

THE PURPOSE OF ANOINTING THE SICK: A REAPPRAISAL

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SINCE THE appearance of Fr. Kern's classic on extreme unction a half century ago,¹ a goodly number of theologians of all schools have agreed that, granted the proper dispositions on the part of the recipient, the sacrament of unction has the power of canceling the total debt of punishment and thus preparing the soul for immediate entrance into heaven.² Not all agree on what is meant by proper dispositions, and it is difficult at times to say whether this extraordinary effect is to be attributed directly to the sacrament or to the devotion and fervor of the sick person. Kern himself demands that the sacrament be received with due preparation and devotion and at a time when the sick person can and does cooperate fully with the actual graces peculiar to this sacrament.³ And with this view most of Kern's admirers are in agreement.

But there have been more ardent followers of Kern, particularly here in the United States, who have either ignored or who have refused to admit the qualifications with which Kern proposed his thesis. Thus, as early as the year 1916, Fr. F. Tecklenburg, writing in the pages of the *Ecclesiastical Review*, attempted to popularize through the clergy the results of Kern's researches. Tecklenburg also demanded

¹ Josephus Kern, S.J., *De sacramento extremæ unctionis tractatus dogmaticus* (Regensburg, 1907).

² E. Doronzo, O.M.L., lists the following authors as having accepted Kern's thesis "cum aliquo clamore reinventæ veritatis": Pohle-Preuss, Otten, Kilker, Lercher, Cappello, Dafarra, and, among writers of articles in dictionaries and periodicals, Toner, Tecklenburg, Richards, Feld, Gits, McCarthy, and Verhamme. To this list we would add such names as Pesch, Van Noort, Piolanti, and Vermeersch, although Doronzo does not believe that the teaching of these authors necessarily favors Kern's teaching. Cf. *De extrema unctione* 2 (Milwaukee, 1955) 148.

³ The following single paragraph best sums up Kern's thesis and its qualifications: "Cum sacramentum ad hoc sit institutum, ut animam christiani morti appropinquantis ad immediatum introitum gloriæ disponat ideoque ex specifica sua ratione habeat vim abstergendi omnem reatum poenæ temporalis, omnes infirmi, qui plenum fructum s. *Uctionis nanciscuntur, plenam poenarum relaxationem consequuntur*. Plenum autem s. *Uctionis fructum nanciscuntur, qui illam cum debita praeparatione et devotione in eo statu morbi percipiunt, quo cum auxiliis intuitu eius sibi oblatis cooperari adhuc valent, et qui hanc cooperationem de facto plene praestant"* (*ibid.*, p. 190).

that the sacrament be "properly received" if it is to achieve its ultimate purpose. But "properly" means little in the following context:

Extreme Unction, if properly received, intends to eliminate purgatory for the recipient, intends to guarantee him the immediate beatific vision after death. . . . Nor is there any reason to suppose that such a disposition should be particularly difficult to obtain. In the sacrament of Penance, ordinarily not all punishments are remitted. The Council of Trent (XIV Sess.) tells us that Penance will cleanse us perfectly only if accompanied "*magnis fletibus et laboribus.*" This sacrament is therefore not available for our purpose. One might say that we have the plenary indulgence and the apostolic benediction. I answer that these depend too much upon the disposition, the piety and exertion of the patient. A plenary indulgence presupposes remission of all sins, and in so trying a need it is altogether too uncertain a thing. We must have a sacrament; nothing less will do.⁴

Writing in the pages of the same review, Fr. W. J. Feld, S.J., questions the demands made by Kern, and, for all practical purposes, equates the efficacy of extreme unction in canceling the debt of punishment with that of baptism.

The best of authorities assure us that, while Confession is God's merciful invention to save such souls from hell, Extreme Unction is the merciful sacrament designed by Him to enable them to escape the fires of purgatory. Yes, the soul of the man who dies after receiving Extreme Unction, at least with attrition or imperfect contrition, goes straight to heaven.⁵

Only recently, Kern's thesis, but without Kern's insistence on full cooperation with the grace of the sacrament, has been brilliantly and forcefully argued by Fr. H. A. Reinhold.⁶ In a section significantly entitled "Anointing for Glory," Reinhold compares baptism, the sacrament of initiation, with unction, the sacrament of perfection, and

⁴ "The Primary Effect of Extreme Unction," *Ecclesiastical Review* 55 (1916) 292.

⁵ "Why Be Anointed?," *ibid.* 84 (1931) 487 f. In a second article, "Is Purgatory Inevitable?," *ibid.* 88 (1933) 588, Feld expresses the belief that when Kern "uses the words 'cooperate fully' he surely would not wish to exclude all those who do what they can even though the degree and amount of their cooperation are far from being objectively perfect."

⁶ *The American Parish and the Roman Liturgy* (New York, 1958). The chapter on extreme unction as an anointing for glory is based on a paper read at the National Liturgical Week and published in their Proceedings for 1941. Fr. Clifford Howell, S.J., regards this paper "as quite the best short treatment of this matter that I have ever read," and admits that he has borrowed heavily from it in his own chapter on unction in *Of Sacraments and Sacrifice* (Collegeville, Minn., 1952) p. 75, note 1. Fr. Reinhold's teaching has been further popularized by H. Fuchs, O.S.B., in the booklet, *The Last Rites for the Sick and the Dying* (Collegeville, 1955) pp. 45 ff.

implies, at least, that no more is demanded of the recipient of unction for the integral remission of sins than is demanded in baptism. "The helplessness of our infancy is repeated in the helplessness of our last hour. Again we are thrown entirely on God's fatherhood and mercy."⁷ Like Tecklenburg, Reinhold is aware that his teaching tends to depopulate purgatory, but, like Feld, he is convinced that his teaching represents not only the "best authors" but "the older and more generous tradition of our Church."

Should we assume that indulgences and blessings instituted by the Church are more powerful than a sacrament instituted by our Lord and promulgated by His Apostles? If Baptism and Confession deliver us from hell, should there not be a sacrament which by its very essence frees us from the ordeal of purgatory? The sacramental system of our Holy Church certainly looks more complete and more adequate, and Christ's honor as Saviour is more perfectly expressed, if we follow the older and more generous tradition of our Church.⁸

It is not our purpose to question directly the thesis which states that one of the effects of extreme unction is to remit the total debt of temporal punishment.⁹ Instead, our purpose is to question the basic premise on which this conclusion is based, namely, that the purpose of extreme unction is to prepare the soul for immediate entrance into heaven. As we shall see, this purpose was the agreed point of departure of all the great Scholastic doctors of the thirteenth century in discussing the principal effect of the sacrament. And even though Thomas alone draws the conclusion that through the sacrament a person "is freed from the liability of temporal punishment, so that when the soul departs from the body nothing remains to prevent entrance into glory,"¹⁰ it would seem that once you grant the basic premise that

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 84.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 86. Howell regards the view as expressed by Reinhold as the "common opinion of theologians almost without exception, from the Patristic age right down till the Council of Trent" (*Of Sacraments and Sacrifice*, p. 76). Actually, as we shall see, if any of the Fathers of the Church held this view, he is the exception.

⁹ Doronzo regards this thesis, no matter how qualified, as having no solid foundation in tradition. Instead, it is a new and unhappy invention, definitely embraced only by a few theologians and given a kindly and superficial nod of approval by certain others (cf. *op. cit.* 2, 165).

¹⁰ *C. gent.* 4, 73. We should note that in the *Supplement* Thomas speaks of the debt of punishment as being lessened rather than fully remitted through the grace of the sacrament (q. 30, a. 1, ad 2m). Again, in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, Thomas holds that the

unction is an immediate preparation for glory, Kern's thesis is less assailable.

But how valid is the premise? Does it actually represent the traditional teaching of the Church prior to the great Scholastic age? And if not, how can we explain the gradual emergence of an idea which so completely dominated speculative thinking on the purpose of the sacrament in the thirteenth century? The purpose of this paper is to attempt an answer to both questions.

THE MINISTRY OF HEALING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The rite of anointing the sick may be regarded as the continuation and sacramental counterpart of the apostolic ministry of healing as recorded by the Synoptics. Actually, the Church's ministry of healing is the continuation of Christ's ministry as entrusted to the Twelve. After recording that Jesus went about the towns and villages, "curing every disease and infirmity" (Mt 9:35), Matthew tells us that Jesus, "having summoned His twelve disciples, gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out and to cure every kind of disease and infirmity." The parallel passages of Mark (6:7) and Luke (9:1) say the same. Mark, however, adds the significant detail that the ministry of healing was accompanied by an anointing with oil: "And going forth they preached that men should repent, and they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many sick people, and healed them" (6:13).

Although the Council of Trent teaches that the sacrament of extreme unction is hinted at or suggested (*insinuatium*) in the passage from Mark,¹¹ commentators and theologians generally from the time of Trent have regarded the apostolic ministry of healing as nothing more than the foreshadowing, figure, or type of the future sacrament.¹² Lagrange, however, feels that the expression "figure or type" is too weak to describe the relation between the rite of Mark and our sacrament.

full remission of the temporal punishment is obtained sacramentally only through baptism: "Baptismus inter alia sacramenta est maximae necessitatis: tum quia pueris non potest aliter subveniri; tum quia etiam nec adultis quantum ad remissionem totius poenae" (*In 4 Sent.*, d. 5, q. 2, a. 1, ad 1m).

¹¹ Sess. 14, c. 1 (DB 908).

¹² "Bellarmin, Estius, Corneille La Pierre, Jansenius, dom Calmet, Knabenbauer, parlent seulement de 'figure et de type'" (L. Pirot, *La sainte Bible* 9 [Paris, 1946] 466).

Writing in the tradition of Bede the Venerable and Maldonatus, Lagrange sees in the Marcan account "the real origins of the sacrament."¹³ Most authors feel that the emphasis in the Marcan account is on the charismatic power of healing bodies and not on the more strictly sacramental power of healing souls.¹⁴ It should be noted, however, that in all three Synoptic accounts the power of curing bodies is coupled with a power over devils and unclean spirits, a power which, as we shall see, is ascribed to oil of the sick in many of our early liturgies. Again, Mark seems to imply that repentance should precede the casting out of devils and the subsequent cure of the sick. Accordingly, the apostolic ministry even at this early stage is not sheerly charismatic or thaumaturgic. It may well represent the exercise of a "sacramental" power given by Christ to the Twelve, to be extended to the presbyters mentioned by the Apostle James, and to be continued in Christ's priests today.

If this be so, we can with Lagrange and earlier commentators regard the rite as promulgated by James not as a new rite with a basically new purpose, but as the same rite as that recorded by Mark.¹⁵ True, James states that "if the sick person has committed sins, it shall be forgiven him" (5:15). But this is a conditional effect of the sacrament. The subject of the rite need not be a sinner. In fact, we may presume that in many instances the sick person has only recently been baptized in the name of the Lord. Accordingly, the purpose of this anointing "in the name of the Lord" is not principally the forgiveness of sins but the recovery of health. Admittedly, the words *sōsei* and *egerei* in the clause, "And the prayer of faith will save the sick person and the Lord will raise him up" (5:15), can refer to a spiritual cure. But the context suggests and the use of the word *iathēte* in the exhortation "pray for one another that you may be healed" (5:16) confirms the

¹³ "Ce rite est bien le même qui demeure en usage dans l'Eglise (Jac. v, 14). . . . Le terme de figure et de type (employé par Knabenbauer) est peut-être trop faible, car il s'agit plutôt des origines réelles du sacrement, comme Bède (sur Mc) le dit très bien" (*Évangile selon saint Marc* [Paris, 1947] pp. 154 f.). For Bede's statement cf. *infra* p. 321.

¹⁴ Cf. B. Poschmann, *Busse und Letzte Ölung* (*Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte* 4/3; Freiburg, 1951) p. 126.

¹⁵ In his commentary on Mk 6:13, Pirot concludes: "Aussi est-ce à bon droit que le concile de Trente a vu *insinué* par ce geste des apôtres le sacrement de l'extrême-onction, dont l'épître de S. Jacques devait montrer la pratique courante aux temps apostoliques" (*loc. cit.*).

impression that the specific purpose of the sacrament is the physical cure of the sick person.

We would make one final observation on the text of James for the bearing it has on our future documents. Although the cure of the sick person is the work of the Lord and although the cure is ascribed to the anointing and the prayer of faith, James seems to demand faith and confidence on the part of the presbyters and the bystanders for the full effect of the sacrament. This may be seen even in the expression "prayer of faith," which may mean "prayer inspired by the faith," or "prayer accompanied by faith," a meaning which better explains the closing remark of James: "for the unceasing prayer of a just man is of great avail" (5:17).

Admittedly, most theologians are anxious to emphasize the spiritual effects of the rite of anointing as described by James in order to bring it into closer accord with current speculation on the effects of the sacrament. But even granted that we have minimized somewhat the spiritual purpose of the rite of anointing the sick, there is nothing in the text of James which would suggest that the purpose of anointing is to prepare the sick person for death or that the anointing with oil is an anointing for glory. Such ideas are not only foreign to the text of James; they are completely contrary to the purpose of the apostolic ministry of healing as described by the Synoptics, a ministry which in some way prepares for our sacrament.

EARLY FORMULAS FOR BLESSING OIL OF THE SICK

The earliest clear reference to oil of the sick is to be found in the formula of the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus (ca. 215). "O God, who sanctifiest this oil, as Thou dost grant unto all who are anointed and receive of it the hallowing wherewith Thou didst anoint kings, priests and prophets, so [grant that] it may give strength to all that taste of it and health to all that use it."¹⁶ The kingly, priestly, and prophetic symbolism of oil is verified in the hallowing of the rites of initiation; the specific petition for oil of the sick is that it may give strength and health to all who use it. Since this oil was presumably used in the presbyteral rite of anointing the sick, we may conclude

¹⁶ 5, 1 (ed. Gregory Dix, New York, 1937, p. 10). We should note that the Ethiopic version, in place of "health to all that use it," reads "sanctify them who receive it" (*ibid.*).

that the specific purpose of the rite was to strengthen the sick person and to restore him to health.

The over-all purpose of oil of the sick is spelled out in the more developed prayer of Serapion (*ca.* 350):

We invoke Thee, who hast all power and might, Saviour of all men, Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and we pray Thee to send down from the heavens of Thy Only-begotten a curative power upon this oil, in order that to those who are anointed with these Thy creatures or who receive them, it may become a means of removing "every disease and every sickness" [Mt 4:23], of warding off every demon, of putting to flight every unclean spirit, of keeping at a distance every evil spirit, of banishing all fever, all chill, and all weariness; a means of grace and goodness and the remission of sins; a medicament of life and salvation, unto health and soundness of soul and body and spirit, unto perfect well-being.¹⁷

"Perfect well-being" appears to sum up the purpose of the anointing of the sick. True, perfect health includes health of soul as well as body. Not only is the Church's rite of anointing the sick intimately connected with Christ's ministry of removing "every disease and every sickness," but it is the continuation of the apostolic ministry of casting out demons and unclean spirits. Finally, the rite of anointing is a means of grace and the remission of sins. Thus all the effects of the sacrament are listed, but once again there is nothing to suggest that the anointing is a preparation for death. Instead, confidence is expressed in the "curative power" of oil to banish "all fever, all chill, and all weariness."

The prayer of the Gelasian Sacramentary, which may well represent the formula used in the Roman Church from the fifth century, is quite similar in its petitions to the prayer of Hippolytus and Serapion:

Send down from heaven, we beseech Thee, Lord, the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, upon the richness of this oil, which Thou hast deigned to bring forth from the green tree for refreshment of mind and body. And may Thy blessing be to all who anoint, taste and touch a protection for body, soul and spirit, for dispelling all sufferings, all sickness, all illness of mind and body. . . .¹⁸

Since the prayer of the Gelasian Sacramentary is with one minor change the same as that used for the consecration of oil in the Roman

¹⁷ *Didascalia et Constitutiones apostolorum*, ed. F. X. Funk (Paderborn, 1905) 2, 191 f.

¹⁸ 1, 40 (ed. H. A. Wilson, Oxford, 1894, p. 70).

Pontifical today, we may conclude that the over-all purpose of oil of the sick is and always has been the recovery of perfect health, by dispelling "all sufferings, all sickness, all illness of mind and body."

Equally instructive on the purpose of oil of the sick is the early Gallican-Visigoth formula which was more widely used in Spain and southern Gaul in the pre-Carolingian period.¹⁹ The prayer for the consecration of oil of the sick runs to fifty-nine lines in Chavasse's editing of the text. We shall merely summarize the general tenor of the prayer and its principal petitions.

The formula assumes that the practice of exorcising and sanctifying oil derives from Christ and was promulgated by the apostles. Faith is expressed in Christ, "the most skilled of all physicians," who "quickly cures every kind of disease." And in this spirit of faith and confidence, the consecrator prays that the heavens will be opened and that the Lord will pour out His healing medicine upon the oil. Prayer is then made that the oil "may be of profit to those who are troubled with fever and dysentery," that it may be of help to "paralytics, the lame, the blind and others similarly afflicted." Hope is expressed that the use of oil "may drive out the quartan, tertian and daily chill of fever; that it may loosen the lips of the dumb, cool and refresh feverish members of the body, restore to knowing the mind that is demented." In a word, the oil of the sick is regarded as a panacea for every disease and infirmity. And since it was generally believed that all disease and infirmity resulted from the intervention of diabolical forces, the prayer concludes with a long petition that the oil will be effective against the "onslaught of demons," and that "the enemy, going forth in confusion and in torment from the bodies of Thy servants, may leave no stain in them, but be restrained by Thy angels."

It is difficult to read this early formula without coming to the conclusion that the specific purpose of oil of the sick is the physical cure of all sickness and infirmity. True, the prayer opens with a reference to the text of James, in which the forgiveness of sins, if present, is promised. Again, the cure of the sick involves a preternatural power over demons and unclean spirits. But the emphasis throughout is on the power of oil as an antidote for every kind of disease and infirmity.

¹⁹ Cf. Antoine Chavasse, *Etude sur l'onction des infirmes dans l'église latine du IIIe au XIe siècle* (Lyons, 1942) pp. 57 ff.

There is no suggestion that the oil was to be used as a preparation for death. On the contrary, the prayer repeatedly expresses confidence in the curative effects of oil and implies that the oil is to be administered with similar confidence and faith.

EARLY REFERENCES TO THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK

Origen is, perhaps, the only author who refers explicitly to the unction text of James in the ante-Nicene period. The text is quoted by Origen to illustrate the seventh means of remitting sins in the New Testament, namely, "when the sinner bathes his couch in tears . . . and when he is not ashamed to show his sin to the priest of the Lord, and to seek the remedy."²⁰ Space does not permit us to rehearse the variety of interpretations which have been given to Origen's use of the text of James as illustrative of confession of sins to a priest.²¹ We are willing to grant the possibility that Origen has a dying penitent in mind and that even at this early date the practice of reconciling and anointing dying penitents was known.

It is not likely, however, that the practice was widespread. Our principal argument is from silence, but the argument is impressive, since the documents which fail to mention an anointing of the dying deal expressly with the case of dying penitents. Thus, the thirteenth canon of the Council of Nicaea prescribes that "if any one is departing this life, he is not to be deprived of the last and most necessary gift for the journey (*ephodiou*)," an expression which is translated by the Latin *viaticum*. In the same canon it is stated that dying penitents are to be reconciled, and, by way of extension, that the bishop after investigation is to grant the Eucharist to all, whoever they be, who are departing this life.²² Accordingly, it would appear that the rites of the dying included reconciliation and viaticum, and that viaticum was the last sacrament, the sacrament of the departing. We stress this point now, since there will come a time when theologians, including the great Scholastic doctors, will speak of unction as the last sacrament, as the Church's parting gift, as the immediate preparation for the journey heavenward, as the final preparation for glory. In the early

²⁰ *In Leviticum hom. 2* (GCS 29, 295 f.).

²¹ Cf. Doronzo, *op. cit.* 1, 97-102.

²² Mansi 2, 673.

Church, viaticum was the sacrament of the dying, and unction, we believe, was simply the sacrament of the sick. And it is for this reason, it would seem, that there is no reference to unction in the canon of Nicaea which deals with dying Christians.

The same reason explains, we feel, why there is no reference to unction in those writings of Innocent I and Leo the Great which deal *ex professo* with the rites of reconciling and communicating dying Christians.²³ Reconciliation and viaticum are the last rites of the Church. Nothing is said of extreme unction. The argument from silence is even more impressive in the Gelasian Sacramentary. Here we have a detailed description of the last rites for a dying penitent. The penitent is reconciled and given viaticum.²⁴ There is no reference to unction, even though the same Sacramentary has a detailed formula for blessing oil of the sick. Once again, we suspect that unction was not normally regarded as a sacrament of the dying, for the added reason that the oil of the sick was blessed for the purpose of restoring health and not for the purpose of preparing the dying Christian for his journey heavenward. Viaticum served this latter purpose.

Perhaps the most convincing argument that unction was not regarded as the normal complement to the rites of the dying in the present period may be drawn from the celebrated passage of Innocent I on the recipient of the sacrament. After citing the text of James, Innocent continues:

Now there is no doubt that these words are to be understood of the faithful who are sick, and who can be anointed with holy oil of chrism, which has been prepared by the bishop, and which not only priests but all the faithful may use for anointing, when their own needs or those of their family demand. . . . But he [the bishop] cannot pour it on penitents, since it is a kind of sacrament. And how can it be deemed proper to grant one kind of sacrament to those who are denied the other sacraments?²⁵

From this passage it is clear that the subject or recipient of the sacrament is a sick person, but not one who is so sick as to be at the point of death. Otherwise Innocent could not deny the sacrament to a penitent. Accordingly, Innocent has in mind one who is still a public

²³ Cf. Innocent I, *Ep.* 6 (*PL* 20, 498); Leo I, *Ep.* 118 (*PL* 54, 1011).

²⁴ *Sacramentarium Gelasianum* 1, 39 (ed. Wilson, p. 66).

²⁵ *Ep.* 25, 8 (*PL* 20, 559 f.).

penitent, who has not yet qualified for reconciliation and the reception of the Eucharist, what Innocent refers to as "the rest of the sacraments." True, the penitent is sick, but his sickness is not such as to warrant reconciliation and viaticum. In a word, Innocent regards unction as a sacrament of the sick, and not specifically as a sacrament of the dying. True, it is quite possible that Innocent would be prepared to anoint a dying penitent. However, it is more likely that the actual procedure would simply be reconciliation and viaticum, a procedure Innocent himself recommends to Exsuperius in dealing with those who seek penance only when they come to die: "Therefore, along with penance, communion will be granted at the end, so that men of this sort, our Lord willing, may be delivered from eternal destruction."²⁶

THE EARLY MEDIEVAL PERIOD

With the fall of the Roman Empire in the West, the Church was faced with the task of evangelizing and civilizing the heathens to the north. In the Church of Arles, St. Caesarius (†543) repeatedly exhorts his people to put their trust, in time of sickness, in the Eucharist and in the oil of the sick, rather than to rely on the incantations of the sorcerers. Although Caesarius refers to the text of James, in which the ministers of anointing are presbyters, he encourages the practice, mentioned by Innocent I, of self-anointing and lay anointing. Although lay anointing is no longer practiced in the Church today, it is not unlikely that many in the early Church believed that oil consecrated by a bishop, even when self-applied, had the same relative efficacy as the consecrated Eucharist when self-administered. In any event, the exhortations of Caesarius of Arles throw additional light on what Christians believed to be the purpose of anointing the sick.

Thus, Caesarius endeavors to put an end to the heathenish practice of sorcery in the following exhortation:

How much more correct and salutary it would be to hurry to the Church, to receive the body and blood of Christ, and with oil that is blessed to anoint in all faith themselves and their dear ones; for, according to what James the Apostle says, not only would they receive health of body, but also the remission of sins. For through him the Holy Spirit has made the following promise: "If anyone is sick, let him call in the presbyters of the Church, and let them pray over him,

²⁶ *Ep.* 6 (*PL* 20, 498).

anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and if he be in sins, they will be forgiven him" (Jas 5:14 f.).²⁷

Obviously, this exhortation would be meaningless if Caesarius regarded the Eucharist and oil of the sick as a preparation for death. The sorcerers promised health of body. Caesarius must promise the same. Actually, it is the Holy Spirit, speaking through the Apostle James, who promises not only health of body, but health of soul. Again, the sick person is exhorted to put as much faith in the oil of the sick as pagans put in the incantations of the sorcerers. To do this he cannot be persuaded that unction is a rite for the dying or that it is to be given only when life is despaired of. Instead, he is to hurry to the church to receive the Eucharist and oil with which to anoint himself and his dear ones, a description which hardly applies to one who is at the point of death.

Writing a century later, St. Eligius of Noyon (659) is faced with the same problem as was Caesarius. Again there is the same plea that Christians have confidence in the Eucharist and oil of the sick.

As often as any sickness shall occur, let them not seek out the sorcerers . . . but let the sick person put his trust in the mercy of God alone, so as to receive with faith and devotion the Eucharist of the body and blood of Christ, and with confidence to ask the Church for blessed oil, with which he may anoint his body in the name of the Lord; and according to the Apostle, "the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. . . ." ²⁸

The practice of lay anointing or self-anointing continued in the West down until the Carolingian period. One reason for this may have been the negligence of priests in visiting the sick, a negligence which will be expressly censured by the reform councils of the Carolingian period. In England, it would appear that priests were more zealous than their Continental counterparts in the administration of the sacraments.²⁹ In any event, Bede the Venerable, while admitting that

²⁷ *Serm.* 279, 5 (among the works of Augustine, *PL* 39, 2273).

²⁸ *De rectitudine catholicae conversationis* 5 (among the works of Augustine, *PL* 40, 1172).

²⁹ Many of the Carolingian reform measures touching the pastoral obligations of the clergy are prompted by Celtic discipline introduced to the Continent by Irish monks and English missionary scholars; cf. O. D. Watkins, *A History of Penance* 2 (London, 1920) 688 ff.

Christians might anoint themselves and the members of their family, is able to say: "Even now the custom of the Church holds that the sick are to be anointed with consecrated oil by presbyters, and to be healed by the accompanying prayer."³⁰ More important, Bede regards this priestly ministry of healing as a continuation of the apostolic ministry of casting out devils and of healing the sick. In his commentary on Mk 6:13, "And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many sick people, and healed them," Bede remarks: "Hence, it is clear that this custom was handed on by the apostles themselves, that possessed persons or any others who are sick are to be anointed with oil consecrated by a pontifical blessing."³¹ Since the apostolic ministry of healing was not restricted to those who were dying, and since the purpose of that ministry was to cure "every disease and infirmity," it is quite obvious that Bede, the first extant commentator on the Epistle of James, does not have the dying principally in mind when he speaks of the anointing of the sick. Much less would he agree that the purpose of the anointing and the accompanying prayer is to prepare the sick person for death and the beatific vision.

THE CAROLINGIAN REFORM

Up until the period of the Carolingian reform, which begins at the close of the eighth century, there is no certain evidence either in the liturgies or the writings of ecclesiastical authors that the sacrament of unction was ever regarded as a preparation for death or that the rite of anointing formed part of the Church's last rites for the dying.³² True, there are a number of references to the rite of anointing the dying in the lives of the saints written in the sixth and seventh century. But there is no mention of reconciliation or viaticum in these narratives, nor is the purpose of the rite to prepare the Christian for death; rather, the purpose of the hagiographers is to extol the curative powers of oil of the sick when administered by men of holiness. It is only in the later ninth-century accounts of the lives of such saintly personages

³⁰ *Super divi Jacobi epistolam* 5 (PL 93, 39).

³¹ *In Marci evangelium expositio* (PL 92, 188).

³² We arrived at this conclusion before having the opportunity of consulting Chavasse's richly documented study in which he draws the following conclusion relative to the pre-Carolingian period: "L'onction des infirmes n'apparaît pas, dans les textes qui nous restent, sous forme de rite préparatoire à la mort" (*op. cit.*, p. 193).

as Eugene of Ireland (*ca.* 500) and Tresanus of Rheims (*ca.* 600) that we find unction described as a rite of the dying and as a preparation for the reception of viaticum.³³

Accordingly, it would seem that it is not until the period of the Carolingian reform that the anointing of the sick becomes the normal complement to penance and viaticum in the Church's last rites of the dying. The general tone of the reform, as it applies to the duties of priests, is set in the following capitulary ascribed to Charles the Great: "Likewise, with respect to the sick and penitents, that the dying should not pass away without an anointing with consecrated oil, and without reconciliation and viaticum."³⁴ Unquestionably, the practice of anointing dying Christians is a legitimate development of the earlier practice of anointing the sick, but in the words, "the dying should not pass away without an anointing with consecrated oil," we detect the first clear suggestion that unction along with viaticum is to be regarded as a sacrament of the dying.

And yet the earlier emphasis on unction as a remedy for restoring health is by no means lost in the reform measures of the ninth century. Thus, the Second Council of Chalon (813) reminds the faithful that "a remedy of this kind, which heals the weakness of soul and body, is not to be lightly regarded."³⁵ The Council of Pavia (850) is the first to refer explicitly to unction of the sick as a "salutary sacrament," but by "salutary" the Council means that "through it, if one asks with confidence, [sins] are remitted and, as a result, bodily health is restored."³⁶ The present Council is important also for clearing up a misunderstanding on the relative position of unction and reconciliation. The earlier capitulary of Charles the Great had seemed to imply that unction was to precede reconciliation and viaticum. The Council of Pavia, referring back to the prescription of Innocent I, prescribes that "if the sick person is bound by public penance, he cannot receive

³³ This judgment was originally based on some seven or eight excerpts from the *Acta sanctorum* supplied by Kern and Doronzo. More abundant material is offered by Chavasse (pp. 164-90). Comparing the lives of the early saints written before the Carolingian period with those written from the ninth to the twelfth century, Chavasse concludes: "Du moins, quand on compare les témoignages antérieurs au IXe siècle et ceux qui lui sont postérieurs, constate-t-on qu'ils forment deux blocs opposés: dans le premier, l'onction *in extremis*—au sens que nous avons dit—n'est jamais mentionnée, tandis que dans le second elle l'est très fréquemment" (p. 194).

³⁴ *Caroli magni capitularia* (PL 97, 124).

³⁵ Mansi 14, 104.

³⁶ Mansi 14, 932.

the remedy of this mystery, unless he has first received reconciliation and is worthy of the communion of the body and blood of Christ.”

Since Kern and his followers are convinced that the purpose of the sacrament is to cancel the debt of punishment and thus prepare the soul for immediate entrance into heaven, it might be well to include here a rather lengthy excerpt from the Council of Mainz (847). The passage is valuable in showing that extreme unction is not a substitute for penance, either personal or vicarious. It is valuable as well in so far as it regards death as a possibility and not as something inevitable. It is important, finally, as a witness to the climactic position of viaticum in the administration of the last rites.

A sincere confession of sins is to be demanded of the sick who are in danger, not for the purpose of imposing a large penance, but of learning [their condition] in order that the burden of penance may be relieved by the prayers of their friends and by zeal in almsgiving, so that, if perchance they shall depart this life, they may be freed of excommunication and profit by their sharing in [the works of] others. But if they shall be delivered by God from danger and recover, let them observe with all care the type of penance imposed by their own confessor. And so, lest the door of mercy seem closed to them, after they have been encouraged by the prayers and consolations of the Church, together with God's healing anointing, let them be refreshed, in accordance with the decrees of the holy Fathers, with communion by way of viaticum.³⁷

A CAROLINGIAN RITE OF ANOINTING THE SICK

Although the rite of unction is frequently associated with penance and viaticum in the conciliar decrees of the Carolingian period, it is quite remarkable that possibly the earliest ritual of anointing which has come down to us has no reference to death. We refer to the ritual of anointing which is appended to Alcuin's *Ordo for the Visitation of the Sick*, and which may be found in Menard's edition of the Gregorian Sacramentary.³⁸ Since the present Roman rite of anointing is based,

³⁷ Mansi 14, 910. There is, however, what appears to be a contemporary document which is more in accord with Kern's view that the sacrament of unction actually remits the total debt of punishment. Thus, the penitential ascribed to Egbert of York (ca. 750) states: "scriptum esse quod quicumque hanc disciplinam habuerit, anima ejus aequae pura sit post obitum ac infantis qui statim post baptisma moritur" (PL 89, 416). For the authenticity of the various penitentials ascribed to Egbert, cf. McNeill-Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance* (New York, 1938) p. 237.

³⁸ PL 78, 231 ff. C. Harris regards this ritual as "probably the most ancient full service for the administration of Unction now in existence" (*Liturgy and Worship* [London, 1932] p. 495). H. B. Porter believes that the Gregorian rite was compiled from Roman, Gallican,

at least in part, on this earlier ritual of the Carolingian period, we shall give the latter in some detail.

Prayers for Visiting the Sick

In the first place let the priests prepare blessed water with a sprinkling of salt, and sprinkle it over the sick person himself and over his house, with an Antiphon and Prayers.

[After six short prayers which are taken from Alcuin's order for visiting the sick, the following longer prayer, which has survived in the present Roman Ritual, is said.]

Then let this prayer be said by the priest:

Lord God, who hast spoken by Thine Apostle James, saying: Is anyone sick among you? Let him call 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 shall save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him: cure, we beseech Thee, our Redeemer, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, the weakness of this sick man; heal his wounds, and forgive his sins; drive out from him all pains of body and mind, mercifully restore him to full health, both inwardly and outwardly; that recovered and healed by the help of Thy mercy, he may be strengthened to take up again his former duties of piety to Thee. Through. *And so let the ailing person bend the knee or knees, and stand at the priest's right, and let the following antiphon be sung:*

[Psalm 49 is recited, the Antiphon repeated, and the following prayer is said.]

We pray our Lord Jesus Christ, and in all supplication we ask that He deign through His holy angel to visit, gladden and comfort this His servant.

The Antiphon follows: Come, O Lord, to the assistance of this sick person, and heal him with spiritual medicine, that, restored to former health, he may return thanks to Thee in soundness of health.

[Psalm 119 is recited, followed by the Antiphon "Heal, O Lord, this sick man, etc." Psalm 37 is introduced and concluded with a Gloria and repetition of the Antiphon "Heal, O Lord."]

[The Rite of Anointing]

And let him anoint the sick man with sanctified oil, making *signs of the cross on the neck and on the throat, and between the shoulders and on the breast; or let him anoint further the place where the pain is more pronounced; and by way of supplication, while the sick person is being anointed, let one of the priests say this prayer.*

There follows this prayer: I anoint thee with holy oil in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, that the unclean spirit may not remain hidden in thee, nor in thy members, nor in thy organs, nor in any joint of thy

and Mozarabic sources between the years 815 and 845 ("The Origin of the Medieval Rite for Anointing the Sick or Dying," *Journal of Theological Studies* 7 [1956] 223).

members; rather, through the working of this mystery, may there dwell in thee the power of Christ, all-high, and of the Holy Spirit. And through this ointment of consecrated oil and our prayer, cured and warmed by the Holy Spirit may thou merit to receive thy former and even better health. Through.

[A long prayer of Mozarabic origin, "O Lord, God, our Saviour . . ." is followed by a shorter petition that God be propitious to the sins of the sick man.]

Then let him communicate him with the body and blood of the Lord. And let them do the same for seven days, if there be need, both with regard to communion as well as the other office; and the Lord will raise him up, and if he be in sins, they will be forgiven him.

[The following rubric, or, better, suggestion of an additional anointing of the five senses, is probably not part of the original rite. However, the rite of anointing the five senses, and more specifically as the organs of sin, will soon become the fixed rite of the Latin Church.]

Now many priests anoint the sick also on the five senses, that is, on the eyelids, and on the inner nostrils and on the tip of the nose or externally, and on the outside of the lips and on the outside or back of the hands. Accordingly, on all these members let them make the sign of the cross with sacred oil, saying: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

It is difficult to read through this early ritual without coming to the conclusion that unction is a sacrament of the sick and not principally a sacrament of the dying. The introductory heading refers to prayers "for visiting the sick," for one who is still able to "bend the knee or knees," and to take part in the accompanying ceremonies. In the prayers and antiphons, confidence is expressed that the sick person will resume his "former duties," and that he will receive his "former and even better health." In the rubric for anointing, the priest is told to anoint the place where "the pain is more pronounced." True, the rite is brought to a close with the administration of the Eucharist. However, the word viaticum is not used, nor is Holy Communion looked upon as "food for the journey." Instead, the Eucharist is to be administered along with the anointing for seven days or until the sick person is better. Such, we believe, is the meaning of the rubric: "And let them do the same for seven days, if there be need."

THE EARLY SCHOLASTICS

Sometime before the year 1200 the rite of anointing the senses as the organs of sin was accompanied by the prayer that the Lord would

remit all sins committed through these various organs of the body. One result of the new method of anointing and the accompanying formula was to restrict the anointing to those who were capable of sinning, thus excluding children under the age of reason.³⁹ Another result, however, was to stress the remission of sins as the principal effect of the sacrament and thus prepare the way for the great Scholastic debate on the sense in which the remission of sins is the principal effect or reality (*res*) symbolized by the external anointing. Before our attention is engaged in this debate, it will be instructive to see how the remission of sins, which the Apostle James regarded as a conditional effect of the sacrament, gradually became the principal and, in some instances, the sole effect mentioned by the early Scholastics.

Hugh of St. Victor (†1141) is perhaps the first to speculate on the purpose of anointing the sick. His teaching is, in a sense, transitional. The purpose of anointing is developed in a context which is singularly free from any reference to death, but the emphasis is more on the spiritual effect of the sacrament than on the recovery of the sick person. And yet, Hugh regards the alleviation of physical illness as one of the purposes of the sacrament. After citing the text of James, Hugh continues:

In this passage it is shown that this sacrament was instituted for a twofold reason, namely, both for the remission of sins and for the alleviation of bodily sickness. Hence it is clear that he who receives this anointing faithfully and with devotion unquestionably merits to receive through it alleviation and consolation both in body and soul, provided, however, that it is expedient that he be alleviated in both. But if perchance it is not expedient for him to have soundness and health of body, he unquestionably acquires by the reception of this anointing that health and alleviation which is of the soul.⁴⁰

³⁹ An unknown author of the *De sacramentis morientium infantum* had solved the problem created by the new formula by stating: "Si quis parvulum noviter baptizatum, sed infirmitate correptum, oleo sancto ungere voluerit, non necesse habebit ut totum unctionis officium recitet, et minime illas orationes, quae de remissione peccatorum agere videntur" (*PL* 148, 1271). As late as the closing decade of the twelfth century, Peter Cantor, with an obvious reference to the formula "quidquid deliquisti," does not believe "talem formulam verborum esse de substantia sacramenti, immo forte cum minima quantum ad verba benedictione posset conferri illa unctio. Istud aliis solvendum relinquimus" (cited by H. Weisweiler, "Die Letzte Ölung in der Frühscholastik," *Scholastik* 7 [1932] 550, note 83). However, as the formula became fixed and was regarded as essential, the sacrament was not given except to those who had committed sins; cf. Weisweiler, *art. cit.*, pp. 550 ff.

⁴⁰ *De sacramentis* 2, 15, 2 (*PL* 176, 577 f.).

In a passage which is reminiscent of the teaching of the Council of Pavia in which it is stated that through unction, "if one asks with confidence, [sins] are remitted and, as a result, bodily health is restored," Hugh explains why the remission of sins must be first in the order of effects:

. . . The soul is first cured and then the body is healed. It is for the soul's correction that the body has become sick. And so to restore health of body, the soul must first be cured. And if perchance the body does not convalesce and regain its former health, there is no cause for alarm so long as the soul regains its soundness. . . .⁴¹

Although Hugh admits, as he must, that the spiritual cure of the soul is more important than the cure of the body and that this cure of the body will be subordinate to the good of the soul, it is well to note that Scholastic speculation begins with a frank acknowledgement that the over-all purpose of the sacrament is the cure of both body and soul, a purpose which is in better accord with the documents of the earlier centuries.

The teaching of Hugh on the purpose of the sacrament is repeated by Roland Bandinelli, a disciple of Abelard and the future Pope Alexander III. According to Roland the sacrament "was instituted for this reason, that through it certain sins might be remitted and that the sick man might convalesce more quickly and be restored to health."⁴² Omnebene, a contemporary of Roland, employs the technical terminology of the Schools in discussing the reality (*res*) symbolized by the external sacrament or anointing, and concludes: "The reality (*res*) of the sacrament is the remission of sins and, at times, the health of the body and the bestowal of other goods."⁴³ Finally, in the early decades of the thirteenth century, William of Auxerre echoes the teaching of Hugh of St. Victor when he states: "The principal and proper effect of this sacrament is the cure of the body . . . but the most excellent (*dignissimus*) effect is the remission of sins."⁴⁴

Although the custom may well have obtained of anointing only those

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 3 (PL 176, 578).

⁴² *Sententiae* (ed. A. Gietl, 1891, p. 262; cited by Weisweiler, p. 340, note 73).

⁴³ Cited from unpublished manuscript by Weisweiler, p. 338, note 67.

⁴⁴ *Summa aurea in 4 Sent.* (Paris, 1500-1501) p. 283; cited by P. Browe, "Die Letzte Ölung in der abendländischen Kirche des Mittelalters," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 55 (1931) 536, note 1.

in danger of death, there is no suggestion in the authors of the Victorine tradition that unction was a preparation for death and glory. However, there is another tradition, almost contemporary with the teaching of Hugh of St. Victor, which definitely regards the anointing of the sick as a sacrament of the dying, to be administered *in exitu*, and which restricts the reality or *res* of the sacrament to the remission of sins.

The first to give expression to this view is probably the author of the *Epitome theologiae christianae*, a work at one time ascribed to Peter Abelard, but now regarded as the work of his disciple, Master Herman. Whereas Hugh of St. Victor had regarded the oil of the sick as the third or last in the Church's sacramental rites of anointing, following the anointing of baptism and confirmation, Master Herman regards the sacrament as "the last of all and, so to speak, the final consummation," a sacrament to be given *in exitu*: "Every Christian is anointed three times: first, for his inception, namely in baptism; secondly, in confirmation, where the gifts of grace are conferred; thirdly, on departing (*in exitu*), where, if sins are present, they are remitted in whole or in major part."⁴⁵

Like Omnebene, the author of the *Summa sententiarum*, probably a mid-century contemporary of Herman, develops the effect of unction in terms of the reality (*res*) symbolized by the external anointing. But unlike Omnebene, he restricts the reality of unction to the remission of sins: "The sacrament is the anointing itself; the reality of the sacrament (*res sacramenti*) is the remission which is conferred by the internal anointing. For in the same canonical epistle [of James] it is said: 'And if he shall be in sins, they shall be remitted unto him.'"⁴⁶

The author of the *Summa sententiarum* makes no mention of the recovery of health as part of the reality (*res*) symbolized by the external anointing. Neither does Master Simon, a contemporary, in his treatise *De septem sacramentis*.⁴⁷ The conditional effect of the sacrament, namely, the remission of sins, becomes the sole effect (*res*) sym-

⁴⁵ *Epitome* (PL 178, 1744).

⁴⁶ *Summa sententiarum* (PL 176, 153).

⁴⁷ This work was first published by Weisweiler in his *Maître Simon et son groupe De sacramentis* (Louvain, 1947). Our citations are from Weisweiler's article in *Scholastik*, where, in speaking of Simon's treatise, he says: "In ihm fällt kein einziges Wort von der Krankenheilung, obschon er ganz allgemein die Wirkung beschreibt und nicht nur von der 'Sache' redet" (p. 344).

bolized by the anointing: "That the reality of this sacrament is the remission of sins, which is conferred by the internal anointing, is witnessed by the same Apostle, in the same Epistle, when he says: 'And if he be in sins, they are remitted unto him.'"⁴⁸ Coming closer to the purpose of this article, Master Simon is perhaps the first to state that the sacrament of the departing prepares the soul for the beatific vision. Introducing a theme which is dear to Kern and his admirers, and which will be repeated time and again in the high Scholastic period, Simon draws a parallel between baptism, the *sacramentum intrantium*, and unction, the *sacramentum exeuntium*: "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 the character of Christ; unction presents (*representat*) those who are departing this world for the divine vision."⁴⁹

Such was the climate of thought when Peter Lombard (*ca.* 1150) compiled his *Books of the Sentences*. With a nod to Hugh of St. Victor, he admits that the purpose of the sacrament is twofold, the remission of sins and the alleviation of bodily sickness.⁵⁰ But his teaching on the reality (*res*) symbolized by the sacrament is taken almost verbatim from the *Summa sententiarum* and the treatise of Master Simon. "The sacrament is the external anointing, the reality (*res*) of the sacrament is the internal anointing, which is perfected by the remission of sins and the increase in virtues."⁵¹ Writing in the same tradition, Peter Lombard is perhaps the first to use the term "extreme unction"⁵² to

⁴⁸ Cited by Weisweiler, p. 345.

⁴⁹ Cited by Weisweiler, p. 345.

⁵⁰ *Sent.* 4, d. 23 (*PL* 192, 899).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² There are, however, two references to extreme unction which seemingly antedate the Scholastic period. The first occurs in the statutes ascribed to Sonnatius (†631), in which we read: "Extrema unctio deferatur laboranti et petenti, illumque pastor in propria saepius invisat, et pie visitet, eum ad futuram gloriam animando, et debite praeparando" (*PL* 80, 444). The second is an account, presumably by Prudentius of Troyes (†861), of the death of Blessed Mansa: "Hoc extremum munus a te peto, Prudenti Pater episcopo, ut in eorum praesentia de manu tua eucharistiae et unctionis extremae recipiam sacramenta" (*PL* 115, 1374). Doronzo believes that both references to extreme unction probably antedate the ninth century and is somewhat indignant that scholars, both Catholic and non-Catholic, should question their antiquity (*op. cit.*, pp. 131 and 153 ff.). And yet there seem to be too many anachronisms in these passages to warrant their authenticity. Not only is the word "extreme unction" quite extraordinary for so early a period, but, as we shall see, the association of unction with the preparation of the soul for glory and the inverted order of viaticum followed by unction reflect an idea and a practice which become current only at

describe what Hugh of St. Victor had referred to as "the sacrament of anointing the sick."

THE SCHOLASTIC DOCTORS

By the middle of the thirteenth century, unction, if received at all, was normally postponed until the moment of death, when all hope of recovery was lost. Various reasons have been assigned for this abuse in practice: (1) the ministry of anointing the sick, often involving a number of priests and expensive preparations, was too costly for the average Christian; (2) the superstitious belief was widespread that a person after anointing could no longer walk barefoot, because of the anointing of the feet, and, more important, that he could not marry or resume marital relations.⁵³

More important for future teaching on the purpose of the sacrament was the change in the order of receiving the last rites of the Church. Up until the close of the twelfth century the normal order of the rites of the dying was reconciliation, anointing, and viaticum.⁵⁴ When the great Scholastic period opened, however, the sacrament of viaticum had yielded its climactic position to the sacrament of extreme unction.⁵⁵ Up to this time viaticum had been regarded as the Church's last or parting gift, as food for the journey, as an antidote against evil, and

the close of the twelfth century. Again, the emphasis in both documents on seeking the sacrament ("petenti," "peto") recalls the early Scholastic debate as to whether a person must ask for the sacrament before it can be administered; cf. Weisweiler, *art. cit.*, pp. 547 ff.

⁵³ Kern cites a number of synodal decrees of the thirteenth century which condemn the avarice of the clergy and the superstitious beliefs of the people (cf. *op. cit.*, pp. 282 ff.). Similar decrees may be found in Weisweiler and Browe.

⁵⁴ Cf. Browe, *art. cit.*, pp. 550 ff., who cites Martène: ". . . luce meridiana clarius demonstratur, unctionem viatico olim ordinario usu praemissam fuisse, id quod confirmant omnia pene ritualia ms. quae meas in manus ceciderint" (*De antiquis ecclesiae ritibus* 1, 7, 2). Browe also argues from early chronicles and lives of the saints. In this connection we might note that of the nine excerpts given by Chavasse (*op. cit.*, p. 195, note 1) which describe the death of the early saints, but written between the ninth and twelfth century, all but one place viaticum after unction. The single exception does not mention viaticum.

⁵⁵ Cf. Browe, *art. cit.*, pp. 544 ff. The earliest instance of unction following viaticum is from the life of Bernhard the Penitent, who died at St. Omer in 1182. Thereafter, except in the older religious monasteries, such as those of the Cistercians, the practice of anointing after viaticum became so widespread that the Catechism of the Council of Trent could refer to it as "Catholicae Ecclesiae perpetua consuetudo" (2, 6, 12). The practice was prescribed in the Ritual of Paul IV (1614) and has continued up until recent years, when the *Nova collectio rituum* restored the ancient order of reconciliation, unction, and viaticum.

as a preparation for eternal life. This purpose of viaticum is still to be found in the prayer which accompanies the administration of viaticum: "Receive, my brother (sister), this food for your journey, the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He may guard you from the malicious enemy and lead you into everlasting life. Amen." But as extreme unction became in point of administration the last sacrament, it is not surprising that theologians, faced with a new sacrament of the dying, should ascribe to unction what had formerly been ascribed to viaticum, and that they should insist that unction as a preparation for glory should be received only upon departure from this life.

Master Simon was perhaps the first to teach that the purpose of anointing is "to present those who are departing this world for the beatific vision."⁵⁶ Admittedly, the idea is consoling and it was bound to attract the attention of the great Scholastic doctors as it has captivated the minds of Kern and his followers today. The idea is not only consoling but it is given eloquent expression by William of Auvergne, perhaps the first to develop the idea and to show its reasonableness. And since the passage, which occurs in his treatise on the sacraments in general, has escaped the notice of the authors we have read, we shall cite it in some detail:

Now since those who are departing this world are soon to be presented to God, it is not proper to doubt that they are to be sanctified from those faults which have clung to them while in this world, just as dust clings to the feet of the wayfarer, and from those slight and daily blemishes which are usually called venial sins; for a bride never approaches the bridegroom without some preparatory ablutions and fitting attire. . . . And since those who are about to die are like the bride who is about to enter the chamber of the bridegroom . . . it is clear to men of understanding how necessary and how fitting is the sacrament of the last hallowing (*extremae sanctificationis*). Again, since those who have been sanctified are, as it were, recruited for a holy and spiritual war, and since there still remains the most bitter of struggles and wars against the demon . . . who shall doubt how necessary is strength and renewed vitality: strength, I mean, by which they may manfully win a resounding victory against their enemies and forcefully put them to flight?⁵⁷

Unquestionably, this eloquent description of the purpose of extreme unction will commend itself to "men of intelligence" in every age. Its only defect is that it views unction solely in the context of those "who

⁵⁶ Cf. *supra* p. 329.

⁵⁷ *Opera omnia* 1, 2: *De sacramentis in generali* (ed. Paris, 1674, p. 415).

are departing this world." Nothing is said of the possibility of the sick person's recovery, for the simple reason that unction is no longer regarded as a sacrament of the sick but as a sacrament of the dying. In fact, the sick person's recovery would seem to frustrate the purpose of the anointing, which, according to William, is to prepare the soul to meet the bridegroom.

And yet the purpose of extreme unction as expressed so cogently by William of Auvergne was accepted by all the Scholastic doctors of the thirteenth and fourteenth century. Actually, unction as a preparation for glory was the common point of departure in determining the reality (*res*) or principal effect of the sacrament. The Franciscan school of Bonaventure and of Scotus agreed substantially with William of Auvergne that the principal effect of the sacrament was the remission of venial sins. Like the author of the *Summa sententiarum* and Master Simon, Bonaventure appeals to the text of James: "And if he shall be in sins, they will be remitted unto him," and concludes: "Therefore this sacrament is ordered against some disease of sin. . . . And since it is not against original nor mortal sin, it follows that it is against venial sin. And this opinion is held commonly."⁵⁸

The Dominican school of Albert the Great and Thomas admitted that the principal effect of the sacrament was the remission of sins, since this was the conclusion reached by Peter Lombard in determining the reality (*res*) symbolized by the external anointing. In commenting, however, on the passage from Lombard, Albert makes it clear that the sin remitted is not original sin, since this is cleansed through baptism, nor personal sin, since this is cleansed in penance, but the remnants (*reliquiae*) of sin which impede the soul's transit to glory.⁵⁹ Thomas is faithful to his own master, Albert the Great. He will admit that the guilt of sin is remitted by way of a consequent effect, since the

⁵⁸ *In 4 Sent.* 4, d. 23, a. 1, q. 1. Scotus' teaching may be found in his *Paris Commentary on the Sentences* 4, d. 23, q. unica.

⁵⁹ "Effectus et res hujus sacramenti (sicut Magister dicit) est peccatorum remissio et virtutum ampliatio. . . . Unde peccatorum remissio secundum quod conjungitur purgationi originali, est effectus baptismi: secundum autem quod conjungitur purgationi actuali causatae ex peccati detestatione, motu liberi arbitrii in Deum, est causatum poenitentiae. . . . Secundum autem, quod tollitur peccatum in reliquiis quae impediunt transitum ad requiem, purgatur in extrema unctione" (*In 4 Sent.* 4, d. 23, a. 14).

sacrament infuses grace by which sins are remitted. But the principal effect of the sacrament is the spiritual cure of those "fallings which render a man spiritually sick, with the result that he has not that perfect strength needed for leading a life of grace and glory. Now this falling is nothing else but a debility and inability of sorts, which is left us as the result of actual or original sin." Later in the same article, Thomas says that this debility is called by some the remnants (*reliquiae*) of sin.⁶⁰

It is not our purpose to resolve the Dominican-Franciscan debate on the principal effect of the sacrament, nor to determine the precise meaning of *reliquiae peccati* as used by Albert the Great, St. Thomas, and their contemporaries. Our purpose now is to show the consequences of their common teaching that the sacrament prepares the soul for immediate entrance into heaven.

It has been assumed at times that the practice of anointing only those who are at the point of death is due in great measure to the erroneous teaching of the Scotistic school, which held that the principal effect of the sacrament of unction is the final remission of venial sins, and that accordingly the sick person should not be anointed until he is incapable of sinning again. That Scotus actually held this view we shall see presently. But in all fairness to Scotus, it should be noted that the practice of anointing only when death is imminent results not from the teaching of any particular school on the principal effect of the sacrament, whether it be the remission of venial sins or the removal of sins' remnants, but from the teaching of all schools that the purpose of the sacrament is to prepare the soul for the beatific vision.

Thus, Albert the Great, who regarded the reality of the sacrament as the purification of those remnants of sin which might impede the soul's transit to glory, is just as forthright as Scotus in insisting that the sick person can be anointed only when death is imminent and life is despaired of. As noted above, by this time anointing had supplanted viaticum as the last of the Church's sacraments, and this may explain Albert's use of the expression *extremum sacramentum* for *extrema unctio*:

⁶⁰ *Suppl.*, q. 30, a. 1. In the *Summa*, Thomas speaks of unction as a spiritual cure, "quae removet peccatorum reliquias, et hominem paratum reddit ad finalem gloriam" (3, q. 65, a. 1).

This sacrament is called by all the last sacrament (*extremum sacramentum*); but last things (*extrema*) are had only when death is at the door and life is despaired of; therefore only such are capable of receiving this sacrament. . . . Only on departure (*in transitu*) is this sacrament to be received.⁶¹

For Thomas, as well, the anointing is the Church's last remedy, and as such can be given only to those who are departing this life:

This sacrament is the last remedy which the Church can give, since it is an immediate preparation as it were for glory. Therefore it ought to be given to those only who are so sick as to be in a state of departure, through their sickness being of such a nature as to cause death, the danger of which is to be feared.⁶²

St. Thomas' reference to a "state of departure" and the further qualification that the sickness must be such as to cause death and awaken fear apparently make his teaching less demanding than that of Albert the Great. However, the spirit of his teaching, which is prompted by the purpose of the sacrament, is the same. Thus, to the objection that the sacrament of unction is more excellent a remedy than bodily medicine, and that it should accordingly be administered to all who are sick, just as bodily medicine is administered, Thomas replies in a manner which indicates how radically a sacrament of the sick has come to be regarded as a sacrament of the dying or departing:

The principal effect of bodily medicine is bodily health, which all sick people lack, whatever be the stage of their sickness. But the principal effect of this sacrament is that deliverance (*sospitatem*) which is needed by those who are departing this life and setting out for glory. Hence the comparison fails.⁶³

The same kind of reasoning leads Bonaventure to demand imminence of death as the necessary disposition for the reception of the sacrament. "The subject of this sacrament depends on the purpose of the sacrament; now the purpose is the more speedy transfer to heaven by putting aside the burden of venial sins." Accordingly, extreme unction is the "sacrament of those departing this life"; it is to be given only "where danger of death is imminent"; and only to those "who are as it were in transit to another state."⁶⁴ To the objection that the sacrament is to be given in time of sickness, Bonaventure replies that the sacrament is given

⁶¹ *In 4 Sent.*, d. 23, a. 11.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, ad 2m.

⁶² *Suppl.*, q. 32, a. 2.

⁶⁴ *Breviloquium* 6, 11.

... not on account of sickness, but because the sick person is approaching life's departure, at which time venial sins can be perfectly cured. And that this is true is clear, since no matter how sick a person is, the sacrament is not given unless he is presumed to be dying or is at the point of death. And if it is manifest that a person might be delivered from death or is about to be delivered, he should not be given this sacrament.⁶⁵

At this point one might legitimately wonder why sickness is demanded at all in the recipient of the sacrament, and not simply imminence of death from whatever cause. Most theologians would reply that the external anointing symbolizes a spiritual cure; hence, to preserve the symbolism, the person anointed must be sick. Scotus, however, gives a more startling answer, and it is this answer which has brought Scotus' teaching into disrepute. However, granted that the purpose of the sacrament is to prepare the soul for immediate entrance into heaven, is Scotus' teaching altogether illogical?

[Extreme unction] is to be given only to such a sick person who is no longer capable of sinning and who is in danger of death; nor is it to be given to anyone else, even though death be imminent for reasons other than sickness, as one undertaking a voyage or entering battle, because in such cases, no matter how imminent the danger of death, a man always has the use of his free will, and can afterwards sin, and to such as can still sin, it is not given. . . .⁶⁶

We may conclude this section with two citations, one from Richard of Middletown, a disciple and contemporary of Scotus, and one from William of Paris, a theologian of the Dominican school. Richard of Middletown writes:

Since the principal effect of this sacrament is not any sort of remission of venial sins but complete and perfect remission, immediately introducing [the soul] to that well-being of eternal life, and since such remission cannot ordinarily come to those who are well, it follows that this sacrament must not be given to one who is well nor even to a sick person unless he is so overburdened that it is probable that he is in danger of imminent death (*in periculo mortis de proximo imminenti*).⁶⁷

Albert the Great has insisted that the anointing could not be administered until the patient was at death's door and hope of life was despaired of. William of Paris says the same, but in a way which

⁶⁵ *In 4 Sent.*, d. 23, a. 2, q. 2.

⁶⁶ *In 4 Sent. (Opus Parisiense)* d. 23, q. unica.

⁶⁷ *In 4 Sent.*, d. 23, a. 2, q. 3.

points up even more vividly how little faith was placed in the sacrament of unction as a remedy for the sick.

Likewise it must be noted that this sacrament has reference not only to sickness, but to the state of sickness: and so, it can be given for any sickness, but not in any stage of sickness, but only in extreme necessity, at the moment of death (*in articulo mortis*), when it is hoped that the man is dying (*in quo speratur homo mori*).⁶⁸

THE COUNCIL OF TRENT

The teaching of the great Scholastic doctors on imminence of death as a necessary condition for the reception of extreme unction lasted up to the time of the Council of Trent. In fact, the first schema or draft of the decree on extreme unction would demand that the sacrament be given "only to those who are in their final struggle and who have come to grips with death and who are about to go forth to the Lord."⁶⁹ Providentially, the final draft was changed to read: "The Synod declares, moreover, that this anointing is to be used for the sick, but especially for those who are so dangerously ill as to seem at the point of departing this life."⁷⁰

True, the Council of Trent introduces its teaching on the sacrament in the context of a dying Christian. Echoing the sentiments of William of Auvergne, the Synod regards the sacrament as the strongest safeguard against the attacks of Satan, who is never more relentless in his efforts "to destroy us completely and, if possible, to disturb our confidence in the divine mercy, than when he perceives that the close of our life is imminent."⁷¹ And it is for this reason that the dying especially (*praesertim*) should be anointed. However, Trent affirms that the sacrament is to be given not only to the dying but to the sick, and in describing the reality (*res*) symbolized by the anointing Trent includes not only the spiritual effects mentioned by Peter Lombard and many of the earlier Scholastics, but those which are psychological and physical:

⁶⁸ Cited from *Dialogus de septem sacramentis* 23, by Doronzo, who agrees that the work is more probably that of William of Paris (†1314), General Inquisitor for all Gaul (*op. cit.*, 2, 239).

⁶⁹ Cf. A. Theiner, *Acta genuina ss. oecumenici Concilii Tridentini* 1, 541; cited by Doronzo 2, 556.

⁷⁰ Sess. 14, *Doctrina de extrema unctione*, c. 3 (DB 910).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, *Proem.* (DB 907).

To continue, the reality (*res*) and effect of this sacrament is explained in these words: "And the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he be in sins, they will be forgiven him" [Jas 5:15]. For this reality (*res*) is the grace of the Holy Spirit, whose anointing wipes away sins, provided there are still some to be expiated, as well as the remnants of sin (*peccati reliquias*), and comforts and strengthens the soul of the sick person, by arousing in him great confidence in the divine mercy; encouraged thereby, the sick person bears more easily the difficulties and trials of illness, and resists more readily the temptations of the demon who "lies in wait for the heel" [Gn 3:15], and where it is expedient for the health of the soul, he receives, at times, health in body.⁷²

Considering the climate of theological speculation prior to Trent, this is a remarkable passage, and proof, if proof were needed, that the Holy Spirit guided the decisions of the assembled Fathers. Earlier theologians had appealed only to the conditioned effect of the sacrament as described by James, "And if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him," in order to prove that the reality symbolized by the sacrament was the remission of sins. Trent appeals to the full text of James to prove that the reality of the sacrament is spiritual, psychological, and, at times, physical. Again, nothing is said of unction as an immediate preparation for eternal life, a rather significant omission at a time when theologians had regarded such preparation as the over-all purpose of the sacrament and the point of departure in discussing the effects of the sacrament.

And yet there is one passage in Trent which seems to imply that unction brings to completion what has normally been left undone by the sacrament of penance, namely, the total remission of the debt of punishment and the resultant preparation of the soul for the beatific vision. At least this is the interpretation which Kern gives to the opening sentence of the decree, in which Trent states that the sacrament of extreme unction "has been regarded by the Fathers as the culmination (*consummativum*) not only of penance, but of the whole Christian life, which ought to be a continual penance."⁷³

To confirm this interpretation of Trent, Kern appeals to St. Thomas, who also uses the word *consummativum* of the sacrament of unction: "It is clear that this sacrament is last and, so to speak, the culmination (*consummativum*) of the whole spiritual cure, whereby a man is pre-

⁷² *Ibid.*, c. 2 (DB 909).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, *Proem.* (DB 907); cf. Kern, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

pared, as it were, for participation in glory."⁷⁴ Now it is quite likely that Trent had this passage of Thomas in mind when referring to the "Fathers,"⁷⁵ but it is less likely that Trent intended to give to the term *consummativum* the precise meaning that it had for Thomas or the extended meaning that Kern sees in it. Trent's meaning is seen better, we believe, in the following context.

In the same fourteenth session, Trent had dealt earlier with the sacrament of penance and asserted that, unlike baptism, the sacrament of penance demands "copious tears and labors" for the complete and integral remission of sins.⁷⁶ In the paragraph immediately preceding our disputed passage, Trent teaches that satisfaction can be made to God not only by sufferings freely undertaken or by punishments imposed by the confessor, but also "by those temporal punishments inflicted by God and borne patiently by us."⁷⁷ Three paragraphs later, in discussing the reality and the effects of extreme unction, the Council teaches that through the grace of the sacrament "the sick person is encouraged and bears more easily the difficulties and trials of his illness."⁷⁸

In this context, it would seem that unction is perfective of penance and of the whole Christian life, which ought to be a continual penance, not in the sense that unction is a substitute for personal satisfaction, or that, like baptism, it has the power to cancel the total debt of punishment, but rather in the sense that the grace of unction enables the sick person to bear more readily the affliction of sickness with which God has visited him, and in this way to make satisfaction for his sins.⁷⁹

THE PERIOD AFTER TRENT

In discussing the purpose of extreme unction as a preparation of the soul for immediate entrance into heaven, Kern expresses surprise that a doctrine taught so explicitly by the great Scholastic doctors should

⁷⁴ *C. genl.* 4, 73; cf. Kern, p. 104.

⁷⁵ To our knowledge, the only other author or "Father" who uses the expression *consummativum* of penance is Master Simon (cf. supra pp. 328-29).

⁷⁶ Sess. 14, *Doctrina de sacramento poenitentiae*, c. 2 (DB 895).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, c. 9 (DB 906).

⁷⁸ Sess. 14, *Doctrina de extrema unctione*, c. 2 (DB 909).

⁷⁹ This interpretation better explains the practice of imposing a penance even on those who are to be anointed, a practice defended by St. Thomas, who argues that the grace of unction strengthens the sick person to bear more easily the penance imposed by his confessor (cf. *Suppl.*, q. 30, a. 1, ad 2m).

come to be neglected, called into question, and even denied by so many theologians after Trent. Kern suggests three reasons for this: (1) a reaction against Protestantism, which denied the existence of purgatory, and which prompted Catholic theologians to insist on its necessity even for those anointed; (2) a Jansenist spirit of rigorism which pervaded many sections of the Church; and (3) a lack of knowledge of the teaching of the early Scholastics and the great Scholastic doctors.⁸⁰

There is, however, another reason which explains the gradual decline of a theory which might have died had not Kern himself revived it. The belief that extreme unction is a preparation for death and glory can logically survive only in a theological context which regards unction as the last sacrament, a sacrament to be given only *in extremis* or *in exitu*. In the course of time, although much time was needed, what had come to be regarded as the sacrament of the departing has come to be regarded as the sacrament of the seriously sick. The change begins with Trent's statement that the sacrament is to be administered principally but not exclusively to the dying. The Catechism of the Council of Trent goes a step further in regarding it as "a very serious sin to defer Holy Unction until, all hope of recovery being lost, life begins to ebb, and the sick person is fast verging into a state of insensibility."⁸¹ Theologians of the high Scholastic period had regarded unction as a sacrament to be given only *in transitu*, when all hope of recovery had been lost. The Catechism of Trent, in words which reflect the spirit of the early Church, strongly censures this implicit lack of faith in the curative powers of the sacrament. After stating that the "recovery of health, if indeed advantageous, is another effect of this sacrament," the Catechism continues:

And if in our day the sick obtain this effect less frequently, this is to be attributed not to any defect of this sacrament but rather to the weaker faith of a great part of those who are anointed with the sacred oil, or by whom it is administered; for the Evangelist bears witness that the Lord "wrought not many miracles among his own, because of their unbelief" [cf. Mt 13:58].⁸²

⁸⁰ Cf. Kern, pp. 106 ff.

⁸¹ 2, 269.

⁸² 2, 272. This same lack of confidence in the curative efficacy of the sacrament is betrayed by Reinhold: "If all we had to get from this mystery were 'greater strength in the hour of death' and 'perhaps, bodily health,' every priest, doctor, and nurse could tell us that such effects are seldom seen. Quite apart from those countless cases when it is ad-

True, the Catechism of the Council of Trent states that the sacrament cannot be given except to those who are "dangerously sick."⁸³ But as theologians began to speculate on the degree of danger necessary for anointing, the view gradually prevailed that danger of death need not be proximate but remote. More important, theologians began to question whether or not real or objective danger of death was necessary at all for the valid reception of the sacrament. Thus Suarez, after stating that a prudent judgment of danger of death is more probably necessary for the sacrament, admits that "this condition does not seem to be so substantial that, if a person is perhaps anointed prematurely, the sacrament is therefore to be regarded as invalid."⁸⁴ Coninck, Lessius, St. Alphonsus, and among more recent theologians and moralists, Marc-Gesterman, Cappello, Vermeersch, Conte a Coronata, and Regatillo all suggest or teach that probable and not objective danger of death is sufficient for the valid reception of the sacrament.⁸⁵ And even though this view is challenged by Kilker and, more recently, by Doronzo, we believe that the more liberal view is in better accord with the teaching of the Holy See.⁸⁶

In his Apostolic Letter *Sodalitatem*, directed through the bishops to the members of the Bona Mors Society, Benedict XV instructed the sodalists that, in keeping with the Church's teaching and precepts, the sick are to be strengthened by the sacraments, "as soon as the sickness becomes more serious and one can prudently judge that there is danger of death."⁸⁷ The operative word "prudently" is explained by Pius XI in his Apostolic Letter *Explorata res* to the members of the same society as a synonym for "probably":

ministered to unconscious people, to the hopelessly moribund, in ninety out of a hundred instances we hardly notice a difference of attitude before and after we have given the sacrament, except in those who gain a quite natural reassurance, knowing that all has been done and settled that the Church can do" (*op. cit.*, p. 85). If this is the attitude of most priests when they recite the prayers of the ritual, it is understandable, as the Catechism notes, why the physical and, we might add, the psychological effects of unction are seldom seen.

⁸³ 2, 269.

⁸⁴ *In 3am partem*, q. 84, disp. 42, s. 2, n. 4 (Vives ed., 1866, p. 852).

⁸⁵ Cf. Doronzo, who gives citations from all the authors listed. However, Doronzo is reluctant to see even in the most forthright statements of these authors the view that probable danger of death suffices for the valid reception of the sacrament (*op. cit.* 2, 588 ff.).

⁸⁶ Cf. Doronzo 2, 591.

⁸⁷ *Sodalitatem*, May 31, 1921 (AAS 13, 345).

For it is not necessary either for the validity or the liceity of the sacrament that death be feared as something proximate; rather, it is enough that there be a prudent or probable judgment of danger. And if in such conditions unction ought to be given, in the same conditions it surely can be given.⁸⁸

Now the teaching that "probable judgment of danger of death" is enough for the valid and licit administration of unction is equivalent to saying that real or objective danger of death is not a necessary condition for the validity of the sacrament. For the valid reception of the sacrament of penance it is not enough that the priest judge with probability that the sinner is penitent. The sinner must be really so. However, for the valid reception of the sacrament of unction, it is enough that the priest judge with probability that the patient is in danger of death, even though the person is not really and objectively in such danger. In other words, the degree of sickness does not affect the validity of the sacrament of unction, although a prudent judgment of danger of death, whether proximate or remote, is required on the part of the priest to administer the sacrament licitly. Accordingly, the prescription of canon law, which restricts the sacrament of unction to the faithful who have reached the age of reason and who are in danger of death from illness or old age,⁸⁹ is not a doctrinal demand affecting the validity of the sacrament, but a disciplinary measure controlling the liceity of anointing in the Latin Church.

If this be true—and the logic of our position seems to be inescapable—it is understandable how the early Church could have anointed those who were apparently in no danger of death; how she could have anointed little children as well as those who were capable of sinning; how she could have extended the term infirmity to include not only sickness in the restricted meaning of the term, but also that infirmity which results from the loss or serious impairment of such faculties as sight, speech, and hearing; how, finally, she could have anointed those who were mentally sick or possessed by devils. After all, Christ's ministry of healing extended to every category of physical infirmity. And there is enough evidence in the documents which we have seen that the early Church regarded her sacramental ministry of healing as the continuation of the healing ministry of Christ and His apostles.

⁸⁸ *Explorata res*, Feb. 2, 1923 (*AAS* 15, 105).

⁸⁹ Cf. canon 940: "Extrema unctio praeberi non potest nisi fideli, qui post adeptum usum rationis ob infirmitatem vel senium in periculo mortis versetur."

Again, if danger of death from illness or old age is merely a disciplinary demand of the Latin Church today, it is understandable why the Church has never condemned the Eastern practice of anointing the sick who are in no such danger, and why in her attempts to win back the schismatic churches of the East, the Church has insisted only on serious sickness as a condition for the administration of the sacrament.⁹⁰

Finally, if danger of death is but a disciplinary demand, it may come about that, as the sacrament of unction is regarded more and more as a sacrament of the sick and less as a sacrament of the dying and a preparation for eternal life, the Church herself will decide that serious sickness alone shall be the norm in determining whom to anoint.⁹¹

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article was to reappraise in the light of tradition the view which regards extreme unction as the preparation of the soul of the dying Christian for immediate entrance into heaven. We are persuaded that up until the middle of the twelfth century there is little in the documents to commend this view. Instead, the prayers for the blessing of oil of the sick and the actual rite of anointing indicate but one purpose, namely, to cure the sick person, both physically and spiritually, and to restore him perfectly well, in body, mind, and spirit, to the Church.

Again, there is no suggestion that the rite of anointing was used exclusively for those who were dying. Instead, the prescription of Innocent I that penitents were to be denied the sacrament is proof enough that the sacrament was regarded as a remedy for the sick and not exclusively as a sacrament of the dying. Finally, the exhortations of Sts. Caesarius of Arles and Eligius of Noyon that the faithful should put more trust in the Eucharist and in unction than in the incantations of the sorcerers would be meaningless if they intended the faithful to

⁹⁰ Cf. B. Botte, "L'Onction des malades," *Maison-Dieu*, no. 15 (1948) 101 ff.

⁹¹ F. Meurant is an eloquent spokesman for a growing number of priests in France who would like to regard unction as a sacrament of the sick rather than as a sacrament of the dying. According to Meurant, "La conception de l'extrême-onction comme préparation à la mort n'est pas seulement préjudiciable aux malades, elle l'est aussi aux prêtres" ("L'Extrême-Onction est-elle le sacrement de la dernière maladie?", *Vie spirituelle* 92 [1955] 250). The author admits, however, that only the Holy Father is capable of modifying current ideas and practice (*ibid.*, p. 251).

believe that the Eucharist was to be their viaticum and unction their preparation for death and glory.

In the Carolingian period, priests were exhorted to see to it that none of the faithful died without reconciliation, unction, and viaticum. And it is from this period, we believe, that unction came to be regarded more exclusively as one of the Church's last rites. However, it was not until the middle of the twelfth century that the anointing of the sick received the name *extreme* unction, and it is only in this period that extreme unction came to be regarded as the last sacrament, the Church's final preparation of the soul for glory. Up to this time, viaticum had been regarded as the Church's last sacrament, her parting gift, and, in the administration of the last rites, viaticum had retained its climactic position. At the close of the twelfth century, however, the order of unction and viaticum was inverted so that unction became the last sacrament, the Church's final remedy, a position which the anointing retained up until a few years ago, when the original order was restored.

Faced with a new sacrament of the dying, it is understandable why the great Scholastic doctors, including Albert the Great, Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, and Scotus, discussed extreme unction solely in the context of a dying Christian; why they all agreed that the purpose of the sacrament was to prepare the soul for immediate entrance into heaven; why they failed to include physical health as part of the reality (*res*) symbolized by the external anointing or sacrament; why, finally, they insisted that the sacrament could be administered only when death was imminent and life was despaired of.

Admittedly, the teaching of the great Scholastics on the purpose of the sacrament does not necessarily demand that the anointing be postponed until the moment of death, but who shall say that such teaching did not contribute to a practice which has continued up until recent times? Today, the followers of Kern are in the forefront of the crusade to have sick persons anointed early, when danger of death is still remote, even when such danger is only probable. But are they not working somewhat at cross-purposes?

Is it psychologically sound to instruct the faithful that the purpose of unction is to prepare the soul for death and at the same time to encourage them to put their trust in the curative powers of the sacrament? And even granted that the recovery of health is but a condi-

tioned effect of the sacrament, in what sense can a physical cure be of spiritual profit to one who, according to Kern, has been fully prepared by the sacrament for the enjoyment of the beatific vision?⁹²

Finally, if the purpose of unction is to prepare the soul of the dying Christian for immediate entrance into heaven, is it not legitimate to ask why so extraordinary a sacrament is denied to those who face death from some cause other than sickness or old age? Kern's first argument to prove his thesis on the principal purpose of unction is drawn from propriety or fittingness. Baptism, he argues, frees the pagan, upon his entrance into the Church, of the total debt of punishment. Why, he asks, should there not be a sacrament to do the same for one of Christ's members who is departing the Church?⁹³ If the argument is valid, why does it not apply to all who are departing the Church militant for the Church triumphant? The only answer, we believe, is that unction is a sacrament of the sick, and not principally a sacrament of the dying. Viaticum is the sacrament of the dying and as such is given to all who are faced with death.

At first glance, Kern's teaching on the purpose of unction as an immediate preparation for heaven appears to be the more consoling and more generous view. Unquestionably, it will bring comfort to a man in his last agony to be assured that, despite a life of sin, he may confidently expect to escape the ordeal of purgatory and to go straight to heaven. But experience shows that one who is seriously sick, but not hopelessly so, finds little comfort in the same assurances. What he wants is relief from sickness or at least strength to bear more easily the burden of sickness. More than all else, he wants what the Church still prays for in her liturgy of anointing: "perfect health, both inwardly and outwardly, that recovered and healed by Thy mercy, he may be strengthened to resume his former duties [of piety to Thee]."

This prayer will not always be answered. For it is appointed unto all men to die. And the sacrament of anointing the sick is not to be regarded as the tree of life or a fountain of eternal youth. And yet we believe that, if the prayers of the ritual are recited with confidence in the recovery of the sick person, more often than not "the prayer of faith will save the sick person and the Lord will raise him up."

⁹² The condition for the recovery of health, "ubi salutis animae expedierit," would seem to mean that prolonged sickness rather than health may be more profitable for the person who has not as yet fully satisfied for his sins; cf. *supra* pp. 337-38.

⁹³ *Op. cit.*, p. 84.