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## “Jesus’ school” in the light of biblical theology of vocation

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## “JESUS’ SCHOOL” IN THE LIGHT OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF VOCATION

The subject of being Jesus’ disciple is closely related to the Good News. It is sufficient to notice the following: the very first thing Jesus did, immediately after John’s imprisonment and at the very beginning of His public activity, was to call disciples. Jesus proclaims the coming of the Kingdom, calls to conversion and recruits followers (Mk 1,16-20). The next scene shows them together: *And they went into Capernaum (...) he entered the synagogue and taught* (Mk 1,21). They came together; they are listening and Jesus is teaching. Since that time the fate of Jesus and the fate of His disciples are united; a peculiar *school of Jesus* comes into being, which will take on, as we will see, surprising features. Jesus will be carrying out His salvation deed, introducing disciples into the mystery of His person and linking them with His fate.

While looking at the issue of *being a disciple* from a wider perspective, we will observe that vocation, the formation of a disciple before sending him for a mission constitutes crucial element of the history of Salvation. In a sense, it is the history of vocations; it forms a continual school of the called. They – called and formed by Yahweh - will become the leaders of His people. When Jesus calls His disciples, He opened a successive stage of the same history: the history of vocations, which will be the continuation of the great biblical *school of God*.

Taking the above into consideration, we would like to present two issues. Firstly, we will take a global look at characteristic features of biblical vocation, paying attention to the process of becoming a disciple and entering *the school of God*. We will scrutinize the most distinctive examples of the disciples of the Lord; we will ask how man becomes a disciple of God and what it signifies. Secondly, we will analyze this issue by taking into account the Gospel’s record concerning strictly defined *school of Jesus*. We will especially take into account the record of the Gospel according to Mark 8,27-10,52, which is the description

of that school. We will pose a question: what are its constitutive elements and what is taking place there?

## I. AT GOD'S SCHOOL CHOSEN AND CALLED

Careful study of the Scripture, carried out from a perspective of the meeting between calling God and called man, allows us to differentiate three essential elements of a vocation:

- 1) eternal choice,
- 2) calling in time,
- 3) invitation to enter the new experience of God.

### **1. Eternal choice. «Before you were born i consecrated you» (Jer 1,5)**

The moment of the calling, of appointing a disciple, has its *before*, has *pre-history*, which is brought to life outside man, it precedes him, and prepares *before* this historical moment of vocation comes, which is precisely set in particular time and in particular conditions. A called man realizes that he is a part of the great plan of salvation, and the vocation to being a disciple, at the particular time, is a part of timeless conception of God.

The most distinctive example of the above is the description of the calling of Jeremiah. It becomes a paradigm, a stable point of reference, a perspective in which we should perceive the other biblical descriptions of vocations. The text in question is Jer 1,4-10. Because the analysis of the whole excerpt, however inspiring, goes beyond the scope of the present study<sup>1</sup>, let us focus on the fragment which directly refers to our subject.

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,  
 “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
 and before you were born I consecrated you;  
 I appointed you a prophet to the nations” (1,4-5).

The scene describing the vocation of Jeremiah starts with seemingly simple mention of the encounter with God (1,4). Seemingly simple, because it is very laconic, however how meaningful! It is of a distinctive nature when compared to other descriptions of prophet vocations. Let us notice that while Isaiah contemplates the vision of the throne of God surrounded by the seraphim (Iza 6), and Ezekiel presents extraordinary theophany (Ezek 1), Jeremiah limits himself to one statement: *Now the word of the Lord came to me saying* (1,4). This is the only thing decisive about his future life as a prophet: God has spoken. The place and conditions in which the prophet received the Word are of secondary importance. The weight of the description rests on the encounter with the Word of God, with God who has spoken.

<sup>1</sup> Cfr. J.L. SICRE, *Profetismo in Israele. Il Profeta - I Profeti - Il messaggio*, Roma 1995, p. 123-126.

Then we get to know that God's decision, in consequence of which Jeremiah was called as a prophet, was distant in the past. It was not the result of one moment, nor was it based on man's devotion to God's cause – like in the case of magnanimous Isaiah – but it brings the realization to the reader that God thought about Jeremiah long before that encounter: *Before I formed you in the womb...*<sup>2</sup>. The main emphasis is in the text is placed on God's activity. In this single verse there are as many as four God's activities: *formed* – *knew* – *consecrated* and finally *appointed a prophet*. This special action of God is referred to the self of a particular man; the pronoun – *you* is used with every verb describing God's actions. At the end of the verse there is unusual shift from the relation at the level *I – you* towards the openness for others: *I appointed you a prophet to the nations*. Jeremiah, about whom commentators wrote that *he is a prophet of intimate proximity with God*, tells us that the proximity is not reserved to him alone; he was not called to rejoice the presence of God in solitude. His calling is to go to others. And he will go to them *as a prophet* – the one who speaks on behalf of God<sup>3</sup>.

Comparing other accounts of vocations in the light of this unusual description, we notice that not only it is God's initiative of calling, but also we understand that behind this initiative there is the eternal conception, plan, in which chosen man is included.

His subjective impression of inadequacy must give way to the plan, since God, who calls, perfectly realizes whom He calls and reassures him, like in the case of Jeremiah: *I am with you*. Paul the Apostle perfectly realizes this when he writes about God who chose him already in his mother's womb and called with His grace (Gal 1,15)<sup>4</sup>.

Was it likewise with the disciples of Jesus? Indeed it was. On the pages of the Gospel we find the scene preceding the appointment of the Twelve, which perfectly shows the grace, Paul spoke about, the *before* preceding the time of vocation, Jeremiah wrote about. This evangelical *before* precedes historical entrance to the school of Jesus. This is the scene (Lk 6, 12-16):

In these days he went out to the mountain to pray;  
and all night he continued in prayer to God.  
And when it was day, he called his disciples,  
and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles (...).

In accordance with the biblical tradition a mount, a hill makes an ideal place for an encounter of man with God, it is the symbol of God's presence, and from the perspective of man it is a way to approach God. Thus, it is no coincidence that Jesus is on the mount while appointing the Twelve<sup>5</sup>. He wants to be in ultimate intimacy with the Father. A very special moment comes in which Jesus

<sup>2</sup> L.A SCHÖKEL, J.L. SICRE DIAZ, *I Profeti*, Roma <sup>3</sup>1996, p. 480-481.

<sup>3</sup> J.L. SICRE, *Profetismo in Israele*, op. cit., p. 124.

<sup>4</sup> J.CH. BAKER, *Paul the Apostle. The Triumph of God in Life and Thought*, Philadelphia 1984, p. 115.

<sup>5</sup> O. DA SPINETOLI, *Il Vangelo dei poveri*, Assisi, <sup>3</sup>1994, p. 232-234.

desires proximity with the Father. The mount becomes an ideal place for intensive prayer of Jesus. Luke showed this intensity of prayer in several exceptional moments of the Lord's life (3,21; 9,28; 22,41). Jesus always prayed in the face of important decisions related to His mission. Now he does likewise.

The night prayer of Jesus on the mount is of twofold significance. Firstly, it reveals Jesus in the whole truth of humanity. The decisions he has to make, are within God's plan which Jesus gradually discovers and implements. In communion with the Father, He will be able to find the necessary light. The duration of the prayer – *the whole night* – emphasizes the significance of that moment. Intense is the prayer of the Lord, because an unusual thing is to happen: the inclusion of the chosen ones in His salvation plan. This is not only about seeking light in the presence of God. Jesus will call those who have been appointed since time immemorial. During the night prayer Jesus will become a messenger bringing eternal will of God to the chosen people. The night prayer during which Jesus enters God's eternity, from which He then draws the names of the called, constitutes the *before*; it reveals that the historical moment of the calling is the consequence of the eternal choice of God. This is why and only after one can enter the *school of Jesus*. The disciples do not enter the school out of their choice, but because they are called. Furthermore, their calling is preceded by Jesus' prayer, that introduces the disciples into the plan, which God prepared and intends to carry out. That is the *before* of the vocation.

Having said this, one more reflection related to the mention of the mount has to be made. The mount on which the appointment of the Twelve takes place, evokes another mount, which is dominant in the whole Bible tradition – Mount Sinai. While Moses ascends the mount alone, Jesus ascends it in the company of His disciples. And just like on the Mount Sinai the foundations of the chosen nation were laid (Ex 19,5-8; 24,12-18), also on this mount which Jesus ascends, the foundations of the new community of the faithful are laid. The expression *and when it was day* additionally intensifies the statement: the dawn of the Kingdom of Heaven is coming. It is manifested by the calling of the disciples.

## 2. The call in time – God's initiative

We have underlined so far the first essential element of a vocation: the eternal call from God. The second is the awareness that the initiative to call the chosen man was put forward by God. To be a disciple means to be called – in a specific place and time. The most distinctive Old Testament example of such awareness is Isaiah's attitude at the face of his calling; full of readiness to embark his mission, for the question: "*Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*" (6,8), he answers God not in the words *I'll go* but *send me!* (6,8)<sup>6</sup>.

The description of the vocation of Jeremiah is also very instructive on the matter. Doubts (1,6) which raised in him, in the face of the greatness of the mis-

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<sup>6</sup> J.P. LOVE, *The Call of Isaiah*, Interpr 11 (1957), p. 282ss.

sion which was entrusted to him, reveal that he felt he was not talented enough to complete it. Similarly, Moses feared he cannot speak and invoked to his young age<sup>7</sup>. The words of God's order (1,7), disclose that God does not accept Jeremiah's doubts because He is not interested in man's subjective perception of his features and abilities. God clearly determines for what reason He calls: *I send you - you shall go, I command you - you shall speak*. This very sentence comprises the nature of prophetic vocation:

- 1) go, because God sends;
- 2) speak, because God orders.

Jeremiah talked about his hesitation relying only on his personal feeling of inadequacy, disregarding God's plans and situation of other people. God establishes the relationship *I – you – they*, which justifies his vocation despite his personal doubts<sup>8</sup>.

Isaiah and Jeremiah differ from each other much, yet they have one thing in common: they both know that in order to take upon their mission – either magnanimously like Isaiah, or reluctantly like Jeremiah – they have to be sent. The one who calls and sends is God. It is His initiative.

On the pages of the Gospel, this aspect is highlighted already in the description of the scene of the first disciples' calling, Mk 1, 16-20:

And passing along by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and followed him.

The main initiative of God who calls was discussed above. Let us notice that in the above cited excerpt of the Gospel already at the level of narration the above text is totally *dominated* by Jesus; He is the leading figure: He passes by, sees, addresses working people, calls<sup>9</sup>. He is the leading subject, His actions determine the whole. The called ones will not become the subject of the action until the last sentence of the description, when obediently respond to the initiative, to Jesus' action. The dominant position of Jesus strikes even more when we realize that the perspective of the whole narration focuses on the called. Yet,

<sup>7</sup> J. BLENKINSOPP, *Storia della profezia*, 22; cfr. W.L. HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah and Moses: Further Observations*, JBL 85 (1966), 17-27; F. GARCIA LOPEZ, *Élection-vocation d'Israël et de Jérémie: Deutéronome VII et Jérémie I*, VT 35 (1985), 4: „L'objection proprement dite s'exprime de façon différente, ce qui est naturel dans chacun des récits, bien que la toile de fond soit la même pour les trois: l'incapacité humaine de mener à bon terme la mission confiée par Dieu". In conclusion (p. 12) he writes: „La vocation de Jérémie trouve sa force et son sens à la lumière de l'élection d'Israël et de la figure de Moïse et, par conséquent, se présente non seulement sous les traits d'un prophète, mais aussi ceux d'un guerrier”.

<sup>8</sup> J. L. SICRE, *Profetismo in Israele*, op. cit., p. 124.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. J. GNILKA, *Marco*, Assisi 1991, p. 85-88.

it is Jesus who looks and calls. They leave their jobs and follow Him: *they left their nets and followed Him ... followed Him*. This is the way they begin new life. Following Jesus means for the called personal unity with Him, participation in His life. Indeed, the follower of a Jewish rabbi participated in the life of his master, however in the case of the called disciples by Jesus, two essential differences has to be noted comparing to the traditional relationship between a follower and the master. Firstly, Jesus calls authoritatively. Secondly, He will not teach His disciples Torah; they will be gradually getting to know Him in person, penetrating His mystery. He himself will be the *doctrine* they are to comprehend. The disciples will follow Jesus towards gradual discovery of His mystery, which will be fully manifested in Jerusalem during paschal events.

### 3. Towards a new experience of God

Apart from the eternal God's plan, which is some kind of *prehistory of the vocation*, apart from the calling in time, which comes from God, the Bible reveals one more special feature of biblical vocation. Namely, becoming a disciple means a new experience, leading to totally new knowledge of God.

A vocation, either to a community or individual – like presented in the Bible<sup>10</sup> – is of sacred nature<sup>11</sup>. It is bound up with the encounter with personal, holy God, who on one hand makes holy, consecrates and brings closer to himself<sup>12</sup>, and on the other hand reserves to himself the chosen people “driving them away from anything that is unholy”<sup>13</sup>. A perfect example of such *separation*, seen as the consequence of the vocation, is the case of St. Paul. He was – as he writes at the beginning of the letter to the Romans - *αὐφωρισμένης εἰς εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ* which is translated as *assigned* for the Gospel of God (Wulg. – *segregatus in Evangelium*). This *allocation* also means entering new experience of God<sup>14</sup>. The old one, until the time of vocation was connected with *allocation* for the faithfulness to the Law.

Due to his zeal to keep the Law, he persecuted the followers of Christ. Paul was a Pharisee. Now Pharisees were those “who cut themselves off from others in order to better keep the Law (...). This was in a sense the goal of their lives. They lived for that matter and finally we can conclude that this is why they put

<sup>10</sup> Cfr. C.M. MARTINI, *Bibbia e vocazione. Dalla vocazione battesimale alla vocazione presbiteriale*, Brescia <sup>2</sup>1993; K. ROMANIUK, *Powołanie w Biblii*, Warszawa <sup>2</sup>1989; A.J. DROGE, *Call Stories*, Anchor Bible Dictionary, vol. 1, New York 1992, p. 821-823.

<sup>11</sup> J. HOMERSKI, *Powołanie człowieka w świetle tekstów biblijnych*, w: *Scrutamini Scripturas. Księga pamiątkowa z okazji jubileuszu Ks. Prof. Stanisława Łacha*, Kraków 1980, p. 65.

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. M. WOJCIECHOWSKI, *Jezus jako Święty w pismach Nowego Testamentu*, Warszawa 1996, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> A. JANKOWSKI, *Biblijne pojęcie świętości człowieka*, RBL 37(1984), p. 112

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. G. RAFIŃSKI, *Pawłowe doświadczenie Boga objawiającego się w Chrystusie*, w: W. CHROSTOWSKI (red.), *Słowo Twoje jest prawdą. Księga pamiątkowa dla Księdza Profesora Stanisława Mędali CM w 65. rocznicę urodzin*, Warszawa 2000, p. 278-296.

Lord Jesus to death. They did it exactly out of their faithfulness to the Law (cf. J 19, 7)<sup>15</sup>.

This *allocation* of Paul to the Law was related to his personal understanding of God, whom he encountered and experienced within the community of the faithful. Once the mystery of Jesus Christ was revealed to him, it entailed a new experience of God. Thanks to this experience, Paul understood that he became *segregatus in Evangelium*. This unusually powerful and indeed new experience of God forms the basis for his new identity of *a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle* (Rom 1,1)<sup>16</sup>.

The truth contained in the Paul's experience is present in the descriptions of the vocations of Old Testament heroes of faith. Their vocation was connected with powerful experience of God. It was, each time, an extremely personal encounter<sup>17</sup>, based on unique experience, and its depth was only known to coming and revealing God and to man, who was invited to participate in this experience.

The encounter with God and getting to know God at the time of vocation has two aspects in the Scripture:

1/ either it relates to meeting God for the first time, in the case of a man who did not know God in the first place,

2/ or it relates to getting to know God anew, in the case of a man who already met God.

The above truth can be illustrated by the accounts of Samuel's and Isaiah's vocations. In the former case<sup>18</sup>, once Samuel reaches the age of certain cognitive development, God calls him one night in order to announce His words. Before this happened – according to the story - *Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him* (1Sam 3,7). He did stay in the temple, where, under the tutelage of Eli, he served and did the appropriate jobs connected with the worship, yet he did not know God. Now, after the first encounter, he gains such experience of God that will lay cornerstone to his life as a prophet.

The case of Isaiah was slightly different. We cannot say that *he did not know the Lord*. He knows Him, but at the moment of his calling (Isa 6), he meets God differently – in an entirely new way. This is, above all, the experience of God's holiness – His greatness and majesty on the one hand, and his own smallness, sinfulness and sinfulness of the nation on the other hand. It is by no means pos-

<sup>15</sup> Z. KIERNIKOWSKI, *Posługiwanie ojcostwu Boga*, Warszawa 2001, 18; K.L. Schmidt, *orizw*, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, vol. 5, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1993, p. 454: *afwrismenoy* is the current transl. of the Heb. פְּרוֹשׁ and Aram. פְּרִישׁ of which *Farisaiōj* is the transcription<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Cfr. A.F. SEGAL, *Paul the Convert, the Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee*, New Haven and London 1990, p. 125ss.

<sup>17</sup> C.M. MARTINI, *Bibbia e vocazione*, *op. cit.*, p. 13: „vocazione è un fatto molto personale”.

<sup>18</sup> Cfr. R.K. GNUSE, *The Dreams Theophany of Samuel, Its Structure in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Dreams and Its Theological Significance*, Lanham-New York-London 1984; J. ŁACH, *Samuel – ostatni sędzia i pierwszy prorok Izraela*, RBL 20 (1967), p. 331-340.

sible to exhaustively cover the issue of Isaiah's calling, so abundant in content, within the scope of the present paper. Regarding the subject in question, which is the experience of God and its relation to a calling, let us concentrate on synthetic presentation of what forms the new experience of God, which affected him in time of vocation<sup>19</sup>.

The scene describing this new experience of the prophet can be divided into three parts:

1. Vision (ww.1-5)
2. Purification (ww.6-7)
3. Mission (ww.8-13).

The initial vision (ww.1-5) makes the prophet aware of the *majesty and authority of God*. His rule is manifested in the three contrasts:

1) the life of God contrasts with the death of Uzziah – we pass from the dead king to the King – the Lord of hosts; the king died, meanwhile immortal Ruler *sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up* (6,1).

2) incognizability of God, depicted very generally, from a distance, - *and his train filled the temple* (6,1) – contrasts with seraphim described in greater detail.

3) the greatness of God contrasts with Isaiah himself, who recognizes his smallness and feels awe over the glory and might of God.

Then there are three contrasts, which emphasize authority, majesty, and might of God: *death-life; things that are seen -invisible God; uncleanness-holiness*. God's majesty is expressed synthetically in an expression characteristic of Isaiah – *Holy* (Isaiah uses this title with reference to God 25 times, while elsewhere in the whole Scripture it is used only 5 times!). The title *Holy* refers to absolute separation of God from the world and everything that is on the earth; this existential *distance* is related to the difference on moral plane – infinite *distance* that separates God from evil, sin. The former aspect is evident in the form in which Isaiah describes God; the latter is evident in his personal sense of his own smallness, sinfulness, impurity and also impurity of his own nation: *I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips* (6,5). This experience gave Isaiah a new insight into understanding God.

Omitting, out of necessity, a number of interesting issues concerning the account of Isaiah's calling<sup>20</sup>, it must be stated that his example may be used to highlight the truth that any calling means, above all, a new experience of God. This is extremely close contact with God, so mysterious and personal; it engages the prophet in the execution of God's plans regarding a nation at a particular point in time. This is – as we will see – not only the experience of Isaiah. Everyone who was called experienced a personal intervention of God, which usually marked a turning point of his life.

<sup>19</sup> Vide J.L. SICRE, *Profetismo in Israele. Il Profeta - I Profeti - Il Messaggio*, Roma 1995, p. 118-123.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. detailed and comprehensive studies: C.F. WHITLEY, *The Call and Mission of Isaiah*, INES 18 (1959), 38-48; J.M. SCHMIDT, *Gedanken zum Verstockungsauftrag Jesajas (Is. VI)*, VT 21 (1971), 68-90; F. MONTAGNINI, *La vocazione di Isaia*, BibOr 6 (1964), p. 163-172.

Against this background, the calling of the disciples, their introduction to Jesus' school is not only a call for sharing His mission, it is not merely of a practical, useful function; but above all it is a call for entering God's mystery, revealed in Jesus. He did not call His disciples out of pagans; He called those who knew and worshipped God and this was the basis for building their lives, they participated in religious life of their nation. Like in the case of Old Testament prophets, they are gradually introduced into experiencing God in a new way. This time it will be much closer insight, going infinitely beyond the OT prophets' experience; it will be the experience of the Father's love revealed in paschal mystery.

## II. JESUS' SCHOOL

We are aware that becoming a disciple, in time, at a specific hour, has pre-history, which is a part of God's conception. Furthermore, man's vocation is not merely a call to take on some task, mission; above all God calls in order to gain a new experience of faith, new experience of God. The above comprehensive outline of biblical perspective prepares us to undertake the subject of evangelic *school of Jesus*.

Apart from the calling of the disciples right at the beginning of His ministry (Mk 1,16-20), and apart from establishing the special circle of the Twelve (Mk 3,13-19), the Gospel according to Mark, which is our focus, comprises a special section devoted to the formation that Jesus gives His disciples. This coincides with the beginning of Jesus' way to Jerusalem, where His passion, death, and Resurrection will be accomplished. This last way of Jesus along with His disciples becomes a special *school*, which introduces them into the mystery of Jesus. The passage in question comes from the Gospel of Mark 8,27-10,52<sup>21</sup>.

To ensure a smooth passage into the subject, let us look at the composition of the Gospel according to Mark:

Part one: The Galilean Ministry (1,14-8,26)

Part two: The passion, death, and Resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem (8,27-16,8)

- Jesus' way to Jerusalem (8,27-10,52)

- The activity of Jesus in Jerusalem (11,1-13,37)

- The passion, death, and Resurrection (14,1-16,8)

### 1. The school of Jesus – overall characterization

The account of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem forms an essential part of Mark's Gospel. The way, Jesus covers with His disciples towards Jerusalem, goes be-

<sup>21</sup> Cfr. K. STOCK, *Il cammino di Gesù verso Gerusalemme. Marco 8,27-10,52*, Roma <sup>2</sup>1996.

yond external, physical dimension. Jesus' intention, while on the way to Jerusalem with His disciples, is to introduce them into His mystery and to share His own fate with them. The reading of this part of the Gospel is necessary not only to truly and fully comprehend the Lord's passion. It is also necessary to understand why a disciple is called. It gives the answer to the question: what does it take to follow Jesus?

From the point of view of the internal structure, this part of the Gospel is constructed in such a way as to make it obvious that Jesus is on the way together with His disciples. Let us notice the following elements of the structure of this part of the Gospel:

- the term *way* appears in the first and last sentence of the whole section, which creates a clear inclusion: *on the way He asked His disciples* (8,27) - *followed Him on the way* (10,52).

- the same concerns Jesus' disciples: they are mentioned in a clear way at the beginning of the first and last scene of the whole section. Jesus' disciples, participants of His school, are constantly on the way with Jesus and are clearly distinguished from the other people whom Jesus meets (Mk 8,28). This special position of disciples and a distinguishing trait at the same time results from the fact that Jesus orders them to keep silence (8,30; 9,9), and He himself focuses on their formation (9,30n). The announcement of the fate of Jesus is reserved to the disciples (8,31; 9,31; 10, 33n – only for the Twelve). The transfiguration and the conversation with the disciples following this event is reserved to the three of the disciples: Peter, James, and John (9,2-13). Hence, the following fact is also significant: the first preaching about following Him, starts with the words: *he called to him the multitude with his disciples* (8,34). This implies that the special formation of the disciples is orientated to turn them into fishers of men (1,17), and it is through them that He desires to reach all men.

- Let us also observe that during the period of *Jesus' school on the way*, there are only two instances where Jesus addresses a larger group of people, not only disciples alone: first time when He talks about following Him (8,31-9,1) and the other occasion – on the subject of divorce (10,1-9). The above becomes even more significant, if we realize that in the next two chapters, following the section being discussed, Jesus addresses His disciples only twice with a special teaching. All this reveals the supreme importance of *Jesus' school on the way*, during which Jesus is making every effort to form His disciples<sup>22</sup>.

The school of Jesus has its own subject matter: that is the fate of Jesus, Son of God – His passion, death, and Resurrection. The Evangelist underlines that Jesus introduces the disciples to the subject *plainly* (8,32). Beginning with the pericope introducing Jesus' school, this subject becomes dominant. He is misunderstood and not accepted by the disciples, yet Jesus persists in instructing about His fate and the consequences, of events awaiting Him, for the disciples

<sup>22</sup> K. STOCK, *Il cammino di Gesù verso Gerusalemme*, op.cit., p. 9.

(8, 34-9, 1; 9, 35-50; 10, 41-45). *The school of Jesus* originates from the issue of Jesus' identity. The identity of Jesus, the answer to the question: Who is He, is of absolute importance in Jesus school: Who is the One who heads to Jerusalem and takes disciples for the journey? However this question is immediately followed by the next one: the question about the identity of the disciples. The end of Jesus' journey is Jerusalem and the events to come there. The end of the disciple's journey is their readiness to accept Jesus in the whole truth and readiness to follow Him in His way. The school of Jesus has three steps of the disciples' formation:

- 1) uniqueness of Jesus,
- 2) this uniqueness is manifested in the paschal mystery,
- 3) this mystery does not only concern Jesus, but it is also bound up with the fate of the disciples.

The above concerns – running throughout the whole *school of Jesus*, appear at the very beginning of the section and they will form our point of reference.

## **2. Jesus' school – Stage one – The uniqueness of Jesus**

Away from the uproar of the world, Jesus wants His disciple to discover that He is a unique person, unique in the whole history of Salvation. This issue appears at the very beginning of their mutual journey to Jerusalem, and it is represented by the following pericope:

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him (Mk 8,27-30).

The disciples are faced with the fundamental question to the whole Gospel, *who is Jesus?* There are two things worth noting before the scrutiny of this subject. In *Jesus' school*, it is He who opens the dialogue, with the disciple, concerning His identity; He asks about the other people's opinion and about their own opinion. What is more, let us observe that each time Jesus asks the disciples or whenever they ask Him, these dialogues never take place in public, but always in private, when only Jesus and the disciples are present. Such a dialogue in private is the symbol and a tool to develop unity between Jesus and disciples.

The people, whose opinion Jesus asks about, are all those who do not belong to the circle of the disciples. Their reply reveals a deep respect to Jesus, who was considered a prophet. Jesus' second question, addressed to the disciples and intended to bring a different answer, shows a fundamental distinction that the Lord makes: a clear division into the circle of the disciples and into those who are not. The basis for this distinction, and the base for the new response that Jesus is awaiting, is a special bond with Him, communion, mutual

fate they are to experience since the moment of calling (1,16-20). Jesus definitely separated the disciples from those who are *those outside* (4, 10-12). It was this appointed group that witnessed the series of redemptive events, which were reserved to them alone: when He stills the storm (4,35-41), and when Jesus walks on the water (6,45-51), the preparation to the feeding of multitude (4,35-41 and 6,35-44). The participation of Jesus' disciples in the subsequent events leads them to the following question: *Who then is this?* (4,41). This is the question concerning Jesus' identity and it is a central question in the life of a disciple: *who is my Lord?*

The answer comes from Peter. Because he, called as the first disciple, was a special witness and follower of Jesus; from the very beginning he lived in a particular communion with the Lord. Now he is to give testimony of his understanding of Jesus' mystery: *You are the Messiah*. What is hidden behind this confession? A fuller understanding of Peter's answer is easier in the light of the words of high priests, who call crucified Jesus: *the Messiah, the King of Israel*. Messiah means for them the king of Israel. In Peter's confession, Jesus is the King – and according to the nation's expectation of a Messiah – He is sent by God as the last King, who is to lead them to definitive Salvation. This means there is only one such King. Peter professes the uniqueness of Jesus and this is in contrast to earlier statements on the subject of Jesus' identity. In other people's view Jesus is one of the prophets, one among others, another to be followed by new ones. With accordance to Peter's confession, Jesus has a task, which is different from all previous messengers of God and no one is to come after Him: He is unique and the last.

The discovery that Jesus is the Messiah – the last sent King, someone unique is the first aspect of Jesus' mystery, which He himself wishes to reveal to the disciples in His school. As it is self-evident in the further part of the Gospel, the understanding of Jesus' identity as a King – Messiah was not complete. Peter – and probably the disciples as well – were not able to comprehend that Salvation, which Jesus is to accomplish, will come through passion and the Cross. This will come in the next stage towards getting to know Jesus in His school. For the time being, Jesus orders the disciples to keep silence. This implies that the disciples are to cover with Jesus all the way to Jerusalem, they are to complete the school, and recognize His mystery, and only then they will speak about it.

Let us draw several conclusions. The question about Jesus' identity is posed at a specific time: Jesus is finishing His vast ministry in Galilee and is heading to Jerusalem, where His fate will be sealed. Giving Him recognition as the King has twofold function at this stage:

- 1) it summarizes previous experiences of the disciples;
- 2) it is the point of departure for the next stage of the disclosure of His mystery. From the Messiah to crucified Jesus – this is the *direction* of this ultimate experience.

### 3. Jesus' school – Stage two – Paschal mystery

The uniqueness of Jesus, expressed by Peter and obvious for the disciples, needs to be specified. In what sense is Jesus someone exceptional? What forms this uniqueness? The answer comes immediately. Jesus is not *a* Messiah, Someone vague; He is the crucified Messiah and He is the Risen One. Here is the second stage in introducing the disciples into the subject of Jesus' identity. The answer given is not complete. It must be complemented:

And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter, and said, "*Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men.*" (8, 31-33).

Jesus' fate, and thereby His identity as the Messiah, whom Peter confessed, is expressed by four verbs:

- 1) to suffer,
- 2) to be rejected,
- 3) to be killed in a cruel way,
- 4) to rise from the dead.

Revealing the mystery of His own identity and fate, that is ahead of Him, Jesus points at the final resort, which stands behind these events. The impersonal form in the Greek text *it is necessary* (eng. - *the Son of man must*) indicates God. Jesus' fate depends on Him; the activity of man is under His authority<sup>23</sup>. Every next stage of Jesus' journey is bound with God's will. People do act, yet their activity is included in God's Salvation plan. At this stage of Jesus' school, it is vital for the disciples to recognize that behind all things that befall Jesus, behind all incomprehensibility, is God and His Salvation plan.

How much this conception of God, sending Jesus on the way of the Cross and then to Golgotha and the Resurrection, was alien to human perception can be manifested by Peter's reaction. He, who professed the uniqueness of Jesus, does not want to accept His agony and death. Peter intends to *exclude* Jesus from the communion with the other disciples and in private, he wants to correct what Jesus presented.

Mark does not quote the words with which Peter addresses Jesus, yet he presents the *way* Peter does it. The word used here *rebuke* is very strong and in the mouth of Jesus was used against demons (1,25; 3,12; 9,29), against the violent storm on the sea (4,39). Without any further scrutiny, we can state that the way

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<sup>23</sup> J. GNILKA, *Marco*, Assisi <sup>2</sup>1991, p. 448 where He notes: „Nei testi apocalittici *dei* definisce l'arrivo necessario di quei fatti che rientrano nel corso degli avvenimenti finali. Il destino del Figlio dell'uomo sarebbe quindi un fattore irrinunciabile del dramma finale della storia della salvezza. Ma il riferimento a Sal 118,22 suggerisce di collegare la necessità con la volontà di Dio disposta nella Scrittura”.

Jesus began to interpret His fate, was treated by Peter as marked by *the evil spirit*. Peter wants to wipe this demon out of Jesus' thought. Jesus' reaction is directed to restore the appropriate structure of His school: Jesus does not address Peter alone, but speaks to him, addressing the disciples. This implies that the words directed to Peter are meant for all disciples. Jesus makes use of the same verb, Peter uttered just a moment earlier, with reference to Peter: *rebuke*. It is not Jesus who has the evil spirit, while He is talking about His passion, death, and the Resurrection. It is Peter who has the evil spirit, not comprehending and not accepting the mystery Jesus speaks about.

The words, directed to Peter, *Get behind me, Satan!* are of enormous importance<sup>24</sup>, and what is more – not infrequently, these words happen to be misunderstood as a token of rejection of Peter. However, this is not the case. For a moment Peter desired to become the teacher, Jesus' master, he wanted to replace Him, to lead Jesus, wanted Him to follow him. Meanwhile, the Lord restores the order of things, characteristic of Jesus' school. It is Jesus who is in front, He outlines the way, and He knows where to lead the disciples. They in turn must follow Him. A disciple's position is behind the teacher. This relationship cannot be disrupted or altered. And that was Peter's intention. He wanted to dissuade Jesus from carrying on, towards passion and death. These words of Jesus form the second calling of Peter. For the first time, at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus addressed Peter and his brother with the call *Come after me* (1,17). Now He does it for the second time. Jesus insists on Peter's leaving, He does not want his dismissal, He wants Peter to occupy his due position, which is behind the master, not in front of Him. "Peter rejects this portrait of the suffering Son of Man; and so Jesus categorizes his lack of understanding as worthy of Satan"<sup>25</sup>. Naming Peter a demon, Jesus makes him and the other disciples aware that Peter's intention of dissuasion Jesus from His way, the disturbance on the way to passion and death, places Peter on Satan's side, thus he acts like God's opponent. There is similarity between Satan's activity and that of Peter: in 4,15 Satan is called the one who *takes away the word which is sown in them*, whereas Peter *opposed the word of Jesus*, not being able to accept it.

It is time to draw some conclusions. While, indeed, Peter professed the uniqueness of Jesus, he also had his own conception of this identity. He relied on popular, people's opinion on this subject (you are not on the side of God, but of men – said the Lord to him 8, 33). On the other hand if Jesus was not someone exceptional, the Messiah for Peter, he would not have reacted so violently, when faced with Jesus' announcement concerning His way. Peter, as can be noticed, was far from the adequate image of Jesus, the Messiah, he did not understand and accept all the consequences behind the recognition of Jesus as the Messiah.

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<sup>24</sup> K. STOCK, *Il cammino di Gesù verso Gerusalemme*, op. cit., p. 46-47.

<sup>25</sup> R.E. BROWN, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, New York 1997, p. 138-139.

Peter's reaction reveals the state of soul and mind of this disciple, who discovered that Jesus is an exceptional Person, and had to face his own image of this uniqueness. Then, discovering Jesus and His identity proves to be a process, as much long as difficult one; and it takes much time and formation until a disciple, not merely accepts that Jesus is the crucified and resurrected Messiah, but will also want to follow in His footsteps. Peter's resistance, in accepting the mystery of Jesus - the Messiah suffering and finally put to death, will reach the climax with Peter's triple denial of Jesus (14,66-72). The Lord, already as the Risen Lord, however, will call him once more as His disciple: *go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him* (16,7).

Let us then notice that in the Gospel we deal with threefold calling of Peter and the disciples, and each calling corresponds to the subsequent stages of the revelation of Jesus' mystery: at the beginning of His ministry He calls them to follow Him (1,16-20). Beginning His last way towards final destiny, introducing the disciples into the mystery of His fate, Jesus calls them again in the time of their resistance against the reality of His mystery (8,33). After the fulfillment of the paschal mystery, He calls them for the third time, despite their faithlessness and downfall (14,28; 16,7).

#### **4. Jesus' school – Stage three – Paschal mystery: the participation of a disciple in the paschal mystery**

Getting to know Jesus does not limit only to the discovery of His uniqueness, it does not come down to the acceptance of heartbreaking, perhaps even scandalous or repulsive image of suffering Jesus the Messiah. The school of Jesus leads a disciple to identify with Him, to share His fate – this is the third element of this unusual inner way, which Jesus' disciples must go through, heading with Him to Jerusalem. Here is the central subject of the following pericope:

And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them: If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. (Mk 8,34-35)

Getting to know Jesus and His mystery cannot remain a theory, an idea, or conception. This leads to sharing His fate. This will be the next message directed to the disciples, who will be joined by the crowd called by Jesus. The presence of a wide audience means that the words to be spoken concern, not only the narrow circle of the disciples, but the whole nation; they outline the way of life for the community established by Jesus. Jesus' statement, beginning with if any man would come after me is, according to the Greek grammar *conditio simplex*, which presupposes that the condition is indeed fulfilled. In this case, Jesus presupposes that people will follow Him. Basing on this will, Jesus explains what conditions are necessary to really become His disciple, to indeed follow Him. Jesus makes use of three imperatives that a future disciple must fulfill:

1) deny oneself. In the text above, the same word is used as one in the description of Peter's denial of Jesus (14,68-70). The denial of Jesus meant that Peter wanted to separate himself from Him, to break the community with Him; he did not want to have anything to do with His fate, Peter only wanted to cling to himself. Applying this word to himself, the Jesus' disciple is called to separate from himself and to cling to Jesus totally, to deepen communion with Him, to tighten bonds with the Lord. The disciple is to separate from his passing moods, from the way people think, and he ought to cling to God's way of reasoning, in accordance with the plan God has towards the world. Such a way of life demands readiness to sacrifice oneself. At this stage there is no alternative: following Jesus to the end may entail the loss of life for His sake. Peter knows perfectly to what degree he can unite with Jesus, when said: *If I must die with you, I will not deny you* (14,31). Either life with Jesus to the end - or denial. There is no other alternative.

2) such availability is demanded of Jesus' disciple, who tells him to take the cross. This is the instrument of Jesus' death. He did not come down from the cross to save His earthly life (15,30.32). What is more, after the Resurrection, He was presented at the height of His mystery as Jesus of Nazareth – Crucified (16,6). *Crucified* – became Jesus' own name. This means that anyone wishing to become Jesus' disciple, is to follow Him in everything He encountered on His way, including the Cross. Otherwise, it will be only partial, incomplete following.

3/ following the Lord is expressed in the Greek text in the imperative form of the present tense and hence it presupposes continual disposal. Thus, in order to follow Jesus, to really become His disciple one needs not only to abandon oneself and cling to Jesus, not only share Jesus' fate to the cross – but one needs to constantly focus on Jesus, to direct attention on Him, to constantly desire to build a deep communion with Him. Without the above, it is impossible to become a disciple. Jesus' statement, specifying the conditions of following Him, reveals the following: the necessity for continual, incessantly renewed focus on Him. Against this background, in this context, specific *activities* will take place: denial of oneself and carrying one's own cross.

## SUMMARY

What conclusions can be drawn from this *look* through the open door of Jesus' school?

1. Jesus in His school introduces the disciples by revealing the truth about His own person in two stages: firstly he appears as the unique, exceptional One (=the Messiah, the King of Israel), and then He relates this uniqueness with the Paschal Mystery.

2. In this school of Jesus the disciples get to know that there is a direct connection between the fate of the crucified and suffering Messiah and their own fate. The way, the Messiah walked will become the way of the disciples. Then, Jesus establishes a fundamental rule of unconditional following Him: the way of the disciple cannot be different from the way of the Lord. The communion between the disciples and the Lord is not possible from a distance. It is not possible for the Lord to walk one way while the disciples follow another, their own. The unity with the Lord is possible only through their participation in His fate!

3. In order to build this communion one has to give up everything, renounce everything, even one's own life. The disciple will receive the life in the glory of the Father – just like the Resurrected Jesus.

## STRESZCZENIE

### «Szkoła Jezusa» w świetle biblijnej teologii powołania

Powołanie i formacja uczniów są ściśle związane z działalnością Jezusa. Jedną z pierwszych Jego czynności jest wezwanie uczniów (Mk 1,16-20); z kolei ich przebywanie z Mistrzem, wspólnota losu, wchodzenie w Jego tajemnicę odbywa się w ramach swoistej *szkoły*, *szkoły Jezusa*. W niej dokonuje się formacja uczniów, która ma prowadzić z jednej strony do stopniowego odkrywania tożsamości Pana, z drugiej zaś ma pozwolić uczniowi odkryć własną tożsamość. Szczególnym zapisem formacji w takiej *szkole* jest zapis Ewangelii Marka 8,27-10,52. To swoista *szkoła w drodze*; Jezus zmierza ku Jerozolimie wprowadzając uczniów w tajemnicę własnego losu i pozwalając im wchodzić w nią na trzech etapach: od odkrycia wyjątkowości Jezusa, poprzez wejście w tajemnicę paschalną, stanowiącą o istocie tej wyjątkowości aż po zjednoczenie z Mistrzem. Szkołą Jezusa prowadzi uczniów do pełnej wspólnoty losu.

Spoglądając na to zagadnienie w szerszej perspektywie biblijnej odkrywamy, że powołania i kształtowanie ucznia przed wysłaniem go z misją jest elementem konstytutywnym całej historii zbawienia, która jest w pewnym sensie historią powołań, historią powołanych. Wezwani i ukształtowani przez Boga, będą przewodnikami Jego ludu. Kiedy Jezus powołuje swych uczniów, otwiera zatem kolejny etap tej samej historii: historii powołań, która będzie dalszym ciągiem wielkiej, biblijnej *szkoły Boga*.

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### Słowa kluczowe / key words:

«Szkoła Jezusa», teologia biblijna, teologia powołania  
“Jesus' School”, biblical theology, theology of vocation