

# A Missiological Understanding of Witness

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**Abstract:** Witnessing is necessary for the growth of the Kingdom of God. It is therefore important to understand the term and the concept of witnessing. The witness terminology is best understood from a missiological perspective since witness is directly related to mission studies. The concepts of *missio Dei*, Kingdom of God and Church which are foundational concepts of missiology therefore form an important basis for a clear understanding of the term witness. Witness is also clearly rooted in the Bible and hence the understanding and practice of witness has a firm basis and clear guidelines. Witness has subsequently been passed down from the Biblical times, to the early church and to the present day.

**Key Words:** *Missio Dei*, Kingdom of God, Church, witness

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The growth of the Kingdom of God happens when there is addition of new members into the kingdom. This is made possible through witness. This article will therefore look into the concept and understanding of this term. This term will be studied from the perspective of missiology. As such, the paper puts forward the importance of looking at this term from a missiological perspective. Following this the understanding of this term beginning from the Biblical roots and the way this term is understood today is briefly explored.

## II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A MISSIOLOGICAL VIEW

The significance of a missiological view towards understanding witness cannot be understated. This is because this term needs to be seen in the light of the *missio Dei*, the mission of God. A missiological view is also very significant because of the wide range of study that it covers as well as the relationship it has with other branches of theological studies. While all this wide range of relationship is great, the danger of relating everything to mission made Stephen Neill (1964) rightly warn that “if everything is mission, nothing is mission” (81).

The term “missiology” may be simply understood as the study of mission as derived from the etymology missiology (*mission* + *logy*). The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines Missiology as “the study of the church’s mission especially with respect to missionary activity” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. “Missiology”) Missiologist Marvin J. Newell defines missiology as “the reflective discipline that undergirds and guides the church’s propagation endeavors as it advances the knowledge of the gospel in all its fullness to every people, everywhere” (Newell 2019, para.3).

Missiology is a comparatively new branch of study in theological education. Petr Cincala notes that, “In some theological schools missiology is just one of the courses in the area of practical theology; however, in a growing number of seminaries missiology is viewed as a discipline with its own programs and department” (Cincala 2017, 1). As Thomas John Hastings, appeals to the readers of the International Bulletin of Missiological Research (IBMR) it is important to reflect on how ‘mission theory sheds light on mission practice and mission practice sheds light on mission theory’(Hastings 2018, 5). The importance of missiology as a subject is therefore an important aspect of theological education and research today.

While tracing the ‘rhetoric of mission, as used by the church today’, Michael W. Stroope (2019) notes that mission as an activity of the church began to be used only in the sixteenth century when Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits in 1539 introduced “mission as a way to speak about vocation and human agency, as well as the Catholic Church’s encounter with the wider world” (165). He goes on to explain that,

Prior to this time, mission was chiefly a term to describe the diplomatic and military activities of Spain and Portugal, as well as individuals who were political agents of these empires. The exception was early Christian writers who used the Latin *mission* to explain the inner workings of the Trinity. We find *mission* employed in this way by Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Augustine, and then later and more extensively by Thomas Aquinas (Stroope 2019, 165).

Today both Roman Catholic and Protestant scholars such as Paul Kollman, John O'Malley, and David Bosch, have developed the understanding of mission basing on this "Ignatian linguistic appropriation of mission for the church" (Stroope 2019, 165). Thus mission today is generally understood as the extension or continuation of the *missio Dei*.

## **2.1. The Three Concepts of Missiological Thought**

The Church participates in the *missio Dei* through its witness. Further, the witness of the church is focused on the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. Engelsviken (2003) calls these "the three concepts that form a dynamic triangle in post-war missiological thought: *missio Dei*, the kingdom of God and the church" (481). An insight into the understanding of these three concepts in missiological thought will therefore enable a comprehensive understanding of witness.

### **2.1.1. *Missio Dei***

The term *missio Dei* was made more popular due to David Bosch's monumental work *Transforming Missions: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. David J. Bosch defines Christian mission as giving "expression to the dynamic relationship between God and the world, particularly as this was portrayed, first in the story of the covenant people of Israel and then, supremely, in the birth, life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus of Nazareth" (Bosch 2010, 9). He goes on to say that one must differentiate between mission (singular) and missions (plural). The first refers to the *missio Dei* and the second refers to the Church's participation in various forms in the *missio Dei* (Bosch 2010).

Tracing the origin of this concept, Engelsviken dates it back to Augustine and relates it to the trinity. However, he also notes that it was not until the Willingen meeting of the International Missionary council in 1952 that the *missio Dei* concept gained more meaning and purpose. He also reiterates that the foundation of understanding the *missio Dei* is its Trinitarian basis. He points out that, it is God the Father that sends his Son and consequently man through the Spirit can be made one with God (Engelsviken 2003, 482). An insight into the role, the relationship, and connection between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit is therefore necessary in understanding the *missio Dei*.

In the mission of God, God is both the sender and the one being sent. God is the content of the sending and the purpose of this sending is salvation for all creation. God began the process of redemption and the church continues this redemptive act of God (Engelsviken 2003, 483). The *missio Dei* in this sense is a concept that covers all the things that the church needs to do in obedience and in response to the will and purpose of God for the entire creation. This concept therefore becomes very wide and varied when studied under the subject of missiology which is a "global ecumenical discipline" (Engelsviken 2003, 483).

Commenting on the understanding of the *missio Dei* today, Engelsviken (2003) says that there is, "a certain convergence of views between the ecumenical and evangelical streams of missiology when it comes to the Trinitarian understanding of the basis of mission" (490). This can be seen in the evangelical manifesto of *AD 2000 and Beyond* movement as well as the ecumenical statement of the World Council of Churches Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME). The secretary of the CWME commission, Jacques Matthey gives further insight by pointing out two ways of understanding and use of the term *missio Dei*. One can be called the "classical" way of referring to the *missio Dei* based on John 20:21, in which the church is the primary agent of God's mission. The other is the understanding that God is already actively present in the secular, political and social events of the world and hence the church needs to understand and recognize and participate in what God is already doing (Engelsviken 2003, 491).

These two views can be comprehensively understood through an emphasis on the Trinitarian basis of mission as seen in John 20:21-22 and the Nazareth manifesto in Luke 4:16-20. The Trinitarian view also broadens the understanding of the *missio Dei* to a Theocentric view rather than merely Christocentric or ecclesiocentric view as advocated by John Hick and Wilfred Cantwell Smith. This also sharpens one's view of the role of the church while obediently participating in the mission of God to the whole of Creation. *missio Dei* would therefore involve "both proclamation and service, both individual and communal renewal, both justification and justice, and both peace with God and peace on earth" (Engelsviken 2003, 490).

Engelsviken rightly points out the present and future challenge of a pluralistic and inherently relativistic religious understanding of the *missio Dei* because of the question that the omnipotent and omnipresent and omniscient God of all creation could be at work even in other religions. However, for this research, the *missio Dei* will focus on "confessing and proclaiming the unique *missio Dei* in which God the Father is the only source of all mission, Jesus Christ the only Lord and Saviour and the Holy Spirit the only divine life giver and power" (Engelsviken 2003, 494).

### 2.1.2. Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God simply put is the kingdom over which God rules. His subjects include all who will believe in the work of Jesus Christ to redeem the world. It includes all creation as Paul notes that, “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2: 10-11). However a lot of questions arise when we try to answer what this kingdom is about; whether it is present or is yet come, whether it is present in the spiritual realms or in the world. George Eldon Ladd refers to these paradoxes when he says,

The Kingdom is a present reality (Matt. 12:28), and yet it is a future blessing (I Cor. 15:50). It is an inner spiritual redemptive blessing (Rom. 14:17) which can be experienced only by way of the new birth (John. 3:3), and yet it will have to do with the government of the nations of the World (Rev. 11:15). The kingdom is a realm into which men enter now (Matt. 8:11). It is at the same time a gift of God which will be bestowed by God in the future (Luke 12:32) and yet which must be received in the present (Mark 10:15). Obviously no simple explanation can do justice to such a rich but diverse variety of teaching (Ladd 1959, 18).

Many scholars agree that it is the kingdom of God that is the central unifying theme in the interpretation of the Scriptures. This is therefore an important concept to be grasped if one is to have a proper understanding of the Bible and all that it teaches in respect to living Christian lives and fulfilling the mission that Christ has entrusted to his disciples. In order to understand the concept of the kingdom of God we will first turn to the scriptures.

#### 2.1.2.1 Old Testament

Ridderbos in his book about the Kingdom of God carefully looks into the scripture in order to present his view about the Kingdom. He notes that the phrase ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ is not found in the Old Testament, yet it is very important to understand this phrase. The Old Testament however does refer to Yahweh as King over all the earth and over Israel. This kingship encompasses the past and the future and hence points towards an “almost timeless character” (Ridderbos 1962, 4) of Yahweh’s Kingship. Ridderbos also points out that the phrase ‘Kingdom of God’ is found in the form of Israel’s nationality, and that these ideas seem to be referring to a “higher spiritual and imperishable reality” (1962, 5).

The Kingdom of God therefore does refer to the reign of God, “His rule, His sovereignty, and not to the realm in which it is being exercised... God’s kingdom, His *malkuth*, is His universal rule, His sovereignty over all the earth” (Ladd 1959, 20). Here we see that there is a “kingly self-assertion of God, of his coming to the World in order to reveal his royal majesty, power and right” (Ridderbos 1962, 19). The kingdom of God in the Old Testament is thus Theo centric as it concerns God and it originates from God. It is also comprehensive as it takes into consideration not just Israel and the heathen nations but the whole world that God created (1962, 23-24).

#### 2.1.2.2. New Testament

The word ‘kingdom’ in the New Testament is translated from *basileia* which denotes royal power, kingship, dominion and rule. It denotes the right or authority to rule over a kingdom and not the actual kingdom itself. It also could mean the territory subject to the rule of the messiah (Thayer and Smith, 1999). Unlike the other writers Matthew also uses kingdom of heaven to denote the kingdom of God. This usage may be due to the fact that Matthew was writing for a Jewish audience and hence like the Old Testament *malkuth shamayim* he used ‘kingdom of heaven’ since the Jews would try to avoid the use of God as far as possible.

Verkuyl notes that in the New Testament the concept of a kingdom,

involves a proclamation and realization of a total salvation, one which covers the whole range of human needs and destroys every pocket of evil and grief affecting mankind. Kingdom in the New Testament has a breadth and scope which is unsurpassed; it embraces heaven as well as earth, world history as well as the whole cosmos (Verkuyl 1979, 168).

Proclamation of the gospel is therefore a proclamation of the good news of the kingdom of God. Its proclamation includes the tension of the ‘already, not yet’ as it embraces life on earth as well as beyond, in heaven.

#### 2.1.2.3. The ‘already not yet’ Kingdom

The kingdom of God exists in a state that is ‘Future’ as well as ‘Present’. In the beatitudes, the future tense is used which describes the bliss of the kingdom of Heaven. Most of Jesus’ allusions to the kingdom refer to another reality – an “eschatological” reality (Ridderbos 1962, 38). Ridderbos explains that “the nearness or the future of the kingdom should not be conceived in a linear temporal sense but as the expression of the fact that human existence related to God’s reality from moment to moment” (1962, 43).

It is important at this point to understand the *kairos* and the *chronos* of time as the Jews understood it. While *chronos* indicates the linear aspect of time, *kairos* indicates the moment in time, a time of fulfillment. We may say that we are now in the *kairos* of the kingdom of God. “The most prominent example of *kairos* is the incarnation of the Son of God, of which the apostle Paul speaks in Gal 4:4” (Platovnjak 2021, 802). In this sense we find that “Jesus also speaks of the coming of the kingdom as a reality that is being fulfilled already during the time of his preaching” (Ridderbos 1962, 47). In the New Testament, we may therefore understand that the presence of the kingdom is at the same time “a future revelation, which the gospel denotes as the consummation of all things” (1962, 56).

Mark R. Saucy opines that the tension between the “already” and the “not yet” may be understood better if the role of the Spirit is understood. He says, “the Spirit’s presence in the present age is in fact the presence of the kingdom, or perhaps more precisely, the presence of the *power* of the kingdom” (Saucy 2011, 90). This reminds us that until the kingdom is fully realized, the Holy Spirit is present in power to establish and build the kingdom towards its realization.

Jesus began his ministry preaching about the kingdom of God. Most of his parables and teachings give us allusions to the Kingdom. His teachings also contain both aspects of the present as well as future kingdom. The presence of the kingdom can be seen in the exorcisms, his claim to be the messiah, and the call to the eschatological community. Norman Perrin notes that “the kingdom of God is now present in history ... in that the power of demons is broken, sins are forgiven, sinners are gathering into an eschatological fellowship round Jesus” (Perrin 1963, 187). Jesus also looked forward to a future consummation as found in Matthew 24:27, 37, 39; Luke 17:30, in which Jesus talks of the coming of the son of man.

This future aspect also points towards “the element of judgment a message to be found in the twin parables of the Tares Among the Wheat and the Dragnet (Matt. 13:24 – 30; 13: 47f)” (Perrin 1963, 188). In these parables there is the illusion of the wicked being separated from the righteous on the day of Judgment. Norman Perrin (1963) points out that the Lord’s Prayer is a good example to see the tension between the present and the future in the teachings of Jesus. This is so since it is a prayer said by those who are already supposed to have come into the kingdom but want others to share in it and also look forward to its consummation (193).

### **2.1.3. The Church**

Quoting David Bosch’s view that mission originates from the heart of God and that mission exists because of God’s love for people, Ruth Meyers draws out a profound perspective that, “the church does not have mission; rather, God’s mission has a church that participates in God’s mission by proclaiming and enacting God’s love for the world” (Meyers 2016, 4). This perspective clearly defines the role of the church, as the *ecclesia*, the called out ones, and the people of God. The church thus, does not refer to the building rather to people and hence, an anthropological view of the church becomes very important in mission studies.

Although one may argue that Anthropology is a social science that is based upon secular revelation rather than scriptures, Paul G. Hiebert rightly points out that it has become very important to critically look into the contribution that anthropology can make towards effective missions. He says, “In missions we must study the scriptures and also the sociocultural context of the people we serve, so that we can communicate the gospel to them in the ways they understand” (Hiebert 1994, 10). While applying anthropology to mission, Luis J. Luzbeyak points out the nature and mission of the church under five major models (Luzbeyak, 1988). These five models are – the church as a community, the church as a universal sacrament, the church as a Herald, the church as Servant and the church as an Institution. These models depict the missionary nature of the church.

#### **2.1.3.1. The Church as a Community**

This community is the body of Christ, the called out people of God. It is a fellowship that is closely connected and concerned for the wellbeing of its members, while at the same time not being self-centered but radiating the love of God for the whole creation and in perfect unity (1 Cor. 12:12-27) (Luzbeyak 1988, 376-380).

#### **2.1.3.2. The Church as Universal Sacrament**

The church reflects the presence of God and the grace of God. This is particularly seen in the liturgy of the church. The rituals and religious life of the members of the church display their faith and belief for the world to see. This is the non verbal aspect of communicating the Gospel and proclaiming the kingdom of God through worship and everyday life (Luzbeyak 1988, 381-384).

#### **2.1.3.3. The Church as a Herald**

As a Herald, the church is involved in proclaiming the kingdom of God. The presence of the church in the world is a sure sign of the kingdom of God. The church acts as a herald and communicates to the world through all the different models mentioned (Luzbeyak 1988, 385-386).

#### 2.1.3.4. The Church as Servant

The church as a servant ought to reflect and live in the footsteps of the servant leader, Jesus Christ. The church serves humanity through self-giving and commitment to Jesus. In order to uplift the downtrodden and marginalized, the church exercises love, justice, peace and freedom (Luzbeyak 1988, 386-394).

#### 2.1.3.5. The Church as an Institution

The church ought to be living in the world in an organized manner with Christ as the head. There is a structure with offices, order, discipline, and obedience. The church as an institution systematically carries forward the creed, correct teachings and the legacy of the church while avoiding the pitfall of turning into institutionalism (Luzbeyak 1988, 395-396).

The above three concepts of missiological thought, *Missio Dei*, Kingdom of God and the Church, are important concepts that connect the witness of the church and worship. These concepts will act as a lens through which the researcher will further attempt to define witness and worship.

### III. MISSIOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF WITNESS

As mentioned above, witness refers to participating in the *missio Dei*. Bosch points out the importance of the word 'Witness' which is an important word for describing mission as seen in the writings of Luke-Acts. Bosch also quotes Gaventa who pointed out that, in Acts, "witness" becomes *the* appropriate term for "mission" (Bosch 2010, 116). Keeping in mind that 'mission' as is generally understood today isn't necessarily a word found in the Bible, (Stroop 2019) the word 'witness' can be seen as an important way to understand mission.

#### 3.1. Witness in the Bible

The beginning of witnessing may be traced back to the Old Testament as Littell notes, "...a man – Abram – was called out of his natural life of idolatry and polytheism into worship and service of God. This new relationship is described in terms of a contract between God and this particular man" (Littell 1976, 1). The worship and service of God was Abram's witness to the pagan world during those days. Later on in the New Testament we find that "the early Christians also understood themselves to have been called out of pre-history into history as fellow heirs of the same promises declared through apostles and prophets to the Jews" (Littell 1976, 1). Thus, rephrasing Bosch and replacing 'mission' with 'witness' we may say that witness "is, quite simply, the participation of Christians in the liberating mission (witness) of Jesus..., wagering on a future that verifiable experience seems to belie. It is the good news of God's love, incarnated in the witness of a community, for the sake of the world" (Bosch 2010, 519). Here we find that witness is a continuation of what Jesus did. It is the proclamation of God's love as demonstrated through the gift of his only begotten son who came into the world to offer salvation to all who would believe. This salvation goes beyond human beings to all creation, to the whole cosmos. Witness as continuation of what Jesus did also includes fulfilling the Nazareth manifesto, by ministering to the social problems in the world.

The story of the People of God in the Scriptures is filled with instances of God's intervention in order to lead and guide them and enable them to be a blessing to all nations. Whenever the People of God began to drift away from the truth, God sent witnesses in the form of anointed judges, kings, prophets and the apostles who were led by the Holy Spirit to remind them of His love and concern for the world. The witnesses reminded them that they were chosen and that they were chosen to be a blessing to all nations. They were to be a witness of Yahweh to the world.

##### 3.1.1. Witness in the Old Testament

The call to be a witness in the Old Testament which has been neglected for sometime has now come to play an important role in our understanding of mission. Kaiser (1981) mentions three basic texts, Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:5-6 and Psalm 67, which are "the most powerful statements of a missionary call that can be given anywhere" (25). These three texts reveal God's call to proclaim God's plan to bless the nations, to participate as agents of that blessing and to prove God's purpose to bless all the nations (Kaiser 1981, 26). In order to fulfil this, God performs mighty acts as He leads and guides the People of God throughout the Old Testament. Yet we find that very often the People of God stray away from God. However, each time God in His grace restores them back to his fold. In Genesis 1-11 itself we find three failures - the fall of man, the great flood and the Tower of Babel - and how God had a saving word of grace for each of the failures. In Genesis 12:2-3, Kaiser notes that, there are actually three promises of blessing... which God promises:

1. I will make you a great nation,
2. I will bless you, and
3. I will make your name great...

But this is immediately followed by a purpose clause. It is '*so that* you may be a blessing' (Kaiser 1981, 27).

The three promises enable Abraham to witness (experience for himself) the truth about God and hence become a witness (for others to see) and a blessing to the world.

From this example we are shown that God reached down and witnessed to His elect Abraham in order that he may become a witness to all nations. This is *missio Dei* to which the descendants of Abraham were to participate in. They were chosen and blessed and given a great name before they could be a blessing. As a nation they had to reflect and be a witness of the blessings of God. Further, in Exodus 19:4-6, we find God's call to the people to make them a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Kaiser 1981, 29). Kaiser notes that in this passage the whole nation was called to priests however, they rejected this offer by urging "Moses to go up to the mountain on their behalf... Nevertheless, even though God's original plan was for the moment frustrated and delayed until New testament times, it was not defeated, substituted, or scrapped" (Kaiser 1981, 30). These passages shows that the witness that began in the call of Abraham, and the people of God, continued through chosen individuals until the coming of Jesus Christ. The followers of Jesus then carried forward the witness of Jesus Christ.

### **3.1.2. Witness in the New Testament**

In the New Testament we find a shift in witness as a new people of God are formed. The people of God are no longer just the Jews, but all who come to the Father through Jesus Christ. However, we may also note that Christ came through the Davidic lineage (Matt. 1:6; Luk. 1:27), and that his ministry was among the chosen People of God. It was only later on that the Gentile mission began to grow through Paul the 'missionary to the Gentiles' (Rom. 11:13). God's concern was for the lost sheep of Israel and Jesus came to redeem Israel as the promised messiah. Yet, under the circumstances that Jesus ministered in Jewish territory, "the number of personal contacts with Gentiles recorded in the Gospels is surprising" (Goener 1981, 80). Critics continue to argue that the spread of the mission to the gentiles is actually a means of bringing back all of Israel into the fold of God (Rom. 11:11). This view emphasizes the importance of being witnesses and reaching out to the chosen People of God.

In the ministry of Paul we can see that he talks of salvation first for the Jews and then for the Gentiles (Rom. 1:16). At the same time passages like Romans 10:12 and I Cor. 12:13 point out that in the kingdom of God no such distinctions will exist. However, there seems to be a priority for Israel, and the focus would once again return to it once the "full number of Gentiles has come in" (Rom. 11:25). There is also the Great Commission by Jesus that begins from Jerusalem and then moves out to the ends of the earth. Yet, we also see that Jesus came to fulfill the purpose of God to be a witness and a blessing to all nations and fulfill the covenant made with Abraham regarding all nations. In this regard Richardson (1981) rightly calls Jesus "A Man for All Peoples" (83).

Paul continuously keeps in touch with the Churches, encouraging them to be faithful witnesses and reminding them to stand firm in their faith. He also writes to them to teach them and solve issues that the early church had to face. The messages to the seven churches (Revelations 1:11) in the book of Revelations (Revelations 2,3) also serve as a reminder from God to the churches to continue in their faith and awaken in the areas they have fallen. There is the call to each church to be 'overcomers' (Rev. 1:7, 11, 17, 26; 2:5, 12, 21) and to always be ready since the kingdom would come like a thief in the night. Therefore, we may say that God continues to have primary concern for those he has chosen so that they may continue to remain faithful witnesses and those who go astray may be brought back and be obedient to his voice.

### **3.2. Witness in the Early Church**

In the early (pre-Constantinian) church, the witness of the church can be closely related to the word 'martyr' which is the root word for witness. Paolo Prosperi in his discourse on the witness of the martyrs defines witness as revealing the Love of God in Christ which is done through preaching and active *agape* love. The best example of this love is seen in God's act of sending his only begotten Son Jesus to take away the sins of the world through his life, death on the cross and resurrection. This sacrificial act is seen as an ultimate witness of the Love of God. Summing up Balthasar's, book *The Moment of Christian Witness*, Prosperi points out that the martyrs of the early church were epitomes of Christian witness (Prosperi 2014). Witness of the Love of God even up to martyrdom was possible because "he 'comes from' the love of Christ through which he has been reborn" (Prosperi 2014, 39).

While there was a steady growth of the church where ever there were Christians, from the very beginning of the birth of the church we see that there have been itinerant preachers, people we would call missionaries today. Terry and Gallagher notes that even in the second and third centuries "it seems there was a body of full-time missionaries" (Terry and Gallagher 2017). These missionaries can be broadly classified into Bishop missionaries and lay missionaries. Besides the missionaries and the Bishops, Terry points out that lay people also played a huge role in the spread of the Gospel. The lay people shared the Gospel while engaged in their daily activities as they moved about as traders or soldiers.

The growth and spread of the Gospel was through personal contact, a good public testimony even leading to martyrdom, social service and benevolent activities of the Christians. Terry also points out six factors, *Divine Blessing, Christian Zeal, Appeal of the Message, Organisation and Discipline, Inclusiveness and High Ethical Standards* that had a positive effect on the expansion of the church (Terry and Gallagher 2017).

### 3.3. Witness in the Twenty-first Century

The factors identified by Terry and Gallagher which led to the growth of the early church are important considerations for witness today. Equating witness with mission, one may say that witness is mission in action or in other words, when one becomes a witness, one is participating in mission. This also points to the Great Commission in which all the disciples are to be witnesses, that is they are all to be a part of the mission. Today this imperative is seen in the growth of congregations that aim at becoming not simply a church with a mission but 'missional' churches. While this is a worthy goal, it is also important that the basic features of being a witness is not lost.

A. A. Trites notes three important features of witness. Firstly, the "witnesses are passionately involved in the case they seek to present" (*The New International Dictionary* 1986, 1049). They do not need to be forced to witness since they are fully convinced by the need and their desire that they tell people about their experience. They are therefore voluntary witnesses as they have been moved and empowered by the Spirit to tell people what they have seen and what they have heard.

Secondly, "witnesses are held accountable for the truthfulness of their testimony" (*The New International Dictionary* 1986, 1049). This word is used especially as a legal term, bearing first hand proof of what happened. Just as witness takes oath of truthfulness, the Christians were to be "responsible under God for speaking truthfully" (1986, 1049). Paul in fact declares that God is his witness, and Christians today are thus called to be witnesses taking the scriptures as the "standard whereby their witness is to be judged" (1986, 1050).

Thirdly, "witnesses must be faithful not only to the bare facts of the Christ-event, but also to their meaning" (*The New International Dictionary* 1986, 1050). This means they present Christ as they have experienced and understood in their own lives. They present the full impact that Christ has had on their lives, and present a faithful interpretation that is in accordance to the word of God.

Due to the rapid advancement of technology and connectedness of various cultures around the globe, Witness today has taken many forms and has adapted to the changing times and cultures. Even the witness of worship has a wider reach. For instance during the COVID 19 pandemic, worship services were streamed online and even today many churches continue this mode of witness even among the Baptist churches in Kohima. While the mode of communication and the varied uses of technology increases, the factors and features mentioned above that describe witness and that has helped in the spread of the gospel remain the same. These features of witness thus need to be there even during worship so that worship becomes genuine and an expression of participating as well as looking forward to the kingdom of God.

## IV. SUMMARY

The witness terminology can be seen as an appropriate expression of missions. A clear understanding of this terminology is seen to be possible when looking at the term from a missiological perspective. The concepts of the *missio Dei*, the Kingdom of God and the Church also contribute towards a clear understanding of the witness terminology. The term witness is also clearly rooted in the Bible, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. A clear understanding of this term will consequently lead to the right practice and effective missions taking place. This will result in the growth of the Kingdom of God.

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