

The Papal System – XIII. Extreme Unction



Continued from [XII. The Confessional](#).

The only two Scriptures quoted by the Catholic Church to sustain the practice of extreme unction, simply prove that in the Saviour's day his servants miraculously raised the sick by the use of oil. In Mark vi. 13, we find these words: "And they [the disciples] cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them." The persons anointed are not said to be dying; the act is not called the Last Unction, and the transaction was a miracle, the design of which was to restore health, not to fit men for death.

In James v. 14, 15, we read: "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith shall save [save from his disease] the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." Here the unction is not to fit the man for dying; it is the human part of a miracle of restoration. Christ commonly used some natural agency and the astonishing power of God in performing his miracles. He could have made the wine out of nothing at Cana, but he required six stone vessels to be filled with water; he could have created all the bread and fishes needed to feed the hungry thousands, but he sought the five loaves and two fishes, and gave them a miraculous enlargement. And so the anointing in James is but the natural basis of a supernatural cure. It is not a work performed on the dying, but a process applied to the sick to give them perfect health. Nor is it the unction which effects the healing, but the prayer of faith: "And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up." "And if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him," through the prayer of faith.

These are the only Scriptures brought forward to sustain extreme unction, and they simply prove that the Saviour, in the age of miracles, cured, not the dying, but the sick, by having them anointed with oil, and by having his wonder-working servants offer up believing prayers for them. As the age of miracles passed away, so did this custom. If the practice should exist now, it could only apply to the removal of diseases. The sick Christian, instead of calling in a physician, should send for the elders of the church, to anoint and pray for him, that he might become well.

The Greek Church retains the Form of Anointing recommended by James.

When a member of that communion is dangerously ill, the elders, that is, a body of priests, not a single priest, are called in, who anoint the patient with oil, and pray for his recovery. This is exactly the object of James's unction.

An unction was recommended in the sixth century, and for several ages immediately after, for the sick, with a view to hinder the use of amulets, charms, and incantations for the recovery of health; a practice prevalent among converts, and rendered popular among others by their experience. This unction was applied to all cases of sickness, as well to those threatened with death; and the oil was used by laymen on themselves and their families.

Bede alludes to this oil when he says: "It is clear from the apostles themselves, that this holy custom was delivered to the Church, that the possessed, or any other diseased persons, may be anointed with oil consecrated by the pontifical benediction."

Jonas, Bishop of Orleans, from A.D. 821 to 843, in his "Institutione Laicorum," censures many for preferring the advice of soothsayers, or female fortune-tellers, about their diseased friends, to sending for the priests, and having themselves or relatives anointed with consecrated oil, according to the apostolical tradition."

The Council of Chalons, A.D. 813, regretting the contempt with which the unction of health was treated in their forty-eight canon, "Recommend the anointing of the sick, which ought to be performed by priests, with an oil consecrated by the bishop; adding that a remedy so fit to cure the infirmities of the soul and the body, ought not to be neglected." The canon was intended to show the advantages of this unction for health and pardon. The information it gives, that priests ought to apply it, would sound strange from a Catholic Council to a Romish community now.

The Council of Paris, A.D. 850, in their eighth Constitution, say that:

"The priests should instruct the people in the saving nature of the Sacrament of Unction (not extreme), of which the apostle James speaks, and make them sensible that they can hope to receive the wished-for effects of that mystery; the remission of sins, and health, only where they desire it with a sound and full faith; that because it often happens that sick persons know not the force of that sacrament, or think their distempers inconsiderable, or forget to desire it, the priest of the place ought to put them in mind of receiving it, and he ought to invite the priests of his neighborhood to be present at its administration. Only those fitted to receive the other sacraments of the Church should have this unction."

This Council knew nothing of the unction for death; it was THE ANOINTING FOR HEALTH AND PARDON. The churches knew nothing of the anointing for death for at least nine hundred years after Christ.

Hagenbach says: "The apostolical injunction respecting the sick (James v. 14), gave rise to a new sacrament, which came into general use from the ninth century, and could be administered only in the dying hour." This is extreme unction, or, properly, the Sacrament of Death. Possibly, in the tenth century, there were a few who had heard of the Sacrament of Death; but the opinion of Riddle is more precisely given, and nearer the truth: "The ceremony of extreme unction, as now used by the Church of Rome, cannot be traced to an earlier date than the end of the twelfth century; after this century, it was universally adopted in the Western Church."

It is formally adopted by the Catholic Church in the Council of Florence, A. D. 1439.

The decree is short and descriptive. It is:

"The fifth sacrament is extreme unction, whose matter is olive oil blessed by the bishop. This sacrament ought not to be administered unless to the infirm whose death is feared. The places to be anointed are: the eyes on account of sight, the ears on account of hearing, the nostrils on account of smelling, the mouth on account of tasting and speaking, the hands on account of touching, the feet on account of walking, the reins on account of their being the seat of pleasure."

The form of this sacrament is this:

"By this anointing and his own great mercy, may God indulge thee whatever sins thou hast committed through sight, etc., and in like manner by the other members. The minister of this sacrament is the priest. The effect truly is the healing of the mind, and as far as is fit, of the body also."

This is the first time in which the new unction was enrolled among the laws and sacraments of the Catholic Church, by the supreme legislature of that community.

The Catechism of Trent, after describing the oil in the last unction, as applied to the eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth and hands, proceeds to say:

"As in bodily infirmity although the entire body be affected, the cure is applied to that part only which is the source and origin of the disease; so is this unction applied, not to the entire body, but to those members which are preeminently the organs of sense; and also to the loins which are, as it were, the seat of pleasure and of sensuality, and to the feet, by which we are enabled to move from one place to another."

Hogan says: "Send an American (Protestant) missionary to a Catholic country, and without aid from home he will starve; he has no servants whom he can persuade to give him ten or twelve dollars for saying mass, no dying person who will send for him and pay him well for taking out of his pockets a set of oil stocks for the purpose of greasing him over, commencing on the forehead, then proceeding to the tip of the nose, the eyelids, the lips, the breast,

the loins, and the soles of the feet."Hogan has breast for hands, which, in all probability, is a mistake. But the loins are anointed.

The oil is regularly blessed once a year by the bishop, so that the priests have it always holy and ready for use.

The Council of Trent says: "If any one shall say that the sacred anointing of sick persons does *not confer grace, nor remit sins, nor raise up the sick*, but that now it has ceased, as if the grace of cures existed only in former times; let him be accursed."

The Catechism of Archbishop Spaulding says: "Extreme unction is a sacrament that gives grace to die well. It is given when we are in danger of death by sickness."

Extreme unction is not observed to restore health, by miraculous answers to prayers. It is only given to the dying, and it is applied to impart grace to them that they may die well; and to remove all traces of remaining sin.

The manner of applying Extreme Unction.

"The priest provides seven balls of cotton to wipe the parts to be anointed; and a taper (candle) to light him during the ceremony. As he enters the chamber of death he must wear a surplice and the purple stole; he gives the sick person the cross to kiss, he sprinkles him, the apartment, and the assistants with holy water in the form of a cross; confession and absolution if possible must precede the unction. The priest dips his right thumb in the 'Oils of the Infirm,' and anoints each part in the form of a cross, pronouncing words appropriate to the part receiving the unction; for the eyes, for example, he says: 'May God by this holy anointing, and by his most pious mercy, pardon you the sins you have committed through the eyes!' At the conclusion of the anointing the priest repeats some prayers, after which he delivers an exhortation to the sick, and retires."

Such is extreme unction, one of the leading sacraments of the Church of Rome; it has no place in the Scriptures; no location among the fathers; it was never heard of until from nine to twelve hundred years after Christ. It is a MODERN INNOVATION.

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