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# DISCIPLESHIP IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

BY

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To my wife Wilma and three children Dirkie, Cilliers and Antoinette

## Summary

In principle discipleship is the continuation of the mission of Jesus through the imitation (*hupodeigma*) of Jesus' way of life. This implies that his disciples will live according to the will of God, for Jesus was the personification of the will of God. The disciples of Jesus are therefore the *locus* of the manifestation of God -- their way of life must indicate the presence of Jesus (and God) in the world in a different mode. Discipleship indicates a personal relationship between Jesus and his disciples which is modelled/based on the Father-Son relationship which is elucidated by the agency model. A Descent-Ascent Schema forms the setting for this concept, with the Johannine dualism as the determining factor for this schema. Thus the 'agency' motif constitutes the structure for discipleship in the Fourth Gospel with a revelatory-salvific assignment. The revelatory aspect concerns the disciples' relationship towards God and the salvific aspect their directedness towards the world. The disciples have to live a holy life through which God will be revealed and which will enable them to accomplish their mission in the world so that the world may become saved. This study concentrates on the theological perspective of discipleship with some reference to the characteristics of discipleship.

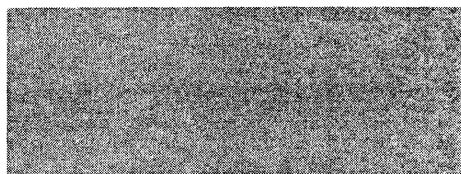
## Opsomming

Dissipelskap is in beginsel die voortsetting van Jesus se missie deur die nabootsing van sy manier van lewe. Dit impliseer dat sy dissipels volgens die wil van God sal lewe want, Jesus was die personifikasie van God se wil. Jesus se dissipels is dus die *locus* van God se manifestasie -- hulle lewenswyse moet Jesus (en God) se teenwoordigheid in 'n ander modus van bestaan in die wêreld aandui. Dissipelskap dui op 'n persoonlike verhouding wat daar tussen Jesus en sy dissipels bestaan. Dit is op die Vader-Seun verhouding gebaseer en in die gesantskapsmodel vasgelê. 'n Neerdaal-Opvaar-skema vorm die agtergrond vir hierdie konsep, met die Johannese dualisme as die bepalende faktor van hierdie skema. Die gesantskapsmotief konstitueer die struktuur vir dissipelskap in die Vierde Evangelie met 'n openbaring-verlossingsopdrag. Die openbaringsaspek behels die dissipels se verhouding teenoor God en die verlossingsaspek dui op die dissipels se gerigtheid teenoor die wêreld. Die dissipels moet 'n heilige lewe lei waardeur God openbaar sal word en wat hulle in staat sal stel om hulle missie in die wêreld te vervul, sodat die wêreld gered kan word. Hierdie studie konsentreer op die teologiese perspektief van dissipelskap, met sekere verwysings na die kenmerke van dissipelskap.

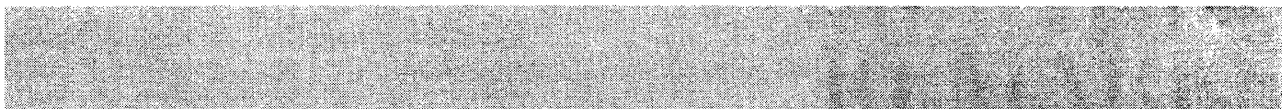
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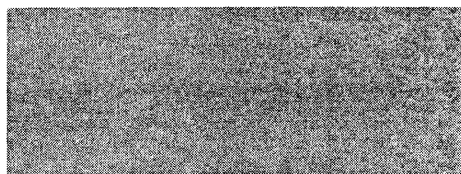
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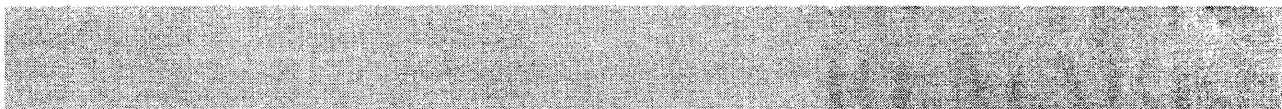


# INTRODUCTORY REMARKS





# INTRODUCTORY REMARKS





## **Introduction**

We live in a time which is commonly regarded as being dominated by materialism and secularism. In addition, it is a time when many believers are drifting away from their close relationship with God. The Christian church cannot afford to ignore the plan God has chosen for the renewal of society. God's plan, which was to change the history of the world in a way that has never been equalled, started in an astonishingly 'simple' way. In the words of the Fourth Evangelist, God sent his Son to draw to himself a small band of disciples. For the best part of three years he probably lived with them, set them an example, taught them, corrected them, forgave them, trusted them and loved them to the end. The disciples, on their part, sometimes failed him, disappointed him, and sinned against him. Yet never once did he withdraw his love from them. And later, empowered by the Holy Spirit, this group of trained disciples, continued with the mission started by Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

The following academic discussion on discipleship in the Fourth Gospel (FG) is *inter alia* an attempt to appeal to the children of God to act this plan. May this discussion be seen as a “φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, εὐθύνατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου” (Jn 1:23).

## **1. The rationale behind the thesis**

### **Discipleship in the Fourth Gospel has largely been overlooked**

Recently, there has been an enormous interest in discipleship especially as a source of inspiration for spiritual growth in contemporary believers and as a source of church growth. During the last two decades much popular reading matter<sup>2</sup> concerning discipleship has been published. Academically as well this subject is relevant and of current interest<sup>3</sup>. Although attention has been paid within Synoptic scholarship<sup>4</sup> to this subject, the question of discipleship in the FG *per se* was largely overlooked, until the eighties (Siker-Gieseler 1980:199; Pazdan 1982:2,41; Neethling 1984; Segovia 1985:77; Donahue 1985-6:76). In spite of this, discipleship has not yet received the attention it deserves.

### **The importance of discipleship in the Fourth Gospel.**

Such an omission is paradoxical and even more surprisingly so when one compares the incidence of the term 'disciple' (μαθητής) itself in the four Gospels: it is in fact the FG that provides the highest number of such occurrences. The word μαθητής<sup>5</sup> occurs seventy-eight times in the FG in comparison with Matthew in which it occurs seventy-three times;

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<sup>1</sup> '...this gospel is often regarded as either the best introduction to or the most sublime meditation on what Christians believe about Jesus. As such, it is commonly given the role of leading individuals to faith in Christ or of deepening their communion with him or their understanding of his significance' (Rensberger 1988:15).

<sup>2</sup> Ortiz (1975), Pratney (1975), Kuhne (1978), Leroy (1978), Hanks & Shell (1981), Stephen (1981), Watson (1983), Adsit (1988), Dunnivant (1991:157ff).

<sup>3</sup> Lundin & Lancaster (1990), Wagner (1990), Robert (1990), McFadyen (1991), Zahniser (1991).

<sup>4</sup> Twelftree (1990), Milne (1990), Trainor (1991), Willson (1991), Arias (1991), Breytenbach (1993), Du Rand (1991).

<sup>5</sup> For statistic purposes only μαθητής is used from ἀκολουθεω and ὀπισω.

Mark: forty-six times and Luke: thirty-seven times, not even mentioning the numerous implicit references to discipleship in the Gospel. Clearly, the disciples represent important actants in the Gospel narrative.

Legitimacy for the importance of discipleship is primarily to be found in the Gospel itself. In the Evangelist's thought and his presentation of the Gospel, discipleship and the circle of the disciples are very important. From the beginning of the FG Jesus was accompanied by disciples. The disciples enter the scene when John the Baptist points two of his followers to Jesus (1:35ff), and remains with him (2:2,11-12,22; 4:2,8,27, etc) until the closing pages of the narrative when the disciples assumed his mission. In John 4 and 6 the disciples appear prominently. They are mentioned in the unit on Samaria, in the last two signs, and at the very end of the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. There is an important interlude in the chapter on Samaria which describes a conversation between Jesus and his disciples (4:27-38). The disciples also make an appearance in the accounts of the second miracle of Cana (4:46-54), the healing at the pool of Bethesda (5:1-9) and the healing of the man born blind at the pool of Siloam (9:1-7). They are essential to the account of Jesus' walking on the lake as those who are chiefly concerned. In five (13-17) of the chapters in the second part of this Gospel, Jesus concentrates on talking only to his disciples before his departure. In chapter 18 he was betrayed by Judas and denied by Peter. And in chapters 20 and 21 the disciples are again of great interest in relation to the risen Christ.

Schnackenburg correctly stated that the disciples were introduced into these Johannine texts quite deliberately and that for the Fourth Evangelist the circle of disciples had a definite theological meaning in Jesus' work and activity on earth (Schnackenburg 1975:233f; Segovia 1985:77f; cf Siker-Gieseler 1980:199; Culpepper 1983:115). Segovia (1985:78; also Culpepper 1983)<sup>6</sup> asserts that the disciples play a continuing role in the development of the FG. Boismard<sup>7</sup> in his introduction mentions the disciples of Jesus as an important idea which was developed through the four successive stages of composition within the Johannine school.<sup>8</sup>

It is therefore, when looking at the internal evidences<sup>9</sup> of the FG itself and the opinions by scholars about the important role of the disciples as well as other features<sup>10</sup> in the FG, that

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<sup>6</sup> This is asserted by these two scholars from a narratological perspective.

<sup>7</sup> Boismard, M E & A Lamouille 1977. *L'Évangile de Jean* [Synopse des quatre évangiles en français]. Paris. Ref by Pazdan 1982:3f.

<sup>8</sup> The number of the different stages is diverse and debatable. For further discussion concerning these stages, see Brown (1975:XXXIV) -- 5-stages; Schnackenburg (1972) -- 3-stages; Du Rand (1990:91ff) -- 4-stages; Smalley (1978:119ff) -- 3-stages; Teeple (1974) -- 4-stages; Wilkens (1958:92-93) -- 3-stages; Lindars (1981:46ff) -- 3-stages; cf Painter (1981) -- 3-stages. See Kysar (1975:38ff) and Du Rand (1990:89ff) for discussions of some of these proposals.

<sup>9</sup> Only after a systematic-historical survey concerning what has been written on discipleship in the FG, can external conclusions regarding the necessity and legitimacy of such a study be made. This will be done after the historical survey in ch 1.

<sup>10</sup> Relevant features are the double meaning of words functioning in the FG and the meaning ascribed to characters in this Gospel by the readers (cf Siker-Gieseler 1980:215ff) like the Samaritan woman (4:7-30); the official from Capernaum (4:46-54); the man born blind (9:1-41) and Martha (11:1-44).

some scholars might concede that the FG is *The ideal Gospel on Discipleship*<sup>11</sup>.

The following questions arise: What does discipleship mean to the Fourth Evangelist (FE) and his readers? Did the term specify their function and meaning as believers? Was the FE's point of view about discipleship unique? How does discipleship fit in, in the Christology, Soteriology and the Theological structure of the FG and what will the implications be? Since discipleship is a 'rational phenomenon' (Pazdan 1982:78), what kind of relationship obtains here? These questions will be answered in chapter 3.

## **2. The demarcation of this study**

Through the entire presentation of the FG (20:30) the Fourth Evangelist seeks to persuade his reader 'to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God' (20:31) (Okure 1988:52). The theme of 'discipleship' pervades the entire Gospel and there is hardly any theological aspect not associated to this theme.<sup>12</sup> Since it would be impractical and beyond the scope of this thesis to undertake an analysis of the entire Gospel material, it becomes necessary to reduce the enquiry to a workable proportion,<sup>13</sup> and to do so in such a way that the material selected will be broad enough to encompass the concept of 'discipleship' raised in the FG.

The scope of this study is to discover and to formulate the meaning of discipleship in the FG as it is presented in that document. This study, firstly, is demarcated on the theological-philosophical level by the concept 'discipleship'. Secondly, on a literary level, the study is restricted to the FG.<sup>14</sup> As a working-hypothesis I take for granted that, because of the close parallel between the relationship of the Father/Son and Christ/Disciples as depicted in the FG, discipleship relates to the Father/Son relationship; it is parallel to the Father/Son relationship.<sup>15</sup> Because the Father/Son relationship is in a strong sense depicted in the FG in the 'Agency-event', discipleship therefore will relate to the 'Agency' concept. If this is true, then chapters 17 and 20:10-31 must be seen as the two main texts. The reason for the choice of these two texts (Jn 17 & 20:19-31) is their theological and historical reflections on discipleship. John 17 may be regarded as the theological grounding for

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<sup>11</sup> Some people who support this point of view are: Müller (1975:490) who says that reflection on discipleship is particularly characteristic of the FG; Doohan's (1988:131ff) assumption is that John's Gospel is a fundamental document for Christian faith and calls to a mature faith; Hengel (1989:121) agrees that John sought to give 'solid food' -- to use the language of Hebrews -- to the circle of disciples and Christian communities who were ready to listen to the old teacher and accept his message; De Jonge (1977:1-28) wrote a chapter 'The Fourth Gospel: The book of the disciples'; Brown stated in his Presidential Address to the Society for Biblical Literature in 1977 that  $\mu\alpha\theta\eta\tau\acute{\eta}\varsigma$  is the title *par excellence* in the FG because it is the primary Christian category (quoted by Pazdan 1982:1). He also express this view in *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves and Hates of an individual Church in New Testament Times* (1979:191). Brown never developed this statement further.

<sup>12</sup> Discipleship is linked to almost every theme in the FG, for example: the Beloved disciple, the Johannine community, revelation, soteriology, Christology, etc.

<sup>13</sup> See for instance the comprehensive compilation of Johannine literature by Malatesta (1967), Van Belle (1988) and the worthy contribution of Kysar (1975) and others. This would become too comprehensive for the researcher.

<sup>14</sup> Although the first letter of John (1 Jn) has been seen as the first commentary on the FG, and in which the concept of discipleship also appears, it will not be considered in this study.

<sup>15</sup> This statement will be motivated throughout the study.

discipleship for it is only here in the FG that most components of 'agency' converge and where the disciples of Jesus are officially appointed as his agents (17:18). John 20:19-31 may be regarded as the historical grounding for discipleship, for it is only here in the FG that the disciples are explicitly and historically sent out (20:21) to continue Jesus' mission.

Owing to the nature of the FG I shall have to incorporate other texts as well.<sup>16</sup> I shall concentrate on the central relevant sections, but shall also incorporate elements from the rest of the FG which do not receive the necessary attention in the central sections and which help to elucidate and interpret elements in the central sections. This will be done on account of two factors, namely, on stylistic and theological levels:

**(i) On the *stylistic level***, the movement of thought and the technique which the FE uses, influences the whole research process. Firstly, an important peculiarity of the FG is that it often links long discourses with brief stories. Secondly, the structure of the Gospel as a whole displays a notably dramatic element which develops and causes it to reach its climax.<sup>17</sup> Thirdly, in the discourses another technique used is the verbal links through keywords, concatenation of ideas by means to recourse to earlier ones, and *inclusio* whereby thought is brought back to its starting-point (Schnackenburg 1965:115f). Fourthly, the Fourth Evangelist's movement of thought 'circles' around certain concepts; but still moves forward, while remaining within a circle. The FG's movement of thought is best compared to a spiral: although the thoughts circle and return, they still move onward. In the forward movement it is explanatory and usually goes to a higher level.<sup>18</sup>

**(ii) On the *theological level***, Van der Watt (1991:93-126) made a useful contribution regarding the structural exposition of Johannine theology (see also Loader 1984:188-216) which he indicates as a 'pictorial representation'. He indicates how the Johannine thought-system (Christology, soteriology, ethics, pneumatology and eschatology) which is organic-systematic in character, can be presented pictorially. The different themes are organically linked and recall one another systematically for they are spread throughout the FG. He stresses that:

*Johannes telkens uit die teologiese bedding wat sistematies saamhang, geput het en die temas konsekwent deur die Evangelie aangebied het. Dit kan ook as verklaring dien waarom dieselfde temas deur die loop van die Evangelie telkens na vore tree en waarom Johannes verkies om met 'n beperkte aantal temas te werk. In die piktorale samehang is die temas nie logies-opeenvolgend (kettingagtig) gestruktureer nie, maar logies verbandhoudend (piktoraal).<sup>19</sup>*

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<sup>16</sup> These texts will not undergo the detailed exegesis as will be the case in chs 17 and 20:19-31. Important and relevant elements will however be pointed out.

<sup>17</sup> In chapter 20 (the resurrection narratives), the scenes are so disposed that the reader might share the feelings of the characters there (the woman, two disciples hurrying to the tomb, Mary Magdalene, the twelve with and without Thomas). In his identification with the characters the reader comes to an experience of increasing faith, culminating in a supreme expression of faith (Schnackenburg 1965:115).

<sup>18</sup> This way of developing the thought can only be seen in the analysis of the individual sections. In the parabolic discourses the method of concentric thinking which progresses to new circles is very clear. Here we find a meditative way of thought which uses few arguments but goes progressively deeper into its subject to gain better and higher understanding of it (Schnackenburg 1965:116f).

<sup>19</sup> Meeks' (1986:161) perception, although earlier, is supportive to Van der Watt's hypothesis when he says: 'The reader cannot understand any part of the FG until he understands the whole'.

This should for instance imply that when the 'sending of Jesus' is raised 'the sending of the disciples' will also be implied and *vice-versa*. This organic-systematic pictorial structure forces the exegete each time to view every specific theme against the background of other themes.

Due to these stylistic techniques, especially the spiral movement of thought (Schnackenburg), as well as the organic-systematic structure of theology (Van der Watt), I have been compelled to work with motifs. Especially in the theological grounding of discipleship, perceptible in chapter 17, I shall have to look for and work with motifs regarding discipleship and then look at the development of these motifs throughout the FG. Therefore also the associative meaning of the texts, and not only the denotative meanings, will have to be considered as well.

### **3. The term 'discipleship'**

The term 'discipleship' does not occur in the FG. Morphologically it relates to the lexeme 'disciple' and has theologially been derived from the multiple appearances of the term μαθηταὶ in the FG and the functions directed to the disciples by Jesus Christ. It indicates a lifestyle with a multiplicity of perspectives embedded in the whole thought system of the FG. Discipleship indicates the dignity of being a disciple, just as, for instance, kingship indicates the dignity of being a king.

Before coming to a historical survey of discipleship in the FG, it seems necessary to give a brief analysis of the design of this study.

### **4. Design of the study**

*Chapter one:* A systematic-historical survey will be launched regarding what has been delivered on discipleship in the FG particularly during the second half of this century. Some conclusions will be drawn from which relevant tendencies concerning the theme of this study will be indicated. This will also be used for the rationale to legitimise this study.

*Chapter two:* This chapter concerns the issue of methodology. Here I shall indicate my perception on hermeneutics, exegesis and the method I will pursue.

*Chapter three:* This is the most comprehensive chapter in which all the text investigations will take place on the basis of disciplined exegesis and theological discussion. In this chapter a thorough investigation will be made concerning the appearances and description of the disciples in the Fourth Gospel. After a paradigmatic investigation of μαθητής, I will draw some conclusions which may help to determine the angle of incidence in this study.

Because discipleship in the FG relates to the 'agency' motif of Jesus, the descent-ascent motif (DAS) and the agency-structure will determine the structure and content of this chapter. Because the DAS forms a most important part of the 'agency-motif' which is one of the two major motifs in the FG and runs throughout the Gospel, all the explicit text-indications related to the DAS will be investigated. In the case of the 'agency-motif', only the most explicit relevant texts related to this motif will be explored.

Finally, because of the important role of the Spirit-Paraclete and the fact that no discipleship can be realised without the dynamic work of the Paraclete, I shall also investigate briefly the role and function of the Paraclete in discipleship.

*Chapter four:* Systematic conclusions regarding this study will be made with special reference to the correlation between the 'agency' of Jesus and the 'agency' of the disciples in relation to discipleship.

*Addendum:* In the addendum to this document, paradigmatic surveys of words may be found.

## **5. Formal aspects**

(i) The abbreviations used in this study for theological literature are according to the recommendations of Schwertner, S M 1992. Internationales Abkürzungsverzeichnis für Theologie und Grenzgebiete. Zeitschriften, Serien, Lexika, Quellenwerken mit bibliographischen Angaben.

Other abbreviations used in this study that need to be defined are:

- ch(s) for 'chapter',
- p(pp) for 'page',
- sec(s) for 'section',
- v(vv) for 'verse',
- f(ff) for 'following page',
- C for 'colon',
- FG for 'Fourth Gospel',
- FE for 'Fourth Evangelist',
- OT for 'Old Testament',
- NT for 'New Testament',
- BD for 'Beloved Disciple',
- LD for 'Last Discourse'.

A reference to a specific verse will be indicated as 6:9, a colon as C6 and a semi-colon as C6.9.

(ii) The Harvard reference system has been used. Because long argumentation could disrupt the flow of discussion, footnotes will be used. The Harvard reference system is applied in the footnotes as well.

(iii) Only literature used in the investigation and noted in the text will appear in the bibliography.

(iv) In text references the Greek text will be used. Instead of using words in the infinitive mode the word will be used as it appears in the Greek text in order to make it easy for the reader to pick up these words in the text. Whenever the Greek text is used double inverted commas will be used, due to the diacritical tokens in the Greek text which may cause confusion.