

AUDIENCE 12

What is shame and why did it not exist in the state of “original innocence”? In the way it is defined today, particularly with respect to sexual modesty, we can see how complex the basic way in which man expressed himself as a person within his own existence. With the feeling of shame, humans feel fear with regard to their “second self” e.g. woman when confronted by man. We have to recall that Adam considered the second person created as part of himself (“bone of my bones”). This then, is fear of one’s own “self”. With fear, man is in fact showing the need for recognition and acceptance of “self” according to his own worth. He feels shame in two ways – inside himself, and in front of the other. Shame is complicated. It almost keeps people apart, but at a certain level, it also brings them closer.

For the same reason, shame is an integral part of the formation of ethos (the guiding beliefs or morals) in our society especially in the man / woman relationships. Shame is deeply rooted in the way we behave in mutual relationships, it shows the rules of “the communion of persons” and how it touched man’s “original” solitude. Shame in Genesis 3 is multi-dimensional, but more of this later.

First we have to understand that it is a non-presence of shame, and not a lack of it. We cannot think of, or understand shame in its earliest or original sense. Not only does Genesis 2:25 definitely exclude the possibility of us thinking about shame or immodesty, it excludes us even explaining it by analogy by comparing it to another human experience. Genesis 2:25 “they were not ashamed” does not show a lack of shame, but a knowledge and understanding of it. It shows a full understanding of the meaning of the body, tied into the fact that they were naked.

In the Yahwist text, the appearance of shame, particularly sexual modesty is connected to the loss of original fullness. If we take experiencing shame as a “borderline” experience (the point where a major change occurs), then what does original nakedness refer to?

To understand this, we have to remember that “original solitude” showed itself as a lack of knowledge of “man’s” own humanity with respect to the rest of the animals. It was not until after he was created male and female they discovered their own humanity with the help of the other person. They started to see the world from the point of view of their bodies. This perspective led to their understanding their unity in their humanity. We can then understand that nakedness depended on a consciousness of their bodies through their senses.

They knew they were naked, they knew they were given to each other that way, and this means that this is the true way they were meant to be. This came before any other human knowledge or experience as it came first, and is closely connected with experiencing the meaning of the human body. Since they were given to each other naked and knew this was the way they were meant to be, their original “knowledge” was innocent. And uncorrupted.

We cannot understand original nakedness by man’s understanding of the world around him. We have to understand his interior understanding of it, and Genesis 2:25 starts to show us this. Our language today is totally different from the original way of communicating. Much of our

communication is indirect, for example from the media, but originally it was a communication between people. It was about the common union that existed between man and woman. It was all about their common environment and experiences.

This way, the human body had a different meaning. It was based on the human “self”. It was more than just the external, and was more than the individual. It was those plus a knowledge of “self” as humans.

The bible shows us that the visible body “makes visible the invisible self” It tell people who we really are, and not just a physical shell. God made us to know each other that way, and that is what allows us to understand the meaning of original nakedness. If we only look at it externally, we will not understand it, but when we look at it “internally”, it will make sense. The words’ they were not ashamed” can mean that as male and female, through their physical being, their personal intimacy and communication was pure, but to understand it completely, we also have to look at it fully, we have to include the interior man in relationship to God, how he was made “in the image” of God. According to this internal understanding, man “is” really naked.