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Review

Defences, Human Nature, and Spiritual Awakening: A Christian Counselling Perspective

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Abstract: This article delves into the intricacies of human defences in various domains, including the biological and psychological responses to protect oneself, and the abstract concept of sacrificing one's life to uphold ethical, moral, religious, and spiritual values. While physical, psychological, and moral values have been attended to in counselling, regard for the religious and spiritual aspects is still developing. As the author writes from a Christian perspective, Christian faith and values are considered. It is posited that a study of human nature, as presented in the Christian Bible, can facilitate a profound comprehension of human defences. The paper scrutinizes the correlation between "human defences" and "Christian spirituality" through a Christian lens on human nature. Furthermore, it introduces the idea of "spiritual defence" and how it is related to a spiritual awakening.

1. Introduction

Concerns about integrating psychology and Christian faith peaked in the 1960s (Worthington 2010, p. 33). One of the contentious issues between Christian theologians and psychologists was over the defence mechanism. Christian theologians criticized the idea on the basis that defence mechanisms could allow people to deceive themselves and thereby avoid taking responsibility, preventing them from addressing the issue of sin (see Powlison 2003, pp. 16–19). In contrast, secular psychologists believe that people often use religious or spiritual practices to evade their emotional problems or unfinished business; such a practice is also a type of defence mechanism, namely, spiritual bypassing (see Picclotto et al. 2017, pp. 2–3; Welwood 2000, pp. 11–12). Thoughts such as these might be influenced by Sigmund Freud's view that the concept of God is simply a projection of human qualities, emotions, and repressed desires onto a divine figure (see Galatariotou 2005, pp. 24–25; Fromm 1950, p. 12). Although more studies have been undertaken on integrating these two approaches in Christian counselling in recent decades,[1] there are still many gaps in the literature that need to be filled, in order to have a deeper understanding of the relationship between human defences and Christian spirituality.

2. The Significance of Defences and Human Nature in Counselling

The understanding of defence mechanisms plays a crucial role in counselling because it profoundly influences the perception of the client's emotions, behaviours, and internal and interpersonal interactions.[2] It is contended that humans use defence mechanisms to avoid either facing discomfort or to repress desires (see Greenberg and Mitchell 1983, p. 235; Burgo 2012, p. ix). Sigmund Freud was the first to explore defences, and he concluded that there are various forms of defences used to release anxieties.[3] It is called a "mechanism" because the defences are regarded as mechanically responsive and "denote how a particular defence works" (Galatariotou 2005, p. 18). In addition, they are automatic responses to various situations that could stem from childhood experiences (see Greenberg and Mitchell 1983, pp. 297–98).

This article investigates the possible connection between "human defences" and "Christian spirituality". It examines the characteristics of human defences from the Christian perspective on the nature of humanity. The author opines that a thorough understanding of these two areas can provide Christian counsellors with valuable insights into the counselling process and spiritual growth. This knowledge can equip Christian counsellors with the tools to help others in achieving greater spiritual fulfilment.

3. Defence in Three Dimensions

Discussion in the following encompasses defences in three dimensions, namely, physiological, psychological, and abstract levels (ethical and Christian spiritual).[4] Defences happen not necessarily in an either–or but also in both an unconscious and conscious state.[5] Generally, human defence mechanisms safeguard life from physical and psychological harm. However, humans also tend to protect abstract values, such as moral/ethical or spiritual/religious beliefs, for which they may be willing to sacrifice their lives. Therefore, human defence mechanisms can be categorized into multiple types.

3.1. Defence from a Physiological Perspective

Humans, animals, and plants are born with a defence mechanism that protects them and endows them with the basic survival ability. For example, the thorns on the stems of cactuses (plants) are used for protection, and the spikes on the bodies of porcupines (animals) are used for defence. These are innate defensive means for plants and animals. Similarly, humans also have an innate physiological ability to defend and protect themselves, such as the immune system, in which white blood cells can help the body fight bacterial infections (Lam 2023, pp. 590–91; see also Grossman and Wilson 1992, p. 5; Galatariotou 2005, p. 15).

3.2. Defence from a Psychological Perspective

The term "psychological defence mechanism" describes a psychological mechanism for coping with intrapsychic stimuli, which helps resolve inner conflicts when internal or external stressors trigger a person (Northoff et al. 2007, pp. 141–42). Freud discovered that humans would unconsciously use different means to repel painful thoughts and emotions away from their consciousness, to protect the inner self and reduce the risk of internal conflicts (Freud 1915, pp. 125–28; Peters 1956, pp. 5–8). According to Freud, the human mind consists of the "id", "ego", and "superego" (Blanck and Blanck 1974, p. 22). The id is an entirely unconscious part of the mind which tends to seek pleasure and gratification (Galatariotou 2005, p. 17). The ego represents the conscious aspect of the mind, but it also operates unconsciously in the intricate process of adapting to reality (Blanck and Blanck 1974, p. 22; Galatariotou 2005, p. 17). It has the ability to reason and make a balance to fight against the influence of unacceptable impulses or desires from the id, and thus exercises a central functional control (see Freud 1966, pp. 472, 503, 510; Galatariotou 2005, pp. 15–18). The superego is partly conscious, which harbours the conscience, moral, and unconscious sense of guilt (Gay 1989, p. xx). Freud's daughter, Anna Freud, opined that the superego, with a defence effect, internalizes feelings of guilt from parental figures in the state of unconsciousness (Galatariotou 2005, pp. 27–28).

3.3. Defence on an Abstract Level

Humans differ from animals and plants because their desire to protect extends beyond physical life. While animals and plants have defence mechanisms to protect their lives, humans may establish boundaries to preserve their values and principles. Humans may even sacrifice their own lives to protect the values and beliefs of others. In Freud's view, this is the function of the superego, which emphasizes the importance of conscience and morality in the human mind. To him, the superego is an essential component of the mind that guides us towards making ethical and moral choices. The choice to prioritize the

community's needs over our instinctual desires is crucial to human behaviour (Freud 1966, p. 27). The essence of ethical/moral defences can be clarified by the following examples.

3.3.1. Chinese Moral Tradition

The teachings of Mencius, a Chinese philosopher from the 4th century BCE, emphasize choosing righteousness over life. The original text and a translation of the lesson are provided below:

> 魚，我所欲也，熊掌，亦我所欲也，二者不可得兼，捨魚而取熊掌者也；生，亦我所欲也，義，亦我所欲也，二者不可得兼，捨生而取義也。《告子上》

> I like to eat fish, but I also want to eat the palms of bears. I prefer the latter and give up the former when choosing one.

> I like life, but I also like righteousness; if I had to choose one, I would choose righteousness and give up life. (translation mine)

Mencius was a philosopher whose teachings greatly influenced Chinese culture. One of his most important teachings was being faithful to one's master and righteous towards others. This virtue has been accepted by Chinese people for centuries and is considered a standard of Confucianism. According to this teaching, even when facing danger or death, one must hold on to virtue and consider it the highest value. This is known as an ethical or moral defence. The motivation for following this teaching may vary from genuine faithfulness to a fear of damaging one's reputation if the virtue is not upheld.

3.3.2. Judeo-Christian Traditions of Martyrdom

There are many stories of martyrdom in the Judeo-Christian literature, but because of limited scope, we will take up only the martyrdom of the mother and her seven sons, as recorded in the book of 2 Maccabees, as an illustration.[6]

2 Maccabees 7.1-42 records one of the most known martyrdom stories in Jewish history. It was the time when the Seleucids (Greek) began to rule Palestine (198 BCE); King Antiochus the IV (175–163 BCE) suspected that the Jewish religion was the biggest obstacle to the Jews being Hellenized and submitting to Hellenistic rule. He tried to eradicate the Jewish religious influence by erecting Greek temples and ordering the Jews to eat pork, such actions that the Jews took to be most profane and blasphemous to God. According to the 2 Maccabees, chapter seven, Antiochus the IV arrested a mother and her seven sons. He ordered the young men to eat pork, but they denied the king's order one after another. They were consequently tortured to death in front of the mother. At last, the mother was killed, too.

It appeared that the mother and the seven sons chose to die, rather than gave up their religious maxims. There are different reasons to explain why someone might choose to become a martyr. The words of the sons and the mother may be taken by secular psychologists as a kind of spiritual by-passing, because they accepted their death as dying for the divine Law given to their ancestors (vv. 2, 11, 37), it may even have a redeeming effect for the nation (v.7), and, finally, the tyrant will be condemned (vv.17, 19) and they will be restored to heaven (9, 14). All these may look like self-comforting words, camouflages, or deliberations, made up to cover inner fear and emotions, functioning as a sort of spiritual bypassing, but they can also be considered, of course, as demonstrations of genuine faithfulness to God, a way to protect one's reputation or to please a divine figure. In whichever interpretation, the story highlights the willingness of humans to sacrifice life for a higher value, which consequently breaks the natural defence mechanism.

3.3.3. Reflections on the Teaching of Mencius and the Martyrdom Story in 2 Maccabees 7:1–42

In both cases, the fear of being defamed or the divine being blasphemed is a driving factor. However, there are significant differences between the two scenarios. Mencius' proclamation is not connected to divine revenge or afterlife hope, while the martyred sons

believed that God would reward them with eternal life and punish the tyrant, thus making their defence religious or spiritual. Therefore, the former can be seen as a defence of ethical or moral reasons, while the latter is based on religious or spiritual grounds.

The illustrations above show that conscious and rational choices can be used to defend moral, ethical, or religious beliefs. However, it is essential to remember that the force behind those decisions may result from early education or indoctrination during childhood. As a result, these beliefs may arise unconsciously without undergoing rational thinking.

3.4. Defence Mechanisms Can Be Healthy or Unhealthy

Having a healthy defence mechanism is a positive trait that helps individuals to cope with anxiety, fear, or pain and even to endure pain temporarily. However, people may sometimes develop defence mechanisms against unpleasant experiences, due to the accumulation of pain and negative experiences in the past. This can become troublesome in life (Lam 2023, p. 592; see also Carmer 2000, p. 640). Defence mechanisms can be harmful if misused, thus preventing individuals from addressing and resolving their issues. This can also hinder their ability to form authentic connections with others (Lam 2023, p. 592; see also Horowitz 1988, p. 187).

Depending on the situation, moral and ethical defences can be considered healthy. For instance, the martyrdom of the mother and her seven sons or anyone who died for righteousness can be seen as good and healthy because they died for their ultimate concern, which allowed them to fulfil their life's purpose. People who share the same concern consider this type of death heroic and glorious. However, it can be unhealthy if their ultimate concern is based on an untrue ideology, or if they are dedicated to a false figure, like a tyrant. This kind of blind faithfulness is then foolish and misguided.

Whether a moral or ethical choice is healthy depends on whether it is based on truth. However, it is challenging to determine what the truth is. Moral choices guided by the superego (the agency of our conscience) are often influenced by external factors, group ethics, or environmental conditions.[7] In such cases, truth is often replaced by social recognition. Unfortunately, this can lead to misguided moral choices, as has happened repeatedly throughout history.

4. The Human Nature from the Christian Biblical Perspectives

To discuss spiritual defence from a Christian perspective, we must first understand what the Bible says about humanity. According to the book of Genesis, chapter 1, verse 26, God created man (*adam*), and gave him dominion over all other creatures, including the fish in the sea, birds of the air, cattle, wild animals, and all creeping things upon the earth (*adamah*). This description, along with Genesis 1:28, reveals two things: first, the relationship between humans and the earth, as seen from the etymology of the words *adam* and *adamah*; second, the human position as masters of the other creatures. Additionally, since humans are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26), they are endowed with unique dignity. Therefore, humans are distinct from animals, from other beings, and even from the creator (Wine 1997, p. 340).

4.1. Humans as a Unit Whole

The Hebrew understanding of human nature is unique and reflected in the language used throughout the Bible. However, when the Old Testament (OT) is translated into Greek, i.e., Septuagint (*LXX*, ca. 200 BCE), it has the potential to introduce the Greek perspective on human nature into Christian theology, which may result in some misleading conclusions (Wolff 1974, p. 7). For instance, the Greek words soul (*psychē*) and body (*sōma*) may incorrectly give the reader the view that humans are composed of two distinguished entities, because the words are used in such a way outside the Christian domain (Taylor 1992, p. 321). Therefore, in the beginning, we have to stress that, in biblical and Hebrew thought, the human person is a unity, which is different from the dichotomic or even trichotomic Greek thought on the nature of humans.[8]

Bultmann asserts that "*sōma* (body) is not something that outwardly clings to a man's real self, but belongs to the real essence. We can say that man does not *have a 'sōma;'* he *is 'sōma.'*" He continues, "*Man, his person as a whole,* can be denoted by *sōma*" (Bultmann 1952, pp. 194–95, italics original).[9]

The different terms about the nature of humans do not mean that humans have different "parts" separated from each other, but instead allow us to "clarify for ourselves the peculiarity of the human existence, i.e., the formal structures of this existence" (Bultmann 1952, p. 192). Or as Wolff states, "The variants indicate different aspects of the same subject" (Wolff 1974, p. 7). Here, we need to pay attention to the word "aspect", which underlines that the different terms are not indications of different parts but the different aspects of humans in their virtual existence as humans.

4.2. The Different Aspects of Human Nature

Below is a sketch of the Bible's different terms, which tells us the different aspects of humans in the Biblical view. We shall concentrate on the most important ones, which might not only be significant in Christian counselling but also have a bearing on the integration of psychology and Christian faith.

4.2.1. Body (*Basar*, *Sarx*, and *Sōma*)

The Hebrew word for body is *basar*. The *LXX* uses two different words to translate *basar*, i.e., *sōma* (body) and *sarx* (flesh). Both refer to the human body, "with no differences in meaning" (Bultmann 1952, p. 200), although the word "*sōma* (body) has no direct equivalent in Hebrew" (Dunn James 1998, p. 54).

Basar

Basar occurs 273 times in the OT, more than one-third of which are used in connections with animals. The rest are related to humans, but never in connection to God (Wolff 1974, pp. 26, 32). According to Wolff, *basar* tends to be fragile and corrupt (Wolff 1974, pp. 30–31). It has the character of being unreliable, weak, and prone to sin. Such ideas are also found in the Pauline use of the word *sarx* (flesh). For Paul, *sarx* is "a sinful power at enmity with God" (Bultmann 1952, p. 200). The fragility of *sarx* (flesh) includes moral weaknesses, flaws, and the destructive power evident in its hostility to God (see Dunn James 1998, pp. 62–69). The problem of the flesh is not that it is sinful, but that humans are "vulnerable to the manipulation of its desires and needs as flesh" (Dunn James 1998, p. 70). No wonder Paul said that those who desire the "flesh" are tantamount to being sold to sin (Romans 7:14).

Sōma

Sōma appears over 50 times in the seven letters generally recognized as written by Paul. Although *sōma* shares some of the negative characteristics of *sarx*,[10] it nevertheless contains specific significant characteristics which are not only important to the understanding of the nature of humans in the Pauline way but are also relevant to the topics discussed in this paper, i.e., "human defence and Christian counselling". The body (*sōma*) is not just the physical part of a human being but the embodiment of the whole person, the "I" that can act and relate to both the natural and the social environment, the world per se. Thus, *sōma* denotes human nature in relation to God and the world (Dunn James 1998, p. 53). Bultmann stressed that humans also can have a relationship with themselves (the self), and "this relationship can be an appropriate or a perverted one; that he can be at one with himself or odds" (Bultmann 1952, pp. 197–98).

Concerning defence mechanisms, a human being is by nature like other animals, trying hard to avoid dangers in order to protect life. However, because of humans' unique relationship with the creator, it is within the instincts of humans to prevent themselves from becoming victims to outside powers, so that a harmonious relationship between the self and the creator God can be maintained.[11] When a human falls under the attack of sin

and the weaknesses of the flesh, there appears "a cleft within man, and so great a tension between self and self" (Bultmann 1952, p. 199) that the human yearns for redemption and reconciliation. (Romans 7:24).

4.2.2. Soul (*Nephesh*, *Psychē*) and Spirit (*Ruach*, *Pneuma*)
Soul (*Nephesh*, *Psychē*)

The Hebrew word for the "soul" is *nephesh*; in the *LXX*, the translation of *nephesh* is *psychē*, and English renders *nephesh* as soul. Wolff says, "*n.* is designed to be seen together with the whole form of man…man does not have *n.*, he lives as *n*" (Wolff 1974, p. 10). In a different way expressing the same thought, Robinson asserts, "The body is the soul in its outward form" (Robinson 1952, p. 14). Similarly, Bultmann states that there is "the term *psychē* (soul), so often used with *sōma* to designate man in his entirety" (Bultmann 1952, p. 203).

The above statements show clearly that *nephesh*, just as *sōma*, represents the whole person. In this regard, there is a significant difference between Hebraic and Greek anthropology. In the Greek usage, "*Psychē*" is the essential core of a human, which can be separated from his body and which does not share in the body's dissolution, and the Greek concept of "the immorality of the soul" originated here (Dunn James 1998, p. 76).[12]

Wolff notes that, in the OT, the word *nephesh* denotes many different imageries, i.e., the neck, throat, desires, soul, life, and the person. All of these are related to human characteristics and needs; for instance, desires, deficiencies, vulnerabilities, and different emotions (Wolff 1974, pp. 11–25). *Psychē* in the *LXX* expresses a person's vitality and refers to the human life force. Genesis 2:7 reports that "the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath (*nesamah*) of life, and the man became a living being".[13] (*nephesh*) This verse clearly shows a relationship between humans as living beings and the breath of God. The word breath (*nesamah*) and the word *ruach* (wind/spirit) are close synonyms (Dunn James 1998, p. 77).

Spirit (*Ruach*, *Pneuma*)

Spirit (*Ruach*) appears in the OT 389 times, of which 136 are applied to God and only 129 to humans, animals, and false gods. It is translated as wind, because it is related to natural force as well (Wolff 1974, p. 33). Bultmann says that the human has a spirit, which means that "He is a person who lives in his intentionality, his pursuit of some purpose, his willing and knowing" (Bultmann 1952, p. 209). Thus, with the spirit, the human is empowered.[14] When the spirit of Yahweh comes to the prophet, it means God's authorization, or the prophet, has become God's hand (Isaiah 42:1). Genesis 2:7 shows that the "spirit" is the most direct connection between humans and God, and the "spirit" carries the vitality from God. For Paul, the human's "spirit" must be united with God's "spirit" to be awakened and to live a complete and powerful life, able to defend themselves from the fleshy (*sarx*) inner anxieties and conflicts (Romans 8:9–11).

4.2.3. Heart (*Leb*, *Kardia*) and Mind (*Nous*)
Heart (*Leb*, *Kardia*)

The Hebrew word for "heart" is *leb*. Wolff pointed out that "heart" is the most crucial word in the OT study of anthropology.[15] The heart denotes emotion, feeling, desire, reason, conscience, mind, will, and so on. It allows humans the rationality to understand, reflect, distinguish between good and evil, and plan for the future. Humans may have wise hearts but also broken and fearful hearts. Hearts can be hardened or softened. The OT regards the "heart" as the seat of human life. The heart plays a crucial role in human life, because it is the heart which responds to God's word.[16]

The *LXX* translates *leb* as κορδία (*kardia*, heart). The word refers to the deepest inner part of a person, encompassing their thoughts, will, reason, emotions, and other aspects that contribute to their choices, abilities, and position. The heart can also affect one's decision to draw closer to or distance themselves from God (Dunn James 1998, pp. 74–75).

The importance of the heart in this aspect can be illustrated by Proverbs 4:23, which says, "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life".

Mind (*Nous*)

Nous occurs 28 times in the New Testament, of which 25 are in the Pauline writings. Dunn related *nous* (mind) and *leb* (*kardia*, heart) as a pair, because both stress the human's reasoning power and rationality (Dunn James 1998, p. 73). Wolff did not mention the word, because *nous* is a Greek concept. However, when he discussed the word *leb* (heart), he said that *leb* includes the characteristics of the mind and how a human being can judge right from wrong (Wolff 1974, pp. 51–55). Dunn contested that *nous*, in Greek thought, is the highest-level part of human beings. It is related to rationally evaluating sacred matters and identifying and understanding God's law. Thus, the transformation of Christians is through the renewal of the *nous* (Dunn James 1998, pp. 73–74).

4.3. Summary: Human, as a Unit Whole and the Functions of Its Different Aspects

The analysis of the different aspects related to human nature above, i.e., in Hebrew: *basar*, *nephes*, *ruach* and *leb* and in Greek: *sōma*, *sarx*, *psychē*, *pneuma*, *kardia* and *nous*, as found in the Christian Bible, can be simply summed up as in the following. The *sarx* (flesh) tends to be weak, and humans are easily tempted. The desires of the soul (*psychē*) can be hard to be satisfied. Therefore, humans often are driven by inner desires, allowing themselves to fall into sin. Since the *nous* (mind) and the *kardia* (heart) can distinguish right from wrong, human life often struggles between submission to the good or to the bad. The key lies in the orientation of the heart. If the heart relies firmly on the Lord and human's *pneuma* (spirit) is open and connected to the Spirit of God, the weakness of the flesh can be overcome, and true peace (*shalom*) can be obtained. Readers who are familiar with the Freudian "structural model of personality theory" would not find it difficult to discover the similar tone and functions between the different aspects of human nature and the basic elements of the force of drive, namely, the id, ego, and superego. This will become extraordinarily significant in the future discussion of "defence mechanisms" between psychology and Christian faith.[17]

4.4. Spiritual Defence from the Perspective of Christian Spirituality

Recently, counsellors and psychologists have paid more attention to the spiritual part of the client, although the definitions of "spiritual" may vary (Hansen et al. 2023). What is "spiritual defence?"[18] Spiritual defence refers to defences related to the divine. There are several examples to elaborate this, as set out below:

In Christian belief, the relationship between human and God was broken after Adam and Eve sinned, and the human "body" and "soul/spirit" became weak and self-centred. They want to protect themselves to avoid sin, but the actual result is that they sin more. They want to please God, but in reality, they drift further away from the divine. Although they are endowed with reason (*kardia* and *nous*, the heart and the mind) and given the Law, which tells them right and wrong, they cannot follow with absolute obedience. Subsequently, fear arises, and a cry of desperation, echoing Romans 7:24, that sounds, "How could we become righteous and be released from God's wrath?" Further below is the story of Adam and Eve, which the present author regards as a good illustration of an unhealthy spiritual defence.

Like physiological and psychological defence mechanisms, spiritual defence can also be divided into healthy and unhealthy categories. The following two examples belong to the latter, while the remaining two belong to the former, spiritual awakening.

4.4.1. Two Examples of Unhealthy Spiritual Defence[19]

Adam and Eve: It Is the Other's Responsibility

The loss of human relationships begins with sin. The Law enables people to know right and wrong. When humans violate the Law and commit sin, they fear that punishment

will come from the Lawgiver (God), and, unconsciously, they want to escape from God's judgment. Genesis 2:16–17 says, "…the Lᴏʀᴅ God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die".' This was a commandment given by God to mankind. But Adam and Eve violated it. Chapter Three of the book of Genesis vividly tells how Adam and Eve ate the tree's fruit and tried to escape punishment.

First, they hid themselves in the bushes to avoid God. When God called Adam and asked, "Where are you?" Adam told God that he had heard God's voice. He was so afraid because he was naked, and that was why he hid himself. And God said to him, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" Adam said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit from the tree, and I ate". Then, God asked Eve what happened, and Eve said it was the serpent's fault (Genesis 3:11–13). After breaking God's commandments, Adam and Eve were afraid to face God. They tried to avoid God and shifted the blame onto others. While they knew they had disobeyed God, they refused to take responsibility for their actions and wanted to protect themselves from punishment. They became irresponsible and tried to conceal their wrongdoing by accusing others. This behaviour can be considered an unhealthy "spiritual defence" as it was a way, it seems, for humans to protect themselves against the divine.

The Oral Law: Making a Fence around the Law

In the history of salvation, it is known that God gave, through Moses, the commandments/Law to the Israelites on Mount Sinai. To the Israelites, the Law is a type of spiritual defence, because the Law aims to protect the Israelites from committing sin. However, the Israelites continued to sin and to violate the Law. In the words of the Israelite prophets, they are rebellious, stiff-necked, and their hearts are hardened.[20] Since the Law is limited by time and context, its meaning may become obscure and complex, creating difficulties in understanding correctly in different contexts and practices. It is under such circumstances that the religious leaders of the Jewish people, to prevent Israelites from falling trapped into sin, skilfully and ingeniously interpreted the Law and created the so-called "Oral Law". They preached that the Oral Law was given to Moses when he received the written one on Mount Sinai;[21] thus, it is endowed with the highest authority, just as the *TaNaKh* (= Pentateuch + Prophets + Writings = the Old Testament). According to the Oral Law (Mishnah),[22] the tractate *Aboth* 1.1 commands the Israelite "to make a fence around the Law". [23] Building a hedge around the Law ensures that people do not violate the law by accident or because of ignorance. In the view of the scribes and Pharisees, even when the fence is crossed, there is still a distance from breaking the Law. Therefore, the Law itself is not offended, and the essence of it is intact. As such, this ploy can also be regarded as another kind of spiritual defence.

The idea behind constructing a fence around the Law was well-intentioned. However, as it was created by humans and depends on human ingenuity, it not only fails to achieve its purpose but can also lead to more serious transgressions. Strict adherence to the rules in the Oral Law can come across as overly legalistic and may cause those who successfully keep the commandments to feel superior to others, leading to feelings of pride. The outward appearance can be deceiving, as often the hearts have already crossed the boundaries and committed sins within. This is why the scripture emphasizes the importance of circumcising the heart, rather than just the body. In Romans 2:25–29, Paul explains that being a Jew is not merely about outward appearances or physical circumcision. Rather, true Jewish faith is about an inward transformation and a circumcision of the heart.

In Matthew 23, Jesus denounced the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy, as they preached but did not practise what they preached. He also criticized them for imposing heavy burdens on others. The scribes and Pharisees were often at odds with Jesus, with many of their arguments centring around the interpretation of the Law. Jesus viewed the scribes and Pharisees as hypocrites, comparing them to whitewashed tombs that look beautiful on the outside but are filled with decay and impurity on the inside. According to

Professor Hagner, Jesus' attacks against the Pharisees in this chapter most likely refer to the Oral Law (Hagner 1995, p. 660). It is clear that relying solely on artificial spiritual defences without a true spiritual awakening is ultimately futile. The original intention of the Oral Law was to guide individuals towards living a life aligned with God's will. However, human frailties have led to an overemphasis on defence, where the means have become more important than the end result. As a result, the true essence of faith and spirituality has become distorted.

4.4.2. Three Examples of Healthy Spiritual Defence and Spiritual Awakening

Peter: To Save Is to Lose, and to Lose Is to Save

Peter was the first apostle among the 12 apostles and is one of the most influential figures in the history of Christianity. The New Testament has collected many stories, not just of his achievements but also of his failures. Many followers of the church were aware that Peter denied three times knowing Jesus. The Gospel of Luke, chapter 22, describes how, during the last supper with his disciples, Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him three times before the rooster crowed. This account is also found in Matthew 26:31–35 and Mark 14:27–31. Peter was a brave and faithful man who wanted to stand by Jesus. In a moment of courage, he told Jesus that he was ready to follow him even to prison and death (Luke 22:33). This prediction came true when Jesus was arrested and taken to the high priest's house. Peter followed him into the courtyard, where Peter was questioned three times by different people, a maid and two other men. When the last man questioned Peter, he accused him of being with Jesus, since Peter and Jesus were both Galileans. However, Peter denied it, saying, "I don't know what you're talking about". The rooster crowed, and Peter then remembered what Jesus had told him. He felt ashamed and went outside to weep bitterly (Luke 22:54–62).

Peter was in a situation where he felt threatened and wanted to defend himself. To save his own life, he denied Jesus. However, he later felt remorseful and regretted his actions. He wept. In Luke 9:23–24, Jesus says, "If any man wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it".

In these two verses, Jesus encourages us to follow Him wholeheartedly, even to death, as salvation is in the hands of God. Anyone who tries to save their life through human effort is destined to fail. This means that if we attempt to save our lives by denying Jesus, we may be alive in front of the "world" but spiritually dead before God. However, if we follow Jesus faithfully until death, as Peter did, we can receive salvation. Church tradition records that Peter was martyred in Rome in the decade of 60 CE–70 CE for his unwavering faith in Jesus (Eusebius 1989). He had fulfilled the words of Jesus; "Whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it", i.e., salvation. The incident we mentioned above illustrates a spiritual awakening in defence related to spirituality. In the spiritual realm, it is only God who is our defender, just as the Psalmist says, "I lift up my eyes to the hills from where will my help come?" (Psalms 121:1).

Thomas: Let the *Nous* Open for God

Thomas was one of the twelve apostles. His name always appears on the lists of the twelve selected by Jesus.[24] However, we know him only by name in the Synoptic Gospels. It is only in the Gospel of John that we learn more about him. Thomas was best known in the church for the incident when he did not believe in the words of the other disciples that Jesus had resurrected. When the others told him that they had seen the Lord, Thomas replied, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25).

Here, we can see that Thomas is a person governed by reason. He is rational, a man of the *nous*. He wants to know things clearly and in order, as seen in his dialogue with Jesus about the way in the Gospel of John, chapter fourteen (John 14:1–6). He cannot believe a dead person can return to life, because this is out of human understanding. On the other

hand, he is also open, though with conditions, i.e., he will believe when there is proof (John 20:25). Because of his rational character, he seemed stubborn when he first heard the news. Still, when Jesus appeared to him eight days later and invited him to put his finger into the wound and place his hands on his sides, Thomas was moved, and his spirit was awakened. He opened himself totally to the risen Lord. He did not touch Jesus' body but answered, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). Afterward, Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe" (John 20:29).

Thomas was a rational person. He drew a boundary for himself against the seemingly impossible news. This was a part of his spiritual defence against unfamiliar and irrational ideas. If he stubbornly kept to such a boundary, others might call him "a man of principles", but he was actually foolish and blind before God. In John 14:1–6, Jesus reveals to the disciples that he is "the way" to the Father. Thomas did not understand the words of Jesus, and he wanted to have the matter clear, so he said to Jesus, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (14:5) If Thomas was not open to revelation, he would have remained blinded by his rational self-defence. However, when he was ready to connect his spirit (*ruach*) to the spirit of God, he was awakened, and he became an enlightened man with a sound spiritual defence.

A Modern Experience: Let the Heart (*Kardia*) Open to God

Mary grew up in a family with a strong Christian background, and she was highly committed to her faith. She trusted that God is love and full of grace. One day, she received the very sad news that a close relative of hers had died suddenly in a car accident. Overwhelmed with a mix of emotions about being abandoned, she did not understand how God would allow such a thing to happen, and it was so difficult for her to accept that it was real. She kept these conflicting feelings deep inside, and as a result, an inner conflict emerged. On the one hand, she was driven by her inner anger to throw a temper tantrum at God, but on the other hand, she believed that it was not right to accuse God because God is always loving and graceful and to be respected, just as she had been taught by her parents and the church in her upbringing. However, the anxiety troubled her, and she was depressed. She did not want to leave home for a long time, until she acknowledged to herself that she needed help. She went to seek help from a Christian counsellor.

During the counselling sessions, Mary's defence was softened by the empathetic responses of the counsellor. She was soon able to connect herself and began to be conscious about the unconscious part inside herself. As a result, she was able to encounter her inner anger realistically. In prayers, she opened herself to God and boldly expressed her frustrations and sadness. It was at this juncture Mary experienced a profound warmth of comfort, a complete release from anger and an unspeakable peaceful calmness. Her eyes were opened, and she heard a gently loving voice from inside calling her, "Mary, my child, why are you there crying and grumbling? Don't you know that I am always at your side, walking along with you in the paths of your loneliness? You are not abandoned because I am with you always". A spiritual awakening occurred in Mary's life when she was willing to open her heart freely to her feelings and to God.

The experience of Mary recalls the experience of Mary Magdalene of the empty tomb (John 20:1–18). Mary Magdalene was lost and anxious about the whereabouts of the dead body of her master. She was blind to recognize that the Lord had been there at her side and responding to her questions. Nevertheless, her spirit was awakened when she heard the intimate voice of the Lord softly calling her name. Consequently, she became the first person to proclaim the resurrection of the Lord.

From the perspective of secular psychologists, Mary's experience can be explained as a balance in defence between the id and the superego, in Freudian terms. However, Christian counsellors believe there is a step further to a spiritual awakening, i.e., letting the "heart" open to God and listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit, because a spiritual enlightenment occurs only in the midst of divine love.

4.5. Spiritual Defence and Awakening

Human tried to build a defence between God and humanity after Adam and Eve's fall. However, the result of such artificial defences did not work in the spiritual sphere, and it caused humanity to become even more separated from the self, split from other humans, and even further away from God. The fence of the Oral Law might sound positive initially, but the results are different kinds of horrors for a person eager to find peace with God. Under the attack of sin, the "flesh" is fragile and self-centred. In such a situation, the human tries many ways to launch a spiritual defence to protect themselves from sin. However, the more they try to avoid sins or cover up their transgressions, the further away they are from God. In the words of the Scripture, they become enemies of God (Romans 5:10).

Through spiritual awakening, as we see in the cases of Peter, Thomas, and Mary,[25] we may reach the truth of spiritual defence. In Peter's case, we know that the human way of defence might help us save a life, but not in a spiritual sense. A sound spiritual defence depends entirely on relying on God rather than on human efforts. The findings above may echo the concerns of Christian theologians, that too much emphasis on the individual "self" can lead to self-centeredness, which is dangerous for the Christian faith (Powlison 2003, pp. 14–15). However, if one strengthens the self with God's spirit, it can lead to a healthy view of the self. The Thomas narrative reveals that, in order to connect with the divine, we must be ready to relinquish our boundaries and be open to God. Once when the human spirit (*pneuma*, *psychē*) connects with the Spirit of God, a spiritual awakening occurs. We become enlightened and free, leading to reconciliation between human and God. Regarding the modern case of Mary, she defended herself by suppressing her anger towards God, which disturbed her inner peace. However, when she opened her heart (*kardia*) to the Spirit of God and let herself be embraced in the divine love, the peace of *shalom* was found, and a spiritual awakening occurred.

5. Conclusion, Reflection, and Anticipations for Christian Counselling

Based on the previous discussions, the author has the following reflections. These are significant to the integration of psychology and Christian spirituality in Christian counselling.

5.1. Defences and Human Nature

Defence is a response to fear and anxiety. It may be conscious or unconscious, related to life safety (biological), to a fear generated by past events (psychological), to a fear of the name of the person/ family/ nation becoming defamed (moral/ ethical), or to a fear of divine punishment and the anxiety that the gracious God's name is profaned (spiritual). In the view of Christian faith, the nature of human is a unit whole, but it has many aspects, including the "body", "flesh", "heart", "mind", "spirit", and "soul". The "flesh" tends to be weak and relies solely on human strength. The "mind" helps people judge right from wrong. The "heart" is the key to life orientation. If the "heart" inclines to the "flesh", humans will use their own methods to defend themselves; if the "heart" is inclined towards God, the human "spirit" will be connected with the "spirit" of God, and the outcome is the power to overcome the weakness of the "flesh" and receive the true peace, just like the metaphor given by St. John on the relation between the vine and the branches: when the branches unite with the tree, they can bear fruit (John 15:1–8). This is the best and most healthy spiritual defence.

5.2. Biblical and Psychological Perspectives on Human Nature

The concept of the defence mechanism originates with Sigmund Freud. The above study of the Christian view on the nature of human reveals similarities between the Christian and the Freudian perspectives in this regard, although different terms have been employed for the same signification. For instance, the "*sarx/basar*", often associated with fragility, unreliability, weakness, and criminal tendencies, may parallel Freud's concep-

tion of the "id", which is driven by pleasure and self-centeredness. Freud's theory of the ego (inner balance) and superego (external balance) echoes the functions of "*leb/kardia*" and "*nous*" to distinguish good from evil, thereby achieving balance and making the right choice. In the Christian view, a human must be connected with the Spirit of God to overcome weaknesses. It is herein that lies the greatest difference between Christian faith and the Freudian understanding of humans. The latter is, in fact, centred on atheistic materialism, in which faith and spirituality are not taken into consideration. According to Powlison, a human's psychological disorientation is only a symptomatic phenomenon of human alienation from God, and Freud's attempts to describe these problems as ontological mechanisms only reinforce this disorientation (Powlison 2003, p. 20).

5.3. Defences and Spiritual Awakening

Adam and Eve tried to hide from God. This is in fact an impossible mission. Nor is blaming others' responsibility a good strategy of defence. A person must be led to face their struggles, i.e., when the unconscious become conscious, and to stand up again when they stumble. However, the "heart" of humans must let go of relying solely on human effort against sin and turn to God for justification. The grace of Christ is sufficient for everyone to regain a healthy relationship with God.

Moreover, building a fence around the Law is just a superficial solution. These artificial techniques will ultimately turn humans to legalism and hypocrisy to cover up human sinful nature and weakness, but the original problem is still not solved. The crying of human in Romans 7:24 will continue to be heard, "Wretched person that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

Humans have, by nature, a tendency to defend themselves. This defence mechanism can be triggered anytime, even during counselling processes, whether consciously or unconsciously, and can affect the interaction between the counsellor and the client. Therefore, it is important that both parties should be aware of such a hidden force and its negative impacts. With regard to counselling, there have already been studies related to defence mechanisms in physiology, psychology, morals, and ethics. Still, more attention must be paid to the influence of human defences in the religious and spiritual spheres. This article highlights the importance of knowing the different aspects of human nature, both from the view of Christian religion (biblical) and from the secular (e.g., Freudian), for the success of integrating psychology and Christian faith in Christian counselling. We hope this article will be a starting point for more in-depth discussions and new directions in the future.

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Notes

[1] Johnson ([2000] 2010) and Greggo and Sisemore (2012) have compiled and edited five different integrative approaches to Christian counselling, including "A Level of Explanation" (David Myers), "Integration" (Stanton Jones), "Christian Psychology" (Roberts and Watson), "Transformational Psychology" (John Coe and Todd Hall), and "Biblical Counselling" (David Powlison).

[2] Many counselling scholars, including Tan (2011), Horowitz (1988), and McMinn and Campbell (2007), have emphasized the importance of defence mechanisms in the counselling process.

[3] In the beginning, Freud used the term "defence" but later changed it to "repression" as the better description of this specific mechanism. Eventually, he realized that repression is just one of several defence mechanisms and is often a part of other defence processes (Freud 1915, pp. 177–78, 182–83; Freud 1966, p. 510; Galatariotou 2005, pp. 15, 19).

[4] Vayalilkarottu (2012, pp. 347–50) emphasized humans are not only psychological and psychological but also ethical/moral and spiritual beings.

[5] Subconscious and conscious defences are often interrelated and cannot be delineated sharply. See discussions in the following Sections.

[6] 2 Maccabees 7 can be found, e.g., in The New Jerusalem Bible and the New English Bible. For other stories of martyrdom, the reader may also turn to Acts 7:1–60, the martyrdom of Stephen, and the book of "The Martyrdom of Polycarp" in the *Apostolic Fathers*.

[7] Superego is the agency of our conscience (see Galatariotou (2005, p. 25)); Galatariotou (2005, p. 15) contends that the importance of the external world "amount[s] to almost a fourth agency" after the id, ego, and superego.

[8] See Robinson (1952, pp. 13–16) on the detailed discussion about the contrast between Hebrew and Greek thoughts on humans.

[9] Robinson (1952, p. 14) says that the last sentence quoted above comes from W. Robinson.

[10] Bultmann (1952, p. 200) asserts that "Paul can speak the *sōma* in just the same way as he does of *sarx* itself".

[11] The command of *Aboth* 1.1, namely, "to make a fence around the Law" is of the same function.

[12] Here, Dunn quotes the words of Jacob in *TDNT* 9.611.

[13] In this article, all Bible quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVUE).

[14] "Man as he is empowered" is the title Wolff (1974, p. 32) used for his discussion about the spirit (*ruach*)

[15] *Leb* occurs a total of 598 times in the Hebrew Bible, and the word appears in different forms a total of 858 times (Wolff 1974, p. 40).

[16] Wolff (1974, pp. 40–58); see, e.g., Proverbs 23:26; Jeremiah 29:13.

[17] The author understands this area needs to be further explored, though it lies outside the scope of this paper.

[18] Spiritual defence points to defences related to God, no matter if they are healthy or unhealthy.

[19] The two examples below, i.e., Adam and Eve and the Oral Law, were also mentioned in Lam (2023, pp. 598–99), but they are elaborated on further here.

[20] E.g., Isaiah 29:9–13; 65:2–12; Jeremiah 2:1–13; 31:31–34.

[21] Although the Mishnah was edited later, the Jews believe that the Oral Law predates the time of Jesus (see Danby 1933, pp. xvii–xxiii).

[22] Judah ha-Nasi collected the Oral Law in the third century CE, compiled them into a book, and called it the "Mishnah", which means to study repeatedly until the meaning becomes familiar (see Herford 1962, p. 21).

[23] *Aboth* 1.1, "Moses received the Law from Sinai and committed it to Joshua, and Joshua to the Elders, and the Elders to the Prophets; and the Prophets committed it to the men of the Great Synagogue. They said three things: Be deliberate in judgement, raise many disciplines, and make a fence around the Law". See Danby (1933, p. 446).

[24] E.g., Matthew 10:2–4; Mark 3:16–19; Luke 6:13–16.

[25] We may add the martyrdom of the mother and her seven sons in the same regard.

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