



The Ontology of Sponsality in Karol Wojtyła's Thought: The Relationship to Which We Are Called

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Abstract: This article presents a teleological perspective on spousal love, exploring Wojtyła's thoughts on sponsality as the divine plan for human love. The investigation is important because spousal love is presented in the Bible and in Christian mysticism as an analogy for God's love and for the eschatological mystery. It is also necessary considering the social impact of family experiences on issues such as mental health, parenthood, criminality, and antisocial behavior. This bibliographical research is based on Wojtyła's *Love and Responsibility* and *The Catecheses on Human Love in the Divine Plan*. It is divided into four sections: the human person as a relational being, biblical texts about spousal love, Wojtyła's teaching on this category, and the teleological aspects observed in this teaching. Our findings indicate that for Wojtyła, spousal love is the teleological reality of the human person, supported by three main aspects. (1) According to Wojtyła's personalistic thought, God must be understandable when inviting a person to a definitive relationship. The Bible uses spousal relationship to indicate God's definitive alliance. (2) Wojtyła understands spousal love as the original sacrament of trinitarian relation. He states that the human person is the image and likeness of God because it was created as man and woman. (3) Spousal love is a total gift of self that leads the person to blessedness and fulfillment. It is the only way to imitate Christ in his kenosis.

Keywords: sponsality, spousal love, teleology, eschatology, ontology, theology of the body, nuptiality, Karol Wojtyła, John Paul II

Pope Benedict XVI in his social encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, calls for a critical and axiological deepening of "relationship" (CV 53), especially from an anthropological and metaphysical perspective. This category is fundamental for understanding the most essential realities of the human person and of the Trinity itself. The Ineffable is not fully understood through the categories that are attributed to him. In this way, the statement that the Trinity — or even the human being — is relational is not the end of the matter. It is necessary to say something more about this relation, to try to unravel it from the very relations established and revealed by God.

Pope Francis, for his part, has on two occasions exhorted the members of the International Theological Commission (Francis 2023) to consider a "Bride Church."

To be a bride depends on being in a very specific kind of relationship that springs from spousal love: sponsality. But what is spousal love?

Karol Wojtyła's history of philosophical and theological production includes two fundamental texts that help us answer this question: *Love and Responsibility* (2013) and the *Catecheses on Human Love in the Divine Plan* (John Paul II 2006).¹ These texts deal with an *adequate anthropology* which, in its reflections, takes into account theological, axiological, phenomenological, teleological, ontological and metaphysical aspects. It is an integral vision of the human being.

This reflection is important in at least three ways: to better understand the Trinitarian relationship; to better understand the reality of anthropological relationships; and, finally, to shed light on human relationships, especially their ethical aspects.

This ethical and social impact is even more valuable when one thinks of studying the relationship from the perspective of spouses. The overall marriage rate has been decreasing, while the divorce rate and the proportion of children born outside of marriage have been increasing over time (Ortiz-Ospina and Roser 2020). Furthermore, many studies (Cassel, Pains, and Kirsten 2021; Grossmann et al. 2002; Dagan et al. 2021; McCormick and Kennedy 2000; Stokkebekk et al. 2019; Kalmijn 2016; Roeters and van Houdt 2019; Lewis and Lamb 2003; Araújo and Faerstein 2023; Cabrera et al. 2000; Miralles, Godoy, and Hidalgo 2023) point to the negative impacts of unstructured, divorced, and dysfunctional families, as well as the absence of one of the parental roles or low parental interaction with their children; impacts that particularly affect children's cognitive and emotional development, and are associated with depression, suicide, and drug addiction, both in adolescence and adulthood. The damage obviously goes beyond the subjective aspects and affects society as a whole: the family dimension and some of its aspects have a significant impact on violence, crime, antisocial behavior, as well as recidivism in crime (Basto-Pereira and Farrington 2022; Derzon 2010).

Therefore, dealing with the subject of spousal love and its horizons of application and understanding is crucial for developing a proper family ethic, self-awareness as spouses and parents, and consequently for designing and promoting public policies, social and pastoral actions that correspond to this understanding, based on theological anthropology, and that affect not only personal and individual life, but also that of society.

On the other hand, theology has always aimed to understand Revelation in an effort to know and relate to the Creator. Thus, deepening our study of the category of relation, especially the relationship to which he calls us, will always be the theological exercise par excellence.

¹ As pointed out by Waldstein (2006) and Merecki (2014) it is worth noting that most of these Catecheses were written prior to Wojtyła's papal election. However, this fact does not diminish the magisterial importance of the catecheses. Additionally, it allows us to consider them as part of Wojtyła's original thought.

In addition to the social and theoretical justifications, this work is important because there are few studies that directly address the ontological aspects of spousal relationality. By researching these characteristics, we can develop a more complete understanding, which will lead to more effective application of these concepts in ethics and social life.

The proposed section offers a teleological perspective on spousal relationality, in other words, as the relation to which we have been called. The methodological approach is based on bibliographical research, specifically the reflections of two texts that shape Karol Wojtyła's spousal thought (*Love and Responsibility* and *The Catecheses on Human Love in the Divine Plan*) and some commentators such as Michael Waldstein, Giovanni Reale, and Jarosław Merecki. A complementary bibliography was consulted when necessary.

The text is organized into four sections. The first one addresses the aspects of the human person as a relational being. The second section focuses on biblical texts about spousal love. The third section develops Wojtyła's teaching on this category. In the final section, the teleological aspects observed in Wojtyła's thought on spousal love are further explored.

1. Development

1.1. Relationality and the Need for Understanding It

Relationality is considered an ontological reality, initially of the Trinity, as noted by Gregory of Nyssa (Maspero 2011). As the human being is believed to be the image and likeness of God, it is also considered ontological to man (Maspero 2011; Ratzinger 1995). The need for relationality in man is not due to any imperfection or lack, but rather is an inherent aspect of human ontology. Because he is the image of a God who is a Communion of Persons (Maspero 2011; John Paul II 2006) the human being is a relational being in his deepest essence (Ravasi 2011; John Paul II 2006).

The man par excellence, Christ, has existed within the Trinitarian relationship for eternity. Because The Word lives the Trinitarian relation, he, incarnated, lives the Trinitarian relationship bodily. In other words, the man Christ reveals divine relationality through his humanity. In this way, the category of relationship is an "element of a new ontology, of a new project of existence made accessible by the Trinitarian revelation." (Maspero 2011, 19) There is a new way of living because Jesus Christ lived his relations as a body, in the same way that the Trinity relates within himself — given the limitations of incarnate corporeality.

However, throughout human history, relationality is wounded by sin — sin is precisely its rejection — and salvation, consequently, is the return to relationship; not to any relationship, but to the proper one (Ratzinger 1995). Through salvation we

are invited to return to the right relationship. The question remains: what exactly is the right relationship?

Human beings are invited to live the Trinitarian life, with love dwelling within them, united with Christ who is one with the Father (John 17:21–26). This invitation cannot be forced, nor can it be a complete mystery without meaning or significance. Communication cannot be unintelligible. If God desires to establish a particular relationship with a human being, he cannot use the person as a means to achieve this relationship. It is crucial for persons to have a clear understanding — sufficiently for them to give their conscious consent — of the nature of the relationship they are about to enter. This is because it is impossible for God to use the person as a means “because he, by the very fact of giving a rational and free nature to the person, decided that the person himself will define the ends of action.” (Wojtyła 2013, ch. 1) Karol Wojtyła continues (2013, ch. 1): “Therefore, if God intends to direct man to some ends, first and foremost he lets him know these ends, so that man can make them his own and strive for them on his own.” It is important to note that persons must be able to comprehend the nature of the invitation in order for God to guide them towards these ends. To do otherwise would be to undermine the very quality that God has bestowed upon humans — that of being self-determined and inalienable (Wojtyła 2013).

The human being is corporeal. Therefore, when clarifying the divine will and the type of relationship to which we are invited, it is necessary for God to take our corporeality into account. That brings the possibility to understand the nature of the relationship that God invite us to within human relations themselves.

Synthesizing, humanity is the main way in which God has chosen to reveal himself, especially — and fully — in the person of Christ (John Paul II 2006; Second Vatican Council 1965). If it is possible for every human being to participate in Trinitarian life, which is relational, then it may be necessary to understand at least part of this Trinitarian relationship through the categories of human relationships. To do so, we must first understand the relationship to which we are called in the history of Revelation, and which human relationship best reflects the Trinitarian relationship.

1.2. Biblical Indications of Sponsality as the Apex of Relationality

Sacred Scripture presents two significant categories for thinking in terms of relationality: filial and spousal. While filiation reveals much about the nature of the relationship, there are certain aspects of the relationship to which we are called that differ from our understanding of filial relationships.

As we understand from our human experience, it is usually the father who gives his life to his son, while in the Gospels we too are called to lose our life in order to save it (Matt 16:24–26). The son, even in the Gospels but especially in our daily lives, presents the possibility of leaving home, taking what is his, and disobeying (Luke 15:11–32). On the other hand, we are called to do the Father’s will, as Jesus

himself has done (John 6:38; 1 John 2:17). Above all, a son is not one with his father, while we are invited to be one with the Father. Even Christ's relationship with the Father cannot be fully explained by the father-son hermeneutic. It is Christ's desire for us to become one with him as he is one with the Father (John 17:22–23).

On the other hand, the Bible gives indications that sponsality is the kind of relation to which God invites us. Sometimes reflecting their full realization, with their healed relationality, their sponsality, as the ideal bride or fruitful wife (Song of Songs; Isa 54:1–10; 62:4–5; Jer 2:2; Ezek 16:8; Hos 2:18, 21–22; Matt 22:1–14; Eph 5:22–33; Rev 19:7). At other times reflecting their relationality stained by sin, their non-sponsality, being called a prostitute (Isa 1:21; Jer 3:1–9; Ezek 16:15; Hos 1:2; Rev 17:1, 5).

Jesus states that, from the beginning of creation, is the spousal relationship that unites two beings as one (Matt 19:4–6; Mark 10:5–9). Hence the hypothesis that the sponsality can be an explanatory hermeneutic for the Trinitarian relationship, for the relationship between God and human beings and between human beings themselves, without losing the clarifications that the filial relation provides. After all, in eschatological contexts and in the figures of the definitive relationship, there is less emphasis on the filial relation and more emphasis on the spousal relationship.

From this reflection, it can be inferred that in divine revelation, the highest form of relations is sponsality. The prophetic books and the Song of Songs seem to give sponsality a definitive character, as they speak of the development of the relationship between God and his people. The first line of the Song of Songs expresses the bride's deep longing for the groom: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth" (Song 1:2). The prophets texts about spousal relation are many: "Do not fear [...] For your husband is your Maker; [...] My love shall never fall away from you, nor my covenant of peace be shaken" (Isa 54:4–5, 10), "No more shall you be called 'Forsaken,' [...] But you shall be called 'My Delight is in her,' [...] For as a young man marries a virgin, your Builder shall marry you; And as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so shall your God rejoice in you" (Isa 62:4–5). "On that day — oracle of the Lord — You shall call me 'My husband,' [...] I will betroth you to me forever [...] and you shall know the Lord" (Hos 2:18, 21–22). These Old Testament texts suggest a definitive relationship. They indicate the culmination, the final form, of the relationship between God and his people.

The New Testament contains several parables that illustrate the Kingdom of Heaven through spousal aspects. For instance, in Matt 22:1–14 Jesus tells: "The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son." Another example of an eschatological parable is that of the ten virgins (Matt 25:1–13). The Letter to the Ephesians (5:22–33) draws a comparison between human marriage and the relationship between Christ and the Church, portraying it as a perfect spousal relationship. The book of Revelation concludes the biblical narrative with the marriage between the Bride (the Church) and the Lamb (Christ) (Rev 19:7; 21:2; 22:17). The last sentence of the last commentary of the Pilgrim's Bible states: "This

is how Revelation and our Bible end: with ‘the voice of the bridegroom, the voice of the bride’, as it began with the joyful voice of the bridegroom (Gen 2:23), the voice that John the Baptist heard with joy (John 3:29).” (Alonso Schokel 2017, 2976)

The fact that the spousal relationship constantly appears to be definitive, and especially eschatological, is very significant. That does not oppose to the fact that we are and we will always be children because we have inherited the Filial Spirit from Christ (Rom 8:15). Nonetheless, in order to fully receive this inheritance both now and in the end of the days, it is necessary for us to unite with Christ in marriage; we must clothe ourselves with clean linen garment (Rev 19:8) and Ophir’s gold (Ps 44[45]:10). The result is sonship, but the invitation is to nuptiality.

Considering the above, it is acceptable to understand that sponsality is the type of relationship that can express the definitive relationship to which we are called to participate in Trinitarian life. Acknowledging the marriage proposal of the Lamb is how one enters Trinitarian relational life. From this point is important to comprehend the characteristics of this spousal relationship; understanding that will be obtained through an analysis of spousal love based on the concepts of Karol Wojtyła.

1.3. Spousal Love According to Karol Wojtyła

Reale (2003, LXXIX) identifies two fundamental elements of love that are presented in Wojtyła’s *Love and Responsibility*: “1) a specific relationship that is established between people, and 2) the attitude that men in this relationship assume towards the good.” Furthermore Reale (2003, LXIX) states about Wojtyła’s thought: “The imitation of the ‘Absolute Interaction’ of the three Persons of the Trinity constitutes the paradigmatic basis in the constitution of the human person. And just as it happens in the Trinity, so the human person is fully fulfilled only in love.”

According to Wojtyła, there is an inherent opposition between love and use. Wojtyła establishes a precise ethical norm, called the personalistic norm, which states in its negative form: “the person is a kind of good that is incompatible with using, which may not be treated as an object of use and, in this sense, as a mean to an end.” (Wojtyła 2013, ch. 1) This norm has an obvious Kantian basis.² Furthermore, Wojtyła’s expands from it in the positive expression of his personalistic principle: “the person is a kind of good to which only love constitutes the proper and fully-mature relation.” (Wojtyła 2013, ch. 1)

As Reale notes (2003) Christian love consists of self-giving. Above all, “love is a union of persons.” (Wojtyła 2013, ch. 1) Moreover, Wojtyła’s thought delves deeper, describing a profoundly experiential encounter between a man and a woman as they

² “Wojtyła takes up, in the first instance, the Kantian thesis according to which the human person must always and only be treated as an ‘end’ and never as a ‘means’, and takes it to its extreme consequences, stating: ‘No one has the right to use a person, to use them as a means, not even God, their creator.’” Reale states (2003, LXVII) citing *Love and Responsibility*.

discover each other as potential reciprocal gift of self. Merecki (2014, 167–68) describes this event as follows:

In human experience, however, the discovery of a person's uniqueness doesn't only have this meaning [being an end in itself]. It happens that a person discovers the uniqueness of another person among all the others. This has its foundation already in the body, in the sexual institute, which directs the male towards the female and the female towards the male, passes through the emotional experience of falling in love, but finds its culmination in the act of the person, in their free decision. When, in the experience of falling in love, the uniqueness of a person in the world of people is discovered, then the man and the woman ask themselves a question: how do I affirm this truth, how do I respond to this unique value that this person has for me? In order to respond adequately to this unique value, love in the most general sense is not enough; the love that touches every human person is not enough. It is precisely from the discovery of the unity of a person in the midst of other people that the desire to give oneself to the other is born in the heart of man or woman.

Merecki's beautiful observation is, in fact, the discovery that Wojtyła made when he encountered the couples he accompanied during his time as a priest. *The Jeweler's Shop* is a play written by Karol Wojtyła that portrays how spousal love and its expressions can touch the depths of the human heart. In this play, Wojtyła illustrates Andrew's discovery of the uniqueness of a person through his relational experience with Teresa. She holds a specific persistent position in Andrew's mind that he could not neither explain nor comprehend. In Andrew describes this position as a "you ought to" in his consciousness.

The love of the personalistic norm is sufficient as a practical response to everyday life in any relationship that may exist between people. However, as if love was not enough, spousal love emerges and goes beyond simply treating people properly as if an even greater love was possible and necessary. The experience of love begins to expand, starting with the body and radiates out to the whole person. A love that only finds an answer in the total giving of self.

According to Karol Wojtyła's thought, spousal love is the total gift of self. This integrality, or totality, distinguishes spousal love from other expressions of love. "Spousal love is something other and something more than all the forms of love analyzed so far, both from the perspective of the person who loves, and from the perspective of the inter-personal connection created by love." (Wojtyła 2013, ch. 2) For Wojtyła, spousal love differs from other forms of love by expressing the "giving one's own person." (Wojtyła 2013, ch. 2)

Waldstein (2006) argues that this statement is very similar to Kant's definition of the marriage relationship. However, in Immanuel Kant it seems to be rather contractual, while for Wojtyła it is ontological. For Waldstein (2006) Kant suggests that the surrender of oneself is a contractual recovery of oneself, once a person uses

another one as an object to obtain sexual pleasure, and this pleasure is negative. There is no dimension of gift in Kant's definition. In contrast, Karol Wojtyła's self-giving love is not only related to pleasure, nor does pleasure have a negative character as an integral and reciprocal self-giving. For Wojtyła, self-giving is independent of a contract and is a fundamentally subjective act of one person towards another, who mutually decide to give themselves totally in a reciprocal relationship because of the love they feel for each other (John Paul II 2006; Wojtyła 2013). João W. R. Chagas Júnior (2022) defines love in Wojtyła's thought as a spousal attribute of the person, as the ability to become a gift — and it is “through this gift that he or she [the human person] realizes the meaning of his being and existence.” (Chagas Junior 2022, 60)

Wojtyła's perception does not align with the romantic and idealized view of love that is commonly known. This view typically considers love between a man and a woman solely from the perspective of eros, which is focused on the hormonal reactions experienced during the encounter. In contrast, Wojtyła believes that love involves a decisive and determined, therefore rational and ethical, choice to give of oneself (Wojtyła 2013). It is important to make a thoughtful decision rather than an impulsive one. The phrase “because of the love they feel for each other” should not be interpreted as simply referring to mutual feelings of strong emotions and hormones experienced by both men and women. While this phenomenon is significant, Karol Wojtyła's concept of love encompasses much more. He refers to a “love that is not limited to sentimental experience, but involves the whole person, flowing in the gift of self to the other.” (Merecki 2014, 159) According to Wojtyła, love is not only filled with emotions but also with all the human phenomena that facilitate the possibility of a complete and reciprocal self-giving relation between a man and a woman. This includes the crucial attitude of decisive gift of self, which is an ethical attitude (John Paul II 2006; Wojtyła 2013).

This is the central theme of *Jeweler's Shop* (Wojtyła 1992) that revolves around three stories. Each story focuses on a different couple who decided to commit to each other in their own unique way. Andrew and Teresa are drawn to each other despite the differences between their feelings and decide to marry. Their marriage was a spousal one. Stephen and Anna, on the other hand, struggle in their marriage and lose the mutual care and sympathy. However, they were able to maintain a space for the gift of self that can arise, precisely because of their ethical decision, despite the temptations. Wojtyła at the end of the play indicates that this space can be regained. Christopher and Monica were driven by impulses, yet they made a very conscious and thoughtful decision to unite, despite the feeling of insecurity stemming from their stories.

It is evident in all Wojtyła's work, including the dramaturgical one, that the body has a profound spousal significance: its role is to induce us to seek this gift of ourselves. According to Merecki, Wojtyła views the body as a “principle of communion: man is for woman and woman is for man. This is what St. John Paul II calls

the spousal meaning of the body. The body in its sexual configuration contains within itself 'the capacity to express love.' (Merecki 2014, 138) The concept of the body as a sign of total gift of self is a "fundamental concept for building an adequate anthropology, made up of permanent meanings, among which is that of sponsality. This spousal meaning is something essential and irreducibly human in man." (Chagas Júnior 2022, 59)

This ontological condition is based on "the God-given power of the body to be a sign of the radical gift of self between man and woman." (Schonborn 2006, xxv) In other words, the divine plan for human love is the total gift of self (John Paul II 2006), which leads to holiness, fullness, and union with God. Giving ourselves as a gift is how we fulfill ourselves as persons, and spousal love is precisely this giving of ourselves in an integral way, without reservations (John Paul II 2006). Marriage is a journey that is in accordance with God's will and is founded on spousal love. The body serves as a sign of this love and its value.

Regarding the spousal meaning of the body, the pontiff states that it is a matter of "a transparent sign by which the Creator – together with the perennial reciprocal attraction of man and woman through masculinity and femininity — has written into the heart of both the gift of communion, that is, the mysterious reality of his image and likeness." (John Paul II 2006, 324)

This definition of spousal love as a total gift of self, which demands a series of intrinsically linked attributes and characteristics, expands not only into different hermeneutics and analogies, but also into radical and defining understandings. As John Paul II (2006, 500) stated, it allows for "a certain cognitive 'penetration' into the very essence of the mystery." Furthermore, in reflecting on the analogy of Ephesians and the prophets regarding spousal love, the Pope understood the mystery between God and humanity — its creation and redemption — "as the love proper to a total and irrevocable gift of self by God to man in Christ." (John Paul II 2006, 500) Of all the biblical analogies, none other seems to suggest such an integral self-giving as spousal love (John Paul II 2006).

John Paul II believed that God's complete gift is found in the 'transcendental fullness of his divinity' and that "such a 'total gift' (an uncreated gift) is shared by God himself only in the 'Trinitarian communion of Persons,'" (John Paul II 2006, 501) This communion is what we are invited to and prepared for in the economy of salvation. The Church receives "the fullness of salvation as a gift of Christ, who 'gave himself for her' to the end." (John Paul II 2006, 478) Although John Paul II does not explicitly state it in his catecheses, he implies that *kenosis* is a necessary condition for love to be considered spousal. To fully comprehend the highest expression of love as a total gift of self, we must delve deeper into this kenotic reality.

Gaudium et Spes (no. 24) says that Christ reveals us to ourselves. He reveals to us that it is the total gift of self — which requires *kenosis* — that is the deepest attitude of love. He teaches that the greatest act of love is to give one's life (in the broadest sense

of the word). The gift of spousal love must achieve the same totality, meaning it must be a gift of the truth of ourselves, which is the image and likeness of the Trinity. This truth can only be understood with the innocence of the heart, which is moral participation in the permanent and eternal act of divine will (John Paul II 2006). According to John Paul II, spousal love is the union of the will with that of the Father, in configuration with the total gift of the Son, which is only possible in the Holy Spirit. On this basis, conjugal love continually fulfills and reveals the human person.

Sponsality does not reveal persons who totally give themselves and then no longer have anything to give – as if by giving everything there's nothing left to give. This is very paradoxical. The *kenotic* being discovers or takes possession of oneself precisely in this surrender. Through this surrender, one expands spiritually and consciously, allowing for even more to be offered than before (John Paul II 2006). In this expansion process, *kenosis* is not something that needs to be repeated because the giving is already integral. There is no need to perform a new *kenosis*. There is an expansion of the gift of self that has already been made. Persons who give themselves in this way discover more about themselves, give more, and fulfill themselves more. This expansion was well understood by John Paul II (2006) in his analysis of spousal love. The fullness of *kenosis* is the infinitude of the gift, which is the infinitude of love. Through spousal love, we participate by the Holy Spirit, in Trinitarian Love.

1.4. Sponsality as the Teleological Reality of the Human Being

When we delve into Wojtyła's thought, especially his catecheses on human love in the divine plan, it becomes evident that the human person possesses a spousal character that extends beyond the confines of marriage but is revealed by it. This leads us to conclude that the person is ontologically spousal. Merecki (2014, 138) refers to this as "spousal existence."

In fact, John Paul II's reasoning leads us to Trinitarian love, to the beatific vision won for us by the merits of Christ, that is, to a communion of redeemed persons. This is our supreme vocation — and it is Christ who reveals it — which is made known through the two spousal paths: indissoluble marriage or renunciation of marriage for the love of the Kingdom of God (John Paul II 2006). It is a vocation conceived for us from the beginning, ontological, inscribed in our constitution and expressed through our body, through our sexuality (John Paul II 2006).

The purpose of this analysis is to comprehend the nature of the relationship that human beings are destined for in the ultimate, eschatological horizon, as per Karol Wojtyła's thought. Specifically, what sort of relationship was envisioned for human beings in teleological terms? This inquiry is genuinely Wojtylian, despite not being explicitly posed by him, considering the term he employs for his *Theology of the body* is "Human love on the divine plane." (John Paul II 2006, 659) Although some indications have already been set, it may be beneficial to revisit some of the earlier themes

and introduce additional ones to further explore how Wojtyła's thinking views sponsality as teleological for human beings.

As previously mentioned, human beings exist within a relational ontology. This belief is supported by both the first account of creation and the concept of original solitude present in John Paul II's catecheses (John Paul II 2006). In the Priestly account of creation (Gen 1), when God says that he created man in his own image and likeness, he adds: "male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). As per John Paul II's (2006) statement, this complement can be seen as evidence that the divine image and likeness is related to the relationality, moreover spousal relationship.

In the analysis of the Yahwist text of creation, particularly Gen 2, it is noted by John Paul II (2006) that the state of solitude experienced by the first male human being before meeting the woman indicates the ontological need of persons to relate to one another. The Yahwist text portrays loneliness as a primordial condition of human existence, which is not exclusive to males as it predates sexual differentiation (John Paul II 2006). According to John Paul II (2006), this loneliness does not imply that humans were created as solitary beings, but rather that it drives them towards their original purpose. This conclusion is supported by two arguments. Firstly, the creation of man without a woman is not the finished work. Creation of man alone, without a woman, made God declare that "it is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen 2:18), while God's statement before the whole creation is that it was "very good" (Gen 1:31). Secondly, it could be argued that indications of creation as an unfinished work are found in the Yahwist text itself. This is evident both in the torpor, that according to the Pope is a state of return to the divine creative act in which the human being has no part, and in the man's exclamation upon meeting the woman, which expresses a sense of completion (John Paul II 2006).

Original solitude also emphasizes the human need for self-definition through self-awareness and the fact that humans are inherently in a relationship with God: "*the created man* finds himself from the first moment of his existence *before God* in search of his own being, as it were; one could say, in search of his own definition; today one would say, in search of his own 'identity'." (John Paul II 2006, 149) This search is for their own fulfillment.

According to John Paul II (2006), is the original unity to surpasses and overcome the original solitude. This does not imply that solitude disappears, but rather that it is resolved. The concept of original unity emerges from the fact that human being is a body in two different ways: male and female (John Paul II 2006). This differentiation highlights the complementary nature that leads to oneness. The original unity that overcomes the original solitude — and therefore the search for fulfillment and the need for relationship — is a nuptial union. It is worth quoting the entire paragraph:

In any case, in the light of the context of Genesis 2:18–20, there is no doubt that man falls into this "torpor" with the desire of finding a being similar to himself. If by analogy with

sleep we can speak here also of dream, we must say that this biblical archetype allows us to suppose as the content of this dream a “second I,” which is also personal and equally related to the situation of original solitude, that is, to that whole process of establishing human identity in relation to all living beings (*animalia*), inasmuch as it is a process of man’s “differentiation” from such surroundings. In this way, the circle of the human person’s solitude is broken, because the first “man” reawakens from his sleep as “male and female.” (John Paul II 2006, 159–60)

Loneliness and the desire for self-definition are alleviated through the encounter with another person. This person presents a somatic homogeneity that is so evident that, despite sexual differences, the man awaking from his sleep exclaims: “This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” (Gen 2:23) (John Paul II 2006)

“In the biblical account, solitude is the way that leads to the unity that we can define, following Vatican II, as *communio personarum*.” (John Paul II 2006, 162)³ The second account of creation “reveals, in the manner proper to it, that the complete and definitive creation of ‘man’ [...] expresses itself in giving life to the ‘*communio personarum*’ that man and woman form.” (John Paul II 2006, 163) According to Wojtyła’s thought, the relationship that makes us the image and likeness of the Trinity, and for which we were created, is the sponsality. This relationship is characterized by the integral and free gift of self, which requires a kenotic attitude. Sponsality can be seen as the teleological reality of the human being.

The text highlights the significance of freedom and choice in the act of self-giving, particularly in the ethical considerations of how to give and whom to give. *Love and Responsibility* (Wojtyła 2013) argues that genuine exercise of freedom is only possible within the spousal relationship, in contrast to the filial relationship where the person is giving without choice in a natural and biological process. When a person leaves their parents, they do not give up that relationship, but they come to see its importance reduced by another, much more human, that arises from mutual choice: the relationship between spouses. In other words, a relationship that is not imposed, but assumed. It is a determination — something profoundly human. The spousal union is constituted by the body in its femininity and masculinity. It is within this union and through the body that one person helps the other to find themselves in communion of persons (John Paul II 2006). This choice “establishes the conjugal covenant between the persons, who become ‘one flesh’ only based on this choice.” (John Paul II 2006, 168) The decision expresses self-determination and is based on the structure of original solitude, in this case, double solitude, which is the expression of self-consciousness (John Paul II 2006).

This reality highlights an essential aspect of humanity, and it is also profoundly divine: the awareness of one’s solitude leads to a voluntary and self-determined

³ John Paul II references GS 12.

decision to form a profound relationship and fully unite with another person. This communion of persons is so inherent to the human being that the Pope expresses it as “inner normativity” — that which objectively guides the interior of the human being — “that gives the covenant its essential meaning.” (John Paul II 2006, 277)

It is important to note that the ultimate expression of “one flesh” is procreation. Wojtyła expands this notion to include paternity and maternity, and how this ontological characteristic is also teleological as a consequence of the spousal relationship (John Paul II 2006; Wojtyła 2013). This parental reality does not exclusively concern biological parenthood, which is the purpose of the union in the conjugal act, but not the unique purpose of spousal love. Those who choose to live the “continence for the Kingdom” can carry out their role as spiritual parents (John Paul II 2006).

In fact, those who choose to live a life of continence in view of the Kingdom, live sponsality in a unique way. Their chaste abstinence points to the eschatological corporeal reality (John Paul II 2006). This brings us to the final perspective necessary to affirm that spousal love is the teleological reality of the human being: as a path desired and created by God it must point to beatitude. In other words, John Paul II referred to sponsality as the ‘human love in the divine plan’ (John Paul II 2006, 659); this plan must include our salvation and our predestination to be holy and without blemish before God (Eph 1:4).

It is important to remember and recall that John Paul II’s reflections are an investigation into the teaching and doctrine left by Jesus Christ on spousal love. John Paul II argues that, in the eyes of Christ, the foundation of spousal love and the reality envisioned for married couples remain the same as they were before the Fall (John Paul II 2006). In his confrontation with the Pharisees, Jesus twice uses the expression “in the beginning,” which John Paul II interprets as having a normative aspect (John Paul II 2006). Therefore, to live sponsality according to the *ethos of the Gospel* is to live it as it was originally conceived (John Paul II 2006). Jesus found in the Genesis account the teachings on spousal love, to the extent that he used it to respond to the Pharisees’ provocations by combining the two creation accounts. At the same time, this is not only a normative response to the Pharisees’ moral theological questioning. It also indicates that the desired state for sponsality is the original situation of the spouses before the Fall, as planned by God. This is supported by Jesus’ statement “what God has joined together, no human being must separate,” (Mark 10:9; Matt 19:6) which has a sacramental aspect (John Paul II 2006).

This statement presents the theological and ontological aspects of spousal love, emphasizing that the union of spouses is performed by God as a result of his will and plan for human love, as revealed in the book of Genesis. It is not simply a correction of marriage practices, but rather a theological, ontological, and teleological perspective on spousal love. John Paul II’s work was to examine the accounts of creation in light of Christ’s guidance. The Father acts through the Word, not as a fleeting concept but rather as a manifestation of the Spirit. The purpose of God’s original act of

uniting spouses must have a specific function in his plan of eternal blessedness, as it is impossible for God to act in vain.

Christ's response makes it impossible to claim that the possibility of living original spousal love ended with original sin once he indicates "the beginning" as a reference for marriage relationships. Although original innocence is not possible, Christ's act of redemption — which is also a redemption of the body — allows for a new approach to God's plan for human love (John Paul II 2006).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ does not invite man to return to the state of original innocence, because humanity has left it irrevocably behind, but *he calls him to find* — on the foundation of the perennial and, one might say, indestructible meanings of what is "human" — the *living forms of the "new man."* In this way a connection is formed, even a continuity, between the "beginning" and the perspective of redemption. In the ethos of the redemption of the body, the original ethos of creation was to be taken up anew. (John Paul II 2006, 323)

Furthermore, John Paul II equates communion through a reciprocal gift with the desire for union with God. This perception is supported by his biblical synthesis of desire, which results in the following patristic sentence: "[Concupiscent] 'desire,' I would say, is the deception of the human heart with regard to the perennial call of man and woman to communion through a reciprocal gift — a call that has been revealed in the very mystery of creation." (John Paul II 2006, 287) According to John Paul II, this concept of desire refers to a theological unity of Christ's thought, indicating consistency and completeness. The Pope states that since the human person was created from the beginning in the image and likeness of God, when Christ refers to "the heart" or the inner man [in the Sermon of the Mount], his words do not cease to be charged with that truth about the 'beginning,' to which he had referred the whole problem of man, woman, and marriage in answer to the Pharisees." (John Paul II 2006, 287) This means that the beatitude, the ultimate end of the human being, are precisely that communion of persons.

John Paul II (2006) recognizes that the state of original innocence described in Genesis is the same state of election presented in Eph 1:4: "he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him." It is this holiness that God sees in the creation of man and woman when he declares it "very good" (Gen 1:31). This state of original innocence, lost through sin and regained through redemption, is a state of holiness. The Holy Spirit's action restores our potential to live in a state of original innocence, allowing us to freely live sponsality.

Grounded in the ethos of the Gospel, living the body in its true meaning, the spousal one, is a path to sanctification. This is the Good News hidden in John Paul II's reflections on the body, which are only a small part of his overall work. Living the body in its spousal meaning, as a sacrament of the Trinitarian Communion,

is an essential part of the path to salvation. It is God's plan for the body, and therefore for the person and human love.

2. Final Considerations and Conclusions

Karol Wojtyła referred to his catechesis on sponsality as "The Human Love in the Divine Plan." (John Paul II 2006, 659) The title is teleological, as it suggests that God has a plan for how mankind should love. According to the Pope, in response to the Pharisees' provocation about divorce, Jesus states that God has united man and woman in a very specific bond that no one should break (John Paul II 2006). According to the Pope's interpretation, Jesus' repetition of "the beginning" indicates that he supports the relationship established by God in the original state of mankind as the one that still represents God's plan for human love (John Paul II 2006).

An analysis of the ontological aspects of spousal love within Wojtyła's thought reveals that sponsality holds a profound teleological meaning for the human person. This is evident not only from his catecheses's title but also from several elements that appear in the Pope's texts, including the catecheses and *Love and Responsibility*. Three main aspects support his conclusion.

First: Wojtyła's personalistic thought on self-determination and inalienability and biblical use of spousal analogy led to understand sponsality as the definitive relation.

Human beings are ontologically relational because they are created in the image and likeness of the Trinity. Original sin prevents a blessed relationship with God from prevailing, and redemption is necessary to reintegrate this relationship with God. However, because we are capable of love, we are also free. Since the Creator has made us this way, he would not force us into a relationship without considering our capacity for self-determination and inalienability. Therefore, he would communicate us this invitation in a way that is understandable to us. The invitation must consider the human persons integrally, including their corporeality. When delving into the story of divine revelation, one may note that the spousal relationship is always linked to the perennial relation between God and humanity. Biblical definitive relations and eschatological figures are often associated with sponsality.

We are invited to participate in the life within the Trinity by relating to each other and to God in a Trinitarian way. This requires us to give ourselves totally. Our image and likeness of God lies in our potential to relate to each other in love. Love is self-giving, and spousal love is its total (integral) form. When spousal love finds reciprocity, the relationship is called sponsality. Therefore, the apex of relationality is sponsality.

Second: the Pope's understanding of the image and likeness of God regards the original relationship between man and woman as a unitive relationship between two persons. This relationship is created by God's action, which unites them as one flesh, resulting in a unity of persons.

This is John Paul II's interpretation of Christ's answer to the Pharisees: "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate" (Matt 19:6). The pontiff emphasizes that this answer has a normative aspect and is part of Jesus' teaching and revelation. Wojtyła reflected on Jesus' emphasis on "the beginning" and concluded that the spousal relationship desired by God before the Fall is the same model that Jesus indicates for spouses to follow (John Paul II 2006). Therefore, it is both possible and desirable to live spousal love as it was originally intended by God. Sponsality is the original plan for human love restored through redemption (John Paul II 2006). It is important to note that according to John Paul II, spousal love can be experienced not only within marriage but also in a life of continence for the Kingdom (John Paul II 2006).

According to John Paul II (2006), spousal love between a man and a woman is a sacrament that is specifically created to reveal divine love. Therefore, it is the most appropriate hermeneutic for Trinitarian Love since marriage is the paradigmatic case of the Trinitarian Relationship (John Paul II 2006; Waldstein 2006). The perfection of the reciprocal gift only happens in the Trinitarian Relationship, to which we are called, yet to love with a spousal love, as an image and likeness of the Trinity is God's plan for humanity.

But that is not the end of the matter. A question with two possibilities arises: (1) Were we created to experience spousal love, or (2) does this kind of relationship exist because we have certain ontological characteristics that make it possible?

If the second case occurs, spousal love is only a possibility based on certain ontological attributes, and we are considered persons precisely because we have these attributes, then it means that, on the horizon of the *imago Dei*, to be a person — image and likeness of the Trinity — is to have attributes that make relationship possible, while relationship itself is only a possibility. In this case, the possibility of relationality, particularly sponsality, would be located on the horizon of possibilities opened up by our ontological attributes. However, it would have neither a protological nor an eschatological role here, because it wouldn't be part of the teleological aspect of the human being, nor would it be necessary for the fullness of being. Relationality would here be ontologically possible, but not original, much less necessary; it would be an accident, not an aspect of the essence of the person. This principle should also be applied to the analogy of the Trinity (as marriage is the paradigmatic case of Trinitarian love). However, this risks falling into tritheism. Relationality would cease to be an ontological feature of the Trinity; it would be a possible reality because the Trinitarian persons could and chose to be so. If the second option were the answer to the question, we would only have the characteristics of the human person that

originate in personalistic philosophical thought: self-conscious, self-determined, inalienable, and their derivatives. This would not necessarily assume the possibility of transcendence, or going out of oneself, and would result in a modern inadequate anthropology (John Paul II 2006; Waldstein 2006; Merecki 2014; Wojtyła 2013).

If we accept the first proposition of our question (we were created to live spousal love) as true, then spousal love retains its full *imago Dei* aspect as the apex of relationality. This proposition sustains the affirmation that the Trinity is a relationship, and so are human beings. Therefore, we are meant to live in a relationship that reflects the image of the Trinity. No other kind of love can achieve this because any kind of love that does not involve the total gift of self is a love without fullness. Hence, the proposition that being a person means having the capacity to find the fullness of love in spousal love becomes an accurate conclusion. Is a new personalistic definition that arises from Wojtyła's thought analysis. Karol Wojtyła develops a spousal personalism.

Taking the position, that we are ontologically — rather than accidentally — relational, does not create an impasse regarding whether relationship, as a fact, precedes existence, or consciousness — a fundamental aspect of Wojtyła's personalism according to Merecki (2014). Even if we did not wish to enter a relationship, we would still exist and be relational, despite not being related to anyone. In this sense, existence precedes relationship. However, we are teleologically and ontologically relational, which means that we are ontologically transcendental. Wojtyła's thought (John Paul II 2006; Wojtyła 2013) suggests that even if the absolute of non-relationship were possible, our solitude would still lead our consciousness to go beyond ourselves and discover a relationship with the Absolute in the whole created world.

Third: spousal love can lead the person to blessedness and fulfillment by imitating Christ's *kenosis*.

There are two aspects to this guidance. The first pertains to the fulfillment achieved by consciousness in human historical reality. John Paul II (2006) describes in his catechesis a cyclical phenomenon of the expansion of love and self-awareness. By totally giving oneself to another person, when this giving finds an adequate reception, the giver discovers oneself precisely in the process of giving, because one encounters a gift greater than one thought one could offer. There is an expansion of consciousness and spirit that allows the giver to offer even more, finding a new boundary of self. This expansion continues as long as it finds reception. It is not necessary to perform a new *kenosis* once one has already given oneself totally; it is a matter of love in perfect and unlimited expansion.

The second aspect corresponds to the eschatological reality. God designed a specific type of relationship that he blessed and chose to be the sacrament of his own love (John Paul II 2006). It is impossible for God to behave vainly. Therefore, this act of his drives human beings towards his will, which is for "everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4) and "to be holy and without blemish

before him” (Eph 1:4). Furthermore, sponsality is the only type of relation that leads to a perfect union between persons, fulfilling Jesus Priestly Prayer (John 17:21).

Our analysis of Wojtyła’s thought has led us to identify these three major themes that demonstrate that sponsality is the teleological reality of human person. At the same time, it can be stated that these same characteristics serve as a radical synthesis of spousal love and without one of them love cannot be considered spousal: (i) it is based on free personal choice; (ii) it has the Trinity as its origin and model, making it kenotic; and (iii) it leads to perfect union, which is the fullness of beatitude.

Further study is required to analyze which ontological aspects are necessary for of the human beings to be able to love in a spousal way. If the teleological reason for human beings is to love in a spousal way, it must have been inscribed in their being from the beginning. What attributes of the human beings demonstrate that they were designed for spousal love? This question should inspire additional research.

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