

A Critical Evaluation of the Moral Logic  
in Brownson's<sup>1</sup> Defense of a Virtuous Category of Same-sex Sex  
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Richard Ostella, Pastor  
[westminsterreformedchurch.org](http://westminsterreformedchurch.org)  
rostella@comcast.net

## Introduction

Probably, the most emphasized subject in Brownson's book, at least regarding methodology, is logic, specifically, moral logic. He refers to that which *underlies* the prohibitions in Scripture against same-sex sex. This reasoning contains premises used to sustain the conclusion that the prohibitions say nothing relevant to a particular modern type of same-gender sexual relations, the loving and committed type practiced by devout Christians. In response, I will discuss two critical premises, Brownson on the Levitical prohibitions, and an alternative.

### I. Two critical premises regarding the prohibitions

#### A. First, an explicit underlying premise

To properly understand the prohibitions, Brownson defends the idea that a male-female relationship is sufficient for becoming one flesh, and thus for marriage, but it is not necessary for either.<sup>2</sup> Of interest here is how he precisely uses his interpretation of "one flesh" to control the conclusion that the prohibitions say nothing relevant to contemporary gay love. To this point, he says, "these prohibitions do not speak directly to committed ... same-sex relationships. Nor are they based on a form of moral logic grounded in biology-based gender complementarity."<sup>3</sup> So, he is convinced "that the church needs to move away from an interpretation of Scripture that assumes that the Bible teaches a normative form of biological or anatomical gender complementarity."<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, his strategy regarding Leviticus 18.18 is counter-argument.<sup>5</sup> The traditional reading of Genesis 2.24 (that assumes complementarity) is not contextual for Leviticus; that kind of moral logic does not underlie the Levitical prohibitions.<sup>6</sup>

#### B. Second, an implicit underlying premise

In defense of the claim that the prohibitions "do not speak...to committed...loving" same-sex relations, lies a subtle but deeply powerful premise of presuppositional status, namely, that a category of loving same-sex relationships exists. Of course, there is no such thing as loving and virtuous same-sex sex if love is defined by God's will, *and* if same-sex sex contradicts God's

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<sup>1</sup> James V. Brownson is Professor of New Testament at Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan and an ordained minister in the Reformed Church of America. The book under review is *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013). Page numbers alone in the footnotes refer to this book.

<sup>2</sup> He makes this defense in chapter 5 titled "One Flesh," 85-109 and in chapter 2, 32-34.

<sup>3</sup> 279-280.

<sup>4</sup> 278. Instead, he limits the one-flesh bond claiming that "delight in the other," "desire for gratification and union," "the bond of loving mutuality," and "a fruitful vision of committed love" are "exclusive" to the one flesh bond being both sufficient and necessary for its existence and for marriage as well.

<sup>5</sup> In his moral logic, he does not treat Leviticus 18.18 until he gets to his concluding chapter (ch 12), when he gets there he rests on the "fact" (the controlling premise) that Gen 2.24 does not require male-female complementarity for marriage or for becoming one flesh.

<sup>6</sup> Of course, it should be clear that there is no "inspired" revelation of the moral logic that underlies biblical texts. He is referring to his interpretation of the underlying context of these texts and how he uses the beliefs he thinks are true to govern the reading of the prohibitions. None of this is wrong in itself, but his interpretation of what underlies a text must not escape close examination and if found wanting, then his moral reasoning does not govern how we are to understand the prohibitions.

will by doing what He categorically prohibits. So, how does a revisionist biblically support the claim that there is a loving type of homosexuality? This is not easy because every text that speaks to the subject presents it as sin.<sup>7</sup> Hence, he has to demonstrate that Scripture nowhere addresses loving homosexual conduct.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the category of same-gender sex, though mostly sinful, has a loving subset within it.<sup>9</sup> However, there is no Scriptural basis on which to ground a loving subset of homosexual behavior.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, his support for this claim is human experience and not biblical revelation.<sup>11</sup> He reveals his stance by speaking repeatedly of Christians that practice homosexuality “who seek to live in deep obedience to Christ.”<sup>12</sup>

### C. Unavoidable results of the implicit premise<sup>13</sup>

#### 1. First result: in a fundamental sense it makes the entire argument invalid

After all, the idea that there are loving gay relationships with love defined by God’s commandments is the point to be demonstrated.<sup>14</sup> Questioning love in this way is not saying that

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<sup>7</sup> In Leviticus 18 same-sex sex is associated with the sexual sins of adultery, incest, and bestiality. Moreover, all the passages that address the subject have a negative prohibitive cast (“you shall not...lest you die”).

<sup>8</sup> Defenders, since Brownson’s 2013 book, in a number of works written in 2014 share this belief as a dictate of human experience: Vines, Gushee, Achtemeier all stumble around the fact that in Scripture there is no positive statement regarding same-sex sex; no commendation, no approval, no acceptance, no putting on of a form of same-sex sex in the place of what is universally in Scripture the sin of same-sex that is to be put off. In the end, in contrast to Brownson, what is to be put on is a virtuous form of sexuality: either celibacy marked by holiness or marriage marked by a one-flesh intimacy that can only be fulfilled in a sexual union of male and female (and of course, within the boundaries of the exclusive covenant of companionship for life). Also, I should stress that this is not denying that much affection and caring exists between many homosexuals but love must be defined by “keeping the commandments.” So, if much affection and caring exists in a bond that breaks God’s law, as in a loving bond between persons engaged in premarital sex, or as in a loving longterm incestuous bond between a brother and sister, then it cannot be loving the neighbor or God according to His commandments. So, if homosexual behavior is sinful, then it cannot be loving. Judgments about love based on some experience ought not to control what Scripture can or cannot say about that experience, whether it is sinful or not.

<sup>9</sup> For revisionists, the pie of same-sex sex may be a huge pie in our contemporary culture, and most of it may be worldly and sinful, but there is a slice of the same-sex sex pie, however small, that is holy. Wherever the same-gender relationship is loving, there you have a slice of the pie to which Scripture does not speak; there the activity is pure and holy. So, persons in the church who practice same-sex sex in a loving committed and exclusive way, practice a loving equivalent of marriage. They do not bring sin into the church like bad apples into a barrel; they do not bring a little leaven into a lump that corrupts the whole; instead, they practice sexual holiness!

<sup>10</sup> I should stress that this is not denying that much affection and caring exists between many homosexuals but love must be defined by “keeping the commandments.” So, if much affection and caring exists in a bond that breaks God’s law, as in a loving bond between persons engaged in premarital sex, or as in a loving longterm incestuous bond between a brother and sister, then it cannot be loving the neighbor or God according to His commandments. So, if homosexual behavior is sinful, then it cannot be loving. Judgments about love based on some experience ought not to control what Scripture can or cannot say about that experience, whether it is sinful or not.

<sup>11</sup> That said, it is reasonable to conclude that taking this kind of moral reasoning *to* the Scriptures is wrongheaded from the start. It is wrong (doubly so if one claims to be a Christian and claims to want to live by the authority of Scripture) to begin with the premise, “there is a loving form of same-gender sex based on experience” and then go to Scripture and limit the range of its applicability claiming that it prohibits all kinds of same-sex sex except “the loving kind based on human experience.” That will be done subtly but confidently if one makes the experiences of those who practice same-sex intimacy the ultimate standard of the truth regarding this conduct. For them, experience teaches that this subset exists. That being the case, before they investigate a single prohibition of homosexuality in the Bible, they already know that none of the prohibitions are applicable or relevant to the loving subset of homosexual relations that is known as truth and that functions as a higher authority than Scripture by the dictates of human experience. This shapes the way gay exegesis proceeds; it determines that certain things cannot be allowed into the study, particularly any alleged fact that denies or implies the denial of a loving form of same-sex intercourse cannot be a true fact; it must be, will be, dismissed one way or another. Furthermore, the deeper problem here is the compromise of *sola scriptura* even while claiming to live under it.

<sup>12</sup>11. “Many of these gay and lesbian Christians seek, not to suppress their sexual orientation, but rather to sanctify it, thus drawing intimate gay and lesbian relationships into the sanctifying work of the Spirit” (11). For Brownson, these gays who profess to be Christian are accepted as such because along with their profession they seek to live in loving relationships that are not given to excess. This is the essence of his moral reasoning in discussion of Romans 1: that problem text for the revisionist is inapplicable to loving gay relationships because it refers exclusively to matters of excess, which are not characteristic of loving committed relationships.

<sup>13</sup> Of course, it is a significant fact that the ultimate standard is not Scripture but experience; it is a departure from Christianity at a foundational level.

<sup>14</sup> The need to demonstrate this point is obvious given the fact that all the references to homosexuality in the Bible condemn the practice.

people in gay relationships show no mutual affection, caring, or self-sacrifice.<sup>15</sup> It is simply saying that love must be defined for a Christian by the will of God expressed in Scripture as the ultimate standard of truth.<sup>16</sup> Notably, Brownson discusses the prohibitions by considering the moral logic that underlies them to draw the conclusion that none of them speaks to loving gay relations, and that underlayment already assumes and is affected by his foregone conclusion that a loving type of same-sex sex exists.<sup>17</sup> Surely, this is an example of question begging: the conclusion of an argument proves itself with veiled circularity.<sup>18</sup>

2. Second result: the ultimate premise of experience cultivates weak moral logic

It disposes writer and reader regarding this “hot” topic to accept the foregone conclusion on the basis of poor evidence.<sup>19</sup> Brownson claims to be reframing the debate on this hot topic by the healing balm of moral logic.<sup>20</sup> But in the end this approach can only polarize the discussion by undermining the authority of Scripture among Christians, by raising the emotional resistance to any evidence that might lead to the condemnation of gay relationships, and by increasing the willingness to accept bad premises in support of desired conclusions.<sup>21</sup>

These results are evident in his handling of Leviticus.

## II. Analysis and assessment of Brownson’s case regarding the Levitical prohibitions

A. Analysis. After stating that **lying with a male as with a woman** (18.22) is an abomination to God, Brownson inquires about “gay and lesbian couples who want to commit themselves to each other...lifelong...as faithful Christians” and says: “In short, the religious, purity, procreative, and honor-shame contexts that form the underlying moral logic of the Levitical prohibitions,

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<sup>15</sup> Similarly, it is saying that people in incestuous or premarital relationships show no affection, caring, or self-sacrifice for one another. The point of emphasis is the will of God that defines right and wrong rather than human experience.

<sup>16</sup> It should be easy to see that the authority of his central dictate of human experience drives every argument he raises. For some Christians, no more needs to be said because this is a fundamental departure from the authority of Scripture.

<sup>17</sup> It is also governed by his rejection of a necessary male-female component in the one flesh principle of marriage and in what constitutes marriage itself.

<sup>18</sup> Not a single passage in Scripture that denounces same-sex sex (as they all do) can apply to loving same-sex sex because if it is loving then it must be in accord with God’s will and commandments. By experience (of participants and sympathetic observers) it cannot be out of accord with the commandments. So, *if you work from this premise of human experience* to the prohibitions in Scripture then you know already what these can and cannot teach; they can teach sinful forms of same-sex sex and they cannot teach that all forms of same-sex sex are sinful because there is a loving form (based on the ultimate authority of experience) which by definition cannot be sinful. The final authority for the verdict that loving (and virtuous) same-sex sex exists is experience because it tells us what Scripture can and cannot teach about such conduct. Of course, the unqualified and categorical denunciation of male-male erotic behavior, as expressed in Leviticus (18.18; 20.13) must be shown to be qualified and restricted in scope to some specific type of same-sex activity that is sinful. However, if this dictate is false, then the effort to find the evidence to shield it from Scriptural condemnation will be unsuccessful. The effort will have a negative orientation to prove what Scripture does not teach and it will construct a building made of wood, hay, and stubble.

<sup>19</sup> This will become clear when we analyze and assess Brownson’s support for his belief that Leviticus 18.18 and 20.13 have a limited scope and speak only to a sinful form of same-gender sex that is truly reprehensible, even abominable, but that says nothing about loving gay relations.

<sup>20</sup> He says, “What is required is a wider canonical exploration of biblical discussions of sexuality in order to develop a cross-cultural sexual ethic that may have relevance for gay and lesbian relationships today. That kind of exploration is the goal of this book” (53).

<sup>21</sup> These are not minor criticisms of the mantra of Brownson’s book, his repeated appeal to the moral logic of Scripture. However, the emotional power of this appeal is properly reduced when we state the obvious fact that when Brownson talks about the moral logic of Scripture, he is (perhaps unwittingly) speaking about his moral logic, his own moral reasoning. Of course, his premises and the inferences he makes are ours to test, and it is important that we test them with due awareness of the fact that the principles of moral logic (of moral reasoning) will necessarily lead in vastly different directions if reasoning itself has a magisterial instead of a ministerial function in relationship to Scripture. It should become self-evident that for Brownson, reason (the reasoning self) definitely functions in a magisterial role when it ought to function in a ministerial role under the authority of God speaking by the Spirit in Scripture, cf. Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2006) 86-89, 187. It can only be a new liberalism versus Christianity (a new version of what Machen discussed in *Christianity versus Liberalism*) when the terminology of reformed theology and reformed theological method are adopted with new, different, and contrary meanings.

understandable that they may be in their own context, simply do not apply to contemporary committed Christian gay and lesbian relationships.<sup>22</sup> At first it appears that he has many supporting claims, but the moral logic to which he refers is what he finds *outside* the immediate context of Leviticus.<sup>23</sup> Important here are his supporting claims derived *from* the immediate context. He gives us two that he thinks tell us what the texts (18.22; 20.13) speak about exclusively: they speak about male honor, and they speak about male-male sexual idolatry, so, they do not apply to loving gay relations.

B. Assessment 1. First on male honor, he argues from the silence about lesbianism.<sup>24</sup>

Since the injunction against bestiality specifically mentions women along with men (Lev 18.23), he wonders why lesbianism is not cited in 18.22, which we would expect, he says, if the issue were gender related. Then, he states his conclusions firmly:

From the perspective of Leviticus, to ‘lie with a male as with a woman’ is to reduce a male to the status of a female, which inherently degrades him and fails to honor his divinely given status as a male...*Sex between females is not mentioned simply because there is no such degradation operative in these cases. This suggests that...the Levitical prohibitions should be read in light of assumptions regarding honor...In short...the underlying moral logic of the Levitical prohibitions, understandable and coherent as they may be in their own context, simply do not apply to contemporary committed Christian gay and lesbian relationships.*<sup>25</sup>

In response, it may be enough to simply note that Brownson gets quite a lot from something about which the text is completely silent. Even the notion of male honor as he states it here is absent in Leviticus and it contradicts equal image-bearing. Also, critical to his argument is his dependance on extra-biblical literature regarding what scholars have uncovered, namely, more silence: there is a lack of literary evidence “for consensual male-male sexual relations in the land of Israel and surrounding regions specifically, apart from that cultic context.”<sup>26</sup> Finally, for all we know, Moses may have omitted the mention of women in one case and not another for stylistic purposes, which would cause no problem of understanding because what applies to male-male violations of marriage surely applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to female-female violations of marriage.<sup>27</sup> The argument based on the silence about lesbianism in 18.22 is at the least inconclusive and more seriously, a case of special pleading. This reasoning gives us nothing that restricts the prohibition to something less than a categorical condemnation of same-sex sex.

2. His second support is that male-male sex is linked with idolatry and cultic prostitution

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<sup>22</sup> 273.

<sup>23</sup> The list includes “the larger canonical movement” from OT to NT regarding purity laws, but then he tells us that some of these do still apply today, which is an important fact that shows that we must work with the immediate context in Leviticus. Also included is the fact that Leviticus 18 and 20 do not have the traditional reading of Genesis as controlling context. Of course, this is not from within Leviticus. Instead, it is counter-argument that puts the revisionist interpretation of Genesis 1-2 in a controlling position to serve as sunglasses by which to see the contents of Leviticus and show that they do not (cannot) fault loving homosexual behavior. Needless to say, this is not the moral logic of Scripture that underlies the prohibitions; it is Brownson’s moral reasoning that limits the range of application allowed to the prohibitions.

<sup>24</sup> It appears that the whole point of his chapter on patriarchy (ch 4) is to ground this argument; otherwise it is hard to see the contribution of chapter 4. In the brief treatment that Brownson gives to Leviticus (four pages, 269-273), more than a page is spent developing this argument from silence (271-272).

<sup>25</sup> 272-273, italics mine.

<sup>26</sup> 270. Of course, this claim assumes what needs to be demonstrated, namely, that Lev 18 itself does not give us literary evidence of male-male sexual relations in the land of Israel apart from a cultic context.

<sup>27</sup> One way that Brownson’s revisionist definition of marriage and his dictate from experience of a loving type of same-sex sex controls and governs his handling of Leviticus 18 is shown in how he does not even address the subject of marriage and family as developed in the entire chapter. Incest is a violation of the marriage bond of husband and wife; it is committed by transgressing the boundaries set by that marriage bond. Contextually then, adultery, same-sex sex, and zoophilia are also transgressions of the bond of husband and wife.

This is more promising because it is grounded in three specifics actually mentioned in the “immediate context”: sacrificing to Molech, abomination, and the death penalty.

a. Sacrificing to Molech. Leviticus 18.20-23 states: **And you shall not lie sexually with your neighbor's wife and so make yourself unclean with her.**<sup>21</sup> **You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.**<sup>22</sup> **You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.**<sup>23</sup> **And you shall not lie with any animal and so make yourself unclean with it, neither shall any woman give herself to an animal to lie with it: it is perversion.** Question: what is it about the flow of thought here that tells us that the sin of verse 22 must be *limited* to idolatry and cultic prostitution? The question is legitimate because neither the adultery of verse 20 nor the zoophilia of verse 23 are *limited to* idolatry or cultic practice by the reference to sacrificing children to Molech. All that Brownson tells us is that the prohibition of male to male sex in 18.22 is “closely linked” to the practice of idolatry cited in 18.21.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the flow of context shifts from heterosexual actions (incest, adultery) to nonheterosexual actions (homosexuality, zoophilia) with child sacrifice in the middle (v. 21).<sup>29</sup> This suggests that child sacrifice is linked to marriage in which children are its product, *and* linked to homosexuality and zoophilia as sins against procreation. Neither linkage restricts the homosexuality to cultic practice.<sup>30</sup> Clearly, the text is unqualified and categorical, which means that all forms of male same-sex sex are prohibited and *mutatis mutandis* all forms of female same-sex sex are prohibited as well.

b. The characterization of abomination. Interestingly, Brownson states that calling the male-male sex of 18.22 an abomination “makes use of a strong word of abhorrence that is closely linked to idolatrous practices in at least thirty-eight other passages in Scripture.”<sup>31</sup> Granted: idolatry is an abomination, but so is lying and a host of other sins.<sup>32</sup> Further, “abomination” may have no cultic context whatsoever, as in the Egyptian attitude of repulsion toward shepherding sheep.<sup>33</sup> Hence the *reductio*: if this kind of moral reasoning teaches that the homosexuality of 18.22 is limited to idolatrous practice in texts where it is called an abomination, then to be consistent, it must also teach that a prohibition of lying is *limited to* idolatrous practice in texts where it is called an abomination.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> 270.

<sup>29</sup> In contrast to the mere mention of such sacrifice and the suggestion of a close linking, Webb discusses the contextual flow of thought that moves from the discussion of heterosexual intercourse (incest, adultery) in 18.6-20 to nonheterosexual intercourse (homosexuality and bestiality) in 18.22-23 and reasons that the sacrifice of children fits in the list as a sin against the product of heterosexuality. Therefore, the sacrificing of children is linked “primarily with the heterosexual relationships, mentioned earlier in the list, due to the offspring that comes from those relationships,” William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001) 198.

<sup>30</sup> Bahnsen ((Homosexuality: A Biblical View, p. 45) notes that the same line of reasoning that works from the “circumstances” of idolatry suggested by sacrificing to Molech applies to bestiality: “Parallel reasoning would lead us to deem bestiality outside of religious or cultic contexts as morally acceptable today.” To the counter that bestiality is not a matter of love between humans (so disanalogous), the point is that appealing to the Molech cult of 18.21 to restrict the scope of the male-male reference in 18.22 without also restricting the scope of the reference to adultery in 18.20 and without also restricting the scope of the reference to bestiality in 18.23 is special pleading and inconsistent. These other sexual sins mentioned in the context growing a *reductio ad absurdum* of the appeal to Molech to limit 18.22 to cultic sexual practice.

<sup>31</sup> 270.

<sup>32</sup> Proverbs 12:22: Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who act faithfully are his delight. Proverbs 13:19: A desire fulfilled is sweet to the soul, but to turn away from evil is an abomination to fools. Proverbs 17:15: He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD.

<sup>33</sup> Gen 46:34: for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians.

<sup>34</sup> One may counter that sacrificing to Molech puts the male-male abomination into an idolatrous context, but as we have just noted for that to have weight, we must conclude that the adultery in view is limited to a cultic context, as well as zoophilia and all the forms of incest in the wider context of Leviticus 18.

Regarding the idea of restricting the reference here to unloving forms of homosexuality, in the flow of thought, adultery, incest, and zoophilia are not limited to unloving forms. They are condemned without qualification as is male-male eroticism. Of course this reprehensibility applies to cultic homosexuality as well as to every kind of male-male erotic behavior.<sup>35</sup>

c. The fact of the death penalty in 20.13. There we read: **If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.** Brownson claims that same-sex eroticism that is consensual is not found in the literature of the period outside the cultic context, so the linking of it

...with temple or cultic prostitution also helps to explain the death penalty for male-male sex in Leviticus 20.13: it would make no sense to apply such a penalty in the context of gang rape...[that] would be monstrous.<sup>36</sup>

On the basis of this moral logic, he concludes:

So we can say with reasonable confidence that the activity envisioned in the Levitical prohibitions is assumed to be consensual, and that it is probably envisioned to take place in cultic contexts, with clear linkages to idolatry and other religious practices foreign to the nation of Israel... [the prohibition of idolatrous same-sex sex is] “part of Israel’s call to be...holy.”<sup>37</sup>

Granting the fact that the sin in view is consensual, what shall we make of the claim that the activity prohibited is *probably* cultic with clear linkages to idolatry? On one hand, if it is probable that it is cultic, then it may not be cultic. On the other hand, if we grant that literary evidence for consensual male-male sexual relations is lacking apart from a cultic context, how does that establish the probability that the clearly consensual activity of 20.13 is cultic, especially given the fact that most homosexuality we know of is not religious?<sup>38</sup> Brownson does not tell how the lack of information available about consensual same-gender sex in the land of Canaan necessarily informs us that the Levitical references to it are probably cultic.<sup>39</sup> In the end, Brownson points us to nothing compelling that restricts the unqualified and categorical prohibition of same-sex sex, which teaches that there is no such thing as a loving subset of same-gender sex that is virtuous.<sup>40</sup>

### III. What alternative may we suggest for a better view of love from the Leviticus Holiness Code?

Marriage is the context within Leviticus 18 that governs how we are to understand the male-male sin prohibited in the chapter; otherwise, we would have no way to make sense of

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<sup>35</sup> A survey of the use of the strong term abomination points in a different direction than Brownson suggests: we can only conclude from the use of this word itself that a given text where it occurs may or may not refer to something cultic that is reprehensible. The mere use of this word in no way allows the conclusion that Leviticus 18.22 must be limited to homosexuality of a cultic nature. Instead, the prohibition is categorical and applies to every kind of male-male erotic behavior.

<sup>36</sup> 270-271

<sup>37</sup> 271: It “is part of Israel’s call to be both separate from other nations and holy to the Lord.”

<sup>38</sup> Would Brownson agree that in our world today, most consensual homosexual activity takes place outside of a religious or cultic context. Why should we trust the limited evidence that we have available to us presently to such a degree that we can be sure that no consensual same-sex sex existed among the Canaanites in any other context than a religious one, given that fallen human nature is fundamentally the same throughout history?

<sup>39</sup> The claim that there is no literary evidence in the land of Israel of consensual male-male sex outside a cult assumes that Leviticus 20.13 is not such evidence. The point to be demonstrated is that this text is limited to a cultic context. If Brownson is correct in depending on Nissinen regarding what has been found in ancient extra-biblical texts (up to 1998 when Nissinen’s book was published), what is the scope of the sample of extant texts and possible texts yet to be discovered that establishes the probability that no consensual homosexual practice outside of a religious context existed in the world contemporary with Israel?

<sup>40</sup> Again, recognizing that all types of same-gender eroticism are sinful and therefore unloving is not saying that these relationships display no mutual affection, care, or self-sacrifice. It is saying that because these relationships transgress God’s law, they cannot be examples of love for God or for the neighbor. It is saying that they are reprehensible and cannot escape condemnation.

incest, adultery, and so forth that include husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, and children in the chapter from beginning to end. Notably, in Leviticus 18, sexual intimacy belongs exclusively to husband and wife for the production of a family of brothers and sisters in a bond of love without sexual overtones. The categorical prohibitions of incest, adultery, and same-sex sex protect the family by separating it from sin for holiness.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the Code opens a door to Christian family love as a foretaste of heaven where love abides without eroticism. How that works can be shown by a discussion of fall, restoration, and consummation.

A. The Fall. Since the fall, sexual immorality transgresses the boundaries established by the Lord for all the relationships of the family. These relationships reach beyond the nuclear family (of husband and wife) to extended family, and to the Israelite nation as a family of brothers and sisters. Called to holiness, fathers and mothers from different households are brothers and sisters in the national family. Accordingly, virtuous family love is preserved when brothers and sisters do not cross the boundaries of the marriage covenant of fathers and mothers. So, any form of same-sex sex is a sin against God's design for *family love* within Israel.<sup>42</sup>

B. Through restoration, the new Israel, the church is also to be a holy family,<sup>43</sup> Peter says (1 Pet 1.15-16) **as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,**<sup>16</sup> **since it is written in Leviticus 19.2, You shall be holy, for I am holy** and in Leviticus 20.7: **be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy**. That Peter roots this call to holiness in Leviticus shows that Peter's call to the church includes the levitical prohibitions of adultery (20.10), incest (20.11; applied by Paul to the church in 1 Cor 5), male-male sex (20.13), and zoophilia (20.15-16).<sup>44</sup> All forms of same-gender sex (Lev 18.22; 20.13) are therefore not only sins against God's standard for marriage *but also sins against God's standard for love in the human family generally and in the restored family of God, the church specifically*.<sup>45</sup>

C. In the consummation, heaven will be a place of virtuous family love without marriage

The church's sexual purity in all relationships that emerge from marital intimacy is to be a foretaste, anticipation, and embodiment of the glory to come where marriage will have passed

<sup>41</sup> These facts reinforce the requirement of a male and a female in the theology of marriage given in Gen 1-2; it also rests on that foundation.

<sup>42</sup> But the Canaanites transgressed the God appointed boundaries of marriage and family. Their sins ripened, rotted, became full (Gen 15.16), defiled the very land which was made sick and vomited them out for a cleansing of itself (Lev 18.24-30): this is figurative of God's judgment on the sins of that people and His judgment of all who follow in their steps, including old Israel. Therefore, all expressions of same-sex sex (however affectional and caring they may be) are violations of family love that reveal the fallenness of the human family and the need of the Savior, Jesus Christ, the risen Lord.

<sup>43</sup> It turns out that Brownson's statement of what is sufficient and necessary for marriage is actually a fairly helpful statement of what is sufficient and necessary for nonsexual family love that is a bond that is not defined by gender (as marriage is so defined).

<sup>44</sup> Notably, by faith, all brothers and sisters in God's new Israelite family, called to be a holy people (a holy nation, 1 Pet 2.9) are not to be conformed to the sexual sins that contradict holiness defined in Lev 18-20 as quoted by Peter in 1 Peter 1.16. Thus, being bound for perfect holiness that has no sexual elements, the church is called to holiness in all relationships that emerge from the blessing of sexual intimacy of husbands and wives. Love between women is exemplified in the love between Ruth and Naomi. Love between men ought to grow in this life toward the love shared, for example, between Jonathan and David (1 Sam 18.1-4), even though men may be too reserved, too proud, too emotionally fragile (fearing rejection) to develop close affectional bonds with other men.

<sup>45</sup> The Catholic writer Helminiak (*What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*, 2007) suggests that David and Jonathan had a homosexual relationship. To 18.1-4, he adds 1 Sam 20.30: Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said to him, "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman, do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness?" (1 Sam 20.30). Regarding 20.30, Helminiak misses the clear point that, for Saul, Jonathan shames himself and his mother by giving up his claim to be the next King. In Saul's view, he dishonors his mother who conceived him (to the shame of her nakedness) and he dishonors himself as rightful heir (to your shame) by forfeiting his title to David. Therefore, Helminiak (driven by an erotocentric mindset) also misses the loving self-sacrifice of Jonathan per 18.1-4. *He misses the example of a man loving another man, as he loves himself, as the great love command teaches: love God with all your strength and your neighbor as yourself*. Wesley Hill of Trinity Seminary represents professing Christians who pursue celibacy while struggling mightily with same-sex attraction. His upcoming book speaks to this matter of love between men (and love between women) that is strong and affectional without eroticism, *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian*. Also, helpful is his book, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*.

away in ultimate fulfillment (Mat 22.30). Then the goal set out in the six and one account of Genesis 1.1-2.3 of an earth filled with a family of image bearers in eternal Sabbath rest will be fulfilled, of course through redemption by Christ because of the fall. Therefore, if we cultivate brotherly and sisterly love that respects the boundaries of marriage of husband and wife, then we anticipate the glory of heaven where there will be no marrying in a family of brothers and sisters.<sup>46</sup> We then have a goal for the present rooted in what is coming: “an inconceivably pure, sweet, and fervent love between the saints in glory”<sup>47</sup> because heaven is a world of love where “this glorious fountain forever flows forth in streams, yea, in rivers of love and delight, and these rivers swell, as it were, to an ocean of love, in which the souls of the ransomed may bathe with the sweetest enjoyment, and their hearts, as it were, be deluged with love!”<sup>48</sup>

Thus, the love that we cultivate now of brothers to brothers, sisters to sisters, and sisters to brothers is to be a wholesome deep affectional bond that is not driven by sex. By this love, we anticipate the love that abides in heaven. The eschatological perspective shows that, though a source of wonderful delight, sexuality is not ultimate; full humanness will be attained in glory without it. This outlook helps us maintain a balanced view of the great delight of marital intimacy for husband and wife by restraining exaggeration and preserving holiness. These insights help us put sin to death in our members by putting love, marriage, and marital intimacy into a rich biblical perspective.

**To the glory of the triune God forever, amen**

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<sup>46</sup> In language used by Brownson but adapted here, the church is to embody, its members (male and female, brother to brother and sister to sister) are to say with their bodies here and now on earth that there is no marriage or marital intimacy among them as siblings in anticipation of the glories of heaven where there will be no marriage or marital intimacy in the redeemed family of male and female image bears. Sex between a sister and brother outside the nuclear family of husband and wife is sinful; as is sex between sisters and between brothers that occurs outside the nuclear family of husband and wife. Therefore, those who practice same-sex sex live in contradiction of the holiness to be embodied now in the church in anticipation of heavenly glory.

<sup>47</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, 202.

<sup>48</sup> *Charity*, 196.