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Preparation of Young People for Confirmation: A Pauline Perspective

Abstract: Many modern programmes of preparation of young people for confirmation are based on theological models which are correct in theory but ineffective in practice. They often assume that young people come to know the Holy Spirit through catechesis based on Scripture. This article demonstrates that a much better way of preparing young people for confirmation can be found in the genuine letters of Paul the Apostle. He showed that the presence of the Holy Spirit in a human person is not merely a matter of belief, but it can also be experienced in a reliable way, which is not limited to charismatic phenomena. This way is based on the discovery of a number of virtues in young people's hearts, which are quite unexpected in the context of their human egoism, laziness, etc. For this reason, they must be regarded as the fruit of the Spirit, who broadens human hearts to love and to serve the poor. In this way, young people may also discover Christ – as the one who humbled himself to serve not his social status but people in need.

Keywords: youth pastoral, sacrament of confirmation, Paul the Apostle, Holy Spirit, *Christus vivit*, Christocentrism

One of the greatest challenges that the Catholic Church nowadays faces is, without a doubt, the transmission of faith to the young generation. The young generation, at least in the Western world, is largely disinterested in the matters of faith.¹ Moreover, the models and ways of the transmission of faith to the young generation which were elaborated in the Church in the past no longer function today. This is particularly visible in the preparation of young people for

¹ Cf. Jarzembowski, “Mobilizing,” 3; Maier, “Discovering,” 114; Razum, “Crisis,” 171.

confirmation, which in many cases does not effectively lead to real growth in faith.

Arthur D. Canales in his article “Models and Methods for Confirmation Catechesis in Catholic Youth Ministry” thus summarizes the effectiveness of the programmes of preparation for confirmation in the United States: “From my experience of being involved in Catholic youth ministry for over 30 years and a result of the informal data collected, the two-year approach does not achieve any more success than the one-year method. The parishes that pride themselves on a two-year model, usually ‘force’ teenagers to be part of the high school youth ministry for their second year, which typically does not keep teenagers in the church. Thus, the same old problem exists: the mentality and misperception that parents and teenagers have regarding confirmation being graduation from the workings of the church instead of another initiation rite into the ministries and life of the church. The one-year method for confirmation does not seem to be working either, despite the widespread use of this method across the United States for the past sixty-plus years. The problem still exists of spiritually, non-engaged teenagers getting confirmed and still viewing confirmation as a rite of passage out of the church.”² Jakub Akonom similarly summarizes the situation in Poland: “Research shows that a significant part of the confirmands regards the sacrament as a formality, and the preparation for it does not show a satisfactory level of Christian consciousness.”³ Therefore, the Church needs a serious discussion concerning the validity of the past models of transmitting the faith to the young generation and a creative discussion of other possible ways of leading them to faith.

1. Current Pillars of Youth Pastoral

Youth pastoral nowadays seems to be based on three main pillars: Christocentrism, community, and testimony. This is visible, for example, in the Polish basic Catholic programme of preparation

² Canales, “Models and Methods,” 7.

³ Akonom, “Przygotowanie,” 169.

for confirmation, which begins from Christocentrism (“Christian kerygma,” “I believe in Jesus Christ”), then leads to community (meetings in small groups, “Introduction into the community of the Church,” “I believe in the Church,” “My place in the community of the Church”), and finally to testimony (“I am ready,” “The sacrament of confirmation obliges me to testimony”).⁴

In theory, all these pillars should lead young people to a deep relationship with Christ and with the Church communities of young Christians. In practice, however, these pillars do not function as an effective basis for growth in faith. Let us first see why this is the case.

Christian faith should be Christocentric. This is obvious to every theologian and pastor. Pope Francis entitled his post-synodal apostolic exhortation addressed to young people “Christus vivit,” already in the opening words pointing to Christ as the centre of young people’s faith. After the scriptural introduction (*CV* 5–21), the Pope devotes a whole chapter of the exhortation to a beautiful description of Jesus, the Church, Mary, and saints as being young and as serving as models for young people to imitate (*CV* 22–63). Later on, he states that “any educational project or path of growth for young people” must have as its first goal “the development of the *kerygma*, the foundational experience of encounter with God through Christ’s death and resurrection” (*CV* 213).⁵ Consequently, as he emphasizes, “youth ministry should always include occasions for renewing and deepening our personal experience of the love of God and the living Christ” (*CV* 214).⁶

Pope Francis, following the whole tradition of the Church, is certainly right in placing Christ at the centre of young people’s faith. We must never forget this Christocentric dimension of Christian faith. However, in practice, despite long years of catechesis at school and outside school, young people’s knowledge of Christ, the Gospel,

⁴ Konferencja Episkopatu Polski, “Wskazania Konferencji Episkopatu Polski,” nos. 12, 21–23, and part VI.

⁵ Cf. Danroc, “Le Christ est vivant,” 20.

⁶ Cf. Šimunović, “Kirchliche Praxis,” 1152–1153. Cf. also Konferencja Episkopatu Polski, “Wskazania Konferencji Episkopatu Polski,” no. 22.

Scripture in general, etc. is often minimal. These topics simply do not square with the world of their smartphones. Hence, they know more about Ronaldo, Messi, or Olivia Rodrigo than about Jesus. Therefore, although in theory correct, placing too much weight on Christocentrism in the preparation of young people for confirmation may prove ineffective and disappointing.

The second pillar of modern youth pastoral is community life. Pope Francis states that the second goal of “any educational project or path of growth for young people” is “growth in fraternal love, community life and service” (*CV* 213). Accordingly, “any programme of youth ministry should clearly incorporate various means and resources that can help young people grow in fraternity, to live as brothers and sisters, to help one another, to build community, to be of service to others, to be close to the poor” (*CV* 215).⁷ Therefore, the Pope highlights the importance of “oratories and other youth centres, which in many cases offer a friendly and relaxed setting where friendships can grow, where young men and women can meet one another, where they can share music, games, sports, but also reflection and prayer” (*CV* 218).⁸

The establishment of youth centres and peer groups was for decades a vital part of youth pastoral.⁹ In such milieus and groups, young people could break their isolation, make friendships, fall in love, seek a good partner for life, etc. However, in the age of the Internet, these social goals of young people are most often achieved through social media and dating apps. One can often observe groups of young people on a bus, tram, or metro not talking to each other but following their social apps. Therefore, young people nowadays, at least from their own points of view, do not need Church milieus to break their isolation. Physical contact with another person is much less important to them than social media contact. Therefore, youth pastoral which is mainly focused on creating youth groups and milieus is often also ineffective and disappointing.

⁷ Cf. García Mourelo, “Itinerario pastoral,” 104, 108.

⁸ Cf. Canales, “Pope Francis’ Theology,” 98.

⁹ Cf. Akonom, “Przygotowanie,” 176–178.

The third pillar of modern youth pastoral is testimony. The terms “testimony” and “being a witness” are nowadays considered key terms for formulating the process of transmission of faith to the young generation. Pope Francis states, “Filled with the love of Christ, young people are called to be witnesses of the Gospel wherever they find themselves, by the way they live” (*CV* 175).

In theory, everything is simple. The one who has known Christ becomes a witness to him and to his Gospel in the world. However, it should be noted that the theological category of “witness” and “testimony” is rather superficial. In Paul’s genuine letters, this category, as referring to bearing witness to the power of the risen Christ and his presence in the Church, is almost absent (an exception could be 1 Cor 15:15).¹⁰ It was Luke, a good catechist (cf. Luke 1:4), who widely used this secular, mainly legal, easily understandable category of seeing something and bearing witness to it (Acts 1:21–22; 13:31; 22:15; 26:16; etc.).¹¹ He did it to reformulate the advanced but

¹⁰ Cf. Coenen, “μαρτυρία,” 1765–1767. In Paul’s authentic letters, the root *μαρτ* is applied to God (1 Thess 2:5, 10; 2 Cor 1:23; Rom 1:9; Phil 1:8), to the recipients (1 Thess 2:10), to Paul’s imploring (1 Thess 2:12), to Paul’s testifying God’s will (1 Thess 4:6; Gal 5:3) or the eagerness of others (2 Cor 8:3; Rom 10:2; Gal 4:15), to the testimony of Christ (1 Cor 1:6), to the testimony of conscience (2 Cor 1:12; Rom 2:15; 9:1), to testifying legal issues (2 Cor 13:1), to the testimony of Scripture (Rom 3:21), and to the testimony of the Spirit (Rom 8:16). The Deutero-Paulines add the sense of testifying to Paul’s apostolic activity (2 Tim 1:8; 2:2). Mark used the root *μαρτ* to describe testifying which revealed the opponents’ narrow-mindedness (Mark 1:44; 6:11; 13:9; 14:55–57, 59–60, 63). Therefore, it was Luke who first widely used the root *μαρτ* in the sense seeing an object of faith and bearing witness to it, which is discussed here. It was later adopted in the Gospel of John, the Book of Revelation, etc.

¹¹ In Luke’s theology, the root *μαρτ* is usually applied to external features of spiritual realities. It mainly refers to being witnesses of Jesus’ earthly activity (Acts 10:39), to having seen the risen Jesus with one’s bodily eyes (Acts 13:31; 22:15; 26:16, 22–23), to being witnesses of the bodily resurrection of Jesus (Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 10:41), and to being generally witnesses of Christ (Acts 1:8; 22:18, 20; 23:11; 28:23). As concerns more spiritual experiences, it also refers to being witnesses of general forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47–48; Acts 2:38–40; 5:31–32; 8:22–25; 10:42–43) thanks to God’s grace (Acts 20:24). It should be noted that according to Luke paradoxically even the Spirit himself (by definition spiritual) could be seen in a bodily form (Luke 3:21–22; cf. Acts 2:2–4). This fact is underplayed by

difficult to understand Pauline categories, in which the Apostle described Christian mysticism of participating in Christ's cross and resurrection, into the easily understandable category of bearing witness to the risen Christ. It is no wonder, therefore, that the secular in itself category of "witness" or "testimony" cannot bear the weight of the complex, spiritual process of transmission of faith to the young generation.

2. What Is the Gospel?

In order to address adequately the problem of the transmission of faith to the young generation, let us first consider the question what exactly we want to transmit to young people. What is the good news, the gospel, which should be transmitted to them as the heart of the Christian message?

If we try to answer this question from the perspective of the Apostle to the Nations, we can find the first, most natural (not influenced by later polemics and explanations, mainly referring to Paul's attitudes to the heritage of Judaism and the claims of Jewish Christianity) definition of the gospel in his earliest letter, the First Letter to the Thessalonians.¹² The fragment 1 Thess 1:5–8 presents the transmission of the gospel to recent pagans (cf. 1 Thess 1:9), so it aptly suits the situation of the candidates for confirmation, who are often on the verge of being pagans. Although 1 Thess 1:5–8 mainly refers to the transmission of the gospel, and not so much

Menzies, *Empowered for Witness*, 133, who interprets it in the category of mere objectivity of the presence of the Spirit, and does not refer to bodily perception as a basis for bearing witness (Acts 13:31; 22:15; 26:16; etc.: see Menzies, *Empowered for Witness*, 212–214).

¹² More fully developed presentations of Paul's gospel, which include explanatory and polemical aspects (divine origin, accordance with the scriptural prophets, reference to Christ's resurrection, universal scope, etc.), are presented in later texts, like Rom 1:1–4; 1:16; Gal 1:6–7, 11–12; 2:7; etc. For descriptions of various aspects of the Pauline gospel in general, not only in 1 Thess 1:5–8, see, e.g., Dunn, *Theology*, 163–181; Wolter, *Paul*, 51–69; Lindemann, "Evangelium," 322–344; Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Inspiration and Truth*, nos. 40 [I.3.5.2/b], 92 [II.3.4.1/a].

to its contents,¹³ these two aspects, as will be seen below, cannot be separated from each other because the ways in which the gospel is transmitted and received also reveal important aspects of its contents. What is then the gospel, according to this earliest Pauline text?

The first aspect of the gospel, which the Apostle mentions, is a *communicative* one.¹⁴ Paul writes that the gospel (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον) did not become known to the addressees “in word (ἐν λόγῳ) only” (1 Thess 1:5a). Therefore, to formulate this idea in positive terms, the gospel is a kind of message, which is conveyed to the addressees. This is the most obvious meaning of the gospel. Honestly saying, many gospel preachers and pastors limit their understanding of the gospel to this basic meaning. What is important to Paul, however, is that the gospel is not only a message. It is something much greater than a message communicated to people, in his case, young people. Therefore, we should not limit the preparation for confirmation to imparting some knowledge, even most important knowledge, concerning Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Church, the sacraments, the Decalogue, etc. We need to convey much more.

The second aspect of the gospel, mentioned by Paul, is a *dynamic* one. The Apostle states that the gospel came to the addressees “in power” (ἐν δυνάμει: 1 Thess 1:5b). In Paul’s letters, “power” refers, among others, to the message of the cross (1 Cor 1:18), Jesus as Christ (1 Cor 1:24), the kingdom of God (1 Cor 4:20), resurrection (1 Cor 6:14; 15:43; 2 Cor 13:4; Phil 3:10), miracles (1 Cor 12:10, 28–29; 2 Cor 12:12; Rom 15:19; Gal 3:5), Jesus as God’s Son (Rom 1:4), the dynamism of the gospel (Rom 1:16), creation (Rom 1:20), and the Spirit (Rom 15:13, 19).¹⁵ However, an intuitive, modern understanding of this aspect as related to dynamite can here suffice. We need to give to young people some kind of “dynamite” of the gospel: not only message, but also dynamite. What this could mean in practice is another question, which will not be dealt with here. But

¹³ By referring to “our gospel” (1 Thess 1:5a), Paul assumes that the addressees already know its main content, namely, the crucified and now risen Lord; cf. Fee, *Thessalonians*, 33.

¹⁴ Cf. Fee, *Thessalonians*, 32.

¹⁵ Cf. Richard, *Thessalonians*, 65.

all persons preparing young people for confirmation should keep in mind that the second most important aspect of the gospel is a dynamic one.

The third aspect of the gospel, as viewed by Paul, is a *pneumatological* one. The gospel became known to the addressees “in the Holy Spirit” (ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ: 1 Thess 1:5b).¹⁶ This aspect will be dealt with in detail later in the article, as it is particularly relevant to the issue of the preparation of young people for confirmation. At this point, it should only be noted that according to Paul the reception of the Holy Spirit is something that can be experienced,¹⁷ and that it happens right with the reception of the gospel, and not after some process of further preparation.

The fourth aspect of the gospel, which is mentioned by Paul, is a *persuasive* one. Paul states that the gospel became known to the addressees “in much assurance” (ἐν πληροφορίᾳ πολλῇ: 1 Thess 1:5b). The Greek word πληροφορία means “full conviction,” “full assurance,” or “certainty,” conveying the idea of the state of complete certainty.¹⁸ Moreover, in 1 Thess 1:5b it is accompanied by the adjective πολλή (“much, many”), which together with the noun forms the almost pleonastic phrase “much of full assurance.” This means that the gospel is not just a kind of message, news, or information. It should strongly persuade the addressees. It should have such an impact on them that they might live in full conviction concerning its truth and reliability.¹⁹ Accordingly, we should apply all our skills and techniques, both spiritual and rhetorical ones, to persuade young people that the gospel is relevant for them and reliable as an appealing way of life.

¹⁶ Even without the definite article, the reference here is to the Holy Spirit; cf. Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 79.

¹⁷ Cf. Fee, *Thessalonians*, 32–33.

¹⁸ Cf. BDAG, “πληροφορία,” s.v.

¹⁹ Cf. Wiarda, *Spirit and Word*, 19–20. Therefore, this aspect is not limited to a rhetorical one, but it also includes spiritual reality; cf. Fee, *Thessalonians*, 34–35. On the other hand, it cannot be limited to a pneumatological one since Paul links these two aspects with the coordinating conjunction καί: “in the Holy Spirit and [in] much assurance.”

The fifth aspect of the gospel is a *personal* one. While describing the gospel, Paul adds an apparent digression: “as you know what kind of persons we became (οἰοὶ ἐγενήθημεν) among you for your sake” (1 Thess 1:5cd). This is, however, not a digression.²⁰ It is an important aspect of the gospel itself.²¹ According to Paul, the gospel is a message which needs someone to stand behind it and to show what it means in practice. In the Catholic Church, this aspect is easily understandable. In contrast to the Protestant principle *sola Scriptura*, which highlights the importance of the written Word, the Catholic Church maintains that the transmission of divine revelation occurs in Scripture and in apostolic Tradition. This Tradition is understood not only as a message, a kind of supplement to Scripture, but also as the example the apostles gave and the institutions they established.²² Consequently, it is not enough to print the Gospels or catechisms and hand them over to young people. The gospel needs living persons who, following the apostles, in this case Paul the Apostle, show how to live the gospel in various contexts and situations of life.

The sixth aspect of the gospel, related to the preceding one,²³ is a *mimetic* one. Paul states that the addressees became “imitators” (μιμηταί) of him and of the Lord (1 Thess 1:6a). He presented himself not as a “witness” to the gospel (to use the later Lukan terminology) but as someone whom the addressees should imitate, just as he imitated Christ (cf. later 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Phil 3:17).²⁴ He was bold enough to show Christ to the addressees not somewhere in Palestine, some years ago, but in his own living person.²⁵ Therefore, it is not enough to tell young people stories, distribute books, or show films about Jesus who lived in Israel 2000 years ago. We should live in such a way to show Christ in our persons, in our lives, so that young people might imitate us, just as we imitate Paul and Christ. We are the living “film” showing Jesus.

²⁰ Cf. Richard, *Thessalonians*, 48; Malherbe, *Thessalonians*, 113; Fee, *Thessalonians*, 36.

²¹ Cf. Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 80.

²² Cf. CCC, nos. 76, 78.

²³ Cf. Fee, *Thessalonians*, 37.

²⁴ Cf. Richard, *Thessalonians*, 49, 67; Fee, *Thessalonians*, 38.

²⁵ Cf. Malherbe, *Thessalonians*, 125–126; Giesen, “Eschatology,” 258.

The seventh aspect of the Pauline gospel is a *mystical* one.²⁶ Paul writes that the addressees received the word “in much affliction (θλίψις), with joy (χαρά) of the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess 1:6b). These two elements in Paul’s theology are strongly correlated with each other (cf. 2 Cor 7:4; 8:2; etc.).²⁷ They show the addressees’ participation in Christ’s cross and resurrection.²⁸ The addressees received the gospel in much affliction, but despite this affliction, or precisely in this affliction, they experienced joy of the Holy Spirit. This mystical aspect of participating in Christ’s cross and resurrection can often be found in Paul’s letters (cf. 1 Cor 4:8–13; 2 Cor 1:5; etc.). This aspect of the gospel shows that the preparation of young people for confirmation should also include a mystical aspect. It may seem strange to us, since, as was noted at the beginning of the article, young people in the Western world, at least in their own opinions, are often much distanced from faith and from the Church. Nevertheless, as the Apostle shows, the transmission of faith to pagans already at the beginning includes an important component of mysticism. Without some kind of Christian mysticism, the gospel will be a message that young people hear, but it will not be rooted in their own hearts.

The eighth aspect of the gospel, as it is presented by Paul, is an *exemplary* one.²⁹ Paul states that the addressees themselves became an “example” (τύπος) to other people (1 Thess 1:7–8). The word τύπος means here a model to be imitated.³⁰ Again, Paul does not

²⁶ We may adopt here St. Thomas Aquinas’ definition of mystical knowledge: *cognitio divinae bonitatis seu voluntatis affectiva seu experimentalis* (STh II-II, q. 97, art. 2, ad 2).

²⁷ Cf. Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 80; Malherbe, *Thessalonians*, 115; Fee, *Thessalonians*, 39.

²⁸ Cf. the classical study of Paul’s mysticism as participation in Jesus’ dying and resurrection: Schweitzer, *Mystik*, esp. 15–16, 142–143, 148–150, 157–158, 165–168, here also 320. Cf. also Stanley, “Elements,” 12–13; Dunn, *Theology*, 395, 401–404; Kourie, “Christ-mysticism,” 76–77; Wolter, *Paul*, 243–245; Marguerat, “Paul le mystique,” 490–492. Against understanding the participation in Jesus’ dying and resurrection as mysticism, see Vollenweider, “Mystik,” 206.

²⁹ Calling this aspect simply “missionary,” as some scholars suggest, would not do justice to the element of example and imitation, which is so important here.

³⁰ Cf. LSJ, “τύπος,” s.v., IX.1; Fee, *Thessalonians*, 40.

use the later Lukan category of “witness” but rather his preferred category of imitation. The addressees imitate Paul and Christ (cf. 1 Thess 1:6a), and then they become a model to be imitated by others. Who are these others? Firstly, the Thessalonians’ closest neighbours, the Macedonians (Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia). Then, the people in the neighbouring, southern province of Achaia (1 Thess 1:7). Finally, people “in every place,” so (hyperbolically) in the whole world (1 Thess 1:8).³¹ Paul depicts here growing circles of the propagation of the gospel: first to the people who surround us, then to our more distant neighbours, and finally to the whole world. What is important here is the fact that this propagation occurs not so much by way of transmitting a message as rather through imitation. Paul envisages here a long chain of progressing imitation: the Lord → Paul → the Thessalonians → people in Macedonia → people in Achaia → people in the whole world.³² Therefore, preparing young people for confirmation should include creating such a chain: as young people imitate Christ and us, they should also become models for imitation for others: first for their closest relatives and friends, then for their more distant neighbours, and finally for people in the whole world. This makes them not just passive recipients of the gospel message but important and responsible people whom the most important things have been entrusted.

3. Where Is the Holy Spirit?

When we devise a programme of preparation of young people for confirmation, the first question to be asked is, “Where in this programme is the Holy Spirit?” The prevalent image of the Holy Spirit, which can often be found in Church documents and practice, is the One who is invoked and who comes. For example, in the pneumatological section of his exhortation “Christus vivit,” Pope Francis writes, “Ask the Holy Spirit each day to help you experience anew the great message” (CV 131).

³¹ Cf. Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 83; Malherbe, *Thessalonians*, 117–118.

³² Cf. Fee, *Thessalonians*, 41.

In fact, this is a Lukan image of the Holy Spirit, which is largely based on Old Testament pneumatology (Ezek 37:9–10 etc.). In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke often described the Holy Spirit as the One who is invoked (Acts 8:15 etc.) and coming (Acts 1:8; 2:2–4; 8:17; 10:44; 19:6; etc.).³³ In Paul's genuine letters, such an image of the Holy Spirit is completely absent. It is rather the Spirit who cries, "Abba," which means, "the Father" (Gal 4:6).³⁴ Where is then, according to Paul the Apostle, the Holy Spirit?

The short presentation of the earliest definition of the gospel, namely that from the beginning of Paul's earliest letter, the First Letter to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 1:5–8), has shown that that gospel is not just a message. It has many important aspects. One of them is the pneumatological one. As was noted, according to this text the Holy Spirit is given and comes to the addressees right at the beginning, with the initial transmission of the gospel to pagans.³⁵ Therefore, for Paul the presence of the Holy Spirit functions not as a conclusion of theological reasoning but rather as its premise. Consequently, also nowadays the presence of the Holy Spirit should not be presented as a conclusion of theological discourses concerning scriptural images of the Spirit, descriptions of the Holy Spirit in the catechism, theological discourses concerning the Holy Trinity, etc. Various aspects of the presence of the Holy Spirit should not be taught as an abstract idea (the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit etc.), which young people should learn before their confirmation. It is rather something that young people should be certain of.

In his descriptions of Christian spiritual life, the Apostle describes the presence of the Spirit as a "first instalment" or "down payment" (ὑπάρβών), given by God in our hearts (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5).³⁶ The full payment will be given to us in the afterlife, in heaven (2 Cor 5:1–4).³⁷ Now, we have received the Spirit, whose presence functions as the assuring "first instalment." This Pauline image shows

³³ Cf. Keener, "The Spirit and the Mission," 37–38.

³⁴ Cf. Barr, "Abba Isn't 'Daddy'."

³⁵ Cf. Dunn, *Theology*, 419, 425.

³⁶ Cf. Fee, *God's Empowering*, 293.

³⁷ Cf. Dunn, *Theology*, 421.

that the presence of the Spirit in us, depicted metaphorically as the “first instalment” or “down payment,” is not a matter of abstract theological reasonings and deductions. It is something that we can be certain of.

This idea of the presence of the Spirit regarded not as a conclusion but as a premise for further theological argumentation can be seen in other Pauline letters as well. For example, in his argumentation concerning the salvific invalidity of the works of the Law, Paul repeatedly asks the addressees, “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law or by the hearing of faith?” (Gal 3:2); “Having begun in the Spirit, are you now ending in the flesh?” (Gal 3:3); “Does therefore the one who supplies the Spirit to you and works deeds of power among you do it by the works of the Law or by the hearing of faith?” (Gal 3:5).³⁸ It is evident that Paul understands the presence of the Holy Spirit as something that the addressees can be certain of, that they may somehow experience.³⁹ Otherwise, building other arguments on something that the addressees regard as uncertain or abstract would be futile.⁴⁰

4. Experiencing the Holy Spirit in the Love of God?

From the preceding considerations, the question immediately arises, “How to experience the Holy Spirit?” If young people should be certain of the presence of the Holy Spirit in them, not as an abstract theological statement but as something experiential, then how can they experience this presence?

In the Pentecostal movement, the answer to this question is quite simple. If someone experiences the charisms of the Holy Spirit, then he or she experiences the presence of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostal pneumatology is in this respect mainly based on the Pauline catalogues of charisms, for example, 1 Cor 12:8–10.⁴¹ In this text, Paul refers to the word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, charisms

³⁸ Cf. Dunn, *Theology*, 420.

³⁹ Cf. Dunn, *Theology*, 430; Wolter, *Paul*, 151–152; Keener, *Galatians*, 216.

⁴⁰ Cf. Fee, *God’s Empowering*, 393.

⁴¹ Cf. Fee, *God’s Empowering*, 10.

of healings, working of miracles, prophecy, discernments of spirits, various kinds of tongues, and interpretation of tongues.⁴² In Pentecostal theology, such charisms are a reliable token of the presence of the Holy Spirit. If someone displays the presence of them, then he or she is filled with the Holy Spirit.

Is this Pentecostal answer to the question of human experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit the only possible one? Classical Catholic theology seems to be reluctant to address this issue.⁴³ Since the presence of the Holy Spirit is by definition considered supernatural and spiritual, then it cannot be directly experienced by a human person. It should rather be regarded as a matter of belief, based on Scripture, the sacraments, etc.

However, Paul insists on the presence of the Holy Spirit as something that can be experienced, and according to him this experience is not limited to extraordinary charisms.⁴⁴ In Paul's letters, the most important realm in which the presence of the Holy Spirit can be experienced is the love of God. At the end of a list of six spiritual gifts (peace, grace, afflictions, endurance, character, and hope: Rom 5:1–4), the Apostle formulates the seventh, climactic⁴⁵ statement, “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom 5:5). Since the Holy Spirit mediates the outpouring of God's love to humans, he thereby indirectly reveals his presence to us. Accordingly, the presence of the Holy Spirit can be experienced in the love of God which has been poured out in our hearts.⁴⁶

Pope Francis argues that we can know this love of God because it is described in various passages of Scripture, and in fact he quotes seven such passages from the Old Testament (*CV* 114). However, as stated at the beginning of the article, young people nowadays, at least in the Western world, often have minimal knowledge

⁴² Cf. Ferguson, *The Spirit*, 229–242.

⁴³ See Congar, *Credo*, I, 180 (“Oblivion of the Holy Spirit”).

⁴⁴ Cf. Fee, *God's Empowering*, 10; Kamlah – Kleiber, “πνεῦμα,” 710–711.

⁴⁵ Cf. Cranfield, *Romans*, I, 261.

⁴⁶ Cf. Fee, *God's Empowering*, 497; Rabens, *The Holy Spirit*, 231, 251–252.

of God and of the Bible, and consequently, of God's love, which is described in Scripture. Therefore, the argument that we experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in God's love to us may seem abstract to them, even if a pastor, following Pope Francis, states, "The very first truth I would tell each of you is this: 'God loves you'" (*CV* 112). Although in theory the love of God is a foundation of all Christian life, in practice referring to this love in the preparation of young people for confirmation may prove inefficient.

Therefore, although Paul argues that the presence of the Spirit can also be experienced in the believers' comporting themselves according to the Spirit (Rom 8:4), setting their minds on the things of the Spirit (Rom 8:5–6),⁴⁷ having the Spirit within them (Rom 8:9–11),⁴⁸ by the Spirit putting to death the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13),⁴⁹ being led by the Spirit (Rom 8:14),⁵⁰ receiving divine adoption and crying "Abba, the Father" (Rom 8:15),⁵¹ being spiritually strengthened by the Spirit (Rom 8:16),⁵² and groaning in the Spirit (Rom 8:23, 26), all these aspects of the presence of the Spirit can be traced in the believers, and not in those who are on the verge of being pagans, a state which nowadays often characterizes young candidates for confirmation. Although the theological ideas concerning the presence of the Spirit in the believers (Rom 8:4–26) are beautiful, their application to real attitudes of modern candidates for confirmation is often problematic. Catechesis cannot replace evangelization. Young candidates for confirmation need evangelization to have motifs for believing.

5. Experiencing the Holy Spirit in Unexpected Virtues

In Paul's letters, there are passages which show yet another way of experiencing the presence of the Holy Spirit. In one of his lists of afflictions and ways of prevailing over them, presumably

⁴⁷ Cf. Kowalski, "Cognitive Spirit," 50–56; Ferguson, *The Spirit*, 178.

⁴⁸ Cf. Kowalski, "Individual," 390–402; Ferguson, *The Spirit*, 177, 180–186.

⁴⁹ Cf. Rabens, *The Holy Spirit*, 210–214.

⁵⁰ Cf. Rabens, *The Holy Spirit*, 214–215.

⁵¹ Cf. Rabens, *The Holy Spirit*, 216–219, 224–227; Ferguson, *The Spirit*, 187–196.

⁵² Cf. Rabens, *The Holy Spirit*, 227–228.

in the suffering and risen Christ, Paul mentions the presence of the Holy Spirit among other spiritual virtues: “in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love” (2 Cor 6:6). This fact implies that the presence of the Holy Spirit may be compared to the presence of spiritual virtues, such as purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, and genuine love. The presence of such virtues can quite easily be experienced by the person in whom they are present (or not). All young people can answer the question whether they are really pure, patient, kind, and loving in a genuine way. A sincere answer to this question, even given to themselves, and not to a pastor, will indirectly lead them to the answer to the question whether the Holy Spirit is active in them or not.

The same idea was elaborated by Paul in more detail in his description of the fruit of the Spirit: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal 5:22–23). Three of the spiritual virtues mentioned in this catalogue are borrowed from the earlier list 2 Cor 6:6, namely, love (*ἀγάπη*), patience (*μακροθυμία*), and kindness (*χρηστότης*), the latter two being mentioned together in Gal 5:22 in the same order as in 2 Cor 6:6. However, if in 2 Cor 6:6 the presence of the Holy Spirit was simply mentioned among other virtues, in Gal 5:22–23 it governs the whole list. Accordingly, in Gal 5:22–23 Paul argues that the presence of the Holy Spirit in a human person can be experienced in the presence at of least nine spiritual virtues, which can be perceived in a more experiential way.⁵³ All young people can answer the question whether in them there is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, and other similar virtues. This indirectly leads them to the answer to the question whether the Holy Spirit is active in them or not.

There is yet another important element which distinguishes the catalogue in Gal 5:22–23 from the earlier list in 2 Cor 6:6. In Gal 5:22–23 Paul states that all the virtues he mentions are the “fruit” (*καρπός*) of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). This means that they do not merely function along with the presence of the Holy Spirit, as in 2 Cor 6:6, but their presence results from the presence of the Holy

⁵³ Cf., in more general terms, Congar, *Credo*, I, 13 (“Note on ‘experience’”).

Spirit in a human.⁵⁴ In other words, it is the Holy Spirit, and not merely human culture or moral training, who causes the presence of a number of such virtues in a given person.⁵⁵ Therefore, if young people experience the presence of much love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, and other similar virtues in themselves, despite their natural, fairly common at their age, laziness, self-indulgence, egoism, arrogance, etc.,⁵⁶ it must be the Holy Spirit who causes the unexpected presence of all these virtues in their hearts. The Holy Spirit can therefore be experienced as a mysterious supernatural factor which broadens and enlarges human hearts, so that they are capable of overcoming their human egoism etc. and of displaying the virtues of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc.

Pope Francis argues that such broadening of young human hearts occurs especially in their service for the poor. He exhorts young people, “Above all, in one way or another, fight for the common good, serve the poor, be protagonists of the revolution of charity and service, capable of resisting the pathologies of consumerism and superficial individualism” (*CV* 174). Somewhat later, he states, “Christian service represents a unique opportunity for growth and openness to God’s gifts of faith and charity. Many young people are attracted by the possibility of helping others, especially children and the poor. Often this service is the first step to a discovery or rediscovery of life in Christ and the Church. Many young people grow weary of our programmes of doctrinal and spiritual formation,

⁵⁴ Cf. Matera, *Galatians*, 210.

⁵⁵ Cf. Fee, *God’s Empowering*, 444.

⁵⁶ Viktor E. Frankl has diagnosed modern young people as generally feeling the meaninglessness of their lives, and consequently often indulging in conformism, depression, addiction, and aggression. See Frankl, *Man’s Search*, 94, 99–105, 140. Against this psychological background, the virtues given by the Holy Spirit can be regarded as unexpected. This unexpectedness could be seen, for example, in the surprisingly great engagement of many Polish young people in helping Ukrainian war refugees. This spontaneous but also well-organized (with the use of smartphone apps and social media) engagement often far surpassed that of local parishes, organized institutions like Caritas, etc. Did we manage to Christianize this engagement as pointing to the Holy Spirit?

and at times demand a chance to be active participants in activities that benefit others” (*CV* 225).⁵⁷ According to the Pope, Christian service of young people to the poor is not just a programme of social commitment. It is primarily a way to discover real faith and spiritual life.⁵⁸ “Social engagement and direct contact with the poor remain fundamental ways of finding or deepening one’s faith and the discernment of one’s vocation” (*CV* 170).

Therefore, the preparation of young people for confirmation should always include opportunities for broadening their hearts, not only through catechesis but also through their service to the poor and other people in need. Young people need important tasks to struggle and live for.⁵⁹ This may lead to an unexpected for them experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit and his gifts. As Pope Francis states, “Today, thank God, many young people in parishes, schools, movements and university groups often go out to spend time with the elderly and the infirm, or to visit poor neighbourhoods, or to meet people’s needs through ‘nights of charity’. Very often, they come to realize that there they receive much more than what they give. We grow in wisdom and maturity when we take the time to touch the suffering of others. The poor have a hidden wisdom and, with a few simple words, they can help us discover unexpected values” (*CV* 171). Precisely this aspect of discovering hitherto unexpected values may lead young people to the discovery of the Holy Spirit and his “broadening” activity in their hearts.

6. Finally, Christocentrism

Until now, we have discussed various ways of discovering the presence of the Holy Spirit in young people’s hearts without any direct reference to Christ. Does it mean that in the process of the preparation of young people for confirmation Christ is somehow forgotten?

⁵⁷ Cf. Chrupek, “Relacja osobowa,” 101.

⁵⁸ Cf. Sala, “Youth Ministry,” 6. Cf. also J. Akonom (“Przygotowanie,” 183) who, however, discusses the opportunity for growth in human altruism and fraternity rather than in faith.

⁵⁹ Cf. Frankl, *Man’s Search*, 88, 120–121.

Not at all. Pope Francis, following classical ways of formulating theological arguments, states that the knowledge of God's love and Christ's gift of salvation leads to the knowledge of the Holy Spirit: "In these three truths – God loves you; Christ is your Saviour; he is alive – we see God the Father and Jesus. Wherever the Father and the Son are, there too is the Holy Spirit" (*CV* 130).

However, the discovery of Christ and his love may come after and not before the discovery of the Holy Spirit in young people's hearts. In the service for the poor, young people may experience not only the presence of the Holy Spirit, who frees them from egoism and broadens their hearts to serve various people in need, but also the presence of Jesus, who humbled himself and laid aside his safe life status to serve the poor. Paul states, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake he became poor, although he was rich, so that through his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9). In his last, spiritually most mature, testamental letter, Paul developed this idea⁶⁰ and depicted the whole life of Christ precisely in this one aspect: "Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal to God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" (Phil 2:6–7).⁶¹

A natural reaction to Christ's self-denial for us consists in human self-denial for Christ: "But whatever was a profit to me, because of Christ I have considered it as a loss. [...] For whose sake I forfeited everything, and regard it as garbage, in order to gain Christ" (Phil 3:7–8).⁶² This image of self-denial in the service for others, especially combined with that of offering one's life for them, may be very persuasive for young people,⁶³ much more than other Christocentric images, like that of being similar in form to the image of God's Son

⁶⁰ Pace Gorman, "Paul's Corporate," 202, who, presumably on the basis of form-critical presuppositions concerning Phil 2:6–11 as a pre-Pauline hymn, opts for the reverse direction of development, surprisingly arguing for an abbreviation of the structure of Phil 2:6–8 in 2 Cor 8:9 ("Paul's Corporate," 202, n. 69).

⁶¹ Cf. Martin, *Carmen Christi*, 165–196; Eastman, "Philippians 2:6–11," 5–6; Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 131, 135.

⁶² Cf. Eastman, "Philippians 2:6–11," 20; Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 139.

⁶³ Kourie, "Christ-mysticism," 75, sees in Phil 2:7 such attraction, knowledge, and experience of God by humans, that it can lead to human mysticism.

(Rom 8:29), boasting in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Gal 6:14), or more generally living and dying for Christ (Phil 1:20–21).

In the Western culture of ruthless pursuit of economic and social career, the image of Christ as going contrary to *cursus honorum* may be particularly appealing to young people, who often look for important goals in their lives, so also to those preparing themselves for confirmation. Therefore, through unexpected broadening of their hearts by the Holy Spirit, young people may come to know Jesus Christ, who is the supreme example and model of such broadening. In other words, in the process of preparation of young people for confirmation, experienced pneumatology may lead to Christocentrism.

Conclusion

Many modern programmes of preparation of young people for confirmation are based on theological models which are correct in theory but ineffective in practice. They often assume that young people come to know the Holy Spirit through catechesis based on Scripture. This article has demonstrated that a much better way of preparing young people for confirmation can be found in the genuine letters of Paul the Apostle. He showed that the presence of the Holy Spirit in a human person is not merely a matter of belief, but it can also be experienced in a reliable way, which is not limited to charismatic phenomena. This way is based on the discovery of a number of virtues in young people's hearts, which are quite unexpected in the context of their human egoism, laziness, etc. For this reason, they must be regarded as the fruit of the Spirit, who broadens human hearts to love and to serve the poor. In this way, young people may also discover Christ – as the one who humbled himself to serve not his social status but people in need.

We should not assume that modern candidates for confirmation only need good catechesis about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Church. At their age of general contestation and distance to the values of former generations, they are often in need of basic evangelization. Therefore, the Pauline ways of showing the gospel, the fruit of the Spirit, and the attitudes of Christ which are appealing

not only to believers but also to humans on the verge of paganism should be implemented in modern programmes of preparation of young people for confirmation.

Przygotowanie młodych do bierzmowania: perspektywa Pawłowa

Abstrakt: Wiele współczesnych programów przygotowania młodych ludzi do bierzmowania jest opartych na modelach teologicznych, które są poprawne w teorii, ale nieefektywne w praktyce. Często zakładają one, że młodzi ludzie poznają Ducha Świętego poprzez katechezę opartą na Piśmie Świętym. Niniejszy artykuł wykazuje, że dużo lepszą drogę przygotowania młodych do bierzmowania można znaleźć w autentycznych listach Apostoła Pawła. Pokazał on, że obecność Ducha Świętego w ludzkiej osobie nie jest tylko przedmiotem wiary, ale można także doświadczyć jej w wiarygodny sposób, który nie jest ograniczony do fenomenów charyzmatycznych. Ta droga oparta jest na odkrywaniu w sercach młodych ludzi szeregu cnót, które są całkiem nieoczekiwane w kontekście ich ludzkiego egoizmu, lenistwa itp. Dlatego muszą one być uznane za owoc Ducha Świętego, który rozszerza ludzkie serca, aby kochać i służyć ubogim. W ten sposób młodzi ludzie mogą także odkryć Chrystusa – jako Tego, który uniżył samego siebie, by służyć nie swojemu społecznemu statusowi, ale ludziom w potrzebie.

Słowa kluczowe: duszpasterstwo młodzieży, sakrament bierzmowania, Paweł Apostoł, Duch Święty, *Christus vivit*, chrystocentryzm

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