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# Four Correlations of the Revelation of God and the Witness of God

ARTHUR M. VINCENT

Christian scholars of many ages have often found "the revelation of God" and "the witness of God" among the major concepts needing study and application to their times. Modern theologians, under the influence especially of Karl Barth, have shown some of the depth and breadth of these topics. Now the Second Vatican Council with its pronouncements, including the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, has brought these subjects into the limelight for current consideration.

Leaders and members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod need especially to study the revelation of God and the witness of God. In comparison with other Scriptural teachings of the Christian church, these subjects have received very little emphasis in our early history and even to the present time. We have usually subordinated study of the revelation of God to study of the doctrines of Holy Scripture and inspiration.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore,

<sup>1</sup> In his *Christian Dogmatics* Francis Pieper has no section on *De Revelatione* but devotes 150 pages to *De Scriptura Sacra*. He writes one short paragraph on revelation in a section which introduces the doctrine of God. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), I, 371. E. Eckhardt in his *Homiletisches Reallexikon* does not list a single article or monograph under *Offenbarung*. Fred Kramer presented a more extended discussion of the paucity of major works on these subjects in his paper "The Biblical View of the Revelation of God," presented at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Nov. 28, 1966.

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we have consistently exhorted our people in publications and preaching to be Christian witnesses, but we find an astonishing dearth of major exegetical and systematic treatment of the Christian witness.<sup>2</sup>

Even if our own needs and interests had led us previously to delve deeply into the revelation of God and the witness of God, our swiftly moving times and currents of theological discussion today would lead us to rethink these subjects and reapply them to our own lives, individually and collectively. We can now proceed to draw some correlations between the two concepts and receive further insight and motivation for carrying out the mission of God in our time.

## I

To lay a foundation for any correlations between revelation and witness we need to turn briefly to definitions of these terms.

Scripture uses a considerable variety of terms for revelation. In this paper we shall be concerned primarily with two terms: ἐπιφάνεια and ἀποκάλυψις.<sup>3</sup> While we may have some difficulty with the terminology, Scripture leaves no doubt

<sup>2</sup> Richard R. Caemmerer's *The Church in the World* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1949) first introduced the author to the potential of the Christian witness Biblical materials. The latter's own series of articles on "The Christian Witness" appeared in the *American Lutheran*, XL—XLI (November 1957 to November 1958).

<sup>3</sup> Other terms for revelation are: φανέρωσις, δρᾶμα, ὀπτασία, and λόγος.



about the fact of revelation and its importance in the plan of God.

As a religious term, ἐπιφάνεια, "appearing" or "appearance," means

a visible manifestation of a hidden divinity either in the form of a personal appearance, or by some deed of power by which its presence is made known. In [the New Testament and early Christian] literature, it is used only of Christ's appearance on earth.<sup>4</sup>

In the New Testament ἀποκαλύπτειν, "to reveal, disclose, bring to light," is always used of God's act of revealing and never in a human or a secular sense.<sup>5</sup> ἀποκαλύπτειν stresses an impartation not of knowledge or formulated doctrines, but rather God disclosing and communicating Himself to men. Albrecht Oepke, for example, summarizes the New Testament usage of this word:

In the New Testament, too, revelation denotes, not the impartation of knowledge, but the actual unveiling of intrinsically hidden facts, or theologically, the manifestation of transcendence within immanence. . . . It is the turning of the holy and gracious God to men who are lost in sin and death. This is prepared in the salvation history of the Old Testament and actualised in the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It now awaits its consummation at the *parousia*.

<sup>4</sup> William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 304. Arndt cites 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 1:10; 4:1, 8. The verb ἐπιφάνειν also refers to the appearance of God or of His grace and love. (Titus 2:11; 3:4)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 91. See also Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), pp. 53, 198.

By derivation, however, revelation is also the message which transmits this content. It is the effective transmission of it to the hearer.<sup>6</sup>

As God reveals and gives Himself to people, He also makes known His will and gives gracious promises. These call for a response of faith and obedience from men.<sup>7</sup>

We turn now to define "witness." Our English word "witness" comes from an Old English verb *witan*, which means "to know." A witness knows and can testify because he knows from first-hand experience, usually from seeing and hearing. We find this usage often in the Bible. For example, Ananias said to the blinded Saul:

The God of our fathers appointed you to *know* His will, to *see* the Just One, and to *hear* a voice from His mouth; for you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have *seen* and *heard*. (Acts 22: 14-15)

For the Biblical terminology we shall restrict our consideration to μάρτυς, μαρ-

<sup>6</sup> Albrecht Oepke, *καλύπτω*, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, III (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), 591. This dictionary will hereafter be referred to as TDNT. In discussing the Old Testament usage Oepke also stresses that revelation is not "the impartation of supernatural knowledge or the excitement of numinous feelings" but in the proper sense "it is the action of Yahweh. It is the removal of his essential concealment, his self-offering for fellowship." (P. 573)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 573. Theodore Crustion Vriezen makes this same point in his *Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), pp. 242—43. See also Fred Kramer's definition: "Revelation in the most proper sense is the revelation of a personal God to human persons in words and acts. It is a revelation, not of a set of formulated doctrines, but of the person and will of God, made known in command and promise." (Op. cit., p. 43)



τυρεῖν, μαρτυρία, μαρτύριον, and μαρτύρομαι.<sup>8</sup>

μάρτυς would seem to come from the root *smere*, to bear in mind, to remember, to be careful. "The μάρτυς was probably one who remembers, who has knowledge of something by recollection, and who can thus tell about it, that is the witness."<sup>9</sup> Karl Barth relates witness to recollection:

The event of revelation has a definite time which precedes it and a definite time which follows it. There is an expectation and there is a recollection of revelation. The subject of both is the same, Jesus Christ . . . prophets and apostles are called to witness to the fullness of time. Prophets witness to a future event, apostles to an accomplished one.<sup>10</sup>

William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich give the following definitions for μαρτυρέω:

1. Active

- a) bear witness, be a witness
- b) bear witness to, declare, confirm
- c) testify favorably, speak well of, approve of
- d) be a witness (unto death), be martyred

2. Passive

- a) be witnessed, have witness borne by someone
- b) be well spoken of, be approved.<sup>11</sup>

Strathmann presents two possibilities for the meaning of μαρτυρία. The secondary noun μαρτυρία, whether referred to μάρ-

<sup>8</sup> Hermann Strathmann has done a definitive study of these words and their compounds in TDNT, IV, 474—514.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., IV, 475.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted by Kramer, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Arndt-Gingrich, pp. 493—94.

τυς or μαρτυρεῖν, has in the first instance, like most nouns, an abstract significance: the bearing of witness. But it can then mean the witness thus borne.<sup>12</sup>

The New Testament uses μαρτυρία of the testifying as well as of the testimony, whether used in a court of law or in religious matters. μαρτυρία describes both the witness of people to Jesus, for example John the Baptist, and to Jesus' testimony concerning Himself.<sup>13</sup>

Further, Strathmann draws the fine line between μαρτυρία and μαρτύριον by observing that μαρτύριον stresses that which serves as testimony or proof:

Unlike μαρτυρία, μαρτύριον does not mean the process of giving testimony. Even in witness we are to think less of the content than of the fact that the objective testimony, whether it be an object, act or utterance, is primarily a means of proof.<sup>14</sup>

μαρτύρομαι adds the note of demand, affirmation, or warning *emphatically*. Our preaching and admonition, like that of the apostles and early believers, might very well take on this note as we witness to one another.<sup>15</sup>

If with these meanings in mind a Christian witness is an eyewitness, how can you and I or any believer today consider ourselves witnesses? Mrs. Gertrude Schmidt of St. Trinity-by-the-Expressway says wistfully: "I wish I could have seen Jesus with

<sup>12</sup> Strathmann, p. 475.

<sup>13</sup> Arndt-Gingrich, p. 495.

<sup>14</sup> Strathmann, p. 502. Arndt-Gingrich adds under μαρτύριον: "That which serves as testimony or proof, consisting of an action, a circumstance or a thing that serves as a testimony. This may be also a spoken or written statement." (P. 494)

<sup>15</sup> Strathmann, p. 511.



my own eyes and talked to him. Then I could tell what I had seen and heard, like the fisherman who followed Jesus. But I haven't seen or heard him in person, so I can't witness."

Strathmann has given the author a new insight into the use and development of the witness concept which will help us see a long line of witnesses from the apostles to and including Mrs. Schmidt and ourselves. Both non-Biblical and Biblical language show witness used in a broader meaning than the legal sense. The legal sense of witness to ascertainable facts widens and we find another meaning: "witness to truths, the making known and confessing of convictions." This second meaning — not a secondary one, notice — is "the proclamation of a view or truth of which the speaker is convinced. It thus relates to things which by their very nature cannot be submitted to empirical investigation."<sup>16</sup>

In the Old and New Testaments, thus, witness may mean both a witness to facts and a witness to one's convictions as to the truth of the facts. St. Luke has this latter sense for witness, a combination of witness to facts and witness in the sense of evangelistic confession. Consider Luke 24:44 ff., for example. The risen Savior eats with His disciples and opens their minds to understand the Scriptures. Luke's accounts deal with the facts of Christ's death and resurrection, and he treats the latter as no less a fact than the former. But the witness Jesus commanded includes the *significance* of these facts: that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. (Luke 24:47)

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 478, 489.

This [significance] too is from God's standpoint a fact. But it is a fact on a different level from the facts in the story of Jesus. It cannot be confirmed by witnesses; it can only be believed and then attested by proclamation. . . . The declaration of specific facts and the believing, confessing, evangelizing confession of their significance are indissolubly united in the concept of witness. The witness to the facts and the witness to truth are one and the same — the unavoidable result of the fact that the Gospel represents a historical revelation.<sup>17</sup>

After the apostles had died God raised up other witnesses, who had never seen Jesus with their physical eyes or heard the sound of His voice beating on their ears. This new line of witnesses, however, believed although they did not see, and God continued to use their witness and testimony as one of His vehicles for leading others to faith (Luke 1:1-4). One can tell Mrs. Schmidt, therefore, that the New Testament calls her a witness just as it does James and John and Peter.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 492. Again, "seen from the standpoint of faith this content of the Gospel is a fact. God has established it. But it is a fact of higher order which cannot be observed and attested like other facts of earthly occurrence. If the witness refers to this, it becomes a witness to revealed and believed truth. The factual witness in the popular sense becomes evangelistic confession" (ibid., p. 497). For an example of witness to faith and conviction in the Old Testament, Strathmann discusses Is. 43:9-13 and 44:7-11, the trial of the nations. (Ibid., p. 484)

<sup>18</sup> Fred Kramer feels that "it is useful to distinguish between objective and subjective revelation, understanding by objective revelation the revelatory activity of God, and by subjective revelation the appropriation of the objective revelation of God in faith. This distinction helps to preserve the concept of prophets and apostles as the recipients of the objective revelation of God" (op. cit., p. 43). Fact-witness and



By now, no doubt, you have begun to see the remarkable correlation between the revelation of God and the witness of God. Consider Acts 9, for example, and notice how the four steps in the pattern of revelation mentioned above (communication from God to man, a command from God, a promise from God, and man's response) find their parallel in the witnessing process. The Lord Jesus communicated with Saul; he heard Jesus' voice. Witness was both implicit and explicit in the command and promise: He was to rise, to go to the city, for he was God's chosen instrument to witness to Christ before Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel (9:15; 22:15,21). The response was baptism and immediate proclamation of his witness that Jesus was the Son of God. (9:18,20)

Indeed, at the great Pentecost of the Gentiles recorded in Acts 10, we have again such a close correlation that witness accompanies and parallels revelation. God communicates and testifies to both Cornelius and Peter through visions and trances and the Spirit talking to them. He commands a message sent to invite Peter to Caesarea; He commands Peter's acceptance. He does not state but certainly implies blessings both to Peter and Cornelius when they came together. They responded and 10 men made round trips of 54 miles (10:7; 11:12), and when they arrived, Peter witnessed to the impartiality of God and His love for all men in Christ

faith-in-the-facts witness help preserve the same distinction. The eyewitnesses, the apostles, testify to facts which God revealed once and for all in Christ Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Their successors received this witness in faith and from faith spoke it for faith in others. In this way the unique witness of the apostles continued throughout the history of the Christian church.

Jesus (10:34 ff.). Then the Spirit-filled Gentiles realize the promise implied in the command: they, too, begin to witness in worship and know the joys of Holy Baptism. (10:44 ff.)

## II

Out of the many possible correlations of the witness of God and the revelation of God, we shall consider these four:

- A. Both are God-centered; in both God is the subject and object.
- B. Both have as goal a faith which involves fellowship of God with man and man with man.
- C. Both call for an obedient faith, a response by the whole person in deed and word.
- D. Both call for urgency and highest priorities.<sup>19</sup>

### A

God stands as the subject of both revelation and witness. The Triune God takes the initiative and communicates Himself to men, not because they expect it or deserve it, but because of His own good and gracious will. Man does not search out God, find Him, and introduce himself to his God. Rather, the hidden God discloses Himself to man, who otherwise would not know Him as He is. Perhaps that is why, as Alan Richardson observes, the New Testament never uses ἀποκαλύπτειν (to un-

<sup>19</sup> Other correlations of revelation and witness which occurred to the author are: Both are world centered, that is, intended for all people. Both move centrifugally yet flexibly to carry their patterns or processes and to attain their goal. Both meet with tough opposition, and the costs and losses are high. Both generally are effective in the face of opposition. Both communicate clearly, yet retain an element of paradox and mystery. Both confront us with awe-inspiring responsibilities and promises.



veil) in the everyday, literal sense, but only as a technical, theological term. "In the New Testament it is always used of God's act of revealing and is never used in a human or secular sense."<sup>20</sup>

Man sees, hears, and knows God, who reveals Himself. The Father reveals the Son (Matt. 17:1 ff.; 16:15-17); the Son reveals the Father (Matt. 11:27; John 1:18; 14:8-9), and the Holy Spirit also acts as Revealer. (Acts 2; John 14:26)<sup>21</sup>

Notice again the complete correlation of revelation of God and the witness of God, for Scripture presents the Triune God also as the One who witnesses to men. Awesome indeed that God moves in revelation to give Himself in communion with men. Yet too often men do not listen; they listen and soon forget. Then God starts witnessing to them. Amazing! God throws Himself into the task of self-witness to enable men to see (again) and hear and live. He puts Himself on a cosmic witness stand, as it were, and under oath swears to the truth. We swear by God to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. God swears by Himself, the Truth, to show his earnestness. "As I live, saith the Lord," appears again and again in the Bible.<sup>22</sup> To help Abraham accept the testimony of the Gospel promise, "In thy seed [Christ] all the nations of the earth shall be blessed," God swore by two immutable things, by Himself and His faithfulness. (Heb. 6:13, 17)

<sup>20</sup> *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), pp. 53—54.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31—34, 40.

<sup>22</sup> For example, God uses this phrase 14 times in Ezekiel alone: 14:16, 18, 20; 16:48; 17:16, 19; 18:3; 20:3, 31; 33:11; 34:8; 35:6, 11.

Paralleling revelation, we find the Holy Trinity and each person in the Trinity as Witness. As the apostles spoke a bold witness also, "the Lord bore witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands."<sup>23</sup>

The Father is subject of witness, for He testifies to the Son (John 8:17); He anoints Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power (Acts 10:38). The Son bears witness to Himself (John 8:17). Jesus went about doing good; He was the true and faithful Witness (Rev. 1:5; 3:14). In His ministry He testified to what He had seen and heard from God, His Father (John 3:11; 15:15). Before Pontius Pilate He witnessed a good confession (1 Tim. 6:12; John 18:27). Finally He gave the blood-witness; He sealed the testimony of His life with His innocent suffering and death.<sup>24</sup>

The Holy Spirit witnesses. What a subject: the Spirit of truth (1 John 5:7), the Spirit of the heavenly Father (Matt. 10:20)! In times of persecution when they were flogged and dragged before governors and kings, the Holy Spirit would give them the testimony to speak. To equip them for those experiences, Jesus promised to send the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, from the Father, who would testify of Jesus the Christ (John 15:26). The Acts of the

<sup>23</sup> Acts 14:3. Sometimes it is not clear whether "Lord" refers to God (Yahweh) or Jesus Christ as Lord. But in either case it is God as subject of the witness. (Cp. also Acts 10:38 ff.)

<sup>24</sup> In Revelation the phrase "the witness of Jesus" or "of Jesus Christ," found six times, is a subjective genitive. This phrase along with "Word of God" is a "plerophoric expression of the Christian revelation in general." "The Word of God and the witness of Jesus Christ are inseparably interwoven." (Strathmann, p. 500)



Apostles is really the book of the Acts of the Holy Spirit as He personally and actively directs the evangelism program, first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles.<sup>25</sup>

The concept of the witness of God also relates at times to the Holy Scriptures. For example, the word μάρτυς appears in a small group of passages with Scripture and the Holy Spirit as the subject of a judgment given. Witness can mean in such cases "to declare emphatically on the basis of existing authority."<sup>26</sup> For example, the writer to the Hebrews often quotes the Old Testament Scriptures and introduces them with the phrase: "It is testified. . . ." In Heb. 10:15 the writer says that the Holy Spirit bears witness with him and then quotes Jer. 31:33! (Cp. Heb. 7:8.) Both Peter (Acts 10:43) and St. Paul (Rom. 3:21; Acts 26:22) insisted they were testifying and witnessing to the same things that Moses and the prophets had written in the Scriptures.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> A study of the functions which are part of God's mission all show the same God-centeredness, for God comes as proclaimer (κήρυξ), minister (διάκονος), evangelist (εὐαγγελιστής), teacher (παιδευτής), as well as revealer and witness. After people come to faith, He is also the subject of the watching and keeping of His people. Without exception God is the initiator of mission, and we imitate Him as we respond.

<sup>26</sup> Strathmann, p. 497.

<sup>27</sup> In the "tent of witness" of the Old Testament the tent and the ark were not the witness, but the copy of the Mosaic law in the ark, housed in the tabernacle, is thought of as the witness. In "tent of witness" it takes on the sense of revelation, the revelation of divine commandments. Strathmann concludes: "The full appropriation of the word μαρτύριον and its plural μαρτύρια for the self-witness of God in the Mosaic legislation is a highly significant process for the development of Old Testament nomism." (Ibid., pp. 485—86)

We have warrant therefore when we teach our people to witness with Bible or Scripture tract in hand or to quote the Scriptures as a testimony of God. And the Christian who uses the Scriptures will speak them with appropriate sincerity and confidence because he knows the Holy Spirit can and does witness with and by the Scriptures and because the Scriptures are a means of revelation.

The prophets witness. The apostles witness. Angels witness (Acts 10:3, 30, for instance). God Himself witnesses. Jesus predicted that the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, would bear witness to Him, and then He added: "*And you too* are witnesses; for ye have been with Me from the beginning" (John 15:26). Peter used this truth to emphasize his message: "And we are witnesses of these things," the death and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:32). So does the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him (Acts 14:3). What a witnessing team we are on! Cowitnesses with God! John says, the Holy Spirit and we. Luke says, we and the Holy Spirit. The amazing thing is not the order but the fact that we appear in the lineup at all. The world's champion Witness, the Holy Trinity, heads the lineup. Witnesses are in the best possible company!

Just as God is both Revealer and the revealed One, so God is also the Witness and the One to whom witness is borne. The testimony of God can be both objective and subjective.<sup>28</sup> In demonstration of the Spirit and power, St. Paul came preaching the testimony of God, that is, the testimony to God (1 Cor. 2:1). The

<sup>28</sup> Arndt-Gingrich, p. 495.



Corinthian Christians heard the call of God, and not many of them were "wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth" (1 Cor. 1:26). Nevertheless they were enriched in Christ with all speech and all knowledge, because the *testimony to Christ* had been confirmed among them (1 Cor. 1:6). Although Paul was a prisoner, he urged and exhorted Timothy not to be ashamed of testifying to the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 1:8). In their preaching the apostles testified to the cross and resurrection of Christ. (Acts 4:33; 2 Thess. 1:10)

B

Next consider the correlations of revelation and witness in their common aim and goal. As He reveals Himself in Christ, God aims at man's salvation. He not only revealed Himself in His Son once for all and for all men, but He keeps working ceaselessly to make men capable of receiving His revelation. By His Spirit He enables men to believe and obey. Thus we may say that God revealed Himself so that people may have fellowship with Him and live a life of holiness.<sup>29</sup>

The witness of God has similar goals. John the Baptist came for a testimony to Christ, the Light, so that all might believe

<sup>29</sup> See also Vriezen, p. 238. Vriezen agrees that the aim of God's revelation, unless it is a revelation for judgment, is man's salvation. Therefore, he continues, "it can never be ambiguous let alone misleading (so as to introduce uncertainty or even lead him astray) as we do find elsewhere in the ancient world with respect to divine indications and oracles." He also reminds us that this revealing Word does not only proclaim salvation but also brings it near and actualizes it. Moreover, the fellowship initiated by God's revelation includes a moral dimension and must manifest itself in obedience. (Deut. 29:29; Titus 2:11-12; 1 Peter 1:13-14)

in Him. St. John's Gospel in 27 passages uses witness in the sense of evangelistic witness to Christ's nature and significance which aims at faith. In John 19:35, for example, John testifies to the blood which came from the pierced side of Jesus and the aim both of the shedding of the blood and the testimony of it:

The obvious point at issue here is not the historical attestation of a remarkable event, but the witness to an event which intimates the *saving efficacy* of the death of Jesus and which is attested by a believer "that ye might *believe*."<sup>30</sup>

God has revealed Himself as One who wills and seeks fellowship with man. He moves person to person to establish a faith that is based on a personal relationship with Himself. With sovereign grace He binds Himself to man and man to Himself in covenant (Gen. 17:1-8). To use the bold figure of some of the prophets, he proposes marriage (Hos. 2:19). Indeed, as Vriezen puts it:

Old Testament teaching rests on the religious certainty of the intercourse between the Holy God and man, a certainty based on the history of revelation. . . . The word "intercourse" is an excellent rendering of the relationship between God and man. It is used in the Old Testament itself . . . to denote the communion of the faithful with God . . . as well as the relationship between God and his people Israel.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, the witness is one who *knows* God, remembers His saving actions, lives in intimate fellowship with Him, and testifies so that others may enter into the

<sup>30</sup> Oepke, p. 500.

<sup>31</sup> Vriezen, p. 232. See also Richardson, p. 198.



same joyful communion with God. We find the classic expression of fellowship with God as the goal of both revelation and witness in the First Letter of John:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made *manifest* [revelation] and we saw it and *testify* [witness] to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was *made manifest* to us—that which we have *seen and heard* [basis for witness] we proclaim also to you, so that you may *have fellowship* with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing [more witness!] this that our joy may be complete. (1:1-4)

And in St. Paul God made it clear that the witness to the Gospel is part of the Gospel, and He who revealed Himself wills that witness be borne, so that He can continue to reveal Himself to men for their deliverance. Paul said over and over again that he had seen and heard a light and a voice. The voice of Jesus explained the divine goal of revelation and witness:

I have *appeared* to you for *this purpose*, to appoint you to serve and *bear witness* to the things in which you have *seen* me . . . I send you to open their [Jews and Gentiles] eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Me. (Acts 26:16 ff.)

The open-eyed witnesses tell others where to get that free, divine operation which will enable them to see God. The called ones, in their calling, sound forth God's call, as Richard R. Caemmerer has

said so memorably. He who has experienced God's "about-face" walks along with people and speaks God's commands and promises so that they too make the radical, 180-degree turn back to God. Thus revelation and witness both attain their goal, the total well-being of a man who finds his God.

### C

These correlations have something to say about some current questions and discussions of evangelism. We've been asking again, What is evangelism? Can you evangelize by deeds without necessarily speaking the Gospel, the Word? Must evangelism be verbal (*κήρυγμα*), or can it be effective as service and ministry (*διακονία*)? Is evangelism both verbal (the loving word) and nonverbal (the loving deed)? Is evangelism primarily verbal and secondarily ministry, or does our time call upon us to make evangelism primarily ministry to get a hearing for the *kerygma*?

In terms of revelation and witness the questions may be asked: Does God the Holy Spirit continue to reveal Himself to people by means of the actions of His people as they respond to the vision, command, and promise of God, or does He reveal Himself by means of His revealing Word, which people communicate to others? Does our witness consist in word or deed or both? Which is most urgent for our time? A corollary puts the antithesis not so much between deed and word as being and action, especially organized action in programs of the congregation or synod: "When you *are* a Christian, one who has become the new being in Christ, you are in mission by virtue of your nature; you will automatically or



spontaneously witness by deed and word; and therefore we do not need "programs" or evangelism or organized witnessing efforts—indeed, these hinder the new being in action."

We begin to evaluate these antitheses when we understand that both revelation and witness require a personal, total response by the whole person, in deed and word.

Revelation assuredly includes both deed and word; it is video-audio, often, and usually in that order. The revealing Word always accompanies the revealing act, and the two cannot be severed:

Revelation happens in history as a deed-word (*Tatwort*) and a speech-word (*Redewort*) as communication in the sense of giving a part and of making it known. The *act* of God's revelation and the interpretation of the revelation *in word* cannot be separated in the revelation.<sup>32</sup>

The communication of God in His mighty acts was seen and heard. God's acts were "a word," but they also received an interpretation in words, and God spoke His command and promise. Work and word are correlatives in the revelation of God. One implies the other; neither is complete without the other.<sup>33</sup> If God's revelation produces a response, it too is often video-audio, witness by deed and word. The responder to revelation becomes evident as he does all the things of the Law (Deut. 29:29 ff.), keeps justice, and does righteousness (Is. 56:1). The holy and gracious God calls men by revelation into fellowship, and that fellowship has a moral dimension; he who lives in that fellowship obeys with holy and righteous deeds and words.

<sup>32</sup> Kramer, p. 6.

When Christ Jesus, the true and faithful witness, appeared, that was a revelation and a witness in deed and word, and it results in a response that is deed-word response, visual-audio (Titus 2:11-14; 3:3-7). The promise and hope of the future revelation at Christ's Parousia also become the basis for emphatic demand (*μαρτύρομαι*) for letting Christ be seen in their lives now. (1 Peter 1:13 ff.; Eph. 4:17; Titus 2:11 ff.)

Above we have shown that the witness of the Word was an objective witness which God commanded His people to give, and they obeyed. The New Testament terminology for witness includes both living and speaking the Gospel of Christ. The *Tatwort* receives the interpretation of the *Redewort*, and the *Redewort* becomes God's means of grace to work faith and obedience in the hearers. Without the *Redewort* the beholder of the *Tatwort* does not know and share the secret of the believer's deed-word—his power and life. By the combined *Tatwort* and the *Redewort* God makes the same thing happen in others that has already happened in the testifier.

Those who want to think of the New Testament witness as a *Redewort* apart from or without the *Tatwort* find little encouragement in the New Testament. The picture we have of New Testament witness is not audio without video; it includes conduct as a necessary dimension of witness in the mission of God:

*μαρτυρεῖν* can mean "of good report." It is used in the absolute for "to give a good report," whether actively with the dative of the person to whom it applies or passively in the sense of receiving a good report . . . the meaning is always that on the basis of *direct observation* [video!]



the nature or conduct of those concerned is said to be satisfactory and the one who judges is ready in some sense to vouch for it.<sup>34</sup> (Italics mine)

Timothy gave a video-audio witness, and he "was well spoken of" (ἐμαρτυρεῖτο) by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium (Acts 16:2). The Jews in his town spoke well of Ananias (μαρτυρούμενος) because he was a devout man (Acts 22:12). Not only such outstanding men as the Seven (Acts 6:3) had to be men of good reputation (μαρτυρούμενος), but aged widows also had to receive the testimony of the church that they were active in good deeds: such video things as washing feet and children (1 Tim. 5:10). Both God and men could point to the things they had seen and heard a man of God, such as Demetrius (3 John 12) or Cornelius (Acts 10:22) do. The public had to give its testimony both to Christians and pastors; they had to have earned a reputation day in and day out as they moved among the outsiders. And pastors in those days were just as much in the limelight (video) as now, and they had to pass muster (1 Tim. 3:7). Sometimes we get witness lockjaw because we do not have such a strong witness of a good conscience (2 Cor. 1:12) as St. Paul, who asked the whole congregation in Thessalonica to witness to his holy and righteous conduct when he was in their midst (1 Thess. 2:10). Thus men of the Old Testament and the New Testament received both divine approval as God witnessed to them and human approval as their fellowmen truly attested to their faith. (Heb. 11:2, 4-5, 39)

<sup>33</sup> Vriezen, p. 251.

<sup>34</sup> Strathmann, p. 497.

This New Testament video-audio, *Tatwort-Redewort*, deed-word, demonstration-proclamation, διακονία-κήρυγμα revelation and witness is from the Triune God to the whole man in deed and word and demands a personal response of the whole man, which in turn confronts the whole man He meets in a whole witness of deed and word. Such witness God blesses and uses! In actual practice we may have to ignore the hyphen because the word and deed are so interrelated and occur simultaneously as a part of the communication received by others that people do not stop to think or ask where one ends and the other begins. In other situations the deed may of necessity be separated from the verbal interpretation for a period of time, but sooner or later the Word joins the deed as an adequate instrument for God to use as His Spirit tries to reveal Himself in faith to men. But we dare not hyphenate the word-deed or the deed-word witness and then drop one side or the other. A Christian, a congregation, or a synod that reduces and weakens God's witness does so to the peril of its success in mission and stands under the judgment-witness of Him who commanded and demonstrated the full witness of God!<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Professor Johannes Christian Hoekendijk presents the necessity of a full witness and a whole evangelism by emphasizing the Biblical concept of *shalom*. Emphasizing the "abundant multiplicity" of the Messianic *shalom* in Matthew 9, he notes such video items as healing, cleansing, raising the dead, and the audio element of the poor having the Gospel preached to them. He says this *Shalom* is proclaimed (κήρυγμα), it is lived (κοινωνία), and it is demonstrated (διοκονία). "These three aspects, kerugma, koinonia, and diakonia should be integrated in our work of evangelism." Then he continues to show the interrelation of these three elements and how each exists only in con-



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In the last section we shall turn our attention to the assertion that both revelation and witness are urgent and demand the highest priorities.

Revelation is primarily an eschatological conception, and witness imperatives also appear urgently in the descriptions of the last time. St. Matthew catalogues tribulation, martyrdom, hatred, apostasy, betrayal, false prophecy, multiplied wickedness, cooling love, and then climaxes by saying:

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a *testimony* to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matt. 24:14)

The alarm today usually does not sound the eschatological note, but centers on the more current concern for witness and evangelism as reflected in the statistics for various denominations.

William H. Kohn, executive director of the Board of Missions of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, has suggested that "there is an apparent indifference toward mission in the Church."<sup>36</sup> The statistics undergird the extent of the problem and its urgency. In the decade 1956 to 1966 God gave The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod a growth in communicant members from 1,384,950 to 1,860,949, an increase of nearly half a million in 10 years.

nection with and supported by the others. His description of "comprehensive evangelism" parallels our description of comprehensive revelation and comprehensive witness. (*The Church Inside Out* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964], pp. 25—26)

<sup>36</sup> The *Lutheran Witness Reporter* (Oct. 15, 1967), p. 1. T. A. Raedeke of the Evangelism Department of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and others concur in this judgment.

Yet the total gain from without in 1966 was only 3,497 more than in 1956. In 1956 it took 36 adults in the Missouri Synod to gain one from without. In 1966 it took 44.5. In 1956 we gained 33,864 adults by confirmation and baptism. In 1966—with half a million more communicants—we gained 3,000 less adults, 30,636. In 1956 it took 63.6 adults to gain another adult; in 1966 it took 92 communicants a whole year, on an average, to gain an adult. To the extent that we grow larger in total membership and weaker in our witness to the revelation of God we indeed have a serious symptom of spiritual malady on our hands.

Perhaps we should view the decline in membership as that which can be read positively in some of its aspects. What we need is not more members but better members. If possible, more and better members, but certainly better members. In the last times we may be viewing a trend God wills and can use: the faithful in diaspora grow smaller and smaller numerically in relation to the world, but stronger and more effective because they are purified by suffering and let God use them completely as His instruments for testimony and confession. If prosperity and affluence, which should call us to repentance and confession of the mercy of God, instead weaken our will to witness, then God may do as He has done in the past—send us tribulation and poverty so that we will finally get into motion and testify in deed and word to Him and His salvation!

Leaving the future up to God in His wisdom and mercy, let us remember that the revelation of God and the witness of God call for highest priorities in our plan-



ning and our allocation of resources in men and money. Are we in our congregations and synodical structure putting witness among the most important functions of the total mission of God?

Ever since 1958 the Board for Missions has been reminding us that about one third of all our congregations do not gain a single adult in a year, and the situation is not improving with our growth in total membership.<sup>37</sup> If these congregations are faithfully witnessing individually and collectively by deed and word, yet God, who alone must give the increase, does not bless their witness with tangible results, they may live with these statistics. We ask, however: "Are we truly giving witness and personal evangelism the top priority it rates in the mission of God? Evangelism

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<sup>37</sup> The last figure I have available at the moment is for 1962, when 1,741 congregations out of 5,722 did not gain any adults at all and 1,466 confirmed one to three adults. In the same year 1,082 confirmed no juniors. In 1957 studies were made of the congregations with low accession rates. In that year 1,583 congregations had less than three adult accessions. More than half of these churches have less than 100 communicants. Eighty percent were rural. Two thirds of those churches are located in counties with populations that are less than 50 percent unchurched. Almost half are served by a full-time pastor. The rest are multiple parishes. By far the great majority are over 30 years of age. Three hundred were subsidized by the District Mission Board, and 295 were vacant. In seeking solutions, perhaps we should reexamine the forms and structures both of these congregations and their ministry. For an effective deed-word witness we may have to help these groups of Christians break out of the forms which weaken their witness impact on the community. With these fellow Christians we need to ask: "Do these small rural and small-town churches need ecumenical merger or at the very least inter-Lutheran merger to become effective witnessing units once again? Does the universal pattern of a salaried ministry in every church need re-examination?"

and social action too often are the last areas of congregational responsibility to receive proper direction and organization. Though we have a board for stewardship and board for education, it is only slowly that we acknowledge our evangelism responsibilities by appointing a board or committee. Too often we don't get that far. At Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, the author teaches a course in parish evangelism for senior students and pastors. Every year, at the beginning of the course, the instructor has students write a description of the evangelistic organizations or lack of it in the parishes where they vicared. The vast majority annually say: "We were not organized for evangelism in my vicarage church. The pastor and I did all the calling." In some cases a small group met regularly to work on the responsibility list. As a rule no one other than the pastor has the major responsibility to motivate the people and train them for evangelism, whether of the programmed type or the spontaneous type in daily life. After studying the theology of mission evangelism and witness and evaluating ways of training and organizing the congregation, pastors who have completed the course invariably say: "I'm going back home and lead my people into their God-given function of witness. We haven't been doing it the way we should, and we're not organized to do it now. Evangelism will get a higher priority from now on." The author bases his conclusion admittedly on limited evidence, but if evangelism and witness are the last to be organized among the functions of the congregation and the first to be neglected in the rush of competing activities, then he is not surprised at declining growth patterns.



Training for personal evangelism and the Christian witness must begin to receive much higher priorities in our educational system from parochial schools through terminal institutions.

T. A. Raedeke, secretary for directed evangelism programs of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, has helped in evangelism workshops for 2,700 teachers in various districts. He has also participated in evangelism workshops on various campuses, including those at Milwaukee and St. Paul, and has others scheduled for Ann Arbor and Concordia Seminary, Springfield, Ill. The author participated in the "Youth Invasion" of Michigan in which almost the entire student body and many faculty members from Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Ill., knocked on doors for a weekend to witness for Christ. What a thrill! By their own admission, many of the young people were testifying to our Savior for the first time in their lives. This convinced many of our youth to rise to the challenge of the Christian witness. We ought to train them, not only in quickie courses of one weekend but with solid, accredited courses

sufficiently practical in nature to require experience in the field.

If we do not give the witness of God and the revelation of God highest priority, then we face a disturbing "Why?" Millions added to the world's population every year have a right to ask why our priorities are so completely upset. And more awesome yet, what if the greatest Witness of all times, God Himself, should also become the prosecutor and the judge and ask, "Why?" His "why?" haunted and condemned His chosen people of the Old Testament. Isaiah's vision of the cosmic witness struggled between God and the gods (Is. 43:9 ff.) is more true in our day of mass communication than ever before. He has appointed us leaders of His people for such a time as this. Can a leader be saved? Can a pastor be saved? Can a professor be saved? Can a district president be saved? Hardly! Yet miraculously, yes! His all-embracing grace reaches even us — especially us. In and by that grace let's get going with the revelation of God that calls us to witness!

St. Louis, Mo.