishop as the "original minister" of this sacrament (*Lumen gentium* 26). The bishop efficaciously represents the generative power of Christ the Head, who safeguards the common good of the Church. And given that Confirmation entails the ability to communicate the faith by ecclesial mandate, it makes sense that the bishop is its "original minister."

Having established the distinction between Baptism and Confirmation, we can now turn to examine the effects of Confirmation in the life of the baptized Christian. Let us begin by describing the permanent effect of Confirmation, namely the sacramental character that it confers. We will then examine the form of life that the sacrament inaugurates, which we will describe as a new generative capacity of the faithful.

5. THE CHARACTER OF CONFIRMATION: THE CAPACITY TO GENERATE IN THE CHURCH

What is meant by the term "sacramental character"? Theology has considered this question in response to the fact that certain

32. *ST* III, q. 63, a. 3, ad 2 (Confirmation bestows, like holy orders, an *officium principis*); *ST* III, q. 72, a. 5, ad 2 (in Confirmation, the faith is proclaimed *quasi ex officio*); Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiis* IV, d. 7, q. 2, a. 1, qc. 3, ad 1.

sacraments cannot be repeated.[33] The reason for this is that these sacraments consist in an encounter with the Risen Lord, who bears in himself the definitive measure of history. Nothing can happen for the baptized person that would relativize or render irrelevant this definitive encounter through which he comes to participate in the death and resurrection of Christ.

The sacramental character could be defined as our incorporation into the body of Christ, which is given to us in the Eucharist. This is why, in order to understand the sacramental character, it is helpful to consider the incarnate nature of the human person.

If we acknowledge that the body is a part of the identity of the person, then we accept that the person has an identity that is relational. For the body reminds us, first, that we have received life from others, who partake of the mystery of our origin and of our name. We will always be the children of our parents, even if we repudiate them, and this relationship will forever mark who we are. Moreover, the experience of fraternity, which unites us to those who share our same bodily origin, is also rooted in the body. Our relational network expands in marriage, where man and woman become one flesh, uniting their lives to each other's until death. This network grows yet again if children are born, thus transforming the parents' identities, opening them to a broader future.

The body, besides situating man relationally, also situates him in time. By virtue of having a body, man is, in the first place, one who receives life. His most foundational memory is that of a family with parents and siblings. Having a body, man is also one who, by professing wedding vows, unites the span of his life with the span of his spouse's life and prolongs it as well in their children.

In short, the fact that we live in our bodies and in time means that our identity is relational and dependent on the cycle of generations to which we belong as children, siblings, spouses, and parents. It is here, in this relational identity that our incarnate nature gives us, that the sacramental character emerges.

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33. Regarding the sacramental character, see José Granados, *Introduction to Sacramental Theology: Signs of Christ in the Flesh* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 263–94.

To understand this we must consider the Incarnation of the Son of God. He has assumed our flesh, uniting himself intimately to every man. And in the flesh he lived out human relationships anew, based on his unique sonship vis-à-vis the Father, revitalizing the ways of being son and brother, husband and wife, as well as the ways of generating life. He has done so in order to incorporate us into his body, and thus to communicate to us his own new relational order, which makes possible a new way of loving.

The sacraments are situated at the meeting point between the body of Christ and our own body. Thanks to the sacraments, our basic relational network, which we received at birth, is transformed, expanding in accord with the measure of Christ, who assumed that network at his Incarnation. Baptism consists in this new birth in which we receive our new body, the body of the family of Christ. And just as, once we are born, it is impossible to be born again to new parents and siblings, so also the character imprinted at Baptism remains with us forever. The baptismal character is, in fact, more definitive than the relational body with which we are born, for the character unites us to a body, Christ's, that has conquered death in the Resurrection.

This bodily change brought about by Baptism also affects the way we structure our existence in time. This happens in Baptism through our relationship with our origin. The origin of every child who is born is marked by his relationship with his parents, who point him toward the Creator. Through Baptism, the person's relationship to his origin is transformed, since his origin is now situated, from within the body of Christ, in the filial relationship that the Son has with his Father from all eternity. This new origin of the baptized individual does not eliminate his relationship to his parents and siblings, but it resituates it, giving it its true foundation.

Therefore, we can define the baptismal character as a new configuration of the bodily network of relationships that constitute the identity of the baptized Christian. To belong to the body of Christ is already a grace, because it makes possible a new way of loving, inaugurated by Jesus, which is the definitive grace. This explains why in medieval theology the character was described as both "res et sacramentum" (reality of grace and sign of grace). For the character gives us grace by bringing us into the

body of Christ. At the same time, the character remains the sign of another grace, namely, of the love that vivifies our membership in the body of Christ. In fact, without this latter grace, the character does not bring salvation, but rather remains in us as an empty sign that condemns us, just as one's first name and last name remain with the son who has rejected his parents, as signs of his ingratitude.

What happens in Confirmation? In light of what we have said, if Baptism places us within relationships of receptivity as a son and a brother, then in Confirmation we progress to giving and bearing witness to what we were given in Baptism. The confirmed Christian, by virtue of his maturity in Christ, is capable not only of being received into the relationships of the Church, but of widening those relationships in such a way that he becomes a protagonist in the work of building up the body of Christ. Therefore, Confirmation configures, in a generative way, the relational, filial, and fraternal identity that we have received in Baptism. Confirmation transforms the body and its affective life, making them sources of relationships that create community and generate new life within that community.[34]

On the one hand, then, we see the intimate relationship between these two sacraments. The character of Confirmation is rooted in the initial receptivity conferred in Baptism, as a font from which it continually draws refreshment. And, on the other hand, we see that the generative capacity that Confirmation bestows is meant to be individuated in other sacraments in accord with the various modes of generativity.

Confirmation unfolds, on the one hand, in marriage. Even though it does not imprint a character, marriage creates a conjugal bond that has been called by some theologians a "quasi-character." This bond consists in a new bodily configuration of the male and female sexed bodies. The bond transforms these bodies so that they can express the measure of love that obtains between Christ and his Church. Husband and wife therefore become capable of a promise that lasts until death and of the

34. For the juridical effects of this new configuration that takes place at Confirmation, see José M. Ribas Bracons, "Efectos jurídicos del sacramento de la Confirmación," *Ius Canonicum* 6 (1966): 403–39.

unconditional forgiveness that builds up the communion of the Church. This is why the Church asks the couple who wish to marry to receive Confirmation first as a foundation (*CIC*, can. 1065, §1), so that they may be able to expand their communion beyond themselves and into the social and ecclesial "we." Confirmation acts in marriage, therefore, by preventing spouses from closing in on themselves and by strengthening their mission. This relationship with marriage helps us to understand that those who experience adolescence having received the sacrament of Confirmation possess a crucial aid to understanding the oblative and generative meaning of sexuality.

The generative character of Confirmation also serves as the foundation for the sacrament of Holy Orders. Holy Orders bestows a new fatherhood, according to which the man who has been ordained represents Christ as the head and source of all the sacraments of the Church. Therefore, Confirmation bestows a basic generativity that disposes a man toward the reception of that fatherhood that is proper to the presbyterate. It is for this reason that Confirmation is required for Holy Orders to be received licitly (*CIC*, can. 1033). Unlike Holy Orders, Confirmation does not build up the eucharistic structure of the Church; rather, it is the task of the confirmed person to extend the eucharistic dimension to all other aspects of life.

Confirmation is also individuated in consecrated life. We know that the profession of evangelical vows amounts to "a special consecration, which is deeply rooted in that of Baptism and expresses it more fully" (*Perfectae caritatis* 5). Consecrated life also brings the consecration of Confirmation to fulfillment, because consecrated life is a public witness of the radical following of Christ throughout the life of the one who has been called to it.

Finally, the character conferred by Confirmation helps us connect this sacrament to the Eucharist. The reception of Confirmation makes it possible to receive every eucharistic possibility, according to St. Augustine's admonition, "Be what you can see, and receive what you are."[35] If "receiving what we are" is

35. English translation taken from *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*. Part III: *Sermons*, vol. 7: *Sermons 230–272B*, trans. Edmund Hill, OP (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1993), Sermon 272, p. 301.—*Trans.*

possible thanks to Baptism, which transforms us into the body of Christ, then "being what we can see" could be applied to Confirmation, which extends the Eucharist that we have received into the whole of our lives. The confirmed Christian participates more fully in the eucharistic liturgy, as well as in the extension of the Eucharist into one's own life and into the Church. Confirmation unfolds the full richness of the Eucharist, for it transmits the Eucharist into the whole of life. Let us now examine what this means for the lives of the faithful.

6. THE GRACE OF CONFIRMATION: CHRIST'S GENERATIVE POWER

We have presented Confirmation as a generative sacrament. This helps us to describe the grace that this sacrament gives and its effects on the Christian life. Once again, we must look to the life of Christ, which is communicated to the faithful in the sacrament.[36]

Christ lived a filial relationship with his Father, animated by the Holy Spirit, culminating in his radical trust unto death on the Cross and leading to the Resurrection. In this way he imprinted upon all the relationships that he lived in his body a filial meaning, which is the basis for the sacrament of Baptism.

Moreover, Christ lived in all of his relationships a generative capacity to give the gift of the Father to others, a capacity rooted in the receptive, filial meaning of his body. In the Eucharist he gave thanks to the Father for giving him power, not only to live in his resurrected body, but also to give the life that he received from the Father to others ("This is my body which is given for you" [Lk 22:19]; "this is my blood . . . which is poured out . . . for the forgiveness of sins" [Mt 26:28]). This generative power of Christ is the root of the sacrament of Confirmation.

With this we are brought to consider once more the question of the power to act, which, as we have noted, is in crisis today. Earlier, I referred to Paul Ricoeur, who, in one of his last writings, offered a summary of his concept of the "capable man,"

36. For a theological view of generativity, see José Granados, "La generatività: chiave per una sintesi teologica," *Anthropotes* 29 (2013): 99–122.

which recurs throughout his philosophical writings.[37] Ricoeur discusses man's various capacities for action: the capacity to decide, to act, to tell one's story, to assume responsibility, to make promises, and so forth.

It is important to add that this "capable man" of whom Ricoeur speaks is not "capable" merely on his own. The capacity to act is always realized vis-à-vis another and for another, for it requires mutual recognition. Thus, the "capable man" is always a man made capable by others and a man who makes others capable (the "man who is capable-of-making others capable"). This implies that the capability of the human subject is a generative capability.

Christ has revealed himself as the capable man, and as the one who makes others capable, par excellence. We see this in various moments throughout his life, which continue into the lives of the faithful thanks to the sacrament of Confirmation.

6.1

Christ is *capable of preaching the truth*. Those who heard him noted that he taught with authority (Mt 7:29). He does so because he does not receive what he teaches from any man; rather it is he who illuminates all that is human. His authority therefore consists in the fact that the truth that he proclaims brings to fulfillment man's original experience according to the Creator's plan. Since this original human experience, revealed to us by Christ, consists in receiving oneself from the Father so as to respond with love to his gifts, Christ's authority lies in proclaiming the truth of love.

This is as much as to say that the truth that Christ proclaims is generative. In fact, it is possible to generate only when one understands, not only the goodness of one's own life, but the goodness of life itself, because of which it is worthwhile handing on.[38] And in order to perceive the goodness of life,

37. Ricoeur, "Devenir capable, être reconnue," 125.

38. See Rémi Brague, *The Anchors in the Heavens: The Metaphysical Infrastructure of Human Life*, trans. Brian Lapsa (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2019).

we must understand that it comes from a primordial love that overflows into others. It is, indeed, impossible to generate life in someone in the full sense of the word if we are not ready to teach that child that life has a truth, namely, the truth of love. Confirmation renders us able to bear witness to this truth, revealed in Christ, which illuminates the profound experience within the heart of every man.

6.2

Christ is *capable of making promises*, establishing a covenant that endures across time and beyond every betrayal and death. He makes a promise when he says that "my words will not pass away," even if heaven and earth will pass away (Mt 24:35). He makes a promise when, on the eve of his Passion, he says, "I will not leave you orphans" (Jn 14:18). And he makes a promise after he triumphs over death: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20). Christ's capacity to make promises is the capacity to generate community, which endures across time and embraces more than any one individual. This ability to make a promise is the basis of his capacity to establish the Church, so strongly that the gates of hell shall not prevail against her (Mt 16:18). His ability to make a promise also constitutes his capacity to institute the sacraments as a source of fruitfulness in the Church, based on the new life that the Father will give her at the resurrection.

In Confirmation, this capacity to make promises that establish a lasting communion is given to the faithful. It is in this capacity that the foundation for all subsequent fruitfulness lies, for no one generates alone. On the one hand, Baptism brings us into a promise that precedes us—that is, the faithful promise of God who assures us of the unity of our lives across time. On the other hand, Confirmation allows us to make promises, establishing new covenants in Christ through which the future of the Kingdom will unfold. This promise exerts a particular influence on the sexuality of man and woman, in which the grammar of the fundamental covenant of life is written. Confirmation teaches us that the language of the sexually differentiated body is a language of promise, so that in that language it becomes possible to express the offering of self and the gift of self.

6.3

Christ is *capable of forgiving sins*. This power is united with the power to free man from the slavery of the devil and to heal man from sickness and death. Sin binds man to his past, preventing him from carrying his history forward. Hence, the power to forgive sins is related to a narrative power over the account of human life, and thereby to the ability to reconfigure man's life in time. Christ narrates human history based upon his origin in the Father and makes it possible for man to recover his own dignity as a son, in this way reopening the future as a path toward God.

What about the confirmed Christian? The forgiveness of sins is given in Baptism, which also makes it possible for him to go to confession. What, then, does Confirmation add to the forgiveness of sins? Once again, it adds the generative dimension of forgiveness, which we can see in the three moments of the sacrament of penance: contrition, confession, and satisfaction. *Contrition*: Confirmation amplifies the sorrow that we experience for the harm that sin has caused in relationships with those whom the Lord has entrusted to us. *Confession*: the confirmed person can reveal to others the mercy of God who has forgiven him. *Satisfaction*: the confirmed Christian receives the capacity to cooperate with Christ not only in the regeneration of his own history but in the regeneration of the ecclesial fabric as well.

These three aspects of Christ's power, communicated to the Christian, envelop the life of the confirmed individual and suggest avenues for pastoral practice. We can better understand, then, the strength that is proper to faith—the generative strength, communicated in Confirmation, and which sheds light on how we can live with fortitude in a communal way, which is so necessary today.

First, Confirmation teaches us that fortitude rests on a prior gift of the Father. This is attested to in the life of Christ, the font of Confirmation. To the filial (baptismal) gratitude of Christ is added the gratitude proper to Confirmation: gratitude because the Father has made us capable of communicating and transmitting life to others. This implies that every power of Christ and of the Christian is a power of response, which is to say it is a responsibility. This is why Confirmation is inseparable from Baptism, which remains alive in it, because the confirmed person acts for

others on the basis of the baptismal call that he has received from the Father.

Second, fortitude cannot be lived autonomously and in isolation; it is only possible within belonging and communion. The arduous good for which Christian fortitude strives is the communion between man and God and among all men. It is a fortitude that is channeled toward fostering communion, for this communion is what makes us able to generate a new future. Fortitude not only receives a gift from above but also strives to live this gift in relation so that it may bear fruit beyond ourselves.

Third, fortitude is revealed in the passage of our own personal history toward an end that transcends us. It is a generative fortitude because it is capable of looking toward a future that exceeds our lifetimes, a future in which others will continue our work. In Christ, this fortitude makes us able to face death. Already for the Greeks, facing death was the litmus test of the courageous man, who fears only one thing: to die without glory. Christ brings human action to its fullness because for him death no longer constitutes the end of his acting, the fruit of which would thus endure only in the memory and the lives of others. Rather, Christ's action continues after death because the Father receives it and resurrects it. In Christ, man becomes capable of an action that, welcoming death, reaches the highest possible future, one of communion with God.

What we have said about Confirmation applies not only to the life of the Christian, but also to the Church, which is born of the sacraments. The whole Church is baptized and confirmed. If Baptism makes the Church a place of unity, Confirmation makes the Church a place of generative creativity. In a secularized society, it is Baptism that allows the Christian community to remain united in its own proper culture in the face of the forces of division. But in a secularized society, it is also precisely Confirmation that makes of this united minority a generative minority. The Christian cannot limit himself to constructing his own culture, sheltered from the world; rather, he works to extend to the whole world the culture generated by faith. Otherwise, he would undermine the capacity of Christian culture to embrace everything that is human, which is one of that culture's essential characteristics.

As a generative sacrament, Confirmation brings to fulfillment the image of God in man. This is why the grace that it communicates is, like that of Baptism, sanctifying grace.[39] Confirmation crowns the *imago Dei* in man: God is glorified when his creation imitates his capacity to give beyond himself. We are the children of our heavenly Father when, like him, we act with a generosity that makes the sun to rise and make it rain on the just and the unjust. The fullness of the image of God in man is to be found in man's ability to become capable of participating in God's creation.[40] This is entirely the work of the Spirit who, being sent, "renew[s] the face of the earth" (Ps 104:30). The Spirit acts in Confirmation in the same way. Confirmation is, for that reason, the generative sacrament, the sacrament of "more."—*Translated by Carmen Horwitz* □

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39. See Bonaventure, *In IV Sent.*, d. 7, a. 2, q. 1. See *ST* III, q. 72, a. 6.

40. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* III, 21.