When, ten years ago, the IAMS announced the launching of the 'Biblical Studies and Missiology' (BISAM) project, I was delighted. The absolute necessity of such a project was indeed indisputable. Moreover, it had already become abundantly clear that Johannes Blauw's book, The missionary nature of the Church, had not only been completely overtaken by biblical research since it was first published in German in 1961, but also that such a project was, indeed, unrepeatable. I was hoping that the BISAM project, being a concerted effort in which scholars from various disciplines, confessions and cultures cooperate, would really help us uncover for our own time what has traditionally been referred to as the "biblical foundations for mission". Several publications dating from the 1970s and the 1980s, have shown only too clearly how far removed we were from gaining clarity on this issue. In a recent review article on the subject I formulated the dilemma as follows:

Biblical scholars, on the whole, tend to emphasize the diversity of the biblical message and the historical conditioning of each text. This makes them very reticent to draw a direct connection between the biblical text and today's missionary enterprise. The biblical text functions, at most, as a metaphor, model or paradigm for our own involvement, and there always remains a large range of alternative possibilities; we should, therefore, refrain...
from any single-option reductionism. In addition, biblical scholars tend to point out that the books of the Bible were not written as guides for Christian mission (not even the Book of Acts) so they cannot become that twenty centuries later. The reticence of biblical scholars thus indeed helps us to come to a fuller understanding of the text in its original historical setting. At the same time, however, they frequently fail to show whether, and, if so, how, the Bible can be of significance to the church-in-mission and how, if at all, a connection between the biblical evidence and the contemporary missionary scene can be made. The church thus feels left in the lurch, at least to a degree.

By contrast missiologists writing on the "biblical foundations for mission" tend to err in the opposite direction. Even where they are sufficiently sophisticated not to use the Bible as a handy reference file of quotations to justify their own group's actions, they do have a tendency to operate with a very large brush. On the one hand, they are inclined to overlook the rich diversity of the biblical record and therefore to reduce the biblical motivation for mission to one single idea or text (for instance, the great commission or, more recently in liberation theology circles, Jesus' appeal to Isaiah in Luke 4); on the other hand, they tend far too easily to read back into the Bible aspects of the missionary enterprise in which they are involved today.

[Bosch 1985:532]

If I understood Marc Spindler correctly, it was precisely this dilemma that persuaded the IAMS Conference which met in Bangalore in January 1982 to abandon the original project or, rather, to restrict its focus to the study of one concept only and that concept's significance for mission in biblical perspective, namely the biblical notion of witness.

I was, I must confess, very disappointed by the Bangalore decision. I believed at the time that it was a mistake, and I still believe so, despite Spindler's eloquent defence of the decision and his lucid and impressive survey of the "new quest", as well as Martin Walton's truly informative analysis of the study of the witness concept in recent biblical scholarship.

I shall attempt to respond to Spindler - and, by implication, to Bangalore - by first presenting my reasons for believing that the