

SOCIAL WORK & CHRISTIANITY

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PERCEPTIONS OF CONFLICT BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIAL WORK: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

Dwain A. Pellebon

A sample of 145 church members recruited from nondenominational churches to measure perceptions of social workers and the social work profession. The study examined two dependent variables: 1) perceptions of conflict between Christianity and the social work profession and 2) the degree of agreement with social work values. Statistically significant findings indicate that this sample both perceives a high degree of conflict with social work and disagrees with humanistic interpretations of social work values. The study highlights the importance of social workers engaging in spiritually and religiously sensitive exploration of clients' perceptions in order to understand them and to help the clients understand social workers and their roles.

THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION HAS SHOWN A GROWING interest in spirituality. Recent papers on spiritual topics include spiritual and religious principles in social work practice (Ballenger & Watt, 1996; Elhany, McLaughlin, Brown, & Bertucci, 1996), the inclusion of spirituality in human behavior and practice courses (Marton & Bailey, 1996; Thornton & Garrett, 1996; Russel & Derezotes, 1996; Robbins, Canda, & Chatterjee, 1996), and the benefits of examining one's own spirituality (Dudley & Rice, 1996). Others have looked at the contributions of religion to social work (Canda, 1988; Siporin, 1986), the religious beliefs of social work educators and practitioners (Bergin, 1991; Derezotes, 1995; Sheridan, Bullis, Adcock, Berlin, & Miller, 1992; Sheridan, Wilmer, & Atcheson, 1994), including spirituality in social work course content (Canda, 1989), religion in social work research (Faver, 1986), as well as debates about spirituality in social work (Cornett, 1992; Hemert, 1994).

The profession should recognize the relevance of religion/spirituality issues for practice, research, and education because it is an issue of cultural competency. Though the process of identifying spiritual or religious groups is subjective (Kropf & Isaac, 1996), religion and spirituality are diversity issues. As cultural diversity is considered when developing interventions (Henderson, 1994; Locke, 1992), spiritual and religious diversity must also be taken into account (Joseph, 1984). Therefore, the profession requires data that will provide insight into the perceptions within these cultural groups.

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