



# The Holy See

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## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

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***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'' 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.