

## 5. Summary of the Results – Perspectives for the Future

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This final part of the book has three main tasks. First, it gives an overview on the main results concerning the present situation of confirmation work in Europe. Such an overview cannot replace the detailed descriptions in the individual chapters above. Yet it will give readers who are pressed for time the chance for a quick glance at what results the study has to offer. Second, a separate section is devoted to challenges for the future. These challenges also arise from the empirical findings. At the same time, their identification presupposes more than an empirical description. Challenges always have to do with normative expectations. Third, we will also raise the question of the need for further research, not only in the general sense that may be expected from any empirical study – more research is always needed! – but in respect to specific questions and arguments concerning confirmation work.

Following the format of the whole book as well as of the study itself, the focus will be on general tendencies characteristic of confirmation work in Europe as well as on comparative aspects that emerge from the empirical findings. In other words, both, commonalities and differences between the countries, will be of interest.

We will also offer a number of perspectives for the future that are also of importance for the practice of confirmation work. Readers should keep in mind, however, that the development of practical consequences for confirmation work in the different countries clearly requires more than what a single empirical study can offer. The present study can only be a first step in this direction and additional steps will be needed (in some of the countries, respective publications and programmes for the workers are already under way). This is not only true because of the general questions referring to the relationship between theory and praxis but also because of the contextual nature of confirmation work in the different countries.

## 5.1 Confirmation Work in Europe: Summary Description of Its Present Situation

### 5.1.1 The Changing Shape of Confirmation Work

Protestant instruction in preparation for confirmation has a long tradition that goes back to the time of the Reformation. Although this instruction has gone through various reforms and has taken on somewhat different forms over the centuries, its basic catechetical shape has remained one of its core characteristics. Until today, preparation for confirmation is often associated with the catechism, with predefined questions and with answers that had to be learnt by heart. Yet today, as can be seen in the country reports in part 3, in all of the participating countries, this traditional shape is clearly changing. Especially during the last 40 or 50 years, catechetical instruction has been replaced, at least to some degree, by more pupil-oriented, active and creative ways of teaching and learning. The term »confirmation work« itself is expressive of the new ways of working with confirmands. Today's confirmation work often is much closer to youth work than to traditional kinds of teaching at school.

According to the data from the present study, it is this kind of confirmation work that is so widely accepted by the adolescents as well as by the workers who are responsible for this programme. One of the most important explanations of the positive responses to confirmation work in all of the countries lies in the new ways in which this work is actually carried out today. Yet it is also easy to see that the renewal of confirmation work has not been pursued with equal determination in all places. In this respect, there are differences within the countries as well as differences between the countries. Within the countries, the differences refer to local or regional factors, for example, to different traditions or different demographic factors but also to the varying commitment of individual workers and parishes. As far as differences between the countries are concerned, we can speak of different profiles at a system level. At least in some respects, confirmation work does not mean exactly the same in the different countries. The most striking example for this comes from Finland on the one hand and Denmark on the other. While confirmation work in Finland has more and more come to mean spending longer periods of time together in camps with a great number of young volunteers involved, confirmation work in Denmark takes place in close connection to school, following itself a school-type format taught solely by the minister.

The present study can be seen as the attempt of tracing and documenting the renewal of confirmation work in Europe. It shows how far the changes have

actually taken place and to what degree they can be considered successful in different locations.

The study draws on questionnaires that were completed by more than 19000 confirmands, 2300 workers and 6900 parents from 900 parish groups in the seven countries involved (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden). The questionnaires were administered in autumn 2007 ( $t_1$ , in most groups this meant the beginning of their confirmation time) and in spring/summer 2008 ( $t_2$ , shortly before the confirmation took place).

### 5.1.2 The Confirmands: Religious Orientations, Expectations and Experiences

The first question arising in this context probably is about the general religious outlook of the confirmands. Is confirmation really a religious ritual for them? Or even more far-reaching, are the confirmands themselves religious? Can they be called believers? Item CE09: »I believe in God« entails a first answer. While German, Austrian and Danish confirmands clearly affirm this statement with affirmation rates of 67%, 68% and 62% (answer 5, 6 and 7 on the 7-step rating scale), the Swedish confirmands agree to only 30%. In all other countries, the response is in between these values. At the same time, in most countries, the confirmands are not very sure what to believe but they are clearly not atheists. The results for items CE01: »God created the world« and CE02: »There is life after death« are similar and consequently confirm this view. The confirmands are hesitant to identify with certain beliefs of the Church but they also do not reject such beliefs.

Concerning confirmation itself, there can be no doubt that it is a very religious ritual for them. At the beginning of confirmation time, this may not be so clear. CB11 »to receive a blessing on the day of Confirmation« receives a positive response by less than half of the confirmands (45%). Right before confirmation, this value is much higher (65%; KB11). Other motives of a more material kind like money and gifts are high in the beginning (55%; CB10) but the increase towards the end is lower (67%; KB10). For the confirmands, there seems to be no contradiction between these two motives. The values concerning the expectation of a nice celebration on confirmation day are also very high. They should, however, not be interpreted just in a material sense. With the family and sometimes friends they include a strong social dimension that can imply a religious meaning, not in the sense of particular beliefs but in respect to deep certainties of life. The feeling of really belonging to a group of other people can definitely count among such certainties, especially with adolescents.

What can be said in relationship to other expectations at the beginning of the

confirmation time? The religious motives are not very prominent. For example, the item CB01: »to learn more about God and faith« is approved of by only 40% of the adolescents; CB03: »to come to my own decision about my faith« receives only slightly more agreement (45%). The other items in this section show a similar picture. None of the confirmands' expectations, be they intrinsic or extrinsic, are very pronounced. The general attitude at the beginning of confirmation time is not all too clear. Only two topics receive a lot of emphasis from the confirmands – friendship (84%; CL09) and the meaning of life (64%; CL11) – topics that are close to the life-world of adolescents and can also be of religious importance.

Among the reasons for taking part, three items are affirmed by more than half of the confirmands. The first two items have already been mentioned (CB10: »to get money or presents at the end«: 55%; CB09: »to have a beautiful celebration with family and friends on the day of confirmation«: 55%). The third item is baptism (CA04: »because I was baptised when I was a child«: 55%).

Given these preconditions it is quite remarkable that, at the end of confirmation time, all the corresponding values have clearly gone up into the positive. Sometimes the results are very prominent now. KB01: »I have learnt more about God and faith«, for example, is up to 72%, compared to only 40% expecting this (CB01). However, it also has to be noted that the amount of change, e. g., in religious knowledge, differs greatly between the different countries (cf. chapter 4.5, p. 247). Still, the overall tendency is clearly positive, with the striking exception of KB15: »I have learnt more about other religions« that is affirmed by only 30% of the confirmands. Since the issue of »other religions« raises important general questions, we will come back to it below.

Altogether it is obvious that the confirmation time has been successful in giving young people an opportunity to experience being part of a group in the context of a parish or church and to come to terms, to some degree, with questions of life and faith. Most of the expectations articulated at the beginning have been met (for a more detailed analysis see chapter 4.4, p. 240). In most cases, the experiences excel the expectations of the confirmands. There clearly is a high degree of general satisfaction with confirmation work. Looking back, 72% of the confirmands are satisfied with their confirmation time in general (KN01), the percentages are even higher for satisfaction with the camps, the feeling of community and the ministers/leaders (which does not exclude critical statements or the need for additional reforms).

### 5.1.3 The Workers

Taking again the traditional model of Christian instruction that used to be the task – and privilege – of the minister for comparison, the most remarkable observation concerning today's confirmation work certainly is the role of volunteers. Confirmation work has turned into one of the large fields of voluntary work in society, often with young people who, after their own confirmation, have become workers in the programmes. Moreover, deacons and youth workers have become part of the teams that share the responsibility for the programmes. In both respects, however, there are clear differences between the countries. In some cases, there is a strong emphasis on the young volunteers and, especially in Finland, training programmes for them have become available on a routine basis – with the effect that on an average one out of three confirmed adolescents starts a training for becoming a volunteer at next year's confirmation camp. In other cases, most of all in Denmark, volunteers continue to play a very limited role. Yet altogether, confirmation time is an important occasion for coming into contact with voluntary work and with other young people who are actually involved in this kind of work. It is no surprise that many confirmands indicate that they have become motivated to work as volunteers themselves after their confirmation (24 %; KK27). What confirmands perceive during confirmation time, obviously shapes their image of the Church and their willingness to become actively involved themselves. In Denmark, only 8 % became motivated for voluntary work, in Finland this rate is 51 % – more than six times higher than in Denmark!

This observation is even more remarkable when the very high degree of workers' satisfaction is also taken into consideration (international mean: 6.00 for Index iVM1 on a scale from 1 to 7). According to this result, the involvement with, and the commitment to working with, confirmands is very impressive. The satisfaction values are high for the ministers (5.61) but they are even higher for the volunteers (6.32). This indicates that this kind of voluntary work goes along with non-material gratifications, for example, positive feedback from the confirmands and their parents but also acknowledgement from the Church. This in turn is an important presupposition for the future stability of the volunteers' commitment – a remarkable asset that should be carefully maintained.

Another important observation concerns the aims of the voluntary workers. Two results are especially noteworthy. First, the volunteers are clearly committed not only to the social dimension of confirmation work, for example, strengthening the group experience, but also to the theological aims. Second, their aims are closer to the expectations of the confirmands. In this respect, they can take over an important function in bridging the gap between the Christian tradition or the Church as an institution and the young people. Their involve-

ment visibly proves that young people can find a meaningful place in this context and that the Church is open for the younger generation, not only as a service institution but for young people taking over responsibility and claiming some authority and influence of their own.

Finally, it should also be noted that the ministers take confirmation work very seriously. Many of them say that they like being with the confirmands (92 %; WE05). Very few would prefer to be relieved of this task (6 %; WE06). Even if there are no other values that these results can be compared to, it is easy to see that the commitment to confirmation work is very high.

Although confirmation work is appreciated very strongly by the Churches involved, it often is given very little attention in the training of ministers and other church staff. The Danish country chapter (3.4) reports that a minister faces often a »real confirmand« for the first time in his life when he starts his first parish-duty. Teaching and training on the subject of confirmation work has been neglected for too long in the theological faculties as well as in many institutions responsible for the training and further education of staff.

#### 5.1.4 Didactics

Giving confirmation work a new shape implies a kind of didactics that is different from catechetical instruction. In this case, the transition must be from rote learning to creative and activating methods and to ways of teaching and learning that allow for individualised interests. Yet didactics means even more. As educators are eager to point out, it also refers to the contents and to the need of selecting and presenting the contents in ways that are appropriate for young people.

The analysis of the guidelines that are in use in the different countries shows important differences. The analysis can be summarised as follows: »The more these two elements are focused upon«, i. e., relationship to the life-world and relationship to the parish, »the further confirmation work moves away from the school-type to the youth-work-type« (cf. chapter 4.3.3, p. 228). This implies that the tradition towards a more pupil-oriented approach has not been realized to the same degree in all places.

Further analysis allows for comparisons between different orientations in the participating countries. While dogmatics and the catechism remain important for the workers in all of the countries – with the exception of Switzerland with its Reformed tradition that seems to have little place for set theological contents – there are interesting differences with topics related to the life-world and the relationship to the parish as a place for young people. The relevance of confirmation work in terms of the life-world is of least concern in Denmark and

Germany. Finnish workers score highest on the relationship to the life-world but also to the parish. Finland most clearly represents the new shape of confirmation work that takes youth work as its model.

Concerning the relationship to the parish, Denmark scores lowest. Less than two out of five Danish workers consider it important that confirmands get to know their parish better. This makes Danish confirmation work an example of the school-type setting. The other country with a significantly lower emphasis on the relationship to the parish is Sweden. Instead, the main focus there is on the aspect of the life-world – a focus that can be interpreted as further privatisation of confirmation.

Concerning methods or organisational models, the most obvious differences refer to overnight events. In Sweden and Finland, most of the confirmands participate in confirmation camps or outings that last for about one week (in Finland almost all groups work like this, in Sweden 25 %, sometimes in specialised campsites that gather confirmands from different regions for a parish-independent confirmation period). In Austria, Germany and Switzerland, only a minority of the confirmands have this experience. In Norway, camps are even less frequent while they are missing in Denmark altogether.

Traditional methods familiar from school settings are still in use in many places. More modern methods that are pupil-oriented, activating, creative and experiential still are not to be taken for granted in most places. The emphasis on camps and outings in Finland and Sweden go along with a stronger emphasis on the renewal of methods as well.

Creative and activating methods are attractive for the confirmands. The confirmation camp experience is of special importance to them. In groups that have been to camp three nights and more, we find higher scores with almost all indexes on the confirmands' experiences: more growth in faith, higher identification with Christian beliefs, and more adherence to the Church (cf. chapter 4.5). They also show more ethical learning, they are more satisfied with their group experience, they feel that their parish has been more open to them and they have had better liturgical experiences.

The emergence of camps is one of the developments which seem to be very promising for the future of confirmation work. New ideas could emerge in the future – like, for example, an international confirmation camp bringing together confirmands from different countries.

### 5.1.5 The Meaning of Confirmation Work for the Churches

The meaning of confirmation work for the Churches is of importance in several different ways. First of all, there is the question of how the actual shape of con-

firmation work is related to a theological understanding of this work. In a more far-reaching manner one can, secondly, wonder what kind of church presents itself to the younger generation in confirmation work. And third, given the financial constraints that the Churches in the participating countries have to deal with (although to different degrees), some people raise the question if this field of work still pays off for the Churches or if it should be given up in favour of other programmes and activities. In all three respects, there is suspicion that the confirmands are motivated less by issues of faith than by material motives like money and other gifts or general social functions like a religiously non-descript rite of passage. The present study allows for a number of responses to such questions on an empirical basis.

Concerning the first question and the demands of theology on confirmation work we can clearly state that this work is closely connected to the core of all Protestant theology. Personal faith plays a strong role in the expectations of the confirmands as well as of the workers. According to the young people themselves but also to the observations of the workers, this faith is nurtured and educated during confirmation time in impressive ways. It must be noted in this context, that faith related aspects and other aspects that can be associated with youth culture like, for example, the group experience or having fun, by no means are mutually exclusive in the context of confirmation work. Quite the contrary seems to hold true. Where confirmation work is close to the needs and interests of young people, it is also more effective in terms of strengthening personal faith. The data also show that motives of faith and expectations for gifts and beautiful celebrations can go together quite well. For the confirmands this is not a matter of choice or a question of either/or. In this respect, there can be no doubt that confirmation work in all of the participating countries fulfils important theological tasks and expectations, even if there remain differences between the countries as pointed out above.

The second question refers to the understanding of the Church or, in theological terms, to ecclesiology. What does confirmation work mean for the Church in terms of its self-presentation to young people? It is no surprise that the adolescents interviewed in the present study indicate that, for the most part, their active involvement with the Church prior to confirmation time was rather thin. Many of them have been in touch with some church-related activities in childhood – it is not true that they bring »no prior experiences whatsoever« to their confirmation time – but the contacts with the Church obviously did not lead to a continuous religious practise. It must also be said that, in this respect, confirmation work does not have very strong effects – the changes between  $t_1$  and  $t_2$  are rather small. Probably not too much can or should be expected from a programme that may last for only one year or for an even shorter period of time. Yet most of the changes show a more positive relationship to the Church at the

end of confirmation time. The strongest effect shows up with the question if one would be interested in taking part in a Christian youth group after confirmation (rising from 17% to 27%; CG08/KG08). These confirmands would be willing to continue their involvement with the Church after confirmation. This speaks for a need to make sure that the adolescents can actually find opportunities for such involvement which does not seem to be the case in all places.

Another issue concerns worship services. In all countries included in our study, the confirmands are obliged to take part in a set number of Sunday services. This ranges from only four services during the whole confirmation time (Finland) to a number of about 25 services, for example, in Germany. Contrary to the expected effect of »acclimatisation« to church services for the confirmands, there is an increase of the negative attitudes between  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ . The only exception is Finland but even there the positive effect is very limited. In other words, the view that church services are boring remains a huge challenge in all of the countries. If confirmation work should support a better relationship to the Church, worship services should not be exempted from the need for renewal.

In ecclesiology, one can sometimes encounter an opposition between a church that is based on active participation arising from personal commitment and faith on the one hand, and a church as a service agency that takes care of individual needs as they arise, for example, within the family life cycle. While undoubtedly there are different images and guiding ideals of the Christian Church operative with different theologies or groups, our data speak for a mix of motives that are strongly intertwined in the views of the confirmands. Celebrating with one's family on the day of confirmation is closely related to the family life cycle. Yet this does not mean that more theological motives are excluded. It seems that theological motives become important for young people not in spite of confirmation's deep roots in the personal needs of individuals and families but exactly because of these roots. Empirically, the two different understandings of the Church as active congregation and as service agency are not simply opposites but they often go together. This empirical result should not be overlooked in theology.

In this context, one more observation may be of interest. In most of the countries involved confirmation no longer serves as the date of first admission to Holy Communion because children are allowed to take part in the Holy Communion. This »loss« for confirmation as an initiation rite into this sacrament apparently has not put a damper on the attractiveness of confirmation. It is remarkable though, that even in countries that have already introduced Holy Communion with children many years ago, some parishes stick to the tradition of first admission with confirmation– this can be seen as one of the indicators for the different schedules of parishes in adapting new developments.

Given these observations and arguments, the answer to the third question above follows almost automatically. There can be no doubt that confirmation work is highly important for the Church. If these programmes did not exist, the Churches would have to come up with an equivalent. Today, confirmation work clearly is one of the major points of access to the Church for the younger generation. No other programme reaches as many of the adolescents in the participating countries as confirmation work. »Regarded in a lifelong perspective, the confirmation period is for most church members the most significant period and possibility in life that provides a chance to get to know the teaching of the Church and to establish a positive relationship to the Church« (3.7.1, p. 186). In this respect, confirmation work closely corresponds to what is called the public nature of the Gospel – the theological need to make the Christian message accessible to everyone who wants to listen.

As will be explained in the next section, confirmation work also is a major service for society at large. Its contribution to social and moral orientations and to the structures of civil society and volunteerism deserves special attention. This contribution goes way beyond the Church as a service agency catering to individual needs. It is expressive of the social and diaconal task and function of the Church.

### 5.1.6 The Meaning of Confirmation Work for Society

The celebration of confirmation had – and still has – an important meaning as a social event in many of the countries involved, especially the Scandinavian countries. The Norwegian country report, for example, describes confirmation as a national event and as a spring festival (cf. 3.6.1) that has found some imitators among non-Christian groups in the meantime because there is the feeling that one can hardly start summertime without the celebrations of confirmation. Certainly, confirmation nowadays is no longer connected to civil rights, but it still has a public meaning. Our study shows that this is not only true for the festivity of confirmation itself but also for confirmation time on the whole.

That confirmation work should contribute to society at large is not a new idea. It is also not just a demand from the outside, for example, from politics or social analysis. In the preface to his *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther emphasised that catechetical instruction should also have the function to teach the *Stadtrecht* – the »law of the city« or what today we would call rules for living together. In its own self-understanding, the Church wants to serve a social and diaconal task and function.

In the present study, confirmation work is interpreted in relationship to civil society in several ways (cf. chapter 4.7). It could be shown that confirmation

work contributes to social interaction and participation, that it strengthens the ethical commitment of young people, and that it introduces and activates young people for voluntary work. In other words, confirmation work is related to civil society through its content – among others, social values like justice and empathy, solidarity, tolerance and respect – but also through the experiences it allows for. Such experiences concern the group process as a core aspect of confirmation work and they include the encounter with volunteers who often are adolescents themselves.

More specifically, the results of the study suggest that the contribution of confirmation work to society at large depends on how this work is carried out. In other words, there is a need to strengthen the awareness of this task, at least in some of the countries. Yet independently of future improvements, the actual contribution of confirmation work not only for the Church but also for society deserves much more public acknowledgement than it has received so far.

## 5.2 Challenges for the Future

For centuries, Christian instruction in preparation of confirmation was part of growing up in the countries involved in the present study and of the general culture that could be taken for granted. Confirmation was firmly rooted in civil culture, with even many civil rights directly depending on it. It was itself an institution not only of the Church but of society on the whole. Correspondingly, participation was guaranteed by many social controls, of the family no less than of other parts of society.

Contrary to this traditional situation, confirmation and confirmation work have become a matter of individual choice today. Its meaning has been privatised. No longer does any civil right depend on confirmation. The first challenge for the future must therefore certainly be identified as the fragility that this condition implies (cf. chapter 4.2.2, p. 216). Confirmation and confirmation work are subject to the religious individualisation that sociologists and philosophers from Peter L. Berger (1979) to Charles Taylor (2007) have described repeatedly. The experiences of dramatically dwindling participation rates in Sweden since the 1970s and, to a lesser degree, more recently in Norway must be interpreted in this sense (see Figure 8, p. 216). They indicate that the future of confirmation work is uncertain, just like that of any religious institution in an era of religious individualisation and pluralisation.

The confirmands show themselves convinced that it is up to them if they want to participate in confirmation work. When asked, who influenced their

decision to register most, 59 % answered »my own«, only 33 % answered »my family«, only a few named friends or other people. This implies that they might actually not want to do so. The flipside of this situation in which participation has become a matter of individual preference, is that no one needs to be ashamed of doing so (only 6 % are; CE07). Individual choices are respected by the peers. Yet as easy as it is to decipher the traces of religious individualisation in our data and to interpret the results of the present study within the parameters of contemporary sociology of religion, it should not be overlooked that there also are important indications that speak for a different interpretation. The most important example for this is the surprising persistence of baptism as motive for participation («because I was baptised when I was a child» receives the affirmation of 55 % of the confirmands – more than any other item in this section; CA04). In this case, a most traditional religious institution remains of decisive importance for the young people. This does not mean that confirmation work could cease to be worried about its future fragility. But it shows, once more, that the binding influences of religious traditions have not disappeared.

The same cannot be said about another traditional institution – the worship services on Sunday in which the confirmands have to participate as part of their confirmation time. In this case, there seems to be no awe-inspiring effect triggered by the ancient rite. Instead, the confirmands tend to find the services simply »boring«, even more so after they had a chance to attend them on a regular basis. In a situation of choice and of following one's own preferences in religious matters no less than in other respects, this experience can be expected to have its detrimental effects on the confirmands' future relationship to the Church. The differences between the participating countries – the effects are not equally negative in all cases – and the result that certain approaches, including active participation of the confirmands and having more youth oriented services, can clearly lead to more positive attitudes towards worship services. Worship services with adolescents are no hopeless case. Moreover, these services play a crucial role for the theological identity of the Church. The renewal of worship services in the context of confirmation work is a main challenge for the future.

In many respects, confirmation work has to struggle with the competition created by the ever increasing time demands of the school. This is especially true for a country like Germany where the traditional limits of school time in the morning are currently expanding into the afternoon. Yet even countries that are used to longer school hours sometimes are experiencing new pressures today, for example, when schools, like in Denmark, no longer want to keep open reliable time slots for confirmation work (cf. chapter 3.4.8, p. 137) The more confirmation and confirmation work appear as a purely private matter, the less the public school can be expected to respect the needs of this work. The oppo-

site, however, is true as well. The more the meaning of confirmation work for society at large becomes visible, the more one can expect that its needs will be respected.

Concerning the school and its influence it should also not be overlooked that Religious Education as a school subject can obviously have a strong supportive influence on confirmation work. This does not mean that Religious Education in school should serve the purposes of the Church or that it should take over the tasks of the parish – a demand on the school that is now widely refused in most European countries (Kuyk et al. 2007). Yet religious individualisation often implies that the whole process of religious education, starting with the family all the way to culture and the media, becomes much more tenuous. One programme alone – and be it very effective in itself – can hardly compensate for the weaknesses of religious socialisation. Even if we cannot prove this with our data, the dwindling participation rates with confirmation work in Sweden and Norway might well be connected, at least among others, to the non-Christian orientation of Religious Education in the schools of those countries. In Sweden, the participation rates started to go down at the same time as the new »objective« religious study approach was introduced at school in the 1960s and 1970s. In Norway, the transition to different kinds of non-Christian instruction at school has paralleled the similar developments with confirmation work in recent years. If this hypothesis holds true, there is a clear need to think about possible support structures for confirmation work in the years long before confirmation. It makes a lot of sense that the Churches in countries like Norway and Switzerland have begun to face up to this task that might be just as inescapable for other countries in the future.

In the participating countries, confirmation work takes place in an increasingly pluralist context. The presence of non-Christian religions, most of all of Islam, has become a general characteristic of religious culture. In this sense it is not surprising that many confirmands expect to learn something about other religions during confirmation time (36 % say so; CL07). At the end of the confirmation time, the value for the corresponding statement »I have learnt more about other religions« is clearly lower (30 %; KB15). Very few confirmands feel that confirmation work has contributed to their knowledge or understanding of other religions. In a society that has become not only multicultural but also multireligious this is a disappointing result. It seems that confirmation work does not prepare the young people for living in an environment in which Christianity can no longer be taken for granted. As long as the Church does not address the plural environment, it also does not offer an answer to the question why one should prefer to become or to remain a member of the Protestant Church.

One of the results that must be most worrisome for the Churches in this

connection is the increase in the confirmands' view that the Church does not have answers to the questions that are important for them (31 % affirm this in  $t_1$ , 34 % in  $t_2$ ). Even if the increase is stronger in some of the countries than in others, there is no exception in this respect. After the confirmation time the confirmands have become more sceptical vis-à-vis the Church's ability to respond to their questions. Most likely, this view has to do with the perceived distance between the Christian tradition and doctrines on the one hand and today's life-world on the other. Part of this life-world is the religious pluralism that is not addressed in today's confirmation work.

The empirical findings of this study also show a remarkable »gender-gap«: »the classical contents and also the group-oriented methods of confirmation work are approved of and appreciated by the female more than by the male confirmands« (p. 262). It obviously remains a challenge in all participating countries to find didactical forms and settings that are attractive for boys and that correspond to their specific preferences, interests and social-behaviour patterns.

### 5.3 The Need for Further Research

The present study is the first of its kind. Never before has there been an attempt of conducting a large scale integrated empirical study on confirmation work in several different countries. This is true in all respects treated in this volume – the confirmands and the workers but also the didactics of confirmation work. While its pioneering character makes the study innovative and especially valuable, it also implies a number of limitations. Interpretations of empirical data always require points of reference that allow for comparisons. Calling something »much« or »little« is difficult without a scale that allows for such comparisons. In the absence of earlier studies and results, the present study tried to create some reference points within itself, most of all in the relationship between  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ . Yet it is easy to see that replicating the present study a few years from now would create many more new possibilities. The results of the present study could then serve as points of reference. Most of all it would become possible to observe tendencies over time. Such tendencies could be sought for in the attitudes of the confirmands and of the workers – concerning their attitudes towards the Church and the Christian faith, their commitment to confirmation work, etc. It would also be of interest to see, however, how the didactics of confirmation work are developing. Does the tendency towards a more youth-work-type of programme continue? Are there new tendencies that come into play, for example, in response to a postmodern situation? Maybe it would even

be possible to find out if the results of the present study have some impact on the practice of confirmation work.

With the two times of interviewing the confirmands and the workers ( $t_1 - t_2$ ), the present study takes a first step towards investigating the effects of confirmation work. It is obvious, however, that the question of effects cannot be answered on the limited basis of two questionnaires administered during the year before confirmation. Only long-term studies can tell if confirmation work really does have effects beyond the date of confirmation and how these effects can be described. To our knowledge, so far such studies have only been undertaken in Finland (Niemelä 2008). The results indicate that the question should not only be about confirmation work as such but about what kind of confirmation work has what kinds of effects. In any case, according to the Finnish results, positive experiences with confirmation work go along with more positive attitudes towards the Church even five or more years after confirmation.

The present study makes a strong case for the meaning of confirmation work for society at large and especially for civil society. The arguments offered for this point of view should be deepened. Additional empirical research could give us a better understanding of the processes of social and moral learning involved. The question of volunteerism and of the motives that make a young person want to continue as a volunteer after confirmation should be pursued in much more detail. In these respects, the present study offers a first overview that should be supplemented by special studies focusing on these aspects.

Similar demands can be formulated in a number of respects that have not really been addressed in the present study. To just mention a few examples: What are the reasons for not participating in confirmation work? In some countries the number of the non-participants is small, in other countries it is the majority of the adolescents. In any case, their total number is considerable but we know very little about their views and attitudes. Another question refers to confirmation, as a worship service on the one hand and as a family celebration on the other. Our data show that confirmation is very important for the confirmands. It does not make much sense to just focus on confirmation work without addressing confirmation. Young people usually do not register because they want to take part in confirmation time but rather because they want to become confirmed. Yet there are very few studies on how the confirmands and their families actually experience confirmation, how they celebrate it in their families and what could be done to improve the ways in which the day of confirmation is celebrated. Working with parents is another topic that has not received the attention it deserves. Should parents be more involved with confirmation work? Can the relationship of the parents to the Church be improved in the context of confirmation work?

The present study basically operates on the level of comparing whole countries or Churches. It is very likely, however, that there are important regional differences within the countries. Only the German study has a sample large enough to allow for representative results referring to different areas or regions (cf. Ilg/Schweitzer/Elsenbast 2009). While this study indicates that there are a number of basic tendencies that can be considered nationwide, it also brings to light far-reaching differences within the country. The most important difference in Germany refers to eastern and western Germany – as a special situation due to the history of the two Germanies between 1949 and 1990. Yet there are also important differences between the regional Churches in Germany. It would be interesting to see to what degree such differences play a role in other countries as well and how such differences can make the picture of confirmation work in Europe more concrete.

Another innovative aspect of the present study lies in its international comparative scope. International research on education is becoming increasingly important and influential in many European countries, most of all through the international studies on scholastic abilities of students. There also is some international research on the school subject of Religious Education. It is important that other areas of Christian and religious education beyond the school will not be left out of sight. With their manifold programmes for children and youth as well as for families or with their activities in the field of adult education, the Churches in Europe count among the most important sponsors of education in society. It is an important task to make the Churches' educational role more visible, within the Church itself but also for society. The present study should be considered a beginning of a new tradition of international cooperation for empirical research in the field of Christian and religious education.

Throughout the book it has become obvious that international comparative research also has to offer innovative contributions to academic work. Many questions have been addressed – or have at least been raised – that have not played a role in the academic discussion in this field before. This observation again underlines the need for more international comparative research in the area of religious education.

Finally, we want to come back to the question of theology. Some people consider empirical work an alternative to theological analysis. In our own understanding, however, this would not make sense. If there is an alternative at all, it is not between theology and empirical work but between empirical and purely doctrinal approaches on the level of methodologies. What we should be striving for is a constant interplay between theological analysis and empirical research. Most of the questions discussed in this volume have a clear theological background and the results of the study hold many new impulses for theological

thinking, about confirmation work itself but also about the Church and ecclesiology. It is an important task for further research to address this relationship in more detail.