

# “To Be as God”: Scriptural Links between Abortion and Natural Family Planning

*William S. Kurz, S.J.*

IN GENESIS WE READ: “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27 RSV). However, already in chapter three, we encounter the temptation to this first male and female: “You will be like God, knowing good and evil”(Gen 3:5 RSV). From the first chapter of Genesis to the third we observe the exaltation and the downfall of the human race in relationship to its Creator God and to the rest of material creation. In the creation account of Genesis 1, God created man in his own image, male and female, and gave them dominion over the rest of the material universe to manage it on behalf of the Creator of all things. Genesis portrays the human race in the beginning as veritably “on top of the world.”

Already by chapter three, however, the first humans found themselves no longer satisfied with being in God’s image, even though this meant that after God they had dominion over the earth and all that is on it. They wanted more—they wanted themselves to “be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5 RSV). In other words, it was not enough for humans to be in God’s image exercising dominion as God’s viceroy over all the rest of material creation. They wanted themselves to be like God. They wanted themselves to “know good and evil,” that is, to decide for themselves what is good and what is evil, what is right and what is wrong. “We do not have to obey laws”—not even God’s laws. “Our conscience will tell us what to do. We will follow our own conscience.” Thus in Genesis 3 humans went from being the pinnacle and crowning glory of God’s material creation, from acting in place of God as his image and having dominion over the rest of creation, to striving to be other gods, autonomous beings determining right and wrong for themselves. As an immediate result, they fell out of God’s friendship, and

became utterly alienated from God and afraid of God. Since they had ceased obeying God and had challenged God's authority, they had set themselves up as rivals to God. Subsequently, Genesis portrays them as realizing their helplessness before God's unlimited power and dreading his justice and wrath, and therefore living in fear of God and hiding from him.

Human rebellion against their Creator quickly extended to all areas of human behavior and morality. Genesis 4-11 portray a rapid diffusion of disobedience, alienation, and sin of all sorts. After the initial disobedience of Adam and Eve, their first son Cain murdered their second son Abel, and sin spread with the human race over all the earth. These Genesis accounts all narrate happenings before the dawn of history and record keeping, but they typify the virtually universal human experience of alienation from God and from fellow humans and the practically universal state of sin that has made human life miserable throughout all the centuries.

This paper will contend that it is the primeval human temptation "to be as God" that lays the ultimate foundations within the overall biblical perspective and worldview for the links between abortion and contraception, even though neither abortion nor contraception receives significant explicit discussion in Scripture. A brief overview of the rise of Christian acceptance, first of contraception, consequently of abortion, can help to contextualize these issues. It can provide some recent perspective on how contraception and abortion relate to each other and to this enticement in Genesis "to be as God."

After the Anglican Lambeth Conference of 1930 became the first Christian body to claim that contraception could ever be objectively right under any circumstances, a committee of the Federal Council of Churches in 1931 followed this up by endorsing "careful and restrained" use of contraceptives. In reply, the *Washington Post* (March 22, 1931) editorialized:

It is impossible to reconcile the doctrine of the divine institution of marriage with any modernistic plan for the mechanical regulation or suppression of human birth. The church must either reject the plain teachings of the Bible or reject schemes for the "scientific" production of human souls.... The suggestion that the use of legalized contraceptives would be "careful and restrained" is

preposterous.<sup>i</sup>

At the time of the very first acceptance in principle of any form of contraception in any Christian denomination, even the editors of the secular *Washington Post* were able to state as obvious the contradiction between contraception and “the plain teachings of the Bible.” Yet today such an assertion would surely seem as preposterous to the vast majority of American Christians, including Catholics, as the “careful and restrained” use of contraceptives seemed to those editors in 1931. How could such a massive change in moral perception have taken place in seventy years, even among American Catholics? In the light of this massive change in moral mindsets, what can be said today about what the Bible teaches (plainly or less so) that might shed moral light on the roots of both contraception and abortion, on their mutual relationship, and on how contraception is differentiated from the alternatives of fertility awareness and natural family planning?

We must begin by acknowledging that we live in a situation of an unequal battle in Western culture between two diametrically opposed perspectives on the meaning of sexual activity and marriage: the position of the sexual revolution that has virtually become the consensus attitude, and the tiny counter-cultural minority position that has been championed most publicly by the magisterial teaching of the Catholic Church. The dominant perspective is that of the sexual revolution: sexuality is regarded as functional, as a biological mechanism to be mastered and used *primarily to give and receive pleasure*. From this perspective, sexuality’s sometimes unwanted “secondary effects,” the production of children, must often be suppressed or circumvented. It is common knowledge that abortion becomes the primary backup in cases of failed contraception.

Especially during the impetus it received from the introduction of “the Pill” in the 1960s, the sexual revolution participated in the broader Sixties’ *Zeitgeist* of arrogance about human ability to dominate nature and to manipulate it to human purposes. This attitude is in turn rooted in Enlightenment notions of domination over nature.<sup>ii</sup>

By the 1990s, the ecological devastation that such earlier arrogance

had wreaked had become undeniable, with the result that environmental “Green” movements sprang up. These movements insisted once again that humans should respect nature and not abuse it. However, this ecological realization seems to have had only a very minor application to the analogous damage to female ecosystems that “the Pill,” DepoProvera, Norplant, and other steroids were concurrently doing as a consequence of the sexual revolution. This strange dichotomy and widespread blindness to the ecological damage caused by the most effective and widely used forms of contraception can apparently best be explained by the domination of ideology in driving the sexual revolution.<sup>iii</sup>

The ultimate logical consequence (if too vulgar to be expressly stated) of the sexual revolution’s treatment of sexuality as a biological mechanism—to be mastered and used primarily to give and receive pleasure while suppressing its reproductive effects (a theory whose “patron saint” could be said to be Alfred Kinsey)—would be to regard the primary analogate of sexual activity not as heterosexual intercourse (let alone in marriage), but as variations on masturbation, alone or with others of either sex or any age.<sup>iv</sup>

Furthermore, the effects of the sexual revolution have extended considerably beyond sexual activity. According to the revolution’s prevailing opinions, sexuality, gender, and gender roles are predominantly products of culture and learned behavior rather than of nature, are extremely elastic, are able to be multiplied beyond the constricting narrowness of traditional male and female duality, are changeable, and in considerable measure interchangeable. Biological aspects of sexuality tend to be viewed as encumbrances that need to be mastered, controlled, and compensated for, in pursuit of total sexual autonomy.

This autonomy is pursued especially for the woman, who is regarded as having traditionally been held back from her own fulfillment and career and inequitably “saddled” with reproduction and motherhood. One of the primary objectives of the sexual revolution in most of its forms is to liberate and dissociate most sexual activity from constraining reproductive consequences. This is why “reproductive freedom” to abort unwanted children is a persistent keystone of dominant feminist ideologies. The ultimate logical consequence of such a dissociation is a

Huxlean “brave new world,” which portrays “mother” as a dirty word, and instead delegates all reproduction to artificial wombs in factories. All sexual activity in this brave new world is sterilized and relegated entirely to the spheres of entertainment.<sup>v</sup>

The “minority report” is promoted most noticeably by magisterial Catholic teaching. In response to the dominant perspective about human sexuality, Pope John Paul II (*Theology of the Body*, pp. 396-97) states, “The human body is not merely an organism of sexual reactions. But it is, at the same time, the means of expressing the entire man, the person, which reveals itself by means of the language of the body. This language has an important interpersonal meaning, especially in reciprocal relationships between man and woman” (*Theology of the Body*, p. 397). “It can be said that in the case of an artificial separation of these two aspects, a real bodily union is carried out in the conjugal act, but it does not correspond to the interior truth and to the dignity of personal communication—communion of persons” (*ibid.*, p. 398).

From the perspective of Scripture and of the “theology of the body,” each person’s sexuality as male or female is an integral and never-ceasing characteristic of his or her personhood created in God’s image. Male and female sexuality are complementary to each other and need each other for the normal fullness of human personhood and communion. Contrary to heresies like gnosticism and Manicheism, which despised the human body and especially hated procreative human sexuality, the church has for millennia insisted that one’s male or female sexuality is a positive and intrinsic property of each person’s humanity.

Even more, the Church follows the lead of Scripture in regarding our sexual identity as male or female, as a distinguishing and ennobling component of our overall identity as a human person. The first account of creation in Genesis relates that when God created the human race, “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27 RSV). God’s individual creation of each of us incorporates our sexual identity. For example, when God created me in his image, he created me male, and I will remain male in my resurrected body.

In the biblical perspective, this essential complementarity and equal

dignity of man and woman as a couple enables their physical union to bring forth children in a family, which in turn is the foundational unit of society and of civilization. Consequently, sexual complementarity situates all sexual activity within a context that safeguards the common good of society as well as of the family and of the couple with their children. Because of the intrinsic link between sexual activity and children in a family within society, the Bible and those churches that adhere to its teachings regard sexual activity with the utmost seriousness and value it very highly. The church refuses to allow human sexuality to be degraded and reduced to merely giving and receiving sensual pleasure, even though sexual pleasure is one prominent component of sexual union. Refusing to let sexual activity be so trivialized that it is nothing more than sensual pleasure, the church insists on an openness in that activity both to the lifelong committed union of spouses and to cooperating with God to produce the new life of children as well as to care for and educate them.<sup>vi</sup>

It is not because of a derided “biologism” that the church’s teachers persist in emphasizing that both the intrinsically unitive and the procreative aspects of every marital act be respected and maintained. In analyzing sexual actions, these teachers and those who promote fertility awareness and natural family planning are respecting the integrity of the sexual act within the microcosms of female and male systems of fertility, in a way similar to environmentalist demands that humans respect the integrity of the natural environmental ecosystem in the macrocosm. Why is this equivalent attitude of humble respect for human limits in dominating nature so often considered admirable and noble with respect to the environment (even to the healthy raising of chickens), but a despicable slavery to “biologism” with respect to sexual activity?

However, since the attitudes and consequences of the sexual revolution concern a much wider spectrum of issues than simply sexual activity, the response to them must go beyond mere human moderation and the recognition of the environmental constraints that must be imposed on human attempts to dominate and manipulate nature. This is why Pope John Paul II, in his *Theology of the Body*, tries to ground his response to the mechanistic Enlightenment attempt to dominate and

manipulate nature on the more compelling world perspective of biblical revelation.

#### APPROACHES TOWARD CONSULTING AND APPLYING SCRIPTURE

As biblical and moral theologians search the Scriptures for evidence and arguments concerning God's biblical truth about human sexuality and marriage, they take various approaches toward Scripture. The most common approach is proof-texting the classical passages that have been interpreted as pertaining to the meaning of human sexuality or to the particular examples of sexual intercourse in which conception was deliberately prevented (as in the story of Onan). Proof-texting has produced extensive debates and an apparent stalemate between the church's and the secular world's attitudes toward the meaning of sexuality. Since the central disputes are not about the meaning or misinterpretation of some isolated biblical texts, but about a broader worldview or perspective on reality, their solution has to be on the latter more inclusive level. The solution is found within the canonical biblical perspective on how human sexuality fits into the broader plan of the cosmos as created and put in order by God.<sup>vii</sup>

However, this solution does not preclude controversies about which biblical passages to consider or how to combine them into a synthesis that arises exegetically from the biblical message rather than being imposed eisegetically onto the text by the interpreter. Even after agreement has been reached about a symbolic world of Scripture, considerable disagreement can still remain about *how to argue* from such a symbolic world toward potential solutions to various particular contemporary questions about sexuality.<sup>viii</sup>

One approach to choosing *which biblical passages* to emphasize is to retrace some of the more consequential steps on the path through Scripture followed by Pope John Paul II in his *Theology of the Body* and critiqued by scholars such as Luke Timothy Johnson. Johnson's critiques have in turn generated rebuttals from scholars who support the papal perspectives, with the result that a lively conversation and at least a potential debate has been initiated. Joining this conversation seems one fruitful entrance point into that biblical evidence that is particularly

germane to the morality and interrelationship between abortion and contraception.<sup>ix</sup>

#### SOME KEY BIBLICAL PASSAGES STUDIED IN *THEOLOGY OF THE BODY*

Because *Theology of the Body* attempts to address all principal aspects of human sexuality, its mining of the Scriptures is more wide-ranging than our more narrowly focused investigation of biblical foundations for the morality and spirituality of sexual activity as particularly related to questions of fertility awareness, contraception, and abortion. I believe this remains true even if, as the pope admits and as Luke Johnson observes, the concluding set of papal instructions indeed applied the pope's "theology of the body" toward a more biblically-grounded basis for *Humanae Vitae*, whose explicit argumentation was limited primarily to natural law reasoning.

*Bedrock Passage: "In the Beginning" Genesis 1-3.* In Matt 19:3-9, esp. v. 8, the reference by Jesus to a state before the fall "in the beginning" that more perfectly than extant conditions reflected the will of the divine creator undermines and overturns the casuistry and moral argumentation in his time about sex (as well as their equivalents today). It directs readers to the Genesis narratives of the creation and fall. These accounts in Genesis 1-3 have been some of the texts in the Bible most studied and pondered throughout the Jewish and Christian millennia. Psychologists acknowledge the extraordinary insight that these chapters give into the meaning of life, the hierarchy of creation, the problem of evil, the meaning and consequences of sin, and the alienation between humans and God and between man and woman.<sup>x</sup> These issues provide the necessary biblical context and foundation for an adequate response to contemporary questions concerning contraception and abortion.

Without getting into such controversies as those concerning creationism, original sin, and historicity, let us concentrate more practically on what these Genesis chapters contribute to a "biblical worldview," one that provides a matrix for questions about the meaning of human sexuality. From these accounts, a few fundamental conclusions can be drawn that can function as principles for further systematic reflection on the biblical evidence.<sup>xi</sup>

I propose to begin with an approach similar to that used by John Paul II in his *Theology of the Body*—a reflective and close reading of the Genesis creation passages from the perspective of familiarity both with the biblical canon and with the reader’s own human experience of and reflection on sexuality and marriage. Despite widespread specious dismissals of clerics as “lacking the experience” needed to discuss sexual questions, the pope’s phenomenological reflections are unquestionably based on his years of extensive and intense interactions, as a young priest and then as bishop, with many young couples and families, including several very close friends. Their experience complements the pope’s own academic research and publishing and the medical findings of the institute in Krakow for natural family planning and fertility awareness that he sponsored as archbishop.

Perhaps the most fundamental truth revealed in the beginning of Genesis is that God himself as creator (by his word alone) is the source of all material reality known as the world or cosmos. All beings on this earth, including humans, are created by God and are therefore his creatures. There is a resultant unlimited and unbridgeable chasm between God the creator and all his creatures, including humans, who depend on God for their very existence. There is only one God—everyone and everything else is created by this one God. According to the Genesis account, humans from the beginning were created by God “in his image” and were given dominion over all other material creatures. They therefore received an ontological preeminence over all other material creatures and special protection against being killed by other humans (cf. Gen 9:6, “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image”).

Also from the beginning, however, humans refused to be content with their exalted status as God’s images having dominion over the rest of material creation. They wanted themselves to “be like gods” and to “know good and evil” (cf. Gen 3:5). Before the first couples’ disobedient rebellion, of course, evil had not yet even existed on earth (although there is a traditional belief in a fall of some angels before the earth’s creation). Indeed, the very attempt by humans to know good and evil precipitated on earth for the first time the very existence of the evil that they were

striving to know. In reality, the desire to *know* for themselves the meaning of good and evil proved equivalent to the desire to *decide for themselves* what is good and what is evil—in other words, to make laws unto themselves, to be autonomous, to be independent from God their creator. From the beginning, humans have wanted to decide for themselves what their commandments should be, and not to be subject to God's authority and commandments. By this rebellious choice, they in fact caused to exist the very evil that they now came to know.

This primeval human desire for autonomy and the sinful actions that followed it did not result in the coveted human equality with God, but in its very opposite. Its consequence was complete human alienation from God's friendship and from the divine-human intimacy that existed "in the beginning" of human creation and that was God's perfect will (as distinguished from "permissive will") for divine-human relations. In their comparative ontological statuses as creator and creatures, the chasm between the divine creator and human creatures remained infinite, despite human attempts to force the bridging of this chasm by their revolution against God their creator.

The most basic revelation of Genesis, echoed in the "first and greatest commandment," is that there always has been, is now, and will ever remain only one God. Human creatures are not gods and never can be. They can neither be gods themselves nor be genuinely independent of God, even though they have been endowed with the God-like powers of intellect and free will that elevate them essentially above all animals. Among material creatures, God gave only to humans the spiritual faculties of intellect and free will, in order to enable his human images to accept his offer of an intimate love relationship with him. God-given intellect and will empowered humans truly to relate to God in the filial love relationship of being his adopted (*vs.* natural and intrinsically divine) daughters and sons. However, those same spiritual faculties of intellect and will enabled humans both to be aware of the conceptual possibility of being "like gods" and to desire that possibility with their free will, even though it challenged the expressed desire and will of God their creator. Humans rejected the divine offer of a relationship of filial love with God in their attempt instead to seize autonomy and equality

with God.

Put in philosophical terms, the primary question in Genesis 1-3 has been whether human creatures would accept the status, unique among material creatures, offered them by their creator: to be not only his ontological images, having, like God, the spiritual faculties of intellect and free will. Would they also freely love God within the intimate relationship that God was offering to them to be his adopted sons and daughters? In place of this proffered intimate relationship of filial love with God their creator, humans attempted to choose autonomy and equality with God.

This rejection of God's proffered love resulted in an alienation and separation from God and a loss of divine intimacy that distorted God's original plan for human relationships, not only with him but also with one another and between male and female. In place of original friendship with God, humans came to fear God slavishly and to hide from him as if he were a cruel master (cf. Gen 3:8-10). Genesis 3 explains in addition how the perverted relationships between men and women that are experienced in history came to be so perverted (Gen 3:16).

For instance, the two-in-one union divinely designed into the sexual differentiation between male and female (which the pope calls "the nuptial meaning of the body") has been debased. Instead, male domination and oppression of women and mutual male-female recrimination and hostility have come to prevail. Instead of the unmitigated joy of mothering another human "child" of God, women have come to experience extreme and life-threatening labor pains.<sup>xiii</sup> Rather than manifesting the submission of nature to its human "gardener," the earth would yield to the male's sweaty toil not fruit but thorns and thistles, "rebell[ing]" against human dominion in a manner analogous to the way in which humans had rebelled against divine dominion (Gen 3:17-19). In turn, instead of humans cultivating nature as its steward, they would try to dominate it as if it were a mere mechanism. Even man's body would now rebel against his spirit (Rom 7:23), so that man would in turn attempt to subjugate his own body as if it were an alien entity or a mere tool (contraception is one such way). Worst of all, death would henceforth be the lot of all—"thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return"

(Gen 3:19). Fear of that death would further enslave the already wounded freedom of the human race (cf. Hebrews 2:15).

Human history has played out the dire consequences of this primeval rebellion against God's authority over humans as their creator. As humans persisted in striving for ethical autonomy from any supra-human moral authority, especially from the authority over them that their creator had by virtue of having created them, a tragic history of sin and alienation added calamity to devastation. The primeval history of the growth of sin and alienation from God is typified in Genesis 4-11. Similar patterns of sin and alienation play out throughout the remaining narratives of the Old Testament.

The very term "sexual revolution" quite evidently fits within this overarching biblical perspective of ongoing human rebellion against and alienation from God's authority, in this case against the divine plan built into human creation for the relationship between male and female. For to the eyes of Jewish and Christian faith, this sexual revolution ultimately comes down to a revolt against the authority of God as creator of our masculine and feminine beings, and the striving for complete autonomy with respect to the use of our sexual faculties.<sup>xiii</sup>

The plan of God for our identities as male or female persons is revealed in the two Genesis accounts of the creation of humans, read together canonically as mutually complementary. God made man [*adam, ton anthrôpon*] according to God's image: male and female he made them. God's original blessing and mission for them was to "increase and multiply [through their male and female sexual complementarity] and fill the earth"; the blessing and mission that follows upon this is that, consequent upon multiplying and filling the earth, they were to "subdue it" and all the creatures on the earth (Gen 1:28). Sexual procreation of the human race through families is the primeval commission from God, upon which all other human tasks and missions depend. At the end of this creation account that had culminated on the "sixth day" in the creation of the human couple, the narrator in the Septuagint version commented: "And God saw all the things that he had made, and, behold, they were *very good*" (Gen 1:31 LXX, Brenton trans., emphasis added). (At the end of the previous five days, the narrator had been content to comment,

“And God saw that they were good” [e.g., Gen 1:25 LXX, Brenton trans.]) The creation of man as male and female is pronounced very good, contrary to various early forms of gnosticism that denigrated human sexuality.

Genesis 2 provides a more primitive and pictorial account of human origins, which complements the insight gleaned from the first account. God as creator is portrayed (more anthropomorphically than in Genesis 1) as forming “the man” [*anthrôpon*] from dust from the earth (that is, from pre-existent matter) and breathing into this earthy being the breath of life (Gen 2:7). In canonical perspective as read by centuries of believers, this breath of life came to represent the individual human soul placed within each person by God as animating principle of the human body.

The narrative in Genesis 2 makes no initial mention of man as a couple, as the first account had from its first reference to human creation. Rather God is pictured as planting a garden in Eden and placing there the man (the *adam* [*anthrôpon*] or Adam) whom he had formed (Gen 2:8). In this account “the man” is pictured as a solitary being, about whom God remarks, “It is not good that man should be alone; let us make for him a helper or partner suitable for him” (Gen. 2:18). The animals that God subsequently molds from the earth and brings to Adam to be named by him do not provide a suitable partner “like himself” (Gen 2:19-20). As Pope John Paul II had emphasized in his meditation on these texts, these passages emphasize the “primordial solitude” of man in the material world, human loneliness despite the presence of all the animals to which he is so superior, and his need for completion in a companion, helper, and partner who is genuinely “like himself.”<sup>xiv</sup>

The imagery and symbols used to picture God as creating this suitable partner like Adam puts special emphasis on the divinely intended unity and complementarity between male and female persons. To provide a suitable partner, God “anaesthetizes” Adam, takes one of his ribs from his side, and fills it out and forms it as a woman. To form woman, God does not go back to the earth for his materials, as he had for Adam and for each of the various species of animals. Rather, God’s taking a rib from Adam emphasizes the unity of origin and sameness of species between Adam and “the woman” (Gen 2:21-22). This unity in sameness

is accentuated by Adam's exclamation when God presents the woman to Adam: "This at last is bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh. She shall be called woman (*ishah*) for she was taken from man (*ish*)" (Gen 2:23). Lest anyone miss the marital significance of this narrative, the narrator explains to the readers, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). To emphasize the innocence and goodness of this sexual relationship, the narrator adds a commentary that "the two were naked, both Adam and his wife, and they were not ashamed" (Gen 3:1).

Both accounts of human creation, therefore, present human sexuality in an extremely positive light as not only "good" but "very good." Both portray sexuality as at the very heart of the spousal and familial relationships that would result in the human race. Humans were at peace and in a state of friendship with both God their creator and with one another. The unity of the original pair was so intimate that they "became one flesh" (Gen 2:24). Their sexuality and their love were experienced with such innocence that in their nakedness in each other's presence, they experienced no shame (Gen 3:1). There is not a hint of disordered passion, lust, domination, control, alienation, blame, or use of the partner as a sexual object or plaything.<sup>xv</sup> All these negative aspects of human sexuality originally became part of human experience only after the first couple's fall from God's grace (in Genesis 3).

#### FALLEN SEXUALITY AND COMMANDMENTS PROTECTING PURITY

Catholics disagree with those who claim that either human nature in general or human sexuality in particular has been completely corrupted by the fall and by original sin. Nevertheless, everyday experience forces them to admit that especially human sexuality and the difficulties of integrating it gracefully within a generally virtuous life provide ample evidence that human sexuality has indeed been grievously wounded.<sup>xvi</sup>

Therefore a biblical foundation for considerations of human sexuality must take account not only of the creator's original plan for human sexuality, but also of scriptural references to commandments regulating sexual behavior in sexuality's new fallen state, and to frequent biblical reports and condemnations of abuses of human sexuality. Two of

the Ten Commandments relate to sexuality: “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” and “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife.” Many laws in the Pentateuchal books refer to sexual codes and to sexual misbehavior and its related punishments. In addition, many biblical narratives describe sexual behavior and misbehavior (e.g., Bathsheba, the daughters of Lot, Ruben’s lying with his father’s concubines) in ways that clearly at least imply moral judgments regarding such behavior. Furthermore, the wisdom books give extensive practical advice about “managing” unruly human sexuality.

Pope John Paul emphasizes that much of the Old Testament casuistry regarding sexual behavior and adultery already manifests compromises with the fallen condition of human sexuality.<sup>xvii</sup> Jesus fulfills the original divine plan and purpose of the law and prophets by calling people back to the inner meaning of the commandments. Since much contemporary moral theology is likewise based on conditions of a fallen humanity, the pope wants to recall attention to Jesus’s revelation of the creator’s original plan for human sexuality.

Despite this New Testament emphasis on God’s original and exalted plan for human sexuality, biblical struggles against negative uses of sexuality also carry over into the New Testament. One basic but important category of New Testament treatments of sexual sins occurs as a component of conventional “vice lists.” For example, Gal 5:19-20 gives the following list: “Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like” (RSV). In this list, the first three sins, fornication, impurity, and licentiousness (*porneia*, *akatharsia*, *aselgeia*) relate to human sexuality. Although these three sexual sins are followed by twelve other vices that are named, their presence at the head of the list gives them a distinct prominence. The gravity of Paul’s condemnation of all such sins could not be more beyond question: “I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal 5:21 RSV).

A similar Pauline list of vices (also with a harsh judgment against them) occurs in 1 Cor 6:9-10: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will

not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts [the Greek specifies two separate classes of sinners], nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God” (RSV). In this list of ten vices, the four vices mentioned first, third, fourth, and fifth relate to sexuality (*oute pornoi ... oute moichoi oute malakoi oute arsenokoitai*). This high proportion demonstrates an emphasis on condemning sexual sins (along with other types) that is similar to that found in Galatians 5.

In my judgment, customary scholarly evaluations of the significance of these conventional New Testament vice lists have sometimes tended not to do justice to the seriousness with which the sins in those lists are condemned as incompatible with the kingdom of God and Christian living.<sup>xviii</sup> It is important to note that even though most such vice lists are conventional, they are customarily edited to make them in fact more suitable for their particular New Testament context. One must be wary of the impression that these lists might be mere rhetorical “throwaways.” They are fundamental to the moral teaching of the authors who use them. The number and importance of specific vices relating to sexual misbehavior is a reminder that New Testament Christians maintained and repeated Old Testament condemnations of such behavior, without apparently finding it necessary to describe what actions constituted the rejected behavior. A simple reference to certain generic types of sinful actions would presumably suffice to make obvious the writer’s point.

When Paul deals with those churches composed primarily of converted pagans, he finds himself forced to condemn more explicitly and in greater detail actions that his churches should have realized were obvious sexual misbehavior, such as a man’s marrying his father’s wife, or the use of prostitutes (sacred or otherwise). Thus 1 Corinthians contains multiple discussions of sexual sins to be avoided by Christians and eliminated from their midst. For example, in 1 Cor 6:12-20, Paul is forced to give his converts a reason why sexual sins are so grave: this is because they are sins against one’s own body, which has been consecrated to the Lord.

Before Paul can respond to the more esoteric (perhaps even

casuistic) questions relating to sexuality that the Corinthians wrote to him (in 1 Corinthians 7), he has to remind the Corinthians on a much more fundamental level that the biblical God-given purpose of sexual intercourse is the two-in-one union in marriage (Gen 2:24). Willy nilly, all sexual intercourse has the effect of causing a genuine union with the sexual partner, even if the partner is only a paid prostitute (1 Cor 6:15-16). The bodies of Christians are members of Christ: “Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!” (v. 15 RSV). Because a Christian’s body also has the dignity of being a temple of the Holy Spirit, Christians are to use it with reverence, especially its sexual powers. Thus, Paul emphasized, “Shun immorality (*porneian*). Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body. 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 with a price. So glorify God in your body” (vv. 18-20 RSV).

#### MATTHEW 5 & THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

Reflection on New Testament perspectives relevant to contemporary issues of contraception and abortion cannot fail to mention the revolutionary interiorizing principle from the Sermon on the Mount as quoted from the mouth of Jesus. “You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt 5:27-28 RSV). From the time of Paul and the earliest Christian patristic authors, the church has taken very seriously this progression (attributed to Jesus himself) beyond the literal actions forbidden by the ten commandments (such as murder or adultery) to the interior attitudes, passions, and vices that lead to them (such as anger and lust). If consenting to even the interior passion and vice of lust is forbidden by Jesus, *a fortiori*, all acting out of that lust, even in solitary sexual sin or deliberate fantasizing, let alone in sexual behavior with others, stands condemned.

It is of course this attitude of defending purity and disapproving of even interior responses to sexual lust that has been a prime target of the

sexual revolution and its attitudes. If interior lust is condemned even before it is acted on, this self-evidently undercuts virtually all the attitudes and sexual practices promoted by the sexual revolution. Despite lofty rhetoric about loving the other or even about wholesome sexual pleasure, closer inspection of either actions or their written descriptions usually appear much more akin to manifestations of lust than to anything approximating chaste love of the other as personal subject, and not as merely a desirable object for satisfying one's own instinctual cravings. This intimate relationship between the sexual revolution and lust surely helps explain why proponents of that revolution are so hostile to what they sneeringly refer to as "Catholic guilt" regarding lust.

These statements from the Sermon on the Mount undercut the very possibility of a sexual revolution that concentrates on sexual practices as primarily focused on giving and receiving pleasure. John Paul II's meditations on them provide a profound reflection on how lust demeans one's sexual partner. They describe how a person is degraded from his or her rightful status as a subject or person, whose sexual complementarity to oneself exhibits the "nuptial meaning of the body" and the teleology of sexual union to bring "two into one flesh" (Gen 2:24). In lust, even one's spouse can be reduced to an object for satisfying one's own sexual instincts. For example, I have personally heard women who had switched away from the pill complain about previously "having felt used by their husband," who constantly expected them to be available for intercourse.

Lust is an appalling "use" of a person of equal dignity whom God created as an end in him- or herself, never to become merely an objectified means or instrument for the utilitarian satisfaction of another's desires. It is hard to see how the contrary understanding of human sexuality that prevails in the sexual revolution—namely, a view of human sexuality as primarily a function to be manipulated for the primary purpose of giving and receiving pleasure—can rise above the manipulating acts that follow necessarily from lust. For direct seeking of pleasure seems intrinsically directed toward oneself, even if there is a further element of wanting to give pleasure also to one's sexual partner. Even giving of pleasure seems a world apart from having two persons precisely as persons become one not only in body but in mind and spirit.

## CONCLUSION

Corresponding to the godlike dignity of the identity of each human as a male or female person, John Paul II's biblically-inspired *Theology of the Body* regards the sexual union of male and female as not only a special but even a sacred event. Whereas the sexual revolution trivializes sexuality and sexual behavior by its materialistic, mechanistic, and utilitarian reductionism, the Bible and church teachers consider union of the complementary sexes as sacred and as intimately related to our identity as male and female created in God's image. This theology of the body reveals both the nuptial meaning of the body and our human likeness to the communion of persons within the very Trinity. This is one reason why violation of a person's sexual integrity through abuse and rape is especially devastating, undermining one's sense of sexual identity and self-worth as a person (who should never, under any circumstances, be merely used for the ends of another). Even sexual-revolutionaries admit the biological relationship between heterosexual intercourse and the prospect of conceiving children. Biblical and traditional church teaching protects children, the potential offspring from sexual union, by limiting sexual union to the safe environment of a committed and lifelong heterosexual marriage open to the procreation and education of children.

But to protect the meaning and dignity of marriage and family, which are the fundamental building blocks of all human society and civilization, church teaching makes explicit the implications of biblical anthropology by further defining the marriage act as ordered both to the union of the spouses (physically, emotionally, spiritually) and to the procreation and education of children. The papal "theology of the body" emphasizes that all marital sexual union must both symbolize and actually express and "incorporate" unconditional, complete and mutual self-giving between the spouses. To limit the two "ends" of the marriage act to just one of them (whether a sexual union that blocks procreation or reproduction in labs without sexual union) is to desecrate the sacred and integral meaning of marital sexuality and procreation.

To substitute one's own human intentions and designs for the marriage act in place of God's design is also a clear example of the

primordial human temptation of trying to be as gods deciding for themselves what is good and what is evil. An especially flagrant example of playing God comes when humans create human life without sexual union through In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) in petri dishes. Not only do doctors play God by “manufacturing” human beings from collected sperm and ova in the lab (almost by analogy as to how Genesis 2 had portrayed God as molding Adam from clay). They also play God in that IVF routinely produces large numbers of embryos in excess of the single embryo desired for implantation in the infertile couple. The freezing, storing, experimenting on, killing or disposing of these excess embryos or the harvesting of them for stem cells and body parts involves grave abuse and the killing of human life that is in God’s image. It is not easy to know with certainty how many such excess embryos have been created and abused, stored, or killed in infertility clinics and in laboratories, but at the time of this writing, *The Washington Post* cited the May 2003 issue of the journal *Fertility and Sterility* as mentioning numbers like 400,000 frozen embryos in the United States infertility clinics alone.<sup>xix</sup>

The opposite action, the deliberate blocking of the procreative possibilities of the marriage act, changes the meaning of marital intercourse. It is no longer an expression of complete, unconditional, and mutual self-giving of the spouses in their respective totalities. Contraception transforms the marriage act into an incomplete, narrowly conditioned acceptance of the other minus her or his fertility, which is the most precious aspect of one’s sexuality (as amply demonstrated in the anguish of infertile couples). Contraception thus radically alters the meaning of the sexual act from one properly expressive of the total and unconditional mutual self-giving of husband and wife, to one that explicitly rejects and blocks the spouse’s fertility, the characteristic of the spouse’s self that has the potential to lead to new life and offspring. The psychological and practical link between contraception and abortion becomes particularly evident when couples whose contraception failed resort so frequently to abortion as the ultimate rejection of fertility. Scripture reserves the taking of innocent human life to God alone (e.g., Gen 9:6). Rejecting one’s innate fertility and killing the child that results from it is also trying “to be as God.”

## NOTES

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i. Quoted in Charles E. Rice, *50 Questions on the Natural Law: What It Is and Why We Need It*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), p. 309. I owe this and several other references to my research assistant, Jeremy Holmes.

ii. Luke Timothy Johnson has argued persuasively for the need to get beyond the shortcomings of the Enlightenment worldview to one more oriented toward fresh investigation of both historical and contemporary evidence and of attending to and interpreting experience, both of first and twenty-first century Christians. See Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 2d ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), pp. 10-16.

iii. Actually, there has been some interest in NFP among those of the “Green Movement”—called “Green NFP” by those of us involved in teaching and researching NFP issues—but this group is limited in numbers and influence.

iv. Cf. Janet E. Smith, “Logic, Weed-Eaters, Homosexuality and Contraception,” *Catholic Dossier* Vol. 7, No. 2: *Non Enim Erubescio Evangelium. Rom 1:16* (March/April 2001): “In the 1960s, when many Catholic theologians began questioning the Church’s teaching on contraception, a handful of philosophers and theologians predicted that if the Church changed its teaching on contraception, soon theologians would be justifying fornication, masturbation, and homosexuality. There was widespread scoffing at these predictions. But, as history has now shown, logic was on the side of the prophets; indeed, if anything, their predictions were too cautious; they said nothing about the connection between abortion, euthanasia, and the push for homosexual marriages and contraception.

“What are the middle terms that connect contraception and these other practices? Contraception is based on the premise that it is moral to separate the love-making from the baby-making power of sexual intercourse; that sexual intercourse can be engaged in strictly for expressing love and need not be expressive of a respect for new life as well. In fact, contraception has not only diminished our appreciation of the life-giving, or baby-making power of sexual intercourse, it has also obscured or destroyed our understanding that sexual intercourse should be an expression of love and of a life-time commitment to another. It has become altogether respectable to think of sexual intercourse as strictly a pleasure-giving activity and it matters little with whom one enjoys that

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pleasure—one’s boyfriend or girlfriend, oneself, a member of the same sex, or one’s mistress.”

v. Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (London: Flamingo, 1994), pp. 3-13, 20.

vi. Cf. Don DeMarco, “Contraception and Trivialization of Sex,” *Lay Witness* 20/6 (July/August 1999) 34-36.

vii. Pope John Paul II admits that the moral norm upheld in *Humanae Vitae* “is not formally (that is, literally) expressed in Sacred Scripture” [*Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books, 1997), 389]. However, he does argue that the norm, so often propounded by tradition and the magisterium, “is in accordance with the sum total of revealed doctrine contained in the biblical sources (cf. *HV* 4)” (ibid.). He explains, “It is a question here not only of the sum total of the moral doctrine contained in Sacred Scripture, of its essential premises and the general character of its content. It is also a question of that fuller context to which we have previously dedicated many analyses when speaking about the theology of the body. Precisely against the background of this full context it becomes evident that the above mentioned norm belongs... also to the *moral order revealed by God*” (ibid., emphasis in original).

viii. Cf. the competing approaches reported in William S. Kurz, S.J., “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.

ix. Luke Timothy Johnson, “A Disembodied ‘Theology of the Body’: John Paul II on Love, Sex & Pleasure,” *Commonweal* 128/2 (January 26, 2001): 11-17. The most complete rebuttal to Johnson’s arguments can be found in Christopher West, “A Response to Luke Timothy Johnson’s Critique of John Paul II’s ‘Disembodied’ Theology of the Body,” (unpublished at the time I received it via email). A short published rebuttal came from David C. Hajduk, “Critique: Theologian Errs in His Criticism of the Pope’s Teaching,” *This Rock* (October/November/December 2001) 11-14. In response to Johnson, Hanna Klaus, M.D. wrote a Feb. 14, 2001 letter to the editor of *Commonweal*, in which she witnessed as NFP teacher and researcher about non-believers finding meaning in natural methods after trying contraception (received via [nfplist@dfpm.med.utah.edu](mailto:nfplist@dfpm.med.utah.edu)). Janet Smith emailed to the list a brief response noting how Karol Wojtyla in *Love and Responsibility* had indeed argued for sexual pleasure in recommending simultaneous climax, as a rebuttal of Johnson’s charge about the lack of appreciation for sexual pleasure apparently shown by the pope ([jsmith@acade.udallas.edu](mailto:jsmith@acade.udallas.edu)).

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x. Cf. Paul M. Quay, *The Mystery Hidden for Ages in God*. American University Studies, Series VII, Theology and Religion, 161 (New York: Peter Lang, 1995).

xi. Cf. the approach in Kurz, "Ethical Actualization."

xii. Gen 3:16. This is not to deny the phenomenon of occasional painless childbirth. See Susan McCutcheon, *Natural Childbirth the Bradley Way* (New York: Plume, 1996) p. 97. Physical pain is part of a larger complex of pain associated with having children.

xiii. The extent to which the dissent in the Catholic Church against its prohibition of contraception in *Humanae Vitae* mirrors a far broader revolt against Church authority than merely that of the sexual revolution is strikingly (and prophetically, in view of the clerical scandals of 2002) laid out by Paul V. Mankowski, S.J., "The Prayer of Lady Macbeth: How the Contraceptive Mentality Has Neutered Religious Life," *Faith & Reason* 19/1 (1993) 79-93, available online at <http://www.ewtn.com/library/PRIESTS/FR93103.TXT>.

Compare a strikingly similar perspective from 750 years earlier in St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, Q. 5, art. 3: "It is manifest that he who adheres to the teaching of the Church, as to an infallible rule, assents to whatever the Church teaches; otherwise, if, on the things taught by the Church, he holds what he chooses to hold and rejects what he chooses to reject, he no longer adheres to the teaching of the Church as to an infallible rule, but to his own will ... Therefore it is clear that such a heretic with regard to one article has no faith in the other articles, but only a kind of opinion in accordance with his own will." (My Marquette colleague Dr. Patrick Doyle brought to my attention this convergence over centuries between the insights of Mankowski and Aquinas.)

xiv. John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, pp. 35-37. In the light of this Genesis emphasis on human loneliness amidst animals but without a human partner, the contemporary tendency of many young adults to delay marriage and to substitute a dog or other pet for a spouse (and/or by married or cohabiting couples to substitute a dog or dogs for children) seems particularly ironic.

xv. As a friend once jokingly remarked to me, "God created for Adam a helpmate, not a playmate."

xvi. Cf. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1995) # 402-09, 2520.

xvii. *Theology of the Body*, pp. 105, 133-35. For example, the patriarchal and royal narratives exhibit a widespread toleration of polygamy, which certainly

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contradicts the “two become one flesh” ideal from “the beginning.” The pope depicts Jesus as prophetically calling the people back to “the beginning,” to God’s purposes in creation, beyond later accommodations to human weakness and sinfulness after the fall.

xviii. Compare Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*. Anchor Bible vol. 32A (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984), pp. 567-68, who begins by warning readers “not to over-interpret the catalog of vices” (in 2 Cor 12:20): “These are all quite traditional...found in other vice lists...” (p. 567). However, he goes on to acknowledge that these vices are in fact applicable to Paul’s Corinthian addressees (p. 567). With regard to the grossly sexual sins to which Paul refers in the following verse (12:21), Furnish points out that these too “are traditionally present in Hellenistic ethical lists” (as also in Gal 5:19); but apparently somewhat reluctantly, he admits that this seems almost the only place in 2 Corinthians where Paul is concerned that sexual immorality is a current problem in the Corinthian congregation (p. 568). Yet compare the first letter, 1 Cor 6:9-10, quoted above.

xix. Rick Weiss, “400,000 Human Embryos Frozen in U.S.; Number at Fertility Clinics Is Far Greater Than Previous Estimates, Survey Finds,” *The Washington Post* (Final Edition, May 8, 2003) p. A10 (cited online). A census of all 430 U.S. fertility clinics verified this enormous number of frozen embryos. “The unexpectedly high number...is the byproduct of a booming fertility industry whose success depends on creating many embryos but using only the best” (ibid).