



# The Holy See

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## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

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### The Nuptial Meaning of the Body

Rereading and analyzing the second narrative of creation, the Yahwist text, we must ask ourselves if the first "man" (*adam*), in his original solitude, really "lived" the world as a gift, with an attitude in conformity with the actual condition of one who has received a gift, as is seen from the narrative in the first chapter. The second narrative shows us man in the garden of Eden (cf. Gn 2:8). Though man was in this situation of original happiness, the Creator himself (God-Yahweh) and then also "man," pointed out that man was alone - instead of stressing the aspect of the world as a subjectively beatifying gift created for man (cf. the first narrative and in particular Gn 26:29).

We have already analyzed the meaning of original solitude. Now we must note that a certain lack of good clearly appears for the first time: "It is not good that man, should be alone" - God-Yahweh said - "I will make him a helper..." (Gn 2:18). The first man said the same thing. After having become thoroughly aware of his own solitude among all living beings on earth, waited for "a helper fit for him" (cf. Gn 2:20). None of these beings (*animalia*) offered man the basic conditions which make it possible to exist in a relationship of mutual giving.

In this way, these two expressions, namely, the adjective "alone" and the noun "helper," seem to be the key to understand the essence of the gift at the level of man, as existential content contained in the truth of the "image of God." The gift reveals, so to speak, a particular characteristic of personal existence, or rather, of the essence of the person. When God-Yahweh said, "It is not good that man should be alone", (Gn 2:18) he affirmed that "alone", man does not completely realize this essence. He realizes it only by existing "with someone" - and even more deeply and completely - by existing "for someone."

This norm of existence as a person is shown in Genesis as characteristic of creation, precisely by

means of the meaning of these two words: "alone" and "helper." These words indicate as fundamental and constitutive for man both the relationship and the communion of persons. The communion of persons means existing in a mutual "for," in a relationship of mutual gift. This relationship is precisely the fulfillment of "man's" original solitude.

In its origin, this fulfillment is beatifying. It is certainly implicit in man's original happiness, and constitutes that happiness which belongs to the mystery of creation effected by love, which belongs to the essence of creative giving. When man, the male, awakening from the sleep of Genesis, saw the female, drawn from him, he said: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen 2:23). These words express, in a way, the subjectively beatifying beginning of human existence in the world. Since it took place at the "beginning", this confirms the process of individuation of man in the world. It springs from the depths of his human solitude, which he lives as a person in the presence of all other creatures and all living beings.

This "beginning" belongs to an adequate anthropology and can always be verified on the basis of the latter. This purely anthropological verification brings us, at the same time, to the subject of the "person" and to the subject of the "body-sex". This simultaneousness is essential. If we dealt with sex without the person, the whole adequacy of the anthropology which we find in Genesis would be destroyed. For our theological study the essential light of the revelation of the body, which appears so fully in these first affirmations, would then be veiled.

There is a deep connection between the mystery of creation, as a gift springing from love, and that beatifying "beginning" of the existence of man as male and female, in the whole truth of their body and their sex, which is the pure and simple truth of communion between persons. When the first man exclaimed, at the sight of the woman: "This is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Gn 2:23), he merely affirmed the human identity of both. Exclaiming in this way, he seems to say that here is a body that expresses the person.

According to a preceding passage of the Yahwist text, it can also be said that this "body" reveals the "living soul," such as man became when God-Yahweh breathed life into him (cf. Gn 2:7). This resulted in his solitude before all other living beings. By traversing the depth of that original solitude, man now emerged in the dimension of the mutual gift. The expression of that gift - and for that reason the expression of his existence as a person - is the human body in all the original truth of its masculinity and femininity.

The body which expresses femininity 'for' the masculinity and viceversa the masculinity 'for' the femininity, manifests the reciprocity and communion of persons". It expresses it by means of the gift as the fundamental characteristic of personal existence. This is the body - a witness to creation as a fundamental gift, and so a witness to Love as the source from which this same giving springs. Masculinity and femininity - namely, sex - is the original sign of a creative donation and an awareness on the part of man, male-female, of a gift lived in an original way. Such is the meaning

with which sex enters the theology of the body.

That beatifying "beginning" of man's being and existing, as male and female, is connected with the revelation and discovery of the meaning of the body, which can be called "nuptial." If we speak of revelation and at the same time of discovery, we do so in relation to the specificity of the Yahwist text. In it, the theological thread is also anthropological, appearing as a certain reality consciously lived by man.

We have already observed that the words which express the first joy of man's coming to existence as "male and female" (Gn 2:23) are followed by the verse which establishes their conjugal unity (cf. Gn 2:24). Then follows the verse which testifies to the nakedness of both, without mutual shame (Gn 2:25). This significant confrontation enables us to speak of the revelation and at the same time the discovery of the "nuptial" meaning of the body in the mystery of creation.

This meaning (inasmuch as it is revealed and also conscious, "lived" by man) confirms completely that the creative giving, which springs from Love, has reached the original consciousness of man. It becomes an experience of mutual giving, as can already be seen in the ancient text. That nakedness of both progenitors, free from shame, seems also to bear witness to that, perhaps even specifically.

Genesis 2:24 speaks of the finality of man's masculinity and femininity, in the life of the spouses-parents. Uniting with each other so closely as to become "one flesh", they will subject their humanity to the blessing of fertility, namely, "procreation", which the first narrative speaks of (cf. Gn 1:28). Man comes "into being" with consciousness of this finality of his own masculinity-femininity, that is, of his own sexuality. At the same time, the words of Genesis 2:25: "They were both naked, and were not ashamed", seem to add to this fundamental truth of the meaning of the human body, of its masculinity and femininity, another no less essential and fundamental truth. Aware of the procreative capacity of his body and of his sexuality, man is at the same time "free from the constraint" of his own body and sex.

That original nakedness, mutual and at the same time not weighed down by shame, expresses this interior freedom of man. Is this what freedom from the "sexual instinct" is? The concept of "instinct" already implies an interior constraint, similar to the instinct that stimulates fertility and procreation in the whole world of living beings (*animalia*). It seems, however, that both texts of Genesis, the first and the second narrative of the creation of man, connected sufficiently the perspective of procreation with the fundamental characteristic of human existence in the personal sense. Consequently the analogy of the human body and of sex in relation to the world of animals - which we can call an analogy of nature - is also raised, in a way, in both narratives (though in a different way in each), to the level of "image of God", and to the level of the person and communion between persons.

Further analyses will be dedicated to this essential problem. For the conscience of man - also for modern man - it is important to know that the revelation of the "nuptial meaning of the body" is found in those biblical texts which speak of the "beginning" of man. But it is even more important to establish what this meaning expresses precisely.