

Wednesday 26 September 1979

The Boundary between Original Innocence and Redemption

Answering the question on the unity and indissolubility of marriage, Christ referred to what was written about marriage in Genesis. In our two preceding reflections we analyzed both the so-called Elohist text (*Gn 1*) and the Yahwist one (*Gn 2*). Today we wish to draw some conclusions from these analyses.

When Christ referred to the "beginning," he asked his questioners to go beyond, in a certain sense, the boundary which in Genesis passes between the state of original innocence and that of sinfulness, which started with the original fall.

Symbolically this boundary can be linked with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which in the Yahwist text delimits two diametrically opposed situations: the situation of original innocence and that of original sin. These situations have a specific dimension in man, in his inner self, in his knowledge, conscience, choice and decision. All this is in relation to God the Creator who, in the Yahwist text (*Gn 2* and *3*), is at the same time the God of the covenant, of the most ancient covenant of the Creator with his creature-man.

As an expression and symbol of the covenant with God broken in man's heart, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil delimits and contrasts two diametrically opposed situations and states: that of original innocence and that of original sin, and at the same time man's hereditary sinfulness which derives from it. However, Christ's words, which refer to the "beginning," enable us to find in man an essential continuity and a link between these two different states or dimensions of the human being.

The state of sin is part of "historical man," both the one whom we read about in Matthew 19, that is, Christ's questioner at that time, and also of any other potential or actual questioner of all times of history, and therefore, naturally, also of modern man. That state, however - the "historical" state - plunges its roots, in every man without exception, in his own theological "prehistory," which is the state of original innocence.

It is not a question here of mere dialectic. The laws of knowing correspond to those of being. It is impossible to understand the state of historical sinfulness without referring or appealing (and Christ appealed to it) to the state of original (in a certain sense, "prehistoric") and fundamental

innocence. Therefore, right from the beginning, the arising of sinfulness as a state, a dimension of human existence, is in relation to this real innocence of man as his original and fundamental state, as a dimension of his being created in the image of God.

It happens in this way not only for the first man, male and female, as *dramatis personae* and leading characters of the events described in the Yahwist text of chapters 2 and 3 of Genesis, but also for the whole historical course of human existence. Historical man is, so to speak, rooted in his revealed theological prehistory. So every point of his historical sinfulness is explained (both for the soul and for the body) with, reference to original innocence. It can be said that this

reference is a "co-inheritance" of sin, and precisely of original sin. If this sin signifies, in every historical man, a state of lost grace, then it also contains a reference to that grace, which was precisely the grace of original innocence.

According to chapter 19 of Matthew, when Christ referred to the "beginning," by this expression he did not indicate merely the state of original innocence as the lost horizon of human existence in history. To the words which he uttered with his own lips, we have the right to attribute at the same time the whole eloquence of the mystery of redemption. Already in the Yahwist texts of Genesis 2 and 3, we are witnesses of when man, male and female, after breaking the original covenant with the Creator, received the first promise of redemption in the words of the so-called *Proto-gospel* in Genesis 3:15 and began to live in the theological perspective of the redemption.

In the same way, therefore, historical man - both Christ's questioner at that time, of whom Matthew 19 speaks, and modern man participates in this perspective. He participates not only in the history of human sinfulness, as a hereditary and at the same time personal and unique subject of this history; he also participates in the history of salvation, here, too, as its subject and co-creator. Therefore, he is not only closed, because of his sinfulness, with regard to original innocence, but is at the same time open to the mystery of redemption, which was accomplished in Christ and through Christ.

Paul, the author of the Letter to the Romans, expresses this perspective of redemption in which historical man lives, when he writes: "We ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for...the redemption of our bodies" (*Rom 8:23*). We cannot lose sight of this perspective as we follow the words of Christ who, in his talk on the indissolubility of marriage, appealed to the "beginning."

If that beginning indicated only the creation of man as male and female, if - as we have already mentioned - it brought the questioners only over the boundary of man's state of sin to original innocence, and did not open at the same time the perspective of a "redemption of the body," Christ's answer would not at all be adequately understood. Precisely this perspective of the redemption of the body guarantees the continuity and unity between the hereditary state of man's sin and his original innocence, although this innocence was, historically, lost by him irremediably. It is clear, too, that Christ had every right to answer the question posed by the doctors of the law and of the covenant (as we read in Matthew 19 and in Mark 10), in the perspective of the redemption on which the covenant itself rests.

In the context of the theology of corporeal man, substantially outlined in this way, we can think of the method of further analyses about the revelation of the "beginning," in which it is essential to refer to the first chapters of Genesis. We must at once turn our attention to a factor which is especially important for theological interpretation, because it consists in the relationship between revelation and experience.

In the interpretation of the revelation about man, and especially about the body, we must, for understandable reasons, refer to experience, since corporeal man is perceived by us mainly by experience. In the light of the above mentioned fundamental considerations, we have every right to the conviction that this "historical" experience of ours must, in a certain way, stop at the

threshold of man's original innocence, since it is inadequate in relation to it. However, in the light of the same introductory considerations, we must arrive at the conviction that our human experience is, in this case, to some extent a legitimate means for the theological interpretation. In a certain sense, it is an indispensable point of reference, which we must keep in mind for interpreting the beginning. A more detailed analysis of the text will enable us to have a clearer view of it.

It seems that the words of Romans 8:23, just quoted, render in the best way the direction of our researches centered on the revelation of that "beginning" which Christ referred to in his talk on the indissolubility of marriage (cf. *Mt* 19 and *Mk* 10). All the subsequent analyses that will be made on the basis of the first chapters of Genesis will almost necessarily reflect the truth of Paul's words: "We who have the first fruit of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait for...the redemption of our bodies." If we put ourselves in this position-so deeply in agreement with experience - the "beginning" must speak to us with the great richness of light that comes from revelation, to which above all theology wishes to be accountable. The continuation of the analyses will explain to us why and in what sense this must be a theology of the body.

Wednesday 10 October 1979

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 God-Yahweh 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, zoón noetikón*. This process also leads to the first delineation of the human being as a human person with the specific subjectivity that characterizes him.

Wednesday 24 October 1979

Man's Awareness of Being a Person

In the preceding talk we began to analyze the meaning of man's original solitude. The Yahwist text gave us the starting point, in particular by the following words: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (*Gn 2:18*). The analysis of the relative passages in the second chapter of Genesis has already brought us to surprising conclusions which concern the anthropology, that is, the fundamental science about man, contained in this book. In relatively few sentences, the ancient text portrays man as a person with the subjectivity that characterizes him.

God-Yahweh gave this first man; so formed, the order that concerned all the trees that grew in the garden of Eden, especially the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This adds to the features of the man, described above, the moment of choice and self-determination, that is, of free will. In this way, the image of man, as a person endowed with a subjectivity of his own, appears before us, completed in his first outline.

The concept of original solitude includes both self-consciousness and self-determination. The fact that man is "alone" conceals within it this ontological structure and at the same time indicates true comprehension. Without that, we cannot understand correctly the subsequent words, which constitute the prelude to the creation of the first woman: "I will make a helper." But above all, without that deep significance of man's original solitude, it is not possible to understand and interpret correctly the whole situation of man, created in the image of God, which is the situation of the first, or rather original, covenant with God.

The narrative in the first chapter says that this man was created in the image of God. In the second narrative he is manifested as a subject of the covenant, that is, a subject constituted as a person, constituted in the dimension of "partner of the Absolute." He must consciously discern and choose between good and evil, between life and death. The words of the first order of God-Yahweh (*Gn* 2:16-17) speak directly of the submission and dependence of man the creature on his Creator. They indirectly reveal precisely this level of humanity as subject of the covenant and "partner of the Absolute." Man is "alone." That means that he, through his own humanity, through what he is, is constituted at the same time in a unique, exclusive and unrepeatable relationship with God himself. On its part, the anthropological definition contained in the Yahwist text approaches what is expressed in the theological definition of man, which we find in the first narrative of creation: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (*Gn* 1:26).

Thus formed, man belongs to the visible world; he is a body among bodies. Taking up again and, in a way, reconstructing the meaning of original solitude, we apply it to man in his totality. His body, through which he participates in the visible created world, makes him at the same time conscious of being "alone." Otherwise, he would not have been able

to arrive at that conviction which he reached (cf. *Gn* 2:20), if his body had not helped him to understand it, making the matter evident. Consciousness of solitude might have been shattered precisely because of his body itself. The man, 'adam, might have reached the conclusion, on the basis of the experience of his own body, that he was substantially similar to other living beings (*animalia*). On the contrary, as we read, he did not arrive at this conclusion; he reached the conviction that he was "alone." The Yahwist text never speaks directly of the body. Even when it says that "The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground," it speaks of man and not of his body. Nevertheless, the narrative taken as a whole offers us a sufficient basis to perceive this man, created in the visible world, precisely as a body among bodies.

The analysis of the Yahwist text also enables us to link man's original solitude with consciousness of the body. Through it, man is distinguished from all the *animalia* and is separated from them, and also through it he is a person. It can be affirmed with certainty that man, thus formed, has at the same time consciousness and awareness of the meaning of his own body, on the basis of the experience of original solitude. All this can be considered as an implication of the second narrative of the creation of man, and the analysis of the text enables us to develop it amply.

At the beginning of the Yahwist text, even before it speaks of the creation of man from the "dust of the ground," we read that "there was no one to till the land or to make channels of water spring out of the earth to irrigate the whole land" (*Gn* 2:5-6). We rightly associate this passage with the

one in the first narrative, in which God's command is expressed: "Fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion..." (*Gn* 1:28). The second narrative alludes specifically to the work that man carries out to till the earth. The first fundamental means to dominate the earth lies in man himself. Man can dominate the earth because he alone - and no other of the living beings - is capable of "tilling it" and transforming it according to his own needs. ("He made channels of water spring out of the earth to irrigate the whole land.") This first outline of a specifically human activity seems to belong to the definition of man, as it emerges from the analysis of the Yahwist text. Consequently, it can be affirmed that this outline is intrinsic to the meaning of the original solitude and belongs to that dimension of solitude through which man, from the beginning, is in the visible world as a body among bodies and discovers the meaning of his own corporality.

Wednesday 31 October 1979

The Alternative between Death and Immortality Enters the Definition of Man

Today it is opportune to return to the meaning of man's original solitude, which emerges above all from the analysis of the so-called Yahwist text of Genesis 2. As we have seen in the preceding reflections, the biblical text enables us to stress not only consciousness of the human body (man is created in the visible world as a "body among bodies"), but also that of its meaning.

In view of the great conciseness of the biblical text, it is admittedly not possible to amplify this implication too much. It is certain, however, that here we touch upon the central problem of anthropology. Consciousness of the body seems to be identified in this case with the discovery of the complexity of one's own structure. On the basis of philosophical anthropology, this discovery consists, in short, in the relationship between soul and body. The Yahwist narrative with its own language (that is, with its own terminology), expresses it by saying: "The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being" (*Gn* 2:7). Precisely this man, "a living being," distinguishes himself continually from all other living beings in the visible world.

The premise of man's distinguishing himself in this way is precisely the fact that only he is capable of "tilling the earth" (cf. *Gn* 2:5) and "subduing it" (cf. *Gn* 1:28). It can be said that the consciousness of "superiority" contained in the definition of humanity is born right from the beginning on the basis of a typically human praxis or behavior. This consciousness brings with it a particular perception of the meaning of one's own body, emerging precisely from the fact that it falls to man to "till the earth" and "subdue it." All that would be impossible without a typically human intuition of the meaning of one's own body.

It seems necessary, then, to speak in the first place of this aspect, rather than of the problem of anthropological complexity in the metaphysical sense. The original description of human consciousness, given by the Yahwist text, comprises also the body in the narrative as a whole. It contains the first testimony of the discovery of one's corporeality and even, as has been said, the perception of the meaning of one's own body. All this is revealed not on the basis of any primordial metaphysical analysis, but on the basis of a concrete subjectivity of man that is quite clear.

Man is a subject not only because of his self-awareness and self-determination, but also on the basis of his own body. The structure of this body permits him to be the author of a truly human activity. In this activity the body expresses the person. Therefore, in all its materiality ("God formed man of dust from the ground"), it is almost penetrable and transparent, in such a way as to make it clear who man is (and who he should be), thanks to the structure of his consciousness and of his self-determination. On this rests the fundamental perception of the meaning of one's own body, which can be discovered when analyzing man's original solitude.

Here, with this fundamental understanding of the meaning of his own body, man, as subject of the ancient covenant with the Creator, is placed before the mystery of the tree of knowledge. "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (*Gn 2:16-17*). The original meaning of man's solitude is based on experience of the existence obtained from the Creator. This human existence is characterized precisely by subjectivity, which includes also the meaning of the body.

But could man - who in his original consciousness, knew exclusively the experience of existing and therefore of life - have understood the meaning of the words, "You shall die"? Would he have been able to arrive at understanding the meaning of these words through the complex structure of life, given to him when "the Lord God...breathed into his nostrils the breath of life"? It must be admitted that the word "die," a completely new one, appeared on the horizon of man's consciousness without his having ever experienced its reality. At the same time this word appeared before him as a radical antithesis of all that man had been endowed with.

For the first time, man heard the words "You shall die," without having any familiarity with them in his experience up to then. On the other hand, he could not but associate the meaning of death with that dimension of life which he had enjoyed up to then. The words of God-Yahweh addressed to man confirmed a dependence in existing, such as to make man a limited being and, by his very nature, liable to nonexistence.

These words raised the problem of death in a conditional way: "In the day that you eat of it you shall die." Man, who had heard these words, had to find their truth in the interior structure of his own solitude. In short, it depended on him, on his decision and free choice, if, with solitude, he was to enter also the circle of the antithesis revealed to him by the Creator, together with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and thereby to make his own the experience of dying and death.

Listening to the words of God-Yahweh, man should have understood that the tree of knowledge had roots not only in the garden of Eden, but also in his humanity. Furthermore, he should have understood that that mysterious tree concealed within it a dimension of loneliness, hitherto

unknown, with which the Creator had endowed him in the midst of the world of living beings. In the presence of the Creator himself, man had given names to them, in order to understand that none of them was similar to him.

The fundamental meaning of his body had already been established through its distinction from all other creatures. It had thereby become clear that the "invisible" determines man more than the "visible." Then, there was presented to him the alternative closely and directly connected by God with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The alternative between death and immortality, which emerges from Genesis 2:17, goes beyond the essential meaning of man's body. It grasps the eschatological meaning not only of the body, but of humanity itself, distinguished from all living beings, from "bodies." However, this alternative concerns in a quite particular way, the body created from "dust from the ground."

Not to prolong this analysis, we will merely note that right from the outset the alternative between death and immortality enters the definition of man. It belongs "from the beginning" to the meaning of his solitude before God himself. This original meaning of solitude, permeated by the alternative between death and immortality, also has a fundamental meaning for the whole theology of the body.

With this observation we conclude for the present our reflections on the meaning of man's original solitude. This observation, which emerges in a clear and penetrating way from the texts of Genesis, induces reflection both on the texts and on man. Perhaps he is too little conscious of the truth that concerns him, which is already contained in the first chapters of the Bible.