

The Attested Light: John the true Witness

In the beginning was **the Word**

The Word of God is always at the beginning of what God wants to do in the world

And the Word was **toward God**

The Word of God has a dynamic, intimate relationship with God

And the Word was God

*The Word of God is also fully and wonderfully **God himself***

All things **were made** by the Word

Upon the Word of God the creation and existence of everything is utterly dependent.

In the Word is **LIFE**, the very **LIGHT** of men

The life the Word of God has, and gives, is the only light that can defeat the darkness of men

^{John 1:6} There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light,
that **all might believe** through him.

⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

In the Spring of 1985, Peggy Noonan was on the White House Staff in Washington, D.C., serving then President Ronald Reagan. One day, President Reagan awarded to Mother Teresa the *Medal of Freedom* in the Rose Garden. Peggy Noonan remembers that, as she herself was

[leaving the ceremony] I walked down the corridor between the Oval Office and the West Wing drive, and there she was, turning my way. What a sight: a saint in a sari coming down the White House hallway. As she came nearer, I could not help it. I bowed. "Mother," I said, "I just wanted to touch your hand."

She looked up at me—it may have been one of God's subtle jokes that His exalted child spent her life looking up to everyone else—and said only two words. Later, I would realize that they were the message of her mission.

"Luff Gott," she said. "Love God." She pressed into my hand a poem she had written, and then glided away in a swoosh of habit.

I took the poem from its frame the day she died (Noonan continues). It is free verse, 79 lines, and is called "Mother's Meditation"ⁱ (In the Hospital). In it, she reflects on Christ's question to his apostles – "Who do you say that I am?"

Mother Teresa wasn't afraid [to speak the truth to the most powerful of people in the most public of settings]. The poem she gave me included her personal answers to Christ's question. She said Christ is...

***the Truth to be told
the Way to be walked
the Light to be lit.ⁱⁱ***

Sometimes, you run into truly remarkable people who genuinely take Jesus seriously. They

are single minded, particularly so about presenting the Lord Jesus Christ to a watching and listening world.

Mother Teresa was that kind of woman. Very intent about what she said about Christ, about what she did in Jesus' name. Didn't matter to her how she looked, or whom she was with, or what the politically correct thing was to say. In 1995 she told then President Clinton and Vice-President Gore, and their wives, straight on at a National Prayer Breakfast, that the greatest destroyer of peace in this world is abortion.ⁱⁱⁱ She could rebuke a national audience of baby-boomers and belt-way movers about the neglect of their parents and grandparents in nursing homes. She was willing to speak and live out the truth which came from Jesus wherever she was.

I speak of her this morning because she must have had a *model*-a model found near the beginning of the Apostle John's gospel.

His name, too, was "Ἰωάννης" – John, the wild-haired, goat-skinned-clothed, locust-and-honey-eating son of Zacharias the priest and his *past-the-age-of-childbearing* wife Elizabeth. Before their son was born, Zacharias heard God's angel declare that his boy

Luke 1:15-17 "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. ¹⁶ "And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. It is he who will go as a *forerunner* before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Thirty years later, when John burst on the scene, he was relentless. His shouts could be heard echoing across the lower Jordan River valley, the voice of one crying out in the Judean wilderness (cf. Matthew 3:1-17, Luke 3:1-22). People flocked from large cities and small villages to hear him preach, many to be baptized by him in the Jordan River.

- He didn't assure people that they would be successful if they simply thought happy thoughts
- He warned them they were sinners, that God's wrath was coming, and that the only way they could escape it was to repent
- "The axe is laid to the root of the tree! Every tree bearing bad fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (Luke 3:9)
- "If you have two shirts, give one to someone who has none. If you collect taxes, never cheat. If you have authority, stop using it to abuse and take advantage of others" (Luke 3:11-14)

His ministry, his message was so uncompromising, so against the grain, so out-of-the-box, the

crowds wanted to worship him, to make him the messiah, to put him in the spotlight.

But the Baptizer would have none of it. He would have none of it because...

**True witnesses to the WORD
urgently call EVERYONE to BELIEVE in Him**

John 1:6-8 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

So what does John's example teach us about being a "true witness to the WORD"? John 1 provides the following answers.

First, **A TRUE WITNESS (like John)
is CLEAR about his/her ROLE.** John 1:7-8

He came as a **witness**, to bear **witness** about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear **witness**^{iv} about the light.

In two short verses, the Apostle repeats a key word 3 times, the word "witness." In the 1st century Greek world, it meant to step up and provide an accurate, clear, verbal--even courageous--account of the truth. Jesus himself would say, "Truly, truly I say to you," To "testify" as to what happened, or what is.

Often, it takes courage to tell the truth. Witness, μαρτυριαν, became the root idea for the word "martyr." Often in church history, when Christians witnessed, they paid for it with their lives. Your "witness" could lead to your "martyrdom."

So John the Baptist understood his role. He was not the LIGHT, but he came as a true witness about the light. And please notice WHY...***that all might believe through him.*** True witnesses understand ***that is*** the objective: *God uses a clear, accurate, verbal and courageous witness so that others might BELIEVE in the Word...in the One who is the Word, who created all things, who has LIFE and LIGHT for anyone who will believe.*

What does it mean to "believe"? You'd think we'd know without thinking about it, but in fact understanding the nature of believing requires some thought. Believing is so crucial to everything God wants to do in our life – Hebrews 11:6 tells us that without faith (or believing) it is impossible to

please God – it makes some sense to make clear what believing is.

When the Holy Spirit calls us to “believe,” it means three things.

First, it means **to know: be clear about truthful ideas** about Jesus Christ. Faith, or believing is not a “leap into the unknown dark.” It begins with an apprehension, a clarity, a knowing of what God has revealed about Himself and His Son. One cannot believe without knowing what is true.

Second, it means to **have confidence: to depend upon those truthful ideas** as they apply to you. To know that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh and died for the sins of every human being and rose again from the dead, and that no one has a chance of standing before God without the gift of righteousness is one thing. Lots of unsaved people can recite the basic facts of Christianity. But to *personally depend on the truth* that Jesus died for MY sins and rose again for MY justification and that I must RECEIVE God’s gift of righteousness is a 2nd, and necessary personal step. This second step of belief means I stop depending and stop having confidence in MYSELF, and I start depending upon and having confidence in Jesus Christ alone.

Third, it means **to change: a transforming of my thinking which results in a change in my living.**

This is why so often, the “world’s” understanding of FAITH (or belief) comes up short.

In the classic movie, *Miracle on 24th Street*, Santa Claus utters what much of the world conceives to be as “faith.” *Faith*, Claus utters, *is believing in things when common sense tells you not to*. In other words, faith (or believing) is irrational, contrary to experience, logic, and knowledge, and is so even at the most common sense level.

Nothing, my friends, could be further from the truth. It is much more like this:

Suppose there is a fire in the upper section of a house. People gather in the street below, and a child is seen at the window of a room next to the fire. The hook and ladder truck is 5 minutes too late to help. How is the child to escape?

In the neighborhood lives a large man, well known for his strength and athletic ability. He arrives below the 2nd story window and shouts to the child, “Drop into my arms. Don’t be afraid. I will catch you.”

It is one part of believing for the child to know that the man is there. It is another part of believing that the man standing there is strong and able to catch her. The essence of faith is jumping out confident you will land in the man’s strong arms.

Faith in the Word, believing in Christ, is the most common sensical decision in the world. It is

perfectly rational and reasonable. It personally depends on Someone who has been proven to be true. A true witness is clear about his/her role to call people to believing in Christ.

Second, **A TRUE WITNESS (like John) is PURPOSEFUL about his/her APPROACH.** John 1:19-28

First, John introduced Jesus by DIMINISHING his OWN importance.

(i.e., he was unrelentingly humble) John 1:19-28

^{John 1:19} And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰ He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." ²¹ And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." ²² So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³ He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

²⁴ (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) ²⁵ They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" ²⁶ John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, ²⁷ even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." ²⁸ These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Wow...what a powerful passage. There is so much here from which to learn.

Note that John **refused the spotlight in no uncertain terms**. (John 1:20)... "And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed" the Apostle John records. [Leon Morris] "He vigorously repudiates any suggestion that he might be the Messiah."^v

John knew **he was just a voice with one message**. (John 1:23)... "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD." [Raymond Brown]

John the Baptist was to prepare a road....[he was] opening up the hearts of men, leveling their pride, filling their emptiness, preparing them for [The Word's] intervention."^{vi}

And, John **underscored his personal unworthiness**. (John 1:27) "Not worthy to work with his shoe strings!"

The Jewish rabbis held that master teachers could ask their disciples to do just about anything for them as compensation for their services. But a line was drawn at dealing with someone's feet. "Every service which a slave performs for his master shall a disciple do for his teacher EXCEPT the loosing of his sandal thong." Such a thing was too demeaning, too menial.

Yet John exclaims, "You don't understand. The Person coming is **so** important, so great, so preeminent...**and** He is standing in your midst and you do not know it...I am not even worthy to do the demeaning thing which is *forbidden* to do."

No spotlight + One message + Absolute humility = true witness. Diminishing my importance so that ALL will believe in Him.

Second, **John introduced Jesus by EXALTING the Word's UNIQUE importance.**

(i.e., he was unmistakably clear)

John 1:29-34

John 1:29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"³⁰ This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.'³¹ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel."³² And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him."³³ I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'³⁴ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

True witnesses, eager to be sent and used by God, make the importance of the WORD clear:

- #1 The WORD is the LAMB OF GOD who takes away the sin of the world 1:29
- #2 The WORD is of UNSURPASSED IMPORTANCE because of his Pre-existence 1:30-31
- #3 The WORD is UNQUESTIONABLY APPROVED by God the Father 1:32
- #4 The WORD baptizes those who believe with the HOLY SPIRIT 1:33
- #5 The WORD is THE SON of God 1:34

May I personalize John's description for you and me?

He is God's LAMB – the only One who can take away your sin
He is the MOST IMPORTANT PERSON you can know
He is GOD the FATHER'S answer for your life
He can give you (immerse you in) God's HOLY SPIRIT
He is the GOD'S SON – the Person like whom God longs for you to become.

CONCLUSION

Among the workers in his construction firm was a common laborer who helped dig basements and pour the foundation walls for new homes. But he was well known for his simple heart and compelling Christian maturity. When asked, he would always offer a clear, solid testimony about what his life was really about.

His boss came to him one day, found him alone during the lunch hour, and said, "You know, whatever you've got, I want. You have such peace, no tough day depletes your joy. You seem so content. How can I get this?"

The laborer said, "Go home tonight, and tomorrow, put on your best suit. Come down here and work in the mud with the rest of us—and then you can have it."

"What are you talking about? I could never do that. I'm the boss; you're the worker! That's beneath my dignity." And the conversation ended.

Months later, the boss found him again, and said, "I ask you again...what is it that you have and how can I get it?" He smiled, "I told you...go put on your best suit and climb down in the hole with us, and work...and you can have it." Again, the boss' face became red and he walked off.

Finally, in desperation, he came back to the laborer the third time. His life was miserable, and he relented. "I

don't care what it takes! I'll do anything." The laborer said, "Will you but on your best suit and come down and work in the mud?" For a moment they stood there in silence, and then the boss agreed he would do even that.

The laborer then responded. "OK...you don't have to. Let me tell you about Christ."

The point was powerful. It wasn't the mud that was standing between his boss and peace; it was his pride. Both the laborer's witness and the laborer's word was about the same thing. True witnesses call everyone to BELIEVE in Christ. And true BELIEVE lays down one's pride, one's insistence on SELF, and drops down into the arms of THE WORD...the Messiah, the Lamb of God, the Savior who can take away our sins, and give LIFE and the LIGHT of life.

God continues to need Mother Teresas and *John the Baptists, and **disciples just like you and me,*** to run out ahead and urge people to "make the way clear" [of your pride] and "believe."

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¹ Mother's Meditation [In the Hospital]

You are God.

You are God from God.

You are Begotten, not made.

You are One is Substance with the Father.

You are the Son of the living God.

You are the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity.

You are One with the Father.

You are in the Father from the beginning:

All things were made by You and the Father.

You are the Beloved Son in Whom the Father is well pleased.

You were the Son of Mary,

Conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary.

You were born in Bethlehem.

You were wrapped in swaddling clothes

By Mary and put in the manger full of straw.

You were kept warm by the breath of the donkey

Who carried your Mother with you in her womb.

You are the Son of Joseph,

The Carpenter as known by the people of Nazareth.

You are an ordinary man without much learning,

As judged by the learned people of Israel.

Who is Jesus to Me?

Jesus is the Word made Flesh,

Jesus is the Bread of Life.

Jesus is the Victim offered for our sins on the Cross.

Jesus is the Sacrifice

Offered at the Holy Mass for the sins of the world and mine.

Jesus is the Word - to be spoken.

Jesus is the Truth - to be told.

Jesus is the Way - to be walked.

Jesus is the Light - to be lit.

Jesus is the Life - to be lived.

Jesus is the Love - to be loved.

Jesus is the Joy - to be shared.

Jesus is the Sacrifice - to be offered.

Jesus is the Peace - to be given.

Jesus is the Bread of Life - to be eaten.

Jesus is the Hungry - to be fed.
Jesus is the Thirsty - to be satiated.
Jesus is the Naked - to be clothed.
Jesus is the Homeless - to be taken in.
Jesus is the sick - to be healed.
Jesus is the lonely - to be loved.
Jesus is the Unwanted - to be wanted.
Jesus is the Leper - to wash his wounds.
Jesus is the Beggar - to give him a smile.
Jesus is the Drunkard - to listen to him.
Jesus is the Little One - to embrace him.
Jesus is the Blind - to lead him.
Jesus is the Crippled - to walk with him.
Jesus is the drug Addict - to befriend him.
Jesus is the Prostitute - to remove from danger and befriend her.
Jesus is the Prisoner - to be visited.
Jesus is the Old - to be served.

To me ...

Jesus is my God.
Jesus is my Spouse.
Jesus is my Life.
Jesus is my only Love.
Jesus is my All in All.
Jesus is my Everything.
Jesus, I love with my whole heart, with my whole being.
I have given Him all, even my sins
and He has espoused me to Himself in tenderness and love.
Now and for life I am the spouse of my Crucified Spouse.
Amen.

Bt. Matka Teresa z Kalkuty. <http://tmoch.i365.pl/lew/meditation.htm>

[#] Peggy Noonan, "A Combatant in the World—Mother could be fierce in defending her beliefs," *Time – Commemorative Issue* (September 15, 1997), Vol. 150, No. 11, p. 84.

^{##} Ibid.

^{iv} *STRONGS NT 3141*: μαρτυρία μαρτυρία, μαρτυρίας, ἡ (μαρτυρέω, which see) (from Homer down);

1. a testifying: the office committed to the prophets of testifying concerning future events, Revelation 11:7.

2. what one testifies, testimony: universally, John 5:34; in a legal sense, of testimony before a judge: Luke 22:71; Mark 14:56; with the genitive of the subjunctive, Mark 14:59; John 8:17; 1 John 5:9; κατά τίνος, against one, Mark 14:55; in an historical sense, of the testimony of an historian: John 19:35; John 21:24; in an ethical sense, of testimony concerning one's character: 3 John 1:12; 1 Timothy 3:7; Titus 1:13; in a predominantly dogmatic sense respecting matters relating to the truth of Christianity: of the testimony establishing the Messiahship and the divinity of Jesus (see μαρτυρέω, a.), given by — John the Baptist: John 1:7; John 5:32; ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ Ἰωάννου, John 1:19; Jesus himself, with a genitive of the subjunctive, John 5:31; John 8:13f; God, in the prophecies of Scripture concerning Jesus the Messiah, in the endowments conferred upon him, in the works done by him, John 5:36; through the Holy Spirit, in the Christian's blessed consciousness of eternal life and of reconciliation with God, obtained by baptism ((cf. references under the word βάπτισμα, 3)) and the expiatory death of Christ, with a subject. genitive τοῦ Θεοῦ, 1 John 5:9-11, cf. 1 John 5:6-8; the apostles, σου τῆν μαρτυρίαν περὶ ἐμοῦ, Acts 22:18 (Winer's Grammar, 137 (130)); the other followers of Christ: Revelation 6:9; with a genitive of the subjunctive αὐτῶν, Revelation 12:11; with a genitive of the object Ἰησοῦ, Revelation 12:17; Revelation 19:10; Revelation 20:4 (ἔχειν this μαρτυρία is **to hold the testimony**, to persevere steadfastly in bearing it, Revelation 6:9; Revelation 12:17; Revelation 19:10 (see ἔχω, l. 1 d.); others, however, explain it **to have the duty of testifying laid upon oneself**); elsewhere the **testimony** of Christ is that which he gives concerning divine things, of which he alone has thorough knowledge, John 3:11, 32f; ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ, that testimony which he gave concerning future events relating to the consummation of the kingdom of God, Revelation 1:2 (cf. Revelation 22:16, 20); διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, to receive this testimony, Revelation 1:9.

^v Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1971), 133.

^{vi} Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John I-XII* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1966), 50.