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JOHN THE BAPTIST AS WITNESS PROTOTYPE IN KARL BARTH

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THEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION OF TESTIMONY—A LESS EXPLORED TERRITORY

Literature on Jesus' resurrection since the 19th century has explored the tension between theology and historical criticism; the grounds upon which the resurrection can be legitimately considered a historical event have been often debated. In the New Testament, the facticity of the resurrection and its meaning is communicated by a specific method—eye-witness accounts, and secondary witnesses based upon these first reports. Apparently biblical authors considered 'witness' both a legitimate means to account for the resurrection as a historical fact, and simultaneously to communicate its theological meaning. However, 'witness' as a biblical concept is not often seen being used theologically, especially in recent literature, to elucidate the relation between the resurrection and history.

The first part of this paper draws attention to latent drawbacks of philosophical constructions of the concept of witness in biblical studies and theological writings. An alternative approach is to understand testimony (and the act of witness) as a theological category. The second part of this paper explores the shape and substance of Karl Barth's theological reflection on John the Baptist as the witness prototype. John's type is significant as a blueprint of the witness concept in *Church Dogmatics*, where Barth revisits the Baptist's model from time to time. Where Christian witness is concerned, I intend to draw attention to the importance of balancing philosophical traditions and constructions of witness with a theological understanding of the concept, which begins with a proper emphasis on the role of divine agency in both the constitution and operation of human testimony.

From the 1950s onwards, contemporary with the emergence of the New Quest, where the notion of testimony is invoked in debates of the resurrection, it is rarely understood as a theological category. This indicates two things. First, the discussion of testimony has a confined scope; it begins with and also stops at the historical plausibility of the resurrection. The relevance of testimony is exclusively its capability (or incapability).

bility) to mediate evidence of the event. In fact, Lessing's ditch is never crossed, and it is common for these discussions to halt at a re-description of the unresolved tension between faith and historical evidence.¹ Second, the concept of testimony presupposed is predominantly anthropocentric, with minimal consideration of the Triune God as the 'Witness'. Conceivably, scriptural passages that speak of the divine Persons as witnesses are rarely referred to.²

Both Selwyn in the mid 1950s and Glasson in the late 1960s claimed that 'martyria' had received less attention than it deserves, especially in contrast to the concept of kerygma.³ Their suggestions met with limited positive response, and it was not until the emergence of the work of Trites, Brueggemann, and Lincoln that the concept received in-depth treatment.⁴ Without detailing these works here, one point should be highlighted: working in a postmodern intellectual context, both Brueggemann and Lincoln pitch the category of testimony exclusively in the realm of human rhetoric. By using a perspective which is either sociological or literary rhetorical (or both), their projects trade on the metaphor of courtroom, in which the character and acts of God and Jesus are put on trial in the arena of human opinions. Particularly in Brueggemann, the question of history and ontology is eschewed from the beginning. Though these projects are exemplary in deploying testimony in biblical interpretation, their concept of testimony is predominantly sociological and rhetorical.

Another notable attempt at deploying the concept is Bauckham's *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*,⁵ which is oriented toward meeting the challenge of form criticism. Where form criticism displaces the centrality of eye-wit-

¹ A. L. Nations, 'Historical Criticism and the Current Methodological Crisis', *SJT*, 36 (1983), 59-71; H. Staudinger, 'The Resurrection of Jesus Christ as Saving Event and as "Object" of Historical Research', *SJT* 36, (1983), 309-26; T. S. Garrett, 'Recent Biblical Studies and Their Doctrinal Implications', *SJT* 7, (1954), 225-32; D. E. Nineham, 'Eyewitness testimony and the gospel tradition', *JTS*, 9 (1958), 13-25, 243-52, 253-64; and G. Theissen, 'Historical Scepticism and the Criteria of Jesus Research or My Attempt to Leap Across Lessing's Yawning Gulf', *SJT*, 49 (1996), 147-76.

² For examples, John 8:18; Acts 5:32; Rev. 1:5, 22:20.

³ T. F. Glasson, 'Kerygma or Martyria?' *SJT*, 22 (1969), 90-5.

⁴ A. A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997); and A.T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000).

⁵ R. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

ness reports and testimonies, Bauckham seeks to reinstate this category as a legitimate mode of transmitting the history of Jesus. Although in the concluding section Bauckham advocates 'testimony' as both a historical and theological category, throughout his book treatment of the category is devoted predominately to vindicate it as the former. Testimony is argued as a proper tool for the undertaking of historiography concerning Jesus; and a legitimate means to transmit theological truth. While Bauckham acknowledges the intervening factor of divine agency that connects the theological event of Jesus' history to the theological quality of eye-witnesses attestations,⁶ his analysis of this factor is not substantial and readers are left with a notion of testimony that is theologically underdeveloped to be serviceable.

The etiology of an anthropocentric construal of testimony might be traced back to philosophical understandings of witness, which somehow find their way into biblical and theological studies. The concept of testimony receives considerable attention among philosophers; the works of Coady, Ricœur and Lévinas are notable examples.⁷ What seems to be the case is that in borrowing insights from philosophies of testimony, theology and biblical studies have to a greater or lesser extent affirmed the centrality of an autonomous and reflective human subject.⁸ For us, this affirmation precisely heightens the need to rethink the concept in an adequately theological sense. In particular, Christian testimony essentially points away from the human plane to the resurrection, which an adequate account cannot be achieved without reference to divine activity. Testimony narrowly construed in forensic, sociological and rhetorical terms would not suffice to address divine agency, which is core to the event. Grounded in human subjectivity and sociality, testimony presupposes a natural capacity to read off meaning from the surface of history. Confidence in this proficiency is questionable even when it comes to uncommon events in mundane experience,⁹ let alone in giving statement

⁶ *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 508.

⁷ E. Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969); Lévinas *Otherwise than Being, or, Beyond Essence* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998); P. Ricœur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980); Ricœur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004); and C. A. J. Coady, *Testimony: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

⁸ Such philosophical influence on the construing of the category of testimony can be identified in the works of Lincoln, Brueggemann and Bauckham.

⁹ Coady, *Testimony*, pp. 179-99.

to divine acts in history, assuming that divine activity is not automatically precluded in the first place. It is perhaps no accident that Lincoln intriguingly circumvents the historicity of the resurrection, and instead systematically accentuates the importance of Jesus' death.¹⁰ In fact, how one construes the notion of testimony has direct impact on how one speaks of Jesus' resurrection, and as Sonderegger ably illustrates in her comparison of Jenson and Barth, a shift from a firm grasp of an attitude of being a witness towards a stance of an interpreter of ecclesial traditions can readily alter not only one's recounting of the resurrection, but subsequently the shape and material of one's dogmatic work.¹¹

THE WITNESS PROTOTYPE AND BARTH'S THEOLOGICAL CONCEPT OF TESTIMONY

Barth's theological concept of witness is multifaceted and a full view of it would require combing through several doctrinal areas (e.g. proclamation, Holy Scripture, ecclesiology and vocation), which cannot be achieved in this paper. As a starting point, an investigation of Barth's idea of prototypical witness is advisable for two reasons: first, this prototype of human witness is thoroughly theological as it will be shown later on that it is a derivative of the prototype of divine self-witness. Second, it contains the conceptual structure and basic features that a full account of Christian witness required.

Our exploration begins with Barth's portrayal of the Baptist in *Witness to the Word*.¹² Ideas from his exegesis are organized into three blocks: the ontology, the history, and the appropriation of witness. Not only are these three helpful as a way of depicting the type of John's ministry, Barth's reflection on him in *Church Dogmatics* can also be organized accordingly under these headings. Given the rich details of his treatment of the case, a thorough analysis of the Baptist's portrait in *Church Dogmatics* would require a separate project. What can be achieved here is a con-

¹⁰ See A. T. Lincoln, 'The Beloved Disciple as Eyewitness and the Fourth Gospel as Witness', *JSNT*, 85 (2002), 25-26; Lincoln, "I am the Resurrection and the Life": the Resurrection Message of the Fourth Gospel', in *Life in the Face of Death*, ed. by R. N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 127, 131; and Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, p. 433.

¹¹ K. Sonderegger, 'Et Resurrexit Tertia Die: Jenson and Barth on Christ's Resurrection', in *Conversing with Barth*, eds. J. C. McDowell and M. Higton (England: Ashgate 2004), pp. 191-213.

¹² K. Barth, *Witness to the Word: A Commentary on John 1*, ed. by W. Fürst and trans. by G. W. Bromiley (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003).

cise and probably not exhaustive enumeration of theological resource in Barth's thinking of the prototype.

ONTOLOGY OF WITNESS

In Barth's commentary on John 1 we discover a paradigmatic model of witness in the Baptist, which overlaps the Evangelist's self-understanding.¹³ The ontological connection between witness and the pre-existing Logos is made at the very beginning of the commentary, though Barth admits that such connection is not entirely obvious on the textual surface. Interpreting John 1:3 he asserts,

[A witness] has no independent existence or function over against him who is called *houtos* in v. 2. All of them have their existence and function only *di' autou*... The witness is not the Revealer, nor is he a witness to himself but to the Revealer.¹⁴

This relation between witness and the Revealer is elucidated with the concept of light (*phōs*) and life (*zōē*). Beginning with his understanding of 'life,' Barth decides to read 'light' as a subordinate concept of 'life,' such that the way to ascertain the meaning of 'life' is also applicable to the notion of 'light'. Barth's proposal is that 'life' essentially directs us to think of redemption; while 'light' should be taken to mean revelation.¹⁵ It is common among exegetes to read verse 4 as an explanation and follow-up of the previous verse. Noting that Augustine and Calvin also adopted this approach, Barth counter-proposes,

Always in this Gospel the term *zōē* ... has soteriological-eschatological significance.... [*Zōē*] is not the life that is already in us or the world by creation; it is the new and supernatural life which comes in redemption and has first to be imparted to us in some way.¹⁶

This reasoning is applied to the subordinate concept of 'light' in verse 4–5. Similar to 'life' which does not hark back to verse 3, the 'light' con-

¹³ Barth, *Witness*, pp. 15, 55–6. Concerning how the Evangelist positioned himself in connection to the Baptist (Matt. 11.11), Barth's definite answer—the Baptist is a paradigm with which the Evangelist derives his self-understanding. See also pp. 58, 102 for arguments against the common view among exegetes that the awkward statement of John 1:8 could have betrayed criticism against the Baptist sect.

¹⁴ Barth, *Witness*, p. 35.

¹⁵ Barth, *Witness*, pp. 35–6.

¹⁶ Barth, *Witness*, p. 39.

cept thrusts forward to a new thought that points to the whole complex of reconciliation and revelation. It refers not to the eternal light that exists always, but a light of revelation that is now new to humankind. It is not something that has presence in the creation; rather it comes fresh with redemption.

In brief, both 'light' and 'life' refer to reconciliation which is in principle a future that comes to humankind. Witness stands alongside revelation as a reflection. Where 'light' is the revelation of the incarnate Logos, it is an un-borrowed light; while human witness is the instrument in which this light bounces on and reflects. This metaphor points to the necessity of testimony, as implied in John 1:14. Referring to the incarnation, Barth writes,

[because] the Logos became flesh, the witness is worthwhile and divinely necessary. Because the Logos became flesh the witness is possible and has an object. On this ground it has also its human necessity.¹⁷

This necessity comes forth as the eternal Logos spread His tent and dwelled among us in time.¹⁸ In this specific history, for those who beheld and perceived revelation, there is of them a necessity to give witness, God has spoken and a human echo must be heard.

In *Church Dogmatics*, Barth revisited the ontological issue by way of the concept of 'divine delivery'¹⁹ (*paradidōmi* or *Überlieferung* in *Kirchliche Dogmatik*), as he deliberates the delivery of John and Jesus into the hands of enemies. To Judas' betrayal there was a parallel and corresponding form of delivery in Saul's persecution of Christians before his conversion, and also in his later ministry as the apostle Paul.²⁰ That is to say, even the antagonistic kind of delivery of the Jews, of Judas and Saul, which consists in ignoring, setting aside and nullifying the Word of God, is to be understood in the light of God's prototypical act of delivering and the 'handing over' of His Son into the world.²¹ Judas' act was not original.

¹⁷ Barth, *Witness*, pp. 95-6.

¹⁸ Barth, *Witness*, pp. 12, 94.

¹⁹ K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (referred to as *CD*), ed. by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. by G. W. Bromiley et al., 13 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1947-68). Delivery is 'the handing-over or transfer of a free or relatively free person to the confining power of those who wish him harm, and from whom he must expect harm' (*CD* II/2, pp. 481, 490).

²⁰ See *CD* II/2, pp. 481, 501 for a contrast of Judas' delivery and apostolic delivery.

²¹ Doubt may arise whether Barth entertains a positive correspondence between Judas' betrayal and apostleship. See *CD* II/2, pp. 484, 505 for a discussion.

What Judas took from Jesus, or the freedom he stole, is but a pale reflection of the divine freedom in which God denied Jesus Christ. In a fundamental sense, delivery is nothing other than the reality of the incarnation of the Word and a proper way to understand divine omnipotence.²² Here we move decisively from John's prototype to a more fundamental prototype of divine self-delivery, which constitutes the basis of all acts of witness. Witness shares the same semantic meaning with 'delivery,' and the act of witnessing consists in the faithful and complete transmission, into a second set of hands, of the message of Jesus.²³

The delivery enacted by the apostolate and the delivery of the betrayer are both reproductions of a divine prototype.²⁴ Resembling the notions of light and life in John 1, Barth attaches soteriological significance to delivery. The content and material of divine self-delivery is precisely the creation of condition for the things we receive in faith, that is, the removal of our trespasses.²⁵ This act of handing over underscores the eternal decree of God's love.²⁶ The ectypal character of Christian witness is succinctly spelt out,

From the positive divine παραδοῦναι we now look back at the concept of the apostolic παράδοσις... this action undoubtedly has its origin in the act of God Himself... the saving apostolic tradition is not a new or strange thing, an independent reality. It is simply the human transmission of that which God has divinely given. It is not a productive, but only a reproductive [activity].²⁷

In *CD IV*, the passivity of the Baptist as witness is further accentuated. Barth speaks of his history being absorbed by Christ to an extent that John is now alluded to as a 'rock face' and a reflector of divine speech.²⁸ This

²² *CD II/2*, p. 490.

²³ *CD II/2*, p. 482. Connecting Judas's delivery with that of the apostles, the latter has the judgment of the former as its background and context, and while being judged, its form is taken up again as 'the delivery which calls the Church into life'. See p. 483.

²⁴ Cautiously Barth thinks that the negative models of Judas, Saul and the Jews are 'active participation in the positive task of the apostolate', yet such participatory correspondence in negative human delivery must be understood in terms of delivery of humans in divine wrath, see *CD II/2*, p. 488 for elaborated arguments.

²⁵ *CD II/2*, p. 489.

²⁶ *CD II/2*, p. 491.

²⁷ *CD II/2*, p. 497.

²⁸ Barth writes, Jesus 'Himself is primarily, originally, immediately and directly the Witness who introduces the voice of the friend and makes him His witness by His own attestation' (*CD IV/3*, p. 612; see also, *CD IV/3*, p. 232).

passivity of human agents is reflected also in the predestinarian language Barth uses to describe the selection and the inauguration of apostleship.²⁹ Barth presses on to purge John's positive identity; even his water baptism becomes only a marker by which to differentiate him from Jesus.³⁰ The purpose of this move is to clear the way for a more rigorous and exact theological rendering of the structure of witness. Having delimited the Baptist's ministry, Barth proposes a tripartite structure of witness³¹ which cannot be detailed here. Suffice to note that John's prototypical structure of witness preceded Jesus, and yet soon to be surpassed by Him. In this surpassing, the definition of witness extends to cover eye-witness in the Fourth Gospel, and eventually the succeeding generations of witnesses.

HISTORY OF WITNESS

For Barth the Baptist's story is a paradigmatic history of witness. Nonetheless, where Jesus is the Light, the Baptist as witness is a rather empty and shadowy figure. The restrained character of this paradigm is evident in John 1:19–34, marked by his refusal to be identified as Christ, and not even any of the traditional secondary figures. The only positive note of John's identity is perhaps his voice crying in the wilderness, which brought both anonymity and enigma. The paradigmatic history of John also contains what Barth calls 'witness proper'³² (John 1:29–34), in which statements were made to give direct witness to the Lamb of God. It is clear from the Baptist's confession that without himself being told by 'He who sent me,' the Baptist would never recognize the 'Spirit descending as a dove'. Materially, this human witness was a medium, yet divine revelation does not come about through it, as a divine act revelation takes place without reliance on human mediation. Thus, through the human medium, what comes through is not revelation but faith in it.³³ Human words can perform a mediatory role solely because the divine Subject is precisely on the scene, speaking about Himself, and not just *Deus Dixit*.³⁴

²⁹ CD IV/3, p. 585.

³⁰ CD IV/3, p. 611. Regarding the water baptism of John, Barth also sees in it the significance that he is not utterly a figure of the Old Testament, but 'at least one foot in the Christian community, as a kind of apostle before the apostles'. See CD IV/2, p. 205.

³¹ CD IV/3, pp. 611–12.

³² Barth, *Witness*, p. 134.

³³ Barth, *Witness*, p. 52.

³⁴ Barth only speaks of humans and human words as medium of revelation in a qualified way, see *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion, Volume One*, ed. by R. Hannelotte and trans. by G. W. Bromiley (Grand

Analyzing Barth's earlier writings on this point, McCormack observes progress in his thinking in that Barth's former reliance on divine act in creating a 'single mathematical point' in which the unintuitable becomes intuitable, has been buttressed (not replaced) by an ontology of the divine, which underlies both his Christology and soteriology. On this secure ontological ground human witness finds God intuitable, and relaying the divine Word becomes a possibility.³⁵ Towards the end of McCormack's analysis the crucial role of the Holy Spirit in the presence of the risen Christ is mentioned, though not elaborated. The operation of the Holy Spirit coincides with the *Christus Praesens*,³⁶ 'The Holy Spirit is the power whereby Jesus...attests and imparts himself as crucified and risen', it is in *Christus Praesens* that human witnessing as a qualified kind of mediation becomes a possibility, as such human mediators can come upon provisional discoveries of divine self-witness.³⁷ To the question of how correspondence comes about in the mediation of divine attestations with human witnessing, the answer lies with the analogy of faith. This analogy names the proper relation between a human person and divine revelation. Human apprehension and replication of the divine Word is an act of conformity. McCormack observes that in faith human hearing has a content that conforms to divine speaking, without being an exact replication. This analogy works strictly from above to below, making human witnessing provisional, derivative and yet sufficient. Also, '[the] analogy is highly actualistic in character, meaning that 'it is effective only in the event of revelation'. The analogy, though established, 'does not become the attribute of the human subject'.³⁸

Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 58-9, 67. In *CD*, the mediatory role is performed in a definitive way by Christ alone.

³⁵ B. McCormack, 'Revelation and History in Transfoundationalist Perspective: Karl Barth's Theological Epistemology in Conversation with a Schleiermacherian Tradition', *JRel*, 78, (1998), 18-37.

³⁶ *CD* IV/2, pp. 322-3.

³⁷ G. Hunsinger, 'The Mediator of Communion: Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit', in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. by J. Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 181-2; E. Busch, *The Great Passion: An Introduction to Karl Barth's Theology*, trans. by G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 146.

³⁸ B. McCormack, 'Historical-Criticism and Dogmatic Interest in Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis of the New Testament' *Lutheran Quarterly*, 5 (1991), p. 219. For Barth's idea of sufficiency of human assertions of the divine, see also G. Hunsinger, 'Beyond Literalism and Expressivism: Karl Barth's Hermeneutical Realism', *Modern Theology*, 3 (1987), 209-23.

The Baptist's history has another paradigmatic dimension—he joined together the apostles and the Evangelist. The Evangelist portrayed the Baptist to represent a category—[what] is true of him is true of all those who with him, classically represented by him, fall under the concept of “witness”.³⁹ It has been deliberately brought together in the Gospel the inauguration of apostleship with the ministry of the Baptist. John 1:35–51 is in sharp contrast to the Synoptics regarding the calling of the Twelve; what stands out is the deliberate positioning of the event ‘in the middle of the Baptist movement in Perea’ instead of Galilee.⁴⁰ The Baptist stood at in the beginning of the line of apostleship and ‘sets the ball rolling’⁴¹ by instructing his own followers to turn to Jesus, and thus Barth discerns that he was the one ‘who is the first to know, what the apostles know’.⁴²

The significance of John's history is also established by his location on the threshold between the Old and New Testament, marking the turn of the two aeons.⁴³ The Baptist's message proclaimed two things simultaneously, one being the fulfilment of the Old Testament, and the other being the promise of the One who will come and baptize with the Holy Spirit. John as a typification of witness indicates that biblical witness is both pointing back to the earlier covenant and forward to the future of Christ;⁴⁴ continuity of the two Testaments is presupposed in witnessing. It is unequivocal in the Baptist's message that ‘the new thing in the *kerygma* of Jesus is also the old, the oldest of all—the incarnation of the eternal Word’.⁴⁵

The history of witness is further understood with the concept of Christ's contemporaneity. In *CD I*, Jesus' history is spiritually contemporary with the Old Testament figures as well as the New Testament church,⁴⁶ whereas in *CD III*, more nuanced ideas of the resurrected Christ as contemporary with witnesses are introduced. To state the problem, John's prototypical witness focused on the incarnation and the point-

³⁹ Barth, *Witness*, p. 57.

⁴⁰ Barth, *Witness*, p. 147.

⁴¹ Barth, *Witness*, p. 147.

⁴² Barth, *Witness*, p. 137.

⁴³ *CD I/1*, p. 112; *CD I/2*, p. 75; *CD II/2*, p. 426.

⁴⁴ *CD I/2*, p. 120.

⁴⁵ *CD IV/2*, p. 207.

⁴⁶ Barth's concept of contemporaneity is reflected in his disagreement with Cullmann, contemporaneity stipulates a relationship that exists in the particular and historically unique words of the fathers and the history of Jesus (*CD*, III/2, pp. 481-2). This presence of Christ to both aeons is grounded firstly in His self-declaration which is precisely His revelation; and secondly in the awakening of faith wrought by His Resurrection.

ing out of the Lamb, whereas the apostolic witness noticeably shifted the emphasis to the risen Christ. Barth tackles this shift by suggesting that in the apostolic testimony, there is a strong affinity to the theophany of the pre-Easter transfiguration.⁴⁷ There stands a tradition that weaved together Jesus' transfiguration, his baptism and the infancy narratives. As such these events underscored the reality of incarnation, and also in unity they anticipated and prefigured Jesus' resurrection.⁴⁸ The risen Lord was spoken of in terms of the transfigured Jesus; the Jesus in His pre-Easter earthly past is the same One revealed in His Resurrection. The same reasoning is applicable to other salient passages such as Jesus' baptism and infancy narratives. All these accounts shared the basic elements of divine epiphany (e.g. the opening of the heaven and a voice from it, indicating no ordinary miracle). The baptism of Jesus 'belongs to the same cycle of tradition as the transfiguration'.⁴⁹ The hour of His baptism is also an hour of revelation; as such it is the same as the revelation in His Resurrection. The witness of John merges with the apostolic message forming a unified whole and within its boundary Christian witness can move its focus from the Incarnation to Resurrection without being incoherent.

Christ's Resurrection and its implications on creaturely time are tackled in detail in *CD III*.⁵⁰ Dawson offers an in-depth analysis of it, and he reframes Christ's presence as His 'contemporaneity'.⁵¹ Using this concept, we may conceive of the Baptist's testimony and that of the apostles as pointing at the same Christ. True testimony is based not on the amount of empirical data that one eye-witnessed, but rather on Christ who as the true revelation of God also elects His witnesses. The historicity of the man Jesus is opaque. The chief priest and Pontius Pilate had seen, heard and

⁴⁷ *CD III/2*, p. 478.

⁴⁸ For Barth, 'the transfiguration is the supreme prefiguration of the resurrection'. Substantiating this claim he refers to 2 Peter 1:16, in which the apostolic witness is tied to the transfiguration with no mention of the Resurrection, as if the transfiguration is more central. Barth also discerns in Saul's conversion his encounter with the Lord had a strong allusion to the pre-Easter transfiguration. These examples illustrate that the pre-Easter Jesus was in a state of concealment, yet even as such, 'He was actually and properly the One He was revealed to be in His resurrection' (*CD III/2*, p. 478).

⁴⁹ *CD III/2*, p. 479.

⁵⁰ *CD III/2*, pp. 438-512.

⁵¹ R. D. Dawson, *The Resurrection in Karl Barth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). See also, K. A. Richardson, 'Christu Praesens: Barth's Radically Realist Christology and Its Necessity for Theological Method', in *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology: Convergences and Divergence*, ed. by S. W. Chung (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), pp. 136-48.

been involved in things that happened to Jesus, but they are not His witnesses in the way the bible uses the term. Where human testimony can be taken up by Christ and be placed alongside His revelation as a true reflection of it, it is Christ who solely determines His witnesses. So even from the time of the Baptist to that of the apostles, there is a noticeable development in the kerygma; both testimonies are properly pointing to the same revelation. The authenticity of their testimony has been wrought by the risen Christ,⁵² who is contemporaneous with all moments of created time. Dawson understands the Resurrection doctrinally as an 'outward vector'⁵³ of the risen Christ: in Resurrection He moves towards all moments of history as the contemporary One. Barth's Christ does not only have a definite period of earthly time, He is also the representative of all humans before God. Christ's time is in relation to all three modes of time in which humans populated or will populate.

APPROPRIATION OF WITNESS

In his exegesis of John 1:10–12, Barth offers a close-up view of human knowing, receiving and believing, which elucidates how witness is appropriated. Barth has no interest in psychological theories as suggested by Bauer, Holtzmann and Zahn,⁵⁴ which offer to explain how knowing generates beliefs, or to give a temporal structure to the sequence of knowing, receiving and believing. These proposals seek to account anthropologically the mechanism of knowing, believing and receiving, through which the authority to be God's children is routinely transferred. The Evangelist's text warrants no such theorization. What is allowed instead is to speak of a 'coincidence or personal union; those who believe in his name are the same as those to whom the Word gave *exousia*'.⁵⁵

Barth describes knowing, receiving and believing theologically with a strong adherence to the plain meaning of the text.⁵⁶ These terms are related

⁵² The idea of God speaks as the ground for human testimony to become a possibility is present in Barth's *Witness to the Word* (p. 134). In *CD III* (p. 435), Barth refers to John 3:27, James 1:17 and Psalm 20:6 to substantiate his point.

⁵³ Dawson, *The Resurrection in Karl Barth*, p. 67.

⁵⁴ Barth, *Witness*, p. 79.

⁵⁵ Barth, *Witness*, p. 79.

⁵⁶ In verses 10–12, knowing, receiving and believing refer primarily to the incarnate Logos instead of testimony about Him, yet in the context of the entire prologue where the Logos who became flesh has made it a necessity for human to give witness, we have reason to think of knowing, receiving and believing are also suitable concepts for describing what happens in the communication of witness.

as follows: the Greek text offers different words that convey the sense 'to receive', however there is no discernable shift in meaning. To properly interpret its nuance, Barth suggests referring back to the 'knowing' in verse 10. To receive is not separable from knowing the Logos who comes into the world, the sense of receiving is primarily a receptive knowing. There emerges another category in verse 12—'believing', and the inter-relationship between the three requires clarification. In John's Gospel, believing may be put before or after knowing, and Barth tends to see both positions are valid. What mediates between this dynamic relationship of 'knowing' and 'believing' is the notion of 'receiving'.⁵⁷ To the question whether these three are chronologically distinguished, Barth's answer is negative because such distinction is not given in the text. If we ask how the receivers of witness came to receive, the answer is supplied in verse 12 that 'to them he gave authority to become sons of God'.⁵⁸ In contrast to this usual translation, Barth renders the phrase 'to them he gave them the possibility'.⁵⁹ The 'possibility' given is not about our having authority and might, but rather a legitimation of becoming children of God.⁶⁰ Contrast to philosophical models of testimony, for instance, Coady's naturalistic view, for Barth a proper concept of witness is not about investing in a technical explanation of human intellect moving from knowing into believing, nor a microscopic view of how human receptivity is mediated. What really needed is a theological understanding of the reality of the possibility that comes to us, and our recognition that 'the Word creates its own hearers'.⁶¹

Another decisive aspect of appropriation is that the death of Jesus guaranteed the transmission of witness. The earlier concept of 'delivery' shows yet another facet of witness appropriation. Jesus' death is the necessary and sufficient guarantee of this transmission. In Judas's betrayal there was the sinful intention to nullify the Word. Now with Jesus' death this risk is neutralized, the earlier sinful form of delivery has been dis-

⁵⁷ To 'know' is to be enlightened; to 'believe' is a state of brightness; and to 'receive' is the aptness that describes our receptivity. Barth, *Witness*, p. 71.

⁵⁸ Young's Literal Translation.

⁵⁹ In text B in which the English translation is based, Barth renders the term *exousia* as power; while in text A he uses 'possibility' instead. In subsequent discussions, he inclines to the sense of 'possibility' instead of 'power' or 'authority'. Barth, *Witness*, pp. xi, 11, 72-3.

⁶⁰ Barth, *Witness*, pp. 72-3. The giving of this *exousia* is neither a movement commencing directly from heaven, nor mediated through humans. Rather, it is given by Christ out of His decision and act (*CD IV/4*, 14).

⁶¹ Barth, *Witness*, p. 74.

armed, and Jesus' death creates a new faithfulness and purity.⁶² Thus in the New Testament church the grave risk of handing over Jesus once again into corrupted human tradition is removed, the danger is eliminated as Christ dies no more (Rom. 6:9). The power of resurrection now wrought a 'new, authentic, redemptive delivery of Jesus'.⁶³ The New Testament presents this danger as one that has been 'banished and overcome, as one which is in practice non-existent',⁶⁴ not because the apostles acquired a superior position, but rather with the juxtaposition of Jesus' death the risk had been removed before it could take form.

A third theme of the appropriation is that witnessing is at once taking offence in Christ and a joyful ministry. Barth highlights 'being offended in Christ' (*ärgert*) as a prominent feature of John's prototype.⁶⁵ This idea is directly tied to Barth's critique of modern efforts to delineate revelation from history.⁶⁶ In response to Brunner, Barth queries if there is any chance at all that one can happily accept revelation without being offended. Referring to Matthew 18:7; 26:31 and Luke 17:1, Barth asserts that humans as self-seekers are bounded to offend and be offended in their encounter with revelation. The type of existence that Israel demonstrated by the crucifixion of Jesus was 'a drastic attempt to get clear of the offence of revelation, to make God's time the same as our time...'.⁶⁷ Although human appropriation of witness is permeated by this negative theme, Barth picks up the theme of 'friend of the Bridegroom' in John's ministry, which he repeatedly returns to in *CD* II and IV.⁶⁸ On the one hand, Christ made Himself alien, incomprehensible and repugnant even to the Baptist and His own disciples. On the other hand, there is genuine joy in hearing Him, a joy of discipleship that is permitted and commanded by Christ. In John 3:29 we see a jubilant ministry that counterbalance the negativity of offence.⁶⁹

Finally, witness appropriation is a problem of salvation.⁷⁰ In this regard salvation is a matter of existence or non-existence of preachers,

⁶² *CD* II/2, pp. 499-500.

⁶³ *CD* II/2, p. 482.

⁶⁴ *CD* II/2, p. 499.

⁶⁵ *CD* I/2, p. 57.

⁶⁶ See *CD* I/2, pp. 56-8 for Barth's refutation of both a general phenomenon of history and a presupposition of knowledge in what the normal structure of time is like. He also protests against the methodological decision to problematize revelation and to force it into the strictures of human history.

⁶⁷ *CD* I/2, p. 62.

⁶⁸ *CD* II/2, p. 588; *CD* IV/2, pp. 168, 182; *CD* IV/3, pp. 613, 629.

⁶⁹ *CD* I/2, p. 279.

⁷⁰ Romans 10:14.

and the event of proclamation is apparently connected with sending of messengers. What Barth seeks to establish is the legitimacy of indirectness in the hearing and proclaiming of the Gospel. All those being sent are witnesses or fundamentally apostles;⁷¹ this sending however, does not rest on a direct encounter with God but with an indirect one.⁷² In contrast to the concern of the global reliability of testimony transmission, which is a core concern for philosophical models of testimony, Barth's thinking of indirectness of witness is theological. Likened to the Baptist, all witnesses that come afterwards are concretely limited in their situation, and are determined and characterized by it. This limitation is not only because of divine transcendence, but also 'immanently by His becoming man', it is the self-witness of Jesus that dictates the content of the proclamation, and as such human words cannot 'crowd out the *kerygma* of Jesus'.⁷³ The foundation of the authority of human witness lies in the sameness of content in human proclamations as they repeat Jesus self-witness, such that '[he] who listens to you listens to me' (Luke 10:16). Also, in Rom. 16:25 what Paul called 'my gospel' is identical to the '*kerygma* of Jesus Christ'. Barth is firm in the view that '[there] is no place, therefore, for any appeal to the undoubted philosophy, scholarship, eloquence, moral impeccability and personal Christianity of the preacher, or for any notion that there is in his preaching any immanent power or value or salvation, or that the Christian *kerygma* is a self-sufficient and self-operative hypostasis'.⁷⁴ Thus, the focal point 'indirectness' does not rest on the idea that later generations hear the message indirectly from their predecessors. Rather, indirectness is thought of theologically in terms of humans are being delimited by God's transcendence, and simultaneously by the immanence of His becoming flesh.

CONCLUSION—BALANCING DIVERSE MODELS OF TESTIMONY

The Baptist's significance lies in the fact that he demonstrated a law by which all proclamations are 'inflexibly controlled'.⁷⁵ As a prototype, John is of every relevance to the church. He represents a demeanour and humility that the Church ought to follow—to take to its heart John's self-denial and to set for itself similar limits.⁷⁶ To outline John's prototype is a

⁷¹ CD IV/2, p. 207.

⁷² CD IV/2, p. 208.

⁷³ CD IV/2, p. 208.

⁷⁴ CD IV/2, p. 208.

⁷⁵ CD IV/2, p. 209.

⁷⁶ Barth repeatedly sees ecclesial ministry in the light of John's prototype, see CD, IV/3, pp. 629, 836, 854; CD IV/4, p. 33.

beginning towards working out a thoroughly theological concept of witness. Recapitulating main themes in the three blocks of ideas explored so far: the ontology of witness consists in the prototypical divine self-delivery, to which Barth attaches soteriological significance. Second, the paradigmatic history of the Baptist is about his position on the threshold of the two Testaments; and his pacesetting role in the apostleship. Moving from John's paradigm to the history of apostolic witness, a slight shift in the focus of proclamation is noticeable: what brings together John and the apostolic witnesses is the contemporaneity of the risen Christ. Lastly, the appropriation and transmission of testimony commences with the possibility of knowing, receiving and believing, which is a gift of grace. The appropriation process itself is guaranteed by the death of Jesus and characterized by indirectness, as humans are delimited by divine transcendence and immanence.

In Barth's theological understanding of testimony, divine agency is definite, preemptory and uncompromised; it has precedence and predominance in the constitution of witness, as well as in its transmission and performance. Christian witness in its different junctures is held in unity neither by the continuity in creaturely subjectivity nor by practical mutual trust in the organic social body. But in other conceptual proposals about the nature of testimony, such a stance is not always clear. For instance, in *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, at one point Bauckham comes close to a theological understanding of testimony. In explaining the 'we' of John 12:38 and 21:24 as an authoritative source of testimony,⁷⁷ human testimony is anchored to Jesus' self-witness. Bauckham reasons that John acknowledged and repeated the authoritative testimony of Jesus, which in turn Jesus had heard from the Father—the dimension of divine agency in witnessing comes into sight. This thought is so briefly stated, and in what follows Jesus and the Paraclete are placed on a par with five other exemplary (human) witnesses,⁷⁸ thereby giving an impression that these seven were giving qualitatively the same kind of testimony; a differentiation of Jesus' (and the Paraclete's) witness from other human words is not accentuated. Where a theological concept of witness is not operating in full strength, the conceptual space tends to be filled in by sociological and epistemological considerations. In fact, Bauckham's appropriation of Coady and Ricœur shows more attention to the social and epistemological aspect of testimony.⁷⁹ This interest in the communal and practical value of testimony follows through to his drawing of a parallel between

⁷⁷ Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, pp. 382-3. Cf. chapters 14-15, and 18.

⁷⁸ Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 387.

⁷⁹ Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, pp. 473-90.

the Gospel and the Holocaust.⁸⁰ The rhetorical force of the comparison encourages readers to develop empathetic understanding of 'uniquely unique' events in history to which fellow humans have borne witness to. To have faith in this sense can be intriguingly similar to having natural faith in others because of the shared need to dwell together, and because none of us is self-sufficient.⁸¹ In contrast, Barth's witness prototype signals an alternative plane in which testimony operates. It offers conceptual structure and materials, with which humans testifying the Resurrection are essentially connected back to the divine Word and agency as their proper origin. The prototype and more fundamentally a theological definition of witness is necessary for balancing proposals of Christian testimony, which have drawn their conceptual resource from philosophy and other disciplines.

⁸⁰ Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, pp. 493-508.

⁸¹ Coady, *Testimony*, pp. 16-7.