

It is in this third part of the book that most revisions have taken place since the publication of the first edition in 2005. This is to accommodate some very significant developments in case law which have had a major effect on the way religious liberty is currently being treated by the legal systems in the West. Some of the most important case law has been in Europe, as a result of decisions by the European Court of Human Rights (e.g. the case of *Lautsi v. Italy* concerning the display of a crucifix in the state school classroom), but there is also some significant and controversial domestic law (such as the decision in *Ladele v. Islington Borough Council* where the courts refused to recognise a Registrar's right to be excused involvement in same-sex civil partnerships). Not all of the examples are from Europe, however. One of the authors (Rex Ahdar) is based in New Zealand, and in general the book draws on an impressive range of materials from a range of legal systems in the Western world. Although the approach in this part of the book is very much that of legal analysis, the authors write with a lightness of touch that makes their commentary easily accessible to the non-legal reader.

In conclusion, as a survey of current developments in religious liberty in the West with a legal emphasis, this is a very significant study. It is also highly unusual. The authors present themselves in the introduction as evangelical Christians ('Evangelical Catholic' and 'Anglican Evangelical', respectively). Their book is written from a Christian perspective insofar as their writing is infused with an understanding of the motivation for religious expression from an internal point of view. They write: 'The most mundane of human behaviours can be "spiritualised" and take on a religious connotation. One is practising one's religion when one eats, drinks, works, plays and gardens, as much as when one reads scripture, prays or meditates' (p. 157). It is this appreciation of the potential reach of religious obligation, from the perspective of the religious claimant, that sets the study apart from other commentaries and indeed the courts themselves – which tend to focus on identifying specific externally observable 'manifestations' of religion and to see these as matters of choice and as potentially easily defeated by other interests. Ahdar and Leigh provide a vital and principled corrective to this view and this greatly enriches their overall analysis. In sum, this book is a highly recommended read for those interested in the topic and not least Christians who wish to explore a very significant contemporary issue from within a broad Christian perspective.

James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013). xii + 300 pp. £19.99/ US\$29.00, ISBN 978-0-8028-6863-3 (pbk).

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One area of agreement across the range of views on same-sex unions is that there is no lack of biblical and theological scholarly literature in the field. What then, if anything, does this recent volume by James V. Brownson bring to the overcrowded table of books on the subject? Does he really, as his subtitle claims, provide a 'reframing' of the Church's debate on same-sex relationships?

In terms of his substantive practical proposal there is little new. He advocates a well-established 'revisionist' ethic supporting same-sex unions as quasi-marital (or perhaps

marital; he is never totally clear on this important distinction). Part of his significance is that he does this from an evangelical and Reformed tradition – he is a minister of the Reformed Church in America – that remains strongly ‘traditionalist’. There have, however, been serious academic ‘revisionist’ arguments from such a perspective for years, notably Michael Vasey’s *Strangers and Friends* (1995) and Jack Rogers’s *Jesus, the Bible and Homosexuality* (2006). Part of Brownson’s significance is also that he argues as a ‘convert’. He had previously published in support of the ‘traditionalist’ view that ‘God intends genital sexuality to be expressed exclusively in the faithful union between a man and a woman in marriage and that Paul speaks against homosexual behaviour because it does not express that creation intent’ (*Reformed Review* 59.1 [2005], p. 4) but has rethought his view due in part to the coming out of his own teenage son (pp. 11–13). This book may therefore represent and facilitate a wider rethinking in that theological and ecclesial constituency. (Its key claims are already being popularised for a wider audience in Matthew Vines’s *God and the Gay Christian* [2014].)

The real significance, however, is that Brownson writes as a biblical scholar – he is New Testament Professor at Western Theological Seminary, Michigan – with a high view of biblical authority, and the book is focused on issues of biblical exegesis and hermeneutics. His ‘reframing’ proposes a biblical theology and ethics of sexuality which both critiques the traditionalist claim to be *the* biblical perspective and offers revisionists a much more substantive biblical case than merely silencing the traditional condemnatory texts and then appealing to wider biblical themes such as love, justice, liberation or inclusion. In Brownson’s words, ‘[A]t bottom – at least for most churches of the Reformation – the question has to do with Scripture and ethics. What is the moral vision regarding gender and sexuality that Scripture commends?’ (p. 3). Given this combination of context, expertise and focus, his rationale for a ‘revisionist’ case makes the work highly significant.

The book’s argument is clearly laid out in four parts across twelve chapters (each concluding with a short summary of its central argument). The first part defends offering another book on same-sex relationships, and its primary goal (chapter 2) is to argue that the fundamental theological and cross-cultural justification claimed by ‘traditionalists’ for opposing same-sex unions – gender complementarity – is not taught by Scripture and is never a biblical rationale for the negative texts about homosexuality.

Brownson’s own constructive reading of the Bible on sexuality is in the book’s two central parts. The goal here is to uncover, by taking a canonical approach, what Brownson describes as the ‘moral logic’ of biblical teaching. Exploration of eight key areas enables him to develop a biblical sexual ethic, one that is affirmative of permanent, faithful, same-sex unions. Although not citing it, he appears here to work with something akin to Cosgrove’s first hermeneutical rule that ‘the purpose (or justification) behind a biblical moral rule carries greater weight than the rule itself’ (Charles H. Cosgrove, *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate: Five Hermeneutical Rules* [2002], p. 12).

Part Two is about ‘recovering a broad, cross-cultural vision for the center of Christian sexual ethics’ from Scripture (p. 55). Its focus (chapter 5), drawing on the language of Genesis 2, is a ‘one flesh’ kinship relationship which includes but is not limited to heterosexual marriage and shapes the form and disciplines for biblically sanctioned sexual relations. In setting out this vision he also argues that a canonical reading will treat patriarchy in Scripture as a cultural phenomenon which is not binding today

because it is relativised by Scripture's competing vision of gender equality (chapter 4), that procreation is not biblically required for marriage (chapter 6), and that demanding celibacy is contrary to the teaching of Jesus and Paul (chapter 7). Each part of this vision removes some of the alleged biblical roadblocks often placed in the path of supporting same-sex unions and critiques aspects of the traditionalist case while offering a constructive biblical sexual ethic that can guide everyone, whatever their sexuality.

This vision is given further depth in Part Three by challenging traditionalists on their apparently strongest biblical ground, Romans 1:24-27. Brownson examines the four key moral categories or, as he puts it, forms of 'boundary language' that Paul uses in order to discern *why* he writes as he does. Brownson begins (chapter 8) with the language of lust and desire (*epithumia*, v. 24, *pathos*, v. 26, *orexis* and *ekkaio*, v. 27), and this theme is then prominent in shaping his accounts of the other three key moral categories at work in Paul's argument. These are purity/impurity (chapter 9, focused on *akatharsia*, v. 24), honour/shame (chapter 10, with reference to *atimazo*, v. 24, *atimia*, v. 26 and *aschemosyne*, v. 27) and nature (chapter 11). He argues that the appeal to nature (*physis*, v. 26), often the primary or sole concern in traditionalist readings, refers in Paul and the ancient world not only to biology but also to a person's individual nature and to social conventions. In relation to each of those four categories Brownson concludes that the 'moral logic' of Paul's critique in Romans 1 is one that can and should shape our sexual ethic but that this does not entail a rejection of all forms of homosexual behaviour and relationship. He argues that this conclusion follows because of our contemporary understanding of sexual orientation (where homosexuality is viewed not as a matter of uncontrolled lust but as an aspect of an individual's nature) and our different cultural context (in which honour is not as important or tied to patriarchal views of gender). We may therefore accept the categories or criteria in Paul's moral logic but then not accept the view that quasi-marital same-sex unions are lustful, impure, dishonourable or unnatural.

In contrast to many discussions of the Bible and homosexuality, Brownson's examination of the other six main biblical texts referring negatively to homosexual behaviour does not come until Part Four's final chapter and is quite brief. He argues that they too are best understood within his vision and understanding of Scripture's 'moral logic' concerning sexuality and are thus not normative, permanent, universal prohibitions.

Although most of Brownson's points can be found in the existing literature, the way in which he brings them together does justify his claim to offer a 'reframing' of the church debate and makes the book a significant contribution. It offers, in terms of the appeal to Scripture for a sexual ethic, the weightiest critique of the 'traditionalist' position and the most thorough biblically-based alternative. Its varied arguments therefore need careful and deep scrutiny. The limits of this review require selectivity (cf. my more comprehensive discussion cited at the end), so in what follows I explore six crucially important areas where I believe Brownson's arguments need further support to be persuasive – the question of 'moral logic', his critique of gender complementarity, his treatment of two wider theological and ethical issues (creation and procreation), his appeal to science, and his exegesis.

1. The quest for the underlying 'moral logic' of biblical commands and prohibitions is a crucial one in constructing a biblical ethic, but it is also complex and contentious, particularly when the proposed 'moral logic' is used to challenge traditional understandings and the apparent plain sense of the text. Brownson says relatively little about his principles or

method in discerning moral logic from biblical texts, other than highlighting the important criterion of canonical reading. '[T]he way any particular passage of Scripture is located within the larger themes and movements of Scripture as a whole' is crucial (p. 9). This much is uncontroversial, although more study of the range of biblical material – he offers, for example, very limited discussion of the various sexual prohibitions in the Torah – could help readers better judge the validity of his proposed themes and movements.

For example, his favouring of 'one flesh' over 'marriage' in relation to moral logic means that, despite the close correlation between legitimate sexual behaviour and marriage across the canon, he offers no study of changing understandings and patterns of marriage within the biblical witness and across biblical cultures. He also never addresses the fact that, with the exception of marriage, there is a strong Old Testament witness that close kinship relations should not be sexual. Even where his choice is more conventional and he gives attention to canonical trajectories, further questions are raised. For example, in relation to purity he offers a three-fold canonical development to argue for a redefinition in the New Testament from the external to the internal, from separateness to engagement, and from creation to new creation (briefly defended at pp. 189-93). This proposed trajectory risks failing to do justice to the continued importance in the New Testament of the external (particularly what we do with our bodies as shown by Paul's regular linking of *akatharsia* with *porneia* as in 2 Cor. 12:21, Gal. 5:19, 1 Thess. 4:3-7 among other texts). This neglect turns a proper distinction into a separation between internal disposition and external action that is both too crude and textually unsupported (and in which uncleanness relates only to the former). It also does not engage with the New Testament concern for separateness from sin or with the place of creation, the latter an issue I return to below.

Alongside the importance of the canon in determining moral logic, Brownson also places great emphasis on cultural context. By the end of the book he is more transparent about the method he has been using in 'uncovering the [Bible's] deeper values and commitments' through 'a broader exegetical exploration of the whole witness of Scripture, *along with other ancient texts*' (p. 259, italics added). While clearly Scripture cannot be abstracted from its cultural context, his description of the supposed *biblical* moral logic appears in a number of places to owe at least as much to *extra-biblical* sources. This is most notable in suggesting that Paul objected to male homosexual acts as shameful because in them males were 'either actively degrading others into the female role or shamefully adopting the passive female role for oneself' (p. 211). Such a claim not only lacks explicit textual support in Paul but appears to presuppose a particular patriarchal view in tension with Paul's non-hierarchical vision in 1 Corinthians 7, where the man's body belongs to his wife and should be yielded to her if she desires. While he acknowledges that 'the New Testament also challenged the honor-shame codes of its day' (p. 214), it remains unclear on what basis Brownson at times concludes that forms of moral logic in the wider culture were used by Paul and the early church.

2. Alongside offering a vision of Scripture's moral logic more amenable to same-sex unions, Brownson strongly rejects the moral logic he formerly advocated and rightly identifies as central to traditionalist readings – what he labels 'gender complementarity' (GC). Here he highlights an area where greater clarity and rigour and perhaps some rethinking are needed among traditionalists, while also revealing serious weaknesses in his own case.

Probably the best general definition Brownson offers of GC in traditionalist thought is that 'male and female are both similar and different, and this combination of similarity and

difference – or gender complementarity – is foundational to human identity, and to the institution of marriage’ (p. 17). In other words, there is theological and moral significance in the sexual differentiation of humankind in God’s creation purposes and there is a created unity-in-difference which means that within the sameness of a shared humanity there are two different ways of being human – male and female – which are important for understanding what it means to be a human creature and for the flourishing of humanity. Within this he rightly acknowledges a range of understandings among its advocates and concentrates his attention on the major work of Robert Gagnon (*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 2001) and what Brownson labels ‘anatomical and procreative complementarity’ focused on biological, particularly genital, differences. In critiquing this he offers a careful rebuttal of Gagnon’s exegesis of Genesis 2 in order to undermine the claimed biblical basis for GC. The main difficulty here is that Gagnon’s exegetical conclusions are not always representative of most traditionalists. It is quite possible to agree with Brownson against Gagnon on specific interpretive questions – whether the original *adam* is sexually undifferentiated, and whether the image of God is fully seen only in the sexual union of male and female (on both Gagnon argues ‘yes’, Brownson ‘no’) – without thereby abandoning some form of GC. Gagnon’s view is, for example, not that proposed in probably the most significant recent work of OT scholarship on sexuality, Richard Davidson’s *The Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (2007), which surprisingly Brownson does not cite. Nevertheless, despite reaching the same conclusions as Brownson on these questions, Davidson is a robust defender of a form of GC and the traditional reading of Scripture on homosexuality. In summary, Brownson here critiques one prominent scholar’s reading of Genesis 2 as if it is essential to the traditionalist case and essential to GC, but it is not.

Brownson’s own conception of complementarity and its relation to gender also require much further elaboration. He argues strongly for the importance of complementarity in committed relationships understood in terms of an otherness in which there is the ‘mystery...characterized by a deep and profound interaction of similarity and difference’ (p. 263). His concern is rightly that these qualities can be found in same-sex relationships and so ‘one need not relinquish complementarity; one must only loosen its essential link to a hard-wired understanding of gender’ (p. 265). He fails, however, to address what relationship there might be between gender and complementarity and such important theological questions as whether the fact that humanity is created male and female is perhaps the most profound interaction of similarity and difference among humans, especially in the light of Genesis (and Jesus’ appeal to it in Mark 10.6-8) and how this has been read in the Christian tradition. (He does not adequately engage with Christian theological discussions of this subject, showing, for example, no knowledge of Christopher Roberts’s major 2007 study, *Creation and Covenant: The Significance of Sexual Difference in the Moral Theology of Marriage*). Hence, even if GC is not explicitly taught in a detailed and normative manner in Scripture, the questions remain of whether we can and should give a Christian account of it and whether it was a reality of being human of which the biblical writers were aware from their experience and assumed in what they wrote. At times Brownson implicitly admits that some form of GC is present in Scripture (in the themes of patriarchy and the importance of procreation which require some concept of a combination of similarity and difference within humanity as male and female) but he nowhere addresses the crucial underlying question of the significance of humanity’s creation as male and female.

In short, Brownson highlights weaknesses and disagreements among those appealing to GC and, quite properly, the need for more work to be done on what is meant by GC. He does not, however, do justice either to the range of traditionalist readings or to the question of the biblical and theological significance of male/female differentiation – readers are left with no sense of Brownson’s own understanding of the meaning or import of this. Moreover he has not fundamentally undermined the traditionalist claim that this bi-polarity or sexual differentiation within humanity is a significant created good which must have a place in any theological anthropology and related account of sexual ethics.

3. That specific weakness in relation to the place of GC in a doctrine of creation signals a wider theological issue raised by Brownson’s account, namely the place of a doctrine of creation in Christian theology and ethics. Arguing, as noted, for a canonical trajectory from creation to new creation in relation to purity, he fails to do justice to the many echoes of creation narratives within Romans 1. Brooten, who highlights these, draws like Brownson on the work of Mary Douglas but reaches an opposite conclusion: ‘I am applying her [Douglas’s] insight about purity to Paul’s use of “impurity” in Rom 1.24 and simply stating the obvious: homoeroticism is fundamentally about gender. Impurity applied to gender thus means that people are not maintaining clear gender polarity and complementarity’ (Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* [1996], p. 235). Brownson’s failure to engage with this alternative understanding of purity in Romans 1 is a telling weakness. So too is his treatment of Leviticus where he acknowledges that ‘preserving what was perceived as the order of creation’ (p. 269) is part of the moral logic but then appeals to the movement to new creation to avoid addressing its significance today. This problem also appears in his discussion of patriarchy: he appears to see the egalitarian vision in the New Testament as solely eschatological and unrelated to an original equality in creation. He writes of two ‘countervailing’ streams in terms of a patriarchal one which ‘assumes life in this world, shaped by the structures of creation’, and an egalitarian one which ‘assumes life in the age to come, shaped by the structures of the gospel’ (pp. 80–81). This opposition between creation and gospel is highly problematic, suggesting his ethic has no place for the good order of creation redeemed in Christ.

4. Turning from dogmatic to moral theology, although the book’s discussion of Romans 1 helpfully highlights the breadth of the language of the ‘natural’, there is surprisingly little interest in the question of natural law and its biblical basis. This is seemingly on the grounds that, as *physis* is not used in the LXX, it is clear that ‘nature’ is ‘not an inherently Jewish concept, and it plays no role in either Hebrew or Aramaic Jewish literature’ (p. 225). While as a biblical scholar he can perhaps be excused engaging moral theologians’ technical discussions of ‘nature’, it is surprising that there is no reference to the wide literature on the moral significance of nature and creation and the place of natural law in the Old Testament and wider Jewish thought (for example, Barton, Levering, Novak, Bockmuehl, vanDrunen and Brown) that may shape Paul’s argument.

The one place where Brownson extensively engages moral theological debates is his chapter on procreation. This has surprisingly little biblical material but much on Christian moral teaching. Unfortunately, he demonstrates that he is far from home territory, presenting a crude polarisation in which Roman Catholic official teaching ‘states that procreation defines the essential purpose of marriage’ but Protestants claim that ‘the unitive meaning of marriage defines its essence’ (p. 126) and the Bible is said to support the

latter. The complexities of the debates are thus ignored. There is no recognition that *Humanae Vitae* was clear that ‘the unitive significance and the procreative significance... are both inherent to the marriage act’ and spoke of ‘each of these essential qualities, the unitive and the procreative’ (para. 12). Nor is there any awareness that, in *Life in Christ*, Anglicans and Roman Catholics agreed that ‘procreation is one of the divinely intended goods of the institution of marriage’ and so ‘a deliberate decision...without justifiable reason, to exclude procreation from a marriage is a rejection of this good and a contradiction of the nature of marriage itself. On this also we agree’ (para. 78). The challenge of why one can accept as a marriage the union of a man and a woman unable to conceive but not the union of two men or two women unable to conceive remains one of the major questions for those traditionalists who oppose same-sex marriage by tying marriage to procreation. Brownson’s discussion however illustrates that many who raise it work with simplistic caricatures about the debates over sex, marriage and procreation within moral theology.

5. A similar non-engagement with complexities is evident in Brownson’s treatment of the scientific evidence in relation to sexual orientation. This is crucial to his hermeneutic because his claims about our knowledge here justify the argument that following what he presents as the Bible’s ‘moral logic’ allows or even requires affirmation of same-sex unions. He never really explains what he means by sexual orientation but gives the impression that ‘homosexual orientation’ is a single, simple phenomenon which contrasts with ‘heterosexual orientation’. He therefore argues that a traditionalist view imposes celibacy on those with the former. Most definitions, however, recognise an orientation spectrum ranging from, in Kinsey, wholly heterosexual (0) to wholly homosexual (6) and this is increasingly being recognised as more people, particularly women, identify as bi-sexual. Brownson’s seemingly crude binary approach is also evident in his references to traditionalists expecting people ‘fully to change their sexual orientation’ (p. 142). Here his account lacks discussion of significant literature such as the work of conservative Christians Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse (in their 2007 book *Ex-Gays? A Longitudinal Study of Religiously Mediated Change in Sexual Orientation* and subsequent papers) or secular lesbian, Lisa Diamond, first in relation to female sexuality in *Sexual Fluidity* (2009) and more recently regarding male sexuality. This research would support claims that change is neither easy nor as common as traditionalists sometimes claim (raising pastoral and moral challenges to that position) but it would also require Brownson to be much more careful in his account. There are indeed situations where we are having ‘to come up with answers to questions that no one has ever asked before’ (p. 9) and to do so requires more than biblical study. However, in drawing on scientific understanding and insights in developing a contemporary sexual ethic and identifying what the new questions are, it is wise to heed the concluding cautions of Edward Stein that we still have a long way to go ‘in terms of justifying our metaphysical and scientific views about sexual orientation and sexual desires’ and that ‘confidence that we have advanced a great deal in our understanding of sexual orientation compared to Aristophanes and his fellow celebrants in *The Symposium* is premature’ (Stein, *The Mismeasure of Desire* [1999], p. 348).

6. Finally, even on Brownson’s home turf of biblical exegesis, there are a number of places where his claims are highly debatable and represent a minority view among commentators. These include his quick dismissal of the widely accepted view that

arsenokoitai is a term originating in Paul's reading of Leviticus 18 and 20, his view that lesbianism is not a concern in Rom. 1 (*contra* Brooten and others), and his reading of 1 Tim. 1 that makes no mention of the widely recognised echoes of the Decalogue in the vice list and instead conflates three broad terms so as to narrow the concern to the sex trade in young boys for older men.

In conclusion, perhaps the greatest challenge facing those seeking to argue a biblical basis for same-sex unions is that – in contrast to debates over gender equality or war or remarriage after divorce – the canonical evidence is uniformly, often strongly, negative. Brownson's work asks whether there is 'anything inherent in the moral logic that shapes the Bible's discussion of one-flesh unions that not only *assumes* but also *requires*' (p. 106, italics original) such unions to be male and female. Answering in the negative, he has presented the most thorough case so far that one can still be faithful to the Bible by going beyond its explicit witness in this area and appealing to moral logic and cultural change to argue that 'what is *normal* in the biblical witness' – only male–female sexual unions – 'may not necessarily be *normative*' (p. 109, italics original).

Brownson's argument from Scripture and proposed reframing of the debate present some important challenges to the traditionalist view but his contribution also leaves some serious theological, methodological and exegetical questions unanswered.

This review draws on Andrew Goddard's more detailed discussion of Brownson's book which is accessible at <http://klice.co.uk>.

Elaine Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Public Theology in a Post-Secular Age* (London: SCM Press, 2013), xxvii + 266 pp. £55.00, ISBN 978-0-334-04598-4 (pbk).

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Between a Rock and a Hard Place is a perceptive and timely contribution to current debates in public theology. Elaine Graham's prose is incisive and briskly paced, and she demonstrates not only great breadth of reading in theology and the social sciences, but also close attention to theology as it is practiced in the real world. And while Graham echoes more traditionally liberal concerns in her call to recover public theology as a distinctly apologetic endeavor, she does so in a highly nuanced way, taking particular account of postliberal challenges to that tradition. I briefly summarize the book's three sections, before making several critical observations.

Graham maps the current state of play in Part 1, giving particular attention to the uncharted territory in which the West finds itself in relation to religion and the secular. Her explication of this condition is one of the strengths of the book. The West is becoming not only more secular but also more religious—yet religious expression is less tethered to institutions, and secularism is marked, at least in some quarters, by a growing degree of self-awareness that might qualify as *post*-secularism. As theorists from José Casanova to Jürgen Habermas to Charles Taylor have made clear, a bewildering variety of expressions of both belief and unbelief is available today, with the implicit rules governing the interactions between religion and politics being revisited. Thus, even as traditional religious practice appears to be in decline, religion is becoming increasingly