

## CONFIRMATION

### Comments by Pope Benedict XVI

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) was interviewed by Peter Seewald over the course of 3 days. Excerpts from his responses to a number of questions on sacraments follow. (Taken from: Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. God and the World. Ignatius Press, 2002.)

**Confirmation, according to the belief of the Catholic Church, is the “sacrament of growing up in the supernatural life.” How are we supposed to imagine this—and how does confirmation work?**

Ratzinger: “The essential sign is, first, the anointing; another is the laying on of hands. The laying on of hands is the sign of being sheltered and protected by God and the sign of the presence of the Spirit. The anointing unites us with the Anointed One himself, who is Christ, and becomes a sign of the Holy Spirit, who inspired and lived in Christ.

Confirmation is the completion of baptism. If baptism primarily emphasizes our being united with Christ, in confirmation the emphasis is more on our fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

What is also expressed is that the confirmed Christian is now a fully active and responsible member of the Church. Thus for some time people have liked calling it the coming-of-age sacrament...and this had led to a desire to celebrate it later and later, at around the age of sixteen or eighteen. But there is quite a different way of looking at it. The Eastern Churches combine it with infant baptism. The reasoning underlying this is that one should really only be admitted to Communion after having received the two initiation sacraments of baptism and confirmation and having thus been fully received into the fellowship with Christ and the Holy Spirit.

One significant aspect of confirmation is that it means to turn us away from what is merely exterior, from preoccupation with success and achievement, and says to us, you have an inward aspect. Let the inner man, as St. Paul puts it, grow strong within you. The stifling of the inner life by practical cares has become one of our greatest problems.”

**Material success has become the value above all values in modern civilization. “Anyone can do it” is what a whole army of motivation gurus promise us.**

Ratzinger: “It’s catching. When I see someone else with it, then I want it too. When parents see how other people’s children are all dressed up and how paths are opened up for them, they quite justifiably want the same for their own. I think

when that happens we are only looking in one direction. People want to have as much as possible, want to be something in an exterior sense. But how necessary in our lives the cultivation of our inner selves is, is something we forget.

People are certainly now attempting, by methods of meditation, to build up some kind of inner life again. In fact we do need, and I would like to repeat this, to discover a new way of cultivating our inner life, to learn anew how the “inner man”, as St. Paul calls him, can grow along with the outer one and can acquire the strength for us to be sufficiently mature to confront the external events we encounter.”