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## **Confirmation Ceremonies / Maturity / Processes of Faith and Life**

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Thomas Schlag

# Confirmation Ceremonies / Maturity / Processes of Faith and Life

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Basic Information

Confirmation work is one of the core fields and topics of Protestant pedagogical work. Far beyond this, the self-understanding of Protestant Theology and Protestant Church is reflected in the historical developments, the theological justifications, and the current pedagogical and ritual forms of practice of this programme offered for young people. For Practical Theology as an academic discipline and for church life the challenges of future-oriented practices are dynamically reflected in confirmation work.

Since the practice of confirmation varies greatly from one country to another, the following considerations are essentially geared to the challenges and characteristics in the German-speaking countries and, with a sideways glance, to other European countries as well. In terms of empirical insights, this article refers especially to the so called Second Study on Confirmation work, which was conducted 2012–2014 in Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Norway, Poland, Sweden, and Switzerland (Schweitzer, Koch, and Maaß 2015a; Schweitzer et al. 2017; for Germany see esp. Schweitzer et al. 2015b, for Switzerland Schlag, Koch, and Maaß 2016). A new third study is currently under way and results can be expected in 2022.<sup>1</sup> References to the situation in the USA are not made in this article since confirmation work there differs significantly in various respects from what is offered in the European context (Osmer 1996) and results from the U.S. survey, conducted in collaboration with the European Second Study (Osmer and Douglass 2018).

It is important to know that confirmation work in the European countries, participating in the study, takes place in groups that are largely homogeneous in age (ranging from about 13 to 16 years) with a regular cycle and over a period of one to two years. Confirmation has as its theological basis the connection with baptism and from there aims at the maturity of young people's own faith. Within this goal horizon, the confirmation period includes insight into the essential contents of the Protestant faith. Confirmation work is characterised by a variety of different contexts of discovery, which include pedagogical and ritual, pastoral and congregational, as well as pastoral care elements. In all these contexts, the aim is for young people to become

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1 Cf. <http://konfirmandenarbeit.eu/en/network/> (30.11.2021).

familiar with the core contents and the practice of shaping the church through their own experiences. In this sense, confirmation work aims at individual insights into the meaning of church, the ability to position oneself religiously and the practice of liturgical-ritual practice. Confirmation work is a complex experience- and dialogue-oriented educational process that is open to participation and resonance (Ebinger et al. 2018).

In this context, the ritual dimension of ‘Confirmation Ceremonies’, which is central to this paper, plays an essential role. This classically refers to the confirmation service, which marks the end of the confirmation period. In theological terms, the confirmation service ceremony represents a symbolic interface between the young people’s life so far and their future life and faith. Through this final service, the young people are publicly addressed as mature members of the congregation and become recognisable in their relationship to faith and the church.

In addition to this theologically and biographically highly significant ceremony at the end of the confirmation period, which will be discussed in more detail, it should be pointed out that other ritual elements are included in the churches’ pedagogical programmes. These range from regular participation of the young people in ‘normal’ Sunday services, the so-called presentation service at the beginning of the confirmation period, baptismal services for the young people in the confirmation group who have not yet been baptised, the celebration of the Lord’s Supper – which nowadays very often already takes place at confirmation camps or group weekends – to smaller liturgical and ritual elements during confirmation classes – such as common prayer or meditation, musical elements or even a blessing ritual at the end of the respective group meetings.

At the same time, and in connection with this expansion of ritual practice, it should already be pointed out that in recent decades the instructional character of confirmation work, has changed in favour of a more experiential, experimental, and developmental character. As a result, the aim is actively to include age-specific conditions and potentials as constitutive factors in the planning and design of this programme. From a ritual point of view, this has led to considerable dynamics in the shaping of confirmation time and its liturgical-ritual practice in recent decades, which will be discussed in more detail below.

## 1.2 Theological-Cultural Roots

In confirmation work pedagogical and ritual-liturgical aspects are closely linked from the beginning (Grethlein 2001). The theological logic of confirmation ties in with the early Christian tradition of baptismal catechesis, in which individual Christian formation was closely linked to ritual admission into the community of believers from the very beginning. One of the most important achievements of the Reformation was indeed the introduction of confirmation, which spread from Ziegenhain in Hesse, Germany all over the world. In the *Ziegenhain Church Discipline*, which was

issued in 1539 by Landgrave Philipp with the cooperation of the reformer Martin Bucer, it was stipulated that children should be systematically taught catechism before they were confirmed and thus admitted to the Lord's Supper. The introduction to Christian doctrine, the individual confession, the – *nota bene* changed – ritual of anointing those willing to be admitted, as well as the admission to the Lord's Supper, are elements that still form essential components of the Protestant understanding of confirmation today. In contrast to the Catholic tradition and its practice of confirmation (*Firmung*), however, confirmation is not a sacramental act. Rather, in the confirmation service, the divine promise already given in baptism is symbolically confirmed and celebrated. In this sense, instruction in the Christian faith and the confirmation service have been closely linked since the time Reformation.

Until recently, the catechetical significance of the confirmation period was expressed in the fact that in the final service, the catechism – i. e., the core of the Christian faith – had to be learned by heart and recited in front of the congregation as a kind of exam. This was not infrequently associated with stressful situations and often downright traumatic experiences on the part of the young people and their families.

The strong theological charge of this ritual-liturgical event can still be seen today in many church orders of the Protestant Churches, and especially in the liturgical agendas for the confirmation service. In addition, in many church contexts it is still only through confirmation that admission as a godparent and the right to participate in church elections, as well as the right to be elected to honorary church offices, are opened up. The right to participate in the Lord's Supper, which for centuries was only connected with confirmation, is now hardly common due to a greatly changed church practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper with children. The confirmation service can thus be characterised as a ritual-liturgical celebration with several sacrament-like aspects (creed, confession/affirmation, blessing, release into future life), in which the affiliation to the Christian community established by baptism is symbolically confirmed. At the same time, this “graduation” service represents an important religious-cultural act throughout the ages – both with regard to the individual person of the confirmand, the internal family system and the broader social public. The ritual act itself was perceived as a *rite of passage* in terms of biographical, religious, and civic maturity and was celebrated accordingly. This was demonstrated, for example by the fact that male adolescents were given watches or valuable writing utensils as insignia of this acquired maturity and adulthood, while female adolescents were given appropriate items of clothing or important objects for the future marital household.

### 1.3 Current Challenges

Confirmation work not only lives from complex theological and cultural roots, but its dynamics and practical design, including ritual practice, are also strongly connected to a series of current challenges: these relate, on the one hand, to the current condi-

tions of young people growing up and their self-understanding and, on the other hand, to the situation of religion, faith and church in contemporary society and culture.

Regarding adolescence, a clear decline in religious socialisation can be observed over the past decades, which in turn points to the massively changing religious demographic situation in German-speaking and other European countries. This should not lead to the premature conclusion that religious aspects no longer play a role in adolescence. However, with regard to the feeling of belonging to or identifying with the church, ‘believing’ and ‘belonging’ have clearly diverged. For many young people this encounter with church practice is their first experience.

In addition, due to the specific developmental psychological conditions of adolescence, certain traditions and authorities given ‘from outside’ or ‘from above’ are perceived critically anyway. Even in the case of religious socialisation experiences in childhood, a sceptical-critical basic attitude towards church programmes must be expected for adolescence. Due to the developmental-psychological and socio-cultural conditions of adolescence, it can also be assumed that developmental steps towards critical maturity (Gräb 2004) no longer require an ecclesiastical rite of passage in the sense of a substantial rite of passage.

Finally, there is currently an increasing collision between church structures and the realities of young people’s lives. This refers to the highly different time structures, as well as the life, language, and image cultures – one thinks here especially of the dynamics of digital culture – as well as independent preferences in choosing their peers and peer groups, which confronts church group formation processes with considerable plausibility requirements. In general, then, it can be said that during the confirmation period, the reality of young people’s everyday lives and their “lived” – or quasi “unlived” religion sometimes collide hard with the church’s and ministers’ interests and expectations with regard to young people’s positive identification with the church and the “taught religion” represented by it (Koch 2020).

In addition to these challenges, the role of those who are professionally and pastorally responsible for the implementation of the respective programme has changed considerably in recent decades. For centuries, their self-image consisted primarily of conveying the central contents of the faith to the young people as strongly and convincingly as possible in the mode of catechesis and instruction. Their role in the confirmation period was thus clearly and unambiguously that of the frontally acting model of faith and life. In the usually obligatory participation of the young people in church services during the entire confirmation period, they were to experience this church practice indirectly, so to speak, or already practise the role of later regular churchgoers – and this with all the disciplinary difficulties associated with it.

In view of the ritual practice of particular interest here, the concluding confirmation service was not only the symbolic goal of the celebration of youthful maturity, but from the perspective of the pastors the ultimate climax of instruction for the mature life of faith. This was symbolised in front of all the congregation in the retrieval of the learned material, the sermon as a powerful speech to take with you on the fur-

ther journey of life, the blessing of the confirmands, as well as by the symbolic exodus of the then 'confirmed' at the end of the service. The worship ceremonies thus did not have to legitimise themselves or make themselves plausible, but carried their self-evident and unquestionable institutional-authoritative meaning.

This understanding has fundamentally changed since the general social and cultural transformations of the 1960s and beyond. In the course of far-reaching emancipation tendencies, and thus also a changed role and perception of church and its personnel, the catechetical objectives have changed towards forms that are more open to experience and participation.

Accordingly, the practice of worship has also undergone a significant reforming. As already indicated, for many young people worship services are unfamiliar or even incomprehensible, both in terms of liturgical form and the forms of language used in the content. This makes it indispensable for professional staff not only to introduce the meaning and deeper meaning of liturgical events, but also to make them fundamentally plausible in their possible relevance to meaning and life. In other words, the specific meaning and history of confirmation work and the ritual practice associated with it, must be symbolised, clarified, and practised again and again as precisely as possible in view of young people's present perceptions of themselves and the world. What applies to the pedagogical dimension can consequently also be said for the ritual dimension.

This orientation in the mode of a mutual process of discovery and development between the message and the subjects of the confirmation work is consequently manifested in an increasingly participatory worship practice (Schlag 2010). This can lead to a situation, where the young people themselves not only determine the theme of the final service, but also take on considerable responsibility for shaping it. In this case, they do not simply "repeat" "given" prayers or other parts of the text. Instead, the elements of design include their own musical and textual productions, as well as sometimes even specially formulated parts of the sermon. In this way, this new balance between confirmands and staff, which is open to creative participation, is once again demonstrated for the congregation itself in a symbolic and manifest way.

## **2 The Relationship Between Different Aspects of Confirmation Ceremonies**

### **2.1 Staging Patterns (Inszenierungsmuster)**

The challenges outlined above lead to the need for institutionalised permanent innovation in the pedagogical and liturgical design of confirmation practice. For ritual practice, it is therefore helpful to be clear about the different dimensions of meaning

of the confirmation service – which in turn can also guide other ritual elements during the confirmation period.

Thomas Klie very helpfully differentiates between four different so-called staging patterns of the baptising, forming, and confirming actions of the congregation, both for the overall practice and for the confirmation service that is to be consistently connected with it (Klie 2007). The crucial point of this differentiation is that depending on the (sometimes almost unconscious) pastoral favouritism of the respective pattern, both the objectives and the characteristics of the concrete programme – in pedagogical and ritual terms – can take on different forms:

In the sense of the *cybernetic-integrative staging pattern*, the confirmands are to undertake and experience a kind of “trial living” in the space of church and congregation through active participation in church and liturgical practice. According to this logic, the aim is to create “an overlapping field as large as possible between lived and taught religion”. For the confirmation service, this entails a clear focus on the desired affiliation of the young people to the congregation. In the sense of the *life-cycle-blessing staging pattern*, confirmation is primarily understood as a “casual service of maturity”, from which the concrete profile of the service is formatted less ecclesiastically than biographically. Accordingly, the confirmation service does not focus on communion and confession, but on elements of blessing and intercession. In the sense of the *catechetical-church-legal staging pattern*, there is a strong instructional orientation towards the acquisition of elementary Protestant confessional content. The reference to the historical-theological tradition, i.e., the admission to the Lord’s Supper, as well as the ecclesiastical granting of the right to be a godparent, is in the foreground. In the sense of a *sacramental-ceremonial staging pattern*, the pedagogical orientation of the confirmation service is broken in favour of its liturgical dimension. The confirmation service as a form of expression of religious-symbolic communication thus takes on a performative form. The common celebration in the congregation and as a congregation comes into view as a space of experience in which life-historical and theological interpretations are closely intertwined.

Now, in view of this helpful heuristic fourfold differentiation by Klie, it should be pointed out that these different interpretations hardly occur “in pure form” in either pedagogical or liturgical practice, but rather in mixtures, which in turn are shaped by the respective expectations of the actors involved in confirmation practice. And these expectations include not only the pastoral liturgists but also the young people, their parents, and families, as well as the congregation, and not least the church boards and councils. Thus – and this is also to be noted for the ritual practice – quite different expectations and logics come together in the time of confirmation.

This justifies speaking of a plurality of expectations inherent in confirmation, which can hardly be transferred back into a one-line homogeneous horizon of meaning. In this respect, the art of this church event – to anticipate it already at this juncture – consists in aligning the respective focus in practice in such a way that as few “blind spots” and exclusion tendencies are created as possible. At the same time the question arises, whether in view of the current challenges indicated above, a stronger

and clearer profile of confirmation work and the liturgical practice to be experienced and shaped in it, should be developed in general. To do this, it is helpful to look empirically at young people's experiences with and their expectations of this programme.

## 2.2 The Significance of Ritual Practice During the Confirmation Period and the Confirmation Service – Empirical Insights

In a comprehensive, predominantly quantitative study, the expectations and experiences of confirmands and workers in a total of 9 European countries were surveyed in the years 2012–2014. The survey was conducted at the beginning of the confirmation period ( $t_1$ ), shortly before confirmation ( $t_2$ ) and in retrospect about one year after confirmation ( $t_3$ ). One thematic focus of these three consecutive surveys was on worship and ritual practice. In the following, some central insights will be presented, concentrating on the participating German-speaking countries Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. In the following, detailed percentage figures will be dispensed with, but the respective recognisable tendencies will be depicted.

Regarding expectations at the beginning of the confirmation period ( $t_1$ ), about half of the confirmands agree with the statement “Church services are usually boring”. Only about one third expressed interest in the topic “Course and meaning of Sunday services”. With regard to their own attitude to church services, more than half would like “to experience services adequate for young people”. However, only a quarter of confirmands – in Switzerland only a tenth – are willing “to contribute my own ideas to the services” and “to have tasks in the services (for example, do a reading)”. In terms of expectations, about half said “to meet nice people in the services” and slightly less than half said “to listen to interesting sermons”. A quarter of the confirmands agree with the statement: “It is unclear to me what I can expect from a worship service”. As far as confirmation itself is concerned about half also expect “to have a beautiful celebration with family and friends on the day of my confirmation” and “to receive a blessing on the day of confirmation”.

There is a notable discrepancy in the survey between the confirmands and those working in the church. In response to some of the questions mentioned above, which those working were asked in the same way, the importance of the practice and themes of the service is rated significantly higher overall. For example, about four-fifths of those working consider the topic “Course and meaning of Sunday services” to be central. There is an equally clear tendency for them to want to offer worship services that are appropriate for young people and to involve young people in the design of worship services. In addition, about two thirds want the young people to “get acquainted with the liturgy” – a question, which incidentally was not asked of the young people themselves.

It is interesting to compare the expectations expressed by the young people at the beginning of the confirmation period with the experiences ( $t_2$ ) they articulate



shortly before confirmation, i. e., in retrospect of the confirmation period: the assessment that church services are “usually boring” has practically not changed compared to the initial expectations, and the thematic interest in church services has remained more or less the same at a low level. It seems surprising, especially in comparison with the original intentions of those working in the church, as well as their perceptions at the end of the year, that – according to the confirmands – only about half have experienced youth-oriented services. In contrast, in retrospect, the workers rate both the provision of youth-oriented services and the active participation of the young people as much higher. It should be noted that the confirmands, who not only took on “tasks” but were also able to contribute their own ideas to the service, rated the services more positively overall.

It should also be noted that at the end of the year, about half of the young people tended to confirm positively that they had met “nice people” in church services, liked the music and atmosphere, could “calm down” and felt “secure in the group” and “as a part of the worship community”. However, almost half also stated that it was important for them, “to get through with it as soon as possible”. Four-fifths of the young people had positive expectations of the confirmation service that was about to take place.

The statements about the day of confirmation itself made by the young people one year after their confirmation ( $t_3$ ) are exciting (Christensen and Krupka 2017). Again, about half agree with the statement that the day of confirmation was “one of the most important days of my life”, two thirds agree with the statement “Having a beautiful celebration with family and friends was important for me” and about half agree “To receive a blessing was important for me”.

Overall, both the expectations and the experiences of the confirmands show that at least the “normal” worship practice is clearly inferior to the other experiences during the confirmation period. The confirmation service is an exception here, which is hardly surprising in view of its prominent, biographical, and familial significance. And of course, the experience of being at the centre of it all as a young person is of considerable lasting significance.

Further empirical results of the study show that the confirmation period as a whole, and the church service at the end, are not experienced by young people as so important that it would really be appropriate to speak of it as a *rite de passage*. The assessment that the young people had made “an important step in growing up” through the confirmation time, was positively answered by less than half: “In all the participating countries, confirmation has lost most, but not all, of its implications for the civil status of adolescents, both within and outside the church.” (Christensen and Krupka 2017, 30). It therefore seems problematic to regard confirmation itself as a decisive rite of passage.

However, it should be pointed out that, due to the specifically experience-oriented character of the confirmation period, many decisive ritual-related experiences are not made in the classic church building or in the normal Sunday service, but for example at confirmation weekends or at confirmation camps. Thus, it can be assumed

that not only successful group experiences, joint activities, and camps, as well as the positive perception of church workers, are relevant for the positive overall assessment of the young people, but that these experiences also have a considerable influence on the perception of the ritual practice. In this respect, it can be reasonably assumed that celebrating, praying, and singing in the group outside of the Sunday service nevertheless facilitated positive experiences with this church practice.

### 3 Confirmation Ceremonies as Dialogical and Resonant Relational Events of a Theological Interpretation of Life and Religion

The historical and theological considerations, as well as the empirical findings, have shown that there is a close connection between pedagogical, liturgical, pastoral-theological and church-theoretical aspects in confirmation work and the ritual practice associated with it. If one takes up the objective of confirmation work formulated at the beginning, namely coming of age in questions of one's own faith, then it is clear that there is no need for homogenising, nor at the same time for pooling these different aspects. As a conceptual bracket for this, a definition of the *Confirmation Ceremonies as a dialogical, resonant relational event of a theological interpretation of life and religion* can be understood. This needs to be explained theologically in more detail in the following:

Religious maturity – to put it theologically – is not acquired through a specific ritual practice. Rather, this ritual event is itself a symbolic expression of the maturity experienced and practised during confirmation, which has already experienced its full expression in baptism. Theologically speaking, the experiences of confirmation combine the passive dimension of promise and the active dimension of encouragement to form a religiously significant whole of meaning. Confirmation ceremonies are thus on the one hand – with regard to their dimension of passivity – predetermined provisions of interpretation for individual life and religious practice. On the other hand – in respect to their dimension of activity – they open up a constantly new and not yet fixed resonance space for individual and at the same time group-related interpretation through the possibilities of individual co-creation.

This is based on the church- and liturgy-theoretical conviction that in the ritual itself, individuals are never only atomistically present alongside each other, but that the respective common experience contributes significantly to this resonance-open relational event. In this respect, it is of considerable importance from the point of view of ritual theory and church theory that it is precisely in the ritual that the confirmation group can experience itself both collectively as a group and together with the staff.

On the other hand, the individual family constellation (as problematic as it may be in individual cases) is of course also directly 'gathered' in this resonance space –

ultimately in the confirmation service. Finally, the congregation celebrating is also experienced as a congregation gathered in the worship space and as an interacting community. Theologically speaking, in a successful case the respective rite makes it possible to experience the congregation as a whole individually and collectively as *communio sanctorum*. In this sense, the ritual practice during the confirmation period itself represents a specific form of jointly lived religion.

Thus, confirmation work is decisively about opening up the most experience-oriented connections possible between church-symbolic practice and individual theological literacy. In a successful case, it can become clear which specific content-related message can be opened up through this symbolising act of the rite or can open itself up. Exemplarily, this could manifest itself in the confirmation service, in that the elementary significance of baptism for the understanding of the promised and given faith is made a theme (Schlag 2010).

Consequently, this already makes it necessary to practise ritual and worship during the confirmation period (Meyer-Blanck 2001). However, this also means that especially in and through ritual practice, the factually existing plurality and heterogeneity among all the actors involved must not simply be blunted. Rather, as a wealth of individual religious needs and forms of expression, this must consciously take shape and be expressed in ritual practice – which may then include the creation of individual prayers, as well as the productive-creative restaging of existing rituals. However, from the empirical results, it must be emphasised once again that a merely liturgical auxiliary function should in any case not yet be passed off as truly responsible participation. In a successful case, one could speak of a ritual-related theological productivity.

And on the part of the staff, this also makes it absolutely necessary for them to reflect again and again on their own ritual practice and its possible relevance for the realisation of a mature life of faith. The role as liturgist, preacher and hermeneutic theologian of lived and taught religion only becomes plausibly transparent and, in the truest sense of the word, can only be experienced as credible through one's own mature performance and one's own readiness for relational resonance (Beile 2016).

To conclude: From this theological point of view, the confirmation service is the public and visible expression of a many-voiced, partly ambivalent, but basically approving 'yes' of all those involved in it: the young people, their families, those responsible for this programme, as well as the whole congregation celebrating with them – and all this against the backdrop of an intensely resonant, audible and visible tradition.

This is why this church celebration represents an enormous opportunity for a theological-reformatory profile in such a way that the manifold expectations and experiences in their factual fragility and openness are included. A supposedly more coherent adjustment to secular would hardly meet the demands of this ceremony. Theologically responsibly not sweeping the complexities and fractures of life under the table, but consciously articulated – also by the young people themselves – the profile

of the confirmation service differs significantly from secular youth consecration like the in the former East Germany still quite popular *Jugendweihe*.

In this respect, it is important to keep in mind this richness and the need to preserve theological tradition on the one hand, but on the other hand also to be open to elements that are appropriate for young people and also quite fresh, unconventional and surprising. In this way, the confirmation service corresponds to the experiences made during the whole confirmation time – in the best case: as an encounter with a faith tradition that is still relevant for young people today, and with a church that is open to impulses and ideas from the “next generation” in a convincing way (Simojoki, et al. 2018, 200).

## 4 The Contribution to Practical Theology in General

Dealing with confirmation work and its ritual references makes it clear that strong networking between the practical theological disciplines should be implemented wherever possible. In concrete terms, it becomes clear that confirmation work can by no means be adequately defined or even profiled by reflection on religious education alone. Rather, precisely because it is such a complex event, the ritual-theoretical, church-theoretical, pastoral-theological and pastoral-care aspects must be addressed integratively in the interplay of the various practical-theological disciplines and reflected upon hermeneutically and empirically in their factual context.

In addition, the challenges of confirmation work show the need for much closer cooperation between Practical Theology and Systematic Theology in the future, with regard to both dogmatic and ethical questions. Here, in the sense of a hermeneutic-pedagogical approach to ritual practice and its better understanding, perspectives of ‘theological literacy’ in the sense of a “lived theology”, as well as the question of empowerment of the young generation – also in terms of their civil society engagement (Schweitzer et al. 2016; Simojoki et al. 2018, 109–124) – must be increasingly considered in a theological-intradisciplinary way.

It is particularly important for Practical Theology to think systemically in the area of confirmation work and beyond. Because it is the entire family and church network that is relevant for a coherent and sustainable confirmation practice – and this applies not only to the question of religious socialisation in the parental home, but also to the shared experience of worship.

In any case, it would be an indictment – with all understanding for the cultural significance of the confirmation service, which has long since changed – if at some point it were to be understood and experienced only as a civil-religious family celebration and no longer as a life-significant common celebration in the face of life given by God.

For the staging of this event, this means that the young people are naturally at the centre of all liturgical events and should experience them as such. However, theologically speaking, it is important that such a centre experience is not under-

stood as a self-created religious experience. Rather, this worship practice is to be profiled and staged as a blessing event through which the young people can experience themselves as individually endowed by God with inalienable and inviolable dignity and be able to express this in their own feelings and words.

In this respect, if the concept of religious maturity is to be used constructively here, practical-theological reflection is needed on what life development means in the horizon of Protestant faith and what it does not mean. In any case, it would be theologically and developmentally problematic to assume a teleological understanding of this concept of maturity, according to which a new qualitatively higher state of aggregation would be established through confirmation.

Rather, such a concept only makes sense if it is understood as processual. In this respect, the development of religious maturity is not to be seen as a specific, possibly already clearly established goal. Maturity is to be understood here as an expression of the experiences with religion and faith that are to be made anew in each case, which can and should lead to ever new processes – not stages! – of interpretation on the basis of the respective individual and common experiences. However, this can and must neither undermine nor homogenise the factual plurality of different interpretations and, for example, the different patterns of staging mentioned above.

From there, it can be demanded from a practical-theological point of view that such a ritual practice is not only to be limited to the Sunday service, but can also be experienced in completely different places, right into the everyday life of the young people. Here, for example, the experience of praying together as a specific rite is such an element of experience that can remain significant far beyond the time of confirmation.

In the best case it must be reflected – e.g., in confirmation group processes – that despite all the heterogeneities and possible conflicts within the confirmation group, something like the ideal form of solidary congregation can be symbolised in the rite during the confirmation period. Of course, it should be borne in mind – and the empirical results point to this – that it is often only half of the young people who can really gain positive experiences from the confirmation period. What this means for the question of exclusion of a certain majority requires further thorough consideration and creative design, especially for those young people, who do not have positive previous experiences. In concrete cases, this has eminent pastoral implications. On the other hand, such a justice-sensitive ritual confirmation practice also has a highly relevant signal function from a social and political perspective.

In this respect, continuous reflection on the conditions and forms of convincing and life-relevant confirmation work and its liturgical-ritual practice is a challenge not only for Practical Theology, but also for the church in its self-understanding as a biographically, religiously, and publicly significant manifestation of Protestant faith and life.

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