

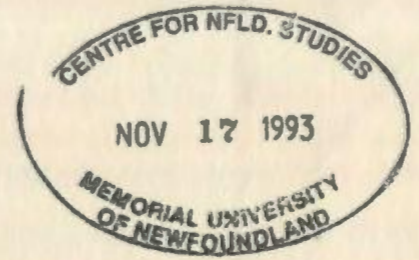
**CONFIRMATION: A FOLKLORE ETHNOGRAPHY OF
ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISH PRACTICE IN NEWFOUNDLAND**

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EILEEN M. CONDON



CONFIRMATION: A FOLKLORE ETHNOGRAPHY
OF ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISH PRACTICE IN NEWFOUNDLAND

BY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis describes and interprets the practice of the sacrament of confirmation in the context of one Roman Catholic parish in Newfoundland. This sacrament affords a researcher unique opportunities to explore folk-official dynamics in Catholicism. Confirmation often brings the highest official in a diocese, a bishop, into contact with adolescents. As a sacrament of initiation, confirmation draws together persons who are accustomed to "practicing" Catholicism in different ways.

Historically, Christian bishops in the Western Rite toured extensive areas to bless previously baptized candidates, anoint them with holy oil, and lay hands upon them. Through these actions, candidates were recognized to have received the Holy Spirit and its gifts, as fully initiated Christians. In 1991, 114 candidates were confirmed at St. Cecilia's, a Roman Catholic parish in the Archdiocese of St. John's.

Unlike theology or sacramental history, more common approaches to this topic, this study approaches the meaning of confirmation from the perspectives of adolescent candidates, their families, and parish leaders. Like recent studies of confirmation by

Scandinavian ethnologists, this investigation draws upon oral accounts of confirmations and other data collected through participant observation and interviewing.

References to written sources such as city newspaper accounts, local church histories, and archdiocesan reports help portray the significance of confirmation in the context of Newfoundland history. Local beliefs and practices are presented and analyzed to critique theological representations of this Roman Catholic sacrament. Special attention is paid to adolescents' conformativ and non-conformativ play at a preparatory retreat, and to the structure and function of confirmation costume.

Key words: Adolescent, Catholicism, confirmation,
 folklore, Newfoundland, play

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The Apostles' Creed is the Catholic prayer that finishes with an affirmation of belief in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. At the risk of co-opting yet another item of religious culture to express worldly convictions, I will allude to this creed to thank many people for helping me with this project, a folklore ethnography of Roman Catholic parish practice.

The Department of Folklore at Memorial University of Newfoundland, its Folklore Archive, the School of Graduate Studies, and Memorial's Institute for Social and Economic Research have supported my education, research, and accommodation over the past two years by providing me with archive and research assistantships, two Graduate Studies Fellowships, and an ISER Research Grant. For this support, and for the consideration and confidence with which it was administered to me by many single people, I am grateful. Without sufficient means, the daily "resurrections of the body" to conduct this research would have been difficult or impossible.

Theses attain everlasting shelf life by being bound and catalogued side by side with other academic efforts, but their adherence to scholarly and disciplinary standards may make them more truly useful to others over time. Guidance from senior scholars is essential. I thank my supervisor, Dr. Diane Goldstein, Dr. Martin Lovelace, and many other faculty members in this department for their creative teaching, generous discussion, and thesis counsel.

While studying here in Newfoundland, I have shared the majority of my time, space, fears, and hopes with friends, my fellow students. It is primarily with you that I have learned to be academic. In free and committed conversations with you I have integrated ideas advanced at the university with the idea of getting through life outside. We have often managed to mix this "life of the mind" with the collective minding of our lives, to the enrichment of both.

In many enlightening discussions, Anita Best lent me her unconditional support for continuing with this topic. Melissa Ladenheim and Jamie Moreira envisioned folklore so intensely as a unique, collegial, political discipline with local and international responsibilities that I am proud to have completed the thesis in their company.

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openly with me, trusted me, and joined with me in the hope of presenting a well-rounded picture of lives and beliefs connected with confirmation in their Newfoundland Catholic parish. Many shared enthusiasm and concerns which made me feel that such a study was worthwhile. Coordinators of the confirmation program and other parish leaders were especially patient and kind while I struggled awkwardly to ask what seemed to be the right questions in the right ways. I am sincerely grateful. I think of all these helpful people as a real "communion of saints." However, I take full responsibility for any inadequacies in the final presentation. I hope that readers find more in this project that is gracefully contradictory and informative than needs forgiving.

This project is dedicated to the small group
of parishioners who huddled outside parish church
doors in March to protest abuse of power
over young people, to those who prayed inside,
and to my brother

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Preface

This is a folklore field study of confirmation, one of the three rites of Christian initiation.¹ In official Roman Catholic tradition, confirmation is one of "the seven sacraments," distinct rites which are the central signs and means of communication between God and people.² Catholic theology teaches that there is visible and invisible communication at these rites.³ In each of the seven sacraments, people move, speak, or manipulate earthly materials in holy ways according to formulas preserved in official tradition.⁴ Contact is made between people and God, and the communities of participating souls are marked, changed, and given life

¹The others are baptism and eucharist.

²These are baptism, reconciliation (confession), eucharist, confirmation, ordination, marriage, and anointing of the sick. There have been seven since the middle ages.

³Page 380, Raphael Schulte, "Sacraments," Sacramentum Mundi, ed. Karl Rahner, vol. 5 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970) 378-84.

⁴Sacraments are said to be "instituted" by Christ, meaning generally that something Jesus did in his time on earth set a precedent for them. See the summary of the findings of the Council of Trent in Schulte 378-84.

after death. Sacraments like eucharist and reconciliation are enacted over and over again during the year in a Catholic parish, while sacraments such as baptism or confirmation are performed only once in a lifetime.

Third-century Christian writers provide the earliest descriptions of confirmation as a distinct initiation rite. In Western Rite Christianity, confirmation is ordinarily the duty of bishops. Bishops tour extensive areas to bless previously baptized candidates with a verbal formula, anoint them with holy oil, and lay hands upon them. This is the traditional visible essence of the sacrament. Through these actions, candidates are recognized to have received the Holy Spirit and its gifts as fully initiated Christians: the invisible grace.

Confirmation is administered today to adolescents, amid theological and popular controversy over when and how the sacrament can "confirm" their growth into mature Christians. The age of the candidates has been called the "most controversial pastoral question" regarding the sacrament, but the Vatican has never taken an official stance on the proper age.⁵ Not surprisingly, a variety

⁵See page 408, Piet Fransen, "Confirmation," Sacramentum Mundi, ed. Karl Rahner, vol. 1 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968) 405-10.

of folk, regional, and official rationales for appropriate confirmation ages have flourished in the room Rome leaves for speculation.

This investigation focuses upon a sacrament to examine Catholicism. As David Hufford suggests, there are other, less official categories of Catholic practice. In addition to sacraments there are sacramentals and "spontaneous and purely private devotions."⁶ Hufford explains that sacramentals are "actions or objects that in some way resemble the sacraments, but that have been instituted by the Church rather than by Christ himself."⁷ Using relics to promote healing and making the sign of the cross are two examples he provides. Sacramentals may be spread among Catholics through official and unofficial channels. Unlike purely private devotions, sacraments and sacramentals bring together "large numbers of others of the faithful, past and present," making Catholic culture accessible to study.⁸ As public forms of devotion, Hufford points out, sacraments and sacramentals invite field study.

⁶David Hufford, "Ste. Anne de Beaupré: Roman Catholic Pilgrimage and Healing," Western Folklore 44 (1985): 194-207. Quote from page 198.

⁷Hufford, "Ste. Anne" 198.

⁸Hufford, "Ste. Anne" 198.

This field study looks in depth at the practice of the sacrament of confirmation in one Newfoundland community. The official liturgy is enacted once a year at St. Cecilia's, a parish in the Archdiocese of St. John's, Newfoundland.⁹ In 1991, 114 adolescent candidates were confirmed here and drawn into a controversial and complex confrontation with religious maturity and commitment. At the 1991 liturgy candidates reprofessed their Catholic faith aloud and relit decorative candles used at their infant baptisms. Older relatives and friends were chosen to accompany the candidates to the altar, where the St. John's archbishop and other officials performed the laying-on-of-hands, the anointing, and the blessing.¹⁰

However, the liturgy is not the primary focus of this thesis. Confirmation is more than a liturgy. Coming chapters concentrate upon the people of St. Cecilia's parish, young and old, and their ways of remembering, celebrating, and preparing for confirmation. Families and adolescents participate in local and regional traditional activities that precede and follow

⁹Names of all informants and the name of the community have been changed throughout the thesis to provide some degree of anonymity.

¹⁰"Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit."

the rite itself. Their participation may be shaped by word of mouth at home, among peers, or at the parish church and school. Adolescents, parents, and teachers re-create these traditions in playful and creative ways.

Local confirmation beliefs and practices are presented and analyzed to contrast with the theological representations of this Roman Catholic sacrament. Special attention is paid in later chapters to adolescents' conformative and non-conformative play at a preparatory retreat, and to the structure and function of confirmation costumes. First, however, this introduction portrays life here and now in the parish and archdiocese, describes the 1991 confirmation night, and explains the folklore approach taken. The introduction concludes with an overview of the chapters ahead.

St. Cecilia's Parish

The weekend of the annual Garden Party is like no other at St. Cecilia's parish, but somehow it captures much of what is possible to capture about life in a Roman Catholic parish in St. John's. The weather for the party was fine this year. Breezes off the water, rarely very far from the parishes on the Avalon Peninsula, blow across the parking lot in front of the parochial school. The edge of a baby's bonnet lifts and falls. She sleeps

in the sun while her mother lolls behind the stroller catching the latest news.

The lot is filling with people of all ages who wave and talk to each other because they see and know each other within different space and time in the community. Some are neighbors in government-subsidized housing projects erected here and there around the parish church and school. Others emerge from homes they own or rent and walk slowly along the road toward the weekend masses. People may see each other inside the parish church every week, or once in a while, or not at all, or not any more.

On Sunday, cars are parked and unparked in the parish lot. Cars seep out onto the busy street that runs past the church. Somehow masses are always crowded. In a parish this size many parishioners do not, and may never, know each other. Some, however, remember their neighbors on the dusty roads here before urban development three decades ago. They remember where all the old houses stood, whether they met municipal building standards or not, and what dandelion greens used to taste like.

Like a choppy sea which draws all rivers, the parish Garden Party brings all the members of this community out at one time, into one space. The Garden Party draws the loosest and therefore most reliable boundaries of

belonging. Children rove in laughing packs across the lot or quietly hold the hand of an adult while they wait for their chance to cast the line from small fishing rods over the edges of tall plywood boxes called "the fishponds." Their parents probably supply the small change the fishpond lady takes before she returns to her place inside the box. It is she who hangs the prizes on the end of the line, not some force the littler children may hopefully imagine.

Older men and women wander slowly, sometimes alone, among the swelling crowd or rest for a moment at the wheels of fortune. People lean or push with interest against square betting bars. Bets are placed. The wheels spin and click, slow, and stop. The players lift their heads and look wonderingly around at their neighbors, in an odd, hopeful moment of comradeship before wins and losses at the wheel are at last determined.

In between the morning masses, "turkey tea" organizers have hurried from the church to the parish hall where they help arrange carefully cellophaned cold lunch plates in rows down long tables. Later in the afternoon an elderly man crouches suspiciously in a truck parked in the middle of the lot, rises with a menacing grin, and revs up what turns out to be a chainsaw. There

is the crack of a starting gun and four priests charge in a circle around the lot, holding motorless cardboard boxes with margarine-container headlights and wheels up around their waists. A young priest wins first place in "The Go-Cart Races." People smile or squint in the heat of the afternoon and applaud his efforts.

Members of parish youth groups run food concessions at the Garden Party long into the hot afternoon, and eventually give in to the heat by dousing each other with icy water that kept the drinks cold. A young parish organist and I jump away laughing from the splashing and resume our conversation about this parish, who makes it whatever we think it is, and what kind of Catholics we might call ourselves.

The Archdiocese Today

Crowded, complex social gatherings such as Garden Parties demonstrate that contemporary Catholic culture in Newfoundland cannot be equated simplistically with the troubling history of child sexual abuse by clergy recently uncovered within the Archdiocese of St. John's. However, these disturbing events have spurred Newfoundland Catholics to scrutinize their parish and archdiocesan leaders and consider their own beliefs and practices more critically than ever before. This sociocultural context cannot be ignored. The unfortunate

reality of abuse continues to unfold as offenders are brought to trial and survivors continue to seek counselling and compensation.

The Archdiocese of St. John's encompasses over forty Roman Catholic parishes scattered around Newfoundland's Avalon Peninsula. Following recent revelations of longstanding child sexual abuse by local clergy, the archdiocese was called to account for itself by local and national news media, a Royal Commission of Enquiry, and its own angry parishioners and leaders. Since the late 1980s over twenty local priests and brothers have been charged with sexual and physical abuse of children within the archdiocesan district. Many have now been convicted and sentenced. While some offenses are recent, others date back as far as the 1970s. Abuses occurred within archdiocesan parishes as well as at Mount Cashel Orphanage, an institution in St. John's run for nearly a century by Christian Brothers, now closed.

Revelation of widespread and long-term abuses provoked responses inside and outside the church. In June of 1989 a Royal Commission of Enquiry, headed by retired Justice Samuel Hughes, was appointed to investigate how police and government handled the incidents at Mount Cashel. While the work of the Hughes Commission goes on, the conclusions of a church-appointed

investigative effort, the Winter Commission, were released in July of 1990. The Winter Commission's highly critical review of archdiocesan management led to Archbishop Alphonsus Penney's resignation. Penney submitted his resignation a week after the release of the Winter Report, after delivering a long-overdue public apology to the survivors of abuse and their families. Although the Winter Commission recommended that victims and their families receive monetary compensation from the archdiocese, the directive has not yet been fulfilled.¹¹

A frequent speculation on the lips of local Catholics and other Newfoundlanders is whether or not people are "leaving the church" in significant numbers as a result of the sexual abuse crisis. Researchers interested in resolving this speculation might look not to this thesis but to the tremendous collection of angry, hopeful, and thoughtful briefs which local parishioners themselves submitted to the Winter Commission for

¹¹For a fuller treatment of this subject, see Chapter Three of this thesis and page vii, volume 1 of Gordon Winter, Frances O'Flaherty, Nuala Kenny, Everett MacNeil, and John Scott, The Report of the Archdiocesan Commission of Enquiry into the Sexual Abuse of Children by Members of the Clergy, 3 vols. (St. John's: Archdiocese of St. John's, 1990).

publication.¹² Their candid observations about themselves and their parishes throughout the crisis are essential to this line of investigation.

This work does not attempt to resolve such speculation but focuses instead upon understanding a small segment of Catholic culture, the sacrament of confirmation, in the context of the subtle and diverse meanings of religious "practice" in one parish in this archdiocese. Confirmation is a phenomenon that unites persons who "practice" Catholicism by different standards. Two assumptions operate throughout this study: (1) that the differences among St. Cecilia's parishioners over standards, definitions, and meanings of religious practice are not entirely new or dictated solely by recent events, and (2) that the impact of the current context upon belief and practice cannot be ignored.

Confirmation Night, 1991

Ten years from now there will be a new set of small children jumping and pointing around the fishponds in the heat of the summer Garden Party at St. Cecilia's and the

¹²The second volume of the Winter Commission Report contains 170 pages of these reprinted letters and reports. See also Michael Harris's Unholy Orders (Markham, ON: Viking, 1990) or Dereck O'Brien's own story, Suffer Little Children (St. John's: Breakwater, 1991) for information on specific cases of abuse.

small children of today will be between thirteen and fifteen. In the spring of their eighth grade year at the parish school, most will be confirmed, if they seem mature, and if they seem to choose.

In 1991, Confirmation Night fell on a Friday evening late in April, clear and mild, without a hint of spring fog. The parish church was decorated. There are always the same colors and shapes at confirmation, parishioners explain, white and red, the dove and the flame, reminders of the descent of the Holy Spirit in scripture, the idea of the holy in days of old. Enormous red and white vertical banners now line the beams that support the roof of the church, proclaiming in large letters the gifts the candidates are to receive through the work of the Holy Spirit, in confirmation. Knowledge. Wisdom. Right judgment. Reverence. Courage. Wonder and awe in God's presence. Understanding.

A dove is carved into the wooden lectern on the left of the altar. Over in the parish hall, paper doves and flames are taped to walls and tables for a reception after the ceremony. A dove is drawn in colored gel across a confirmation sheet cake waiting uncut upon a table. Back in the church a bright dove banner hangs above the altar, crafted in red, black, and gold felt by the parish banner maker. There are doves sewn carefully

in colored thread into the heavy white altarcloths. Candles are lit and there is a sense of purity, holiness, a scent of incense, and thoughts of the Holy Spirit. For parents and grandparents, there are memories of confirmations past, in other Newfoundland parishes.

Adolescent candidates sit with their families, filling the pews in a pre-rehearsed alphabetical order. Dressed more or less nervously in their Sunday best, if they have one, or better, they await the entrance of the Archbishop and the start of the hymn beginning the Confirmation Mass. Some family members mentally rehearse their cues to rise and deliver a scripture reading. Other families run their eyes around the inside of the church, not having paid this place in the neighborhood a visit in years. Most are waiting to get their first glimpse of Archbishop James MacDonald, in person, to get an impression. He is the man who has very recently succeeded an archbishop who had to resign, for reasons we all remember. The days have passed in Newfoundland, and elsewhere in North America, when Catholic bishops slapped young men and women on the cheek at confirmation to symbolize all they might suffer as soldiers of Christ in this world. They no longer choose a new name for themselves. Here, today, they receive the traditional blessings and they will shake the bishop's hand.

The organ intones the Irish melody of the entrance hymn and all rise as a procession enters from the rear of the church. The archbishop strides slowly by, surrounded by ministers and altar servers bearing holy objects. A cut conical hat dips with each turn of his head. His poppy-red robes swing along as he punctuates each step, like some royal shepherd, with the flash and tap of his long golden staff. For the candidates, the preparation period is finally over. Confirmation itself is now happening.

The candidates have worked their way through parish meetings, educational filmstrips, school confirmation projects, question-and-answer sessions on the Trinity, the Seven Sacraments, the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. They have signed worksheets saying they did ten hours of "community service" such as babysitting, housecleaning, or Red Cross volunteering, and they have sat through orations, long and short, by teachers, pastoral workers, priests, and relatives on "How to Be A Mature Catholic."

Parishioners say that confirmation has something to do with maturity. Maturity itself seems harder to define. It is everywhere and nowhere at confirmation. It is social, spiritual, and very physical. It belongs to everyone and to no one candidate in particular. The most adult confirmation outfits are somehow still

startling on thirteen-year-old boys and girls. Close, new haircuts, small suits, carefully swept-up plaits, and form-fitting gowns against childish faces and awkward, growing limbs suggest a game of dress-up. The candidates pass as a group through the confirmation preparatory program. Despite this passage no single candidate necessarily possesses real or complete maturity.

Perhaps it is the potential for maturity that is recognized so dramatically here. Candidates may find they have received a few, rather than all, the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Surely they will feel more ordinarily adolescent tomorrow, when they put away their confirmation clothes, slip into their regular weekend duds and recall that their confirmation has come and gone.

But before this rite is finished, the adults who have prepared them at school, at the parish, and at home will rise and testify that they are ready, that they are, somehow, mature. The adolescents themselves will rise and say so by professing, line by line, a full understanding of Catholic faith. The archbishop will threaten to ask these already nervous young candidates over one hundred religious questions. In the end he settles for kiddingly calling upon a few boys and girls to confirm that they do understand, among other things,

that the Holy Spirit, at that moment, is somehow really there. They say they believe.

A Folklore Approach to Confirmation

Unlike theology or sacramental history, more common approaches to this topic, this study approaches the meaning of confirmation in the context of its practice in a single parish, and from the perspectives of adolescent candidates, their families, and parish leaders. Like recent studies of confirmation by Scandinavian ethnologists,¹³ this investigation draws upon oral accounts of confirmations and other data collected through participant observation and interviewing in the field. Written sources such as city newspaper accounts, local church histories, and archdiocesan reports help to portray the regional significance of confirmation. Local beliefs and practices exist in tension with the theological representations of this Roman Catholic sacrament.

As an academic discipline, theology, like folklore, offers a variety of approaches to the study of religious experience and culture. Process theologies and

¹³Compare Birgit Hertzberg Johnsen, "Passage Rites --A Cultural Elucidation of Class Differences," Ethnologia Scandinavica (1988): 76-84 and Ann Helene B. Skjelbred, "Religious Confirmation--Civil Confirmation--The Confirmation Party," Ethnologia Scandinavica (1988): 85-94.

theologies of liberation, for example, share with folklore an orientation toward investigating tradition's survival by constant change in context, and an enthusiasm for assessing ordinary people's freedom from institutional culture.

As denominational approaches, Roman Catholic theologies may also seek to reconcile contemporary forms of religious practice with the early historical accounts of these practices, and with scriptural accounts posited as bases for liturgical tradition. As an approach which is not inherently religious, folklore may be freer to assess spiritual and social disunities, as well as unities, in sacramental or other kinds of religious cultural traditions.

The folklore approach taken here assumes that ordinary people in this parish, even the adolescent candidates themselves, create and live out meanings of confirmation, apart from and alongside prescribed official liturgical tradition. This is a study of folk religion, in Don Yoder's sense.¹⁴ These ordinary "folk" know what confirmation means and they have been asked. Their answers may and often do range outside and beyond the limits of official sacramental prescriptions.

¹⁴See page 15 of Don Yoder, "Toward a Definition of Folk Religion," Western Folklore 33 (1974): 2-15.

Through inductive, experience-centered investigation of sacramental practice in a Catholic field community, folklore may offer an alternative to conservative theological representations of such events and their meanings.

The sacrament of confirmation in particular affords a researcher unique opportunities to explore the folk-official dynamics of Catholicism. This sacrament often brings the highest official in a diocese into contact with adolescent Catholics. Status difference is navigated in official and unofficial ways. As a sacrament of initiation, confirmation draws together persons who are accustomed to "practicing" in different ways. They may have ethnic, aesthetic, or pragmatic motives, as well as religious ones, for coming into the parish church for the sacrament.

Confirmation also requires a once-in-a-lifetime participation from the candidates and families. As such it defines a more divided, less homogeneous Catholic community than does a Sunday mass, the year-round repetition of the sacrament of the eucharist. At confirmation, people who are Catholic in more private ways come into the parish church alongside Catholics accustomed to worshipping in public. "Practicing" and "non-practicing" are working status categories for

members of the parish. Studying confirmation allows for investigation of what draws the "practicing" and "non-practicing" Catholics together, and what keeps them apart.

A sacramental focus presents a particular challenge for folklore. Sacraments are arguably the most official forms of Catholic practice. Like other sacraments, confirmation is organized in significant part by parish leaders, who refer to archdiocesan guidelines and official, written catechetical materials to instruct the practice and belief of young candidates. The official structures and meanings of confirmation are highly accessible in participant-observation at the parish church and through library research.

On the other hand, confirmation may be studied as a nexus of local traditions of preparation, celebration, and belief surrounding an official rite. A folklore approach can move beyond the public or church-centered practices into the private, informal, material, or orally expressed experience of confirmation. Parish prescriptions of adolescent belief at the confirmation retreat, costume recommendations by clergy and pastoral workers, and theological and historical accounts of confirmation tours entail the participation and reactions

of small groups of ordinary Catholics, on and off parish church grounds.

The contributions of ordinary parishioners and adolescents may be much more creative than obediently mimetic. The candidate retreat involves play. Costume is selected and arranged by individuals. People tell stories among themselves about the bishop. The perspectives of these ordinary members of a parish may challenge rather than support the official representations of sacraments by parish leaders or higher authorities. While it may be more difficult to document folk sacraments,¹⁵ there is folk experience of the sacraments of the Catholic Church.

Overview of Coming Chapters

Individual chapters in this thesis look at parish confirmation from angles suggested by this folklore orientation and by an inductive approach to practice as experience. This approach assumes adolescent views are a

¹⁵Catholic women's eucharistic rituals recently described by Jennifer Livesay might perhaps qualify as folk sacraments. Ignoring official liturgical formulas and Rome's refusal to ordain women, the women Livesay observed wrote their own eucharistic liturgies, adopted new symbols, utilized materials other than bread and wine, and conducted liturgies in their homes, without the aid of priests (Jennifer Livesay, "Multivocality and the Eucharist Ritual in a Catholic Women's Liturgy Group," *Folklore Studies Association of Canada/American Folklore Society Annual Meeting*, St. John's, NF, 17 Oct. 1991).

primary source of information on the experience and meaning of confirmation. Instead of looking to assertions about God, claims of Christian writers and the institutional church, bishops' homilies, or the views of other Christian adults, in that order, for answers about what confirmation means, the perspectives of adolescents are sought out most extensively. From this foundation, interpretation moves outward through the hierarchy of a single parish community in a search for the meaning of the event.

On the basis of conflicts which emerged from comparative analysis of the data, I have asked what seemed to be provocative questions from the parish point of view. The thesis opens with a chapter addressing a primary challenge for research methods and a subject of hot debate at the parish church: apparent distinctions between "practicing" and "non-practicing" Catholics in the parish community. Next, a chapter on the history of Roman Catholic confirmation in Newfoundland uses past and present accounts of episcopal confirmation tours to critique traditions of approach and assessment between ordinary parishioners and bishops at confirmation rites. Special attention is paid to confirmations as folk-official encounters during periods of particular economic

hardship and social strain for ordinary Catholic Newfoundlanders.

A chapter on the adolescent candidates' retreat connects play with maturity, and compares the theological separation of physical and spiritual maturity in confirmation with the integration of these concepts in the local practice. Candidates' responses to retreat exercises are evaluated as forms of play, and compared with more direct accounts of their religious experience and belief. Accounts of adolescent faith and examples of their keen skepticism are provided.

A chapter on confirmation costume considers the costumes described in parish confirmation narratives and observed in the field. A more uniform past costume type is compared with three contemporary types worn in the parish today. Costume is approached as a "language" used by community groups to convey sacred and secular values. The thesis conclusion assesses confirmation as an adolescent phenomenon occurring within broader contexts of belief about adolescent spirituality and maturity, in and outside Catholicism. The specific approach used in this investigation is located within the experience-centered perspective in folklore and other disciplines. Confirmation is interpreted as a form of play.

Though I present this portrait as "representative" of views of parishioners I have studied, I also know that there is no one in the parish who would have connected and interpreted these materials in precisely this way. I also do not expect that any single parishioner would agree with the totality of views I have assembled. I do not claim to understand the community which graciously hosted me, but only to have described and interpreted their confirmation practice, in contexts of archdiocesan and Newfoundland history. The opening description of the Garden Party is meant to convey the ultimate impossibility of answering the overwhelming call to portray life in this singular Newfoundland Catholic parish.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODS

"Practicing" and "non-practicing" are terms reflecting a division between Roman Catholics which has been noted in Canada and in the United States. A study published recently in Canadian Social Trends reports that less than a third of self-identified Roman Catholics surveyed attended church once a week in 1990, down from 36% in 1985. The poll also revealed that the proportion of Catholics who attended rarely (more than once a year, but less than once a month) or never, had increased over the same period from 16% to 21%. Data from this survey also indicated that Atlantic Canadians are more likely to attend church weekly than other Canadians.¹

Suggesting that persons with expressed religious affiliations who rarely worship in public may be lumped together with those who report "no religion,"² leaves the door open for qualitative investigation of the reasons for affiliation, practice in contexts other than churches, and alternative definitions of religious practice. This kind of investigation might provide

¹Alain Baril and George A. Mori, "Leaving the Fold: Declining Church Attendance," Canadian Social Trends, Statistics Canada Catalogue #11-008E, Autumn (1991): 21-24.

²Baril and Mori 22 and 24.

information that would challenge the generality of the conclusion that there is "an overall trend toward declining religious activity in Canada."³

Lydia Fish suggests that practicing and non-practicing Catholics meet "Raoul Naroll's classic criteria for a distinctive ethnic group" in four ways:

they (1) are biologically self-perpetuating, (2) share fundamental cultural values realized in overt unity in cultural forms, (3) make up a field of communication and interaction, and (4) have a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as belonging to an order constituting a category distinguished from other categories of the same order.⁴

Fish asks whether "Catholics consider themselves to be an ethnic group and...to be a member of this group without participating in its religious practices."⁵ To support her contention that they do, she says

the very terms used by Catholics to refer to persons who no longer join in the religious rituals of the group, "lapsed Catholics," "fallen-away Catholics," or "non-practicing Catholics," show that these deserters are in some way still considered to be members of the group.⁶

³Baril and Mori 24.

⁴Lydia Fish, "Ethnicity and Catholicism," New York Folklore 8 (1982): 83-92. This quote is from pages 83-84.

⁵Fish 84.

⁶Fish 84.

This line of argument draws attention to Catholics' differences over religious practice and suggests that the rationales used to characterize or claim group identity may be complex.

In this chapter I expand upon Fish's proposal by exploring a problematic split over practice in a Catholic parish in Newfoundland. "Non-practicing" and "practicing" are operant terms in St. Cecilia's parish. Despite ambiguities, they delineate two categories of status in the community. I will show how parishioners seem to be using religious rationales more often than an ethnic group consciousness to justify differing notions of practice and belonging in a parish community.

In a sense, the practicing/non-practicing split delineated two fields to be researched at once: parishioners who were frequently present at the parish church and parishioners who were rarely seen there. The latter group had to be sought out in their homes in the parish neighborhood. However, on confirmation night, both "practicing" and "non-practicing" families show up at the parish church to see their children confirmed. The terms "parish" and "community" in this study will henceforth refer to both groups.

Three experiences in fieldwork summarized below demonstrate how parishioners recognize and use the two

main categories of practice. When it came to rationalizing personal practice, however, they often revealed more complicated views. The "practicing" and "non-practicing" categories entered into discussion during (1) a confirmation planning meeting, (2) two family interviews, and (3) one mother's description of her son's practice and her own. The emic practice categories and the variety of actual practice affected the methods of investigation. Rapport during family interviews was both impeded and enhanced by discussing practice. Research methods such as participant observation, interviewing, and data analysis were adjusted to achieve adequate sampling of all parishioners and to interpret their information in reliable and valid ways.

Example 1: Practice Concerns at a Confirmation Planning Meeting

When I first met the small group of confirmation planners who gathered one October evening in an upper room in the parish hall, I noticed their diversity. A few were teachers in the parish school. Some of the men and women were parents. There was a nun present, and a priest. A scriptural reading about Pentecost opened the meeting on a note of spiritual pluralism guided by the Holy Spirit:

The meeting began with a prayer, thanks to Father Hal. He began reading from the Acts of the Apostles, from the Holy Bible, revised standard version. White with a stained glass circular design on front. Looked well-thumbed. He read a passage about Pentecost, and speaking in tongues, and the last line was something like "and they wondered to themselves what does all this mean?" I thought that was cool. What indeed? Apostles at Pentecost was a good metaphor for this group of people, speaking different languages, about the same topic, confirmation, and I think we were all wondering, during the meeting, what it all means. I certainly was.⁷

What came out at the meeting was a consensus upon questions, rather than answers, about confirmation. Planners questioned the meaning of the sacrament, the appropriate age for candidacy, how and whether a candidate's readiness might be assessed, and how and when the Holy Spirit's power in confirmation took effect in a candidate's life. The group also debated the appropriateness of confirming sons and daughters of "non-practicing parents."

During this debate, I realized the group's concerns lay with behavior and attitudes which were not their own but characteristic of a separate group, the "non-practicing" people in the parish. The confirmation coordinator explained, expressing some frustration to an understanding audience. There were parents, for example,

⁷Notes on Confirmation Planning Meeting, 11 October 1990, St. Cecilia's parish hall, St. John's.

who would call long after the seven-month preparatory program had begun, and request that a son or daughter might join, to "get done."⁸ In these short exchanges on the phone, the coordinator might note that callers had not heard announcements about confirmation during Sunday masses in the parish church, nor had they read announcements in a weekend bulletin. By giving away perhaps inadvertently that they had not been to mass, such callers would be labelled "non-practicing."

Confirming children of non-practicing parents highlights an unresolvable contradiction in parish policy regarding administration of the sacrament. Confirmation implies a candidate's regular Sunday mass attendance, one part of parish criteria for determining the readiness of candidates. Adolescents, however, may have to depend upon their parents to get to Sunday mass. Since persons in this dependent position cannot be held entirely responsible for the regularity of their attendance, refusing these candidates confirmation is hard to justify. On the other hand, confirming a child of non-practicing parents (parents who do not attend masses regularly) may confirm a less visible parishioner and affirm his or her "non-practice."

⁸Differences in terminology for confirmation are detailed in Chapter 5.

Prayer and performance of charitable service in the local community are the other measures parish leaders use to judge the readiness of confirmation candidates. It may be argued that these activities complete the official parish definition of "practice," but in the context of this parish meeting, "practice" referred solely to church attendance. Attendance is easier for parish church leaders to monitor than service or prayer. Later, in taped interviews, some members of this planning group hesitated to define religious practice in any narrow way, and revealed that their own definitions of "practicing religion" did encompass more than attendance at Sunday mass. The leaders' personal caution in defining practice may explain why candidates from families labelled "non-practicing" are not ordinarily refused confirmation.

Participant Observation and Family Interviews

At the planning meeting, "practicing parishioners" mentioned "non-practicing parishioners," a group known to exist in the parish neighborhood but rarely or never present on parish grounds. This was the first time I observed parishioners using two practice categories to classify members of their community. "Non-practicing" parishioners, who attended mass irregularly or rarely, had briefer, sporadic, and unpredictable communication with the parish church. "Practicing" people, by

contrast, could be counted on to contact the parish church daily or weekly. "Non-practicing" parishioners' occasional visits and phonecalls might stem from an interest in participating in the rites of baptism, first communion, confirmation or marriage at the appropriate time of life, while "practicing" parishioners might show more interest in attending the preparatory programs for these rites.

The confirmation planners' power to decide to refuse confirmation to candidates and families who do not attend mass regularly makes the status difference between "practicing" and "non-practicing" groups evident. Though this power is rarely if ever exercised in this parish, it seems nevertheless to exist.⁹ "Non-practicing" parishioners, like the late phonecaller who "didn't hear about" confirmation, may also use different terms for sacraments and avoid discussing their mass attendance.

My basic mode of inquiry throughout the year was participant observation. I participated in and observed the preparatory program for confirmation from October to April, and joined the parish music ministry for the rest

⁹Archdiocesan policy makes rejection on this basis a possibility by stipulating that it is "active membership in a parish...which constitutes readiness to celebrate the sacrament" (see page 5 of Archdiocese of St. John's, "Pastoral Norms for the Celebration of Confirmation," unpublished policy paper, 1987).

of the summer. I loitered around the parish church after masses and confirmation meetings to talk to parishioners, attended festive gatherings, helped out at the candidate retreat, and filmed and taped the confirmation rite.

Departmental colleagues Melissa Ladenheim and Marie-Annick Desplanques accompanied me to the rite of confirmation, where we snapped pictures, ate from the confirmation reception table, and asked our own ethnographic questions. Afterwards, we traded observations on tape, and congratulated ourselves on participating and observing as a team. I conducted 15 hours of formal interviews with parish clergy and leading parishioners.

In order to study the parishioners who spent less time on parish grounds, however, I needed to move into the parish neighborhood. By conducting 20 additional hours of formal interviews in the homes of families of ten confirmation candidates, I acquired a more balanced sample of perspectives on religious practice. Field research was enhanced by research at the university library and its Centre for Newfoundland Studies. Newspaper accounts, local ecclesiastical histories, and archdiocesan reports provided a wider perspective on the varieties of Catholic religious practice and the history of Catholic confirmation in Newfoundland.

Example 2: Interviews with Two "Non-Practicing" Families
Family A

I would describe my first family interview in the parish as a prolonged effort to have a conversation, for which I was eventually awarded, sympathetically, a cup of tea.¹⁰ I sat down with Family A, a woman and her daughter, an eighth-grader about to be confirmed in St. Cecilia's, in the kitchen of their apartment in the parish neighborhood. Though they had previously agreed to let me interview them on confirmation, they seemed shocked that I had in fact found their home, and even more surprised to see my tape recorder.

We began to trade brief and nervous comments about confirmation. Early in the interview, I wondered if these informants might be the "non-practicing" kind of parishioners I had heard described by the "practicing" folks. The woman referred to her own confirmation as "getting done." Next, she made an observation about the confirmation preparation meetings at the parish that showed me she must have missed a few of them. When I asked her what she thought of what went on at the parish church, she seemed at a loss for words. My own embarrassment increased. I began to suspect that she

¹⁰Interview with Holloran family, 14 March 1991, St. John's.

might not have been inside the church in a long time. I felt unable to press the point. The "non-practicing" label seemed to fit.

Moving away from practice, I stressed that I was from the university, not the parish. Soon after this, the woman laughed and confessed that she had called her sister over several weeks earlier after receiving a questionnaire "from the parish" about confirmation. With her sister's help, she said, she thought she might be able to figure out "what they want us to say on this." I smiled, relieved she had dissociated me from the parish, but basked silently in the revelation that my confirmation questionnaire had failed. After mistaking my questionnaire for a parish form, the family had filled it with what they thought the parish wanted to hear.

Later on, before I was served tea, the daughter widened her dark eyes with a look of innocent and vaguely aggressive humor. Teachers at school said that confirmation was about "getting close to God and all that," she said, but the reason she didn't want to get confirmed at first was that she wasn't sure she wanted to wear a dress. Whatever the truth was about why she was getting confirmed, I decided that she was playing with me. I laughed, drank my tea, and vowed to keep an eye on

her and the other candidates at my next opportunity, the candidate retreat.

The Family A interview, the first of two "non-practicing" family interviews to be discussed, demonstrates that the power of the practice labels may hamper honest dialogue, even in inquiry that takes place away from the parish, in the family's home territory. Furthermore, it reveals a family's assumption that the parish church would not ask open-ended questions but would require "correct" rather than honest answers about religious belief and practice. The danger of relying on questionnaire data became clear when these informants showed me that they had mistaken my questionnaire for a parish quiz, despite my explanation of the questionnaire and other research methods at a confirmation meeting at the church.

Family A may have continued to perceive me during the interview as a parish representative, in spite of my clarifications. They expressed their discomfort at being perceived as a "non-practicing" family by concealing their ordinary levels of communication with the parish church. They also avoided discussing practice or activities at the parish church. The taboo upon admitting "non-practice" may have suppressed Family A's contribution of relevant data in this interview.

Family B

Not all families who attended mass irregularly took an evasive approach to discussing practice. In one such interview, Family B (Joe and Dorothy Davis) stated that while they expected and encouraged their son to be confirmed, they felt that forcing him to attend mass was wrong. Furthermore, the couple differentiated attendance from what they were teaching him to believe:

J: We as parents aren't saying to the kids...make your own decisions as to what you want to do, believe in or anything. What we are doing is saying that ah, you know, you have more room than we ever did, and that's the way we want it, at least that's the way we want it in our household. Ah, you know, I, I won't turn around and say to my kids, stand over my kids with a stick and beat 'em out the door Sunday mornings so's they go to church. I don't believe in that.

D: That's the way it was with us...You had to get up at six o'clock in the morning and walk ten miles to church, I know I had to.

J: Rain, hail, sleet, or snow.

D: It didn't matter. You were thrown out, thrown out through the door. Have to go. Crying, I often went out. And I'd be crying because it was too cold to walk.

J: Yeah and hungry.

D: And hungry. You had to receive Holy Communion so therefore you weren't allowed to have anything to eat or anything. And we'd have to go seven days a week like that.

J: But now the kids ah...it's up to themselves.¹¹

Like many parishioners, this couple used the terms "good person" and "good Christian" almost interchangeably. They explained that believing in "one being" was not something on which they thought churchgoers, Catholics, or Christians had a monopoly. There were even different beliefs about how to be religious within their own family:

D: Like my mother now, she's 84. And she's not able to go to church, but the priest'll come out every weekend, and she'll receive Holy Communion. But ah, she'll make Dad go for her. Now Dad will go for himself on a Sunday morning. But a Saturday night he'll have to go to church for her.

J: Yeah, take her place.

D: Take her place, cause she can't get to go. Cause she's feeble, and she can't get around.¹²

Mrs. Davis worries about what her mother (who resides in another parish) would think if she knew that she did not attend mass weekly. She stated that one reason she attended church less often in recent years was the revelation that priests she had known had been charged with sexual abuse. These thoughts upset her and distracted her at mass, she said.

¹¹Interview with Joe and Dorothy Davis, 28 May 1991, near St. John's.

¹²Interview with Joe and Dorothy Davis, 29 May 1991, near St. John's.

Implications of Family Interviews

Interviews with Families A and B illustrate how standards of practice may vary from family to family as well as across the generations in a single family. Concealment of the "non-practice" status may occur between family members as well as in field interviews. Some informants may be more open with a researcher about their practice and practice views than they would be with relatives. Familial clashes over religious practice, such as Mr. and Mrs. Davis's past and present differences with their parents, may prompt one or both parties to redefine their standards, or distinguish religious beliefs from religious practices.

The Davises offer a religious rationale which reinforces their affiliation and practice choices. They (1) allude to a central belief in "one being" that they perceive others to share despite practice and denominational differences, and (2) equate being a "good Christian" with being a good person. The Christian-person equation lifts their Christian/Catholic identity out of specific times or places of worship and spreads it throughout their whole lives. By recalling several personal patterns of mass attendance, the Davises demonstrate how practice and belief may vary throughout a

lifetime. Parishioners may grapple continuously with "practicing" and "non-practicing" labels.

Example 3: When Practice Labels Fail

When we got around to discussing being religious, Maureen Keene says she never forgot the ring "with Holy Mary on it" that she and her friends at school used to wear proudly, or the gold-edged cardboard-backed picture of Jesus that she bought from the new religious articles store when it first opened at the Basilica downtown. Maureen says she has kept this picture ever since and always puts it up in her bedroom. When it comes to mass, though, Maureen admits that she "doesn't go all the time," but goes when she wants to, because it

makes you feel better...gives you something on the inside, I don't know what it is, but it does for me anyway, right... Like I say I'm not praying to the priests, I'm praying to the-God, right?¹³

Maureen said her son was old enough to make a choice about getting confirmed, so she left it up to him:

I think a lot of parents, too, leave it up to the kids...if you're old enough to say, "Well, Mom, I think I'm ready" well you're old enough to decide whether you want to get confirmed or not. Which is a good idea, right? Because you know what I mean we've all been there, right? More or less when I was growing up I had to do it...My dad wasn't a Catholic and there wasn't a Sunday morning that he never got us all up

¹³Interview with Maureen Keene, 24 May 1991, St. John's.

out of bed, the eight of us up out of bed, and go off to church, in, sleet, snow or rain but my kids--none of that. "Get up and go to church." "[sighing] Yeah, right. You know what I mean?"¹⁴

She then described her children's religious practices.

The reasons for a change in her son's practice are hard to pin down:

M: Caroline likes going because she goes downstairs [to the children's liturgy at early mass]...now Brendan don't mind taking her...I think they should but I don't think they should be made to go to church. I think it's entirely up to themselves, right? Like I said I've been there, I don't need, you know what I mean. Like I said to Brendan--Brendan's an altar boy and everything, he just, gave it up. I don't know why, I don't know, right, hearing all about the priests and the Christian Brothers there, I don't know if that struck him, the way, that way--it struck him, but you know what I mean he just stopped, right, you know what I mean for no reason. He would never tell me the reason.

E: That was how long ago? A couple of years ago?

M: Two years ago. Right? He was going to the church, oh my he was right in with the Church over there with you know, really with the altar boys and everything...I really don't know.¹⁵

Implications for Later Observations of Adolescents

The Keene interview demonstrates that families may practice religion and express religious affiliation in a

¹⁴Interview with Maureen Keene, 24 May 1991, St. John's.

¹⁵Interview with Maureen Keene, 24 May 1991, St. John's.

variety of ways: by arranging holy pictures in the home, praying, accompanying children to mass, or sending them on their own to parish activities specially geared towards children such as altar service and children's liturgies. Though they may not attend mass weekly, "non-practicing" seems a misnomer for the Keenes.

Brendan Keene maintained silence about reasons for his change of practice, despite his mother's curiosity and the apparently relaxed attitudes in his home. The silence at home heralds the difficulty of eliciting adolescent views about practice in research contexts. Adolescents interviewed and observed at the parish church and in their school often remained silent or offered playful answers. Methods were adjusted to compensate.

The candidates were observed at their preparatory retreat and later in focus group interviews. I participated and observed at the retreat by helping to run exercises and taking notes during and after each day of the retreat. The retreat lasted five days. Fellow folklore students Marie-Annick Desplanques and Jeannie Myrick helped me to interview most of the confirmation candidates in the parish school. The interviews investigated adolescents' perceptions of confirmation and adulthood. Twelve forty-minute group interviews, with 80% of the confirmation class, were obtained with

permission from the St. John's Roman Catholic School Board and thanks to the cooperation of school staff.

Focus group interviewing techniques encouraged all group members to speak.¹⁶ Interviewers guided discussion by moving "around the circle" of small groups, encouraging the participation of each member. Quieter group members were addressed directly or by their first name. Teachers at the parish school also suggested groups in which students known as "talkers" would be mixed with quieter students to promote conversation. Groups were gender-mixed. Nevertheless, in these interviews and at the preparatory retreat, adolescents were often reluctant to provide lengthy or serious answers. Those who answered seriously had their comments transformed into comedy by clowning or skeptical peers.

I compensated by approaching the data adolescents provided in these observational settings as play and verbal art. From this perspective their responses may be taken as performances which employ irony, double-entendre, and other intentional ambiguity. There is no straight text. The premise of this approach rests upon Richard Bauman's observation that many forms of verbal

¹⁶Our primary resource for focus group techniques was James Higginbotham and Keith Cox, Focus Group Interviews: A Reader (Chicago: American Marketing Association, 1979).

communication ask to be taken in interpretive "frames" other than straight talk.

Bauman encourages the study of other communicative orders, such as insinuation, joking, imitation, translation, or quotation.¹⁷ The structure of the retreat and its exercises were recorded, categorized, and analyzed as play, along with the candidates' kinesic and verbal responses to game-like spiritual exercises. Jokes, folktales, allusions to folktale motifs, puns, taunts, and other "trick" responses were collected as folklore and subjected to comparative analysis from these theoretical perspectives.

Summary

The phrases "non-practicing Catholics" and "practicing Catholics" suggest, as Fish has observed, differing ways of still being Catholic. In St. Cecilia's I have found that the terms denote two levels of parishioner communication with the parish church. Parishioners whose religious practices include high levels of communication with the parish church seem to be able to converse more freely in interviews and may rest a bit more assured that their children will not be refused confirmation on the basis of their practice.

¹⁷See Richard Bauman, "Verbal Art as Performance," American Anthropologist 77 (1975): 290-95.

Parishioners who communicate less frequently with the parish church may refrain, out of embarrassment, from discussing their beliefs and practices in a variety of contexts. Some of these parishioners may provide religious rationales for their choices. Their communications with the parish may increase around the times their children ought to receive sacraments such as confirmation. For research to represent the views from either perspective, parishioners must be observed both on and off parish church grounds. For this reason, participant observation was supplemented by family interviews.

The terms "practicing" and "non-practicing" seem to have won a general and powerful recognition in the community by distinguishing parishioners on the basis of the regularity of their mass attendance. At the same time, many parishioners, whatever their own standards of attendance, seem hesitant to define "practice" narrowly or equate belief with practices. Parishioners "practice" belief and belonging in many ways. However, parishioners may also refrain from discussing practice and practice attitudes out of general embarrassment, or for fear of being labelled "non-practicing" because they rarely or never attend mass. Some parishioners who were reflective in interviews about practice and who stated openly their

reasons for attending mass only occasionally, seem nevertheless to conceal their actual churchgoing habits at times to avoid conflict at home or with parish administrators.

The taboo on deviance from official norms of worship provoked evasion, concealment, and discomfort in interviewing, rather than relaxed, open conversation. To compensate in such interviews, I distinguished my role from the role of a parish administrator, emphasized confidentiality, and stressed that my questions were not a quiz on proper religious practice. In some cases, however, informants appear to have suppressed additional information.

It seems unwise to assume that quiet informants, who are still connected with a parish by having their children confirmed there, have necessarily lost a religious view of the world, or do not consider themselves members of the parish community. Perhaps this sort of informant can be distinguished to a degree from the vocal narrators of Catholic school stories in Louise Krasniewicz's study who simply asserted that they had "left the church."¹⁸ However, Krasniewicz also reports

¹⁸Louise Krasniewicz, "Growing Up Catholic and American: The Oral Tradition of Catholic School Students," New York Folklore 12 (1986): 51-67.

that many of her informants would not tell stories of negative experiences in Catholic education "to persons they knew were still practicing the Catholic faith, mostly for fear of insulting them."¹⁹

With adolescent informants there was more room to compensate for incomplete or inconclusive responses. The candidate retreat and focus group interviews provided me with greater opportunity to observe them and investigate their views. Recording, categorizing, and analyzing their behavior and responses as play and performative folklore allowed me to explore multiple meanings rather than assume contradictions had rendered their data useless.

Methods selected and adapted for this investigation of confirmation in a Newfoundland Catholic parish revealed a variety of practices, beliefs, and rationales for claiming denominational and/or parish affiliation. The variety of religious experience in the parish emerges more fully in description and discussion in subsequent chapters. Non-religious motives must also be considered. Finding a variety of practices and attitudes, on a continuum between purely religious and secularly ethnic Catholicisms, suggests the inadequacy of using rates of

¹⁹Krasniewicz 52.

attendance at public worship alone to measure religiousness, qualify the significance of denominational affiliations, or propose trends in national or local "religious activity." Multi-method qualitative investigation can uncover delicate shades of belonging in a parish community which narrower categories such as "practicing" and "non-practicing" may conceal. Data from this kind of investigation may make discussions of secularization and ethnic Catholicism more precise.

CHAPTER THREE

CONFIRMATION IN NEWFOUNDLAND:

A TRADITION OF FOLK-OFFICIAL ENCOUNTER

The only people I think that they can understand is, is the priests and the nuns...with the Archbishop, or Father Hal and them. When they explains it we understand.

--Confirmation candidate, St. Cecilia's parish, 1991¹

Confirmation holds a unique place among the seven Roman Catholic sacraments by requiring that the person with the most power in a diocesan hierarchy, a bishop, travel to meet confirmands, members of a parish community who hold little power or status. Confirmation is an encounter between religious officials and ordinary people. Confirmations are often the only opportunity ordinary parishioners have to meet and talk with the highest regional religious leader, yet topics appropriate for conversation are often curtailed by the sacramental context. As the quote above implies, even adolescents recognize the sociology of knowledge within their religious community. They notice that certain members of the community think and speak with authority while others listen, or appear to do so. Early work in folk religion

¹Focus group interview with Class #4/E Group, 3 June 1991, St. Cecilia's school, St. John's.

sprang from perceptions of such disparities and an impulse to "narrow the understanding gap between the pulpit and the pew."²

Confirmation candidates find themselves in the listening position. As the next chapter will show in greater depth, confirmation candidates are parishioners who are not yet full members of a parish community, child-adults who are oddly expected to demonstrate spiritual and social maturity while they are nonetheless subject to the control of elders at home, parish, and school. In addition, in Newfoundland society at large, most of these adolescents are too young by law to drive, to work, to choose to discontinue their education, or to give informed consent to sex.

In this chapter oral accounts of parishioners who "met the bishop" at Newfoundland confirmations are juxtaposed with written accounts, in local newspapers and histories, of how bishops met confirmation candidates. By this comparison I mean to show how these accounts root the meanings of these meetings within contexts of time and place in Newfoundland, and to explore how it is that folk and official participants in confirmations come away

²See pages 1-2 in Don Yoder, "Toward A Definition of Folk Religion," Western Folklore 33 (1974): 2-15.

from highly formulaic encounters believing they know something about each other.

"There is Anger"

As media cameras rolled and flashed one afternoon in summer of 1990, Archbishop Alphonsus Penney made the first official apology on behalf of the St. John's Roman Catholic archdiocese to persons sexually abused as children by archdiocesan priests.³ The Archbishop's apology came almost twenty years after some of the abuses were first disclosed to top archdiocesan officials, more than two years after the first of a series of local priests and brothers was brought to trial on such charges, and one week after receiving the Winter Commission's investigative report.⁴

The Winter Report revealed that the Archbishop and other top officials in the St. John's Roman Catholic archdiocese had failed to react to repeated pleas from victims themselves and others in the local community. To the survivors of the abuse, and the public, Penney apologized by admitting

³The sexual abuse crisis in the archdiocese was introduced in Chapter One.

⁴Gordon Winter, Frances O'Flaherty, Nuala Kenny, Everett MacNeil, and John Scott, The Report of the Archdiocesan Commission of Enquiry into the Sexual Abuse of Children by Members of the Clergy, 3 vols. (St. John's, NF: Archdiocese of St. John's, 1990).

These boys, now young men, are victims. They are blameless. To you we say that we are deeply sorry that this sexual abuse has happened...for the times you were not believed, were not supported or were ostracized in any way in our Archdiocesan community...We also apologize for not recognizing, from the outset, your need for services to promote healing and wholeness or our responsibility in enabling that to happen...your disclosure has effectively exposed this evil which was seriously impeding the growth of God's Kingdom in our faith community.

We are a sinful Church: the priest offenders; the Church administration who did not choose to stand clearly with victims; and our parish communities who have not always believed victims or supported them in their suffering...This is not a time for deaf ears or denial...All of us have the responsibility to heal our wounded Church and make it more authentically Christian.⁵

With this statement the Archbishop fulfilled the first recommendation in the Winter Report, that the church "formally acknowledge its share of guilt and responsibility, and... apologize in such a way as to remove any suggestion that the victims were to blame."⁶ An August 1991 news article indicates that more than a year after the release of the Winter Commission Report, the second of its fifty-five recommendations, which

⁵See pages 1-2, Alphonsus Penney, "Statement by Archbishop Alphonsus L. Penney re: Report of the Archdiocesan Commission of Enquiry into the Sexual Abuse of Children by Members of the Clergy," press conference, St. John's, 18 July 1990.

⁶Winter, Report vol. 1, 141.

is not present. The writer uses confirmation to illustrate his point:

In your interview, you indicated that you had visited 38 parishes and met approximately 10,000 people so far. That is a commendable effort. However, given the time of year, my guess is that many of these contacts were in the context of short visits to parishes for the celebration of confirmation. They probably did not give you much opportunity to really take the pulse of the Diocese.¹¹

The author of the letter then offers the Archbishop his own experience at a confirmation, demonstrating how and why his own anger was concealed there:

You are new here...but the anger is there. (For example, I was part of a ministry group when you visited the parish where I worship to celebrate confirmation. However, I didn't stay after the liturgy to meet you because I was afraid that I might confront you publicly on the question of compensation for survivors. I didn't want to risk disturbing the celebration of our youth, their families and our parish--so I left and held my comments for another time.)¹²

As a parishioner and delegate to the fall 1990 archdiocesan Assembly on Implementation of the Winter Commission Report, the writer offers three possible explanations for why the Archbishop "might not have encountered anger." The first is people's friendly or polite concealment, especially at time-limited and

¹¹Duggan 14.

¹²Duggan 14.

traditionally celebratory community events such as confirmation. Second, he suggests

Many people have become deeply cynical about the Church. They have given up expressing their thoughts as they have absolutely no expectation that the Church intends to do anything meaningful either to right the sins of the past or to put in place effective safeguards for the future.¹³

His third explanation is that

Many of the angriest and most hurt people (some survivors and other people who have had their confidence in the Church completely undermined) have simply left the Church. Neither you nor the rest of the Church will hear their anger unless we consciously open ourselves to it by reaching out and supporting them in whatever ways they need support over an extended period of time.¹⁴

The letter suggests other reasons for the Archbishop's not encountering anger, such as his reliance upon the statistics of contacts at large confirmation tours rather than actively confronting angry Catholics. Their anger, the letter further points out, has already been "well documented in the print and broadcast media's coverage."¹⁵ The letter writer seems to be suggesting

¹³Duggan 14.

¹⁴Duggan 14.

¹⁵Volume 2 of the Winter Commission report, "Background Studies and Briefs," contains 170 pages of reprinted letters and reports from angry and distressed Catholics all over the Archdiocese. See also journalist Michael Harris's Unholy Orders (Markham, ON: Viking 1990) and survivor Dereck O'Brien's own story, Suffer Little Children (St.

that Archbishop MacDonald not only study but follow a similar model of inquiry:

If I may offer some unsolicited advice, I would like to suggest that you start going to stay for a week or so in parishes. Meet with ordinary people in small groups, with their families and friends, or with the different parish groups and committees to which they belong. Talk with them about the Church, their feelings, and their needs.¹⁶

This writer is contesting an established convention by which bishops have been represented to superiors and to ordinary parishioners. Traditionally, allusions to a bishop's extensive tours to confirm high numbers of candidates in his district have been used to bolster support for these leaders, their office, and their power in Newfoundland. Early written references to confirmation and other clerical tours have represented bishops as shepherds who undertake lengthy and arduous journeys to reach an enormous flock.

Confirmation and Other "Clerical Tours"

Sometime before June 1807, one of the first Catholic bishops in Newfoundland, Patrick Lambert, posted the following account to his Dublin superior, Archbishop Troy, of a taxing confirmation tour:

John's: Breakwater, 1991).

¹⁶Duggan 14.

At the time your Grace's letter arrived here I was in Conception Bay visiting Father Ewer's district which I had the happiness of finding in as good order as could possibly be expected in so large a range of coast. I cruised about 21 leagues of the coast of it and confirmed almost 400 children--the two last places I confirmed in had rather odd sort of names for a Bishop to go confirm at--one of them is called Rogue's Roost [Harbour Main], the other Gallow's Cove. Were the planters left to themselves they might be easily managed and would I am confident, in a little time be a religious and devout people, but the unprincipled and ignorant set of lawless wretches that come out every year from Ireland & the West of England blight our fairest prospects & disseminate spiritual ruin along our shores--I feel the want of Irish much on many occasions, especially with this description of men.¹⁷

Lambert's comments suggest that he judged the spiritual and moral disposition of the people in his district at least in part by weighing observations of them made during a confirmation tour.

If Lambert's judgments of his flock seem harsh, comments from the first Catholic bishop in Newfoundland, James Louis O Donel, seem hardly less so. The following excerpt from O Donel's correspondence sums up how economy, oppressive governmental policy, insubordinate clergy, and even geography conspired from the first to

¹⁷Patrick Lambert, letter to John Thomas Troy, 9 June 1807, Gentlemen-Bishops and Faction Fighters: The Letters of Bishops O Donel, Lambert, Scallan and Other Irish Missionaries, ed. Cyril Byrne (St. John's: Jespersen, 1984) 237-39.

make his religious mission to Newfoundland additionally trying:

It is truly difficult to minister to the Catholics on this island, which has been settled only in coastal regions scattered in the hollows of hills and forests and therefore unable to be reached save with the greatest danger in open fishing boats. The political regime here holds back agricultural development and charges strictly that only a sufficient number may winter over as are necessary to preserve from ruin the buildings and other store houses, seeing that the intention of the government is that this place should be a school for sailors who are to be accustomed to the dangers and difficulties of the ocean by annually going and coming back.

Many inhabitants are scattered here and there in various ports through a laxity, who living like animals, scarcely have any knowledge of the Deity, with the exception of the children of the Irish who have retained some glimmer, inextinguishable up to this point, of religion from the tradition of their ancestors. It is unbelievable with how great a joy these were moved at obtaining free exercise of their religion, especially since a number of years back several of them were punished by the heaviest fines and their houses burned publicly by the special order of the magistrate because one or two priests making a stay here celebrated Mass in the rooms of these houses.

But these two priests were in fact seculars entangled in censures and expelled from the dioceses of Cork and Ferns in the Kingdom of Ireland who, for the past seven years, wandered the whole Island leading a drunken and truly disgraceful life, and in truth disgracefully baptizing and marrying, and also hearing confessions of the faithful without danger of death...Up to this point I have not been able to obtain an exact idea of the number of Catholics but I believe there to be at least ten thousand on the whole Island of whom the

greater part is engaged as servants scarcely setting foot on land except when ships unload fish....

It is most difficult to train the highly uneducated native population, but already I have trained catechists in all outports known to me who in winter time are to instruct them diligently in the rudiments of the faith. In summer nothing can be done in this regard since everyone is busily occupied in the making of fish.¹⁸

O Donel wrote this account not long after he arrived in Newfoundland on July 4, 1784.

The undertaking of clerical tours in Newfoundland, especially in spite of harsh physical conditions, seems to have helped win heroic reputations for more than one of the first officially sanctioned Catholic clergymen on the island. Harbour Grace missionary Patrick Whelan (Phelan) and, later, Bishop Michael Fleming toured farther and more often than others such as Lambert. In his 1888 ecclesiastical history of Newfoundland,¹⁹ Archbishop Howley says he acquired from the Honorable J. L. Prendergast of Harbour Main this imaginatively morbid and peculiarly phrased account of Whelan's very last tour:

¹⁸James Louis O Donel, letter to Leonardo Antonelli, [Dec. 1785?], Byrne 52-57.

¹⁹M. F. Howley, Ecclesiastical History of Newfoundland (1888; Belleville, ON: Mika, 1979).

Father Whelan was a most exemplary and zealous priest, whose name is embalmed in the memory of the people. Twice every year, spring and fall, he made a visitation of his parish. It was when returning, in September, 1799, that he lost his life during a storm. His boat reached Grates Cove, and in attempting to land, the boat was swamped, and all on board perished. The body of Father Whelan was the only one recovered from the waves. He was found erect in the water, his Breviary under his arm, a cane in one hand, and a small bag containing his vestments (probably the pyx) in the other. The body was taken to Harbour Grace, and his sorrowing people laid him to rest in the old Catholic grave-yard. A monument is erected over his remains, on which is engraved a long and panegyric epitaph of some twenty-five lines, extolling his many virtues and noble deeds, and testifying the affection and esteem of the flock for the memory of their faithful pastor.²⁰

Whelan's death by drowning while on tour is confirmed less legendarily elsewhere.²¹ In addition, Bishop Fleming in 1834 is reported to have

embarked upon a clerical visit to the east and northeast coasts of Newfoundland and visited forty-six communities in Conception, Trinity, Bonavista, and Notre Dame Bays. He travelled as far north as Fortune Harbour and his visitations in the area from Fogo Island to Fortune Harbour caused him great hardship. He often had to sleep on the bare floors of small cabins, for days had only fish and hard bread to eat, and was forced to travel in small, open boats, through treacherous seas, in all winds and weathers. This did not deter him, however,

²⁰Howley 183-84.

²¹James Louis O Donel, letter to Leonardo Antonelli [Dec. 1785?], Byrne 55-56.

and the next year he made a similar visit along the south coast, travelling as far west as Bay d'Espoir.²²

Such references to bishops and their confirmation tours are not limited to Newfoundland's written records. The Catholic Encyclopedia, published early this century in the United States, refers to tours through colonial North America in the seventeenth century:

Previous to the establishment of the hierarchy, many Catholics in North America died without having received confirmation. In some portions of what is now the United States the sacrament was administered by bishops from the neighbouring French and Spanish possessions; in others, by missionary priests with delegation from the Holy See.²³

Like Newfoundland sources, the encyclopedia praises numerous bishops for travelling to confirm high numbers of candidates, among them a "Bishop Calderon of Santiago who visited Florida in 1647 and confirmed 13,152 persons, including Indians and whites."²⁴

Newspaper descriptions of outpost confirmations in the 1930s emphasize, like other written records, the

²²Page 214 of "Fleming, Rt. Rev. Michael Anthony," Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador, ed. Joseph Smallwood, vol. 2 (St. John's: NF Book Publishers, 1967) 213-15.

²³T. B. Scannell, "Confirmation," The Catholic Encyclopedia, ed. Charles Herbermann, et al., vol. 4 (New York: Appleton, 1912) 215-22. This quote is on page 221.

²⁴Scannell 221.

number of candidates confirmed at various stops on the Bishop's circuit. They also describe established forms of local preparation in Newfoundland:

During the months of August and September [1934] His Grace the Archbishop visited and administered the Sacrament of Confirmation in various sections of the Archdiocese. In Ferryland 260 candidates were confirmed; in Bar Haven 200; St. Bride's 230; Renews 187; and Trepassey 200. Everywhere His Grace was met with the traditional Catholic welcome from pastors and people to the Chief Pastor of the Diocese and arches and bunting with the large congregations present at the ceremonies showed that the old spirit of loyalty and devotion to the Church and its pastors is still strong amongst our people.²⁵

Five years later, the Monitor recounts a louder and even more festive confirmation reception in Placentia Bay:

As usual on such occasions there was present that spontaneous quickening of Catholic life always evident on the visit of the Bishop of the Diocese and outwardly manifested by bunting, arches, musketry, and hearty cheers.²⁶

The Archbishop at the time would have been Edward Patrick Roche. According to this source, the Archbishop was accompanied by four priests, travelling by road and then "by the steamship 'Home'" to Burin, Lamaline, Red Island,

²⁵"Archiepiscopal Visitation. Confirmation Administered to over One Thousand Candidates," Monitor [St. John's, NF] 6 Oct. 1934: 8.

²⁶"His Grace Administers Confirmation in Several Placentia Bay Parishes," Monitor [St. John's, NF] Sept. 1939: 10c.

and Fox Harbour. In his confirmation speech, Roche addressed the stark economic decline in these outports.

The signs of hardship were apparently hard to ignore:

In speaking to the people he referred sympathetically to the changed conditions under which they were living and the difficulties that had come upon them due to the bad fisheries of the last decade....Although many changes were noticeable there was one thing that had not changed and that was their spirit of loyalty and love of the Faith.²⁷

As local dole songs can attest, ordinary Newfoundlanders were hit hard by depression in the 1930s, when employment and food were short.²⁸ Unlike this confirmation address, however, the songs lay some blame upon local merchants and government policies, and point out that Newfoundlanders with power or money went without less than others.

Oral Accounts

Newfoundland bishops and missionaries were not alone in making pilgrimages across Newfoundland's rough rural

²⁷"His Grace Administers Confirmation in Several Placentia Bay Parishes," Monitor [St. John's, NF] Sept. 1939: 10c.

²⁸For four examples of Newfoundland songs about depression and the dole, collected on the Avalon and Burin Peninsulas, see song number 30, pages 51-52 in Genevieve Lehr, ed., Come and I Will Sing You (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1985), as well as the following field recordings and transcriptions in the Memorial University Folklore and Language Archive, St. John's: File 70-5, tape C640; file 78-236, tape C3549A; and file 69-28 (no accompanying tape).

landscape for confirmation. One middle-aged woman, now a nun and a parishioner in St. Cecilia's, recalls how her own family had journeyed from their outlying rural community on the Burin Peninsula to catch up with the Bishop on his confirmation tour:

He would come to Marystown first maybe, then he would come to Burin, then he would go to St. Lawrence and then, I think...I guess the Bishop didn't go around to all the little places, we were probably to go to Burin, that was our parish church, and be confirmed with the group there. But on the day that the Bishop was having confirmation in Burin, ahm, the weather was bad and we just couldn't go. Too windy, too windy for the boat to go. So we thought we would be able to go to the next community where the Bishop was, namely St. Lawrence. Ah, I remember my uncle--like communication wasn't really good at that time, any more than transportation--so I remember my uncle walked to St. Lawrence which was about an eight or ten mile trip, perhaps, to find out something about I guess when confirmation was going to be there, or something like that.

Anyway, he came back and told us that the Bishop had already been to St. Lawrence and we were too late for confirmation. However, the Bishop knew about this little group of children who were not confirmed. He had been notified I suppose by my uncle or whatever, so, he stopped over in Marystown and waited. For us. He had already had confirmation in Marystown but he had a special celebration, stayed over an extra day, and had a special celebration in Marystown for us. So, we--went to Burin by boat, then, we got a car and went another, I don't know...let's say ten to twelve miles, something like that. Anyway my parents hired a taxi and we went to Marystown and we were confirmed in

Marystown. So, because of all of that surrounding my confirmation, I remember it in particular.²⁹

By way of closing, she observed

Of course it was all so new....We had an aunt living in Marystown, my father's sister, and we had never seen her, because we had never been to Marystown. So this was a big thing, for us to get a boat ride to Burin, and get a car ride to Marystown, see our aunt for the first time. So there were a lot of other things bound up with that too, than just getting confirmed and being strengthened in the Spirit.³⁰

Now a member of the clergy, Sister remembers the folk experience of official religion as an exciting, mutual approach between a rural Catholic family and the bearer of the power to confirm, across Newfoundland's rough terrain.

A number of St. Cecilia's parishioners remember their fear of meeting the archbishop at confirmation and provide several reasons for their apprehension. Dorothy Davis, confirmed in a parish on the Southern Shore, says

I know it was scary to me. Because the Bishop was coming there. You only see the Bishop once a year, that was confirmation...you didn't, you didn't remember what went on because you were too scared...it was a frightening thing because you only see the Bishop once a year. And, it was a big, a big thing but you were scared to death. You didn't know, what it was all about.

²⁹Interview with Sister Scholastica, 9 May 1991, St. John's.

³⁰Interview with Sister Scholastica, 9 May 1991, St. John's.

You were, I mean in school they told you what it was all about, but sure when [laughs] you go to the rails...you get scared to death, you know, you're there, shaking.³¹

Dorothy's husband points out half-seriously that the former custom that the bishop "slap" (gently tap) the candidates on the cheek, for strength as Christian soldiers, may have contributed to nervousness and fear.³²

Another parish family remembered the story of a grandfather's confirmation. In their account, fear arises from the young man's characteristic shyness at having to tell the bishop his chosen confirmation name.

...when Dad was confirmed and the names, that they always took a name. And ah, Dad you know was always a shy, like he's a very quiet man. And like he was always kind of a shy type of person. And when he went up to ah make his confirmation and the Bishop asked him what name he wanted to take, he was really shy and he wouldn't answer. He wouldn't say that he had a name picked, because he was really shy to speak to the Bishop. And he said that, that you know he still wouldn't say what it was. So uh, I don't know if it was the Bishop or if it was the Christian Brother like who had them all there from school said, "OK then he doesn't

³¹Interview with Joe and Dorothy Davis, 28 May 1991, near St. John's.

³²William Bausch explains the evolution of this custom from a kiss of peace, to a slap, to a sign of peace in A New Look at the Sacraments (Mystic, CT: Twenty-third Publications, 1990) 106-07. As noted in Chapter One, St. Cecilia's candidates now shake hands with the bishop or priest who confirms them.

want to say what name he wants so we can give him Mary." [laughs] So he was William Henry Mary Donnelly after that then.³³

Like the "slap," name-taking is no longer practiced today in St. Cecilia's. The family added that in their experience it was common for girls to have been given a male saint's name such as "Joseph" and boys to have been given the name "Mary," after the Blessed Virgin, at confirmation.

This family's descriptions of festivities in a Cape Broyle parish resemble the descriptions of festivities in newspaper accounts:

I just remembered this is another thing we used to do, to prepare for the Bishop. And ah he only came up that once, a year, and they'd build an arch, of boughs, over the, there in the back lane. An arch of boughs, where he could go in underneath...to make the occasion really special cause he only came up once a year, so. That's what I remember now, they, that they really decorated there, an archway of boughs, and the men'd be making it for the Bishop to pass under...and we had to, you had to, you had to kiss his ring. He had a ring and we had to kneel and kiss his ring. Bow on one knee and say your Grace or was it? Something like that. Whenever you met the Bishop, you had to bow and kiss his ring.³⁴

As they remembered traditional festivities which marked the bishop's visit as a singular annual event, two family

³³Sis Donnelly, in interview with Donnelly family, 13 May 1991, St. John's.

³⁴Interview with Donnelly family, 13 May 1991, St. John's.

members continued to laugh, recalling their fear as children at forgetting the formula for greeting the bishop. Newfoundland writer Wayne Johnston takes up this theme in his recent comic novel The Divine Ryans.³⁵ The novel's narrator is a nine-year-old Catholic boy from St. John's who discovers, only too late, his ignorance of the formula. Not even his aunt, a nun, saves him from puzzled humiliation:

Smiling at me, he [the archbishop] extended his hand, not to shake mine, I was fairly certain, since he did so palm down, but for what reason I had no idea.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Sister Louise motioning frantically for me to do something. I saw her rubbing one of her fingers, and making a frantic downward motion with her hands. What this meant, I could not begin to guess. I stared at her in panic, wondering what on earth she wanted me to do...the motion of her hands became so ferociously concentrated, that her whole body began to shake as if with sheer spite. She was rubbing her finger so vigorously she appeared to be trying to erase her knuckle, all the while staring at me with ever increasing exasperation, as if she believed I was only pretending not to understand. What by this time was obvious to everyone but me was that Sister Louise and the archbishop wanted me to kiss his ring.³⁶

Johnston conveys comically a popular fear of being caught

³⁵Wayne Johnston, The Divine Ryans (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990).

³⁶Johnston 108.

unprepared by tradition to meet the highest official in the archdiocese.

The pervasiveness of a theme of fear of the bishop in oral accounts may relate to a theme of the perception of difference in status and status behavior. The humor of the following story, said to originate in Harbour Grace, depends upon a tension between adopting or dispensing with the formula with which bishops and ordinary parishioners must address each other:

J: I'm reminded about a little story I heard one time, about this ah, down around the bay, Harbour Grace area, it's an old fella told me this, pretty near to being ninety-three, and is dead now for about five or six years. But anyway the Bishop at the time, used to send around word to the various parishes and say, you know, I'm coming down in towards the end of May or maybe in June month, for confirmation and you know he'd ah, make a request to have the church you know, done up in some kind of fine style, maybe there used to be some painting done or the roof done or, something like that.

And where he, ah, this fellow, Johnny McGarrity, was down in ah Harbour Grace area. So he ah sent him a letter and told him he was coming out for confirmation and asked him if the church was ready and in closing the letter he said, "Sincerely yours in Christ Archbishop-whoever it was"... "Archbishop of St. John's" or something like that.

Well anyway this fellow McGarrity he prepared the church and when everything was ready, see, he wrote back to the Bishop, told him you know that things had been done, he was all set for him to come down at the, the appropriate time to give out confirmation. But he didn't know how to close off the letter. See. When he got

the thing from the Bishop, "Sincerely yours in Christ" you know, and he figured that he had to do things a little different than, you know, just writing Johnny McGarrity. So anyway he closed off the letter by saying [emphatically] "I am yours by the Lord God, John McGarrity" [laughter].

M: Now whether that's true or not we don't know [laughs].

J: That's a name from down there, anyway, you know, and this fellow that told me that, he wasn't known to tell lies. So, I would imagine it happened, I don't know...³⁷

Given themes of fear and status difference in these oral accounts of past confirmations, perhaps it is not surprising that many parents of current candidates reacted positively to the Archbishop's humorous confirmation address at St. Cecilia's parish in 1991, and to his overall presentation of himself at the event:

S: What sort of impressed me about it was that I thought that the, you know, it was really nice the way the Archbishop came down into the church and spoke to the children and that.

M: Made it really informal.

S: Sort of personal like. Then afterwards like I found he went around to a lot of people and just said hello, you know. Like it was really nice because a lot of the times like with these things, you know, unless you go up to the Archbishop or you go up to the priest or something they don't really you know, go around to the people. And I found that he did that. You know, he seemed to be very friendly...

³⁷Interview with Donnelly family, 13 May 1991, St. John's. The name of the Harbour Grace teller has been changed.

M: And he didn't put them on the spot, either, with the children, when he asked them questions. He just came down and sort of, he gave them the answers, like if they didn't know, kind of relieved the--.³⁸

Parents and confirmation candidates interviewed described Archbishop MacDonald, whom most had never seen or met before, as "relaxed," "funny," and "informal."

MacDonald's speech was a series of catechetical questions and jokes addressed teasingly and at random to individual candidates seated with their families in church pews closest to the altar. His address did not cover the current state of the archdiocese or other controversial issues, but focused upon adolescents' preparation for and understanding of the sacrament of confirmation.

In group interviews, some candidates said they found especially funny the Archbishop's allusions to hockey (the game that was proceeding without them on television because the parish was attending confirmation, which lasted about three hours).³⁹ Adolescents also observed in the group interviews that some of their parents

³⁸Interview with Donnelly family, 13 May 1991, St. John's.

³⁹Hockey and religion have been metaphorically compared in Canadian scholarship and fiction. See Tom Sinclair-Faulkner's "Hockey in Canada," Religion and Culture in Canada, ed. Peter Slater (Waterloo, ON: CCSR, 1977) 383-405 and Johnston's Divine Ryans.

decided after the confirmation that MacDonald had presented himself better than the previous Archbishop.

Discussion

Together, written and oral accounts of encounters between bishops and ordinary Catholics at past and present confirmations provide a critical data base from which to begin to assess expectations ordinary parishioners and religious officials had and have of each other, both inside and outside of confirmation. Early Catholic bishops' correspondence contains judgments and complaints about the physical, moral, and spiritual demeanor of Newfoundland's "inhabitants," their unfamiliarity with tenets of Catholic Christian faith, or their resistance to catechism. Their letters show that they may have formed such opinions on the basis of their limited encounters with the people on confirmation and other clerical tours. It might also be assumed that bishops brought opinions inherited from their superiors with them into these encounters. In their writings to superiors, early Catholic bishops seem oddly unwilling to acknowledge that inhabitants may have found governmental policies of religious oppression, harsh economic conditions, and reliance or subjection to the ministries of renegade priests at least as "taxing" as they did themselves.

The archdiocesan newspaper's accounts of confirmations in the early twentieth century depict confirmation crowds less severely. According to these descriptions, bishops found faithful and loyal crowds awaiting them at confirmation, unlike the "lawless wretches," "animals," or uninstructed masses their predecessors said they encountered. Local forms of festivity are dubbed "tradition" by the newspaper accounts, but early correspondence did not mention the building of archways, firing of muskets, or other forms of celebration and episcopal welcome.

The sample of oral accounts presented here of encounters with bishops dates only as far back as the early twentieth century. As a group, the accounts indicate that varying degrees of fear of encountering the bishop pervade memories of confirmation. Their attitudes of apprehension, intense excitement, and seriousness seem only recently to have been replaced with feelings of relaxation, informality, humor, or even overt criticism of the archbishop's role in or outside confirmation.

The humorous account of a correspondence between Johnny McGarrity and his bishop demonstrates that ordinary Catholics, past or present, may turn a keen and critical eye toward the comedy of status inequality and the verbal formulas which support status difference in

their religious community. The teller of this story guessed that the events happened only seven years ago. However, the family's doubts about the truth of the story and their attributing it to the personal experience of a 93-year-old Harbour Grace man would seem to place it, whether fact or fiction, farther back into the past.

This narrative is remarkable as an oral account because its humor turns upon (1) status formula in written communication between the official and the folk, and (2) a parishioner's attempt to represent himself in what are conventionally a bishop's terms. There is a meta-awareness of the dynamics between orality, literacy, and status. The humor also envisions status reversal, elevation, or equalization, an ironic foreshadowing of the real 1990 newspaper letter from an angry parishioner to Archbishop MacDonald. Printed for all to see in the Catholic paper, the "There is Anger" letter records what the writer and perhaps others may have thought but would not say to an archbishop in the context of confirmation. Archbishop MacDonald's joking with adolescent candidates in his 1991 confirmation address may suggest exchange between real (or rhetorical) status equals, but status differences at confirmation ordinarily impede serious dialogue between the pulpit and the pew.

Both officials and ordinary Catholics, past and present, seem to be limited in what they can or will say to each other in their encounters at confirmation. Officials' correspondence to other officials, and parishioners' oral exchanges with other parishioners seems to reveal more about what ordinary Catholics and officials actually think and expect of each other. Direct or extensive communication of expectations between bishops and parishioners is more rare, inside or outside confirmation. One of the rarer finds, the open letter from a parishioner to Archbishop MacDonald, expresses an ordinary Catholic's expectation, whether old or new, that an archbishop move beyond the limited encounter with people on a confirmation tour to understand an ordinary Catholic's lived experience.

The expectation that a bishop address issues of social, political, or economic import which hover in the context of the celebration of confirmation may not be new. In Newfoundland's social, political, and economic history there has been more than one occasion where issues of enormous concern to average Newfoundlanders may have impinged upon the experience of all parties at confirmation. Written accounts suggest that Archbishop Roche responded to the context of the 1930s depression by recognizing economic hardship in his speech. Roche seems

to have attributed responsibility to nature, the decline of the fisheries, rather than culture, the governmental or local social responses to the crisis.

In his article "Religion in Newfoundland: The Churches and Social Ethics,"⁴⁰ John Williams makes the claim that none of the leaders of the several denominations of Christianity in Newfoundland dared to criticize unscrupulous shipowners and local government for consciously maintaining unethical labour standards which led to (and continued after) the loss of 253 ordinary working men who went to sea with the sealing ship Newfoundland in 1914. Williams cites Harold Horwood's account of the working conditions of such men before their untimely deaths:

The hardships they endured were compounded by the greed of the shipowners, who refused to provide clothing or safety equipment. The men had no meals to cook or any way to cook them: for weeks and months they lived on sea biscuit and tea. Even their drinking water was polluted with blood and seal fat until it stank. They slept like cattle in ships' holds without bedding.⁴¹

⁴⁰John Williams, "Religion in Newfoundland: The Churches and Social Ethics," Religion and Culture in Canada, ed. Peter Slater (Waterloo, ON: CCSR, 1977) 95-116.

⁴¹Harold Horwood, foreword, Death on the Ice, by Cassie Brown (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1972) vii-ix. Cited in Williams 104.

The lack of archdiocesan response to the contemporary crisis of sexual abuse is consistent with Williams' observation that Newfoundland churches support, rather than question, the status quo. A letter dated 1827, written in Latin by Newfoundland Bishop Thomas Scallan to a superior, reveals that almost one hundred fifty years ago, a Roman Catholic priest appears to have been punished by the church for similar abuses of priestly power:

...it is a matter of the utmost grievance that Father Samuel Burgess, who recently was suspended and departed from this Island, has for a long time here been a stumbling stone and a rock of scandal for the faithful; staggering even on his hands almost daily for drunkenness through the main streets, and--a thing unheard of here--sneakily bringing in male youths into my house to "spend the night" with him--a matter which became known to me only very recently and after a long interval....⁴²

Burgess was suspended and died in Ireland not long after his suspension,⁴³ but another "long interval" appears to have passed during which the highest Roman Catholic official in Newfoundland knew nothing of abuses of clerical power which occurred under his nose, at the expense of young Newfoundlanders.

⁴²Thomas Scallan to Peter Caprano, St. John's, Newfoundland, 29 September 1827, in Byrne 347-350.

⁴³Byrne 347.

Early written accounts allude to confirmation tours to present bishops and other high church officials in Newfoundland, and elsewhere, in heroic terms. Despite the harshness of their judgments of ordinary people, earlier Newfoundland bishops on tours appear to have entered at least more physically than their later counterparts into the lived experience of parishioners, the trappings of daily life on land and sea in Newfoundland. The means of transportation available at the time probably set the standards of physical comfort during such trips. Episcopal travel today is easier but leaves bishops with the challenge of bridging subtle, ideological gaps between folk and official positions. Yet the degree to which bishops were represented in the past as particularly heroic for doing briefly or longer what many of the poorest Newfoundlanders did every day to survive on land and sea is a measure of how much farther up and far away from the ordinary man or woman a bishop stood on the ladders of religious, social, and economic status. Representations of bishops as true "men of the people" may also reflect wishes in either camp that this were so.

To what degree, if any, could or can ordinary Catholics and officials know or judge one another after encountering at confirmations? Opportunities for crowds

or bishops to get to know each other, and judge each other on that basis, are limited during a confirmation tour, as a letter to the present archbishop has pointed out. Time at each crowded stop on the tour was and is limited. Early bishops and many members of their "flock" did not even speak the same language. Early letters reveal that many Newfoundland inhabitants spoke Irish, while officials spoke only English, and conducted masses and sacraments like confirmation in Latin, the language of the church. Newfoundland Catholics have only been participating in English versions of these liturgies since change in the 1960s, after the Second Vatican Council.

Finally, traditional formulas themselves help limit the range of communication between folk and official. Verbal, decorative, and ritual formulas predetermine folk-official greetings, map confirmation activities, and create a uniformly festive veneer of welcome and mutual approval, preventing spontaneous communication, and maintaining status difference. In the absence of a purposeful, planned attempt, from outside or inside the community, to supplement or overcome the limits of communicating via traditional formulas, structure may

continue to dominate communitas, within and outside confirmation.⁴⁴

To what degree do Catholic parishioners and bishops share the same expectations of each other in and outside confirmation? While a critical letter appeared in a local newspaper, the Archbishop's performance of his confirmation duties at St. Cecilia's seems nevertheless to have pleased many parents and candidates. Most persons I interviewed seemed satisfied that the Archbishop displayed a sense of humor at confirmation and addressed his remarks directly to adolescent candidates. No one seemed to expect a state-of-the-community speech at confirmation addressing sexual abuse or other political or economic issues. It is important to distinguish between what parishioners expect of an archbishop at confirmation and their judgments of his overall competence in office. However, candidates' comments about their parents initial skepticism about the new archbishop cannot be assumed to refer only to the styles of his confirmation address, but must be taken within the context of widespread concerns about better leadership.

A consensus about confirmation's meaning as an

⁴⁴Victor Turner, The Ritual Process (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1969) passim.

encounter is hard to claim on the basis of this data. Oral and written accounts of confirmations point instead to a lack of spontaneous discourse between ordinary Catholics and high church officials at the event. Spontaneous discourse was better cultivated and achieved at the Winter Commission's public hearings in local parishes and at parish response meetings to the Commission's findings. These meetings allowed ordinary Catholics to express their deepest feelings, thoughts, and concerns about their religious community, its leaders, and their performance, though participants still questioned how and whether their concerns would reach the ears of those in power in archdiocesan administration.⁴⁵ Confirmation in these oral and written accounts emerges as an occasion where parishioners and bishops do assess each other, but where a silence upon pressing issues in the community normally prevails. As such, the sacrament appears to be an encounter with a potential for, rather than a history of, folk-official communication which might move beyond formula to change the spiritual and social status quo in the local community.

⁴⁵I attended several such response meetings during summer 1990, before my fieldwork in St. Cecilia's began. Meetings were well attended by ordinary parishioners who contributed and recorded many comments and ideas.

Figure 3.1. Controversial cartoon which appeared in
 a local newspaper after the arrival of the new
 Archbishop. © 1991, Peter Richardson and
 The Sunday Express. Not to be reprinted
 without permission.

Figure 3.1. Controversial cartoon which appeared in a local newspaper after the arrival of the new Archbishop. © 1991, Peter Pickersgill and The Sunday Express. Not to be reprinted without permission.



CHAPTER FOUR

MATURITY AND PLAY AT RETREAT

Midway on the path through life I found myself
in a dark wood...but to tell you about the good
that I found there, I'll lengthen a few things
I might have shortened.

Dante, Divine Comedy¹

They sent us out to play games in the woods.

Folklorist, remembering preparation
for First Holy Communion in Brittany
twenty years ago

Whether or not the Catholic sacrament of confirmation has something to do with maturity is a theologically touchy question which has generated about seventeen centuries of scholarly debate.² For Roman Catholic parishes, however, whether their adolescent candidates are mature enough for confirmation remains an obvious and critically relevant concern. Official and local voices contribute to this discussion. Even within one parish there are the distinct views of separate folk groups: children, parents, lay teachers, and clergy.

This chapter explores local norms of spiritual, social, and corporeal maturity by looking at the way

¹Dante Alighieri, La Divina Commedia, ed. Giuseppe Vandelli (Milan: Hoepli, 1983) 3-4 [Inf. I, verses 1-9].

²The controversy surrounding appropriate candidate age is described in Chapter One and below.

confirmation candidates in St. Cecilia's parish play at a preparatory retreat. Emic understandings of maturity are used to critique the theology of confirmation.

Adolescents react to prescribed forms of play at the retreat by inventing their own play forms. Through play they express conformity and non-conformity to local norms of maturity.

The first part of the chapter is a theological overview of the sacrament, introducing the official separation of spiritual and physical maturity in the Roman Catholic theology of confirmation. In Part Two, I present several levels of play at the retreat the parish held to prepare the candidates. Candidates' responses to a series of game-like retreat exercises demonstrate adherence to and deviance from parish norms of mature behavior and understanding. Their reactions call for consideration of the rootedness of their maturity in time, experience, and bodily existence.

PART I: Theological Overview of Confirmation Sacraments and Their Foundations

In Catholic theology the word "sacrament" may mean one of "seven sacraments," Jesus himself, or the

Christian church.³ Broadly speaking, "sacrament" refers to signs and means of communicative encounters between God and people.⁴ Jesus is a "sacrament" in the sense that he is both divine and human, and because he is believed to have been sent among humans by God, as a living sign and means of communication of God's love for humans. Likewise the Church is a sacrament, as a group of people who are in relation with this God, and as a set of liturgical traditions, the ritualized communicative activities through which this relation is maintained. In its historical usage, however, the term "sacrament" has

³For more on viewing "sacrament" as Jesus and Church see Edward Schillebeeckx, Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God (1960; New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963); Raphael Schulte, "Sacraments," Sacramentum Mundi, ed. Karl Rahner, vol. 5 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970) 378-84; William Bausch, A New Look at the Sacraments, 2nd ed. (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990) 3-31; and Joseph Martos, Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981) 7-8, 65-69, and 139-159. The writings of Peter Lombard and the documents of late medieval and later church councils establish seven sacraments [Martos 65-69; Bausch 100-01; Elizabeth Rogers, Peter Lombard and the Sacramental System (1917; Merrick, NY: Richwood, 1976); Joseph Gill, The Council of Florence (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1959) 307; H. J. Schroeder, Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent (1941; Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1978).

⁴For a review of the official Catholic vision of sacraments as both instruments and means of divine saving grace ex opere operato (as works being worked) see page 297 of D. J. Kennedy, "Sacraments," The Catholic Encyclopedia, ed. Charles Herbermann, et al., vol. 13 (New York: Appleton, 1912) 295-305 and Schulte 378-80.

not always been so broad as to dissuade scholars from devoting great efforts to enumerating "the sacraments."⁵ Today the seven sacraments include the rites of baptism, eucharist (communion), reconciliation (confession/penance), confirmation, matrimony, ordination (holy orders) and the anointing of the sick (extreme unction).⁶

Each of these rites merits a place among the seven sacraments according to traditional official rationales.⁷ All seven rites are said to be "instituted by Christ,"⁸ which generally means that something Christ did in his time on earth set a precedent for them. Schulte observes

⁵Martos 68: "Lists of sacraments by various authors ranged from twelve all the way up to thirty. On the more conservative side, a book of sentences compiled before 1150 treated only five ecclesiastical sacraments, and Peter Abelard around the same period enumerated six, leaving out holy orders."

⁶See Walter Abbott and Joseph Gallagher, eds., The Documents of Vatican II (Piscataway, NJ: America/New Century, 1966). Schulte's list (378) omits reconciliation. I have included the older names for ease of reference.

⁷Gill (307) describes a portion of the Bull Exultate Deo of November 22, 1439 "...on the sacraments stating their number as seven, distinguishing in them the two necessary elements of 'matter' and 'form,' and declaring that three of them, Baptism, Confirmation, and Orders, may never be repeated as they give a 'character to the soul.' Each sacrament is then treated of separately, to clarify what is its matter, its form, its ordinary minister, its effect."

⁸See Schulte's summary of findings of the Council of Trent (378).

that sacraments' being instituted in this way relegates them, and their effects, to a domain beyond the control of the Church.⁹ Nevertheless, the arguments for the institution of any given sacrament rest upon ecclesiastical citation and interpretation of instances of institution in New and even Old Testament scripture. Such citations have been repeatedly employed by canonical authorities, and, in turn, by religious people to whom these rationales have been conveyed through various channels.¹⁰

In some cases, as Bausch argues for confirmation, the scriptural citations for institution are inconsistent with each other, or they bear no clear-cut resemblance to liturgical practices that later come to define the sacrament.¹¹ The early third century writings of Tertullian and Hippolytus, rather than scripture itself, contain the earliest references to what is now known as

⁹Schulte 380.

¹⁰The concept of "institution" of sacraments, sometimes accompanied by citation or discussion of various scriptural precedents, is transmitted at St. Cecilia's parish by word of mouth or literature, in the catechetical preparation of confirmation candidates, in readings/sermons at Sunday masses preceding confirmation, and in the organizational discussion at the confirmation planning meeting.

¹¹Bausch (102-03) compares the two traditional citations for institution, Acts 8:17 and 19:6, with other confirmation-like references in the New Testament.

confirming: the anointing and laying hands on previously water-baptized initiates while invoking the Holy Spirit.¹² The West gave bishops the more or less exclusive duty of confirming, separating confirmation in time from the rite of baptism. The ages deemed suitable for confirmation vary historically and geographically thereafter. Variation of the customary age and delays are not surprising given (1) the greater distances bishops eventually needed to cover to confirm larger numbers of candidates throughout expanding Christendom, and (2) the greater importance ascribed to infant baptism, rather than confirmation, in attaining salvation.¹³

Theological Differentiation: Baptism and Confirmation

While baptism proceeds visibly¹⁴ by immersion or pouring of water upon the candidate while invoking the Trinity, confirmation proceeds by anointing the candidate with oil, invoking the Holy Spirit, and laying on of

¹²Bausch 93.

¹³Martos (212-13) and Bausch (94-97) identify bishops' travel as a factor in the separation of the rites over time. Both sources mention that a ruling from the Council of Elvira (circa 300) and St. Augustine's teaching on original sin helped produce the tendency to rush to baptize infants in the interests of salvation, while delaying confirmation.

¹⁴Sacraments proceed both visibly and invisibly, as "visible signs of invisible grace" (Schulte 380).

hands. Difference in the "ordinary minister" of the two sacraments has also been the norm in the Western Rite.¹⁵ Though the matter, form, and ministers of confirmation and baptism may differ, the invisible processes and effects of confirmation and baptism remain more difficult to differentiate.¹⁶ Confirmation has not been distinguished definitively from baptism by the argument that each sacrament conveys particular graces. The Roman Catholic Church has never officially identified the "character" that confirmation bestows, only affirming that it, like baptism, has one.¹⁷

Both baptism and confirmation are initiation sacraments which involve the Holy Spirit's contact with the initiates. In either sacrament, the Spirit may be expected to "descend upon" and mark the candidate, by analogy with its descent upon Jesus at or after his

¹⁵Bausch (95 and 101) points out the West's tradition of reserving the power to confirm for a bishop, rather than priests. The rule has now relaxed.

¹⁶I am using "matter" and "form" loosely here to take in sacramental actions, materials, and verbal formula as "elements of the outward sign," acknowledging also Schillebeeckx' clarification that the medieval terms "matter" and "form" are not as binary as the older patristic terms "verbum" and "elementum," which broke the sacrament into a heavenly part (word of faith) and an earthly part (thing or an action) (Schillebeeckx 92-93).

¹⁷Piet Fransen, "Confirmation," Sacramentum Mundi, ed. Karl Rahner, vol. 1 (New York: Herder and Herder 1968) 408 and 409.

As encounters between God and humans which feature involvement of the Holy Spirit, confirmation and baptism share a complex of official meanings which make their difference harder to establish. They are separated ontologically and historically in time, being discrete sets of acts and acts distanced again from each other within the human lifespan. Despite differences in substance, time, and social context, two questions remain about confirmation in relation to baptism: (1) does confirmation do what baptism does, confer the Holy Spirit, all over again, and (2) if not, what might that "something else" be that distinguishes the action of the Holy Spirit in confirmation?

Spiritual Maturity and the Problem of Time

Thomas Aquinas says that spiritual maturity is what distinguishes the action of the Holy Spirit in confirmation from its action at baptism,²¹ but he posits paradoxically that this maturity is realized in candidates independently of the passage of time. In the third part of the Summa (3a.72) Aquinas says

²¹Refer to questions 3a.65 and 3a.72, Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, vol. 56 (3a.60-5), trans. David Bourke and vol. 57 (3a.66-72), trans. James J. Cunningham (Blackfriars/McGraw, 1975), questions 65 and 72. See also confirmation references in Abbott and Gallagher (28, 160, 379, 492, and 597).

strengthening and growth of the soul are separate from maturity of the body. In his view, spiritual maturity associated with confirmation does not depend upon the physical, temporal maturity of the candidates.

Though Aquinas divorces spiritual maturity from aging, he uses a natural metaphor to convey his conception of the connection between baptism and confirmation: "...confirmation is related to baptism as growth to generation."²² Hence his characterization of the spiritual maturity confirmation conveys rests upon a contradictory ontology. The differentiation between seed and sapling, child and adult, depends upon change through time, the process of aging, and, if there is conscious being, the acquisition of experience.

Like Aquinas, Bausch carefully dissociates confirmation maturity from a maturity rooted in the passage of time. The spiritual maturity confirmation conveys is thus distanced from social privileges, such as the exercise of choice, which accrue upon individuals in communities as they age. Though he presents other approaches,²³ Bausch warns against the "historical

²²Aquinas, Summa 3a.72.

²³Bausch points out how it is both right and wrong to see confirmation as a sacrament of maturity, commitment, or strengthening (106-07 and 112-27).

misunderstanding which diminishes the primary importance of baptism," the hypothesis that the receipt of the gift of the Holy Spirit in baptism is "completed" by mature acceptance of the Holy Spirit in confirmation. The corollary to this "completeness" by adult choice in confirmation, is, unfortunately, an "incompleteness" due to immaturity, in infant baptism. The immaturity of a confirmand who is biologically and experientially too young would pose a similar theological threat.

Sacramentum Mundi warns that

Some theologians define confirmation as the sacrament of Christian maturity, which is acceptable, provided the term is not taken unwittingly in a biological or psychological sense, but in the dogmatic sense of Christian fullness in the Spirit.²⁴

Schillebeeckx comes close to acknowledging the problem posed by the youth of a confirmand. He points out that an infant benefits no less by baptism because it is biologically unable to know God or approach its baptism with faith. Mothers, by way of analogy, do, and should do, what is best for infants, regardless of their unawareness of the process or its benefit. Once "grown up," however, the infant must "make the grace it has received personally its own."²⁵ The maternal analogy

²⁴Fransen 410.

²⁵Schillebeeckx 111.

works less well if used over again for confirmation in adolescence, and even less if a spiritual maturity is associated with the later sacrament.

The disconnectedness of life-time maturity with the time of administration of confirmation coincides with a geographical and historical variation of ages deemed proper for administration of confirmation, before and well after the Council of Trent established proper age for the sacrament as no younger than seven and no later than twelve.²⁶ Confirmation in the East was and is given with baptism and eucharist to infants; Western confirmation in the middle ages was put off until as late as age fifteen.²⁷ After a 1910 papal decree, confirmation was combined with "solemn Communion" and administered around age seven, Fransen reports.²⁸ Parents of current St. Cecilia's confirmands, confirmed in a variety of Newfoundland parishes, describe having received confirmation along with eucharist before they reached adolescence, that is to say approximately five to

²⁶This happened in the sixteenth century. See Bausch 107 or Schroeder's translation of the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent 54-55 (Canons 1-3 on confirmation, under the Seventh Session, "Reform"). Schroeder is cited fully above.

²⁷Fransen 408.

²⁸Fransen (408) seems to be referring to practice in Europe.

six years earlier than the age range presently favored for confirmation in the archdiocese.

Today, in the St. John's Roman Catholic archdiocese, the customary time is "grade eight" though an official archdiocesan guide points out it is "active membership in a parish and not physical presence in a grade eight class which constitutes readiness to celebrate the sacrament."²⁹ Eighth-graders in St. Cecilia's are between 13 and 15 years of age. In Newfoundland's western diocese the sacrament is administered somewhat later, in high school.

PART II: Parish Maturity and Retreat Play

Parish Norms of Maturity

Despite the official taboo on determining the right confirmation age, and the historic inconsistency of ages of administration, parents, clergy, lay leaders, and confirmation candidates in St. Cecilia's connect age with religious and social maturity. Sister Scholastica, a no-nonsense nun and parish school principal who dared me, with charismatic sarcasm, to sit with her and the rest of the heretics at a parish supper table, offered this observation of eighth-grade confirmation candidates:

²⁹Page 5 of Archdiocese of St. John's, "Pastoral Norms for the Celebration of Confirmation," unpublished policy paper, 1987.

At that age they're too, too young to curse and too old to cry...It's kind of a no man's land almost, they don't know where they are, they're not little kids anymore, and they're not really adults...we hardly know where they are sometimes and yet we're putting, we're asking them to make this religious commitment. I, I think it's the wrong time.³⁰

Many parishioners identify adolescence with rebellion against parental control, vulnerability to peer group pressures, and resultant ambivalence and confusion.

One father of a St. Cecilia's confirmand explains that he believes Catholic confirmation is as inclusively significant of physical maturity as a ceremony in Jewish tradition:

Confirmation I think in the RC church would be the same as a bar-mitzvah in the Jewish religion. It's like a coming-out, OK? So, ah, you know, they're thirteen, they're fourteen years old, it's puberty...the whole works there and it's, the start, OK, it's the start of, it's the kick-off to adulthood, I guess, or adolescence--, or whatever you want to call it. Whereas, with us, it was a lot earlier. You never even really understood the full, the full impact or the emphasis of it, right?³¹

Bausch's handbook specifically prohibits this broad an ecumenism.³² Rather than consulting theological

³⁰Interview with Sister Scholastica, 22 March 1991, St. John's.

³¹Interview with Joe and Dorothy Davis, 28 May 1991, near St. John's.

³²Bausch makes a point of discouraging the view of confirmation as a "kind of Christian bar-mitzvah, a coming of age, of physical maturity" (107).

guidebooks, however, parents may look to the sacrament's name for its meaning:

It's, it's actually, all that confirmation is, is exactly literally what the word says, a confirmation of your faith, your belief in it. It's as simple as that. Doesn't mean anything else. You know, so I mean, where does how somebody says their prayers or how often they go to church come into this statement of I, I, you know I am confirming my belief and my faith by going ahead with this. Cause, they have the ability to say no.³³

The two comments above express native notions of the age of confirmands as the start of adulthood, an age which brings with it biological and/or social abilities to understand and to choose a spiritual activity.

Connections such as these, between age, biology, experience, and spiritual and social maturity, characterize the emic concept of the sacrament. This vision of confirmation differs from the official theological view and makes parish confirmation a localized practice. Apart from and alongside its official representations in theology and Vatican policies, parish confirmation unfolds itself in a social context, the localized and individual beliefs of its participants, in rather than out of time.

³³Interview with Joe and Dorothy Davis, 28 May 1991, near St. John's.

Retreat Play: A Physical Description

It is a Monday morning in April. About twenty confirmation candidates make their way across a school yard for a day of retreat, to be held in St. Cecilia's parish hall. By week's end, four more such groups come and go, as I watch, take notes, and eventually join in with Jan, the confirmation coordinator, in running candidates through the retreat activities designed to prepare them to receive the sacrament of confirmation.

There is the sound of a distant stampede below us, as thirteen- to fifteen-year-old boys and girls mount the stairs and burst into the room. Jan directs them to sit down, in a circle, with us. She is cheerful and self-assured. I am nearly paralyzed. Like Harriet the Spy, I scribble nervously into my notebook my observations of those who surround me.³⁴

Every girl there has spent more time on her hairdo that morning than me. Wavy and curly perms on long hair are apparently the rage. The girls' bangs are teased, curled, or spiked defiantly upward. Eyeliner and mascara have been applied lightly and flawlessly. Other girls

³⁴Louise Fitzhugh, Harriet, The Spy (New York: Harper, 1964). This child-heroine of children's literature bears a striking resemblance to an ethnographer. Filling a notebook with nervous observations of her peers, Harriet pays her dues when they get their hands on her data.

sport only a translucent shade of lipgloss, no doubt the berry or kiwi flavors readily available for testing in nearby malls.³⁵ They whisper excitedly to each other. A few glance quietly, but not unkindly, towards me.

Post-punk hairways survive among the boys, blond and brown lawn-like textures at the top of the head, with razor-made ridges, fringes, and tails. Along with the girls they sport fluorescent pieces of clothing. One tall and serious young man's tight T-shirt reveals an upper bicep with a blue tattoo on it. His blond hair hangs long, in the spirit of Rock-N-Roll, around his gaunt cheeks. I note, however, a certain contrast. This fellow might accompany a boy farther down the circle into a PG-13 movie, if need be. The latter boy is wiry and small, his face plastered with freckles. His hair is a short furry crown. He may be eleven, or ten. A hush falls as Jan prepares to start. There is an almost audible aura of collective self-consciousness in the room. I wonder, if they are wondering, if I am wondering...just how old are they?

Structural Levels of Play

The confirmation retreat for this parish can be conceived of as one large form of play--serious play--at

³⁵Occasionally I met candidates, by chance, at local shopping malls on weekends.

four structural levels. As a religious activity in a specific cultural context, the parish confirmation retreat was presented verbally and organized by the parish to a degree as play. The parish confirmation coordinator, Jan, began retreat day for each of five classes by explaining that retreat meant a kind of break or time away from school, in which their participation, though serious, was also optional, unlike school.³⁶ Like play, the retreat would also have a theme to guide activities: "You Are A Gift."

Below this first structural level, the representation of the retreat, there is a second level of play: game-like or playful retreat activities. Candidates were invited to draw and discuss their own image of God, listen to the story of The Frog Prince told as guiding allegory, and watch an action-packed film about Catholic culture hero Archbishop Oscar Romero.³⁷ While these activities are designed and presented by adults, for a specific religious purpose (confirmation preparation), they also involve imaginative creativity, absorption, free participation, and heightened self-

³⁶It is perhaps worth noting that "opting" out of retreat meant returning to school.

³⁷After the recent crisis of authority in the local church, Romero offered confirmands an alternate model of episcopal leadership.

awareness on the part of the candidates, characteristics of play.³⁸ Structural and functional parallels between play and religious activities and experience have been pointed out by play theorists Huizinga and Caillois, as well as by Hugo Rahner, Elizabeth Mouledoux, and Frank Manning.³⁹ A more troublesome conformity between play and religious values in early forms of Protestantism has been explored by George Eisen.⁴⁰

A third structural category of play in the retreat is in the students' movements: circular, random, or self-directed seating arrangements; imitative gestures during film action scenes and imitative sounds; and physical impressions of adult roles and actions.

³⁸These and other characteristics of play are identified in David Lancy and Allan Tindall, eds., The Anthropological Study of Play: Problems and Prospects (Cornwall, NY: Leisure Press, 1976) and by Roger Caillois, Man, Play, and Games, trans. Meyer Barash (1958; NY: Free Press, 1961).

³⁹See Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens (Boston: Beacon, 1950); Caillois; Elizabeth Mouledoux, "Theoretical Considerations and A Method for the Study of Play," Lancy and Tindall 38-50; Frank Manning, "The Rediscovery of Religious Play: A Pentecostal Case," Lancy and Tindall 139-47; and Hugo Rahner, Man at Play, trans. Brian Battershaw and Ed Quinn (London: Compass/Burns and Oates, [1965?]). Rahner is cited by Mouledoux 43 and by Jorg Splett, "Play," Sacramentum Mundi, ed. Karl Rahner, vol. 5 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970) 31-33.

⁴⁰See George Eisen, "The Concepts of Time, Play and Leisure in Early Protestant Religious Ethic," Play and Culture 4.3 (1991): 223-36.

Elements of mimicry, competition, and chance, some of Caillois' categories of play, are present in various combinations.

The fourth category of retreat play is generated most exclusively by candidates themselves, with little to no adult prescription or control.⁴¹ This category takes in verbal and linguistic forms of play such as the jokes, puns, repartee, parodies, and trick retorts offered by the adolescents to teaching questions.

Exercise 1: Adolescent Images of God

After Jan explained the Trinity at the retreat, saying "God sent the Spirit, with Jesus, on earth but God was not on earth," candidates drew or selected words to convey their image of God, which they recorded on paper. Eighty-three of the responses to the "Image of God" exercise were contributed by students to the study. Half of the respondents relied on sayings alone to convey their "image of God." Most of the remaining half relied on word/drawing combinations, although ten respondents conveyed their image by drawing alone. Both boys and girls appear to have preferred to convey their "image of

⁴¹Mary Knapp and Herbert Knapp, One Potato, Two Potato: The Folklore of American Children (New York: Norton, 1976) 1, remark that much of children's time, like a great portion of the "play" at this retreat, is often supervised and organized by adults.

God" by sayings first, combined forms second, and drawings third.

Tempting as it may be to conclude that these Catholic parish schoolchildren envision God more verbally than visually, contextual variables also affected their responses, as the following excerpt from notes reveals:

Two boys consulted with each other in a half joking way, trying to come up with words. Finally, Jan called on a kid named Terry, next to her. He says he has "God as in the world around us, in nature." Another boy says under his breath "very poetic" and Jan reprimands him a bit, saying that people couldn't be made fun of, whatever they had to say they could say and that was to be OK and accepted. Next, a girl said "creator, giver of all life," another girl, "sign of life," another girl "sign of hope," another says "helper," "life," "life," "forgiving us so that we can start over again," another said "bird, cloud, moon, earth," another kid said "nature," another "creator," a boy said "body and blood," another kid said "caring," another said "person," then one of the two boys who were consulting with each other said "I see God as everlasting peace." On his sheet [which I could see] he had the word "everlasting" careted in over the original sentence with just "peace" in it. Tommy next to him likewise had "everlasting" in his: "I see God as everlasting love and warmth."⁴²

Students' answers, whether visual or verbal, were limited by amount of response time, which varied from day to day. Responses from students seated next to each other show many similarities. Kernels, such as "body and blood," by

⁴²Notes on Retreat Week, 15-19 April 1991, St. Cecilia's parish hall, St. John's.

which candidates referred orally at the retreat to their image were sometimes set confusedly within written responses. A saying kernelized as "body and blood" reads, "He is our body and blood of us and others." Students' words and designs echo Jan's suggestions to envision God as nature, as a person, or as a presence. Despite confusion, repetition, and echoes of suggestions, complex and unique drawings and sayings were submitted. The verbal and visual responses are summarized in Tables 4.1 and 4.2 at the end of this chapter.

Verbal responses in Table 4.1 are grouped into three pattern categories. The first pattern includes images of God which involve emotions or qualities of human relationships, self-consciousness, and other personal or abstract states. Participle forms which might be taken either as adjectives or as gerunds were common. These forms might either be describing God as "loving" or equating God with the act of "loving" itself.

The second pattern includes descriptions of God as a person or an actor. These responses describe God as human or divine, and assign God roles such as master, helper, guide, guardian, father, peacemaker, ruler, healer, friend, saviour, creator, and observer. Although many of these action roles might appear gender-neutral, the construction "he is..." was used frequently. Many

drawings in Table 4.2 also feature male figures, often bearded, with priestly clothing and gestures associated with priests or pictures of Jesus. One notable exception is a drawing of a woman, captioned "a loving and kind person." This response was submitted by a female candidate.

The third category of verbal responses, and many of the drawn responses, identify God with non-human beings or broader abstractions. God is identified as nature, life, a spirit, light, a saint, an angel, prayer, church, a "burning bush," a "tongue of fire," and "the eyes of souls." Drawings suggest additional imagery such as planets, plants, stars, flames, and hearts. Complex illustrations of landscapes, panoramas of planets and stars, and figures in motion indicate respondents' efforts to move beyond one-to-one equations into sets of relationships and world view. Drawings and verbal responses submitted together often differed. This suggests that students may be considering many possible images of God.

It is unclear whether students believe in, or even understand, the images they submitted. Students in group interviews complained that they failed to understand much of what they were being taught in their religion classes at the parish school. The following excerpt from a focus

group dialogue shows that students were confused by the concept of the Trinity, perceived a non-fit between the story of Genesis and evolutionary theory, and were frankly more interested in discussions about sex during religion class:

E: So what kinds of stuff do you, what do you get out of religion class, I mean what do you think about what they say, about relationships and all that stuff?

Boy: I don't mind the stuff about, the stuff that we're doing now, on sexual intercourse [students laugh] and all that stuff, yeah but, I mean that stuff where he gets into the spirits and all that stuff, Miss, drive you nuts.

E: Like what.

Girl: It's confusing.

G: Yeah.

B: It is, Miss, like first he's dead, and then he says, "the Spirit's with you," then, they says something else.

G: You see, he's dead but he's not, like he's dead, but his spirit is with you like. [Boy makes inaudible comment, group laughs.]

E: What?

B: [boy's name] just said that if there's apes--

B: Yeah, before him--

B: --yeah, apes before, like the men-ape, before us?

B: Cave man. Cave men, Miss.

B: All weird.

- B: It's all weird. Like, there's apes, and there's Jesus, and there's the, Vikings, then there was us, no okay, it goes, the apes, Jesus, the Vikings, then it's Indians, and then it's us, right?
- B: What happened to cave men?
- B: Yeah what about cave men?
- B: Adam and Eve.
- B: Yeah, Miss, how can that be?...Miss but they says that first it was Adam and Eve, right? Then there's Jesus and them, but then it says in the other books it said that it was apes, and then it was--
- G: Then Adam and Eve, then it's Jesus and all that.
- B: But they says the only two people that was on the earth was Adam and Eve.
- B: Right, but then how--
- B: Then, then there are dinosaurs--
- G: Like how did the world begin and how [many voices join in, drowning her out]--was born, and how Jesus and God, cause like Jesus and God are two different people right. [Pause] Aren't they?
- B: There's three, there's four of them. The Spirit, the Holy, The Holy Spirit--
- G: The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit--
- B: The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and Amen. [laughter]
- G: Amen is--
- G: Amen is just the--
- B: There's three of them Miss and then they says they're all the same one, and Jesus, they said, Jesus is God's father, or something.

G: No, God is Jesus' father, and the Holy Spirit--
[pauses]

B: Right.

G: I don't know, he's not related.

B: Right, Miss, see, and then he says they're all three of them, are all, just one person.

G: Just one person yeah.

B: First, father, God is Jesus' father, and Jesus is, father's, God's son--

G: And the Holy Spirit is Jesus.

B: Right and then he says they're all, one person.

B: I can't--

B: Where do they get the weirdest ideas? I don't understand. It's so confusing.⁴³

Later in the same interview students added that some parts of what they were being taught about God did make sense to them. Students also seemed to equate sense with the style of presentation:

E: So...what of it makes any sense?

B: Miss, the only I think is, is, Miss, is when it's Jesus himself, when he's back, when he was getting crucified and he was teaching and everything. Just him. Can't understand when you gets a bit ahead, when Jesus dies, the Holy Spirit comes, and then God comes.

G: That's confusing, but like he said, like it's more, as, when it's just Jesus himself--

B: I think the only people that can understand--

⁴³Focus group interview with Class #4/E Group, 3 June 1991, St. Cecilia's school, St. John's.

G: [inaudible]--people? It's like that's the most understandable part--

B: The only people I think that they can understand is, is the priests and the nuns.

G: --like the priest, with the Archbishop, or Father Hal and them. When they explains it we understand...

B: ...like the priest does over there, Miss [referring to archbishop's confirmation sermon] they puts a bit of jokes and that in with it.⁴⁴

While these excerpts reveal a lack of full understanding of central tenets in Roman Catholicism, they also reveal extremely adult forms of doubt. Though adolescents' belief in their expressed images cannot be asserted, neither can it be ruled out. Many students admitted in interviews that they did pray on occasion, especially in times of trouble or sickness. One mother in the parish offered a story of an experience one of her children had had around confirmation age. This experience seems to be the exception rather than the rule, although confirmation candidates who may have had such experiences were probably not likely to have revealed them among laughing peers in focus group interviews:

Two years ago when she went to high school
[school outside the parish] ah, she came home
from school one day and she said "Mom I saw

⁴⁴Focus group interview with Class #4/E Group, 3 June 1991, St. Cecilia's school, St. John's.

something today" she said "Mommy," she said, "You're not going to believe this" and she was almost crying in the kitchen. Thirteen years old, or, fourteen years old. And I said "What did you see my love?" She said "Mom, we had, our French teacher came in," she said "Mom he was being really contrary, really mean," and so she said, "[sighs] Mom I didn't know what to do" she said "you know I hate being in the classroom when the teacher's acting really mean and contrary." So I said "Well what did you do," and she said "Mom I started praying for him." I said "God bless you," I said. "Good for you" I said, "pray for him, it's all you can do and it's the only thing that's going to change him anyhow."

And she said "Mom," she said "So, I was praying for him" she said "and I felt like looking out the window, like all of a sudden like I felt like drawn to look out the window?" And there's a, right next to [the high school] there's a [building]. She said "Mom when I looked out the window" she said "I saw Jesus." And I said, "What do you mean?" She said "Mom," she said "I saw an image of Jesus" she said, "Mom," and she said he had a, it was just like a long white gown, and she said it was flowing and she said the front of it was open and she said "I could see his heart," it was like it was exposed? And she said he had his hands out like this. Ohh, this gives me the shivers when I'm telling you. She said he had his hands out like this and here we were, I see us now the two of us plain as day. I started to get, I said, "Are you serious?" I saw, I never saw a vision in my life. And she said Mom she said yes she said.

I said "Well what did you do?" She said "Mom I got such a fright I didn't know what to do" she said, "I, I turned my head in and I looked down at the book" and she was, she said "I started praying" and she said "Oh God if this is real, I'll look again" she said, "if it's not real will you take it away" she said, "I don't want to see it again."

She looked out again and it was still there and she kept looking at it and as she looked at it, like this went on for about three minutes. She could see it you know like it didn't, like, fade away, it, like, she could see it, move, off, just like this and it like, didn't exist no more, and she watched it go. Now can you believe that? Fourteen years old, she saw a vision like that.⁴⁵

The candidates' verbal and visual responses to the "Image of God" exercise provide a landscape of imagery which adheres to and departs from the imagery of official tradition. Within this landscape students may be expressing profound, individual religious experience or experimenting with presentations of religion which they doubt or fail to understand.

Exercise 2: Religious Allegory (The Frog Prince, AT 440)

Jan read a short version of "The Frog Prince" (AT 440) during the retreat.⁴⁶ Her version was more like a plot outline of the tale which included several Marchen formulas. She prefaced her reading by taping a Xerox of a crowned frog to a television screen and introducing him to the listeners as "George." Jan unfolded this version

⁴⁵Interview with Sherry McCarthy, 22 May 1991, St. John's.

⁴⁶Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, The Types of the Folktale, 2nd rev. ed., Folklore Fellows Communications No. 184 (Helsinki: FFC, 1961) 149-50.

of the first of Grimm's Household Tales⁴⁷ as a religious allegory by a series of teasing questions designed to elicit several parallels. (1) Frog equals people--who may not be at their best due to feeling unloved or behaving badly. (2) The princess who kisses the frog equals the Holy Spirit, the "role of the Church," and by extension of those who, touched by the Holy Spirit in confirmation, belong to the Church. (3) Frog-kissing, Jan explained, is what the Holy Spirit does, and is also "our task," "what we are called to do" for other people. Candidates were then asked to consider when they themselves acted or felt like frogs, and to name some people who were "frog-kissers" for them.

This activity met on one morning with some of the following repartée. To "This is George," the Xeroxed frog, candidates responded by exclaiming "Kermit," "Is he a boy or a girl," "frog to frog," "Georgina," and "Curious George." Several identified George as really "a prince." A smaller boy near me asked "do we have to pin a tail on him or what?" I pointed out he had no tail. The barrage of jokes continued: "George is a monkey," "I heard that one in kindergarten," and "buddy's rejected."

⁴⁷Jakob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, Grimm's Household Tales, ed. Margaret Hunt, vol. 1 (London: Bell and Sons, 1910) 1-4 and notes 337-39, 2 vols.

To "what changed the frog," a boy responded quickly "wicked witch." "No," Jan said, and asked "what are we called to do?" One answers "kiss people," another suggests "animals." Another exclaims "frog legs." Not surprisingly, this exercise was excluded another morning, when retreat time was running short and Jan described the group as "too hyper."

Jan selected and used the Frog Prince exercise with a consciousness of its ability to catch the immediate attention of adolescents by talking about kissing. She stressed to her audience, however, that she was talking about love of one's neighbor, rather than "the boy-girl kind" of love. The Knapps claim that kissing games are most popular in junior high school, and report that kissing is a prominent theme in American children's sayings and playground games.⁴⁸ Like Jan, the Knapps distinguish between friendly and erotic kisses. However, the transformation of the frog in tale type 440 has been analogized with processes of sexual maturation, and apparently secular versions of this folktale have

⁴⁸Knapp and Knapp 217-20.

provided a veritable goldmine of imagery for folktale scholars of a Freudian bent.⁴⁹

Exercise 3: Retreat Film

Romero is a dramatic and violent film about Archbishop Oscar Romero's struggle against institutionalized human rights abuses in El Salvador in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵⁰ He is portrayed in the film as a scholarly man who hesitates to speak but later learns to act when Salvadorans and priests protesting military atrocities and supporting voting rights are imprisoned, tortured, and killed. When the government forcibly closes the cathedral to the people, the Archbishop braves machine gun fire to attend to the Blessed Sacrament. As soldiers fire upon the tabernacle, Romero frantically and fearfully picks up the broken Host from the floor. Forced out, he eventually returns, leading the people en masse through the doors. The film finishes with his assassination during the sacrifice of the Mass.

⁴⁹Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1977) 286-91, and Alessandro Falassi, Folklore by the Fireside (Austin: U of Texas P, 1980) 39-41 and 323; Wolfgang Mieder, "Modern Anglo-American Variants of The Frog Prince (AT 440)," New York Folklore 6 (1980): 111-35.

⁵⁰Romero, dir. John Duigan, with Raul Julia, Paulist Pictures, 1990.

The students imitated the action in the film at a variety of scenes. During a protest scene, boys lifted their fists along with the crowd. Students clapped along with music and dance in a fiesta scene and sang along with nuns chanting a Spanish folksong. Boys also imitated by motions and sound effects the machine gun fire during the Blessed Sacrament scene, and were warned they were "missing the whole point."

Summary

The question for the community is, "Are they ready for confirmation, a sacrament in the Catholic Church?" As Jan explains, this is "not the Holy Spirit coming down whooosh the night of your confirmation," but the confirmation, through words, touch, and chrism, of a spiritual potential, already there since baptism, for a human to connect with the divine. To widen the perspective on parish concerns with appropriate confirmation age and social and spiritual maturity, I suggest two possible readings of the retreat. Since I derived these readings by applying to the retreat data the questions and concerns about confirmation age and maturity which were expressed to me by parishioners over a year of research in the field, I offer these readings as etic interpretations which are relevant to or consistent with emic views.

By the first reading the students are children. Their many readily made, all-too-familiar Catholic phrases and images for God from Mass and memorized prayers show they've mastered form but perhaps not the content of the faith. Their jokes in response to Jan's attempt to work out a religious allegory show they can't follow or will not consider the metaphors, but rather fall giddily back into marchen formulas, things as one student put it, they "learned in kindergarten." Their machine gun fire shows they may truly have "missed the whole point."

The second reading assumes the students are adults. Whether through years of hearing Masses, religious learning, memorizing and saying prayers, or other means of absorbing religious culture, they know the words with which to envision God and hence the ideas that matter, even if they are still connecting them: body and blood, life, nature, healing, creation, sins, forgiveness, everlasting properties and states, signs and their referents. With the "Frog Prince," their jokes turn to the adult topics of sexuality, maleness and femaleness, kissing people. Their mock-literal or marchen-type responses in dialogue during this exercise belie not their inability to follow religious allegory but a conscious rejection of the marchen material as ill-suited

to their age or their capacity and preference for highly complex linguistic play. They make machine gun fire along with the anti-heroes in Romero because they recognize them as such. As uncomfortable as adult Catholics might be at a scene in which divinity itself is threatened with desecration, they put on safely, as it were, the clothes of the soldiers who fire upon the host, a tabooed role which they may step out of once "caught" so to speak by their teacher. As one student interviewed suggested, joking promotes understanding. Like adults, they are wondering how they can integrate the existence of a complicated, three-person, divine and human God with multicultural history and the evolution of the natural world.

Either, or both, of these interpretations of the retreat play might be assumed at any one time. In their community, candidates are viewed and treated with a similar ambivalence, as child-adults, to whom household and other responsibilities are given and whose social comings and goings are anxiously noted or controlled. In Newfoundland society at large, they are considered children by law. As playful informants, they show themselves to be both the liminal subjects and the sophisticated exploiters of these dialectical double standards.

They are judged, labelled, and directed according to "maturity" and "immaturity," terms used by parents and teachers to impose or reject social control. They themselves play with these terms to control each other, across a variety of jocular genres. By engaging in precociously complex linguistic forms of play, in the retreat and elsewhere, they demonstrate, often to the distress of adults, a rebellious and keen awareness of the pedagogical ploys adopted to attempt to mold them socially and spiritually. Like Geertz's winker in the mirror, they caricature their own image in the eyes of judging adults before each others' eyes, for their own amusement.⁵¹ They are judged, not only as they play, but when they exercise choice to get, or not get, confirmed, when they demonstrate how willing they are to accept responsibility for "Christian service" which often means childcare or other forms of paid or unpaid labor in the household or the community, and when they discuss or express their sexuality.⁵²

⁵¹Clifford Geertz, "The Balinese Cockfight," Myth, Symbol, and Culture, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: Norton, 1971) 1-37.

⁵²Birgit Hertzberg Johnsen's research on past Norwegian Lutheran confirmations reveals that work was also a part of candidates' preparatory period, but for a more practical, less ostensibly religious reason. Young candidates whose families could not afford confirmation outfits had to work, often for unscrupulous employers, for the outfits

The retreat play allows the young residents of "no man's land" to test and learn how their parish church defines behavior and thought appropriate to, and inseparable from, age. Their experimentation takes place in a liminal, and therefore complicated, cultural space. In Victor Turner's terms, they play between structure and communitas.⁵³ On one hand they face communitas, as the adult choice of religious commitment which includes the right to "just say no," the response to a sacrament as free gift. On the other they are confronted with structure, the mandatory response to sacrament as a call to action, a response which is well-nurtured in childhood by the hierarchy in the religious community.

Sister Scholastica and others say that, if forced to make a judgment call, they would call grade eight the wrong age for confirmation. The occasional need to make a judgment call in relation to confirmation and candidate maturity distinguishes confirmation as a local or folk religious form of practice from confirmation in

themselves, or for the cash to purchase them (Birgit Hertzberg Johnsen, "Passage Rites--A Cultural Elucidation of Class Differences," Ethnologia Scandinavica (1988): 76-84). Johnsen's book on confirmation, Den store dagen. Konfirmasjon og tradisjon, published in Oslo in 1985, has not yet been translated into English.

⁵³Victor Turner, The Ritual Process (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1969) *passim*.

theological theory. The parish does, however, re-enact the confirmation tradition every year, with retreats, rehearsals, the rite, costume, traditional gifts, parish and private celebrations. In practice, the parish is more prone to worry about the maturity of its candidates than to highlight individual immaturity by rejecting a candidate.⁵⁴ Sister offers a playful explanation for this paradox: Confirmation isn't a game. It isn't like recruiting for a basketball team, she says, the big confirmation team in the sky. You don't pick the team. If confirmation is a game in any sense, perhaps God picks the team, being a being best qualified, like the coach, to distinguish the "mature" players from the "immature."

Confirmation as practice is nevertheless serious business for parish people, who must, in practice, attempt to discern the spiritual development of adolescents, what one organizer calls "their faith experience." In this sense, people may find themselves uneasily "playing God." People in parish communities must acknowledge time and attempt to measure the physical and experiential change which intervenes between the

⁵⁴Observation and discussion of candidate maturity were frequent this year though no candidates, to my knowledge, were rejected. Very late enrollment, evident in one case in 1991, seems more likely to warrant rejection from the preparatory program than "immature behavior."

planting of seeds of belief in infant baptism and marking their survival and development in adolescent confirmation. In this interval occurs the spiritual and social maturities which concern local communities.

In the realm of official belief, removed, as it were, from practice, confirmation seems a more playful business. Officials, like Aquinas, play with a natural metaphor to convey the paradoxes of responsibility and freedom in practice. Maturity in time requires human assessment and nurturance; maturity out of time can only be assessed and nurtured by God. Sister Scholastica tries to balance out human and divine responsibility:

I, I know we can't play God and what we're about in all of it, is really God's work, and we're only instruments in promoting that...and we have to be careful that we're not trying to take the place of the Holy Spirit and say "this magic thing happens at 13 years old and under these particular circumstances." Because I mean God can get through to people whenever and however he or she wishes, OK...."⁵⁵

She locates parish responsibility for confirmation in a conceptual space between the communicative omnipotence of God and the careful organization of sacramental practice. In this space, there is room to play with the issues at the heart of the Reformation. Claims for salvation by grace through faith, the efficacy and role of human

⁵⁵Interview with Sister Scholastica, 22 March 1991, St. John's.

efforts, the predeterminations of mature, free spiritual choice, and the differentiation of sacramental religion from magic are issues which keep redefining themselves in the practice of confirmation at the parish level.

Table 4.1. Verbal Responses to "Image of God" Exercise**Category 1: God as States/Emotions/Relational Traits**

Everlasting peace
 Everlasting love and warmth
 Happy, caring, kind, loving/love, share, light
 Love, happiness and understanding
 Loving and understanding.
 Peace, trustworthy, love
 God is peace/created one another/love/someone to look up to
 Caring/"and loving" erased
 Love
 A saint/understanding and a forgiving person
 Love/life written over love
 Big ball of light (presence) eternal life loving
 caring understanding/"person" crossed out
 Eyes of souls/love/friends
 The friendship and love that grows within
 us/lights up the world and his light blocks
 out darkness/a peacemaker
 Father guardian love caring friend
 Loving caring
 Angels, prayer, church, love
 Love
 Love
 God is like my conscience, because when I'm doing
 something I shouldn't do I think of God then
 automatically quit what I'm doing
 Our father and love/a goal to make a good commitment
 in the future/easy to confront any challenge
 in your life time

Category 2: God as Person or Actor

God is a helper
 New beginnings, healing us so we can start over a new life
 He was a caring person
 He is life of/he is creator of life
 Creator and giver of all life
 Someone to look over us and care for us
 Our guide through life
 Our guide to live in prayer

Table 4.1, Continued

Category 2 Continued: God as Person or Actor

Our father and love/a goal to make a good commitment
in the future/easy to confront any challenge
in your life time

Father to me

A heavenly father

A spirit, a person, our father

Forgive us from sin

God is peace/created one another/love/someone to
look up to

Our maker

Our saviour/healer

A loving and kind person

Observer of the universe

A saint/understanding and a forgiving person

A tall, skinny man almost like Jesus but no
beard/creator of life

Thing that chooses us to do what we do, and makes us
what we are/also the one that makes us choose
for things and has our future marked out for
everything also with pictures showed a white man
but he could be african american or asian
or japanese etcetera

A man

Just as human as Jesus was

The friendship and love that grows within
us/lights up the world and his light blocks
out darkness/a peacemaker

Father of Jesus/man that created all people

Our guide through life/our father

Father of the world

Creator

Our father who is full of love

Father/creator/master

The friendship and love that grows within
us/lights up the world and his light blocks
out darkness/a peacemaker

Father guardian love caring friend

Someone ("person" crossed out) who rules the world

Saves lives by people praying and he saves lives because
he feels that some young people or old people should
get a second chance and give them a second chance in
life/He is the light that shines over the world?

Table 4.1, Continued**Category Three: God as Non-Human Being/Other**

The world around us/"being there" erased
 Our body and blood of us and others
 Life of/he is creator of life
 Life (3 times)
 Sign of nature
 Sign of life
 Sign of hope
 Angel
 A hug
 A loving and kind person
 A saint/understanding and a forgiving person
 Light like sunshine in the world
 Love/life (written over love)
 Happy, caring, kind, loving/love, share, light
 A spirit, a person, our father
 Big ball of light (presence) eternal life loving
 caring understanding/"person" crossed out
 Everything
 The Holy Spirit, a tongue of fire
 Life, light
 Eyes of souls/love/friends
 Light (2X)
 Saves lives by people praying and he saves lives because
 he feels that some young people or old people should
 get a second chance and give them a second chance in
 life/He is the light that shines over the world?
 Angels, prayer, church, love
 "God is the light of the world" erased
 Burning bush

Note: Table 4.1 includes all sayings contributed, with
 or without drawings. Two-part responses are repeated
 under relevant categories.

Table 4.2. Drawn Responses to "Image of God" Exercise

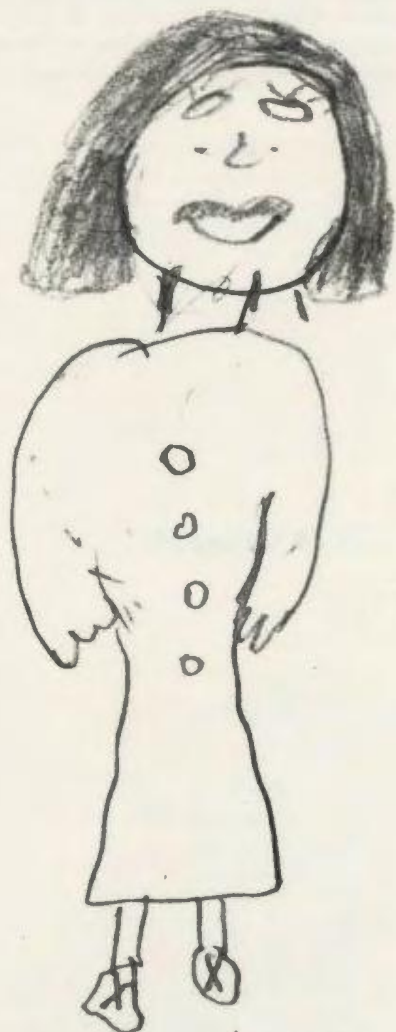
<u>DRAWING</u>	<u>ACCOMPANYING SAYING</u>
Robe	"happy caring kind loving/love share light"
Praying hands (traced)	"God is a helper"
Gift box with cross on outside, light emanating from within	"I see God as everlasting love and warmth"
Landscape	"Sign of nature"
Church	None
Cross with light emanating	"Peace/created one another/love/someone to look up to"
Angel	"Angel"
Block cross with scroll, light emanating from cross	"God is our maker"
Landscape, man in priestly garb laying hand on head of girl	"Our saviour, healer"
A face, erased	"A hug."
A woman	"A loving and kind person"
King kneeling on carpet	"Observer of the universe"
Angel-man	"God"
Angel-man	"God"
Sun with flames and light rays	"A big ball of light (presence) eternal life loving caring understanding" ("person"-erased)

Table 4.2, Continued

<u>DRAWING</u>	<u>ACCOMPANYING SAYING</u>
Smiling tree/blindfolded sun	"God is life"
Landscape	"everything"
Flame with a halo over it	"Holy Spirit, a tongue of fire"
Sun and flowers	None
Priestly man with outstretched arms	None
Praying hands (traced)	None
Priestly man	"God"
Star/cross in sky with earth and stars	None
Landscape	None
Man with arms outstretched on clouds	None
Earth	"Life, light"
Eye, heart, smiling faces	"Eyes of souls, love, friends"
Candestick, with arrow pointing to flame	"Light"
Landscape/ person with arms outstretched (erased)	"God is the light of the world" (erased)
Heart	"Love"
Burning bush, high hill with tiny cross	"Burning bush"
Heart	"Love, angels, prayer, church"

Figure 4.3. The woman.

Figure 4.3. The woman.



A Loving & kind person

EST

Burning Bush

Figure 4.4. The burning bush.



Figure 4.4. The burning bush.

Observer of the Universe

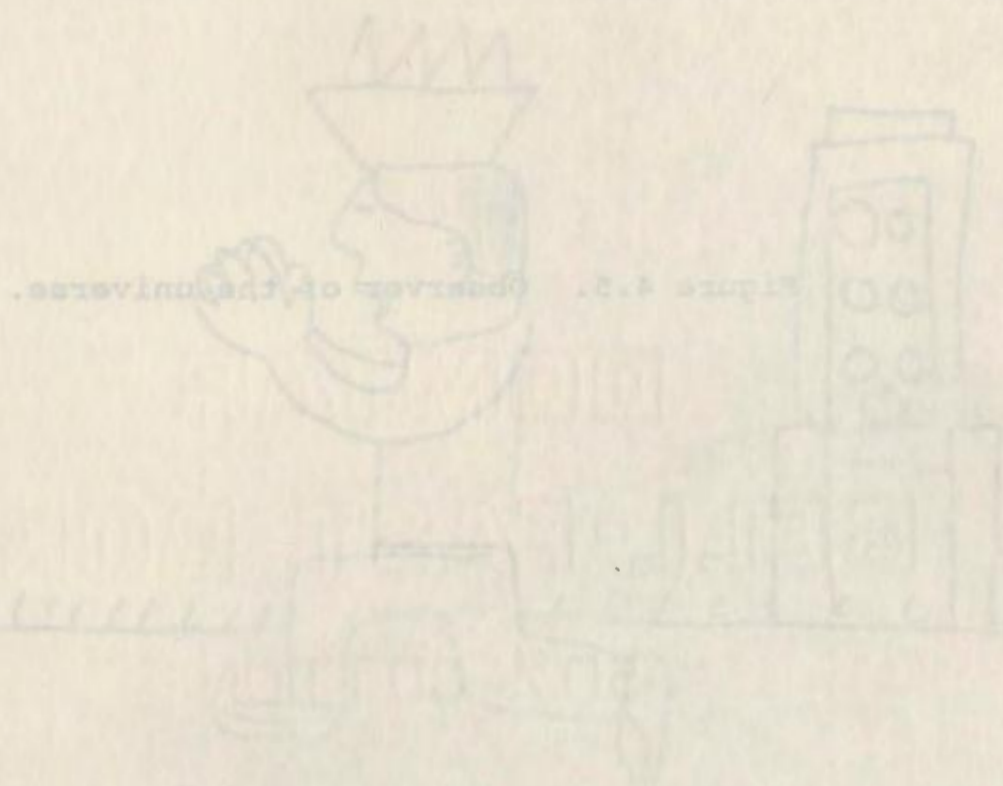


Figure 4.5. Observer of the universe.

Myself

Figure 4.5. Observer of the universe.

observer of the
universe

King



My Gifts

①

Figure 4.6. The man with the rope and
the outstretched arms.

Figure 4.6. The man with the robe and
the outstretched arms.

Good



CHAPTER FIVE

CONFIRMATION COSTUME

If costume may be considered a kind of language, as it has been in folkloristics,¹ the procurement, assembly, and uses of confirmation costume at St. Cecilia's parish may be seen to "speak" about confirmation as a social and spiritual event, and about the participants themselves. Confirmation costume is not controlled by official prescription from the Vatican but is negotiated within a parish among leaders, families, and the candidates themselves. Costume is their means of speaking about confirmation. Costume traditions, like traditions of retreat play, may sprout up, survive, or change predominantly within a local practice of this Catholic sacrament. Parishioners' memories of confirmation often cluster around their descriptions of the costume, past or present.

¹In Henry Glassie's review article "Structure and Function, Folklore and the Artifact," Semiotica 7 (1973): 311-51, he quotes Joseph Greenberg's Essays on Linguistics (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1963) to point out that for folklorists and others it is "natural to compare spoken language with other forms which likewise consist of ordered arrays of elements in some physical medium and obey fixed laws of combination" (Glassie 323-24, citing Greenberg 1). Glassie reviews Petr Bogatyrev's multiple-functional approach to costume in The Function of Folk Costume in Moravian Slovakia (1937; The Hague: Mouton, 1971).

In her recent, pioneering research on the history of Norwegian Lutheran confirmation,² Scandinavian ethnologist Birgit Hertzberg Johnsen has connected Norwegian Lutheran confirmation costume with class differences, arguing that "the local norms of proper clothing and equipment" for confirmation once made "class membership more visible and significant" in Norway.³ This chapter treats confirmation costume as a language "spoken" simultaneously by St. Cecilia's parishioners across boundaries of class and differing norms of practice and belief. St. Cecilia's parishioners' narratives show that what candidates wear to confirmation shapes their experience before, during, and after the ceremony.

The chapter is divided into sections based on discrete notions of costume in context. Section One, "Costume in Present Contexts," is comprised of informant narratives and field observations about contemporary confirmation costume. Three broad types of current confirmation costume are examined as they are perceived

²Birgit Hertzberg Johnsen, "Passage Rites--A Cultural Elucidation of Class Differences," Ethnologia Scandinavica (1988): 76-84. Johnsen's book on confirmation, Den store dagen. Konfirmasjon og tradisjon, published in Oslo in 1985, has not yet been translated into English.

³Johnsen "Passage Rites" 78.

by (1) parish leaders and candidates during the preparatory retreat, (2) candidates and family members at home, and (3) candidates themselves among their peers. Section Two, "Past Confirmation Costume," presents older and more rural Catholic confirmation costume in Newfoundland, according to informant narratives and descriptions. Costume is portrayed throughout the chapter as sets with parts to be procured, combined, or altered. Old and young, St. Cecilia's parishioners practice Catholicism differently and live in differing socioeconomic circumstances. Before, during, and after confirmation, the folk groups within this parish remember, confront, and create a variety of costume values.

The concluding "Discussion" section relates structure and functions of costume, past and present, to contemporary confirmation, a multivocalic local religious custom which allows several parish folk groups to "speak" at the same time without necessarily agreeing. Structure and function of confirmation costume are analyzed. I explain how parishioners use different phrases to describe confirmation and consider how folk groups or individuals may be using smaller "dialects" of costume within the parish costume "language" to express emic notions of confirmation.

Section I: Costume in Present Contexts

Don Yoder has said that folk costume is to dress as a dialect is to a language.⁴ A local costume convention, such as confirmation costume, may be a more or less delineated subset to one or more larger dress contexts. What Newfoundland confirmands wear on their confirmation night is a product of selection, combination, or alteration⁵ of options available in the everyday and festive secular clothing in peer groups, school, region, and "international fashion."⁶

Adolescent candidates are highly conscious of what they and their peers wear to the rite. Often, they help decide what is and is not worn. Sets of options are specified, encouraged, and discouraged at the parish by confirmation organizers and at home by family members. Three types of confirmation costume anticipated in the parish may be deduced from a parish leader's dialogue with students at the preparatory retreat. These are (1) elaborate formal dress, (2) modest formal dress, and (3)

⁴Don Yoder, "Folk Costume," Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1972) 295-323. He states this on page 296.

⁵Lovelace, Martin, "Folk Costume," course lecture for Folklore 6500: Folklife, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, winter 1990 and Yoder, "Folk Costume" passim.

⁶Yoder, "Folk Costume" 296.

casual dress. Families and candidates also recognize these three basic types. The outfits individual candidates wear are not simple exemplifications of costume guidelines but versions of these broad types. Meanings are ascribed to costume in many social contexts within a single parish community. Common components of the three types appear in Figure 5.1 at the chapter's end.

Parish: The Retreat

During April retreat week in St. Cecilia's, 114 confirmands were divided into five groups. Retreat days, represented repeatedly as a "break from the daily routine" of school, were held in the parish hall and church. The retreat provided students with time off from wearing school clothes. All five retreat groups received stern recommendations about what to wear to their confirmation night, about a week away. Questions were permitted. Jan Reed, the confirmation coordinator, told one group to remember that they were "not going to a prom," and that she hoped

none of you come dressed this way. Guys--no jeans, no sneakers. Cords, dress pants are okay. No tuxedos. Girls--no off-the-shoulder

dressess, no bare shoulders, bare-backed. If you do I'll ask you to cover up with a shawl or sweater.⁷

At this, the whole group, boys and girls, turned to stare at their companion Moira, as if to indicate they knew or suspected Moira planned to dress precisely in the elaborate formal manner forbidden.

Moira was dressed maturely. Her make-up was applied subtly, her hair teased and sprayed carefully. She wore a sweater, a more conventionally adult choice of clothing than the adolescent, fluorescent t-shirts many of her male and female companions were wearing. During a donut break that day, Moira made a similarly precocious joke. To a peer's inaudible teasing question, she snapped back sarcastically, "I'm pregnant." Jan scolded her immediately to "give it up." In a family interview after confirmation, Moira affirmed her delight at having indeed worn her brightly colored "ball gown" that evening, with a graceful, scooped neckline.

"Ball gowns" and "tuxedos" were not for confirmation, Jan had repeated to giggling groups during retreat week. "Come, not" she said and a boy filled in the blank correctly, "for a fashion show." "Like a wedding," girls whispered in another group. Jan

⁷Notes on Retreat Week, 15-19 April 1991, St. Cecilia's parish hall, St. John's.

suggested ties, and shoes instead of sneakers. One boy commented loudly that he didn't have a tie. From his seat in the first pew of the parish church, another boy lifted his foot aggressively up over the pew for Jan to inspect. "What about these, Miss?" he challenged, as Jan ignored him.

Someone asked, "Are we having a dance after?" "No," Jan smiled, "You're having 'a cup of tay [tea].'" (The rumor of a dance even came up in family interviews before confirmation.) To questions about costume or dancing, Jan pointed out that confirmation was neither a prom nor a graduation. "You don't graduate from the Church," she added, driving the point home.

Statements, questions, jokes, and gestures in the dialogue about costume at the retreat demonstrate that elaborate formal male and female dress ("ball gowns," "low-cut dresses," "tuxedos") was anticipated and discouraged. The warnings about casual dress (sneakers, jeans) were directed almost exclusively at boys. Jan's explicit statements and the candidates' reactions ("fashion show" remarks, giggling, staring, expressing lack of requested items) indicated that she and they recognized distinctions between these costume types.

Jan discouraged elaborate items of clothing for their association with secular rites and festive

gatherings which contrast with confirmation, despite proximity within adolescence: "proms," "dances," and "graduation." The "correct" form of costume promulgated by the parish is modest formal dress, neither elaborate nor casual. This form calls little attention to itself, unlike dress in "a fashion show." Broken into parts, the correct form includes simple dresses or skirt/blouse combinations for girls, and corduroy pants, shirts, and ties for boys.

In a random videotaped sample of one third of the 1991 confirmation candidates at St. Cecilia's, most of the boys were observed to have worn modest formal dress (shirt/pants combinations with ties, jackets, or both). Girls' costumes in the sample demonstrate more varied combination of parts than boys'.⁸ Of twenty-four girls observed, eleven wore dresses or skirt combinations which reached below the knee or, in one case, reached the floor. Another ten girls wore short (knee length) dresses or skirt combinations. Three girls wore pants. These mixed forms indicate that girls were less likely to adhere strictly to "modest formal dress," though their degrees of variation from this prescribed parish norm are

⁸This is not a surprising finding given international fashion's greater attention to diversity and style in women's wear.

hard to measure. Girls individualized their costumes by accessorization, such as hair cutting and styling; addition of jewelry, make-up, or hair decorations; and selection of headwear, legwear, and shoes. These variations make the separation of costumes into formal or casual types more difficult. In the interest of brevity, this level of costume variation cannot be treated here.

It may be safer to assert that girls who wore floor-length or long dresses may have been tending toward elaborate formal dress. No clearly casual female dress was observed. Girls who wore pants combined them with long sweaters or frilly blouses, distinguishing their dress from more mundane forms evident at school or retreat. Participant observation and review of photographs of others in the confirmation class add to the information provided by the videotaped sample. Data from these sources reveal that a number of females did wear floor-length gowns with elaborate necklines, matching the "ballgown" form prohibited at the retreat. One girl wore a long white gown which, combined with a flowery white headband, resembled a wedding dress.

Home/Family

Elaborate formal dress, modest formal dress and casual dress, three basic divisions of confirmation costume today, are recognized by ordinary parishioners as

well as parish leaders. Mrs. Keene, whose son Brendan was confirmed this year, perceives, like Jan, the link between elaborate dress and the secular rites:

I came home I said to my husband I said Barry they were dressed up...like they were going to proms. Oh the girls were really up to the nines the girls were with the satin dresses on--and you know what I mean? Really, I couldn't get over it. It's not, seeing the young girls over, dressed, really really, really pretty, really nice, right? Dressed like they were going to their grad, a lot of them are, I found, right, and then you got a particular person just with a skirt and blouse on, right.

And then Brendan, I said "Brendan what do you want to wear, do you want to wear a suit, do you want to wear a, blazer and pants." He said "No a sweater and pants and shirt is fine." I said "Oh OK, mm"...oh it's nice, that people get dressed up, right, you put all this time into it, you should you know what I mean put another little bit of effort into, dress up.'

Mrs. Keene looks more kindly upon elaborate formal dress than parish leaders do because she views the elaboration of costume as a sign of "effort." The effort put into costume appropriately complements the efforts made by candidates and others to prepare for confirmation over the year: the more effort, the better the complement. Parents attended parish meetings. In school, at the parish, and on retreat, parish leaders have instructed, observed, and interviewed the candidates. Candidates

⁹Interview with Maureen Keene, 24 May 1991, St. John's.

themselves were expected to study, attend meetings and retreat, undergo a parish interview, perform community service, pray, and attend Mass before their confirmation.

However, through bargaining, Mrs. Keene and her son agreed upon a form of modest formal dress. He rejected a blazer, her slightly more elaborate suggestion. Her comments show how costume may be composed in the home, a context outside direct parish control. The process of verbal bargaining between parents and children may determine what is worn.

Parishioners Joe and Dorothy Davis described similar bargaining in their home. They point out the resultant attire may express the wishes of the candidates or of the parents. The costume may represent the domination of a single point of view or a compromise:

J: With the girls, that, that comes from the parents, OK? Cause with us, we would have liked to have seen Terry in a three-piece suit. I know I would have, cause that's what I did, you know. It, it was, it was special. But he didn't want it so I didn't force the issue, you know. I was happy he wore a shirt and tie, you know, and a pair of trousers, that's fine. Ahh, I wouldn't, he would not be permitted to go there with a pair of dungarees or jeans or anything else. I would not have permitted that. Ahh, the girls, it's still a big thing with most of the girls. They go out and they spend money on dresses and if not they borrow them, you know....

E: It looks like some people really did go, go out and--

J: Go all out? Yeah, that's right. Yeah. One-upmanship...I'd leave it up to the individual family...you don't wear sweats, you don't wear jeans and you do wear a shirt and tie, at least. You know. Show some respect for the importance of the event.¹⁰

Joe's comments again distinguish three costume types. He also observes that girls seem more prone to elaborating than boys. Modest formal dress according to Joe shows "some respect for the important of the event," while elaborate or costly costume may promote "one-upmanship" or competition between families. While ruling out casual dress invariably as inappropriate, Joe thinks deciding what to wear at confirmation ought to be a family affair.

Outfits not selected and combined from pre-existing wardrobes are bought or borrowed. If buying clothes, parents and candidates travel to stores which feature regional repertoires of North American fashion. Bargaining may continue as candidates try on their options. However, in this setting, the parents' focus seems to be very much on the candidate and his or her individual tastes. There seems to be a "shock" of realizing candidates' independence and maturity, expressed by and through costume. Joe Davis describes the experience he and his wife had with their son:

¹⁰Interview with Joe and Dorothy Davis, 28 May 1991, near St. John's.

J: Actually it was quite a shock for us, because, he decided that he wanted to wear some, some comfortable clothes, and most of what Terry has is like most kids, sweats or jeans. So you talk about an eye-opener. I now realize that the male sex is non-existent when it comes to clothiers, at least, from the age of seven, to fourteen. Forget it. They don't live. They're not born, they're not around. They die off and then they come back at age sixteen, when we went out looking for clothes.

And it was then when we realized that we, when he was shopping in a young men's shop, not a boy's shop--cause, we always considered him a boy and he's not a boy anymore, he's a young man. And that was an eye-opener that night, I'll tell you. To realize, when he came out of the dressing room and, dressed in his khakis and a, a nice shirt, and you know--modish, you know current fashion trend thing--that uh, phew, there's no boy here anymore, right? [Mrs. Davis laughs] You know. It, it was an eye-opener.

Never ever realized it before. Actually we got into a discussion because, ah, his mother was going along picking out boyish things and I was saying pick out what you like, you know. So anyway he went, goes into the dressing room and puts on his duds and that and I go to the door and I says "Are you ready?" and he says, "Yeah" I said "Do you like that" and he said "Yeah but Mom won't." [D laughs] "Mom don't like it eh," I says "No you're wearing, now you come on out." So he comes on out. "You like that Mom?" "Mmmm, mmm, well I like another color in a sweater, in--" something else you didn't like in this and then finally you know we said--it's his."¹¹

One of the bargaining points between Terry and his parents was his desire for "comfort" versus their

¹¹Interview with Joe and Dorothy Davis, 28 May 1991, near St. John's.

requirements of formality. Shopping for new, formal clothes, with which Terry might be comfortable in mind or body, seems to have been the compromise.

Parents of a girl confirmed with Terry had a similarly epiphanous experience, in a local store, of his daughter's "sudden" maturity in potential confirmation clothes. Her father remembers a moment during the shopping trip emotionally and tentatively, as if he still can't believe what he saw:

Well it was so strange, the ah, we took Laurie out shopping for, her outfit that she wore, right? And Laurie's a very conservative person, right, you know she dresses conservatively. And when we were in the store and she tried this particular outfit on, and she come out. Ah, knocked me for a loop. It was the first real ah, realization that ah, our little girl was no longer a little girl, that she was a young woman--? For some reason I don't know why but it was strange.¹²

Family shopping expeditions thus bring the bargaining process into the context of regional or international fashion. Selection and purchase of new clothes categorized in stores by age and size led these families into intense consideration of their children's "sudden" maturity. Maturity may have been apparent in the candidates' independent or individualized tastes in dress, or in their mature physical appearance in the

¹²Interview with Lydia and Lionel Wright, 14 May 1991, St. John's.

clothes. The family's deliberations are stamped into memory by the powerful visual impact of viewing their child as he or she emerges from the dressing room for assessment.

Not all parents were struck by their children's maturity when the family discussed confirmation attire or viewed the candidate in costume. One mother pointed out the difference between how her children looked in their clothing versus how mature they are, at least in her view, as their mother. Though Theresa thought girls' wearing white at the confirmation was better and more "traditional," in regard to what her boys wore, she said:

Doesn't matter, right. If it's the Church, or whether it's here at home. When they're dressed up, they're, fine young men. And they're still fine young men in their jeans and sweatshirts [laughs] you know....Young men, yeah. I could say they're my babies, but they gets all upset," [laughs]... and they are my babies, right?¹³

Theresa is also making the point that her boys are who they are regardless of where they are and whether they are dressed formally or casually. By judging her sons "fine young men" apart from their clothing or context, Theresa implies continuity between who her boys "are" at a church confirmation and who they are every day. For

¹³Interview with Theresa Fagan, 29 May 1991, St. John's.

her, costume may be an object perceived as an object, or a sign that signifies its own failure to measure such qualities as maturity or morality.¹⁴

Another mother, Suzette Mayor, frankly stated that she knew that some of the candidates who underwent confirmation were nevertheless "immature," i.e. not ready for the rite. In addition, Suzette said she thought that during the confirmation preparatory meetings for parents, the parish was trying to make some things seem special which, to her and others, were actually mundane:

There was a lot of preparation I didn't think was necessary...The Mass was lovely, the service, Mass they had prior was lovely, it was nice, beautiful, but a lot of people were not interested, like in the [history of the] vestments the priest wore--a lot of people weren't interested in that...people were working all day and they felt compelled to come to the meetings. I know I did. And we were exhausted. We felt it was a waste of time. I phoned people afterwards and I know they felt the same. No one was interested in the

¹⁴In "Structure and Function" 339-40, Glassie says "the distinction on which Bogatyrev works most carefully is...the distinction between the object as object and the object as sign....The folk artifact has been studied much more as object than as sign but there have been exceptions." He also points out "...the usefulness of the object-sign distinction requires knowledge as to whether the artifact is a sign to the sender or the receiver or both. However, just as with the aesthetic practical distinction, the clarity of boundaries is less important methodologically than the awareness of possibilities: the artifact should be analyzed as practical and aesthetic, as object and sign. Of this Bogatyrev was aware...."

priest's vestments--the priest wears a uniform, like a nurse would wear, or like a nun's.¹⁵

Mrs. Mayor's comments illustrate how an explicit attempt at demonstrating religious and ritual significance of costume (the parish's history of symbolism of vestments) may fail when listeners' experience of the costume is mundane. The experience of mundanity may be due to perception of equality or at least analogy between religious costume and lay occupational dress.

Mrs. Mayor and her friends may also find costume in religious ritual neither "unforgettable" or "unique"¹⁶ because of observing it habitually, as many Catholics do, through weeks and years of Masses and sacramental celebrations. Though she experienced the confirmation as a special and worthwhile event, for which young people had to be "ready" by being "mature," Suzette sees costume worn during liturgy not in light of its historic

¹⁵Interview with Suzette Mayor, 28 May 1991, St. John's. Comments were recorded by notes during and immediately after phone conversation.

¹⁶Bronislaw Malinowski describes some religious rituals as "unforgettable" and "unique" experiences, especially for individuals undergoing a religious passage [Magic, Science, and Religion and Other Essays (1948; Garden City, NY: Doubleday/Anchor, 1954) 63]. As an outsider to Trobriand Island religion, he also speaks of "the contagiousness of faith," "the dignity of unanimous consent," and "the impressiveness of collective behavior." Repeated, collective religious practices force ongoing participants to re-experience and question rituals which might seem more unforgettable and unique to an outsider.

religious or ritual significance but as a pragmatic indication, like a uniform, of the wearer's frequent, present-day social roles.

Peer Group Interviews

Parents speak about their children's experience of costume in confirmation. Parish leaders' words guide adolescents regarding confirmation in general and costume in particular. However, candidates themselves also determine and describe their own experience of confirmation costume. During twelve focus group interviews with approximately 80% of the recently confirmed candidates, students revealed attitudes toward the event and what they wore to it.

The students used different verbal genres than their parents to express themselves in group interviews about confirmation. Rather than using a genre more common among the adults (the personal experience narrative), adolescents conveyed information about their confirmation through jokes, taunts, allusions, parodies, and other jocular verbal forms. Narratives would have required one adolescent to hold the floor at some length over six or ten others. This occurred rarely in focus groups; more frequently, the adolescent participants rendered it impossible for any one peer to hold forth. Instead, with

joking interruptions, they satirized, clarified, corrected, or supported the responses of peers to interviewers' questions:

- Boy: I was gonna rent--buy a tuxedo but she [Jan] said you weren't allowed and then I wasn't ready, so I just wore joggin' pants and a new pair of sneakers and. And a what?
- Girl: Wore duck pants and a jacket.
- Boy: Yeah, and my jacket. [laughs]
- Boy: [Slowly, with mocking emphasis] I wore a shirt, and pants, and socks--
- Boy: [To boy above] Go on.
- Int: How about you, Mary?
- Boy: Mini-skirt!
- Mary: [with dry annoyance] Dress.
- Boys: Mini-skirt. Real ugly one too.
She wore a suit.
And she wore silver shoes.
Glass slippers.
Yeah, Mary wore glass slippers.
- Mary: [condescendingly] I didn't wear glass slippers.
- Boys: Rella-cinda. [laughter]
- Boy: She gotta be in by nine otherwise....
- Mary: Oh yes, definitely. Yeah.¹⁷

This focus group excerpt shows that some candidates took item-by-item notice of what their companions wore to confirmation. One boy shows he responded to the prohibition against elaborate formal dress (tuxedo) by wearing casual dress, likewise a forbidden option. One of his watchful peers corrects him by pointing out that

¹⁷Focus group interview with Class #2/J Group, 31 May 1991, St. Cecilia's school, St. John's. Jeannie Myrick conducted this interview.

he also wore a jacket, an apparent concession to parents or the parish.

Regardless of what he did wear, the boy's words imply that dressing casually could or would have been his response to being judged "not ready" (immature) before his confirmation. Similarly, the string of substitutions for what Mary actually wore relies upon rebellious or joking preoccupation with the absolutely forbidden: excessively elaborate dress (like Cinderella's) or excessively casual (real ugly mini-skirt). By taking up the "wrong" costume, literally or hypothetically, the candidates show among their peers that they understand the community's attempts to control confirmation itself and their part in it.

During this and other interviews, the candidates often parodied their teachers' and Jan's uses of the labels "immature" and "mature" to control their immediate behavior and their participation in confirmation. Here is one example of a total of twelve such parodies in this forty-minute interview:

[Question: Do you feel more often like you're an adult, or not yet an adult?]

All: Not yet an adult!

Int: Why?

Boy: [in sarcastic parody of matter-of-fact tone] I'm immature.

Girl: Exactly. I was going to say the same thing. Immature.

Boys: Always making jokes--make people laugh, laughing in class, kicking rubbers around--[list continues, group grows inaudibly wild]

Girl: And your parents still boss you around.

All: Yeah!

Others: We don't have authority.

Girl: And teacher--you're still in school, so you're definitely not an adult if you're still in school, cause, if you're smart you wouldn't be in school.

Another: Only 14.

Another: We're not smart enough yet.

Another: Parents still keep all kinds of rules--

Girl: Come in this time. Come in that time. Wash dishes. Babysit him. Babysit her. Whatever.

Another: Make up your bed.

Boy: [Whispering to another] Not yet. Two evil stepbrothers, no.

Boy: I have two step-brothers. I have two step-brothers. Evil too, man.

All: Evil step-brothers! [laughter]¹⁸

Students like Moira at the retreat did seem to know how to manipulate clothing and appearance to convey maturity or potential maturity. However, whether they identified themselves as "immature" or "mature," candidates in group interviews did not seem to perceive confirmation costume as a sign of maturity. Instead, candidates measured their status by their treatment in everyday life, and concluded that they were "not yet adults." To back their case, they point out their lack of authority at home and school, enforced responsibilities, lack of personal

¹⁸Focus group interview with Class #2/J Group, 31 May 1991, St. Cecilia's school, St. John's. Jeannie Myrick conducted this interview.

control over leisure time, and subjection to parental control.

The candidates make light of adult costume prescriptions and their lack of adult privileges by alluding to the folk tale Cinderella (Aarne-Thompson tale types 510 and 511)¹⁹ or to common Marchen motifs (evil stepbrothers, curfews, and glass slippers).²⁰ They liken confirmation to Cinderella's ball. An extraordinary, costumed event like the ball, confirmation offers fleeting escape from mundane trials in the family or home. The rite offers a momentary celebration of maturity and general social acceptance, while these forms of status remain unattained in daily life. Like quipping Cinderellas, candidates joke about being stuck with evil siblings in a metaphorical "dungeon" where they receive increasing responsibility (childcare or household tasks) while they are restrained by curfews and repeatedly called immature.

¹⁹Alan Dundes, Cinderella: A Casebook (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1988) vii-xi.

²⁰Compare the following motifs: K2211.3 "treacherous stepbrother," S33 "cruel stepbrother," F823.2 "glass shoes", C752 "Tabu: Doing thing after a certain time," and C761.3 "Tabu: staying too long at ball." Stith Thompson, Motif Index of Folk Literature, 6 vols. (1932-36; Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1966).

Section II: Past Confirmation Costume

Views expressed by parish leaders, parents, and candidates on contemporary types of confirmation costume take on a fuller meaning when considered in the context of recollections of past costume. Parents and even parish leaders bring their confirmation memories into contexts which contribute to current decisions about dressing for confirmation.

Parents may have moved to St. Cecilia's from rural parishes, like Mary Donnelly, who was confirmed in Cape Broyle, 1958, at age thirteen. Mary explained to me the rules for confirmation dress at her childhood parish:

M: When I was confirmed, up in Cape Broyle, we, all the girls, had to wear a wedding dress. So, I don't know if they went and borrowed 'em, or if somebody had 'em, I can't remember now. But they all dressed in a wedding dress.

E: So it was actually someone's wedding dress?

M: Yeah somebody that--

E: --someone had already got married in.

M: --someone who had, yeah, a bride. I guess maybe they donated their dresses to the church after they'd wear it, I can't remember now....

E: How would you find a person who would lend you a wedding dress?

M: Oh we wouldn't know. We wouldn't know who. The teachers'd do that, right?²¹

²¹Interview with Donnelly family, 13 May 1991, St. John's.

Mary's description and the "like a wedding" comment at the retreat demonstrate that costume can create a visible relation between sacraments such as marriage and confirmation. Even today, confirmation is still officially required of parish couples before the sacrament of marriage will be administered to them.²²

In the past in Cape Broyle, teachers and parish officials may have been reducing family expenses by helping to organize the recycling of costume through sharing of wedding dresses. Nevertheless, an informant described past confirmation costume, in St. Cecilia's, as "an unwanted expense" for the family. While elaborate dress continues to be acceptable at weddings in St. Cecilia's, confirmands are now urged to dress modestly. Parish leaders are thus encouraging families to spend less for confirmation costume.

Yet by promoting modest confirmation attire, current confirmation organizers in effect discourage the possible use of a more elaborate costume for several events, even graduations or proms, which occur within a short time of confirmation. It is difficult to assess which option might cost families more: purchasing one elaborate

²²This fact was confirmed at the retreat and in my conversations with Jan Reed, the confirmation coordinator. Candidates themselves showed an interested awareness of this requirement.

costume for several social occasions or spending moderately for several separate outfits. Elaborate costume does not appear to vary with families' economic means. Candidates whose families who live in subsidized housing may wear elaborate costumes; candidates whose parents are homeowners may dress modestly.

These observations contrast Birgit Hertzberg Johnsen's findings that costume and other aspects of Norwegian Lutheran confirmations highlighted class differences in communities around the turn of the century. Johnsen reports that the burden of purchasing confirmation costume seems to have rested entirely upon families and candidates. Unlike wealthier confirmands, candidates from poorer, more rural areas labored without rights or regulations under exploitative employers for costumes or the cash to buy them.²³ Nowadays, Norwegian Lutheran confirmation candidates wear white capes which express "the ideology of equality which dominates Norwegian society today."²⁴

Teachers and other parish leaders in Newfoundland parishes took and still take a central role in transmitting local dress rules for confirmation. In the

²³Johnsen, "Passage Rites" 79.

²⁴Johnsen, "Passage Rites" 82-83.

past, however, parishes like Mary Donnelly's had more direct control over the procurement and distribution of confirmation costume for girls. Boys' "confirmation suits" were composed of jackets, ties, shirts, and red ribbons; girls wore white stockings, white shoes, and veils with white gowns or wedding dresses. Generally speaking, rules requiring uniformity of color and standard combination of pieces of clothing left past confirmands with fewer individual options than their present counterparts have in assembling confirmation costumes. Johnsen found that white costume was not always the norm in the past in Norway. Beneath an 1890s photograph of two chambermaids wearing black dresses, Johnsen explains that

The confirmation dress later had to serve as working dress for girls who took domestic employment. It was against this background that many people protested when white Confirmation dresses became fashionable after the turn of the century.²⁵

Newfoundland families seem to have paid special attention to the age-appropriateness of certain costume components. Parents weighed carefully the propriety of allowing girls to substitute nylons or pantyhose for socks. Jan Reed, the confirmation coordinator, remembers

²⁵Johnsen, "Passage Rites" 80.

getting ready for her confirmation in Harbour Breton around 1970, when she was twelve:

Small community...would have been about twenty-seven hundred at that time. Well it was one of the biggest communities on the coast...I remember a white dress. And I would have had knee socks. Probably, like I probably wasn't allowed to wear pantyhose or nylons...and the white veil...Now the veil, there's something about the veil. It was, one that was passed down from somebody, now I don't quite, it would either have been a confirmation veil or possibly made, a veil remade or redone from someone's wedding or something of that sort. But I can remember my sister and the veil. I remember her and the veil--and there was a lot of fuss, over the veil...She was fussing over me having this veil and that it had to be, yeah, that it had to be right.²⁶

Family members also contributed to costume composition by altering pre-existing materials. In addition to bargaining over selection, there was "fuss" over the appearance of standard parts. Some present-day confirmands have elaborate dresses custom-made for the occasion by a pair of women in the St. Cecilia's parish neighborhood. The women teamed up to design and sew dresses similar to those in local retail stores, at less cost to families.²⁷ Many boys and girls nevertheless purchase clothing directly from stores.

²⁶Interview with Jan Reed, 8 March 1991, St. John's.

²⁷Interview with Lowry family, 15 May 1991, St. John's.

Joe and Dorothy Davis, confirmed in St. Cecilia's and on the Southern Shore respectively, observe that the proper color, materials, and accessories at confirmation were connected with an aura of holiness or purity. Having the right costume on was also the sine qua non for the very reception of the sacrament:

D: Yeah so when I was confirmed I had to wear white, white. It had to be either a wedding dress, could have been a wedding dress, as long as it had to be white lace. Everything and the veil--like you were getting married [laughs]...

J: I think that's a, that's a spin-off of the nuns. Pretty and pure. You know.

D: Oh yeah. The nuns did push, push it, really, cause the nuns taught you.

E: Was there anybody, like, in your confirmation class who didn't wear white?

D: Everyone had to wear white, all--

J: Oh you didn't get confirmed if you weren't wearing the, if you weren't wearing your confirmation suits.

D: No, they were all white, white stockings, white shoes, everything had to be white. Gloves, you had to have gloves.²⁸

Though the uniformity of color of costume and accessories may have been prescribed by nuns, teachers, or other "officials" in the parish to create an atmosphere of "purity," people confirmed in the past say

²⁸Interview with Joe and Dorothy Davis, 28 May 1991, near St. John's.

they themselves felt pure and holy wearing white. Lydia Wright, who was confirmed in the East End of St. John's explains:

About my own confirmation, I will say that with the white gloves, the white dress, the white veil, the white pantyhose--I felt so pure. And I think that's missing now...you felt holy, it was holy, you felt so holy.²⁹

Lydia and her husband Lionel, regular weekly churchgoers, feel that the experience of confirmation in the past was qualitatively different because of this difference in costume.

The Wrights also note a difference between their experience of their son's confirmation several years ago and their experience of their daughter's confirmation. They attribute the difference to the prevalent costume types. At their son's confirmation, elaborate formal dress prevailed. At their daughter's, they felt people were dressed more modestly. The Wrights say at their son's confirmation they saw "low-cut, off-the-shoulder dresses for girls, boys in tuxedos, and people arriving in limos...not like this year."³⁰ Elaborate formal dress, which they associated with "non-practicing"

²⁹Interview with Lydia and Lionel Wright, 14 May 1991, St. John's.

³⁰Interview with Lionel and Lydia Wright, 14 May 1991, St. John's.

families, reminded them that there were a lot of families participating whom they "did not know." For them, costume highlighted differences in religious practice and differences in belief about practice. The aesthetics of costume defined a parish community with which the Wrights, a highly visible couple at the church, were uncomfortable.

Although they have their own view of proper confirmation aesthetics, Lydia and her husband nevertheless question the conventions associated with confirmation. Some conventions, like the former customary taking of a confirmation name, they classify as "just tradition":

I mean times have really changed, in that regard. But in the, in the regard of taking another name, I wasn't affected by that, you know? I did it, but...I think it's just--tradition. That people even today wished, you know, to take another name, right? What difference does it make, really?³¹

³¹Interview with Lydia and Lionel Wright, 14 May 1991, St. John's. Name-taking, once a customary part of confirmation in this and other Newfoundland Catholic parishes, has all but disappeared. St. Cecilia's parish cites a desire on the part of parish leaders to conform to Vatican II recommendations to link, rather than differentiate, confirmation and baptism in Christian initiation. Hence the candidate's baptismal name is repeated at confirmation.

However, they regarded the traditional laying-on-of-hands during the rite as "very powerful,"³² adding that a spiritual maturity that comes with age and experience might be necessary for candidates to experience the power of the Holy Spirit on the spot. The Wrights distinguish between more and less important elements of tradition, and they differentiate these elements from participants' actual experience of confirmation. Nevertheless, the Wrights also experience confirmation by perceiving costume as a sign. This and other signs affect their sacramental experience. Costume conveys community heterogeneity.

Don Yoder points out that costume may "deindividualize the individual" in folk cultures, especially small, rural, or peasant communities, where "the focus" is "not on the individual but upon the community." In communities such as these, costume may express the wearer's "conforming participation in age,

³²William Bausch dates the appearance of the laying-on-of-hands within confirmation to the early third century A.D. By then, he says, "...simple water-baptism has acquired striking additions...the anointing with oil...and later the bishop's anointing, laying his hand on or over the candidate and praying for the blessing of the Holy Spirit" [A New Look at the Sacraments (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990) 93.]

sex and status groups within a unified community" rather than individual identity.³³

Joe Davis remembers his confirmation in St. Cecilia's more than twenty years ago. The parish was smaller in number. The neighborhood then was less urban and more uniformly working-class. By their "conforming participation" in the traditional displays of confirmation costume, Joe's parents individualized and emphasized the importance of the event for him. They paraded him, as one member of one family, before his admiring relatives:

E: So what else do you, I'm curious, what else do you remember about your own confirmations?

J: Me? Money [all laugh at this]. Yeah...well, the, OK, the actual OK the actual confirmation. We were, you were prepared basically on the rules and regulations of the church OK and what you could do, the Ten Commandments. What you could do and you couldn't do, OK? And uh, you had to wear a suit. You had to wear ah, for your confirmation you had to wear a red ribbon on your arm, the band with the things hanging down and the gold fringe on the bottom of it and another one in your, in your lapel, OK. And ah--

E: Do you have any idea why it's always red and white? It seems to be always red and white.

J: White, ah, red was for the Sacred Heart, OK. And white, ah, from what I understood was for the purity, the dove thing, you know what I mean? And that's how we always thought of it, anyway, that's all it meant to us...there was

³³Yoder, "Folk Costume" 308.

no school, because when you finished that, your parents took you and they dragged you all over town to see all your aunts and your uncles and your grannies and friends and whatever else and of course for one reason: to fill your pockets. Full of money. [laughter] You know? Yeah, it was as simple as that.

And I think now, when I think back on it, geez how stupid it was you know. Come in and see your First Confirmation suit. Well it's a suit, it's got a jacket, a shirt, a tie, a pair of pants, and a red ribbon. The same as the other, three thousand kids in the city would wear, you know.³⁴

In retrospect Joe is amused by his family's eagerness to display his costume. He recognizes that his outfit was hardly individual. According to Joe, the costume, the rewards associated with it, and the religious values connected with colors conformed to a general rule in the archdiocesan community. Parts of an event like costume, gifts, and colors call up well-known,

³⁴Interview with Joe and Dorothy Davis, 28 May 1991, near St. John's.

inherited interpretations of the whole. Joe's Catholic world in St. John's resembles the world within and around oral ballads and their singing composers.³⁵

Confirmation costume in the past was recognized as a whole and as a sign that the candidate had participated in the event of confirmation. Members of the community, even beyond the candidate's family, might recognize the significance of the event with the customary contribution, as Jerry Donnelly recalls:

It was always an occasion too where you picked up a few dollars, you know. Everybody'd be inclined to give you something for your confirmation. And I remember when I made mine, and on the way home we used to live down to Fort Amherst, right? I don't know if you know where that is, but it's right down the southside of St. John's...And on the way home, we met the mailman who was coming up from the southside after delivering the mail. And of course I was going down and I had on the, decked with the ribbons you know and Mom was there, going along with me.

And I remember meeting the postman now. And this was a fellow mind you who just delivered our mail. He didn't know us anymore than, you know, the fellow who delivers your mail now perhaps. Well maybe a little more because people at that time were walking and of course they probably had a little more contact with people, like that.

³⁵David Buchan, The Ballad and the Folk (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966) 171, says the oral composer of ballads draws upon the "mythology of the traditional community," i.e. its old knowledge of itself, for "symbolic imagery," "motifs," and "episodes": "The narrative and linguistic texture of the ballads, then expresses the texture of thought and feeling in the oral community."

But anyway we met the mailman, coming across the long bridge. And he immediately recognized that I was after making my confirmation. And he shoved his hand down his pocket and then we had our thirty-five cents, which was a big deal, back in the forties, or maybe the early fifties. Thirty-five cents, thought it was a miracle.³⁶

Many families expressed an intense desire to remember confirmation visually through artifacts such as videotapes and photographs. One parent declined to be interviewed, expressing strong disappointment at being denied the chance to capture the event on a family video camera:

Brought a video camera and the priest said we could only take pictures from where we were sitting, we were way in the back--couldn't see a thing. We didn't even go over to the parish hall or nothing afterward.³⁷

Another mother gave this account of her family's attempts to locate a lost Holy Communion photograph:

My aunt had, em, the only thing that I always wanted was my, Holy Communion picture. And she had a black and white five-by-seven Holy Communion picture. And she passed away. And, my uncle remarried. And I did approach him and my sisters approached him for me cause they say I looked identical to my daughter when I was her age, right. And they ah, the only thing that he said is that he's, he said we destroyed

³⁶Interview with Donnelly family, 13 May 1991, St. John's.

³⁷Phone conversation with Christine Dunn, 6 May 1991, St. John's.

them all. Oh and I was really disappointed cause I really wanted it. Because I don't have any, pictures of me when I was younger.³⁸

After this year's confirmation, candidates, families, and their friends flocked around the altar to pose for pictures. At the parish hall reception following the rite, candidates posed again, by themselves or with other candidates, for a professional photographer who had been engaged by the parish to accommodate the widespread wish for photographs.

The priority given by families in the past and present to making a visual record of sacraments underlines the importance of the sacraments themselves, their association with specific times in the life cycle, and their visual aspects, such as costume. As Jerry Donnelly points out, costume itself, like a visual emblem, helps maintain memory of confirmation over time:

Any special day involved, there's always some kind of costume, that, that sort of goes with it...you're newly outfitted with a, with a new suit for first Holy Communion, in my day at least everybody was, anyway. Confirmation was the same thing you know you had some kind of red ribbon and, and, I think any kind of thing, if you get married, you put on a costume for that, I guess it all helps remember. And then when the future time comes around you know you look at it and

³⁸Interview with Maureen Keene, 24 May 1991, St. John's.

there's nobody got to second guess you see this thing on your arm and the way you're done up and everybody knows.³⁹

Discussion

Summary

As a form which "consists of ordered arrays of elements" in a "physical medium" and "obeys fixed laws," the past and present types of confirmation costume may "naturally" be compared with spoken language.⁴⁰ In the past, the parish church seems to have taken the central role in arranging sets of prescribed confirmation costume parts for male and female candidates. In the case of female costume, primary costume parts such as wedding dresses were even procured by the parish church.⁴¹ Required uniformity in costume color and in selection and combination of parts generated a sacramental costume easily distinguished from mundane attire. Adherence to these "fixed laws" uniformities was prerequisite to sacramental participation.

³⁹Interview with Donnelly family, 13 May 1991, St. John's.

⁴⁰Greenberg 1, cited in Glassie 323-24.

⁴¹Lydia Fish notes that many nuns she taught in New York "took their final vows in full bridal costume...unsold wedding dresses were donated to the convents by pious owners of bridal shops." See her article, "Roman Catholicism as Folk Religion in Buffalo," Indiana Folklore 9 (1976): 165-74. Quote is on page 172.

In the present at St. Cecilia's, however, parish specifications have diversified into (1) prescription of one costume type (modest formal dress) accompanied by (2) prohibitions against two other types, the elaborate formal and the casual. Former promotions of uniformity of color and stress on standard selections and combinations of parts have relaxed to accommodate family and individual choices in procuring and arranging sacramental costume. Through verbal bargaining on shopping trips, at home, or in the parish neighborhood, settings beyond direct parish control, families now navigate the procurement, purchase, custom design and production of costume amid a wider variety of permissible colors and outfit parts. Trends in international, North American, and regional fashion form contexts which impinge upon these decisions.

Unlike past confirmation costume, two of the three present types of costume, the modest formal and the casual, are less easily distinguished from mundane attire. Parts, colors, and dress cuts of elaborate formal costume stand out sharply from school clothes or after-school sportswear but resemble costumes appropriate for secular ceremony and festivity, the graduation and the prom. Elaborate costume offers a visual bridge between confirmation and proximate secular rites, whereas

color unity and the sharing of bridal gowns in the past created resonances between the costumes of several Catholic sacraments.⁴²

Present-day families and candidates are not adhering solely to the type of costume recommended by parish leaders. Rather, they are selecting and combining elements into costumes which correspond more or less with elaborate-formal and casual types discouraged by the parish. The repertoire of candidates' costume at confirmation includes "ballgowns," sneakers, and other items which fall outside the modest formal norm. Family narratives and candidates' jocular dialogues about costume show that parents and children, like their parish leaders, recognize three basic costume types.

Meanings received and sent in connection with each costume type vary along with views expressed verbally by individual families and candidates. If present confirmation costume in this parish is still subject to a parish "law," such law is no longer being "obeyed" to an extent that results in uniformity. Rather, ordinary parishioners are generating their own "laws" which both

⁴²Even today, girls in this parish are commonly dressed as miniature "brides," in fancy white dresses and veils, for their First Communion. Christening gowns may also be white.

explain and perpetuate plurality and individuality in costume composition.

If folk costume is to be defined as "the visible, outward badge of folk-group identity, worn consciously to express that identity,"⁴³ past confirmation costume seems to qualify as folk costume more than contemporary confirmation costume. Sheerly by being more uniform and less open to individual variation, past confirmation costumes emphasized conformity over individuality more effectively, at least at a visual level of religious practice. This is not to conclude, however, that past confirmands were any more conformative or uniform than their present counterparts in attitudes toward confirmation or what they wore. On the other hand, contemporary confirmation costume might qualify as folk costume by being composed and assigned meaning in folk contexts such as home, family, or adolescent peer groups. The bargaining about present costume forms and their values in these contexts takes place a bit more "apart from" than "alongside" the recommendations of church officials.⁴⁴

⁴³Yoder "Folk Costume" 295.

⁴⁴"Folk religion is the totality of all those views and practices of religion that exist among the people apart from and alongside the strictly theological and liturgical forms of the official religion." Don Yoder, "Toward A

Like grammar, then, costume may be analyzed structurally, as a whole composed of parts whose movement and relation are guided by rules. As a structure, confirmation costume has varied along with its historical cultural context. The rules of costume have changed through use over time. New outfit parts, like new vocabulary words, are added to the selection pool, to be ordered in new ways. Study of a "language" such as costume can move away from structure to focus upon those who manipulate the structure: people themselves.

Costume Structure and Function

Confirmation costume as discussed here has structural functions (functions more dependent upon costume structure) and intentional functions (functions more determined by individual intentions). "Structural functions" refer to meanings which derive from the broad social recognition of costume as a whole composed of necessary parts. Parish communities, especially in the past, recognized confirmation costume as an aesthetic whole, a tradition of clothing, color, and ornament associated exclusively with a once-a-year, once-in-a-lifetime series of events. Such a structure, so recognized, signifies confirmation itself. As Jerry

Definition of Folk Religion," Western Folklore 33 (1974): 2-15. Quote appears on page 15.

Donnelly phrased it, you look at confirmation costume and "everybody knows" which event has taken place, apart from individual intentions. This is one example of a structural function.

There are other examples of structural functions. Confirmation costume might not only announce the occurrence of the rite, but unify the chain of subsequent celebratory activities. The costume has its place in the rite of confirmation itself, on candidates' walking journeys home, during displays for relatives, and in photographs and videos. The structure of confirmation costume focuses the family and the community upon the importance of the event and insures that the event will be recorded.

By "intentional functions" I mean meanings "sent" or "received" primarily by individuals through costume. Some parents say they experienced their children's maturity as the adolescents donned potential outfits, emerged from dressing rooms, and expressed their individual preferences. Others associate particular costume parts and traits with particular spiritual or social experiences ("whiteness" with "holiness and purity," and elaborateness with non-practice and community heterogeneity). Still others recognize costume elaboration as a sign of "effort" appropriate for an

elaborately planned social and spiritual event. Casual confirmation attire might convey a lack of "respect for the importance of the event." I am calling these intentional functions of confirmation costume because they depend upon communication between individuals and upon idiosyncratic, rather than communal, values.

By "intentional functions" I do not mean to imply that these functions require conscious sending of one such message consciously received, unchanged, by another. The limits of my field data prevent me from even speculating upon which of so many possible meanings reach receivers precisely as candidates, parents, or other parishioners meant to send them. For the purposes of this discussion, I consider all informants who verbally identify values with costume as the potential senders and receivers of such meaning.

Moreover, parishioners themselves perceive the difference "between the object as object and the object as sign."⁴⁵ There is a perception of costume as a sign of its own failure to measure, at a single moment in time, the human qualities it purports to measure. Parents question whether their children's mundane existence, which is supposed to be "confirmed," is not

⁴⁵Glassie 340.

the better measure of the social or spiritual maturity proclaimed or denied by costume and other signs in confirmation. Candidates themselves show through joking references to costume types that they are unable to reconcile their daily experience of immaturity with the marked celebration of their social or spiritual maturity.

Dividing meanings of confirmation costume into structural versus intentional functions is not quite enough. Room must be made for dialectics of meaning in the community, in which confirmation costume's structure critiques its function, which critiques its structure. For example, costume may suggest the rite of confirmation. The rite itself may suggest to some participants the immeasurability of maturity by an outward sign. Participants may consider the mundane as an alternate measure and reconsider whether confirmation costumes should be composed to resemble or differ from mundane costume forms. The structure of costume may be questioned as a measure of human qualities, and recomposed.

Costume as "Dialect"

Confirmation costume's functions may be illuminated further by considering costume as a "dialect," a subset of a larger parish "language." Adolescent girls, boys, and older parishioners may speak their own "dialects" by

wearing or preferring to see different sets of confirmation clothes at confirmations. Like speakers of highly differentiated dialects, they may find themselves unable to "converse" with each other. Adolescent boys may wear duck pants proudly among their peers, disregarding their grandparents' wish to see them in three-piece suits. Girls may displease teachers who stressed modest attire by wearing the elaborate white gowns that suggest holiness and tradition to their outport relatives. Approaching costume as dialect, a little language not spoken simultaneously by everyone in a parish community, directs more attention to whether the "artifact is a sign to the sender or the receiver or both."⁴⁶ St. Cecilia's parishioners differ in their attitudes toward this sacrament, and towards religious practice in general.

Emic Terms for Confirmation

Costume is not the only "language" parish groups use to express confirmation values. They have more than one term for confirmation. "Getting done" is the local Catholic vernacular for undergoing the initiation sacraments of baptism, holy communion, or confirmation. "Getting done" sometimes even means marriage. Working-

⁴⁶Glassie 340.

class families in the parish neighborhood often use this phrase, but there are exceptions.⁴⁷ Families who attend mass more regularly at the parish church seem more likely to say they are "getting confirmed." Clergy and lay parish leaders say the adolescents are "being strengthened in the Spirit." As John Gumperz has observed, a speech community is not synonymous with a social group⁴⁸ and people who may be separated by class, occupation, and habits of religious practice may share uses and understandings of words.

Parish leaders may employ the term "getting done" to characterize what they perceive as "non-practicing" families' misunderstandings of confirmation and sacraments in general:

Jan and Sister Scholastica got right into it, agreeing that there were plenty of people who just wanted their children "done," wanted them to be part of the program, and often did not practice themselves. They traded typical remarks they had heard...Father Hal asked them to clarify this a little bit for him, asking whether there were parents who did not practice, who did want the kids to be confirmed...According to Jan, there are quite a few....

⁴⁷The opposition between these terms and their rival definitions were made clear at the October parish planning meeting, in numerous conversations with parishioners and parish leaders, and through observation of their use during family interviews.

⁴⁸John J. Gumperz and Dell Hymes, Directions in Sociolinguistics (New York: Holt, 1972) 16.

Jan then acted out the typical February phonecall she would get from a latecomer to the program: "They'll call in February, after the program's been on since October. October, November, December, January. Four months, and she'll call and say, 'I want my child to be prepared for confirmation this year' ('I want to get him done'). And I'll say, 'Are you a member of the parish?' and she'll say yes and I'll say, 'We've been doing this for four months now,' and she'll say, 'Oh I didn't hear about that,' and I'll say 'Did you hear about it at Mass or did you get the Bulletin?' And she'll say, 'I still want my child confirmed.'" ⁴⁹

Two informants who attend Mass regularly and take an active role in other parish activities speculated that the term "getting done" is not used as often as it was in the past. They attributed this to greater discussion and education "about sacraments that there is now." The longer they considered the term, they began to discuss improper uses of words, class, and education in the parish, and how meanings change. Homeowners themselves, they made the cautious, nervous admission that the parish, at least in the past, had been considered a "poor area of town." While socioeconomic standing may not dictate attitudes toward sacraments, some parishioners may associate specific religious attitudes with class and educational status.

⁴⁹Notes on Confirmation Planning Meeting, 11 October 1991, St. Cecilia's parish hall, St. John's.

So-called "non-practicing" families who spend less time in church or say less about what differentiates sacraments may attribute importance to "getting done." I asked Jim Holloran about when he was confirmed. He did not respond immediately to this term. Instead, Jim provided me with his perspective of the essence of sacraments as he experienced them, "getting done" at age nine in a rural parish on the southwest coast of Newfoundland:

- J: I never went through that.
E: Confirmation? So...did they give you communion and--
J: No, I see, I give up school when I was thirteen.
E: Uh huh.
J: I went to work.
E: Right.
J: So I mean, I, I never went through none of this, what she's going through.
E: Yeah.
J: But there, I'd say that's why I'm probably getting mixed up. I thought confirmation and communion--same thing.
E: Yeah.
J: But it isn't...[but] With the white dress and everything else.
E: But you think of them as one thing.
J: Yeah. Same.
E: Cause ah, what, you mean, cause you get dressed up the same way?
J: Mm, you get dressed up, and you go up and say whatever you have to say, that's it.
E: So uh, were you guys from the same place?
D: No, he's from the West Coast.
J: Codroy Valley...Well, I was nine when I made mine. So, how how come, I don't know why they got to wait till they're fifteen or sixteen years old, you know, they should do it while they're still eight or nine years old.
E: Yeah.

- J: Don't give'em no choice. [Some laughter] Do it.
- E: So, what about brothers and sisters, you have any brothers and sisters?
- J: Oh yeah, there's thirteen more besides me.
- E: So, did they all go through their confirmation and communion?
- J: Well the oldest ones, like, there's four or five of us I don't think did go through it. Never went through it. The rest would be.
- E: So, people sort of made their own choice anyway, right?
- J: No, we never had no other choice any way in the matter. Soon's we were big enough to get out and go to work Dad said "Out the door." I mean we never stuck around kidding and laughing about confirmation.⁵⁰

Earlier in this interview, Jim's wife answered that, like Jim, she had received two sacraments at once, at age six in her Shea Heights parish. She too perceived receiving communion and confirmation as a necessity and as one event, unified with one ceremony, celebration, gifts, and a single costume. The Hollorans believe that "getting done" is a solemn occasion, and that getting done must get done, not unlike work.

Whether parishioners view sacraments, like these people do, as matters of course, woven into the fabric of mundanity, or whether they set sacraments above the mundane, in momentary time and life-time, by preparation and "efforts," people may share belief in the basic importance of confirmation, as well as other spiritual

⁵⁰Interview with Holloran family, 14 May 1991, St. John's.

beliefs or experiences. It is often difficult to qualify how "religious" or "Catholic" either point of view may be.

Jimmy Holloran's comments do demonstrate how parishioners' memories of costume may be embedded in and in some sense inseparable from attitudes toward the sacrament's place in the socioeconomic reality of their lives. Remembered economic burdens may shape the amount and kind of language exchanged in discussions about sacraments. This may or may not be part of what might be called a Catholic ethnicity. Informants may associate life events other than confirmation with maturity and the assumption of responsibility. Confirmation may be assigned an overall life importance relative to these events.

It is possible that parish leaders' concern with the term "getting done" rests upon perceptions of passive versus active roles of sacramental participants. In their view, there are families and candidates actively "doing confirmation" versus "getting done" by the parish or by God, without making an effort. The "effort" expected of a confirmation candidate may be defined, like costume, in many ways, according to many kinds of people in one parish.

Furthermore, if parishioners expect "strength from the Holy Spirit" as a possible benefit of confirmation, the requirement of human effort may be balanced by a sense of the mysterious, uncontrollable transcendence of the Holy Spirit's will to confer gifts upon individuals. The tricky balance of communicative power between humans and God is reflected in a story that circulates, year after year, among confirmation coordinators. This is the story of Brian Hennessy, the "non-practicing" boy who, protesting that he wanted to make his confirmation anyway, asked his teachers how they knew that what he got during confirmation (the Holy Spirit) would not suddenly "kick in" years later. Brian made his confirmation. Teachers may not remember what costume he wore, but they remember "he had a point."⁵¹

Multivocality of Confirmation Costume

Because confirmation costume refers to parish community values which "cluster around opposite semantic poles," confirmation costume may be considered a multivocal ritual symbol, in Victor Turner's sense.⁵² Confirmation costume conflates secular and sacred values,

⁵¹Notes on Confirmation Planning Meeting, 11 October 1991, St. Cecilia's parish hall, St. John's. I heard this story repeated many times in the field.

⁵²Victor Turner, The Ritual Process (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1969) 52.

maturity and immaturity, the momentary and the mundane, social responsibilities and freedom, human effort and divine grace. Yet these unities may exist merely at symbolic or official levels, unless individuals experience them.

Given the many differences and disagreements about values in the parish, expressed in words and in costume, perhaps confirmation costume is "multivocal" in a more radical sense. It allows people who may "cluster around opposite semantic poles," adolescents and adults, male and female candidates, clergy and lay people, families and parish officials, to come together and express spiritual and social difference.

**Table 5.1. Common Components of Three Current
Costume Types**

<u>Elaborate Formal</u>	<u>Modest Formal</u>	<u>Casual</u>
(Male)		
Three-piece suit	One suit piece + dress shirt	Sports shirt
Two-piece suit	Dress shirt + sweater	Jeans Cords Sweats
Tie	Tie	
New/dress shoes	Ordinary shoes	Sneakers
Haircut	Haircut	
(Female)		
Floor-length gown	Dress	None
Skirt/dress below knee	Simple skirt/blouse	described
All-white outfit	Dress slacks/blouse	or
Headband/hair corsage		observed
French braids	French braids	
Pantyhose	Pantyhose	
Heels/dress shoes	Dress shoes	

Figure 5.1. Candidates Cutting the Confirmation Cake.
Photo by M.-A. Desplandres.

Figure 5.2. Candidates Cutting the Confirmation Cake.
Photo by M.-A. Desplanques.



CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

All that confirmation is, is exactly literally what the word says, a confirmation of your faith, your belief in it...cause they have the ability to say no.

--Parent of a candidate

This folklore study takes an inductive approach to uncover a sacrament as experience. My approach has been influenced by the current concentration upon experience in folk belief studies and by concurrent and earlier related work in other disciplines. After locating the approach in relation to its main influences, this final analysis treats confirmation as an adolescent phenomenon. I ask why it is that adolescents receive confirmation in the Roman Catholic Church, rather than adults, and whether the persistence of this age of administration might indicate a gap between secular and Catholic assumptions about adolescence in Newfoundland. Confirmation is then considered against broader traditions of belief about adolescent spirituality, in and outside Catholicism. The sacrament is finally interpreted as a form of play which moves beyond aesthetics and mediates sacred and secular values and a plurality of Catholic experience in this Newfoundland parish.

An Inductive Approach to Practice

In 1969 sociologist Peter Berger distinguished between two approaches to the study of religion: one that deduces meaning from tradition, and another that induces meaning from generally accessible experience.¹ These differences rely, according to Berger, upon two different understandings of the relationship between reason and faith. Deductive approaches, even if they use rational methods, often emphasize faith rather unecumenically as revelation. Inductive approaches assume a more ecumenical relativity and investigate rational processes which support ordinary people's beliefs. Belief scholar David Hufford promotes a similar set of views among folklorists as an experience-centered approach to the study of supernatural belief.² Scholars like Hufford and Berger work within the theological tradition spearheaded by Friedrich Schleiermacher, the eighteenth-century liberal Protestant who caught the ear

¹Peter Berger, A Rumor of Angels (New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1969) 88.

²See especially David Hufford, The Terror That Comes in the Night: An Experience-Centered Study of Supernatural Assault Traditions (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1982) as well as "Traditions of Disbelief," New York Folklore Quarterly 8 (1982): 47-55 and "Reason, Rhetoric, and Religion: Academic Ideology Versus Folk Belief," New York Folklore 11 (1985): 177-94.

of skeptical friends by explaining religion in terms of experience.³

In this research, I have taken an inductive approach to the practice of a Roman Catholic sacrament. I use the word "practice" rather than "belief" on purpose.

Participation in the sacrament of confirmation in this parish does not absolutely presuppose religious beliefs any more than a Catholic life presupposes religious faith. American novelist Mary McCarthy has explained very eloquently the discontinuity between the experience of an American Catholic upbringing and matters of belief or disbelief. In her preface to Memories of a Catholic Girlhood, McCarthy, an ardent disbeliever, bravely describes depths of her Catholic heritage which survived a loss of faith:

Granted that Catholic history is biased, it is not dry or dead, its virtue for the student, indeed, is that it has been made to come alive by the violent partisanship which...acts as a magnet to attract stray pieces of information not ordinarily taught....Nor is it only a matter of knowing more, at an earlier age, so that it becomes a part of oneself, it is also a matter of feeling. To care for the quarrels of the past, to identify oneself passionately with a cause that became, politically speaking, a losing cause with the birth of the modern world, is to experience a kind of straining against reality, a rebellious nonconformity

³Friedrich Schleiermacher, On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers, trans. John Oman (New York: Ungar, 1955).

that, again is rare in America, where children are instructed in the virtues of the system they live under, as though history had achieved a happy ending in American civics.⁴

Non-religious Catholicism can and must be studied, though skeptics may doubt its existence. Disbelievers do complicate the picture by changing their minds. Berger makes the sly observation that official religious traditions require "unreasonable loyalties" of their participants. Therefore, in the right official contexts, Catholics like McCarthy may experience urges to believe which, Berger warns, ought not be equated with choice or faith:

Such notions have a curious persistence, even among intellectuals who have largely emancipated themselves from their respective religious backgrounds...such statements as "I must find out more about my faith," or, even more sharply, "I really ought to learn what we believe."...Faith, in the proper meaning of the word, is or is not held....There is even something touching about a Jewish agnostic who feels twitches of conscience as he eats his dinner on Yom Kippur, or a skeptic of Catholic antecedents who senses a pressure under his kneecaps as the host is carried by on Corpus Christi. If such psychological data are elevated to become criteria of truth, however, they become mystifications that perform the function Sartre called "bad faith"--that is, they misrepresent choice as destiny and thus deny the choices actually made.⁵

⁴Mary McCarthy, Memories of a Catholic Girlhood (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1946) 24-25.

⁵Berger 88-90.

Berger's remarks highlight the role of choice and options in individual experience of faith and suggest the danger of equating belief with participation in official religious practice. Hufford takes the consideration of choice and options further and reports that his informants integrated or manipulated several orders of explanation for extraordinary experience.⁶

Both scholars are interested in investigating dialectics between doubt and faith which occur at a remove from official religious tradition, in the realm of individual encounter with the supernatural. Yet amid the excitement of investigating dynamics of extraordinary experience, the mundane, direct experience of the practice of tradition may easily be overlooked. Official religious practices like sacraments can imply contact with the numinous that is predictable, controllable, or even constant. Investigation of ordinary people's experience of such practices can contribute to reassessment of the ontological claims of official

⁶Hufford's informants considered physical as well as supernatural explanations for "Old Hag" attacks, used the terms of more than one supernatural assault tradition to describe the attacks, and sometimes assumed there were multiple causes (Hufford, Terror 10, 66, and passim).

traditions⁷ and contradict the assumption that the experience of official religious practice is necessarily religious.

From this perspective, "bad faith" can be re-examined as the experience of official tradition's call to belief. This call necessitates responses and generates meanings with which other modes of experience must be integrated. To use Berger's example, the weak-kneed skeptic of Catholic forbears may return home after holy day mass and see the ghost of his grandmother. Alternately, he may flip on the TV news, retire to bed, and re-read his favorite philosophical arguments against the existence of God. The spectrum of experience warrants more attention, from practice to belief and back, through the habitual, as well as the unusual.

The approach taken here assumes that parish informants can and will articulate their participation in confirmation reasonably as individual, more-or-less religious choices and experience. Parishioners in St. Cecilia's define faith not only in Berger's strict sense but in the context of their family and their lifetime, where it does indeed appear and disappear, inside and

⁷Whether or not there are suspicions of secular humanistic waterings-down of notions of the holy. Official ontologies may contain more or less space for the sacred than parishioners' views of the world.

outside practice. In this community context, I am interpreting confirmation as practice, rather than belief. Confirmation candidates and families may be practicing their belief, practicing to believe, or practicing Catholicism as a moral, aesthetic, or intellectual world view. Conceiving of confirmation as practice is meant to take in both Berger's point that participants at traditional religious events may spend time "practicing" how to believe rather than really believing, and McCarthy's enormous appreciation for Catholic cultural experience that is separable from faith.

Methodologically speaking, the approach I have taken is inductive in three respects. First, rather than relying upon official accounts of the confirmation liturgy, I have studied confirmation as a series of preparations for the rite and associated celebrations, inside and outside a parish church. Participant observation of these activities during the year allowed me to enter into the sacrament as an experience. Secondly, I have collected and compared narratives and other verbal genres by which participants describe and assign meaning to confirmation as a personal experience. Thirdly, I have allowed my analysis to be guided by conflicts and questions that emerged out of field data.

I have assumed relativism in the sense of assuming, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, that each parishioner's experience of confirmation was real, thought out with some care, and appposable with any other point of view in the parish.

Confirmation and Adolescent Status

Roman Catholics ordinarily receive the three rites of initiation into their religion before they finish adolescence. The persistence of childhood administration of baptism, communion, and confirmation is remarkable and problematic in contexts where secular societal systems simultaneously deny adolescents and younger persons the social privileges and responsibilities of adulthood. Laws in Newfoundland and across North America declare adolescents too young to vote, determine their education, or consent to sexual relationships.

Adolescent candidates in St. Cecilia's are urged to get "ready" for confirmation, a rite which marks their maturity as Roman Catholics, but inside and outside the parish they are not considered ready for adult privileges and responsibilities. Most candidates said they consider themselves "not yet adults," citing parental control over their lives as evidence. As a recognition of maturity, confirmation is an anomalous experience for these adolescents. The rite may conceal, rather than express,

parishioners' general ambivalence about calling their sons and daughters "mature."

It is hard to explain why confirmation is conferred upon candidates of this age. To complicate matters, early Christian initiates were adults. The widespread practice of baptizing infants appears to date back only so far as the influence of St. Augustine's teachings on original sin and a ruling from the Council of Elvira at the turn of the third century. Rome has officially endorsed various ages under fifteen, but the frequency and extent of local bishops' travels also help determine how many of what age are confirmed when. Those who would turn to theology or liturgical history for unequivocal justifications of childhood administration of the sacraments of initiation may not find them.

The theology of confirmation, discussed in Chapter Four, associates spiritual maturity with confirmation but insists that candidates achieve this independently of their age and experience. Parishes, on the other hand, face and assess first-hand the age, experience, and understanding of adolescents who are getting ready for confirmation. Theology may ignore norms in the local social context, yet parish leaders and parishioners must ask questions and find answers within this context.

Newfoundland's west coast parishes are already pushing confirmation age up into high school years.

Inherent in many definitions of adulthood are assumptions about the cognitive capabilities of children and the inseparability of such capabilities from their biological age. Perceptions of adolescence in this parish may be compared with secular norms and laws in the surrounding region. Here in Newfoundland, as elsewhere in Canada, legal determination of an adolescent's inability to give informed consent to a sexual relationship rests upon an assertion that a person at this stage in life cannot grasp the implications of such an action sufficiently to choose it autonomously.⁸ How is it possible, then, that a Newfoundland parish orchestrates preparatory and celebratory events each year which recognize the abilities of children and adolescents to understand and choose freely to support the central tenets of Roman Catholicism?

There may be a gap between sacred and secular estimations of what adolescents can understand. Precedents for regarding children as spiritually mature

⁸Gordon Winter, Nuala Kenny, Everett MacNeil, Frances O'Flaherty, and John Scott, The Report of the Archdiocesan Commission of Enquiry into the Sexual Abuse of Children by Members of the Clergy, vol. 1 (St. John's, NF: Archdiocese of St. John's, 1990) 29-30.

certainly exist in the larger Roman Catholic tradition. Theology and parish practice may both be giving adolescents credit for more cognitive ability than they actually possess, declaring "maturity" prematurely in order to maintain old but questionable liturgical conventions. This criticism, however, assumes that spirituality is a partially or completely cognitive affair or that adolescents employ the same abilities to understand a religious event as they would to grasp the implications of other critical life events. Different events may be thought to require different understandings.

Adults I interviewed in this parish might call their children ready for confirmation, but were hardly arguing with local laws that state they are too young to work, drive, vote, or give informed consent to sex. Confirmation may be perceived as a different order of event altogether, a rite recognizing God-given supernatural maturity that adolescents might consciously possess. Unlike other adult privileges and responsibilities, undergoing confirmation has few clear implications for adolescents' health, civil rights, or economic welfare. Securing their informed consent before the rite is comparatively less crucial. "Community service" required of candidates is not severe and is

frequently fulfilled by domestic assistance the adolescents already lend their parents at times. In some cases young confirmation candidates do volunteer for local service organizations. Some candidates interviewed said they did experience greater pressure from parents around confirmation time to perform household responsibilities, but most seemed to agree that their roles had not changed after being confirmed.

Whether or not adolescents are considered adults by local secular standards, their readiness for confirmation is still an important parish issue. Parish leaders try to measure readiness by asking students if they pray, attend Sunday mass, and volunteer to help their neighbors out. In group interviews for this study, many candidates admitted, however, that they were unable to understand many key tenets or to reconcile a scriptural history of the world with evolution. Their doubts, before and after confirmation, may be overlooked precisely because they are very adult doubts, or because parish adults perceive adolescent spirituality or cognitive ability as evolving rather than defined. Some parishioners, however, may take these admissions as evidence that adolescents are not ready or too young.

On the other hand, candidates expressed a remarkable variety of images of God. An adolescent girl in the

parish seems to have navigated her way through a supernatural experience by traditional testing and careful observation. After looking away, praying, and looking again at an apparition of Jesus with his heart exposed, she came to believe it was genuine.⁹

Confirmation may confirm the adolescent potential for such religious experience.

Moreover, adolescent religious experience may integrate itself with the concrete, unadult realities of local adolescent life. The apparition in question occurred in the context of an adolescent's recognition of her position of subjection to the "contrary" control of an adult teacher. An image of God appeared to her as she was praying for an adult's behavior to change. She was rewarded for doing what she could do, given her status. Her experience validates, rather than contradicts, other local adolescents' descriptions of their lack of power over their own lives and their frequent subordination to adults.

⁹Praying is one traditional way of testing the authenticity of an apparition. Sprinkling the apparition with holy water is another. Adolescent visionaries at Garabandal in the early 1960s used both methods; see F. Sanchez-Ventura y Pascual, The Apparitions of Garabandal, trans. A. de Bertodano (Detroit: San Miguel, 1966) 89. A young girl at Medjugorje sprinkled holy water on her vision of the Blessed Virgin and said the Virgin smiled [Lucy Rooney and Robert Faricy, Mary, Queen of Peace (New York: Alba House, 1984) 21].

Broader Traditions of Adolescent Spirituality

In the tradition of Roman Catholic Marian devotion there are precedents for regarding adolescents as capable of understanding spiritual truth before they reach other levels of social maturity. Children and adolescents have frequently been first to receive dramatic revelations through the Blessed Virgin or directly from God. Notable examples are apparitions of Mary to three shepherd children at Fatima, Portugal in 1917, and similar apparitions to four young girls at Garabandal, Spain, in the 1960s. The Garabandal girls said the Virgin they saw looked about seventeen years old herself, while her herald angel looked about nine.¹⁰ Six young people at Medjugorje, Yugoslavia had visions of the Virgin throughout the 1980s.¹¹

Saints Bernadette of Lourdes, Maria Goretti, and Thérèse of Lisieux are also reputed for receiving visions and demonstrating spiritual understandings before or shortly after puberty. The apparitions at Fatima, Garabandal, and Medjugorje exemplify a widespread tradition of belief in the likelihood of God to entrust messages of geopolitical importance to children, rather

¹⁰Sanchez-Ventura y Pascual 51, 35.

¹¹Rooney and Faricy 7 and passim.

than adults. The Virgin usually warns of war, begs for peace, and says that faith, prayer, and fasting will help. Not surprisingly, very young vocations to the priesthood or convent life have until rather recently been regarded by many Roman Catholics as more, rather than less, authentic.

Recent American news reports point to an upsurge of "Fatima fever," a folk and official belief that the recent democratization of the former Soviet Union is the result of a divine intervention, prophesied by Our Lady of Fatima in 1917. Belief is currently feeding upon news reports of a secret alliance between Pope John Paul II and U.S. President Ronald Reagan aimed at "destabilizing the Polish government and keeping the outlawed Solidarity movement alive after the declaration of martial law in 1981."¹² The Polish pope has made statements linking the events at Fatima to the collapse of communism in Europe and has rendered public thanks to Our Lady of Fatima for sparing him from assassination on May 13, 1981, the sixty-fourth anniversary of the first Fatima apparition.¹³ Apparitions at Medjugorje in the 1980s

¹²Carl Bernstein, "The Holy Alliance," Time 24 February 1992: 28-35.

¹³R. Gustav Niebuhr, "Fatima Fever: Did Mary Prophecy Soviet Goings-On?" Wall Street Journal 27 Sept. 1991: A1, A4.

occurred in the context of severe religious oppression under a communist regime. Events at Garabandal and Medjugorje have not received the degree of official approval extended to those at Fatima.

Adolescents' burden of obedience to questionable elders is a common theme in Marian apparitions, and an especially provocative one given the ease with which world leaders are currently interpreting and coopting the adolescents' experiences for political purposes. In descriptions of events at Fatima, Garabandal, and Medjugorje, emphasis upon young people's spiritual capacities is often balanced by descriptions of their vulnerability to adult disbelievers, inside and outside the faith, with resulting exploitation, mistreatments, and control. Skeptical priests, bishops, and political leaders are frequently involved. Regardless of their religious beliefs or experiences, confirmation candidates at St. Cecilia's complained in interviews and during their preparatory program of being controlled by adults generally.

Religious Objections to the Confirmation of Adolescents

Along with confidence in adolescent spiritual abilities, there is doubt about adolescent spiritual maturity in St. Cecilia's and in Roman Catholicism. Supporters of the parish RCIA program (Rite of Christian

Initiation of Adults) cast a critical eye upon the "confirmation" of adolescent faith. RCIA promotes extended exploration of religious faith, in adult group discussions, previous to the rites of initiation.

Members of this program recognize that conversion and full commitment to Catholicism is something even adults must seek carefully and slowly. Though they might hesitate to call the RCIA program an entirely "rational" process (since they believe it to be supernaturally guided), it nevertheless requires an adult's thoughtful assessment of his or her life experience. The RCIA program is open to Catholics who have not committed themselves to the faith, in addition to non-Christians and members of other Christian denominations.

William Christian reports that villagers in the Garabandal region regarded local teenagers as a mocedad, the "most unsacred associations" a priest could have. Informants noted these adolescents' "mock versions of the Lord's Prayer" and their tendency to "mock all authority," signs of status within a "temporary counterculture."¹⁴ Younger priests offended older

¹⁴William A. Christian, Person and God in a Spanish Valley (New York: Seminar, 1972) 184. Alessandro Falassi has collected some Italian prayer parodies in Folklore by the Fireside (Austin: U of Texas P, 1980) and children are not the only ones who use them.

residents by beginning to associate with young people by the 1970s. Christian attributes the change to the advent of a new system of conceiving relations between person and God in this Spanish valley.

In the new system, Christian argues, divine intermediaries were replaced by human ones: persons were to be signs of God to other persons. One wonders if the adolescent visionaries at Garabandal might have been caught in a skeptical dialectic, after Vatican II, between older villagers who thought them "unsacred" and younger priests who waved talk of Mary and angels away. The Virgin at Medjugorje seems to have evaded the clash by telling the children she would leave a permanent, visible sign of her appearance for some while reminding them also that "you do not need a sign, you must be a sign."¹⁵

There are various objections in St. Cecilia's parish to confirming adolescents. Not all parishioners are convinced that adolescents are old enough to understand what their religious culture is about, much less commit themselves. There are adults who would take adolescent play with official tenets of faith (jokes about the Trinity, Transubstantiation, and so forth) at their face

¹⁵Rooney and Faricy 42.

value, as evidence of spiritual or general immaturity. As the chapter on retreat demonstrated, however, adolescent expressions of belief are mixed continually with expressions of doubt within performances of jocular folklore genres.

On the basis of data from group interviews, retreat observation, community narratives, and drawn and verbal "Images of God," I would hesitate to characterize confirmation candidates as a kind of mocedad in this parish. They are continually confirmed by the parish, joking aside. St. Cecilia's adolescents may simply form a "temporary counterculture" by practicing what George Orwell called "doublethink" for a time, in order to acquaint themselves with traditions of belief and disbelief.¹⁶ Where "doublethink" ends, of course, is where more complete faith or doubt might begin.

Confirmation is administered each year in St. Cecilia's amid the many pro's and con's. Some parishioners say they admire their children's last veneer

¹⁶Hufford, "Traditions of Disbelief" 47-55. Antony Flew suggests "the philosophers of religion might well draw upon George Orwell's...concept of doublethink," meaning "the power of holding two contradictory beliefs simultaneously, and accepting both of them." (Flew, quoting Orwell's 1984, page 220, in Antony Flew, R. M. Hare, and Basil Mitchell, "Symposium on Theology and Falsification," Reason and Responsibility, 6th ed., ed. Joel Feinberg (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1985) 71-76.

of "innocence" at confirmation, well aware that youth will soon pass. Other parents hoped confirmation age would not be raised because the event "would not mean as much" to candidates at an older age. Still other parents stubbornly asserted their determination to nudge their children through confirmation during the rebellious period of adolescence until the prodding "paid off" later in regular, willing mass attendance and strong religious faith.

Finally, Roman Catholic perceptions of adolescent spirituality might be viewed as part of a continuum of religious and supernatural beliefs and phenomena.¹⁷ Such a continuum might include childhood religious initiations, child clergy stories, legends of child-saints (and of the childhoods of saints), adolescent preaching and testimony, apparitions to children, and even poltergeists associated with adolescent agents.¹⁸ Adolescent spirituality is questioned and valued within

¹⁷The concept of a continuum of beliefs and experiences comes from Peter Rojcewicz, "'The Men In Black' Experience and Tradition: Analogues with the Traditional Devil Hypothesis," Journal of American Folklore 100 (1987): 148-60.

¹⁸Alan Gauld and A. D. Cornell have conducted a computerized analysis of poltergeist stories in their book Poltergeists (London: Routledge, 1979). They say (page 16) that "it is a commonplace of poltergeist stories that poltergeists tend to centre round particular persons, often adolescents, especially girls."

and outside the Christian tradition. Eight-year-old Islamic preacher Abdul Fatah, known as the "child Imam," addressed a crowd of 200,000 Algerians last year on sexual mores.¹⁹ Diane Goldstein has argued that thirteen-year-old Maharaj Ji's popular reputation as "the teenage guru" helped to distinguish his Divine Light Mission from other eastern cult organizations prevalent in the U.S. in the 1970s.²⁰

Ethnic Catholicism and Practice Differences

While the above discussion establishes contexts of belief which surround confirmation, confirmation does not have a single, purely religious significance to this parish community or to individual participants. Chapter Two exposed the variety of practice standards among the participants in confirmation and the tendency within the community to regard church-oriented families as "practicing" while referring to privately religious families as "non-practicing." These observations make it more difficult to differentiate religious and ethnic Catholicisms.

¹⁹See page 25, Judith Miller, "The Tidal Islamic Wave," New York Times Magazine 31 May 1992: 23-26, 38-42.

²⁰Diane Goldstein, unpublished paper on Maharaj Ji, the "teenage guru" of Divine Light Mission, 1979.

There may be families who participate in confirmation at St. Cecilia's without religious motives. They may wish to have their children's upcoming adulthood recognized publicly, emphasized by costume, and preserved in photographs or videotapes. Given the taboo against admitting a preference for practicing religion outside the parish church, it is doubtful that families would admit having purely secular reasons for participating in confirmation. Parish leaders seem to acknowledge the possibility of non-religious participation. They complain that some people seem to be forgetting the spiritual side of confirmation by overemphasizing costume or other material effects.

Confirmation draws together a different set of Catholics than those who meet regularly at Sunday masses in the parish church. Unlike masses, confirmation occurs once in the candidate's lifetime. Confirmation can unite Catholics who have no common denominator of religious practice. Some may attend mass regularly. Others may practice religion privately. Still others may do neither, or both. The study of sacraments, more so than pilgrimages, sacramentals, or "spontaneous and purely

private devotions,"²¹ exposes the diversity of rationales people use to call themselves Catholic.

Confirmation: Aesthetics and Play

Confirmation in St. Cecilia's parish is a beautiful practice: there is an aesthetic unity to the rite. Tiers of the hierarchy of the parish community rise in turn to testify out loud that the youngest among them understands their religion. If one considers the liturgy as a cultural question, rather than an answer, the aesthetic "truth" seems to survive all the splits between participation and belief. The highest official in the archdiocese calls upon parish clergy, pastoral workers, schoolteachers, parents, and sponsors to verify that candidates are ready to be confirmed. Boys and girls between thirteen and fifteen walk to the altar to be greeted and blessed. As they pass in procession, their neighbors see what they are wearing, perhaps their first startlingly adult set of clothes. The garments may hang upon them awkwardly, touchingly emphasizing their childhood, or they may fit perfectly, transforming children for an evening into the adults their parents have been waiting to know.

²¹David Hufford, "Ste. Anne de Beaupré: Roman Catholic Pilgrimage and Healing," Western Folklore 44 (1985): 194-207. Quote from page 198.

It is startling to see children profess their belief in anything adults call mysterious or assert their confidence in the enormous claims that their elders have made for centuries about the way the world is. It is invigorating to see children changing physically and socially, slowly and somehow all at once, into adults. There is in confirmation a great deal of the "universal," if such a value exists in cultural terms; the aesthetics of the rite give rise to the "contagiousness of faith," "dignity of unanimous consent," and "impressiveness of collective behavior" which may carry observers away.²² Berger (and Sartre) might judge the persuasiveness of "universality" an even greater seduction into "bad faith" than the unreasonable appeal of tradition. Yet there is always room to question the correspondence between the public activities of crowds and the truth.²³ The unified aesthetics of ritual can and do conceal diversities of experience and belief which individuals and small groups bring to these community events.

The meaning of confirmation is not purely aesthetic. Confirmation embodies broad social and religious values

²²Bronislaw Malinowski, Magic, Science and Religion (Garden City, NY: Doubleday/Anchor, 1954) 63.

²³Søren Kierkegaard, "That Individual," Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: New American Library, 1975) 94-101; Malinowski 55-56.

in controversial ways. The sacrament emerges out of old Roman Catholic liturgical tradition, expands into many forms of celebration and preparation within individual parishes, and survives today in Newfoundland. The official tradition permits a tremendous variation in the organization of the event at the parish level. Confirmation is a fine example of what the German scholar of folk religion Georg Schreiber might have called kirchliche Volkskunde or even nebenkirchliche Volkskunde, "folk-cultural phenomena which are associated with or grow out of ecclesiastical phenomena" or which attain "a partially independent existence outside the boundary of orthodoxy."²⁴

Like the parish Garden Party, confirmation at St. Cecilia's brings persons who do not necessarily agree all year round about adolescent maturity, religious faith, and community life, together in one space, at one time. Narratives, jocular folklore, and play express divisions as well as unities among parishioners who participate in this event. Because confirmation juxtaposes so many conflicting views within the boundaries of traditional celebration, the sacrament might be viewed as a form of

²⁴Don Yoder provides these explanations of Schreiber's phrases in his article "Toward A Definition of Folk Religion," 33 (1974): 2-15.

play. The official history of Christian confirmation, its evolution as a Roman Catholic liturgy, and local parish programs shape and deliver the rite as an established world with its own rules. Past and present costume types are material which participants handle traditionally and creatively to make different, often conflicting statements of practice and belief in the "safe" atmosphere of the liturgy. Like play, the liturgy stands at a remove from mundane existence, reflecting, escaping, and potentially reshaping this reality.

At the rite of confirmation, it is somehow safe for persons who are not in the habit of worshipping publicly, or worshipping at all, to walk inside the parish church alongside neighbors and leaders who claim this space and its mood by their year-round, regular presence.

"Practicing" parishioners meet and assess the people they might call "non-practicing." By uniting Catholics in their heterogeneity, confirmation plays with the myth of a uniformity of Catholic practice.

The highest leader in a diocesan community comes and shows himself to ordinary Catholics at confirmation. Ordinary Catholics come and show the archbishop their children. Verbal formula at the rite and the common understanding of a celebratory mood prevent hierarchical ritual structure from dissolving into a communitarian

question-and-answer session between parishioners and leaders on the current state of the archdiocese. Nevertheless, the rite remains the one opportunity most parishioners have each year to encounter and assess the highest local Roman Catholic leader. Local concerns about child sexual abuse, adolescent rights and privileges, or Newfoundland economics may hover, unspoken, in the air.

It has also become safer recently for adolescents to play with certain costume forms at confirmation to proclaim their physical maturity, along with their spiritual development. Costumes today introduce the play between sacred and secular values in the lives of Newfoundland adolescents. On one hand, they may wear clothes which resonate with the costumes of other Roman Catholic sacraments or which hark back to the holy, mandatory whiteness of confirmation costume in Newfoundland parishes in the past. Alternately, their confirmation costumes may resemble outfits for graduations and proms, secular events which mark educational and sexual maturity.

If confirmation may be taken, like play, as a world of its own, then the safety of that world may also end where its boundaries break down. Family life, physical and spiritual experiences of adolescence, church

politics, local issues of social justice, and Newfoundland economics exist in the context of the mundane, outside the safe zone marked off by sacramental tradition. The safe play between official and folk Catholicism in confirmation might be transformed into questions which ordinary Catholics might ask from day to day about religious experience and community ethics. Confirmation in this sense may be pervaded by the playful virtue Hugo Rahner called "eutrapelia," a "rest we take as a means to further activity."²⁵

John Williams has suggested that the Catholic Church in Newfoundland is an institution so intertwined with local government and education that it cannot separate itself from the status quo in order to ask hard ethical questions.²⁶ Gregory Baum has shown that Catholics elsewhere in Canada defied papal and episcopal condemnations of socialism during and after the Depression to strive for economic and political reforms.²⁷ Newfoundland Catholics are now more self-

²⁵"Eupractic Eutrapely," rev. of Man at Play, by Hugo Rahner, Times Literary Supplement 13 May 1965: 374.

²⁶John Williams, "Religion in Newfoundland," Religion and Culture in Canada (Waterloo, ON: CCSR, 1977) 95-116.

²⁷Gregory Baum, Catholics and Canadian Socialism (Ramsay, NJ: Paulist, 1980) and "Social Catholicism in Nova Scotia," Religion and Culture in Canada, ed. Peter Slater (Waterloo, ON: CCSR, 1977) 117-48.

conscious than ever as a result of public investigation into child sexual abuse by clergy. Yet this is not to say that ordinary Newfoundland Catholics never questioned the authority of the church in the past, or might not have called themselves Catholic then for unconventional reasons.

There must have been thoughtful and rebellious faces among the crowds that gathered around bishops at Rogue's Roost and Gallow's Cove in the eighteenth century. The Winter Commission's investigations and report might prove Williams wrong about Newfoundland Catholicism, if more of its recommendations for real institutional change, starting with victim compensation, are translated into action. As a practice which confirms parishioners' loyalty to an official and folk tradition, confirmation in St. Cecilia's nevertheless challenges all of its participants to admit their differences and ask new questions about individual and collective Catholicism.

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