

Dogmatic Theology

UNCTION OF THE SICK

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THE SICK



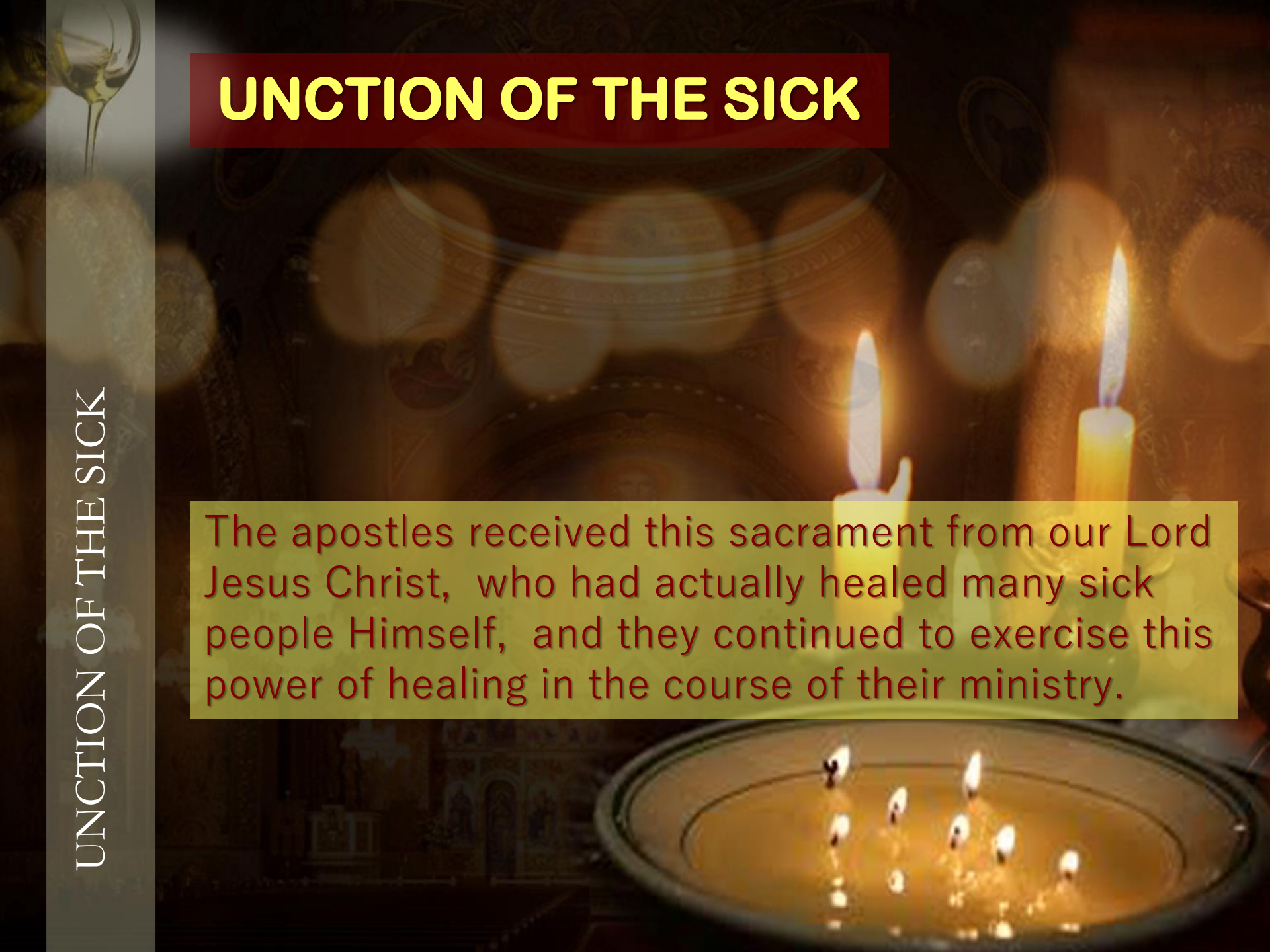
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UNCTION OF THE SICK, a sacrament instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ and carried out by the apostles, who, as attested by Mark 6:13, "anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them." It was also commended by the Epistle of James: "Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven" (Jas. 5:14-15).

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The apostles received this sacrament from our Lord Jesus Christ, who had actually healed many sick people Himself, and they continued to exercise this power of healing in the course of their ministry.



Testimonies of the Fathers

Expounding the various means by which our sins can be forgiven, ORIGEN (c. 185-c. 254) speaks of baptism, the suffering of martyrdom, almsgiving, forgiving others their sins, converting other sinners from the error of their ways, and philanthropy. Finally he cites a "seventh, albeit hard and laborious: the remission of sins through penance, when the sinner washes his pillow in tears,

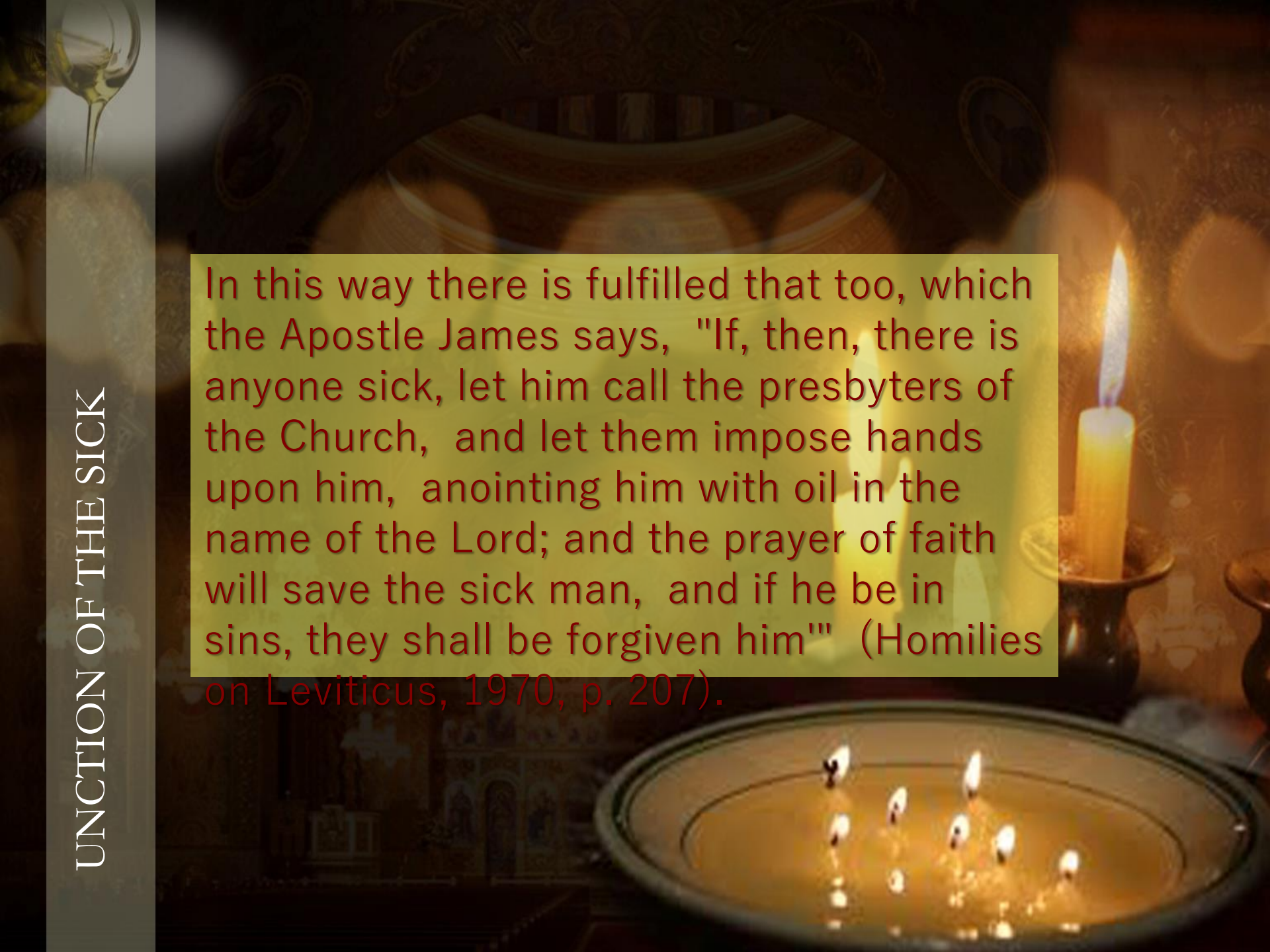
Testimonies of the Fathers

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When tears are day and night his nourishment, and when he does not shrink from declaring his sin to a priest of the Lord and from seeking medicine, after the manner of him who says, "I said, 'To the Lord I will accuse myself of my iniquity,'" and You forgave the disloyalty of my heart' [Ps. 32:5].

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In this way there is fulfilled that too, which the Apostle James says, "If, then, there is anyone sick, let him call the presbyters of the Church, and let them impose hands upon him, 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 shall be forgiven him" (Homilies on Leviticus, 1970, p. 207).

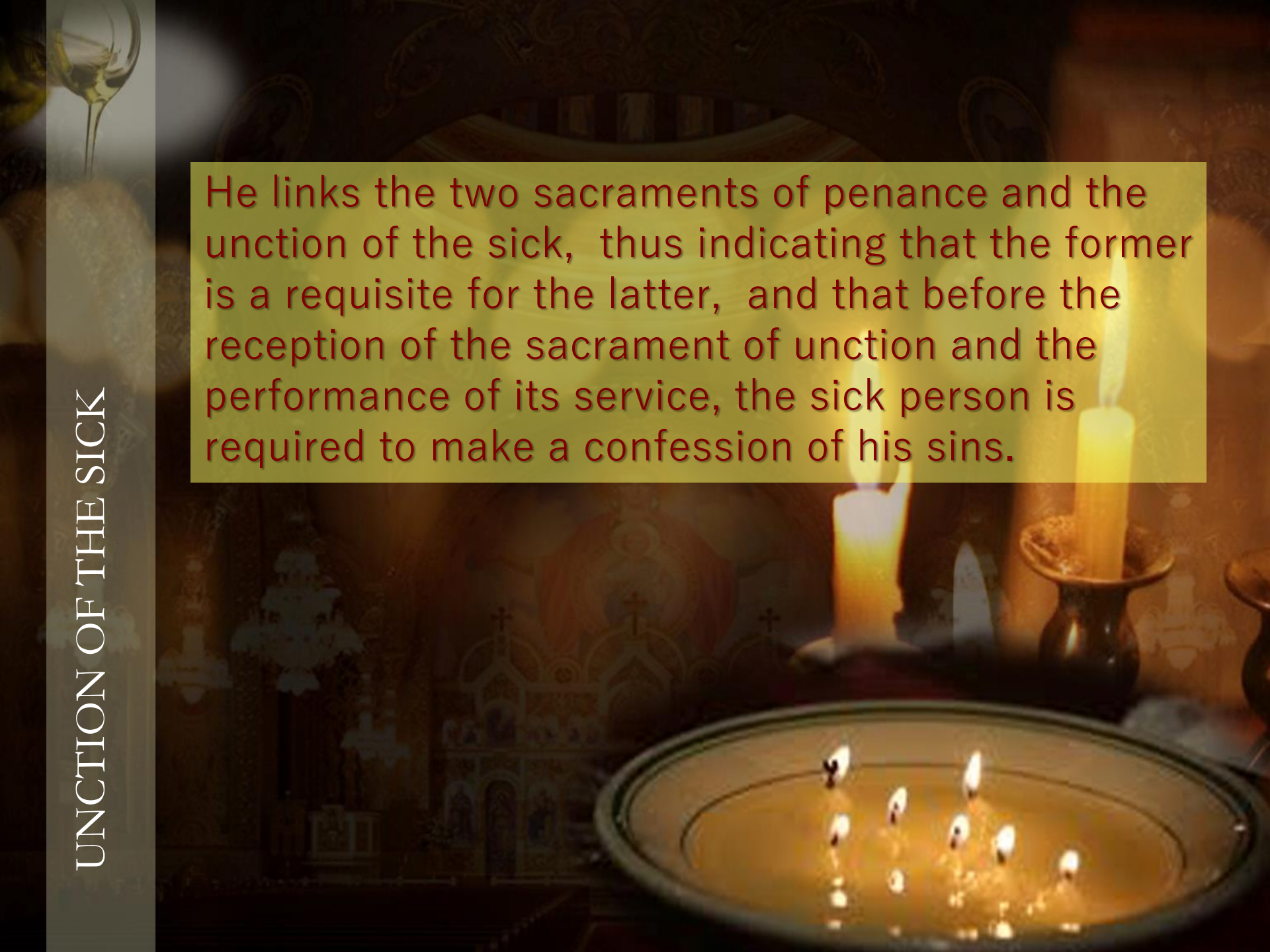


Two points deserve particular attention in Origen's homily:

- ❖ With reference to the verse from James, he substitutes "impose hands upon" for "pray over" a sick person, thereby referring to the procedure followed in administering this sacrament, and still in current usage.



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He links the two sacraments of penance and the unction of the sick, thus indicating that the former is a requisite for the latter, and that before the reception of the sacrament of unction and the performance of its service, the sick person is required to make a confession of his sins.

Dwelling upon the spiritual and physical efficacy of the sacrament of unction of the sick, Saint JOHN CHRYSOSTOM draws a comparison between spiritual fathers and parents: God has bestowed a power on priests greater than that of our natural parents. The two indeed differ as much as the present and the future life.





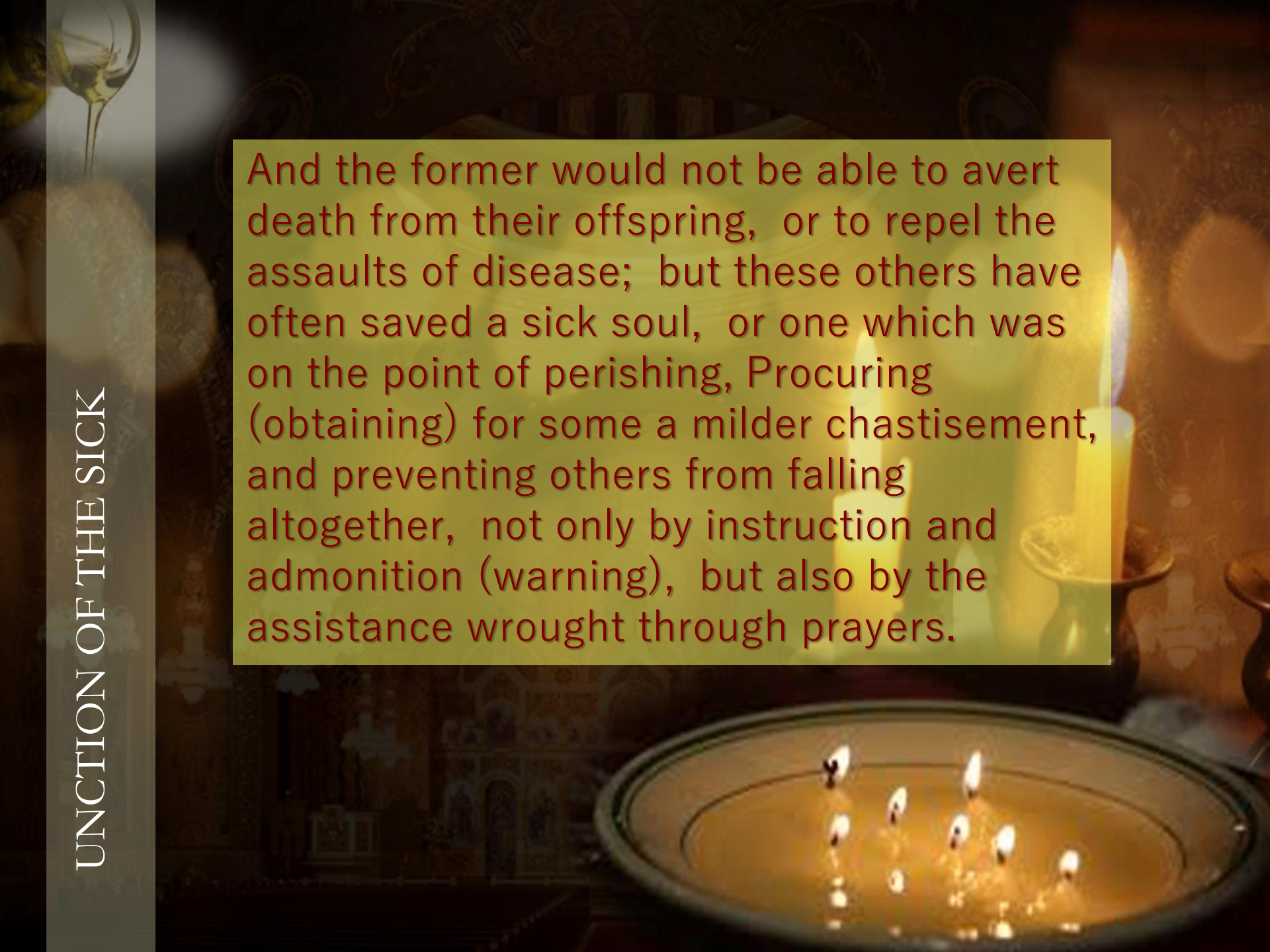
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For our natural parents generate us
unto this life only, but the others unto
that which is to come.



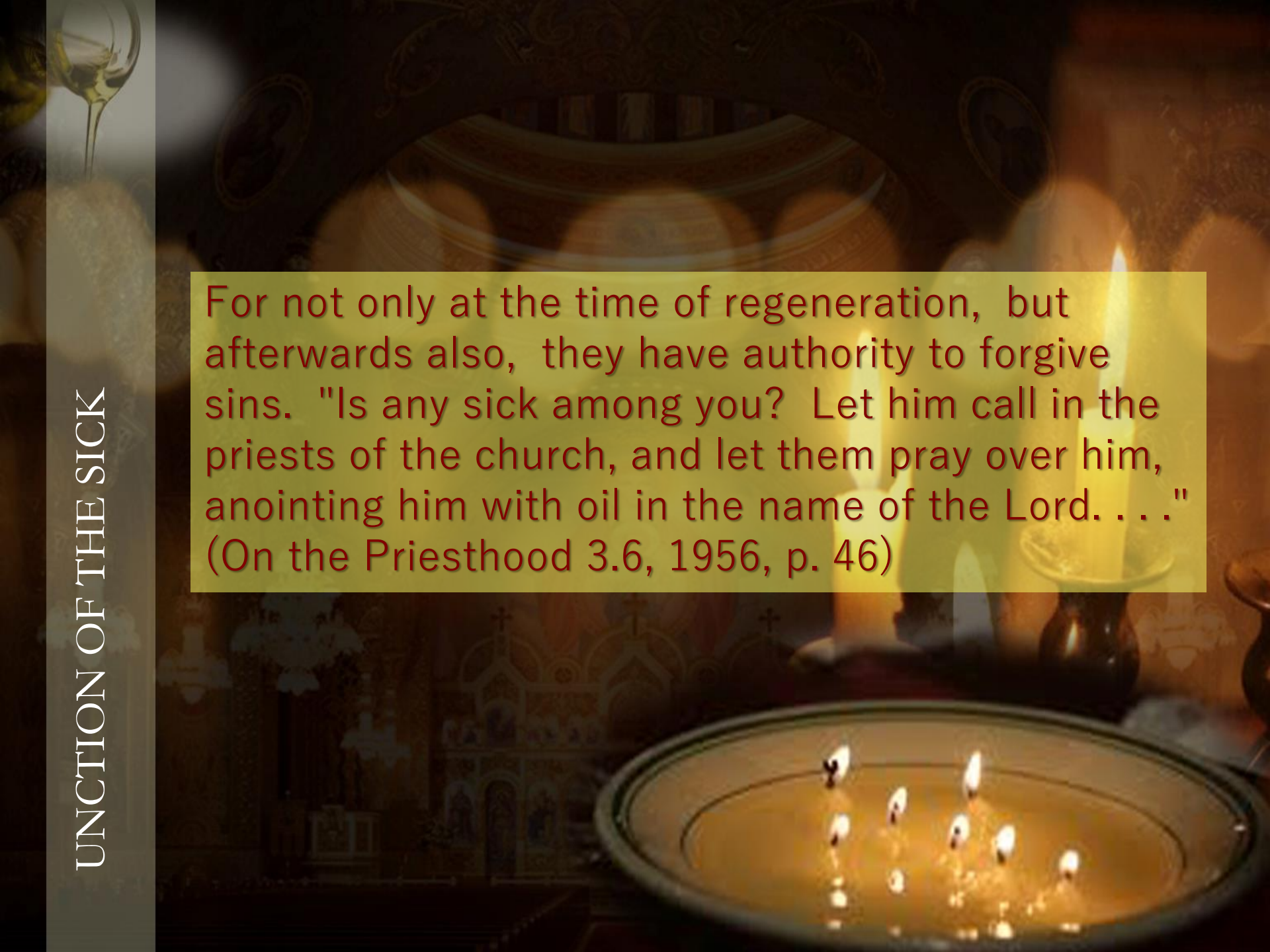
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And the former would not be able to avert death from their offspring, or to repel the assaults of disease; but these others have often saved a sick soul, or one which was on the point of perishing, Procuring (obtaining) for some a milder chastisement, and preventing others from falling altogether, not only by instruction and admonition (warning), but also by the assistance wrought through prayers.



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For not only at the time of regeneration, but afterwards also, they have authority to forgive sins. "Is any sick among you? Let him call in the priests of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. . . ." (On the Priesthood 3.6, 1956, p. 46)

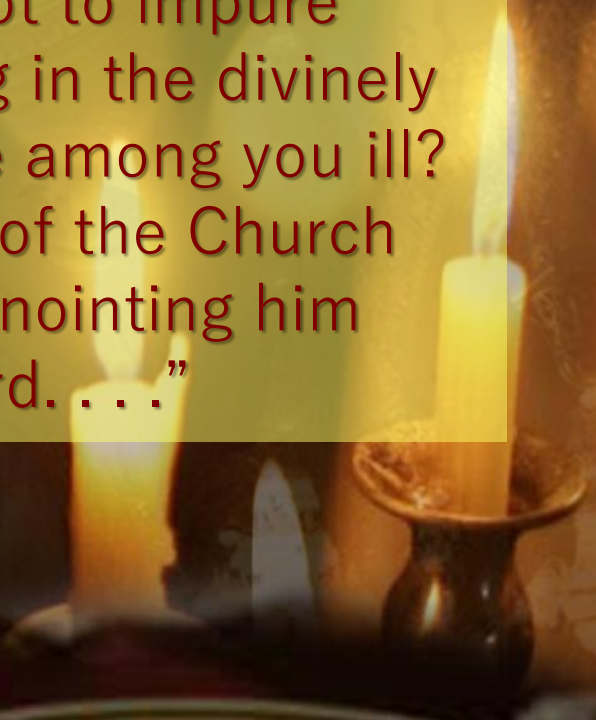
Saint Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) says: But you, if some part of your body is suffering, and you really believe that saying the words "Lord Sabaoth!" or some such appellation which divine Scripture attributes to God in respect to His nature has the power to drive that evil from you, go ahead and pronounce those words, making them a prayer for yourself.





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You will be doing better than you would by just uttering those names, and you will be giving the glory to God and not to impure spirits. I recall also the saying in the divinely inspired Scripture: "Is anyone among you ill? 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. . . ."



Elements of the Sacrament

Like all other sacraments, unction of the sick has three basic constituents:

1. The consecrated priest (or the bishop); originally this sacrament, including seven prayers, was administered by seven priests, but there is no restriction to a minimum number who can take part
2. The sick recipient of the sacrament, Who makes a confession of his or her sins to the priest, and has full faith in the efficacy of the sacrament;

3- Oil, as the visible material element, preferably olive oil; from the scriptures we gather that prophets, kings, and priests were anointed with oil (Ex. 29:7; I Sm. 9:16, 10:1, 16:1, 12, 13; I Kgs. 19:16; Mk. 6:13; Lk. 10:30-34).



With the exception of the paschal week, during which no incense may be used in services, the sacrament of the unction of the sick can be administered any day throughout the year. In addition, this service is also performed publicly in all churches on the Friday (The Last Friday of the Great Lent) preceding the Saturday of Lazarus. On this occasion, the service is held immediately before the start of the Divine Liturgy.



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Whereas repentance was instituted as a sacrament by which we obtain remission of sins, unction of the sick is a means of physical, as well as spiritual, healing. As such, it was practiced in all churches of Christendom until the twelfth century

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when a change came about in the Western church, whereby the use of oil was restricted to the anointing of people on the brink of death, not as a means of their recovery but for the purpose of the remission of their sins. In addition, it was denied to those who had not reached the age of discretion