



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION  
OF POPE PAUL VI

## ***SACRAM UNCTIONE INFIRMORUM***

ON THE SACRAMENT OF ANOINTING OF THE SICK

*November 30, 1972* The Catholic Church professes and teaches that the Sacred Anointing of the Sick is one of the seven Sacraments of the New Testament, that it was instituted by Christ and that it is "alluded to in Mark (Mk. 6:13) and recommended and promulgated to the faithful by James the apostle and brother of the Lord. If any one of you is ill, he says, he should send for the elders of the church, and they must anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord and pray over him. The prayer of faith will save the sick man and the Lord will raise him up again; and if he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven (James 5:14-15)." (1) From ancient times testimonies of the Anointing of the Sick are found in the Church's Tradition, particularly her liturgical Tradition, both in the East and in the West. Especially worthy of note in this regard are the Letter which Innocent I, our predecessor, addressed to Decentius, Bishop of Gubbio, (2) and the venerable prayer used for blessing the Oil of the Sick: "Send forth, O Lord, your Holy Spirit, the Paraclete," which was inserted in the Eucharistic Prayer (3) and is still preserved in the Roman Pontifical. (4) In the course of the centuries, in the liturgical Tradition the parts of the body of the sick person to be anointed with Holy Oil were more explicitly defined, in different ways, and there were added various formulas to accompany the anointings with prayer, which are contained in the liturgical books of various Churches. During the Middle Ages, in the Roman Church there prevailed the custom of anointing the sick on the five senses, using the formula: "Per istam Sanctam unctionem et suam Piissimam misericordiam, indulgeat tibi Dominus quidquid deliquisti," adapted to each sense. (5) In addition, the doctrine concerning Sacred Anointing is expounded in the documents of the Ecumenical Councils, namely the Council of Florence and in particular the Council of Trent and the Second Vatican Council. After the Council of Florence had described the essential elements of the Anointing of the Sick, (6) the Council of Trent declared its divine institution and explained what is given in the Epistle of Saint James concerning the Sacred Anointing, especially with regard to the reality and effects of the sacrament: "This reality is in fact the grace of the Holy Spirit, whose anointing takes away sins, if any still remain to be taken away, and the remnants of sin; it also relieves and strengthens the soul of the sick person, arousing in him a great confidence in the divine mercy, whereby being thus sustained he more easily bears the trials and labors of his sickness, more easily resists the temptations of the devil 'lying in wait' (Gen. 3:15), and sometimes regains bodily health, if this is

expedient for the health of the soul."(7) The same Council also declared that in these words of the Apostle it is stated with sufficient clarity that "this anointing is to be administered to the sick, especially those who are in such a condition as to appear to have reached the end of their life, whence it is also called the sacrament of the dying."(8) Finally, it declared that the priest is the proper minister of the sacrament.(9)The Second Vatican Council adds the following: "'Extreme Unction,' which may also and more fittingly be called 'Anointing of the Sick,' is not a sacrament for those only who are at the point of death. Hence, as soon as any one of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, the appropriate time for him to receive this sacrament has certainly already arrived."(10) The fact that the use of this sacrament concerns the whole Church is shown by these words: "By the sacred anointing of the sick and the prayer of her priests, the whole Church commends those who are ill to the suffering and glorified Lord, asking that he may lighten their suffering and save them (cf. James 5:14-16). She exhorts them, moreover, to contribute to the welfare of the whole People of God by associating themselves freely with the passion and death of Christ (cf. Rom. 8:17; Col. 1:24; 2 Tim. 2:11-12; 1 Pt. 4:13)."(11)All these elements had to be taken into consideration in revising the rite of Sacred Anointing, in order better to adapt to present-day conditions those elements which were subject to change.(12)We thought fit to modify the sacramental formula in such a way that, in view of the words of Saint James, the effects of the sacrament might be better expressed.Further, since olive oil, which hitherto had been prescribed for the valid administration of the sacrament, is unobtainable or difficult to obtain in some parts of the world, we decreed, at the request of numerous bishops, that in the future, according to the circumstances, oil of another sort could also be used, provided it were obtained from plants, inasmuch as this more closely resembles the matter indicated in Holy Scripture.As regards the number of anointings and the parts of the body to be anointed, it has seemed to us opportune to proceed to a simplification of the rite.Therefore, since this revision in certain points touches upon the sacramental rite itself, by our Apostolic authority we lay down that the following is to be observed for the future in the Latin Rite:THE SACRAMENT OF THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK IS ADMINISTERED TO THOSE WHO ARE DANGEROUSLY ILL, BY ANOINTING THEM ON THE FOREHEAD AND HANDS WITH OLIVE OIL, OR, IF OPPORTUNE, WITH ANOTHER VEGETABLE OIL, PROPERLY BLESSED, AND SAYING ONCE ONLY THE FOLLOWING WORDS: "PER ISTAM SANCTAM UNCTIONEM ET SUAM PISSIMAM MISERICORDIAM ADIUVET TE DOMINUS GRATIA SPIRITUS SANCTI, UT A PECCATIS LIBERATUM TE SALVET ATQUE PROPITIUS ALLEVIET.In case of necessity however it is sufficient that a single anointing be given on the forehead or, because of the particular condition of the sick person, on another more suitable part of the body, the whole formula being pronounced.This sacrament can be repeated if the sick person, having once received the Anointing, recovers and then again falls sick, or if, in the course of the same illness, the danger becomes more acuteHaving laid down and declared these elements concerning the essential rite of the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, we, by our Apostolic authority, also approve the Order of the Anointing of the Sick and of their pastoral care, as it has been revised by the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship. At the same time, we revoke, where necessary, the prescriptions of the Code of Canon Law or other laws hitherto in force, or we abrogate them; other prescriptions and laws, which are neither abrogated nor changed by the above-mentioned Order, remain valid and in force. The Latin edition of the Order containing the new rite will come into force as soon as it is published. The vernacular editions, prepared by the episcopal conferences and confirmed by the Apostolic See, will come into force on the day that will be laid down by the individual conferences. The old Order can be used until December 31, 1973. From January 1, 1974, however, the new Order only is to be used by all those whom it concerns.We desire that these decrees and prescriptions of ours shall, now and in the future, be fully effective in the Latin Rite, notwithstanding, as far as is necessary, the Apostolic Constitutions and Directives issued by our predecessors and other prescriptions, even if worthy of special mention.Given at St. Peter's in Rome, on the thirtieth day of November, in the year 1972, the tenth of our Pontificate.**Pope Paul**

## VI

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**NOTES**1. Council of Trent, Session XIV, De extr. unct., chapter 1 (cf. *ibid.* canon 1): CT, VII, 1, 355-356; Denz. Schon, 1695, 1716.2. Letter Si Instituta Ecclesiastica, chapter 8: PL, 20, 559-561; Denz. Schon, 216.3. Liber Sacramentorum Romanae Ecclesiae Ordinis Anni Circuli, ed. L. C. Mohlberg (*Rerum Ecclesiasticarum Documenta, Fontes, IV*), Rome 1960, p. 61; *Le Sacramentaire Gregorien*, ed. J. Deshusses (*Spicilegium Friburgense, 16*), Fribourg 1971, p. 172; cf. *La Tradition Apostolique de Saint Hippolyte*, ed. B. Botte (*Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen, 39*, Miinster in W. 1963, pp. 18-19; *Le Grand Euchologe du Monastere Blanc*, ed. E. Lanne (*Patrologia Orientalis, XXVIII, 2*), Paris 1958, pp. 392-395.4. Cf. *Pontificale Romanum: Ordo benedicendi Oleum Catechumenorum et Infirmorum et conficiendi Chrisma*, Vatican City 1971, pp. 11-12.5. Cf. M. Andrieu, *Le Pontifical Romain au Moyen-Age*, vol. 1, *Le Pontifical Romain du XIIe siecle* (*Studi e Testi, 86*), Vatican City 1938, pp. 267-268; vol. 2, *Le Pontifical de la Curie Romaine au XIIIe siecle* (*Studi e Testi, 87*), Vatican City 1940 pp. 491-492.6. *Decr. pro Armeniis*, G. Hofmann, Council of Florence, 1/11, p. 130; Denz. Schon, 1324f.7. Council of Trent, Sess. XIV, De extr. unct., chapter 2: CT, VII, 1, 356; Denz. Schon, 1696.8. *Ibid.*, chapter 3: CT, *ibid.*; Denz. Schon., 1698.9. *Ibid.*, chapter 3, canon 4: CT, *ibid.*; Denz. Schon., 1697-1719.10. Second Vatican Council, *Const. Sacrosanctum concilium*, 73: A.A.S., LVI (1964) 118-119.11. *Ibid.*, *Const. Lumen gentium*, II: A.A.S., LVII (1965) 15.12. Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Const. Sacrosanctum concilium*, 1: A.A.S. LVI (1964) 97.

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