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# The Idea of Witness in the Synoptic Gospels

## Some Juridical Considerations

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The idea of witness is most fully developed in the Johannine and Lukan writings, but it is also present in other parts of the New Testament. It is therefore important to examine both the Synoptic Gospels and the New Testament Epistles to see where the idea of witness is used, for what reasons, and against what background. In this article an attempt will be made to explore the former subject, namely, the idea of witness in the Synoptic Gospels.

Before getting into exegetical details, however, a word of explanation is necessary. "Witness" is frequently used today as a broad word covering the total task of the church's communication of its faith. But in the New Testament the idea of witness is generally juridical, as Professor Bavinck has pointed out:

The term "witness" expresses somewhat more strongly (than *kerussein*) the opposition to the foolishness, the obstinacy, and unbelief of a world that will not put its trust in Christ. The term

"witness" suggests something of the atmosphere of a trial, a lawsuit between Christ and the world, in which the apostles are witnesses.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Bavinck's contention is fully justified in the case of the Synoptic Gospels—a fact which will become abundantly clear in the course of this investigation. The importance of this juridical element is not really surprising, particularly in view of the mass of evidence which points to the Old Testament lawsuit as the principal background for the New Testament conception of witness.<sup>2</sup>

The idea of witness is present in Mark's Gospel, but is nothing like as prominent as it is in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>3</sup> Many of the questions of the scribes and Pharisees look as if they may introduce controversies similar to those in the Old Testament and the Fourth Gospel, but instead they turn out merely to introduce various sayings of Jesus (Mk. 2:7ff., 16f., 18ff., 7:5ff.; cf. Mt. 12:2ff., Lk. 6:2ff.), and the debate is cut short. Nevertheless, the Synoptic Gospels show that Christ's mighty works are done against a background of hostility in which his opponents are ever seeking opportunities to "accuse" him (cf. Mk. 3:2 and parallels Lk. 6:7, Mt. 12:10, where the verb *kategorein* is used).

In Mk. 1:44 Jesus tells the cleansed leper to "go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded *eis martúron autoís*." Mt. 8:4 and Lk. 5:14 use the same Greek phrase in their accounts of the incident, and are therefore to be considered with Mk. 1:44. However, these passages make no contribution to the idea of witness, for though the priest is the legal authority, his authority is not exercised in a lawcourt setting, as Lev. 14:1ff. shows.

In Mk. 6:11 reference is made to the idea of witness. The context is the sending out of the Twelve (Mk. 6:7-13 and parallels). Jesus instructs them, on leav-

ing a place where their message has not been received, to shake off the dust from their feet *eis martúriion autoís*. Luke's parallel is even more explicit: *eis martúriion ep'autoús* (Lk 9:5). Interpreting this injunction in the light of the Jewish practice of removing dust from a heathen land before returning to Jewish soil, the significance of the action here commanded is to pronounce the place which rejects them heathen (cf. Mt. 10:14, Lk. 10:11, Acts 13:51).<sup>4</sup> At the same time it serves as a warning to the people that the missionaries have fulfilled their responsibility toward that place, and that from now on they must shoulder their own responsibility (cf. Acts 18:6, where the shaking off of the dust is accompanied by the solemn words: "Your blood be upon your own heads!"). Cranfield is helpful when he says that *martúriion* in Mk. 6:11 includes the ideas of:

(i) witness to God, to his grace and also to his judgment on those who reject his messengers; (ii) witness addressed to the people concerned—a warning and summons to repentance; (iii) evidence which will lie against them at the final Judgment—the fact that the warning has been delivered to them and not heeded will be produced against them.<sup>5</sup>

There also seems to be an application of the idea of witness in Mark 8. Those who are ashamed of Christ and his words in "this adulterous and sinful generation" will be put to shame by *ho huiòs tou anthrōpou* "when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (Mk. 8:38, cf. Lk. 9:26). The forensic element appears even more clearly in the accounts of Luke and Matthew: "And I tell you, every one who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man (acting in a legal capacity) also will acknowledge before the angels of God; but he who denies me before men, will be denied before the angels of God" (Lk. 12:8f = Mt. 10:32f.). In both the Lukan and Matthean accounts the juridical

words "confess" (*homologeîn*) and "deny" (*arneisthai* and *aparneisthai*) are used, together with reference to testimony "before men." In both cases what is confessed or denied is the disciple's solidarity with Christ. In other words, the disciple's confession of Christ on earth ensures Christ's confession of him in heaven (cf. Rev. 3:5).

In the Lukan account the juridical note is strengthened in two ways. First, there is the introduction of the verb *apologeisthai*, which is frequently used in juridical contexts, particularly in the book of Acts (Lk. 12:11, 21:14; Acts 24:10, 25:8, 26:1,2,24). Second, the parallel between the earthly and the heavenly confessions is made more explicit in Luke: (a) Confession *emprosthen tôn anthrōpon* is directly related to confession *emprosthen tôn angélon*. (b) Confession in Christ's case (*en emoí*) results in Christ's confession in the believer's case (*en autô*). These special characteristics of the Lukan account, however, do not destroy or nullify the common elements in Lk. 12:8f. and Mt. 10:32f. In both Matthew and Luke "...the scene of the judgment will be heaven, ... God will be the judge, ... and Jesus as the Son of Man will be the chief *witness* for men (or 'the advocate of the faithful before God')."<sup>6</sup>

After the summons to fearless confession (Lk. 12:8-12), Luke mentions a case which is presented to Christ for arbitration (Lk. 12:13-15). This passage is noteworthy for the present inquiry because of its reference to the *krites* or *diakastes* (there is an apparent allusion to Ex. 2:14 which would account for the textual variant; cf. Acts 7:27,35) who is to decide the case. This legal personage is also termed a *meristés*—an unusual word which is not found elsewhere in the Greek Bible. The *meristés* was the arbitrator who carried out the legal decision. Hence the term at once reminds

one of the Old Testament conception of justice in the gate (e.g., Ruth 4:1-12), and of the famous arbitrators mentioned in Homer's *Iliad* (XVIII:497—508).

The next passage calling for consideration is Mk. 13:9-13, where the themes of testimony and confession are further developed. Here, as in the parallel passages (Lk. 21:12-17 and Mt. 10:17-22; cf. Mt. 24:14), the witness is definitely given in a hostile context and in the face of active persecution. Now according to Strathmann the phrase *eis martúrion autoís* in Mk. 13:9, as in Mt. 10:18 and 24:14, means incriminating evidence against them at the Last Judgment rather than a witness to them so that they may believe.<sup>7</sup>

But, as Cranfield has said:

... it is surely better to allow for the various ideas which are involved in the witness-imagery rather than to insist on choosing between "witness to" and "evidence against." We suggest that the meaning here is threefold: first, that the disciples' profession of Christ before the tribunals of governors and kings will be a piece of evidence for the truth of the Gospel (cf. Calvin: "... Christ means that his Gospel will be so much the more fully attested, when they have defended it at the risk of their lives... their unshaken constancy... was... an authentic seal of the Gospel..."); secondly, it will be a piece of evidence for the truth of the Gospel offered to their persecutors (*autoís* probably including both the governors and kings, who otherwise might not have heard the Gospel, and also the disciples' Jewish persecutors); and thirdly, if the evidence for the truth of the Gospel which this courageous profession of Christ's name presents is not accepted by the persecutors and judges, then at the final judgment it will be evidence against them...<sup>8</sup>

They will be without excuse, having been recipients of such evidence.

In Mk. 13:9-13 and its parallels, then, as in the Fourth Gospel and the book of Revelation, witness is very much a live metaphor. Hauled into court by their opponents (*hoi antikeimenoí*, Lk. 21:15), Christians will be told what to say "in that hour" by the Holy Spirit (Mk. 13:11; Mt. 10:19f.). The very fact of "standing"

before kings, councils and governors will offer unprecedented opportunities for bearing "testimony before them;" this point is specially underscored in the Lukan parallel: being brought into court "will give you an opportunity to testify" (*apobesetai humín eis martúrion*, Lk. 21:13; note also Luke's use of the verb *apologeísthai* in Lk. 12:11 and 21:14).

Christians need not fear these times: "Settle it therefore in your minds, not to meditate beforehand how to answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict" (Lk. 21:14f.; cf. Mt. 10:19f., Acts 6:10). The Lukan quotation is striking on two counts. In the first place, it contains the verb *apologeísthai*, whose importance in juridical contexts in Luke-Acts has already been noted. In the second place, it employs in a juridical context the noun *ho antikeiménos*, which is used in the LXX of "the accuser" (Hebrew *hasatan*) in Zech. 3:1, and in the New Testament of the antichrist (II Thess. 2:4) and, possibly, of Satan (I Tim. 5:14, cf. Rev. 12:9-10).

In times of persecution and opposition Christians were expected to stand firm and bear their witness faithfully. Hated by all men for the sake of the Name (Mk. 13:13, Lk. 21:17, Mt. 10:22, cf. Jn. 15:18-19), they would often be condemned in earthly lawcourts, but in the heavenly lawcourt the Son of Man would acknowledge them and reverse the unjust judgments pronounced against them by their earthly judges (Mt. 10:32f., Lk. 12:8f.). These passages are interesting, for they provide a real parallel to the book of Acts, where the dying witness Stephen sees the Son of Man standing as a vindicating witness at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55f.).

But how can the Son of Man act in a juridical capacity in view of his own

condemnation in an earthly lawcourt? After all, had he not been accused by the leaders of his nation and delivered to the Roman procurator as a criminal deserving death (note the use of *kate-goreîn* in Mk. 15:3f.; Mt. 27:12; Lk. 23:2, 10, 14 and the reference to Pilate "sitting" on his *bêma* in Mt. 27:19)? This problem is faced, for Mark tells his readers that Jesus himself had predicted the Son of Man's rejection and condemnation by the Jewish leaders (Mk. 8:31, 9:31; and especially 10:33, where *katakrinein* is used; cf. Mt. 16:21, 20:18; Lk. 9:22, 17:25, 18:31-33).

Moreover, the Gospels describe the condemnation of Christ in considerable detail.<sup>9</sup> He is condemned by the chief priests, scribes and elders of the Jewish people meeting in council (Mk. 14:53, 55, 64, and parallels). Significantly, no mention is made of witnesses for the defense. Instead an attempt is made to prosecute Jesus—this explains the use of both *katamartureîn* (Mk. 14:60, Mt. 26:62, 27:13) and *pseudomartureîn* (Mk. 14:56,57). Every effort is made to press the accusation that Jesus had said: "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands" (Mk. 14:58, cf. Mt. 26:21, Jn. 2:19). Matthew thinks the testimony against Christ is false, for he calls it *pseudomarturia* (Mt. 26:59) and the witnesses *pseudomártures* (Mt. 26:60). Mark twice calls attention to the fact that the *marturia* of the witnesses did not agree (Mk. 14:56, 59); according to Jewish criminal procedure, this would mean that their evidence was inadmissible, for the very closest agreement was necessary in such cases (Susanna 54, 58, 61; cf. *Talmud*, Tosefta Sanhedrin V,5b).

Failing to secure unanimous testimony on the accusation, the high priest proceeds to question Jesus, suggesting that the nature of the testimony against him demands a reply (Mk. 14:60; cf. Mt. 26:62). When Jesus remains silent, the

high priest tries to establish the charge of blasphemy by asking: "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" (Mk. 14:61, cf. Mt. 26:63, Lk. 22:70). Jesus boldly replies: "I am (*ego eimi* appears in a forensic setting here as it frequently does in both Isaiah 40-48 and the Fourth Gospel), and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mk. 14:62, cf. Mt. 26:64, Lk. 22:69). There is obviously here

... a tacit identification of the Prisoner with the expected Son of Man, whom one day every eye shall see as both Judge and Savior, and the thought may be similar to that of the Fourth Gospel, where it is made clear that, if the Lord stands before judges, whether the Sanhedrin or Pilate, yet in reality it is he who is judge, not they...<sup>10</sup>

Certainly Caiaphas is quick to grasp the significance of Christ's quotation of Psalm 110:1 and Dan. 7:13, for he declares the affirmation blasphemous and liable to the death penalty; on these grounds he dismisses further evidence as unnecessary (Mk. 14:63, Mt. 26:65, Lk. 22:71, cf. Job 15:6, Lk. 19:22).

It is clear, then, that all the Synoptic accounts of the trial of Jesus have a forensic ring about them. All three versions mention the denial of Peter, which is described in juridical terms by the use of *arneisthai* (Mk. 14: 68f., Mt. 26:70, 72; Lk. 22:57) and *aparneisthai* (Mk. 14:30f., 72; Mt. 26:75; Lk. 22:62). Again, all three Gospels insist that the real cause of the condemnation and death of Jesus was his claim to be the Messiah (Mk. 14:62; Mt. 26:64f.; Lk. 22:69f.). It was this claim which made the evidence of the witnesses superfluous.

In both Matthew and Mark *mártus* has its forensic meaning of "a witness at a trial who gives evidence," but there is a difference. Whereas Mark emphasizes the lack of agreement among the witnesses, Matthew stresses the falsity of their testimony.

One further point may be mentioned. All three accounts speak of the Son of Man's sitting at the right hand of power (Mk. 14:62, Mt. 26:64, Lk. 22:69), and in Mark and Matthew the juridical note is strengthened by reference to "the clouds of heaven"—a feature which strongly points to his vindication.<sup>11</sup> Condemned by his earthly judges, Christ will be fully vindicated, and as *ho huiòs tou anthropou* will judge Caiaphas and company (cf. Dan. 7:13, where "one like a son of man" is similarly mentioned in connection with the theme of vindication). To borrow words from John's Gospel which are relevant here, God "has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man" (Jn. 5:27).

Some attention must now be given to those passages in Matthew and Luke which have not been dealt with in considering Mark's use of the idea of witness. Mt. 5:25f. certainly presupposes a forensic situation:

Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser (*ho antidikos*) hand you over to the judge, and the judge (*ho kritès*) to the guard (*ho huperetès*), and you be put in prison; truly, I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny.

The Lukan parallel speaks of appearing "before the magistrate" (*'ep' archonta*), employs the verb *appallàssesthai* in a legal sense meaning "to be quit of" and uses the unusual word *práktôr* to refer to the "court officer who is under orders from the judge and in charge of the debtor's prison" (Lk. 12:58f.). It also uses the technical terms *antidikos* and *kritès* to refer to the "accuser" and the "judge" in a court of law. All this evidence suggests the picture of a formal court with regular officials.

Similarly, Mt. 12:36-37 suggests a forensic situation. An eschatological "day of judgment" is mentioned when

men must give an "account." The evidence presented will prove sufficient to secure either their vindication or condemnation—a fact indicated by the use of the contrasting verbs *dikaioûn* and *katadikázein*. No witnesses are called, for the evidence will be supplied by their own "words."

The idea of witness appears graphically in Mt. 12:41f. and Lk. 11:31f., where the men of Nineveh and the Queen of the South are mentioned as "condemning this generation." The verb *katakrínein* here does not imply that the Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba will occupy a place on the bench, but rather that their evidence will secure a conviction (for *katakrínein* = "secure a conviction," cf. Heb. 11:7).<sup>12</sup> After the fashion of accusing witnesses in the Old Testament lawsuit, they will "rise" to give their evidence against "an evil and adulterous generation" on the day of judgment (cf. Lk. 11:19—"They shall be your judges" [parallel, Mt. 12:27]). These passages merit comparison with John's Gospel, where Moses is mentioned as an accusing witness who will rise up and give evidence against the unbelieving Jews (Jn. 5:45ff.).

The "judges" passage just mentioned is interesting in its own right, for the background is definitely one of controversy—a controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees comparable to the debates in the first half of the Fourth Gospel. In the Beelzebul controversy Jesus clearly makes the co-religionists of the Pharisees their accusers. Here as in the Old Testament lawsuit the same persons can serve both as accusing witnesses and as judges; hence the use of *kritai* is quite natural and appropriate in Lk. 11:19 and Mt. 12:27.

In Mt. 18:15-17 witnesses appear in connection with a dispute between two members of the Christian community. When such a dispute occurs, a three-

fold procedure is suggested to the aggrieved party: (1) Go to the offender alone, and try to reason with him or “talk him round” (*élenxon autòn*) after the fashion of the Old Testament lawsuit (Mt. 18:15, cf. Lev. 19:17, Job 40:2, Isa. 43:9, Jn. 16:8). (2) If this measure fails, take one or two with you, “that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses,” a step suggested by Deut. 19:15.<sup>13</sup> (3) If the additional people fail to convince the offender of his sin, they will serve as witnesses when the matter is brought before the whole assembly and treated after the manner of the Old Testament lawsuit. Finally, “if he refuses to listen even to the church,” he is to be treated as an outsider (Mt. 18:17).<sup>14</sup>

A juridical note is also apparent in Matthew’s version of the parable of the wicked husbandmen (Mt. 21:33-46). Thus Mt. 21:41 adds the words *légousin autô* which are absent from the parallel passages in Mark and Luke (Mk. 12:9, Lk. 20:15). The point to notice is that Matthew’s parable resembles the juridical parables of the Old Testament (e.g., II Sam. 12:1-14, 14:1-20); in each case the party concerned is made to pronounce sentence against himself (Mt. 21:41; II Sam. 12:5-6, 14:11). Matthew evidently believed that such parabolic teaching was effective, for by it the chief priests and the Pharisees perceived that Jesus “was speaking about them” (Mt. 21:45, cf. Lk. 20:19).

Mt. 23:29-36 and its parallel, Lk. 11:47-51, also invite examination. Here Jesus warns his unbelieving contemporaries of “this generation” that unless they dissociate themselves from the past by an act of national repentance they will be held morally responsible for “all the righteous blood shed on earth from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah” (Mt. 23:35, cf. Lk. 11:50f.). Their history is a history of cumulative

guilt, a continual rejection and persecution of God’s “prophets and wise men and scribes” (Mt. 23:34). By priding themselves on their supposed superiority to their fathers, they provide evidence (*martureíte*) that they are ethically the “sons of those who murdered the prophets” (Mt. 23:30f.).<sup>15</sup> In this way they serve as witnesses “against” themselves (the dative *heautois* here is *dativus incommodi*), and consent to the deeds of their fathers (Lk. 11:48, cf. 6:22f., 13:33f.; Mt. 5:12, 21:35f.). They provide evidence which will lead to their condemnation and judgment by God.

The picture of “the Last Judgment” in Mt. 25:31-46 is likewise thoroughly juridical. The “Son of Man” is the judge, the “angels” are the court officials who come “with him,” and the judgment seat, where the judge “sits,” is the “throne” (Mt. 25:31). The verb *sunágein* here seems to have the technical sense of “gathering before a court of law,” and the verb for “separate” (*aphorizein*) is similarly used of a process of judgment. There is no trial as such, but simply the pronouncing of the verdicts (Mt. 25:34ff., 41ff.). This passage is noteworthy for here Christ is described as the judge at the Last Day whereas in similar passages he is depicted as the witness (Mt. 10:32f.; Mk. 8:38; Lk. 9:26, 12:8f.). This difference is not the problem that Jeremiah has made it out to be,<sup>16</sup> for in the Old Testament lawsuit the same person could serve both as witness *and* judge; the same principle is observed in the New Testament (e.g., Jn. 5:30f., 8:18).

Another interesting passage is found in Luke 10. When the Seventy return from their mission, rejoicing that even the demons are subject to them, Jesus tells them: “I saw (note the force of the imperfect tense here: *etheoroun*) Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Lk. 10:18). G.B. Caird has brought out the juridical significance of this passage:

The vision is prophetic: the exorcisms of Jesus and his disciples were not themselves the decisive victory over Satan, but only tokens of a victory to be won through the Cross. Up to this point, it should be noted, Satan is still in heaven. He owes his place there partly to his original office of prosecuting counsel in the divine lawcourt (Job 1, Zech. 3:1-5), the ruthless accuser who misrepresents God's purpose by pressing the claims of his justice to the complete exclusion of his mercy; partly to the commonly accepted idea that all earthly realities and events have their counterpart in heaven, so that even the sum total of earthly evil must have its heavenly representative (cf. Heb. 9:23, . . .). The ejection of Satan means that God's redemptive mercy has delivered men both from the sentence that hung over them and from the guilt and power of sin that held them captive (Rev. 12:7-12).<sup>17</sup>

In other words, Luke 10:18 affords a very striking cross reference to the Johannine conception of witness, where Satan loses his case and is banished from the heavenly lawcourt by the victory of Christ on the Cross (cf. Jn. 12:31, Rev. 12:8f.).

Lk. 18:1-8 records the parable of the unjust judge, and is of interest to this study for its use of legal terms. The judge's function here, as frequently in the Old Testament, is not to condemn but to help the aggrieved party to justice (Isa. 1:17; Psalm 7:8, 26:1, 35:24, 43:1). In this case it is a widow who needs help against her legal opponent (*ho antidikos*, Lk. 18:3, cf. Mt. 5:25, Lk. 12:58, I Peter 5:8), and according to the Old Testament, she is entitled to special legal aid (Deut. 24:17, 27:19; Isa. 1:17, 23; Zech. 7:9f.). Consequently, she cries out for the *krites* to "vindicate" her (*ekdikēin* is used in Lk. 18:3, 5). Although the judge "neither fears God nor regards man," he decides to grant her vindication to escape "her continual coming" (Lk. 18:5); this accounts for the use of *ekdikēsis* with *poiein* in Lk. 18:7,8. The argument is an *a fortiori* one. If an unjust judge will grant vindication to a needy case for such a selfish reason, how much more will a loving God, the

helper of widows and of all in distress (cf. Psalm 10:14, 18; 65:5; 146:9), "vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night" (Lk. 18:7)? Here, as in the Old Testament controversy, the same person can be both judge and witness (Psalm 50:6-7, Mic. 1:2-4, Mal. 3:5 cf. Susanna 45ff.); in Lk. 18:1-8 the "judge" is the vindicating witness of the aggrieved party, in contrast to Lk. 11:19, where the "judges" are the accusing witnesses. Here, then, is a vivid use of legal language which recalls the Old Testament controversy or lawsuit. It also sheds light upon the conception of witness in the book of Revelation, where the cries of the martyrs and their answer are similarly described in juridical terms (Rev. 6:10, 18:20, 19:2).

The Lukan parable of the pounds (Lk. 19:11-27) contains a juridical point which deserves a word of explanation. The unfaithful servant is convicted on his own evidence: "I will condemn (*krinō*) you out of your own mouth, you wicked servant!" (Lk. 19:22). This passage recalls a juridical parable in the Old Testament which ends on a similar note: "So shall your judgment be; you yourself have decided it" (I Kings 20:40). This theme of self-condemnation by one's own evidence is present in several other Old Testament passages which shed light on Lk. 19:22 (II Sam. 1:16, Job 9:20, cf. Susanna 61). To borrow words from the book of Job, one could say: "Your own lips testify against you" (Job 15:6).

Several other passages in Luke's Gospel contain interesting juridical words (e.g., *pseudomarturein*, in 18:20; *krima* in 20:47, 23:40, 24:20; *aition* in 23:4; *anakrinein* in 23:14; *epikrinein* in 23:24), but a study of their use does not materially advance one's understanding of the Lukan conception of witness.

Finally, one passage at the beginning of Luke's Gospel and another at the end call for special comment. In the Pro-

logue of his Gospel Luke makes it crystal clear that his conception of witness places the strongest possible emphasis upon the historical foundation of the Good News (Lk. 1:1-4). He is not concerned with myths or speculation, but with facts which took place at a definite point in space and time (cf. Lk. 2:1-2, 3:1-2). This concern for established facts leads Luke to insist that the fundamental testimony concerning Christ is given by men who are qualified as *autóptai* as well as *uperétai* (Lk. 1:2).

But of what were the apostles eye-witnesses? The answer to that question is found by turning to the other passage at the end of Luke's Gospel (Lk. 24:44-49). There Jesus plainly tells the Twelve that they are witnesses of his sufferings and death, of his resurrection from the dead on the third day, and of the message that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations. Here clearly the idea of witness is used in a two-fold sense, just as in secular Greek literature and the Old Testament lawsuit.<sup>18</sup> The apostles are both witnesses to facts *and* advocates who try to convince their opponents of the truth of the Christian position. Consequently, their testimony concerns not only the reality of historical events which they have seen and heard, but also a conviction as to what these events signify, namely, the saving activity of God in history. This testimony is to be given after they are "clothed with power from on high" (Lk. 24:49, cf. Acts 1:8).

According to Luke, the truth of the apostolic testimony is confirmed by the testimony of the Scriptures: "Then he (Jesus) opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his

name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things'" (Lk. 24:45-48). That is, the apostles testify that Jesus is proved by their evidence to fit the description of the Messiah predicted by the Old Testament, a point which is given great emphasis in the book of Acts (3:18, 13:32f., 17:2f., 26:22f., 28:23). This seems to be another illustration of the two-witness principle set forth in Deut. 19:15 and its parallels, Num. 35:30 and Deut. 17:6; eyewitness testimony is corroborated by scriptural testimony that every word may be established at the mouth of two or three witnesses.<sup>19</sup> This principle is constantly recurring in the New Testament, and is of the greatest importance to the New Testament conception of witness.

## SUMMARY

The idea of witness is very much a live metaphor in the Synoptic Gospels. Hauled into court by their opponents, Christians will be told what to say in the hour of crisis by the Holy Spirit. The very fact of standing before kings, councils and governors will offer unprecedented opportunities for bearing testimony before them. Though often Christians would be condemned in earthly lawcourts, in the heavenly lawcourt the Son of Man would acknowledge them and reverse the unjust verdicts pronounced against them by their earthly judges.

All the Synoptic accounts of the trial of Jesus quite naturally have a forensic ring about them, and mention the Son of Man's sitting at the right hand of power. In Mark and Matthew the juridical note is heightened by reference to "the clouds of heaven." Condemned by his earthly judge, Christ will be fully vindicated and as Son of Man will judge Caiaphas and company.



The Synoptic Gospels also contribute to an understanding of courtroom procedure and terminology, the importance of eye-witnesses, the place of accusing witnesses, the use of witnesses in the settlement of disputes within the Christian community, the importance of multiple witness and the juridical function of Satan.

Jesus insofar as it relates to the idea of witness. For recent discussions on the historicity of the trial see Paul Winter, *On the Trial of Jesus* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1961), and A.D. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (The Sarum Lectures, 1960—61. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 24—47.

<sup>10</sup> R.H. Lightfoot, *The Gospel Message of St. Mark* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), p. 54.

<sup>11</sup> C.F.D. Moule, *From Defendant to Judge—and Deliverer: An Inquiry into the Use and Limitations of the Theme of Vindication in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxonian Press, 1952), reprinted in his book *The Phenomenon of the New Testament* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1967), pp. 82—99, especially pp. 87—88.

<sup>12</sup> G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1966), p. 241.

<sup>13</sup> This principle of evidence has also been advanced as a possible explanation of Matthew's use of *two* blind men in Mt. 20:30, where Mark and Luke mention only one. Cf. Zane C. Hodges, "The Blind Men at Jericho," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, CXXII (1965), pp. 319—330: "Matthew wanted the additional evidential value of two witnesses to Jesus' power." Cited in *Religious and Theological Abstracts*, IX (1966), item 651.

<sup>14</sup> A similar procedure for settling disputes was adopted by the Qumran community (cf. *The Zadokite Document* (9:3-5), *The Manual of Discipline* (5:24—6:1), and *The Damascus Document* [X]).

<sup>15</sup> The fact that Lk. 11:48 has "you build" where Mt. 23:31 has "you are the sons (of)" is to be explained in terms of an Aramaic original 'athwn bny'n 'athwn which could be read either way. The Matthean version is to be preferred in view of the fact that Luke's words ("and you build") are anti-climactic. Cf. Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (2nd edition; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), pp. 11—12.

<sup>16</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. S.H. Hooke (Revised edition; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), p. 206—208.

<sup>17</sup> G.B. Caird, *The Gospel of St. Luke* (London: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 143; cf. also G.B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), pp. 31—37.

<sup>18</sup> On the witness terminology of secular Greek see A.A. Trites, *op. cit.*, pp. 19—52.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. H. van Vliet, *No Single Testimony: A Study in the Adoption of the Law of Deut. 19:15 Par. into the New Testament*, Vol. IV in *Studia Theologica Rheno-Traiectina*, eds. H. W. Obbink, A.A. van Ruler and W.C. van Unnik (Utrecht: Kemink, 1958).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, trans. David H. Freeman (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1961), p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. A.A. Trites, "The New Testament Conception of Witness," unpublished D. Phil. dissertation (1968), deposited in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, pp. 1-163.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. J.C. Hindley, "Witness in the Fourth Gospel," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, XVIII (1965), 319—339; Ignace de la Potterie, "La Notion de Témoignage dans Saint Jean," *Sacra Pagina*, II, eds. J. Coppens, A. Descamps and E. Massaux (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1959), pp. 193—208.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. T.W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus* (London: S.C.M. Press Ltd., 1949), p. 76.

<sup>5</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark* (*Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary*). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), p. 201.

<sup>6</sup> A.M. Hunter, *The Work and Words of Jesus* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1950), p. 106.

<sup>7</sup> Hermann Strathmann, "Martus," *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1933ff.), IV, 509; English edition, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), IV. 503.

<sup>8</sup> Cranfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 397—398.

<sup>9</sup> This investigation is simply concerned with what the Synoptic Gospels say about the trial of