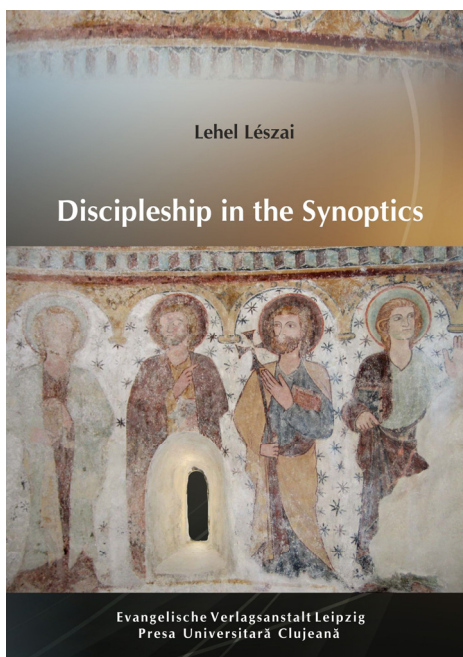


*RÁD András László*¹:

Lehel Lészai: *Discipleship in the Synoptics*, Presa Universitară Clujeană – Evangelische Verlagsanstalt Leipzig, 2017, ISBN 978-606-37-0276-1

Most of the readers of this journal are used to finding positive reviews in this section written with the purpose of recommending a worthy piece of academic literature to our peers. With the intention of breaking this pattern, allow me to provide the possible readers with a set of warnings with regard to whom I do *not* recommend this book to. So, if you do not find yourself in any of the predicaments below, do consider picking up a copy of the book as it will not disappoint you.

I do not recommend this book to those who approach academic texts with a hard-line expectation as to the necessity of having circular sentences interwoven with specialized terminology. Lészai uses a linguistic register accessible even to laypersons and presents a difficult topic that has been the focus of scholarly debate for centuries. In the foreword, Professor Péter Balla, Rector of the Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, considers this



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work that studies the “relationship between God and men [...] in the light of discipleship” a great asset for Hungarian theological literature.

If you expect that the interpretation of the notion and practice of discipleship includes an exclusively Protestant bias based on the background of the author, this monograph is not for you. The ecumenical sensitivity of the book is highlighted early on as the motto is quoted from Mother Teresa of Calcutta, but the constant susceptibility of the author is evident in every formulated conclusion.

Should you expect discipleship to be a concern of theological institutes and distant from your personal narrative, avoid this book because it does not deal with discipleship as a result of formal training. The relationship it highlights opens up the possibility of participation to the reader in the sense that the author, in his consciously inclusive wording, draws you in and emphasizes that you may also become a disciple in your own context as a member of an unbreakable chain that spans over millennia. As such, we are witnesses of God’s plan unfolding throughout history.

Do not seek absolute truths and axioms, rather expect a fruitful dialogue with the author who engages in a pertinent scientific panoply of the most relevant sources. He embarks on a tough endeavour and does so with humility and gratitude.

If you are able to provide a fairly certain off-the-cuff definition to the notion of discipleship, you might find yourself slowly shedding preconceptions while the author takes you on a historical journey into the Anglo-Saxon theological tradition highlighting that the differentiation of the notions of apostle and disciple took a fairly long time.

If you’d rather see the Holy Spirit floating above primordial waters and be present in tongues of flame but not in scholarly processes, this is not the book for you because Lészai brings a refreshing approach of prayer before leaning over Scripture and trying to comprehend its complexities. This is a trait we would definitely welcome in other works of theological reasoning.

If you think that bypassing the establishment of the foremost scholars is a reason enough for being shunned, you will find that Lészai bravely takes on this challenge and returns to the exegesis of the original text focusing on the valuable yield of the historical method’s application. He presents the topic of the book embedded in the fabric of history, in which disciples of the 21st century have to find the possibilities of self-interpretation. A subjective range of interpretation on my behalf includes a wishful observation: perhaps the faded mural on the cover page provides an unconscious visual representation of this possibility.

If you consider that faith is a thing obtained by pious churchgoers and not needed by you, stop reading the monograph because Lészai raises thoughts and faith in the readers during the whole 6 chapters, just as he stated in his intention with this research.

If you are still not dissuaded by this time, you must truly be interested in finding out how discipleship is portrayed in the synoptics. Let me try and give you some further warnings.

If you consider that the synoptics undoubtedly belong together, buckle up for a detailed exposition on why this is not axiomatic. The author summarizes several essential hypotheses regarding the correlations between the gospels and shows masterful finesse in taking a stand and building a path towards new possible resolutions as a groundwork for the following chapter.

If you think healing should be done by doctors, service by soldiers, and preaching by priests, you are in for a surprise because in chapter three Lészai notes that the Lord's mission undertaken by Jesus Christ is still an open call to all humanity. We are all called to continue teaching, preaching, healing, serving, and even suffering. The author seamlessly slides into the fourth chapter by quoting Donald A. Hagner: "We cannot understand the nature of Jesus' sending and the meaning of his teaching without knowing very well the religious life of his time." Because of this, in the next chapter, during the examination of the disciples' call, the author tries to gain an insight into the religious life of their era by considering the relationship between other masters and disciples.

If you consider that disciples were instant friends with one another, the author's detailed analysis in chapter four will prove you wrong. He focuses on the radical changes that had to take place in the lives and mentality of the disciples for them to get along. The abundance of problems that arise from clashing theories pertaining to varying aspects of the disciple's commission are equidistantly and fairly presented, and the fact that the author does not choose to commit to any specific side denotes a strong attitude defined by humility rather than anything else.

If you fondly cradle stereotypes of disciples being bearded men, be prepared to have your views brought up to date as the author gives a wonderful exposition on the importance of the service of women disciples.

If you think 160 pages is enough to circumnavigate the ins-and-outs of the notion of calling, note that the disciples were not only called but also sent. The author provides a detailed analysis on how this occurred, who was the agent, where they were sent, and why this came about.

If following through on a tiresome project that lasts for years seems like a dull endeavour, consider the author's story in chapter six. Lészai voiced his doubt that he would not be able to properly deal with such a huge and ramifying subject and questioned his own scholarly efficiency. He sincerely writes: "Investigating different issues I had to deal with the cruel fact that very often I was forced to investigate certain aspects of certain topics – not at all unimportant – only tangentially." Due to the fact that his supplementary work is so valuable for our region, I am thankful that his doubt did not prevail, and this monograph was born. This book is not merely a work of exploration as it dedicates an important part of the final observations chapter to portraying the contemporary significance of the study. Honest reflection makes it possible for the author to draw some general, unchanged, normative conclusions for the disciples who live at the threshold of the third millennium despite the fact that there is a gap of nearly two thousand years of radical change between us and the disciples' original vocation and mission.

Lehel Lészai ends his work with the following: "The triune God has called, chosen and sent us making us worthy to become his serving and suffering fellow-workers according to his unending grace." So, read this book at your own risk, as it might just move you towards a life of service with all that implies. Do not say you have not been warned!