

HEALING THROUGH CELEBRATION:

A Short Survey of Select Christian Sacramental Celebrations

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Religions guide believers to wholeness, holiness and salvation within the purview of their lived and living traditions. It is through religious celebrations that a religion generally manifests its principles and way of life. In order to promote life and the celebration of it, religion advocates and stipulates certain means and methods, which in most cases, come to the limelight through religious celebrations, for there is an epiphany of the ethos of the community taking place in every celebration.

Healing is basic to religious faith and life. Often it is in the context of a celebration that religion introduces and initiates its believers into healing and new life. While religious celebration can bring about healing, it is simultaneously a celebration of healing, that is, life. So, in a sense, celebration encompasses the orbit of religious healing and life.

This paper is divided into four parts: 1) the meaning of *healing*; 2) the root of sickness; 3) the Christian approach to sickness; and 4) the route to healing in reference to the sacramental celebrations in the Church.

It may be fitting to note down the general hypothesis at the very outset: If in ordinary human life words, sight, taste, touch, smell, actions, movements, etc., have a real healing effect, then an integral healing could be envisaged through religious corporate, corporeal and conscious celebration, where words, sight, taste, touch, smell, actions, movements, etc., acquire greater power and vigour.

1. The Meaning of *Healing*

Our understanding of the word *healing* will help us appreciate the value and role of celebration in bringing about healing among believers.

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The verbal form of *healing* is *to heal*. In its transitive usage, *to heal* means to make whole or sound in bodily condition; to free from disease or ailment, restore to health or soundness, to cure.¹ And in its intransitive application *to heal* denotes to become whole or sound; to recover from sickness or a wound; to get well.² It is significant here to recall that the words health and whole and holy and hale, all have the same root, namely, an old English word *hal* meaning complete³. Thus, the term *healing* evidently connotes completeness, mending, reparation, restoration of wholeness, well-being, safety, or prosperity, spiritual restoration, salvation.⁴

For R. F. Hurding 'concepts of healing and health refer to the bringing of wholeness and soundness to any or every aspect of human life'⁵. Health, according to L. D. Weatherhead, "is the complete and successful functioning of every part of the human being, in harmonious relationship with every other part and with the relevant environment."⁶ Though the above definitions give a global perspective on health and healing, the latter seems to be more tangible and verifiable.

Today there are certain factors, which are generally, and yet seriously taken into consideration in the field of health care and healing ministry. The interrelationship between patient-physician-community is of paramount importance in the discussion of healing and healing itself. Such parameters of health care could be traced back to the biblical tradition as well, for the

¹ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Second edition. Vol. VII (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 52.

² *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 52. See also Klaus Kienzler, Heil, in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, Vierter Band (Herder, 1995) 1259.

³ Leslie D. Weatherhead, *Psychology, Religion and Healing* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963) 317.

⁴ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 53.

⁵ R. F. Hurding, Healing, in *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics & Pastoral Theology*, eds. David J. Atkinson, et. al. (Illinois, USA & Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995) 431.

⁶ Weatherhead, *Psychology, Religion and Healing*, 315.

healing in the bible takes place in the purview of the covenantal community, where Yahweh is the true healer⁷ and all others are agents of healing.⁸ There healing and sickness are considered as signs of God's favour and punishment.⁹ In the New Testament, Jesus is seen as God's agent of healing¹⁰. It is equally evident that in the healing accounts of Jesus the response of faith is a prerequisite for the healing to occur, whether it be present in the patient or somebody who assists her/him.¹¹

According to H. C. Kee, "In each case, in the light of the biblical tradition, healing, which is essential to the fulness of human beings created in the image of God, is accomplished through God's action in behalf of members of the faithful community, communicated through a human agency or by direct performer"¹². In this summary statement of Kee, it is vivid that healing that comes from God, which may be executed in diverse manners, is basic to human realization in reference to the community.

Such an understanding of healing, on the one hand, presupposes a certain woundedness or illness or sinfulness of human beings, and projects a primordial vision of human beings having fullness, wholeness and holiness, on the other. Thus, in a certain sense, the question of healing is always in connection with the past, present and future of human beings. It is linked with the past, for the present sickness is something, which was not present before. It is a disorder that was absent from the beginning and is present at this moment in the history of a person. The disorder or rupture of relationship with other parts or spheres of human being causes discomfort or ailment, which is the present order of things. It is connected with the

⁷See *Gen* 20, 17; *Ex* 15, 26; *Deut* 32, 39; *Job* 5, 17-18; *Is* 6, 10; *Jer* 3, 22; *Zech* 11, 15-17. See also Howard Clark Kee, "Medicine and Healing", in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 4 (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 659-60.

⁸See *IKg* 17, 8-16. See also H. C. Kee, "Medicine and Healing", 660.

⁹*Ibidem*.

¹⁰*Ibidem*, 662.

¹¹See *Ibidem*.

¹²*Ibidem*, 664.

future of human being, since every treatment implicitly or explicitly involves a strong hope and desire for wholeness or order, which motivates people to go for therapy proper to the disorder. The purpose of true healing is 'the restoration of the person to wholeness in which the spirit, mind, body, bio-energy and emotions are in perfect balance.'¹³ This explains the wholeness, which is taken for granted to be the order, and promises wholeness of the person. Thus in theological anthropology it is right and fitting to put healing as follows: while every healing is a present historical restoration of the order of relationship, it is closely and fundamentally supported by the primordial vision of well-being and directed towards an eschatological wholeness.

The theological understanding of healing takes us to the original picture of human beings. There we come across the scene of primeval creation where God creates human being as the crown of creation in His own 'image and likeness'¹⁴, which is her\his identity and vocation in creation. It is a bright image of humans, which illustrates and explains their privilege and challenge of being a blessing to creation following the image of God. This bright image of humans did not last for long. The story tells us that as the primeval parents of humanity lost their mastery over themselves, they lost the sense of mystery as well. Consequently a rupture in human relationship with everyone in the scene is obvious, that is, a broken relationship with God, the human partner and creation. But in the fullness of time, God sent His own Son out of immeasurable love for the world, with whom the image of the human being becomes once again brilliant and radiant, in whom the world found 'fullness of grace and truth',¹⁵ through whom humans beheld the glory of God and their destiny. Through His death and resurrection Jesus Christ restored the image of humans and opened the possibility for wholeness and holiness. During the celebration

¹³Morris Maddocks, "Spiritual Healing", in *A Dictionary of Pastoral Care*, ed. Alastair V. Campbell, second edition (London: SPCK, 1990) 266.

¹⁴*Gen* 1, 26.

¹⁵*Jn* 1, 14.

of the Syro-Malabar *Qurbana*, the assembly thankfully remembers the great favours that the Lord has done for humanity.

You put on our humanity in order to vivify it by your divinity and have exalted our low state, raised us who are fallen, vivified our mortality, forgiven our debts, justified our sinfulness, enlightened our knowledge, condemned our enemies, O our Lord and our God, and granted victory to the weakness of our frail nature in the overflowing mercies of your graces.¹⁶

A brief account of healing that was inaugurated and initiated by Jesus Christ is available in the above anaphoral prayer of the *Qurbana*. In quintessence the healing of Jesus was a restoration and renewal of the human identity, the image of God. Through the mystery of the Incarnation, we get a glimpse of human dignity in Jesus Christ, as daughters\sons in the Son.¹⁷ In Him we encounter the loving kindness of the Father. With Him we share the holiness and wholeness of God. Through Him we have access to and acceptability before the Father in the Holy Spirit. This is not everything. With this restoration and renewal of God's image in us, Jesus introduces the kingdom of God on earth, the key to which is conversion, which is a call for constant and continued healing of self and the community in question. The kingdom of God unveils manifold sectors and spheres for human healing. In fact healing is not in isolation from the human community and creation, but it is accomplished through being and becoming related with God, human community and creation. Here we catch hold of the key to healing. If a woundedness or sickness or sinfulness takes for granted a brokenness in our relationships, healing is an attempt to restore or bridge the relationship with God, neighbours and fellow beings in creation. The classification of relationships involved in health and healing according to C. K. Hamel Cooke is worthy of our attention, for it takes various essential relationships into full consideration. He observes:

¹⁶The Syro Malabar *Qurbana*, *The Order of Raza* (Syro-Malabar Bishops Conference, 1989) 42.

¹⁷See Rom 8, 14-17; John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 18; Réal Tremblay, *Cristo e la morale in alcuni documenti del magistero* (Roma: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1996) 37-71.

Health and illness have to do with relationships. They derive their meaning from the individuals or communities to which they refer. Such relationships, whether considered personally or corporately, can be broadly divided into four: downwards, to things; outwards, to other peoples; inwards, to themselves; and upwards to God. The divisions must not destroy the recognition that they are interactive and interdependent.¹⁸

Healing, in the arena of relationship, involves treating and tending of manifold relationships, be it in the case of the individual or the community. It is quite clear from an ordinary wound. For example, as we get a wound on our finger with a knife, it cuts the skin or vein. A scar appears on the finger, which was otherwise absent. Healing, in this case, means a coming together to normal functioning of the parts cut apart. Being related and united, parts enter into their usual functioning. The brokenness is overcome and relationship is once again regained. That is what is taking place during the healing of a wound. The phenomenon and process is similar in every wound though there will be a difference in degree and grade according to the nature of the hurt.

It is important to grasp that though a wound is very much localized, the pain or the feeling of being wounded is total and global. As this principle is verifiable in the case of a wound on our finger, it is equally applicable in the case of any illness. The effect of healing is also equally total and whole.

This experience leads us to another important observation: if illness is a brokenness of relationship, whereby the subject loses oneness and relatedness, then healing aims at bridging the broken relationships, through which the subject regains wholeness.

Another essential aspect of healing is that it focuses on life, life in fullness and wholeness. The Indian term used for the science of medicine is *ayurveda*, meaning science of life. It illustrates the living and life-giving dimension of healing. True healing leads one to fuller and greater life. As the question of healing springs up from an understanding of life, it is also the

¹⁸C. K. Hamel Cook, "Health and Illness: Pastoral Aspects", in *A Dictionary of Pastoral Care*, 108.

foreground of any healing. In the absence of life, there is no question of healing. Healing makes no sense when and where there is no scope of life. Though healing promises life, it provides 'no guarantee against death'.¹⁹ In this connection it is important to recall that there is certain death behind any life.²⁰ But healing 'sets one free from the desperate feeling that one is living only to die, and allows one to opt for life even in death.'²¹ In this sense, healing is highly religious in content. Hence, life is assumed to be eternal and healing means salvation. Thus, healing, in its ultimate religious sense, indicates and imparts a greater participation in and transformation of human life in the divine eternal life and bliss, whereby humans are fully restored to their image and likeness of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Healing, in the above sense, is a call to conversion (*metanoia*). It is a returning or restoration (*sûb*). Naturally, here arise the following questions. What is the ground of such a conversion? What is the end of such a conversion or returning? What shall we restore? It is returning to *šahlôm*, which means completeness, soundness, well-being.²² It is a conversion to the kingdom of God, where the loving kindness of the Father reigns supreme in the grace of Jesus Christ though the accompaniment of the Holy Spirit, which in concrete realization means to be a member of the mystical Body of Christ.

From this follows the communitarian or covenantal meaning of healing. On the one hand, since believers form the different members of the mystical Body, the life or health of each member is important and contributory to the wholeness or soundness of this body. On the other hand, when the body is said to be healthy, it is taken for granted that every member of it is healthy. In other words, individual and communal healing are complementary and revelatory in nature. Further, the healing of an individual takes place not in a vacuum, but in being somewhere, related with

¹⁹Antonio Mongillo, "Healing", *Concilium* 9-10 (1974) 126.

²⁰See the parable of the seed in *Jn* 12, 24.

²¹Mongillo, "Healing", 126.

²²*New Bible Dictionary* (1996) 891.

somebody and through the medium of something. So place, person and things are channels of healing. That is to say, healing is a "living reality"²³ which presupposes a community of beings. The term *healing* itself alludes to this reality of community as it connotes "to make whole" and "to become whole."²⁴ Obviously here the person in need of healing wants to be related and integrated with something or somebody. The symbolism of the kingdom of God or the mystical body of Christ clarifies the communitarian or ecclesial dimension of healing and life. The healing takes place in the context of a community and the individuals healed become part of it. "A healed society guarantees the health of its members, and healthy men make society healthy."²⁵ Community chalks out plans and executes them for the well-being of its members. However, the health of a community depends upon the life of its members, and vice versa.

The healing that operates in the context of a particular community, to be total and integral, has to embrace humanity and creation as a whole, for they are not alien to the believers, but fellow beings (*sahcari*) in His world. If these strata of relationships are not taken into full consideration, naturally there will be emptiness and incompleteness, which mean an absence of wholeness or salvation. Hence, the relationship with human neighbours and the cosmic community is a prerequisite for total healing and abundance of life.

2. The Root of Sickness

We notice an increase in the rate of illness nowadays. Huge hospitals and clinics that surround us silently witness to the fact that the nature and number of sicknesses are on the increase. At least people are becoming more and more conscious of disorders and those who can afford make it a point to visit specialists in healing.

²³Mongillo, "Healing", 125.

²⁴*The Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) 52-53.

²⁵Mongillo, "Healing", 126.

Health care of the citizens has turned into a big concern of the States. Scientists are spending night and day to develop adequate treatment for illness. New drugs appear in pharmaceuticals claiming to have greater compatibility against newly spurt diseases. Humans have succeeded in alleviating the pain of the sick and in prolonging the life of people on earth to a considerable extent. Though humans are making unprecedented progress in the sector of health care, nonetheless, the problem of sickness exists in our world, and it is becoming more real and tangible in our times. In certain situations, both physicians and patients find themselves helpless and bewildered.

The presence of illness compels us to reflect on the root cause of it. As it is evident from our experience, the cause of disease varies from one to another. Consequently, there will be as many reasons, as there are ailments. Furthermore, there may be many causes to each disease, depending on one's living milieu. However, our scope here will be very limited and general.

Generally speaking, we notice certain dis-order associated with illness of any kind. The explanation of dis-ease may differ according to the angle from which one examines a particular illness. It does not mean that sickness is not objective. On the contrary, diverse explanations on a specific illness illustrate the complexity and reality of the interrelatedness of the individual in question. For that matter, woman\man is not an isolated being, but a relating-being and being-in-relation.²⁶

I think, here lies the key to sickness. Dis-order of every kind and of any sphere presupposes a certain rupture in relationships, which are fundamental to human living. This 'fracture' kills ease-ness in life; and there arises dis-ease in life. Therefore, it may be correct to make a conjecture that there is a brokenness or dis-connection behind every illness according to its nature, though the degree and sphere may vary from case to case. For example, one could suppose that spiritual dis-order is not going to affect the physical well-being of a person. Just the opposite is true. As

²⁶This principle is equally applicable to any *body* in the world. The existence of a *body* whether it be living or non-living (*caracara*) requires a certain relationship with another *body* or *bodies*.

there is a brokenness in a particular realm of a human being, it quickly and spontaneously affects other realms as well, since each realm in a human is neatly and finely interrelated.

If this principle of separation or brokenness is obvious in physical illness, it rightly applies in the case of spiritual sickness, which we call sin. Sin fundamentally involves a brokenness of, alienation and going away from one's relationship with God, the consequences of which reflects on every other realm of human relationship. The brokenness of relationship with a neighbour and creation will ultimately display one's relationship with God, and vice versa. In the above sense, sin, seen as the brokenness or disorder, is the cause of sickness, be it physical, spiritual, social or environmental. But this does not mean that every sick person is a sinner. The just also suffer and experience disease. The story of Job²⁷ symbolically portrays a picture typical to a just person, who experiences isolation in its bitterness. However, one thing is strikingly exemplary in the story of Job. He, in his utter helplessness, sickness or suffering does not break his relationship with anyone in the scene, though others take leave from him either through death or decisions of their own.

3. The Christian Approach to Sickness

The reality of sickness and the accompanying suffering compel us to reflect on different attitudes towards sickness in the Christian tradition. Stanley S. Harakas, an Orthodox theologian, lists eleven propositions in approaching sickness,²⁸ which are very fundamental to a Christian understanding of illness. They are: i) evil is a condition; ii) sickness is an evil; iii) the goal of life as God-likeness transforms illness; iv) sickness is a testing; v) sickness is a gift; vi) sickness is a temptation; vii) illness is an

²⁷For example, see *Job* 19.

²⁸S. S. Harakas, *Heaven and Medicine in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition* (New York: Crossroad, 1990) 40-42. Arnold Pangrazi, in his article "The Spiritual Dimension of Health Care", *Ethos Today* 1 (1987) 1:8-29, specifies eight interpretations of sickness in the context of a hospital: i) sickness is a punishment; ii) sickness is a trial; iii) sickness is a personal responsibility; iv) sickness is a destiny; v) sickness is a reality of life; vi) sickness is a school of sight; vii) illness is a curse and viii) illness as a way of loving.

occasion for witness; viii) illness affects other responsibilities; ix) health maintenance is a responsibility; x) it is appropriate for a Christian to seek healing when sick and xi) Christians have a responsibility for the health of others. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* dedicates many paragraphs to discussing illness in human life.²⁹ The Church takes into account both the negative and positive approaches one can have towards sickness:

Illness can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God. It can also make a person more mature, helping him discern in his life what is not essential so that he can turn toward that which is. Very often illness provokes a search for God and a return to him.³⁰

In another section on maintaining a proper balanced approach concerning life and health, the *Catechism on the Catholic Church* teaches, "Life and physical health are precious gifts entrusted to us by God. We must take reasonable care of them, taking into account the needs of others and the common good."³¹ Pope John Paul II, who champions the advocating of a "culture of life"³² over against a "culture of death",³³ instructs his fellow believer "to trust in the Lord and to renew his fundamental faith in the One who heals all your diseases"³⁴. In the same encyclical, the Pontiff strikes a proper and fitting note taking into account diverse factors that shape human responsibility in fostering life. "Certainly there is a moral obligation to care for oneself and to allow oneself to be cared for, but this duty must take account of concrete circumstances."³⁵

All these above mentioned attitudes on life and sickness unveil one fundamental truth that though life is a basic value which is good in itself and

²⁹CCC 1500-1510.

³⁰CCC 1501.

³¹CCC 2288.

³²John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (1995) 28, 77, 82, 95, 98, 99.

³³EV 21, 28, 50, 86, 87, 104, 105.

³⁴EV 46.

³⁵EV 65.

the resultant responsibilities to take care of one's bodily life on earth, it is not an absolute value compared to the eternal divine life, into which every believer is being transformed in Christ through the Spirit.

With these observations on the Christian approach to life and sickness, we are now ready to take off on the route to wholeness, or salvation, the goal of healing.

4. The Route to Healing

There are many routes to healing depending on the field of interest. The goal is healing or wholeness, though means and methods differ. As we have earlier mentioned, there is no clash between different methods in healing wounds, if they are healthy and enable people to wholeness. Further, all these ways of healing will lead an individual to wholeness and salvation, if they are properly integrated by the subject and they can offer her/him a wider horizon for life in its fullness.

However, our scope here is very limited. As the title of this paper indicates, we are interested to study the route to healing through religious celebration. To be more precise, our immediate and present concern would be the study of the religious celebrations of Christians.

According to Sacred Scripture, Christians are people who celebrate. Paul exhorts his faithful to rejoice. "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice."³⁶ That is to say, celebration is part and parcel of Christian life. "Like a mother, she [the Church] cares about our birthing, marrying, failures and reconciliations, our dying and our rising again."³⁷ It is also true that each celebration adds life and vigour to the faithful. "Over and over, the feasts invite us to engage, see, feel, touch, experience, grow strong and, finally, to be transformed."³⁸ The life of the faithful becomes manifest and vibrant during their religious celebration. Christian life is encircled by

³⁶Phil 4, 4; See also 1 Thes 5, 16.

³⁷Gertrud Mueller Nelson, "Festival Days", in *At That Time, Cycles and Seasons in the Life of a Christian*, ed. James A. Wilde (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1989) 25.

³⁸G. M. Nelson, "Festival Days", 25.

sacramental celebrations from the birth to the death of a person. Therefore, it is proper to study the celebrations of sacraments, which are actually efficient and practically effective in healing the wounds of believers bringing salvation to their immediate realization.

When we rightly celebrate the sacraments as privileged signs of hope, then we realise that we can truly respond to God's promises with a hope that unites us all in a saving solidarity to the praise of God, the liberator and redeemer. Celebrating these signs of unity and love, the Spirit of adoration makes us realize ever more that we can adore God in Spirit and truth only if we are sincerely and actively committed to the good of all our brothers: that is, to peace, justice and the promotion of human rights in our own small world and in the world at large.³⁹

In the following paragraphs we shall examine select sacramental celebrations and their dynamism in healing, giving special emphasis on the celebration of the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of Christian life. We commence with the sacrament of Baptism.

4.1. The Sacrament of Baptism

In the celebration of baptism the believer is re-stored and participates in the new life and love of God offered in Christ in the Church through the Holy Spirit, that is to say, the believer enters into the "Most Holy Trinity through the configuration to the Paschal Mystery of Christ,"⁴⁰ the gateway to wholeness, holiness or salvation. The celebration of the sacrament of baptism enables the believer to regain her/his healthy relationship with God - *being newly born in Christ through the Spirit*; with fellow beings - *being a member of the communion of sisters and brothers regenerated in Christ and directed by the Spirit*; and with the world *being in a world created and redeemed in Christ and being sanctified by the Spirit*, which puts relationships back in order and harmony.

³⁹Bernard Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ, Moral Theology for Priests and Laity*, Vol. 1. *General Moral Theology* (Homebush: Society of St Paul, second Australian edition, 1979) 483.

⁴⁰CCC 1239.

Thus, we notice that through the celebration of baptism the believer is not only forgiven of her/his sins but also is integrated into the economy of salvation through the transformation of her/his life into that of Christ. The Church, in her Catechism, puts forward these healing dimensions succinctly, "through baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission."⁴¹ On the one hand, the celebration of baptism reminds of the newness of life in Christ and demands such a living from the believer, and on the other, the sacrament makes it possible to live such a new life.⁴²

Through perceptible and communicative symbols of the sacrament of baptism, like, the sign of the cross, baptismal water, the anointing with sacred chrism, the white garment, the candle, holy communion and the solemn blessing,⁴³ the Church proclaims and presents healing and wholeness to the newly baptized person.

4.2. The Sacrament of Reconciliation

The term 'reconciliation' connotes itself the profound aspect of healing and life. As it is explicit from the very term 'reconciliation', the sacrament brings believers back into a healthy and life-giving relationship through the forgiveness of sins. As we have earlier seen that sin involves a brokenness in my relationships, which could be generally classified as tridimensional, namely, one's relationship with God, humans and creation. It is against this background we can better appreciate the *logos* and *skopos* of celebrating the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Besides, the sacrament of reconciliation is known as a sacrament of healing.⁴⁴ In the light of this understanding, sins are said to be the

⁴¹CCC 1213.

⁴²See Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord*, Vol. 1, *Christian Moral Principles* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983) 741-742.

⁴³CCC 1234-1245.

⁴⁴Basilio Petrà, "La prassi penitenziale nelle chiese orientali", *Credere Oggi* 16 (1996) 73.

“pathological conditions of human beings, a true and proper sickness of the spirit.”⁴⁵ In this context sin manifests itself more as a sign of “powerlessness than potency, a weakness than strength.”⁴⁶ Since sin is a sickness or weakness, the confessor becomes a physician, who takes adequate care of the illness of the penitent, who is wounded and helpless. The confessor is not a judge who makes a ruling juridically on the sins of the penitent, but is a pastor who bandages the wounded sheep with the oil of God’s mercy. In the celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation, the priest is not up there in the heavens but is one with his folk. A prayer said by the priest at the beginning of the celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation in the Syro Malabar Rite marvelously reveals the true Christian disposition for healing, where priest and penitent represent wounded humanity in need of salvation:

Peace be with us. Lord, into your presence we lift up our hearts. You are our hope and salvation. According to your nature pardon our debts and sins in your mercy. Now, forever and ever. Amen.⁴⁷

The above prayer makes God’s loving and forgiving presence present, which is the source of forgiveness and healing in the celebration. This is again brought to light in the formula of absolution, “May the Lord, who sanctifies sinners of contrite heart, forgive your sins and enable you for eternal life. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁸ It is important to note that it is not the priest who directly absolves here, but God. Thus the priest invokes the merciful God for the forgiveness of sins and who can heal the wounds and restore relationships that assures new life to the penitent.

The immediate effect of the celebration becomes distinctly clear in the prayer that the priest continues to make, “God, who has made you like Him

⁴⁵*Ibidem.*

⁴⁶*Ibidem*, 74. (Si manifesta invece come segno di impotenza più che di potenza, di debolezza più che di forza).

⁴⁷“Sacrament of Reconciliation”, in *Synodal News, Bulletin of the Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Church*, No. 3 (1994) 31. Emphasis mine.

⁴⁸*Ibidem.*

through the forgiveness of sins, may bless you to live in unity with the Church and your brothers and sisters. May He enable you to bring the renewal to completion that you have commenced. Go in peace."⁴⁹ Many important therapeutic aspects of healing are present in this prayer. As, on the one hand, this prayer picturesquely portrays the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God, which explain the indicative of the penitent's union and communion with God, while on the other hand, it outlines the imperative for the penitent to be united with the Church and fellow human beings. A natural outflow of healing and life is visible in this celebration. It equally emphasizes the process and duration involved in the healing and renewal of life.

The gestures, prayers, listening, directions and blessing in the celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation illustrate some of the basic elements in any healing. However, reconciliation becomes complete when one goes for Eucharistic communion, which is medicine for illness.

Another sacrament, which links directly with sickness and death, is the celebration of the Anointing of the Sick in the Church, to which we shall turn now.

4.3. The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

The Anointing of the sick is a celebration orientated to healing, again an integral healing in the light of the faith of the community. This becomes explicit at the outset of the celebration, where the priest greets all assembled around the sick person. He addresses them as follows, "Christ who made us partakers in His death and resurrection through baptism sanctify you all."⁵⁰ In these words, the Paschal Mystery, which is the basic and ultimate horizon of believers in understanding suffering and healing and in which every believer is initiated in baptism, finds immediate manifestation, through which they look back to the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection and look ahead to the eschatological kingdom of God in their present story.

⁴⁹*Ibidem*, 32.

⁵⁰The Anointing of Sick, in *Synodal News, Bulletin of the Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Church*, No. 3 (1994) 52.

Properly speaking, these words enable the assembled, including the sick person, to anchor their vessels.

These introductory words should not give one a wrong impression that the Anointing of the sick is a preparation for death. Rather it is a healing service. It aims at life. In fact those words are only doing a work of pitching a tent for true healing. An integral healing, both physical and spiritual healing, is the scope of the Anointing of the sick. This is echoed in the opening prayer. "Send your Holy Spirit and console this sister\brother who is tormented by physical and spiritual sufferings. Lord, giver of health to the sick, heal this sister\brother through this service of anointing."⁵¹

The *karozutha*⁵² (the proclamation prayers) reveals practically almost all basic biblical truths and teachings regarding healing. For example, they herald the Lord who healed the sick and forgave sins; the Lord who instructed the glory of suffering through His death; the Lord who discerned the will of the Father in His sufferings; the Lord who commanded the paralyzed to take up his coats and go home; the Lord who announced that the anointment of sick with faith would be healing; the Lord who commissioned the apostles to heal those who were sick and so on. Having brought these healing scenes to life through effective proclamation, the priest, in his concluding prayer to the *karozutha*, praises the Lord who extends health to the sick, forgiveness to sinners and consolation to the suffering and invokes Him for healing the sick who are physically and mentally in trouble.⁵³ From these texts, it is obvious that the celebration of the Anointing of the sick intends the total healing of the person concerned.

The blessing of oil for the anointing makes exceedingly clear the scope of the celebration of the Anointing of sick:

O merciful Lord, who heals the sick, bless this oil with your Holy Spirit. Let this be a divine medicine for all our diseases. Through the

⁵¹Synodal News 3 (May 1994) 53.

⁵²Synodal News 3 (May 1994) 58-59.

⁵³Synodal News 3 (May 1994) 59-60.

anointment of this oil may pain be relieved, suffering be alleviated, wounds be healed and the body and soul gain well-being.⁵⁴

From the above text of the blessing of oil, on the one hand, the belief of the community in integral healing is marvelously made manifest, and on the other hand, the text communicates the meaning and purpose of the celebration of the Anointing. A concise Christian theology on suffering and healing is proclaimed in the prayer of the priest as he lays his hand on the sick:

The Lord, who said to His disciples 'lay your hands on the sick and they shall be healed,' heals you. May He forgive your sins and give you peace. May He transform your pain and suffering into salvation. May He appoint His heavenly angels to console you. May He bless you and all who are dear to you and who take care of you.⁵⁵

Next is the anointing of the forehead, eyes, ears, lips, hands, and feet. During the anointing with oil, the priest utters prayers reflecting the sense of physical and spiritual healing. It is a moving scene when the priest anoints different members of the body and asks for pardon from the Lord for the patient if these members have been an occasion for sin. While the priest pleads for the forgiveness of sins that might have been incurred through the bodily organs, the anointing formulas magnificently manifest the healthy and worthy use of them.

<i>Organs</i>	<i>Ethos of the believers</i>	<i>Paraneisis</i>
eyes	saw the divine glory	to see the divine glory

⁵⁴*Synodal News* 3 (May 1994) 60.

⁵⁵*Synodal News* 3 (May 1994) 60-61.

ears	listened to the Word of God	to listen to the Word of God
lips	sang praises	to sing the praises to God
hands	helped others	to assist others
feet	walked in the sanctuary	to walk in the sanctuary

As these prayer formulas depict the Christian ethos, on the one hand, they present a framework for their healthy and holy life, on the other. However, we shall return to this point a little while later, as we make our reflection on the celebration of the Eucharist.

It is by and large clear how the sick person is assisted in the healing of his wounds in a holistic and communitarian context through appropriate and corporate corporeal actions in the celebration of the Anointing of sick. Before we conclude this section, it is of crucial importance to point out one of the elements that appears in the final blessing. "May the Lord strengthen you to bear your sufferings with joy and offer yourself on the cross of Christ and live in the hope of eternal bliss."⁵⁶ In these words there is a reverberation of a truly existential and eschatological approach to healing, which is thoroughly Christian in essence. The community is always present to care for its sick, though curing has its limits. Knowing the limits of human life and not evading reality, the community embraces the truth of death with hope and courage on the cross of Christ, which is a sign of love and life for the believers.

With these observations on the celebration of the Anointing of the sick towards an integral and total healing, where again the Communion of the Mystery is an essential feature for its completion, we shall now pass to the

⁵⁶*Synodal News* 3 (May 1994) 68.

sacrament of the Eucharist, which we call *raza* (mystery) or *qurbana* (offering) in our tradition.

4.4. The Celebration of the *Qurbana*

Finally, we have arrived at the point where we have started and which is the source and strength of all the other Christian celebrations, namely, the celebration of the Eucharist. In the above paragraphs of this section, we have seen that the Communion of the Mystery, is an inseparable element of celebrating the sacrament of Baptism,⁵⁷ Reconciliation and Anointing of the sick. This is also true of the other sacraments in the Church. Therefore, the Church rightly and emphatically teaches that the Liturgy is “the source and summit,”⁵⁸ “the sum and summary”⁵⁹ of Christian life.

In essence the *Qurbana* is “the celebration of Christian life”⁶⁰ on its existential and eschatological axis. It is a celebration of the mystery of Christian life in remembrance (*anamnesis*) of the Paschal Mystery and thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) of the mystery of the Holy Trinity for the creation by the Father, redemption in the Son and transformation through the Holy Spirit, which is on its upward and forward march. Therefore, the celebration of the *Qurbana* encompasses every aspect of the Christian life that is charged with the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation.

We shall briefly indicate some of the healing elements in the celebration of the *Qurbana*. It shall be on the following criteria: i) the ‘coming together’ as healing; ii) re-membering as healing; iii) communion as healing; and iv) celebration as healing.

⁵⁷At least this is true to Eastern Churches, the recognition of which is made by CCC 1244. The Eastern Churches maintain a lively awareness of the unity of Christian initiation by giving Holy Communion to all the newly baptized and confirmed, even little children, recalling the Lord's words: “Let the children come to me, do not hinder them”.

⁵⁸SC 10.

⁵⁹CCC 1327.

⁶⁰Varghese Pathikulangara, The Celebrational Coefficient of Liturgy, *Christian Orient* 14 (June 1993) 59.

4.4.1. The 'Coming together' as Healing

The coming together of the faithful is a constitutive and central feature of the Christian celebration of the *Qurbana*, for the celebration of the Eucharist is fundamentally a corporate act of the community of believers, through which it re-members, re-enacts, re-minds, re-lives and re-news the Mystery of Christian life. This is very explicit from the very beginning of the *Qurbana*. The celebrant commences with the following words, 'Let us begin the *Qurbana*...' to which the assembly responds, "We do this in accordance with the command of Christ."⁶¹ So, truly speaking, there is no worthy celebration of the *Qurbana* without the assembly. This takes us to the further conclusion that there is a definite and decisive step towards the togetherness of the believers, who are the members of the mystical body and the head of which is Jesus Christ. Thus, the celebration of the *Qurbana* brings all the faithful under one and the same banner, that is, the risen Lord, in the Holy Spirit, on equal ground as children of God the Father. Therefore, they cry out in one voice, with the love and freedom of the children of God, "Our Father."⁶²

As the community of the faithful gathers around the altar of the Lord, it recalls, on the one hand, the command of the Lord to "Do this in remembrance of me,"⁶³ and on the other hand, His injunction, "first be reconciled to your brother (and sister), and then come to offer your gift."⁶⁴ St. Paul elaborates the theme concretely in the context of the celebration of the community, 'Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.'⁶⁵ This oneness and unitedness of the believers in the Lord is the ground for their coming together and being together. St. Paul reminds them, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."⁶⁶

⁶¹*The Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, 1.

⁶²*The Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, 2.

⁶³1 Cor 11, 24. See also *The Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, 1, 30; 40; 42.

⁶⁴Mt 5, 24.

⁶⁵1 Cor 11, 29.

⁶⁶1 Cor 12, 27.

He sees the resultant relationship among the members in an organic and marvelous way, 'If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one members is honoured, all rejoice together.'⁶⁷

The coming together of the faithful for the *Qurbana* should not be mistaken as a closed or ghetto gathering of Christians alone. On the contrary, their celebration of the *Qurbana* reaches out to the whole of humanity and the entire universe. This is magnificently clear from the Introductory rite of the celebration, where the celebrant together with the community dramatically represents and entreats the Angels' hymn,⁶⁸ 'Glory to God in the highest.' 'And on earth, peace and firm hope to men in all times for ever and ever.'⁶⁹ While the hymn characterizes the universality of the prayer of the community, it is a hymn sung in praise of God for the universe and all inhabitants therein.⁷⁰ Here the Christian community makes its priestly, mediatory function as human beings and the "cosmos come to self-consciousness," in the world. Besides, though the celebration of the *Qurbana* is the corporate action of the community, it is in no way tied up with it, but rather brings everybody in the universe to the altar with them to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. The universal character of the prayer is abundantly clear in a response by the community to the request made by the celebrant, "May God, the Lord of all, ... accept your *Qurbana*... for us, for you, and for the whole world, through the goodness of His mercy for ever."⁷¹

Thus we see the 'coming together' of the believers to worship the Father as one and united in their Lord, Jesus Christ, the head of the body, through the Holy Spirit, which makes and manifests the community. The

⁶⁷1 Cor 12, 26.

⁶⁸Lk 2, 14.

⁶⁹The Syro-Malabar *Qurbana*, 1.

⁷⁰This becomes eminently clear in the first *gehantha* of the *Qurbana*, where the celebrant makes a mediation for the entire world and its inhabitants. See *The Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, 37-38.

⁷¹The Syro-Malabar *Qurbana*, 34.

purpose of this gathering, as we have seen, is to praise God in the Church and to establish peace (well-being) and hope to human beings on earth in-being united with everybody in the cosmos. Hence, we notice an experience and an adequate expression of wholeness, completeness and totality in the coming together of the faithful, as they discharge their priestly function in the world. The worshippers overcome their brokenness with their fellow believers and become united with the Lord, which brings them holiness and salvation and which, in turn, would help them to establish peace on earth and hope to fellow beings in the world, with a sense of 'mystery and mastery.'⁷² When we observe the celebration of the *Qurbana* from this point of view, it is highly a moment of the believers being healed and becoming whole in order to commit themselves to the greater and total healing and holiness of everybody.

4.4.2. The Re-remembering as Healing

One of the major thrusts of the *Qurbana* consists in its *anamnesis* or remembrance of the history of salvation, where God, humans and the world come alive in the scene. The *Qurbana* is the memorial re-enactment, the representation of the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Viewing the celebration from the tripartite structure of the Eucharistic prayer of the *Qurbana* in time sequence, Thomas Elavanal points out the general structure in the celebration as follows:

We can notice past present and future aspects in the celebration. The first part of the anaphora is centred mainly on the abundant graces of God manifested in creation and redemption. The second part is the celebration and actualization of the Paschal Mystery. The third is orientated towards the future.⁷³

⁷²Paulos Gregorios gives a beautiful description of the priestly function of human beings in the world. He depicts it as follows, "In our relation to nature, we have to walk the precarious path and live in the difficult rhythm between mystery and mastery." @ *The Human Presence, An Orthodox View of Nature* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1978) 88.

⁷³Thomas Elavanal, *The Memorial Celebration, A Theological Study of the Anaphora of the Apostles Mar Addai and Mari* (Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India, 1989) 72.

The celebration of the *Qurbana*, therefore, is a remembrance of the past and future in the present. On the one hand, it is a remembrance of praise, thanksgiving and supplication to the most Holy Trinity, and on the other hand, it is "a vivid proclamation of the biblical understanding of man,"⁷⁴ which openly confesses that God created man in His own image and likeness, and a celebration of "the new creation and eternal springtime inaugurated by the incarnation of Christ."⁷⁵ During the celebration of the *Qurbana*, the assembly faithfully remembers the blessed Trinity 'who created the world by your grace and its inhabitants by your mercifulness and bestowed great grace on mortal men'⁷⁶ and therefore, rightly and fittingly gives thanks to the most blessed Trinity, "Worthy of praise from every mouth; of confession from every tongue and of worship and exaltation from every creature."⁷⁷ The voice of the gathering finds its fine echo, when it gives thanks to the Lord for the merits that the Son has gained for humanity.

In quintessence, it consists in a healing of wounds, the restoration of the image of God and transformation into human-divine life.⁷⁸ Varghese Pathikulangara attests importance to the recuperation and transformation of the image of God in the context of the celebrations of baptism and the *Qurbana*, "Those who are baptized in Him, have become His brothers through participation in His resurrection. They are gradually and progressively transformed through their continued participation in the Holy *Qurbana*."⁷⁹

Hence we behold the celebration of the *Qurbana* as an abounding occasion for the believers to remember who they are in the light of the Mystery and to reunite or 're-member' the believer/s with God, Neighbour

⁷⁴Varghese Pathikulangara, *Resurrection Life and Renewal* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications\Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies, 1982) 275.

⁷⁵Elavanal, *The Memorial Celebration*, 92.

⁷⁶*The Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, 38.

⁷⁷*The Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, 37.

⁷⁸See *The Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, 42.

⁷⁹Pathikulangara, *Resurrection Life and Renewal*, 252.

and Nature according to the restored and transforming image proper to Christians. That is to say, *the dismembered become 're-membered' through the celebration*. The *Qurbana*, as it is obvious, is an introduction into 'remembering,' which is an expression of the healing, holiness and wholeness of the community of the believers. Besides, Eucharistic remembrance advances the awareness of the assembly and the modes of existence of realities in its proper relatedness and oneness, which can inspire and promote healthy and holy actions.

4.4.3. The Communion as Healing

If a wound or hurt is disunion, then healing is union or communion. As we have rightly noted above, there is a wound connected with illness of any kind. The Communion in the celebration of the *Qurbana* is a precious moment and event, through which the believers regain union and communion with God, Neighbour and Nature.

The Eucharistic bread, which 'earth has given and human hands have made'⁸⁰ turned to be the body of the risen Lord for the community in worship, is a "living and life-giving"⁸¹ symbol. It is true of Eucharistic wine, too. Through the Communion of the eucharistic Mystery, each and every believer proclaim their communion with God, because the bread is divine; with humans, for, on the one hand, it is made by human hands, and on the other hand, sharing and eating is a sign of human fellowship; and with creation, since the divine-human bread is from the earth. In the Communion we get a taste and foretaste of the *theanthropocosmic*⁸² union in a marvelous manner. Envisaging daily communion, St. Ephrem paints a beautiful picture of this union and communion, "The assembly of the saints

⁸⁰New ... *Saint Joseph Sunday Missal and Hymnal*, complete edition (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1986) 20.

⁸¹*The Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, 47.

⁸²*Theanthropocosmic* refers to the related yet distinct reality of the mystery of theos-anthropos-cosmos.

bears resemblance to Paradise: in it, each day, is plucked the fruit of Him who gives life to all."⁸³

Besides, according to St. Ephrem, who is a great representative of and contributor to the tradition, the hidden presence of Christ in the Eucharistic Bread and Cup is "Medicine of life." He writes:

The Grape of Mercy was pressed
and gave the Medicine of Life to the People.⁸⁴

Our Lord baptized human kind with the Holy Spirit,
He nourished it with the Medicine of Life.⁸⁵

Homilies of Narsai of Nisibis also place in evidence the medicinal character of the Eucharist in the Church. For example, he illustrates, "Lo, the Medicine of Life! Lo, it is distributed in Holy Church."⁸⁶ Though consuming the eucharistic Bread and Wine is healing and life-giving, it may bring illness, if the reception of them is not done worthily. St. Ephrem, in tune with the words of St. Paul in *I Corinthians* 11, 29, reflects on the Bread of Life:

For he who receives that Medicine of Life unworthily
takes judgement upon himself:
it is a matter for wonder that such a person
has, in reverse, gained death by means of Life⁸⁷

⁸³St. Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise* VI, 6. in Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye, The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem* (Rome: CIIS; Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1985) 78.

⁸⁴St. Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginity* 31, 3. in Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 77.

⁸⁵St. Ephrem, *Hymns on Nisibis* 46, 8. in Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 77.

⁸⁶Narsai, *Homily XVII*, in *An Exposition of the Mysteries in Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, trans. R. H. Connolly, Text and Studies VIII (Cambridge: 1909) 29.

⁸⁷St. Ephrem, *Armenian Hymns* 47, lines 13-14. in Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 82-83.

This vein of thought is faithfully carried over and made present in the celebration of the *Qurbana* as well, "Let not your living Body, O Lord, which we have eaten and the precious Blood which we have drunk, turn into our judgment and condemnation, nor into our weakness and infirmity,"⁸⁸ but "for the pardon of offences and forgiveness of sins and for the great hope of the resurrection from the dead and for the new life in the kingdom of heaven."⁸⁹ In these texts the motif of healing and life is predominantly clear. Thus, the eating of the Bread and drinking of the Cup turn to be a healing and life-giving experience to the faithful.

This healing and life-giving experience in the *Qurbana* will be spontaneously extended to the healing of the whole creation, which is in urgent need of it, for creation symbolizes the temple of the Lord, dwelling place of Christ, that which is filled with the Mystery of God,⁹⁰ which is one of the two Books of revelation.⁹¹ St. Ephrem captures the inner dynamics of the process of healing, which has its beginning in the personal holiness through the Medicine of Life. He scribbles:

The Medicine of Life flew down from on high
to reside in those worthy of it.
Let us make holy our souls and thoughts
in honour of his glory.
We hold God in our hands:
let there be no blemish in our bodies.
Once He has entered, He takes up residence with us,
so let us make ourselves holy within.⁹²

⁸⁸*The Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, 56-57.

⁸⁹*The Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, 49.

⁹⁰St. Ephrem, *Hymns on Faith* 6, 9.

⁹¹In his book *Moses* described the creation of the natural world, so that both Nature and Scripture might bear witness to the Creator: Nature, through man's use of it, Scripture, through his reading of it, *Hymns on Paradise* V, 2. (English translation from S. Brock, *St. Ephrem the Syrian*, 102-103).

⁹²St. Ephrem, *Armenian Eucharistic Hymns* 47, lines 27-30. in Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 90.

Healing, whether it be of persons or creation, takes place through the Communion of the Mystery of the Eucharist. The supposition is that when human beings are made holy through the Communion, which is incarnational in essence, they, in turn, through their efficient administration (*economia*) shall heal the wounds of creation. Thus, *economia* paves the way to *ecologia*. Moreover, the faithful confess and proclaim their communion with the whole universe as and when they partake of the Bread and Cup of the Eucharist in wonder and gratitude.

4.4.4. Celebration as Healing

Our hypothesis in this paragraph is this: if healing involves a oneness, wholeness, completeness and holiness in reference to manifold relationships, the Christian religious celebration is a therapy for being and becoming one, whole and holy.

As we have already mentioned above in this section, that there is a coming together of the faithful in every Christian religious celebration, especially, that which is explicit and essential for the celebration of the *Qurbana*. This gathering of people in the name of God as children of the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit is in itself a corporate healing act of the community, for the very decision and action to gather together in His sanctuary is significantly reconciling and rewarding. Besides, it renews the healthy relationship with God, Neighbour and Nature. Thus there emerges the scope of restoring and rejuvenating life in each and every celebration. In this sense, the assembly of the *Qurbana* itself becomes a sacrament of healing and life-giving in the world, for it manifests and makes the healthy environment for the celebrants, where they become one, whole and divine.

Apart from the coming together of the believers, the celebration of the *Qurbana*, which is a public corporate act, strengthens the bonds of their inner and interpersonal relationships. The elaborate rite of Reconciliation in the *Qurbana* is a vivid and splendid moment of recuperation and restoration of relationships, which is healing in effect.

Again the celebration of the *Qurbana* presupposes a corporeal act, which is highly symbolic and significant in extending an experience of healing. By a corporeal act I mean that the entire human body with its sense

organs takes part in the celebration. This does not mean that the other faculties of human beings are absent in the celebration. On the contrary, the other faculties come to realize their relatedness, wholeness, holiness and salvation in and through the body.⁹³

Moreover, it is *through our sense organs that we receive, register and retrieve wounds of different kinds and grades in our body*. Illness in any sector of human life will ultimately find its reflection or bearing on the human body. So also *healing should be corporeal in order to be total and integral*. The interesting aspect of the celebration of the *Qurbana* is that it offers abundant importance to the body and the senses.

The manifold elements of the celebration, such as, gestures, postures, greetings of peace, movements, processions, singing, the kissing of the cross and the lectionary, washing, incensing, light, the Communion, art and architecture, etc., make the *Qurbana* very celebrational and experiential. They offer the assembly a taste of life and healing.

In order to demonstrate the dynamism of healing in and through the celebration of the *Qurbana*, suffice to cite one of its orations, which marvelously manifests the importance and the experiential content of the celebration. After the Communion of the Mystery, the community of the faithful thankfully remembers the Lord for a continuity of the celebration in their daily life.

Strengthen, O Lord, the hands, which have been outstretched to receive the most Holy unto the forgiveness of sins. Make them worthy to bring forth fruits everyday for your divinity. Make the lips which have praised you within the sanctuary be worthy to sing your glory. Let not the ears, which have heard the sound of your praises, hear the voice of terror. Let the eyes, which have beheld your great mercy also behold the blessed hope, which is from you. Dispose the tongues, which have cried holy, for the speaking of truth. Make the feet, which have

⁹³The worth and sacramentality of human body is preeminently manifest in the mystery of Incarnation.

walked in the churches walk in the region of light. Renew the bodies, which have eaten your living Body unto new life. ...⁹⁴

In the above prayer, there is an extraordinary reiteration of healing and holiness in the celebration of the *Qurbana* through our senses, such as touch, taste, hearing, sight, smell, etc.⁹⁵ It is also made manifest that the community earnestly desires and implores to continue the healing and life-giving ministry in the whole world. This forms an essential and existential component of the ethos of the community, for the same pattern of healing reflects in the administration of the sacrament of the anointing of sick, as we have already noted in connection with the discussion of the sacrament of the anointing of sick.

Any healing, worthy of its name, comes through hearing, sight, touch, taste and smell. Modern healing therapies give greater importance to an integral yet corporeal dimension of the human person in the community. Here lies the importance of celebrational elements in imparting a holistic healing to the faithful. The above prayer, on the one hand, echoes the practice of the Church, though some of the above elements are not given proper attention in the present practice of the celebration, in the uprise of rational, intellectual and logical, abstract tendencies in the community, which indirectly, though unknowingly, perpetuates a compartmentalisation of thinking and living. On the other hand, it proposes and promotes fundamentals to life and healing, for almost all illness has its root in our senses or any wound enters into our body through words, look, touch, taste and smell. Logically speaking, any project of healing should take into consideration the human body and its senses. The above prayer is a witness and a promise of healing to Christians

Conclusion

In our discussion on healing through religious celebration we have seen that the celebration in the Church is not only concurrent with the

⁹⁴*The Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, 57-58.

⁹⁵It might be fascinating to recall the experience of the Evangelist who recounts his faith experience in *1 Jn* 1, 1-2, where he attests great significance to human sense organs.

original meaning of the word B to make whole, to become whole B but it also confers healing on the participants. The celebrations of the sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation, Anointing of the sick and the *Qurbana* bring to believers healing from their wounds and maintain them as one, whole and holy.

These sacramental celebrations reconcile, recuperate and restore the integral health of the believers in the context of the community with reference to their fundamental relationships with creation-humans-God.

The believers, in the celebration of the *Qurbana*, through their 'coming together,' their re-remembering of primordial, existential and eschatological realities and the Communion of the Mystery, are made healthy and happy. While the eucharistic Bread and Cup, "the Medicine of Life," heal the wounds of sins and give eternal life to the communicants, they, in turn, become a healing and life-giving presence in the world.

The celebration of the *Qurbana* calls the attention of the believers to heal the wounds of creation as well, which involves a translation of the mystery that is being celebrated in the temple in reference to creation and a mastery over oneself.

Different celebrational elements of the *Qurbana* forcefully communicate the significance of conscious, corporate and corporeal acts as effective and efficient channels of integral healing and the genuine health of a person in the Christian community.

Before I conclude this reflection, I would like to highlight another aspect of celebration and healing. It is about the interrelationship between celebration and healing. While healing leads to celebration, celebration can be a proclamation of the healing. On the one hand, celebration is a manifestation of healing received, and on the other, it is a healing celebration. That is to say, celebration heals and it celebrates life.

I wish to conclude with the parable of the prodigal son,⁹⁶ where we have a glimpse of healing in its subtlety. The younger son who went away

⁹⁶Lk 15, 11-32.

from his father, brother, friends, servants and land experiences isolation, illness, weakness and sinfulness in a foreign land among unknown people and away from his father. In his utter weakness, the prodigal son remembers the glory and splendour of his father's house, he decides to go back to his father and to ask pardon. The coming together or meeting of the lost son in the house of the father turns the atmosphere into celebration, which is simultaneously an expression of the healing and participation in new life. The father in the parable seems to say, "let us celebrate!" so as to remember, to have communion, which guarantees the experience of life and healing in the context of religious celebration.