

Meeting the spiritual needs of a dying person

Ivan Platovnjak*

ivan.platovnjak@teof.uni-lj.si

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7779-0889>

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Most palliative care research confirms that spirituality has an important role and thus it is necessary to pay attention to the spiritual needs of dying even more. In this article, the author briefly presents the relationship between religion and spirituality, the meaning of different types of spirituality, and how everyone can live their own form of spirituality, as spirituality is a part of their life that they have chosen freely and consciously. In the following, he explores how understanding the spiritual needs of the dying person depends on understanding spirituality and its impact on human life, especially on health. In the last part, he presents the fundamental spiritual needs for anyone who wishes to pay attention to a dying man in the most integral way possible.

Key words: *Palliative Care, Religion, Spirituality, Spiritual Needs of a Dying Person, Types of Spirituality.*

* Ivan Platovnjak, PhD, Assis. Prof., University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Theology; Address: Poljanska cesta 4, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Introduction¹

I remember my professor of spirituality, a priest who suddenly learned he had thyroid cancer. As soon as I started talking to him during a visit about a month later, he said:

»Don't tell me anything. Do not tell me how to accept God's will, how God has plans for me, how disease makes sense. I used to say all this to others while I was healthy. Now I see that all these words are very empty if they come from someone who has not experienced it himself. I realized that I have to come alone to God to answer questions about the meaning of what I'm experiencing now. You just be there for me, and that's enough.«

This experience has greatly marked my attitude to other people, especially the sick and dying. Today, most palliative care research confirms that spirituality has an important role and thus it is necessary to pay attention to the spiritual needs of dying even more.² The even more important question is what this spirituality is. Most point out that this is not simply religion, but that it is better to talk about religion and spirituality. We advance the thesis that it is necessary to pay attention to the dying man and to the spirituality that he has lived before and that he needs as he approaches death.

1. Relationship between religion and spirituality and meaning of different types of spirituality

Many people are disappointed in religions today because, over the centuries, religions have played a primary role in the world and in regulating people's entire lives. In spite of this, much evil, war, injustice, and suffering of the innocent still took place.³ Of course, we can show through historical study that religions

¹ The authors acknowledge the financial support from the Slovenian Research Agency (research core funding No. P6-0269).

² Cf. Adrian Gwyn EDWARDS et al., Review: The understanding of spirituality and the potential role of spiritual care in end-of-life and palliative care: A meta-study of qualitative research. *Palliative Medicine*, 24 (2010) 8, 753-770, doi: 10.1177/0269216310375860; Katarina BABNIK, Igor KARNJUŠ, Duhovne potrebe in duhovna oskrba pacientov [Spiritual Needs and Spiritual Care of Patients], *Informatica medica slovenica* 19 (2014) 19, 1-2, 12-18; Ruollah SEDDIGH, Amir-Abbas KESHAVARZ-AKHLAGHI, Somayeh AZARNIK, Questionnaires Measuring Patients' Spiritual Needs: A Narrative Literature Review, *Iranian Journal of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences*, 10 (2016) 1, 1-8, doi: 10.17795/ijpbs-4011.

³ St. Pope John Paul II apologized to everyone who had suffered at the hands of the Catholic Church over the 2000 years. See List of apologies made by Pope John Paul II, in Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_apologies_made_by_Pope_John_Paul_II (16.06.2021).

have been misused often to establish or maintain a particular socio-political system⁴ and the interests of individual nations.⁵

History also reveals many good things that have been given through religions, such that humanity has survived and has always found its way forward. Currently, we are the ones who have received many goods that our predecessors did not have.⁶ We also need to see, by analyzing the fundamental message of each religion, that its goodness is often overlooked or insufficiently accentuated, and that every religion is trapped in its own context and therefore we cannot clearly see the goodness found in other religions. However, we cannot ignore the fact that many are disillusioned with religion and cannot accept the fact that only through it can we receive what every human being needs: answers to existential questions, meaning and sense of life, and the values that make life as holistic as possible.⁷ Historically, we must acknowledge that religions have responded to human spiritual needs and allowed people to live according to what is essential.⁸

The word spirituality first appeared in Christianity and was later adopted by other religions. At the same time, it is true that, towards the end of the last century, religion and spirituality became increasingly separated. Many do not want to associate spirituality and human spiritual needs with religion (especially in Europe, neither with Christianity nor with the Catholic Church or other Churches). Where is the way out of this exclusionary attitude of a secularized world that cannot recognize the possibility that true spirituality could be found within a religion?

The time in which we are living is strongly characterized by democracy. The freedom of every human being to decide for himself or herself on the basis of the right to autonomy and self-decision is often emphasized. It must, of course, respect the freedom of others, that is, everything that protects the values of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, cultural diversity, and social cohesion.

⁴ Cf. Janez VODIČAR, *Kritika sekularizacije: tradicija kot pot do trdožive prihodnosti* [Critique of Secularization: Tradition as a Way to a Resilient Future], *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 80 (2020) 2, 253-266, 259.

⁵ The abuse of religions is well illustrated by Maake J. MASANGO, Religion, violence and abuse. *HTS Theological Studies*, 74 (2018) 3, doi: <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i3.5144>.

⁶ Cf. Sascha O. BECKER, Jared RUBIN, Ludger WOESSMANN, Religion in Economic History: A Survey, in Alberto BISIN, Giovanni FEDERICO (ed.), *The Handbook of Historical Economics*, London, Academic Press, 2021, 585-639.

⁷ Cf. Vodičar, *Kritika sekularizacije...*, 255-259.

⁸ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE, Christian witness in a multi-religious world. Recommendations for Conduct, 2011, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/christian_witness_in_multi-religious_world_english.pdf; Ana C. SALGADO, Review of empirical studies on impact of religion, religiosity and spirituality as protective factors, *Propósitos y Representaciones*, 2 (2014) 1, 121-159, <http://dx.doi.org/10.20511/pyr2014.v2n1.55>.

It is just that we should also take this into account in the context of spirituality of a human being. Every person has the right to his or her own spirituality and respect for this decision but, of course, he or she must also respect the freedom of others. It is therefore just that everyone should renounce the monopoly on spirituality, including religion, and it is just that religions should also be granted the opportunity to mediate and facilitate spirituality. That is why we believe that the most democratic path of thinking about spirituality should be based on the human, on his or her existence. In this way, Christians will also be able to act in accordance with what Jesus says: »The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath« (Mark 2:27).⁹ If this were applied to the field of spirituality, one could say that religion is for man and his spirituality rather than man and his spirituality being created for religion.

In defining spirituality, we proceed from an assumption that a man is a being who asks himself existential questions. A consideration at the philosophical-existential level can help us reach the depths of spiritual dimensions. In philosophical terms, a man's spirituality is awakened when an event interrupts his usual life routine and the man begins asking himself existential questions, i.e. the individual embraces and adopts an attitude of radical self-questioning.¹⁰

Sooner or later each of us must confront the questions of the existence of suffering, evil, or death. Every life has a beginning. Every life has an end. Every life begins with birth and ends with physical death. Before every human being there is the horizon of death. Because of that man does not live in an illusion, or in an imaginary endlessness. When a man is in the process of living and working, he may be shaken by his understanding of himself, of others and of the world. He goes from the surface of his life into its depths. For many this marks the beginning of their true spiritual path.¹¹ Spirituality understood in this way is not an area reserved to religiosity at all. Therefore, according to Klun, »philosophical questioning is also one form, though not the only form, of spiritual life«.¹²

Therefore, when our life is shaken and we start asking ourselves holistic questions, we can look for answers not only within ourselves, but we can also open up to address them through existing religions. We can say that we begin to live a religious spirituality when we experience through religion something that changes our way of life, our understanding of ourselves, of others and of

⁹ New International Version, <https://www.biblegateway.com> (22.06.2021).

¹⁰ Cf. Branko KLUN, Fenomenologija duhovnega življenja [Phenomenology of Spiritual Life], in Primož REPAR, Stanislava REPAR, Andrej BOŽIČ (edd.), *Udejanjanje duhovnosti v sodobnem svetu* [Actualization of Spirituality in the Contemporary World], Ljubljana, KUD Apokalipsa, 69-92, 77.

¹¹ Cf. Ivan PLATOVNJAK, The Understanding of Spirituality among Slovene Catholics on the Basis of the Survey »Sacrifice in Christian Spirituality«, *Synthesis Philosophica*, 69 (2020) 1, 217-234, 230-233, doi: 10.21464/sp35112.

¹² Klun, *Fenomenologija duhovnega...*, 77.

the world.¹³ It is a message of salvation that allows us to live in a new way. Life gains a new meaning and purpose that we could not give to it by ourselves. We can say that it is about accepting the light that comes from the outside and illuminates our life or the world in a new way and thus gives everyone a new meaning.

Accepting religion does not mean, first and foremost, accepting religious truths, but accepting a new horizon in which we see the same things that we have seen before in a new light and in a new way. Pope Francis says that for a Christian, believing is to see life with the eyes of Jesus.¹⁴ That viewpoint is found in the Gospels. It is only when we start to look at everything in this new light that religious truths have their true meaning and can be understood. In any case, the adoption of the horizon of faith does not exclude the possibility of other answers. Every true believer is familiar with doubt. He, too, must make the decision to accept the answer religion gives again and again.¹⁵

Questioning requires effort. That effort means that no spiritual life knows leisurely self-rule but requires us to constantly strive to understand life. Therefore, questioning and finding one's own understanding is never an accomplished task but the effort of spiritual life, which could take place within a religion, contemporary faiths or various human sciences. That's why Sheldrake suggests that it is wise to talk about three different categories of spirituality: religious, secular and esoteric spirituality.¹⁶

We have considered religious spirituality, which we can live within different religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.¹⁷ The second category of spirituality is known as *esoteric*. Such spiritualities, which have developed in recent decades, contain religious elements, as well as philosophical or ethical elements. The word *esoteric* includes secrecy. In addition to secret rituals and special introductions (initiation rituals), esoteric spiritualities have several common characteristics. They often search for »code« and »correspondence« to understand the interconnectedness of the visible and invisible universe. »Mediation«, which includes symbols, rituals, ghosts and human teachers acting as mediators (media) of space mysteries is needed.¹⁸

¹³ Cf. Jan Felicjan TERELAK, Psychology and Religion. Remarks from a Methodological Perspective, *Scientia et Fides*, 9 (2021) 1, 357-382, 358, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/SetF.2021.014>.

¹⁴ Cf. Pope FRANCIS, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium*, 24.11.2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (22.06.2021), 18.

¹⁵ Cf. Klun, *Fenomenologija duhovnega...*, 79.

¹⁶ Cf. Philip SHELDRAKE, *Spirituality: a Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, University Press, 2012, 8-17.

¹⁷ Cf. Ahmet TÜRKAN, Dinlerin Salgın Hastalıklara Bakışı [Views of Religions on Epidemics], in Hilmi TÜRKYILMAZ (ed.), *Sosyal Mesafe Döneminde Din [Religion in the Period of Social Distancing]*, İstanbul, Çizgi Press, 2021, 59-117, 61-78.

¹⁸ Cf. Sheldrake, *Spirituality...*, 14-15.

Secular spirituality is an increasingly important category of spirituality today and includes a wide range of secular approaches. Of course, the word »secular« was not originally the opposite of »religious«. The Latin word *saeculum* simply means »this age«. In modern use, »secular spirituality« encompasses the ways in which spirituality is used outside explicitly religious frameworks. Such spirituality can be based on philosophy, but can also be based on psychology, aesthetics, science, gender theory, etc.¹⁹

Either way we understand spirituality, it certainly is not just one part of human life, but it involves »life as a whole« and strives for the »sacred«. This may include believing in God, or the boundless mysteries of the cosmos, or it may also refer to the depths of human life.²⁰ Spirituality is mainly man's quest to find answers to existential questions, meaning and purpose to his life and values that enable him to live as holistically as possible.²¹

If we have this definition of spirituality before us and look at the values of a democratic society, where the individual's freedom in his decisions and right to life are respected and the right to life is respected, it is therefore necessary to allow everyone to live and act in accord with the spirituality which he has freely chosen and according to which he wants to live. This is true even at the time he is dying or especially at that time, because it is precisely during this time that his spiritual need is brought to the fore.

2. Ways of understanding spiritual needs of the dying person

Koenig points out that with the end of the French Revolution there was a final separation between religion and medicine.²² In his debate, he portrays the role of Christian Churches in a very negative light, particularly as an obstacle to the development of medical science. It is certain that the paternalism of

¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 16-17.

²⁰ Cf. Irena AVSENIK NABERGOJ, Od religioznega izkustva do duhovne literature Svetega pisma [From Religious Experience to the Spiritual Literature of the Bible], *Edinost in dialog*, 74 (2019) 1, 214-234, 213-237.

²¹ Cf. Sheldrake, *Spirituality...*, 4-8; Steve NOLAN, Philip SALTMARSH, Carlo LEGET, Spiritual care in palliative care: working towards an EAPC Task Force, *European Journal of Palliative Care*, 18 (2011) 2, 86-89; Francisca REGO, Cândida PEREIRA, Guilhermina REGO, Rui NUNES, The Psychological and Spiritual Dimensions of Palliative Care: A Descriptive Systematic Review, *Neuropsychiatry*, 8 (2018) 2, 484-494, doi: 10.4172/Neuropsychiatry.1000370; Platovnjak, The Understanding of ..., 218; Robert CVETEK, Mateja CVETEK, The Expressions of Spirituality Inventory – Revised (ESI-R): Psychometric Evaluation of the Slovene-Language Version, *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 78 (2018) 4, 1087-1089, 1087-1100; Ivana CRNKOVIĆ, Ivan BRUMINI, Aleksandar RACZ, Assessing Knowledge and Attitudes Toward Spirituality in the domain of providing health care, *Nova prisutnost*, 17 (2019) 2, 323-333, 323-325, <https://doi.org/10.31192/np.17.2.6>.

²² Cf. Harold G. KOENIG, Religion and Medicine I: Historical Background and Reasons for Separation. *Int'L. J. Psychiatry in Medicine*, 30 (2000) 4, 385-398, 386-388.

Christian churches over medicine has occasionally had a dampening influence. At the same time, as shown by various scientific studies they have had a major positive impact on its development, which should not be underestimated.²³ Christian Churches have always emphasized the care of the sick, following the example and learning of Jesus Christ and the mission he gave to his disciples. In the metaphor of the last judgment (cf. Matthew 25:31-46)²⁴, Jesus identified himself so strongly with the sick and hurt, he equated serving them with serving him. Particularly after the 17th century, many hospitals were established. In 2010, the Catholic Church managed 26% of the world's health institutions.²⁵

Christian Churches always emphasized the spiritual needs of the sick and dying man and made sure that he had spiritual help at his disposal, help that differed according to the denominations' theological teachings and pastoral theology.²⁶ Within the Catholic Church, the spiritual need to receive sacraments – confession, Eucharist and anointing of the sick – has always been at the forefront. After the separation of medicine from religion, all attention was focused solely on the patient's physical needs, partly psychological and social.

This separation, among other things, caused him not to be seen holistically. In medicine, this separation lasted until almost forty years ago, when various research on the health impact of spirituality and its importance in the medical care of patients began to emerge.²⁷ The beginning of the hospice movement in the 1960s made a particular contribution to this.²⁸ In their care for the dying man, they brought holistic care to the fore, in which spiritual care is also important, care that responds to the dying patients' spiritual needs. Thus, in its first official definition of palliative care in 1992, the World Health Organization (WHO) also highlighted a patient's spiritual needs:

»Palliative care is the active and total care of patients whose disease is not responsive to curative treatment. Control of pain and other distressing symptoms, and of psychological, social, spiritual problems is paramount.«²⁹

Over the last 20 years, many studies have been conducted on the spiritual needs of the dying man. The understanding of these needs varies considerably depending on how spirituality is understood in nursing. The first approach is

²³ Cf. Ronald L. NUMBERS, Darrel W. AMUNDSEN, Martin E. MARTY, *Caring and curing: Health and medicine in the western religious traditions*, New York, Macmillan, 1986.

²⁴ *New International Version...*

²⁵ Cf. CATHOLIC NEWS AGENCY, Catholic hospitals comprise one quarter of world's healthcare, council reports. 10.02.2010, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/18624/catholic-hospitals-comprise-one-quarter-of-worlds-healthcare-council-reports> (16.06.2021).

²⁶ Cf. Piotr ROSZAK, Between Wisdom and Sluggishness: Thomas Aquinas on the Elderly, *The Thomist*, 83 (2019) 91-109, 103-105.

²⁷ Cf. Koenig, *Religion and Medicine...*, 387-388.

²⁸ Cf. Suzanne RYAN et al., Evolving Definitions of Palliative Care: Upstream Migration or Confusion?, *Current Treatment Options in Oncology*, 21 (2020) 3, 1-20, 2-3, doi: 10.1007/s11864-020-0716-4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

purely religious. It understands spiritual needs as the needs of patients emerging from their religious beliefs.³⁰ The second approach is spiritual, therefore non-religious, because it understands spirituality as independent of religion. It argues that spirituality concerns every human being, because, above all, it represents his search for the meaning and purpose of life and everything that helps him to live holistically. This approach speaks only of his spiritual needs without special attention to his religious needs, as far as he is religious.³¹

We believe that the third approach is the most suitable, because it views a dying man as a spiritual being seeking answers to his existential questions, the meaning and purpose of his life and holistic relationships, and anything that allows him the fullness of life within a spirituality, which can be religious, esoteric, or secular. Such a respectful and integral approach can provide the best assistance to a dying man, as it puts him first and creates a safe space where he is accepted in what he has lived and wants to live at the end of his life. It also helps him to respond in the best possible way to the needs he now has in this situation.

A review of research from the past decade on the spiritual needs of the dying man shows that most authors are in favor of the second approach.³² They do not directly rule out a third approach, but even indirectly support it, as most stress the need to see the importance of both spirituality and religion for the patient. However, only a few directly state that we can talk about different types of spirituality.³³

Edwards and his colleagues analyzed nine research articles published from 2000 to 2009 that addressed directly or indirectly the spiritual needs of patients at the end of life. They categorized all spiritual needs into three categories: need to finish business, need for involvement and control, and need for a positive outlook.³⁴ Sharma and his colleagues classified the spiritual needs of cancer patients into three categories: psychosocial (e.g. stress relief, relationships); spiritual (e.g. purpose, meaning, hope, forgiveness and peace) and religious (e.g. prayer, religious texts, religious rites, conversations with a priest or religious leader).³⁵

We agree with the conclusions drawn from the analysis of various questionnaires measuring the spiritual needs of dying patients by Seddigh et al. that

³⁰ Cf. Mihaela SKOBERNE, Zdravstvena nega umirajočega [Nursing Care of the Dying], *Zdrav Obzor*, 20 (1986) 187-209, 198.

³¹ Cf. Babnik, Karnjuš, *Duhovne potrebe...*, 13.

³² Cf. Edwards et al., *Review...*, 753-770; Babnik, Karnjuš, *Duhovne potrebe...*, 12-18; Seddigh, Keshavarz-Akhlaghi, Azarnik, *Questionnaires Measuring Patients'...*, 1-8.

³³ Cf. Seddigh, Keshavarz-Akhlaghi, Azarnik, *Questionnaires Measuring...*, 5-7.

³⁴ Cf. Edwards et al., *Review...*, 366-368.

³⁵ Cf. Rashmi K. SHARMA et al., The spiritual needs assessment for patients (SNAP): development and validation of a comprehensive instrument to assess unmet spiritual needs, *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*, 44(2012) 1, 44-51, 47-49, doi: 10.1016/j.jpainsymman.2011.07.008.

spiritual needs are »a complicated, multidimensional phenomenon«. ³⁶ It is difficult to capture them in keywords without overlooking something important. For us, it is best to describe the different fundamental spiritual needs that occur in virtually every dying man.

3. *The fundamental spiritual needs of the dying person*

When we approach a patient who is in the last days of his life, it is important that we first listen to him and try to discern what he needs, what he wants, and what he expects. ³⁷ It is important to be aware that at the end of life there is often suffering, which is physical, psychological, sociological, and spiritual. When a man confronts the reality of his death, he often experiences difficult spiritual hardships associated with his life story, his loved ones, life events and experiences, and everything that gave his life meaning and purpose. ³⁸ When he sees the meaning and sense of his life, his spiritual life is holistic and integral. However, when he cannot see that any longer, he experiences various spiritual stressors. If we want to help him, it is first necessary to see what is causing his spiritual distress or what his spiritual needs are.

3.1 *The need for human closeness*

In his last weeks, a dying man longs for human closeness. He wants to be in communion with other people and desires that someone should be with him all the time. ³⁹ He is most afraid of being left alone and in pain when he dies. He needs to feel that he is understood, accepted as he is, cared for, supported, justified, encouraged, and accompanied. Family, relatives, and friends are a fundamental source of love and support for the dying man. Nurses and spiritual companions can be additional resources, or, at times, an alternative source of love. ⁴⁰

The dying man also has the need for frequent visits from which he draws new courage to move forward. He wants visitors to talk to him about every-

³⁶ Seddigh, Keshavarz-Akhlaghi, Azarnik, *Questionnaires Measuring...*, 7.

³⁷ Cf. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, *End of Life Care Strategy. Promoting high quality care for all adults at the end of life*, 2008, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/136431/End_of_life_strategy.pdf (12.06.2021), 11-31.

³⁸ Cf. Heather WISEMAN, *Spiritual care at the end of life: how to reduce distress as we face dying*, (06.12.2016), <https://palliativecare.org.au/spiritual-care-end-life-reduce-distress-face-dying> (03.06.2021).

³⁹ Cf. Angelo VIZZARRI, *Malati e assistenza spirituale*, (01.12.2017), <http://www.diocesichieti.it/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/04/MALATI-E-ASSISTENZA-SPIRITUALE.pdf> (20.03.2021), 1-11, 9.

⁴⁰ Cf. Adriana NARDIN, *La relazione spirituale con la persona malata*, (01.05.2018), <https://www.diocesiimola.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/lezione6.pdf> (10.05.2021), 1-12, 4-5.

thing he wants to talk about. He needs people by his side, people whom he can trust unconditionally when he is released and separated from his daily life. This will help him to begin letting go of his life. Particularly at a later stage, he has the need for touch and for someone to hold his hand. Communication moves from the level of words to that of touch. He feels that he is not alone, even though he may not be able to say so any longer. The dying patient can usually tolerate pain more easily when someone is with him.⁴¹

3.2 *The need to be heard*

The dying patient has a need to be listened to. It is the only way he feels he is important and unique to this world. He wants to be listened to even when he is full of reproaches, anger, grief and hardship.

Self-accusations are an expression of his experience. We must not discourage him from self-accusations, because he may then be able to express his truth, his feelings, and his suffering. By accepting his self-accusations, we free him. If his self-accusations are not shared, they can cause feelings of guilt and shame. These are common consequences of inward-facing aggression and distress, which then drag or even block the personal maturation of the dying man.⁴²

If a dying man does not have anyone to hear his grief, he can fall into depression. The dying man thus empties his internal world, where self-accusations, complaints, hardships, anger and sadness have accumulated, so that he can then accept something new.

A dying man has the need to remember different periods of his life. In them, he discovers his successes and victories, as well as his disappointments and defeats. He has a basic spiritual need to speak about his life, his memories, what he is grateful for and what he regrets before the last journey. He needs someone who will listen to him and accept his life story as it is.⁴³

3.3 *The need for compassion, acceptance, respect and solidarity in his situation*

A dying man needs to be unconditionally accepted as a free and self-responsible person. Therefore, when the dying man speaks, he is always at the center of conversation. This helps him to express himself and his interior world better and teaches him to understand himself better.

⁴¹ Cf. Henrich PERA, *Razumeti umirajoče. Praktična navodila za spremljanje umirajočih [Understand the dying. Practical guidance for accompanying the dying]*, Ljubljana, Župnijski urad Ljubljana – Dravlje, 35-135.

⁴² Cf. Pera, *Razumeti umirajoče...*, 152-157.

⁴³ Cf. Edwards et al., *Review...*, 8.

Compassion for the dying man is therefore understood as one being immersed in his suffering, sharing with him in his pain, confusion and loneliness. He also has a need to be helped by making his life conscious until the end. This means that he will not suffer helplessly until the end of his distress, but that he will accept what life offers him here and now. He needs a spiritual companion who expresses his authenticity and human warmth in conversation with him to help him in this way.⁴⁴

A dying man has the need to express his feelings and emotions, his fears and his distress to someone who listens to him. However, he often hides these feelings behind words. He often wants to cover them up out of fear that others might not accept and understand him. When he feels that others have accepted his problems, he is calmer and more relaxed.

Every dying man wants to take at least some control over the course of the last stage of illness, be involved in decisions about his life, and remain connected to his loved ones. The need for autonomy in one's own desires and will is strongly present at that time. Some want to be able to talk with their loved ones about their own reputation and actively prepare for death. The sense of losing control of the situation they found themselves in often leads to spiritual distress.⁴⁵

3.4 The need to find answers to fundamental life issues together

Dying raises a person's deepest life questions.⁴⁶ When an incurable disease is diagnosed, the patient's life is called into question. The patient, who began dying at the time of diagnosis, wonders what is really happening to him. His interior shifts to the fundamental life questions: Why is this happening to me? What happens to me after I die? Am I going to be missed? Will I be remembered when I die? Is there a God? If there is God, is God there for me? Will I have time to complete my life's work, my unfinished projects?⁴⁷

The dying man is holding on to these questions. He is often hiding them, because there is no one to encourage him and give him space to talk about them. Today's empirical-science view of man treats the dying man merely as a physical being, taking into account only the practical consequences of the disease, but forgetting the deeper issues that are most important to humans with an incurable disease. Moreover, it is often forgotten that the dying person now deals with issues more emotionally. He no longer wonders what kind of

⁴⁴ Cf. Pera, *Razumeti umirajoče...*, 34-75.

⁴⁵ Cf. Vizzarri, *Malati e assistenza spirituale...*, 3-10.

⁴⁶ Cf. Christina M. PUCHALSKI, Spirituality and End-of-Life care: A Time for Listening and Caring, *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, 5 (2002) 289-294, 290-293.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 290-291.

disease he has. His focus now is how he feels about or how he is experiencing the disease. No one asks him how he is getting through it.⁴⁸

3.5 The need for forgiveness and reconciliation and for a suitable good-bye

Learning that his disease is incurable raises the question of unresolved relationships. The distress caused by unresolved relationships is severe. Particularly in the final stages of life, the vision of the dying man turns to retrospection. This is often complicated, with conflicting experiences woven out of defeats and victories, darkness and light. He harbors feelings of guilt within himself, to which the inability to accept himself and to say yes to the past and recognize the positive in his activity is often added.

Thus, the dying man has a need to come along with himself, his family, relatives, friends and God. Feelings of guilt can pose both a danger and an opportunity. Danger emerges when he tortures himself and condemns himself with feelings of guilt. However, these feelings also offer an opportunity to be overwhelmed by God's mercy. For a religious person, the rites of forgiveness can be of great help (for Catholics, the sacrament of reconciliation). The path of forgiveness is, in a way, the path of liberation.⁴⁹

Every dying man has a profound spiritual need to say good-bye to all his loved ones before the end of his life. The life of an individual is subject to a series of separations and necessary failures that find their realization in death. The need for a proper goodbye to people, things, projects, is part of human nature. Satisfying the need to say goodbye makes the separation more peaceful.⁵⁰

3.6 The need for hope and finding a meaning in pain

The need to continue hoping and finding reasons for joy seems very strong and dominant even when the circumstances in which we are placed seem to deny this and the disease is very serious. The dying person's hopes can either be small or big and fill the dying person's mind.

Preserving the hope of a dying man does not mean that we are cheating him or pretending to deny the seriousness of his situation with false words. It does not mean prioritizing unrealistic expectations from a medical point of view

⁴⁸ Cf. Klelija ŠTANCAR, *Eksistencialna misel pri Martinu Heideggerju in Emmanuelu Levinasu ter njena uporaba pri duhovnem spremljanju v paliativni oskrbi*. Doktorska disertacija [Existential Thought in Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas and its Application to Spiritual Accompaniment in Palliative Care. Doctoral Dissertation], Univerza v Ljubljani Teološka fakulteta, 2014, 141-153.

⁴⁹ Cf. Pera, *Razumeti umirajoče...*, 120-122.

⁵⁰ Cf. Vizzarri, *Malati e assistenza spirituale...*, 8-10.

or miraculous interventions from above. The dying man needs to be helped to reinforce anything positive that is still possible. This means that he notices little progress that has happened to find reasons to continue fighting evil, or, finally, to trust God. When hopes of recovery are no longer realistic, his hope changes and shifts to something that is no longer related to treatment or life extension but leads to a life after death.⁵¹

There is a certain kind of pain that is destructive and another kind of pain through which one grows. Pain can be simultaneously devastating and creative. It can be devastating because it can lock us in and separate us from others. It can also be creative because it offers an opportunity for a new birth and for a hope that nothing can take away.

Finding meaning in the moment is to find something a dying patient can believe in as death approaches. It can be expressed in a direct or indirect manner, as a metaphor or in silence, in the gestures of the patient or in symbols. Perhaps it can be expressed through art or in the unexpected potential of the patient's creativity at the end of life.⁵²

Many dying people also have a need for positive attitudes and beauty. They crave happy thoughts, the smiles of loved ones, humor, laughter, and even art. All of this help them to be in the present, here and now.⁵³

3.7 *The need for rituals and prayer or meditation*

Although this need is cited last, it may also be the most important. For a dying man, it is often his faith in God and the rituals within a particular religion that help him find meaning and hope even in a hopeless situation.⁵⁴ Participation in rituals, read holy books, exercise personal or common prayer, meditation, and everything that is characteristic of religious or esoteric spirituality often brings relief, better acceptance of facts and the true nature of the disease, and improves the quality of life in the time of dying.⁵⁵

To those who firmly believe, it helps to have a personal relationship with God to confront what they are experiencing and to reach a degree of acceptance

⁵¹ Cf. Nardin, *La relazione spirituale...*, 6-7.

⁵² Cf. Luciano SANDRIN, L'attenzione spirituale nelle cure palliative e il ruolo della cappellania nel prendersi cura della speranza, *MEDIC*, 22 (2014) 1, 75-80, 76-78.

⁵³ Cf. Edwards et ad., *Review...*, 8-9.

⁵⁴ Cf. Piotr ROSZAK, La fe y la participación en la naturaleza divina según santo Tomás de Aquino, *Espíritu*, 155 (2018) 153-172, 164-166.

⁵⁵ Cf. Ana Cláudia MESQUITA, Erika de Cássia LOPES CHAVES, Guilherme Antônio MOREIRA de BARROS, Spiritual needs of patients with cancer in palliative care: An integrative review. *Current Opinion in Supportive and Palliative Care*, 11 (2017) 4, 334-340, 330-338, doi: 10.1097/SPC.0000000000000308; Ivan LEUTAR, Zdravka LEUTAR, Duhovnost kao resurs snage i otpornosti obitelji u rizičnim okolnostima [Spirituality as a Resource of Power and Resilience of Families in Risk Circumstances], *Nova prisutnost*, 15 (2017) 1, 65-87, 69-85, <https://doi.org/10.31192/np.15.1.4>; Nardin, *La relazione spirituale...*, 8-10.

about the end of their lives. It is of great help to the dying man to realize that God has not abandoned him in his suffering and will be with him at the time of death as well as afterwards because in him is eternal life. Some, however, experience great hardship because of religion, particularly those with an image of God as the one who judges their sins and punishes them. Others experience great distress because they can no longer believe that God is a loving Father, who truly loves them. They may see God as the one who caused all that happened to them. They feel frustration with God and real anger sometimes. They may feel betrayed. Faith may no longer give them hope or meaning.⁵⁶

Such people, in particular, need someone who will listen to them and accept what they feel about God. They need a religious companion who can sincerely and respectfully accept everything they are experiencing.⁵⁷ This person can be of great help to show them that God accepts them. God does not punish or forsake them. In conversations with each other, listening to the Bible or other holy books, prayer and rituals, they can slowly come to a new perspective on God and themselves in God.⁵⁸ Forgiveness often plays great role in this process.⁵⁹

For a dying Catholic, the sacraments, particularly the sacraments of Eucharist, reconciliation and anointing of the sick, are of central importance.⁶⁰ The great value of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick is that it helps a dying man feel a real and vivid presence of God in his life. It gives him the certainty that he is not alone on this unknown path toward death and that death is merely a transition to an everlasting life with Jesus Christ, who also died, rose on the third day, and now lives forever.

Conclusion

Every dying man is a spiritual being, so it is necessary to approach him as integrally as possible, taking into account his complex spiritual needs. First and foremost is the need for human closeness. When we are with him and listen to him respectfully and lovingly, we can also hear his other spiritual needs and help as integrally as possible to satisfy them. It is certainly necessary to respect everyone in his free choice of the type of spirituality and to enable him to find in it what he needs.

⁵⁶ Cf. Wiseman, *Spiritual care...*

⁵⁷ Cf. Juan Manuel PINEDA-ALBALADEJO, Jorge LOPEZ PUGA, Francisco José MOYA-FAZ, The spirituality of integral training as a bioethical and sustainable welfare factor, *Scientia et Fides*, 8 (2020) 1, 205-219, 207, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/SetF.2020.009>.

⁵⁸ Cf. Piotr ROSZAK, Analogical Understanding of Divine Causality in Thomas Aquinas, *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 4 (2017) 133-153, 138.

⁵⁹ Cf. Ivan PLATOVNJAK, Spiritual help for persons suffering from depression, *Nova prisutnost*, 18 (2020) 2, 259-277, 266-274.

⁶⁰ Cf. Nardin, *La relazione spirituale...*, 8-10.

Perhaps such an approach seems to be too secular. However, if we look more closely at Catholic spirituality, which is a type of religious spirituality, we can see that its essence is to be with God and with another person in his current situation. If Catholics have faith that God became man in Jesus Christ to be with them and to share in their lives from conception to death, then it is also essential for their spiritual help that they be with the people in their situation. It is not enough to simply offer them sacraments and to pray for them. It is important that they first be with the dying man and that he be allowed to share with them everything he experiences. It is not obvious that Catholic spiritual care puts listening to and being with the patient at the forefront. Since Catholic spirituality is very sacramental with a wide variety of oral prayers and devotions, it often does not pay enough attention to the importance of silence and listening.⁶¹

People who work with dying patients are called to live out their unconditional and faithful love through daily feedings, gentle baths, clean sheets, listening, and words of reassurance regarding the value of their patients' lives as the end of their life approaches. For all dying patients, these acts serve as reminders of a love that never ends, and for religious patients', they are reminders of God, in whom they believe.

⁶¹ Cf. Ivan PLATOVNJAK, Popular piety: Living or »dead« tradition?, *Studia Gdańskie*, 42 (2018) 105-118, 111-116.

Ivan Platovnjak*

Zadovoljavanje duhovnih potreba umiruće osobe

Sažetak

Većina istraživanja palijativne skrbi potvrđuje da duhovnost ima važnu ulogu, stoga je potrebno još i više obratiti pozornost na duhovne potrebe umirućih osoba. U ovom članku autor ukratko prikazuje odnos između religije i duhovnosti te značenja različitih vrsta duhovnosti i načina na koji svatko može živjeti svoj vlastiti oblik duhovnosti, koji je to dio njihova života koji su slobodno i svjesno odabrali. U nastavku autor istražuje kako razumijevanje duhovnih potreba umiruće osobe ovisi o razumijevanju duhovnosti i njezinom utjecaju na ljudski život, osobito na zdravlje. U posljednjem dijelu predstavljene su temeljne duhovne potrebe svakoga tko želi posvetiti pažnju umirućem čovjeku na najcjelovitiji mogući način.

Ključne riječi: duhovnost, duhovne potrebe umiruće osobe, palijativna skrb, religija, vrste duhovnosti.

* Doc. dr. sc. Ivan Platovnjak, Sveučilište u Ljubljani, Teološki fakultet; Adresa: Poljanska cesta 4, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenija; E-mail: ivan.platovnjak@teof.uni-lj.si.