

THE SERVANT IN A FELLOWSHIP OF SUFFERING AND LIFE WITH THE LORD

An exegesis of John 12,26

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Introduction

The Synoptic Gospels, while visualizing discipleship as a fellowship in suffering and life with the Master, prefer to emphasize in a particular way the communion of the disciple in the suffering and death of Jesus. After his decision to follow Christ, the disciple is associated in a very special way to him and accompanies his Master on the way which leads to the cross. Hence, the communion of the disciple with Jesus is accounted for in the terms of the cross.

The Gospel of John underlines the intimate relationship of faith and love between the Lord and the disciples, who are completely aware that all they are and have is a gift of God. Jesus promises to those who follow him a complete fellowship in suffering and life with him, who is now in the Father's abode where he went to prepare for them a place (Jn 14,1-4) in order that they may be "there where he is" – this being the typical Johannine note of the Christian discipleship. It is a supra-temporal and a supra-spatial promise which Christ makes to all Christians of all ages. Jn 12,26 thus becomes central for one's understanding of discipleship in the Fourth Gospel: «If any one serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if any one serves me, the Father will honour him.»

This study will consider the context wherein the Evangelist has placed this verse, since in John, in particular, the context is also a carrier of theological ideas which influence the singular elements that make up the whole context. Thus, the study of the dynamism of the pericope will shed light on the right understanding of the verse itself. The exegesis of the verse will follow; this endeavours to usher out the significance the Evangelist has put into this saying about discipleship. The study of the similitudes and divergences of this Johannine saying of Jesus with that of the Synoptics (Mk 8,34; Mt 16,24; Lk 9,23 and

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Mt 10,38; Lk 14,27), will bring out the particularities of the viewpoint of John as compared to that of the Synoptics.

The context of John 12,20-36

The verse finds immediate context in the pericope 12,20-36 near the end of chapters 11 and 12 of the Gospel of John, which owing to their thematic importance, serve as a conclusion to the first part of the book and an introduction to the second part, focusing as they do on the hour of glorification of Jesus. Brown, in fact, groups these chapters together under the theme of «Jesus moves toward the hour of death and glory».¹ The fact that they are situated within the context of “the passover of the Jews” (11,55; 12,1) already suggests that they are meant to serve as a prelude to the passion narrative. The same do the references to the objections of the disciples to Jesus’ decision to go to Judea where he had previously found hostility (cf. 11,5-16).

Chapter 11,1-44 recounts the “sign” of Lazarus’ resurrection which underlines that Jesus is the resurrection and the life (11,25-26; cf. also 11,11.23.43) and that this had happened «so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it» (11,4; cf. also 11,40). The following verses (11,45-54) narrate the consequences that this miracle had on the population but, especially, on the Pharisees who decide that Jesus should be put to death for, in the words of the high priest, «it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish» (11,50). This comment is underlined by the Evangelist by what he says in vv.51-52, interpreting it in universalistic terms. Verses 55-57 serve as a transition from this “sign” to that which follows in Chapter 12.²

Chapter 12 begins with two significant narratives: the Anointing at Bethany (12,1-8) and the Triumphal Entry in Jerusalem (12,12-15) both of which are presented by the Evangelist as a preparation for the passion of Jesus. In fact, in the Anointing scene Jesus refers the action of Mary to “the day of my burial” (12,7) while the messianic tenor of the second narrative is quite visible. Dodd summarizes the import of this Triumphal Entry saying that «it is a *sēmeion* of

1. Cf. R.E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, I (AB 29; New York 1966) 419.429; E. RASCO, “Christus, granum frumenti”, *Verbum Domini* 37(1959) 19. C.H. DODD, although he suggests that these two chapters constitute two different episodes (11,1-53: the sixth episode; and 12,1-36: the seventh episode), seems to underline just as well their thematic unity. In fact, he says that the theme of chapter 11 is «Christ Himself manifested as Resurrection and Life by virtue of His self-sacrifice», *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge 1953) 368. It is the same theme, more or less, of the seventh episode: life through death to which Lazarus is the privileged witness (cf. Jn 12,17-18).
2. Cf. DODD, *Interpretation*, 369; BROWN, *Gospel according to John*, I, 445-446.

the universal sovereignty of Christ as Conqueror of death and Lord of life, and as such the sequel to His (symbolic) death».³

In the verses set between the two narratives (12,9-11) the Evangelist underlines the hostility of the chief priests against Jesus stating that they had decided to kill also Lazarus since because of him many people were believing in Jesus. The verses 12,16-18 are in themselves a comment on the crowd's attitude towards Jesus, while serving also to link all this to the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead. Verse 19, reporting the statement of the Pharisees that "the world has gone after him" is the link with what follows.

Next comes the pericope where the verse under study is situated (12,20-36). This is followed by what commentators consider to be the epilogue of the first part of the Gospel (12,37-50).⁴

The Pericope 12,20-36

Brown considers this scene, from the viewpoint of thought sequence, as «an ideal conclusion to chapters 11 and 12».⁵ Many times in this Gospel we have heard Jesus state that his hour had not yet come (2,4; 7,30; 8,30), the hour of his return to his Father through crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. In 11,4 we had heard Jesus say that the death of Lazarus was for the glorification of the Son of Man. Now this hour of glorification has come (12,23). The immediately preceding scenes include a series of actions which show the imminence of the passion of Jesus and, thus, of his being lifted up in the resurrection and drawing all men to himself to give them life (12,32; cf. v.24). Also, the fact that this is not exclusive to the Jewish people is underlined by a series of universalistic references which reach their climax in the coming of the Greeks (12,20).

It is, in fact, their approach which gives the occasion to Jesus to make the following speech. The inclusion of this incident by the Evangelist is not to be considered as insignificant.⁶ For even if it were possible to speak of 'insignificant

3. *Interpretation*, 371; BROWN says that it is «an affirmation of a universal kingship that will be achieved only when he is lifted up in death and resurrection», *Gospel according to John*, I, 463.
4. Cf. DODD, *Interpretation*, 379-83; BROWN, *Gospel according to John*, I, 481-93 who refers to this section as the evaluation and summation of Jesus' ministry.
5. *Gospel according to John*, I, 469.
6. Cf., for example, Lagrange who together with others links this incident with the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem saying that the Greeks' question was mere curiosity. Cf. G. FERRARO, *L'Ora di Cristo nel Quarto Vangelo: Analisi di Strutture Letterarie* (Excerpta ex dissertazione; Roma 1970) 23, footnote 3.

scenes' in other parts of the Fourth Gospel, it is much the less here where the moment presents itself as solemn and the themes of utmost importance⁷ Their coming gives Jesus the opportunity to make a very important revelation about Himself and His mission.⁸ They stand for the whole world which shows that the unfolding of the hour assumes universalistic dimensions. «These Greeks are the vanguard of mankind coming to Christ».⁹ Brown synthesizes the matter thus: «The coming of the Gentiles is so theologically important that the writer never tells us if they got to see Jesus, and indeed they disappear from the scene in much the same manner that Nicodemus slipped out of sight in ch.3».¹⁰ It is only a right understanding of this incident of the approach of the Greeks to Jesus that can adequately explain his exclamation that the hour of glorification of the Son of Man has come (v.23).

In fact the main theme of this pericope is the glorification of Jesus and of the Father which is supported by a number of other themes which illustrate this reality and revelation, even through contrast. Owing to the number of themes present in this pericope, Brown refers to it as «a climactic scene» while Rasco states that this brings out the importance of the pericope which assumes the role of an introduction to the imminent drama of the passage of Jesus to the Father (13,1).¹¹

Rasco also points out that in this pericope the themes of death and glorification of Jesus are so intimately connected one to another that they identify themselves. The death of Christ is his glorification. It is under this light that the Evangelist wants the reader to approach his passion narrative.¹² Barrett

7. Cf. FERRARO, *L'Ora di Cristo*, 24; also C.K. BARRETT, *The Gospel according to St John: An Introduction with commentary and notes on the Greek Text* (London 1962) 350.
8. Cf. RASCO, "Christus, granum frumenti", 20.
9. DODD, *Interpretation*, 371; cf. also BARRETT, *Gospel according to St John*, 350; M. DOSIO, *L'Ora di Cristo nel discepolato: saggio di teologia biblica giovannea* (Roma 1980) 14; J. JEREMIAS, *Jesu Verheißung für die Wölken* (Stuttgart 1956) 31-32 as quoted in FERRARO, *L'Ora di Cristo*, 25. This is also the line of thought that St Augustine follows in his Commentary of the Gospel of John. He says: «Ex occasione igitur istorum gentilium qui eum videre cupiebant, annuntiat futuram plenitudinem gentium; et promittit iam iamque adesse horam glorificationis suae, qua facta in caelis, gentes fuerant crediturae.» *In Ioannis Evangelium in: Opera Omnia di Sant'Agostino: Commentario al Vangelo di San Giovanni — Edizione Bilingue* (Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana XXIV/1-2; Roma 1985-6) Tract. 51,8.
10. *Gospel according to John*, I, 470.
11. Cf. BROWN, *Gospel according to John*, I, 469; RASCO, "Christus, granum frumenti", 20; also M. DE LONGE, *Jesus: Stranger from heaven and Son of God: Jesus Christ and the Christians in Johannine Perspective* (SBL SBS 11; Montana 1977) 173.
12. Cf. RASCO, "Christus, granum frumenti", 20: «Et revera in hac pericopa intimius quam alibi coniunguntur sane usque ad identificationem, thema mortis et glorificationis. Mors Christi

adds that the death of Jesus is seen, here, as the climax of his complete obedience to the Father and thus becomes the judgement of this world (v.31), the exaltation of the Son of Man (vv.23.32), the fruition of the whole ministry (v.24) and a challenge to Israel (vv.35-36).¹³ This is, in Johannine terms, the "hour of glorification" which comprises the totality of the paschal mystery and the convergence point of the whole public life of Jesus.¹⁴

The dynamism of this pericope as presented hereunder will help us understand the different sections of the whole scene which are, in turn, strictly connected one to another. The speech-answer of Jesus (vv.23.30.35) is always introduced by the verb *legō*. In vv. 23 and 30 this verb is united with the other 'answering' verb *apokrinomai*. The key words of every speech of Jesus (indicated in brackets) underline the theme treated in every section and which sheds light on the main theme of the whole pericope:

- 1st speech: the hour of glorification — its impact on Jesus and his servant;
- 2nd speech: the judgement of the world through the exaltation of Christ;
- 3rd speech: the contrast between light and darkness — necessity for the people to decide owing to the exaltation of Christ.

est eius glorificatio. Utrumque thema paulatim per evangelium evolutum erat, hic iam commiscetur. Auctor nos veluti admonet ut sub hoc lumine eventus Passionis legamus.»

13. Cf. *Gospel according to St John*, 350-351; also K. TSUCHIDO, "Tradition and redaction in John 12,1-43", *New Testament Studies* 30(1984) 613.
14. Cf. FERRARO, *L'Ora di Cristo*, 186-187; also BARRETT, *Gospel according to St John*, 350; DOSIO, *L'Ora di Cristo*, 8.28; H., VAN DEN BUSSCHE, "Si le grain de blé ne tombe en terre" *Bible et Vie Chrétienne* 5(1954) 55.57.

The dynamism of the pericope

- I. 12,20-22 : Introduction (Some Greeks want to ‘see’ Jesus);
 12,23-28 : Speech — Answer (*hōra*: vv. 23.27.27; *doksaō*: 4x in vv.23.28 thus enclosing the whole speech; *pouchē*: vv.24.24.27; the stem *diakon*- 3x in v.26);
- II. 12,29 : Reaction of the crowd — Incomprehension (links up with the preceding verse in that the crowd reacts to the sound);
 12,30-32.33 : Speech — Answer of Jesus (*hupsoō*: v.32; *krisis*: v.31; *kosmos*: v.31);
- III. 12,34 : Reaction of the crowd — Incomprehension (links up with the preceding verse in that the crowd takes up what Jesus had said about himself, including also the important verb *hupsoō*);
 12,35-36a.36b : Speech — Answer of Jesus (*phōs*: vv.35.35.36(x3); *peripatein*: v.35.35; *skotia*: v.35; *pisteuō*: v.36);
- Conclusion (Jesus “hides himself”).¹⁵

The verse 12,26 within the pericope

The main theme and the dynamism of the whole pericope will enlighten the right understanding of the verse which, in turn, sheds light also on the whole context. Some authors believe that « in vss. 20-33, what is being discussed is the ultimate destiny of Jesus’ disciples, which is directly connected with the “lifting

15. A similar schema is presented by FERRARO, *L’Ora di Cristo*, 27. X. LÉON-DUFOUR, “Trois chiasmes johanniques (Jn 12,23-32; 6,35-40; 5,19-30)”, *New Testament Studies* 7(1960-61) 249-251 and A. DI MARCO, *Il chiasmo nella Bibbia: contributi di stilistica strutturale—ricerche e proposte* (Torino 1980) 145-146 propose a chiasmic structure of 12,23-32 which, they contend, «sottointende la teologia giovannea sull’unione del discepolo e del maestro» (DI MARCO, *Il chiasmo nella Bibbia*, 145). They do not find a place in this chiasmic structure to 12,29-30, which as they say, break the structure. So they unite them to 12,33-35. This shows the fragility of this position.

up — glorification” of the Son». ¹⁶ However, I think that although there is an intimate relationship between Jesus and his disciples, the pericope is above all Christological. Still, we cannot deny that «Jesus and his exaltation can be spoken of only in terms of its significance for his followers. One can treat Jesus and those who belong to him only together». ¹⁷ Thus the ecclesial significance of the pericope, although always subordinate to the Christological one, is also important.

The disciple is related intimately to Christ, his Lord. The disciple believes in the Light, and, thus, becomes the son of Light (cf. v.36). He listens to the word of Jesus: “I am the Light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (8,12). He is united so much to Christ that there is almost an identification between one and the other. Through his uncompromising behaviour, lived always in complete obedience to the will of the Father, the disciple becomes a continuing appeal to the world to decide for Jesus, to forsake darkness in order to embrace Light itself. It is a way of life, which like that of Jesus, brings about persecution and suffering from those who are interested to remain in the realm of sin. This implies that the disciple, like his Master, has to renounce himself and make the experience of suffering and death in order to be honoured by the Father. ¹⁸

The intimate relation that there is between Christ and his disciples is made visible in a most particular way in the first section of the whole discourse of Jesus (12,23-28), the immediate context of our verse. The verb *doksazō* in vv. 23 and 28 (3x) makes an inclusion of the whole section, thus calling for an interpretation in the light of this glorification. The same does the noun *hōra* in vv. 23 and 27 (2x). This speech explains what is meant by the “hour of glorification”; it explains what is meant by Jesus when he says that “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” (v.23). It is the death which has as its end the bearing of fruit which is not merely a separate and successive moment from the disintegration of the grain of wheat, which became a seed, but it is already contained in it (v.24). It is, again, the total gift of oneself, of one’s life to God and to others even to the point of death wherein one finds the true significance of life (v.25). It is, finally, the complete obedience of one’s will to God even though this perturbs one’s soul, creating no small suffering (v.27). The recompense of all

16. Cf., for example, DE LONGE, *Jesus: Stranger from heaven*, 174. In the lifting up — glorification of the Son he sees the «bringing together in the Father’s house (14,1-3) of all God’s children who are scattered over the whole world».
17. M. VELLANICKAL, “Discipleship according to the Gospel of John”, *Jeevadhara* 10(1980) 145.
18. Cf. LÉON-DUFOUR, “Trois chiasmas johanniques”, 250.

this is the honour of the Father, which, again, is not a separate, successive moment but is simultaneous to one's self-renunciation and self-sacrifice (v.28¹⁹).

The passage between Christ and the disciple is quite easy to make at this point. While v.23 clearly refers to Jesus himself followed immediately by v.24, which explicates in parabolic form the "hour of glorification", v.25 is left quite ambiguous as regards its application. It can refer both to Jesus and to the disciples, applying to them that which was said of Christ before. Here, in this verse, they have become almost identified. This is brought to its ultimate consequence in v.26 when Jesus promises his disciples that "where I am, there shall my servant be also".²⁰ At this point the complete fellowship between Jesus and his disciples is transparent. Schweizer says in this regard:

The last phrase (v.26) shows that v.25, which one would at first apply to Jesus, has, quite as a matter of course, been extended to the disciples in the same sense in which it is applied to Jesus. This seems so self-evident that one can no longer even say whether a particular phrase refers to Jesus or to his disciples. It holds good for both because they have reached full communion. An all-embracing "being where he is" has been granted to whosoever follows him.²¹

And it is in this spirit that verse 12,26 will be studied.

19. Note that in the voice that comes from heaven the verb *doKsazō* is used once in the aorist and once in the future. BROWN, following THÜSING, says that a plausible explanation of this is that «the aorist refers to the whole ministry of Jesus, *including the hour...* The past tense used by the heavenly voice means that God has heard the prayer and accomplished that glorification in the hour now begun... The future glorification of the divine name will be accomplished by the exalted Christ who, as vs. 32 assures us, will draw all men to himself», *Gospel according to John*, I, 476-477.
20. Cf. RASCO, "Christus, granum frumenti", 75-76: «Illa oscillatio versuum 25-26 inter Christum et discipulos suos, fortasse sub luce theologica sufficienter explicari potest. Graeci volebant Iesum videre (vv.20-22) et Iesus "respondet" affirmando horam glorificationis advenisse (v.23) per exaltationem in cruce, qui "ad eius horam pertinet coadunatio communitatis", et sic saltem indirecte responsum Graecis datur per passionem eius, ad Iesum tamquam exaltatum, accessum habent. Via igitur glorificationis per mortem transit (v.24); haec est lex cui Christus ex amore sese subiecit, quae directe quidem ad eum applicatur, ita tamen ut non excludatur, immo quodammodo exigatur, eiusdem legis ad suos applicatio... Haec vero lex iam in versu 25 directe ad Christi discipulos applicatur ... potissimum ratione illius inseparabilitatis vitae discipulorum a Iesu, illius solidaritatis consequentis sacrificium Christi.» Cf. also BROWN, *Gospel according to John*, I, 474.
21. E. SCHWEIZER, *Lordship and Discipleship* (SBT 28; London 1960) 86; F.B. WESTCOTT says that «the truth expressed in vss 24-25 is applied specially to the claims of discipleship. Service is progressive (comp. 21,19ff) and the effort of 'following' does not fail its issue.» Moreover, he notes as remarkable the repetition of the pronouns in v.26. *The Gospel according to John with Introduction and Notes* (London 1958) 181.

John 12,26

Since this verse, together with the preceding two, seems to be an insertion between v.23 and vv.27-28, product of editorial rearrangement,²² some authors tend to think that they are not Johannine. Rasco established that the literary criteria indicate Johannine paternity to vv.24-26. Verse 26, he says, «implies more certain criteria of authenticity».²³ This verse, in fact, contains one of the Johannine characteristics, that is *(e)an (mē)tis*, used twice: *ean emoi tis diakonē* and *ean tis emoi diakonē*.²⁴ There is also chiasm which is favoured by John in the central part of the phrase.²⁵ Finally, there is also the typical Johannine use of the pronoun *emos* instead of *mou*. In our text this is combined to the noun with a repetition of the article, which thus becomes exclusive: *ho diakonos ho emos*.²⁶

The verse opens with a *protasis*, followed by an *apodosis*, which in turn is followed by two promises of Jesus to those who decide to serve him in following him. The verse is thus structured:

A	<i>ean emoi tis diakonē,</i>			
	<i>emoi akoloutheitō,</i>			
		<i>kai hopou</i>		
			<i>eimi</i>	
B		<i>ekei kai</i>		<i>egō</i>
				<i>ho diakonos ho emos</i>
			<i>estai</i>	
A ¹	<i>ean tis emoi diakonē</i>			
	<i>timēsei auton ho patēr.</i>			

22. Cf. BROWN, *Gospel according to John*, I, 471.

23. "Christus, granum frumenti", 14.

24. Cf. E. SCHWEIZER, *Ego eimi ... Die religionsgeschichtliche Herkunft und theologische Bedeutung der johanneischen Bildreden, zugleich ein Beitrag zur Quellenfrage des vierten Evangeliums* (Göttingen 1939) 93, as quoted by RASCO, "Christus, granum frumenti", 14.

25. DI MARCO says on the use of chiasm in the Fourth Gospel that «il vangelo di Giovanni è opera non solo di un grande teologo, ma di un grande artista. Teologia e arte vi sono scambievolmente complementari.» *Chiasmo nella Bibbia*, 140.

26. Cf. RASCO, "Christus, granum frumenti", 14.

The *protasis* in A finds its equivalent in A¹ (although here *tis* is put before *emoi*²⁷), forming a saying which is synthetically parallel and creating an inclusion. The centre of the structure of the verse is, then, characterized by the chiasm that there is between the subject (*egō* and *ho diakonos ho emos*) and the verb (*eimi* and *estai*) of the two parts of the phrase (clearly indicated by *kai hopou* and *ekei kai*). Silva comments on this, saying that «the chiasmic disposition of the *logion* in the Fourth Gospel underlines the dialectic union of both moments in the following of Christ».²⁸

The *protasis* is formulated by *ean* together with the verb in the subjunctive present. This conditional phrase indicates eventuality and iteration²⁹ which, with the verb in the present, refers to the future.³⁰ In the Johannine conditional statements the *protasis* and *apodosis* are integral one to another. Together they explain what it means to be Jesus' disciple.³¹ This is also true of our verse. In the central part of the *logion* the verb *eimi* is considered to refer to the future, a present with a future value.³² This is confirmed by the use of the future tense in the second part of the phrase, *estai*.³³

The condition which opens the phrase is an invitation to one and all, leaving everyone in full freedom of choice. It includes, taking account of the whole

27. Some authorities change the order of the first *protasis* putting *tis* before *emoi* to make it conforming with that in A¹. These include the capital-letter manuscripts D and Θ, the small-letters manuscripts f^{1,13}, 33, 565 and others. The majority text (M), moreover, puts *diakonē* before *tis*. However, the order as it presents itself is witnessed by the Papyrus (P) 66 and, probably also, 75, as well as by the capital-letter manuscripts R, A, B, K, L, W, Ψ and 0250 and some small-letter manuscripts such as 892 and 1241. The present order creates also a chiasm between the pronoun and the indefinite pronoun. This will be discussed shortly.
28. S. GONZALEZ SILVA, "El seguimiento de Cristo en los logia Akolouthiein", *Claretianum* 14(1974) 158.
29. Cf. F. BLASS/A. DEBRUNNER, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature* (Chicago/London 1961) § 371(4).
30. Cf. Idem, § 373(1).
31. J.S. SIKER-GIESELER, "Disciples and Discipleship in the Fourth Gospel: A canonical approach", *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 10(1980) 213-214: The conditional statements where the disciples are the subject include 11,9.10 (those who walk in the day will not stumble); 11,40 (those who believe will see the glory of God); 14,7 (those who know Jesus will keep his word and commandment); 14,15.23 (those who keep his commandment will abide in Jesus' love). Siker-Gieseler says that «both the *protasis* and *apodosis* in each condition are part of being Jesus' disciple. Each is integral to the other. The conditions appear miscellaneous, and in most cases the context lends little help in interpreting the conditions, which have a maxim-like quality to them.» This latter statement, obviously, does not apply in our case.
32. Cf. BLASS/DEBRUNNER, *Greek Grammar*, § 323(1).
33. The same formula is used in Jn 7,34 and 14,3. The link with 12,26 of these verses will be discussed later.

context, not only the Jews but also those who came from outside this people. In fact, the formulation of the conditional phrase as well as the general tenor of the Fourth Gospel allows us to state that this is an invitation that Jesus makes to all those — whoever they may be — who read or listen to these words.

This saying of Jesus includes no less than four uses of the possessive pronoun *emos* which have to be coupled to the use of the pronoun *egō*. According to Westcott, their use is in each case emphatic.³⁴ We need also note the internal chiasm in A and A¹. While in A the pronoun is put first, in A¹ it follows *tis*. This chiasmic form (*emoi tis* in A, and *tis emoi* in A¹) gives prominence to the pronoun. It underlines the intimate personal relation to which Jesus is inviting his disciple, a relation which will find its fulfillment in a complete fellowship.

Specific to this Johannine saying on discipleship is the verb *diakonein*, which is used twice. The verb is only used once more in John, also in this chapter, in relation to Martha's service to Jesus. Also used in this *logion* is the noun *diakonos*. The noun is used twice more in the Fourth Gospel, in the context of the miracle of Cana, when the waiters are referred to as *diakonoi*. What is meant, in this context, by these words?

According to Beyer, *diakonein* «has the special quality of indicating very personally the service rendered to another. It is closest to *hupēreteō*, but in *diakoneō* there is a stronger approximation to the concept of a service of love».³⁵

Beyer states that there are three meanings to the verb *diakonein* in secular Greek:

- a. to wait at table;
- b. more generally: to provide or care for;
- c. to serve in a comprehensive sense.

In Greek mentality serving is not very dignified since ruling, and not serving, is proper to man. Service acquires a higher value only when rendered to the state. Judaism, as part of eastern thinking, does not find anything unworthy in service. The relation of a servant to his master is accepted, especially when he

34. Cf. *Gospel according to John*, 181.

35. H.W. BEYER, "Diakoneō", *TDNT*, II, 81 (to whom I am indebted in this part). E. BEST compares *diakonos* to *doulos* saying that the latter can refer to the status of an individual while the former to a particular kind of unimportant or degrading service. He, however, admits that this can involve a service of a personal nature freely offered. *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (JSNTSS 4; Sheffield 1981) 126.

serves a great master. This, therefore, attains a supreme value when the service is rendered to God.

The New Testament moves along this line. However, «Jesus' attitude to service is completely new as compared with the Greek understanding. The decisive point is that He sees in it the thing which makes a man His disciple».³⁶

Even when in the New Testament the term is used in its original sense, "to wait at table" (cf., for example, Lk 17,8; Jn 12,2), one can notice the appraisal of service that Jesus makes, especially in his ethical estimation of the relation between serving and being served (Lk 22,26-27). In fact, Jesus institutes «a new pattern of human relationships».³⁷ Mt 25,42-44 proves this. Here the term comes to have the full sense of active Christian love for the neighbour and as such is a mark of true discipleship of Jesus. Moreover, Mk 10,44-45 states the role of Jesus as a servant which is explained in 10,45b to the extent of giving his life for the redemption of all. Hence, it results that *diakonia* «is of the essence of the messianic ministry in which the disciples are called upon to participate — which is to say, it is of the essence of discipleship».³⁸ Quoting Brandt, Beyer states: «*diakonein* is one of those words which presuppose a Thou, and not a Thou towards whom I may order my relationship as I please, but a Thou under whom I have placed myself as a *diakonōn*».³⁹ This is the specificity of the disciple of Jesus.

Jesus understood this kind of service as the offering of his life, as a full and perfect sacrifice, that is of being for others whether in life or in death. Thus the concept of 'service' achieves its final theological depth, it comes to mean much more than a comprehensive term for any loving assistance.⁴⁰ What is true of Christ Himself is made a command for all his disciples in Jn 12,26. The

36. BEYER, "*Diakoneō*", 84.

37. Cf. Idem, 84.

38. W. MUNRO, "Women disciples in Mark?", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44(1982) 234; cf. also P.S. PUDUSSERY, "Discipleship and Suffering in the Gospel of Mark", *Jeevadhara* 18(1988) 121-139.

39. Cf. BEYER, "*Diakoneō*", 85. This emphasis can be perceived in Jn 2,4,9, the marriage at Cana, where the *diakonoi* are put in direct relation with Jesus. In fact, the Evangelist is careful to say that they alone, besides Jesus, knew the source of the new wine. Cf. P.H. BOULTON, "*Diakoneō* in the Four Gospels" in: K. ALAND, F.L. CROSS, et al. (eds), *Studia Evangelica* (Berlin 1959) 418. Boulton says that the fact that the waiters are called *diakonoi* and not *douloi* in this account when the marriage feast is already under way can be influenced by the place of the former in the organization of the Church. He confirms this by quoting Mt 22,1-14.

40. Cf. BEYER, "*Diakoneō*", 86; J.G. INRIG, "Called to Serve: toward a philosophy of ministry, (Ex 18,17; Mk 9,33-37; Jn 12,23-26)", *Bibliotheca Sacra* 40(1983) 340; VELLANICKAL, "Discipleship", 144.

association of this verse to the previous two within the context where it is found demands that we understand *diakonein* as service even unto death which is rewarded, then, by the honour given by the Father to the disciple.

Thus in Jn 12,26 we have a reference to the *diakonia* of true discipleship as seen in the light of glorification of Jesus through the Cross. Boulton says that «Jesus had breathed into this usage all that His vocation to be the Suffering Servant meant to Him, and should, in consequence, mean for His disciples». ⁴¹ Thus, the use of this word now implies also the identification that there should be between the disciple and his Master in that the disciple learns from him that he has to surrender everything — even one's life. As it meant to Jesus, so to the disciple, this life should be translated into a life of complete obedience to the will of the Father. It is in this line that Augustine understands the service that the disciple should render to Jesus as doing Christ's will which will reach its climax in surrendering one's life for others. ⁴² Still, as we have already mentioned earlier the fellowship in this life in the service of Christ does also involve the honour that the Father has reserved for those who are faithful to him. «Service is the secret of life, for it produces fruitfulness, an unwasted life, and divine honour». ⁴³

Hence the use of the verb *diakonein* by John in this *logion* is not to be explained by John's wish to avoid a tautology, as Schulz says. ⁴⁴ His intention goes much beyond this. The sense which we give to this word influences the whole significance of the verse in its context. However, the use of this word here (concentrating three uses of the stem on the six it is used in the whole Gospel) has given rise to a discussion among commentators on whether this word is traditional or not. Dodd says that *diakonein* «is more readily transferred to the situation of the Christian in the world than *opisō mou elthein*, and if so, then the form of tradition behind the Fourth Gospel perhaps betrays a *Sitz im Leben* somewhat farther removed from the original historical situation in the life of Jesus». ⁴⁵ Brown, commenting on Dodd's position, says that although the Synoptics do not refer to the disciples as servants of Jesus there is the coupling of the verbs *diakonein* and *akolouthein* in the Synoptics in Mk 15,41 and par. (cf. Lk

41. BOULTON, "Diakoneō", 419.421; cf. also BARRETT, *Gospel according to St John*, 353.

42. *In Ioannis Evangelium*, Tract. 51,12.

43. INRIG, "Called to serve", 340.

44. A. SCHULZ, *Suivre et imiter le Christ d'après le Nouveau Testament* (Paris 1966) 87, footnote 69.

45. C.H. DODD, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge 1963) 353.

10,40). This may indicate that it is not impossible that John's form of this statement is ancient.⁴⁶

The pregnant significance with which the Evangelist seems to have loaded the verb *diakonein* sheds light on the meaning which we should give to the verb *akolouthein* in this context. Schulz says that, owing to the external structure of the verse and the parallelism there is between the first part (A) and the last part (A¹), the verb *akolouthein* in A should be translated by the future as it corresponds to the promise made in the future of A.⁴⁷ I think, however, that translating the imperative present by the future would be interpreting in one's way the mind of the Evangelist. In effect one would impoverish the text were the verb *akolouthein* translated by the future. For this present imperative includes the decision to follow Jesus in serving him in the present and continuing to do so in the future which will eventually lead to one being definitely honoured by the Father. Thus, it has the same range of the "hour of glorification" of Jesus.

The verb *akolouthein*,⁴⁸ here, includes the various meanings that the Fourth Gospel attributes to this important verb, becoming, as it were, the privileged *terminus technicus* for discipleship.⁴⁹ This verb becomes a synonym of faith in that it embraces the meaning of a process through which the disciple discovers

46. Cf. *Gospel according to John*, I, 475; also R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel according to St John*, II (New York 1987) 385 is of the same opinion as Brown. MUNRO, discussing Mk 15,41, arrives to the conclusion that *diakoneō* here has to be interpreted as a parallel to *akolouthein* and, thus, in terms of discipleship. A main reason supporting this theory is that both verbs are followed by the personal pronoun *autō*. However, he says, this would apply to after the death of Jesus since as such it could possibly accord with Mark's theological stance to acknowledge Jesus' female following then rather than before, "Women disciples", 231-235.

47. Cf. *Suivre*, 88-89.

48. The verb *akolouthein* recurs 19 times in the Gospel of John (1,37.38.40.43; 6,2; 8,12; 10,4.5.27; 11,31; 12,26; 13,36(x2).37; 18,15; 20,6; 21,19.20.22). Four different meanings can be identified:

- the simple classical usage of 'following after, accompanying';
- the derived meaning of 'being a disciple';
- at times the verb is equated in John to the meaning of 'to believe';
- the meaning of entering into a fellowship with Jesus as to participate also in his death and glory.

There are four different recurrences in John's Gospel which convey the external meaning 'walking after': 6,2; 11,31; 18,15 and 20,6. However, the context of 6,2 and 18,15 may indicate something deeper than this.

49. Cf. BROWN, *Gospel according to John*, I, 78; F. SEGOVIA (ed.), *Discipleship and the New Testament* (Philadelphia 1985) 96, footnote 26. John, as the Synoptics have already done, uses several times the verb *akolouthein* and *mathētēs* as synonyms. In the Fourth Gospel the term *mathētēs* becomes an eminently theological concept, a *theologoumenon* characterizing the Christian faithful. Cf. R. MORENO JIMENEZ, "El discípulo de Jesucristo según el Evangelio de S. Juan", *Estudios Bíblicos* 30(1971) 287-88; SCHULZ, *Suivre*, 69-70.

more deeply the mystery of Christ.⁵⁰ This is evidenced by the “vocation narrative” of Jn 1,35-51. Here, the verb is used as a means to depict the «movement toward the progressive discovery of the mystery of Jesus».⁵¹ It is the beginning of the process of faith which intertwines with that of being a disciple. A disciple is one who, living with Jesus, gradually obtains a deeper insight into the person of Jesus and shares this experience with others.⁵² By answering the call to follow Jesus, a person is believing in him, putting all his trust in him and, thus, begins a process wherein he enters more and more into an intimate relationship with him who called him. This will eventually lead to a complete fellowship of both in that the destiny of one becomes the destiny of the other.⁵³

Hence, this concept of ‘following’ goes much further than just implying imitation, as De Longe wants.⁵⁴ Schweizer says:

The word ‘follow’ therefore has a middle position. It certainly indicates ‘serving’, that is to say, the attitude of a disciple upon earth who walks behind his Master step by step and is appointed by him to the service of witness (John 1,35ff). But John 8,12 and 10,4f,27f have already shown how the main emphasis is on the disciples’ being guarded and supported by Jesus, which is not implied in the idea of service.⁵⁵

It is, thus, a step forward from what the idea of service implied; through ‘following’ Jesus the disciple enters in full fellowship with him — a notion which will be explicated further in the central phrase of this Johannine saying.

The expression *kai hopou eimi egō ekei kai ho diakonos ho emos estai* is typically Johannine.⁵⁶ Similar expressions are found also in Jn 7,34.36; 8,21.22;

50. Cf. G. TURBESSI, “Il significato neotestamentario di ‘Sequela’ e di ‘Imitazione’ di Cristo”, *Benedictina* 19(1972) 191.
51. E. COTHENET, “Sacred Scripture” in: E. MALATESTA (ed.), *Imitating Christ* (The Religious Experience Series 5; Hertfordshire 1974) 30; cf. also DODD, *Interpretation*, 293; ID., *Historical Tradition*, 302.
52. VELLANICKAL, “Discipleship”, 141; SCHNACKENBURG, *Gospel according to St John*, I, 308; SEGOVIA, *Discipleship*, 90.
53. Cf. N. LAZURE, *Les valeurs morales de la théologie johannique* (EB; Paris 1965) 59 as quoted in COTHENET, “Sacred Scripture”, 32-33.
54. Cf. *Jesus: Stranger from heaven*, 160-161.
55. *Lordship*, 87.
56. The expression is used also in the Synoptics (Mt 6,21; 24,28; Mk 6,10; Lk 12,34; 17,37), but in a different impersonal sense. DODD is of the opinion that since this expression is coined with what he considers as the non-Johannine word *diakonos* then this may be traditional. In

13,33; 14,3; 17,24. In all these the main idea is the listeners' relation to Jesus and their possibility or impossibility to be where he is. A study of these recurrences would show that where Jesus is speaking to the Jews (7,34 and 8,21) he speaks in the negative: "where I am you cannot come", whilst when he speaks to the disciples in the last discourse (14,3; 17,24) he speaks in the positive: "where I am you may be also". When he speaks to Peter in 13,33, he again speaks in the negative but in v.34 he makes him the promise that he will follow afterward. Thus, as it can be contemplated, it is a promise-gift which Jesus makes only to those who believe in him, those who serve him and follow him, that is those who are ready to enter into a complete fellowship with him.

It is obvious that here we are not dealing with a simple local reference. Christ is speaking as the glorified one. The presence of the "hour" informs all the subsequent words of Jesus. His servant will be in him with the Father (cf. Jn 14,3-6), participating in the glory that the Son had even before the world was made (cf. Jn 17,5). So, here we have to understand this "being where I am" in the sense of what John means by the permanence of the disciple in the Son, which comes out clearly in the Johannine vocabulary through the use of the verb *menein*. This verb suggests overtones of the deep and abiding fellowship established between Jesus and his disciples. The relationship they established with Jesus has about it the character of constancy and stability. This is already suggested by the first uses of the verb in relation to the disciples in the Fourth Gospel (Jn 1,38.39). Brown comments: «If the training of the disciples begins when they *go* to Jesus to *see* where he is staying and *stay* on with him, it will be completed when they *see* his glory and *believe* in him (2,11). This scene is the anticipation of what we shall hear in 12,26».⁵⁷ Thus, it is a theological space which will then be specified both as soteriological and eschatological, in that the disciple participates in the self-sacrifice of Christ through his communion with him and, consequently, also in his glory in the Father's house.

As it was already stated, the tense of the verb 'to be' used here is the present with a future value for *eimi* and the future for *estai*. Does this imply that this communion with Jesus would be only in the future, perhaps in the consummation of time, as at least Jn 14,3 seems to imply? De Longe moves in this direction. Speaking of this expression with reference to the whole community he says:

The community finds itself still in the midst of the world (17,11.15.18), only later to be "where I am" (17,24), beholding the glory which the Son

fact, he is not certain whether to consider this central part of v.26 as a supplement to v.26a or as a separate saying, *Historical Tradition*, 353.

57. *Gospel according to John*, I, 79; cf. also VELLANICKAL, "Discipleship", 137; G. ZEVINI, "I Primi Discepoli seguono Gesù", *Parola, Spirito e Vita* 2(1980) 140-153.

shares with the Father... We find the expression “where I am” used in 12,26 also to indicate the ultimate goal of the true servant of Christ... and in 14,1-3, where in v.3 it is connected with the expression *palin erchomai kai paralēmpsomai*. It is only natural here to think of the stage of consummation.⁵⁸

But it seems that here we are dealing with different conceptions of time: the present which prolongs into the future, in the eschatological.⁵⁹

As, in John’s theology, the glorification of Christ includes not only his suffering and death but also, in the same moment, his exaltation (note here the remarkable double meaning of the verb *hupsōō*: ‘being lifted’ on the cross and the exaltation to new glory), consequently, owing to the full communion that there is between Jesus and his disciple, “being where he is” implies also a present moment which will prolong and reach its fulfillment in the future. Hence, “being where he is” achieves its full consummation only after death.⁶⁰ Feuillet states on this point: «John maintains the traditional eschatological perspective, which can be harmonized with the mystical perspective. The Christian now shares really, although imperfectly, in the life of God, but he will share it fully at the Parousia».⁶¹

Hence, the expression “to be where he is” does not entail only a participation in Christ’s death,⁶² but it comprises — as the “hour of glorification” does — the different moments of this complete fellowship of the servant with Jesus. In this sense, “to be where Jesus is” is a promise which includes also an order: if the disciple is persecuted as the Master was (15,8-16,4), he will accompany him also in the house and the glory of the Father (14,3; 17,24). For the Father does the same honour to the disciples as he does to Christ, his Son. As a matter of fact, we already share in the glory which the Son has.⁶³

58. *Jesus: Stranger from heaven*, 173. This is also the opinion of SCHNACKENBURG, *Gospel according to St John*, II, 385-386. He says that it signifies the end that the disciple will reach through death — the celestial world. Cf. also SCHULZ, *Suivre*, 86; D. RAMOS-LISSÓN, “El Seguimiento de Cristo (En los orígenes de la espiritualidad de los primeros cristianos)”, *Teología Espiritual* 88(1986) 11.

59. Cf. BROWN, *Gospel according to John*, II, 779-780.

60. Cf. SCHWEIZER, *Lordship*, 69.87.

61. A. FEUILLET, “Man’s participation in God’s Life: A key concept in John”, in M.J. TAYLOR (ed.), *A Companion to John: Readings in Johannine Theology* (New York 1977) 144.

62. Cf. K.J. SCHELKLE, *Die Passion Jesu in der Verkündigung des Neuen Testaments* (Heidelberg 1949) 222.

63. Cf. VAN DEN BUSSCHE, “Si le grain de blé”, 60: «Là où je suis, la aussi sera mon serviteur est un ordre, mais également une promesse: si le disciple est persécuté comme le Maître le

This makes Augustine say: «What great honour could the adoptive son receive as that to be where the Only-Begotten Son is, not equal in his divinity, but associated to him in eternity.»⁶⁴ In this same note, perhaps a little more mystical, we find the Third Ode of Solomon which sings:

I love the Beloved, and my soul loves Him.
And where His rest is, there also am I.

...

I have been united (to Him), for the lover has found the Beloved:
In order that I may love Him that is the Son, I shall become a son.⁶⁵

The *Pistis Sophia* goes somewhat further by stating, speaking of the twelve apostles and, in particular of Mary Magdalene and John, the two “virgins”: «I will be you and you will be me»; thus, a complete fellowship which has to pass through suffering «for the sake of all men».⁶⁶ Thus, we see that the preference the patristic writings show to the eschatological fulfillment of this complete fellowship is not made at the detriment of eliminating the possibility of this communion before death.

The repetition of the conditional phrase, which we found in the opening of this saying, seems to lead to such an interpretation. Hence, what is at stake here is not only the future – the destiny of the disciple once he is dead and, therefore, has passed the proof of suffering and death here on earth – but also the here-and-now of the disciple. That is, this complete communion of the disciple with Jesus begins on earth, including, thus, not only the moment of glory but also the moments of suffering and, possibly even death.

The last phrase of the saying includes the verb *timaō* in the future which has as its subject the Father and as its object the disciple. This is the only occurrence in the New Testament where this occurs. In 5,23, where the verb is used four times, the subject is *pantes* for the first two uses while for the second two uses the subject is indefinite, but always human beings. The object of the

fut (15,18-16,4), il l'accompagnera aussi dans la maison et la gloire du Père (14,3; 17,24) ... Car le Père nous fera les mêmes honneurs qu'au Fils: la même gloire nous est déjà donnée (17,22) et nous en contemplerons l'épanouissement dans la maison du Père (17,24)»; also SCHULZ, *Suivre*, 87-88.

64. In *Ioannis Evangelium*, Tract. 51,12: «Nam quem maiorem honorem accipere poterit adoptatus, quam ut sit ubi est Unicus, non aequalis factus divinitati, sed consociatus aeternitati?»
65. R.HARRIS and A. MINGANA (eds), *The Odes and Psalms of Solomon*, II (Manchester 1920) 216, stanzas 5.7.
66. Cf. *Pistis Sophia*, Chap.96, lines 15-32 in: C. SCHMIDT and W. TILL (eds), *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller* (Erster Band; Berlin 1954) 148.

verb is twice the Father and twice the Son. In 8,49 Jesus is the subject (speaking in the first person) while the Father is the object.

It is a new affirmation of the union, almost identification of the disciple with Jesus. The Father honours the disciple of Jesus for he sees in him his own Son. This 'identification' comes about through service, in the following, in being where Jesus is, that is, being with him in death and resurrection.⁶⁷ «Just as for Jesus, the exaltation on the cross is at the same time his glorification, so also for the disciple, serving and following him and being where he is means participating in his glory.»⁶⁸ Thus, the *diakonia* of the disciple of Jesus attains its final development: «To be a *diakonos* in the mind of St John ... is one who, in his life of *diakonia* has so identified himself with the *diakonia* of his Master that he can look forward to being not just a *diakonos* but an honoured guest at the Heavenly banquet.»⁶⁹

The Link of John 12,26 with the Synoptics

The question of the relation between John and the Synoptics has been and still is a subject of discussion among scholars into which I do not intend to enter here. A chapter which aroused much interest because of its material was precisely chapter 12, where our saying is found.⁷⁰ The different positions vary a

67. Cf. FERRARO, *L'Ora di Cristo*, 34. However, it is important to note the care John takes to use two different verbs to say the honour which the Father will give to the Son: *doksazō* in v.23 and v.28, and the honour which the Father will give to the disciples of his Son: *timaō*. As Gonzalez Silva notes, the difference in the use of the verb indicates that, while underlining the almost 'identification' of Jesus with his disciples, there is an essential difference between the Son and his disciples, bringing out the mediating role of Jesus. GONZALEZ SILVA, "El Seguimiento", 159.
68. VELLANICKAL, "Discipleship", 145; cf. J. PATHRAPANKAL, "Jesus and the Greeks: reflections on a theology of religious identity (Jo 12,20-26)" *Journal of Dharma* 10(1985) 400-401.
69. BOULTON, "*Diakoneō*", 422.
70. I limit myself to give some bibliographical indications of material on the subject with special reference to our chapter 12: C.K. BARRETT, "John and the Synoptic Gospels", *Expository Times* 85(1974) 228-233; M. GOULDER, "From ministry to passion in John and Luke", *New Testament Studies* 29(1983) 561-568; L.R. KITTLAUS, "Evidence from Jn 12 that the Author of John knew the Gospel of Mark" in: P.J. ACHTEMEIER (ed.), *Society of Biblical Literature. 1979 Seminar Papers*, I (SBLASP; Missoula, Montana 1979) 119-122; A.B. KOLENKOW, "Two Changing Patterns: Conflicts and the Necessity of death: John 2 and 12 and Markan Parallels" in: P.J. ACHTEMEIER (ed.), *Society of Biblical Literature. 1979 Seminar Papers*, I (SBLASP; Missoula, Montana 1979) 123-126; D.M. SMITH, "Jn 12,22ff and the Question of John's Use of the Synoptics", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 82(1963) 58-64; IDEM, "John and the Synoptics: Some dimensions of the problem", *New Testament Studies* 26(1979-80) 424-444; IDEM, "John and the Synoptics", *Biblica* 63(1982) 102-113.

great deal as one would expect. There are those who deny that John made any use of the Synoptics, at least as a principal source;⁷¹ others say that John, if the traditional date of the Gospel is correct, should have known at least one of the Synoptics, which was used by his ecclesial community. But also here the opinions vary. There are those who say that John knew Mark, and had pondered its meaning.⁷² Others say that in some parts of his Gospel, among which also John 12,20-50, John was dependent on Luke.⁷³ It is very difficult to decide for one position or for the other. However, it is not really essential here to determine this issue.

The same problem lies also with our saying. Barrett, for example, says that «the material introduced by the coming of the Greeks is based mainly upon the Synoptic tradition».⁷⁴ Kittlaus says that «for the announcement of Jesus' hour, John has used the language found in Mark and then has continued Jesus' speech with a pattern familiar from the Markan passion prediction units».⁷⁵ Rasco, on the contrary, states that in the number of sayings which we have in Jn 12,24-26, it seems that at least v.25 has a synoptic parallel, hence not pronouncing himself on our verse.⁷⁶ Brown, Dodd and Schnackenburg, in their commentaries, study this saying in relation to what they consider to be its parallel in the Synoptics, that is Mk 8,34 (and par.). Dodd, in particular, says that «if it is unlikely ... that the separate sayings were borrowed by John from the Synoptics, it is also unlikely that the sequence as a whole was drawn from them; yet it has a manifest affinity with Mk 8,34-9,1».⁷⁷ What position should we assume? And what do we mean when we say 'affinity'?

Studying the context of the saying in both the Synoptics and John we witness that they have many elements in common. We are in the framework of the passion (passover in John; passion prediction in the Synoptics) which does not exclude the aspect of the resurrection. In the Synoptics, Jesus makes a specific reference to the resurrection in his prediction while the series of sayings is followed by the Transfiguration theme. In John, the "hour of glorification"

71. Cf. SMITH, "Jn 12,22ff and the Question", 64; KOLENKOW, "Two changing patterns", 123-125 (although the latter's position is not completely clear).

72. Cf. BARRETT, "John and the Synoptics", 233; KITTLAUS, "Evidence from John 12", 121.

73. Cf. GOULDER, "From ministry to Passion", 566.

74. *Gospel according to St John*, 350.

75. "Evidence from Jn 12", 122.

76. Cf. "Christus, granum frumenti", 13.

77. *Historical Tradition*, 390.

includes all the different moments of the paschal mystery. It is also considered by some that in 12,27-36 John incorporates some of the motifs that the Synoptics have embodied in the scene of the Transfiguration. These would include the voice from heaven and the fact that Jesus will be 'lifted up'.⁷⁸ In Matthew and Mark the whole pericope is situated in Caesarea Philippi, a place where there were many non-Jews. John puts at the beginning of this pericope the request of some Greeks to see Jesus. In the Synoptics, it is only Matthew who restricts the saying to the circle of the disciples; the others have a wider auditorium. John addresses the saying to one and all — a conclusion to which we arrive from the formulation of the conditional phrase. From this we can see that there are a number of similarities. However, there are also a number of important divergences especially in the structure of the *logion* itself.

In the Johannine saying it is only the first part (A) which could be presented as a parallel to the Synoptics. In fact, while the latter have the *protasis* followed by the announcement of two requirements and only then by the *apodosis*, in John we have the *protasis* followed by the *apodosis* and he says nothing, at least on the level of terminology, of the other two requirements. The Johannine saying includes, instead, two promises which *follow* the first part (A). Again, in the *protasis*, while the Synoptics use the phrase *opisō mou elthein*, John uses the verb *diakonein*. Finally, the Synoptics accentuate the obligation of the disciple to follow (cf. the use of the verb *thelein*) while John, using the formula for the condition *ean tis*, accentuates rather the liberty of the disciple. This, apart from the other characteristics which were referred to earlier when dealing specifically on the saying itself.

Considering all these elements, we have to say that John does share something with the Synoptics but then he moves his own way. Thus, it seems quite sure that, at least for this saying, John is not using directly any of the three Evangelists except for the context although he is following a separate tradition which brought down to him that which Jesus said to his disciples.⁷⁹ Any further assertion does not seem to be well supported. However, one can state with more certainty the close affinity that there is in the theology of the *logion* in the Synoptics and in John. This would indicate firmly the unique origin of the saying on the mouth of Jesus.

78. Cf. BROWN, *Gospel according to John*, I, 476.

79. Cf. also in this direction DODD, *Interpretation*, 452.

Conclusion

Jn 12,26 is the saying *par excellence* of the discipleship of Jesus; it embodies the fullest idea of the *sequela Christi*. The *sequela* of Jesus in full communion with him will lead not only to death but also to participation in his victory and fulfilment in his Father's house. Suffering and death are underlined as a stepping-stone, albeit necessary, toward the glory, especially that which is definitive. This means that in the Church, both in its life as a community as well as in the life of individuals, the Risen Lord is present and sheds his light on all the difficulties and perplexities through which they have to pass making of the moment of suffering a moment of glory. It is a call to all Christians to live in a loving obedience to the will of Jesus in full communion with him so that what he promised might come true.

Hence, this verse 12,26 shows that 'serving Jesus', 'following Jesus' and 'remaining with Jesus' are all parallel phrases expressing the reality of discipleship. If 'serving Jesus' involves a dying to self, obedience to his will, 'following Jesus' is a pathway of suffering and death which the disciple has to walk behind our Lord. The sum-total of this serving and following Jesus is therefore indicated in the words, which epitomize all the Johannine idea of discipleship: "where I am there my servant shall be also" (12,26).