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Lejn Hajja Sesswali isbah

Kummissjoni Djoċesana Żgħażaġh • Moviment ta' Kana
Dar Ġuzeppa Debono

Y
is sex
worth waiting
4



Lejn Hajja Sesswali isbaħ



KLABB QARI NISRANI
MALTA 2007

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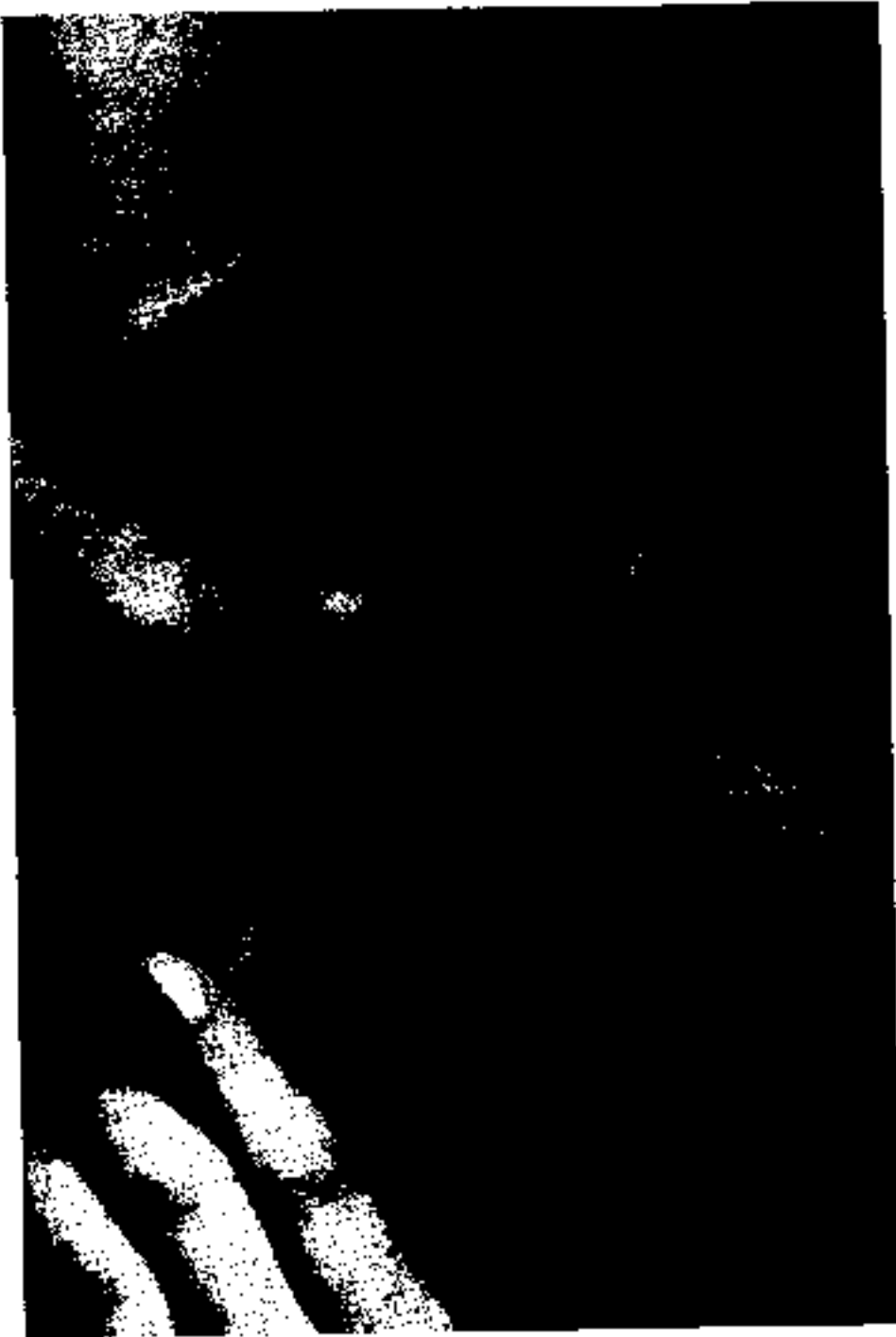
The Biblical Perspective of the Human Person

1. Biblical Anthropology

Anthropology as a humanistic science had its beginnings in the 19th century: 1860-1890, to be more precise. Its roots, though, can be traced as far back as Herodotus of Halicarnassus (484-420 B.C.), Thucydides (465-395 B.C.), Xenophontes (430-355 B.C.), Tacitus (55-120 B.C.), and Suetonius (69-125 B.C.). These are only a few Greek and Latin historians, who are considered as the forefathers and precursors of Western anthropology. The science of anthropology does not limit itself to studying humanity only as a physical being, but has as well its existential environment as focus of analysis: history, culture, civilization ... In sum, the science of anthropology has as its object of study the age-old but unavoidable question: "What is mankind?"

The Bible itself poses this same question, "what is man?", in Psalm 8, for example. However, in the psalm the question takes on a particular slant to it: "What is man that *you* are mindful of him, mortals that you care for them?" (v.4). The "you" here is used analeptically, referring back to "Lord" of the opening verse. Psalm 144 is another example: the psalm asks what is man. However, the question is more specifically addressed to God: "O Lord, what are human beings that you regard them, or mortals that you think of them?" (v.3). Thus, Biblical anthropology is theological: it poses the same question as scientific anthropology but addresses it to God.

The sacred authors of the Bible did not mean to write scientific books. We should therefore speak of theological Biblical



anthropology. The same question is asked, but it is addressed to God, and meant to speak of God as well!

1.1 The human person in Israelite mentality

Fruit of Israelite culture, the Bible reflects a Jewish anthropological perspective and knowledge of humankind, implying a *synthetic* depiction;¹ in more modern terms: a holistic picture (from the Greek *hólos*, whole, complete, global). The consciousness of totality is the most fundamental element that contributes to a correct understanding of an Israelite psychology and anthropology. No dualism obtains in the concept of mankind within the Israelite knowledge of man. In Biblical jargon itself: man is *néphesh hayyàh* (Gen 2,7), a living breath or spirit, a living creature, in the sense that it is a spirit that is made concretely manifest in the body.

Let us tarry a bit on this idea. "The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being (Gen 2,7)." No dichotomy obtains between the body and the spirit/soul in Israelite mentality. Israel has a monistic mentality (*mónos* in Greek means one, single, unique): they are one on the psychological and personality levels: spirit-soul-body, one whole being. The Greek philosophical perception of the person, especially the later-Plato, conceived of the person as a body united to a soul, distinguishable between them ("the body is the soul's cage").² Later on, Cartesian philosophy brought this distinction to a clear rift.³

¹ Cfr AUBREY R. JOHNSON, *The vitality of the individual in the thought of ancient Israel*, University of Wales Press: Cardiff 1947.

² Cfr JOE FRIGGIERI, *In-nisga tal-ħsieb. Storja tal-Filosofija*, I – Mill-Griegi tal-Qedem sar-Rinaxximent, Media Centre: Malta 2000, pgs 23; 130; 134; FREDERICK COPLESTON, *A history of Philosophy*, 1, PART I – Greece and Rome, Image Books: Garden City/NY 1962, 32-241.

Cfr FREDERICK COPLESTON, *A history of Philosophy*, IV – Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Leibniz, Image Books: Garden City/NY 1963, pgs 125-132; UBAI DO NICOLA, *Antologia illustrata di Filosofia*. Dalle origini all'era moderna, Demetra-Giunti Gruppo Editoriale: Firenze 2000, pgs 72-73; 222.

How are we to understand this unity? Israel did not distinguish between psychic and body functions. Both are dependent upon the body's organs, insofar as the body is the whole person's most tangible manifestation.

Perceiving no dualism, or rift or distinction, Jewish anthropology attributed, without any second thought, passions (love, hatred), organic functions (hunger, tiredness, food, the senses), sentiments (anger, joy, sadness), to the soul as much as to the body. The same principle applied in the same way to thoughts, feelings, decisions as referred to the body organs.

This would imply that for Israel, the point of reference of its anthropology was the body and not the soul! The Bible refers to some eighty different body parts. It can name concrete terms like the hand and the arm, the leg and the foot, and the gall, the kidneys and the intestines, as well as abstract ones like the spirit and the soul. A particular note is in place here: the human faculties and the body organs can act independently of each other! In a literal translation of the Hebrew texts, we would find expressions of this sort:

- The Lord said, 'What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!' (Gen 4,10).
- Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him (1Kgs 19,18).
- The eye of the adulterer also waits for the twilight, saying, 'No eye will see me'; and he disguises his face (Job 24,15).
- All my bones shall say, 'O Lord, who is like you?' (Psa 35,10).
- My kidneys will rejoice when your lips speak what is right (Prov 23,16).
- Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made (Isa 2,8).

- If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell (Mt 5,29).
- It is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him' (1Cor 2,9).

In the previous instances, the organs and body parts are described as independent centres of activity, performing functions of other organs. We come across examples where certain body parts seem to function totally independent of the rest of the body of the person doing what is being described. Body parts can also be judged of independent moral behaviour: the Hebrew Bible knows of deceitful lips (Prov 12,22) and truthful ones (Prov 12,19), faithful hearts (Neh 9,8), as well as hardened ones (Jer 5,23).

The Bible often interchanges abstract terms such as the spirit and the soul: "My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God" (Psa 84,2). They are used instead of the whole person: "I also could talk as you do, if you (*lit. – your soul*) were in my place (*lit. – in my soul's place*)" (Job 16,4). Sometimes the function of a body part is replaced by the part itself: "How beautiful (*lit. – fitting, i.e. agile*) upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns'" (Isa 52,7).

1.2 Conclusion

The Jewish Biblical perspective of mankind is that of a completely whole one: body and soul form such a complete unity that they are inseparable from each other. We would not be reflecting Biblical thought and theology were we to distinguish between the material (the body) and the spiritual (the soul) aspects of mankind. The human person forms one whole. On a moral and

behavioural level: any discourse on grace in mankind cannot be dictated in terms of any separation between the body inclined to evil and sin, and the soul goodness and grace. It is the human being as one whole that is of interest to God.

2. Humankind is a relational creature

In a discussion regarding Biblical anthropology, the aspect of the human ability to relate can never be overlooked. Gen 1 gives us the creation account of man as the crowning of all creation: humankind was created last as the most important work of God, the most sublime ("everything was *very good*" 1,31). Above all: creation found its harmony in humankind. Gen 2, on the other hand, gives an opposing view: humankind was created first, and the rest was created for his sake.

Man's creation affirms a milestone truth: humankind was created by God (by the word of God's mouth, as with all creation in Gen 1); Gen 2 depicts God rolling up his sleeves, soiling his hands to knead and mould the dust of the earth and form humankind. The author of Genesis uses the verb of the potter (*yāzār*) who kneads the clay with his bare hands and forms his pottery work. However, the potter never formed a series of similar artefacts, but every single item was unique and different from the rest. One can notice a sense of affectivity between the potter and his handcraft.

All this implies that within humankind subsists a large dose of –indeed he is all made up of– "relationality". Humankind always exists in relation to others:

- a special relation with God (word and mouth, by which humankind was created, have got a particular affinity with the person whose mouth and word they are);
- a special relation with the rest of creation, a relation that assigns a special place to humankind (Adam gives a name to every animal, implying power over them: Gen 2,19).

- a special relation to the rest of humankind: the human being is not human at all if he is not man and woman. Rabbinic literature presents God creating man as if one whole statue and then sawing and separating him into man and woman ("This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken" – Gen 2,23).

This particular characteristic is lived by humankind:

- i. in its relationship within the family (= micro-society)
- ii. in its special relationship with other human beings (= macro-society)
- iii. in its relationship with God, in celebrating his feasts

The context of the institution of the family includes:

- polygamy and monogamy (with procreation of the offspring as their aim)
- the severely strict legislation on marital fidelity
- children, especially the institution of the first-born
- levirate marriage

The context of society:

- the people (slavery, the Exodus, occupation of the land, the exiles)
- authority and leadership: kings, priests, prophets ... always in the name of and under God's authority
- the Law: its transmission to the people, covenants, and its sanctions

The context regarding God:

- relatively recent feasts⁴
- primeval feasts⁵

2.1 The human body: harmony and its consequences

– Ideal perfection, wholeness and "relationality" in the Creation Account of Genesis 1-2

It is pertinent to point out a theme that is frequently neglected in this area and to which the first account of creation in the Book of Genesis hints. The refrain "And God saw that it was good" appears six times in the first account of creation in the book of Genesis (Gen 1,4.10.12.18.21.25). This sentence encourages the reader to imagine God sitting back, while surveying his creation of the single works. God approves of the masterly handiwork coming out of his own hands. But these six times that God looks around him with satisfaction have a crescendo to them! God's creation so far has merely been a build-up to his grand masterpiece. The seventh time, God congratulates himself in a superlative manner: "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen 1,31).

The superlative comment of the Hebrew original can be translated into "very good, excellent, superb", but also "the best"!

⁴ YŌM KIPPŪR (10 *Tishri*/Sept-Oct – Lev 16; 23,26-33; Ex 30,10): Day of expiation and repentance, Day of fasting; HANŪKKA: (25-30 *Kislev*/Nov-Dec; 1-2 *Tebet* – Dec-Jan – Jn 10,22): Day of Purification of the Temple by Judas Maccabeus (164 n.c.), Dedication of the Temple, and Feast of Lights; PURIM: (14 *Adar*/Feb-Mar – Est 9): Liberation of the Jewish people in the time of Esther.

⁵ PESACH: (14-21 *Nisan*/Mar-Apr – Ex 12,2-20; Lev 23,5): Easter, liberation of Israel from Egypt, and Feast of Unleavened Bread (*Mazzoth*); SHĒVUOTH: (6 *Sivan*/May-June – Ex 23,16; 34,22; Lev 23,15-21): Feast of Weeks or Harvest (Pentecost – 7 weeks after Pesach), giving of the Law on Mt Sinai, and first harvest of wheat; SUCCOT: (15-21 *Tishri*/Sept-Oct – Lev 23,33-43; Num 29,12-39; Dt 16,13): Feast of Booths or Tabernacles, celebrating the 40 years of desert wanderings.

The author ingeniously juggles around this symbolic superlative description literally as well. The verb "he created" is used seven times in the creation account. The divine name *'ēlōhīm* is mentioned thirty-five times, and the phrase "heaven and earth" occurs twenty-one times: all are multiples of seven. The number seven is the Biblical symbolic number for perfection. Furthermore, in the original Hebrew text of Genesis, the first verse has seven words; the second fourteen! From every point of view, creation and its descriptive account is a pointer to the perfection that God has created.

The Genesis account of creation is meant to be a meditation on the meaning of creation, of what is living, with mankind as its centre and summit: it was only after God created man that he could be described as observing: "it was very good". This exclamation is the seventh and the culmination in the series of approvals in the eyes of God. There is nothing negative that mars the picture; nothing can be added to its perfection. Nothing is superfluous.

The fact that this superlative approval is made by God himself at the very conclusion of his act of creation indicates that he sees perfection not only in the individual creatures themselves, but also, and in a particular manner, in their inter-relationships. God specifically approves of the harmonious perfection that exists among his created beings. The perfection that God sees in his creation is enhanced by the relationship between the creatures themselves.

And this brings us to the crux of the matter: no man is an island. The Genesis creation account and, particularly, the divine approval of the harmonious relationship between the created beings, reinforces the adage that no man, woman or creature is an island. This implies that whatever one creature does, affects the other creatures. Whoever he or she is, and whatever he or she does as a created being, has a ripple effect upon every other creature. Humankind's actions, and indeed,

its very being, contribute to the perfection that has emanated from the hands of God.

If the creation of humankind crowns God's creation, and he deemed it fit to congratulate himself for it, how much more consequential upon the whole of creation are man's being and actions? No being can consider itself neutral. No action can be deemed indifferent. Whoever we are and whatever we do affects the whole of creation. What a responsibility this is, and yet, how self-fulfilling it can be!

2.2 Reciprocal self-giving

– Perfection and "relationality" in the human body and in human love

A truly sublime means of communication is the way by which the human person can give itself to another in love. This is a further point to be made regarding the theology of the body. Contemporary culture considers the human body as separate from the whole human person, and thus as an object that can be possessed and out of which one is free to extract whatever one wants. Christianity, on the other hand, never ceases to view the body as of intrinsic value.

The human body was created to be "for", to be given! Biblical anthropology does not acknowledge the concept of the person *having* a body, but rather "it is a body", or worded better: the body is the visible expression of the whole person. Viewed in this way, the Biblical vision of the human person becomes a vision of relationships: that of mankind with the world, and that of a human person with humanity as a whole. Within such a perspective, the beauty and value of the human body – both female and male – is a living image of the beauty of all creation.

In this Biblical theological framework, the Song of Songs – a Jewish love-song, probably written in the 3rd century B.C.E.–

becomes a eulogy of human love. It is only in chapter 7, (the Song of Songs has only 8 chapters), that we come to know the name of the bride. Here the bridegroom sings rapturously of the beauty of ten parts of her body⁶. The author does not mention other parts, even though they have much to do with the language of love, and which had already been mentioned earlier in the poem. No mention is made of the colour of her skin, though it had been mentioned in 1,5-6, nor her facial features (1,10; 2,6; 4,3), her arms (2,6), her lips (4,3), or her teeth (4,2.6). The author intentionally mentions only those ten parts in 7,1-9, because ten is the number of completeness in the Bible. The Hebrew language makes use of the letters of the alphabet to signify numbers. The number ten is written with the letter *Yud*. But the same letter begins the Holy Name of Yahweh, the name of the City of Jerusalem (*Yerûshālayim*), the name of the People of Israel (*Yisrā'ēl*), and even the word "Hebrew" (*Yehûdî*). To say "beauty", one says *yôfi*, which too begins with the letter *Yud*! As can be clearly seen above, whatever is most dear to any Jew begins with the letter *Yud*, the letter for the number ten, thus completing the picture of perfection.

The bride's name is *Shûlammît*, a pluri-symbolic name. Being a Semitic language, Hebrew is based on consonants. The consonants that make up this name are the same consonants of the name *Shlôm* (Song 3,7). And King Solomon was Israel's most eminent representative at the height of his wisdom, when Israel was at the peak of its political, religious, economic and social glory. The bride's name carries also the same consonants of *Shālôm*, complete well-being, peace – the most precious gift that God can give to his people, and indeed to every human person.

The lovers' beauty is compared to the beauty of nature, since it forms part of a more eminent beauty, namely that of the whole of creation, as it is depicted at the beginning of the Book of Genesis. This implies that when the Bible wants to speak about any kind of beauty, it always does so with reference to the

precise vision of the world and its relationship with the rest of creation that is found in Genesis 1. There God himself looked upon beauty as «*tôb m'od*, superbly good». A very interesting note that has to do with relationships and that dots the whole Song is a note we find in 7,11: "I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me" (2,16; 6,3). The Hebrew word for "desire" (*texûqāh*) immediately reminds us of the text in Genesis 3,16 and 4,7: "your desire shall be for your husband, but he shall rule over you." In their love since the Fall, the woman desires her husband, but because of disorderly passion, as a consequence of sin, their relationship turns into submission of the woman on the part of the male. On the contrary, in the Song, the woman's desire for the man is no more a submissive attraction but one of communion and true reciprocal love and communion.

2.3 Human bodies for temples

One of the most positively intriguing aspects about mankind as a humankind is the way it can look upon itself as a whole being: its body, spirit and soul are a unique whole that together constitute it. Even Jesus himself gives witness to the beauty and holiness of the human body when he heals others using his body. His holiness emanates wholeness unto others thus showing us that holiness is wholeness.

Jesus makes use of his hands continuously to pass on to others his wholeness and holiness. He raises children and adults alike from the dead by taking them by the hand; he heals the sick by touching them one by one; he heals the High Priest's servant's ear, cut off by Peter's violent sword, by taking it in his loving hand and putting it back in its place; he washes his Apostles' feet, including that of his traitor Judas. Maybe the most touching scene in this regard is when Jesus takes a child from among the crowd, crouches down beside him, so as to become small like him, even physically, and points him out as a model for all his disciples. He extols the gestures that a sinful woman showers upon him – even though they are all intimate physical

gestures: bathing his feet with her grateful tears, drying them with her hair, kissing his feet, and pouring precious perfumed oil upon his head. He rebukes the intolerant Pharisee who felt scandalized at Jesus' "tolerance". In just two verses, Jesus heartily accepts a concentration of physical gestures, the signs of gratitude for the loving forgiveness already received. Jesus never shunned or dismissed any sincere gesture, coming from people's hearts, even gestures pertaining to the human body, a symbol of their whole person. Jesus looks at the human body as the vehicle of the manifestation of God's action, the Kingdom of God, to use Biblical jargon.

St Paul talks about the human person in this way: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. So glorify God in your body" (1Cor 6,19-20). By "body", Paul implied the whole human person in its earthly existence. Notwithstanding all its limitations, the human person is the symbol par excellence of the manifestation of God because the divine Holy Spirit takes a visible and tangible manifestation precisely in the human body. That is how we can see God in our neighbour. That is simply how God's Word, the Divine Son, could become human "flesh" and dwell amongst us, human beings. That is also how He could give himself to us as "body that is given" and "blood that is shed".

All this implies that the most precious way in which God could give himself to us was in "my body, which is given up for you". Whenever and wherever Scripture speaks of the human body, it underlines the principle that the body was created by God with the awesome power of being able to bring harmony to others. It is "very good" when it is perceived as part and parcel of the whole human person. Thus the body can never be detached from the person. Ultimately, the human being finds fulfilment only when accepting the reality that each person is affecting others when relating to them.

Pope Benedict XVI in his very first encyclical letter says: "...searching" love ... expresses the experience of a love which involves a real discovery of the other, moving beyond the selfish character that prevailed earlier. Love now becomes concern and care for the other. No longer is it self-seeking, a sinking in the intoxication of happiness; instead it seeks the good of the beloved: it becomes renunciation and it is ready, and even willing, for sacrifice"⁶.

3. General conclusion

If Biblical anthropology is a theological anthropology and one that has its roots in the word of God himself, and thus how God himself looks upon man, then it is the perspective we should adopt whenever we speak about humankind. Whenever we introduce distinctions and separate mankind into compartments of soul, spirit, body, mind, will ... then we would be separating it against what God did in his Son, Christ Jesus. Humankind is a whole being; that is the way God envisages it; that is how the human-Divine Jesus was; that is the only manner in which we can be of true service to him whom God created whole so as to live in a holistic manner his human life on earth.

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⁶ Feet, thighs, navel, belly, breasts, neck, eyes, nose, head, flowing locks.

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Sa fejn għandi nasal?

Fr Fabio Attard SDB

Din id-domanda li spiss inlissnu, tidher domanda illi donnu x'ħin ikollna risposta għaliha, allura nħossu li nkunu solvejna d-dubbji kollha li ġgib magħha.

Insib ruħi quddiem din id-domanda l-iktar meta xi koppji jkollhom ix-xewqa sinċiera li jaffrontawha. Dejjem nibda biex nistaqsi "minn fejn hi ġejja d-domanda?", "x'qed nippruvaw ngħidu meta nagħmlu din id-domanda?"

ħsieb tal-bidu

Nixtieq qabel kollox nagħmel ħsieb żgħir imma ta' importanza fundamentali għal dak li ġej wara.

Fil-ħsieb nistrani s-sesswalità hija meqjusa bħala don li Alla żejjinna bih mal-ħolqien tagħna. Bħala persuni nesprimu dan id-don bl-isbaħ mod, meta nkunu qed ngħixuh fil-ħsieb ta' min silifulna. Jekk il-ġisem huwa l-mod li jesprimi min jien, is-sesswalità tiegħi hija wkoll lingwaġġ, hija mod kif jien nesprimi l-personalità tiegħi.

Din l-esperjenza sesswali għandha bħala waħda mill-espressjonijiet sbieħ tagħha, il-mument meta l-maskil u l-femminil, ir-raġel u l-mara, jersqu lejn xulxin u jesprimu fl-għaqda tagħhom, dik tal-ġisem u dik tal-qalb, dak il-pjan tal-bidu li Alla kellu għalih.

Dan inkunu qegħdin nifhmu meta nitkellmu dwar iż-żwieġ nistrani – għotja sħiħa, għal dejjem.

Bħala nsara, għalhekk, meta niġu biex nitkellmu dwar is-sess u dwar is-sesswalità kull ma nkunu qegħdin nagħmlu huwa