

Delwin Brown, *What Does a Progressive Christian Believe?: A Guide for the Searching, the Open, and the Curious* (Seabury Books, 2008) [Theologian, taught at Ariz State, Iliff School of Theology, PSR].

Preface: “Progressive Christianity is a family of perspectives [in the USA—KW] that vigorously rejects the ‘religious right’ as a gross distortion of the Christian faith. Just as important, progressive Christianity criticizes and moves beyond the (other) conservatisms and liberalisms of the immediate Christian past. In our time it is new.” (xi)

Author “hesitates to refer to the voice now needed as a ‘progressive’ Christian voice” for three reasons: first, “progress is not always good and preserving the past is not always bad.” / Second, progressive movts. In USA have been political and “though now without merit. . . have left a great deal to be desired from a Christian standpoint.” Third, the term is “virtually synonymous with. . . the term ‘liberal.’ However, other possible terms, such as “prophetic” and “evangelical liberalism” also have drawbacks---but the term “progressive Christianity” is currently” most often used to refer to this [the one he wants to describe in this book] Christian viewpoint.” (xii-xiii)

Chap 1: What Progressive Christianity is Not (1-14)

It is more than a rejection of right-wing Christianity—their agenda is “historically and politically incorrect”—US not founded as Christian nation and they have “co-opted the name, language, and morals of the Christian faith” and tried to get the government to do their will. Author notes that you “can be a Republican and a Christian. . . [even] a very conservative Republican and a Christian” without accepting the ‘idolatry’ of the religious right—e.g. saying only they have the truth and “conflating” it with a particular political viewpoint.(1-3)

It is not Liberal Christianity in Disguise—liberal Christians (17th to 20th century) accepted empirical evidence and science and tried to “make the gospel relevant in each new age” but went too far when “reasoning based on (supposedly common) human experience became for them more than valued *tools and tests* to be utilized in shaping the / inherited Christian materials; gradually it became also the *source* of liberal theology.” Brown criticizes “modernism” defined as “the idea that there is one truth grounded in the nature of things in such a way that thinking individuals can have immediate access to this truth through reasoned analysis of contemporary experience, w/o any special dependence on inherited resources” [“Scientism,” or belief that only truths accessible to science can be given credence, would also fit here-KW] / Also adds that by 1940s & 1950s, liberal Christianity became “little more than the sanctimonious expression of common [secular] beliefs and values. . . . Liberal Christian morality was reduced to the common cultural interpretation of rectitude” without attention of the “rich biblical and historical inheritance” of the Christian past. (4-6)

“It is not Conservative Christianity Polished Up”. Post-Reformation Christianity in USA was influenced by Calvin (right belief—led to fundamentalism of Princeton theologians) and by John Wesley (right action—personal holiness and social reforms such as abolishing slavery). By the 1870, social reform had given way to emphasis on personal piety while the Princeton school moved toward biblical inerrancy. (6-8)

“A progressive Christian theology shares the 19th century evangelicals’ commitment to social justice But a theology that can endure must be much more deliberate than that of the evangelicals in its intellectual awareness and articulation. The mind is not all of human nature by any means, but it is part of and essential to a healthy humanity. Similarly, a full and credible theology is essentials to a healthy Christianity. *Hence a progressive Christian movement , if it is to be more than a fad, must be resolutely theological as well as active in the pursuit of justice [emphasis added]* / Adds that progressive Christians learn from conservatives “that all people. . . are historical people. We are formed by our past. . . . To pretend that our histories are absolute or inerrant is a mistake, [conservative error] but to ignore the power of our fallible traditions to inform, enrich, criticize, and transform the present is a grave / mistake too [liberal error] “*Progressive Christianity is an analysis and rejection, in the name of Christian faith, of the message that comes from right-wing Christianity. But it is . . . also a critique of liberal and conservative Christianity, as well as a continuation of valuable elements provided by each. [emphasis added]* (9-11)

Chap 2: Bible: Negotiating the Heritage (15-25)—The Bible is not inerrant, but contains many contradictions, even “different and conflicting theologies” on important matters such as the nature of Jesus and salvation. See examples. (15-19)

Then Brown contrasts the Roman and Hebrews notions of authority. Romans had a ‘normative’ view of authority, “the view that an authority is a singular standard or norm to which everyone should conform.” They also had the view “that once something has been founded it remains binding for all future generations.” [see fntc #5] / “Early institutional Christianity understandably appropriated this Roman view of authority. . . .The Apostles, witnesses to Jesus, became the ‘founding fathers’ of the Church. . . .Protestants and Catholics alike worked with a Roman or normative interpretation of Christianity’s founding event, now transmuted into a biblical canon. At the level of doctrine, the Bible was said to be, or to provide, an objective measure to be conformed to. . . .This Roman view of authority is very different from the view [of the Old Testament]. In this world each generation treated its authoritative past with respect, and with creativity! The prophets, for example, lived from their histories, but they did so innovatively—adapting and sometimes even reversing past interpretations of the exodus or the wilderness experience in order to meet the needs of new times. . . .”(20-21)

Tradition was authoritative, but not as a fixed and singular past that must be replicated.” In the gospels, Jesus spoke with “authority” and basic to the use of this term (*exousia*) in Mark 1:22, Luke 4:32, and Matt 7:29 “is the notion of a right or power to act or respond creatively. This power is first of all God’s, then Jesus’, and finally it is extended to the believing community. *The focus is on the creativity, power, and freedom of the authoritative source. That is, authority has to do with the creativity appropriate to an action, not the conformity appropriate to a reaction.*” (22) /

“The Bible is authoritative for progressive Christians because it empowers, not because it confines. The Bible is heeded because it forms us, not because it norms us. We read its stories, we listen to its parables, we hear its admonitions, we follow its reasoning, we are taught by its conclusions. In our personal lives and in our corporate worship, the Bible is the source out of which we live self-consciously as Christians, as we live into new times, confront new challenges, and address new issues.” (23) / “Among the diverse voices of Scripture are those that critique our individualistic notions of salvation, condemn our indifference to the rest of creation, challenge our imprisoning ‘free’ market assumptions, unmask our shallow view of responsibility, dismantle our notions of rank and power, denounce our religious and national exceptionalism, and reject the contrived categories by which we divide humankind. . . . And sometimes . . . we do disagree with biblical teachings. We permit divorce, although the Bible rejects it. We pay and charge interest, although the Bible condemns it. We reject slavery even when the master is kind and monarchy even when the ruler is benevolent. . . . / We follow the reasoning of the dominant voices—Paul and the theologians behind the Gospels. We listen to them and we agree, or modify, or sometimes sharply disagree. They are good teachers . . .who help us think for ourselves in our times and cultures.” (24-5)

Chap 3: Christ: Overturning the Categories (29-41)

Early New Testament writings asked what Jesus did and then later who he was—on this second point there are differing interpretations in the Gospels and Epistles. “Each of these interpretations is just that, one interpretation. . . .a particular standpoint, one bold witness to the significance of Jesus. Each is a specific answer to the question, what does Jesus mean for us in our time.” (31)

Church councils codify meaning of Jesus—God was incarnate in Jesus—a view not fully articulated until the Gospel of John, and a conclusion that “was audacious. . . .that Christianity has not fully assimilated even to this day.” (33; see pp. 34-35 for brief look at each council from Nicea to Chalcedon in 451) Jesus seen as fully God and fully man, with councils assuming “that divinity, whatever else it is or does, is the source of salvation, and second, that divinity works by somehow joining with that which it seeks to save.” (35)

Impact of incarnationalism for progressive Christians: “So if God assumes what God seeks to save, then God is somehow incarnate in the entire creation—the ordinary and extraordinary, the broken and the whole, the known / and the unknown, the familiar and the mysterious world. . . .[but] God is not reducible to the world; ‘God’ and ‘world’ are not synonyms. The world is not perfect. But God’s place in this imperfect place, and its destiny and God’s are joined. . . . [Therefore] “we ground our progressive Christian vision in the bold good news of the Christological councils, taken to its logical conclusion. The divine is at one with the cosmos and all that is in it. God is in and with the world. God is with the rest of creation, too—fully God, fully world, fully one. . . . At its most basic level, the doctrine of the incarnation means that we are at home in the world.”(36-37) And that means:

- “the fallible, self-correcting process of scientific inquiry is not alien to us. We do not have or need a separate, special way of knowing facts about the created order.” (38)
- “the arts and philosophies of our many cultures are all places where God is present. All are vehicles for the expression of the divine, however partially” (38)
- “the incarnation of God means that all of the world’s religions are frail but fecund sites of the divine. . . . We may say with John’s gospel that no one comes to God except through Christ, but ‘Christ’ is the Christian name for the logos of God in all of creation, including all religions. We do not have a privileged religious perspective, and we do not need one in order to embrace and proclaim our faith.” (38)
- But we also “believe that the incarnation in Jesus, proclaimed in the New Testament, has something of saving value / for other to consider. . . .In the birth of Jesus we see the gentleness and vulnerability of the divine. . . .In the actions of Jesus we see the primacy of God’s commitment to the neglected ones. . . .In the compassion of Jesus for the least ones we become aware of God’s love for all creation. . . .In the parables and other teachings of Jesus, we hear God’s challenge to every human convention, every status quo. . . .In the persecution of Jesus we witness the seemingly intractable evil that the divine work of salvation everywhere faces. . . .In the crucifixion of Jesus we see the willingness of God to suffer and to die, with and for us, if that is what oneness with the world requires.” / And finally, “in the resurrection of Jesus we experience the tenacity of a God who will not let go of us or the rest of creation. We believe that no defeat diminishes the divine resolve to seek the human good and the good of the entire created order.”(38-40)

Chap 4: God: Exploring the Depths (43-56) [Replacing God as Cosmic Monarch with the Incarnate God first discussed in Chapter 3]

God as cosmic monarch—this makes God responsible for evil, leaving us to puzzle over such a God would allow or bring about the destruction that besets nature and humanity and why we should try to make things better if everything that happens is God’s will. (44-46)

The incarnate God, by contrast, “incorporates the realities of all created life—chance and order, animate, human and non-human, living and dying, good and bad, joy and sorrow. It will be a God whose way of creating is the persuasive power of what is best or better for each given / situation, large and small. It will be a God whose way of saving is as a presence throughout the creation, as creative energy, judging goodness, healing love.” (47-48)

This leads to an explanation of Openness Theology (Freewill Theism) or Process Theology. / Clark Pinnock is a leader of Openness theology and John Cobb is the best known Process theologian. Both begin with idea that “love is the fundamental character of God. . . .God is vulnerable; the life of God is a dynamic process that is affected by the world. . . .God suffers in our suffering. God is torn by the persistent injustice of our societies. God is diminished by the / mistreatment of the non-human world.” God is not omnipotent or omniscient. “A God who is open to the world—whether by primordial choice (the Openness position), or metaphysical necessity (the Process position)—cannot do anything that God might wish to do, and cannot know everything that God might desire to know.” This gives humans more power. / “human free choices (and, for them, the processes of nature, too) are inviolate, limiting conditions within which God must work, and, in love, does work willingly.” (48-51)

How this incarnate God is experienced: God’s role is to nudge creation “from less to more adequate forms and processes. . . .The call to repent and move away from self-centeredness, beyond racism, sexism, and homophobia toward economic and ecological justice is an experience of God.” (52) “God is also experienced as presence, an immediacy. . . .an experience of nature [or] of communion with another individual or within a community. . . .God is experienced as mystery” and this “may be the greatest gift that God has to offer our world today.” (53)

We can have no clear or absolute description of God—our concept “is always an interpretation.” “*The ‘absolutizing’ of religion and religious belief is a sign of fear, a desperate attempt to hide the fact that our fundamental orientations toward life are always interpretive adventures, always a risk. Critics of religion are fully justified in denouncing its absolutistic expressions. They misunderstand religion, though, when they assume that the*

absolutistic impulse is essential to it. On the contrary, it is a corruption of religion, / precisely because religion is a standpoint of faith."(emphasis added)

[Note: a former owner of my copy of this book wrote the following questions at the end of this chapter: "How much is his idea of God a projection or a construction of liberal theology or ideology? That is, are we doing the same thing as the ancients except merely putting our own best characteristics on this God? Good questions, highlighting at least a real danger in progressive Christianity.]

Chap 5: Humanity: Continuing the Creation (57-68)

Who are we to be? God brought animals to Adam to be named—we are to be stewards of creation, co-creators with God. "Human domination" asserted in Genesis is not an entitlement or a privilege, but a responsibility (58-60)

What are we to do? Another way to show the interconnectedness of creation due to incarnation—basic theme: "We are to live God with all the parts of our being, not just some. Further, our love of God is connected to our love of neighbor—the latter obligation "is like" the former. Finally, love of neighbor is connected to love of self." (61) And, of course, good Samaritan parable says that "the neighbor is whoever is in need." (62)

Love of God and neighbor are "the abiding obligation of the progressive Christian". Bible doesn't stipulate a particular set of beliefs and practices, but communicates to us "a process of 'pious' (in the best sense) witness, critique, response, and failure and growth. It is a process into which we are invited." The Bible also "embraces difference. . . .Acceptance of diversity, however, does not mean indifferent relativism. If there are not perfect ways to love God and neighbor, in each case, some ways are far better than others." / "Differences provoke us to seek the better ways and prod us to do so in humility." Notes that Tower of Babel story is not meant to be a punishment from God, but rather "a safeguard, a protection against the illusion that we are or can become like God. God intervened when uniformity became excessive." (64-65)

Chap 6: Sin: Failing and Hiding (69-82)

Traditional Christian Theology: Sin as Pride and Sensuality, the former seen as "excessive self-regard" and the latter seen as its opposite, "inadequate self-regard, limiting oneself too much, expecting for oneself less than that to which one is entitled." (71)

Then he "translates [recasts] this traditional understanding of the forms of sin into a different language, using as our reference point the two great commandments. . . .[these commandments require] an interconnected and balanced love, a love fitting to the object of love. In light of these commandments, then, sin is disproportionate love, love that is out of balance—excessive or deficient love. Stated abstractly, sin is an affirmation of oneself that neglects the needs of the neighbor, or an affirmation of those like us that fails to show love for those who are different, or a love for humanity that fails to affirm the intrinsic worth of the rest of creation. Sin is also the reverse of these: sin is loving God but neglecting the creation in which God is incarnate, or / loving the rest of creation but diminishing humanity, or devoting oneself to those who are different with little regard of one's own kind., or devoting oneself to neighbor and ignoring one's own needs." (72-73—examples follow)

Sin as self-deception (see Romans 1:18-22). He notes as examples religious leaders who hypocritically preach against homosexuality while "engaging in homosexual acts on occasion when they are under stress" or "who use the mass media to raise money for God while they build their mansions and buy their Ferraris."(77)

His take on Original Sin: "It is about the fact that these inherited structures [racism, sexism, other cultural and institutional 'givens'] are stubborn givens and take possession of our world and of our individual being—they are both external and internal. . . .We are born into these, and they are inculcated in us. We begin with them. We have no other starting place." (79) "We fail, we hide, and [these] build into binding, but comfortable, modes of life which love of God and others is manipulated, twisted, cheapened, distorted, denied, or virtually destroyed." (80)

Chap 7: Salvation: Seeking and Finding (83-94) [Thesis: salvation, like much else in progressive Christianity, is broad (includes more than the individual) and is focused on the present world.]

84) “Salvation, for example, is either spiritual or material in nature, for the individual soul or for individuals-in-community, for human beings or for all of creation, available in the present or in the future, forgiveness or transformation, a gift bestowed or a product of human seeking. From the perspective of a progressive Christian vision no such choices can be made. *Salvation includes all of the above.*” [*emphasis added*]

84-6) Support for the above: Implications of the notion of incarnation (in early church councils) for salvation.

- Nicea said Jesus was “fully and truly God.... Thus the salvation made possible by God incarnate is fully and truly salvation. . . . The real God makes possible real salvation.”(84)
- Council of Cple said that this God “is incarnate in the actual world, in ordinary humanity, and following Paul’s vision in Romans, throughout the natural order. Thus, salvation is possible for the entire creation...”
- Council of Ephesus said that “God is incarnate not only in, but also through, the creation. Thus, salvation is made possible not only in but through the natural order of things. The God become incarnate in history through nature [evolution??] makes salvation possible through natural processes, both non-human and human.” (85)
- Fourth, Chalcedon said that “in the incarnation full divinity and humanity are united ‘without division, without separation.’ So “again, following the elaboration of the concept. . . by Paul, the process of divine salvation is one with the ordinary and natural processes of the world, without division, without separation.”

“The God at home in this world saves this world through processes that are part and parcel of this world. Salvation comes through the complex personal, political, social and environmental processes of the created world, not in opposition to or distinction from it. (85)

Two metaphors for a progressive understanding of salvation:

First, “the kingdom” or “reign of God” in which salvation comes from a messiah who rises up to bring it into being or from an apocalyptic event in which God intervenes causing a radical break with nature and history. / In this “reign of God” model, this reign is not only spiritual but also economic, social, and political. “It is human and non-human, individual and collective. . . . fullness of health throughout the whole web of life. . . . Salvation comes into being. . . through this-worldly processes of nature, history, interpersonal relationships, and the dynamics of our individual lives.” It comes in this life, breaks in upon us “in the variety of ways we celebrate and cherish—a request for forgiveness, a change of heart, a growth in love, a dedication to values beyond the self.” (87-88)

Second, the “eternal life” metaphor, in which the word “eternal” does not refer to life after death or to the “immortality” of the soul, but to “the quality of a life lived in the incarnate reality of God.” / It implies a more subjective view than does the “reign of God” metaphor: “Our lives find a place in the life of the everlasting God who is incarnate in creation. . . . What we do somehow makes a difference to God, contributes to the divine aims, adds to the divine life, enriches the divine experience. This is the ‘eternality’ of our lives. Our lives have an everlasting meaning. . . as they find a place in the God who “assumes” them and all of life.” (89-90)

How Hell fits into this picture: “Not only the good, but also the evil. . . is accepted into God’s / reality. All that we do has permanence. Therefore . . . there is a hell as well as a heaven. Heaven is the permanence of every achievement on behalf of love, however partial, and the permanence of every action that contributes to that achievement, in the reality of God. But hell is real too. It is the permanence of the good ‘that might have been, and was not.’ Every destruction, every loss, every failure to love God, self, neighbor, and the rest of creation—these too are taken up as indelible facts in the being of an incarnate God. . . . Divine grace makes sense only if there is some real meaning to ‘hell,’ and if grace is everlasting then so is failure. . . . If failure is permanent, so is grace.”

And what about “personal immortality”? “That is not precluded by the idea of eternal life.” Although some theologians have questioned the idea of personal immortality, he says, “confidence in some sort of personal existence beyond death is part of the more common New Testament vision. Unlike the Greek idea of the immortality of the soul, however, in the biblical tradition existence beyond physical death is the continuation of the full person—not just the isolated, immaterial ‘soul’—in the environment of a new or renewed world.” (90-91)

Chap 8: Church: Serving and Being Served (95-109)

[Thesis: seven themes or tenets of the progressive Christian perspective as well as images of the church and how the church can best be understood as “a servant people”]

These seven themes summarize his understanding of progressive Christianity.

1. “Progressive Christians are people formed by the tradition grounded in Jesus Christ. . . .The assertion of absolute truth for this tradition, or any interpretation of it, is contrary to Christianity’s own best insights. . . . But we believe Christianity’s historic resources offer vital criticisms, values, and visions that can provide insight, hope, and transformation today to the entire human family.
2. “The Bible is our foundational resource. Its varied interpretations of Jesus Christ and the gospel “author” our identity as Christians. The diversity of these interpretations compels us to honor differences among Christians today. . . .The manifold voices within our scriptural foundation invite us into their dialog, criticize our limited understandings, teach us to think. . . for ourselves, and empower us to come to views of our own about the meaning of Christian responsibility in today’s world.
3. “Jesus Christ discloses to us the oneness of God with the world and the manner of God’s working in it. We share St. Paul’s conviction that God seeks the salvation of the entire created order, and we share the conviction of the ancient Church that salvation is made possible by the power of / God’s presence. . . .we affirm the incarnation of God in the entire creation, not just humanity—fully God, fully at one with the full creation.
4. “The God revealed in Jesus Christ is the creative power for good at work in all of creation. God judges, heals, and transforms through persuasive love, not absolute power. Just as God makes a difference in the world, so we make a difference in the divine experience. God rejoices in our joys and suffers in our sorrows. We may experience the incarnate God as guide, presence, and mystery, but we can never capture God in our understanding.
5. “Humanity is called to work with God in the service of the entire creation. . . .Our guides are the Two Great Commandments—to love God and to love others as ourselves. /
6. “Sin is thinking of ourselves—individually or collectively—more highly, or less highly, than we ought to think. Sin is the excessive valuing or devaluing of any element, group, or portion of the creation in relationship to the rest. . . .Our failure to love properly and our self-deception about this failure create structures of inhumanity that continue from generation to generation. These structures—egotism, classism, racism, misogyny, homophobia, consumerism, nationalism, heretosexism, humanocentrism—abide in the environments in which we are formed from birth, and for which we must be set free.
7. “Salvation is the activity of the God incarnate, working through all of the processes of the creation to bring it to the fullness and health made possible by love. . . .Like all hopeful expectations, the comprehensive healing affirmed by Christian faith is visionary and thus metaphorical. . . .The principle metaphors. . . are two-fold: the ‘reign of God’—a vision of this world transformed by justice and love, and ‘eternal life’—a vision of God incarnate in the world to whose reality our efforts and our lives might somehow contribute everlastingly.” (96-98)

100) Here Brown expresses his belief that ideas (“any worldview, religious or secular”) must be “created and sustained most effectively in and through communal practices. The power of communities. . .resides in their complex meshing of mind and feeling, cognition and emotion. . . .in a communal reality. . .ideas enter into and emerge out of –antiphonally, if you will—the emotional and actional life of the affections.”

102-06) Brown lists and critiques four images of the Church: “People of God”, “body of Christ”, “community of the Spirit”, and “servant people.” The first seems a bit arrogant and “more than a little triumphal;”/ the second is better, connecting us “to the event of Jesus Christ” but / can lead us to think of the Church “as somehow embodying a special virtue, in this case ‘Christ-likeness;’ the third suggests the idea “that

the ‘reign of God’ [is] always coming into this world” (a good thing) but can also suggest “that the Church already possesses the Spirit.” / Brown prefers the fourth image, that of the Church as the “servant people” and defines it thus: “*the Church is the community of those who seek to serve God’s healing work in the world, as that divine activity is understood in light of Jesus Christ.*” (emphasis added). This task requires judgment, but more: “serving the Power that makes for healing requires sustained / commitment—reflection, confession, repentance, affirmation, and resolution.” (see following page for more).

Epilogue: Rightly Mixing Religion with Politics (111-122) “There are good reasons. . .for urging that religion be kept out of politics [primarily our differences]. The only problem is that it is not possible.” So what are some rules for doing it in the best possible way. (112)

“Religious people cannot participate in our common public life w/o bringing their religion into this participation” because religion includes “our most basic values” but we can avoid undermining democracy—in fact, we can give voice to a Christian perspective that affirms and strengthens the democratic process. And we must!” (113) / Our first step might be to realize that “the secular perspective is not acceptable to everyone, nor in fact, is it self-evidently true. . . .The second step is to realize that a secular perspective is not inherently anti-religious.” Secular society is often defined as one “in which the various human enterprises (government, science, the economy, etc.) are differentiated from each other, and all of them are freed from religious coercion. “The progressive Christian is as firmly committed as any other ‘secular’ person to freedom from religious coercion, overt or subtle, in every sphere of life, including (we might note) the religious sphere.” (114) He adds, however, that it is “worth noting” these sphere of life are not sealed off from each other. Government and economics, for example are often connected in our study and life. (114-15)

Rules for Bringing Religion into Politics (115-119)

1. “Christians must accept the fact that our religious convictions are never, ever to be privileged over the convictions of others. . . .God created the entire world in all of its tumultuous diversity, and pronounced it to be good. For progressive Christianity in particular it is also [our] belief that God is incarnate everywhere in the creation.” /
2. “Christians must seek to understand our adversaries, and to be understood by them, but in that order. . . . We need to hear the stories of others—the secular humanists’ stories of the Enlightenment and science, the Muslims’ stories of the Prophet and the *hajj*, the Jews’ stories of Torah and the land. We need to hear the evangelicals tell how Jesus changed them, and Pentecostals tell how the Spirit filled them. But also, others need to hear our story. It is a story of God’s oneness with the world, God’s unreserved commitment to it, and a transforming story of the healing that this Oneness can bring to our brokenness.” /
3. “Christians should identify the many values that we share with others & ask what we can build together [based on] the things we hold in common. . . .From a progressive Christian perspective, we will hold much in common because we are all creatures in whom God is incarnate. [We each have some God in us—KW]
4. “Whenever possible Christians must give as much ground as possible. In short, we must compromise.” / “There is a Christian reason for valuing compromise. It is the realization that we are all fallible, that none of us knows the pure will of God, that each of us is prone to hubris and self-deceit, and that the point of view of the other person, even if wrong, can perhaps provide a critique of our excesses, our short-sightedness, our own insufficiencies.”
5. “Christians should never press to outlaw conduct unless it directly undermines the common good.” He cites a prayer by a conservative Christian: “Dear Lord, we are thankful that we live in a country that allows people to do things we believe are sinful.” The principle, Brown says, is that we should “never seek to outlaw something because we think it to be immoral, or we find it to be offensive, unless it directly threatens the common good.” [e.g. gay and lesbian marriage does not threaten the common good.] /
6. “Christians should deliberate in community. . . .when enough unity exists to make conversation valuable.”

“Having differences is not a sign of failure, nor is our inability to resolve them readily or finally. The political struggles we have, in the church and the broader culture, are part of the process of divine creation. In our differences we are, together, ordering and reordering the world.” (121)