

# The Early Church Fathers on The Sacrament of Confirmation

The sacrament of Confirmation continues what was begun in the sacrament of Baptism. The grace of Baptism brings us into the family of God and helps us to understand our need for Him. Through the sacrament of Confirmation, we invite the Holy Spirit to strengthen and mature us in the faith. Confirmation further equips us with special gifts that enable us to effectively live and promote the faith. Gifts such as wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and the fear of God. Administering the sacrament of confirmation is not some late invention of the Church. We see the apostles Peter and John administering it in Acts 8:14-17 and we know by the writings of the Early Church Fathers that the practiced was continued.

## Theophilus of Antioch

Are you unwilling to be anointed with the oil of God? It is on this account that we are called Christians: because we are anointed with the oil of God (*To Autolyucus* 1:12 [A.D. 181]).

## Tertullian

After coming from the place of washing we are thoroughly anointed with a blessed unction, from the ancient discipline by which [those] in the priesthood . . . were accustomed to be anointed with a horn of oil, ever since Aaron was anointed by Moses. . . . So also with us, the unction runs on the body and profits us spiritually, in the same way that baptism itself is a corporal act by which we are plunged in water, while its effect is spiritual, in that we are freed from sins. After this, the hand is imposed for a blessing, invoking and inviting the Holy Spirit (*Baptism* 7:1–2, 8:1 [A.D. 203]).

## Hippolytus

The bishop, imposing his hand on them, shall make an invocation, saying, ‘O Lord God, who made them worthy of the remission of sins through the Holy Spirit’s washing unto rebirth, send into them your grace so that they may serve you according to your will, for there is glory to you, to the Father and the Son with the Holy Spirit, in the holy Church, both now and through the ages of ages. Amen.’ Then, pouring the consecrated oil into his hand and imposing it on the head of the baptized, he shall say, “I anoint you with holy oil in the Lord, the Father Almighty, and Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit.” Signing them on the forehead, he shall kiss them and say, “The Lord be with you.’ He that has been signed shall say, ‘And with your spirit.” Thus, shall he do to each (*The Apostolic Tradition* 21–22 [A.D. 215]).

## Cyprian of Carthage

It is necessary for him that has been baptized also to be anointed, so that by his having received chrism, that is, the anointing, he can be the anointed of God and have in him the grace of Christ (Letters 7:2 [A.D. 253]).

## Council of Carthage VII

[I]n the Gospel our Lord Jesus Christ spoke with his divine voice, saying, ‘Except a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God’ [John 3:5]. This is the Spirit which from the beginning was borne over the waters; for neither can the Spirit operate without the water, nor the water without the Spirit. Certain people therefore interpret [this passage] for themselves wrongly, when they say that by imposition of the hand they receive the Holy Ghost, and are thus received, when it is manifest that they ought to be born again [initiated] in the Catholic Church by both sacraments (Seventh Carthage [A.D. 256]).

## Anonymous

[I]t has been asked among the brethren what course ought specially to be adopted towards the persons of those who . . . baptized in heresy . . . and subsequently departing from their heresy, and fleeing as supplicants to the Church of God, should repent with their whole hearts, and only now perceiving the condemnation of their error, implore from the Church the help of salvation. . . . [A]ccording to the most ancient custom and ecclesiastical tradition, it would suffice, after that baptism which they have received outside the Church . . . that only hands should

be laid upon them by the bishop for their reception of the Holy Spirit, and this imposition of hands would afford them the renewed and perfected seal of faith (*Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 [A.D. 256]).

#### **Cyril of Jerusalem**

After you had come up from the pool of the sacred streams, there was given chrisam, the antitype of that with which Christ was anointed, and this is the Holy Spirit. But beware of supposing that this is ordinary ointment. For just as the bread of the Eucharist after the invocation of the Holy Spirit is simple bread no longer, but the body of Christ, so also this ointment is no longer plain ointment, nor, so to speak, common, after the invocation. Further, it is the gracious gift of Christ, and it is made fit for the imparting of his Godhead by the coming of the Holy Spirit. This ointment is symbolically applied to your forehead and to your other senses; while your body is anointed with the visible ointment, your soul is sanctified by the holy and life-giving Spirit. Just as Christ, after his baptism, and the coming upon him of the Holy Spirit, went forth and defeated the adversary, so also with you after holy baptism and the mystical chrisam, having put on the panoply of the Holy Spirit, you are to withstand the power of the adversary and defeat him, saying, "I am able to do all things in Christ, who strengthens me" (*Catechetical Lectures*, 21:1:3–4 [A.D. 350]).

#### **Serapion**

[Prayer for blessing the holy chrisam:] 'God of powers, aid of every soul that turns to you and comes under your powerful hand in your only-begotten. We beseech you, that through your divine and invisible power of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, you may effect in this chrisam a divine and heavenly operation, so that those baptized and anointed in the tracing with it of the sign of the saving cross of the only-begotten . . . as if reborn and renewed through the bath of regeneration, may be made participants in the gift of the Holy Spirit and, confirmed by this seal, may remain firm and immovable, unharmed and inviolate. . . .' (*The Sacramentary of Serapion* 25:1 [A.D. 350]).

#### **Pacian of Barcelona**

If, then, the power of both baptism and confirmation, greater by far than charisms, is passed on to the bishops, so too is the right of binding and loosing (*Three Letters to the Novatianist Sympronian* 1:6 [A.D. 383]).

#### **Council of Laodicea**

They who are baptized must after Baptism be anointed with the heavenly chrisam and be partakers of the Kingdom of Christ (Canon 48 [A.D. 390]).

#### **Ambrose of Milan**

[Baptism] is followed by a spiritual signing, as you have heard in the reading today; for after the font it but remains to perfect the work, when, at the invocation of the priest the Holy Spirit is poured out, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of council and fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and piety, the spirit of holy fear (*The Sacraments* 3:2:8 [A.D. 390-391]).

#### **The Apostolic Constitutions**

[H]ow dare any man speak against his bishop, by whom the Lord gave the Holy Spirit among you upon the laying on of his hands, by whom you have learned the sacred doctrines, and have known God, and have believed in Christ, by whom you were known of God, by whom you were sealed with the oil of gladness and the ointment of understanding, by whom you were declared to be the children of light, by whom the Lord in your illumination testified by the imposition of the bishop's hands (*Apostolic Constitutions* 2:4:32 [A.D. 400]).

#### **Gregory the Great**

Either from writings or witnesses, as to whether persons have been baptized or confirmed, or whether churches have been consecrated, that such persons should be baptized and confirmed, and that such churches should be canonically dedicated, lest such doubt should become ruin to the faithful (Letters 14:17 [A.D. 600-604]).