

Wednesday 5 September 1979

The Unity and Indissolubility of Marriage

For some time now preparations have been going on for the next ordinary assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which will take place in Rome in autumn of next year. The theme of the Synod, "The role of the Christian family," concentrates our attention on this community of human and Christian life, which has been fundamental from the beginning. The Lord Jesus used precisely this expression "from the beginning" in the talk about marriage, reported in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark. We wish to raise the question what this word "beginning" means. We also wish to clarify why Christ referred to the "beginning" on that occasion and, therefore, we propose a more precise analysis of the relative text of Holy Scripture.

During the talk with the Pharisees, who asked him the question about the indissolubility of marriage, Jesus Christ referred twice to the "beginning." The talk took place in the following way:

"And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, 'Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?' He answered, 'Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.' They said to him, 'Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?' He said to them, 'For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so'" (*Mt* 19:3ff., cf. also *Mk* 10:2ff.).

Christ did not accept the discussion at the level at which his interlocutors tried to introduce it. In a certain sense he did not approve of the dimension that they tried to give the problem. He avoided getting caught up in juridico-casuistical controversies. On the contrary, he referred twice to "the beginning." Acting in this way, he made a clear reference to the relative words in Genesis, which his interlocutors too knew by heart. From those words of the ancient revelation, Christ drew the conclusion and the talk ended.

Therefore, "the beginning" means that which Genesis speaks about. Christ quoted Genesis 1:27 in summary form: "In the beginning the Creator made them male and female." The original passage reads textually as follows: "God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Subsequently, the Master referred to Genesis 2:24: "Therefore, a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh." Quoting these words almost in full, Christ gave them an even more explicit normative meaning (since it could be supported that in Genesis they express *de facto* statements: "leaves...cleaves...they become one flesh"). The normative meaning is plausible since Christ did not confine himself only to the quotation itself, but added: "So they are no longer two but one flesh.

What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." That "let not man put asunder" is decisive. In the light of these words of Christ, Genesis 2:24 sets forth the principle of the unity and indissolubility of marriage as the very content of the Word of God, expressed in the most ancient revelation.

It could be maintained at this point that the problem is exhausted, that Jesus Christ's words confirm the eternal law formulated and set up by God from "the beginning" as the creation of man. It might also seem that the Master, confirming this original law of the Creator, did nothing but establish exclusively his own normative meaning, referring to the authority itself of the first Legislator. However, that significant expression "from the beginning," repeated twice, clearly induced his interlocutors to reflect on the way in which man was formed in the mystery of creation, precisely as "male and female," in order to understand correctly the normative sense of the words of Genesis. This is no less valid for the people of today than for those of that time. Therefore, in the present study, considering all this, we must put ourselves precisely in the position of Christ's interlocutors today.

During the following Wednesday reflections at the general audiences, we will try, as Christ's interlocutors today, to dwell at greater length on St. Matthew's words (19:3ff.). To respond to the indication, inserted in them by Christ, we will try to penetrate toward that "beginning," to which he referred in such a significant way. Thus we will follow from a distance the great work which participants in the forthcoming Synod of Bishops are undertaking on this subject just now. Together with them, numerous groups of pastors and laymen are taking part in it, feeling especially responsible with regard to the role which Christ assigned to marriage and the Christian family, the role that he has always given, and still gives in our age, in the modern world.

The cycle of reflections we are beginning today, with the intention of continuing it during the following Wednesday meetings, also has the purpose, among other things, of accompanying from afar the work of preparation for the Synod. However, it will not touch its subject directly, but will turn our attention to the deep roots from which this subject springs.

Wednesday 12 September 1979

Analysis of the Biblical Account of Creation

Last Wednesday we began this series of reflections on the reply Christ gave to his questioners on the subject of the unity and indissolubility of marriage. As we recall, the Pharisees who questioned him appealed to the Mosaic Law. However, Christ went back to the "beginning," quoting the words of Genesis.

The "beginning" in this case concerns what one of the first pages of Genesis treats. If we wish to analyze this reality, we must undoubtedly direct our attention first of all to the text. The words which Christ spoke in his talk with the Pharisees, found in Matthew 19 and Mark 10, constitute a passage which in its turn is set in a well-defined context, without reference to which they can neither be understood nor correctly interpreted.

This context is provided by the words, "Have you not read that the Creator from the beginning made them male and female...?" (*Mt* 19:4). It referred to the so-called first account of the creation of man inserted in the seven day cycle of the creation of the world (cf. *Gn* 1:1-2, 4). However, the context nearest to the other words of Christ, taken from Genesis 2:24, is the so-called second account of the creation of man (*Gn* 2:5-25). But indirectly it is the entire third chapter of Genesis.

The second account of the creation of man forms a conceptual and stylistic unity with the description of original innocence, man's happiness, and also his first fall. Granted the specific content of Christ's words taken from Genesis 2:24, one could also include in the context at least the first phrase of the fourth chapter of Genesis, which treats of the conception and birth of man from earthly parents. That is what we intend to do in the present analysis.

From the point of view of biblical criticism, it is necessary to mention immediately that the first account of man's creation is chronologically later than the second, whose origin is much more remote. This more ancient text is defined as "Yahwist" because the term "Yahweh" is used to name God. It is difficult not to be struck by the fact that the image of God presented there has quite considerable anthropomorphic traits. Among others, we read that "...the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (*Gn* 2:7).

In comparison with this description, the first account, that is, the one held to be chronologically later, is much more mature both as regards the image of God, and as regards the formulation of the essential truths about man. This account derives from the priestly and "Elohist" tradition, from "Elohim," the term used in that account for God.

In this narration man's creation as male and female - to which Jesus referred in his reply according to Matthew 19 - is inserted into the seven day cycle of the creation of the world. A cosmological character could especially be attributed to it. Man is created on earth together with the visible world. But at the same time the Creator orders him to

subdue and have dominion over the earth (cf. *Gn* 1:28); therefore he is placed over the world. Even though man is strictly bound to the visible world, the biblical narrative does not speak of his likeness to the rest of creatures, but only to God. "God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him..." (*Gn* 1:27). In the seven day cycle of creation a precise graduated procedure is evident. However, man is not created according to a natural succession. The Creator seems to halt before calling him into existence, as if he were pondering within himself to make a decision: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..." (*Gn* 1:26).

The level of that first account of man's creation, even though chronologically later, is especially of a theological character. An indication of that is especially the definition of man on the basis of his relationship with God. "In the image of God he created him." At the same time it affirms the absolute impossibility of reducing man to the world. Already in the light of the first phrases of the Bible, man cannot be either understood or explained completely in terms of categories taken from the "world," that is, from the visible complex of bodies. Notwithstanding this, man also is corporeal. Genesis 1:27 observes that this essential truth about man referred both to the male and the female: "God created man in his image...male and female he created them." It must be recognized that the first account is concise, and free from any trace whatsoever of subjectivism. It contains only the objective facts and defines the objective reality, both when it speaks of man's creation, male and female, in the image of God, and when it adds a little later the words of the first blessing: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth; subdue it and have dominion over it" (*Gn* 1:28).

The first account of man's creation, which, as we observed, is of a theological nature, conceals within itself a powerful metaphysical content. Let it not be forgotten that this text of Genesis has become the source of the most profound inspirations for thinkers who have sought to understand "being" and "existence." (Perhaps only the third chapter of Exodus can bear comparison with this text.) Notwithstanding certain detailed and plastic expressions of the passage, man is defined there, first of all, in the dimensions of being and of existence ("*esse*"). He is defined in a way that is more metaphysical than physical.

To this mystery of his creation, ("In the image of God he created him"), corresponds the perspective of procreation, ("Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth"), of that becoming in the world and in time, of that *fieri* which is necessarily bound up with the metaphysical situation of creation: of contingent being (*contingens*). Precisely in this metaphysical context of the description of Genesis 1, it is necessary to understand the entity of the good, namely, the aspect of value. Indeed, this aspect appears in the cycle of nearly all the days of creation and reaches its culmination after the creation of man: "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (*Gn* 1:31). For this reason it can be said with certainty that the first chapter of Genesis has established an unassailable point of reference and a solid basis for a metaphysic and also for an anthropology and an ethic, according to which *ens et bonum convertuntur* (being and the good are convertible). Undoubtedly, all this also has a significance for theology, and especially for the theology of the body.

At this point let us interrupt our considerations. In a week's time we shall deal with the second account of creation. According to biblical scholars, it is chronologically more ancient. The expression "theology of the body" just now used deserves a more exact explanation, but we shall leave that for another occasion. First, we must seek to examine more closely that passage of Genesis which Christ had recourse to.

Wednesday 19 September 1979

***The Second Account of Creation:
The Subjective Definition of Man***

With reference to Christ's words on the subject of marriage, in which he appealed to the "beginning," we directed our attention last week to the first account of man's creation in the first chapter of Genesis. Today we shall pass to the second account, which is frequently described as the "Yahwist," since it uses the name "Yahweh" for God.

The second account of man's creation (linked to the presentation both of original innocence and happiness and of the first fall) has by its nature a different character. While not wishing to anticipate the particulars of this narrative - because it will be better for us to recall them in later analyses - we should note that the entire text, in formulating the truth about man, amazes us with its typical profundity, different from that of the first chapter of Genesis.

This profundity has a especially subjective nature and is therefore, in a certain sense, psychological. The second chapter of Genesis constitutes, in a certain manner, the most ancient description and record of man's self-knowledge. Together with the third chapter it is the first testimony of human conscience. A reflection in depth on this text - through the whole archaic form of the narrative, which manifests its primitive mythical character - provides us *in nucleo* with nearly all the elements of the analysis of man, to which modern, and especially contemporary philosophical anthropology is sensitive. It could be said that Genesis 2 presents the creation of man especially in its subjective aspect. Comparing both accounts, we conclude that this subjectivity corresponds to the objective reality of man created "in the image of God." This fact also is - in another way - important for the theology of the body, as we shall see in subsequent analyses.

It is significant that in his reply to the Pharisees, in which he appealed to the "beginning," Christ indicated first of all the creation of man by referring to Genesis 1:27: "The Creator from the beginning created them male and female." Only afterward did he quote the text of Genesis 2:24. The words which directly describe the unity and indissolubility of marriage are found in the immediate context of the second account of creation. Its characteristic feature is the separate creation of woman (cf. *Gn* 2:18-23), while the account of the creation of the first man is found in Genesis 2:5-7.

The Bible calls the first human being "man" (*adam*), but from the moment of the creation of the first woman, it begins to call him "man" (*ish*), in relation to *ishshah* ("woman," because she was taken from the man - *ish*). It is also significant that in referring to Genesis 2:24, Christ not only linked the "beginning" with the mystery of creation, but also led us, one might say, to the limit of man's primitive innocence and of original sin. Genesis places the second description of man's creation precisely in this context. There we read first of all: "And the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man; then the man said: 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of

man" (*Gn* 2:22-23). "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (*Gn* 2:24). "And the man and his wife were both naked, and they were not ashamed" (*Gn* 2:25).

Immediately after these verses, chapter 3 begins with its account of the first fall of the man and the woman, linked with the mysterious tree already called the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (*Gn* 2:17). Thus an entirely new situation emerges, essentially different from the preceding. The tree of knowledge of good and evil is the line of demarcation between the two original situations which Genesis speaks of.

The first situation was that of original innocence, in which man (male and female) was, as it were, outside the sphere of the knowledge of good and evil, until the moment when he transgressed the Creator's prohibition and ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge. The second situation, however, was that in which man, after having disobeyed the Creator's command at the prompting of the evil spirit, symbolized by the serpent, found himself, in a certain way, within the sphere of the knowledge of good and evil. This second situation determined the state of human sinfulness, in contrast to the state of primitive innocence.

Even though the "Yahwist" text is very concise, it suffices with clarity to differentiate and to set against each other those two original situations. We speak here of situations, having before our eyes the account which is a description of events. Nonetheless, by means of this description and all its particulars, the essential difference emerges between the state of man's sinfulness and that of his original innocence.

Systematic theology will discern in these two antithetical situations two different states of human nature: the state of integral nature and the state of fallen nature. All this emerges from that "Yahwist" text of Genesis 2-3, which contains in itself the most ancient word of revelation. Evidently it has a fundamental significance for the theology of man and for the theology of the body.

When Christ, referring to the "beginning," directed his questioners to the words written in Genesis 2:24, he ordered them, in a certain sense, to go beyond the boundary which, in the Yahwist text of Genesis, runs between the first and second situation of man. He did not approve what Moses had permitted "for their hardness of heart." He appealed to the words of the first divine regulation, which in this text is expressly linked to man's state of original innocence. This means that this regulation has not lost its force, even though man has lost his primitive innocence.

Christ's reply is decisive and unequivocal. Therefore, we must draw from it the normative conclusions which have an essential significance not only for ethics, but especially for the theology of man and for the theology of the body. As a particular element of theological anthropology, it is constituted on the basis of the Word of God which is revealed. During the next meeting we shall seek to draw these conclusions.