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# The Spiritual Dimension Of Social Work Practice In And Through Research, Education, And Life Experience

Pauline Kay Burthwick

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THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN AND  
THROUGH RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND LIFE EXPERIENCE

by

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Bachelor of Science in Social Work, University of North Dakota, 1986  
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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Grand Forks, North Dakota  
December  
1999

This dissertation, submitted by Pauline Kay Burthwick in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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11-22-99

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years there has been an effort to reintroduce religion and spirituality as tangible constructs into social work education and practice in an effort to incorporate all aspects of the client's system (biological, psychological, social, spiritual) and to understand and appreciate the client's diversity and potential strengths and resources. The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of religion and spirituality in the lives of social work practitioners as it relates to their social work practice and to the education of future social workers.

This study was composed of two parts. The first was a secondary data analysis using factor analysis, regression, and analysis of variance techniques to analyze items of interest from a national survey of social workers. Questions for the secondary analysis focused on the definitions of religion and spirituality; the religious and spiritual beliefs, practices, and ideologies of the social workers surveyed; their ideas about incorporating religion and spirituality into social work practice situations; and whether they believed that spirituality should be considered a fundamental aspect of being human. The second part is a reflection upon and an accounting of the unexpected developments in the spiritual journey of the researcher as they unfolded during the investigative process.

Social workers surveyed defined the concepts of religion and spirituality much in the same way as researchers did. Factor analysis identified similar latent components to the concepts of religion and spirituality. Stepwise forward multiple regression identified

two models that reflected differences as to whether social workers felt it was appropriate to bring up the topic of religion or spirituality in their social work practice. Differences were based on the personal private or personal public community religious practices of social workers. Analysis of variance demonstrated that the greater the lifetime frequency of participation of social workers in spiritual or religious activities, the more likely they were to believe it is appropriate to raise the topics of religion and spirituality. Over 90% of social workers in this sample agreed that religious and spiritual beliefs should be incorporated into social work education because they are a part of multicultural diversity and 77.7% believed they should be included because there is a spiritual aspect of human existence. Eighty-nine percent of social workers believed that spirituality was a fundamental aspect of being human. The importance of each social worker's awareness and participation in their own spiritual self-journey was stressed through the findings in the literature and the researcher's own personal reflections.



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Social work practice had its beginnings in the outgrowth of Judeo-Christian faith practices of different religious traditions. It is a profession strongly motivated by values. Over the years, many of the value changes within the profession have paralleled the changes in economic and social philosophies and other ideologies of the larger social environment. Humanism, Pragmatism, and Positivism have significantly contributed to the values and practice of social work (Kohs, 1966).

In recent years, Constructivism and Postmodernism are having an impact in the areas of research and practice such as the increased use of qualitative research methods and participatory action research. Participatory action research and similar efforts of change at the community level are based on the understanding that it is important to know local reality. There has been an increased understanding that “reality” is constructed by those participating in the community and that interventions must be developed out of an appreciation of that reality in order for them to be effective. However, not much has been articulated in the social work literature about the underlying theories of Postmodernism and Constructivism or their relationship to Quantum Physics, which is a study of science that has led scientists to conclude that nothing is real and we cannot understand anything unless it is being observed. Other theories that have influenced society’s mandate for social welfare services are the philosophies of

capitalist-puritan belief system, Judeo-Christian belief system, and the humanist-positivist-utopian belief system (DuBois & Miley, 1996; Keith-Lucas, 1972).

These various changes of philosophy and clarifications of values occurring within the larger social system affect professional social work practice. For many years, the religious and spiritual aspects and needs of clients have often been ignored. Overlooking the religious and spiritual sphere in social work practice (an important aspect of the client's system) has had several effects. It has affected which clients will decide to seek social work services, the identification and definition of problems to address and related working goals, which resources are recognized in the client's support system, which particular interventions might be selected, how effective social work services will be, the outcomes of social work services, and the interaction of value systems of the social worker and the client (Loewenberg, 1988).

## Background of the Study

### Social Work Values

The profession of social work retains a strong core of values: service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 1996). Despite the impact of other philosophies, these values remain compatible with basic Judeo-Christian beliefs (Ressler, 1998). The current professional values are identified and described in the National Association of Social Workers (1996) Code of Ethics which directs the professional practice of social workers. According to the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the accrediting body for schools of social work, these values are to

be articulated in each social work course taught in schools of social work (Council on Social Work Education, 1999a, p. 3). Schools of social work have the primary responsibility for teaching “a specific body of knowledge, values, and professional skills . . . [that are] grounded in the profession’s history and philosophy . . . [The schools promote] the development and advancement of knowledge, practice skills, and services that further the well-being of people and promote social and economic justice” (Council on Social Work Education, 1999b, p. 1).

Canda (1990b) conducted a study of 18 social work scholars with differing religious and spiritual backgrounds. In considering the findings of that study, he identified a surprising commonality of core values which he summarizes as the “common heart of compassion” (as cited in Canda & Furman, 1999, p. 27). “Participants [were] from atheist, humanist, Christian, Buddhist, existentialist, Jewish, and shamanistic perspectives” (p. 27). The participants were in agreement about the following concepts:

- a. the inherent dignity and worth of humans,
- b. each human deserves unconditional positive regard,
- c. social workers should focus both on the well-being of the individual and on issues of social justice,
- d. humans should demonstrate care and responsibility to the non-human world (for a variety of reasons which reflect the diversity of their belief systems),
- e. all people should develop a moral perspective that goes beyond the self and exploitation of the environment,



f. there is a basic congruence between professional values and their personal values,

g. the decline of professional ideals of justice and service to the poor and oppressed.

From this small, diverse sample, there was evidence of considerable agreement in values.

Canda believes the agreement is related to social workers of diverse spiritual backgrounds dialoging with one another resulting in discovering our “common heart of compassion.” As Canda and Furman (1999) put it,

Social work in its best sense can be considered a spiritual vocation. This does not mean that all social workers follow the beliefs of the Judeo-Christian tradition or that they are religious. Rather, it means that there is an awareness of suffering and the possibility of transformation. It means that there is a motive of compassion to work together and with other people to help us to overcome obstacles and to achieve our aspirations. And it means that spiritually sensitive social workers uphold unconditional positive regard for clients and hope in the possibilities of resiliency, reconciliation, and realization of social justice. Of course, it is difficult to “walk this talk.” (p. 9)

Canda and Furman (1999) have developed ethical principles for spiritually sensitive social work practice. These principles are based on the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (1996). The authors have chosen to write about and discuss these values in such a way that they lend easily to future discussion by the profession as they are presented within the context of values that have been already articulated and accepted by the profession.

### The Council of Social Work in Education: Educational Standards

Two documents published by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) that impact social work education are the Eligibility and Evaluative Standards (1999b) and the Curriculum Policy Statement (1999a). They identify the professional and educational content that accredited social work programs must include in their curriculum and field practicum. All components of each program are expected to reflect the outlined values and principles.

Russel (1998) reviewed the history of previous curriculum policy and evaluative standards of the CSWE. The spiritual and religious issues of humans were identified as expected components of the first CSWE's curriculum policy in 1953. The term "spiritual" was also included in the 1962 standards. The standards in 1970 and 1984 had no reference to religion or spirituality. In Russel's words,

The concepts of spirituality and religion have also been reintroduced into the Council on Social Work Education's curriculum guidelines. The Fourth Edition of the Council's Commission on Accreditation Handbook of Accreditation Standards and Procedures 1995 states that "programs must provide curriculum content about differences and similarities in the experiences, needs, and beliefs of people" [p. 140]. Religion is mentioned as an element of client diversity that should be included in the curriculum. The Standards further provide that practice "content also included the approaches and skills for practice with clients from differing social, cultural, racial, religious, spiritual, and class backgrounds, and with systems of all sizes" [p. 141]. (as cited in Russel, 1998, p. 18)

On June 20, 1997, the Board of Directors of CSWE approved a preamble and a change in Evaluative Standard 3: Nondiscrimination and Human Diversity. The changes were effective July 1, 1998. According to the preamble, "The program must demonstrate respect for and understanding of social, cultural, and human diversity consistent with the Curriculum Policy Statement" (Council on Social Work Education, 1999b, p. 1).



The wording of Evaluative Standard 3 prior to the change was: "The program must be conducted without discrimination on the basis of race, color, gender, age, creed, ethnic or national origin, disability, political orientation or sexual orientation." The new Evaluative Standard 3 reads: "The program must make specific, continuous efforts to provide a learning context in which understanding and respect for diversity (including age, color, disability, ethnicity, gender, national origin, race, religion, and sexual orientation) are practiced" (Council on Social Work Education, 1999b, p. 5).

#### The Nature of the Spiritual Component of Humans

Evaluative Standard 3 of the CSWE appears to approach the spiritual/religious aspect of a person as one component of diversity. While agreement with this concept would seem to be apparent within the profession, there is growing support within the social work community in the belief that the human system also includes a spiritual aspect. Most social work textbooks in human behavior (Ashford, LeCroy, & Lortie, 1997; Furr, 1997; Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 1997) are now defining the human system as a biopsychosocial system. However, existentialism and transpersonal psychology have influenced some social work educators like Canda and Furman and they are incorporating the spiritual component of humans into their teaching. In Hugen's (1998b) words, "This perspective reintroduces spiritual issues as a legitimate practice focus and provides for a more complete understanding of client strengths, weaknesses, and problems" (p. 4).

Kohs, writing in 1966, suggested that due to negative condition of social work education towards the spiritual aspect of humans and the lack of social workers' understanding of that spiritual element, the faith aspect of the client was one area that

social workers avoided. Potentially, ignoring this component of the client's life can lead the client and social worker to overlook important concerns related to religion or spirituality and also to overlook the healing or strengths aspects that faith can bring to client situations. Over the past several years, the focus of social work education and practice has changed from a problem-centered to a strengths-centered approach (Saleebey, 1997). Overlooking the potential strengths of the client's spiritual system is to the client's great disadvantage.

### Integrating Spirituality With Social Work Education and Practice

With these changes in the Evaluative Standards of the CSWE and the addition of the preamble, it is important to determine the impact for social work education programs. In addition, there are many important reasons to incorporate the spiritual aspect of persons into the social work helping process.

One of the basic assumptions of social work practice is that a person interacts with another as a whole person. Deliberately avoiding one segment of a person's life, such as religion, will handicap the interaction, even if it is a professional relationship between a social worker and a client. One may wonder whether a social worker can really have a meaningful or helpful relationship with clients who have a strong religious commitment when such a social worker avoids religious aspects of their lives altogether. (Loewenberg, 1988, p. 87)

In order to incorporate religion and spirituality into social work practice, social workers will need to be comfortable (having the necessary knowledge and skills) discussing the religious and spiritual realm with clients and be able to demonstrate understanding, respect, and openness to other viewpoints besides their own. That endeavor will necessarily include studying about many diverse religious views and considering one's own spiritual journey.



Hugen (1998b) cites the writings of Derezotes and Evans (1995) and Joseph (1988). They have identified that many social workers are reluctant to address spiritual issues with clients.

Much of this hesitation is due to the lack of knowledge and skill in this area. Greater sensitivity to the concerns of the religious client has also been shown to be related to the social worker's own spiritual awareness – the ability to integrate the personal, spiritual and religious self with the professional self. Again, there has been a reluctance to incorporate such knowledge into social work education, considering such discussions as an intrusion into a private space. (Hugen, 1998b, p. 4)

#### Need for the Study

There was a need for a national study of social workers to identify how they define religion and spirituality, how they view inclusion of these areas in their social work practice, and what the implications would be for social work education. There has been some discourse on these topics by social workers in the past. There have also been some smaller studies of educators, students, state boards of social work, and practicing social workers; but there have not been any national studies. With the advent of the new curriculum policy statements, social work education programs will need to determine how to include material on religion and spirituality in social work courses. It would be important that this effort be informed by research.

#### Delimitations of the Study

Canda and Furman conducted such a national research study of 2,069 social workers in 1997. The focus of the study was to look at the role of religion and spirituality in social work practice. The present study includes a secondary data analysis of a sample of 1,283 social workers drawn from the initial study based on the criteria that

they worked full time, were licensed as a social worker, and had the highest level of education at the master's degree.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of religion and spirituality in the lives of social work practitioners as it relates to their social work practice and to determine what implications this has for social work education. As this study evolved the researcher experienced an encounter with God that was unexpected, but became an integral part of the project and advanced the spiritual journey of the researcher. A summary of that experience and the impact on the researcher has been included in this report as an example of an unexpected way that the process of personal spiritual growth may occur with resulting enhanced self-knowledge and increased skill and ability.

### Research Questions

There were four general research questions that were explored:

1. How do practicing social workers define religion and spirituality?
2. What demographic and other selected variables are related to the social workers' beliefs that it is appropriate to "raise the topic of religion" and to "raise the topic of spirituality?"
3. What is the relationship of the frequency of social workers' personal spiritual or religious practice to their belief in the appropriateness of raising the topic of religion and spirituality with clients?
4. What variables can be used to predict the social worker belief that spirituality is a fundamental aspect of being human?

## Terminology

For the purpose of this study, religion has been defined as “an organized structured set of beliefs and practices shared by a community related to spirituality” (Canda & Furman, 1999, p. 316). Spirituality has been defined as “involving the search for meaning, purpose, and morally fulfilling relations with self, other people, the encompassing universe, and ultimate reality however a person understands it . . . spirituality also can be expressed through religious forms, but is not limited to them” (Canda & Furman, 1999, p. 316).

## Summary

Social work is rooted in the Judeo-Christian faith practices of early practitioners. While it has been influenced by many other philosophies over the years, the concepts of religion and spirituality have recently been reintroduced into the profession of social work. Many social workers believe that there is a spiritual dimension to human existence. Social work is reintroducing the concepts of religion and spirituality into social work education and practice; therefore, it is important for social workers to study diverse religious and spiritual beliefs and practices as well as to become aware of their own spiritual journey and how it influences their social work practice.

This research project was an effort to contribute to the knowledge base of practicing social workers and social work educators to enable the concepts of religion and spirituality to be further developed and integrated into education and practice. The literature review introduces concepts relevant to human moral and spiritual development and identifies some of the benefits and potential drawbacks of belonging to religious and

spiritual groups. Understanding the human developmental processes is helpful for social workers as they work with clients and as they consider their own spiritual journey.



## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In order to incorporate religion and spirituality into social work practice and education, social work educators will need to become familiar with many different religious and spiritual belief systems and other aspects of religious and spiritual development in humans. The focus of this literature review is on the moral and spiritual aspect of human development. First, the trend toward incorporation of “alternative means” of healing such as prayer and meditation in the helping professions and the changing trends in American faith traditions and practices is discussed to provide a background and context for inclusion of religion and spirituality in social work practice and education. Next, the primary focus of the literature review is presented – a focus on the theories of human development and psychology that describe moral and spiritual development of individuals. Finally, there are recommendations for spiritually sensitive, respectful, and competent social work practice that incorporates the religious and spiritual aspect of the client’s system.

#### Trends Toward Alternative Methods of Healing

Recent trends in the 1980s and 1990s within the helping professions have turned clients and practitioners toward incorporation of alternative methods of healing. No longer do people seeking healing for medical or mental health conditions wholeheartedly embrace the Western view or the “medical model.” These changes are evident both in

the evolving practices in medicine and in other helping professions such as social work. This has resulted in the need for schools of medicine, nursing, social work, counseling, and psychology to incorporate new perspectives and paradigms into their education programs.

Even the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) has incorporated a problem area called “Religious or Spiritual Problems.” The items listed in this section are not considered mental illness, but rather, they reflect an acknowledgement of the religious or spiritual aspect of life as an area where problems in living can develop as well as an aspect of life that can play a positive role for people. This is a “departure from psychiatry’s historical tendency to treat religious experience as a sign of immaturity or delusions” (Canda & Furman, 1999; Martinez, 1994, p. 1).

Ryan, one of the founders of the Association of Christian Therapists (members include nuns, priests, spiritual directors, physicians, nurses, mental health experts, and social workers), commented that “more and more doctors are praying with their patients because patients are asking for it. It’s a grassroots movement” (as cited in Martinez, 1994, p. 1). King and Bushwick (1994) interviewed 203 family practice adult inpatients at two hospitals about their views on their health concerns and religion and found:

Seventy-seven percent said physicians should consider patients’ spiritual needs, 37% wanted their physicians to discuss religious beliefs with them more frequently, and 48% wanted their physicians to pray with them. However, 68% said their physician had never discussed religious beliefs with them. (p. 1)

In fact, recently there has been increased medical research in the areas of alternative medicine, particularly the use of prayer and meditation.



## Advances in Medical Science

Byrd (1988) reported on the use of intercessory prayer to the Judeo-Christian God by Christians who prayed outside the hospital for 393 Coronary Care Unit patients. Significant differences were found in outcomes with the control patients using the interventions of ventilation, antibiotics, and diuretics more often than those in the intercessory prayer group. Koenig, a geriatric psychiatrist and Duke University researcher, studied 87 depressed elderly patients who were hospitalized for medical problems such as heart disease and stroke. The study is reported by Mental Health Net (1998) on-line. The report indicates these findings:

For every 10-point increase in a person's intrinsic religiosity as measured by a scientifically validated questionnaire, there was a 70 percent increase in the speed of recovery from depression. Recovery time was even faster for older patients whose medical conditions worsened or failed to improve after discharge. For each 10-point rise in religious faith, there was a 100 percent increase in the speed of remission from depression, compared to their non-religious counterparts. (p. 1)

Transcendental meditation has proven effective in reducing health insurance usage in all categories in all areas of medical problems studied ranging from 30.4% for infectious disease up to 87.3% for diseases of the nervous system (Orme-Johnson, 1987). Matthews and Clark (1998), in The Faith Factor, summarize much of the medical research that supports this notion that prayer and meditation can make a difference. They attempt to integrate the practice of medicine with concepts of faith from a Christian perspective. Their book, for instance, provides information on developing a spiritual program, prayer, the riches of the Bible, and the benefits of spiritual community. Matthews and Clark note that most medical studies are based on measures that focus on involvement in religious services as an indicator of increased well-being or improved



health outcomes. They assert that it is difficult to measure spirituality because it is a more individual process, so research is not as clear on benefits of spirituality. Matthews and Clark encourage those who are in the Judeo-Christian traditions to be both religious (active in church services) and spiritual because attending religious services has proven to be an important factor in several studies.

Benson (1987), another mind/body researcher from Harvard, has studied and developed the relaxation response and has demonstrated specific health benefits including the effects on brain chemicals that regulate moods and pain. His book, Your Maximum Mind, gives practical examples of ways to incorporate these benefits into everyday life. It is apparent that many of the medical studies conducted over the last 10 years have supported the idea that regardless of the source of knowledge or power that people are seeking through prayer, meditation, and participation in religious services – whether it be the Christian God or otherwise – there appears to be similar physiological benefits that impact both mental and physical health and healing.

#### Advances in Physical Science

Another area of science, Quantum Physics, has been mentioned in some of the literature as pointing to an explanation of why spiritual principles might contribute to improved health and healing. This is an interesting, but difficult, area of study for many to comprehend due to the complexity of the theories. Missler (1994a, 1994b), an internationally recognized high technology executive and authority, has related these theories to biblical verses and biblical events in a two audiotape series called Beyond Perception and Beyond Time and Space. He summarizes the theories of Quantum

Physics as they have evolved and explains that much of the happenings that reportedly occurred in the Bible could have happened if more dimensions were being evidenced at that moment. He explains that current life experience in the physical world occurs in four dimensions called space-time, but Quantum Physics is going beyond space and time. Quantum physicists now believe that there are at least 10 dimensions in the universe. He asserts that Quantum Physics has led to the understandings that:

Quantum physics is a self contradicting world:

1. Nothing is real; we cannot say anything about what things are doing when we are not looking at them. Nothing is real unless it is observed.
2. It is non-causal and non-determinate: everything is probabilistic in some pretty strange ways.
3. Reality is non-local: two photons traveling at the speed of light in opposite directions: measurement of one affects the other instantaneously. The particles seem to be inseparably connected into some indivisible whole, each seemingly aware of what happens to each of the others. Every particle in the universe is somehow connected. (Missler, 1994a, pp. 4-5)

Missler (1994a) says that all of these findings have led to an understanding that:

Science now deals with events that cannot be certain; which only follow probability distributions. Causality, the traditional handmaiden of science, with its attendant certainties, is now a thing of the naïve past. Physics, the most rigorous of the sciences, is now cast adrift on a sea of uncertainty. (pp. 21-22)

He suggests that higher dimensional geometry may provide some answers and he describes the advancement of several theories ending with the Theory of Everything: Superstrings, which refers to the existence of strings which create matter through harmonies created by their vibration. This theory ties together mathematically the theories that explain micro physics and those that explain macro physics. It is a connecting link and overall theory. The strings are one-dimensional and stretch across the universe, but are smaller than a single atom. "They are 100 billion times smaller than



a proton. A particle is not a point at all, but a mode of a vibrating string. Matter is nothing but the harmonies (resonances) created by this vibrating string” (Missler, 1994a, pp. 33-34). They can only “vibrate self-consistently in 10 and 26 dimensions” (Missler, 1994a, p. 34). Interestingly, Missler points out that:

500 years ago, the Hebrew cabalists theorized that God established the universe with 10 dimensions: From Genesis Chapter 1: “. . . and God said . . .” (10X) 10 dimensions; four of them are knowable (Eph 3:18); six contracted into submicroscopic dimensions during the six days of Genesis . . . (Missler, 1994a, p. 34)

Missler (1994a) also points to Psalm 33:2; Psalm 92:3; and Psalm 144:9 which all state that praise music was played on an “instrument of 10 strings” (p. 35). Throughout his tapes, he draws attention to biblical evidences of what science is discovering. Missler directs us to Colossians 1:17. Colossians 1:15-17 which speaks of the Supremacy of Christ is quoted here:

15. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17. *He is before all things, and in him all things hold together* [italics added]. (Barker, Burdick, Stek, Wessel & Youngblood, 1985, p. 2297)

In Beyond Time and Space, Missler (1994b) further explains how science initially led to a linear world-view which resulted in many errors in reasoning. These errors in thinking would enable people to discount the many biblical examples of “non-linearities” such as warnings of the flood for four generations, appearances of the Shekinah glory of God, incidents of angels appearing and speaking to people, and the transfiguration (Matthew 17). This also influenced people’s understanding of the reality of the spirit world, including the reality of Satan, angelic warfare, and the battle of deceit versus truth.

Quantum Physics is an area of scientific study that will be worth following. It is highly technical, but Missler's information was presented so that lay persons could begin to grasp the implications of these recent findings as they relate to the reality of the spiritual world and provide additional support of the accuracy of the information in the Bible.

### Religious and Spiritual Factors and Trends in America

When considering approaches to healing that the helping professions may embrace, it is important to understand the perspective of the American people. Barna (1996) has compiled an index of leading spiritual indicators that reflects trends in religious and spiritual beliefs and practices of people in the United States. He says that:

Cross-cultural studies in developed nations show that Americans are perhaps the most religious people. The key shift that is in process is the movement away from being the most Christian-oriented nation on earth to a nation of people who are religiously diverse and who maintain a high fascination with the spiritual realm. (pp. 1-2)

### General Factors and Trends

The following list consists of several statistics taken from Barna's book that help describe the religious and spiritual atmosphere in America today. His book draws on many sources that are cited.

1. Eighty-seven percent of adults surveyed state that religious faith is an important part of their lives (Carter, 1993, p. 41, as cited in Barna, 1996, p. 1).
2. Sixty-seven percent say they have "made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today" (Carter, 1993, p. 41, as cited in Barna, 1996, p. 3).
3. Forty-one percent report absolute commitment to Christianity while 44% report moderate commitment (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985, p. 226, as cited in Barna, 1996, p. 3).



4. Seventy-four percent of those adults studied would like to have a "close relationship with God" (Anderson, 1992, p. 19, as cited in Barna, 1996, p. 5).
5. Thirty-three percent moderately agree and 45% strongly agree that "the Christian faith is relevant to their lives today" (Anderson, 1992, p. 19, as cited in Barna, 1996, p. 6).
6. "The vast majority of Americans consider themselves to be religious and are not afraid to admit it. For most, religion means a personal affirmation of faith in God and an identification with a religious denomination, but it does not necessarily mean joining or being an active member of that particular group. It is more of a private commitment than a shared experience." (Kosmin & Lachman, 1993, p. 1, as cited in Barna, 1996, p. 2)
7. "... Eighty-five percent believe that Jesus Christ was crucified, died, and rose from the dead and is spiritually alive today." (Kosmin & Lachman, 1993, p. 10, as cited in Barna, 1996, p. 19)
8. "Most Americans do not believe in Satan (or, the devil) . . . Fifty-eight percent believe that Satan is not a living being, but a symbol of evil." (Gallup & Castelli, 1989, p. 60, as cited in Barna, 1996, p. 22)
9. "... Seventy-one percent say they have heard of spiritual gifts which are supernatural abilities given by God, through the Holy Spirit, to those who believe in Jesus Christ. However, comparatively few adults who have heard of these gifts believe they, personally, have a spiritual gift or able to identify their gift." (Roof, 1993, p. 72, as cited in Barna, 1996, p. 24)
10. Common American understandings of the concept of God:
 

Those who believe in the traditional concept of God (as perfect, all-powerful creator)	69%
Others believe in a supreme being:	
God is "a state of higher consciousness that a person may reach"	11%
Total realization of personal human potential	8%
Many territorial gods each with its own territory	3%
Each person is god	3%
There is no god	2%
Don't know	4%

(Gallup & Castelli, 1989, p. 60, as cited in Barna, 1996, p. 30)

## 11. Faith Groups represented in Americans surveyed:

Protestant	35%
Catholic	29%
Christian (other)	21%
Atheist	8%
Mormon	2%
Jewish	2%
Muslim	1%
Other	2%

(Barna, 1996, p. 16)

## 12. Alternative method of viewing the faith divisions as measured in 1995:

Biblical Christianity	10%
Conventional Christianity	25%
Cultural Christianity	28%
New Age Practitioner	19%
Jewish	2%
Atheist/Agnostic	9%
Other	8%

(Barna, 1996, p. 125)

13. "People's reactions to the quality of their church experience were rather lukewarm. While they feel that most activities are done with excellence or good quality, still their confidence is slipping and their commitment is waning. It is as if the key to their experience is the great missing ingredient: the presence of God, which is infrequently sensed. Without that, much of what takes place is simply human performance of rituals." (Barna, 1996, p. 45)

"It seems that contemporary church-goers have redefined worship from activities done in the presence of God to those acts of service, humility, and praise which are done for the benefit of God – however distant He may be from them." (Barna, 1996, p. 52)

14. In regards to spiritual practices, prayer, miracles, meditation, fasting, and chanting are common spiritual activities. Prayer is important to most Americans. Eighty-nine percent of Americans say they pray to God (Gallup & Castelli, 1989, p. 252, as cited in Barna, 1996, p. 61). Eighty-two percent believe "prayer can change what happens in a person's life" (Gallup & Poloma, 1991, p. 125, as cited in Barna, 1996, p. 23). Seventy-three percent of people believe that "all of the miracles described in the Bible actually took place" (Gallup & Poloma, 1991, p. 125, as cited in Barna, 1996, p. 27). Meditation is also common among some. Twenty-four percent of adults report that during a typical month they meditate. Most likely to meditate were Protestant adults, at 28%, and next were non-Christians at



19% (Gallup & Poloma, 1991, p. 16, as cited in Barna, 1996, p. 63). Fasting is practiced monthly by about 8% of American adults and another 6% use chanting (Gallup & Poloma, 1991, p. 16, as cited in Barna, 1996, p. 63).

15. "Many terms pertaining to Christianity are bandied about as if their meaning is clear and widespread. The evidence indicates otherwise. In a nation where the Christian faith is losing its grip on the public, relying upon traditional terms to summarize concepts and convey meaning is an ill-advised communication strategy. These terms are more likely to create confusion and misunderstanding than to convey substance." (Barna, 1996, p. 78)

Many of these recent trends in America that are noted by Barna should be understood by social workers as they seek to understand the culture and diversity of their clients. It is vital for social workers to realize that people believe that their faith is an important part of their lives. Not only is there considerable diversity of beliefs, but many are seeking a closer relationship with God and they still see the Christian faith (at least at some level of an understanding of what it is) as relevant. Faith and spiritual growth is more of a private than a public activity. For some people, church experience may bring a sense of community and belonging, but often they do not experience God's presence there nor are they aware of the personal spiritual gifts they may have been given. Terms often used by society and religious groups to communicate about religious and spiritual concepts and practices no longer have clear meaning; clarification of meaning is necessary in order to have meaningful discussions of these concepts. Many American people find prayer, meditation, fasting, and chanting to be helpful spiritual interventions in their life (Barna, 1996).



### Angel Worship

Another trend in America is the worship of angels. Time Magazine featured “The New Age of Angels” in its December 1993 issue, linking the increased popularity of angels with a New Age in which “a grass-roots revolution of the spirit has all sorts of people asking all sorts of questions about angels” (Gibbs, 1993, p. 56). Sixty-nine percent of people expressed belief in angels, 46% believed they had their own guardian angel, 49% believed in the existence of fallen angels, and 32% reported having personally felt an angelic presence in their life. The belief in angels is reported by Gibbs as an almost universal belief “across cultures and through the centuries” (p. 58). She cites their presence in Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hinduist, Zoroastrian, Sumerian, Egyptian, and Assyrian faith practices. The resurgent belief in angels is reported to be a popular thinking or feeling approach that does not follow any theological teachings. “For those who choke too easily on God and his rules, theologians observe, angels are the handy compromise, all fluff and meringue, kind, nonjudgmental. And they are available to everyone, like aspirin” (p. 56).

### New Age

According to Murphy (1996), secular humanism, coming from Western Europe, used to be the major competition to Christianity. Now the challenge is the Age of Aquarius. It holds a Far Eastern world-view. Murphy states that “it is not new, it is the age-old hiss from the Garden when the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will be like God’” (p. 501). Murphy credits Dr. Geisler for identifying these major views of the New Age movement:

1. God is all and all is God – pantheism. God is an impersonal force, both good and evil and is in all things.

2. Philosophical monism – there is only one essence in the universe: the only reality is God. God is in all nature. The universe is alive – animism.

3. Man is God – self-deification. “Good works” saves man.

4. Belief that we must look inside to find God and Godhood is obtainable if we look inside, this leads to extreme mysticism.

5. A belief in reincarnation – the need to be re-born over and over until one “gets it right” – spiritual evolution.

6. An illusion that good and evil are the same thing – just different sides of a coin.

7. Optimism that the world is getting better. This is a broad, unorganized movement that seeks a new world order.

8. Globalism is sought in which the human race will become one. All religious and other philosophies must be combined together into one soup – syncretism.

9. Christ is seen as man who took on the Christ office. He died and was reincarnated.

The spiritual climate in America has been changing. It is helpful for social workers to be aware of the many different religious and philosophical views that their clients are likely to present. Social workers also find themselves working with refugees and immigrants from other cultures. It is important to be culturally aware and sensitive to

their religious and spiritual practices. If there is a spiritual aspect to all humans, it is likely that everyone is on some type of a spiritual journey.

### Theories Related to Human Development and Religious and Spiritual Journeys

In social work education, the primary insights into religion and spirituality have come from the perspectives of developmental psychology and existentialism. More recently, concepts from transpersonal psychology have been introduced in the social work literature (Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 1998). Philosophers and researchers such as Piaget, Kohlberg, Erikson, Gilligan, and Fowler who have studied human development have submitted theories of moral development which give insight into how humans journey along the path of spiritual development. Existential theories about making meaning out of the present circumstances provide helpful insights to the “making meaning” aspect of spirituality. Transpersonal theorists such as Maslow, Jung, Assagioli, and Wilber also provide insights for social work practice that includes the concept of spirituality.

Several theorists have presented their ideas of what leads to moral development. They primarily provide a “positive and rational view of human behavior” (Robbins et al., 1998, p. 266). Some developmental theorists who are commonly discussed in social work human behavior textbooks are Piaget, Kohlberg, Erikson, and Gilligan. However, none of these theorists addresses the spiritual implications of moral development (Robbins et al., 1998). Fowler (1981), a theorist not commonly studied by social work students, describes stages of faith development. He combines a liberal Christian



perspective with his theoretical perspective built on theories of human development. This lays groundwork for linking human development and spirituality (Robbins et al., 1998).

### Piaget

Piaget proposed a two-stage theory of moral development that coincides with the preoperational and operational stages of development. He believes that before age 5 children are premoral. The first stage, moral realism, is reflected through socialization of children at ages 5 through 10. In this stage, they unquestioningly follow the rules of those in authority. Piaget's second stage was called moral relativism and was developed at age 10 through adulthood. At this stage, children come to see developing rules as an interactive process and they become aware of the meanings or reasons for the rules. He believed that healthy conflict between children leads to the development of moral reasoning (Robbins et al., 1998).

### Kohlberg

Kohlberg, who also was a stage theorist, believed the process of moral development was more complex than what Piaget proposed. Kohlberg believed that moral development advanced through cognitive struggles that occur when the present level of moral reasoning is not working and when a person has an ability to understand the views of others. Kohlberg's model has three levels with each level having two stages. The first level is called preconventional and it is evident from birth to about 9 years old. It includes avoiding punishment (stage 1) and seeking rewards (2). It is followed by the conventional level, which occurs from about ages 9 to 15; here the focus is on gaining

approval (3) and following the rules (4). The last level is called the postconventional level that develops from approximately age 16 onward. However, Kohlberg believes that few people ever reach this level. At this level, the focus is on social contract (5) and individual principled conscience (6) (Robbins et al., 1998).

### Erikson

Erikson's work on human development has been foundational for much of the other research such as that of Fowler. Erikson defined eight psychosocial stages that were sequential starting at birth and ending in old age. Each stage consisted of a primary conflict or crisis that was critical at that stage. The crisis needed to be resolved to attain the resulting strengths. The extent to which the crisis is resolved successfully was believed to affect how successfully later crisis will be resolved. Eight stages were identified by Erikson. Table 1 summarizes the stages, ages, crisis, and important event associated with each.

### Gilligan

Gilligan's research focused on women's moral development and lends a feminine perspective. It was a critical attempt to bring more understanding to moral development that was not only focused on male subjects. She developed a three-stage theory. However, her theory is controversial and has received "little empirical support" according to Robbins et al. (1998, p. 251). The first stage in Gilligan's model is self-survival, where the focus is on caring for one's self. The transition to stage two results from a realization that caring only for one's self is selfish; the result leads to stage two, which is called caring for others. This seems to be an opposite reaction and an attempt to

overcorrect. When this is realized, stage three occurs where a woman develops interdependence of self and others. The transitions from stage two to three are based on conflict of values between selfishness and responsibility.

Table 1

Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development

Stage	Age	Crisis	Event
Infancy	Birth to 18 months	Trust/Mistrust	Feeding
Early Childhood	18 months to 3 years	Autonomy/ Shame, Doubt	Toileting
Play Age	3 to 6 years	Initiative/Guilt	Locomoting
School Age	6 to 12 years	Identity/Inferiority	School
Adolescence	Adolescence	Identity/Role Confusion	Peer relationships
Young Adulthood	Young Adult	Intimacy/Isolation	Love relationship
Maturity	Maturity	Generativity/ Stagnation	Parenting and creating
Old Age	Old Age	Ego Integrity/ Despair, Disgust	Reflecting, accept one's life

(Ashford et al., 1997; Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 1997)

Fowler

Fowler (1981) is one of the theorists that social work texts have omitted. He addresses moral development as stages of faith. Fowler has identified seven stages of faith. Fowler builds his theory with the understandings of the works of Erikson, Piaget, Kohlberg, and Levanson. While psychosocial crisis might be what moves people from one stage to the next in development, he says of faith development:



We began to realize that a time of movement from one of Erikson's eras to another frequently correlated with or helped to precipitate a change in the structural operations of faith. *But not always*. More recently we have come to see that a person's structural stage of faith (correlated with other structural aspects) has important implications for the way the person will construct the experience of crisis that inaugurates a new Eriksonian developmental era. (Fowler, 1981, p. 107)

A weakness of Fowler's studies is that his sample, and thus the stages developed, has a Christian and Western bias. His sample included Jews, Catholics, Protestants, agnostics, and atheists, but does not have a cross-cultural perspective. Fowler plans cross-cultural research in which he expects that there will be "replacement or altering of some of the seven aspects we have generated to help us describe the respective integrities of the stages," but that the "stage sequence that will emerge from that work will bear a close relationship to the formal sequences with which we now work" (Fowler, 1981, p. 298).

### Faith-Identity Patterns

Fowler asserts that there are three major types of faith-identity patterns: polytheistic, henotheistic, and radical monotheistic. They are based in part on the ideas of Niebuhr (1960). A polytheistic pattern "lacks any one center of value and power of sufficient transcendence to focus and order one's life . . . [interests] are in many minor centers of value and power" (Fowler, 1981, p. 19). The henotheistic pattern "suggests trust and loyalty to one god . . . one invests deeply in a transcending center of value and power, finding in it a focal unity of personality and outlook, but this center is inappropriate, false, not something of ultimate concern . . . an idol" (Fowler, 1981, p. 20). Radical monotheism consists of "a type of faith identity relation in which a person or

group focuses its supreme trust and loyalty in a transcendent center of value and power, that is neither a conscious or unconscious extension of personal or group ego nor a finite cause or institution . . . symbolized in both theistic and nontheistic ways” (Fowler, 1981, p. 23). Fowler believes the stages of faith development are found in all people regardless of their faith-identity pattern.

### Fowler’s Stage Theory

Fowler presents his theory as a dynamically connected process with each stage represented by a circle that is linked through a spiral to the one above and below it. Each stage overlaps because some life issues (intimacy with self, others, world, God) are encountered again at each stage but at a higher level of complexity. Up until stage 4 there is a movement toward individuation, and then stages 5 and 6 move back toward participation and oneness at “different levels of complexity, differentiation and inclusiveness” (Fowler, 1981, p. 274).

Transitions from one stage level to another are often drawn out and painful, and the process can come to an impasse at any of the stages. Fowler asserts, too, that many people do not reach stages 5 and 6. However, Fowler does not believe the stages only depend on us, but also depend on God (or the transcendent Ground of Being). He believes that persons are at the given stage they are at because it is right for them at that time of their life, and that in each stage there is the “potential for wholeness, grace and integrity and for strengths sufficient for either life’s blows or blessings” (Fowler, 1981, p. 274).

Two types of faith change. Fowler describes two types of change: structural change and conversion. Structural change refers to the way one's faith operates such as ways of knowing, valuing, judging, and committing – how the content of faith is appropriated. Structural change is somewhat predictable because it is related to maturation of biological, psychosocial, cognitive, and moral developmental aspects of an individual.

The second type of change is called conversion. Conversion is “*a significant recentering of one's previous conscious or unconscious images of value and power, and the conscious adoption of a new set of master stories in the commitment to reshape one's life in a new community of interpretation and action*” (Fowler, 1981, pp. 281-282). It is here where transcendent experiences are likely to initiate change. Conversion can happen during any of the faith stages. Conversion can be sudden or gradual, but it leads to change in the contents of faith, which Fowler identifies as the centers of value, images of power, and master stories of one's faith.

Emergent strengths. Fowler (1981) presents an emergent strength or virtue of each structural faith stage. In infancy when there is Undifferentiated faith the virtue is “mutuality, trust, and pre-images of the Ground of Being” (p. 290). At early childhood, an Intuitive-Protective faith is developed, which gives rise to imagination and images of an “Ultimate Environment.” In childhood, faith is called Mythic-Literal. Stories and narration become important here. In adolescence, faith is called Synthetic-Conventional and it involves the beginning and forming of a personal faith and identity. In young adulthood, the faith stage is called Individuative-Reflective faith. In the case of young



adulthood, reflection becomes important with the construction of ideology and of a vocational dream. Finally, in adulthood, Conjunctive faith becomes important which is paradoxical, consisting of great depth, and an intergenerational sense of responsibility for the world.

Recapitulation after conversion. If a person has a conversion experience, a “re-grounding of these virtues and their reorientation [must occur] in light of faith’s new center of value, images of power and decisive master story” (Fowler, 1981, p. 290). This is a process of recapitulation which includes a reconstruction of the pre-images of God or the Ground of Being and re-establishment of basic trust. Primal images of the Ultimate Environment are transformed to be consistent with the new understandings. New stories and associations with a people of like belief or faith develop. A new identity develops in relation to the “new center of value, images of power, and master story.” New vocational and theological understandings develop to compliment the conversion and a new level or quality of partnership develops with God, or the Ground of Being, and with the world.

Conversion, as Fowler describes it, may happen spontaneously or slowly and during any stage. It is likely that conversion is related to other theories such as those that speak of a search for meaning and those describing transpersonal experiences such as altered states of consciousness or mystical experiences.

Existentialism/Transpersonal Psychology/Altered States  
of Consciousness/Mysticism

There are several other applicable theories that relate to spiritual growth and spiritual experiences such as existentialism, transpersonal psychology, altered states of consciousness, and mysticism.

Existentialism

Existentialism is an intellectual orientation that developed as people attempted to cope with times of crises during rapid social growth and change and the crises of war during the late 1800s to mid 1900s. There was a wide diversity of religious and non-religious theorists who wrote from this perspective. They all had in common a “criticism of their contemporary *crisis of meaning*” (Robbins et al., 1998, p. 365). The “absurdity” of meaning that had been constructed by humans became the focus of their writings and a great search for ultimate meaning ensued. Existentialists challenge social norms and religious ideologies that create meanings that are repressive to humans. The focus is on making meaning of life in the “now” reality, particularly in times of crisis, and taking personal responsibility for one’s views. Religious existentialists from the Christian and Jewish perspectives focus on personal experience rather than adherence to doctrines, as an expression of one’s freedom (Canda & Furman, 1999).

Many aspects of existential theory contribute to social work practice as clients attempt to make meaning out of their crisis situations and social ills need to be addressed. Philosophies of existentialism and transpersonal psychology often compliment each other. A person with an existential and transpersonal orientation realizes “there is a

paradox inherent in the mystery of suffering: complete acceptance of the incapacity of human beings to understand our existential predicament of mortality and meaningless results in a sense of spiritual empowerment and wisdom. Kierkegaard described this as *authentic faith . . .*” (Robbins et al., 1998, p. 366).

### Transpersonal Theory

Transpersonal theory is also called the Forth Force. It follows dynamic (first), behavioral (second), and experiential, humanistic, existential (third) approaches of psychology. It challenges traditional Western views of psychology in which the focus is on self-actualization. Persons with this “forth force” perspective would believe that the spiritual life is as much a component of human life as the biological, psychological, or social aspect. Transpersonal psychology involves the study of “transcendent” experiences – ones that reach beyond the self, time, and space (Cowley & Derezotes, 1994). Transpersonal psychology has no religious institutions built around it; however, “it has had a strong influence on the so-called New Age movement” (Canda & Furman, 1999, p. 163).

Freud viewed religion and spirituality as pathology; but other theorists such as Jung (1938), Assagioli (1965, 1973), and Wilber (1995, 1996) disagreed. Jung saw religion as a search for meaning and a means to attain wholeness, and that search as an integral part of psychological development (Jung, 1938).

Assagioli (1965, 1973) emphasized the important role of religion and spirituality in helping people to realize an inner unity between all aspects of themselves and also a unity with all in the cosmos . . . [he named] the therapeutic process for assisting in this personal realization of unity “psychosynthesis.” (Robbins et al., 1998, p. 366)



Wilber has developed what he calls a full spectrum of consciousness model of transpersonal theory that is very comprehensive. His theory integrates the viewpoints of many disciplines and Eastern and Western philosophic and religious thought. Robbins et al. (1998) summarize his most recent writings (Wilber, 1995, 1996) and latest version of his model. An interesting note for social workers is that his perspective encompasses both the micro and macro perspective in that he shows development of personal and social systems. Wilber assumes evolutionary process in which all system levels “face similar challenges to move toward increasingly sophisticated forms of mental functioning and all human systems influence each other’s development” (Robbins et al., 1998, p. 372). This fits well with the current concepts of systems theory taught in social work education.

Wilber’s model is a holarchy: It increases in complexity at each higher level. He does not believe that one must completely master one level to gain access to higher levels. The process of moving from one level up to the next involves three stages:

1. Self moves up to the next level and achieves comfort there and identifies with that level;
2. New experiences and challenges are encountered and the person begins to dis-identify with that level;
3. Self moves up to the next level with knowledge and competence gained at the levels below it.

There are three main phases in Wilber’s theory (pre-egoic, egoic, and trans-egoic) and there are transitional stages within each phase. The theory as it applies to individuals is

found in Table 2. Approximate ages are provided in the theory, although the schedule for development is not seen as fixed. Similar to the developmental theorists, Wilber, too, believes that few people attain the higher levels and move into the transegoic phase.

Wilber's spectrum model is difficult to reduce to simple concepts; this is particularly so since his theories have been presented in manuscripts rather than in summary form. Since relatively few people have attained these higher levels of spiritual development, it would follow that they may be more difficult to grasp conceptually since our language does not have words to represent the concepts being presented. The higher levels of spiritual development often occur while the person is experiencing states of altered consciousness, a concept that is somewhat more familiar to most people.

#### Altered States of Consciousness

There have also been studies to demonstrate that there are different levels of altered consciousness. Much of this research was conducted using drugs, biofeedback, hypnosis, and meditative spiritual practices. It has been shown through this research that there are different levels of consciousness. Of particular importance for social workers in their practice of social work is the need and ability to interpret the client's spiritual experiences properly within the views of the client's own belief system and not misdiagnose reports of these type of events as problems of delusions or hallucinations.

Robbins et al. (1998) discuss three categories of consciousness that were identified by Grof (1988) during the 1950s and 1960s using LSD and later with non-drug techniques called holotropic breathwork which "opens awareness to transpersonal and mystical experience and removes space and time as barriers" (p. 370). These altered

Table 2

Wilber's Spectrum Model: Stages of Spiritual Growth

Phase	Stage	Individual level	Approximate age	Characteristics
Trans-egoic (transcends egocentrism, ethnocentrism, rationalism)	10	Nondual (ultimate goal of development)	later adulthood, if ever	All is experienced (Source, Goal and Process of development) as one – no duality.
	9	Causal	later adulthood, if ever	Both Soul and God as personalized entities are transcended.
	8	Subtle	later adulthood, if ever	The individual Soul and a personal God are experienced in communion. Nature is transcended, yet embraced as an immanental expression of the Divine.
	7	Psychic	later adulthood, if ever	The Individual develops a clear sense of an inner Witness (Soul, or spiritual essence), a consciousness that can reflect on self and world without being bound to it. Commonly here one feels connected with nature.
Egoic	6	Vision-logic	mid to later adulthood	Most people do not attain this. Vision-logic – realization of worldcentric identity. Focus shifts toward holistic and systemic understandings. Well-being of self is intrinsic with well-being of others.



Table 2 (continued)

Phase	Stage	Individual level	Approximate age	Characteristics
	5	Formal Operations	early to later adulthood	Highest level that most people attain. Allows for highly abstract and complex mental functionings. The sense of separate self is completely formed.
	4	Concrete Operational	age 7 to adolescence	Clear sense of autonomous self. Still clearly defined by roles. Can increasingly take the perspective of others.
Pre-egoic	3	Late Preoperational	age 4 to 7	Belief in magical control moves from self to literalistic concepts of supernatural spirits or deities.
	2	Preoperational	ages 2 to 4	Able to differentiate self from others. Often confuses own thoughts with things in the environment and believes that one's thoughts can control the environment.
	1	Sensoriphsical	ages 0 to 2	Body-oriented self identity. Self is enmeshed with environment. Body needs drive their behavior.
Pre-stage	0	Nondual (as source and potential of development)		

(Extracted from summary provided by Robbins et al., 1998, pp. 376-381)

states of consciousness may also be evident in transcendent spiritual experiences. Please see Table 3 below for the categories and definitions.

Table 3

Holotropic Categories

Holotropic category	Definition
1. Experiential Extension Within Consensus Reality and Space-Time	Experience transcends space-time barriers so that the boundaries do not exist between the individual and the universe. i.e., identifying with your own embryonic development
2. Experiential Extension Beyond Consensus Reality and Space-Time	Experiences defy conventional Western thinking about the material world. i.e., communication with souls of the dead, spirits of plants or animals, or cosmic consciousness
3. Transpersonal Experiences of a Psychoid Nature	The boundary between consciousness and matter is blurred. Spontaneous or intentional consciousness over matter events such as faith healings. i.e., when there is a meaningful but noncausal link between dreams or thoughts and actual events in one's life

Mysticism

Mysticism is another concept related to spiritual growth, particularly at the higher levels of spiritual growth which the theorists assert not many attain. It is a term misunderstood by many. There is not much information about mysticism available although it has had profound effects on spiritual traditions. Mysticism has been described by Underhill as "the art of the union with reality" (Underhill, 1915, p. 3, as cited in Bullis, 1996, pp. 103-104). Webster's New World Dictionary (Guralink, 1982) defines it as:

1. the doctrines or beliefs of mystics; specif., the doctrine that it is possible to achieve communion with God through contemplation and love without the medium of human reason 2. Any doctrine that asserts that the possibility of attaining knowledge of spiritual truths through intuition acquired by fixed meditation. (p. 942)

Mysticism may be described as coming from several different perspectives: from that of Eastern religions and New Age practitioners, from a combination of Christian and non-Christian ideologies, or from a specifically Christian perspective. In non-Christian perspectives, many mystics seek knowledge from the Ground of Being, or the universe, or from within themselves, or from other spirit guides; they are not seeking the Triune Creator God described in the Bible. While the physiological benefits may be similar, the source of knowledge is different.

Bullis (1996) summarizes the typology of mysticism presented by Underhill (1915). There are five distinct stages: Awakening of the Self, Purgation, Illumination, Penumbra: Dark Night of the Soul, and Unity. In the Awakening of the Self, one becomes conscious of things beyond oneself and involves an encounter with that which is ultimate or divine and opens new levels of consciousness. This can be sudden or gradual. The stage of Purgation is the realization of a profound need to cleanse the self of sin or harmful behavior and selfish ways. The soul is purged from that which veils it. This may be experienced as a time of painful cleansing. The stage of Illumination is an intensifying of the awakening; it is experiencing God in an immediate and intimate way such as happened to Moses on Mount Horeb where an angel appeared in a bush that burned but was not consumed. There, God spoke personally to Him (Exodus 3:2-6). In this stage the senses are heightened. The stage of Penumbra is anticlimactic. It comes on



the heels of the bliss of illumination. It is a temporary period of darkness and is natural following such a profound experience. It reflects a “loss and grief over a former life and the confusion – even terror – of entering an unknown and strange lifestyle” (Bullis, 1996, p. 107). The successful resolution of this stage moves one along to the stage of Unity. In the stage of Unity, there is integration or union between the divine and the person, a uniting of the spirits.

### Christian Mysticism

Nancy Missler, reviewing her experience in a book by Missler and Missler (1999), is a Christian who struggled personally with a long season of the “Dark Night of the Soul,” a spiritual depression. She struggled with that darkness. She writes out of her personal experience with life crisis that led to spiritual darkness and eventually to knowing God and a continuing intimate relationship to Him, and describes her experience of Christian mysticism this way:

True Biblical mysticism is simply contacting God in the deepest part of our being where He now dwells. Christian mysticism, however does not mean [seeking] experientialism. It does not mean visions or voices or dreams, but simply an *all-pervasive awareness of God's presence*. It means [though] experiencing His nearness, His guidance, His revelations, His anointing, His Love, His Power, His peace and His joy. The only way to experience these things is not though [sic] techniques, introspection or experience, but humility, endurance and love for God. (Missler & Missler, 1999, pp. 235, 237)

She describes a process in her book of how to access the “Holy of Holies” and obtain this level of intimate relationship with Him. An assumed important aspect of this process is coming to God through repentance and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. She asserts that spending time listening for His voice is vital. Many Christians have not been taught when to listen or how to listen for God’s voice.

Missler (Missler & Missler, 1999) outlines an Inner Court ritual for Christians based on the Old Testament practices in Solomon's temple. It is one means that the Christian might undertake to experience this level of communion with God. She describes the Incense Altar as being symbolic of our

*experiential union with God, the complete union of our spirit with His. . . . Complete union of spirit means that our spirit has been sanctified and strengthened, so that it is now able to freely direct our soul in all things . . . We have finally not only positionally but experientially become one. (p. 248)*

Missler (Missler & Missler, 1999) described these as "guidelines" that would assist in this process of gaining intimacy with God. Missler gives specific verses and suggestions to persons seeking intimacy with God in her book. The general process of what happened in Solomon's temple, the rituals that were followed to gain access to the Holy Place, is presented below:

*The priests dealt with their sin and were reconciled to God in the Inner Court, but they worshiped and petitioned their prayers before His presence in the Holy Place. The order of service for the priests was as follows: They entered the Inner Court with praise and thanksgiving. Then, they went to the Lavers of Bronze where they washed their hands and feet (confessed and repented of their sins). After that, they went to the Brazen Altar where they sacrificed the animals in order to purge the sins of the people. Next, they went to the Molten Sea where they bathed completely by bodily immersion. Then, . . . they took the hot coals from the Brazen Altar, went back into the Holy Place where they changed their clothes and then sprinkled incense over the coals at the Golden Incense Altar. Finally, they worshiped the Lord in the "beauty of His holiness" in front of the Incense Altar and said their prayers. (pp. 355-356)*

The Solomon's Temple ritual was the means of forgiveness for sins under the old covenant that God had with his people. It was the way sins were forgiven before Christ's birth, death, and resurrection. The book of Hebrews describes that the High priest under the new covenant is now and forever Christ Jesus. Christ Jesus is also the sacrifice. He



mediates between the Father God and the person. Because of Christ's death and resurrection, Christians now may freely enter the Holy Place. The ritual provided by Missler (the details of which are found in her book) can be very helpful for the Christian to understand the process of experiencing that unity with God. She describes this oneness symbolically: The incense from our Golden Incense Altar rises up and it intermingles with the cloud – the Glory of God – found in the Holy Place. Though we do not become God, we become one with Him (our incense intermingled with His Cloud of Glory). These insights to mysticism in general and Christian mysticism may be quite helpful to social workers both for personal spiritual growth and as a means of understanding and helping persons as they go through different spiritual phases of growth. Mysticism often involves experiencing things that few others have experienced. It is important to understand the difference between these transcendent experiences and mental health difficulties.

#### Mysticism and Mental Health Issues

Bullis (1996) presents some helpful insights to know the difference between mysticism and schizophrenia and between depression and the long Dark Night of the Soul. The information he presents on schizophrenia is based on work by Wapnick (1972).

Persons with schizophrenia:

- have difficulty with social relationships
- their inner world is unorganized and haphazard
- they are isolated and try to escape the world through isolation



- they do not reciprocate with the social world by offering meaningful interaction back to others
- are likely in spiritual crisis

Mystics on the other hand:

- seek unity with God or divine reality
- they have meaningful relationships with others
- often bring healing to others
- they have undertaken isolation specifically to commune with God
- they often have mentors or guides that provide direction to their activity

The Dark Night of the Soul is a term that refers to a spiritual depression. Bullis (1996) makes a comparison of the Dark Night of the Soul and depression based on a poem written by St. John of the Cross as he described his own Dark Night of the Soul. Depression may be caused both by circumstance or may be biologically based. Depression is a response to emptiness; the person feels little spiritual connection with God and has few spiritual insights. He/she experiences feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, inappropriate guilt, and does not appreciate a sense of blessings. The Dark Night of the Soul is a spiritual experience that is a letdown response to a time of spiritual fullness. Spiritual insights are often overwhelming. Guilt that is experienced is appropriate guilt and finds resolution. Feelings of unworthiness come when the realization of who the self is as compared to the divine. People experiencing the Dark Night of the Soul can identify positive aspects of life. This is a spiritual process and

Bullis (1996) recommends that social workers should provide support, but not try to intervene by trying to eliminate the experience or related feelings.

Not only are the theories that are related to human development and spiritual growth helpful for social workers, but there is insight to be gained in studies that have evaluated the role of the church in a person's life, particularly as it relates to prevention and problem solving. Social workers will often find it helpful to assess clients from the perspective presented by Maton and Pargament (1987). Understanding the client's relationship of their church group to the prevention of problems and promotion of personal and social change allows for better understanding of the client's support system, strengths, and the role of religion in their life.

#### Religion's Role in Prevention of Problems and in Promotion of Personal and Social Change

The focus of the work of Maton and Pargament (1987) is on the role that religion plays in prevention of problems and promotion of personal and social change. Much of their work is qualitative in nature, which is often appreciated by social workers as it aids the researcher and reader to gain a broader understanding of the constructed meanings groups and individuals have developed. The researchers make a case for the importance of the helping professions to understand the different religious influences on the individual (inreach) and their influence on the community and society (outreach). This understanding would aid in providing a multidisciplinary approach to working with clients and for the purposes of working collaboratively with religious groups. It also has implications for the practitioner. For instance, if particularly effective patterns are found

in religious groups that effectively address personal and social growth and problem solving, these might be evaluated as potential new tools for the practitioner to consider adding to their own practices. The focus discussed here will only be that of the individual or inreach aspect of Maton and Pargament's research.

Drawing from case studies, Maton and Pargament (1987) have identified seven pathways of religious influence on the individual (Table 4). The pathways have two dimensions: level of individual involvement in their religion and the orientation function of religion. The level of individual involvement ranges from low to high personal involvement. There were two types of orientation of function that he identified: conserving and challenging. Conserving acts to help maintain the psychological self, and challenging acts as a catalyst for growth. Different persons/groups/congregations can be categorized into one of the patterns identified and are reflected in Table 4. This categorization may help to bring additional understanding of client/groups' strengths and identify potential areas conflicts of clients' personal needs and religious system characteristics.

### Summary of Theories

It is apparent that there are many different perspectives from which to view the role of religion and spirituality in the life of a person. Only a small sampling has been presented here. The theories presented provide a wide variety of means to evaluate religion and spiritual growth that appear to have valuable insights for social workers as they grapple with how to introduce spirituality and religion into the curriculum and social



Table 4

Maton and Pargament Inreach Pathways

Pathway	Level of involvement/Challenge	Prevention/Promotion
1. Personal Quest Flexible community Interpersonal relationships valued Variety of personal expression encouraged Members can challenge each other	High Personal Involvement Growth/Challenge Catalyst	+ enhanced sense of self efficacy + greater tolerance of diversity + greater trust in others + open mindedness + greater creativity + compassion - higher levels of self criticism - may lead to higher levels of anxiety and insecurity
2. Personal Empowerment Personal relationship to a loving God God empowers by support and challenge Faith that God is positively involved with person and society Community of caring people with shared spiritual activities	High Personal Involvement Both Challenging and Conserving	+ high measures of self-esteem + attitudes towards death were positive + developed positive personal attributes
3. Personal Structure Structured - specific behavioral expectations spelled out Authoritarian world-view God seen as vindictive	High Personal Involvement Conserving	+ lower rates of drug/alcohol abuse + upright lifestyle may be preventative + increased security + sense of hope + guidelines for dealing with problems - lower self-esteem - greater personal maladjustment - closed mindedness - prejudice - limited independent thought - potentially dysfunctional social norms

Table 4 (continued)

Pathway	Level of involvement/Challenge	Prevention/Promotion
<p>4. Personal Identity                      Defines identity of individuals through structure, traditions, rituals, and symbols</p>	<p>Medium Personal Involvement                      Conserving</p>	<p>+ sense of uniqueness                      + shared meaning                      + meaningful view of self and world                      + for persons in times of uncertainty                      + for marginal social groups                      - if it becomes exclusive</p>
<p>5. Personal Stress Buffer                      Usually involved at times of life stress or transition – find rituals, congregational care giving, and religious world-view helpful</p>	<p>Limited Personal Involvement                      Both Challenging and Conserving</p>	<p>+ with well-being                      + with self-esteem                      + reduced mortality rates for infirm and poor elderly                      - some may blame self for crisis</p>
<p>6. Personal Marginality                      Most groups and systems present members with the opportunity for marginality if they feel unwelcome or “different.” It often happens when there is lack of fit with personal and religious system.</p>	<p>Limited Personal Involvement                      Challenging</p>	<p>+ may spur personal growth if develop a sense of uniqueness                      - potential threat to personal well-being, worse in a benevolent system</p>
<p>7. Personal Defense                      Religion is a resource to tap into. It is not a unifying, internalized truth. Rather, it may be a defense against problems, justification for a particular lifestyle, an outgrowth of past family tradition, or a place to meet people or business contacts.</p>	<p>Low Personal Involvement                      Limited Conserving</p>	<p>- ten studies showed negative mental health                      * three other studies found neither positive or negative effects</p>

work practice. The theories may also be helpful as a framework from which to examine the social workers' own spiritual or faith journey. The knowledge base and skills for social work practice that demonstrates competence in addressing religious and spiritual issues need to be established.

### Definitions of the Concepts of Spirituality and Religion

#### Fowler

Fowler (1981), a developmental psychologist, spent much time defining the term faith as it comes out of the religious traditions. He speaks against the "widespread identification of faith with *belief*" (Fowler, 1981, p. 10). He cites the writings of Smith, a man who "has the linguistic competence to study most of the major religious traditions in the languages of their primary sources" (Fowler, 1981, p. 9).

According to Fowler,

Smith gives a persuasive demonstration that the language dealing with faith in the classical writings of the major religious traditions never speaks of it in ways that can be translated by the modern meanings of belief or believing. Rather, faith involves an alignment of the heart or will, a commitment of loyalty and trust. . . . Faith, therefore involves vision. It is a mode of knowing, of acknowledgment. (p. 11)

According to Smith, this change in the use of the term to mean belief happened gradually after the 16th century and was complete by the 19th century. In Smith's (1979, p. 118) words:

There was a time when "I believe" as a ceremonial declaration of faith meant, and was heard as meaning, "Given the reality of God, as a fact of the universe, I hereby proclaim that I align my life accordingly, pledging love and loyalty." A statement about a person's believing has now come to mean, rather, something of this sort: "Given the uncertainty of God as a fact of modern life, so-and-so reports that the idea of God is part of the furniture of his mind." (as cited in Fowler, 1981, p. 13)



What is important to note here is that the definition of faith that Fowler uses is closer to the definition of spirituality that social workers use. Fowler asserts that faith

is the most fundamental category in the human quest for relation to transcendence. Faith, it appears is a generic, a universal feature of human living, recognizably similar everywhere despite the remarkable variety of forms and contents of religious practice and belief. . . . Faith involves an alignment of the will, a resting of the heart, in accordance with a vision of transcendent value and power, one's ultimate concern. . . . Faith, is an orientation of the total person, giving purpose and goal to one's hopes and strivings, thoughts and actions. (Fowler, 1981, p. 14)

### Nursing

Nursing approaches spirituality in much the same way as social work. Stoll (1989) provides these descriptors for a person's spirituality as she draws from Allen and Schoolcraft (1984), Bayly (1969), Dickinson (1975), and McSherry (1983):

- The core of one's being; a sense of personhood; what one is and is becoming.
- Concerned with bringing meaning and purpose to one's existence; what or who one ought to live for.
- Feeling level of experience of God as a transcendent and/or personal being.
- Intangible motivation and commitment directing toward ultimate values of love, meaning, hope, beauty, and truth.
- A supreme experience.
- Trust relationship with/or in the transcendent that provides bases for meaning and hope in life's experiences and love in one's relationships. (Stoll, 1989, pp. 6-7)

### Social Work

Canda and Furman (1999) discussed the attempts by social work to define religion and spirituality. Canda has done extensive research in this area including a study of the social work literature in 1986 and an interview with 18 prominent social work authors from many spiritual perspectives for more detail. In 1990, Canda summarized his ideas as follows:

I conceptualize spirituality as the gestalt of the total process of human life and development, encompassing biological, mental, social, and spiritual aspects. It is not reducible to any of these components; rather, it is the wholeness of what it is to be human. This is the most broad meaning of the term. Of course, a person's spirituality is concerned significantly with the spiritual aspect of experience. In the narrow sense of the term spirituality, it relates to the spiritual component of an individual or group's experience. The morally fulfilling relationships between oneself, other people, the encompassing universe, and the ontological ground of existence, whether a person understands this in terms that are theistic, atheistic, nontheistic, or any combination of these. (as cited in Canda & Furman, 1999, p. 44)

Canda has defined religion as, "Religion involves the patterning of spiritual beliefs and practices into social institutions, with community support and traditions maintained over time" (Canda, 1997, p. 173). "Religion refers to the outward form of belief including rituals, dogmas, and creeds, and denominational identity" (Bullis, 1996, p. 2).

Canda and Furman (1999) identify six common aspects of the concept of spirituality as it is conceived by social workers:

1. An essential or holistic quality of a person that is considered inherently valuable or sacred and irreducible.
2. An aspect of a person or group dealing with a search for meaning, moral frameworks, and relationships with others, including ultimate reality.
3. Particular experiences of a transpersonal nature.
4. A developmental process of moving toward a sense of wholeness in oneself and with others.
5. Participation in spiritual support groups that may or may not be formally religious.
6. Engagement in particular beliefs and behaviors, such as prayer or meditation, in a spiritual or religious context. (pp. 44-45)

### Issues in Social Work Practice Related to the Concepts of Religion and Spirituality

The historical emergence of social work as an outgrowth of religious activities has been well documented. Past research on religious practices of social workers shows



moderately high religiosity (Furman & Chandy, 1994; Sheridan, Bullis, Adcock, Berlin, & Miller, 1992). Some have even suggested that social work is basically a type of spiritual practice (Canda & Furman, 1999; Siporin, 1985, 1986) and have compared it to Christian liberation theology and shamanistic practice (Bullis, 1996). Bullis (1996) even says that “social workers are theologians whether they like it or not” (p. 33). Huguen (1998a) and Joseph (1997) provide examples of social work being a “calling” for many. Transpersonal proponents see spirituality as an integral component of the person and they advocate for a biopsychosocial spiritual model of helping (Robbins et al., 1998). The code of ethics of the profession acknowledges that the religious aspect of life is a legitimate area of client diversity. As Bullis (1996) expressed it, “Except for contraindications . . . there is no ethical mandate prohibiting spiritual assessments or interventions. Moreover, it is unethical to avoid such discussions when client needs or wishes so dictate them” (p. 38).

More and more social workers are writing on the non-proselytizing and respectful integration of spirituality with social work practice as a legitimate area of practice and education (Bullis, 1996; Canda & Furman, 1999; Canda, 1989; Dudley & Helfgott, 1990; Furman, 1994; Garland, 1998; Joseph, 1987; Loewenberg, 1988; Marshall, 1991; Marty, 1980; Ortiz, 1991; Ressler, 1998; Robbins et al., 1998; Russel, 1998; Sermabeikian, 1994; Sheridan, Wilmer, & Atcheson, 1994; Sherwood, 1988a; Siporin, 1985; Spencer, 1961), and material suitable for use in courses is now being published which will influence what is presented in the classrooms and eventually the practice of social work



(Bullis, 1996; Canda, 1998; Canda & Furman, 1999; Garland, 1992; Huguen, 1998b; Locke, Garrison, & Winship, 1998; Robbins et al., 1998).

Much helpful information has also recently been published on incorporating spiritual/religious issues into assessment (Boyd, 1998; Bullis, 1996; Canda & Furman, 1999; Raines, 1997; Ressler, 1998; Sherwood, 1998b; Robbins et al., 1998; Van Hook, 1998) and approaches to intervention that include either specific spiritual approaches which inform practice (Capozzi, 1992; Canda, 1990a; Consiglio, 1987; Cowley & Derezotes, 1994; Smith, 1995) or interventions that would be considered spiritual such as prayer, rituals, meditation, and referral to religious support groups (Delgado & Humm-Delgado, 1982; DiBlasio, 1988; Gatza, 1979; Hallar, 1998; Neu, 1995). It is clear that the concepts of spirituality and religion are beginning to be integrated into the research, writings, teaching, and practice of social work.

#### Spiritually Sensitive Practice: A Central Issue in Social Work

Since religious and spiritual beliefs can be held onto tenaciously, since many people are not conscious of their own spiritual journey, and since religion and spirituality have not been seen as legitimate areas of practice in the past, the most important concern for practitioners appears to be how to respectfully integrate these concepts into practice. If social workers separate themselves and their clients from the spiritual aspect of humanity, much is lost in terms of genuineness, identification of client's strengths, sharing of insights gained along life's journey, and the use of potential interventions that would facilitate healing. In addition, when spiritual concerns are avoided, problems that are of a spiritual nature are not identified or addressed.

Canda and Furman (1999) have suggested that there is a common theme of compassion across many religious traditions and that theme may be a deep commonality that social workers share as they strive to “develop a moral and ethical framework that honors diversity while finding common ground” (p. 27). Canda and Furman have identified “Ethical Principles for Spiritually Sensitive Social Work Practice” that should be a very helpful starting point of discussion for the profession. These principles are developed around the already accepted NASW Code of Ethics, using the six core values. They started with the code (the original is in italics) and then added their “own elaboration that highlights how this principle could be expressed in the context of spiritually sensitive social work practice” (p. 29).

The social work value that most applies to the discussion here is that of dignity and worth of the person. It will be quoted extensively here because of its importance:

*Spiritually sensitive social workers treat each person in a caring and respectful fashion, mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity, religious and spiritual diversity, and all other forms of human variation.*

Spiritually sensitive social workers address clients as whole persons, applying professional roles, rules, and assessment labels in a flexible way that is responsive to the values of the client and his or her community. They also strive to make respectful connections across differences and to find common ground for cooperation. They honor the common and universal human needs for a sense of meaning, purpose, and morality.

Spiritually sensitive *social workers promote clients' socially responsible self-determination*. They assist clients to engage in clear moral and ethical decision making in a manner that respects the spiritual perspectives of clients, as well as the right of other people and communities to uphold their own self-determination. When there are conflicts of values between clients and social workers or clients and others in their environment, spiritually sensitive social workers engage in a process of dialogue that encourages mutual understanding and mutually beneficial solutions to problems.

Spiritually sensitive *social workers seek to enhance clients' capacity and opportunity to change and to address their own needs*, including the capacity to grow through crises and experiences of spiritual transformation.



*Spiritually sensitive social workers are cognizant of their dual responsibility to clients and to the broader society. They seek to resolve conflicts between clients' interests and the broader society's interests in a socially responsible, peaceful manner consistent with the values and ethical principles, and ethical standards of the profession. Spiritually sensitive social workers reflect carefully on their own moral and ethical positions as they interact with those of clients and the broader society and engage in a process of continual moral discernment and growth. (Canda & Furman, 1999, pp. 31-32)*

This concept of respecting the client's right to self-determination (honoring their beliefs and genuineness) is of utmost importance. It is also of utmost importance to honor the beliefs of the social worker and allow for genuine expression of the worker's self in the helping process. Spiritual and religious viewpoints and inclusion as areas of legitimate social work practice should not be viewed differently than any other potentially conflicting ideological or philosophical viewpoints such as what constitutes abuse, what are helpful parenting techniques, what is appropriate medical care, and other culturally relevant ideologies.

In addition, two other values enumerated in the NASW Code of Ethics are particularly applicable to this discussion. These are the values of integrity and competence. Social workers must be open and honest about their views and those of the agency in which they work. Clients have the right to "informed consent and freedom of choice . . . to decide whether to maintain a professional relationship with the worker or the organization" (Canda & Furman, 1999, p. 33). In the area of competence, social workers must

*continually strive to increase their professional knowledge and skills and to apply them in practice. Especially in regard to the explicit use of religious or nonreligious spiritual beliefs, symbols, rituals, therapeutic practices, or community support systems, spiritually sensitive social workers obtain relevant knowledge and skills. (p. 33)*



Spiritually sensitive competence of social workers also includes respect for the values of others and other spiritual traditions as well as collaborative cooperation with community based spiritual resources and contribution to the knowledge base of the profession.

It is important to note, though, that the NASW Code of Ethics does not dictate and reflect accurately what happens in social work practice. That depends on each social worker's "personal code of ethics" which is "based on her or his core values, determined through experience and personal reflection as to which teachings and values one wishes to incorporate into one's personal worldview and to translate into one's behavior" (Canda & Furman, 1999, pp. 29-30). This process, then, becomes the challenge for each social worker – to interact and understand their own path of spiritual growth:

1. to know the source of their own spiritual strength and knowledge;
2. to know how to integrate these two aspects of their life (spiritual self and professional self) and become a genuine person/social worker; and
3. to know how to incorporate all aspects of themselves respectfully into a practice of social work that is spiritually sensitive to each of their clients while maintaining their own integrity.

In reality, this process has been occurring all along, much of it unconsciously and some of it consciously. Now social workers are having the opportunity to examine it and bring the process out into the open. Religion, faith, and spirituality are no longer taboo subjects.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

This study constitutes a secondary data analysis of a national survey of practicing social workers who were members of the National Association of Social Workers. The sample was drawn from an initial study conducted in June 1997 by Dr. Leola Furman, University of North Dakota, and Dr. Ed Canda, University of Kansas. The purpose of their study was to identify the views and practices of practicing social workers related to the social workers' personal religious and spiritual practices and beliefs and to identify social workers' beliefs and practices as to how religion and spirituality should be integrated into social work practice and education.

This report also includes a discussion of the profound spiritual experience and growth that happened unexpectedly to the researcher at the end of May 1999, while in the process of writing this paper. An unexpected, God initiated "conversion" experience occurred and has continued to develop during the final five months of the completion of this project. This conversion experience is an excellent personal example from which to provide enhanced discussion of many of the theories of faith and spiritual development described in the literature review.

## 1997 Study by Canda and Furman

Sample Selection

Following is a summary of the sampling procedure as described by Canda and Furman (1999). Potential subjects consisted of a stratified random sample of 8,000 practicing social workers who were members of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), a national association with voluntary membership. Participation in the study was limited to social workers in the practice areas of Child/Family Welfare, Criminal Justice, Medical/Health Care, Mental Health, Occupational, SWK-EAP, School Social Work, and Other. The sample was stratified by region based upon the U.S. Census Bureau Regional Divisions which resulted in the four regions: North, Midwest, South, and West. Eight thousand questionnaires were mailed, 2,000 to each area. There was an overall response rate of 26% (2,069) for an expected sampling error plus or minus 2.2% at the 95% confidence interval. Response rates were North, 23%; Midwest, 27%; South, 25%; West, 28%.

Instrument Development for 1997 Study by Canda and Furman

The instrument was a mailed survey consisting of 105 questions that included demographic, education, and practice information. Question format included Likert-type items, yes/no items, items measuring how often certain experiences of behaviors were noted, items to be checked if true for the social worker, and three open ended questions. (Please refer to Appendix A for a sample of the survey and Appendix B for the letter of permission to use the data.)



Canda and Furman (1998) described how some of the questions were developed.

Ideology questions were adapted from Lehman (1974) who measured types of belief in divinity or a personal God (Item 81). Items concerning past and current religious or spiritual affiliation and/or involvement were used. A newly developed scale separating religion from spirituality was also employed to assess practicing social workers' agreement with raising the topic of religion and spirituality for differing client needs. In addition, there were items exploring possible conflicts between religion and spirituality with the social work mission, code of ethics, and separation of church and state. Some items were drawn from Dudley and Helfgott's (1990) study (Items 1, 2, 60-66) and Sheridan, Bullis, Adcock, Berlin, and Miller's 1992 & 1994 scales that measured attitudes on the role of religion and spirituality in practice and social work education (Items 33-41, 67-68, 72-76). Also, modified items were used from Bullis' doctoral dissertation (1993) questionnaire involving interventions performed in providing services to clients (Items 33-41, 67-68). Finally, items regarding forgiveness, the DSM-IV, referral to clergy, and attitudes about so-called cults were included. (pp. 519-520)

### Reliability and Validity

The 1997 study by Canda and Furman was the first time this particular instrument was used; although, as mentioned above, some of the questions had been previously used in research. The researchers did a principal components analysis of items 3 through 26, and determined that they were measuring one (or at least a very few) constructs. Then coefficient alphas were calculated for the religion items (odd numbers), spirituality items (even numbers), and religion/spirituality combined items. The alpha coefficient for the religion items was .97, for the spirituality items, .96, and for the combined items, .97. The items do appear to measure social workers' belief in the appropriateness of using religion and spirituality in social work practice. It is believed that these items reliably measure this concept.

Items that were used previously in research reflect a peer review process that has established content validity. Newly developed items and items revised from previous research were reviewed by 13 members of a university faculty. In addition, the survey instrument was pilot tested on university faculty, which resulted in refinement of the items.

#### Design of the Current Study – Secondary Data Analysis

The present study involved a secondary data analysis of the previously discussed descriptive study by Canda and Furman. The methodology for the current study consisted of selecting a sample from the original study and conducting data analysis using the standard version of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Release 8.0.1 (11 May 1998), to answer the research questions of interest. Research techniques that were used include descriptive statistics, factor analysis, regression, one way analysis of variance, and post hoc multiple comparisons.

#### Sample Selected for Current Study–Secondary Data Analysis

For the present study, a sample of 1,283 social workers was selected from the original study respondents based on the following criteria:

1. They worked full time,
2. they were licensed as a social worker, and
3. their highest level of education was the master's degree.

These criteria were selected to decrease the variability due to employment status (hours of work per week), education, and license status (similar levels of practice) in order to

reflect as closely as possible current beliefs and practices of full time social workers who had been educated at the same level of social work education.

#### Procedure Used for Each Research Question

Four general research questions were explored. Each question was analyzed using items selected from the survey questionnaire. In some cases it was necessary to develop new variables through factor analysis, recoding, or transforming other items. Missing data were eliminated as much as possible by combining missing information with neutral responses in Likert-type items and coding it as zero in binary categorical variables.

Each of the variables that were created to be used in analysis is delineated below and the manner in which they were created is described. Following that discussion, each research question is presented with a summary of the procedure used and the variables that were selected or created for the analysis.

#### Variables Created for Data Analysis

The following four variables were created for the statistical analysis:

1. Quantification of religious study
2. Appropriateness of raising the topic of religion
3. Appropriateness of raising the topic of spirituality
4. Intensity of frequency of participation in spiritual/religious activity

The procedures of development for each of the above mentioned variables are discussed below.



Quantification of religious study. The variable, Religious Study, was created to be used in answering research question two. In order to generate this variable, several demographic questions were summed. These questions related to whether respondents had religious study and by recording how many different types of arenas in which they completed religious study. Respondents could identify up to five different types of religious study in which they had been involved. These categories were coded initially as binary variables in which a value of 1 indicated that the respondent had religious study in that category. The new variable was quantified by adding these five variables together to get a total sum of involvement in religious study apart from social work education.

Table 5 displays the categories and frequencies of this created variable.

Table 5

Frequencies for Quantification of Religious Study

Category	n	%
0 None	675	52.6
1 One type	378	29.5
2 Two types	168	13.1
3 Three types	46	3.6
4 Four types	15	1.2
5 Five types	1	.1

Appropriateness of raising the topic of religion and appropriateness of raising the topic of spirituality. Two dependent variables were created to be used in answering research questions two and three. The survey items 3 through 24 asked similar questions about if the social worker thought it appropriate to bring up the topic of religion (questions 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23) and spirituality (questions 4, 6, 8, 10, 12,

14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24) in different situations that were the focus of social work practice such as loss of job, family relationships, sexual abuse, and natural disasters. It was believed that these items might be able to be summed to develop two dependent scale scores. The odd sum would reflect the belief “it is appropriate to raise the topic of religion” and the even would reflect the belief “it is appropriate to raise the topic of spirituality.” Reliability analysis was conducted on the odd questions 3 through 23 and then the even questions 4 through 24. In each situation, the corrected item total correlations were all positive and greater than .20. The alpha reliability for variables included in “it is appropriate to raise the topic of religion” was .968 and the alpha reliability for the variables included in “it is appropriate to raise the topic of spirituality” was .960.

Factor analysis was then conducted to explore if the religion variables (odd questions) and the spirituality variables (even questions) did, in fact, factor into two or more factors. Factor analysis was completed using Alpha extraction with Oblimin (an oblique) rotation. Nine rotations were required before convergence occurred. The criterion used to identify factors was that 10% or more of the variance was explained by the factor. Using this criterion, the factor analysis confirmed that there were two factors identified with all of the questions. The first factor was related to raising the topic of religion and included all of the questions that specifically asked about raising the topic of religion. All of the questions that related to raising the topic of spirituality fell into the second factor. At this point, two new dependent variables were created. The first was called “it is appropriate to raise the topic of religion” and it was created by summing all

of the respondents' scores to the items that were identified as being in factor 1. The second factor was called "it is appropriate to raise the topic of spirituality" and was created by summing all of the respondents' scores to questions identified in factor 2. The range for each of these variables was from 11 to 55. The mean of the variable called "it is appropriate to raise the topic of religion" is 36.97, and the mean of "it is appropriate to raise the topic of spirituality" is 42.14. Please see Table 6 for the results of the factor analysis.

Intensity of frequency of participation in spiritual/religious activity. An independent grouping variable was created to be used in answering research question three. The variable was called "intensity of frequency of participation." It was computed by first recoding the following frequency of participation variables (frequency of participation in religious community services during elementary years, frequency of participation in religious community services in adolescent years, frequency of participation in current religious services, and frequency of private religious or spiritual practices currently) to binary variables such that 0 = an intensity of once a month or less and 1 = an intensity of two to three times a month or more. Then these variables were summed to reflect a total intensity of frequency of participation score. The final scores ranged from 0, which is the least amount of lifetime intensity of frequency of participation, to 4, which is the highest level of intensity of frequency of participation over their lifetime. For example, a score of 0 means that across all of these measures (elementary, adolescent, current public, and current private participation) the respondent indicated that they participated in religious or spiritual activity no more often than once a



Table 6

Factor Analysis of Variables Measuring the Appropriateness to Raise the Topic ofReligion and Spirituality as It Is Related to Particular Problem Foci

Variable	Factor 1 It is appropriate to raise the topic of religion	Factor 2 It is appropriate to raise the topic of spirituality
Religion and:		
Partner Violence	.928	
Sexual Abuse	.914	
Family Relations	.908	
Loss of Job	.903	
Natural Disaster	.900	
Criminal Justice	.874	
Chronic Mental Disorder	.844	
Substance Abuse	.843	
Bereavement	.825	
Terminal Illness	.727	
Foster Parent	.719	
Spirituality and:		
Partner Violence		-.939
Sexual Abuse		-.936
Natural Disaster		-.890
Family Relations		-.882
Loss of Job		-.878
Criminal Justice		-.854
Substance Abuse		-.828
Bereavement		-.781
Chronic Mental Disorder		-.772
Terminal Illness		-.658
Foster Parent		-.650

month or less. A score of 1 means that in one of the variables measured, the respondent participated in religious or spiritual activity two to three times a month or more often. A score of 2 means that in at least two of the frequency of participation variables which were measured the respondent participated at the level of two to three times a month or more often, and so on up to the intensity level of 4 which means that across all frequency

of participation variables the respondent indicated that they participated two to three times a month or more often. Table 7 presents the frequencies of this variable.

Table 7

Intensity of Frequency of Participation

Total intensity of participation across lifetime		n	%
Group 0	Low to none	62	4.8
Group 1		127	9.9
Group 2		289	22.5
Group 3		367	28.6
Group 4	High	438	34.1

Research Questions and Variables Used for Analysis

Research Question 1: How do practicing social workers define religion and spirituality?

Research question one was answered using the procedure of describing frequencies and through factor analysis. The factor analysis was conducted using the 16 terms provided to respondents from which they selected the terms that reflected their own understanding of the concepts of religion and spirituality.

Research Question 2: What demographic and other selected variables are related to the social workers' beliefs that it is appropriate to:

- a. "raise the topic of religion"?
- b. "raise the topic of spirituality"?

Research question two was broken into two components, a and b above, in which stepwise forward multiple regression was used to identify the variables that best predicted each concept. Independent variables that were selected to be included in the regression

problem were several that were related to social workers' beliefs about addressing the topics of religion and spirituality with clients, social workers' own participation in spiritual and religious activities, social workers' religious or spiritual ideological positions, and several demographic variables.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship of the frequency of social workers' personal spiritual or religious practice to their belief in the appropriateness of raising the topic of religion and spirituality with clients?

Research question three was answered with one way analysis of variance using the created grouping independent variable called "intensity of frequency of participation score" and several variables that reflect the social workers' beliefs about social work practice and actual social work practice.

Post hoc multiple comparisons using Gabriel's test were also completed when the analysis of variance proved to be significant at the .01 level.

Research Question 4: What variables can be used to predict the social worker belief that spirituality is a fundamental aspect of being human?

Research question four was answered through stepwise forward multiple regression to determine which variables would be the best predictors of the belief "spirituality is a fundamental aspect of being human." Most of the same variables were used in this analysis as those that were used in research question two. However, variables that appeared to measure the same concept were not included. Variables that measured the belief and practice of social workers related to forgiveness as an intervention were also included.



## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The original data set consisted of 2,069 cases of which 1,283 cases were selected for analysis in this study. The analysis was completed using traditional descriptive and analytical statistical methods. Answers to each research question were determined by analyzing selected survey questions that answered the specific research question.

#### Demographics of Cases Included in This Analysis

Seventy-four and one-half percent of subjects included in the analysis were female and 25.5% were male. Subjects ranged from age 24 to age 75 with the mean age being 46.6 years. Seven percent were members of minority ethnic or racial groups with 3.3% indicating African American descent, 2% Latino/Hispanic, 1.2% Asian American, 1% Bi/Multi-racial, and .6% Native American.

All subjects selected were licensed social workers with 59.4% being licensed as Licensed Certified Social Workers (independent), 25.3% licensed as Licensed Social Workers, and 15.3% licensed at both levels. The average number of years in practice was 15.35 years, ranging from 1 month to 45 years.

Subjects were asked about the location of their social work practice and 50.4% of subjects reported that they worked in a public setting while 49.6% reported they worked in a private setting. Subjects also reported if their practice was rural, urban, or suburban,

(these were not specifically defined) with 18.4% reporting rural, 38.1% reporting suburban, and 43.5% reporting urban.

Another location variable that was considered was the region of the United States where the respondent resides. When Canda and Furman sent out the surveys, the United States was divided up into four regions that corresponded to the U.S. Census Bureau Regional Divisions and equal numbers of surveys were sent randomly within each region. The locations of respondents in my sample were as follows: 22.1% from the North, 26.7% from the Midwest, 24.9% from the South, and 26.1% from the West.

Subjects were also asked their religious group affiliation. Respondents were allowed to make more than one selection if more than one applied so the total exceeds more than 100% (Table 8).

Most of social workers (58.1%) indicated affiliation with some type of Christianity. Several people reported multiple religious (9.7%) or non-religious affiliations (8.7%). Eight percent of respondents reported some type of Jewish affiliation. Several other groups were represented reflecting a wide diversity of religious/spiritual affiliation of respondents.

One factor that gives confidence to the findings of this research project is that the racial and gender breakdowns are similar to those from a 1995 NASW member survey (Gibelman & Schervish, 1997). NASW did not survey the religious or ideological positions of social workers. Table 9 provides the comparison demographic information for the NASW survey, Canda and Furman's sample, and the sample reported on in this paper.

Table 8

Frequencies and Percentages of Respondents' Religious/Spiritual Affiliation

Religious/Spiritual affiliation	n	%
Protestants	388	30.2
Catholics	254	19.8
Multiple Religious (more than one religious group)	124	9.7
Non-religious Multiple (belong to more than one spiritual affiliation)	112	8.7
Non-Denominational Christian Group	48	3.7
Christian Unspecified	45	3.5
Jew Reformed	45	3.5
Agnostic	43	3.4
Other Religion	30	2.3
No Religious or Spiritual Affiliation Identified	25	1.9
Jew Non Affiliated	24	1.9
Atheists	23	1.8
Unitarian	23	1.9
Buddhist	18	1.4
Jew Conservative	17	1.3
Latter Day Saint	15	1.2
Existential	11	.9
Eastern Orthodox Christian	7	.5
Other/Unspecified	6	.5
Jews Unspecified	5	.4
Quakers	5	.4
Goddess	4	.3
Traditional Native American	4	.3
Wicca	3	.2
Hindu	2	.2
Jew Orthodox	2	.2
Spiritism	2	.2
Other Jew	2	.2

The present sample reflects social workers with more practice experience (15.35 years) than the NASW sample (6 to 10 years). A greater percentage of persons were working in a public setting (50.4%) than the NASW sample (33.7%). Compared to the NASW sample, there was a slightly lower percentage of African Americans represented in the current sample but slightly more Latino/Hispanics. There was about a 4% greater



Table 9

Comparison of Demographics of the NASW Sample, the Canda and Furman Sample, andThis Sample

	NASW's sample	Canda and Furman	This sample
Demographics	%	%	%
Gender			
Female	78.3	74.4	74.5
Male	21.7	24.7	25.5
Race/Ethnicity			
Caucasian	88.5	90.3	91.0
African American	5.3	3.6	1.2
Latino/Hispanic	2.8	1.7	2.0
Asian American	1.7	1.1	1.2
Native American	5	.7	.6
Bi/Multi-racial	1.2	1.2	1.0
Other	.1	1.7	1.7
Areas of Practice			
Child/Family	25.5	13.6	13.9
Criminal Justice	1.3	3.2	3.0
Medical Health	12.8	15.5	15.8
Mental Health	37.6	53.7	56.2
Occupational	.8	2.5	2.9
School Social Work	5.1	6.7	8.1
Other	12.0	17.6	17.0
Private/Public Practice			
Private	66.3	54.4	49.6
Public	33.7	45.6	50.4
Average Years in Practice	6 to 10 years	18.07 years	15.35 years

(1) NASW data from Gibelman and Schervish, 1997, pp. 27-69

(2) Canda and Furman data from unpublished portions of manuscript, 1997, p. 532

response from males (with a corresponding decrease in female response) in the current sample than that of NASW. One of the biggest differences is reflected in the areas of practice. The NASW sample had 50.4% of the respondents indicate that they worked in

medical or mental health areas. In the current sample 72% of the respondents identified that they worked in medical or mental health category of practice. The areas of social work practice in medical and mental health are perhaps more actively influenced by other disciplines such as medicine, nursing, and psychology. Within these disciplines, there have been trends toward incorporating the use of alternative interventions such as prayer and meditation.

#### Percentages of Responses for Other Variables

##### Used in the Analysis

Several different groups of variables were used throughout the data analyses to answer the research questions. Variables that were used in addition to the demographic variables fell into the following categories: those related to social workers' professional practice and beliefs about appropriate professional practice, social workers' frequency of participation in religious and spiritual activity, and social workers' religious/spiritual ideology. Tables 10, 11, and 12 present a summary of the frequencies (percentage of respondents answering in agreement with the statement) of the specific variables in each of these groups.

As indicated in the group of variables selected to represent social workers' beliefs about their professional practice and their actual activities in their professional practice, there was agreement by over 75% of respondents to the inclusion of spirituality and religion in social work education both because it reflects multicultural diversity, but also because they believe that there is a fundamental spiritual aspect of being human.

Table 10

Percentages of Respondents to Items Related to Social Work Practice and Beliefs About Practice

Variable	% Agreement (Strongly agree + Agree)
27. Religious history should be completed as part of intake.	58.8
28. Spiritual history should be completed as part of intake.	60.4
56. Social worker should introduce religion/spirituality according to their professional judgment even if clients do not first express interest.	36.8
57. Social worker should address religion/spirituality only if the client first expresses interest.	51.9
58. Helping clients assess if they want to work on forgiveness is an important part of social work practice.	59.9
59. I use techniques that deal with forgiveness.	73.2
60. Spirituality is a fundamental aspect of being human.	89.2
67. Religious and spiritual beliefs should be included in social work education because they are part of multicultural diversity.	90.3
68. The current biopsychosocial framework used in social work education should expand to include the spiritual aspect because there is a spiritual aspect of human existence.	77.7

Social workers agreed least with the statement that the social worker should introduce the topic of religion/spirituality according to their professional judgment even if the client does not express interest first. This is likely related to the strong social work value of the client's right to self-determination. Nearly 60% of social workers believe that a religious and a spiritual history should be part of the intake assessment done on clients as well as an assessment of whether or not the client wants to work on forgiveness issues.



Table 11

Percentages of Respondents to Participation in Community or Private Religious/SpiritualActivity at a Level of Two to Three Times a Month or More Often

Variable	% who participate(d) 2-3 times a month or more often
72. Frequency of participation in religious community services in elementary years.	82.0
73. Frequency of participation in religious community services in adolescent years.	73.3
74. Frequency of participation in current community religious services.	45.1
75. Active or involved in current relationship to organized religion or spiritual support group.	50.7
76. Frequency of participation in private religious or spiritual practices currently.	76.0

Social workers were most involved or active in participation in community group religious services in their elementary years. One might expect that that would slowly decrease over time as they have more opportunity to direct their own personal choices apart from parental influence. It appears that involvement in current religious community activities has declined. However, the private religious or spiritual practices of social workers is currently at a level of 76%, which is the highest category of participation after participation in elementary years. It would appear that social workers are currently active in private religious and spiritual activity but not as involved in public religious or spiritual community groups as they were in their childhood.

Table 12

Percentages of Respondents to Ideological Positions

Variable	% yes
8101. There is a personal God or transcendent existence and power whose purpose will ultimately be worked out in history.	43.3
8102. There is a transcendent aspect of human experience which some persons call God, but who is not imminently involved in the events of the world and human history.	7.6
8103. There is a transcendent or divine aspect, which is unique and specific to the human self.	15.5
8104. There is a transcendent or divine aspect found in all manifestations of nature.	37.3
8105. Notions of God or the transcendent are products of human imagination; however, they are meaningful aspects of human existence.	8.1
8106. Notions of God or the transcendent are products of human imagination; however, they are irrelevant to the real world.	.7

There were several ideologies posed to the respondents and they were again allowed to select more than one response so the total percentage is greater than 100%. In the response selected by most of the social workers, 43.3% of social workers indicated that they believed that there is a personal God or transcendent existence and power whose purpose will ultimately be worked out in history. The other response that was selected by over 35% of the respondents was that there is a transcendent or divine aspect found in all manifestations of nature. It is interesting to note that less than 1% of respondents believed that notions of God or the transcendent are products of human imagination and

are irrelevant to the real world. These results are consistent with those found by Sheridan et al. (1992). They compared a sample of licensed clinical practitioners which included licensed professional counselors (LPC), licensed clinical social workers (LCSW), and licensed psychologists (P) in the state of Virginia. In this sample 49% of LPCs, 34% of Ps, and 30% of LCSWs agreed that “there is a personal God of transcendent existence and power whose purposes ultimately will be worked out in human history.” For the view that “there is a transcendent or divine dimension found in all manifestations of nature, agreement was indicated by 39% of LCSWs, 30% of Ps, and 23% of LPCs.

#### Research Questions

Each of the research questions were explored using selected survey questions and methods of statistical analysis that answered the question.

Research Question 1: How do practicing social workers define religion and spirituality?

At the beginning of the survey Canda and Furman provided definitions of the terms religion and spirituality and, at the end of the survey, social workers were asked how they personally defined the terms religion and spirituality. A list of (the same) 16 terms was provided for each concept. See Table 13 for the frequencies.

Terms selected to define religion by more than 70% of the cases were organization, ritual, belief, and scripture. On the other hand, terms selected to define spirituality by more than 70% of the cases were meaning, personal, purpose, values, belief, and personal relationship with a higher power. Terms that were selected by less than 30% of respondents under religion were miracles and meditation. For the concept of



Table 13

Frequencies and Percentages of Terms Used to Define Religion and Spirituality

Religion	n	%	Spirituality	n	%
Organization	1018	79.3	Meaning	1118	87.1
Ritual	1012	78.7	Personal	1082	84.3
Belief	976	76.1	Purpose	1019	79.4
Scripture	952	74.2	Values	977	76.1
Prayer	866	67.5	Belief	938	73.1
Community	836	65.2	Personal Relationship	933	72.7
Values	796	62.0	Higher Power		
Sacred Text	776	60.5	Ethics	839	65.4
Morality	665	51.8	Meditation	796	62.0
Personal Relationship	638	49.7	Prayer	632	49.3
Higher Power			Morality	611	47.6
Ethics	626	48.8	Miracles	303	23.6
Purpose	478	37.3	Ritual	299	23.3
Meaning	477	37.2	Community	268	20.9
Personal	426	33.2	Scripture	171	13.3
Miracles	294	22.9	Sacred Text	154	12.0
Meditation	252	19.6	Organization	73	5.7

spirituality, less than 30% of respondents selected the terms ritual, community, scripture, sacred text, and organization.

The selection of these terms appears to reflect the initial definitions that the researchers used to describe the terms. The term religion was defined at the start of the survey as “an organized, structured set of beliefs and practices shared by a community related to spirituality.” Spirituality was defined as “involving the search for meaning, purpose, and morally fulfilling relations with self, other people, the encompassing universe, and ultimate reality however a person understands it.” It is likely that because the above survey questions came at the end of a long survey, and the researchers specifically asked for how the social worker personally would define these terms, that the

responses do reflect the subject's understanding of the terms rather than being a direct reflection of the initial definitions provided by the researchers.

#### Factor Analysis of the Concepts of Religion and Spirituality

Another way the concepts of religion and spirituality were explored was through factor analysis. The purpose of the factor analysis was to identify meaningful latent factors which could then be compared to each other to further illuminate how the concepts of religion and spirituality might be similar to or different from each other.

#### Factor Analysis of Religion

The 16 terms that were provided to respondents to use in defining the term religion were analyzed using factor analysis. Alpha factoring was used with Promax (an oblique) rotation. The criterion of an eigenvalue greater than 1.0 was used to determine the factors.

Three latent factors were identified for religion and these were evaluated and labeled based on their content. The first factor was labeled Personal Identity/Ethics and consisted of the following terms: ethics, values, meaning, purpose, personal, morality, meditation, and belief. The second factor was called Relationship with God or the Transcendent Being and contained these terms: prayer, personal relationship with higher power, scripture, and miracles. The third was named Structure/Framework and consisted of the terms organization, ritual, sacred text, and community (Table 14).

#### Factor Analysis of Spirituality

The 16 terms selected under spirituality were also factor analyzed using Alpha factoring with Promax (an oblique) rotation and four factors were identified. The factors

Table 14

Promax Rotated Factors for Terms Selected for Religion

Term	Personal Identity/ Ethics	Relationship with God/ Transcendent Being	Structure/Framework
Ethics	.767		
Values	.758		
Meaning	.644		
Purpose	.605		
Personal	.455		
Morality	.444		
Meditation	.387		
Belief	.314		
Prayer		.565	
Personal Relationship Higher Power		.519	
Scripture		.499	
Miracles		.465	
Organization			.573
Ritual			.545
Sacred Text			.483
Community			.440

were very similar as those obtained in the analysis of religion, but the Personal Identity/Ethics factor was split into two factors in the spirituality analysis rather than one factor. Table 15 provides the results of the factor loadings above .30 in the exploratory factor analysis of the terms selected for spirituality.

In the spirituality analysis, the first factor was the Structure/Framework factor and consisted of the terms organization, community, sacred text, ritual, and scripture. The second factor was the Personal/Ethics factor, which contained the terms ethics, values, and morality. The third factor was the Relationship with God or the Transcendent Being which contained the following terms: prayer, personal relationship with higher power,



Table 15

Promax Rotated Factors for Terms Selected for Spirituality

Term	Structure/ Framework	Personal/ Ethics	Relationship with God/ Transcendent Being	Personal/ Identity
Organization	.679			
Community	.578			
Sacred Text	.575			
Ritual	.546			
Scripture	.444			
Ethics		.838		
Values		.699		
Morality		.567		
Prayer			.783	
Personal Relationship				
Higher Power			.598	
Miracles			.426	
Meditation			.349	
Meaning				.678
Purpose				.670
Personal				.340

miracles, and meditation. Finally, the fourth factor was the Personal/Identity factor which was composed of the terms meaning, purpose, and personal.

In summary, social work respondents chose terms to describe the concepts of religion and spirituality that appear to agree closely with the definitions that the researchers initially used to define these concepts. When factor analysis was conducted to further examine each concept and compare the terms, religion fell into three latent variables and spirituality into four. The latent variables were very similar, with one latent variable, Personal Identity/Ethics, in religion splitting more decisively into two concepts in the spirituality analysis to Personal/Identity and Personal/Ethics. It leads to the

question of how these concepts might be further differentiated both experientially and in concept for persons as they practice their religion and spirituality.

Research Question 2: What demographic and other selected variables are related to the social workers' beliefs that it is appropriate to:

- a. "raise the topic of religion"?
- b. "raise the topic of spirituality"?

In order to answer these questions, two dependent scale variables were created as described in Chapter III: one to represent the belief that it is appropriate to raise the topic of religion, and the other to represent the belief that it is appropriate to raise the topic of spirituality when working with a client. It should be noted that these two variables are highly related to each other with a correlation of .687 and  $p < .001$ . This might be expected since these concepts are similar in many ways. The following regression analyses were conducted using each of these variables independently to determine which other variables are contributing significantly to the prediction of each.

The following demographic variables were selected to be included in each regression analysis: age, gender, years in practice, work setting (public/private), average number of clients per week, social work study included content on religious and spiritual matters, number of different types of religious study (a computed demographic variable explained in Chapter III), and possession of a religious degree.

Other variables that would be related to the social workers' belief that it is appropriate to raise the topic of religion and raise the topic of spirituality were also included. These variables selected reflected the social workers' beliefs:

- Social workers should introduce religion/spirituality according to their professional judgment even if clients do not first express interest
- Social workers should address religion/spirituality only if the client first expresses interest
- Spirituality is a fundamental aspect of being human
- Religious and spiritual beliefs should be included in social work education because they are part of multicultural diversity
- The current biopsychosocial framework used in social work education should expand to include the spiritual aspect because there is a spiritual aspect of human existence

Several other variables were included that measured the frequency of the social workers' participation in spiritual and religious activities. These were:

- Frequency of participation in religious community services during elementary years
- Frequency of participation in religious community services in adolescent years
- Frequency of participation in current religious services
- Positiveness of current relationship to organized religion or spiritual support group
- Frequency of private religious or spiritual practices currently

The last group of variables that were included reflected the social workers' religious or spiritual ideological position that includes:

- There is a personal God or transcendent existence and power whose purpose will ultimately be worked out in history
- There is a transcendent aspect of human experience which some persons call God, but who is not imminently involved in the events of the world and human history



- There is a transcendent or divine aspect, which is unique and specific to the human self
- There is a transcendent or divine aspect found in all manifestations of nature
- Notions of God or the transcendent are products of human imagination; however, they are meaningful aspects of human existence
- Notions of God or the transcendent are products of human imagination; however, they are irrelevant to the real world

Stepwise forward multiple regression was used to identify the variables that best predicted each of the dependent variables (social worker believes it is appropriate to raise the topic of religion and social worker believes it is appropriate to raise the topic of spirituality). The results of each analysis are discussed below.

What Demographic and Other Selected Variables are Related to the Social Workers' Beliefs That it is Appropriate to Raise the Topic of Religion?

Stepwise forward multiple regression was used to identify the variables that best predicted the dependent variable "it is appropriate to raise the topic of religion." The predictor variables were included in the final regression model based on the criterion of a probability of .01. Table 16 provides the coefficients for the variables that were retained in the regression model. Table 17 provides the model summary for the linear regression.

The variables that entered the model and explained 54% of the variance are listed below in the order that they entered:

- 56. Social workers should introduce religion/spirituality according to their professional judgment even if clients do not first express interest

Table 16

Stepwise Forward Multiple Regression for "It Is Appropriate to Raise the Topic of Religion"

Variable	B	Std error	Beta	t	Sig	r
Constant	23.338	2.219		10.515	<.001	
56	3.029	.318	.326	9.536	<.001	.485
68	.918	.320	.082	2.870	.004	.289
74	.526	.109	.117	4.820	<.001	.198
57	-1.336	.330	-.133	-4.052	<.001	-.396
67	1.326	.382	.096	3.474	.001	.241
Gender	-1.952	.596	-.078	-3.276	.001	-.060
8102	-2.787	.982	-.067	-2.839	.005	-.096

Table 17

Correlation Summary for Stepwise Forward Multiple Regression of "It Is Appropriate to Raise the Topic of Religion"

Model	R	Rsq	Rsq Change	F Change	Sig F
1	.485	.235	.235	393.687	<.001
2	.504	.254	.019	32.396	<.001
3	.516	.266	.012	21.670	<.001
4	.525	.276	.009	16.413	<.001
5	.530	.281	.006	9.847	.002
6	.536	.287	.006	10.296	.001
7	.540	.291	.004	8.061	.005

- 68. The current biopsychosocial framework used in social work education should expand to include the spiritual aspect because there is a spiritual aspect of human existence
- 74. Frequency of participation in current community religious services

- 57. Social workers should address religion/spirituality only if the client first expresses interest
- 67. Religious and spiritual beliefs should be included in social work education because they are part of multicultural diversity
- Gender
- 8102 There is a transcendent aspect of human experience which some persons call God, but who is not imminently involved in the events of the world and human history

What Demographic and Other Selected Variables are Related to the Social Workers'

Beliefs That it is Appropriate to Raise the Topic of Spirituality?

Stepwise forward multiple regression was used to identify the variables that best predicted the dependent variable: The social worker believes that it is appropriate to raise the topic of spirituality. The final regression model was selected based on the criterion of the probability of .01. These variables accounted for 58.9% of the variance. See Table 18 for coefficients for the variables retained in the model. Table 19 demonstrates the model summary for the linear regression.

The predictor variables that were included in the final model are listed below in the order in which they entered the model:

- 56. Social workers should introduce religion/spirituality according to their professional judgment even if clients do not first express interest
- 60. Spirituality is a fundamental aspect of being human



- 68. The current biopsychosocial framework used in social work education should expand to include the spiritual aspect because there is a spiritual aspect of human existence
- 57. Social workers should address religion/spirituality only if the client first expresses interest
- 76. Frequency of private religious or spiritual practices currently

Table 18

Stepwise Forward Multiple Regression for "It Is Appropriate to Raise the Topic of Spirituality"

Variable	B	Std error	Beta	t	Sig	r
Constant	23.549	1.786		13.186	<.001	
56	2.135	.258	.272	8.275	<.001	.496
60	2.331	.313	.195	7.459	<.001	.379
68	1.370	.251	.146	5.452	<.001	.376
57	-1.379	.267	-.162	-5.169	<.001	-.411
76	.271	.101	.067	2.686	.007	.251

Table 19

Correlation Summary for Stepwise Forward Regression of "It Is Appropriate to Raise the Topic of Spirituality"

Model	R	Rsq	Rsq Change	F Change	Sig F
1	.496	.246	.246	417.704	<.001
2	.559	.312	.066	123.639	<.001
3	.575	.330	.018	34.422	<.001
4	.586	.344	.013	25.627	<.001
5	.589	.347	.004	7.214	.007

In comparing the two regression models, it is apparent that more variables go into predicting “it is appropriate to raise the topic of religion” than the model that predicts “it is appropriate to raise the topic of spirituality.” The same variable enters both models first. It is the variable that indicates that social workers should introduce religion/spirituality according to their professional judgment even if clients do not first express interest. There are two other variables that are common to both models and they are “the current biopsychosocial framework used in social work education should expand to include the spiritual aspect because there is a spiritual aspect of human existence” and “social workers should address religion/spirituality only if the client first expresses interest.” This latter variable is weighted negatively which indicates that the respondents who were willing to raise the topic of religion and spirituality with clients tended to disagree with this statement. One might have a concern then that this means that they are ignoring the client’s right to self-determination. However, since the variables being predicted are scores reflecting the appropriateness of raising the topics of religion and spirituality as interventions in working with specific problems, it is possible that social workers who are appearing to disagree with this statement do so based on their belief that all available interventions should be offered and then the client’s right to self-determination is applied once the different interventions have been offered and is based on which interventions the client indicates they prefer.

In the model that predicts the appropriateness to “raise the topic of religion,” there are two other variables with negative scores that have not been mentioned. These are gender (which would indicate that males were more likely to give this response) and

disagreement with the statement “there is a transcendent aspect of human experience which some persons call God, but who is not imminently involved in the events of the world and human history.”

It is interesting to note that the model predicting the appropriateness of bringing up the topic of religion included the variable frequency of participation in current public religious services. It also reflected the belief that these concepts should be taught in social work education because they are part of multicultural diversity. In contrast, the model that predicted the appropriateness in raising the topic of spirituality included the variable that indicated the frequency of the social worker’s private religious or spiritual practice. With regard to social work education and the concepts of religion and spirituality, there was the belief that these topics should be included in social work education because there is a spiritual aspect of human existence. While these concepts of bringing up the topics of religion and spirituality are similar, each has some different variables that go into the prediction model. Several of the variables that differ appear to be closely associated with the concept they are predicting.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship of the frequency of social workers’ personal spiritual or religious practice to their belief in the appropriateness of raising the topic of religion and spirituality with clients?

One way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to explore this question. An independent variable called frequency of participation was created as described in Chapter III to reflect lifetime frequency of involvement in personal private or personal



public religious or spiritual activity. The resulting variable provided five groups with levels of intensity of involvement from 0, no involvement, to 4, the highest involvement.

In addition to the created independent variable, eight dependent variables were selected for the ANOVAs based on the researcher's belief that they appear to reflect the social workers' willingness to raise the topic of religion or spirituality with clients. These variables are listed below:

- 27. Religious history should be completed as part of client intake
- 28. Spiritual history should be completed as part of client intake
- 56. Social worker should introduce religion/spirituality even if client does not first express interest
- 57. Social worker should address religion and spirituality only if the client expresses interest first
- 58. Helping client assess if they want to work on forgiveness is an important part of social work practice
- 59. I use techniques that deal with forgiveness
- It is appropriate to raise the topic of religion scale score
- It is appropriate to raise the topic of spirituality scale score

Analysis of Variance of Intensity of Frequency of Religious

and Spiritual Practices of Social Workers

To understand the findings of the ANOVA and multiple comparison tests, it would be helpful to understand the five levels of intensity of frequency of participation that are measured by the intensity of frequency of participation variable that was created.

The scores ranged from 0, which is the least amount of lifetime intensity of frequency of participation, to 4, which is the highest level of intensity of frequency of participation over their lifetime. At the intensity level of 4, it means that across all of the frequency of participation variables the respondents indicated that they participated two to three times a month or more often. The frequencies of each group are listed in Table 7 found in Chapter III. The results of the analysis of variances are presented in Table 20.

When examining the results of the ANOVA of the different groups representing the intensity of frequency of participation of the social worker in personal private or personal public religious or spiritual practices, a significant difference at the .01 level was found in all of the dependent variables explored except the two variables “the social worker should address religion and spirituality only if the client expresses interest first,” and “I use techniques that deal with forgiveness.” A post hoc analysis was done for each of the variables and the significant differences are presented below.

Discussion of Post Hoc Multiple Comparison Tests Based on Level of Intensity of Frequency of Participation of the Social Worker in Religious or Spiritual Activity Score (Groups 0-4) and Their Beliefs That it is Appropriate to Raise the Topics of Religion and Spirituality

Multiple comparisons using Gabriel’s test were conducted on the variables in which there was a significant difference noted on the ANOVA. Gabriel’s test is suitable to be used with unequal groups and has experimentwise type of error rate. The results of the multiple comparisons are found in Table 21.

Table 20

## ANOVA: Selected Variables Indicating Social Workers' Willingness to Raise the Topics of Religion and/or Spirituality by Social Workers'

## Frequency/Intensity of Religious and Spiritual Practices

Variable		Group 0	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	df	F ratio	p																																																																																																																				
27 Religious history	M	3.29	3.37	3.36	3.46	3.63	4, 1,278	3.477	.008																																																																																																																				
	SD	1.25	1.11	1.18	1.17	1.07				28 Spiritual history	M	3.15	3.46	3.42	3.61	3.64	4, 1,278	4.341	.002		SD	1.17	1.07	1.14	1.09	1.09	56 Introduce religion/ spirituality based on professional judgment even if client doesn't bring up first	M	2.34	2.72	2.73	2.86	2.94	4, 1,278	4.427	.001		SD	1.17	1.18	1.25	1.15	1.13	57 Address religious/ spiritual issues only if the client expresses interest first	M	3.48	3.28	3.31	3.18	3.23	4, 1,278	1.386	.237		SD	1.07	1.02	1.06	1.11	1.10	58 Help client assess if want to work on forgiveness	M	3.32	3.32	3.42	3.55	3.61	4, 1,278	3.836	.004		SD	1.16	1.10	1.02	.90	.91	59 I use techniques that deal with forgiveness	M	3.68	3.64	3.69	3.74	3.88	4, 1,278	3.090	.015		SD	1.00	.99	.91	.94	.83	It is appropriate raise topic of religion	M	31.95	36.14	34.86	37.25	39.07	4, 1,278	10.524	<.001		SD	10.33	10.69	11.84	11.11	9.83	It is appropriate raise topic of spirituality	M	36.31	41.41	40.40	43.45	43.23	4, 1,278	12.759	<.001		SD	9.61	8.74
28 Spiritual history	M	3.15	3.46	3.42	3.61	3.64	4, 1,278	4.341	.002																																																																																																																				
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Table 21

Post Hoc Comparisons of Social Workers' Willingness to Raise the Topics of Religion and/or Spirituality by Social Workers'

Frequency/Intensity of Religious and Spiritual Practices

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Group 0	- Raise spirituality	- Raise spirituality	- 28 Spiritual history - 56 Intro even if client not ask - Raise religion - Raise spirituality	- 28 Spiritual history - 56 Intro even if client not ask - Raise religion - Raise spirituality
Group 1				- 58 Assess if want to work on forgiveness - Raise religion
Group 2			- Raise religion - Raise spirituality	- 27 Religious history - Raise religion - Raise spirituality
Group 3				
Group 4				

Gabriel,  $p < .05$ ; Top half of diagonal is represented

### Discussion of Results of the Post Hoc Analysis

The post hoc multiple comparison test was utilized with the significance level set at .05. Post hoc analysis indicated that there were no significant differences demonstrated between Group 3 and Group 4. It is interesting to note that 62.7% of respondents fell into Groups 3 and 4.

There was a significant difference between Group 0 and Groups 1, 2, and 3 on willingness to raise the topic of spirituality, with Group 0 being less willing to raise the topic than the other groups. Group 0 was also less willing to raise the topic of religion than those in Group 3 and Group 4. Two other items were significantly different for Group 0 between them and Groups 3 and 4. Group 0 was significantly less likely to believe a spiritual inventory should be taken during assessment and to introduce the idea of religion and spirituality even if the client did not ask about it first.

Group 1 showed significant differences from Group 4 on the items raising the topic of religion and assessing if the client wants to work on forgiveness. Group 1 was significantly less likely to do either of these activities in their practice than Group 4. However, Group 1 was significantly more likely than Group 0 to raise the topic of spirituality.

Group 2 was significantly less likely than Groups 3 and 4 to believe it appropriate to raise the topic of religion and raise the topic of spirituality when working with clients. They were also significantly less likely than Group 4 to believe that a religious history should be part of the assessment process. Group 2 was, however, significantly more likely to believe it is appropriate to raise the topic of spirituality than Group 0 was.

In summary, no significant difference between the beliefs and approaches of social workers in Group 3 and Group 4 was demonstrated on the measured variables under consideration. These groups have the highest level of intensity of personal involvement in religious and spiritual activity across their lifetime and likely have found it to be a source of encouragement and strength. One interpretation is that they believe the topics of religion and spirituality should be raised to assess if it is a strength for the client, and whether or not the client would choose interventions related to religion and spirituality. It is possible that those who have little or no experience or participation with religion and spirituality activities have had previously negative experiences associated with those activities and/or have little knowledge how to assess these concepts and incorporate them into their practice with clients. Since most people fell into Group 3 and Group 4 and these groups were so similar, in the future it may be helpful to examine each of these frequency of participation variables individually.

Research Question 4: What variables can be used to predict the social worker belief that spirituality is a fundamental aspect of being human?

Stepwise forward multiple regression was used to evaluate several selected variables to determine which variables would be the best predictors of the dependent variable "spirituality is a fundamental aspect of being human." When respondents answered this question on the survey, 89.2% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Other variables that were selected to be used in the regression problem were as follows:



Variables related to social work practice and education:

- 56. Social workers should introduce religion/spirituality according to their professional judgment even if clients do not first express interest
- 57. Social workers should address religion/spirituality only if the client first expresses interest
- 58. Helping clients assess whether they wish to work on forgiveness is an important part of social work practice
- 59. In my practice, I use techniques that deal with forgiveness
- 67. Religious and spiritual beliefs should be included in social work education because they are part of multicultural diversity

Variables related to frequency of social worker involvement in religious/spiritual activities:

- 72. Frequency of participation in religious community services during elementary years
- 73. Frequency of participation in religious community services in adolescent years
- 74. Frequency of participation in current religious services
- 75. Positiveness of current relationship to organized religion or spiritual support group
- 76. Frequency of private religious or spiritual practices currently

Demographic variables included were age, gender, years in practice, work setting (public/private), average number of clients per week, had content on religious and spiritual issues in social work education, and earned a religious degree.

Variables related to social workers' religious/spiritual ideology that were included:

- 8101 There is a personal God or transcendent existence and power whose purpose will ultimately be worked out in history
- 8102 There is a transcendent aspect of human experience which some persons call God, but who is not imminently involved in the events of the world and human history
- 8103 There is a transcendent or divine aspect, which is unique and specific to the human self
- 8104 There is a transcendent or divine aspect found in all manifestations of nature
- 8105 Notions of God or the transcendent are products of human imagination; however, they are meaningful aspects of human existence
- 8106 Notions of God or the transcendent are products of human imagination; however, they are irrelevant to the real world

Regression Analysis of Predicting the Belief That “Spirituality  
is a Fundamental Aspect of Being Human”

Stepwise forward multiple regression was used to identify the variables that best predicted that the respondent believed that spirituality is a fundamental aspect of being human. The final model was selected based on the criterion of the probability of .01. Table 22 gives the coefficients for the variables that entered into the final regression model and Table 23 demonstrates the model summary for the linear regression of the belief that spirituality is a fundamental component of being human. The predictor

Table 22

Stepwise Forward Multiple Regression for “Spirituality Is a Fundamental Aspect of Being Human”

Variable	B	Std error	Beta	t	Sig	r
Constant	2.729	.124		21.978	<.001	
76	.079	.009	.231	8.569	<.001	.348
58	.133	.020	.168	6.501	<.001	.273
67	.138	.025	.140	5.441	<.001	.246
56	.087	.017	.132	5.037	<.001	.264
8106	-.941	.233	-.102	-4.037	<.00	-.181
8105	-.227	.073	-.080	-3.090	.002	-.161
Gender	-.128	.044	-.072	-2.906	.004	-.051

Table 23

Correlation Summary for Stepwise Forward Multiple Regression of “Spirituality Is a Fundamental Component of Being Human”

Model	R	Rsq	Rsq Change	F Change	Sig F
1	.348	.121	.121	175.942	<.001
2	.410	.168	.047	72.970	<.001
3	.441	.194	.026	41.213	<.001
4	.459	.211	.017	27.397	<.001
5	.469	.220	.009	14.901	<.001
6	.475	.225	.005	8.635	.003
7	.480	.230	.005	8.446	.004

variables that were included in the final model account for 48% of the variance and are listed below in the order in which they entered the model:

- 76. Frequency of private religious or spiritual practices currently
- 58. Helping clients assess whether they wish to work on forgiveness is an important part of social work practice



- 67. Religious and spiritual beliefs should be included in social work education because they are part of multicultural diversity
- 56. Social workers should introduce religion/spirituality according to their professional judgment even if clients do not first express interest
- 8106 Notions of God or the transcendent are products of human imagination; however, they are irrelevant to the real world
- 8105 Notions of God or the transcendent are products of human imagination; however, they are meaningful aspects of human existence
- Gender

The item that entered the model first is one that reflects the social workers' frequency of private religious or spiritual practices currently. It is followed by the idea of the importance of helping clients assess whether they want to work on forgiveness. The third variable that entered was the belief that social work education should include information about religious and spiritual beliefs because they are aspects of multicultural diversity. The next variable entered was the belief that social workers should introduce religion and spirituality according to their professional judgment even if clients do not first express interest. The next two variables entered were weighted negatively which indicates that they entered if there was not agreement with them. This means that social workers who did not agree with the statements "notions of God or the transcendent are products of human imagination; however, they are irrelevant in the real world" and "notions of God or the transcendent are products of human imagination; however they are meaningful aspects of human existence" entered the prediction model. The last variable

to enter the model was gender and it was negatively weighted which reflects that males were more likely to have these beliefs.

The importance of the concept of forgiveness is found in this model. Social workers have been reported to use concepts of forgiveness more than other professionals do in clinical mental health counseling. This finding leads to further questions about the role of forgiveness in healing and mental health issues and how the concept of forgiveness has influenced the personal lives of the social workers.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In the West, the “scientific” ideological trend has been shifting from Positivism (cause and effect) to Constructivism and Postmodernism (local realities, nothing is certain). This ideology has affected the beliefs and practices of many of the disciplines including medicine and social work. The healing and helping disciplines have been willing to examine alternative means to achieving health and wellness. Interventions that formerly would not have been considered are now being explored and research studies have been implemented to try to measure the intangible and its affects on outcomes. The common truths found in both Western and Eastern philosophies are being mixed in an effort to address personal and social problems more effectively, including faith, religion, and spirituality.

As a profession, social work is progressing along a path of spiritual development. The field of social work has long espoused a philosophical base of values and ethical practices based primarily out of the Judeo-Christian faith practices of the early practitioners. For many years, secular ideologies began to influence the profession. However, several practitioners continued to examine the role of faith, religion, and spirituality and how to best incorporate these concepts into practice. The ideological climate has now shifted back to incorporate spirituality and religion as legitimate areas of practice. The Council on Social Work Education has recently reinstated and incorporated



some of these expectations back into the educational requirements. More and more social work researchers, educators, and practitioners are writing about how they have incorporated these concepts into practice and social work textbooks are becoming available to assist in this endeavor.

### Summary of Results

The purpose of the study was to look at the role of religion and spirituality in the lives of social work practitioners as it relates to their social work practice and to determine what implications this has for social work education. There were four basic research questions explored: how social workers defined religion and spirituality, what variables were related to the social workers' beliefs that it was appropriate to raise the topics of religion and spirituality, what relationship existed between the frequency (intensity) of the social workers' own religious practices and their belief of the appropriateness of raising the topics of religion and spirituality, and what variables predicted the belief that spirituality is a fundamental aspect of being human.

The results of this research report indicate that the social workers who responded to the survey have considerable agreement with the focus and direction that the profession appears to be heading. The sample may or may not be representative since the response rate was less than 30%.

#### Social Workers' Beliefs Related to Religion and Spirituality

Over 90% of social workers agreed that religious and spiritual beliefs should be included in social work education because they are part of multicultural diversity, and 77.7% believed they should be included because there is a spiritual aspect of human

existence. Eighty-nine percent believed that spirituality was a fundamental aspect of being human. Nearly 60% of respondents felt that taking a spiritual and religious history were important as well as assessing whether to use techniques of forgiveness. Seventy-six percent of social workers indicated participation currently in private religious or spiritual practices at a level of two to three times a month or more often. There was moderate agreement (43.3%) with the statement that “there is a personal God or transcendent existence and power whose purpose will ultimately be worked out in history.” In addition, another 37.3% agreed that “there is a transcendent or divine aspect found in all manifestations of nature.” The fact remains that while there is considerable diversity of individual faith perspectives, there does appear to be a “common heart of compassion” (Canda & Furman, 1999), based in spiritual practices and understandings, found in social work and a willingness to dialogue together about it within the framework provided by the Code of Ethics.

### The Research Questions Answered

#### Religion and Spirituality Defined

Social workers defined religion and spirituality much in the same manner that Canda and Furman (1999) defined the terms at the beginning of the survey. Canda and Furman defined religion as “an organized, structured set of beliefs and practices shared by a community related to spirituality.” Over 70% of respondents selected the following terms as representative of religion: organization, ritual, belief, and scripture. Spirituality was defined by Canda and Furman (1999) as “involving the search for meaning, purpose, and morally fulfilling relations with self, other people, the encompassing universe, and

ultimate reality however a person understands it.” Over 70% of respondents selected the following terms as representative of the concept spirituality: meaning, personal, purpose, values, belief, and personal relationship with higher power.

Factor analysis of the terms selected to define the concepts of religion and spirituality identified three latent factors for religion and four latent factors for spirituality. The latent factors were very similar and reflected different aspects of religion and spirituality such as the personal identity and personal ethical aspect, the relationship with God or the transcendent aspect, and the structural framework aspect. The personal identity and personal ethical aspect were one concept in religion, but separated into two concepts in spirituality. It would be helpful to explore these concepts and their meanings further in future research projects. It is apparent from the information provided by Barna (1996) that the meaning of religious terms is not widely shared and agreed upon; in spite of this, social workers did select terms that they thought represented these concepts. In social work practice and in dialogue with each other, it will be vital to understand the terms and frame of reference that a person has when speaking with them about their religious and spiritual practices as it is likely that these words have many different levels of meanings.

#### Raising the Topics of Religion and Spirituality

Generally, social workers agreed that it was appropriate to raise the topics of religion and spirituality. These concepts were highly correlated with each other at .687. They were evaluated separately through stepwise forward multiple regression to determine which variables best predicted each. The variable that entered both prediction



models first was “social workers should introduce religion/spirituality according to their professional judgment even if clients do not first express interest.” Other common variables in the two models were “the current biosychosocial framework used in social work education should expand to include the spiritual aspect because there is a spiritual aspect of human existence” and “social workers should address religion/spirituality only if the client first expresses interest” (negatively correlated). Again, this reflects the commonalities between these concepts.

There were differences in the models and the most notable were that persons who were likely to indicate that the topic of religion should be brought up were also more likely to indicate frequent participation in current public religious services and thought these concepts should be taught because they were an important part of multicultural diversity. In contrast, those who were most likely to indicate that the topic of spirituality should be brought up scored higher on frequency of private religious or spiritual practices and indicated the belief that spirituality was a fundamental aspect of being human.

#### Relationship of Social Workers' Private Religious or Spiritual Practices to Their Belief in the Appropriateness of Raising the Topics of Spirituality and Religion

Respondents were grouped into five groups (0-4) based on a cumulative lifetime score of frequency of religious/spiritual activity across elementary, adolescent, current public/religious community, and current private religious or spiritual participation. Group 0 scored the lowest and Group 4 had the highest frequency of involvement. They were compared on several variables and multiple comparison tests were conducted on the variables that were significantly different. Group 3 and Group 4 showed no significant

differences; it is interesting to note that 62.7% of people were represented in Groups 3 and 4 and only 4.8% in Group 0.

The only significant differences in Group 0 with Group 1 and Group 2 were that they were less likely to raise the topic of spirituality (no significant differences in raising the topic of religion). They may be more comfortable raising the topic of religion since religion is understood to be an aspect of cultural diversity. Group 0 was significantly different than Groups 3 and 4 in that they were less likely to take a spiritual history or introduce these topics if the client did not ask about them. This is likely due to the fact that the persons in Group 0 have been least involved personally in religious and spiritual activity and may be unfamiliar with how to address these issues or uncomfortable bringing them up in discussion.

Group 1 (9.9% of respondents) showed less likelihood to conduct an assessment if the client wanted to work on forgiveness and they were less likely to raise the topic of religion than Group 4; otherwise it was not significantly different than the other groups. Group 2 (22.5% of respondents) was less likely than Groups 3 or 4 to raise the topic of religion and the topic of spirituality and less likely than Group 4 to take a religious history from a client. In general, as the level of intensity of personal religious/spiritual activity across their lifetime score increased, practitioners were more likely to incorporate religious and spiritual concepts into their practice. However, at the two highest levels of frequency of activity, there were not any significant differences in approach to social work practice across the variables measured.



### Spirituality as a Fundamental Aspect of Being Human

Spirituality is one of those “concepts” that cannot really be measured with cause and effect accuracy. What is spirituality? How can it be a fundamental aspect of being human? Where is the spirit located? How does one measure it or prove that it exists? Eighty-nine percent of social workers who were surveyed indicated a belief that there was a spiritual aspect of human existence. This question examined what variables would predict this belief. The final regression model predicted 48% of the variance. The variable “frequency of private religious or spiritual practices currently” had the greatest prediction effect. Other positively correlated beliefs were helping clients assess if they wanted to work on forgiveness, the idea that religious and spiritual beliefs should be included in social work education because of diversity, and that social workers should use professional judgement to raise the topic when appropriate even if the client did not first express interest.

The sample that was evaluated for this study proved to be fairly homogeneous in their support for incorporating the concepts of religion and spirituality into social work education and practice, both because they believe there is a spiritual component to human existence and because they believe that it is an issue of multicultural diversity. Most of the respondents in this survey reported being active currently in religious or spiritual activities. It is unknown for certain if this sample is representative of social workers in general. Members of NASW tend to be overrepresented by master’s level social workers and, therefore, the beliefs of bachelor’s educated social workers are not reflected in this



survey. This sample composition needs to be considered when conducting further research and when addressing issues of social work education.

#### Recommendations for Social Work Education and Practice

Canda and Furman (1999) have identified several recommendations that are extremely applicable for social work practice in their "Ethical Principles for Spiritually Sensitive Social Work Practice." Particularly important is an approach that respects the dignity and worth of the client and is non-proselytizing. This approach must, at the same time, respect the integrity of the social worker and reflect competent social work and spiritual practice. Social workers must identify their own belief systems and gain competence, further education, and skill development in order to adequately address these issues in practice. It is important that clients be informed what the social workers' guiding philosophy and qualifications are so that they may make informed consent.

Bullis (1996) emphasized the importance of the social worker as well as the client to construct a "spiritual cosmology" which "often depicts the origin of human beings, seminal spiritual places, the world of spirits, the place of human beings, and where and how healing can be accomplished" (p. 37). Cosmologies are often constructed using symbols in a graphic or artistic manner. He asserts that spiritual anthropologies flow from the cosmology and then assessments and interventions flow from there. "It is the anthropology that drives the methodology of a spiritual social work assessment and intervention. To the extent that a spiritual anthropology is authentically and competently constructed, clinicians may responsibly employ spiritual social work practices" (p. 40).

Sheridan et al. (1992) acknowledges that informed consent is important. They also state that there should be an ongoing process of

openness and reflection on one's personal beliefs, values, and attitudes concerning the religious or spiritual dimension of human existence. Just as it is important to continually examine one's views on diversity of culture, socioeconomic class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. . . . This self-examination process is a relevant process for all social workers whether they adhere to a particular faith, have a secular philosophy, or consider themselves antireligious. (p. 200)

In many ways, this might seem like a daunting task: to explore one's own spiritual beliefs and become conscious of his/her own pathway as well as begin to explore and integrate information about a multitude of other religious and spiritual belief systems into social work education. The reality is that most people are doing this anyway, in some form or another; but when this is not acknowledged, it happens covertly.

It may be even a more monumental task for current practitioners as they try to apply these concepts into their practice without the benefit of supporting social work education. Perhaps schools of social work will be able to offer workshops for continuing education or advertise their elective courses on spirituality to community social workers. For persons who are anti-religious or atheistic, there may be little motivation to accomplish this activity. It is expected that competent social workers who are not interested in the spiritual or religious aspect of working with clients will at least seek out and make referrals to appropriate social workers or community spiritual representatives when clients have issues related to spiritual concerns.

Competency in practice in these areas is very important. It might be relatively simple to add the religious and spiritual component to assessment; but to adequately develop and use spiritual interventions requires specific training in the interventions. It



will also be important to conduct research with spiritual interventions to demonstrate their effectiveness.

The emphasis on the implications for practice and education here is not comprehensive, but has been one of emphasizing the importance of respecting the client, competent practice, integrity of the social worker, and self-participation in the process of spiritual growth – the creation of the social worker’s own spiritual cosmology. This research project has had such an impact on me. From the beginning of this project until the completion five months later, some of the most profound spiritual changes I have ever experienced in my life have occurred. They cannot be viewed as accidental and they have become an integral part of my research and personal faith development. Although the initial focus of my project was on the quantitative analysis of the research project, the report has expanded to include these other aspects that could not have been anticipated when the proposal was written. The rest of this report is therefore quite unconventional and is written in the first person as a “testimony” of the events that happened. I will discuss them within the framework of several of the theories discussed in the literature review.

### My Unexpected “Conversion Experience”

I started this project because of my interest in spiritual issues. I was raised a Lutheran and came to accept the saving work of Christ for me personally in 1972. In 1981, I experienced a “call” from God. It happened while I was working as a radiologic technologist administering radiation therapy treatments to cancer patients. I had also been struggling in a difficult marriage for several years. I had found my way to hope and



resolution of these issues through my faith. I understood that “call” to be that I would teach, speak, and counsel within a context of faith with others who were struggling with illness, life issues, and emotional problems. I expected it was up to me to discover what that would look like. At first, I thought it would be conducting workshops; but after going to a training to be a facilitator, I came to an intuitive understanding that my “call” included being seen as “competent in the eyes of the world.” I was not even sure what that meant, but I knew I needed to get my bachelor’s degree in social work as a first step; so I started there. Back in those days, God spoke to me through a “knowing in my heart” (what some might call intuitive knowing) of what He wanted me to do.

After I earned my bachelor’s degree, I worked in an elderly congregate living facility, then a hospice, and, finally, in a hospital as a medical social worker. Then, after four years of practice, I knew it was time to pursue my master’s degree. Following that degree, I worked in the medical setting again and then in the field of mental health. At that point, I sought out teaching positions and eventually taught in two different social work programs. In 1997, I was hired in a tenure eligible position at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, a Lutheran college associated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. I truly reasoned that now I must be in the position I was “called” into. I was certain that I must now be “credible in the eyes of the world.”

Unfortunately (from my perspective at that point), the college expected me to have a Ph.D. in order to eventually be awarded tenure. It took me a few months to accept that this was also what God wanted me to do; but once I accepted that fact, He provided for me as He had through all the other educational endeavors – working out the financing,

scheduling, traveling, and lodging arrangements. His hand has been evident throughout my educational journey. These provisions cannot be construed as “coincidence.”

I was about to the end of this Ph.D. and working on the analysis of data for my dissertation when I became involved in some voluntary lay ministry work in my church. Through that work I learned of TheoPhostic prayer ministry, taught by Dr. Ed Smith (1996, 1999) and I attended a workshop on basic training in this method. I was so encouraged by what I learned that I “knew” I was to go to the Alathia Equipping Center in Campbellsville, Kentucky, for advanced training. I was still working on the data analysis for this Ph.D. research project and had done minimal reading for the literature review. I continued to gather the literature, but planned to complete the data analysis while I had ready access to my advisor and the statistics were fresh in my mind. The full literature review would come next.

While I was in Kentucky for advanced training, I experienced a TheoPhostic session as the client. During that session, the Lord Jesus appeared to me (as He often does in TheoPhostic sessions). He revealed a stronghold in my life that had effectively prevented deeper spiritual growth for me and He removed the problem. He also gave me new insights into things in my past, gently giving me His perspective on some matters which promptly and gently spurred me to seek repentance. Then a profound thing happened. It was what Fowler (1981) calls a “conversion experience” – *a significant recentering of one’s previous conscious or unconscious images of value and power, and the conscious adoption of a new set of master stories in the commitment to reshape one’s life in a new community of interpretation and action*” (pp. 281-282). It was sudden and



God initiated. A power from heaven fell on me and the Holy Spirit started prophesying words. I just repeated what I heard Him say (that is what the client does in TheoPhostic counseling because Jesus talks to them directly, not the facilitator). He said that he was going to give me spiritual gifts and that He was doing some work back home in my church and at the college and that I would be a part of it. He said that these were things He was doing, and that He already was preparing for them to happen. That was a new perspective for me; I had always done what I thought He wanted me to do; I never understood this type of work – where He said He was doing it and I was to join Him! (This experience reflects what Fowler suggested that new vocational and theological understandings develop and a new level of partnership with God.) Then that power left, but the Holy Spirit continued on speaking. The next thing that happened was that an electromagnetic force enveloped me. When the force enveloped me, my arms and legs clasped together; my arms wrapped around each other, and my legs wrapped around each other as if they were magnets. It looked like I was bound up like a chain. I knew that the only way out of that “bondage” was if the Lord Jesus released the electromagnetic force which, of course, He did. This was not in any way a frightening or painful experience. During that time that I was “bound up” He said that many people were oppressed and that He was going to set them free. He said that Satan thought He had them, but that was not true; He – the Lord Jesus – was going to set them free. When He said that He was going to set them free, my legs and arms were released.

This was really a profound experience! Thankfully there were two witnesses who were just as surprised as I was – let me just say that our “theology” did not really allow



for a way to explain experiences such as this. I guess it might be similar to the profound experience Saul (later called the Apostle Paul) had on the road to Damascus when the Lord blinded Him. That did not fit in his theology either.

Well, I could have just chalked this up to one of those “mountain top” experiences you hear about; but since that very day, my life has changed and it continues to change. The events that were foretold in that session are now coming to pass. He has given me new spiritual gifts. On two separate occasions following that incident, I happened to be in the presence of “spirit-filled” (operating in the gifts of the Holy Spirit) pastors, both previously unknown to me. They both prophesied over me. Their prophecies both confirmed what the Lord had told me earlier and gave greater promises of His faithfulness in equipping me for what was to come. In each of these incidents close personal friends were witnesses of the prophecy. God has started speaking to me personally now. I know this sounds crazy, and I even wondered for a time if I was going crazy – you know what us “mental health types” have heard about “voices.” But, this is only one voice and it speaks of His love for me and His plans for me. God has been so good to provide me daily with encouragement and confirmation that what is happening to me is real and that it is possible for people to have a much more intimate relationship with Him than most Christians had ever imagined. Not only has this new way of relating to God through Jesus Christ happened to me, but several of my Christian friends have met Jesus in this same way – including two others who went for training to provide TheoPhostic prayer ministry. We are all experiencing these higher levels of faith development and transcendent spiritual experiences that Wilber, Fowler, and Underhill

described. We are experiencing an intimacy with Jesus Christ that we did not know was possible. However, whenever we question anything that happens, we go right to the scripture. At first, we thought someone changed the words. We found that the words were the same, but now had different levels of meaning. These experiences are described right there in the scripture for those who have ears to hear and eyes to see it.

As you might imagine, I did not know “what to do with this.” On the way home from Kentucky, I asked God how I was supposed to understand this. I heard Him say, “Go home and re-read the Experiencing God (Blackaby & King, 1990) workbook you have at home.” I was not sure how this would help, but I found this book immediately when I arrived home. I had done this study two years earlier and learned a few helpful things from it. I remembered thinking back then of the Old Testament saints: “It was easy for them to do what God wanted them to do because God actually talked to them and told them He was going to do it. God does not do that anymore, so it is a lot harder to know what He wants from us and we have to guess what it is and try to accomplish it in our own effort, hoping He will bless it.” Well, now I was one of those to whom the Lord had come and said . . . “I am doing this . . . and I want you to join me.” This Experiencing God study has been instrumental because it has confirmed repeatedly what He is doing in my life, and has given me the assurance it is from Him and no other source.

Not only did He direct me to Experiencing God, but He also directed me to the information on Quantum Physics by Missler (1994a, 1994b) and the book by Missler’s wife (Missler & Missler, 1999) in which she recorded her similar experiences – ones



which she encountered through a different pathway than what I had taken. Somehow, many other books and accounts of other present day Christians who were having similar transcendent experiences also “found their way to me.” Perhaps the most meaningful have been books by Joyner (1994, 1996) in which He shares visions and dreams that the Lord Jesus Christ has given him about the army of God and the last days. Much of what had been happening to me began to make sense as I read these books. I now understand that the “call” I experienced back in 1981 was far greater than I could have ever dreamed or imagined. (These understandings are representative of the conjunctive faith level [Fowler, 1981] in which there is great depth and an intergenerational sense of responsibility for the world.)

As I reflect on all of these events, I realize that I have given 18 years of my life to higher education in faithfulness and preparation to that call – all the while not fully understanding what it would be and wondering why I couldn’t be studying more about Him and His ways rather than being schooled in the “ways of the world.” I still do not know the fullness of what it is that He is calling me to; but I await that with anticipation.

In addition to all these confirmations, I began to work on my literature review for this project and found that the processes discussed by Fowler, Wilber, and Underhill were descriptions of what had been happening to me. I was quite excited that God had provided me an experience and He was now providing me deeper understanding through the literature review for my research project. It also made sense why I felt so strongly that the literature review in its fullness would need to wait until after the statistical analysis was completed. Timing – it was obviously His timing! This has been an



amazing spiritual experience and there are many insights I have gained from it so far. God has been speaking to me and He has given me insights into the practice of social work as it relates to Christians, social workers in general, the New Age ideologies, and His view on the oppressed. These insights are found in Appendix C.

## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
QUESTIONNAIRE



### The Role of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work Practice

These following questions ask your views about the appropriate role of religion and spirituality in social work practice. To aid you in responding to these questions, definitions are provided below. You will note that, for the purposes of this study, spirituality is more broadly defined than religion. Therefore, some questions address spirituality in both religious and non-religious forms. Some questions distinguish between religion and non-sectarian approaches to spirituality. When all forms of spirituality are intended both spirituality and religion will be mentioned in the question.

**Religion** is an organized structured set of beliefs and practices shared by a community related to spirituality.

**Spirituality** involves the search for meaning, purpose, and morally fulfilling relations with self, other people, the encompassing universe, and ultimate reality however a person understands it. Spirituality may be expressed through religious forms, but is not limited to them.

Please rate your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement by circling the one number that best reflects your opinion.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The constitutional principle of separation of church and state prevent social workers from dealing with <i>religion</i> in their practice.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The constitutional principle of separation of church and state prevent social workers from dealing with <i>non-sectarian spiritual matters</i> in their practice.	1	2	3	4	5
3. It is appropriate for a social worker to raise the topic of <i>religion</i> when dealing with a client who has a <i>terminal illness</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
4. It is appropriate for a social worker to raise the topic of <i>spirituality</i> when dealing with a client who has a <i>terminal illness</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
5. It is appropriate for a social worker to introduce the issue of <i>religion</i> when dealing with a client who has a <i>substance abuse disorder</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
6. It is appropriate for a social worker to introduce the issue of <i>spirituality</i> when dealing with a client who has a <i>substance abuse disorder</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
7. It is appropriate for a social worker to raise the topic of <i>religion</i> when dealing with a client who is preparing to become a <i>foster parent</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
8. It is appropriate for a social worker to raise the topic of <i>spirituality</i> when dealing with a client who is preparing to become a <i>foster parent</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
9. It is appropriate for a social worker to raise the topic of <i>religion</i> when dealing with a client who is recovering from <i>sexual abuse</i> .	1	2	3	4	5

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
10. It is appropriate for a social worker to raise the topic of <i>spirituality</i> when dealing with a client who is recovering from <i>sexual abuse</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
11. It is appropriate for a social worker to raise the topic of <i>religion</i> when dealing with a client who is or has <i>experienced partner violence</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
12. It is appropriate for a social worker to raise the topic of <i>spirituality</i> when dealing with a client who is or has <i>experienced partner violence</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
13. It is appropriate for a social worker to raise the topic of <i>religion</i> when dealing with a client who is <i>suffering</i> the effects of a <i>natural disaster</i> (flood, hurricane, tornado, earthquake, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
14. It is appropriate for a social worker to raise the topic of <i>spirituality</i> when dealing with a client who is <i>suffering</i> from the effects of a <i>natural disaster</i> (flood, hurricane, tornado, earthquake, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
15. It is appropriate for a social worker to raise the topic of <i>religion</i> when dealing with the <i>bereaved</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
16. It is appropriate for a social worker to raise the topic of <i>spirituality</i> when dealing with the <i>bereaved</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
17. It is appropriate for a social worker to raise the topic of <i>religion</i> when dealing with a client who is suffering from a <i>chronic mental disorder</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
18. It is appropriate for a social worker to raise the topic of <i>spirituality</i> when dealing with a client who is suffering from a <i>chronic mental disorder</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
19. It is appropriate for a social worker to raise the topic of <i>religion</i> when dealing with a client suffering from a <i>loss of job</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
20. It is appropriate for a social worker to raise the topic of <i>spirituality</i> when dealing with a client suffering from a <i>loss of job</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
21. It is appropriate for a social worker to raise the topic of <i>religion</i> when dealing with a client who is experiencing difficulty in family relations.	1	2	3	4	5



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
22. It is appropriate for a social worker to raise the topic of <i>spirituality</i> when dealing with a client who is experiencing difficulty in family relations.	1	2	3	4	5
23. It is appropriate for a social worker to raise the topic of <i>religion</i> when dealing with a client who is involved in the criminal justice system.	1	2	3	4	5
24. It is appropriate for a social worker to raise the topic of <i>spirituality</i> when dealing with a client who is involved in the criminal justice system.	1	2	3	4	5
25. The social worker's attempt to alter the belief system of a client, who is involved in a <i>cult</i> , is an interference with the client's right to self determination.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Informing a client of the social worker's <i>religious/spiritual belief system</i> , or lack thereof, is important when establishing the helping relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
27. Taking a <i>religious history</i> of the client should be part of intake and assessment.	1	2	3	4	5
28. Taking a <i>spiritual history</i> of the client should be part of intake and assessment even when the client is not religious.	1	2	3	4	5

The following questions deal with religion and spirituality in regards to problem solving.

29. How often do you meet clients for whom their *religious participation* has been detrimental to solving their problems? (Please check one response)
- daily       2-3 times a month       5-6 times a year       once a year  
 once a week       once a month       2-4 times a year       not at all
30. How often do you meet clients for whom their *spirituality* has been detrimental to solving their problems? (Please check one response)
- daily       2-3 times a month       5-6 times a year       once a year  
 once a week       once a month       2-4 times a year       not at all
31. How often do you meet clients for whom their *spirituality* has been a strength in solving their problems? (Please check one response)
- daily       2-3 times a month       5-6 times a year       once a year  
 once a week       once a month       2-4 times a year       not at all
32. How often do you meet clients for whom their *religious participation* has been a strength in solving their problems? (Please check one response)
- daily       2-3 times a month       5-6 times a year       once a year  
 once a week       once a month       2-4 times a year       not at all



The following lists various interventions, which could be performed in providing services to clients. Please indicate by circling "yes" or "no" for the behavior listed: (1) the interventions that you yourself have done with clients; and (2) whether or not you believe the interventions to be appropriate for social work practice.

	Have Personally Done w/clients		Is Appropriate Social Work Intervention	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
33. Use or recommend religious or spiritual books or writings.	Yes	No	Yes	No
34. Pray privately for a client.	Yes	No	Yes	No
35. Pray or meditate with a client.	Yes	No	Yes	No
36. Use religious language or concepts.	Yes	No	Yes	No
37. Use nonsectarian spiritual language or concepts.	Yes	No	Yes	No
38. Recommend participation in a religious or spiritual support system or activity.	Yes	No	Yes	No
39. Touch clients for "healing" purposes.	Yes	No	Yes	No
40. Help clients develop religious/spiritual rituals as a clinical intervention (e.g. house blessings, visiting graves of relatives, celebrating life transitions).	Yes	No	Yes	No
41. Participate in client's religious/spiritual rituals as a practice intervention.	Yes	No	Yes	No
42. Encourage the clients to do regular religious/spiritual self reflective diary keeping or journal keeping.	Yes	No	Yes	No
43. Discuss role of religious or spiritual beliefs in relation to significant others.	Yes	No	Yes	No
44. Assist clients to reflect critically on religious or spiritual beliefs or practices.	Yes	No	Yes	No
45. Help clients assess the meaning of spiritual experiences that occur in dreams.	Yes	No	Yes	No
46. Help clients consider the spiritual meaning and purpose of his or her current life situation.	Yes	No	Yes	No
47. Help clients reflect on their belief about what happens after death.	Yes	No	Yes	No
48. Help clients consider ways their religious/spiritual support systems are helpful.	Yes	No	Yes	No
49. Help clients consider ways their religious/spiritual support systems are harmful.	Yes	No	Yes	No

The following questions deal with the DSM-IV (please circle one response for each question)

50. Do you use the DSM-IV in your practice? ..... Yes No
51. If you use the DSM-IV, do you as a social worker consider the religious or spiritual beliefs of clients in determining a proper diagnosis?..... Yes No

The following questions deal with client referral to religious/spiritual leaders.

52. Have you ever referred a client to a clergy person, or other religious/spiritual helpers or leaders? (Please check the appropriate blank.)  
 YES (If yes, continue with question 53)  
 NO (If no, please skip to question 56)

Please circle one response for each of the question.

	Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Sometimes	Always
53. Do problems concerning differences of beliefs or values between social worker and <i>religious/spiritual leaders</i> prevent referrals?	1	2	3	4	5
54. Do social workers lack of trust or confidence in <i>religious/spiritual leaders</i> prevent referrals?	1	2	3	4	5
55. Do <i>religious/spiritual leader's</i> lack of trust or confidence in social worker prevent referral?	1	2	3	4	5

Please rate your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement by circling the one number that best reflects your opinion.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
56. In general, social workers should introduce <i>religion/spirituality</i> according to their professional judgement even if clients do not first express interest.	1	2	3	4	5
57. In general, social workers should address <i>religion/spirituality</i> only if the client first expresses interest.	1	2	3	4	5
58. Helping clients assess whether they wish to work on <i>forgiveness</i> is an important part of social work practice.	1	2	3	4	5
59. In my practice, I use techniques that deal with <i>forgiveness</i> (e.g. assisting clients to forgive themselves, forgive others and seek forgiveness).	1	2	3	4	5
60. <i>Spirituality</i> is a fundamental aspect of being human.	1	2	3	4	5
61. Social workers should become more sophisticated than they are now in <i>spiritual matters</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
62. Social work practice with a spiritual component has a better chance to empower clients than practice without such a component.	1	2	3	4	5

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
63. Integrating religion and spirituality in social work practice conflicts with social work's mission.	1	2	3	4	5
64. Integrating religion and spirituality in social work practice conflicts with the NASW Code of Ethics.	1	2	3	4	5
65. Social Workers, in general, possess the <i>knowledge</i> to assist clients in <i>religious/spiritual</i> matters.	1	2	3	4	5
66. Social Workers, in general, <i>do not</i> possess the <i>skill</i> to assist clients in <i>religious/spiritual</i> matters	1	2	3	4	5

#### Social Work Curriculum and Education

The following questions ask your views about the inclusion of content on religion and spirituality in the social work curriculum. Please answer these questions by circling the appropriate number or checking the appropriate blank.

There are generally two rationales given for including content on religion and spirituality within the curriculum of schools of social work; these are listed below. Please indicate your level of agreement with each position by circling the one number that best reflects your opinion.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
67. Religious and spiritual beliefs and practices are part of multicultural diversity. As such, social workers should have knowledge and skills in this area in order to work effectively with diverse client groups.	1	2	3	4	5
68. There is a spiritual aspect of human existence beyond the biopsychosocial framework currently used to understand human behavior. Social Work education should expand this framework to include this spiritual aspect.	1	2	3	4	5

69. In your social work education have you received content on religious or spiritual issues?

(Please check the appropriate one)

YES (Please continue with question 70)

NO (Please skip to question 71)



70. During your social work education, in what specific types of courses was this material included? (Please check as many courses as are appropriate)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> HBSE                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Practice (Macro Practice) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Policy                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Field Practicum                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Research                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Spirituality Courses       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SWK Administration                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Human Diversity Courses             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clinical Practice (Micro Practice) | <input type="checkbox"/> Field of Practice Courses           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Groups (Mezzo Practice)            | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Social Work Courses           |
|   | Please specify: _____  |

71. In what courses if any, do you think material on religious and spiritual issues should be presented in social work education? (Please check as many courses as are appropriate)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> HBSE                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Practice (Macro Practice) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Policy                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Field Practicum                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Research                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Spirituality Courses       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SWK Administration                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Human Diversity Courses             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clinical Practice (Micro Practice) | <input type="checkbox"/> Field of Practice Courses           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Groups (Mezzo Practice)            | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Social Work Courses           |
|   | Please specify: _____  |

#### Religiosity/Spirituality Scale

72. During your *elementary* school years, how often did you participate in religious community services? (Please check one response)

- |                                      |  |   |                                      |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> daily       | <input type="checkbox"/> 2-3 times a month | <input type="checkbox"/> 5-6 times a year | <input type="checkbox"/> once a year |
| <input type="checkbox"/> once a week | <input type="checkbox"/> once a month      | <input type="checkbox"/> 2-4 times a year | <input type="checkbox"/> not at all  |

73. During your *adolescent* years, how often did you participate in religious community services? (Please check one)

- |                                      |  |   |                                      |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> daily       | <input type="checkbox"/> 2-3 times a month | <input type="checkbox"/> 5-6 times a year | <input type="checkbox"/> once a year |
| <input type="checkbox"/> once a week | <input type="checkbox"/> once a month      | <input type="checkbox"/> 2-4 times a year | <input type="checkbox"/> not at all  |

74. How frequently do you *currently* participate in religious services? (such as going to church, temple, or other places of religious activity) (Please check one response)

- |                                      |  |   |                                      |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> daily       | <input type="checkbox"/> 2-3 times a month | <input type="checkbox"/> 5-6 times a year | <input type="checkbox"/> once a year |
| <input type="checkbox"/> once a week | <input type="checkbox"/> once a month      | <input type="checkbox"/> 2-4 times a year | <input type="checkbox"/> not at all  |

75. Indicate your present relationship to an organized religion or spiritual support group: (Please check one response)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> active participation, high level of involvement                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> no identification, participation, or involvement with religious or spiritual group |
| <input type="checkbox"/> regular participation, some involvement  | <input type="checkbox"/> disdain and negative reaction to religion or spiritual tradition                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> identification with religion or or spiritual group, very limited or no involvement |   |

76. How frequently do you currently participate in *private*, religious or spiritual practices? (e.g., meditation, visualization, reading scriptural texts, prayer, etc). (Please check one response)

- daily                     2-3 times a month     5-6 times a year     once a year  
 once a week             once a month             2-4 times a year     not at all

Please rate your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement by circling the one number that best reflects your opinion.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
77. I feel negative about the <i>religious</i> experiences of my childhood.	1	2	3	4	5
78. I feel negative about the <i>spiritual</i> experiences of my childhood.	1	2	3	4	5
79. I feel negative about my <i>religious</i> experiences in the present.	1	2	3	4	5
80. I feel negative about my <i>spiritual</i> experiences in the present.	1	2	3	4	5

#### Religious or Spiritual Ideological Positions

81. Listed below are six types of ideological positions that people (sometimes) take in relation to religious or spiritual beliefs. After you have read all six, please place an X next to the statement(s) that comes closest to your own ideological position or that is most important to you.

- There is a personal God or transcendent existence and power whose purpose will ultimately be worked out in history.  
 There is a transcendent aspect of human experience which some persons call God, but who is not imminently involved in the events of the world and human history.  
 There is a transcendent or divine aspect, which is unique and specific to the human self.  
 There is a transcendent or divine aspect found in all manifestations of nature.  
 Notions of God or the transcendent are products of human imagination; however, they are meaningful aspects of human existence.  
 Notions of God or the transcendent are products of human imagination; however, they are irrelevant to the real world.

#### Demographics Information

82. What is your present age? \_\_\_\_\_ Years
83. What is your gender? Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

84. What is your race/ethnic group? (Please check one response)
- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> African-American                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian/EuroAmerican       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Latino/Hispanic-American                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Bi-racial/Multi-racial _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian-American/Pacific Islander                |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Native American/American Indian/Alaskan Native | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____                  |
85. What is your current religious affiliation or spiritual orientation (Please check as many as are relevant)
- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agnostic         | <input type="checkbox"/> Confucianism     | <input type="checkbox"/> Muslim                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Atheist          | <input type="checkbox"/> Existentialist   | <input type="checkbox"/> Spiritism or Shamanistic                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Buddhist         | <input type="checkbox"/> Goddess religion | <input type="checkbox"/> Traditional Native American Spirituality |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Christian        | <input type="checkbox"/> Hindu            | <input type="checkbox"/> Wicca                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Catholic         | <input type="checkbox"/> Jewish           | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Protestant       | <input type="checkbox"/> Reform           |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Orthodox | <input type="checkbox"/> Orthodox         |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Non-denomination | <input type="checkbox"/> Conservative     |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____     | <input type="checkbox"/> non-affiliated   |   |
86. Type of Professional Certification or License (Please check all that apply)
- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Licensed Certified Social Worker (Independent level) | <input type="checkbox"/> Family Therapy Practice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Licensed Social Worker                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Pastoral Counseling     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> BSW level  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MSW level  |  |
87. Education (Please check the highest level of education attained)
- |                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> BA    | <input type="checkbox"/> MSW            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> BSW   | <input type="checkbox"/> PHD            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MS/MA | <input type="checkbox"/> POST DOCTORATE |
88. How many hours of religious education have you had in the past 10 years? Your best estimate is fine. (In c though e please specify any other religious education you may have attained)
- | Type of Religious Education | Hours of Education |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| a. Religious Studies        | _____              |
| b. Theology                 | _____              |
| c.                          | _____              |
| d.                          | _____              |
| e.                          | _____              |
89. Have you ever earned a religious degree?  No  Yes If yes, Was a degree awarded?  Yes  No



90. Have you attended any *social work* related workshops or conferences in the past five years that dealt with some aspect of religion or spirituality? (Please check the appropriate one)

- YES (Please continue with question 91)  
 NO (Skip to question 92)

91. If yes, how many?

- 0-5     6-10     11-15     16 or more

92. Have you attended any *non-social work* related workshops or conferences in the past five years that dealt with some aspect of religion or spirituality?

- YES (please continue with question 93)  
 NO (skip to question 94)

93. If yes, how many?

- 0-5     6-10     11-15     16 or more

94. What is your current area of practice?

- Child-Family Welfare     Occupational SW-EAP  
 Criminal Justice     School Social Work  
 Medical Health Care     Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Mental Health

95. As a social worker do you work?     Full-time     Part-time

96. Average number of clients per week in the past three months? \_\_\_\_\_

97. Number of years you have been in social work practice: \_\_\_\_\_ Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months

98. Is your primary work setting:     Private     Public

99. My practice is for the most part:     Rural     Suburban     Urban

#### Definitions of Religion, Spirituality, and Faith

For the purpose of this research, we gave you definitions of religion and spirituality to use when completing the questions. Now we would like to know how *you personally* define these terms. Please check the word(s), if any, that you think best define religion, spirituality, and faith.

100. How would you define *religion*?

- meaning     organization     values     personal relationship with the divine  
 purpose     community     ethics    or higher power  
 belief     personal     miracles     sacred texts  
 ritual     morality     prayer     scripture  
 meditation

101. How would you define *spirituality*?

- meaning     organization     values     personal relationship with the divine  
 purpose     community     ethics    or higher power  
 belief     personal     miracles     sacred texts  
 ritual     morality     prayer     scripture  
 meditation

102. How would you define *faith*?

- |                                     |                                       |                                   |  |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> meaning    | <input type="checkbox"/> organization | <input type="checkbox"/> values   | <input type="checkbox"/> personal relationship with the divine |
| <input type="checkbox"/> purpose    | <input type="checkbox"/> community    | <input type="checkbox"/> ethics   | <input type="checkbox"/> or higher power                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> belief     | <input type="checkbox"/> personal     | <input type="checkbox"/> miracles | <input type="checkbox"/> sacred texts                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ritual     | <input type="checkbox"/> morality     | <input type="checkbox"/> prayer   | <input type="checkbox"/> scripture                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> meditation |                                       |                                   |  |

#### Optional Section

In order to learn more about your views on the topic of religion and spirituality as it relates to social work practice and your education as a social worker, we have a few open ended questions that we invite you to answer. (Please remember this is optional)

103. Please indicate any specific areas for which you think content on religious or spiritual issues is particularly relevant in your education as a social worker? (e.g. special populations, client problems, life stages, service settings, etc.)

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104. Please describe appropriate or inappropriate uses of religion and spirituality in social work practice.

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105. Please use the space below to make any additional comments you would like about the topic of religion of spirituality, especially as it relates to social work practice and your education as a social worker.

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Thank You for your time and cooperation. If you would like a copy of the results please check here \_\_\_\_\_. We will see you receive a copy of the results as soon as they are available.

**Directions For Return:** The completed survey can be returned by folding it over so that the postage paid return mailing address is exposed, and sealing it with cellophane tape. Again, thanks for your response.

Please Page Over to Continue 11

APPENDIX B  
PERMISSION LETTER



UNIVERSITY OF  NORTH DAKOTA

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK  
P.O. BOX 7135  
GRAND FORKS, NORTH DAKOTA 58202-7135  
PHONE (701) 777-2669  
FAX (701) 777-4257

May 19, 1998

Ms. Pauline Burthwick  
2514 N. River Drive  
Moorhead, MN 56560

Dear Ms. Burthwick,

It is my pleasure to inform you that you may have full access to my data from the national survey of practicing social workers regarding Religion and Spirituality in Social Work Practice. There are 2069 respondents and 103 items in each survey. I understand that you will be using this data to conduct statistical analysis and interpretation for your dissertation.

I have been in communication with Professor Ed Canda, from the University of Kansas, who helped me design the survey. I spoke with him on May 18, 1998, and he is in full agreement with your using the data. We both request, however, that our names, or at least my name be included on any publication that you may have as a direct result from using this data. In addition, we would like to preview any paper you may have written as a result of this research prior to publication. Also, we request that you do not publish any article until Dr. Canda's and my book has been published. The publication date is date is April 1999.

I am looking forward to serving on your dissertation committee. Please contact me should you have any further question.

Sincerely yours,



Leola E. Furman, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor

LF/nr

HNR\MISC\DATARELEASE.LF

APPENDIX C  
MUSINGS FROM A CHRISTIAN MYSTIC

Now that God was speaking to me in my private prayer times, I began to understand that Some would call me a Christian Mystic. I was receiving prophetic messages from Him. These experiences I have had and am continuing to have were truly transcendent experiences. For example, I hear Jesus speak to me -- mostly He tells me about His love and protection for me and what He has planned for me. He confirms what He tells me with scripture or by some other means such as through other people in the church or circumstances. He has taught me some things that I will need to know to do the work He is calling me to -- I have a marvelous notebook full of His words to me. He has told me that He desires this same type of communion for everyone who is a Christian. In fact, He said that He has been standing around waiting for people to listen, but few will listen. He has given me visions and God has used me as a vessel to bring His emotional and physical healing to several people through use of the healing work of Jesus Christ in TheoPhostic prayer ministry.

Underhill (1915) discussed this process of mysticism. The Awakening of the Self for me happened when I became conscious of the encounter with the power from on high, the Holy Spirit. Along with that came the sense of Purgation -- the realization of the need to cleanse the self of sin or harmful behavior and selfish ways. That process also has continued on past that first experience. The Illumination occurred throughout the whole experience, but particularly when the power came from on high and the electromagnetic force enveloped me. Penumbra occurred for me -- the anticlimactic state -- as I tried to "figure out" how to incorporate this new experience into my life. The next stage is Unity, an integration or union between God and the person. I believe that I am now between



these last two stages. Each day brings more revelation and starts the whole process over again. Eventually, I suspect I will feel very comfortable with that and realize that union more fully.

One day as I was communing with Him, I asked Him about why I had never been able to sweat. Now, the inability to sweat has presented me problems throughout my life by causing me to experience heat exhaustion very easily and quickly in the hot summers. What happened next is an example of what Grof (1988) called Experiential Extension Within. The Lord Jesus took me back to my birth in a vision. He revealed that I had been left on a table for much too long, unattended under hot surgical lights. Intuitively, I understood that I became so dehydrated that I nearly died. My body "learned" from this experience that I would die if I sweat, so it never allowed me to sweat. In the experience, I saw the Lord Jesus stand next to me (in my vision of me as a baby). He looked like an IV pole. He put his pointer finger and his middle finger on my forearm just as if he was giving me a transfusion of life. Ever since that day, I have been able to sweat. This has taken some getting used to since now I have to plan enough time to take a shower after I mow the lawn. Nevertheless, I am so thankful, it will be liberating -- perhaps in the future I can even travel to hot foreign countries. What an amazing God!

One of the first days after this "return to birth experience" happened, I knew I was getting hot and needed to sweat. I encouraged my body to do so. I heard my cells say to me, "But, you do not give us enough water." (This is the first time in my life I have ever heard any body part talk -- I didn't know they could talk.) I felt that I had to prove to them that I would drink enough water. Of course, when your cells talk to you, you tend

to listen. This appears to be an example of what Grof (1988) calls Experiential Extension Beyond Consensus Reality and Space-Time.

I found that I have had to begin to re-image or Recapitulate my faith story and my understanding of who God is, just as Fowler suggested. I would not go back to the type of Christianity I had before for anything. In fact, I am losing the desire for anything that this life has to offer. As I have emptied myself of present day idols and counterfeit sources of knowledge and continue to seek knowledge from Him, I have continued to relate to Him with even deeper intimacy. All the lures that this life on earth has to offer seem counterfeit. It pales in comparison with what union with Him offers.

My perspectives and experiences of living the Christian life are in a flux. As I read His Word -- the Bible -- and the books by Joyner and others, and as He teaches me directly about Himself, I find that my understanding of Him and His ways expanding daily! How narrowly we have understood His love. How condemning and judgmental we have been. How little of His power have we understood and appropriated. How important was the death of Christ on the cross to our future. The people of God have been building their own "religious kingdoms" and have wandered far from where He would have us be. No wonder those around us wonder if He is real; no wonder we ourselves have wondered if He is real. No wonder we say that we "believe," but we are not able to "act out" what we say. We have not allowed Him to do His refining work in our lives. We do not have His perspective. We have not renewed our mind with Him and His ways daily. How could we expect to live a life different and better than the world, when we have become so much a part of it and loved what it has to offer?



I expect this is what it was like to be a Christian back in the times after Christ's death. People back then understood this kind of intimacy with Him and they walked in His kingdom on the earth at a much deeper level of intimacy than what we have been: They walked in demonstration of His spiritual gifts and healing powers. This is joy unspeakable and full of Glory! The promises of the scriptures now seem to be within grasp -- a true reality! It is no longer difficult for me to believe all that the scripture says and promises. His word is true.

#### Ponderings About Spiritual Growth

As I have pondered these things, I have wondered why more Christians do not know these truths or experience these higher levels of spiritual growth. Although mystic/transcendent experiences between man and God make up the entire Bible, there are likely several reasons why people schooled in Christianity through the lens of the Western perspective do not seek this deeply intimate relationship with God. Several possibilities of why few people experience this level of fullness with God are identified below:

1. Researchers like Kohlberg, Fowler, and Wilber indicate few people ever reach this level of spiritual growth attainment -- so in general not many people reach this point.
2. The Western view has discounted anything that cannot be seen or measured as not being real and Christians in America have been raised under that "Western ideology."
3. There has been a lack of understanding and attention to Christian Mysticism in Christian circles likely due to the association of mysticism with non-Christian religious experiences.



4. Historically there has been marginalization of proclaimed Mystics within the faith by either offering sainthood or excommunication to those Christians who do report or write about these experiences. Most people do not seek such positions.

5. Over time, the church as an institution and organization has denied the power of God as it builds itself into its own social institution or worldly "power." A possible result is that churches become social communities and places where people can talk about God, but may not ever meet Him or experience His power. The goal has shifted from building God's kingdom to building man's kingdom. Each different group establishes their own "authorized" interpretation of what God has said and works to establish the authenticity of their own view. Division has entered the church as man has sought to build his own kingdom of religion rather than God's kingdom of love. God intended the church to be one body and to move in unity together.

6. Many people have had negative experiences with the Church and Christians. They have rejected God along with Christianity because they assume He is being accurately reflected in the Church or by people who call themselves Christians. As a result, when their own spiritual birth pangs are groaning, they seek God through alternate means, throwing out the concept of the God of the Bible along with their disgust of the people and institutions of faith. Most of them never pursue reading of the scriptures for themselves to gain a more balanced understanding of who God is and who He says He is.

7. Modern life has become too complex and hectic. People are trying to survive, and they have no time to seek out a God who seems so distant. Relationships take time, having one with God is no different. Time is one thing people are convinced they lack in

this modern world. Time has been filled up with multitudes of frantic activity or second and third jobs, mainly to buy the things that the world has to offer. All this activity is really believed to be necessary; but it serves to make life much more complex and less meaningful than it needs to be.

8. Psychiatry and Psychology have historically defined what constitutes “appropriate” behavior and experiences. Especially in the West, the reality of the Spiritual world has been denied. Many people fear discussing their spiritual experiences because of the likelihood of being misunderstood and receiving a negative and harmful label of some type of mental illness.

9. Christians who are active in their faith have not been taught how to find and experience God. Many know about Him, but fail to KNOW Him. They do not know that it is possible to intimately know and commune with Him. They are blinded because they fail to understand that the Kingdom of God functions in more dimensions or levels of consciousness than the physical world and reality we live in. Therefore, they see biblical accounts as “historical events” or “miracles” which they believe in their “head” have happened in the past and think with their “mind” could happen in the present or in the future; but certainly only rarely, and not ever to them or anyone they know. After all, God does not really “talk” to people does He?

In summary, most Christians do not know the Triune God experientially in their “heart.” They lack faith to believe these biblical events could happen in our physical world. This is primarily because of our indoctrination into the “Western view.” Christianity began in the East. The spiritual dimension was understood and accepted in



the East. However, modern Christianity has primarily developed in America. Here, Christians are generally unaware of the reality that when one becomes a Christian they begin a spiritual journey that leads to the higher levels of spiritual development as defined by the theorists. It is possible to seek that intimacy and learn to walk in oneness, a deep intimacy with God. When this happens, they will no longer be bound by the dimensions of time and space, as we know them on earth. They will begin to experience walking in His Kingdom on earth, as he promised. Yes, even while they are on earth, experiencing the deeper levels of His Kingdom is possible. In His Kingdom and under His orchestration and command, John was given revelation, Peter was transported, dreams and visions were common experiences, prayers changed the events of history, trumpet blasts won wars, the sick were healed, and the dead raised to life. If we do not know how to hear from Him, we will never know what His command is. The God of the Bible is the author and initiator of spiritual experiences; why do we seek them elsewhere? Perhaps we fear the cost involved. Is not the cost we are paying without His fullness even greater?

#### Visits With God

It is vital that each of us begins to contemplate our own spiritual journey. As I pondered these things, I wondered what God thought about the idea of including religion and spirituality as aspects of social work practice, about the New Age movement, and about issues of social justice. The Lord spoke to me directly about these issues and I would like to quote Him here.



To social workers who are Christians, He is calling you closer to Him. In respect to your practice He said:

The spiritual dimension must be acknowledged. My people will know Me. They will recognize My voice in you. I will use you to call them to Me. Many see dimly. Those who truly seek Me will find Me. There will be many who reject Me for the way is narrow. I love them anyway. You must love them too. Understand this, it is as the Word says, even some who have said Lord, Lord, we did these things in your name, they will be surprised on that day.

I work in everyone's (all people) heart to draw them to me. If they seek Me, they will find Me. They must seek Truth, not balm or ointment or peace or love; for those are only byproducts of knowing Truth. They must seek Truth and know Me and then they will know True freedom, have True love and True peace. I Am ointment, I Am balm, but they must find Me by seeking Truth. That is, by seeking Me.

I Am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I Am the Creator God; I Am Jesus Christ who became human, suffered and died for your sins and rose again for your salvation, sanctification, healing, and in order that the I Am Holy Spirit might come and live in you. Do you not know, I Am the Sprit of Truth? I teach you all things. I Am the Teacher, I Am your Counselor. Whomever the Son sets free is free indeed!

They must seek Truth (clients, people seeking answers). O, yes, I know many think there is no truth. And it is true, that there are many "truths," but there is TRUTH. I Am TRUTH. The many "truths" may approximate Me or even be some of My Truths, but do not be deceived. I AM TRUTH. The only way to salvation and victorious living is through me.

People may find temporary help -- they may even find some of My Truths through others, through other ways and means, but that is only because they are My Truths. My Truth is all around. It can be found all around, but if you are satisfied with bits and pieces of truth, you will not find Me and My Truth.

It is a worthy cause to find Me. You will not be the same. I will make you Mine. I will commune with you. We will walk together. I will be your Counselor, your Healer, your Deliverer, your Protector, I will be your Life. You will live in Me and I will live in you.

I have created nature. My evidence is all around you. Many wise men and sages have found part of truth, but not as many of them have found Me. I Am. I Am Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I Am TRUTH.

If you are Mine, you must be genuine, you must testify and witness and live out the life I have called you to no matter what your vocation, you must not deny me. You must acknowledge My name when you are asked. Since I Am Truth, you must present Me in Truthfulness. (personal communication from God on 8-9-99)

He gave me further instruction about New Age philosophies and worship of false gods/ idols.

I give everything life. My breath gives life to everything. But, that does not mean it is "Alive." To be "Alive," it must have spiritual life. That comes through Jesus Christ. That is why people must be re-born. Their first birth is their physical birth and that gives them life; but they are not "Alive" until their spiritual birth.

All things share in common that I have given them life, I have created them; but only people can become "Alive." Only people are capable to receive "Abundant Life." "Abundant Life" is only possible after they have been made "Alive" by Me, and then it depends on their choices and how deeply they are willing to walk with Me, how intimate they become with Me.

I long that they all have the experience of "Abundant Life," for it is a promise for all and available to all, but many refuse it because they seek after idols and do not give their whole heart to Me.

My breath holds everything together, but that does not mean everything is made "of Me" or "is Me." It is made by Me and I give it life. People do not become capable of being "Alive" until they have spiritual birth. They are, in fact, dead (spiritually dead) even though they have life; they are not "Alive."

Yes, this is a subtle difference, not many understand it. You will need to know these things as you give your defense of Me. All that is Mine, it has been formed by My breath. I Am responsible for all things that have been made.

I allow Satan to plot his wicked schemes, he does think he is knowledge, but I have all knowledge. He deceives the hearts of people, but he does not deceive Me. I am Knowledge of Good and Evil. I am the Tree of Life.

Adam and Eve were seeking knowledge; they already had knowledge in Me. I wish that they would have understood that they had all knowledge in Me.

Seeking after knowledge for the sake of knowledge is wrong. The pursuit should be to seek after TRUTH, to seek to know Me, the ONE TRUE GOD. Knowledge does not give birth to the "Abundant Life"; it does not make one "Alive." Only I



can make one "Alive." Only I give "Abundant Life," and that only comes when all other gods before me are burned on the altar of sacrifice to Me.

Many know me and worship me as only the Creator God. They are being deceived by Satan. I Am the Creator God, but I Am also Christ and the Holy Spirit. People do not want to seek me through Jesus, because they do not want to repent. They have believed Satan's lie that you can become like God by worshipping the Creator God. When they understand that partial truth about Me and see that they experience oneness with all that I have created, they think they have found Me. They are truly deceived for they only know part of Me and only know that part of Me in half-truth. For even though I Am the Creator God, becoming "Alive" does not happen through Me. I only give life -- earthly physical life -- The spirit (spiritual birth) can only be born through Jesus Christ as one is born again in Him.

Satan is a great deceiver. Satan uses half-truth very effectively -- to blind the eyes of the people. If people are not spiritually "Alive," they are blinded to things of the Holy Spirit. He is continually working to draw them to Jesus, but they believe they have found God already (the Creator God). They believe that Jesus, repentance, and the way of the cross is not necessary. They think they have found Me already. Pray that they might have eyes to see. (personal communication from God on 8-26-99)

The last communication I will share reflects God's heart toward people (the way is not as narrow as we think -- it is open to all who come to know Christ), the poor and oppressed, and His love for all who would seek Him.

I am not a respecter of persons. It is man who makes those distinctions. I seek out all people to come to Me. Look at My word and see how I, Jesus, elevated women and slaves. I loved them and empowered them. It is through my work that their lots in life have changed.

The world looks at the people who call themselves Christians to see how they live. That is Satan's ploy to direct their attention away from Me. Many who call themselves Christians do not walk in the fullness of their heritage. They have only let Me enter their minds in a cognitive way. They have not sought Me from their hearts. I, Jesus, desire to indwell their hearts. When I come into the heart, I make the spirit new.

Renewing the mind of the old ways then becomes the process of sanctification and growth in Me. Once I am in your heart, I do the refining work, but many refuse to place Me fully on the throne (in charge) and they turn a deaf ear to Me. The lure of the world continues to be a focus for many of them.



Some have sought Me in desperation, because of their awareness that what the world offers is pale and counterfeit, they find it easier to walk in the process of renewing the mind. They have less denial of their own role in the messes they find themselves in and they have greater understanding of the ugliness the world offers.

Satan seeks out the women, the righteous, the oppressed, the children, the poor, the foreigners, and the needy. This he does because he knows how I esteem them. He seeks to destroy them every way he can because he knows I choose to honor them. He knows I love them.

Satan is a counterfeiter. He counterfeits My ways and My miracles to attract the world. He offers power and the world does not see his power for what it really is -- they do not see all the darkness it contains. He is the destroyer. He seeks to destroy all that is Mine. He replaces the desire to worship Me with the allure and appeal of other gods and idols.

For everything I have done, he has a counterfeit. Read My word and see how Satan has blinded your eyes so that you do not see Me or seek Me; but rather you seek after all that he offers, all that is counterfeit. If you do not know what is real, what is TRUE, and all you know is that which is counterfeit, how can you find Me?

You can begin to know Me through My Word, but to have your spiritual eyes opened, you must have the one True Spirit guide -- the Holy Spirit, and He enters when you are born anew. When you repent of your sinful nature and receive the gift of life, Jesus Christ. You then become "Alive" and your spiritual ears become opened to Me and My Ways. (personal communication from God on 8-30-99)

One final comment here. I am not used to receiving direct communication from God and am walking in a totally new place with Him; please only accept these words if He confirms them in your own heart. I in no way want to represent God to you -- that is His job. However, I do believe there is a message for all of us here. Perhaps some of the words of Joyner (1996) would be helpful. He describes several different means that God has used to communicate with people. This type of message that I received appears to fit one of his descriptions of revelation of the type which is called a

conscious sense of the presence of the Lord, or the anointing of the Holy Spirit, . . . [it] gives special illumination to our minds . . . it gives me much greater confidence in the importance or accuracy of what I am saying . . . but it is still a level where we can still be influenced by our prejudices, doctrines, etc. (p. 10)

Joyner (1996) also asserts that he does “not believe that any kind of prophetic revelation is for the purpose of establishing doctrine. We have the Scriptures for that” (pp. 12-13). Revelations help to illuminate doctrine and also occur “to reveal the present or future strategic will of the Lord in certain matters” (p. 13). May all of these words of testimony cause you to ponder Him in your heart and to seek Him for the answers to all your questions.

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