



# The Holy See

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## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*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 "Elohistic" 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.