

Testimony in John 4 : A Philosophical Understanding with Thomas Aquinas' *Commentary on John's Gospel*

《若望福音》第四章中的見證： 以聖多瑪斯《若望福音注釋》的哲學理解

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摘要：本文探討對《若望福音》第四章中「見證」觀念的一個新看法，而這個新看法乃來自聖多瑪斯的《若望福音注釋》。在《若望福音注釋》中，聖多瑪斯展示天主如何給予祂屬神的見證和人類如何參與天主的見證的傳播。聖多瑪斯不但從神學的角度釋經，也用哲學的概念作為他釋經的基礎。由於聖多瑪斯對於見證的理解及《若望福音注釋》未被廣泛討論，本文先會依據數本聖多瑪斯的聖經注釋，為他對見證的看法提供一個概覽，然後按《若望福音注釋》的內容指出《若望福音》第四章有關見證的特色。本文最後會嘗試探討福音故事中的見證事件是否可以用現代知識論的概念去理解。由是可見，本文嘗試透過以下兩方面促進相關的研究：（一）探討「聖多瑪斯的見證觀」這個未獲重視的課題；（二）從「見證」這個觀念提供一個對《若望福音》第四章的新闡釋。

關鍵詞：聖多瑪斯、《若望福音注釋》、撒瑪黎雅婦人故事、見證、知識論

Abstract: *This paper examines the concept of testimony in John 4 with a new perspective: a philosophical one in terms of Thomas Aquinas' Commentary on John's Gospel. In his commentary, Aquinas elaborates on how God gives his divine testimony and how humans share the divine mystery by transmitting God's testimony. Aquinas does not only explain the biblical texts theologically, but he also studies them with philosophical concepts. Since both Aquinas' account of testimony and this commentary remain unexplored, this paper will first give a brief overview of Aquinas' account of testimony, especially by referring to some of his biblical commentaries. Then, by using the Commentary on John's Gospel, the paper exhibits the features of testimony in John 4. Finally, the paper will try to explore whether the explained testimonial events belong to the so-called "assurance view" in contemporary epistemology. Accordingly, the paper contributes to the current study by both investigating an unexplored area (Aquinas' account of testimony) and offering a new understanding of John 4 in terms of testimony.*

Keywords: *Aquinas, Commentary on John's Gospel, the Samaritan woman and the Samaritans, Testimony, epistemology*

1. Introduction

Testimony is one of the important concepts in John's Gospel. In the context of the Gospel, testimony denotes the witness of God's salvation, namely, the Son of God¹ became flesh, died for the salvation of humans, and was risen from the dead. It is thus conceivable that Thomas Aquinas puts effort into explaining this in his *Commentary on John's Gospel* (hereafter: the *Commentary*).² Aquinas does not only explain the concept of testimony in a religious sense, but he also argues with philosophical views, such as the importance of an agent's will in the process of intellectual understanding that renders faith successful, or the limitations of human understanding that hinder the knowledge transmission. Additionally, since Aquinas tries to rationalize the meanings of the biblical texts and bring them into harmony, the *Commentary* can show how Aquinas understands testimony in a way that other literature of him cannot. Therefore, studying the *Commentary* (rather than studying the biblical texts alone) is a new way to appreciate the Gospel.

A considerable amount of literature studies either the theological understanding of testimony or the meaning of testimony of some particular biblical verses in John's Gospel.³

1 In order to avoid implications caused by different titles of Jesus Christ, "Son of God," "the Messiah," or "Jesus" will be used in this paper.

2 Concerning the literature of Aquinas, all the texts, translations, and paragraphs marked with '§' are taken from <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/>.

3 The following articles are some relevant work recently: Christian-B. Amphoux, "L'identité et la fonction de Jean le témoin (Jn 1, 6)," *Revue des sciences*

Yet, not many studies focus on how Aquinas interprets the Gospel which renders both Aquinas' account of testimony and his *Commentary* remains unexplored. Still, *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas* collects some fruitful articles about the *Commentary*.⁴ Among them, Serge-Thomas Bonino's "The Role of the Apostles in the Communication of Revelation according to the *Lectura super Ioannem* of St. Thomas Aquinas" focuses on how Aquinas explains the concept of testimony in the Gospel.

In the article, Bonino makes plain that God's testimony is not for the sake of God himself because he is perfect. Rather, it is to ennoble those whom God appoints to testify. Thus, the apostles, who could reach the divine knowledge, are not only ennobled to be the intermediate causes in the God-human communication, but they also benefit from the direct and eminent participation of Jesus' knowledge. The process of understanding God's testimony is not immediate but gradual because time is needed to change both the minds and hearts of the apostles. In other words, the acquisition of the divine knowledge involves not only exterior communication of objective teaching, but also interior action of conversion brought about by the Holy Spirit.⁵

philosophiques et théologiques 101, no. 1 (2017): 31-48; Julie Casteigt, "Identité du témoin et accomplissement des figures: le modèle de la voix et du Verbe dans la lecture albertienne de Jn 1, 19-24," *Annali di Storia dell'Essegesi* 34, no. 1 (2017): 125-2144; Thomas Simpson, "Testimony in John's Gospel: The Puzzle of 5:31 and 8:14," *Tyndale Bulletin* 65, no.1 (2014): 101-118.

4 Michael Dauphinais, and Matthew Levering, ed., *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005).

5 Serge-Thomas Bonino, "The Role of the Apostles in the Communication of

After receiving the divine testimony, the work of the apostles, according to Bonino's explanation of Aquinas, is to transmit the testimony they receive from God. They preach not only the *epistemic knowledge* they receive, but also the *faith* they have. In other words, as a secondary cause that reflects the first cause (i.e. God), the role of the apostles is to transmit the content of the testimony that they receive from God (epistemically). Yet, preaching should not remain on the epistemic level. Rather, the epistemic knowledge leads to faith. It is thus conceivable that, according to Bonino, Aquinas exhibits the communication and the cooperation between God and humans that brings about the God-Human testimony and the Human-Human testimony.⁶

The paper will first give a brief outline of Aquinas' account of testimony. Then, it will demonstrate the features of testimony shown in the *Commentary* by using the narrative of the Samaritan woman and the Samaritans (Jn 4:4-42) as an example.⁷ Afterwards, it will try to study whether the narrative can be taken as an example of the "assurance view" in contemporary epistemology.

A remark should be given. The concept of testimony in the *Commentary* is shown both literally and contextually. Since the

Revelation according to the *Lectura super Ioannem* of St. Thomas Aquinas," in Michael Dauphinais, and Matther Levering, ed. *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), pp. 318-346.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 318-346.

7 The narrative is usually called the "narrative of the Samaritan woman." In this paper, I call it the "Samaritans narrative" because my study relates to the narrative of both the woman and the Samaritans.

Commentary is written according to the sequence of the biblical verses, the concept of testimony is thus shown when such an idea emerges from the relevant biblical verses. The concept of testimony, in this sense, is presented in a *literal* way. However, the concept of testimony can also be found *contextually* even though the word “testimony” is not used in a particular biblical verse. In other words, the context of the biblical passage is related to giving evidence, so to speak. I might then need to reconstruct the ideas shown in the *Commentary* so as to understand how testimony is understood in the context.

2. An Overview of Aquinas’ Account of Testimony

Up to my knowledge, there is no academic study giving an overview of Aquinas’ account of testimony by consolidating the data about testimony in Aquinas’ literature. What I can contribute here, rather, is to refer to the overview given in my Ph.D. dissertation.⁸ My overview is mainly based on Aquinas’ biblical commentaries, in which Aquinas’ account of testimony is classified into three main areas: the identity of Jesus, the apostles, and suffering.

In addition, I have to explain briefly how I understand testimony. I take testimony as a topic which is a sub-branch of epistemology. The simplest form of a testimony is “a speaker testifies a content / an object / an event to a hearer.” Basically, it is about knowledge, its acquisition and transmission. Advanced issues are, for example,

⁸ W. M. Choi, *Second-person Experience, Testimony, and Healing: An Investigation with Aquinas into the Problem of Human Suffering*, unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation (Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2023).

the credibility of the speaker, the hearer's trust given to the speaker, telling lies, and the virtues of the speaker and the hearer.⁹ Before addressing my overview, Aquinas' view on testimony given in other literature has to be addressed briefly.

Aquinas uses the word testimony straightforwardly. He uses “*testimonium*” for testimony, evidence, or witness, “*testifitor*” or “*testificatio*” for giving evidence; and “*testis*” for the one who gives evidence. It also seems that the use of the above keywords does not have other purposes. Therefore, I presume that Aquinas understands these words as literally as what has been shown above unless further evidence is found.¹⁰

One may think that *Summa Theologiae* (*ST*) is a major source of reference. However, Aquinas does not dedicate his effort to explaining it there utterly. Short discussions about the topic of testimony are scattered over the corpus, especially in the *Secunda Secundae* (II-II).¹¹ These short discussions are about “Oath”

9 I admit that because of the limitation of the scope many arguable discussions of testimony in contemporary epistemology and the epistemological views of medieval philosophers cannot be explained in this paper. One may also query how suffering is related to the discussions of testimony. Details are attainable in the mentioned dissertation.

10 Contemporary philosophy classifies testimony as a sub-branch of modern epistemological analyzes. Some of the aspects involve whether knowledge is reducible to other knowledge or whether testimony is a justified true belief. However, as a pre-modern philosopher, Aquinas is not interested in such technical aspects of justifications. Instead, he would focus on its metaphysical or theological aspects, such as the purposes of giving testimony, the reliability of knowledge obtained by testimony, and in particular, the person who gives testimony.

11 Roy J. Deferrari, M. Inviolata Barry, and Ignatius McGuinness, *A Lexicon of St. Thomas Aquinas Based on the Summa Theologica and Selected Passages*

(*ST* II-II, q. 89), “Truth” (*ST* II-II, q. 109), “Lying” (*ST* II-II, q. 110), “Public Denunciation” (*ST* II-II, q. 33), and “Precepts of Justice” (*ST* II-II, q. 122). Moreover, as testimony relates to martyrdom and the fortitude of the martyrs,¹² questions 123, 139, and 140 in the *Secunda Secundae* could not be overlooked.

Attention has to be paid to two articles of question 70 (*ST* II-II, q. 70) in which the issues about giving witnesses in formal testimony (such as in court cases) are discussed. Article 1 enquires whether a man is bound to give evidence. Aquinas cares about the matter of justice. He thinks that when a person is subject to a superior for the matters of pertaining justice, the person is bound to obey and testify so as to pertain to justice. But the person is not bound to give evidence for dishonor (*infamia*) even though the person is subject to the superior. In addition, even though the person is not subject to an order of the superior, he is bound to declare truth for serious matters, such as for unjust death or false defamation. This is because being silent about injustice means consent, according to Aquinas.¹³

of *His Other Works* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1948), p.110, <https://archive.org/details/AquinasLexicon/> [accessed 15th October, 2023].

12 There is a general consensus that the Christological martyrdom is a particular kind of testimony because martyrs sacrifice for the sake of faith. Aquinas holds this view too. In his *The Spirituality of Martyrdom*, Servais Pinckaers argues that Aquinas “unfolds [the spirituality of martyrdom] within a theological synthesis nourished by scripture and the fathers, through which he interprets Christian experience and the tradition of the church.” Servais Pinckaers, *The Spirituality of Martyrdom*, trans. Patrick M. Clark and Annie Hounsokou (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), p. 134. It is thus conceivable that the third area of Aquinas’ account of testimony relates to suffering.

13 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae (ST)*, II-II, q. 70, a. 1.

Moving on to article 3, Aquinas clarifies that the authority of a witness' evidence could be fallible. He names several possibilities that could cause fallible authority: the fault of the witness (such as the witness is guilty); the defect of the witness' reasoning (such as the witness is stupid); the defect of the witness' personal feeling (such as the witness is an enemy of the accused); or other external conditions (such as the witness is induced to give false evidence).¹⁴

Let us go back to the overview of Aquinas' account of testimony that I have given in my dissertation. As mentioned, in accordance mainly with the biblical commentaries of Aquinas, I classify Aquinas' account of testimony into three main areas: Jesus as the witness of God, the testimony of the apostles, and suffering as testimony. These areas are interrelated: Jesus is the witness of God. Not only that the Scripture, the prophets, and the law testify to his identity, but Jesus and his followers also testify the truth and announce it to the world. Yet, the proclamation causes suffering. Thus, in order to testify the truth of God, Jesus, his apostles, and many martyrs endure difficulties and sacrifice for the sake of faith and justice.

The three named areas need to be explained in detail. First, the testimony of the identity of Jesus is in accordance with the divine testimony, that is, the testimony given by God. In the Gospel of John, "witness" or "testimony" are used frequently. Merrill Tenney mentions that "[t]he noun *μαρτυρία* occurs fourteen times in the

¹⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 70, a. 3.

Gospel, and the verb *μαρτυρέω* thirty-three times.”¹⁵ Therefore, it is not surprising that Aquinas’ *Commentary* has many literal interpretations on the topic. For instance, testimony are the witnesses given by God the Father (Jn 5:31-37), the Holy Spirit (Jn 1:32-34), the Scripture (Jn 5:39; 12:38-41), and John the Baptist (Jn 1:15-27). On the other hand, the contextual understanding is found in the passages of how Jesus reveals himself such as in the passages about Nathanael (Jn 1:48-51), the Samaritan woman and the Samaritans (Jn 4), the man who had been lame for 38 years (Jn 5), and the born blind man (Jn 9).

The *Commentary of Matthew’s Gospel* is another source showing the testimony of Jesus’ identity. The evidence given by John the Baptist (Mt 3) and the Old Testament (Mt 1:22-23) are similar to what has just been mentioned in the *Commentary of John’s Gospel*. Moreover, the witness of the magi (Mt 2:1-12) and the passage about transfiguration (Mt 17:1-13) show that Jesus’ divinity is witnessed by a natural phenomenon (the star) and the ancient men (Moses and Elijah). In contrast, the Jews who do not believe in Jesus are the counter-examples. Upon being caught by the Jews, Jesus is accused of giving false witnesses (Mt 26:57-75). And when Jesus dies, the earthquake

15 Merrill C. Tenney, “Topics from the Gospel of John Part III: The Meaning of ‘Witness’ in John,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (1975): 229. Thomas Simpson also has the same count. In addition, Simpson shows that the author of the Gospel uses different forms of sentences to explain testimony. For example, when John the Baptist testifies “*p*,” this is what Simpson calls “simple testimony.” When John the Baptist testifies and tells the readers that his testimony is true in the form of “*p*, and I tell you that *p* is true,” this is a “self-attested testimony,” etc. Thomas Simpson, “Testimony in John’s Gospel: the puzzle of 5:31 and 8:14,” *Fyndale Bulletin* 65, no. 1 (2014): 103-108.

and the horrible natural phenomena also testify to the death of Jesus (Mt 27:50-54).

The second area (the apostles) and the third area (suffering) are closely related because many followers of Jesus suffer for the sake of testifying their faith.¹⁶ Jesus always reminds his followers to testify for the sake of faith. However, Jesus does not particularly tell his followers that their sacrificial actions would be praiseworthy except, for example, the rewards shown in the Beatitudes. For St. Paul, he does mention that those who endure suffering for the sake of faith are virtuous. For example, taking himself as an example of suffering for the sake of faith, Paul reminds Timothy should be patient and have courage when he faces the upcoming prosecution (2 Tim 2).

Let us also focus on how Aquinas rationalizes the meanings of the biblical texts regarding the apostolic suffering. When he comments on the dangers faced by the apostles (Mt 10:16-18),¹⁷ he says:

And why did God thus will to send them [the apostles] into dangers? This was to manifest his power, because if he had sent armed men, it would be attributed to their violence, not to God's power; so he sent poor men.... And you [the apostles] will be brought before governors,

¹⁶ I only mean that the apostles and their suffering are interrelated in Aquinas' account of testimony. I do not mean that suffering in general are necessarily related to the apostles. Nor do I mean that all apostolic suffering (such as the illness of the apostles) are testimonial.

¹⁷ "Look, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves; so be cunning as snakes and yet innocent as doves. Be prepared for people to hand you over to sanhedrins and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for my sake, as evidence to them and to the gentiles." (Mt 10:16-18) New Jerusalem Bible. All the biblical texts refer to the New Jerusalem Bible, <https://www.bibliacatolica.com.br/new-jerusalem-bible/> [accessed 15th October, 2023].

and before kings, as to Herod, and many others. But you should have great consolation, because it is for my sake [Jesus' sake], namely, whom you love.... This will be for a testimony to them, i.e., against them, i.e., the Jews and the gentiles. For since they will hand you over in councils, this will be in witness against them. Likewise, since it will be before kings and governors, this will also be against them.... Sending out the apostles is] a testimony to them, namely to the Jews and the gentiles, because I [Jesus] send you to them as witnesses of my faith to the Jews and gentiles; hence a martyr is the same as a witness, because by your suffering you will be witness to my suffering. And you will be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and even to the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).¹⁸

Here, Aquinas explains God's action of sending poor men for preaching: if God sends armed men, the preaching would be attributed to violence instead of God's power. In addition, Aquinas modifies the danger that the apostles would face by introducing the concept of martyrdom and he associates martyrdom with the apostolic witnesses (while the biblical texts only mention that the apostles would be caught, questioned, and scourged). As Aquinas should notice the history of the persecutions and the suffering experienced by both the apostles and the early Church, it is not surprising that he adds these factors to his commentary.¹⁹

18 Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Matthew's Gospel*, § 838, 845, <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/> [accessed 15th October, 2023].

19 Some theologians do agree that Aquinas' biblical exegeses provide theological understanding on top of the biblical texts. For example, in his "Thomas Aquinas, Human Suffering, and the Unchanging God of Love," Michael Dodds quotes Aquinas' "Jesus was made a participant of *our* affliction" (emphasis original) and claims that we will "predicate of God a human suffering like our own." By quoting Aquinas' *Commentary on Colossians*, Dodds also shows that Paul identifies his suffering as the Church's and God's. As if those in the Church

To summarise, my brief overview given to Aquinas' account of testimony starts by defining the terms and delimiting the literal and the contextual conditions. After showing some questions in the *Summa Theologiae*, I argue that Aquinas' biblical commentaries are the best sources on the topic. By categorizing the topic into the identity of Jesus, the apostles, and suffering, I give examples of how Aquinas' commentaries explain the biblical texts and how they provide additional flourishing insight into the topic.

3. The Testimonial Events of the Samaritans Narrative

With reference to the settings above, this section returns to the *Commentary*, showing some features of Aquinas' account of testimony by using the Samaritans narrative as an example.²⁰ This example shows not only the God-Human testimony and the Human-Human testimony but also the testimonial duties of the apostles (that is, the second area of Aquinas' account of testimony).²¹

The Samaritans narrative starts with an encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman. Jesus revealed to the woman that he is the Son of God. She believed and announced this to her neighbors

who experience whatever kinds of suffering, comfort and courage are given to the sufferers because God suffers in their own wounds. Michael J Dodds, "Thomas Aquinas, Human Suffering, and the Unchanging God of Love," *Theological Studies* 52, no. 2 (1991): 334, 341. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Colossians*, § 61, <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/> [accessed 15th October, 2023].

20 I call the narrative regarding the Samaritan woman and the Samaritans "the narrative of the Samaritans" because I take the narrative as a whole that do not only focus on the part regarding the relation between Jesus and the woman.

21 The testimonial events are explained by reconstructing the materials in the *Commentary* and they are understood as testimony contextually.

(the Samaritans). Consequently, the neighbors invited Jesus to stay in their town. All of them finally believed in Jesus after listening to him. Accordingly, there are three testimonial events and the structure of the events are as follows:

	Speaker	Hearer(s)
First testimonial event	Jesus	The Samaritan woman
Second testimonial event	The Samaritan Woman	The Samaritans
Third testimonial event	Jesus	The Samaritans

In the first event, Jesus initiates the dialogue and testifies to the woman (Jn 4:4-26). After that, the woman believes and gives her testimony to other people (Jn 4:28-38). These two events lead to the third one, that is, Jesus testifies directly to the Samaritans who finally believe in Jesus (Jn 4:39-42).

Attention is paid to some features of each event. In the first event, Jesus initiates the dialogue by asking her for drinking water. The gospel explains that the action of asking for water is strange because the Jews do not associate with the Samaritans. Jesus gradually reveals his identity (the Messiah) to the woman by telling her two things: he knows her history and the analogical meaning of the living (spiritual) water. Even though the woman does not understand the meaning of the living water, she desires to know. When Jesus reveals himself gradually to the woman, she is surprised. Yet, she still misunderstands the identity of Jesus because she thinks that he is a prophet. With further explanation and directly telling her that he is the Messiah, the woman finally understands, hurrying back to the town to tell other people.

In the second event, the woman is the speaker while the Samaritans are the hearers. She testifies to the Samaritans about what she knows in the first event. As she tells the people that she meets the Messiah, the people go to find Jesus. It seems that the second event ends here. Yet, I suggest that the dialogue between Jesus and the apostles who have just come back to Jesus after getting food for him (Jn 4:31-38) can be counted into the second testimonial event even though the apostles do not have their role in the events. That is because the food mentioned in this dialogue is commonly understood as the believers of the divine testimony.

John 4:39 of the third event mentions that many Samaritans believe in Jesus because of the woman's testimony. Then, they approach Jesus, asking him to stay with them for two days and listening to him. After that, many more Samaritans believe (*πολλῶ πλείους ἐπίστευσαν*). They tell the woman, "Now we believe no longer because of what you told us; we have heard him ourselves and we know that he is indeed the Saviour of the world" (Jn 4:42).

With these features highlighted, I will now explore Aquinas' account of testimony shown in his biblical exegeses extensively. My purpose is not to do an exegesis, but to give a new way to understand the biblical texts in terms of Aquinas' account of testimony.

3.1 The First Testimonial Event

In the first testimonial event, Jesus gives his divine testimony. Why does God do so? There are many ways of answering the

question. While it is commonly (and theologically) believed that God gives his divine testimony because of his love, the *Commentary*, rather, gives us a philosophical answer by studying the reason (*causa*) for giving testimony. It is given when Aquinas explains the duty (*officium*) of John the Baptist, namely, being a witness (*testimonium*) of God's divine testimony. Aquinas writes:

Here we should understand that there are two reasons for bearing witness about something. One reason can be on the part of the thing with which the witness is concerned (*ex parte rei cui testimonium adhibetur*); for example, if there is some doubt or uncertainty about that thing. The other is on the part of those who hear it (*ex parte audientium*); if they are hard of heart and slow to believe. John came as a witness, not because of the thing about which he bore witness, for it was light. Hence he says, that he might bear witness to the light, i.e., not to something obscure, but to something clear. He came, therefore, to bear witness on account of those to whom he testified (*propter ipsos quibus testificabatur*), so that through him, John, all men might believe.²²

Aquinas says clearly that testimony is given for the sake of “the thing that the witness is concerned (with)” (the object of the testimony) and/or “those who hear it” (the hearers). In the context of the first testimonial event, the object is Jesus himself. As Jesus is the Son of God, the object of this testimony is clear and not obscure. We can also analogically believe that for divine testimony (in general), the object of the testimony (that is, God)

²² Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on John's Gospel*, § 118, <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/> [accessed 15th October, 2023].

is clear. Thus, the reason for John's testimony is for the sake of the hearers with the purpose of letting it be known.

"Hard of heart and slow to believe" is one of the reasons why hearers need the divine testimony, according to Aquinas. In the biblical context, the hearers are the Jews and the priests who do not believe in Jesus. In fact, it can be extended to a wider context. For instance, those who have no desire to know, who are reluctant to believe, or who are stubborn are the persons with hard hearts while the persons with limited intellectual abilities are those who are slow to believe.

Indeed, no matter whether one is slow to believe or not, the intellectual abilities of humans are not capable of understanding God, at least at the beginning of the process of understanding. Aquinas explains that "[i]t is impossible for any created intellect to see the essence of God by its own natural power.... If the mode of anything's being exceeds the mode of the knower, it must result that the knowledge of the object is above the nature of the knower."²³ Obviously, the intellect of the Samaritan woman is insufficient to understand the essence of God. She misunderstands two things: she thinks that Jesus is a prophet and she mixes up the concept of natural water and spiritual water. Therefore, Jesus gives his spiritual teaching (*doctrinam spiritualem*) step-by-step and reveals himself at an appropriate time.²⁴ Aquinas calls this how God gives testimony *intelligibly*, that is, by inspiring the hearts of humans (*inspirando*

23 *ST I*, q. 12, a. 4.

24 *Commentary on John's Gospel*, § 575, 619.

in cordibus aliquorum).²⁵ With God's intelligible inspiration, the limitations of the created intellect would be overcome. And once the intellect of the person affirms the propositions of faith, the *will* is drawn to the goodness of God, and the person would desire a union with God.

Aquinas further connects "the woman's desire of knowing" with "the living water" (*aqua viva*). He writes:

[L]iving water, i.e., grace (*gratiam*), is obtained by desiring it (*per desiderium pervenitur*), i.e., by asking [formally] (*per petitionem*)... for grace is not given to anyone without their asking and desiring it.... There are two things which [urge on] (*incitatur*)²⁶ a person to desire and ask for grace: a knowledge of the good to be desired (*ex cognitione desiderandi boni*) and a knowledge of the giver (*ex cognitione datoris*). So, Christ offers these two to her.²⁷

Aquinas equates the living water with grace. The source of this living water, according to what he says previously, is the Holy Spirit: "the grace of the Holy Spirit is correctly called living water because the grace of the Holy Spirit is given to man in such a way that the source itself of the grace is also given, that is, the Holy Spirit."²⁸ Thus, what Jesus offers to the woman is not only grace but also the Holy Spirit.

25 *Commentary on John's Gospel*, § 820.

26 The translation given by "<https://aquinas.cc/la/en/>" is as follows: "[t]here are two things which lead [*incitatur*] a person to desire and ask for grace." However, I prefer to translate *incitatur* as "urge on" to show a strong desire.

27 *Commentary on John's Gospel*, § 578-579.

28 *Ibid.*, § 577.

Furthermore, this grace is given when the person asks for and desires. This is in contrast to the persons who are hard of heart. That is, those who are hard of heart do not have the desire to know nor would they ask. Asking, I further suggest, is an action: the desire of knowing needs to be put into action. Otherwise, the knowledge of the testimony could hardly be acquired or transmitted successfully.

What is known so far is about the hearer of the divine testimony: the Samaritan woman does not only want to know the living water, she also asks for further information. Undeniably, her misunderstanding (that is, her desire to get the natural water) drives her to know more. But when grace is given to her through Jesus' step-by-step revelation,²⁹ her desire turns into a correct direction and the limitations of her intellectual ability are gradually overcome.

Other than being led by the Holy Spirit, Aquinas thinks that knowledge is that which urges on (*incito*) the woman's desire and asking. This knowledge, namely, the "knowledge of the good to be desired" and the "knowledge of the giver" is Jesus himself. Thus, Jesus is the content or the object of the testimony. At the same time, he is the speaker.

The certainty of knowledge is an important matter for testimony. In our context, the certainty of what Jesus reveals to the woman is crucial. From a religious perspective, the certainty of Jesus' messages is undoubtedly reliable. But let's see how Aquinas assures the certainty of the divine testimony from an alternative perspective. He says:

²⁹ *Ibid.*, § 619.

For just as knowledge (*scientia*) is certain (*certa*), so is faith (*fides*); indeed, much more so, because the certainty of knowledge rests on human reason (*rationi humanae*), which can be deceived (*falli*), while the certainty of faith rests on divine reason (*rationi divinae*), which cannot be contradicted. However they differ in mode: because faith possesses its certainty due to a divinely infused light (*lumine infuse divinitus*), while knowledge possesses its certainty due to a natural light (*lumine naturali*). For as the certitude of knowledge rests on first principles naturally known, so the principles of faith are known from a light divinely infused.³⁰

Here, Aquinas compares *scientia* with *fides* and their sources. Since *scientia* is the knowledge that rests on human reason and its certitude rests on first principles, it is certain but its certainty is fallible. In contrast, faith is certain and infallible because it rests on divine reason and its certainty rests on the divinely infused light. Therefore, the divine testimony, which urges the woman to desire and ask for grace, does not simply contain *scientia*. Rather, the divine testimony rests on divine reason and its certainty rests on the divinely infused light. In other words, its certainty is assured.

Jesus further explains to the woman the place of worship (Jn 4:21-23).³¹ According to Aquinas, Jesus points out the false

30 *Commentary on John's Gospel*, § 662.

31 “[B]elieve woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know; for salvation comes from the Jews. But the hour is coming—indeed is already here—when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: that is the kind of worshipper the Father seeks.”

idea of God held by the Samaritans, namely, God is corporeal and he should be adored only in one definite corporeal place.³² Indeed, the priority of salvation is given to the Jews because they have true knowledge of God (*vera cognitione Dei*).³³ However, Aquinas argues that there cannot be a false knowledge of God. By referring to Aristotle, Aquinas points out that humans may have false knowledge about complex things. But for simple things, there are two situations: either humans attain true knowledge of them because their quiddity can be known perfectly, or humans do not know them at all when humans cannot the knowledge of them.³⁴ In other words, humans either know the true knowledge of the simple things or do not know them at all. And there is no option of having false knowledge of simple things. For this reason, since God is absolutely simple,³⁵ there cannot be a false knowledge of God. After correcting the misunderstanding held by the Samaritans, Jesus shows the woman his identity (that is, the Messiah), which is the moment when the testimonial knowledge is fully known.

At the beginning of this sub-section, I have shown that “God’s love” is a common reason given as to why God gives divine testimony. I hope that my explanation has shown a very different perspective to the question given by Aquinas. Although divine testimony is for the sake of humans in both perspectives, Aquinas’ fruitful explanations (which include the limitations of the human

³² *Commentary on John's Gospel*, § 603.

³³ *Ibid.*, § 605.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, § 603.

³⁵ *ST I*, q. 3, a. 7.

intellectual abilities, the lack of willingness or desires, equating the living water with grace, the certainty of the divine testimony, etc.) bring about a philosophical and epistemological perspective.

3.2 The Second Testimonial Event

It is evident that the woman does not only attain knowledge from Jesus, but she also has faith. Faith is a virtue and an act to believe. This virtue is a predicamental quality that changes her beliefs and behaviour substantially. She also has grace that modifies her profoundly. Aquinas calls this the infusion of grace (*infusionem gratiae*),³⁶ that is, God's power moves the free will of humans.³⁷

As a hearer in the first testimonial event, the woman turns out to be a speaker in the second testimonial event. Aquinas asserts that she takes on the role of an apostle.³⁸ By proclaiming the knowledge that she attains from Jesus, not only her affective devotion (*devotionis affectus*) is evident, her apostolic role is also shown by her way of preaching (*praedicationis modus*) and the effect of her preaching (*praedicationis effectus*), according to Aquinas.³⁹

Since she is inspired by Jesus impressively, her devotion is affective. This is shown by her actions: she forgets her physical needs (the natural water) and devotes herself to the welfare of others. By giving symbolic meanings of the water jar and the well as the worldly desires and the worldly manner of life respectively,

³⁶ *Commentary on John's Gospel*, § 151.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, § 154.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, § 624.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, § 624.

Aquinas posits that she takes on an apostolic role, abandons the worldly things, and looks for the divine things.⁴⁰

At the same time, she forgets her own shame that is brought about by her previous marriage affairs. She talks about it in public and uses it as the evidence to show the divinity of Jesus. This further shows how she gives up the earthly things.⁴¹

With her affection, she invites others to experience and see whether they would be affected in the same way. These actions lead to a promising result. A great number of people listen to her testimony and go out of the city to find Jesus.⁴²

Noteworthy, the speaker of the second testimonial event is a human person. It means that the divine testimony turns out to be a kind of human testimony. But why are humans, whose abilities are limited, involved in divine testimony? Or, why shouldn't God testify to the Samaritans directly at the beginning? By referring to Origen, Aquinas answers:

God wanted to have certain witnesses, not because he needed their testimony, but to ennoble those whom he appointed witnesses (*tut eos nobilitet quos constituit testes*). Thus we see in the order of the universe that God produces certain effects by means of intermediate causes, not because he himself is unable

40 *Ibid.*, § 625.

41 *Ibid.*, § 627.

42 *Ibid.*, § 625-629. In addition, regarding the food or the harvest mentioned by Jesus in the dialogue between Jesus and his apostles, it denotes the success of having the faithful after the divine testimony. Aquinas thinks that the harvest is the conversion of the faithful who know and keep the truth in their souls for the sake of having their eternal life. *Ibid.*, § 646, 651.

to produce them without these intermediaries, but he deigns to confer on them the dignity of causality because he wishes to ennoble these intermediate causes. Similarly, even though God could have enlightened all men (*omnes homines illuminare*) by himself and led them to a knowledge of himself (*in cognitionem suam adducere*), yet to preserve due order in things and to ennoble certain men, he willed that divine knowledge reach men through certain other men.⁴³

Aquinas, again, tries to encounter this kind of question from a philosophical perspective, referring to the notion of causality. Participating in God's divine testimony or being God's witness is an ennoblement, according to Aquinas. God wants his divine knowledge to be known through certain human persons although he can enlighten everyone himself directly. It follows that such ennoblement, I suggest, is so valuable and it could override the defects of the limited creatures.

I further suggest that the second testimonial event can be elaborated from the first-person experience of the woman. Other than receiving grace, she responds and takes action courageously regardless of her personal weakness and shame. This courage is a moral virtue, which could not be attained without her willingness and cooperation. Put differently, she turns her epistemic knowledge (on the conceptual level) into actions (on the practical level). Her participation, therefore, gives new meanings to the testimony.⁴⁴

⁴³ *Commentary on John's Gospel*, § 119.

⁴⁴ Although a "beautiful big picture of God's ennoblement" is given here, it is reminded that suffering is usually involved when the apostles preach, which makes this picture no longer "so pleasant." This is shown when the apostles

3.3 The Third Testimonial Event

The fruit of the whole testimony is gradually shown in the third testimonial event. With the testimony given by the woman, her neighbors go out to look for Jesus. This is the “primary” fruit of the testimony and is a sufficient inducement to believe Jesus.⁴⁵ Aquinas says, “after they [the Samaritans] believed [in the woman’s words], they came to Christ, to be perfected by him.”⁴⁶

The Samaritans ask Jesus to stay with them because they want to listen to his testimony directly. Importantly, according to the biblical texts,

many more came to believe on the strength of the words he [Jesus] spoke to them [the Samaritans], and they said to the woman, “Now we believe no longer because of what you told us; we have heard him ourselves and we know that he is indeed the Saviour of the world.”⁴⁷

Undoubtedly, Jesus’ testimony given to the Samaritans is successful both because many *more* people believe him and because it is a divine testimony. For Aquinas, “[t]his signifies that although

suffer from persecution or death because of preaching. In other words, the ennoblement might not be something “merely joyful” like the low-level appetites. Rather, it can be extremely painful. This also shows why suffering is the third area of my overview given to Aquinas’ account of testimony.

45 *Ibid.*, § 657.

46 *Ibid.*, § 658.

47 Jn 4:41-42.

many believed because of the prophets,⁴⁸ many more were converted to the faith after Christ came.”⁴⁹

Let us closely look at the reason for their belief given by the Samaritans, which relates to the validity of the woman’s testimony in the second testimonial event. On the one hand, the effect of the woman’s testimony is affirmed. On the other hand, Jesus’ testimony given to the Samaritans is direct and clear. How can we rationalize the meaning of “now we [the Samaritans] believe no longer because of what you [the woman] told us”? Does it imply that the woman’s testimony is valid no more (Jn 4:41)?

According to my observation, there is a small difference between the Latin biblical texts used by Aquinas and the original Greek texts for this quote (Jn 4:41). The Latin text of John’s Gospel that Aquinas uses shows “*quia non propter tuam loquelam credimus*” (not because of your account of speech we accept as true). The Greek canonical text, however, shows “*οὐκέτι διὰ τὴν σὴν λαλιὰν πιστευομεν*” (no longer because of your speech we believe), which is also used in my translation quoted from the New Jerusalem Bible.

The difference (between “not because” and “no longer because”), I suggest, is small but subtle. While the validity of the

48 Regarding the use of the word “prophets,” I take Aquinas to denote the people who proclaim the news before the coming of the Messiah. In this sense, the Samaritan woman, who testifies to the Samaritans before the presence of Jesus, fits to be a prophet.

49 *Commentary on John’s Gospel*, § 661.

woman's testimony in the second event is unquestionable, the third event provides new information that might change the validity of the woman's testimony given in the previous event. I suggest that there is *a possibility* to deny the validity of the woman's testimony if we take the option of "not because of." But if the option of "no longer because of" is used, we do not need to deny the effect or the validity of the woman's testimony. I prefer to take the latter option because I do not think that Aquinas denies the validity of the woman's witness. Aquinas only emphasizes that a person can have faith without relying on any intermediate cause but on God's truth alone.

Three things lead us to believe in Christ. First of all, natural reason.... Second, the testimony of the law and the prophets.... Third, the preaching of the apostles and others.... Yet when a person, having been thus instructed, believes, he can then say that it is not for any of these reasons that he believes: i.e., neither on account of natural reason, nor the testimony of the law, nor the preaching of others, but solely on account of the truth itself.⁵⁰

The "truth itself" is Jesus. Aquinas explains that the Samaritans affirm that "Christ is the unique, true and universal saviour."⁵¹ I do not think that Aquinas denies the beliefs made through natural reason, the testimony of the law and of the prophets, and the preaching of the apostles. As long as they are true, they are valid, even though they could be fallible. Rather, only the truth itself, that is God, is certain and infallible. In other words, it is the fact

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, § 662.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, § 663.

that a person can believe Jesus in accordance with natural reason, testimony, or preaching. Still, a person can believe because of the truth of God alone as if the experience of the Samaritans in the third event: God's grace is infused directly and the knowledge of God is also attained directly.

4. Believing in Jesus versus Believing in the Evidence given by Jesus

At the beginning of the paper, I have mentioned the simplest form of a testimony: "a speaker testifies a content/an object/an event to a hearer." In our context, Jesus is the speaker in the first and the third testimonial event. The content of the testimony is the identity of Jesus and the way that the Samaritans should worship. Thus, roughly speaking, Jesus is both the speaker and the content of the testimony. To put this in some terms in epistemology, when Jesus testifies, he (as the speaker) gives evidence to show the validity of the propositions relating to himself. Then, a distinction, probably, needs to be made: whether the woman and the Samaritans believe in Jesus (the speaker) or his evidence.⁵²

This question relates to the "assurance view" in the discussions of contemporary epistemology. Richard Moran explores the difference between believing in the speaker or believing in the proposition of the speaker in his "Getting Told and Being Believed." In brief, the assurance view shows how hearers believe in the speaker rather

⁵² The question implies that Jesus is a reliable speaker of the events.

than the speaker's proposition. In other words, it is the speaker who "assures" the truth of the testimony. Moran writes:

On the assurance view, dependence on someone's freely assuming responsibility for the truth of P, presenting himself as a kind of guarantor, provides me with a characteristic reason to believe, different in kind from anything provided by evidence alone.⁵³

Besides, Frederick Schmitt gives some scenarios of the assurance view.

Assurance allows an epistemic reason to be given to the addressee [hearer] even when no evidence is given. The testifier's [speaker's] assurance may be understood in various ways—as the testifier's presenting himself or herself as having an adequate epistemic reason to believe *p* or as epistemically responsible in asserting *p*, or as inviting the addressee to trust him or her that *p*, or as offering to take responsibility for *p*'s being true.⁵⁴

In our context, perhaps we could not know whether the Samaritans believe in the words of Jesus or believe in Jesus himself because no dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritans is given in the biblical texts. It is also possible that the Samaritans believe in both Jesus (as the speaker) and his testimonial propositions.

53 Richard Moran, "Getting Told and Being Believed," in *The Epistemology of Testimony*, ed. Jennifer Lacky and Ernest Sosa (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), p. 279.

54 Frederick F. Schmitt, "The Assurance View of Testimony," in *Social Epistemology*, ed. Adrian Haddock, Alan Millar, and Duncan Pritchard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 217.

However, it seems that we could investigate whether the woman believes in Jesus, his propositions, or both. In other words, we could check whether the assurance view is applicable to the woman's faith according to the dialogues between Jesus and the woman.

First, it is evident that the first testimonial event is understood contextually,⁵⁵ but words relating to the testimony are used. For example, Jesus does ask the woman to "believe him" (Jn 4:21). When this "believe *me*" (the speaker) is taken literally, it seems that it is close to the assurance view described by Moran and Schmitt.

Second, the reasons of belief given by the woman deserve attention. In John 4:17-19, the woman thinks that Jesus is the prophet because Jesus could show her the evidence about her marriage. In John 4:29, the woman uses the same piece of evidence to show the Samaritans. But what she claims is changed: she claims that Jesus is the Messiah.⁵⁶ It means that while the woman refers to the same piece of evidence given by Jesus, her belief is changed: from believing that he is a prophet to believing that he is the Messiah. Importantly, the change, I believe, is based on, in Schmitt's words, an "epistemic reason" given by Jesus, namely, he is the Messiah (Jn 4:25-26). Therefore, it is fitting to claim that the assurance given by Jesus changes the belief of the woman. She accepts Jesus' assurance, believing that he is the Messiah, by relying on the same piece of evidence (the disclosure of her marriage affairs).

⁵⁵ According to the distinction mentioned earlier, testimony can be understood either literally or contextually.

⁵⁶ The woman says, "come and see a man who has told me everything I have done" in John 4:29. I take that "everything I have done" means the affair of her previous marriage.

5. Conclusion

This paper has first given a brief overview of Aquinas' account of testimony, especially by referring to some of his biblical commentaries. I have classified the topic into three interrelated areas: the identity of Jesus, the apostles, and suffering. Then, the paper has focused on the *Commentary of John's Gospel* and has shown some features of Aquinas' account of testimony. By using the Samaritans narrative as an example, I have shown three testimonial events. And by highlighting the biblical comments given by Aquinas, not only the distinction between God's testimony and human testimony has been shown, many testimonial features have also been discussed, including why humans are involved in divine testimony, the human limitations of understanding divine testimony, the desires of knowing God's truth, and the validity of human testimony.

Finally, I have analyzed how the woman's belief can be taken as an assurance view in the discussion of contemporary epistemology, that is, the woman's belief is based on the speaker rather than the evidence. Given that the evidence to which the woman refers remains unchanged, I argue that the woman believes the speaker (Jesus) after knowing the speaker's epistemic reason (he is the Messiah).

Yet, the scope of this study is limited in terms of approaching aspects such as the successfulness, effectiveness, or degree of knowledge transmission in the train of testimonial events. Further work might also analyze the virtue of the faithful and its effect. These are the subsequent questions that arise from this work, which I will look for further opportunities to explore.