Testimony and the Knowledge of God:
Sounding Biblical and Phenomenological Motifs of Witness for Their Contribution to Theological Epistemology



Andrew K. Turnbull

Wycliffe Hall

University of Oxford

A thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Christmastide 2022

For *Julie*
Judah, Abigail, and Anna.
Home.

And in memory of the one who first saw the path to Oxford,
Rev. Dr. Ellis André.
Eternally Home.

Table of Contents

Contents.....i
Acknowledgements.....ii
Abbreviations.....iv
Short Abstract.....v
Long Abstract.....vii

INTRODUCTION.....1
The Potential of Fresh Attention to Biblical and Phenomenological Witness Motifs for Contribution to Theological Epistemology

CHAPTER ONE.....11
Taking a Stance, and Charting a (Thematic) Course Toward Contribution in Theological Epistemology

CHAPTER TWO.....65
Discerning the Defining Characteristics of the Testimonial Logic Central to John's Gospel

CHAPTER THREE.....148
Primordial Witness: Ricoeur, Chrétien, and Marion and Their Appeals to Witness at the Heart of Their Descriptions at the Borders of Consciousness

CHAPTER FOUR.....215
From Testimonial Logic to a Theo-Logic for Theological Epistemology

CONCLUSION.....252

Bibliography.....256

Acknowledgements

This thesis is offered with great regard for the life and ministry of Rev. Dr. Ellis André, and with heartfelt appreciation to his wife - now widow - Ruth. I had the immense privilege of serving alongside Ellis for eight years of pastoral work after he invited me onto his ministry staff at White Rock Baptist Church, Vancouver. No others have had as great an effect on my character, the direction of Julie's and my ministry, and the direction of my studies, than Ellis and Ruth. Ellis was the first to encourage me to consider doctoral studies in the UK, and was uniquely enthusiastic about Oxford. "It's the road less travelled", he would say, by which he was indicating the sacrifices involved in moving a young family internationally, the rigour of a university like Oxford, and also the substantial financial cost. But he also was signalling the intangible rewards that would come through walking out such a road. He walked alongside in the journey, supporting in countless ways big and small, as long as he could. I very much grieve his brain cancer taking such a strong mind from us, and that he did not see this project's completion. Yet, I trust he does in some sense see, or will see, and rejoice in it amid all other mercies of God.

Two churches have been especially supportive of the road to and through Oxford: White Rock Baptist Church, mentioned above, and St. Ebbe's Oxford. The people of WRBC have given substantially, have written unflaggingly, have visited, have wrestled with when to ask after the studies and when not to, and have prayed. They have been exceedingly generous in a multitude of ways. Likewise the wider staff team of St. Ebbe's, and my congregation within the church in particular, have been very patient. I was resolved to finish this project before putting down roots in the ministry of the church. But the Covid-19 pandemic struck four months after I joined the team, and put paid to that idea. The people of St. Ebbe's have been an indispensable source of support as I have strained toward final submission amid the pressures of young family and full-time urban ministry. Vaughan Roberts, Pete Wilkinson, Annabel Heywood, Glenn Nesbitt, Tim Dossor, Cathy Terry, Andy Butterworth, Jonathan Crozier, Hudson Hovil, and Andrew Moeller - and the other beloved members of City congregation - all deserve special mention. The road would not have been completed without the grace that came through them.

And if one were to ask after other ways this doctoral journey has been surprising, the unexpected privilege of being supervised by Professor Graham Ward comes next to mind. I was accepted to the University under a different professor who, upon accepting me, promptly took a chair in the Netherlands! Graham - as Regius Professor of Divinity - certainly had no obligation to take in an orphaned student, but he did. I can assure that said little about me and much about him. Graham's emphasis on the connection between theology and prayer, theology for the church and fully engaged with the academy, and his example of rigorous interest in a variety of relevant disciplines, yet ever from a stance of commitment to Christ as disclosed in the scriptures and as discerned with the aid of the Christian tradition, has made an indelible mark. He has pushed me to be broader and deeper, and has been exceedingly patient with me as I have attempted to find my voice as a theologian. He has also spoken just the right pastoral words of guidance at several key junctures in this journey, without which I am quite sure this page would not be penned. For all his notable achievement, he remains a model of humility, approachability, and support.

I also wish to thank the personal and academic support offered by the staff and students of Wycliffe Hall. The now lifelong student friends know who they are, but Mark Earngey and Andrew Newell were special gifts. And a word of thanks to key staff who have been important to me at Wycliffe: Michael Lloyd, Matthew Kirkpatrick, Justyn Terry, Andrew Atherstone, Kirsten Jeapes, Robyn Wyncoll, Philip Chapman, and Helen Steffens - thank you. Further academic support has come from Professor David Downs and Professor J. Aaron Simmons, who have been a boon of encouragement in examination. Their diligent correction, insightful comments and questions, intelligent engagement, and thoughtful care have come as great gifts to me at the close of this project. Finally, I was greatly helped by the counsel and friendship of Amanda Madden, David Mitchell, and the 'Band of Brothers' at pivotal points in the work of the thesis.

The project is dedicated to my family. Julie's and my wider families have been a great support amid their quiet but significant sacrifice in seeing us move grandchildren across land and sea. But closest and dearest: Judah, Abigail, and Anna have indeed given much to see this thesis done. Julie, you have given all. Thank you.

Abbreviations

BBR	*Bulletin for Biblical Research*
BSac	*Bibiotheca sacra*
BTNT	Biblical Theology of the New Testament Series
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
EDNT	*Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
JAT	*Journal of Analytic Theology*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
NITDNTT	*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

Short Abstract

The question driving the research behind this thesis has been: what might motifs of witness, in their biblical and contemporary philosophical manifestations, have to contribute toward constructive development within contemporary theological epistemology? The thesis argues that sounding biblical and phenomenological motifs of witness for their contribution to theological epistemology reveals that the motif of testimony commends viewing well worn debates within the field through the phenomena of witness taken as an analogical meta-lens through which a variety of epistemic stances can be assessed.[1]

After an introduction, the first chapter sets out the stance that the thesis takes amidst the varieties of ways that theologians and philosophers relate the theological and the epistemological aspects within the combined discussion that seeks to relate the two, known as theological epistemology. Having clarified the stance this thesis launches from, I then establish four touchstones which I argue should characterise contribution toward the field from the integrity of that outlined stance. From that perspective, I note an increasing prevalence of thematic approaches to the field of theological epistemology, where a given motif or theme is selected and then made central within one's overall approach to the discourse. I assess two examples of the thematic approach, and find that the strategy has merit but can be subject to its epistemic connections being tenuous or to losing its Christological focus if a robust enough theme is not selected. I conclude the first chapter by commending witness / testimony as a superior central motif through which to develop constructive contribution for the discipline.

From this introductory chapter, the argument proceeds through three stages - the biblical, the philosophical/phenomenological, and the theo-constructive. The biblical stage of the argument focuses on the Gospel according to John, understood as containing the highest and

1. I speak of "sounding" biblical and phenomenological motifs of witness, where I could just as easily speak of "considering" or "analysing", to include those reflective aims but also signal the considerable depth of these motifs, and thus the provisionality of my own circumspect contribution.

most sophisticated expression of a biblical motif of witness. Whereas New Testament scholarship has long recognised the vital importance of the motif of witness for the Fourth Gospel, it has tended to not treat the motif beyond recognising a multiplicity of witnesses operative throughout the narrative of the text. I take the examination of the motif further, and recognise a testimonial-logic at play behind and through the gospel's presentation of witnesses, and demonstrate how the *Logos* incarnate at times honours this testimonial logic as it pertains him, and at other times insists that it cannot constrain him. I conclude the second chapter by examining the contested function of the witness motif within the Gospel of John and identify two functions.

I then turn toward philosophical uses of the motif of witness within modern phenomenology, with examples examined in the works of Paul Ricoeur, Jean-Louis Chrétien, and Jean-Luc Marion, which demonstrate uses where the motif of witness is taken as a central analogical meta-lens through which these thinkers examine the fundamental relation between finite human consciousness and absolute infinite reality, when working in a phenomenological mode, and explicitly between God and humanity when they are working within a theological mode.

Before a brief conclusion which summarises the argument of the thesis as a whole, in the final chapter I demonstrate how adopting the motif of witness as a meta-lens through which to approach central matters of theological epistemology enables development of an epistemic posture that has strong theological, ontological, contextual, and ethical resonance - as promised in the first chapter. I develop a profile of the epistemic stance of the witness by drawing on the second and third chapter, and by pulling together their biblical and phenomenological insights to build the final chapter's constructive conclusion.

Long Abstract (1500 to 2500)

Our driving research question, again, has been: W*hat nourishment might the motif of testimony, in its varied biblical, contemporary philosophical, and theological manifestations, contribute toward a fresh conception of the nature of human bearing of the knowledge of God?*[2] My argument is that attending to the nature of testimony in its biblical, contemporary philosophical, and theological dimensions - rather than merely providing insight into one 'source' of theological knowledge among many - in fact furnishes an overall meta-lens through which to see afresh and address a range of concerns raised in contemporary theological epistemology. The contention is that one could scarcely do better in seeking to develop a theological motif for the nourishment of theological epistemology than to revisit, reopen, and redevelop the ancient theme of witness / testimony, and draw it back to the heart of our contemporary Christian understanding of what it means to bear the knowledge of God in Christ as a human being.

After an introduction, the first chapter sets out the stance that the thesis takes amidst the varieties of ways that theologians and philosophers relate the theological and the epistemological within theological epistemology. Having clarified the stance this thesis launches from, I then establish four touchstones which I argue should characterise contribution toward the field from the integrity of that outlined stance. From that perspective, I note an increasing prevalence of thematic approaches to the field of theological epistemology, where a given motif or theme is selected and then made central within one's overall approach to the discourse. I assess two examples of the thematic approach, and find that the strategy has merit but can be subject to its epistemic connections being tenuous or to losing its Christological focus if a robust enough theme is not selected. I conclude the first chapter by commending witness / testimony as a superior central motif through which to develop constructive contribution for the discipline.

The goal of the second chapter is to attend to the motif of witness / testimony as it finds expression in the Gospel of John. Some attention is given to how it relates to varied expression

---

2. See the introduction for explanation as to why I specify "*human* bearing of the knowledge of God".

of the theme in the rest of Holy Scripture and other relevant contexts, but the focus is on John. I argue that engagement with the theme in John has often been occupied with noticing several witnesses in the narrative of the Gospel - which is clearly a phenomena of the motif in the text, and is helpfully pointed out - but then begin to show that something more is at play. This is that the whole of the Gospel itself is, in John's case, presented within a testimonial frame, and that examination of this epistemic framing of the whole of the narrative of the Logos become flesh in Jesus Christ reveals that a testimonial logic is assumed between the Evangelist and their readers or hearers.

The bulk of the chapter is given to unfolding central aspects of this testimonial logic, namely: 1) central witnesses in the narrative (there are peripheral ones) are understood as arising from God's own initiative, being sent by him to speak publicly what they themselves have seen and heard; 2) thus the witnesses do not come of their own accord, with an independent self-attestation - instead they point away from themselves and thus do not foster their own glory; 3) the witness understands that testimony has multiplicity at its heart, even as they expect a significant degree of concord amidst that multiplicity; 4) Jesus Christ - as the story of the *Logos* become human is unfolded through the narrative of the Gospel - both plays within this testimonial logic and is commended by it, but is also clearly understood by the Evangelist to not be contained by it. In other words, there are clear ways in which the Evangelist understands that Jesus supersedes and breaks open a testimonial logic, even as it plays a central role in fostering our knowing him; 5) I conclude the chapter with reflection on the apparent purposes of the motif, which helps us clarify its epistemic intent. I argue that this purpose is multi-level, as with many of the significant themes in the Gospel: that it does have an eyewitness intention at a basic level, but that the motif also serves as an overall frame for discernment and judgement at a higher level, recalling similar uses in Isaiah - which the Gospel manifestly enjoys relation to. Combining the above insights together, then, we conclude that the stance of the witness is the fitting epistemic correlate to the Logos become human in Jesus Christ.

The aim of the third chapter, then, is to relate the themes that have emerged in the prior biblically focused chapter to philosophical engagement with the same or similar themes. I begin the chapter by noting frequent theological engagement with the analytic discourse on testimony - which often maps on to the more basic eyewitness function of the motif of witness we noticed in John, but then quickly identify and focus on an opportunity for theological engagement with the phenomenological tradition and its use of the motif of witness. Many French phenomenologists have employed themes of witness in ways that are resonate with the second function of it we identified in our reflection on the Johannine material - as a central metaphor for capturing the nature of human phenomenality. Therefore, in this chapter I select three recent French thinkers who have worked within the phenomenological tradition and who each, in their own way, share our interest in, and have shown responsiveness to, the Gospel of John's use of the motif of witness in their own attempts to describe phenomenality itself - not just as it pertains to the phenomenon of encounter with the divine, but also with supreme phenomena utilised as paradigmatic of phenomenality in general. I argue that in doing so they locate reflection on the dynamic of testimony at the heart of their phenomenology, and thus at the heart of what it means to know and to perceive as a human being fundamentally.

But in highlighting this thread of continuity between Ricoeur, Chrétien, and Marion, I do not mean to minimise their unique accents upon the theme. Ricoeur, for his part - known as he is for combining phenomenological description with hermeneutics - thus draws out the hermeneutical dynamic at the heart of bearing witness, and thus grasps the provisionality of our testimony while not minimising its truthfulness and significance. Chrétien, I argue, helps theology attend to the inevitably embodied and agonic nature to bearing witness (though I argue further that his agonic phenomenology opens up an aporia in his philosophical thought that only finds resolution in his theological reflection on the Christian conception of witness, and its relation to resurrection). Finally Marion, provocatively, claims a reduction of the *I* to a witness in response to what he names as the 'saturated phenomena'. As I relate his work to that of the earlier two, we are helped to consider to what degree the witness is responsive to prior initiative, and to

what degree the phenomena of bearing witness and giving testimony involves not a kind of auto-response (though it is responsive), but also a choice to testify or not. The insights of these three thinkers, in their use of the motif of witness as a foil for reflecting on the fundamental nature of phenomenality itself, combine to provoke the idea that to write a phenomenology of witness, therefore, is to begin to write a phenomenology of the pilgrim nature of human knowledge of God and, indeed, to some degree, of all else. The instinct discovered within these phenomenologists to utilise the motif of testimony as a kind of meta-lens for gaining understanding on the fundamental nature of consciousness and understanding itself, encourages us to then take the testimonial logic we began to discover and unfold in the second biblical chapter, and to begin to develop it into a theo-logic that can help frame and foster human knowledge of God, from a Christian perspective.

Before a brief conclusion which summarises the argument of the thesis as a whole, in the final chapter I demonstrate how adopting the motif of witness as a meta-lens through which to approach central matters of theological epistemology enables development of an epistemic posture that has strong theological, ontological, contextual, and ethical resonance - as promised in the first chapter. I develop a profile of the epistemic stance of the witness by drawing on the second and third chapters, and by pulling together their biblical and phenomenological insights to build the final chapter's constructive conclusion, thus contributing to our theological understanding of bearing the knowledge of God in Christ in a way that displays a genuine theological rationality, is ontologically attuned, contextually rooted, and explicit about its ethical entailments.

Introduction: The Potential of Fresh Attention to Biblical and Phenomenological Motifs of Witness for Contribution to Contemporary Theological Epistemology

> If the New Testament has invented neither the word witness (*martus*) nor the thing itself, it has given them new and decisive meanings that have left their deep and durable imprint on our relationship to that word and that act. The immense and rich philological, historical, exegetical, theological, philosophical literature devoted to witnessing according to Christianity is such that it would be absurd and pretentious to renew the analysis.
>
> Jean-Louis Chrétien (1952-2019)[3]

Every worthwhile theological endeavour risks absurdity and pretension. How can we presume to adequately listen to, let alone insert a worthy voice into, all the Christian tradition bears to us on the topics we feel compelled to hazard again and again? And as seen above, French phenomenologist and theologian Jean-Louis Chrétien sensed the weight of this objection to be particularly true of the field of enquiry that this thesis ventures: research into the biblical, current philosophical, and theological dimensions of the category of witness/testimony, in search of its contribution - however slight or significant it may result to be - for the further development of a modern theology of human knowledge of God. Thus, the central question that has driven the research has been this: *What nourishment might the motif of testimony, in its varied biblical, contemporary philosophical, and theological manifestations, contribute toward a fresh conception of the nature of human bearing of the knowledge of God?*[4] My argument is that attending to the nature of testimony in its biblical, contemporary philosophical, and theological dimensions - rather than merely providing insight into one 'source' of theological knowledge among many - in fact furnishes an overall meta-lens through which to see afresh and address a range of concerns raised in contemporary theological epistemology. The contention is that one

---

3. Jean-Louis Chrétien, "Nine Propositions on the Christian Concept of Witness," in *Under the Gaze of the Bible*, trans. John Marson Dunaway (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 86.

4. I specify "human bearing of the knowledge of God" to indicate that I am not here focused on other non-human beings who have knowledge of God, whether that be angelic creatures, or God himself. I am focused on asking how fresh examination of motifs of witness can illuminate the nature of knowledge of God *for human beings*.

than to revisit, reopen, and redevelop the ancient theme of witness / testimony, and draw it back to the heart of our contemporary Christian understanding of what it means to bear the knowledge of God in Christ as a human being. The motif is a rich but daunting one. Hence resonance with Chrétien's words above is particularly acute. His sense of pretension in venturing his topic then, over fifteen years ago when he wrote those words, is weightier now as reflection on the nature of witness and the dynamic of testimony has only continued in both the analytic and French phenomenological traditions.

Though Chrétien notes the pretension of attempting to advance the discussion on the theological significance of the category of witness, we take comfort in the fact that he nonetheless went on to engage it afresh - even as he noted the trenchant contribution of Barth's engagement with the theme in the 20th century. Yet, even within the shadow of Barth's trenchant contribution, Chrétien nonetheless ventured on at the request of the French journal *Revue Philosophie* for its 88th volume, dedicated as it was to the drawing together into one discussion the analytic, biblical (his contribution was here), and ontological aspects of the topic of *témoignage*.[5] Clearly *Philosophie* saw the need for facilitating an interdisciplinary discussion on the phenomena of testimony and its relation to knowing, and it is in addressing this ongoing need that this project finds its potential for advancing scholarly insight into the field - albeit circumspectly. It continues to be an exciting and strategic moment to engage the question of testimony and its relation to a Christian vision of knowing. Many of the central figures in the history of modern philosophy have addressed the question of how testimony relates to knowledge - Locke, Reid, Hume, Kant, Russell, and Wittgenstein - to name a few. But in contemporary times, Coady's *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*,[6] is frequently credited for initiating a fresh stream of analytic research into testimony that has now come to be recognised as a separate sub-

---

5. Jean-Louis Chrétien, "Neuf Propositions sur le Concept Chrétien de Témoignage," *Revue Philosophie* 88 (2005): 75–94.

6. C. A. J. Coady, *Testimony: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

discipline within epistemology more broadly, and one of its more generative current developments at that.[7] On the continental side of the philosophic divide, Paul Ricoeur provided a theologically informed phenomenology of testimony as a means of understanding the convergence of the transcendent with human history.[8] Jean-Louis Chrétien frequently returned to phenomenological reflection on the nature of human attestation throughout his work, by emphasizing how our speech is always and only in response to a prior call upon the self which wounds but also frees human testimony.[9] Biblical scholars and theologians have likewise already begun the work of relating the Christian tradition to these philosophical developments, using especially the analytic reflection on testimonial knowledge across a broad spectrum: from employing it in an attempt at revival of some kind Old Testament historiography,[10] to reconfiguring Christian conceptions of divine revelation,[11] with many iterations in between. It is very rare indeed, however, to find interdisciplinary work that seeks an answer to the question of testimony and its relation to human knowing that is enriched by the biblical, analytic, phenomenological, and theological spheres together.[12] This thesis engages this interdisciplinary

---

7. Axel Gelfert, *A Critical Introduction to Testimony* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 1–2.

8. Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Testimony," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis Seymour Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 119–54.

9. Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, trans. Anne A. Davenport (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004) Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Ark of Speech*, trans. Andrew Brown (London: Routledge, 2004); Chrétien, *The Ark of Speech*. See also Rosi Braidotti, *After Poststructuralism: Transitions and Transformations* (Durham: Acumen, 2010), 268–74.

10. Iain W. Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 1st ed (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 43–74 See also Brueggemann's earlier work in OT theology which creatively employed the motif of witness: Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

11. Mats Wahlberg, *Revelation as Testimony: A Philosophical-Theological Study* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2014).

12. Some discern the possibility that discourses reflecting upon testimony might provide opportunity for the analytic and phenomenological traditions to listen to and learn from one another, given their common interest in the phenomena of witness / testimony. See, for example, J. Aaron Simmons, "Continental Philosophy," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, ed. William Abraham and Frederick Aquino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 564–75, who sees the potential for dialogue between the two traditions. But note the caution of the editors of this volume, who attempt likewise to bring the two streams together, while still acknowledging very

need, as embryonic as its contribution can only be - and seeks to do so from the stance sketched at the outset of the first chapter.

It nonetheless makes its contribution from the conviction that the varied phenomena of witness / testimony lends itself to a contextually sensitive account. Our study of the theme with reference to scripture will show that there the category - throughout its variety of description - is understood to provide a pilgrim epistemology. In other words, to the degree the motif of witness illuminates the nature of human knowing of God in a pre-lapsarian state, or within a fully consummated future, it does so by way of comparison of the continuities and discontinuities of those states of human knowledge of God with our knowledge of God between that beginning and that end. For example, the motif of testimony is intimately related by the Evangelist of the Fourth Gospel to the theme of judgement, in both present and future conceptions of the term. Thus in the heart of testimony itself is a recognition of the tensions wrought into the testimonial dynamic now, and also an anticipation of the resolution of those tensions of testimony in final judgement. Chrétien's wider phenomenology of call and response, and our agonistic experience of that dynamic, will help us explore the depth of that tension - while we must also assure that the agonistic aspect of this phenomena is not conceived in an ongoing way, lest it subvert an emphasis on resurrection hope and final consummation.[13] In this pilgrim sense - a pilgrimage that does have a telos - the motif does contribute to an account of human knowing of God that is on the move: sensitive to the development of the Lord's unfolding work of redemption within history, at least to some degree.

---

different starting places and overriding concerns in the respective discourses: Sybille Krämer and Sigrid Weigel, eds., *Testimony / Bearing Witness: Epistemology, Ethics, History and Culture* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

13. Even in the eschaton, human beings will not be infinite even as they then live evermore. Therefore the relation between the infinite call, and our redeemed finite (even if then eternal) response will remain asymmetric even after the renewal of all things. The claim here, however, is that though our experience of that asymmetry is agonistic now, it will not be for the redeemed in the eschaton. With thanks to Dr. Aaron Simmons for drawing out this clarification.

In addition to enabling us to explore something of salvation-historical context, the motif of witness taps deeply into our current cultural contexts in the West. In recent years, a dizzying variety of different cultural forces have collided to create crises of public discernment on a chilling scale. The relativising dynamics resident in the variety of cultural postmodernities seem to have progressed to a heightened stage. The rise of Donald Trump - who obviously and flagrantly and continually bore false testimony to the American public - and to the world - on a shocking scale[14] - only to then be elected(!), alongside the struggle over Brexit here in Europe, which likewise revealed a trenchant suspicion and lack of trust in long-standing norms and institutions, combined with other factors and resulted in Oxford Dictionaries offering 'post-truth' as the word of the year for 2016. The resulting presidency, its numerous scandals and impeachments, and the fall-out of the Brexit vote, have rippled out over years and are still significantly felt. Intense social justice movements have been sparked from tragic incidents of abuse of power and trust and, on top of it all, a global pandemic was laid over and through it, which has drawn both the best and the worst from our common humanity through its intense pressure. We have now seen that the problem of the rapid spread of misinformation through social media - a phenomena which is incredibly complex and not at all reducible to issues of information or data alone - has tragically come to cost human lives. At root seems a significant loss of all trust for many, the spread of a choose-your-own-adventure approach to disseminating and receiving large cultural narratives, and an increasing lack of public capacity for discernment.[15]

---

14. Unsurprisingly, that dynamic of near daily instances of Trump's false testimony clearly on display during the 2016 election, continued on into his presidency. Washington Post fact-checkers discerned 16,000 different lies - many repeated dozens or even hundreds of times - from his inauguration to early 2020. The argument is not that this politician is alone in a penchant for bearing false witness, of course. Rather, that he did so to an exceptionally egregious scale, and to great public harm: The Washington Post Fact Checker Staff, *Donald Trump and His Assault on Truth: The President's Falsehoods, Misleading Claims and Flat-Out Lies*, Illustrated ed. (London: Scribner, 2020).

15. These dynamics were captured anecdotally in conversation with a Romanian barber in Oxford - Emil - during a haircut between lockdowns. Chatting casually, he began to argue why it was foolish to get the vaccine. I just listened to his story at length and later gently mentioned that our family was getting vaccinated, once he had moved

Into this swirl, a testimonial account of the nature of human knowledge of God can speak.[16] It by no means would pretend to be able to address every aspect of this tangle - or even the heart of it. But a testimonial logic can help foster public discernment within those trained by it - as a partial aid to the problem, and a testimonial account of the church's knowledge of God in Christ emboldens it to speak the good news of the gospel within times of confusion.

Argument Summary

After this introduction, the first chapter sets out the stance that the thesis takes amidst the varieties of ways that theologians and philosophers relate the theological and the epistemological within theological epistemology. Having clarified the stance this thesis launches from, I then establish four touchstones which I argue should characterise contribution toward the field from within that framework. From that perspective, I note an increasing prevalence of thematic approaches to the field of theological epistemology, where a given motif or theme is selected and then made central within one's overall approach to the discourse. I assess two examples of the thematic approach, and find that the strategy has merit but can be subject to its epistemic connections being tenuous or to losing its Christological focus if a robust enough theme is not

---

on from the topic by a ways. He had apparently assumed my respectful demeanour as he shared his position was a sign I agreed with him, and was somewhat shocked that we had been able to disagree graciously. I came to probe after who he trusts, after noticing him fade almost imperceptibly from the credibility of vaccine science, to Bill Gates' pernicious plans behind the supposed science, to him speaking of significant problems with political corruption in his home country that were clearly very well founded. I asked him who he trusts. He said starkly, 'No one.' I replied assuring that surely he meant no one political or otherwise in authority. But he quickly corrected and said, 'No, I mean no one.'

16. In the final chapter I address the relationship between testimony and trust at greater depth, as I engage the work of Linda Zagzebski in particular. She argues that relations of trust - whether personal dynamics of trust or broader societal dynamics - are preconditions to the functions of testimony. I agree and yet go further, arguing that restoring hope in testimonial approaches to discernment can also go someways to restoring trust in the possibility of shared public truth. In other words, it is not merely that trust is a precondition for testimony. It is also true that to the degree a given society is furnished with shared tools of testimonial discernment, to that degree trust can also flourish as those peoples grow in confidence that they can discern between true and false witness, and hence are better equipped to apportion trust, and thus also are increasingly fortified from lazy scepticism and parochialism.

selected. I conclude the first chapter by commending witness / testimony as a superior central motif through which to develop constructive contribution for the discipline.

The goal of the second chapter is to attend to the motif of witness / testimony as it finds expression in the Gospel of John. Some attention is given to how it relates to varied expression of the theme in the rest of Holy Scripture and other relevant contexts, but the focus is on John. I argue that engagement with the theme in John has often been occupied with noticing several witnesses in the narrative of the Gospel - which is clearly a phenomena of the motif in the text, and is helpfully pointed out - but then begin to show that something more is at play. This is that the whole of the Gospel itself is, in John's case, presented within a testimonial frame, and that examination of this epistemic framing of the whole of the narrative of the Logos become flesh in Jesus Christ reveals that a testimonial logic is assumed between the Evangelist and their readers or hearers.[17]

The bulk of the chapter is given to unfolding central aspects of this testimonial logic, namely: 1) central witnesses in the narrative (there are peripheral ones) are understood as arising from God's own initiative, being sent by him to speak publicly what they themselves have seen and heard; 2) thus the witnesses do not come of their own accord, with an independent self-attestation - instead they point away from themselves and thus do not foster their own glory; 3) the witness understands that testimony has multiplicity at its heart, even as they expect a significant degree of concord amidst that multiplicity; 4) Jesus Christ - as the story of the *Logos* become human is unfolded through the narrative of the Gospel - both plays within this

---

17. One could argue that each of the four canonical gospels are "presented within a testimonial frame" and, indeed, as we will see in the next chapter, Richard Bauckham does just that. By extension, one could argue further that the whole of the New Testament then builds from this fundamental testimonial foundation. I will argue shortly, however, that the Fourth Gospel is nonetheless unique in its creative deployment of the motif of witness / testimony both in terms of the frequency of testimonial language explicit in the text, and in terms of the implicit awareness of a sophisticated testimonial logic woven throughout it. I thus engage it at length not for want of substantial evidence of witness motifs elsewhere in the New Testament, but because I argue John's use is the strongest and most sophisticated example of the motif within it. The Apocalypse, the Acts of the Apostles, and indeed the Johannine Epistles, could all be profitably explored, and substantially illumined, through the lens of witness. But I give special attention to John given its most substantial deployment of the motif, and from need of boundary to the project.

testimonial logic and is commended by it, but is also clearly understood by the Evangelist to not be contained by it. In other words, there are clear ways in which the Evangelist understands that Jesus supersedes and breaks open a testimonial logic, even as it plays a central role in fostering our knowing him; 5) we conclude the chapter with reflection on the apparent purposes of the motif, which helps us clarify its epistemic intent. We argue that this purpose is multi-level, as with many of the significant themes in the Gospel: that it does have an eyewitness intention at a basic level, but that the motif also serves as an overall frame for discernment and judgement at a higher level, recalling similar uses in Isaiah - which the Gospel manifestly enjoys relation to. Combining the above insights together, then, we conclude that the stance of the witness is the fitting epistemic correlate to the *Logos* become human in Jesus Christ.

The aim of the third chapter, then, is to relate the themes that have emerged in the prior biblically focused chapter to philosophical engagement with the same or similar themes. We begin the chapter by noting frequent theological engagement with the analytic discourse on testimony - which often maps on to the more basic function of the motif of witness we noticed in John, but then quickly identify and focus on an opportunity for theological engagement with the phenomenological tradition and its use of the motif of witness. Many French phenomenologists have employed themes of witness in ways that are resonate with the second function of it we identified in our reflection on the Johannine material - as a central metaphor for capturing the nature of human phenomenality. Therefore, in this chapter I select three recent French thinkers who have worked within the phenomenological tradition and who each, in their own way, share our interest in, and have shown responsiveness to, John's use of the motif of witness in their own attempts to describe phenomenality itself - not just as it pertains to the phenomenon of encounter with the divine, but also with supreme phenomena utilised as paradigmatic of phenomenality in general. In doing so, I argue, they locate reflection on the dynamic of testimony at the heart of their phenomenology, and thus at the heart of what it means to know and to perceive as a human being fundamentally.

But in highlighting this thread of continuity between Ricoeur, Chrétien, and Marion, I do not mean to minimise their unique accents upon the theme. Ricoeur, for his part - known as he is for combining phenomenological description with hermeneutics - thus draws out the hermeneutical dynamic at the heart of bearing witness, and helps us to see the provisionality of testimony while not minimising its truthfulness and significance. Chrétien, I argue, helps theology attend to the inevitably embodied and agonic nature to bearing witness (though I argue further that his agonic phenomenology opens up an aporia in his philosophical thought that only finds resolution in his theological reflection on the Christian conception of witness, and its relation to resurrection). Finally Marion, provocatively, claims a reduction of the *I* to a witness in response to what he names as the 'saturated phenomena'. As I relate his work to that of the earlier two, and by doing so am able to ask to what degree the witness is responsive to prior initiative, and to what degree the phenomena of bearing witness and giving testimony involves not a kind of auto-response - though it is responsive, but also a choice to testify or not. The insights of these three thinkers, in their use of the motif of witness as a foil for reflecting on the fundamental nature of phenomenality itself, combine to provoke the idea that to write a phenomenology of witness, therefore, is to begin to write a phenomenology of the pilgrim nature of human knowledge of God and, indeed, to some degree, of all else. The instinct discovered within these phenomenologists to utilise the motif of testimony as a kind of meta-lens for gaining understanding on the fundamental nature of consciousness and understanding itself, encourages us to then take the testimonial logic we began to discover and unfold in the second biblical chapter, and to begin to develop it into a theo-logic that can help frame and foster human knowledge of God, from a Christian perspective.

Then, in the fourth and final chapter, I demonstrate the utility of taking the phenomena of witness as a meta-lens through which to view one's overall epistemic stance as it aids in addressing afresh well worn debates within the broader field of theological epistemology. I develop these contributions under the headings of the four touchstones that I identified in the first

chapter, marshalling connections between it, and the second and third chapters, to develop ‘the epistemic stance of the witness’.

Therefore, in summary, with the late Jean-Louis Chrétien, we will presume to attempt to 'renew the analysis' of this ancient theme – one so central to Christianity. Here I have sought to demonstrate why the time may be opportune for such an intellectual endeavour, and how the theme shows some measure of promise for developing a non-reductive contribution to our understanding of the nature of our human knowing of God in Christ.

Chapter One: Taking a Stance, and Charting a (Thematic) Course Toward Contribution in Theological Epistemology

This chapter sets out the overall stance toward the topic of theological epistemology that the thesis adopts, and draws out four virtues that should characterise this stance. I then examine two examples of the thematic approach to the topic that the thesis maintains, which is necessary not only for establishing scholarly precedence for the methodology of the thesis, but even more to help discern the strengths and potential pitfalls in the approach. Having examined the examples of Stackhouse and Meek, and noting the merits of their accounts, I then argue that the motif of witness / testimony is a superior candidate for thematic constructive development within theological epistemology.

Topic and Stance Toward It.

The broad field within which I here seek to dig a narrow well of enquiry is that of theological epistemology. Among the philosophically initiated, what is indicated by the latter of this pair of descriptors is widely understood: by an 'epistemology' we signify a theory of human knowledge. But what it might mean to situate our reflection on *epistēmē* under the umbrella of the theological is less apparent. What does it mean to ask the central questions of epistemological reflection - What *is* knowledge?, What can be known?, and How do we know what we know? - theologically? An impressive array of relations between epistemology and theology can be, and in fact are, construed.[18] Is approaching epistemology theologically to ask what the world's religions have to say about the nature of human knowing generally? Or to ask how a particular faith construes knowledge of *the divine*? Is it to assume philosophical debates on these questions

---

18. John Greco distinguishes between the domains of 'general epistemology' - the theory of knowledge engaged without necessity of reference to God, largely in the analytic tradition, 'religious epistemology' - which is to approach the question of the knowledge of God from the assumptions of the domain of general epistemology, and 'the epistemology of theology', by which he means engagement with epistemological issues that arise as one conducts theological work, from an intentionally theological standpoint, John Greco, "Knowledge of God," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, ed. William J. Abraham and Frederick D. Aquino (London: Oxford University Press, 2017), 9.

as read, and only then to bring theological resources to bear within the shared assumptions underpinning those debates, submitting to whatever counts as authoritatively persuasive within them? Or is it to approach the question dogmatically, perhaps first via an attempt to bracket the philosophical - if that were possible or desirable, then to say what can be said about the nature of God's own knowledge from theological resources alone, and only then frame human knowledge in terms of continuity and discontinuity with his? Is it asking how human knowledge is affected by 'religious experience'? Of course, different theologians and philosophers working within different faith traditions approach theological engagement with the questions of epistemology differently. Some, perhaps simply from the difficulties native to handling the topic, leave it to their readers to discern how exactly the theological is intended to relate to the epistemological within their work.

But as aids to clarity - if not fail-safe tools of categorisation - three questions can help bring one's unique approach to theological epistemology into greater focus. First, is it a general religious account or a theologically specified one, consciously situated within a particular religious tradition?[19] Second, what is the focus of knowing in this theologically informed account of knowledge? Is it God (or some other account of knowing the divine if not a monotheistic one), or is it primarily knowledge of created things (or at least the non-divine) in view, or both?[20] Third, where does the centre of authority for the discussion lie? Is this account primarily a theologically enriched philosophy of human knowledge? Or is it essentially a philosophically

---

19. An example of a general religious account is *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue*, ed. Laura Frances Callahan and Timothy O'Connor (Oxford: University Press, 2014). Some of its contributors do specify a Christian faith as their starting point. On the other hand, Lydia Schumacher, *Divine Illumination: The History and Future of Augustine's Theory of Knowledge* (Chichester, West Sussex, UK ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) works openly from the Christian tradition - and a decidedly Augustinian expression of it.

20. In other words, to attend to matters of epistemology theologically is not necessarily to forefront *the knowledge of God* in one's account. Below I will engage with the work of both John Stackhouse and Esther Meek. Stackhouse is primarily concerned with giving a theological account of knowledge understood as 'what we need to know in order to do what we need to do'. Here knowledge of God is not in the fore. Meek, on the other hand, forefronts particularly the covenantal nature of knowing God as indicative of the nature of knowing all else. Thus her use of the knowledge of God as paradigmatic for the nature of all human knowledge keeps it in the foreground of her account, even as she turns to consider human knowledge of things other than God.

engaged doctrine of the nature of human knowing?[21] No sooner have I delineated these spheres, and I immediately sense the porous frailty of their borders.[22] Nonetheless, at the intersection of the theological and the epistemological, these questions do prove illuminating. At the very least they will assist in signalling the intended stance of this work.

In the first instance, here I am seeking to work within the Christian faith, rather than attempt a general religious account of the questions taken up. With regard to the second question, here the focus is exploring the nature of human knowledge of God, rather than also attempting to illuminate the nature of human knowledge of all else.[23] Finally, in the third instance, the manner

---

21. For example, Christian philosophers Alvin Plantinga and Paul Moser both commend the rationality of belief in, and knowledge of, the Christian God within much overt appeal to Christian Scripture and tradition. But their approach is fundamentally not to commend their epistemological vision from an assumption of the intrinsic authority of these sources. Rather, they accept their vision of the Christian faith on authority, but then commend its rationality (or at least defend it from the charge of irrationality) based on standards of reason they hope to share even with their atheistic readers (or at least standards of rationality they feel should be shared). In other words, theirs is a theologically enriched philosophy of religious knowledge. See Alvin Plantinga Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Paul K. Moser, *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). In contrast, John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Pittsburg, N.J: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co, 1987) is an example of a philosophically engaged theological account which does not attempt to work from a common conception of what might count as authoritatively persuasive with a reader sceptical of Christianity.

22. Perhaps the border here noted between the philosophical and the theological is the most contentious. And of course, any talk of God, or any subject consciously undertaken in the light of God is, in a broad sense, theological. But to offer an initial - if provisional - answer to the complex question of the difference between an account that is merely philosophical, and one that is at least seeking to be theological, the following makes a start. Under a Christian view of the question, what primarily distinguishes the theological from the philosophical is not the subject matter, which can indeed be God in both cases; or the source material, which again can be religious in character in either sphere. Instead, the discerning factor is whether the rationality employed has at its heart a faith that God exists, and has indeed spoken definitively in Jesus Christ, as attested by the Prophets and Apostles of Holy Scripture, and in such a way that our reflection is accountable to the authority of that divine action in revealing self-disclosure. Here theological sources are understood to participate in some way in an authority beyond that of the merely human, whilst fully dependant upon the human. In other words, evidence of engagement with theological sources only raises the question of how the theological is being engaged, and does not alone discern whether the account offered is theological in underlying rationality or not. Though we may indeed still gain much from the "say so" of others, there will never be a need to gather two or three witnesses to testify in order to resolve a disputed matter for fear that someone may be bearing self-interested false testimony.

23. This is not to say that I agree that there is a sharp divide between the way we know God, and the way we know all else that we know. Theological epistemology can rightly take up the question of the nature of human knowledge more broadly. Thus, in my view, it is a significant weakness of the recent *Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology* that it assumes an answer to this question rather than debating it, by adopting Aristotle's idea of 'epistemic fit' from the outset. William J. Abraham and Frederick D. Aquino, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of The Epistemology of Theology* (London: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1–5. It would have been helpful indeed to ask to what degree different epistemologies must be bespoke to different topics, and to what degree

in which I am seeking to be theological in my approach is not merely to be informed or inspired by a reading of the Christian Scriptures and tradition, while engaging a primarily philosophically situated topic. I desire not merely to engage in theological discourse, but to adopt a theological rationality. I explain what I believe this to mean shortly, but suffice it to say here that to adopt such a stance is not to invoke some kind of intellectual trump card, which isolates the Christian thinker from exposure to critical concerns. Rather, it is to adopt a scholarly disposition of seeking to respond primarily to the revelation of God in Christ, and to be prayerfully responsive to his voice as attested in scripture and discerned within the multitudinous voices of the Christian tradition. From this stance must then flow an intellectual honesty and rigour, eager to discover truth wherever it can be found, including within discourses not at all sympathetic to a theological rationality themselves.[24]

Now, having marked out the relationship between theology and epistemology that this work intends to maintain, I must push further and ask what fulfilment of this intent might involve in practice. What would characterise this stance toward theological epistemology as it is walked out in doctrinal development? Here I argue that this intended stance toward theological epistemology - one situated within the Christian tradition, focused on the nature of human knowledge of God, and attempting to employ a genuinely theological rationality - will find itself

---

a unified epistemology exists that then founds the diversified epistemologies suited for specific spheres of knowledge. The focus of the argument of this thesis is indeed on the nature of knowledge of God. But this is from necessary restraint, not out of conviction that there is a sharp division between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of all else. Within the context of an analogical understanding of the nature of knowledge of God, I am in fact inclined to see a high degree of continuity between the way in which we know God, and the way in which we know all else that we know. See Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2014), 142–43. Williams acknowledges that many from Aquinas onward, while holding that human knowing is 'eccentric' when it comes to knowledge of God, nonetheless recognise a 'family resemblance' between knowing God and other knowing.

24. I understand this choice to set the project firmly within the Christian tradition does limit the prospect of the possible impact of the work, especially within analytic discussions of the epistemology of testimony - discussions I have gained much from. But given the aim of the work is to ask how motifs of witness, in their biblical and phenomenological expressions, might enrich a Christian conception of *theological* epistemology in particular, this decision is apt as to do otherwise would make the final theological contributions of the thesis diffuse. This is not to prevent, however, certain insights of the project from being repackaged to serve the analytic discussion on testimony in future, should my examiners see any potential along those lines.

faithful to its intent at least to the degree it embodies the following four characteristics: it will be theological (permit me to say more than I have thus far), ontological, contextual, and ethical. Exploring these characteristics here briefly at the outset will assist in binding the below argument to my above stated intent, aide in assessing the work of others, and will provide a framework through which I can draw my constructive contribution to theological epistemology at the conclusion of the thesis, building on the reflection on biblical and philosophical motifs of witness established in these early chapters.

Four Adjectives of Appraisal

Having identified in the above section the specific relation between the epistemological and the theological that the argument of the thesis develops from, this section now identifies four virtues that should characterise contribution toward the topic from its adopted stance: *theological, ontological, contextual-missional, and ethical.*

Theological. Eyebrows raised, encroaching upon furrowed foreheads above squints over glasses and down noses at mention to respected colleagues, within a faculty of modern doctrine helpfully indebted to the continental tradition, of a study focused on *epistemology*. And rightly so. Dangers do abound here. That forbidden tree standing over against the tree of life was one that proved pernicious to humanity precisely in its enticing absorption with knowledge (Hebrew: *da.at*, Gen. 2:9, 17). And that enticement has proved as modern as it is ancient. To forefront the epistemological in the context of the theological is to complement oneself with the company of such theologically amicable fellows as Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant, and - albeit to a lesser extent - Schleiermacher. And so Barth needs thunder that the event of revelation constitutes a "self-enclosed circle" where not only "the objective but also the subjective element in revelation, not only its actuality but also its potentiality, is the being and action of the self-revealing God alone",[25] thereby closing the circle, lowering a portcullis on any attempt to establish a universal

potentiality within humanity - specifically within human reason - to which the revelation of God in Christ can make appeal. Christian theology now - it is supposed - a more secure castle; possibly isolated, but at least safeguarded.

Here to first ask the question of the epistemological is precisely to undermine the theological. Thus Trevor Hart, as he summarises the implications of Barth's thought for contemporary inter-religious apologetics, speaks of the "reckless folly (perhaps blasphemy is not too strong a word?) of seeking to afford the gospel warrant by appealing to prior canons of acceptability...It is to seek to justify faith on the basis of terms laid down by sinful unbelief, to bring Yahweh to Baal for his blessing".[26] Clearly by these lights, one can scarcely imagine a riper potential breeding ground for cognitive idolatry than the field of the epistemological being brought to bear on the theological. To specify, here the stated danger is not exploring the epistemological *within* the theological, but rather that of only asking the question of the theological within the constraints of the foreign epistemological *a priori*.[27] Yet even if the danger resident in this ordering is theoretically understood, avoiding it can get blurred rather quickly in practice. Suffice it to say here, however, that if - in asking after the question of the nature of human knowledge, the theologian is conceding to the temptation of seeking external grounds for theology by appeal to a rationality foreign to it, they compromise theology via an epistemological route. Thus even if I come to disagree with Barth (and Hart) to a significant degree, in the end,

---

25. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (London: T & T Clark, 2009), I.2, 280.

26. Trevor Hart, "Karl Barth, the Trinity, and Pluralism," in *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: WBEerdmans, 1997), 137.

27. One could understand this approach to the relation between epistemology and theology as an epistemic parallel to onto-theology, where onto-theology is understood as doing one's doctrine of God and creation within prior metaphysical commitments as to the nature of being. Here, the epistemological parallel would be to conduct one's theology of knowing within prior philosophical presuppositions that go unchallenged or unexamined by the engagement with theology, and are instead assumed. This would be a kind of episteme-theology - an epistemic equivalent to onto-theology (with thanks to Dr. Aaron Simmons for drawing out this insight). It is of course possible to engage in reflection on the epistemology of religion from a philosophical standpoint that is self-conscious and reflective upon the philosophical presuppositions that are being brought to the engagement with religion and theology, thus avoiding the *a priori* critique.

nonetheless their warning concerns a danger well attested in the development of Christian theology since the Enlightenment. Heeding the implication of furrowed brows, then - 'Wouldn't such a topic be rightly situated within a department of analytic philosophy of religion (whose very existence may itself be suspect!)?' - I must agree that perhaps nowhere more than when concerning oneself with the epistemological in relation to the theological is caution needed to assure that a truly theological rationality remains operative. A theological epistemology must aspire to be *theological*.

Yet that observation only provokes a more difficult question: what then does it mean to adopt a theological rationality? Here the essential issue is not whether the discourse concerns itself with reflection upon God, or whether the topics engaged are done so in light of him. One does not discern the presence of a theological rationality merely by noticing the presence of engagement with theological 'sources'. Rather, the heart of the matter is whether the operative rationale takes seriously the priority of God's agency, thus consciously situating its operations as secondary to, and dependant upon, his being and action.[28]

In other words, to aspire to be theological in one's theological epistemology is to seek to do one's thinking about knowing *within* one's thinking about God in Christ, rather than attempting to do one's thinking about knowing in some primary or otherwise a-theological extracted sense, only then to give account of the knowledge of God within those alien constraints. Therefore, although I am comfortable using the language of 'epistemology', below I am attempting to couch my epistemological reflection in a very different context than that in which it is commonly traded - a theological one - and could just as easily speak of a *doctrine* of the human knowledge of God.[29] Undertaking the questions of epistemology in this way involves,

---

28. Darren Sarisky, "Theological Theology," in *Theological Theology: Essays in Honour of John Webster*, ed. R. David Nelson and Justin Stratis (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 3.

29. In taking this approach, however, it is vital that I do not reduce what I mean by 'knowledge of God' to a definition of knowledge limited to conscious intellection or intelligent understanding, which is the regular subject matter, generally speaking, of analytic epistemology. Knowledge of God is not less than intellectual understanding in relation to him, but it is more - signalling a participative communion that cannot be reduced to intellectual fellowship

at the very least, diligence in Scriptural exegesis, a close attention to doctrinal development within the Christian tradition in relation to it, and a refusal on behalf of theology to concede its fundamental integrity and assumptions through a reduction of its own rationality to those operative within other disciplines - especially as a ground for its own standing.

This is not at all to begin to fully answer the question of theology's engagement with other disciplines. But it is to say that a genuinely *theological* theological epistemology must not rest content to merely answer the questions of contemporary epistemology from a theological viewpoint. Instead, it must go further: not only must it engage the discussion from the standpoint of its own theology, it must also do so from within the integrity of its own rationality. This will lead the theologian not only to seek to attempt to answer the questions within the discourse, but to push the questions one finds there until they break open and reveal where faulty assumptions underpin them - thus questioning some of the fundamental questions he or she finds there.[30] They will pose new questions, often alien to it. This is to probe not only what is there in the discussion, but to notice also what is not there. And what is often not there is reflection upon the wider theological context within which all human knowing takes place, and from which it discerns its own fundamental character: in inextricable relation to the Triune God, and his relation to his created world - especially to his human creation, embodied and embedded as we are within his

---

alone. See Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, 127.

30. In other words, this is to propose something of a reciprocal relation between the scholar's philosophical commitments, and her theological ones. Thus I do not mean to suggest that adopting a 'theological rationality' entails refusing that one's theological commitments could be challenged and altered by engagement with related philosophical discourses. I do mean to suggest, however, that fundamental theological convictions - like doctrines of Trinity, creation, and incarnation - central to the Christian tradition, broadly understood - do function as control beliefs that can be enriched by philosophical reflection, but cannot be overturned by it. And to go further still, these doctrines are the framework within which what counts as 'rational' is discerned. Thus even as these doctrines are brought into conversation with philosophical, and indeed scientific, discourses that relate (but which arise from conceptions of what counts as authoritative or persuasive in those discourses that are either not shared with theology, or not fundamental to it), theology learns even as it refuses to surrender its fundamental orientation of submission toward God and what we believe has been disclosed to us through Jesus Christ, the scriptures, and the Christian tradition of reflection on both Christ and the scriptures. Of course, the devil is in the details, and the question of how this stance might play out as pertains discussion on 'less central' matters, of which there are not a few(!), naturally arises. Thus I will illustrate how this stance might play out in relation to calling God 'Father', and feminist critique, below where I briefly reflect on the Lord's Prayer.

world. In other words, one of the key questions the theological must pose to the epistemological, if the theological is to remain genuinely theological, is that of the ontological.

Ontological. Secondly, a theological epistemology will only be successful at being genuinely theological if it is ontologically attuned. I desire to contribute toward an account of human knowing in such a way that it is resonant with a Christian ontology of the Triune God, his relation to his creation generally, and his relation to his intelligent human creation specifically. This approach assumes that the ontological is more fundamental than the epistemological, and that the epistemological is dependant upon the ontological. What human knowing *is* is profoundly influenced by who God is and how he chooses to sustain and relate to his creation, of which humanity generally, and human knowing specifically - whether of God or of anything else in his creation - is a dependant aspect. And thus, what human knowing *is*, is not only related to who God is but also to what humanity is.

Different contemporary theologians, even working from the same branch of the Christian tradition, can of course arrive at significantly different theological ontologies. For example, the late John Webster (1955-2016), while working within the Anglican tradition in the United Kingdom, taught that to give an ontologically sensitive account of human knowledge of God has first to do with the *order* in which one engages the topic. It means to begin one's process of theological reflection on the question with the Holy Trinity as the *principium essendi* of Christian theology.[31] In his last article published almost exactly a year before his untimely death “What Makes Theology Theological?” Webster argues, "Reflection on theology's cognitive principles begins with the doctrine of God: not, that is, with survey of the capacities, incapacities, and operations of human knowers".[32] Further, for Webster it is not merely a priority in order of

---

31. John Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 135.

32. John Webster, “What Makes Theology Theological?” (JAT, 3; 2015): 20. Webster is of course aware that it is still human knowers who are formulating and articulating a doctrine of God. He is not claiming a view from nowhere for the human knower, even as they reflect on the doctrine of God. He is, however, asserting that it does matter where we humans begin in our reflection on how we might go about knowing the nature and limits of our own

reflection because beginning with the doctrine of God soon indicates that God's priority of Triune being and act is actively *operative* in underpinning the knowledge of creatures - the priority in order of reflection itself reflecting an order of being. As God condescends to his creation and invites 'rational fellowship' with humanity, he grants that they might share something of his knowledge, and does so in a manner that befits their humanity.[33] Here the capacity for human intelligence is bestowed and preserved by God which - far from indicating its passivity - instead grounds the activation of its dependant work. It is finite and always incomplete while progressing through time, and is caught up in the dynamics of human fallenness and regeneration in Christ by the Spirit.[34] Such a sketch, though altogether too brief, is nonetheless a fair indication of what it means for Webster to found the epistemological upon the ontological. Here the emphasis rests upon the prohibition from saying "too much too early about the subjectivity of the theologian"; instead prioritising reflection upon God and his active relation to his intelligent human creation.[35]

As Webster assumed what would sadly be his last academic post as Chair of Divinity at the University of St. Andrew's, he remarked in an inaugural lecture entitled “Once Again: Theological Theology” (2014) - intimating his inaugural lecture as the Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity in Oxford, “Theological Theology” (1997)[36] - that he gave too little attention to the

---

human knowing, and is suggesting that such reflection can only properly begin with reflection on the doctrine of God. For Webster, this then positions the human knower to understand the fundamental nature of their own understanding as arising from a dependence upon our Creator, and his gracious gift of our participation in rationality - which is properly resident in a self-sufficient way only in his nature. Webster would say this fundamental dependence of our understanding and rationality pertains whether we are humbly conscious of it, or stand in proud disregard of it. Either way, unlike God’s own understanding our rationality, conversely, is not fundamentally understood - for Webster - unless we see it as dependent upon, and sustained by, God - who is beyond us. This predisposes the human knower to a stance of fundamental humility, which confesses that it will never succeed in *grounding* human understanding within the bounds of humanity alone. This is the point he is making.

33. Ibid. Webster thus maintains the distinction between *theologia in se* - God’s archetypal knowledge of himself, and *theologia nostra* - our human theology which, even at its best and truest, only stands in ectypal relation to God’s knowledge of God’s self.

34. Ibid., 21–22.

35. Webster, “What Makes Theology Theological?” 25.

36. See John Webster, *Theological Theology: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered Before the University of*

doctrine of creation in the earlier address. [37] Yet Webster's final published words on the topic, engaged above, as clear as they are in delineating a field of active work for creaturely intelligence within the prior agency of God, nonetheless still leave much to be desired by way of reflection on God's relation to creation, and by way of a theological anthropology. Surely, had his time not been cut short, what would have been offered here would have been rich indeed.

Here it is illuminating to compare Webster's attempt at grounding the epistemological upon the ontological with that of Graham Ward. Professor Ward, like Webster, is working from the Anglican tradition in the United Kingdom.[38] He too gave an inaugural lecture at the University of Oxford - in his case upon taking up the mantle of Regius Professor of Divinity in 2013 - which reflected not upon the nature of human knowledge of God directly, but the epistemologically related issue of "What Makes a Belief Believable?".[39] A monograph on this topic then appeared in 2014 bearing the title *Unbelievable: Why We Believe and Why We Don't*, which is acutely attentive to the intersections between the anthropological and the epistemological. Here Ward takes pains to point out that the underlying structure as to what makes a belief believable is inextricably related to the models of knowledge that prevail in a given culture.[40] He argues further that any vision of what it means to know and to understand

---

Oxford on 27 October 1997 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); See also John Webster, "Theological Theology," in *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II, 2d Ed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 11–32.

37. Sarisky, "Theological Theology," 2.

38. Further points of similarity maintain: Ward was also born in 1955, and has also engaged substantially with the work of Karl Barth, Webster's chief influence. See Graham Ward, "The Erotics of Redemption-After Karl Barth," *Theology & Sexuality*, no. 8 (1998): 52–72; Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Ward, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology*Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology* (Cambridge: University Press, 1998); and Graham Ward, "Barth, Modernity, and Postmodernity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 274–95.

39. The lecture was delivered on the 14 May 2013, at the University's Examination Schools. It can be heard here: Graham Ward, "What Makes a Belief Believable? Graham Ward Inaugural Lecture | University of Oxford Podcasts - Audio and Video Lectures." https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/what-makes-belief-believable-graham-ward-inaugural-lecture.

40. Graham Ward, *Unbelievable: Why We Believe and Why We Don't* (London: IBTauris, 2014), 121–22.

within a given culture is related to how it attributes value to any number of other related aspects of what it means to be human: namely belief, desire, imagination, experience, and so on. In other words, "the wider horizon within which a culture's epistemological conditions prevail is intimately associated with what that same culture understands of what it means to be human".[41]

Thus Ward consistently sets his discussion on the question of belief within the wider question of the nature of humanity, integrating insights from contemporary evolutionary biology and neuroscience, and recognising that what it means to believe and to know is changing as our cultural situation changes - indeed as human nature itself changes. The work creatively opens up onto the religious and the theological as it progresses, rather than assuming a shared theological viewpoint with the reader from the outset.[42]

However, *Unbelievable* not only moves toward the theological. It in fact arose within a two-year pause on systematic work to focus on questions that presented themselves as Ward first began efforts toward his multi-volume systematic theology, the first volume later published as *How the Light Gets In: Ethical Life*. Here again, in as much as the work takes up the epistemological, it is always closely related with the ontological; often the anthropological with a persistent focus on the somatic and the affective.[43] But the human work of theological creativity - which Ward often captures with the term *poiesis* - is, as with Webster, here too situated within *theo-poiesis*: God's gracious operations of creation and salvation in Christ by the Spirit. Thus theological knowing participates in what is known, is a human *poiesis* that is responsive in nature given its context within *theo-poiesis*, and thus fundamentally expresses itself as prayer.[44]

---

41. Ibid.

42. Ward's consistency in striving to situate the epistemological upon the ontological, with a focus on the anthropological, is seen much earlier in his work, including in overtly theological reflection. See for example Graham Ward, "The Logos, the Body and the World: On the Phenomenological Border," in *Transcending the Boundaries in Philosophy and Theology: Reason, Meaning and Experience*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Martin Warner (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2007), 105–26. For a similar account, also interacting extensively with McGilchrist's *The Master and His Emissary,* as Ward's accounts in both *Unbelievable* and *How the Light Gets In* also do, see Rowan Williams, *Being Human: Bodies, Minds, Persons* (London: SPCK, 2018), 49–68.

43. Graham Ward, *How the Light Gets In: Ethical Life I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 246.

Throughout his discussion of the *poiesis* of theology, Ward continually emphasises the embodied nature of all human cognition, seeing any epistemology far removed from such reflection as a kind of ex-carnation.[45]

Thus Ward's work goes further in grounding the epistemological upon the ontological in that he persistently seeks to embed his epistemological reflection within a theological anthropology. However, it would be a mistake indeed to then conclude that Ward - with his consistent focus on our human knowing situation, broadly conceived - concedes to the danger Webster feared, as noted above, of beginning with a "survey of the capacities, incapacities, and operations of human knowers", in some sort of a-theological way.[46] For Ward, there just is no such thing as the a-theological, strictly speaking, and thus the operations of God in human knowing, and those of humans themselves, cannot be so neatly divided *by humans.* He recognises a distinction between the two - hence the distinction between *poiesis* and *theo-poiesis*, but does not think that *we* can easily trace the border between them.

Thus it is not that Ward would disagree with Webster's priority on the being and action of God, or that he is unaware of the danger of constraining the theological via an anthropological route. Instead it is precisely through his prioritising of God and his *Logos* - through whom, and in whom, and to whom all created things exist - that Ward arrives at a methodology for theological *poiesis* that is eager to gather the truth "from a thousand planes, among myriads of flowering sources: literature, film, architecture, philosophy, painting, sport, advertising, song etc".[47] This is not to minimise the priority of Holy Scripture and the Christian tradition in enabling discernment of the truth. But it is to recognise that the Church's reading and speaking is already embedded and implicated within an intertextuality of *all other* speaking and writing.[48] Thus theology must

---

44. Ibid., 245

45. Ibid., see section found between 135-137, and 143.

46. Webster, “What Makes Theology Theological?” 20.

47. Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 222.

be consciously engaged with other discourses from the outset because it is already woven with them. Any theological account that claims to start with God, pure and untangled from these influences, is here understood to be an illusion. An "order" bought at the cost of extraction from the actual order of created reasoning that already and always maintains - namely one that is embedded and entwined. Thus Ward announces a systematic theology that is "engaged": one that is honest about, and actively presses into, the embedded nature of all human reasoning.

The account that follows is more indebted to Ward than it is to Webster – at least in aspiration, but note here that both - albeit in significantly different ways - strain to exemplify the virtue of consistently grounding epistemological reflection upon the ontological. Their accounts, for all their significant differences of emphasis, do not stand in staunch contradiction. Instead, I have suggested that Ward has gone further than Webster in working to relate his ontological account right through to God's relationship to the world through a doctrine of Christ as *Logos*, and to a theological anthropology that is thoroughly embodied and contextually embedded, which leads him to a less straightforward methodology. Thus it is precisely because of Ward's theological ontology that he sees no easy division between a dogmatic approach, taking its cues from Holy Scripture and the Christian tradition, and an apologetic one, thoroughly conversant with the world around.[49] And this world around finds its fundamental bearing in its relationship to God, its creator, as mediated through Christ - the eternal *Logos* now become fully human. The revelation of God in Christ discloses that the fulcrum upon which God's relationship to his world in general - and his relationship to humanity in particular - is and always has been Christ. Therefore, on this view, any ontologically sensitive contribution to theological epistemology will need to be related to Christology.

In drawing a brief comparison between the work of Webster and Ward - one more suggestive than conclusive - I have been signalling that in what follows I aspire to the virtue

---

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid., xiii, 206, 222.

exemplified by both scholars: a keen eye that the epistemological be consciously related to the ontological. The thesis must be focused - and focused it is upon developing a contribution to theological epistemology through examination of biblical and phenomenological uses of the motif of *witness*. But this contribution to theological epistemology seeks to be ontologically sensitive in so far as it realistically can be whilst focused on the topic at hand. I will say more about how I seek to fulfil this aim below, but first must turn to the third of the adjectives of appraisal, one which arises from the ontological in that it further fleshes out the anthropological.

Contextual. Thus far I have argued that to be genuinely theological in one's approach to theological epistemology is, in large measure, to be ontologically attuned. I have also already suggested that to take up the ontological is to engage not least the Christological and the anthropological; which is also to say, thirdly, that a truly theological theological epistemology will also be *contextual*.

Unlike God, humans know within the bounds of a creaturely context, situated within individual and corporate histories, embedded in the matrices of specific sociolinguistic contexts, cultures, and political and ecclesiastic environments; inextricable from influence under the force of predominant philosophical, political, and religious narratives, and the significant historical events of their times. Thus, whereas the helpfulness of speaking of God as having a "perspective" is debatable given how qualified such a statement needs be, no account of *human* knowing of God or all else is complete without weighing its perspectival nature. Further, it is important to note from the outset that these aforementioned contextual aspects of human knowing are *creaturely* before they are fallen. In other words, to acknowledge the perspectival nature of our human knowing is not to implicitly bemoan it as something to be overcome. A Christian account must indeed consider how these aspects of our knowing context are tainted and twisted by sin; but first one must be careful to say that being unlike God in the situatedness of our knowing is not primarily occasioned by sin. The perspectival nature of human knowing is primordial and prelapsarian - and thus is to be celebrated as an expression of God's wisdom in the goodness of creation before the necessary question is asked concerning how this aspect of our

knowing has become fallen.[50] Thus to note these contextual aspects of creaturely knowing is not to relativise it, which would then be to tempt to demean it. Instead, it is to situate it in order to better understand it, and thus more fully regard it as a gift of God in creation.

As stated above, from a Christian theological perspective, the fundamental context in which human knowing is situated is one of creaturely dependence upon the Triune God, operative as it is within the context of his works of creation, redemption, and consummation. Therefore, a contextually sensitive account seeking to respond to the question, "What is the nature of human knowledge of God?", needs answer first with a question of its own, namely: *"When* do you mean?" It is a simple point, but one often not sufficiently accounted for in otherwise theologically rich accounts of human knowing of God. In this regard, it might then be wiser to speak of the *natures* of human knowledge of God, rather than seek to describe it in the singular. By this account one must, at the very least, construe the nature - singular - of human knowledge of God in light of its iterations in creation, disruption, restoration, and fullness - reaching its telos only in the eschaton, and informed by that telos from the beginning.

What can be said then of human knowledge of God in creation, prior to the fall of humanity into sin? What are the noetic effects of sin under the fall, at least as pertains knowledge of God? What was the nature of human knowledge of God within the history of redemption as God first called for himself a people - that of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? What is the nature of human knowledge of God for those inheritors of the promises as redeemed in Christ, having received the Spirit? And finally, what will be the nature of human knowledge of God in the New Creation, when he is seen not as in a mirror dimly, but 'face to face' (πρὸσωπον πρὸς πρὸσωπον)?[51] Situating an account of human knowing of God within a history of salvation in this way is not to imply that Jesus came to deliver an epistemology. He did not! He came to

---

50. James Smith thoroughly establishes this point in, James K. A. Smith, *Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic, 2d Ed* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012).

51. 1 Corinthians 13:12.

save.[52] He has saved, is saving, and will save scores from every tribe and tongue, presumably among peoples with significantly different epistemologies operative. Yet even as I acknowledge that salvation in its fullness cannot be reduced to the *salus* of human knowing alone, I also desire to argue that salvation has profound implications for human knowing, and desire to explore these implications. This approach assumes that certain epistemologies are more or less hospitable to redemption, and more or less attuned to the *telos* of human knowing in the New Creation.[53]

Further, a thoroughly contextual reading will also attend to the distinctiveness of our current context, not only widely conceived within epochs of salvation history, but specifically conceived here within a late modern context here in the United Kingdom at the head of the 21st century. What is it about our present cultural and intellectual context that provokes the question about knowledge in the first place? Is it a legitimate question for us to ask, from a Christian theological perspective - even if not a paramount one? How do our current cultural climates affect our understandings of knowledge, and our practices of it? What narratives of knowledge prevail, and do they aid human flourishing and, by implication, foster hospitality to the gospel of Christ; or are they oppressive? How is the question of human knowledge of God taken up in contemporary art, film, and literature, science and philosophy? And how do these sources illuminate or obscure our context, and interact with our theological work? Who, within our current context, is the epistemology explored herein ultimately *for*? Who is it really serving - intentionally or otherwise? Another way of asking this question is to ask another: Who stands to

---

52. Matthew 1:21; Luke 2:11, 19:10; John 1:29, 3:17, 12:47.

53. In other words, though having a correct epistemology - if one could speak of such a thing - is not a pre-condition to salvation, we nonetheless can grow in our understanding of human knowing such that it is more consciously attuned to that salvation, arises from it, and is hospitable to it. Resident in this thought is the conviction that the condescension of the Son of God to become human, and the life and teaching of Jesus Christ - the Son of God incarnate - does usher in, and is most attuned to by, a *kenotic* epistemology that correlates with his self-emptying, condescension, and humility: one of humility, trust, dependence, openness, and hospitality (with thanks to Dr. Aaron Simmons for drawing out this point). In what follows I will demonstrate the kenotic aspects of a witness epistemology through appeal to phenomenological reflection on the motif of witness.

gain power as a result of this epistemology? A contextually aware theological epistemology will need to wrestle with these questions, at the very least, demanding as they are.[54]

Finally, a contextually aware theological epistemology will also explore human knowing of God in Christ within its native home of the church. The church is where the aforementioned contextual accents - the historical-redemptive and the current cultural - meet. Local congregations gathering in the name of Jesus Christ bring their embeddedness in their languages and cultures to church - so to speak - and there, as the *ecclesia*, participate through faith in Christ in his cosmic body comprised of all in Christ throughout space and time. Within this society - and through its participation in grace: its localised announcements of the gospel of the kingdom, its attentiveness to Holy Scripture, its sacraments, its liturgies and prayers, its giftedness by the Spirit, and its mutual ministry as believers love and serve one another along the shared path of discipleship to Jesus Christ - he is pleased to invite us to participate in the knowledge of him, and in the life of the Triune God through union with him.

Thus far, under the guidance of the theological, I have begun to trace a vision of what a truly *theological* theological epistemology should aspire to, traversing through the ontological to the anthropological, and therein acknowledging the contextual and the social. Then, with a mind to the contextual and the social, I have now said that the ecclesial is anything but incidental to the epistemological. Now, to go just one final step further: to acknowledge the importance of the ecclesial is to invite the question of the ethical - that is, the question of what it means to live in right relation to God, to others, and toward all else in creation.

Ethical. Thus far I have maintained that a truly theological theological epistemology will situate its thinking about knowing within its thinking about God, allowing a theological

---

54. Though here focused on contemporary context, I am aware that the assumed stance toward the relation between the theological and the contextual-historical sketched in these paragraphs does commit me to an approach to scripture that eschews a sharp binary between either the "theological interpretation of scripture", or a willingness to gain substantially, if critically, from the insights of historical-critical approaches. To scrutinise the embeddedness of various theologies, whilst eschewing historical-critical reflection on ancient texts and their development - even *holy* texts, would open me to the critique of special pleading. Yet equally, to limit the horizon of reflection on the Bible to the historical-critical alone would be to presuppose a truncated ontology of scripture.

rationality to be operative; that this involves relating one's reflection on human knowing to one's reflection on the nature of God, of his relation to the whole of the created world, especially humanity in its embodiment and embeddedness; and that this involves relating one's reflection on knowing to one's reflection on our knowing context within the history of redemption, within our present historical and cultural moment, and within the church. In other words, thus far I have maintained that to explore the characteristics of a truly theological theological epistemology has much to do with actively situating one's account of human knowledge of God within its matrix of constitutive relations. To acknowledge this is already to imply an intimate relation between the epistemological and the ethical - the intimacy that must maintain between one's thinking about the nature of human knowing of God, and one's account of the character of a human life well lived - the blessed life.

If - as I have suggested above - human knowing in general, and human knowing of God in particular, is dependant ultimately upon the being and prior agency of God, then it is fundamentally responsive in nature, and this response finds its primal expression in prayer. From a Christian perspective, to go this far is already to be immersed in the ethical character of divine and human life, and thus of human knowing. As the gospels according to Matthew and Luke each attest, to pray under the tutelage of Jesus Christ is to pray conscious of our primary relations as the church, and within the ethical character of those relations.[55] As Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, he is - at least in part - demonstrating how to respond within the pulse of life in relation to God and to one another. We pray to "our Father" [Πάτερ ἡμῶν, Mt. 6:9]; that Father has a name that we desire to be hallowed, and a kingdom and a will that we ask to be realised in our midst on earth, as it is in heaven.[56] We are concerned not merely for ourselves, but ask for our

---

55. Matthew 6:9-15; Luke 11:1-4. The Gospels according to Mark and John do not contain a version of the Lord's prayer.

56. Earlier in this chapter I indicated that I would use this brief reflection on the Lord's Prayer, and its reference to God as 'Father', as an opportunity to explore how a theological rationality might respond to philosophical concerns that naturally relate to a peripheral theological matter under reflection. Are we here implying that 'Father' is a proper name of God? If so, is that not deeply problematic in light of feminist critiques, not to

daily bodily sustenance that we together need, and for the forgiveness from God that we all require, and should wish to extend to one another. We pray conscious of our capacity to be gripped by strong desires to think and do things we know resist the pulse of life in relation to our Father, and our life together resonant with his kingdom and will - temptations which entice us to be forgetful of his rich provision. Thus we ask that we not be led into temptation to sin against him and one another. In other words, to be taught to pray is - at least in part - to be taught a vision of the good life. The prayer not only teaches how to speak to God but also, through doing so, implicitly speaks to the one who prays, saying: "This is the life in which you actually live, and this is what it means to ask for its flourishing here and now, and to call for its complete fulfilment in future." Therefore, as Jesus teaches how to pray, we learn that we cannot pray apart from a vision of right relations to God and to one another - we do not pray apart from a vision of

---

mention the implication of a gendered God? In response, strictly speaking the Lord's Prayer itself does not give a name of God, though it does ask that God's name be hallowed. Though it begins with reference to God as 'our father', this is not the name. The name is not given in the prayer. And to the degree that feminist critiques engaging with Christian theology have urged that God is not gendered, and thus that maternal human imagery for God found elsewhere in scripture (Cf. Is. 42:14, 49:15, 66:13; Mt. 23.37; Lk. 13:34) is equally essential in forming our understanding of God, theology finds itself helped and corrected to the degree it has conceded to a patriarchal conception of God. Nonetheless, a theological rationality that learns from (but does not ultimately submit to) the deliverances of other philosophical disciplines - like feminist theory - will resist a call for the church to abandon all talk of God as Father. Such a rationality would grant that such language involves the condescension of God to our understanding and our language, such that there can be no strict equivalence between our language and God's being. But it would maintain that this condescension, and this choice to speak of God as father, is *of God* and thus not merely a choice of limited human linguistics (thought it is indeed that too). An analogical relation between our talk of God and God as God remains. Thus, in addition to humbly hearing, with contrition, a feminist critique of the church's God-talk, and learning much from it, theology - within the integrity of its own rationality, which prioritises as we have seen God's agency in his self-disclosure and our reception of it - would have questions of its own to ask, such as: What is the significance of our being taught by Jesus to call God 'Father'? Though there is ample maternal imagery in scripture, is it significant that its tutelage of us falls short of urging us to call God 'Mother' in the same way it does to call God 'Father'? Is there theological significance behind the Son of God becoming incarnate as a man, rather than as a woman, or some type of a-gendered human, if that were possible? And what resources might there be in exploration of answers to these questions, if any, to actively resist the oppression of women by men - tragically seen so often in society and indeed even more tragically in churches - perhaps within a possible rehabilitation of what 'father' and 'man' are meant to be, over against what they so often are? Pastorally, this approach involves empathetic listening to the stories of abused women, prophetic grieving, repentance, and corrective challenge in response to abusive experiences of fatherhood and manhood, and a likely refrain from calling God 'Father' in pastoral situations where that was deeply confusing for those to whom we are called to minister. But ultimately a goal would remain to rehabilitate what human fatherhood should be, in light of the 'fatherhood of God', rather than jettison all notion and talk of God as Father. So much more could be said on this difficult topic, but I trust this sketch gives some illustration of the theological rationality I commend operative amid an important but more peripheral issue in theology, without direct bearing on central doctrines like the Trinity, creation, incarnation, etc.

the ethical life under God.

Therefore, if we do not pray outside the ethical character of the primary relations within which we pray - to God and with one another - and if human knowing of God arises from within this primal prayerful response to the ethical callings of these fundamental relations then, just as there is no a-moral, or ethically neutral prayer, so too there can be no a-moral knowing, and no ethically detached vision of human knowing of God that is truly theological. If we only ever know within living relations in response to God, to one another, and to the rest of God's creation, and if we can live either with the pulse of those relations or against it, then the quality of our knowing will always be intimately entwined with the quality of our ethical living, and the quality of our living more broadly will come to bear substantively on the quality of our knowing. In fact, here any sharp barrier between knowing and ethical living begins to break down.

Instead, a vision of human knowing emerges that is truer and richer than that which Rowan Williams critiques as the "lighthouse beam model" of human knowing. Here, while reflecting on the embodied nature of all human knowledge, Williams critiques what he sees to be a prevalent imaginary within our western cultures of what it means to know: knowing as situated almost solely within our head which, in the act of knowing, acts like a kind of lighthouse striking out with its illuminating beam, swivelling back and forth over the landscape about, turning up the intensity of its beam as it seeks to solve this or that problem.[57] Against this largely disembodied vision of the knowing head, Williams emphasises human knowledge as understood in terms of its wider relatedness to "body and interchange and language", and construes its responsive character as "'attunement', being on wavelength, being aware that there are stimuli coming into us to which, as embodied minds or intelligent bodies, we are learning to vibrate".[58] This responsive vision of knowing is, from the start, characterised by a practical intelligence that expresses itself, for Williams, in *attention, attunement*, and *at-one-ment*.

---

57. Rowan Williams, *Being Human*, 51–52, 59, 66.

58. Ibid., 59.

To take each in turn: attention - developing a capacity to be absorbed in attending; attunement - learning to be resonate with and responsive to the stimulus we encounter as intelligent bodies; and at-one-ment - learning to be at one within our relations.[59] Thus, although it is slightly unclear as to how these three, especially attunement and at-one-ment, differ from one another, nonetheless Williams' sketch of human knowledge in these responsive terms opens onto the rich ethical entailments involved in knowing. In comparison, the lighthouse model appears cold and inept in uncovering something of the ethical character of knowing (what, after all, does it take to turn on a switch?).

Notice that in Williams' vision, the direction of travel between epistemology (as an account of the nature of human knowledge) and ethics (as an account of the nature of the good life, and our role in living it) runs both ways. It complicates any account that would posit that our epistemological efforts first help us to arrive at our best vision of theoretical truth, and our general ethical account, and specific reflections on matters of ethical difficulty, then help us discern how we should act on the basis of that theoretical vision, as if they are delineated spheres with one being more primary than the other. As Aquinas taught - though one can distinguish between a speculative intellect directed at apprehension and understanding, and a practical intellect which discerns and directs fitting action from what is apprehended - we are not to understand them as distinct powers, but one power directed toward different but dynamically related ends.[60] Thus, rather than knowing relating to ethical action like primary dominoes relate to secondary ones, knowing instead relates to ethical living as the heart does to blood: it can only ever output while drawing in. As the heart enlivens blood, and blood enlivens the heart, so knowing employed in the service of ethical living opens onto further knowing, which grounds

---

59. Ibid.

60. Aquinas Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. Thomas Gilby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1a, 79, 11. On this point, see also Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: A Guide and Commentary* (London ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 137.

further ethical living. The converse is also true: the destruction of life can lead to further alienation from knowing, and further alienation in knowing can lead on to further degradation.

In other words, to explore our knowing situation, broadly conceived, is to explore our relatedness; and exploring that relatedness uncovers the vital importance of human acting in any account of human knowing. In fact it complicates considerably a division between knowing and acting. Intentional knowing is a kind of action. And various actions lead to greater or lesser knowing. This is to move away from a conception of the knowing subject as one exercising their intelligence so as to probe the inactive and impersonal object, and to move toward the knowing subject as conceived in relation to other knowing subjects, where they not only know, but are known, and where one's actions towards those other subjects lead to greater or lesser knowing. In this epistemological vision, knowledge is responsive and ethically implicated - a dynamic that Williams seeks to capture something of in his emphasis on attention, attunement, and at-one-ment. Here the question, “What does it mean to know?” is not at all far removed from the question, “What does it mean to love?” A devil's intelligence may sparkle profoundly, while loving not at all. Yet, on a more profound level still, their failure to love signals a failure to truly know.[61] Therefore, a truly theological theological epistemology must be ethical in that it must endeavour to elucidate this connection.

In summary, thus far I have sought to identify not only the topic of the thesis, but also the particular stance taken toward it, which has required clarifying a provisional position on the complex relation between theology and epistemology. Then, having marked this particular stance, I have now highlighted four central adjectives of appraisal that must characterise a contribution to theological epistemology that maintains this stance with a measure of integrity. I have argued that such a theological epistemology, at the least, will be theological, ontological, contextual and - as I have just argued - ethical. This is not to claim that I have exhausted the

---

61. 1 Corinthians 8:1-3.

adjectives that could be used to appraise an appropriately theological contribution to the topic of the nature of human knowing of God; but I do argue that these four are central.

However, marking territory on a map is one thing and walking through it is quite another. Having begun to look squarely - through the lens of these four attributes, each ponderous in their own right - at the demanding terrain that must be traversed in order simply to avoid a reductionist contribution to the topic of the nature of human knowledge of God, it is difficult not to be daunted - perhaps to lose heart. How can one take a step forward at all, and avoid a kind of theological paralysis, in view of the dizzying array of interconnections involved in developing a merely adequate account? Granted, this challenge of mutuality between doctrines is one intrinsic to the systematic task from beginning to end - not at all unique to the demands of theological epistemology. And, conversely, the temptation to fragmentation and the siloing of the theological endeavour is likewise not unique to the topic of this thesis but is instead chronic.

Yet whether this challenge of doctrinal integration, and the alluring temptation to fragmentation which invites us from it, are particularly acute when approaching theological epistemology or simply the nature of theological *poiesis* wherever one turns,one nonetheless needs a way through this particular patch of ground. Thus the attributes of appraisal provoke the question of the *strategy* by which one can make a profitable contribution to the contemporary discussion on theological epistemology, as limited as it inevitably will be - an answer to the question: given the breadth of this terrain, how might one begin to make a contribution?

Assessing the Thematic Strategy: Two Examples in Stackhouse and Meek

Whether other theologians wring their hands as restlessly as I do over the difficulty of avoiding the temptation to reductionism in theological epistemology, or instead approach the challenge with greater aplomb, it is clear that a number chart their own path through the terrain via a similar strategy - a thematic one. This strategy is characterised by an approach to the topic through the lens of a singular selected motif, theme, or doctrine, which is forefront throughout the discussion and serves to unify the varied aspects of it. The unfolding of the selected theme as

it pertains to theological epistemology thus crystallises the theologian's unique contribution, usually without at all diminishing the advantage of traversing the terrain by means of other themes, or other strategies than the thematic (see below for examples of thematic approaches).

That said, what I am here identifying as a thematic strategy is to be distinguished from selecting one sub-topic within theological discourses on epistemology, and developing if further - without attempt to use it as an overall lens through which to view the whole. I of course am not suggesting that any theologian who chooses to write on a given theme with epistemological connection is adopting what I am referring to as a thematic strategy to the field. Any number of topics are regularly selected and examined in an atomised way. Rather, I am here making reference to the strategy of selecting one motif within the overall discourse, and making it central and dominant in the development of a proposal that seeks to foundationally ground the nature of the whole. This thematic strategy seems to be increasingly deployed as, in recent years, we have seen Christian theologians and philosophers approach epistemological matters theologically by focusing on a number of different themes, each taken as a central lens in an individual theologian's overall epistemological contribution. These have included the themes of faith, error, ritual, Torah, the motif of Hebrew wisdom literature, and the doctrine of divine hiddenness.[62]

Below I briefly unfold how two authors have employed the thematic strategy, before critically assessing how their work embodies the four adjectives of appraisal I have argued a truly theological theological epistemology should aspire to. The purpose of engaging examples of the

---

62. Note the thematic strategy perspicuous in the titles of the following works, which each attempt to engage a variety of issues in the overall field of religious or theological epistemology through a singular dominant theme or motif: Paul G. Tyson, *Faith's Knowledge: Explorations Into the Theory and Application of Theological Epistemology* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2013); Dru Johnson and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Biblical Knowing: A Scriptural Epistemology of Error* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013); Dru Johnson, *Knowledge by Ritual: A Biblical Prolegomenon to Sacramental Theology* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2016); Ryan O'Dowd, *The Wisdom of Torah: Epistemology in Deuteronomy and the Wisdom Literature* (FRLANT, 225; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), and Paul K. Moser, *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Paul Fiddes adopts a similar strategy in *Seeing the World and Knowing God*. Here his focus is not epistemology, per say. Instead he seeks illuminate our human knowing situation by commending a Christian theology of wisdom - a richly epistemically related theme. He does this by selecting Hebrew wisdom as his central motif, which he continually puts into dialogue with select late-modern thinkers: Paul S. Fiddes, *Seeing the World and Knowing God: Hebrew Wisdom and Christian Doctrine in a Late-Modern Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

thematic strategy, and then combining critique of their contributions by means of our four characteristics, is to weigh the merits of this approach for enhancing the discipline from the perspective of the stance this thesis adopts, as outlined above. Given the increasing prominence of this thematic approach toward contribution to theological epistemology, it is worthwhile that the higher level question be asked as to whether this approach serves the development of a broad, non-reductionist, approach toward the topic that I have argued for above. The two authors are John Stackhouse and Esther Meek, and their respective works that each adopt a thematic strategy while seeking to contribute to theological epistemology are, *Need to Know: Vocation as the Heart of Christian Epistemology,* and *Loving to Know: Introducing Covenant Epistemology*.[63] As the titles of these monographs clearly convey, both authors have selected an overriding theme through which they seek to make a theological contribution to matters of epistemology overall. Stackhouse is not merely seeking to ask how the theological motif of vocation might shed light on epistemological questions. He is going further to hold up vocation as *The Heart of Christian Epistemology*. And Meek is not merely probing how motifs of covenant, prominent as they are in the bible and Christian theologies, might enhance epistemological discourse. She is not offering a few insights to epistemology from her explorations of covenant. Rather, she is claiming to make an overarching contribution where covenant frames the whole of the discussion, thus *Introducing Covenant Epistemology.* After sketching the contours of their proposals, I will ask to what degree they are theological, ontological, contextual, and ethical in an attempt to assess the strengths and weaknesses of a thematic strategy for our position and purposes outlined above.

Need to Know: Vocation as the Heart of Christian Epistemology. In this work, Canadian theologian John Stackhouse aims to provide an overall epistemological framework within which the Christian can become better equipped in thinking "Christianly about all of life".[64] It is the

---

63. John G. Stackhouse, *Need to Know: Vocation as the Heart of Christian Epistemology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Esther L. Meek, *Loving to Know: Introducing Covenant Epistemology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011).

64. John G. Stackhouse, *Need to Know*, 18.

burden of the work to rise to this central challenge of discipleship - that of learning to think "Christianly all the time about everything".[65] And, as its subtitle suggests, Stackhouse seeks to furnish his Christian epistemology by placing a doctrine of vocation right at the heart of his proposal. This is not to say he thinks his proposal only has relevance to Christians. Instead, he believes it provides a theological explanation relevant to the human knowing situation generally, even as his particular focus is to provide an epistemological framework that ultimately will assist the Christian. He is able to ground both the general and specifically Christian applications of his proposal because he finds in scripture and in the Christian tradition warrant for applying a doctrine of vocation in both ways: arguing for both a general human vocation, arising from God's indiscriminate call upon humanity as its Creator, as well as for uniquely Christian callings which God has laid upon the church as its Redeemer.[66] Thus Stackhouse makes a distinction between "creation commandments" and "salvation commandments", summarising the former as the callings to love God, to love one's neighbour, and to love the rest of creation,[67] and the latter as the callings upon the church to witness to its experience of Christ, to exemplify Christ's Kingdom ethic in the quality of its life together, and to become agents of God's mission through aiding the discipleship of others in the way of Christ.[68] Stackhouse avoids a sharp dualism within his proposal by stressing that the salvation commandments are temporary and are given not to replace the creation commandments but to serve their ultimate restoration and fulfilment.[69]

---

65. Ibid., 19.

66. Stackhouse maintains that the 'creation commandments' apply even to non-Christians, whether or not they are conscious of God's creation mandates for humanity, given they nonetheless are created by God even though not fully conscious of that truth. He also maintains that many non-Christians do live out - to varying degrees - God's creation mandates for them, regardless as to whether or not they have some sense of those callings arising from God or not. With thanks to Professor David Downs for drawing out this point.

67. Ibid., 70.

68. Ibid., 77–79.

69. Ibid., 79–80.

Therefore, his strategy is to approach epistemological matters theologically by founding his whole discussion of the nature of human knowledge on a doctrine of vocation. By doing so, Stackhouse is able to re-frame our epistemic expectations in light of God's creative and redemptive purposes for humanity. This allows him to disabuse his readers of any pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, and positions him to focus them on God's trustworthiness in providing just the knowledge we *Need to Know* in order to do what he is calling us to do. He argues that God would not commission us and then deprive us of the knowledge needed to fulfil those commissions.[70] That "God will be (epistemically) faithful so that we can be (vocationally) faithful" is the central argument of the book.[71] In addition to applying this ground for confidence to the above creation and salvation commandments, he goes further by acknowledging that God calls particular people to specific vocations (as engineers, lawyers, carpenters, professors, etc.), and thus maintains that God can therefore be trusted to furnish us with the particular knowledges we need to fulfil those individual callings as well.[72]

Given the sketch thus far, one would be forgiven for thinking that Stackhouse's perspective is rose-tinted. However, as his emphasis on our need for redemption implied above, he is also at pains to elucidate our epistemic situation not only in the light of our finitude, but also within the shade cast by our fallenness.[73] Cognisance of our finitude cautions us from over-estimating the certitude of what we think we know. We quite likely do not possess all the data relevant to a complex problem and, even with the data we do have to hand, we cannot be certain that our reasoning processes and intuitions are always reliable; further, we see the world with interest and bias - "the cognitive is intrinsically connected with the affective and the moral", he

---

70. Ibid., 19.

71. Ibid., 21.

72. Ibid., 19.

73. Ibid., 89. Beyond the aforementioned discussion of *affect*, more discussion of our embodiment as a central aspect of human finitude would have been most welcome in *Need to Know*.

stresses.[74] But beyond stressing these aspects of our finitude, Stackhouse also emphasises the cognitive effects of our fallenness: we are not merely interested but also 'wickedly interested' in some things more than others - having a taste for evil which affects both our capacities to perceive and to process.[75] Thus, in sum, Stackhouse employs the doctrine of vocation within an overall framework of creation, fall, and redemption - while conscious of our finitude and the epistemic effects of sin - which then combine to provide a balance of both confidence and sober caution in our acts of knowing. Thus, his is a critical realism.[76] Much more could be said by way of critical appreciation of Stackhouse's proposal, and I will engage it further below. But here the aim has simply been to highlight his strategy of approaching matters of epistemology theologically via the medium of a choice theological motif or theme which provides rudder throughout the discussion of the overall topic - in this case a doctrine of vocation is taken right to the heart of this vision of theological epistemology, and thus enlivens the whole.

Loving to Know: Introducing Covenant Epistemology. For a second example of this thematic strategy, we turn from a Canadian theologian to American philosopher Esther Meek. It is noteworthy that Stackhouse does not engage Meek's work in *Need to Know*.[77] But as her

---

74. Ibid., 87–88.

75. Ibid., 89.

76. Ibid., 86, 89. Stackhouse outlines ten epistemological implications of vocation (pp. 80-85). Among those which most highlight his critical realism are his acknowledgement that in this era of redemption God might very well allow "extended periods of ignorance of even important truths as part of an overarching scheme of global salvation" (p. 83), and may "allow us, and even prompt us, to believe things that are not strictly true" (p. 85).

77. *Need to Know* was published three years after *Loving to Know*, and eleven years after Meek's more popular, but still illuminating, Esther L. Meek, *Longing to Know: The Philosophy of Knowledge for Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004). Meek's work has been critically regarded by scholars appreciated by Stackhouse (like James K. A. Smith). So the passing over of Meek's work is noteworthy, when a dizzying array of other contemporaries within his circles are engaged. Further, having taken his graduate seminar in epistemology, I know that he is appreciative of Polanyi's epistemology, as evidenced frequently in *Need to Know* (although coming on to many of Polanyi's insights independently and reading him late in the day (p. 127n60). But Meek is among those Christian philosophers and theologians who have thoroughly worked through Polanyi's epistemological insights theologically. I can thus only conclude that his passing over of Meek's work is intentional, and propose a likely explanation below - one to which Stackhouse himself hints. I raise this because I believe it illuminates a key difference between the proposals.

subtitle indicates, the central lens through which Meek focuses her epistemological vision is that of the interpersonal relationship, covenantally constituted. Her central argument is that we "take as a paradigm, of all acts of knowing, the unfolding, covenantally constituted, interpersonal relationship".[78] Construing knowing in this way first occurred to Meek upon reading Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, specifically her account of the quiet and patient attentiveness that was demanded if Dillard wanted to lay eyes upon the ever-elusive muskrat.[79] Meek had been reflecting theologically upon God as covenant Lord alongside reading Dillard, and was struck by the covenantal characteristics displayed in her account of "stalking" the evasive creature. By this she meant she had to comport herself in a certain way in order that she might arrive at her desired encounter. If she was not still, no muskrat was revealed. If she was, one possibly may be. And for Meek, herein lies an intimation of a covenantal construal of knowing. She sets her account over against a vision of knowledge that arises primarily from a desire to strip bare the world around so as to secure increasingly penetrating insights into its nature - where nature is conceived of mainly in impersonal terms. In contrast, Meek's account of knowing is anchored first in the dynamics of interpersonal voluntary disclosure, which then gives rise to a series of epistemic virtues that are attuned to that dynamic. Here knowing is akin to a marriage: one binds oneself with promises to love, honour, and obey - and only then does one enter into knowledge of one's partner as spouse through encounter, as each chooses to disclose themselves within the bounds of covenant.[80] Within this interpersonal and covenantal epistemic framework, commitment, humility, respect, and patience are central virtues which "invite the real".[81] Thus knowing is a kind of courtship between knower and known, akin to a dance.[82] Ultimately, Meek is arguing that human

---

78. Ibid., Xiv; Cf. 44.

79. Ibid., 36–37.

80. Ibid., 37.

81. Ibid., 38.

82. Ibid.

knowledge of God is prototypical of all other acts of human knowing.[83] Just as knowledge of God is carried by humans within a personal relation which is covenantal in character, so too knowledge of all else in God's world bears that covenantal imprint, she argues.

Yet Meek goes further than merely saying that covenantally constituted interpersonal relationships are *paradigmatic* of all acts of human knowing - though she does indeed emphasise this. Through reflection on her colleague Michael Williams' work *Far as the Curse is Found,*[84] Meek goes further to say that all human knowing takes place within actual covenant relationship to God, whether that fundamental relational context is recognised by the human knower or not.[85] Williams maintains - and Meek agrees - that the language utilised in the creation accounts of Genesis 1-2 displays covenantal features,[86] and Meek sees the cultural mandate as being covenantal in character.[87] Thus, although the motif of covenant finds special expression in the relationship between Yahweh and his chosen people, it also has wider application to all of creation: "Everything exists by virtue of a covenant relationship to the Lord of all".[88]

---

83. Ibid., 176. Meek does not engage Emmanuel Levinas at length, although she does interact at length with theologian Philip Rolnick (pp. 371-90), and Rolnick's *Person, Grace, and God* does engage Levinas' work at great depth. Through interaction with Rolnick, Meek develops her own emphasis on personhood as 'persons-in-communion', which would resonate with Levinas' emphasis on the Other as being constitutive of any identity of self or personhood. Meek would shrink back, however, from going as far as Levinas does in his assertion that our encounter with the other human person is the condition of encounter with God. Meek's emphasis that knowledge of God is prototypical of all other acts of human knowing indicates this - an assertion that Levinas would reverse (with thanks to Professor Aaron Simmons who asked after this connection).

84. Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2005).

85. At this point , there is justification in asking whether a coherent notion of covenant can maintain in the situation where one party is not aware that they have been covenanted! But for Williams - and I assume by extension for Meek - sin is here construed as the breaking of covenant. This severance can entice the offending party to suppression of, and then ignorance of the fact that there had been a covenant at all. Such suppression and ignorance does not release them from covenant obligation.

86. Meek, *Loving to Know*, 199.

87. Ibid., 210.

88. Ibid.

What does a covenant entail then, exactly? Williams takes a broader view than scholars who restrict the motif of covenant to contexts where there is a formal treaty enacted - usually one between a suzerain and a vassal - finding instead evidence that language of covenant was commonly used in the ancient Near East to describe relationships characterised by obligations and promises.[89] These were often economic or political, but Williams also sees the motif as applying to marriage and friendship, where obligations and promises underwrite an unfolding relationship between persons through time.[90] Thus Williams resists a reduction of the motif of covenant to that of contract.[91] But if Williams' definition of what constitutes a covenant is broad, Meek's is broader still. She takes the notion of covenant to indicate "the parameters that intangibly but normatively constitute any interpersonal relationship, according to the particular level and nature of the involvement".[92] In seeking to persuade as to the utility of this definition, she acknowledges that some may wish to reserve the idea of covenant to the most formal and comprehensive types of relationship. But she sees this as a technical matter related to term choice, rather than one that disturbs her argument. Whether one accepts her use of the term or questions it, by it she aims simply to indicate the normative aspects of any relationship - the agreements appropriate to the given significance of relationship which serve as its "covenantal terms", whether tacit or explicit.[93] For example, explicit covenantal pledges are at the heart of a marriage, while implicit parameters may nonetheless also be at play normatively. But for Meek, tacit normative bonds within relationship - such as the obligation we may feel to keep a watchful eye on our neighbour's home whilst they are away - are no less covenantal.[94]

---

89. Ibid., 194.

90. Ibid.

91. Ibid., 202.

92. Ibid., 194.

93. Ibid., 202.

94. Ibid., 203.

Notice that here, as with Stackhouse, Meek aims to foster theological and philosophical reflection on the nature of human knowing - in a foundational all-encompassing sense - by adopting a central motif from which she develops the whole of her epistemological contribution. Both thinkers not only draw out the implications of robust theological themes for epistemological concerns; they both go further and introduce themes not often reflected on in contemporary epistemology and make them central and overarching in their theological epistemology.

I have highlighted the work of Stackhouse and Meek to position me to explore the strengths and weaknesses, the potential merits and pitfalls, of adopting a similar thematic strategy for our purposes - namely that of fostering a theological epistemology from the stance outlined above: one that is genuinely theological, which is to say it is also ontologically attuned, contextually sensitive, and explicit about its ethical entailments. Rather than assess each of their two proposals against each of the four bars I have raised, I will highlight a few observations that emerge.

Theological. Here the question is to what degree the thematic strategy adopted by these two scholars lends itself to fostering a genuinely theological theological epistemology in practice - one that is openly conscious of and responsive to God's priority of being and action in founding human understanding of him.

Stackhouse's vocational approach does introduce a robust theological theme into epistemological discourse. The significance of this was acknowledged by his epistemologically-minded peers as the *Journal of Analytic Theology* dedicated a symposia to responding to *Need to Know* soon after its publication. Lynn Cohick, Paul Martens, Myron Penner, and Oliver Crisp each contributed in-depth critical responses to the work - offering exegetical, ethical, philosophical, and theological assessments, respectively - and Stackhouse then responded to his "Four Good Friends".[95] Stackhouse does root his discussion of the theme in a biblical account of

---

95. John G. Jr. Stackhouse, "Response to Four Good Friends," (JAT, 4; 2016), 215–21 Lynn H. Cohick, "Cultivating Shalom: A Response to John Stackhouse's Epistemology," *Journal of Analytic Theology* 4 (2016): 193–97 Lynn H. Cohick, "Cultivating Shalom: A Response to John Stackhouse's Epistemology," Lynn H. Cohick,

creation, and does also seek to develop it in relation to God's ongoing work of redemption in Christ, as we have seen. Sitting under this tutelage positions him to draw a creative insight from the theme, arguing from it that we can then assume that God will be epistemically faithful and assure that we need to know what we need to know so that we can then be vocationally faithful. This fosters a healthy epistemic dependence, averting presumption and pride, while also warding off a crushing scepticism in view of the frailty of our knowing situation. That he made a substantial theological contribution to matters of epistemology by adopting this thematic approach seems clear - if the level of engagement the work has received is any indication.

Meek likewise, in her selection of the motif of covenant, reflects on a substantial theological category - one also not regularly engaged in epistemological discourse - and elucidates a great measure of its epistemological significance. She too seeks to ground her reflection on the nature of covenant in dialogue with Christian faith. She wants to say that the "transformative interpersoned, face-to-face encounter and communion that all of us experience in the richest moments of our lives affords us the best paradigm of *all* knowing", recognising that for Christians this dynamic is best captured in knowing Christ but insisting that her covenant epistemology also describes the nature of knowing - through and through - for all people, whether they claim to know God or not.[96] Meek acknowledges the influence of Michael Polanyi on her own thought, especially his *Personal Knowledge*,[97]and views the covenant epistemology she commends as a further development of insights she first discovered in Polanyi. Further, as her work has developed, she's found these epistemological insights as deeply resonate with her Christian faith - and the covenantal category as central to that connection. Thus, she approaches

---

"Cultivating Shalom: A Response to John Stackhouse's Epistemology," (JAT, 4; 2016): 1; Paul Martens, "Stackhouse's Critical Realism: A Pragmatic Epistemology on the Lam," (JAT, 4; 2016): 204–10; Myron A. Penner, "John Stackhouse's Vocation-Centered Epistemology," (JAT, 4; 2016): 211–14; Oliver Crisp, "Vocation and Christian Doctrine: A Response to John Stackhouse," (JAT, 4; 2016): 198–203.

96. Meek, *Loving to Know*, xvii.

97. Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

the topic as a philosopher, and openly acknowledges her philosophical debts while also clearly trying to learn something theologically from the Christian scriptures and tradition as pertains the dynamic of interpersonal covenant and, as with Stackhouse above, sits under that tutelage. To that degree, a theological rationality is at play within her work and is central to her ability to make a fresh contribution to epistemology generally, and the knowledge of God in particular, as she extends through a vista first opened to her by Polanyi. Both works indicate that a thematic strategy can be effectively employed in relation to a genuinely theological rationality.

However, neither volume is particularly rigorous in exegetical attention to its selected theme in its biblical or traditional-theological manifestations - even as both authors are openly attempting to think Christianly about their motifs and, from that tutelage, to bring gifts to epistemological reflection from that standpoint. This raises a question as to whether the motif is really driving the discussion. Meek treats the theme of covenant in a very general sense - coming to largely define it as interpersonal communion structured by entailed commitments, which are either explicit or implied.[98] Had she attempted to employ a more rigorous theological rationality, attending to the varied motif of covenant as developed in numerous ways in the Bible and Christian tradition - allowing it to drive her along further than merely the elements she selected - this already rich work may have been richer still.

As noted above, a perennial danger in handling epistemic themes theologically is to not trace them through until they open onto God's redemption in Christ, and Christ's work by the Holy Spirit through the church, with subsequent blessing to the world. In her penultimate chapter, Meek holds up the Eucharist as the ultimate expression of covenant epistemology in action - as the supreme epistemic practice that most clearly "invites the real" - and goes so far as to say it is "the most strategic primer of the pump of human knowing".[99] She suggests that it (and

---

98. Recall my mention above of her example of the natural obligation one might feel toward one's neighbour, in watching their house while they are away, as a kind of covenantal construal.

99. Meek, *Loving to Know*, 467.

I am sure she would say, by extension, *not* the reading of her works) is the most effective form of the epistemological therapy her work too seeks to effect. Then, in the final chapter, she confesses to her reader that there is something more vital than seeing knowing through a covenantal lens and executing the according epistemic duties rightly, and that is to be known by God.[100] Having framed her interpersonal epistemology as arising from an interpersonal construal of fundamental reality in God's own triunity, she is positioned to speak openly about God's initiative in incarnation and for our salvation.

However, it is illuminating for reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of a thematic approach for fostering a genuinely theological rationality to notice that reference to covenant almost entirely drops out of *Loving to Know* throughout the discussions of Eucharist and incarnation and salvation. A more rigorous theological rationality that attended to the epistemic fruits of the biblical and theological theme of covenant would have taken us to the specificity of the actual covenant promises of God and their epistemic entailments, and would have led the account into explicit relation to Christ which, as I argued above, is requisite if an epistemological account is to be ontologically attuned given that Christ is the *Logos* through whom creation was made and is sustained.[101] Thus it seems that Meek employs the covenantal category only insofar as she must to commend interpersonal relation and commitment as fundamental to knowing through it. Therefore, she makes her argument for God's initiative in salvation from the ultimately personal nature of reality, not from the insights her covenantal theme naturally offers along these lines.[102] Although, in her brief section on the Eucharist as the most important epistemic practice one could engage in she does allude to Jesus' pronouncement of a new covenant in his blood, it seems an opportunity missed that a general discussion on covenant,

---

100. Ibid.

101. For example, we see the covenantal and the epistemic collide in the specifics of Jeremiah 31:31-34, where a new covenant is foreseen - one that offers transformation of heart - and results in no one saying 'Know (*ya.da*) the Lord' for all, high and low, will know (*ya.da*) him.'

102. Ibid., 476–77.

alongside abundant theological reference otherwise, did not result in connecting the specificity of the new covenant to the specificity of Jesus as saviour. We have acknowledged that she is approaching the topic largely as a Christian philosopher, thus to what degree she would confess to intending to employ a theological rationality in her work is an open question. But one is left feeling that the thematic approach, only half-executed, could inadvertently turn out to be Christ-less. Therefore, it is clear that a theological rationality is likely only to be truly operative within a thematic approach to the degree it attends to the motif on its own terms, allowing it to drive the discussion. That will involve some measure of close exegetical attention to it biblically, with an ear to what Christian thinkers historically have seen of God through it.

Ontological. Here the question is to what degree a thematic strategy, at its best, might position the theologian to develop an epistemological account that is ontologically attuned to God, his relation to his creation, and particularly his relation to humanity. For her part, Meek commends covenantal epistemology as being rooted ontologically. In fact, her central argument is that the primary advantage of covenant epistemology is that it rings in harmony with a relational ontology. Human knowing of God and of all he has created is covenantal in character because God is covenantal in his relations to his creation. Thus becoming attuned to the covenantal nature of knowing is necessitated by the covenantal dimensions of reality itself.[103] Therefore, though Meek's work is focused on the epistemological, she sees her epistemology as consciously responding to a Trinitarian ontology. She goes so far as to say that her work "implies an ontology...in which a Person, interpersonal relationship, and covenant, are *the* fundamental and formative categories".[104] The Triune God is "back of all reality", and calls us to share in relationship with him. Therefore, covenantally constituted interpersonal relationship is the "fundamental situation we find ourselves in".[105] Further, Meek's appeal to the motif of covenant

---

103. Ibid., 201.

104. Ibid., emphasis mine.

105. Ibid., 202, 206. She devotes a later chapter - *Knowing as Dance* - to substantial engagement with Colin

allows her to highlight the historically unfolding and situated nature of covenant, and thus of knowing. This involves the bodily rootedness of all human thought, as well as our embeddedness in specific cultures, languages, communities, and histories.[106] In covenantal perspective, these facets of our rootedness are not obstacles to knowing, but the very context in which all human knowing is situated. In fact, within Meek's Polanyian perspective, these aspects of our creaturely situatedness are to be intentionally indwelt – regarded as subsidiaries through which we make contact with the real.[107]

Meek's covenantal construal - relating as it does to a Trinitarian ontology and playing out in relation to him as embodied creatures embedded in a developing history within this world - allows her to place the primary initiative in human knowing not with the human knower, but ultimately with the known. In a biblically informed understanding of covenant, God descends to initiate covenant with humanity. The human knower is not the covenant partner taking the first step. Meek uses this characteristic of biblical covenant to reject the idea that our knowing is fundamentally akin to an "inert known" being uncovered at the initiative of the human knower by means of a linear and methodical process of discovery. Instead, all we can do by means of our initiatives in knowing - whether linear and methodological or otherwise, whether focused on knowledge of God directly, or on something he has made - is "invite the real" as it breaks in, often in surprising and unexpected ways.[108] However, as argued above, though Trinitarian, Meek's proposal - while mentioning the Eucharist - fails to adequately relate itself to Christ's centrality in God's relation to his creation, and thus to any Christian ontology.

Stackhouse, in selecting a doctrine of vocation as his central prism through which to make a theological contribution to epistemology, is positioned to relate his account to a God who

---

Gunton and, through him, with the notion of trinitarian perichoresis (pp. 327-359).

106. Ibid., 205–6.

107. Ibid., 206.

108. Ibid., 208–9.

creates and mandates - a God who sustains and calls. His central argument that God will be epistemically faithful to us, so that we might be vocationally faithful, very much acknowledges the Lord's active providential care in our knowing and, in that sense, is recognising the priority of God's being and action in his epistemological account. Stackhouse is aware of the danger of implying that God's primary concern is for us to know facts about the universe, and does say that God's fundamental concern is that we might know *him*. This involves not only the attainment of information, but even more the transformation of character.[109]

Yet there is a tension in Stackhouse's work on this score. It, by and large, does tend toward a focus on knowing "the stuff that we need to know", and does not lean near as naturally as Meek's account toward reflection on knowledge of God as our creaturely end, and the knowing of all else that we know ultimately in the service of fostering that end in ourselves and our fellow humanity. Therefore, though this vocational account does place God's action in our knowing at the centre, it nonetheless also - unlike Meek's covenantal approach - has a tendency to leave the reader primarily focused on the nature of knowing "things" rather than inspiring an impassioned pursuit of knowing God. From the start of his work, Stackhouse focuses the end of human knowing on *shalom*, which is defined as a fitting harmony between ourselves and creation, one another, and ourselves and God.[110] And yet, as his proposal unfolds, God does at times come across as a means to the end of obtaining what we need to know in order to do what God has called us to do, rather than the from whom, and through whom, and to whom that all true human knowing is called to tend toward. A strength of placing vocation at the heart of a Christian epistemological vision is that it clearly frames human knowers in relation to a creator God who calls. But the theme offers little in connecting that dynamic of knowing to a theological anthropology which envisions humanity's telos as the personal knowledge of God, and to Christ's centrality to that knowledge of God.

---

109. John G. Stackhouse, *Need to Know*, 83.

110. Ibid., 20.

Therefore, in comparing the ontological fruits of the employment of a thematic approach in both Stackhouse and Meek, Meek's account is stronger in its ontological sensitivity, yet both fail to adequately relate their epistemological contribution to Christ. It is clear, should a thematic strategy be adopted, that it must have a theological wealth embedded within it sufficient to cast light upon the intimate relation between a Christological ontology and epistemology. The strategy can clearly be profitable, but the theme selected must also have this intimate relation native to it.

*Contextual***.** We have argued above that a Christian theological epistemology that seeks to be truly theological will be contextual in at least three senses: it will be sensitive to the progression of the nature of human knowledge of God through the major iterations of salvation history in general, attentive to the unique knowing situation experienced in the theological proposal's own contemporary cultural context in particular, and will ultimately identify the "home" of Christian knowing of God within the *ecclesia* - the Christian church as its native context. Stackhouse's proposal has a clear start in creation, acknowledges the disruption of the Fall, and then goes on to distinguish between creation mandates which give rise to a general human vocation, and redemption mandates which give rise to the specific vocation of the church. The redemption mandates are framed as aiming at restoration of humanity toward its originally intended aims in creation. Though little is said about the nature of eschatological knowledge of God, the implication is that it is a return to pre-lapsarian experience. Meek's covenantal proposition which, as I have noted, is handled in a general rather than a specified way, tends to explicate the nature of human knowing now, with little reference to categories of creation, sin, or redemption. That said, there is in her work, in comparison to *Need to Know*, a clearer forward trajectory toward the telos of human knowing as complete fulfilment of interpersonal communion with the living God. Even if, again, Christ is not central to this aspect of her epistemological contribution, this epistemology clearly is on the move.

Then in terms of contemporary context, both accounts are actively sensitive to the situatedness of our knowing situation in a late/post-modern, early 21st century, Western context,

with their central motifs clearly selected in large measure because they are understood to be helpfully responding with this context. Stackhouse's vocational account does launch from an acknowledgement of the presence of a variety of different forms of postmodernism.[111] He believes his epistemological vision, centred on vocation, enables him to avoid a floundering scepticism while also resisting a counter-reaction that only returns to an overly confident and independent account of the status of human knowledge which characterised the Enlightenment. Likewise Meek - and here one can note Polanyi's influence before he is mentioned - sees a dangerous array of false dichotomies besetting the functional epistemology that many live with within our contemporary Western cultures. Dichotomies between knowledge and belief; knowledge as *facts* in contrast to opinion, interpretation, values, and morals; knowledge and reason being epitomised in science, over against art, imagination, religion and authority; dichotomies between objectivity and subjectivity; between a supposedly "neutral" public square where the above defined objective knowledge is welcome, over against a private sphere where one is entitled to one's opinion, but best not commend it; between mind and body. She also further points out that too often it is implied that this world of knowledge, facts, reason, theory, science, objectivity, mind, and the neutral public square are associated with the male, which is then set over against the female.[112] Therefore, Meek's interpersonal covenantal construal of the nature of human knowing of God and all else is responsive to a prevalent current epistemic cultural context, and goes far in deconstructing the false dichotomies therein. She and Stackhouse, therefore, both demonstrate a strength in the thematic approach in that it enables them to construct unified proposals that are broad in scope and yet especially suited to address problems they see and experience in our current epistemic landscape.

However, whereas a thematic strategy is at strength in responding to a given understanding of our contemporary knowing situation, in both of our examples it fails to foster a

---

111. Ibid., 38–55.

112. Meek, *Loving to Know*, 8–9.

robust positioning of the church as a local gathering of people in Christ who together foster growth in the knowledge of God amidst themselves, and thus to the world. Stackhouse's vocational approach of course challenges to love of neighbour. And as we have noted above, Meek holds up the Eucharist as a supreme epistemic practice that invites the real. Both accounts do thus have ecclesial intimations. However neither proposal is particularly robust in identifying the space the *ecclesia* holds within God's intent for how human beings come to know him. Again we find ourselves both encouraged and warned, as we assess their work for the merits and potential pitfalls of a thematic strategy in seeking to illumine matters of theological epistemology: the selected theme must be vigorous in its potential connections, and must also be followed through on its own terms such that its resident epistemic potential is unfolded to greater degree.

Ethical. Finally, how does their thematic strategy enable Meek and Stackhouse to elucidate something of the connection between human knowing and right living - between a vision of what it means to know as a human, and a vision of what it means to live the good life? Meek's covenantal construal of knowing allows her to emphasise the importance of commitment - or pledge - in knowing. All human knowing involves the knower in commitment, appropriate risk, self-binding, and pledge - as with Annie Dillard stalking for a glimpse of the muskrat. Whereas we are often driven to reflection on epistemological questions out of a desire to first be sure before we commit, Meek's covenantal construal makes such commitment constitutive of knowing itself, opposing an idea of knowledge that positions itself as a precursor to commitment.[113] Fundamentally, the covenantal framework for this epistemological proposal construes knowing as unfolding relationship, which very much positions Meek for exploring the interplay between knowing and ethical living. Here we know amid a relational story and on a trajectory, where all human knowing is a coming to know - an unfinished work.[114] She uses the

113. Ibid., 207.

114. Ibid., 208.

lens of covenant to focus the telos of knowing ultimately on interpersonal communion. Here the goal is not primarily the acquisition of data in as exhaustive a supply as possible, where mystery is then an enemy to be overcome.

Meek does not indicate at this point in her discussion how knowledge of even impersonal entities might be a kind of communion, or lead to interpersonal communion either with God or with others. But she does think this covenantal construal helpfully shoulders out an understanding of the goal of knowing as certain knowledge.[115] She also argues that to construe human knowing along covenantal lines is to align it with a biblical understanding of blessing for honouring covenantal conditions, or cursing for dishonouring them. Where we conduct ourselves covenantally in our knowing, we know and extend blessing. When we conduct ourselves irresponsibly in our knowing, this results in a kind of cursing – a misalignment with reality that brings with it real negative effects. Here our knowing can either tend toward, or away from, *shalom*.[116] Thus, as her title *Loving to Know* indicates, Meek posits a dynamic two-way interplay between knowing and loving - between her epistemological vision and her vision of a life well lived in love. She wants to say that knowing is loving, that it *is* interpersonal covenantal relationship. But she doesn't want to make this a reductive claim. Knowing is not *only* loving, and *only* relationship.[117] Stackhouse likewise believes that his vocational framing of epistemology entails within it a close relationship with ethical virtue: "striving, as we ought, to be morally right persons performing morally right tasks is a useful approximation of what it means to be vocationally faithful".[118] But his account lacks something of the dynamic interplay between knowing and living a life of love, and is vulnerable to reducing knowing to having

---

115. Ibid., 209.

116. Ibid., 210–11.

117. Ibid., 179.

118. John G. Stackhouse, *Need to Know*, 228, n53.

knowledge that one obtains, which then serves as a wealth of perspective from which one can love better. That is a partial account and, as far as it goes, is true. But Meek's account is richer in seeing that not only is knowing an entry into richer ethical living, but ethical living is also a vital entry into richer knowing. Thus in both cases, the epistemological accounts are either strong or adequate, respectively, in drawing out their ethical entailments, largely because the motifs centralised within their respective thematic strategies came resident with ethical connection.

Thus far, in this introductory chapter of the thesis, I have marked out the stance from which its argument will proceed, and have established that this stance toward the field of theological epistemology entails, within its own integrity, commitment to fostering contribution to epistemology characterised by at least the four adjectives of appraisal I have outlined. This non-reductive approach to the topic is necessitated by a consistent and thorough thinking through of what is involved in genuinely approaching it *theologically*. Then, in response to the challenge of developing a constructive proposal under the call of those aims, I have weighed the merits of what is an increasingly popular method: that of selecting a theological theme from within Holy Scripture and the Christian tradition, which is epistemically significant, and making that motif central to one's overall approach to the whole discipline of theological epistemology. I have weighed the method by examining two proposals which employ it, and then laid over those proposals our four touchstones of appraisal to see how that might illuminate the utility of the method for the purposes of the thesis. My claim is not that these authors themselves aspired to the attributes I have identified and are attempting to embody.

However, given the increasing frequency with which Christian thinkers are taking the approach of making a given theological motif *central* to their overall account of epistemology from a theological perspective, this chapter seeks to makes a contribution to the scholarly discussion by asking the higher level question about the utility of a thematic strategy, and that has required providing a stance from which to assess. I have concluded that though the strategy has proved generative, much depends - as one might expect - on the motif that is chosen and whether, when taken on its own terms, it is sufficiently robust enough to indeed play a central

role. In order for a genuinely theological rationality to remain operative within the method, it is vital that the selected theme be allowed to contribute on its own terms - traced along the integrity of its own trajectories. This involves a call to some measure of exegetical care and attention to the theme that is selected, and conversely some measure of resistance to cashing out on the motif's epistemological insights too early - before its unique specificity comes to bear. I have largely found that the authors we engaged with embodied our adjectives of appraisal to the degree their selected motifs naturally bore them resources that enabled them to develop these aspects of an adequate theological epistemology, or not. These observations position me to begin to make my own positive contribution to the related scholarship.

Commending the Motif of Witness/Testimony

In the introduction of the thesis, I argued that it is an opportune time for theology to revisit the motif of witness/testimony, in part because of a revival of philosophical interest in reflecting on the phenomena.[119] Here, having affirmed the generative potential of a thematic approach to theological epistemology but having also established, through comparison of the works of Meek and Stackhouse, the importance of selecting a sufficiently robust theme, I now want to contend that the motif of witness is a superior candidate for contributing toward theological epistemology via a thematic strategy. In maintaining this, I am not meaning to imply that I am here - within the bounds of this thesis - attempting development of the motif toward its *full implication* for theological epistemology. Rather, I am beginning that process within the constraints of the doctorate, in anticipation of further opportunity to develop this vital theme in future. With that circumspect intent in mind, I commend the motif for its greater resonance with the non-reductive stance toward the topic I have established above than the two examples I have examined.

---

119. And shortly I will argue why it is also the case that turning to a focus on testimony is a vital corrective for our societal situation in many Western cultures, where there is a clear erosion of public trust, on the one hand, and a and manifest lack of judgement as pertains who *is* trusted as reliable guides (or we might call them "testimonial authorities"). Thus, not only is the revival in philosophical interest a reason for a turn to testimony. Perhaps even a more compelling reason is that it addresses issues central to our current post-truth cultural crises.

In terms of opportunity to wrestle with the theme from within a genuinely theological rationality, the biblical motif of witness/testimony is much more clearly entwined with other epistemological themes than either that of vocation or covenant - as important as those motifs are. I will demonstrate shortly, as we turn to examine the motif of witness in John's Gospel, that there it maintains a vital and fundamental relation to each of the gospel's other epistemologically freighted themes: those of truth, belief, and knowledge. The plenitude of these relations provides ample field in which to explore what the motif of witness might bear without having to strain the theme beyond the actual position it holds in Scripture. Here is ample room for the genuine employment of a theological rationality.

Further, in terms of contributing to theological epistemology with active resonance in relation to a Trinitarian and Christological ontology, the phenomena of witness is very well placed. No sooner has the Evangelist of John's Gospel spoken of the *Logos* that was in the beginning, the one who was with God, who also was God - the one through whom all things were made that have been made - when we are told of a man sent from God who was not himself this light, but was instead one who came to bear witness to the light. Here the motif has embedded within it Christological resonance from the start. And as the narrative of the gospel progresses forward, the theme is developed to full Trinitarian effect, as not only the Son, but also the Father and the Spirit are said to testify. Therefore, it only falls to me to uncover the connections between a testimonial epistemology and a Trinitarian and Christological ontology; far from risking straining the motif beyond its genuine epistemological import, here the threat is falling short of opening all that could be opened and discovered in so rich a field. Anthropologically, the motif also shows some measure of promise in that it so clearly rooted in our embodiment. Embodied experiences of seeing and hearing, and speaking of what one has seen and heard, are central to the phenomena of testifying.

Contextually and missionally, the motif of witness commends itself along each of the three contextual axis I drew out - the contexts of salvation history, that of our current early 21st century Western context, and that of the church. Far from lending itself to an individualistic or an

a-ecclesial contribution to epistemological discourse, motifs of testimony are inherently communal. The focus of testimonial knowledge is not a private and personal experience of knowledge. Rather it is an expression of knowledge at the heart of a shared community, where one speaks what they have seen and heard on matters vital to that community for the purpose of enabling that community's critical discernment. In other words, the witness has no need to exist save for the community's pursuit of truth together. Further, the witness expects to be attended by other witnesses, with whom they hope to share concord. They hope to be trusted, but also anticipate that healthy suspicion would only be natural on such contestable matters vital to the community's understanding of their overall story as a people. Thus the witness understands that their testimony ideally should be attended by that of others, with whom they hope to share some measure of concord alongside differences that will surely remain.[120]

The ecclesial connections are clear: though witness would have been understood for its communal significance among early Christians not only with regard to "religious" matters, it became central for the early church - in as much as the NT gives us insight into it - not least because they understood themselves as having been commissioned by Jesus Christ to be witnesses who testified to what they had seen and heard of him and his ministry, and to do so in consonance not only with one another, but vitally with the testimony of none other than the Holy Spirit - their testimony arising not merely from their experience of Jesus, having been with him "from the beginning" (Jn. 15:27), but fundamentally from their experience of that history as illumined and confirmed by the work of the Holy Spirit.[121] Pentecost, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the early disciples represented, centrally, the birth of an *ecclesia* of *martureō* (Cf.

---

120. It is important to say "ideally" here, as sadly there are seasons in communities of faith, and in whole societies, where "truth stumbles in the streets" (Cf. Is. 59:14) and deception is so widespread that the true witness tragically needs to raise their voice as a solitary call. But even then, the witness to the truth longs to be attended by other resonate voices - far from rejoicing or taking pride in their lone voice, they grieve it. A study in the life of the prophet Jeremiah, for example, would underscore this point. With thanks to Professor Aaron Simmons for drawing out this clarification.

121. Matthew 10:18; John 15:26-27; Acts 1:8; Revelation 12:11.

Acts 14:3; 23:11). These preliminary observations suggest that developing the motif of witness for contribution to matters of theological epistemology should prove generative in highlighting something of the nature of knowledge of God as rooted in the church and extended into the world as the *ecclesia* of Christ bears witness to his saving work and, through its testimony of what it has seen and heard of Christ, announces to all who would hear that this salvation is open to all.[122]

Further, a focus on motifs of witness bears promise for fruitful connection with a late modern early 21st century Western context. In 2016, *Oxford English Dictionary* selected "post-truth" as its word of the year, which they define as an adjective "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion that appeals to emotion or personal belief". Some of the short listed words for the same year included: "alt-right" and "brexiteer". With Brexit and the 2016 US election now seemingly a world away (although for most Americans it has yet to feel that way!), "post-truth" is used less in common parlance, but labels of "fake news" and "misinformation" and "conspiracy theories" frequent public discourse with a prominence that they failed to have even six years ago. Western publics are increasingly polarised and ill equipped to recognise where the fake news and misinformation actually are. The increasingly worrying implication is that far too many are assured that fake news and misinformation reside very much at home in "the other camp" but not in one's own.

Viewing these cultural phenomena through the lens of witness will not provide a comprehensive enough picture so as to be sufficient on its own to account for them. However, addressing these urgent disruptive dynamics from the standpoint of testimony, I argue, is necessary as one central aspect of a multifaceted response. It would diagnose the current emphasis on these dynamics of "fake news" and "misinformation" as reductionist, given the moral agents behind their production are safely in the background when these labels are traded. This may be partially as a result of assuming an online forum for our contemporary public discourse, where anonymity is easily had and the moral agent can easily distance themselves

---

122. Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:7-8; Romans 10:1-15.

from their account, with little to no accountability. Hence the focus on "news" and "information", rather than on those human agents who are the sources of them, presuming to bear testimony to the public on matters of great importance to our communities. If we need a strong indication that a turn to speaking of "fake news" and "misinformation" might facilitate further degradation of our cultural capacity to discern between true and false testimony, rather than help it, we need only note that such language is used as often, if not much more often, by those clearly seeking to deceive the public as it is by those who are trying to get to the truth of the matter.[123]

Examining these dynamics through the lens of witness/testimony would lead us to speak of "false testimony", over against "fake news" and "misinformation". This is not to limit the application of testimonial categories to strictly legal spheres, where the language of false testimony is perhaps most at home in modern Western cultures. But when viewed through the lens of Holy Scripture, the ninth commandment is not only relevant to what we would understand as legal contexts alone. Rather, in ancient Israel testimonial categories were applied yes, to issues of breaking Mosaic Law in what would seem comparable to our "criminal" or "legal" sense, but also to issues of land and marriage and exchange of goods, and one account of the people's history over against another. Thus one could testify before a gathering of the community and its leaders on any matter of vital importance for the life of the community, and to bear false witness in this context - which is not merely to lie, but to lie publicly, on a matter of great importance to the community's common life together, within the context of it gathering for common critical discernment as to the truth of the matter. Here, to speak of false testimony is to make clear that this is not only lying, but lying to the great harm of the common good; and to speak of false testimony is to highlight the moral agency of the one who lies about what they have seen and heard in this context. Though it too speaks of a content to the message - testimony, like news, or

---

123. One need not look further than the use of the language of "fake news" by former US President Donald Trump to realise that his use of such language is key to the furtherance of his false testimony. This should signal to us that something is amiss, and help us see that it is a form of misdirection. A testimonial logic helps us get to the deeper issue of discernment regarding testimony, and reliable testimonial authorities (with thanks to Professor Aaron Simmons for drawing this point out).

information - the phenomena of testimony does not reduce the matter to issues of true or false "content" and instead highlights the dynamics of our apportionment of trust (or lack thereof) toward the one bearing their testimony to us, and helps us become more attuned to how we might discern whether this "content" is true or false because it attunes us to the witness themselves, who accompanies and supports their testimony, and what interests and motivations might maintain that would inform our apportionment of trust.

Within this contemporary context, examining our public discourses through the lens of testimony not only highlights reductionist ways matters of truth and falsity are commonly spoken about, it also discerns a want of categories for testimonial discernment in significant swaths of modern Western publics. By saying this, I do not mean to argue that this lack of capacity for testimonial recognition and discernment is limited to one segment of society over against another - conservative or liberal, educated or less so, lower class or upper-middle class, etc. Instead, I observe a frightening credulity in many different segments of society, though often the matters upon which one is prone to be credulous are different within those different segments. In the place of credulity, an understanding of testimonial discernment recognises the inability for our common life together to proceed save on the basis of mutual trust in one another's words, while at the same time recognising that many will seek to twist that trust to serve not the truth or its flourishing amidst the community, but instead their own interests. A testimonial logic is not an airtight fail safe against false testimony, but it does foster both the importance of trust, the absolute necessity of pursuing the truth *together*, and the critical safeguarding of trust through a healthy suspicion that false testimony does exist, even close to home, in one's own camp. In response, it offers a logic of discernment for public discourse which, ancient though it may be, is nonetheless seemingly just as relevant as ever, and all the more given how effectively false testimony spreads, without accountability, via the internet. As mentioned above, a multifaceted approach is surely needed; but central to any approach at mitigating these cultural dynamics concerning public truth should be attempts to equip publics to be more discerning, inspiring and

empowering them to begin to discover what it might look like to foster practices of testimonial discernment amidst their own local communities.[124]

Further with regards to context, the above account of the *travail* of testimony in contemporary Westerns societies signals, implicitly, its place amidst salvation history. Within John's Gospel, a Trinitarian testimony does indeed unfold between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - as the Son attests to having come from the Father, bearing his testimony, and the Father and the Spirit testify to the centrality of the Son - his life, death, and resurrection - for the furthering of God's unified salvation purpose within history. This Trinitarian bearing for testimony should be understood as expressing analogically something of the life of the Triune God *ad extra*, which is experienced eternally *ad intra.* To hold this position is to acknowledge that there is an analogous relation between the testimonial relations we see amidst the Triune God through the drama of his salvation works *ad extra*, and the eternal life of God that exists eternally *ad intra*. These testimonial dynamics do give us insight into the eternal life of Triune honour and reciprocity. However, it would be a category mistake to attribute testimony itself to the internal, eternal life of the Trinity, given that testimony is clearly a category of critical discernment under travail in the very contexts where testimony is attributed to the Father, Son, and Spirit. They offer their testimony of one another amidst and for the world.

Therefore, testimony - as with knowledge in the sense of one knowing something vital that another does not, and therefore holding capacity to teach another - will pass away in the

---

124. How would this approach relate to a Rawlsian standard of public reason? Rawls' teaching on public reason encourages "reasonable citizens" to make their *public* case for a specific political vision not on the basis of the their unique religion or worldview (whether that be Christian, Muslim, Atheistic, etc. - even if it is indeed aspects central to a specific worldview that motivate a desire for the political vision commended). Instead, Rawls urged that responsible public reason is exercised by basing one's attempts at public persuasion upon values that all "reasonable citizens", or at least most, could identify with - trusting as he did that the main religions and worldviews do give rise to similar central values, which can be identified by "reasonable" people. We are learning in our "post-truth" societies, however, that perhaps more fundamental to "shared values", as important as those clearly are, is a shared understanding of what the truth of our common life and history together is. For example, "Was the 2016 US presidential election stolen by Joe Biden, or not?" In other words, from a testimonial perspective, there can be no discussion about "shared values" if there is not some significant shared understanding of the central events that have shaped our common past, and are shaping our common experience of the present. With thanks to Professor Aaron Simmons for drawing out this relation to Rawls.

eschaton. No one will say, "know the LORD", as all will know him.[125] In this light, reflection on the motif of witness contributes toward development of a theological epistemology *on pilgrimage*. It is sensitive to its context in salvation history as contributing toward our understanding of the nature of our own theological understanding after Fall, and through redemption, until fulfilment. The witness leans forward to the final judgement of all testimony, even as they do believe their testimony expresses a genuine (though provisional) seeing and hearing even now.[126]

Finally, I have argued above that a truly theological account of human knowledge of God will draw out its ethical entailments. How might viewing issues in theological epistemology through the meta-lens of the phenomena of witness help illumine the intimate connection between knowledge of God and the ethical life? I have argued immediately above that the lens of testimony helps elucidate the ethical character of our public discourse - rather than just "news" and "information" we are constantly taking in the *testimony* of others in the forms of news and information and, whether we are mindful of the need for a dynamic of discernment or not, we

---

125. Cf. Jeremiah 31:34; Habakkuk 2:14; 1 Corinthians 13:8-13.

126. To conversant with the analytic discussion on the epistemology of testimony, this surely is a strange claim indeed! How would one know the epistemic contours of the eschaton? And will we not, even then, still be dependent upon the "say so" of others for our growth in knowledge? Granted, there would be no way for us to know the epistemic contours of the eschaton save if God were to reveal something of it to us before that time. Yet, though some passages of scripture do emphasise that in some sense "knowledge" (in the sense of one needing to instruct another on a vital matter they do not know about) ceases (Cf. Jer. 31:34; Hab. 2:14; 1 Cor. 13:8-13.), my main reason for emphasising that "testimony" ceases in the eschaton is that in scripture the motif of witness/testimony is consistently found in contexts of conflict over contestable matters of great importance for the discernment of the community. Thus, as I will argue further shortly, when the Bible speaks of testimony it is not interested merely in our everyday gaining of knowledge by the "say so" of others, in some generic sense. "Knowledge by means of the say so of others" is a necessary but not sufficient aspect of the definition of the Bible's use of the category. Vitally, the Bible's use of the motif of witness is acutely attuned to situations of communal conflict over matters of central importance for the community - which are often matters where the stakes are high and thus there is in-built temptation for them to be lied about through false testimony. Thus this aspect of witness as being key to a community's discernment on a contested matter (i.e. amid conflict), is what leads me to say that witness, as such, will not be present in the eschaton - because conflict and lying will clearly not be present. We may indeed still learn from the "say so" of others, but we will never again need to call two or three witnesses so that we have a chance of arriving at communally agreed truth regarding a contested matter over which we fear false testimony may be given. In this sense, we confess, "witness, it will cease", just as we say, "where there is knowledge, it will pass away" (1 Cor. 13:8).

should engage these tides of testimony with an eye (and an ear!) to whether or not they should be heeded. This involves being attuned to the ethical context surrounding the presentation of testimony, and involves an ethical stewardship on behalf of the ones who testify, and likewise on behalf of those who listen and have a choice as to how they will respond once presented with the testimony. Thus, when viewed under each of the adjectives of appraisal established above, the motif of witness/testimony demonstrates ample promise for being generative toward creative constructive contribution within theological epistemology.

Conclusion

After establishing the stance that this thesis adopts toward the relation between epistemology and theology within the discipline of theological epistemology, and committing to what is entailed in working from this stance, I assessed the merits of the increasingly popular thematic strategy within the discipline. I argued that it has been used to helpful effect, but cautioned that its usefulness in a given instance depends much on whether a robust enough theme is chosen, given the strategy by definition not only asks how a given theme might relate to theological epistemology but instead, as I have demonstrated, makes it central to one's entire account. Then I have argued, should a thematic strategy be adopted, that the motif of witness bears much promise for such a role within constructive development in the field, given its resonance with each of the four virtues of a non-reductive approach that I identified. Yet, to remind of a vital qualification: in arguing this I am not meaning to imply that I am seeking to develop the theme to its full epistemic potential in this thesis. Rather, I am here only beginning to unpack its import, furthering my overall argument that the motif of witness, as expressed in aspects of its biblical and phenomenological manifestations, provides not only a "source" for theology, as has often been noted, but also an analogical lens through which human knowledge of God can be helpfully explored. That is to say, I am arguing that there is a connection between the epistemic entailments bound up with being a witness, and those of knowing God. I now turn to the next

stage of the argument, which is to unfold the character and significance of the witness motif in John's Gospel.

Chapter Two: Discerning the Defining Characteristics of the Testimonial Logic of John

"The Johannine theology of witness merits the greatest possible attention in connection with our current burning problems concerning the foundations of faith".

Rudolf Schnackenburg[127]

A theological epistemology attempts a theologically informed self-understanding of the nature of our own human theological understanding. Most often it concerns itself with the nature of human knowledge of God (rather than the more general question of knowledge as it arises as a theological topic, which would then centre the discussion on God's knowledge of God and all else), but at times it attempts to explain aspects of the nature of human knowledge more generally. My argument is that attending to the nature of testimony in its biblical, contemporary philosophical, and theological dimensions - rather than merely providing insight into one 'source' of theological knowledge among many - in fact furnishes an overall lens through which to address a range of concerns relevant to theological epistemology. In other words, if theological epistemology, broadly speaking, is seeking to sharpen our theological understanding of the nature of our own knowing of God and all else known to us, then a Christian's fundamental self-understanding *as witness* is a very good place to start.[128]

---

127. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John, Vol. 2, Commentary on Chapters 5–12*, trans. Cecily Hastings, Francis McDough, David Smith, and Richard Foley (London: Burns & Oates, 1980), 120.

128. I am not here claiming that contributing toward theological epistemology by means of reflection on the epistemic stance of the witness is *the most fundamental* loci one could approach the topic from. One could profitably contribute to the field by exploring other motifs that are closely tied to epistemic themes in scripture, as the motif of witness is, thus discovering other potential "epistemic stances" that could be generative for theological epistemology. For example, one could explore the relation between the rich epistemic themes in Ephesians and the "epistemic stance" of being a child, given the letter's epistemic themes are often closely related to the framing of the identity of the Ephesian Christians as children of God the Father (Cf. Eph. 1:1-14, 17; 2:3, 18; 3:14; 5:1-8; 6:23). Therefore, I am not claiming that the epistemic stance of the witness is somehow the most basic Christian stance. I do claim that the self understanding of the witness is fundamental to Christian theological epistemology, given in part that Christianity is based on the incarnation of the Son of God within history, which was witnessed and testified to. But there are other fundamental approaches to the nature of human knowledge of God in addition to this one (with thanks to Professor Aaron Simmons for drawing this connection out).

But immediately at least one concern arises, and one question. The justifiable concern is as follows: even if we were to grant that to bear the mantle of a witness (over against other stances we might assume like that of a sceptic or a judge, for instance) is to embrace certain "epistemic entailments" native to testifying, surely to treat the nature of Christian witness from the angle of theological epistemology risks reducing and thus significantly distorting it. Surely the rich and varied phenomena of Christian testimony cannot and should not be reduced to, and constrained by, the concerns of theological epistemology. Might the Christian theme of witness have only superficial relevance to the nature of human knowledge? For example. what if it is primarily about something else - say, mission without reference to questions of knowledge?[129] If the implication here is true, then to approach the theme of witness from the set of assumptions and questions which presently concern theological epistemology would be a risk to say the least.

I respond to this concern in two ways. Firstly, I sympathise with its implied critique and seek to heed its caution. On prevalent definitions of knowledge, especially in the analytic tradition - knowledge as "justified true belief", say - it would be the case that to attend to the theme of Christian witness as if it were only concerned with the transmission of knowledge so conceived would be to reduce the phenomena at hand to the point of distortion. One clue that this is the case is the fact that post-resurrection testimony to Christ by believers in him, from its inception, is presented as only possible through the work of the Holy Spirit. The apostles' witness cannot be what it is to be until they are "clothed with power from on high"; until then they are to wait in the city (Luke 24:48-9; Cf. Acts 1:8; John 15:26-7).

This would not be the case if the phenomena of Christian testimony by believers, understood here as only a post-Pentecost possibility, could be adequately encompassed by a concern for merely bearing or transmitting justified true belief by means of verbal articulation. That would be to assume it shared largely the same field of explanation as my testifying to any

---

129. As the argument develops throughout the thesis, I demonstrate that the motif of witness is very much concerned about knowledge, and carries that concern in service of mission.

extraordinary event I have experienced: seeing my home city erupt into riots as the Vancouver Cancucks lost the final game of the 2011 Stanley Cup final to the Boston Bruins on home ice, for example, or - more extraordinary still - the experience of being present at the birth of our firstborn. As exceptional as these are, they could be attested to by anyone present, including anyone without the Holy Spirit. Now this is not to say that Christian testimony and the phenomena of "general attestation" do not share meaningful overlap in their respective fields of description - I will argue that they do. But it is to sympathise with the danger of a reduction of Christian testimony in relating it to the questions of theological epistemology and some of its assumptions about knowledge. We will guard against this danger by seeking to attend to the to the unique fullness of the phenomena of Christian witness on its own terms, even as it stands seemingly unrelated to or beyond the questions raised by our enquiry.

Further, there is a second way of responding to the concern of reducing the phenomena of Christian witness to matters of knowledge - a more perceptive one. That is to attempt to be more theologically rigorous in our understanding of what knowledge itself *is* as we relate it to the phenomena of Christian witness. Seeking to encompass that phenomena within a discussion of knowledge understood along the lines of older analytic definitions of "justified true belief", or more current and nuanced extensions of the same discussion, would be to reduce the phenomena of Christian witness. But if we establish our definition of knowledge from the outset within a broader theological understanding of knowing, one which includes but extends beyond what we might call "articulate knowing", then it might be that the enacted Christian self-understanding as witness could be approached from desire to explore the nature of human knowledge of God through it, with less risk of reduction to it. This approach would seek to allow the fullness of what witness is to expand our understanding of what knowledge and knowing is, and it is the approach ventured in this thesis.[130]

---

130. This is to say, from the Christian theological stance that the thesis launches from (as explored at length in the first chapter), that Christian theology can change our definition of what knowledge itself is. But this is not to say that an a-theological theory of truth (if there is or could be such a thing), would be of no use to Christian theology

I indicated that there was not only at least one significant concern with approaching the testimonial logic resident in the New Testament from the angle of theological epistemology - that of a reduction of Christian witness - but also one question: namely what is meant by a "testimonial logic" in the New Testament at all? I have chosen to develop an answer to this question by extensive engagement with the motif of testimony in the Fourth Gospel. I do this without assumption that it encapsulates all variances on the wider biblical theme of witness/testimony, but simply that it does represent the pinnacle of biblical usage due to the extent and depth of its engagement with the theme.[131] It thus warrants close attention. In this chapter I argue that its narrative not only presents a series of witnesses testifying to the identity of Jesus Christ. Instead it goes further in locating them within an overall testimonial logic woven throughout the Gospel, through which it invites belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. For those who do believe, this testimonial logic is understood to be the appropriate epistemic correlate to the encounter with the eternal Word incarnate. In other words, to enter into knowledge of God through Jesus Christ is to bear that knowing in the manner of a witness, with

---

at all; nor is it to prohibit the theologian from commending a theory of truth she believes to be most conducive to human flourishing without appeal to her theological sources as authoritative in themselves, such that those fellow philosophers who do not share her theological convictions might engage with, and be helped by, her work. It is to highlight that in so doing she may be at risk of reducing her account of what knowledge itself is. This again illustrates the importance of approaching our topic from within a genuinely theological rationality.

131. Allison Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness* (SNTSMS, 31; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 66. Echoes of this highly developed employment of the motif of witness in the Gospel of John are found elsewhere in the Johannine corpus, most notably in 1 John and the Apocalypse. As with other strong thematic resonances between the five different works that comprise the corpus, the similar uses of the motif of witness shared among them are explained either by appeal to a common author, or a common "Johannine community", which gave rise to the works. It seems most plausible that 1 John was written after the Gospel, given it seems to assume the teaching of the Gospel. For example, 1John gives instructions on the "new commandment" without actually naming it (1 Jn. 2:7-8; Cf. John 13:34-35), and 1 John 5:6 speaks of Jesus coming by "water and blood" without explanation of what this means (but there is strong verbal parallel with John 19:34). See Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters* (BTNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 93. It could be that the first epistle, along with the other two, were written before the Gospel and that the apparent dependencies assume not a prior written Gospel but instead well established traditions within the community, whether written in part or oral. But either way, it is still correct to say that the Gospel represents the fullest and most sophisticated development of the motif of witness that we have in the New Testament, and indeed in the whole of the Bible, and thus sheds substantial light on how it is used in 1 John, even as 1 John does enrich the motif significantly (with thanks to Professor David Downs for drawing out this connection between 1 John and John's Gospel). Below I will explore the Gospel's sophisticated use of the motif in relation to Isaiah, further underscoring "pinnacle usage".

the epistemic implications that a testimonial logic entails. However, before attending to John's testimonial logic, two issues of method of approach to the motif of witness in the Fourth Gospel need mention.

The Gospel According to John, and its Testimonial Logic: Commending an Inductive Approach

There is wide consensus within contemporary New Testament scholarship that the motif of witness/testimony is frequently and vitally employed within the Fourth Gospel (and to a lesser degree in the Johannine Epistles and Apocalypse).[132] John the Baptist (1:6-8, 15, 19-42), the Samaritan Woman (4:39-54), the "writings" (5:39), the crowd who were witness to the raising of Lazarus (12:17), the Holy Spirit and the disciples (15:26), the signs/works of Jesus (5:36; 10:25), God the Father (5:37; 8:18), Jesus himself (3:11; 8:13-8; 18:37), and the Beloved Disciple (21:24) are all said to testify. This multiplicity of witnesses, placed as they are at different angles within the narrative, claim to represent independent perspectives which are then drawn by the author into its commendation of a consensus on the reality and meaning of Jesus Christ: He is the incarnation of the Son of God come as a light into a world of darkness to save.

As I have mentioned, this chapter aims to discern the defining characteristics of this witness motif. Given John's investment in a testimonial logic, with what understanding of the nature of witness is the Fourth Gospel developing the motif? And to what ends does it weave it through its narrative? Here we are seeking to perceive the nature of witness in John by attending

---

132. See for example: Robert G. Maccini, *Her Testimony is True: Women as Witnesses according to John* (JSNTSup, 125; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 55–62; Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, ed. Noel Hoare and John Riches (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 50 (n5), 84, 145, 172, 293 (n4), 553; C. K. Barrett, *Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2 ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1978), 159, 258, 264–68, 339, 482, 583–84, 587–88; Edwin Abbott, *Johannine Vocabulary: A Comparison of the Words of the Fourth Gospel with Those of the Three* (London: A & C Black, 1905), 152; Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 89–92; Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel according to John: A Theological Commentary* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997), 14–6, 79, 202–3, 291; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John, Vol I* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 243–47; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 120 (also n1); J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 24–27; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 33; A. E. Harvey, *Jesus on Trial: A Study in the Fourth Gospel* (London: SPCK, 1976).

closely to how it presents itself within the narrative of the Gospel. This manner of opening and wrestling with the question of definition, in contrast to beginning with studies of the possible lexical backgrounds for John's use of μαρτυρία and μαρτυρέω is particularly important in the study of any of the heavily theologically vested vocabulary embedded into the fabric of John's Gospel. I am not suggesting that an inductive approach to definition is necessary for all the words it employs. But right from our encounter with λόγος four times over in the Prologue (1:1, 14), we are given strong indication that our text is strategic, provocative, nuanced, playful, and at times intentionally obscure,[133] in how it develops meaning (and artfully juxtaposes *meanings*) of the words and themes that habituate the Gospel.

It is true generally that the gospel message had to announce itself from within the belief-systems, philosophies, and vocabularies of its originating contexts and, as it did so "had to employ the languages available at the time, turning words, concepts, ideas, and phrases to its own account."[134] And of all the canonical gospels, perhaps John most demands that we recognize this gospel dynamic of turning of words "to its own account". In this regard Peter Phillips, in his excellent study on *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel*, comes to the following conclusion on John's theologically charged use of λόγος in the Prologue:

> The author of the Fourth Gospel, then, takes an ambiguous word, which has a good deal of religious and philosophical potential. He then places this word into a context which destabilizes the readers' understandings of the lexeme and so destabilizes their assumptions about the use of the word: Christians are taken aback by a new way of identifying the message about the Messiah with the Messiah himself; Stoics are shocked by a λόγος incarnate; Jews are offended by God's agent, whether Word, Wisdom or Torah, identified with God; Gnostics are appalled by the reference to flesh and the emphasis on the Hebrew Scriptures. In other words, by placing the lexeme in a context which questions the integrity of the semantic domain presupposed by the readers, the author can encourage the reader to suspend disambiguation until further information is gathered. The author encourages the reader both to understand λόγος within their own cognitive categories, but also to question these categories. In speech accommodation terms, we could say that the author/narrator converges with the outgroup by using a

---

133. Abbott, *Johannine Vocabulary*, 4.

134. Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 12.

> common religious/philosophical lexeme. However, he also employs divergence by seeking to change the cognitive category within which this word operates.[135]

Phillips here argues that it is vital to recognize both continuity and discontinuity, convergence and divergence, between the Prologue's use of λόγος in relation to its familiar semantic ranges within discourses its audiences would have regularly traded in (acknowledging that beyond the Prologue John employs the word to a broadly standard effect). For Phillips, this by no means diminishes the importance of attending to general Greek usage, other Christian usages, and key Hellenistic and Jewish backgrounds for grappling with John's λόγος. But crucially, he sees that John's Gospel, though creating a bridge of identification with its readers in using the word, is primarily kicking up the dust of their settled semantic ranges for λόγος as they read ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο, in order that their understanding of the word and concepRowet may then resettle, with many of its original primary connotations now bearing the image of Jesus Christ. Hence primarily the context of the gospel itself, and specifically the Christ narrated within it, becomes the central focus in Johannine definition.

Crucially, I am arguing that a similar approach is necessary for discerning the definition and functions of the witness/testimony motif in the Fourth Gospel. If we hope to grasp something of its implications for a Christian theological epistemology, we must first seek to discern its meaning and purpose by close attention to the Gospel itself. Like the Gospel's other interrelated epistemologically thick lexica - ἀλήθεια, γινώσκω, εἴδω, λόγος, πιστεύω, σημεῖον, σκότος, φανερόω, φῶς, and other related words - μαρτυρία and μαρτυρέω are also exercising their labour with a rich nuance that demands and rewards allowing the drive of the Gospel itself to sketch their import in relation to semantic ranges prevalent among its potential initial readers.[136]

---

135. Peter M. Phillips, *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel: A Sequential Reading* (LNTS, 294; London: T & T Clark, 2006), 139–140.

136. Though very sympathetic to Rowe's work, I understand this position to be a related but significantly different approach. Rowe argues that overlapping vocabulary between Stoics and Early Christians is functioning in radically different ways within the two traditions, uses which can only be truly known (and tested) from within a life lived within those traditions: Christopher K. Rowe, *One True Life: The Stoics and Early Christians as Rival Traditions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).

Beyond Treating Individual Witnesses in John: Discerning Witness as Act

In addition to commending an inductive approach to discerning the shape of witness in John, I also argue that many of the treatments of its witness motif within contemporary New Testament scholarship are hindered by structuring the discussion around one or more of the various witnesses identified in the narrative. These approaches structure the discussion by devoting sections to the individual witnesses: John the Baptist, the Samaritan Woman, the Father, Jesus himself, the signs, the Scriptures, the Spirit, Mary Magdalen, the disciples, etc., examined in their unique function as witnesses.[137] This approach has value as it highlights the polyphonic nature of Johannine witness, which is integral to the way witness functions in the gospel, as we will see.

But our first clue that this approach may be missing something crucial is that the word most commonly used to signify a witness in the NT, μάρτυς (martus), though occurring 35 times in the New Testament, does not appear at all in its document most invested in the motif of testimony, the Fourth Gospel.[138] Jean-Louis Chrétien, with his characteristic textual watchfulness, does not miss the significance of this:

> This Johannine preponderance is not without surprises. The very word for *a witness* is absent from the gospel of John (even if translations sometimes introduce it), whereas the verb *to witness* and one of the words for *testimony* (*marturia*) abound. This emphasis on the very act is worthy of attention. John goes from witnessing to the witness and not the reverse.[139]

In other words, the Fourth Gospel focuses on the motif of witness *as action*. Witnesses are identified, but only as they enact their testimony in speech within the drama of the gospel. This

---

137. Merrill C. Tenney, "Topics from the Gospel of John: Part III - The Meaning of 'Witness' in John," (BSac, 132 no. 527; 1975): 229–41; Urban C. Von Wahlde, "The Witnesses to Jesus in John 5:31–40 and Belief in the Fourth Gospel," (CBQ, 43, no. 3; 1981): 385–404; Loren Johns and Douglas Miller, "The Signs as Witnesses in the Fourth Gospel: Reexamining the Evidence," (CBQ, 56, no. 3; 1994): 519–35; Allison Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, 78–127. Though Trites treats the theme by expounding the witnesses, he does so with sensitivity to the narrative.

138. μάρτυς does appear in the Apocalypse (Rev. 1:5; 2:13; 3:14; 11:3; 17:6).

139. Jean-Louis Chrétien, 'Nine Propositions on the Christian Concept of Witness', in *Under the Gaze of the Bible*, trans. John Marson Dunaway (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 86–7.

strategic employment of words of witness in action helps, in part, to underscore that there is no such thing as an *unengaged* witness – no conception of witness as one who has the ability to speak to a matter by virtue of what they have seen and heard, but are at rest in that capability as a mere inactive potentiality. There is no such thing as a *potential* witness in John. One is only a witness in the act of witnessing.[140] For John, those religious authorities of Jesus' milieu who believed in him but did not confess it for fear of being cast out of the synagogue are not witnesses to Christ, no matter the sincerity of their cloaked allegiance to him (12:42. Cf. 9:22). This is true also of Joseph of Arimathea who, we are told, "was a disciple of Jesus but secretly for fear of the Jews" (19:38),[141] and of the disciples after the resurrection but before Jesus' appearance to them, as they bunkered down behind locked doors, again from fear (20:19). John keeps the language of witness far from this dynamic of believing but not confessing. For this gospel, witness is a phenomenon only caught in the act. Thus, I question whether the prevalent manner of treating the theme of testimony in the gospel by means of a series of portraits on the various witnesses employed within it bears the most promise for discerning its meaning and purpose. Instead, I attempt to identify in this chapter the main features of the testimonial logic at play in the gospel, which manifests itself through its various witnesses.

A further weakness of a more static assessment of individual witnesses in the text is that it relies exclusively on a keyword methodology for identifying testimony in the gospel. The keywords are central to discerning the motif; however, once familiarity with those contexts develops, the key words can drop out while it is clear that testimony is being enacted.[142]

---

140. I suggested in the first chapter of the thesis that sounding the depths of motifs of witness for their contribution to theological epistemology aligns with our concern for an *ethical* account of knowing (the fourth of the four touchstones of a non-reductive epistemological account, after *theological, ontological, and contextual-missional)*, and develop what the ethical contours of a witness-epistemology further in the last chapter. But here, in the present focus on witness *as act*, the strong ethical connections are already emerging.

141. ὢν μαθητὴς τοῦ Ἰησοῦ κεκρυμμένος δὲ διὰ τὸν φόβον τῶν Ἰουδαίων (19:38)

142. For example, explicit testimonial language is absent from John 9 and its account of the healing of the man born blind, who testifies clearly to Jesus and his healing of him when summoned for public questioning. It is also absent from the account of Mary Magdalen's post-resurrection encounter with Jesus, and her "announcement" to

Given these dynamics, this chapter's analysis is not structured by means of a selection of witnesses that can be identified as testifying in the gospel. Instead, I have sought to attend to this act of testifying common to the witnesses, seeking to discern what *witness-logic* is at play in its definition. This not only helps address our first concern given above – that of allowing the gospel itself to play a central role in defining the motif – but also this second concern of respecting the gospel's own presentation of witness in action, while being watchful for it even in passages where John's witness keywords are absent. This unique approach has the greatest potential to make a fresh contribution to the scholarship, given that generally NT monographs and articles exploring the motif have most often followed suit after the prevalent witness-by-witness and keyword approaches.

This broader approach to illuminating how the author conceives of this act of testifying – seeking not merely to identify individual witnesses identified by keywords but digging deeper into the testimonial logic within which they speak – also proves more helpful for approaching its theological import within the gospel, which will be important as I turn now to demonstrate the presence and importance of a testimonial-logic embedded in the drama narrated throughout John's Gospel. The first prominent feature of the gospel's testimonial logic raises the question of the theological context of the act of witness.

The Context of the Act of Witness: Sent by God into the World

There is some advantage to beginning a treatment of the theological implications of the motif of witness in John's Gospel with focus on its central witness, Jesus Christ. This approach sets up a

---

the disciples that she had seen the Lord (Jn. 20:18), but this again is clearly an account of testimony very similar to instances where the word group is in the immediate context, as it is in the account of the woman at the well going to tell her villagers that she had met the Messiah (Jn. 4:29 & 39). I have elsewhere developed an appendix, not included with the thesis, which, while not needing to be read for the argument of the thesis to carry, does demonstrate how I trace the motif of witness through the Gospel of John with attention to its various contexts and the measure of polemic within them, and the overall structure of the Gospel as a whole.

certain theological order by honouring the Christological focus of John's Gospel, and indeed its own opening focus on the *Logos* who was from the beginning.[143] But the Gospel itself does not first attribute *testimony* to Jesus, its central figure. Instead it speaks of a "man sent from God, whose name was John", as the first to testify, and we will let the order of the gospel's narrative direct our initial focus on the theme. This has the advantage of first establishing the testimonial logic with which the author is operating, before then discerning how Christ is related to it. This may prove important as Jesus is by no means the only witness found to be testifying in the narrative. And as I seek to demonstrate in this section, this approach also helps found its Christocentric focus within the gospel's broader emphasis on a sending God.[144] So we begin with the man John:[145]

> **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. **9** The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.
>
> **1:6**Ἐγένετο ἄνθρωπος ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ, ὄνομα αὐτῷ Ἰωάννης·**7** οὗτος ἦλθεν εἰς μαρτυρίαν, ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός, ἵναπάντες πιστεύσωσιν δι᾽ αὐτοῦ. **8** οὐκ ἦν ἐ κεῖνος τὸ φῶς, ἀλλ᾽ ἵναμαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός. **9** ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινὸν ὃ φωτίζει πά νταἄνθρωπον ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον. **(1:6-9)**

Here John's ministry is unfolded in relation to both God, from whom he is sent (1:6), and "the light" – previously identified with the eternal *Logos* (1:1-4), who is coming into the world in the

---

143. This approach is admirably demonstrated by Chrétien, "Neuf Propositions sur le Concept Chrétien de Témoignage".

144. Rainbow acknowledges the Christological focus of John's Gospel, tracing the argument for a primarily Christological emphasis within it, in modern New Testament scholarship, to the influence of Bultmann. But he then rightly notes how post-Bultmann scholarship came to recognize that God was among the most neglected topics in New Testament theology. Rainbow thus begins his discussion of Johannine theology with God the Father. Paul A. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, the Epistles and the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 72–75. See also the second chapter of Marianne M. Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2001). For a balancing viewpoint to that of Thompson and Rainbow, which acknowledges the Gospel's emphasis on God the Father while also arguing that it nonetheless is unapologetically Christocentric - as this emphasis was vitally needed in its original Jewish context - see Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 360–63.

145. All English quotations from the Bible are taken from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted. The Greek text used, unless otherwise noted, is the Society of Biblical Literature Greek New Testament.

Son made flesh (1:7, 14) – about or concerning whom (περὶ x2) John testifies. John's testimony, then, does not originate primarily within his own initiative as a spontaneous response to what he has encountered. Rather, we note that the Gospel's first mention of witness, A) begins with an exceptional human being who is nonetheless a mere human being, who B) testifies as one sent to do so by God. John's human act of testimony is comprehended within the redemptive work of God who initiates it in his sending of John to testify that others might believe through him.

The theme of *being sent* is prominent in this gospel.[146] Here I am pointing out how intertwined it is, from the Prologue onward, with the motif of testimony – so much so that each of the most significant witnesses who testify in the narrative of the gospel, outside of the Father himself, are said to have been sent *within contexts that are explicitly testimonial*, as with John above. This is not to say that the purpose for which these witnesses have been sent is *only* ever explained in relation to testimony (John is also said to have been sent to baptise, for example – 1:33), but it is to argue that the act of testimony is inextricably embedded in the prior action of the God who sends witnesses to testify amidst the world. It is true, however, that not all those who testify are also said to have been sent. The Samaritan woman who converses deeply with Jesus at the well and then goes into the town saying, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" (4:29 – an act which the narrator retrospectively calls testimony in 4:39), does so rather spontaneously, it appears, and is not said to have been sent. Likewise, the man born blind, who is healed by Jesus on the Sabbath and cast out of the synagogue for his confession of Jesus, is not *sent* to testify in any clear way (9:1-41). But though we can identify witnesses in the narrative who are not explicitly said to have been sent, each of its key witnesses – i.e. those who play a central role in the narrative and its theological import – are said to have been sent to testify, and those we might call more spontaneous witnesses can be understood as

---

146. πέμπω (pempō) "to send" (32 occurrences in John of the 79 in the NT), and ἀποστέλλω (apostellō) "to send" (28/132) can be used synonymously (see the use of each, related in parallel, in 21:21). ἀπόστολος (apostolos) "apostle" also occurs once in 13:16 (1/80). The theme also appears outside of the presence of these words.

arising to their testimony in response to the prior testimony of the Gospel's central witness, Jesus, and the work of the Holy Spirit who testifies.

Though most English translations place the following words in the mouth of the narrator of the Gospel, they could also be an extension of the baptiser's dialogue with his disciples over the growing prominence of Jesus' ministry.[147] Either way, they bind Jesus' act of testimony within his having been sent by God with the words of God:

> **3:32** He bears witness to what he has seen and heard yet no one receives his testimony. **33** Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. **34** For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.
>
> **3:32** ὃ ἑώρακεν καὶ ἤκουσεν τοῦτο μαρτυρεῖ, καὶ τὴνμαρτυρίαν αὐτοῦ οὐδεὶς λαμβάνει. **33** ὁ λαβὼν αὐτοῦ τὴν μαρτυρίανἐσφράγισεν ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἀληθής ἐστιν. **34** ὃν γὰρ ἀπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὰῥήματα τοῦ θεοῦ λαλεῖ, οὐ γὰρ ἐκ μέτρου δίδωσιν τὸ πνεῦμα **(3:32-4)**

Here the testimony that Jesus bears is so united with God, who sent him, that a reception of Jesus' testimony is an affirmation of the truthfulness of God himself. The Spirit, given without measure, is positioned as an explanation for this identification of Jesus' testimony with the words of God.[148] Jesus' testimony, like that of John above, is understood within the context of a sending God. So too with the testimony of the Spirit, whose act of testimony is introduced only within the context of being sent. Later in Jesus' ministry, he promises his disciples that, "when the Advocate (ὁ παράκλητος) comes, whom I will send to you from the Father (πέμψω ὑμῖν παρὰ τοῦ πατρός) – the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father – he will testify about me (ἐκεῖνος μαρτυρήσει περὶ ἐμοῦ·). And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning" (15:26-27, NIV).[149] Jesus will send the Spirit, proceeding also from the Father, and the Spirit will testify about Jesus. The Spirit's work cannot be *reduced* to testimony (Cf. 16:4-

---

147. See the ESV, NIV, RSV, for example. But note also the NLT, which includes the quotation above as John's words, rather than the narrator's. This blurring of voices may be intentional.

148. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John: Vol. 1, Introduction and Commentary on Chapters 1–4*, trans. Kevin Smyth (London: Burns & Oates, 1968), 386–87.

149. I use the NIV here for its translation of παράκλητος (paraklētos) as 'Advocate'.

15), but his work of testimony to Jesus is comprehended only within the sending of the Father and the Son. As with John, here the first explicit reference to the Spirit's work of testimony is grounded in the sending work of the Father and the Son. The testimonial logic with which the Gospel is operating does not conceive of witness apart from the sending work of God, as we have seen now in the testimony of the principal witnesses of John, Jesus, and the Spirit of truth.

Further, in 15:26-7 above, the disciples are told that upon the sending of the Spirit they too will testify. The testimony of the disciples is in no ways envisioned apart from the sending of the Spirit to testify. From this passage alone, where the disciples' testimony is inextricably linked to that of the Spirit, who is sent, we might conclude by implication that the disciples' testimony is also here envisioned within the sending work of God. This is confirmed later in the narrative, post Jesus' resurrection, when the Evangelist places the fulfilment of the promised reception of the Spirit by the disciples at the point when Jesus appears to the disciples behind locked doors. ""Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you", he said, and breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit"" (20:21-2). Thus, the disciples are sent by Jesus in a way analogous to the Father's sending of the Son, and they are sent in the context of the reception of the Holy Spirit.[150] Therefore we rightly infer, by holding the conclusions of 15:26-7 and 20:21-2 together, that the disciples' act of testimony is also set within the context of their being sent as Jesus himself was sent by the Father, and is made possible by the provision of the Holy Spirit, whose testimony also comes within the context of the sending work of God. Other key witnesses within the text, by extension, are then included in this group of disciples. Mary Magdalen, who is of great importance as the first witness to testify to the risen Lord, is sent by

---

150. John's emphasis on the work of the Spirit, and the Spirit's testimony as the context of the sending of the disciples to testify, is resonate with Kierkegaard's emphasis on the Spirit's gift of faith, which can only be received through death to one's own self-sufficiency. In the next chapter, in dialogue with phenomenological reflections on the category of witness, I will draw out this "agonic" aspect to participation in the knowledge of God as witness. For reflection on this aspect of Kierkegaard's thought in relation to the Holy Spirit and the gift of faith, see J. Aaron Simmons, "Kierkegaard and Pentecostal Philosophy," in *Kierkegaard's God and the Good Life*, eds J. Aaron Simmons, Stephen Minster, and Michael Strawser (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017), 238–39.

him in her testimony: "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father, but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father…' Mary Magdalen went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord" – and that he said these things to her" (ἔρχεται Μαριὰμ ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ **ἀγγέλλουσα** τοῖς μαθηταῖς ὅτι Ἑώρακα τὸν κύριον καὶ ταῦτα εἶπεν αὐτῇ. – 20:17-8).[151] And the Beloved Disciple, who remains anonymous in the text which claims his authorship (21:20-25), also gives the "testimony" of his written gospel (21:24) within the sending commission of Jesus by implication of him including himself within the band of disciples which, as we have seen above, he has clearly set within the sending work of the Triune God.

But what is the significance of understanding God's work of sending as integral to the testimonial logic of the gospel? Of refusing to define testimony apart from this theological context to which the gospel persistently binds its notion of witness? The significance of seeing the act of testimony as only comprehended within the sending work of God is best answered with reference to its destination. If the origin of testimony is God's act of sending, the destination to which that testimony is sent is 'the world', and the aim of the sending of that testimony is salvation for the world. This is evident in the first passage we engaged above. John came not as the light himself, but as a witness to testify to "the true light, who gives light to all people" as that light "was coming into the world (ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινὸν ὃ φωτίζειπάντα ἄνθρωπον ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον – 1:9)." John comes to testify to this light, coming into the world, "that all might believe through him" (ἵνα πάντες πιστεύσωσιν δι᾽ αὐτοῦ. – 1:7).[152] In other words, the context for John's testimony is that into which the light was sent, namely, the world. The Evangelist has us see that Jesus understood "the world" as the context for his own testimony

---

151. Maccini highlights Mary Magdalen's importance as a witness by noting, in addition to the Beloved Disciple, she is the only other witness in the narrative of John's Gospel who can testify to having seen both the cross and the empty tomb, "to the fact that this same Jesus died and rose". Maccini, *Her Testimony is True,* 232.

152. Bernard notes that Abbott argues that ἁὐτοῦ here refers to Jesus, who makes the case that every other use of ἁὐτοῦ in the Prologue refers to him. But Bernard rightly points out that nowhere in the gospel, in all its references to belief, are we instructed to believe *through* Jesus. Jesus is instead the object of faith, rather than a medium of faith,. J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John*, ed. A. H. Mcneile (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928), 9.

as he stands before Pilate. Jesus has said that his kingdom is not of this world. "So you are a king?" Pilate says. Jesus answers "For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice" (ἐγὼ εἰς τοῦτο γεγέννημαι καὶ εἰς τοῦτο ἐλήλυθα εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἵνα μαρτυρήσω τῇ ἀληθείᾳ· πᾶς ὁ ὢν ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας ἀκούει μου τῆς φωνῆς – 18:37). Here the context of Jesus' ministry is the world and his purpose for coming into is to testify to the truth. The 'world' is the theatre of Jesus' testimony to the truth.

But what is the significance of "world" in this gospel? We meet the term κόσμος, which appears frequently in this gospel (78/185), for the first time in 1:9-10, where it appears four times within the two verses. Some discern an overlapping range of meanings in this gospel's use of the word: 1) the created world inhabited by humankind, 2) the world in the former sense but also including human beings, 3) and the world as humanity "fallen and in darkness, yet remaining the object of the love of God (3:16)".[153] But although a handful of passages can be argued to maintain a neutral emphasis, the word appears with negative connotations in its great majority of contexts, where it is understood as the created order which, though created good, has now turned in rebellion against its Creator. Thus the world, in John's characteristic usage, is not comprised by believers in Jesus *at all*. They are chosen out of the world (15:19).[154] As Bultmann notes, this understanding of the world is the basis of the Johannine dualism of God and the world, and of light and darkness.[155] Jesus brings judgment on this world, and the dark "ruler of this world" is cast out under the forceful repercussions of his ministry (12:31. Cf. 16:11). But Jesus is sent into the world not to condemn the world but to save it, as the Lamb of God who takes away its sin (3:16-7; 1:19).

---

153. George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 2nd ed. (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1999), 12.

154. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 122.

155. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 54–55.

Thus this world – which does not readily receive the one sent to save it – is the theatre of testimony. The first words recorded as testimony in the gospel are introduced thus: "John bore witness about him, and cried out (Ἰωάννης μαρτυρεῖ περὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ κέκραγεν λέγων·)."[156] And from this point forward, consistently through the narrative of the gospel, testimony finds its native home at the juncture between God's redemptive work in Jesus and the world which resists him. The disciples are first told that they too will be witnesses on the heels of Jesus' preparatory instructions to them, assuring them that if the world hated him it will hate them also (15:18-16:4). Thus there is no private testifying.[157] It is by nature engaged in God's sending, redemptive work amidst the world and thus by definition is public and open. For the Evangelist, the testimony *cries out* amidst the world, seeking that it might believe. This saving intent is vital to grasp, lest we presume that the Evangelist's setting of the world as the definitive context for witness means that it is inherently combative rather than redemptive. The Evangelist anticipates that the testimony is and will be contested and resisted, but that is not to say that the witness inherently adopts an antagonistic, pessimistic, or contentious stance in their testimony. Rather the stance of the witness can be hopeful in the act of testifying. From the Prologue on, the Evangelist inspires confidence that some do receive the testimony (1:12), and this foreshadowed dynamic plays out throughout the narrative of the gospel, which draws near to a conclusion with the affirmation that the whole story was written "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (20:31).

In summary of this section, then, the testimonial logic at play in the Fourth Gospel does not conceive of testimony as an autonomous witness, merely reporting what they have seen and heard, without any investment in the stakes of the realities to which they testify. Rather the

---

156. In Classical Greek the verb krazō "to cry out" is associated with forensic testimony. See M. J. Edwards, *John* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 23.

157. This is not to say that it is impossible to testify to private matters, or to a secret. It is to say - as far as the way the concept is used in John's Gospel is concerned - testimony is by definition public, and thus to testify about private or secret matters would be to bring an end to their privacy and secrecy through their public disclosure (with thanks to Professor Aaron Simmons for drawing out this connection).

originating source of testimony is the sending work of the God, who sends witnesses to testify to the light amidst the world for the sake of its salvation. John's Gospel does not conceive of the witness as a disinterested onlooker who is pulled aside at random for their version of events. Rather, the witness is heavily invested in their testimony. As I have demonstrated above, each of the Gospel's central witnesses account are sent to testify by God. This is not to deny that a spontaneous testimony also exists. The key testimonies of both the Samaritan woman in John 4, and that of the man born blind in John 9 - not at all peripheral to the overall witness of the Gospel of John - do not arise from any clear sending or commissioning. Nonetheless even their testimony is responsive to, and comprehended within, the overall stream of witness that arises from the central witnesses of the Gospel. Both the Samaritan woman the man born blind arise to their testimony in response to the testimony and work of Jesus, who is clearly understood to be sent by the Father. Therefore, by extension, their testimony does flow from and is dependent upon the sending work of the Father, even though they are not themselves explicitly said to have been sent or commissioned themselves.[158]

In other words, the witnesses of the Fourth Gospel do not arise to their testimony from their curiosity, their self-interests, or even their own initiative, as a mere spectator might. Rather, they have been called and set there for a purpose and within a scope of initiative that arises before and extends beyond them. And if we allow this testimonial logic to inform our understanding of the nature of human knowledge of God, then we will understand our theological knowing as arising within the sweep of the prior redemptive work of God. Seeing human knowing of God within this aspect of the rubric of witness results in seeing human knowledge of God as comprehended in the sending work of God and engaged with people within the world for the sake of their salvation. To the extent that knowing God involves human reason as only one aspect of our being related to him, the logic of testimony challenges us to see that

158. With thanks to Professor David Downs for drawing out further clarification on the spontaneous testimonies that play and important role in John's Gospel.

"God is not summoned into the presence of human reason; reason is summoned before the presence of God".[159] And it sees the theological work of human reason thus within a wider context of discipleship to the God who sends.

Further, knowledge of God informed by this testimonial logic not only locates itself within the sweep of God's prior summons, it also finds itself orientated by that initiative toward people within the world and for their salvation, out in the open, engaged in their discourses, within which testimony speaks. Here the aim of knowledge of God is not mere cognitive accuracy, isolated from the holistic nature of human existence and detached from its location amidst the world. Rather its aim is the salvation of people within the world. There are grounds for what Ward calls an "engaged systematics" in locating theological knowing within the rubric of the witness, who is anything but isolated and disengaged from the histories, languages, locales, and specific discourses of the people within the world into which they are sent with their testimony.[160] Rather their testimony can only find itself enmeshed in and engaged with these dynamics given the aim of salvation. Thus our understanding of human knowledge of God, as informed by testimony as an act arising from the initiative of God and orientated toward the salvation of people within a fallen world, resists both the divorce of theology from its utter dependence upon God and the divorce of theology from engagement with and concern for the world and its salvation in God's name. Theology conceived within the rubric of a testimonial logic thus sees the critique of any theology as "unable to save" as the most devastating that could be landed, and indeed a key to understanding the nature of heterodoxy itself.[161] But the witness, in their concern for the salvation of people within the world, is also concerned from a position of being sobered by their own capacity for false-testimony. They do not see Peter as unique in his

---

159. John Webster, *Holiness* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 17.

160. Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 12–13, 24, 33–34.

161. Graham Ward, "Receiving the Gift," *Modern Theology* 30, no. 3 (2014): 88.

capacity for it as he denies that he knows the Lord three times (18:15-27). Those who testify as sent into the world are acutely conscious of their own need for salvation.[162]

The Sensitivity of the Gospel's Testimonial Logic to the Issue of Self-Testimony: Witness and the Danger of Testifying in One's Own Name for One's Own Praise

If the first striking feature of the Evangelist's conception of testimony is its context as anchored within the salvific work of God, who sends the witness into the world to testify, a second follows on immediately and is also transparent in John's ministry: The witness is focused on pointing toward Jesus in their act of testimony, and this necessarily involves a disavowal of the witness' pursuit of praise from those to whom they testify. This section argues and unfolds this point, crucial as it is for grasping this gospel's internal testimonial logic. John's ministry, having been viewed through a wide lens in the Prologue (1:6-9), is brought into sharp foreground focus as the gospel pivots from the Prologue into the narrative of the Gospel itself. Given that John's ministry was framed in testimonial terms in the Prologue – "he came as a witness to testify" (1:7) – it is not surprising that the beginning of the narrative of the gospel is introduced with reference to the content of John's testimony: "And this is the testimony of John…" (1:19). It is helpful to compare how John is introduced here, in the Fourth Gospel, with the Synoptics' introduction of him. There John is mentioned as 'the Baptist' no less than twelve times, and is also referred to as "the Baptiser" (Mk. 1:4; 6:14, 24).[163] In the Fourth Gospel, however, he is only ever referred to

---

162. I cannot give a full description of what I mean by "salvation" here, or when I make reference to it elsewhere in the project. I do, however, relate my primary focus on the motif of witness to salvation, both here and elsewhere, and so need to offer a preliminary description of what I mean by it. I understand the doctrine of salvation to be a subset of a wider doctrine of redemption, where salvation is understood to refer to *human* redemption. All of creation will be redeemed and made new at the Last Day (Rev. 21:5; Cf. Rev. 20:7-15 which makes clear that the renewal of "all things" is not to be taken to mean that fallen angels will be redeemed, or that human beings who reject Jesus Christ will be saved - I must pass over here the important question of those who have not been given chance to hear the gospel of salvation through Christ, save to assure trust in the absolute wisdom, goodness, and perfectly righteous judgement of God). Central to that redemption of all things is the salvation of human beings from condemnation through the forgiveness of sins offered through faith in Christ - the Son of God become also fully human, whose obedient life, death upon the cross, resurrection, ascension, and return makes possible salvation, by the grace of God. Human salvation is central to the redemption of wider creation as a whole as human sin was central to ushering in the creation's current bondage to decay (Rom. 8:21).

163. John McHugh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on John 1–4* (London: T & T Clark,

as Ἰωάννης. The absence of the baptistic titles for John, clearly prominent in the Synoptics and thus in early Christian parlance, signals an intentional choice by the Evangelist to re-accentuate John's ministry around its testimonial impact.

Thus his ministry of baptism is placed more to the background of the Fourth Gospel's narrative, in comparison to the Synoptics, in order that the testimonial nature of his ministry might stand in the light of centre stage.[164] What then is the content of John's witness? It is striking that the first accounts of his testimony in this gospel have as much, if not more, to say about the man John, who testifies, than the Word to whom he testifies. His testimony, right from its introduction in the Prologue, explicitly points away from himself just as consciously as it points toward Jesus: "John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me'" (1:15). Then, immediately following the Prologue the reader is presented with a fuller account of John's testimony:

> **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."
>
> **1**:**19** Καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ Ἰωάννου ὅτε ἀπέστειλαν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἐξ Ἰεροσολύμων ἱερεῖς καὶ Λευίτας ἵνα ἐρωτήσωσιν αὐτόν· Σὺ τίς εἶ; **20** καὶ ὡμολόγησεν καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσατο, καὶ ὡμολόγησεν ὅτι Ἐγὼ οὐκ εἰμὶ ὁ χριστός. **(1:19-20)**

Here ὁμολογέω (homology) "to confess/profess" is closely linked to μαρτυρία, and is emphasized by occurring twice, the repetition thus underscoring the definitive nature of John's testimony.[165] Following these verses, where John plainly confesses that he is not the Christ, he goes on to testify that he is also not Elijah, nor 'the Prophet' but instead is the one Isaiah wrote about: the voice of one calling in the desert (1:21-23. Cf. Is. 40:3).[166] Here we find John in an act

---

2009), 114.

164. Ibid., 114.

165. Jean Calvin, *The Gospel according to St John: 1–10*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), 27.

166. John's threefold refusal to entertain messianic ambitions contrasts Peter's later threefold denial of

of confession, which we are to understand as a species of testimony (1:19). What does he confess? Given that the Prologue has already established the superiority of Jesus over John – "he himself was not the light" (1:8), "He who comes after me has surpassed me" (1:15) – we perhaps should not be surprised to find the subject of John's initial confession to be not who Jesus is, but rather who John himself is not: "I am not the Christ". And this intimate intermingling within John's witness of confession of who he *is not*, conjoined with testimony to who Jesus *is*, characterises his witness in the opening chapters of the gospel.[167] For John, his pointing toward Jesus in testimony is inexorably fused to a simultaneous pointing away from himself.

Now given this self-lowering nature of John's testimony, and the clear positioning of Jesus as superseding John *within John's own witness*, it is difficult to avoid suspecting that the Evangelist is addressing a polemic amidst his original audience between followers of Jesus and others within some kind of "Baptist sect". Indeed, numerous New Testament scholars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries argued that this Gospel's portrayal of John arises from an historical background of controversy between followers of Jesus as Messiah and enduring followers of the Baptist.[168] Boatman, for example, goes so far as to suspect that this sect saw John as having the authority of a "Revealer", with the debate centring on whether John or Jesus was the Messiah.[169] His argument was supported by appeal to the discovery of the Mandaeans and their dualistic teachings, which they claimed had lineage to John the Baptist.[170] And though

---

Christ (Jn. 18:17, 25, 27). See Köstenberger, *John*, 60.

167. John is not the light, but comes to testify to it (1:8); Jesus surpasses John because, though he comes after him, he is in fact before him (1:15); John baptises with water, but he is unworthy to untie even the sandals of the one who follows him (1:26-7); John is not the Christ but only the one sent ahead of him (3:28); Jesus is compared to a bridegroom, and John to the friend of the bridegroom (1:29); Jesus must become greater, and John less (3:30); Jesus comes from above, John belongs to the earth (3:31). Later in the Gospel we are told that Jesus (through his disciples) was baptising more disciples than John (4:1-2). Jesus himself claims to have a weightier testimony than that of John later still in the narrative (5:36. Cf. also 10:41).

168. Keener, *The Gospel of John, Vol I*, 388.

169. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 17, 88.

170. Edwards, *John*, 20.

appeal to the Mandaeans for plausible background to the Fourth Gospel came to be rightfully contested,[171] support for some kind of enduring following of the Baptist can be recognised from elsewhere in the New Testament itself. The Apostle Paul encounters "disciples" (μαθητής) in Ephesus, as recounted in Acts 19, who are still only familiar with the baptism of John – having not yet received the Spirit or been "baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5). This or a related background would help explain the Evangelist's efforts not only to include numerous humbling statements of John himself, as he exalts Jesus in testimony, but also the Gospel's portrayal of disciples of John leaving his side to follow Jesus at the exclamation of John as Jesus passes by: "Look, the Lamb of God!" (Ἴδε ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ - 1:35-42). It seems highly plausible then, given this data in the text alone, that this gospel has been designed, at least in part, to lead followers of the Baptist, or those strongly influenced by him if not rightly called disciples of him, to embrace Jesus as Messiah.

This of course would have been exceedingly difficult to do without running the risk of alienating the disciples of John. But, with those disciples of John in mind, the choices left open to the Evangelist - convinced as he is that Jesus is the Messiah and that John recognised him as such while living - are either to seek to persuade that Jesus is the Christ *without* reference to John (perhaps out of sensitivity and deference to his disciples), or to commend Jesus as Christ *with* reference to John (which also clearly would have been difficult given the role John played as a forerunner to Jesus). The Evangelist has to make a choice, and takes the latter route, seeking to persuade disciples of John as to the identity of Christ through appeal to what he believes to be John's own insight into the identity of Jesus. This logic is one of solidarity and identification: "You are devoted to John and his message? So (in some sense) am I. And see what he said and who he ultimately was devoted to. Look, the Lamb of God!" In other words, to the degree that disciples of John are part of the Evangelist's intended audience, he identifies with their regard of

171. Ibid.

John - giving him a central place in the Gospel's opening - in order to persuade them to place their faith not in John, but in Jesus Christ as, he argues, John himself would have had them do.[172]

If this is true, it helps explain the unique and prominent place John has in the early chapters of this gospel. And given this probable partial background to the Fourth Gospel's portrayal of John, one might expect this intimate linkage of pointing away from oneself as one testifies toward Jesus to be limited to his ministry uniquely. But, as significant as this would nonetheless remain,[173] this aspect of the Gospel's testimonial logic extends beyond its portrayal of John. Interestingly, though Jesus testifies to himself throughout the gospel's narrative – seen most forcefully in the self-attestation of his "I Am" statements – it nonetheless remains important for Jesus himself, as a witness within the Gospel, to underscore that his self-testimony is not a mere solitary witness. He too points to other witnesses in support of his own:

> **5:30** I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me. **31** If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true. **32** There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true.
>
> **5:30** Οὐ δύναμαι ἐγὼ ποιεῖν ἀπ᾽ ἐμαυτοῦ οὐδέν· καθὼς ἀκούω κρίνω, καὶ ἡ κρίσις ἡ ἐμὴ δικαία ἐστίν, ὅτι οὐ ζητῶ τὸ θέλημα τὸ ἐμὸν ἀλλὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πέμψαντός με. **31** Ἐὰν ἐγὼ μαρτυρῶ περὶ ἐμαυτοῦ, ἡ μαρτυρία μου οὐκ ἔστιν ἀληθής· **32** ἄλλος ἐστὶν ὁ μαρτυρῶν περὶ ἐμοῦ, καὶ οἶδα ὅτι ἀληθής ἐστιν ἡ μαρτυρία ἣν μαρτυρεῖ περὶ ἐμοῦ.

Here Jesus claims that if his own testimony to himself were to remain a solitary one, somehow the testimonial logic at play would be dishonoured and his witness would, in some sense, not be "true" (ἡ μαρτυρία μου οὐκ ἔστιν ἀληθής).[174] Following these words Jesus points to the testimony of John, the Father, and the Scriptures (5:33, 37, 39, 46-47) as attending his own

---

172. With thanks to Professor David Downs for inquiring as to how this strategy would avoid being alienating to disciples of John.

173. Ridderbos suggests that instead of viewing John's self-lowering as he elevates Christ in light of polemic, that we may instead understand the Evangelist as portraying him as the ideal witness to Christ, after which his readers might model their witness: Ridderbos, *The Gospel according to John*, 64.

174. "The statement is based on the principle of witness in Deut 19:15. In Jewish legal procedure it was witnesses, not the accused, who were examined; hence the statement in *Keth.* 2.9: "A man is not attested through himself (i.e. through his own testimony)...A man cannot bear witness for himself" (Str-B 2:466)". Beasley-Murray, *John*, 70 (Note L).

testimony to himself. Thus the testimonial logic that we see reflected in John's ministry – one of not coming in one's own name – is honoured even in the testimony of the Gospel's central witness, and indeed the chief object of the testimony of all of the witnesses placed throughout the narrative of this Gospel, Jesus. Before this passage, Jesus has emphasised that "the Son can do nothing by himself", introducing this thought with the solemn, "Truly, truly I tell you…" which adds emphasis, underscoring the vital importance and solemnity of what is about to be said: Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, οὐ δύναται ὁ υἱὸς ποιεῖν ἀφ᾽ ἑαυτοῦ οὐδὲν (5:19). And this theme is picked up again just paragraphs later in our passage immediately above where Jesus stresses his unity with the Father by saying, "I can do nothing on my own" (5:30), where again οὐ δύναμαι is repeated.[175] This theme of Jesus' dependence upon his Father for the work of his ministry also comes to the fore in how he understands the origin of the *words* he speaks: "The things I have heard in my Father's presence, I speak" (8:38), and "the things I heard from him are the things I say to the world" (8:26). He views himself as "a man who has spoken to you the truth which I heard from God" (ἄνθρωπον ὃς τὴν ἀλήθειαν ὑμῖν λελάληκα ἣν ἤκουσα παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ· τοῦτο – 8:40. Cf. 12:49). Thus the Evangelist thoroughly presents Jesus as One who does not come in his own name, but in the name of his Father.

Why is this aspect of this Gospel's testimonial logic – that of necessarily pointing away from oneself, and refusing to come in one's own name in one's testimony – important? As we follow a touch farther on in the same discourse we began to look at above (5:30-32), we see that this sensitivity to the danger of self-testimony in one's own name is connected to a link the Evangelist sees between testifying in one's own name, and seeking the praise of those to whom one testifies – a dynamic that he believes undermines the potential for belief:

> **5:41** I do not receive glory from people. **42** But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. **43** I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. **44** How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

---

175. In v. 19 δύναμαι is in the 3rd person, as Jesus refers to himself as 'the Son', whereas Jesus uses the 1st person form of the verb in v. 30. The tense, voice, and mood are the same in both instances (present, indicative, middle).

> **5:41** δόξαν παρὰ ἀνθρώπων οὐ λαμβάνω, **42** ἀλλὰ ἔγνωκα ὑμᾶς ὅτι τὴν ἀγάπην τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἔχετε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς. **43** ἐγὼ ἐλήλυθα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ πατρός μου καὶ οὐ λαμβάνετέ με· ἐὰν ἄλλος ἔλθῃ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τῷ ἰδίῳ, ἐκεῖνον λήμψεσθε. **44** πῶς δύνασθε ὑμεῖς πιστεῦσαι, δόξαν παρ᾽ ἀλλήλων λαμβάνοντες, καὶ τὴν δόξαν τὴν παρὰ τοῦ μόνου θεοῦ οὐ ζητεῖτε;

Thus far in the Gospel the Evangelist has already told us that Jesus did not entrust himself to those who believed in him, and did not need humankind's testimony about humanity (2:24-5). And in the immediate context of this passage, Jesus has said that he does not receive (or "accept" – NIV) the testimony of human beings (5:34a). He only recognises the importance of it in so far as it is a means to his hearers being saved (5:34b).

Likewise, though we do come to hear Jesus' cry out in prayer that the Father would "glorify the Son" that the Son may in turn glorify the Father (17:1), here in Chapter 5 we see how imperative it is for the Evangelist that Jesus' pursuit of glory is orientated toward the Father and for the Father, and not toward seeking glory from those to whom he bears witness: δόξαν παρὰ ἀνθρώπων οὐ λαμβάνω (5:41). Here by receiving δόξα (doxa) "glory" (vv. 41, 44x2), Jesus means something akin to seeking or otherwise welcoming the "esteem" or "praise" of his hearers: "His thought is that He does not set before Himself the idea of pleasing men, but that of pleasing the Father. Therefore it is nothing to Him whether men praise Him or not. He does not receive the glory that they might wish to bestow on Him".[176] The Evangelist would have us see that this stance is absolutely fundamental to the integrity of Jesus' testimony – just as a similar stance was constitutive of John's witness in the early chapters of the gospel, as we have seen. This is presented with such force in Jesus' case, in this passage, by its sharp contrast between Jesus who comes in the name of the Father, only to be rejected (v. 41), whilst it can be said of his interlocutors: ἐὰν ἄλλος ἔλθῃ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τῷ ἰδίῳ, ἐκεῖνον λήμψεσθε. Trenchantly, Jesus argues that their capacity *to believe* is at stake in this disposition toward welcoming teachers who

---

176. Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, 331–32.

come “in their own name”, which means something akin to speaking on one’s own authority.[177] Later Jesus will address this point again: “He who speaks on his own does so to gain honour for himself, but he who works for the honour of the one who sent him is a man of truth, there is nothing false about him” (7:18). Thus, Jesus sees at the core of the unbelieving opposition he here encounters a love of the praise of people, which he takes to be antithetical to love for God, and a dynamic that thoroughly undermines capacity for genuine belief (5:41-44). As the narrative of the gospel sweeps on to the end of Jesus’ public ministry in Chapter 12, right before it pivots toward Jesus’ journey to the cross, the Evangelist is summing up the impact of the ministry and says, “Nevertheless many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God” (ἠγάπησαν γὰρ τὴν δόξαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων μᾶλλον ἤπερ τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ - 12:42-3). Here love of glory from people, rather than undercutting belief, undermines open confession and testimony.

In this section I have sought to demonstrate that integral to this Gospel’s testimonial logic is the conviction that the faithful witness is, by definition, one who does not come in their own name, enacting self-testimony and beholden to a love of the praise of the people to whom they are sent to bear testimony. Instead the witness’ act of pointing away from oneself, toward the one in whose name they come, is constitutive of their testimony. This stance of the witness, we can now see, arises from the setting of testimony unfolded in the last section. If testimony arises from the sending work of God, who sends the witness into a world which does not naturally receive their testimony, then the faithful witness will come in the name of the one that sent them, not their own. And if those within the world are in need of salvation, just as we ourselves are, the Evangelist would here have us see that central to what we need saving from is our disordered loves, orientated as they are toward seeking from created things – in this instance glory from other people – what we are meant to seek from God.

---

177. Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 334.

As we allow these reflections on the testimonial logic of the gospel to shape our understanding of human knowing of God, it is striking how the Evangelist avoids any detached conception of knowledge of God. Rather he presents the potential to know God, within the rubric of testimony, as necessarily bound up with the deepest movements of our affections, our social interactions, and our fundamental allegiances. If one dares to take up knowledge of God in Jesus, the challenge the Gospel's testimonial logic brings on this point is one to disavow speaking of God in one's own name, merely by one's own authority. Here theological articulation is necessarily a straining to hear the words of another, words which nonetheless come to be our words, but do not simply originate within us. This stance, we here find, will inevitably require a parallel disavowal of seeking the praise of our fellow human beings as we seek to testify faithfully to God. This temptation is potentially pernicious and subtle, and perhaps all the more within ecclesial and academic circles, which can tend to trade in the giving and receiving of glory in a variety of ways. This theme will be developed later in the thesis. But I now must turn to a third feature of the Gospel's testimonial logic: the vital place for multiplicity of witness within Christian theological articulation arising as it does, in part, from this Gospel's mandate for a multiplicity of witness.

Concord Amidst a Multiplicity of Witnesses as Essential to Testimonial Logic

Thus far I have uncovered two features of the testimonial-logic embedded in the Fourth Gospel. First, that John conceives of the act of testimony as arising from the sending work of God - orientated toward the world and, second, that the act of witness operates within an ethos sensitive to our human capacity for self-glorification and its potential for distorting our testimony to the truth. Thus we saw that the category of witness fosters suspicion of testimony to oneself. We noted in this regard, however, that Jesus both showed regard for this testimonial-logic, but ultimately superseded it in his own self-attestation. This is also the case as we turn our attention to the third feature of John's testimonial logic. In this section I argue that vital to the Gospel's

witness-logic is its assumption that adequate witness to the truth will of necessity arise from a multiplicity of witnesses who share a measure of concord among their independent testimonies. Here again, Jesus shows deference to the Law's demand of multiplicity in testimony. But he then also asserts a uniqueness to the nature of his own testimony.

This assumed necessity of concord of testimony amidst a multiplicity of witnesses is made explicit at points in the gospel, but is also implied. It is implied by the gospel's frequent identification of witnesses who are either presented by the Evangelist in the act of testimony, or are explicitly said to be testifying. John came testifying (1:7-20; 3:26-33), the Samaritan woman preaches to her hometown about the man who told her everything she ever knew (4:39-44); the Father, the Scriptures, and Moses are said to be testifying. Jesus' works or signs testify to him (5:31-39). The Holy Spirit will testify, and the disciples alongside the Spirit, to Jesus (15:26-27). Finally, the gospel itself is framed in its entirety as the testimony of the Beloved Disciple (21:24). The Evangelist presents these witnesses as united in their testimony: they each, in their unique ways, share concord with Jesus' self-attestation as the Messiah, the Son of God.

This testimonial-logic implicit in the gospel's presentation of concord of testimony amidst multiple witnesses is made clear at at least two points in the gospel's narrative. The first was examined above when, in response to his interlocutors' charge that he was testifying to himself and thus his testimony was inadmissible, Jesus responds by saying there was another who testified to him (5:31-39). Though the focus of that passage is on testimony *to-oneself*, it relates to the passage we will focus on in this section, namely testimony *by-oneself*. In chapter 5 Jesus responded to the charge of testifying to-oneself by insisting that he was not testifying by himself - others testified alongside him, thus implicitly appealing to the aspect of testimonial-logic that he explicitly recognises in 8:17-18:

> **8:17** In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. **18** I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.
>
> **8:17** καὶ ἐν τῷ νόμῳ δὲ τῷ ὑμετέρῳ γέγραπται ὅτι δύο ἀνθρώπων ἡ μαρτυρία ἀληθής ἐστιν. **18** ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ μαρτυρῶν περὶ ἐμαυτοῦ καὶ μαρτυρεῖ περὶ ἐμοῦ ὁ πέμψας με πατήρ. **(8:17-18)**.

Here the reference to the law calls to mind for Jesus' hearers, and the Evangelist's readers, commandments of the law which insisted that weighty judicial convictions could not be established on the basis of one witness alone: "A single witness shall not suffice to convict a person of any crime or wrongdoing in connection with any offence that may be committed. Only on the evidence of two or three witnesses shall a charge be sustained" (Dt. 19:15; Cf. 17:6; Nu. 35:30). Thus, the Rabbinic wisdom of the Talmud likewise insisted that at least two witnesses come forward to establish charges in both criminal and civil matters of the law.[178] With these backgrounds likely in view, Jesus provocatively references "your law", standing in sharp contrast to Nicodemus' earlier appeal to "our law" (7:51). Here Jesus stands apart from those questioning him, and adopts a prophetic stance like that of Isaiah who spoke of "your incense...your evil assemblies...your appointed feasts" (Is. 1:13-4).[179] Nonetheless, his acknowledgement, "it is written" demonstrates respect for the law and he appeals to the law, at least on one level, to demonstrate how his claim to be "the light of the world" applies: the law requires two witnesses, he is one and his Father is the other (8:18). Jesus' appeal to his Father calls to mind his earlier reference along the same lines, where the works the Father had given Jesus to do and the scriptures were in view as witnesses who shared concord with Jesus' own witness (5:36-9).[180] But in this passage there is more of an ironic interplay, where the testimonial logic of concord amidst multiplicity is both appeased and superseded. Schnackenburg captures the irony of the account well:

> If we bear in mind Jesus' status as representative, the dialectic and paradox of the whole narrative become apparent: as God's representative he himself gives totally adequate evidence because in him the Father speaks (v.14). On the other hand, as God's representative he can be distinguished from the one who sent him, and so there are two witnesses. This second witness behind Jesus cannot, of course, be seen or heard by the others, but to Jesus he is present, active, and unchallengeable.[181]

---

178. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, 231, 233.

179. Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 482.

180. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John, Vol. 2*, 194.

181. Ibid.

Within the narrative of the text, Jesus doesn't disregard the testimonial logic of his contemporaries. Instead he adopts it. So too, at the level of the author of the text - that of the Evangelist - the testimonial logic of concord amidst multiplicity is clearly leveraged, hence the peppering of the text with multiple witnesses and testimonial reasoning throughout the narrative. But it is vital to recognise that though Jesus is commended within this testimonial logic, that the reader still has the vaulted words of the Prologue ringing in ear - this is the eternal Word made flesh. Any submission to testimonial logic on his part is a voluntary condescension for our salvation, not a logical necessity or requirement.

Nonetheless, though the Word made flesh stands above our testimonial logic, even as he voluntarily condescends to be assessed within it, we cannot stand above it. We are ever negotiating this aspect of testimonial logic, weighing the testimony of a multiplicity of witnesses, searching for concord among them, and approximating the truth by means of this process. That this process is central to the Christian faith is evident in the canonical embrace of the four-fold witness of the one gospel received through the varied testimonies to it according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. This recognition fosters a theological stance that does not fear scrutiny, questioning, and multiplicity. On the contrary, the witness only finds concord amidst other witnesses.

Witness as Speaking what One has Seen and Heard

Thus far we have uncovered three features of the testimonial-logic within which the Evangelist commends belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God: 1) the origin of the testimonies central to the gospel's narrative is the sending work of God, and the field within which that testimony is proclaimed is the world; 2) testimony to oneself - to one's own praise or for one's own benefit - rightly draws suspicion whereas testimony away from oneself toward another is compelling; and 3) crucial to persuasive testimony is its presence in the mouths of a multiplicity of witnesses who together share a measure of concord in their varied testimony. We now turn to a fourth defining characteristic of the gospel's testimonial-logic that is implicit throughout our discussion thus far:

4) according to the testimonial logic of the Fourth Gospel, to testify is to speak what one has seen and heard on disputed (or disputable) matters vital to the community's shared life together.[182]

In arguing this it is imperative to keep in mind the foregoing observations on how testimony is understood in John, lest we be mistaken for arguing that testimony is *merely* speaking what one has seen and heard according to its logic. This would result in a very broad definition of what it is to testify, including even everyday insignificant assertions as to what one has observed. Here, "This morning I enjoyed an omelet at Green's Cafe" would be well within the realm of the testimonial. It is a spoken report as to what I observed myself doing this morning - a very broad conception of what it is to testify indeed. And many definitions of the nature of testimony found in contemporary analytic epistemology are broader still. Elizabeth Fricker defines testimony as "tellings generally with no restrictions either on subject matter...or on the speaker's epistemic relation to it", Audi argues that it is simply 'people's telling us things', and Sosa commends a "...broad sense of testimony that counts posthumous publications as examples ... [It] requires only that it be a statement of someone's thoughts or beliefs, which they might direct to the world at large and to no one in particular".[183] As you can see, these are very expansive definitions of what it is to testify - definitions that even remove sensory observation as a necessary basis for what is spoken as an essential feature of testimony. Here, one is testifying even if they are just sharing their mental states.

---

182. In this regard, the motif of witness overlaps with that of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible. Both motifs find their context in within the believing community. But though all prophecy has a testimonial character - in that the prophet reports what they have "seen and heard" of the LORD's revelation to them - not all instances of witness/testimony in the Hebrew Bible are prophetic. Instances of bearing witness over a host of contestable matters vital to the life of the community can be found, whether that be to who owns a given piece of land, whether an offence against the Torah has been committed, etc. Likewise in the New Testament, all prophecy is testimonial in character, but not all testimony is prophetic in the sense of making a "Thus says the LORD" claim, or a similar claim that makes some stake in revelation from God regarding the future, or another matter. For a helpful discussion on prophets using lawcourt language, like that of witness/testimony, in their preaching to Israel, see: Allison Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, 33–34.

183. Jennifer Lackey, "The Epistemology of Testimony and Religious Belief," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, eds William Abraham and Frederick Aquino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 203–4.

But as demonstrated above, these contemporary expansive definitions of testimony would seem reductive for the Evangelist. They are expansive in that they envelope such a broad range of types of "tellings". But when laid beside the nuanced testimonial-logic at play in the Fourth Gospel they are reductive because, though testimony is not less than "people's telling us things," in John it is much more. If the above attempts to tease out the essential features of its testimonial-logic have been at all persuasive, then testimony as a saying-so of one's convictions is necessary to John's definition, but not sufficient. For this gospel, testimony is only testimony when it concerns a contestable matter of great significance for the wider community; it is by nature invalidated when clearly vested with self-interest, especially as it pertains to seeking the glory people can award; and essential to its definition is also the expectation that there must be more than one witness who shares the testimony in a measure of accord.

Yet though I have argued that these features are necessary to the gospel's understanding of testimonial logic, even taken together these too would remain insufficient in their combined contribution to definition were one central aspect left unmentioned: at the heart of the act of testifying in John is verbalising what one has seen and heard. I will demonstrate this first by briefly tracing out that testifying for this gospel is almost always clearly verbal. With very few exceptions it involves articulation - whether by spoken or written word. This distances the gospel's use of the martus word group from the added meaning of our "martyr" - the testimony of one's life, even unto death. Casey notes that, as concerns the μάρτυς word group, scholars have often been most concerned to explain how witness in the sense of "testimony" in a courtroom setting came to have the meaning of μάρτυς as "martyr" in early Christian documents. But this orientation of investigation has tended to blur notice of the presence of several early Christian usages of the μάρτυς word group which most certainly do not all pertain to witness unto death.[184] Though μάρτυς does not appear in the Fourth Gospel, Casey notes that in it μαρτυρέω and

184. Robert Casey, "'μάρτυς' In *The Beginnings of Christianity," in The Beginnings of Christianity*, vol. 5, eds Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake (London, 1933), 5:30–31. See below for further (and more recent) sources on the development of early Christian martyr language.

μαρτυρία appear more frequently than anywhere else in the New Testament.[185] Yet he stresses that they do not function as technical terms, but as "a natural and favorite metaphor of the author's to describe Jesus' knowledge of himself and his disciples' appreciation of his significance". [186] We begin to see μάρτυς *developing* the sense of "martyr" as early as the Apocalypse, but that trajectory only reaches its full stage of meaning later in the Second Century.[187]

Nearly every instance of testimony in the gospel, save those where its use seems to be a metaphorical extension of a more basic and more prevalent use, what is expressed in the articulation of testimony is what one has "seen and heard" on matters of vital, yet contested, matters for the community. The consistent assumption is that testimony is based upon what the testifier has come to know through sensory perception, most often highlighting the ocular and aural senses.

Again, from the beginning key themes that will reappear throughout the narrative of this gospel find their initial focus in the Baptizer - its first witness. John's appearances in the early stages of the narrative take their cue from the introduction of him in the Prologue: to be a witness who testifies encapsulates the reason John is sent (1:6-8). And his testimony is immediately construed in verbal terms. We are told that he testified concerning Jesus, and "cried out, saying" (μαρτυρεῖ περὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ κέκραγεν λέγων) that he who comes after him actually ranks before him (1:15). Then the summary of the "testimony given by John" (Καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ Ἰωάννου) which follows his introduction in the Prologue turns out to be a discourse between John and the priests and Levites sent from Jerusalem to ask after John's identity (1:19-28). At the

---

185. Ibid., 34.

186. Ibid., 35.

187. Ibid., 35–6. TDNT likewise locates common usage of the μάρτυς word group with the connotation of martyrdom, including not only death but also the willingness to be martyred for one's faith, among early Christians in the middle of the second century: Hermann Strathmann, "Μάρτυς," TDNT 4:504–8. Likewise Beutler claims that the martyrological use may not be assumed even in the Apocalypse, where the two witnesses of Jesus (Rev. 11:3) first prophesy and then are killed after they testify (Rev. 11:7): J. Beutler, "Μάρτυς," EDNT 2:395.

heart of John's testimony in response to their question is his spoken "confession": "He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah'" (καὶ ὡμολόγησεν καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσατο, καὶ ὡμολόγησεν...) (1:20). If not the Christ, then who is he? The Evangelist hosts John's response to this question utilizing the Prophet Isaiah: this one sent to be a testifier claims that he is *the voice of one crying out* (ἐγὼ φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ) in the wilderness that a straight path may be prepared for the Lord. John, the testifier, is presented as understanding himself to be the forerunner Isaiah anticipated, whose ministry of going before the Lord is characterised as a voice. Here John's testimony, which sets the tone for the theme of witness throughout the gospel, is thoroughly verbal. Here testimony is construed in terms of a "crying out" at multiple levels - both at the level of the Evangelist's narration of John's introduction to the story (κράζω - 1:15), and then within the narrative itself, in the Baptizer's own mouth, as he construes his own testimony as a voice "crying out" by his quotation of Isaiah (βοάω - 1:23). At the heart of his testimony is his spoken "confession" that he is not the Christ (ὁμολογέω - 1:20). The whole section introduced as John's testimony presents him at discourse. Here, testimony is spoken.

However, though testimony in this gospel, from its beginning, is framed as verbal attestation in spoken form, this is not *always* so. As we turn from its first pages to its last, we see that testimony can also be understood as *written* verbalisation.[188] The conclusion of the gospel (as it has come to us), construes the whole of its narrative as the written testimony of that anonymous "disciple whom Jesus loved" found trailing Jesus and Peter in the gospel's final scene (21:20-25).[189] We lay down his testimony with these words of witness ringing amidst its conclusion: "This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true" (Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ μαθητὴς ὁ μαρτυρῶν περὶ τούτων καὶ ὁ γράψας

188. The original author and readers would not likely have seen a disjunction between acts of speech and acts of writing. This Gospel would have been read aloud amidst the early congregations. Thus the writing is a kind of speaking, and the lines begin to blur and the distinction becomes less important.

189. Note that some see the conclusion as a separate literature to the rest of the gospel, which would minimise the bookend effect of 21:24-25 considerably.

ταῦτα, καὶ οἴδαμεν ὅτι ἀληθὴς αὐτοῦ ἡ μαρτυρία ἐστίν - 21:24). Here testimony is again thoroughly verbal, but taking the form of written rather than spoken utterance.

This understanding of testimony as either spoken or written utterance, which we see assumed in both the prologue, the early accounts of the Baptizer, and in the epilogue of the gospel, we also find throughout its intervening narrative. Jesus is not in need of anyone to "bear witness about humankind" (μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου - 2:25) in the sense that he has no need for anyone *to tell him* about human nature - he already knows. Then, in the next scene, Jesus tells Nicodemus "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony" (3:11), clearly understanding bearing witness and testimony as a kind of speaking (here λαλέω). Then, when John's disciples come to him over a dispute concerning purification, they ask him about "the one two whom he bore witness" - the one he had spoken of earlier (3:26) - and John argues that they themselves could bear John witness that they had heard him say that he - that is John - is not the Christ (3:28), and he explains that Jesus is unique in that he is the bridegroom whilst John is the friend of the bridegroom and Jesus is "from heaven", testifying to what he has seen and heard there, though "no one receives his testimony" (3:32-3). In each of these references to testimony in John's discussion with his disciples, testimony is verbal.

So too with the testimony of the Samaritan woman whom Jesus met with at the well. Her testimony is equated to her saying to the people of her town "He told me all that I ever did" (4:39; Cf. 4:44). Testimonial language next appears when Jesus addresses the self-referential nature of his own testimony after making central publicly spoken claims about his own identity (5:25-27, 31-32; 8:12-15), indicating that here too testimony is spoken utterance. In the first passage, Jesus buttresses his claims with appeal to others who also testify on his behalf: John the Baptizer testified (5:33-35); but Jesus does not accept human testimony (5:34), and instead enjoys "a testimony greater than John's" (Ἐγὼ δὲ ἔχω τὴν μαρτυρίαν μείζω τοῦ Ἰωάννου· - 5:36): Jesus' own works testify that the Father has sent him (5:36), and Jesus' claims enjoy the support of the witness of the Father himself. We will address in what sense Jesus' works testify

below. But first, note that mention of the witness of the Father (which is clearly distinguished from the witness of the works, which the Father had given Jesus to do - 5:36-7), instantly moves into reflection on how Jesus' hearers - having not seen the Father's form or heard his voice directly - have received (or failed to receive) *his word* in the Scriptures. That they do not have "his word abiding in them" explains why they have not received the one whom the Father has sent (5:38). This lack of the word of the Father abiding within is explained in terms of their handling of the Scriptures: the writings are diligently studied by Jesus' hearers, but their purpose is missed in that they testify to Jesus and yet they refuse to come to Jesus that they might have life (5:39-40). In short, here testimony stands in the place of seeing the Father and hearing his voice directly and that testimony of the Father given in want of that direct experience of him is mediated by the word of God in the scriptures.[190] They testify to Jesus, who testifies to his hearers as one who has "come from above" and thus is uniquely able to speak of what he has seen and heard in the presence of the Father.[191] Again, a consistent emphasis on testimony as speech. This invites the question as to how this rich emphasis on the importance of the voice relates to the Gospel's robust ethic of loving action more broadly speaking, and love in a cruciform manner after the pedagogy of Jesus himself (Jn. 15:13). I will wrestle with this question in the final chapter. At present, however, having drawn attention to something of the testimonial logic embedded within the gospel, I now need to relate this more concretely to the incarnate *Logos*. How does this testimonial-logic so clearly at play relate to him and his interests? I will approach that question through a seeming contradiction in the text which, I argue, is in fact a key to grasping Jesus' relation to this logic.

---

190. This indicates that testimony in the Fourth Gospel is a thoroughly *relational* - rather than, we might say, merely *transactional* motif. In other words, the Evangelist's interest arranging witnesses throughout the narrative of their Gospel, and positioning themselves a witness likewise, is not merely to transmit notional knowledge of who Jesus is, alone. Instead, the conviction that Jesus is the Son of God incarnate - to the degree that is an idea to be passed on - invites a fundamental relational response of faith and obedience (with thanks to Professor Aaron Simmons for drawing out this connection).

191. Consider, for example, his discussion with Nicodemus (Jn. 3:10-15).

A 'Greater Than' Testimony, and *a Prima Facie* Contradiction between John 5:31 and 8:14

As argued above, at the heart of the Fourth Gospel's use of the category of witness is the way it both employs and openly wrestles with the question of multiple witnesses over against singular testimony (which is generally deemed invalid). The question becomes an explicit matter of debate between Jesus and his interlocutors in two key passages: first in 5:31-47 where the story of Jesus' healing of an invalid at the pool of Bethesda is told, with its ensuing debate with 'the Jews' as the healing was on the Sabbath (5:1-30); and then in the account told by 8:12-30, where Jesus' claim to be the light of the world results in 'the Pharisees' challenging the validity of his self-identification on the basis that it is *self*-testimony (and hence a species of singular testimony).

One striking aspect of the comparison of these two conflicts is, between them, Jesus appears to take two contradictory stances on the question of the validity of self-testimony. In the account of Jesus' words related by John 5:31, we hear him confess:

5:31 If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true.

5:31 Ἐὰν ἐγὼ μαρτυρῶ περὶ ἐμαυτοῦ, ἡ μαρτυρία μου οὐκ ἔστιν ἀληθής·

Then, in the second conflict where the issue of self-testimony over against the necessity of multiple witnesses arises again, Jesus takes the opposite position. 8:14:

8:14 Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid,

8:14 Κἂν ἐγὼ μαρτυρῶ περὶ ἐμαυτοῦ, ἀληθής ἐστιν ἡ μαρτυρία μου,

Although at certain points in John's Gospel it is difficult to discern where the words of a given character in the narrative are to be taken to end and the narrator's voice to begin (for example, whether John 3:13-21, or 3:16-21 should be attributed to Jesus via the author or are best understood as the narrator's own words directly) there is no doubt that both of the above statements are clearly placed on the lips of Jesus.

In both instances aspects of the Torah are clearly in view, which also became important in later rabbinical teaching and the Qumran community to the effect that at least two witnesses were required to prove a capital offence (Nu. 35:30; Dt. 17:6; 19:15).[192] Further, ancient Greek and Roman courts valued the role of witnesses, but testimony on one's own behalf was easily dismissed.[193] The wider context of these statements will be discussed below. But suffice it to say here that given the near identical nature of the two assertions in Greek, once the negation of the first is taken into account, it is understandable why the majority of commentators wrestle with this *prima facie* contradiction to one degree or another. And though many of those commentators dispense with the issue in a few paragraphs, I argue that to do so is to turn from a window into what the Evangelist is doing with the motif of witness throughout his Gospel. Probing into this apparent contradiction opens up onto the wider question of the purpose he has for the various witnesses he employs, and their relation to his central purpose and assertion concerning the identity of Jesus.

Here we will explore the problem at greater depth by engaging Thomas W. Simpson and his article "Testimony in John's Gospel: The Puzzle of 5:31 and 8:14".[194] He is a strategic dialogue partner on the matter for at least three reasons: 1) his article offers a sustained treatment of the question, 2) it forms one of the most recent attempts to address the issue, and is thus abreast of much of the earlier biblical scholarship, and 3) his work on this aspect of John's Gospel arises from a longstanding broader interest of his in the epistemology of testimony within analytic philosophy generally.[195] Here I will briefly summarize his resolution of 5:31 and 8:14

---

192. Allison Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, 52–4, 231–38.

193. Keener, *The Gospel of John, Vol I*, 656.

194. Thomas Simpson, "Testimony in John's Gospel: The Puzzle of 5:31 and 8:14," (TynBul, 65:1, 2014), 101–18.

195. Thomas Simpson, "The Nature of Scientific and Religious Belief," (paper presented at a seminar of the Ian Ramsey Centre at St. John's College, Oxford, 5 June 2014).

before drawing out the strengths and weaknesses of the approach in order to probe the deeper issue of what John is attempting in his use of the category of witness throughout the Gospel.

Simpson's article breaks into two broad sections. The first identifies fourteen different types of testimony he claims John uses. This is taken to further establish the centrality of the witness motif in the Gospel, and to demonstrate the philosophic sophistication with which the author thought about testimony.[196] The second and larger part of the article, and our focus here, deals with the apparent contradiction we have raised above. Simpson puts the issue this way:

> The problem is this: according to John, what is the epistemic status of Jesus' self-testimony? Does he think that Jesus's self-testimony alone is sufficient for a hearer's belief that Jesus is divine, or does it require supplementary corroborating testimony?[197]

He notes as we have that the narrative raises this concern explicitly in two passages, and *prima facie* gives contradictory answers. Simpson sees three options in response: 1) Acknowledge that the author contradicted themselves not only *prima facie* but actually (to which we might add that this aporia could then signal different source materials that have been placed together indiscriminately); 2) give "interpretive priority" to 5:31, thus attempting to reconcile 8:14 within its bounds by one of various means of doing so; or, 3) instead give that "interpretive priority" to 8:14 and attempt to understand 5:31 within its broad claim also by one of various means.[198]

Simpson takes the final option. He, rightly in my view, argues against the first option on the following grounds: the legitimate principle of interpretive charity when possible, the elegance and precision of the Gospel's use of Greek as arguing against an actual contradiction by oversight, the presence of detailed and planned patterns in the text (here relying in part on Bauckham's work which identifies numerical patterns in the text, at least pointing to a uniting final editor),[199] the author's use of deliberate *prima facie* contradiction elsewhere in the gospel as

---

196. Simpson, "Testimony in John's Gospel", 108.

197. Ibid.

198. Ibid., 109.

199. Richard Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the*

a means of provocation onto deeper truth (eg. compare 5:22 and 9:39, with 3:17 and 12:47 on the question of whether Jesus came to judge the world). The cumulative force of these factors, which are further strengthened if either or both of the second or third options hold, argue against a straight contradiction.[200]

Before going on to explain the second and third approaches to the problem, Simpson makes a distinction that will prove central to his later argument. He observes, correctly, that a statement can said to be "true" or "valid" in at least three different ways: 1) true to fact – true if and only if it describes the world as it actually is, 2) true as "valid evidence" in a legal setting – in the sense of being admissible and persuasive legally, or 3) epistemically "rational to believe as true" irrespective of whether it corresponds to reality or is legally admissible. This third understanding of a statement's being "true" acknowledges that we can at times be rationally justified in believing falsehoods, and also in believing testimony that may not meet the rigours of being legally useful (Simpson uses the example of hearsay evidence which, though not usually admissible in a court of law may nonetheless form a basis for belief in other epistemic settings). *The key interpretive move is to introduce the distinction between a more stringent legal validity and a less stringent epistemic validity.* Simpson argues that *alēthēs*, translated as either "true" or "valid" in 5:31 and 8:14, as we saw above, has a possible range of meaning that extends to include at least these senses of the word.[201]

Simpson calls the second approach to the *prima facie* contradiction the "No Single Testimony" view. According to this position, the prohibition against singular testimony denies out of hand the validity of any attempt at mere self-testimony on behalf of Jesus. For Simpson this prohibition would stand in both the legal and merely epistemic understandings of validity just given, though the legal context is in focus in the two passages under view.[202] Thus Jesus'

Gospel of John (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 271–84.

200. Simpson, "Testimony in John's Gospel", 110.

201. Ibid., 111.

testimony to himself was not to be accepted on its own, *and Jesus did not expect it to be.* Though Jesus says he does not accept human testimony, he concedes to the legal requirement for multiple witnesses that his hearers "may be saved" (5:34), and marshals the witnesses of John the Baptist, the signs, and his Father's testimony to him in Scripture as fulfilling the need for a multiplicity of witnesses to his identity. Then, according to this second view, in chapter 8 this point is reinforced. There Jesus cites the requirement of the Torah, "In your Law it is written that the testimony of two men is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me". (8:17-18). He thus shows the same respect for the Law's demand for multiple witnesses found in chapter 5. The seemingly contradictory statement of 8:14 should thus be glossed in the following way: "Even if I testify on my behalf, my testimony is legally valid because others, namely my Father, testify for me as well". In this position, the account of his words in 5:31 are clearly being prioritised: "If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true". Simpson attributes this view to Leon Morris, among other lead commentators of the 20th century.[203] But it is important to note that Morris' actually disagrees that Jesus is primarily concerned with the legal requirement for multiple witnesses in chapter 5, and instead believes he is emphasising his dependence upon his Father's words as the basis for his.[204]

Simpson is correct, I believe, in finding this second position unconvincing. The decisive weakness in it, as he notes, is that its gloss interpretation of Jesus' statement relayed in 8:14 does not account for what immediately follows on. To give the whole verse:

> **8:14** Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going".
>
> **8:14** ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· Κἂν ἐγὼ μαρτυρῶ περὶ ἐμαυτοῦ, ἀληθής ἐστιν

---

202. Ibid.

203. Ibid., 112. In addition to Morris, Simpson notes this view is shared with Hoskyns, Dodd, and Brown.

204. Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, 324.

ἡ μαρτυρία μου, ὅτι οἶδαπόθεν ἦλθον καὶ ποῦ ὑπάγω· ὑμεῖς δὲ οὐκ οἴδατε πόθεν ἔρχομαι ἢ ποῦ ὑπάγω.[205]

The explanation that Jesus immediately gives for his statement that his own testimony is valid is first and foremost a statement of his own ability to give self-testimony based on his knowledge of where he has come from and where he is going – knowledge the Pharisees, in this instance, do not have. So whereas in the account given in chapter 5 Jesus would not testify to himself, here he clearly does and only then appeals to the witness of his Father. Thus the effort to subsume the assertion here in 8:14 under that of 5:31 is severely weakened.[206]

Simpson thus commends a third position, which he calls the "Sufficiency of Self-Testimony" view.[207] He argues that though Jesus submits to the legal requirement for multiple witnesses in 5:31, he does so as a concession to the demands of his interlocutors, not because he endorsed this means of adjudicating his identity.[208] Simpson takes him to be saying here that they should accept Jesus' self-testimony, but even though they do not there is still sufficient witness to his identity even on the needlessly limited grounds *they* have adopted. Thus in 8:14 Jesus is asserting his ability to offer self-testimony. There, "Jesus subverts the Pharisees' view that his self-testimony is valid only if there is testimony additional to Jesus' own. The effect is to deny the legal requirement as the only valid one. When it comes to the broader *epistemic* access to a

---

205. What might Jesus mean by "I know" here? He contrasts his knowledge with those to whom he is speaking, who do not know where he comes from and where he is going. Were they to know, they would recognise that he was uniquely sent from God, and is returning to God. This "knowledge", were they to truly have it, would consist not only of a notional recognition of the truth of the origin and destiny of Jesus, but would also function as a *call* to belief in Jesus as the Messiah where belief is understood as relational trust in him. This trust would involve approximately correct notions of Jesus' origin and destiny, but could not be reduced to articulable propositional knowledge. This being the case for those to whom Jesus speaks, we thus are on sure footing in deducing that Jesus' words "I know where I come from and where I am going" also signify a knowledge that is more, though not less, than that he holds true propositions about his origin and destiny. It also means that he has personal experience of his relationship with the Father and his pre-incarnate past, and an experience of his Father in the present, which assures him of his future (with thanks to Professor Aaron Simmons for drawing out this connection).

206. Simpson, "Testimony in John's Gospel", 113.

207. Ibid.

208. Ibid., 114.

correct embrace of his identity, Jesus insists that his self-testimony is sufficient".[209] Thus, as noted above, the distinction between legal and epistemic validity when it comes to testimony is key for Simpson. At the demand of his interlocutors, Jesus can meet the legal requirement of the need for multiple witnesses. But his self-testimony can be legitimately embraced simply on its own merit. Further, for Simpson, *this is not a situation that is unique to Jesus due to his divine Sonship and heavenly origin*. In other words, 8:14 is taken "as stating a normative principle which governs valid testimonial belief" generally.[210] Each of us could say, in his view, "Even if I were to testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid" *in the general epistemic sense of giving legitimate grounds for valid belief* even if self-testimony does not serve in the more stringent legal sense.

We have already noted strengths in Simpson's argument – namely his positive case for not accepting the strict-contradiction view, and also his demonstration of the weakness of seeking to resolve the *prima facie* contradiction between 5:31 and 8:14 by attempting to subsume the latter under the former. His commendation of the third way just outlined also deserves serious engagement. As mentioned at the outset of this section, Simpson sees a high level of philosophical sophistication in the understanding of testimony held by the gospel's author and this significantly influences the way he resolves the conflict: he does so by introducing a philosophical distinction between a more stringent legal validity and a more general epistemic validity and argues that the two sides of the apparent contradiction are independently concerned for different kinds of validity, and thus are not ultimately in conflict.

However, the argument sits roughly with the text at some points and I hope to extend the strengths of Simpson's view further by addressing the few weaknesses. First, Jesus does willingly embrace the multiple witness criteria *for himself* in the middle of the extended response relayed in chapter 5 as he responds to criticism (5:31 within 5:19-46). The category of witness is

---

209. Ibid., 115.

210. Ibid., 117.

not thrown at him like it is in chapter 8. Instead, at this point in the Gospel, the category of witness has been adopted positively by the Evangelist in numerous ways, chief among them being the testimony of John the Baptist to Jesus (1:6-15, 2:1-36), that of both Andrew to the Messiahship of Jesus and Nathaniel both to his Messiahship and divine Sonship, the testimony of his first sign at the wedding in Cana (2:1-11) and the prediction of the sign of his resurrection (2:18-22). Jesus claims to speak of what is known and testify to what is seen in his conversation with Nicodemus, though he acknowledges that his testimony is rejected (3:11), a sentiment which is very soon reiterated with reference to the ministry of Jesus in the further testimony of John the Baptist to him (3:32-36). Then, after encounter with Jesus at the well, the Samaritan woman returns to her town with her testimony of wonderment over him and "many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I ever did'" (4:39). Then a whole household believes from the witness of Jesus' second miraculous sign preformed coming from Judea to Galilee – the healing of the official's son (4:53-54). Finally, the healing of the invalid at the pool of Bethesda launches the debate related by the first passage we have been concerned with in this section. Clearly the narrator has adopted a *positive* role for appeal to many different kinds of witnesses to Jesus at this early stage, and further relates Jesus to be doing so himself before the narrative progresses to 5:31.

Granted, the narrator does make clear that Jesus would not entrust himself to the crowds who believed in him because "he knew what was in man" (2:24), and that he did not need "man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in man" and thus clarifies in his appeal to John the Baptist as a supporting witness: "Not that the testimony that I receive is from man"[211] (5:34a). Jesus seeks his commendation from his Father alone and chides those who seek glory from other people (5:44). But to conclude from these qualifications that Jesus is positioned by John only as adopting the legal demand for multiple witnesses merely as a "by your lights" concession to his opposition is to miss the fact that the appeal to witness is initiated first positively by the narrator,

---

211. ἐγὼ δὲ οὐ παρὰ ἀνθρώπου τὴν μαρτυρίαν λαμβάνω (5:34a)

and taken up positively by Jesus himself by this point in the gospel. Indeed Simpson himself acknowledges the breadth of Johannine scholarship that sees the trial motif as an encompassing theme framing the whole Gospel.[212] Thus we must be careful of denigrating the role of the appeal to multiple witnesses lest we find ourselves at odds with the wider purpose of the Gospel itself. It is adopted not first and foremost as a concession to a lesser means of validity that Jesus or the gospel writer intends to subvert, but an essential strategy the gospel itself employs, by varied means, for inviting the reception of Jesus through the light of manifold testimony to him in the face of prominent rejection (1:6-13). Thus, Jesus explains that he appeals to the witness of John the Baptist, "so that you may be saved" (5:34b).[213] Jesus is not seeking the subversion of the category of witness in John 8:14. Rather the employment of the motif of witness by the Gospel According to John, and the Jesus of John, is a subversion of the darkness itself – a subversion of the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God.

Finally, Simpson's argument would be strengthened further still if he sought to explain Jesus' claim to the truth of his self-testimony in 8:14 not by appeal to a distinction between a more stringent legal standard for testimony (in 5:31) and then a more relaxed, general epistemic standard in 8:14. Simpson is not able to make any argument for this distinction arising from the text itself, but draws it from contemporary philosophy of testimony. But a more germane approach would first seek resources in the text that might shed light on the apparent conflict between 5:31 and 8:14. It might be that the wider substantive theological themes in the Gospel provide a clue. There surely is warrant for believing in certain things or certain people on the basis of their self-testimony alone, in certain circumstances. I see no reason to believe that the

---

212. Simpson, "Testimony in John's Gospel", 104; For works which defend a trial motif encompassing the whole of the Gospel of John, see: Maccini, *Her Testimony is True,* Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel according to St John* (London: Continuum, 2005); Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000); Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*; Allison Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, ; Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 48–9; Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, 89.

213. Cf. the similar stance of the author toward their own testimony in the writing of the Gospel: 19:35; 20:30-31.

author of the gospel would strongly reject this notion either. But it is clear that in the second of our seemingly conflicting pair of statements on the validity of Jesus' self-testimony, the immediate context is heavily invested with legal overtones and could not set the *uniqueness* of Jesus in sharper relief.

Simpson's position plays down both these elements in the treatment of 8:12-59 at the very point appeal to both the legal motif and the uniqueness of Jesus are prominent rather than peripheral. With respect to 8:14 it is argued that Jesus is primarily appealing to the general epistemic validity of self-testimony in everyday life, which is not exclusive to Jesus but open to us all, and which stands in contradistinction to the legal approach of multiple witnesses for validity. But the reference to the utter uniqueness of Jesus is prominent in this passage. It begins with, "I am the light of the world" (8:12) and the account ends with "Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am" which nearly gets Jesus stoned (8:58-9). In between these bookends are three less formal employments of "I am": "*I am* the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father bears witness about me" (8:18), "Unless you believe that *I am* he, you will die in your sins" (8:24), and "When you have lifted up the Son of Man you will know that *I am* he, and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak just as the Father has taught me" (8:28),[214] and we are told that as Jesus was saying these things many believed in him (8:30).

But not only does the wider context of 8:14 stress the utter uniqueness of Jesus, it also is still clearly set in a legal context rather than the everyday general one Simpson's proposal requires at this point. He does not address the most significant textual issue that bears on our question, namely the account of the woman caught in adultery (7:53-8:11). Both the internal and external evidence against including the account as original to the Gospel weigh heavy, and thus the many modern translations that single it out as a late scribal addition are right to do so, though it is quite possible that the event itself did happen.[215] With its removal, however, it brings 8:14

---

214. Maccini, *Her Testimony is True,* 82.

215. Köstenberger, *John*, 245–49; Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 333–37; Michaels, *The Gospel of*

into closer proximity with the question of legal requirement with respect to trying Jesus. Jesus' testimony, "I am the light of the world" then comes straight on the heels of the ridicule Nicodemus receives in response to his question to the chief priests and Pharisees: "Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" (7:51). Therefore, if the account of the woman caught in adultery is removed, our second passage forms a clear response to this question, inviting us into that 'hearing' Nicodemus calls for, with Jesus' bold claim entered into it, and his justification for it given in support. Thus the context of 8:14, where Jesus initially claims the truth of his own self-testimony, is not one of appeal to general, everyday, epistemic standards over against a more stringent legal standard. Something else seems to be happening.

Jesus does indeed assert the truth of his own self-testimony, which does seem to contradict the account of his words in 5:31. But instead of explaining the difference with appeal to a kind of everyday validity in knowing, open to us all, he instead emphasises the uniqueness of his identity ("I know where I came from and where I am going"), which clearly hints not just a kind of personal knowledge that would be available to anyone as a basis of self-testimony, but a unique spiritual apprehension of an origin and future with the Father that is unique to him as God's Son. The language then does not drive away from the legal, but straight into it with reference to Jesus' repeated right to judgement and his opponents' failure to judge rightly. He then appeals to "your Law, where it is written that the testimony of two men is true" and asserts that he bears witness to himself and his father does as well (8:17-18). Morris observes here that Jesus' has registered distance from the law by uncharacteristically saying "your Law",[216] when he

---

John, 493–94; Barrett, *Gospel according to St. John*, 333, 589–92. But see Knust and Wasserman's important work which, while also acknowledging that the account was most likely added to the Gospel in the third century, nonetheless argues for using the account as a lens into how Gospel traditions were shaped by the communities that received them. Thus, rather than merely reducing the story to a "corruption" of the text, they close the work by exploring how the *pericope adulterae* has been received by the church liturgically: Jennifer W. Knust and Tommy Wasserman, *To Cast the First Stone: The Transmission of a Gospel Story* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

216. Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, 442.

everywhere shows regard for the authority of the Scriptures in the lives of his disciples and his opponents.[217] This creates a sense of distance from his opponents, as does his reference to testimony from "two men" whereas until now "two witnesses" has been employed in similar forms.[218]

Pulling these insights together then, rather than this section de-emphasizing the testimonial uniqueness of Jesus and the legal, Jesus appears to be overflowing and superseding the categories of legal warrant with intentional reference to his unique identity as the Son of the Father (8:18-19), creating an if-this-than-how-much-more-this argument on the basis of the legal demand for multiple witnesses.[219] "If you accept the witness of two *men* under *your* Law, how much more that of the Son and the Father?" (Cf. 1John 5:9). Thus, aspects of Simpson's argument put us in the awkward position of having to commend the stance that Jesus adopts in 8:14 as somehow less stringent than the demands of legal validity at the very point where it appears that his appeal to legal warrant could not be more expansive and explosive. So Barrett, also noting 'an apparent contradiction' between the two passages, explains the following:

> Here Jesus vindicates his right to make, in conjunction with his Father (v. 16b), statements about himself. Indeed if he did not make them the truth could never be communicated to men, who (as Bultmann says) are dependent on the self-knowledge of the Revealer…. Man as such is a creature of the present; that is why his testimony about himself is unreliable. He does not know what brought him to the present hour or where the next moment will find him. Jesus on the other hand knows whence he came, and therefore fully understands himself, and whither he goes, and is therefore subject to no temptation to conceal or twist the truth; hence his own witness regarding himself is true. He is not as other men - ὑμεῖς δὲ οὐκ οἴδατε. The Jews are not in themselves qualified to bear true self-testimony; nor can they understand why Jesus is so qualified.[220]

Thus rather than an appeal to Jesus' everyman right to general self-testimony, the emphases of the passage in 8:12-30 is in precisely the opposite direction.[221] This would then mean that in 5:14

---

217. Keener notes 2:22; 7:38; 13:18; 17:12; 19:24. 28, 36-7, and 20:9. Keener, *The Gospel of John, Vol I*, 741.

218. Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, 442.

219. Ibid.

220. Barrett, *Gospel according to St. John*, 338.

Jesus concedes to, or willingly plays within, the demand for multiple witnesses that we all wisely employ on the plane of human inquiry. But here he instead chooses to show how, *unlike for us*, for him that is a choice. In fact, his self-testimony has all the warrant it needs and, when pressed, overflows and explodes the human demand for multiple witnesses through the Son's awareness of his own divine origin and his relation to the Father.

Therefore I commend a recognition of the legal overtones of 8:12-30, and an appeal to strands of the gospel's rich theological tapestry in seeking to adjudicate the *prima facie* contradiction between 5:31 and 8:14 on the validity of Jesus' self-testimony. Rather than seeking easy resolution of the apparent conflict, wrestling with it further serves as a window into realities at the very heart of the testimony of this gospel. As we might expect, given the pervasiveness of the testimonial theme in the gospel, pressing on it takes us to the heart of its purpose. The correct question with respect to the *prima facie* contradiction, then, is not primarily the epistemic status of Jesus' self-testimony, but the question of how the use of the theme of witness in the Gospel relates to its central theological anchor in God's work of incarnation and redemption in Jesus Christ. Jesus, as the light of the world from the Father and filled with the Spirit (1:32), is in no need of further light to illumine him. All other witnesses can only be derivative and participatory in this divine self-testimony of Jesus (1:9). So on one theological level, the one represented in 8:14, Jesus does not disparage but fulfils and overflows the contemporary categories of legal adjudication by means of his identity as the Son of God who receives his testimony to himself from the Father himself. But on another theological level, that expressed in 5:31, this very Son of the Father "became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (1:14) and is resolved, along with the Evangelist of the gospel, to kick at the darkness by every means possible. The Evangelist sees that Jesus willingly descends to the humility of restricting his testimony to dependence on other multiple witnesses for the sake of commending himself to those who, as Augustine said, "Are so

---

221. See also: Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John, Vol. 2*, 192–93.

weak that we search for daylight be means of a lamp".[222] Though he needs praise from not one of us, he who not only willingly embraced our humanity, but also our cross, counts it no cause for shame to hear the testimony on human lips, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29).

The Function(s) of the Motif of Witness in John's Gospel

The aim of this chapter has been to attend to the rich motif of witness in the Fourth Gospel - choosing it as the centre of my biblical focus because it represents, I believe, the most sophisticated and Christocentric employment of the motif in all of Scripture. To this point, I have commended taking an inductive approach to attending to the theme, have sought to press beyond a "sequence of individual witnesses" approach often characteristic of scholarship on the theme in the Fourth Gospel, and instead have aimed at discerning the testimonial logic embedded in the narrative that undergirds and drives along its presentation of multiple witnesses. I have sought to show that this in-built testimonial logic assumes that the origin of the witness is the sending redemptive work of God into the world, that fundamental to the character of the stance of the witness is a renouncing of the glory on offer amidst that world, and a commitment to speaking not in one's own name but only in the name of the one who sent the witness. I have sought to demonstrate also that central to the way in which testimony operates as a means to communal critical discernment is by its principle of seeking concord amidst a multiplicity of witnesses who each, from their own perspective, speak what they have seen and heard on matters of vital importance to the whole community - matters that provoke potential disagreement and contention within the community. The witnesses are appealed to, then, to bring relief from this tension given their unique proximity to the truth of the matter. Finally, immediately above, I sought to draw out

---

222. John II.8, BA 71. St Augustine of Hippo, *St. Augustine of Hippo: Homilies on the Gospel of St. John*, ed. Paul A. Boer Sr (London: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), 760; Quoted in, Jean-Louis Chrétien, "Nine Propositions on the Christian Concept of Witness," in *Under the Gaze of the Bible*, trans. John Marson Dunaway (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 90.

how the *Logos* incarnate is related to the testimonial-logic the Evangelist assumes and develops around the One who stands at the heart of his narrative: Jesus is willing to submit to the testimonial logic of communal discernment in as much as it can lead his own to reconciliation with him, and thus to salvation. But that testimonial logic ultimately cannot hold him and breaks around him as the Logos upon whom all true human rationality ultimately depends. Therefore, he has a "greater than" testimony that can analogously appeal to the practice of communal testimonial discernment, but that at the same time cannot be ultimately circumvented and held by it. I now, before concluding this chapter, explore the (contested) purposes the motif plays within the gospel by examining the relation between the approaches of three scholars: Allison Trites, Richard Bacukham, and Andrew Lincoln.

Allison A. Trites – Eyewitness and metaphorical function both affirmed but relation undefined

Allison Trites' *The New Testament Concept of Witness* remains the most comprehensive treatment of its topic in English, and the largest chapter of this work unfolds the theme of witness in the Fourth Gospel.[223] Trites sees its use of the category of witness as an integral part of the gospel's sustained use of judicial metaphor, where the contested issue 'on trial' is that of the Messiahship and divine Sonship of Jesus.[224] He notes that John does not seek to support his case by virtue of a long string of OT quotations. Instead the Fourth Gospel marshals a number of independent witnesses whom the evangelist positions in the narrative as offering evidence to the claim that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God.[225] Trites is diligent to set his understanding of the NT concept of witness within its wider context of the use of testimonial terminology in wider Greco-Roman literature and the LXX, specific instances of controversy in the OT where

---

223. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*. Trites' work on the topic was originally completed in 1968 as a doctoral dissertation under Dr. G. Caird, of Mansfield College, Oxford.

224. Ibid., 78.

225. Ibid., 90.

such terminology is prominent, as well as appeal to the category of testimony in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Josephus and Philo.

But amidst these various sources of potential background for the NT category of witness, he finds the employment of the motif in Deutero-Isaiah 40-55 particularly illuminating of John's usage.[226] I will first explain what he sees in this portion of Isaiah, and then demonstrate how he relates it to John. He argues Isaiah 40-55 presents a sustained use of controversy between Yahweh and the gods of the nations, and between Yahweh and his own people.[227] In the former case Yahweh is the accuser against the false gods; in the latter he is the accused before Israel's denouncements. Trites maintains that both controversies are related in the form of a lawsuit.[228] For his part, he carries this argument in large measure by tracing 10 judicial features of the section and, given the importance of this argument also for Lincoln's analysis of John below, I will briefly summarize his exposition of these features: *1) The summons before the court:* "Set forth your case, says the Lord; bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob" (Isa. 41:21), "Let them bring their witnesses to prove them right, and let them hear and say, 'It is true'" (Isa. 43:9 – Cf. 41:1, 22; 43:8; 48:14, 16); *2) The appeal to witnesses:* "'You are my witnesses,' declares the LORD, 'and my servant whom I have chosen'" (Isa. 43:10 – Cf. 43:12; 44:8); *3) Affirmation by oath:* "By myself I have sworn" (Isa. 45:23 – Cf. 49:18; 54:9); *4) The accusation of the adversary, which is then refuted:* "But Zion said, 'The LORD has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me'" (Isa. 49:14 – Cf. 40:27); *5) Adversarial interrogation:* "Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the Lord?" (Isa. 45:21 – Cf. 41:2, 4; 26, 28; 43:9; 50:1-2);[229] *6) Challenge to the opposite side*

---

226. Ibid., 112.

227. Ibid., 45.

228. Trites sees the lawsuit motif evoked particularly by the language of these passages in Isaiah 40-55: 41:1-29; 43:8-13, 22-8; 44:7-8; 45:20-1; 48:14-16; and 50:1-2a, 7-9.

229. Trites is careful to note that not all uses of interrogative in Isaiah 40-55 are best understood as being

of the case: "Put me in remembrance; let us argue together; set forth your case, that you may be proved right" (Isa. 43:26 – Cf. 44:7); *7) The appeal to final justice:* (49:4); *8) The verdict of failure over the opposition's case:* "But when I look there is no one; among these there is no counsellor who, when I ask, gives an answer. Behold, they are all a delusion; their works are nothing; their metal images are empty wind" (Isa. 41:28-29 – Cf. 41:11, 24); *9) The presence of other technical terms of controversy:* for example in Isaiah 50:8-9, Trites notes: *tsa.deq* "to justify, vindicate the cause of", *mish.pat* "my adversary", and *ra.sha* "to condemn as guilty"; *10) Instances of controversy speeches:* Trites sees speeches of the accused in Isa. 43:22-8 and 50:1-2a, speeches of the plaintiff in Is. 41:1-4 and 44:6-8, and a speech of the judge in Isa. 41:21-9.[230] For Trites, these features of Isaiah 40-55 confirm its overarching judicial motif, and thus sets its usage of the language of witness within the section's wider use of sustained judicial metaphor, which is employed as a means of revealing an aspect of God's relation to Israel and to the nations as one of polemic and judgement. He claims of it, "Perhaps nowhere in the Old Testament is lawcourt imagery used with more telling effect than here."[231]

What then has Isaiah to do with John? From the opening words of his chapter on the Fourth Gospel (which also includes a section on the use of witness in the Johannine Epistles), Trites makes the connection with Isaiah explicit: "The Fourth Gospel, like Isaiah 40-55, is of particular importance for it presents a sustained use of juridical metaphor. Here we must ask what is the issue being debated, who are the participants in the debate and what is the outcome".[232] He goes on to briefly argue that the contested question that the gospel takes up is

---

judicial in character. He suggests that judicial reference seems absent in the questions of Isa. 40:6; 42:19; 43:19; 44:19. But in my view Isa. 42:19 is best seen as judicial given its accusatory context and the summons, "Hear, you deaf" in 42:18.

230. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, 36–39.

231. Ibid., 44.

232. Ibid., 76.

that of the identity of Jesus, its central argument being for his Messiahship and divine Sonship. He accordingly takes the position that the primary purpose of the gospel is to encourage belief in Christ among those yet to believe, citing John 20:31, ". . . but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name", and drawing support from C. Moule and W. van Unnik's work on the purpose of the evangelist.[233] Beyond this identification of evangelistic purpose, Trites does not specify whether he thinks a primarily Jewish or Gentile audience is in view. And save for a passing reference to need for John the Baptist's followers to be included in the Christian community as a "probable life situation" behind the prominence the Baptist enjoys in the early part of the gospel, he makes no further appeal to a theory of its *Sitz im Leben* as he seeks to elucidate its use of witness.[234]

Trites instead focuses on first establishing the overall juridical character of the Fourth Gospel by noting several legal overtones amidst its literary characteristics, much the same as he did with Isaiah 40-55 as noted above.[235] Having framed the gospel in this way, he then is free to expound the numerous testimonies that he finds throughout it, which he breaks up into "The Lawsuit of the Ministry" (Chs. 1-12) and "The Post-Resurrection Lawsuit" (Chs. 13-21). Principal among these are included the testimony of John the Baptist, seven signs of Jesus (the seventh being the raising of Lazarus in Trites' estimation, not the resurrection), the Samaritans, the testimony of the Father, the writings, Jesus himself, and that of the Holy Spirit and the apostles.[236] Throughout his expositions of these various witnesses, Trites frequently makes appeal back to Isaiah 40-55, indicating that the Gospel's use of witness is modelled after that of

---

233. Ibid.

234. Ibid., 92. He does refer to a general background of opposition or persecution at other points in the chapter (pp. 81, 108, 122), but here he is referring to the wider literary background of the Gospel as a whole as it comes to bear on individual passages and themes, not the life situation of original implied readers.

235. The "juridical character" of the gospel will be taken up below in evaluation of Lincoln's account (similar to Trites).

236. Ibid., 90-120.

Isaiah, and is thus functioning within a wider metaphorical trial within which the evangelist sets his witnesses and thus marshals a case for the Messiahship and divine Sonship of Jesus.[237] The witness motif is therefore being used as a "live metaphor" within John's wider metaphorical trial motif, in which "God incarnate has a lawsuit with the world", as Yahweh does in Isaiah.[238] And yet, alongside this affirmation of a metaphorical employment of the category of witness comes repeated affirmations that the evangelist, at least in certain instances, intends his testimonial terminology to be interpreted in a literal eyewitness sense – "witness to facts", as Trites says.[239] The disciples are meant to be understood as eyewitnesses to Jesus' public ministry, having been with him "from the beginning" (15:27), the testimony to Jesus' side being pierced on the cross is intended as an eyewitness account (19:34-5), along with the resurrection and appearing accounts of John 20 and 21 (21:24).[240] Thus Trites, at least in certain instances, maintains a literal eyewitness function for the category of witness in the Fourth Gospel, and yet also strongly affirms its use as a literary device, an Isaianic-like metaphor, within the gospel's employment of a broader metaphorical lawsuit motif.

The New Testament Concept of Witness received strong engagement but mixed reviews when first published; amidst notes of appreciation for the scope of the work often comes exposure of lack of attention to, or oversimplification of, central historical-critical matters in Johannine interpretation. I would only add the following critiques relating to our question of the *function* of the witness motif in the Fourth Gospel. Trites does not identify any particular method

---

237. Claim of "links", "similarities" and "parallels" corresponding between John and Isaiah's use of witness within a trial metaphor abound: Ibid., 78–9, 82, 84, 87–9, 102–3, 110–2, 115, 117–8, 120.

238. Ibid., 122.

239. Ibid., 115. See also pp. 84-6, 95, 114, 122, 124. Trites argues the theme of witness in 1 John 1 is also intended to be understood as literal eyewitness, making appeal to it's opening words: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – the life was made manifest and we have seen it, and testify to it . . ." (1 Jn. 1-2a), 124.

240. Ibid.

for tracing the motif. Rather it seems that anything of "evidential value" in the Gospel is reckoned as a "testimony" of some kind – whether or not testimonial language is present in that given section. For example, the "Testimony of the First Disciples (1:35-51)" is examined under that heading, thus identifying as "testimony" the affirmations by Andrew, Philip, and Nathaniel that Jesus is the "Messiah", "the one whom Moses and the prophets wrote about", and "the Son of God; The King of Israel", respectively (though μαρτυρέω, μαρτυρία, or ὁμολογέω do not occur in the passage). This may be correct on certain methodological grounds that Trites does not give. But if so, it is not then immediately clear why Mary Magdalene's initial "announcement" (ἀπαγγέλλω) of the Lord's resurrection (20:18) is not also included in his account of testimony in the Fourth Gospel. This lack of methodological rigor for identifying – in as much as we might be able to – the specific definition, limits, and contribution of the motif, risks blurring the features of the wider trial theme, comprised as it is also by additional elements other than the theme of witness, and the gospel's concept(s) of witness itself. This approach at best only elucidates the wider motif of trial, and fails to approach the unique contribution of the Gospel's use of "witness" specifically.

Nonetheless, Trites' argument for reading the function of the motif in light of Isaiah does indeed cast light on John and, as we will see below, is picked up and developed much further by Lincoln. But even on this strong point in Trites' treatment, a weakness in methodological care seems apparent. As noted above, Trites argues for the dependence of John's use of witness on that of Isaiah 40-55 only by noting *similarities* between the two at a number of points in his exposition of John. But search as one might in his treatment of the relation between the two documents, either in his exposition of Isaiah 40-55 or John, the reader finds no mention of the fact that the Fourth Gospel quotes Isaiah four times (Jn. 1:23 of Isa. 40:3; Jn. 6:45 of Isa. 54:13; and Jn. 12:38-41 of Isa. 53:1 and then 6:10 – three of these quotes coming from Isaiah 40-55), explicitly names 'the prophet' Isaiah four times (1:23; 12:38, 39, 41), and arguably alludes to and

makes numerous thematic connections with Isaiah elsewhere.[241] Establishing the link in this way surely would have strengthened his contention that the implied reader of the Fourth Gospel would have picked up its Isaianic intertextuality – present as early as chapter 1 – and read its witness motif at least in part in that light (though this would still leave open the question of just how extensively we are to understand the employment of a trail motif to be). So though *in fact* the connection Trites makes between Isaiah and John is present, *in method* he falls prey to a kind of "parallelomania".[242]

However, most importantly for my aim here of first establishing the function of the witness motif in the Fourth Gospel, we have noticed Trites' affirmation of both an eyewitness use of testimonial terminology, but also its use as a "live metaphor". As we have seen, he believes, at least at certain points in the narrative, earliest readers of the gospel would have understood the testimonial terminology as representing a claim to a literal eyewitness account of historic events. But his overall treatment of the witness motif in John is framed in metaphorical terms with reference to the similar literary device in Isaiah, where the witness language clearly *does not* refer to literal eyewitness at all. The reader is then left to ask how these two functions of the witness theme in John might go together, if at all. This ambiguous tension between an eyewitness function and a metaphorical-witness function in Trites' account may result from his effort to draw out *the* New Testament concept of witness, when in fact the Fourth Gospel may have *concepts* of testimony, employing the witness motif in different ways at different points in the narrative, possibly operating at different points along a spectrum between an eyewitness and metaphorical use of testimony at different junctions of plot and/or at different levels of meaning. As we will see, this unresolved tension, or unexplained relation, between witness as eyewitness and witness within a metaphorical law-court motif, continues in subsequent scholarship on the

---

241. For an excellent article on this topic, with a helpful chart noting several connections between Isaiah and John's Gospel, see: James M. Jr Hamilton, "The Influence of Isaiah on the Gospel of John," *Perichoresis* 5, no. 2 (2007): 139–62.

242. Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," (JBL 81:1, March 1962), 1–13.

function of John's witness motif, and tends to tilt either one way or the other in both Lincoln and Bauckham. To Lincoln we now turn.

Andrew T. Lincoln – The witness motif as a literary device within a metaphorical lawsuit

After Trites, Andrew Lincoln's extensive work on the Fourth Gospel represents the next major stage of engagement with the question of the function of its use of witness/testimony in recent English scholarship. Two of his monographs and one article have direct bearing on the issue.[243] *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* still stands, over a decade and a half after its initial publication, as the most vigorous and extensive defense of the thesis that the Fourth Gospel is framed by a lawsuit motif that situates its whole. Nearly all subsequent English commentaries on the Fourth Gospel of traditional style reckon with his thesis in some way. Whereas, as we noted, Trites signalled the gospel's resemblance to Isaiah 40-55 in its trial motif but failed to establish it by a rigorous argument for John's intentional use of Isaiah, instead relying on noting only similarities between the two, Lincoln knows no such defect.[244] He makes a strong case for the Fourth Gospel's intentional evocation of Isaiah 40-55 in its employment of a trial motif, through not only an evaluation of the Fourth Gospel's explicit use of this section of Isaiah (and Isaiah more broadly), but also through an argument for the early prominence of the gospel's reference to this portion of Isaiah which, he argues, tips off the "informed reader" that the Isaianic metaphorical lawsuits between Yahweh and the nations and Yahweh and Israel are going to find analogy in the story the gospel is about to tell of his relation to his people as he is revealed in Jesus Christ. Lincoln observes that the first of the Gospel's direct quotations of Isaiah comes right at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, in John the Baptist's testimony to Jesus (Jn. 1:23 and Isa. 40:3), with the second and third quotations then coming right at the end (Jn.

---

243. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*; Lincoln, *The Gospel according to St John*; Andrew T. Lincoln, "The Beloved Disciple as Eyewitness and the Fourth Gospel as Witness", (JSNT, 85; 2002): 3–26.

244. Lincoln does interact with Trites' work, and most often comments appreciatively: Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 5, 31, 38–39, 49, 106, 116, 137, 171, 179, 219, 379, 388.

12:38 of Is. 53:1, and Jn. 6:45 of Isa. 54:13), immediately before the narrative transitions from its account of Jesus' ministry, to its intimate portrait of his ministry to the disciples in the Upper Room. Lincoln points out that this prominent placement of reference to Isaiah forms an *inclusio* around Jesus' public ministry, and includes two references to Isaiah 40-55, signalling continuity between that section's metaphorical trial motif and this major section of John. Whereas Isaiah 40-55 contains two lawsuits, one between God and the nations and another between Yahweh and Israel, Lincoln argues that these two become one in John, with Israel now representing the world and Jesus representing Yahweh.[245]

But it is not merely via connection with Isaiah that Lincoln asserts the judicial character of the Fourth Gospel. As mentioned above, Trites also traces similar features but we passed over his account there in promise of briefly summarising Lincoln's more robust treatment of similar material here. In addition to Lincoln's elucidation of the juridical nature of the Isaianic connection with John, he argues for a general lawsuit motif in the gospel along other lines as well. He notes that juridical elements occur not only in each of the major sections of the gospel, but do so in prominent ways.[246] A testimonial *inclusio* bookends the gospel, with the Beloved Disciple's final note of "testimony" to Jesus in the Epilogue mirroring that of John the Baptist in the Prologue (1:6-8 & 21:24-25). Explicit reference to the legal norms of witness come to the fore in Jesus' controversies with "the Jews" (5:19-47; 8:12-59), and the legal note is sounded loudly by the appearance of the man whom Jesus' had healed of blindness before the inquisition of the Pharisees, alongside his parents (9:13-34). Jesus' farewell discourse emphasises the ministry of the Advocate in Jesus' absence (14:16, 26), and alongside the eventual ministry of the disciples themselves, promising that the Advocate's ministry will in part be one of conviction of the world (15:26-27; 16:7-11). The Roman trial of Jesus is central to John's passion narrative

---

245. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, 46.

246. Lincoln sees the Fourth Gospel breaking into five major sections: 1:1-18; 1:19-12:50; 13:1-20:31 (which then divides again between 13:1-17:26 & 18:1-20:31), and finally 21:1-25: Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 14.

(18:28-19:16a). Jesus' crucifixion, as the climax of the narrative, is related in the terminology of testimony (19:35). Unlike the Synoptics, John's narrative has no account of a Jewish trial before the Sanhedrin (only a questioning by the High Priest and then a trial before Pilate).

This, to Lincoln, results from, and furthers the effect of, the whole of Jesus' ministry being construed as a trial. Within this trial, he sees seven signs, seven discourses, and seven witnesses (John the Baptist, Jesus' own witness, Jesus' works, God himself gives witness, the Scriptures, the Samaritan woman, and those who testify to the raising of Lazarus).[247] Lincoln argues the combined effect of these features is to firmly construe the life and ministry of Jesus within a metaphorical trial in which the reader is initially led to see Jesus as under trial, only to gradually realise, in a twist of irony, that it is actually his accusers who are under trial and must give answer. Further, though he does not attempt a detailed reconstruction of the life situation of the implied readers, he does argue that the gospel tells a two-level story, narrating not only the ministry of Jesus, but also through the gospel's account of Jesus' travail of trial it narrates the story of readers who may have been having to give their testimony to Jesus in the context of strong resistance, a reality that the gospel anticipates in its account of the Advocate's ministry alongside the disciples as they participate in his ministry of witness to Jesus (particularly in 15:18-16:15).[248] For Lincoln, "both the pervasiveness and the positioning of the motif encourage readers to view the narrative, as a whole, from the perspective of a trial".[249] Indeed, elsewhere he goes so far as to say that the Fourth Gospel is "dominated by the motif of the trial".[250] And though others might not put it quite so strongly, Lincoln is most certainly not alone in noting a

---

247. Ibid., 22–23.

248. Ibid., 27, 34.

249. Ibid., 22.

250. Lincoln, "The Beloved Disciple as Eyewitness and the Fourth Gospel as Witness," 20.

lawsuit motif as a pervasive characteristic of the Gospel.[251]

Having established the basic contours of Lincoln's overall argument that an all-encompassing metaphorical trial motif frames the Fourth Gospel, his understanding of the witness motif within the gospel readily unfolds. Helpfully, his position on the function of the theme of witness is crystallised in an article he wrote to address a growing tendency he noted amidst some scholars who, to his mind, were making an all too simplistic attribution of an eyewitness function to the Beloved Disciple said to be testifying in John 21:24, which then has implications for how the witness language of the Fourth Gospel is understood throughout. He names Maccini, Tovey, and Vanhoozer who each attribute an eyewitness function to the Beloved Disciple all arguing, albeit in different ways, that taking the claim of 21:24 seriously necessarily entails recognising some manner of eyewitness function to the witness motif.[252] We cannot examine their distinct arguments here, but only Lincoln's account of the witness function in direct response to them. Lincoln's critical interpretive move is to argue that the witness motif is correlated to the theme of 'seeing and hearing,' which runs alongside the motif of testimony in the gospel.[253] He rightly points out that the theme of testimony first appears in relation to John the Baptist, "who comes as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him" (1:7). Lincoln notes that this is hardly a straightforward "seeing and hearing" that results in an everyday kind of eyewitness testimony. It is not about physically seeing a light or reporting a straightforward event.[254] Further, the next reference to John the Baptist's testimony concerns the incarnate *Logos* who is greater than the Baptist because he came before him (1:29-

---

251. An earlier treatment, which Lincoln acknowledges but does not interact with substantially is: Harvey, *Jesus on Trial*; See also: Maccini, *Her Testimony Is True*, 32–62.

252. Maccini, *Her Testimony Is True*; Derek Tovey, *Narrative Art and Act in the Fourth Gospel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Hermeneutics of I-Witness Testimony: John 21:20–24 and the 'Death' of the 'Author'", in *Understanding Poets and Prophets: Essays in Honour of George Wishart Anderson, ed. A. Graeme Auld* (JSOTSup; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 366-87.

253. Lincoln, "The Beloved Disciple as Eyewitness and the Fourth Gospel as Witness", 7.

254. Ibid.

30). John's testifying to the pre-existence of the *Logos* surely does not imply a kind of literal eyewitness testimony.

Further the "seeing" of 1:14: "we have seen his glory . . . who came from the Father full of grace and truth" is not to be understood as a kind of "observing" but a kind of "beholding".[255] Lincoln notes a close relationship between the Prologue's use of "seeing" in conjunction with "receiving" (1:11, 12, 16), "knowing" (1:10), and "believing" (1:7, 12), and asserts that this relationship is nearly synonymous in nature, indicating that the testimony that arises from such "seeing" is not a kind of mere eyewitness reporting of events, but signals a deeper existential reality.[256] Further, the language of seeing is employed alongside that of witnessing in John 1:32-3, as John testifies to seeing the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove and remain on Jesus. He grants that it seems in this instance the reader is meant to understand that John had some manner of a visionary experience, but again asserts that this type of "seeing" and "testifying" clearly defies any easy positioning within an eyewitness mould. He argues the same for Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, with its references to seeing the kingdom of God and heavenly realities through being born from above (3:3, 12). Yet Jesus "sees and testifies" about them from the position of his unique relationship to the Father (3:31-3).[257] Lincoln then reinforces these insights on the nature of the relation between seeing and testifying in the Gospel with reference to his earlier work on the lawsuit metaphor in John, which we sketched above. Thus, he asserts:

> The relationship between God and the world in this narrative is represented by an extended metaphor. The narrative's point of view is that God's relationship with the world is like a lawsuit. The language of witness, therefore, has to be seen, first and foremost, as functioning within this metaphorical framework. Those who witness are testifying to key aspects of disputed claims about the relationship between God and the world, in particular to the identity and role of the one who purports to be God's agent. To attempt to make the witness language function first of all as ordinary eyewitnessing that

---

255. Ibid., 8.

256. Ibid., 9.

257. Ibid.

> indicates the historical accuracy of the narrative's discourse is to lose sight of its primary function as part of the lawsuit metaphor.[258]

These insights then play the decisive role in how he will understand the appeal to testimony on behalf of the Beloved Disciple, named in John 21:24, and whom Lincoln believes is the one present at the piercing of Jesus' side, though there he goes unnamed (19:34-6).[259]

Lincoln acknowledges that the text claims an "eyewitness element" for the Beloved disciple by placing him at key points in the narrative involving description of events that have every appearance of an eyewitness account. And he acknowledges that the intended reader very well may be expected to retrospectively recognise the Beloved Disciple as the unnamed disciple that appears at the beginning of the gospel with Andrew (1:35-40), thus placing him as a kind of eyewitness who walked with Jesus "from the beginning"[260] Here Lincoln does not shrink from acknowledging the "intriguing phenomena" that straightforwardly the narrative, "turns out to be suggesting that in some way it incorporates an eyewitness element in the Beloved Disciple's role and yet one in which from the very start the notion of witness and even of seeing is quite confessional and part of the extended metaphor of the cosmic trial".[261] He then entertains a number of different explanations for this phenomena, and concludes that the claim to literal eyewitness in the gospel's portrayal of the Beloved Disciple is to be understood as a literary device which serves both to draw the reader into the heart of the narrative through the position of the Beloved Disciple, and to add a sense of verisimilitude to the narrative.[262] Lincoln notes that this in no ways compromises the truthfulness of the narrative's claims about the identity of Jesus,

---

258. Ibid., 10.

259. Ibid., 14.

260. Ibid., 15.

261. Ibid., 16.

262. Ibid., 19; See also Lincoln, *The Gospel according to St John*, 24.

but simply frames the way it claims what it claims. The Gospel is not seeking to impart "facts" about Jesus' life. For Lincoln, those were not the concern for the original readers:

> For the issues at the heart of the lawsuit motif, the basic "facts" are not in dispute. According to the narrative, Jesus' deeds and teaching were controversial and could be constructed as blasphemous and law breaking; he antagonized the Jewish religious authorities who had him arrested and then handed him over to Pilate on a charge of political sedition; he was executed by the Roman governor for his alleged claim to be the King of the Jews. Both sides agree on this data. They disagree on the slant that should be put on them.[263]

Thus recognising the Gospel's positioning of the Beloved Disciple as an "eyewitness" in the narrative as a literary device is not to question its *truth*. Rather, it is to establish the kind of truth the Gospel attempts in its employment of witnesses. For Lincoln, the truth that needed asserting for the implied readers was not the "facts" about Jesus' historic life. Those were not at issue. Rather it was the *slant* on those facts that were contested and needed addressing. This confessional interpretation of the facts is the issue taken up within the Gospel's wider trial motif. Lincoln helpfully references broader examples of Jewish literature roughly contemporaneous with the Fourth Gospel. He notes that there are eyewitness accounts on the part of the patriarchs in the apocalyptic visions of *1 Enoch*, the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* and claims to testimony that exist in *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.[264] Thus readers of the Fourth Gospel would have been familiar with types of literature where claims to eyewitness testimony were straightforward and to be taken at face value, and others where it intended a different more provocative and reflective response.

In response to Lincoln's work, both on the trial motif and how he elucidates the function of the witness motif within it, there is no question that he mounts an exceptionally persuasive and well constructed case. The calibre of his work is such that those who dismiss his argument out of hand because of its challenge to the notion of the Beloved Disciple as eyewitness end up revealing more about the depth of their engagement with Lincoln and the central interpretive

---

263. Lincoln, "The Beloved Disciple as Eyewitness and the Fourth Gospel as Witness," 20–21.

264. Ibid., 19.

issues involved than they do about the relative merits of his proposal.[265] It is vital, as Lincoln asserts, that the question of the gospel's truthfulness be framed in relation to *its* aims and expectations within its originating context, and his warning against imposing our alien expectations upon it is well taken. The gospel's relative 'truthfulness' can only be judged against its own standard, both generally speaking and, in our interest, specifically with reference to the testimonial motif.

Further, Lincoln's fundamental interpretive move, that of aiming to unfold the function of the testimonial language by correlating it to its paired notion of "seeing", is extremely helpful. One of the ways to elucidate the Gospel's use of the category is most certainly to probe its notion of "seeing" as Lincoln begins to do here. With that said, there is a question as to whether he has indeed done that with complete even handedness in his argument related above. It is true, as he amply demonstrates, that the concept of witness without question takes on a confessional mode and is at numerous places tied to a kind of "seeing" of the unseen. But this is not the only use of "seeing" emphasised within the narrative. The phenomena of literal sight is not totally absorbed into a notion of supra-seeing. A fairer treatment, as I hope to demonstrate below, reveals instead a juxtaposition between empirical sight and a metaphorical extension of it. This will be shown in relation to the point in the narrative where the question of sight comes to the fore with greatest force, and that in the context of testimony, namely in the account of the healing of the man born blind (9:1-41).

It is also present, I believe, in John the Baptist's account of Jesus' Baptism which Lincoln takes up. He rightly points out that whatever it was that constituted John's apprehension of the Spirit resting upon Jesus as a dove, that it most certainly could not be reduced to a kind of everyday experience of sight. And the experience indeed gives rise to John's confession of Jesus'

---

265. Unfortunately the case here: James M. Jr Hamilton, "Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel", (BBR, 16:2; 2006): 369–71. But for a much more appreciative review, also from a conservative perspective similar to that of Hamilton's, see: Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel," *Trinity Journal* 22, no. 2 (2001): 269–72.

identity, not merely to descriptive facts about the event itself, void of any interpretation of them. But Lincoln fails to mention that John claims that he was given a *prior* visionary experience that enabled him to interpret Jesus' identity at his baptism. The Baptist claims that he would not have known who Jesus was had he not had this preparatory experience: "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'" (1:33). In other words, if we accept Lincoln's position on this account, we must hold that the Fourth Gospel means to commend not just that the Baptist had an exceptional visionary experience at Jesus' Baptism, but that he needed a visionary experience to interpret a visionary experience, a tautological position. It seems more probable that he needed a preparatory word to read rightly an extraordinary visual experience at Jesus' baptism; one that was experienced in part within John's empirical sight, and then by the preparatory word given him, extended from it into a "seeing" of the significance of Jesus' identity as revealed in his baptism.

Above, with respect to Trites' work on the function of the witness motif, we noted a methodological concern. Here as well we must raise a central issue of methodology. As demonstrated, Lincoln does use the witness terminology to bolster his affirmation of a broad trial motif in the Gospel. But he also argues from the broad trial motif to support his interpretation of the gospel's witness motif as fundamentally juridical and metaphorical in function. With the exception of his appeal to Isaiah, there is little in his account to keep these two aspects of his argument from simply inflating one another, causing them to float as a potentially abstract interpretive grid misconstruing the text at places, rather than genuinely supporting one another from independent rooting in the text. Again, there is a tendency in Lincoln to assert *one* function of the witness language within *one* context (namely a polemic lawsuit use of testimony). It is curious, given its sheer size and thoroughness, that *Truth on Trial* includes no basic lexical study of μαρτυρέω and μαρτυρία , which throws up a range of possible emphases for these key testimonial words in John, and a range of pertinent contexts, not all polemic or juridical, as we will see below. It is quite possible that, in conjunction with a spectrum of notions of "seeing and

hearing" which extends from the empirical to the metaphorical, that there is also a spectrum of witness, extending from the literal eyewitness usage to, certainly at points, a metaphorical extension of the idea of testimony. It will also be important to ask whether, within the narrative of the gospel at the micro-level, in individual pericopes including testimony, the theme of testimony *always* has polemical overtones which play into the motif of a trial. If not, this would raise the question as to whether the function of witness at the macro-level, in the framing of the gospel as a whole, is indeed as polemic and judicial as Lincoln sees it to be.

Finally, as we saw, Lincoln notes that the fundamental issue to which Fourth Gospel's various testimonies give witness is to the identity of Jesus Christ. It would seem to follow from this, then, that the Gospel's expressions of testimony would attempt to reckon with the entirety of the reality to which it points in Christ – suggesting that understanding the Gospel's use of witness would correspond to its Christology. In other words, if we are to understand the Fourth Gospel's employment of the category of witness as true to itself in this central characteristic, we must not only seek to understand its meaning and function by relating it to the juridical features of the gospel, or to its rich and varied notions of "seeing" and "hearing", which we certainly must do. We must also allow the gospel's concepts of witness to be informed by its presentation of Christ as the pre-existent *Logos* come incarnate within the matrix of human history – the One who is "seen and heard". The motif of witness in response to *this* reality would then, we would expect, be an expression of "seeing" the fullness of this Christ, including in his historic dimension.

Regarding, then, Lincoln's assertion over the real issue that was at issue in the context of the earliest readers of the Fourth Gospel – that it was not the facticity of the events of Jesus' ministry that were contested, but their meaning – we might ask: Why are we to believe that central contours of Jesus' life and ministry were not at issue for the Gospel's implied readers? Why, in his list of the "basic facts" of Jesus' life which were *not* disputed between its Christian audience and the polemic environment in which they found themselves, did Lincoln only list his deeds and teaching, his polemic with Jewish authorities, his handing over to Pilate, and his

crucifixion? Why not mention the Gospel's claim to incarnation and its account of the resurrection? These would be at issue in any context where Jesus' identity was at issue, given that their status as events (or non-events) are inextricably tied to the meaning of his identity.

Thus surely Lincoln is correct that the gospel is demonstrably concerned with confession to Jesus as Messiah and Son of God. And, as argued above, his identification of juridical metaphor in the gospel is persuasive. But a question remains as to just how pervasive a metaphorical treatment extends. If we conclude that the Fourth Gospel is not merely concerned with a kind of metaphorical reflection on the Word made flesh, one where there is no intent to assert the historicity of the incarnation in its claims about it (which again would not be to gainsay its *truthfulness*), then it would seem to follow that we must be open to the possibility of its use of quite expansive notions of "seeing" and "testifying". They would then be understood as categories which seek to wrestle with that Word in both his pre-existent and come historically incarnate dimensions. Witness as response to the Word come real flesh makes way for an eyewitness element to the testimonial theme in addition to the metaphorical use that Lincoln argues for. Therefore, whereas Trites leaves the relation between a metaphorical employment of the category of witness and an eyewitness function ambiguous, finding both in the text but failing to unfold their relation, Lincoln also finds them both in the text but represses the eyewitness function wholly within the metaphorical framework by defining it entirely as a literary device. In our final representative author, I will argue that Bauckham approaches the opposite pole.

Richard Bauckham – The eyewitness function disassociated from the testimonial language

In *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* Richard Bauckham engages at length the question of the function of the witness motif in the Fourth Gospel.[266] The

---

266. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008). Also, the following chapter helpfully summarizes the argument of chapters 14 & 15 of *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*: Richard Bauckham, "The Fourth Gospel as the Testimony of the Beloved Disciple," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008), 120–39. Further, the following work is a collection of essays on various topics related to John's Gospel, but

central thesis of the work arises from Bauckham's concern that the widespread form-critical assumption that the Jesus traditions behind the gospels existed first within a long process of transformation trough oral tradition transmission is incorrect.[267] Bauckham does not so much launch an attack on premises central to a classic form-critical hypothesis (such as those developed by Schmidt, Dibelius, and Bultmann).[268] Rather he largely presumes the demise of the central arguments supporting the form-critical explanation of the formation of the gospels. Nonetheless, he notes that the overall picture of a long period of oral transmission remains: "It is a curious fact that nearly all the contentions of the early form critics have by now been convincingly refuted, but the general picture of the process of oral transmission that the form critics pioneered still governs the way most New Testament scholars think".[269] Bauckham's thesis aims to rectify this concern by arguing that the influence of actual eyewitnesses to Jesus' life and ministry extends much closer to the formation and preservation of the traditions about Jesus contained in the canonical gospels than was previously thought:

> The period between the "historical" Jesus and the Gospels was actually spanned, not by anonymous community transmission, but by the continuing presence and testimony of the eyewitnesses, who remained the authoritative sources of their traditions until their deaths . . . Gospel traditions did not, for the most part, circulate anonymously but in the name of the eyewitnesses to whom they were due . . . So, in imagining how the traditions reached the Gospel writers, not oral tradition but eyewitness testimony should be our principal model.[270]

Bauckham attempts this shift of emphasis to a more direct relationship between the Gospels and eyewitness testimony behind them by means of a number of sub-arguments. Given our focus on his treatment of the function of the witness motif in John, we cannot engage them to any depth

---

with respect to the function of the witness motif it adds little to the argument of *Eyewitnesses*: Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*.

267. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 240–49.

268. Ibid., 242.

269. Ibid.

270. Ibid., 8.

here. But needless to say Bauckham's overall approach to the New Testament Gospels leads him to examine each in search of signs of its "eyewitness character". But interestingly, with respect to the Fourth Gospel, Bauckham does not do what one would initially expect him to do given his overall thesis – namely create an easy association between the testimonial language of the Fourth Gospel and an eyewitness source. Though he does not reckon with Trites work at any great length,[271] he does engage with and is significantly influenced by Lincoln's work on the function of the category (and as we saw above Lincoln *is* influenced by Trites' line of argument). So what then does Bauckham do with the motif of testimony in the Fourth Gospel?

He argues that only the Gospel of John claims not only to be based on eyewitness accounts but further, at least on the face of it, attests to being written by an eyewitness – the Beloved Disciple (21:24-5).[272] But Bauckham rightly wrestles with the nature of the Beloved Disciple's identity, authorial relationship to the gospel, and testimony. He does this by bringing into dialogue Lincoln's work and that of Swedish scholar Samuel Byrskog.[273] Lincoln, as we have seen, emphasises a metaphorical trial framework for John, which then situates the witness motif as a literary device within it and results in the testimonial language not amounting to any intended claim to eyewitness. Byrskog, for his part, comes at the question from the angle of comparative studies between the canonical gospels and the practices of ancient historians, seeking to ascertain how eyewitness accounts were treated in both instances. Bauckham holds him as successfully demonstrating that Greco-Roman historiography, at its best, believed that true history could only be obtained while events were still in living memory and accessible from

---

271. Trites is acknowledged as the go-to source for the "witness as metaphor" theme within the NT in a passing footnote. Bauckham does not note that Trites in fact develops both an eyewitness and metaphorical explanation of the function of the NT concept of witness in his work: Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 474n3.

272. Ibid., 358.

273. Samuel Byrskog, *Story as History - History as Story: The Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History* (WUNT, 123; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

first hand oral reports of involved participants in the events.[274] This meant that the ideal eyewitness was not dispassionate. Instead the socially involved participant was to be preferred.[275] Of course the ideal was not always met, and many would combine their oral sources with written to supplement their knowledge of the past, and to corroborate the testimonies of other eyewitnesses.[276] But Byrskog argues that the gold standard for ancient history writing focused on the oral testimonies of the living eyewitnesses to the events inquired after.

He then goes on to argue that a similar esteem for eyewitness testimony obtained in the formation of the gospel traditions and their textual forms and seeks to identify eyewitness influence within the canonical gospels, and argues that their narratives were a synthesis between the historical eyewitness reports of the involved participants and the work of narrative construction by the author – a combination of story and history. But the influence of the eyewitnesses, on Byrskog's account, still maintained as the gospels began to circulate. Their presence served to help guard and steward the tradition even once written.[277]

Bauckham appreciates the emphasis of Byrskog's work, only summarised through Bauckham here (given our focus on him). He notes, however, that perhaps *Story as History* assumed more than demonstrated that the gospels are comparative with ancient Greek and Roman historiography best practice.[278] Thus Bauckham sets out to further strengthen this general case, but then argues for how it pertains to individual gospels.[279]

---

274. Bauckham, "The Fourth Gospel as the Testimony of the Beloved Disciple," 121.

275. Ibid.

276. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 9.

277. Ibid., 10.

278. Ibid., 11.

279. See especially chapter 3 of: Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*.

In the instance of John, then, Bauckham has a unique challenge as he has been persuaded by both Byrskog's and Lincoln's theses, and they seem to conflict when it comes to the witness motif in John. Byrskog is exploring the role of historic eyewitnesses in the development and oversight of written gospel traditions. And Lincoln is arguing for witness as a metaphorical construct in the Fourth Gospel. How does he then attempt to honour both? He first argues that in Greek μαρτυρέω (martureō) and related words within its word group have a primarily legal connotation and takes on a metaphorical witness concept when used without reference to a literal courtroom setting.[280] This is similar to how "eyewitness" functions in English – it takes on metaphorical freight when used without reference to an actual legal context. But Bauckham notes that in Greek this confusion is absent as αὐτόπτης (autoptēs) (found in Lk. 1:2), does not have metaphorical connotations, but refers to a literal eyewitness to events. John, however, does not use αὐτόπτης (autoptēs). So, despite Bauckham's desire to uncover eyewitness connections within each of the gospels, with respect to John's testimonial language he confesses: "The important point is that the New Testament use of the μαρτυρέω word group does not itself come from historiographical usage".[281] Thus far, I am sure, Lincoln is quite happy.

However, Bauckham then turns to Lincoln's work and, after appreciating it in significant ways, holds that, even given the recognition of his insights on the role of trial metaphor in the Fourth Gospel, the μαρτυρέω (martureō) word group nonetheless is being used "with historiographical significance" within the trial motif. He accepts Lincoln's thesis that John unfolds two phases of the Gospel's presentation of the cosmic trial. These two phases have temporal succession. The first centres on the ministry of Jesus as its content, and is supported by seven witnesses who testify within the first 12 chapters: John the Baptist, Jesus himself, the Samaritan woman, God the Father, Jesus' works/signs, the Scriptures, and the crowd who testifies to the raising of Lazarus. Then, in the second phase of the trial after Jesus' death and

---

280. Bauckham, "The Fourth Gospel as the Testimony of the Beloved Disciple," 123.

281. Ibid.

resurrection, which is in the future from the perspective of the narrative, there are two witnesses: the Holy Spirit and the disciples, of which the Beloved Disciple is one.[282]

But on the heels of this appreciation for Lincoln's insight, Bauckham then points out that from the perspective of 21:24-5, the witness of the Beloved Disciple encompasses the whole of the gospel and, he argues, forms an *inclusio* with the reference to John the Baptist's testimony in the Prologue. This means that the Beloved Disciple's witness in fact encompasses all of the witnesses in the book, including the seven of Jesus' public ministry.[283] And yet the gospel shows a manifest concern for multiplicity of witness concerning Jesus. Therefore, Bauckham concludes, if the witness of the Beloved Disciple does not entail a measure of actual reporting of the way the other witnesses 'testified' concerning Jesus in his lifetime, then in actual fact the temporal succession of the phases of the trial have collapsed into one, and we really only have the Beloved Disciple's witness. But instead it appears that he is using his testimony to enable other testimonies to find their own voice through his own, and hence a measure of 'reporting' must be left to the testimonial language of John, despite the lexical hindrances Bauckham notes.[284]

Bauckham then moves from this general argument on the witness character of the whole gospel, to specific focus on establishing the Beloved Disciple as its principal author. This includes arguing against a trend he notes in modern biblical scholarship of affirming that γράφω (grafō) can be understood in a causative sense. Instead, the lexical data points to it maintaining a closer relationship between the author and the text, which often included the use of an amanuensis, but nonetheless positioned the author as the one finally responsible for the text.[285] Bauckham is simply seeking to establish the nature of the claim in 21:24-5, defending the limited

---

282. Ibid.

283. Ibid., 124.

284. Ibid.

285. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 358–61.

range of meaning for the verb 'to write,' while recognising that even if that is granted, many scholars would remain unconvinced about the veracity of such a claim. He further argues that rather than 20:30-31 representing the original end of the gospel as many have thought, with the Epilogue added later, that these verses and 21:24-5 form a two-stage conclusion, and parallel one another in clear ways, forming an *inclusio* around the Epilogue and tying it closely to the main text.[286] Bauckham then argues that John the Elder, an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry but not one of the twelve, stands as the likely candidate for the Beloved Disciple.[287]

There is much is to be appreciated about Bauckham's work on the Fourth Gospel, and his sizeable body of other work, which includes historical theology, other exegetical works, and systematic theology. Much of his work on John bristles with insightful exegetical insights. His portrayal of the development of the gospels in relation to an ongoing eyewitness oversight, however, can be critiqued for possibly assuming too much on behalf of ancient readers in their ability to discern the numerous subtle signals to eyewitness tradition that Bauckham finds in the texts, and possibly could run counter to his earlier collaborative work that argued that the gospels, as residing within the *bios* genre, were generally intended for wide circulation rather than maintained tightly within originating communities.[288] How these two theses are held together by Bauckham is unclear.

But of the three positions outlined in this chapter, Bauckham's is to be appreciated the most for seeking to work out how the apparent eyewitness character to at least some of the testimonial language of the Fourth Gospel might relate to metaphorical employment of the category. He seems genuinely appreciative of Lincoln's insights, and there is more tension in Bauckham's work as a result of it which he clearly refused to avoid, seeking, it seems, to follow

---

286. Ibid., 365.

287. Ibid., 433.

288. Richard Bauckham, *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).

the truth where it leads. Lincoln, I believe, is in a more comfortable position having collapsed the eyewitness completely within the metaphorical, but the less accurate for it.

With that said, some further refinement is needed. Bauckham confuses the matter of the proper context of the μαρτυρέω word group, I believe, by seeking to open its historical significance in relation to Byrskog's emphasis on *historiography*. I trust that he is right that the word group is not frequently used in ancient historiography to convey the notion of an eyewitness. But that is not the question. The question is to what degree the μαρτυρέω word group can be used outside of legal contexts to convey a kind of testimony to fact, with historic reference, but more generally. And if it then can, to what degree does it within John? And it seems indeed that it can. Casey notes regarding the word group, that scholars have often been most concerned to explain how witness in the sense of 'testimony' in a courtroom setting came to have the meaning of μαρττυς as 'martyr' in early Christian documents. But this orientation of investigation has tended to blur notice of the presence of *several* early Christian usages of the μάρτυς word group which most certainly do not all pertain to witness unto death.[289] Though μάρτυς does not appear in the Fourth Gospel, Casey notes that in it μαρτυρέω and μαρτυρία appear more frequently than anywhere else in the New Testament.[290] Yet he stresses that they do not function as technical terms, and notes that they often take on a metaphorical connotation as "a natural and favorite metaphor of the author's to describe Jesus' knowledge of himself and his disciples' appreciation of his significance".[291] I do not deny that John's usage frequently maintains legal associations. But in many instances, such as the Woman of Samaria returning to her town with her testimony of her encounter with Jesus, all manner of polemic seems absent. Emphasis on trial seems either absent or roughly imposed in this instance of the Gospel's use of μαρτυρέω, and instead an everyday kind of reporting as to what happened that others may know

---

289. Casey, "'μάρτυς' In *The Beginnings of Christianity," 30–31.*

290. Ibid., 34.

291. Ibid., 35.

too seems native to the context. If this is correct - that the testimonial word group that John employs can and in some instances does have historical reference, even if it was not the preferred word in historiography - then Bauckham does not need to deny a kind of eyewitness character to the word's semantic range in order to achieve his purposes.

Conversely, once Bauckham has found a way to reinforce the "historic significance" of the witness motif in John, then all talk of its possible metaphorical employment seems to drop away, and the focus is squarely on the historical significance alone. This is not a critique of Bauckham, as he comes at the motif with a specific interest and is not aiming to unfold the theme in all its wider significance. But *we* might ask what is lost if we functionally were to collapse the tension between the metaphorical and the eyewitness aspects of the motif in John. What of the value of the motif of witness/testimony as metaphor for exploring the nature of our epistemic situation under God, or the nature of our ongoing response to his revelation amidst the world? It appears as Bauckham's work marches on, that this question is lost to other purposes, but it is central to the concern of this thesis.

As I have indicated above, through comparative critique of Trites, Lincoln, and now Bauckham, John's gospel provokes a multi-level reading of the purpose the motif of witness is serving within its presentation of Jesus Christ - taking as it does its cues from him. As the eternal Word become flesh, and as his ministry is attended by the work of God through him and in those around him, eyewitness testimony to his ministry, his death, and his resurrection, become the apostolic basis for belief. In this sense, the testimony of those who have 'seen and heard' bridge a gap for those of us who have not had direct proximity to Jesus' embodied ministry here on earth. This does not mean he has left himself without witness. He had to go away, as he told his disciples, but his ascension meant the outpouring of the Holy Spirit who would lead the early disciples into the fullness of the significance of the truth they had seen and heard in Jesus Christ. Given Christ's full humanity and, with it, his full embodiment, apostolic eyewitness testimony to that experience is foundational to the church, and is reflected in the tactile nature of John's descriptions of bread and wine and blood and water and fish over fire by the sea. To forsake an

eyewitness character to what the early church meant by witness is to forsake the historical nature of the incarnation, and thus of the heart of the Christian faith. Jesus highlighted that his initial disciples would be central to the Holy Spirit's ongoing work of testimony because they had been with him from the beginning, highlighting the importance of their fleshly proximity to his presence for the ongoing foundation of faith. Yes, the Holy Spirit would bear witness, but not apart from their testimony to what they had seen and heard of the history of Jesus (Jn. 16:26-27). This eyewitness tradition is carried to future generations through Holy Scripture and the traditions of the church as the Holy Spirit guides and preserves the faith of the church, renewing in each generation an apprehension of the significance of the eyewitness testimony of the first disciples. Their testimony bridges a gap that Jesus highlighted to Thomas: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (Jn. 20:29). In other words, testimony bridges a gap of embodied proximity to the embodied Son of God - the object of our faith. And so the Evangelist testifies that others of their day and we ourselves might believe, having been enabled to see and hear through the seeing and hearing of the Beloved Disciple as the Holy Spirit continues his ongoing work of testifying to the reality of Jesus Christ through his people. The eyewitness character to testimony is foundational.

But the Evangelist also employs the motif of witness in an analogical sense as well, using it to capture something of the nature of living out faith in Christ within the cosmic drama of redemption - akin to Isaiah's use of metaphorical trial imagery in order to capture something essential about Israel's relationship with Yahweh and with the nations at a given point in their history. Likewise, the phenomena of testifying captured for the early Christians something central about the nature of their bearing of the knowledge of God through their now ascended Lord into a world of staggering diversity of beliefs, where their testimony would not always be welcome. That self-understanding as witness - that stance of the one who testifies *vis-à-vis* the world, has not merely epistemic implications, but it nonetheless is vital in shaping the epistemic expectations of the individual believer and of churches, as I will show below. Thus though an account of testimony as eyewitness "source" will always remain central to Christian faith,

likewise holding the phenomena of being a witness and of testifying as a central analogical lens through which to understand the nature of Christian experience until the eschaton is also vitally important for maintaining faith.

Conclusion

To review the argument of the thesis as a whole thus far, its first chapter served as an introductory clearing of the ground for the project. There I made clear how I relate the theological to the epistemological within the broad topic of theological epistemology. Given there are several ways of relating the two, and given the temptation to not make clear how one is handling this relation, I specified in the first chapter the Christian theological stance I am approaching the topic from, and then outlined four touchstones - four adjectives of appraisal - that should characterise an epistemology arising with integrity from that stance. I argued that such a theological epistemology would strive to be *genuinely theological, ontologically attuned, contextually-missionally focused, and ethically alert*.

After establishing these four touchstones, I then turned to explore a thematic approach to constructive theological epistemology by examining the works of John Stackhouse and Esther Meek, who both take a thematic approach to the topic, and asked whether such an approach holds promise for a contribution to theological epistemology that honours the four virtues I identified. I concluded that the thematic approach, as demonstrated in their works, does indeed hold promise but that in both cases the necessity of identifying a biblical motif with stronger and more natural epistemic ties than the themes that Stackhouse and Meek selected (vocation and covenant, respectively) is stark. I therefore concluded the chapter by arguing for a superior candidate for thematic contribution to the field of theological epistemology - the motif of witness/testimony. I made this argument by sketching, in a preliminary way, how the motif of witness shows promise for developing an epistemology that is genuinely theological, ontological, contextual-missional, and ethical. I also signalled that a turn to sounding something of the depths of this motif, as ancient as it is and as often as it has been done, promises nonetheless to be

freshly profitable given both a philosophical moment of renewed reflection on the motif - in both analytic and phenomenological traditions - and given our cultural moment in the West, braced as it is in a struggle with dynamics of "fake news", "misinformation", and "conspiracy theories" - all of which relate to the question of testimony.

Thus, having cleared the ground for a thematic approach to contribution to theological epistemology by means of a fresh sounding of the motif of witness in aspects of its biblical and philosophical expressions, in this chapter I set the foundations of the unique contribution of the thesis by examining what I argued to be the pinnacle of the motifs biblical usage as found in the Gospel of John. I opened the chapter by clarifying how I approach the Fourth Gospel's usage of the motif, namely that I approach it inductively - attempting to allow the Gospel's narratival drive and content to give primary shape to the meaning of the theme in John (rather than merely approaching it lexically), and that I approach it with a focus on witness *as act* (rather than recounting the various witnesses in the text one after the other, as has been done). This approach to the motif - an inductive one that focuses on witness as act - yields an important contribution: namely an unfolding of a *testimonial logic* that is woven throughout the Fourth Gospel. By this testimonial logic I mean a shared understanding as to key testimonial principles which undergird a community's public discernment, aiding them in distinguishing between true and false testimony. I demonstrated how this testimonial logic relates to an overall trial motif that frames the Gospel as a whole, and expounded how that logic serves to make appeal to its hearers.

This is to say that the Gospel seeks to persuade its hearers to faith in Jesus Christ as the incarnate Son of God by unfolding its presentation of him in accord with the testimonial logic that was common to them in discerning disputable matters of vital importance for their communities more generally. In other words, the Evangelist takes a central everyday and long established means of communal discernment - that of a testimonial logic that served to help their communities discern between false testimony and true - and then develops it on a cosmic scale to commend his understanding as to the identity of Jesus, the life he offers, and the response he demands. I noted the significant New Testament scholarship that has identified links between

John's Gospel and Isaiah in this common strategy of taking everyday lawsuit themes, and writing them large such to help their readers discern the state of their relationship with the God of Israel, and his call in a given moment of their life with him.

Unfolding then the expression of this strategy in the Gospel, I identified four aspects to this testimonial logic that the Evangelist both assumes and develops out of desire to commend faith in Christ to his hearers: 1) the central witnesses of the Gospel are understood to be sent to bear public testimony amid the world, which gives rise to, 2) a sensitivity to the issue of self-testimony: the true witness does not come in their own name (they are sent and are invested in their testimony), and thus they do not testify for the purposes of their own praise; instead they point away from themselves to the phenomena they bear witness to. Just as the Evangelist understands that his hearers rightly suspect self-serving testimony, so to sympathy is displayed toward a resistance of *singular* testimony: 3) singular witness is rightfully suspected and instead, when it comes to matters of vital importance for the community, a multiplicity of witnesses who share concord in their testimony (even among significant differences), is expected. Finally, 4) the true witness demonstrates proximity to the matters they bear testimony to: to bear witness is to testify to what one has *seen and heard*.

But the unfolding of this testimonial logic, and the Evangelist's presentation of Jesus through it by marshalling a series of witnesses that serve to provide a super-abundance of testimony to him, nonetheless invites an important theological question: given that the Prologue of the Gospel, and several statements of Jesus within it, indicate that he is the Son of God who is the agent of all creation with an unparalleled relationship to, and identity with, God, how then can he somehow be dependant upon the testimonial logic of mere human beings - his creation(!) - for his commendation? Will we dare say that we need the lamp of testimonial discernment to illuminate the blazing sun that is the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ? If he is the light that gives light to all people, would he not then undergird the sustenance of all human reasoning - testimonial reasoning not least - and thus is it not folly to even attempt to commend him by a kind of everyday mode of communal discernment? I addressed this question by

exploring Thomas Simpson's work on the *prima facie* contradiction within the Gospel between John 5:31 and 8:14, where on the one hand Jesus acknowledges that were he to bear testimony alone, about himself, his testimony would be inadmissible (5:31), but then on the other hand says just the opposite: that even if he does testify on his own behalf, his testimony is valid. Here it is clear that Jesus both does, and does not, show willingness to bow to the testimonial logic of his interlocutors, that of the Evangelist as the Gospel is composed, and that of its hearers. I showed that the answer to this contradiction is best found in the identity of Jesus that the Evangelist has already amply established by the point in the narrative that he allows this "contradiction" to develop. Jesus, having already descended to become human, is on his way to descending further still to the depths of being betrayed, denied or abandoned by many of his dearest, falsely accused and falsely tried, and crucified. The Evangelist knows this is where the story goes as chapters 1-12 are penned. An as a part of this descent, Jesus does suffer a kind of epistemic descent too, willingly allowing himself to be commended by everyday testimonial means - allowing us to hold up the lamps of our fragile and partial communal rationalities as a means of discovering the blaze of his eternal glory. But lest we mistake the deployment of this testimonial logic for something that grounds his truth - as if there were something more fundamental than him that could verify him, who *is* the Truth, the Evangelist playfully allows us to see that the testimonial logic that commends him cannot be understood to ground him or constrain him. Even a testimonial logic breaks around him, ultimately. He, uniquely, can testify to the truth of who he is because he *is* the truth. I suggest this is why the Evangelist sees no ultimate contradiction in Jesus saying both "Yes" and "No" to the truth of his identity being judged by a testimonial logic: "Yes" in his descent and in service to those he came to save. "No", lest the reader misunderstand, and think there is something more fundamental to him, by which he can be judged.

Finally, I closed this chapter by examining the contested functions of the motif of witness in the Fourth Gospel by noting the approaches of Trites, Lincoln, and Bauckham on this score. Trites noted both an eyewitness and metaphorical meta-trial function for the motif, but did not relate them to one another. Lincoln then actively resisted an eyewitness notion of testimony in

John's Gospel, arguing that eyewitness testimony as to the "facts" of the life and ministry of Jesus were not at issue for the Evangelist and the Gospel's intended audience. Bauckham then redressed Lincoln's imbalance by arguing strenuously for an eyewitness understanding of the motif of witness in John, while tangentially acknowledging the presence of a metaphorical use in recognition of the strength of Lincoln's scholarship. In response to these three, I argued that each of these approaches is unsatisfactory in different ways, and drew attention to the theme of "seeing and hearing" in John, and how it functions on multiple levels, like many of the rich themes that course through the Gospel. I concluded, just as physical seeing is clearly vital to the Evangelist (as evidenced by rich "earthy" description of central scenes), so too is spiritual apprehension - and in this sense sight - into the identity and purpose of Jesus. In this way, the eyewitness testimony of the multiplicity of witnesses in the narrative of the Gospel, and that of the Evangelist as well, serves to marshal a case within an ongoing "cosmic trial" that was at play when the Gospel was first written and heard, and is at play still as the Holy Spirit grants witness to Christ through it, and through disciples of Christ who bear witness to Jesus today. In this way, both the eyewitness and metaphorical functions of the motif of witness prove vital and work in tandem with one another.

The Forth Gospel is deep and complex and thus this foundational chapter has had to address several weighty matters as it has explored its use of a motif of witness. After clearing the ground in the first chapter, my aim in this second chapter has been to demonstrate that a testimonial logic is deeply at play in the unfolding drama of the incarnate Son of God which the Fourth Gospel holds out. This will be the basis for the constructive contribution to theological epistemology in the final chapter. But the thesis promises to sound both biblical and phenomenological motifs of witness for their contribution to the field. Therefore, having made a partial exploration of biblical motifs of witness through this chapter's focus on John, I now turn to engage philosophical discourses which have also wrestled with the Gospel's motif of witness to varying degrees.

Chapter Three: Primordial Witness: Ricoeur, Chrétien, and Marion and Their Appeals to Witness at the Heart of Their Descriptions of Fundamental Human Experience

Introduction

In the last chapter, I argued that a close study of the witness motif in the Fourth Gospel reveals that it not only is comprised of a series of witnesses that are presented in the text one after the other. Rather, the witness motif in John's Gospel finds its deepest expression through a testimonial logic that is embedded in the drama of the narrative at multiple levels. I further demonstrated, by comparing the works of Trites, Lincoln, and Bauckham, that the motif of testimony functions on at least two different levels in the gospel: 1) a relatively straightforward eyewitness function and, 2) as a metaphor for encapsulating the nature of bearing the knowledge of Christ in the world after Jesus' ascension, by the Holy Spirit. In this third chapter of the thesis I turn to theological appropriations of philosophical reflection upon the dynamics of witness, with a focus on phenomenological accounts which show promise for enriching a theology of the knowledge of God illumined by the mantle of witness especially in manners similar to the second function of witness I identified in John's Gospel. Below I focus on phenomenological treatments of witness in works of Paul Ricoeur, Jean-Louis Chrétien, and Jean-Luc Marion, while giving the lionshare of the engagement to Chrétien, given his work is the least appropriated of the three in the English speaking world. Thus by a special focus on him at the heart of the chapter, I am to further contribute to English language understanding of his work as pertains his use of the motif of witness. Here I carry forward the overall argument of the thesis that biblical and phenomenological motifs of witness bear to theological epistemology an analogical meta-lens through which central aspects of its inherent stance in relation to God in Christ are helpfully discerned. This chapter carries forward the central thesis by demonstrating how the selected thinkers below also use the motif of witness as a metaphorical lens through which to understand the relation between consciousness and absolute reality.

Theological Engagement with Analytic and Phenomenological Motifs of Witness

Regarding the two functions of the witness motif I identified in John's Gospel, contemporary analytic epistemology of testimony is very much concerned with the conditions under which one is justified in obtaining beliefs via the testimony of others, and takes as its central paradigm a basic eyewitness conception of testimony which it then expands upon. Thus one could, at this juncture in the thesis, utilise analytic philosophy of testimony as a foil for exploring the degree to which aspects of the biblical texts generally, and the canonical gospels in particular, relate to the dynamic of eyewitness testimony.

However, instead of splitting the focus of this chapter between assessing theological engagement with current analytic and then phenomenological discussions of the phenomena of witness, I instead here choose to focus on aspects of recent phenomenology for two reasons. First, less theological appropriation of its more metaphorical employment of the motif of witness has taken place. A number have drawn on analytic philosophy of testimony for insights on how the eyewitness function of witness might be drawn into the service of theology.[292] And of course theological appropriation of recent developments in phenomenology, broadly speaking, is well underway and ongoing.[293] However, I am as yet unaware of any attempt in English to be attuned to the category of witness as a reoccurring theme, running as a thread through the work of a number of recent phenomenologists, seeking to ascertain the commonalities and distinctions in its varied usage across them. That there is such a thread is indisputable. Emmanuel Lévinas

---

292. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*; Provan, Long, and Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 36–50; Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the Gospel's Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Induction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 74–107.

293. For recent noteworthy efforts at theological response to, and appropriation of, the phenomenological tradition, see for example: Kevin Hart, *Kingdoms of God* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014) and Adam Y. Wells, *The Manifest and the Revealed: A Phenomenology of Kenōsis* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2018).

challenged the meaning of testimony that he discerned in the history of Western philosophy which, to his mind, had reduced its meaning to a mere confession of what one has experienced of of a subject's experience or knowledge. To redress this he asserted a primordial, pre-conscious relation between consciousness and being – a "testimony to the infinite" which constitutes the self as being-for-the-Other.[294] Here the phenomenological gaze is reversed. Whereas the gaze of the subject upon the object was primary in the phenomenological project descending from Husserl, now the organizing phenomenological principle (that up to this point had been delegated solely to the intentionality of consciousness) is being directed by the face of the Other.[295] Paul Ricoeur then wrestles with the same themes of identity and alterity, self and other, in relation to the category of testimony. He does so acknowledging his debt to Lévinas, while at the same time critiquing his sharp divide between the self and the Other and the Other's primacy of initiation toward the self, arguing instead for a reciprocal "*intersecting* dialectic of oneself and the other".[296] Earlier, Ricoeur had wrestled with the theme of testimony apart from dialogue with Levinas in his essay *The Hermeneutics of Testimony*. There he engages in a phenomenology of key varieties of testimony – the "ordinary", the "juridical", and the "biblical" employments of the motif – to then use it as a metaphor through which to elucidate the hermeneutical relation between the horizons of the absolute and finite history, within which the absolute gives a testimony of itself, and to which finite humanity then responds with its own counter-testimonies.[297] Jean-Luc Marion, in similar fashion to Lévinas, also seeks to invert the classic intentional structure of phenomenology where consciousness constitutes the limits of the

---

294. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Emmanuel Lévinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 97.

295. Bruce Benson, "Continental Philosophy of Religion," in *After Poststructuralism: Transitions and Transformations: History of Continental Philosophy*, ed. Rosi Braidotti (Durham: Acumen, 2010), 258.

296. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 341. See also: 188–9, 335–41, and 355.

297. Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Testimony".

phenomena, and thus can only be to us phenomena as mere "objects" subjected to the "I".[298] Instead, he asserts precisely the reverse: those phenomena that are "saturated phenomena" – exceeding the subject's ability to adequate the phenomena with their thought –constitute the subject who becomes a "constituted witness".[299] Here "the witness is therefore opposed to the I in that he no longer has the initiative in manifestation . . . the phenomena is no longer reduced to the I who would gaze at it".[300]

In briefly tracing only some of the more prominent ways the motif of witness has been used in recent developments within French phenomenology, and even noting some similarity of treatment between Lévinas and Marion, I do not mean to assert that these thinkers explore the motif in near identical ways to the same effect. This chapter will go some ways to identifying continuities and discontinuities in the appeals to witness made by the thinkers selected. At this point I am merely drawing attention to its significance as a generative phenomena that some recent phenomenologists have explored as a means of unfolding something more of the nature fundamental of human consciousness in different though related ways. This forms the first reason for turning to the sphere of French phenomenology in our examination of testimony and the light it casts on the nature of human knowing: the work of examining the motif of witness as a reoccurring theme within phenomenology, and the subsequent work of critiquing and appropriating it as significant for constructive theology, remains largely undone.[301]

---

298. Ibid., 260,

299. Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2002), 216–19. The theme of witness is not unrelated to Marion's examination of Augustine's *Confessio*: Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012), 11–55, 115. Many thanks to Dr. Taylor Knight for pointing this out to me.

300. Marion, *Being Given*, 217.

301. Of course, to acknowledge that a work is largely left undone is not to argue that it should be done. Many things left undone are so for a reason! However,when it comes to asking after the use of the motif of witness

Secondly, in addition to the hypothesis that greater labour remains undone in theologically appropriating the phenomenological tradition's recent engagement with ideas of witness in comparison to theological appropriation of analytic epistemology of testimony, the former warrants further attention even more because its recent achievements as pertains witness have been more fundamental than those of the latter.

Analytic philosophers who work on the epistemology of testimony often note that recent decades saw a seismic shift in the tradition's understanding of the importance of testimony as a means of knowledge. Of course the Western philosophical tradition generally has often engaged the topic: John Locke, Thomas Reid, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Bertrand Russell, and Ludwig Wittgenstein – to name only some of the more prominent figures in the discussion – all

---

within phenomenology as a central meta-lens onto the experience of human finitude in encounter with the infinite, this work should be done for both phenomenological and one theological reasons. Phenomenologically, this work should be done because, as I will show, key phenomenologists make appeal to the phenomena of witness at *central* junctures of their thought. This indicates that the phenomena of witness keeps furnishing resources to the heart of the phenomenological project, and yet a clear gap remains in exploring different thinkers around their common use of this theme and asking how they compare and contrast with one another in their deployment of it, and what they are gaining by it and why. In other words, a key phenomenological reason for the faint beginnings of such an attempt in this chapter is that the phenomena of witness is not at all peripheral to the wider phenomenological project, and to the degree the project itself has value, then so does reflection on how the motif of witness can consistently serve at the heart of certain expressions of that project. Then from a theological perspective, we also find reason as to why this work should be done. In the last chapter I identified that the motif of witness is not only important to the Christian faith in its eyewitness function - although I was at pains to say there that the eyewitness function is indispensable; I also identified a metaphorical extension of this everyday eyewitness phenomena as also vitally important to Christian self-understanding, on a meta-level. Much help has been gained from the analytic tradition in developing and expressing the eyewitness character of the heart of the Christian faith. Much less has been done, however, in exploring what this metaphorical extension of the phenomena of witness means for the expression of Christian faith today. The phenomenological tradition is well suited to give philosophical aid to that task given how it has used the motif in a similar way, as noted above. Therefore, I do not here or elsewhere seek to play the analytic and phenomenological traditions off one another, as if one had the high ground. They are in fact intimately related and share a complex web of dependencies that are not at all straightforward, and I have benefited greatly from both in my own thought. I only here pass over the analytic contribution because of the wealth of excellent theological work that has already been done in appropriating the epistemology of testimony within my own tradition, and the limitations of the thesis - not at all from need of persuasion of the value of the analytic tradition or the profit of placing the two in dialogue with one another around the theme of witness. For an excellent start on the such a dialogue, albeit while noting significant disjunctions between the two discourses as pertains witness, see Sybille Krämer and Sigrid Weigel's introduction to their edited volume. The title of the introduction signals both the potential and problems of relating the two discourses as they wrestle with witness: "Introduction: Converging the Yet-Separate Theoretical Discourses of Testimony Studies" in Krämer and Weigel, *Testimony / Bearing Witness: Epistemology, Ethics, History and Culture*, ix-xxv.

rigorously engaged the question of the nature of knowledge by the say-so of others.[302] However, despite this pedigree, the discussion remained at best a side-issue within analytic epistemology. This changed with the seminal work of C. A. Coady, *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*.[303] Coady argued that modern epistemologies had pursued at great length the role of memory, perception, and inductive and deductive reasoning as fundamental means to knowledge, but had largely neglected our dependence upon the testimony of others for the beliefs that we form which, Coady argued, is just as fundamental as these others: "After all when we inquire into the basis of some claim by asking: 'Why do you believe that?' or 'How do you know that?' the answer 'Jones told me' can be just as appropriate as 'I saw it' or 'I remember it', 'It follows from this' or 'It usually happens like that'".[304] To argue that testimony is just as fundamental to our knowing as memory, sense perception, and logical inference was a simple idea, but one rigorously defended by Coady, which resulted in a mushroom cloud of reflection on the "epistemology of testimony", as a demarcated sub-discipline within analytic epistemology, and a very generative one at that.

It is no small achievement to recognise just how trenchant our reliance upon the reports of others is for our day to day lives. We would be debilitated were we to forsake our fundamental capacity to trust and utilise the testimony of others. Therefore, as long as testimony was only regarded as a means of knowing subsumed under aspects of memory, sensory perception, and reasonable inference, we were all the more impoverished for its relegation to the periphery.[305] And from a theological point of view, religious epistemology will only welcome the above developments, given the constitutive role testimony plays - specifically testimony to spiritual

---

302. Gelfert, *A Critical Introduction to Testimony*, 1.

303. Coady, *Testimony*.

304. Ibid., 6.

305. Jennifer Lackey and Ernest Sosa, *The Epistemology of Testimony* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 1.

experience - at the foundation of many of the world's great faiths – Abrahamic faiths not least. Here a widespread realisation that "testimony is an ineliminable epistemic source" more generally, is most welcome.[306] That general realisation can help restore a space for discussion of the nature and legitimacy of religious testimony which, characteristically, did not fare well under modern epistemologies which took as foundational only memory, sensory experience, and logical inference.

However, here I argue, as significant as the above achievements of analytic epistemology are as pertains reflection on testimony, that the phenomenological tradition has wrestled with witness at a more primordial level and thus has marked a more vital achievement. By this thesis I do not at all mean to drive a sharp wedge between the analytic and the phenomenological, as if they can in the end be cleanly distinguished; nor do I mean to delegitimise the one as if what is needed is to vindicate the other. Instead I resonate with the instincts of J. Aaron Simmons as he argues that the continental and analytic traditions may not be as far apart as is often posited when it comes to matters of philosophical theology. He argues that the continental and analytic traditions have both come to critique classical foundationalism, opening a way for philosophical theology to avoid being ontotheological and thus for the two traditions to increasingly engage in open dialogue with one another in matters of philosophy of religion.[307] One could specify further that matters of witness and testimony may provide opportune fields for such engagement, given the theme has proved so generative in both traditions in recent decades.

But pursuits of this vision will only be successful as they are first sober about the trenchant differences. Regarding witness, similarity of language of testimony in both discourses could cloud the fact that often the motif is being discussed in very different ways at significantly different levels in the respective systems. The analytic tradition admits that it is not primarily focused on "the nature of testimony itself, but instead on how justified belief or knowledge is

---

306. Lackey, "The Epistemology of Testimony and Religious Belief," 203.

307. Simmons, "Continental Philosophy," 569.

acquired on the basis of what other people tell us".[308] But witness is at times figuring within recent phenomenology in a much more primordial way, one which warrants greater attention. I argue that the most significant contribution of recent phenomenology as pertains witness is not, for its part, primarily a phenomenology of witness itself. For one would think, given what I have said above, that where phenomenology goes further than the analytic tradition in reflection on witness – in not being primarily concerned with justified belief *vis-à-vis* testimony – must be precisely to illuminate "the nature of testimony itself" through a phenomenological reduction. Instead I find that phenomenology has made its most significant contribution to our topic, in a way ironically similar to the analytic tradition: by *not* focusing on the nature of witness in, as we would expect, conducting a reduction to illuminate the phenomena of what it is to be a witness or to give testimony. It has at times done this. But crucially it has often has done something more vital than this and has taken up the nature of witness as a means of doing something more fundamental than conducting a phenomenology of testimony, and I argue in doing so that it has marked a more significant achievement. Thus, though it has considered the nature of witness, its most significant contribution has come as it has used the phenomena of witness as a metaphor for illumining the fundamental nature of phenomenality itself, by figuring the witness motif right at the heart of descriptions of how phenomenology is conceived and conducted, no matter the phenomena in view.[309] Thus if the recent achievement of the analytic tradition for testimony has been to level-up its status right alongside memory, empirical sensation, and logical inference as an "ineliminable epistemic source" – no small achievement indeed, the recent achievement of the phenomenological tradition is more vital still: to uncover how testifying is fundamental to the

---

308. Lackey, "The Epistemology of Testimony and Religious Belief," 203.

309. In addition to this chapter's testing of this claim in dialogue with Ricoeur, Chrétien, and Marion, we could profitably explore it with regard to Levinas, Derrida, Henry, and Lacoste as well (with thanks to Professor Aaron Simmons for drawing out connection to these other thinkers beyond the scope of this chapter).

operations of consciousness itself, probing and finding dynamics of witness deeper, thus not reckoning it merely as one phenomena among many, but a phenomena that illumines something of the fundamental nature of the relation between human consciousness and transcendence.

Thus in the French phenomenological sphere we find a counterbalance to the contemporary analytic discussion of testimony, occupied as it is with parsing the conditions under which it is possible to be justified in gaining knowledge by means of the testimony of another, and already being appropriated theologically. In what follows we find that witness figures prominently within phenomenology's development in recent decades, as a part of "a movement from modern to postmodern philosophy and from epistemology in quest of certainty to a more nearly existential understanding of who we are, of what it means to be a human self".[310] The more phenomenology moves from its roots in Hegel and Husserl, and its initial implication in the Enlightenment project in pursuit of certain human knowledge,[311] the more the motif of witness has figured to help explain what the nature of phenomenality is instead. And as already anticipated by the above sketch of the ways French phenomenologists are employing the category of witness, their discipline is rigorous in its resolve to think the nature of human understanding, being, and its relation to the world, together, which at times results in a figuring of the motif of witness right at the heart of their description of fundamental human experience – not merely as a means of knowledge, but as a metaphor that illumines the nature of being a conscious knowing human self, a metaphor that sheds light on fundamental human consciousness in contact with transcendence. Thus we turn to three phenomenologists, who also have written as adept Christian theologians and who, in what follows, work toward appropriating this metaphorical use of the motif of witness theologically. Thus, in sum, I turn now to three examples of theological engagement with the motif of witness, influenced by French

---

310. Merold Westphal, "Phenomenology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern European Thought*, ed. Nicholas Adams, George Pattison, and Graham Ward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 540.

311. Ibid., 524.

phenomenological reflection, as opposed to examining the theological appropriation of analytic conception of testimony as source, not only because more work of theological appropriation of the phenomenological use remains, but more importantly because it utilises the theme at a more fundamental level.

Why Ricoeur, Chrétien, and Marion?

Many French phenomenologists have employed themes of witness in ways that resonate with the second function we identified in our reflection on the Johannine material - as a central metaphor for expressing the nature of human phenomenality. Therefore in this chapter I select three recent French thinkers who have worked within the phenomenological tradition and who have each, in their own way, shown dependence upon the Johannine motif of witness in aspects of their attempts to describe human consciousness in encounter with transcendence - not just as it pertains to the phenomenon of encounter with the divine, but often in terms of a supreme phenomena utilised as paradigmatic of phenomenality in general. In doing so, I argue, that at times in their work they locate reflection on the phenomena of being a witness at the heart of their descriptions of human consciousness.

However, in highlighting this thread of continuity between Ricoeur, Chrétien, and Marion, I do not mean to minimise their unique accents upon the theme. Ricoeur, for his part, draws out the hermeneutical dynamic at the heart of bearing witness; Chrétien, I argue, helps theology attend to the inevitably embodied and agonic nature to bearing witness (though I argue further that his agonic phenomenology opens up an aporia in his thought that only finds resolution in his theological reflection on the Christian conception of witness); and Marion, provocatively, claims a reduction of the *I* to a witness in response to what he names as the "saturated phenomena". Further, here I do not pretend to treat the thought of three significant thinkers in the space of one chapter. Here I merely am seeking to show three instances of how

these three thinkers, in their unique ways, reflect upon the motif of witness as a foil for reflecting on the fundamental nature of human consciousness and its relation to transcendence. Together they combine to provoke the idea that to conduct a phenomenology of witness, is to begin to write a phenomenology of that nature of human knowledge of God.

Ricoeur's Hermeneutical Accent on the Dynamic of Witness to the Infinite

In 1980 Lewis Mudge signalled that the work of philosopher Paul Ricoeur was becoming increasingly important for biblical and theological studies.[312] Forty years later, the trajectory he noticed then is manifest all the more. In light of the epistemological concern of the thesis, it is of particular interest that modern theologians are utilizing Ricoeur's hermeneutical philosophy as an alternative to classical-foundationalism in seeking a basis for crafting theology in a postmodern age.[313] Here I examine one of his most important essays, "The Hermeneutics of Testimony". In it, relatively early on in his work, he raises the question of testimony, an idea that will then fade into the background until it emerges at the heart of his epistemology a quarter of a century later.[314] In this section, I argue that here Ricoeur's phenomenologically enriched biblical reflection on the phenomena of witness signals an opportunity for the development of a robust Trinitarian theology of testimony and further maintain that, though it does not represent a positive articulation of the Christian message, it does help clear the way for its flourishing in postmodern times by avoiding the opposing dangers of a regressive relativism on the one hand, and an absolute objectivism on the other.

---

312. Lewis Seymour Mudge, "Paul Ricoeur on Biblical Interpretaion," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis Seymour Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), vii.

313. See for example: Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era*, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2006); John R. Franke, *The Character of Theology: An Introduction to Its Nature, Task, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2005); Steven B. Sherman, *Revitalizing Theological Epistemology: Holistic Evangelical Approaches to the Knowledge of God* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2010) .

314. Dan R. Stiver, *Theology After Ricoeur: New Directions in Hermeneutical Theology*, 1st ed (Louisville: Westminister John Knox Press, 2001), 202.

In his essay, "Freedom in the Light of Hope", Ricoeur situates himself as a "post-Hegelian Kantian" (this esteemed label he borrows from Eric Weil). As he explains what he means by this, we see that he cannot take or leave either Kant or Hegel entirely:

> In us something of Hegel has vanquished Kant; but something of Kant has vanquished something of Hegel, as we are as radically post-Hegelian as we are post-Kantian. In my opinion, it is this exchange and this permutation which still structure philosophical discourse today. This is why the task is to think them always better by thinking them together – one against the other.[315]

What does this mean? Ricoeur is sensitive to Kant's stricture on human knowledge arising from the role reason plays in structuring what it knows. For Kant the *noumena* cannot be described in-themselves. Only the phenomena are known - things as they appear to us as filtered through our perception. Though Ricoeur sees reason affirming more for human knowledge than Kant allows, he is as negative as Kant is against the human apprehension of *absolute* knowledge.[316] And yet he embraces Hegel's progressive apprehension of knowledge through the dialectical process. But again, Ricoeur is "with Kant" in rejecting the Hegelian claim to absolute knowledge. So in a sense he wants a Kant that has grown to understand the enduring value of the insights of Hegel and embraces a post-Hegelian Kantian approach to philosophy in this sense.[317]

He of course does this situated within the wider phenomenological tradition, having been significantly impacted by the work of Husserl. Prior to 1960 his work is best understood as emerging from the tradition of existential phenomenology, but about this time he underwent a significant shift in his thought where he concluded that in order to properly study humanity he had to combine the phenomenological description of consciousness with the insights of hermeneutic interpretation. Whatever is intelligible to us in consciousness is so by the vehicle of

---

315. Paul Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis Seymour Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 166.

316. Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur*, 195.

317. Ricœur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation,* 167.

language, and thus requires interpretation.[318] As he took this "linguistic turn" he did not leave behind phenomenology but did, from then on, wed hermeneutics to its core.

The Hermeneutics of Testimony

This leads to his important essay, "The Hermeneutics of Testimony". All of the aforementioned dynamics - the attempt to work out the tension between Kant and Hegel, the phenomenological description of consciousness, and the concern with hermeneutics - are drawn together here by the theme of testimony, an idea which is here explored as a vehicle for gathering these varied streams of philosophy. It seeks to gather them not merely into an approach to biblical hermeneutics (as its post-publication inclusion in a compendium entitled *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* might lead us to believe).[319] Rather, his hermeneutics of testimony is meant to be an approach to philosophy as a whole, not only the interpretation of texts, as I will now demonstrate by tracing its argument for the purpose of critique.

"What sort of philosophy makes a problem of testimony? I answer: a philosophy for which the question of the absolute is a proper question, a philosophy which seeks to join an *experience* of the absolute to the *idea* of the absolute . . ."[320] It will take the rest of the essay to unpack Ricoeur's answer to this opening question. Clearly for him, the category of testimony should no longer be relegated to the spheres of law and history. Rather it should be applied to words, to actions, and to very lives.[321] The essay proceeds in four main sections which he entitles

---

318. Bernard Dauenhauer and David Pellauer, "Paul Ricoeur," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford, 2012).

319. The compiling of this popular presentation of the essay was done by Lewis S. Mudge, a former student of Ricoeur. Mudge includes a foreword that seeks to use testimony as a unifying theme for Ricoeur's wider work, and includes this essay. Ricoeur also included a short response to Mudge's foreword, in which he approves of the general project.

320. Ricœur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, 119.

321. Ibid., 119.

as: I. The Problem, II. Semantics of Testimony, III. Irruption of the Prophetic and Kerygmatic Dimension, and IV. The Hermeneutics of Testimony.

In the first section of the essay, (*I. The Problem)*, Ricoeur is inspired by the work of fellow French philosopher Jean Nabert who, in 1966, wrote *Le Désir de Dieu* which wrestled with the question of how "the absolute," could be experienced within finite history. At this point the conversation is set in clear opposition to Hegel.[322] In the preface to *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel suggests that it might be best not to refer to "the pure Subject" as God, as this noun is empty without a definite predicate; whereas "Being", "One", or "Singularity" communicate immediately.[323] But he becomes freer with this designation of "the absolute" in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*:

> The beginning of religion, more precisely its content, is the concept of religion itself, that God is the absolute truth, the truth of all things, and subjectively that religion alone is the absolute true knowledge. For us who have religion, what God is, is something well-known, a content that can be presupposed in subjective consciousness.[324]

Here the absolute is equated ultimately with God. So though Ricoeur does not define what he (or Nabert) mean when referring to "the absolute" at the head of the essay, it becomes clear not only through the implicit Hegelian background, but also as Ricoeur addresses Hegel directly near the end of the essay, again revisiting Nabert. There "apprehension of the divine" requires a divestment of oneself that corresponds to the divine's own divestment in allowing himself to be made manifest to human consciousness through signs. For consciousness this is a "double humility [divestment] which comes to it from its relation to the divine that it discerns in history".[325] Ricoeur notes that for Hegel "the appearance of the absolute" is then gathered up into

---

322. Jean Nabert, *Le Désir de Dieu* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1966) Ricoeur wrote the preface for Nabert's volume.

323. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press, 1977), 40.

324. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. Robert F. Brown

a unity with the logic of the concept that corresponds with it in consciousness so that the differences between them are "swallowed up in absolute knowledge". Instead, Ricoeur (and Nabert) propose a *reflexive* philosophy "where it is not possible to reduce to a unity the correlation between two divestments".[326] Here again, "the absolute" is equated ultimately with God.

Therefore the problem that Ricoeur's hermeneutics of testimony sets itself against, as delineated in this first section, is nothing less than how an "original affirmation" of the absolute can be made by finite creatures within history. Again, "original affirmation" goes undefined initially. But as the essay carries on it unfolds as a unique internal response, a personal witness, to an encounter with the absolute within history that gives rise to experiential knowledge of the divine. It joins experience and idea. What, then, is the problem? The problem is how a moment in history can be invested with the character of the absolute.[327] Here the resonance with Kant, Hegel, and phenomenology generally, is clearly felt. A gap is being set up that makes way for a dialectic of interpretation.

As the essay transitions between sections I and II, the reader feels like they have broken out of a thick wood into an open plain. From the heady heights of the problem just described, Ricoeur begins to build his notion of a hermeneutics of testimony, his answer to the problem, by descending to a semantic analysis of "the profane" use of the language of testimony in everyday discourse. His headings here, and conclusions, are threefold: 1) Testimony has the basic meaning of attesting to what one has seen and heard in experience. 2) The language of testimony always arises within the context of a trial. It has a judiciary context of dispute, the decision of a justice, and testimony as a kind of proof that is entered into the argumentation between the dispute and

---

(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 366–67.

325. Both quotes here are Ricoeur quoting Nabert: Ricœur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, 148-49.

326. Ibid., 149.

327. Ibid., 122.

the juridical decision. And finally, 3) *who* the witness is, is bound up in their act of testimony. False testimony is not just a case of error, "it is a lie in the heart of the witness". Thus the act of testimony runs deeper than a dispassionate report of fact. The testimony attests outside of the witness to even their own interiority, to their conviction, to their faith. Here Ricoeur draws in that the Greek word behind the English translation of witness is *martus*.[328]

From this explication of the everyday use of testimony language, Ricoeur turns to an exploration of the biblical use of the term. He examines the use of the root word *martus* in the New Testament, and its equivalents in the Old, to assert that the profane usage is both employed and extended in its biblical use. Through witness texts in Isaiah (43:8-13; 44:6-8) the profane usage is developed by the added theological idea that here the witness is not just anyone who comes forward, but is someone who is sent. And here Yahweh himself is witnessed to, the witness is global in its intended scope of proclamation and, to develop witness as act of being in outlined under everyday use, the profession of the witness implies total engagement of their life in the sacrifice of witness.[329] Of these characteristics of the OT theme of witness that of the witness being sent is what separates this new meaning of testimony from ordinary use.[330] In addition, both the quasi-empirical and judicial meanings are utilized. Here there is a confessional element to religious testimony. But the confession of faith is not to be divorced from the recital of things actually seen and experienced in history. This is very important for Ricoeur: "There is therefore no witness of the absolute who is not a witness of historic signs, no confessor of absolute meaning who is not a narrator of the acts of deliverance".[331]

---

328. Ibid., 123-30.

329. Ibid., 130-32.

330. Ibid., 131.

331. Ibid., 133-34.

This Old Testament Prophetic explication of testimony paves the way for the New Testament meaning of the term where it is developed further. Here a number of the same traits maintain. But, especially in the Johannine literature (which for Ricoeur, refers to the Gospel of John, all three epistles, and the Apocalypse), very interesting developments emerge. Jesus is the witness *par excellence*. Here the disciples are witnesses of him, but the Spirit alone is the guarantor of their witness to Jesus. But though his witness is immediate and internal, it is nonetheless related to fact narrated in history: he has risen.

Ricoeur develops a continuum between witness as testimony to fact in history, and witness as testimony to confession of the meaning of that fact. He weights Luke to the factual side of the continuum and John to the other. But even with John he notes how near the end of the Gospel the Evangelist writes: "he that saw it testifies to it, and his testimony is true" (John 21:24). Again, for Ricoeur, "Testimony-confession cannot be separated from testimony-narration" even in John, the most "mystical" of the Evangelists.[332] To bring his biblical reflection to a climax, Ricoeur turns to Revelation 12:11: "And they [the witnesses] have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for the loved not their lives even unto death". Here in this judicial scene where Satan is conquered Ricoeur sees both testimony-confession (the word of their testimony), and the testimony of narration/acts (they loved not their lives even unto death).[333]

Thus far Ricoeur has posed the problem of the obstacle to the absolute manifesting itself in the finitude of history, has delineated testimony as a category that has everything to do with narration of things seen, is juridical in context, relates deeply to the person of the witness, and develops religious connotations in the Bible, referring to the testimony of even God himself and his witnesses. How will Ricoeur marshal this groundwork in answer to the problem? He asks

---

332. Ibid., 139.

333. Ibid., 142.

again, "Do we have the right to invest a moment of history with an absolute character?"[334] As we turn to the fourth and final section, though we enter the thicket again, there is light.

Here, an "unbridgeable chasm" exists, and Ricoeur posits a theory of interpretation that relies on the categories of testimony to address the gap. First the absolute makes concrete manifestation of itself within history, within the realm of the contact of human consciousness. There is a witness of the absolute *by the absolute*. For Ricoeur it is vital to note that in a testimony of the absolute, it *actively gives something to be interpreted,* as in all types of witness. It is immediate, but because it imparts experience of itself, this immediacy functions as the initiation of a progressive cycle of interpretation. In two crucial sentences Ricoeur says, "This immediacy functions as origin, as *initium,* on this side of which we can go no further. Beginning there, interpretation will be the endless mediation of this immediacy. But without it interpretation will forever be only an interpretation of interpretation".[335] Without a testimony from the absolute that imparts experience of itself:

> A hermeneutic without testimony is condemned to an infinite regress in a perspectivism with neither beginning nor end. This is a hard saying for philosophy to understand. For the self-manifestation of the absolute here and now indicates the end of the infinite regress of reflection. The absolute shows itself. In this shortcut of the absolute and its presence is constituted an experience of the absolute. It is only about this that testimony testifies.[336]

The absolute as testifier to itself launches a process of interpretation that invites forward movement based on continually renewed experience, not mere endless regress.

But as the absolute gives something to be interpreted, it also demands interpretation. Therefore in actuality the hermeneutics of testimony consists of a dual trial of testimonies or, as Ricoeur says, a dual exegeses: the testimony of the absolute, as it exegetes itself in contact with

---

334. Ibid.

335. Ibid., 144.

336. Ibid.

human consciousness, and the testimony offered in response as humans exegete the testimony of the absolute and choose the witness to the absolute they will offer in response.[337] Thus both the narrative-testimony pole, and the confession-testimony pole, as discovered in the earlier explication of testimony, are employed and a cycle of interpretation moves between them.

From the confessional/human, side of the hermeneutics of testimony, an "original affirmation" develops as a "criteriology of the divine" (as Ricoeur relies on Nabert again) is employed by consciousness and makes itself the judge of the divine, choosing either for its God or its idols.[338] Here interpretation is not externally imposed upon testimony, but is apart of testimony itself. Consciousness interprets the absolute as it wrestles to give witness to the absolute as it expresses itself within human experience. Consciousness has a real choice. Here testimony and its connection to the adjudication at trial brings its full force.[339]

Ricoeur acknowledges that there is a rift between his hermeneutics of testimony and absolute knowledge. Compared to the scientific ideal for knowledge, it appears to be "blemished by relativity".[340] There is no fail-safe assurance that the affirmation we perceive of the absolute in consciousness is not artificially constructed, which other consciousnesses might contest.[341] The hermeneutics of testimony only deals in probabilities of modality. But all trials in human life are like this. The distance between the act of absolute testimony and the act of its reception is not reducible. It is the difference between "a hermeneutic philosophy and a philosophy of absolute knowledge".[342] Indeed, Ricoeur concludes his essay by saying, "We must choose between philosophy of absolute knowledge and the hermeneutics of testimony".[343]

---

337. Ibid., 143.

338. Ibid.

339. Ibid., 145.

340. Ibid., 149.

341. Ibid., 150.

342. Ibid., 152.

Assessing the Hermeneutics of Testimony on its own terms

Before seeking to critique Ricoeur's essay theologically, it would be wise to ask how successful it is on its own terms, according to its own goals. Though Ricoeur took the chair of Paul Tillich at the University of Chicago, he did not seek to address himself directly to the theological world as Tillich did, but sought to write as a philosopher for philosophers.[344] Here it is crucial to see his philosophical decisions in primary relation to the ideological context outlined at the head of this section, before relating them to theological concerns. On this point it is helpful to remember that one of the essential goals of Ricoeur's system is to avoid following Descartes or Nietzsche to either of their tired ends. He says:

> To my mind, attestation defines the sort of certainty that hermeneutics may claim, not only with respect to the epistemic exaltation of the cogito in Descartes, but also with respect to its humiliation in Nietzsche and his successors. Attestation may appear to require less than one and more than the other. In fact, compared to both of them, it too is properly *atopos*.[345]

Is Ricoeur successful in avoiding complete concession either to Descartes or Nietzsche, Kant or to Hegel, in his hermeneutics of testimony? His reflection upon the motif of witness, setting it as he does at the heart of this early account of how finite human consciousness can make an affirmation of the infinite, allows him to do a number of helpful things: First, it allows him to frame the manifestation of the absolute in active, self-testifying terms, rather than within a static conception. Given the absolute actually enters into the system and gives immanent testimony within it, there is contact between the absolute and the immediate that keeps the system from regressing in relativism. There is real contact. Second, it allows him to instil a juridical element

---

343. Ibid., 153.

344. Mudge, "Paul Ricoeur on Biblical Interpretaion," 3.

345. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 21.

which keeps a tension alive within the dialectic and thus propels it forward. Narrative-witness and confessional-witness are never collapsed into each other as it appears they are within the Hegelian scheme. Third, human freedom is maintained. In their testimony, witnesses are also judiciaries with the choice of interpreting the manifestations of the divine. This is an important difference between Ricoeur and Marion, as we will see, as Marion at times describes the nature of witness in response to saturated phenomena in completely passive terms.

In terms of philosophical questions, one might ask for greater clarity as to how ideas arise from an experience of the absolute. Ricoeur proclaims that in the hermeneutics of testimony we have the intersection of both experience and ideation, but does not elucidate what that means here. Also, related to this, it is not clear how actual progress in knowledge is made within this scheme. We have a definite ongoing dialectic and tension which keeps humanity from being subsumed within divine knowledge, and also from being relegated to complete detachment from it. But what it is that gives it forward, progressive movement, is left ill defined. We could presume on behalf of Ricoeur that the manifestation of the absolute is always dynamic and forward moving, in and of itself, thus driving the process forward.

Theologically appropriating the insights of Ricoeur's hermeneutical use of the motif of witness

As I now turn to assess Ricoeur's phenomenologically enriched application of the phenomena of witness at the heart of the central issue of how the finite can bear any kind of witness to the infinite, I will first assess his argument from a general theological perspective -examining Ricoeur's approach with an eye to how it might serve contemporary theology. Then, having asked that broader question, I will summarise Ricoeur's unique use of the motif of witness for the purpose of comparison to use of the motif in Chrétien and Marion.

From a general theological perspective, Ricoeur's essay is successful in a number of ways. He maintains a clear distinction between the absolute as Creator over against creature, and between knowledge that the Creator has, and derivative knowledge that the creature has, which emerges through experience of the divine framed hermeneutically. From a theological

perspective, though, one of the most interesting things about this essay is his beginnings of an exposition of the biblical theme of witness/testimony. Considering the scope of this biblical theme, Ricoeur of course can give it relatively little space and considers a comparatively few number of passages. But what is evident from the biblical work he does do is that he senses the vital importance of the theme, as does the overall argument of this thesis. It is, as Ricoeur begins to tease out, much more theologically significant than its beginnings in the Torah would initially let on, where claims of crime are adjudicated by two or more witnesses, or various monuments serve to safeguard different geographical claims by means of their witness (Gen. 31:52; Nu. 35:30; Dt. 19:15). This theme develops though, as Ricoeur points out, through the prophets and into the New Testament where, especially though the Gospel according to John, but also through Acts and the Pauline Epistles, and comes to be related to nearly every central doctrine in one way or another, including the economic relations of the Triune God (Jn. 8:14-18; 15:26-27).

It is interesting to note alongside the above earlier observation that there has also been something of a surge of philosophical interest in testimony as an epistemological category in the past two decades, a surge,that has not been consciously related to Ricoeur. He does not even make one appearance in the index of either of the standard texts in the contemporary field.[346]

Any contemporary theological response to "The Hermeneutics of Testimony" needs to ask in what sense his framework can serve the development of theology in a postmodern age. Stanley Grenz and John Franke rely somewhat upon Ricoeur in the development of their evangelical post-foundational theology.[347] As we consider this final question, it is vital to note that Ricoeur is not primarily seeking to give positive declaration to the Christian message

---

346. Coady, *Testimony*; Jennifer Lackey, *Learning from Words: Testimony as a Source of Knowledge* (Oxford: University Press, 2008).

347. Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*, 1st ed (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 74, 76.

through his work in this essay. One might think that because of his engagement with Scripture and because of his reference to Christ as witness, etc., that he is somehow explicating the Christian Gospel in his setting. But that would be misleading. It would be more accurate to say that he is drawing upon his Christian heritage for resources to meet philosophical challenges in a philosophical way. Vanhoozer is correct when he notes that, "he never crosses the limits of reason to affirm that God has indeed entered, spoken and acted in history to redeem humanity . . . he is more concerned with elaborating the condition for the possibility of revelation and redemption rather than with proclaiming their historical achievement".[348] Though Ricoeur does hold that the absolute enters and interacts in immediacy, the focus is not on redemption. But this is not to say that his work can have no redemptive implication. Ricoeur serves modern theology by "preparing the way for the reader of the biblical text to be called again".[349] As noted above, he helps safeguard theology against either an overweening Cartesian absolutism on the one hand, and a crumbling scepticism on the other, reminding the Church and its theology to anticipate dynamic immediacy with the Living God. And at the heart of this philosophical account that seeks to establish "the condition for the possibility of revelation and redemption" is Ricoeur's use of the motif of witness.

Finally, turning from a general theological assessment of Ricoeur's approach in his essay to his specific employment of the motif of witness within it: he recognises the inherent interpretive quality to the phenomena of witness. Given his aforementioned "hermeneutical turn" the phenomena of witness appeals to him as a foil for reflection because it brings together qualities of responsiveness to what is perceived, a fundamental interpretive dimension that is related to the moral agency of the witness, and assumes that through this dynamic of contact, input, interpretation, and output there is genuine contact with fundamental reality. Ricoeur uses

---

348. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (Cambridge: University Press, 1990), 284.

349. Ibid.

the category to refuse both a collapse of distance between human consciousness and the absolute, and to also safeguard the witness from simply being completely identified with and assumed within the absolute. The hermeneutical centre to the nature of witness is what safeguards this distance for Ricoeur and makes his use of the motif illuminating as we relate it to our work on the biblical motif as manifest in John's Gospel.

As mentioned, Ricoeur sees in the biblical motif types of testimony, on either end of a pole: testimony as statement of fact on the one end and testimony as confession of faith on the other. But he refuses a separation of these and instead desires they be held in tension, with both dynamics being present in the biblical accounts at any one point, although to greater or lesser degrees respectively. But as I compare the earlier work above, identifying a logic of testimonial discernment within John's narrative of Christ, with Ricoeur's reflection on the biblical motif, and his creative use of it within his answer to his philosophically orientated question about the relation between finite consciousness and affirmation of the infinite within it, it is immediately clear that Ricoeur recognises the fundamental hermeneutical characteristic of the biblical motif. He sees that the motif in Holy Scripture is not adequately captured by identifying a series of witnesses who report what they have seen and heard. It must be seen, additionally that those acts of testimony take place within a shared logic of testimonial discernment that involves interpretive decision. Ricoeur sees that the witness motif is a thoroughly hermeneutical motif - a central aspect of what I argued for above. What is missing from Ricoeur's account, however, is the communal dimension of this testimonial discernment. His focus on consciousness (and the necessarily individual focus via that lens) makes it difficult for him to acknowledge that the witness motif is not merely hermeneutical in character, but that testimonial interpretation and adjudication only ever takes place - if the biblical witness motif as manifest in John's Gospel is taken on its own terms - in the midst of a community of discernment that shares a common testimonial logic, which then undergirds its common pursuit of the truth on matters vital to its

communal life together.

Again, I do not here attempt to treat the wider thought of these three significant scholars, and am instead focused on select instances of their use of the motif of witness. Here we have seen that Ricoeur, in his essay "The Hermeneutics of Testimony" employed the motif metaphorically to capture something of the mystery of how the infinite can be affirmed from within finite human consciousness. Having assessed Ricoeur's use theologically, I now turn to aspects of Jean-Louis Chrétien's interaction with the phenomena of testimony in both his phenomenological accounts, and his decidedly theological reflections, comparing them.

Chrétien's Agonic and Bodily Conception of Witness as Response to the Prior Call

Having highlighted Ricoeur's hermeneutic accent upon the category of witness to the infinite, we now turn to portions of the phenomenological and theological writings of Jean-Louis Chrétien, in as much as they come to bear on the theme of witness. There are significant benefits to doing so. Chrétien's work is still, comparatively, in its early stages of reception in the English speaking world, exposing a need that this research helps address. Further, his phenomenological employment of the category of witness is situated within a much wider phenomenology of call and response, embodiment, and language that furnishes a response to the reductionist danger always lurking nearby in seeking to treat matters of epistemology. And helpfully for our purposes, Chrétien not only speaks to the nature of witness in his phenomenological mode but also explicitly develops the theological implications of the category in one of his theological works.[350] This dynamic, though not unique to Chrétien, nonetheless opens up a space to compare his phenomenological and theological reflection on the theme.[351]

---

350. Chrétien, "Neuf Propositions sur le Concept Chrétien de Témoignage"; Chrétien, "Nine Propositions on the Christian Concept of Witness".

351. Below we will consider the critiques that have been levelled against Chrétien for intermingling phenomenology and theology as he does, examine his response to them, and form our own.

In this section I argue that, by means of his unique development of the call and response structure and his emphasis on the bodily nature of our response to the call, Chrétien develops a phenomenology of the call and response that illumines the *agonic* and *embodied* nature of witness. This conception of testimony takes further insights gained from our reading of Ricoeur. And with Chrétien, I argue that we begin to see a theme that comes straight to the fore in Marion's work: the idea that the identity of the witness is constituted by what they witness to. This becomes a primary phenomenological and epistemological insight that the category of witness has in phenomenological discourse. However, as we examine the agonistic nature of witness in Chrétien, I find reason to suspect that his phenomenology enthrones agony as irrevocably bound to the heart of what it means to be human, making him vulnerable to the charge of esteeming suffering. This aporia in Chrétien's phenomenology then leads me to turn to his *theological* conception of witness, and it is only there that one find's a measure of resolution to what otherwise would remain a disturbing aspect of Chrétien's conception of witness, and by implication, of human knowing.

The argument of this section proceeds in three steps. First, I will demonstrate that Chrétien's use of testimonial categories is rooted in the call and response structure central to his thought, which situates our response to a prevenient call in our bodily nature and reveals it as agonistic. At this juncture I demonstrate the central utility of the category of witness in Chrétien's thought, and critique the implication of perpetual agonistics. Second, I reveal how Chrétien's phenomenology of call and response is related to his development elsewhere of a theologically robust account of what he calls "the Christian concept of witness". This account is exemplary in developing a philosophically sensitive theology of testimony that then can inform a theological understanding of human knowing. Third, I then demonstrate how it is only in this Christian conception of witness that the agonistic aporia opened in the phenomenological concept finds some measure of resolution.

Witness as Situated in the Agonistic and Bodily Response to a Prevenient Call

The dominant and unifying theme of Chrétien's varied phenomenological descriptions - which take up topics as diverse as beauty, speech, art, prayer, the body, touch, language, and the voice - is his consistent description of these phenomena in relation to the motif of call and response.[352] His conception of witness is no exception, and can only be understood in relation to this motif.[353] Chrétien joins Lévinas and Marion in their move within the whole of the wider French phenomenological project (which all newer phenomenology has continued in as well, whether of French origin or not), to reverse the intentional direction of the classical German phenomenology of Husserl. The goal of the phenomenological task for Husserl was an adequation between the object intuited and intended by consciousness and consciousness itself so that the *Sache* – the thing – is itself *there*. It is "immediately intuited" within consciousness.[354] The role of the ego in this process is intentional toward the object of perception: "For the Ego that signifies: not aiming confusedly at something, with an empty expectant intention, but being with it itself, viewing, seeing, having insight into, it itself".[355] Here the *noesis* – the act of thinking – becomes the exact equivalent of the *noumena* – the object intended by perception.[356] For Husserl, "the principle of all principles" which drives his phenomenological project is the following:

> that every originary presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition, that everything originarily . . . offered to us in "intuition" is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being, but also only within the limits in which it is presented there . . . Every statement which does no more than confer expression on such data by simple explication

---

352. Bruce Benson, "Continental Philosophy of Religion," 269.

353. Ibid.

354. Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1960), 57.

355. Ibid.

356. Benson, "Continental Philosophy of Religion," 250.

> and by means of significations precisely conforming to them is . . . an *absolute beginning* called upon to serve as a foundation, a *principium* in the genuine sense of the word.[357]

Both Lévinas and Marion later argue that the limits Husserl speaks of here place the subject in control of the object – a problem which becomes all the more acute in his later philosophy where he developed his concept of the transcendental ego.[358] Husserl realized that if the ego is the centre of our experience of the world, it cannot at the same time be *in* the world but must transcend it by having an ontological quality different than worldly being.[359] But this poses a problem as it implies that consciousness grounds the world and removes the possibility of a genuine "otherness" where the particularity of the object is ultimately lost.[360] Husserl acknowledged this challenge and sought strenuously to resolve it through his concept of the "life-world" (*Lebenswelt)* – an attempt to contextualise consciousness within the world.[361] Despite this attempt, the problem of the other remained and it is this problem that Levinas in particular attacks. Both Marion and Chrétien also develop their approaches to phenomenology in response to this problem. Without naming him, Chrétien responds directly to Husserl's conception of the ego in phenomenological description: "The various powers of the call we describe are not addressed to a pure transcendental ego but to the whole human being, body and soul".[362]

---

357. Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. Fred Kersten (Dordrecht ; Boston: Kluwer, 1982), 44.

358. Benson, "Continental Philosophy of Religion," 250.

359. Sebastian Luft, "Husserl's Method of Reduction," in *The Routledge Companion to Phenomenology*, ed. Sebastian Luft and Soren Overgaard (London: Routledge, 2012), 247.

360. Benson, "Continental Philosophy of Religion," 251.

361. Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

362. Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, trans. Anne A. Davenport, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy, No. 33 (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 3.

It is only within this structure of call and response that Chrétien's conception of witness takes form. Here the category of witness is employed at times as an aspect of human response to the call, and at others to sum up the varied forms the response can take under one head. An example of the former is found in his *L'Arche de la parole*, where Chrétien is describing how to understand the relation of speech to the description of the divine beauty. There he appeals to the category of witness for utility in his attempt to describe the nature of speech which responds to the call of God: "When speech tries to unveil God instead of letting itself be unveiled and stripped bear, the loss of its dramatic tension is also the loss of its light and intelligibility. If there is a divine beauty, we cannot be its spectators, but only its witnesses".[363] Here he uses the concept of witness not merely in the sense of seeing something and reporting it, but as a category invested with more meaning, namely the aspect of personal agonic commitment to one's testimony – the allowing of oneself to be "unveiled and stripped bear" in their witness to the divine.[364] Here the motif of witness is not merely employed as one among many varied expressions of response to the call, but instead to describe the nature of the response *as a whole*. Likewise in his *Retrospection*, Chrétien sums up what he was attempting to do throughout his book *Corps à Corps* as an attempt at "thinking finitude positively, as the place where there can

---

363. Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Ark of Speech*, trans. Andrew Brown (London: Routledge, 2004), 85.

364. Notice that this emphasis on the agonic human experience in response to the call of the divine ("unveiled and stripped bear") is Chrétien's and not merely mine. Notice also his use of "wounding" and "breaking" language as he seeks to describe - in the mode of a phenomenologist and not a theologian - the phenomena of prayer. In prayer, "We affect ourselves before the other and toward him. This in prayer is the first wound of the word: the yawning chasm of its addressee has broken its circle, has opened a fault that alters it. An other is silently introduced into my dialogue with myself, radically transforming and breaking it" (153), "the manifestation of self to the other by the word is agonic and transforming, for it is a dialogue and conversation with the other where our truth is at issue. Being before God is at stake only in and through prayer. The Christian tradition has insisted on this agonic dimension" (158), "This agonic dimension is nothing other than the ordeal of transcendence" (161), and "How is the Word of prayer wounded by its addressee? The man praying addresses his word to the divine ear. In distinction from a determinate human ear, this ear is always already awake...Being expected in this way renders it unexpected to itself. To be heard by God is an ordeal, speech being put to the test like no other; for our speech is exposed in all that it seeks to hide, excuse, justify, obtain. Speech appears in the attentive light of silence - the voice is truly naked" (161), Jean-Louis Chrétien, "The Wounded Word: The Phenomenology of Prayer," in *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*, ed. Dominique Janicaud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 153, 158, 161

truly be – though not transparently – a testimony to the infinite".[365] Here again we see how Chrétien can employ the category of testimony to describe the responsal aspect of the call-response structure that permeates his thinking. In order to understand the significance of this type of usage, we need to see how Chrétien develops his conception of call and response.

His development of the structure is explicitly worked out in relation to Heidegger's. Chrétien himself acknowledges *L'Appel et la réponse* as the decisive juncture in the development of this central theme of his thought,[366] and in the early stages of this work, Chrétien raises Heidegger's delineation of speech as only subsisting within the prior call of speaking that precedes our own. There he quotes a portion of *Essays and Conferences* where Heidegger argues that we ever only speak in so far as our speech corresponds to the speech that has called our own into being as we have listened to its address. We only ever speak, Heidegger argues, because the appeal of other speech is always primary to our own and calls out our response.[367] Here, we can speak only inasmuch as our speech corresponds to that preceding our own – it being a response to the call of prior language seeking to correspond to what comes before it. But in his own development of the call and response structure, Chrétien challenges Heidegger's assumption that this relation between call and response is one of *correspondence* (*Entsprechung*) with a suggestive question: "Is speaking founded on the possibility, or the impossibility, of corresponding to the call?"[368] Chrétien embraces the latter of the two options. Instead of founding our response as commensurate with the call, he will found it on the infinite *disproportion* between the two.

---

365. Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped For*, trans. Jeffrey Bloechl (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 122.

366. Ibid., 126.

367. Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, 6.

368. Ibid.

This enables him to develop the distinctly religious dimension of the call in the form of a paradoxical relation between the infinite and the finite, rather than one of correspondence – a construction that could only ever be pseudo-religious because of its inbuilt assumption that our speech can correspond to the infinite, based as it is on a model of democratic dialogue.[369]

What does this mean? What is it that calls? Chrétien begins his phenomenology of call and response with an examination of the Greek words *kalein* (call) and *kalon* (beauty) and traces their use through Platonic thought where *kalon* only is given to us insomuch as it functions as a *kalein*.[370] Chrétien suggests, "If beauty calls by its very essence, then it does in-itself include as such the possibility of our response and includes it".[371] In doing this he avoids Bultmann's sharp distinction between sight and hearing which attributes an emphasis on sight to Greek thought and hearing to the Hebrew.[372] Instead, Chrétien argues that visual beauty speaks and the eye listens and this dynamic pervades our existence so that: "wherever we are, we are always already called and requested, and our first utterance, like our first glance, is already an answer to the request wherein it emerges".

From the Platonic conception of the call of Beauty itself, Chrétien then moves to consider a call that comes to humanity *through* beauty via a reflection on Pseudo-Dionysus: the call of God. Here to call is to create, to bestow beauty, and to save.[373] Chrétien turns to words of St. Paul to assert that the call of God always calls us out of nothingness and can only ever resound in emptiness, thus ever preserving the difference between its call and ours.[374]

---

369. Anne A. Davenport, "Translator's Preface," in *The Call and the Response* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), xxi-xxii.

370. *The Call and the Response*, 8–10, 14.

371. Ibid., 11.

372. Ibid., 14.

373. Ibid., 15-16.

374. Ibid., 21-22.

Here we would be right to see the influence of the apophatic theological tradition framing Chrétien's expectation of the correlation between our experience of God's call and the adequacy of our call in response. He draws heavily upon apophatic authors within the history of spirituality: Pseudo-Dionysus, John the Scot St. John of the Cross, and Philo of Alexandria.[375] He asserts the necessity of listening to these voices because they model a necessary openness, "not obsessed and blinded by the human project of total self-assurance and self-understanding as we truly are."[376] This apophatic dialogue informs Chrétien's understanding of the excess of the call, the incommensurability of our response, the necessity of our fundamental stance as one of openness and the embrace of our weakness.

And yet in the weakness of our response, others are called. The voice forms the benchmark of our response to the call, but it also serves to ring out and extend the call to others through our voice.[377] In fact - and this is a vital point for Chrétien - the call itself is only heard in our answer:

> Whenever the call is conceived in such a way that it makes use of our voice by dispossessing us entirely in order to keep the origin unaltered, whenever it is conceived in such a way that it is heard directly in itself rather than in our answer, it abolishes itself as a call and no longer calls anyone. . . . We hear the call only in the answer, in a voice that has been altered by it, which utters the very alteration that gives it to itself as not belonging to itself, and which endures its own unsubstitutable disinheritance.[378]

Here the call is only actually heard within the mode of our response to it, in our voice which we discover has been altered by an alterity that it has received in the call and which enacts a kind of "disinheritance" of our voice as it makes room to give voice to the call. Ultimately, Chrétien's

---

375. J. Aaron Simmons and Bruce Ellis Benson, *The New Phenomenology: A Philosophical Introduction* (London: A & C Black, 2013), 125.

376. Chrétien, *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped For*, 125–26.

377. Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, 24.

378. Ibid., 27.

phenomenology of the experience of being called leads him, as he advances by degrees, to the conclusion that it is within the prior call of God that we live and move and have our being, and that this call is constitutive of our very selves as we respond to it.

A Properly Phenomenological and Coherent Approach to the Call and Response Structure? (Responding to the charges of Janicaud and Davis)

Thus far in this section of the chapter focused on Chrétien, I have begun to probe the roots of Chrétien's call and response phenomenology and have argued that his conception of witness is fundamental to, and always set within, that structure. As we will see below, even once Chrétien is working in a purely theological mode, one can still discern the responsorial dimension foundational to the whole of his thought. Chrétien's phenomenology of call and response, sensitive as it is to the embodied and agonic nature of bearing witness, would prove helpful to the theologically constructive account of witness that I am developing throughout this thesis. However, one is hindered from appealing to Chrétien's work as resource for disciplined phenomenological reflection given the accusation levelled against him by other phenomenologists who believe that Chrétien has transgressed the bounds of the properly phenomenological task, and has instead simply asserted Christian doctrine within his phenomenological accounts. If this charge has merit, then I am making a mistake in my argument at this point by examining Chrétien under the rubric of theological appropriation of his phenomenological reflections on testimony. If the charge has merit, I am simply examining theological thought under the guise of the phenomenological. Therefore, I argue here that those who charge Chrétien of violating the essence of phenomenology by bringing religious phenomena into its purview, are incorrect and I am right to make a distinction in this section between Chrétien's phenomenological reflection and his openly theological writing.

Therefore, to the question: can Chrétien's account of the call and response structure be seen as truly phenomenological? Is Chrétien not rightly charged here with importing theological categories of the transcendent into what should be phenomenology's necessarily restricted field

of immanent description? Further, if Chrétien's account of call and response is deemed properly phenomenological, is it *coherent* phenomenology? Does it trade in genuine paradox in the way it construes the relation between the finite and the transcendent, or merely in thinly veiled contradiction? The charges of violating the boundary between theology and phenomenology, and committing incoherence and contradiction within his phenomenology are the two most significant charges that have been levelled against Chrétien's account of the call/response relation, and by implication his understanding of witness.

We will critique each of these charges in turn, beginning with Dominique Janicaud's objections to the first aspect of this attempt. In his 1991 official report to the French government on the state of philosophy in France he announced that French philosophy had been taken over by theology in as much as it had come to permeate phenomenology, the dominate mode of philosophy in France.[379] Such a charge carries significant political weight in light of the longstanding tradition of *laicité* in France, and its concrete realization into laws that aim to protect public institutions generally, and public schools in particular, from official religious influence. With respect to recent French phenomenology, Janicaud charges that any phenomenology of the in-apparent must of necessity evade phenomenality as such and is implicated instead in imposing theological categories upon the phenomena which distorts the proper description of their appearing.[380] He is clear that he is not taking aim at theology *as such*, but is seeking to whistle an intrusion of the theological within the purportedly strictly philosophical work of phenomenologists like Lévinas, Henry, Marion, and Chrétien.[381] Taking aim at Chrétien's work *La voix nue*, which aims to offer phenomenological reflection on the

---

379. Dominique Janicaud, et al., *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*, trans. Bernard Prusak and Jean-Francois Courtine (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).

380. Ibid., 46–49.

381. Ibid., 34.

nakedness of the body and the voice, after noting a number of instances in the text where Chrétien refers to the "soul", "acts of praise", and the final glory of the body, Janicaud says:

> Let us be clear: it is not at all a question here of contesting the interest, for a Christian thinker, or rethinking corporeality, including in the perspective of the resurrection promised by the Scriptures. But we must observe, as a matter of fact, that in the text in question the recourse to phenomenology is constantly biased by both a "call" that is purportedly original and a reference, imposed on the reader, to religious experience. It is a question here, we might put it, of a Christian phenomenology . . . but whose properly phenomenological sense must fall away, for a nonbeliever, midway through the journey.[382]

Janicaud accuses Chrétien of working from a Christian "bias" that occludes the work's "properly phenomenological" aim, which is to be characterized by "phenomenological neutrality".[383]

Janicaud's opponents, however, turn his charge back on him, arguing that arbitrarily restricting what can be considered as an appearance of the phenomena to the finite horizon of the ego is itself an imposition upon the phenomena, one which closes itself off from the possibility of a disclosure within the appearing which exceeds it.[384]

For his part in this debate, in his *Retrospection*, as he looks back over a decade of his work on the occasion of a re-publishing of *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped For*, Chrétien insists that he has respected a proper division between his theological and phenomenological works, and describes that division in the following manner:

> Concerning, on the other hand, the relations of philosophy and theology, simple good sense suffices for one to see that the only act calling for critique would be one that confuses the two (and in two senses! There are theologians who are in fact only philosophers). There is nothing at all contentious in what the same author writes of philosophy *and* theology, which is the case here. The criterion of theology is to be expressly under the *lumen fidei,* in the light of faith, and thus in obedience to the Word of God - a trying obedience, since it is one that will always fall short of the excess of what it must hear. This criterion suffices to discriminate which among the diverse works evoked here belong to philosophy and which to theology. As for the internal articulation, it resides in the fact that it is possible, as many philosophers have thought, that philosophy poses questions to which it cannot respond in ultimate fashion, and that philosophy

---

382. Ibid., 67.

383. Ibid., 68.

384. Joshua Davis, "The Call of Grace: Henri de Lubac, Jean-Louis Chrétien, and the Theological Conditions of Christian Radical Phenomenology," in *Words of Life: New Theological Turns in French Phenomenology*, eds Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 183.

> cannot close on itself. One is certainly at liberty to say (but one must also demonstrate this) that such questions are badly posed, or that they have no response. It is also possible (and indeed, by saying this one does it) to seek the response in another source, and to examine what light harks back to it.[385]

Thus Chrétien does claim to operate in two separate but related modes in his thought and writing – one demonstrably commending its argument by appeal to obedience to the Word of God, expressly under the *lumen fidei*, and another philosophical mode which, though free to describe religious phenomena and refer to religious authorities in as much as they hold out a rich tradition of seeking to do the same, nonetheless holds back from appealing to them *as authorities as such.* Instead philosophy *as philosophy* merely takes the questions left open by philosophy into dialogue with theological sources in order "to examine what light harks back", presumably not demanding that light *must* hark back at all. A reader sympathetic to this approach is thus equipped to follow Chrétien's attempt to describe the phenomena of call and response, in its movement from Plato to St. Paul, as more rigorously phenomenological, not less, inasmuch as it seeks to expose itself to a broader range of tradition in search of insights which may prove to cast light on the varied features of the phenomena in question. In his phenomenological mode, Chrétien would seem to think that whether or not they do so is only discovered in the act of attempting them, not by virtue of an appeal to their intrinsic authority assumed from the outset. Such, on the face of it, is his explanation of the "internal articulation" of "God-talk" within his phenomenological descriptions.

But a less sympathetic reader, such as Janicaud, might remain unconvinced, in which case we can respond by asserting that Janicaud's position assumes that phenomenological investigation is not hermeneutical in nature – not inevitably involving our wider philosophical and theological commitments as the lens through which we seek to describe what is presented to consciousness.[386] Further, Janicaud's position assumes that the ideals of "neutrality" esteemed by

---

385. Chrétien, *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped For*, 128–29.

the scientific worldview can be attained in phenomenological inquiry. He assumes the secular. But what *a priori* reason do we have to believe that this assumption will enable us to attend to the phenomena of existence more faithfully?[387]Or that such neutrality is even possible? In other words, Janicaud wrongly denies the hermeneutical nature of phenomenological description and inadvertently asserts the presuppositions of his own worldview in the place of those he accuses. In accusing the new phenomenologists of playing with "loaded dice" Janicaud has revealed that he himself is assuming a specific take on phenomenological method which presumes ideals of objectivity and neutrality – ideals that are themselves contested by the new phenomenologists as they seek to open up phenomenological description onto new possibilities.[388] Therefore, I maintain that Chrétien's employment of "God-talk" within his attempts at phenomenological description do not, in fact, automatically implicate him in bias incompatible with phenomenological description anymore than Janicaud's secular assumptions implicate him.

Having defended the possibility that Chrétien's phenomenology of call and response, and of witness as situated within it, is yet properly phenomenological even in its exploration of theological material, it is another question altogether as to whether his phenomenology of call and response is coherent and successful *as phenomenology*. It is of course possible to find Chrétien to be attempting phenomenology and not theology, and to still find his phenomenology incoherent in the end. And Davis charges Chrétien precisely along these lines. Though he holds "Christian phenomenologists" generally under his critique – he names also Marion, Lacoste, and Breton – he has Chrétien primarily in view. Here I will unpack and respond to Davis's critique of Chrétien, again so I might clarify my own appropriation of him.

Davis argues that Chrétien's phenomenological project is unintelligible, and that though it claims to trade in paradox, it in fact commits contradiction.[389] He asserts that both Janicaud

---

386. Ward, "The Logos, the Body and the World: On the Phenomenological Border," 106.

387. Ibid.

388. Simmons and Benson, *The New Phenomenology*, 84.

and the "Christian radical phenomenologists" have misread the debate about the theological turn within phenomenology. Janicaud has failed to realise that there is a long history of implicating the phenomenological with the religious in the French reception of the work of Husserl and Heidegger. He relies heavily on Dupont's thesis which argues that alongside the Husserlian account of the nature of perception exists the Blondel-Bergson stream of the French reception of his phenomenology.[390] And though the Husserl-Heideggerian stream demands a "purely immanent construal," the Blondel-Bergson stream is much more content to reach its fulfilment by final appeal to religion.[391] Thus, Davis concludes, Janicaud is unwarranted in taking Husserl as the phenomenological benchmark against which he holds the radical phenomenologists. Conversely, the Christian phenomenologists are also at fault in how they employ the theological within the phenomenological as they seek to establish a measure of continuity between themselves, Husserl and Heidegger. Both Janicaud and the new phenomenologists thus seek to prioritize *revealability* over *revelation* in their account of phenomenological methodology. But Davis wants to argue that revelation takes priority over revealability as the decisive factor in affirming the manifestation of transcendence within the purview of finite consciousness, as he believes the Blondel-Bergson tributary of the French reception of phenomenology saw:

> Just as Blondel states in his *Letter on Apologetics*, phenomenology can point to what is united to but not confused with nature (that is, the supernatural) insofar as it presents itself in the mode of a demand to act with regard to an essential and unattainable possibility. What phenomenology cannot do is confuse that possibility with a capacity or condition (*Offenbarkeit, potentia obedientialis*) of manifestation as such, which requires an affirmation of the contradiction that the inaccessible (impossible) is accessible (possible).[392]

---

389. Davis, "The Call of Grace," 189.

390. Christian Yves Dupont, *Phenomenology in French Philosophy: Early Encounters* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 338.

391. Davis, "The Call of Grace," 183.

392. Ibid., 192.

As intimated here, for Davis the *theological* recognition of an act of divine grace enabling an act of human judgement of manifestation as being one of transcendence should restrict the phenomenological claim. Rather than claiming that the manifestation of transcendence is a *necessary* condition for manifestation and can be given *within* manifestation one can only claim the *possibility* of inaccessibility manifesting itself within the accessible. The latter is paradox. The former is just mere contradiction.[393] His charge is sweeping:

> The phenomenological recognition of transcendence is an event that determines, includes, and alters the action of the perceiver as an agent. The failure of Christian radical phenomenology to account for this fact, preferring instead to focus on what is given to be perceived in the things themselves, has resulted in the ultimate unintelligibility of its respective projects, especially with regard to its implicit affirmation of the contradiction that the inaccessible is accessible.[394]

Thus for Davis, Chrétien's phenomenological project, though justified in the way it utilizes to theological sources, is ironically not theological enough in its understanding of the necessity of the operation of grace upon the perceiver in order to affirm transcendence as manifest.

In response, I first question whether establishing the connection with Blondel-Bergson is as significant as Davis claims. If Chrétien and other "radical phenomenologists" are consciously seeking to relate themselves to Husserl and Heidegger, as they clearly are, then Janicaud is certainly within his rights to examine the warrant of their claims with respect to those roots, no matter if it is primarily a Blondel-Bergson tributary they find themselves in or not. If they do relate themselves to the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger, then Janicaud's analysis would simply be an attack on a present manifestation of that stream's claimed relations to classical phenomenology, no matter what legitimate ties to the history of the French-reception of phenomenology the Blondel-Bergson stream may have.

Second, Davis asserts that the new phenomenologists make the affirmation of transcendence as manifest within finite consciousness a *necessity* for undergirding manifestation

---

393. Ibid.

394. Ibid.

as a whole, rather than as a *possibility* that could be adjudicated only by an act of the will. But, as Davis acknowledges, Westphal points out this may be to critique the new phenomenologists for a position that they do not hold.[395] Davis' use of "transcendence" here is slippery. Would the new phenomenologists want to affirm that transcendence does *surely* give itself in some way to finite consciousness when transcendence is understood as the givenness of sheer beauty, our contact with the vastness of the world, or the sea of speech that we find ourselves immersed in? Yes, it seems they would. But would they then demand that *God* must be available to such manifestations as a transcendent necessity? No. Here they desire only to hold open the *possibility* of revelation to manifestation as a religious phenomena *par excellence*. With Marion it is clear that he merely wants to hold open the *possibility* that a revelation of God could be given within consciousness.[396] He desires to think through that possibility and to ask what it would mean for the structures of perception and revealability. He does not demand its actuality.

And Chrétien too argues that there is no *philosophical* parousia.[397] Paradox is central to Chrétien's conception of the call and response structure. This is why wounding is so central to his thought, as we shall see. He is not saying that the infinite call is both irreducible and reducible within finite consciousness at the same time and in the same respect, and thus simply asserting a mere contradiction. Rather he argues for the paradoxical incommensurability between the call and our response, and hence presents the wound as the site of this experience. Davenport tries to grapple with this difficult aspect of Chrétien's work. For her, the language of paradox is a way "to give voice within phenomenology to the infinite alterity experienced at the limit of exposure. What Chrétien pursues, consequently, is not a formal grasp of paradox as a logical

---

395. Ibid., 193.

396. Simmons and Benson, *The New Phenomenology*, 133–34.

397. Chrétien, *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped For*, 126.

structure, but a phenomenological grasp of the events through which paradox seizes and alters the ego, transforming self-reliant subjects into self-overcoming witnesses".[398] I conclude, then, that Chrétien's phenomenology of call and response is both properly phenomenological and formally coherent. This does not mean that I will find no issue with aspects of his account, as we will see. I now turn to examine his account of the call and response structure, in its agonistic and embodied dimensions, and seek to get at the significance of his utilization of the category of witness.

The Intrinsically Agonic Nature of Participation in the Call and Response

Having explored Chrétien's conception of the call and response structure to human existence, and defended his approach to this structure as properly phenomenological, we now give attention to an essential aspect of Chrétien's account of the dynamics of call and response, namely its agonistic nature. "The Wounded Word", Chrétien's chapter on the "Phenomenology of Prayer", is a common entry point into his writings in the English speaking world, in part due to its publication as a chapter in *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*. It also became available in English due to its inclusion as a chapter, under a slightly different name (Wounded Speech*)*, in *L'arche de la parole* (*The Ark of Speech*), which was published in English in 2004. Thus it serves as an apt place to begin an exploration of Chrétien's conception of the agonic nature of our participation in call and response. Here in his phenomenology of prayer we find his explanation as to why prayer is inextricably bound up with a *wounding*. Speaking of our speech in prayer, he asks:

> Why call it "wounded word"? It has as its origin in the wound of joy or distress, it is always a tearing that brings it about that the lips open. And it does so as it is still and otherwise wounded. Wounded by this hearing and this call that have always preceded it, and that unveil it to itself, in a truth always in suffering, always agonic, struggling like Jacob all night in the dust to wrest God's blessing from him, and in keeping the sign of swaying and limping by which speech is all the more confident as it is less assured of its own progress. For the man praying learns in prayer that he does not know how to pray,

---

398. Davenport, "Translator's Preface," 17.

> that he is called by a call that exceeds him in every way . . . This act of a word wounded by the radical alterity of him to whom it speaks is pure address.[399]

Here prayer is always agonic, arising from a wound, a suffering, a tearing, from a struggle akin to Jacob's struggle with "a man who wrestled with him till daybreak" who, Jacob later learns, is a manifestation of God himself, leading him to name the place Peniel – the face of God – as he walks away limping at the hip due to the "man's" touch (Genesis 32:22-31).[400] And here Chrétien calls prayer a wounded speech for more than one reason. The primary reason is that prayer is a response to the preceding call of God which unveils the one who prays, exposes their inadequacy, and exceeds – one might say overwhelms – the one who prays. Prayer is said to arise from this wound resulting from this experience of the "radical alterity" between the One who calls and the called. It is also wounded for a second reason: we carry in prayer the despair of

---

399. Jean-Louis Chrétien, "The Wounded Word: Phenomenology of Prayer," in *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2000), 174–75.

400. One of the things that makes Chrétien unique, in comparison to the other two thinkers engaged in this chapter, is this emphasis of his on the agonic nature of human encounter with the divine. Why not merely speak of "divestment", or a shedding of our "self-sufficiency" - which are of course central aspects of what Chrétien is speaking of. The reason for going further and highlighting the agonic dimension of this experience is that it is indeed, at this point in salvation history, painful to experience this. Pain is a part of the phenomena under description, Chrétien believes. In other words, as he conducts his reduction on the phenomena of prayer, he believes it would be reductive not to find a way to describe the agonic experience of prayer (which other language might not make plain as acutely). He does not mean a destructive agony, nor a self-inflicted flagellating one, but instead a necessary conflict that though painful is indeed good. From a theological perspective, which Chrétien might possibly have in mind in this emphasis, without calling upon it explicitly (the absence of explicit appeal to it, with reference to the history of salvation, proves to be problematic as we shall see shortly, though he has no other option in his phenomenological mode) a Christian theological understanding akin to kenosis and its parallel in the life of Christian discipleship. Christ - though being in very nature God - emptied himself to become human. This kenosis, however, is not merely understood as an emptying like one might effortlessly empty a glass. The kenosis of Christ involved a suffering due to the context of his life and ministry amid a world turned from God. Thus Christ not only became human, but was humbled to the point of death on a cross. The agony of his faithful response to God the Father is not perpetual. He now has been highly exalted by God (Phil. 2:6-11). Given that Christ did not need wounding at the site of his egoism but, for him, arose centrally from his context within a world opposed to God which would not receive him, we also cannot reduce the phenomena of our agonic experience of the infinite to our egoism alone. Unlike Christ, with us this is a central aspect of our agonic experience of encounter with God. But as with Christ, this is not the whole of it. This cross-shaped-exulted life of Christ - descending and rising - becomes then the pattern of the life of his disciples, who too are called to deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Christ (Lk. 9:23). Even if we judiciously reserve language of kenosis for the self-emptying of divine Son of God in incarnate life and death - which is clearly exceptional, we nonetheless must find ways of speaking of our own dying and rising in the everyday life of discipleship (with hearty thanks to Professor Aaron Simmons for drawing out this connection).

those who are unable to pray for themselves, either because they have bound themselves to the worship of deaf and mute idols, or because they are so destitute in despair that they are unable to pray themselves. We then take up the wound of the prayerless and from that experience of destitution our prayers arise as wounded words on their behalf.[401]

This theme of agonistic struggle weaves not only through Chrétien's phenomenology of prayer, but also through his wider body of work, where the theme of wounding appears time and again alongside his application of his philosophy of call and response to any number of his descriptions of the phenomena of human experience. Gschwandtner notes that the call is a pervasive theme in Chrétien, possibly even his most prominent theme, marshalled at key junctures in nearly all of his writings.[402] But for Chrétien it is not just a call. Benson notes that it is the "call *that wounds* that appears in multiple texts and can be considered a dominant motif of his thought",[403] and goes so far as to argue that "something like the structure of "wounding" is at the heart not just of Chrétien's own "theological turn" but also of the theological turn in phenomenology in general" due to its consistent conception of the call of the other as a kind of revelation that breaks in and de-centers the transcendental ego, reconstituting it in the pain of enduring challenge to its self-sufficiency.[404]

For his own part, Chrétien would agree with this assessment of his work. He notes two themes that his works ceaselessly struggle to deepen, both of which concern the call/response structure and its agonic nature. First, his re-occurring argument that the failure of our response to correspond to the call does not constitute an ultimate failure of response, but a "wound by which our existence is altered and opened, and becomes itself the site of the manifestation of what it

---

401. Ibid., 175.

402. Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics?: Arguments for God in Contemporary Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 148.

403. Benson, "Continental Philosophy of Religion," 269. Emphasis mine.

404. Bruce Ellis Benson, "Chrétien on the Call That Wounds," in *Words of Life: New Theological Turns in French Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 294.

responds to."[405] Here he is attempting to "think finitude positively" as the place from which a "testimony to the infinite" can arise.[406] But a second theme emerges from the first, namely that the falling short of our responses invokes "chorus and polyphony" as the wound in our voice seeking to answer the call then serves to extend the call to others and invite their response.[407]

It is not surprising then, given Chrétien's persistence in these two themes throughout his work, to find reference to Jacob's wrestling with the Angel of the LORD even in works dealing with phenomena of human experience not immediately religious. For example, in *Hand to Hand* he also employs the story of Jacob's struggle as a lens through which to think through the nature of our response to the call, but in this work he focuses on how that response relates to the call of poetry and painting.[408] He would later say that this work is centred on the meditation that "the wound can bless, and the benediction wound" in Jacob's story.[409] Here Chrétien plays on the French words for "wound" (*la blessure*) and "bless" (*bénir*) to say "*la bénédiction blesser*" – "the blessing can wound".[410] Here the noun is followed by the infinitive verb, and could also be translated: "the blessing *to* wound". Jacob emerges from the struggle with God wounded and blessed at one and the same time, and Chrétien wants to say that the two are not incidental to one another. He would have us think that perhaps *blessure* – wound (noun), is not a *faux amis* after all.[411] This is not to say that Chrétien argues that all human suffering can be somehow positively

---

405. Chrétien, *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped For*, 122.

406. Ibid., 122.

407. Ibid.

408. Jean-Louis Chrétien, *Hand to Hand: Listening to the Work of Art*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (London: Fordham University Press, 2003).

409. Chrétien, *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped For*, 122.

410. Benson, "Chrétien on the Call That Wounds," 217.

411. Ibid.

accounted for by virtue of situating it somehow as related to humanity's response to being called. But he is arguing that at the heart of our response to the call that precedes our existence, our speech, our act, is an agonistic struggle opened in us by the call and constituting ourselves as called. Although the link cannot be established both ways. Though all experiences of being called do result in an agonistic struggle of some kind, not all suffering can be traced to an experience of being called.

What does he then mean by the call? And wherein lies its agonistic nature? Chrétien relates the theme of 'call' to the specific calls of beauty, of God, the call to responsibility, the call sensed in the body, the call to prayer, and so on.[412] But each of these constitutes a kind of encounter with the excess of things from which issues a call to us and to which we respond out of the wound that the hearing of the call instils.[413] In *The Call and the Response*, where Chrétien situates our speech as ever only a response to a prior call, he roots the agonistic nature of response to the call in our inability to correspond to it:

> How are we to conceive that to respond to the call is indeed to correspond to it? Is it possible to correspond to the call? Or does the devastating excess of its blank cry, which alone parts our lips, cause the answer to fall short of any possible match, so that this very failure is really what gives us speech – which is to say that speech is indeed its purpose? Is speaking founded on the possibility, or on the impossibility, of corresponding to the call?[414]

Chrétien goes on to answer this question by affirming the latter: it is, for him, precisely our *failure* to correspond to the call that gives rise to the possibility of our own speech. But clearly there are different ways of falling short. It is the excess of the call over our ability to respond that both accounts for the agonistic nature of our response, *and constitutes it.* Thus Davenport, in her translator's preface to *The Call and The Response*, is correct when she asserts that Chrétien is seeking to shift phenomenology from "a framework of correspondence to one of

---

412. Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics?*, 149.

413. Chrétien, *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped For*, 121.

414. Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, 6.

incommensurability and self-destitution", one where the call is not heard in the adequacy of our response, but precisely in its *deficiency*.[415] This experience of deficiency, which Chrétien elsewhere describes as a kind of unveiling, a being found naked, is what gives rise to the call's agonistic nature. Its superabundance highlights our deficiency and thus assaults our self-sufficiency. That wound reconstitutes us and reorientates us around the other as opposed to the self, and thus forms the seedbed from which our response to the call can grow, the call fully only being heard within our response.

And so in Chrétien there are different reasons given as to why our participation in call and response is necessarily agonistic. You will have noticed above that sometimes the themes of "self-sufficiency" being dispossessed as its source. This would imply that agony at times results from *resistance* to the call on our part. At other times Chrétien emphasizes the *disproportion* between our response and the scope of the call we receive as being the source of agonistic struggle. Perhaps a kind of cognitive dissonance is part of what is in view here. Although one can imagine that the grappling with the paradox at the intersection of my reception of a call that far outstrips my capacity to respond could invoke *excessus mentus* – not to be understood as an experience of any kind, but a suspension of self-consciousness which can then give rise to many different kinds of experience. At still other points he speaks of the encounter of the need of the other as what demands and calls for sacrifice, or grief as we encounter the need to give voice to the prayers of those who cannot themselves pray.[416]

A critique of Chrétien's conception of the agonistic nature of call and response will be given below. But having now outlined the essentially agonic aspect of our existence within the throws of call and response, I must also briefly turn to a second essential aspect of our response

---

415. Davenport, "Translator's Preface," xxii.

416. Chrétien, "The Wounded Word: Phenomenology of Prayer," 175.

to being called, in Chrétien's thought, if we are to understand his conception of testimony, bound as it is to the inextricably bodily nature of hearing and responding to the call.

The Body as the Necessary Site of Hearing and Responding to the Call

Chrétien believes that the human being is a unity of body and spirit. With St. Maximus, he denies that man is primarily soul, against Plato's *Alcibiades*, and asserts instead that "he is composed of body and soul, and subsists only as the unity of the two: in the same way, the world, which is only ever *one single world,* is composed of sensible and intelligible aspects".[417] For Chrétien, "the body alone witnesses to the spirit, and endlessly sends us letters of credence, or of apostasy and repudiation".[418] Thus, any attempt to parse his philosophy of call and response, and to situate his understanding of testimony and its relation to human knowing within it, would be severely reductionist if it did not consider the embodied means of all response to being called. Chrétien's most extensive treatment of the body is *Symbolique du corps* (*Symbolism of the Body*)[419] and is yet to be translated. It is an extended reflection on the *Song of Songs* and ruminates over the different parts of the body and their unique connections to the soul.[420] However, it is clear that the "wounded word" spoken of above refers not merely to some hidden internal wounding of spirit or soul, a disembodied angst, if there could be such a thing. Rather, for Chrétien, it is vital to say that the call that wounds is the "hearing of an other Word that wounds body and soul".[421] Indeed, the body is the site of all response whatsoever to the call.[422] He wants to affirm, with

---

417. Chrétien, *The Ark of Speech*, 118.

418. Chrétien, *Hand to Hand*, xxvii.

419. Jean-Louis Chrétien, *Symbolique Du Corps*, 1 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France - PUF, 2005), 320.

420. Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics?*, 154.

421. Chrétien, *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped For*, 125.

422. Ibid., 127–28.

Paul Claudel, that we are not to think of our embodied nature as a soldier might think of riding his steed, or a sailor might think of sailing in his boat. Instead our subsisting through our bodies is as a labourer exists through her work and a flame in its torch.[423] How can one listen to and respond to a call apart from the body? Chrétien asserts:

> Listening is a truly palpitating activity, it can happen only with this heart that beats, this air breathed in and out, this patient activity of the entire body. It is with all one's body that one listens, as the act of speech is never separable from an act of the body.[424]

Chrétien does maintain a place for silent prayer in his phenomenology of prayer. But even this kind of prayer is not disembodied. "All attention takes place body and soul . . . To suspend one's voice is not to suspend one's breath".[425] And prayer reaches its fullest expression in vocal prayer. At the call of God to prayer, we feel our deficiency in prayer and seek to "find a way into the perfect prayer . . . the prayer that from God goes to God, in a voice and thus in a human body".[426]

Further, in *The Call and The Response* Chrétien focuses on touch as essential to all response to being called, *and grounds the other senses in it*. He evokes Aristotle's work on touch as his "guiding thread" through his phenomenology of touch, saying that his is the "most radical and patient" analysis of touch in the history of philosophy.[427] Hearing is a touching of sound and sight a touching of light.[428] For Chrétien, we might suppress or lose our ability to speak or hear or see, but our sensation of touch is universal and inseparable from life itself.[429] It is not one

---

423. Ibid., 127.

424. Chrétien, *The Ark of Speech*, 18.

425. Ibid., 69.

426. Ibid., 37.

427. Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, 84.

428. Ibid., 107, 130.

429. Brian Treanor, "Embodied Ears: Being in the World and Hearing the Other," in *Words of Life: New Theological Turns in French Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 225.

regional study of ability among many, but is fundamental to any phenomenality of embodied life itself.[430] Treanor points out that Chrétien's emphasis on touch is a counterbalance to Levinas' emphasis on hearing over against sight as the primary metaphor of apprehension in the history of philosophy, and that in employing it Chrétien balances his own emphasis on the hearing of a call by relating the call not merely to the ear (though we must keep in mind that Levinas' meditations on "caress" in his earlier work.[431] He does not desire to replace the oral/aural metaphors of apprehension with those of touch, nor to situate our experience of call and response outside of the body. But he does emphasize the founding nature of touch.[432]

A Phenomenology of Witness as both Agonic and Embodied

Having thoroughly established Chrétien's embodied and agonic phenomenology of call and response (and having defended it as rightly phenomenological against two accusations to the contrary), we are positioned now to ask: how then are we to understand the significance of Chrétien's selection of the category of *witness* at the key junctures in his work opened at the head of this chapter, in relation to the central theme of call and response that we have now identified as running through his work? Why choose the language of witness/testimony to not merely speak of one means of response among many, but at times as a way of encapsulating the totality of our response to the call, in all its varied dimensions? Chrétien himself does not tell us. But we saw that its usage enjoys similar precedence at key junctures in other writers in Chrétien's phenomenological tradition, such as Lévinas and Marion.

But why might it be a suitable category for Chrétien to employ in seeking to articulate our relation to the phenomena of experience? Perhaps the central reason it finds utility within the phenomenological discourse is that the "notion of witness means that the human subject does not

---

430. Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, 86.

431. Treanor, "Embodied Ears: Being in the World and Hearing the Other," 124.

432. Ibid., 231.

make or constitute the event he witnesses, but is himself made by it into what he has become: witness".[433] We do not set out to become witnesses. Rather we are made witnesses by the experience of being witness to something given to us in experience. It is easy to understand then why the new phenomenologists would be attracted to the phenomena of testimony as they seek to reverse the direction of the intentional gaze from the subject to that of the excess of the gaze of the Other. The theme of witness, then, also ties into the incommensurability of one's ability to witness and the phenomena that one gives witness to. Marion notes the powerlessness of the witness to master the excess of the event they give witness to, and notes how any attempt to describe the event that one has witnessed often soon plunges the witness into silence as they become conscious of their inability to constitute the event that constitutes them as witness.[434]

This responsorial positioning of the subject that is invoked by the language of witness seems to be the central insight within the phenomena of testimony that attracts the new phenomenologists to it, Chrétien included. That responsorial posture, as situated within his structure of call and response, will then inevitably be marked by its agonistic and embodied nature.

Perpetual Agonistics?

But here we must pause to revisit the agonistic dimension. As we have seen, Chrétien reads a phenomena of wounding at the heart of human existence as a means of grappling with the paradox of our being constituted by a call that we at times resist, and are always outstripped by. It is difficult to see how this construal avoids rooting agony inextricably to human existence,

---

433. Jeffrey L. Kosky, "The Human Question: Augustinian Dimensions in Jean-Luc Marion," in *Words of Life: New Theological Turns in French Phenomenology*, ed. Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 114.

434. Ibid., 115.

seemingly exalting suffering as a necessary good part and parcel of human existence. Benson sees the problem. As he concludes explicating the theme of wounding in Chrétien's phenomenological work, he comes to the conclusion:

> If Chrétien is right, then there is a certain kind of violence that is not merely present but *necessary* in our encounters with the other. Unfortunately, the violence often has to be done *to* us, even done *by* us, precisely for the sake of relationship with the other. The agonic aspect of our relations to others, then, may not be the *only* aspect, but it is certainly one that must be present. Not surprisingly, then, Chrétien does not see all violence as simply gratuitous and thus always to be avoided. In fact, he links the wound of the call with the giving of the gift. On his view, one cannot have one without the other.[435]

Here - on Chrétien's account - fitting response to the world, to the human other, and to God, is *necessarily* bound to a kind of suffering. Thus here an aporia opens up in Chrétien's phenomenology. There is a serious danger implicated in this conclusion. It is one that denigrates something of human nature by affirming a perpetual suffrage as integral to it. One wonders, if this is the last word on our engagement with the phenomena of existence, why engagement would be desirable. If inevitable agonistics is *essential* to our faithful response to phenomenal attention and devotion, it seems a natural conclusion that a life strategy of isolation and anaesthetic numbing of attention could be a means to human fulfilment and flourishing – if, as seems natural, suffering is instinctively felt as antithetical to ultimate flourishing, even though if it is often understood that it must be endured for a time to achieve ultimate flourishing. But if it is perpetual agonistics, why grow? Why attend to existence more? Why be more devoted? What is there to call the suffering pilgrim on?

Rowan Williams, in *The Wound of Knowledge*, points to the work of Dorothee Sölle in her book *Suffering*. There she elucidates the New Testament's resistance of a spirituality that shies from conflict – as if God could be had apart from Christ crucified.[436] Yet, Williams notes that it is "one of the great strengths of her study that she consistently refuses to identify the

---

435. Benson, "Chrétien on the Call That Wounds," 216–17.

436. Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, 11.

acceptance of pain with passivity in the face of it, a passivity which is, in fact, hardening and dehumanizing. The Christian meets pain in acceptance and *hope*; he or she confronts it, identifies with those experiencing it, and then struggles through it to grow into a new human-ness."[437] And yet a measure of resignation to the reality of our agonic situation between call and response seems to be an inevitable result of Chrétien's phenomenology.

This brief interrogation of a central aspect of Chrétien's phenomenology reveals an aporia and opens a space for the theological. Here we note that it is precisely at this point in Chrétien's phenomenological work that we would suspect him of turning to a theology of cross and resurrection for some closing of this philosophical aporia *if he was indeed transgressing the boundaries of phenomenology into theology as Janicaud claims*. Instead, as we saw Benson draw out above, Chrétien allows the philosophical aporia to remain there in his phenomenology of call and response, without any philosophical parousia.

This theological account cannot do the same, and neither could Chrétien's wider theological thought. I turn now to explore the question of how Chrétien's phenomenology of call and response, in its agonic and bodily dimensions, then comes to inform his *theological* conception of testimony. Here I will focus on the portion of his theological writings where he takes up a sustained treatment of the theme of witness/testimony. In doing so, and in comparing Chrétien's phenomenology of witness within call and response to his theology of Christian testimony, I signal that I am consciously switching discourses, reflecting that Chrétien himself would have considered himself to be switching modes. In what follows, though we find resonance with his phenomenology, we must understand that he is now doing theology, under the *lumen fidei,* in the light of faith. As I do so, I argue that here too one finds, in his Christian

---

437. Ibid., 11–12.

concept of witness, the agonic nature of witness raises its head, but here in relation to the person and call of Christ, in which the suffering finds resolution.

Chrétien's Theological Account of "the Christian Concept of Witness"

Chrétien's Christian conception of the nature of witness/testimony emerges most explicitly in an article he published in 2006 in the French journal *Philosophie*. It devoted its eighty-eighth edition to the question of *Témoignage* – testimony – recognizing along with this thesis that the contemporary biblical, analytic, and phenomenological discourses on the theme of witness have deep ties that are nonetheless still largely left unrelated to one another.[438] Thus it devoted half of the journal to articles on the epistemology of testimony emerging from the analytic tradition, and gave the other half to articles taking up the biblical and ontological (or phenomenological) dimensions of the theme (4 articles to 5 respectively).

For his part, at the request of *Philosophie*, Chrétien crafted a response to their inquiry as to what constituted the *Christian* conception of witness/testimony. He entitled it *Neuf propositions sur le concept chrétien de témoignage*. It was later republished in a collection of Chrétien's essays under the head *Sous le regard de la bible*.[439] As a result, there has been little critical attention to Chrétien's conception of witness, as thoroughly developed in this piece, in the English speaking world. Further, its subsequent publication under a theologically orientated head has overshadowed the fact that it was initially aimed primarily at a philosophically astute audience, and little effort has been expended to relate Chrétien's work on the nature of Christian testimony to his wider philosophy of call and response even in the French speaking world, despite the fact that his phenomenology of call and response was well developed and widely published in numerous monographs at the time of this significant attention to the category of witness. Here we can only begin that work but, by sketching the development of Chrétien's nine

438. "Le Témoignage: Perspectives Analytiques, Bibliques et Ontologiques," *Philosophie*, no. 88 (2006).

439. Chrétien, "Nine Propositions on the Christian Concept of Witness," 85–103.

propositions and relating them to his phenomenology of call and response, I will nonetheless argue that though his conception of the Christian category of witness is thoroughly theological, it is also deeply indebted to his phenomenology of call and response. I will demonstrate that his employment of the agonistic and embodied character of our interplay within call and response are prominent and, as mentioned above, it is here that we see the agonic and embodied natures of call and response ultimately reconciled.

Chrétien's Nine Propositions of the Christian Concept of Witness

Can God testify to man's testimony? Can the nature of witnessing be thought out independently of what one is testifying to? Is the order or scope of the testimonial category tightly defined and discreet, or "inclusive" of many different kinds of phenomena within human experience, having broad implications across a range of discourses? With these questions Chrétien opens his discussion on the category of testimony.[440] While the first two questions find answer only as the article develops, he addresses the third immediately: "The acknowledgement or absence of acknowledgement accorded a witness, the refusal to witness, the torture or execution of witnesses, the falsification of testimonies, belong to the order of the testimonial", thus establishing that the category of witness is not merely restricted to the act of testimony itself, but to a whole realm of social and ethical considerations related to it, "spreading in such a way that nothing, once it is opened up, can remain foreign or exterior to it".[441] Like Ricoeur in his *Hermeneutics of Testimony*, Chrétien maintains a distinction between the popular, or judicial, conception of testimony and that of the New Testament but holds that there is no radical disjunction between the two. Instead both thinkers see the NT concept of testimony as one that extends and deepens the common conception.[442] Nonetheless, for Chrétien, though the NT

---

440. Ibid., 86. He will come to answer these three questions: "yes," "no," and "inclusive" respectively.

neither invented the word (*martus*) or the act itself, it most certainly has "given them new and decisive meanings" that have made an indelible impact on how we think of the word and the act.[443]

With this introductory context in view, I will briefly open the nine propositions in order, pointing out the promised connections to the foregoing description of Chrétien's phenomenology. First, Chrétien asserts that the "primordial" meaning of testimony is *self-testimony* – the testimony one gives to oneself. This immediately distinguishes this primordial meaning of testimony from its common judicial meaning. Though it is often necessary for a defendant to testify to their innocence, it would almost never be considered sufficient for establishing the facts of an event in a serious case. Other witnesses are drawn in and their testimony heard as the primary human means of uncovering the facts that surround the defendant. Thus it is a "vivid paradox" that Christ claims the ability to testify for/to himself in response to the Pharisee's charge that his testimony to his identity as the light of the world was invalid due to its self-referential nature: "Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true" (John 8:13-14. Cf. 8:18). Chrétien quotes Augustine to the effect that light can indeed testify for itself. It by definition has no need of another light to shine upon it in order to vindicate its nature as light. For Jesus, a manifestation of himself is also a self-attestation. But this veracity of self-attestation in Jesus' case is *sui-generis*. Everywhere else the common rule which disallows self-testimony applies, even in the case of other witnesses for Christ.[444] As we will see, this means that the testimony of the church is not primarily its own testimony. Rather it is a participation in the self-attestation of Christ himself. Turning a glance back to Chrétien's wider phenomenology helps us see even in this initial proposition the language of call and response and the primacy

---

441. Ibid., 86.

442. Ibid. Cf. Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Testimony," 122–23.

443. Chrétien, "Nine Propositions on the Christian Concept of Witness," 86.

444. Ibid., 87–88.

accorded to Jesus within that structure: "this light [Jesus] is the *Logos*, the Word, which in responding for itself responds for the possibility of responding for anything in general".[445] Here the unique place accorded to Christ as the only one for whom self-testimony is appropriate, the one bearing the "primordial" meaning of testimony, the Word that makes all other words of response possible, seems to set his call as being the ultimate call that summons us to respond through the variety of other calls we hear.

Second, the testimony that Jesus bears to himself does not, however, form a tautology for it includes in itself, in Trinitarian fashion, the testimony of the Father and the Spirit to him. For Chrétien there is an alterity even at the heart of Jesus' self-attestation. For him the question of how Jesus' testimony to himself can also be the testimony of another for him is the same question as: Why can the Word in person, who has ultimate authority, say nothing from himself but only what the Father gives him to say? Thus the unity of these two questions – How can Jesus' testimony be both a testimony to himself? And, How can it be the testimony of another to himself? – "is in a sense Christianity itself. The alterity at the heart of self-testimony is a part of its very content and also forms that which opens it forever, that which gives it an eternal future".[446] Further Jesus' acts become signs which testify and, even though silent, become an audible voice. Even death, when rendered in the testimony of God, is an utterance.

Third, Christ-the-Light, who witnesses to himself, calls and entreats witnesses to enter and further that testimony. Here Chrétien notes that the first testimony mentioned in the Gospel According to John is not the primary testimony – the self-attesting Light – but John the Baptist, who came as a witness to the Light (John 1:6-8). With Aquinas he probes: Why would absolute

---

445. Ibid., 87.

446. Ibid., 89.

Light need another light to illumine it?[447] He answers that the incarnation demands human participation in God's self-testimony. The event of Jesus' self-testimony both invites us to enter into it. Little is said at this point about *how* we are made to participate in the ongoing testimony of Jesus which arises from his life, death, resurrection and ongoing ministry. Nonetheless we are commanded to testify to it. This wounds us at our point of vulnerability to superfluity – we can add nothing to it and our testimony to him can only ever be an expression of his own self-testimony. Yet it is essential to the "drama of testimony" that we are called into it. Here, again with Chrétien's phenomenology in mind, we begin to see how the call both overwhelms and wounds as it invites and finds expression in our response to it. Those who hear the call of Christ are "thrown upside down" in that event, and yet through it find life.[448] The agonic nature of the response to the call comes clearer still, however, in the next proposition.

Fourth, the "unsurpassable dehiscence and inferiority of the witness *vis-à-vis* what he testifies belong to the essence of testimony and are alone sources of its grandeur and veracity".[449] This section asserts that the "trembling voice" of the witness partakes of the content of the testimony itself. Whereas the natural order of testimony cherishes the reputation of the one who gives witness here, in the Christian category of testimony, God elects witnesses not for their strength of reputation but in light of their weakness (1 Corinthians 2:3-5). Here the "disproportion" between the Light and witnesses to it "is essential and principal. Strictly irreducible".[450] The witness enters into and even enriches the content of their testimony to Christ *by means of their own weakness.* Further, when one presumes upon the strength of their own ability to offer testimony to Christ they become a false witness, as Peter did when he trusted in the fervour of his own devotion to Christ as the basis for his testimony. He soon denied Christ

---

447. Ibid., 90.

448. Ibid., 89.

449. Ibid., 92–93.

450. Ibid., 93.

three times.[451] The response arises not from adequation with the call but from the bursting open of the wound of inferiority and inadequacy at the invitation into Christ's self-attestation. "The witness' centre of gravity is outside themselves – and this is the reason there exists an essential disequilibrium and fragility".[452]

Fifth, that the witness is sent entails that their testimony not only bears on the past, but has ongoing meaning for the future. Here Chrétien's essential insight is that the disciples are not considered witnesses simply because they have walked with Jesus, experiencing the events of his earthly ministry. The key texts he draws on are John 15:26-27 and Acts 1:8 which, taken together, make clear that the disciples are not automatically witnesses by virtue of their mere apprenticeship to Jesus, rather they *become* witnesses only after the Holy Spirit is granted to them at Pentecost. If this were not true, one would assume that they would be prepared for their role as witnesses as soon as Jesus ascended. Instead they are told "*you will* receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and *you will be* my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8, ESV).[453] This indicates that the primary locus of Christian testimony reaches not into the past but stretches into the future. The plenitude of testimony comes only at Pentecost with the gift of the Holy Spirit, who leads the disciples into all truth and clarifies for them the meaning of their testimony.[454]

Sixth, the Spirit, through witnesses, continually calls other witnesses throughout time. Here, through the testimony of the witnesses, the Spirit himself gives testimony to Christ so that every new generation of disciples receives the self-testimony of Christ firsthand. There are no "second-hand disciples", as both Kierkegaard and Newman noted.[455] Christ preaches Christ

---

451. Ibid.

452. Ibid.

453. Emphasis mine.

through the work of the Spirit. But this does not give us a religion of mere immediacy and interiority. Mediation through time in history becomes fundamental. The law of testimony is submitted to the law of incarnation and thus to historicity and exteriority. The testimony of Christ only comes to me in the voice of other human witnesses, as "essentially exposed, exposed to derision, to dispute, to manipulation, to scorn, to the Cain and the Pilate that live in each of us. It is of the essence of testimony to be stricken, wounded, mistreated, via the witness who bears it".[456] Here again the agonic nature of heeding the call is plain. Further, here he begins to draw on the *polyphonic* nature of response to the call that was also mentioned above. There Chrétien's conception of response to the call necessarily implicated the trembling voice, the wounding of which served as a means for others to be called to offer their own testimony to the infinite.

Seventh, the witness is absorbed and transformed by their testimony to Christ in a way that engages the whole of each individual, making them irreplaceable. Though it is the interior witness of the Spirit that opens spiritual eyes to the Light, and thus makes the witness of the witnesses effective, it does not remain interior. "It is thus with his whole self, body and spirit, that the witness is called to testify".[457] In a key sentence Chrétien argues:

> The word in the name of God, in the name of the Name, must be signed in the letters of our human names, for it would lose its right in erasing its conditions of possibility, and the paradoxical mediation, which counts for all the tension, all the risk, and all the necessity of testimony, according to which infinite light has chosen to come through the straight gate and the constricted, choked-up throat of its witnesses.[458]

Here both the agonic and bodily nature of testimony are employed as a response to the "infinite light", ringing with parallel to Chrétien's phenomenology of call and response. There is a "paradoxical mediation" between that infinite light and its residence in the dehiscence of the one

---

454. Chrétien, "Nine Propositions on the Christian Concept of Witness," 95.

455. Ibid., 96.

456. Ibid., 98.

457. Ibid., 99.

458. Ibid.

called to be a witness. Yet that inferiority does not erase or nullify the importance of their individuality, rather it establishes it. Testimony does not proceed on the basis of the identity of the witness, but the witness discovers their identity in their act of witnessing to the Light.[459]

Eighth, the event of testimony to the Light, which the Light gives to itself in the testimony of his witnesses, also reveals the shadows and ignites their insurrection in false testimony. The self-testimony of God not only calls some to become witnesses, it also is refused and denied by others who are then incited by it to become false-witnesses who attack the Light.[460] This adds to the "dramatics of testimony" already elucidated. But Chrétien is careful to note that the dividing line between true and false witness not only divides people. First and foremost it divides each of us: "It passes into the heart of each of us before the Light; it is an integral part of the agonic nature of testimony, which is always a combat, intimate first, against our own falseness".[461] Here we find echoes of the agonic nature of response to the call arising from the call's challenge to our self-sufficiency – here noted as "falseness". This combat arises within us before it storms around us.

Ninth, and finally, Christ's self-testimony is uncircumscribable and thus calls unceasingly for witnesses, none of whom exhaust it though this does not make their testimony fragmentary.[462] Each witness to the light gives witness to the whole Christ, but the whole Christ cannot be contained in any individual witness – who can never "exhaust the truth of him to whom he bears testimony".[463] Our inclusion in witness to Christ does not imply the inadequacy of Jesus' self-

---

459. Ibid., 99.

460. Ibid., 101.

461. Ibid., 101–2.

462. Ibid., 102.

463. Ibid.

testimony, but exists because the Word wants not only our eyes and ears, but our throat, our breath, our voice, that voice of testimony as if waiting within us as yet unknown to us".[464] So ends Chrétien's exposition of the Christian concept of testimony.

Chrétien's Christian Concept of Witness and the Resolution of Perpetual Agonistics

As I progressed through the nine propositions that give shape to Chrétien's Christian conception of witness, I highlighted clear continuities between them and his phenomenology of call and response. There Chrétien described the self-testimony of Christ as an "infinite light" that wounds our self-sufficiency and calls us to enter into a testimony that is not our own, allowing the testimony of the one who calls to find his voice in our own. Even once we allow ourselves to enter into the self-testimony of the light in response to its call, indeed as a necessary means of *hearing* the call itself, we do so through the "aporia of testimony" which is double: First, we are not called to give testimony to some fragile light in desperate need of our tending, rather to a superabundant light that shows everything. Further, once we recognize the infinite scope of the Light that calls us, we are engendered with questions of our own superfluity and inferiority – and these questions are not incidental to our becoming witnesses. Instead the "unsurpassable dehiscence and inferiority of the witness vis-à-vis what he testifies belongs to the *essence* of testimony".[465] But this is not the degradation of our human nature in perpetual agonistics that go nowhere. As I have demonstrated, here we are invited to participate in the self-testimony of Christ and, so though we have seen the agonic theme arise here in Chrétien's theology of Christian witness, in this context it arises in an altogether different light.

The further feature of the wound in our voice of response to the call *constituting a call to others* is also present. This arose in mainly the sixth and ninth propositions. The sixth emphasized the iterative nature of the Spirit's call of witnesses through witnesses. And the ninth

---

464. Ibid., 103.

465. Ibid., 92–93.

spoke of the inexhaustible nature of the response of testimony to the call of the Light, which thus invites a multitude of witnesses, each of whom render their testimony to the whole of Christ without exhausting Christ's self-testimony in their own, thus calling forth others to give their own witness. So rather than a static experience of the agonic, history is seen to be moving toward a goal, a resolution, as a host of witnesses is gathered and progresses through history. And given here the agonistic nature of our response to the call of Christ's self-testimony arises from our participation in his *kenosis,* his sufferings, we also have the assurance of participating in his resurrection and redemption – the agonic nature of our present participation in his self-testimony sees an end.

Chrétien, by means of his unique development of the call and response structure and his emphasis on the bodily nature of our response to the call, develops a phenomenology of call and response that illumines the *agonic* and *embodied* nature of witness. Further, the identity of the witness as one *constituted by* what they witness is the primary phenomenological and epistemological utility that the category of witness has in his phenomenological discourse. However, as I opened up the agonistic nature of witness in Chrétien, we found reason to suspect that his phenomenology enthrones agony as irrevocably bound to the heart of what it means to be human, making him vulnerable to the charge of glorifying suffering. This aporia in Chrétien's phenomenology then led us to turn to his *theological* conception of witness, and it is only there that we found a measure of resolution to what otherwise would have remained a disturbing aspect of Chrétien's conception of witness, and by implication, the nature of our human knowing.

Therefore, if Ricoeur used the motif of witness to highlight the hermeneutical nature of attesting to the infinite within finite human consciousness, Chrétien highlights the responsorial nature of that relation on behalf of the human side. He further highlights the embodied and agonic aspects of this resonance to the call, and how the wound of the call constitutes the self. I

now turn to briefly examine how Jean-Luc Marion appeals to the motif of witness at a vital juncture in his work.

Marion's Conception of Self as *I*-to-*Witness* in Encounter with Saturated Phenomena

In this section I argue that Jean-Luc Marion appeals to the category of witness at a critical juncture in the development of his phenomenology. In fact, Marion reflects more thoroughly and critically on the category of witness/testimony than either Ricoeur or Chrétien do. He does so not by attempting a phenomenology of witness in its own right and for his own sake, but instead appeals to the category at pivotal junctures in his thought as he develops his philosophy of the fundamental phenomenological structure of human intention and understanding. Thus, he is not writing a phenomenology of the phenomenon of witness as one might reflect phenomenologically upon the nature of prayer – for example, but instead is reflecting upon the phenomenon of witness as a foil for expressing a central aspect of the phenomenological structure of consciousness itself.

This is not to say that one finds scores of reflection on a testimonial-logic, or the phenomena of witness throughout his volumes. It is to say that close examination of the overall structure of Marion's phenomenality, cannot miss the centrality of the category to his thought as it appears at key junctures. From the outset of his constructive phenomenological program Marion aims to place givenness as a concept at its heart. For Marion, the goal of phenomenology is return to the things themselves, the things in question, after Kant.[466] But it is not at all self-evident to him that this can be done within Husserl's framework of objectification. Heidegger too realized this, and sought to move beyond Husserl's attempt to establish the objectivity of the things in themselves, as he instead pursued their being and the nature of being.[467] But for Marion,

---

466. Jean-Luc Marion, *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 2.

467. Ibid., 2–3.

with Husserl and Heidegger both, the self is construed either as the Transcendental I or as *Dasein*. And with most contemporary phenomenologists in France, Marion is trying to find a different way forward than the German founders to his school of thought. He is seeking to allow the phenomenological way of thinking to rest solely on its own protocols, which he believes are unnecessarily restrained either by focusing phenomenology either on the constitution of the object in objectivity, or of beings in their being.[468]

Thus rather than Husserl's transcendental reduction, or Heidegger's existential reduction, Marion seeks to establish a third reduction which is based on a responsorial call and response structure. Here it is not the self that constitutes the phenomena by its reduction, but instead the self itself which is established by the call of the phenomena with which it encounters.[469] Thus Marion turns the phenomenological structure on its head giving primacy to the phenomena and their appearing within consciousness rather than to the self and its intentional consciousness. Within this renewed viewpoint of the phenomenological structure of understanding, in which the givenness of the phenomena are given primacy, Marion distinguishes between regular and saturated phenomena.[470] Regular phenomena are those in which our capacity of for aligning our thought and powers of description to the phenomena are adequate to the phenomena. Saturated phenomena, on the other hand, are those which overwhelm our capacity for attending to them adequately. In his earlier work, Marion listed the four types of saturated phenomena as event, idol, flesh, and revelation. But in his later work he substituted *icon* for *revelation* and raised the phenomena of revelation to a higher, fifth type, that concentrates each of the four more properly phenomenological types of saturated phenomena.[471]

---

468. Ibid., 3.

469. Ibid., 106–7.

470. Robyn Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 2.

And it is here that the centrality of the category of witness for Marion comes clear. Here, at this crucial juncture of his thought where the givenness of the phenomena most overwhelms our capacity of adequation, and thus when we are most constituted in our self by the overwhelming nature of the call of the saturated phenomenon, Marion turns to the phenomena of witness to explore description of appropriate response to the call. These phenomena not only suspend the phenomena's subjection to the I of the self, but inverts that dynamic. Here the subject becomes a constituted witness who is in effect created by the call of the saturated phenomena. Here "the *I* takes on the status of the *witness*".[472] In contrast to a manner of knowing where the *I* determines the phenomena through intentionality - organizing and the intuitions of the phenomena through adequation of concept to the phenomena - in encounter with saturated phenomena this posture of mastery on behalf of the *I* becomes untenable.[473] For Marion, as witness the subject's act of synthesis becomes passive.[474] Here Marion goes beyond Ricoeur in arguing, in the case of saturated phenomena, that here attempt at definition of the phenomena passes beyond our capacity to identify meaning in the phenomena with what is at hand immediately to us, even by a hermeneutical process. Here the saturated phenomena stands over the intentional gaze, and constitutes the subject rather than being constituted by it. Here the *I* "stupefied and taken aback" no longer has the initiative in the dynamic of manifestation. Here the "witness succeeds the I by renouncing the first person".[475]

Conclusion: Ricoeur, Chrétien, and Marion - Primordial Testimony

---

471. Jean-Luc Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner (Ashland, Ohio: Fordham University Press, 2008), xiv.

472. Jean-Luc Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 52.

473. Ibid., 52–53.

474. Marion, *Being Given*, 217.

475. Marion, *Being Given*, 217–18.

Thus as with Chrétien, so too with Marion: the self is constituted by its encounter with the call (in Chrétien's case) and the saturated phenomena (in Marion's case). However, we found above that Ricoeur perceived in biblical motifs of witness a hermeneutical element - the witness has a choice to make as to whether they will respond to the phenomena they encounter with faithful witness or not. Sadly, John's Gospel speaks of many even among the leaders of the people who believed in Christ, but who would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue, for they loved human praise (Jn. 12:42-43). Therefore Ricoeur acts as a corrective to Marion. It is possible to suppress open encounter even with saturated phenomena, and to refuse to let oneself be constituted as witness as a result of that encounter. One can refuse to bear witness. One can choose to bear false witness. Though there are responsorial dynamics in each of the three thinkers, Chrétien's thought is the most robust in drawing out the embodied and agonistic nature of responding faithfully in witness to the prior call. Then, in his openly theological reflection on witness, it becomes clear that the call is - ultimately - the call of Christ who bears witness to himself and calls for belief in him.

This chapter set out to further develop the argument of the thesis that biblical and phenomenological motifs of witness have to offer theological epistemology not merely testimony as source, as indispensable as that basic mode of testimony is to Christian faith. Yet given theological engagement with analytic philosophies of testimony in an attempt to assist Christian faith in understanding its testimonial roots in terms of testimony-as-source is now common, I have here focused on select instances of the phenomenological tradition where it is more common to use the motif of witness as metaphorical lens through which to view fundamental human experience. Through its manifestations in the Gospel of John and now in examples from Christian phenomenologists who have used the motif of witness at vital junctures of their thought, I have sought to demonstrate that reflection upon witness in these traditions encourages theological epistemology to rediscover what it might mean to adopt the epistemic stance of the

witness in response to any number of epistemic challenges contemporary thought and life bring to our self-understanding of the nature of bearing the knowledge of God in Christ. Ricoeur, Chrétien, and Marion have taken a basic understanding of testimony, and have used its elements to explore the nature of human relation with ultimate being. Thus, in a short final chapter I will begin to demonstrate how theological epistemology might go about developing a constructive and intentional witness-stance, by taking aspects of the testimonial logic we found operative within the pulse of the Gospel According to John, and develop their characteristics into a meta-lens through which to view the nature of human knowing of God in Christ. To a start at that task I now turn.

Chapter Four: From a Phenomenologically Enriched Testimonial Logic to the Epistemic Posture of the Witness: Contributions to Theological Epistemology

Introduction

This final chapter seeks to deliver what was promised at the outset of this project: that reflection on motifs of witness, in aspects of their biblical and phenomenological expressions, leads to constructive contribution to the field of theological epistemology. Thus the central question that has been driving the research of the thesis has been: *What nourishment might motifs of witness and testimony, in their biblical and phenomenological manifestations, have to bear toward constructive refreshment of theological epistemology*? And the answer to this question, which has developed through the unfolding argument of the thesis, is that reflection upon the motif of witness not only highlights the importance of testimony as *source* for Christian faith - as indispensable as eyewitness testimony is to the foundation of Christianity, but at another meta-level the phenomena of witness also functions as *metaphorical lens* through which to view something of the epistemic stance the church is called to maintain toward God, toward one another, and toward the world. Having seen, in the last chapter, something of how a metaphorical extension of the phenomena of witness is exemplified in select ways within phenomenological reflection, this stage of the argument then presses me to conclude the thesis by asking how the testimonial logic, discovered as interwoven through the Gospel of John, can be developed into a theo-logic that can guide constructive development within theological epistemology.

To put it another way, I have been developing the argument throughout the thesis that the motif of witness, on at least one Christian view, does not merely furnish us with assurance as to the historical character of our faith, rooted as it is in eyewitness testimony - and as vital as that foundation is. I have argued that it also furnishes us with a testimonial self-understanding that helps us to rightly frame our relation to God and to the world, and that this frame has significant epistemic implication. I have sought to show, through examination of the Gospel of John and select phenomenological authors, that this testimonial self-understanding comes loaded with

epistemic entailments that significantly inform our understanding of the nature of our bearing of the knowledge of God, and the epistemic expectations that befit it. In sum, we know God in the world - at least in part - as witnesses who testify to what we have seen and heard of him. This is to say that we can explore our knowing situation, as those who bear something of the knowledge of God, by exploring the epistemic stance, or epistemic posture, of the witness in their act of testimony.

We can adopt any number of epistemic stances, depending on the social situation that we find ourselves in, the epistemic roles and expectations that are embedded in that setting, and the place we find ourselves situated in amid that web of relations. As a teacher, my epistemic stance would ideally be one of some measure of confidence to guide my students into greater understanding of my topic(s), even as I also learn from them. As a student, my epistemic stance might be one of deference to my teachers and fellow students, characterised by a posture of wanting to learn all that I might from them. The epistemic stance of a judge (with an aim of impartial just judgement and adherence to the law) might be different than that of a prosecuting lawyer, a defence attorney, or a juror. In each instance, what I expect to know and how I bear that knowledge with reference to the social setting I am in changes. Further examples could be offered to illustrate this concept of epistemic "stance" or epistemic "posture".[476]

In this chapter I will use this notion of epistemic stance to develop my contribution to theological epistemology under the headings of the four touchstones I identified in the first chapter. There I argued that a theological epistemology that maintains integrity to the theological stance adopted by the thesis should be characterised by the virtues of being genuinely theological in its rationality, ontologically attuned, contextually and missionally rooted, and ethically alert. Thus in what follows I will draw together the foregoing development of motifs of witness in the

---

476. Similar to my idea here of various epistemic "postures" or "stances" we might adopt, Stackhouse helpfully characterises whole movements of Western culture and thought by description of their unique "cognitive styles", and sketches the styles of Enlightenment thought, Romanticism, Process thought, and Postmodernity: John G. Stackhouse, *Need to Know*, 29, 30, 33, 36, 38 Stackhouse recognises that a sketch is just that, and that various cognitive styles can coexist within a given culture, as one does not neatly supplant another within the history.

Gospel of John and our select phenomenological readings in Ricoeur, Chrétien, and Marion to develop a picture of the epistemic stance of the witness bearing testimony that exemplifies the four virtues I have identified, thus demonstrating how the development of the epistemic stance of the witness furnishes contribution to theological epistemology.

Theological: The Epistemic Posture of the Witness as Enabling a Confident Theological Rationality, while also Fostering Epistemic Openness and Humility

Christianities in the West are experiencing a sea change as the final vestiges of Christendom rapidly fade. Increasingly, nearly all varieties of expressions of Christian faith found in the West are having to adapt to surrounding cultures that are often fast losing sympathy for their values, let alone their overall worldview. Among many other temptations Christian faith faces in such a situation, *epistemic* temptations exist which would serve to blind it from the genuine opportunity such cultural moments provide. Temptations to hardening Christian faith and understanding, and closing rank - out of a desire to regain something of modernity's epistemic confidence (as elusive and fleeting as it ever was), or the position that Christianity once held in Western cultures - would keep us from seeing the opportunity in postmodern modes of thought for deconstructing idols of knowing made in humanity's own image, and for humanity's own glory.[477] Conversely, temptations also exist to give way to a cultural relativism that shrinks back from sharing the hope of Christ, and from staking any kind of Christian claim publicly, for the salvation of the world, perhaps from the sentiment that it is easier to leave everyone to practice their own way and not interfere. Tragically, it seems a prevailing relativistic intellectual mood is doing more to foster dogmatism and extremism than it is to bolster tolerance of other viewpoints.

Yet, as we have seen in our reflection on John's Gospel, the earliest Christians lived in a situation of great cultural and religious diversity, and one of the ways they not only coped with

---

477. For a similar stance toward postmodern modes of thought, and the opportunities they can provide Christian reflection, see: J. Aaron Simmons, "The Strategies of Christian Philosophy," in *Christian Philosophy: Conceptions, Continuations, Challenges*, ed. J. Aaron Simmons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 199–200.

that situation, but even more flourished and impacted the cultures of their times, was by adopting the posture of a witness. In his reflection on the *martus* word group, Trites draws the connection between that testimonial posture, and our current times. Speaking of modern times in the West:

> Theological ideas from a wide range of sources have been thrown into the contemporary melting pot and are being vigorously debated. This is precisely the type of situation in which the NT writers make abundant use of witness imagery and terminology. The claims of Christ were being hotly contested, then as now, and in such a milieu the language and thought forms of the Old Testament controversy sprang naturally to mind.[478]

Trites is here urging that Christians rediscover the posture of the witness amid cultures where Christian faith and practice increasingly entails epistemic tension with friends and family, co-workers and neighbours, media and culture, and is marginalised to the edges of society as a whole.[479] However, though Trites urges that the varieties of Christian faith in the West rediscover the posture of the witness, he does not say why such a rediscovery would be useful, save to draw some parallel between our increasingly pluralist situation in the West and that of the early Christians. Why is it that the self-understanding of the witness - the epistemic posture of the one who bears testimony - equips and empowers Christians amid situations of great plurality?

Presently, our wrestling with the motif of witness in the Fourth Gospel positions us to contribute further to this conviction, and to demonstrate the theological roots that explain why the posture of the witness serves as an optimal Christian stance in such a cultural moment. Below I open how a testimonial posture provides foundation for both an epistemic humility and openness, and a confident articulation of testimony amid difference, scrutiny, and opposition. Then, at the close of this section, I develop a partial corrective to aspects of Karl Barth's extensive use of the motif of witness which, if left unchecked, serve to mute the insights arising

---

478. Lothar Coenen and Trites, Allison, auth, "Witness, Testimony", (NIDNTT, 3; Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 1048.

479. Note the *epistemic* connotations of the witness posture for Trites, as he speaks of the connection to OT controversy. That is to say, he sets his comments in the context of how testimonial discernment is marshalled time and again in the Hebrew bible as a means of Israel coming to the truth of matters vital to its common life together.

from our examination. I draw on the foregoing biblical and phenomenological conclusions throughout.

The epistemic posture of the witness grounding epistemic humility and openness

In the second chapter of the thesis, focused as it was on the motif of witness as expressed in the Fourth Gospel, I wrestled with the approach of Thomas Simpson to the *prima facie* contradiction between John 5:31 and 8:14. As an alternative to his solution to the problem, I made appeal to the "greater than" nature of the testimony of Jesus: "I have a testimony weightier than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to finish - the very works I am doing - testify that the Father has sent me" (Jn. 5:36; Cf. 1 Jn. 5:9 where God's testimony is said to be greater than that of human testimony). I argued that Jesus, as the incarnate Son of God, humbled himself to take on human nature and, in so doing, also willingly humbled himself to submit to human modes of epistemic discernment - shared approaches to communal discernment on matters of vital importance to those communities. He submitted to a testimonial logic on the one hand, "If I testify to myself, my testimony is not true" (Jn. 5:31), but then shortly made clear that this testimonial logic could not ultimately justify him - as if he would somehow take warrant from it or was ultimately constrained by its limitations: "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I come from and where I am going" (8:14). The Prologue of the Gospel positioned Jesus as the agent of all creation, and the light of all people (Jn. 1:1-4). Therefore the truth of his identity does not stand or fall on the success or failure of the judgements of human discernment. He instead founds the existence of all creation, human modes of testimonial resolution of dispute not least. Thus I established both Jesus' "Yes" to his submission to the scrutiny of a testimonial logic on one level - the level of his willingness to condescend to cultural modes of discernment, and his "No", on a deeper level, to that voluntary kenotic submission to a testimonial means of discernment as being taken to imply that the truth of his identity was somehow grounded on that logic for its ultimate justification.

The disciples of Jesus then, both in the first centuries and now, adopt a similar witness posture in their own engagement with a surrounding world that doubts and scrutinises their testimony to the identity of Jesus. This posture of the witness, taking the character of its epistemic posture from the Christ it testifies to, is able to hold in tension both a radical openness and humility, and a firm conviction that does not give way under the pressures of a pluralist environment, as if the witnesses' claim to Christ somehow expected to find its ultimate justification in the mirror of the world amid which it testifies. I will elucidate this open humility, and then this confidence, in turn.

As we have seen, the posture of the witness entails an expectation of scrutiny. Though at times the witness has to bear testimony alone, they do not desire it to be this way. A testimonial logic assumes a plurality of witness, which means that the witness does not bear the expectation of a self-sufficient testimony. I demonstrated in the second chapter that the witness expects to be scrutinised, to be questioned, to be doubted and to need confirming support from the complementary testimony of other witnesses. The witness' posture is thus one of humility and openness to interrogation and dispute. This epistemic stance does not expect or assume a place of unquestioned pride of place in its bearing of testimony. Quite the opposite. The witness bears their testimony with the epistemic expectation that some - perhaps many - may not be convinced of their testimony. Thus the posture of the witness is open to other testimonies and perspectives, and humble in the bearing of their own. Here rediscovery of the perspectival nature of all human knowing, including our knowing of God, is welcome rather than threatening.

This epistemic stance of humility and openness to scrutiny has not only been found in the Gospel of John's motif of witness, but has also emerged as fundamental to the phenomenological explorations of the motif engaged in chapter three. I demonstrated how Marion, at a key juncture in his phenomenological description of the self's encounter with what he calls a "saturated phenomena", relied upon the phenomena of the witness bearing testimony to find some means of describing what happens in this mysterious encounter. He describes the encounter as a transformation of the *I* into the posture of the witness - developing a distinction between the two.

When the *I* is comprehending objects that are not saturated phenomena, the *I* can confidently know the phenomena it is attending to, with their being an adequate adequation between what appears to them and their capacity to encompass the phenomena with their understanding. However, in encounter with saturated phenomena the *I* is transformed into the witness:

> But in front of a saturated phenomena, this posture becomes untenable for the *I*: indeed, the excess of intuition over the signification or significations (or concepts) available forbids not only knowing without having to see (everything), but above all knowing adequately, precisely because one foresees all too well. Without question, the witness sees, but without managing to inscribe the superabundant intuition in the synthesis (through recognition) of the concept, or in the (noematic) constitution of the signification. The witness knows what he says, quite certainly and surely, since he speaks of what he has received through intuition; but he *does not understand* what he says, since he cannot unify it in a comprehensive concept, or identify it in a sufficient signification (*propositio sufficiens*).[480]

When Marion speaks of the witness knowing, but not completely understanding what they give testimony to - due to the fact that they have encountered something that overwhelms their capacity to adequate their concepts to the phenomena they bear witness about - he has in mind a particular witness, we learn shortly after this passage: the man born blind whom Jesus heals (Jn. 9). Marion sees in his experience of bearing witness to his encounter with Jesus a genuine testimony, but also one that cannot fully comprehend what it speaks of: "the man born blind, takes note, and makes all those around him take note, of the intuitive fact of his healing (from that moment he, the one blind from birth, can see), but he does not know its origin, or its signification, nor does he claim to know these at any moment".[481] Marion argues that this posture of the witness is so central to making a genuine signification of encounter with God that it is what distinguishes the words of the devil - who speaks from himself and is a liar - and Christ who does not speak from himself or his own authority (Jn. 14:10). Here in Marion we have a phenomenologically enriched reflection on the motif of witness at the heart of John's Gospel -

---

480. Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 53.

481. Ibid., 54.

bringing the biblical and the phenomenological together - which is fundamentally humble and open in its posture.[482]

Thus the epistemic posture of the witness grounds the virtues of humility and openness as fundamental to human bearing of the knowledge of God. In this way it contributes to theological epistemology by calling it to a radical humility in its tenor and fundamental disposition, with warning that to do otherwise risks sharing company with the devil. Thus the motif of witness, in the aspects of its biblical and phenomenological expressions that I have drawn on in chapters two and three respectively, contribute to a genuinely theological approach to theological epistemology by describing the epistemic conditions in which we human beings bear our knowledge of God in a way that befits that knowledge. We do so always amid the rightful and open expectation of limitation, disagreement, and scrutiny, and conscious that in our bearing witness to Christ the content of our testimony cannot ever be understood to circumscribe or fully contain the phenomena of our encounter with the Christ we bear witness to. This gives rise to a humble openness not so much by calling for it as a virtue by command, but by describing the epistemic situation of the witness - the situation that fundamentally pertains for them epistemically. Then, from the fundamental epistemic posture of the witness, humility and openness find their footing, arising as they do from the witness' epistemic self-understanding.[483]

---

482. Though, in chapter three, I traced very similar themes in Ricoeur and Chrétien as well.

483. This is not the place to develop this insight into its fuller implication for pastoral theology and ecclesiology. But suffice it to say here that ecclesial cultures that either implicitly or explicitly suppress questions and disagreement about what is taught strike right at the heart of the mission of the church. There is of course a central place for right doctrine, and opposing heresy with correction and sound teaching is essential to the health of the church. But this is not to be identified with a culture that suppresses an interrogating mind. Many intelligent converts to Christianity have left the traditions they first came to know Christ within because they found, in time, that those cultures were too narrow and closed to help them to integrate their newfound faith with the rest of their life and the wider world as they grew in maturity. An healthy ecclesial culture will be one in which leaders and their teaching can be questioned, and open investigation of the claims of Christian faith is encouraged in a non-defensive way. If such cultures are lost, so too is the ecclesia as witness. The witness expects to be interrogated and questioned, and bears their testimony not in an attempt to control the belief of others, but in faith that the Holy Spirit attends their testimony with his. Control is relinquished to him and his work in witness. Coercion and suppression kill witness.

The epistemic stance of the witness grounding articulation of confident conviction amid plurality

However, at the outset of this section I signalled that integral to the epistemic stance of the witness is not only humility and openness, but also confidence of conviction in encounter with plurality and disagreement. Thus, on the other end of a tension, the posture of the witness does not at all deduce from their humble and open acknowledgement of many other perspectives on matters vital to the flourishing of the community, or from the superabundance of the nature of their encounter with Christ, that their own perspective or their words that testify then have no resonance with reality. The witness resists the temptation to privatise their perspective in the face of plurality of perspective. This is integral to the very nature of the witness. I established in the second chapter that the central witnesses of the Gospel of John are clearly sent into the world to bear their testimony. In other words, the posture of the witness finds its footing on the sending work of God within the public context of the world. Therefore, there is no such thing as privatised witness. Testimony is by definition open to the world and *for* the world. Thus the witness resists resignation as to possibility of shared publicly public truth. On the contrary, the witness is passionately invested in their testimony to what they have seen and heard and confidently enters into the community's process of common discernment such that they dare speak - even cry out, as John, the forerunner to Jesus, did (Jn. 1:15). This confidence persists even amid opposition. The witness, though not desiring to stand alone in their testimony, nonetheless will if they must.

Thus a confidence exists in the epistemic stance of the witness that coexists alongside its humility and openness. The man born blind, healed by Jesus, may not know where Jesus is from or how it was that he was able to heal his eyes, or whether or not Jesus is a sinner, but he knows and confidently asserts that he was indeed blind, and now sees in the face of strong opposition to the contrary (Jn. 9:27-34). Again, reflecting phenomenologically on this passage and the epistemic stance of the witness exemplified in the man born blind, Marion also sees an appropriate confidence resident within it - a genuine testimony that can indeed be given, even to God in Christ, the supreme "saturated phenomena". As we saw, he argues that "the witness may

also end up by saying the genuine signification but it does not come from him, and thus makes the saturated phenomenon appear precisely on the basis not of an intentional *I* but on that of this phenomenon itself". Thus the ground of the witness' confidence resides ultimately beyond them, and is drawn foundationally from the phenomena to which they attest in their witness. Marion sees that this confidence in testimony is not something that can be grounded within the self-sufficient *I,* but the one bearing witness nonetheless can express what they have seen and heard with a confidence which is drawn from beyond them, hosted as it is within the epistemic openness and humility noted above.

Therefore here, by drawing together aspects of the foregoing exploration of motifs of testimony in the Gospel according to John and in our select phenomenological thinkers, the epistemic posture of the witness engenders within theological epistemology a genuine theological rationality - one that is free to act from the integrity of what it has seen and heard, even in the face of challenge and opposition, while at the same time bearing that witness in the manner of a humble openness to difference, scrutiny, and disagreement. Here a testimonial logic is developed to furnish a theo-logic that adopts a posture of humility and openness to the other, while maintaining confidence even amid great plurality and contest of opinion. The witness, convinced that they have seen and heard something of Christ, thus testifies to that encounter. Here the self-understanding of the witness frames our epistemic expectations such that Christian faith can enjoy both realism and hope. Hard isolationism and relativism are eschewed, and humility, openness, and confident engagement are fostered. This explanation of how the Christian posture of witness rests upon the kenotic action of Christ contributes to the observation that Trites made above, by developing the foundational theological reasons adopting such a posture has been empowering for Christians amid cultural moments of great plurality.

Barth's a-critical deployment of the motif - an initial response

However, if Christians are going to be empowered to increasingly adopt the epistemic stance of the witness in the West at the head of the 21st Century, the most prominent theological

deployment of the motif in the 20th Century needs brief examination and partial correction. Karl Barth was unmatched in the scale of his usage of the motif of witness within 20th century Christian theology, both in terms of the frequency with which he made appeal to the motif, and the centrality with which it appears in his works. Though it is difficult to find secondary literature that deals specifically and at article length with the question of what exactly Barth is doing with his extensive use of the motif of witness throughout his works, one can find scattered comments that recognise the central importance of the motif for Barth among his most authoritative interpreters.[484] While recounting the development of Barth's early lectures on the Gospel of John in Münster, where he took up the post of Professor of Dogmatics and New Testament Exegesis in the Autumn of 1925 and lectured for four hours a week on the Gospel of John as his major teaching assignment in the Winter semester of both 1925 and 1926, John Webster summarises how Barth used the motif of witness in his theological writings:

> A key term here is 'witness'. Here, as throughout his work, Barth uses 'witness' as a shorthand term to denote the ways in which creaturely persons, actions and products serve revelation by a ministry of indication...The Baptist is the paradigmatic witness, and in what he says about him, the Gospel writer is speaking about 'the situation which arises....when someone other than Christ himself, a human person, but an authorised human person, speaks of Christ...Applied to the Evangelist and his text the category of 'witness' functions in a similar way to that of 'apostle': it indicates that the communicative act by which the interpreter is encountered is not only an historical quantity, but also as such an element in an economy of communication whose primary agent is God...Barth's use of 'witness' serves to show that the Evangelist is not the originator of a communicative act of which the text is the deposit, but rather one who writes in order to testify to a profess of revelation anterior to his authorship.[485]

Note Webster's account of Barth's general use of the motif of witness - he of course would recognise that there are a number of different ways that Barth refers to witness throughout his extensive works - but note what emphasis is prominent: here the motif of witness is used to safeguard God's revelation as being distinct from creaturely agents. Barth holds that only God

---

484. Although see Dury, who focuses on the vital importance of personal testimony within the Wesleyan tradition, with some minimal reference to Barth: John L. Dury, "Barth and Testimony," in *Karl Barth and the Future of Evangelical Theology*, eds Christian T. Collinds Winn and John L. Drury (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 102–14.

485. Webster, *The Domain of the Word*, 75–76.

reveals God's self even as, in his wisdom, God chooses to use creaturely medium. For Barth, the "witness" is historically bound while God is not bound by anything. In a key passage in his lectures on the Gospel of John, Barth speaks of John the Baptist and his human word:

> As a medium of what is historical, the human word of the witness to revelation demands our total, concentrated, and serious attention. But only as a medium, not for its own sake and not to be understood in terms of itself, but as a witness which itself needs witness and expects witness - the witness that its subject must give.[486]

Here we find in Barth support for Webster's assessment of his characteristic use of the category throughout his work as a medium of what is historical, the human word of the witness to revelation. Note here the gap that testimony of the witness fills. For Barth, it safeguards the Creator / creature distinction as pertains revelation. The human witness has nothing within himself of God's revelation - not as a deposit or otherwise at his disposal. Rather the human witness only truly becomes a witness, for Barth, when conjoined with God's witness. The human witness is "a witness which itself needs a witness and expects witness". And elsewhere in the Gospel of John Barth would not have any difficulty in finding support for this. Above I pointed to John 15:26-27 where the Holy Spirit is promised by Jesus as a Helper who would come to the disciples and would bear witness about Jesus alongside their human witness.

This position of Barth's, which gives definition to what is meant by witness from within a prior commitment to a doctrine of revelation, also relates to Barth's position on natural theology - and the possibility that there can be some point of contact between God and humanity apart from Jesus Christ. It is not that Barth wants to deny any human capacity for receptivity to God, as he is frequently misunderstood to think. Barth prefers to speak of a "readiness" in humanity, but refuses that the revival of the readiness be in any way construed apart from Jesus Christ. If there is a human capacity it always and only ever lies in the hands of God.[487]

---

486. Karl Barth, *Witness to the Word: A Commentary on John I: Lectures at Münster in 1925 and at Bonn in 1933* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 12.

487. John Webster, *Barth*, 2nd ed. (London: Continuum, 2004), 79.

In response to this Barthian construal of witness, faith, and human reason, I recall the argument of the thesis thus far. I have demonstrated that the motif of witness in the Gospel according to John is a critical category of discernment, relating to how the community came to decision on contestable matters of vital importance for their communities. The implied audience receiving the Fourth Gospel shares with the Evangelist a testimonial logic to which the Evangelist makes appeal. Above in this section I made connections to the "greater than" testimony of Christ, which resonates very much with Barth's deployment of the category of testimony. There I also noted, however, an alternate pole that showed willingness to engage with and submit to prevailing modes of communal discernment, in as much as they help facilitate commendation of Christ - while resisting the temptation to try and ground Christ upon them. This involves and encounter with difference and scrutiny and limitation that is integral to the posture of the witness. This pole is either lost or actively opposed in Barth's thought.

Therefore, connection needs to be made again to the foregoing phenomenological reflection on the motif of testimony, where Ricoeur - in his reflections on the motif of witness, and with an eye to the biblical expressions of the motif as with Marion's reflection above does as well, saw a *hermeneutical* dimension built into the heart of the posture of the witness. He understood its interpretive nature, and argued that testimony facilitates the convergence between the historical claim as to the narration of the events of the life of Jesus, and the reflexive or subjective embrace of the meaning and significance of those events. In this way, testimony gives itself to be subject to interpretation, while also calling for an interpretation itself.[488] This interpretive dynamic integral to the phenomena of bearing testimony is what attracts Ricoeur to employ it at the heart of his description of humanity's encounter with the divine, and it is what enabled him to use it at the heart of his answer to the question as to how there can be an affirmation of the infinite within the finite. Thus both our biblical reflection on the posture of the

---

488. See Lincoln, where he likewise draws together reflection on John's Gospel, and Ricoeur, to highlight the interpretive and hermeneutical nature of a witness posture: Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 347.

witness, and Ricoeur's hermeneutical thought on the nature of testimony, serve to balance Barth's deployment of the motif of testimony, which tilts to honouring only one of two poles in the dynamic of the hermeneutic of testimony. As argued above, John's Gospel demonstrates that Christ himself honoured both.

Yet, in Barth's characteristic use of the motif witness taking place within a logic of critical communal discernment has fallen away and, as Webster noted, it has been reduced to "shorthand" for the distinction between the human medium of revelation and God's sovereign free action in relation to that medium.This leads to down playing or outright denigration of any kind of active apologetic with relation to the intellectual commendation of the Christian faith save on any other basis than the simple proclamation of the Gospel. It leads to a distinction between "rational apologetics" and "witness apologetics" where the former is understood as a concession to Enlightenment rationalism, a bringing of the gospel of Christ to Baal for a (rational) blessing, as Kevin Hart was quoted as having said at the outset of the thesis.

In this vein, Andrew Moore notes that a "rational apologetics", understood as a Christian submission to any prevailing notion of what counts as rational within a public, and then an attempt to commend Jesus within those alien restraints, leads in fact to atheism and perpetual irresolvable conflict between the "rational apologist" and the atheist. But there is something worse than this perpetual struggle, Moore asserts:

> But worse than that the central theme and focus of Christian faith and of a properly theological epistemology is unlikely to get a look in: Jesus Christ and his risen presence with his people in the power of the Holy Spirit are subject to the same (sceptical) epistemic scrutiny as any other core Christian belief.[489]

In other words, the proper focus of the church's proclamation is a "witness apologetics" that proclaims the gospel and demonstrates through its common life together the presence of the risen Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in their midst. Under this view, there is no place for any other kind of persuasion as the church seeks to hold out the hope of Christ to the world.

---

489. Andrew Moore, "From Rational Apologetics to Witness Apologetics," *Antonianum* 90, no. 2 (2015): 285.

But both our biblical and phenomenological reflections on the motif of witness have suggested that what we see in the relation of the *Logos* to a prevailing testimonial logic, which served as an everyday cultural logic of discernment, is a willingness, in as much as it is conducive for salvation, for the incarnate *Logos* to submit to the prevailing critical rationality which served communal discernment in as much as it was truth conducive to him and his purposes. As demonstrated above, this does not necessitate the implication that warrant for the truth of his identity is somehow grounded upon, or constrained by, that logic. It is to imply that it goes against the very nature of testimony itself to employ it as a tool to isolate it from intellectual scrutiny and interrogation by modes of reasoning prevalent in a given culture's modes of public discernment.

If this is correct, what relationship to a prevailing culturally accepted mode of public reasoning does such a stance indicate? Not one that can be so easily parsed by a distinction between witness and rational apologetics. There is a public everyday rationality appreciated and appealed to within the Fourth Gospel both at the level of the narrative within the text, and the overall framing of the Gospel by the Evangelist in testimonial terms. The Evangelist's stance as witness is far from a fideistic towards the relationship between faith and reason if by fideism we mean a theological stance that eschews not rationality per say - Andrew Moore, and certainly Karl Barth, have robust places for the use of human reason with regards to matters of faith *as arising from faith* - but one that eschews making direct appeal to standards of rationality current in the world for the purpose of commending the rationality of Christian faith through them, *even from the standpoint of Christian faith*. Barth's concern of subjecting the revelation of God to the bar of human reason, thus subjugating Christian theology, is real. There still exists the danger of a lingering Enlightenment rationality, where Christ is indeed at the bar of human reason and either showing his merits there or facing relegation to the realm of "personal belief" over against "truth and fact". Apologists can be especially prone to this temptation.

However, from the perspective of the motif of witness and a testimonial logic as a meta-lens through which to develop a theo-logic that informs constructive development in matters of

theological epistemology, it is clear that a third way is needed between Barth and Moore's fideism and theology's subjugation to Enlightenment rationalism. As I have argued above, the Evangelist's use of the motif of witness throughout the Fourth Gospel represents neither a fideistic disavowal of appeals to any kind of public rationality for the purposes of commending Christ, nor a complete submission to the prevailing logic - as if it could subsume the Christ and ground the truth of his identity, as if a flashlight might illuminate the sun. Instead a persuasive rationality is operative. Through faith in Christ and his experience of him within the believing community, the Evangelist takes his intellectual bearing from the supremacy and freedom of the *Logos*, and does not pretend to constrain him by a public rationality for discernment, or to ground the truth of his identity. But nor does the Evangelist eschew any possible relation between a prevailing rationality for critical communal discernment and the *Logos*. Christ, willing to become human and to die as one, and not only to die, but to die on a cross, is willing also to kenotically submit to prevailing modes of discernment in as much as that will enable his salvation to be understood and embraced. By no means will any human mode of rationality be able to "hold" him or "ground" the *Logos*. But it would seem that Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are willing to utilise common rationalities, creatively employed in the service of aiding others in discovering the truth of Christ, while not at all seeking warrant from them as a ground for their own work and standing.

Such a stance - the epistemic stance of the witness - enables Christians to confidently and yet humbly and openly, engage increasingly pluralist settings with their testimony to what they have seen and heard of Jesus. Thus a testimonial logic serves a theological epistemology by encouraging a witness stance of humility and openness to scrutiny while not compromising its own fundamental conviction and integrity. Having demonstrated how the foregoing biblical and phenomenological reflections on the motif of witness serve to build a profile of the posture of the witness, we find in that posture great resource for developing an epistemic self-understanding that supports a genuine theological rationality. Having demonstrated how the posture of the witness bearing testimony serves as a meta-lens through which contribution can be made to a

genuinely *theological* theological epistemology - I now turn to the second touchstone: the epistemic stance of the witness, as developed through reflection on the motif in the aspects of its biblical and phenomenological manifestations examined above, contributes to a theological epistemology that is *ontologically attuned*.

Ontologically Attuned: The Witness and Theological Ontology

In this section I begin to unfold the rich Trinitarian, Christological, and embodied anthropological epistemic connections resident in the posture of the witness, as developed through the thesis' earlier biblical and phenomenological reflections, demonstrating their contribution to a theological epistemology that is attuned to theological ontology.

The witness and participation in the Trinitarian life and mission of God

The first aspect of the testimonial logic unfolded in the second chapter demonstrated that John's Gospel presents the central witnesses of its narrative as being sent by God to bear their testimony. This is not to say there is no room in its account for witnesses who bear spontaneous testimony, like that of the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn. 4) and that of the man born blind (Jn. 9), who are not described within the narration of the Gospel as being sent to give their testimony. But it is to say that even these spontaneous testimonies arise within the wider sweep of the testimonies of the central witnesses to the narrative who are clearly portrayed as sent by the Father - that of John the Baptist, Jesus himself, the Holy Spirit, the disciples, and the Evangelist - and thus ultimately find their origin in sending initiative of God the Father in a secondary sense.

The Gospel's sending motif breaks out into Trinitarian form as it unfolds. The Father sends the Son, and testifies to him through the scriptures and through the works that the Son is enabled to do (Jn. 5:36; 8:18). The Son comes not in his own name, but bears witness to the Father, speaking only the words that have been given him by the Father (Jn. 5:19; 12:49), and the Father and the Son send the Spirit to enable the disciples to bear their testimony to what God has

done in Jesus Christ (Jn. 14:26; 15:26-27). Among the richest descriptions of the salvation that the Gospel invites its hearers into is that of participation in the very oneness that the Father and Son share.[490] This oneness amid the disciples, upon being granted by the Father in response to Jesus' prayer, is the foundation upon which their testimony to Christ becomes compelling and inviting to the world. The depths of the following words cannot be exhausted: "I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me" (Jn. 17:23). Thus, as the readers of the Gospel have opportunity to overhear Jesus praying to his Father, it becomes clear that Jesus desires the disciples to participate in the very oneness that the Father and Son share, and that this has profound implications for the effectiveness of the future testimony of the disciples amid the world. He asks for the oneness of his disciples - including those who will later believe in him through the testimony of the initial disciples (Jn. 17:20-21) - for a missional purpose that has epistemic connotations: *that the world may know that you have sent me*.[491] As the believing community of followers of Jesus enjoy oneness with each other, they are participating in the oneness of the Father and the Son by, as seen shortly, the work of the Holy Spirit. This participation, however, is not merely for them to enjoy. It forms the context within which God is pleased to demonstrate to the world that the Jesus confessed by this community is not merely a great man, or even a great prophet, but further still is one uniquely sent by God the Father.

Michael Gorman speaks of this participation in the life of God that is also a participation in the *missio dei* as "missional theosis", and describes the nature of this participation:

> Participation means, at least for John (as for Paul), a mutual indwelling of the triune God and believers that entails the empowering and transforming work of God, by the Spirit, in and on believers individually and as a community...to participate in the Son's union with the Father [is] to participate in the Father's (missional) activity in and through the Son.

---

490. See Jesus' prayer in John 17, where he asks that those who believe in him might see his glory, and may be one, as Jesus and the Father are one (Jn. 17:20-26).

491. "Know" in the context of John 17 is framed in participatory relational term: "And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn. 17:3).

> By grace we become children of God and thus participate in the communion and activity that the Son, by nature, shares with the Father.[492]

Note Gorman's care in distinguishing between the communion with the Father that the Son enjoys "by nature", and the participation in the life of God that those in Christ come to enjoy. The believers participate in the unity of the Triune life through their union with Jesus, who enjoys that union fundamentally and by nature. And from this participation in the life of God flows participation in the mission of God.

Thus, from an initial experience of this oneness, the disciples are sent by the Holy Spirit to bear their testimony to Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Vitally, Jesus connects the testimony of the disciples to that of the Holy Spirit: "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning" (Jn 15:26-27). Jesus promises to send the Spirit from the Father, and the Spirit will testify. The disciples also testify, but this testimony only finds its grounding in the work of the Spirit. Yet here the epistemic stance of the witness holds together both the historical pole of the eyewitness experience of the disciples, and the work of the Spirit who attends the witness of the disciples. It is not enough that the disciples had been with Jesus "from the beginning", but it is also indispensable that they have had this historical experience of him and thus are able to bear witness to what they have seen and heard of him. But even this historical experience would remain ineffective for testimony were in not for the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus the epistemic posture of the witness is inextricably entwined with a Trinitarian ontology of the life and mission of God himself: the stance of the witness is here placed by the Evangelist at the heart of this conjunction. The witness, is caught up in participation in the Trinitarian life and work of God, and in a way that honours the disciple's embodied experience of having "seen and heard" the events of Jesus' ministry "from the beginning". I examine the implications of this for an

---

492. Michael J. Gorman, *Abide and Go: Missional Theosis in the Gospel of John* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018), 22.

embodied theological anthropology of participation in the life and testimony of God's Spirit shortly, but must first explore the rich connection between the epistemic posture of the witness and the incarnation.

The epistemic posture of the witness and the incarnation

As indicated immediately above, the participation in the Triune life of God is Christological and pneumatic in character. It is through union with Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit that believers participate in the Triune life and mission of God. Christ's person and work is what makes this participation possible. Through his incarnation, life, death, and resurrection, he becomes "the way" - the entrance - to the Father (Jn. 14:6). By means of his incarnation, the Son of God become human makes the glory of God visible (Jn. 1:14), such that Jesus can say that if his disciples have truly seen him, they have also *seen* the Father. Jesus' full humanity is not incidental to this revelation, but is the very means by which this pinnacle of the revelation of God to humanity is achieved. The full humanity of Jesus is strongly emphasised in the Fourth Gospel, as is his full divine identity and origin. Further, the embodied aspect of his becoming fully human is underscored, and intimately entwined with the Gospel's witness motif,as I will demonstrate presently.[493]

Sunny Kuan-Hui Wang establishes the intimate connection between a priority placed on sense perception in the Gospel of John, and its testimonial motif. Thus she unfolds the Gospel's connection between sense perception and spiritual insight.[494] Rich "earthy" descriptions of the embodied aspect of Jesus' fully human existence are woven throughout the Gospel, and become central to the foundation of the witness of the disciples set within its narrative, and of the Evangelist whose testimony frames the Gospel as a whole. In other words, the Word is not

---

493. This is not to say that the body of Jesus exhausts description of his full humanity, just as humans in general are not adequately described by the material/bodily aspect of humanity - as absolutely central as it is.

494. Sunny Kuan-Hui Wang, *Sense Perception and Testimony in the Gospel According to John*, (WUNT, 2:435; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 149.

merely described as becoming flesh and making his dwelling among us (Jn. 1:14). That description of the identity of Jesus sets the stage for the narrative to follow of his earthly embodied existence, which will be vivid in its sensory description as the Gospel is composed. This vivid narrative of Jesus' life in the flesh is the means by which the Evangelist fills out the introductory statement, "we have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father full of grace and truth" (1:14). As we read, we are to hear the wind bristling through the branches of the fig tree under which Nathaniel sits, smell and desire to taste the fresh wine created from water at the wedding at Cana, feel thirst as Jesus asks the Samaritan woman at the well for a drink, taste the bread and the fish at the feeding of the five thousand, hear Jesus spit onto the ground and see him make mud from it, and wonder as he wipes it on the eyes of the man born blind, hear the weeping at Lazarus' tomb and the astonished words of the crowd who see him raised, and hear the shouting of "Hosanna!" as Jesus enters Jerusalem.

We are to feel the water upon our feet as Jesus himself washes them at the Passover Feast, see a strong fruitful vine drawing its life from connection to the branch as Jesus describes the nature of abiding in him, hear and feel the disciples' bewilderment as Jesus describes the need for him to go away, feel the peace of the olive grove that Jesus enters with his disciples after the Passover meal - a peace then violently disrupted by a mob led by a betrayer. We are to feel the sting of the slap of Jesus' face before the high priest, and hear the crow of the rooster at Peter's denial, feel the chill of the cry of the crowd as they demand Barabbas from Pilate instead of Jesus, and feel the desire to look away from the horror of his flogging, crown of thorns pushed down onto brow, and the mockery of a purple robe with false praise to a king before blows to the face. We are to feel the mouth pucker at the taste of wine vinegar offered through a sponge on the stalk of a hyssop plant, and hear the sound of the breaking of the bones of the legs of the men on either side of Jesus, and see the sight of water and blood coming from his side as it is pierced. At this point the Evangelist adds, "The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells he truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe" (Jn. 19:35). The next day, the hearers of the Gospel smell spices and fresh strips of linen amid the as Jesus is

entombed. Yet then, on the next day, they hear feet pounding down dirt paths as Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved run to find an empty tomb, which Mary Magdalen had told them about. After they go and leave her there, they hear Jesus' risen word to her, "Woman, why are you crying?" and then feel the warmth in his voice as he says, "Mary" (Jn. 20:15-16). The readers of John soon then feel the breath of Jesus as he breaths on his disciples and sense the swell within their chests as he says, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn. 20:23); they see the furrowed exasperated brows of the disciples as they seek to explain to Thomas that they have seen the risen Lord, as he refuses to believe unless he sees him for himself. And then the readers feel their own fingers on Jesus' scarred hands and pierced side. Finally, the Gospel comes to a close with rich description of a great catch of fish - as we hear nets straining, feel the warmth of a fire with coals on it, and smell the freshly cooked fish and the bread. Then we are invited to walk along and overhear the intimate conversation between Peter and Jesus as the latter restores the former. Thus, in all of this description, we are given opportunity to see the glory that the Evangelist promised from the outset (Jn. 1:14).

These rich description of Jesus' embodied life invite the reader into the position of the witness that they too might pass on the testimony, should they too believe and receive the Holy Spirit. Thus there is an intimate link between the ontology of the incarnation, and the epistemic stance of the witness who attends to the Word become flesh. Before there can be the testimony there must be the seeing and the hearing of the enfleshed Son of God. This experience is a means by which God does a work of grace and opens eyes of spiritual apprehension and understanding into the significance of the Word made flesh. What is seen in the flesh is not at all incidental to the apprehension of the life of the Word. It is precisely in and through the life of the flesh that the Word is disclosed, should eyes be granted to see the glory resident there, shining in and through the flesh of the Son of God. Thus, this fully human embodied life of Jesus - the divine Son of God - opens up onto the question of the eyes and ears of those who encounter him.

The embodied witness

I have sought to establish that the motif of witness in the Gospel according to John is intimately interlocked with the enfleshment of the Son of God in incarnation. Thus the epistemic posture of the witness has rich ontological connection not only with the Triune life of God, but also with the incarnation of the Son of God. At the conclusion of this section I will draw out the input this bears to the discipline of theological epistemology. First, however, I need to briefly link the embodiment of the Son of God as a central aspect of his full humanity with the embodiment of the witnesses that testify to him in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Throughout this study on motifs of witness in aspects of their biblical and phenomenological expressions, the topic of the bodies of those who testify has frequently arisen. In examination of John's use of the motif, I argued that at the heart of the Gospel's definition of the phenomena of bearing witness as *speaking* what one has *seen* and *heard* in order to facilitate the discernment of the life of the community as to the truth on matters that vitally concern that life. Here - in the life of the witness at the act of testimony - bodies are integral to its very nature. The eyes and the ears (which themselves can be understood as organs of touch)[495] attend to existence and are the means by which the events that will be testified to are observed. Then, in the act of testimony, the *voice* strains and words are spoken.

In the third chapter I turned to Chrétien who emphasises the embodied aspect of the posture of the witness. I demonstrated that he argues that the visual phenomena of beauty "speak", and the eye "listens" to them, and that through this experience of beauty we experience a call that constitutes us and invokes a response. Chrétien goes so far as to say that the call, in a sense, goes unanswered at all until it is extended through the answer of our own voice:

> Whenever the call is conceived in such a way that it makes use of our voice by dispossessing us entirely in order to keep the origin unaltered, whenever it is conceived in such a way that it is heard directly itself rather than in our answer, it abolishes itself as a call and no longer calls anyone...We hear the call only in the answer, in a voice that has

---

495. For a compelling argument that touch is the primary sense, see: Ward, "The Logos, the Body and the World: On the Phenomenological Border."

> been altered by it, which utters the very alteration that gives it to itself as not belonging to itself, and which endures its own unsuitable disinheritance.[496]

Here, for Chrétien, the call of transcendence echoes through beauty and in fact is not complete until it finds itself resonate in our own speech of response - our own voices echoing and extending the call as it moves through us and by moving through us reaches beyond us through the sound of a voice given over to the call.[497] In other words, Chrétien would say that our knowing of the phenomena is not complete with its appearance to our senses as input. He is arguing that our knowledge of transcendent phenomena heard in the call is incomplete until it also passes through our senses as active response to the call - as output. Here the embodied aspect of our humanity is fundamental to our experience of knowing and, should we develop Chrétien's notion theologically, there is a sense in which knowledge of God within the human being is straining to always have voice - and to bear public witness - such that there is a sense in which God is not known as God desires to be known within the one who does not testify to God. What has been seen and heard strains to find voice, and is seen and heard further as it does.

In this section I have further developed the epistemic stance of the witness by drawing out something of the rich ontological connections that are resident within the understanding of what it means to be a witness who enacts testimony. Through appeal to the foregoing biblical and phenomenological reflection I have developed the portrait of the witness, further illustrating how it serves as a meta-lens through which we gain insight into the nature of our bearing of the knowledge of God. As witnesses, we carry our knowledge of God through participation in the Triune life through faith in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. The incarnation of the Son, and notably his embodiment, ground the phenomena of witness to him and resounded with the

---

496. Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, 27.

497. When Chrétien speaks of the voice, he does generally mean the spoken voice. Sensitivity must be taken, especially in a pastoral context, however, when emphasising the importance of sense experience given the reality of various kinds of disability which affect sensory experience. Though Chrétien does not himself emphasise the written "voice", or the sound "heard" through sign-language, etc., one can extend his thought in a secondary way to these experiences where the senses seem to cross over and have meaning through the experience of other senses.

bodies of those who immediately attended to his life and ministry. For those who saw and embraced him in faith, his testimony then moved in and through them and their bodies such that their own knowledge of God through faith in Christ was in a very real sense incomplete until it was given to them to bear witness themselves and hear the testimony of God to Christ, through the Holy Spirit, arising from their own throats and tongues.

This development of the posture of the witness in its ontological connections offers significant import to the current field of theological epistemology. *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology* is one of the most recent comprehensive guides to the field. It has been a faithful reference throughout the development of this project and is to be commended for its outstanding achievement in providing something a current baseline for a host of central topics that are relevant to the field of theological epistemology. However, as I here hold up the epistemic posture of the witness as a meta-lens through which to view the field, rich as the motif of witness is in its ontological connections, a significant gap is laid bare as not one of forty-one chapters gives substantial treatment of the embodied nature of our knowledge of God or to the incarnation of the Son of God as foundationally relevant to human knowledge of God. Though there is no chapter dedicated the nature of our human knowing of God through participation in the Triune divine life, thankfully there is one on the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.[498]

But clearly, when viewed through the lens of the posture of the witness, significant work remains to be done in elucidating the central role of the body in our human bearing of the knowledge of God. The above emphasis on participation in the life and testimony of God does entail theosis. Theosis can be understood as a transformation of human life such that it remains fully human - it does not break down the Creator/Creature distinction - but nonetheless human life is transformed through participation in communion with the divine life.[499] This experience,

---

498. Paul K. Moser, "The Inner Witness of the Holy Spirit," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, eds William J. Abraham and Frederik D. Aquino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 111–25.

499. Gorman, *Abide and Go*, 19.

as we have seen above and will explore further shortly, involves being sent by the Spirit in mission. But here I have argued that our bodies are not at all incidental to this experience of theosis - as John's Gospel underscores with its emphasis on seeing and hearing and speaking the testimony, and Chrétien would have us remember as well. We do not experience what the first disciples experienced directly. But the Evangelist gives rich description, appealing to our senses as we hear and read, such that we are drawn into the witness of the Evangelist.[500] Thus our experience of the testimony of the Holy Spirit, as he continues to bear witness to Christ through the church, is still vitally an embodied experience, through an extension of the testimony of those who first saw and heard and touched the flesh of Jesus, and bore witness to him.

Here we begin to receive insight into what the knowledge we seek ultimately is. It involves verbal or notional "content". We do bear witness to our reading of the historic experience of the first disciples, and our experience of the Holy Spirit's dynamic work today, and this testimony involves a kind of articulable knowledge - propositions that can be spoken. But this knowledge that we carry as witnesses cannot be limited to that understanding of knowledge alone. Here the bearing of the knowledge of God as witness involves embodied participation in the very life and ongoing work of God through faith in Christ, and by the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus our very conception of knowing is transformed. As witnesses, we do not take what we have seen and heard of Christ, and then leave him behind - so to speak - to go and bear our testimony. The testimony of God comes before, undergirds now, and extends beyond our own, and our own is here pictured as an embodied participation in his own life and mission. Wonderfully, we have seen here also that this mystical experience of theosis is not something that leaves aside our embodied existence. Instead, the epistemic stance of the witness highlights an embodied

---

500. Again see Sunny Kuan-Hui Wang, *Sense Perception and Testimony in the Gospel According to John,* where the author demonstrates the close connection between sense perception and testimony in the Fourth Gospel, and argues that this connection is deployed as part of a rhetorical strategy to draw the reader into participation in the events of Jesus' life and ministry through the testimony of the Gospel.

theological anthropology that encourages careful stewardship of the body.[501] Thus, in both its Trinitarian and embodied connections, the epistemic stance of the witness is rich in what it bears to our attempts of describing the nature of knowing God in Christ. Having argued that a testimonial epistemology of the knowledge of God is rich with ontological connections, I turn now to explore how the epistemic stance of the witness is contextually and missionally grounded.

The Epistemic Stance of the Witness as Contextually and Missionally Grounded

In this section I will demonstrate how a witness posture, with its epistemic entailments, is contextually rooted within this moment in salvation-history, is poised to connect with our current cultural moment in the West, and that it assists in empowering the church for mission within this cultural moment in the first quarter of the 21st century.[502]

The place of the witness in salvation history

In the early stages of the argument of this thesis I argued that the phenomena of witness, biblically conceived, does not endure into the eschaton.[503] Through examination of the Fourth Gospel, I established that what gives rise to the central place of the witness in this age of salvation history is the ascension of Jesus Christ. One could call the age between the first and second coming of Christ the age of testimony. John's Gospel, and the Synoptics, of course make

---

501. Here again is not the place to draw out the pastoral implications of this insight. Suffice it to say here, however, that those of us who do teach within the church most likely could stand to emphasis the body more. Our current cultural context in the West manifests an unhealthy obsession with the body - one which is often superficial, vain, and overly sexualised. This has a great impact for ill on many, not least the elderly. There is a danger in response to the surrounding culture's overemphasis that those of us who teach in the church then go silent on the matter, in an attempt to redirect focus. Instead it would be wise to lay hold of the cultural interest in the body, celebrate what is good in that emphasis, and expose what is reductionist. The above argument indicates that the stewardship of the body in proper rest, exercise, and eating is not at all incidental to our capacity to bear the knowledge of God.

502. Again, I do not here argue that the posture of the witness is fully understood by exploration of its epistemic entailments. I am, however, drawing attention to the epistemic entailments within a the identify of the witness.

503. See, for example, the final footnote of the first chapter of the thesis.

clear that testimony to Jesus on behalf of others who believed in him was present during his earthly life to some degree. But as our examination of John has shown, the first disciples were not unleashed in their testimony until the ascension of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, creating the church. Above I argued, through reflection on John 15:26-27, that although the disciple's experience of being with Jesus "from the beginning" was essential to their testimony, it alone was not sufficient to constitute them as witnesses. Participation in the testimony of the Holy Spirit, who initiates, attends, and works through the testimony of the disciples, is also a necessary condition of their testimony.[504]

This is to say that the gap that the testimony of the disciples enters into is the gap left by Jesus' ascension, and with it, the inability of future generations to see and hear him for themselves directly. That such a direct seeing and hearing is to be desired is openly acknowledged in the Fourth Gospel. The Samaritan woman who meets Jesus at the well, and comes to be deeply impacted by him and becomes convinced that he must be the Messiah, goes to testify to her community about the Christ. The Evangelist tells us that "many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony" (Jn. 5:39), which is to say they believed without direct experience of Jesus for themselves. They instead believed through the testimony of the Samaritan woman whose testimony, it seems, was attended by ample demonstration of a profound work of grace in her life arising from her encounter with Jesus. This then led to many Samaritans going out to Jesus, and him coming to stay with them for two days. After this time, many said to the Samaritan woman: "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the

---

504. This is confirmed in the Acts of the Apostles, where Jesus speaks of the necessary condition of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which would mark the beginning of their becoming witnesses: "But *you will receive* power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and *you will be* my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Note also that the historical aspect of the testimony of the initial disciples is also maintained as a replacement for Judas is chosen and only men who had accompanied the company of disciples "all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us - one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection" (Acts 1:21-22). Thus both the eyewitness character of the initial testimony, and that testimony not being constituted in its origin until Pentecost's experience of the Holy Spirit, are maintained in Acts just as in John 15:26-27.

world" (Jn. 5:42). Thus the Gospel is honest about it being desirable, on one level, to encounter Christ directly. But Jesus himself sees that it is in fact better that he ascends, as it will usher in the gift of the Holy Spirit who will empower the disciples to multiply throughout the earth and throughout time such that there is not one localised centre of his presence (Jn.16:7). Nonetheless sympathy is displayed for those who desire to see Jesus directly, and thus Thomas' request to see the risen Lord directly is accommodated (Jn. 20:24-29). But even as Jesus appears to Thomas and accommodates his desire to see and touch his risen body, Jesus speaks of the blessedness of those who will believe without such direct manifestation, thus signalling the central place of the Holy Spirit's work through the disciples to testify to what they had seen and heard: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Therefore, with Jesus' ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit comes a fresh age in God's work of redemption through salvation-history - the age of the witness. Thus the epistemic stance of the witness, developed here through recall of the thesis' earlier biblical arguments, is found to be centrally rooted to current context conceived on a broad theological scale of redemptive history, and our current place within it between the ascension and return of Jesus. It is also relevant to our current cultural moment in the West in the first quarter of the 21st century.

The contribution of a testimonial-epistemology to our current cultural moment

As noted in the introduction of the thesis, several of our Western cultures, and the experience of various expressions of Christianity within them, are in a trenchant battle with dynamics of "fake news", "misinformation", and "conspiracy theories". The 2016 US Presidential election, its subsequent presidency, and the 2020 election with the historic assault on democratic process on January 6, 2021, the experience of Brexit in the UK in January of the prior year, the Covid-19 pandemic that followed shortly after, and the ongoing war in Ukraine, have all raised the issue of testimonial discernment. The problem of vast swaths of Western populations clearly being vulnerable to false testimony, especially when it is consumed through social media, television, and smart phones, cannot be reduced to matters of testimonial discernment alone. Yet

clearly testimonial dynamics are at play. How might a testimonial epistemology serve theological epistemology such that it can serve the church and wider society at this crucial juncture?

The epistemic posture of the witness assists in the first place by not blushing at such cultural dynamics. It does not see them as new, even if there is a heightened and very concerning experience of them at the present time. But the witness knows that the ninth commandment, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour" (Dt. 5:20) has existed for many a millennia, and was needed long before it found its pride of place even in Mosaic Law. From the perspective of testimony, theological epistemology is encouraged to sharpen its focus on fostering discernment as to when false testimony is present at the heart of the community. The ninth commandment is not merely addressing the question of lying, broadly speaking. As argued earlier in the thesis, it instead is concerned with lying "against your neighbour" - which signals not merely a lie, but a lie that harms the community's common discernment on a matter of vital importance that also concerns the neighbour mentioned, and their relation to the common community as well.

Culturally speaking then, the posture of the witness exhorts theological epistemology to not only be concerned with the church's knowledge of God, but challenges it to take up concern for how the cultures we inhabit discern the truth at all. Our reflection on the Fourth Gospel demonstrated how the Evangelist depended upon and developed a shared testimonial logic amid the communities of his hearers. Likewise, as those who bear our knowledge of God in part as witnesses, there is an inherent concern that many within our social circles and within our churches have lost, or are swiftly losing, a basic capacity to discern when someone is lying to them about a vital matter that concerns our common life together. Thus the epistemic posture of the witness entails within it a challenge for theologians to take up deep concern for this wider cultural phenomena, and to encourage basic skills within our spheres of influence for discerning between true and false witness. Basic principles of testimonial discernment, like those found embedded in the testimonial discipline of the Fourth Gospel, would not form a complete picture but nonetheless would serve as a stronger foundation than many have presently. This would

involve encouraging and equipping fellow citizens to ask questions of public testimony such as: Does this person who is testifying on this matter of central public importance to our community have proximity to the matters they are testifying to, or are they relaying it second or third hand? Is it possible that they have something to gain if they testify one way or another on this matter? Are they clearly testifying in their own name, to the effect of their own glorification or to otherwise draw attention and praise to themselves? Is their testimony complemented by a multiplicity of other witnesses who, while not necessarily sharing identical testimony nonetheless do share concord at the heart of their account? These aspects of testimonial discernment would go some way to fortifying publics from false witness, and also could prepare a path for commending Christ's own identification within such means of communal discernment. Here appeal to the epistemic posture of the witness has significant resonance with our current cultural context in the West. This brings us, finally, to the place of the church within that context.

The church sent by the Spirit on mission as the context where Christ is seen and heard today

And how might the posture of the witness locate human bearing of the knowledge of God in Christ within the *ecclesia,* and within the sweep of its mission in the world? As I have argued above, Jesus sends his disciples into the world as he himself was sent by the Father, and provides them with the Helper who empowers their witness to Christ. Thus a witness posture not only embraces an understanding of the knowledge of God as theosis, but as a *missional theosis*. Michael Gorman elucidates what this concept means. Missional theosis is, "participating in the *missional* life of God because the God we know in Christ is missional - the sending Father - who is of course the loving Father".[505] Gorman goes on to acknowledge that it is possible to draw richly on the Fourth Gospel's emphasis on theosis and miss altogether that it itself is deeply entwined with mission.[506]

---

505. Gorman, *Abide and Go*, 22.

506. Ibid., 23.

In other words, to experience theosis through faith in Christ is to be united to Christ and to experience something of the Trinitarian life of God in its oneness and glory, as argued above. This Trinitarian life, Gorman sees, is fundamentally a missional life - reaching out in love to lost humanity for redemptive purposes. Therefore, from the perspective of the epistemic stance of the witness, growth in the knowledge of God is, in great measure, growth in approximation to the missional heart of God for humanity outside the church, having not yet embraced the testimony about Jesus. This has profound implication for our understanding of the nature of human bearing of the knowledge of God. It helps to explain why some of the most profound expressions of the experience of the knowledge of God found in the New Testament come alongside description of the cost of the Apostle Paul's missional ministry.[507] In other words, as we hold up the epistemic meta-lens of the witness to matters of theological epistemology, the discipline receives further challenge: it is questionable, from the perspective of the epistemic stance of the witness, whether there can be a genuine trajectory of growth in the knowledge of God if an individual believer or group of believers are not actively living out a life of partnership in the mission of sharing the testimony of God's action in Christ with the peoples of their community, their nation, and the nations of the peoples of the wider world.

The nature of this partnership does look very different for different believers in different parts of his church. For some it does mean participating in God's mission in a land foreign to their own. For many it will mean engaging their local church and seeking that it might be an outpost of expression of God's love for the world in their city, town, or village. Whether we participate in this mission abroad, or in a more familiar place, with Christ's ascension, the *ecclesia* of the gathered believing community is the expression of his body on earth, as it is filled with his Spirit and submits to Christ as its head. At entrance to that *ecclesia* people are baptised into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Bread and wine are taken in remembrance to

---

507. See for example 2 Cor. 4:7-18, which is clear in its testimonial connections. See also Philippians 3:7-21.

nourish faith in Christ, and to testify to the crucified body and shed blood of Jesus. The testimony of the apostles and prophets is read and taught from scripture, and creeds of the church historic, which has heard and taken into its own voice that testimony, are spoken. From this gathering the witness of Christ extends through space and time until he comes again.

Here again, I have argued that developing the epistemic stance of the witness furnishes insight into the nature of human knowledge of God in Christ. In this section, I have argued that the posture of the witness who testifies is, in part, an epistemic stance that is contextually rooted in this point of salvation-history between Christ's ascension and return, with great relevance to our current cultural context, and with strong connection to the importance of the local church for our bearing of the knowledge of God in Christ. This leads to the final touchstone: the epistemic stance of the witness is ethically alert.

The Ethical Character of the Epistemic Stance of the Witness

The act of testimony is vibrant with ethical entailment. As I have argued in the biblical and phenomenological reflections on motifs of witness, testimony is a relational category which frames our knowing situation in terms of relation to God (which the phenomenologists we engaged often explored through reflection on the relation between infinite and finite consciousness), and in relation to others. The Evangelist of John's Gospel positions their witnesses within the sweep of the narrative of the Gospel always in relation to others within the narrative. There is no individualistic witness which implies, if we take the epistemic phenomena of bearing witness as a meta-lens onto the nature of our human knowing of God more broadly, as I have argued we should, then we can also affirm that there is no individualistic human knowing of God. This is to say that our knowledge of God is bound up, indeed, in relation to him; but also in relation to others whose testimony we hear, and to whom we testify.

Linda Zagzebski's work on dynamics of interpersonal trust in our everyday experience of knowing has opposed an individualistic "epistemic-egoist" approach. She develops a model of rationality that is based on the fundamental principle that it is rational, in fact essential, to take a

multitude of our beliefs simply on the authority of the say-so of others. She begins with an account of the rationality of trusting oneself, and then extends that account of rationality of trust in oneself to trust in others.[508] She thus treats dynamics of testimony thoroughly, although she takes a broader definition of testimony as a basic telling or say so of others, by which we are justified in gaining beliefs, over against my narrower more focused definition of testimony which I have developed through inductive research of the way the category functions in the Gospel according to John where testimony is not a mere say so, but a public saying so on a contested matter of great importance for the common life of the community. But despite the difference of definition - whether her broader one (which she shares with the wider field of the epistemology of testimony in the analytic tradition) or my narrower one - both conceptions of the definition of testimony are socially rooted and thus are ethical in character. Thus the epistemic posture of the witness already yields a strong ethical connection due to its manifestly social character, based as it is on the adjudication of interpersonal trusts. In what follows in this section I will examine the main ethical issue that arose in the second chapter of the thesis - the ethical relation between testimony and dynamics of glorification

The epistemic stance of the witness and the ethics of glory

The foregoing soundings of motifs of witness in aspects of their biblical and phenomenological manifestations, yielded an unsuspected yet persistent focus as pertains the ethics of witness. Much of course could be said about the ethical entailments of bearing testimony, but I choose here to focus the discussion on one aspect of the foregoing argument that brings together both the prior Johannine and phenomenological discussions. Both, in distinct yet related ways, raised the question of self-glorification or exaltation in relation to the act of bearing testimony. This was a surprising discovery of the research, which is not often examined within

---

508. Linda T. Zagebski, *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority, and Autonomy in Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 55.

epistemological discussion. Thus I close the thesis with reflection on this aspect of the ethical character of the epistemic stance of the witness.

The issue of glorification and testimony arose from the start with the argument that the witness is sent to testify not in their own name, but in the name of another. This is exemplified powerfully in the opening page of the Fourth Gospel and its focus on the Baptiser. John's testimony to who Christ is also intimately bound up, we discovered, with John's testimony as to who he is not: "I am not the Christ" (Jn. 1:28). This theme continues through Jesus' emphasis that he speaks not in his own name but in the name of his Father, and the Evangelist's criticism of those within his narrative that do not believe in Christ, despite the multiplicity of testimony that surrounds him, because "they loved the praise of other people more than the praise of God" (Jn. 12:43), and Jesus' own assumption that it would indeed be impossible for any to believe in him who receive glory from one another, but do not seek the glory that comes from God (Jn. 5:44). Here Jesus' assumption is that there is an ethical choice at the heart of faithful testimony, and it is not whether we will pursue glory from another, but from whom we will pursue it. Jesus here teaches not that we should forsake pursuit of receipt of glory, but that it is vital to our capacity for ethical epistemic stewardship that we actively seek the glory that God gives to those who are faithful to him, and forsake the fleeting glory that comes from people.

In their own way, Ricoeur, Chrétien, and Marion all emphasised a turning away from self-glorification in their common emphasis on divestment. Each of them, in their unique expressions of human encounter with the divine, emphasised how this involves a divestment of the self's self-sufficiency and the embrace of a tearing of the self-exalting ego which prides itself on self-sufficiency and pretends that the self can find its ground within its own remit. Instead, these thinkers (along with the new phenomenology more broadly) all ground the identity of the self in encounter with the other or Other outside of the self, in a strong affirmation of an outward gaze, which causes a loss of self-sufficient ego, and thus in one sense is painful - or agonic, to use Chrétien's notion - but at the same time is life giving as the self is opened and founded through its encounter with the free other. Further, each of these three phenomenological thinkers called

upon the category of witness - perhaps influenced by the Christian tradition and their personal reflection on John's Gospel - to help capture this self's discovery of the self in divestment of the ego, which clearly involves a forsaking of seeking praise from people.

This aspect of the epistemic posture of the witness has profound implication for how we think about our bearing of the knowledge of God. The turning of the finger that is meant to be pointing, like the Baptiser's, out to Christ, can so subtly turn back toward the self. Johannes Zachhuber, in an essay entitled "The Rhetoric of Evil" explores such subtlety in relation to the German Confessing Church that stood against the Nazis.[509] Zachhuber is appreciative, and certainly does not underestimate the difficulty in achieving what Barth achieved in the Barmen Declaration, which stood against Nazi ideology as an idol that opposed Christ and had no place in the church. However, Zachhuber notes that Barmen was not only inadequate in its silence on the Jews, but also because its pointing - its aim - had began somewhat to curl around:

> The Theological Declaration, while emphasising the centrality of Jesus Christ for the Christian faith, at the same time served to underwrite an inward looking project of ecclesial restoration...Barth in 1939 overlooked the ever-precarious situation of the Church attempting to confess her Lord. His strategy may have helped preserve churches and pulpits as places of evangelical proclamation, but it also provided a pretext for an introverted, triumphalist ecclesial attitude, which in German Protestantism long survived the demise of the Third Reich.[510]

The observation is chilling. Here, with the meta-lens of the witness held up to matters of theological epistemology, the epistemic stance of the witness strongly forefronts a topic that is rarely engaged in discourse on the human nature of bearing the knowledge of God - that of the human pursuit of glory, which must find its proper home if that knowledge is to flourish. This calls for an active and regular renouncement of pursuit of praise from people, recognised as a perennial and at times very subtle temptation, and an active prayerful pursuit of the glory that comes from God in reward to those who faithfully seek him. As with biblical sanctification more

---

509. Johannes Zachhuber, "The Rhetoric of Evil and the Definition of Christian Identity," in *STUDIEN DES BONNER ZENTRUMS FÜR RELIGION UND GESELLSCHAFT*, eds Paul Fiddes and Jochen Schmidt (Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag, 2013), 193–217.

510. Zachhuber, "The Rhetoric of Evil," 215.

broadly, here too there is not merely a call to "putting off" what is evil, but also a positive call to "put on" in its place what is righteous.

This insight has implication for both ecclesial and academic environments that deal with the testimony of Christ. Successful churches - even ones that prize outward looking evangelism regularly - can gain an inward looking culture that comes to glory not in the name of Christ, but in the name of the church, or the charismatic pastor that leads it. Likewise, academic theology can often trade in dynamics of glory giving, which can quietly undermine its capacity to aid the church in confessing Christ.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how the thesis' foregoing examinations of aspects of biblical and phenomenological motifs of witness have helped me develop the epistemic stance of the witness, which has served to aid in developing a theological epistemology that is genuinely theological in its rationality, ontologically attuned, contextually and missionally rooted, and ethically alert.

Conclusion

I have drawn out that the stance of the witness, while not being reducible to matters of epistemology, nonetheless does have epistemic entailments integral to it, which helps Christian communities navigate a radically diverse world respectfully and winsomely. Let me remind how the argument has proceeded.

Having set the theological stance toward the topic in the first chapter, and then outlining four characteristics that should be manifest in any contributions toward theological epistemology from that stance, that chapter then engaged the question of the thematic strategy toward the field. I argued, through assessing the thematic works of Stackhouse and Meek, that a thematic strategy is clearly generative, but that much depended upon how epistemologically robust and Christologically related the chosen motif was. I then argued that the motif of witness bears much promise for development along these lines. In the second chapter I then began that development by arguing that the motif of witness within the Fourth Gospel not only contains a series of witnesses which are presented throughout the narrative, but that a logic for testimonial discernment is embedded as assumed within the narrative, and is explicitly interacted with throughout the narrative of the gospel on multiple levels. This logic emphasised the assumption that a true witness is sent; that they do not testify to themselves, for their own glory, but to another; that they expect that their testimony will be held as dubitable and thus should expect a measure of suspicion as they testify on matters of such vital importance for the community, and thus just assume that their testimony will be gainsaid unless it is attended by the witness of others who share concord with their testimony.

I then examined recently scholarly impasse as regards the function or purpose of the witness motif in the Fourth Gospel, and concluded that the motif functioned on the dual level of that of eyewitness testimony (Bauckham), and the level of that witness being viewed analogically within a metaphorical cosmic trial - the witness seeing their testimony as playing out on a cosmic

scale (Lincoln). In this latter sense of the use, the analogical lens of witness illuminates something of the church's and individual believers' relation to God, to one another, and to the world - even when they are not enacting testimony in an eyewitness sense. I then turned to the question of theological engagement with contemporary philosophies of testimony with an aim to exploring how they relate to the Johannine aspect of the rich biblical motif. I found that significant theological engagement with analytical philosophies of testimony has been taking place for sometime, and aligned fairly neatly with exploring how the eyewitness testimony of the first disciples related to religious transmission through generations, through Scripture and tradition - all under the rubric of testimony as source. As a result, I argued that a focus then on the phenomenological tradition was strategic given a want of theological engagement with witness discourses there. Turning then to the select uses of the motif of witness in the works of Paul Ricoeur, Jean-Louis Chrétien, and Jean Luc-Marion, I argued that these Christian phenomenologists each, at different times and in different ways, utilised the motif of witness as a metaphorical lens through which to gain insight on the nature of the fundamental relation between human consciousness and ultimate or absolute reality. Ricoeur used the motif of witness to highlight the hermeneutical nature of this relation; Chrétien viewed dynamics of testimony as integral to human life within dynamics of call and response which envelope human life, and he highlighted the agonistic and embodied nature of this fundamental human experience of sensing a call and answering with response that puts testimony as response to the call at the heart of human experience of consciousness; finally we found that Marion drew the phenomena of witness to the heart of his description how the *I* is reduced to witness through encounter with saturated phenomena, which are those that outstrip our capacity to meet them with adequation of thought to the saturated phenomena being encountered. While favouring Ricoeur over Marion on the question as to whether there is such a thing as a passive witness who only responds - Marion seems to uphold a kind of auto-response - we nonetheless found that each of the three thinkers took a common strategy of using the phenomena of witness as a kind of analogical meta-lens through which they could gain some measure of insight into, and purchase of, the fundamental

human relation between finite human consciousness and infinite reality.

Then, in the fourth and final chapter I drew together the argument of the prior three chapters by demonstrating how the biblical insights unearthed in the second chapter, and the phenomenological contributions of the third, combine to aid in developing a theological epistemology that exemplifies the four touchstones identified in the first chapter.

WORKS CITED

Abbott, Edwin. *Johannine Vocabulary: A Comparison of the Words of the Fourth Gospel with Those of the Three*. London: A & C Black, 1905.

Abraham, William J., and Frederick D. Aquino. "Introduction." In *The Oxford Handbook of The Epistemology of Theology*. London: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Barrett, C. K. *Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*. 2 ed., 638. Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1978.

Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics*. London: T & T Clark, 2009.

———. *Witness to the Word: A Commentary on John I: Lectures at Münster in 1925 and at Bonn in 1933*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986.

Bauckham, Richard. "The Fourth Gospel as the Testimony of the Beloved Disciple." In *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser, 120–39. Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008.

———. *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998.

———. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008.

———. *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007.

Beasley-Murray, George R. *John*. 2nd ed. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1999.

Benson, Bruce Ellis. "Chrétien on the Call That Wounds." In *Words of Life: New Theological Turns in French Phenomenology*, 208–21. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.

Benson, Bruce. "Continental Philosophy of Religion." In *After Poststructuralism: Transitions and Transformations: History of Continental Philosophy*, edited by Rosi Braidotti, 246–74. Durham: Acumen, 2010.

Bernard, J. H. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John*. Edited by A. H. Mcneile. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928.

Beutler, J. "Μάρτυς." In *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. 2*, eds Horst Balz, Gerhard Schneider, 393–95. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981.

Braidotti, Rosi. *After Poststructuralism: Transitions and Transformations*. Durham: Acumen, 2010.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997.

Bultmann, Rudolf. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. Edited by Noel Hoare and John Riches, xii+744. Oxford: Blackwell, 1971.

Byrskog, Samuel. *Story as History - History as Story: The Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament, 123. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000.

Calvin, Jean. *The Gospel according to St John: 1–10*. Edited by David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance. Translated by T. H. L. Parker, vi+278. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961.

Carson, D. A. *The Gospel according to John*, 715. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991.

Casey, Robert. "'μάρτυς' In *The Beginnings of Christianity." In The Beginnings of Christianity*. Vol. 5, eds Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, 30–37. London, 1933.

Chrétien, Jean-Louis. *The Ark of Speech*. Translated by Andrew Brown. London: Routledge, 2004.

———. *The Call and the Response*. Translated by Anne A. Davenport. New York: Fordham University Press, 2004.

———. *Hand to Hand: Listening to the Work of Art*. Translated by Stephen E. Lewis. London: Fordham University Press, 2003.

———. "Neuf Propositions sur le Concept Chrétien de Témoignage." *Revue Philosophie* 88 (2005): 75–94.

———. "Nine Propositions on the Christian Concept of Witness." In *Under the Gaze of the Bible*, translated by John Marson Dunaway, 85–103. New York: Fordham University Press, 2015.

———. *Symbolique Du Corps*. 1, 320. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France - PUF, 2005.

———. *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped For*. Translated by Jeffrey Bloechl, xxii+135. New York: Fordham University Press, 2002.

———. "The Wounded Word: Phenomenology of Prayer." In *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*, 147–75. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2000.

———. "The Wounded Word: The Phenomenology of Prayer." In *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*, edited by Dominique Janicaud. New York: Fordham University Press, 2000.

Coady, C. A. J. *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.

Coenen, Lothar, and Trites, Allison, auth. "Witness, Testimony." 3:1038–1051. In *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, edited by Colin Brown. Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978.

Cohick, Lynn H. "Cultivating Shalom: A Response to John Stackhouse's Epistemology." *Journal of Analytic Theology* 4 (2016): 193–97.

Crisp, Oliver. "Vocation and Christian Doctrine: A Response to John Stackhouse." *Journal of Analytic Theology* 4 (2016): 198–203.

Dauenhauer, Bernard, and David Pellauer. "Paul Ricoeur." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. Stanford, 2012.

Davenport, Anne A. "Translator's Preface." In *The Call and the Response*, vii-xxix. New York: Fordham University Press, 2004.

Davies, Brian. *Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: A Guide and Commentary*. London ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Davis, Joshua. "The Call of Grace: Henri de Lubac, Jean-Louis Chrétien, and the Theological Conditions of Christian Radical Phenomenology." In *Words of Life: New Theological Turns in French Phenomenology*, eds Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba, 181–95. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.

Dupont, Christian Yves. *Phenomenology in French Philosophy: Early Encounters*, 338. Dordrecht: Springer, 2014.

Dury, John L. "Barth and Testimony." In *Karl Barth and the Future of Evangelical Theology*, eds Christian T. Collinds Winn and John L. Drury, 102–14. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017.

Edwards, M. J. *John*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.

Fiddes, Paul S. *Seeing the World and Knowing God: Hebrew Wisdom and Christian Doctrine in a Late-Modern Context*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Frame, John M. *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*. Pittsburg, N.J: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co, 1987.

Franke, John R. *The Character of Theology: An Introduction to Its Nature, Task, and Purpose*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2005.

Gelfert, Axel. *A Critical Introduction to Testimony*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.

Gorman, Michael J. *Abide and Go: Missional Theosis in the Gospel of John*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018.

Greco, John. "Knowledge of God." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, edited by William J. Abraham and Frederick D. Aquino, 9–29. London: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Grenz, Stanley J. *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2006.

Grenz, Stanley J., and John R. Franke. *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*. 1st ed, 273. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

Gschwandtner, Christina M. *Postmodern Apologetics?: Arguments for God in Contemporary Philosophy*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013.

Hamilton, James M. Jr. "The Influence of Isaiah on the Gospel of John." *Perichoresis* 5, no. 2 (2007): 139–62.

Hamilton, James M. Jr. "Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel." *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 16, no. 2 (2006): 369–71.

Hart, Kevin. *Kingdoms of God*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014.

Hart, Trevor. "Karl Barth, the Trinity, and Pluralism." In *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion*, edited by Kevin J. Vanhoozer. Cambridge: WBEerdmans, 1997.

Harvey, A. E. *Jesus on Trial: A Study in the Fourth Gospel*. London: SPCK, 1976.

Hegel, G. W. F. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Edited by Peter C. Hodgson. Translated by Robert F. Brown. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007.

———. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press, 1977.

Hippo, St Augustine of. *St. Augustine of Hippo: Homilies on the Gospel of St. John*. Edited by Paul A. Boer Sr, 760. London: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012.

Horner, Robyn. *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology*, xi+272. New York: Fordham University Press, 2001.

Husserl, Edmund. *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Translated by Dorion Cairns. The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1960.

———. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970.

———. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*. Translated by Fred Kersten. Dordrecht ; Boston: Kluwer, 1982.

Janicaud, Dominique, et al. *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*. Translated by Bernard Prusak and Jean-Francois Courtine. New York: Fordham University Press, 2000.

Johns, Loren L, and Douglas B Miller. "The Signs as Witnesses in the Fourth Gospel: Reexamining the Evidence." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (1994): 519–35.

Johnson, Dru. *Knowledge by Ritual: A Biblical Prolegomenon to Sacramental Theology*. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2016.

Johnson, Dru, and Craig G. Bartholomew. *Biblical Knowing: A Scriptural Epistemology of Error*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013.

Keener, Craig S. *The Gospel of John, Vol I*, 1696. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010.

Knust, Jennifer W., and Tommy Wasserman. *To Cast the First Stone: The Transmission of a Gospel Story*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019.

Kosky, Jeffrey L. "The Human Question: Augustinian Dimensions in Jean-Luc Marion." In *Words of Life: New Theological Turns in French Phenomenology*, edited by Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba, 103–19. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.

Köstenberger, Andreas J. *John*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004.

Köstenberger, Andreas J. *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*. Biblical Theology of the New Testament Series. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009.

———. "Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel." *Trinity Journal* 22, no. 2 (2001): 269–72.

Krämer, Sybille, and Sigrid Weigel, eds. *Testimony / Bearing Witness: Epistemology, Ethics, History and Culture*. London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017.

Kuan-Hui Wang, Sunny. *Sense Perception and Testimony in the Gospel According to John* 2:435. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017.

Lackey, Jennifer. "The Epistemology of Testimony and Religious Belief." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, eds William Abraham and Frederick Aquino, 203–20. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

———. *Learning from Words: Testimony as a Source of Knowledge*. Oxford: University Press, 2008.

Lackey, Jennifer, and Ernest Sosa. *The Epistemology of Testimony*, vi+312. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006.

Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Emmanuel Lévinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*. Edited by Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.

Lincoln, Andrew T. "The Beloved Disciple as Eyewitness and the Fourth Gospel as Witness." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 85 (2002): 3–26.

Lincoln, Andrew T. *The Gospel according to St John*. London: Continuum, 2005.

———. *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000.

Luft, Sebastian. "Husserl's Method of Reduction." In *The Routledge Companion to Phenomenology*, edited by Sebastian Luft and Soren Overgaard, 243–53. London: Routledge, 2012.

Maccini, Robert Gordon. *Her Testimony is True: Women as Witnesses according to John*. Journal for the Study of the New Testament. Supplement Series, 125. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996.

Marion, Jean-Luc. *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*. Translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky, xi+385. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2002.

———. *Givenness and Revelation*. Translated by Stephen E. Lewis. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

———. *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*. Translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012.

———. *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*. Translated by Thomas A. Carlson, xvii+261. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1998.

———. *The Visible and the Revealed*. Translated by Christina M. Gschwandtner, xviii+181. Ashland, Ohio: Fordham University Press, 2008.

Martens, Paul. "Stackhouse's Critical Realism: A Pragmatic Epistemology on the Lam." *Journal of Analytic Theology* 4 (2016): 204–10.

McHugh, John. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on John 1–4*. London: T & T Clark, 2009.

Meek, Esther L. *Longing to Know: The Philosophy of Knowledge for Ordinary People*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004.

———. *Loving to Know: Introducing Covenant Epistemology*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011.

Michaels, J. Ramsey. *The Gospel of John*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010.

Moore, Andrew. "From Rational Apologetics to Witness Apologetics." *Antonianum* 90, no. 2 (2015): 275–88.

Morris, Leon. *The Gospel according to John*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971.

Moser, Paul K. *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

———. "The Inner Witness of the Holy Spirit." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, eds William J. Abraham and Frederik D. Aquino, 111–25. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Mudge, Lewis Seymour. "Paul Ricoeur on Biblical Interpretaion." In *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, edited by Lewis Seymour Mudge, 1–40. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980.

Nabert, Jean. *Le Désir de Dieu*. Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1966.

O'Dowd, Ryan. *The Wisdom of Torah: Epistemology in Deuteronomy and the Wisdom Literature*. Forschungen Zur Religion und Literatur Des Alten und Neuen Testaments. Vol. 225. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009.

Penner, Myron A. "John Stackhouse's Vocation-Centered Epistemology." *Journal of Analytic Theology* 4 (2016): 211–14.

Pennington, Jonathan T. *Reading the Gospel's Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Induction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012.

Phillips, Peter M. *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel: A Sequential Reading*. Library of New Testament Studies, 294, xvi+258. London: T & T Clark, 2006.

Plantinga, Alvin. *Warranted Christian Belief*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Polanyi, Michael. *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.

Provan, Iain W., V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman. *A Biblical History of Israel*. 1st ed. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.

Rainbow, Paul A. *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, the Epistles and the Apocalypse*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014.

Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue. Edited by Laura Frances Callahan and Timothy O'Connor. Oxford: University Press, 2014.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*. Edited by Lewis Seymour Mudge. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980.

———. "The Hermeneutics of Testimony." In *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, edited by Lewis Seymour Mudge, 119–54. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980.

———. *Oneself as Another*, 363. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Ridderbos, Herman N. *The Gospel according to John: A Theological Commentary*. Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997.

Rowe, Christopher K. *One True Life: The Stoics and Early Christians as Rival Traditions*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016.

Sandmel, Samuel. "Parallelomania." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81, no. 1 (March 1962): 1–13.

Sarisky, Darren. "Theological Theology." In *Theological Theology: Essays in Honour of John Webster*, edited by R. David Nelson and Justin Stratis. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015.

Schnackenburg, Rudolf. *The Gospel according to St. John, Vol. 2, Commentary on Chapters 5–12*. Translated by Cecily Hastings, Francis McDough, David Smith, and Richard Foley. London: Burns & Oates, 1980.

———. *The Gospel according to St. John: Vol. 1, Introduction and Commentary on Chapters 1–4*. Translated by Kevin Smyth. London: Burns & Oates, 1968.

Schumacher, Lydia. *Divine Illumination: The History and Future of Augustine's Theory of Knowledge*. Chichester, West Sussex, UK ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

Sherman, Steven B. *Revitalizing Theological Epistemology: Holistic Evangelical Approaches to the Knowledge of God*. Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2010.

Simmons, J. Aaron. “Continental Philosophy.” In *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, edited by William Abraham and Frederick Aquino, 564–75. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

———. “Kierkegaard and Pentecostal Philosophy.” In *Kierkegaard’s God and the Good Life*, eds J. Aaron Simmons, Stephen Minster, and Michael Strawser, 227–52. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017.

———. “The Strategies of Christian Philosophy.” In *Christian Philosophy: Conceptions, Continuations, Challenges*, edited by J. Aaron Simmons. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Simmons, J. Aaron, and Bruce Ellis Benson. *The New Phenomenology: A Philosophical Introduction*, 267. London: A & C Black, 2013.

Simpson, Thomas. “The Nature of Scientific and Religious Belief.” (Paper presented at a seminar of the Ian Ramsey Centre at St. John’s College, Oxford, 5 June 2014).

Simpson, Thomas. “Testimony in John’s Gospel: The Puzzle of 5:31 and 8:14.” *Tyndale Bulletin* 65, no. 1 (2014): 101–18.

Smith, James K. A. *Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic, 2d Ed*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012.

Stackhouse, John G. Jr. “Response to Four Good Friends.” *Journal of Analytic Theology* 4 (2016): 215–21.

Stackhouse, John G. *Need to Know: Vocation as the Heart of Christian Epistemology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Stiver, Dan R. *Theology After Ricoeur: New Directions in Hermeneutical Theology*. 1st ed, 257. Louisville: Westminister John Knox Press, 2001.

Strathmann, Hermann. “Μάρτυς.” In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. 4*, translated by Geoffrey W Bromiley, 474–514. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967.

Tenney, Merrill C. “Topics from the Gospel of John: Part III - The Meaning of ‘Witness’ in John.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132, no. 527 (1975): 229–41.

“Le Témoignage: Perspectives Analytiques, Bibliques et Ontologiques.” *Philosophie*, no. 88 (2006).

Thomas, Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. Edited by Thomas Gilby. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Thompson, Marianne M. *The God of the Gospel of John*. Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2001.

Tovey, Derek. *Narrative Art and Act in the Fourth Gospel*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997.

Treanor, Brian. “Embodied Ears: Being in the World and Hearing the Other.” In *Words of Life: New Theological Turns in French Phenomenology*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.

Trites, Allison. *The New Testament Concept of Witness*. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series. Vol. 31. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Tyson, Paul G. *Faith's Knowledge: Explorations Into the Theory and Application of Theological Epistemology*. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2013.

Vanhoozer, Kevin J. *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, xiii+308. Cambridge: University Press, 1990.

Vanhoozer, Kevin J. "The Hermeneutics of I-Witness Testimony: John 21:20–24 and the 'Death' of the 'Author'". In *Understanding Poets and Prophets: Essays in Honour of George Wishart Anderson: Journal of the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series*, edited by A. Graeme Auld, 366–87. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993.

Von Wahlde, Urban C. "The Witnesses to Jesus in John 5:31–40 and Belief in the Fourth Gospel." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (1981): 385–404.

Wahlberg, Mats. *Revelation as Testimony: A Philosophical-Theological Study*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2014.

Ward, Graham. *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

———. "Barth, Modernity, and Postmodernity." In *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, edited by John Webster, 274–95. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

———. "The Erotics of Redemption-After Karl Barth." *Theology & Sexuality*, no. 8 (1998): 52–72.

———. *How the Light Gets In: Ethical Life I*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

————. "The Logos, the Body and the World: On the Phenomenological Border." In *Transcending the Boundaries in Philosophy and Theology: Reason, Meaning and Experience*, edited by Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Martin Warner, 105–26. Abingdon: Ashgate, 2007.

———. "Receiving the Gift." *Modern Theology* 30, no. 3 (2014): 74–88.

———. *Unbelievable: Why We Believe and Why We Don't*, x+245. London: IBTauris, 2014.

———. "What Makes a Belief Believable? Graham Ward Inaugural Lecture | University of Oxford Podcasts - Audio and Video Lectures." https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/what-makes-belief-believable-graham-ward-inaugural-lecture.

The Washington Post Fact Checker Staff. *Donald Trump and His Assault on Truth: The President's Falsehoods, Misleading Claims and Flat-Out Lies*. Illustrated ed. London: Scribner, 2020.

Webster, John. *Barth*. 2nd ed., xvi+181. London: Continuum, 2004.

———. *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason*, 205. London: T&T Clark, 2012.

———. *Holiness*, 116. London: SCM Press, 2003.

———. *Theological Theology: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered Before the University of Oxford on 27 October 1997*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.

———. "Theological Theology." In *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II, 2d Ed*, 11–32. London: Bloomsbury, 2016.

Webster, John. "What Makes Theology Theological?" *Journal of Analytic Theology*, Vol. 3 (2015): 17–28.

Wells, Adam Y. *The Manifest and the Revealed: A Phenomenology of Kenōsis*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2018.

Westphal, Merold. "Phenomenology." In *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern European Thought*, edited by Nicholas Adams, George Pattison, and Graham Ward, 523–41. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Williams, Michael D. *Far as the Curse is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2005.

Williams, Rowan. *Being Human: Bodies, Minds, Persons*. London: SPCK, 2018.

———. *The Wound of Knowledge*. London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2014.

Zachhuber, Johannes. "The Rhetoric of Evil and the Definition of Christian Identity." In *STUDIEN DES BONNER ZENTRUMS FÜR RELIGION UND GESELLSCHAFT*, eds Paul Fiddes and Jochen Schmidt, 193–217. Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag, 2013.

Zagebski, Linda T. *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority, and Autonomy in Belief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.