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Religion, Spirituality, and the Family

Multifaith Perspectives

FROMA WALSH

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> Love is the most powerful
> and still the most unknown energy of the world.
> —TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

Over the millennia and across cultures, people have lit candles, prayed together, meditated, and quietly turned to faith for solace, strength, and connectedness in their lives. Spiritual beliefs and practices anchor and nourish families and their communities. At times of crisis and with prolonged adversity, they foster recovery and resilience. Today, the vast majority of individuals and their families adopt some form of expression for their spirituality, whether within or outside formal religion. Many who seek help for physical, emotional, or interpersonal problems are also in spiritual distress. Therefore, as therapists and human service professionals, we need to attend to the spiritual dimension of human experience if we are to understand the needs and suffering of our clients and assist in their healing and growth.

Spirituality is not simply a special topic. Rather, like culture and ethnicity, it involves streams of experience that flow through all aspects of our lives, from family heritage to personal belief systems, rituals, and practices, and shared faith communities. Spiritual beliefs influence ways of coping with adversity, the experience of suffering, and the meaning of symp-

toms. They also influence how people communicate about their problems and pain; their beliefs about the causes and future course; their attitudes toward professional helpers—in pastoral care, mental health, health care, and human services—as well as faith healers; the treatments they seek; and their preferred pathways in problem solving or recovery. Moreover, psychotherapy itself, long considered a healing art, can be a profoundly spiritual experience for both clients and therapists, yet this has been a hidden aspect of our work. The very essence of the therapeutic relationship and meaningful change is ultimately spiritual in nature, fostering transformation, wholeness, and relational connection.

Therapists and trainees across professional disciplines have begun to show keen interest in exploring and developing the spiritual dimension of our practice. This overview chapter examines the growing diversity and significance of religion and spirituality for individuals, couples, and families today. Chapter 2 then suggests ways to include spirituality in clinical practice to understand spiritual sources of distress and to tap spiritual resources for healing, recovery, and resilience.

SPIRITUALITY IN A CHANGING WORLD

There has been a growing interest in spirituality throughout North America as people have sought greater meaning, harmony, and connection in their lives (Bibby, 2002; Miller & Thoresen, 2003). Over recent decades, tumultuous social and economic dislocations have generated widespread insecurity. Our harried, fragmented, and materialistic culture leaves many disconnected and unfulfilled, contributing to a spiritual malaise (Lerner, 2007). Marriage and family life have become more challenging. With increasing diversity, changing gender roles, and varied family structures over an extended life course, family members seek transcendent values and practices for greater coherence in their lives (Walsh, 2003b, 2006).

Moreover, major disasters, war, and widespread terrorist attacks shatter illusions of invulnerability and heighten awareness of the precariousness of life. In times of crisis and tragedy, people turn to their loved ones and to spiritual resources for meaning, solace, and strength in facing an uncertain future. Life was never more secure in earlier times; yet in our era, some are alarmed by a seeming collapse of universal moral values and seek spiritual moorings. The rise in religious fundamentalism in many parts of the world expresses, in part, a desire to restore traditions that provide clear structure and absolute certainties in the midst of rapid social change. Buffeted by global forces seemingly beyond control or comprehension, we yearn for inner

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peace, for a sense of coherence in our fragmented lives, and for more meaningful connection with others. It is no wonder that so many Americans have been turning to spiritual resources for resilience, blending varied religious traditions, and seeking new spiritual pathways to fit their lives.

DEFINING RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

It is important to clarify our understanding of the terms *religion* and *spirituality*, which are often used interchangeably. *Religion* can be defined as an organized, institutionalized belief system, set of practices, and faith community. *Spirituality*, an overarching construct, refers to a dimension of human experience involving personal transcendent beliefs and practices, within or outside formal religion, through family and cultural heritage, and in connection with nature and humanity.

Most research and discourse until recently have focused on religious beliefs, practices, and congregational affiliation (e.g., Gallup and Pew surveys). More attention is needed to the broader and more personal expressions of spirituality, as people are increasingly seeking and shaping their own varied spiritual pathways.

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Religion: Organized Belief System

Religion is an organized belief system that includes shared, institutionalized, moral values, practices, involvement in a faith community, and, for most, belief in God or a Higher Power. Through sacred scriptures and teachings, religions provide standards and prescriptions for individual virtue, relational conduct, and family life grounded in core beliefs. Congregational affiliation provides the guidance of clergy and a community of shared faith, as well as support in times of crisis. Rituals and ceremonies carry profound significance, connecting individuals and families with their larger community, its history, and its survival over adversity. Religious belief systems provide faith explanations of past history and present experiences. For many, they predict the future and offer pathways toward understanding the ultimate meanings of life and existence (Campbell & Moyers, 1988).

Spirituality: Transcendent Beliefs and Practices

Spirituality is a dimension of human experience involving transcendent beliefs and practices. It is the heart and soul of religion (Pargament, 2007). Spirituality can also be experienced outside formal religious structures, and

is both broader and more personal (Elkins, 1990). Spiritual resources might include practices of prayer, meditation, or traditional faith healing rituals and participation in a faith community. Many people who do not consider themselves "religious" lead deeply spiritual lives and find spiritual nourishment in varied ways. Some find renewal and connection through nature and the creative arts; others find meaning and purpose through secular humanism, service to others, and social activism.

One simple yet profound definition of *spirituality* is "that which connects one to all there is" (Griffith & Elliott Griffith, 2002). It involves an active investment in an internal set of values. It fosters a sense of meaning, wholeness, harmony, and connection with others—a unity with all life, nature, and the universe (Wright, Watson, & Bell, 1996). One's spirituality may involve belief in a supreme being, a divine spirit within all living things, or an ultimate human condition toward which we strive.

Spirituality invites an expansion of consciousness, along with personal responsibility for and beyond oneself, from local to global concerns. A child's moral awareness evolves out of spiritual belief systems (Coles, 1997). Morality involves the activity of informed conscience—judging right and wrong based on principles of justice, decency, and compassion (Doherty, 1995; see Chapter 11, this volume). Moral or ethical values spur us to go beyond virtuous conduct to respond to the suffering of others; to dedicate efforts to right injustice; and to repair and improve conditions in our world (see Perry & Rolland, Chapter 20, this volume). At their best, they promote humanity.

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Spirit

Universally, the spirit is seen as our vital essence, the source of life and power. In many languages the word for *spirit* and *breath* is the same: in Greek, *pneuma*; in Hebrew, *reach* ("ray-akh"); in Latin, *spiritus*; and in Sanskrit, *prana* (Weil, 1994). We are *inspired* by great teachers, scriptures and hymns, works of art, and the magnificence of nature. We *aspire* to become our best selves. We *expire* with our last breath at death, when, for religious believers, our spirit is released to an afterlife.

Soul

Similarly, the soul has been seen over the ages as the source of human genuineness, depth, joy, sorrow, and mystery. In many religions, the soul is also a metaphor expressing the relationship between human beings and God: To tend to the soul is to restore and strengthen that connection.

Herbert Anderson, a theological authority on marriage and the family (see Chapter 10, this volume), describes the soul as our visualizing center, guiding how we live with others and ourselves. Yet we can't quite locate it: We sense something as true or profound in our "gut." Anderson notes that the literal translation of Proverbs 23:16 is "my kidneys will rejoice when your lips speak what is right" (1994, p. 209). He adds that because the human being is a unity, soul or kidney may also refer to the individual as a whole.

Taking a double view, Anderson (1994) describes the soul as being everywhere but nowhere—in every cell of the body and also capable of self-transcendence. In this view, we are both soul-filled bodies and embodied souls, linked to earth and sky. Similarly, Thomas Moore (1992) observes that if we are to care for the soul, then "we will have to know the sky and earth as well as human behavior" (p. 20).

Such perspectives are strikingly akin to Native American and First Nation spirituality. Black Elk, a Holy Man of the Lakota tribe, recounting the tragic decades of the Custer battle and the Wounded Knee Massacre, revealed the spiritual source of resilience that sustained Native American tribes: their system of beliefs based in a vision of the unity of all creation. "All living things . . . are children of one mother, Mother Earth, and their father is one Spirit. We are related to all things: the stars in the universe and the grasses of the earth" (Neihardt, 1932/1979, p. 5).

Many scholars and therapists regard the wounding or neglect of the soul as a primary source of the maladies of our times, afflicting individuals and society with symptoms such as obsessions, addictions, violence, sexual abuse, and loss of meaning and hope (see Aponte [Chapter 6], Barrett [Chapter 14], Kamya [Chapter 15], and Weingarten [Chapter 18], this volume). Moore (1992) asserts that the mental health field tries to isolate and eradicate these symptoms, but much suffering that is given pathological labels may also be understood as maladies of the soul, of overwhelming loss and disconnection. We refer to someone in despair as a "lost soul," without hope or community, struggling to survive. Much of the suffering that therapists treat involves deep yearnings for meaning and connection. When we lose ourselves in a multitude of activities and petty concerns, we endanger the soul. Tending to the soul involves purposeful activity and restful replenishing.

We can only glimpse the soul and cannot penetrate its essence. More process and substance, the language of soul is not technical or scientific but rather embodied in poetry, art, and music. Imagination is the expression of soul; it involves the making of meaningful memory, linking the past, present, and future; the individual with the community and all that is beyond.

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The soul also involves vulnerability and uncertainty. As humans we are all susceptible to being wounded; we grapple with the meaning of our lives and with our own mortality. We nourish the soul by living without pretense or armor, approaching all experience with openness, courage, and compassion.

INCREASING RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL PLURALISM

Americans are among the most religious people in the world. In 2007 surveys, 83% of all adults said that religion is important in their lives, 56% regarded it as very important, and nearly 33% considered it the most important part of their lives (Gallup, Inc., 2008[1]). Over recent decades, religion has been in transformation (Smith, 2005), with growing diversity and personal choice of faith beliefs and practices.

The United States was founded by religious dissidents on the principle of respect and tolerance for diversity of faith (Gaustad & Schmidt, 2002). Christianity has remained dominant, as it has in Canada (Lindner, 2008); however, the religious landscape in North America has been changing dramatically over recent decades both through immigration and the increasing desire to seek varied spiritual pathways.

Religious Identification

Over 80% of Americans identify as Christian (Gallup, Inc., 2008). Nearly 50% are Protestant, with membership shifting in recent years from mainline denominations to evangelical churches, many nondenominational. Twenty-three percent are Roman Catholic. Additionally, 2% identify as Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints) and 0.8% are Eastern Orthodox (e.g., Greek or Russian).

Over 40% of Christians describe themselves as evangelical, "born again," or fundamentalist, which are overlapping groups (Gallup, Inc., 2008). The influence of the Christian right, a coalition combining fundamentalist visions of religion with a politically and socially conservative agenda, has been waning. Evangelical Christians are politically diverse and increasingly broad in focus on human rights, poverty, and environmental concerns (Greeley & Hout, 2006).

The non-Christian proportion of the United States has been rising, from 3.6% in 1900, to nearly 15% by 2000 (Gallup, 2002). Over 2% of Americans consider themselves to be Jewish, ranging widely in beliefs and practices from Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist branches

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to secular humanism, identification with parentage or upbringing, and connection to the history and heritage of the Jewish people (Mayer, Kosmin, & Keysar, 2002). Those who identify as Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus are near 1% each and increasing. Others follow ancient traditions such as Native American, Sikh, Shinto, and Tao. Some are drawn to religions that present a universality of faiths, such as Unitarian/Universalist and Baha'i, which avows "many lamps; one light."

Faith Communities

Formal denominational affiliation and congregational membership have been declining in recent years in North America, especially in Canada (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008; Lindner, 2008). In the United States, 62% say they are members of "a church or synagogue," although attendance at worship services is less regular than in the past, particularly by men. Yet there are over 2,000 denominations plus countless independent congregations (Lindner, 2008), with nearly 500,000 churches, temples, mosques, and other places of worship—from small storefronts to megachurches drawing tens of thousands of congregants.

Beyond places of worship, congregations that flourish are vibrant communities of faith, offering a wide range of programs, with flexible schedules and childcare, to fit the needs of overburdened families. In addition to prayer and scripture reading groups, choir singing, potluck suppers, and social gatherings, they encourage involvement in community service, from volunteer support in faith-affiliated hospitals and social service agencies, to local and global activism for causes such as disaster recovery, HIV-AIDS prevention, social justice, human rights, peace efforts, and the environment. Many offer "cradle to grave" services including marriage and parenting skills, childcare and eldercare, teen clubs, computer and job skills training, preventive health care, mental health counseling, and senior activities. Clergy and pastoral counselors provide spiritual guidance through times of adversity. In religious support groups, members gain strength and a sense of interdependence. Internet services provide information, promote connection, and rally prayers and support for those in need.

INTERTWINING OF RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Religion and culture are interwoven in all aspects of spiritual experience (McGoldrick, Giordano, & Garcia-Preto, 2005). Frank McCourt (1998)

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experienced his Irish Catholic upbringing as a faith that seemed "mean, scrimped, and life-denying" (p. 64). He formed the image of an angry, vengeful God "who'd let you have it upside your head if you strayed, transgressed, coveted. . . . He had His priests preaching hellfire and damnation from the pulpit and scaring us to death" (p. 64). In traveling to Italy, McCourt was struck by the differences: "Statues and pictures of the Virgin Mary in the Irish churches seemed disembodied and she seemed to be saying, 'Who is this kid?' In contrast, Italian art portrayed a voluptuous, maternal Mary with a happy infant Jesus at her bosom" (p. 64). McCourt wondered: "Was it the weather? Did God change His aspect as He moved from the chilly north to the vineyards of Italy?" (p. 64). He thought that, all in all, he'd prefer the Italian expression of Catholicism to the Irish one.

Spiritual beliefs and practices vary greatly across and within cultures. African Americans are far more likely than all other groups to consider religion important, from personal faith and connection with God to active congregational participation (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999). Many are involved in historically Black churches (e.g., AME, African Methodist Episcopal) that have been vital resources during and since the time of slavery. African Americans practice their faith fervently and look to it for strength in dealing with adversity (see Boyd-Franklin & Lockwood, Chapter 7, this volume).

Hispanics are transforming the religious landscape in the United States, especially the Catholic Church, through their growing numbers and their practice of a distinctive form of Christianity (Pew Hispanic Project and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2007). Two-thirds of Latinos identify as Roman Catholic—now one-third of all Catholics in the U.S. Over half of Catholic Latinos find religious expressions associated with the Pentecostal and charismatic movements. Also, growing numbers are converting from Catholic to evangelical churches, primarily for a more direct, personal experience of God.

For the great majority of Latinos, regardless of religious preference, God is an active force in everyday life. Most identify with spirit-filled religion or renewalist movements emphasizing God's ongoing intervention in daily human affairs through the Holy Spirit. Many say they have experienced such occurrences as divine healing, miracles, transpersonal encounters (with angels, demons, and other spiritual visitations), and direct revelations from God. Most Latinos pray every day, have religious objects in their home, and attend religious services at least monthly. Latino-oriented churches are flourishing; two-thirds of Hispanics attend churches with Latino clergy and services in Spanish. This trend is prevalent among not only recent immi-

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grants but also native-born and English-speaking Latinos, suggesting that it involves a broad and lasting form of cultural and spiritual identification (see Falicov, Chapter 8, this volume).

Immigrants from Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa commonly follow traditional spiritual beliefs and practices alongside Christianity, comingling African and indigenous influences, as do many Latinos in *santería* and *espiritismo* (Comas-Díaz, 1981; see Falicov [Chapter 8] and Kamya [Chapter 15], this volume). Most turn to the church for weddings, christenings, and funerals, yet tend to personalize their connection with God through special relationships with saints or spiritual guides, and show faith and gratitude through offerings, prayers, and rituals. Many believe in an invisible world inhabited by good and evil spirits who influence human behavior and can either protect or harm, prevent or cause illness, and be influenced by good or evil deeds. Incense, candles, and powders, alleged to have mystical properties, are used to cure illness and ward off the "evil eye."

Differences are found between families from rural, traditional backgrounds and those from urban, educated, and middle-class settings. Religious expression is further influenced by race, recent immigration, and acceptance or marginalization by the dominant culture. Religious prejudice or discrimination can lead family members to suppress identification.

It is crucial not to link religion and ethnicity reflexively, and to guard against stereotypes. Contrary to popular belief, only one-third of Arab Americans are Muslim; many are Christian. U.S. Muslims include African Americans, as well as immigrants from the Middle East, North and sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Indonesia. Although they face strong discrimination, Muslim Americans are largely assimilated, happy with their lives, and moderate with respect to many issues that have divided Muslims and Westerners around the world (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2007).

Immigrants from Southeast Asia may be Christian or bring Eastern religious and ancient animist traditions. Refugees from the former Yugoslavia who are Croatian, Bosnian, or Kosovar, are also Orthodox Christian, Catholic, or Muslim—differences that carry heavy historical meaning (i.e., the 13th-century imposition of Islam by invading Turks) that fueled hatred and bloodshed across the generations. In our work with Bosnian and Kosovar refugee families who fled "ethnic cleansing," it was important to be mindful of the religious aspect of their trauma and their resilience (Walsh, 2006).

In a predominantly Christian nation of European origins, we must be cautious not to superimpose the template of Western European values on

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other belief systems and practices that may not be understood in Christian terms. It is crucial not to judge diverse faith orientations, particularly those of non-Christian, non-European, and indigenous cultures, such as African healing traditions, as inferior or primitive (Somé, 1998). Early European American conquerors viewed Native American tribes as savage heathens and regarded their spiritual beliefs and practices as pagan witchcraft. Such attitudes led to government and religious missionary programs to educate and acculturate Indians in Christianity and Western ways, eradicating their tribal language, religion, and customs. Children were forcibly taken from their families and tribes and sent to boarding schools, where they were stripped of their cultural identity and religious heritage. Today, Native American youth are returning in large numbers to the spiritual roots of their ancestors, seeking identity and worth in their spiritual communities (Bucko, 2007; Deloria, 1994).

Religious intolerance and extremism have spawned hatred and violence. Although Muslim terrorists proclaim religious adherence, Islamic Law forbids suicide and the killing of innocent people (Nasr, 2002). In the United States, violent acts have also been committed by members of White supremacist, extremist Christian groups that espouse racism and religious intolerance. Imposition of the dogmatic belief that there is only one "true religion" has led to catastrophic consequences throughout human times, such as holy wars, including the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition, to convert, subjugate, or annihilate nonbelievers (Marty, 2005).

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COMMON RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Belief in God is strong among Americans. In 2007 surveys, 86% said they believe in God, a Higher Power, or a Universal spirit. Only 6% are atheists, nonbelievers in the existence of God, and 8% are agnostic, or uncertain (Gallup, 2008). Conceptions of God vary widely; some think of God as a "force" that maintains a balance in nature. Most believe in a personal God, who watches over and judges people, guiding them in making decisions. Most believe that God performs miracles today. Many say they have felt the presence of God at various times and believe that God has a plan for their lives. The closer people feel to God, the better they feel about themselves and others.

Most Americans believe that they will be called before God on Judgment Day to answer for their sins. The vast majority believes in an afterlife: 81% believe in heaven, and 75% believe in angels, whereas nearly 70%

believe in hell and the devil (Gallup, 2008; see Walsh, Chapter 4, this volume). Most people say their religious beliefs help them to solve problems, to respect themselves and others, to help those in need, and keep them from doing things they know they shouldn't do. However, there is often a gap between people's faith and knowledge of their religion and its core tenets. Although over 90% of homes contain a Bible, 58% of Americans couldn't name five of the Ten Commandments; furthermore, 10% thought Joan of Arc was Noah's wife. Nearly half of all teens thought Moses was one of the twelve Apostles (Prothero, 2007)!

Public attitudes across a set of social issues such as gay marriage, gay adoption of children, abortion, and stem cell research have become more moderate (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2006). The most conservative on these issues are White evangelical Protestants, men, Blacks, those over 65, and those less educated.

Such issues can be contentious in couple and family relationships. Yet we must be cautious not to assume that particular individuals or families adhere to doctrines of their religion. On reproductive rights, most Americans (73%) view abortion as morally wrong in at least some circumstances. Yet across the ideological spectrum, two-thirds support finding common ground: making abortion available but rare. Among Catholics, over 60% believe that those who have abortions can still be good Catholics. Over 75% of Catholics disagree with the Church refusal to sanction divorce and remarriage (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999). There is a growing gap between personal faith and adherence to institutionalized religious systems. Most people regard decisions such as birth control, abortion, divorce, and assisted dying as matters between themselves, their loved ones, and God. In all, most Americans are highly independent in their spiritual lives (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2006).

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Prayer, Meditation, and Rituals

Prayer has strong meaning for Americans: 90% pray in some fashion at least weekly; 75% pray daily (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999; Gallup, Inc., 2008). For most, prayer originates in the family, is centered in the home, and grows in importance over the life course. Prayer at bedtime and saying grace or giving thanks to God before meals are common practices. Most people report that they pray whenever they feel the need. As one African American woman said, "My own father died when I was 18 months old and so I had to talk to my father in heaven and rely on him to guide me throughout my life." She added, "You need that higher power to help you when you have deaths in

the family or your children get into trouble. If I didn't always have Him to talk to, I never would have made it through."

Prayers serve many functions. Daily prayers express praise and gratitude. Almost all people pray for their family's health and happiness; very few pray for bad tidings for others. People commonly pray for strength, wisdom, or courage in facing life challenges. Many pray to seek forgiveness for sins, wrongdoing, or harm to others. Some request intercession or miracles in dire situations, such as when a loved one's life is at risk. Others pray that God's will be done.

Prayer generates feelings of hope and peace. Most who pray believe it makes them better persons. Nearly all report that their prayers have been heard and answered. One in four reports a voice or vision as a result of prayer. Most say they received what they hoped for, as well as divine inspiration or a feeling of being led by God. Yet one in five persons has been angered or disappointed when prayers have not been answered, most often when a requested miracle did not occur. Some (30%) have had long periods of time when they stopped praying, mostly because they got out of the habit. A few (10%) stopped because they lost their faith, were angry with God or their church, or felt their prayers had not been answered (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999).

Every religion values some form of prayer or meditation. Many people who are not religious also practice meditation for physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being. It may involve silent contemplation, mindfulness practices, chanting, reading sacred or inspirational texts, reciting a rosary or a mantra, or rituals, such as lighting candles or incense. Catholics commonly offer prayers to patron Saints for guidance or intercession with God. Hindu meditation and offerings to various gods take place most often in the home, where small statues and shrines are placed. One of the five pillars of Islam is observance of ritual prayer, facing Mecca, five times daily. For Muslims, one reason to pray is to express praise and gratitude for life itself. Another reason is to keep life in perspective, which is considered the most difficult lesson people must learn (Nasr, 2002). Across faiths, shared meditative experiences foster genuine and empathic bonds, reduce defensive reactivity, and deepen couple and family bonds (see Gale, Chapter 13, this volume).

Rituals and ceremonies serve invaluable functions in connecting individuals with their families and communities, as well as guiding them through life passage and times of adversity (Imber-Black, Roberts, & Whiting, 2003; see Imber-Black, Chapter 12, this volume). Rituals celebrate or commemorate important events in family life and faith traditions. They also connect a particular celebration or tragedy with all human experience, a birth or death with all others.

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Patriarchy and Changing Gender Role Relations

Patriarchy, an ancient and enduring cultural pattern embedded in most religious traditions, has been a dominant force. At its worst, it has sanctioned the subordination and abuse of women and children (Bottoms, Shaver, Goodman, & Qin, 1995; Bowman, 1983; Bridges & Spilka, 1992). In Genesis 3:16, Eve was admonished, "In pain you shall bring forth children; yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." In the New Testament, St. Paul told women, "Wives, be submissive to your husbands" (Colossians 3:18). Confucius (551–479 B.C.) boldly proclaimed, "one hundred women are not worth a single testicle." The Hindu Code of Manu (c. 100 A.D.) declared, "In childhood a woman must be subject to her father; in youth to her husband; and when her husband is dead, to her sons. A woman must never be free of subjugation." A legacy of this devaluation in some parts of the world, such as China and India, has been the practice of infanticide, abandonment and, with modern technology, abortion of unwanted daughters. With the preference for sons, the one-child mandate in China since the 1980s has produced a gross imbalance in the numbers of young men to women.

Over recent decades, traditional gender role relations have been in transformation in couples and families. In the United States, evangelical and mainline Protestant churches have markedly different ideological positions on these changes, with evangelicals holding to patriarchal expectations for the husband/father to be the "spiritual head" of the family. Yet, as Wilcox (2004) finds, the actual family behavior of Christian men who are married with children does not differ greatly. Mainline Protestant men, whom Wilcox terms "new men," take a more egalitarian position on the sharing of household responsibilities than do their conservative peers; and they take a more involved approach with their children than do men with no religious affiliation. Wilcox finds that Evangelical men tend to be "soft patriarchs": authoritative yet not as authoritarian as past generations. Their parenting style involves both strict discipline and warm, expressive interactions, and they tend to be more affectionate and dedicated to their wives and children than mainline Christian and secular men (Wilcox, 2004; see also Anderson, Chapter 10, this volume; on Latter-Day Saint marriage and family life, see Dollahite, 2007).

Within conservative sects, most women support traditional family role relations, adhering to their deep faith convictions when they are treated with respect and valued for their centrality in family life as mothers, caregivers, and keepers of the hearth. However, tensions rise when relationships are highly skewed in power, privilege, and control. Men who are more conser-

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vative than their wives are more likely to act violently toward them when conflict arises as women assert their needs or challenge authority (Sullivan, 2001).

Harmful patterns of denigration and abuse lead women increasingly to separate and divorce; they also alienate many from their religious roots. Some have found new meaning and esteem through more progressive churches and faiths, such as Baha'i, that promote the equality of men and women in family life and society. Some turn to holistic or Earth-based spiritualities. Feminist scholars have challenged androcentric interpretation of scriptures, such as the Bible and the Koran (Bakhtiar, 2007). The theologian Frymer-Kensky (cited in Murphy, 1998) asserts that the complex, multifaceted nature of God, combining all the attributes that went into the making of humankind, set a standard of unity, without sex or class division, that should be an inspiration to all.

Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

The condemnation of homosexuality in religious doctrine has been a source of deep anguish for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) persons. Some denominations have adopted a loving acceptance of gay persons as human beings created by God, yet abhor same-sex practices as unnatural and sinful. Such a dualistic position perpetuates stigma and shame, producing a deep schism in an individual's gender identity that wounds the soul. Even those who avow to "hate the sin, but love the sinner" engender a sense of conflict between their sexual orientation and full participation in religious life.

Many LGBT persons abandon their childhood faith, feeling that to accept themselves, they must reject their religion (Yip, 2002). They may still confront heterosexist religiosity in their family, kin, and social network; in their community; or in dealings with health care, workplace, or other, larger systems. Longstanding public opposition to same-sex marriage and adoption by gays and lesbians is declining. Those who have a friend or family member who is gay are twice as likely to be supportive (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2006, 2008).

Increasingly, many religious groups have been challenging traditional orthodoxy for the full acceptance of persons and relationships of diverse sexual orientation as human rights issues for equality and social justice. Many offer broadly inclusive ministries to meet spiritual needs, such as Unitarian and Metropolitan Community Churches. Many local congregations of varying denominations welcome LGBT members despite the official positions of their larger institution.

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The diversity among LGBT individuals, couples, and families requires an especially broad definition of religion, faith, and spirituality. The challenges presented by religious dogma have not undermined the importance of spirituality. Some LGBT Christians and their families reconcile their spiritual and sexual identities through a personal relationship with a God that loves them unconditionally (Lease & Shulman, 2003). The HIV-AIDS crisis, the proliferation of families headed by same-sex partners, and the heated debates on same-sex marriage and gay clergy have intensified spiritual explorations (Davidson, 2000; Smith & Horne, 2007; Tan, 2005). Many show resilience in forging their own spiritual pathways by seeking out gay-inclusive faith communities and focusing on self-exploration and spiritual growth (Roseborough, 2006). Others turn to alternative faiths that emphasize personal, versus institutional, authority over spiritual matters, including Eastern and Earth-spirited faiths (Yip, 2002).

Spiritual Resources through Nature, the Arts, and Activism

Spiritual resources are all around us. Many find spiritual connection and nourishment through communion with nature—in a walk at sunrise or the rhythm of waves on the shore; in tending a garden or a bond with a companion animal (Walsh, in press). Such everyday experiences take us into the moment and beyond ourselves, making us feel at one with other life and the universe. Many are drawn to visit places with high spiritual energy—sacred mountains, shrines, cathedrals, mosques, and temples; sites of past civilizations; places of natural beauty and wonder. Living in harmony with nature and the environment is at the heart of the spirituality of indigenous communities.

Across cultures, people are inspired by art, poetry, and drama that communicate our common humanity. Music, both sacred and secular, can offer a powerful transcendent experience. Native Americans say, "to watch us dance is to hear our hearts speak." African American gospel "spirituals," blues, jazz, and "soul music" are creative expressions forged out of the cauldron of slavery, racism, and impoverished conditions, transcending those scarring experiences through the resilience of the human spirit.

Many who don't consider themselves religious do find spiritual meaning through nature, the arts, or activism. The author Alice Walker (1997) combined all three in her spiritual journey. Her beloved mother, devoted to her rural church, was active in bringing children in need into her home and looking out for the welfare of others in their struggling African American community. Walker dropped out of the church at age 13, feeling that the structure and teachings were oppressive. Finding that nature nourished her

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soul, she became what she calls a "born-again pagan" experiencing spirituality through the land. Her activist spirit found powerful expression in her writing and work in movements for social justice, following her mother's footsteps, yet on her own path.

Broad Spectrum of Faith Beliefs and Practices

The wide spectrum of faiths today has been called a "supermarket" of religions, attesting to their strength and vitality. A broader spirituality is expected to continue in significance over the coming decades, shaped less by institutions and more by the people who are seeking meaning and connection. They commonly pick and choose among spiritual beliefs and practices from their faith tradition and from other sources to fit their lives. Canadian sociologist Reginald Bibby (2002) calls this trend "religion à la carte." Many immigrants blend traditional or indigenous beliefs and practices with Christianity. Others combine Buddhist teachings with their Jewish or Christian heritage. As spiritual diversity within families increases, most are taking a broader, multifaith, holistic perspective. Most Americans believe that all religions are essentially good and that nonreligious people can lead ethical lives. Although affiliation and adherence to formal religion has been declining, what matters for most is deep personal spirituality, guided by transcendent values that are lived out in daily life, relationships, and concern for others (Wendel, 2003).

From Spiritual Diversity to Pluralism

The terms *pluralism* and *diversity* are sometimes used synonymously. However, as Eck (2006) clarifies, diversity refers simply to many differences—splendid, colorful, perhaps threatening. For instance, she observes that located on the same street in one neighborhood, there are diverse faith communities: a Vietnamese Catholic church, a Cambodian Buddhist temple, a Ukranian Orthodox church, a Muslim Community Center, a Disciples of Christ church, and a Hindu temple. Pluralism involves the engagement and relationship with one another that creates a common society from multifaith diversity.

America's growing spiritual diversity is generating a new period of bridge building as varied faith communities forge linkages with one another (see Harvard's Pluralism Project at *www.pluralism.org*). Interfaith dialogues tackle issues such as teen pregnancy; coalitions work to fight hunger and homelessness. More than the tolerance of differences, pluralism requires some knowledge of our differences and our commonalities. Rather than

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relinquishing the distinctiveness of one's own tradition of faith to reach the "lowest common denominator," it involves a broad inclusiveness of people of every faith, and of none, nurturing constructive dialogue, mutual understanding, and connectedness.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUALITY IN FAMILY LIFE

Spirituality is deeply interwoven in all aspects of family life. A growing body of research has been examining the influences of spiritual beliefs, practices, and congregational involvement on family functioning, parenting styles, family dynamics, and intergenerational bonds (Bailey, 2002; Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001; Marks, 2006; Snarey & Dollahite, 2001; Snider, Clements, & Vazsonyi, 2004). Scholars are exploring the adaptation of a wide range of faith traditions for contemporary families (Browning & Clairmont, 2007). Studies of highly religious families are examining the role of religion in couple conflict (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006; Marsh & Dallos, 2001) and parent–child interactions (Marks, 2004).

Those who regard religion as the most important influence in their lives and receive a great deal of comfort from their faith are far more likely to feel close to their families, to find their jobs fulfilling, and to be hopeful about the future. In public surveys, over 80% say that religion was important in their family of origin when they were growing up, and nearly 75% report that their family relationships have been strengthened by religion in their home (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999). From a family systems perspective, there is a mutual influence between spirituality and the family: Meaningful spiritual beliefs and practices can strengthen families and their members; in turn, their shared spiritual experiences strengthen members' faith. Likewise, harsh or oppressive spiritual beliefs and practices can wound family members, their spirits, and their relationships; in turn, those who have been injured often turn away from their faith.

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Transcendent Values

Family process research has found that transcendent spiritual beliefs and practices foster healthy family functioning (Beavers & Hampson, 2003; Stinnett & DeFrain, 1985). A system of values and shared beliefs that transcends the limits of family members' experience and knowledge enables better acceptance of the inevitable risks and losses in living and loving fully.

Family values became a hotly debated topic in political discourse over recent decades as many religious conservatives contended that the chang-

ing family forms and gender roles led to the demise of the family. Today, there is less polarization and wide recognition that faith traditions need to adapt to the growing complexity and diversity of family life (Browning, Miller-McLemore, Couture, Lyon, & Franklin, 2001; Browning & Clairmont, 2007; Edgell, 2005; Houseknecht & Pankhurst, 2000). It is crucial to move beyond the faulty assumption that one family model is the "paragon of virtue" and that all others are inherently damaging (Stacey, 1996). Abundant research confirms that the vast majority of children fare well when raised in a variety of kinship arrangements, and by gay as well as straight parents. What matters most are stable, caring, committed bonds and family processes that support optimal functioning and positive growth (Walsh, 2003b). By becoming more broadly inclusive toward contemporary couples and families, faith institutions and communities can be more responsive to their diverse relational and spiritual needs.

The vast majority of families raise their children with strong values. Some contemporary values break with tradition, such as regarding men and women as equal partners in family life (see Anderson, Chapter 10, this volume). Still, most couples and families uphold traditional values of commitment, responsibility, and investment in raising healthy children. Most value a spiritual dimension in their lives that fosters personal and relational well-being, positive growth, and concern for others. Most are giving and forgiving in their personal relationships. Of interest, survey respondents (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999) have ranked family ties, loyalty, and traditions as the main factors thought to strengthen the family; next were moral and spiritual values, which far outranked family counseling and parent training classes.

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Spirituality across the Family Life Cycle

Religion and spirituality profoundly influence individual and family development. They involve dynamic processes that ebb and flow, shifting in meaning over the life course and across the generations (Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003; Worthington, 1989).

In all religions, the family is central in rites that mark the birth of a new member, entry into the adult community, marriage vows, and the death of a loved one. For instance, the practice of Judaism is centered on the family observance of rituals, from weekly *Shabbat* (Sabbath) to the holidays in the Jewish calendar year and rites of passage across the life cycle. Each ritual carries significant meaning that connects family members with their larger community and with the history and survival of the Jewish people and their covenant with God.

Couple Relationships

In the family life cycle, marriage often brings religious considerations to the fore. Conflict may arise over whether to have a religious ceremony. Even partners of the same faith may differ in their particular denomination, degree of observance, or preferences for clergy and vows. Families of origin may exert pressures for wedding plans in line with their own convictions, or they may not attend, if offended. This can fuel intergenerational conflicts and in-law triangles that reverberate for years.

When spouses are similar with respect to religious affiliation, beliefs, and practices, they report greater personal well-being, more relationship satisfaction, less abuse, and lower likelihood of divorce (Myers, 2006). Couple relationships are enhanced by the sharing of meaningful spiritual practices, such as holiday rituals (Fiese & Tomcho, 2001).

Until recent decades, many religions prohibited interfaith marriage. Families strongly discouraged their children from marrying someone of even another denomination. As society has become more open, interfaith marriage has become widespread (Waite & Lewin, 2008). Acceptance has increased with the support of interfaith movements and the blurring of racial and ethnic barriers. However, the high rate of intermarriage by Jews (over half) is of deep concern to their community, and families may react with a sense of disappointment and loss, if not outright disapproval.

For interfaith couples, religious beliefs can complicate relationship issues and generate conflict. Under stress, tolerance for differences can erode, particularly if one way is upheld as right, true, or morally superior. In some cases, the choice of a spouse from a different religious background may express rebellion against parental values and authority (Friedman, 1985). The acceptance or disapproval by families of origin can strongly influence the success or failure of the marriage and intergenerational relations.

Divorce and remarriage can be fraught with religious complications. For Orthodox Jews, a woman wishing to remarry must obtain a "get," or written permission, from her ex-spouse, although a man is not required to do so. The Catholic Church regards marriage as a sacrament that is indissoluble. The church does not recognize divorce. An annulment (granted with proof that the marriage was invalid or unconsummated) is required for remarriage in the church. These strict rulings have led many Catholics to leave the church. Some couples decide to live together without legal remarriage or religious rites. When annulments are granted, even over objections of a former spouse and children, they may be deeply wounded at the invali-

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dation of their prior family life and legitimacy. It is crucial to explore such conflict-laden religious issues.

Parent–Child Relationships

A growing number of studies find that parent–child relationships benefit from spiritual resources. Consonant with the "lived experience" of religion and spirituality, when parents are congruent in transmitting and following their spiritual values in family life and interactions with their children—practicing and parenting what they preach—and when they engage in meaningful spiritual practices together, children are more likely to internalize similar beliefs and practices, to find them to be a resource, and to feel more positive about their relationships (Marks, 2004). Involvement in religious communities is a strong protective factor for at-risk adolescent single mothers and their children, with lower depression and child abuse, and higher socioemotional adjustment and educational and job attainment (Carothers, Borkowski, Lefevre, & Whitman, 2005). Data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Pearce & Haynie, 2004) show that when both mothers and their adolescent children consider religion important and attend religious services, the child is less often delinquent. Religion tends to be protective when shared among family members.

The vast majority of parents want their children to have some religious upbringing (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999). With the birth of the first child, some couples who viewed religion as unimportant in their lives find that one or both partners care deeply about it for their children. Often the children bring their parents back to their religious roots. One secular Jewish couple was surprised when their 12-year-old son requested a bar mitzvah. In interfaith marriages, or with intrafaith differences in degree of observance, conflicts may arise over decisions about rituals such as circumcision, christening, baptism, or confirmation. Here again, the older generation, now as grandparents, may make their religious preferences strongly known. Previous acceptance of their children's choice of a nontraditional wedding or an interfaith marriage may shift when they consider the moral development and religious identification of their grandchildren. This is an especially salient concern in the Jewish community. Studies suggest that if the non-Jewish partner converts to Judaism, children are more likely to grow up with a Jewish identity and practice their faith.

Most teenagers say it is important for parents and young children to attend religious services together (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999). Like their parents, the vast majority of teenagers believe in God and that God loves them.

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Three out of four teens say they pray when alone. Youths of diverse faiths express interest in discussing life's meaning and how to make moral decisions (Coles, 1990, 1997). Most parents and children show increasing religious tolerance and favor courses in public schools to provide nondevotional instruction about various world religions.

Adulthood and Later Life

Young adults, particularly those in college, often distance from their religious upbringing. Some simply become less involved and lose faith, while others more actively question or cut off from their family religious traditions. Many explore other spiritual paths in search of meaning, faith, and commitment. Some who choose to convert or "marry out" may seek to rebalance the family's ethnic or religious orientation, moving away from some values and toward others. In some cases, this may express an attempt to separate and differentiate from their family of origin (Friedman, 1985). Parents may interpret such a choice as a rejection of them and their heritage. Some may wish to cut off from religious or parental upbringing that they experienced as oppressive, but more often this choice is a natural outgrowth of broader social contacts in our multicultural society.

Middle to later life is a time of growing saliency of spirituality, as family members grapple with questions about the meaning of life and face the death of loved ones and their own mortality (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986; Lyons, 2005; Walsh, 1999; see Walsh, Chapter 4, this volume). With parental chronic illness, despite physical decline and caregiving burdens, a deeper intimacy and spiritual bond may develop between parents and the adult children involved in their care. Spiritual resources are particularly important for caregivers of elders with dementia (Smith & Harkness, 2002). In the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community, the impact of the HIV-AIDS epidemic and the aging of leaders in the Gay Rights movement have increased the importance of spirituality (Maher, 2006). As gay persons age, they often engage in a process of existential questioning, complicated by legal and religious battles for equal rights, that leads to deeper explorations of faith, spirit, and soul.

With aging and retirement, most people shift priorities to make more time for their spiritual life. Active participation in a faith community, prayer and meditation, time spent in nature, and service to others tend to become increasingly important. As individuals reflect on their lives, they focus more on their connections with those who came before them and with future generations. Surely the wisdom of elders is deepened by their growing spirituality.

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Spirituality, Connectedness, and Resilience: Many Pathways

Faith is inherently relational from our earliest years, when the most fundamental convictions about life are shaped within caregiving relationships. Intimate bonds with authentic communication ("I and Thou") are expressions of spirituality and offer pathways for spiritual growth (Buber, 1921/1970; Fishbane, 1998), as in the Quaker adage "I lift thee and thou lifts me." We experience deep connections with "kindred spirits" and "soul mates." Caring bonds with partners, family members, and close friends can nourish spiritual well-being; in turn spirituality deepens and expands our connections with others. It can be spiritually enriching to share intimacy, to care for an infant or a frail elder, to befriend others or to receive the loving kindness of strangers. The intimate bond with a loving God strengthens many people in their darkest hours (see Elliott, Chapter 17, this volume).

Faith, intimacy, and resilience are interwoven (Higgins, 1994). Love sustains people's lives, infuses them with meaning, and supports faith in overcoming adversity. Viktor Frankl (1946/1984), in recounting his experiences in Nazi prison camps, was sustained by his deep connection with his wife, by visualizing her image: "I didn't even know if she were still alive. I knew only one thing—which I have learned well by now: Love goes very far beyond the physical person of the beloved. It finds its deepest meaning in his spiritual being, his inner self" (pp. 59–60).

The transcendent connectedness of family and community is forged through shared values, commitment, and mutual support through adversity. In contrast to the highly individualized concept of human autonomy centered on the "self" in Western societies, most cultures worldwide view the person as embedded within the family and larger community. African theologian John Mbiti (1970) describes this sociocentric view of human experience: "I am because we are." We need to keep this broad outlook toward spirituality as it is experienced within faith traditions and through many aspects of people's lives. Banding together in community service or social activism can be a transformative expression of spirituality (see Perry & Rolland, Chapter 20, this volume).

Faith, in its many communal expressions, fuels the resilient spirit in families. As Anderson affirms (see Chapter 10, this volume), human systems, like families, are meaning making communities with directionality and a life of their own. For that reason, each family has its own spirituality. Despite the diversity of perspectives, the broad aim of spirituality remains constant: to be open to the transcendent dimension of life and all relationships, both in ordinary, everyday activity and in the midst of adversity.

In our rapidly changing world, religion is less often a given that people are born into and accept unquestioningly. Increasingly, individuals, couples,

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and families are seeking their own spiritual pathways for meaning and connection, and they choose among beliefs and practices to fit their lives. This combining of varied elements has been likened to a platter of "religious linguini" (Deloria, 1994). As spiritual pluralism increases within families, many are creating their own recipes for spiritual nourishment.

NOTE

1. It is difficult to obtain accurate statistics on the lived experience of spirituality and religion. In interpreting the percentages of individuals who report specific beliefs and practices, it must be kept in mind that nearly 80% of Americans are Christian; thus, high (or low) percentages reflected predominantly Christian views. Over more than 60 years, Gallup Polls have provided reliable and widely cited surveys of individual religious identity, beliefs, and practices (see Gallup & Lindsay, 1999). Recent Gallup survey data can be found on the website *www.gallup.com*.

   The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (*www.religions.pewforum.org*) provides a wide range of information and survey data. Their 2008 *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* focused on "affiliation" (belonging to a particular denomination and attending worship services regularly); they note that 16% of Americans were "unaffiliated," but that does not mean religion and spirituality were unimportant in people's lives (Lindner, 2008). Their data are not directly comparable with Gallup Poll findings on religious identification. Also of note, both surveys have used only the term *religious* and have not used the term *spiritual*, which might not capture the more varied ways in which Americans tap spiritual resources.

   The Pluralism Project at Harvard University (*www.pluralism.org/resources*) offers a treasure trove of information on the wide spectrum of religious orientations in America today, multifaith perspectives, and interfaith initiatives (see also Eck, 2006).

   A resource website for journalists, *religionsource* (*www.religionsource.org/contents/resourcesstatistics.aspx*), offers links to a number of online providers of religious statistics.

   beliefnet (*www.beliefnet.org*) is the largest spiritual website offering the general public a wide variety of multifaith and spiritual resources to help meet spiritual needs, including articles, devotionals, sacred text searches, message boards, prayer circles, and photo galleries.

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