

Book Review

Angelo Muroi, *L'ordine dei sacramenti dell'iniziazione cristiana: La storia e la teologia dal XIV secolo al 1992 nel rito Romano*. Centro Liturgico Vincenziano -Edizioni Liturgiche, Bibliotheca <<Ephemerides liturgicae>> <<Subsidia>> 141, Roma 2007, 510 pp., ISBN 978-88-7367-066-7.

Many authors have compiled informative histories of baptism and its ancillary rites, but few have attempted the difficult history and implicit meaning of the oscillating sequence of two postbaptismal ceremonies in the Roman rite: confirmation and first communion. Pietro Angelo Muroi has commendably absorbed extensive research and presents it insightfully. True to his subtitle, he offers not just history but theology of the order of the sacraments of Christian initiation, while focusing on the 14th through the 20th centuries.

Muroi confidently guides the reader through this labyrinth. He identifies key developments. For example, he notes the influence of Durandus, who composed a rite of confirmation separate from baptism and placed it atop a series of blessings, ordinations and consecrations (42). Muroi gives due attention to a theologically prophetic statement of Suárez, the earliest to associate "initiating" with the three sacraments that so commonly carry this descriptor today: "Tria sunt sacramenta, quibus per se initiantur, et sanctificantur fideles, Baptismus, Confirmatio, Eucharistia" (231). Muroi is careful

not to draw too much from this tantalizing statement, isolated in pre-modern history. Similar restraint would apply to treatment of Ambrose of Milan, who says of the initiatory anointing, "confirmavit te Christus dominus" (De mysteriis); it would be reckless to conclude that Ambrose coined the word "confirmation".

Muroni correctly shows the various pastoral circumstances that influenced the age of confirmation: the desire that the child remember the event so as to avoid its repetition (80), the availability of a bishop (170), and the imparting of preparatory sacramental catechesis (189). His discussion of the correlative concepts "the age of discretion" and "the age of the use of reason" is helpful (172-5).

The author ably demonstrates how church councils in France introduced a theology for postponing confirmation after first communion, how similar decisions in other countries favored or reversed this opinion, and how Rome tended to promote confirmation before first communion (309-382).

However, because the focus of this research begins in the 14th century, Muroni makes some false assumptions that a more thorough examination of earlier texts could have avoided. Notably, he calls the sequence of communion before confirmation an 18th century novelty: "[Durandus] rappresenterà in realtà l'inizio dei problemi più seri riguardo il conferimento dei tre

sacramenti, che troverà il suo apice nel XVIII secolo con una nuova, seppur annunciata, novità: l'inversione nell'ordine di amministrazione della confermazione e dell'eucaristia dove la prima prenderà, letteralmente, il posto della seconda nel loro conferimento" (16). History tells another story. Exceptions to the so-called "traditional" sequence of baptism-anointing-eucharist were in evidence from the very beginning of Christian history. Even in the period commonly called the "golden age of the catechumenate," presbyters and deacons baptized and offered communion to those whose work or physical condition kept them away from the bishop's full initiation rites. By the 8th century many ritual texts instructed baptizing presbyters to give the infants communion and present them later to the bishop for confirmation. (Ordo XV and the Gelasian Angoulême are only two examples). It is simply not true that confirmation and first communion suddenly exchanged places in the 18th century as Muroni repeatedly assumes (29-34, 57, 100, 190, 380, for example.) The 18th century did contribute a new theology to accompany this sequence, but it had long coexisted with its reverse.

Muroni uses the phrase "sacraments of initiation" throughout his history. As he avers, Père Gy proposed that this phrase came into popular usage only in the 20th century (232). One can even argue that the famous command of *Sacrosanctum concilium* 71 did not name confirmation one of the sacraments of

initiation, but rather assumed it was something else: "Ritus Confirmationis recognoscatur etiam ut huius Sacramenti intima connexio cum tota initiatione christiana clarius eluceat" (407). Consequently, it is anachronistic to speak of "the three sacraments of initiation" on every page of history. There were always three sacraments, but *deferred* confirmation and first communion were not called initiation sacraments until the 20th century, and not clearly in any official Church document until the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Although Muroani's work is comprehensive, it misses a few key references. For example, it omits the late 10th-century Pontifical of Egbert, which predates Durandus' publication of an independent rite of confirmation. Also untreated is the 1971 Decree of the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship promulgating the *Ordo confirmationis*, which made the rather surprising statement that in confirmation, "the initiation in the Christian life is completed."

By focusing on the Roman Rite, Muroani could not draw adequate attention to the initiatory patterns of the Eastern Rites, nor the insights that they might shine on the West. This may explain why this work, which so thoroughly treats the order of these sacraments, does not address the equally important notion of occasion. Even if the sequence flows more

theologically, deeper meaning appears when baptism, confirmation and first communion share the same occasion.

Muroni heralds the seriousness of this topic and the urgency to address it. The problem is deepened by the inability of faithful and pastors alike to see the unitary theology of the three sacraments and the connections among them. "E ciò è dimostrato proprio da quanto veniva affermato in precedenza: profondo rispetto per la teologia ma.... si fa altro" (448).

Now that Pope Benedict XVI has promoted a theological and pastoral investigation of the sequence of the initiation rites (Sacramentum caritatis 18), greater attention should be given to Muroni's fine work. "Dobbiamo inserire questa realtà nell'ordine dei mezzi impiegati dallo Spirito per approssimarci al mistero di Dio" (444).

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