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'To Be As God': Biblical Reflections on the Sexual Revolution (article)

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Introduction

Genesis 1 provides the following optimistic account of the creation of humans: “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). Not only does this first creation account of Genesis depict God creating humans in his own image as male and female, but also giving them dominion over the rest of the material universe to manage the earth on behalf of the Creator of all things. Genesis portrays the human race in the beginning as veritably “on top of the world.”

Only two chapters later, however, Genesis 3 narrates that 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).1 In other words, it was not enough for humans to be in God’s image exercising dominion as God’s viceroys over all the rest of material creation.

1 “You will be like God” – The English translations vary between such translations as “be as gods,” “be as God,” “be like gods/God.” The Septuagint Greek translation uses the conjunction “as” – “Semitically, combined with a substantive to take the place of a substantive or adjective
With a little help from the serpent, humans also found themselves chafing at limits on the dominion that God had entrusted to them.

The direct command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was the first and most explicit limitation on their dominion. Later in the narrative, other implied limits will emerge, such as denial to them of any dominion over human life in contrast to their dominion over subhuman life. For example, Gen 9:4-6 denies humans blood even after the new post-flood (and fallen) dispensation allows them to eat the flesh of animals (because blood is regarded as life, which belongs exclusively to God). Even more stringent is the command and threat against taking the lifeblood of humans: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image” (Gen 9:6 RSV).

The limitation on ending human life because humans are in the image of God is not logically unrelated to limitations regarding the beginning of human life as well. Gen 1:28 indicates clearly the way in which God expects them to begin human life: “be fruitful and multiply” (said also to animals in Gen 1:22) clearly implies that humans are to cooperate with God in pro-creating human life through sexual intercourse. All seven instances of “be fruitful” in Genesis refer to natural reproduction (Gen 1:22,28; 8:17; 9:1,7; 26:22; 35:11). The biblical mindset does not envisage humans “manufacturing” or “breeding” in expressing a comparison as it were, something like, as (RV 8.8)” (Analytical Lexicon, Bible Windows).

The point of this temptation is that the human couple will exercise God’s ability to know good and evil. In God, to know good and evil includes to decide what is good and what is evil. The temptation is to disregard God’s command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The serpent’s rationale is that if they do so, they will not die, as God had threatened if they disobeyed this command. Rather, they will be like God, as God, knowing for themselves (without having to take God’s word for it or obey his command concerning it) what is good and evil. This is an inducement to disobedience and therefore to autonomy from God’s command and from God’s rule in general. Instead of obeying God, they strive to function on the same level as God: to “be as God, knowing good and evil.”
human life, even though human dominion over animals evidently does allow this (e.g., in breeding mules by crossing horses and donkeys).

Apparently, by Genesis 3 such limits have become unacceptable to the first humans. 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 to striving to be other gods themselves. They went from acting in place of God as his image, with authority as God's deputies and representatives over the rest of material creation, to trying to be autonomous beings determining right and wrong for themselves. As an immediate result, humans fell out of God's friendship and became utterly alienated from God. When they ceased obeying God and instead challenged God's authority, they set themselves up as rivals to God. Subsequently, Genesis portrays them as aware of their helplessness before God's unlimited power and dreading his justice and wrath. Far from being like God, human creatures found themselves living in fear of God and hiding from him.

Genesis 4-11 depicts the precipitous spread of this human rebellion against their Creator to all areas of behavior and morality. After the initial disobedience of Adam and Eve, their first son Cain murdered their second son Abel, and sin and its consequences spread with the human race over all the earth. Although these Genesis accounts evidently concern happenings that occurred before the dawn of historical record keeping, they typify the virtually universal human experience of alienation from God and from fellow humans and the practically universal sin that has made human life miserable throughout all the centuries.

This article will treat the contemporary "sexual revolution" as a cogent instance of the dynamics of human sin in general, which is the primary referent of Genesis 3. It will contend that the primeval human temptation "to be as God" reveals the essential structure and dynamics of the sexual revolution. The temptation "to be as God" pro-
vides the ultimate explanation, within the overall biblical perspective and worldview, of why the meaning of human sexuality has become so profaned and controverted throughout biblical and subsequent human history. This degrading of sexuality has occurred in a particularly explosive fashion since the recent “sexual revolution,” whose very name implies human attempts to “be as God, deciding for themselves what is good and what is evil.”

Obviously, the contemporary sexual revolution, which most argue received its major impetus from the introduction of the birth control “pill” in 1960, is not even implicitly mentioned in Scripture. This absence diminishes the utility of the most common approach to using Scripture for ethical questions, “proof texting.” One is unlikely to find in Scripture many “proof texts” that provide guidance about the contemporary sexual revolution or about many other current biomedical and ethical questions. Contemporary problems and concerns are bound to have at least a different context and configuration than analogous topics present in Scripture.

Furthermore, in The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A Constructive Conversation, Luke Timothy Johnson and I recommend approaches to Scripture that are more directly related to the questions and needs of the church and believers than the more academically ori-

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2 In a Sept. 17, 1983 discourse to priests at a study seminar on “responsible parenthood,” Pope John Paul II made this link explicit. “It also follows that men and women are not the arbiters, are not the masters of this same [procreative] capacity, called as they are, in it and through it, to be participants in God’s creative decision. When, therefore, through contraception, married couples remove from the exercise of their conjugal sexuality its potential procreative capacity, they claim a power which belongs only to God: the power to decide, in a final analysis, the coming into existence of a human person. They assume the qualification not of being cooperators in God’s creative power, but the ultimate depositories of the source of human life. “In this perspective, contraception is to be judged, objectively, so profoundly unlawful as never to be, for any reason, justified. To think or say the contrary is equal to maintaining that in human life situations may arise in which it’s lawful not to recognize God as God” (John Paul II, “Heroism in Marriage,” in The Pope Speaks 28/4 (Winter 1983): 356-59, pp. 356-57, italics in original).
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ented approaches that have become the norm. We also recommend learning from the ways in which patristic authors applied Scripture to the lives of believers in their day. One way to do this is to focus less on searching biblical texts for explicit answers to contemporary problems, such as the sexual revolution, or on reconstructing the historical facts and situation at the time when biblical texts were written. Instead we recommend reading Scripture as the actual believing Catholic readers we are and reading it within the context of the entire Christian canon and tradition of Catholic interpretation and the guidance of the contemporary Catholic magisterium.

This more pastoral approach to biblical revelation yields a great deal of direction for even current questions regarding human sexuality and fertility. Scripture does communicate God's plan for creation. It does provide a biblical worldview in which to consider the relative and interrelated situations between God the Creator and humans and other creatures in the world. A holistic and canonical reading of the Christian Bible, Old and New Testaments, portrays the dignity and limitations of human creatures with all their gifts and attributes, including their sexuality and fertility.

This biblical worldview provides an outlook that differs radically from the dominant contemporary worldview of the sexual revolution. The Bible can stand as a challenge to the depiction of human beings and their sexuality that is promoted by the sexual revolution. From a positive perspective, if believers desire to conduct themselves as obedient creatures who trust their Creator God, Scripture does provide a great deal of guidance about how to use one's God-given intellect and will to cooperate rationally with the designs of sexuality that are built into human nature. This article will suggest some ways in which we can recall the biblical worldview in order to understand and


4 Ibid.. Our book addressed Catholics and the Catholic situation, but many of its suggestions apply analogously to other Christians and denominations.
deal with the sexual revolution according to God’s plan and wisdom. An especially critical recent step in the autonomous determination of human sexual morality was the rise of Christian acceptance of contraception. A brief overview of this acquiescence can provide further historical context for understanding why the biblical outlook seems so alien to contemporary assumptions and how to relate Scripture to contemporary questions about sexuality. It can provide some

As I was finishing my final draft of this article to send it to the editors, I noticed a cover article by Luke Timothy Johnson, “Sex, women, and the church: The need for prophetic change,” *Commonweal* 130 no. 12 (June 20, 2003) 11-17. A closely related online version, under the title “Sex and American Catholics,” can be found on the Emory University web site at http://www.law.emory.edu/cistr/documents/lukespeech.pdf. Johnson’s article refers initially to the church’s prophetic teaching thus: “It speaks of a vision of the world defined by God over against practices that distort creation” (p.11). Johnson locates the sexual revolution in a broader context of drastic and precipitous change in the 1960’s. First was an unparalleled and sustained material prosperity that produced the microchip and birth-control pill and promised a winning war against poverty. Second was the sexual revolution. Third was commercial exploitation of the sexual revolution through advertising and pornography. Fourth were the political scandals and assassinations leading to disillusionment and political cynicism. Fifth was the women’s movement that drew from these others, relating sex to gender and to social and economic power. Lastly, the gay- and lesbian-rights movements were born. During all this the dramatic changes from Vatican II (1962-65) occurred, as well as Kennedy’s election, which was perceived as ending Catholic immigrant status. Finally, widespread expectations that the church would modify its opposition to birth control were dashed with *Humanae Vitae*.

I emphasize more than Johnson does the rebellion against church teaching authority (magisterium) under the rubric of “dissent” that followed immediately. My evaluation of the phenomena of the sexual revolution differs at root from his, perhaps because my experience of the effects of the sexual revolution differs from his. To the extent to which the results of my biblical approach have validity, especially in regard to moral absolutes regarding sexuality, they seem incompatible with several of Johnson’s key perspectives regarding human sexuality. I do share many of Johnson’s concerns about fraud in Catholic practice compromising the church’s prophetic role.
recent perspective on how attitudes toward the meaning of human sexuality have changed so radically since the sexual revolution.

After the Anglican Lambeth Conference of 1930 became the first Christian body to claim that contraception could ever be objectively right, 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.6

Surprisingly, at the time of the very first acceptance in principle by any Christian denomination of any form of contraception, 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 70 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 human sexuality and on how contraception is differentiated from the alternatives of fertility awareness and natural family planning?

We must begin by conceding 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 posi-

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of the sexual revolution that has virtually become the consensus attitude, and the tiny countercultural minority position that has been championed most overtly by the magisterial teaching of the Catholic Church. The perspective of the sexual revolution is dominant: 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. Especially during the impetus it received from the introduction of "the Pill" in the 1960's, the sexual revolution participated in the broader 60's 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 human domination over nature. 7

By the 1990's, however, 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 must 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. 8

The sexual revolution deals with sexuality primarily as a biological mechanism — to be mastered and used primarily to give and

7 Luke Timothy Johnson has argued persuasively for the need to get beyond the shortcomings of the Enlightenment worldview and to do a fresh investigation of both historical and contemporary evidence. He emphasizes the importance of interpreting especially experience, both of first and twenty-first century Christians. See Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (2d ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 10-16.

8 Actually, there has been some interest in Natural Family Planning (NFP) among those of the "Green Movement" — called "Green NFP" by
receive pleasure, while suppressing its reproductive effects. The “patron saint” of this conception could be said to be Alfred Kinsey, who wrote the seminal studies of male and female sexual behavior that fueled the fires of the sexual revolution. The ultimate logical consequence of treating sexuality as a mechanism for pleasure, as Kinsey advocated, 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.

Furthermore, the effects of the sexual revolution have expanded considerably beyond sexual activity. According to the revolution’s prevailing assumptions, sexuality, gender and gender roles are predomi-

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9 Cf. Kinsey, Alfred C., Wardell B. Pomeroy and Clyde E. Martin, 
*Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Co., 1948), and 
Kinsey, Alfred C., et al., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female, by the Staff of the 
Indoctrination of a People* (eds. J. Gordon Muir and John H. Court; Lafayette, La.: 

10 Cf. Janet E. Smith, “Logic, Weed-Eaters, Homosexuality and Con-
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 con-
traception, soon theologians would be justifying fornication, mastur-
bation, 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
nantly products of culture and learned behavior rather than of nature. 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, 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 many feminist ideologies. The 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.11

The “minority report” is sponsored most noticeably by magisterial Catholic teaching. In response to the dominant attitudes about human sexuality, Pope John Paul II 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 396-97). “It can be said that in 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 pleasure – one’s boyfriend or girlfriend, oneself, a member of the same sex, or one’s mistress.”

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 398). Communion of persons on the physical, emotional and spiritual levels is a far cry from sexuality viewed as primarily a function to provide pleasure.

In addition, the biblical perspective views the essential complementarity and equal dignity of man and woman as a couple as enabling 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 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 cooperation with God to produce the new life of children as well as to care for and educate them.12

It is not because of a derided "biologism" that the church's teachers persist in emphasizing that both the intrinsic unitive and the procreative aspects of every marital act be respected and maintained. In analyzing sexual actions, church 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 environmentalists' demands that humans respect the integrity of the natural environmental ecosystem in the macrocosm.

However, since the attitudes and consequences of the sexual

12 Cf. Donald DeMarco, "Contraception and Trivialization of Sex," Lay Witness 20, 6 (July/August 1999), 34-36.
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**

The most common approach that biblical and moral theologians take in searching the Scriptures for evidence about human sexuality and marriage 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 been unable to get beyond a stalemate between the church's and the secular world's attitudes toward the meaning of sexuality.

Since the central controversies are not about the meaning of isolated biblical texts, but about a broader worldview or perspective on reality, their solution also has to be on the latter, more inclusive level. Let us search within the canonical biblical perspective to ascertain how human sexuality fits into the broader plan of the cosmos as created and put in order by God.\(^{13}\) Even this broader question 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

\(^{13}\) 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 previ-
the interpreter.¹⁴

One approach to choosing which biblical passages to emphasize in our limited space 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 like 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 potential debate has been initiated. Joining this conversation seems one fruitful entrance point into that biblical evidence.¹⁵

Some Key Biblical Passages Studied in *Theology of the Body*

**Bedrock Passage: “In the Beginning,” Genesis 1-3.**

In Matt 19:3-9, esp. v. 8, Jesus responds to a question about

ously 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).

¹⁴ In addition, 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. Cf. the competing approaches reported in William S. Kurz, S.J., “Ethical Actualization of Scripture: Approaches toward a Prolife Reading,” *Fides Quaerens Intellectum: A Journal of Theology, Philosophy & History* 1/1 (Summer 2001): 67-94.

why Moses allowed divorce: “For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so” (Matt 19:8 RSV, emphasis mine). This reference to a state in the beginning that differs from our present situation is quite significant for moral arguments about God’s will. In Matthew, Jesus refers to a state before the fall “in the beginning” that reflected the will of the divine creator more perfectly than extant conditions. That initial situation “in the beginning” undermines and overturns the casuistry and moral argumentation about sex in Jesus’ time (as well as that of today). It directs readers to the Genesis narratives of the creation and fall.

These accounts in Genesis 1-3 have been among the texts in the Bible most studied and meditated on 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. These teachings from Genesis 1-3 contribute to a “biblical worldview” that can provide the necessary biblical context and foundation for an adequate response to contemporary questions concerning the meaning and proper uses 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.

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


17 Cf. the approach in Kurz, “Ethical Actualization.”
with the biblical canon and with the reader's own human experience of and reflection on sexuality and marriage. Perhaps the most fundamental truth revealed in the beginning of Genesis is that God himself has created all material reality known as the world or cosmos (by his word alone, Ps 33:6) – God alone is the world's creator and sole origin.¹⁸ 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, because humans from the beginning were created by God "in his image" and were given dominion over all other material creatures, they thus 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").

We have seen, however, that from the beginning humans refused to be content with their exalted status as God's images, but wanted themselves, "like gods," 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. 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 coveted to know. In reality, the desire to know for themselves the meaning of good and evil proved equivalent to the

¹⁸ Several contemporary studies of Genesis and creation accounts imply that Genesis connotes more that God overcame chaos than that God created everything "ex nihilo." See, e.g., Löning, Karl and Erich Zenger, To Begin with, God Created... Biblical Theologies of Creation (trans. Omar Kaste; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical [Glazier], 2000). This article reads Genesis 1-3 not in reference to its Near Eastern context but in light of its canonical interpretation by the believing church throughout the ages. For an especially perceptive exegesis of Genesis 1, see Francis Martin, "Male and Female he created them: A summary of the teaching of Genesis chapter one," Communio 20/2 (Summer 1993): 240-65.
desire to decide for themselves what is good and what is evil. In other words, humans wanted to make their own laws unto themselves. Humans wanted to be autonomous, to be independent from God their creator. From the beginning, Genesis informs us, 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.

We have also seen that 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 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. 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. 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.

Put in philosophical terms, the primary question in Genesis 1-3 was whether human creatures would accept the status, unique among material creatures, offered them by their creator. They were to be God’s images ontologically, 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.

The alienation from God caused by this rejection distorted God’s original plan for human relationships, not only with him but also with one another and between male and female. Genesis 3 explains how the perverted relationships between men and women that are experienced in history came to be so warped (Gen 3:16). For instance, the two-in-one union divinely designed into the sexual differ-
entiation 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. In addition, instead of the unmitigated joy of mothering another human "child" of God, women have come to experience extreme and life-threatening labor pains (Gen 3:16).

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. 19

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 anthropon] according to God's image: male and female he made them. God's original blessing and mission for humans was to "increase and multiply [through their male and female sexual complementarity] and


Compare a strikingly similar perspective from 750 years earlier in St. Thomas Aquinas, _Summa Theologicae_, 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
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 commented: “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good’ (Gen 1:31 RSV, emphasis added).20

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” [adam, anthrōpon] from dust from the earth (adamah, that is, from pre-existent matter) and breathing into this earthy being the breath of life (Gen 2:7). 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. 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 and human loneliness, despite the presence of all the animals to which he is so superior. He needs completion in a companion, helper, and partner who is genuinely “like himself.”21

The imagery and symbols used to picture God as creating this

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.)

20 For a fine treatment of these biblical texts that is complementary to mine, see Michel Séguin, “The biblical foundations of the thought of John Paul II on human sexuality,” Communio 20/2 (Summer 1993) 266-89.

21 John Paul II, Theology of the Body, 35-37. In the light of this Genesis
suitable partner like Adam put special emphasis on the divinely intended unity and complementarity between male and female persons. 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). The expression of bone and flesh implies both kinship and covenant relationship, as when Laban said to his nephew Jacob, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" (Gen 29:14). Lest anyone miss the even more fundamental 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 the 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 as well as before God, 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. All these negative aspects of human sexuality originally be-

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.
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 provides ample evidence that human sexuality has indeed been grievously wounded. Therefore an adequate 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. Although we do not have space to discuss them, we need to recall also the relevance of 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. Pope John Paul emphasizes that much of the OT casuistry regarding sexual behavior and adultery already manifests compromises with the fallen condition of human sexuality, such as polygamy. 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 recollect Jesus' revelation of the creator's original plan for human sexuality.

23 Theology of the Body, 105, 133-135. For example, the patriarchal and royal narratives exhibit a widespread toleration of polygamy, which certainly 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.traditional... found in other vice lists..."
Despite this New Testament (NT) emphasis on God’s original and exalted plan for human sexuality, biblical challenges against negative uses of sexuality also carry over into the NT. One basic but important category of NT 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 named vices, 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 comparable second list of vices (also accompanied by Paul’s 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 arsenokoitaï). 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 NT vice lists have sometimes failed 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. 24 It is important to note that even though most such vice lists are conventional, they are customarily edited to make them in fact more

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24 Compare Victor Paul Furnish, II Corinthians (AB 32A; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984) 567-568, who begins by warning readers “not to
suitable for their particular NT context. One must also be wary of the impression that these lists might be mere rhetorical “throwaways.” They are basic 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 NT Christians maintained and repeated OT condemnations of such behavior, often simply through listing types of sinful actions.

Matthew 5 and the Sixth Commandment.

Reflection on NT perspectives relevant to the sexual revolution must not overlook the revolutionary interiorizing principle from the Sermon on the Mount. “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 interiorizing interpretation attributed to Jesus himself. The Sermon on the Mount rejects not only those actions forbidden by the ten commandments (such as murder or adultery), but also the interior attitudes, passions and vices that lead to them (such as anger and lust). Matthew makes it clear that 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 also condemned.

It is of course this attitude of defending purity and disapproving of even interior responses to sexual lust that has been a prime traditional... found in other vice lists...”(567). However, he goes on to acknowledge that these vices are in fact applicable to Paul’s Corinthian address­ees (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 (568). Yet compare the first letter, 1 Cor 6:9-10, quoted above.
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. The 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 these statements reflect profoundly on how lust demeans one's sexual partner. They describe how one 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, on multiple occasions I have personally heard women who had switched off the pill complain about previously "having felt used by her 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 principal 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.²⁵

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 “in vitro” 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 men trying to be as gods, deciding

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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 how Genesis 2 had portrayed God 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.26

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. That is, contracep-

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tion blocks that characteristic of the spouse’s self that has the potential to lead to new life and offspring. In addition, the psychological and practical link between contraception and abortion becomes evident when couples whose contraception failed so frequently resort to abortion as the ultimate rejection of their fertility. Scripture reserves the taking of innocent human life to God alone (e.g., Gen 9:6). Rejecting one’s innate fertility or killing the child that results from it are also ways of trying “to be as God.”

This brief overview of some key biblical passages about the meaning of the human person and of human sexuality and what the Bible considers an appropriate vs. a lustful exercise of sexuality has provided some context for considering controversies not explicitly treated in Scripture. Because recent understanding of the sexual revolution and the patterns and cycles of human fertility cannot be expected to be brought up in the Bible, there was little point in searching for “proof texts” that might be somehow relevant to these contemporary questions. Nevertheless, we have found in biblical revelation a meaningful context and therefore significant direction for dealing with even current questions regarding human sexuality.

In God’s plan for creation of humans in the image of God (as male and female) “in the beginning” in Genesis, we found a setting within which to consider how we can with our God-given intellect and will cooperate rationally with the designs of sexuality that are built into our human nature. Especially germane was the biblical contrast between the goodness of human sexuality as God created it in the beginning and its later wounded condition after humans tried to be as gods, autonomously determining for themselves what is good and what is evil regarding their sexuality.

This contrast provided special perspective into the falsehoods about and rebellion against our creator’s plan for human sexuality that are at the heart of the sexual revolution. For until we can distinguish and acknowledge the false assumptions and deceptions of the sexual revolution, its presuppositions for solving contemporary problems about human sexuality and fertility will continue to falsify our solutions. Within the biblical perspective on human sexuality, as created
“very good” and as oriented toward spouses and family, we found a more positive context in which to reflect on how humans can cooperate with God’s plan for human fertility. To spell out the details of such cooperation, however, would require another article at least as long as this one.

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