

## Chapter-2

### Biblical Basis of Mission and its Theological Impacts

The following Gospel verses show how the disciples were instructed to continue the work of the kingdom of God.

Matt 28: 28-20 [AD 75]; Mark 16: 15-16 [AD 68]; Luke 24: 46-49 [AD 80]; Acts 1:18[AD 85]; John 20: 31 [AD 90]; John 21: 24.

Jesus said to his disciples, “If any one would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Matt 16: 25). Following the way of the cross is the mark of the discipleship. The fragrance of such a lifestyle will spread everywhere; it is like a sweet scented-flower. This vision is an important emphasis of the New Testament.

Interestingly, neither the word “mission” nor a word meaning mission is found in the bible. Mission is the gift of the colonial period; it has the flavour of colonialism and its domination; it has the characteristics of exploiting resources and destructing native cultures. Its primary aim was to Christianise non-Christian territories.

Witness and witnessing are words used in the New Testament for proclaiming the gospel. A witness who travels on the way of the cross may end up as a martyr. When God calls you for his mission, it is implied that you are called to die and become a martyr for Jesus. God called these chosen people, “You are my witnesses.”

#### Witnessing in the Old Testament:

In the Old Testament, punishments were handed out after obtaining testimony from witnesses during prosecution. If one had killed another, s/he accepted a death sentence on the basis of testimonies from witnesses. But no-one can be put to death on the testimony of only one witness (Num35: 30). The matter issue must be resolved by the testimony of two or three witnesses (Duet 9:15; Lev 5:1; Num 23:18). People sometime entered into contract with God as a witness. Yahweh was the witness for the covenant between Jacob and Laban (Gen31:44-47). God was the witness for the contract between David and Jonathan (1Sam 20: 23, 42). Even the ever seeing and ever knowing Yahweh will look at the witnesses’ role book when He pronounces His final judgement (Mal 3:5).

Second Isaiah gives us a different understanding in his description of Yahweh’s suffering servant (Is 43: 9-15): “All the nations gather together and the people assemble. Which of them foretold this and proclaimed to us the former things? Let them bring in their witnesses to prove they were right, so that others may hear and say, “It is true.” “You are my witness”, declares the Lord, “and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor there anyone after me. I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no saviour. I

have revealed, saved and proclaimed - I, am not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses," declares the Lord, "that I am God. Yes, from ancient days I am he. No-one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?"

God's intention was to use his servant Israel to bring all nations of the world under the knowledge and domain of the 'Law of the Lord.' In addition, the prophetic opinion was that the suffering of the servant was for redeeming the sins of others and to glorify God's name. God's lofty and unmatched expectation for Israel is totally and finally fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This great expectation and responsibility of Israel found its fulfilment in Jesus. The divine purpose revealed and expanded in the New Testament found its completion in the suffering servant hood of Jesus Christ. Israel's experience of saving acts of Yahweh is imprinted in the history and memory of Israel. They are the living witnesses of liberation from Egypt to Canaan, wandering through the deserts, miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, provision of food in manna, water from the rock and many other miracles over a forty year period; this was their real experience and no-one can deny this saving plan under any circumstance.

The servant hood of Israel was a means of bringing peoples and nations to Yahweh. Liberation and return from Babylonian exile was yet another example of God's saving plan and purpose for Israel; their history is a genuine record of God's action for liberating and saving them from bondage. Genuine people were witnesses to this saving plan. Therefore, these witnesses, their experiences, and convictions are important historical landmarks. According to Prophet Amos, the protection extended to Israel was not exclusive to them. "Are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites?" declares the Lord. "Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?" (Amos 9: 7).

God's actions of salvation are not meant for a particular nation or community. It is meant for the whole world, but only Israel realised that it was God's plan and it was meant for them. The exodus journey from Egypt included not only Israelites, but others as well who were under bondage together with them (Exo12: 37-38). Prophets testified that God has no partisanship or favouritism.

### **Witness in the New Testament:**

(There was a Church before the writings of the Old Testament.)

The New Testament is a record of witnesses of a living Church during the period AD 50 - AD125. This was indeed a period of great persecutions, prosecutions, and unimaginable tribulations. There was heretical teaching within the Church and also state-directed violence without. It is from this background that we should make sense of the verses quoted in the beginning of this chapter.

Church grew after the resurrection events of Jesus Christ. Church spread and grew as a faith community regionally, nationally, and trans-nationally under the tutelage and guidance of Apostles, driven by the Holy Spirit, and their co-workers. Church acquired specific and unique identities as Church in Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Ephesus and

so forth. Furthermore Church acquired other specific identities as Markan, Johannine and Pauline communities. In addition, Christians who lived under the influence of Hebrew culture in Palestine were known as Palestine Christian Community; Christians who lived under the Greek culture were known as Hellenistic Christian Community. Culturally and economically there were differences between these communities. But these aspects are not discussed in this review for the limitation of space. Most of the New Testament books were written under tremendous suffering, socio-economic problems, political turbulence, tribulations, trials and torture. Therefore, it is an authentically lived out and historically crafted experiential testimonial record of the early Church.

This being the case, the gospel of St. Matthew belonged to the Church for which he gave leadership. The command is to baptise everyone, teach what Jesus taught and then lead them to discipleship.

The term, “ethne” (all castes), has been translated to mean outcastes, which is not entirely correct. Ethnic community strictly means a community which shares a common language and a common cultural heritage. Countries similar to USA have many ethnic communities. The Divine ordinance was to make every baptised person a disciple of Christ. Those who take up the cross are the disciples. The witness of the community which has the vocabulary and grammar of the cross is very valuable. St. Matthew’s community was intimately integrated with the Palestine culture. Their lifestyle is recorded to a certain extent in the book of Acts. They had no deprivation. Believers pooled their resources including their birthrights and other possessions and the resulted common pot was used for the common good. Everyday they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with joyous and sincere hearts. They Praised God and enjoyed the grace and favour of all the people. The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2: 44-47).

St. Matthew’s community consisted of people who felt and followed the essence of the cross. They were the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt 5: 13, 14). Salt loses its outward texture to share its saltiness with others; light drives away darkness. Light is the antithesis of darkness. The disciples of the community of God share their lives with others like light and salt.

St. Matthew’s community offered their services to the poor (Matt 25: 31-44). The poor provide the passport to disciples for the kingdom of God. The entry to the kingdom of God is made possible through serving the least and the poor in the society and through building solidarity with them. It is through the medium of serving the poor that disciples share the grace of God. The poor become the sacramental elements through the grace of God.

St. Mathew’s community valued poor people with devotion and respect in a manner akin to the respect and devotion they owed to the ‘Holy Elements’ of sacraments. Communal life was their witness. As a result, people entered such communities with powerful and innate compulsion (Matt 11: 12).

Here is a real life anecdote to illustrate this from the history of the Church in the Indian State of Kerala. One of our “*achens*” (a Mar Thoma priest) was transferred to a parish; soon it was time for Onam (harvest) festivities. Evangelical work is an important event during the Onam period in the parish calendar of the Mar Thoma Church. When the committee met to chalk out the programme, our achen enquired about the preacher for that year’s Onam period. Then the question arose, “Who should be the preacher?” As this achen was new to the parish, the consensus was to ask the newly-arrived achen himself to be the preacher. But our achen graciously declined the honour and asked the parishioners to preach during the evangelical outreach meetings. The achen’s rationale was simply that it is the parishioners who had day-to-day interaction with other people in the community; it was the parishioners who were involved in buying and selling coconuts, peppercorns and other farm produces. Therefore, the achen’s logic was that people in the community would listen to parishioners more than anyone else because they did their daily dealings with the rest of the community. The achen insisted that people should listen to the preaching of the parishioners only. But no-one came forward to do the preaching as the new parish priest suggested. As a result, that year there was no evangelism during Onam festivals. In short, life-centred sermon should be our witness to communities.

St. Mark, St. Luke, St. John and the communities that they formed, nurtured, and represented provided Christian witnessing through their Christian lifestyles. For such witnessing they sacrificially dedicated their lives. Their blood seeded the Church and the Church grew.

St. Luke and St. John, who were witnesses themselves; have used the word ‘witness’ several times in their writings,.

Witness is a word used in legal practice and discourse. Eye witnesses, hearers to particular conversations, and participants in or parties to particular events make people witnesses. Witnessing is necessary for the execution of justice, as it reveals the truth and provides redemption.

**Witnessing in the Lukan communities played out in the following way:**

1. Witnessing through caring for the poor.

In St. Luke’s gospel the word poor is used in the context of economic poverty. Zacchaeus was voluntarily compelled to give half of his possessions to the poor in his encounter with Jesus. To that rich and young ruler Jesus said, “Sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven.” Wealth that is not shared with the poor brings danger to the rich. In Luke’s vision and Mary’s song we see, “He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.” Caring for the poor and the oppressed was an integral part of the witnessing of the Lukan community.

## 2. Witnessing through loving the enemy:

In Good Samaritan's parable Jesus answers the question, "Who is my neighbour?" Treating the enemy as a friend is an important and outstanding part of Jesus' teaching (Luke 10: 25-37).

## 3. Witnessing through gender equality:

Empowering through gender justice practices is a special aspect of Luke's gospel. We see women becoming disciples and women learning under the tutelage of Jesus Christ in this gospel. Women's partnership in building the kingdom is beautifully recorded here. Mary became a perfect model to everyone through her complete submission.

### **Witness in the Markan Community**

#### 1. Witnessing through servant hood:

It is St. Mark who presents Second Isaiah's model of the suffering servant in Jesus (Mark 10: 35-45). Jesus told his disciples, "Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be the first among you must be a slave of all." Son of God came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as ransom for liberating others from the bondage of sin. The suffering servant's picture is completed in Jesus. A witnessing community is a community which suffers for others.

#### 2. Witnessing by carrying the cross:

"Don't tell anyone" is a command that Jesus gave after performing all his miracles. It is commonly known as the 'Messiahic Secret.' It is through the cross of Jesus that we should see the miracles. The cross is indeed the greatest miracle. It is difficult to understand miracles fully without understanding the power and the centrality of the cross. The cross is the core of the Christian faith.

### **Witnessing of the Johannine Community**

The words, "witness" and "witnessing", are used 147 times in the New Testament, but we see this 77 times in St. John's writings. In St. John's gospel we read, "There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify the light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light....." Now this was John's testimony: "I have seen and I testify that this is the son of God." (John 1; 6-9; 19, 34).

The person who wrote John's gospel gives us the following pledge: "This is the same disciple who was an eye witness to all these things and wrote them down. And we all know his eyewitness account is reliable and accurate." (John 21: 24). Further we read,

“But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that by believing that you have life in his name.” (John 20: 31).

The introduction to St. John’s first letter is of importance in this context; it begins: ‘from the very first day, we were there, taking all in – we heard it with our own ears, saw it with our own eyes, and verified it with our own hands. The word of light appeared right before our eyes; we saw it happen! And now we are telling you in most sober prose that what we witnessed was, incredibly, this: the infinite life of God himself took shape before us. We saw it, we heard it, and now we are telling you so you can experience along with us the experience of communion with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ.’

Purposes of witnessing are as follows:

1. To have faith in Jesus
2. To have a faith that will lead to eternal and abundant life.
3. To have fellowship (koinonia) with the Father, the Son and the Church.
4. Jesus says that he came down to this earth in order to give people life, life in all its abundance; an abundant life is the purpose of witnessing.

Christian witnessing is based on the transformed lifestyles of life-centred witnesses; the way they lived was their witness. The important subject of St. John’s gospel is life. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”(John 3:16). It is love that makes life abundant. We know what love is because Jesus laid down his life for us (I John 3:16). Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only as a single seed. But if it dies, it produces a harvest (John 12: 24). Whoever believes in the Son has life; whoever rejects the Son, rejects life (1 John 5:12). Life is a gift, not only human life. Eternal life is noble, best and qualitatively excellent; death has no domain over it. The quality of life can be enriched through abiding in Christ (John 15; 1), by knowing him (John 17: 3) and in believing in him (John 3:16). Jesus’ life is the eternal life. He lived thirty three and a half years in his earthly body. Therefore, eternity is possible in this earthly body; it continues after death; this reality cannot be destroyed by death. Thus, the power of witnessing has the strength to fight death, which blocks eternal life. A robust, endless, lifestyle against the forces of death is unavoidable. The cross is the inevitable consequence of this ministry; we shall be discussing this later on.

Witnessing in the Acts of the Apostles:

Mission is, in fact, the predominant message of the Acts. When the resurrected Christ says “You are my witnesses,” what are we witnesses to? A witness to the event of resurrection was elected for the apostolic ministry in the place of Judas as the eleventh Apostle (Acts 1: 22). The following texts reveal the marks and characteristics of witnesses:

Acts: 2: 32; 3:15; 4:33; 5: 29-32; 6: 3; 7; 8; 9: 10-11; 9: 13-28.

**Life sustaining Factors:**

Circumstances:

Lord God who created life provided everything needed for sustaining it. God planted a garden, Eden, in the east. He took the man he created and put him in the garden to work and take care of it. The Garden of Eden was very fertile, had trees, shrubs, orchards, streams and rivers. Careful resource management was essential for sustaining life and for providing the custodianship of the garden. Earth, water and air are essential elements for sustaining life (Gen 2: 4-7).

**The situation of the kingdom of God:**

Life is only sustainable in an environment of justice, peace and happiness. In addition, the fruit of the Spirit, love, should overflow so that people can enjoy the abundance of life. To enjoy the abundance of life one should have other components of love such as joy, peace, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, and self control. All Divine commandments are enclosed in this.

These are essentials for sustaining a healthy life in the community. God's kingdom is just, peaceful and happy. Interestingly, the root derivation of the Hebrew word, "justice", is relationship. Justice is maintaining good relationship with God, humankind, and nature. It is only in this we find tranquillity and joy. To put it differently, peace is another word for salvation, which is the same as everlasting life. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God."(Matt 5: 9).

The kingdom of God which Jesus proclaimed is an inclusive one. God is not rejecting anyone (Matt 13: 31-32; 47-48). The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest garden plant so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches. Jesus told them yet another parable: "The Kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough." The purpose is to achieve the fullness of the kingdom of God through the transformation of the whole society. Abundant life is possible in transformed communities. God's kingdom is a treasure; it is like a fishnet cast into the sea, catching all kinds of fish; it is like a jewel merchant on the lookout for excellent pearls. He gathers noble and valuable things from everywhere as part of God's kingdom.

**Secular witness of the Church:**

The Church and the society should be secular; secular does not mean irreligious. On the other hand, it should be considered a pilgrim community walking together for the fullness of truth with mutual respect and understanding. One of the problems today is the loss of secular witnessing of the Church. This should not be taken to mean that churches are devoid of humanitarian concerns. A significant feature of Reformation was the

transformation that occurred when the church and society came together; this process should continue for ever.

Salvation is the central theme of the bible. Freedom, justice, peace, redemption, equality, and happiness are familiar words used in the secular society. Christians, Jews, Greeks, Romans, Muslims, Hindus and agnostics/atheists also use these words. But today some of these words have become exclusive to churches and church-related people. Finding a secular resonance in these words is part of Christian witnessing. For example, starting a conversation on peace and justice and co-operating with enforcing agents or agencies of Hindus, Muslims or atheists for achieving these objectives is witnessing. All efforts for establishing peace, justice and meeting the existential needs of the victims of society are services orientated to God's kingdom.

God used the Persian king Koresh, Cyrus the Great, for delivering Israelites from the Babylonian exile, but Koresh did not know that God was using him. However, Cyrus is named in the bible as Messiah by second Isaiah (Is 45). God uses people for his work who do not know him. Pharaoh's daughter and her maids were used for rescuing infant Moses from the river Nile. There is no-one that God cannot use. But people usually do not realise that God is using them for his purpose. United Nations' peace initiatives, the International Court of Justice, and governmental / non-governmental agencies (NGOs) working for justice and uplifting the poor from their poverty and misery are providing service on behalf of God's kingdom. It is because of this that we include these agencies in our prayers of 'Great Intercession' every Sunday.

Missionary Societies did not start educational institutions exclusively for Christians. Education, which is the foundation of liberation, was provided by missionaries without any consideration for caste or creed. At an age when poor sections of the community were prevented from acquiring knowledge, at a time when the ears of the lower caste people were blocked with molten lead, missionaries provided them education and taught them the Bible. During a period of aggressive class-riddled segregation, missionary endeavours helped to create a casteless society through witnessing of the church. And these efforts were transformed into social reformation. These created a real sense of human rights, human freedom, and human dignity. The Gospel enlightened the kindred spirits of Sri Naraya Guru and Ayankali, and they became voices of the voiceless and the oppressed people of Kerala. Together with them Communist institutions and their leaders such as A K Gopalan, E M S Namboodiripad, and C. Achutha Menon came forward to fight for social justice. We are fortunate in having had and continuing to have a very long list of social reformers and fighters for all kinds of freedoms for liberating mankind from the shackles of oppression and injustice.

The roll call of such people include: Modpudkar, Baba Amthe, Ambedkar, C. K. Janu, Laha Gopalan, Gandhi, Nehru, Lal Bahadur Sastri, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Jaya Prakash Narayan, and M. P. Manmadhan. All these people were servants of God and in the service of God's kingdom. Having a commitment for protecting and respecting life together with helping to find abundance of life are all part of witnessing. All who are engaged in authentic witnessing were challenged with death, threats of all

kinds and humiliation. When the Church hesitates to intervene, God finds others. Transcending barriers and divisions such as parties, affiliations, castes and such things, God uses them for his purpose: to heal a fractured world.

Interacting with other people, in the secular stage, who work for peace and justice is a mutually enriching experience. The lifestyle-based, as opposed to the “message-based” witness of a follower of Jesus will affect others. Their own life will be challenged. This kind of witnessing will lead others to God. This does not mean that one person is rendered more complete or made better than the other. Instead they will be able to understand and correct each other. Thus, they will nurture each other and grow together. In such a situation energies from all sources will flood us and help us to become virtuous and grow in goodness. This will bring unity.

Seeking for the theological understanding with other religions does not mean that we should accept all different theological assertions. Instead, we should accept what we can, but develop a respect for what we cannot. As a result, we will have a harmonious interrelated theology. Living in harmony or unity is witnessing. Inter religious dialogue and interaction may lead to the following four advantages: 1) mutual influence; 2) mutual correction; 3) mutual growth; 4) mutual transformation.

All the above advantages were captured in the vision of St. Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10, 11). Both St. Peter and Cornelius had a change of mind and transformation. Following this the whole Church had a transformation (Acts 11). Peter now realised that God does not show any favouritism, but accepts men/women from every nation who fear him and do what is right (Acts 11: 34, 35).

Do we accept people who are accepted by God? The recorded vision of a huge blanket with all kinds of animals lowered by ropes on four corners and the command to Peter to “kill and eat” was a severe challenge to Apostles and the Church (Acts 10: 9-22). Witnessing is not denying others, but accepting them. The Palestinian church and its leader, Peter, were strict in observing laws and sacraments literally. They worshipped in the Temple with Jews. Peter told the people assembled in Cornelius’ house, “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean” (Acts 10:28). Peter’s courage to have obedience to this new vision was a milestone in the growth of the Church.

St. Peter became the early bird in this new sky. This vision challenged the caste system of Kerala and India. Doesn’t this vision include the pronouncement (Do not ask anyone his caste) of Guru Narayana? Isn’t the assertion, whatever is the religion, man should become better, another gospel truth? It doesn’t matter who mills the rice as long as it is polished and white. The true light that gives light to everyman was coming into the world (Acts 1:10). John was talking about the light that was there before the incarnation of Jesus. People who follow that light are following Jesus. There are thousands of followers of Jesus in India without knowing this fact. God has delegated us, the Church, to carry the cross with the oppressed victims of society as fellow travellers.

Jesus Christ and the Father will listen to the prayer of a member of any caste, because there is only one God. Does God listen to only the prayers from Christians? Certainly not! God has given us a mandate to break away from old (out of context) God-given instructions in the light of current theological vision. The yardstick for achieving this should become a noble thing for man. Breaking such prejudices, Peter visiting Cornelius, was only possible for Peter, thanks to the special nature of Peter's witnessing.

### **Eucharistic lifestyle:**

The first reference to the Eucharist (Holy Communion) in the Bible is in St. Paul's second letter to Corinthians chapter 11 verses 23 onwards. Paul wrote this letter around AD 54. Paul might have received this information from the Antiochan Church. He might be quoting this section from the liturgy of the Antiochan Church. "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took the bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."(I Cor 11: 23-25). Here we are entering the highest pinnacle of Jesus' service. This is the experience of breaking his body and shedding his blood. He is becoming the highest and unequalled sacrifice. There is no sacrifice equal to this. Serving till the end, and giving away his life as a ransom for many is love's most transparent revelation and sacrifice. Through this sacrifice God introduced redemption for our sins.

Paul continues the discussion on the body in the twelfth chapter of his first letter to Corinthians. The body is one unit, though it is made up of many parts; and although all its parts are many, they are from one body. So it is with Christ. "For we were baptised by one Spirit into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, bonded or free - and we were all given one Spirit to drink." (1 Cor12: 12-13). The Church is the body of Christ. Members of the Church are parts of Christ's body and related to each other in that mode, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. There are many parts, but one body (Vs 20; Eph 1: 23). Where is the broken body today? When we participate in the Holy Communion we are historically submitting ourselves to be broken. The Eucharist will become meaningful when we use our sacrifices, trials, tribulations and difficulties for the redemption of the whole world.

Bearing the cross and witnessing are synonymous. The lifestyle of the cross is a Eucharistic lifestyle. Witnesses are to model the lifestyle of the cross, because it is the way to which all disciples are called. Have we lost today the art of living for others and becoming everything to others without others expecting such things of us? If we have lost it then we (the Church) are duty-bound to redeem it.

Let us think of another unforgettable scene in the Bible. Pouring water into the basin and wrapping a towel round his waist to wash and dry his disciples' feet is a lifestyle which returns one to repentance. 'The son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' (Mark 10: 45). Power, honour, position, titles, miracle-making, miraculous healing, wealth and importance are the marks of worldly rulers. Jesus told his disciples: 'You should not be like them. Whoever wants to be the first must become your servant.' The lifestyle of Jesus Christ's cross is sacrifice, suffering, denying self to reach out to others, redemption, patience, and kindness.

St. Paul, the servant, who was imprisoned in Christ, traces his autobiography along the following line: "I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with a rod; once I was stoned; three times I was ship-wrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, and I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own country men, in danger from Gentiles; in danger from the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have laboured and toiled and often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Beside everything else, I face daily pressure of my concern for all the churches." (2 Cor 11: 23-28). Paul says, "That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weakness, in insults, in hardships, in persecution, in difficulties. For when I am weak I am strong." (2 Cor 12: 10).

Paul is going through an experience of being shattered and broken down; His lifestyle is this utter brokenness. In John's gospel we read how resurrected Jesus is showing the disciples his hands, and sides. The nail marks are still there in the body of the resurrected Jesus. The world will continue to see the nail marks on the Church, which is the body of the resurrected Jesus. It was recorded that all the Church leaders who attended the Nicenean Synod had deformities due to their persecutions. The way of the suffering is the way of witnessing.

Witnessing is about taking up the cross, which is indeed the foundation and the essence of Christian witnessing. Jesus asked of those who wanted to be his disciples: "If anyone wishes to come after me", he said, "He must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Cross is the path of love.

To the discerning eye, it is easy to see that all the three temptations that Satan presented Jesus with are actually against taking up the cross or against self-denying love. The tempter came to Jesus and said, "If you are the son of God, turn these stones into bread." Making bread without the sweat of the brow, without effort, work and suffering is satanic. He did not make bread out of stones, but he himself became the true bread for the world on the cross. All easy ways and short cuts are satanic.

The second temptation was proclaiming the kingdom through a circus act, a stunt. Jesus was told that nothing will happen to him if he were to jump from the pinnacle of the tower of the Temple to the depth, 300 feet, of Kidron valley. The devil guaranteed that an

angel will protect him. Jesus rejected the offer and became a miracle on the cross. The cross is the greatest miracle the world has seen. When Jesus died on the cross, the centurion confessed, "Surely he was the son of God!" What a miracle! Miracle was bearing suffering and facing difficulties.

At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns in prison; at once all prison doors flew open. Assuming that all the prisoners had escaped, the jailer pulled out his sword and was about to do himself in. At that moment Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" The jailer was astonished and wondered why they did not escape: what kind of a faith is this, which prevents prisoners from escaping when the prison doors are wide open and unguarded in the middle of the night? He was astonished. Had they escaped, he would be put to death instead of them.

They didn't escape for the sake of the jailer. This made the jailer ask the question, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Cross was thus the wonder.

The third temptation of Jesus was the offer of worldly powers; the whole world, for what appeared to be small gesture, Jesus rejected that offer too, and instead accepted the position of a servant. "Whoever wants to become great among you must become your servant. Son of man didn't come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10: 35-45).

St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians relates the power of the cross in the following terms: "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all surpassing power is from God and not from us..... We always carry around us in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body." Here the word death (nekros) is used to indicate the bearing of the cross. To reveal Jesus' life in our mortal body we carry Jesus' death always in our body. We carry in our body sufferings, difficulties, trial, and torture to make Jesus' life to that extent evident in us. Life is eternal power; it is an investment and a treasure. (2Cor 4: 7-9); In Colossians we read, "Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the Church. (Col 1: 24). Peter wrote, "Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body has done with sin." (1 Peter 4: 1). Never quit the sufferings of the cross, accept them joyfully for glorifying God and becoming his witness. Where we talk about 'clouds of witnesses' (Heb12:1-2), we are talking about people who entered eternity after enduring torture and sufferings.

Dose the present generation distance themselves from the sacrifice and suffering of the cross? Do the activities of Charismatic institutions and God-men try to remove sufferings and difficulties? If those were to be so then those are satanic plots.

Carrying the cross is witnessing; we must fast and pray for receiving the courage/ honour to bear the cross. Jesus' prayer at Gethsemane reveals to us this great truth.

## **Life threatening Powers:**

### 1. Environmental Problems:

It is God's wish to protect and nurture all his creation. The beautiful world that God created has been disfigured by man through his disobedience and greed. Although it happened through man's actions or inactions, it is in partnership with man that God is repairing the damage and continuing the restoration. Deforestation and industrialisation increase the carbon dioxide content of the atmosphere. Because of the 'greenhouse effect' and Global warming, glacial ice sheets melt to increase the sea levels. And because of the holes in the ozone layers dangerous ultraviolet rays enter the atmosphere. Consequently, *the* atmosphere, which is essential for sustaining life in this planet, is polluted. The excessive use of chemical fertilizers is destroying earthworms and other mutually benefiting ecological systems for enriching the fertility of the earth. As a result the earth is becoming infertile. Industrial wastes and other effluents are polluting life sustaining water, which is used for drinking, bathing and irrigation. The water in all forty-four rivers in Kerala has been polluted. As earth, water and air are essential for sustaining life, polluting these is an unforgivable challenge against life; it is murder of the first degree. Therefore, protecting the environment is witnessing.

## **Religious Fundamentalism and Fanaticism:**

Religious fundamentalism and fanaticism, some maintain, have killed more people than the two world wars. Instead of destroying each other with religious rivalry and warring, there is a need to increase unity for our peaceful co-existence, unity in our diversities. Christian religious fundamentalism is a challenge to life itself. For witnessing it is necessary to have increased trust and unity between faith communities. We need to re-engage and continue conversations with other religions and our sister churches. The witnessing mission of the Church is to follow the lifestyle of the cross in the context of respecting differences and accepting pluralities. Wars of the crosses in the style of the crusades are not suitable for the Indian culture or Christian witnessing. It destroys witnessing. Together with other faith communities we should seek secular values and at the same time values rooted in God's Kingdom such as justice, peace, joy, love, tolerance, sacrifice, kindness, and control over sexual proclivities. In other words, to witness is to search for the eternal truths of the Kingdom of God, and become partners in fighting for common Christian causes, celebrating festivals together and working for re-establishing and sustaining the integrity of creation. Thus, acknowledging the presence of God in other religious-faith traditions is included in the area of witnessing.

## **Corrupted-Nationalism and Nationalised-corruption:**

India is considered to be one of the advanced democratic nations of the world. After her independence, in scientific and industrial arenas and in the field of agriculture, she has made many achievements. True, all these are important factors for sustaining life. But corrupted nationalism and nationalised corruption have stained our democratic

credentials. All political parties have sent criminals to our parliaments. This is a challenge to democracy. According to one source of statistics, 29% of our Members of Parliament are people who committed crimes and offences. 153 out of 534 the Members of Parliament have been found guilty in criminal cases. The conflicts and causes behind their crimes were not political rivalries but conflicts of interest in the sector of organised crimes. Further, the number of millionaires in the parliament has increased. But none of these is a credit to democracy. For, tragically, those who committed themselves to protecting life have indeed become destroyers of life; they are gatekeepers who became poachers.