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Discipleship in the Gospel of John based on the verb μένω

Thesis of the Doctoral Dissertation

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The word μαθητής (disciple) turns up seventy-eight times in the Gospel of John. This term is used for those women and men who followed Jesus and believed in Him. Being the first followers of Jesus, the disciples of His time are portraits, models for all future generations of believers. The interweaving of these models of following Him gives us the larger concept of discipleship, which breaking the geographical and the historical limits, becomes a category that can be applied to Jesus followers of all times. Being a disciple and following Jesus are synonyms, they refer to the lifestyle that concentrates on being together with Jesus.

We meet the verb μένω (to abide, to remain, to stay) forty times in the Gospel of John. Besides the word ‘disciple’, this is one of John’s favorite expressions. Maybe it’s not a coincidence that these two concepts appear together at the beginning and at the end of the Gospel, similarly to a frame. This fact also motivates us to devote a separate study to this theme.

The title, as well as the theme of our dissertation, is: ‘Discipleship in the Gospel of John based on the verb μένω.’ We will make a parallel analysis of the following concepts: discipleship and abiding, in order to gain a more profound understanding of the notion of discipleship in John’s view.

In the first chapter, we will present, the published literature on the concept of discipleship: articles, studies, monographs, in chronological order, then we will turn our attention to publications focusing on the verb μένω.

In the second chapter, we will go deeper into the meaning of the verb μένω and analyze its occurrence in Septuaginta. Later, we will immerse ourselves into the study of the Gospel of the New Testament in order to show the reader the unique complexity of the meaning of the verb μένω in the Book of John.

Also in this chapter, we will present some images related to the verb μένω as it is used by John. In this way, we will get an insight into the amazing metaphorical language of John and also reveal the extremely complex net of images present in the Gospel. The Spirit coming down from heaven as a dove and sitting on Jesus (John 1,32–33), the holy marriage or bond between God and people, the motifs of God’s joy and wrath (John 3,28–36), also the unique relationship between Father and Son are all red threads that can be followed through the whole Gospel.

Between the third and eighth chapter, we will analyze pericopes that are significant for our theme. The first of them is the John 1,35–39 section, which relates the first time Jesus met His disciples.

We tried to do our best to structure the content of the III.-VIII. chapters in a transparent, easy-to-follow manner. First, we present our own translation of the texts, then we concentrate on the critical commentaries of those texts. Later, we focus on the narrower and broader context of the different sections. Here we will be dealing briefly with the statements conceived according to the diachronic method, as our approach is mainly synchronic, i.e. we start from today's form of the texts. Further parts of these chapters will be dedicated to the exegetical analysis of the texts. Each chapter will be closed with a short final conclusion.

We will approach the first three verses of the pericope formed of verses 1,35–39 based on the structure of ‘description of the situation’ (1,35), ‘testimony’ (1,36), ‘following’ (1,37). Then we will focus on the first dialogue between the Logos and the man, and the analysis of inviting and staying with Jesus.

Verses 1,35–39 create a transition between episodes presenting John the Baptist (1,19–34) and stories relating the invitation of disciples (1,40–51). In this brief section the attention of the evangelist turns from the Lamb of God to Jesus and the disciples, thus it becomes associated with the aforementioned motif of testimony and it becomes even more emphasized.¹

In our opinion, verbs like ‘look’, ‘hear’, ‘follow’, ‘ask’, ‘say’, ‘search’, ‘go’ all become part of the terminology of discipleship according to the evangelist. These all point to the verb *μὲνω*, as the keyword that marks the formation of the relationship between disciples.

As John the Baptist’s disciples are anonymous, the text in section 1,35-39 is not particular, it doesn’t concentrate only on the phenomenon of following Jesus that concerns them directly, but on the starting point of discipleship. The two disciples simultaneously represent anybody and everybody. They are indicators illustrating that following Jesus is possible for the reader too.²

In John’s Gospel discipleship is made possible by two important factors: God’s intention to turn to people and the people’s search for God.

¹ TAKÁCS, GY., *Szent János evangéliumának magyarázata I*, Pannónia Nyomda Kft., Budapest 2015, 117.

² BRODIE, TH. L., *The Gospel According to John. A Literary and Theological Commentary*, Oxford University Press, Oxford – New York 1993, 161.

Apparently, the starting point of the chain reaction of becoming a disciple is the testimony of John the Baptist. However, God is behind all of this: God sent John the Baptist (1,6), God made the recognition of Jesus possible (1,33). Similarly to the Synoptics, in John's Gospel discipleship is God's special gift; according to our text, God offers this to people in an indirect way, through others. The ones who accept discipleship as God's gift and share it with others become gifts themselves.

The first followers of Jesus were disciples of John (1,35). While mentioning them we find the first traces of the word μαθητής (disciple). This noun is a derivative of the word μαθάνω (learns) and indicates the open-mindedness and interest in learning.

The verb μένω in the question 'where do you live, Rabbi?' means much more than an inquiry about the place. The intention of the disciples was 'the profound knowing of Jesus and the ascension to Him'.³ Their interest covers not only the whereabouts and home of Jesus but also the identity of Jesus: where does he come from, who is he, what is his objective? The 'where do you live?' question actually refers to the question 'who are you?'.⁴

The analogy between the section made up of verses 1,35-39 and the Book of Wisdom helps us outline some of the personality traits of the first disciples⁵: pure-hearted, seekers, they love and long for Wisdom. These traits facilitate one of the most beautiful paradigm shifts in history.

In the fourth chapter, we positioned the eucharistic speech (6,52–59), and the reaction of the Twelve (6,66–71) in the center of our inquiry. We thought it was essential to mention here, under the title of literary unity the four-source theory of Bultmann and the different views regarding the sacramentality of verses 6,52–59. We share the point of view of D. Daube, G. Ziener, B. Gärtner, E. Kilmartin⁶, who think that the writing of the 6th chapter was also influenced by the liturgical-eucharistical theology of the Church. The eucharistic section

³ BOLYKI, J., „*Igaz tanúvallomás*”: *Kommentár János evangéliumához*, Kommentárok a Szentíráshoz, Osiris Kiadó, Budapest 2001, 91.

⁴ SCHOLTISSEK, K., *In Ihm Sein und Bleiben, Die Sprache der Immanenz in den johanneischen Schriften*, Herders Biblische Studien 21, Herder, Freiburg – Basel – Wien 2000, 240.

⁵ Wis 6,12–13.16; Prov 8,34–35.

⁶ KILMARTIN, E. J., *Liturgical Influence on John 6*, in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* XXII (1960), 183–91.

was conceived in the context of the outlining of Christian liturgy. In the fourth chapter, we continue our exegetical inquiry based on verses 6,52–59.67–71.

Spending time with Jesus becomes a unique experience, thus the disciples join Jesus, the ‘staying with Him’ becomes ‘joining Him’. The followers of Jesus are not only inspired by the teachings of the Master, as students in the rabbinical school, they also share a sense of common destiny.

Being together with Jesus contributes to the building of a new network of relationships. The first appearance of the term ‘twelve’ (δώδεκα) in verse 13 from the 6th chapter refers to this phenomenon. The number of the baskets is in a strong relationship with the cohesive group of the Twelve, which is mentioned for the first time in 6,67. In the symbolic language of the Gospel of John, the college of the Twelve refers to God’s new people.

The fact that the Twelve doesn’t turn its back on Jesus after the speech of Capernaum (6,52-71), is, in fact, the acknowledgment of Jesus’ eucharistical (6,52-59) ‘hard teaching’ (6,60). It assumes the new identity and habit marked by the participles of ὁ τρώγων (eater), and ὁ πίνων (drinker) (6,56). The verbs ‘eat’ and ‘drink’ establish mutual assimilation: the complete, mutual and personal immanence is created, which in the case of the disciple means the participation in the suffering and glorification of the Son of man. For Jesus, it means participation in the everyday life of the disciple.

Staying with Jesus and joining Jesus becomes staying with each other, complete, personal, mutual and efficient immanence. The new family of Jesus, the new people of God are connected with one another and eternity by the divine blood flowing through their veins. The disciples who make up the college of the Twelve as the twelve guardians of the baskets that contain the ‘remaining bread’ are a guarantee for future generations that they also receive the eucharistical gift.

We dedicate the fifth chapter to the section about ‘His real disciples’ (8,30–36). We will start with the analysis of the expression ‘who had believed Jesus’, then we will focus on the notions of ‘disciple’ and that of ‘real disciple’ (8,30–31). Then, we will go deeper into the criteria of a ‘real disciple’, we will focus on the road, leading from ‘staying to freedom’. After the motif of ‘freedom’ inherited from Abraham, we will shed light on the problem of slavery to sin. We dedicate the closing of our exegetical analysis to the parable of the slave and the Son (8,35–36).

A 'real disciple' is the one who remains faithful to the word of Jesus: renounces all personal interests and seeks God's will (8,31). The verb μένω is used as a term that refers to a well-founded, constantly renewed decision and continuous action: the 'word' has to be heard, its meaning should be contemplated. The sense of fidelity and identification with it is quintessential: it should be fulfilled and turned into actions in order to live from and by it. Staying in the logos is intertwined with the concept of faith, as our faith in Jesus, which is always described with a verb by the evangelist is presented as a way of life. Just like experiencing the faith, staying in the logos, is a direct answer to God's word: a stretched out arm used to touch the Saviour's hand. Jesus who 'came from above' by staying in the logos and the active faith lifts up the ones who suffer in depth.

The truth known by learning the words of Jesus as well as the freedom arising from it makes us feel complete. The slave gets back its dignity, the disciple receives as a gift the status of God's child, people recover everything they've lost because of slavery. As the fulfillment of the most intense and profound desire, freedom is the ultimate exemption of desires. This is the fulfillment of joy, that doesn't need anything.

The sixth chapter leads us to the room of the Last Supper. From the farewell discourse of Jesus, we chose the motif of preparing a place (14,1–3) and the promise of the Paraclete, which is related to the motif of Jesus' return (14,15–25). Only in this chapter, do we meet the noun μονή, which as a derivative noun of the verb μένω is closely related to the theme of our dissertation.

Our exegetical approach is concentrated on the following motifs: the invitation to believe (14,1); the numerous rooms and the preparation of the place (14,2–3); the condition of receiving the Paraclete (14,15), the sending of the Paraclete (14,16–17); the return of Jesus (14,18–20); the disciple as the Church (14,21–25).

Jesus encourages his people not as Ebed Jahve but as the triumphant King with words such as 'your heart shall not tremble' and 'believe'. The 'house of the Father that has many rooms' and in which Jesus 'prepares a home for his people' as an image, in spite of a single mentioning, defines the line of thought of chapter 14. The intertwining of phrases like μονή (dwelling), τόπος (place) and ἡ οἰκία τοῦ πατρὸς μου (My father's house/household) receives a strong eschatological aspect: it makes reference to immortality and the joyful coexistence with God and His household. Verbs like 'leave', 'depart' and 'return' facilitate the connection between distant spheres like heaven and earth, up and down. During his 'journey' Jesus

crosses the distance that separates the habitat of the disciples from the habitat of God. He builds a bridge between the transient world and eternity in order to have his disciples with him.

The love for Jesus expressed by keeping the faith and commands results in the sending of the Paraclete. The Spirit ‘asked’ by Jesus ‘will stay with and within disciples’ forever (14,16-17). It joins them as a companion, leads them to the whole truth (16,13), and teaches them everything (14,26). Testifies of Christ (15,26) and reveals the sins of the world, the truth and the sentence (16,8). As God acted through Jesus in the world, God will also be present and active in the community of disciples and the world through them and the ‘other Paraclete’ (14,16).

The presence of God’s Spirit in the disciple and the community of disciples is a kind of sign for the world: God dwells and works in us. The Paraclete, by remaining with the disciples contributes to the formation of the ‘contrast society’ which serves not the ‘prince of this world’ (14,30) but God.

The disciple that loves and guards the commands of Jesus becomes the ‘locus’ of God’s presence: ‘Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them (μονὴν παρ’ αὐτῷ ποιησόμεθα)’ (14,23). If we want to localize the μονή, the dwelling, we can claim that it belongs to the terrestrial sphere and not the heavenly or transcendent one. The bearer of the μονή is the disciple himself, ‘it is with him’ (παρ’ αὐτῷ) where the dwelling of the Father and Son will be. This special divine presence turns the disciple into the theophany of the Holy Trinity.

In the seventh chapter, we will focus on the analysis of the verses about the vine and its branches (15,1–11), which is, at the same time, a conglomerate of the occurrences of the verb μένω. We will present the complex biblical image of the vine and the branches, addressing their appearance in the Old and New Testament. Subsequently, we immerse ourselves in the analysis of the expression of ‘remaining in Jesus’ (15,1–4). The presentation of the consequences of remaining or not remaining on the vine (15,5–8) is strongly related to this. Verses 15,9–11 are dedicated to the analysis of John’s ethics. Remaining in the love of Jesus receives special importance in this ethic.

Similarly to remaining in the ‘logos’, remaining in love is not a static, passive and humble state, instead it is trust, action, and growth, more precisely ‘fruition’. Love has to

grow in two different directions: vertically, we must nurture our love for God. Horizontally, we must experience the love of neighbor.

Disciples make up a community in which they pursue this love-relationship not only individually but also collectively. This transforms and shapes not only the individual but also the community. Subsequently, the love they experience can also transform the region in which the community of disciples exists. The thought of individual and collective transformation which manifests itself in the ‘fruitage’ when it comes to the internal and external growth is strongly related to the verb μένω.

By remaining in the love of Jesus, the dichotomy between existence and deed, more precisely ‘being a disciple’ and ‘living as a disciple’ disappears in John’s Gospel. Actions prompted by love are the expressions of the association of disciples and the common identity of disciples with Jesus.

The eighth chapter leads us to the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The verb μένω occurs for the last time in the dialogue related to Peter and the fate of the disciple whom Jesus loved. The section we analyze consists of verses 21,20–23. As the disciple whom Jesus loved is the embodiment of the discipleship of John, we think it is important to do a brief presentation of the episodes related to him: the beloved disciple at the Last Supper (13,23–26), under the cross (19,25–27.31–36), and at the empty tomb (20,1–10). After presenting the future fate of the beloved disciple (21,20–23) we will examine his identity.

On the occasion of the Last Supper, the disciple whom Jesus loved steps on the scene, the gospel says the following about him: ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, in translation he ‘was reclining on Jesus’ bosom’. Here we can mention the image presented by the verse 13,25: the disciple whom Jesus loves: ‘He then lying on Jesus’ breast’ (ἀναπεσὼν οὖν ἐκεῖνος οὕτως ἐπὶ τὸ στῆθος τοῦ Ἰησοῦ). These unique and symbolic gestures invoke the words of the prologue (1,18): ‘No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known’. As if the evangelist compared the strong connection between Father and Son to the relationship of Jesus and the disciple whom he loved.

If we add to this imagery the last testimony of Jesus on the cross, in which he entrusts his mother to the disciple whom he loves and him to his mother using the words ‘Behold your son’, we can conclude that the disciple enjoys the status of a son. He is the symbol and

representative of 'God's child' depicted in the prologue. Concepts like 'discipleship', 'son', 'God's child' intertwine in the figure of the beloved disciple.

The images portraying the disciple whom he loved together with the prologue depict a true witness: he is able to describe God the Son who turned into a human in a reliable manner. His testimony is a link between the testimony of John the Baptist and that of the community marked as 'we'. He is the source and valid authority of the information depicting Jesus, embraced and spread by the community marked as 'we' as joyful tidings to others.

Fitting together the motifs of verse 21,20-23 as pieces of a mosaic, we get the following image of the beloved disciple's destiny: Jesus' loyal disciple and true witness, follows Peter and Jesus and steps over the doorstep of death, 'lying on Jesus' breast', stays alive in the eternity and alive in his testimony.⁷ The message uttered at the Last Supper is fulfilled in his destiny: 'And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.' (John 14,3). The destiny of the beloved disciple illustrates the destiny of Jesus-followers at all times: a life lived in the spirit of following Jesus leads to eternity.

In the final conclusion of our dissertation, we will try to take a short review of the notion of discipleship as it appears in the Gospel of John. Based on the verb μένω, we can conclude the following aspect of discipleship: it is God's gift, the result of the search made by man, participation in the life of Jesus, it is a new kind of relation, a mutual immanent relationship with Jesus. This opens up the way to enter the relationship between Father and Son, which creates the state of being God's child. As God's child, he receives the gift of freedom. As a disciple, the Jesus-follower will become the inheritor of places in Heaven, and thus the bearer of the Spirit and God here on Earth. This also implies a continuous purification process, fruitage and remaining in love. Discipleship leads to the imitation of Jesus, as the disciple is also God's child and the authentic witness of His love. Similarly to the disciple whom Jesus loved, due to remaining in Jesus, the man of Spirit is a sanctuary of God, and as such he remains forever. Similarly to the beloved disciple by joining Jesus the man of the Spirit, the sanctuary of God will be eternal. The beloved disciple, as an embodiment of the discipleship of John, through his anonymity will reflect the vocation and fate of Jesus-followers of all times.

⁷ DE LA POTTERIE, I., *Le témoin qui demeure: le disciple que Jésus aimait*, in *Biblica* 67 (1986), 343–359.

After having a short review of our dissertation, we consider that it brings the following novelties: **1)** as far as we know, there is no detailed exegetical writing dedicated to the relationship between the notion of discipleship and abiding, our dissertation intends to fill this gap; **2)** our work pays attention to and relies on those innovative specialized texts that connect the notion of discipleship and the meaning of the verb μένω with other motifs. In this category we mention the extremely detailed work of Klaus Scholtissek⁸ related to the immanence of John, the monograph of Rekha Chennatu⁹ about the motifs of discipleship and covenant, and also the exceptional writings of Mary L. Coloe¹⁰, who links the motif of God remaining with His folk with that of the Church, and implicitly with the notion of discipleship. We also took into consideration the commentaries, monographs and scientific articles published in Hungarian and other foreign languages, as it is indicated in the bibliography.

Our dissertation is meant to give a basis for researches regarding this theme in the Hungarian specialized literature with the purpose of providing a wider context.

Our goal is to present the beauty and uniqueness of following Jesus also from John's point of view.

Following the evolution of linguistic phenomena in John's Gospel will probably help us: get closer to the revelation of the secret essence of reality, face ourselves, find out who we really are and what is the essence of our life as Christians as well as what is the real purpose of our lives.

⁸ SCHOLTISSEK, K., *In Ihm Sein und Bleiben, Die Sprache der Immanenz in den johanneischen Schriften*, Herders Biblische Studien 21, Herder, Freiburg – Basel – Wien 2000.

⁹ CHENNATU, R. M., *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship*, Hendrickson, Peabody 2006.

¹⁰ COLOE, M., *God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota 2001; COLOE, M., *Dwelling in the Household of God. Johannine Ecclesiology and Spirituality*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota 2006.