

16. Christianity as Healing Methods

One of the most important breakthroughs in the redefinition of religion and thus in our development of a Next Christianity is the understanding that religion is not fundamentally about thinking, dogma, or a worldview: it is about practice. Religion is something you do – daily, weekly, yearly, for the rest of your life. Thinking is part of what you do, but it is a supporting part of this core thing: PRACTICE. “Practice” means doing group rituals, viewing core icons, telling core stories, doing solitary exercises, building group consensus, conducting cooperative actions of truthful witness and social justice, carrying out group disciplines, and more. Thinking is part of each of these things but not the core definition. Various sorts of intellectual work are included in a complete religious practice, such as doing the sort of theologizing illustrated in these chapters. But, we should never again speak of having a theology. We should only speak doing theology or theologizing – that is, of pushing our theological edge still further into the abyss of the unknown.

And by “practice” I mean practicing a Next Christian religion. There are many religions and many Christian religions, each of which may define religion somewhat differently. Understanding religion as practice opens another deep discovery: our methods of practice are as important as our theological understandings. Religious methods are important content to be learned by the practitioners of a Next Christianity. In this chapter, I will describe some specific healing practices, which I will also call “methods.”

Healing Methods

If we were practicing Buddhism, we would begin by learning the practice of meditation and experiencing for ourselves how that practice works for us in making us more accident prone to the accident of enlightenment. A next Christian practice can include mediation practices that we learn from Buddhism or elsewhere. Similarly, we can adopt dancing, chanting, toning, feasting, fasting, or whatever from wherever. Some of these religious methods are optional, rather than essential to a Christian practice. Other methods are basic to a Christian practice. Some of the methods Christians need to practice can be used anywhere – such as consensus methods, workshop methods, and leadership methods. I will not describe these important but generally-used methods in this chapter. I will focus on five key methods that are uniquely needed for a Next Christian practice.

Method One: Conducting Profound Dialogue

I will describe first a religious method I call “profound dialogue.” We all tend to have an interior council of “great people” with whom we dialogue: a parent, a teacher, an author, an artist, an activist, a personal friend, a person in the distant past, a contemporary, and many others. As a religious practice, “profound dialogue” means bringing these “great people” into our consciousness, through remembering or reading their words – hearing their voices, their music, their poetry – seeing their paintings, their sculpture, their architecture. These people are “great” because we have found them inspiring, evoking Awe within us, assisting us to access our own profound greatness of awe-filled, Reality-breathing living.

The various voices that have spoken to us have taken up a place in our memory and tend to talk to us more or less all the time. Our practice of profound dialogue begins when we take charge of this interior council of “great voices.” We can seat these speakers as we want them seated. Some of them are on the front row of our circle of interior council members. We consult them first or most often. Others we have seated further back. We consult them with reservations or infrequently. We can order our

interior council in accord with various subjects or topics or ways of aiding us. This is our council, our creation, our interpretation of our personal history of being inspired. It is also our future resources for further inspiration. We have the power to listen or not, accept what they say or not, correct them, enrich them, or shut them up. This religious practice is a dialogue, not a monologue. We are not only listening. We are only speaking. In a dialogue we listen for truth and we speak back: we do both as a way of appropriating more realism in our living.

Since this is our very own council meeting, we do not need to play defensive games with it. We are not passive pawns of our inspiring voices, nor are we closed to what these voices have to share with us. In the practice of dialogue, we go to these “great people” willingly and actively for the enrichment of our lives. We may disagree with them, fight with them, and even unseat them from our interior council, but we maintain a continuing humility of being open, curious, aggressive learners.

In order to see how this universal dynamic of interior dialogue can be uniquely Christian, let us apply this general human dynamic to the topic of a Next Christian practice of dialogue with the writers of the Bible. Using the marvelous work of the historical scholars of our Christian origins, we have a relatively clear picture of the historical Jesus, distinguished from the Jesus of Paul, the Jesus of Mark, the Jesus of Matthew, the Jesus of Luke, and the Jesus of John. We can now dialogue with the historical Jesus. Rudolf Bultmann was among the first to scientifically separate out the earliest historical layer of the Mark, Matthew, and Luke texts. This work is summarized for the public in his classic book *Jesus and the Word*. A more recent work, *Jesus, a Revolutionary Biography* by John Dominic Crossan adds interesting details to a plausible view of the historical Jesus. And I have recently read and been impressed by *Jesus Before Christianity* by Albert Nolan, who who created another plausible picture of this historical figure’s address to our lives today. Nolan has assisted me to better understand Jesus’ identification with the destitute and with his attack on the moralistic piety of the prosperous. He has better illuminated my own struggles with hierarchical society and its injustices and hypocrisies.

Having clarified what I mean by the historical Jesus, I can view the word “Jesus” or “Jesus Christ” in the writings of Paul as a dialogue with Paul rather than a dialogue with Jesus of Nazareth. I might say that I am in dialogue with Paul as a resurrected embodiment of Jesus – that is, with Paul as an ongoing member of the Jesus Christ breakthrough in history. If next I read the Gospel of Mark, I am in dialogue with Mark, not Jesus. When I see Jesus as a character in Mark’s fictional drama, I can dialogue with this Markian Jesus as a fictitious character much in the same way as I can dialogue with Harry Potter as a fictitious character in the writings of J. K. Rowling. In a much deeper sense I can also dialogue with Rowling and her insights into profound humanness that she is embodying in her fiction. My wife Joyce and I have recently read aloud *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens. I find myself now in dialogue with many of the vivid characters of that Dickens novel. But on an even deeper level I am in dialogue with Dickens and his profound insight into people that he was able to share with me through the creation of his characters.

Similarly, in the fiction of Matthew and the fiction of Luke and the fiction of John, I need to be clear that I am in profound dialogue with Matthew, Luke, and John (or whoever these writers actually were). These dialogues are as significant as the dialogues I have with the characters in their fiction, including Jesus as a character in their story. These Gospel writers, like Paul, can be viewed as the resurrected profound humanness of Jesus. The Jesus figure in Mark, Matthew, or Luke is what we might call historical fiction – that is, some memories of the historical figure of Jesus still influence their fiction. But in the gospel of John, the tradition of fictionalizing Jesus has leaped all previous bounds and gone into wholesale development of sermons by whoever it was

who wrote this Fourth Gospel. In my most profound dialogue with “John’s” piece of fiction, I have had to remain clear that I am in dialogue with a most amazing theologian who has made Jesus into a spokesperson for his (or her) edge theologizing.

The considerations just summarized illustrate the sort of religious methods needed for Scripture study/dialogue within a vital and responsible Next Christianity. There is no authority of the Bible involved here. There is a great love of history. And this love of history is part of the religious methodology needed for a Next Christianity. In the context of loving our own history, we Next Christian practitioners also need to love the history in which the Christian writers of the past lived and witnessed and loved.

Also, these methods of Scripture study/dialogue include a great love of the actual text and a great love of the profound humanness that the text writers are describing. And we can dialogue with each fictional Jesus as we can also dialogue with the fictional Harry Potter or David Copperfield. But we do not view these fictional characters with a literalistic or an authoritarian attitude. We look to them for clues to our own profound humanness in our own historical moments. And to do this dialogue well, we will need to be aware of the historical circumstances of Mark, Matthew, Luke, John, Dickens, and Roweling. We need our love of history to read our Bibles.

Ignatius of Loyola emphasized dialogue with Scripture. But he, like Luther, viewed Scripture authoritatively, and he, like Luther, knew that the authority of Scripture had to be appropriated personally. So he created a method for doing that. He asked his retreat participants to take characters from the biblical story and have a conversation with them. He asked them to imagine a mini-drama: me, Peter, me, Peter, me, Peter, me, Peter, me. As Ignatius knew, it requires profound imagination to invent such dialogue between these ancient characters and the emerging “me” in my historical times. I believe that Ignatius’ religious method can be updated for a Next Christianity. But today we need to move away from Ignatius’ authoritarianism into a Next Christianity’s authenticity emphasis. We need to insist that our religious methods fit the times in which we live. Our dialogue with Scripture or with Augustine, Ignatius, or Luther needs to be based on authenticity, not authority. What did these ancient witnesses see about profound humanness that can inform me in my own experience of and quest for profound humanness – a humanness that I am proposing to live within the historical flow of my historical times and as an outflow of my love of the historical challenges I face and the responses I am going to make?

In summary, Method One helps us address both the solitary and communal aspects of our profound humanness. It is a needed method for rooting our authentic life in history, in time, in the past as well as the future, and for living within the now of decision.

Method Two: Metaphorical Translation

Following is a description of a method that is closely related to the method just described. In order to carry out dialogue with Biblical writers or other Church fathers and mothers, we need a method for translating insight from the older two-story mythic language into a language or poetry that resonates with the full round of thinking and living that we must do in the 21st Century. As lovers of history we can learn to take seriously the imagery of these former times in which our Christian heritage was composed, and yet re-say the core meaning of this old language in imagery taken from our times. Only if we learn to practice an effective method of metaphorical translation from **then** to **now** will our dialogue with Christian Scriptures and other ancient witnesses come alive for us and for those to whom we witness concerning our Christian-based discoveries of profound humanness.

Kierkegaard likened reading the Scriptures to receiving a love letter. Our purpose is hearing what our lover is saying to us. Whatever trouble we have to go through to

open the envelope and translate the letter is preliminary. We do that only in order to get to the message that the letter has for us. When we are reading love letters from Reality written 2000 years ago in some no-longer-spoken language, we have some work to do to be sure we are hearing appropriately. Fortunately, the language scholars have done some of the work for us. We can read the love letter in our own contemporary language, but the metaphors in which we think and the meanings we assign to specific words are still there to deal with. So we must learn a deeper kind of translation, namely translating meanings from a two-story mythical storytelling era to our one-story ways of speaking about profound experiences. We cannot honestly believe in a supreme being in some next door world. And if we are honest, we need to admit that we have had a hard time understanding that Jesus and others used that old poetry meaningfully to talk about their real lives. We are tempted to dismiss these old Scriptures (or large portions of them) as irrelevant to us. Or we are tempted to read into these supposedly authoritarian documents whatever we want them to say. To find an appropriate way to read a two thousand-year-old love letter from Reality is a challenge. Using the word Reality instead of God is a start, but even here we must ask ourselves what we mean by "Reality," and if what we mean by "Reality" corresponds with what earlier Christian witnesses meant by "God." Also we need to explore how using the devotional word "God" adds something to using the more neutral word "Reality."

Here is an example of doing metaphorical translation with one familiar verse: *Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.* (Luke 6:20 RSV) The authors of *The Five Gospels* favor this textual translation: *Congratulations, you poor, God's domain belongs to you.* I suggest that the word "destitute" is a better textual translation than "poor," because poor in our world today can mean a state much more well off than the state of those to whom Jesus was referring. And I suggest that "Fortunate" rather than "Congratulations" would also be a better textual translation. So now we have for a text: *Fortunate are you destitute, God's domain belongs to you.*

With this text, we still have some puzzling features. Whether we use "God's Domain" or "The Kingdom of God," we still have to ask what was being pointed to by Jesus. As we have already developed in previous chapters, Jesus clearly understood the word "God" in the Old Testament manner – a devotional word for WHAT IS – that is, for the Almighty Reality which confronts us in every happening. "Reality's Domain," as Jesus used that term, points to the arrival in history of a way of being for human beings that is serving God rather than serving the opposite of God, which Jesus calls "Satan's Domain." Before our literalistic minds conjure up an otherworldly figure with horns and tail, let us insist that Jesus was pointing to something going on in his experience, namely the fact that humans were fleeing from and fighting with God's Domain. The fallen state of humans was being symbolized by a powerful "kingdom" symbolized by its own supermundain king. Serving this evil king clearly meant not serving the Truth, the Real, the WHAT IS. So serving the evil king meant serving an illusion – some sociologically empowered lie about WHAT IS. The pronouncement that God's Domain was coming in Jesus lifetime meant that people were being healed from their illusions and restored to their REAL lives. Satan was being defeated, tied down by a stronger force, and humans were being released from Satan's prison to live their REAL lives in glorious freedom, love, and trust in Reality's love for them.

We can now suggest the following metaphorical translation of above verse for our lives in the 21st Century: *Fortunate are those who are devoid of the benefits of our evil age, for they are ripe to participate in the realistic living of their lives.* Now we have a translation of that particular love letter from Reality (that particular Word of God) that this verse holds for us. We may not be happy with it, for we may not find ourselves among the destitute, and thus we may seem to be left out of the "good news." Apparently,

someone in the early church had this same feeling, for they “improved” Jesus saying to mean “destitute in spirit” (Matthew 5:3) rather than the simply “destitute” in the more literal economic sense. We can assume that they meant that the Domain of God was also happening in the lives of people who were not literally destitute, but was occurring among those who were joining the destitute in being “not of this evil world.” So the point of the verse is not that having no worldly goods is itself a blessing. No, the blessing is having weak ties to the Satanic kingdom and thus an openness to living a realistic life.

With that polemical and cryptic “yell out” on some Galilean hillside, Jesus clearly got the attention of the destitute and the rich by reversing a taking for granted view that it was the rich who were being blessed by God and that it was the destitute who were in a state of lesser honor or no honor at all.

We certainly must not take from this verse the notion that poverty is a good thing. Jesus clearly saw that it was good for the rich to provide for the poor, and that it was good for everyone to help everyone with their fundamental needs. Nevertheless, we can share in Jesus’ distrust of riches, for riches commonly serve as a bond with Satan’s kingdom that needs to be given up. It is as true now as it ever was that “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Augustine, as we have seen, taught that if a wealthy Christian’s heart was at rest in the Domain of God, that person would generously provide for the poor and generously provide for the work of the Church throughout the Empire. He fought for this view against both the views of the arrogant rich and the views of perfectionistic Christians who were making wealth itself an evil thing. Augustine’s view enabled the cultural conquest of the Roman Empire. If the perfectionistic view had prevailed, we might never have heard of Christianity in the Western part of the world.

So what is the Word of God in this verse to each of us today? Each of us must answer that question for ourselves because the Word of God comes to each person personally and directly from Reality as each person is encountering Reality. For me the verse means that I need to be detached from whatever wealth and benefits this world is providing me and to fully devote those gifts toward the liberation of both those who seek their significance in amassing wealth and those who are destitute and and who are also dishonored for being needy. I also face the Demand of Reality to greatly lessen the vast inequality between rich and poor.

What I have attempted to illustrate with this rather elaborate metaphorical translation of a single verse is that we need to approach each verse of the Bible with these four basic steps:

1. What does the text say in the language in which it was written as translated into the language we are using.
2. What did the text mean in the understanding of those who first said it, heard it, wrote it, and preserved it.
3. What is being said to me today from the Mouth of Reality as I am confronting Reality in my own life.
4. What does this Word of God ask me to do in my own living.

Each of the chapters of Part One and Two are further illustrations of the method of metaphorical translation. In Chapter One I did some metaphorical translation of the texts written by Isaiah and Second Isaiah. In Chapter Three I did some more metaphorical translation of Jesus’ sayings and of the Church’s use of the title “Christ.” In Chapter four I did some metaphorical translation on Paul’s use of the words “God” and “sin.” Similarly, metaphorical translation was done with texts from John, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Martin Luther. In every historical era before our own, we encounter in Christian witnessing a use of the two-story metaphorical

language. That language has to be translated for our era, or else we fall into one of two serious Christian “heresies”: (1) Supposing that all these early witnesses were insensitive and superstitious fools, or (2) Reading into their words our own superstitious misreading of their message to us.

Can Ordinary Christians Read the Bible and Study the Saints?

Yes, is my answer to this question. But it is a serious question, because metaphorical translation is not easy for most members of our culture. Therefore, the metaphorical translation method will need to be carefully taught to the well-educated, the poorly educated, and the miseducated of our emerging communities of Christian religious practice. We will need to view this skill as basic, like breathing, like sharing our lives, like gathering together weekly in committed circles for religious practice. There is no excuse for avoiding metaphorical translation or skirting it with any member of our Next Christian practice. It is part of the methodological catechism that every teenager and elder needs to know as fully as driving a car safely or working a computer skillfully. There will, however, be various levels of competence in understanding the history of ancient times and therefore understanding how a specific text can address us in our times. Those in our groups who are the most skilled with metaphorical translation will need to view themselves as servants of the rest, and the rest will need to welcome that service. Any excuse for avoiding this core method is bogus.

With such reservations in mind, we can still do Bible reading and discussion as an essential part of a weekly meeting of Next Christians. In my own meetings with other people most of whom are not Biblical scholars, we have found that these four questions can yield very meaningful conversations with almost any passage of Scripture

1. What words or phrases did you hear?
2. How would you put the message of this text in your own words?
3. How does this message address you personally?
4. What does this message challenge you to do?

The Method of Metaphorical Translation is necessary for accurately accessing the Bible and other ancient texts as guides to the Christian revelation as a discovery of our own profound humanness in its contemporary setting.

Method Three: An Existential Study Method

The Western religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam all emphasize the extensive study of their heritage. The practitioners of Eastern religions also study their heritage, but their emphasis tends to be upon the nonintellectual methods such as meditation, chanting, dancing, and other bodily movements and non-movements. These methods also appear in the West. Sufi Muslims place great emphasis on the nonintellectual methods. So do Jewish and Christian mystics, although it is interesting to note that the most famous Christian mystics almost always insisted on writing a book (or many books). Whatever be the trends in these different religious expressions, a Next Christianity cannot be true to the core of the Jesus Christ revelation without a vibrant study of its heritage and the basic love of history that I have been at pains to illustrate in every chapter of this call to create a viable Next Christian practice.

Many people, most of the time, simply skim written material, looking for highlights they agree with or already understand. That is not a good way to learn something. And it is a flaw in the general culture – a flaw that Christian practitioners can join others in correcting. My view is: if someone does not want to learn to study and study well, they are not yet ready for membership in a vital Next Christianity.

If in the communal life of my envisioned Next Christianity we are going to do serious study of the Scriptures, of the church fathers and mothers, and of

contemporary theologians and ethicists, we will need to learn a competent existential study method. By this I mean a method that allows us to hear what an author is actually saying, and then hear what if anything he or she is saying that resonates with our own lives, that calls us into question, that challenges us, or that informs us at the level of our basic existence.

Charting is such study method. This method can be spelled out in great detail, but here are its basic principles: (1) View the structure of the author's thought by constructing a visual picture of the text, its subparts, its relations, giving this chart your own titles, but your own titles for what the author is actually talking about. This picture is your gestalt, not of what you want to believe, but of what the author apparently believes and wants to say to you the reader. (2) The second step is grounding the key points of this chart in your own life experiences, working toward those "Ah Hah" moments where realistic insight emerges where it may never have existed before. (3) The third step is talking back to the author. Obviously, no author is perfect about everything, or says everything you would like to hear on the topic. So you will always have something to say in addition to thank you for the gift the author has given you. Trust your own intuitions and past awakenings to qualify you to have something to say to any author, however accomplished that author may be. With these three steps you are doing study, not skimming.

The same three steps apply to the teacher who is leading a group in a study process. He or she needs to do that same kind of study before leading the class through these similar steps: (1) The teacher needs to come prepared to make the structure and meaning of an author's text as clear as possible to everyone. (2) Then the teacher can assist the class to discover this clarity in their own lives. In good teaching method, the teacher comes prepared to ask good grounding questions about all the key points in the text – questions that assist the class to recall and get out their own experience of and their own challenges by the key points of the study material. The teacher needs to avoid doing all the clarifying or all the grounding, but instead sees the teaching role as a sort of midwife role, enabling the class to conduct its own creative dialogue with the text. Such a teacher can include himself or herself as a member of the class in this clarity and grounding process. (3) The teacher can leave time at the end of the study for some general discussion of appreciation for and critique of the author studied. Time management is one of the key skills needed for leading an effective class process. Before teaching the teacher needs to plan the amount of time to be allotted to each part of the text, leaving adequate time for the most key issues and having a planned intent for how to end on time. Of course, a good study session will always be a surprise, so all these plans will need to be flexibly applied, as the occasion warrants.

Method Three makes possible the sort of serious study-life that is needed in a local, yet planet-responsible Circle of Next Christian practice.

Method Four: An Art-Form Conversation Method

Our methodological catechism needs to reach beyond language and poetry into all the arts, paintings, sculptures, architecture, music, dancing, drama, movies, novels, stories, singing, chanting, and whatever else we consider to be an artistic formation. Art assists us to experience our own experience by creating for us a virtual reality that can awaken us to our actual reality of feelings, sensibilities, realizations, repentances, forgivenesses, intentions, callings, whatever.

We tend to short-circuit our experience of art by jumping to rational interpretations or statements of pro and con before we have taken time to consciously appropriate the actual content of the art and the personal feelings and awarenesses that the experience of this art form awakens in us. So a method needs to be employed that allows us to

have group conversations about art that take us through three important steps of understanding what art can do for us as an aid to our living. We can then take a fourth conversation step that specifically assists us with our Christian understanding. Imagine that we are viewing a painting: here are the first three conversation steps:

Step one: **Objective impressions:** What shapes do you see? What colors? Where? what designs? What objects?

Step two: **Reflective feelings:** What objects seem pleasant to you? What objects seem unpleasant? What color would you like to subtract? What color would you like to add? Where to do see strong feelings expressed? What are these feelings? How do you feel right now? Where would you like to hang this picture in your house?

Step three: **Interpretive considerations:** What might you title this picture? What is its mood? What story could you tell that would lead to such a mood? So what is the picture about? What is this picture saying to you? What would you like to say back? Complete this sentence: It seems to me that this painting is about_____ .

Then for Christian clarity, a fourth type of question can be asked such as: How does this painting tell us something about our experience of sin, our experience of God the Almighty, our experience of Holy Spirit, the transformative event of grace, etc.? Movies are especially good for assisting us to understand the nature of a Jesus-Christ-type event of death/resurrection as such transformational moments happen to ordinary human beings in their ordinary everyday lives.

Method Four is needed to help us be clear that profound humanness is itself more like an art form than a prose paragraph. And profound humanness can be accessed through art, perhaps more easily than through prose.

Method Five: Prayer as Persistent Intentions

“Prayer” is a much misunderstood method in Christian practice because “God” has been a much misunderstood word. We need to focus first of all on clarifying that prayer is the exercise of our own *freedom* to which we are being liberated. In prayer we are taking the *initiative* to speak to Reality about our truth, concerns, hopes, confessions, gratitudes, or the simple joy of being in conscious dialogue with the Final Reality that we face. We have permission from our own Love of Reality to address Final Reality with personal terms like: Dear God, Blessed Mother, whatever. We do not need to take literally any of our personal sounding addresses, for we know that we are addressing an absolute Mystery about which we know nothing in a literal sense. We cannot presuppose to describe the Infinite with our finite minds. To insist upon a male designation, for example, says something about ourselves but nothing about God, unless “male” means power. But today “female” also means power. Clearly, the Infinite is neither male nor female. Anything said about the Infinite is actually said about our relationship with the Infinite, rather than about the Infinite Herself, Himself, Itself – surely this is clear.

So what sorts of things do Christians benefit from praying about? Here is an interesting gestalt of the types of topics that Christian heritage has emphasized for a practice of prayer: confession, gratitude, petition, and intercession. The benefit of doing any of these types of prayer is that we are programing our psyche to operate differently in the ongoing round of our living. We are rehearsing intentions that we will intend in the entire round of our living. Prayer is a responsiveness to the living challenges that we are actually facing. So with that in mind, here is a simplified summary of these four categories of prayer:

Confession means owning up to some reality in our behavior, our attitude toward life, our feelings, our thoughts, whatever. It means admitting the ways these bits of our living are escapes from the Whole of Reality or from our true self. Our confession may

also own up to our fractured or troubled relations with other selves. Confession is an important initiative on the part of our consciousness because it is a beginning toward being where we are in our living, rather than pretending to be where we are not.

Gratitude means choosing the reality we are being given, instead of the unreality we might desire to substitute for the given Reality. In so far as the given Reality always includes forgiveness and the option of a fresh start in our living, we may experience grateful feelings for this welcome release from self-incrimination, self-underestimation, or self-victimization. But whether we have grateful feelings or not, the practice of gratitude is restorative to our solid here-and-now openness toward life. Life, openly lived, does provide its joys and exuberance, but the practice of gratitude does not mean forcing ourselves to have pleasant states of feeling. Gratitude is an intention that allows our real lives to produce whatever feelings and potentials life naturally produces. Gratitude can move into the very deep passion required to give thanks for enemies, tragedies, and challenges we wish in the first instance to avoid entirely.

Petition means choosing what to intend relative to augmentations for our own existence. Where do we want to go in our life journey? What do we want to have as states of being or worldly opportunities? Petitionary prayer is a courageous thing because we do not always receive exactly what we ask for, or what we thought we were asking for, or what we thought having our request would actually mean. A petition puts our life out there to be disappointed or surprised or amazed beyond all expectations. Petition is a powerful practice, it readies us to receive a future which contains that for which we are asking. Petitionary prayer programs our psyche to pursue opportunities as they present themselves. Petition is a powerful thing: it changes history. But petitionary prayer is not a magical means of controlling the future. Our petitions seldom work out exactly as we expect. History is in some way or another always a surprise, a surprise that can be intensely disappointing as well as overwhelmingly joyous.

Intercession means choosing what to intend with regard to other people, social systems, ecosystems, and the planet as whole. To intercede means to stand between a value and the threat to that value. To intercede means to put our body, our wealth, our reputation, our very being in the breach of creating solutions that handle the threats to what we value. Intercessory prayer means intending our being. Intercession is not asking some divine being to do something for someone. Intercession means requesting with our whole body that Reality change on behalf of some specific value or person that concerns us. In making an intercession we do not need to have a clear plan about how the requested change in history can happen or what our role needs to be in making this change. We can intercede for something that may seem or be impossible. An intercessory prayer is simply the programming of our psyche in a specific direction. We set up our own being to be on the lookout for insights and opportunities that pertain to the value that is the topic of our intercession. Both intercession and petition are an expression of our Trust in the possibility aspects of Mysterious Reality, an attitude that reaches beyond the limits of our familiar norms.

Method Five is a core method for accessing and living out a “personal” relationship with the always surprising, Final, Awesome Mysteriousness that is our God.

Conclusions on the Healing Methods for Christian Practice

There are many other methods that are important for the optimal practice of a Next Christianity, and much more could be said about each of the five methods summarized above. An exhaustive exploration of this topic would require many books. I have limited myself to illustrating this key point: *Good Christian-oriented religious methods are key to the creation of a vital functioning Next Christianity.* Each of the Methods summarized above are applicable to both solitary and group practice. There is no need to wait until

we have a group who are willing to practice with us; each of us can begin now with 20 minutes to an hour set aside each day to practice some or all five of the above methods. We do this to beckon Spirit/Awe to appear and give foundation to our day.

As soon as we have one or two other people willing to practice a Next Christianity with us, we can meet weekly (perhaps more often) for a regular group beckoning of Spirit/Awe flowing from these Awe Ones among who we commune and from the Awesome Almightyness that is giving each of us our lives and life challenges.