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**A STEP TOWARDS FAITH: THE LIMITATIONS OF SPIRITUALITY IN  
ADULT EDUCATION PRACTICE**

A Thesis in

Adult Education

by

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## ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study examined how eight adult education practitioners understand spirituality and how that understanding impacts their practice. The investigation defined and grounded the notion of spirituality within a specific religious/theological tradition, Christianity broadly defined. The study began by exploring the religious, theological, and etymological foundations of a Christian understanding of spirituality. The analysis was framed around two organizing principles: first, viewing research through the metaphoric lens of the story and second, the notion of filling in gaps.

Using informal, conversational, taped interviews as the primary means of data collection, three main themes and thirteen subsuming themes emerged. The study used these results to interrogate the discourse of spirituality within the field of adult education. The research found that a number of serious problems exist within that discourse including the non-definition and misuse by the discourse of the term spirituality, the hazards of individualized spirituality caused by imprecise definitions of the term, a failure to address issues of faith substantively, and the separation in the discourse of religion from spirituality.

The study concluded that by couching discussions in spiritual terminology, the discourse creates the illusion of confronting and dealing with issues of faith in a substantive manner. In reality, however, the difficult issues are avoided. Suggestions for future research on spirituality in adult education are given, including a proposal to move the discussion from issues framed in terms of spirituality towards a discourse of faith.

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## PREFACE

Every once in a while, something inside just clicks. It, whatever it is, falls together, resonating in your mind, your soul with such clarity that you are almost completely taken back in amazement and are subsequently, forever changed. That is precisely what happened to me the first time I was confronted with the notion that a research problem or topic is something that is of personal interest—almost a tension or an anxiety—to the researcher: it just clicked! I suspect the reason it clicked was due in large part to the fact that the idea made sense to me. A topic that is interesting or creates tension is more likely to be examined comprehensively by the one doing the research because s/he has something personal at stake—be it an interest or anxiety—and is therefore propelled to investigate the issue more thoroughly.

Given this understanding, it is not surprising that I have initiated an investigation that addresses spirituality. To say I have an interest in things spiritual would be a gross understatement. For me spirituality is not just a passing fancy or fad, some kind of “. . . response to the spiritual malaise at the end of a thousand-year epoch . . . or disillusionment with materialistic gains” (English & Gillen, 2000, p. 1); spirituality has been and continues to be my passion, an integral part of my being. I have attended church regularly since infancy, received my undergraduate degree in religious education, and have spent the last 23 years—virtually my entire working life—engaged in pastoral

ministry, a vocation I suspect most would agree pertains, or at least should pertain, to spirituality, all within the Christian tradition.

Additionally, the primary focus of my formal training, practice, and research in the field of adult education has been on things related to the spiritual (see Milacci, 1992, 1995, 2001a, 2001b; 2002; Milacci & Howell, 2002). With Jarvis and Walters (1993), I operate under the assumption that the secular and sacred are not divided, “the former being the province of adult education and the latter the legitimate concern of theology. [Rather] any divide between adult education and theology is a divide about interpretation of life experience” (p. ix).

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### *Overview*

Direct discussion of spirituality in academic adult education had been non-existent, outside of the subfield of adult religious education for quite some time (Tisdell, 2000, p. 310). Recently, however, things have begun to change. The field of adult education is starting to recognize that “. . . to omit the spiritual dimension [in adult education] is to ignore the importance of a holistic approach to adult learning as well as the complexity of the adult learner” (English & Gillen, 2000, p. 2).

Because this interest is a relatively recent phenomenon, the discourse surrounding spirituality and adult education is still somewhat narrow and limited in focus. However, as the field has begun to recognize the importance of the spiritual dimension to adult education, that discourse has started to develop and expand (e.g. Baptiste, 2002a; Dirks, 1997; English, Fenwick, & Parsons, in press; English & Gillen, 2000; Fenwick, 2001; Fenwick & Lange, 1998; Groen, 2002; hooks, 1999; McDonald, 2001, 2002; Milacci, 2002; Milacci & Howell, 2002; J. Miller, 2000; L. Miller, 2000; Saul, 1997; Schaufelle & Baptiste, 2000; Tisdell, 2000; Tisdell, 2003; Tisdell, Tolliver, & Villa, 2001; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2002). But in spite of this expansion, gaps in the literature still exist.

Much of the current literature dealing with spirituality in adult education is either purely theoretical or of a “how to” nature. Few empirical studies critically examine any aspect of the connection between spirituality and practice in the field. Additionally, as

discussed in Chapter Two, there is a paucity of literature in adult education that even attempts to address definitional, religious, theological, or etymological foundations of spirituality. Instead of endeavoring to ground the term, the trend in the literature appears to be to construct a notion of spirituality that may be more palatable to a wider readership, but does so at the risk of stripping the term of any real meaning.

This work begins to address the gaps in the literature by phenomenologically researching the link between spirituality, as grounded in a specific religious/theological tradition (Christianity), and practice. To help meet this goal, the study is framed around two organizing principles, introduced here but discussed in detail in Chapter Four. The first principle centers on the utility of viewing research through the metaphoric lens of the story (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Riessman, 1993; Ryan & Bernard, 2000; Silverman, 2000). The second principle is the notion of filling gaps.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to add to the discourse of spirituality within the field of adult education by examining the concept of spirituality as it is applied to the practice of adult education. More specifically, the study investigates how select adult education practitioners describe the notion of spirituality and how that description impacts their practice. Given this purpose and the fact that qualitative research in general and phenomenology in particular are concerned with describing and interpreting human phenomena from the perspective of those who have experienced them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Heidegger, 1962, 1972; Husserl, 1931, 1970, 1973; Moustakas, 1994, van Manen, 1990), phenomenological inquiry was most appropriate for this research.

### *Research Questions*

In this work, spirituality is conceived as being grounded in a religious/theological context, being grounded in faith. Furthermore, this study operates under the assumption that spirituality is connected with practice at both conscious and subconscious levels. With this in mind, and given that the overarching objective of this study is to critically and phenomenologically examine the concept of spirituality as it is applied to adult education practice, the primary research questions that frame this investigation are:

- How do selected adult educators describe spirituality?
- How do select adult educators describe the relationship between their spirituality and their practice as educators?
- What educational practices are framed within the discourse of spirituality in adult education?

### *Definitions and Assumptions*

One of the assumptions underpinning this study is that substantive definitions of key terminology, such as spirituality, are necessary and need to be explored. Webster's (2001) dictionary defines spirituality as “. . . the quality or fact of being spiritual; incorporeal immaterial nature; predominately spiritual character as shown in thought, life, etc.; spiritual tendency or tone; first surfaced (as an English word) between 1375-1425” (p. 1840). Furthermore, the term spiritual “. . . pertain[s] to the spirit or soul, as distinguished from the physical nature; closely akin in interest, attitude, outlook, etc.; of or pertaining to spirits or to spiritualists; supernatural or spiritualistic” (p. 1840). These

understandings are consistent with the rich historical, theological, and etymological heritage of the term, a heritage that locates the construct in the realm of the theological and metaphysical, where spiritual is equated with “the transcendent and the immanent” (Cully, 1990, p. 608)

Moreover, my own assumptions about what constitutes spirituality are framed and strongly influenced by the premises, teachings, ethics, and ideals of one of the primary lens through which I view the world. That lens is Judeo-Christianity, and more specifically, evangelical Christianity. Broadly speaking, evangelical Christianity is defined here as pertaining to those Protestant groups or individuals that recognize revelation, the Bible, as the primary standard of faith and practice, and that have maintained a loyalty to traditional, conservative theology (Deffner, 1956, p. 18).

Because I identify myself as an evangelical Christian, my definition of and assumptions about spirituality are grounded in and strive to be consistent with the Biblical understanding of the construct. Furthermore, this Biblical notion of spirituality is grounded in the metaphysical, and therefore cannot be understood without reference to other metaphysical constructs such as “sacred,” “transcendent,” “God,” “holy,” etc. Then too, the Biblical roots of spirituality are fundamentally linked to questions of meaning and purpose. In fact it is the presence and operation of spirituality that drives human beings to search for meaning in life beyond self, beyond the material and into the realm of the metaphysical.

Nevertheless, I recognize that the Biblical understanding of spirituality is only one understanding among many. Other non-Biblical notions of the construct grounded in a variety of religious and faith traditions exist that are equally as important and worthy of

exploration. However, due to its prominence in the United States and my extensive background and training in the Christian tradition, this study defines and locates spirituality solely within a Biblical understanding of the term.

### *Locating Myself as a Researcher*

I am certain that my passion for things spiritual is due in large part to the influence of my parents. As I have gotten older and had children of my own, I have grown to appreciate and recognize the tremendous impact my parents had on me, particularly as it relates to my own spiritual development.

I was born and raised in an evangelical Christian home in what was at the time a mostly white, middle-class suburb of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. We went to church as a family regularly, faithfully, three times a week—for Sunday School/Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday night prayer meeting—from my infancy forward. We only missed if we were sick, and even then, only the “sick” person stayed home. My siblings and I were involved in all of the children’s and youth ministries our church had to offer including summer camp, vacation Bible school, Scripture memorization programs, etc. Church was a major player in our growing up years.

In fact, church was so much a part of our childhood that, years later when I went away to college, I decided I wouldn’t have to go to church as much and subsequently “cut back” to one service a week. But after a very short time, I returned to the pattern of church attendance I had always known because the truth of the matter was I missed going to church. It was then I realized I did not go to church because I have to; I go because I want to.

As for my parents, they were not just attendees at church; they were actively involved in its ministry. My father taught—and continues to teach—an adult Sunday school class for over fifty years, his entire adult life. He also teaches once a month in the “Pathfinder” class for the mentally challenged. For as long as I can remember, he has served as a deacon in the church and at one time, seriously considered if he was being called to vocational pastoral ministry. I have vivid memories of going with him on visitation, to nursing homes, and to the state mental hospital outside of Philadelphia where he would lead a service for the patients. My mother was equally involved in our local church in a variety of ways: teaching Sunday School for most of my growing up years, working in the church nursery, going with my dad on visitation, helping serve at church dinners, and playing the piano (when she absolutely had to). Together, they gave of their time and their resources to the church, to missionaries, and to others who were in need. Thinking back, I now realize just how powerfully their legacy of faithfulness and service has impacted me; in fact I am sure it explains, at least in part, not only why I became a pastor, but how I approach my pastoral ministry.

I also realize that my parents were not the average churchgoers or religious people I had encountered even in our own church, they were different; they were people of faith, people who were deeply spiritual. True, they were not perfect, but as someone who lived with them for eighteen years I also knew they were not hypocrites; they truly lived what they believed and it touched every aspect of their lives. Beyond going to church, we prayed and read the Bible together as a family on a regular basis. In fact, one of my most vivid memories of childhood is praying with my mother at the front door of our house every morning before heading off to school—a practice my wife and I have continued

with our own children. The genuineness and depth of their faith, not just on Sundays, but Monday through Saturday, instilled in me a passion for spiritual authenticity in my own life. It also created within me a loathing of hypocrisy and religiosity; a loathing that has influenced how I preach, how I raise my children, how I look at other people, and how I try to live.

The true depth of my parents' faith was sounded in 1971 when my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. At that time, the prognosis for someone in her condition was bleak, and my parents knew that. Yet, throughout the whole ordeal—which included a double, radical mastectomy, intense radiation and brutal chemotherapy treatment, extended hospital stays, numerous doctor visits, and a great deal of pain—their faith in God remained solid. Never once did my mother or father lash out at God, or seem to lose faith. They hung on to each other and on to God as my mother continued to weaken and deteriorate. Finally, mercifully, on August 30, 1974 at the age of forty-four, she died—the very day I was supposed to start as a freshman in Bible College.

Looking back on how my parents dealt with my mother's cancer, I realize how truly remarkable their faith and spirituality was, and how deeply it affected me. In a real way, the way they modeled their faith shaped how I would deal with the difficulties I would encounter in my own adult life, serious difficulties such as the death of our infant son, the premature birth of our daughter, and my wife's chronic illness.

As for me, those days surrounding mother's death were a blur. I was an eighteen year-old young man, graduated from high school, heading off to college, whose mother had battled cancer for three years and eventually lost. I knew we all were hurting, but I was ready to get on with my life and really was not aware of much else beyond that. Six

months after she died, however, that all changed. I “hit the wall” and had my first real crisis of faith; I experienced what is referred to in the second chapter of this work as the “dark side” of spirituality (see Fenwick & Lange, 1998; Fenwick, 2001) in a very profound, very personal, and very transformative way.

The circumstances that precipitated this life-changing experience have long since escaped me. What I do remember, however, is being in my dorm room, feeling sad and alone, and missing my mother deeply. I also remember being extremely annoyed with God, wondering how God could let someone so good, so loving, so devoted to her family, so needed by me, and so faithful, suffer and die. It seemed to me that there were a lot of other “worse” people in the world far more deserving of death than my mother. Why did they live and she die? Where was the loving God I had heard so much about my entire life?

I had reached a crossroad in my spiritual journey. At that moment I came face to face with the fact that for the eighteen plus years of my existence, I had been riding the spiritual coattails, so to speak, of my parents. The religion and faith I claimed allegiance to in reality was not mine at all; it was theirs. Additionally, I came to the stark realization that my parents’ faith could not bring me through the spiritual crisis I faced. Standing there awash in grief and doubt, I knew I had a decision to make regarding my faith, my spirituality: own it or abandon it.

The fact that I have been involved in pastoral ministry for twenty-three years and am presently writing about the connection spirituality has with practice indicates that the path I chose, or perhaps the path that chose me, was to claim faith as my own. Choosing that path, however, did not come easily or automatically. But in the end, I chose faith

because I had seen how faith worked in the lives of my parents, how it had guided them through good times and bad, how it framed the way they lived and treated other people, and I wanted to experience that for myself.

That was winter 1975. In the nearly twenty eight years that have transpired since then, I completed Bible college, got married, spent two years with my wife as an assistant to a missionary pastor in the state of Utah, had and (nearly) raised six children, was ordained to the gospel ministry and became the pastor of a rural, evangelical Christian church, and embarked on a graduate journey in the field of adult education that has culminated in this investigation. Throughout those years and myriad experiences, the faith, the spirituality I embraced in my dorm room in 1975 has been the guiding principle of my life.

In much the same way winter 1975 was pivotal for me spiritually, June 2001 proved to be pivotal for me academically. For it was at that time I came to the realization of just how my background and experience in theology and faith might contribute to the discourse of spirituality within the field of adult education.

I attended the 42nd annual Adult Education Research Conference at Michigan State University with three colleagues. Together, we had conducted a phenomenological investigation of adult learning and had been selected to present our study at this conference, thus the reason for my attendance. Scanning the conference program, one particular session, in light of my background, caught my eye: "Toward a Culturally Relevant and Spiritually Grounded Theory of Teaching for Social Transformation and Transformational Learning." I had heard there was a burgeoning interest in spirituality

within the field, but had yet to encounter it so directly. So, with a great deal of anticipation, I attended the session.

Forty minutes later, out of sheer frustration, I left before the session was even completed. The spirituality discussed in that room was ethereal, devoid of and completely disconnected from any etymologic, historic, or theological moorings I knew (because of my theological training) to be connected with the term. Even more disturbing was the underlying assumption that this brand of spirituality was deliberately watered down so it might be palatable to all. It was not palatable to me. I knew that the supposedly benign activities being conducted in that session—candle lighting, meditation, and choreographed breathing—were rituals rooted in religious tradition, no different than the prayers or responsive Scripture readings we do each week in church.

I left the conference with conflicting emotions, a mixture of aggravation and exuberance. I felt as if I had something personally at stake in the discourse swirling around spirituality in adult education and knew that it was something I needed, perhaps was destined, to research. Given my extensive religious and theological background and training, I was confident spirituality was a subject I could explore and discuss from an informed point of view. Returning home, I dove into this exploration headfirst.

I began by reviewing the literature relative to spirituality in the field of adult education. Additionally, I reflected on how my faith, my spirituality influenced who I am and how I conduct my adult education practice. I found myself “seeing” spirituality everywhere, in almost every part of my life. More and more, spirituality seemed to find its way into my sermons, my teaching, my conversations. I also began to pay close

attention to other adult educators, seeing if I could get a sense of any connection between their spirituality and practice. I was hooked.

Then, in the spring of 2002, I took a class entitled “Applied Qualitative Research” and the pieces of this puzzle fell into place. As part of the requirements of this course, we were to conduct a qualitative study on a topic of our own choosing, a sort of dissertation in miniature, if you will. In light of all that I had been through to that point, it should come as no surprise that I chose to phenomenologically investigate the concept of spirituality as it is applied to adult education practice. Ultimately, that class project became the pilot for this study.

Considering my experiences, it could be said that this present study is something I have been preparing for my entire life. However, spirituality is for me more than just a topic to be researched. It has been and continues to be a major force in my life, shaping who I am, how I view the world and how I conduct my adult education practice. Subsequently, spirituality also affects the manner in which this study is approached and conducted.

## Chapter 2

### THE DISCOURSE OF SPIRITUALITY: IDENTIFYING THE GAPS

#### *Identifying the Theoretical Gaps*

##### Introduction

The primary focus of this chapter centers on a literature review and theoretical discourse surrounding spirituality and adult education. Initially, I examined the works of authors within the field of adult education who directly or indirectly connect their practice to notions of spirituality (e.g. Dirkx, 1997; English & Gillen, 2000; English, Fenwick, & Parsons, in press; Fenwick, 2001; Fenwick & Lange, 1998; Freire, 1997; Gillen & English, 2000; Groen, 2002; hooks, 1999; Horton & Freire, 1990; McDonald, 2002; Milacci, 2002; Milacci & Howell, 2002; J. Miller, 2000; L. Miller, 2000; Schaufelle & Baptiste, 2000; Tisdell, 2000; Tisdell, 2003; Tisdell, Tolliver, & Villa, 2001; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2002). Concomitantly, I analyzed the discourse in light of the perspectives of critical and religious scholars, particularly as these scholars discuss notions and understandings of spirituality (e.g. Cimino & Lattin, 1998; Cully & Cully, 1990; Lerner, 2000; Nouwen, 1981; Schaeffer, 1971; Schweizer 1968; Sider, 1997; Stott, 1999a, 1999b; Vine, 1966; Wallis, 1999, 2000; West, 1993; Wilber, 1998). Finally, I reviewed the literature connecting any aspect of spirituality with practice, within adult education (e.g. Groen, 2002; McDonald, 2001, 2002; Tisdell, 1999, 2000, 2003) and

outside of the field (e.g. Bullis, 1993; Dettmore, 1986; Goncalves, 2000; Hahn d'Errico, 1998; Hale, 1995; Langston, 1997; Lederhouse, 1998; Miklancie, 2001; Sullivan, 1997).

As used here, the term discourse describes the language exchanges within a particular field of study that are viewed as a source of socially constructed knowledge and which are produced in an institutional system in regulated language (Piantanida & Garman, 1999, pp. 228-9). Discourse is also understood as an analytic concept that can effectively enhance one's ability to wrestle with contemporary society and its issues (Piantanida & Garman, 1999, p. 228). Thus defined, discourse seemed a more appropriate term to describe the process of reviewing much of the theoretical literature on spirituality. This chapter begins by examining foundational elements in the theoretical discourse of spirituality in adult education. It then explores the state of the discourse as it currently exists. Finally, it reviews the literature that investigates any aspect of the connection between spirituality and practice.

#### Religious, Theological, and Etymologic Foundations of Spirituality

Foundations are, by definition, the base upon which something rests (Funk & Wagnall, 1973, p. 526). The foundation undergirding the discourse of spirituality in adult education is no exception. Not as clear, however, are the specific elements that comprise this particular foundation. This section attempts to identify and briefly examine one of the more significant foundational elements of the discourse of spirituality in adult education, the etymologic foundation.

The term spirituality has a rich historical, theological, and etymological heritage, a heritage that locates the construct in the realm of the theological and metaphysical, where spiritual is equated with “the transcendent and the immanent” (Cully, 1990, p. 608) and where “the heart set on [God] the Father’s kingdom is a heart set on the spiritual life” (Nouwen, 1981, p. 43). Therefore, a cornerstone of any discussion of spirituality needs to be the religious, theological, and etymological origins of the term. However, in the field of adult education, descriptions of spirituality as both an elusive term and concept (Tisdell, 2000), and characterizations of spirituality as a construct that is “hard to define” (English & Gillen, 2000, p. 87) pepper the discourse. For that reason, identifying and exploring the religious, theological, and etymologic foundations of spirituality is an important first step.

The term “spirituality” first surfaced in the English language between 1375-1425 (Webster’s, 2001, p. 1840) as a translation of the Greek New Testament word, *pneumatikos*. Since Greek was the original language of the New Testament, the language from which all English versions of the New Testament were translated, it is not surprising then that the original, etymological understandings of the English word spirituality have roots in a Biblical apprehension of the construct. Therefore, in light of the fact that this study is grounded in a Christian perspective, it seems prudent for etymologic purposes to explore Greek and Biblical understandings of the term.

According to New Testament word scholar William Vine (1966), spirituality and the closely related words spiritual and spiritually “always connote the idea of invisibility and of power” (p. 64). Additionally, in the New Testament spiritual is used to describe the angelic hosts, things that have their origin with God, the purposes of God, and “. . .

all that is produced and maintained among men [sic] by the operations of the Spirit of God” (Vine, 1966, p. 65). The term spiritual does not appear in the Old Testament.

All three terms—spirituality, spiritual, and spiritually—come from the same root word, “spirit” (Greek *pneuma*). Spirit is much more common in the Bible than spiritual, occurring nearly 500 times, of which roughly two-thirds are found in the New Testament. Again according to Vine (1966), spirit “primarily denotes the wind; also breath; then, especially the spirit, which, like the wind, is invisible, immaterial and powerful” (p. 62). Greek New Testament scholar Schweizer (1968) goes into great etymological detail, tracing the word back to its non-Biblical usage in the Greek world. “The verbal noun *pneuma* means the elemental natural and vital force which, matter and process in one, acts as a stream of air in the blowing of the wind and the inhaling and exhaling of breath” (p. 334-5). He then traces the word from this point through its etymological progression from “wind” to “breath” to “life,” and finally to its transferred meaning, “spirit.”

The concept of *pneuma* in the Gk. [Greek] and Hell. [Hellenistic] world develops on the basis laid down in specific modalities of general usage and in the earliest notions of popular religious belief concerning the direct and comprehensive connection of being and operation between wind, breath, soul, and the power of generation, life and spirit (pp. 339-340).

From these etymological moorings, the word spiritual came to refer to the things of the spirit (both the human and Holy Spirit), synonymous with the invisible, immaterial, and metaphysical (Vine, 1966, p. 62). As such, it is intrinsically distinct—yet at the same time, indivisible—from and antithetical to that which is physical, secular, and material.

Furthermore, because it is grounded in the metaphysical, this understanding of spiritual cannot be understood without reference to other metaphysical constructs such as

(but not limited to) “sacred,” “transcendent,” “God,” “holy,” and so forth (see Beringer, 2000, p. 159). Additionally, the Biblical roots of spirituality are fundamentally linked to questions of meaning and purpose. In fact according to the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is the presence and operation of spirituality that drives human beings to search for meaning in life beyond self, beyond the material and into the realm of the metaphysical. As religious scholar Michael Learner (2000) affirms in his discussion of soul and spirit,

In religious terms, the soul is what makes repentance and atonement possible. No past mistake will ever be bad enough to keep us from starting over and fundamentally transforming ourselves. The capacity for self-transformation and inner healing is part of what we mean by having a soul. The soul is the part of us that energizes us to go for our highest ethical and spiritual vision of who we can be (pp. 9-10).

Learner’s statement illustrates why the perspectives of critical religious and theological scholars (e.g. Cimino & Lattin, 1998; Lerner, 2000; Sider, 1997; Stott, 1999a, 1999b; Wallis, 1999, 2000; West, 1993; Wilber, 1998) are salient to definitional discussions of the construct. As these authors argue, an ungrounded definition of spirituality, which fails to recognize etymologic and theological origins contributes to the term being stripped of any real meaning and makes it much easier for the term to be co-opted and misused. Thus, Cimino and Lattin (1998) state,

Baby boomers often view self-expression, such as in "finding one’s true self," and empathy with others as spiritual values in themselves. Thus, wherever one finds one’s "true self," whether it be in sports, work, hobbies, or sexuality, can become a place where sacredness and the "soul" are discovered. If spirituality can be translated into a search for one’s true self and for other human values—creativity, love, trust, openness, personal fulfillment—where does God come into the picture? The answer is not always clear (p. 28).

Critical religious scholars also underscore the importance of retaining original notions of transcendence in spirituality, warning of the inherent dangers in removing transcendence from the term. As Beringer (2000) argues, “religious scholars and metaphysicians are adamant that spirituality cannot be understood without a metaphysical framework . . . the many new age versions of spirituality notwithstanding, there can be no discussion of spirituality without reference to the sacred” (p. 159). Learner (2000) agrees, stating,

Most people have a real need for meaning and purpose in their lives, a meaning and purpose that could transcend the selfishness and materialism of the competitive marketplace and root them in something with transcendent significance. That need is so great that people will seek to fulfill it in whatever way they can (p.75).

While the focus in this section has been exclusively on a Biblical understanding and perspective, much of the current discourse of spirituality in adult education ignores all religious, theological, and etymological foundations of the term, regardless of faith tradition. Unfortunately, as it will be discussed in detail later in this chapter, this failure of the field to properly ground spirituality may make the concept more palatable to a wider readership, but it does so at the risk of stripping the term of any real meaning, making it much easier for the term to be co-opted, commodified, and misused.

### Historical Roots of the Theoretical Discourse

Prior to the recent discourse and outside of the subfield of adult religious education (ARE), direct or indirect discussion of spirituality had been non-existent for quite some time. But historically this was not always the case. As English and Gillen

(2000) observe, many early adult educators such as Basil Yeaxlee of the United Kingdom (1925), Eduard Lindeman of the United States (1961, 1988), and Canadian Moses Coady (1939), had what could be characterized as a transcendent vision of life that prompted them to “. . . consciously or not, dr[aw] upon thousands of years of spiritual thought in formulating their operational principles and sets of assumptions” (English & Gillen, 2000, p. 2) upon which much of the field is founded. Furthermore, according to English, Fenwick, and Parsons (in press), “the history of the early adult education movements such as Chautauqua, Antigonish, Highlander, and Mondragon highlight this original spiritual purpose and the deep roots of spirituality in our field [of adult education].”

While it is recognized that a comprehensive examination of the historic roots of spirituality in adult education would be valuable to the field in general and this work in particular, such an exploration is beyond the scope and intent of this study. Instead, for the purpose of illustration this section points to a specific time within the history of the field when the discourse was grounded in religion.

With the possible exception of Britain’s Basil Yeaxlee (1925), “who promoted the spiritual dimensions of adult education in his writing and professional work with the YMCA” (English, et al., in press), direct discussions of spirituality were all but absent during the foundational years of adult education. What appear in abundance, however, are indirect references to spirituality through frequent and direct discussions of religion and the religious roots of the field, particularly during the formative years of American adult education (Milacci, 1995). As Grattan (1955) illustrates, “Chautauqua stemmed from religion, like so much adult education, and its best adventures in ‘culture’ were deeply colored by religious presuppositions” (p. 166). This emphasis on religion and

subsequent de-emphasis on spirituality is due to the fact that for many early adult educators, spirituality was grounded in and equated with religion, and in many cases, the spiritual and the religious were interchangeable (e.g. Coady, 1939; Keller, 1934; Martin, 1932; Yeaxlee, 1925). Therefore, in order to examine the spiritual roots of adult education one must explore the religious roots of the field, since at the time, the two were virtually synonymous.

One indication of the presence of religious roots is the number of theologians and members of the clergy who were actively involved in the field of adult education during those seminal years (Day, 1989; Jarvis & Walters, 1993). For the purposes of this study, two of the more noteworthy and influential ministers-turned-adult educators, Eduard C. Lindeman and Everett Dean Martin, will be discussed.

Both Lindeman and Martin had, at one point in their careers, served as ministers in liberal Protestant churches (Stubblefield, 1988) and continued to remain true to their theological moorings throughout their lives (Day, 1989, p. 44). They are also among several key individuals who have been classified by the principal, mainstream historians of the field (e.g. Grattan, 1955; Knowles, 1977; Stubblefield, 1988) as first generation theorists of adult education. Perhaps even more significant, however, is the close association Lindeman and Martin had with the Carnegie Corporation of New York City, the most active force in adult education at that time (Grattan, 1955; Knowles, 1977; Rose, 1989; Stubblefield, 1988; Stubblefield & Keene, 1994). Through the activities and financial backing of the Carnegie Corporation, the first official organization of American adult education, the American Association for Adult Education (AAAE) came into

existence in 1926. As Rose (1989) comments, "to ignore the origins of Carnegie interest [in adult education] is to misunderstand . . . why the AAAE was founded (p. 148)."

While the fact that the Carnegie Corporation played the lead role in the founding of the AAAE is undisputed, the reason behind the Corporation's involvement and interest in adult education has not always been clear. Grattan (1955) and Knowles (1977) suggest that the AAAE was established by Carnegie to organize the many diffuse and diverse agencies and institutions involved in what came to be known as adult education. Rose (1979), on the other hand, suggests that the founding of the AAAE was directly related to the internal policy and administration of the Carnegie Corporation. According to Rose, the heart of Carnegie interest in adult education was found in its original desire to advance and diffuse knowledge. Therefore, those asked to become involved with Carnegie in their adult education endeavors—such as Lindeman and Martin—were those believed to be most capable of helping the Corporation achieve its goals.

Whatever the reason for its involvement, the Carnegie Corporation's Board of Directors organized a preliminary conference in 1924 to discuss the possibility of conducting a comprehensive study on the then present status of adult education in the United States. At this conference seven individuals were chosen to act as the Carnegie Corporation's Advisory Board on Adult Education (Rose, 1989; Stubblefield & Keene, 1994). It is not clear how these men were selected other than that they showed an interest, were in close geographic proximity, and had worked with the Corporation previously. Significant is the fact that two of the seven chosen to serve on this highly influential advisory board were Lindeman and Martin. Additionally, both Lindeman and Martin were actively involved in the publication of the *Journal of Adult Education* (JAE), the

official publication of the AAAE, each having served a stint as the journal's associate editor (Martin, 1929).

Due largely to their high visibility in the field via their connection to the Carnegie Corporation and their strong leadership roles in the AAAE and the JAE, Eduard C. Lindeman and Everett Dean Martin had a notable influence over the direction and discourse of American adult education during those developmental years and as such, illustrate one way in which spirituality (through religion) was present, active, and deeply rooted in the field during that era.

Beyond the influential presence of clergymen during those formative years, a further indication of the religious roots of American adult education is found in the pages of the JAE itself. In a study (Milacci, 1995) that examined all of the articles contained in the thirteen volumes of the JAE during the years it was published (1929-1941), references to religious literature, religious terminology, religious imagery, and prominent religious and Biblical figures were identified and subsequently organized into four general categories (pp. 52-53). The presence of such references in the official publication of the field indicated a strong connection between religion and adult education existed at the time. Moreover, the use of such references suggested that not only was the author familiar with the Bible and religious terminology, but it was assumed the majority of the readers would have a similar familiarity, indicative of just how deep the roots of religion ran during those early years (Milacci, 1995, p. 53).

Religion played a significant role in the field of adult education during its early years. Furthermore, though the term spirituality is by and large absent, spiritual concepts, concerns, and ideals are present and discernible in the literature of that era, spoken of in

religious, rather than spiritual, terms (see Coady, 1939; Martin, 1932; Milacci, 1995).

These historic roots of spirituality provide a foundation upon which the current discourse is constructed (English & Gillen, 2000; English, et al., in press).

### A Shift in the Discourse

The current wave of interest in spirituality and adult education is both a renewed and relatively recent phenomenon. However, because this interest is recent, there is a limited amount of literature on spirituality and adult education from which to draw and, as discussed in Chapter One, that which is available is varied and somewhat disjointed. Yet, that body of literature has started to develop and expand. Keeping these factors in mind and building on the etymologic and historic roots previously discussed, the focus of this section will be to examine how and in what direction the current theoretical discourse of spirituality in adult education is developing.

Recalling the analysis of historic roots, it could be said that this present-day discourse of spirituality in adult education is a case of the field revisiting its past. Then again, the current discourse is fundamentally different from that of the field's formative years, for unlike their educational forefathers, many of today's proponents of spirituality see religion as something which maybe connected to spirituality (though "not necessarily," English & Gillen, 2000, p. 1) but that is decidedly separate from and in fact more than religion (English, et al., in press; English & Gillen, 2000; Tisdell, 2000; Tisdell, 2003).

According to these authors, while there may be some overlap between the two, religion and spirituality are definitely not the same and should be kept separate from each other (English & Gillen, 2000; English, et al., in press; Tisdell, 2003; Vella, 2000; Vogel, 2000). As Tisdell's (2000) remarks typify, "spirituality is not the same as religion; religion is an organized community of faith that has written codes of regulatory behavior, whereas spirituality is more about one's personal belief and experience of a higher power or higher purpose" (p. 309). However, what the proponents of separation fail to recognize is that by divorcing spirituality from religion, the discussions are left ungrounded.

Part of the reason behind this desire to separate religion from spirituality is the belief that speaking about spirituality from a particular religious vantage point is thought to limit the generalizeability of spiritual ideas. As English and Gillen (2000) state, "we speculate that this [equating of spirituality with religion] was the reason that Yeaxlee's book, written seventy-five years ago with a decidedly religious outlook, did not have enduring value" (p. 87). Another reason for this separation is the fear of appearing to push or impose a particular religious agenda (Tisdell, 2000, 2003). Additionally, advocates of separation believe that not separating spirituality from religion would, in today's postmodern, pluralistic world, make it extremely difficult to describe spirituality in ways that would obtain approval by different groups, religious or otherwise (English, et al., in press).

This desire to separate spirituality from religion represents a shift from the historic traditions of the past, when the two (religion and spirituality) were viewed synonymously. Realizing that such a change has occurred, however, leaves us searching for an explanation as to when and how this shift took place.

Seeds of change were sown during a time in which religion and spirituality were connected, that is, during the foundational days of the field. At this time, liberal Protestantism was the dominant Christian religious tradition in the United States in general (Milacci, 1995, p. 52) and the field of adult education in particular (e.g. Carrier, 1936; Keller, 1934; Martin, 1932). Briefly stated, theological liberalism was essentially an attempt to resolve the tension that existed between scientific pragmatism associated with the Enlightenment and old religious doctrine (albeit Judaism or Protestantism), with doctrine taking on a decidedly subordinate role (Elias, 1982; Schaeffer, 1981). In practice, liberalism came to mean experience was favored over Scripture, scientific method was preferred over supernaturalism, and personal growth and social change became the center of both thought and action.

This attempt to resolve the conflict between scientific pragmatism and religious doctrine indicated that liberalism was a natural outgrowth of the times in which it came into prominence. According to critical religious scholar Ken Wilber (1998), this was a time in which “science and religion entered into a fierce and complex war . . . a war between worlds, a war between a premodern and mythological orientation to the universe and a thoroughly tough-minded and modern gaze, rational in its aspirations (p. 15)”; a time he calls modernity.

Wilber (1998) defines modernity as the period of human history that began with the Enlightenment (p. 43), during which the previously fused (i.e. during premodern times) “cultural value spheres” of art, morals, and science were differentiated. But as differentiation evolved into disassociation,

A powerful and aggressive science began to invade and dominate the other spheres, crowding art and morals out of any serious consideration in approaching “reality.” Science became *scientism*—scientific materialism and scientific imperialism—which soon became the dominant “official” worldview of modernity (Wilber, 1998, p. 13).

In the process, religion came to be viewed as little more than a “holdover from the childhood of humanity, with about as much reality as, say, Santa Claus” (Wilber, 1998, p. 4). Wilber (1998) further notes that with the rise of modernity in the West, “[the core claims of spirituality] all but disappeared giving ours the dubious distinction of being the “first major civilization in the history of humanity to deny almost entirely the existence of the Great Nest of Being” (p. 9).

As modernity continued to gain momentum, spirituality and religion were discarded by “rational” thinking people—adult educators included—in favor of science, said to be “the eye of reason linked to evidence offered by the empirical senses” (Wilber, 1998, p. 19). As Tisdell (2003) observes, the silence in the academy on the topic of spirituality may be due to the emphasis on rationality and scientific method that has dominated the academic world for most of the twentieth century.

Evidence that adult educators readily accepted this scientism, beyond the fact that since the foundational days and until recently, direct or indirect discussion of religion or spirituality has been primarily non-existent in adult education, is found in the proliferation of technicist ideology and professionalization which dominated the field (Collins, 1991). As English, Fenwick, and Parsons (in press) note, “Somewhere in the past fifty years adult education and training have become more about teaching techniques and learning styles than about inspiration, aspiration, and consecration.”

But in recent years, it seems the grip science has held on Western society in general and the field of adult education in particular has begun to loosen. People are beginning to realize “the world isn’t working. Things are unraveling, and most of us know it . . . Our most basic virtues of civility, responsibility, justice, and integrity seem to be collapsing . . . an illness of the spirit has spread across the land” (Wallis, 1999, p. xiii); an illness science and “the eye of reason” has been unable to treat. Into this climate of unrest and uncertainty, interest in spirituality—sans religion—has (re)emerged. But as this section has shown, in the field of adult education, it is an interest fundamentally different from that of days gone by.

### Holistic Orientation

A key element within the current discourse is also one that speaks to the issue of why addressing the spiritual dimension is considered by many to be integral to the field: a holistic view of human beings. Though variations in number and definition exist, generally speaking, subscribers to this position view every person as a tripartite being consisting of mind, body, and spirit. Threaded throughout much of the discourse is the assumption that these constituents—including and especially the spirit—are inherent, important, and essential to “humanness.” Furthermore, this type of holistic understanding of human nature assumes that mind, body, and spirit cannot be separated and in fact work in concert with one another. As Miklancie (2001) states, “a central belief of holism is unity and the assumption that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts” (p. 2).

The discourse of spirituality in adult education has numerous examples of this holistic view of human beings, particularly as the notion relates to educational practice (e.g. English, 2000; English, et al., in press; English & Gillen, 2000; Groen, 2002; hooks, 1994, 1999; Milacci, 2002; Milacci & Howell, 2002; J. Miller, 2000; Orr, 2000; Palmer, 1998; Tisdell, 2000; Vella, 2000; Vogel, 2000; Zinn, 1997).

Vella (2000), for example, argues that to be human is to be spiritual (p. 10), calling for “a spirited epistemology” which she believes “. . . applies to all persons, regardless of whether they are Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, or Sikh . . . . [because] it is an epistemology grounded in humanity” (p. 7). Palmer (1998) suggests that “. . . when our ‘self’ is whole—body, mind, will, and spirit—the gift we bring to our subject matter and our students is filled with potential for understanding more deeply and engaging more fully” (p. 11). Vogel (2000) agrees, adding that “. . . if we are to teach adults and learn with them, they must be addressed as whole persons . . . “ (p. 17). hooks (1994), in a compelling passage in which she discusses the two “teachers” who have most deeply influenced her own educational practice, points to Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh as the one who

Offered a way of thinking about pedagogy which emphasized wholeness, a union of mind, body, and spirit. His focus on a holistic approach to learning and spiritual practice enabled me to overcome years of socialization that had taught me to believe a classroom was diminished if students and professors regarded one another as “whole” human beings (pp. 14-15).

As these examples indicate, a holistic understanding of human nature is intrinsically tied to a holistic approach to teaching and learning, an approach that focuses on the spiritual dimension of teachers and learners, identifying spiritual elements as an

integral part of learning (English, et al., in press). Moreover, proponents of this holistic approach to adult education, such as English and Gillen (2000), contend

Adult educators have paid a great deal of attention to the aesthetic, social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and other aspects of education but have neglected the equally important spiritual dimension. We argue that to omit the spiritual dimension is to ignore the importance of a holistic approach to adult learning as well as the complexity of the adult learner (p. 2).

Additionally, those who advocate this type of holistic method of teaching and learning claim that this not a new phenomenon. Rather, they see it as reminiscent of the approach practiced by many early adult educators who believed that any adult education endeavor should address not only the material needs of people, but spiritual needs as well. Such, the holistic advocates maintain, was the position of Coady (1939), who stated, “Economic action is intimately linked up with spiritual activities. It influences all man’s actions, and when his economic life is deficient there is grave danger of his spiritual life being likewise defective” (pp. 144-5).

The holistic view of human nature is essential to the discourse of spirituality in adult education because without it there is little justification for addressing the spiritual dimension whatsoever, let alone emphasizing it as its advocates do. If, however, human beings do consist of mind, body, and spirit, and if, as supporters of this position contend, these constituents cannot be separated but in fact work in concert with one another, then including spiritual elements in educational practice is integral to and an important part of adult education (English, et al., in press).

### Definitions and Uses of Spiritual

One of the more problematic areas is the manner in which the notion of spirituality is currently being defined and discussed. Particularly troublesome, “unsatisfactory” (Beringer, 2000, p. 159), and perhaps potentially dangerous are the vague descriptions being offered as meaningful definitions of the construct (e.g. English, 2000; English and Gillen, 2000; English, et al., in press; Tisdell, 2000; Tisdell, 2003; Vella, 2000; Vogel, 2000). As Beringer (2000) remarks, “spirituality lacking precise theoretical-conceptual definition and being subject to increasing speculations regarding its nature has unfavorable implications” (pp. 157-8).

For example, English and Gillen (2000) purport to address the spiritual dimensions of adult learning. However, what they actually deliver is an ill defined, decontextualized notion of spirituality that in effect confuses more than it addresses. Notice, for example, their statement, “. . . this book is located in what Berry refers to as public spirituality or in what Van Ness refers to as secular spirituality” (English & Gillen, 2000, pp. 1-2). As previously discussed, the etymologic roots of spirituality make it intrinsically distinct—yet at the same time, indivisible—from and antithetical to that which is physical, secular, and material. Thus, to speak of a “secular spirituality,” as do English and Gillen, is to ignore the word’s etymologic heritage and in the process, strip it of its original meaning.

Equally imprecise and lacking in theoretical grounding is English and Gillen’s (2000) description of spirituality as “an awareness of something greater than ourselves, a sense that we are connected to all human beings and to all of creation” (p. 1). This definition seems to ignore the etymologic heritage of the term and in effect negate

spirituality by locating it in the realm of the physical, the empirical, and what is knowable through sensory perception.

With regards to vague descriptions of spiritual concepts, Tisdell (2000) fares no better, stating—or perhaps, not stating,

In sum, *spirituality* is an elusive term and an elusive concept, but perhaps this is so because it is all encompassing and cannot be torn from other aspects of one's life, including one's cultural experience, one's further development, or one's social change work in the world . . . it is difficult to discuss what is so elusive and at the same time so personal and so encompassing [about it] (p. 333).

In a subsequent work, she remarks, “different people define it [spirituality] in different ways, and all definitions seem to be incomplete. Nevertheless, it is important to be clear as possible what is meant here by the term *spirituality* and how it relates to [this] work” (Tisdell, 2003, p. 28). Yet the definition she provides for purposes of clarification is not much of a definition at all. Rather, it is a set of seven assumptions on the nature of spirituality as it relates to education; assumptions based on interviews with 31 adult educators she conducted and “discussed in prior work with colleagues” (Tisdell, 2003, p. 28). These assumptions include: Spirituality and religion are not the same, but for many people they are interrelated; Spirituality is about an awareness and honoring of wholeness and interconnectedness of all things through mystery to a higher power; Spirituality is fundamentally about meaning-making; Spirituality is always present in the learning environment; Spiritual development constitutes moving toward greater authenticity; Spirituality is about how people construct knowledge through image and symbol; and Spiritual experiences most often happen by surprise (Tisdell, 2003, pp. 28-9).

Other examples of the vague descriptions which characterize the discourse include English, Fenwick, and Parson's (in press) purposefully broad definition of spirituality intended to reflect their ". . .belief that, if one is to understand the current impact of spirituality, one's definition should be as inclusive as possible;" Vella's (2000) assertion, the "spiritual dimensions of adult education [as] the human dimensions, and attention to these dimensions makes for excellent, effective adult learning" (p. 7); and Vogel's (2000) rather nondescript statement,

Defining *spirituality* is a nebulous task; there is no commonly agreed-upon definition. Some find the term to their liking; others find it too vague and without substance. Some feel that the word *spirituality* diminishes their religious faith, whatever it might be; for others it is a preferred term precisely because it does not contain particular doctrinal, historical, or theological content (p. 17).

This type of vague, imprecise description appears to be an attempt to make spirituality mean all things (or anything) to all people by labeling it as "hard to define" or perhaps even worst, leaving it to be described purely in individualistic terms with the historical, theological, and etymological underpinnings of the concept completely ignored (Fenwick, 2001). Furthermore, as previously alluded to, this type of decontextualization of religion, which fails to understand notions of the sacred implicit in the term (see Beringer, 2000, p. 159), may make the concept of spirituality more palatable to a wider readership, but it also serves to eviscerate the term, leaving it with no real meaning. It also makes it much easier for the term to be co-opted, commodified, and misused (e.g. Bolman & Deal, 2001; Conger, 1994; Covey, 1989; Cox & Liesse 1996; Peters, 1992).

Prior to discussing the specific manner in which spiritual terms are misused, it should be noted that such misuses are particularly (but not exclusively) prevalent in the

human resource development (HRD) literature. However, not all of the literature focusing on spirituality in the workplace and HRD is guilty of misuse. Imel (1998), for example, takes a macro view of spirituality in the workplace from which the interested reader can springboard into a more in depth study on the topic. Specifically she reviews reasons behind the emergence of spirituality in the workplace, such as the presence of corporate layoffs and downsizing and the aging of the workforce. Additionally, Imel (1998) touches on some of the issues associated with spirituality in the workplace, including whether or not spirituality is compatible with the profit motive of business and the relationship between spirituality and religion. Still, this type of work seems to be the exception and not the rule in the body of the HRD literature.

In particular, misuse in this case refers to the way in which concepts such as “soul,” “spirit,” and “spirituality” have been co-opted and commodified by authors on an as-needed basis to further economic goals and to serve the interests of the marketplace (Cox, 1999; Frank, 2000). As critical religious scholar Harvey Cox (1999) notes,

The lexicon of *The Wall Street Journal* and the business sections of *Time* and *Newsweek* turned out to bear a striking resemblance to Genesis, the Epistle to the Romans, and Saint Augustine’s City of God. . . . [with] The Market becoming more like the Yahweh of the Old Testament – not just one superior deity contending with others but the Supreme Deity, the only true God, whose reign must now be universally accepted and who allows for no rivals (pp. 18-20).

For example, Bolman and Deal (2001) in their book, *Leading with Soul* venture beyond management’s emphasis on body and mind and draw attention to the neglected, deeper, spiritual needs of employees. As workers take on greater responsibilities at work with the resulting requirement to take more responsibility for their self-development, the

authors suggest that corporate leaders develop an awareness of workers from a holistic perspective, including the needs of their souls.

Each of us has a special contribution to make if we can shoulder the personal and spiritual work needed to discover and take responsibility for our own gifts . . . Leading with soul returns us to ancient spiritual basics – reclaiming the enduring human capacity that gives our lives passion and purpose (pp. 11-12).

Tom Peters (1992), in his book *Liberation Leadership* plays on liberation theology associated with radical social movements in support of the poor and disenfranchised, to encourage the use of workers’ spirituality for the benefit of organizational effectiveness and profit. He states that,

[S]oul, my preferred term for rules, value, vision, philosophy, whatever. . . . Work as dialogue, shared minds, and the floating crap games of project teams (of insiders and outsiders) ‘tied’ together by soul of some sort – that’s the mostly elusive “stuff” that adds up to “beyond hierarchy” (p. 472).

Even religion is fair game in this corporate cooptation of spiritual terminology. To illustrate, Cox and Liesse (1996) identify the corporation as the replacement for organized religion and the government.

Purposeful corporations have a critical role – and opportunity – in society today. As the authority of organized religion and government is diminished, the corporation – the interpersonal network committed to some mission in the service of customers, employees, shareholders and publics – becomes a more prominent building block of society (p.5).

Fenwick and Lange (1998) were among the first adult educators to identify this trend in the business literature. They also initiated substantive discussion on the movement of HRD from skills based training and career development into the

manipulative uses of spirituality in the workplace for the express purpose of an “increased control and seamless meld of whole persons to the global marketplace” (p. 79). By tracing HRD’s expanding curriculum into areas of spirituality, Fenwick and Lange (1998), and later Fenwick (2001) effectively argued that much of what is current in HRD

regards workers’ spirits as an untapped resource with remarkable potential for improving productivity. The new corporate interest in spirituality is easily presented to employees as a natural outgrowth of HRD’s humanistic caring for its organization’s workers. And once the domain of the spiritual is admissible in the corporate training mission, it becomes subject to the ideological control of corporate high priests (p. 1).

Additionally, their critical analysis cited examples of spiritually-based HRD programs and showed how “such programs embed contradictions, are pervaded by a fundamentalist zeal, invade individuals’ privacy, demand surrender while resisting critical discernment [and] appropriated selected promises of spirituality” (Fenwick & Lange, 1998, p. 63).

More recently, Milacci and Howell (2002) attempted to build upon and extend Fenwick and Lange’s (1998) foundational analysis of the way spiritual concepts have been co-opted and commodified to serve the interests of the marketplace by exploring the socio-economic implications that enable broader and subtler means of worker control. The study examined and cited examples of how discussions of spirituality in business and HRD literature can be categorized as having 1) a focus on individuals in organizations with an *implicit* spiritual theme (e.g., Covey, 1989; Peters, 1992; Senge, 1990); 2) a focus on individuals in organizations with an *explicit* spiritual theme (e.g. Bolman & Deal, 2001; Conger, 1994); and 3) a focus on corporations as individuals with souls (e.g. Cox & Liesse, 1996; Kahnweiler & Otte, 1997).

The preceding analysis indicated how utilizing vague descriptions of the term spirituality, when coupled with a failure to ground discussions of spirituality within a historical, cultural and religious framework, not just of Christianity but also across the scope of the religious landscape, has the potential to implicate adult educators as culprits in this cooptation and commodification of the spiritual within the marketplace. Yet, this type of misuse is not confined to the business and HRD literature only. Misappropriation of the spiritual can also be found outside of the body of business literature, even in education. In fact, there exists within educational literature the possibility for educators to be guilty of “educational malpractice” (Baptiste, 2002b) by co-opting the spiritual for their own use.

An example of this potential misuse can be found in one of the explanations offered for the current fascination with spirituality in the field of adult education. Though subtly stated, the rationale behind wading into spiritual waters appears to be rooted in the fact that spirituality is at present extremely popular and highly fashionable. As English and Gillen (2000) observe, “Spirituality! Like dandelions in the spring, the term is cropping up everywhere. There are books, magazine articles, newsletters, conferences, tapes, even Web sites dealing with the subject” (p. 1). English, Fenwick, and Parsons (in press) agree, stating, “Spurred on by popular culture’s interest in returning to a concern for the common good, spirituality in adult education and training is an emerging topic. There is a stirring inside, and adult educators and trainers are responding . . . “

But just because something is fashionable and popular, does it qualify to be part of the [adult] educational domain? Is it ethical or for that matter, spiritual for adult educators ride to this current wave of spirituality by appropriating it as an important part

of their discourse? Because such questions are not addressed in the current discourse, one cannot help but wonder along with Fenwick (2001) if in fact adult educators' participation in the arena is truly an extension of the pedagogical project or little more than a commodification of the spiritual for their own interests.

This is not to imply that spirituality does not belong as part of the adult education discourse but rather that adult educators should take greater care in evaluating their motives behind their participation, not giving the appearance of evil by wittingly or unwittingly setting themselves up as culpable participants in the commodification and co-opting of the spiritual. In other words, adult educators should be wary of uncritically rushing in to the [spiritual] place where even angels fear to tread.

#### In Search of the "Dark Side"

The failure to ground notions of spirituality within the traditional, etymological, and religious/theological moorings underpins yet another shortcoming in the discourse: a failure to address all of the dimensions of spirituality in general, and the "dark side" of spirituality in particular. As Fenwick (2001) observes, "most faith traditions acknowledge and accept human struggle with death, desire, misfortune and evil as important parts of life to be embraced, not avoided. Questioning, doubting, and dark introspection are not seen as a loss of faith, but accepted as part of the spiritual journey" (p. 2). Yet, with the exception of Palmer (1999), hooks (1994), Baptiste (2001, 2002b), and Fenwick (Fenwick & Lange, 1998; Fenwick, 2001), the vast majority of the adult education literature (e.g. Dirx, 1997; English, 2000; Groen, 2002; McDonald, 2002; L. Miller,

2000; Vella, 2000; Vogel, 2000; Wickett, 2000; Zeph, 2000; Zinn, 1997) presents a one-sided view of spirituality. Specifically, theirs is a view characterized by a “sunny feel-good idealism [which] provides little help in working through life’s complexity” (Fenwick, 2001) and that virtually ignores the darker yet no less important spiritual constructs such as sin, evil, deception, greed, and death.

For example, permeating the discourse are appeals by spirituality advocates for adult educators to promote in their teaching idealistic, humane principles such as justice, caring, service, and cooperation (English, 2000; English & Gillen, 2000; L. Miller, 2000; Vogel, 2000). What is not discussed, or even mentioned by these authors, however, are the very real and inevitable complexities, challenges, and difficulties that are likely to be encountered internally and externally in such an undertaking. As theologian Henry Nouwen (1981) observes, “the spiritual life can only be real when it is lived in the midst of *pains* and *joys* of the here and now” (p. 21, emphasis mine). Furthermore, this view assumes that such principles are universally desirable, which may even not be the case.

Much is also made of how education can facilitate “a [globally] shared commitment for the common good” (English, 2000, p. 35), or as Bean (2000) envisions,

A more sustainable, equitable world in which both people and resources are honored as sacred and where everyone is more fulfilled through an increased awareness of their connection and contribution to the greater good of the entire Earth community. [It] is a vision in which spirituality, adult education, and [community] development are inseparable (p. 75).

But again, absent from this perspective is any notion of the resistance that is likely to come from those who envision a different kind of world; specifically, from oppositional forces who desire neither “the common good” nor an “equitable world” because such a

world would threaten and undermine their own wealth or position of power, or as Coady (1939) states, threaten their “vested interests” (p. 136).

Another stream in the discourse that evidences this one-sidedness speaks directly to educational practice. Here promoters of spirituality call their colleagues to a more caring, fully human, and humane way of teaching (Groen, 2002; J. Miller, 2000) that can be accomplished as adult educators dedicate themselves to practicing “spiritual” values. Included in these values are respect for learners (Orr, 2000; Vella, 1994, 2000; Wickett, 2000), creating a “safe” learning space for learners (Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Parks, 1996; Vella, 1994; Vogel, 2000; Wickett, 2000), developing a sense of community between teachers and learners (Palmer, 1999; Vella, 1994; Zeph, 2000), and inclusiveness (Groen, 2002). But again, no mention is made of the internal, personal struggles adult educators most likely will encounter in pursuing such practice. Specifically, ignored is the internal struggle to always do the right thing, to “do unto others as you would have them do unto you;” a struggle that is part and parcel of Christian religious and theological notions of spirituality.

Finally, this one-sided view of spirituality is evidenced in an idealistic, sunny view of the past. For example, English and Gillen (2000), in an attempt to illustrate their contention that interest in “a spiritual quest” is not unique to current times, reference Moses Coady as one who believed that any adult education endeavor should address not only the material needs of people, but spiritual needs as well (p. 2). But the desire to meet both the material and spiritual needs of people is only one side of Coady’s story. The other side describes the fierce battles he faced—spiritual battles against economic and societal evil—in his effort to bring about the social changes he advocated.

That is why Christianity in the beginning purged the pagan world of the immorality that characterized it. We must be realistic enough, moreover, to admit that there is little hope of bringing all modern anti-social forces to repentance through moral persuasion alone . . . The Communists are right when they say we must use force. They are wrong, however, when they demand a bloody revolution (Coady, 1939, p. 148).

There are, however, encouraging signs that some have begun to include the dark dimension of spirituality in their discussions. For example, Baptiste (2001) condemns adult educators for their “humanist lust to be nice [to people that] knowingly and willfully hurt and harm others” (p. 215), calling them instead to “embrace wholeheartedly their obligation to impose” (ibid). In a later monograph (2002b) where he emphasizes that “context matters in the attainment and assessment of effective teaching” (p. 1), Baptiste asserts his belief that “evil is as basic a human quality as goodness, and not merely a proxy for mistakes or ineptitude” (p. 13). Lederhouse (1998) also ventures into the “dark side” in her frank description of the tension that arose when the evangelical faith of three elementary school teachers came into conflict with their constructivist pedagogic practice. This parallels the account of the ideological struggle (Milacci, 2001b) that resulted when my evangelical Christian faith collided with the economic system I, as a white, middle class citizen of the United States, had grown to know and love, capitalism:

It became more and more difficult for me to continue to dismiss the accusations that greed, materialism, oppression and exploitation were inherent in capitalism . . . The tension within was mounting because, if the critics I was reading were correct, then I began to wonder if capitalism was in direct conflict with the premises, teachings, ethics and ideals of one of the primary lens through which I view the world. That lens is Judeo-Christianity, and more specifically, evangelical Christianity (pp 5-6).

Still, when it comes to the discourse of spirituality within the field of adult education, these few examples are by far the exception. The rule in the discourse seems to be to ignore “the dark side” in favor of a “sunny, feel good naïveté” that may be more palatable, but clearly is of no more importance. Thus, if the discourse is to expand substantively, explorations of and encounters with “the dark side” must be included.

### *Identifying the Literature Gaps*

#### Overview

Within adult education, few studies exploring any aspect of the connection between spirituality and practice have been conducted. The studies that do exist (e.g. Groen, 2002; McDonald, 2001, 2002; Tisdell, 1999, 2000, 2003) are of relatively recent origin, indicative of the current explosion of interest in spirituality discussed earlier.

Groen’s (2002) qualitative study of five adult education practitioners from a variety of work contexts uses a “life history approach” (p. 135) to explore how participants incorporate spirituality into practice, concluding that “spirituality and how adult educators address the spiritual dimensions of the workplace are elusive concepts, where definitive answers are not readily available” (p. 139). McDonald’s (2001, 2002) research employs Kovel’s five mediations on spirit as an analytic framework to study the spirituality of eighteen environmental activists, a spirituality that is rather vaguely described as “the way in which people bring spirit into their lives” (2002, p. 269). She concludes that for these participants, “their environmental work is the making of spirit” (McDonald, 2002, p. 272).

Tisdell, one of the more prolific authors addressing the topic of spirituality in adult education (1999, 2000, 2003; Tisdell, et al., 2001; Tisdell, et al., 2002; Tisdell & Toliver, 2002), began her research by investigating how spirituality influences the motivations and practices of a multicultural group of women adult educators (Tisdell, 2000). More recently, her work has expanded to include an examination of the connection between spirituality, culture, and higher education (Tisdell, 2003). However, Tisdell's studies, like those of Groen and McDonald, are based on the type of vague, religiously/theologically ungrounded descriptions of spirituality discussed earlier in this chapter.

There are numerous studies outside of the field of adult education from a variety of academic disciplines that explore (qualitatively) or measure (quantitatively) how and to what degree spiritual beliefs and attitudes are manifested in practice. The fields most often represented by these studies are social work (Bullis, 1993; Langston, 1997; Sheridan & Amato von Hemert, 1999), counseling and psychotherapy (Griffith, 1998; Hale, 1995; Hammond, 1991; Johnson, 1989), nursing and nursing education (Dettmore, 1986; Dunajski, 1994; Miklancie, 2001), public school education (Lederhouse, 1998; Renteria, 2001), and occupational/rehabilitation therapy (Farrar, 2001; Kiner, 1996; Morrison-Orton, 2001). Additionally, these studies employ a number of different research methods including phenomenology (Dunajski, 1994; Hahn d'Errico, 1998; Miklancie, 2001), ethnography (Kiner, 1996; Messikomer & DeCraemer, 2002), case study (Hamilton & Jackson, 1998; Lederhouse, 1998; Sullivan, 1997), and quantitative survey research (Berman, 1999; Bullis, 1993; Goncalves, 2000; Griffith, 1998; Hale, 1995; Sheridan & Amato von Hemert, 1999; Smith, 1998; Winston, 1991).

### Survey Research Studies Outside Adult Education

Using survey research approaches, a significant number of studies focus on predicting or measuring the correlation between a participant's level of religiosity or spirituality and their use of spiritual methods, interventions, or techniques in practice (e.g. Bullis, 1993; Dettmore, 1986; Goncalves, 2000; Hale, 1995; Langston, 1997). A second group of quantitative studies (e.g. Farrar, 2001; Griffith, 1998; Pezzulo, 1997) seek to predict and measure participants' responsiveness to addressing the spiritual dimension or spiritual issues in practice. A third category of surveys clusters around measuring participants' views and attitudes (i.e. favorable or antagonistic) towards the role of spirituality and religion in practice (e.g. Daaleman & Frey, 1999; Engquist, Short-DeGraff, Gliner, & Oltjenbruns, 1997; Sheridan & Amato von Hemert, 1999; Winston, 1991).

Emblematic of the group of quantitative studies that explores the correlation between level of spirituality and use of religious methods is Bullis (1993). Using a variety of statistical analyses, Bullis (1993) surveyed 116 clinical social workers to explore the importance of the religious/spiritual in relation to participants' assessment, interventions, professional ethics, and personal comfort. The study found that viewing religion/spirituality as helpful in practice emerged as a significant factor. The study also found that participants' level of spirituality (measured by personal comfort and professional ethic views) roughly corresponded to use of spiritual interventions in

practice, a finding collaborated by Langston's (1997) later study of forty two clinical social workers.

Dettmore's (1986) survey of sixty-three registered nurses found that the level of importance of spirituality in a participant's life had a direct impact on the type and number of nursing interventions the participant used in practice. Goncalves (2000), using the eighty-five item Spiritual Orientation Inventory (SOI), surveyed 800 randomly selected mental health professionals to measure how a respondent's personal spirituality correlates to the use of spiritual interventions in practice. The study found that the level of spirituality as measured by the SOI is significantly related to attitudes about and the frequency with which spiritual interventions are implemented. These findings parallel those of Hale (1995), whose survey of 122 psychotherapists confirmed his hypothesis that composite measures of religiosity are positively related ( $p = < .05$ ) to explicit use of spiritual techniques in practice.

Typical of the second group of quantitative studies that seek to predict or measure a participant's responsiveness to addressing spiritual dimensions in practice is that of Farrar (2001). Her survey of 200 Canadian and 210 US occupational therapists concluded that, while it is appropriate to address spirit and religion in practice, respondents struggled with how this could be done without imposing their own religious or spiritual beliefs on their clients. Similarly, Pezzulo's (1997) research surveyed 211 social workers' attitudes towards whether or not they should address their clients' religious or spiritual issues in treatment plans and if so, how such issues should be addressed. The study found that the strongest and most consistent predictor of the decision to address such issues was

the degree of importance respondents placed on social workers' familiarity with religious or spiritual issues.

Finally, representative of the third category of survey research that seeks to measure respondents' views and attitudes towards implementation of spirituality in practice is the work of Engquist, Short-DeGraff, Gliner, and Oltjenbruns (1997). Their study investigated the opinions of 270 registered occupational therapists and found that although spirituality (not defined) was an important part of their own life and a very important dimension of the health and rehabilitation of their clients, addressing spirituality directly was believed to exist outside of the scope of their practice.

Conversely, Sheridan and Amato von Hemert (1999) surveyed students from two schools of social work and found "a generally favorable stance toward the role of religion and spirituality in social work practice . . . and the utilization of spiritually oriented interventions" (abstract). These findings parallel those of Winston (1991), who studied 320 family therapists and found that spirituality was both "personally relevant and professionally useful" (abstract).

None of the studies reviewed in this section describe spirituality from the perspective of the participants' lived experience. The absence of such descriptions, as Morrison-Orton (2001) observe, is due largely to the fact that "capturing intangible concepts like spirituality or religion using traditional epistemologies and quantitative strategies are inadequate for understanding what people mean when they discuss or use the concepts in practice" (p.7). As such, studies such as these that rely exclusively on survey research methods are inadequate for this research.

### Qualitative Studies Outside Adult Education

Beyond studies that rely on survey methods for data collection exist a number of other works that attempt to research spirituality and its relationship to practice qualitatively. One such group of studies examines how spirituality is experienced and described by participants, but does so without connecting those descriptions in any way to the participants' practice (e.g. Dunajski, 1994; Hamilton & Jackson, 1998; Kiner, 1996). Dunajski (1994), for example, conducted a phenomenological study of thirteen female registered nurses who described spirituality as an abstract concept that is difficult to define and that is expressed "through relatedness and is demonstrated through caring, fellowship, and the use of self" (abstract). Just how this vague understanding of spirituality impacts the nursing practice of the participants, however, is not revealed.

The same can be said of the work conducted by Hamilton and Jackson (1998), and Kiner (1996). Utilizing a case study research method with twelve females from the helping professions, Hamilton and Jackson's (1998) study investigates how spirituality, described vaguely around the three themes of self-awareness, interconnectedness, and a relationship to a higher power, becomes a conscious component of an individual's life. Similarly, Kiner's (1996) ethnographic approach to seven occupational therapists working with the physically disabled explores the participants' definition of spirituality and whether or not the patients' spirituality is incorporated into treatment. But again, neither study attempts to connect these descriptions to the participants' practice and therefore both studies are problematic for understanding this present research.

A second set of qualitative studies focus on participants' descriptions of how the spiritual dimension is incorporated and integrated into practice (e.g. Johnson, 1989;

Larkin, 1995; Morrison-Orton, 2001; Renteria, 2001). Johnson's (1989) three-phase methodologic approach utilizing a combination of questionnaires, phone calls, and in depth interviews of psychotherapists concluded that spirituality can be incorporated into practice through a variety of techniques, interventions, rituals, and inner attitudes (TIRIA). The study further found that prerequisite to incorporation of the spiritual into practice is the rather vague processes of choosing a spiritual path, practicing meditation, and working with a spiritual director. Likewise, Morrison-Orton's (2001) phenomenological study investigates what fifteen rehabilitation professionals mean when asked to define the term spirituality and probes what the participants think would be done if spiritual or religious interventions were incorporated into their rehabilitation practice. But in both of these works the focus of the research is on direct integration of spirituality into practice as distinguished from how participants' descriptions and understandings of spirituality impact or influence practice, which is the intent of this present research.

Renteria (2001) uses narrative analysis of fourteen public school teachers who self identify as spiritual people and who are committed to teaching from their understanding of spiritual wholeness to describe what is referred to as a "lived spirituality." The practice of a lived spirituality centers on three spiritual themes: "contributing as love providing", "connecting as love inviting", and "guiding as love shepherding" (p.8). But missing from Renteria's discussion of lived spirituality is any reference to the "dark side" of the spiritual realm: notions of the struggles, difficulties, and inevitable complexities of life; instead, spirituality is equated with love.

A third group of studies are those that use a qualitative research paradigm to focus on how spirituality, as defined by participants, influences practice (Hahn d'Errico, 1998;

Lederhouse, 1998; Miklancie, 2001; Sullivan, 1997). Hahn d'Errico (1998), for example, uses in-depth phenomenological interviews to explore how the spiritual attitudes and beliefs of twelve organizational development consultants impact their consulting practice. The study concluded that spiritually oriented individuals applied their sense of the interconnectedness of life to their practice (Hahn d'Errico, 1998, p. x). However, understandings of spirituality in this study are vague, lack theoretical grounding, and are described in “terms of universal principles such as unity, interconnectedness, love, compassion, energy and intuition” (p. x).

Miklancie (2001) uses Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology as a theoretical framework in conjunction with the Dutch phenomenological research method (van Manen, 1990), similar to this present research, to explore the manner in which nurse educators describe their own personal spiritual experiences within the context of their teaching practice. The study assumed that nurse educators have the capacity for experiences of spirituality and describes those experiences in five essential themes: 1). Relationship/connection with God, with self and with others; 2). Ways of being spiritual; 3). Finding meaning and purpose in and beyond life; 4). Risk-taking/role modeling because of a spiritual “boldness”; and 5). A call to serve others spiritually (Miklancie, 2001, abstract).

Sullivan (1997) seeks to address a shortfall in the training of mental health practitioners regarding their ability to respond to spiritual and religious issues uncovered in therapy by analyzing how a select group of six “spiritually mature” psychotherapists experience their spirituality as impacting their practice. The study concluded that the spirituality of the participants not only enabled them to “competently address the spiritual

and religious issues raised by clients, but also significantly impacted the way they conducted the process of psychotherapy” (Sullivan, 1997, abstract, p. 2).

While helpful in terms of providing insight into research method, overall the utility of these studies (e.g. Hahn d’Errico, 1998; Miklancie, 2001; Sullivan, 1997) for this present work is limited because of their failure to ground notions of spirituality within historic, religious/theological traditions. Then too, these studies probe participants’ understanding of spirituality by asking them to define the construct directly, as illustrated by Miklancie’s (2001) first two questions listed in her interview guide: “From your perspective as a teacher, what does spirituality mean to you?” (p. 162) and “Can you share your definition of spirituality with me?” (p. 163). Such direct inquiry into participants’ definition or understanding of spirituality predisposes them to interpret the nature of the phenomenon before they have “even come to grips with the significance of the phenomenological question” (van Manen, 1990, p. 46).

Conversely, as discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, the plan for this study was to avoid asking the participants to define or describe spirituality directly. Instead, I opted for the indirect approach, probing their understanding of faith and a description of the process or journey that brought them to this understanding, a clear reflection of both my own perspective about what spirituality means and my desire to explicate participants’ assumptions on the construct.

Finally, Lederhouse’s (1998) qualitative study examining the influence of faith on the teaching practice of three public elementary school educators is perhaps most germane to the purpose and plan of this present research. This is due in large part to understandings of spirituality in the study being defined and described in terms of

religious faith. Furthermore, the specific faith grounding these descriptions and definitions is evangelical Christianity. Then too, adding both to its significance and relevance is the fact that Lederhouse's (1998) study explores the rarely mentioned "dark side" of faith and spirituality, specifically by identifying the conflict and tension that arose when the teachers' beliefs collided with their constructivist pedagogic practice in both their professional and religious communities. The study draws conclusions regarding a tension all educators, despite the nature of their beliefs, come in contact with, the merging of "private belief with public practice" (Lederhouse, 1998, p. ix). However, because Lederhouse's study does not explore how faith influences practice beyond the tension created when the two (i.e. faith and practice) collide, it too has limited application for this research.

### Summary

As the preceding sections have shown, few studies have been conducted within adult education exploring any aspect of the connection between spirituality and practice. Those that do exist, along with numerous studies outside of the field that also connect spirituality with practice, are based on vague, religiously/theologically ungrounded descriptions of spirituality. This study responds to this gap in the literature by investigating the link between spirituality and practice and grounding that investigation within the specific religious/theological tradition of Christianity.

## Chapter 3

### METHOD

#### *Introduction/Overview*

Phenomenologists agree that a rich, full understanding of any human phenomenon requires a deep, probing examination of people's lived experiences (Heidegger, 1962, 1972; Husserl, 1931, 1970, 1973; Moustakas, 1994, van Manen, 1990). Given that the intent of this study is to gain a richer, fuller understanding of the phenomenon of spirituality and how select adult educators' understanding of the phenomenon influences their practice, phenomenological inquiry is the most appropriate research method.

Two important definitional clarifications regarding the term "phenomenology" need to be made. First, etymologically the term derives from the Greek *phaenesthai*, to flare up, to bring to light, to place in brightness, to show itself in itself (Heidegger, 1962, p. 57); hence, the maxim or dictum of phenomenology, "To the things themselves" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). Second, for the purposes of this research, phenomenology refers primarily (though not exclusively) to a qualitative research method concerned with understanding phenomena from the perspective of those who have experienced them (Cohen & Omery, 1994; Giorgi, 1985a, 1985b; Moustakas, 1994; Ray, 1994; van Manen, 1990).

While phenomenology is a qualitative research method, it is first and foremost a philosophy (Heidegger, 1962; Husserl, 1970; Ray, 1994; van Manen, 1990) or better, "a variety of distinctive, yet related, philosophies" (Ray, 1994, p. 118). Moreover, the body

of literature concerned with phenomenological research methods (Cohen & Omery, 1994; Giorgi, 1985a, 1985b; Moustakas, 1994; Ray, 1994; van Manen, 1990) agrees that knowledge of phenomenological philosophy has direct implications on phenomenological research practice. The literature further suggests that phenomenological researchers develop some level of “understanding of the philosophical basis of phenomenology [that would] enable better evaluation of phenomenological research” (Cohen & Omery, 1994, p. 136). This chapter begins by exploring phenomenological philosophy and its importance to phenomenological research. Then, building on those philosophic elements, it describes the design for how this particular phenomenological research study was conducted.

### *Phenomenological Research*

The two philosophers most cited and whose influence is most obvious within phenomenology as a research method are Edmund Husserl (1931, 1970, 1973) and Martin Heidegger (1962, 1972). Husserl is considered to be the founder of and central figure in the modern phenomenological movement (Cohen & Omery, 1994; Giorgi, 1985a, 1985b; Ray, 1994; van Manen, 1990). He is also credited with developing eidetic or descriptive (also known as transcendental, Husserlian, or the Duquesne school) phenomenology. Heidegger, a student and critic of Husserl, is credited with radically reinterpreting phenomenology (Ray, 1994) with his hermeneutic or interpretive approach that emphasizes understanding rather than description.

Simply stated, the difference between the Husserlian/descriptive tradition of phenomenology and the Heideggerian/interpretive frame is one of focus. As Ray (1994) explains,

Eidetic phenomenology is epistemologic and emphasizes a return to reflective intuition to describe and clarify experience as it is lived and constituted in consciousness (awareness) (Husserl, 1970). The hermeneutic-phenomenologic tradition or interpretative approach is ontologic, a way of being in the social-historical world where the fundamental dimension of all human consciousness is historical and sociocultural and is expressed through language (text) (Heidegger, 1962), (p. 118).

Put another way, whereas Husserl was primarily interested in understanding what persons know, Heidegger's focus was on the question, "what is Being and what are the foundations for philosophizing and phenomenologizing in the midst of it" (Cohen & Omery, 1994, p. 142)?

This divergent phenomenological focus in philosophy led to a difference in phenomenological method between the two traditions: the employment (by eidetic/Husserlian phenomenology) or non-employment (by hermeneutic/Heideggerian phenomenology) of bracketing. Bracketing, also known as the *epoche* (Moustakas, 1994; Ray, 1994) or reduction (Cohen & Omery, 1994; van Manen, 1990) was borrowed from mathematics by Husserl, himself a mathematician (van Manen, 1990, p. 176), and refers to the act of holding in abeyance or suspending one's beliefs or presuppositions about a phenomenon so that, by means of deep reflection, the essential structures of the phenomenon, "the things themselves," can be understood and studied (Giorgi, 1985b; Moustakas, 1994; Ray, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Thus, as Moustakas (1994) explains, for an eidetic study, "we set aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about

things . . . The world is placed out of action, while remaining bracketed. However, the world in the bracket has been cleared . . . to be known naively and freshly through a ‘purified’ consciousness” (p. 85).

Conversely, in Heideggerian or hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher does not engage in bracketing or reduction of beliefs. Instead, this approach takes the position that presuppositions are “what constitute the possibility of intelligibility or meaning” (Ray, 1994, p. 120) and thus welcomes assumptions, beliefs, and presuppositions as an integral part of the phenomenological interpretive process.

Additionally, the philosophical distinctions that exist between the two schools of phenomenological thought are manifested in different methodological approaches (Cohen & Omery, 1994; Moustakas, 1994; Ray, 1994; van Manen, 1990). These methodologic distinctions however, have less to do with the operation of specific techniques and more about the goals and tasks of the research methods themselves (Cohen & Omery, 1994, p. 147). Specifically, the goal of an eidetic study is to describe a phenomenon from the perspective of those who have experienced it. To achieve this goal, the researcher must first engage in the intellectual practice of bracketing her assumptions, then reflect on the experiences as described by the participants, and from that, determine the essential structures of the phenomenon or experience under study (Cohen & Omery, 1994). In a hermeneutic study, the goal is one of interpretation, bringing out the meaning the phenomenon possesses by virtue of the context in which it occurs, revealing its sense of “being-in-the world” with method, such as it exists, focusing on the “unequivocal and systematic in the interpretations of meaning” (Cohen & Omery, 1994, p. 149).

In addition to the distinct research goals and methods found in the descriptive-Duquesne and the Heideggerian-hermeneutic traditions, a third phenomenological school exists that has utilized phenomenological philosophy to guide its own research practice. Known as Dutch phenomenology and epitomized by Max van Manen (1990), this tradition combines features of both descriptive and interpretive phenomenology, particularly with respect to the interview format utilized for data collection and what is termed “close participant observation” (van Manen, 1990, p. 68).

Furthermore, both individual and groups of researchers have “applied the philosophy and used variations in methods and forms of reporting so that there is more variety” (Cohen & Omery, 1994, p. 150) with this methodologic approach. Because of its great utility and versatility as a research method, the Dutch phenomenological approach, and van Manen’s (1990) method in particular, was determined to be an appropriate approach for “uncovering meanings of every day spiritual experiences” (Miklancie, 2001, p. 36) and used in this study.

With the philosophic elements of phenomenological research established, the following section focuses on the plan used in conducting this phenomenological research study critically and phenomenologically examining the concept of spirituality as it is applied to adult education practice.

### *Research Design*

Salient to methodology in a phenomenological study is the issue of approach (Cohen & Omery, 1994; Giorgi, 1985b; Ray, 1994). By approach, I have in mind the philosophic elements or “the fundamental viewpoint toward man and the world that the

[researcher] brings, or adopts . . . whether this viewpoint is made explicit or remains implicit” (Giorgi, 1970, p. 126). As Ray (1994) explains,

Each researcher has a particular attitude or orientation to methodology *from philosophical knowledge or lack of it* that is carried into the work and that implies a certain way the study will be accomplished. Thus the issue of approach affects the research process and the results and, ultimately, its classification as excellent or not (pp. 126-127, emphasis mine).

At one time, I located myself squarely in the interpretivist as opposed to the transcendental camp of phenomenology (e.g. Baptiste, Lalley, Milacci, & Mushi, 2001; Milacci, 2002), arguing that with “Heidegger I believe that all human experiences are by definition interpretive. This inevitability of interpretation precluded the bracketing or suspension of my assumptions, as Husserl and the transcendentalists advocate” (Milacci, 2002, p. 9). While I still doubt my desire or ability to bracket my assumptions, the phenomenological research approach used in this study is more in line with the Dutch school of phenomenology (van Manen, 1990) than it is with the interpretivist frame alone.

In phenomenological research, once the philosophic approach has been determined, other essential aspects of the inquiry, such as deciding on a topic, formulating the research question (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990), and explicating the nature of the participants are to be addressed (Ray, 1994). However, these type of activities are done ever mindful of the importance of the phenomenological approach to understanding, because “what is to be captured is the meaning of an experience . . . [and] there are different ways [i.e. descriptive, interpretive, or both] to understand and capture the meaning of experience” (Ray, 1994, p. 127).

Further, in phenomenological studies the research question(s) grow out of an “intense interest in a particular problem or topic” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 104). As van Manen (1990) states,

Every project of phenomenological inquiry is driven by a commitment of turning to an abiding concern . . . [and] does not start or proceed in a disembodied fashion. It is always a project of someone: a real person, who, in the context of particular individual, social, and historical life, circumstances, sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence (p. 31).

With that in mind, and given my experience in the field of adult education and my interest in and passion for things spiritual, I determined to investigate how other adult educators describe the notion of spirituality and how that description impacts their practice. Additionally, this study addresses the gaps in the literature by phenomenologically researching the link between spirituality, as grounded in a specific religious/theological tradition (Christianity), and practice. Thus, the primary research questions framing this study are as follows:

- How do selected adult educators describe spirituality?
- How do select adult educators describe the relationship between their spirituality and their practice as educators?
- What educational practices are framed within the discourse of spirituality in adult education?

### Bounding the Study

Recently, interest in spirituality, as noted earlier, has exploded. English, Fenwick, and Parsons (in press) touch on the magnitude of this explosion when they describe a visit to a “bookstore devoted to the topic of spirituality where there were—to our count—thirty eight different categories for the ‘spiritual.’” Therefore, as a means of bounding (Stake, 1995, 2000) what otherwise has the potential of being an enormous study, criteria for participation in the research has been established to include individuals who are:

- Self-identified adult educators with at least two years of practice in the field;
- Formally trained in the academic discipline of adult education at the graduate level;
- Identified and confirmed by reputation and works as holding a notion of spirituality grounded in a Christian tradition, broadly defined.

By bounding the study with these criteria, it becomes more manageable in terms of both its size and allocation of resources. As Stake (2000) observes, a study

Is one among others. In any given study, we will concentrate on the one . . . [it is] “a bounded system”; ultimately, we may be interested in a general phenomenon or a population of cases more than in the individual case. And we cannot understand this case without knowing about other cases. But while we are studying it, our meager resources are concentrated on trying to understand *its* complexities. (p. 436).

On this issue of manageability, van Manen (1990) agrees, warning of the need to keeping a phenomenological research project “well-defined and well-focused . . . otherwise one is quickly lost in the sheer expanse and depth of one’s question” (p. 167).

Furthermore, the current discourse of spirituality in adult education is characterized by vague, ungrounded descriptions of the construct. Therefore, limiting

participation in the study to Christian notions of spirituality speaks directly to the issue of grounding these discussions in a specific, religious and theological context. Moreover, my extensive exposure to, experience with, and formal education in Christian theology best qualifies me to critique notions of spirituality from a Christian worldview. Finally, “Christian” is how I as the researcher am oriented to the phenomenon, spirituality, and as van Manen (1990) suggests, “to orient oneself to a phenomenon always implies a particular interest, station, or vantage point in life” (p. 40).

Using a method that follows a type of purposeful sampling suggested by Patton (1990) and following the approach used in the pilot study (Milacci, 2002), I selected eight individuals to serve as participants in the study. Purposeful sample is well suited to phenomenological research because, as Patton (1990) explains, “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling” (p. 169).

Four of the participants selected were colleagues, people whom I knew well, have worked with, and whom I contacted directly. Three participants were individuals I would characterize as acquaintances rather than colleagues, but whom I knew well enough to also contact directly. One participant was known to and nominated for participation by three of the other interviewees; contact with this person was done through an intermediary. All contacts were done either through email, phone, or in person.

Additionally, the data selection process utilized in this research provided for some diversity in gender, age, race/ethnicity, occupation (i.e. among adult education

practitioners), psychological, and social roles (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982) among the participants. The selection process provided several shared and unanticipated commonalities among the participants.

Finally, the participant selection process ended once I determined that the data had reached saturation. By saturation, I mean the data evidenced repetition of salient points and it was established that “the addition of new information [would] confirm the findings rather than add new information” (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999, p. 23).

### Data Collection

The primary means of data collection in all phenomenological research are informal, conversational, taped interviews (e.g. Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Dey, 1993; Giorgi, 1985b; Moustakas, 1994; Ray, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Other means of data collection, such as tracing etymological sources of the phenomenon under study, close (i.e. participant) observation, and analysis of documents such as diaries, journals, and logs are discussed (Giorgi, 1985b; Moustakas, 1994; Ray, 1994; van Manen, 1990), but interviewing is by far the method of choice in phenomenological inquiry.

Furthermore, phenomenological interviews are to be guided by the research question(s) “that prompted the need for the interview in the first place” (van Manen, 1990, p. 66). Moreover, in phenomenological research, the interview process is determined by the philosophic approach taken in the study. So, for example, in a phenomenological interview guided by the transcendental approach, questions are not predetermined but rather flow from the dialogue that results after the initial “meaning or

analogy question” (Ray, 1994, p. 129) is asked. If, however, the research approach is rooted in hermeneutic phenomenology, interview questions can include “conceptual, theoretical, or historical traditions” (Ray, 1994, p. 129) as part of the process.

The interview format used in this study was, by design, highly conversational and unstructured. In line with the Dutch tradition it was a combination of both the descriptive and interpretive approach. In this tradition the researcher strives for what are essentially recorded conversations with participants in which they relate their own life stories, anecdotes, experiences, incidents, etc. (van Manen, 1990, p.67). The purpose of this type of interview is to explore and gather “narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding”(van Manen, 1990, p. 66) of the phenomenon under investigation.

Towards that end, I began every interview by asking participants to talk about and describe themselves, their job/work, their life or a typical day outside of work, etc. (see Appendix A), in an attempt to get them to share their own stories and experiences. It was vital, however, for me to remain concrete throughout this process, asking the participant to think of specific instances, situations, or events and then “explore the whole experience to the fullest” (van Manen, 1990, p. 67). The specific measures I took to obtain this type of highly conversational interviews are discussed in the interview protocol section below.

Consistent with phenomenological research (Giorgi, 1985a; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990), all initial interviews conducted lasted from one and one half to just over two hours in length. Six of these initial interviews were conducted face-to-face, in a setting convenient to and selected by the participant. Due to geographical distance and

following Creswell (1998, p. 124), two of these initial interviews were conducted over the phone. All interviews were audio taped. Additionally, notes were taken before, during, and after the interviews were conducted yielding approximately seventy-five handwritten pages of observations, thoughts, questions, key words, ideas, and etcetera. During the face-to-face interviews, however, I deliberately attended more to the words, facial expressions, and body language of the interviewee than to copious note taking.

Furthermore, small amounts of data were collected via close participant observation (van Manen, 1990) in which the researcher is both a participant and observer at the same time, endeavoring to “maintain a certain level of reflectivity while guarding against a more manipulative and artificial attitude” (van Manen, 1990, p. 69). Then, documents written by the participants that addressed issues related to their own spirituality and adult education practice were obtained and analyzed. These included published written materials (such as but not limited to conference proceedings and journal articles), unpublished written materials, course syllabi, and informational brochures produced by the organization(s) for which the participant(s) worked and provided by the participant.

As a means of clarifying a few minor questions generated during the data analysis phase of the study, five brief follow up interviews, two over the telephone (these were not audio taped) and three via email, were also conducted. Additionally, all references to participants in tapes, field notes, and relevant documents were coded; a master list of participants and their identity is stored in a separate location.

In one instance, data collection began with close observation of the participant while engaged in adult education practice. This observation lasted approximately two

hours and was conducted on site, i.e. in the setting where the participant engaged in practice during which some notes were taken. During the initial interview session for this observed participant, questions and data generated from that observation were addressed.

Institutional regulations hindered me from procuring permission to observe other participants engaged in practice. Then too, shortly after conducting the initial observation I realized that this sort of observational data was of limited utility to this study given that its purpose was to investigate descriptions of spirituality. Faced with the institutional constraints and the fact that gathering this type of data was not germane to the purpose of this study, after consultation with my advisor, I decided to forego doing additional participant observations.

### Interview Protocol

All interviews began by asking the participant to share something about him/herself, followed by a description of their job, work, and what they do, strongly emphasizing that I did not want a mere job description (see Appendix A). Starting the interview with this line of inquiry provided some valuable data and helped to create what I believe was a more relaxed, comfortable atmosphere for both the interviewer and interviewee. It further served to produce the highly conversational interviews desired in the Dutch tradition of phenomenological research.

In an attempt to get at “thick, rich descriptions” I refrained from asking the participants to define or describe spirituality directly. Instead, I opted for the indirect approach, probing their understanding of faith and a description of the process or journey

that brought them to this understanding, a clear reflection of my own bias about what spirituality means. I then probed the participant as to how their understanding of faith impacts or comes into play in the work situation described earlier. Throughout the interview process I made a conscious and deliberate effort to listen carefully to the participants' descriptions, making both mental and written notes of words, phrases, gestures, etc., things I considered to be useful as prompts that enabled me to "get at" the type of information I was interested in.

### Data Analysis

Following the data collection process and in line with Dutch tradition, the collected data was approached in terms of "meaning units, structures of meaning, or themes" (van Manen, 1990, p. 78). Phenomenological themes are elements that occur frequently in the text and are understood to be the *structures of the experience* (van Manen, 1990, p. 79, emphasis original). The process of recovering the theme or themes embodied in the work is identified as "theme analysis" (van Manen, 1990, p. 78). It is a process in which the researcher attempts to gain control and order of the phenomenological research by "seeing" meaning in the data (van Manen, 1990, p. 79).

The process of theme analysis for this study began by listening to each tape straight through (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 178) in a preliminary data analysis phase. During this preliminary phase, I began to keep an electronic journal, cataloguing my thoughts, ideas, questions, and frustrations as they related to this project. Concomitantly, all taped interview data were transcribed (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 1990; Ray, 1994;

Rossman & Rallis, 1998; van Manen, 1990) verbatim, yielding over 150 pages of single-spaced text. I transcribed two of the interviews, the other six were done by a professional, hired transcriptionist. Transcription of interview data is important because, according to van Manen (1990), “human science meaning can only be communicated textually” (p. 78). Once again the nature of that analysis in phenomenological research differs according to philosophic approach (Ray, 1994).

I found the data collected for this study, particularly the interview data, to be a rich source of fascinating information and quickly realized how easily I could be distracted into interesting issues that were not related to the purpose of this study. As van Manen (1990) warns, “unless the researcher remains strong in his or her orientation to the fundamental question or notion, there will be many temptations to get side-tracked or to wander aimlessly” (p. 33).

Therefore, shortly after entering the preliminary data analysis phase, I posted the three research questions guiding this study—along with a code sheet containing the participants’ pseudonyms—on the wall in front of my computer, and regularly referred to them while examining the data. This seemingly minor step forced me to look at the data first and foremost through the lens of the research questions. It also effectively served to keep me focused on the stated purpose of—or maintain a strong and oriented relation to (van Manen, 1990, p. 33)—the study.

Upon receiving the interview transcripts I was able to enter the next level of data analysis. This second level involved a more rigorous, deliberate process of listening and re-listening to the interview tapes while at the same time reading and re-reading the transcribed interview data, field notes, and pertinent participant documents in search of

meaning units or structures of the phenomenon, spirituality. Attention in this second level of analysis was also paid to obvious and hidden notions relevant to the influences of spirituality on education practice. Words, phrases, sentences, etcetera, that were deemed potentially significant to this study were highlighted in yellow. Key words, phrases, and sentences were also circled and/or underlined in pencil directly on the written transcripts.

Then, after several more readings and re-readings of the transcripts, the words, phrases, sentences, etc. thought to have potential significance were identified, using a red pen, based on their relationship to the three research questions guiding the study. More specifically, data that directly addressed the research questions were coded into meaning units that eventually became the three main themes—reflective of the three guiding research questions—of this study. For example, data that addressed participants' descriptions of spirituality were coded "spir" (for spirituality) directly in the margin of the transcript. Similarly, data that spoke to the link between spirituality and practice were coded "practice," while data that addressed specific educational practices framed within participants' descriptions of spirituality were identified "spec" (for specific educational practices), again directly in the margins of the transcripts (see Appendix B).

van Manen (1990) states that a researcher "may use the emerging themes as generative guides for writing the research study. In other words, the entire study—or at least the main body of the study—is divided into chapters, parts, or sections . . ." (p. 168). Accordingly, the three main themes that emerged in the second level of data analysis became the basis for the three main sections of Chapter Five. Additionally, each section in that chapter addresses the research question that underpins it. Thus, in section one, "Descriptions of Spirituality," the first research question is addressed; section two,

“Exploring the Link Between Spirituality and Practice” speaks to question two; and section three, “Specific Educational Practices” tackles the third and final research question guiding this study.

Once the emerging main themes were identified, a third level of analysis followed. The intent of this next level of in-depth analysis was to explicate the structure of each of the three primary themes identified in the second level (van Manen, 1990, p. 168). During this third level of analysis, the written transcripts were once again pored over through a process of reading and re-reading. Any data that I thought might potentially be quoted in the study was crosschecked against the audiotapes for accuracy.

Then, following the same system utilized in the second level of analysis of highlighting in yellow and circling/underlining in pencil, the three main themes were subdivided into potential subsuming themes (van Manen, 1990, p. 168). Using a red pen, these potential subsuming themes were then coded as sub-themes, once again directly in the margins of the written transcripts themselves. The purpose of coding these third level, sub-themes was to “articulate the [main] theme . . . being described in that section” (van Manen, 1990, p. 168). Thus, in the example provided (see Appendix B), data that had been identified during the third level of analysis as relating to the main theme, “Specific Educational Practices,” was coded as a sub-theme “CB” for “community building.”

A total of six sub-themes emerged in the data that served to explicate the first main theme, Six Descriptions of Spirituality: Closely Related Terms, Beyond the Physical and Material, Relationship to Community, Problematic Nature of Individualized Spirituality, Dissatisfaction with Current Definitions of Spirituality, and finally, Encounters with the “Dark Side.” Additionally, four sub-themes surfaced in the analysis

of the second main theme, Exploring the Link Between Spirituality and Practice: The Critical Aspect of the Link, The Human Aspect of the Link, The Challenging Aspect of the Link, and The Central Aspect of the Link. The third and final main theme, Specific Educational Practices was divided into three subsuming themes, or three educational practices: Community Building, Engaging Others on a Deeper Level, and Facilitating Others in their Growth and appear as such in the third and final main section of Chapter Five (See Appendix C).

### *Creating the Phenomenological Text*

A central concern in phenomenological research is language. As van Manen (1990) argues, “to *do* research in a phenomenological sense is already and immediately and always a *bringing to speech* of something” (p. 32, emphasis original). Thus, following the data analysis phase, I engaged in the process of phenomenological writing and rewriting for the purpose of creating a phenomenological text (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990).

Ultimately, my goal in this process was to develop a text or manuscript that could effectively organize and re-present the spirit of this study (Moustakas, 1994, p. 174) while at the same time animate the research questions (van Manen, 1990, p. 111) However, since there is no set research design or blueprint to follow in phenomenological research, I faced the very real and daunting challenge of determining how to go about creating my phenomenological text.

Here, van Manen’s (1990) idea that the “structure [of the study] in its decisive form only emerges as one textually progresses with the work” (van Manen, 1990, p. 167)

proved both prophetic and helpful. For while I was engaged in wrestling with “textual processes,” I inadvertently stumbled upon two concepts that ultimately became the principles around which this study was organized: viewing research through the metaphoric lens of story and filling in gaps. These two principles provided me with the framework I needed to construct this phenomenological text.

Finally, according to the phenomenological research literature, to be a truly phenomenological inquiry, the written text must include a generous sampling of the participants’ voices (Giorgi, 1970; 1985b; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). After pouring over the interview data, I realized it was in my participants’ voices the richness and depth of phenomenological meaning of spirituality would be found since “depth is what gives the phenomenon or lived experience to which we orient ourselves its meaning and its resistance to our fuller understanding” (van Manen, 1990, p. 152). Thus, the voices and stories of the participants were re-presented (Riessman, 1993) in abundance—deliberately so—in the study.

### *Trustworthiness*

Every attempt during every phase of this study—from data collection through creating the phenomenological text—has been made to produce a trustworthy and credible work. “‘Trustworthiness’ not ‘truth’ is a key semantic difference: The latter assumes an objective reality, whereas the former moves the process into the social world” (Riessman, 1993, p. 65). Additionally, as Lather (1991) argues, “lack of concern for data credibility within praxis-oriented research programs will only decrease the legitimacy of the knowledge generated therein” (p. 68).

Therefore, a number of specific methods were implemented to ensure that the credibility and trustworthiness of this study was preserved. For example, as a means of cross checking the data to confirm its credibility (Janesick, 2000), member checking was conducted. In this study, member checking consisted of providing participants the opportunity to review the analyzed data and subsequent write up of the research prior to final submission of the study (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility of the data was also supported by constantly comparing the written transcripts with the audiotapes for accuracy during the analysis phase (Miklancie, 2001; van Manen, 1990).

Then too, periodic peer reviews of interview transcripts, analyzed interview data, the phenomenological text, notes, ideas, etcetera, were carried out as well. These peer reviews were conducted with upwards of six adult education colleagues, both faculty and students. The intent of peer review was to provide an external check of the research process (Creswell, 1998, p. 202). Conducting peer review also contributed to the trustworthiness of a study by affording a means of “debriefing and feedback [to] aid in the interpretation and refinement of the findings” (Howell, 2000, p. 124).

For the purpose of triangulation, information and data was collected from a variety of sources (Creswell, 1998; Howell, 2000). These sources included participant interviews, field notes, emails, analysis of a variety of pertinent documents—including but not limited to published and unpublished written materials, course syllabi, and informational brochures produced by the organization(s) for which the participant(s) worked—and a limited amount of participant observations.

Ultimately, however, method alone cannot guarantee credibility or trustworthiness of a study. That burden rested squarely on my shoulders as the researcher. In this process

I came to realize, with Riessman (1993), that “validation in narrative studies cannot be reduced to a set of formal rules or standardized procedures . . . . there is no canonical approach in interpretive work, no recipes and no formulas” (pp. 68-9).

Finally, there is no claim whatsoever of neutrality or objectivity—tacit or explicit—in this study. With Baptiste (2001) I contend, “If every human action bears consequence regardless of intention, then it follows that educators cannot be neutral” (p. 204). Though significant attempts to produce a credible work were made, at best, this work is a representation, or re-presentation (Riessman, 1993), constructed from and grounded in my experiences, readings, interpretations and conversations.

## Chapter 4

### ADDRESSING THE GAPS

#### *Two Organizing Principles*

##### Overview

According to van Manen (1990), “Creating a phenomenological text is the object of the research process” (p. 111). The question then needing to be addressed is how does a researcher go about this attaining this goal and create a phenomenological text for her particular study? van Manen (1990) argues that there is no prescriptive approach, no one “right way” to accomplish this feat. Rather, “[the researcher must] be mindful . . . . that the textual approach one takes in the phenomenological study should largely be decided in terms of the nature of the phenomenon being addressed, and the investigative method that appears to appropriate to it” (van Manen, 1990, p. 173). In other words, decisions regarding the construction of the phenomenological text fall solely upon the shoulders of researcher.

This chapter begins by presenting the two organizing principles around which this particular phenomenological text is constructed. The first organizing principle is viewing research through the metaphoric lens of story and the second relates to filling in gaps. Then, brief introductory portraits of the participants—my collaborators in addressing the gaps—are provided.

### Organizing Principle One: Using the Concept of Story

The first of these two organizing principles centers on the utility of viewing research through the metaphoric lens of the story (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Riessman, 1993; Ryan & Bernard, 2000; Silverman, 2000). At one time, I thought of stories primarily in terms of data collected from research participants, focusing only “on the storied qualities of qualitative textual data, that is the ways in which social actors produce, represent, and contextualize experience and personal knowledge” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 54). According to this view, by thinking about data as stories researchers are able to analyze and interpret that data more creatively (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 55).

I realized that research is more than simply a matter of passively collecting and relaying others’ stories, rather it is essentially the researcher telling her own story. Riessman (1993) argues that the story metaphor describes what qualitative researchers do with their research materials and “emphasizes that we create order [and] construct texts in particular contexts” (p. 1). This means the accounts I give of stories told to me are just that: accounts, reflections, interpretations, recollections, and reconstructions of those stories by me; they have been filtered through my experiences, my understandings, my readings, my memory, (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Riessman, 1993). These accounts are my representations, my interpretations of the participants’ stories and as such are “incomplete, partial, and selective” (Riessman, 1993, p. 11).

Additionally, the stories recounted in this study exist in a particular context, as connected to and part of my story. As Riessman (1993) points out, “although the goal [of research] may be to tell the whole truth, our narratives about others’ narratives are our

worldly creations” (p. 15). The sole reason the participants’ stories are being relayed in this study is because they are part of my story, a story which began in my childhood and continues to this day.

Finally my participation in this story ends the moment I put my thoughts down on paper. The moment my story, transformed and re-presented by me into words and text, is read by another, it no longer is my story, but rather becomes part of the story of the reader. At this point, the reader’s experiences, understandings, readings, memory, etcetera, filter, reflect on, and interpret my story (Riessman, 1993, pp. 14-5) and in the process, weave my story into the fabric of their lives, making it their story.

#### Organizing Principle Two: Filling in the Gaps

A second organizing principle is the notion of standing in, or filling, gaps (Alexander, 1976, pp. 72-3). The idea of seeking to fill in gaps is applicable to the purposes of this investigation in general and this chapter in particular.

Specifically, three gaps related to this study emerge. The first gap is the one that exists in the literature. The second gap is found between a lived experience and the communication or telling of that experience (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Riessman, 1993; van Manen, 1990). Gap three lies between a story as told by the participant of a study and the re-telling—or perhaps better, the re-presentation—of that story by the researcher (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Riessman, 1993; Ryan & Bernard, 2000; Silverman, 2000).

Regarding the first gap, there is a paucity of literature in adult education that even cursorily attempts to address definitional, religious, theological, or etymological

foundations of spirituality. Instead of endeavoring to ground the term, the trend in the literature appears to be one of constructing a notion of spirituality that may be more palatable to a wider readership, but does so at the cost of stripping the term of any real meaning. A major intent of this study is to begin to bridge these gaps in the literature by phenomenologically investigating the link between spirituality, as grounded in the specific religious/theological tradition of Christianity, and practice.

Gap two exists between a lived experience and the communication of that experience. As Riessman (1993) states,

In the telling [of a story or experience], there is an inevitable gap between the experience as I lived it and any communication about it. Caught in the “prison house of language,” in the words of Nietzsche . . . . there is no way to break through to the ideas which my words refer because language is uncommunicative of anything other than itself . . . . Yet without words, the . . . . experience cease[s] to exist. Language makes [experience] real (pp. 10-11).

Riessman’s comments point to the ambiguity and challenge of phenomenological research: first, finding a way of “bringing to speech” the essence of an experience and then, finding a way to communicate it textually—by way of organized narrative or prose (van Manen, 1990, p. 78). Meeting this challenge requires the researcher to engage in thoughtful reflection on the experience, or “bringing into nearness that which tends to be obscure, that which tends to evade the intelligibility of our natural attitude” (van Manen, 1990, p. 32).

The third significant gap is that which lies between a participant’s story, as told *to* a researcher and as retold or re-presented *by* the researcher. With Riessman (1993), I contend,

We cannot give voice [to others], but we do hear voices that we record and interpret. Representational decisions cannot be avoided; they enter at numerous points in the research process, and qualitative analysts . . . . must confront them. Investigators do not have direct access to another's experience. We deal with ambiguous representations of it—talk, text, interaction, and interpretation. It is not possible to be neutral and objective, to merely represent (as opposed to interpret) the world” (p. 8).

Ryan and Bernard (2000) concur, pointing to the numerous judgments a researcher must make regarding the “meanings of contiguous blocks of text” (p. 780) when managing and analyzing data. Similarly, Silverman (2000) speaks of a “narrative approach” to analyzing qualitative data, the manner in which “interviewers and interviewees, in concert, generate plausible accounts of the world” (p. 823). Ultimately, however, it becomes the onus of the researcher, not only to strive for accuracy in representations (Fenwick, 1996), but perhaps more importantly, to learn to live with the imprecise nature of the representations created by the gap.

According to Riessman (1993), “the construction of any work always bears the mark of the person who created it” (p. v). Clearly, my mark permeates this study; it is undeniably a story constructed by me. Nevertheless, it is also a story that could not be told, that would be incomplete, and would not exist without the input, the helpful cooperation of the individuals who participated in this study. In a very real sense, they are collaborators and co-workers in this attempt to tackle the three gaps addressed in this section. Thus, in order to begin to grasp the framework surrounding this study, some degree of familiarity or acquaintance with the collaborators is required. Introducing the participants is the purpose of the next section.

*Portraits of the Storytellers*

This section presents the eight individuals, Sue, Jodi, Frank, Matt, Bob, Martin, Chloe, and Sara (all pseudonyms), whose stories shaped the construction of this study. First, a group snapshot identifying similarities in the participants is given, followed by more detailed, individual portraits. Additionally, these pictures were taken, developed, and displayed by me; they are not self-portraits. Moreover, though every attempt has been made to produce a trustworthy and credible biography of these eight individuals (Fenwick, 1996), these accounts are at best my representation (Riessman, 1993), constructed from and grounded in my experiences, interactions, conversations, etcetera, with them.

A Group Snapshot

These eight individuals share some noteworthy commonalities not specific to the criteria used for selection. For example, all of them are either working towards their doctorate in adult education or have already earned their degree. Then too, all of the participants currently live and practice adult education in North America; in fact, with the exception of Sue and Martin, all not only currently live and work in, but also hail from the United States.

Additionally, all of the participants revealed in their interviews that they were raised in an environment they themselves described as religious, within the Christian tradition broadly defined, by parents who had some notion of and commitment to faith. The depth of their parents' faith commitment, however, did vary across the spectrum,

from those who spoke of their families as somewhat religious to those who characterized their upbringing as deeply religious. For example, according to Sara, the Irish Catholic home in which she was raised

Wasn't overly religious by Catholic standards; although I remember when I was a kid that we would we'd have to do the rosary periodically when I was really young. When I was a preschooler, we went to church every Sunday, I mean we always did that. But, besides that, we didn't eat meat on Fridays, like a lot of the stuff that's very cultural.

Frank, on the other hand, had a markedly different experience in the white, middle class home in which he was raised. In his family, church and religion played a far more visible role:

I was deeply involved in the church growing up . . . . My mother's been the organist for the church for thirty years, actually just this last Sunday was her first Sunday as "organist emeritus." She quit just a week ago. And my father taught Sunday School.

But regardless of the degree to which it was manifested, all participants agreed that their religious or faith upbringing had direct impact on their own faith development; it also impacted their present understanding of spirituality.

Finally, the commonality that is perhaps most noteworthy and pertinent to this study was the sense of transparency and authenticity that emanated from the eight collaborators. This sense of authenticity was evident in the words they spoke and the stories they told. And, as evidenced in the next chapter, authenticity was something all participants valued and aspired to. As Matt, by way of example, stated,

As time goes on, I'm becoming more concerned with being an authentic, genuine human being than I am with being a success. And that, I think springs from my faith . . . . So I guess as I feel my mortality, I'm

becoming more concerned with that, being authentic in reconciling my actions with what I say I believe.

This sense of spiritual authenticity was connected to a belief system that was lived out before the participants in their childhood. Two interviewees spoke explicitly and in glowing terms, not just of the faith of their parents but of the consistency of their parents' faith on a day-to-day basis. This element of consistency in turn profoundly influenced their present understanding of faith, as well as how they themselves currently live that faith on a daily basis.

Jodi, for example, grew up in Michigan in a mainline Protestant home where "we always went to church, that was what you did on Sunday morning." But, she added, "it was more than that . . . . my parents had a very strong belief system." Now in her fifties, Jodi recalled how her parents actively participated in both the church and community, how they lived what they taught, how their actions were consistent with their words, and how sometimes, that consistency came at a cost for the whole family.

A good example of that was when I was in upper elementary school, a family around the corner was selling a house, and an African-American doctor was going to buy it. And all the people in the neighborhood signed a petition to keep them from buying the house, because they did that kind of stuff back then. [Well] my dad refused to sign it, and so kids in the neighborhood didn't talk to my sister and I for a while.

Jodi also mentioned how she was deeply affected in her spiritual and faith development by the consistent, lived faith of others she encountered, most notably in her church, during her growing up years:

I would say that the youth leaders had a very big impact on me too, because being the minister at that church, they really lived what they taught . . . . So I would say that growing up the people I interacted with

in the church were people that put their actions where their words were, [it] wasn't just a Sunday morning thing, but actually lived it out.

Matt, like Jodi, also encountered a "living faith" in a few adults during his formative years:

I remember, I have an aunt that just passed away two months ago. I remember they asked for people to donate their old stuff to [be] part of this same thing, this [Johnstown] flood victims' relief fund. They were asking for buckets and blankets and stuff, and I remember my aunt going out and buying all new stuff; she wasn't going to send someone her junk. But she'd go out and buy twenty buckets and fifty blankets and send them brand new stuff.

Additionally, Matt's encounter with consistency in faith affected his present view of the relationship between faith and day-to-day living. As he so succinctly remarked, "faith that isn't lived, isn't faith. It's just . . . it's meaningless."

### Individual Portraits

At the time of her interview, Sue, a native of Canada, was serving as an assistant professor in adult education and educational administration at a public university in Western Canada and in the process of applying for tenure. White and in her early forties, Sue also volunteers as an adjunct faculty at a theological college in Canada, which she readily admitted was "a huge investment of time but its bloody well worth it because once a month I get to sit around and talk with people who have these same faith crises."

In high school Sue was a piano performance major. At that time, her dream was to become a concert pianist and so, prior to attending university, Sue traveled to Italy to study with a maestro for a year. This bit of Sue's personal history is noteworthy because

music was—and still is—an integral part of her life in general and her connection to the Christian Church in particular.

I've always puddled around the Christian faith. I took it very much for granted in my growing years because I was a musician. I was the church organist from the time I was about thirteen years old and actually employed by large churches by the time I was sixteen directing choirs and so on, so I probably took it for granted that that was a big part of life mainly in terms of music in the church and I carried on music ministry for many, many years. I've always had some sort of job on the side in music ministry . . . . music ministry was and continues to be a very important part of my participation in church and in my faith.

Jodi has long since left Michigan but is still loosely affiliated with the mainline Protestant church she was raised in. She saw herself as someone who “is good at working with people and helping them see, understand what they're doing, how they're doing it, and how it connects to everybody else.” Though she has had many varied and interesting experiences during her adult life such as raising five children and obtaining several degrees in a variety of disciplines, Jodi identified the time she and her husband spent in Columbia as volunteers for the Peace Corps during the 1960's as that which has had the greatest, most profound impact on her life in general and her faith and spirituality in particular.

Specifically, it was the extreme poverty she witnessed first hand in those mountainous regions of South America that forever changed how she viewed the world, herself, and her faith. As she recounted,

You could see when you walked in the house, there's no food, and they're living just day by day, the woman was doing the wash or whatever, really there was so much poverty . . . . So I'd say that had a big impact when we came back . . . . actually we should have written a book. A lot of things we said [when we got back], and people looked at us like we were crazy.

They didn't even want to talk about it. So I'd say that that had a real big impact on my whole belief system at that point.

Currently, Jodi works as the director of a student aid office at a large university in the Northeast United States.

Chloe, an African American in her early fifties, is the mother of eleven children and widowed when those children were young. Chloe views her "life's work as adult education [that started with] community organizing in the sixties, and then, programmatically, around housing." Her role as a community organizer dealing with inner city housing issues sprang directly out of her own housing needs that rose to the surface following the untimely death of her husband:

My first issue was trying to maintain some housing for my family. I'm a single parent because I'm a widow and I have eleven children. And my housing location was just key . . . . enough room, the price is right, and that's when I first began doing a programmatic organizing. But then what organizing really entailed, when you're doing it in the community, low income community, I might add, is adult education. Because you're bringing your resources to the table, and then you expect your neighbors to bring their resources to the table, and then what you discover is you have all these questions and no answers.

For Chloe faith has played a major role, not just in her ability to survive the tremendous obstacles she encountered in the past, but also in defining who Chloe is today:

You know when I woke up and decided and realized that I had these eleven children depending on me and I'm all alone, that's the scariest thing in the world for me. But I had to move on, on faith. And when I left my safety net, which was the Israelite nation, that I had "aligned myself with," grew up with, we all practically lived in the same neighborhood . . . . and declared to everybody, we're Catholic, all that was scary . . . . but it felt right, it felt like it was the right thing to do.

Chloe still lives in the Midwestern United States. At present, she serves as a counselor and academic advisor for inner city, undergraduates who are enrolled in a program for nontraditional students entering the university at which Chloe works.

The final female participant in this study, Sara, was born and raised in New England as the fourth of five children in an Irish Catholic family. Now in her forties, Sara described her current relationship to the church of her youth as one of ambivalence. As she candidly stated, although she did not think she could ever “be a card carrying member,” she still thinks

[The Catholic Church] has wonderful things; it provides rituals during important times of transition and ways we use to mark those transitions. And of course,[it provides] a community of support, a community of faith, and those are all the things that I really value [along with] good music, ...singing together, and I think that those ways of being with people in the world are important. And it also provides some kind of guidance, you know, from a theological perspective.

Prior to entering the field of academic adult education, Sara earned an undergraduate degree in math, her masters in religion, and spent ten years as a lay minister for the Catholic Church. Paralleling Sue’s experience, Sara’s affinity and expertise with music played a significant role in her connection to the church.

Additionally, music proved instrumental in Sara’s involvement in Catholic lay ministry work. After graduating from college, Sara applied to the Jesuit volunteer corps and was offered a position as a campus minister because

I was a musician [and] this was the era of the folk band [and] I played the guitar, and the piano . . . . And I thought they were trying to recruit me for being a nun because at the time I didn’t know any lay people working in ministry, and I was like, I’m not going to be a nun. And they said, “Oh no, no...you know, we didn’t think you’d be a nun, but [we are] starting this lay ministry and [you would be] a plus because you can do music.”

Currently, Sara is employed as an associate professor of adult education at a large university in the Northeastern United States.

Frank majored in philosophy at both the undergraduate and graduate level. Though only in his late twenties, Frank has already faced a number of difficulties in life. These challenges, however, have served as a catalyst to deepen his faith and strengthen his resolve. As he remarked,

I'm very resilient, and I'm very tough, and I've developed that. That's been a process of years in the making and going through my own health problems, and all sorts of twists and turns in my road. And I feel like I am where I am because I maintained passion through a lot of uncertainty.

Frank was especially passionate and vocal about issues relating to social justice and saw this passion directly linked to or rooted in his Christian belief system. Speaking of a pastor and mentor who had a great personal impact on him and his spirituality, Frank recounted, "I liked him, and he was very interested in social justice issues, which is something that I had not seen growing up from my pastors . . . . I can't understand how there is a Christian message independent of social justice message."

Additionally, Frank spent some time pastoring a small congregation in a rural area. Currently he works as the director of a Protestant undergraduate student group at a university in the Northeastern United States.

Matt is also white, but somewhat older than Frank, in his late thirties. Recently, Matt assumed the role of director of youth ministries for a large (over 1200 members) mainline Protestant Church in a small city in the Northeastern United States. At the time

of the interview, however, Matt was employed as an assistant director of the office of fellowships and awards in a university also located in the Northeastern United States.

When he was only two years old, Matt's father died unexpectedly at the age of forty-two. His father's family, however, stepped in and took care of him, his mother, and sister and "were really the ones that came and saved the day." He grew up in the Brethren Church of his paternal grandparents, in a tradition he described as "liberal, socially activist [and] pacifist." His father's family and subsequently the church they were affiliated with had a strong influence on him in those formative years.

During high school and college, Matt experienced what he called a "transition of skepticism, not being very involved in the church, viewing the church as arcane, [and subsequently was not] active in any single church at all." But later, as an adult, Matt felt drawn back to church, to reinvestigate the beliefs and traditions that had been so much a part of his childhood experience. Specifically, Matt thought about the people he had met in those bygone days whose lives were consistent with their stated beliefs and it was those thoughts that "re-invigorated that desire" to become involved in church:

I had never completely rejected the things that I had learned as a child about Christ, and about being Christian; and I guess to some extent, I was convinced that there were people who got it, who were doing and living. I didn't want to reject the whole thing out of hand until I had really discussed it and thought about it more.

The third male participant, Bob, is white and in his early fifties. Bob grew up and was quite active in church all through high school, in a religious tradition he described as conservative, evangelical Protestant. Perhaps even more significant than the theology of the church Bob grew up in was the pastor of the church. According to Bob, his was a

“good, mentoring” type of pastor who had—and continues to have—a great influence on Bob. As he stated,

I’d call [my pastor] fairly liberal minded . . . . even though the theology was fairly conservative. We got involved through [him] in a lot of social activist kinds of things . . . . he’s still very active in terms of social issues . . . . I think he kind of understands what I’m talking about, but not totally. But he’s a person I can talk to about it, and that’s good, and we have a great friendship at this point. We don’t see enough of each other, but I mean every time we do, it’s like we kind of pick up where we left off. So yeah, I mean, he’s a very important influence.

Another strong influence on Bob’s life and faith was his seminary experience. As Bob recounted,

I hit the seminary at a time when it was really very progressive in terms of some different kinds of educational styles, and also I think then very socially activist, a lot of the professors came out of this area, and you know, were fairly—again in their own faith journey still a little conservative, but had moved through a process, and it was a great time to be there in terms of a lot of interesting things happening. The curriculum put a lot of emphasis on field education, of being involved in community agencies.

Bob remarked that he has had “kind of a checkered past in terms of other stuff that I’ve done.” The “stuff” Bob has done so far includes serving as a part time associate pastor, earning two graduate degrees, a master of divinity and a masters in counseling, from the mainline Protestant seminary where he also worked as director of field education, coordinating religious education in a large church, and serving as the personnel director for about a 350 person mental health organization, where, according to Bob, “I did a lot of counseling for the staff, so like I was the in house person people would come to . . . and that was interesting.” Currently, Bob works as the director of a private, non-profit workforce investment agency in the Northeastern United States.

Martin, the final participant in the study, is an Afro-Caribbean in his early forties who, like Bob, has also had a wide and diverse range of both vocational and educational experiences. For example, prior to earning his doctorate in adult education, Martin obtained both his bachelors and masters degrees in music and entertainment management. In addition, he has extensive experience in vocational Christian ministry. As he stated,

I used to be an evangelist, I started churches, I ran Christian organizations, youth pastors in a number of churches, youth directors. I still teach in the church that I go to; high school, middle school, Sunday school, you know. I'm still fairly active in the things that I believe and the things I do.

Currently, Martin serves as director of prevention and intervention programs for a private, non-profit drug, alcohol, and mental health organization in New England.

Martin was the only interviewee that talked explicitly and somewhat extensively about the issue of power as a “sort of a basis of thinking about change.” As he remarked, “I’ve come from a colonial context where power is resident in a few people and the masses sort of have to basically depend of the . . . . wisdom of the supposed leadership of the few, you know?” Martin stated that his involvement in adult education is directly linked to his desire to “organize people to [learn to] use [power] wisely.”

Finally, Martin was the one participant who was most direct in articulating how his faith framed his life in general and his adult education practice, in particular:

I would say that if there’s one thing that is consistent in my life, is the concept of faith as a governing principal of being in the world. Faith, I don’t know people use faith, how you are using faith, but to me, faith is a principal that there is a Supreme Being that exists and has your best interest at heart, has a universal knowledge and that knowledge is a good intention towards you, and that to trust in that knowledge means that you have received a better deal than if you launch out on your own or trust something else. It does not mean that good things will always happen to you, but it does mean that a better thing is happening to you . . . . I was

born into a religious Christian family, but I have a special commitment to Jesus Christ that gives me a relationship with God in a way that is personal to me . . . . so faith to me frames my whole way of thinking and being in the world.

In fact, Martin ended the interview reiterating this same theme of the centrality of faith, not only to his life, but to all human life: “[Faith] helps me deal with the absurdity of living in a crazy world, one that is full of . . . . inconsistency and paradoxes and strange realities, you know? I don’t know how else to . . . . understand the human condition without belief in God.”

### Summary

Riessman (1993) observes how “nature and the world do not tell stories, individuals do” (p. 2). The stories of eight individuals shaped the story unfolding in this study. In the preceding sections, individual and group snapshots of the participants were presented in an attempt to involve the reader personally (van Manen, 1990, p. 121) in the lives and stories these eight storytellers. Beginning with the next chapter, the participants’ stories are recounted, interpreted, and re-presented as part of the telling of my story so that they may, in turn, be re-interpreted and re-represented by you, the reader as part of your story.

## Chapter 5

### BRIDGING THE GAPS

#### *Theme One: Six Descriptions of Spirituality*

##### Closely Related Terms

One of the primary purposes of this study was to investigate how select adult educators describe the notion of spirituality. However, in an attempt to get at the “thick, rich descriptions” sought after by qualitative research and phenomenological inquiry, I deliberately avoided asking the participants to define or describe spirituality directly until the latter part of the interview. Instead I opted for the indirect approach, probing the interviewees regarding their understandings of faith, asking them to describe the journey or process that brought them to those understandings (see Appendix A), a clear reflection of my own understanding of or bias about what spirituality means.

For most participants, using the terms “faith” and “spirituality” interchangeably during the interviews was unproblematic and in fact mirrored their own understanding of the synonymous nature of the two constructs. Chloe, for example spoke explicitly about spirituality as something that is “closely related to faith.” Jodi equated spirituality with her “basic belief system.” Sue also saw the two terms closely connected, as evidenced in this statement: “I think we have to push people to want to stand up and talk about spirituality, to talk about what they really believe.”

Furthermore, throughout her interview, Sue frequently used the two terms interchangeably herself. For example, when queried about her faith journey, Sue responded,

I guess in my mid twenties, I had sort of a crisis of *faith* . . . . I found some writers that were very helpful to me . . . . even some educational writers in *spirituality* have been helpful like Parker Palmer . . . . and in reading all of that I came to a new sense of what *faith* was for me and for my work (emphasis mine).

Matt also used faith and spirituality interchangeably: “[I] read a book several years ago where [the author] has these two different forms of *faith*. One is what he calls a *spirituality* of dwelling and the other’s a *spirituality* of seeking” (emphasis mine).

However, not every participant was completely comfortable with the indiscriminate swapping of these two terms. For Sara particularly, spirituality and faith are distinct concepts that may be hard to define but are indeed separate from one another; as such, they should be differentiated.

It’s a distinction that sometimes I make and sometimes I don’t, but if we’re going to be really clear, then I would say . . . yeah . . . . I think of faith in that sense, as often being tied to a religious tradition . . . you know. It could be, like I could talk about my faith development in relation to Catholicism and there would be significant places where that faith development and that spiritual development would intersect.

Sara went on to state that, in spite of the fact she often used the term spirituality, she was somewhat uncomfortable doing so.

I’m not that wild about the term, but of course I use it. I’m more comfortable with it . . . . than I am with religion, because I’m not talking about a specific religious tradition, and I’m not talking about people that necessarily identify, you know with a specific religious tradition. I thought about using the word spirit instead of spirituality, but I haven’t done that [yet].”

Four of the other interviewees took what Sara described as discomfort with the term spirituality a step further and expressed how they intentionally chose to avoid using the word altogether. In its stead, these participants substituted words they found to be more palatable such as faith, transcendence, spirit, tradition, or even religion. Frank, for example, declared emphatically,

I don't use it. I try not to use the word 'spirituality.' In fact, every time I say it, I kind of go like that [he shivers]; you know I get chills up my spine. And I use the word spirit, or I use the word passion, or I use the word energy, or transcendence.

Later in the interview, Frank added, "a lot of folks in the university setting want to use the word spirituality and spiritual as an acceptable term to encompass all groups we deal with. I prefer to use the word 'tradition.' It's not spirituality, it's tradition, because you're engaging a tradition whenever you're accepting a certain set of beliefs."

Martin was even more forceful in expressing his avoidance of the word. Instead he opted to use the word religion: "Honestly, as bad a word as religion is, I prefer to use religion [instead of spirituality]." The reason behind this choice was rooted in Martin's belief that "religion calls you into an active spirituality within the context of your community." In his view, spirituality, on the other hand, "Is a farce, really. It's a farce to propagate all kinds of things upon us and to avoid the responsibility of our commitment to the brotherhood of humanity or to the human condition. So I have maintained the use of religion or faith."

### Beyond the Physical and Material

One of the main criteria for participation in this study was that the individual “be identified and confirmed by reputation and works as holding a notion of spirituality grounded in a Christian tradition, broadly defined.” A Christian or Biblically based understanding of the term spirituality has a rich historical, theological, and etymological heritage that locates the construct in the realm of the theological and metaphysical. Because it is grounded in the metaphysical, this understanding of spiritual also cannot be understood without reference to other metaphysical constructs such as (but not limited to) “sacred,” “transcendent,” “God,” “holy,” and so forth (see Beringer, 2000, p. 159). The manner in which the participants used or understood the term spirituality was consistent with and reflective of the Christian notion of the construct.

Jodi for example depicted faith or spirituality as that which lies at the very “core” of who or what a person is and in fact used the term core in the context of spirituality frequently. “[Spirituality’s] kind of like the core of my being, I would say. And it has nothing to do with physical flesh and bones or mind kind of stuff.” Later, she added, “I think that spirituality is a very core part of what a person is, in a metaphysical sense.” Then, in a follow up email interview, she reaffirmed her previous apprehension of the term, saying, “I think my faith—my basic belief system—is the basis of who I am as a person.”

Frank equated the concept primarily with “transcendence.” Sara thought of the construct primarily in terms of “spirit.” Sue spoke often and contemplatively of spirituality being connected to “foundations, fundamentals, and foundational beliefs about what is knowledge, what is nature, what is being” equating those foundations with

“grand narrative, a grand theme, and truth.” She went on to lament the fact that these foundations of beliefs seem to be missing from present discussions of spirituality in adult education, as are other important, metaphysical concepts such as “. . . death and life . . . . . cosmology, the nature of God or the divine, or nature, or human beings within the system of the ecology of nature.”

Bob candidly expressed the difficulty he faced in trying to articulate his understanding or definition of spirituality. Eventually, he was able to talk about it in terms of something that is beyond self:

Well, I'm not sure if I have all of it, but I think that it has to do with the way people understand, [or perhaps] people, I think want to find something that's bigger than themselves. And spirituality has to do with the way people come to grips with that thing that's bigger than themselves, that thing or whatever that is, and so that's why spirituality is bigger than any religion. Because there's nothing that, there's no religion that can totally capture the . . . . enormity, the capacity, or I don't know exactly what you would call it, but the bigness of that thing that's out there.

Chloe, like Bob, spoke frankly about her struggle to understand and explain a construct that “you can't see and can't touch,” but like Jodi, did several times refer to a “core of faith” that she has had her entire life. She also admitted that spirituality was something “I'm still really thinking about,” adding, “[but] I know what I mean when I say spirituality from an African American woman's standpoint . . . . that means listening and being guided more by the spirit . . . . doing the right thing, treating your neighbor right, and looking out for the whole.”

Finally, for both Matt and Martin, spiritual was equated with the transcendent and immanent (see Cully, 1990; Nouwen, 1981). Consistent with the Christian or Biblical

understanding of the term, they described spirituality in terms of being intrinsically distinct, yet at the same time indivisible from and antithetical to the physical and material.

### Relationship to Community

Also present in all of the participants' discussions and descriptions of their understanding of spirituality, both explicitly and implicitly, was an emphasis on community. Chloe, for example, used the word "community" in a variety of ways nineteen times in her interview; both Martin and Sue made a dozen references to the construct. Sue also talked often of "building community" and "finding one's place in a community." Matt and Jodi spoke of "active participation in the community" on several occasions and Bob talked repeatedly about the various communities and community-based organizations he interacted, dialogued, and had contact with by virtue of his occupation.

According to the writings of Christian religious and theological scholars, community is a key construct in a Christian notion of spirituality (Ritchey, 2000; Schaeffer, 1971; Sider, 1999; Wallis, 2000). In that literature, community refers to a "natural bond between individuals, fostering resilient, dynamic, strong social networks" (Ritchey, 2000, p. 8). Historically, this notion of community is manifested in Christianity by a strong emphasis on collective worship, fellowship, and shared activity for and among its worshippers. As Wallis (2000) states, "It's not just that you can't do it alone but that you shouldn't. And you don't have to" (p. 160).

Especially present in the participants' discussions and descriptions was the importance of being connected to or part of a community of faith. Martin, for example, had strong opinions regarding the importance of grounding discussions of spirituality in the notion of community:

Oh, spirituality to me is just another American way of avoiding their responsibility to community . . . . [that is why] I prefer to use religion, because religion calls you . . . . into an active spirituality within the context of your community. In other words, if you say you have spirituality and you are religious, what does that mean for the group? Is it possible to be spiritual without it having some impact on somebody else? . . . . That's where [young people, for example] will find their values, when they're part of a youth group, when they're part of a community that says, sex before marriage is wrong, you know; that's the way they find support from peer group pressure, and solidarity about the things that make sense. So spirituality's not a vague sense of...a vague notion of belonging to some universal you know, goo or something, but it is actively participating in a community that has the interest of each other at heart and stuff like that.

Sara, though not as adamant, nevertheless also spoke of how "healthy" and "important" the "idea of worshipping as a community . . . . [and the] sense of spirituality that was embedded in the community of faith" was to her. She especially resonated with the communal spiritual practices of "good music, singing together, those ways of being with people in the world." Frank agreed, stating, "You know, I think that there's just something kinetic that happens when people get together, to worship, using the term worship loosely . . . . and I think that people who imagine that transcendence can happen independent of other people are missing out on a lot."

### Problematic Nature of Individualized Spirituality

Frank's previous comment also points to what most of the interviewees identified as a serious problem they saw in the current discussions of spirituality: an emphasis that borders on privileging on individualized spirituality. As he stated,

Part of the newer spirituality is that you don't need other people, you don't need this church, you don't this congregation, or synagogue, or mosque; you know you don't need to have other people. I think that's part of commodifying, that's part and parcel of anything that gets commodified is making it sale-able to the individual, pulling it out of the social network that in fact created it in the first place.

Based on her remarks, apparently Sue was in agreement with Frank's assessment of this new individually focused form of spirituality: "Some people want to keep spirituality as this sort of fluffy feel good sort of thing, self centered, that whole celebration of self . . . . I have a problem with that." Additionally, Sue's observation was that emphasizing individual spirituality came at the cost of excluding collective spirituality, a cost she believed is too high: "We have the whole issue of individualist spirituality almost uprising and pushing aside collective spirituality, collective expression of worship, and I think these are serious questions."

Sara referred to this current emphasis on individualism in the discourse as a decontextualized spirituality:

I'm not wild about this spirituality in the workplace, you know, these individualist notions of spirituality . . . . it does seem kind of decontextualized, you know, to me, and too individualist in its orientation and not much sense of what's the common good, it's just what's good for me in that organization, but not necessarily what's good for the world, I guess.

Chloe was most succinct in describing spirituality in terms of the community or group, the antithesis to such individualistic notions. In her words, the essence of spirituality “is treating your neighbor right and looking out for the whole [community].”

Martin also had a very strong opinion regarding what he saw as the problems and inherent flaws in the individualistic, “American” notion of spirituality dominating the discourse in academic adult education:

Spirituality is another form of individualism, so it’s like you could be in your little house and be spiritual. You can light your candle and play music over there in your little hole and be spiritual, you can stand upside down on your head, or swing from a rope, or line, or bed of nails, or sit on the ground or under water, and be spiritual . . . . it just means that you have an option to say that you could do something by yourself . . . . it says nothing about how you live in the world. It says more about how you are in the world as some kind of individualistic person, you know.

These statements by Frank, Sue, Sara, Chloe, and Martin parallel remarks made by Matt and Jodi. With the exception of Bob, the participants all had a strong, visceral reaction to the individualistic notions of spirituality being touted in the current discourse within academic adult education.

### Dissatisfaction with Current Definitions of Spirituality

Beyond the problematic nature of the individualistic spirituality within the current discourse, most participants also expressed varying levels of dissatisfaction with how spirituality is currently being defined and discussed. What they found to be particularly dissatisfying and disturbing were the nebulous, vague understandings that purport to be a “one-size-fits-all” type of spirituality.

Frank, for example, was particularly vocal in his criticism of the imprecise, ill-defined notion of the current, pop spirituality dominating academe. To him, the vagueness of the term “makes it so convenient for advertising, for people to make money out of it. The more general and vague and empty you can make a term, the more marketable it becomes.” As a means of illustrating his point, Frank cited what he saw as the demise of the term “diversity,” a construct “that has so much power to it, but it’s just been beat and stamped on and used in five year plans to death. And the word means nothing any more.” For Frank the term spirituality has experienced the same fate, deliberately so, “so that we can be permissive, and be open and welcoming to everything. And I think that that has been a big culprit in taking a lot of the meaning out of the word.”

For Jodi, these types of imprecise, vague definitions of spirituality can lead to the co-opting and commodification of spiritual concepts to further economic goals and serve the interests of the market (see Cox, 1999; Frank, 2000). As she commented,

I think that when we talk about spirituality in the workplace, or soul, or spirit, or whatever, people tie that directly to their religion . . . . that’s where it gets [mis]used, and that’s where I say if you don’t link that back to those beliefs, then we are subject to that being [mis]used.

Sue took exception to the claim of neutrality implicit in these kinds of vague, imprecise, notions of spirituality. In her words, “when you are trying to be all things to everyone, particularly when a lot of this is actually foundationalist in its own way, you know, its just a different kind of foundationalist, worship yourself, light a few candles, and feel good (laughs). I have a problem with it too.”

Martin intentionally avoided using the word spirituality altogether. The reason Martin gave for abstaining from using the term was rooted in his dissatisfaction with these same vague, imprecise, definitions that characterize the current discourse of spirituality. As he stated,

It's a nothing word. It's a word that means nothing. It just means that you have an option to *say* that you could do something by yourself, or have some kind of internal feng shui or something going on; but it's a word that actually means nothing or says nothing, it says nothing about how you live in the world. It says more about how you *are* in the world as some kind of individualistic person, you know (emphasis original).

Precisely because spirituality, in its present form, is a word that is devoid of meaning, Martin chose rather to use constructs others avoid, such as religion and faith; constructs he saw imbued with meaning:

So I have maintained the use of religion or faith because those have called or call us...as [the New Testament book of] James says, if you're a religious person, show me your religion by what you do, pure religion and undefiled before God is to visit the widows and the fatherless in their affliction. So it's clear what religion is, it involves active participation in the world of lived experiences. So for me, you know, I prefer to talk about religion and *then* fight for true religion. Of course I'll start there, and then somebody says, there's so much crap has been perpetrated because of religion; and I say that, that is true. Lots of bad things have been done in the name of religion, lots of good things have been done in the name of religion. But *nothing* good or bad has been done in the name of spirituality (laughs) . . . it's just a, a buzz, man, it's just a buzz, you know? So I will fight for true religion, and true religion that expresses itself in a relationship with God and a love for humanity and an active participation in the redemption of human experience as opposed to spirituality, which is sort of an internal access to some sort of godness in your life which could be *any* possible thing (emphasis original).

For Matt, the vagueness of the term was only part of what he found disturbing with the present use of spirituality. Even more troubling, “incredibly insulting” as he put

it, was the inherent, assumed superiority of these vague constructions of spirituality over those grounded in history, religion, theology, and context:

[Spirituality] is absolutely vague and meaningless, it has no historical grounding; it is the psychic friends hotline, it is whatever you want it to be; it is making meaning in the world—or not, or whatever . . . what irritates me about this discussion of spirituality is that it is privileged to discussions of faith that are grounded in history and context; that I find insulting. That it is somehow intellectually greater, that people who are still talking about this in terms of Christianity, or Islam or Hinduism are somehow not getting it . . . and I find that insulting.

Later, in a discussion on what he identified as the marginalization of religion in general, and Christianity in particular, in the academy he added,

It's not a sense of being marginalized that I'm concerned about; it's being talked down to that I find reprehensible . . . when I read this stuff on spirituality, the way it dances around context and history . . . the way it appropriates the language of faith while at the same time looking back disparagingly on faith that is grounded in faith and history and sacred Scripture and tradition as being somehow parochial and not well thought out, it's just an incredible insult.

These unambiguous expressions of dissatisfaction with current definitions of spirituality in academic adult education by Frank, Sue, Jodi, Martin, and Matt reflect more tacit remarks made by Sara and Chloe. If Bob was dissatisfied with current definitions of spirituality, he did not express so in the interview.

Furthermore, concerns of potential misuse of spiritual concepts inherent in these expressions of dissatisfaction are neither exaggerated or unfounded. Vague, imprecise descriptions that attempt to make spirituality mean all things to all people or worse, leave it to be described purely in individualistic terms—with the historical, theological, and

etymological underpinnings of the concept completely ignored (Fenwick, 2001)—have “unfavorable implications” (Beringer, 2000, p. 158).

### Encounters with the “Dark Side”

One of the “unfavorable implications” of failing to ground notions of spirituality within traditional, etymological, and religious/theological moorings is that it empties the term of meaning, which in turn makes it much easier for the term to be co-opted, commodified, and misused (e.g., Bolman & Deal, 2001; Conger, 1994; Covey, 1989; Cox & Liesse 1996; Peters, 1992). A second adverse implication of this failure is that it often leads to ignoring darker, yet no less important spiritual constructs such as sin, struggle, evil, deception, greed, and death. Ignoring this “dark side” of spirituality is problematic because “most faith traditions acknowledge and accept human struggle with death, desire, misfortune, and evil as important parts of life to be embraced, not avoided. Questioning, doubting, and dark introspection are not seen as a loss of faith, but accepted as part of the spiritual journey” (Fenwick, 2001, p. 2).

Consistent with these conclusions, the participants in this study described their encounters with, and acceptance of, the “dark side” of spirituality. With Nouwen (1981), they recognized that “the spiritual life can only be real when it is lived in the midst of pains and joys of the here and now” (p. 21). For Sue, the “dark side” included a time “in my mid twenties [when] I had sort of a crisis of faith that persisted, without going into details, I guess a number of years and I began puddling around in theology, asking a lot of questions . . . . and it shook down to a reaffirmation of my faith.”

Matt went through a similar “dark” period of skepticism and rejection of the faith he had grown up with. However, in Matt’s case this cynicism was precipitated by an intense disenchantment with numerous Christians he met and perceived as inconsistent, as people who did not “live their faith”. Frank also encountered hypocrisy in the church in a painfully personal way, manifested in the form of intense criticism directed at a very close member of his family. This incident triggered in him a desire to turn from formal religion and things of faith for a period of time as well. In his words, it “just didn’t make any sense to me. In fact I hated [the hypocrites] because of it. And that was near the end of my senior year, and I went away to college, and I thought that every Christian was a hypocrite.” Eventually, however both Matt and Frank came through their “dark side” experience, emerging from it decidedly more spiritual and stronger in faith. As Matt’s remarks illustrated,

I realized that [hypocrisy] isn’t a rationale for not believing, or for not participating . . . . when people say I’m not going to the church, it’s all full of hypocrites, my response now is yeah, and there’s always room for one more. But we do that to some extent in all aspects of our lives. So to say that I’m not going to attend church because it’s so hypocritical, well, if that was your criterion for not participating in things, you wouldn’t do anything. You wouldn’t go to the doctor, [you] wouldn’t go to school, [you] wouldn’t go to work.

Bob spoke frankly and extensively about his faith struggle, a struggle that was markedly different from that experienced by Sue, Matt, and Frank in that it was one of dark introspection (Fenwick, 2001). Specifically Bob’s struggle centered on how his faith has changed from what it was early on in his life, how he is currently “in flux” spiritually speaking, and how this state of spiritual transition impacted his life and relationship to the organized church. Bob admitted, as the story of his struggle unfolded, that this was a

subject he was rather uncomfortable talking about and for that reason, “I don’t really talk about this too much.” Still, he stated,

I’m convinced that the organizational church has some big issues, and I have some big issues with the organizational church. A lot of those revolve around the issue of being an ordained clergy person, and what that means in terms of leadership and . . . things that that does to laypeople, in terms of disempowering them, you know, to take roles that they really need to take . . . . I’ve been reinventing or rethinking all of the theological concepts and . . . I look at God differently, I think I look at Jesus’ role differently. I understand the history of the church, but I’m concerned about where it’s going . . . . the church must reinvent itself or it’s going to die . . . . I think I’m spiritual in a different way. I think I’m not as confined by the stuff that’s back there in my religious upbringing, and I tend to see that right now as a good thing. And I expect that [well] I’m not quite sure where I’m going to go at this point. In flux [I guess] . . . . I think that’s where my main conflict with the organizational church comes. Because when you boil that down to things like adult education, the organizational church wants me to be teaching doctrine, and I want to be talking about how people contribute to this growing thing that’s out there, this spirit, you know, that’s moving forward, and taking some places. And I find that there’s a real dissonance between those two things.

This form of reflective story telling continued for an extended period of time in the interview. Eventually, however, Bob summarized:

You know, many people find it just so hard to get out of the “I grew up in the church, I learned this stuff, and what I either do is that I totally buy it and don’t challenge it, or I totally reject it and don’t come back to church.” So, I mean, what I’m saying is that I think there’s another way. You know, I don’t think you have to totally buy it or totally reject it. You can place yourself as an actor in taking that to new directions.

Though perhaps not as intense as Bob’s, both Sara and Jodi did speak of the struggle they had with formal religion in general, and the religious tradition of their youth in particular. As Jodi stated, “I have to say I have a real problem at this point with organized religion, and whereas going to church every Sunday used to be what you did, it

isn't what I do [now]." Sara spoke of how for her religion was a "mixed bag" of both wonderful things and negative things that contributed to her current "ambivalence towards the Catholic Church."

Chloe's description of her encounter with the "dark side" of spirituality centered on the constant struggles or tests of faith she experienced in life. In spite of a lifetime of tremendous adversity, Chloe remained undaunted. In fact, she was more than undaunted, as her words evidence, Chloe remained hopeful:

Well, that core of faith that I've always had, you know. [This core of faith] is out there in a sense, because I believe if you do the right thing and you praise God constantly and expect miracles, those [road] blocks, those mountains, they're not removed, but you get the strength to climb over them or the insight to see them.

[For example] when it was time for me to make that decision to come to [the university] that was a faith move. I had no money, you know, I've always been poor . . . . I didn't think I was good enough; I didn't think I was smart enough; I spent my whole first three years thinking they were going find me out and throw me out. You know? But it's that faith [that keeps me going]. I've had so many faith encounters, if you will, it was just that faith that God wouldn't bring me here and drop me; that I walked in faith that I thought it out and I talked with God. When we [would] do things in the community with no money, you know, one person who had a lot of money, and he came to the community and lost everything trying to help the community.

When you don't have any money and you don't even have the intellectual capacity or whatever if you want to call it, I call it cultural capital, to even figure out how you're going to do things, and all you have is your faith and your determination . . . . And when you don't have resources, all you have is your faith. And I think it's the same faith; every faith happens chronologically. For African Americans, it was their faith that one day it's going to be over and the children will not have to suffer like they did that got our people through slavery. The stories that my grandparents tell about being a sharecropper, I couldn't have ever gone through that; I would have just killed myself or just gone to jail. But it was their faith to get us to a certain point and I think it was my faith that God promised that he would never see the righteous forsaken or his seed begging [for] bread that let me go on and know . . . I knew in my soul that those children were going to be

okay in the world; they were going to be educated and they were going to have the opportunity to be upstanding human beings, that they would have a choice, you know what I'm saying? That everybody has done what they're supposed to do. So, it was that type of faith, I just knew that if I just kept getting out there doing the right kind of thing that we would survive.

Finally, it is significant to note that there was not unanimous agreement on the issue of the "dark side" among the participants in this study. According to Martin, his belief that "God is in charge of this whole operation and he is a good God and has my best interest at heart" led him to conclude, "I have not really come across any reason to doubt and to despair within my life. I mean I've had friends who are Christians and have gone through real serious times of doubt and you know, sort of almost losing everything, and then just sort of back up [to faith]; but I've not really gone through that."

This is not to say that Martin viewed life unrealistically, with blind optimism, or that he experienced a trouble-free existence. What it does say is that Martin's faith framed his life in such a way that it provided him with "a knowledge to realize that there really is no bad thing that can happen to me. It's a strange way of thinking . . . . it's a strange way of talking about yourself." He then went on to add,

I mean my mom died, my father died, but the nature of faith itself is this absolute belief that God is in control. I know it's easy to say that, and probably I could keep saying that until, you know, you never know what extreme situation might happen to you; I might be hanging somewhere being tortured daily, and have no way out. So you don't know until you're put into that place, but so far, I can't really think of anything that I would consider to have been a really dark thing that's happened to me that's made me question my faith. Because I know the way that faith defines itself is true.

A number of circumstances look good and bad in the present reality, whether you're being sawn in two, or the list of things that are mentioned in the Bible in relation to the accomplishments of faith [such as] all those

people who raised the dead, and routed armies, won victories and also a list of pretty dastardly deeds and stuff; women pregnant who got ripped open, people sawn in two, wandering around like mad men, and going crazy; it's possible that I could totally lose my mind and become totally insane because of positions or whatever I have.

So, I think the knowledge to me of the nature of faith is that God . . . . is a good God and has my best interest at heart. If you don't believe that, you're in for big trouble . . . . I don't know what'll happen . . . . but I don't think I'd question the nature of God or the goodness of God or the reality of God.

Martin attributed his unique outlook on the “dark side” to a “special gift of faith” in which special was defined as “hav[ing] a capacity to entertain this concept at a higher degree than average people.”

The stories highlighted in this section give substantive evidence to the fact that the “dark side” is a bona fide, significant, and accepted part of the spiritual life of the participants. To ignore this aspect of spirituality in favor of a “sunny, feel good naïveté” (Fenwick, 2001)—as does the current discourse within the field of adult education—is to present an inaccurate, shortsighted, unbalanced view of spirituality that is inconsistent with most faith traditions and disregards an important dimension of the spiritual experience of many, if not most, people of faith (see Baptiste, 2001, 2002b; Fenwick, 2001; Fenwick & Lange, 1998; Nouwen, 1981; Palmer, 1999).

### *Theme Two: Exploring the Link Between Spirituality and Practice*

This second main section addresses the second question: how participants describe the relationship (or link) between spirituality and the day-to-day adult education practice in which they are engaged.

### The Critical Aspect of the Link: Faith, Practice, and Calling

Beginning with the very first interview, participants framed the impact of their faith/spirituality on their practice in terms of being their “life’s work,” a “mission,” their “vocation,” and/or a “calling.” Calling is a value-laden term often found in a religious context (e.g. s/he was called to the priesthood). According to Collins (1991) vocation “refers to a calling and entails firm commitment to the performance of worthwhile activities that are not *merely* calculated to advance personal career aspirations or fulfill minimum job expectations” (p. 42, emphasis mine). According to the literature, the usage of these terms conveys a sense of mission and urgency, the expression of a higher purpose (Collins, 1991; Graves & Addington, 2000, p. 91; Guinness, 1998).

Significantly, the link drawn between participants’ sense of calling and practice was totally unsolicited. Additionally, based on the interviewees’ stories and descriptions, this connection between calling and practice was considered by them a vital or critical link (see Collins, 1991; Graves & Addington, 2000; Guinness, 1998).

Chloe, for example, spoke of how “I’ve always viewed my life’s work as adult education.” In fact she used the phrase “life’s work” in reference to her practice frequently throughout our conversation. Chloe also spoke of her work in adult education in terms of being part of her mission:

You know I have always done my work as my mission, that’s what I do, and I’ve been blessed most of my life to do what I love and to be. And adult education is just the engine to let me be; because I teach, and I’ve taught classes, but I teach not much differently than the way I did in the community. The information is different, [be]cause we were learning for

survival; but it's still from a co-learner and respect stance. And I respect my students as knowledge producers.

Bob used the term “vocation” no less than eight times in his interview. When probed about how he was using the construct, Bob explained his understanding of vocation was rooted in the religious notion of the term and is synonymous with calling. He then added,

Calling is a way you're trying to relate to that bigger thing. You know, [how] I interpret is, it's not the external thing, you know Christian rhetoric something. But it's the result of past experience, of leading you somewhere that you take responsibility for and move ahead then. And in the midst of that, you're trying to work out, and again, and it's just one of the contexts for working out your connection to this bigger thing as you conceive it; so, yeah, [I] am absolutely [using calling] in that [religious] way.

For Frank, calling was also a very meaningful term. From early in his life, Frank was aware of being called to some kind of vocational ministry. Furthermore, for Frank calling is not limited to vocational ministry only but applies to any and all vocations, regardless of the specific type of practice one is called to.

That sense of being called was especially important to Frank because it helped keep him focused and moving forward towards his vocational goals, in spite of the numerous obstacles he encountered on the way (see Graves & Addington, 2000):

Logically I should have turned and run in the other direction, but the call got stronger and stronger, it really felt like a call at that point. You know, before that people would say to me “do you feel called?” and I'd say oh, yeah. But I really – I was drawn to it, I wouldn't say called, but the “call” was stronger and stronger—and it has gotten stronger and stronger.

Sue, more than any other participant spoke explicitly and extensively about her understanding of calling and the link between it, faith, and practice. She also discussed at length why she believed the notion of calling is so critical to practice. Her awareness of her calling came after experiencing a crisis of faith in her mid twenties. As she recounted, following that crisis,

I began to see a real solid connection between my faith and my calling, my vocation if you like as an educator. . . . I guess for me calling is an essential activity . . . the word itself has meaning to me [as being] simply the deepest purpose of one's work. And I think I can say that I believe as a Christian that work is a fundamental activity in life, in worship, in being, in making relationships. I guess for me calling is an essential activity through all of one's life, it's determining what is one's calling, to what work is one called. And through that work one realizes the potential of one's being, one's relationship to God, one's relationship to society, to other people, one's place in community; all that kind of thing. So finding one's calling to me has a very important kind of connotation.

Later, when queried as to whether she believed calling was specific to place, context, or type of practice, Sue explained,

Education became for me, yes the framing of what I do and I think partly because it was the field that I've been working in. So it's the way I contextualize my thinking and I think if I were in another field, another helping profession say health care, I don't believe I would have had an epiphany that I should be a teacher instead. I believe I would have contextualized my calling within that field of health care; so the field itself isn't what's important to me. It's the relationship to the people and understanding who I am as a servant to others regardless of whether it's serving their learning or serving their bodies or their health or their political aspirations or whatever field one is in; for me it happens to be their learning and their work as educators.

Although never explicitly using the words calling, vocation, or mission, Martin did however, make a strong implicit reference to the concepts. Specifically, when asked

to elaborate on how his faith, which he described as underpinning his entire life, is connected to practice, Martin replied,

I keep asking myself why am I so poor, darn it. Why do I keep working in these nonprofit organizations all my life or in these church businesses. But I do question why do keep doing this kind of work, I've never done a secular job, I've never not worked in nonprofit organizations, you know, it seems as if I am doomed to be *involved* in this kind of humanitarian effort, and I think the basis of that comes from a certain world view that that faith provided me with, and this is sort of this consuming desire to seek the betterment of humanity, you know . . . . So faith frames my internal desires, sort of the compassion to be involved in the kind of work that I do.

Sara also indirectly or implicitly referenced the link between calling and her practice when she stated,

My interest in cultural issues is [based on] a passage from Luke, or is it from Isaiah, you know, bring glad tidings to the world, heal the broken hearted, comfort those who mourn, to set the captives free. I mean that's probably the most important underpinning to the work that I do, from a Christian perspective.

Finally, though the application or specific context of calling differed between and among participants, the purpose of that calling remained the same for all: to serve others. Sara, for example, addressed this purpose when she expressed the intent of her practice was to "bring glad tidings to the world, comfort those who mourn, [and] set the captives free." Martin indicated a similar purpose in his practice or work when he commented,

It seems as if I am doomed to be involved in this kind of humanitarian effort, and I think the basis of that comes from a certain worldview that that faith provided me with, and this is sort of this consuming desire to seek the betterment of humanity, you know. Of course you could do that by making a lot of money, and you know, giving people money or something like that, but I've always sort of had a desire to help or to relieve the condition of the human experience, and I think that is where, that is what I have acquired from, I think the basis of that is my faith.

Matt also saw helping others as a part of his calling:

When I came into [adult education], I was fairly geared more towards displaced workers. Because I had just been through that, and was thinking about, gee, where could I help people who were in a similar situation, use those situations as a plus, to turn the tables, and try to make a good out of a bad thing.

Sue's comments were especially insightful in this regard. Speaking of the faith crisis she experienced in her mid twenties that precipitated an awareness of her calling, Sue added,

So I had to stop and reclarify what I was doing and I did that by deciding that my [calling] was to help people, in a really profound way my job was to help other people pursue their dreams, usually in education . . . The field itself isn't what's important to me, it's the relationship to the people and understanding who I am as a servant to others regardless of whether it's serving their learning or serving their bodies or their health or their political aspirations or whatever field one is in.

Then too, Chloe also linked her life's work, or mission, with helping others. In fact, Chloe's immediate goal was to complete her dissertation work so that she might become a professor of adult education and affect her students by encouraging them to become "knowledge producers:"

[The] last career choice that I have chosen [is] to be a professor. That's what I'm going to do when I grow up. I will retire being a professor. Now, that won't give me a lot of money, but it might give my students a lot. But I think the type of classes that I'd probably be able to teach I will still be in the arena where I will be helping people look at their options, look at it from different world views, and increase their capacity as knowledge producers.

This external outworking of one's calling as being more about serving or helping others than about a particular job or vocation, explicitly articulated by Frank, Sara, Martin, Matt, Sue, and Chloe, was consistent with what Jodi and Bob expressed tacitly.

### The Human Aspect of the Link: Faith, Practice, and Others

One of the most important and frequently mentioned links between participants' spirituality and their adult education practice relates to how people of faith should, ideally, see and treat others around them. Specifically, "others" were identified by the interviewees as those encountered in their day-to-day adult education practice including, but not limited to, colleagues, coworkers, and students.

Additionally, all participants discussed at length the inherent value of other people as the basis for their belief that people should be treated humanely, with dignity and respect. This belief and aspect of practice was consistent with the premises of the Christian faith (see Sider, 1999; Stott, 1999b; Wallis, 2000). More importantly, this belief was grounded in the teachings of Jesus, who instructed his followers to "love your neighbor as yourself."

Jodi was the most vocal and fervent of all participants when it came to describing how other people are to be treated. When probed about whether and how her notions of faith impact her work as a team leader in the student aid office where she works, Jodi replied,

Well [how] can it not impact you? I think that that's where maybe adult ed and some of the courses and readings that I've done helps, because it helps you helps me understand better why I do things the way I do them and where I come from. I think that the other – the metaphysical – mystical

part of faith and the part that you don't understand kind of mixes in with all this . . . . it's certainly it has to do with how you see people. For me it's how I see people, and I think that at work, you know, for the most part, I don't have a lot of problems getting along with most of the people at work. [Also I am] able to understand where they come from and what kind of influences them and then take it from there kind of instead of blaming them. In other words if I have to think about what I think is important in terms of what I believe, you know, it's that people are important and it's about caring and love and therefore, by extension, justice . . . . I think people have a right to have a job, and to be able to make a living and a decent life. And so it isn't about picking who's best and then trying to get rid of the rest of them, I have trouble with that. I don't think my belief system plays in very directly to the fact that I know that corporations exist for people. Corporations exist for people, not the opposite. People don't exist for corporations. Get that right!! (she laughs)

Matt, though perhaps not as forcefully, nevertheless directly linked his spirituality and practice to how others are to be valued and treated as well. When probed, as was Jodi, as to whether and how his faith affects his work, he replied:

I hope it does . . . . if it doesn't that would sort of bother me . . . . part of what Wuthnow (1998) said is that we have to have an I/thou dichotomy, instead of an I/it dichotomy. I hope that when I see people, regardless of whether I agree with how they live or what they do, I hope that part of what I get from my faith is that I think of them as a "thou" rather than an "it."

Matt then proceeded to describe in detail how this aspect of practice is rooted in his Christian faith: "When I come into a room with people, I think I do have a sense of that each of those people has value inherent in their existence. I think that comes out of my trying to be more Christ-like." For Matt, being "Christ-like" in this context meant identifying with the humanity of every person, "even if you do not agree with how they live their life."

Frank, like both Jodi and Matt, also made a direct link between his Christian beliefs and the importance or centrality of other people to his practice. “You know, the people, the heart and soul of ministry is people . . . . that’s where, really, the love of Christ [comes in].” For Frank the “love of Christ” manifested itself in his work with undergraduate students in a very practical way: giving students individual, and whenever possible, undivided attention. “The way I operate when teaching a hundred person class [is] I like to get to know the[m individually]. I have no interest in educating people I don’t know.”

Sara as well affirmed her belief in the “unique essence [of] every human person,” which she identified as “spirit,” a belief she stated is grounded in theism. Sara went on to describe what she terms the “unique essence of a human person” as, “a little piece of that divine spirit in every single person. And I do think while we can never know that little spark of divinity, we might live there for a split second.”

Martin was explicit in describing his belief of how faith is linked to and played out in the way one sees and treats others. When asked directly about how he integrates his faith or spirituality into his work as a drug and alcohol/mental health prevention and intervention specialist, Martin explained,

My focus is [on] the redemption of the human body within the context of the sixty, seventy, or eighty years [people] have to live. Now, how you do that is sort of played out, or in other words, how that is done is determined by the values of eternal nature of what you believe. So, the value of human life, the ethical decisions you make about how you treat people, your respect for the human condition and for human experience the value of each individual life, how you show respect for people or the ethical beliefs you have about what is right and what is wrong, all of those things are backed up by your eternal values, you know. The work that you do from day to day even though it’s in relation to sort of temporal things or things that people are just doing for eighty years or so, they are the more

significant values that are impacting on why you do it and how you do it. And in my life, and I guess, that's what people see they if they are thinking that I'm a different person.

Jodi also spoke of what she saw as the strong connection between her core beliefs, how she sees other, and how she believed others are to be treated. When asked to identify specific ways or cite specific examples of how this link might be manifested in practice, Jodi replied,

[It's] about caring about people, and knowing that people need to be treated with some sense of dignity, and respect, and that people have the ability to learn if they're given the proper—if they're worked with—I don't like [to use the word] give, because I don't think you can give people an education. But if people are given the opportunity and the training, and the tools that they need, that they can learn their job and do a good job. But also [included in this is] recognition that everybody contributes in a different way and at different levels- that doesn't mean that they don't contribute.

Chloe agreed with both Martin and Jodi, as evidenced in her statement that being spiritual “means listening and being guided more by the spirit, and it's hard to explain something you can't see and can't touch. It's so closely related to faith, but it's doing the right thing, treating your neighbor right.” Sue spoke of being with others “in a way that is Christian” which she defined as “loving those around us.” Finally, Bob's description of this link between faith and practice was the most concise and perhaps also the most profound. In his words, “[spirituality is] most often seen through loving acts.”

Linking faith to “loving acts” in practice is consistent with the spirituality literature within the field of academic adult education. More specifically, permeating the discourse are appeals by spirituality advocates for adult educators to promote in their teaching idealistic, humane principles such as justice, caring, service, and cooperation

(English, 2000; English & Gillen, 2000; L. Miller, 2000; Vogel, 2000). Also present in the discourse are calls to a more caring, fully human, and humane way of teaching (Groen, 2002; J. Miller, 2000) that can be accomplished as adult educators dedicate themselves to practicing “spiritual” values. Included in these values are respect for learners (Orr, 2000; Vella, 1994, 2000; Wickett, 2000), creating a “safe” learning space for learners (Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Parks, 1996; Vella, 1994; Vogel, 2000; Wickett, 2000), developing a sense of community between teachers and learners (Palmer, 1999; Vella, 1994; Zeph, 2000), and inclusiveness (Groen, 2002).

However, absent from the literature is any substantive discussion of the very real challenges, both internal and external, that are likely to be encountered when endeavoring to promote these idealistic, humane, spiritual values (e.g. caring, respect, community building, etc.) in practice. Challenges that four of the participants in this study experienced and referenced directly as part of their stories.

Jodi, for example, who was most vocal about the connection between her core beliefs and how she believed others were to be treated, expressed that she had “very mixed feelings about working for an institution that I feel on the bottom line wants people for their money . . . it’s hard for me to accept.” So, in an attempt to reconcile her practice with those core beliefs, Jodi and some of her colleagues in the student aid office “tried to get our policies changed” to reflect a more humane, just, and fair way of dealing with students they served. Unfortunately, she continued, “We got our heads cut off, basically. And so, it didn’t work.” Undaunted, Jodi added, “[Now] I try to come at things from different directions.”

Matt also spoke openly about the tension he experienced in trying to square his beliefs about the way students should be treated in his office of fellowships and awards with the policies of the university that employed him. For Matt, this boiled down in a very personal way to a conflict of faith:

I mean the university tells me it's not our job. [According to them] our job is to very quickly and precisely get to the point, give these people the resources they need to reach their goal . . . [and] get them out the door. I don't believe that. I mean our goal here is to make sure people graduate feeling that they've been appreciated and that they've learned whatever it is they want to learn, maybe even what they need to learn. That involves more than just sort of strategic planning and adding value. It involves being human and being compassionate and being caring. The difficulty is in this place now [is that] everything needs to be quantified. You can't quantify that. You can't quantify your compassion. I guess maybe I could enumerate the number of compassionate encounters I've had. But I think that is playing into my tension with this position.

Sue was quite forthcoming about the internal struggle she experienced in understanding how to be with others she encountered in her day-to-day practice in a way that was Christian, or at least in a way she defined as Christian:

I guess [that's] where my faith comes into most difficulty . . . I do believe that we are called to love the people around us and that's not necessarily that we are to be a doormat, I don't believe turn your cheek means that either; I think it means be wise as a fox and gentle as a lamb [as] we read in the good book. And so I do believe my job is to give [others] space to be who they are to not judge them for what they appear to be or to jump on them when I feel personally slighted or hurt. You know, to be a good citizen in this community, to help bring relationships together. I do believe in building community wherever and however I can. I also know I'm terribly limited; I'm not as good at this as other people so one of my jobs is to try and learn from others, how they build community well; and emulate to extend, to learn from and that kind of thing.

Finally, Martin also spoke of the challenge he faced living in a manner consistent with the faith he espoused in general, and how he dealt with and related to others in

particular. As he stated, “I despair of my own frailty, why am I such a jerk, why do I keep doing stuff even though I know it’s wrong; I despair about those kinds of things.”

### The Challenging Aspect of the Link: Faith, Practice, and Integration

The challenge some of the participants experienced endeavoring to link spirituality with “loving acts” towards others was not the only challenge of this kind the interviewees referred to. Most openly discussed their struggle to integrate faith into practice, a struggle identified here as “the challenge of integration.” Further, while the reasons given for this struggle varied to some degree between and among participants, more often than not, the “challenge of integration” was in some way connected to the participants’ work in or relationship to the academy.

For example, three participants traced this “challenge of integration” back to what they perceived to be a deep-seated antagonism in the academy towards religion in general and Christianity in particular. As Frank shared,

I live with [the problem of integrating faith in an academic environment] all the time. My advisor . . . just can’t stand organized religion. And in fact can’t stand the idea of spirituality or transcendence at all. And a lot of what he writes is talking about how we need to eliminate notions of transcendence from our theoretical discussions . . . I ha[ve] a really hard time with that.

Matt spoke of antagonism towards Christianity he saw in the academy as well. As he put it, “it’s not a sense of [Christianity] being marginalized [in the academy] that I am concerned about; it’s being talked down to that I find really reprehensible.” Sue agreed, adding, “Christians in particular, and I believe world religions in general are quite

marginalized, if not actively persecuted, for being everything from patriarchal to building grand narratives versions of truth that are basically mocked by most avante garde theorizing.”

A second expression of this “challenge of integration” identified by interviewees occurred when the goals of the academy came in direct conflict with the participants’ principles, foundations, and core beliefs. Such was the case for Jodi, who spoke openly of the difficulty she had working “for an institution that I feel on the bottom line wants people for their money” because those institutional goals were incompatible with her core beliefs. To illustrate how those goals conflicted, she shared the following story:

[There was this] single mother, I think she had one or two kids. [She] got a GED in '98 or '99, got admitted, [and for some reason] delayed coming to the university, [eventually] started in 2000. [She] took 6 credits-2 courses remedial math and remedial English—failed them both. That was in the Fall. Spring semester-same two courses, failed them both. The next fall, same two courses, failed them both [again]. . . . She did not come back for the fourth semester as a half time student, [though she was] still eligible for aid. But she was [placed] on [academic] probation, [ending up with] \$10,000 worth of loan debt. Now did that university experience help that mother? No—she left the university in worse shape than what she came. \$10,000 worth of loan debt and no credit! That’s hard for me to accept.

Matt also experienced a similar “challenge of integration” in the university in his role as assistant director of fellowships and awards:

I think is part of this growing discontent that I have with this work is that when I came here, that there was a real sense that this was a student service office, and that we were here for the students, and for the faculty who were trying to support students. As that changes it becomes much more of an administrative institutional office, where we’re here to promote and how should I say it, add value to the institution’s goals....and to promote what the institution deems as being the place that we should put our emphasis....rather than where the need of the student is . . . . If the university deems it as being a priority, that doesn’t necessarily mean that it

is, but it means that it is! (he laughs) Because we don't have a choice in determining what the priority is, and that's a little troubling.

Later, Matt added, "I think part of what I rail about and get such dissatisfaction within the academy is that it's so much posturing and about me being looked at as being real smart and having good ideas, more than about trying to help people and get to some place that really makes a difference."

For Sue and Frank, a third aspect of this "challenge of integration" was manifested their inability to articulate how spirituality is/should be integrated into their work in the academy. As Sue candidly acknowledged, "[I am constantly] searching for ways [to] integrate spirituality much more into my writing, not just explicitly but implicitly; I don't for example pray before I write; I would like to be in a space where that was a very natural thing to do, but [here] I don't." Frank was equally forthcoming about his struggle in this regard:

My faith is very much in Christ, and that doesn't come out very much in this [place]. At least I haven't found the opportunity or the right slice of life at [this university] to insert that . . . . So I have very little engagement with people on the level of faith . . . . So I guess I struggle – I struggle – around the faith issues [and] around integrating it into practice.

Sara's "challenge of integration" centered on determining when and to what degree it was appropriate to bring out the "spiritual lens" in her classroom. As she described,

I think the spiritual lens is there for me, but more implicitly, because of the way that I view the world. But it's not necessarily something that I would talk about it overtly, because it is a loaded word for people . . . . different people are going to map to that term in a different way, and so, you know. [So] I don't necessarily really [bring out the spiritual lens] very much in an overt kind of way.

Martin located his “challenge of integration” in his struggle to follow what he believed to be a “Christian mandate,” which he described as “call[ing] people into a long term relationship with God” in the context of his work. In his words, this was “something that I don’t do . . . [but] probably something I should do . . . you know, on a more personal level, talking to people, and there was a time when I was more involved in doing that, I can’t say that I am totally living up to that now.”

Further, Martin did not attempt to excuse his failure to follow this mandate. In response to my statement that there may be some places where adhering to this aspect of the Christian mandate is neither easy nor appropriate, Martin simply stated,

I would say I don’t think it’s ever easy or appropriate. I would also say that the nature of the gospel isn’t easy or appropriate . . . I think we’ve been called to be hard and inappropriate, I think that is what we are afraid of, being inappropriate and hard, you know. The gospel is a very divisive kind of religion . . . . I don’t think it’s ever been easy, I think we have just bought into a modern concept that there’s some other way of doing it, but it’s not true. I don’t think there’s any other way of doing it besides doing it . . . and that’s what we see different [now] . . . you know, that the people in the early church, it wasn’t politically correct for them to be that way either . . . they were being stoned left, right and center, and you know, beaten up in boiling hot oil and all kinds of stuff, but that’s what they wanted to do, and that’s what they believed they should be doing.

Finally, it should also be noted that neither Chloe nor Bob implicitly or explicitly mentioned the “challenge of integration” in their interviews.

The Central Aspect of the Link: Spirituality, Practice, and Authenticity

In addition to the critical, human, and challenging aspects of the link between spirituality and practice described above, central to participants' discussions of this connection was the notion of authenticity (see Tisdell, 2003; Vella, 2000). Matt's words were typical in this regard when he stated, "I'm becoming more concerned with being an authentic, genuine human being . . . . and that, I think springs from my faith."

More precisely, spiritual authenticity in relation to practice as described by the interviewees meant being—or becoming—an authentic Christian; reconciling one's actions with what one says they believe. For Bob, this type of authenticity was described as going beyond giving "lip service" to Christian teachings and "living the Jesus story" consistently, on a day-to-day basis:

I see an awful lot of congregations that are out there that give lip service to the role of a Christian in society. [But] my understanding is that if you are on that cutting edge where you understand that you're involved in terms of this growing this spiritual base that's out there [this] most often is seen through loving acts. And for me that's where the Jesus story is a very important one, in terms of what we have to do, and I think that's where a lot of people get inspiration from that. But if the Jesus story's just told and it's not lived, then it's just a part of that other thing that's back there, part of that – that old stuff that just keeps getting re-talked about, doesn't get reinvented, it doesn't get applied.

Sue described being authentic as both the need to and challenge of "being with others in a way that is Christian." Martin spoke of it in similar terms, such as "living out the gospel" before others and "being a Christian in the world."

I would say from a self-critiquing standpoint and from critiquing Christianity, we have sort of backed away from the consequences of what it means to live out the gospel in a full and meaningful way. In terms of talking about long term consequences and application of the everyday realities of what it means to be a Christian in the world, you know,

whether it's confronting all the ills that we have that's our day to day lifestyle, or whether it's racism or ageism, or whatever ism that exists out there that might affect the way people live, fight for justices and equality is our Christian mandate.

Matt saw spiritual authenticity as the real “power of Christianity” which to him, was a matter of “being Jesus” to and before others (see Sider, 1999). Specifically, “being Jesus” for Matt meant showing others the “kind of abiding love that Jesus expressed to people” while He was here on earth. To illustrate, Matt told the story of

A guy I know who is a pastor at the Gateway Truckstop in Breezewood. What he does is a chaplain at a truckstop. And I've seen this guy talk to people out there without saying, “Hi, I'm the chaplain at the Gateway Truckstop.” But just be Jesus. You know? He just be's Jesus [and says to others] is there anything I can do for you? How's your trip going? Where you headed to? Why don't you let me buy you a cup of coffee...you look tired...Is there something wrong? Let me help you. And people respond to that, because that's what it means to be Christian. That to me is the kind of essence of Jesus.

Frank, like Matt, spoke of authenticity in terms of expressing the love of Christ to others as well.

Sara framed this central aspect of the link between spirituality and practice explicitly, in terms of “moving towards a more authentic self.” She readily admitted, however, that attaining this type of authenticity is easier said than done, which is why Sara referred to this as a process of “moving towards an authentic self.” As she explained,

Central in my notion of spirituality [is] this notion of authenticity, that spirituality is about moving towards a more authentic self. Now we have to deconstruct that notion of authenticity, because what is the authentic self, and how do you know when you've gotten there? . . . . I would be very skeptical of anybody that had claimed that they'd arrived, because this is what cult leaders claim, you know. So it's impossible to ever get

there, but you can move towards [authenticity] and I think in terms of my understanding of spirituality [this is] key.

Jodi tied her desire for personal authenticity directly into ethical behavior in her work as director of a student aid office. As such, being authentic was inescapable and also meant “practicing what she believed” in a very tangible way.

I work in a very regulated environment. Driven by statutes, statutes are driven by or made by our elected representatives . . . . So for students to get aid, they have to meet certain requirements, and they get certain aid according to certain formulas, and costs and everything, and there are certain things you can do and certain things you can't [do]. And I can't not do that. Now there are people who within our office and within the university who under the guise of helping somebody, will try to get around that [but] I can't. I mean I can't do that. Obviously there are people that separate it because they're claiming to care for somebody, you know, [but] I can't separate it.

Chloe was the only participant who did not directly link spirituality, practice, and authenticity. She did, however, make implicit references to the notion when she spoke of “being extremely faithful” to God her entire life, the need to be careful and “remain in touch” with your core beliefs, and living in a way that enables her to “sleep with myself at night.”

### *Theme Three: Specific Educational Practices*

As van Manen (1990) observes, a major goal of phenomenological research is to “reflectively ask what is it that constitutes the nature of this lived experience” (p. 32). Thus far, the focus in this chapter has been on descriptions of spirituality and the “lived experience” of how participants link those descriptions with their with the day-to-day practice in which they are involved. In this third and final section, some specific

educational practices framed within those descriptions as identified by the participants will be discussed.

### Community Building

A strong, recurring theme, implicitly and explicitly, in all participants' descriptions of how their faith informs or frames their practice was community building. Sue, for example, discussed the notion of community building explicitly, by name, using the construct itself. Her understanding of the term referred primarily to creating, establishing, and maintaining relationships with and among those encountered while engaged in adult education practice. Specifically, Sue described building community with students as,

Help[ing] other people create relationships with each other with the voices in the literature, with the wider community . . . . with what they do. And by that I mean to say in adult education, [in] the community of scholars to which they are perhaps not [yet] realizing but they are definitely a part; to faculty they have not met yet and to me as a go between, a mediator, facilitator.

When referencing her relationship with colleagues, Sue described building community as,

Giv[ing] my colleagues space to be who they are; to not judge them for what they appear to be or to jump on them when I feel personally slighted or hurt; or you know to be a good citizen in this community to help bring relationships together. I do believe in building community wherever and however I can.

In the interview with Martin, the notion of community building was more implicit than explicit. Nevertheless it was clear that building community had meaning for him in his practice. Additionally, whereas for Sue community building was described in terms of

relationship building, for Martin, community building meant strengthening the community (see Ritchey, 2000, p. 96). Thus, on one occasion, he spoke of the significance of “increasing the health of the community.” In another instance, Martin described the goal of one of his prevention and intervention programs as “strengthen[ing] the family and the community so that it provides a base for the child to function and gives the child success.” He also spoke several times of the importance of “active participation in the community that has the interest of [others] at heart.”

Matt also described community building implicitly, in terms of building or creating a “human connection” with others. As he stated, “I really do believe that when Jesus saw anyone, that He felt that sort of connection . . . what I mean when I think of creating the kingdom of God here on earth is this sense of humanity and brotherhood and camaraderie that makes us, connects us all.” For Matt, this kind of community building was manifested in practice by “really trying to see beyond the superficial differences that divide us, and I think for the most part, they are superficial.”

Bob used phrases such as “community systems” and “systems building” in the context of describing his work, but never directly referred to “community building.” Still, there seemed to be some interesting parallels between Bob’s notion of systems building and community building in a broad sense, particularly as it related to strengthening the system (or community). As he detailed,

[Our office has] the responsibility to connect the public work force system with things like economic development, public education. So I’ll do a lot of work with what I would call *systems building*, connecting our system with other systems and figuring out how to leverage money and to just overall work together and to make that kind of thing happen. We do a lot of work with the analysis of labor management, labor market information, and work with the state on that. We also operate a one-stop service center,

which is a place where people who are looking for a job or need additional training to be able to move ahead in their career ladders can come for counseling [and] for a variety of resources we have . . . . [In short] *systems building* is getting these many systems together to focus on a common goal.

Bob also acknowledged that he found his current role as a “systems builder,” where he has the capacity to “change people and change things that are happening” in the workforce system “more satisfying than work[ing] in a local church.”

For Jodi, community building involved, at least in part, literally helping to build an actual, physical community. Harking back to the time she and her husband spent in South America in the peace corps, Jodi talked about engaging in community building with a Catholic priest as a practical and vital part of the work there:

The priest was out in the mountains five days a week. In fact we would go out with him; he had a generator and a movie projector, and we’d get movies, some were educational, and some were just, you know, cartoons, or whatever. And we’d go out with him to the communities, and show movies . . . . we were actually working on a project helping people to grow gardens, and get more vegetables, and stuff like that.

Community building for Sara and Frank was also taken in its literal sense and meant actively contributing to the community you belong to (see Ritchey, 2000, p. 117). Additionally, Frank attributed his understanding of community building to the teachings of his mother who, according to him, “was very much the kind of person who said, ‘you’ve committed yourself to be a part of that community. Now, you know, put some guts to it and actually do the work, you know, contribute to that community.’”

Chloe also practiced community building in its most literal sense. Chloe’s work in adult education began with “community organizing in the sixties” around issues related to

housing; that work continues to be a major part of her focus to this day. Furthermore, Chloe described this kind of community building not only in terms of an educational activity she also saw it as being “very spiritual.” In her words,

[I see a] spiritual dimension to my work when I’m out in the community. Or when I’m doing work at . . . a homeless shelter . . . . it’s everything we do, or try to accomplish, or even sitting around in a circle, sharing ideas and hopes and then putting it out on paper, when it becomes a strategic plan, you see what I’m saying? I see all those encounters, eating together, dreaming together, just honestly listening to other people and letting them hear you listen and feel them and be a part of their dreams. This is what we talk about as co-learning. Give back to them that I’ve learned from them as they’re learning from me to make them feel as copartners. That feeling, for lack of a better description that feeling that you get of camaraderie, and hope in this particular venture feels very spiritual . . . .you’re doing it together, even though you’re engaged in an intellectual exercise it’s just as common as sitting around the kitchen table figuring out the grocery bill and how to take the regular money and have Thanksgiving. You know??

This emphasis by all of the participants on community building as an outward manifestation or expression of spirituality in their adult education practice is reflective of the adult education literature on spirituality where developing a sense of community, for example, between teachers and learners (Palmer, 1999; Vella, 1994; Zeph, 2000), is frequently discussed.

#### Engaging Others on a Deeper Level

A second specific practice framed within many of the participants’ descriptions of spirituality was what Frank referred to as “engaging others a deeper level.” For Frank, this was his primary goal in his work with undergraduate students:

I probe them for questions, what I want them to do is engage what they're saying on a deeper level. And to reflect and understand that everything you do—and for me this is the movement of the Spirit—when you start understanding that everything you do touches your life on a deeper level, touches other people's lives on a deeper level than what you imagine, you know, or what you let yourself believe, if I can tap them into that, then I feel like I'm doing my job right.

Additionally, engaging students at a deeper level was something Frank felt quite passionate about, precisely because he linked it directly to his understanding of faith or spirituality:

And I think I feel like, I believe in my heart of hearts that when they engage things on a deeper level [and] just quit floating on the surface, I don't think you can avoid (pauses). I think it's very charismatic. I think that that is [a time when] you can't avoid engaging the spirit, when you start doing that kind of stuff. And that kind of reflection is very exciting.

Sara was also quite passionate about engaging students on a deeper, more reflective level, a passion that she too linked to spirituality. By way of illustration, Sara talked about her approach to assigning students in her class a book review/critique:

I want them to try to figure out a way to creatively deal with the themes in the book, one or two themes in the book with the group. So I encourage them to think about other things besides a little mini lecture. This would be where spirituality would be implicit, you know. What kinds of things can you use, can you use symbol, can you use music, can you do drama, can you do...what other kinds of things can you do to create an activity that would be engaging, not just to be cutesy, but for them to think about the context in which they teach and then to try to figure out ways of doing that.

Also indicative of Sara's desire to engage her students at a deeper level was her "way of trying to work with [students she advises] to really get them to figure out what

they are completely passionate about . . . . and not what they think pleases me.” Helping students discover their passion was something Sara herself felt quite passionately about:

But my job isn't always, you know, to have students get on the bandwagon that I happen to be interested in. This is why again, to go back to that passage [in Luke's gospel], to try to work with them, to try to find out what their own passions are, you know...is my job . . . . I mean there are some people that are doing stuff that quite frankly, it's good work, but it's not terribly interesting...to me personally, because I'm not that interested in participation of whatever it is....um.... so, but, but what's key is that it's a passion for them, you know,...and so to try to find ways to help them get at that passion, I think is fundamentally you know, what, what it means for me to act out of that to, bring glad tidings, you know, and for people to really discover you know how smart they really are and what contributions they can make, either to the field or to their own community, so....that's what kind of...it's not always consciously spiritual.

Sue framed the practice of engaging others at a deeper level in terms of “pushing” people beyond themselves. Additionally, this notion of pushing others was especially vital and applicable to the spirituality discourse in adult education:

I think we have to be more rigorous, I think we have to push people to want to stand up and talk about spirituality to talk about what they really believe . . . . We're a civil society; all of our arguments in adult ed have focused on what has happened to the shrinking civil society; well let's frame that in a spiritual debate and see where it takes us; let's frame it as a religious debate.

For Matt in his work in the university office of fellowships and grants, engaging others at a deeper level was not as much a direct or explicit educational practice as it was an act of compassion. More specifically, engaging others for Matt meant trying to get students in need to dig below surface or immediate issues and talk about what was really the problem. As he stated:

More often than not when somebody comes in here and asks about funding, they really want to talk about more than that. Because if they're coming in here looking for money, or trying to be competitive at some time in the program, there's a lot more at risk and at play than just getting a check, you follow me? More often than not, they end up here, because they've been cast off by their department, or their faculty people, they're feeling uncertain about their own abilities as a budding academic or as somebody who can be competitive in this world inside the academy. And so, if ...I try to I think that is part of my faith entering in. Because frankly, it would be just as easy to say why are you here? What precisely do you want me to do for you? But oftentimes, you know, we'll sit and talk about all kinds of things that maybe have tangentially to do with what they really want.

Finally, two of the other four participants spoke tacitly of engaging others at a deeper level. Bob, for example, referenced his efforts to aid others in “becoming lifelong learners, getting involved in something educationally that is going to move them ahead in their vocation, but also maybe in terms of broadening their thinking” as a means of engaging others at a deeper level. For Chloe, this deeper level of engagement was expressed in her desire to help people “look at their options, look at it from different world views, and increase their capacity as knowledge producers.” Engaging others at a deeper level was not mentioned—directly or indirectly—by either Jodi or Martin.

### Facilitating Others in Their Growth

The third and final type of educational practice mentioned by participants as being framed within their descriptions of spirituality is what is defined here as facilitating others in their growth. More specifically, the phrase is meant to serve as an umbrella subsuming a variety of closely related educational practices that reflect the participants' desire to assist others in their growth.

For Bob, facilitating others in their growth meant equipping people, or providing them with the tools they need to become empowered. Apparently, the notion of empowerment itself was important to Bob because he made no less than eight direct references to it in his interview (see Shor, 1992):

The way I think about things, people need to be out there [and they have] got to be equipped. That means, you know, you have some self-confidence, but you also need some tools. And so what I try to do when I come into the institutional church [to] teach, I try to give people tools. For example, when I'm teaching a Bible course, I'm talking about Biblical criticism, and how to use that in terms of this faith journey and hooking up with this spiritual connection. And you know, the fact that you are trying to give people hermeneutical tools to understand and empower themselves, that they can then interpret, and then bring them into their own life.

People need to be empowered to become lifelong learners [which means] getting involved in something educationally that is going to move them ahead in their vocation. But also maybe in terms of broadening their thinking, you know, empowering them to feel like they're responsible for their life and their education and all that kind of stuff.

As part of our operation over here, we see probably 100 people a week that are coming in working on their G.E.D. I mean that says to me that people feel empowered to do something to improve themselves, you know, to be an actor, to be involved.

Like Bob, Sue also spoke of facilitating growth in others as providing them with tools. However, unlike Bob, for Sue these tools were not to be used for purposes of empowerment but rather to enable others to deal with difficult issues and questions they might encounter. Referring to the students she works with at seminary, Sue stated, "we have to find a way I think to bridge those kinds of questions with some of the traditions and tools that adult education can bring; collectivist ideas in adult ed[ucation]."

Martin referenced facilitating growth in terms of encouraging others to access the power available to them, power that would enable them to make substantive changes in their lives and/or circumstances. Martin went on to state that he believed adult education provided him the avenue to do this because it “addresses [the issue of power] more from the bottom up [as well as] how do you mobilize people to get or to use their power.” He then added,

Consistently, my goal or my drive has been working with people [to enable them to] change and accomplish the goals that they want, [goals] that are meaningful for them. So having power is the way that we access change . . . . I think more along the line of how do you organize people to run their own lives. And so that’s what [I] mean [when I say] that power [is] necessary for how people organize themselves to make lasting changes.

Sara framed the notion of facilitating the growth of her students as “set[ting] the captives free and bring[ing] glad tidings to the lowly.” Specifically, this meant that she spent more time working with and helping give voice to those “[who] have been excluded from the educational debate [which] have been primarily people of color.” As Sara stated,

I do think it’s really important when you’re researching the other, whoever the other is, people that you’re not like, to approach it as doing research with and not research on. And where possible, I use their words and not my own because I want [them] to be coauthors with me. Because what’s the difference between me interviewing them and calling it a research study and them speaking for themselves? You know, we can speak together. . . I think it’s important for me not to own their words, you know, they’re the authors.

Chloe’s description of facilitating growth in others was similar to that used by Sara, particularly as it related to giving voice to a people who remain unheard and ignored. For Chloe, those unheard voices belonged to inner city people in poverty:

My community is located right on the very tip of the university. So therefore a lot of their researchers who need to do research on any social action or social movements period would come up here, you know, it's an easy playground. All they needed was somebody to be the guy, to the community, and I participated a lot, I really did, because you get the grad assistant, and they do bring good skills and stuff, they are helpful especially technically. But what would happen when I would read the finished product it was always framed in a lens that they could understand but it wasn't the lens of the people. So therefore our voices were never heard. The data was correct, but [it was always written] from the lens of what the investigator had to view it from. I always wound up very, very angry. So I told myself, "Stop being angry, go to college, get your masters and your doctorate and write the story yourself."

Chloe went on to describe another expression of facilitating others in their growth academically, helping her students gain an understanding of what was unfamiliar to them by "putting it into everyday language." As she recounted,

It feels real spiritual when I can help a student get from point A to point B in their understanding, and let me qualify that. For people who come from the inner city, they have a hard time in understanding or trying to hear it from the instructor's standpoint, and that's exactly where they're going to be evaluated from. So, I get the opportunity to take the text and put it in everyday language, and let them see that they already knew that, or knew something about it that it's not totally foreign. And I find myself doing that a lot, just taking the language [of academia] and putting it in everyday language, everyday reality. I know their reality, it's mine. That feels spiritual to me because I'm in a place where I can do this and I'm able to look at the student, and see that what's needed. They are just not getting it; I did that for an anthropology student last week. And he says, "oh, oh, oh, okay!" You ought to see that light bulb go on! Oh it's a beautiful thing!

For Jodi in her role as team leader in the student aid office she directs, facilitating growth in others was most apparent in her efforts to build a mentoring relationship with her coworkers. According to Jodi, her purpose in developing this kind of relationship was to "help them see, understand what they're doing, how they're doing it, and how it connects to everybody else."

Additionally, Frank spoke of trying to encourage “cognitive dissonance” as a means of facilitating spiritual or faith growth in the undergraduate students he works with. According to Frank,

Faith will come into their lives when they experience a need for faith. So I think that probably I would try to encourage some strong cognitive dissonance you know, things that just don't make sense, injustices that happen. Because I think it's when we cannot make sense of things, when we really have our backs against the wall that faith comes out. And if you don't have the resource to pull from the faith, somebody like me can see that in that instance, and kind of insert it-start building up that resource. Which is why I think that mission trips are so powerful. Because [with] mission trips, you're engaging people who are on the outs, the margins of society, and that just doesn't make sense to people who've had a wealthy suburban lifestyle. And this [creates a]strong cognitive dissonance or strong contradiction [that] for me the only way to deal with that is by faith. I've done a lot of work with homeless folks in Washington D.C. and that experience has been, at times, too painful to engage on an intellectual level. So it had to be viewed on a level of faith, and then later on integrating the intellect and the faith, because I think ideally they should be integrated.

Finally, although Matt did not directly speak of any specific educational practices he utilized to facilitate growth in others he did indirectly refer to the importance of facilitating that growth. As he so poignantly remarked, “whether the adult education people think I'm good at what I do or not, I couldn't possibly care less. But if people get something out of [my practice] and it helps them to lead lives that are more satisfying and Christ-like then take it. I'm there.”

## Chapter 6

### CONCLUSION: HAZARDS IN THE SPIRITUALITY DISCOURSE

#### *Overview*

This study has pointed out several hazards that appear in the spirituality discourse within the field of adult education. These hazards are identified as follows: non-definition and misuse of spirituality, imprecise definition and individualized spirituality, failure to address issues of faith substantively, and separation of religion and spirituality. This chapter begins by discussing these hazards. Then, based on the study's findings, the chapter offers suggestions for future research in the discourse of spirituality within adult education. The chapter concludes by proposing a way for the hazards to be avoided.

#### *Non-Definition and Misuse of Spirituality*

A recurring theme throughout this study is related to the hazard the discourse has created for itself and by itself in failing to commit to substantive definitions of the term, spirituality. This issue was first raised in the literature review in Chapter Two. It was also discussed at length by the majority of participants in the study as a major theme in their descriptions of spirituality.

By substantive definitions, I am referring specifically to definitions grounded in historical, theological, and etymological underpinnings of the construct (see Cully, 1990; Schweizer, 1968; Vine, 1966). Instead of these, the discourse has deliberately chosen to use vague, imprecise, and noncommittal terms in their definitions, describing spirituality

as “nebulous” (Vogel, 2000, p. 17), “elusive” (Tisdell, 2000, p. 333) and “hard to define” (English & Gillen, 2000, p. 87) in an apparent attempt to appear permissive, welcoming, and as Sue observed, make spirituality “be all things to everyone.”

But as this study pointed out, by striving to make spirituality palatable, the discourse has evacuated the term of any meaning. On this, the majority of participants were particularly vocal. Martin, for example, mentioned how spirituality is “a nothing word; a word that means nothing.” Matt agreed, stating that for him spirituality is “absolutely vague and meaningless, it has no historical grounding . . . . it is whatever you want it to be.” Therein lies a major hazard, because a spirituality emptied of meaning is highly susceptible to co-optation, commodification, and misuse for purposes that are anything but spiritual (see Beringer, 2002; Fenwick & Lange, 1998; Milacci & Howell, 2002).

A prime example of this type of hazardous misuse is found in the business and HRD literature. There, spirituality is misused as a tool for economic and marketing purposes (e.g. Bolman & Deal, 2001; Conger, 1994; Covey, 1989; Cox & Liesse 1996; Peters, 1992), a problem both Jodi and Frank made direct reference to in their interviews. In that literature, the principles and terminology of spirituality are misused to divert individuals’ focus inward toward self-development, wants and needs, so they will be oblivious to the fact that they are being pushed to lend their expertise to continually boost the bottom-line. In this way, words that mean one thing within the context of one’s spiritual life are turned into a commodity for misuse in the marketplace (see Fenwick & Lange, 1998; Milacci & Howell, 2002).

It would be easy to summarily dismiss these kinds of misuses solely as evidence of the propensity of a capitalistic society to commodify anything and everything. But in fact, much of the blame falls squarely on the shoulders of the spirituality discourse within adult education. Failing to commit to substantive definitions of spirituality and in effect making the term meaning-less implicates the discourse as facilitating and cooperating in this kind of marketization, cooptation, and commodification of the spiritual. The fact that we as a field participate in these misuses indirectly or unintentionally neither excuses or exonerates us from blame.

#### *Imprecise Definition and Individualistic Spirituality*

Beyond contributing to the co-optation and commodification of the spiritual, this study has also pointed out how the imprecise, vague definitions of spirituality in the discourse within adult education contribute to a second hazard: the hazard of promoting an individualistic spirituality. As Sue stated, “Some people want to keep spirituality as sort of . . . self centered, that whole celebration of self . . . . I have a problem with that.” Frank agreed adding, “Part of the newer spirituality is that you don’t need other people, you don’t need this church, you don’t need this congregation, or synagogue, or mosque; you don’t need to have other people.”

A spirituality focused on the individual is hazardous, precisely because it is intrinsically self-centered and self-serving. Then too, individualized spirituality ignores the fact that people do not live in isolation but are individuals who exist as part of a community. Accordingly, an individually focused spirituality promotes egocentric ideals

such as self-fulfillment, personal happiness, meaning making, and meeting individual needs while at the same time snubbing personal responsibility to community and society.

These assumptions underpinning individualistic spirituality place it in diametric opposition to a Christian notion of the construct where, according to the writings of Christian religious and theological scholars, community plays a central role (Ritchey, 2000; Schaeffer, 1971; Sider, 1999; Wallis, 2000). Furthermore, factoring in that all participants in this study viewed the world from a Christian frame and spoke of community as central to their understanding of spirituality, these assumptions also provide some explanation of why the participants had such strong, visceral reactions to the tacit but very real imposition of individualistic spirituality within the discourse of adult education.

Finally, the individualistic spirituality that lurks implicitly within the discourse of adult education is hazardous because it effectively excludes substantive discussions of how faith affects practice, how a person of faith should “live in world.” As Martin remarked, individualistic spirituality “means that you have an option to say that you could do something by yourself . . . . it says nothing about how you live in the world. It says more about how you are in the world as some kind of individualistic person.”

I find it somewhat ironic that the field of adult education, a field that prides itself as historically being concerned with the greater good of society at large, has so indiscriminately bought into and adopted as part of its own discourse a spirituality that, intentionally or unintentionally, makes the good of society subservient to the needs and concerns of the individual. Until and unless the discourse moves beyond the imprecise

definitions of spirituality it currently privileges, the hazards associated with this trend of implicitly promoting individualistic spirituality will continue.

### *Failure to Address Issues of Faith Substantively*

The lack of precise definition of the term spirituality coupled with the failure of the field to ground notions of the construct within traditional, etymological, and religious/theological moorings underpins yet another hazardous and insidious shortcoming in the discourse: a failure to address serious, substantive, issues of faith. These issues include, but are not limited to the “challenge of integration” mentioned in the previous chapter, how belief affects practice, and how a person of faith is “live” in the world. However, as this study pointed out, perhaps the most blatant illustration of this hazardous shortcoming is found in the discourse’s failure to tackle issues related to the “dark side.”

The “dark side” is a term used in this study to describe the struggles, questions, doubts, fears, and evils experienced by people of faith—and also recognized by most faith traditions—as an inevitable, legitimate, and important part of the spiritual journey (see Fenwick, 2001; Nouwen, 1981). The participants in this study described numerous encounters with the “dark side” in a variety of ways, such as experiencing a crisis of faith, feelings of skepticism towards and rejection of religion, struggling with hypocrisy and inconsistency of “religious” people, and constant difficulties, trials, and tribulations as a means of testing one’s faith.

However, these participant descriptions of spirituality were markedly different from those found in the discourse within adult education. There, the emphasis is on

promoting the “sunny, feel good” side of spirituality alone (e.g. Dirx, 1997; English, 2000; Groen, 2002; McDonald, 2002; L. Miller, 2000; Vella, 2000; Vogel, 2000; Wickett, 2000; Zeph, 2000; Zinn, 1997) and leaving the “dark side” practically ignored. So much so, in fact, that the silence of the discourse on issues related to the “dark side” is almost deafening.

By couching its discussions in spiritual terminology, the discourse in adult education creates the illusion of confronting and dealing with issues of faith in a substantive manner. But as the deafening silence with regards to the “dark side” indicates, in reality the tough issues are skirted. Therefore, space should be made within the discourse where real issues of faith, such as how belief affects practice, the “challenge of integration,” and “the dark side,” can be legitimately and substantively discussed.

### *Separation of Spirituality and Religion*

An additional hazard is found in the gap created by the attempt within the spirituality discourse in adult education to divorce religion and spirituality (e.g. English & Gillen, 2000; English, et al., in press; Tisdell, 2003; Vella, 2000; Vogel, 2000). Not only is this attempted separation a dramatic departure from the historic traditions of the field of adult education, it is a forced, unnatural, and subsequently hazardous separation rooted in a false assumption about religion.

According to its proponents, spirituality is “not the same as religion; religion is an organized community of faith that has written codes of regulatory behavior, whereas spirituality is more about one’s personal belief and experience of a higher power or higher purpose” (Tisdell, 2000, p. 309). But as this study pointed out, for most

participants religion is more than a system of worship, regulatory codes, or a community of faith. Like spirituality and faith, central to religion are foundations, fundamentals, foundational and core beliefs.

Furthermore, although the terms spirituality and religion are not identical, they are very closely connected, evidenced by the fact that many participants used the two terms interchangeably. In fact, some participants, in light of the vague, imprecise definitions of spirituality discussed in a previous section, preferred to use the terms religion and faith instead of spirituality. When understood in this way, religion and spirituality simply cannot be divorced.

Therefore, by pushing to keep religion and spirituality separate, the discourse is in effect asking the adult educator who is a person of faith to find some way to extricate their foundational beliefs and close off who they are at the very core of their being. This, however, is impossible. As Matt so powerfully expressed,

The[ir] rules can't take [my faith] away. It's like this whole prayer in the schools thing. I don't know how you can stop people from praying in school, or praying in their work, or praying in their car, or praying wherever they want to pray. I mean you can't stop me, because it has nothing to do with being legitimized, or being given chunking out time for me to do it. I do it whenever I want anyway.

This points to the primary hazard in attempting to keep spirituality and religion separate. Realizing that they cannot do the impossible and simply shut off their core beliefs at will as advocates of divorcing religion from spirituality require, the person of faith is faced with hazarding, as one participant summarized, “feeling fraudulent” or risk “being dismissed as a total flake” by colleagues in the field, neither of which is desirable. Instead of forcing people of faith to choose between attempting the impossible and doing

the undesirable, the onus should fall on the discourse within adult education itself to recognize that for many within the field, spirituality and religion are intrinsically connected.

Any hazards or risks that may result from linking spirituality and religion should be assumed by and entertained in the literature and not by a specific group of adult education practitioners. To be sure, when entering the quagmire of discussing religion and foundational beliefs, risks are inevitable, not the least of which is the risk of being exposed the emotional messiness and heated debates that are sure to erupt when core beliefs collide. But these are risks worth taking especially in light of the aforementioned alternative.

Finally, it seems to me that this is precisely the *raison d'être* of “discourse” in the first place: to take risks, to generate discussion and substantive debate. As Matt put it, “When [someone] set[s] out to write about . . . . adult education and spirituality, I’d like to at least read they’re either feeling intensely angry or intensely interested. But to leave [reading] it feeling indifferent is just really very sad.”

#### *Suggestions for Additional Research*

In spite of the fact that interest in spirituality has exploded in recent years (English, et al., in press), few empirical studies critically examining any aspect of the connection between spirituality and practice appear in the field of adult education. This study was a step in attempting to address this gap in the adult education literature, but it was only a step; further studies are needed to expand the discourse in a meaningful way. In this section, suggestions for additional research are provided.

### Studies with Different Criteria for Participation

In an effort to keep the project well defined and well focused (van Manen, 1990, p. 167), this study was bound by some very explicit—and subsequently, very limiting—criteria. Specifically, this research focused only on individuals who were:

- Self-identified adult educators with at least two years of practice in the field;
- Formally trained in the academic discipline of adult education at the graduate level;
- Identified and confirmed by reputation and works as holding a notion of spirituality grounded in a Christian tradition, broadly defined.

Needed are additional studies that link faith to adult education practice, studies that utilize different criteria for participant selection than those used here. For example, phenomenological research could be done on the link between descriptions of spirituality and practice as grounded in a faith or religious tradition other than Christianity, such as Judaism or Islam. The criteria for such a study could also be expanded to include those who do not identify with any formal religious or faith tradition whatsoever.

Then too, all participants in this study were adult education practitioners who currently live and work in the field within North America. Additionally, all were either working towards or had already completed their doctorate in the field. Other studies could be done to include practitioners who do not have advanced academic degrees in adult education, who do not consider themselves to be professional adult educators, or whose practice is beyond the North American continent.

A benefit of expanding participant selection beyond the limited criteria used in this study is that it would allow both the descriptions of spirituality and how those descriptions affect adult education practice to be compared and contrasted. More precisely, comparisons could be made between and among different faith traditions, educational background, and both type and location of adult educational practice.

### Studies of Spirituality in Action

As mentioned in Chapter Three, institutional regulations regarding the treatment of human subjects hindered me from procuring permission to observe the majority of participants in this study while they were engaged in practice. Fortunately, gathering observational data was not germane to the purpose of this study. This does not mean, however, that such data is of little or no value, in fact quite the contrary. Studies of spirituality in action—or studies targeting specific instances of how faith informs practice—would add significant depth to the current discourse within the field of adult education.

For example, research could be conducted to see if specific educational practices identified by participants as being informed by their spirituality are observable. If they are observable, research could then focus on how those practices are manifested in participants' daily work as adult educators.

This line of observational research could begin by conducting a study that targets the educational practices identified by participants in this present study to see if and how these practices are implemented. These practices included seeing the value in others,

treating others in a loving manner, actively participating in building community, engaging others at a deeper level, and facilitating others in their growth. The research could then be expanded to include any additional educational practices framed within descriptions of spirituality that have been gleaned from other participants in other, yet future research studies.

### Studies Beyond the Realm of Practice

Thus far, this chapter has focused exclusively on research exploring the link between spirituality and adult education practice. But if, as this study contends, spirituality is truly about one's core beliefs, then the affects of spirituality must certainly extend beyond the level of one's practice alone. Most assuredly, spirituality—or better, foundational beliefs—has an impact on one's theorizing about deeper issues such as what is learning, what is knowledge, what is society, what is it to be human, and so forth.

With that in mind, it is recommended that research be conducted which pushes the discourse in adult education beyond how spirituality is connected to practice. More specifically, studies could be undertaken that phenomenologically and critically examine the link between spirituality or faith, as grounded in a specific religious/theological tradition, and various adult education theories. As Sue suggested, “We’re a civil society; all our arguments in adult ed[ucation] have focused on what has happened to the shrinking civil society. Well, let’s frame that in a spiritual debate and see where it takes us . . .”

Sue's comments point to a potential benefit of embarking on research studies that move beyond mere issues of practice with respect to the affects of faith and spirituality on the field of adult education. By framing issues relating to adult education theory as a spiritual debate, it just might help create the kind of space within the discourse, mentioned above, where serious, substantive issues of faith can be discussed and deliberated.

### Studies Linked to Context

Finally, one of the more intriguing findings of this research is related to the struggle many participants experienced in their attempt to integrate faith into practice, or what participants referred to as the "challenge of integration." Especially interesting was that for some, this "challenge of integration" was rooted in what they perceived to be a deep-seated antagonism, that bordered on marginalization, in the academy towards religion in general and Christianity in particular. The reasons underpinning this perceived antagonism or why those participants felt marginalized in the academy, however, were not identified in the interviews and therefore not discussed in this study.

This issue speaks to a significant gap in the spirituality discourse within adult education. Missing in the literature are discussions surrounding the link between faith and institutional context and the relationship between spirituality and the place where a person of faith conducts her adult education practice. Therefore, it is suggested that research be done which examines faith at work. Potential topics to be explored here include if and how institutional context affects the faith/practice link and how place

frames the types of and manner in which a person of faith implements educational practices in that place.

*Avoiding Hazards: Moving from Spirituality Towards Faith*

Earlier in this chapter several hazards appearing in the spirituality discourse within the field of adult education were identified and discussed. The findings of this study indicate that because these hazards are tied, both directly and indirectly, to problems associated with the term spirituality, they can be avoided. However, avoiding these hazards requires a bold move by the field away from current discussions conveniently couched in undefined, non-offensive notions of spirituality towards a discourse framed explicitly and unapologetically in terms of faith.

Underpinning this proposed move from spirituality to faith is an assumption concerning a fundamental difference in how the two constructs are defined. Unlike spirituality with its ungrounded, nebulous, imprecise, and vague definitions, the term faith comes loaded with meaning; meaning that is grounded in historical, theological, and etymological contexts. More specifically, inherent in faith are notions and understandings related to foundations, fundamentals, and foundational or core beliefs. Thus, while the object of faith may differ between and among individuals and traditions, the substance or definition associated with the construct remains rooted in core beliefs.

Because it is grounded in the historical, theological, and etymological, the term faith is less likely to be co-opted, commodified, and misused for purposes that are anything but spiritual. As Frank observed, “The more general and vague and empty you can make a term, the more marketable it becomes.” Thus, by moving towards discussions

of faith, the discourse reduces its susceptibility to the hazards of misuse associated with the type of spirituality devoid of meaning currently in vogue (see Cox, 1999; Fenwick & Lange, 1998; Milacci & Howell, 2002).

Furthermore, a deliberate move from spirituality to faith would avoid the hazard of failing to address serious and difficult issues of faith, such as the “challenge of integration” and “the dark side.” Instead the discourse would be compelled to engage its discussions on a deeper, more substantive level. Because spirituality, as Martin remarked, is “a nothing word,” dialogue on these type of issues is easily and conveniently skirted. However, as noted above the term faith is imbued with meaning and by its very nature provokes discussion and debate about foundations, core beliefs, and how those beliefs frame or underpin practice. Thus, moving the focus of the discourse from spirituality to faith increases the likelihood that substantive issues will be addressed.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, framing the discourse in terms of faith would avoid the problems associated with the current attempt to divorce spirituality from religion and faith. Specifically, it would avoid the hazard of asking adult educators who are people of faith to shut off their core beliefs or risk “feeling fraudulent and/or being dismissed as a total flake.” Instead, core beliefs would become an accepted and substantive part of the discourse by virtue of their affiliation with faith. This would in turn bring to the fore discussions of specific educational practices that are framed within those core beliefs, how a person of faith should “live in the world,” and how faith affects practice.

I fully recognize that implementing this proposed move from spirituality to faith is not without risks of its own. Discussions focused on issues of faith and foundational

beliefs strike at the very core of who we are as human beings. Furthermore, when those beliefs are called into question or argued against, tempers flare, the debate heats up, and things have the potential of becoming combative. Nevertheless, if the discourse is to move beyond its present lethargic, impotent condition, a healthy dose of lively debate generated by such a bold move may be exactly what is needed.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

**Project Title:** *A Phenomenological Inquiry into Spirituality and Adult Education Practice*

Fred Milacci, Principal Investigator  
The Pennsylvania State University

1. Tell me about yourself; your job/work, what you do, etc. as an adult educator (NOTE: Not just “job description” but thicker, richer)

Prompts:

- Faith
- Relationship with co-workers
- Purpose of Job
- Ethical, moral issues
- Typical day
- Cues from notes taken during participant observation

2. Tell me about your life/typical day outside of your work

Prompts

- Church/religious experiences and activities
- Family, family background
- Friends
- Recreation, hobbies, outside interests, etc.
- Free time

3. Describe for me your understanding of faith and the journey or process that brought you to this understanding. (NOTE: This question is asked here only if it has not been addressed as a result of question 1 or 2).

4. How does your understanding/concept of faith play into/fit the seminal aspects of your life (i.e. described in question 2)?

Prompts

- How do you balance your faith with (work, family, home, et al.)?

- How does your faith “interact” with these things?

5. What is your understanding of the term spirituality?

Prompts:

- Synonyms, phrases, closely related concepts
- Thoughts, ideas, concepts, experiences that come to mind

6. How familiar are you with the notion of spirituality as it appears in the field of adult education?

Prompts include familiarity with/understanding of works by:

- Fenwick
- Tisdell
- Dirx,
- Hooks
- Vella etc

7. Do you see a “spiritual” dimension in your work as an adult educator? If so, can you describe what it is?

8. What else, significant to either spirituality or your adult education practice, would you like to share?

9. Mention/request for a follow-up interview

## APPENDIX B: EXAMPLE OF RAW DATA ANALYSIS

**I:** Well, it was when I first started to write professionally and write and publish in journals academic journals, which I guess would be about 10 years ago or so and I mean I think we all have different spiritual crisis throughout our lives cause we move through different phases of exploring our spirituality but for me that was the one that really, uh, it really was a shake down cause it forced me to, here you are writing about things that are supposed to be your foundational beliefs about what is knowledge, what is nature, what is being, uh, and when you realize that what you are writing doesn't jive at all with what you believe, what you worship, that's when I thought, if felt quite fraudulent actually for a while. But I'm still working through parts of that too

**R:** Now you used the word calling or vocation and I am assuming you used that word very deliberately, correct? (YES) when you talked about education, can you tell me a little bit about that process how you came to understand that that was what that was and maybe tell me how you understand what you mean by those words?

**I:** Oh, well I'm aware that there is a literature about calling, and I'm not familiar with it other than through my students and so on and I don't necessarily associate myself with that literature; I may if I read it better so you should know that but when I say deliberate I'm using it uh because the word itself has meaning to me, I'm not drawing on the literature when I use that?? But I calling to me is simply the deepest purpose of one's work. And I think I can say that I believe as a Christian that work is a fundamental activity in life, in worship, in being, in making relationships. I guess for me calling is an essential activity through all of one's life, it's determining what is one's calling, to what work is one called? And through that work one realizes the potential of one's being, one's relationship to god, one's relationship to society, to other people, one's place in community; all that kinda thing. So finding one's calling to me has a very important kinda connotation.

**R:** Absolutely and you felt that education was or helping people, I don't know if I got that exactly cause you said a lot there, so

**I:** Education became for me yes the framing of what I do and I think partly because it was the field that I've been working in so it's the way I contextualize my thinking and um I think if I were in another field, another helping profession say health care, I don't believe I would have had an epiphany that I should be a teacher instead; I believe I would have contextualized my calling within that field of health care; so the field itself isn't what's important to me, it's the relationship to the people and understanding who I am as a servant to others regardless of whether it's serving their learning or serving their bodies or their health or their political aspirations or whatever field one is in; for me it happens to be their learning. And their work as educators.

LATER.....

**I:** Well, here's how I guess it plays out for me. With students I guess I believe that I am there for them whenever they need me. And I don't go as far as my husband on this one I have really had to struggle where on puts boundaries on all of this but when students need me I drop everything to help you know depending on what kind of help they need. sometimes they don't know the kind of help they need; they think they need someone to sit around and listen to them whine for 2 hours and what they really need is for someone to give them some solid direction, um, but other times people do need for someone to sit and listen to them talk for 2 hours that's what they need, nothing else and I guess I feel that's is what my job is is to try and figure out what they really need and try and provide that and to know when I'm not the one to provide it and when they need someone else to provide it to be able to help them find the person who can. I believe my job in the class room is to help build community, to help other people create relationships with each other with the voices in the literature, with the wider community that's with what they do and by that I mean say in adult education the community of scholars to which they are perhaps not realizing but they are definitely a part, to faculty they have not met yet and to me as a go between, a mediator, facilitator, I believe that my job is to help students find with relationships, connections if you like, what is their calling. And to help them and some already have a good sense of that, some aren't ready to think about that, and some really need someone to listen and help them say find their way to that. Some already are well progressed and they just need you to help celebrate so I guess that sums up my work with students. With my colleagues I guess where my faith comes into most difficulty in understanding how to be with others in a way that's Christian, what I define as Christian, I do believe that we are called to love the people around us and that's not necessarily that we are to be a doormat, I don't believe turn your cheek means that either; I think it means be wise as a fox and gentle as a lamb. And so we read in the good book and so I do believe my job is to give my colleagues space to be who they are to not judge them for what they appear to be or to jump on them when I feel personally slighted or hurt or you know to be a good citizen in this community to help bring relationships together. I do believe in building community wherever and however I can. I also know I'm terribly limited; I'm not as good at this as other people so one of my jobs is to try and learn from others, how they build community well; and emulate to extend, to learn from and that kind of thing.

## **APPENDIX C: LIST OF MAIN THEMES AND SUB-THEMES**

### **Theme One: Six Descriptions of Spirituality**

- Closely Related Terms
- Beyond the Physical and Material
- Relationship to Community
- Problematic Nature of Individualized Spirituality
- Dissatisfaction with Current Definitions of Spirituality
- Encounters with the “Dark Side”

### **Theme Two: Exploring the Link Between Spirituality and Practice**

- The Critical Aspect of the Link
- The Human Aspect of the Link
- The Challenging Aspect of the Link
- The Central Aspect of the Link

### **Theme Three: Specific Educational Practices**

- Community Building
- Engaging Others on a Deeper Level
- Facilitating Others in Their Growth

**APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**Project Title:** *A Phenomenological Inquiry into Spirituality and Adult Education Practice*

Fred Milacci, Principal Investigator  
The Pennsylvania State University

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to be interviewed as a participant in a research project entitled: “*A Phenomenological Inquiry into Spirituality and Adult Education Practice*” being conducted by Fred Milacci as an authorized part of the education and research program of The Pennsylvania State University.

**Purpose:** I understand that the purpose of this study is to enhance the discourse of spirituality within the field of adult education by examining the concept of spirituality as it is applied to the practice of adult education. More specifically, the study seeks to investigate how select adult education practitioners understand the notion of spirituality and how that understanding impacts their practice.

**Procedure:** I understand that the investigator will conduct a 1 to 1 1/2 hour semi-structured phenomenological interview of me and that the session will be audiotaped. I also understand that a transcriptionist will be employed to transcribe the tapes and that a follow-up e-mail or phone interview of not more than 1/2 hour will be requested of me if necessary.

**Consent:** I understand that neither my name or any other personally identifying marks will be attached to any of my data (the tape recorded interviews or transcripts) and that the code sheet linking my personal identity information with my data will be kept in a locked and protected location in the investigator’s office. I also understand that the interview tapes will be kept in a locked and protected drawer in the investigator’s office, that only the investigator and his advisor, Dr. Fred Schied will have access to the tapes, and that all tapes will be destroyed by June 30, 2004.

Further, I understand that my participation in this research is entirely voluntary, involves no risk to my physical or mental health beyond those encountered in everyday life, and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without consequence. I also understand that I may decline to answer any specific question asked of me, that my participation in this study is confidential and that only the researcher listed above will have access to my identity and the information associated with my identity. I further understand that for any correspondence conducted by email, confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically I understand

that no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties.

**Questions:** I understand that the information given to me along with any questions I might have had related to this study have been satisfactorily answered. I also know that if I have any additional questions about this research project, I may contact Mr. Fred Milacci by phone at (814) 342-0766 or by email at [fmilacci@clearnet.net](mailto:fmilacci@clearnet.net).

I also understand that should I have any questions regarding my rights as a participant in this research, I may contact the Penn State University Office for Research Protection at (814) 865-1775.

By signing this form I certify that I am 18 years of age or older.

Please check one of the following:

I give my permission to be audio taped.

I do not give my permission to be audio taped.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Researcher: I certify that the informed consent procedure has been followed and that I have answered any questions from the participant as completely as possible.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

VITA Frederick A. Milacci, Jr.

#### EDUCATION

2003	The Pennsylvania State University University, University Park, PA	D.Ed.	Adult Education
1995	The Pennsylvania State University University Park, PA	M.Ed.	Adult Education
1980	Baptist Bible College Clarks Summit, PA	B.RE	Pre-Seminary

#### CURRENT POSITION

1982-2003 Pastor, Messiah Baptist Church Kylertown, PA

#### PROFESSIONAL AND TEACHING ACTIVITIES

2003 Instructor, Graduate Program in Adult Education, Penn State University

2001-2003 Graduate Assistant, Graduate Program in Adult Education, Penn State University

2001-2003 Teaching Assistant, Graduate Program in Adult Education, Penn State University

#### PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

Baptiste, I., Lalley, K., Milacci, F., & Mushi, H. (2003). "Anatomy of Adults' Learning Experiences." Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Adult and Continuing Education Research Conference. Harrisburg, PA: Temple University.

Milacci, F. & Howell, S. (2003). Marketing God: A critical inquiry into spirituality in the workplace. Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Adult and Continuing Education Research Conference. Harrisburg, PA: Temple University.

Milacci, F. & Howell, S. (2002). Marketing God: A critical inquiry into spirituality in the workplace. Proceedings of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Adult Education Research Conference. Raleigh, North Carolina: North Carolina State University.

Baptiste, I., Lalley, K., Milacci, F., & Mushi, H. (2001). "Anatomy of Adults' Learning Experiences." Paper presented at the Annual Adult and Continuing Education Association Conference, Baltimore, MD.

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