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„ELECTION” AS A SALVIFIC CATEGORY  
ACCORDING TO ROMANS 9  
STUDY OF A BIBLICAL CONCEPT

In Romans 9-11, Paul the apostle undertakes the topic of Israel's disbelief in Jesus Christ<sup>1</sup>. The situation that occurred needed clarification. Israel, who in the comparison to other nations was better prepared to accept the Messiah – did not believe in Him. In Romans 9, 4-5, the apostle brings up an entire list of Israel's privileges which stress his particular position, such as adopted sonship, glory, the covenants, giving of the Law, serving God, promises, fathers and Christ Himself as to the flesh. It was particularly the Christians who were of pagan descent who could conclude that something had failed in salvation economy. Israel received so much, but in spite of this, still did not believe. This is also the thesis of the first of the three chapters which deal with this topic. It is found in verse 9, 6a and states: „But it is not as though the word of God has failed”.

In looking at the list of privileges in 9, 4-5, one can notice the lack of one of them – election<sup>2</sup>. The authors sporadically attribute great significance to this<sup>3</sup>. According to some, the privilege of election is included in the term

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<sup>1</sup> A lack of any kind of particle linking 9, 1 with previous chapters suggests that the apostle begins a new topic. The festive testimony of God's faithfulness and love in 8, 31-39, however, permits going into chapters 9-11.

<sup>2</sup> The term election (ἐκλογή) does not appear even once in LXX, but others do not appear as well, such as sonship, promise and only once giving of the Law (2 Mch 6, 23). Despite this, the above ideas are present in the OT.

<sup>3</sup> This is done by, for example, J. A. Fitzmyer *Romans. A New Translation with*

Israelites or in adopted sonship<sup>4</sup>. It seems that in not mentioning the privilege of chosenness, which is most characteristic of Israel's being privileged, is a conscious act. Starting from verse 6b, that follows the stated thesis, the apostle concentrates his whole attention on the nature of election in salvation history. In looking through this issue, we will try to determine if Paul's understanding of election gives a reply to the principal thesis about the permanence of the Word of God.

### 1. THE NATURE OF DIVINE ELECTION

The key statement, which in itself contains the resolution of the problem are the first words after the thesis, that the Word of God did not failed<sup>5</sup>. As stated: „For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” (Rom 9, 6b)<sup>6</sup>. This statement is shocking. The apostle uses the term „Israel” in its double meaning: first, he points to „those descended from Israel” (οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ), meaning the ethnic Israel<sup>7</sup>; the second demands being determined<sup>8</sup>. Authors are in agreement that Paul makes a difference between one and the other Israel, but do not agree as to the interpretation of this differentiation. Among the scholars, three main positions can be distinguished: 1) differentiation between ethnic Israel and the chosen Israel<sup>9</sup>; 2) between ethnic

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*Introduction and Commentary*, AB 33, New York 1993, p. 543 or J.-N. A l e t t i *Israel et la Loi dans la Lettre aux Romains*, LD 173, Paris 1998, p. 168-169 and ff.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. J. D. G. D u n n, *Romans 9-16*, WBC 38B, Dallas 1988, p. 526.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. D. G. D u n n, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, London–New York 2003, p. 504-505.

<sup>6</sup> We do not accept J. Pipera's proposition (*The Justification of God. An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9: 1-23*, Grand Rapids 1983, p. 47-48), that we should move the negation to the second clause and translate it as: „All those who are descendants of Israel are not Israel”. This would mean that no one from ethnic Israel is an Israelite.

<sup>7</sup> See BAGD 235.

<sup>8</sup> This second Israel is often described as the true Israel (see D. M o o, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, Grand Rapids–Cambridge 1996, p. 574; S. L é g a s s e, *L'Épître de Paul aux Romains*, LD Commentaires 10, Paris 2002, p. 589).

<sup>9</sup> See H. R ä i s ä n e n, *Römer 9-11: Analyse eines geistigen Ringens*, ANRW II 25.4, Berlin 1987, p. 2900; L. M o r r i s, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Leicester 1988, p. 352-353; cf. also H. S c h l i e r, *Der Römerbrief*, HTKNT 6, Freiburg i. B. 1977, p. 473. F. Watson (*Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*, SNTSMS 56, Cambridge 1986, p. 227, p. 9) is surprising, since he questions the relationship between Israel's election and salvation (we will clarify this in point 2).

Israel and the particular/spiritual Israel in the ethnic womb – while this external circle of Israel is not deprived of its privilege of election<sup>10</sup>; 3) between the ethnic Israel and the Church (made up of Jews and pagans)<sup>11</sup>. Some of the scholars are close to the first two positions, but they do not make their views clear enough to be placed in one of these groups<sup>12</sup>.

A key element for solving the problem seems to be what the apostle understands by election in Rom 9<sup>13</sup>. If only a part of ethnic Israel answers to God's call (the faithful remnant) and election still concerns all of Israel (ad 2), then this means that Paul understands election as meaning God's call, directed to a certain community, where a lack of reply to this call does not annihilate election. When election is understood in such a way, then the ethnic premise plays a determining role (a historical approach)<sup>14</sup>. If in turn the chosen Israel is the faithful remnant (ad 1), then according to Paul, does election not incorporate all of ethnic Israel, and the ethnic category did not play any role (a theological approach)? If, at last, Israel in verse 6b is the Church (ad 3), then does referring to the undertaken election among the sons of the patriarchs does not question the argument that the Church is made up of Jews and pagans? – Writing about the patriarchs and biblical Israel, the apostle interprets the nature of election in the then period. We will attempt to answer these questions during our study.

### 1.1 A Paradigm: Sons of Abraham and Isaac

The statement „for not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” finds clarification in the next verses, beginning with the word: „and not all

<sup>10</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield (*The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2, ICC, Edinburgh 1986, p. 471 and 473) describes this dependency as „Israel in its mother's womb”. See also D u n n, *Romans*, vol. 2, p. 539-540; R. J e w e t t, *Romans*, Hermeneia, Minneapolis 2007, p. 574-575.

<sup>11</sup> E. D i n k l e r, *The Historical and Eschatological Israel in Romans Chapters 9-11: A Contribution to the Problem of Predestination and Individual Responsibility*, JR 36 (1956), p. 116; M. R e s e, *Israel und Kirche in Römer 9*, NTS 34 (1988) p. 208-217; T. N. W r i g h t, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology*, Minneapolis 1991, p. 238; G. S t r e c k e r, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, Berlin 1996, p. 215; L é g a s s e, *Romans*, p. 589.

<sup>12</sup> See F i t z m y e r, *Romans*, p. 559-560; M o o, *Romans*, p. 569 and 574.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. E. E. J o h n s o n, *The Function of Apocalyptic and Wisdom Traditions in Romans 9-11*, SBLDS 109, Atlanta 1989, p. 225.

<sup>14</sup> In one of the latest studies, its author presents an overview of positions (J. N. L o h r, *Chosen and Unchosen. Conceptions of Election in the Pentateuch and Jewish-Christian Interpretation*, Winona Lake 2009). Among them this historical approach prevails over a theological one.

are children of Abraham because they are his descendants" (Rom 9, 7a). In other words, not everyone who has Abraham as his father is a child of Abraham. The statement that not everyone who biologically comes from Abraham is acknowledged as his son is not as surprising as the first one.

Everyone will say that he is referring to Ishmael, and next to Esau, who were not recognized as a true offspring<sup>15</sup>. Paul uses the example of Abraham to show that even though both his sons were to the same degree his biological descendants, however, only one of them was admitted to be a such. What does this mean? This means that biological birth does not decide whether someone is or is not a son of Abraham. In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring (v. 8). According to the apostle, the promise made to Abraham decides that, despite the laws of nature, meaning in his very advanced years, he will have an offspring with Sarah. God promised this and fulfilled.

This example might have awakened doubts among the addresses, if whether the basis of the decision was rather that Sarah was the true wife of Abraham – Hagar was the slave, who gave Abraham an offspring in the situation when Sarah was not able to do so. In order to dispel all doubts, Paul brings up another example. He refers to Rebecca, who had twins with Isaac. This time we have the same parents, and between their sons there was no difference. With this in mind, the apostle stresses that they were conceived from one bed, meaning one marital sexual act. He also refers to the fact that God's choice already occurred in their mother's womb, meaning before they ever did anything good or evil.

In order to even more strongly stress that election is not conditioned by natural reasons, the one who was born second was chosen. Therefore, there were no reasons for choosing Jacob and not Esau. Biological reasons, in this the rights of the firstborn, do not have any significance. Why? The apostle replies: in order that God's purpose of election based on His free choice might continue (v. 11b). How do we understand this freedom of choice? In the context of the given examples, this is freedom not biologically conditioned. If God were tied by biological-ethnic conditions, He would not be free in His choosing<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> This does not concern whether Abraham and Isaac admitted them to be their sons (they admitted them), but rather that they were not admitted to be such in God's plans.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, p. 560.

This double-track, that is choosing Isaac and not Ishmael, Jacob and not Esau, for Paul constitutes the basis of his further argument on the topic of election. Election is God's free decision, not conditioned by blood ties, but rather – as he further states – showing God's mercy (v. 16). In this way, the apostle prepares the foundation for the conclusion that disbelief in the Messiah by the majority of Israel does not prove that the word of God has failed.

### 1.2 *The Invariability of the Paradigm from the Time of the Patriarchs*

In the interpretation of the history of the sons of Abraham and Isaac, there is no discrepancy between the apostle and his countrymen. Both interpreted it in the same manner. Difficulties begin with Jacob. Starting with Jacob, we have twelve tribes and the present principle, meaning free choice, not based on biological procreation, in the conviction of Israel ceases to be binding. From Jacob on, all are Israelites (obviously we do not intend the historical process but his later religious interpretation according to which Israel's origins were traced back to the patriarchs). This is evident in such descriptions of God on the pages of the OT as „the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob”. Otherwise, the God of Israel would also be the God of Arabs and Edomites (in the background, we can see the ethnic „appropriation” of God). Instead, we very often find the term „the God of Jacob”. A double-meaning does not occur here: from Jacob on, all are Israel<sup>17</sup>. Starting with Jacob, election begins to be linked with biological or ethnic origin, which constitutes a departure from the principle which God applied in the case of the sons of Abraham and Isaac. The historical reason starts prevailing over the theological.

According to Paul, election continually remains unconditioned by biology in the case of the descendants of Jacob, meaning that the principle: one is chosen, the other not, transfers onto all Israel. This principle is still binding, since – as is written – God's plans concerning election, which is biologically unconditioned, remains unchanged (Rom 9, 11b). The value of truth about this unchanged plan is confirmed by the principle acknowledged in Judaism, that what refers to the fathers also refers to their descendants; the way God dealt with Abraham and Isaac, is the same way He must deal with their descendants (the descendants of Abraham do not stand above him). Abraham settles a paradigm in many fields. For example, in Ga 3, 15 ff., the apostle states that the Law given at Sinai, 430 years later, can't nullify the promise

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<sup>17</sup> It was due to this reason that Jacob was called Israel, and not Abraham or Isaac (the historical reason). The Bible gives a theological reason (Gen 32, 25-30), which to some degree hides the historical.

given to Abraham (what is more, the promise was given directly by God; the Law through angels and a mediator: v. 19-20, meaning that it is not a perfect expression of God's will<sup>18</sup>). Abraham also indicates the paradigm by that which concerns justification by faith: at the moment of justification, he was not yet circumcised (this principle, meaning faith, is primary in relation to the introduced circumcision as a condition for entering into the community of Israel). Finally, Abraham indicates this same paradigm concerning issues of chosenness. The principle which God used in choosing the patriarchs (chosen / not chosen) stands above Israel's choice<sup>19</sup>. Not by chance Paul says in Rom 9, 7a of Abraham's offspring and not of his sons, because the rule according to which God chooses him the sons extends onto Israel.

At the point Jacob / Israel, Paul makes a certain transfer. He moves from the biological-family level onto the ethnic-community level. That which first referred to individual people now illustrates the situation of all of Israel. By ethnic in reference to Israel we understand an equivalent of biological descent in case of the patriarchs sons. In other words we think of Israel according to the flesh.

Even if we accept different levels within the concept of election<sup>20</sup>, it can not stand in contradiction with the paradigm designated by God during the time of the patriarchs. Since the principle: one is chosen, the other not, is precedent and constantly actual, then God also made a choice in the ethnic Israel. In order to show that God made such a choice in the womb of Israel, Paul evokes the idea of the remnant (Rom 9, 27b); only the remnant will be acknowledged as the true descendants. The apostle applies the so-called *geze-  
ra szawa* procedure (v. 27-28 and 29)<sup>21</sup>, in which he links the offspring with the faithful remnant: the true descendants are the faithful remnant<sup>22</sup>. Concerning the choosing of the remnant of Israel, it was not blood ties which decided this, since these ties joined the chosen faithful with those who were not included among them. Here we see that the paradigm from the time of the patriarchs, that is the principle of free choice, which is ethnically uncon-

<sup>18</sup> That is why the promise is perfect, the Law therefore is not (among the many positive epithets of the Law in Romans, the apostle does not even once use the term „perfect“).

<sup>19</sup> Abraham becomes the father of all nations. The choice of Israel is written into this plan – it is its constructing segment.

<sup>20</sup> Cranfield permits such a state of affairs (*Romans*, vol. 2, p. 471).

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. A l e t t i, *Izrael et la Loi*, p. 182.

<sup>22</sup> See Gen 17, 3 ff. The covenant had in view the descendants of Abraham. According to Paul, this descendant is Christ (Ga 3, 16).

ditioned, is still binding. God's election is not inherited by being born in a particular society. Otherwise we would have to do with a static reality not taking into consideration the dynamic of God's salvific will. So, the apostle describes the nature of election as a no-ethnic category: it is not inherited by birth: „for not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel”.

Dunn's conclusion<sup>23</sup>, that since God chose Jacob, not Esau, before they were born, meaning that further deeds, good or bad, do not have an influence on choice, is beyond what Paul wanted to state. In this way, he is able to point out that election is based only on God's call directed to a certain community: a lack of response to this call, that is the mentioned bad deeds, do not take away their privilege of election (opinion no 2). With such an understanding of election, the ethnic premise becomes more important than faithfulness to God. The apostle wants to state, rather, that God, in choosing Jacob while he was still in Rebecca's womb, not Esau, that is before they did anything, was not guided by human merits. Paul does not say anything about further actions and about their meaning on issues concerning election.

Cranfield<sup>24</sup> expressed a similar view earlier. What he states seems to be that God's call directed to a designated community is more important than their reply to this calling. According to him, the idea of election is enclosed in the term „Israelites” (9, 4a). In truth, Israel is the salvation-history community, not only ethnic, but binding unconditionally election to it results in ascribing excessive meaning to the ethnic dimension. God's election becomes primarily a no-salvific concept.

In the surprising statement in Rom 9, 6b that not all who are of Israel are Israel, Paul uses the term Israel in a double meaning: the first use has ethnic connotation, that is biological offspring, and incorporates the entire ethnic Israel (authors are in accord with this); the second points to those who, in the example of Isaac and Jacob, were chosen by God, meaning the faithful remnant of Israel. The problem is whether the people who did not enter in among the „remnant” will still be the chosen people. What decides whether someone is in the chosen people according to Paul: only God's call or is it too man's response to it? In order to respond to this question, we must take a closer look at the nature of election in Rom 9.

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<sup>23</sup> *Romans*, vol. 2, p. 549; also *ibidem*, *Theology of Paul*, p. 510.

<sup>24</sup> *Romans*, vol. 2, p. 471 and 474.

### 1.3 „Election” as a Salvific Category

In Rom 9, 22-23, Paul speaks about vessels of anger and love. The division into one and the other does not involve coming from among either pagans or Israel, that is an ethnic premise: for example vessels of anger – the pagans, and vessels of love – the Jews (or vice-versa). The criterion of the division constitutes the response to God’s call. Those who respond, enter into the chosen people of God. The apostle, in writing about the vessels of love ends with: „[...] We are the people, called by him not only out of the Jews but out of the Gentiles too” (v. 24).

This verse reveals the nature of election<sup>25</sup>. Election is a category that requires a response on the part of man (the faithful remnant); responsibility is taken for failing to respond (vv. 19 nn)<sup>26</sup>. We can initially say that, according to the apostle, failure to respond to God’s call does not bring one into the chosen people. The called / chosen in verse 24 are those among Israel and pagans who responded to God’s call and believed in Jesus Christ<sup>27</sup>. Analogically, before the coming of Christ, it was the faithful remnant who lived in accord with God’s will.

Such an understanding of election pushes the ethnic premise to the back. The nature of God’s election consists in response to His call too. When Paul speaks about the choosing of Isaac and Jacob, there is no mention about their response to this choice. At the beginning the apostle’s goal was to designate the paradigm about the non-biological and non-ethnic condition of election as the foundation for further argumentation. Election, unconditioned by blood ties, is more precisely explained in further parts of the argument.

The called / chosen in Rom 9, 24 are the faithful remnant of Israel and the believing pagans. In the next verses (meaning 25-26), he quotes the words of Hosea (2, 1 and 25), which in the original context concern unfaithful Israel, who upon his return is once again accepted by God. The apostle refers the words of Hosea to the pagans: „Not my people” becomes „my people” and „not loved” – „beloved”. The message of this situation, which Hosea speaks of, is characteristic: departure from God deprives one of belonging to the people of God. The very call, without responding to it, is not

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<sup>25</sup> In reality, it is speaking about their calling, but in v. 11, 7 the apostle understands this calling to be election.

<sup>26</sup> Showing endearment (v. 23) also assumes in the context of v. 24 an act of will on the part of man, meaning giving a reply.

<sup>27</sup> In the image of the potter the reply to God’s call is decisive, not the origin (clay), nor destiny (any kind of goal for the vessel’s use).

sufficient<sup>28</sup>. Israel's lack of faith in the times of Paul, similar as in the past, deprives him of belonging to the chosen people. The category of the people of God is related with the faithfulness<sup>29</sup>. This is clearly stated in Rom 9, 8a: „Not the children born according to the flesh are the children of God”.

Paul, when speaking about election in Rom 9, allows perceiving how important the ethnic origin was in Israel of then. This led to erroneous conclusions, such as for example that descending from the patriarchs might have significance in the moral evaluation of a person. This is rectified by John the Baptist's reply: „[...] And do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father' [...]" (Mt 3, 8-9)<sup>30</sup>. Rabbinic literature provides interesting arguments. For example, in the times of the Tannaim, there were discussions held if the proselytes would obtain salvation<sup>31</sup>. Some of the rabbis were of the opinion that only their children would be saved, because they are not descendants of Jews. This means that circumcision and keeping the Torah were not as significant as descending from ethnic Israel (this discussion reflects a broad view). For some, blood ties became the main criterion for election and salvation. Ethnic exclusivity limited God's freedom in choosing, and Paul strongly defends God's freedom to choose.

In truth, Israel was always open to other nations (we can give a long list of examples), but the condition for entering into the chosen people was becoming a Jew. The ethnic barrier decided about a person accessing God's gifts granted to Israel. In the understanding of election, the concept of the chosen nation prevailed over the chosen people. That is why in Rom 2, 28-29, Paul asks the question about who is a true Jew<sup>32</sup>. The reply: one is not a true Jew by the sole fact of being an ethnic Jew. Fleshly origin does not give advantage over the pagan; predominance is ensured by one's response

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<sup>28</sup> This unveils a weak side of Cranfield's argument. It is true that God's calling in terms of gift is more important than human response to it but at the same time this call becomes active only with man's response.

<sup>29</sup> Speaking about the unfaithful part of Israel (9, 27), the apostle omits the term „people” from Isaiah's quote and replaces it with „the number of sons”. Aletti (*Israel et la Loi*, p. 190) is convinced that the change is only to avoid the identifying of two different subjects in vv. 25-26 (believing pagans) and in 27-29 (the unfaithful part of Israel). This seems appropriate, since otherwise Paul would confront the people of God, made up only of pagans, with all of Israel, meaning also the faithful remnant.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. J 8, 31-42.

<sup>31</sup> Zob. w: S. S a f r a i (ed.), *The Literature of the Sages*, part I: Oral Tora, Halakha, Mishna etc., Compendia Rerum Judaicarum ad NT, Philadelphia 1987.

<sup>32</sup> Fitzmyer (*Romans*, p. 560) draws attention to this.

to God's call. Without that, a Jew will not be included into the faithful remnant. „Ethnic Israel” does not automatically mean the „chosen Israel”. So, it is wrong to perceive God's election as a very choice of Israel. It is a static and incomplete understanding of the election. Meanwhile it is a dynamic reality, reaching successive stages of its fulfilling in „the remnant”, Church and the kingdom of heaven. The dynamic of God's election is well seen in the words: „In him [Christ] he chose us before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love” (Eph 1, 4). God's choosing has in view our salvation.

The beginning of identifying the choosing of ethnic Israel with God's election should be sought in the interpretation of the dawning of Israel's identity<sup>33</sup>. As a result of this, the conviction was born (to some degree) 1) that belonging to ethnic Israel itself can ensure participation in God's election; 2) that until the pagans do not become Jews, they are excluded from election. The above conviction would never have arisen if ethnic Israel did not leave behind the paradigm since the time of the patriarchs. Then the formation of the ethnic identity of Israel would not have been indissolubly related with God's election as a call to grace.

In the case of the patriarchs, the apostle used descriptive language: speaking about loving and hating<sup>34</sup>. Here, a subsequent transfer takes place, which is the going from election in the sense of „predilection”, mainly using descriptive language, to election in the sense of the call to grace, meaning the clearly defined salvific reality. In the developed idea of election, there is clear mention of the salvific dimension<sup>35</sup>.

The concept of election, meaning the chosen people (first the remnant of Israel, next the Church) is for Paul a category of salvation. This results from

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<sup>33</sup> The prophets see the beginnings of Israel's election in the exodus from Egypt (cf. Am 9, 7; Oz 13, 4; Mi 4, 3-5; Jr 2, 2; Ez 20, 58), and the giving of the Law at Sinai contributed to this. According to another tradition, election goes back to the time of the patriarchs, more precisely to the time of Jacob (Jr 33, 26; Ez 28, 25; 37, 25-28). Both traditions come together in Deut 4, 37; 7, 6-8; 9, 5; 14, 2.

<sup>34</sup> To love – to hate doesn't constitute the anti-thesis in the literal meaning, but that He loved one more than the other (see Gen 29, 31. 33; Deut 21, 15; also Mt 6, 24; Lk 14, 26; J 12, 25).

<sup>35</sup> The apostle points out the way God behaves, but does not give a reply as to why he behaves in such a way. He lets us understand that even if we do not understand God's behavior, we cannot question God. Thus he states: „Man! Who are you to dispute with God?” (v. 20a). The apostle referred to the *ad hominem* argument, meaning of the type: you are too small to understand this.

the already cited v. 24 and from v. 27b, where the remnant of Israel is tied with salvation: „[...] only the remnant will be saved”<sup>36</sup>. Response to God’s call is an essential part of election, which results in salvation. Such a model of a relationship with God already functions in the OT (e.g. Deut 30, 19; Hosea). Election is a salvific category – its ultimate goal is salvation. The chosen means: saved or taking the path of salvation. We can make more specific now the meaning of statement in Romans 9, 11b: the goal of God’s unchanging resolution, based on free choice, is salvation. The choice of the ethnic Israel – even though it is valuable in itself (cf. 3, 1-2) – does not constitute fulfilling God’s design as to election, since it is a salvific design. One should not therefore perceive election as the very choice of the Israel community. Such an approach hampers God to bestow salvation upon non-Jews. Separating the concept of election from salvation results in losing by its any connection with God’s plan towards the humanity (see Eph 1, 4). It becomes then an incomprehensible gesture of God’s sympathy or even a caprice. This conclusion forces us to make a clear distinction between the choice of an ethnic community (in the sense of giving it the possibility to enter into a particular relationship with God) and the response to this choice of the „remnant”<sup>37</sup>.

The apostle, when stating in 9, 6b: „For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” wants to say that not all who belong to the ethnic community of Israel enter automatically into the chosen Israel<sup>38</sup>. Some part of ethnic Israel does not constitute the chosen Israel, since the criterion of election are not blood ties but one’s response to God’s calling. This is an essential difference which the apostle undertakes in v. 6b: not all who were born in Israel, by this very fact constitute the chosen by God Israel. The rule set up in the patriarchs times that not the children according the flesh are the children of God (v. 8a) is still present. The principle: the chosen / those not chosen transfers from Abraham and Isaac onto all Israel.

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<sup>36</sup> Salvation in this verse for certain does not mean eschatological salvation, but being destined for salvation, meaning entering onto the path leading to it. Otherwise, all who did not become the remnant would not obtain salvation, and we do not consider this to be so.

<sup>37</sup> God, however, did not reject the part of Israel which did not accept Christ (cf. Romans 11, 1 ff.). Since His plan is salvific, then it always leads to including them in His plan, but also, based on this idea, at the moment they do not constitute the chosen people.

<sup>38</sup> The formation of ethnic consciousness of Israel from the times of Jacob does not constitute the criterion of election, since the ethnic criterion limits God’s free will.

The above understanding of the nature of election, that is as a category of salvation, allows Paul to prove the principle thesis in Rom 9, 6a that the word of God<sup>39</sup> did not fail. This conclusion can be drawn under the condition that by the election of Israel Paul understands the biblical remnant – those who responded to God's call. If by election the apostle understood belonging to ethnic Israel, he would have to admit that the majority did not believe and that it constitutes a „setback” in God's economy of salvation<sup>40</sup>. Understanding election in the sense that it is the faithful remnant allows the apostle to state that nothing has failed in the economy of salvation. The faithful remnant constitutes the foreseen fullness of the chosen people. As a confirmation, Paul quotes Isaiah: „[...] The Lord fills the earth with His word, effectively and quickly”<sup>41</sup> (v. 28). Everything was fulfilled according to the apostle to the smallest letter of the law. On the other hand, if we understood God's election in the sense of choosing of ethnic Israel, His word would have failed because the majority did not believe. But understanding God's election in the sense of the faithful remnant everything was fulfilled because only the faithful remnant constitutes the chosen Israel.

If we accept Cranfield's<sup>42</sup> understanding, that nothing has failed in God's election, since there was always a division in Israel, relieves the apostle's strength of argumentation. The proof is the very fact of division (there were always faithful and unfaithful people), not just the fulfillment of God's plan in the faithful remnant. According to Cranfield's interpretation, and those who think in a similar way, the strength of Paul's proof drastically diminishes, since this proof implies the lack of faith of the major part of Israel as something normal and based on this, convinces a person that it is not a defeat. It would be like trying to convince someone that it was not a tragedy that in an airplane crash the majority of the passengers died, since usually in such crashes, the majority of people die. According to the interpretation we support, in the apostle's thoughts the chosen people constitutes only the

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<sup>39</sup> We understand the expression „word of God” as His saving intention / plan. By this, the authors also understand it in relation to the chosenness of Israel (C r a n f i e l d, *Romans*, vol. 2, p. 472-473) or to the promises granted to Israel (M o r r i s, *Romans*, p. 352; M o o, *Romans*, p. 573), and this is pointed out by the direct context. They are, however, part of the God's saving plan.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. e.g. F i z t m y e r, *Romans*, p. 559.

<sup>41</sup> The future tense might suggest that we are dealing with a continuous process, which also concerns Christianity.

<sup>42</sup> *Romans*, vol. 2, p. 474.

faithful remnant. In this way, one can effectively show that nothing has failed. God's plan was fulfilled in this remnant<sup>43</sup> – just as it was previously fulfilled in Isaac and Jacob (and not choosing Ishmael and Esau did not constitute the reversal of God's salvation economy). We can illustrate this case with the final fulfillment of God's election, that is salvation. The existence of eventual damned does not cast shadow over God's calling of humanity to salvation, meaning that it suffered a defeat because of their existence. The saved constitute the foreseen fullness of the God's people in which the whole salvific plan accomplishes. The damned, anyway, remain sad reality.

The presented understanding of election does not constitute any barriers against the pagans: it places demands (the same as for Israel), but not barriers. A great number of pagans joins the chosen people, that is the faithful remnant. But that which took place in ethnic Israel also takes place among the pagans, meaning that only a certain part believed, whom we can similarly name God's „remnant". Nothing changes in the economy of salvation. The principle from the time of the patriarchs is continually binding: the chosen / the not chosen, meaning the one who responded and the one who did not. God places His offer, and a part of the humankind responds to it. Election is a mercy because choosing Israel and next pagans He gives possibility of entering into relationship with Himself that is a mercy. God's mercy does not fully consist in a very choosing of someone but in making him enter into relationship with Himself. And that requires man's response. The principle also concerns Christianity itself. Salvation economy, based on the free offer given to people, which is in no way their own merit, does not undergo change. Over the ages, there has been a continual division and entering or not into relationship with God, meaning into the chosen people (cf. Rom 11, 5 and 7).

According to Rom 9, the category of the chosen Israel (the faithful remnant) has precedence over ethnic Israel, since election is primarily a salvific category. Tying Israel's election with the faithful remnant has the deepest theological meaning – and at the same time points to the advantage of the designation „chosen people" over „chosen nation". If election is a category of salvation, that is incorporating all those who replied to God's call, then the part of Israel who did not respond to God's call, before the coming of Christ and after His coming, we should not speak about as the chosen people

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<sup>43</sup> According to Johnson (*Function*, p. 226-227), nothing has failed in God's economy thanks to the including of pagans among the chosen people. This, however, is not enough. The lack of faith of a significant part of Israel still remains then a defeat.

in the full meaning of the word, since the simple choosing of ethnic Israel does not constitute the fulfillment of God's plan concerning election.

Fulfilling God's plan as to election is salvation (e.g. Eph 1, 4). We can thus speak about the choice of the ethnic community of Israel, about its privileges, about the particular endearment, but not about God's election in the full meaning and sense of the word, since this is entering onto the path leading to salvation: „[...] only the remnant will be saved”. By the chosen Israel, we understand that part of Israel which, throughout its entire history, was faithful to God.

We judge that the above understanding of election, which is not ethnically conditioned, is the cause for Paul's omitting this privilege in 9, 4-5 – with the goal of bringing us closer to its nature.

## 2. WHAT ABOUT THE CHOICE OF ETHNIC ISRAEL?

We must make a distinction between God turning to the community of Israel, calling it to the particular relationship, and entering into this relationship by responding to God's call. Within the concept of election, we must distinguish two levels, meaning differentiate – as the apostle did in Rom. 9, 6b – between the ethnic Israel and the chosen Israel. The first level I would call the choice/chosenness, the second – election. The choosing concerns a select community, meaning Israel as the *locus* of God's revelation (cf. 3, 2b). Paul has nothing against the choice of ethnic Israel as a *locus* of God's particular activity, but is against identifying this choice with God's election; in other words, that this „ethnic Israel” is equal to „the chosen Israel”. The choosing of the community of Israel does not automatically result in election as a category of salvation. Watson's<sup>44</sup> astonishing statement that Paul in 9, 6 ff. rejects the tie between the choice of ethnic Israel and salvation ought to be understood in the above way.

The Greek term meaning „choice” and „election” appears in Romans four times (9, 11; 11, 5. 7 and 28) and refers to the faithful remnant of Israel, the Church (e.g. 1 Thes 1, 4) and once to the unbelieving part of Israel (11, 28)<sup>45</sup>. The last case might contradict the proven thesis in this study about

<sup>44</sup> Paul, *Judaism and the Gentiles*, p. 227, p. 9; cf. also D. J. M o o, *The Theology of Romans 9-11. A Response to Elisabeth Johnson*, in: D. M. H a y, E. E. J o h n s o n (ed.), *Pauline Theology*, vol. III: *Romans*, Minneapolis 1995, p. 249.

<sup>45</sup> I do not fully agree with Alettim (*Izrael et la Loi*, p. 195), that this term regards Israel

the lack of participation of the unfaithful part of Israel in God's election as described above. The context resolves this problem. The apostle writes that in matters concerning the Gospel, they are enemies of God; in that however, which concerns ἐκλογή, they remain the subjects of love on account of their fathers. We have here the proposed two level distinction: if the unfaithful part of Israel is in a state of enmity with God, then it hasn't entered onto the path of salvation yet, meaning that the used term ἐκλογή ought to be understood in the sense of the choice of ethnic Israel<sup>46</sup>, not election. The choice of the community of Israel as the *locus* of God's revelation still has power and the love<sup>47</sup>, but a lack of response to God's call does not introduce a person to the community of the chosen.

Therefore, what is the role of the community of Israel? When God revealed His will to Israel, the binding and superior paradigm was the one from the time of the patriarchs. That is why the choice of Israel did not stand above the saving plan of God, which was not ethnically conditioned – as the given Law did not stand above the promise granted to Abraham (Ga 3, 15 ff.). We perceive the choice of Israel as a gift and mission in relation to humanity. Without any doubt, Israel remains the first inheritor of God's revelation. But we stated that election demands a response on the part of man and from that moment on occurs his or her joining the people of God and destiny to salvation. Israel became the depositary of God's revelation, but should not have expected that access to this revelation was a sufficient condition of election, nor set conditions for it related with the ethnic community.

The apostle, in stating that election is based completely on God's freedom in choosing, realized that this freedom could be incorrectly understood by the addressees, meaning as a certain self-will and at the same time as an injustice. That is why in Rom 9, 14 and 19, he collects such accusations (a diatribe) and convinces the reader that God is not unjust in acting in such a way. The choosing is an expression of mercy, it is a grace (vv. 15-16). But the goal of the offered mercy is to bring to salvation. God's mercy does not only consist in choosing but also requires responding on the part of a man. The so-called „not chosen” do not remain rejected. They find themselves out, but not rejected. It is up to them to respond to God's call. Those who do not

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in all cases.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. C r a n f i e l d, *Romans*, vol. 2, p. 580; M o r r i s, *Romans*, p. 423; M o o, *Romans*, p. 731-732.

<sup>47</sup> The statement that the unfaithful part of Israel is continually the subject of love on God's part is obvious. God wishes to lead all to salvation.

respond take responsibility for that failure (v. 19). But even not responding they have a task to fulfill. Ishmael and Esau become fathers of other nations; the person of Pharaoh serves to make the name of God known; the lack of faith in part of Israel serves to start evangelizing the pagans (11, 11 ff.).

The apostle, concerning the supposed accusations, refers to the OT image of the potter – the potter who molds various vessels (particularly to Wisdom 15, 7). The potter is absolutely free in his choice: some vessels are molded for honorable purposes – others are not. It is worth noticing that the apostle stresses that the potter molds all the vessels from the same clay – but only their destiny is different. There is no difference in material – meaning biological, ethnical origin<sup>48</sup>. The origin is the same for all, that is from Adam (Rom 5, 12 ff.) and from God (3, 29)<sup>49</sup>.

The mistake Israel makes in understanding God's election lies in departing from the principle of the times of the patriarchs: chosen / not chosen, and in taking the blood ties for the basis of God's election. The principle which is binding since the time of Abraham is a principle based on the free choice of God, having in view overall salvation. The choice of ethnic Israel constitutes a value, but a value which is not superior to the election in the sense of destiny to salvation. The choice of the ethnic community, therefore, is not the full meaning of the word „election” – that is why we introduced a two level distinction.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS

Pauline argumentation in Romans 9 results in additional conclusions and questions.

Speaking of election in the OT, we must understand it as a chosen people, not an ethnic community. The term „chosen nation” is an ethnic category and wrongly defines election, that is, it narrows the appropriate understanding of election: 1) to the Jews, it suggests that ethnically belonging to Israel is a sufficient condition of election (I was born into this nation, that is why I have an ensured participation in God's election). This is the opposite of Paul's principle, which would in this case sound like: whoever comes from Israel is Israel; 2) in addition, to pagans this suggests that belonging to Israel

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<sup>48</sup> Esau and Jacob descended from the same parents and had the same genetic code.

<sup>49</sup> The image of the potter most often appears in wisdom literature, in which the leading theological topic is the theme of God the Creator; the topic of election of Israel takes second place.

is a necessary condition of election (they must overcome the ethnic barrier, meaning become Jews, in order to participate in this ethnically conditioned election). This is also the reverse of the preached by Paul teaching about justification by faith. Thus, the concept of the „chosen people” does not simplify in relation to the Jews (1), nor does it narrow in relation to the pagans (2) the salvific perspective and appears to be correct in the salvation history perspective. The faithful remnant, from among Jews and pagans, is named in Ga 6, 16 „God’s Israel”.

The present chosen people, meaning the Church, stands before a similar challenge. Identifying the Church with the chosen people can form similar erroneous thinking. Even though this is not the exact picture of the example of biblical Israel, since the ethnic premise does not play any role in the Church, despite all this it is replaced by belonging to a certain community with a particular relationship with God. Also, the dangerous and wrong conviction may exist that only formally belonging to the Church is a sufficient condition for belonging to the people of God.

If election, according to God’s plans, is not biologically conditioned in the case of the sons of Abraham and Isaac, which settles the paradigm in God’s proceedings, and it is also not conditioned by the same thing in New Testament times, then the question about the real value of ethnic conditions during the intermediate period arises. The question does not concern election in the womb of Israel itself. We already determined this. The question concerns the relationship in which pagans remained in respect to the category of the chosen Israel, the faithful remnant, in the times of biblical Israel. Is it necessary to become a Jew in order to enter into the people of God? This is so strongly expressed on the pages of the OT. Was it in those times a plan of God or was it only human interpretation? If it was a plan of God – then it only had a temporary characteristic; if it was human interpretation – then it was an inappropriate interpretation of God’s plan (as in the case of divorce, which Jesus criticizes in His discussion with the Pharisees: Mt 19, 3 ff.).

The question concerns whether the God’s faithful remnant in the OT period could be expanded to righteous pagans? Are there examples of this? Is someone like Job, who was an Edomite, and about whom the Bible expresses itself as if he were a faithful Israelite (Jb 1, 1), even though he was not a Jew, belonged to the category of the chosen people? Or was it rather that the category of the chosen people in that period of salvation history was hermeneutically closed in ethnic Israel?

This is mainly a question about circumcision, which at the beginning of Christianity was admitted to be a ritual, ethnic category, not salvific. When God

chose Abraham, He did not look at Abraham's circumcision, because it did not exist yet. When it was already introduced and He chose Isaac, not Ishmael, neither then He used circumcision as a cause of choosing, since Ishmael was already circumcised, but Isaac not, since He was not yet born. Next, when He was choosing Jacob, not Esau, neither then He was guided by circumcision, since the choice was made in their mother's womb. At the very beginning, the basis for God's election was neither biological descent nor circumcision.

The apostle states in Romans 9, 11b that God's plan, based on free choice, that is His saving plan, remains unchanged since the times of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. If the concept of ethnic Israel is subordinated to the concept of the chosen Israel, meaning the ethnic category to the salvific one, then the conclusion is drawn that someone who lived according to God's will, in accord with his own conscious, fulfilled the required condition. This is how Paul sees this in Rom 2, 26: „Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the Law [in accord with his conscious: cf. vv. 14-15], will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?”<sup>50</sup>. At that time, such a person already belonged to the chosen people, since it is a salvific category, and salvation, which is not ethnically conditioned, never referred to Israel itself. Paul's speech in Ga 3, 15 ff. goes in this direction. The covenant made with Abraham sets up the paradigm in God's dealings with Israel.

Due to this, the promise made to Abraham and his descendants is tied by the apostle with Christ, meaning that the descendant of Abraham is Christ. Why? The promise made to Abraham is fulfilled in Christ, neither in the choosing of Israel nor in given him the Law. As it is fulfilled in Christ, it concerns salvation regarding the whole humanity. God's including all of humanity into the plan of salvation already in the covenant with Abraham is precedent in respect to the choice of ethnic Israel. God's election, being a saving reality, stands above the choice of ethnic Israel, and the election of the biblical remnant constitutes a component part of election as inclusion of all peoples in the universal plan of salvation. From the very beginning, the dominating category was the category of salvation<sup>51</sup>. In this way, from the very dawn of creation, God's work included all of mankind in His salvific plan.

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<sup>50</sup> On the pages of the OT texts, there is no mention about righteous pagans as the people of God or the chosen, which can be explained by the then narrowing of the concept of election.

<sup>51</sup> If the principle category was the ethnic category, God would have at a certain moment of salvation history to change the criterion for choosing: from ethnic to salvific.

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„WYBRAŃSTWO” JAKO KATEGORIA ZBAWCZA WEDŁUG RZ 9  
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## S t r e s z c z e n i e

W Rz 9, 4-5 Apostoł przytacza całą listę przywilejów Izraela, które podkreślają jego szczególną pozycję. Zwłaszcza chrześcijanie wywodzący się z pogaństwa mogli dojść do wniosku, że skoro Izrael nie uwierzył w Mesjasza, coś zawiodło w ekonomii zbawienia. Taka też jest teza, która znajduje się w Rz 9, 6a i brzmi: „Nie znaczy to jednak wcale, że słowo Boże zawiodło”. Przeglądając listę wymienionych w 9, 4-5 przywilejów zauważa się brak jednego – wybraństwa. Autorzy sporadycznie przywiązują do tego wagę. Wydaje się, że przemilczenie przywileju wybraństwa jest świadomym zabiegiem. Od w. 6b, czyli od pierwszych słów po postawionej tezie, Apostoł skupia całą uwagę na naturze wybraństwa w historii zbawienia. Przyglądając się temu zagadnieniu ustaliliśmy, że Pawłowe rozumienie wybraństwa daje odpowiedź na postawioną tezę o trwałości słowa Bożego: dzięki temu, że nie wszyscy, którzy pochodzą z Izraela, są ludem wybranym (w. 6b; por. w. 8a), nic nie zawiodło w ekonomii zbawienia. W wiernej reszcie, podobnie jak w przeszłości, wypełnia się cały zamysł zbawczy. Apostoł odcina się od jedynie historycznego rozumienia wybraństwa i akcentuje jego wymiar zbawczy. Oddzielenie koncepcji wybraństwa od zbawienia sprawia bowiem, że traci ono związek z Bożym planem względem ludzkości i staje się jakimś niezrozumiałym gestem osobistej sympatii ze strony Boga czy nawet kaprysem.

Pawłowa interpretacja wybraństwa odbiega od tego, jak je postrzegano w czasach biblijnego Izraela. Nie powinno to dziwić, gdyż po pierwsze Izrael odszedł od pierwotnego zamysłu Boga, obecnego w życiu patriarchów (w. 7-13), przywiązując zbyt dużą wagę do wieżów krwi, a po drugie dzieło Jezusa Chrystusa polega na tym, że przewyższa wszystko, co zostało powie-

dziane w czasach Starego Przymierza. Modelem w rozumieniu idei wybraństwa jest zatem historia patriarchów, następnie koncepcja wierniej reszty, co znajduje kontynuację w Kościele i ostateczne wypełnienie w królestwie niebieskim. Takie rozumienie wybraństwa odsłania dynamikę zbawczego zamysłu Boga, który osiąga kolejne etapy realizacji w historii zbawienia. W przeciwnym razie mamy do czynienia jedynie ze statycznym pojmowaniem wybraństwa, a to jest obce ekonomii zbawienia.

**Key words:** election/chosenness, Israel's disbelief, Epistle to the Romans.

**Słowa kluczowe:** wybraństwo, niewiara Izraela, List do Rzymian.