

A CONCEPTUALIZATION OF SPIRITUALITY FOR SOCIAL WORK:  
ITS ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

DISSERTATION

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By

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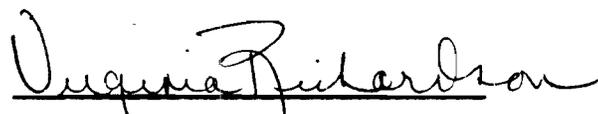
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## FIELDS OF STUDY

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Social work has its historical roots in religious movements for charity and social justice action (Leiby, 1977). Yet as the profession detached itself from the institutional limitations and ideological biases of sectarian contexts, it also tended to neglect explicit consideration of the spiritual component of its basic values and human service goals. This is ironic considering that throughout our history leading social workers, such as Towle (1965, orig. 1945) and Siporin (1982), have called for a recognition of spiritual issues as important considerations for professional practice. In 1956, Spencer advocated for professional discussion of religious issues that takes into account the heterogeneity of perspectives among social workers and their clients. A study by Jaffe in 1961 pointed out that there was no professional frame of reference for the spiritual aspect of social work. In 1967, Salomon observed that the profession needs to go beyond a narrow positivistic view of human beings in order to develop

a concept of humanity that deepens the social worker's understanding of people's moral and spiritual nature. Two professional concerns about freedom from sectarian bias and the need for spiritually-oriented theory and practice must be reconciled if the profession is to fulfill the service mandate it has set for itself. Such a precise and comprehensive conceptualization of spirituality, including details of its implications for social work, has not been developed.

As the National Association of Social Workers 1981 "Working Statement on the Purpose of Social Work" states, the primary goal of the profession is to promote the maximum fulfillment of the person and environment in interaction. As theoreticians of human fulfillment such as Maslow (1968) point out, spiritual needs relating to the actualization of existential meaning and purpose are as crucial for human well-being as the satisfaction of subsistence needs. Since social work has established a value commitment to assist the maximum fulfillment of people, social work theory and practice must begin to explicitly address these spiritual needs. Yet, despite recurring calls for a renewal of spiritual concern in the professional literature, there is little explicit discussion of these needs in literature, education, research, or direct practice. Except for a few recent contributions (Brower, 1984; Hammond, 1986; Siporin,

1985), the concept of spirituality itself is defined rarely in the social work literature, even where employed in discussion.

Sectarian social work contexts are perhaps an exception to this general observation. However, there are limitations to sectarian discussions of spirituality for social work purposes. First of all, in sectarian sources the concept of spirituality is rarely precisely defined for specific application to research and practice. Secondly, sectarian definitions of spirituality are usually stated in religious terms acceptable only to a particular community of believers. They tend to be parochial, dogmatic, or ethnocentric. Such definitions are not suitable for incorporation into the common base of social work since the profession as a whole must respond to religiously and culturally diverse clients. Yet they provide many valuable insights that can contribute to a comprehensive conceptualization of spirituality. Accordingly, this study examines spirituality as a fundamental aspect of human experience, including but not limited to its particular religious expressions.

Recent general and nonsectarian descriptions of spirituality by social work scholars provide a conceptual starting point for refining a conceptualization. Existential authors allude to the individual's life process of

discovering and actualizing a sense of the meaning, purpose, and quality of existence through interaction between the person and the environment (Krill, 1979; Edwards, 1982). In a recent dissertation on the characteristics of practice by spiritually sensitive social workers (Brower, 1984, p.2), the spiritual dimension is said to involve (1) expression of the immaterial human spirit; (2) integration of all aspects of the person; (3) awareness of and relationship with the "spirit/energy source of creation". Brower (1986) identifies four central questions that a person needs to answer in a manner congruent with reality in order to avoid spiritual distress. These are "Who am I?" "Why do I exist?" "Why is there suffering?" "What will give meaning to my life?" Thus spirituality relates to a way of life that is committed to the pursuit of self-understanding, understanding of the world, and understanding of the ultimate reality that transcends the physical world.

Siporin (1985, p. 210) recently stated the most detailed conceptualization. In his conceptualization, the spiritual element of the person is an aspect of the psyche which is essentially moral, called the soul. This spiritual aspect involves striving for transcendental values, a sense meaning, knowledge of ultimate reality, and relatedness with other people and the supernatural powers that guide the universe. Siporin adds that spirituality may be expressed

outside the context of institutional religion. This conceptualization highlights several ideas: (1) the psyche or soul as the spiritual element of the person; (2) the moral quality of spirituality; (3) the search for meaning; (4) concern with knowledge about ultimate reality; (5) importance of community relationships; (6) striving for relatedness supernatural powers. Elsewhere, Siporin (1983) argues that the profession needs to identify moral principles that balance both individual freedom and social responsibility, a task that is essentially a spiritual quest.

Hammond (1986) includes the following elements in his definition: (1) elimination of pretenses and facades through expression of the inner self or soul; (2) alignment of the inner self with psychological and social dimensions; (3) development through the life span toward achieving of a sense of wholeness in oneself and in relation with the outer world. Coughlin (1970), using theological language, pointed out that the central concern of religion (in the generic sense of spirituality) is the meaningful bonding of oneself with society, nature, and God. Spirituality is an expression of an intrinsic existential drive to transcend the bounds of the physical world through creativity and self-realization. Self-realization involves realization of union with God.

Working definition of spirituality.

These views of spirituality may be converged to provide a tentative general definition of spirituality as a starting point for further elaboration in this study:

Spirituality is the human process of developing a sense of meaning and fulfillment through striving for personal integrity and wholeness in the context of moral relationships between self, society, nature, supernatural powers, and ultimate reality.

This definition needs to be further clarified and elaborated so that it can be useful for professional human behavior theory development, practice, treatment effectiveness research, and hypothesis testing. Further, the philosophical assumptions underlying this general definition may themselves be culture-bound.

In order to develop a comprehensive conceptualization of spirituality that is not limited to any particular belief system, an exploratory, descriptive, qualitative study will be pursued. This study will also specify the implications of this conceptualization for professional knowledge development, practice application, social work education, ethical issues, and social research. The issue of the desirability and feasibility of operationalizing and quantifying the concept for research purposes will also be examined. In the nomenclature of Rothman's (1980) social

research and development schema, this study is applied or "conversion/design" research, focusing on conceptual clarification linked to social work practice application.

#### Research goals.

To summarize, the research goals are as follows: (1) To conceptualize spirituality comprehensively and clearly in a manner applicable to service for clients of diverse life styles, religious orientations and cultural backgrounds. (2) To specify implications of spirituality for social work theory, values, practice (micro and macro), education, and research. Expected contributions will be stated at the end of this chapter after a more detailed examination of the research problem.

#### Professional Context of the Research Problem

##### Professional commitment.

It is crucial for social workers to examine spirituality because of the professional commitment to promote interactions that benefit the quality of life for everyone (National Association of Social Work, 1981). As Helen Perlman (1968) emphasized, social workers must assist clients to achieve the satisfaction of basic subsistence needs and then proceed to help them satisfy higher developmental needs. Satisfying basic subsistence needs allows existence to continue. The higher developmental needs involve the meaningful fulfillment of existence— the

domain of spirituality- as Charlotte Towle (1965) and Abraham Maslow (1968) have suggested.

The professional goal of benefitting everyone, that is, matching satisfaction of needs between individuals and their environments for mutual benefit (Gordon, 1969; Gil, 1979), requires professionals to express their own highest spiritual potentials in service. Approaching problem solving with the intent of mutual benefit for all people is impossible without expression of compassion that is unbiased according to race, religion, sex, class, ability, or other discriminations. It precludes service biased according to the egocentricity and ethnocentricity of the worker or interest groups. All-encompassing service can only arise from all-encompassing compassion. Such love springs from the spiritual depths of a person. In the Christian words of St. Paul, "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (New Testament, First Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12). In Mahayana Buddhism, this is known as the Bodhisattva way: the commitment of an enlightened person to serve all beings without attachment to self (Keefe, 1975a). All spiritual traditions emphasize that authentic spiritual experience brings awareness of responsibility for the welfare of others. Concomitantly, there is an existential imperative for compassionate service that cannot be denied with authenticity. Therefore, if "the

benefit of everyone" is meant genuinely, not as a platitude, then a major spiritual awakening of the social worker is needed. As Brower's (1984, pp. 163-165) study of the personal and professional characteristics of ten spiritually sensitive social workers and counselors showed, an holistic and spiritual world view and approach to clients refines the application of basic professional values, knowledge, and skills and is consistent with them.

Historical and cultural factors.

As the social work profession strives to define itself, Marty (1980) points out, it must address the connection with religion during its historical development and in the motivations and beliefs of its practitioners and their clients. Social work in Western countries has been shaped significantly by its origin in Judeo-Christian world view as well as its on-going relation with sectarian social service agencies. Constable (1983) contends that basic social work values are derived from religious origins and that private religious values of practitioners are influential in their public performance. Core professional values of religious origin include concern with social justice, assisting the freedom and ability of people to satisfy needs, and upholding the dignity of clients through humane and responsive institutions. Yet these ideals often are not achieved, nor are their religious roots and rationale often

accepted and encouraged publicly. Consequently, social workers are often under strain to achieve consistency between private and public values. In order to assist social workers in this task, the profession should more openly deal with the historical and contemporary connections between religion and social work. Brower's (1984, pp. 16-38) review of the historical relation between religion and social work in the United States points out the discrepancy between advocacy for spiritual concerns (which seems to fluctuate according to fashion and larger social trends impacting on the profession) and the gross neglect of religious and spiritual issues in social work research, education, and practice.

In non-Western countries, the traditional religions are also closely involved with the development of social work and human services. Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, the many forms of shamanism, and all other religious traditions are concerned with the human condition and how to improve it (e.g. Battacharya, 1965; Brandon, 1976; Canda, 1983; Jain, 1965; Kotb, 1953; Macy, 1983). Given the multicultural composition of our client population, this fact has an important implication. Conscious and unconscious assumptions about the human condition and the helping process are conditioned by enculturation and personal spiritual experience. These may often conflict between

workers and clients because of misunderstanding or intolerance. For example, an Anglo-Protestant social worker must be able to acquire ethnographic knowledge and empathic understanding of Caribbean spiritualism in order to provide effective service for many Puerto Ricans (Delgado, 1977). The use of charismatic Christian symbolism, prayer, and congregational support among many rural Anglo Americans must be met with a congruent and affirming approach by urbanized social workers (Meystedt, 1984). Also, the exploration and incorporation of diverse spiritual traditions and helping techniques can lead to enhancement of the social work profession's repertoire of practice modalities, as Keefe (1975b, 1979) has illustrated with regard to the therapeutic value of Zen Buddhist meditation. Social work scholars are also beginning to examine the advantages of converging psychological insights and therapeutic ritual processes from shamanism with social work theory and practice (Canda, 1983; Cataldo, 1979; Laird, 1984).

#### Ethical decision-making.

Moral philosophy and ethical decision-making are crucial concerns for professionals, as the social work code of ethics affirms. Yet the code of ethics is neither an ultimate source of moral authority, nor an adequately detailed practical guide for resolving contradictions between rival ethical responsibilities. For example, is it

ethically correct to violate laws or agency policies when these contradict the best interest of the client or the morality of the worker? The code mandates our responsibilities to relate professionally and responsibly toward the interest of the client, the agency, the general public, and the profession. But how can we prioritize these responsibilities when they conflict? An even more profound question is from whence do these ethical principles derive--personal preferences, cultural norms, rational analysis, professional conventionalities, ethnocentric biases? In order to probe beyond blind conformity to conventional morality and seek authentic, possibly even ultimate, sources of authority, one must engage in a heartfelt spiritual reflection. Sophisticated ethical decision-making requires what the cognitive developmentalist Kohlberg (1963) calls post-conventional morality. As Fowler (1981) points out, post-conventional moral reflection is linked with careful self-reflection and critical social analysis in a person's process of clarifying fundamental faith commitments. Even Reamer's (1983) valuable guidelines for resolving ethical dilemmas in social work are debatable on both rational and theological grounds. If professional ethics are to be more than mere arbitrary dictates, subject to the attack of personal and cultural relativism, they must be founded upon an understanding of human nature itself, including the

inextricable relations among the individual, the social and physical environments, and ultimate reality as the person experiences it.

Siporin (1982) contends that social workers as individuals and as a professional group must develop a moral philosophy and code of ethics that are consistent with our professed person-in-environment holistic viewpoint. This implies avoiding both the extremes of ethical relativism or egotistical libertarianism on the one hand and self-righteous moralism on the other. He advocates for a moral philosophy that balances the claims of individuals and social groups in order to mutually promote the individual and common good. It must take into account spirituality, which he refers to as the transcendental and moral aspects of consciousness concerned with ultimate meanings and relationships conceived in religious or secular terms.

In short, spirituality needs to be an important consideration for every social worker since it is a fundamental aspect of being human. Our commitment to viewing the whole person-in-environment and the client's highest potential requires considering the spiritual aspect of human functioning, along with the biological, cognitive, affective, and social aspects.

### Criteria for Conceptualizing Spirituality

This discussion has established the importance of spirituality for social work and a tentative working definition of the concept. At this point, it is helpful to establish some guidelines for conceptual elaboration based upon the professional commitments and concerns so far established.

#### Inclusion of diversity.

Social work's common value base upholds unconditional positive regard for people. It advocates against oppression and inequity based upon distinctions of race, ethnicity, life style, religion, sex, class, or ability. Consequently, an appropriate conceptualization of spirituality must comprehensively take into account the diversity of all peoples' religious and nonreligious views. In so far as possible, the conceptualization must not be constrained to any particular sectarian or ideological claims.

Reinhold Niebuhr (1932), a noted Christian theologian writing on the contributions of religion to social work, emphasized the danger of religious beliefs that intensify enmity and alienation. So-called holy wars and the persecution of heretics occur with frightening frequency in all religious traditions. Unfortunately, even well intentioned religious institutions often attempt to enforce conformity in order to maintain their own social stability

and alliance with the political elite. Aside from political expediency, the reduction of reality to doctrinal and dogmatic assertions often results in a suppression of spiritual freedom. As Maslow (1970) warns, sectarian institutional control of spirituality poses the danger of inhibiting spontaneous transcendent experience. The psychotherapist Peck (1978) has eloquently documented the psychological damage done to children by religious parents when they are narrow minded and authoritarian.

In addition, definitions of spirituality used in sectarian agency contexts seem to be too imprecise for practical use. For example, Caplis (1983) asserts that Catholic Charities agencies have been remiss in the practical application of their unique spiritual beliefs to social work practice. She finds very few empirical studies that test the effectiveness of Christian spiritual techniques in psychotherapy. Vigorous discussions in the Jewish social welfare literature demonstrate that much work remains to be done to reach clarity and consensus about religious concepts and their implications for practice even within the ancient and venerable tradition of Jewish community service (Bubis, 1980; Linzer, 1979; Nussbaum, 1983).

Another important limitation of sectarian views of spirituality relates to the present secularization of social

work ideology and institutions. The United States constitution mandates the separation of church and state. Given the tremendous impact of government funding upon social services, this legal requirement has reinforced the general social trend to divorce formal religion from human service. Sectarian social service agencies increasingly rely upon government funds and restrict the specifically religious character of their activities. As Netting's (1984) study of church-related agencies showed, many de-emphasize sectarian interests as a response to the diversity of their clients' beliefs or confusion about the practical application of religious tenets in administration and practice. According to Netting, some clients seek help in terms of a particular religious orientation. Others feel the need for help but do not wish to be identified with any particular religion. In brief, sectarian concepts of spirituality have limited applicability outside the confines of their sectarian contexts and may be considered inappropriate or inoperable by workers or clients even within the sectarian agency.

In tandem with the process of secularization is an increase in the multicultural diversity of the United States and other industrial countries. Social workers can no longer assume that Judeo-Christian based assumptions about the nature of reality and morality are relevant and

meaningful to all clients. Our client populations include Puerto Rican spiritualists, Southeast Asian Hmong shamanists, Japanese Buddhists, atheist communists and people of every other conceivable spiritual orientation. In order for our service to be relevant, effective, and acceptable to this diverse range of clients, social workers must "start where the client is" in terms of spiritual experience and tradition. The worker must accomplish this through acquisition of knowledge about the client's own religious training and spiritual orientation. It is also desirable that the social worker develops a spiritual awareness that is profound enough to transcend cultural and sectarian barriers.

This is not to say that sectarian conceptualizations of spirituality are irrelevant to the research task. On the contrary, sectarian social welfare conceptualizations are a rich resource for inspiration and will be utilized extensively in this study. The important point is that the end product of this concept generating study must be able to include the strengths and avoid the weaknesses of both sectarian and nonsectarian viewpoints.

#### Holistic perspective.

Spirituality is a fundamental aspect of being human. Whether a person is religiously inclined or not, the primary feature of adult development is the psychosocial task of

reflecting upon the meaning of life and coming to terms with one's conclusions, discoveries, and revelations (Erickson and Martin, 1984). Furthermore, spirituality is a sui generis existential characteristic, unique and irreducible to biology, thinking, feeling, and behavior. Certainly, all these human attributes are mutually interactive, but they cannot be reduced one to another without violating the integrity of the human being as a whole. This sui generis quality of spirituality is most obvious in profound experiences of sacred revelation and enlightenment. All those who have experienced charismatic grace, cosmic consciousness, mystical contemplation, or life-shaking insights know that it is difficult to describe the experiences. It is certainly impossible to capture them in logical-empirical reductions (Eliade, 1959; Otto 1950; Peck, 1978). Indeed, deep spiritual experiences are felt to be ultimate sources of meaning, love, and understanding rather than objects for detached analysis and explanation (Hardy, 1979).

Accordingly, humanistic psychology developed in reaction to the reductionism of positivistic behaviorism and Freudian psychodynamic determinism (Maslow, 1969). For at least the past two decades, humanistic psychology, largely because of its concern with spiritual experiences, has been moving beyond a self-centered view of self-actualization. A

transpersonal view has been emerging that recognizes the necessity of mutual fulfillment as an essential feature of self-actualization (Boucouvalas, 1980). In effect, a person can only fulfill his or her own highest potential by relating in a mutually fulfilling manner with all others, including ultimate reality as individually and culturally symbolized.

In sum, spirituality is an aspect of human development that cannot be reduced to any constituent part of a person or human functioning. It cannot be reduced to logical analysis. It cannot be reduced to self-centered satisfactions. Rather, spirituality is an aspect of whole persons in profound relationship with others and the ground of their existence. Therefore, an adequate conceptualization of spirituality must be holistic, taking into account biological, psychological, social, physical environmental, and transcendental aspects of human experience.

This requirement for an holistic conceptualization is consistent with current trends in professional paradigm building within the profession that continues the effort championed for many years by William Gordon (1967, 1969) to clarify the fundamental integrative and generative ideas for the profession. For example, building upon the professional commitment to assist maximum mutual fulfillment of

individuals and their social environments, Constable (1984), Anderson (1984), and Steiner, Briggs, and Gross (1984) emphasize the importance of phenomenological and holistic approaches to research and theorizing. As Imre (1984) argues, the professional concerns with social transaction and the existential process of meaning construction require a transcendence of reductionist and dichotomous conceptualizations that the profession has inherited from 19th century classical science and the social sciences. As Haworth (1984) mentions, the so-called exact sciences have themselves shattered the classical scientific world view through innovations in relativity and quantum theory (Capra, 1975; Ferguson, 1980; Heisenberg, 1958; Keutzer, 1984; Wilbur, 1984; Zukav, 1979). Social work theorizing needs to catch up to these innovations and abandon the simplistic assumption that the world operates according to the rules of objectivity, causal determinism, and strict logic. Indeed, the increasing attention paid to philosophical and spiritual issues by innovators in the physical and behavioral sciences reinforces this author's contention that concern with spirituality is a logical and necessary extension of current social work paradigm-building efforts.

Linkage between knowledge, values, skills, and practice.

A final criterion for a conceptualization of spirituality derives from a general professional concern with the integration of knowledge, values, and practice. As a practice oriented profession, social work utilizes a diverse range of knowledge related to human behavior and strategies for change (Rein & White, 1981). This knowledge is selected and applied according to various core professional values, most fundamentally, the value to promote maximum realization of individuals' potential through matching of needs with the environment. As Gordon (1965) emphasizes, knowledge and values should be clarified and aligned in social work practice. Imre (1984) makes a profound observation that knowledge of any kind (including scientific knowledge) is acquired through value-preferred epistemological, methodological, and ontological assumptions. All knowledge is value-laden. Knowledge and values are inextricable. Therefore, it might be more accurate to term statements of putative knowledge, beliefs. Therefore, any conceptualization for social work should make explicit its knowledge (belief) and value components.

Knowledge and values in social work are meaningful in relation to practice. They have direct implications for

skill development and application. In view of this, Levy (1978) advocates that conceptualizations and conceptual frameworks provide a guide for inquiry, assessment, and treatment application. Accordingly, a comprehensive conceptualization of spirituality for social work needs to include explication of relevant beliefs, values, and practice applications.

#### Summary of guidelines.

The guidelines for elaborating a conceptualization of spirituality can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Inclusion of diversity. It needs to include of diverse sectarian and nonsectarian views.
- 2) Holistic perspective. It needs to be holistic and ecologically oriented, taking into account the interaction of the whole person with the environment as well as the transcendental aspects of human experience.
- 3) Linkage between beliefs, values, and practice. It needs to be developed within the context of social work concerns, while explicating general principles of beliefs and values as well as specific practice applications.

#### Distinction Between Spirituality and Religion

These guidelines lead to an important conceptual distinction between spirituality and religion. Historians of religion have documented that the concept of religion as an abstract, separable aspect of life is itself culture-

bound. The contemporary Judeo-Christian world view identifies religion with specific social institutions (e.g. denominations), doctrines (e.g. resurrection of the dead or reincarnation), and behaviors (e.g. going to synagogue or church). Judeo-Christians frequently talk about who belongs to what religion, who is religious and who is not, or what is a true or false religion. These distinctions all presuppose that religion is a compartmentalized aspect of life. Yet many non-Western languages do not even have a word for religion. What Westerners call religion is viewed as an all-pervasive orientation to life in most traditional cultures. In this perspective, religion is a society's way of life. As a Chippewa-Cree teacher put it, religion as promoted by white people is separated from everyday life. In contrast, his traditional culture is concerned with how to live at one with the universe, to honor its sacredness and mystery, and to act responsibly in relationship with all beings through every aspect of daily activity. Therefore, he says it is impossible to translate the English term religion into his language (Ron Evans, personal communication, August 12, 1985).

Given Westerners' tendency to dichotomize between religion and other aspects of life, the historian of religions W. C. Smith (1964) makes a helpful distinction between faith, referring to spiritual experience and life

style, and tradition, the historically derived and institutionally prescribed religious beliefs and practices. The Christian theologian Niebuhr (1932) made a similar distinction between institution-bound, alienating religion and true religion. By "true religion" he meant a spiritually mature life style committed to compassionate service for the betterment of individuals and society.

Another important distinction is made by the existentialist social worker Krill (1979). A genuine existential grappling with the meaning and purpose of life must be distinguished from blind acceptance of hand-me-down beliefs. Krill calls the latter, "bad faith," meaning the denial of freedom for the sake of security and identity.

In order to avoid the pitfalls of dogmatism, religious exclusivism, ethnocentrism, and bad faith, it is important to distinguish between religion and spirituality. This author is in agreement with Brower (1984) that this is a crucial distinction for social work, given its commitment toward unconditional positive regard for diverse beliefs and life styles. Religion is defined here as an institutionally determined, legitimated, and enforced set of behaviors and beliefs concerning the nature of human existence, the nature of ultimate reality, and standards for moral conduct. As we have tentatively defined spirituality, it relates to the existential process of exploring and actualizing a sense of

meaning and fulfillment in relations between the individual, society, the nonhuman universe, and the sacred ground of existence. Spirituality may be expressed through and supported by institutional religious contexts. However, spirituality is not bound to them. In fact, spontaneous spiritual insights and ethical imperatives for promoting social justice sometimes come into conflict with official doctrines and religious policies.

#### Purpose and Contributions of the Study

This research will elaborate a comprehensive conceptualization of spirituality according to the specified guidelines. The working definition developed in this chapter is tentative and open to revision according to emerging insights during the research process. In fact, it is intended that the final conceptualization to be proposed will be refined further in an ongoing process of professional dialogue after the completion of this study. This dissertation will include the following chapters: chapter two will present the methodology of the study; chapter three will present an analytical review of sectarian and nonsectarian perspectives in the social work literature; chapter four will present findings from analysis of diverse perspectives culled from interviews with social work scholars; chapter five will discuss the implications of a conceptualization of spirituality for social work as

developed from convergence of insights in the literature and interviews. The research problem is highly significant because it relates to the conceptual foundations of the social work profession.

The following contributions are anticipated:

- 1) Clarification of a conceptualization of spirituality relevant to social work's mission and performance.
- 2) Calling professional attention to a neglected area of professional understanding and service.
- 3) Developing a conceptual common ground that may assist collaboration and mutual understanding of sectarian and nonsectarian professional helpers from diverse ethnic and religious affiliations.
- 4) Generating implications for social work knowledge, values, research, education, and practice.
- 5) Generating research questions for further study.

#### Limitations of the study.

The high level of abstraction and generality of the research topic allows its broad significance for the profession. However, it also prevents the formation of specific testable hypotheses. Since the research problem involves both a high level of abstraction and an attempt to generate new insights for concept clarification, the study will be limited to an exploratory and descriptive format utilizing qualitative research methodology. Actually, the

indeterminateness of the research problem is itself a great advantage in that it provides a rich opportunity for creative innovation within the profession of social work. Given the limitation of the study, it must be seen as a contribution to ongoing professional dialogue rather than a final and conclusive statement on the meaning and significance of spirituality for social work.

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## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY

#### Research Problem and Design Type

This study will generate a comprehensive conceptualization of spirituality that is relevant to the fundamental mission and performance of social work and is inclusive of diverse perspectives. It will also suggest implications of this conceptualization for social work theory, values, practice, research, and education.

#### Subsidiary questions.

1. What is the significance of spirituality for fundamental goals and values of social work as discussed in the introduction?
2. What are the implications of the conceptualization of spirituality for social work application in assisting the maximum fulfillment of the person-in-environment?
3. What are the sectarian conceptualizations and applications of spirituality in the social work and social welfare literature (specifically, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, and spiritist)?

4. What are the nonsectarian conceptualizations and applications of spirituality in the social work and social welfare literature (specifically, existentialist)?

5. What is the result of augmenting insights derived from literature review with the insights of contemporary social work scholars in the process of generating a comprehensive conceptualization of spirituality?

6. Is it possible and desirable to operationalize the concept of spirituality?

Design type.

In order to fulfill the research goal, this study utilizes an exploratory, qualitative, descriptive design as described by Selltitz, Wrightsman, and Cook (1976, chap. 4). Exploratory design is most appropriate for development and refinement of concepts. The primary requirement of this design is that it stimulate rich insights for the purpose of concept generation and formulation. In order to ensure that the conceptualization fits with social work contexts, the design must facilitate the inductive development of conceptualization from the insights of social work literature and scholars, along the lines suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for the development of grounded theory. Complementarily, the criteria for generating an adequate conceptualization for social work set forth in the introduction provide an a priori axiomatic framework for the

inductive inquiry. Given criterion number two (holistic perspective), the philosophical underpinning of this research methodology derives from the naturalist paradigm (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), which emphasizes the importance of phenomenological, inductive, contextual, and holistic approaches to inquiry for research into human experience. Therefore, Lincoln and Guba's recommendations for qualitative research will be adapted according to the guidelines for conceptualization as the primary framework for the design. As Filstead (1979) and Bogdan and Biklen (1982) point out, qualitative research is especially valuable for dealing descriptively with issues of interpersonal relations, values, processes, meanings, and subjective experiences.

This study is philosophical and conceptual in nature although the outcome will include specific implications for social work practice. As Krathwohl (1977) suggests, typical highly structured and predictable research designs are least suited to such studies. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that the positivist and quantitative assumptions underlying typical research strategies are not appropriate for naturalistic inquiry, since they require analytical reductionism and strict control of variable interaction rather than holistic and spontaneously emerging interactions and insights. Given the exploratory and philosophical

characteristics of this study, the criteria of design adequacy for quantitative research (e.g. internal and external validity) will be adapted to the qualitative terms and interpretations established by Lincoln and Guba (e.g. credibility and transferability). Specific methods and design adequacy will be explained in the remainder of this chapter. The various methods will mutually interact to maximize the potential for the synergistic emergence of insights. In accord with the requirements for an exploratory study, specific details of the design will transform during the actual course of the study, so this methodology is intentionally flexible and open-ended. Appendix A depicts the interaction of methods within the design.

### Summary of Methods

#### Overview of methodology.

As the chart in Appendix A depicts, there are four major phases to the research process. Phase one, preparation, included the preliminary work of proposal development and clarification of rationale for the research, professional context of the research problem, and guidelines for conceptualizing. This phase involved the stage of preliminary literature review and problem conceptualization; the results are contained in chapter one. Phase two, specification of design, emerged during the preparation

stage and continued to be refined through interaction with activities in phase three; the design is described in this chapter. Phase three, identification of perspectives, involved a detailed analytical review of literature that identifies sectarian and nonsectarian social work perspectives (stage three; reported in chapter three), conducts key informant interviews with social work scholars, and analyzes the interview data (stages four and five; reported in chapter four). Insights from stage three helped the development of interview questions and analysis codes employed in stages four and five. The three stages of phase three are concurrent and mutually interactive, so that insights from literature and interviews amplify each other and enhance the researcher's perception of interconnections and patterns of meaning. Throughout phases one to three, a conceptualization of spirituality is built up from convergence of insights derived from preliminary literature review, in-depth literature analysis, and interview analysis. The resultant conceptualization is reported at the conclusion of chapter four. Phase four, developing implications, involves reflection upon implications suggested by the final conceptualization (reported in chapter five).

Analytical literature review.

The preliminary literature review (phase 1) establishes the rationale, professional context, and guidelines for the study. This is followed by a more exhaustive analytical review (stage 3) of social work literature to identify and explicate the predominant sectarian and non-sectarian perspectives on connections between religion, spirituality, and social work. In particular, the key ideas of these perspectives related to knowledge, values, and practice application were examined. Thus, the current social work conceptualizations of spirituality were discovered as the basis for further exploration and clarification through the key informant interviews.

Since this study is focused upon conceptualization by and for social work, the stage 3 literature review was limited to social work and social welfare writings. The preliminary literature review identified the following perspectives as most prominent in social work writings which explicitly discuss the connection between religion, spirituality, and social work: Buddhist (Zen), Christian, Jewish, spiritist (including shamanism, Hispanic spiritism, and Native American spirituality), and existentialist. Therefore, these perspectives were chosen to be explored in depth through both the intensive literature review and the interviews.

Experience survey: Key informant interviews.

As the preliminary literature review has shown, there is little written on the topic of spirituality in the social work literature. Most of the writing is based upon sectarian assumptions that are not applicable to the profession as a whole, for the reasons discussed in chapter one. Also, the conceptualization of spirituality underlying these writings is rarely explicit or comprehensive enough to encompass knowledge, value, and practice application aspects. Therefore, an exploratory intensive experience survey of social work scholars who have published or presented national conference papers on this topic was conducted to furnish additional details and insights for further conceptualization.

Interview sample characteristics.

Twenty-five potential interviewees were identified from the social work literature reviews in stages one and three. Requests for interviews were mailed to all twenty-five, although two of the addresses proved to be inaccurate. Of the twenty-three accurate mailings, twenty responses to the inquiry were received. All respondents agreed to be interviewed. However, one respondent preferred not to be interviewed by phone. As there was no other feasible alternative, given the person's distant location, that respondent was eliminated from the interview sample.

Another respondent no longer practices or identifies with social work. Therefore, this respondent was also eliminated from the sample. In effect, a large sample of the population of living social work scholars who have dealt with the connection between religion, spirituality, and social work was achieved. In fact, every significant sectarian and nonsectarian perspective identified from the literature is represented in the sample of interviewees, thus assuring diversity of input to the conceptualization process. The interviewees also represent diversity in terms of practice specializations (e.g. clinical, community organization, policy, administration, education, research). These characteristics of the sample are presented with the results of the interviews.

Social work scholars (defined as social workers who published or presented at national conferences) were chosen because of their demonstrated capacity to reflect, conceptualize, and discuss clearly about the research topic. Their point of view also complements the viewpoints on spiritually sensitive social work practice expressed by counseling and social work practitioners in the study by Brower (1984). Social work scholars were chosen in the expectation that they would be able to contribute eloquent and succinct insights about the research topic within the constraints of one-shot interviews. This expectation was

met, as demonstrated by the interview analysis in chapter four.

The letter of inquiry sent to the twenty-five potential interviewees explained the purpose of the interview, requested participation, and obtained information necessary for scheduling the interview (see Appendix B).

The interview process.

In order to interview eighteen scholars located in widely separated areas of the country, telephone interviewing was the method of choice. In order to limit expense, one-shot interviews averaging forty minutes in length were conducted. These converted to transcripts averaging 20 double-spaced pages each. The interview dialogue stimulated creative and well thought out responses on the part of interviewees. The interviews elicited the interviewee's views and concerns about the connection between spirituality and social work knowledge, values and practice according to their distinctive perspectives. Therefore, the dialogue utilized open-ended questions. This approach follows Dexter's (1970) recommendations for "elite" interviewing of persons with special expertise on a research topic. Audio tape recording was used to capture the details of dialogue since the telephone context made it difficult to immediately record sufficient details through interview notes. Interviewees' permission to tape record was obtained

in writing on the initial letter of inquiry as well as orally at the beginning of the interview. The audio tape recording was transcribed in entirety and proof read by a professional typist and the researcher. Reflective notes and observations were written during the interview and immediately after the interview in order to help the researcher consider emerging insights and methodological refinements.

The time constraint of a one-shot interview required that the open-ended questions be organized within conceptual categories based upon criterion number three-- linkage between knowledge, values, and practice. These questions are shown in the flexible interview schedule in Appendix C. The questions were used as guidelines rather than rigid rules. Actual questions asked were determined by the spontaneous unfolding of dialogue between researcher and interviewee. The only rule regarding content was that each topic be addressed in the interview. The beginning of the conversation checked that the time of the telephone call was convenient for the interviewee, reviewed the intent and format of the interview, and reconfirmed confidentiality and permission to tape-record. The researcher paced the interviews through the content areas (knowledge and beliefs, values, practice implications) allowing for spontaneous diversions. Throughout the interview, the researcher asked

probing questions, offered summarizations of interviewee comments, and checked for confirmation of the researcher's understanding. This strategy is recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (1982), Dexter (1970), and Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Prior to beginning formal interviews, the interview procedures were pre-tested for feasibility with a doctoral student in social work who has interest in the connection between spirituality and social work. This also familiarized the researcher with the interview process to increase his skill and level of comfort in formal interviewing.

In order to maximize the yield from a one-shot interview, the eighteen interviewees were mailed an interview orientation letter to help them cognitively prepare (see Appendix D). The letter also reviewed the purpose of the study, the researcher's academic affiliation, and the format of the interview, thus saving time for more substantive discussion during the actual interview.

#### Classification and analysis of interview data.

Each interviewee was assigned a random identification letter. In order to render the information anonymous, identifying personal information was removed from the transcripts before analysis. Transcript data were classified and analyzed according to the constant comparative method as originated by Glaser and Strauss

(1967) and refined by Lincoln and Guba (1985, pp. 339-351). The constant comparative method proceeds as follows: begin collecting data; identify similarities and differences among key issues and concepts that allow for the construction of data categories; allow these categories to refine further questioning and data collection efforts; record insights and observations about the emerging categories; continue the process of clarifying categories until all relevant data can be included; explicate the patterns, meanings, and connections within and between categories in the process of building up descriptive and explanatory conceptualizations.

Transcript data were separated into units of information on a given topic, ranging from a sentence to a few paragraphs, as designated by the coding guide in Appendix E. Each topical category of data was stored in a separate file. Since each unit could be assigned to more than one category, multiple copies of transcripts were made. Units were coded according to interviewee, transcript page number, and concept categories as shown in the coding guide in Appendix E. Data units were compared and contrasted within each concept category file, taking into account differences of religious or philosophical perspective as well as viewpoints on particular issues. Insights derived from interview analysis were converged with literature review in order to develop the conceptualization of

spirituality proposed at the conclusion of chapter four. The strengths of the various perspectives are combined in an effort to satisfy the guidelines for an adequate conceptualization set in chapter one. Observations and conclusions are conveyed in an essay format appropriate to the philosophical thrust of the study.

#### Adequacy of the Research Design

The design should fit the characteristics of the research problem and criteria for rigorous procedure. The following criteria for adequacy of design are those relevant to qualitative research.

##### Fits the research topic.

As previously discussed, the research topic requires a flexible and insight stimulating design. Therefore, exploratory design is appropriate. Considering the necessity of a philosophical and holistic approach to the topic, qualitative research is appropriate.

##### Fits realistic limits.

The topic of spirituality in general and its associated literature in many disciplines is too vast to deal with in the context of this study. The research intent to produce a conceptualization grounded in social work perspectives and constraints of feasibility required limiting the investigation to literature and scholars within the profession of social work itself, thus setting a realistic

scope for the study. The researcher's own professional training and experience in the field of comparative religious studies also made it realistic to attempt a broad interreligious and philosophical approach to the topic.

Achieves credibility.

In qualitative research, the concept of internal validity is replaced with "credibility." Credibility refers to rigor of procedure that demonstrates that the data and interpretations presented actually correspond the views of research subjects (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 296). Four techniques adapted from suggestions by Lincoln and Guba have been employed to support the credibility of the data collection and interpretations. First, triangulation of sources involving the synthesis of insights from social work literature and scholar interviewees (who are in fact the majority of authors cited) will ensure that the data accurately reflects a comprehensive spectrum of perspectives in the profession. Second, informal researcher debriefing, involving frequent corrective and reflective feedback from the dissertation committee will improve adequacy of design, procedure, and range of insights. Third, negative case analysis including comparison of diverse viewpoints in literature and interviews will be used in order to ensure consideration of the full range of professional perspectives. Fourth, in regard to the credibility of

interview data, transcripts were reviewed for accuracy by a professional typist/transcriber and the researcher. Also, copies of transcripts were mailed to fourteen of the interviewees who expressed interest. This allowed them to notify the researcher of any errors (member checking). No corrections were suggested.

Allows transferability.

The concept of external validity is reinterpreted as transferability. Transferability refers to the applicability of findings from the research to settings and contexts beyond the study itself. This is a crucial concern for this study, since the intent is to provide a conceptualization of spirituality applicable to the profession as a whole and relevant to both sectarian and nonsectarian settings of practice. Transferability of the outcome of the study is supported by the careful incorporation of diverse viewpoints within the conceptualization process. In addition, the researcher intends to present the new conceptualization in publication and conference presentation formats in order to solicit critical reflection and dialogue within the profession. This study does not intend to formulate a final and inflexible conceptualization, but rather to contribute to an ongoing process of professional reformulation and refinement.

Achieves dependability.

Just as validity requires reliability, credibility requires dependability in qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 316). In addition to the credibility techniques described above, dependability (accuracy and confirmability) of data collection and concept-generation processes and products is safeguarded by leaving an audit trail. The audit trail includes the following records (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, pp. 319-320). (1) raw data consisting of interview audio recordings as well as bibliographic citations; (2) data reduction products consisting of interview summaries, unitized and coded interview data in files, and notes on emerging insights from interviews; (3) data synthesis products including the text of the dissertation; (4) instrument development information including interview request forms and the interview schedule. In addition, a reflexive journal and reflexive notes were kept during stages four and five as a report of the researcher's reflections on the research process. Incorporating suggestions from Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 327) and Bogdan and Biklen (1982, pp. 86-89), the reflexive journal contains entries on the following topics: (1) the schedule and logistics of the study; (2) a personal diary involving self-reflection, opportunity for catharsis, and speculations on emerging insights; (3) a methodological log

in which rationales for design decisions are discussed, as necessary.

Upholds standards of ethical research.

The study involves no manipulation of specific variables or human subjects and no covert or distressing impact upon interviewees. All interviewees sign a statement of agreement to participate and to have interviews tape-recorded. Most interviewees felt that confidentiality was not necessary; however, confidentiality and anonymity have been maintained in order to encourage open expression of ideas. This was accomplished by protecting raw data, removal of personal identifying information from transcripts before analysis, and eliminating or disguising identifying information in reports.

Provides relevant information for the profession.

The issue of spirituality relates to a fundamental aspect of human existence and development, so it is relevant to every aspect of social work activity. All areas of social work thinking and practice can be enlightened by the conceptualization. A comprehensive conceptualization of spirituality can also serve as a point of rapprochement between sectarian and nonsectarian approaches to professional helping. A significant portion of the study's conclusion will be devoted to specific implications for the social work profession.

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## CHAPTER III

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

This chapter presents an analytical review and synthesis of social work literature regarding the connection between religion, spirituality, and social work. As established in chapter one, this review will focus upon spirituality as an aspect of human experience that may be expressed through religious institutional contexts but is not limited to them. In order to explicate the predominant diverse social work perspectives on this issue that have been identified in chapter one, literature reflecting Buddhist (Zen), Christian, existentialist, Jewish, and spiritist (including shamanic) spiritualities will be examined.

The distinctive beliefs, values, and practice implications of each perspective will be summarized briefly along with their underlying commonalities. This chapter represents stage three within phase three (data collection and analysis) in the research design. Building upon the framework established in chapter one, this chapter will

provide further clarification and details of social work conceptualizations of spirituality. Since these are rarely explicitly stated in the social work literature, they will be inferred from an analytical review of the selected religious and philosophical perspectives. Given the contributions of each perspective, the tentative conceptualization offered in chapter one will be elaborated. In chapter four, the perspectives found in the interview data will be analyzed and used to further elaborate the conceptualization.

#### Buddhist Conceptualization

##### Basic belief commitments.

Since Buddhism derives from India and the Far East, it offers a valuable contrast to the predominant Judeo-Christian perspectives in the profession with regard to understanding spirituality. On a practical level, it is also important to be familiar with the Buddhist background of many Asian American clients (Timberlake & Cook, 1984).

The form of Buddhism that has been discussed in social work literature is Zen, a Japanese school that emphasizes the priority of attaining enlightenment through direct personal experience and disciplined effort. Zen originated in China under Indian influence, incorporated elements of Taoism and Confucianism, and spread to Korea, Japan, and Vietnam (Nielsen, 1983, chap. 15). In the social work

literature, the Zen perspective is presented without adherence to any specific religious affiliation; rather, it is portrayed as a way of life (Brandon, 1976, p. 2). Keefe (1979) recommends Zen inspired meditation techniques for the psychological benefit of clients and the training of workers in empathy, relaxation, and concentration skills-- without maintaining the cultural or religious set of beliefs that are traditionally associated with it. As Brandon (1979) asserts, Zen oriented social work cannot be cannot be restricted by a set of beliefs or attitudes. Rather, it should be "a way of actually walking the mountains, a method of training, the basis of which is a gradual opening out into love" by emptying the mind (p. 35).

The Zen approach rests upon a fundamental conviction that reality can be known only by transcending the limitations of human thinking, beliefs, and desires. In Buddhist terms, human suffering can only be overcome by liberation from desires as manifest in personal beliefs and cravings. Enlightenment involves awakening from the illusion (samsara, Sanskrit), that we exist as autonomous egos that must possess objects separate from ourselves in order to be satisfied (Brandon, 1976). Paradoxically then, the most fundamental Zen belief is that all beliefs and desires must be transcended.

### Basic value commitments.

With enlightenment, one realizes the essential oneness of oneself with all other beings. From this experience of oneness, there naturally arises a sense of compassion (karuna, Sanskrit) to help all other beings become enlightened and overcome suffering (Brandon, 1976, chap.4). In Zen, the supreme ideal is the Bodhisattva, a person who attains enlightenment and vows to help all beings do the same (Keefe, 1975). Thus, the Zen oriented social worker upholds a profound commitment to empathic relations with clients, undistorted by counter-transference (Keefe, 1976). Yet this compassion extends to all beings, not just one's clients and not just human beings.

### Practice implications.

Zen oriented practice is wary of conceptual constructs, a priori treatment plans, and diagnostic categories because these tend to obstruct direct and spontaneous interactions with the client (Brandon, 1976, chap. 3). Rather than impose professionally designed interventions that arise from the worker's own desires and conceptual constructs, the Zen oriented worker strives to merge harmoniously with the spontaneous ongoing process of mutual interaction with the client. Indeed, the Zen approach assumes that the client truly knows the way to resolve his or her suffering, but is unaware or is not implementing it. As Brandon (1979) put

it, "Social work is then a process of attempting to widen and illuminate his choices and their costs, to extend autonomy rather than restrict it" (p. 30).

Zen practice makes use of meditation training for both the worker and the client (Keefe, 1979). Zen meditation combines relaxation of the body with focusing of the mind. The meditator learns to be aware of the stream of consciousness without being attached to the thoughts and feelings which pass through. The meditator then becomes able to perceive the world directly, without the contamination of desires and illusions. This benefits the client through stress management, enhanced self-awareness and clarity of seeing one's situation and how to deal authentically with it. This benefits the social worker by increasing skills of concentration, attentiveness, accurate listening, empathy, and stress management. Prosky (1986) has recommended Zen meditation training for clinical practitioners who would like to develop pure intuitive awareness of intersubjective relations with clients for the purpose of "subjective research" into treatment effectiveness and authenticity of behavior.

#### Zen Buddhist view of spirituality.

The term spirituality is rarely used in the Buddhist social work literature. This may be because the Zen perspective does not favor dichotomies such as

physical/spiritual. Zen is a way of life that transcends all dichotomies. The Zen view of helping even transcends professional limits, because it arises from compassion that transfuses all of one's life rather than a mere professional role (Brandon, 1976, p. 5). Perhaps the Zen social work view of spirituality is best illustrated by the quotation of Brandon cited at the beginning of this section on Buddhism. For Zen, spirituality is the total life process of awakening to reality undistorted by personal desires, through meditative disciplines that free the mind of attachment to thoughts and feelings, and through compassionate service to help all other beings become enlightened as well. For Zen, spirituality does not pertain to any part of the person or any realm of reality that is separate from anything else (such as a soul or a heaven). Rather, Zen spirituality is a way of living in harmony and oneness with all in reality, moment to moment.

### Christian Conceptualization

#### Basic belief commitments.

In contrast to the relatively recent introduction of Buddhist perspectives into social work by a few authors, the Christian tradition has influenced the development of social work from the very beginning. In general, Christian social work authors do not emphasize denominational affiliations in their writing. Although there are many variations in

doctrine and practice among Protestant and Catholic denominations, Christian authors in social work tend to present viewpoints that are commonly shared in Christianity. Therefore, this discussion will not attempt to present denominational details.

Whereas Zen emphasizes direct personal experience through meditative disciplines as the primary source of knowledge and belief, Christian social workers rely more heavily upon church tradition. Primary sources of Christian world view are the Old and New Testament as the inspired "Word of God," the doctrines of various denominations, and personal experience of insight and salvation inspired by the Holy Spirit (National Conference of Catholic Charities, 1983; North American Association of Christians in Social Work, 1986).

From these sources, Christian social workers derive several common key beliefs about the world. These can be summarized as follows (Biestek, 1956; Keith-Lucas, 1960, 1972, chap. 12, 1985; Kuhlmann, 1985; NACSW, 1986). The universe was created by a personal supreme God. Humankind was created with the capacity for moral choice. People often choose sin, asserting their own prideful desires in disobedience to God's will. Jesus Christ became incarnate as both God and man in order to save humanity from sin by atonement through his crucifixion and resurrection from the

dead. Christ will come again to usher in the fullness of the Kingdom of God on earth. The Holy Spirit continues to guide and strengthen Christians. These three divine Persons are One God. People who turn away from their sinfulness and align their wills with the will of God are promised salvation and eternal reward after death.

The central message of Christianity is that God is love (King, 1965). Human beings achieve fulfillment through personal and loving relationship with God (McCabe, 1965). God's love is given in a pure act of grace. When people are open to the grace of God, they discover a sense of meaning, reconciliation between self, the world, and God, and strength and hope in the face of suffering. This reconciliation is expressed and experienced through loving relationships between people and between God and people. As Hess (1980, p. 63) stated it, Christianity sees human nature as "being-in-situation-with-others-for-a-purpose." The theme of love in Christianity, then, sets relationship as a central fact of human experience. Moral relationship with self and others is necessary for personal fulfillment.

#### Basic value commitments.

Perhaps the most central value commitment of Christians is to live a life of charity. Since this word has become distorted in popular usage to mean "condescending help," it is important to return to the theological meaning. Charity

(caritas in Latin; agape in Greek) is recognized in the New Testament as the most important virtue (Benton, 1981). Charity does not expect gratitude or reward. Charity is a spiritual impulse of love, arising from union with God. As Christ is recognized to be present in all people, the Christian shows love of God in service to the needs of people. Charity involves recognizing the essential communion of all people, both in their shared suffering of the human condition, and in their unity with God. As Tillich (1962) explains, relating to another person in charity involves both unconditional acceptance of the person's worth and also caring expression of constructive criticism.

As the National Conference of Catholic Charities (1983) asserts, four related primary values are love (as charity), truth, justice and freedom. The Christian upholds the truth of God's reconciling work in the world. He or she works toward the just ordering of social relationships, respecting the needs of all people. The Christian supports freedom of opportunity for all people to live in a fully human and loving manner. This may involve active opposition to corrupt social policies and social institutions (Scharper, 1975).

Biestek (1956) gives a Christian interpretation to the meaning of some key social work values. (1) Acceptance of

the client means that the worker perceives the client accurately, both strengths and weaknesses, while maintaining a sense of the client's innate dignity and worth. (2) Self determination means respecting the client's right to free choice within the context of the client's capacity for constructive decision-making, moral reflection, and social responsibility. (3) Nonjudgmentalism means that the worker carefully evaluates whether the behavior of the client is helpful or harmful to self and others, without judging guilt or innocence. In the absence of such reflective evaluations, it is impossible to provide planful and caring assistance to the client.

Practice implications.

For the Christian social worker, there is an integral connection between life in Christ and professional activity (NACSW, 1986). Referring to work with emotionally deprived children, Smith (1961) points out that helping the client to be healed of emotional wounds requires constant expression of love in the helping relationship as well as in the ongoing daily interactions of staff. This modeling and sharing of love involves the personal spiritual growth of the worker as well as the healing of the client. Indeed, for Keith-Lucas (1960), the empathic helping relationship is a human reflection of the divine love shown by God to people through the incarnation of Christ and the grace of the Holy

Spirit. For these reasons, according to Keith-Lucas (1985) the Christian social worker uses practice methods that enhance an "I-Thou" type of helping relationship, affirming the distinctiveness, worth, and capacity for choice of the client.

Tillich (1962) identifies four main aims of this love expression in social work. First, the worker helps the client promptly satisfy immediate needs. Second, the worker guides the client toward independence and withdraws from the dependency relationship. Third, the worker communicates to the client a sense of being a necessary and significant person. This provides a perspective of cosmic meaning in which each person has "... a necessary, incomparable, and unique place in the whole of being" (p. 16). Finally, the worker thereby helps to fulfill the ultimate goal of humanity and the world which is to integrate each individual aim into the universal aim of being itself. Thus, Christian social work deals with practical material needs in the context of spiritual needs, the two kinds of need being inextricable (NCCC, 1983, p. 18). Essentially, the Christian view explains the fact of human suffering in terms of sin. When sin is understood as alienation from one's authentic self, from others, and from God (King, 1965), it becomes clear that the primary goal of Christian social work is reconciliation and atonement (literally "at-one-ment").

As Keith-Lucas (1985, p. 14) describes the helping process in Christian terms, there are four main elements: repentance, which requires that a person recognize a problem needing help; confession, which requires telling someone about the problem; submission, which requires giving up familiar old but unproductive behaviors; and faith in the positive outcome of the change efforts.

One practice method employed by some Christian social workers is witnessing their faith to the client. The authors reviewed consider it inappropriate to prosythesize clients in a self-righteous manner. Keith-Lucas (1985, pp. 28-29) suggests four situations in which witnessing may be appropriate: when a client is a Christian, would like to be one, or wishes to have companionship in prayer; when a client inquires about the worker's motivation for providing caring and helping; when the client's view of Christian faith needs enlargement or theological reflection; when the client explicitly asks questions about the meaning and purpose of life and suffering. He adds that the "most effective Christian witness is not talking about religion, but treating people in a Christian way oneself." (p. 29)

Another Christian helping method is "seeking help from God for specific situations through prayer in a professional context" (Gatza, 1979). Healing prayer may involve petition for help, quiet meditation, or sacrament. It involves an

openness to God's grace which goes beyond ordinary human ability to heal. Gatzka recommends that healing prayer be used to complement ordinary professional knowledge and skill. Sneek and Bonica (1980) point out that one need never overtly and explicitly pray with a client in order to help prayerfully. The Christian worker trusts in the power of God to heal through the therapeutic relationship itself. Their contraindications to praying with clients are: "when the counselor is inexperienced; when the client is potentially hostile or in danger of being exposed to needless additional pain; when an act of prayer is a substitute for a more genuine and imaginative intervention" (p. 31).

Another practice method employed by Christian social workers is cooperation with clergy and church communities that are significant sources of support for Christian clients (Joseph, 1975; Pepper, 1956, p. 26). Bigham (1956) believes that when social workers and pastoral workers understand each other and share basic aspects of world view, their work can fit into each other. Thus, clients can deal with problems in both psycho-social and spiritual terms.

#### Christian view of spirituality.

Christian social work authors often employ the terms spiritual and spirituality, but without explicitly defining the underlying concept. Conrad (1980), expressing the

Catholic position elaborated in Vatican II documents, cites the common Pre-Vatican II tendency to dichotomize spiritual from social, professional, and political responsibilities as a very serious error. Keith-Lucas (1985) decries a distorted form of spirituality which sees the church as only concerned with the saving of souls while people are hungry or oppressed. In this distorted view, spirituality does not affect everyday life (Keith-Lucas, 1972, p. 202). In contrast, the mainstream Christian view is that the protection of human dignity and material well-being has direct relevance to spiritual well-being (Swift, 1956, p. 9). The Christian social worker relates to the client as a whole person in relationship with others and God, so any dichotomy between the material and the spiritual is artificial. In Mayo's (1956) view, the person is essentially a spiritual being. Therefore, "as social work is concerned with the individual in all relationships and with his fulfilment, it is actually dealing with spiritual matters" (p. 79). Mayo points out that this is true even though many social workers are not fully aware of the spiritual aspect of their work.

Hess (1979) presents a Christian concept of the spiritual. The spiritual dimension of the person involves an innate desire to give meaning to life and to actualize values through relationships with self, others, and God. As

indicated in this literature review, a specifically Christian spirituality is filled with theological and Christological content. A Christian fulfills this innate desire for meaning through loving relationship between people and a personal God who is transcendent Father, incarnate Son, and guiding Holy Spirit. Yet as Hess points out, a Christian need not limit recognition of spiritual expression to Christian doctrinal and institutional forms. He says that all people have an innate desire to find meaning and one need not posit the God of Christianity to come to an awareness of meaningfulness. "That meaning is made available to man in the creativity of his tasks, his reflective experiences, and particularly in the attitude he brings to situations of inescapable suffering" (p. 67).

#### Existentialist Conceptualization

##### Basic belief commitments.

Existentialism has become a major philosophical perspective in Europe and the United States during the twentieth century. The existential perspective has been introduced to social work primarily within the last twenty years. Some of the most commonly cited philosophical sources are Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Husserl, Sartre, Heidegger, Camus, Buber and Tillich (Bradford, 1969, chap. 2; Krill, 1979, p. 152). The religious traditions of Christianity, Judaism, and Zen Buddhism have also had

significant influence (Krill, 1978). There are theistic, atheistic, and agnostic forms of existentialism.

Underlying this diversity is a common world view that focuses upon concern with the human condition. Individuals are free to determine the meaning of their own lives. Authentic meaning derives from clear awareness of one's identity in relations with others in the constant process of moment-to-moment change (Krill, 1978). The qualities of freedom and individual dignity arise from the distinctive subjectivity of each person. This subjectivity of the individual is not a matter of isolation, however. The human condition involves inextricable intersubjective transactions between the self and other people (Bradford, 1969, p. 54; Krill, 1979, pp. 150-151).

A person's subjective awareness of potential for satisfaction and meaning encounters inescapable human limits and finitude, most intensely with regard to the fact of death. This contradiction results in suffering. Existential suffering is inevitable because there is a creative force for growth at the core of the person which brings one into experience of the conflict between desire and limit, life and death (Krill, 1979, p. 158). Existential suffering, often manifested in feelings of dread, shame and guilt, is rooted in the problem of alienation within the self, between self and others, and

between self and the totality of being.

Paradoxically, the human being is impelled to create and discover meaning in the knowledge that all systems of meaning are finite and flawed approximations of a mysterious and often painful reality. This awareness invokes a sense of dread in the face of the absurd. Nonetheless, each person must make choices, must create meaning, and must learn to survive through one's own mistakes and the assaults of social pressures toward conformity. As Edwards (1982) puts it, being human involves self-responsibility for one's choices in discovering and inventing arbitrary rules and authorities. "To-be in an existential world means that human being can never belong to a self that thinks the meaning of its behavior is determined by an agent beyond its awareness" (p. 26).

In the view of Christian and Jewish existentialists, authentic meaning becomes possible when the individual is able to transcend limitations and anxiety through spontaneous and immediate experience of others and God. Yet in the existentialist view, God is beyond the limits of human concepts. Therefore, the spiritual emphasis is upon experience rather than adherence to doctrines (Imre, 1971). Relying upon the convenience of beliefs asserted by religious or other authorities constitutes a rejection of one's freedom and responsibility. However, even in a

nontheistic view, authentic faith is a crucial element in the successful creation of meaning. Edwards (1982) states that faith is not belief in illusions or fantasies. Rather, it is an empathic expression of self toward others. "It is the unique manifestation of a commitment to spiritual communion meeting and encompassing the be-ing of two individuals" pp. 49-50).

Basic value commitments.

The existential perspective opposes the influence of depersonalization and conformity in contemporary industrial society (Imre, 1971). In contrast to the pressures of society toward conformity and to the awesomeness of human suffering, the existentialist asserts human freedom and dignity (Krill, 1978, p. 4). Each person must take responsibility for one's own freely chosen views of self and the world and their consequences in action (Krill, 1979, p. 15). Existentialism also asserts that merely rational means of knowing are inadequate, particularly in that they tend to reduce understanding of human relationships to relations between things, mere objects. Truth must be known through intimate personal experiences (Bradford, 1969, p. 17). In fact, individual determination of meaning should occur through responsible and loving relations with others.

As Krill (1979) says, "Human love is the effort to understand, share and participate in the uniqueness of

others" (p. 150). Existential relationship involves authentic acceptance of a person's intrinsic dignity and worth, expressed through caring and helping. In the terms of Buber's theological existentialism, this type of relationship is called I-Thou, one subjectivity relating lovingly with another subjectivity. This human relationship is rooted in humanity's relationship with the eternal Thou, the divine source of being. The solidarity of caring people helps them to hold the courage required to affirm meaning and creativity in the face of doubt, suffering, and absurdity (Imre, 1971; Krill, 1979).

Practice implications.

The existential social worker helps the the client to overcome both social institutional forms of oppression and psychological barriers that limit the expression of freedom and dignity. Through the solidarity of a therapeutic I-Thou relationship, the client is supported to actualize potential and meaning through clear self-awareness and responsible relations with others (Imre, 1971; Krill, 1979). The helping relationship is intense, open, and intersubjective, genuinely sharing the selfhood of the worker with the client. The therapeutic encounter helps the client to develop keen awareness of self and to tap one's creative possibilities for attaining meaning and satisfying relationships (Bradford, 1969). Given the concern about

constraints on human freedom and dignity, existential social work favors more effective service for poor and minorities; an attitude toward the client of caring, empathy, and affirmation; present-focused, experiential, short-term therapies; eclectic use of treatment techniques within the spontaneous therapeutic relationship. It discourages diagnostic categorizations and stereotyped treatment plans that strip clients of their distinctiveness and freedom. The existential therapeutic approach can be summarized as client-centered, experiential, rapid change focused, and sensitive to issues of values and philosophical or religious perspectives (Krill, 1978, 1979).

According to Edwards (1982), some specific treatment approaches that are consistent with an existentialist view are brief and paradoxical therapy, family systems therapy, reality therapy, rational emotive therapy, psychodrama, holistic therapies integrating body and mind, relaxation and meditation methods, client-centered therapy, and existential group therapy. Krill (1978) emphasizes the importance of phenomenological, humanistic, reality-oriented, interpersonal and unselfish social action types of helping approaches. He also incorporates insights and techniques from Eastern and Western religious traditions.

Existentialist view of spirituality.

There is a mystical aspect of the existential perspective in that both religious and nonreligious existentialists emphasize the importance of actualizing meaning in life through direct, clear, intuitive, and creative experience of reality (Krill, 1979, p. 150). Going beyond a psycho-social approach, the existentially-oriented social worker deals with the spiritual level of the client's suffering, helping the person to confront the absurdity of existence and the transcendent unknowability of ultimate reality with courage in order to discover meaning (Krill, 1978, pp. 2-5). The I-Thou way of relating among human beings is also seen as spiritual (Edwards, 1982; Imre, 1971). I-Thou relationship with between people and between people and the ground of being naturally yields love. Loving relationship is seen as spiritual communion. The spiritual dimension also comes into play as the person realizes the relativity and limitation of all humanly constructed meanings of self and world, becomes detached from them, and transcends them through immersion in the ongoing process of loving relations between self, others, and the ground of existence. In short, the existential view of spirituality emphasizes the courageous effort of human beings to confront the experience of human suffering and the limitations of human beliefs through loving, meaningful, and

responsible relations between individuals and between individuals and the transcendent source of being.

### Jewish Conceptualization

#### Basic belief commitments.

Like Christianity, general values of Judaism that infuse Western cultures have influenced the development of social work from its beginning. However, literature advocating for a specifically Jewish perspective in social work is limited to books and journals that are geared toward Jewish communal service rather than toward the profession as a whole. This fact may be related to the distinctive features of Jewish identity as related to professional helping. According to Neusner (1979), a Jewish scholar of religion, Judaism is a tradition built upon the scriptures (tanakh), ethical commandments governing daily conduct, faith in God, and membership in the Jewish ethnic community. Given the importance of Jewish law (halakhah) and living one's daily life within the context of Jewish community, it follows that a Jewish perspective for social work would emphasize its intimate connection with and relevance for the Jewish community. Given the challenges of diaspora and holocaust, many Jewish authors see the heightening of Jewish identity and preservation of the Jewish community as the key issues in Jewish social welfare (Bubis, 1981; Sprafkin, 1970). Judaism is a way of life, not just a religious or

philosophical system. However, there is a great deal of variety of life style and belief within the Jewish community (e.g. orthodox, conservative, reform, reconstructionist). As with the other perspectives, the description of the Jewish perspective here is based upon common elements found only in the social work literature and does not reflect the full range of diversity or detail.

In the Judaic view, there is an inextricable connection between faith in God and service, because the tanakh requires Jews to imitate God through partnership in the ongoing process of creation, including social welfare activities (Eskenazi, 1983; Schechter, 1971). According to Eskenazi, the God of Israel has no identifiable appearance nor a name which Jews may speak. Yet God sanctifies diverse and authentic emotions as well as fallibility. God transcends human images but also sanctifies the uniqueness of human experience. I-Thou is the proper mode of relationship between people and God.

The details of this relationship are prescribed by the Torah (Pentateuch) and its commentaries, pertaining to diet, Sabbath, morality, civil law, and Torah study (Ostrov, 1976). There are also communal commemorations of annual holy days (e.g. Yom Kippur), life events (e.g. Bar Mitzvah), and historical events (e.g. the Six-Day War). Religious observance is most strict among Orthodox Jews.

According to Ansel (1973), Judaic thought views human nature as essentially good (in the image of God), including an innate need for growth. However, this growth may be blocked by misunderstandings of self or external conditions. When this growth runs contrary to God's purpose and moral relationships, one must practice t'shuva (repentance), involving self-awareness and change of heart, to return to God's will. This process may involve a healthy feeling of guilt and reconciliation. Accordingly, Judaic thought includes an understanding of human behavior in terms of sin. Yet the relationship between sin and mental illness is a complex one in the Torah. Identification of a person who has mental health problems as a "sinner" in the pejorative sense is not appropriate (Wikler, 1977).

#### Basic value commitments.

As all people are created in the image of God, each person has intrinsic worth. The Torah concept of "loving one's neighbor" is expressed through commitment to standards of righteousness, compassion, and truth with regard to all people (Schechter, 1971). In particular, this love ethic has been expressed through systematic means of providing help to members of the Jewish community in need. The Jewish person performs acts of loving kindness (hesed) and righteousness (tsedakah) out of an inner quality of compassion modeled upon the compassion of God (Linzer,

1979). Therefore, the Jewish worker extends compassionate help to clients while restraining his or her own self-needs that may interfere with the client's benefit. Yet Bubis (1980) asserts that within the context of Jewish communal service, workers who are sanctioned to uphold the Jewish community must advocate community values to the client "when those values are demonstrably essential to the continuity and prosperity of that community" (p. 233). According to Nussbaum (1983), the core value of tsedakah (righteousness) has promoted organized and private efforts toward social welfare. However, it traditionally has been limited to the Jewish community and has supported class inequalities. Nussbaum suggests that the concept of tsedakah can be reevaluated in more universal and egalitarian terms to support a broad concern with social justice.

Practice implications.

Among articles reviewed, there seems to be a consensus that Jewish social work and social welfare should be directed primarily at affirming Jewish identity and protecting and supporting the Jewish community (Bubis, 1980; Gold, 1970; Levin, 1970; Miller, 1980; Sprafkin, 1970). However, this does not exclude providing service in response to social problems among the general American population if resources are available.

The Jewish worker who works with Jewish clients needs to affirm Jewish identity, values, and experience as meaningful and significant factors (Berl, 1979). Therefore, the Jewish worker needs to have knowledge of the impact of Jewish history, ideologies, geography, sociology, life cycle, and calendar (Bubis, 1980). Indeed, in order to be a good role model for other Jews, the Jewish worker needs to uphold Jewish values in his or her own life (Eskenazi, 1983). This does not only apply to adherence to Jewish regulations, but also to the inner cultivation of compassion, kindness, and restraint of self-needs as basic personality attributes (Linzer, 1979). In essence, the Jewish worker needs to combine professional knowledge and skill with personal Jewish commitment (Miller, 1980).

While the Jewish helping professional needs to be knowledgeable and sensitive about the religious dimension of clients' needs, he or she must also be able to discern between uses of religiosity in functional or dysfunctional ways (Ostrov, 1976; Spero, 1981). In order to avoid nonconstructive overidentification or collusion between the worker and the client's religious resistances, Spero (1981, p. 336) recommends that therapy begin with the following recognitions: that shared religious beliefs may involve shared distortions of religious expectations; that shared religious belief is not a legitimate motive for positive or

negative regard; and that both therapist's and client's religious beliefs will be subject to examination. Ostrov (1976) urges caution in challenging dysfunctional religious practices and beliefs. One approach is to attempt to deal with the underlying psychopathology itself in order to free the client to develop more constructive religious expression. If the religious issue is too great an obstacle to effective treatment, then consultation with a competent religious authority who is sensitive to psychological dynamics is advisable.

#### Jewish view of spirituality.

The Jewish social welfare literature reviewed has not employed the term spirituality. As Jewishness is a complete way of life, it seems inappropriate to dichotomize between spirituality and anything else. It might be best to summarize Jewish spirituality as a way of life grounded in Jewish tradition, community, and relationship with God. Jewish spirituality involves living in accord with both the spirit and the letter of the law to love God and neighbor. This love is expressed through acts of religious propriety and humane compassion.

#### Spiritist Conceptualization

##### Basic belief commitments.

Delgado and Humm-Delgado (1982) define spiritism as "the belief that the visible world is permeated by an

invisible world inhabited by both good and evil spirits who influence human behavior" (p. 84). The term is used here to cover a diverse range of religious traditions found on every continent. It does not refer to a particular formal religion, but rather to certain common underlying features of many religions associated with diverse cultures and American ethnic groups. These include the traditional spiritualities of Native Americans and many Hispanic and Asian Americans. The African roots of many black American folk healing practices are also spiritistic. For example, among Puerto Ricans, there is a variety of spiritistically oriented folk healing systems. These include spiritism proper, santerismo deriving from African and Roman Catholic beliefs, herbal treatment based on "hot/cold" balance, treatment of santiguadores based on physiological interventions enlisting the will of God, and curanderismo using Catholic imagery in folk healing (Delgado & Humm-Delgado, 1982). This cultural and ethnic diversity must be recognized as the context of the generalizations portrayed in the literature analysis.

Spiritism is only rarely described in the social work literature. As in the writing of Delgado (1977), it is usually described to broaden practitioners' ethnic awareness and to encourage openness to cooperation with folk healers rather than as a useful perspective for social work itself.

However, Frey and Edinburg (1978) and Canda (1983) point out that spiritistically oriented healing is the historical precursor of social work and other helping professions. Articles directly advocating for incorporating spiritist insights into social work are very recent (e.g. Canda, 1983; Cataldo, 1979; Laird, 1984). These focus upon shamanism, which is perhaps the most widespread form of spiritism. The remainder of this discussion will therefore deal with shamanism.

Shamanism is an anthropological label for the oldest and most widespread religious approach to healing in the world (Eliade, 1964; Halifax, 1979; Lewis, 1971). It is most commonly found in tribal contexts but also exists in agricultural and industrial societies. Shamanism typically describes the universe as consisting of three cosmic zones, heaven, earth, and underworld, each of which is populated by spirit powers. A shaman is a religious specialist of healing who utilizes trance and ritual to spiritually communicate between these three realms in order to maintain or restore harmonious relations among them. The shamanic world view is holistic. It believes in the intimate interdependence of the person (body, spirit, and mind) and the environment (social, physical, and spiritual). Therefore, shamanic diagnosis attributes both physical and mental illnesses to harmful spirit forces or conditions of

disharmony within the person, society, and cosmos as a whole.

The natural (nonhuman) world is seen to be a source of beauty and inspiration. The earth and sky are often described as our mother and father, with all creatures our relatives, since our lives are sustained by the natural environment. Therefore, shamanistic life style and healing typically include sharpening awareness of human connections and harmony with the natural world (Cataldo, 1979).

The shamanic view of human development recognizes that life crises offer opportunities for major leaps of growth. Since crises are dangerous, causing feelings of disorientation and personal disintegration, shamanic techniques are directed toward helping an afflicted person pass through a crisis successfully, at least with restored harmony and hopefully with enhanced well-being (Canda, 1983). In fact, the shaman typically believes that his or her own recruitment to the profession must include not only formal training but also personal resolution of an intense spiritual crisis.

#### Basic value commitments.

Although there are forms of shamanism that involve the practice of magical attack, shamanic healers are primarily committed to compassionate service for the human community (Canda, 1983). This compassionate stance is mandated by the

spirit guides of the shamans. Therefore, shamans intercede with harmful and helpful spirits on behalf of human welfare.

Shamans also value the personal cultivation of spiritual wisdom as well as practical competence, since both are considered necessary to perform healing effectively. Shamans are committed to uphold the harmony of relationships among all things. Shamanism views insights derived from a wide range of consciousness states as valuable, including dreams and visions.

Practice implications.

Shamanistically inspired social work would deal with the person/environment constellation in a holistic manner, incorporating the whole person, important social networks, and the physical environment (Canda, 1983). Indeed, the I-Thou quality of relationship advocated for people and God in Jewish and Christian traditions would be extended to the natural world. As Canda states, healing in shamanism involves "restoring or creating anew balanced I-Thou relationships between all beings and Being itself. Shamanic healing addresses the client, relatives, friends, ancestors, animals, plants, and beneficent and malign non-corporeal entities" (p. 17).

This does not mean that the shamanistically-inspired social worker must believe in spirits, but rather regards all beings, human and nonhuman as sacred and significant.

Therapeutic practice would also help the client to pay attention to the quality of relationship with the natural environment, not only in terms of physical resource acquisition, but also in terms of the client's openness to the inspiration and beauty of the earth (Cataldo, 1979).

Shamanistically-inspired social work would also utilize a wide range of consciousness states for both the practitioner and the client (such as meditation and trance to heighten empathy and stimulate creativity of insights). The kind and quality of ritual celebrations of life transitions employed by the client would be examined and improved where found lacking or dysfunctional (Laird, 1984).

The shamanistically inspired social worker would also practice personal disciplines that encourage constant personal growth and resolution of fundamental existential issues and crises, so that he or she is prepared to offer assistance for the clients' spiritual quests from a standpoint of personal experience (Canda, 1983). Finally, the shamanistically inspired social worker would be willing to professionally collaborate with religious support systems of the client that offer spiritual comfort and spiritual strategies for helping the client (Canda, 1983).

### Spiritist view of spirituality.

The spiritist view of spirituality may be summarized as the quest for harmony in relationships between individuals, society, the natural environment, and spirit powers. Spiritist spirituality recognizes the sacredness of all beings and the sacred quality of harmony in relationship among them. It is also very practical in emphasizing that harmonious life styles results in human satisfaction, healing, and well-being.

### Comparison of Perspectives

Figure 1 summarizes and compares the key ideas of each perspective reviewed in this chapter. Comparison of similarities and differences helps to delineate the necessary components of the emerging conceptualization of spirituality for social work by identifying the critical core ideas that must be included as well as the range of diverse beliefs, values, and practice issues that must be encompassed. Perhaps it should be re-emphasized that the characteristics of the perspectives identified here are based upon the social work literature, so they do not represent the views of all adherents to these perspectives, nor is the full philosophical depth of these perspectives conveyed. The intent is to use the generalizations and insights of this review to refine the components and parameters of a general conceptualization of spirituality

for social work. The differences between the perspectives will not be restated in detail, since they can be compared in the foregoing discussion and in Figure 1. This summary comparison will emphasize the broad varieties of spiritual views and the common core elements which must be included in a comprehensive conceptualization of spirituality for social work.

Comparison of basic belief commitments.

Each belief system reviewed addresses common core issues of knowledge and beliefs considered to be critical. These refer to ultimate reality (metaphysics); human nature and the human condition, including the meaning and purpose of human existence (ontology); the nonhuman world; and optimal relations between ultimate reality, human beings, and the nonhuman world that are conducive to maximum human fulfillment (epistemology and axiology). Most perspectives are theistic (Christian, some existentialist, Jewish, some spiritist). Zen Buddhism, particularly as portrayed in the social work literature, neither affirms nor denies theistic concepts. It may be described as nontheistic. Existentialism encompasses theistic, atheistic, and agnostic beliefs. Like Zen, it emphasizes the primacy of direct experience. The spiritist perspective encompasses theism as well as belief in spirit powers in the natural world.

Regarding human nature, all perspectives recognize suffering and alienation as basic to the human condition. Despite contrasting beliefs about whether people are innately good, sinful, or undetermined, each perspective sees that human beings have an innate desire to stop suffering by developing a sense of meaning and purpose. For Zen, this involves seeking enlightenment through direct experience. For Christianity and Judaism, it involves alignment with the will of God in all aspects of life. In spiritism, it involves recognizing and honoring the sacredness and harmony among all beings. All perspectives agree that human existence is intrinsically relational-- individual fulfillment is only possible through moral relations between self, society, the nonhuman world, and ultimate reality. Christian, Jewish, and spiritist perspectives tend to define standards of moral relationship in terms that are specific to cultural or religious institutional doctrines. Zen and existentialism, in contrast, emphasize that moral standards naturally arise from authentic moment-to-moment interactions, rather than from norms or regulations.

Comparison of basic value commitments.

While there is great diversity of beliefs, there is a striking similarity of fundamental values among these perspectives. Each perspective upholds the inherent dignity

of people. While some perspectives emphasize individual autonomy (Zen, existentialism) more than others, every perspective advocates for loving and just relations between people, the nonhuman world, and ultimate reality. Indeed, each perspective asserts that compassion toward others is the natural outcome of authentic communion in relationships. However, Christianity, existentialism, and Judaism emphasize compassion toward fellow human beings. Spiritism emphasizes that compassion and a standard of harmony should be extended to all beings in one's environment, including the nonhuman plants, animals, and spirit powers. Zen goes furthest in extending compassion to all beings in the universe.

In each of these perspectives, the concomitant of compassion toward others is transcendence of one's own selfish desires. In essence, one's own fulfillment requires a life of communion between self, society, the nonhuman world, and ultimate reality.

#### Comparison of basic practice approaches.

Given the common value commitment to compassionate and moral relationship, each perspective approaches the helping relationship as one of I-Thou mutuality. Each perspective is also holistic and ecological in addressing the connectedness of biopsychosocial and spiritual aspects of the client. Each perspective sees the primary aim of helping as enabling the client to overcome suffering and

alienation in terms of both subsistence and fulfillment needs. Therefore, the client is helped to heighten awareness of self and environment in order to establish mutually beneficial relationships. Each tradition utilizes various techniques of prayer, meditation, and ritual to assist both client and social worker in this task. Each tradition sees that the professional helper must engage in his or her own process of coming to terms with suffering and alienation in order to help clients effectively and to model the process successfully for the client. Each perspective is also open to cooperation between social workers and religious specialists, although some Christian and Jewish practitioners might be reluctant to cooperate with religious specialists of different faiths, given their own doctrinal commitments.

Comparison of concepts of spirituality.

Each perspective has distinctive philosophical and cultural coloration in its concept of spirituality. These distinctions are precious to their adherents and deserve respect. Zen and existentialist perspectives are perhaps least concerned with conformance to specific concepts, but they also uphold the positive value of philosophical, religious, and cultural traditions. Yet underlying these diverse colorations, there are certain common themes.

First, spirituality refers to the total process of human life and development, encompassing biological, mental, spiritual, and social aspects of the person. There is no dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual, although some perspectives (Christian, Jewish, spiritist) may include concepts of a human soul, spirit entities, and a Supreme Being. Even in these perspectives, spirituality does not pertain exclusively to the nonphysical realm. Spirituality arises from an innate human impulse to find fulfillment through establishment of a personal sense of meaning and loving relationships between individuals, society, the nonhuman world and the ground of existence- ultimate reality. This process inevitably involves heightening personal awareness and moral reflection. It involves courageous and faithful confrontation with the facts of human limitation, suffering, and the inconceivable nature of reality itself. Spirituality manifests in concrete ways for each person, perhaps involving disciplines of prayer, meditation, and ritual. Spirituality may also manifest through affiliation with religious institutions, but may not.

#### Reformulation of a General Conceptualization of Spirituality

This detailed literature review provides numerous insights for developing a comprehensive conceptualization of spirituality that is consistent with the tentative conceptualization offered in chapter one. By emphasizing

commonalities and by converging differences among the perspectives, the conceptualization is elaborated and enriched. In order to enhance clarity, the new conceptualization is divided into components.

(1) Spirituality is the gestalt of the process of human development, encompassing the biological, mental, spiritual, and social aspects. In particular, spirituality is concerned with the spiritual aspect of human life as it is interwoven with all the other aspects. The spiritual aspect refers to experience of a quality of sacredness and meaningfulness in self, the world, and the ground of being.

(2) The central dynamic of spirituality is the person's search for a sense of meaning and fulfillment, which arises from an innate impulse and need to do so.

(3) Since human existence is characterized by suffering and alienation, spirituality involves confronting these courageously and faithfully while developing a sense of meaning and fulfillment that help to cope with and transcend experience of suffering and alienation.

(4) The person's development of meaning and purpose occurs in the context of relationships between self, other people, the nonhuman world, and the ground of being itself.

(5) As a person grows in genuine awareness of self, the world, and the source of being, relationships are conducted according to a standard of mutual benefit, social

justice, and compassion.

(6) In order to enhance spiritual growth, many people employ personal and community activities of prayer, meditation, and ritual.

(7) Spirituality may be supported and guided by formal religious institutions and doctrines. However, spirituality is not limited to them.

(8) Since the social work profession is committed to an holistic and ecological approach to helping people, it is inevitably involved with spirituality, even though many social workers may not be aware of this.

(9) Therefore, in order to provide more effective service to clients, social workers need to deal explicitly with clients' situations in spiritual terms, but should not employ religious beliefs or terminology if irrelevant to the client.

(10) Social workers' understanding of spirituality must be broad enough to encompass the following diverse issues:

(a) clients' theistic, atheistic, agnostic, and nontheistic concepts of ultimate reality or the ground of being;

(b) any given religious, cultural, or distinctive individual belief context of clients' spirituality (e.g. Buddhist, Christian, existential, Jewish, spiritist, etc.);

(c) clients' particular experiences of suffering and alienation and their strategies of coping and constructing meaning;

(d) the quality of clients' relationships with self, significant others, the general social environment, the nonhuman world, and the ground of being;

(e) clients' capacity to experience and express compassion and moral reflection in relationships;

(f) professional helping relationship styles of mutual respect and growth;

(g) assessment and problem-solving strategies that help the clients to grow in a sense of meaning and fulfillment as well as practical need satisfaction;

(h) use of prayer, meditation, and ritual in helping as relevant to the treatment goals and beliefs of the client and also as components in social workers' own self-development and preparation for professional helping;

(i) utilization of positive insights and behavioral changes derived from a wide range of states of consciousness in the experience of both client and worker;

(j) professional cooperation between social workers and religious or spiritually-oriented helpers who are significant persons in the client's support network.

### Further Refinement of Conceptualization

The following chapter will present an analysis and synthesis of insights from interviews. The conceptualization presented in this chapter will be further refined by converging it with the interview insights. The interviews will be examined for confirmation or disconfirmation of the conceptualization as stated here and also to add additional details relating to issues of beliefs, values, and social work practice implications. However, since the literature analysis presented a very thorough overview of belief, value, and practice issues, the interviews will be used to supplement rather than repeat these insights. It is not the intention of the interview analysis to provide quantitative statistics on the numbers of adherents to particular viewpoints. Since it is assumed that all viewpoints are valuable in this concept-generating study, equal weight will be given to all viewpoints expressed by interviewees. Chapter four will conclude with a reformulation of the conceptualization stated here, taking into account the insights provided by interviews. The final chapter will present detailed implications of the conceptualization for social work.

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## CHAPTER IV

### INTERVIEW FINDINGS

#### Introduction

This chapter reports the findings of the constant comparative method of qualitative data analysis for eighteen interviews with social work scholars in accordance with the methodology described in chapter two. The data were analyzed in order to reveal significant insights about diverse conceptualizations of spirituality for social work as a supplement to insights derived from literature review. Findings of this analysis are presented here according to the major themes of inquiry that organized the interview schedule and the literature analysis: i.e. beliefs, values, and practice implications associated with the interviewee's conceptualization of spirituality for social work. Within each major theme, interviewees' viewpoints are compared and their underlying commonalities are summarized. These findings conclude with a convergence between the insights that emerged from interview analysis and the conceptualization of spirituality stated at the conclusion of chapter three. Thus, the conceptualization is

reformulated to encompass the complete range of insights revealed in this study. This chapter reports the findings of stage five in phase three of the research design, identification of perspectives.

Each interviewee was randomly assigned an identification letter. Citations in this chapter from interview transcripts are labelled with the identification letter and transcript page number in order to permit the possibility of a research audit. For example, "A1" signifies that the information cited can be found on the first page of the transcript for interviewee A.

As stated in chapter two, interviewees were selected who have demonstrated scholarly reflection upon the connection between religion, spirituality, and social work through publication or national conference presentation. In order to achieve diversity of input to the concept-generation process, the range of diversity reflected in the literature was duplicated in the interview sample. The primary characteristic sought for was diversity of religious or philosophical perspective, including representation of Buddhist (Zen), Christian, Existentialist, Jewish, and Spiritist perspectives. This diversity was achieved as shown in Table 1, which lists the religious or philosophical self-identifications of the interviewees by identification letter, and Table 2, which lists the interviewees according

to perspective. Diversity of self-reported practice interests is depicted in Table 3. These self-identifications were obtained from the form, "Insights Requested for Study on Spirituality and Social Work," (Appendix C) and the interviews.

In order to maintain the anonymity of interviewees, many of whom are well known in the social work profession, letter identifications will be associated only with perspective; further identifying information will not be attached to specific interviewees. Where personal pronouns are used to refer to interviewees, the feminine gender will be employed. In actuality, gender representation includes 5 females and 13 males. Not all interviewees are cited in the literature review, in order to eliminate the possibility of making an identification by matching interview comments with published comments.

The presentation of insights from interviews regarding beliefs, values, and practice is organized according to conceptual themes rather than religious or philosophical orientation in order to emphasize commonalities and convergences between perspectives for each thematic area. The conceptualizations of spirituality per se are presented according to perspective for the sake of comparison. In general, the religious/philosophical categorizations of interviewees proved to be a less helpful way of organizing

data analysis than the themes established by the interview schedule and coding guide. Whereas discussions of religion and spirituality in social work literature usually involve advocacy for a particular clearly identified perspective, the interviews revealed much greater overlapping and flexibility of belief systems. For example, interviewee A's views reflected Christian and existentialist perspectives together with influences from other diverse religious and scholarly sources. Interviewees F and G identified themselves as atheists, but they also advocated for the positive value of spiritist perspectives. In general, interviewees espoused a particular belief system while demonstrating familiarity with and respect for a variety of others. They showed that it is possible to maintain personal commitment to one particular religious or philosophical stance while being respectful and accepting of diversity of beliefs among clients and human beings in general. Therefore, most often their insights indicated general relevance to the theme under discussion, transcending the boundaries of their particular ideological and institutional affiliations. The themes used to organize this presentation of findings were extracted from the coding categories as derived from constant comparative analysis of the data.

**Table 1**  
**Interviewees' Religious or Philosophical Perspectives**

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I.D.	Perspective
A	Christian (Protestant) & Existentialist
B	Christian (Protestant) & Existentialist
C	Jewish (Orthodox)
D	Christian (Roman Catholic)
E	Buddhist (Zen) Influence
F	Atheist & Spiritist Interests
G	Atheist & Spiritist Interests
H	Christian (Protestant)
I	Native American with Christian, Atheist & Spiritist Influences
J	Jewish (Reconstructionist)
K	Native American with Spiritist Interests
L	Christian (Roman Catholic)
M	Jewish (Reform)
N	Christian (Roman Catholic)
O	Theistic Humanist
P	Christian (Protestant)
Q	Christian (Protestant) & Existentialist
R	Jewish (Reconstructionist)

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**Table 2**  
**Perspectives Represented By Interviewees**  
**(Overlapping Categories)**

Perspective	Letter Identification	Frequency
Atheist	F, G, I	3
Buddhist	E	1
Christian	A, B, D, H, I, L, N, P, Q	9
Existentialist	A, B, Q	3
Jewish	C, J, M, R	4
Spiritist	F, G, I, K	4
Theistic Humanist	O	1

**Table 3**  
**Practice Interests of Interviewees**  
**(Overlapping Categories)**

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<b>Practice Interest</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>Education</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Community Organization</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Clinical Practice</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Family Therapy</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Group Work</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Planning and Policy</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Administration</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Generic</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Research</b>	<b>1</b>

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### Comparison of Basic Belief Commitments

#### Human nature and needs.

The data revealed a remarkable similarity of general conceptions of human nature among interviewees, despite theologically-related differences of detail. For example, Christian respondents often used the doctrine of original sin to account for human beings' tendency toward alienation and suffering. Jewish respondents did not use this doctrine; one explicitly rejects it (R2). Instead, R and J point out that all people have the capacity for good or evil behavior and express their inclinations according to the interaction of personal choice and environmental conditions. The Buddhist respondent also contradicts the tenet of original sin by stating that the "basic innate quality (of human nature) is loving and gregarious and compassionate" while being "twisted by society in that we have to repress our natural selves in the interest of the production economy" (E1). Yet the Jewish position, stated in these general terms, seems to represent an underlying agreement for all perspectives. That is, all respondents beliefs are consistent with the view that human beings are faced with the task of actualizing their potential for self-fulfillment and loving relationships in the context of an environment which may be either nurturing or detrimental. However, respondents of all perspectives also point out that human

existence inherently involves experiences of suffering, alienation, death, and meaninglessness, whether the source is innate, self-produced, societal, or simply a result of human mortality and fallibility. As A puts it, human beings are caught up in a dilemma of reconciling a sense of personal importance and meaningfulness with the facts that they will die and eventually be forgotten; this is termed confrontation with the absurd in existential parlance (A1).

Interviewees agree that human beings have a capacity for coping with this dilemma by virtue of the fact that we are intrinsically relational in nature. Existentialist respondents emphasize individuals' autonomy and responsibility for selves. Existentialist and atheist respondents emphasize that people create their own sense of reality and meaning in the face of this dilemma. Yet all perspectives recognize that freedom of individual choice and meaning construction occur in the context of relationships upon which the individual is dependent for nurture, love and solidarity.

The various perspectives account for different ways in which relationships can provide a resolution of this dilemma. The atheists F and G emphasize that people "invent reality" (F4) through social interactional processes. Native American respondents I and K emphasize that social relationships (especially through kinship and ceremonial

participation) provide mutual support in terms of needs for both material sustenance and emotional nurturance. K expresses the significance of this as "that sacredness that comes through that relationship with your kin circle and the (ceremonial) societies you belong to" (K2).

Jewish and Christian (including Christian existentialist) respondents agree that social relationships are essential for individuals to satisfy needs for material sustenance, emotional nurturance, and meaning construction. However, while social construction of meaning is seen as necessary, it is not seen as sufficient. As B puts it, "all purely human constructs or institutions get perverted in time" (B2). The counterpart of human fallibility and limitation is the intrinsic dependency of people upon God. According to A, refusal to accept that dependency and to view oneself as the independent source of one's own creation is sin-- alienation from God (A2). Although it is often often overlooked, according to D, everyone strives for "meaning in their life and for union with the ultimate and with the energies spiritual and physical in the world" (D4). As N explains, "the human being is created by God and destined for a relationship with God" (N2). The defect in our nature is overcome by the grace of God, which enables people to live out the vocation to sainthood, to which everyone is called (N4).

The Jewish perspective is similar to these Christian views in that human beings are said to be created in the image of God with the inherent need to connect with God (C2, M2) especially through the attainment of goodness and holiness in relationships with other people (J2, R1-2). While the Buddhist respondent does not employ theistic language, E stresses the importance of directly experiencing a sense of harmony and connectedness with a "universal consciousness" and compassionate relationship with people and other living beings (E2).

This relational aspect of human beings necessarily extends to the nonhuman environment, upon which we depend for existence. According to C, the Judaic perspective on this relationship is that "man's task is to control this nonhuman world for the purpose of building a world, building a just society." However, this control "cannot be of a ruthless nature, wanton destructiveness for the sake of one's ego gratification" (C3). It must be within the limits of respect for all life forms. This is why there are ecologically oriented laws in Judaism, such as extending kindness and compassion for an animal to be killed for food. A similar Christian view is that "we were created to be the caretakers of our world environment in a constructive growthful way." Therefore, "our task is to love self, others, the environment or the created universe and God"

(H4). As N, expresses it, the earth is a treasure given to us to care for; we are degraded ourselves when we abuse the animal world (N5). Human beings' authority over creation derives from our own special relationship with God as beings created in his image (P4-6). But since all creation is a reflection of God the Creator, we must live with it in a harmonious manner (L3, D4). Indeed, according to A, nature provides a sense of connectedness and beauty to human beings. The world "gives love messages to human beings through the trees and the animals. Also it conveys the sense of power, the forces of nature that seem to be beyond man's control which is another message to man about his finiteness" (A3). Thus, in the Jewish and Christian perspectives, human beings actualize the positive aspects of their nature through a compassionate caretaking relationship with the nonhuman environment.

In nontheistic Buddhist terms, E points out that when a person experiences oneself in unity with the world rather than alienated from it, compassion is naturally expressed toward all life. In contrast, the feeling of alienation in socio-economic relations spills over into disregard for the damaging and polluting consequences of human production (E4).

The Native American respondents emphasize the qualities of compassion and harmony in relations with the

nonhuman world, as well. However, they do not employ the imagery of custodianship or authority of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Rather, they emphasize the complete integration and harmony of relationship between humans and the nonhuman world. In fact, the nonhuman world is seen as sacred and alive with spirits. For example, I says that "all things have spirits, even inanimate objects-- trees, sometimes people understand that-- but rocks, everything" (I3). Therefore, rather than exploiting, human beings should cohabit the world with nonhuman beings in a harmonious give-and-take relationship. K explains that when she was a child and someone hunted a deer, part of the deer was offered back to the spirits in thanks for the deer. K adds that when she cuts the bark off a tree for medicine, she offers tobacco, "thanking the spirits for putting that tree there so that I can get well. So that's to me, what is sacredness" (K3).

All interviewees agree that correct relationships between the individual and the social and nonhuman environment are necessary for human beings to satisfy their developmental needs. Human needs are described in all perspectives as encompassing material sustenance, individuation and self-esteem, nurturing and loving relationships, and a sense of meaning and purpose. Interviewees' views of human needs are consistent with

Maslow's hierarchy, in that material needs generally must be satisfied before higher level needs can be met adequately. Respondents D, E, H, I, O, and R specifically cite Maslow. Given a nurturing environment, interviewees believe that the full range of human needs can only be satisfied through a developmental process that includes a spiritual dimension of personal experience and growth.

Consistent with the previous discussion on human nature, Jewish and Christian perspectives assert that this involves fellowship with God and expression of this fellowship in loving and holy relations with other people and the nonhuman world. As R puts it, "a thoughtful person comes to realize that there is more to life than self. There is something beyond the person that is inexplicable, incomprehensible, indefinable, untouchable, and real" (R4). The Judaic ideal of living in accord with this divine mystery is akin to the situation of the priests during the time of the temple in Jerusalem. The priests were called holy vessels because "their lives had been so dedicated to the service of God that they themselves became vessels of holiness, not just the things they utilized" (R4). Paraphrasing St. Augustine, N says that the spiritual need for relationship with God is inbred in human nature; our hearts were created for God and we can't have rest until we rest in God (N2). A says that experience of the spiritual

realm, beyond the time and space limits in which we usually live, is the way out of the dilemma of living a meaningful life in the face of the absurd (A2). The need to connect with this spirit beyond the self may be especially keen during times of suffering or great joy (C2), significant life transitions (H3), and peak or mystical experiences (L6). Spiritual development throughout the life cycle involves growing in consciousness of a supreme being and integrating one's reflection upon the supreme being (L3). Relationship with God can be integrated into every aspect of daily life, so that one is "seeking God among the pots and pans" (N19).

Atheist respondents, while not accepting the tenets of any formal religion or theistic belief system, also recognize the importance of religion and spirituality for human development. "I've come to see that every culture everywhere for all time has dealt with issues of spirituality and religious faith and meaningfulness, and that is terribly important" (F2). G points out that religion plays a very supportive role in human development, providing a sense of purpose and meaning and a sense of hope and direction (G2). Religious behavior may also function as an outlet for frustration and resistance to oppression by minority groups ((G4). As Q says, "the mythology of religious tradition is absolutely essential to human beings"

(Q5). J explains that Judaic religious law helps to channel human development toward expression of holiness in terms of satisfying material needs as well as the need for atonement, loving relationships in society (J2-3, J6). Indeed J emphasizes that religion should alienate a person from unjust social structures rather than encourage conformity; indeed, in J's terms, all human structures fall short of the Kingdom of God (J9). However, as G and other respondents from Buddhist and Christian perspectives mention, institutional religion can also be an instrument of alienation and oppression (E4-5, G2, L4).

Aside from attachment to any particular religious institutional context, spiritual experience can provide a sense of comfort and personal identity (I4), and a mental health promoting awareness of a "life giving force" that engenders a sense of humble balance between one's ability to conquer and the need to surrender one's will (C3).

#### Intellectual sources.

Interviewees demonstrated a breadth of knowledge that includes widely cited social work sources as well as sources not commonly utilized in social work. Sources familiar to social work include social interactional, social psychological, humanistic psychological, and systems theories. Sources less familiar to social work include phenomenological and existential philosophy, cultural

anthropology, literature, Marxist theory, feminism, Jungian depth psychology, and religious scriptures and theology. Many respondents ecletically combined diverse religious and secular sources. For example, A referred to Buddhist, Christian, existentialist, humanistic psychological, and systems theory sources. J referred to Judaic, social work, and Christian sources. B and G expressed concerns about the problems of limiting oneself to any particular theoretical framework which may hamper spontaneity. Given their sense of caution about adhering to models, they prefer an eclectic, dynamic, and experiential approach to understanding the world and relating with clients (B3-4, G4). This attitude is consistent with the emphasis on philosophical or theological sophistication and holistic, systemic, and eclectic approaches to understanding the world which is pervasive throughout the interviews. Perhaps this attitude is a realistic response to the challenge of exploring the existential and spiritual aspects of human experience, which tend to defy simplistic explanations.

#### Epistemological orientations.

This eclectic style is also reflected in the way interviewees employ various means of acquiring knowledge about the world. Interviewees were asked to comment on their use of the following: empirical observation, rational analysis, intuition, religious tradition and scriptures, and

mystical (or peak) experiences. All respondents use multiple means of knowing in combination, so that triangulation of sources of information can yield a more reliable understanding than any one alone. Further, respondents unanimously reject a strict logical positivist approach as inadequate for understanding human experience, particularly regarding the spiritual aspects. For example, A sees both "scientific" (empirical and rational) and "artistic" (spontaneous and intuitive) means of learning about and relating with a client as essential for the helping process (A5). She also incorporates prayer, scriptural study, meditation, and church and sacramental participation into her personal life. B points out that values always underlay scientific investigation. Also, use of empathy and mystical experience ("a sudden realization of some truth") add together with values and scientific inquiry to form the basis of one's knowledge, so that no one way of knowing should be used to the exclusion of another (B4). As an atheist, G does not adhere to any religious doctrine, but also decries the bias of our society toward the rational-empirical over the intuitive-mystical (G5).

Most respondents do not set an absolute standard for priority of one way of knowing over another, but rather view them as complementary. One exception to this is N, who agrees that all ways of knowing should be used to check and

balance each other, but sees reason as the "litmus test" for the validity of all conclusions (N7-10). Another exception is E, who feels that mystical experience ("clean experience derived from meditation") takes first priority, since this involves higher levels of consciousness (E2, E6). Some respondents set a priority among these ways of knowing relative to their own temperament or experience. For example, some respondents are not personally familiar with mystical and peak experiences, although they recognize the positive value other people claim for them (J4, M3, O4). Also, Buddhist, Christian, and Jewish respondents utilize insights from their own religious traditions and scriptures in shaping their beliefs and knowledge. Interestingly, most respondents (including some without formal religious affiliation) do recognize the importance of triangulating scientific, intuitive, religious, and mystical means of knowing. Perhaps this indicates that exploration of the spiritual aspect of human experience requires a truly holistic epistemological approach, utilizing all the faculties of human knowing and understanding.

#### Comparison of Basic Value Commitments

It is already clear from the review of interviewees' beliefs that beliefs about the world are connected inextricably with value commitments. Respondents choose to accept or reject various religious tenets as well as

scientific theoretical orientations according to value preferences. They form value preferences about epistemology itself, such as the priority among various ways of acquiring knowledge. In fact, respondents tend to be quite explicit and forthright about their value preferences and the impact of these upon their world views and professional practice.

Motivation to engage in social work.

Analysis of interviewees' motivations to engage in social work reveals three main motivations: feeling of a mandate to serve; a desire to foster justice in society; and a search for self-satisfaction. Ten respondents explicitly mentioned a feeling that they are mandated to help other people. Religious and nonreligious respondents both expressed that they feel a mandate to serve originating from participation in cultural traditions that encourage humanitarian behavior. The Buddhist representative said that social work is a way to express compassion toward all life, which is an important value in Zen (E6-8). The Jewish respondents referred to their social work as a fulfillment of the religious and cultural mandate to help other people and to create a just society (C4, J5, M4). Christian respondents said that social work is an expression of "gospel values" (L6) and Christian vocation (N10). Native American respondents mentioned the strong influence of tribal values of cooperation, sharing, and mutual helping

(I5, K passim).

Interestingly, some respondents emphasized that this mandate is not simply internalized from cultural conditioning, but that it also arises from a transcendent or divine source. For example, E explains that compassion and the desire to help others naturally arises from meditative experiences of connection and unity with other beings through higher states of consciousness (E passim). In the Judaic perspective of J, the fact that humanity is created in the image of God, as custodian of the earth, involves the mandate that individuals should serve society (C4 and passim). H describes a "spiritual motivation" that began when she was two (H6). L points out that social service is a concrete means of expressing love for God (L6). B and N explain that the Christian concept of "vocation" or "election" means that the person is called by God to be of service to others by making the best use of one's talents (B5, N10). As B says, "I am impelled not on my own volition, not on making a conscious choice, but that is the way the Lord wants to use me."

For these respondents, the feeling of a mandate to serve is expressed in a wish to foster justice in society. This wish is also expressed by others, coming from a different stimulus. Many respondents mention a personal concern about the distress of the poor, minorities, and the

oppressed as a motivating factor (e.g. G5-6). This includes feelings of frustration and anger toward the injustices of society that prompt resistance through social work and political action (K7, O4).

Finally, all respondents mention that they derive some form of personal satisfaction from social service and that this motivates them to continue. Personal satisfaction derives from fulfilling the religious or cultural mandates, seeing positive changes in clients as a result of professional actions, and earning support for their families. Thus, one's own benefit and the benefit of others are mutual in the perspectives of interviewees. As one put it, "my own growth as a person is dependent upon relating myself to people who are very different from me" in helping contexts (A6). M says that professional service satisfies her search for a meaningful occupation (M4).

Congruence between personal and professional values.

To the extent that social work satisfies respondents' motivations to provide human service, there is a fundamental congruence between their personal (including religious and spiritual) values and general professional values. Respondents often affirm such basic social work values as advocacy for the needs and rights of the poor and oppressed and positive regard for the dignity of all clients. Some Jewish and Christian respondents attribute this congruence

to the fact that the profession has absorbed general Judeo-Christian values from American culture during its historical development. However, areas of value tension or incongruence highlight some salient points of interviewees' perspectives.

The first major area of concern regards a gap perceived by several respondents between the profession's avowed concern for the poor and oppressed and its actual present behavior. These respondents are worried that the profession is turning more energy toward lucrative private practice, career advancement, and professional elitism (e.g. through state licensure and imitation of a psychiatric medical model) while abandoning its traditional commitment to the poor and oppressed (A6-7, F8, I7, K7, O5, R7). One respondent points out that social work sometimes aids the oppression of people by supporting the socio-economic status quo (E7).

A related concern is that as the profession turns more toward a scientific management approach to helping, the helping relationship itself is dehumanized, becoming "I/It" rather than "T-Thou" (B5). In direct practice situations, the code of ethics is also not very helpful in providing guidelines for evaluating competing ethical requirements, for example, between protection of the client's self-determination, the standards of the worker, and the general

welfare of society (Q6). The tension of competing ethical requirements becomes very acute when a worker's personal moral commitment runs counter to popular sentiment in the profession, as in the case of a Catholic who wishes to protect the worth and dignity of an unborn child and also the mother who may wish to have an abortion (N12).

These examples of tension or incongruence between personal and professional values demonstrate that the spiritual orientations of the interviewees are very consistent with general social work commitments. They also demonstrate that on the level of implementing ethical decisions there are likely to be inconsistencies or disagreements of interpretation and implementation.

Significance of spirituality for value issues.

Underlying the value commitments revealed by interviewees are their spiritual experiences and orientations. This conclusion supports the contention that the spiritual dimension has a significant impact upon social workers' choice of theoretical and philosophical views, their motivation to engage in professional helping, and the specific ways in which they implement the service mandate. As L says, one's personal spirituality requires an expression through action (L7). From both religious and nonreligious points of view, this action involves compassionate service to alleviate individuals' suffering, to

help them develop meaningful and loving relationships, and to foster justice in society as a whole. For the theistic person, spirituality involves experience of a connection with God that provides a moral perspective on the dignity of the human being and the mandate to serve (N14). For an atheist respondent, there is a shared ideal that spirituality should yield a sense of mission to promote justice and fairness in this life as well as the next (G6). In fact, it is quite striking that respondents consistently associate spirituality with the fundamental value commitment to help other people. They see this value commitment as a natural and necessary expression of the social worker's own spirituality. From this, a fundamental moral principle emerges: that in the course of one's own development, one must aid the development of other people as well. It seems that this principle is not merely a matter of religious or social convention, but is rather a statement of conviction about the nature of human development itself. That is, everyone's physical support and spiritual growth is mutually beneficial and necessary. According to this principle, no one can truly achieve their own full developmental potential at the unjust expense of another.

### Comparison of Basic Practice Approaches

#### The professional helping relationship.

As revealed in the analysis of interviewees' commitments to beliefs and values, compassionate concern for individuals' well-being and justice in the wider society are common to all perspectives. These qualities are expressed in interviewees' preference for a helping relationship that is compassionate, empathic, affirming of client dignity and worth, and sensitive to the full range of client needs. Likewise, this compassionate concern extends to the environment of the client which will be affected by changes in the client system. J gives an illustration of this compassionate concern in macro community organizing settings: Martin Luther King's "notion of beloved community and the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed" (J6). King's notion involves the principle that it is necessary to balance firm opposition to social injustice with efforts toward reconciliation between oppressor and oppressed through nonviolent social action. This principle derives from a conviction that violence is opposed to the will of God and also that oppressors are often good people caught up in evil social structures.

Interviewees state many times that the client's own needs and situation must be considered of paramount importance in designing a helping approach. As R puts it,

the worker always must be sensitive to both client need and readiness (R10). Given this client-centered approach to practice, interviewees tend to be eclectic. We have already seen the eclecticism of epistemology and knowledge base. Eclecticism also extends to situation-appropriate choice of techniques. For example, K utilizes conventional family and groupwork techniques combined with use of fictive kinship supports and ceremonial activity as relevant to Native American clients (K5). G uses both micro and macro levels of intervention, including incorporation of ethnic religious support systems together with more conventional professional helping (G6). E supports individually oriented techniques for helping clients to overcome suffering on a personal level as well as macro oriented action to address socio-economic institutional sources of alienation and oppression (E8-9). A selects from a wide range of treatment techniques, including existentially oriented therapies and meditation, by attempting to match a particular client's need for growth (A7). She is opposed to the approaches of "the slick technician" who treats only symptoms while ignoring broader life issues and "the guru therapist" who imposes spiritual direction upon the client (A10). Both of these approaches involve the therapist's inflexible imposition of techniques and values upon the client.

In general, interviewees seem to share the viewpoint of B, who emphasizes the importance of an I/Thou quality of relationship as the context for an eclectic application of helping strategies; rigid adherence to theoretical models and helping techniques is rejected (B3, B7 and passim). F says that the therapist must master skills and techniques and internalize them to the point that they can be applied in an intuitive and creative manner in spontaneous relationship with the client. Like a well-trained samurai warrior, the skills and techniques become so much a part of the professional helper that one doesn't know when one is using them (F6-7). As J puts it, "a lot of helping comes basically by your presence for another person and by their faith in your ability to help" (J5). J suggests that the relationship of solidarity with the client in an atmosphere of help is probably the critical therapeutic factor. C emphasizes that successful helping relies upon trusting the process of helping itself, in which the client grows toward acceptance of the need for change and growth (C5). Each of these examples illustrates that the quality of the client-centered helping relationship itself is more crucial than the specific theoretical models or helping techniques employed, in the views of interviewees representing all perspectives.

In the views of respondents, a good quality helping relationship that is sensitive to the spirituality of the client includes expression of skills generic to all social work settings such as empathy (B7, M5), careful listening (I9, L8, N16, O7), and loving acceptance and tolerance (L8, O7, Q7).

Interviewees agree that the primary purpose of the helping relationship is to enable the client to satisfy needs for subsistence, nurturing and loving relationships, and sense of meaning in life. This observation is a consistent extension of the consensual beliefs and value commitments regarding human development reviewed in this chapter. Therefore, interviewees' approaches to practice go beyond remedial treatment of symptoms of suffering and alienation to address underlying social structural and existential processes. As noted in the review of beliefs, alienation within the person and between the person and the world is seen as a key cause of suffering. Therefore, both issues of intrapersonal meaning and social justice are addressed.

#### Significance of spirituality for practice issues.

The review of interviewees' beliefs and values has established that they define spirituality in terms of concern with the human quest for personal meaning and mutually fulfilling relationships between people, the

nonhuman environment, and, for some, God. Given this orientation, it is clear why the interviewees attune their practice to issues of meanings and relationship for clients, between clients and the professional helper, and between client and the environment. Social work practice is itself a spiritual endeavor, involving the growth and fulfillment of client, professional helper, and the environment. The moral and developmental principle set out in the conclusion to the review of spirituality and value issues is manifested clearly in practice: true personal growth for any individual requires the mutual benefit of all parties involved. It is not surprising then that interviewees utilize a variety of helping skills and techniques that explicitly address the religious and spiritual aspects of client needs.

Several interviewees point out that the social worker needs to cultivate self-awareness through skillful self-reflection in order to adequately respond to the spiritual needs of clients. "The social worker has to be in touch with their own feelings about the spiritual, about their own religious beliefs, be aware of their own unresolved issues around institutional religion" (D8). As D points out, the social worker must develop comfort in these areas in order to learn appropriate skills for exploring these issues without the distortions of countertransference. P says that

one can hardly engage a client in dealing with spiritual issues "without turning one's attention inward and having to struggle with one's own needs, sinfulness, inadequacies" (P10). H explains that self-reflection prior to contact with clients or students helps to restore her intentionality in a "positive constructive loving caring approach" (H9).

Interviewees agree that spiritually sensitive social work practice requires exploration of the meanings of life events for clients (e.g. J7, N16). F emphasizes that the exploration of meanings, from the client's own point of view, is much more helpful than imposing diagnostic clinical categories (F10). As A explains, a client can be helped to "discover meaning in his suffering so that his pain is not just something he wants to do away with, but is really a sign post for change in self-knowledge" (A8). C recommends exploring clients' theodicies at times of crisis in order to discover their ways of understanding suffering and God's role in their suffering (C6). Thus, clarification of meaning provides the client with a perspective that transcends the feelings of helplessness and pointlessness often associated with suffering. Of course, the meaning achieved needs to make sense to the client, rather than being imposed by the helper (M6).

With the exception of the atheist respondents, interviewees from all perspectives feel that relationship

with spiritual powers beyond the human can be significant in the helping process. As M puts it, the helping relationship "is one that involves the social worker being a representative of the community and of the ultimate reality and that relationship to the worker is a way of relating to that symbolically" (M6). Therefore the worker's skill in being open to this can be important. B describes a case in which a client achieved greater strength and courage to deal with her situation when she decided that she needed to develop her relationship with God (B7). D recounts "tremendously profound spiritual experiences in relationships with clients" in which unexpected breakthroughs occurred through the operation of the Holy Spirit (D7-8). In fact, P believes that truly holistic helping ultimately involves helping the client as a whole person come into relationship with God. The worker can only help a client to do this if the worker is willing to risk one's own perceptions of self and reality in openness to the spiritual dimension of reality (P9-10). In addition to these Jewish and Christian respondents, Native American respondents also affirm the importance of relating with the realm beyond the human, including ceremonial contact with spirits, as assisted by qualified medicine people (I9, K9). E does not directly address this with clients, but does support them when they have spiritual experiences through

meditation or other profound activities (E9).

With the exception of C, M, and O, representatives of all perspectives utilize prayer, meditation, ritual, or scripture study in practice, at least indirectly. C feels that these are inappropriate for a professional (C7). Although M is reluctant to use these in practice, she feels that they can be valuable if carefully and appropriately applied (M6).

Jewish and Christian respondents report that praying with a client or a student can be valuable (A5, D8, H10, I10, J7, L8, P11, R11). Some will invite a client to pray when they sense that it may be appropriate and the client is ready (D9, L8). Others will pray only at the client's invitation (H10, I10, J7). N feels that this is appropriate only indirectly, by referral of an interested client to a clergyperson (N16-17).

Several Christian and Buddhist respondents utilize various types of meditation in practice. While A is a Christian, she teaches clients a type of meditation that fosters mental clarity based upon Zen techniques (A6). E also teaches Zen type meditation, but carefully separates it from the promulgation of any particular religious belief (E9-11). Others use Christian meditation and contemplation (D8, P11) and guided imagery meditation exercises for insight stimulation or healing (D8, Q7).

Several Christian, Jewish, and spiritist (including atheists with spiritist interests) respondents utilize rituals that help clients to mark important life transitions and crisis resolutions or to foster involvement with meaningful symbols and community supports (e.g. H10, R9). As an atheist interested in the efficacy of rituals, F helps clients to develop their own meaningful rituals (F10). G, who is also an atheist, links interested clients with supportive religious networks and rituals even though she does not personally share the client's belief. As she puts it, "whatever is necessary to help that person get through the crisis and provide support... is where I have to go," whether this is a priest or a tree (G3). Native American respondents incorporate ritual process into groupwork with Native American clients, but if a traditional ceremony is to be performed, a qualified medicine person is involved (I9, K9-10).

Finally, two Christian respondents report using scripture study with clients. A may discuss a scripture story with a client to underscore an idea or to help the client examine alternatives in religious interpretations relevant to the client's situation (A5). P may use serious scripture analysis "to try to gain insights into human nature, insights into ways in which I or my clients might be out of sync with God's plan for the world" (P11).

In summary, spirituality is both implicitly and explicitly involved in the interviewees' practice. This is true as an influence in their own motivations, helping styles, selection of theoretical approaches, and choice of specific helping skills and techniques. It is also true in their attunement and response to clients' own implicit and explicit spiritual issues.

#### Comparison of Concepts of Spirituality

Interviewees were asked to summarize their definition of spirituality. Their responses make explicit the conceptualizations of spirituality interwoven with their views on beliefs, values, and practice. A review of their responses, organized according to perspective, will help in the reformulation of the general conceptualization of spirituality proposed at the conclusion of chapter three. Their responses also provide insights about the possibility and desirability of operationalizing the conceptualization.

#### Atheist perspective.

Although these respondents do not believe in a God, they are deeply interested in religious and spiritual matters. Their responses demonstrate that it is not necessary to believe in a God nor to participate in formal religious institutions in order to be committed to spiritual concerns. F is interested in the ways in which all cultures deal with issues of religious faith and meaningfulness.

During the course of her studies of these matters, she has developed greater consciousness of the spiritual dimension of her own life, without becoming attached to formalized religion (F2). She defines spirituality as being actively involved in the world, in a meaningful way that goes beyond preoccupation with subsistence needs to include a sense of sacredness (F8, F11). G defines spirituality as "a hope and a feeling that there is more to this world than the concrete and the material;" this feeling engenders a sense of mission to care for people and to promote justice and fairness (G6-7). G emphasizes that as long as the term spirituality is not limited to religious affiliation per se, it is possible for an atheist to be spiritual (G7). While I does not believe in God, she feels that all religions probably have some truth in them (I2). She says, "I don't believe in God, but I feel very spiritual... (Spirituality) seems to be reverence for land or reverence for life," to share with other people, to live harmoniously, and to experience that life has meaning (I4, I10). In fact, all three of these respondents have professional interests and involvement in the spiritist perspective. In particular, I has both Christian and traditional Native American involvement.

#### Buddhist perspective.

Like those respondents who identified themselves as atheists, E does not use theistic or religious language to

define spirituality. She relates spirituality to experience of connection with the world, sometimes achieved through meditation and other ways of reaching higher states of consciousness. Genuine spiritual experience yields a sense of compassion toward life. E is uncomfortable with the term spirituality in that it implies a spirit as something outside of oneself (E10). E also sees that spirituality is not limited to religious institutions (E5).

Christian perspective.

With the exception of I, respondents who identified themselves as Christian conceptualize spirituality in a manner consistent with the doctrines described in the literature review. I is atypical in that she expresses a Christian denominational affiliation but does not believe in God. She expresses a nontheistic belief system that is open to the insights of many religious traditions, particularly Native American traditions. For A, B, and Q, existentialist ideas are interwoven with the Christian perspective. Thus, with the exception of I, Christian respondents profess a theistic conception of spirituality. Yet it is interesting that they do not emphasize doctrinal details in their definitions of spirituality, so that their comments are relevant to a much broader range of people than Christians.

P relates spirituality to a dimension of human beings that includes but transcends the physical and temporal

aspects of human existence. This dimension of human beings derives from their being created by God and being accountable to God (P9). Similarly, N defines spirituality as the rational striving of people to understand the meaning of existence, including and transcending the merely biological, in terms of their true nature and purpose in relationship with God. Spiritual awareness yields a commitment to justice and a respect for life. N agrees that spiritual needs are not necessarily expressed through her own religious tradition, but does feel that Catholicism has a truth for all people (N2, 3, 15). B defines spirituality in terms of the nonquantifiable and existential aspects of relationships between people and God, involving a perception of holiness in everything. B is uncomfortable with the term spirituality in so far as it implies detachment from social justice concerns or division between body and soul (B2, 3, 7). Since D experiences God as incarnate in the world and in human relationships, she defines spirituality as the basic dimension of the personality that involves the "striving for meaning beyond and transcending self which is relationship with God and relationship with the world and our unification with all" (D3-4). She clarifies that religion, including one's creed, ethics, and liturgical practice, should help to express the spiritual dimension, but it is distinct from that dimension. Similarly, L

defines the spiritual as the aspect of the human that puts us in touch with the transcendent and is not limited to formalized religious expression (L9-10).

H sees spirituality as the aspect of the human being that incorporates and integrates the biological, mental, and emotional aspects while transcending them. It involves the moral activity of the inner self, or conscience, that helps people to discern harmonious ways of living. She sharply distinguishes between religion as an organized system of beliefs and spirituality as an inherent aspect of human beings (H2-7). A associates spirituality with the existential qualities of freedom, spontaneity, creativity, intuition, imagination. Spirituality is connected with revelatory experiences of God and a way of experiencing the world of spirit that breaks people out of the usual conceptual limitations into a sense of the eternal (A8-9). While A sees Christianity as having a special advantage in revelation, he recognizes that spirituality may be expressed in valuable ways through many traditions and beliefs. Finally, Q defines spirituality as one's understanding of the purpose, meaning, and responsibility of human existence, especially as this is expressed through intimate relationships among people (Q2-3, 8). Q distinguishes religion from spirituality in that religious "institutional beliefs are the product of the individual spirituality at a

given time and they have to be written down and codified to be transmitted to people but over the years they become pretty distorted and biased" (Q3).

In summary, Christian respondents usually define spirituality in terms of an innate aspect of human beings that is expressed through relationships with other people and God, a quest for a sense of meaning and purpose, and an experience of the holiness of life. It involves the human capacity to integrate biological, psychological, and social aspects with an experience of a transcendent realm that answers the need for meaning and holiness. Thus, there is no dichotomy between the spiritual and the material in the views of the Christian respondents.

Judaic perspective.

Jewish respondents express a view similar to the Christian, while emphasizing the immanental aspect of the "God-force" within the human being and human relationships (J6, M2). The inner God-force is expressed in concrete ways: achieving a sense of meaning and holiness through religiously observant life styles, caring relationships, and just community structures (J2-6, M2, R11). C emphasizes that spirituality is expressed through human aspirations, acts of kindness, appreciation of beauty, and attempts to understand suffering and evil (C7-9). R summarizes that spirituality is "bringing into one's life and world a sense

of the transcendent, a sense of the eternal, a sense of the holiness and the potential in everybody becoming holy, sanctified, better" (R11). J cautions about limiting the concept of spirituality to the mystical or a dimension separate from this world. For J, "the otherness and the thisness" of holiness are integrated. As M puts it, spirituality involves relationship with God, the ultimate reality which "is beyond the limits of immediate sensory perception" as expressed immanently in religious practice and service to others (M2). R affirms the importance of the distinctively Judaic way of manifesting spirituality while recognizing that spirituality is a universal human characteristic that may be expressed in other ways (R12).

Spiritist perspective.

The views of F, G, and I, who are atheists with interests in a spiritist perspective, have already been described. More specifically in relation to the spiritist perspective, I appreciates the spiritual quality of mutual support and unity brought about through Native American traditional ceremonies (I5). K associates spirituality with the sense of sacredness involved in relationship with one's circle of kin and participation in Native American ceremonies and sacred societies. In particular, spirituality is involved with mystical experiences engendered by traditional ceremonies such as the vision

quest or sun dance (K2, 6). As we have seen in the discussion of spiritist beliefs, this spiritual sense of the sacred also includes an honor of the spirits of the nonhuman world and a commitment to live in harmony with these powers.

Theistic humanist perspective.

The respondent indentifying herself as a theistic humanist defines spirituality as "an attempt to get beyond one's self and find meaning" (05). She regards this as a very personal and individualized search which is not limited to instituional religious forms (03).

Summary of conceptualizations.

This analysis of interviewees' conceptualizations of spirituality confirms the doctrinal distinctions noted in the literature review. It also confirms the valuable insight that spirituality, as a universal aspect of human nature and experience, is expressed through atheistic as well as nontheistic and theistic beliefs systems. Furthermore, interviewees comments about the universality of spirituality indicates that it is certainly possible and desirable for social workers to maintain personal commitment to their own particular beliefs and values while also affirming the worth of alternate spiritual approaches, especially when working with clients of diverse perspectives.

Underlying the various perspectives of the interviewees are several recurrent themes regarding spirituality. First, spirituality is an intrinsic and irreducible aspect of the human being expressed through individual development and relationship with the environment. Spirituality is not separate from any other aspect of human experience, but rather is the integration of all aspects. It involves the quest for a sense of meaning and purpose. It involves loving relationship with self, other people, the nonhuman world, and ultimate reality (however conceived). The spiritual experience of relationship and unity provides a resolution to the problem of human suffering and alienation. Spiritual experience also provides an integration of the immanent this-worldly aspects of life and the transcendent aspect beyond the usual limits of human perception and temporality. As the transcendent and the immanent are united in spiritual experience, one realizes the holiness of all things and comes to a profound desire to express compassion and justice toward other people and life forms. Spirituality may be fostered through involvement in institutional religions but it also may be distorted and hampered. Therefore, religious expression itself needs to be carefully evaluated and inspired by the standards of compassion and justice that arise from spiritual experience. Since compassion and justice result from spirituality, it is

the primary motivating force behind interviewees' commitments to serve people through social work. Social work itself then becomes a means for expressing one's spiritual mandates. Accordingly, as we have seen in this analysis, one's spirituality has a significant impact upon the formation of beliefs and values as applied to social work practice.

Operationalizing the concept of spirituality.

Interviewees were asked whether it is possible to operationalize the concept of spirituality. Responses include the following: unsure (A10, H10); yes (C8-9, I10, J8-9, M6, O8); yes, but only partially (B8, D9, E10, F12, G8, K9-10, L4 and L7-9, N17-18); no (Q); information missing (P, R). These responses do not relate to religious or philosophical perspectives, but rather seem to relate to methodological consideration of the most effective way to research and understand spirituality as defined by each respondent.

Of those who are not sure, only A refrained from comment. H questions both the desirability and possibility of measurement. She indicates that she is presently struggling with this question and has not come to a conclusion.

Of respondents who say it is possible to operationalize spirituality, all recognize that it would be a difficult

but worthwhile task. C suggests that this abstract concept can be made more concrete by questioning people who express interest in spirituality about their specific needs. In particular, clients' theodicies at times of crisis and overall life aspirations should be examined. I suggests ethnographic research into the details of ethnic groups' own definitions and behavioral expressions of spirituality. J says that God and holiness are known by their manifestation in people's behavior, so a person's spirituality must have observable results. M recommends use of qualitative methodology to deal with the phenomenological and unmeasurable aspects of spirituality. O states that it is possible and desirable to operationalize spirituality in measurable terms, but does not yet know how to do it. In short, respondents who believe it is possible to operationalize spirituality are addressing only the behavioral manifestations, rather than the subjective and transcendental aspects. Most of these respondents recommend qualitative methodologies (e.g. interviewing and ethnography), perhaps in recognition of the difficulty or impossibility of reducing a phenomenon involved with subjective experience and intersubjective relationships to a quantifiable and measurable form.

Those respondents who believe it is possible partially to operationalize the concept mention explicit concerns

about the elusiveness of subjective and transcendental experience. B points out that one is able to measure superficial manifestations, such as associated physiological changes or how much people pay attention to spirituality, but one cannot measure its actual quality. D suggests that qualitative research, such as studying people's self-reports, can help one to operationalize; however, "we just can't measure something so important and so delicate and so profound as the relationship with God." In a similar way, E points out that changes in consciousness states can be measured with biofeedback equipment, but the spiritual experience itself is ultimately ineffable. F says that one can measure religious behaviors, such as church attendance, but this does not reveal anything significant about the relationships and meanings involved in spirituality. In fact, she describes the measurement of spirituality as "the ultimate horror." G proposes that rational analysis of the key factors involved in spirituality can be valuable in clarifying the concept for teaching and practice, but that the phenomenon itself tends to escape rationality. K cautions that reducing spirituality to its measurable manifestations (such as ritual participation) will lose the holistic quality of experience. In contrast to K, L agrees that only behavioral effects of the spiritual can be measured but that this itself can shed valuable light on

issues of human development. Interestingly, she says that since God is truth, the pursuit of partial sources of truth through research is valuable. N suggests that spirituality has been traditionally operationalized through rational reflections in the writing of the saints and that these are valuable insights; describing spirituality cannot be limited to statistics and numbers. In short, these respondents agree that behavioral manifestations of spirituality can be identified, measured, and described, and that qualitative research may be helpful. However, there is disagreement as to whether such efforts are desirable or useful.

Only Q refutes both the possibility and desirability of operational measurement of spirituality. She praises the experimental method as a tool for learning about the material world but does not see it as useful for studying spirituality. Q prefers to use immediate feedback from the client through the process of dialogue as a way of evaluating the spiritual issues involved in a therapeutic relationship. She does not wish to use measurement.

In summary, all interviewees who addressed the question of operationalizing spirituality express concern about reducing the experiential reality to a superficial result or mistaken measurement. All respondents recognize an elusive quality of spirituality related to the subjective nature of human experience, the holistic quality of relationships,

and/or the transcendental aspect of ultimate reality. In the interviewees' views, it seems that qualitative research strategies which are respectful of the irreducible aspects of spirituality hold the most promise for developing further concreteness in the conceptualization.

#### A General Conceptualization of Spirituality: Final Form

Interviewees' perspectives on beliefs, values, and practice in relation to spirituality have been analyzed in order to supplement the insights derived from literature review. The perspectives presented in this chapter are very consistent with the literature review. This is not surprising since many of the interviewees are also authors cited. The interview perspectives are also consistent with the conceptualization of spirituality presented at the conclusion of chapter three. Thus the interview data confirm that the scope and content of the conceptualization is an accurate reflection and appropriate elaboration of present social work scholars' thinking on this subject. The interview findings also contribute additional details that can be incorporated into the conceptualization and discussion of its implications. The following conceptualization is a result of this convergence. It represents the final form of the conceptualization resulting from the concept generating process of this study. As specified in the requirements for a comprehensive

conceptualization set forth in chapter one, the conceptualization integrates consideration of knowledge, values, and practice application into a general framework that is inclusive of diverse perspectives.

(1) Spirituality is the gestalt of the total process of human life and development, encompassing the biological, mental, social, and spiritual aspects. In particular, spirituality is concerned with the distinctively spiritual aspect of human experience as it is interwoven with all the other aspects. The spiritual aspect refers to experience of a quality of sacredness and meaningfulness in self, other people, the nonhuman world, and the ground of being (as conceived in theistic, nontheistic, or atheistic terms). For many people, this quality of sacredness and meaningfulness is associated with a dimension of reality that exceeds the ordinary limits of human understanding and description, because it is experienced to transcend the material and the temporal while also being immanent within them.

(2) The central dynamic of spirituality is the person's search for a sense of meaning and purpose, which arises from an innate impulse and need to do so.

(3) Fulfillment of the need for a sense of meaning and purpose is integrally involved with satisfaction of prior developmental needs, such as for material subsistence and

loving social relationships.

(4) Since human existence is characterized by suffering and alienation, spirituality involves confronting these courageously and faithfully while developing a sense of meaning and fulfillment that help to cope with and transcend experience of suffering and alienation.

(5) The person's development of meaning and purpose occurs in the context of interdependent relationships between self, other people, the nonhuman world, and the ground of being itself.

(6) As a person grows in genuine awareness of self, the world, and the source of being, relationships are conducted according to a moral imperative for mutual benefit, social justice, and compassion. In fact, fulfillment of the individual's spiritual potential is dependent upon caring and mutually beneficial relations with other people and the nonhuman world. This involves balancing autonomous choice with moral responsibility.

(7) In order to enhance spiritual growth, many people employ personal and community activities of prayer, meditation, and ritual.

(8) Spirituality may be supported and guided by formal religious institutions and doctrines in diverse forms. There is also the danger that religious institutions may distort or oppress spirituality. Many people choose to

express spirituality without institutional religious affiliation.

(8) Since the social work profession is committed to an holistic and ecological approach to helping people, it is inevitably involved with spirituality, even though many social workers may not be aware of this.

(9) Therefore, in order to provide more effective service to clients, social workers need to deal explicitly with the spiritual aspects of clients' situations, but should not employ religious beliefs, terminology, or helping approaches if irrelevant to the client.

(10) Social workers must therefore learn to assess the spiritual aspects of client needs and to relate to those needs in terms of the client's own perspective and readiness.

(11) Accordingly, the professional value of respecting the dignity of the client needs to be extended to include respect for the client's own morally responsible choices for expression of spirituality.

(12) The professional helping relationship needs to be a genuine expression of the social worker's own spiritual commitment to compassion and social justice.

(13) Social workers' understanding of spirituality must be broad enough to encompass the following diverse issues:

(a) clients' theistic, atheistic, agnostic, and nontheistic concepts of ultimate reality or the ground of being;

(b) any given religious, cultural, or distinctive individual belief context for clients' spirituality (e.g. Buddhist, Christian, existential, Jewish, spiritist, etc.);

(c) clients' particular experiences of suffering and alienation and their strategies of coping and constructing meaning;

(d) the quality of clients' relationships with self, significant others, the general social environment, the nonhuman world, and the ground of being;

(e) clients' capacity to experience and express compassion and moral reflection in relationships;

(f) professional helping relationship styles that are client-centered, empathic, respectful, and caring;

(g) assessment and problem-solving strategies that help the client to grow in a sense of meaning and fulfillment as well as practical need satisfaction;

(h) use of prayer, meditation, and ritual in helping as relevant to the treatment goals and beliefs of the client and also as components in social workers' own self-development and preparation for professional helping;

(i) utilization of positive insights and behavioral changes derived from a wide range of states of consciousness

in the experience of both client and worker;

(j) professional cooperation between social workers and religious or spiritually-oriented helpers who are significant persons in the client's support network.

(k) use of research and practice evaluation strategies that are sensitive to the spiritual aspects of clients' experience without reducing spirituality to superficial measurable expressions.

(i) continuing development of the social worker's own spiritual experience and consistent expression in beliefs, values, and professional practice.

#### Implications of the Conceptualization

This conceptualization, together with the insights from literature and interviews upon which is based, have many implications for the profession of social work. The conceptualization includes many assertions and recommendations that need to be considered further.

Several respondents echo the concern expressed in chapter one as a rationale for conducting this study: that the social work profession cannot live up to its commitment to holistic service for the person-in-environment unless it increases its knowledge, understanding, and practice approaches relevant to the spiritual dimension of human life (e.g. D9, G5, L10). N points out that social workers are like sleep-walkers. They are engaged in a deeply spiritual

activity, but often lack awareness of this (N18). ⑥ suggests that when the profession wakes up to the importance of spirituality, there may be a crisis of professional soul searching-- but that this crisis will lead to benefit (G7-8). Whether or not a crisis in the profession results from serious consideration of the issues presented in this study, there are many significant implications to take into account. In the following concluding chapter, these implications will be examined.

CHAPTER V  
IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

Introduction

This study was designed to converge insights from diverse perspectives on the connection between religion, spirituality and social work in order to develop a comprehensive conceptualization of spirituality relevant to the knowledge base, values, and practice activities of the profession. Analysis and convergence of insights from an extensive social work literature review and interviews with eighteen social work scholars resulted in the conceptualization stated at the conclusion of chapter four. The conceptualization includes assertions and recommendations, which if accepted, have many implications for growth and change in the profession.

This concluding chapter is a report of phase four of the research process: creative conjecture about these implications. In order to cover a broad range of professional concerns, the implications will be discussed in relation to the areas of professional knowledge, values, micro practice, macro practice, education, and research.

Many of the recommendations expressed here were inspired by the authors of the literature reviewed and the interviewees. However, as they reflect the researcher's own interpretations and conjectures, their limitations and shortcomings are the researcher's own. These implications are offered in the hope that they will serve to stimulate ongoing professional dialogue about the merit of the conceptualization as well as the viability of recommendations for innovation that follow from it.

#### Knowledge Base

The conceptualization makes clear that spirituality and religion are two distinct concepts. By making this distinction, one can see that spirituality is a dimension of all people's lives, whether religious or not. Since spirituality is a basic aspect of being human, the social work knowledge base needs to deal with it. Only thus can the profession uphold its commitment to holistic and ecological understanding.

Our knowledge of both religion and spirituality needs to be expanded. We need to examine variations of religiosity and their beneficial and deleterious effects upon client functioning. We also need to explore ways of understanding and communicating about spirituality in relation to panhuman or transcultural aspects. While these may seem to be enormous tasks, there has already been a

large amount of work done. The social work profession can benefit by incorporating the insights developed in many fields, most notably cultural anthropology, comparative religious studies, theology, philosophy, literature and fine arts, humanistic and transpersonal psychologies, pastoral counseling, spiritual direction, and ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. In addition, the social work profession can conduct its own research geared to its particular needs and purposes. Given the vast body of knowledge and range of possible inquiry, it seems appropriate for some social workers to specialize in the field of spirituality and social work. However, knowledge about spirituality should not be limited to specialists. It should be incorporated into the common knowledge base through education.

On a very general level, the continuing efforts of the profession to define itself and to develop general paradigms need to incorporate consideration of the spiritual nature of social work activity. On a very specific level, social workers can learn about the particular spirituality of each client, using dialogue with the client as well as reading of relevant literature. Questions related to religion and spirituality should be included on intake forms and in assessment interviews.

As shown in literature reviewed in chapter one, there is increasing advocacy for holistic, ecological, and phenomenological perspectives in social work. This stance is further reinforced by the inherent difficulties in learning about spirituality. An important recommendation suggested by interview analysis is triangulation between various ways of knowing: direct empirical observation, rational analysis, intuition, and mystical or peak experiences. Such an holistic epistemology would require that the profession more clearly define these terms and develop disciplined ways of exercising these ways of knowing. For example, most religious traditions have developed techniques of meditation and contemplation to enhance personal functioning, to stimulate insight and intuitive processes, and to foster wisdom (see Ajaya; Khan; Pelletier & Garfield; Tart). These need to be studied and adapted into our professional repertoire of research methodologies, helping strategies, and general epistemology.

This study has demonstrated the inextricable linkage between beliefs and values. By facing the ambiguities and difficulties of studying spirituality, the profession can become more humble about its claims of having definitive knowledge. The interviews showed that it is possible to recognize the relativity of one's own beliefs, to respect others' beliefs, and at the same time to hold a commitment

to one's own beliefs. The fact that there are many diverse and compelling conceptions of the nature of human beings and the universe should engender an appreciation for the relativity of truth claims, even when made under the aegis of science. However, recognizing personal and cultural relativity does not necessarily imply moral relativism. It challenges us to be more sophisticated and knowledgeable in setting value priorities and committing ourselves to particular theories and models of human behavior and professional helping.

The study and experience of spirituality poses very difficult questions to answer. We have seen the diversity of beliefs expressed in this research. How can their truth value be evaluated? Is there a God? Is there objective evil? Is human nature essentially good, bad, or indifferent? Is there life after death? Why do people suffer? Since these issues are so crucial --literally matters of understanding life and death-- they need to be discussed with tolerance for controversy in social work literature, conferences, and classrooms. The profession may not be able to provide the answers, but it certainly needs to overcome its reluctance to examine the questions. If not, the professional pursuit of knowledge will not prepare social workers to help their clients who struggle with these questions.

Spiritual growth involves introspection and moral reflection for the development of self-knowledge and wisdom. Certainly, each social worker needs to develop this self-knowledge in order to be able to respond to the spiritual needs of clients effectively. Likewise, the knowledge base of social work as a whole, borrowed from other disciplines and self-developed, constitutes in effect the cognitive aspect of the collective spirituality of the profession. Its own meaning constructs impact professional behavior just as the meaning constructs of clients contribute to their fulfillment or debilitation. In view of this, the profession needs to examine itself through publications, conferences, and other forms of professional dialogue-- how helpful is the profession's spirituality and in what ways does it fall short?

#### Professional Value Issues

The conceptualization of spirituality states that spiritual maturity results in experience of compassion and concern for social justice. Although professional values enshrined in the code of ethics have roots in the Judeo-Christian tradition, their connection with spiritual maturity is less clear. On the most superficial level, they become values propagated through education and enforced through professional sanctions. On a deeper level, many social workers uphold these values with deeply heartfelt

commitment. We have seen that the interviewees are in fact deeply committed to fundamental professional values. But it seems that the source of their commitment is primarily spiritual experience of compassion rather than mere professional indoctrination. The profession needs to encourage moral reflection, careful evaluation of ethical dilemmas, and general spiritual growth among social workers in order to vitalize the value commitments with profound experience. The weakness of reliance upon professional value conventions rather than spiritual imperatives for compassion and social justice is shown by interviewees' concerns about professional trends toward acquisition of wealth and prestige that threaten our commitment to the poor and oppressed.

Ethical decision making, especially in situations of competing goods, can be a difficult process. Several authors reviewed in chapters one and three, as well as interviewees, point out the need for refinement of professional guidelines for ethical decision making. A spiritual perspective would suggest that these guidelines be rooted in a sense of moral responsibility to maximize the benefit of all parties impacted by a decision. For example, the professional value of self-determination should not be misused to encourage narcissism. The principle of compassion requires that changes brought about in a target

system be examined for their effects on interacting systems. This fits with the code of ethics' rigorous demand of simultaneous responsibility to client, profession, agency, law, and society as a whole. It also fits with an ecological view of the person-in-environment.

Moral and ethical decision making become even more difficult when a social worker's own values conflict with professional or societal trends, as illustrated by the Catholic interviewee's stand on abortion. Open professional discussions about disputed value issues such as prenatal diagnosis, genetic engineering, and prolongation of biological functioning after brain death, should be required as part of professional training.

The conceptualization of spirituality suggests that ethical decision making cannot be complete without tapping the spiritual aspect of the decision maker. Gut feelings about values and rational schemes for setting priorities need to be enhanced by serious meditative reflection. Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, and spiritist perspectives cited in this study claim that the ultimate source of compelling values transcends the merely human realm. These perspectives suggest that transcendence of self-centeredness through prayer and meditation results in moral insight and clarity. The merit of this claim needs to be

evaluated, for social workers may be able to employ meditative disciplines to enhance their capacity to reflect and decide.

Finally, a few specific ethical principles are suggested by the conceptualization. First, religious tolerance and respect for a client's particular spiritual perspective should be seen as a necessary aspect of granting unconditional positive regard. Second, social worker's need to carefully and conscientiously challenge aspects of a client's spirituality that are harmful to self or others. Third, the social worker should exercise utmost caution in order to avoid inappropriate proselytizing and religious witnessing. Ethical guidelines for exploring the spiritual dimension in practice with clients need to be further developed, along the lines begun by Keith-Lucas as described in chapter three.

#### Micro Practice

Parts 9-13 in the conceptualization of spirituality include many recommendations applicable to practice with individuals, groups, and families. First of all, as mentioned in the discussion of implications for knowledge base, the social worker needs to develop knowledge of self and clients regarding religious issues and spiritual growth. Inquiry of the client's spirituality needs to proceed according to the ethical guidelines suggested in the

previous paragraph in order to uphold respect for the client's dignity. Self-inquiry of the social worker's own spirituality needs to be a disciplined and consistent process of personal and professional growth. The social worker should examine his or her own beliefs, motivations, values, and activities in relation to their impact upon the client's spirituality. Complementarily, self-reflection upon the social worker's reactions to the client's spirituality can help in the worker's own discernment and spiritual growth.

The professional helping relationship needs to be a genuine expression of the social worker's spiritual commitment to compassion and social justice. The relationship thus becomes one of an "I" empathically relating with a "Thou". In such a relationship, while the client is intended as the primary beneficiary, the worker also grows.

The helping relationship can serve as a model for the client, demonstrating that loving and healing relationships are possible, even if the client has been hurt or rejected by others. As relationship is crucial to spiritual growth, the experience of a caring relationship can be a major boon to the client's spiritual development.

As the social worker explores underlying dynamics of the client's suffering, both lack of resources and lack of

meaning need to be addressed. The conceptualization of spirituality emphasizes that where there is suffering, there is also most likely alienation-- from self, from other people, from nature, from the ground of being. The factors involved in this alienation need to be dealt with in helping whenever possible. The alienation may involve deprivation of means of subsistence, self-esteem, or loving relationships. It may involve disorientation and anxiety in times of crisis. It may involve confrontation with the absurd through awareness of mortality and death. It may involve social structures that oppress the client. While these problems are being redressed, the client's internal struggle to work out a sense of meaning and reconciliation needs to be aided. For example, how does the client explain the cause and meaning of suffering and injustice (theodicy)? The client can be helped to construct and discover meanings that provide insights for transforming suffering into an opportunity for growth.

Clients sometimes have spiritually significant experiences that sound unfamiliar or bizarre to the worker. Care must be taken in clinical assessment not to confuse insights from altered states of consciousness or peak experiences with psychopathology. Religious visions, trance, and paranormal events may be reported by people who make a special commitment to focus on their spiritual growth

or who are caught in the midst of a spiritual crisis. In particular, clients who regularly practice meditation or participate in charismatic or spiritist religious groups are likely to experience a broader range of states of consciousness than the social worker who does not. If the worker is not competent to deal with these experiences in a constructive manner, the client should be referred elsewhere. Guidelines for differential clinical assessment need to be developed along with spiritually-sensitive ways of helping the client understand and integrate the experiences. Some headway in this area has been made by humanistic and transpersonal psychotherapies as well as by religious traditions that have focused on developing these experiences (Wapnick, 1980). These insights need to be incorporated into the training of clinical social workers.

If caring and harmonious relations with the nonhuman world is a necessary concomitant of spiritual growth, as the conceptualization suggests, then the client's relationship with his or her nonhuman environment is important. Social work references to "person-in-environment" most frequently refer to the social environment and sometimes include material resources. Yet the nonhuman world is rarely addressed in social work literature with the sense of respect and appreciation expressed by interviewees. Perhaps social workers need to develop a rapport with nature

themselves in order to realize the potential benefits for clients. On a macro level, it is obvious that destruction of the environment is also harmful to humans. But the spiritual perspectives reviewed here suggest that there is a more profound level to this interdependence, in which experience of nature can provide a source of beauty and sacredness. The influence of nature-human interrelations upon client functioning needs to be explored in greater depth in order to evaluate its significance and to develop programs, such as wilderness retreats, that may enhance the relationship.

With the exception of atheist interviewees, all perspectives emphasized the importance of relationship with ultimate reality, whether defined in theistic or nontheistic terms. The conceptualization of spirituality implies that, when relevant to client goals for personal growth, it is important to be alert to the client's relationship with ultimate reality, the meanings and symbols imparted to it, and the benefit or harm this involves. With these considerations, the common phrase "person-in-environment" is expanded to include relationships between client, the social environment, the nonhuman world, and ultimate reality.

The conceptualization of spirituality suggests that certain criteria could be established to assess a client's moral and spiritual development. The work cited by Kohlberg

and Fowler in chapter one is a helpful beginning in regard to moral development. Perhaps the social worker could evaluate the client's spiritual development according to the client's life satisfaction, degree of caring and love in relationships with others, capacity for sophisticated moral reflection, and willingness to come to terms with mortality and other challenges to a sense of meaning and purpose. Much work needs to be done to develop assessment criteria. At the same time, these criteria should not be used to reduce the client's spirituality to externally observable behaviors.

Finally, professional helping may be significantly enhanced by the introduction of prayer, meditation, contemplation, ritual, and scripture study, as appropriate to the client's own orientation. Nonsectarian forms of meditation and ritual have already been advocated for social work practice, as discussed in the literature review. However, there remain numerous meditative and ritual therapeutic techniques from Eastern and Western religious traditions that have not been discussed or applied in social work (see Grossinger, 1980; Kleinman, 1980; Wilber, 1981). In addition, guidelines for assessment of client willingness and readiness to employ specifically religious prayers and other practices need to be developed. Social workers who do not share the religious orientation of

clients may need to learn how to help the client pursue these religious interests, just as with any other interest that worker and client do not share. Likewise, for the social worker who does not share the client's regard for religious scriptures or writings, it is still possible to give serious consideration to any of these that are important to the client, whether it is the Tibetan Book of the Dead, the Chinese I Ching, or the New Testament. Of course, when the social worker feels uncomfortable with employment of some religious or spiritual practice desired by the client, a referral to an appropriate clergyperson, spiritual director, or other qualified person should be made. Certainly, significant religious community support systems of the client, including clergy, monks, or shamans, can be cooperated with in a teamwork approach to helping the client.

### Macro Practice

For the purpose of this discussion, the term macro practice is used to include social work in administration, community organization, and social policy. From the dearth of material in literature review and interview analysis on this topic, it is apparent that little work on the connection between spirituality and macro practice has been done. Therefore, a major implication of this research is that more attention needs to be directed toward this area.

An interesting question requiring further study is whether collectivities-- groups, organizations, communities, societies, or even the human species as a whole-- can be said to have a spirituality of their own. Most of the discussion in this study refers to individuals' spiritualities (albeit in relationship with others). Yet what of groups' spiritualities? For example, is there a spirituality of a Christian social service agency and is it significantly different from that of a public agency? This speculation is given credence when viewed in the context of studying culture. Cultural anthropologists and historians of religion frequently use the term religion in a broader sense than religious institutions or sects. The term religion is often used to refer to cultural patterns of meanings, symbols, myths, and rituals with reference to experience of the sacred (Comstock, 1984). Following the analogy with culture, further study should be directed to the question of the ways in which the spirituality of the collectivity, as more than the sum of its constituent parts, both results from and impacts upon the spiritualities of its individual members, especially through the arena of social policy.

In regard to macro practice, community organization strategies can be enhanced by enlisting the aid of religious and ethnic support systems that have spiritual concerns.

The parish or synagogue community, ethnic mutual assistance organizations, kinship networks, and folk healers are all potentially significant sources of aid for a client. In fact, they may be client-systems themselves, on whose behalf the community organizer is enlisted. This approach has already been advocated for social work, as shown in the literature review and interview analysis. However, interviewees who are involved with this type of practice expressed concern that social workers are often skeptical of this or lack training in the skills necessary to successfully conduct such strategies. For example, community organizers need to carefully examine the ways in which religious institutions and support groups can help member clients satisfy their needs for material and social support as well as for sense of meaning and purpose. Also, the possible deleterious effects of religious organizations, such as enforcement of conformity or class oppression, need also be considered.

When spiritual standards of compassion and social justice are applied to community organizing and political action for social change, strategies that maximize the benefit of all parties are preferable to strategies that liberate one group and oppress another. Martin Luther King's principle of the "beloved community," discussed in chapter four, is one example of this. Spiritually-oriented

political action strategies need to be further explored and developed within social work, such as those of King and Mahatma Gandhi.

It is also fruitful to consider the implications of conducting agency administration according to a spiritual commitment to "I-Thou" relationships. It seems that such an administrative style would emphasize open systems design, sharing information and power in a relatively egalitarian manner among executives, staff, and clientele. Spiritually-oriented administrators could benefit from meditation for stress management and clarity in decision-making. Compassionate administration would encourage management techniques that balance cost-effectiveness with client-satisfaction.

Finally, as increasing spiritual awareness expands one's view of the connections between all people and all existence, spiritually-oriented macro practice would need to take into consideration the impact of decisions upon the nonhuman environment and the global community. This view promotes a general social policy goal of a just social and geo-political order in harmony with the ecology of the planet. Policy issues arising from this perspective are being debated within the Green movement, particularly in Europe (Capra & Spretnak, 1984). Social work could benefit by examining the experience of the Greens.

### Education

As pointed out in the previous discussion, social workers need to learn how to be self-reflective and competent to deal with the spiritual needs of clients. In order to accomplish this, social work education should include content on religion and spirituality. Just as with ethnic, gender, and life style issues, spirituality needs to be dealt with both through specialized courses and through pervasive discussion whenever relevant in all courses. It is therefore important to develop curricular materials concerning spirituality and social work. This educational development would be encouraged by formal endorsement from the Council on Social Work Education.

Since spiritual growth involves experience in relationships, an experiential component of education would facilitate the student's preparation to deal with clients' spiritual needs. It may be useful to develop new learning methods that are inspired by religious and spiritual disciplines, such as examination of conscience, introspective meditation and contemplation, and group ritual processes.

Finally, social work students learn from observing faculty as role models, beyond the formal instruction. In order to have congruence between faculty as role models and faculty as instructors about spirituality, it seems

necessary that faculty develop their own spirituality. If faculty can manifest a high degree of personal resolution about existential and ethical dilemmas and treat colleagues and students in a compassionate manner, then the aims of spiritually-oriented social work education will be well advanced.

### Social Research

The implications for expanding our professional knowledge base suggest many research questions. For example, what are the effects of spiritually significant altered states of consciousness on perception and behavior? How do individuals and groups symbolize their spiritual experience and what are the effects of the various symbols? Are there discernable stages of spiritual development and how would they be distinguished? What are the differences between psychotic hallucinations and delusions and authentic spiritual visions and insights? Which helping relationship styles and strategies are the most effective in enabling the spiritual growth of clients? Are there aspects of spirituality that are shared by all humans, beyond cultural variation? What is the effectiveness of religious and folk healers? What therapeutic innovations can be developed by adaptation of religious meditation and ritual techniques for nonsectarian spiritual helping? The research experience of other fields that have a longer history of study in this

area can be tapped by social work researchers. In addition, social work researchers can develop more research questions and methodologies that are specially suited to our profession's needs.

Social work research on spirituality needs to be attuned to the intersubjective and transcendent aspects of the subject matter. Therefore, qualitative and combined qualitative/quantitative research designs are likely to be most helpful. Phenomenological and ethnographic research strategies can be useful for studying both intersubjective experience and group patterning of spirituality. Even quantitative statistical research on patterns of religious behavior of client groups could be a useful source of information for both micro and macro practice.

However, as interviewees consistently caution, research on spirituality must not make the mistake of reducing spiritual experience to observable behaviors. For example, a person's frequency of attendance at religious service says nothing about that person's degree of resolution about existential issues or commitment to standards of compassion and social justice. It also says little about the quality of the person's relationship with self, other people, the nonhuman world, or ultimate reality. Another mistake is to claim that subjective or transcendental experiences that cannot be measured, cannot be real. Social work research

needs to develop a more phenomenological understanding of epistemology.

These reflections lead to consideration of operationalizing the conceptualization of spirituality. The concept of spirituality, could be operationalized in measurable terms simply by reducing its meaning to specific empirical referents. This problem is no different from operationalizing any other abstract concept, such as alienation. However, the same pitfall also applies. Through analytical reduction, the concept loses its connection with the existential reality of the experience. As the famous first line of the Taoist text Tao Te Ching says, the Tao that can be named is not the real Tao (Lao Tsu, 1972). Likewise, the spirituality that can be measured is not the real spirituality. For the sake of research expediency, spirituality can be defined and measured, but the gap between the reality and the operationalization must always be made explicit in the research design and report. In order to avoid the dangers of reductionism, perhaps it is best to rely on qualitative research strategies that do not employ strict operationalization. According to the distinction set in this conceptualization of spirituality, religious behavior may be more appropriately operationalized than spiritual experience.

Finally, there are traditional religious research methods that have been geared toward the subjective aspect of spirituality that could be explored. For example, there are many forms of Hindu yoga, Buddhist meditation, and Christian contemplation that are basically strategies for researching consciousness itself (e.g. Pelletier & Garfield, 1976; Tart, 1975). Western science has tended to focus on development of skill in extroverted research. This can be complemented by spiritual strategies of introverted research.

### Conclusion

#### Contributions of the study.

The expectation for contributions of the study indicated in chapter one have been met. A comprehensive conceptualization of spirituality for social work has been developed. Attention of the profession is called to this neglected area of social work's goals and performance. Since the conceptualization incorporates diverse perspectives, it furnishes a conceptual common ground for sectarian and nonsectarian professional helpers, to encourage mutual understanding and cooperation. Implications of the conceptualization and suggestions for further research have been presented. In addition, the literature review and interview analysis leading up to the conceptualization include many detailed considerations and

bibliographic references which will be of interest to social workers who are concerned with this area of inquiry.

Finally, while this study was not conducted with the intent of replication, its findings are completely congruent with the general conclusions and recommendations of the Brower (1984) study on the characteristics of spiritually sensitive social workers. Given the mutual support of these two exploratory studies, a firm groundwork is established for continued refinement of research and application.

#### Limitations of the study.

In chapter one, it was pointed out that the high level of abstraction and generality of the research topic allows its broad significance for the social work profession. At the same time, however, it limits the results to a highly general conceptualization and numerous implications of a tentative nature. In addition, the results of the study rely upon the capacity of the researcher to converge creatively many insights from diverse perspectives during the course of the conceptualization process. Thus, the results are affected by the limitations and biases of the researcher. For these reasons, the results of the study are offered to the profession, not with a pretense of finality, but rather in the hope that they will stimulate an ongoing process of clarification through lively dialogue, research, and practice innovation.

The conceptualization poses the difficulty of being complex and open ended. This may be considered a weakness by people who are more comfortable with concise definitions. Similarly, as discussed in this study, there are serious problems and pitfalls in attempting to operationalize the conceptualization as a whole and many of its constituent concepts. Comstock's (1984) observations on problems of defining religion are germane. He points out that in the field of religious studies, there are numerous definitions of religion, each offering a valuable insight but none of them capturing the phenomenon entirely. Some scholars remain eager to find an "exact" definition, a goal which eludes them. However, seeking an exact definition for a concept of a complex phenomenon may be neither possible nor desirable. Rather, based upon current trends in philosophy and semantic analysis, Comstock advocates for an open definition.

An open definition is a brief text that introduces an open set of interconnected texts that provide the linguistic context through which the word to be defined receives specification and clarification (Comstock, 1984, p. 509). Such definitions are contingent upon the prior history of conceptual efforts to define as well as future continuous elaboration through scholarly dialogue. An open definition also suggests associations with the concept of many

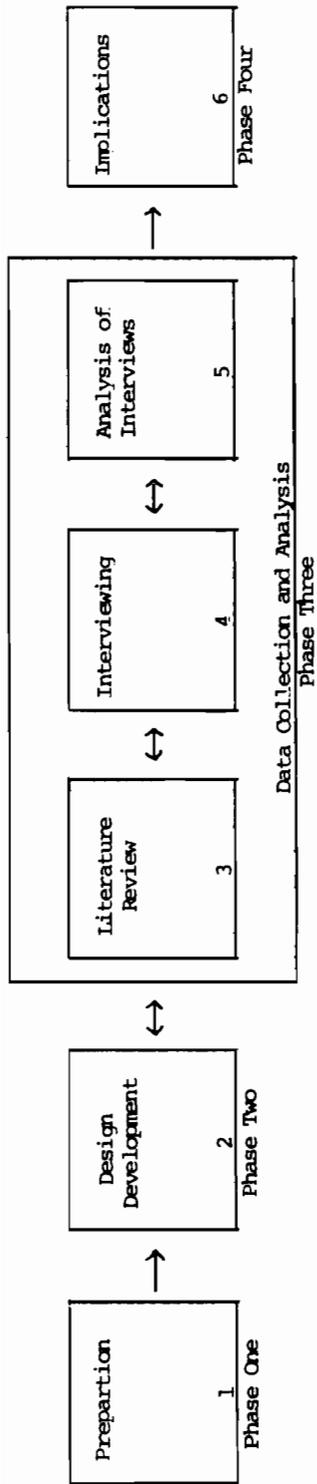
interrelated phenomena. Spirituality has been given an open conceptualization in this study. This openness is entirely appropriate for the complex and phenomenological character of the subject matter. Thus the limitation on closer inspection proves to be an advantage. The conceptualization is stated in such a way as to encourage continuing scholarly work on this complex subject while also respecting the existential and transcendental aspects of the experience involved.

In conclusion, the researcher hopes that this conceptualization will help to increase the social work profession's awareness of the meaning and importance of the the spiritual dimension of its goals and service. Perhaps, through the collective professional process of considering the issues raised in this study, the spirituality of the profession itself will be enhanced.

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## APPENDIX A



- STAGE 1: Proposal development and establishment of background
- STAGE 2: Development of design throughout research process
- STAGE 3: Analytical review of social work literature
- STAGE 4: Interviews of eighteen social work scholars
- STAGE 5: Classification and analysis of interview data  
(Final conceptualization of spirituality)
- STAGE 6: Presentation of implications for social work

FIGURE 1  
METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

## APPENDIX B

## INSIGHTS REQUESTED FOR STUDY ON SPIRITUALITY AND SOCIAL WORK

Edward R. Canda, Ph.D. candidate  
Graduate Teaching Associate  
College of Social Work  
1947 College Rd., Stillman Hall  
The Ohio State University  
Columbus, Ohio 43210

Dear \*\*\*:

I am conducting doctoral research on the meaning and importance of spirituality in the context of social work values, theory and practice. During my literature review, I have discovered that you have made important contributions in this area. In particular, your writing on the subject of \*\*\* has been very helpful. Since there is a scarcity of published material on this topic, I am seeking to interview persons such as yourself who are able to contribute further insights. Your contribution would be extremely valuable to my study. Given your expertise, I would be honored and deeply grateful for your assistance.

I would like the opportunity to interview you by phone for 1/2 to 1 hour. In the overall study, I am exploring diverse viewpoints in terms of personal and professional philosophy, denominational membership, cultural tradition, and religious institutional or noninstitutional affiliation. The interview would explore your basic beliefs and values as they relate to conceptualizing spirituality and implications for social work practice. I would hope to be able to cite your insights in the study, but your remarks can be confidential if desired. With your permission, the interview would be tape recorded for analysis. I will give you a more detailed explanation of the study and a summary of the research results when the study is completed in summer of 1986.

If you are interested to help me with this study, please complete the form below and return it by January 31. I will contact you in early February. Thank you very much for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Edward R. Canda

## INSIGHTS REQUESTED FOR STUDY ON SPIRITUALITY AND SOCIAL WORK

IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

Please complete this form (print) and return it to me by January 31. This information will help me to organize interview questions and to guarantee diversity of viewpoints among respondents. Since I am consulting you as a key expert informant, there may be some advantage if I can cite your contribution (for example, to amplify your published statements). However, I can maintain complete confidentiality if you desire. Please indicate if you wish the identifying information and your interview comments to remain confidential.

Yes, I wish this information to remain confidential \_\_\_\_\_

It is not necessary to maintain confidentiality \_\_\_\_\_

name (print) \_\_\_\_\_

signature \_\_\_\_\_

agency/institution \_\_\_\_\_

address \_\_\_\_\_

telephone (including area code) \_\_\_\_\_

convenient days and times to reach you:

Sun \_\_\_\_\_ Mon \_\_\_\_\_ Tues \_\_\_\_\_ Wed \_\_\_\_\_ Thurs \_\_\_\_\_ Fri \_\_\_\_\_ Sat \_\_\_\_\_

8 a.m. - noon \_\_\_\_\_ noon - 5 p.m. \_\_\_\_\_ 5 p.m. - 8 p.m. \_\_\_\_\_

comments \_\_\_\_\_

do you identify yourself as a social worker? yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_

social work educational degrees \_\_\_\_\_

highest degree earned \_\_\_\_\_

practice specialization \_\_\_\_\_

religious affiliation or philosophical orientation (Please describe yourself as specifically as possible. If you feel that one or more of the categories below is accurate, simply check it. Otherwise, add your own category and/or explanation.)

AGNOSTIC \_\_\_\_\_ ATHEIST \_\_\_\_\_

BUDDHIST \_\_\_\_\_ Mahayanist \_\_\_\_\_ Theravadin \_\_\_\_\_ Vajrayanist \_\_\_\_\_  
sect or school \_\_\_\_\_

CHRISTIAN \_\_\_\_\_ Protestant (list denomination) \_\_\_\_\_

Roman Catholic \_\_\_\_\_  
other \_\_\_\_\_

EXISTENTIALIST (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

HUMANIST (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

JEWISH \_\_\_\_\_ Conservative \_\_\_\_\_

Orthodox \_\_\_\_\_

Reform \_\_\_\_\_

NATIVE AMERICAN SPIRITUALITY (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

SHAMANIC (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

OTHER (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

permission to tape record? yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_

(please add additional comments on back if necessary)

**APPENDIX C**

## FLEXIBLE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

### I. Introduction

1. Verify that time of call is convenient.
2. Summarize purpose and format of the interview.
3. Remind interviewee that conversation is being audio tape recorded in accordance with permission.
4. Double-check that required demographic information of original interview request is supplied.
5. Respond to any special comments returned on interview request form.
6. Remind interviewee that he/she is encouraged to reframe concepts and questions in the open-ended interview.
7. Reassure of confidentiality of conversation.
8. Ask if interested in receiving copy of transcript.

### II. Basic Knowledge and Beliefs

#### A. Content

1. How would you describe the basic characteristics of human nature?
2. What are the most fundamental needs of the human being?
3. How would you describe the relationship between human beings and the nonhuman world?

4. How would you describe ultimate reality and what would you call it?
5. What is the relationship between human beings and ultimate reality?
6. How would you describe the distinctively spiritual aspects of human development?
7. Given your views, what is the importance of religion and spirituality for human development and need satisfaction?

#### B. Means of Obtaining Knowledge and Beliefs

1. What theoretical and philosophical frameworks are helpful to you in understanding human nature, human needs, and social work strategies for helping (e.g. behaviorism, ego psychology, Freudianism, existentialism)?
2. Are there any specific religious or philosophical frameworks that are important sources of your perspective?
3. How would you rank the relative importance of the following means of learning about the world, and why: empirical observation, rational analysis, intuition, scripture or oral religious tradition, mystical or peak experiences?

#### III. Basic Value Commitments

1. What is your primary motivation for committing yourself to the social work profession?
2. How would you summarize the primary value commitments of the profession?

3. How does this match your own motivation and value commitments?
4. How do these values relate to the issue of spirituality?
5. How would you deal with ethical dilemmas?
6. Do you use any moral and ethical guidelines for decision-making that derive from religious or personal spiritual sources?
7. In what ways might spirituality be relevant to professional value concerns?

#### IV. Approach to Professional Practice

1. What is the relationship between your world view and your choice of practice specialization, settings, and clientele?
2. How do you use various ways of knowing and understanding to assess a client's situation, formulate a treatment plan, and implement it?
3. What are the most important skills and techniques for addressing the spiritual needs of clients?
4. What modes of practice do you utilize (e.g. at micro and/or macro levels)?
5. What are the most important helping or therapeutic techniques that you regularly use in practice?
6. Do you use any techniques that relate specifically to religious, existential, or mystical experience (e.g. prayer, meditation).

#### V. Conclusion

1. Given the foregoing discussion, how would you define spirituality?
2. If the profession were to take seriously the role of spirituality in human life, what would be the implications?
3. Do you believe that the concept of spirituality can and should be operationalized in measurable terms for research and practice purposes?
4. Is there anything you would like to emphasize or highlight in your comments so far?

**APPENDIX D**

STUDY ON SPIRITUALITY AND SOCIAL WORK  
INTERVIEWEE ORIENTATION

Edward R. Canda, Ph.D. candidate  
Graduate Teaching Associate  
College of Social Work  
1947 College Road, Stillman Hall  
The Ohio State University  
Columbus, Ohio 43210  
(614)422-6510  
February 25, 1986

Dear Interviewees:

I want to thank you deeply for your interest in this study and agreement to assist me as an interviewee. The favorable responses to my request exceeded my expectations. I truly appreciate the scholarship and expertise that you bring to my study and am looking forward to our conversations. Now that it appears I have received all responses that are likely to be forthcoming, I would like to provide you with additional information to clarify the purpose and format of the interview. I hope to complete the interviews in March.

As mentioned in the initial request for interviews, I am exploring diverse viewpoints on conceptualizing spirituality and the relationship between spirituality and social work. The interviews will complement discussions in the social work literature to provide the basis for further refinement of conceptualization and application to social work theory, values, practice, research, and education. With your permission, the interview will be tape recorded for accuracy of data and analysis. Also, in order to encourage an open conversation, I have decided to maintain the confidentiality of all interviews, even though many of you did not require this.

These interviews will be designed to explore your professional viewpoints about conceptualizing spirituality and the relationship between spirituality, religion, and social work. Open-ended and general questions will be used to allow you maximum flexibility and creativity in interpretation and response. Some questions or concepts may be irrelevant to your perspective; if so, please feel free to reframe them in meaningful terms. Since these will be one-shot brief interviews (1/2 to 1 hour by telephone), I have organized content areas for these open-ended questions to promote thorough and concise answers. Several specific questions will be tailored to your professional interests as indicated by your publications and responses to my initial

questionnaire. The content areas are ordered from the most general level of knowledge and values to specific practice implications. The content areas are:

- 1) Interviewee's most important conclusions about human nature, basic developmental needs, and relationship between people, the nonhuman environment, and "ultimate reality."
- 2) Most important sources and ways of obtaining this knowledge and these beliefs (for example, empirical observation, rational analysis, intuition, scriptural or oral religious tradition, faith commitments, mystical/visionary experience).
- 3) Interviewee's most important professional goals and value commitments (for example, motivation to practice as social worker).
- 4) Strategies for value-clarification and ethical decision-making (for example, pragmatic criteria, rational prioritizing, acceptance of professional and social ethical conventions, examination of conscience, meditation and contemplation, prayerful reflection).
- 5) Interviewee's view of the most important skills and practice strategies as applications of knowledge and values.
- 6) Any specific practice techniques that relate to the distinctively spiritual aspects and needs of clients (for example, meditation, prayer, ceremony).
- 7) Concluding reflections on conceptualizing spirituality and implications for social work theory, values, practice, policy, research, and education.

Again, I would like to thank you for your support of this study. I will give you a summary of the research conclusions when completed in summer 1986. I am looking forward to speaking with you in March or early April at the latest.

Sincerely,

Edward R. Canda, Ph.D. candidate

**APPENDIX E**

## CODING GUIDE

### Beliefs

- 1- Human Nature
- 2- Human Needs
- 3- Ultimate Reality
- 4- Relationship with Ultimate Reality
- 5- Relationship with Nonhuman World (Nature)
- 6- Spiritual Aspect of Human Development
- 7- Importance of Religion & Spirituality for Development
- 8- Intellectual Sources (theory, philosophy, religion)
- 9- Experiential Sources (e.g. empirical observation)

### Values

- 10-Motivation to be a Social Worker
- 11-Primary Values of Social Work Profession
- 12-Congruence between Personal and Professional Values
- 13-Examples of Ethical Dilemmas
- 14-Ethical Decision-Making Process
- 15-Relevance of Spirituality to Value Issues

### Practice

- 16-Specialization Linked to World View
- 17-Formulation of Treatment Plan, Relationship
- 18-Macro Practice Issues
- 19-Skills and Techniques re: Spiritual Needs
- 20-Specific Spiritually-Directed Techniques (e.g. prayer)

### Spirituality Defined

- 21-General Definitions of Spirituality
- 22-Operationalization of Spirituality

### Implications

- 23-Direct Practice
- 24-Community Organization/Policy/Macro Practice
- 25-Research
- 26-Education
- 27-Theory & Knowledge Building
- 28-Value & Ethical Issues

**APPENDIX F**

	BELIEFS	VALUES	PRACTICE	SPIRITUALITY
BUDDHISM (ZEN)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Nontheistic.</li> <li>(2) Nonattachment to beliefs.</li> <li>(3) Existence is suffering, which caused by desire; suffering ends with enlightenment.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Primary life task is to seek enlightenment.</li> <li>(2) Commitment to compassionate help toward all beings.</li> <li>(3) Transcendence of self/other dichotomy.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Mutuality and harmony in helping relationship.</li> <li>(2) Aim to help client clarify awareness, act realistically; ultimately attain enlightenment.</li> <li>(3) Uses meditation for client &amp; worker.</li> </ol>	* Total life process of seeking enlightenment through meditation and compassionate action.
CHRISTIANITY	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Theistic &amp; trinitarian.</li> <li>(2) Beliefs from old &amp; new testaments, church traditions, faith experience.</li> <li>(3) People are prone to sin; relation with loving God yields reconciliation, meaning &amp; purpose.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Primary task to love God and people.</li> <li>(2) Commitment to charity &amp; justice.</li> <li>(3) Moral relation of individual desire, social welfare, God's will.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) I-Thou helping relationship.</li> <li>(2) Aim to help client meet physical &amp; spiritual needs, reconcile with others &amp; God.</li> <li>(3) May use witnessing, prayer, sacrament, as appropriate.</li> </ol>	* Expression of innate impulse to develop meaning & values through loving, moral relations between self, people, & God.
EXISTENTIALISM	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Theistic/Atheistic/Nontheistic.</li> <li>(2) Beliefs from direct moment to moment experience.</li> <li>(3) People are free; experience is intersubjective; people must cope with suffering by authentically making meaning.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Primary life task to take responsibility for making meaning.</li> <li>(2) Commitment to uphold freedom &amp; dignity of person.</li> <li>(3) Mutual caring &amp; support between people.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) I-Thou &amp; freedom promoting helping relationship.</li> <li>(2) Aim to help client overcome inner &amp; outer barriers to free &amp; responsible action.</li> <li>(3) Uses humanistic, eclectic, change-promoting, client-centered, &amp; experiential tech.</li> </ol>	* Courageous effort of individual to confront suffering & to create meaning in loving relations with world.
JUDAISM	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Theistic.</li> <li>(2) Beliefs from tanakh, halakah, Jewish community.</li> <li>(3) People created in God's image but may be distorted by experience; sinful behavior requires reconciliation.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Primary task to love God &amp; people, uphold Jewish community.</li> <li>(2) Commitment to loving kindness &amp; righteousness.</li> <li>(3) Compassion both inner personal quality &amp; behavior.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) I-Thou and communally concerned helping.</li> <li>(2) Aim to help client problem-solving in context of Jewish community.</li> <li>(3) Uses Jewish role modeling, religious reflection.</li> </ol>	* Way of life in Jewish tradition, community, & love of God expressed through propriety & compassion.
SPIRITISM	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Theistic/animistic.</li> <li>(2) Beliefs from cultural traditions &amp; spiritual visions.</li> <li>(3) People need to keep harmony with nature &amp; spirits.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Primary task to uphold harmony in universe &amp; well-being of people.</li> <li>(2) Commitment to help people &amp; honor earth &amp; sky powers.</li> <li>(3) Cultivation of skill, wisdom &amp; compassion.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Caring and often directive helping relationship.</li> <li>(2) Aim to help client toward wholeness &amp; harmony with world.</li> <li>(3) May use meditation, ritual &amp; nature retreats.</li> </ol>	* Quest for harmony between self, community & sacred earth, sky.

FIGURE 2: COMPARISON OF PERSPECTIVES ON SPIRITUALITY &amp; SOCIAL WORK

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