



The Holy See

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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Original Innocence and Man's Historical State

Today's meditation presupposes what has already been established by the various analyses made up to now. They sprang from the answer Jesus gave to his interlocutors (cf. *Mt* 19:3-9; *Mk* 10:1-12). They had asked him a question about the indissolubility and unity of marriage. The Master had urged them to consider carefully that which was "from the beginning." For this reason, so far in this series of meditations we have tried to reproduce somehow the reality of the union, or rather of the communion of persons, lived "from the beginning" by the man and the woman. Subsequently, we tried to penetrate the content of Genesis 2:25, which is so concise: "And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed."

These words refer to the gift of original innocence, revealing its character synthetically, so to speak. On this basis, theology has constructed the global image of man's original innocence and justice, prior to original sin, by applying the method of objectivization, proper to metaphysics and metaphysical anthropology. In this analysis we are trying rather to consider the aspect of human subjectivity. The latter, moreover, seems to be closer to the original texts, especially the second narrative of creation, the Yahwist text.

Apart from a certain diversity of interpretation, it seems quite clear that "the experience of the body," such as it can be inferred from the ancient text of Genesis 2:23 and even more from Genesis 2:25, indicates a degree of "spiritualization" of man. This is different from that which the same text speaks of after original sin (cf. *Gn* 3) and which we know from the experience of historical man. It is a different measure of "spiritualization." It involves another composition of the interior forces of man himself. It involves almost another body-soul relationship, and other inner proportions between sensitivity, spirituality and affectivity, that is, another degree of interior sensitiveness to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. All this conditions man's state of original innocence and

at the same time determines it, permitting us also to understand the narrative of Genesis. Theology and also the Magisterium of the Church have given these fundamental truths a specific form.

Undertaking the analysis of the beginning according to the dimension of the theology of the body, we do so on the basis of Christ's words in which he himself referred to that "beginning." When he said: "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female?" (*Mt* 19:4), he ordered us and he still orders us to return to the depths of the mystery of creation. We do so, fully aware of the gift of original innocence, characteristic of man before original sin. An insuperable barrier divides us from what man then was as male and female, by means of the gift of grace united with the mystery of creation, and from what they both were for each other, as a mutual gift. Yet we try to understand that state of original innocence in its connection with man's historical state after original sin: "*status naturae lapsae simul et redemptae.*"

Through the category of the historical *a posteriori*, we try to arrive at the original meaning of the body. We try to grasp the connection existing between it and the nature of original innocence in the "experience of the body," as it is highlighted in such a significant way in the Genesis narrative. We conclude that it is important and essential to define this connection, not only with regard to man's "theological prehistory," in which the life of the couple was almost completely permeated by the grace of original innocence. We must also define this connection in relation to its possibility of revealing to us the permanent roots of the human and especially the theological aspect of the ethos of the body.

Man enters the world and enters the most intimate pattern of his future and his history with awareness of the nuptial meaning of his own body, of his own masculinity and femininity. Original innocence says that that meaning is conditioned "ethically," and furthermore, that on its part, it constitutes the future of the human ethos. This is very important for the theology of the body. It is the reason why we must construct this theology "from the beginning," carefully following the indication of Christ's words.

In the mystery of creation, man and woman were "given" in a special way to each other by the Creator. That was not only in the dimension of that first human couple and of that first communion of persons, but in the whole perspective of the existence of the human family. The fundamental fact of human existence at every stage of its history is that God "created them male and female." He always creates them in this way and they are always such. Understanding of the fundamental meanings contained in the mystery of creation, such as the nuptial meaning of the body (and of the fundamental conditionings of this meaning), is important. It is indispensable in order to know who man is and who he should be, and therefore how he should mold his own activity. It is an essential and important thing for the future of the human ethos.

Genesis 2:24 notes that the two, man and woman, were created for marriage: "Therefore, a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh." In this way a great creative perspective is opened. It is precisely the perspective of man's existence, which is continually renewed by means of procreation, or, we could say, self-reproduction.

This perspective is deeply rooted in the consciousness of humanity (cf. *Gn* 2:23) and also in the particular consciousness of the nuptial meaning of the body (*Gn* 2:25). Before becoming husband and wife (later Genesis 4:1 speaks of this in the concrete), the man and the woman emerge from the mystery of creation in the first place as brother and sister in the same humanity. Understanding the nuptial meaning of the body in its masculinity and femininity reveals the depths of their freedom, which is freedom of giving.

From here that communion of persons begins, in which both meet and give themselves to each other in the fullness of their subjectivity. Thus both grow as persons-subjects. They grow mutually one for the other also through their body and through that nakedness free of shame. In this communion of persons the whole depth of the original solitude of man (of the first one and of all) is perfectly ensured. At the same time, this solitude becomes in a marvelous way permeated and broadened by the gift of the "other." If the man and the woman cease to be a disinterested gift for each other, as they were in the mystery of creation, then they recognize that "they are naked" (cf. *Gn* 3). Then the shame of that nakedness, which they had not felt in the state of original innocence, will spring up in their hearts.

Original innocence manifests and at the same time constitutes the perfect ethos of the gift.