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THE VALUE OF THE SACRAMENT OF THE SICK
FOR MENTALLY RETARDED PERSONS

by

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A RESEARCH PAPER
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Statement of the Question

According to Christian Tradition, sickness is seen as the result of the sin of the world. When Christians see the elderly and the sick, they are reminded of their common need for healing and final transformation in and through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Sickness can hinder a person from giving himself over in hope to God's will. The grace of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick is a renewal of hope, allowing a person to live in joy in spite of illness. In the anointing, the results of sickness are mitigated because the sacrament is directed to the person's total physical and spiritual well-being.

Jesus' ministry was a deep, human concern for all people: those from the streets of Jerusalem as well as from the hills of Galilee. He made contact with those suffering pain, with the lonely and with isolated. In all ways, Jesus was the "man for others"¹, particularly for those who

¹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, enl. ed. edited by Eberhard Bethge (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), p. 382.

had no one else. When he went about doing his work of healing, he always showed tenderness, pity and compassion.² Healing ministry in the Church is a continuation of Jesus' ministry for man.

The ministry of the Church is, of necessity, rooted in the ministry of Jesus. The Church's ministry to the sick, therefore, grows out of Christ's own healing ministry.³

When Christ's disciples anointed the Christians who were seriously ill or elderly but by no means at the point of death, their purpose was to restore the person to health and to bestow the healing power of the Church.

Jesus gave all people of all times and all places the basic reason for caring for those who need care when he said: "As long as you did it for one of my least brethren, you did it for me" (Mt. 25:40). From this it follows that each mentally retarded member of the Catholic Church, as well as each other Catholic who has come to the "age of reason", is entitled by his baptism to catechesis and ministry at the time of illness. (Hereafter, when referring to mentally retarded persons, his will refer to either male or female.) This catechesis and ministry imply a preparation for the administration of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick.

²Mt. 9:35 and 10:1; Mk. 6:7,13; Lk. 9:11.

³Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, Anointing and Pastoral Care of the Sick (Milwaukee: Liturgical Commission, 1974), p. 12.

Who has championed the value of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick for the mentally retarded? Hardly anyone! Therefore, this investigator proposed an inquiry into the rights of the mentally retarded regarding this sacrament.

Statement of the Intention

The purpose of this paper was to review research and current literature concerning the value of the sacrament of the sick for mentally retarded persons. Its specific threefold purpose was to explore the following questions:

1. Who is eligible for the anointing?
2. Why should the mentally retarded person be anointed?
3. How will the sacrament be administered most effectively?

Definition of Terms

Terms used in this study and needing clarification follow:

Mental Retardation refers to "significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period."⁴

Anointing of the sick--the celebration of anointing--consists especially in the laying on of hands by the presbyters of the Church; they offer the prayer of faith, and anoint the sick with oil hallowed by God's blessing. The rite is efficacious, for it signifies and confers the grace of the sacrament. Three

⁴Herbert Grossman, ed., Manual on Terminology and Classification in Mental Retardation (Washington, D.C.: American Association on Mental Deficiency, 1973), p. 11.

elements are constitutive: The laying on of hands, the prayer of faith offered and the anointing with blessed oil.⁵

Extreme Unction: term used for the anointing of the sick and dying from medieval times to Vatican II.

The Constitution on the Liturgy clearly states that "extreme unction", which may also and more fittingly be called "anointing of the sick," is not a sacrament for those only who are at the point of death. Hence, as soon as any of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, the appropriate time for him to receive this sacrament has certainly arrived.⁶

Since the new guidelines emanating from Vatican II came into use in 1972, literature referring to the anointing of the sick came into wider use from that date.

The investigator researched current literature and related materials on the question relative to the history, administration and values of the anointing of the sick, especially of sick mentally retarded persons. She contacted priests and sisters who have ministered to ill and aging mentally retarded persons and included their observations with her findings.

This study was confined to an exploration of suggested services in the United States for mentally retarded Catholics outside institutional settings. Literature reviewed was publications in English over the past

⁵John J. O'Brien, "Revised Rites for Anointing the Sick," National Bulletin on Liturgy 10 (January-February, 1977): 27.

⁶"Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," Chapter III, Article 73, The Documents of Vatican II, Walter M. Abbott, S.J., gen. ed. (New York: Guild Press, 1966), p. 161.

fifty years.

Summary

Jesus desires that the sick receive ministry from his Church. The Epistle of James in the New Testament describes this ministry of anointing. The Church respects the right of all the baptized to experience the anointing of the sick. Few have extended to the mentally retarded the right to the sacrament and an adequate catechesis prior to it.

This chapter defined the purpose of the study: to explore the value of the anointing of the sick for mentally retarded persons. Three specific research questions were announced: who, why and how minister(s) the sacrament for mentally retarded persons. Terms relevant to the study and limitations implored on its scope were defined.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RESEARCH

History of the Anointing of the Sick

The New Testament records Christ's healing ministry. In his gospel, Matthew describes Christ's ministry of healing: "And Jesus was going about all the towns and villages . . . curing every kind of disease and infirmity" (Mt. 9:35). Later in the same gospel Christ's ministry of healing is entrusted to the Apostles: "Then having summoned his twelve disciples he gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out and to cure every kind of disease and infirmity."⁷

Even though we have gospel witness of Jesus' healing, and the record of the disciples' anointing, theologians have groped for the specific origins of the sacrament of the sick.

The Council of Trent⁸ states that the letter by James points to Christ's institution of the Sacrament of

⁷Mt. 10:1.

⁸Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, trans. Waterworth, p. 105, quoted in Charles Pickar, O.S.A., "Is Anyone Sick Among You?", The Catholic Biblical Quarterly, vol. VII, n. 1 (January, 1945); 165.

Extreme Unction:

Is any one among you sick? Let him bring in the presbyters of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him (James 5:15-16).

The Council of Trent declared that in these words of James the Church learned from apostolic tradition what the Apostle taught concerning the form, the matter, the proper minister and the effect of this salutary sacrament. In Session XIV the Fathers of the Council claimed the doctrine of the anointing of the sick to be a dogma of faith and it has been accepted as such by members of the Catholic Church.⁹

The Epistle of St. James¹⁰ is the only scriptural argument used by the Catholic Church for the existence of a divinely instituted means of assisting the faithful Christian in time of grave illness. As a spiritual father to the early Christians, the Apostle James advised them on this practice and dogma of the faith.

Christian tradition agreed that when James used the word "sick" he referred to a serious illness rather than to a common physical illness.

A great deal of discussion concerning the specific meaning of James' words has occurred; namely, the scantiness of the rite, the effects and the ministers. Catholic

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 166.

tradition has defended the absence of a definite ritual. Pickar thinks it is sufficient to accept the scanty prescription given in James 5:14-16. Verses 15-16 have been pivotal in the question.

According to Catholic teaching, the primary effects of this sacrament are the graces, comforts and aids it affords the soul of the sick man against the difficulties and trials experienced during the time of death.

According to this same teaching the secondary effect of the Sacrament is: first, the proximate preparation of the soul for entrance into eternal life through the remission of sin and the temporal punishment due to it; and, secondly, bodily health if in the estimation of Divine Providence it is expedient to the soul's welfare.¹¹

From historical data available it is unclear whether people of the patristic period were aware of the words of James' "call in the presbyters." It seems that sick people self-administered communion and continued to anoint themselves or to be anointed by relatives with oil blessed by the bishop.

But by the year 416 A.D., it seems that people were being instructed about the manner of anointing of the sick person. Pope St. Innocent I recognized two uses of oil of the sick which had been blessed by the bishop. They were: 1. Self-anointing or anointing by relatives; 2. The anointing by presbyters or by the bishop. In a letter, Pope Innocent directed that the anointing be assigned to priests

¹¹Ibid., pp. 170-171.

rather than to bishops already burdened with other business.¹²

One historical reference to anointing in the Carolingian Reform was to the negligence of priests in administering to the sick. "It seems that exorbitant fees expected by the priests made the use of the Sacrament a rarity."¹³

In the Scholastic Period, other concerns emerged. The sacramental character of the anointing was established. Peter Lombard called it one of the seven sacraments, saying:

The sacrament is the external anointing itself; the reality (res) of the sacrament is the internal anointing, which is perfected by the remission of sins and the increase in virtues.¹⁴

Another great theologian during this Scholastic Period was Master Simon. He was the first theologian to refer to unction as a preparation for the beatific vision:

Just as baptism is the sacrament of those entering, so this anointing is the sacrament of those departing. Baptism seals those who enter this world with character of Christ; unction presents (representat) those who are departing this world for the divine vision (cited by H. Weisweiler, "Die Letzte Ölung in der Frühscholastik," Scholastik, 7 [1932], 550, note 83).¹⁵

¹²John Clarkson and others, The Church Teaches (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1961), p. 323.

¹³Charles J. Keating, Anointing for Healing (W. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1973), p. 19.

¹⁴Patrologia Latina, ed. Jacques Paul Migne, vol. 192, p. 899, quoted in Paul F. Palmer, S.J., ed., Sacraments and Forgiveness, Sources of Christian Theology, vol. 11 (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1959), p. 298.

¹⁵Master Simon, De Septem Sacramentis quoted in Paul F. Palmer, S.J., ed., Sacraments and Forgiveness, Sources of Christian Theology, vol. 11 (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1959), p. 298.

Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure and Duns Scotus, also great doctors of the Church during this same period, agreed that extreme unction was a preparation for glory when a person was near death. However, they disagreed on the principal effect of the sacrament. Palmer concludes with Bonaventure and Scotus that the principal effect of the sacrament of unction "should be the final remission of venial sins."¹⁶ Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas argued "that the remission of the guilt of sin, whether mortal or venial, was the proper effect of the sacrament of penance."¹⁷

Debates concerning the sacrament of the sick--whether it is anointing for glory or remission of sin--are still very much with us today. A strong advocate for glory is Howell:

What always happens in a man who receives the sacrament in good dispositions is the primary effect. His soul is freed from the after-effects of sin, given full spiritual health and strenght, made into a perfect soul for its share in the glory of Christ our Lord. So that if the soul then leaves the body, there is nothing standing in the way of its entrance into the glory of heaven.¹⁸

¹⁶Paul F. Palmer, S.J., ed., Sacraments and Forgiveness, Sources of Christian Theology, vol. 11 (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1959), p. 397.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Clifford Howell, S.J., Of Sacraments and Sacrifice (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1952), p. 75.

Since the days of the Reformation, theologians seem rather reluctant to admit that extreme unction wipes out the debt of temporal punishment due to forgiven sins because they had to defend, against Protestant attacks, both the existence and the necessity of purgatory. They were so busy proving this that they "soft-pedalled"¹⁹ the traditional doctrine: that the debt of punishment (to wipe out which is the purpose of purgatory) could be remitted by extreme unction before death.

Reinhold deplors the apologetic nature of these discussions. He says:

Extreme Unction is related to Baptism and its complement, Confirmation. Baptism and Confirmation raised us to the level of the divine life for our pilgrimage on earth. This sacrament prepares us to appear among the saints and before the face of God Himself. This is all indicated by the element God chose for its outward sign: the Holy Oil, the symbol of the Holy Spirit. So many modern writers disregard the symbolic character of our Sacraments. They understate the character of them as sacred signs signifying salvation in a very special manner. They put all the emphasis on their causative function, thus leaving out fully one-half of this rich and living world of the sacraments.²⁰

The Council of Trent in the sixteenth century introduced extreme unction as a sacrament to be administered to the sick. It did not, however, reject the administration of the sacrament to the dying. But it provided a turning point: it looked to the anointing of the sick as a sacrament

¹⁹Ibid., p. 76.

²⁰H. A. Reinhold, "The Sacrament of Extreme Unction in Parish Life," National Liturgical Week (1941): 138.

of healing.

Following the Council of Trent the Church began to understand better the teaching of James. The theologians pointed out that his epistle explains the matter, the form and the effect of the sacrament of extreme unction.

For the Church has understood that the matter is oil blessed by the bishop; for the anointing fittingly signifies the grace of the Holy Spirit, by which the soul of the sick person is anointed invisibly; moreover, the form are the words: By this anointing, etc.²¹

In recent times Apostolic Letters written by Benedict XV in 1921 and Pius XI in 1923 state that the person being anointed did not have to be near death but could be anointed if danger of death was only probable. This seems contradictory to the more rigid position stated in the Code of Canon Law issued in 1918 "that a Christian after reaching the use of reason, must be in danger of death from sickness or old age before he may be anointed."²²

Pastoral practice, however, did not always follow this rigid position. As Vatican Council II approached, greater attention to ministry to the sick and dying was urged, even in the case of more remote possibility of death. Reinhold advocated:

Let us first reinstate the stepchild with his six more fortunate brethren, and let us make it again a full-fledged Sacrament in our own popular appreciation of it. Of course it has always been there. But does it not occupy a somehow subservient role, has it not

²¹Palmer, Sacraments and Forgiveness, p. 311.

²²Canon 940 quoted in Palmer, Sacraments and Forgiveness, p. 318.

become a sort of sacramental safety-device in case confession was not as good as it should have been? Is it not a Sacrament we don't like to talk about too much, because the odor of death and farewell accompanies it, and its chant and solemnity are the rears of the faithful and the death rattle of the departing Christian? Even devoted propagators of the liturgical revival prefer to discuss Solemn High Masses or the new life of the baptized.²³

A review of Catholic periodical literature in the past fifty years reveals that the effects, rubrics and recipient have been nagging questions.

In the years 1930-1933, the topics of writings were the effects, matter, ministers, rubrics and legislation, and the recipients of extreme unction.²⁴

Rubrics were a great concern from 1934-1938;²⁵ again from 1939-1943 rubrics are mentioned repeatedly in contemporary journal articles.²⁶

²³H. A. Reinhold, "The Sacrament of Extreme Unction in Parish Life," National Liturgical Week (1941): 136.

²⁴D. Barry, "Extreme Unction and Convalescence," Irish Ecclesiastical Record, 5 ser., 40 (August 1932): 190-202; P. O'Neill, "Matter of Extreme Unction," Irish Ecclesiastical Record, 5 ser., 37 (April 1931): 409-410; P. O'Neill, "Repetition of Extreme Unction During the Same Danger of Death," Irish Ecclesiastical Record, 5 ser., 42 (December 1933): 632-634.

²⁵"Manner of Anointing at the Conferring of Extreme Unction," Irish Ecclesiastical Record 49 (January 1937): 100; "Minister of Extreme Unction," Irish Ecclesiastical Record 48 (November 1936): 525-528; "Subject of Extreme Unction: Should Extreme Unction Be Given to Children," Irish Ecclesiastical Record 47 (April 1936): 404.

²⁶P. O'Neill, "Administration of Extreme Unction to an Unwilling Subject," Irish Ecclesiastical Record, 5 ser., 54 (November 1939): 517-518; J. M. McCarthy, "Administration of the Sacraments to the Unconscious," bibliog. f, Irish Ecclesiastical Record, 5 ser., 55 (June 1940): 630-631; "Extreme Unction and Electrocution," Homiletic and Pastoral Review 42 (August 1942): 1060.

In the years 1943-1948 the main topic was: Who says when a patient is to be anointed, physician or priest?²⁷

In 1948 Reinhold's article "Anointing for Glory"²⁸ injected a new (?) note as he quoted Suarez:

This sacrament unless it finds an impediment, takes away all evil that might hinder or delay our entry into glory. In the hour of death, man is most in need of this preparation. This sacrament has been instituted for the very hour of death. Thus it is quite obvious that this Sacrament has been instituted for this very end: to prepare man for glory. Nothing else has been instituted to achieve this end.

Again in 1950-1954 attention returns to rubrics. This concern continues to appear along with concern for legislation.²⁹

In the years 1954-1956 another article appeared concerning anointing unto glory³⁰ as well as one on the Anointing of the Sick with the oil of glory.³¹

²⁷J. P. Donovan, "Who Says When a Patient Is to Be Anointed, Physician or Priest?", Homiletic and Pastoral Review 46 (December 1945):212; "Extreme Unction and Dying non-Catholics," Sign 23 (August 1943):49; "Extreme Unction in Case of Apparent Death," Sign 23 (April 1944):545.

²⁸H. A. Reinhold, "Anointing for Glory," Catholic Digest, abr., 12 (October 1948): 47-49.

²⁹Clifford Howell, "Health of the Mystical Body," Orate Fratres 25 (June 1951):301-310; E. J. Mahoney, "Dispositions for Receiving Extreme Unction," Clergy Review, n.s., 35 (February 1951):104-106; F. J. Connell, "Sacraments for the Dying, Catholics and non-Catholics," American Ecclesiastical Review 125 (August 1951):146-147.

³⁰B. J. Cunningham, C.M., "Anointing unto Glory," Ave 81 (May 1955):17-19.

³¹A. Boberek, "Anointing Your Sick With the Oil of Glory," Grail 37 (November 1955):27-29.

In the years 1956-1958, in an article on the sacrament for the dying, Viaticum³² was being considered as the Sacrament of the dying.

In the years 1959-1961 articles were written on the sacrament of the sick and its effects on body and soul. Now extreme unction was being replaced by a new title, Sacrament of the Sick.³³

Thus we see how the focus on the sacrament has shifted in contemporary literature in the decade before the Council.

About this time, Zoltan Alszeghy wrote an article called "The Bodily Effects of Extreme Unction" in which he indicated that the spiritual and corporal effects are not merely parallel but intimately related.³⁴

On the eve of the Council, Davis wrote an article called "The Sacrament of the Sick" in which he said:

To understand its purpose, we have to realize it is the sacrament of the sick. In danger of death, the sick person receives the sacrament because he is sick, not because of possible death. This conclusion is based on evidence from the earliest tradition and from the ritual prayers of the sacrament.³⁵

A recent work by Bro links the anointing of the sick with penance and confirmation:

³²C. D. McEnniry, "Sacrament for the Dying," Liguorian 46 (November 1958):47-51.

³³Zoltan Alszeghy, S.J., "The Bodily Effects of Extreme Unction," Theology Digest 9 (Spring 1961):105-109.

³⁴Quoted by Charles Davis, "The Sacrament of the Sick," Theology Digest 9 (Spring 1961):110.

³⁵Ibid.

To really have a correct notion of the Anointing of the Sick we must regard it as the prolongation of the sacraments of Penance and Confirmation. In this way we can see its twofold aspect: with regard to Penance, the remission of sins; with regard to Confirmation, the final strength and capacity for death and resurrection.³⁶

With the opening of Vatican Council II more people became curious about reforms in the Sacrament of the Sick.

In 1963-1964 various questions were still being raised. How long after a person has died may the sacrament of extreme unction be administered?³⁷ When did our Lord institute the sacrament of extreme unction?³⁸ Where is it mentioned in the Bible? Is it true that few souls are in condition to go immediately to heaven?³⁹

With the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy as the first major document to be considered by the Council (1961-1964), Vatican Council II led the way to reforms which gave extreme unction its rightful place in Christian life.

While many liturgical topics were discussed by the Council Fathers, they spent one day--November 6, 1962--on

³⁶Bernard Bro, O.P., The Spirituality of the Sacraments, trans. Theodore DuBois (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), p. 93.

³⁷Bertin Farrell, C.P., "How long after a person has died may the sacrament of extreme unction be administered?", Sign 43 (February 1964):59.

³⁸Bertin Farrell, C.P., "When did our Lord institute the sacrament of extreme unction and where is it mentioned in the Bible?", Sign 44 (November 1964):57.

³⁹D. Jentges, "Is it true that few souls are in condition to go immediately to heaven?", St. Joseph 64 (December 1963):31.

the Sacraments in general. After long debate on various parts of a draft of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy a vote was taken on November 14, 1962 which called for basic adoption of the schema. Suggested reforms--among them those pertaining to anointing of the sick--were to be left to the Liturgical Commission.

Twice during the Second Vatican Council it was suggested that the words "danger of death" be removed from the rubrics for the reception of the anointing. This voiced concern supported the changing the name of the rite to "Sacrament of the Sick."

The Fathers of the Council agreed that Extreme Unction which may also and more fittingly be called 'The Anointing of the Sick' is not a sacrament reserved for those who are at the point of death. Hence, as soon as anyone of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, the most fitting time for him to receive this sacrament has arrived.⁴⁰

The implications and implementations of the Council Decrees concerning the sacrament point to the theological underpinnings on which the Liturgical Commission reflected. Thus the Rite of Anointing and Pastoral Care of the Sick promulgated by Pope Paul VI through the Apostolic Commission on November 30, 1972, and implemented on January 1, 1974, indicates a pastoral theological concern and supports ministry to the sick as well as to the dying.

⁴⁰"Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," Chapter III, Article 73, The Documents of Vatican II, Walter M. Abbott, S.J., gen. ed. (New York: Guild Press, 1966), p. 161.

Thereupon in the United States two documents relative to the new rite were published by the Bishops' Commission: Rite of Anointing and Pastoral Care of the Sick and Study 2, Anointing and the Pastoral Care of the Sick.

Both these new documents answer important questions relative to sickness and the sacraments.⁴¹

Since the Sacrament of Extreme Unction had lost its meaning through the years, it was necessary that the liturgical reform authorized by Vatican II and entrusted by Pope Paul to the Liturgical Commission go back and study roots of the sacrament in the Epistle of James.

The Liturgical Commission based its research in the New Testament where one could focus on the life of Jesus and his ministry to the sick. By a review of scripture it became clearer that Christ instituted the sacrament, but that it was the Epistle of James that specifies it as a sacramental rite. Concerning the effects of the anointing, the Commission states:

The sacrament provides the sick person with the grace of the Holy Spirit, a restoration of morale and the will to live, strength against evil temptations; and forgiveness of sin, if needed, and the perfection of Christian penance.⁴²

Since man can suffer both physically and mentally, it is a comfort to know that the grace of God can help the person live through both these trials. Through the

⁴¹James Mongelluzzo, "Sacraments of Healing," Sign 55 (May 1976):36.

⁴²Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, God's Healing Liturgy of the Sick (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1976), p. 22.

anointing of the sick, Christ is there to support and console them. In order for Christians to have resurrection they must first experience the agony of death. Responding to questions about the proper recipient, the reformers of Vatican II decreed:

Anointing may be conferred upon sick people who have lost consciousness or lost the use of reason, if, as Christian believers, they would have asked for it were they in control of their faculties.⁴³

The Christian's faith permits him to comprehend the perplexity of disease and suffering because it enables him to endure it more bravely. Crichton theologizes:

By baptism we are committed to a life of 'imitation' of Christ. Interiorly we have to be conformed to him in his passion as well as in his resurrection; his life has become the pattern of our own and even if we feel we shall never achieve 'crucifixion' with Christ so that we are able to say 'I live no longer I but Christ in me' (Galatians 2:19,20), yet this must be our aim.⁴⁴

Again, Crichton comments:

In all the sacraments we meet the suffering and the risen Christ, that is, we are able to share in his paschal mystery, but in illness we are called in a special way to share in the suffering of Christ and through the sacrament of anointing, as well as in communion, he reaches out to us, or rather reaches into the innermost places of our being, to raise us up in hope, to dispel anxiety and despair and to heal that condition so that we can return to the community of the church, there to serve our fellow-men and to give praise to God.⁴⁵

⁴³Ibid., p. 24.

⁴⁴J. D. Crichton, Christian Celebration: The Sacraments (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1973), p. 170.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 171

Today, as long as there is illness--chronic or serious--anointing may be given to any Catholic patient.

Crichton comments:

Children who have sufficient use of reason to understand the sacrament and to receive comfort from it may also be anointed. Young children seem rarely to have been anointed though after they have made their first communion, however young they may be, they can certainly 'appreciate' the sacrament of anointing.⁴⁶

Since this sacrament is now looked upon differently, it is easier for people to ask to be anointed.

The whole rite is visibly more personal, directed to the patient and engaging his participation as well as that of those present. Moreover, it may be noted here that for almost every part of the rite alternative texts exist which together construct a powerful impression of the healing power of the sacrament and contributes to a catechesis on the sacrament.

The Values of Anointing Sick Mentally Retarded Persons According to Pastoral Ministers

Answers were received from questionnaires mailed to sisters and priests judged to have experience in ministering to ill and aging mentally retarded persons. Although these pastoral ministers agree that the sacrament is valuable to the mentally retarded person, they have had little experience to share with this investigator.

Those responding reported no major problems encountered in anointing the mentally retarded. Among them,

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 177.

Sister Eleanor Smith wrote about her experience with a Communal Anointing Celebration for the adults at St. Coletta's. Sister says:

Each person has the right to the sacraments. . . . the healing/blessing does much for the individual who realizes God's protection of him. I think it has value as a communal rite because the whole Church can celebrate with the individual(s).⁴⁷ It is a uniting factor for the whole community.⁴⁷

Dunn⁴⁸ shares with us an unforgettable experience of witnessing the anointing of a mentally retarded girl. After her anointing Mary seemed to express to her visitors that she was at peace with herself. Sister Coletta Dunn accents the responsibility that the church has to minister not only to so-called normal parishioners, but also to those mentally handicapped who have experienced sickness. Sister claims that retarded persons should receive all the spiritual benefits proper to baptized members of the Church.

For, as the psalmist reminds us, 'in Justice I shall behold your face' (Ps. 16). A glorious vocation-- to be a champion for justice to these retarded adults-- so that dying they may know Him, and love Him whom on earth they have come to understand through our ministry.⁴⁹

The Office of Religious Education of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee has published a booklet in which it suggests that a communal anointing of the sick be held for the

⁴⁷ Interview via letter, Sister Eleanor Smith, O.S.F. July 8, 1977.

⁴⁸ Coletta Dunn, O.S.F., "Waking I Shall Be Content," National Apostolate For The Mentally Retarded Quarterly Publication (Summer 1974):13.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 16.

mentally handicapped.

Through the means of this Sacrament of Healing, the mentally handicapped person will be encouraged to face life with hope, to grow in patience and to accept in love his/her unique place in Christ's mystical body. This Sacrament will be the means of him/her to continue his/her journey in the promise of the Risen Lord.⁵⁰

Catholic Theology Concerning the Value of Anointing
of Sick Mentally Retarded Persons

Kinsella⁵¹ differentiates between degrees of retardation and, in effect, questions the value of the Anointing of the Sick for lower level mentally retarded persons.

On the other hand, Crichton⁵² defends the practice of children and even mentally ill persons receiving the sacrament of the sick. His words concerning children can be applied to the mentally retarded.

Haskett⁵³ suggests that, if a student is ill and should receive the Sacrament of the Sick, it would be very educational and inspirational to have the ceremony performed

⁵⁰Office of Religious Education of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, The Celebration of the Sacraments Adapted For the Mentally Handicapped, p. 13.

⁵¹Noel Kinsella, Moral Orientation of the Mentally Retarded (Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada: St. Thomas University, 1967), p. 87.

⁵²Crichton, Christian Celebrations, pp. 177, 191; Bernhard Poschman, Penance and the Anointing of the Sick, trans. and rev. Francis Courtney, S.J. (New York: Herder and Herder New York), pp. 253-255.

⁵³Sheila Haskett, Director's Handbook for Journey With Jesus (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Cardinal Stritch College, 1977), p. 81.

within the religious education program. All students must be prepared for the event.

If there happens to be no ill person, some elderly people might be invited to the program to attend a Communal Anointing celebration. The students should take an active part in it and be carefully prepared. They might make a small gift for each of their guests. Again, the celebration could be the Liturgy of the Word and after Mass the students might serve light refreshments to emphasize their desire to be of loving service.⁵⁴

Materials available to the researcher on the administration and effects of this sacrament for mentally retarded persons were severely limited. In his book Pedagogie de Resurrection (soon to be published in English), Henri Bissonier⁵⁵ reports how a nurse gave a young mentally retarded girl an injection of morphine just before the priest was going to administer the sacrament to her. The nurse explained her action: "So that she will not feel anything." It seems the nurse was preparing the girl for an operation instead of for a sacrament. Bissonier observes:

Extreme Unction should be presented to the handicapped as the "Sacrament of the Sick", identifying the suffering member with his crucified and redeeming leader and this identification enables him to give service to the Church to which he belongs.⁵⁶

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 82.

⁵⁵Henri Bissonier, Pedagogie de Resurrection (Paris, France: Fleurus Press, 1957).

⁵⁶Carolyn Frederick, O.S.F., Translation of Pedagogie de Resurrection (Paramus, New Jersey: forthcoming).

Summary

In this chapter the writer traced the history of the rite of the anointing of the sick back to the New Testament roots and through each period in history up to modern times to discover the various theologies of anointing.

The controversy about anointing of the sick--whether it should be considered as anointing for glory or for remission of sin--was discussed in the context of a review of half a century of periodical literature.

Pope Paul VI's promulgation of the New Rite of Anointing and the work of the Post-Conciliar Commission of Vatican Council II were recorded. The subsequent United States Episcopal Conferences published instructions to promote better understanding of the Sacrament of the Sick and these were cited and reviewed.

Responses to the writer's questionnaire indicate that individual dioceses have given little attention to the anointing as it applies to the mentally retarded. Furthermore, several pastoral ministers' experiences were cited. Where guidelines for the catechesis of mentally retarded persons regarding the Sacrament of the Sick existed they were reported.

After a review of the literature many questions remain unanswered. Are mentally retarded persons, although clearly not having the "use of reason", eligible for the sacrament of the sick?

Do we have enough experiences reported to support the values of the sacrament for mentally retarded persons?

If and when the sacrament is administered to mentally retarded persons, what is the most effective catechesis and celebration and rite?

Serious pastoral questions of a similar nature were raised by Gusmer⁵⁷ in 1974 and raised again by his study group⁵⁸ in 1977.

To date no authoritative answers have been given. This does not prevent pastoral workers with mentally retarded persons from the kinds of dialogue and experimentation allowed by the Liturgical Commission for spiritual growth and bodily and spiritual healing of the handicapped whose suffering is a gospel concern:

When you have no friends, when you are an immigrant and you speak the language badly, you are quickly oppressed, for you cannot defend yourself. This is true of the mentally deficient, the sick and the handicapped, the prisoners, and all those who have no voice. They are the oppressed ones and they are numerous in our society.⁵⁹

⁵⁷Charles W. Gusmer, "I Was Sick and You Visited Me: The Revised Rites for the Sick," Worship 48 (1974): 518.

⁵⁸Charles W. Gusmer, "Ecumenical Perspective," National Bulletin on Liturgy 10 (January-February 1977): 30.

⁵⁹Jean Vanier, Followers of Jesus (Guelph, Ontario: Alive Press Limited, 1973), p. 95.

CHAPTER III

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The investigator has made a study of the history of the anointing of the sick in order to expedite its administration to sick Mentally Retarded Persons for whom the value of the sacrament was demonstrated and reported in this study. A review of literature of the past half century, while revealing a shift in an understanding of the sacrament, plainly showed that many fundamental and provocative questions still remain unanswered.

The study uncovered more questions than answers. Are Mentally Retarded Persons really considered eligible for anointing? Does the necessity for the "use of reason" automatically exclude Mentally Retarded Persons from the Sacrament of the Sick? If the anointing is "for glory", why the need for the "use of reason"? Does anointing as healing of the effects of sin postulate a "use of reason"? Is only a priest (and not deacons and others) to be the ordinary minister of anointing? Where is there a model for catechesis of the faithful generally and of the Mentally Retarded specifically regarding this sacrament? Would the

catechesis for the Sacrament of the Sick be available to Mentally Retarded Persons when so many lack a good catechesis generally for the other sacraments? Would it not be better to have a study of ministry to Mentally Retarded Persons in both sickness and health?

In the past, the Mentally Retarded Person's right to be anointed was overlooked; today, an emerging ministry to Mentally Retarded Persons is involving more religious sisters and brothers, priests and lay persons in preparing these handicapped for confirmation, eucharist and penance. If it is so difficult to find pastors who have the time and skill to meet Mentally Retarded Persons, should the ministry to the sick Mentally Retarded be shared by others, for example, deacons who now seem excluded?

Scant attention has been given to the advantages of the Anointing of the Sick for Mentally Retarded Persons. The small number who were contacted relative to their pastoral experience in this area heartily agreed to its advantages although they admitted little experience themselves.

Only two writers advocated a catechesis of Mentally Retarded Persons regarding the advantages of this sacrament. One felt strongly that the catechesis should be within the framework of the supportive Christian community.

Recommendations for Further Study

It is suggested that several unanswered questions become the object of further study:

1. What is the "use of reason", given that "eligibility" for the Sacrament of the Sick requires "use of reason"?
2. Does "anointing for glory" equally describe the Sacrament of the Sick and are the "healing" aspects of anointing for glory generally overemphasized while simultaneously and completely underemphasizing these same "healing" gifts for children and Mentally Retarded Persons?
3. For the Anointing of the Sick, what constitutes a good catechesis that is at once pastorally and psychologically integrated?
4. Should each diocese issue guidelines for the administration of the Sacrament of the Sick to Mentally Retarded Persons?

Conclusion

In a pastoral message on Catholic Education, the Bishops of the United States delineated an ideal "to teach as Jesus did."⁶⁰ What "eligibility" other than that of being a person did Jesus look for in those to whom he ministered?

It seems that we must look at all unanswered questions and future research in the light of this ideal to teach as Jesus did, inherent to which teaching will be an on-going evaluating limited only by our own personal, prayerful ferreting out of the gospel which is to be Good News for all people, including our mentally retarded sisters and brothers.

⁶⁰National Conference of Catholic Bishops, To Teach as Jesus Did (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1973), p. 3 ff.

Appendix A: Form Letter to Those Interviewed

June 30, 1977

Dear Friend of the Handicapped:

I am a graduate student at Cardinal Stritch College writing my research paper on "The Value of the Sacrament of the Sick for Mentally Retarded Persons."

I would be very grateful if you would take the time to answer the following questions which I am hoping to use for my study.

Since I am sending this questionnaire to a small number of "apostles to the mentally retarded", I need every response.

I thank you in advance for taking the time to answer my questions. When it is completed, I would like to submit a summary of my research for a NAMR article.

Enclosed is a self-addressed envelope for ease in mailing me your response.

Sincerely yours,

Sister Noreen Conheeney, O.P.

Appendix B: Questionnaire to Those Interviewed

1. What is your experience in the anointing of sick Mentally Retarded Persons?

_____ Have you conducted communal anointings?

_____ Have most anointings been individual?

2. Describe the values of this Rite for the person in question as you see (these values).

3. Did you have any negative experiences? If possible, suggest how these negative aspects could be eliminated in the future?

4. What is your role in serving the handicapped?

Please return to me as soon as possible.

Thank you,

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