

Brownson's Hermeneutic and its Implications

Introductory Remarks

Reading James Brownson's book¹ one cannot but be struck by its accessibility and persistent persuasiveness. Entering into the method, content and flow of the arguments one is impressed, even at times gripped by a certain internal logic and beauty of consistency. It is not difficult to see why one would be taken by the charming simplicity and yet profundity of style and substance of his book. However, my question is, in spite of its charm and persuasiveness, does it correspond to a faithful understanding of Scripture that is authoritative, clear and sufficient in what it teaches? My short answer to this question is, that the hermeneutic informing his book, and the implications of this hermeneutic, are highly problematic. What is more, I believe Brownson's book will shake the foundations of faith and of the church in a revolutionary way and steer her in a direction of lawlessness.

Brownson's De-ontologizing Hermeneutic and its Problematic Implications

Some General Observations First

In a meet the author event² James Brownson suggested that his hermeneutic seeks to unearth, not what the text says primarily, but what it means. The latter is what is ultimately important for him and needs to guide us in understanding and living. The issue is thus clearly an hermeneutic one.³ In his book he seeks to do this by unearthing a moral logic⁴ that undergirds and informs central texts that speak about the issue of homosexuality, that is, the Bible's belief and practice concerning it.

The first general observation I will make is that I believe that Brownson's work represents an attempt at 'de-ontologizing,' or 'de-essentializing,' biblical texts, that is, in terms of their interpretation and their practical implications.⁵ Given this observation, the challenge that

¹ James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013).

² See, "James V. Brownson at Eerdmans Bookstore," www.youtube.com.

³ Under the subtitle, *Necessity of Interpretation*, Brownson states, "These deeper differences are the focus of this book: they are not so much disagreements about what the biblical texts *says* (though such disagreements do occur at a few points, and I will explore them when they occur), but primarily disagreements about what the biblical text *means* for Christians today. They are disagreements over how Scripture is to be interpreted." Brownson, 5.

⁴ The concept of moral logic he describes as follows, "We must discern the deeper and more comprehensive moral logic that undergirds the specific commands, prohibitions, and examples of the biblical text. We do not interpret rightly any single passage of Scripture until we locate the text within this larger fabric of meaning in Scripture as a whole." *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵ In an exchange on dr. Brownson's own blog devoted to this issue, between himself and myself, Brownson takes issue with my use of the word 'de-ontologizing.' He would rather like to describe what he is doing as an open and honest treating of some fundamental texts with regards to homosexuality. His approach could be considered a thorough application of the *Sola Scriptura*

Brownson presents to the reader is the invitation to join him in reading and (re) interpreting the central texts and contexts concerning homosexuality. Let me be a bit more specific.

I believe the thrust of the arguments of Brownson is to move away from an interpretation of Scripture in regards to homosexuality as being rooted in a creational-biological, historical-ontological interpretation of the Scriptures. Brownson does not see such a framework as a normative basis for understanding and expressing our sexuality.

After having 'de-ontologized' (at least as normative) the basis and practice of human sexuality, Brownson's primary emphasis then shifts to the *how* of our sexual behavior, or the ethics of it. For example, that generally any sexuality, or sexual act should not be oppressive, abusive, polygamous, unfaithful, uncontrolled, etc.⁶ This in turn applies to both the normal heterosexual couples and to the less common, but not necessarily forbidden, homosexual faithful relationships. Now this, of course, also involves a biological-ontological reality, however not as starting point (as somehow normative), but as target (as object and subject of faithfulness and love).⁷ Brownson expresses this in terms of the primacy of the personal (re-defined as individual disposition), the social and then also the biological, and that more or less in that order of importance.⁸ The question, however, is, "is his underlying hermeneutic and its application for such a re-framing, or what I call a de-ontologizing hermeneutic and shift in interpreting the central passages concerning homosexuality, correct, and/or sustainable?"

To answer that question let me first consider, in a short analysis, Brownson's interpretation of Romans 1:24-27. Following I will attempt to analyse and critique, what I consider the centre of his argumentation, Brownson's de-ontologizing hermeneutic of Genesis 2:24 in its context and its implications. Finally I will present my own critical observations.

principle. What I have in mind, however, is the overall hermeneutic of his work, and subsequently his exegesis as a result of that, which may, or may not be a faithful interpretation of the passages in question. Later on in this article I will look, therefore, at some of his more specific interpretations of some central passages by which he seeks to support his arguments with respect to the issue of homosexuality.

⁶ This becomes especially clear when Brownson talks about what 'unnatural' presumably meant in the ancient world. He suggests that, ". . . "unnatural" in the ancient world connoted a wider range of sexual misbehaviour than same-sex eroticism alone. This also suggests that the violation of "gender complementarity" may not stand at the heart of the claim that sexual behaviors are "unnatural," as traditionalists often claim, since some of these "unnatural" behaviors may also occur in sexual relations between men and women." Brownson, 225.

⁷ Here a reversal of sorts takes place. More about this later.

⁸ He writes, "The Biblical vision of a *new* creation invites us to imagine what living into a deeper vision of "nature" as the convergence of individual disposition, social order, and the physical world might look like, under the guidance and the power of the Spirit of God. This might also entail the cultivation of a vision for how consecrated and committed gay and lesbian relationships might fit into such a new order." Brownson, 255.

Romans 1

Taking Romans 1: 22-27 as first passage for consideration let me first mention some possible points of agreement. I believe it is exegetically correct to state that idolatry and sexual immorality are closely connected. Paul points out in fact, and I think it is the logic of his argument, that when one leaves God and His glory (verses 22-23) sexual immorality ensues (24, 26) (verse 25 can be seen as repeating and moving forward the argument, "since they had indeed exchanged God, (who is) the truth, for a lie, and worshipped and the served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever."). In fact, this immorality can be seen as judgment, "God gave them over to passions that bring dishonor."

If I understand Brownson correctly, he would agree with this idea; God first, for God is the norm and ground for faithful, loving relationships and morality, whether hetero, or homosexual. Brownson alludes to this in the following way, "The faithfulness God expects of marriage thus finds its ultimate grounding in God's own character. God's faithfulness to Israel is the norm and ground of all relational bonds that give structure and meaning to human existence."⁹

In this context, I think Brownson would also agree with what William Hendriksen, a conservative interpreter of Scripture, writes in his commentary on Romans 1:26-27, "A person's sexual orientation, whether heterosexual or homosexual is not the point at issue. What matters is what a person does with his sexuality!"¹⁰

So far there might thus be agreement, however, with respect to the rest of what he writes about Romans 1 one feels oneself confronted by a new perspective. For that I cite the rest of the summary of his interpretation of Romans 1: 24-27.

Paul's characterization of the sexual misbehaviour in Romans 1:24-27 as 'degrading' and 'shameless' requires that we understand this form of moral logic. This language must be understood in the context of an honor-shame culture in which public esteem is valued very highly, and where male and female roles are clearly and sharply delineated. In this context, the reference to 'their women' in Romans 1:26 probably does not refer to same-sex activity but dishonorable forms of heterosexual intercourse. The reference to degrading acts between men probably refers both to the ancient assumption that same-sex eroticism is driven by excessive passion, not content with heterosexual gratification, and also to the general assumption in the ancient world that a man was inherently degraded by being penetrated as a woman would be. . . . What is shameful about the sexual behavior described in Romans 1:24-27 is the presence of lust, licentiousness, self-centredness, abuse, and the violation of gender roles that were widely accepted in the ancient world. The church must wrestle with whether all contemporary gay and lesbian committed relationships are accurately described by Paul's language. If not, then perhaps this form of moral logic does not apply to contemporary committed gay and lesbian relationships.¹¹

⁹ Brownson, 96.

¹⁰ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans Volume I Chapters 1-8* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980) 78. Brownson too, in this context, focuses on the moral imperatives that surround and inform our sexual behaviour as being of primary importance, not the sexual orientation as such. He writes, ". . . for Paul, the core form of moral logic underlying his characterization of sexual misconduct as "impurity" focuses on internal attitudes and dispositions, particularly lust (excessive desire) and licentiousness (lack of restraint)" Brownson, 203.

¹¹ Brownson, 221-222.

There are several elements in this summary to be noted, as it follows Brownson's previous commentary and interpretation of Romans 1: 24-27. As mentioned already, Brownson's hermeneutic purports to unearth the why of the message of the text and what informs it as a moral logic. Accordingly, in this passage Brownson seeks to reframe the discussion and interpretation of Romans 1 in terms of a moral logic of an honor and shame culture, lust and desire, purity and impurity, according to which male and female *roles* are of primary importance.¹² In doing so he takes first the cultural context of Paul as, at least in part, determinative of Paul's message; it was a culture of honor and shame in which impurity and purity, lust and desire are viewed in a certain way, which in turn determines what is to be considered as excessive passion, degrading, lustful, licentious, self-centred and abusive. Also to be noted is that the *roles* of the genders are highlighted as primarily important and not the nature, or the sex of the persons involved, as the focus becomes, "the violation of gender roles that were widely accepted in the ancient world."

What seems to take place in this interpretation is a shift in concentration from nature, and/or sex, to *roles* of genders in their cultural context. No longer the ontological differences between female and male are first considered as in some way determinative, but their roles and behavior, as in this case, largely, but not exclusively, conditioned by cultural conventions. In other words, it is first primarily about *ethics*, not about *nature and/or ontological differences*. So too the moral logic is not first to be sought as grounded in a natural design (being) and order, but is lifted (more or less), out of such a context of meaning and determination. Or, in this context, one could say, what one does with one's sexuality is firstly important, not the being of, and design for our sexuality.

On what is such a shift in orientation based? What is the background of this seemingly new perspective? To understand that one must move back from this central text on homosexuality in the New Testament and consider Brownson's overall interpretative framework of the Scriptures, in particular his interpretation of the Genesis account of creation and the institution of marriage. When one does this one begins to understand that it is because of his interpretation of the creation story, that Brownson, in fact, no longer needs to base his interpretation of Romans 1 on a so-called natural design or order, or on the ontological differences between male and female, because he had already re-interpreted, re-framed what others consider foundational for a description and prescription of what our sexuality is and how we should faithfully practice it. Let me refer again to William Hendriksen, whom I quoted previously, to make my point clear, here.

In the context of the previous reference cited, (see above) Hendriksen adds, "According to the plain teaching of Scripture sexual intercourse was intended for a husband and his wife, for

¹² The culture of reference here is primarily the Roman-Greek culture and not the Hebrew society as influenced by the Old testament Scriptures. Brownson presumes that that is Paul's context of primary meaning, for that is the context he is in, and is speaking too. They would not have understood him, otherwise. It assumes that Paul understood the cultural context of his readers as at least partially determinative of his ethical admonitions and exhortations. In other words, the Old Testament, and the Hebrew scriptural understanding of reality and morality were only partially normative for what Paul is writing. Paul attempts to mediate and integrate both cultures for the purpose of communication and instruction.

no one else! (Gen. 2:24) See also Matt. 19:5; Mark 10:7,8; I Cor. 6:16; Eph. 5:31. All else is 'contrary to God's will.' It is in conflict with the Creator's intention."¹³ William Hendriksen, even if he writes that sexual orientation is not what is the point in this verse, but what we do with our sexuality, still grounds his reasoning for what *we ought to do with our sexuality in an ontology of design, of will and of purpose*, and that in accordance with how the Creator originally created man and women and brought them together, and commanded them to live. Brownson, however, by having already re-interpreted Gen. 2:24, that is, what it means what the Bible says about female and male "becoming one flesh," has already eliminated the necessity and possibility of first referring to ontological differences and original design and order as determinative for what we do with our sexuality and its practice. In his interpretation he attempts to make the case that not ontological differences, but kinship should be considered as primary, and therefore as determinative of why the Bible says what it says about sex and sexuality, i.e., what the Bible's moral logic is with regard to the issue of homosexuality.¹⁴ In the end, this is the big picture and framework with which Brownson challenges his readers to re-read passages such as Romans 1 and so reframe the church's interpretation of homosexuality and its practice. Therefore, the burden of proof of his argumentation is foundationally related to his interpretation of Genesis 2:24, ". . . and they shall be (come) one flesh." How does Brownson interpret Genesis 2:24?

Genesis 2:24

Without attempting to be comprehensive, as it certainly is true that Brownson does not leave anything to chance or any stone unturned in his exegesis and his comments on commentaries, let me turn to his interpretation of the important Genesis texts. To get at least glimpse of what he writes let me use his own summary of his interpretation of Genesis 1:26-2:18 and some more specific references in later chapters on the Scriptural expression, "one-flesh."

Brownson writes:

The original 'adam of Genesis 1:26-2:18 is not a binary or sexually undifferentiated being that is divided into male and female in Genesis 2:21. The focus in Genesis is not on complementarity of male and female but on the similarity of male and female. The fact that male and female are both created in the divine image (Gen. 1:27) is intended to convey value, dominion, and relationality that is *shared* by both men and woman but not the idea that complementarity of the genders is somehow necessary to fully express or embody the divine image. The one-flesh union spoken of in Gen. 2:24 connotes not physical complementarity but a kinship bond. These counter theses demonstrate that Genesis 2 does not teach a normative form of gender complementarity, based on the biological differences between male and female. Therefore, this form of moral logic cannot be assumed as the basis for the negative treatment of same-sex relationships in biblical texts. Hence, we need to look further to discern why Scripture says what it does about same-sex intimate relationships.¹⁵

A more precise definition of what "one-flesh" means Brownson gives in the next chapter called, *one-flesh*. ". . . [T]he reference to "one-flesh" in Genesis 2:24 focuses attention on the establishment of a new primary kinship bond, rather than on the overcoming of the

¹³ Hendriksen, 78.

¹⁴ See Brownson, 85-109. More about this later.

¹⁵ Ibid., 37-38. In the book these theses are put together as bullet points.

incompleteness of male and female by recovering an alleged original unity of the genders."¹⁶ And speaking of the 'leaving and cleaving passage', or more precisely *clinging*, as it pertains to the biblical expression of "one-flesh," he writes:

. . . the focus here is not on the *complementarity* of the man and the woman but on the *similarity* between the two. Indeed, it is precisely this similarity that establishes the possibility of a new kinship tie, since kinship is based fundamentally on shared life and experience. . . . In other words, the language of "one-flesh" is not simply a euphemistic way of speaking about sexual intercourse. It is a way of speaking about the kinship ties that are related to the union of man and woman in marriage. It is important not to over genitalize or over sexualize this passage.¹⁷

Some Observatory Comments

Starting with the idea that Brownson interprets the "one-flesh" description of the bond between a man and woman, who are brought together by God to have a life-long faithful relationship, as *kinship*, it is clear that he introduces a fairly new and recent interpretative framework of reference.¹⁸ Why does he define becoming one-flesh as referring to "the establishment of a new primary kinship bond?"¹⁹ What does he mean by kinship bond?

According to Brownson kinship is about shared values, tasks, or functionality, and relationality. It is not rooted in ontological differences but it expresses shared sameness, shared life. He relates it this way, "Sexual union is conceived in the Bible as profoundly metaphorical--it points beyond the physical act to the relational connections and intimacy that undergird and surround it. This is why the Bible requires that sexual expression find its meaning against this larger and more comprehensive backdrop emphasizing shared life and kinship."²⁰ In turn shared life and sameness is not ontological sameness, but 'participatory' sameness. Both the man and the woman are created in the *same* divine image of God in which they participate. What then is the divine image, according to Brownson? He writes, ". . . it is intended to convey the value, dominion, and relationality that is *shared* by both men and women, . . ." ²¹ That is their ultimate

¹⁶ Ibid., 86.

¹⁷ Ibid., 87.

¹⁸ In the chapter on, 'one flesh,' I did not find references to other interpreters that define one-flesh the way Brownson does, but I might have missed something. Brownson's definition seems to be rooted in a non-literal reading of one-flesh. It points to a more symbolic reading of the Scriptures on this point.

¹⁹ Ibid., 86.

²⁰ Ibid., 88-89.

²¹ The full context of his discussion on the image of God is in-capsulated in these references. "It is far better to interpret Gen. 1:27, . . . , to mean that all the dignity, honor and significance of bearing the divine image belong equally to man and women." Ibid., 32. It has nothing to do with ontological differences. "The focus of Genesis 2 is not on the complementarity of male and female but on the similarity of male and female. The fact that male and female are both created in the divine image (Gen. 1:27) is intended to convey the value, dominion, and relationality that is *shared* by both men and women, but not the idea that the complementarity of the genders is somehow necessary to fully express or embody the divine image." Ibid., 37. As important as this

point of departure and reference point, which in turn grounds their becoming one flesh, sharing of same life, values, tasks, functionality and relationality.

It is precisely this de-ontological hermeneutic of Genesis 2 that clears the way for the possibility of considering the negative language about homosexuality in Scripture as having not first having to do with the essential sexual differences between human beings in relationship. The moral logic of the Scriptures, the why of the negative language in Scripture about homosexuality, must be found in other reasons. The other reasons, ethical and dispositional reasons, are then spelled out in his interpretation of Romans 1, and other passages with this hermeneutic as framework. To those I have already alluded under the previous heading.

Now, of course, much more needs to be said and could be said. Brownson is thorough and treats all necessary concerns and passages related to these questions, problems and solutions in his book. Surely I do not do full justice to all his additional nuances and observations drawing on a plethora of other biblical references and other ancient and contemporary interpretations and resources. Nevertheless, I believe that with these observations I do point to the nerve centre of his argumentation, that is, to his own hermeneutical underpinnings, and based on them the internal coherency and consistency of his interpretative approach.

Before turning to my critical comments, I think I need to observe one more thing. Based on what I have noted so far, it is fair to say that Brownson is not operating from a merely antithetical perspective. Building on a comprehensive amount of past and present literature written on the subject matters in question, he is genuinely working out a new perspective on homosexuality, based on also a thorough treatment of texts and contexts. In other words, his approach does not seem to be simply an attempt at debunking complementarity. The critique of the latter is better understood as a 'casualty' of his own consistently applied hermeneutic and interpretation of Scripture, synthesizing insights and seeking a middle road between the

issue is, for the grounding and development of his arguments, Brownson does not think it necessary to develop or further elaborate on the discussion of what the expression, divine image means in the Scriptures. He states, "We need not delve into the entire debate about what exactly the image of God signifies. For our purposes it is enough to say what is *not* signified by the divine image: gender complementarity." Ibid., 32. He notes in passing that, "Throughout much of Christian history, the notion that gender differentiation is part of the image of God (. . .) has occasionally surfaced as a marginal voice, but it has never occupied a significant place in the Christian understanding of the *Image Dei*." In a footnote he does allude to Karl Barth who does propose that a complementary gender understanding of the expression, image of God, is essential to its meaning and expression. I ask myself, either Barth is not part of the history he refers to here, or Karl Barth must be considered a marginal voice. I think neither of these is true. Brownson's own innovative definition of the one-flesh expression as kinship bond, as he grounds it also in the fact that we are created in the image of God, seems not to be solidly supported. I think, it would have been incumbent upon him to 'take on' Karl Barth and his interpretation of the image of God as it touches his own argumentation practically at all levels. For that reason one could consider his scholarship on this point, weak, if not deficient. (See my own discussion on Barth's understanding of the image of God and its implications in, *Meine Veldman, H.F Kohlbrugge and Karl Barth on the Word of God and 'Man'*, (Köln, LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing Ag & Co., 2009) esp. pages 128-138.

revisionist and the traditionalist camp. The question still remains, however, can his hermeneutic and synthesis stand on its own, or is the foundation of it, to say the least, not problematic?

In what I have noted so far, I have attempted to get at some of the foundations of Brownson's argumentation and connected to that the internal logic of Brownson's argumentation, albeit in a very limited and perhaps sometimes too general of a way. What about those foundations then, the internal moral logic and its implications? Here I will offer some critical comments.

Some Critical Observations

Genesis 2

Again the question is, is it possible to maintain and defend what I have called such a de-ontological interpretation of the biblical expression, "one-flesh?" Should sameness be our starting point of reference and following that, is kinship the better understanding of one-flesh? Is it indeed correct to see values, functionality and relationality as primarily important when talking about the man-woman relationship in marriage?

Taking Henry Blocher and his book, *In the Beginning. The opening Chapters of Genesis*²² as my primary guide,²³ what about Brownson's claim that the biblical account emphasizes sameness and/or similarity, rather than difference between man and woman and that based on his interpretation and reference that they both were equally created in the image of God?

Without delving into all the possible interpretations of the phrase, "image of God," which he enumerates,²⁴ Blocher agrees with Karl Barth that, "In the case of man the

²² Henry Blocher, *In the Beginning. The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Leicester: Inter-varsity Press, 1984).

²³ There are, of course, many other sources one could refer to, including more contemporary ones directly dealing with the issue and interpretation of biblical texts in relation to the issue of homosexuality. I have in mind, for example, a very thorough work by James B. DeYoung, a biblical scholar himself, who does not leave anything to chance in terms of an analysis and critique of all the most recent literature on homosexuality and the Bible. See James DeYoung, *Homosexuality. Contemporary Claims Examined in Light of the Bible and Other Ancient Literature and Law* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2000). I will sporadically refer to this great book, as well. My desire, however, is not an systematic exchange and comparison of interpretations of the seminal biblical passages in light of the most recent literature on the subject matter. It would be interesting to do such a comparative analysis between the two James' . . . For the purpose of my own analysis and critique I deem it more helpful to refer to an equally renown scholar whose primary focus was not the issue of homosexuality, as such (with perhaps one particular target or agenda in mind), but a what I believe to be sound and consistent interpretation of the Scriptures.

²⁴ See Blocher, *In the Beginning*, 79-82. It is may be interesting to note that, if one would like to consider a point for point different interpretation of the image of God, in comparison and

differentiation of sex is the only differentiation.' [He continues] no other distinction, racial, ethnic or social, belongs to his essence."²⁵

The text of Genesis makes it clear that, in comparison and contrast to the animals, God very explicitly specifies that the human being is, male *and* female. This specification is directly attached to the fact that God created us in His image. The difference between being male and female belongs thus essentially to the human being as created in the image of God. "The importance of the duality, 'male and female' is beyond all doubt. . . . [T]he biblical text moves to the plural in order to leave no doubt: "he created *them*.'" The duality of the sexes implies the plurality of persons."²⁶

What is significant with respect to these observations is that Scripture makes explicit and underlines the differentiation between the sexes expressly mentioned in the case of the human beings.²⁷ In regards to the animals, Scripture leaves this implicit and thus not as important. Sameness and/ or similarity is much more assumed in regards to the animals. Undervaluing, therefore, or denying the sexual differentiation between male and female as belonging to their essence, as-beings-together, is undermining the importance of the plurality of personhood, and the difference between us and the animal world. Paradoxically, the identification of man and beast might become more pronounced, and the uniqueness of the personal reality of human beings as created under and in the image of God, that is, as related and dependent upon God, might become less preeminent in the understanding of ourselves when stressing the primary importance of sameness.

Considering the larger context of Genesis 2, where in the first account of creation no mention of the sexual differentiation is made, Blocher observes, "The divine deliberation, which

contrast to Brownson's emphasis on similarity and sameness and the claim that the image of God has essentially nothing to do with the sexual difference of a man and woman, one could turn to Karl Barth and his *Church Dogmatics*. Blocher, summarizing writes that for Barth, "Since, immediately after the assertion, 'God created man in his own image,' Genesis specifies 'male and female he created them,' [he] concludes that creation in the image of God refers to human *sexuality*! . . . [This] should be understood that the difference male/female calls mankind to a personal, face-to-face relationship (hence the divine plural, 'let us make')." Ibid., 81.

²⁵ Ibid., 92. See above my comments on what I consider a lack in Brownson's interpretation of the image of God, in particular his interaction with Karl Barth on this issue.

²⁶ Ibid., 92-93.

²⁷ James DeYoung observes, discussing Boswell's treatment of Genesis, from whom Brownson could have taken his cues in terms of his metaphorical interpretation of sexual union (see above), "He believes that Genesis employs symbols and myths "explain all its fundamental truths." . . . However, such interpretations fail to address the obvious pattern language in the account. God created human beings in His image and likeness. Clearly, humankind only as male and female reflects the eternal diversity of the divine Being (Gen. 1:26-27). In addition, God made woman from man as a "helper suitable for him" (2:18, 20). We are able to recognize her special nature and role from her formation. Female animals have no special or corresponding mention, and their only special role is to procreate according to their kind. The text gives no place to the sexual differences among animals, nor does it affirm that females come from males. Both male and female animals come from the earth." DeYoung, 31.

in the first tablet solemnly announced the creation of humanity, here precedes the forming of the second sex, *i.e.* the introduction of sexuality. (The word 'sex' implies the differentiation of the two, signifying etymologically the dividing of humanity)."²⁸

Thus not only from a close examination of the text, 'male and female he created them,' but also from a consideration of the overall movement of and relationship between chapter one and two of Genesis it is to be noted that the further specification and explanation of the origin of the sexes forms an integral part of the definition of humankind. Our word sex reflects this according to its etymology and implication. From this larger and etymological perspective then, the term homo-sexuality appears to be a contradiction in terms. *If* the word sex signifies the dividing of humanity, as rooted in the created ontological differences between male and female, *than* the word homosexuality is self-contradictory. On this basis, at the expense of what the Scripture indicates as essentially important, that is, the ontological difference between male and female as the foundation of what the words sex and sexuality signify, the attempt to primarily emphasize sameness and similarity must be considered not only as a misinterpretation of Scripture, but also inherently and by implication contradictory.

Now, having made these critical comments, I am aware that in an exchange of perspectives one tends to exaggerate one's own emphasis, in this case, ontological differences between male and female. And indeed it is true that the unity of male and female in marriage is equally present and emphasized in Genesis. After all the woman was taken from the man and in marriage they are said to become one flesh again. I do share Brownson's opinion that procreation is not the primary purpose of the unification of male and female. Rather, the reason why God decided to create a woman is not first that they would have offspring, but that they would be together and not alone. In fact, God's expression, "it is not good that man should be alone" (cf. Gen 2:18) is the only negative expression in the first recounting of the creation. To this, Blocher writes, "What prevented him from feasting his eyes on his work and declaring it 'very good' (Gn. 1:31)? The world was suffering from an absence: the absence of woman."²⁹ But precisely this introduction of the woman in the story of Genesis relates also the introduction of sexuality, of the different sexes. As Blocher continues to state, "The divine deliberation, which in the first tablet solemnly announced the creation of humanity, here precedes the forming of the second sex, *i.e.* the introduction of sexuality."³⁰ And as we have already seen, the word sex implies differentiation and the dividing of humanity. And so as these observations show, one cannot simply come away from looking at Genesis and continue to maintain that the unification of male and female by becoming one flesh in marriage does not presuppose ontological differences between the sexes. The interpretation of 'one-flesh' as kinship bond does not reflect the order and meaning of the text of Genesis. It denies the essence of the scriptural texts on this matter and the essence of what it means to be male and female, as image of God and as imaging God in this world, both on an ontological and an ethical level.

²⁸ Ibid., 95.

²⁹ Ibid., 95. It is perhaps too simple to say for some, but it remains true what DeYoung observes as well, ". . . God could have made a thousand males for Adam, yet he would not have fully achieved His own image and its internal diversity. . . . Only a woman, not another man, could complete the divine design for humankind." DeYoung, 31.

³⁰ Ibid., 95.

Concluding Remarks

Having begun with some comments on Romans 1, which drove me to delve deeper into the de-ontological hermeneutic of Brownson, namely his interpretation of Genesis 2:24 and its implication, which I purport to be the determining background of his exegesis of Romans 1, let me conclude with some final observations.

I can imagine Brownson saying, well in the end you have not really challenged my exegesis. What you have done is summarized some parts of my book on very particular texts, analyzed these parts, and then merely pointed out that I employ a so-called de-ontological hermeneutic. Following, you have used a few particular authors, returning to these same texts, to present the opposite interpretation, so that in the end, we still sail as two ships in the dark passed each other.

Perhaps, and yes, there is indeed a danger that an exchange simply reinforces one to be more convinced of one's own interpretation and the problematic interpretation of the other. However, I hope that at least I have been able to point in the direction of what I think is at stake with Brownson's book, a problematic hermeneutic with unethical consequences, which I believe is dangerous, to say the least, for the faith and life of the Church. Let me say it in another, more direct way. What Brownson displays and exposes in his book is a way of approaching the Bible that turns things upside down, that is, in fact, revolutionary. Let me illustrate this by returning to Brownson's interpretation of Paul and the statement referred to before, 'Sexual union is conceived in the Bible as profoundly metaphorical-- . . .'. This says much about Brownson's approach, finally. What does this imply, looking at it in the context of my discussion of Brownson's book?

Let me be a bit more blunt here. One is tempted to say that such an interpretation of Scripture, against the background of what I have observed so far on the issue of homosexuality, borders on the mystical or perhaps Gnostic. Nature purports to stand for something other, something more general, something deeper and spiritual. Elsewhere, Brownson can speak of a, "living into a deeper vision of "nature" as the convergence of individual disposition, social order, and [what] the physical world might look like, under the guidance and the power of the Spirit of God."³¹ And, in fact, it is *in* this metaphorical approach in terms of at least this issue (or perhaps more generally as well), that his moral logic with respect to homosexuality is grounded. What he finds the Scriptural moral logic to be rooted in is what I would simply call a reversal of the plain order of interpretation of Scripture.

According to Brownson, our moral logic, or our interpretation and its ethical implications, should not be grounded in what is first creational, historical, etc. No, it should be grounded in what is pre-eminently spiritual, dispositional, and internal. That is what the New Testament requires, in fact. Let me illustrate this referring back to Gen. 2:24, in the context of

³¹ Brownson, 255.

his discussion on 1 Cor. 6:12-20. Here it becomes again very clear how Brownson's hermeneutic works.

In this context he applies his hermeneutic of Gen. 2:24 by clearly prioritizing the spiritual, and/or what is metaphorically implied, over what is naturally considered first, namely our creation and our historical and bodily reality. I will cite the passage in its entirety. Speaking of 1 Cor. 6:12-20, he writes,

Here the basic kinship background we have already seen is evident in Paul's reference to "one-flesh." Sexual union is intended to create a shared and continuing social reality. . . . As we noted, Paul's use of Genesis 2:24 exposes the core form of moral logic that underlies the problem with sexual promiscuity. We cannot say with our bodies what we will not say with the rest of our lives. Bodies are not indifferent, and what we do with our bodies is not indifferent. Sexual union is deeply metaphorical, and when we strip sexual union of the metaphorical kinship meaning intended by Genesis 2:24, we cease to live in the "real world" governed by God's purposes and decrees³²

No longer grounding his interpretation first and foremost in the historical, creational, and concrete, a reversal has taken place. De-ontologizing the text, which is grounded in God's creation and history, the roles reverse: *the real world is the spiritual world, now metaphorically alluded to by the concrete world*. The historical is no longer the bearer of the spiritual, but the spiritual, the "real world," should be reflected in the historical. As noted above, the individual disposition (which is his description of what person might mean), and the social order of things, *precede* the ontological-biological. This is, finally, the consequence of the application of his de-ontological hermeneutic, which he coherently and consistently applies. This makes his book, indeed also so persuasive, but at the same so revolutionary, turning God's created order and intentions up-side down. That is the spirit of the book. And so he can write, almost concluding his book,

These Christians may celebrate the way in which, by the providence of God, such "queer" folk can naturally deconstruct the pervasive tendencies of majority voices to become oppressive and exclusionary. In this vision, the inclusion of committed gay and lesbian unions represents, not an accommodation to a sexually broken world, but rather an offbeat redemptive purpose in the new creation. that purpose can destabilize the assumed exclusivity of the heterosexual majority, challenging all of God's people to discover more deeply the richness of interpersonal communion, beyond socially constructed roles and responsibilities shaped by a heterosexual majority that is too often oblivious to the ways it can oppress minority voices.³³

After all was not Christ the first one to break through, in this way? Was he not the first revolutionary in this way, as he eschatologically introduced these principles of understanding and practice, not fully understood then, yet? "The way forward is not to be found by a return to a pristine, original nature---or even by more focused attempts to keep the whole law--but rather by following the crucified Messiah, who is ushering in a new creation, empowered by the Spirit of God."³⁴ And did not Paul, even Paul, cautiously join Him, cautiously as not to upset the status quo too much? "The whole world as Paul knew it had come to an end. The gospel of Christ entails nothing less than a radical eschatological reordering of society as a whole. . . ." ³⁵ And he

³² Ibid., 102.

³³ Brownson, 253.

³⁴ Ibid., 250.

³⁵ Ibid., 66.

continues elsewhere, "To reach this world, we need to read and live into the rest of Romans, with its remarkable message of radical grace, freedom from the law, transformation in Christ, and hope of a new creation."³⁶

See here, the results of a hermeneutic loosened from its creational, historical foundations, its ontological groundings. That is finally the spirit that blows through this book. No, not a return to the way it was, or to even the keeping of the whole law, but a way forward. The moral logic turns out to be from the start also an eschatological, a revolutionary logic, an eschatological-moral logic, dare I say, an eschatological-anarchical logic, that is, not back to origins, or to the body of the law of God, but forward! That is finally the danger and subversive fervor of this book. I believe, it is in the final analysis, a subtle, but clear eschatological inauguration of lawlessness and that under the guise of a spiritually deeper understood hermeneutic and practice. Could this not just as well be the eschaton of what Paul describes as the mystery of iniquity (*ἀνομία*) (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:7 and the rest of the chapter)?

³⁶ Ibid., 254. The theological issue here is, as well, what yet of the law? Is radical grace opposed to the law. Does it replace the law? Is the law no longer normative for the Christian, or perhaps just in a different way, an interior way, a dispositional way, an exclusively spiritual way? I believe that that is where Brownson's argument is going. Brownson, in his treatment of some of these issues also seems to re-define what law yet means for the Christian by spiritualizing, or 'de-ontologizing' the reality and application of the law, that is, moving from external to internal, from a more bodily concentration, to disposition. (See especially his discussion on purity and impurity, pp. 179-203).