

# 13.

## Christian Religious Practice

In order to play the piano, the clarinet, or the violin, one must practice. To be a dancer, one must practice. To be a ballplayer, one must practice. And to be a Christian, one must practice.

The term “religious practice” has been reempowered for me by numerous teachers of contemporary North American Buddhism. “Practice” in these Buddhist movements means time spent daily in solitary mindfulness meditation. A Buddhist practice may also include attending nurture groups (or sanghas), hearing talks, working with an individual teacher, and doing compassionate action for others or for the social and natural fabrics of living.

This Buddhist practice is not done for its own sake but for the sake of making every moment of one’s life a connection with the living here and now rather than taking leave of the here and now in an attitude of rebellion or control or clinging or addiction or passivity or panic or despair. One practices meditation not for its own sake but for the sake of allowing each moment to be lived in equanimity, freedom, compassion, and trust that life can be joyfully lived. **Such religious practice is practice for the full concert of living.**

So what does it mean for Christian identified people to design effective religious practice within the context of Christian heritage? Christian prayer, devotional reading, and contemplative exercises can also be understood as practice for the full concert of living. These solitary exercises, properly understood, are not done for their own sake, but as a “means of grace” – that is, as a way of healing our lives and of practicing healed living as preparation for the healed performances of our entire daily lives.

Though Christians do solitary practices, Christians have traditionally emphasized corporate practices such as going to church every Sunday; hearing scripture read and sermons given; studying with others; and celebrating together births, marriages, deaths, and other life passages. All these corporate activities can be “means of grace” – that is, ways of healing our lives in preparation for being healed persons in the performance of our entire daily lives.

The Christian practice I envision includes both solitary and corporate religious practices. The Christian Resurgence Circle meets primarily to do corporate religious practices. And an effective CRC will encourage solitary religious practice in the lives of its members.

The key to moving in this direction is designing practices that work – that genuinely do promote Spirit maturity, that do initiate, maintain, and accelerate the joy and power of living a Spirit empowered life. One of the obstacles to effective practice is our cultural overemphasis on order and rationality. Religious practices must have design and discipline and order, yet these practices must also be open to surprise, to mystery, to the chaos of healing events that real life provides. Effective religious practices must make room for the irrational, the intuitive, the wildness of nature, and the deep freedom of Spirit. Laying out colored cloths, ringing bells, sitting in silence with no rational purpose, conducting open ended conversations, making irrational sounds – such things as these when thoughtfully constructed and playfully done can evoke Spirit.

Spirit is Awe not rational order. Spirit is dread, fascination, freedom, trust, compassion, tranquility, bliss, joy, equanimity, courage – all of which are more than rational dynamics. The

manifestation of Spirit includes Great Thinks, but also Great Feels and Great Resolves. Effective solitary and corporate practices enable the present time experience of these mighty winds of Awe blowing through our lives. To practice effective religion, we must be willing to surrender the controlling mind, the mind of anxious planning and regretting and hoping, the mind which spins out endless doubts and confusions and excuses for slovenly living. We must be willing to leap off the cliff of our own personality patterns into the open air of Spirit possibilities we may find frightening as well as exhilarating.

At the same time, effective religious practice is a discipline. It is something we do whether we feel like it or not, whether we want to do it or not, whether we are hopeful about it or not, whether we see immediate results or not. Like a devoted pianist, we just practice. As a suggested minimum we spend time in solitude at least 20 minutes every day; we spend time with others in corporate Christian religious practice at least two hours every week; we set aside a weekend or more every year for some sort of training or retreat. This is a bare bones minimum for effective religious practice. If we are not doing such a minimum, we are not actually practicing a religion, we are merely talking about it.

But talking about our religion is important. Talking about all these issues is how we move toward designing practices that actually work for us. Talking about practice may be how we make the decision to actually begin a meaningful practice. In the rest of this chapter I am going to talk about possible practices that might work for you or me or others. I am going to talk first about solitary practices and then about corporate practices.

### **Solitary Practices**

The solitary practices that have predominated in Christian heritage can be grouped under these three categories: devotional dialogue, prayer, and contemplation.

By “**devotional dialogue**” I mean reading the Bible and other Christian writings. I also mean reading any religious or secular, fictional or nonfictional work that has the capacity to awaken Awe. If we use the Bible as part of our devotional dialogue, we need a means of doing so that will relate these ancient writings to the actual experiences of our current lives. A very useful method of biblical interpretation is substituting appropriate contemporary words for those troublesome biblical words that tend to carry misleading meanings. For example, in order to avoid hearing the word “God” as a rational idea or as a super-someone who dwells up above all the ordinary processes, we can substitute other words like: “The Awesome Presence,” “The Infinite Silence,” “The Final Reality,” or “The WAY IT MOVES.” These terms can also be misleading unless we associate them with real experiences in our lives. Similarly, for the term “Holy Spirit” the simple word “Awe” will work if we know what we mean by “Awe.” In many instances a biblical passage can help us discover in our own experience the meaning of “Awe,” “the Awesome,” and being an “Awed One” along with Jesus, the disciples, the prophets and others.

Devotional dialogue can also include writing down our responses to the reading of various Awe rich materials. This might be done in some kind of personal solitary journal. Or if we have difficulty reading our own writing, perhaps learning to type and using a word processor would help. Such writing might begin as a chore but can become a happy inquiry – giving personal expression to the Awe that is entering our lives.

In Christian heritage “**prayer**” is a second primary category of solitary practice. Prayer is usually addressed to God and structured as a dialogue with or request from this Infinite dialogue

partner in our life. If, however, we begin our prayers with phrases like “Our father who art in heaven,” such language will tempt us to fall back into literal understandings of the obsolete transcendence metaphor. So it is better to begin our prayers with phrases like “Oh Infinite Silence who welcomes me home to my actual reality” or some other phrase that means something actual to our personal experience.

Prayer is an important practice because it is a practice of freedom. To pray assumes that the future is open to change. To pray assumes that the act of freedom involved in the decision to pray makes a difference in the way life works out. And this is true. Prayer changes things not because it manipulates the Infinite Silence to act differently. Prayer changes things because it programs our own psyche to be open to the Reality already coming our way. This Reality we would have missed or misappropriated if we had not prayed. Prayer is getting our heartfelt passions consciously stated so they can work in real life. Prayer is stating our actual concerns so these concerns can actually function to draw to us those resources we need to meet those concerns. Prayer is the establishment of commitments that prepare us to act as the opportunities to act on these commitments arise in our lives. Prayer is freedom practicing being freedom in order that we may live in freedom in all the moments of our lives.

Petitionary prayer is choosing what we actually want for our own lives. Intercessory prayer is choosing what we are actually concerned to see come to pass in the lives of others. Gratitude prayer is choosing to be celebrative and thankful for our actual lives and for the Spirit wonders that are coming our way. Confessional prayer is choosing to own up to the sorrows, the remorse, and the flawed living that we do not wish to be the pattern in our future living. All these categories of prayer are acts of freedom that are practicing freedom for the living of freedom-filled lives.

“**Contemplation**” has been the third key category of Christian solitary practice. Monastics, Quakers, and the more mystical strands of Christian heritage have emphasized contemplation. Silence is often an important part of Christian contemplation. Listening to the Infinite and listening for the sense of the group Spirit has been a Quaker emphasis. Christian monastics have also used silent time as a means of exploration of inward reality, seeking grounding in the actual experience of living rather than in ideas that may not be rooted in that ground. Christian silence practices have a strong parallel with Buddhist meditation, and many Christians today are learning enrichments for their own use of silence from the contemporary teachers of Buddhism.

Christian contemplation or Buddhist meditation cannot be exhaustively understood in a few paragraphs. In fact these practices cannot be understood at all without actually practicing them. Perhaps a few more words of context will suffice for this overview. Contemplation is not the same as devotional dialogue: it moves toward a wordless apprehension of Awe. Contemplation is not prayer but moves toward a silent communion too deep for words. Contemplation is an emphasis upon pure being rather than the passionate action of prayer or the articulate knowing of devotional dialogue.

While these three categories of solitary practice can be distinguished, they also blend into one another. Our actual Spirit Being performs all three of these dynamics at the same time. Nevertheless, our amazing minds can distinguish them: (1) dialogue as knowing Awe, (2) prayer as doing Awe, and (3) contemplation as being Awe.

Each of us will need to discover for ourselves which solitary exercises are most effective in awakening states of Awe in our lives. But we who are members of a Western culture need to be reminded that effective religious practice entails using not only our minds. Awe is manifest in

Great Thinks, but also in Great Feels and Great Resolves. Discovering Awe as Great Feels will mean paying more attention to our sensory, emotional, and bodily dimensions. And discovering Awe as Great Resolves will mean spending time rehearsing our most passionate intentionalities. Solitary exercises are most effective when they are awakening Awe the knowing, being, and doing dimensions of Awe.

## **Corporate Practices**

Christians, compared to Buddhists, have emphasized corporate practices. Going to church is most often the center of Christian practice. What would it mean to make our gatherings with others the rich Awe experiences we need?

Our current participation in at worship services, weddings, funerals, or baptisms may not impress us as effective means of grace that prepare us for living every moment of our lives. Many current Christian practices are detrimental. They are sentimental, moralistic, and rationalistic – the very opposite of invoking Awe. Most Christian-identified people today are practicing flight from Awe rather than practicing how to live the Awe that is streaming into all aspects of our lives.

So what would it mean to formulate a Christian practice that is indeed a practice of Awe for the living of Awe-filled lives? Even when we are somewhat clear in our minds and in our personal experience what we mean by Awe, we still face the practical issue of what exactly we need to do each week when we gather with other Christians for a couple of hours. And also, what do we need to do to celebrate important life passages like birth, marriage, vocation, and death?

There are thousands of ways to practice an effective Christianity, but we have to choose particular practices that work for us in our living moments. I am going to focus on practices that might be appropriate for a network of Christian Resurgence Circles. Consider these suggestions as exploratory, as research that might spark a general recovery of effective Christian practice.

### **What do we do when we get together?**

What might we do with two hours every week meeting with other Christian-identified people who are willing to experiment with these vast issues?

I would suggest that the first thing we need to do is talk with one another openly and honestly, doing so in the context that what we share is forgiven. In the context of total absolution upon our entire lives, we can and need to share with one another those living experiences, truths, and questions that have been our actual lives, our already absolved lives. By “absolved” or “forgiven” I do not mean excused and I do not mean adored. I just mean that you and I and everyone else are accepted for what we are, have done, and will or will not do. Each person is totally accepted, and though moral judgments abound and are part of our lives, we can set aside any moral judgments that might exclude us from being part of the living present in which we are all called to live in Awe and in compassion, freedom, trust, tranquility, and other aspects of Awe. This acceptance may come from the persons assembled and sharing with us, but always acceptance is coming from that Awesome Actuality that is functioning in and through the entire cosmos. If we who meet with one another and share our lives trust this cosmic forgiveness, we also receive the grace to accept one another.

A second thing we can do is study together the sort of Awe-inspired Christian theology that I

am assuming in all these reflections. We need to clear our minds of all the bad Christian theology that is disabling us. We need to train our minds to see this entire wondrous heritage in a fresh and relevant light. There are many good books and essays for us to study, but we do need to choose carefully and try to avoid subtle forms of moralism, sentimentalism, and rationalism. We also need to choose material that is more accessible than most of the works of Søren Kierkegaard, Paul Tillich, Rudolf Bultmann, and others whose writings are indeed profound enough but whose words may not always make intimate connection with the daily lives of ordinary people living today. Obviously, I have been writing books and essays intended to fill this gap between the popular pulp and the inaccessible academic excellence. This same standard can be used for choosing study materials that are readable and personal as well as challengingly profound.

A third thing we can do is experiment in small ways with ritual. Just singing together is a very good beginning. We can also try very simple rituals like sitting in silence together and praying together. These activities need to be done with fresh theological understandings of what we are doing. It is important to do activities that engage us emotionally, but we can easily slip back into sentimental nostalgias or into practices that are offensive to us rather than nurturing. We do not need to hurry in our creation of complex ritualistic activities. We can let our ritual activities emerge slowly out of the life of our group. Openness to intuitive exploration is an appropriate guideline here.

My final suggestion is that we not avoid interpreting Scripture together. The Christian Scriptures are ancient writings and therefore need thoroughgoing metaphorical translation for our times. We also face the difficulty that the Christian Scriptures are being misused and misinterpreted today in every conceivable manner. Wading through this swamp can be discouraging to even the most biblically trained persons among us. Nevertheless, I am convinced that a meaningful recovery of our biblical foundations is completely necessary for a vibrant Christian resurgence. So let us explore this religious practice. A good deal of my own writing has been devoted to preparing biblical materials that assist with this direction. Using such materials can help us past the pitfalls into the glory of appropriating afresh this core wellspring of our heritage.

This chapter is only an introduction to revitalized Christian religious practice. Finishing the topics introduced here may take several more decades of experimentation. I envision this experimentation being done by thousands of people meeting weekly in Christian Resurgence Circles. Perhaps this entire book is but a preface to that larger report that needs to be written on the other side of a few more decades of Christian religious practice.

## 14.

# Christian Secular Practice

Christian religious practice is practice for our Christian secular practice. Our secular practice is not practice for something else; it is “practice” in the sense that a person might practice dentistry or practice law. Christian secular practice is our whole life. Christian religious practice is part of our life, that part which practices for our whole life.

### The Practice of Giving Witness

Witnessing to others about our Christian self understanding is part of our secular practice. This witness does not require the use of Christian language. This witness does not require any mention of the name of Jesus or of heaven or of hell. When people in currently popular forms of Christianity speak of witnessing to their Christian faith, they usually mean proclaiming a particular dogma. They may even mean luring people with promises of heaven and threats of hell to believe certain dogmas held by their group. Both fundamentalist and liberal Christians often confuse witnessing to their faith with recruiting people to attend their congregation.

True witnessing has nothing to do with getting people to join some group or to believe some dogma or to practice some religious practice. Witnessing is a secular practice. Witnessing means alerting someone to the presence of the Awesome, to the upwelling of Awe, and to the happy choice of living one’s life as an Awed One.

And Awe, remember, includes Trust of that Awesome Mysteriousness that encompasses all processes and all events. Awe includes Compassion for all beings including one’s own being. And Awe includes Freedom from the bondages of fatalistic fantasies, the limitations of personality identifications, and all principles of good and evil. Trust, Compassion, and Freedom are secular things. They are the foundational actualities of our essential humanity. And these basic actualities are being witnessed to through thousands of religious languages. Our Christian language is only one such language (or one set of languages).

Thus, as we make our appropriate secular witnesses to our Awe-filled life, we do not require anything of the hearers of our witness except seeing with their own “inner eyes” the truth of what we are pointing to. We do not ask them to join our group. We do not ask them to use our language. We do not ask them to believe our beliefs. We only ask that they hear that they are wondrous beings, capable of being Awed by the Awesome and filled with Awe.

Later, if any of those who hear our witness want to join us in our Christian practice, we can certainly welcome that, but if they choose a Buddhist practice instead, we do not consider our witness a failure. In fact, our witness is never a failure even when thoroughly rejected. Our witness is a witness to the Truth and this Truth shall win in the end. Before human history is completed every head shall bow and every knee shall bend before this Truth that the Awesome encircles the ordinary events of human life and calls every human being to the life of Awe, to being an Awed One who manifests Trust, Compassion, and Freedom (and we might add other great words to this list: Hope, Peace, Tranquility, Bliss, Joy, Strength, Courage, Wholeness, and more). I am not attempting in these sentences to state this majestic Truth in an exhaustive fashion. I am only underlining that this Truth is a secular actuality. Our witnessing is to a secular actuality. Religion is only our finite and fragmentary manner of pointing to this Truth that transcends all religions.

## The Practice of Constructing Justice

The word “justice” has been used to mean an individual virtue or an interior state of being along with courage, wisdom, and reverence. But I am going to use the term to mean an outward practice of “good society.” This use of the word is closer to what we mean when we speak of rendering justice in a court of law. Implied in this usage is that we want our justice systems to make fair settlements of human disputes, to punish crime appropriately, and to avoid punishing or disgracing the innocent. I am using the word justice in an even broader sense. I mean practicing good society in every aspect of social practice: creating, supporting, and reforming appropriate economic systems; creating, supporting, and reforming appropriate political processes; creating, supporting, and reforming appropriate cultural fabrics. By “cultural fabrics” I mean the education systems, the information providing systems, the research systems, the overall common sense, the common styles of association, the roles and relationships among men and women and the various age groups, the moralities, the customs, the celebrations, the uses of language, the production and uses of art and literature, the creation and practice of ceremonies, the provision for and toleration of the wide variety of religious practices.

In this last item of justice, it may seem that I have overlapped with the religious practice of Christianity summarized in the previous chapter. But in this chapter I am pointing to something different than a personal practice of religion. I am noting that all religion, even my own religion, is a finite social activity alongside every other social activity. Society as a whole needs to provide for religious practice, allow religious practice, and encourage a practice of justice in this arena. In the last few hundred years, a great deal of social thought has been given to what Christians have called “the separation of church and state.” This discussion is dealing with a principle of justice, namely the renouncing of any establishment of a particular religious practice as the one authorized and financially supported by the state. This principle can be expanded to mean that a just polity is always a secular polity. This understanding of “justice” means that there can no longer be any such thing as a Christian nation or a Jewish nation or a Muslim nation or a Hindu nation or a Buddhist nation or any other mixing of a particular religious practice with the functioning of the political system.

There can be nations or regions of the planet that contain people who mostly practice one particular religion. This condition will indeed color the common culture of that region and thus have political effects. But such a condition does not need to lead to state practices that are religiously oriented rather than strictly secular. There is no conflict between having a secular state and a religious people. In fact, I am proposing that the appropriate practice of justice by Christian-identified people includes supporting a secular state and never again any sort of religious establishment. This means that it is inappropriate to name a political party “The Christian Democrats” or “The Muslim Something” or “The Hindu Something” or “The Jewish Something.” Such politicizing of a religious group is an unjust practice. Even saying prayers in a common legislative assembly should be either omitted or done in such a careful manner that it is entirely secular and unbiased toward any religious group. Religious communities do not need to use the common secular structures to promote their moralities and pieties. Religious practices can be best done within an unpoliticized culture which understands that the truth that religion seeks to express has its own inherited authority and needs no assistance from the state.

This strict separation of religion and politics does not mean, however, that each religious group cannot ask how its appropriation of Human Essence or Spirit implies a practice of justice in the general society. In fact, I am saying here that the separation of religion and state is one such practice of justice implied by our Spirit Essence.

Spirit also implies other practices of justice. I am going to spell out these complex matters in another book, but, for example, Spirit implies a practice of democracy rather than monarchy or rulership by a wealthy oligarchy. Spirit implies an economic system that balances the production of wealth for the human community with the overall well being of the natural planet. Spirit implies an economic system that is focused on serving needs rather than merely making money. Spirit implies the creation of an educational system that trains people to think for themselves about the entire destiny of human social reality on this planet rather than merely preparing people to fit into some slot in the current social establishment. Spirit implies the need for an information supplying system that investigates and provides all aspects of the truth rather than the biases of wealthy advertisers. Spirit supports the dignity of both men and women, all age groups, all races and cultures of people, and the establishment of equal opportunities for all of these groupings. And Spirit implies many more such directions in justice practice.

While the justice practices implied by Spirit are specific and are transformative within specific societies, the practices of justice are never a finished product spelled out in some religious book – contemporary or ancient. Though rich in justice themes, neither the Bible nor the Koran provide contemporary answers for our justice practice. Ancient religious literature may lead us to our Spirit Essence which then leads us to specific contemporary justice practices. These appropriate contemporary justice practices are created within the specifics of the times by Spirit-filled persons whose Spirit filledness includes the dynamic of Freedom. The Spirit Freedom presupposed in a Spirit practice of justice includes freedom from all principles of good and evil. The practice of justice may include refurbishing old principles of good and evil and it may include creating principles which have never existed before. And all these principles will be seen by a fully enlightened Spirit person as finite creations that will surely be improved upon in times to come. And these improvements are not derived from past practices but from immediately experienced Spirit.

A Spirit-rooted justice practice does, however, have characteristics that can be described in general terms. One such characteristic is the plain truth that justice cannot be accomplished alone. It requires operating in groups. It requires learning to operate effectively with group processes that are just. It requires learning to be effective as groups in criticizing the status quo, initiating new directions for social change, building momentum for such change along with a wide diversity of other groups. A Spirit-rooted justice practice includes historically defeating recalcitrant forces and incorporating those recalcitrant forces into a new society without need for revenge.

Significant social change is always controversial and traumatic. There are always innocent as well as not so innocent people who get hurt in the process of change. Therefore the practice of justice includes minimizing such hurts and making reparations for such hurts during the change process and after the social battles have been won.

In addition to participation in social change groups, the practice of justice includes choosing which social roles each of us select as our primary focus. Even though we need to require of ourselves an inclusive perspective that includes all social matters, we need not require of ourselves that we become competent in every field of endeavor. We must choose our roles. We must choose the places where we will seek to become competent or expert in our knowledge and action. Then we take those gifts of competence into the groups we choose to work within.

Finally, practicing justice is not an option but a necessity for the Spirit-filled person. Every deed we do, every word we say, every attitude we take is either a practice of justice or a practice

of injustice. There is no escape to some neutral place of guiltless passivity. Our hands are always bloody with the practice of justice or with the practice of injustice or both. The practice of constructing justice is the calling of every Spirit-filled person whatever his or her religious practice, whatever his or her station or phase of life.

## **The Practice of Being Presence**

There is a third secular Christian practice that undergirds the practice of giving witness and the practice of constructing justice. I am calling this third practice “the practice of being presence.”

Whether a Spirit-filled person is giving witness or constructing justice, that person is the same person, the same ongoing integrity. “Presence” means this ongoing quality that can show up in each circumstance of living. “The practice of being presence” means the commitment to be the practice of witness and the practice of justice that is required by the times and the continuation of that commitment year after year, decade after decade.

A successful and effective witness is a wonderful thing, an investment which can indeed fill us with joy, but all witnesses pass into the past and no longer occupy our consciousness. Presence lives on. Presence is the “always” quality of Spirit practice. Similarly, a successful and effective campaign for justice is a wonderful thing, an investment which can indeed fill us with joy, but all justice victories or defeats pass into the past and no longer occupy our consciousness. Presence lives on. Presence is the “always” quality of Spirit practice.

Presence is sustained and deepened by one’s specific religious practices, but the presence I am pointing to is a secular practice. This presence is the always present presentation of the Essential Person or Spirit that you are or I am. Such presence is a practice because it must be actively done. In the midst of making our witnesses we are also being our presence. In the midst of constructing justice we are also being our presence.

Presence is the outward presentation to others of the inner actually of the Essential Spirit Person. Presence is like “coming out of the closet to others.” Spirit is a deep solitary secret, yet this secret can be manifest to those who have eyes to see. And such presence is an important dimension of our secular Christian practice.

Further this presence is not simply an individual affair. A whole group of Christian-identified people can manifest this presence. This presence can be manifest not only within our Christian group meetings but in all the wide-world relations in which our Christian group engages.

And the presence we are talking about here is the presence of the Awe Ones, the presence of Jesus, the Christ, the presence of the Awesome Overallness in the flesh of the wholly human. Being this presence is the secular calling of all those who gather in the name of Christ or in any other name that means the gathering of the Awed Ones.

## **Afterword:**

# **Quality Seeds Yield a Big Harvest**

In this book I have been drawing an outline of the basic directions which I am recommending to all Christian-identified persons for their envisioning and creating of quality Christian community appropriate for the third millennium of this heritage.

Christianity has always been and always will be a wide diversity of religions. So the directions I have indicated will surely take many different forms and be augmented with other directions that are equally as important as those I have mentioned. But the enduring truth that cuts through all this wholesome diversity is the awareness that all our inherited forms of Christian community are constructs for eras that no longer exist. Any thoughtless or safety-seeking continuation of these past forms of Christian community will surely fail. Indeed they are already failing in the ways that matter most for the resurgence and continuation of a vital, viable, invigorating Christian practice.

There are many reasons why Christians may be reluctant to set forth in these new directions. One of those reasons is a sense of tragedy with regard to leaving behind vast numbers of people and becoming once again a minority movement. Wouldn't it be better, we hear some of our inner voices saying, to hang in there with these masses of Christian-identified people and these old institutions of Christian religion and try to bring all these people along with us? How can a few small circles of dedicated Christians have a large or even a meaningful effect upon the vast systems of social injustice, ecological tragedy, and the decaying life quality that characterizes so much of human life?

We need to remind ourselves that many people have been working for many decades to renew the inherited institutions of Christianity. This reform may continue. But no matter how well it succeeds, it will not be enough. It may even stand in the way of what most needs to be done: a thoroughgoing overhaul of Christianity.

For several decades many Buddhist movements have been expanding rapidly in North America. It occurs to me that these movements had the advantage of beginning with no ancient institutions of Buddhist practice. They could adapt their ancient time-tested heritage to contemporary America without confronting a codified version of Buddhism to impede them. They could present themselves as a fresh approach to Spirit expression, which indeed they have been.

Christians who are dedicated to creating a similar vitality for Christian practice on this continent will need to keep their distance from the obsolete formations of Christian religion. In this moment of history, quality is more important than quantity. If we create disciplined Christian circles of obvious Spirit quality, then a large quantity of participation will also happen. If however, we are not willing to turn loose of that large quantity of people who are now doing an obsolete Christian practice and become small, we will lose both quality and quantity in the very near future.

In the Synoptic Gospels we see Jesus telling a story about planting a very small mustard seed that grows into a very large plant. This describes what actually happened to the earliest Christian movement. A high quality seed became an empire-wide movement. And in this and similar stories, Jesus explains that we do not have to produce this growth. We only have to plant the seed. God's rain and sun will achieve the growing.

Spirit is the structure of the cosmos. Spirit is something that is just waiting to happen to everyone. Religious practice is mostly for the sake of getting our old selves, our limiting personality habits, out of the way so Spirit can bubble up on its own. We might say that the Spirit life is about ninety percent experiencing this surprising bubble up and only ten percent religious practice. If in the religious ten percent of our living we do an all-out effort of disciplined practice, we will be doing what we need to do. We can lean on the Awesome Mysterious Overallness to carry us all the way from the void of personality death to the bliss of a Spirit life that knows no defeat. And we can lean on this same Source to provide growth in numbers.

Every genuine Spirit movement begins with small steps in the lives of a few people. But as quality manifests, thousands and thousands and more thousands of people will be drawn into the swirl. We do not have to agonize over how to make this happen. We who wish to serve this movement of Spirit need only to ready ourselves to give this explosion of Spirit living a little order as it unfolds.