Understanding Experience, Reflection, and Beliefs for Educational Leadership

Vignette

One day approximately one week before Halloween, some sixth grade students are sitting in their classroom waiting for the bell to ring. They begin discussing Halloween. The discussion emerges as more children participate, and the teacher eventually gets involved. Later in the day, the teacher reflects about whether she should have offered more during the conversation.

Jack: I am so bummed that we don't get to have a Halloween party and dress up now that we are in middle school. I LOVE Halloween—it's my favorite holiday.

Sophie: I really like Halloween too, especially because it's a holiday just for kids.

Jack: It's a real holiday for lots of people! My mom says that it's based around All Souls' Day in our church, and Halloween is the night that the dead come back to see the living! She says I can learn about it when I go to church and Sunday school this week.

Sophie: I never heard that. I mean, I knew it was about people dressing up and many are scary, but I didn't think it had to do with church!

Preeti: My mom is glad that we don't have to do the Halloween stuff now because she never agreed with it anyway. She always said

that it was a religious holiday for some, but not for us. And it wasn't fair to have it in school since we aren't supposed to have religion in school.

Sophie: Well, I think it's OK that we can have a holiday that is fun and that we all celebrate but isn't necessarily connected to a church. I mean, I guess it is for Jack, but it doesn't have to be for all of us.

Harmony: I agree with Sophie. I mean, I don't care if it's related to church or not, I just really like dressing up. But, Jack, what church do you go to where they talk about souls?

Jack: We go to St. Patrick's Church on Orange Street.

Harmony: That's really close to where I live. I go to the Fellowship Baptist Church next to our school. Preeti and Sophie, what church do you go to?

Sophie: We don't go to church. We used to go when I was little, but then my grandmother died, and my mom doesn't take us anymore.

Preeti: We don't go to a place called a church. We go to a Hindu temple to worship.

Jack: That sounds neat. What is it? I wonder how it is different.

(The teacher, overhearing the conversation, walks over to the group of students.)

Mrs. Stanton: Ok, children, the bell is going to ring soon.

Sophie: But Mrs. Stanton, we were just getting to hear about what a Hindu temple is.

Jack: Mrs. Stanton, where do you go to church?

Mrs. Stanton: Well, I'm not sure we should be talking about all our places of worship here in school.

Jack: OK, but do you believe in God? Is God different in a church than a temple?

Mrs. Stanton: My particular beliefs are personal, and I don't talk about them with students. Furthermore, I'm not comfortable talking about God in school because we really aren't supposed to.

Harmony: I don't get that. I mean, if so many of us go to church or temple or want to know more about it, why don't we get to talk about it?

Mrs. Stanton: Well, our Constitution allows us to teach children of all religions without telling them about religion in school.

Preeti: But what if we want to know more? I mean, how can I learn more about it if my teachers won't talk about it? Also, I don't mind telling someone about my temple if they will tell me about what happens at their church. I mean—we all live close to each other. How come we never get to talk about it in school even though we all go to school here?

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The above student-driven conversation is an example of the types of situations that are presented throughout the book. As the book unfolds, the spiritual theory is explained first, followed by examples that administrators regularly deal with. In the one sample conversation above, the issue of God and existence emerges and the difference of religions is exposed (Chapter 1); the spiritual nature of the teacher is questioned (Chapter 2); a carefully answered nonbiased response is presented by the teacher and she reflects later in the day whether she should have engaged them in a real meaningful conversation (Chapter 3); and the issue of culture affecting conversation and student learning is present (Chapter 4).

THE PURPOSE FOR WRITING THIS BOOK

The purpose for writing this book is to explore the question of spirituality within the context of educational leadership and to provide practicing superintendents, principals, and other administrators with a usable clarification and understanding of *spirituality* that will help them in carrying out their responsibilities in a religiously pluralistic society. Even though the vast majority of people in the United States consider themselves to be Jewish or Christian, we are no longer just a Judeo-Christian country, but rather a Judeo-Christian-Islamic-Hindu-Buddhist-secular country. In fact, the United States is the most religiously pluralistic society in the world, which is its greatest strength. However, great attributes create great challenges and responsibilities for educational leaders. This book is also meant to provide practicing administrators with information and a plan of action that will help them view their personal spirituality as a means of enhancing their job satisfaction as an educational leader.

As a desired side effect of these objectives, it is hoped that super-intendents, principals, and other administrators will be able to impart to their students a healthy pluralistic attitude that values the great spiritual diversity of our nation.

There is one more very important reason for writing this book. It might be able to contribute to the ongoing dialogue and discussion about the role that spirituality plays in the preparation of educational leaders for service in public schools.

Chapter Objectives

- To identify the indicators of spirituality in American society and culture
- To explore the nature of human knowledge as it relates to the issue of spirituality
- To identify the issues that surround the idea of God in relation to spirituality
- To explain the relationship between the discoveries of science and spirituality
- To explore how the problem of evil in human experience impinges on spirituality
- To explore how spirituality affects the practice of educational leadership
- To explore how spirituality impacts the formal education and preparation of educational leaders
- To explain how the profession of educational leadership can be considered a vocation

The Milieu

The culture of the United States takes for granted that people are spiritual by nature. Further, Americans take it for granted that most people practice their spirituality within the context of a specific religious tradition. The United States Constitution guarantees *freedom of* religion, which is a pervasive acknowledgement of the importance of religious spirituality.

What makes the discussion of spirituality difficult for some people is the notion that spirituality is a natural category of being a person. It is a way of categorizing individuals living in the United States usually through a religious tradition such as Jewish, Catholic, Baptist, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist. In other words it is a self-evident category that is easy to apprehend but difficult to understand. Educational leaders are required to carryout their responsibilities within this context.[1]

Contemporary Issues of Spirituality

Through the immediacy of both the electronic and print news media, the constituents of schools and school districts are constantly informed about events in all segments of local and state communities, the nation, and the world. It is this information that helps to shape public opinion about all facets of life, including spirituality and education.

The public has become acutely aware of a series of events that have taken place over the last five years, which have had a lasting effect on public attitudes. The misconduct of some church leaders, the financial misconduct of some corporate and business leaders, and the self-serving misconduct of some governmental leaders have ushered in a renewed interest in the ethical and spiritual character of our leaders and, indeed, of the moral fiber of our nation. Educational leaders are not immune from such mistrust.

Further, therapeutic cloning, the civil rights of citizens, access to medical and pharmaceutical services and products, terrorism, and equality of opportunity continue to be issues that affect millions of Americans and tens of millions of other people throughout the world. Undoubtedly, thoughtful people have confronted these issues in consort with the moral dimension of their spiritual lives.

Evidence of Spirituality Interests

Jon Meacham's new book, *The American Gospel*, has been reviewed on almost every news talk show, including Tim Russert's weekly exploration of current events. Meacham is the managing

editor of *Newsweek* magazine. The premise of his book is that the founding fathers of our country were wise to embed the separation of church and state within the framework of our government. His book was prompted by the ongoing struggle to keep religious zealots from invading our public elementary and secondary schools with their brand of religion. The book speaks to an overt interest in spirituality.

Religion and spirituality are hot topics not only in the news media but also in the entertainment industry. *The Passion of Christ* and *The Da Vinci Code* are good examples of the opinions that seem to continually bombard the public. The real issue, of course, is the intense interest in spirituality that flourishes outside the confines of churches.

The *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported in the January 7, 2005, issue: "Announce a course with 'religion' in the title, and you will have an overflow population." The March 10, 2006, issue declared that "8 out of 10 academics say they are spiritual, and 64% call themselves religious." A most interesting indicator appeared on the cover of the October 25, 2004, issue of *Time* magazine that carried the caricature of a woman praying or meditating with the caption, "The God Gene."

A rather significant indication of the importance of spirituality in the contemporary milieu is the recently released preliminary report of the Task Force on General Education of Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences. It sets the stage for revising the core curriculum of the College, which would be implemented through courses that are required of all Harvard's undergraduates. The report observes that religion is a reality of life in the twenty-first century and, as such, impacts perceptions on issues in science, medicine, law, culture, and economics. Thus the report sets forth a core curriculum requirement dealing with *reason and faith* in order for students to understand the relationship between religion and secular ideas, institutions, and practices.

This revised approach did not get final approval, but the observation of the report that students should be encouraged to become more self conscious about the religious beliefs of others and themselves is revolutionary at a secular university.[2]

Another interesting project that clearly reflects the intense interest of the American people in the spiritual dimension of life is the *Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation.* This is a

project of the Lilly Endowment, Inc. that was initiated in 1999 through an invitation to a selected group of colleges and universities asking them to develop or strengthen existing programs that deal with vocation. Specifically, the call was for programs that would assist students in examining their understanding of the relationship between faith and vocational choice, and to create opportunities for students to reflect on a call to ministry. Finally, the invitation encompassed the development of programs that would equip faculty and staff to teach and mentor students in the area of vocational choice informed by each student's faith.

In 2000 the Lilly Endowment granted approximately forty million dollars to twenty colleges and universities for the exploration of vocations. In 2001 an additional twenty-nine colleges and universities were awarded approximately fifty-seven million dollars; and in 2002 an additional thirty-nine colleges and universities were granted approximately seventy-nine million dollars. Thus a total of eighty-eight institutions of higher education received approximately one hundred and seventy-six million dollars to help students explore the link between faith and vocation.[3]

An Explanation of Terms

Just from this brief introduction, it is easy to see that much confusion can arise about terms that are commonly used to indicate the more ethereal dimension of the human phenomenon. The term *spirituality* and the other four terms set forth in this section are particularly difficult to understand in relation to spirituality and to each other. Also, the common approach to the process of defining terms does not truly give justice to the complexity of the terms; thus what follows is more of a description than a definition.

Spirituality

A necessary characteristic of being human is change. No one stays the same. That change can be either beneficial or detrimental. If it is beneficial, it is commonly referred to as growing and developing. If it is detrimental, it is commonly referred to as regressing.

Thus the first given about spirituality is that it must be evolutionary in the sense that a person grows and develops throughout the various stages of life.

Second, growing and developing does not come easily. It requires continual decision making concerning those options in life that contribute to growth and development. Personal freedom to make such choices is the fundamental ability to living as a spiritual person. In order to exercise such freedom, a person must have an interior life of reflection that leads to self-knowledge and understanding.

Third, often contrary to common parlance, self-knowledge and understanding can be correctly revealed to a person through only his or her relationships to other people. Further, a person cannot fashion those relationships as the *stance of an observer*, but rather must be an engaged person in the various communities to which he or she belongs and with individual people.

Finally, a person's growth and development through the exercise of freedom that leads to self-knowledge and understanding in community with others must eventuate in a life filled with purpose, which focuses on the welfare of others.

The process of gaining self-knowledge and understanding and making decisions arises from the sources through which we gain access to the raw material of self and decision making. In a spiritual context those sources are ontological, experiential, and faith-based insights. These three sources will be explained in the section on *Human Insights and Spirituality.*

Ethics

There are many similarities between spirituality and ethics such as the need to be self-reflective, to freely exercise judgment, and to be engaged with other people. However, the realm of ethics deals with making decisions about the most honorable course of action that a person should take in a given dilemma through the use of reason, which is a dimension of experiential insight. In other words, ethical actions are right conduct for the welfare of other people as individuals or for those belonging to a particular community. Thus the right of teachers to a procedural due process through a performance evaluation procedure is an ethical responsibility of a principal

or superintendent depending on the organizational structure of a school district.

Religiosity

Most people practice their spirituality through a particular religious tradition. Even though they still have ontological, experiential, and faith-based insights, they prefer to base their self-reflection, decision making, and engagement with other people through the tenets of doctrine and morality set forth in the religious tradition to which they belong.

Ideology

This is a particularly interesting phenomenon. Ideology is usually conceived of as a political strategy to accomplish a particular goal in the life of a community. The founders of our country brandished an ideology that was revolutionary at the time because it recognized the rights of the individual to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Through a constitutional government, each citizen has the right to participate in the governmental decision-making process either by running for political office or by voting for those who represent him or her in government service.

Vocation

Educational leaders are public figures in the sense that they provide a public service, which is highly visible to all members of the community they serve. Further, the service that educational leaders and teachers provide requires parents to entrust their children to the care and education of those leaders. Because children are so vulnerable and because the caring and education of children is so personal, the manner in which superintendents, principals, and other educational leaders perceive their responsibilities is an important factor in the wellbeing of children.

The word *vocation* emanates from the Latin word, *vocare*, which means to be called as in an invitation or summons. Educational leaders are contracted by boards of education who are the elected representatives of the taxpayers in the community they serve.

Superintendents, principals, and other educational leaders are paid with tax money. Thus in a real sense educational leaders have been invited and summoned to be of service to all members of the community through the care and education of the children living in the community they serve.

Of course, children are the next generation of Americans who will have the responsibility of caring for, protecting, and leading not only the current generation but also the generation that will come after them. Thus the economic, social, physical, psychological, and spiritual welfare of current and future generations depends on the quality of care and education that the current generation of children receives. Obviously, this is the intergenerational stewardship responsibility of educational leaders, which is why educational leadership is a vocation.

Synthesis

Obviously, there are elements of each term present in each other term. However, for this presentation the predominant themes in the *spirituality* and *vocation* explanations constitute the perspectives that are used throughout this book. The authors recognize the human ability and freedom to reformulate the explanations and to find new ways of distinguishing or not distinguishing the content of the terms. However, they are constructs that help the authors to focus on how spirituality informs the practice of educational leadership.

Practical Discussions and Examples

Every educational leader is spiritual. It is an innate quality. However, not every educator is religious. While many educators are religious, those who work in public school are often afraid to even mention the word religion or spirituality for fear of public uproar about the separation between "church and state." Some very religious leaders choose to work in a school of that particular religion so that they can also teach those ideals as part of their vocation.

Most administrators (and teachers) choose education as their profession because they have an innate feeling or drive to help others.

They may enjoy working with children, but they ultimately choose education because they see a societal need to work in a helping profession where they can influence and teach children in a positive way. Therefore, the choice of vocation is based in a spiritual calling that is not necessarily religious. Of course, there are religious educators who have a calling to teach in a particular religion, but there are also teachers who are not religious, but consider themselves spiritual. That is, they see a calling where they can cause change and hopefully improve society by choosing teaching and leadership as a vocation.

How can an educational leader be religious or spiritual and effectively lead a school filled with a diverse range of children from many religious backgrounds? How can this leader do so without "stepping on toes" of various religious groups and at the same time be impartial to his or her personal religion or spirituality? How can a teacher address the questions her students have about a T-shirt a student is wearing that day in school that says, "In the event of nuclear war, the ban on school prayer will be lifted"? I imagine that prayer in school was inevitable for many of the students and teachers at the Columbine school shooting, and I also imagine that few people were thinking about a controversial prayer T-shirt at the time. Should a teacher be concerned when a parent sends an e-mail to her at school and signs it, "Love in Jesus' name"?

As mentioned previously, there are many atrocities occurring in the United States, our schools, and the world today. Likewise, there are many deeply religious people in our world today who want to spread their news about faith and spirituality. How can teachers and students make sense of these without some moral or ethical direction from the school administrator? Every person has a spiritual component to his or her makeup. It is in what *way* administrators use spiritual leadership that can positively or negatively affect the leadership of the school.

Practically, this may include providing examples of when religious discussion goes "too far" in the classroom. An administrator will no doubt be called upon from various parents about concerns of celebration in December in classrooms. Is an administrator effective in setting rules about such issues, or should the community help decide? These are the types of issues that will be addressed in the practical examples and discussions throughout the book.

Human Insights

There are three sources of insight that all humans have and utilize throughout their lives. Further, all people have the capability of reflecting on the spiritual dimension of the human phenomenon through these sources. A realistic understanding of spirituality demands that educational leaders appreciate the sources of human insight that provide the foundation for making personal and professional decisions.

Ontological Insight

This type of insight is predicated on *what* and *who* people are because they exist. It is the realm of insight generated through physical apprehension and experiences as feelings, emotions, instinct, and reason. It is the milieu of immediate self-knowledge that is self-evident. The term *ontological* comes from the Greek word for being, *ontos*. The implication is that humans have such insight because they are who they are. Thus a person knows instinctively the emotions of love, fear, and happiness in addition to all other emotions and combinations of emotions.

A female knows instinctively what it means to be a female and needs no tutoring in that area. A father immediately understands what it means to be a father when his wife gives birth. A person understands the physical effects of illness without explanations, which is the reason why physicians question patients about their self-apprehension of what is wrong with them.

This type of insight is the most primitive and fundamental of all self knowledge. The prominent psychologist Carl Jung identified this receptacle as the psyche where the *collective unconscious* resides. He thought that human evolution produced a residue that all people have inherited and which influences their perception of life experiences such as the reaction to authority figures. It is also the receptacle of subconscious residue that has been generated by our individual past experiences, especially in childhood. These subconscious emotions influence our daily activities. However, most contemporary psychologists would state that these influences do not

predetermine our decision making, because humans are capable of overcoming all influences.

The way people empathize with others is through projecting their learned ontological feelings and emotions onto them. Empathy occurs through analogy. The other is a person and thus he or she must know what it means to love someone or to be afraid because each person understands such emotions from his or her ontological insight.

Experiential Insight

Experience is what a person acquires through external stimuli, which includes both formal and informal education. As a human being, a person learns something through every poem, movie, work of art, music composition, conversation, injury, and so forth that he or she encounters. It is the very act of living life.

Of course, it is the reason why people with a certain amount of experience are the most desired candidates for some jobs. Older people are venerated in some cultures because of their life experiences. The assumption is that they know more and understand more about how to live life in a better way.

Faith-Based Insight

There is a gap between what we know from ontological and experiential insights that can be filled only through faith. Faith is what we believe that cannot be proven through reason or experience. We believe just because we choose to believe. Most of what we believe is predicated on the human authority of our parents or religious leaders. Other beliefs are accepted because they are contained in documents that people consider to have emanated through divine inspiration such as the Bible or Koran (or Qur'an), or that have a symbolic meaning that represents a spiritual truth such as the Declaration of Independence.

Synthesis

Obviously, the daily life activities of people are not divided into these discrete types of insight. Rather, they inform each other.

It is just as correct to state that ontological insight is informed by experience and faith, or that experience is informed by ontological and faith insights, or that faith is informed by ontological and experiential insights. Humans are integrated and holistic beings who utilize all these insights as they make personal and professional decisions.

Practical Discussions and Examples

In understanding the human insights about spirituality, administrators must be aware of the three main insights that make up each individual person. Every teacher, student, and parent comes to the school with innate experiences, with learned experiences, and with faith. An administrator must be aware that all three of these comprise an individual; therefore, focusing on only one will not educate the child fully. For example, in leading the school as a safe place for all students, the principal asks students, parents, and teachers to have faith that the school will remain safe (faith knowledge). These individuals often respect and believe authority figures; therefore, they do not continually question the safety of the school (ontological knowledge). However, the principal must educate the parents, students, and teachers on some aspects of safety in order to maintain a safe environment (experiential knowledge). An administrator who possesses only one or two of these forms of knowledge in a situation will have a difficult time in leading the school. As explained previously, these forms of knowledge do not operate separately but together to form the beliefs of a person. Therefore, a leader must provide information when necessary and ask for belief in himself or herself when necessary. Of course, faith in a school leader is often compromised when the leader's actions do not warrant respect or faith from parents, teachers, or the community. Furthermore, ontological knowledge and faith will work only part of the time…much of what parents, teachers, and students need is experiential knowledge. Likewise, administrators need to have faith in what they are doing, but they also need the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to effectively lead a school by making informed and evidence-based decisions.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF INQUIRY

World View

From human consciousness emanates the context within which spiritual norms are identified. Essentially, consciousness consists of thought, reflection, and liberty. These components are operationalized through human experience, understanding, and judgment. Thus, spiritual norms emerge. The evolutionary perspective and other scientific knowledge have created a new worldview and vision that compels humanity to reevaluate previous spiritual norms.

The classical worldview considers the world as a finished product and holds that the experiences of people will allow them to grasp a clear understanding of reality. People, therefore, can have a high degree of certitude about spiritual principles that will remain forever valid. The only path to right conduct is formulated using universal principles in a deductive method, which will yield secure and complete conclusions. People with this perspective emphasize the importance of adhering to preestablished norms and complying with authority. Superintendents and principals agreeing with this worldview will probably find it difficult to accept unconventional values.

The evolutionary worldview sets forth that the world is dynamic and evolving; progress and change are its hallmarks. The experiences of people allow them to identify individual traits within concrete and historical particulars. Thus, the path to right conduct is primarily through induction from particular experiences. Some conclusions may change with an increase in knowledge. Thus, incompleteness and error are possible, which could lead to a revision of principles. Adaptation to change and responsibility are characteristic of this worldview.[4] Superintendents and principals following this perspective probably would be more accepting of unconventional values.

Of course, most people would agree that the prudent approach to developing spiritual norms lies somewhere in the middle of these two divergent positions. Therefore, superintendents and principals should use kindness and understanding when dealing with people

who do things that they consider inappropriate or wrong because circumstances could have diminished their culpability.

Critical Reflection on Spirituality

Critical reflection takes into account the importance of practice as the phenomenon upon which theory and spiritual values are based. Everything begins with practice. Knowing and understanding what is occurring in schools and school districts is the only way to evaluate effective leadership. Leadership cannot be a top-down phenomenon, but rather must begin with what is taking place in the classrooms, corridors, cafeteria, media center, parking lots, and playgrounds. It also means knowing what is going on with the physical systems in the facilities. Finally, it means knowing and understanding the attitudes, emotions, and opinions of all stakeholders. Parents, students, teachers, staff members, administrators, and the public at large reflect in their daily lives the values, accomplishments, issues, and problems of public education and the educational practices of particular schools and school districts.

It is from this base that school administrators can ascertain if what they believe in terms of educational theory really works. Does block scheduling work? How successful is teacher empowerment as a management strategy? What about the effectiveness of helping students develop critical thinking skills? The common mistake that many superintendents and principals are guilty of in relation to school reform is making decisions by fiat. There is no question about the value and importance of educational theory. Practice without theory is chaos. Some superintendents and principals move from one new approach to another just in the hope that something new will work better than what is currently being tried. This is a regular occurrence in some schools and school districts particularly where good intentioned but ill informed noneducational reformers with influence and an agenda can capture the attention of school board members.

All theory is predicated on a system of spiritual norms. Teacher empowerment is based on the assumption that professional educators are skilled and dedicated professionals who are capable of making their own decisions not only about their classrooms and disciplines but also about what works best in education. At the school and

school district level, this means sharing the leadership responsibility with teachers and staff members. Thus theory without spiritual values is also chaos. Not making the connection that theory is founded on spiritual values is the same problem that arises when practice is not viewed as emanating from theory.

There is another important aspect to the decision-making paradigm. There is a reciprocal relationship between practice, theory, and spiritual values. Not only does everything begin with practice but in fact, practice can change theory which, in turn, can change a superintendent's and principal's spiritual values. Such a change in spiritual values can further alter a person's theory which will ultimately affect practice

For purposes of discussion, practice can be considered the first level of reflection, theory the second level of reflection, and spiritual values the third level. This is a rather easy paradigm to understand but can be a difficult one to implement because reflection takes time and energy. Reflection requires a superintendent or principal to hesitate before making commitments and decisions. That is often very difficult to do when conflicts occur. However, it is more important that the mechanics of reflection constitute the disposition of superintendents and principals; thereby, influencing them to search for the relationship between practice, theory, and spiritual values.

This search, of course, takes self-knowledge and commitment. It begs the question, "How can I make sure my practice, theory of leadership, and spiritual values match up?" It further requires a superintendent or principal to bring these three elements into synchronization, which in some instances could bring discontent on the part of faculty and staff. A principal who believes that he or she needs to empower his or her faculty to take more leadership responsibility for the instructional program may find a certain degree of resistance because the faculty might view such a position as encroaching on their already overcrowded schedules.[5]

Practical Discussions and Examples

A leader cannot be effective without the use of ethical norms that occur in his or her school district. Ethical norms are what provide the background information that a school leader uses to make

decisions. However, stagnant ethical norms will not provide a leader with the information and tools that he or she will need. Thus, the leader must use the reflection paradigm constantly to perfect and evolve his or her leadership skills and decisions. An effective leader is one who makes decisions based on evidence and input from appropriate stakeholders, staff, and students. These ethical norms are sometimes already established in a school because of previously made decisions influenced by these same groups. As with any leadership position, an administrator must constantly change as needed. Making ethical decisions can be difficult when religion is part of the issue.

For example, suppose that Mrs. Graham is a new principal in a small rural, southern community. This community is traditionally Baptist and is accustomed to influencing members within the community by regular discussion of God and the Bible. Upon Mrs. Graham's appointment to the school, she realizes that this high school has a regularly held Bible study group during a study hall period of the day. This has been the cultural norm of the school for many years. However, after she arrives, a small group of parents approach her about their concern for religion during the school day. They state that they held the same concern previously, but that the previous principal approved of the Bible study group during school hours so they did not question it further. Mrs. Graham discusses the issue with the superintendent and the school legal counsel since she has her doubts that this should be occurring during the school day. But because the school is so much a part of the community, she realizes that completely eliminating the group could cause friction between members of the community and herself as a new leader in the school district and community. Therefore, after discussion with other administrators, parents, students, and some community leaders, she decides that the school will still allow a Bible study group but that it has to be outside of regularly scheduled school hours so that there is no question that religion is being "taught" during the school day.

Mrs. Graham has taken a very delicate issue and changed the norm without eliminating it completely. Therefore, she used evidence provided by those around her to inform her decision and make

some changes. She may have her own religious beliefs; however, her decision is based mainly on beliefs about what the curriculum in her public school should contain. Her philosophical values as an educator surpassed her personal spiritual or religious influence. These are the types of reflections and decisions that educational leaders must constantly make which in turn cause change in theory and practice.

THE QUESTION OF GOD

The Western Tradition

Because of litigation over the separation of church and state, educational administrators are reluctant to talk about God. Yet, the idea of God is always lingering in the back regions of human consciousness. Another reason for this reluctance is usually the heightened fear of offending the sensibilities of other individuals or groups. In addition, there is significant constitutional and legal precedence protecting freedom of religion to a degree where it is better to say and do nothing that might be construed as promoting either religion or atheism. Of course, along this belief/unbelief continuum lie multiple intervals; in fact, there are some schools and school districts in the United States that are virtually religious because a majority of the student body and community are members of a specific religious tradition.

Further, administrators and teachers are engaged in a deliberative activity, molding and forming the moral character and attitudes of children and young adults, to such an extent that it is almost impossible for the educators to suspend their religious belief systems when interacting with students. The word "God" may never be spoken in these encounters, but many educators, students, and parents are certainly aware of the source from which their rules and norms have been borrowed. There is a tacit understanding. Thus not to include a treatment on the idea of belief in God in a book on spirituality would certainly beg the question.

The idea of God's existence has been and continues to be an extremely complex but fascinating issue. Every mature person has thought about this issue at some point in his or her life. It is an