



THE DIFFERENTIATION OF SPIRITUAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING AS AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL PROBLEM

A diferenciação do aconselhamento espiritual e psicológico como um problema epistemológico

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ABSTRACT: Epistemology, as a theory of knowledge, examines the problems of the nature, origin, structure, and limits of cognition and understanding. It can provide guidelines for individuals on how to establish a relationship with the external environment, find their place in it, or adapt to it. Within the framework of epistemology, we can look at spiritual counseling, whose priority also involves existential questions, the search for answers to issues such as life, suffering, death, love, transcendence, etc. Spiritual counselors are still searching for clear boundaries for their actions and practices. Although spiritual counseling is not equivalent to psychological counseling, in many cases, they are closely related. Common aspects can be found in both types of counseling. These connections are significant for achieving holistic spiritual assistance but often introduce epistemological confusion and difficulties in trying to differentiate these areas. In spiritual counseling, the aim is to approach the individual through the lens of religious belief. While practitioners in both spiritual and psychological counseling employ similar professional skills, it is important to recognize and distinguish the values guiding specialists in both practices. The article seeks to answer the question: what are the major differences and similarities between spiritual and psychological counselling? To justify the distinction and identity of spiritual and psychological counseling, this

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article seeks to reveal the essence, meaning, differences, and points of connection between these methods of assistance. Research methods: review, analysis, and synthesis of scientific literature and research.

KEY WORDS: Theology. Psychology. Spiritual counseling. Psychological counseling. Spiritual counselor.

RESUMO: A epistemologia, como teoria do conhecimento, examina os problemas da natureza, origem, estrutura e limites da cognição e compreensão. Ela pode fornecer diretrizes para indivíduos sobre como estabelecer uma relação com o ambiente externo, encontrar seu lugar nele ou se adaptar a ele. No âmbito da epistemologia, podemos analisar o aconselhamento espiritual, cuja prioridade também envolve questões existenciais, a busca por respostas a questões como vida, sofrimento, morte, amor, transcendência e outras. Os conselheiros espirituais ainda estão buscando limites claros para suas ações e práticas. Embora o aconselhamento espiritual não seja equivalente ao aconselhamento psicológico, em muitos casos, eles estão intimamente relacionados. Aspectos comuns podem ser encontrados em ambos os tipos de aconselhamento. Essas conexões são significativas para alcançar uma assistência espiritual holística, mas muitas vezes introduzem confusão epistemológica e dificuldades ao tentar diferenciar essas áreas. No aconselhamento espiritual, o objetivo é abordar o indivíduo através da lente da crença. Enquanto os praticantes tanto do aconselhamento espiritual quanto do psicológico empregam habilidades profissionais semelhantes, é importante reconhecer e distinguir os valores que orientam os especialistas em ambas as práticas. O artigo busca responder à pergunta: quais são as principais diferenças e semelhanças entre o aconselhamento espiritual e o psicológico? Para justificar a distinção e identidade do aconselhamento espiritual e psicológico, este artigo busca revelar a essência, significado, diferenças e pontos de conexão entre esses métodos de assistência. Métodos de pesquisa: revisão, análise e síntese da literatura científica e dos estudos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Teologia. Psicologia. Aconselhamento espiritual. Aconselhamento psicológico. Conselheiro espiritual.

Introduction

Permacrisis (translated from Latin as permanent crisis) – the word chosen by the Collins English Dictionary for the year 2022 aptly describes the state felt by people in the 21st century, a constant and significant condition of turmoil or instability (PERMACRISIS, 2024, not paginated). Faced with challenges and life changes, individuals may experience anxiety, fear, difficulties, a sense of loss, anguish, and a myriad of other emotions and states that typically complicate a healthy existence. Additionally, in identifying their experiences and emotions, individuals become self-aware and try to better understand themselves, responding to their needs. In the modern world of technology, individuals strive to appear successful, but without the right relationship with oneself and others,

genuine connections, an internal burden of grueling baggage begins to accumulate (ŠIDLAUSKAITĖ-STRIPEIKIENĖ, 2022, not paginated). Thus, epistemology, as a theory of knowledge, examining the problems of the nature, origin, structure, and limits of cognition and understanding, can provide guidelines for individuals on how to build a relationship with the external environment, establish themselves in it, or adapt (GOLDMAN, 1985, p. 29-30; RIMKUTĖ, 2024). The inner powers of a person are not always strong enough for them to independently control their psyche without the intervention of others. Therefore, ways are sought to help restore mental balance or strengthen the human spiritual world. Speaking about the importance of spiritual and psychological counseling for individuals, it can be emphasized that, as a living being, one cannot, on their own, find answers to all the questions, solve daily, specific, or existential problems, and fully take care of oneself in this world. Naturally, there is a desire to consult with an expert in the field to find the best solution in crisis situations.

The need to understand the principles of human mental functioning and the origins of its disorders, as well as to develop an appropriate treatment method, gave birth to psychotherapy. In the modern and secular society, the number of mental health disorders is increasing (MILAŠIŪNAS, 2017, p. 18). Naturally, facing the growing and diverse range of ailments and aiming to help individuals by responding to their specific mental health issues, the process of psychotherapy has differentiated into various directions. Thus, relatively recently, a “new field in the practice of psychology, ‘emerging’ from psychotherapy” (KOČIŪNAS, 1995, p. 12) has appeared – psychological counseling, which can be beneficial for individuals experiencing everyday difficulties. Meanwhile, in the 20th century, another practice emerged, rooted in pastoral theology – spiritual counseling, also known as spiritual accompaniment. Although this relatively new field is still seeking clear boundaries of operation and definition (ŽUKAUSKAS; RAMONAS, 2015, p. 9), it is evident that psychological counseling should not be confused with spiritual counseling. This article reveals the essence, meaning, differences, and points of connection between spiritual and psychological counselling.

The ongoing global processes are closely intertwined and contribute to crises experienced by individuals facing changes and challenges in everyday life. Looking at the current situation, it seems that stress-inducing factors such as pandemics, armed conflicts, inequality among societal groups, unemployment, poverty and climate change, diminish people’s trust in society and in each other. In such situations, individuals may experience insecurity, anxiety, helplessness, anger, indifference, which gradually lead to emotional instability or mental health disorders. In this context, it is evident that specialists in the field of counseling are increasingly in de-

mand. The method of psychological assistance or self-discovery is gaining popularity worldwide, as people are becoming more accepting of themselves and the offered help. Modern life poses very complex challenges for consultants, but these challenges are addressed using different perspectives and methodological techniques. The inability of spiritual consultants and psychologists to fully respond to the needs of individuals in the 21st century is a recognized phenomenon. Some label this current issue simply as a spiritual crisis, others as a shift in scientific paradigms, and yet others term it as an epistemological problem. To answer complex spiritual and psychological questions, it is necessary to reconsider counseling from both theological and psychological perspectives. Instead of opposing theology and psychology, and similarly instead of opposing spiritual counseling and psychological counseling, what is needed is collaboration between theology and psychology. Such collaboration could provide answers to existential questions about the inner needs of humans (MANKELIŪNAS, 1991, p. 395-396).

Responding to the needs of the 21st-century individual, counseling theory is also undergoing changes. People receive a multitude of proposals daily, including practitioners, life coaches, various therapy or counseling methods, the diversity of which can complicate decision-making. Therefore, it is crucial to be able to select and utilize the most suitable means of assistance to overcome encountered difficulties. This is related not only to those seeking help but also to those providing it, whose goal is to assist the client, as counseling involves the value-based engagement of two individuals. A dilemma arises when distinguishing between psychological counseling and spiritual counseling. Not coincidentally, this article aims to reveal the differences and points of connection between spiritual and psychological counseling as ways of providing assistance to those in distress. This article relies on insights from various counseling researchers as well as on a previous work by one of the authors of this article (see: RAGINYTĖ; OŽELIS, 2023, p. 78-98). While practitioners in counseling utilize similar professional skills, it is important to recognize the essential differences and distinguish the values guiding specialists in both spiritual and psychological counseling practices.

The object of this article's research is spiritual and psychological counseling, their points of connection, and differences in the process of providing existential assistance. The goal of the article is to discuss the differences and points of connection between spiritual and psychological counseling. The methods include a review, analysis, and synthesis of scientific literature and research. Delving into the processes of spiritual and psychological counseling, one could mention numerous similarities or differences that connect them. We will discuss moments that link these counseling methods. While it is not possible to enumerate all the identical and distinguishing

features and points of connection, we will accentuate essential aspects that allow one to perceive the similarities between spiritual and psychological counseling before moving on to the differences.

1 The concept and definition boundaries of spirituality and spiritual counseling

When starting to talk about spiritual counseling and seeking to define its concept, the focus is first directed towards discussing the concept of spirituality, as it is likely that these elements are closely related. Right from the beginning, one encounters certain difficulties in attempting to unambiguously define spirituality. So far, there is no unanimous agreement on the meaning of spirituality, as different authors interpret this phenomenon from various perspectives. For example, according to Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of "family resemblance", many concepts that we think are clear appear to be puzzling under deeper investigation (WITTGENSTEIN, 1953, p. 66). Due to its multidimensionality, spirituality transcends the boundaries of any single scientific discipline, and it often needs to be explored by integrating not only theological but also philosophical, psychological, and educational knowledge (KONTRIMIENĖ, 2018, p. 11). The word "spirituality" is increasingly encountered in various contexts in modern society. It is also noteworthy that in recent years, discussions about spirituality have become more prevalent both within the Church and in broader society (ROLHEISER, 2017, p. 18). What then is spirituality? Firstly, a person is considered spiritual if they "have many mental powers" (KEINYS, 2012, p. 141). This definition of a spiritual person can be interpreted quite broadly. It is essential to clarify what is considered mental powers and which individuals would fall into this category. According to psychologist Aistė Jonušaitė, mental powers could be understood as "the ability to cope with stressful situations, resilience, emotional stability, high motivation, self-efficacy, and similar aspects related to the psyche that give strength to an individual" (JONUŠAITĖ, 2015). Another meaning of the concept is "having life, spirit" (KEINYS, 2012, p. 141). This definition may sound even more abstract, considering any living, breathing organism as a spiritual being, as the primary explanation of the word "spirit" is "breathable air, breathing, breath, aroma" (KEINYS, 2012, p. 140). However, like most words, this one has more than one interpretation. It is found that spirit is also considered "individualized societal consciousness or the mental forces of a person as a stimulus for action" (KEINYS, 2012, p. 141). Looking deeper, both explanations of the term spirituality/spiritual have quite a few similarities. Both definitions in their annotations draw attention to the human psyche and related aspects.

The American theologian Ronald Rolheiser states that “spirituality has nothing to do with a naturally arising or conscious decision to engage in any spiritual activity – going to church, praying or meditating, reading spiritual literature, or undertaking spiritual practices. It is a much deeper matter” (ROLHEISER, 2017, p. 20). When talking about spirituality as a phenomenon in general, R. Rolheiser claims that every person can be spiritual, regardless of the will or religiosity, even though the mentioned theologian also discusses a specific direction of spirituality – Christian spirituality, which he describes as a challenge for every disciple of Christ. It is often assumed that spirituality is something exotic, esoteric, elevated above everyday life and routine. For many people, spirituality is associated with what is unusual, mystical, with an unfamiliar life of the Church, holiness, humility, otherness, with what seems to be intended only for the chosen ones. Much less often is spirituality understood as an unquestionable essential aspect of our life. In a comprehensive consideration of the concept of spirituality, the author concludes that the “opposite of a spiritual person is a being lacking life force” (ROLHEISER, 2017, p. 19, 26). Therefore, it could be inferred that only a strong, goal-oriented, engaging in inspiring activities, and inclined to embrace life, holistic person is attributed to the spiritual ones, while anyone willing can live like this and strive to achieve this form of life. The American theologian Sandra Marie Schneiders also attempts to define spirituality not only in a Christian sense but in a general sense and offers the following definition: “it is a conscious and deliberate effort to seek not only self-integration and personal development but also the maximum use of one’s abilities in pursuit of the most important purpose in life” (ROLHEISER, 2017, p. 33). The author presents her understanding that spirituality encompasses not only religious experiences but also other meaningful experiences related to life goals and values. Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar calls “spirituality the perception of a person committed in ethical or religious terms and its application in life” (ROLHEISER, 2017, p. 33). Looking at the thoughts formulated by these few authors who delve into the theme of spirituality, one can conclude that each of them sees spirituality in a broad sense, always accompanied by the question of belief and religion, inseparable from this phenomenon, but clearly indicating that a spiritual person is not necessarily religious (RAGINYTĖ; OŽELIS, 2022, p. 10-11).

So, it is clear that spirituality speaks about a person who pays attention to their psyche, has life goals, and is capable of functioning healthily in society. However, it is natural that not everyone smoothly accomplishes this, aims to achieve or maintain oneself as a whole, moves purposefully towards set goals, and adheres to acceptable values. It is not surprising that systematically stumbling in these moments of life, people seek targeted assistance, means that can help delve into spirituality or, as R.

Rolheiser expressed it, overcome the lack of life force. Perhaps not in vain, the practice of counseling emerged, derived from pastoral psychology – that is spiritual counseling, which, like spirituality, also “still seeks clear limits of action and definition” (ŽUKAUSKAS; RAMONAS, 2015, p. 9). According to Spanish psychiatrist Angel Rivera, spiritual counseling goes beyond the limits of traditional forms of psychotherapy because it emphasizes the importance of religion or spirituality in a person’s life. It seeks to integrate standard therapy methods with religious/spiritual practice and wisdom (RIVERA, 2020). Theology Doctor Fr. Arvydas Ramonas and Fr. Laimonas Žukauskas state that “spiritual counseling is understood as an interpersonal relationship between two persons or a person and a group, open to religious feelings (faith)” (ŽUKAUSKAS; RAMONAS, 2015, p. 6). According to the authors, spiritual counseling should not be confused with psychological counseling, although, in part, counseling methods are applied similarly. The main emphasis here should and is placed on the values that are followed during spiritual counseling, so it is essential to notice and highlight them. Values based on Christian virtues could become an essential and distinctive feature of spiritual counseling. There is an apparent equality sign between Christian counseling and spiritual counseling because naturally, if a Christian point of view of a person remains only a private matter for the counselor, and his work is based on a strictly defined program of a particular psychological school, we can no longer talk about Christian counseling. Here another term comes up – Christian counseling, which we will bypass this time, focusing on spiritual counseling. It is essential to emphasize that in spiritual counseling, a person and the problems they face are invited to be seen not merely as an illness or a crisis experienced, which might be the focus of psychological counseling, but as a whole person (RAGINYTĖ; OŽELIS, 2022, p. 12-13). During counseling, counselors are encouraged to adapt and combine the beliefs and applied counseling methods of the counselor.

According to the opinion of the above-mentioned Spanish psychiatrist, Dr. A. Rivera, one does not need to be religious to receive spiritual counseling. This form of therapy is accessible to everyone, even those who do not consider themselves religious. Additionally, the specialist emphasizes that it is possible to consult with a spiritual counselor, even if their religious beliefs differ from those seeking help. According to A. Rivera, this form of counseling can be used to help people who are unsure whether they are truly spiritual or religious (RIVERA, 2020). Considering the opinion presented by the mental health specialist, one could assume that the office of a spiritual counselor might be the place where a person has space to clarify their beliefs and help answer the question of whether the person seeking assistance wants to integrate religion more deeply into their life.

Collette Barnard, a British specialist with extensive experience in counseling and psychotherapy, considers spiritual counseling to be a holistic process. During this process, she aims to emphasize that life is inherently personal and entirely unique, making it impossible to categorically label or define the counseling process. In spiritual counseling, Barnard views the soul as the primary focal point, while lived experience becomes the most significant tool for integrating personal pain and the individual journey. Throughout the process of spiritual counseling, according to consultant and psychotherapist C. Barnard, the goal is for clients to express themselves and their world using their intimate personal wisdom, spiritual awareness, and personal authenticity. During the counseling process, clients are encouraged to honestly and wisely utilize their spiritual gifts, skills, and knowledge (BARNARD, 2009, not paginated).

Spiritual counseling can be considered one of the spiritual practices. It is also observed that within the field of mental health, this type of counseling and its specificity create a lot of uncertainties and variations. Nevertheless, despite these challenges, it is recognized as another form of therapy aiming to reduce the increasing number of mental health disorders in recent years. To demonstrate the benefits and effectiveness of spiritual counseling and to provide a clearer definition of what is considered spiritual counseling, a qualitative study was conducted in Iran. This research revealed that spiritual interventions, or spiritual counseling, are attractive to many people. The study also demonstrated the effectiveness of this form of assistance for various groups of physical and mental health patients as well as for healthy individuals. Based on the findings, the researchers concluded that during spiritual counseling, a spiritual counselor, or spiritual advisor, helps the client address their problems by focusing on spirituality. The study materials indicated that methods such as prayer, forgiveness, service, daily journaling, bibliotherapy, worship, and spiritual visualization are used during the spiritual counseling process. This highlights the inseparable connection between spiritual counseling and religious or faith-related traditions (FARSHADNIA *et al.*, 2018, p. 517-525).

It becomes quite clear that spiritual counseling is receiving increasing attention, with an undeniable recognition of its need and benefits. However, uncertainties persist regarding precise operational guidelines. It is evident that spiritual counseling is not significantly different from psychological counseling, as both share common aspects. Nonetheless, it is considered different in terms of the methods used to provide assistance, even though the ultimate goal is clear: to help individuals address the challenges they face.

“The priority of a spiritual counselor is existential questions, seeking answers to life, suffering, death, love, etc.” (NORVILAS, 2014, not paginated). The very term “spiritual” indicates that each meeting between

a spiritual counselor and the client “is valuable, has its place, role, and purpose” (CALAME, 2020, p. 77). Meanwhile, spiritual consultant Daina Radzevičiūtė-Jašinskienė provides a description of spiritual counseling that nicely summarizes the discussed ideas. According to this spiritual consultant, “spiritual counseling is psychological and spiritual support during difficult periods of life. The aim is to help overcome spiritual crises, existential difficulties, personal and interpersonal challenges, as well as to know oneself and discover spiritual reality. And it is not necessary to be a believer to seek spiritual counseling” (LANAUSKIENĖ, 2017, not paginated). Here, it should be clarified that the practice of spiritual counseling is based on Christian principles, but the counselor can offer services to anyone experiencing spiritual crises or existential difficulties because when looking at psychological life from a spiritual perspective, a spiritual counselor can provide assistance.

Psychologist Karin Bleecker, with extensive experience in clinical supervision and leadership consulting programs, suggests that professional spiritual counselors should understand that spiritual counseling involves the simultaneous spiritual growth of an individual, which is, by itself, a process (NEW LIFE, 2021, not paginated). As it is commonly known, one meeting might not be enough to help a person feel better or find answers to pressing questions. Therefore, there naturally occurs a continuous process of providing assistance. The term “process,” derived from the Latin word “processus,” means “a step forward” (KVIETKAUSKAS, 1985, p. 400). This subtly reveals the essence of the entire spiritual counseling and perhaps counseling in general as a process, as individuals, in solving their challenges and seeking ways of assistance, are already taking steps forward on their unique paths. They are moving along those, perhaps not always easy, but essential steps toward their well-being in life. Spiritual counseling can be compared to a personal healing process for individuals, even referred to as the “midwifery of the soul” (NEW LIFE, 2021, not paginated). Thus, it can be stated that spiritual counseling should undoubtedly be considered a genuine process. Perhaps here it would be more suitable to discuss what it looks like and what it consists of. Once again, we encounter uncertainties because there are no standardized procedures for a spiritual counseling session; it varies for different people. It is believed that the course of a spiritual counseling session depends on the abilities and competencies of the spiritual counselor in the counseling field, as well as the beliefs and values guiding the person in their work. In other words, due to religious beliefs, choices of psychotherapeutic methods, and subtleties of personality, different consultants may work differently and tailor the entire process of spiritual counseling accordingly. The course of the counseling process may also strongly depend on the specific needs of the person seeking counseling, taking into account their suffering in spirituality and religion, the depth of their injury. Depending

on whether the seeker turns to the spiritual consultant to address doubts and anxiety, which are also spiritually grounded issues, or if they need help in navigating between spiritual and religious beliefs, this can also determine the course of the spiritual counseling process (RAGINYTĖ; OŽELIS, 2022, p. 13-15).

The consultant's primary task should be to clarify, listen, and clearly understand the needs of the person seeking help before developing an action plan to address the problem. Subsequently, considering this, initiating an individual spiritual counseling process should begin by focusing not only on the person's mind but also on the deepest corners of the soul. All of this is likely not possible without attentive listening and immediate acceptance, accompaniment, which could be considered the essential parts of the spiritual counseling process, encouraging the "restoration of accompaniment skills and possibilities" (CALAME, 2020, p. 98), and leading towards various choices in solving problems. The process of spiritual counseling differs from psychological counseling in that it attempts to approach the individual through the prism of belief (KRASAUSKAS, 2014, not paginated). This element of the process is likely not often encountered in a psychologist's office, as there is still a distinct boundary between the sciences of psychology and religion. Of course, there is no intention to diminish the help of a psychotherapist, as it is often necessary and fundamentally non-conflicting with spiritual reconciliation and healing paths (HALIK, 2022, p. 52). Regarding the duration of the process, it is essential to note that the spiritual counseling process usually does not extend for a long time and typically lasts up to six months. In the scientific literature (RAGINYTĖ; OŽELIS, 2022, p. 16-17), information is found that if this time is insufficient to resolve the presented difficulties, stabilize emotional well-being, or alleviate them, then the person may need long-term and ongoing assistance from mental health specialists. Referring them and acquainting them with the services provided should also be considered part of the spiritual counseling process.

2 Points connecting spiritual and psychological assistance processes

Both spiritual and psychological counseling areas are closely related and similar as they explore the individual and their states. "A person is a body, soul, and spirit: if a life situation is related to a person's psyche, it is also related to spiritual life" (JUŠKIENĖ; NAVICKIENĖ, 2021, p. 131). Generally, both those in need of spiritual counseling and those seeking psychological help are individuals who are ill, emotionally distressed, or experiencing a crisis. "The psychologist listens, reduces tension, ex-

plains internal conflicts” (VĖŽELIENĖ, 2020, p. 37) and, using acceptable counseling techniques, seeks to help the person requiring assistance. With a similar goal, people turn to spiritual consultants – they want to heal, feel better, strengthen spiritually, and the spiritual consultant helps achieve this using acceptable methods. It can be said that in both counseling cases, a process is taking place aimed at the sufferer, seeking to provide them with some form of assistance, undoubtedly linking spiritual and psychological counseling. And this could be considered one of the essential similarities when talking about these two methods of assistance. The goal of providing assistance is to help the sufferer. When difficulties arise, and crises occur, not everyone can cope equally easily and smoothly. When a person seeks help, they expect to receive appropriate assistance, regardless of the type of help they are seeking. If help is sought purposefully, the consultant should be interested in providing it. Looking at this aspect of providing assistance, one of the essential points that connect spiritual and psychological counseling is evident – the sincere desire of the consultant to help the suffering individual feel better.

According to Sister Dr. Jolita Dudaitė, who herself provides spiritual counseling, spiritual counseling is “assistance for those seeking answers to the meaning of life and other existential questions” (DUDAITE, 2023, not paginated). When discussing counseling, it can be said that counseling is generally defined as a process of helping people make decisions and/or change their behavior. Psychological counseling is a process that helps overcome obstacles to personal growth and achieve optimal development of one’s personal resources. In other words, psychological counseling aims to understand current difficulties, unsatisfactory behavior, self-perception, or thinking and search for ways to solve those difficulties. Counseling teaches people to make decisions in complex situations and change their behavior, feelings, and thinking. Mental health specialist Genovaitė Petronienė (2017, not paginated) defines the psychologist’s function as helping a person solve a specific pressing problem, and not constantly accompanying and overseeing their consciousness. Spiritual consultants help prevent deviation from the path of life. In these definitions, the words help and assist are clearly seen, connecting these two types of counseling. Therefore, it can be argued that both during spiritual and psychological counseling sessions, the aim is to help the individual. It is important to emphasize that both processes are connected not only as means of establishing a relationship but specifically through a similar, sometimes analogous, request on behalf of the assistance seeker. It is believed that the process of assistance should be beneficial, purposeful, and results-oriented. Non-material, emotional assistance is sought in various cases, so the activities of both spiritual consultants and psychologists are related to emotional support, which is not clearly tangible or visible.

Individuals with psychological or spiritual problems turn to specialists who perceive and can address these problems, helping them understand their inner world through their presence and guidance. Consultants in both fields help the seeker overcome problems and answer questions related to personal experiences that hinder their growth and meaningful living. It is likely that a person in such a situation will deliberately and purposefully turn to a provider of assistance who, as an expert in their field, warmly welcomes the seeker, believing in what they do, and helps find appropriate methods and means for the situation. Of course, “not all psychologists are altruists, spiritual people, attentive to their clients. The same can be said about spiritual teachers, only these hide the lack of spirituality behind a mask, and psychologists – behind a professional attitude” (PSICHOLOGINĖ IR DVASINĖ PAGALBA. KĄ RINKTIS?, 2016, not paginated). When seeking assistance and believing in its effectiveness, it is important to find a consultant who matches the individual’s character, temperament, and needs, allowing for a deeper connection to be established. It is likely that both during spiritual consultations and in the psychologist’s office, positive healing results will be much more tangible when meetings between the consultant and the client are based on spirituality, where it is not just a formal, distant, or even depreciating relationship; treatment as a technical service where the client is only a service recipient (WILKINSON *et al.*, 2019, not paginated; PETRONIENĖ, 2018, not paginated). Therefore, it can be argued that both spiritual and psychological counseling are oriented towards the individual and provide psychological, spiritual, and emotional support during complex moments in their life. There may be differences in the methods of providing assistance, coping strategies, values connecting the consultant and the client, issues, and the actual course of the assistance process. Still, an honest, benevolent, and professionally working specialist should strive for one thing – to help the individual feel better in their current situation according to their competence.

Another important aspect connecting spiritual and psychological counseling is the procedures applied during the sessions. As a point of connection between these assistance methods, both counseling models function as a process – a continuous and purposeful action aiming for a specific result. To ensure a smooth and effective process, well-thought-out actions and procedures are often necessary. According to psychologist Rimantas Kočiūnas (1995), the process of psychological counseling has a clearly structured, effective, and practically grounded course, along with corresponding counseling procedures. On the other hand, spiritual counseling differs from psychological counseling in that the most crucial element in the consultation is not the technique applied by the consultant or the psychology school they adhere to, but the consultant’s person: their worldview, values, and attitude towards others. “We integrate classical and

technical knowledge of psychological sciences with a Christian worldview and beliefs,” says Dr. Father Arvydas Ramonas (ŽUKAUSKAS; RAMONAS, 2015, p. 22; LANAUSKIENĖ, 2017, not paginated). However, just as someone wishing to provide psychological assistance must have the knowledge and skills supported by education, not anyone can become a spiritual consultant. When counseling people, certain skills are required, knowledge of the nuances of counseling processes, as well as the ability to listen to the person’s needs (LANAUSKIENĖ, 2017, not paginated). So, whether providing spiritual or psychological counseling, the goal is to help individuals deal with their emotional difficulties. To provide assistance, the consultant specialist must take appropriate actions, known as counseling procedures, which gradually should yield positive results (RAGINYTĖ; OŽELIS, 2023, p. 82-84). After all, the term “procedure” itself indicates that counseling aims for positive progress in the emotional (spiritual, psychological) well-being of the individual.

3 Differences in the processes of providing spiritual and psychological assistance

Although similar counseling methods or procedures are applied, and a comparable or even identical counseling goal is discernible, spiritual counseling should not be confused with psychological counseling. Delving into both of these processes, it is crucial to observe the essential differences that distinguish these two forms of assistance. Psychologists and psychotherapists play the role of a mirror for the individual, linking their well-being with active psychological efforts to help themselves. They place hope in the importance of self-awareness and understanding various functioning peculiarities. In contrast, a spiritual assistant, when engaging in counseling, does not confine themselves to purely psychological activities; they rely on God as an ally (JUŠKIENĖ; NAVICKIENĖ, 2021, p. 131). Of course, a spiritual counselor, alongside knowledge areas such as religion, must have knowledge of psychology as well. In the process of spiritual counseling, an attempt is made to approach the individual through the prism of faith. It is believed that psychologists, in seeking to assist their clients primarily in the process of psychological counseling, focus on selecting an appropriate method of assistance. Meanwhile, in spiritual counseling, there are no finite things, the consultant is like a companion who accompanies the person in the face of serious illness, loss, or other trials (NORVILAS, 2014, not paginated). Empirically measuring the activity of a spiritual consultant would not be very meaningful. One can consider that a person has fulfilled their duty if they helped the individual solve the problem, and if they see that they cannot help on their own, they should refer them to another specialist: a psychologist,

priest, or medical professional. Thus, when it comes to choosing the appropriate method of assistance during a session, a significant and even essential difference between these two counseling methods is highlighted: during psychological counseling, the orientation is towards assistance by choosing an appropriate method, whereas in spiritual counseling, providing assistance is more related to accompanying, being present alongside the individual, when it is difficult to precisely measure the activity and effectiveness during the process.

Family and personal development center consultant Elvyra Kučinskaitė identifies certain risks when discussing psychological and spiritual counseling. According to the spiritual counselor, difficulties and threats arise when “spirituality and psychology start creeping into each other’s territory, not well acquainted with each other’s terminology, tools, and content in particular” (KUČINSKAITĖ, 2019, not paginated). Here, we can pause and discuss the differences between spiritual and psychological counseling, primarily by examining the problems that individuals seeking help face, methods of overcoming them, and the commonly applied approaches in the counseling process.

Problem-solving is a process that involves problem identification, analysis, and finding solutions. The ultimate goal of problem-solving is to overcome obstacles and find a solution that best resolves the issue. In complex situations, individuals may not always overcome the consequences of a crisis on their own. As social beings, it is acceptable and natural for people to share significant or minor life difficulties, discuss them with others, and seek support and assistance. Not always are there people nearby with whom one would like to share, perhaps there is a sense of insecurity, a lack of trust, so a psychologist or spiritual counselor can become the person who helps ease the experience of a crisis. It is considered that a significant step towards self-help is the decision to turn to a specialist for assistance. If this happens in a timely manner, it is likely that the assistance will be more effective. This emotionally challenging stage of a person’s life, requiring personal resources and the right mindset, can become a significant turning point in the individual’s healing process. The most common method applied in both spiritual and psychological counseling processes for overcoming difficulties is the creation of a relationship characterized by an atmosphere of ease and trust, established between the consulting specialist and the client during conversations. “A unique and charming aspect of counseling is that you yourself get involved in the process much more than you would apply your competence in any other way” (BLOCK, 2014, p. 31). Through communication, the consultant can gain useful information about the client, their life, personal attitudes, views, activities, thereby striving to create a close interpersonal relationship and delving into more or less suitable

methods of assistance for that individual. Although the conversation can be called a way of solving problems, looking more closely at this process, specific psychological or other types of assistance methods are applied to help the individual cope with life challenges. Techniques used in the psychologist's office that can contribute to a person's well-being include awareness of emotions, recognition and change of thoughts and beliefs, and the application of new behavioral methods (GYVENIMO POKALBIAI. PSICHOLOGINĖ PAGALBA KIEKVIENAM, 2021, not paginated; RAGINYTĖ; OŽELIS, 2022, p. 86-87). Perhaps these are not specific or exclusively applied techniques in the psychological counseling process to overcome a person's experienced difficulties, but they are essential methods that can determine the successful achievement of goals set in the counseling process.

Working with a client, a consultant typically operates on two levels: content and emotional. When it comes to emotions and their awareness, it is acknowledged that they are inseparable and inevitable factors that promote healing, cleansing the human consciousness. As American psychotherapist James Bugental states, "emotions, feelings in consulting and psychotherapy are like blood in surgery" (KOČIŪNAS, 1995, p. 94). Understanding and reflecting the client's feelings is considered one of the most important methods used in counseling. Once identified and named, there is a natural process of internalizing these emotions. It is likely that the sooner a person becomes aware of emerging feelings or expressed emotions and tries to determine the causes of their manifestation, "the faster they can discover how to direct actions in the desired direction" (STANČIKAS, 2018, paginated). To achieve this, specialists suggest using self-analysis methods and dedicating time to reviewing past events. Specifically, during counseling, the client's self-analysis or reflection on significant past events takes place with the consultant's assistance, or as a spiritual counseling specialist would express it, accompanying the person, walking together side by side. Throughout the counseling process, the specialist acts as a mirror to help the client recognize and reflect on what is heard, paying attention not only to the words and their content but also to the expressed emotional tone. Thus, the person hears what is said to them and can help themselves accept the experienced feelings, sometimes mitigating them, as strongly expressed negative emotions can interfere with the development of the relationship between the consultant and the client.

The individual's desire to recognize and change their beliefs, thoughts, or behaviors that hinder peaceful living prompts them to seek spiritual or psychological help. Specialists apply appropriate methods of assistance that can help eliminate ingrained factors preventing harmonious living. In the specialist's office, the methods of calming and encourag-

ing the client to change are applied. “It is especially important to create a supportive atmosphere in which the client feels free to explore any troubling aspects” (KOČIŪNAS, 1995, p. 92). Clients are usually encouraged with short phrases that reveal approval for what is said or encourage further conversation. This is an essential part of effective listening, contributing to the progress of the consultation. Thus, effective listening is another tool that can become significant in addressing the client’s problems. To change undesirable behavior, specialists use the method of situation modeling during counseling, allowing a better and more critical understanding of what is happening, and by changing and modeling the situation, seeking and applying different behavioral patterns in the future. Summarizing the thought of American consultant Peter Block (1995, p. 35), it can be said that the effectiveness of counseling is closely related to the consultant’s beliefs and assumptions. In other words, the consultant, applying chosen methods of assistance in the counseling process, should first believe in their effectiveness and see the perspectives of help. Searching for ways of overcoming challenges applied differently in psychological and spiritual counseling, assumptions arise because it is assumed that these two methods of assistance are quite similar, and the process of providing help depends on the consultants’ competencies and, in their opinion, effective methods that they consciously choose to apply during counseling. However, several moments can be distinguished, which are likely to be more acceptable to a psychologist but not a spiritual consultant and vice versa.

In the world, there is a vast diversity of psychotherapeutic theories and methods, various branches of psychology, each differing in its approach to the therapeutic relationship, applied procedures, and methods of working with clients. The effectiveness of each is debatable; nevertheless, psychology specialists align themselves with one direction and accordingly apply acceptable methods and models of assistance (BANDZEVIČIENĖ, 2011, p. 10–12). One of the more distinctive but likely methods for overcoming difficulties applied in a psychologist’s office is the use of assistance tools oriented toward the creative process and artistic practices during counseling. This can involve drawing using various art tools, ceramics or textile work during sessions. These applied techniques help individuals express their feelings and emotions. In each case, art therapy tools are applied, considering the needs and goals of the group or individual: the creative process can help solve psychological problems, adjust behavior and emotions, reduce stress, and increase self-confidence. To achieve an impact, an essential phase of the applied method for overcoming difficulties is feedback, narrating and analyzing the created art pieces while attempting to open up (KLIMAITĖ, 2019, not paginated; WILKINSON *et al.*, 2019, not paginated; RAGINYTĖ; OŽELIS, 2023, p. 88-89).

Another method applied in a psychologist's office that can help overcome personal difficulties is mindful awareness. This method of assistance aims for complete focus of the mind on what is happening in the present moment. Often, we find ourselves thinking about everything except what is happening here and now. It may seem easy to focus on the present moment, but for many, it can be a challenge. It is therefore suggested to practice this skill through meditation, choosing the most suitable option for each person. "Scientists have found that the practice of mindfulness can alleviate almost all psychological sufferings, starting from everyday worries, neurotic habits, dissatisfaction, and ending with deeper problems such as anxiety, substance abuse, depression or emotional eating" (MEŠKAUSKYTĖ, 2021, paginated). Thus, the practice of mindfulness can be especially effective as a self-help tool to feel better, and for a psychologist, it can be an effective method of providing assistance in counseling. However, this practice is critically viewed from the perspective of Christianity. "Bishops of the Catholic Church in Spain warned that mindfulness meditation is incompatible with Christian prayer practices and cautioned that Catholics practicing it risk their faith" (PRICHINAS, 2019, not paginated). This statement is based on the idea that meditation and prayer methods that are foreign or even hostile to Christian beliefs, applied to meet the growing need for emotional well-being, can cause even greater confusion for believers. Therefore, it can be argued that mindful awareness, or mindfulness meditation, is unacceptable for a consultant who adheres to Christianity. Thus, it is likely that this method of assistance is rarely applied in the process of spiritual counseling.

Moving on to the methods of overcoming difficulties applied in the process of spiritual counseling, it would probably be unequivocal to agree that the most frequently mentioned and practically applied tool, beneficial in the process of human healing, is prayer. The prayer of the praying person is usually directed towards personal matters. Such prayers support the essence of the praying person. They can strengthen, purify, and comfort (ILGEVIČIUS; ILGEVICIENĖ, 2013, p. 13; RAGINYTĖ; OŽELIS, 2022, p. 89-90). In the case of psychological counseling, this aspect is often overlooked, while in the office of a spiritual counselor, the relationship of the sufferer not only with themselves but also with God should be essential. If understood and applied correctly, prayer can significantly strengthen that relationship and help the person seeking assistance feel better. Perhaps the words of the prayer are not as crucial as how sincerely we pray and whether we believe in the power of our prayer.

Consultants Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins distinguish three models of prayer. The first is the consultant's prayer, where "the consultant should pray for clarity to diagnose the problem properly and pray for wisdom

to understand the solution that would help the client" (LAZDAUSKAITĖ, 2013, p. 12). Then there is the client's prayer, where a person purposefully prays for themselves or, together with the consultant, turns to God for help. It is likely that such conversations with God, praying during meetings, can nurture the client's faith. The third type of prayer is the healing prayer, where one prays for people in need of healing or help. Summing up these prayer models, it can be said that "prayer is a call for help to Him, as though He hears and sees everything, but cannot interfere without being asked" (ILGEVIČIUS; ILGEVIČIENĖ, 2013, p. 21). So, as in any practice of assistance applied by a specialist, the inner belief of the consultant in what they do is important, and when praying during a consultation or another chosen time and it is crucial to maintain faith in what is requested in the prayer, as it helps to open up and not to close oneself off.

In the process of spiritual counseling, an important part of human self-improvement is the reading of spiritual texts. During consultations, one can read excerpts from the Holy Scriptures or other spiritual texts and discuss them with the consultant, seeking answers to pressing questions, finding solutions to arising problems, and growing spiritually. "Indeed, reading today is either a punishment or a mistake. We read for exams, for work, or to 'kill' time. However, reading can have a much nobler purpose – to provide continuous spiritual nourishment, not just be a source of information or a means of cultivating taste" (ELIADE, 2015, paginated). Reading in the consultant's office, discussing spiritual readings, and collectively analyzing them might provide a broader perspective on the difficulties experienced. The interpretation of the thoughts read could enhance self-confidence, belief in oneself, in God, and in the help provided by Him. "We all know that life comes with ups and downs; sometimes our daily experiences may not be enough for the day's events, and difficulties can crush us. Spiritual readings are strong enough to help create a sense of existence that could protect from endless disappointments that come with life" (DVASINIAI SKAITINIAI: KAIP TAI GALI PADĖTI PAGERINTI JŪSŲ GYVENIMĄ, 2023, not paginated).

Speaking specifically about reading the Holy Scriptures, one can employ the method of bibliotherapy, which helps find a path for addressing many psychological problems: hope is born, feelings become clearer, relationships with others improve, and the meaning of life is discovered. Processes related to personal development and health take place (LEONOVIEŅĖ; SUČYLAITĖ, 2019, not paginated). The Bible can be read in various ways: individually, followed by discussions with a consultant about what has been read, or in a group setting. The therapist is needed to help experience and understand the emotions caused by the content read, to see with the mind and heart how one could continue living (LEONOVIEŅĖ; SUČYLAITĖ,

2019, not paginated). Although we are discussing bibliotherapy here as a specific form of therapy rather than a method for overcoming difficulties, the benefits of reading the Holy Scriptures for a suffering individual are emphasized. Therefore, a spiritual consultant's suggestion to read the Holy Scriptures or another spiritual text together with the client may positively impact emotional well-being, aid in overcoming traumas, or help "see with the mind and heart how one could continue living" (LEONOVIENTĖ; SUČYLAITĖ, 2019, not paginated). Bibliotherapy helps the spiritual consultant decode problems so that the person can grow spiritually.

Beside the physical and psychological dimensions, the spiritual dimension is equally important for a well-rounded human life, encompassing the pursuit of meaning, the realization of life goals, creativity, imagination, intuition, and the ability to love and listen to the voice of conscience. The core of a person's spirituality is subconscious and not entirely consciously comprehensible (PERMINAS *et al.*, 2004, p. 121). Spiritual life is human life in the sense that it is intended for the human subject, and it must be allowed to manifest itself in certain visible signs. Providing psychological assistance and emotional support involves dealing with assistance providers and recipients who have different spiritual experiences and values. Their encounter might pose challenges for both the one seeking help and the one trying to provide assistance. According to psychology professor Jean-Francois Catalan (2003, p. 13), "when a psychologist encounters an experience, attitude, or behavior that is considered spiritual, or, in other words, with spiritual (or claiming to be) life and various expressions thereof (prayer, ritual gestures, ethical choices, etc.), he does not aim to be a philosopher (at least not initially), nor a theologian, let alone a doctor. He takes the position of an observer, primarily trying to understand." Unfortunately, spiritual life and related matters in psychology are often oversimplified, explained, and interpreted from a clinical perspective. In such cases, the suffering individual may feel misunderstood, and the consulting specialist may not fully grasp the true distress of the person seeking help. Psychologist and psychotherapist Lina Vėžalienė sees a paradoxical situation where in psychology, which studies and analyzes human character with increasingly sophisticated tests, you will not find a single suggestion on how to treat a person from spiritual and mental health impairing disorders (VĖŽELIENĖ, 2021, p. 34). Renowned psychiatrist Dr. Viktor Frankl writes that "all too often, psychotherapy is insistently demanded to solve problems akin to spiritual ones; because even though it does not know it and does not want to know it, psychotherapy inevitably has some features of spiritual guidance. Often, it has to perform interventions of a spiritual guidance nature" (FRANKL, 2022, p. 296). Thus, psychologists, employing various work methods and adhering to different values, touch upon the spiritual world of a person in their work (RAGINYTĖ; OŽELIS, 2023, p. 91-93).

It is likely that a specialist and a client with similar spiritual experiences will achieve better results in the process of providing assistance compared to those whose perceptions and significance of spirituality in their lives differ. This could be referred to as the power of dialogue (CATALAN, 2003, p. 155). The extent to which the dialogue between the consultant and the client unfolds will determine how well they get to know and understand each other. Jesus Christ said to the Samaritan woman, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink" (John 4:10). These words could be significant for participants in the process of spiritual or psychological assistance because only when the participants know each other can they expect to benefit from the gift sent by God – the possibility of healing. It is natural that everyone with greater or lesser spiritual experiences would want to avail themselves of this gift. Typically, spiritual experience reflects a person's spiritual maturity, and a spiritually mature person is inseparable from self-analysis, introspection, evaluating life and the world, and making important life decisions. Therefore, it can be stated that a person's spiritual experience can indeed influence the counseling process – both spiritually and psychologically – as the level of spiritual experience can determine the difficulties a person faces, their perception of these difficulties, and their ability to address them. The question posed in the Gospel of Luke, "Can the blind lead the blind?" (Luke 6:39), illustrates the importance of being honest with oneself and correctly perceiving one's abilities and limitations. In the counseling process, it is essential to help the person in distress choose the right specialist, while the specialist should be willing to accept the client and not be afraid of their own limitations.

Conclusion

The constant emergence of epistemological problems in theology and psychology is inherent, as the needs of 21st-century individuals pose new challenges. The search for new paradigms and points of connection between spiritual counseling and psychological counseling directs the work of theologians and psychologists towards a point where the knowledge of theology and psychology becomes integral and practically beneficial to society. In modern society, as in all eras, humans continue to raise fundamental questions of existence: What is the meaning of life? What is spirituality? How to address spiritual issues? Undoubtedly, there is a noticeable need and benefit for spiritual counseling as it seeks to respond to the spiritual needs of contemporary individuals. Although spiritual counseling is still seeking clear boundaries and definitions of its operation, it becomes quite clear that spiritual counseling has unique features and is not equivalent to psychological counseling.

Of course, spiritual counseling is not too far removed from psychological counseling, and there are common aspects found in both forms of counseling. The priority of a spiritual counselor is existential questions, the search for answers to life, suffering, death, love, and other issues. In spiritual counseling, the approach to individuals is through the lens of faith, so assistance can be enriched with specific spiritual practices: prayer, forgiveness, sacraments, bibliotherapy. A distinctive element in spiritual counseling is not the methods applied by the counselor but the counselor's personality – their worldview, beliefs, values, and attitude towards others.

Both spiritual and psychological counseling are oriented towards individuals, providing psychological, spiritual, and emotional support during complex moments in their lives. Various methods of assistance, problem-solving approaches, shared values between the counselor and the client, and differences in the help process itself may be applied in counseling. However, in both cases, honest, benevolent, and professionally skilled specialists aim for a common goal – helping individuals feel better during challenging situations. Therefore, both spiritual and psychological counseling should assist individuals in overcoming their emotional difficulties. Counseling aims for emotional, spiritual, or psychological personal progress and positive changes. The concept of spiritual counseling intersects with the concept of psychological counseling when the assistance provided by specialists is directed towards individuals experiencing crises or internal traumas.

Despite the existing similarities, these counseling models are applied as distinct ways of providing assistance, guided by different goals, values, or attitudes by the help providers and those seeking help. Spiritual counseling can be understood as spiritual and psychological support for individuals during difficult moments in their lives, focusing more on existential questions and aiming to help overcome spiritual crises, guided by Christian attitudes. Meanwhile, psychological counseling is more understood as the psychological assistance of a professionally prepared counselor, based on scientifically grounded methods, for individuals facing everyday difficulties and experiences. By familiarizing oneself with the processes of spiritual counseling and psychological counseling, one can discover the connections and differences between these approaches. It is evident that in both counseling processes, the aim is to help the seeker cope with emotional difficulties, with the main difference being the religious, belief-related level and its influence on the choice of the specialist and the problem or crisis situation prompting the seeking of help. In the process of psychological counseling, the consulting specialist adheres to the principles of solving psychological problems, while in the case of spiritual counseling, emphasis is placed on the element

of faith, the counselor's value scale, and adherence to moral principles during counseling. Psychological counseling focuses on human behavior, feelings, experiences (including religious ones) but does not raise the question of the existence of God, while a spiritual counselor does not limit themselves to just psychological activities but relies on God as a partner. In further studies, it would be advisable to explore the historical development of spiritual guidance in early Christian communities and monasteries, as well as in non-Christian religions, especially Judaism and Buddhism. Investigating points of intersection of spiritual counseling in different religions and confessions would be beneficial.

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