

JOHN PAUL II

FROM MAN'S ORIGINAL SOLITUDE TO MAN'S AWARENESS OF BEING A PERSON*

In the preceding talk we began to analyze the meaning of man's original solitude. The Yahwist text gave us the starting point, in particular by the following words: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Gn 2:18). The analysis of the relative passages in the second chapter of Genesis has already brought us to surprising conclusions which concern the anthropology, that is, the fundamental science about man, contained in this book. In relatively few sentences, the ancient text portrays man as a person with the subjectivity that characterizes him.

God-Yahweh gave this first man; so formed, the order that concerned all the trees that grew in the garden of Eden, especially the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This adds to the features of the man, described above, the moment of choice and self-determination, that is, of free will. In this way, the image of man, as a person endowed with a subjectivity of his own, appears before us, completed in his first outline.

The concept of original solitude includes both self-consciousness and self-determination. The fact that man is "alone" conceals within it this ontological structure and at the same time indicates true comprehension. Without that, we cannot understand correctly the subsequent words, which constitute the prelude to the creation of the first woman: "I will make a helper." But above all, without that deep significance of man's original solitude, it is not possible to understand and interpret correctly the whole situation of man, created in the

* Pope John Paul II's address presented in the Vatican during the General Audience of 24 October 1979. The title has been given by the editors. For the original text see J o h n P a u l I I, "General Audience," Wednesday, 24 October 1979, The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19791024.html.

image of God, which is the situation of the first, or rather original, covenant with God.

The narrative in the first chapter says that this man was created in the image of God. In the second narrative he is manifested as a subject of the covenant, that is, a subject constituted as a person, constituted in the dimension of "partner of the Absolute." He must consciously discern and choose between good and evil, between life and death. The words of the first order of God-Yahweh (Gn 2:16-17) speak directly of the submission and dependence of man the creature on his Creator. They indirectly reveal precisely this level of humanity as subject of the covenant and "partner of the Absolute." Man is "alone." That means that he, through his own humanity, through what he is, is constituted at the same time in a unique, exclusive and unrepeatable relationship with God himself. On its part, the anthropological definition contained in the Yahwist text approaches what is expressed in the theological definition of man, which we find in the first narrative of creation: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gn 1:26).

Thus formed, man belongs to the visible world; he is a body among bodies. Taking up again and, in a way, reconstructing the meaning of original solitude, we apply it to man in his totality. His body, through which he participates in the visible created world, makes him at the same time conscious of being "alone." Otherwise, he would not have been able to arrive at that conviction which he reached (see Gn 2:20), if his body had not helped him to understand it, making the matter evident. Consciousness of solitude might have been shattered precisely because of his body itself. The man, 'adam, might have reached the conclusion, on the basis of the experience of his own body, that he was substantially similar to other living beings (*animalia*). On the contrary, as we read, he did not arrive at this conclusion; he reached the conviction that he was "alone." The Yahwist text never speaks directly of the body. Even when it says that "The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground" (Gn 2:7), it speaks of man and not of his body. Nevertheless, the narrative taken as a whole offers us a sufficient basis to perceive this man, created in the visible world, precisely as a body among bodies.

The analysis of the Yahwist text also enables us to link man's original solitude with consciousness of the body. Through it, man is distinguished from all the *animalia* and is separated from them, and also through it he is a person. It can be affirmed with certainty that man, thus formed, has at the same time consciousness and awareness of the meaning of his own body, on the basis of the experience of original solitude. All this can be considered as an implication of the second narrative of the creation of man, and the analysis of the text enables us to develop it amply.

At the beginning of the Yahwist text, even before it speaks of the creation of man from the "dust of the ground," we read that "there was no one to till the

land or to make channels of water spring out of the earth to irrigate the whole land” (Gn 2:5–6). We rightly associate this passage with the one in the first narrative, in which God’s command is expressed: “Fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion...” (Gn 1:28). The second narrative alludes specifically to the work that man carries out to till the earth. The first fundamental means to dominate the earth lies in man himself. Man can dominate the earth because he alone—and no other of the living beings—is capable of “tilling it” and transforming it according to his own needs. (“He made channels of water spring out of the earth to irrigate the whole land.”) This first outline of a specifically human activity seems to belong to the definition of man, as it emerges from the analysis of the Yahwist text. Consequently, it can be affirmed that this outline is intrinsic to the meaning of the original solitude and belongs to that dimension of solitude through which man, from the beginning, is in the visible world as a body among bodies and discovers the meaning of his own corporality.