

## The Concept of Spirituality and Care for the Terminally Ill<sup>1</sup>

Helena Machulová, Tomáš Machula

### Abstract:

The article deals with the importance of spirituality in the care of terminally ill patients. It is based on the assumption that the spiritual dimension is one of the basic dimensions of human existence and must be taken into account in the care of the sick. Subsequently, it presents a reflection upon the current use of the term spirituality in the professional discourse of helping professions and points out certain difficulties that appear in the definitions of spirituality. The next part presents a definition of spirituality which is based on both the theoretical reflection of the concept and practical experience from a particular hospice facility.

**Keywords:** spirituality, hospice, religion

One of the important dimensions of helping professions is the question of the meaning of life which represents a foundation for a number of other questions and also a base for access to other dimensions of human existence in the field of social work, such as the psychological or social level. The question of the meaning of life is closely linked to the concept of 'spirituality' which has its clear meaning in religious discourse. Conversely, in the field of social work (where this concept is increasingly used), its meaning is quite blurred and unclear. This article deals with the place of spirituality in relation to the holistic view of man and the resulting meaning of the word 'spirituality' which would correspond to its use as much as possible, and, at the same time, it would achieve a certain clarity. With regard to the relevant literature and experience with clients of social work, there will be an attempt to clarify this concept for social work. These considerations will be confronted with the experience of one hospice workplace. The aim will not be to clarify the definitive place of spirituality in social work but rather to define future research on the basis of available theoretical considerations and practical experience which should lead to a better understanding of the spiritual dimension of man and thus improve the level of social work.

---

<sup>1</sup> The publication was prepared within the project TA ČR (ÉTA, TL02000147): *Spirituální rozměr člověka v kontextu pomáhajících profesí*.

## Starting Point: the Bio-Psycho-Socio-Spiritual Dimension of Man

A holistic view of man involves multiple layers of the human being. Since antiquity, man has been understood as an intellectual being<sup>2</sup> which includes both the animal, the physical side (bio-), and the mental side which represents knowledge and affectivity (psycho-). In man, the mental side of his being is at the level of reason which is traditionally divided into the theoretical and the practical. This corresponds to the theoretical tendency of man to seek and know the truth and to the practical tendency to establish relationships with other people and create a friendly community.<sup>3</sup> This latter aspect is usually associated with another ancient expression for man – the social being.<sup>4</sup> The spiritual level then corresponds to the theoretical intellectual side of man.<sup>5</sup> Here, however, it is necessary to understand theory not as something detached from life practice but in the original sense as ‘seeing’ the truth. However, all individual and particular searches for a person is ultimately aimed at finding the overall meaning of life, to the search for the horizon of life, or simply to what transcends us, to something that one can attach to himself (whatever it may be). As far as care of the sick is concerned, a holistic model of the view of the person is being promoted today. This approach takes into account the fact that it is not possible to cure all diseases but the sick person can be helped. Unlike the biomedical point of view, it includes the fact that both the origin of the disease and the healing are not only a purely biological aspect of man. All dimensions of man, that is, the whole bio-psycho-socio-spiritual unity, contribute to both processes. Frankl already notes that spiritual questions are the ones that often arise in patients during their period of illness, and neither the doctor nor the psychologist is competent to answer them.<sup>6</sup> These are questions that are neither biological nor psychological in nature, for they are questions of a spiritual nature. They must be answered in a specific way. In Frankl’s view, logotherapy is the way how to do it.

Let us take a closer look at what the unity of the four dimensions of man means. Dočkal reminds us that although a person is a unique and indivisible whole, we can look at him from different angles. Every human being is a part of nature and he is subject to the laws of nature. His body is made up of cells, tissues, etc. This is his *biological* side. However, one also perceives, experiences feelings, thinks, makes decisions. All this has its biological basis but, at the same time, these processes form a separate *psychological* side of life. One also does not live alone but in a community with other people. He lives in a specific social situation, creates his own social network. This *social* dimension therefore also belongs inseparably to every person and has an impact on his life. But there is something else which belongs to man. In various situations, a person asks about the meaning of things, events and the meaning of life. He realises that there is something which cannot be recognised by one’s own senses, something that transcends man. According to various spiritual traditions, we call this God, Cosmic Intelligence, or otherwise. This ability to relate to something that transcends us is the last *spiritual* dimension of human existence.<sup>7</sup>

2 Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics* I, 6, 1098a1-7.

3 Cf. Stanislav SOUSEDÍK, *Svoboda a lidská práva: jejich přirozenoprávní základ*, Praha: Vyšehrad, 2010, p. 64.

4 Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII, 1, 1155a5.

5 The Christian reflection of the concept of spirituality is mostly based on the fact that it is a phenomenon of reason. Emotional understandings of spirituality (and faith) occur marginally, and they are completely unsustainable. Of course, emotions are associated with faith and spirituality but the essence of faith and spirituality does not lie in them. Faith is understood as a virtue which is based on reason, and spirituality is seen as a phenomenon related to the product of abstraction, that is, to the information that can be known only through the intellectual ability to abstract the general fact from the single one. The emotional side belongs to sensuality, so it is focused on the specific and not the general. Animals also have emotions, and yet we do not observe any manifestations of spirituality in them.

6 Cf. Viktor E. FRANKL, *Lékařská péče o duši*, Brno: Cesta, 2006, pp. 25–42.

7 Cf. Jan DOČKAL, *Člověk v současném světě*, Středokluky: Zdeněk Susa, 2008, pp. 61–91.

Human existence includes all of the above dimensions in one. They cannot be separated and dealt with individually because they are all interconnected and interact with each other. The fact that this is the case and that it must be taken into account in connection with the disease is also shown in the well-known definition of health given by the World Health Organization (WHO): ‘*Health* is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.’<sup>8</sup> However, this definition lacks a spiritual component, the importance of which, on the other hand, is increasingly mentioned today. Each of these dimensions is also addressed through other needs that one needs to meet. In a situation of illness, when a person is limited in the ability to fulfil his needs independently, this context must be taken into account. Especially, it should be recognised by those who care for the patient, and who make sure that none of the emerging needs are neglected.

## 2. Difficulties in Defining the Term ‘Spirituality’

Sheldrake states that spirituality is a rather vague concept in the current discourse. And even if it is nowadays based on Christian religious roots, there is a connection with the deepest values and meaning that one seeks in life.<sup>9</sup> It is therefore a certain vision of fulfilling human possibilities. It is crucial in social work because it influences the way people cope with certain life situations. According to Furman, spirituality is a ‘Search for meaning, purpose, and morally fulfilling relations with self, other people, the encompassing universe, and ultimate reality however a person understands it’.<sup>10</sup> These words capture a certain helplessness over the vague boundaries of the term spirituality. It is therefore necessary to seek a narrower definition. Our approach is based on a comparison of professional texts in this field and the specification of the concept so that it can be used in different contexts (cultural, religious) while respecting the individual specifics of the approach to this phenomenon in the case of individual people.<sup>11</sup> We can start, for example, from an experiment presented by Canda and Furman in this matter. They point out certain common features of the definitions of spirituality:<sup>12</sup>

- it relates to what is higher than ourselves;
- man understands himself and his world as something partial, as part of a higher unity;
- it concerns inner experience;
- it is subjective, irrational, and intuitive.

Opatrný, in line with the above-cited efforts to define or at least to approach the meaning of the term ‘spirituality’, states that in a situation of illness, pain, or near death, patients have deep

8 Cf. © Constitution of The World Health Organization, 1948 (on-line), available from: <https://www.who.int/about/who-we-are/constitution>, cit. 13<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

9 Cf. Phillip SHELDRAKE, *A Brief History of Spirituality*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, pp. 1–3.

10 Leola D. FURMAN, Perry W. BENSON, Edward R. CANDA and Cordelia GRIMWOOD, A comparative international analysis of religion and spirituality in social work: A survey of UK and US social workers, *Social Work Education* 24/2005, pp. 813–839, in: *Spirituality and Social Work. Selected Canadian Readings*, eds. John COATES et al., Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2007, p. 25.

11 Thus, we reject relying on research on the use of the term in society. If most of society had nonsensical and contradictory ideas, then sociological research would only lead to a clear and statistically processed finding of these nonsensical ideas. This can be a useful result but not for the goal we are setting. Therefore, the only sensible way is to start from professional texts where the term is used. We should try to finish it in a way that is understandable, but universally applicable and coherent.

12 Cf. Edward R. CANDA and Leola D. FURMAN, *Spiritual diversity in social work practice: The heart of helping*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., New York: Oxford University Press; cit. in Carolyn JACOBS, Exploring Religion and Spirituality in Clinical Practice, *Smith College Studies in Social Work* 80/2010, pp. 98–120.

existential questions and seek relevant answers.<sup>13</sup> The patient needs to give meaning to his life in illness, to cope with fear for himself and his loved ones, to think about his own life, to cope with the wrongs he has suffered, to come to terms with his loved ones, etc. All of this becomes part of the needs of the patient to which it is necessary to respond. It cannot be downplayed by cheap phrases that everything will be good and there is no need to think about these things. The solution to these existential questions actually concerns human spirituality. It may or may not have a religious dimension.

When we talk about religion, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by this word and what is its relationship to spirituality. For our purposes, the definition of religion as an organised and systematic effort to give God respect, obedience to the law, ceremonies, etc. will be sufficient. In the classical ethics of virtues, religion, religiosity, or piety is understood as a virtue belonging to justice. Righteousness gives to everyone what belongs to him, and religion is a concretisation focused on God – it gives to God what belongs to him. The emphasis here is on what is somehow external. Spirituality is, on the other hand, about the internal plane. It is a relation to the transcendental reality and an effort to communicate with it somehow and to understand it more deeply than at the level of duties given by justice.

Religious spirituality can thus be the key to emerging existential questions in times of illness. It helps to find answers and to cope with the difficulties which are connected with the disease. However, if religion is misunderstood in some way, it can eventually exacerbate the common difficulties of the disease. If the disease is understood, for example, as God's punishment, then, in addition to all existential questions, there will be many more thoughts about this punishment regarding why one deserves such punishment.<sup>14</sup>

The connection between existential issues and spirituality is quite obvious.<sup>15</sup> It is certainly worth noting that existentialism, which appears in the context of the developed Enlightenment and its secular discourse, replaces the religiously understood spirituality, that is, the spiritual life of the believer in contact with God. Kierkegaard is usually considered to be the first great existentialist<sup>16</sup> who was still a deeply believing Christian thinker but his dealing with questions of spiritual life and his relationship with God clearly has philosophical and not directly theological features fitting into classical spiritual-theological schemes. It is actually a kind of Christian spirituality in a clearly secularised discourse. For Kierkegaard, it is still authentic traditional spirituality but at the non-church level, i.e., at the level of the individual. For later existentialists, it is either religiously or confessionally indefinite (Jaspers),<sup>17</sup> or clearly atheistic (Sartre).<sup>18</sup>

The fact that spirituality concerns both a person who lives religiously and a person who is secularised is one of the reasons for the blurriness and vagueness of this term. We can also add a warning that although religion is most often understood as Christian (less often as Jewish or, more recently, as Islamic) in our cultural background, there are many more kinds of religious spirituality, which further contributes to the vagueness of this term. Since the most important form of religious spirituality in our context is Christian spirituality, we will focus on the Christian reflection on this concept, and then we will try to define spirituality as clear and distinct as possible. At the same time, we want to keep the term open to religious (Christian and non-Christian) and purely

13 Cf. Aleš OPATRŇÝ, *Spirituální péče o nemocné a umírající*, Červený Kostelec: Pavel Mervart, 2017, pp. 24–27.

14 Cf. OPATRŇÝ, *Spirituální péče...*, pp. 90–92.

15 Cf. OPATRŇÝ, *Spirituální péče...*, p. 27.

16 Cf. Emerich CORETH, Peter EHLEN and Josef SCHMIDT, *Filosofie 19. století*, Nakladatelství Olomouc, 2003, pp. 109–119.

17 Cf. Karl JASPERS, *Filosofická víra*, Praha: OIKOYMENH, 1994.

18 Cf. Jean-Paul SARTRE, *Bytí a nicota*, Praha: OIKOYMENH, 2006 (especially the fourth part of the book).

secularised use.

A small terminological and factual comment needs to be added here. The term spirituality is based on Christianity, and in our environment Christianity is also the most typical and widespread religion. Therefore, it is understandable that most of the domestic literature on spirituality (and, to a large extent, this applies to the literature of our broader cultural Euro-American sphere) is in some way connected with Christianity. At the same time, however, it is true that spirituality is found in various modifications in other cultural circles, in other religions, and, to a large extent, also in secularised and non-religious areas. In this text, in the search for a clear and functional definition of spirituality, we do not limit ourselves to Christian spirituality. Within illustrative examples and used terminology, though, we logically preserve the Christian context as it is more understandable in our environment and it can be experienced more clearly in comparison with, for example, animism or Hinduism.

Although the term spirituality has Christian roots, it has not been in theological discourse for long. In theological literature we find terms such as 'piety' or 'spiritual life' mostly. The term 'spirituality' appears more abundantly later, i.e., in the last fifty years.<sup>19</sup> Today, Christian spirituality is not understandable to most people, yet there is a growing interest in it.<sup>20</sup> Some authors explain today's increased interest in spirituality as a consequence of the secularisation of society.<sup>21</sup> Thanks to this, the spiritual dimension of man was suppressed. Today, one seeks new fulfilment of this dimension. John Paul II also noticed this as well. In the encyclical *Redemptoris missio* he states that

Our times are both momentous and fascinating. While on the one hand people seem to be pursuing material prosperity and to be sinking ever deeper into consumerism and materialism, on the other hand we are witnessing a desperate search for meaning, the need for an inner life, and a desire to learn new forms and methods of meditation and prayer. Not only in cultures with strong religious elements, but also in secularized societies, the spiritual dimension of life is being sought after as an antidote to dehumanization.<sup>22</sup>

And because spirituality is no longer something that is usually passed down in the family from generation to generation, accepting some spirituality is mostly a matter of personal choice. It is no longer the rule that one accepts some comprehensive system of a certain spirituality. One rather forms one's own mosaic of fragments of various spiritual offers. This is evidenced not only by the large number of religious societies in the Czech Republic which provide a certain identity to Czech believers, but also by the huge proportion of people who declare themselves to be believers without belonging to a religious society and people who refuse to answer such a question (assuming that the reason is, to a large extent, the intimacy of the question and the inability or unwillingness to say these things openly).<sup>23</sup> In this sense, however, spirituality lacks a connection

19 Cf. © Gerhard VOSS, Katolická spiritualita dnes, *Teologické texty* 1/2004 (on-line), available from: <https://www.teologicketexty.cz/casopis/2004-1/Katolicka-spiritualita-dnes.html>, cit. 12<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

20 This increased interest is reflected, for example, in the growing interest of a number of social service providers. This publication is a part of the project which was created at the direct request of several dozen organisations. At the same time, these are not just Christian or ecclesiastical institutions.

21 Cf. © Michael MARTINEK, Inkulturace, spiritualita a pastore, *Teologické texty* 5/2005 (online), available from: <https://www.teologicketexty.cz/casopis/2005-5/Inkulturace-spiritualita-a-pastore.html>, cit. 12<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

22 *Redemptoris missio*, art. 38.

23 According to the last census, the largest share of the population did not answer the question about religion at all (44.7%). There are 6.8% of people who claim to be believers without belonging to a religious community and 14% of people who claim to be in a particular church or religious community. Cf. © Český statistický úřad, *Sčítání lidu, domů a bytů 2011* (online), available from: <https://www.czso.cz/csu/sldb/obyvatelstvo>, cit. 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020.



to the community and the church. It is often not even about its truthfulness but rather about its usefulness. Today, Christian spirituality must come to terms with such a conception of spirituality. Christian spirituality offers one comprehensive system bound to the communion of the Church with the fullness of the spiritual life. This makes it different from the abovementioned spirituality. If we want to define Christian spirituality in more detail, we can say that it is a living Christianity. This means taking over and carrying out the vocation of Jesus Christ into our own lives – it includes both individuals and the ecclesiastical community. It is therefore a personal relationship with God. Its effect is following Jesus Christ.<sup>24</sup> The term spirituality is also often used when one wants to refer to various forms of Christian consecrated life (e.g., Franciscan or Dominican spirituality). Both of these combine the fact that spirituality is understood as one's own inner experience of the relationship with God. It is individual and there are differences between individuals. This individually varying experience of spirituality, an inner relationship with God, is connected to a certain external boundary defined by the fundamental contents of the truth of faith and the external framework that is given by the Church as an institution with its own organisational structure and external manifestations. Personal spirituality should not conflict with these boundaries given by the Church. Within these boundaries, though, there is plenty of room for a completely diverse and authentic personal experience of the relationship with God.<sup>25</sup>

### 3. The Analogous Nature of the Term 'Spirituality'

Spirituality can thus be characterised as an analogous concept<sup>26</sup> which is applied in different contexts in different ways. This variability stems mainly from differences in the understanding of the word 'spiritus', i.e., 'spirit', which is the root of the word 'spirituality'. In the Christian sense, this spirit is the Spirit of God. Spirituality is then a way of life in the Holy Spirit, according to the Holy Spirit, or from the Holy Spirit. It is actually about experiencing a relationship with God, in other words, it is about spiritual life. In a more relaxed sense, that spirit may simply be the meaning of life, in other words, a perspective that may not be purely religious. It concerns something that transcends man. If we go even further, spirit can mean the human spirit. In that case, spirituality becomes the way how a person experiences himself, his relationship to the world, to other people, etc. Here, however, in connection with the abovementioned bio-psycho-socio-spiritual dimension of man, a question arises. One can ask how spirituality differs from a psychological state (in terms of experiencing oneself) or a social state (in relation to others and the world).

In the following text, therefore, we will use the second meaning of the word 'spirituality', that is, the term that understands transcendence more generally, as a kind of horizon that transcends man and gives him some meaning. This meaning of spirituality (in its generality) includes even the first described meaning, that is, the classical religious understanding of spirituality. It is so broad that it can be used for the spirituality of a secularised person as well. Such a person is in the process of seeking but does not move within a clearly defined framework of Christian religious life.

24 Cf. John 13:15: 'I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.'

25 Wolfgang BEINERT, *Slovník katolické dogmatiky*, Olomouc: Matice cyrilometodějská, 1994, p. 333.

26 If we use a term in order to refer to different subjects in the same sense, it is *univocity*. In the case of completely different and unrelated meanings, it is *equivocity*. If the meaning is partly the same and partly different, it is an analogy. In the case of the term *spirituality*, it is the analogy of self-proportionality where one term is used for different subjects in different degrees. Cf. KLUBERTANZ, G. P. 'Analogy', *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 1, Gale, 2003, pp. 371–377.

In the book cited above, Opatrný states the 'forms and degrees' of spirituality.<sup>27</sup> These are:

1. general spirituality (general ability and need of a person to relate to something which transcends him);
2. general spirituality associated with existential issues (the abovementioned spirituality associated with the activation of certain issues which are typical for borderline situations, e.g., a very seriously ill person);
3. spirituality with a share of 'religious memories' (the spirituality of a person who, at an older age, uses his memories of religious experience obtained during youth and which is usually associated with an organised religion);
4. the spirituality of one's own spiritual world (the typical state of a person who refuses to declare as an unbeliever and at the same time does not identify with any existing religion – this is often expressed as a belief in 'something above us');
5. the spirituality of a more or less unknown religion (the spirituality of a person professing an exotic, little-known, but for some reason interesting or attractive religion, about which he has only brief information);
6. the spirituality of sects (usually small distinct groups, mostly tied to a charismatic leader, which often raise disproportionate hopes among people in marginal situations);
7. spirituality of healers (often connected to the spiritual background of healers or movements);
8. the spirituality of a person integrated in some 'big religion';
9. false spirituality (approaches that are not really spiritual but pretend to be that way, e.g., used in an effort to manipulate a sick person more easily, etc.);
10. superstitious spirituality (superstitious interpretation of various situations).

Such a division is certainly useful for the practical reflection upon various mental settings with regard to the subject of spirituality. However, it is more about forms and less about degrees. The individual forms can interfere or coexist. We therefore propose the following attempt concerning a typology of spirituality with an emphasis on the gradation of the intensity or delimitation of the concept of spirituality which thus shows its analogous nature. In each degree (in every type) of spirituality, we then present an attempt to capture the basic attitude of man towards spirituality in one word, and to define the appropriate degree of spirituality.

denial of the spiritual dimension of man	<i>naturalism</i> In fact, this is a negation of spirituality, i.e., an attitude that rejects anything that transcends man. It can also be described as <i>immanentism</i> , an attitude that negates anything transcendent. Very often it is presented as <i>atheism</i> , though, this is not entirely appropriate. Many persons who present themselves as atheists do not reject transcendence as a whole as they only deny a clearly defined personal God.
failure to address the spiritual dimension of man	<i>indifference</i> The attitude of a person who does not reject transcendence but, at the same time, does not look for it. So we are still outside the realm of spirituality but from the attitude of direct rejection we come to indifference.

27 Cf. OPATRŇÝ, *Spirituální péče...*, pp. 54–63.

degrees of spirituality	<i>openness</i> This is an area where one can really talk about spirituality. Openness is the attitude of a person who is convinced of the transcendent dimension of life or, at least, presupposes it. Usually, the attitude of life is the search for 'something above us' and 'beyond us'.
	<i>religiosity</i> This is an attitude which recognises some 'god' who is above us. One has already a very simple idea about this god. So it is about the development of that openness towards questions into some kind of answer. However, the concept of God, or more precisely transcendent reality, is clarified very little and does not constitute a basis for socialising with like-minded people.
	<i>confessional spirituality</i> An attitude where the concept of a recognised transcendent reality is already quite clear (in our cultural circle, therefore, one can usually speak of God with a capital letter G). It is shared by a large number of people so that a certain confessional classification can be expected. At the same time, we understand confessional classification broadly, i.e., not only as Christian one, but religiously in general. Man at this stage has a relatively clear concept of God which is shared by some religious or even church community. Within the framework of confessional spirituality, it is still possible to distinguish different types of <i>intra-church spirituality</i> . This is no longer a question of <i>defining the subject</i> of spirituality in more detail, i.e., of the transcendent reality to which one relates. It is rather about the <i>approach</i> to religious life within the framework of the abovementioned confession <i>and its delimitation</i> . Examples are various spiritualities within Catholic Christianity: Franciscan, Charismatic, Benedictine, etc.

This table shows the degrees of spirituality. One can have different attitudes towards their mutual relations. If we start from the confessionally-oriented Christian understanding of spirituality, then one can see a kind of progress towards fullness in that graded concretisation. If we take into account another religion, we could use this view but the terminology would change in some respects, of course (for example, instead of Franciscan and Benedictine spirituality, we would talk about Hasidic and liberal spirituality, or about different directions within Islam, etc.). The core would be preserved, and only the scenery in which the term spirituality is experienced and discussed would change. In some cases (certainly from a secular, non-religious point of view, but perhaps also from some specific religious perspectives), these degrees would not be degrees leading to a better grasp and experience of spirituality as they would merely represent the degrees with the use of the term spirituality. These would not be degrees varying from less perfect to more perfect. It can be assumed that the person of our cultural circle will be influenced by Christianity when thinking about this typology. However, this view is not necessary for the typology itself.

#### 4. Manifestations of Spirituality in Practical Social Work

The presented definition and typology of spirituality is general and can be used not only in social work, but also in other areas. In social work, of course, it can also be used for various target groups. But not for all of them is spirituality equally important and presented as a topic.

One of the target groups which is highly sensitive to the question of spirituality will undoubtedly be the care of the dying. This typology of degrees of spirituality was also based on a discussion about spirituality in the care of dying which took place during a workshop attended by representatives of theology, psychology, social work, and pastoral work. Some of the participants were



workers in the hospice facility. It is actually a generalisation of experience with different types of clients who have entered the Hospice of St Jan Nepomuk Neumann in Prachatice. As part of the documentation,<sup>28</sup> this hospice also records some data important for the field of spirituality.<sup>29</sup> Considering the Czech situation, the collection of these data is a relatively unique approach. There are also certain, and to some extent expected, problems associated with this. Although the type of data collected over the years is the same and comparable, it is not clear whether this selection was chosen appropriately. Because it is a relatively unique set of data which has been obtained during the past two decades, and which can no longer be improved or modified, we use it for further reflection. It should lead, among other things, to suggestions about how to collect similar data in the future, what to change, add, etc. The improvements could lead to better results over time and have a positive impact on the practical work of workers in the helping professions.

The abovementioned typology of spirituality can therefore be compared with these data. Then we can determine whether the documentation is useful for pastoral work within the hospice facility. These are, above all, questions about religion, a request for contact with a clergyman, a willingness to talk with a nun, a request for prayer, and (in the case of a Catholic) reception of the sacraments. The year 2010 was chosen for the first analysis as it represents approximately the middle of the period of data collection in the named hospice. There are 216 records in the given year. Of these, 79% contain information that shows an awareness of the spiritual dimension of man.<sup>30</sup> This is a positive answer to one or more questions that mapped the interest in conversation with a nun, contact with the clergy, prayer, or in the reception of the sacraments.

Of those who were aware of the spiritual dimension in this sense, 88% were interested in conversation with a nun, 62% were interested in prayer, 48% wanted to see a priest, and 35% were interested in receiving the anointing of the sick. An interview with a nun clearly represents contact with a person who, on the one hand is a caregiver, but on the other hand she is known in another role. It can be reasonably assumed that the client sees the nun as a spiritual person who, unlike the priest, is not so much connected with institutional religion from which Czechs are relatively strongly distanced. What role may play in the fact that it is contact with a woman, who naturally evokes a kind of maternal care and trust, rather than a man is an interesting question. However, it cannot yet be answered on the basis of available information. There was less interest in prayer, which can be understood as a certain gradation in the perception of the spiritual dimension of life, or a lower readiness to go deeper than in the case of conversation with a person. Prayer is related to God. In this area, clients might not feel as confident and comfortable as when talking with a person. The interest in contact with the clergy is even lower, which may indicate the above-mentioned distance from institutional religion. One third of people received the sacraments. It is not a small number but it represents the lowest interest of the above possibilities. The reason could be that only a Catholic is particularly interested in the sacraments as they are part of his faith and religious life. Furthermore, the fact that it is one of the above possibilities (that is, a clear identification with a very specific type of religious life and spirituality) may play a role. So it is logical that fewer people are interested at this level in comparison to a much more general and less binding form of spirituality, which is represented by a conversation with a nun. The length of

28 The studied documents were processed in compliance with the conditions of personal data protection and according to legal standards.

29 During admission, hospice clients fill in an introductory questionnaire. The information also includes their religious confession, the importance of faith for them, and whether they want any contact with the clergy (they may change this later). Furthermore, the pastoral staff of the hospice keep a more detailed record of the spiritual needs of patients. They briefly record the needs of individual clients during hospitalisation and their response to these needs.

30 Let us add that the largest number of applicants was of the Roman Catholic faith (80%), non-Catholics accounted for 8% and the remaining 12% were people without religion, or the religion could not be determined).

hospitalisation of patients also played a role. Especially in the case of a very short hospitalisation, the possibility of receiving the sacraments was not even available to the patient. The last circumstance that can be read from hospice records is the frequent postponement of the sacrament of the sick. Patients often responded to the offer that it is too early for this sacrament. Apparently, the perception of the sacrament of the sick as a 'last anointing' still persists here.

It is quite clear that the level at which hospice clients are interested in addressing their spiritual issues and needs is graded. But one needs to be aware of several important points here.

1. Answers do not necessarily reflect the level of the spiritual life of clients, and they may be influenced by other factors. A negative answer can be caused, for example, by distrust of people, but one can somehow experience spiritual life on a very private internal level. However, there is probably no fundamental reason to assume that this is a large distortion.
2. Rejection of all these offers can probably be interpreted as denial or indifference, though, no distinction can be made between them.
3. The gradation of the desire for individual possibilities of spiritual accompaniment also points to a certain gradation in the depth of consciousness and in the practical experience of spirituality.
4. The percentage of people who have shown awareness of the spiritual dimension of life is relatively high. It can be assumed that this fact reflects not only the experience that people are more open to spiritual issues in the marginal situation at the end of life, but also the fact that the largest proportion of clients are people born in the 1920s to 40s. At that time (in comparison with today), teaching of religion was still quite common, and people were confronted much more with religious life even if they did not participate in it.<sup>31</sup> The question is how the situation will develop when the hospice's clients are mainly people born in the 1960s and 70s. One possibility is a radical decline in interest in spirituality in general. Another option is that a high degree of interest in spirituality will be maintained but it will be accompanied by a much steeper decline in interest in various ways of spiritual accompaniment (including all degrees from a conversation with a nun to the sacrament).

## 5. Preliminary Conclusions

In this text, we have tried to outline the problematic nature of the existing definitions of the term spirituality in the field of helping professions. We pointed out the vagueness and blurriness of this concept. After our own research, we have offered our own, somewhat clearer definition of spirituality which leaves room for a very broad understanding of this concept.

However, we still consider this definition to be only a draft and we will realise further research in the hospice of St J. N. Neumann in order to verify and specify it. In particular, qualitative research will now follow in which we will examine (through interviews with hospice staff) whether their clients can be classified into these different degrees of spirituality. Then it will be needed to look for ways to work with clients at different levels of spirituality. It can be assumed that the manifestations of spirituality of a person open to the transcendent dimension of life will be different in intensity and concrete expression from the manifestations of a person anchored in a particular religion. Working with the spiritual needs of believing clients is in a way easy because these spiritual

31 Although the abovementioned number of people who formally profess a religion is relatively high, there were relatively few practising Christians among them. It is still necessary to keep in mind a quite high probability that these people were baptised and, to some extent, religiously socialised in childhood.

needs can be clearly described. In the case of clients whose spirituality is not so clearly defined it is more difficult. They may not be clear on their spiritual needs, and there will be a need for staff or families to learn to perceive and find out about these needs in order to meet them.

**Contact*****Dr. Helena Machulová***

University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice  
Faculty of Theology  
Department of Lifelong Learning  
Kněžská 8, 370 01 České Budějovice  
machulovah@tf.jcu.cz

***Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tomáš Machula***

University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice  
Faculty of Theology  
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies  
Kněžská 8, 370 01 České Budějovice  
machula@tf.jcu.cz