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A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

THE PLAIN CHRISTIAN'S DUTY OF
GOSPEL WITNESS
AS SET FORTH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

I

Who is entitled to be truly accounted a Gospel Witness? Only he who out of honest, humble conviction seeks to make mention to his fellow-men of the imperative need and glorious sufficiency, for us, of our Saviour and Lord, Christ Jesus. He can not only from personal experience tell them of, but also be truly said from a consistent course of life himself to manifest to them, the victoriously sustaining power which is Divinely made available to all who desire faithfully to follow in that Saviour's footsteps, doing His blessed will.

"To wit" is an old-English equivalent of "to know", occurring frequently in our Authorised Bible. Likewise, the Greek word *martur* or *martus* which we render "witness" harks back to a root "remember". A witness proper propounds no theory, is airing no assumption or opinion, when he testifies (to use the synonym which we derive from the Latin). Personal experience is the touchstone.

In the Gospel relation, accordingly, Christ Himself is obviously the primal witness—the ideal (*alethinos*, Rev. iii. 14) in that respect. "We bear witness of that which we have seen," He tells Nicodemus (John iii. 11). A creature angel is never said to testify. (It is the Divine Angel of the Covenant who speaks in Zech. iii. 6.) However much he notifies at first hand of things redemptive, he has himself never undergone the requisite experience. A herald can announce or invite, but by no means always properly testify, whereas the genuine witness can do both.

In our commercial, social, or domestic spheres—if the bathos may for the moment be tolerable—there are recommendatory documents in vogue which are all too often improperly termed "testimonials". In particular, clerical or ministerial references have become a byword for unreliability. If these were always based on the writers' intimately personal

experience of the persons recommended, they would become at once much fewer and more trustworthy. In the Gospel domain, similarly, in the handling of the term "witness" we should be the better for a stricter connotation.

Our witnessing can be by deed as well as by word—can be both verbal and practical, as Spurgeon puts it. In the opening book of Scripture Jacob relies upon his righteous dealing answering for him at the bar of Laban's conscience (Gen. xxx. 33). God's own works in natural providence are said to bear witness continually to His being an ever-beneficent Lord of the universe (Acts. xiv. 17)—as once upon a time also His miracles so often externally attested His revelation of redeeming grace (John v. 36; x. 25; Acts xiv. 3; Heb. ii. 4); as still His Spirit by the dispositions He creates, internally attests His adoption of believers as His children (Rom. viii. 16).

A century ago, J. B. Mozley in a sermon said: "We are intended by God to be witnesses for Him in the world to the power and excellence of the Gospel. The greatest testimony that can be given in behalf of Divine truth is the testimony of our lives. If persons lead such lives that only one explanation can be given of them, viz. a hearty belief in the Gospel, that is testimony to the truth of the Gospel. A man can only be a witness to the Christian faith if his life can only be accounted for by Christian faith."¹ Here is surely a sound and just exposition, as the preacher meant it to be, of our Lord's direction: "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. v. 16). Let it be noted, as we pass on, that the object is not to "glorify you": any aim at self-glory is presently in express terms forbidden; we show, not what *we* do, but what *God* does or has done in and for us; and where this practical illumining of the Gospel is again adverted to, in Phil. ii. 15, we are likewise salutarily reminded by the Greek term used that our light is all along borrowed from Him Who is the world's Light. Operative glorifying, before the unbelieving world, of God and His Gospel of grace is bespoken also in John xv. 8; Phil. i. 11; 2 Thess. i. 12; 1 Pet. ii. 12.² Its antithesis is that inconsistency and disloyalty which belies (A.V. "denies") God and the truth of God, 1 Tim. v. 3; 2 Tim. iii. 5; Titus i. 16, and which entails as its unailing consequence the unbelieving world's blasphemy, Rom. ii. 24; 1 Tim. vi. 1; Titus ii. 5; 2 Pet. ii. 2.

For the benefit of our co-believers also this Christian witness needs to be carried on by each one of us. It draws forth from them a vocal re-echo of that glorification of our God to which we have by grace been made practically instrumental, 2 Cor. ix. 13; Gal. i. 24; 1 Pet. iv. 11. It is requisite continuously in both verbal and operative form in order to "provoke them to love and good works", to vigilance, to patience, to trustfulness, in the power of our risen and reigning Saviour. We read of Paul several times, and of Peter, by virtue of apostolic inspiration, vocally "testifying" to fellow-believers in the way of warning or encouragement.

Of this Godly witness in its practical aspect a special province is furnished by the faith-inspired actions of departed followers of Christ, which abide on record, whether as indited in chronicles or, better still, enshrined in the memories of loving survivors. These blood-bought and now home-called ones are described in Heb. xii. 1 as "a cloud^s of witnesses". True, sentimental exegetes have delectated themselves with the fantasy of a cloud-amphitheatre, the tiers of which are filled with beatified onlookers who survey the Christians beneath running their heavenly race on earth. *Martus* however nowhere else in the N.T. means onlooker or spectator, and here just as elsewhere the Greek Fathers interpret it as "testifier" (by word or deed). If it be otherwise, then the extensive rehearsal in the great preceding chapter (xi) of those worthies' acts of faith, of courage and endurance, is shorn of all relevancy: to state that they had been godly persons should have been enough. The occupants of this celestial grandstand, too, would need to be omniscient, as much so as the Romanists' "Mother of God" and Lady of Perpetual Succour. Such a faculty also, should cut both ways: despite the promise that sorrow and sighing will be found to have fled away, these godly ones would have to behold from above equally the sinful doings of all down here, including, of course, those of their nearest and dearest. The emphasised word of the verse is *tosouton*, "so numerously filled (a cloud)", which matches "these all" of the sentence immediately preceding, whom plainly we must identify with the faith-victors, named and unnamed, with whom that chapter is occupied. Of "these" the more the better, for the fortifying of the faith of those that follow on. "Does that Book tell about any more thieves?" asked a dying burglar of a City Missionary.

It is we that do the beholding: we in mind and memory behold those departed Faithfuls, not they us: in the Greek the nominative or subject of all the active verbs of the verse is "we", not they; and in ch. xiii. 7, we are again told to "look back on their career" and imitate their faith. Each of them, like Abel who leads off, "though dead, still speaketh". And what a helpful secondary message we can thus derive from our Lord's word: "He that believeth on Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John xi. 25)—live on in the influence upon those he leaves behind of what his life evidenced that God can do in response to faith and trust! We must not let a fanciful sentimentalism rob us of this comfort.

It is not, of course, incumbent upon us, in discussing this godly duty, to restrict our attention to those Scripture passages in which the very term "witness" is found. These are far from exhausting the relevant subject-matter. Every word or deed of man's indited or recorded there to enkindle or invigorate Gospel faith in other souls must, in the absence of any definitely contrary indication, be accounted as embodying an element of honest and sincere witness.

II

Now nothing can be clearer on the N.T. page than that vocal or verbal Gospel witness was meant and recognised to be each individual Christian's privileged duty, so far as opportunity offered, whatever specialised forms of it might devolve on those who would be specially commissioned to render such. "A man cannot possibly be a true Christian", that sermon of Mozley's added, "without being also a witness to Christianity." "Whosoever shall confess me before men" is our Lord's word (Matt. x. 32). All, according to the Apostle, are indiscriminately capable of endowment for "prophesying" (Acts ii. 18; 1 Cor. xiv. 5, 24, 31) which, of course, is no synonym of predicting, in Scripture. Women are expressly included in 1 Cor. xi. 5. All Christians are to exhort one another urgently to place unreserved trust in their Lord (Heb. iii. 13; x. 35). They are each to be ready with an answer for every inquirer or objector (Col. iv. 6; 1 Pet. iii. 15). Any one of them may "convert" an erring brother (James v. 19). And each believing and hearing one is to re-echo among his fellowmen the Spirit's and the Bride's call of "Come" (Rev. xxii. 17).⁴

And narrative items are completely in keeping therewith. The Samaritan woman, the Gadarene demoniac, the man healed of life-long blindness, the dying thief, all duly testify. In the Acts vocal witness invariably follows on reception of the Holy Ghost and baptism (ii. 4; iv. 31; ix. 20; x. 46; xix. 6; and comp. 1 Cor. xii. 7-11). Fugitive believers tell abroad the faith that is in them (viii. 4; xi. 19, 20), and converted natives in their own localities make their voices heard in evangelising (xv. 35; xvii. 7). Several Churches northward from Jerusalem, as far as and including Antioch, were founded by people whom we would call laymen—people, too, with no opportunity, even if they had ability, to “deliver addresses”, but dependent on openings in ordinary conversation. Philip’s daughters prophesy, xxi. 9. In his Epistles Paul thanks God that the faith of the general body of Roman Christians is proclaimed throughout the whole world—“so openly had they declared their belief” (Speaker’s Commentary), and that the Corinthian believers are “enriched in all utterance”. Those in Philippi “hold forth the word of life” to their compeers; “are partakers with him in the defence and confirmation of the Gospel”; and “most of the brethren in the Lord are abundantly bold to speak the Word”. From the Thessalonian Christians, likewise, “the Word has sounded out”, and their faith had gone forth everywhere. How, too, can vocal witness be ruled out, at that unorganised stage of the Church’s career especially, from the sense we are to attach to “toil in the Lord” (*kopos*, 1 Cor. xv. 58; xvi. 16), “toil of love” (1 Thess. i. 3; see ver. 8), which is seen to devolve on and is prosecuted by all and sundry, women expressly included (Rom. xvi. 12; comp. Phil. iv. 5)?⁵

Equally as regards practical witness, in the N.T. there are no Christians so plain or unofficial as to be exempt from the calls that are made for its discharge. Christ’s already cited injunction to manifest good works for God’s glory is addressed to all disciples of His. They are all bidden by Him to exhibit an open brotherliness and helpfulness, specifically to their fellow-believers, as such, and in particular to those engaged in proclaiming fresh messages of Divine revelation (Matt. x. 40f). Paul calls upon Christians, everyone, to make known to all men their characteristic principles, such as reasonable temper (Phil. iv. 5) or opposition to idolatry (1 Cor. x. 28). As the agents of Divine grace, they are to convict, if they cannot

convert (Ephes. v. 11, R.V. marg.; 1 Pet. ii. 15; iii. 16). He, with his brother Apostles, insists that the life-conduct of all Christians must testify to the Divine nature and source of what they profess (Col. iv. 5; Titus ii. 10; James ii. 18; iii. 13; 1 Pet. ii. 12; iii. 1).

Accordingly, and in harmony with such appeals, we read of the faith-gestures so constantly either volunteered by or demanded from the beneficiaries of the gracious miracles of the Lord Jesus and of His Apostles⁶; the numberless baptisms by immersion; the two anointings of Christ; the bold action of Joseph, with Nicodemus, at His burial; the community of goods which followed Pentecost; the holocaust of discarded magical appliances (Acts xix. 19); the instances of self-committing comradeship and hospitality accorded publicly (Acts xiv. 20; xvi. 15; xvii. 7; xxi. 5, etc.—passing by cases in the Gospels). The “rank and file” of one Church are told that “ye are our epistle, known and read of all men”, and those of another that “amid a perverse generation ye shine as lights” (2 Cor. iii. 2; Phil. ii. 15).

III

How then has the conception come to be so dominating that this duty and responsibility of Gospel witness devolves only upon the more official, the ordained or specially commissioned and authorised, members of the Church of Christ? For example, at ministerial installations, the flock or congregation is sure to be appealed to solemnly for their unceasing prayer individually for their pastor, but are virtually never urged to back him up, to the measure of their own ability and opportunity, privately or publicly, in the task of Christian witness. It is an issue assuredly most probative and revealing. Viewing the matter from the simply vocal standpoint, who can question the verity of our Lord’s dictum that “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh?” “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard,” says Peter (Acts iv. 20). From the depths of his Gospel experience Paul affirms: “(Like the Psalmist) we, too, believe: therefore we, too, speak” (2 Cor. iv. 13). A reminiscence of Bunyan in *Grace Abounding* provides a sample—that of the three or four poor women sitting at a door in the sun, witnessing to each other (like those of Malachi iii. 16), “telling about the work of God in their hearts”, “by

what means they had been borne up under Satan's assaults", and so forth, "and methought they spake as if joy did make them speak". Alternatively, where the heart is not truly possessed of Christ, the mouth may be expected to be mute as to witness accruing to His glory.

From earliest times the first measure, short of frank apostasy, to be adopted by insincere and merely nominal professors has been to retrench from and whittle down the discharge of practical Christian obligations. The trouble of keeping this course private or covert was quickly seen to be capable of substantial reduction by the devising of specious and plausible pretèxts or pleas for default. One of the first of these was the setting up of the religious practice of official Church members as the recognised standard, model, or ideal, for the generality. It was, forsooth, only reasonable for the latter to expect they would fall somewhat short of that standard; indeed a laudable meekness on their part so to calculate; and on the score of probability, that sound guide of life, they would henceforward take no great pains to keep abreast of it. "The priesthood of all believers" is a most palatable truth to the nominal Christian in one mood, but can be unwelcome enough in another. Tertullian in his day scathingly satirises the obliquity: "when we begin to swell out and flare up against pastors, then we are all the one thing, 'all priests unto God', to quote our slogan; but when we are called on to conform to the rectitude demanded of 'priests' we throw off (figuratively) our canonicals, we are no longer on an equal level."

This trend developed throughout the Middle Ages. As belief in self-merited salvation, largely through artificial austerities and mortifications, made headway, the clerics, thus arbitrarily constituted as paragons, had divers disabilities imposed on them to amplify the gap between the standard and the commonplace practice. It was the laity that everywhere imposed clerical celibacy, as considered to entail more austerity than wedlock. Under our Henry I., e.g., when the Pope actually was willing to dispense from it in England, the king vetoed the proposal. The Emperor Justinian forbade the presence of clergy at places of pastime. Som^t e, sable dress was also prescribed.⁸ The clergy alone comprised "the spirituality"; "the religious" were the monastics only.

Nor did Protestantism by any means wholly shed the

mischievous. If a lay person still is found interesting himself in a Scripture subject or topic, he will be rallied about his "dabbling in theology" (a department to be relegated to Ministers). This or that pastime will be accounted "misbecoming to a clergyman", with the implication that it would be proper enough for any Christian layman. There is a distinct distaste among congregations for the service of a local lay preacher, however well equipped, owing to the risk of his pitching the standard of lay piety and sanctity too high, if even only inferentially. It is in the light of such tendencies as these that we should take the measure of the Englishman's vaunted "reserve about his religion".

We have been stating the case as though the natural aversion in the hearts of unregenerate men and women to the essential Gospel was purely private and personal, utterly free of any umbrage or animosity towards another's reminding them, vocally or practically, of its claims. But, of course, that the contrary is the case has ever been apparent. Not long was it before the Greek term for witness, *Martur*, came to mean a suffering witness, even one who seals his testimony with his blood.⁹ We shall not, need not, adduce what our Lord underwent as Witness as well as Sinbearer (1 Tim. vi. 13). Nor need we labour the sufferings for His sake of the Apostles and the first commissioned evangelists. Only doubtless many are under the impression that such afflictions befell them alone, and that plain ordinary Christians, even then, were more or less exempt. Let those who may so imagine see how persecution was for the latter, then and for all time, forecasted, in Matt. v. 10-12; x. 35-39; xiii. 21; Mark x. 30; Acts xiv. 22; Rom. viii. 17, 35; xii. 12; Phil. i. 29; 1 Thess. iii. 3; 2 Tim. iii. 12; James v. 10; 1 Pet. iii. 14; iv. 1, 13, 19; v. 10; Rev. ii. 10¹⁰; and also, at the time of writing, realised, in John ix. 34; xii. 10; Acts xxvi. 11; 2 Cor. i. 6, 7; Gal. iii. 4; 1 Thess. i. 6; ii. 14; 2 Thess. i. 4; Heb. x. 32, 33; Rev. i. 9; ii. 9; vii. 14. The terms "cross" and "cup", and the fitting Greek verbs, *pascho*, *thlibo*, *dioko*, all make their appearance.

There has been always, besides, the persecution by word as well as by deed—reproach, insult, slander; and that an ample share of this was, and is destined to be, meted out to ordinary and unofficial faithful Christians may be seen by reference to Matt. v. 11; Luke vi. 28; John ix. 28; 1 Tim. i. 13;

v. 14; Heb. x. 33; xiii. 13; 1 Pet. ii. 12; iii. 16; iv. 4, 14. Its diversified nature is reflected from the Greek terms employed—*oneidizo, loidoreo, blasphemeo, hubrizo, epereazo, katalaleo*.

The sermon before us declares, with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in mind: "That Babylon is fallen, but there is another Babylon which still goes on and always will go on till Christ comes again." Still less then can Gospel witness be looked for from merely nominal professors in the face of this external pressure, with "the flesh" being thus reinforced by "the world". These, rather, become witnesses, as the sermon adds, to the power of the world and its motives instead of to that of Christ. Nor is their antipathy to Gospel witness nowadays by any means discoverable only at factory benches, or among cottage and courtyard neighbour women, as hackneyed pious jargon would suggest. Many of them would have all testifiers become, along with themselves, "dumb dogs that cannot bark" (Isa. lvi. 10). Occasions, indeed, arise when, using the shallowest pretext, disloyal adherents of some local church will themselves descend to the inflicting of a measure of reproach and ostracism on faithful brethren openly standing firm for some definite Christian principle, so as to avert from themselves any share of the malevolence naturally proceeding from the avowed foe, and thereby largely stifle what loyal witness is being attempted.

IV

But the jibbing at the duty of Gospel witness is not confined to Christianity's merely nominal members. "Protestantism", the grand historic cognate of our word "witness", has become a markedly distasteful term to an accommodating Evangelical type among us. We are asked to agree to its being quietly jettisoned, and then with it much or most of what it connotes, that is to say, the Gospel in its Protestant sense. And why? Because of its negativeness, is the very soft and sedative answer we first get. This the concise Oxford Dictionary, to begin with, does not bear out: on the contrary, it states that to "protest" means to "affirm solemnly". The word, moreover, comes from the post-Augustan *protestari*, "bear witness (openly)", and has no inherent negative force (Gwatkin). In the A.V. Old and New Testaments wherever it occurs it is affirmative (Jer. xi. 7; Zech. iii. 6; 1 Cor. xv. 31). In Shakespeare (*Hamlet*)

“the lady doth protest too much” means that she overdoes her positive resolving. The poet Herrick (1648) pleads with his fair Anthea to “Bid me to live, and I will live thy protestant to be”. Laud himself points out to a Jesuit how his own school called sacraments “visible signs protesting (faith)”—*protestantia*—and asks why men also may not be called Protestant (*Conference with Fisher*). Pusey too admits that Calvinist Protestantism cannot be belittled as mere negation (*Eirenicon*). Its four fundamental principles are all affirmative:

1. Scripture is the sole, supreme, sufficient Rule of Faith:
 2. private judgment is the inalienable right and duty of every man:
 3. each soul has direct access to God without fellow-creature mediation:
 4. justification by faith is the only medium of salvation.
- There are also other principles, important if secondary, such as assurance, the right of national Churches, which are equally affirmative.¹¹

Again, let this inroad on, or that betrayal of, Protestant interests take place, and from this same quarter we can count on getting the soothing assurance that it amounts to “a trifle” merely, so that any opposition, any witness for the truth, on our part will only reveal our desire to be quarrelsome. In this the promoters themselves usually give the lead.¹² Sacerdotalism, ever and unceasingly a menace within the Christian Church, takes care to push its way forward in a prudently piecemeal fashion, when invading virgin soil, since it would be rarely safe for it to proceed at full speed. But we have to decline to surrender our common sense. Most other scourges, drunkenness, gambling, sabbath-breaking, plainly develop from little to much. “The greatest evils in life have had their rise from somewhat which was thought of too little importance to be attended to” (Bp. Butler). The lessons of the past cannot be ignored. The “little leaven” of the Apostle’s caution (in Gal. v. 9) in the process of the years produced the fell harvest of mediæval Romanism, and a like evolution could in a hitherto Protestant domain be effected again.

But, however, let the Protestant faith be ever so free from mere negation; or the sacerdotal inroad ever so substantial, our compromising Evangelical who has never truly grasped the

necessity for undivided trust in Christ's expiatory sacrifice, would have us forgo our Gospel Protestant witness and betray our Reformation heritage of light and liberty, lest our testimony, vocal or practical, might haply occasion controversy and dissension. Not those, forsooth, who introduce or steadily push unscriptural doctrine or practice, but those who try to confute or check them, are to blame for such an untoward outcome.¹³ The mere sound on our ears of the word "controversy" from these objectors should be sufficient to paralyse voice and action in us on the spot, as apparently Queen Athaliah's cry of "Treason" was expected to be. It perplexes us how they can forget that their Lord (especially towards the close of His earthly ministry) and His Apostles were incessantly involved in disputation, and that with people undeniably as pious as are modern sacerdotalists. Christ foretold that discord would be an inevitable outcome of Gospel preaching (Matt. x. 35f.).

Yet only the barest sidelong allusion, if so much, to the peril besetting our Protestant faith can be permitted at holiness conventions. As though truth has not her claims as well as peace! And what kind of peace, suppose truth were to go under, eventually should we have? In every other domain of knowledge except in this Protestant department of the religious—e.g. in the ethical, political, medical domains—controversy is accounted entirely right in principle, however in practice it may sometimes be mishandled. Properly conducted, it clarifies one's own views, and suggests new aspects of a case to one's opponent. The wise-hearted, says Tennyson, is "certain if knowledge bring the sword, that knowledge takes the sword away". Little indeed would be heard of the harm of controversy, were it not for the spirit of intolerance which can brook no gainsaying, the lack of any keen sense of possessing truth which is of any great worth, the mental indolence which shirks the task of sifting and ascertaining the real truth on momentous matters, and the cowardice which quails before the probable odium and sacrifice risked in maintaining that truth, however personally ascertained.¹⁴

V

Kant, the philosophic German, showed a subtle aptitude for chiming in with natural human disposition in the distinction he drew between the good and the beautiful. The good is

pleasing to a limited number of people only: the beautiful is pleasing to the generality. Hence we had better indulge the laxity of the common conscience and not insist on calling everything that is good "beautiful". Mackenzie in his *Ethics*, too, notes that the phrase "a beautiful life" or "soul" is rarely if ever used of a reformer, such as the Baptist. However superlatively good he was in the basic and the Scriptural sense, he was obliged righteously to say and do what was unpalatable to a lot of people.

On the same lines, any one who witnesses with a straightforward faithfulness so as to incur the ill-favour of ritualists who possess a local influence is sure to be adjudged to be "not spiritual" among a certain pseudo-Evangelical type. That description in its affirmative form is reserved for the brother that steers clear of such an unenviable repute, along with the specious brand of sacerdotalist. Yet it was as "filled with the Holy Ghost" that the Apostle addressed Elymas so scathingly (Acts xiii. 8), and his most directly controversial Epistle, the anti-legalist one to the Galatians, contains more references to the Holy Spirit proportionately than any other N.T. book. Compare also Micah iii. 8.

During the last generation a Liverpool clergyman was the subject of outstanding eulogy at the Anglican Church 1888 Congress, for his remarkably successful evangelism and rescue work in an utterly degraded district of that City, even a prominent baronet attached to the sacerdotal party (who had availed himself of an invitation personally to investigate matters) adding his encomium. It is this Vicar, Canon R. Hobson, long since departed, who in his published memoir¹⁵ registered this judgment. "The experience of thirty-three years as a parochial Minister enables me to affirm that controversial preaching and teaching is a fulcrum for the lever of rousing and uplifting apathetic, careless, sin-stricken souls. . . . I do think the Evangelicals make a great mistake in not utilising, by appeal, instruction, and direction, the latent, inherited Protestantism of the masses. . . . There is a jellyfish spirituality which does not approve of this, holding the entirely erroneous opinion that controversy *must* mean 'bad blood'. I fear such objectors would also take exception to the work of all other missions if they happened to be where the agents of these societies operate." Yes—if they were there! distance, when it does

not lend enchantment exactly, blurs what would at close quarters be displeasing.

VI

“The proper and principal work of those that believe is the confessing of our faith”, so affirms Luther.¹⁶ But it becomes increasingly clear that many of God’s true people have decided that a cultivation of personal holiness, abstract and self-related, has not only the initial, but the continuously paramount call on a Christian, that of Gospel witness being permanently secondary, however in its own time and place and measure essentially important. The trend is wistfully sighed over by such a one as Evan Hopkins, the Keswick teacher: “How many spend their time in the work of preparing their hearts, as if their own sanctification were the great end of their calling!”¹⁷ This “quietist” drift is working havoc, especially nowadays in the German Church which bears the name of Luther himself. Here is a late pronouncement of its organ, the *Deutsches Pfarrerblatt*:¹⁸ “The signs which God gives indicate that the Church of the future will be a praying Church—after (that is, replacing) the preaching Church. We are witnessing a great renunciation of the Church, as an antidote to the activism which was a mark of recent decades.” Such an outlook tallies very imperfectly with the language of Christ’s great chapter of intercession: “I pray for them . . . I have given them Thy word”; aye, with the whole tenor of His appeal for witness to His disciples in the preceding chapters; as also with the Apostolic charge to maintain an unceasing confession of the faith, whilst drawing near with a pure heart (Heb. x. 22, 23). See the prophet’s words in 1 Sam. xii. 23. The candlestick stood in line with the incense altar in the Holy Place. Here are words of Finney the famed evangelist, in deprecating both prayerless evangelism and non-evangelistic praying: “Prayer might be offered for ever by itself and nothing would be done, because sinners are not converted by direct contact with the Holy Ghost, but by the Truth¹⁹ employed as a means, and to expect the contrary is to tempt God.”

It is sometimes contended that witness-bearing is, after all, itself simply a phase or department of holiness. But while God through His Spirit gives to us holiness or sanctification in the abstract, as an influence and a faculty, we (with the help

of His Grace) give, or render (*re-dare*, give back) to God obedience, of which witnessing is one part. In abstract holiness human effort has had no part; in concrete practical holiness it must have. Men are never said to be "chosen" for sanctification, but frequently for witness-bearing (John xv. 16; Acts ix. 15; x. 41).

There are N.T. passages which have been persistently wrested from their proper bearing on evangelic witness, and restricted to the inculcation of abstract or subjective sanctity. Two of them in Philippians specially so treated the present writer has dealt with in this *Quarterly* already (Vol. XIV. 95f.). There are also in vogue phrases of Scriptural sound used in an unscriptural sense. "God's hidden ones" represent an imaginary class whose Christian faith, sincere and genuine, is somehow screened from the world's cognisance. It is borrowed from Ps. lxxxiii. 3, where comparison with xxvii. 5 and xxxi. 20 shows that "hide" poetically means to shelter from attack and harm. According to their Lord, true Christians, like a city set on a hill, cannot be hid. The fact is indeed stated that 7,000 of Elijah's compeers were non-Baalites unawares of him, but its statement did not, no more than the forecast of Amos v. 10, 13, involve pure commendation, and it stood extenuated in the face of attendant risk of death. "Heart-religion," again, is a capital antonym for formalism, but it can be and has been twisted to denote a mere cloistral egoistic quietism, and to gloze over neglect of witness, by word or deed, whenever unpopular—of open loyalty to Christian principle, however unfashionable. The R.V. has found need in several places to stress *ek*, "out of", in connection with the heart; it is not meant to be the covert, but a sallyport, of Christian vitality and faith.

Again, there are Scripture terms as to which it is not sufficiently noted that, though entirely applicable to Christian experimental godliness in general, they appear predominantly in Gospel witness contexts. This holds good of the great class of vocables that come under the heads of antagonism, competition, and struggle—"fight", "conflict", "war", "arms", "armour", "weapons", "soldier", "strive", "contend", "resist", "wrestle", "run", "race", "course", "crown", "prize". Much more rarely are these found to refer to internal heart-conflict with Satan and sin, than to open and overt conflict

against the outer world, against fellow-human opposers of the Gospel, though before examining most people would guess the contrary.²⁰ And the same finding will be arrived at in the case of the word "tempt" ("temptation").²¹

The virtually invariable sense of "serve" ("servant") in the spiritual relation is, in the light of the contexts, evangelistic or witness-bearing, rather than privately personal.²² Further, no one is ever said to "minister" to God (considered as in Heaven's glory) but *for* Him to fellow-saints here.²³

Then a large proportion of the references to spiritual "fruit" ("reap", etc.) apply specifically to the results of Gospel witness in winning souls to God.

May the God of all grace arouse and enable us, His people, one and all, to fulfil this duty of Gospel witness in the strength of His Spirit. We know not who may at any moment be hungering, it may be no more than half-consciously, for its opportune expression or performance on our part. Their Lord's "Well done" at the great Day awaits each faithful witness in word and deed. "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim. ii. 12, R.V.; Rev. xx. 4).

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¹ *Parochial Sermons*, 215f. Comp. the phrase "a good course of life in Christ", 1 Pet. iii. 16.

² The comment here of the Greek Theophylact (eleventh century) is: "When men see true Christians they will say, Christ is so good that His people can die for Him, so strong that He can fortify them with endurance."

³ 'Cloud' would suitably denote that they were no longer physically visible, or capable of being all individually specified.

⁴ This was the great slogan of self-vindication with the lay witnesses of the Evangelical Revival.

⁵ A caution, to be sure, is sounded against being ambitious to function as instructors of assemblies of Christians, for which special Divine enlistment and equipment is imperatively needed. See James iii. 1, where "teachers" (R.V.) must be understood relatively, in the light of such passages as Acts xviii. 26, R.V.; and Heb. v. 12.

⁶ In particular we would instance Mark v. 27; Acts v. 15; xix. 12, where superficial exegesis is wont to find superstition.

⁷ *De Monogamia.*

⁸ Ruskin notes how the womenfolk were prone to decide that, since they could not attain in goodness to the black standard (that of nuns), any lower degree would do (*Sesame*, § 38).

⁹ Its acquisition of that extreme signification seems to have been somewhat later than the N.T. period, even though the R.V. retains "martyr" in Rev. xvii. 6, whilst altering Acts xxii. 20 and Rev. ii. 13.

¹⁰ At least ten more references might be added where endurance ("patience") is reckoned on.

¹¹ Every proposition, of course, presents a negative face to its opposite. The two latest dogmas of Rome herself propound negative tenets—*immaculate conception* (of Mary) and *infallibility* (of the Popes). Many of Scripture's most precious promises and "comfortable words" are negative (Ps. xxiii. 1; John xiv. 1; vi. 35, 37; x. 28; Isa. lix. 1; xli. 10; Heb. viii. 12; xiii. 5, etc.). The Psalter opens with a triple negative; the Decalogue is nine-tenths negative; and Heaven is described almost altogether negatively.

¹² Now and again a frankness gains expression. The Ritualistic *Church Review* (now defunct) once said: "The Protestant is quite right in recognising the simplest attempt at Ritual as 'the thin end of the wedge'. It is so. The first creeping dribble of water and the first few light bubbles announce the advance of the tide" (24/6/1865).

¹³ No new thing is it for Gospel witnesses to be charged with creating discord, Luke xxiii. 5; Acts xvi. 20; xvii. 6; xxiv. 5.

¹⁴ Promoters of priestism never hesitate to bully when they can; when they cannot, they are careful and skilful to wheedle instead. Most prominent or leading Evangelicals are so placed or circumstanced as to be immune from ostracism or from injury to their material interests. Hence they meet with a complaisance from that quarter in which, whether they know or sufficiently care about it, their less advantageously conditioned brother enjoys no share. In return they commonly contract an aversion to witness against sacerdotalism, especially at its more incipient stages, since it might discomfort those persons or personages who treat *them* so amiably and are so plausibly indisposed to initiate discussion as to their doctrines and practices—as much so as a burglar to make noise during his operations. They will learn to treat with aloofness brethren of theirs of a lesser standing who continue inflexibly loyal to the

cause of truth (comp. Gal. ii. 12), to prejudice their rightful claims, to aid in removing them into corners (Isa. xxx. 20). They will depress their credit, none the less effectively if it be with a safe and simple shoulder-shrug, when their names are mentioned in their ears, whilst the cream of their appreciation will be reserved for those who are undermining the Gospel verities.

¹⁵ *What God has Wrought*, pp. 79, 123.

¹⁶ Gal. iv. 6, Comment.

¹⁷ *Law of Liberty*. Spurgeon, likewise, feels the need of urging, in his characteristic way: "We ought to regard the Church not as a luxurious hostel for Christian gentlemen, but as a barracks in which soldiers are gathered who march to achieve victories for Christ."

¹⁸ Quoted in the *Evang. Alliance Quarterly*, 1941, p. 134.

¹⁹ Quietist attempts are also sometimes made at imparting the truth whilst dispensing with the obnoxious task of personal witness. For above a century over-sanguine expectations have been built on snug and peaceful Bible distribution among Roman Catholics. On this score Chalmers in his day backed the so-called Emancipation measure. Good English visitors to Ireland once would drop little Gospels along the railway line out of first-class carriage windows. It is not to say that God has never blessed a stray Scripture to the conversion of a soul, if one pronounces such measures too facile to win great spiritual success.

²⁰ See Rom. viii. 37; 1 Cor. ix. 24-26; xv. 32; 2 Cor. vi. 7; vii. 5; x. 3-4; Ephes. vi. 11f; Phil i. 27, 30; ii. 25; iv. 3; Col. 1. 29; 1 Thess. ii. 2; 1 Tim. i. 18; vi. 12; 2 Tim. ii. 3; iv. 7 (see Acts xiii. 25); Philem. 2; Heb. x. 32; xii. 1, 4; 1 Pet. iv. 1; 1 John iv. 4; v. 4; Jude 3; Rev. ii and iii repeatedly; xi. 7; xii. 11; xxi. 7.

²¹ See Luke viii. 13; xxii. 46; Acts xx. 19; 1 Cor. x. 13 (communal); 1 Thess. iii. 5; Heb. ii. 18 (A. B. Davidson); xi. 36, 37; James i. 2, 10-14; 1 Pet. iv. 12; 2 Pet. ii. 9; Rev. ii. 10; iii. 10. ("Temptings" of God, and of Jesus during His ministry, are passed over; also providential trials of men.)

²² *Doulos, douleuo*. The parallelism or antithesis, legalistic or domestic, occurring in each several passage explains Rom. xii. 6, 25; 1 Cor. vii. 22; Gal. v. 13; Ephes. vi. 6; Col. iii. 24. Inter-Christian witness is expressed in Rom. xiv. 18. Luke ii. 29 gives a translated Hebraism.

²³ *Diakonos, diakoneo*.