



The Holy See

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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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.