



# The Holy See

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**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

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## The Mystery of Man's Original Innocence

The reality of the gift and the act of giving, outlined in the first chapters of Genesis as the content constituting the mystery of creation, confirms that the radiation of love is an integral part of this same mystery. Only love creates the good. Love alone can, in a word, be perceived in all its dimensions and its aspects in created things and especially in man. Its presence is almost the final result of that interpretation of the gift, which we are carrying out here. Original happiness, the beatifying beginning of man whom God created "male and female" (*Gn* 1:27), the nuptial significance of the body in its original nakedness - all this expresses its radication in love.

This consistent giving goes back to the deepest roots of consciousness and subconsciousness, to the ultimate levels of the subjective existence of both, man and woman. This giving is reflected in their mutual experience of the body and bears witness to its radication in love. The first verses of the Bible speak about it so much as to remove all doubt. They speak not only of the creation of the world and of man in the world. They also speak of grace, that is, of the communication of holiness, of the radiation of the Spirit, which produced a special state of "spiritualization" in that man, who in fact was the first. In biblical language, that is, in the language of revelation, the adjective "first" means precisely "of God": "Adam, the son of God" (cf. *Lk* 3:38).

Happiness is being rooted in love. Original happiness speaks to us of the beginning of man, who emerged from love and initiated love. That happened in an irrevocable way, despite the subsequent sin and death. In his time, Christ will be a witness to this irreversible love of the Creator and Father, which had already been expressed in the mystery of creation and in the grace of original innocence. The common beginning of man and woman, that is, the original truth of their body in masculinity and femininity, to which Genesis 2:25 draws our attention, does not know shame. This beginning can also be defined as the original and beatifying immunity from shame as

the result of love.

This immunity directs us toward the mystery of man's original innocence. It is a mystery of his existence, prior to the knowledge of good and evil and almost "outside" it. The fact that man existed in this way, before breaking the first covenant with his Creator, belongs to the fullness of the mystery of creation. As we have already said, creation is a gift to man. His fullness and deepest dimension is determined by grace, that is, by participation in the interior life of God himself, in his holiness. This is also, in man, the interior foundation and source of his original innocence. With this concept, and more precisely with that of "original justice," theology defines the state of man before original sin.

In the present analysis of the beginning, which opens up for us the ways indispensable for understanding the theology of the body, we must dwell on the mystery of man's original state. That awareness of the body - rather, awareness of the meaning of the body - which we are trying to highlight through analysis of the beginning, reveals the peculiarity of original innocence.

Genesis 2:25 manifests in a direct way the mystery of this innocence which the original man and woman both bore, each in himself or herself. The body itself is, in a way, an "eyewitness" of this characteristic. Significantly, the affirmation contained in Genesis 2:25 about nakedness mutually free from shame is a statement unique in its kind in the whole Bible. It will never be repeated. On the contrary, we can quote many texts in which nakedness will be connected with shame or, in an even stronger sense, with ignominy.

In this wide context the reasons are all the more visible for discovering in Genesis 2:25 a particular trace of the mystery of original innocence and a particular factor of its radiation in the human subject. This innocence belongs to the dimension of grace contained in the mystery of creation, that is, to that mysterious gift made to the inner man, to the human heart. It enables both of them, man and woman, to exist from the beginning in the mutual relationship of the disinterested gift of oneself.

This contains the revelation and at the same time the discovery of the nuptial meaning of the body in its masculinity and femininity. It can be understood why we speak, in this case, of revelation and at the same time of discovery. From the point of view of our analysis, it is essential that the discovery of the nuptial meaning of the body, which we read in the testimony of Genesis, takes place through original innocence. In fact, this discovery reveals and highlights the latter.

Original innocence belongs to the mystery of man's beginning, from which historical man was then separated by committing original sin. This does not mean, however, that he is not able to approach that mystery by means of his theological knowledge.

Historical man tries to understand the mystery of original innocence almost by means of a

contrast, that is, going back also to the experience of his own sin and his own sinfulness. He tries to understand original innocence as an essential characteristic for the theology of the body, starting from the experience of shame. In fact, the Bible text itself directs him in this way. Original innocence, therefore, is what "radically," that is, at its roots, excludes shame of the body in the man-woman relationship. It eliminates its necessity in man, in his heart, that is, in his conscience.

Original innocence speaks above all of the Creator's gift. It speaks of the grace that made it possible for man to experience the meaning of the primary donation of the world. In particular it concerns the meaning of the mutual donation of one to the other through masculinity and femininity in this world. However, this innocence seems to refer above all to the interior state of the human heart, of the human will. At least indirectly, it includes the revelation and discovery of human moral conscience, of the whole dimension of conscience. Obviously, this was before the knowledge of good and evil. In a certain sense, it must be understood as original righteousness.

In the prism of our historical *a posteriori*, we are trying to reconstruct, in a certain way, the characteristic of original innocence. This is understood as the content of the reciprocal experience of the body as experience of its nuptial meaning (according to Genesis 2:23-25). Happiness and innocence are part of the framework of the communion of persons, as if it were a question of two convergent threads of man's existence in the mystery of creation. So the beatifying awareness of the meaning of the body - that is, of the nuptial meaning of human masculinity and femininity - is conditioned by original innocence.

We can understand that original innocence as a particular "purity of heart," which preserves an interior faithfulness to the gift according to the nuptial meaning of the body. Consequently, original innocence, conceived in this way, is manifested as a tranquil testimony of conscience which (in this case) precedes any experience of good and evil. Yet this serene testimony of conscience is something all the more beatifying. It can be said that awareness of the nuptial meaning of the body, in its masculinity and femininity, becomes humanly beatifying only by means of this testimony.

We shall devote the next meditation to this subject - that is, to the link which, in the analysis of man's beginning, can be seen between his innocence (purity of heart) and his happiness.