



The Holy See

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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The Meaning of Man's Original Solitude

In the last reflection of the present cycle we reached an introductory conclusion, taken from the words of Genesis on the creation of man as male and female. We reached these words, that is, the "beginning," to which the Lord Jesus referred in his talk on the indissolubility of marriage (cf. *Mt* 19:3-9; *Mk* 10:1-12). But the conclusion at which we arrived does not yet end the series of our analyses. We must reread the narrations of the first and second chapters of Genesis in a wider context, which will allow us to establish a series of meanings of the ancient text to which Christ referred. Therefore, today we will reflect on the meaning of man's original solitude.

The starting point of this reflection is provided for us directly by the following words of Genesis: "It is not good that man [male] should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (*Gn* 2:18). God-Yahweh speaks these words. They belong to the second account of the creation of man, and so they come from the Yahwist tradition. As we have already recalled, it is significant that, as regards the Yahwist text, the account of the creation of the man is a separate passage (*Gn* 2:7). It precedes the account of the creation of the first woman (*Gn* 2:21-22). It is also significant that the first man ('*adam*), created from "dust from the ground," is defined as a "male" ('*is*) only after the creation of the first woman. So when GodYahweh speaks the words about solitude, it is in reference to the solitude of "man" as such, and not just to that of the male.

However, it is difficult to go very far in drawing conclusions merely on the basis of this fact. Nevertheless, the complete context of that solitude of which Genesis 2:18 speaks can convince us that it is a question here of the solitude of "man" (male and female) and not just of the solitude of man the male, caused by the lack of woman. Therefore, on the basis of the whole context, it seems that this solitude has two meanings: one derived from man's very nature, that is, from his humanity, and the other derived from the male-female relationship. The first meaning is evident in the account of Genesis 2, and the second is evident, in a certain way, on the basis of the first

meaning. A detailed analysis of the description seems to confirm this.

The problem of solitude is manifested only in the context of the second account of the creation of man. The first account ignores this problem. There man is created in one act as male and female. "God created man in his own image...male and female he created them" (*Gn 1:27*). As we have already mentioned, the second account speaks first of the creation of the man and only afterward of the creation of the woman from the "rib" of the male. This account concentrates our attention on the fact that "man is alone." This appears as a fundamental anthropological problem, prior, in a certain sense, to the one raised by the fact that this man is male and female. This problem is prior not so much in the chronological sense, as in the existential sense. It is prior "by its very nature." The problem of man's solitude from the point of view of the theology of the body will also be revealed as such, if we succeed in making a thorough analysis of the second account of creation in Genesis 2.

The affirmadon of God-Yahweh, "It is not good that man should be alone," appears not only in the immediate context of the decision to create woman, "I will make him a helper fit for him," but also in the wider context of reasons and circumstances. These explain more deeply the meaning of man's original solitude. The Yahwist text connects the creation of man first and foremost with the need to "till the ground" (*Gn 2:5*). That would correspond, in the first account, with the vocation to subdue and have dominion over the earth (cf. *Gn 1:28*). Then, the second account of creation speaks of man being put in the "garden in Eden," and in this way introduces us to the state of his original happiness. Up to this moment man is the object of the creative action of God-Yahweh, who at the same time, as legislator, establishes the conditions of the first covenant with man.

Man's subjectivity is already emphasized through this. It finds a further expression when the Lord God "formed out of the ground every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to man to see what he would call them" (*Gn 2:19*). In this way, therefore, the first meaning of man's original solitude is defined on the basis of a specific test or examination which man undergoes before God (and in a certain way also before himself). By means of this test, man becomes aware of his own superiority, that is, that he cannot be considered on the same footing as any other species of living beings on the earth.

As the text says, "Whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name" (*Gn 2:19*). "The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man [male] there was not found a helper fit for him" (*Gn 2:20*).

All this part of the text is unquestionably a preparation for the account of the creation of woman. However, it possesses a deep meaning even apart from this creation. Right from the first moment of his existence, created man finds himself before God as if in search of his own entity. It could be said he is in search of the definition of himself. A contemporary person would say he is in search of his own "identity." The fact that man "is alone" in the midst of the visible world and, in particular,

among living beings, has a negative significance in this search, since it expresses what he "is not."

Nevertheless, the fact of not being able to identify himself essentially with the visible world of other living beings (*animalia*) has, at the same time, a positive aspect for this primary search. Even if this fact is not yet a complete definition, it constitutes one of its elements. If we accept the Aristotelian tradition in logic and in anthropology, it would be necessary to define this element as the "proximate genus" (*genus proximum*).

However, the Yahwist text enables us to discover also further elements in that admirable passage. Man finds himself alone before God mainly to express, through a first self-definition, his own self-knowledge, as the original and fundamental manifestation of mankind. Self-knowledge develops at the same rate as knowledge of the world, of all the visible creatures, of all the living beings to which man has given a name to affirm his own dissimilarity with regard to them. In this way, consciousness reveals man as the one who possesses a cognitive faculty as regards the visible world. With this knowledge which, in a certain way, brings him out of his own being, man at the same time reveals himself to himself in all the peculiarity of his being. He is not only essentially and subjectively alone. Solitude also signifies man's subjectivity, which is constituted through selfknowledge. Man is alone because he is "different" from the visible world, from the world of living beings. Analyzing the text of Genesis we are, in a way, witnesses of how man "distinguishes himself" before God-Yahweh from the whole world of living beings (*animalia*) with his first act of self-consciousness, and of how he reveals himself to himself. At the same time he asserts himself as a "person" in the visible world. Sketched so incisively in Genesis 2:19-20, that process is a search for a definition of himself. Linking up with the Aristotelian tradition, it leads to indicating the *proximate genus*. Chapter 2 of Genesis expresses this with the words: "The man gave names...." There corresponds to this the specific differentia which is, according to Aristotle's definition, *nôus, zóón noetikón*. This process also leads to the first delineation of the human being as a human person with the specific subjectivity that characterizes him.