

I. BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

THE EDUCATION OF THE APOSTLE JOHN BETWEEN DISCIPLESHIP AND THE FOURTH GOSPEL

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ABSTRACT. The synoptic gospels present the Apostle John, during the three years of discipleship next to Jesus Christ, in a different way than the Gospel of John. Along with his older brother, James, and the Apostle Peter, he is part of the small, intimate group, which is present at all the important events of the Saviour's ministry. Jesus chooses to change John into a disciple of "love," of gentleness, of compassion by accepting him, by unconditional love, and by entrusting him as the son of Mary, the Mother of God. The paradigm of life is shaped in his new relationship, a fact proved by the writing of the fourth Gospel: he does not mention his name, he describes himself as the disciple "whom Jesus loved", the emphasis on love is twice as great as that of truth and justice.

Keywords: Apostle John, Gospels, disciple, education, parents, the paradigm of life.

The theme of the life of the Apostles, of the disciples chosen Apostles by Jesus, as it is rendered by the writings of the New Testament, raises a series of important questions for the contemporary man. What is the ratio between discipleship, education, and discipline? Respective between discipline – the action of discipline and, what do we call in theology, divine pedagogy? Divine pedagogy is the expression of love, but our question focuses on two possible models of it: the pedagogy of unconditional love and that of conditional love.

When we talk about the process of the apostle John's education between discipleship and the fourth Gospel, we focus on the issue of Christ pedagogy, which has contextualized itself in an educational system specific to the Semitic world, but which retains the characteristics of the rabbinic schools of Jesus' day – the school of Hillel the Elder – a liberal wing of ancient Pharisees²: deep respect

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² See Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Dizionario di teologia biblica*, EDB (Bologna: Centro Editoriale Dehoniano, 2021), 371.

for the law, by emphasizing purity and abstinence – and Shamai’s school,³ respectively some of the accents of the peripatetic education specific to the Greco-Roman culture.

In essence, where does the problem arise?⁴ We are talking in the present about the pedagogy of Jesus. A pedagogy that considers the specificity of the person in the educational process. A different reporting to His Apostles, a pedagogy that is still as valid today as it was 2000 years ago.

The disciple in the Jewish world and Greco-Roman society

In common language “disciple” is the young man who willingly allows himself to be guided by a master or a teacher, thus becoming the student or his disciple in order to learn a trade or activity.

The word μαθητής⁵ is not found in LXX. Only the verb μανθάνω, corresponding to the Hebrew לָמַד (lāmad), it is used 35 times with the common meaning of “to learn”, “to train”, “to inform”, “to study”. Moreover, in TM the noun itself תַּלְמִיד (talṁīd) appears only in 1 Chron 25:8 when it comes to the “disciples” of the teachers who sang at the Temple in Jerusalem. The non-use of the word “disciple” in TM is probably explained by the conscience of the chosen

³ Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Dizionario di teologia biblica*, 372.

⁴ Our interest focuses on two different approaches, or more correctly put, on a perspective presented from two angles.

⁵ Moisés Silva, ed., in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 219-227; Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, „Μαθητής”, in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, IV, W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, 1933 and 1979, 417-464; TDNT 4:390–461; EDNT 2:372–74, 383–84 TDOT 8:4–10; NIDOTTE 2:801–3. D. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 6th ed. (1956); E. Schweizer, *Lordship and Discipleship* (1960); J. Lyons, *Structural Semantics: An Analysis of Part of the Vocabulary of Plato* (1963), ch. VII et passim; H. D. Betz, *Nachfolge und Nachahmung Jesu Christi im Neuen Testament* (1967); S. Freyne, *The Twelve: Disciples and Apostles: A Study in the Theology of the First Three Gospels* (1968); M. Hengel, *Nachfolge und Charisma* (1968); R. P. Meye, *Jesus and the Twelve: Discipleship and Revelation in Mark’s Gospel* (1968); D. Daube, “Responsibilities of Master and Disciples in the Gospels,” *NTS* 19 (1972–73): 1–15; E. Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (1981); M. Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers* (1981); F. F. Segovia, ed., *Discipleship in the New Testament* (1985); M. J. Wilkins, *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew’s Gospel as Reflected in the Use of the Term μαθητής* (1988); R. N. Longenecker, *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (1996); H. Perdicoyianni-Paléologou, “Les familles de διδάσκειν, de μανθάνειν et de παιδεύειν dans les papyrus (jusqu’à la fin de l’époque romaine),” *Athenaeum* 91 (2003): 550–59; R. M. Chennattu, *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship* (2006); S. W. Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (2006); H. Pattarumadathil, *Your Father in Heaven: Discipleship in Matthew as a Process of Becoming Children of God* (2008).

people that only God is his only Teacher and that only his teaching must be followed and studied. Even the descendants of the Old Testament prophets are not called תַּלְמִיד (talmîd), but מְשָׁרֵת (mešārēt) – “servants”. Thus, Joshua Navi was Moses’ “servant” (cf. Ex 24:13; 33:11), Elisha “served” Elijah (cf. 1 King 19:21), Gehazi was Elisha’s “servant” (cf. 2 King 4:12), and Baruch was only the secretary and interpreter of Jeremiah, for after the death of the prophet he did not continue his activity (cf. Jer 32:12).⁶

Regarding the rabbinic tradition, it is known that in the period before the Maccabean wars (2nd century BC), in response to the attempt to establish Greek schools of philosophy in Jerusalem (cf. 1 Mac 1:16; 2 Mac 4:9.12), appears in Judaism the “school” or “institute” of Rabbi. The word רַבִּי (rabî) is a derivative honorary title of the adjective רַב (rab) – “great,” and has the literal meaning of “my great [teacher]”. In the Judeo-Hellenistic community, it corresponds to the Greek term of διδάσκαλος – “teacher”. The one who attends the school of a Rabbi is appointed תַּלְמִיד (talmîd) from the Hebrew verb לָמַד (lāmad).

At the school of a Rabbi (then called “rabbinic school”) one could study not only the Mosaic written law, but also the oral one, known as the “tradition of the elders” (cf. Mk 7:3-5; Mt 15:2). Attending school required an intellectual effort and a long period of preparation on the part of the disciple. Only in this way could he become a “wise man” or a “rabbi”, and then be able to teach others and found his own school. According to rabbinic literature, there were in ancient times various schools of rabbis and their disciples that bore the name of “houses” (the most famous were “Hillel’s house” and “the house of Shammai”), often in contradiction with each other.

In the rabbinic schools, like the schools of philosophy in Ancient Greece, more was taught orally: the teacher repeated in front of the students from memory several times the text of the Mosaic Law. The same method of teaching was used in the transmission of interpretations, scriptural commentary, or moral maxims, except that they were concentrated as much as possible in synthetic formulas. To facilitate mnemonic learning, a Rabbi not only uttered the text out loud, but also used sung recitation.

As for the “disciple”, he basically used two methods of learning: listening and observing. On the one hand, he listened and recorded all the words of the master and his students, asked questions, and in time participated in discussions. On the other hand, he observed and followed the teacher’s gestures, trying to imitate them. The description of the various teaching and learning methods practiced in the rabbinic schools collected much later in the Talmud,

⁶ Christian Blending, „Disciple”, in Colin Brown (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, I (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1975), 480-494.

convey not only the words but also the practical examples used by a Rabbi. The apostle Paul was also formed with these methods at the school of Gamaliel, a teacher of the law famous and “honoured by all the people” (cf. Acts 5:34; 22:3; Gal 1:14).⁷

The disciples of Jesus

In the New Testament the word μαθητής is found 233 times in the four Gospels (72 in Mt; 46 in Mk; 37 in Lk; 78 in Jn) and 28 times in Acts (of which once in the female gender in FAp 9.36: μαθήτρια). As for the corresponding verb, μαθητεύω (to be a disciple, to learn, to instruct), it is found only three times in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 13:52; 27:57; 28:19) and once in the Acts of the Apostles (14:21).

The word μαθητής is used in the four Gospels to specifically indicate those who considered and accepted as their Teacher Jesus Christ. With this term was identified both the multitude that followed Jesus: “a great multitude of his disciples” (Lk 6:17), „the whole multitude of disciples” (Lk 19:37); as well as a small group of disciples: “He chose from among them twelve, whom he called Apostles” (Lk 6:13).

Even if he was not an official teacher (cf. Jn 7:15) but just a simple carpenter (cf. Mk 6:3), Jesus Christ taught and discussed in synagogues (cf. Mk 1:21-28; 6:29; Mt 4:23; 9:35; 12:9-14) and in the temple in Jerusalem (cf. Mk 11:27-12:44). He was considered by the crowd a Rabbi being asked to answer not only the religious issues, but also the legal ones of his countrymen (cf. Lk 12:13-15).

According to the Gospels, it is Jesus Christ himself who forms his group of disciples: at first four, the two pairs of brothers Simon and Andrew, James, and John (cf. Mk 1:16-20), then a fifth, Levi (Matthew), and then many others (cf. Mk 2:13-17). Later he chooses from among them only twelve (cf. Mt 10:2-5; Mk 3:14-19; Lk 6:13-16) which he sends to continue his mission (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15-18). The Disciples call him the “Master” sometimes in the Hebrew-Aramaic form of ραββί (cf. Mt 26:25.49; Mc 9:5; 11:21; 14:45; Jn 1:38.49; 3:2; 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8), but most of the time with its Greek equivalent διδάσκαλος (10 times in Mk; 6 in Mt; 12 in Lk; 3 in Jn). According to the Gospel of John it seems that the historical process of forming the group of twelve disciples was

⁷ Emilio Voigt, *Die Jesusbewegung: Hintergründe ihrer Entstehung und Ausbreitung: Eine historisch-exegetische Untersuchung über die Motive der Jesunachfolge*, BWANT 9/169, (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2008).

more complex than that presented in the Synoptic Gospels: Jesus Christ had the first contact with some of John the Baptist's disciples (cf. Jn 1:35-42) to whom others were then added (cf. 4:1).

The word "disciple" indicates in the Gospels and the disciples of John the Baptist (cf. Mt 9:14; 11:2; 14:12; Mk 2:18; 6:29; Lk 5:33; 7:18; 11:1; Jn 1:35; 3:25), that is, those who followed John and who, according to the teaching received from their master (called "Rabbi" in 3:26), prayed and fasted (cf. Mk 2:18; Lk 11:1). The disciples of John the Baptist included the apostles Andrew, Peter, and John. "Disciples" are also those who followed the teaching of the Pharisees: "disciples of the Pharisees" (Mt 22:16; Mk 2:18; Lk 5:33). And the Pharisees also presented themselves as "disciples of Moses" (9:28), that is, faithful guardians of the Law of Moses.⁸

In the book of Acts, those who believed in Jesus Christ, whether or not they knew Him during His earthly life, are called "disciples" (cf. Acts 6:1; 9:1; 10:26). Thus, after Pentecost, the term "disciple" became synonymous with those who followed "the way of the Lord" (Acts 18:25), both members of a community (Acts 6:1.2.7; 9:1.19.25.26.38; 11:26.29; 13:52; 14:20.22.28; 15:10; 18:23.27; 19:1.9.30; 20:1.30; 21:4.16), as well as one person (Acts 9:10.26.36; 16:1; 21:16). Among them are mentioned a "certain Ananias" (Acts 9:10); Saul whom the "disciples" in Jerusalem "feared him not believing he was a disciple" (Acts 9:26); in Iope a "disciple by the name of Tavita" (Acts 9:36); Timothy "who had good testimonies from the brethren of Lyra and Iconius" (Acts 16:1-2); an "old disciple" Mnason from Cyprus (Acts 21:16).⁹

In some verses the "disciples" are identified with other terms: "the saints" (Acts 9:41), "Christians" (Acts 11:26), or simply "brethren" (Acts 11:29; 15:7.10; 21:4.7). Probably, for the author of the Acts of the Apostles, "disciple" indicated all those who believed in Jesus Christ, of Hebrew or pagan origin (Acts 13:46.48.52; 14:19-22.28; 18:23.27; 19:9.30; 20:1.30), while the "saints," "Christians," or "brethren" were members with authority or office in the early church (cf. Acts 1:15; 9:13). Also, in the Acts of the Apostles, "disciple" is also used to designate the disciples of Saul (the future Apostle Paul) when he was in Damascus: „And taking him his disciples by night, they lowered him over the wall, leaving him down in a basket" (Acts 9:25).

According to the Holy Gospels, Jesus Christ calls to become His disciples whenever, regardless of the economic situation, level of culture, social position, moral character or religious life. Among them we find sinners (cf. Lk 8:2; 19:1-10),

⁸ Rengstorf, Karl Heinrich, „Μαθητής”, 417-464.

⁹ Paul Ellingworth, „ '(His) disciples' (An analysis of scribal flexibility in patterns of inclusion and omission in the Greek New-Testament)", *Novum Testamentum* 42 (2000): 114-126.

publicans (cf. Mk 2:14), righteous (cf. Lk 23:50; Jn 1:47), zealots (cf. Lk 6:15; Acts 1:13), members of the Sanhedrin (cf. Jn 7:50), fishermen (cf. Mk 1:16), wealthy (cf. Mt 27:57), married persons (cf. Mt 8:14), prostitutes (cf. Lk 8:2). The condition for becoming a disciple is to follow Him and accept His teaching.

From this point of view, important differences arise between the disciples in the rabbinic schools and those who follow Jesus Christ. Like the Greek philosophy schools, in the rabbinic schools the disciple was the one who chose the school and the teacher; in the New Testament the Saviour is the one who chooses his disciples, calling them to follow Him.¹⁰ It seems that this explains why the verb μαθητεύω (which in Greek has both the passive meaning of “to be an disciple” and the active meaning of “to make disciples”) it is met only four times in the New Testament, referring to Jesus Christ (cf. Mt 13:52; 27:57) or to those sent by Him on a mission (cf. Mt 28:19; Acts 14:21). For the same reason the verb μανθάνω is rarely used (cf. Mt 9:13; 11:29; 24:32; Mk 13:28; In 6:5; 7:15), didactic valence being rendered by preference with the verb διδάσκω (to teach [someone else]), which usually refers to Jesus Christ (44 times in the Gospels).¹¹

The call to discipleship is expressed in the four Gospels using the verb ἀκολουθέω (to follow) and the expressions ἔρχομαι ὀπίσω (to go after) and δεῦτε ὀπίσω (to follow). In classical Greek the verb ἀκολουθέω has the meaning of “to travel with someone”, “to accompany someone”, “to follow someone”.

In the New Testament this verb is found mainly in the Gospels (59 times in the Synoptic Gospels and 18 times in the Gospel of John). In the Synoptic Gospels he refers to the “great multitude” that followed Christ from one place to another (Mt 4:25; 8,1:10; 12:15; 14:13; Mk 3:7; 5:24; Lk 7:9; 9:11; 23:27); to “many sinners” who after Levi’s call follow Jesus at the lunch offered in his house (Mk 2:15); to the “women” who followed Christ from Galilee to serve Him (Mt 27:55; Mk 15:41; Lk 8:2-3). In all these examples, the action of “following” Christ is not preceded by a particular call from the teacher. Instead, there is a consequence which is the initial and definitive answer to Jesus’ call. It is expressed by the imperative ἀκολούθει μοι – „follow Me” (Mt 9:9; Mk 2:14; Lk 5:27; Jn 1:43) or the expressions ἔρχομαι ὀπίσω μου – „go after Me” ἢ δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου – „come after Me” which we find only in the Synoptic Gospels (Mt 4:19; Mk 1:17.20; Lk 9:23; 14:27).

To follow the teaching of Jesus and thus become his disciple, however, involves certain conditions: separation from family, riches, social situation (cf. Mt 4:20.22; Mk 1:18.20; Lk 5:11; 14:26-28), a true act of repentance and total

¹⁰ For a wide debate on this topic see Morna D. Hooker, *Endings: Invitations to Discipleship*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004).

¹¹ Keith J. Elliot, „Μαθητής with a Possessive in the New Testament”, *TZ* 35 (1979): 300-304.

self-renunciation that can go as far as carrying one's own cross with Christ (cf. Mk 8:34). The Savior invites to follow Him and become His disciples even to those who offer themselves spontaneously (cf. Mt 8:19-22; Lk 9:57-59.61), but one can even reach a refusal as is the case with the rich young man (cf. Mt 19:21; Mk 10:21; Lk 18:23).

In the New Testament, disciples of Jesus Christ can be divided into three concentric groups. First, a large group that includes all those who willingly followed the Savior and to which several women belong (cf. Lk 8:1-3). Of these, Jesus will choose both his "twelve" disciples (cf. Lk 6:13:17; Mt 8:21), as well as the "other seventy [and two]" whom He will send with the twelve to preach in the cities and villages where He intended to go (cf. Lk 10:1). Some will abandon Jesus during the discipleship period (cf. 6:64-66), and others will prefer, for various reasons, to remain his mysterious disciples: Joseph of Arimathea (cf. Mt 27:57) and Nicodemus (cf. Jn 19:38-39). Starting with the Acts of the Apostles, anyone who believes in Jesus Christ becomes a "disciple".

A second group of disciples consists of only the twelve "apostles" who were personally called by Jesus to follow Him and teach in His school (cf. Mk 3:16-19). The number twelve has a traditional symbolic significance, being similar to the number of tribes of Israel. After being with the Savior in His public activity for three and a half years, before ascending into heaven, they receive from the Master the mission to become teachers in turn: "Therefore, go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19).

Finally, a small circle of disciples consisting only of Peter, James, and John who accompany the Savior at certain times of His activity such as: the Transfiguration (cf. Mt 17:1-13; Mk 9:2-13; Lk 9:28-36), the miracle of the resurrection of Jairus' daughter (cf. Mk 5:37-43; Lk 8:51-56), the prayer in the garden of Gethsemane (cf. Mt 26:36-46; Mk 14:33-42). These three were "reckoned pillars" of the Church by the Apostle Paul (Gal 2:9).¹²

Regardless of the group, to be a disciple of Jesus Christ presupposes absolute fidelity to Him, expressed by following Him and practicing his teachings (cf. Mk 8:34-38; Lk 14:26-33). For the twelve, discipleship involved the very abandonment of the profession and the family (cf. Mt 19:27; Mk 10:28; Lk 18:29). After the Resurrection of Christ, they were designated as His envoys, preaching in His name the gospel to all flesh (cf. Mt 28:19). Such an attitude went beyond the normal relationship between the teacher and the disciple known until that time, which gave the word "apprentice" a new meaning. But all these requirements do not refer only to those who were the first disciples

¹² See also Christian Blendinger, „Disciple“, 480-494.

and who knew the Savior personally, they also address Christians of all times, who by baptism become “disciples” of Christ.

Apostle John in the accounts of the Synoptic Gospels and the Fourth Gospel

One of the 12 apostles of Jesus, of whom the New Testament relates, is John (Ἰωάννης). A fisherman from the Sea of Galilee, who was called by Jesus to become a disciple and apostle with his brother, James. The traditional opinion of the Church, except for some contemporary theories,¹³ recognizes John as the author of five of the writings of the New Testament: The Fourth Gospel¹⁴, Epistles 1–3 John and Revelation.¹⁵ John is mentioned in each of the disciples’

¹³ However, these biblical books show differences and similarities in style, vocabulary, and theology that lead to varied conclusions about the identity of the author. See Tracee D. Hackel, “John the Apostle, Critical Issues,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), el. ed.

¹⁴ The church father Irenaeus, ca. ad 185, asserted that John the apostle wrote the Gospel of John (*Adversus Haereses* 2.22.5; 3.1.1). The fourth-century church historian Eusebius differentiates between John the apostle and John the elder (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.1–7). He identifies the apostle as the writer of the Gospel of John and says that if Revelation was not written by the apostle, then it was probably written by the elder. Eusebius bases his statement on a difficult passage from the early second-century bishop Papias (only preserved in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.3–4).

¹⁵ The canonical order of the five John’s books does not represent the chronological order of their writing. For example, 1 John was written, in the opinion of specialists, either after the Gospel, or before, for the purpose of being a draft for the Gospel, or before the Gospel was completed by writing. As the author of the epistles, tradition has identified the “the elder John.” This John is mentioned by Papias (and quoted by Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.4) as one of two disciples of the Lord who were not members of the Twelve. (Urban C. von Wahlde, “John, Letters of,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), el. ed.. Eusebius was unclear whether 2 John and 3 John belonged to John, son of Zebedee, or another John (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III.25.3). He was the first to introduce a formal distinction between the Apostle John and the elder John (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III.39.4). This was perhaps based on a misinterpretation of Dionysius’ earlier reference “that there are two monuments in Ephesus, each bearing the name of John” (cited by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* VII.25.16; compare also *Ecclesiastical History* III.39.2–6). Jerome (ca. ad 347–420) attributed the Gospel and 1 John to the apostle, but not 2 John and 3 John. He followed Eusebius in distinguishing between two Johns and suggested 2 and 3 John may be the work of John the elder (Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, 9, NPNF2 3:364; compare, too, Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, 18) See also James P. Sweeney, “John, Second Letter of,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), el. ed.. The author of Revelation presents himself as “John,” both in the opening verses and at the end (Rev 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8), although he does not claim to be an apostle. Since he received a revelation from Jesus Christ, he is often called “John the seer.”

lists in the New Testament (Mt 10:2–4; Mk 3:16–19; Lk 6:13–16; Acts 1:13),¹⁶ it was part of the inner circle of Jesus, together with Peter and James, being a direct witness to: the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mk 5:37), the transfiguration (Mk 9:2), and the agony in the garden of Gethsemane (Mt 26:37).

According to Mark, Jesus gave the two brothers the Aramaic surname *Boanerges*, translated as “sons of thunder” (Mk 3:17). The name may be linked to their fiery temperaments (Mk 9:38–41; Lk 9:51–56).¹⁷ In this regard, Culpepper interprets the name as a sign of what they could become: mighty witnesses and voices from heaven.¹⁸ John rarely speaks in the Gospels. During the only time when he is alone with Jesus, he says: “Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us” (Mk 9:38 NIV; a shorter version is found in Lk 9:49). Jesus then corrects John and explains that the use of his name is not restricted to the disciples. This scene may be an example of John's intolerance.¹⁹

If in the Mateean story (Mt 20:20), the presence and request of the “mother of the sons of Zebedee” makes the names of the two sons related to their parents. In the Marcan account appear only the sons, remembered by their names: Jacob and John (Mk 10:35–37). In the context of Mt 20:20–28, the author insists on misunderstanding about the nature of Jesus' messianity. The third proclamation of the Passion is immediately followed by a political request, for a privileged position in the new *kingdom*. What does it tell us that the request is made, indirectly, by the mother and not, directly, by the apostles, as in the Gospel of Mark? Moreover, the mother's request is made in the midst of the circle of the 12 apostles,²⁰ to whom he revealed, for the third time, the sufferings, the scourging, the condemnation to death. In this context, the fact that the mother makes the request for the sons probably reflects negatively on them, not her.²¹

What does this detail tell us about John, about the relationship between him and his parents, especially about the relationship with his mother? His father's reputation is also mentioned in this passage, but it is insufficient for

¹⁶ Dan Nässelqvist, “John the Apostle,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), el. ed.

¹⁷ Dan Nässelqvist, “John the Apostle,” el. ed.

¹⁸ R. Alan Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994) 39–40, 50.

¹⁹ Dan Nässelqvist, “John the Apostle,” el. ed. R. A. Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 41–43.

²⁰ See the angry reaction of the other apostles on the way to Jericho, in the nearby of the Passion.

²¹ In the construction εἰπὲ ἴνα, the ἴνα is nonfinal, expressing the content of what Jesus is to say regarding James and John rather than its purpose (cf. 20:33; D. B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 475). See also David Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), el. ed.

Jesus to grant them the dignities required through their mother. The strong, domineering character of the mother, in the critical moments of the approaching Kingdom, reveals the high standard that she had not only now, but as a life attitude. A standard that, imposed on children, is expressed through a conditional love. Jesus reminds them that in the kingdom of God, he who desires to be the greatest will have to serve others, the first must be a servant of all (Mt 20:20-28). Sacrifice, the opposite of the ambition of the reward, the self-giving for other springs from an unconditional love, like that of Jesus.

When parents express a conditional love, with the aim of achieving standards by children, a fear arises in the child's heart: fear of not reaching the standard, fear of implications. Finally, it is the fear of not being loved, the fear of not being forsaken, abandoned by the parents. And this fear translates into the relationship with God. The fear of not being loved by God, of not being forsaken by Him, which leads to an intransigent attitude towards those around you. The critical spirit for the correction of others, it is actually the cry for its own justification. This explains the spirit of justice, of intransigence of the disciple John recounted in the Synoptic Gospels.

How does John relate the stories of his formation as a disciple 20-30 years after the synoptic writings, in his own Gospel?

The account in the Fourth Gospel

John is never explicitly named in the Gospel of John, probably out of the considerable respect he had for John the Baptist.²² He is indirectly mentioned in John 21:2, which says that "the sons of Zebedee" were together with Peter and some of the other disciples at the lake of Tiberias. However, one unnamed disciple is presented as closest to Jesus: he leans on Jesus' chest at the Last Supper (Jn 13:23); he acts as an intermediary between Peter and Jesus (Jn 13:24-25); he is entrusted with the care of Jesus' mother (Jn 19:26-27); he reaches the empty tomb before any other disciple (Jn 20:4); he is the first to believe in the resurrection (Jn 20:8); he recognizes the risen Lord and identifies him for Peter (Jn 21:7).

²² This aspect can be seen from the space that the author of the Gospel attaches to the role of John the Baptist in messianic preparation, both in the prologue and in chapter 1.

He is called “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (e.g., in Jn 21:20).²³ This beloved disciple is Peter’s companion. He is sometimes called “the other disciple” (Jn 18:15; 20:2).²⁴

John emphasizes through all these details that Jesus loved him unconditionally, so the emphasis moves both in the Gospel and in his epistles from justice, intransigence, to love: the unconditional love of God.

What was the event that shaped this attitude in John’s life as well? The possible answer that we can see in the description of the Gospel is related to his entrustment as a son to the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of God.²⁵ She, the one chosen by God to shape the earthly attitude of Jesus towards unconditional love, would also shape John’s attitude towards forgiveness, gentleness, compassion, love.²⁶

In this sense, the model of changing the life of the Apostle John remains a continuous challenge for the Church and contemporary society. The need to learn the unconditional love of God, characteristic of the one who becomes *a new creation* (2 Cor 5:17), having a new life, as St. John Chrysostom said,²⁷ it is

²³ Ramsay Michaels argues that the longstanding tradition that the Beloved Disciple is John the Apostle, son of Zebedee, “deserves the utmost respect” (J. Ramsay Michaels, *Gospel of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 24). Nevertheless, he concludes that the anonymity of the Beloved Disciple should be maintained. He notes that the author of the Gospel of John remains unnamed, as do many of the other characters in the Gospel, such as the woman at the well (John 4:4–42), the man healed at the pool (John 5:1–15), and the man born blind (John 9:1–38; Michaels, *Gospel of John*, 24). Michaels further proposes that the Gospel of John might be attributed to John not because of authorship, but because John the Baptist is prominent in the first chapters (Michaels, *Gospel of John*, 16–7).

²⁴ Dan Nässelqvist, “John the Apostle,” el. ed. Other suggestions for the identity of the beloved disciple include Lazarus, Thomas, John Mark, or Matthias. The beloved disciple is portrayed both as an individual and as a symbolic figure. According to John 21:24, the beloved disciple is identified as the author of the Gospel of John (see the events leading up to John 21:24 in John 21:20–23). See also, Eller, Vernard. *The Beloved Disciple: His Name, His Story, His Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); Brown, Raymond E. *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

²⁵ Vezi detalii la Constantin Preda, „Patimile și Moartea Mântuitorului după Evanghelia Sfântului Ioan (In.18,1-19,42)”, *Mitropolia Olteniei* LIV (2003), nr. 1-4, pp. 53-59.

²⁶ „The child does not need gold, but a good and skilled teacher to form it.” (*Despre slava deșartă și despre cum trebuie să își crească părinții copiii*, trad. pr. Dumitru Fecioru, revizuită de Maria Rizeanu și Ierom. Policarp Pîrvuloiu, PSB 16, *Clement Alexandrinul, Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, Sfântul Grigorie Teologul, Fericitul Ieronim, Fericitul Augustin*, (București: Basilica, 2016), 351

²⁷ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* 11.4 (PG 61,475-476), in. P. Schaff (ed.), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (NPNF)* 1-12, (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 323: „We ought to live for Christ not just because we belong to him, not just because he died for us and not just because he rose again on our behalf. We ought to live for him because we have been made into something different. We now have a new life. The old things which have passed away refer to our sins and impiety, as well as all the observances of Judaism.”

expressed through a freedom with its moral limits.²⁸ Undressing from the old human nature (Eph 4:22-24),²⁹ that belongs to a way of life alien to God,³⁰ specific to living in passions,³¹ it is followed by a restoration of the whole being. The new person, the new man, is identified with the new humanity inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Christ.³² Col 3:10 clarifies that this new man is not yet fully new, but is in the process of renewal (ἀνακαινούμενον).³³ This renewal process is focused on knowledge (ἐπίγνωσις).³⁴ Thus Christians must wait for their full transformation in the image of Christ, through a continuous “change of mind” (Rom 12:2), thought equivalent to knowledge in Col 3:10.

²⁸ Augustine, *Enchiridion* 9.31, J. Baillie (ed.) *The Library of Christian Classics* 7, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 357: „We are then truly free when God orders our lives, that is, forms and creates us not as human beings— this he has already done—but as good people, which he is now doing by his grace, that we may indeed be new creatures in Christ Jesus. Accordingly the prayer: “Create in me a clean heart, O God.” (Ps 51,10)”.

²⁹ Origen, On Psalm 91.12-13, in *CCL* 69, 215: „The “old man” includes all born as earthly men in their old nature.²¹ It is this “old man,” this ancient condition of humanity, that is put off in Christ. Although his body continues, he nonetheless undergoes a change to new life engendered by living baptism. What he was has been “put off.” His old life is renewed by the holy water and the copious mercy of the anointing. He becomes new rather than old, whole rather than corrupt, fresh rather than enfeebled, an infant rather than an old man, eternal rather than ephemeral.”

³⁰ Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Dead* 45.6, in *CCL* 2, 982: „The apostle clearly identifies the old man. For he “put off the old man which belongs to your former manner of life,” not with respect to the decay of any substance. For he is telling us to put away not the flesh but those things that he has elsewhere shown to be oriented to the fleshly way of life, indicting not the body as such but its works.”

³¹ Jerome, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 2.4.22 (*PL* 26, 507C–508A): „The “old nature” whom he tells them to put off has, in my opinion, been aged by wickedness. For, going constantly astray in his former way of life and in the desires of waywardness and acting like a beast in works of corruption, he himself suffers corruption and decay.... But the Word of God kills in such a way as to make the dead one come alive. He then seeks the Lord whom he did not know before his death. He does not corrupt but kills the old man. ... As the outer man decays the inner man is renewed.”

³² Clement Alexandrinul folosește expresia: „omul cel nou, replăsmuit în Duhul Sfânt al lui Dumnezeu”. Clement Alexandrinul, *Cuvânt către elini* 112,3, PSB 4, p. 154

³³ Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa asserts: „Those who, according to Paul’s advice, have stripped off the old man, as a filthy garment, together with his deeds and lusts, and have clothed your own in the bright garments of the Lord, as those shown on the mount of transfiguration, rather, have clothed yourself in our Lord Jesus Christ himself and in love, that is, in his robe, and you have become in his image, becoming uncaring and more divine...” Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa, *Tâlcuire amănunțită la Cântarea Cântărilor* 1, PSB 29, p. 118.

³⁴ „To be a disciple is to learn from the Lord all that brings you near to Him, so that we may follow the Lord, that is, to listen to His words, to believe and submit to Him as a master, king, physician and teacher of the truth, in the hope of eternal life”. (*Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, Despre botez*, trad. pr. Dumitru Fecioru, revizuirea traducerii: Policarp Pîrvuloiu și Adrian Muraru; PSB 4, *Sfântul Vasile cel Mare. Scrieri dogmatice și exegetice*, (București: Basilica, 2011), 198.

Knowledge is commensurate with the image of the One who built it (κατ' εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν), which by allusion to Gen 1:27, identifies the Christian with the new creation, the new humanity renewed by God in Christ.

Conclusion

The synoptic gospels present the Apostle John, during the three years of discipleship next to Jesus Christ, in a different way than the Gospel of John. Along with his older brother, James, and the Apostle Peter, he is part of the small, intimate group, which is present at all the important events of the Savior's ministry. The nickname "son of thunder", his direct interventions characterized by total dedication, intransigence, ambition, judgment can be understood in the light of the description of his parents, father and mother. A father fully dedicated to his work, known in the highest circles of the aristocracy in Jerusalem; an intransigent mother, willing to fight for her children, regardless of their critical situations. Jesus chooses to change John into a disciple of "love," of gentleness, of compassion by accepting him, by unconditional love, and by entrusting him as the son of Mary, the Mother of God. The paradigm of life is shaped in his new relationship, a fact proved by the writing of the fourth Gospel: he does not mention his name, he describes himself as the disciple "whom Jesus loved", the emphasis on love is twice as great as that of truth and justice. Thus, the model of changing the life of the Apostle John remains a continuous challenge for the Church and contemporary society.

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