

## *The Original Unity of Man and Woman*

The words of Genesis, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (2:18) are a prelude to the narrative of the creation of woman. Together with this narrative, the sense of original solitude becomes part of the meaning of original unity, the key point of which seems to be precisely the words of Genesis 2:24. Christ referred to them in his talk with the Pharisees: "A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (*Mt* 19:5). If Christ quoted these words referring to the "beginning," it is opportune for us to clarify the meaning of that original unity, which has its roots in the fact of the creation of man as male and female.

The narrative of the first chapter of Genesis does not know the problem of man's original solitude. Man is "male and female" right from the beginning. On the contrary, the Yahwist text of the second chapter authorizes us, in a way, to think first only of the man since, by means of the body, he belongs to the visible world but goes beyond it. Then, it makes us think of the same man, but through the dualism of sex.

Corporality and sexuality are not completely identified. In its normal constitution, the human body bears within it the signs of sex and is male or female by its nature. However, the fact that man is a "body" belongs to the structure of the personal subject more deeply than the fact that in his somatic constitution he is also male or female. Therefore, the meaning of "original solitude," which can be referred simply to "man," is substantially prior to the meaning of original unity. The latter is based on masculinity and femininity, as if on two different "incarnations," that is, on two ways of "being a body" of the same human being created "in the image of God" (*Gn* 1:27).

Following the Yahwist text, in which the creation of woman was described separately (*Gn* 2:21-22), we must have before our eyes, at the same time, that "image of God" of the first narrative of creation. In language and in style, the second narrative keeps all the characteristics of the Yahwist text. The way of narrating agrees with the way of thinking and expressing oneself of the period to which the text belongs.

Following the contemporary philosophy of religion and that of language, it can be said that the language in question is a mythical one. In this case, the term "myth" does not designate a fabulous content, but merely an archaic way of expressing a deeper content. Without any difficulty we discover that content, under the layer of the ancient narrative. It is really marvellous as regards the qualities and the condensation of the truths contained in it.

Let us add that up to a certain point, the second narrative of the creation of man keeps the form of a dialogue between man and God-Creator. That is manifested above all in that stage in which man (*adam*) is definitively created as male and female (*'is-'issah*). The creation takes place almost simultaneously in two dimensions: the action of God-Yahweh who creates occurs in correlation with the process of human consciousness.

So, God-Yahweh says: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (*Gn* 2:18). At the same time the man confirms his own solitude (cf. *Gn* 2:20). Next we read: "So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of

his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. The rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman" (*Gn* 2:21-22). Considering the specific language, first it must be recognized that in the Genesis account, that sleep in which the man is immersed - thanks to God-Yahweh - in preparation for the new creative act, gives us food for thought.

Against the background of contemporary mentality, accustomed - through analysis of the subconscious - to connecting sexual contents with the world of dreams, that sleep may bring forth a particular association. However, the Bible narrative seems to go beyond the dimension of man's subconscious. If we admit, moreover, a significant difference of vocabulary, we can conclude that the man (*adam*) falls into that "sleep" in order to wake up "male" and "female." In Genesis 2:23, we come across the distinction *'is-'issah* for the first time. Perhaps, therefore, the analogy of sleep indicates here not so much a passing from consciousness to subconsciousness, as a specific return to non-being (sleep contains an element of annihilation of man's conscious existence). That is, it indicates a return to the moment preceding the creation, that through God's creative initiative, solitary "man" may emerge from it again in his double unity as male and female.

In any case, in the light of the context of Genesis 2:18-20, there is no doubt that man falls into that "sleep" with the desire of finding a being like himself. If, by analogy with sleep, we can speak here also of a dream, we must say that the biblical archetype allows us to admit as the content of that dream a "second self." It is also personal and equally referred to the situation of original solitude, that is, to the whole process of the stabilization of human identity in relation to living beings (*animalia*) as a whole, since it is the process of man's "differentiation" from this environment. In this way, the circle of the solitude of the man-person is broken, because the first "man" awakens from his sleep as "male and female."

The woman is made "with the rib" that God-Yahweh had taken from the man. Considering the archaic, metaphorical and figurative way of expressing the thought, we can establish that it is a question here of homogeneity of the whole being of both. This homogeneity concerns above all the body, the somatic structure. It is also confirmed by the man's first words to the woman who has been created: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (*Gn* 2:23). Yet the words quoted refer also to the humanity of the male. They must be read in the context of the affirmations made before the creation of the woman, in which, although the "incarnation" of the man does not yet exist, she is defined as "a helper fit for him" (cf. *Gn* 2:18 and 2:20). In this way, therefore, the woman is created, in a sense, on the basis of the same humanity.

Somatic homogeneity, in spite of the difference in constitution bound up with the sexual difference, is so evident that the man, on waking up from the genetic sleep, expresses it at once, when he says: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh - she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man" (*Gn* 2:23). In this way the man manifests for the first time joy and even exaltation, for which he had no reason before, owing to the lack of a being like himself. Joy in the other human being, in the second "self," dominates the words spoken by the man on seeing the woman. All this helps to establish the full meaning of original unity. The words here are few, but each one is of great weight. We must take into account - and we will do so also later - the fact that the first woman, "made with the rib...taken from the man," is at once accepted as a fit helper for him.

We shall return to this same subject, that is, the meaning of the original unity of man and of woman in humanity, in the next meditation.

### ***By the Communion of Persons Man Becomes the Image of God***

Following the narrative of Genesis, we have seen that the "definitive" creation of man consists in the creation of the unity of two beings. Their unity denotes above all the identity of human nature; their duality, on the other hand, manifests what, on the basis of this identity, constitutes the masculinity and femininity of created man. This ontological dimension of unity and duality has, at the same time, an axiological meaning. From the text of Genesis 2:23 and from the whole context, it is clearly seen that man was created as a particular value before God. "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (*Gn* 1:31). But man was also created as a particular value for himself - first, because he is man; second, because the woman is for the man, and vice versa, the man is for the woman.

In this way the meaning of man's original unity, through masculinity and femininity, is expressed as an overcoming of the frontier of solitude. At the same time it is an affirmation - with regard to both human beings - of everything that constitutes man in solitude. In the Bible narrative, solitude is the way that leads to that unity which, following Vatican II, we can define as *communio personarum*.

As we have already seen, in his original solitude man acquires a personal consciousness in the process of distinction from all living beings (*animalia*). At the same time, in this solitude, he opens up to a being akin to himself, defined in Genesis (2:18, 20) as "a helper fit for him." This opening is no less decisive for the person of man; in fact, it is perhaps even more decisive than the distinction itself. In the Yahwist narrative, man's solitude is presented to us not only as the first discovery of the characteristic transcendence peculiar to the person. It is also presented as the discovery of an adequate relationship "to" the person, and therefore as an opening and expectation of a "communion of persons."

The term "community" could also be used here, if it were not generic and did not have so many meanings. *Communio* expresses more, with greater precision, since it indicates precisely that "help" which is derived, in a sense, from the very fact of existing as a person "beside" a person. In the Bible narrative this fact becomes *eo ipso* - in itself - the existence of the person "for" the person, since man in his original solitude was, in a way, already in this relationship. That is confirmed, in a negative sense, precisely by this solitude.

Furthermore, the communion of persons could be formed only on the basis of a "double solitude" of man and of woman, that is, as their meeting in their distinction from the world of living beings (*animalia*), which gave them both the possibility of being and existing in a special reciprocity. The concept of "help" also expresses this reciprocity in existence, which no other living being could have ensured. All that constituted the foundation of the solitude of each of them was indispensable for this reciprocity. Self-knowledge and self-determination, that is, subjectivity and consciousness of the meaning of one's own body, was also indispensable.

In the first chapter, the narrative of the creation of man affirms directly, right from the beginning, that man was created in the image of God as male and female. The narrative of the second chapter, on the other hand, does not speak of the "image of God." But in its own way it reveals that the complete and definitive creation of "man" (subjected first to the experience of original solitude) is expressed in giving life to that *communio personarum* that man and woman form. In this way, the Yahwist narrative agrees with the content of the first narrative.

If, vice versa, we wish to draw also from the narrative of the Yahwist text the concept of "image of God," we can then deduce that man became the "image and likeness" of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons which man and woman form right from the beginning. The function of the image is to reflect the one who is the model, to reproduce its own prototype. Man becomes the image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion. Right "from the beginning," he is not only an image in which the solitude of a person who rules the world is reflected, but also, and essentially, an image of an inscrutable divine communion of persons.

In this way, the second narrative could also be a preparation for understanding the Trinitarian concept of the "image of God," even if the latter appears only in the first narrative. Obviously, that is not without significance for the theology of the body. Perhaps it even constitutes the deepest theological aspect of all that can be said about man. In the mystery of creation - on the basis of the original and constituent "solitude" of his being - man was endowed with a deep unity between what is, humanly and through the body, male in him and what is, equally humanly and through the body, female in him. On all this, right from the beginning, the blessing of fertility descended, linked with human procreation (cf. *Gn* 1:28).

In this way, we find ourselves almost at the heart of the anthropological reality that has the name "body." The words of Genesis 2:23 speak of it directly and for the first time in the following terms: "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." The man uttered these words, as if it were only at the sight of the woman that he was able to identify and call by name what makes them visibly similar to each other, and at the same time what manifests humanity.

In the light of the preceding analysis of all the "bodies" which man has come into contact with and which he has defined, conceptually giving them their name (*animalia*), the expression "flesh of my flesh" takes on precisely this meaning: the body reveals man. This concise formula already contains everything that human science could ever say about the structure of the body as organism, about its vitality, and its particular sexual physiology, etc. This first expression of the man, "flesh of my flesh," also contains a reference to what makes that body truly human. Therefore it referred to what determines man as a person, that is, as a being who, even in all his corporality, is similar to God.

We find ourselves, therefore, almost at the very core of the anthropological reality, the name of which is "body," the human body. However, as can easily be seen, this core is not only anthropological, but also essentially theological. Right from the beginning, the theology of the body is bound up with the creation of man in the image of God. It becomes, in a way, also the theology of sex, or rather the theology of masculinity and femininity, which has its starting point here in Genesis.

The words of Genesis 2:24 bear witness to the original meaning of unity, which will have in the revelation of God an ample and distant perspective. This unity through the body - "and the two will be one flesh" possesses a multiform dimension. It possesses an ethical dimension, as is confirmed by Christ's answer to the Pharisees in Matthew 19 (cf. *Mk* 10). It also has a sacramental dimension, a strictly theological one, as is proved by St. Paul's words to the Ephesians<sup>11</sup> which refer also to the tradition of the prophets (Hosea, Isaiah, Ezekiel). This is so because, right from the beginning, that unity which is realized through the body indicates not only the "body," but also the "incarnate" communion of persons - *communio personarum* - and calls for this communion.

Masculinity and femininity express the dual aspect of man's somatic constitution. "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." Furthermore, through the same words of Genesis 2:23, they indicate the new consciousness of the sense of one's own body. It can be said that this sense consists in a mutual enrichment. Precisely this consciousness, through which humanity is formed again as the communion of persons, seems to be the layer which in the narrative of the creation of man (and in the revelation of the body contained in it) is deeper than his somatic structure as male and female. In any case, this structure is presented right from the beginning with a deep consciousness of human corporality and sexuality, and that establishes an inalienable norm for the understanding of man on the theological plane.

### ***In the First Chapters of Genesis, Marriage Is One and Indissoluble***

Let us recall that when questioned about the unity and indissolubility of marriage, Christ referred to what was "in the beginning." He quoted the words written in the first chapters of Genesis. In the course of these reflections, we are trying to penetrate the specific meaning of these words and these chapters.

The meaning of the original unity of man, whom God created "male and female," is obtained (especially in the light of Genesis 2:23) by knowing man in the entire endowment of his being, that is, in all the riches of that mystery of creation, on which theological anthropology is based. This knowledge, that is, the study of the human identity of the one who, at the beginning, is "alone," must always pass through duality, "communion."

Let us recall the passage of Genesis 2:23: "Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man.' " In the light of this text, we understand that knowledge of man passes through masculinity and femininity. These are, as it were, two "incarnations" of the same metaphysical solitude before God and the world. They are two ways of "being a body" and at the same time a man, which complete each other. They are two complementary dimensions of self-consciousness and self-determination and, at the same time, two complementary ways of being conscious of the meaning of the body.

As Genesis 2:23 already shows, femininity finds itself, in a sense, in the presence of masculinity, while masculinity is confirmed through femininity. Precisely the function of sex, which is in a

sense, "a constituent part of the person" (not just "an attribute of the person"), proves how deeply man, with all his spiritual solitude, with the never to be repeated uniqueness of his person, is constituted by the body as "he" or "she." The presence of the feminine element, alongside the male element and together with it, signifies an enrichment for man in the whole perspective of his history, including the history of salvation. All this teaching on unity has already been expressed originally in Genesis 2:23.

The unity of which Genesis 2:24 speaks - "they become one flesh" - is undoubtedly expressed and realized in the conjugal act. The biblical formulation, extremely concise and simple, indicates sex, femininity and masculinity, as that characteristic of man - male and female - which permits them, when they become "one flesh," to submit their whole humanity to the blessing of fertility. However, the whole context of the lapidary formulation does not permit us to stop at the surface of human sexuality. It does not allow us to deal with the body and sex outside the full dimension of man and of the "communion of persons." Right from the beginning it obliges us to see the fullness and depth which are characteristic of this unity, which man and woman must constitute in the light of the revelation of the body.

The perspective expression which says, "a man cleaves to his wife" so intimately that "they become one flesh," always induces us to refer to what the biblical text expresses previously with regard to the union in humanity, which binds the woman and the man in the very mystery of creation. The words of Genesis 2:23, just analyzed, explain this concept in a particular way. Uniting with each other (in the conjugal act) so closely as to become "one flesh," man and woman, rediscover, so to speak, every time and in a special way, the mystery of creation. They return in this way to that union in humanity ("bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh") which allows them to recognize each other and, like the first time, to call each other by name.

This means reliving, in a sense, the original virginal value of man, which emerges from the mystery of his solitude before God and in the midst of the world. The fact that they become one flesh is a powerful bond established by the Creator. Through it they discover their own humanity, both in its original unity, and in the duality of a mysterious mutual attraction.

However, sex is something more than the mysterious power of human corporality, which acts almost by virtue of instinct. At the level of man and in the mutual relationship of persons, sex expresses an ever new surpassing of the limit of man's solitude that is inherent in the constitution of his body, and determines its original meaning. This surpassing always contains within it a certain assumption of the solitude of the body of the second "self" as one's own.

Therefore, it is bound up with choice. The formulation of Genesis 2:24 indicates that human beings, created as man and woman, were created for unity. It also indicates that precisely this unity, through which they become one flesh, has right from the beginning a character of union derived from a choice. We read: "A man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife." If the man belongs "by nature" to his father and mother, by virtue of procreation, on the other hand, he cleaves by choice to his wife (or she to her husband).

The text of Genesis 2:24 defines this character of the conjugal bond with reference to the first man and the first woman. At the same time, it does so in the perspective of the whole earthly

future of man. Therefore, in his time, Christ will appeal to that text, as equally relevant in his age. Formed in the image of God, also inasmuch as they form a true communion of persons, the first man and the first woman must constitute the beginning and the model of that communion for all men and women, who, in any period, are united so intimately as to be one flesh.

The body, which through its own masculinity or femininity right from the beginning helps both to find themselves in communion of persons, becomes, in a particular way, the constituent element of their union, when they become husband and wife. This takes place, however, through a mutual choice. This choice establishes the conjugal pact between persons, who become one flesh only on this basis.

That corresponds to the structure of man's solitude, and in actual fact to the "twofold solitude." As the expression of self-determination, choice rests on the foundation of his self-consciousness. Only on the basis of the structure peculiar to man is he "a body" and, through the body, also male and female. When they both unite so closely as to become one flesh, their conjugal union presupposes a mature consciousness of the body. In fact, it bears within it a particular consciousness of the meaning of that body in the mutual self-giving of the persons.

In this sense too, Genesis 2:24 is a perspective text. It proves that in every conjugal union of man and woman, the same original consciousness of the unifying significance of the body in its masculinity and femininity is discovered again. At the same time, the biblical text indicates that each of these unions renews, in a way, the mystery of creation in all its original depth and vital power. "Taken out of man" as "flesh of his flesh," woman subsequently becomes, as wife and through her motherhood, mother of the living (cf. *Gn* 3:20), since her motherhood also has its origin in him. Procreation is rooted in creation, and every time, in a sense, reproduces its mystery.

A special reflection on "knowledge and procreation" will be devoted to this subject. In it, it will be necessary to refer further to other elements of the biblical text. The analysis made hitherto of the meaning of the original unity proves in what way that unity of man and woman, inherent in the mystery of creation, is "from the beginning" also given as a commitment in the perspective of all following times.