

# Reviews

**ANOINTING OF THE SICK: A THEOLOGICAL AND CANONICAL STUDY** by Andrew Cuschieri. *University Press of America*, 1993. Pp. 188. \$22.50.

How the Church celebrates and understands the sacraments is not fixed rigidly. A particular turning point was reached when Vatican II declared that 'extreme unction' was better called 'anointing of the sick'. The pastoral possibilities of the sacrament have been well-explored since then, and now Cuschieri provides us with a full-length study of the sacrament with a focus on canon law.

Like Cuschieri's earlier book on the sacrament of reconciliation, this one is packed with references to early sources, but it does not show a great interest in secondary or very modern literature. It does, however, examine both the canon law found in the 1983 Code and that in the 1990 Code of the Eastern Churches. This comparative approach can be illuminating. Thus, we are made to notice the lack of any explicit mention in the 1983 Code to forgiveness of sin, unlike with the Eastern canons. Still, whilst at one point regarding the question as seemingly insoluble, Cuschieri concludes that the sacrament of anointing does remit venial sins, and indirectly mortal sins too. Incidentally, the recent *Catechism of the Catholic Church* lists as one of the effects of this sacrament the forgiveness of sins, if the person has not been able to obtain it by the sacrament of penance.

There is a good deal of evidence that extremely liberal use has been made in practice of the sacrament of anointing since the Council. Canon 998 of the 1983 Code does, however, specify that the sacrament is intended for those dangerously ill. Cuschieri on the other hand surely goes too far in the opposite direction, but in line with Vatican II, when he translates canon 1004 as concerning those who begin to be in danger of death. The 1983 Code speaks there only of 'danger', without reference to death.

Canon 1004 of the 1983 Code states that anointing can be administered to those who have reached the use of reason. This requirement has been seen as another ramification of the link between sin and anointing—a link going back to the *Epistle of James* 5:15. References to the use of reason as in canons 1004 and 1005 clearly point to the exclusion of small children from receiving this sacrament, but historically they also point to the exclusion of the severely mentally handicapped. Cuschieri should have offered interpretative guidance on the scope of this latter exclusion, beginning with the 1986 statement by the Congregation of the Sacraments on interpreting broadly the anointing of the mentally handicapped.

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