



# The Holy See

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## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*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.