



The Holy See

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 2 January 1980

Creation As a Fundamental and Original Gift

Let us return to analyzing the text of Genesis 2:25: "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed" (*Gn 2:25*). According to this passage, the man and the woman saw themselves, as it were, through the mystery of creation. They saw themselves in this way, before knowing that they were naked. This seeing each other is not just a participation in exterior perception of the world. It also has an interior dimension of participation in the vision of the Creator himself - that vision of which the Elohist text speaks several times: "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (*Gn 1:31*).

Nakedness signifies the original good of God's vision. It signifies all the simplicity and fullness of the vision through which the "pure" value of humanity as male and female, the "pure" value of the body and of sex, is manifested. The situation that is indicated, in such a concise and at the same time inspiring way, by the original revelation of the body as seen especially by Genesis 2:25, does not know an interior rupture and opposition between what is spiritual and what is sensible. It does not know a rupture and opposition between what constitutes the person humanly and what in man is determined by sex - what is male and female.

Seeing each other, as if through the mystery of creation, man and woman see each other even more fully and distinctly than through the sense of sight itself, that is, through the eyes of the body. They see and know each other with all the peace of the interior gaze, which creates precisely the fullness of the intimacy of persons.

Shame brings with it a specific limitation in seeing with the eyes of the body. This takes place above all because personal intimacy is disturbed and almost threatened by this sight. According to Genesis 2:25, the man and the woman were not ashamed seeing and knowing each other in all

the peace and tranquillity of the interior gaze. They communicate in the fullness of humanity, which is manifested in them as reciprocal complementarity precisely because they are "male" and "female." At the same time, they communicate on the basis of that communion of persons in which, through femininity and masculinity, they become a gift for each other. In this way they reach in reciprocity a special understanding of the meaning of their own body.

The original meaning of nakedness corresponds to that simplicity and fullness of vision in which understanding the meaning of the body comes about at the very heart of their community-communion. We will call it "nuptial." The man and the woman in Genesis 2:23-25 emerge, precisely at the "beginning," with this consciousness of the meaning of their body. This deserves a careful analysis.

The two narratives of the creation of man, the Elohist and the Yahwist, enable us to establish the original meaning of solitude, unity and nakedness. They thereby enable us also to find ourselves on the ground of an adequate anthropology, which tries to understand and interpret man in what is essentially human.

The Bible texts contain the essential elements of this anthropology, which are manifested in the theological context of the "image of God." This concept conceals within it the root of the truth about man. This is revealed through that "beginning," which Christ referred to in the talk with the Pharisees (cf. *Mt* 19:3-9), when he treated of the creation of the human male and female. It must be recalled that all the analyses we make here are connected, at least indirectly, precisely with these words of his. Man, whom God created male and female, bears the divine image imprinted on his body "from the beginning." Man and woman constitute two different ways of the human "being a body" in the unity of that image.

Now, it is opportune to turn again to those fundamental words which Christ used, that is, the word "created" and the subject "Creator." They introduce in the considerations made so far a new dimension, a new criterion of understanding and interpretation, which we will call "hermeneutics of the gift." The dimension of the gift decides the essential truth and depth of meaning of the original solitude, unity and nakedness. It is also at the heart of the mystery of creation, which enables us to construct the theology of the body "from the beginning," but demands, at the same time, that we should construct it in this way.

On Christ's lips, the word "created" contains the same truth that we find in Genesis. The first account of creation repeats this word several times, from Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," to Genesis 1:27, "So God created man in his own image."

God reveals himself above all as Creator. Christ referred to that fundamental revelation contained in Genesis. In it, the concept of creation has all its depth - not only metaphysical, but also fully theological.

The Creator is he who "calls to existence from nothingness," and who establishes the world in existence and man in the world, because he "is love" (1 *Jn* 4:8). Actually, we do not find this word in the narrative of creation. However, this narrative often repeats: "God saw what he had made, and behold, it was very good." Through these words we are led to glimpse in love the divine motive of creation, the source from which it springs. Only love gives a beginning to good and delights in good (cf. 1 *Cor* 13). As the action of God, the creation signifies not only calling from nothingness to existence and establishing the existence of the world and of man in the world. It also signifies, according to the first narrative, *beresit bara*, giving. It is a fundamental and "radical" giving, that is, a giving in which the gift comes into being precisely from nothingness.

The first chapters of Genesis introduce us to the mystery of creation, that is, the beginning of the world by the will of God, who is omnipotence and love. Consequently, every creature bears within it the sign of the original and fundamental gift.

At the same time, however, the concept of "giving" cannot refer to a nothingness. It indicates the one who gives and the one who receives the gift, and also the relationship that is established between them. Now, this relationship emerges in the account of creation at the moment of the creation of man. This relationship is manifested above all by the expression: "God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him" (*Gn* 1:27).

In the narrative of the creation of the visible world, the giving has a meaning only with regard to man. In the whole work of creation, it can be said only of him that a gift was conferred on him; the visible world was created "for him." The biblical account of creation offers us sufficient reasons to understand and interpret in this way. Creation is a gift, because man appears in it. As the "image of God," man is capable of understanding the meaning of gift in the call from nothingness to existence. He is capable of answering the Creator with the language of this understanding. Interpreting the narrative of creation with this language, it can be deduced from it that creation constitutes the fundamental and original gift. Man appears in creation as the one who received the world as a gift, and it can also be said that the world received man as a gift.

At this point, we must interrupt our analysis. What we have said so far is in close relationship with all the anthropological problems of the "beginning." Man appears as created, that is, as the one who, in the midst of the "world," received the other man as a gift. Later we will have to make precisely this dimension of the gift the subject of a deep analysis in order to understand also the meaning of the human body in its rightful extent. That will be the subject of our following meditations.
