

sufficiently connect 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 analogy “of nature”—is in both accounts (though in each in a different way) also raised in some way to the level of “image of God” and to the level of the person and communion among persons.

To this essential problem, we will have to devote further analyses. For the consciousness of man—also for that of contemporary man—it is important to know that in the biblical texts that speak about man’s “beginning” one can find the revelation of the “spousal meaning of the body.” However, it is even more important to establish what this meaning properly expresses.

“Freedom of the Gift”—Foundation of the Spousal Meaning of the Body

15 *General Audience of January 16, 1980*
(*Insegnamenti*, 3, no. 1 [1980]: 148–52)

1. WE CONTINUE TODAY THE ANALYSIS of the texts of Genesis we have undertaken according to the line of Christ’s teaching. We recall, in fact, that in the dialogue about marriage he appealed to the “beginning.”

The revelation together with the original discovery of the “spousal” meaning of the body consists in presenting man, male and female, in the whole reality and truth of his body and his sex (“they were naked”), and at the same time in the full freedom from all constraint of the body and of [its] sex. A witness of this seems to be the nakedness of our first parents, interiorly free from shame. One can say that, created by Love, that is, endowed in their being with masculinity and femininity, both are “naked,” because they are *free with the very freedom of the gift*. This freedom lies exactly at the basis of the spousal meaning of the body. The human body, with its sex—its masculinity and femininity—seen in the very mystery of creation, is not only a source of fruitfulness and of procreation, as in the whole natural order, but contains “from the beginning” the “spousal” attribute, that is, *the power to express love: precisely that love in which the human person*

becomes a gift and—through this gift—fulfills the very meaning of his being and existence. We recall here the text of the most recent Council in which it declares that man is the only creature in the visible world that God willed “for its own sake,” adding that this man cannot “fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self” [*Gaudium et Spes*, 24:3].²⁵

2. The root of that original nakedness free from shame, about which Genesis 2:25 speaks, must be sought precisely in the integral truth about man. In the context of their beatifying “beginning,” man and woman are free with the very freedom of the gift. In fact, in order to remain in the relation of the “sincere gift of self” and in order to become a gift, each for the other, through their whole humanity made of femininity and masculinity (also in reference to the perspective that Genesis 2:24 speaks about), they must be free in exactly this way. Here we mean freedom above all as *self-mastery* (self-dominion). Under this aspect, self-mastery is indispensable *in order for man to be able to “give himself,”* in order for him to become a gift, in order for him (referring to the words of the Council) to be able to “find himself fully” through “a sincere gift of self” [*Gaudium et Spes*, 24:3]. In this way, the words “they were naked but did not feel shame” can and should be understood as the revelation—together with the discovery—of the freedom that makes possible and qualifies the “spousal” meaning of the body.

25. “Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when he prays to the Father, ‘that all may be one...as we are one’ (Jn 17:21–22) and thus offers vistas closed to human reason, indicates a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the union of God’s sons in truth and love. This likeness shows that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self (cf. Lk 17:33)” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 24:3).

The strictly theological analysis of Genesis, in particular Genesis 2:23–25, allows us to refer to this text. This constitutes another step between “adequate anthropology” and “theology of the body,” strictly linked with the discovery of the essential characteristics of personal existence in man’s “theological prehistory.” Although this might meet with resistance from the side of the evolutionistic mentality (as well as among theologians), it would nevertheless be difficult not to realize that the text of Genesis analyzed above, especially Genesis 2:23–25, shows not only the “original” dimension, but also the “exemplary” dimension of the existence of man, in particular of man “as male and female.”

The "Spousal Character" of the Body and the Revelation of the Person

3. Genesis 2:25, however, says even more. In fact, this passage indicates the possibility and the characteristic qualification of such a reciprocal "experience of the body." Further, it allows us to identify that spousal meaning of the body *in actu*. When we read that "both were naked, but did not feel shame," we indirectly touch its root, as it were, and directly already its fruits. Interiorly free from the constraint of their bodies and of sex, free with the freedom of the gift, man and woman *were able to enjoy the whole truth, the whole self-evidence of the human being*, just as God-Yahweh had revealed it to them in the mystery of creation. This truth about man, which the Council's text explains with the words quoted above, has two main emphases. The first affirms that man is the only creature in the world that the Creator willed "for its own sake"; the second consists in saying that this same man, willed in this way by the Creator from the "beginning," can only find himself through a disinterested gift of self [*Gaudium et Spes*, 24:3]. Now, this truth about man, which seems in particular to gather within itself the original condition linked with man's very "beginning" in the mystery of creation, can be reread—on the basis of the Council's text—in both directions. Such a rereading helps us to understand even more the spousal meaning of the body, which is evidently inscribed in the original condition of man and woman (according to Gen 2:23–25) and particularly in the meaning of their original nakedness.

If, as we have noted, the interior freedom of the gift—the disinterested gift of self—lies at the root of nakedness, then precisely this gift allows both the man and the woman *to find each other reciprocally*, inasmuch as the Creator willed each of them "for his own sake" (see *Gaudium et Spes*, 24:3). In the first beatifying encounter, the man thus finds the woman and she finds him. In this way he welcomes her within himself (and she welcomes him within herself), welcomes her as she is willed "for her own sake" by the Creator, as she is constituted in the mystery of the image of God through her femininity; and, reciprocally, she welcomes him in the same way, as he is willed "for his own sake" by the Creator and constituted by him through his mas-

culinity. In this consists the revelation and the discovery of the "spousal" meaning of the body. The Yahwist narrative, and in particular Genesis 2:25, allows us to deduce that man, as male and female, enters the world precisely with this consciousness of the meaning of his own body, of his masculinity and femininity.

4. The human body, oriented from within by the "sincere gift" of the person [*Gaudium et Spes*, 24:3], reveals not only its masculinity or femininity on the physical level, but reveals also such a *value* and such a *beauty that it goes beyond the simply physical level of "sexuality."*²⁶ In this way, the consciousness of the meaning of the body, linked with man's masculinity-femininity, is in some sense completed. On the one hand, this meaning points to a particular power to express the love in which man becomes a gift; what corresponds to this meaning, on the other hand, is power and deep availability for the "affirmation of the person," that is, literally, the power to live the fact that the other—the woman for the man and the man for the woman—is through the body someone willed by the Creator "for his own sake" [*Gaudium et Spes*, 24:3], that is, someone unique and unrepeatable, someone chosen by eternal Love.

The "affirmation of the person" is nothing other than welcoming the gift, which, through reciprocity, creates the communion of persons; this communion builds itself from within, while also taking into itself man's whole "exteriority," that is, all that constitutes the pure and simple nakedness of the body in its masculinity and femininity. At that time—as we read in Genesis 2:25—the man and the woman did not feel shame. The biblical expression "did not feel" directly points to "experience" as a subjective dimension.

The Spousal Meaning of the Body as the Fruit of Rootedness in Love

5. Precisely in this subjective dimension, as two human "I"s determined by their masculinity and femininity, both the man and the

26. The biblical tradition reports a distant echo of the physical perfection of the first man: "You were a model of perfection, full of wisdom, perfect in beauty; in Eden, the garden of God" (Ezek 28:12-13).

woman appear in the mystery of their beatifying "beginning" (we see here the state of man's original innocence and at the same time original happiness). This appearance is short, because it includes only a few verses in Genesis; it is, however, full of a surprising content that is theological and anthropological at the same time. *The revelation and discovery of the spousal meaning of the body explain man's original happiness* and, at the same time, they open the perspective of his own earthly history, in which he will never withdraw from this indispensable "theme" of his own existence.

The following verses of Genesis, according to the Yahwist text of Genesis 3, show, one must admit, that this "historical" perspective will be built differently than the beatifying "beginning" (after original sin). It is all the more necessary, however, to penetrate deeply into the mysterious structure, theological and at the same time anthropological, of this "beginning." In fact, in the whole perspective of his own "history," man will not fail to confer a spousal meaning on his own body. Even if this meaning does undergo and will undergo many distortions, it will always remain the deepest level, which demands that it be revealed in all its simplicity and purity and manifested in its whole truth as a sign of the "image of God." Here we also find the road that goes from the mystery of creation to the "redemption of the body" (see Rom 8).

While we remain, for now, on the threshold of this historical perspective, we clearly grasp, based on Genesis 2:23–25, the connection that exists between the revelation-discovery of the spousal meaning of the body and man's original happiness. This "spousal" meaning is also *beatifying*, and, as such, it definitively shows the whole reality of the act of giving about which the first pages of Genesis speak to us. Reading them convinces us that the consciousness of the meaning of the body deriving from this [gift]—in particular the consciousness of the "spousal" meaning of the body—constitutes the fundamental component of human existence in the world.

One can understand this "spousal" meaning of the human body only in the context of the person. The body has a "spousal" meaning because the human person, as the Council says, is a creature that God willed for his own sake and that, at the same time, cannot fully find himself except through the gift of self [*Gaudium et Spes*, 24:3].

While Christ reveals to man and woman another vocation, above the vocation to marriage, namely, renouncing marriage in view of the kingdom of heaven, he highlights the same truth about the human person with this vocation. If a man or a woman is capable of making a gift of self for the kingdom of heaven, this shows in turn (and perhaps even more) that the freedom of the gift exists in the human body. This means that this body possesses a full "spousal" meaning.

16 *General Audience of January 30, 1980* (*Insegnamenti*, 3, no. 1 [1980]: 218-22)

1. THE REALITY OF THE GIFT and of the act of giving, which is sketched in the first chapters of Genesis as the constitutive content of the mystery of creation, confirms that the irradiation of Love is an integral part of this same mystery. Only Love creates the good, and in the end it alone can be perceived in all its dimensions and its contours in created things and, above all, in man. Its presence is the final result, as it were, of the hermeneutics of the gift we are carrying out here. Original happiness, the beatifying "beginning" of man, whom God created "male and female," the spousal meaning of the body in its original nakedness: all of this expresses rootedness in Love.

This consistent giving, which goes back to the deep roots of consciousness and the subconscious and to the final levels of the subjective existence of both man and woman and which is reflected in their reciprocal "*experience of the body*," bears witness to rootedness in Love. The first verses of the Bible speak of it so much that they remove all doubt. They speak not only about the creation of the world and about man in the world, but also about grace, that is, about the self-communication of holiness, about the irradiation of the Holy Spirit, which produces a special state of "spiritualization" in that first man. In biblical language, that is, in the language of revelation, the qualification "*first*" means precisely "*of God*," "Adam, son of God" (Lk 3:38).

2. Happiness is being rooted in Love. Original happiness speaks to us about the "beginning" of man, who emerged from love and initiated love. And this happened irrevocably, despite the subsequent sin and death. In his time, Christ was to be a witness to this irreversible love of the Creator and Father, which had already expressed itself in