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## **Christian Witness: Its Grammar and Logic**

### **Chrześcijańskie świadectwo: jego gramatyka i logika**

**Abstract.** Pope Francis' double-invitation to embrace God's love and to be its witnesses requires human beings to have a spiritual readiness that reflects the grammar and the logic of being Christian. This paper aims to re-propose a fresh discourse on Christian witness. This is particularly imperative in the light of recent acts of heroic witness of those Christians who courageously stand up to hatred, even when it means giving up their lives. This paper proceeds in three steps. First, there is a *contextualisation* of Christian witness with an emphasis on the need to appreciate the fullness and the meaning of the Christian faith. Secondly, the paper sets out to discuss the *grammar* of witness particularly in the light of the Gospel of John. Lastly, there follows a presentation of the *logic* of being Christian despite it often being described as folly by those who have not yet come to know of God's love in real terms. Becoming Christian witnesses is a demanding process, that whenever undertaken, leads the Christian to be a *living-expression* of God's unconditional love to all.

**Streszczenie.** Podwójne zaproszenie papieża Franciszka do przyjęcia Bożej miłości i bycia jej świadkami wymaga, aby ludzie mieli duchową gotowość, żeby odzwierciedlać gramatykę i logikę bycia chrześcijaninem. Ten artykuł ponownie proponuje świeży dyskurs na temat bycia świadkiem Chrystusa. Jest to szczególnie konieczne w świetle ostatnich aktów heroicznego świadectwa tych chrześcijan, którzy odważnie walczą z nienawiścią nawet za cenę swojego życia. Artykuł ten został podzielony na trzy części. W pierwszej zostanie omówiona kontekstualizacja chrześcijańskiego świadectwa z podkreśleniem potrzeby docenienia pełni i znaczenia wiary chrześcijańskiej. W drugiej, omówiono gramatykę świadka szczególnie w świetle Ewangelii wg św. Jana. W ostatniej zostaje omówiona logika bycia chrześcijaninem, która bywa określana przez tych, którzy realnie nie doświadczyli Bożej miłości, jako szaleństwo. Aby stać się chrześcijańskimi świadkami, potrzebny jest wymagający proces, który w każdym przypadku prowadzi do tego, aby chrześcijanin był żywą ekspresją bezwarunkowej miłości Boga do wszystkich.

**Keywords:** witness; reason; faith; hope; truth; freedom and love.

**Słowa kluczowe:** świadectwo; rozum; wiara; nadzieja; prawda; wolność i miłość.

The pontificate of Pope Francis is undoubtedly marked by a double-invitation to embrace God's love and to be its witnesses. It is a clarion call to Christians and to all people of good will to set a new tone for the Church in the world. It is a sincere request to embark on a mission to propose the beauty and usefulness of leading a Christian lifestyle.<sup>1</sup> He insists that faith matters personally, while equally having a social dimension. He advocates for a sense of collective responsibility, hence his reference to a Church of the people (and the poor), to reform its institutional set-up, to do justice while emphasising compassion, as well as to experience the need and the urgency of evangelisation.<sup>2</sup>

Against a backdrop of stifling worldliness characterised by self-centredness – cloaked in an outward religiosity bereft of God – the Pontiff insists that Christians ought to propose the Gospel of mercy and love for all humankind. In various homilies and audiences, but especially in his two apostolic exhortations, Pope Francis explains that in thirsting for authenticity, people worldwide prefer to listen above all to *witnesses who offer hope* in a world apparently slow in proposing ways of finding true happiness.<sup>3</sup> Christians themselves are called to rediscover (inner) freedom in order to profess their faith not merely at the margins, but at the heart of their own culture and in the world at large.

This paper aims to re-propose a fresh discourse on Christian witness. This is particularly imperative in the light of recent acts of heroic witness of those Christians who courageously stood up to hatred, even when it meant giving up their lives. In a way, this recalls what the early church theologian Tertullian (160–220) said about persecution in Carthage, North Africa, namely that it actually strengthens the Church, when he stated that “the blood of the martyrs

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<sup>1</sup> See Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*; A. Figueroa Deck, *Francis, Bishop of Rome*, pp. 60–101; L. Boff, *Francis of Assisi*, pp. 95–151; E. Duffy, *Go, Francis, and Repair my Church*, pp. 2–11; C. Theobald, *Le christianisme comme style*.

<sup>2</sup> For further readings that do justice to Pope Francis' theology and overall pastoral approach, see C.M. Galli, *Il ritorno del popolo di Dio*, pp. 294–300; idem, *La teología pastoral de Aparecida*, pp. 25–50; G. Mangan, *The Challenge of Including the Poor in Society*, pp. 16–19; I. Scaramuzzi, *Francesco in Polonia: rischiare la fiducia*, pp. 389; M. Semeraro, *La riforma di papa Francesco*, pp. 433–441. It would be interesting to examine for instance to what extent did Henri de Lubac (1896–1991) inspire the young Argentinian Jesuit Jorge Mario Bergoglio particularly through the classical work entitled *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* published originally in French in 1950.

<sup>3</sup> See Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium* § 92, 99, 100, 121 etc. and *Amoris laetitia* § 40, 63, 71 etc. For a wider view of witness in the world, see F. Korner, *Testimonianza cristiana in un mondo post-secolare*, pp. 385–408.

is the seed of the Church.”<sup>4</sup> What follows is a humble attempt to rediscover the *grammar* and the *logic* of Christian witness, in a way that also does justice to those marking the initial stages of the Church, particularly the early martyrs.

This paper proceeds in three steps. First, there is a *contextualisation* of Christian witness. In this brief section, the emphasis lies on the need to refresh the memory in this regard as well as to appreciate the fullness and the meaning of the Christian faith. Secondly, the paper sets out to discuss the *grammar* of witness. This involves an examination of the term “witness” in the New Testament and especially in the Gospel of John. Lastly, there follows a presentation of its *logic*, that is how witness can be experienced as love in real terms. It emerges finally that the reality of Christian witness implies an *embrace* that involves one’s openness and disposition toward God as well as one’s being a *living-expression* of God’s unconditional love to all.

## 1. Witnessing the Reason for the Hope Within

Recent martyrs including the Christians killed under Nazism, Communism, dictatorships and terrorism are nothing less than a force of love that overcomes with meekness and patience any malicious attack on professed faith. How can one ever forget the spiritual legacies of the 108 Polish martyrs of World War II; the thirty-eight martyrs killed between 1945 and 1974 by the Communist regime in Shkodër, northwestern Albania; the Archbishop of San Salvador Óscar Romero killed in 1980; the six Jesuits massacred in El Salvador in 1989; the Chaldean Father Ragheed Aziz Ganni murdered in Mosul, Iraq, in 2007; the Coptic Christians massacred on the eve of 7 January 2010 in the Egyptian city of Nag Hammadi; the apostolic vicar of Anatolia in Turkey, Mgr Luigi Padovese, killed in İskenderun, Turkey, in 2010; Father Jacques Hamel killed senselessly in Rouen, France, in 2016 and still many others, perhaps unknown, in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Ukraine, Pakistan, India, China and all over the globe? Ours is a reality that urges Christians to discern their identity and calling especially to contemplate on the nature of being witnesses to what is unifying, true, good and beautiful, that is to God himself, and to behold his presence.<sup>5</sup>

Peter’s words in his first letter – included in the above sub-heading – “to always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks [the Christian] to

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<sup>4</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* 50, 13. An excellent book in this regard is R. Bennett, *Four Witnesses: The Early Church in Her Own Words*, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> On the theme of witness and truth, see P. Martinelli, *Testimonianza e verità: un binomio ancora possibile?*, pp. 29–41 and B. Mondin, *Verità, testimonianza e dialogo*, pp. 49–62.

give the reason for the hope [within]” remain ever realistic, particularly in the light of the topic under discussion.<sup>6</sup> This implies becoming followers of Christ both on the road to the cross as well as being transformed in the *logos* itself. The grammar and the logic of becoming Christians concern a process of self-transformation in the Word being proclaimed to them. In turn, their presence becomes the good news to be announced to others. The *sequela Christi* as a mission of all Christians becomes then a vocation to be heeded and fulfilled. This makes even more sense in the command of Jesus to “go and make disciples” indicating at once inner freedom, readiness, enthusiasm, fascination and even inspiration.<sup>7</sup>

Pope Francis urges Christians to discern not simply the *right language* with which to persuade, but particularly the significant *forms of witness* that can help the Church reach the hearts of people of good will. Truly profound is Peter’s advice that giving an answer or the reason for the hope within should be done “with gentleness and respect”.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps today’s emphasis does not necessarily lie on (the) *truth*, but rather on the basis of *trust*.<sup>9</sup> The authenticity of Christian witness relies on its being faithful and unconditional, hence targeting the *intellectual* and the *existential* dimension of human beings. People in the world yearn for a radiant and attractive witness that instils inner peace and consolidates fraternal communion.<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis, for instance, says that Christians in communities throughout the world are to bear witness to a constantly new way of *living together* in fidelity to the Gospel.<sup>11</sup>

Jesus emerges as the great teacher who indicates the road to inner joy and true selfless love. This has been the experience of the twelve, the Church Fathers

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Peter 3:15.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 28:19. See also the document on *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct* published jointly by the World Council of Churches, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the World Evangelical Alliance in 2011; S. Jambrek, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World in the light of God’s Word*, pp. 187–215.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Peter 3:15.

<sup>9</sup> The Oxford Dictionaries have named “Post-truth” the word of the year 2016 particularly in the light of Brexit and the presidential election in the United States. In this scenario, the call by Pierangelo Sequeri to address today’s society to recover the virtue of trust as a way to restore culture and humanity at large becomes even more important. See P. Sequeri, *Il Dio affidabile*, 1996; M.P. Gallagher, *Truth and Trust*, 3–31.

<sup>10</sup> *Evangelii gaudium* § 99.

<sup>11</sup> *Evangelii gaudium* § 92. This may also be the vision for *Laudato sí* published in 2015 with its emphasis on living together in a responsible manner, while keeping in mind future generations.

and all those of good will who along the centuries embarked on a liberating journey to know Jesus Christ and to trust him wholeheartedly.<sup>12</sup> The Christian faith and tradition should also be interpreted along these lines. In this sense, faith requires one's disposition and willingness to believe in God's Word that will in turn provide credible witness to a reconciled life.<sup>13</sup> The Gospel has a real impact on God's faithful people and on the concrete needs of the present time. Here, reference can be made to a speech Pope Benedict XVI made in 2011:

Faith must never be presupposed but proposed. This is just how it is. Faith is not preserved in the world by itself, it is not automatically passed on to the human heart, but must always be proclaimed. Moreover, if the proclamation of faith is to be effective it must stem in turn from a heart that believes and loves, a heart that adores Christ and believes in the power of the Holy Spirit!<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, every epoch raises the need to rediscover the journey of faith. The new evangelization calls on every baptized person to witness each day to the power of God's love and foster peace wherever possible in concrete life-situations. Pope Francis explains that it calls evangelizers to "speak of a God whom they themselves know and are familiar with, as if they were seeing him".<sup>15</sup> In this sense, faith reflects an inextinguishable yearning present in humanity for the infinite. Alternatively, only the God who became finite in order to open our

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<sup>12</sup> Here one immediately thinks of the calling of the Apostles (See Matthew 4:18–22; Mark 1:16–34; Luke 5:1–11). Moreover, in their own different perspectives, the Church Father emphasised Christ as the streaming fountainhead of Christianity, the one and only teacher. See for example, Polycarp in his *Letter to the Philippians* recommending that they walk in the way of truth traced by the Lord; Ignatius writes on Christ as the fullness of truth; Clement of Alexandria presents Christ as the source of all knowledge and saviour of all humanity; Origen on Christ as the Light of the world and the teacher of divine mysteries; Cyril of Alexandria on Christ who proposes the truth to us etc. On these lines, Yves Congar's book entitled *Tradition and traditions* could be interpreted in terms of opening up and witnessing to God's mystery as a way of life, than simply as tenets of faith to be upheld at all costs. See J. Hanvey, *In the Presence of Love*, pp. 383–398.

<sup>13</sup> In this light read for instance Clement of Rome's strong words: "Let us fix our gaze upon the Blood of Christ, and understand how precious it is to the Father, because, poured out for our salvation, it brought to the whole world the grace of conversion. Let us pass in review all the generations and learn the lesson, that from generation to generation the Master has given an opportunity for conversion to those who were willing to turn to Him". See Clement of Rome, *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, chapter 7, nos. 4–5.

<sup>14</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Opening of the Diocese of Rome's Ecclesial Convention* (June 13–16, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium* § 150; Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi* § 76.

finiteness and lead humans to the breadth of his infiniteness responds to the deep question of their being.<sup>16</sup>

The task of Christians is to serve the faith with a humble spirit and the whole strength of their heart and understanding.<sup>17</sup> There is a process of an *auditus fidei*, an *intellectus fidei* and a *testimonio fidei* in the life of Christians. People in fact want to see a credible and demonstrable connection between faith in God and the prospect of his reign on the one hand, and human beings and earthly creation on the other. How strong, then, are the words of the Jesuit Karl Rahner (1904–1984) when he speaks of the urgency to have a firm faith and the need to be accountable to what has been passed on from one generation to another. He says:

Surely real faith ought to burn! Ought it not to drive us on to the streets? Ought it not to want to convince others, not out of arrogance or superiority, but out of the certainty of a meaning found and a happiness experienced? At least from a sense of satisfaction and inner peace? [...] In those days people must have argued, quarrelled, become enemies and hated each other because they believed there was something at stake. And now? The Christian faith provides no inspiration, exerts no fascination, arouses no enthusiasm. Not in me and not in others. What other explanation is there for the reluctance of young people in particular to commit themselves to the Christian faith?<sup>18</sup>

This leads us to speak of faith as being of its nature “total”. Christian witness implies a deliberate appreciation of the fullness and the meaning of the Christian faith. In this section, the emphasis lays on that “readiness” to give an answer for the hope and faith within. It implies refreshing the memory that faith arises within humans in a movement which carries them “whole” and entire towards their “Whole”, that is God who is love.<sup>19</sup> This then is the reason for the hope that Christians are asked to bear witness to in a disheartened world.

The French Dominican Yves Congar (1904–1995) could not express this truth better when he said that faith tends of itself to invade one’s whole of life, and since things are conserved under the influence of the causes which brought them into being, it is not conserved, and does not develop except in vital accord, in organic union with all the rest of ourselves, of our internal and ex-

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<sup>16</sup> On this theme and the need for continuous conversion be it moral, intellectual or religious, see J.A. Berry, *Man’s capacity for self-transcendence*, pp. 23–42.

<sup>17</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Relativism. The Central Problem for Faith Today*, p. 240.

<sup>18</sup> K. Rahner SJ, *Why believe at all?*, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> 1 John 4:8.

ternal activity.<sup>20</sup> He explains that “faith is, of its nature, rooted in the deepest dynamism which, dominating and unifying the totality of my existence, makes believers and witnesses adhere at once to that which is for *them* the *Whole*, their *Whole*, their satisfying, beatifying, total and lasting good.”<sup>21</sup> After having highlighted the need to present and to clarify that faith is at the basis of Christian witness, what follows is a modest presentation of the *grammar* of witness in the New Testament.

## 2. The *Grammar* of Witness in the New Testament

In order to be prepared to *give account* of the faith today, it is certainly most suitable to see how this is perceived and exercised in the life of the early Church. In the New Testament, the theme of “witness” (Heb. *עֵד*; Gk. μάρτυς *martyrs*) is especially present in the Gospel of John and the books of Acts and Revelation.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, some biblical scholars hold that this also appears frequently elsewhere.<sup>23</sup> There are at least three basic connotations of the term. “Witness” is used primarily in a juridical manner throughout the Bible.<sup>24</sup> Secondly, it is used in connection with Israel and thirdly it is connected to the early Church.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Y. Congar, *The Reasons for the Unbelief of our Time*, I, 14.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, I, 15–16.

<sup>22</sup> The “witness” theme is prominent in John’s Gospel. See Jn 1:7, 19; 3:11, 32–33; 4:39; 5, 31–39; 8:13–14, 18. See Acts 3:15; 13:31; 22:15, 20; 26:16. See Rev 1:5; 2:13; 3:14; 6:9; 11:3; 17:6.

<sup>23</sup> E.g., Lk 22:71; Rom 1:9; 1 Cor 1:6; 2 Cor 1:23; Phil 1:8; 1 Thess 2:5,10; 1 Tim 6:12–13; 2 Tim 2:2; 1 Pet 5:1; 2 Pet 1:16; 1 Jn 5:6–11. See L. Coenen, *Witness*, pp. 1038–1047; A.A. Trites, *Witness*, p. 806.

<sup>24</sup> As a juridical term, a witness is a person who knows the truth and can testify before a court of law, declaring what has been seen or heard. Therefore, a witness is a person who has first-hand knowledge of a fact or an event. See A.A. Trites, *Witness*, p. 806; M. Greenberg, *Witness*, 864. In his explanation of the term, Dale F. Leschert argues that the necessity of recollecting and reiterating what happened implies that witness bearing includes a historical dimension. Furthermore, one notices that although this activity originated in legal contexts, its vocabulary quickly expanded to other social and religious settings. See D.F. Leschert, *Witness*, p. 1384.

<sup>25</sup> See Is 43:10, 12; 44:8; Lk 24:48; Jn 15:27; Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32; 5:32; 10:39, 41. See A.A. Trites, *Witness*, p. 877.

To speak of a grammar in this sense implies retrieving the meaning, appreciating the roots and studying the occurrences of the term ‘witness.’<sup>26</sup> Technically speaking, the action of bearing witness is depicted in various ways as to portray its different meanings. First of all, there is μαρτυρέω or *martyreō* that means ‘to bear witness’ or ‘to attest’. A similar term is διαμαρτύρομαι or *diamartyromai* that means ‘to swear, attest or testify’. There is also μαρτύρομαι or *martyromai* that likewise means ‘to swear, attest or testify’. In the *absolute* sense, μαρτυρέω (*martyreō*) means ‘to bear witness’ (see, for example, 1 John 5:6) or ‘to swear (to)’ (John 12:17; 13:21). With the *accusative* of the thing, it means ‘to attest, testify’; likewise with ὅτι (*hoti*; John 4:44, etc.). With the *dative* of the person, μαρτυρέω ὅτι (*martyreō hoti*) it means ‘to testify something to someone’ (John 3:28, etc.).

Mansueto Bianchi (1949–2016), a former President of the Episcopal Commission for Ecumenism and the Dialogue of the Italian Bishops’ Conference, explains that the evangelist John uses the verb μαρτυρέω (*martyreō*) followed by the dative (*dativus commodi*) so as to shift our attention on to whom witness is given.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the dative can also be a “dative of disadvantage”, that is against someone.<sup>28</sup> Where the verb stands with the dative of the person, it means ‘to applaud a person’ (Luke 4:22). Where it stands with the “dative of the thing”, it means “to bear witness for something”.<sup>29</sup> Alternatively, the *passive* can be used in a neutral sense that is to say that something is witnessed, “testified”, always in reference to Scripture, or it can be used in an evaluative sense to express the notion that someone “has received a good witness”.<sup>30</sup>

It is interesting to see the occurrences of the noun μάρτυς (*martyr*). It is present 13 times in Acts, 9 in Paul (including 3 in the Pastoral Letters) and 5 times in the Book of Revelation. With regard to the compounds, ἐπιμαρτυρέω (*epimartyreō*) is attested only in 1 Pet 5:12 alongside παρακαλέω (*parakaleō*), to exhort in the sense of to remind; καταμαρτυρέω (*katamartyreō*) only in Matt 26:62 (cf. Mk 14:60) and Matt 27:13 in the questions directed to Jesus as to whether he did not wish to express an opinion with regard to the evidence borne against him; and συμμαρτυρέω (*symmartyreō*) is used exclusively by Paul in Rom 2:15; 8:16;

<sup>26</sup> Here, reference shall be made to prominent biblical scholars who closely analyse this important term in the life of the Church. See L. Coenen, *Witness*, pp. 1038–1047; J. Beutler, *martureo*, 389–391; M. Bianchi, *La testimonianza nella tradizione giovannea*, p. 120.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. M. Bianchi, *La testimonianza nella tradizione giovannea*, p. 120.

<sup>28</sup> See for instance Matt 23:31.

<sup>29</sup> This is however only in John, 3 John, Acts 14:3.

<sup>30</sup> See Rom 3:21; Heb 7:8, 17; 11:4f., in the last two instances with the nominative and infinitive.) See J. Beutler, *martureo*, pp. 389–391.



9:1, expressing a confirmatory, reinforcing or accusatory co-testimony of the spirit or of human conscience. Finally, of the 15 cases where διαμαρτύρομαι (*diamartyromai*) is used, 9 are in Acts where the verb is used as a special expression for proclamation as it is, incidentally, also in 1 Thess 4:6, and 3 times in 1 Tim 5:21 and 2 Tim 2:14; 4:1.

With regard to the occurrences of the noun μαρτυρία (*martyria*), out of 37 instances, 21 belong to John and the Johannine Epistles, and 9 to the Book of Revelation, whereas this term is entirely lacking in Paul and in the letter to the Hebrews. Bianchi notes that another word that lacking in the Johannine literature are μαρτύρομαι (*martyromai*; that is ‘to declare solemnly’).<sup>31</sup> With regard to μαρτυρέω (*martyreō*), it appears 76 times in the New Testament, 63 times in the active and 13 times in the passive. It occurs most often in John (33 times) and in 1–3 John (10 times). Acts has 11 occurrences, whereas other books much fewer.<sup>32</sup> This leads us to refer to some connections that John does to other themes, including proclamation, faith and judgement.

The first combination is that between witness and proclamation. John structures the sentences in such a way as to link the theme of witness (bearing testimony) to that of proclamation or religious announcements made in public. This is evident in 1:15, where John links μαρτυρέω (*martyreō*) to κράζω (*krazō*; the proclamation made by John the precursor).<sup>33</sup> Even in Jn 3:11, the episode where Jesus, converses with Nicodemus, witnessing is associated with speaking (λαλέω, *laleō*). Moreover, in 1 Jn 1:2 μαρτυρέω (*martyreō*) is linked to ἀπαγγέλλω (*apangellō*; ‘to declare’). Ignace de La Potterie (1914–2003) the Belgian Jesuit and renowned biblical scholar, however, notices two facts. First the words that John uses in reference to the term “proclamation” are different from those used in the Synoptic Gospels (especially εὐαγγελίζω, *euangelizō* and κηρύσσω, *kērussō*). Secondly, the words John uses are directly related to martyrdom terminology.<sup>34</sup> Relating witness to proclamation means then to go back to the roots and recognising the importance of refreshing memory as well as to have tradition passed on.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. M. Bianchi, *La testimonianza nella tradizione giovannea*, p. 120.

<sup>32</sup> Hebrews 8 times, Paul 5, Revelation 4, the Pastorals 2, Matthew, Luke, and Colossians 1 each. In the passive, the most occurrences are in Hebrews 6 and Acts 4.

<sup>33</sup> One must note that John does not use the word “baptist” but instead opts for the word “precursor”. The latter is directly linked to the concept of witness compared to the former term.

<sup>34</sup> J. De La Potterie, *La vérité dans Saint Jean*, p. 80: “On voit déjà que le thème Johannique de témoignage sera, lui aussi, un thème de révélation”.

Another link present in the Gospel of John in this regard is that between witness and faith. Using verbs like ὁμολογέω (*homologeō*; ‘to acknowledge’) in Jn 1:19–20 and 1 Jn 4:15 and ὁράω (*horaō*) or θεάομαι (*theaomai*; ‘to see’) in Jn 1:34; 3:11–23, 32; 19:35 and 1 Jn 1:2; 4:14, John stresses the strict relationship between ‘seeing’ and ‘believing’. Here, the evangelist of the fourth gospel highlights the eyes of faith compared to ‘seeing’ through the naked eye. Bianchi explains that John uses the verb ‘to see’ in order to connect it to the theme of revelation. This is evident in Jn 1:7 where he says: “He came as a witness, to *bear witness* to the light, so that everyone might *believe* through him.” Bearing witness then means enabling others to see.

The third theme is that of witness in relation to the notion of judgement. Surely, this calls to mind the trial of Jesus. Throughout the whole Gospel, John speaks of “witnessing” in a legal sense. The outstanding Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988), in particular, devoted a whole section of his trilogy to the dramatic confrontation between Jesus and the Jews or, perhaps, between Jesus (the light) and the world (the darkness). Balthasar chooses the terms “drama” and “logic” to reveal how extravagant is God’s love.<sup>35</sup>

John intends to bring to light the contrast between Jesus, being himself the truth (revealing who he himself is) and the inability of the Jews to interpret Moses, the Law and Scripture itself to come to know (and accept) Jesus as the Son of God. Revealing himself as the Son, Jesus is unveiling the face of God as his Father: “it is the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known” (1:18). The grammar of witness then holds fast to the revelation of God as love. This is reiterated once more in Jn 8:14 where Jesus says, “Even though I am testifying on my own behalf, my testimony is still true, because I know where I have come from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from or where I am going”.

The purpose of this section is to focus on and interpret the grammar of faith in the light of Jesus Christ and his mission in this world. The discourse now turns to “witness” as Christ’s revelatory activity. In this sense, the witness asked for by Pope Francis is nothing less than a reflection and an imitation of that witness which has for its object Christ himself in his personal mystery as the Son. Rino Fisichella (1951–), an Italian theologian and the first President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation, explains that Christ bears witness by his entire being and throughout his entire existence. In this sense, the Christian too is asked to radiate his faith throughout

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<sup>35</sup> H.U. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* (five volumes) 1988–2003 and *Theo-Logic* (3 volumes) 2001–2005.

his entire existence. What is at stake here is witness in terms of orthodoxy *and* orthopraxis.

Christians are called to internalise Christ's mission of making himself known as coming from the Father and putting it in practice too. There is an existential dimension that is strongly being referred to. Witness implies the recognition of God's being and love in his plan for humanity. Both fields of Exegesis and Theology have seen in these last years rewarding scholarship concerning the theology of the paschal mystery. Von Balthasar (1905–1988), Louis Bouyer (1913–2004), Adalbert-G. Hamman (1910–2000), Carlo Maria Martini (1927–2012), Jürgen Moltmann (1926–) and Karl Rahner (1904–1984), among others, are all scholars who have renewed and shaped theology on the mystery of revelation reaching its climax on the cross. The reason for this, they argue, is that the cross brings the supreme revelation of Christ. It reveals the incomparable love of the Father for human beings, a love manifested in the incomparable love of Christ for those who belong to him.<sup>36</sup>

The grammar implied in the vocation of bearing witness is nothing less than believing in the Son of God and following him to the cross. Balthasar understands the leading of a Christian life in terms of the loving Triune God manifested in Jesus Christ. He starts by highlighting God's act of love for humanity. Becoming Christian and bearing witness to God is a wonderful truly divine gift. He continues that in front of such an ineffable mystery, Christians never cease to wonder and contemplate Christ. This is followed by a decisive moment wherein the Christian "should be one who offers up his life in the service of his fellow man because he owes his life to Christ crucified."<sup>37</sup>

The grammar of bearing witness means then preparing oneself for the testing by fire. It calls for obedience and surrender. It is indeed a decisive moment in which the Christian is called to perfection in a faithful and loving response to God's call. The grammar of bearing witness means that the Christian, purified by fire, "lend[s] his own love" so that the logic of God's universal engagement with the world in the love of Jesus Christ continues to be manifest today as it did in the past.<sup>38</sup> He says:

All this will, of course, prove a hard test for Christians; if they want to be the teachers of our time, then they must learn to read the signs of the times. This age cannot be purified by fire if Christians are not ready to allow themselves to be tested in the same fire to see whether they are made of gold or of potash, whether their hearts

<sup>36</sup> R. Fisichella, *Testimony*, pp. 1049–1050.

<sup>37</sup> Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 133.

<sup>38</sup> J.A. Berry, *Tested in Fire*, pp. 145–170.

and their work are of “gold, silver and precious stones” or of “wood, hay and straw” (1 Cor 3,13). This is the ultimate truth: that Christians, as guardians of a metaphysics of the whole person in an age which has forgotten both Being and God, are entrusted with the weighty responsibility of leading this metaphysics of wholeness through that same fire.<sup>39</sup>

### 3. The Logic of Christian Witness

This final section concerns a brief explanation of the *logic* (or the apparent “folly” in the eyes of the world) of bearing witness to God’s love and its worth in our days. This paper started by referring to the pontificate of Pope Francis characterised by his zeal to instil hope against any human despair. This makes even more sense in the light of contemporary heartless scenarios including the drowning of fleeing refugees in the Mediterranean, the recent chemical attacks in Syria, the alarming rate of more than 300 million people of all ages suffering from depression on a global scale and many other predicaments.<sup>40</sup>

It becomes imperative, then, to work for the kingdom of God and to bear Christian witness while fostering a sense of belonging and of being loved.<sup>41</sup> This is possible through one’s openness and disposition toward God as well as being a *living-expression* of God’s love to all. Witness means loving unconditionally. In practical terms, it requires an intimate connection between the virtues of faith and love. Christian witness (and faith to that extent) would be senseless, unless they are grounded in (divine) love. It leads to belief in the God of Jesus Christ and to salvation through the power of the Spirit.

The logic of bearing witness is not necessarily the understanding of the reason why one chooses to follow Jesus. Rather it has to do with the Holy Spirit acting within us. Bearing witness is letting God through. It is at once dynamic, real and demands a total self-offering. Examples of this are the life of Pope John Paul II in his unwavering faith or even the admirable examples of people

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<sup>39</sup> H.U. von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 1:654–655.

<sup>40</sup> World Health Organisation, Depression. Fact Sheet published in February 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Rather than simply understood in sociological terms (as Grace Davie or Danièle Hervieu-Léger would argue), I would prefer to push forward a theological (perhaps an affective) approach like those of Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Canadian Jesuit Bernard Lonergan. See B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, p. 1972; C.M. Martini, *Bernard Lonergan at the Service of the Church*, pp. 518–519. Pope Benedict XVI’s encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* should also be interpreted on these lines. See L. Leuzzi; C. Ruini, *La carità intellettuale*, p. 2007.

like Maximilian Kolbe, Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan or Dietrich Bonhoeffer in their prison cells as well as Mother Teresa and other missionaries.

The logic of witness is then a call “to believe”, “to see” and “to be saved”. Let us now explain these three dimensions that should be included in the discourse here. Bearing witness first of all entails a call “to believe”. It is no coincidence that John interchanges the notions of giving witness (Jn 3:11) and believing (Jn 3:12). This is evident in the conversation Jesus had with Nicodemus as well as in the account in which John the precursor gave his testimony. John encourages his readers that in becoming disciples, they give testimony and, at the same time, they believe wholeheartedly. The words with which John ends his First Letter are appropriate here: “I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 Jn 5:13). In this light, there can be no true witness, if not in direct relationship to faith.

Secondly, there is a call to “to see”. The strict relationship between the terminology related to witness or martyrdom and the verbs “to see” (ὁράω *horaō* and θεάομαι *theaomai*) is one of particular importance. Throughout the Gospel, we find instances where John prefers to connect witness and seeing. John 3 includes two examples of this: “In all truth I tell you, we speak only about what we know and witness only to what we have seen...” (Jn 3:11) and “He who comes from heaven bears witness to the things he has seen and heard...” (Jn 3:32). As has been already presented earlier on, what is at stake here is not the physical seeing, but rather the possibility of seeing with the eyes of faith. “Believing”, says Congar, “is seeing with someone else’s eyes”.<sup>42</sup> This is the logic of witnessing, i.e. leading others to see, to grow in faith and to love God wholeheartedly. Therefore, apart from acquired knowledge through listening, faith is an assent to affirmed truths in as much as it has eyes.<sup>43</sup> Referring to Augustine’s idea, Congar explains that, through its eyes, faith focuses on the signs that accredit the witness to revealed truth.<sup>44</sup>

Reference is also made to the witness given by Christ. Bianchi notes that when the verbs “to see” and “to bear witness” have Christ as their subject, both verbs have the same object. So Jesus gives witness in accordance to what he has

<sup>42</sup> Y. Congar, *La foi et la théologie*, p. 81.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Augustine, *Letter 120*, II, 8; in PL 33 (1861) 456. Augustine was the first to use such imagery: “Habet namque fides oculos suos” and later “habet oculos fides”. As such, the theme is profoundly both biblical and patristic. Cf. Augustine, *Letter 120*, II, 8; in PL 33 (1861) 456; *idem*, *Psalm 143*, 19; in PL 37 (1861) 1869; Cf. C. Dillenschneider, *Le sens de la foi et le progrès dogmatique du mystère marial*, Rome 1954, p. 272–5, cit. in *La foi et la théologie*, p. 81, fn 2.

personally seen in the Father's presence. He, who is one with the Father (10:30), being God himself (1:1), who came down from heaven (3:13), is witnessing physically to the celestial (spiritual) reality: "he bears witness to the things he has seen and heard" (3:32). Moreover, there is also the witness given by the disciple. In contrast to the witness given by Christ, when the verbs "to see" and "to bear witness" have human beings as their subject, it is not always the case that both verbs have the same object. On the contrary, many a time, when someone "sees" something, he must perform an act of faith. In other words, the logic is an invitation to take the plunge in truly being a Christian.

Thirdly, bearing witness implies a call to "be saved". The main reason to speak about witness is precisely to re-grasp the reality of salvation. It means to be grounded in human desire for more, for meaning and for God. Speaking of John the precursor, John the evangelist says that "He came as a witness, to bear witness to the light, so that everyone might believe through him" (Jn 1:7). He indicated that he who accepts the witness given, not only receives the light, but also receives salvation through his believing. So, in this sense, testimony leads to salvation. This inspires us to refer to *the apostolic witness*.

Hence, what is the concrete form of bearing witness? In order to reach others, witness must take a concrete form: the preaching of the gospel (Mt 24:14). It is in order to carry the gospel into the entire world that the apostles are constituted witnesses of Jesus (Acts 1:8); they are to attest solemnly before all people to all the events occurring from the baptism of John until the ascension of Jesus, especially the resurrection, which has consecrated his Lordship (Acts 1:22; 2:32; etc.). The mission of Paul is defined in the same terms: on the road to Damascus, he has been constituted a witness of Christ before all people (Acts 22:15; 26:16); in a pagan land he attests especially to the resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor 15:15), and the faith is born in the communities by the acceptance of this witness (2 Thess 1:10; 1 Cor 1:6). The same identification of the gospel and of witness can be found in the Johannine writings.

The logic of witness also leads to martyrdom. The role of the witnesses of Jesus is made still more evident when they have to bear witness before the authorities and the tribunals, in line with the perspective which Jesus had already opened before the twelve (Mk 13:9; Mt 10:18; Lk 21:13f). Then the attestation takes a solemn turn, and it often preludes suffering. If in fact the believers are persecuted, it is "because of their witness of Jesus" (Rev 1:9). In the bible, we read about Stephen who was the first to seal his witness with the pouring out of his blood (Acts 22:20).

The same fate awaits those who are ready to be witnesses of the gospel (Rev 11:7). How many will be slain "for the witness of Jesus and the Word of God" (6:9; 17:6)! They truly are innocent sheep among fearless wolves (Mt 10:16).

Babylon, the hostile power aroused against the heavenly city, will glut itself with the blood of these witnesses, of these martyrs (17:6). But she will only have an apparent victory. Really, it is they who, with Christ, will have conquered the devil “by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony” (12:11). Martyrdom is witness to the faith consecrated by the testimony of blood.

The logic of witness is to become faithful disciples and follow Jesus till the end. In Jn 15,27, at the Last Supper, Jesus said: “And you too will be witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning”. Therefore, one of the characteristics of the disciple is that of “being with Jesus”. It implies not only getting “to know”, but also contemplating the mystery of the Incarnate Word: “Something which has existed since the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have watched and touched with our own hands, the Word of life, that is our theme” (1 Jn 1:1).

## Conclusion

Pope Francis’ double-invitation to embrace God’s love and to be its witnesses requires human beings to have a spiritual readiness that reflects the grammar and the logic of being Christian. Living out as Christian witnesses means creating a whole spiritual movement of an impressive range and continuity that the world can see. The Christian then wants to engage in a world even if the Christian spiritual order is no longer the law of the “whole” of life, and where the *Church* is somehow being fenced off.<sup>45</sup> In this light, the Christian would seek complementarity, for instance, between anthropology and theology.

In the first section, it became clear that faith procures by itself the most direct and most efficacious sign of its credibility.<sup>46</sup> In this sense, while sight helps one to lead a life that is constructed harmoniously on the faith, it is a sight not of the mystery itself, assuredly, but of its quality as believable (credibility).<sup>47</sup> In

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<sup>45</sup> Giovanni Tangorra notes that Congar’s questioning started after having noticed that people were not attracted to the reality of faith and all that concerned the Church’s life. Tangorra adds that nevertheless “these convictions did not lead him to protest in streets, his research and his commitment remain within a strictly theological milieu, but the contribution of his own thought is such that theologians in favour of orthopraxis and even those in favour of liberation theology have considered him as a master”. Cf. G. Tangorra, *Litinerario e l’opera di Yves Congar*, p. 450.

<sup>46</sup> Y. Congar, *The Reasons for the Unbelief of our Time*, I, 19.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*.

the words of Congar, the believer's role is to witness to the essential motive of credibility in these terms. He opines:

We must retain the condition of credibility organically bound up with the nature of faith and with its characteristic of totality. In order to be humanly accessible and efficaciously proposed, faith must be *seen* to be superiorly bound to life, to the values of life: that is how faith must *appear*. That withdraws nothing from its mystery, nor from its essential risk. But since of its nature it is the total Good, since it enters us only from the pressure of the absolute Good and by presenting itself as identified with it, since it demands the whole of man in order to transfigure it, it must stand out as assuming within itself the totality of good, to the attraction of which I cannot refuse myself.<sup>48</sup>

The logic of becoming witnesses has the primary objective of making disciples of all nations, and a secondary objective of teaching them to keep the commandments of Christ. Thus, two tasks are involved here. The first one is that of evangelisation, of pure witness to the faith and the charity of Christ, and secondly, to influence the earthly sphere of humanity. In line with what Pope Francis said to the faithful in Guidonia Montecelio, a town on the outskirts of Rome, the grammar and logic of witness can only be understood in simplicity, that bearing witness to the faith requires “word, heart and hands” to do God's work. That calls for openness and readiness to embrace and transmit God's love with joy.<sup>49</sup>

There is a beautiful text by Jean-Marie Lustiger (1926–2007), a former Archbishop of Paris and later a French cardinal, who captured this sense of being a true Christian and an honest witness to Christ. The grammar and logic of being Christian in the world are then a call to grow deeper in one's vocation, faith-convictions and in a spiritual life nourished by the community of faith. It means a noble disposition to share one's proper experience of a faith that matters, that is credible and that transforms human beings into graced being characterised by truth, freedom and love. He says:

Finally, to believe in God is therefore for persons to open their heart and their intelligence to a purification compelling them to accept that they are not master of the one who comes to them, and to accept that they are not their own master. To discover God

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<sup>48</sup> Ibidem, I, 20.

<sup>49</sup> See <http://www.christiandaily.com/article/pope-francis-slams-christian-parrots-who-attend-church-but-skip-good-deeds/59812.htm> (accessed 18.01.2017).



is to enter into a way of faith measuring humanity in comparison to another, who is always present, already present, who is present at the very source of its being.<sup>50</sup>

The grammar and the logic of bearing witness is precisely that first step that leads to a whole journey where God takes control and makes a whole re-creation. Bearing witness means trusting in God who shall make everything “all in all” in him until everything takes a new meaning and is made whole again (1 Cor 15:28). Witness then leads to truth, joy and communion.

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<sup>50</sup> Jean-Marie Lustiger, *Dare to Believe*, 117.

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