

## **ABSTRACT**

Using the method of narrative analysis, this thesis examines the characterisation of the disciples in the Fourth Gospel, focusing on their faith and understanding. To that end, it studies the group of the disciples in the sequence of the narrative, highlighting the different issues, challenges, or developments related to faith and understanding that this group faces as it follows Jesus during his earthly ministry. In addition to the group of disciples, this thesis examines five individual disciples (Peter, Judas, Thomas, the Beloved Disciple, and Mary Magdalene), also as they appear in the sequence of the narrative. The result of this investigation shows that the disciples are portrayed as believing and as having life from early on in the narrative, but as struggling to understand the identity, words, and mission of Jesus until the pivotal event of his glorification.

The thesis then seeks to make sense of such a narrative portrayal. It argues that Jesus is the protagonist of a sub-plot in which he is commissioned to prepare his disciples to take on the task of witnessing in the world after his departure. For their preparation, their faith was a necessary prerequisite. Consequently, their characterisation plays an important role in communicating the rhetorical purpose of the Fourth Gospel, which is to nurture the implied readers' faith and understanding in order to better equip them for their own witnessing activity. Since the situation of the implied readers, that of faithful followers of Jesus needing to be effective in their witnessing activity, is similar to that of the disciples in the narrative, they can easily undergo a process of identification with the disciples, thus correspondingly being prepared for the success of their own mission.

In turn, questions of temporality are necessarily raised regarding the disciples' characterisation, as one wonders to what extent the implied author's temporal perspective has affected the depiction of the pre-Easter experience of the disciples. This thesis suggests that the implied author chose both to merge the temporal horizons and to clearly distinguish the pre- and post-resurrection experience of the disciples. In the narrative, these two phenomena are presented in dynamic tension so that the implied author can strengthen its implied audience in treating the story of Jesus and the disciples from the perspective of the Johannine community, while insisting that this perspective is founded on the accomplished mission of Jesus towards his disciples.

Based on this narrative understanding of the disciples' faith and understanding in the Fourth Gospel, the thesis concludes with some theological reflections in dialogue with Rudolf Bultmann about the relationship between faith and understanding.