

Of Confirmation – By Martin Luther



It is surprising that it should have entered any one's mind to make a Sacrament of Confirmation out of that laying on of hands which Christ applied to little children, and by which the apostles bestowed the Holy Spirit, ordained presbyters, and healed the sick; as the Apostle writes to Timothy: "Lay hands suddenly on no man." (1 Tim. v. 22.) Why not also make a confirmation out of the sacrament of bread, because it is written: "And when he had received meat, he was strengthened" (Acts ix. 19); or again: "Bread which strengtheneth man's heart?" (Ps. civ. 15.) Thus confirmation would include three sacraments, of bread, of orders, and of confirmation itself. But if whatever the apostles did is a sacrament, why has not preaching rather been made into a sacrament?

I do not say this, because I condemn the seven sacraments, but because I deny that they can be proved from the Scriptures. I wish there were in the Church such a laying on of hands as there was in the time of the Apostles, whether we chose to call it confirmation or healing. As it is, however, none of it remains, except so much as we have ourselves invented in order to regulate the duties of the bishops, that they may not be entirely without work in the Church. For when they had left the sacraments which involved labour, along with the word, to their inferiors, as being beneath their attention (on the ground, forsooth, that whatever institutions the Divine majesty has set up must needs be an object of contempt to men), it was but right that we should invent some easy duty, not too troublesome for the daintiness of these great heroes, and by no means commit it to inferiors, as if it were of little importance. What human wisdom has ordained ought to be honoured by men. Thus, such as the priests are, such should be the ministry and office which they hold. For what is a bishop who does not preach the gospel, or attend to the cure of souls, but an idol in the world, having the name and form of a bishop?

At present, however, we are enquiring into the sacraments of divine institution; and I can find no reason for reckoning confirmation among these.

To constitute a sacrament we require in the very first place a word of divine promise, on which faith may exercise itself. But we do not read that Christ ever gave any promise respecting confirmation, although he himself laid hands upon many, and although he mentions among the signs that should follow them that believe: "They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." (Mark xvi. 18.) No one, however, has interpreted these words of a sacrament, or could do so. It is enough then to consider confirmation as a rite or ceremony of the Church; of like nature to those other ceremonies by which water and other things are consecrated. For if every other creature is sanctified by the word and prayer, why may not man much more be sanctified by the same means, even though they cannot be called sacraments of faith, inasmuch as they contain no divine promise? Neither do these work salvation; while sacraments save those who believe in the divine promise.

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