AUGUSTINE'S MATURE POSITION
IN THE ANTI-PELAGIAN WRITINGS

For most of the last two decades of his life, Augustine engaged in debate with various followers of Pelagius. Pelagius, alarmed at the laxity of Christians who excused their sinful behavior on the grounds of their "weakness" and the fatalistic consequences being drawn from the notion of an inherited sin, staunchly upheld the freedom of the human will to choose good as well as evil. According to Pelagius, God has created our natures as good, with the mental and dispositional capacities enabling us to lead righteous lives; He had also instructed us in His laws and given us examples of holy people (including Jesus) in Scripture, and to these aids were added the cleansing power of Baptism that recreates us as "new people." Against Pelagius and his followers, Augustine increasingly emphasized the will's bondage to sin that has been the human condition since the first trespass in Eden. According to Augustine, the guilt of that sin was transmitted to all fetuses through the mechanism of the sinful lust that now spurs and accompanies sexual intercourse—whether those sex acts are performed inside or outside of marriage, whether procreation is intended or not. All children born since the time of Adam and Eve come into the world doomed to death, unable to choose the good without special assistance from God, and with sexual desires that do not obey the governance of the mind and will. Thus the interpretation of Genesis 1-3 was of special importance for Augustine in his explication of how Original Sin came to infect the human race.

In Book 14 of the City of God, composed around 418–420, Augustine posits that, if Adam and Eve had not sinned in Eden, they would have engaged in sexual intercourse for the procreation of children while enjoying the blessings of Paradise; in this, he sets himself against the teachings of other, more ascetically-minded Church Fathers who did not envision that sexual relations could ever have taken place in a sinless Eden. In the following passages from the City of God 14, Augustine explains why the sexual act would have been deemed good if the first couple had not sinned, and speculates on how it would have been performed.1

CHAPTER 10

It is quite a different question, and one that deserves attention, whether, even before there was any sin, the first man, or rather our first parents—since there was a marriage of two experienced any of those passions in their animal body from which we shall be free in our spiritual bodies, once all sin has been purged and brought to an end. If they did, how could they have been perfectly happy in that marvelous place called Paradise? . . .

The love of our first parents for God was perfectly serene and their mutual affection was that of a true and faithful married couple. And their love brought them immense joy since the object of their love was always theirs to enjoy. There was a calm turning away from sin which, so long as it lasted, kept evil of every other kind from saddening their lives....
Now, this happiness of our first parents, undisturbed by any passion and undiminished by any pain, is the measure of the happiness which the entire human race would have enjoyed if Adam and Eve had not been guilty of the evil which they have transmitted to posterity or if no one of their descendants had committed any wickedness worthy of damnation. And this happiness would have continued until, in virtue of God's blessing, "Be fruitful and multiply," the number of the elect had been completed; after which, another even more perfect happiness was to be given, like that which the blessed angels enjoy, a happiness which would have excluded even the possibility of sin or of death, so that the saints would have lived on earth just as exempt from all labor, pain, and death as will now be their lot to live only after all such things have been suffered and they shall be clothed with incorruptible bodies in the final resurrection.

*Augustine depicts the serpent's approach to Eve that initiated sin:*

CHAPTER 11

This *Lucifer*, striving to insinuate his sly seductions into the minds of man whose fidelity he envied, since he himself had fallen, chose for his spokesman a serpent in the terrestrial Paradise, where all the animals of earth were living in harmless subjection to Adam and Eve. It was suited for the task because it was a slimy and slippery beast that could slither and twist on its tortuous way. So, subjecting it to his diabolical design by the powerful presence of his angelic nature and misusing it as his instrument, he, at first, parleyed cunningly with the woman as with the weaker part of that human society, hoping gradually to gain the whole. He assumed that a man is less gullible and can be more easily tricked into following a bad example than into making a mistake himself. This was the case with Aaron. He did not consent to the making of idols for his erring people, but he gave an unwilling assent when he was asked by the people to do so; and it is not to be thought that Solomon was deceived into believing in the worship of idols, but was merely won over to this sacrilege by feminine flattery. So, too, we must believe that Adam transgressed the law of God, not because he was deceived into believing that the lie was true, but because in obedience to a social compulsion he yielded to Eve, as husband to wife, as the only man in the world to the only woman. It was not without reason that the Apostle wrote, "Adam was not deceived but the woman was deceived." He means, no doubt, that Eve accepted the serpent's word as true, whereas Adam refused to be separated from his partner even in a union of sin-not, of course, that he was, on that account, any less guilty, since he sinned knowingly and deliberately. . . .

To summarize briefly: though not equally deceived by believing the serpent, they equally sinned and were caught and ensnared by the Devil.

*According to Augustine, the first sin changed human nature forever. One result of the sin was our inability to control our sexual organs, as manifested both in raging lust and in unhappy impotence:*

CHAPTER 16
There are, then, many kinds of lusts for this or that, but when the word is used by itself without specification it suggests to most people the lust for sexual excitement. Such lust does not merely invade the whole body and outward members; it takes such complete and passionate possession of the whole man, both physically and emotionally, that what results is the keenest of all pleasures on the level of sensation; and, at the crisis of excitement, it practically paralyzes all power of deliberate thought.

This is so true that it creates a problem for every lover of wisdom and holy joys who is both committed to a married life and also conscious of the apostolic ideal, that everyone should "learn how to possess his vessel in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God." Any such person would prefer, if this were possible, to beget his children without suffering this passion. He could wish that, just as all his other members obey his reason in the performance of their appointed tasks, so the organs of parenthood, too, might function in obedience to the orders of will and not be excited by the ardors of lust.

Curiously enough, not even those who love this pleasure most—whether legitimately or illegitimately indulged—can control their own indulgences. Sometimes, their lust is most importunate when they least desire it; at other times, the feelings fail them when they crave them most, their bodies remaining frigid when lust is blazing in their souls. And so, strangely, lust serves neither the will to generate, nor lust for its own source; and the very passion that so often joins forces to resist the soul is sometimes so divided against itself that, after it has roused the soul to passion, it refuses to awaken the feelings of the flesh.

Thus, feelings of shame about our sexual organs, as well as the desire for privacy at the moment of marital intercourse, testify to the presence of Original Sin's effects even among baptized Christians. Augustine imagines that the sexual relation of Adam and Eve in Eden, had they remained sinless, would have been quite different:

CHAPTER 21

No one, then, should dream of believing that the kind of lust which made the married couple in the Garden ashamed of their nakedness was meant to be the only means of fulfilling the command which God gave when He “blessed them, saying: ‘Increase and multiply, and fill the earth.’” The fact is that this passion had no place before they sinned; it was only after the fall, when their nature had lost its power to exact obedience from the sexual organs, that they fell and noticed the loss and, being ashamed of their lust, covered these unruly members. But God's blessings on their marriage, with the command to increase and multiply and fill the earth, was given before the fall. The blessing remained even when they had sinned, because it was a token that the begetting of children is a part of the glory of marriage and has nothing to do with the penalty for sin.

Rejecting an allegorical interpretation of the words "male" and "female" as used in the creation story, Augustine explains how he imagines the physical act of sexual intercourse would have occurred in Eden if Adam and Eve had not sinned:

CHAPTER 24
In Paradise, then, generative seed would have been sown by the husband and the wife would have conceived as need required, and all would have been achieved by deliberate choice and not by uncontrollable lust. After all, it is not only our hands and fingers, feet and toes, made up of joints and bones that we move at will, but we can also control the flexing and stiffening of muscles and nerves, as when we voluntarily wrinkle our face or pout with our lips. So, too, with the lungs, which are the most delicate of human organs next to the brain, and need the protection of a wall of ribs. Whether we inhale or exhale or make or modify sounds as in puffing, panting, talking, shouting and singing, the lungs obey our will as readily as the bellows obey a blacksmith or an organist. . . . Nor is there any reason why man should not have had control even over those lowly organs which have been so rebellious ever since man's own rebellion against God. As far as God is concerned, there was no difficulty in making men in such a way that organs which are now excited only by lust could have been completely controlled by deliberate choice....

CHAPTER 26

Now, the point about Eden was that a man could live there as a man longs to live, but only so long as he longed to live as God willed him to live. Man in Eden lived in the enjoyment of God and he was good by a communication of the goodness of God. His life was free from want, and he was free to prolong his life as long as he chose. There were food and drink to keep away hunger and thirst and the tree of life to stave off death from senescence. There was not a sign or a seed of decay in man's body that could be a source of any physical pain. Not a sickness assailed him from within, and he feared no harm from without. His body was perfectly healthy and his soul completely at peace. And as in Eden itself there was never a day too hot or too cold, so in Adam, who lived there, no fear or desire was ever so passionate as to worry his will. Of sorrows there was none at all and of joys none that was vain, although a perpetual joy that was genuine flowed from the presence of God, because God was loved with a "charity from a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned."¹⁰ Family affection was ensured by purity of love; body and mind worked in perfect accord; and there was an effortless observance of the law of God. Finally, neither leisure nor labor had ever to suffer from boredom or sloth.

How in the world, then, can any one believe that, in a life so happy and with men so blessed, parenthood was impossible without the passion of lust? Surely, every member of the body was equally submissive to the mind and, surely, a man and his wife could play their active and passive roles in the drama of conception without the lecherous promptings of lust, with perfect serenity of soul and with no sense of disintegration between body and soul. Merely because we have no present experience to prove it, we have no right to reject the possibility that, at a time when there was no unruly lust to excite the organs of generation and when all that was needed was done by deliberate choice, the seminal flow could have reached the womb with as little rupture of the hymen and by the same vaginal ducts as is at present the case, in reverse, with the menstrual flux. And just as the maturity of the fetus could have brought the child to birth without the moanings of the mother in pain, so could connection and conception have occurred by a mutually deliberate union unhurried by the hunger of lust.

Perhaps these matters are somewhat too delicate for further discussion. It must suffice to have done the best that I could to suggest what was possible in the Garden of Eden, before there was any need for the reins of reticence to bridle a discussion like this. However, as things now are, the demands of delicacy are more imperative than those of discussion. The trouble with the
hypothesis of a passionless procreation controlled by will, as I am here suggesting it, is that it has never been verified in experience, not even in the experience of those who could have proved that it was possible. Actually, they sinned too soon and brought on themselves exile from Eden. Hence, today it is practically impossible even to discuss the hypothesis of voluntary control without the imagination being filled with the realities of rebellious lust. It is this last fact which explains my reticence; not, certainly, any lack of proof for the conclusion my mind has reached.

Augustine's interest in promoting a moderate form of asceticism also extended to the period of his anti-Pelagian writings. In 414, for example, he wrote a treatise for a wealthy and aristocratic widow, Juliana, counseling her not to remarry. A position that he had developed in arguing against Manichean detractors of Scripture, namely, that the "difference of times" allowed for the variation in sexual and marital standards appropriate to the Old Testament heroes and to Christians in the present era, is here again rehearsed. Most importantly, Augustine's past concerns intersect in this treatise with his more recent need to refute Pelagian teaching. Since Juliana and her family enjoyed a friendly relationship with Pelagius, Augustine wished to warn her, albeit discreetly, not to accept Pelagius' views concerning the self-sufficiency of the human will for the accomplishment of virtuous behavior. Thus he reminds Juliana that the ability to lead a chaste life is always a gift of God, not the result of human effort alone. Augustine's advice to Juliana is contained in his treatise, The Excellence of Widowhood. Some passages from that work are included here:

CHAPTER 4

You see from the foregoing that conjugal chastity and fidelity to the bond of Christian marriage is a gift, and that this gift is from God, so that if the concupiscence of the flesh in wedlock exceeds to some extent the measure required for the procreation of children, this is not an evil of the married state, but is venial because of the good of marriage. When the Apostle declares: "But this I say by way of concession, not by way of commandment," he is not referring to the union contracted for the procreation of children, nor to the faith of conjugal chastity, nor to the sacrament of matrimony, indissoluble as long as both partners live, all of which are good, but to that inordinate gratification of the senses among married persons, which is due to their infirmity and which is condoned by the intervention of the good proper to marriage. Likewise, when he says: "A woman is bound as long as her husband is alive, but if her husband dies, she is free. Let her marry whom she pleases, only let it be in the Lord. But she will be more blessed, in my judgment, if she remains as she is," he clearly shows that, even when a Christian woman marries again after the death of her husband, she is blessed in the Lord, but that a widow is more blessed in the same Lord; that is to say, if I may make use of the examples as well as the words of the Scriptures, Ruth was blessed, but Anna was more blessed.

CHAPTER 7

The role of holy women was different in the times of the Prophets. Obedience, not concupiscence, impelled women to marry for the propagation of the People of God, among whom the forerunners of Christ were sent in advance. For, this People, by the things that
happened to them as a type, whether they recognized these types or not, were indeed the prophet of Christ, from whom Christ was to take flesh. Hence, in order that this race might be multiplied, the man who did not raise up seed in Israel was held accursed by sentence of the law. That is why holy women were animated by the pious desire of offspring rather than by concupiscence; we may rightly believe that they would not have sought the marriage union if issue could have been obtained in any other way. Men were permitted to have several living wives. That provision for the propagation of the race, and not concupiscence of the flesh, was the reason for this custom is evident from the fact that, though holy men might have several wives, holy women were not allowed to be united with several husbands at the same time, for it was considered shameful for them to seek unions that would not render them more fruitful.

CHAPTER 8
(11) As for you, you both have children and live in that end of the world when the time has already come not "to scatter stones, but to gather; not to embrace but to refrain from embraces"—when the Apostle cries out: "But this I say, brethren, the time is short; it remains that those who have wives be as if they had none.'" Surely, if you had sought a second marriage, it would not have been in obedience to a prophecy or a law, or even the desire of the flesh for offspring, but merely a sign of incontinence. You would have followed the advice of the Apostle, when, after having said: "It is good for them if they so remain, even as I," he immediately added: "But if they do not have self-control, let them marry, for I prefer them to marry rather than to burn." He said this for the benefit of those whom the evil of unbridled lust might lead into criminal indulgence if it were not restrained by honorable marriage. But, thanks to the Lord, you have brought into the world what you did not wish to be, and the virginity of your daughter has compensated for the loss of your own virginity. A careful inquiry into Christian doctrine reveals that in these our times first marriages should be rejected if incontinence is not an impediment. . . . Accordingly, let those who do not have self-control marry rather than embrace the profession of continence, rather than pledge themselves by vow to God, for, if they do not keep their promise made to God, they will be deserving of just condemnation. . . . The good of marriage is always a good, but in former times among the People of God it was an act of obedience to law; now, it is a remedy for infirmity and for some a solace for their human nature. The desire to have offspring, not through promiscuous unions as among animals, but within the bonds of honorable marriage, is a human instinct that is deserving of no blame. Nevertheless, the Christian soul, intent upon heavenly things, attains greater merit by rising above this inclination and keeping it in subjection.

Julian of Eclanum, Augustine's last major Pelagian opponent, pressed home the negative implications of Augustine's position on Original Sin, namely, that Augustine's view of the sexual transmission of Original Sin implied that marriage was evil. For Julian, sexual desire was part of created human nature and, when expressed in a lawful marriage, should be seen as good. To him, Augustine's position sounded outrightly "Manichean," as if God's creation of two sexes were a mistake, as if reproduction were an evil, as if marriage had been invented by the devil, as if the sexual act of a married couple were tantamount to the "murder" of their offspring.
by its necessary imprinting on them of the sin that would lead to their damnation. In response to Julian's critique and taunts, Augustine formulated his fullest statement on Original Sin, lust, the goodness of marriage and reproduction, and the justice of God in his damning and saving activities. Augustine wished to stress that, although fetuses are doomed because of their infection with Original Sin, the saving power of God reached even to babies: God condemned, but God also saved. Christian parents do not have the ability to pass on to their children at the time of conception their own Christian regeneration, but only their old, unredeemed nature; thus God's unmerited grace must come anew to every child who is to receive Christian salvation. God has indeed organized the world in a way that is both just and good, Augustine argued. In Against Julian, dated to 421-422, he sets forth these positions. The "you" whom Augustine addresses is Julian," to whose now-lost book To Turbantius he responds.

BOOK THREE, CHAPTER 16

You say: "The reason for the existence of the sexes is the union of bodies," and you want me to concede this to you. I do concede it. You continue: "If the union of bodies is always evil, the condition of bodies in the different sexes is a deformity." If this argument were good, it would not disturb me, for I do not say that nuptial union-that is, union for the purpose of procreating-is evil, but even say it is good. . . . If you say that, even when there is adultery, the union is good in itself, since it is natural, but adulterers use it evilly, why will you not acknowledge that in the same way lust can be evil, yet the married may nevertheless use it well for the purpose of begetting children? Will you assert there can be evil use of good, but there cannot be good use of evil? . . . .

BOOK THREE, CHAPTER 21

(43) In what do your "glorious combats" of the holy virgins consist, except that they are not conquered by evil, but conquer the evil in good? I prefer to call these combats more glorious, not merely glorious, for conjugal chastity also has its victory, although lesser, from the subjugation of this evil. It, too, combats carnal concupiscence lest it exceed the proprieties of the marriage bed; it combats lest concupiscence break into the time agreed upon by the spouses for prayer. If this conjugal chastity possesses such great power and is so great a gift from God, that it does what the matrimonial code prescribes, it combats in even more valiant fashion in regard to the act of conjugal union, lest there be indulgence beyond what suffices for generating offspring. Such chastity abstains during menstruation and pregnancy, nor has it union with one no longer able to conceive on account of age. And the desire for union does not prevail, but ceases when there is no prospect of generation. But if an act is done in regard to the spouse, not contrary to nature, yet passing beyond the limit of the matrimonial code, then, according to the Apostle, it is something pardonable. . . .

BOOK THREE, CHAPTER 22

(51) Since these things are so, we see that marriage, as marriage, is good, and man, be he born of marriage or of adultery, is good in so far as he is man, because, in so far as he is a man, he is the work of God; yet, because generated with and from the evil which conjugal chastity uses well, it is necessary that he be freed from the bond of this evil by regeneration.
Why do you ask where original sin is, when the lust against which you fight in yourself speaks to you more eloquently than you yourself speak when you praise it?

BOOK FOUR, CHAPTER 4

(34) I did not write the words you quote from me, saying: "The reason children are under the power of the Devil is that they are born of the union of bodies." To say "who are born of the union of the bodies" is not the same as to say "because they are born of the union of the bodies." The cause of the evil here is not their being born of the union of bodies, since, even if human nature had not been vitiated by the sin of the first man, children could not have been generated except from the union of bodies. The reason those born of the union of bodies are under the power of the Devil before they are reborn through the Spirit is that they are born through that concupiscence by which the flesh lusts against the spirit and forces the spirit to lust against the flesh. 48

BOOK FOUR, CHAPTER 5

(35) You argue against my words at length: "Because we are made up of elements of unequal goodness, the soul ought to rule over the body. The one we have in common with the gods; the other, with the beasts. Therefore, that which is better, the soul endowed with virtue, should rule both the members of the body and its desires." You fail to observe that desires are not ruled as members are. Desires are evils which we restrain by reason and fight against with our mind; members are goods which we move by the decision of the will, with the exception of the reproductive members, although they also are the work of God and are good. They are called pudenda because lust has greater power to move them than reason, although we do not permit them to commit the acts to which they urge us, since we can easily control the other members. But, when does a man use his good members badly except when he consents to the evil desires within him? Of these desires, lust is baser than others, and if not resisted it commits horrible impurities. Conjugal modesty alone uses this evil well. This lust is not an evil in beasts, because in them it does not war against reason, which they lack. Why do you not believe that it could have been divinely granted to those in Paradise before there was sin that they might without any lust procreate children by tranquil action and the union or intercourse of the members of the body; or, at least, that lust in them was such that its action neither preceded nor exceeded the will? . . .

BOOK FOUR, CHAPTER

(4g) Who says: "Evil exists in the conjugal members," when marriage uses well the evil of concupiscence for the purpose of propagating children? This concupiscence would not be an evil if it were moved only to lawful union for the sole purpose of generating; but, as it is, conjugal modesty, resisting it, becomes the limit of evil and is therefore a good. Your slander, that "Its crime goes unpunished because of religion," is false because no crime is committed when someone, through a good coming from faith, uses well the evil of lust. Nor can it be said here, as you think: "Let us do evil that good may come from it; "49 because there is no evil in marriage as marriage. In those who were begotten by parents, the evil which marriage did not produce in them, but only discovered there, does not belong to marriage itself. In the case of the first couple, who had no parents, the discordant evil of carnal concupiscence which marriage uses well was the result of sin, and not of marriage, which does not deserve
condemnation from that evil. Why do you ask whether I should call the pleasure of intercourse of Christian spouses modesty or immodesty? Hear my answer: Not the pleasure, but the good use of that evil, is called modesty, and, because of the good use, the evil itself cannot be called immodesty. Immodesty is the shameful use of that same evil, just as virginal modesty is the refraining from using it; therefore, without detriment to conjugal modesty, evil is contracted from evil in birth, and it is to be purged in rebirth.

BOOK FIVE, CHAPTER 12

(46) . . . Nevertheless, because human soundness agrees that the motive in taking a wife is the procreation of offspring, regardless of how weakness yields to lust, I note, in addition to the faithfulness which the married owe to each other so that there be no adultery, and the offspring, for whose generation the two sexes are to be united, that a third good, which seems to me to be a sacrament, should exist in the married, above all in those who belong to the people of God, so that there be no divorce from a wife who cannot bear, and that a man not wishing to beget more children give not his wife to another for begetting, as Cato is said to have done. 53 This is why I said the full number of the three goods of marriage is found in what I declared by the Gospel was a marriage: "Faithfulness, because no adultery; offspring, our Lord Christ; and sacrament, because no divorce." And thus my statement that the full number of the goods of marriage, that is, this threefold good, was fulfilled in the parents of Christ does not, as you think, imply I meant to say that whatever is otherwise is evil. I say that there is another way in which marriage is good when offspring can be procreated only through intercourse. If there were another way to procreate, yet the spouses had intercourse, then they evidently must have yielded to lust, and made evil use of evil. But, since the two sexes were purposely instituted, man can be born only from their union, and thus spouses by their union for this purpose make good use of that evil; if, however, they seek pleasure from lust, this use is excusably evil.

BOOK FIVE, CHAPTER 15

(54) When we consider the passing of original sin to all men, we see that because it passes by means of the concupiscence of the flesh, it could not have passed to flesh that a virgin conceived, not through concupiscence. You quote from another book I wrote to Marcellinus, of holy memory, and you attribute to me the statement: "All who were to come from this stock Adam infected in himself." Christ did not come into His mother's womb thence, whence Adam infected all. I shall repeat the most important parts of my argument, since you did not wish to quote them, for reasons that will soon become clear. I said: "By this hidden corruption, that is, his carnal concupiscence, he infected in himself all who were to come from his stock." 57 Thus, he did not infect flesh in whose conception this corruption was not present. The flesh of Christ received mortality from the mortality of His mother's body, because it found her body mortal; it did not contract the taint of original sin, because it did not find the concupiscence of one carnally seminating. But, if He had received only the substance of the flesh from His mother, and not mortality, His flesh not only could not have been sinful flesh; it could not have been the likeness of sinful flesh.
(62) You say: "Marriage is nothing else but the union of bodies." . . . It would be more tolerable if you said marriage is not begun except through the union of bodies, because men take wives for the purpose of procreating children, and this cannot be done in any other way. But the union of bodies for the purpose of procreation would have taken place differently if there had been no sin; God forbid we think that that most honest happiness in Paradise always obeyed an aroused lust, and that that peace of soul and body held a cause of internal warfare in the first nature of man. If there was no need either to serve lust or to war against it, then either lust did not exist there or was not such as it is now, for at the present time whoever does not wish to serve lust must war against it; whoever neglects the fight must serve it. Of the two, the one, though praiseworthy, is an affliction; the other is base and wretched. In this world, then, one of these is necessary for the chaste, but in Paradise both were unknown to the blessed.

One of the newly-discovered letters of Augustine gives a brief summary of his mature anti-Pelagian views on the topics of Original Sin and lust. Here, in Epistle 6*, dated to around 424, he writes to bishop Atticus of Constantinople. The letter shows that, under fire from his Pelagian critics, Augustine had developed a more nuanced position on these issues: he distinguishes between a lawful concupiscence in marriage and "the concupiscence of the flesh," and he concedes that there might have been a sinless sexual desire in Eden if the "Fall" had not occurred. 60

(3) But that they also slander Catholics is no surprise—if they by this means strive to counter the things [that] are said to prove wrong their poisonous teachings. For what Catholic so defends the right faith against them that he condemns marriage, which the Maker and Creator of the world blessed? What Catholic would call the carnal desire present in marriage the work of the devil, since by means of it the human race would have been propagated even if no one had sinned, in order that the blessing be fulfilled: "Increase and multiply"? By the sin of that man in whom all have sinned, this blessing has not lost the effect of its goodness in that clear, marvelous and praiseworthy fecundity of nature which is there for all to see. What Catholic does not proclaim the works of God in every creature of all soul and flesh and in contemplating them does not burst forth in a hymn to the Creator who was active, not only before the sin, but even now does all good things well?

(4) But they with perverse reasoning confuse with persistent blindness those evils which by reason of sin befall nature with those things that are naturally good, thus praising the Creator of human beings in such a way that they deny that little children need a savior, as if they have nothing evil—this is their most damnable teaching; and they think they can strengthen this vile error by the praise of marriage, saying that marriage is condemned, if what is born of marriage is condemned, unless it is reborn. For they do not see that the good of marriage is one thing, from which good marriage has not fallen away even after sin; but original sin is something else which marriage has not caused and does not cause now, but finds already a fact and uses it well when it does not do with it whatever it likes, but only what is permitted which. But these people refuse to consider this, since they have been obsessed with this error, which they prefer to defend rather than to avoid.

(5) Because of this error they do not distinguish the concupiscence associated with marriage, i.e. the concupiscence of conjugal purity, concupiscence for the legitimate engendering of children, or the concupiscence of the social bond by which each sex is tied to the other, from
concupiscence of the flesh which hankers after the illicit as well as the licit indifferently and through the concupiscence of marriage which uses it well is restrained from the illicit and permitted only the licit. All chastity fights against this force which wars against the law of the mind, both of spouses that they may make good use of it, and of the continent and of holy virgins that they in a better and more glorious way may not make use of it at all. Not distinguishing this concupiscence of the flesh, therefore, in which the sole desire is for sexual relations, from the concupiscence of marriage in which there is the duty of engendering, they most brazenly praise the former, concerning which the first human beings were ashamed, when they covered with fig leaves those organs which before the sin had not been objects of shame; for they were naked and unashamed so that we may understand that this movement by they were put to shame was conceived in human nature at the same time as death. For then they had a reason for shame, when they also began to have the necessity of dying. They proclaim with such great praises that this concupiscence of the flesh must be prudently and soberly distinguished from the concupiscence involved in marriage so that they think that, even if no one had sinned in paradise, without it they were not able to procreate children in the body of this life just as now they are not procreated without it in the body of this death, from which the Apostle longs to be freed through Jesus Christ.

(6) . . . For if that concupiscence of the flesh existed in paradise before the sin, which we know has so disordered a movement that by the restraints of chastity it must be kept back from all usage, or turned by the good of marriage to a good usage, although it is in itself evil, undoubtedly even in that place of such great blessedness there would be two alternatives: either it would be submitted to shamefully, if as many times as there was the motion, so often would he have intercourse with his wife with no need of begetting children, but in order that the appetite for pleasure be gratified, even if his wife were already pregnant; or it must be fought against by the strength of abstinence lest he be dragged down to such filthy things. Let them choose which of these two pleases them. For if the lust of the flesh was submitted to, rather than made to submit, then there was no moral freedom there; if, however, it was forced to submit lest he be found to submit to it, then there was no calm and peaceful bliss. No matter which one of these is chosen, the happy beauty or the beautiful happiness of paradise is abandoned.

Thus Augustine's developed sexual ethic, which was crucial for all later Catholic thinking on marriage and reproduction, was stimulated by his responses to the opponents he confronted: Manicheans, extreme ascetics as well as anti-ascetics, and Pelagians. He sought to develop a sexual and marital ethic that praised the goodness of creation and of reproduction, while upholding the sinfulness of sexual lust. Moreover, marriage involved more than procreation and the containment of lust, for Augustine: it involved a partnership of faithful spouses in a "sacramental bond" that neither adultery nor separation could break. In his time, he sought to combat heretical opinions-whether of the Manicheans or of the Pelagians-while maintaining a moderate stance on sexual and marital issues within the atmosphere of raging debates over asceticism in his era. Especially in his later years, he was concerned to insist on the radical nature of human sinfulness, even while he praised the goodness of human creation and God's justice in his dealings with it. Among our contemporaries, some may laud Augustine's efforts and others may decry them: all,
however, must concede his importance in the development of Christian views on marriage, reproduction, and human sexuality.