

# Catholic Appropriation of Biblical Perspectives Regarding Abortion

*William S. Kurz, S.J.*

## INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of Christianity, the Bible was a primary pillar of any culture of life and an antidote to every culture of death in which Christians have found themselves. Christianity began (as had its parent Judaism before it) as a religion that confessed the intrinsic dignity of each and every human life. It made this counter-cultural confession in the midst of a pagan culture that routinely exposed its newborns and relished watching gladiators battle to the death.<sup>i</sup> However, after the Enlightenment's rationalistic reductionism infiltrated into biblical moral interpretation and reasoning, the import of the fundamental moral tenets of Scripture ceased to find consensus among the principal denominations, biblicists, and moral thinkers. What for centuries was a practically unified mainstream of moral consensus about biblical positions on many issues of human life and death branched out into many disparate tributaries of conflicting moral opinions, principles, and arguments.<sup>ii</sup>

In the face of this growing moral confusion and even an incipient moral chaos resulting from contrary and reductionist points of view, one can make a strong *prima facie* argument that it has been the constancy of the official Catholic Magisterium (rather than the changing and clashing interpretations found in much Protestantism and dissenting Catholicism) that has provided the most effective societal counter-force to the culture of death.<sup>iii</sup> The multitude of competing Protestant denominations and dissenting Catholic scholarly factions has precipitated a chaotic multiplicity of moral opinions.

To make matters worse, many of these dissenting opinions have been gravely compromised by collusion with the culture of death. As

Pope John Paul II demonstrated in *Splendor of the Truth*, currently predominant approaches to moral reasoning frequently involve forms of *consequentialism* or *proportionalism* that can ultimately and logically be reduced to variant forms of *utilitarianism*.<sup>iv</sup> Utilitarianism by definition would allow all things, including human beings, to be “used” for a “greater good.” Utilitarianism is at the root of many of the most horrendous twentieth-century human rights violations by fascism, communism, and unbridled capitalism, to name but a few. For example, once one allows a moral principle that evil may be done so as to attain a “greater good for the greater number,” multifarious harmful and even lethal decisions about vulnerable or minority classes of human beings will inevitably follow, as in Third World slave wages, involuntary euthanasia, abortions of “defective” babies, or selling stem cells from “leftover” embryos (or even from embryos manufactured particularly for this purpose).

In recent decades, arguably the most effective and consistent use of Scripture to counter the culture of death has been made by the Catholic Magisterium. This is not a claim that the Magisterium’s use of Scripture is customarily the most accurate or erudite exegesis. Rather, it is a claim that among contemporary moral approaches to the Bible, the Magisterium’s use of Scripture is least likely to be infected by viruses from the culture of death. Magisterial ethics has proven itself less susceptible than many alternative forms of contemporary biblical ethics to the alien ideologies that are incompatible with the original biblical perspectives about God as Creator, the created world and the human race, and their multiple interrelationships.

In last few centuries of the Catholic Church’s treatment of abortion, the Magisterium has often acted as a kind of “supreme court” for protecting the seminal interpretations of Scripture as lived and expounded in the Church through the millennia.<sup>v</sup> In this way, the Magisterium provided a special bulwark for the culture of life in the decades, if not centuries, before the 1960s. To use another image, in recent centuries the Magisterium has acted as a dam against the rising flood of death-dealing developments regarding human life at both its beginnings and endings.

Dissent, however, has punctured serious leaks in this dam of resistance to the culture of death. The 1968 appearance of *Humanae Vitae* aroused a fury of exceedingly widespread and bitter “dissent,” which has in reality amounted more to a full-scale revolution, against the authority of the Magisterium.<sup>vi</sup> Prior to that 1968 dissent and revolution, in difficult case after difficult case, Catholic moral theologians would typically first argue and debate vigorously among themselves about their competing answers to some moral quandary, but they would resist giving their hypotheses prematurely to the media for mass consumption. Finally and typically, the controverted question would be appealed to the Roman Magisterium, whose solemn decision would then settle that particular dispute.<sup>vii</sup>

Since 1968, however, even though appeals continue to be made to Rome, the Roman responses tend to be generally ignored or “dissented from” in ways that left moral theologians fully without constraints about pursuing in their personal research and promoting openly to the public all manners of moral stances, approaches and systems. Many of these approaches unquestionably result in a culture of death on issues ranging from abortion to abortifacient contraception, *in vitro* fertilization, experimentation on and extraction of stem cells from its “leftover” frozen embryos, cloning, and euthanasia. Not surprisingly, fairly soon after dissent from the Magisterium became widespread, even Catholic moral theologians joined a host of moralists in the rejection of any moral absolutes. Those absolutes had been the backbone both of Catholic moral theology and of ecumenical moral interpretation of Scripture.<sup>viii</sup>

Without moral absolutes, much moral reasoning and interpretation of Scripture has been reduced to mutually contradictory muddling through hard cases, often under the guise of a misguided compassion; the result has been moral mush. Pope John Paul II’s 1993 encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* tried to reaffirm that moral absolutes remain essential.<sup>ix</sup> It attempted to rescue moral theology from its rapidly accelerating relativism and chaotic multiplicity of ethical responses in many areas of morality. But this encyclical too met the same kind of skeptical (if not outrightly hostile) reception from most academics that the vast majority of post-1968 papal moral encyclicals and teachings have

received.

Yet the current relativism and its emphasis on human moral autonomy as well as proportionalism, consequentialism and other forms of utilitarian thinking have been leading the world toward some truly ominous moral horrors. We are sliding headlong toward a “brave new world” in such areas as bioethics, the genome project, end-of-life issues, population control (and ironically its emerging consequences, a population implosion in which dying nations and countries are top-heavy with old people and have too few young wage earners to support them). The list goes on. Even many long-term supporters of legalized abortion are getting queasy about such bioethical abuses as cloning, embryo farming, and the imminent potential for genetic manipulation and selection towards a “superior race.” Because of the constant and deliberate utilitarian confusion involved in promoting morally questionable means in the hope of achieving such good ends as potential cures (not to mention huge profits for biomedical firms), even these horrors have not met with adequately firm and consistent opposition apart from the Catholic Magisterium.<sup>x</sup>

For the purposes of Catholic-Protestant dialogue, I want to investigate the particularly Catholic contribution in interpreting Scripture on questions about abortion.<sup>xi</sup> It became increasingly clearer to me, as I prepared for an April 2002 ecumenical symposium on Scripture and abortion, that differences between Catholic and Protestant approaches to Scripture on an issue like abortion (which has little or no direct treatment in Scripture) are much more obvious on the level of interpretation, application, and actualization of the spiritual senses and meaning of Scripture, than on the level of exegesis of Scripture’s more original literal sense. One of the good fruits of Vatican II has been a much greater unanimity among most Protestant and Catholic exegetes on the “original” meanings of Scripture. As long as applications of Scripture to moral or dogmatic questions did not proceed much beyond the level of the literal meanings of Scripture, increasing ecumenical agreement became possible regarding historical biblical answers even to contemporary concerns, such as questions about the biblical evidence for the morality or immorality of abortion.<sup>xii</sup>

Still, the wildly differing and contradictory answers in many contemporary biblical applications about abortion have continued to flourish in scholarly and popular publications, even though these diverging answers proceed from essentially the same biblical evidence. It seems more and more clear that most of the differences and contradictions among Christian biblical interpreters concerning the morality of abortion have to be attributed less to historical exegetical approaches toward what the texts meant in the first century than to what kinds of contemporary argument are made after biblical principles and evidence have been established. It seems clear that the mutually contradictory uses of Scripture both to legitimize and to condemn abortion (in all or some instances) result more from the mutually incompatible kinds of philosophical or at least extra-biblical moral argumentation on the basis of exegetical evidence than from different exegesis. For example, I expect that many Protestant and Catholic biblicists might find my proposed “biblical world view” unobjectionable in itself. Yet I suspect that among even those who would accept such a biblical context, some might nevertheless disagree with my conclusions concerning abortion.

For example, those who maintain generally prolife biblical approaches toward abortion, but who contend that the Bible does permit abortion as a tragic but moral choice of the “lesser of two evils” in at least some circumstances, almost always use consequentialist or proportionalist forms of argumentation to do so.<sup>xiii</sup> These moral reasonings can arguably be reduced to variations of utilitarian thinking, which is in fact diametrically opposed to the moral absolutes found in natural law arguments. Those like myself who argue that the Bible (or at least the “biblical world view”) never permits direct abortion for any reasons or in any circumstances generally use natural law reasoning to supplement and reinforce their biblical principles and arguments.<sup>xiv</sup> Thus, in treating ecumenical questions and comparing Catholic and Protestant uses of Scripture in the abortion issue, efforts to differentiate magisterial Catholic from dissenting Catholic positions and from some Protestant positions will be found to focus less on exegetical differences than on how the Catholic traditions of philosophical ethics and moral theology operate as well as on how magisterial interventions in some

difficult moral questions and cases influence the way in which a Catholic consults Scripture for guidance relevant to questions concerning abortion.

#### METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

First it is important briefly to clarify some working methodological principles. My aim is indeed to avoid the common approach of facile proof-texting from Scripture, but nevertheless to seek positive guidance from Scripture.<sup>xv</sup> I will look for biblical guidance even for moral questions like abortion that Scripture does not explicitly treat in any detail, if at all.<sup>xvi</sup> A sizable percentage of moral theological traditions regarding abortion arose out of the various translations, exegeses and interpretations of one biblical case in *Exodus*. That case is at best indirectly relevant to abortion: it asks what compensation should be exacted when a pregnant woman is accidentally struck in a fight between two men and loses her baby (cf. *Exod. 21:22-25* in its markedly differing Hebrew and Septuagint Greek versions).<sup>xvii</sup>

The Hebrew version had a more negative immediate effect than its Greek translation, for it seemed to reduce the assessment for the destroyed fetus merely to compensation to the father for lost property.<sup>xviii</sup> On the other hand, the Septuagint translation of this verse inserted a distinction between an early unformed fetus and a formed fetus, with the penalty for a formed fetus being “life for life.”<sup>xix</sup> Because it applied a “life for life” penalty instead of a monetary one, this distinction may at first have seemed helpful in promoting a more exalted estimate of the value of fetal life than the merely property-related Hebrew version. But ultimately, in my judgment, the misleading distinction between formed and unformed fetuses would prove to lead subsequent generations of Catholic moralists down some serious blind alleys.<sup>xx</sup>

Particularly problematic is the distinction between a formed and unformed fetus. It is true that in the Septuagint case of a more developed fetus (primitively defined as one having recognizably human shape and features), the biblical penalty for homicide (“life for life”) was invoked. This early example of relating abortion to homicide would positively affect future moral arguments concerning the humanity of the fetus and the consequent immorality of abortion. Yet the distinction between formed and unformed fetus was not based on what we now know to be

the scientific reality of intrauterine human development. Its ramifications would confuse subsequent treatment of the humanity of the fetus and thus the moral arguments concerning abortion.<sup>xxi</sup>

This Septuagint variation on the Hebrew text of the law generated centuries of Christian moral speculation about abortion.<sup>xxii</sup> We have noted how from a contemporary prolife perspective, the introduction of the “life for life” penalty, which treated the fetus (although strictly it speaks only of the “formed” fetus) as human, would indeed be a moral advancement over a mere monetary compensation for treating the lost fetus as lost property. Yet the Septuagint distinction between the formed and unformed fetus, especially when it was later explicitly linked to the rediscovered but erroneous Aristotelian human biology and embryology, was grounded in ancient and medieval ignorance of how human reproduction results from union of sperm and ovum.<sup>xxiii</sup> In my judgment, that erroneous biology led Catholic moral theologians and canon lawyers for centuries down paths that compromised the humanity of the incipient fetus in ways that were quite counter-productive for a fully consistent prolife position. Incontrovertible contemporary biological and genetic evidence on how all human beings begin their unique existence from the moment of the union of their parents’ sperm and ovum (an existence that is entirely different and distinct from their mothers’ reality even while they are growing within their mothers’ wombs) has rendered centuries of Catholic moral speculation about the difference between formed and unformed fetuses and about the time of ensoulment not only irrelevant but misleading.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Unfortunately, some Catholic moralists, who with less than total candor have been searching for excuses from the tradition to allow abortion in at least some circumstances, persist in citing these ancient and medieval Catholic opinions (St. Thomas Aquinas is a favorite) as supporting evidence for their positions, despite their obviously obsolete biological misunderstandings of human reproduction. In my judgment, this is decidedly disingenuous, and even dishonest.<sup>xxv</sup> I also believe that so many centuries of speculation and focus on these same few isolated biblical verses, which do not even explicitly deal with abortion, have had as one of their quite negative effects the retarding of the Church’s

development of a definitive and consistent biblically grounded moral position on abortion and the uncompromising treatment of the fetus as human from conception (i.e., fertilization) onward.

BEYOND HISTORICAL CRITICISM TO SPIRITUAL SENSES  
AND ACTUALIZATION OF SCRIPTURE

In a recent article and in a slightly variant version in a chapter of a forthcoming book co-authored with Luke Timothy Johnson, I have tried to reconstruct a “biblical world view” gleaned from the canonical Christian Scriptures as a whole.<sup>xxvi</sup> This biblical world view is offered as a vigorous counter cultural alternative to the more widespread forms of secular, Darwinist, historicist, Marxist and other ideological world views that influence American culture.

I tried to demonstrate that, regardless of its multiplicity of authors and books, the Bible provides consistent and distinctive perspectives on the relationship that exists among God the Creator, his human creatures, and the rest of the material universe. Much of this consistent biblical perspective on human life and its relationship to both our Creator God and to the material world, over which God has given us delegated and qualified dominion or authority, found its initial grounding in the biblical narratives of creation in the early chapters of *Genesis*. The unique status of humans, as ranking beneath our Creator God but above and in authority over the rest of material creation (see Psalm 8), provides the principal foundation for the emphatic moral prohibition of the shedding of innocent human blood that permeates most of Scripture.

The bedrock passage for prolife appropriation of Scripture is *Gen.* 1:26-27 (RSV): “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” This creation of generic man was the climax of the initial creation account, towards which the creation of all other creatures on earth and in the heavens had been building. Of all the creatures on earth, only this one was created in God’s image, after his likeness. To man, God’s image and likeness, the Creator then delegated

his own dominion and authority over the fish and the birds and the cattle and every creeping thing (*Gen.* 1:28).

Further, as Pope John Paul II has emphasized in his meditations on *Genesis*, in creating man in his image, God created man male and female. Therefore human masculinity or femininity is no mere accidental and disposable attribute of our humanity. It is vital and even essential to our being in God's image.<sup>xxvii</sup> How we are in God's image is further clarified by the blessing and commission that God gives to the first couple as something that ensues intrinsically from God's having made man male and female. "And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth'" (*Gen.* 1:28 RSV).

To be able to exercise dominion over the whole earth, the human couple is first commissioned to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it" (*Gen.* 1:28). Obviously, to be able to subdue all the earth, one has to be present over all the earth. This necessitated that the initial human couple first multiply itself exceedingly so as to become a worldwide human race. To empower humans to subdue the earth, God gives the human couple authority over all the other (living) creatures on earth—the fish, birds, and all that moves on the earth. The human race was thus established as higher in dignity than all other material creatures, from the most complex animals to the simplest inanimate creatures.

Because of man's unique status among all genera of material creatures, the species of man enjoys a unique moral and legal protection from God who created it. Only with regard to man does God enjoin an absolute prohibition against shedding innocent human blood. *Genesis* 9:6 explicitly grounds this absolute prohibition in man's status as being "in the image of God": "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image" (RSV). It is manifest that Scripture allows the human race to use lower species for its own advantage (even to the detriment of an individual animal that is eaten by humans). Still, even the divine authorization to use lower species for the good of humans is qualified, not absolute. Strictly speaking, in the biblical perspective it remains God (and not humans)

who owns the earth and all that is on it. God alone as Creator maintains absolute authority over all that he created. Scripture reveals that God delegates to humans much of his authority (even “dominion”), but this human authority is not absolute. Not only is it subject to the higher authority of the Creator. It must also respect the dignity of lower creatures and not abuse them, as in mistreatment of animals or pollution of the environment.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Thus I suggest that a principal interpretive key to biblical morality is the categorical distinction that Scripture regularly makes between God as Creator and humans as his creatures.<sup>xxix</sup> The notion of divine commandments that humans must obey is grounded in this primary principle that there is only one God and that we are not God. Since God created humans, humans are not autonomous (as so many ideologies and moralists today presuppose) but are creatures who are under the authority of our Creator. As creatures, we must obey the limits that our Creator established within the situations in which we exist and within our very material-and-spiritual beings, our natures. Such reasoning can be recognized as a biblical explanation for and fountainhead of natural law that humans must obey. In obeying the limits and principles built into our very natures, faith assures us that we are by that very fact obeying God the fashioner of our natures. For one who believes that the Bible is God’s Word and accepts the principles revealed in the Bible, natural law corresponds to the biblical fact and principle that God created the human race and has authority over the human race. Human creatures are therefore not autonomous but under God’s authority, an authority that is already expressed within our human nature and the way in which we are made, and consequently has implications for how we are capable of acting and ought to act.

Beyond the often repeated biblical prohibition against shedding innocent human blood (in manifest biblical distinction from shedding the blood of the guilty in capital punishment or from shedding the blood of violent aggressors in war or in self-defense),<sup>xxx</sup> Scripture also provides a complementary insight into the dignity and value that God places on human life. It comes from the almost universal way in which the Old Testament regarded (even many) children and a large family as a blessing

and infertility as a curse.<sup>xxxii</sup> The New Testament will introduce an important apparent exemption from this universal desire for many offspring in its exalted estimate of celibacy and virginity for the sake of the Kingdom, especially in imitation of Jesus and Paul.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Nevertheless, even in the New Testament an abundance of human offspring remains the typical aspiration and sterility remains the “classic” curse (except for those who voluntarily “make themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven,” *Matt.* 19:12); one can readily see this attitude toward the sterility of Elizabeth in *Luke* 1:7, 13, and especially 25.

This high regard throughout most of the Scriptures for children, large families, and many offspring goes a long way toward explaining the otherwise puzzling silence in both testaments about abortion.<sup>xxxiii</sup> When something is virtually unthinkable and seldom, if ever, practiced among a people, there seems no need to mention it or to provide an explicit prohibition against doing it. To some extent, explicit prohibitions might be taken to imply at least limited genuine temptation to do the prohibited action (such as abortion). For example, explicit prohibitions of idolatry and of homosexual intercourse imply at least the very real temptation to these behaviors arising from Israel’s surrounding culture; to some extent they also suggest that these practices have already infiltrated the Israelite culture. But apparently some behaviors of the “Gentiles” are so utterly abhorrent to the Israelites or Jews that their own laws need not explicitly prohibit them. Two examples of this (at least during Hellenistic times) may have been exposing or aborting children (exposing children seemed the easier “solution” as a practice somewhat safer than abortion in an age of primitive medicine).<sup>xxxiv</sup>

A second and complementary consideration related to abortion in Scripture (which I have also treated in my former articles and chapters) is the biblical conviction that God has a plan and vocation or mission for humans, even before they are born.<sup>xxxv</sup> The classic passage that illustrates this is *Jeremiah* 1:5, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” This verse is echoed by Paul in *Galatians* 1:15, “But when he who had set me apart before I was born...” Not to fall into proof-texting, we must acknowledge that the passages here refer to God’s choice and

vocation of a person before not only birth, but perhaps even before conception.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Nevertheless, the principle that God has a plan for at least some individuals even before they are born (or even conceived) certainly implies a persistence of such a providential design for those same persons during their intrauterine existence between conception and birth.

One can conclude that there is strong Old Testament precedent for considering that God has special “prenatal” concern for humans whom he has created or is about to create, as is illustrated in accounts of the conception and birth of prophets and judges of Israel.<sup>xxxvii</sup> My article also discussed the attitude toward the humanity of the preborn in the womb (whom expectant parents often call their baby but whom those contemplating an abortion often call a fetus), which is clearly suggested in the infancy narratives of the New Testament.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Especially significant are the prophecy-fulfilling implications of the “baptism in the Holy Spirit” of the fetus John who leapt in Elizabeth’s womb at the advent of his “Lord”—Jesus in Mary’s womb (*Luke* 1:39-45). This fulfills *Luke* 1:15 about the Baptist, “for he will be great before the Lord,... and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.” Both babies (John at six months of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, Jesus as young as only a couple weeks of gestation) are unmistakably regarded and treated as human beings who are acting and undergoing human experiences. By Lukan implication, the one fetus (the person Jesus whom Elizabeth called “my Lord”) even baptizes John with the Holy Spirit while John is still in his mother Elizabeth’s womb.

The fusion of such biblical examples and attitudes (concerning God’s call and the bestowal of blessings on humans even before they are born), with the traditional Catholic teaching that God creates every spiritual and immortal human soul in concert with the physical procreating activities of parents (*CCC* § 366, 382) establishes a strong principle by which one can judge with confidence the morality or immorality of actions like abortion.<sup>xxxix</sup> The basic syllogism would go like this: *Major*: Scripture absolutely prohibits shedding innocent human blood (i.e., killing innocent human beings). *Minor*: the “biblical world view,” gleaned from both Old Testament and New Testament but

certainly by the time of the New Testament, regards the prenatal baby in the womb as an innocent human being. *Conclusion*: Therefore, abortion (as shedding innocent human blood) would be absolutely prohibited. In other words, the species “abortion” fits under the genus “shedding innocent human blood.” Therefore it is absolutely forbidden.

From *tradition* comes the assurance that God creates each human soul directly because the soul (as spiritual and immortal) cannot be the end result of merely the biological act of the parents. Although Catholic tradition has not been uniform about saying when God creates the human soul, there has been a consensus that this certainly must happen relatively early in the pregnancy. The 1997 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that “every spiritual soul is created immediately by God,” but in this text *immediately* could conceivably refer to the direct creation of the spiritual soul by God (that is, the term *immediate* could mean “not mediated” by secondary causes) rather than be the consequence of the parents’ action. According to the *Catechism*’s explanation: “it [the spiritual soul] is not ‘produced’ by the parents” (CCC § 366). The summary in § 382 seems to imply further that God’s creation of the human soul is both without secondary causality and temporally immediate: “The doctrine of the faith affirms that the spiritual and immortal soul is created immediately by God.” In any case, killing the baby in the womb was absolutely forbidden since its earliest reference in extant Christian documents (such as the *Didache* and the *Letter of Barnabas*).<sup>x1</sup> Most probably this was because abortion was considered one form of shedding innocent human blood.

For the purposes of clarity, let us repeat the main steps of this syllogism: *Major*: Scripture absolutely prohibits shedding innocent human blood (i.e., killing innocent human beings). *Minor*: the “biblical world view” regards the prenatal baby in the womb as an innocent human being. *Conclusion*: Therefore, abortion (as shedding innocent human blood) would be absolutely prohibited.

At least one prominent Protestant approach to Scripture and abortion, that offered by Richard B. Hays in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (Ch. 18: “Abortion”), eschews this syllogistic approach of ascertaining from Scripture biblical principles from which to construct

extra-biblical moral arguments.<sup>xli</sup> Such an approach using both Scripture and reasoning from evidence seems nevertheless essential for the Catholic appropriation of Scripture. It seems intrinsically related to two distinguishing characteristics of Catholic faith. It is related first and foremost to the intimate interchange in Catholicism between Scripture and tradition.<sup>xlii</sup> On a more fundamental level, this approach also relates to Catholicism's characteristic appreciation for the harmony between faith and reason, as recently championed in Pope John Paul II's *Fides et Ratio*.<sup>xliii</sup> A brief review of Catholic principles and resources for interpreting Scripture seems a cogent way to illustrate why this is so.

#### CATHOLIC INTERPRETIVE PRINCIPLES AND RESOURCES

In addition to the call by Vatican II's *Dei Verbum* for study of the human aspects of the text and its meaning for its original author and audience, a less emphasized balancing call for Catholics is to read Scripture in the Spirit in which it was written (*DV* § 12; cf. *CCC* § 112-114). This implies the need to read Scripture with faith that it is God's Word to us—that the same Holy Spirit who guided the writing of the Bible will guide those who read it so that they will understand it as God wants it to be understood. It thus involves the belief that in reading Scripture we will encounter God's revelation and will for ourselves.

*Dei Verbum* and its summary in the *Catechism* spell out three approaches to reading Scripture in this way: *first*, we are to attend to the unity of Scripture (*CCC* § 112), which seems to relate to the contemporary scholarly emphasis on biblical intertextuality or intratextuality; *second*, we are to read Scripture from within the living tradition of the Church (*CCC* § 113), which in this case would include traditions of Catholic moral theology; and *third*, we are to interpret it by the analogy of faith (*CCC* § 114), i.e., by the mutual coherence of faith-truths in God's saving plan. Three other especially relevant resources for Catholic interpretation of the Bible on moral matters are (1) *natural law* (both accessible to human reason and reaffirmed in Scripture, as in *Romans* 1-2); (2) consequently, the various *absolute prohibitions* that arise both from natural law and from Scripture (cf. *Veritatis Splendor*), and (3) the contemporary guidance of the *Magisterium* in relation to Scripture and

morality as well as to faith and doctrine.

Whoever searches only the literal senses of the written words of Scripture (both Old Testament and New Testament) for explicit responses to questions about the morality or immorality of abortion will find little or nothing. Given this lack of direct treatment, however, Catholic interpreters do not simply presume that they are therefore free to assert whatever they want about abortion. When they explicitly try to read Scripture in the same spirit in which it was written, they ask what directions God is giving them about abortion in what he has communicated in Scripture about the meaning and responsibilities of human life. By faith Catholics accept Scripture as God's Word. But they are also convinced that God's Word is not simply limited to or coterminous with the explicit written words of Scripture (*CCC* § 74-100).<sup>xliv</sup>

To help broaden the scope of what is explicitly discussed in the Bible, Catholics need to attend to the unity of Scripture.<sup>xlv</sup> Since by faith they believe that God is the primary author of Scripture, they can legitimately look for a unity of purpose, fundamental message, and an essential world view among the intentional assertions made by the multiple secondary biblical authors whom the one and same God inspired and guided, even though their individual perspectives and theologies did differ among themselves in details, sometimes even sharply. For example, believers do not expect to encounter both a human biblical author whose writings imply that abortion is legitimate in certain circumstances and also a second biblical author whose writings condemn abortion in all circumstances. For they believe that God as revealed in the Scriptures does not directly contradict himself. Thus they approach the many human authors and texts of Scripture with a hermeneutics of faith, empathy, understanding, and consent.<sup>xlvi</sup> They refrain from a hermeneutics of suspicion, which would be on the lookout for biblical contradictions and openings that might legitimate the reader's holding opinions contrary to those expressed in the Scripture.<sup>xlvii</sup> They focus more on biblical intertextuality or intratextuality and on the interplay and interpretive assistance of related biblical evidence, than on lining up differences and apparent contradictions.<sup>xlviii</sup>

For Catholic interpreters, this unity of Scripture extends beyond the bounds of the written word to include their reading of Scripture from within the living Tradition of the Church, as expressed (for example) in liturgy and sacraments, Church doctrines and teachings, the writings of patristic, medieval and modern Catholic thinkers and teachers, and Catholic spiritual and moral theology, up to and including the present-day guidance of Catholics by the Magisterium in union with the pope. Thus, as a Catholic interpreter, I search the Scripture for further guidance for my Catholic conscience, which is not a *tabula rasa* but is already strongly developed from many years of learning and experience. This implies that when I consult Scripture as a Catholic, I usually expect the answer to be at least compatible with what I already know and hold as a Catholic. It is true that sometimes God's word can shock believers with a radically new insight that would change their opinion about what they had previously believed to be God's revealed moral will. But even then the dialogue between this new expression of God's biblical Word and what my conscience had previously held to be the truth about God's instruction will begin from the previous convictions I had held as a Catholic.

All this in turn is very closely related to interpreting what we find in Scripture by the analogy of faith (CCC § 114), by the coherence of the truths of faith among themselves within God's saving plan.<sup>xlix</sup> In fact this coherence of truths is obviously related to what I have explained previously about a Catholic biblical world view. Whatever I read in Scripture that might shed light on abortion is contextualized in me as a reader by my pastoral experiences of dealing with the extra-textual referent of contemporary abortion—my teaching that it is wrong, trying to help prevent it, and ministering to women and men who find themselves suffering after having aborted their children. The analogy of faith elucidates a unity in one's faith between what one reads in Scripture and analogous external referents, which include one's own confirming experience.

As is well-known, another important resource for Catholic interpreters seeking biblical guidance concerning abortion is the centuries-old philosophical and Catholic tradition of natural law. It is

true that in this age of multiple opinions among Catholic interpreters and moralists, including direct dissent from official Catholic church teaching, there may well be significant numbers of Catholics who do not accept a natural law methodology for solving moral problems. But because of my Catholic philosophical and theological training, I still consider natural law not only an invaluable philosophical approach to moral questions, but also an invaluable interpretive aid for discovering responses compatible with biblical revelation, especially to moral questions like abortion that do not receive extended direct discussion in the biblical texts themselves. Catholic moral tradition follows Scripture's own lead in regarding natural law as both accessible to human reason and reaffirmed in Scripture. For example, St. Paul condemns even those non-Jews who, through no fault of their own, were ignorant of biblical prohibitions against actions like idolatry but who were nevertheless culpable for such actions of theirs because they should have paid attention to the evidence and truths that God had revealed about himself in the things that he created (*Rom. 1:18-23*).

After incorporating the biblical world view on the sacredness of human life as created in God's image, biblical ethicists can use further natural law reasoning to make a convincing case for the absolute prohibition of abortion. Natural law reasoning can demonstrate that if God absolutely forbids the shedding of innocent human blood (e.g., in *Gen. 9:6*), that abortion has to be considered one species or kind of the genus of homicide or murder, namely, the shedding of innocent human blood. The explicit and absolute biblical prohibition against shedding innocent human blood can convincingly be extended to an implied but absolute biblical prohibition against abortion, which is one species of such shedding innocent human blood or killing.

An important, closely related, and overlapping resource for Catholic moral reasoning upon biblical revelation is Catholic belief in moral absolutes and absolute prohibitions. Under heavy recent fire, even from some Catholic moralists, the notions of moral absolutes and absolute prohibitions evidently needed a renewed defense by Pope John Paul II in his 1993 encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor*.<sup>1</sup> In my judgment, only such moral absolutes and absolute prohibitions on the basis of natural law can

provide consistent resistance to the constant encroachment of secular exceptions to more and more prohibitions that had hitherto been considered absolute. Only moral absolutes can close the door to apparent exceptions that would allow a directly evil action to be chosen as a means to a good end (i.e., that would allow one “to do evil that good might result”). That principle would open the moral door for directly choosing to do abortions in order to cope with “exceptions,” such as rape, incest, and health of the mother. Only absolute prohibitions (like “Thou shalt not shed innocent human blood”) can forestall the kinds of excessively elastic moral “discernments” such as for a married couple to abort a pregnancy deemed “likely to yield a deformed or handicapped child.”<sup>ii</sup>

A third distinctive resource for Catholic interpretation of moral directives in Scripture that we have seen throughout is the guidance of the Magisterium. For Catholics, such guidance goes beyond infallible teachings and guidance with regard to faith and doctrine. The guidance of the Magisterium (i.e., the pope and bishops acting in union with him, not dissenting from him) provides a traditional Catholic application of the biblical principles interpreted as legitimating such guidance, including “He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (*Luke 10:16 RSV*), and “I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatsoever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; whatsoever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (*Matt. 16:19 and 18:18*).

#### CONCLUSION

Ecumenical cooperative searching of Scripture for God’s guidance regarding the morality or immorality of abortion has uncovered a lot of biblical evidence relevant to answering that question, evidence on which all parties can agree. I would hope that significant evidence upon which most Christians could agree might include something like what I have just described as a “biblical world view” about the relation of God the Creator to his human creatures and of both of these to sub-human material creatures. In the Bible Christians find described a God who freely and out of love created humans in his image and likeness and who placed them at the head of the rest of his material creation. God gave

humans the commission to “increase and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it” (*Gen.* 1:28). But because there is only one God, and humans are not God, there are intrinsic limits to human authority over material creation. Genesis clearly describes these limits, especially the absolute prohibition against shedding the blood of other innocent human beings (*Gen.* 9:6).

However, *Genesis* 3 also makes clear that from the beginning humans have rebelled against these limits that their Creator imposed on their activity and moral choices. One major limitation of this sort on human choice flows from the fact that only God the Creator has authority to take human life. God placed on man an absolute prohibition against shedding innocent human blood (*Gen.* 9:6). In effect, God as Creator of human life reserved to himself the authority to end an innocent human life, even though he delegated to humans (reasonable and limited) authority over the lives of animals, for these animals were not created in God’s image. Yet from the beginning, humans chose to try to “be like gods, knowing good and evil” (*Gen.* 3:5). The very perceptive biblical description of the essence of human sin is that it is trying to act and/or be like gods. If, for example, only God has authority over the life of those who are made in his image, then for other humans to take that human life (or, conversely, to try to manufacture human life in test tubes) is to act as gods, to behave as if they themselves were God. Such attempts to usurp the exclusive prerogatives of God himself is the core of the horrendous evil of sin, and in few cases is this usurping of God’s prerogatives more obvious than when humans shed the innocent blood of other humans.

To the extent that this position is faithful to the biblical evidence, Christians can share common biblical principles by which to respond to moral dilemmas such as whether abortion can ever be a moral Christian choice or decision. Christians can agree that God has reserved to himself certain prerogatives over innocent human life, since it is created in God’s image. Christians can agree that the absolute prohibition against shedding innocent human blood removes from Christian moral deliberations any option by which they could consider such shedding of innocent blood. In short, only God can take innocent human life, and we humans are not God. Therefore, no manner of heart-tugging

circumstances or considerations of the projected harmful consequences of not taking innocent human life can even be considered as morally relevant to the ethical decision. If killing innocent humans is an absolute moral prohibition, then the circumstances, consequences, and all proportionalist balancing of the projected good or evil effects for the respective options of killing or not killing remain morally irrelevant. “Thou shalt not kill innocent humans” means “Thou shalt not kill innocent humans, for any reason, in any circumstance.”

However, if I have correctly described the situation, these shared biblical principles alone will not suffice to bring traditional Catholics and others to a complete and genuine consensus about abortion. At least in my reading and experiences of both magisterial, dissenting, and Protestant treatments of Scripture and abortion, I have found only in magisterial Catholic teaching a certitude about the prohibition of abortion as an absolute that does not ever permit asking about exceptions, no matter what the circumstances or envisaged consequences might be. If moralists do not adhere exclusively to a method of moral reasoning that accepts moral absolutes and absolute prohibitions, experience has shown that even Christians who take Scripture’s authority seriously and who generally try to protect human life are likely to succumb to the siren call of hard cases and of the Scylla-and-Charybdis type of moral dilemmas and begin allowing “exceptions” in which direct abortion might be morally permitted.

Moreover, decades of both pastoral experience and research involving Christians and others who did crumble under hard-case scenarios and panicked into having abortions have shown unambiguously in case after case that the imagined negative consequences were often focused on exclusively and blown out of proportion. Hindsight in so many cases has led post-abortive parents to profound regret and remorse for what they could later see to have been not only a tragic but a stupid, unnecessary, and morally wrong decision to abort. In hindsight, they could see their error and the sin of acting as if they were God, as if it were up to them to have to make a life-and-death decision about their own child continuing to live, instead of accepting that they were not God and that such a decision was not theirs even to consider. In some cases,

counselors had given in to a false compassion that tried to spare parents from suffering but instead led them to the additional consequence of not only tragedy but crushing guilt for killing their baby. Such parents would afterwards come to realize that they had failed as creatures to trust their Creator God's providence—they had failed to choose from among only the life-affirming alternatives that would both have spared the baby's life and left the parents much more at peace with themselves. This accumulation of decades of tragic personal pastoral experience has rendered me profoundly skeptical about the ability and appropriateness of moral principles and methods of consequentialism and proportionalism or of any form of utilitarian reasoning as a way to find God's will concerning moral dilemmas and hard cases. Instead, sometimes the seemingly harsh alternatives and refusal even to consider abortion, simply because it is against God's absolute biblical prohibition to us as creatures against shedding innocent human blood, is the only honest and truly compassionate course of moral reasoning from Scripture.

In summary, the ecumenical differences in judgment about whether or not scriptural principles could ever permit direct abortion seem clearly to relate more to the kinds of moral reasoning one does with even common results of exegesis than to the exegetical gathering of the indirect biblical evidence. Perhaps a valuable Catholic contribution to ecumenical treatments of how to consult the Scripture to resolve moral problems like abortion is to point beyond our investigations of Scripture itself, even with its impressive common findings. Perhaps a valuable Catholic contribution is to present to our ecumenical brothers these considerations about the importance of extra-biblical and even philosophical concerns with respect to what kind of reasoning one does after exegesis, reasoning that is based on but goes beyond even shared biblical evidence on which we can agree.

NOTES

i. See the historical overviews in Michael J. Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church: Christian, Jewish and Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Paulist Press/InterVarsity Press, 1982); John Connery, *Abortion: The Development of the Roman Catholic Perspective* (Chicago: Loyola Univ. Press, 1977), esp. Ch. 2, “The Roman Background” and Ch. 3, “The Early Christian Era (to 300),” pp. 22-45. Cf. also Stephen D. Ricks, “Abortion in Antiquity” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 1:31-35.

ii. See *The Morality of Abortion; Legal And Historical Perspectives*, ed. with introduction by John T. Noonan, Jr. (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970), esp. his “An Almost Absolute Value in History,” pp. 1-59; John M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992); George Grant, *Third Time Around: A History of the Pro-life Movement from the First Century to the Present* (Brentwood TN.: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, Publishers, 1991); *Abortion Wars: A Half Century of Struggle, 1950-2000*, ed. Rickie Solinger (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1998); Reagan, Leslie J., *When Abortion Was a Crime: Women, Medicine, and Law in the United States, 1867-1973* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1997); Barbara Ferraro and Patricia Hussey with Jane O'Reilly, *No Turning Back: Two Nuns' Battle with the Vatican over Women's Right to Choose* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1990); James C. Mohr, *Abortion in America: The Origins and Evolution of National Policy, 1800-1900* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978).

iii. Pope John Paul II made particularly energetic defenses of a culture of life with his encyclicals *Evangelium Vitae* (1995) and *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), as did Pope Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae* (1968). Pope John Paul II also defended the right to life in passing in his encyclicals *Centesimus Annus* § 47 (1991); *Sollicitudo Rei Sacralis* § 24-26 (1987); *Christifideles Laici* § 38 (1988); *Mulieris Dignitatem* § 14 (1988); and *Familiaris Consortio* § 30 (1981). Further solemn defenses of human life appear in *Gaudium et Spes* § 27, 51 (Vatican II, 1965); *Mater et Magistra* § 193-194 (John XXIII, 1961); and *Casti Connubii* § 63-67 (Pius XI, 1930).

There have also been almost constant letters, speeches, and addresses to the UN and national leaders from the Pope and Vatican defending various aspects of human life. Some more significant examples of Vatican documentation (as from the Pontifical Council for the Family and speeches of its head, Cardinal Lopez-Trujillo) include: “The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality” (1995); Document of the Pontifical Council for the Family, “In the Service of Life” (1991); Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Instruction

---

on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation” (*Donum Vitae*, February 22, 1987); and “Declaration on Procured Abortion” (*Quaestio de Abortu*, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, November 18, 1974).

Other very significant official Catholic prolife interventions include the following: Pontifical Academy for Life: “Statement on Human Cloning”; “Identity and Status of the Human Embryo” (Paper from the Center for Bioethics of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Rome, June 22, 1989); “RU486—Chemical abortion” (Editorial, *L'Osservatore Romano*); “The Rights of the Unborn Child and Artificial Procreation (Center for Bioethics and Human Rights, University of Lecce, 1994); and Mary Ann Glendon: Holy See Delegation's Address to Fourth World Conference on Women (September 5, 1995); and the Holy See's official position at Beijing Conference on Women (August 25, 1995).

US Bishops have also promoted vigorously a culture of life, as exemplified in some of the recent statements by their Conference and committees: their revised “Pastoral Plan for Prolife Activities” (November 2001); “Abortion and the Supreme Court: Advancing the Culture of Death” (November 15, 2000); “‘Catholics for a Free Choice’ is Not Catholic, say Bishops” (May 2000); US Bishops’ Statement: “Faithful Citizenship” (October 1999); “A Good Friday Appeal to End the Death Penalty” (April 1999); US Bishops’ Statement: “Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics” (November 1998); “Sharing Catholic Social Teachings: Challenges and Directions”; US Bishops’ Statement on the 25th Anniversary of Roe vs. Wade (1998); Statement on Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Veto—A Statement of Bishop Anthony Pilla, NCCB-USCC President (June, 1996); “Political Responsibility—Proclaiming the Gospel of Life”—Statement issued by the USCC (September, 1995); US Bishops’ Pastoral, “Confronting a Culture of Violence” (November 1994). It is easy to find such references and collections on web sites; most of these were first gathered at <http://www.priestsforlife.org/magisteriumteachings.html>. In addition, there is the official teaching about abortion in the universal *Catechism of the Catholic Church* § 2258-2279.

iv. See Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (“The Splendor of Truth,” Vatican trans.; Boston: St. Paul Books & Media, 1993), esp. Ch. 2, pp. 43-104.

v. See especially the historical survey in the later chapters of Connery’s *Abortion*.

vi. Cf. Janet Smith, “‘*Humanae Vitae*’ at Twenty,” *Crisis* 6/6 (June 1988) 14-20; Ralph McInerney, *What Went Wrong with Vatican II: The Catholic Crisis*

---

*Explained* (Manchester: Sophia Institute, 1998), pp. 39-56. A major impetus toward this revolution against *Humanae Vitae* once it appeared was John T. Noonan, Jr, *Contraception : A History of its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986 [1965]). See also *Why Humanae Vitae Was Right: A Reader*, ed. Janet E. Smith; foreword by John Cardinal O'Connor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993); Janet E. Smith, *Humanae Vitae, A Generation Later* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1991).

vii. See the survey of 19th and 20th century disputes over craniotomy in Connery, *Abortion*, pp. 225-303.

viii. On rejection of moral absolutes, even by catholic moralists (whom he calls "revisionists"), see William E. May, "Abortion, Moral Absolutes, and Dissent from Magisterial Teaching" in *Abortion: A New Generation of Catholic Responses*, ed. Stephen J. Heaney (Braintree MA.: The Pope John Center, 1992), pp. 277-96. See also William E. May, *Moral Absolutes: Catholic Tradition, Current Trends, and the Truth* (The Père Marquette Lecture in Theology 1989; Milwaukee: Marquette Univ. Press, 1989) and his bibliographical notes.

ix. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, *passim*.

x. Cf. the classic and very prophetic novel by Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York: Harper, 1946), which is proving disturbingly prophetic more than a half-century later.

xi. This article is also to appear as a companion-piece to Michael J. Gorman's essay, "Paul and Abortion: An Historical and Hermeneutical Experiment" in an upcoming issue of *Josephinum Journal of Theology*. Our two papers were originally delivered at an ecumenical symposium, "Scripture and the Abortion Issue," April 15, 2002, at Franciscan University of Steubenville (Ohio).

xii. Note how ecumenical in tone is Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Boston: St. Paul Books & Media, 1993). It treats most contemporary approaches to biblical exegesis and interpretation with a good deal of sympathy. The sharpest disagreements are reserved for "fundamentalist interpretation," pp. 72-75, which is called "dangerous," because it "injects into life a false certitude..." (p. 75).

xiii. E.g., Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*:

---

*Community, Cross, New Creation; A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), pp. 444-61 (Ch. 18, "Abortion").

xiv. E.g., see William S. Kurz, "Ethical Actualization of Scripture: Approaches Toward a Pro-life Reading," *Fides Quaerens Intellectum: A Journal of Theology, Philosophy & History* 1/1 (Summer 2001) 67-94.

xv. For a helpful (and now "classic") introductory guide to a Catholic hermeneutics, see Terence J. Keegan, *Interpreting the Bible: A Popular Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985).

xvi. See Kurz, "Ethical Actualization."

xvii. The influence of this passage (in both Hebrew and Greek) on later discussions of abortion (both Jewish and Christian) is particularly conspicuous in Connery, *Abortion*, pp. 8-13, 16-21 for the earliest (mostly Jewish) treatments, and throughout later chapters for the Christian developments based mostly on the Septuagint version. Debate over the meaning of *Exod. 21:22-25* continues to flourish in contemporary exegetical and ethical articles. See the very careful exegesis by Joe M. Sprinkle, "The Interpretation of *Exodus 21:22-25 (Lex Talionis)* and Abortion," *WTJ* 55 (1993) 233-53, showing in Ancient Near Eastern parallels and in Israelite law how even the *lex talionis* punishments often permitted some kind of monetary compensation as an alternative "ransom" (see esp. p. 243). He concludes that detailed exegesis "shows the passage to be ill suited for establishing a biblical ethic concerning abortion" (p.253). Russell Fuller, "*Exodus 21:22-23: The Miscarriage Interpretation and the Personhood of the Fetus*," *JETS* 37 (1994) 169-84, argues that differences in punishment for killing of a fetus and an adult do not prove differences in personhood between them.

xviii. Although many have used this as a biblical justification for abortion, Fuller cites and rebuts their argument ("*Exodus 21:22-23: Miscarriage and Personhood*"): 169-71 and *passim*. In effect, Sprinkle's argument also undermines such claims ("*Interpretation of Exodus 21:22-25*").

xix. For Jewish reflections on the Greek version, and consequent Christian developments to about 600 A.D., see esp. Connery, *Abortion*, pp. 16-21, 50-64. Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 447, also treats the Septuagint version of this passage.

xx. Connery traces this history throughout his book, but see especially pp.

50-52, 110-11.

xxi. Again, see Connery, *ibid.*

xxii. “The distinction between the formed and unformed fetus, which Basil found so subtle, will become an important factor in the theological discussion of abortion for many centuries to come” ( Connery, *Abortion*, 50).

xxiii. See the discussion of the theories of the formation of the fetus and the influence of the rediscovered Aristotle from Albert to Aquinas in Connery, *Abortion*, pp. 107-12.

xxiv. Cf. Connery, *Abortion*, pp. 107-12, and history of such speculation after the middle ages in Connery's later chapters.

xxv. An example of such dishonest (mis)use of Aquinas is Daniel C. Maguire, *Sacred Choices: The Right to Contraception and Abortion in Ten World Religions* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), p. 37.

xxvi. See Kurz, “Ethical Actualization.” Compare a slightly variant version in a chapter in a book from Eerdmans co-authored by Luke Timothy Johnson and myself, *The Future of Catholic Scripture Scholarship: A Constructive Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), ch. 8, “Voices in the Church: Preunderstandings in Applying Scripture,” pp. 182-202.

xxvii. Cf. Pope John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*, Foreword by John S. Grabowski (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1997), pp. 25-102 , esp. 60-63, “The Nuptial Meaning of the Body.”

xxviii. This was the biggest problem I had with an official Presbyterian argument that the dominion of *Genesis* at least implied the authority to choose abortion, in William S. Kurz, “Genesis and Abortion: An Exegetical Test of a Biblical Warrant in Ethics,” *Theological Studies* 47 (1986) 668-80. That approach read too much autonomy into man’s dominion in *Genesis*, which clearly was circumscribed in several ways. *Genesis* definitely does not warrant a “dominion” that could take innocent human life (as in abortion), since God has clearly reserved authority to give or take innocent human life to himself and sternly prohibited it to human creatures.

xxix. E.g., *Deut.* 4:39: “Know therefore this day, and lay it to your heart, that

---

the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other” (RSV).

xxx. The very use of the death penalty in *Gen.* 9:6 as a deterrent to protect innocent human life indicates a self-evident distinction in the authorial mentality responsible for this passage. Compare the treatment of legitimate defense (which includes a discussion discouraging but not excluding on principle capital punishment) in *CCC* § 2263-67; on intentional homicide § 2268-69; and on war § 2307-17 (plus summary “In Brief” § 2318-30).

xxxi. Even Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 449 admits this, but he relativizes its authority by focusing on the vastly different economic conditions and social role of women as primarily wives and mothers in Scripture.

xxxii. Cf. John Paul II’s reflections in his section “Virginity for the Sake of the Kingdom” in *Theology of the Body*, 262-303); and John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* § 16.

xxxiii. E.g., see Michael J. Gorman, “Why is the New Testament Silent About Abortion?” *Christianity Today* 37/1 (1993) 27-29.

xxxiv. See the distinctions and historical developments in Gorman, *Abortion and Early Church*, pp. 13-62. Gorman does argue that by the time of Origen, Hippolytus and Cyprian, abortion had also become a problem among Christians (pp. 59-62).

xxxv. See Kurz, “Ethical Actualization,” p. 91.

xxxvi. See the criticisms of using this and similar texts as proof-texts in Hays, *Moral Vision*, pp. 446-48.

xxxvii. Such prenatal divine concern for humans appears also in Ps 139: 13,15: “For thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother’s womb.... Thou knowest me right well; my frame was not hidden from thee, when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the earth” (RSV).

xxxviii. Kurz, “Ethical Actualization of Scripture,” p.91, *pace* Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 448.

---

xxxix. The revised edition cited in this article is *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, second edition revised in accordance with the official Latin text promulgated by Pope John Paul II (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997).

xl. See Gorman, *Scripture and Abortion*, pp. 49-50, plus the Greek-English facing texts of *Didache* and *Barnabas* in Michael W. Holmes, ed. & reviser, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations of Their Writings*, in *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations of Their Writings*, ed. & tr. J.B. Lightfoot and J.R. Harmer (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), pp. 252-53, 320-21.

xli. See Hays, *Moral Vision*, pp. 88-89.

xlii. This finds classic expression in “*Dei Verbum*, The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation” in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport: Costello, 1975), pp. 750-65, and is summarized and updated in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, second edition revised in accordance with the official Latin text promulgated by Pope John Paul II, § 74-100, Art. 2, “The Transmission of Divine Revelation.”

xliii. See Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio: On the Relationship Between Faith and Reason*, Vatican translation (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1998).

xliv. Cf. Peter S. Williamson, *Catholic Principles for Interpreting Scripture: A Study of the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, Subsidia Biblica (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2001), pp. 91-160. See esp. “Interpretation in Light of the Biblical Tradition, the Unity of Scripture, and the Canon,” pp. 117-27.

xlv. See Williamson, *Catholic Principles*, pp. 117-27.

xlvi. Williamson treats these topics under the rubric of a “hermeneutic of faith” (Williamson, *Catholic Principles*, pp. 95-108). Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today,” in *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church*, ed., Richard John Neuhaus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and the Rockford Institute Center on Religion and Society, 1989), pp. 1-23, esp. 22-23.

---

xlvi. Cf. Williamson, *Catholic Principles*, pp. 231-32; William S. Kurz, *Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), pp. 173-76.

xlviii. Cf. Williamson, *Catholic Principles*, pp. 72, 118-21, 191, passim. See also Sipke Draisma, ed., *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings: Essays in Honor of Bas Van Iersel* (Kampen, Netherlands: J. H. Kok, 1989).

xlix. Cf. Williamson, *Catholic Principles*, pp. 100-08; Albert Vanhoye, "Esegesi biblica e teologia: la questione dei metodi," *Seminarium* 43/2 (1991) 267-78.

i. See *Veritatis Splendor* § 79-83.

li. As described in Hays, *Moral Vision*, pp. 456-57.