## The Therapeutic Community of Edessa

A community can suffer the exact same things that individuals suffer - hunger, injustice, oppression, disease and death. A community can suffer large-scale death in war or plague. Indeed, as we well know, the current virus is oppressing humanity's global community.

In terms of faith, there is interdependence between the individual and the faith community. The Church cannot exist without individual Christians, and as St. Paul emphasizes, it is not possible to be a Christian without being part of the Body of Christ - the Church:

'For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were

so that I might praise Him with my name.
My limbs were strengthened ...
Infirmities fled from my body,
And it stood [my body] firm for the Lord by His will.' (Ode 8)

'I lifted up my arms on high on account of the compassion of the Lord.
And my helper lifted me up
According to His compassion and His salvation.
And I put off darkness
And put on light.
And I myself acquired limbs.
In them there was no sickness,
or affliction or suffering.' (Ode 21)

The author of the *Odes* believes that God permeates our existence the more we give ourselves to Him in worship, and that His healing affects our body and the disposition of our nature, bringing us peace and rest.

The Odes of Solomon are very early Syrian writings. As the Christian community grows, the emphasis on the worship and healing of the community itself becomes a dominant theme, like in *The Teachings of Adai* as we have already seen, and so also in the writings of St. Aphrahat the Persian Sage (c 280-c345): 'Give rest to the weary, visit the sick, provide for the poor: this is indeed prayer'.<sup>6</sup>

St. Aphrahat is so conscious of the individual's place in the body of the community, that he states that the believer needs to act to bring healing and comfort to others if he is to receive the healing and salvation of Christ.

In one of his hymns, the theological and literary 'giant', Saint Ephrem the Syrian, (c306-373) states -

'Stamp your footprints with visiting