Heart and Soul

A Christian View of Psychology

by

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Quite a number of people come into contact with a psychologist at some time or other. During childhood they may have had to take a psychological test, perhaps at school; or perhaps they took such a test later in life during a medical examination for military service, or when applying for a certain position. There are also people who have made the acquaintance of an industrial psychologist or have been treated by a so-called clinical psychologist when they were undergoing psychological problems.

But in all these examples we’re talking only about applied psychology. There are also many psychologists who engage in scientific research. Ordinarily, the public is largely unaware of their work. These psychologists study such matters as emotions and sense perception (sight, sound, smell, taste) and learning processes and creativity and mental disorders and intelligence and instincts. From this list we can see that psychologists are involved with a tremendous range of problems, and it is very difficult to spell out just what all those problems have in common. Or perhaps I could put the question as follows: In all of that research, what could we identify as the psychological?

The many problems and areas studied by psychology all have something in common, namely, they all relate to phenomena we do not encounter in connection with lifeless things or plants. The phenomena in question are very characteristic of human beings and to some degree are also found in the animals. I will come back to this question later. At this point it is important to note that many psychological phenomena occur only in human beings. And so
psychology looks to be the science that studies the human being; we might call it the science of man par excellence.

Now, there are some other sciences, such as sociology and linguistics, which also qualify as sciences of man; yet on closer examination we see that psychology seems to occupy a central place in all of those sciences. Psychology touches on sociology because sociology is interested in the question how the human individual behaves in groups. Psychology touches on linguistics because linguistics is keen to find out how it is that people learn and use languages. Psychology touches on economics because economics tries to understand patterns of consumer behavior, for example. And so I could go on and on.

1.1. What is psychology?

We see, then, that psychologists concern themselves with a wide range of questions, all of which have to do with the “human being,” or, more specifically, with our inner and psychical and spiritual life and also with our external behavior insofar as it is governed by our inner life. That external behavior is implemented in interaction with his environment. In these two sentences I have managed to say a whole mouthful: they sum up just about everything that is important to mention at this point. Psychology deals with what goes on inside a person as well as with his outward behavior; it focuses on what originates in the person himself and the influence of the environment. When psychology is compared to the other so-called “sciences of man,” which study certain aspects of human life, it appears to stand out as a science that poses the question of the nature of the human being as such.

Of course it is quite pretentious to attempt such a thing. How could we come to know anything meaningful about the deepest “being” of man? For well over a hundred years, psychology has been a so-called “experimental” science; that is to say, it tries to obtain knowledge by making observations and performing experiments. But is it really possible to learn something about the deepest nature of man by simply “looking at” human beings and “listening” to them? After all that’s what happens in observation
and experiment.

In the past, many people thought that such a thing was possible. And they believed that science was a “neutral” and “objective” affair – in other words, a human activity in which one could engage without being caught up in prejudices of any sort. Today, however, we know better. We now realize that there are no human activities whatsoever that are completely “neutral” and “objective,” to say nothing of the scientific work we do being “neutral.” Later on we shall see that psychology itself has provided us with the evidence that all of our observations are indeed “colored” and “prejudiced.” All of us carry within ourselves a fund of experiences, learned “reflexes,” attitudes, ideas, habits, orientations, and predispositions. As a rule, we are scarcely aware of them or perhaps not aware of them at all; nevertheless, they give a certain “color” to all our observations. Everywhere in our lives we see evidence that this is the case, also when we are engaged in scientific work. And where would we find such factors more fully at work than in the science in which we study “ourselves,” the science in which the field of investigation is the human being? And so every psychologist, when he sets out to do his work, is already operating with some partly unconscious preconceived ideas as to who and what a human being really “is.” Those ideas determine his choice of experiments and influence the explanations he offers of the data yielded by his experiments.

Today Christians who choose to work in psychology confront the problem that the researchers who developed the science were not Christians. The fact that the pioneers were not Christians might not be so serious if we were talking about such a field as mechanical engineering or dentistry. But here we are talking about a science that, from the outset, has maintained that it is able to tell us something of great importance about who and what the “human being” is.

It is true that psychologists nowadays are somewhat more modest on this point than they used to be; nevertheless, the idea continues to crop up. But then, the founders and early practitioners of experimental psychology all had one thing in common: they all viewed man as the center of the universe (or at least of his earthly life) and regarded any relationship he might have to his Creator
as something that was beyond their sphere of operations. To the Christian, of course, this meant that psychologists had, on an a priori basis, excluded something that was most essential in man. Therefore we may conclude that the many things that such psychologists “discover” about man may be quite interesting but at best they can be only half-truths, since they start with a mistaken view of man.

For this reason alone, it is not enough for those Christians who choose to work in psychology to pray to God to preserve them from such influences. They would not thereby guarantee a truly critical approach to their discipline. What they really need is a radically Christian psychology, one that has been constructed anew from the ground up, from its foundations. Such a Christian psychology would start with the revealed Word of God. This divine revelation, which is contained in the Bible, gives us not just the highest truth about God but also the highest truth about man, about ourselves. And that truth is of such a nature that it can never be acquired by experimental means; it can only be obtained through divine revelation. This deepest truth discloses the true nature of man to us. To put it in Biblical language, it reveals the heart of man.

Later we will discuss the meaning of the word “heart” in the Bible. At this point I need only say that it has little to do with the hollow muscular structure in our chest cavity that pumps our blood. In the Bible, the heart is to be understood as the innermost depth of man, the central or pivotal point in which all that is man “comes together” and finds its unity. And not only that, we must also recognize that it is in the heart that man is centrally related to a higher reality. Man is a temporal, earthly being, but at the same time he is a being destined for eternity. Man stands on the boundary between time and eternity. And it is there that he finds himself related to a higher, eternal, invisible world. For the believing Christian, that higher world is the heavenly world of God; for the unbeliever (the non-Christian, and sometimes, sad to say, also for certain Christians) it is the world of idols, of demons, of the powers of darkness.

1. 2 Is there a christian psychology?

Of course mine is not the first book that has ever concerned itself
with the relationship between Christianity and psychology. Many Christians before me have written on this subject. I undertook to write this book because I am convinced that these other attempts need some correction. Most of the other books on the subject are indeed properly critical of the view that glorifies “neutral, objective” science. The truth is that there is simply no such science. The scientists who nevertheless persist in believing that there is also maintain that true knowledge about man can be acquired only through such a science. They simply reject the idea that a “religious” (and therefore unscientific) book like the Bible could say anything meaningful about the nature of man. On the other hand, there have been a number of Christian psychologists who have gone to the opposite extreme by declaring that only the Bible says something meaningful about man – psychology has nothing to say here.

Their position is not altogether mistaken: there is something to what they say. It is indeed true that without the Bible, psychology cannot give us any real information about the nature of man. In the final analysis, all truth about man does go back to the Bible. However, we must remember that not everything we could possibly know about man is recorded in the Bible. The fact that it is not all written there is actually something to rejoice over, because it means that the curious among us will still have much to discover. In fact, any investigator who is determined to ground his work in the Word of God will find that he has all the opportunity he could possibly desire to carry out systematic, experimental studies of human emotional and intellectual life. And so I want to affirm clearly that there is plenty of room for experimental psychology that is faithful to the Scriptures. Therefore, when some people contend that psychology cannot provide us with any true knowledge of man, what they are really talking about is non-Christian psychology. But a question should be raised here: Why should non-Christian psychology be characterized as psychology as such, i.e. without any further qualification? For the Christian, true psychology can only mean Christian psychology, that is, a psychology that is faithful to the Scriptures. Such a psychology, finding its starting point in the Bible, uses the light provided by the Bible to acquire further knowledge about man by way of observation and experiment.
Other Christian writers have fallen into other forms of erroneous thinking. For example, there were some who maintained that psychology and theology each commands a field of its own and that the two fields should not be confused with one another. Now, there is indeed something to be said for this claim. Psychology and theology are both special sciences, and as such each must have its own field of investigation. But we must be careful here not to equate “theology” with the Bible. Psychology has to do with theology only in a very indirect way, but it has everything to do with the Bible. If we fail to understand this point, we will fall again into a familiar error, the error of supposing that there is a “neutral, objective” psychology, which studies human behavior, and that there is also such a thing as theology, which concerns itself with man’s “spiritual life.” If we take this way of talking one step further, we can argue that we look to the (clinical) psychologist for help with our emotional life and to the theologian (pastor) for help with our spiritual life. But that is not at all the way things are. The Christian-psychologist takes his starting point in the Bible, just as the Christian-theologian does. The Christian-psychologist begins by regarding man as a creature of God, just as the Christian-theologian does. Moreover, the Christian-psychologist views man as an indissoluble unity, a unity that cannot be split up in such a way that there is a piece for the pastor and another piece for the psychologist. In Chapter 6 below, we shall see that pastoral care and psychology have entered into a fruitful alliance when it comes to Christian counseling.

Such talk of an alliance is music to the ears of certain other Christian writers who wish to see an “integration” or fusion of psychology and theology. But that is not what I am after here. First of all, it should be recognized that psychology and theology, as distinct special sciences, must remain separated. Secondly, such writers are too quick to presuppose the truth of the psychology that is current (and non-Christian). What we are looking for is not a blending of current psychology with theology, but what we might call a conversion of psychology to Scripture. In other words, current psychology needs to be converted (i.e. turned around) in a radical way, that is to say, right down to its roots (radix is Latin for root). Its edifice must be taken apart brick by brick, and then each brick must
be examined individually to see whether it is useful. Some bricks will have to be thrown away, whereas others will still be usable once they have gone into the oven again. Moreover, new bricks will be needed. And of prime importance is the realization that the whole edifice which we call psychology will have to be erected on a new foundation.

From what I have said immediately above, one might infer that the next thing to affirm is that the new foundation that is needed is the Bible. Such a claim would require some clarification. The fact is that one cannot simply base psychology on the Bible. It has so often been said that the Bible is not simply a manual for science; in like manner it is not a textbook for psychology either. Now, there are some authors who have written books on what they call “Biblical psychology,” but no such thing exists if the term is taken literally. What the writers who have used such a term meant by it was a collection of Biblical views of man. But what a collection of such views gives us, at most, is a set of practical insights into human life, insights that, while extremely important, do not count as psychology. At best, such knowledge could be said to belong to the foundation of psychology. But that foundation must also provide answers to such questions as: What, strictly speaking, is science? What is “the psychical”? How do we gather experimental data about “the psychical”? How is “the psychical” related to other aspects of man? These are not questions that are dealt with directly in the Bible, and so what we must try to do is answer them in the spirit and light of Scripture. When we proceed in such a fashion, the answers we come up with are not “Biblical” in the sense that we have simply extracted them from the Bible. Yet we can affirm that they are “faithful to the Bible,” i.e. faithful to the way the Bible commonly speaks. Moreover they are faithful to the universal instruction given throughout the whole of Holy Scripture. As a matter of fact, we all have something of the psychologist within us: we all have a certain amount of knowledge of people, and every day we form “theories” (opinions) about the motives behind the behavior of other people. We judge what makes people tick. But a good psychologist is someone who, in virtue of his training, is able to turn such opinions into theories in a critical and systematic fashion.
He then proceeds to test such theories. In doing all these things, he starts from principles that are true to the Scriptures and thereby in every respect is a good psychologist. However, we must always bear in mind that the Christian-psychologist is never perfect. Even Christian psychology remains faulty work undertaken by fallible human beings: we see through a glass darkly (1 Cor. 13:12).

1.3 The usefulness of a Christian psychology

Of course at this point one might wonder whether there really are Christians sitting around waiting for a Christian psychology to be developed. Would such a psychology truly be useful? I am convinced that the answer is yes – otherwise I would not have written this book. To begin with it is always useful and a fine thing to study the wonderful works of God in creation – even more so when we are talking about the human being, who is God’s masterpiece. Good psychology, by which I mean psychology that is faithful to Scripture, on the one hand, and critical and systematic, on the other, teaches us a great deal about human beings, and thereby also instructs us about ourselves. And so anyone who studies Christian psychology gets to know himself better, and that is always to be welcomed. Such knowledge becomes even more useful when applied in practice. This is what happens in Christian counseling. The world calls it psychotherapy, but in the church it is known as pastoral care. The two are not precisely the same thing.

Most students of psychology are interested in “clinical psychology,” and Christians also will take a keen interest in the implications of a Christian psychology for counseling. On the one hand, there seems to be an ever-growing number of people in the Western world who need psychical-spiritual help. On the other hand, the number of non-Christian – or even anti-Christian – approaches to psychotherapy is increasing rapidly. Many Christians, feeling burdened with mental problems, can no longer see the forest for the trees. In their struggle they feel they have been delivered up to the heathen, and in many cases they are justified in feeling this way. What they badly need are Christian counselors who have not been pitted and scarred by
worldly psychotherapies, counselors who are not confused as to what role faith should play in the process of counseling, counselors who are armed with a thorough and intimate knowledge of the Bible and a Christian psychology and know just how to use this knowledge in practical counseling.

If all of this is to be achieved, a lot of rubble will first have to be cleared away. Professional counselors are not the only ones who are in need of new reflection on these matters. [NOTE: I have offered a more extensive treatment of these matters in my book *Psychologie: Een christelijke kijk op het mentale leven*. Amsterdam: Buijten en Schipperheijn, (Psychology: A Christian View of the Mental Life) 1984.] Ordinary people need it too, regardless of whether they have as yet come into contact with counselors. And this book is also intended for ordinary people. But there’s one thing that I must add at this point: this book deals not just with counseling, but with Christian psychology in general. Indeed, our reflection has to start with Christian psychology in general. In the first place, we should bear in mind that it is a fine thing to discover more about “ourselves,” and in the second place we need to start with Christian psychology because we can only make progress in constructing a science of Christian counseling if we have first understood something of what a Christian psychology in general might be.

Perhaps the point that needs to be made here can be expressed in a different way. This book does not even deal with “psychology” considered as a certain field of study. Rather, it deals with that which is studied in the field of investigation we call psychology. It deals with man, that is to say, with you and me. Or it might be more correct to say that it deals with what goes on inside a human being and how what goes on inside governs his behavior. If you will, it deals with man’s mental life or his “soul” or his “mind” or whatever else you might like to call it. These are all just words, of course, which mean one thing to one person and might mean something quite different to another. Therefore we shall have to look critically at all these words in due course. But for now I would rather stick with a somewhat vague description and say that the book deals with “what goes on inside a person.” The Bible, as the written form of God’s self-revelation, focuses a strong spotlight on
man and illumines our human existence. If we did not have that spotlight, we would get nowhere and would stumble around in the dark. The candlelight of secular psychology tells us nothing essential about man; at best, secular psychology sheds some light on surface or peripheral phenomena. By contrast, the Bible is a spotlight that illumines the whole of our existence. But if we are to apprehend the details properly, we must go out with a magnifying glass and investigate while walking in the light that the Bible sheds. In Christian psychology then, we do our work not by the light of a flickering candle but with the assistance of a powerful spotlight. In the splendid light that the Bible sheds over the whole creation, we can make use of the magnifying glass of scientific experimentation to bring to light a host of details that remain hidden from the uncritical onlooker. Christian psychology makes grateful use of that gloriously radiant light of Scripture: we can understand it as a magnifying glass which enables us to learn innumerable interesting details about ourselves which otherwise we would not have seen. At times those details delight us, and at other times they shock us, but we must take all of them seriously to heart. And so we learn more about ourselves and also about our fellow human beings, and in the process we discover more about the greatness of our Creator.

Great are the works of the Lord;
They are pondered by all who delight in them.
Psalm 111:2

In your light we see light.
Psalm 36:9b

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Psalm 139:14a

For who among men knows the thought of a man except the man’s spirit within him?
I Corinthians 2:11a
There was a time when many people thought that scientists were investigators who collected the facts in an unbiased way and then used the facts to construct their theories. Today there are still people who think along such lines, even scientists, but a great many scientists now realize that this is simply not the case. For one thing, there is no such thing as an “unbiased” scientist. For another, you can’t just collect facts, for you would not know where to start. When scientists collect their data, they have a very specific purpose in mind. They collect very selectively precisely because they start with a number of preconceived ideas which they intend to test by means of their research. Moreover, we should realize that they start their research with a number of very general ideas about the nature of the world, about what man is, about what knowledge is, about what science is, and so forth. Those ideas are of such a nature that they cannot be tested. They belong to the realm of faith, to the scientist’s worldview.

2. Man: who and what is he?

Suppose you wanted to build a bridge or develop a new kind of denture or formulate a physical theory about the nature of light. Would your worldview play a major role in this enterprise? I think it goes without saying that it would not. But if we undertook to expand our knowledge about human beings by developing new theories, then it would be very important what sort of view of man we would presuppose. On the basis of his worldview, every psychologist, right at the outset, adopts a certain general point of
view on the question of who and what man is. Now, there are some psychologists who claim they do not start with a certain view of man, but they are simply fooling themselves and others. The history of psychology (see Chapter 3) makes it very clear how much the famous psychologists have been influenced in their research by their view of man. In any case, Christian psychologists are usually sufficiently forthright to admit that they start their scientific work with a Christian view of man. It is for this reason that some other scientists have accused Christian psychologists of being biased. And it’s true that they are biased! But the point to understand here is that all psychologists are biased and that all start from a certain view of man. It is not that other psychologists are neutral, objective and unbiased, whereas Christian ones are not. The difference is rather that secular psychologists start from a view of man that has been devised by man himself, whereas Christian psychologists start from a view of man based on God’s revelation.

Before we deal in more detail with “all that goes on in man,” which is the aim of the study of psychology, we must devote some attention to the Christian view of man. What that means, unfortunately, is that right at the very beginning, the most difficult questions of Christian psychology come up for discussion. I’m afraid this cannot be helped. If we don’t get some clarity on the starting points of Christian psychology, we will not have a solid and durable foundation on which to erect the actual edifice of psychological theory. The starting points or first principles may indeed seem more abstract or theoretical than the concrete results of psychological experiments, but the more thorough our discussion of them at this point, the better our chances of interpreting the results of any psychological experiments correctly a little later on.

2.1 Aspects of man

Let’s first try to subdivide all of reality as we perceive it into a number of separate realms or “kingdoms,” or whatever you might wish to call them. Since ancient times, many thinkers have made the following distinctions in reality as we perceive it:
(a) The **inorganic** (or **physical**) world of material, lifeless things (stones, mountains, lakes, hydrogen molecules, gold nuggets, bridges, bicycles, etc.);

(b) The **organic** (or **biotic**) world, or kingdom of plants, that is, all living organisms which, as indicated in the word “living,” possess life but lack sensitivity or consciousness;

(c) The **psychical** world or kingdom of animals. These are the organisms that not only live but also possess sensitivity or feeling and/or consciousness. This is a very complicated group and so a distinction must immediately be made. I will not be discussing the lower animals, the unicellular animals (such as amoebas) and the sponges, which do not have a nervous system.

1) There are many lower species of animals which have instincts and which can develop reflexes and which experience sensations because they possess sense organs and nervous system but which nevertheless do not have a (developed) feeling life. This category may include all of the higher animals with the exception of the mammals;

2) **Mammals** not only possess the above characteristics but also have a richly developed feeling life (affections, emotions). The reason for this is that their brain has certain centers that are all but lacking in the lower animals.

(d) The **spiritual** world, or kingdom of human beings, who not only possess a feeling life but a richly developed thought life as well. Because of their thought life, they can, for example, amass and reproduce conscious knowledge. Moreover, they possess an abundance of creativity and are also capable of making conscious, deliberate decisions as acts of the will.

When we take a close look at these four realms, we soon see that each of these areas includes the previous one. Man is, indeed, a typically “spiritual” being, but his life also has a psychical aspect to it, a biotic aspect, and a physical aspect or side. The word “aspect” literally means view. Therefore an aspect is a particular point of view from which we can look at something. Hence we can look at man from a spiritual point of view, a psychical point of view, a biotic point of view, and even a physical point of view, even though the spiritual is the aspect that most fully characterizes him.
Likewise, we can look at animals from a psychical or a biotical or even a physical point of view, although it is the psychical aspect that is most characteristic of animals. In similar fashion, plants can be looked at from either a biotic or a physical viewpoint, even though the biotic aspect is most characteristic of plants. A stone is not *typically biotic* because a stone, after all, is lifeless. And an animal is not “typically biotic” because, even though it has life, life is not what most fully characterizes it. The animal is characterized by the psychical aspect.

On the basis of the distinctions made above, we can now draw a diagram of four realms or “kingdoms,” using the aspects as a perpendicular division.

![Diagram of four kingdoms](image)

In horizontal terms we were able to distinguish four realms – or actually five, since we have already split the animals into two groups. Continuing on this basis, we can distinguish four aspects vertically – actually five, as we will see shortly. In order to take a more careful look at these aspects, some new terms will have to be introduced. Technical terms are necessary in this context because they have one meaning only, whereas words as they are used in everyday life may well have a number of different meanings. Take the word “spiritual,” for example. It can be understood as an adjective having reference to the spirit or the mind or consciousness, in which case it is the opposite of material. But we might also take it to refer to the spiritual life of the believer in the religious sense,
which is the meaning it usually has in the Bible. This is also the
meaning that comes to mind for most Christians. Therefore, I shall
need to coin a new word, “spiritive,” which will avoid the religious
connotations of the word “spiritual.” The spiritive aspect refers to
the intellectual, imaginative, volitional mind, and not specifically to
the life we have in the Spirit or the life that is ours in Christ.

Moreover, since we have already split the psychical kingdom into
two, we will now, for the sake of consistency, have to distinguish
two separate “aspects” in “the psychical:” the perceptive and the
sensitive, which are terms that will soon be explained further.
Therefore we must now think in terms of three separate terms: the
perceptive, the sensitive, and the spiritive. Taken together, I shall
call them the mental aspects.

Now let us examine these three mental “aspects” or points of
view from which we can look at man.

(1) First we have the perceptive aspect or the aspect of (sensation
and) perception, that is, sense perception. Note that it involves not
only the physical stimulation of the sensory organ (the light that falls
on the retina, etc.) but also the sensory awareness of those stimuli
in the brain. Such an awareness is, in fact, the most fundamental
form of consciousness.

(2) The sensitive aspect or the aspect of feeling. Later on, we
will distinguish affections, impulses, and emotions, but without
marking them off sharply from one another.

(3) The spiritive aspect. Here I am thinking of what typifies the
life of the human spirit, which later will be distinguished further,
namely, knowing, imagining, and willing. Now, these are not the
only ways in which we can view this life of the human spirit, for
man, as a “spiritive” being, is also one who thinks logically, creates
culture, uses language, and further is a social, an economic, and
aesthetic being, a being possessed of a sense of justice, and also of
a moral sense, and he is a believing being (“believer” in the most
general sense – every man has faith in something).
In the meantime, it should be clear to the reader that each higher aspect presupposes every aspect that is lower than itself. What I mean to say is that we can never conceive of a higher aspect that is completely detached from all the lower aspects. Within this material world of ours, there are no spiritive beings who are not at the same time also sensitive and perceptive and biotic and physical. In other words, people, who are the only spiritive beings of which we know, have all the other aspects in their makeup as well. On the other hand, we do know of sensitive beings that are not spiritive, for example, mammals. But we do not know of any sensitive beings which are not at the same time also perceptive and biotic and physical. However, there are perceptive beings that are not sensitive or spiritive (namely, the lower species of animals) but which are also biotic and physical. And so I could go on: the lower aspects can do without the higher, but (at least in the visible world which we inhabit) the higher are not to be encountered apart from the lower.

This point is very important for understanding the difference between “feeling” and “thinking,” for example. Feeling and thinking are frequently put on a par. For example, some authors have argued that the “soul” consists of “reason” and “feeling” and “will.” In reality emotion does occur without thinking (as in the case of the mammals and even in the case of some people, under certain circumstances). However, thinking is not possible apart from feeling; that is to say, in beings that think, namely, people, the thinking they do could never be detached from certain impulses, certain affections and/or emotions.

2. 1. 2 The “ground” of all things

What makes this theory of the aspects so important? More to the point, is there anything especially Christian about the decision to divide up reality theoretically into these five aspects? Yes, there is. What is of prime importance is not the dividing up of itself so much as the use that is made of it. Such a division of reality into five different aspects was already to be found in the ancient world, both in the Bible and elsewhere. When we read the Biblical story of creation as recorded in Genesis 1, we see the various “kingdoms”
successively appearing from God’s hand, just as though a new dimension was being added in each case to the creation taken as a totality:

(1) in verse 1 we hear about the creation of *material things*;

(2) in verse 12 (the third day of creation) we see *plant life* appearing;

(3) in verse 21 (the fifth day) we are told about the creation of the *lower animals*;

(4) in verse 25 (the sixth day) the *higher animals* appear on the scene;

(5) in verse 27 (also the sixth day) we witness the creation of *man*.

But as I indicated above, the fact that such distinctions occur in the Scriptures does not make them specifically Biblical or Christian. What is of prime importance is the *use* to which these distinctions are put. In the past, researchers have time and again proven unable to resist the temptation to try to *reduce these different aspects to one another*.

This temptation is entirely understandable. Any thinking person would want to get some general overview of the enormous diversity of phenomena. Now, one way to do so would be to introduce a certain order into the phenomenon on one’s own. And so one could say, for example, “While it is true that I see living organisms and even thinking people all around me, I nevertheless maintain that everything in the final analysis, comes down to *nothing but* matter.” Anyone who makes such a claim has provided himself with an “overview” by stating that everything is matter. Such a person has not *per se* denied the biotic or the psychical or the spiritive. He has left room for them, but he is arguing that those aspects are ultimately able to be *reduced to* the physical aspect. In the final analysis there is nothing other than particular forms of the physical. People who hold such a belief, for example, the Marxists, we call *materialists*, for they believe that at bottom everything is “matter.” There have also been people who have argued the exact opposite. They can be called *spiritualists*. They claim that at bottom everything is spiritual
(or spiritive). They look to the spiritual as the “ground” of all things, and they argue that in the final analysis, even matter is spiritual in nature – only, in matter the spiritual is still strongly “encapsulated,” or something like that. In plants the spiritual comes to a somewhat further development and there assumes the form of the biotic. When we turn to animals, we see that the development has progressed still further, for there it assumes the form of the psychical. And in man, consciousness has come to its fullest development.

Of course there is a big difference between materialists and spiritualists, but in one respect they are in agreement. Both locate the ground of all things within visible reality itself, that is to say, within matter or within the “spirit.” Thus the so-called vitalists look for it within “life,” and the so-called psychical monists look for it within the “psychical,” but what is important to understand is that all of them look for it within the creation. Because they do so, we must characterize all the views of reality they develop as fundamentally un-Christian. A Christian view of reality looks for the ground of all created reality not within but outside the creation – in the Creator.

When we use the word “ground,” we mean two things:

(a) God is the Creator of all things; He has called them into being by His Word of power;

(b) God is also the Preserver of all things; He sustains them constantly by His powerful Word (Hebrews 1:3), so that created things do not exist in themselves, independently of God, but exist without interruption by the strength of God’s preserving Word of power.

Only the Bible tells us about a God who created and preserves the world. Only Scripture speaks of a God who was there before the world began, was always above and outside the world, while at the same time sustaining the world and remaining most intimately involved with it.

Once we have understood that the ground of reality is not to be found within (the aspects of) created reality but in the Creator Himself, we will no longer be tempted to try to reduce all the aspects
to just one of them. Anyone who does carry out such a reduction takes away from what is absolutely unique in the physical, the biotic, the perceptive, the sensitive, and the spiritive as God has constituted them. Some researchers have indeed understood this and so have tried instead to reduce everything to two aspects. For example, starting from a psycho-physical duality, they claim to “see” this duality throughout the entire creation. But those who have reasoned in this way still ran stuck. First of all, they wound up doing an injustice to the other aspects, for example, the biotic and the spiritive. And in the second place, those who see duality everywhere – for them it becomes a dualism – do not sufficiently recognize the unity of the whole creation. In our understanding of the world it is important that on the one hand we should leave room for the diversity of the entire creation (from the physical to the spiritive), while on the other hand remaining aware of the fact that the whole creation finds its unity in the one God who created all the different aspects and preserves all of created reality. As a matter of fact, even within man himself the various aspects find their unity in a striking way. But this is a matter that we will deal with later.

For the present, it suffices to establish that in a Christian view of man we do not derive one aspect from another but allow each aspect to stand in its unique sense as given by God. We do not reduce the aspects to one another but relate them to God, the Creator and Preserver, as the ground of all things. In other words, we do not look for the “ground” of the realities surrounding us within creation itself, because to do so would be to fall into idolatry. After all, idolatry is the worship of part of creation, making it into an absolute and deifying it as though it were the Creator Himself (see Romans 1:22-23). We do not make an absolute of matter, or of life, or of psyche, or of spirit, because all these are but parts of creation. Rather, we relate them all to God. As Christians, we regard them as dependent on God, the Preserver, who, as the One-and-Only, is really “absolute.” Only God is self-sufficient and independent. Every part of the creation is dependent on God for its coming into being and for its continuing in existence. We do not worship the creation – neither the material nor the spiritual. We worship the Creator.
2. 2 Christian theory of man (anthropology)

Up to this point we have talked about five different “aspects” of created reality insofar as it is visible: the physical, the biotic, the perceptive, the sensitive, and the spiritive. But one could also call these, respectively, the aspects of matter, life, perception, feeling, and spirit (mind). Furthermore, we have seen that except for the aspect of mind, they are not characteristic of man only. All of visible reality is material; all living organisms are biotic; and all animals are perceptive in nature. But in this section we shall be dealing with man in particular. The science that uses conceptual thought in an effort to understand a bit more about man, systematically laying out how man is put together and what makes him tick, is called anthropology. This word is derived from Greek and means theory of man. We should understand here that we are talking about philosophical anthropology and not cultural anthropology; the latter tends to focus on the history and development of humankind.

It is quite understandable that the study of anthropology is fascinating to so many people. Anthropology does not study just any creature at all – no, in anthropology man studies himself. Thereby he satisfies one of his own deepest interests, namely, the interest he takes with regard to himself. Anthropology is thus a theoretical, systematic form of self-knowledge. According to the Bible, man is the head of creation. And therefore the entire creation, the whole cosmos, is not only involved with God, the Creator and Preserver, but is also involved in a very special way with man.

2. 2.1 Aspects and structures

We have already seen that there are five aspects to be distinguished in man, but now we could go a step further and assert that we can also distinguish five structures in man. Moreover, in the case of each of these five structures we can again distinguish the five aspects that were already mentioned. This is a very important step in our argument. To make it easier to understand, we shall begin by looking at a plant.
Like a stone, a plant has a physical (material) aspect. In this regard, the plant and the stone have something in common. But at the same time, there is a considerable difference between a plant and a stone – even in physical respects. On the one hand, the material of a plant is subject to the same physico-chemical laws as the material of the stone, but on the other hand, the material of the plant is also entirely different in nature. The difference is that the material of the plant is constituted in such a way as to anticipate life. Plant matter is not life, but it is put together in such a way as to make life possible; that is to say, it can “carry” life or provide a foundation or “substratum” for life. The matter we find in a stone cannot do this. In the stone there is only one structure to be found – the physico-chemical structure. But in the plant we can distinguish two structures:

(1) The PHYSICAL structure. This structure includes the chemical elements, physical processes and chemical reactions that on the one hand, guarantee the unity of the material structure of the plant and by which, on the other hand, the material components are yet able to undergo constant change. In this physical structure we distinguish two aspects:

(a) The physical aspect: the plant matter is subject to physico-chemical laws;

(b) The biotic aspect: the plant matter, as such, is not subject to biotic laws but it does anticipate the biotic aspect; that is to say, it is put together in such a way as to support life or provide a foundation for it.

(2) The BIOTIC structure. This includes the cell structure, the tissue structure, the organic structure, and the physiological life-processes of a living organism (breathing, digestion, metabolism, reproduction, hormonal processes). In this structure, too, we can distinguish the usual two aspects:

(a) The physical aspect: the life processes in the plant are not in themselves subject to physico-chemical laws, but they are supported
or “carried” by these physical-chemical structures and processes which thereby provide a substratum for them.

(b) The biotic aspect: in accordance with their own unique nature, life processes are subject to biotic laws of nature. Therefore we can say that this second structure is typified or qualified by this second aspect. We call the second structure the biotic structure.

What we encounter here, then, is a hierarchical “piling up” of structures in which the higher structure, so to speak, “closes” the lower structure. In similar fashion, we can now take a look at the mosquito, where we encounter a hierarchy of three structures. In the case of mosquito matter, we find an anticipation not just of life but also of the possibility of sensory perception, which we may characterize as a form of “awareness” or “consciousness,” however simple. For that reason, we need to distinguish not just two aspects but three when we study the physical structure of a mosquito. Alongside the physical and biotic aspects there is also the perceptive aspect. Mosquito matter, as such, is not subject to perceptive natural laws, but it does anticipate perception. And so it is with the biotic structure of a mosquito, in which we likewise distinguish a perceptive aspect inasmuch as the life processes in the mosquito also anticipate perception. What this means, very concretely, is that in the “brain” of the mosquito, there are biotic processes that make conscious perception of sensory stimuli possible or “carry” them. But then, in the case of the mosquito, there is yet a third structure, namely, the perceptive structure, in which there are again three aspects to be distinguished: the sensory phenomena are “supported” or “carried” by physico-chemical structures and processes, and also by biotic processes, but they themselves, as such, are subject to the perceptive and natural laws.

In similar fashion, we could make a case for four structures in the case of the mouse. In addition to the physical, biotical, and perceptive structures, the mouse also has a sensitive structure. In each of these structures, we can distinguish four aspects. Mouse matter differs from mosquito matter in this regard, that mouse matter anticipates the sensitive, whereas mosquito matter matter does not. What this means,
concretely speaking, is that in the brain of a mouse we find certain lobes which have a peculiar physico-chemical structure that makes feelings possible; that is to say, they can “carry” or “support” the life of feeling, in a purely physico-chemical way. The biotic structure of the mouse also has a sensitive aspect, for the life processes in the brain lobes are specialized in such a way that they help to make the feeling-life of the mouse possible. The same holds for the perceptive structure of a mouse: the perceptions of a mouse are equally necessary to make its feeling life possible. Nevertheless, at the same time, the feeling life of the mouse cannot be reduced to the physical aspect, the biotic aspect, or the perceptive aspect. The mouse’s feeling life is something entirely new and unique; it has its own characteristics and lawfulnesses. That is why we assumed a fourth structure: the sensitive structure. This sensitive structure is typified or qualified by the sensitive aspect, which has its own unique laws.

2. 2. 2 The five human-structures

If you have been able to follow the complicated story presented up to this point, it will only be one more small step to understand the five structures which we must distinguish when it comes to humankind. In addition to the structures already mentioned, the human being also has a spiritive structure. We must note carefully what this means, namely, that the lower structures, too, are essentially different in man than they are in the lower organisms. When it comes to the human being, the physical, the biotic, the perceptive, and the sensitive structures all have a spiritive aspect. When we study the human brain, we see clearly that the matter we find there, also the life processes and the phenomena of perception and the feeling life, are so constituted as to make the spiritive life of man possible.

Man’s spiritive life is itself again proper to this new, fifth structure, which we are calling the spiritive structure. Once again, there are five aspects to be distinguished in this structure. Four of these aspects serve to make the spiritive life of man possible: the way they do so is by continuing to function according to their own unique laws, while
at the same time exhibiting a way of functioning that anticipates the spiritive. The fifth aspect, the spiritive, is an indication that man's spiritive life functions under its own specific laws. (A little later, we shall see that those laws are not to be considered natural laws but norms, which are entirely different in nature.)

These five structures in the human being are to be called “human-structures,” in order to make it clear that the human being differs from the lower organisms not only in possessing a spiritive structure, but also because the four lower structures do in fact differ fundamentally as found in the human being, from the corresponding structures as found in the lower organisms. When it comes to the lower organisms, the four lower structures do not “anticipate” spiritive life, whereas in the human being they do. But let us now take a closer look at the three highest structures of man, which we shall call the mental structures:

(a) The PERCEPTIVE structure: It includes sense perception and a number of phenomena directly based upon it:

- **instincts**: an instinct is a behavior that is based on an inborn reaction to a particular sensation. (The sucking behavior of a baby may be an example of such an instinct; as soon as the baby’s lips touch the mother’s nipple, it begins to suck.)

- **reflexes**: in the broadest sense of the term, a reflex is any immediate behavioral reaction which occurs involuntarily and without special thought, especially the learned reactions. (We immediately step on the brakes of our car when we see a small child suddenly crossing the street: this is an example of such a learned reflex.)

In the human being, the perceptive structure is “supported” or “carried” by the so-called brain stem, but the so-called cerebellum also plays an important role here.

(b) The SENSITIVE structure: It includes all inner emotions and feelings. Here we must distinguish between the following:

- **affection**: feeling disposed to or attracted by. This is the basis for such feelings as finding something pleasurable or un-pleasurable,
desirable, pretty or beautiful, and likable or nice;

impulses: these are needs, longings, desires; the experiencing – felt as unpleasant – of a lack of something or a pressing desire for something that one is not willing or not able to do without (often called “urges” or “drives”);

emotions: being touched, suddenly being moved. Examples would be joy, pleasure, or sorrow, rage, fear, displeasure, and shame.

In the human being, the sensitive structure is “carried” especially by the limbic system (lobes) of the brain.

(c) The SPIRITIVE structure: this includes the so-called spiritive life or life of the human spirit. It is within this structure that human deliberations, imaginings, and decisions occur – all those operations of the human spirit that are sometimes called *Acts*. Acts are inner operations of the human spirit that are directed toward culminating actions, to external behaviors. An animal also performs certain *actions*, but they do not arise out of “acts,” for animals do not have a spiritive or act-life. The actions of an animal arise instead out of its perceptively determined instincts and sensitively determined urges or drives. Such instincts and drives are not entirely absent in the human being, but human deeds are determined especially by the act-life or spiritive life. This is why the human being must take responsibility for his deeds, whereas an animal does not. A human being can answer for his deeds; that is to say, he can answer the question from which act his action arose.

2. 2. 3 Spiritive life

People engaged in scientific research sometimes employ strange words. Their aim is not to appear interesting; rather, they use such words because they can give them very precise definitions. The words we use in our ordinary, everyday speech are often unsuitable for precise use because they have various undesirable additional meanings, or perhaps because they are not sufficiently precise in
defining what is meant. Therefore, in the case of this exposition, it is inevitable that the reader be burdened with some new terms that at first might appear strange. But the reader should rest assured that technical terms will be used only when necessary. In due course the technical terms to be introduced here – just a small number of them – will become quite familiar.

It is now time to take a somewhat closer look at the spiritive or act-life in the human being. First we distinguish three dimensions in it:

(1) The cognitive dimension: this involves knowing and coming to know by means of thinking. Those acts that deal especially with such thinking and coming to know, with deliberation and reasoning, we call cognitive acts;

(2) The creative dimension: this involves imagining, fancying or picturing (visualizing) something, (trying) to realize something or devise/invent something. Acts that consist primarily of trying to live into (realize) something existing, or of trying to invent something, we call imaginative and creative acts;

(3) The conative (or volitional) dimension: this has to do with willing or with conscious striving after something, that is, with desiring, choosing and deciding. Acts which primarily involve an inner choice or a decision we call conative or volitional acts.

These three dimensions, of course, are always interwoven with one another; they never occur separately. For example, the decision to buy a house is in the very nature of the case a typically conative act, but at the same time, there is a cognitive element to it. One needs to know a great deal about houses in general and this house in particular. Furthermore, one needs to have some knowledge of one’s own financial prospects, and so forth. And there is also a creative element involved in buying a house. In making the decision, one undoubtedly takes time to imagine what it would be like to live in the house in question, and one will also have spent some time
thinking about what one might be able to do with the house.

There is still another way to look at “acts.” Earlier I indicated briefly that there are as many as nine different sides or aspects to man’s spiritive life that can be distinguished. Now it appears that every act is always specifically “typified” or “qualified” by one of those aspects. Here are a couple of examples to make the point clear. The acts of a scientist are analytical in nature; that is to say, they are characterized by differentiating thinking, which is a thinking that takes apart or dissects (“analyzes”). The acts of the man who likes to work with material and also the acts of the statesman are culture-historical in character; that is to say, they are characterized by the exercise of power, domination or control of something (whether it be control of a material, like wood, or of people). The acts of a person who expresses his thoughts in words are lingual in character; that is to say, he considers which sound symbols (what we call “words”) to choose in bringing his thoughts to expression.

Similarly, the acts of someone whose aim is association with others are social in nature; that is to say, they are characterized by interpersonal contact, by social living, by community. The acts of a businessman who takes inventory and makes up a budget are economically qualified; that is to say, they are governed by principles of management, saving and pricing. The acts of an avenger or of a judge, which are aimed at retribution, are jural in character; that is to say, they are qualified by principles of justice and righteousness. The acts of a person in love or of a (genuine) philanthropist are ethical in character; that is to say, they are characterized by benevolence, by love. Finally, the acts of someone who prays or worships or takes part in the Lord’s Supper or reads the Bible believingly are pistic in character; that is to say, they are characterized by the certainties of faith. (Pistis is Greek for faith.)

But there is also a third way in which we can classify human act-life. Our spiritive life is also determined in part by a number of act-determining factors that belong to the peculiarities of each individual person, to his personal individuality. People who are faced with a similar situation in a similar environment will not all respond in the very same way. This is because of their personal, individual disposition or temperament. They respond differently because their
makeup is different, and also because of their heredity. And so, both nurturing and environment play a role in how they respond.

We can point to at least three kinds of act-determining factors:

(1) **Constitutional** factors. A person’s “constitution” is his bodily makeup, his system, his nature, his natural bent or predisposition. Our acts are determined first of all by our constitutional possibilities. Those possibilities can vary from one person to the next and from one moment to the next. People differ from one another in terms of physical fitness, level of the emotionality, psychical ability to cope, temperament, I.Q., creativity, and so forth.

(2) **Operant** factors: these have to do with differences in aptitude to perform certain operations. Our acts are determined in part by the skills that we have taught ourselves or which others have taught us – and that accounts for almost all our skills. Just think of our acquisition of numerous “automatic” activities, such as walking, playing the piano, driving a car, or certain learned emotional reactions, or of the ability we acquire to think logically, also our learned technical skills, our learned native tongue, our acquired social abilities, our formed sense of justice, and even our acquired capacity to love.

(3) **Motivational** factors: the term motivation is derived from the word “to move.” Our acts are also determined by our motives or by the incentives that move us to action. And so there are a large number of inborn or learned “needs:” the need for food, warmth and sleep, the need for sensory stimulation, the need for things to think about, the need for power, the need for social contact, for success, for an identity of one’s own, for fair treatment, for love, and for loving.

Of course, these three kinds of act-determining factors are also closely bound up with one another. For example, much of what we learn is linked up with the possibilities of our constitution. And so most of us never become good hockey players or artists.
Many of our motivations are also closely tied to what we have learned. Thus a man who has lived all his life in the jungle will never fall victim to a sudden desire for a hamburger. I'm sure the reader can think of many other connections between these three kinds of act-determining factors.

2. 3 The unity of man

Earlier we saw that a Christian view of man must put considerable emphasis on the unity of the cosmos and also on the unity of man himself. But up to this point in our exposition the unity of man has hardly come to expression: we have talked about no fewer than five different “human-structures” to be distinguished in man. And we also saw that in those structures we can again distinguish five different aspects, which adds up to no fewer than 25 aspects in totality, that is to say, 25 different “angles of vision” from which we can look at man. So what has become of the unity of man in all this complicated diversity? How can the unity of man be understood in the midst of this diversity?

Perhaps a few images can help us here. A circle consists of an infinite number of points. But all the points making up the circle have something in common, namely, that they are equidistant from a point we call the center. A lens can transmit an infinite number of light rays, but all the different light rays have something in common, namely, that at a given moment they must all pass through one and the same focal point. Well then, man also has such a center or focal point; it is there that all the aspects and all the structures “come together,” so to speak. It is there that they find their unity and coherence. This focal point cannot be physically located in the human body, nor is it susceptible to scientific analysis. The marvelous wonder that we call the human being is too great, too profound, for this to be possible. We must remember that man is God’s greatest creation. Only by means of such metaphors as “center” or “focal point” can we find a way to talk about that point of unity in man.
From time immemorial people have come up with all kinds of names for that point of unity. Among them were: the soul, the spirit, the ego, the personality, the “I,” the self. For my part, I prefer to use the term that the Bible usually uses for this point, namely, the heart. Of course we must bear in mind that even this term is only a picture. The Bible almost never refers to the organ that pumps our blood when it uses the word “heart.”

Non-Christian views of man usually try to locate this “I” or ego in one of the human-structures. As a result, some have declared the spiritual (or sometimes the sensitive) life, or even biotic life, or even pure matter to be that which is most fundamental in man. But all of these views are gravely in error. The point to grasp is that the ego is not one of the “parts,” or structures or aspects of man. It is no more a part of man than the center of a circle is one of the points on the circumference. The ego is not a “part” of man but rather that “point” in which all of the “parts” come together and find their unity. In fact, it is the point where man transcends all his temporal diversity! Because man is a transcendent being, he does have an ego, whereas an animal does not. And because he has an ego, a heart, he is destined for eternity. In his ego, man is oriented toward eternity, or the higher things, toward God (or an idol). There are many temporal, transient structures to be distinguished in the human being, but in his ego man transcends all that is temporal and fleeting.

Precisely because this ego is directed toward eternity, it is beyond our understanding and scientific analysis. Therefore, it is difficult to speak clearly and explicitly about it. Hence we must be very careful not to offer an all-too-ready definition of such concepts as “soul” or “spirit” or “heart” as these occur in the Bible. There are far too many popular books that describe these Biblical terms too simplistically. They do so by making use of just a few selected Bible texts. What we should notice is that the Bible uses these terms in a great variety of ways, just as we ourselves do in our everyday life. And so we must be extremely wary of wanting to find in the Bible all sorts of “divisions” of man into several “parts.” What the Bible does primarily is to speak of man as a unity. In so doing, it ties even
the sensitive and the spiritive to concrete parts of the body like the heart, the kidneys or the bowels. Thus we find the Bible speaking on the one hand of the “breath” of God (Job 34:14), and on the other hand of the “spirit” of the animals (Genesis 6:17). The Biblical words for “soul” and “spirit” originally meant nothing more than breath or wind. The soul is not a “part” of man that is related to God; no, it is the whole man. The body is dedicated to God (Romans 12:1). The flesh yearns for God (Psalm 63:2). Soul and spirit glorify God (Luke 1:46-47). That is how the Bible presents man – not as a “compound” of “parts,” but as a unity. In addition, this unity is identified as “image of God,” a unity that is gathered up in the ego, in the heart. Thus man, in his ego, as a unity, stands before God, and so the believer serves God.

Therefore, the heart is the innermost depth, the very real and essential inner core of the human personality. In the Bible, the heart is often spoken of as the genuine inner core of man, which then stands over against the often-inauthentic exterior of man. Viewed in this way, the heart has a tremendous religious significance. “Religion” (here defined as the worship and service either of God or an idol) is not just a matter of one particular human-structure or of a “part” of man; neither does it involve only part of his time. Religion is a matter of the whole, the total man, and thus of his heart. In virtue of his origin, man, as a creature, has an intense bond with his Creator and Sustainer and is totally oriented to Him. Because of his fall into sin, this bond and orientation were radically disturbed, but through Christ’s redemption the bond is restored again. Whether a man has been redirected to his God, or remains turned away from Him, comes to its profoundest expression in his heart. There are many places where the Bible identifies the heart as the “place” where evil is hatched, where false prophecy originates, where man in his pride sets himself up against God. The heart is the center of self-worship, of ungodly self-reliance, and of conscious resistance against God. But it is also the focal point of our sense of guilt, the place where God works in us to bring about repentance. Moreover, it is the “organ” by which we seek after God as we yearn for communion with Him. It is the focal point of the fear of the Lord, of the service of God, of our walk with God. It is the place of
sorrow towards God and gladness in Him. It is the focal point of adoration of God, of looking into and keeping and treasuring His commandments, of praying to God and trusting in Him. When we realize all of this, we can see that the “pistic” aspect of our spiritual life mentioned above constitutes the basic connection between the spiritual structure and the heart. And so we see that the heart is what most uniquely characterizes man. It is totally inaccessible to psychology and can only be known through God’s Word-revelation, which is to say that it cannot be known through feelings or by the mind but only by the heart itself when it is in the grip of this very Word.

### 2. 3. 2 Personality

Because man has a heart, he is what we call a “person.” The whole of man’s spiritual life – including his thinking, his imagination and his willing – is directed from out of his heart. In his heart and because of his heart, man is responsible before God. In the final analysis, he is guided not by drives, instincts, and reflexes but by spiritual acts, which are subject to divine norms and have their deepest origin in his heart. Since the way this process unfolds differs from person to person, each human being is not only a person but also a unique personality, called to give shape to his responsibility toward God in his own unique manner, that is to say, entirely “personally.”

It is quite remarkable that the term “person” does not occur in the Bible, whereas we do find it in Greek literature (Greek: ἴδιος, Latin: persona). This is especially surprising in view of the fact that the concept “person,” as we know it, is not a Greek notion at all but is very much a Biblical one. The ancient Greeks did not have a correct image of the person because they did not have a correct image of God. One’s view of the person flows directly from one’s view of God. If we do not understand what it means that God is a person, neither can we understand what we are as “persons.” The gods of the ancient Greeks and Romans were indeed “personal,” but they were not infinite, like the God of the Bible. They were not creators, neither were they morally perfect. The Greeks did not have to feel much responsibility or guilt in relation to those quarreling and immoral
gods of Mount Olympus. When it came to sin and penitence, the Greeks preferred to fall back upon the still more ancient nature religion, with its unpredictable, freakish, blind forces of nature to which man was subject. Death was the fate awaiting everyone – even the deities on Mount Olympus.

The influence of this blind fate was extensively portrayed in the Greek tragedies, where fate plays a central role. The actors in these tragedies wore a mask, which in Latin was called a *persona*. An actor wearing such a mask portrayed a certain “character” or a certain “person,” but the “persons” being portrayed in this way were playthings totally at the mercy of the blind, arbitrary powers of fate. In actual fact, these “persons” had no “character” at all. What happened to them was not the result of their own deeds, whether good or bad, nor was it a matter of their own responsibility. It was not their fault and was not due to their own actions; rather, it was due to freakish forces with which they had nothing whatsoever to do. It could hardly have been otherwise if even the gods recognized by the Greeks were unable to resist their fate. The Greek gods simply were not “big” enough, and so the Greek “person” was not big enough either.

The Greeks and Romans gave us this useful term “person,” but their persons did not have the features that we ascribe to a person today, namely, responsibility, deliberation and the possibility of choice, guilt and retribution, good works and reward. The concept of the person with which people in the Western world today are so familiar does not come to us from the ancients but from the Old Testament. The Old Testament tells us of a personal and infinite God who is the Creator and Sustainer of human beings and says to us: “I have made you, and I’m going to tell you how you are to live. I am giving you My commandments because I love you and because I want it to go well with you” (see Deuteronomy 7:8-11). What we read about in this passage is not blind fate, against which any endeavor or responsible act a human being might undertake is utterly ineffectual; rather, this passage talks about a real person, whose personality is derived from the personality of God. This person gets a “setting” or “rule of conduct” assigned to him by God (His commandments) if he is to function at his very best. He is given
all sorts of room and the potential to work out his responsibility.

The working out of one’s responsibility is, first of all, a strictly individual matter. Here again, individuality is a concept that is prominent in the Bible, but in ancient thought it occupies a subordinate place. For the Greeks the individual had value only as a representative of humankind. That’s the reason the Greeks did not have a great deal of respect for the equality of persons. To the extent that they respected equality, it was restricted to people of their own nation and elite group. But in the Old Testament, on the other hand, the fundamental equality of persons is very highly regarded, and it is not restricted to Israel only: it also holds for strangers. The only thing that really mattered in Israel was this: whoever did God’s will and kept His commandments counted for 100 percent, but whoever was disobedient to God was rejected by Him, whether he was an Israelite or not. Or to put the point in the New Testament way of speaking, we could say that a real person is someone who is “in Christ,” someone who lives out of Him in the power of the Holy Spirit, someone who does God’s will, someone who meets his responsibilities and fulfills all of his possibilities. In such a person Christ is formed (Galatians 4:19). Such a person lives life to the fullest; that is to say, only such a person really lives.

2.4 Christianity and materialism

Earlier I emphasized that we must not allow the ego of man to become “absorbed” into one of the temporal, transient human-structures. This mistake has been made many times in the past, but I shall not deal with all those episodes here. No doubt the most popular and extreme effort along these lines was to let the “I” or ego of man be “absorbed” into the matter of which he is composed. Such thinking is called materialism: it is the view that man is ultimately “nothing other than matter” or “nothing but matter.” It is noteworthy that during recent decades science itself has encountered a number of phenomena which cannot be explained if we adhere to such a “nothing but” faith. It would be well worth our while to examine a couple of such phenomena in order to see clearly that the ego of man transcends matter.
First of all, we should reflect on the fact that a number of leading brain specialists, such as Sir John Eccles and Wilder Penfield, reached a very interesting conclusion on the basis of their extensive research, namely, that the “mind” of a human being is not identical with his brain. Apparently, a person’s “I” or ego can freely make decisions apart from his automatic brain processes and can “program” brain mechanisms in various ways or assess what goes on in those brain mechanisms. During a brain operation in which the patient is fully conscious, a brain surgeon can move the patient’s hands by stimulating a particular part of the brain electrically, but when the patient is then asked: “Why did you move your hand?” he invariably answers: “I didn’t do that – you did it.” Or when the surgeon stimulates another part of the brain, the patient may say, for example: “Everything is suddenly getting bigger.” Yet he does not become filled with the fear that the bigger things he thinks he sees will crush him because he is well aware that the surgeon has somehow or other caused this phenomenon. When the surgeon’s electrode moves the patient’s right hand by means of brain stimulation, the patient never says, “I wanted to move my hand.” His will is not a property of his brain that can be aroused and stimulated by an electrode; rather, it is a property of his “mind,” over which the electrode has no control. There is not a single area in the brain where electrical stimulation can make a patient believe or decide something that he does not himself believe or decide.

In a certain sense, the experiences which the surgeon’s electrode bring about in the patient occur outside of “him”; that is to say, outside of his “mind.” The patient does not experience them as his own. In psychology there are various phenomena that seem to confirm this recognition. For example, there is the phenomenon of the so-called cold emotion, which is a state of purely biotic excitement in which the person does not feel excited. Similarly, because of a brain disorder a person may sometimes break out in uncontrollable laughter without feeling in high spirits. Now, according to the materialistic way of thinking, the emotion would have to be the inseverable by-product
of biotic excitement, and merriment the inseverable by-product of laughter, even if it should turn out that the person does not know why he is happy. However, this does not appear to be the case at all. It appears that more is needed if certain feelings are to be aroused along with certain body states. This “more” takes place on another level than the biotic, namely, on the mental level.

Suggestion is another area of psychology that provides us with interesting examples. It might be described as the area of the tremendous influence of the mind on the (material) body. For example, one scientist, over a period of months, was able to increase the breast size of a number of women. He did so by placing the women under light hypnosis, during which he instructed them to imagine that warm water was streaming over their breasts, or that their breasts were being warmed by a heat lamp. Hypnosis is a special kind of suggestion. If the suggestion is made to a person under hypnosis that a particular pencil is a red-hot iron bar, and if that person’s hand then touches the pencil, a blister will appear on the skin. That shows us how strong the influence of the mind on the body really is. Medical doctors have even discovered that people who were seriously tortured in the past can, in a moment of intense recall, produce blisters and bleeding welts at exactly the same places on the body where the ones were originally inflicted. And so we see that the mind can make the body ill. Furthermore, every medical doctor also knows that the mind’s will to live and to get better is of the greatest importance to patients who are undergoing an operation or are recovering from a serious illness (see Proverbs 17:22). Materialists have no explanation for the fact that the mind (the ego, the heart) influences even the body’s growth or state of health.

An entirely different example is the patient who suffers from Parkinson’s disease. His main problem is that he is not able to turn his wish to move his leg into an actual movement of his leg, even though his nerves and muscles are intact. However, it is remarkable that the patient can get around this problem in a purely mental way. For example, when he is unable to walk through a door, he can try all kinds of thoughts until he manages to dance through the door opening, or he can divert his will to another goal replacing
the thought “I want to move my legs” with the thought “I want to get into the other room.” Here again it appears that there is a mind, an “I,” an ego which can freely decide to make use of the other brain mechanisms in order to reach the goal the patient has set for himself.

A final example comes from the area of so-called optical illusions. Here I am thinking of figures that can be perceived or interpreted in either of two different ways. For example, look at the cube below.

You will soon discover that the left lower square can be “perceived” as either the front or the back of the cube. If you stare at the figure for a while, you’ll notice that it switches by itself from one of the two possible interpretations to the other; that is to say, the square which you have been perceiving as the front of the cube suddenly becomes the back of the cube. The interesting thing is that you can also bring about such a switch by means of a conscious act of will.

And so this switch can either happen “automatically” (because of the properties of the eyes and the brain) or by means of a conscious act of will. The “I” or ego can “hold on” to one of these interpretations for quite some time, but when it does so it must act to resist the brain, which has the tendency spontaneously to replace the one interpretation with the other. Here again we see that the consciously choosing, willing “I” or ego stands over against the brain, with its spontaneous physical and biological processes that function in accordance with the natural laws.
It is very difficult to form an idea of the relationship between the “I” or ego (the spirit, the heart), on the one hand, and the human-structures, on the other. It is too simple to talk as though man consists of two separate “things,” namely, a mind (or spirit) and a body – in fact, it is downright wrong. The “I” or ego is not a “thing” in another “thing,” namely, the body. It is only a “point,” the focal point where all the “rays” of our physical, biotic, perceptive, sensitive, and spiritive existence come together. My ego is not corporeal, but neither is it a “thing” that can be distinguished from my body. Thus my ego cannot think, feel, will, believe, desire, and so forth without my body. This is true at least of our human existence as we know it here on earth; as to our existence after death, we know next to nothing about it. The “I” or ego is distinguished from the body just as the center of a circle is distinguished from its circumference. On the other hand, without my body, my “I” or ego is amputated, just as the center of a circle is but a bare point and no longer the center of anything without the circle’s circumference. It would be like a pianist without a piano. He might still be called a pianist, but the designation would mean next to nothing if there were no piano to play on. Only with a piano is a pianist really a pianist. When he plays a piano, he becomes one with it. In itself, the piano is just a dumb thing, just as the pianist without a piano is helpless. In neither case is there any music. Well then, we could say that the heart is the pianist of the body. When a believer passes away, he is with Christ, which is far better (Philippians 1:23). But it is only in the resurrection, when “piano” and “pianist” are reunited, that perfection is reached and redemption is complete.

Thus our Christian view of man maintains both the diversity and the unity of man. On the one hand, we have placed great emphasis on the great differences between physical, biotic, perceptive, sensitive, and spiritive phenomena. They cannot be reduced one to the other. Each of them has its own God-given unique laws and distinctnesses. And so we are not materialists who seek to reduce everything to the physical. But neither are we spiritualists who reduce everything to the spiritive. And we are not something in between. We can maintain
this full diversity of phenomena in a human being precisely because we do not reduce these phenomena to some one of them but instead relate every one of them to God, who is their Creator and Sustainer.

On the other hand, we are prevented from viewing man as the sum of all his different “parts,” and thereby losing sight of his unity. We stress the unbreakable unity of the physical, biotic, perceptive, sensitive, and spiritive phenomenon because we find that unity in something that transcends all those human-structures, namely, the human “I” or ego (heart, mind). Of course, to say this is not the same as to have explained “the phenomenon man,” but our view of man at the same time suggests the reason why man cannot be fully explained. It is precisely because man in his ego transcends all his temporal and transient structures that his deepest ego cannot be grasped in an actual concept or by way of a scientific analysis.

2.5 Psychological knowledge

In what I have written above, I have occupied myself especially with the question: What do psychologists really study? The answer, in simple terms, is that they are doing their best to understand what goes on inside people and how what goes on inside them determines their behavior. They want to understand why this person before us acts in this way or in that. I could put it another way and say: psychologists study what happens within a person’s perceptive, sensitive, and spiritive structures; they note how sense perceptions, feelings and acts lead to certain actions.

However, the question of the what is immediately followed by the question of the how. By what method does the psychologist gather his knowledge? Another question that needs to be raised is this: to what end does the psychologist collect his psychological facts? Why does he collect them? First I will speak briefly about the “to what end” or “why,” and then I will say something about the “how.”

2.5.1 Conditions of knowledge

The first reason why psychologists, like scientists in general, wish to attain scientific knowledge is that knowledge is power. When we come to know something, we can also learn to control it. The
more knowledge psychologists can assemble about the mental life of human beings, the better they will be able not just to understand people but also to find ways to influence and change them. We see these possibilities realized, for example, in education and social work and psychotherapy. Secondly, knowledge provides satisfaction. It gives us joy and provides a sense of accomplishment. More specifically, accurate psychological knowledge is satisfying because it affords us deeper insight into the riches of God’s highest work of creation – the human being. But above all, in the third place, true knowledge is the knowledge which man obtains in his relation to God. Knowledge of God’s creation deepens our knowledge of God Himself. However much the heart of man ultimately refuses to be analyzed scientifically, psychological knowledge turns out to enrich our insight into man as a religious being who stands in relation to his Creator. But if it is to have such an effect, the psychologist must have a correct view of the nature of the reality of which his field of investigation forms a part. That field of investigation is the mental human-structures. Moreover, he will have to be sure that he is gathering his psychological knowledge in the right way.

In order to obtain his psychological knowledge correctly, the psychologist needs to keep three things in mind.

(1) The light of the Scriptures. Just as in the case of every other science, psychology must be practiced in the light that shines forth from the Scriptures and illuminates all of created reality. Only in the light of Scripture are we able to see all the right relationships and connections at the very outset. Thereby we obtain the right framework within which our research can be done. Anyone who lacks that framework of reference is ultimately groping about aimlessly in the dark (see Chapter 3). And so the Scriptures must stand at the very beginning of our research, for they provide us with certain assumptions with which every kind of scientific research must start (see the opening paragraph of this chapter). The Scriptures also accompany us during our research. They keep us from being diverted onto false side-roads or running stuck in dead ends. The Scriptures are also to be found at the end of our research when we seek to put our results to the test.
(2) **The central role of the heart.** It is of vital importance to realize that all true knowledge, in the final analysis, is not just a matter of the understanding or of one’s feelings but of the heart. This statement applies just as much to the everyday knowledge we gain in our ordinary life as it does to our scientific knowledge. Just as all of our acts and actions ultimately proceed from the heart, even so do our scientific acts and actions proceed from the heart – and to the same extent. Precisely because the heart is never neutral, our scientific activity can never be neutral. In his heart a person is always oriented either to God or to a certain “idol.” Therefore, his knowledge, too, in the final analysis, is either true or false. Knowledge is insight into God’s creation, but in the final analysis this insight is not available to a human being who fails to recognize the integral connection of the creation to God the Creator. The man whose heart is not “true” (Hebrews 10:22) does not know the “truth” (see II Timothy 3:7; Titus 1:1). Nowhere does this become more obvious than in the case of psychological knowledge about man himself. After all, man can only be understood rightly in his relationship to God (or to idols).

(3) **The goal: the service of God.** If psychological truth can indeed be obtained along the lines just outlined, then the truth we come up with is necessarily truth unto God. For example, think of the One who said: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). In the Bible the full meaning of “knowledge of” is “communion with.” As for eternal life, it is both “knowledge of” and “communion with” the Father and the Son (John 17:3; I John 1:2f.). In the Bible, having communion or intimate relations with a woman is spoken of freely as “knowing her” (Genesis 4:1; Matthew 1:25). Anyone who has received true knowledge through regeneration and the illumination of the Holy Spirit has communion with God, or has knowledge of God, of Christ, of himself, and indeed of all reality. True knowledge, that is to say, heart-knowledge, can be had in this present age only in Christ, who is the Truth (I John 5:20). This is the complete Truth with regard to the whole of created and uncreated reality, the old and the new creation, God and man. All truth is concentrated in Christ (Colossians 1:17). It is in Christ that we learn to walk in the
truth, and from Him receive light on all parts of reality. Finally, all our knowledge is unto Him, in order that we may learn to serve and worship Him better.

2. 5. 2 The place of psychology

As we have already seen, it could be said that psychology deals with what goes on in the mental structures. At the same time this field of investigation is so many-sided and complicated that psychology winds up maintaining close connections with all the other disciplines. Its various disciplines can be classified in accordance with our scheme of the five “structures” plus the nine “aspects” which were earlier distinguished within spiritive life. When this is done, we get the following overview.

PHYSICAL:
Psychophysics (especially the study of the relation between sensory stimulation and perception), psychopharmacology (the study of the influence of drugs on our psychical life).

BIOTIC:
Neuropsychology (the study of the relation between brain processes and mental processes), physiological psychology (the study of the connection between physiological and mental processes).

PERCEPTIVE:
Psychology of sensation and perception, psychology of conditioning (the study of learning by means of classical and operant conditioning).

SENSITIVE:
Sensitive psychology (the psychology of our feeling-life).

SPIRITIVE:
Analytical: cognitive psychology (the psychology of thinking, deliberating, insight, and knowledge).
Historical: psychohistory, biographical psychology; also developmental psychology (the psychology of the different developmental stages of human life), educational psychology.

Lingual: psycholinguistics (the psychology of language use).

Social: social psychology (the psychology of social life).

Economic: economic psychology.

Aesthetic: psychology of art, psychology of music, and psychology of literature.

Jural: forensic psychology (the psychology of the criminal and of the administration of justice).

Ethical: psychology of ethics.

Pistic: psychology of religion.

There is a special reason why psychology occupies such a peculiar place among all the other disciplines: it is because psychology is situated right in between the natural sciences and the cultural sciences (or “humanities”). Nature includes those “aspects” of reality which are governed by “laws of nature.” Here we are speaking of the physical and biotic aspects. Culture includes the domain of that which is not governed by natural laws but by “norms” – the spiritual. A natural law tells us how something “is” (for example, heat causes iron to expand), but a norm tells us how something “ought” to be. There are all kinds of norms: logical-analytical, historical, lingual, social, economic, aesthetic, jural, moral, and pistic (faith norms). The perceptive and the sensitive aspects occupy an intermediate position between nature and culture. The perceptive aspect lies adjacent to nature; the sensitive aspect borders on spiritual life. And just as these two aspects occupy an intermediate position, so
psychology takes up an intermediate position between the natural sciences, on the one hand, and the cultural or spiritive sciences, on the other. We see this intermediate position reflected especially in the sensitive aspect, which is so typical for psychology. Our feeling-life is not predictable in such a manner as to allow us to consider the sensitive aspect to be an aspect of nature. On the other hand, our feeling-life is not sufficiently subject to our will for us to be able to call the sensitive an aspect of spiritive life.

Because the sensitive aspect has this transitional character, psychology has characteristics in common with both the natural sciences and the cultural (or spiritive) sciences. Like the cultural sciences, psychology is much less mathematical and exact than the natural sciences, and much more descriptive. It also places much more emphasis on the individual and on the particular, as opposed to general characteristics. And so there is also more room in psychology for the spontaneous and the fortuitous. Moreover, psychology more often asks what something is for than what something is caused by. In these respects, then, psychology is more allied with the cultural sciences, even though it must be admitted that the features we have mentioned also hold for the science of biology – but then to a lesser extent – when it is contrasted with the science of physics and chemistry. At the same time, psychology is akin to the natural sciences, as we see from the fact that various characteristics of the natural sciences also play a role in psychology.

2. 5. 3 Psychological experiments

Experimentation plays an important role in both the natural sciences and psychology. In the minds of some people, the phrase “psychological experiments,” conjures up the frightening prospect of human guinea pigs being subjected to the whims of unscrupulous technocrats. I’m happy to report, however, that this is not what goes on in most psychological experimentation. To experiment means simply to test. What it involves is measuring a certain phenomenon, e.g. intelligence, so that it is better understood and more predictable. Even something so simple as a psychological intelligence test is really a form of “experiment.” We should bear
in mind that “measuring,” as it is done in experimentation, is not just the prerogative of psychologists. In everyday life, all of us are constantly busy “measuring” people in our thoughts or our discussions. The questions we ask when we discuss and the observations we make are all forms of “experimentation.” The only real difference between such everyday activities and what psychologists do is that the latter go about their measurements in a more exact and systematic manner.

Of course psychologists are not able to measure things exactly as physicists do. Physicists have very refined instruments that they can use to obtain extremely precise measurements of temperatures, points of time, speeds, and so forth. But when a psychologist administers an intelligence test, for example, he is quite happy if he is able to conclude that a person’s IQ lies somewhere between 115 and 120. In fact, in this regard the psychologist is much like the biologist, who, in many cases, can do no more than measure a certain phenomenon in an approximate way.

Another point of comparison between psychology and the natural sciences is the creation of what we might call “experimental conditions.” When a physicist undertakes to measure the solubility of a certain substance, he simply dissolves a maximal amount of this substance in water of a certain temperature. He tries things out. But when the psychologists sets out to measure the degree of irascibility or of compliance in the subject of his experiment, he is facing quite a different situation. He could expose the subject to all sorts of irritating situations so as to observe his response. However, this would be both ethically objectionable and very difficult in technical respects. And so psychologists face various problems that physicists to not have to deal with. To get around such problems, psychologists sometimes make use of questionnaires, which ask the subject how he would respond to an irritating situation of such-and-such a sort if he were exposed to it. But an “experiment” of this sort is not without many problems either. Will the subject really tell us what he would do in such-and-such a situation? Is he in fact really in a position to be able to determine such a thing about himself with any degree of certainty? Might he not greatly overestimate or underestimate himself? Indeed, can you be sure that he would
always react in the same way in a given situation? Wouldn't the answers to these questions depend on many other circumstances external to the experiment, all of which are of such a nature that neither the subject of the experiment nor the psychologists could control them, so that they often seem wholly arbitrary to us?

It is no wonder, then, that psychologists in a great many cases would reject the questionnaire approach and would rather expose the subject to a number of experimental conditions. Later on we will look at some examples of those conditions. Then we will also see why it is essential for the subject not to know exactly what the experiment is about, that is to say, not to know what the psychologist is really trying to get at. The aim in such a situation, of course, is to get the subject to respond as “naturally” as possible. What happens in such a case is that the psychologist explains the experiment to the subject in advance, giving him the impression that he wants to measure phenomenon A, whereas in reality the object of the experiment is to measure phenomenon B. The psychologist does not want the subject to know the real purpose of the experiment, for then he would no longer react in a spontaneous or natural way. However, it is obvious that such experiments run into certain ethical problems.

(a) In the first place, there is the issue of the “deception” of the subject. I would maintain that it is totally unacceptable to mislead this subject simply for fear that otherwise he would refuse his cooperation. On the other hand, there is also the kind of “deception” I just described, which is really a kind of stage-management. Giving the subject complete information prior to the experiments of a certain sort would indeed make those experiments impossible, and so a certain amount of information must be withheld. What is important to realize is that any good psychologist does inform his subjects fully as to what the aim of the experiment was immediately after it is finished. And so the withholding of information only lasts for a short period of time, and it may not extend any further than what is strictly necessary for carrying out the investigation for which the experiment has been devised.

(b) In some cases, subjects are directly or indirectly goaded in the course of an experiment to engage in behavior that is in conflict
with God’s norms, for example, when they are asked to lie or to steal or to commit fornication or adultery. It should be clear that such experiments are always unacceptable in a Christian psychology.

(c) It is also important to stress that the subject must suffer no lasting psychical damage as a result of the experiment. In itself, it may be difficult to predict in advance what damage might occur. On the other hand, we do possess important data to the effect that many of the more “radical” experiments have been followed up by thorough and lengthy psychiatric investigations in which it became clear that no evidence of lasting psychological damage to the subjects was found. It appears that people can take a great deal. It is also worth noting that after the experiment is over and has been explained, the subjects usually state that they were quite happy to have participated in the experiment and that they considered the temporary “deception” of only minor importance.

2. 5. 4 Psychological “explanation”

It stands to reason that whenever the natural scientist engages in counting and measuring or making observations or undertaking experiments, he tries to eliminate his personal experience as much as possible from his research. His personal reaction to the phenomena he is measuring – whether he finds them “pretty” or “revolting” – may not play any role in his explanation of them. But when it comes to the psychologist, it is more difficult to eliminate all personal experience. Perhaps it is not even desirable. A psychologist studies a certain human behavior in order to get at the “meaning” and “purpose” or “aim” of that behavior. But in his quest to understand the behavior, he cannot ignore his feelings. On the contrary, he has to be able to identify with the subject who exhibits the behavior in question. He must be able to “enter into” its meaning. Even so, the psychologist must try to eliminate his own person as much as he can from this process. The question for him is not whether he would behave in the very same way if he were in the same circumstances. Rather, his aim is to understand the meaning of the behavior of his subject.

And so he must set aside his own psychical qualities and his
own ideas as much as he can and try to approach the subject of his experiment in as unbiased a manner as possible. However, he will never be able to be as objective as the physicist. Psychology has to do with a much more “human” form of knowledge. Therefore it is much less neutral and value-free. The theoretical prejudices and even the worldview of the psychologist play a much greater role in theorizing than they would in the theorizing done by a physicist. This is part of the reason why we find (worldview-diverse) “schools” of thought among psychologists, whereas these are hardly to be found among physicists. Therefore it is easier and more important to work toward a “Christian psychology” than toward a “Christian physics.”

When a natural scientist tries to “explain” phenomenon, he constructs “theories” with respect to them. He hopes to make his theories so airtight that eventually he may speak of them as “natural laws.” Such “laws” are fixed rules according to which certain natural phenomenon appear to behave. The psychologist is less interested in the universal and more interested in the unique, the individual, such as the “meaning” of this special behavior of this person in this situation. Even so, the psychologist does try to classify individual behaviors under more general categories. We do the same thing in everyday life. We talk about strictly unique events in general terms. For example, we say: “The doctor became very upset and took out his aggression on his patient.” Without quite realizing what we are doing, we categorize the event, recognizing that it has certain properties (agitation, aggression, taking it out on a person) which we had previously taken note of as properties of other “unique” events. The psychologist is trying to do the same thing, but in a more exact and systematic manner. He tries to classify what is “unique” under more general headings, looking for general regularities; in short, he tries to formulate “laws.”

We should not understand the word “laws” in too absolute a sense. In science, a “law” is really nothing more than a theory which has not been disproved heretofore. A “law” only describes how a certain phenomenon has behaved up to this point in time. To declare that there is such a law means that up to the present we have not been able to observe an exception to this rule. Moreover,
there are also “laws” – in psychology they are more common – which describe not how a phenomenon always behaves but how it usually behaves. For example, we may say: “In children, intelligence (usually) increases with age.”

There is one other difference between physical and psychological laws that deserves mention here. Physical laws usually indicate a cause, whereas psychological laws are more often likely to indicate a purpose or aim. Psychologists are greatly interested in the aim of behavior, that is to say, in the motives or incentives that induce a person to undertake certain behaviors. In this regard their work is more like that of the cultural sciences, which also take a great interest in motives and incentives. And so we see again that as it develops its theories and formulates its laws, the science of psychology occupies a peculiar position in between the natural sciences and the cultural sciences.
Chapter Three
The Development of Psychology

Experimental psychology as we know it today is only a good hundred years old. Actually, it could not have put in an appearance very much earlier, because it had to wait for other developments to take place first. For instance, the “experiment” first had to be discovered and introduced into the world of science. That was a development that came fairly late in our history. The thinking of Western man had to go through quite a development before “room” was found for the notion that it was important to make sensory observations of concrete phenomena and for the realization that one could do experiments with those phenomena. This change in thinking only came about at the time of the Renaissance (especially the sixteenth century). It was further fostered by the spirit of the Reformation. Under the influence of the Reformation, Western man became interested in God’s creation once again. People no longer took their own ideas regarding the creation as their starting point but began modestly and reverently to put “questions” to the creation; that is to say, they began to make observations and do experiments. The result was that the creation, bit by bit, yielded up its secrets. The “experimental method” proved to be extremely successful in many different fields. A number of researchers operating in the general tradition of the Reformation, such as Johannes Kepler, Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton, did pioneer work in this respect.

These developments made possible the swift growth of the natural sciences in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The growth of this science was also necessary before experimental psychology could make an appearance. A certain amount had been known about the physical and biotic aspects of the human being before it would become feasible to gather knowledge about the mental aspects. And so it should not surprise us that the first “psychologists” in the
nineteenth century were originally physicists, physiologists and physicians. Here I could mention such famous names as Johannes Müller (1801-58), who discovered the reflex (see below) and his pupil Ludwig von Helmholtz (1821-94), who occupied himself with the question of nerve-stimulation and motor reactions, among other things. Other important pioneers were Ernst Weber, and Gustav Fechner (1801-87), who was appointed professor of physics at Leipzig in 1834. Both of these men did interesting research work in the area of the physiology of the sense-organs (how do the senses “work”?). In 1860 Fechner wrote his Elements of Psychophysics, which exercised a tremendous influence on the early history of psychology. This work might well be called the first textbook in experimental psychology. However, Fechner’s book breathed the spirit of Charles Darwin’s On the Origin of Species, which had appeared the previous year. Thus evolutionistic tone was to influence the young science of psychology for a long time to come, as we shall see in due course. Simply put, what happened is that the evolutionistic psychologists decided that the human psyche could be explained solely in physical or physiological terms.

3.1 Structuralism and Functionalism

Fechner launched the experimental-psychological method, but it was another investigator who managed to base a whole science on the foundation of that method. That second investigator was a pupil of Johannes Müller, the physician Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920). In 1873-74, after making a thorough study of the work of Helmholtz, Weber and Fechner, he published his two-volume epoch-making work Grundzüge der physiologischen Psychologie which was translated by E. B. Titchener under the title Principles of Physiological Psychology (New York, 1904). By doing so, he became the first “psychologist.” Yet the very term “physiological psychology” already indicates that Wundt, as a Darwinist, proposed to explain the human psyche in a purely physiological way. In other words, he proposed to explain it in terms of its far-removed animal origins. In 1875, Wundt became a professor at Leipzig and there he opened the world's first “psychological laboratory.”
Before long this laboratory became a world-renowned center where research workers from far and wide were brought together to undertake this kind of study. Once those investigators returned to their home bases, they proceeded to establish similar laboratories themselves. And so, by this route, a whole network of centers for psychological research quickly sprang up, both in Europe and North America. And in the United States it was the great psychologist William James (1842-1910) who set up a psychological laboratory at Harvard University in Cambridge, thereby becoming the pioneer of psychology in that country. By about the year 1900, psychology had thus become an independent and established science in the entire Western world. And so we can say that psychology is still a very young science – so young that the great majority of all psychologists who have ever lived are still alive.

Just how truly psychology was still in its infancy is evident from the fact that around the year 1900 there were different “schools” of psychology that combated one another vehemently. Because there were as yet relatively few experimental data, these new researchers were driven back to the prejudices embedded in their various worldviews – and those prejudices can really differ! The first psychologists did agree that the primary task of psychology should be to study “consciousness.” For them psychology was the theory of consciousness or of the phenomena of consciousness. But there were various questions on which their opinions differed, such as what really mattered when it came to consciousness, and how one could make observations of consciousness.

Wundt himself and his followers were advocates of what was called structuralism. According to them, the idea was to look for the structure, the contents, the elements of consciousness. Included among such elements are, for example, tones, colors, tastes, smells. Moreover, among these elements there are all sorts of relations to be distinguished. For instance, certain colors, sounds, smells, forms, and temperatures are associated with the concept “fire.” In such a manner, consciousness was “filled” with elements, relations, concepts, images, feelings, etc. Introspection, as it was called, was the method recommended by Wundt to investigate the structure of consciousness. What this term means literally is to look inside
oneself. Human subjects were assigned the task of observing changes of consciousness within themselves as the person in charge of the experiment administered all kinds of sensory stimuli.

But there were other researchers who did not think so highly of “introspection.” It soon became evident just how subjective this method was: different investigators using this method would come to totally divergent results. Moreover, introspection could only be used in the case of adults; it was useless when dealing with animals or the mentally retarded or children. And so one could not come to know anything about the development of consciousness, either about the development from baby to adult, or about the development from animal to human being. Yet these were just the things that many Darwinist psychologists wanted to find out about. Just as biologists concerned themselves with the changing functions of the organs during this (supposed) evolution, so there were psychologists who wanted to find how the actual function of consciousness had developed during the continual struggle for survival in the evolutionary process. Psychologists of this mind could also be called functionalists. William James (mentioned earlier) was the leader of this school. Now, the functionalists did not altogether brush introspection aside; they were the first psychologists to introduce other kinds of experiments as well – observation of behavior in children and in animals. By not asking their experimental subjects what they were experiencing “within themselves” but observing how their subjects reacted – even though they realized that one could only observe the subject’s “exterior” – these functionalists felt they could construct a psychology that would be more objective than that of the structuralists.

3.2 Depth Psychology

In complete independence of the developments just sketched above, there arose in Europe, at about the same time, a different psychological school which was associated with the famous physician and psychiatrist Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). In one important respect, however, Freud was in agreement with the thinkers mentioned above: he was a convinced and consistent

Chapter Three – The Development of Psychology
Darwinist. Freud carried into psychology the revolution that Darwin had brought about in biology. He arrived at his “psychoanalytical” theory not by means of experiments but by observing neurotic patients. He took the radical position that psychology was not concerned in the first place with consciousness; it was concerned rather with a deeper and much more influential “layer” or “stratum” in the human personality, namely, “the unconscious” (hence the term “depth psychology”). His first investigations focused on the phenomenon of hysteria, which was quite widespread at the time. People with hysteria suffer from genuine (not feigned) bodily disorders of such a sort that there does not appear to be any physical cause. Such disorders have purely mental causes. Freud developed a method by which his hysterical patients (almost all of whom were women) were able to recall all sorts of emotional experiences of the past. He drew the conclusion that those emotional occurrences could be attributed to “conflicts” between passionate (especially sexual) desires, on the one hand, and the taboos of the environment, on the other. He theorized that because those conflicts were unpleasant, they were “repressed” to “the unconscious,” where they were stored up without the patient’s being aware of it. Nevertheless, the conflicts did come to an expression, but then in a roundabout way: They were “disguised” or “camouflaged” by means of the hysterical symptoms. If the patient could just bring the repressed emotions back “to the surface” (by making them a part of consciousness), he could be rid of them and be healed of his disorders.

Before long, Freud added to these initial theories a number of new ones, which were just as original (and in many cases just as dubious). One such new idea was that of the “Oedipus complex.” According to Freud, every little boy was supposed to have the unconscious desire to get rid of his father so that he could enjoy the love of his mother entirely for himself (including sexual intercourse with her!). Freud used the term “Oedipus” because the Greek king Oedipus had intentionally done that very thing. But with advancing age, this hatred toward the father was supposed to give way to “identification:” the boy would then take his father, and later also some other great and admired figures, as his models. Freud theorized that in the case of people who are mentally ill, this
process did not unfold in the proper way. Instead, it developed into an unhealthy attitude of revolt against persons in authority.

Gradually, sexuality began to occupy a bigger and bigger place in Freud’s theories. Therefore, he taught that in our dreams, all sorts of unfulfilled and even forbidden desires, especially of a sexual and perverse nature, made themselves known. Freud maintained that even the very small child already has sexual drives which are directed toward the parents. He believed that the sexual behavior of the child bears a strong resemblance to certain perverse kinds of behavior occurring in adults. Persons who experience an abnormal development, he thought, could remain “stuck” in certain “stages” (“phases”) of childish sexuality. As a result, they would develop all sorts of mental aberrations. In later years Freud came to distinguish between the Es or Id (the unconscious instincts or drives), the Ich or Ego (the I-consciousness) and the Uber-Ich or Super-Ego (the largely unconscious “conscience,” which is imposed upon us by norms and taboos that stem from our environment, especially during our upbringing).

For Freud, this body of ideas formed an almost unassailable life-and-world-view, which was indissolubly connected with his materialistic and evolutionistic thinking. Scientifically speaking, Freud deserves credit for placing great emphasis on the significance of unconscious emotions and of the experiences of early youth. But for the rest, his views tell us more about the Victorian morals of his time than about the nature of man. Even so, those views have had an enormous effect on Western thought; they are comparable to the influence of Darwin and Marx. Terms like “repression,” “inhibition,” “frustration,” “Freudian slip,” and “the unconscious” have become common coin among us. Moreover, Freud’s arrogant writings on religion, which he viewed as a mental aberration, have contributed mightily to the de-Christianizing of the West. It should also be noted that Freud is the psychologist perhaps most responsible for the fact that in our century we have come to place much less value on ideas of genuine moral guilt and of personal responsibility: man is now represented as being, on the inside, the plaything of unconscious forces, and on the outside, of the environment’s strong taboos. Freudianism has taught us to shift
the blame from the person to the parents and society. In opposition to all such thinking, Christian psychology emphasizes that every individual is personally responsible to God and to all who are in authority over him, even though unconscious forces do play a certain role in our lives, as we shall see.

3.3 Reflexology

We have now taken a brief look at the initial period of development of the science of psychology, focusing our attention on Western Europe and the United States. At this point we will move over to Russia and look at the work of Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936). In about 1900, Pavlov began his famous experiments with dogs. He studied their “reflexes.” We speak of a reflex action when a stimulus is directly and immediately followed by a particular reaction, which psychologists call a “response.” The response is uniquely correlated with the stimulus. The brain and consciousness are excluded in all of this. A standard example is the salivating reflex. When good food is placed before a hungry dog, (or even before a human being!) the salivary glands “automatically” begin to secrete saliva. This is an example of an inborn reflex: under normal circumstances, the stimulus leads unconditionally to the response. Psychologists speak here of an unconditioned stimulus and an unconditioned reflex. What Pavlov did was to investigate this salivating reflex. The stimulus was the sight of food, and the response was drooling. In the course of his investigation, he combined the stimulus with the ringing of a bell, for example. After he had combined the display of food with the ringing of the bell on a number of occasions, he proceeded to ring the bell without showing any food. Lo and behold, the dog began to drool. This indicated that the reflex was “coupled” to a new, conditioned stimulus and therefore had become a conditional or conditioned reflex. The dog had “learned” a new reflex. This particular form of “learning” is called “conditioning.”

It is important to understand that the dog does not start to drool because he “knows” that food is on the way whenever he hears the bell ring. “Conditioning” has little to do with “knowing.”
apparent from the fact that conditioned reflexes can be produced even in very primitive animals. Such reflexes occurring apart from any “knowledge” can also be produced in human beings. An example is the eyelid reflex. The eyelid closes automatically without the person being aware of it when it is subject to a stimulus, such as a gust of wind. If you combine the gust of wind with a weak flash of light, you will find that after a while the reflex occurs after the flash of light by itself. The experiments performed by Pavlov for which he ultimately received the Nobel Prize did not just have an effect in scientific terms. Pavlov placed his results within the framework of a particular worldview and thereby managed to exert great influence. He declared triumphantly that there was no need whatsoever to appeal to any sort of “consciousness” in the process of explaining the results he had obtained. He maintained that if anything along the lines of conscious phenomena existed, they were at most side-effects which should not be allowed to play any further role in psychological explanations. As a convinced Darwinist, this point was of great importance for Pavlov. The great emphasis he placed on animal experiments also stems from his Darwinist convictions. And, when his experiments became known in America, they struck root there. Earlier we saw that the functionalists gradually devoted themselves increasingly to performing experiments on animals, claiming thereby that they would get to understand man better. This is a typically Darwinist strategy.

One such important functionalist was Edward Thorndike (1874-1949). Working completely independently of Pavlov, Thorndike conducted experiments in which he explored the learning process in animals. He wanted to know how animals learned how to free themselves from a “puzzle box” which he had constructed specifically for the purpose of his experiment. When a hungry cat is placed in the cage, it sees food lying outside the cage and would like to get out. It is able to get out if it pulls on a loop. Gradually the cat “catches on” and learns how to free itself ever more quickly as the situation is repeated again and again. This kind of learning behavior was called by Thorndike “trial and error.” It was his conviction that behaviors that resulted in satisfying definite needs lead to the formation of specific nerve connections in the brain.
As those behaviors are repeated and yield the same positive result on each occasion, they are continually “strengthened.” This idea of “strengthening” or “reinforcement” would soon begin to play a major role in psychological investigations.

3. 4 Behaviorism

The experiments of Thorndike and of Pavlov eventually led to the rise of a particularly influential movement in psychology which came to be known as behaviorism. The founder of this school was John B. Watson (1878-1958). In 1913 Watson announced that psychologists would finally have to make a radical break with any and every form of a “theory of consciousness,” for psychology, as he saw it, was a purely objective, experimental branch of the natural sciences. Introspection was fundamentally misconceived; instead, psychologists should concern themselves only with human behavior. Hence, the name that came to be associated with his way of thinking was behaviorism. As for such things as consciousness, mental states of affairs, the will, mental images, Watson decided that they simply couldn’t be described scientifically. But behavior can be observed and described. Appealing to the experiments done by Thorndike and Pavlov, Watson maintained that it is clear that behavior can be explained, and in purely physiological terms at that! Watson believed that if he could simply disallow all mental concepts and get rid of them, he could purge psychology of all prejudices derived from any sort of worldview. He did not realize that he himself was simply introducing a different worldview – a materialistic and evolutionistic one.

In the method he applied, Watson was quite consistent. For him, “thinking” did not imply anything mental: It was nothing more than a form of inaudible talking, accompanied by tiny movements of muscles in the larynx, the tongue and the lips. He thought that “emotions” could be completely reduced to secretions of all sorts of glands. Human beings are essentially nothing more than robots. According to Watson, even the “noblest” human feeling reactions arise from nothing other than conditioned reflexes.

In the 1920s Watson’s school dominated all of American
psychology, but in the 1930s people began to see that his view was simply too extreme. A number of psychologists “repented” of their radical behaviorism, while others developed a more moderate form that came to be known as “neo-Behaviorism.” The most famous of the neo-Behaviorists was B. F. Skinner, who was known especially for his experiments with rats and pigeons. His experiments involved the so-called Skinner box, which was a successor to Thorndike’s puzzle box. In the Skinner box is a small lever which the rat presses or a small plate which the pigeon can peck. When either of these actions is performed, a little ball of food rolls directly into a pan inside the cage. In this situation again, the animal gradually “learns” to know the connection between pressing a lever and the food appearing in the cage. By means of this simple apparatus, numerous clever experiments were carried out to investigate what it takes to establish conditioned reflexes, and also what it takes to break them down.

If we speak here of “conditioning” and “reflexes” (as Skinner himself does), it is important to point out that there is naturally quite a difference between the conditioning experiments of Pavlov and the experiments performed by Skinner. In connection with Skinner’s experiments we are dealing with active learning of certain behaviors by which the animal can itself introduce into its surroundings, certain changes which are pleasing to it. Or, in the case of some other experiments the animal can escape or avoid unpleasant changes in its surroundings. What Pavlov did, on the other hand, was to start from existing, unconditioned reflexes such as the salivating reflex. In such an experiment, the animal subject always remains passive. But in the conditioning carried out by Skinner, the animal subject itself actively learns how to perform certain operations that are useful to it. Pavlov’s conditioning is called classical (or respondent) conditioning, and Skinner’s is called instrumental (or operant) conditioning. It is very important to understand that both forms of conditioning can also occur in human beings, as we shall see later. This is just as much of a truth to be faced as the truth that all human learning cannot be reduced to conditioning, as the extreme behaviorists maintained. And then there is indeed conditioning in the case of human beings, but there
are also “higher” forms of learning in man, and they are of an entirely different order.

3. 5 Humanistic Psychology

In the 1950s, an entirely new school of psychology appeared on the scene. The leadership for this new school came from the American psychologist Abraham Maslow (1908-70). This school represented itself as a third force, professing strong opposition to psychoanalysis, on the one hand, and behaviorism, on the other. Maslow reproached the behaviorists for acting as if rats and pigeons could serve as a kind of simplified “human model.” According to Maslow, much human behavior is totally unique and definitely cannot be reduced to the behavior of rats or pigeons or even of apes. He was thinking of the making of fire, the construction of instruments, of speech, of abstract thinking, of creative social behavior, and of art, science, morals, and religion. But Maslow also had a bone to pick with the psychoanalysts. He argued that there is no proof that all human conduct could be reduced to unreasoned drives or childhood conflicts. In opposition to what Freud tried to do, he maintained that one cannot understand the behavior of healthy persons on the basis of the psychiatric observation of mentally disturbed people. The behaviorist thinks in terms of animals, whereas psychoanalysis thinks in terms of the patient. In opposition to both these approaches, Maslow proposed to think in terms of the (healthy) person. It was time for psychology to become a genuine human psychology! Therefore, the somewhat confusing name “humanistic psychology” was adopted.

At this point a question quite naturally arises: what really is a “healthy person”? According to Maslow, it is a person who has realized all his inner possibilities. And so Maslow regards it as a question of the self-actualization of the person, or of self-fulfillment. To achieve such actualization or fulfillment, according to Maslow, a substantial dose of life-experience is necessary, along with favorable social circumstances (good social opportunities, possibilities for the development of spontaneity, creativity, and so forth!). And so one can readily see that Maslow was not much interested in
“experiments,” and also that he, like other psychologists, presents us with a definite life-and-world-view. In order to attain this self-actualization or self-realization, according to Maslow, a person must obtain the satisfaction of his needs. Moreover, the needs must be satisfied in a distinct order (Maslow’s hierarchy). First of all, the physical needs to be satisfied (thirst, hunger, sleep, and so forth); if this is not done, one would never get around to the higher needs. But once the physical needs have been satisfied to some extent, certain higher needs present themselves: the need for safety, the need for security, for settledness and stability (settled surroundings, regular income, a well-ordered existence). In addition, when these needs have been met to a reasonable extent, one feels the need for love and for “belonging” somewhere. Beyond those needs, one feels the need for esteem and respect, for self-respect as well as respect for others. And when those needs have been reasonably met in turn, the highest needs of all are felt: the need for self-actualization, that is, the need for the highest development and highest use of all one’s abilities and qualities. Only when all of this has been achieved can a person really be said to be “mentally healthy.”

When we consider the strong emphasis on “needs,” we see that Maslow has not really gotten beyond Darwinism either. No more than the other psychologists discussed above has he really put his finger on what makes man typically human – not his (mainly) sensitive needs, but his spiritive qualities. And, Maslow certainly has not put his finger on what is most fundamental in man, that is, his heart or his relation to God (or to idols). Thinking along typically humanistic lines, Maslow maintains that in man, the satisfaction of needs (directed to himself) and “self”-actualization are central. But in Christianity, on the other hand, what lies at the heart of the human being’s life is the actualization and development of his relation to God and of the new life in Christ. In the Christian’s life, the “highest need” is just that – development of communion with the Father and the Son. It is precisely on the basis of a Christian way of thinking that we could come to understand all sorts of phenomena for which there is no place in Maslow’s understanding of things, for example, how (spiritive!) norms transcend (sensitive!) needs. For example, think of the person in a concentration camp who, in spite of his
own gnawing hunger, shares his meager rations with someone else. In such a situation, the highest values play a role, whereas such an elementary need as hunger is not satisfied at all.

### 3.6 Cognitive Psychology

When Hitler came to power in Germany, many German-speaking psychologists fled to North America. The result in North America was that a thorough exchange of points of view took place, and the exchange had a very fruitful effect on the development of psychology. One of the results was that more and more behaviorists abandoned the old overly simple scheme: S → R. That is to say, a certain stimulus S leads to a specific response R, and as for what is between S and R, it is regarded as of no significance or as completely uninteresting. Gradually more and more psychologists did begin to regard the “in between” as interesting. They wondered whether the response was really conditional on the stimulus only or whether there might be something going on in the organism itself which partially determined the response.

Let us consider an example: in the case of the cat escaping from its cage, is it really just a question of a purely automatic “trial and error,” or are such things as “insight” and “goal-directedness” involved? More and more psychologists began to insist that there was something more going on, which meant that we would indeed have to assume in both animals and human beings that there were cognitive factors.

Let us take the instance of perception. “Seeing,” “hearing,” “smelling,” and so forth are not to be understood simply as particular physiological conditions of the brain. There is much more to our “conscious perception.” Moreover, our perception is a determining factor in our behavior! And so it becomes necessary to place at least a P (for perception) between the S and the R: S → P → R. Or we could consider the active learning process in man, as reflected in the learning of a language. Conditioning has very little to do with learning a language. There is much more to it, and the extra dimension can only be explained if we assume not just perceptive factors but also sensitive and especially spiritive factors.
(see Chapter 2). I will have more to say about this matter in Chapter 4. Many more examples could be given of human actions that can only be understood if we assume that such “higher” factors are involved. In our Christian view of man, which we have taken as the starting-point for Christian psychology, this was a perfectly obvious first principle. But in secular psychology, which has suffered for so long under the dominance of materialistic and evolutionistic first principles, psychologists have only slowly and reluctantly come to the point of being willing to accept the presence of such cognitive factors. In this regard they were ill served by the prejudices built into their worldview.

An example of such a “cognitive psychologist” was the neo-behaviorist Edward Tolman (1886-1959), who placed great emphasis on “goal-directedness” in animal behavior. For example, a rat that must learn to find its way in a maze by walking and seeking learns to avoid all sorts of blind alleys and in the end finds the shortest way to the food that beckons enticingly. Its successful performance indicates that it is not just conditioned to carry out a series of individual movements; it learns the route to go, or a “procedure,” or, as people like to say in such a case, a “cognitive map.” What determines the animal’s eventual responses, according to Tolman, is not the stimuli in themselves but the “cognitive maps.”

Now, I do not agree with the use of the term “cognitive” in this context, for I would rather reserve it for man (see Chapter 2), but my terminological objection does not take away from the thrust of the argument, insofar as we see that even in the behavior of mammals there is more involved than simply conditioned reflexes.

3. 7 Gestalt Psychology

Cognitive psychology has also been influenced by a school which assumes a rather special place within the science of psychology. The founder of this school was the Berlin psychologist Max Wertheimer (1880-1943). Whereas the structuralists of a previous generation had sought to analyze consciousness into “elements,” Wertheimer totally rejected the idea of separate elements. He stressed that in perception, people do not perceive any separate elements at all but
rather perceive coherent “wholes,” each of which possesses its own structure. In the German language, such a “Whole” is called a *Gestalt*, and because this word is difficult to translate into other languages, it has been taken over in English and some other languages as a psychological concept. An example of such a Gestalt is a melody. A melody may be played on a number of different instruments, at various tempos and in various different keys, but it is always recognizable as “the same” melody. It is obvious that the melody retains its own quality, structure, form, figure, and “Gestalt” in all these different circumstances.

We often encounter another example of a Gestalt when we're driving in traffic. If we see two red warning lights, the one just above the other, and they are alternately going on and off, we perceive what is before us as though a light is moving up and down, as though it is jumping around. We do not perceive the two lamps going on and off as separate stimuli; rather, we regard them as parts of a whole, of a Gestalt. Consider the example of the two sketches of a face below. In the one case we have a “laughing” mouth, and in the other we see a “sad” mouth. It is very striking that the eyes, which are sketched in exactly the same way in the two figures, make a very different impression. In the one figure we see happy eyes, while in the other we see sad ones. Here we have a fine example of a Gestalt: the faces as a whole. All the parts within the face are dependent on one another. Or to put the point in a slightly different way, we could say that the way we perceive the eyes is not just dependent on how those eyes look by themselves but is influenced by how the eyes are connected with all the other subordinate parts in the total “stimulus-field.”
A noted pupil of Wertheimer was Wolfgang Köhler (1887-1967), who performed a series of now celebrated experiments on chimpanzees. From those experiments, it became apparent that the higher animals are able to solve problems by relying on a certain form of “insight.” They go about it in such a way that their behavior is clearly dependent on the way they experience their entire “stimulus-field” (the surroundings they perceive). Because the animal’s perception of the “field” suddenly “focuses,” so to speak, in a different way, the animal suddenly “sees” the solution of a problem. For example, it may see how it can reach a banana that appears to be beyond reach by making use of a stick or a box. A later follower of Köhler spoke of the “aha-experience.” On the basis of this kind of experimentation and explanation, Köhler enlarged the theory of perception of the Gestalt psychologists and made it into a complete psychological theory.

A similar expansion of the theory was undertaken by another student of Wertheimer, who came to the United States before the Second World War, just as Wertheimer and Köhler did. I am speaking of Kurt Lewin (1890-1947). He began with experiments in the area of motivation psychology, which takes up the question what it is that activates a person. He concerned himself with the “dynamic forces” in people that help to determine their behavior. In the course of his investigations, he made the stimulus field into a complete “dynamic field,” influencing human behavior just as much. The total “psychological field” which determines man’s behavior thus consists of the motivational factors in him and the environmental factors all around him. Lewin sought to express all of this in a formula that has become famous: $B = f(P, S)$. What the formula expresses is that behavior (B) is determined by personal factors (P) on the one hand and by situational factors (S) on the other. It is remarkable that Lewin leaves the life history of the person out of the picture in this formula. In his attempt to explain a person’s behavior, he does not, like a psychoanalyst, appeal to the person’s earlier youth conflicts or, like the behaviorist, appeal to his earlier conditioning(s); rather, he asks what forces in the “psychological field” play a role here and now. Thus it becomes much more important how the person experiences and views his situation here and now. Because he thinks along such
lines, Lewin can make much more room for cognitive factors than the psychoanalysts and behaviorists did. What one knows, or thinks he knows, about his environment and about himself now becomes a primary factor in human behavior. This conclusion represents an important insight, however little this view resembles a Christian psychology in other respects.

3. 8 Existentialistic Psychology

There are still materialistic behaviorists around today, but they constitute a minority. What happens in practice is that many psychologists no longer pay much attention to their “view of man.” They accept that there are both physical and psychical phenomena, and they do take some trouble to try to reduce the one kind to the other. But for the rest, they do not bother much about the connection between these two kinds of phenomena. They no longer cling to such simplistic formulas as \( S \rightarrow R \). For convenience, some unknown \( X \) is placed between \( S \) and \( R \), giving us the formula \( S \rightarrow X \rightarrow R \). For the rest, such psychologists do not concern themselves with the question of the “nature” of man.

A major exception to this pattern is a group of thinkers to be examined now, namely, the existentialists. They include such figures as Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980). The life-view of these thinkers does inquire into the “nature” of man. These thinkers place great emphasis on the total, concrete person, on his uniqueness, his authenticity, his true, full “existence” in the midst of an incomprehensible, absurd world in which man must learn to make choices. These thinkers are somewhat like the humanistic psychologists dealt with above in that the views they offer bear more resemblance to a life-and-world-view than to an experimental-psychological theory. Nevertheless, their thinking has exercised considerable influence in modern psychology.

In opposition to psychoanalysis and behaviorism, the existentialists have emphasized that man’s consciousness cannot be reduced to physical-chemical processes; what they say is that it is only “carried,” or “borne” or supported by them. Christians can agree with this claim, but now come some differences that need
to be noted. According to the existentialists, consciousness (or the mind) is completely free. Human behavior is not determined by our molecules but by our free choices. Indeed, they affirm that a human being really lives, “exists,” only if his freedom is curtailed in no way whatsoever. But a Christian psychology cannot go along with these affirmations, for “freedom” is understood here as a matter of being free from the ordinances that were given by our Creator or in the creation and by His Word. The existentialist exalts the freely developing, evolving mind of man. Whereas the psychoanalyst had talked about a life of drives and the behaviorist of completely conditioned existence, the existentialist speaks instead of the spiritive, creative impulse to development. But this approach is not the solution we are looking for either. On the one hand, man’s spiritive life is not to be reduced to drives and reflexes, as the psychoanalysts and behaviorists respectively would have it, but on the other hand, man’s spiritive life should not be exalted and made into a free mind that hovers fearlessly above the matter of its own will. The life of the mind happens to be subjected not to drives or reflexes but to the heart. And in his heart man is directed either to God and His commandments – in which case he is truly free! – or, to idols and false gods that enslave him, whether they be false gods within man (for example, his drives) or his open “free” mind, or those of his environment, whether material or spiritual.

3. 9 Christian Psychology

We as human beings are subject to divine norms – logical, technical, lingual, social, economic, aesthetic, jural, ethical, and pistic (faith norms). These norms are not thought up by us; rather, they have been laid down by God in His creation order. And true freedom consists not of being independent of these norms but of living in subjection to them. All the schools of psychology which we have discussed up to this point, whether psychoanalytical, behavioristic, humanistic, or existentialistic, failed to appreciate this “vertical” relation of man to God. Psychologists all want to gain some understanding of man. But it is essential to realize that the “nature” of man is concealed in the human heart, which can only be understood in terms of man’s
relationship to God (or the idols). And so Christian psychology would begin with the Biblical wisdom that only God can give us with respect to the relation in which He has placed man. Making grateful use of that wisdom, Christian psychology can then move on to critically deepen and enrich his insights by goal-directed observations and experiments.

The Christian psychologist is like Kurt Lewin in that he is alert to two groups of factors determining behavior: personal (P) and situational (= environmental) factors (S). Nevertheless, in front of both he places the R factor – the religious condition of the human heart. And so our psychological formula must be:

\[ B = f(R, P, S) \]

The reader is reminded once again that when it comes to these personal factors, we can distinguish between biotic (b), perceptive (p), sensitive (feeling) (f), and spiritive (s) factors. Furthermore, there is a division along perpendicular lines to be made between constitutional (c), operant (o), and motivational (m) factors. These additional distinctions now make it possible to present the following two formulas:

\[ P = f_1(R, b, p, f, s, S) \]
\[ P = f_2(R, c, o, m, S) \]

The R factor (the religious condition of a heart) is itself in turn partially dependent on P and S; yet it is determined first of all by that on which religion focuses, namely, God or the idols. And neither God nor the idols are accessible via experimental investigation. As we saw earlier, the heart, too, at its innermost, is not able to be analyzed in scientific terms. When it comes to the heart, we are dependent on the light of God’s truth as it is known to us from Holy Scripture.
Chapter Four

The Mental Structures

Now it is time to offer a brief survey of the psychological knowledge we currently possess about the mental structures. In preparing this survey, I am making grateful use of the psychological information which non-Christian psychologists have assembled. But at the same time, I am dressing up this information in an entirely new way – by drawing on the help of our Christian view of man.

4. 1 The Brain and Hormones

If we are to understand the mental structures, we must first study their biotic basis. In human beings, all mental processes are based on or “carried” by physical-chemical processes. And these processes occur in the brain. When I am suffering a pain in my foot, it is true that my sore foot is the cause of my pain, but on the other hand, my foot is not the “carrier” of my pain in the sense in which we are using the term here. My sore foot causes a certain physical-chemical state in a certain part of my brain, and it is that state which we perceive as “pain.” Not the sore foot but the physical-chemical state in my brain is the “carrier” or “ground” of my pain sensation. Therefore, I will deal first of all with brain processes.

4. 1. 1 The brain

The brain is part of the nervous system, which in turn consists of two parts:

1) The central nervous system, which includes the brain and spinal cord and;

2) The peripheral nervous system, which contains the nerve
connections between the sense-organs and the central nervous system, and also between the central nervous system and the muscles.

The brain is usually subdivided in the following manner:

(1) The **cerebrum**: it is the upper and most important mass of the brain;

(2) The **limbic system**: it consists of a number of brain lobes that are positioned between the cerebrum and the brain stem and thus surround the brain stem like a border (Latin: limbus);

(3) The **brain stem**: this almost vertical bar-like part of the brain supports the cerebrum as a stem and connects at the bottom with the spinal cord;

(4) The **cerebellum**: this is a separate part of the brain behind the brain stem and beneath the cerebrum (in the lower, rear part of the head).

The cerebrum consists of two halves or **hemispheres** (= half-spheres), each of which is the mirror-image of the other. The two hemispheres are connected to each other by means of the **corpus callosum**. The exterior layer of the two hemispheres is called the **cerebral cortex**. This cortex is heavily folded and thus possesses an unusually large surface. The cortex is the place where, in the final analysis, the sensory stimuli arrive, are brought to consciousness, and are recognized and judged. It is here that decisions are made as to which impulses are to be sent out to the muscles. Hence we could say that the **cerebral cortex** is the **foundation**, the “carrier” **par excellence**, of the **spiritive structure**. For example, it appears that there is a connection between the electrical “brainwaves” in the cortex and such a typically spiritive attribute as intelligence. Different parts of the cerebral cortex appear to be specialized for the spiritive interpretation of certain sensory stimuli originating in sensory nerves that are located in various parts of the body, such as the face, the ear, and so forth.
The limbic system plays a major role in our feeling life. If parts of this system are damaged, the result will be all sorts of animal-like emotions and instinctive behaviors. And so we could say that the limbic system is the foundation or “carrier” par excellence of the sensitive structure. For example, it regulates the balance between all sorts of mood states, such as rage or anxiety, aggression or withdrawal, pleasant or unpleasant feelings, stress or relaxation. As for the brain stem, I must make special mention of the pons (= Latin for bridge). This part of the brain contains an unusual network of nerve cells, called by the complicated name “reticular (i.e. having the form of a net) activating system” (RAS). According to many researchers, it is this brain system that switches our consciousness on and off. The RAS sends impulses to all parts of the cerebral cortex, and without the RAS such stimuli or impulses would never be able to come to consciousness. (During sleep, the RAS is inhibited, with the result that sensory stimuli are no longer brought to consciousness.) Therefore the “pons” is very important for the perceptive structure. The same could be said for the cerebellum, where many learned behaviors (walking, talking, knitting, piano playing, tying shoelaces) which we are able to perform “automatically” appeared to be programmed.
4. 1. 2 The autonomic nervous system

Parts of the limbic system and the brainstem form the center of the so-called autonomic nervous system, which also contains many of the nerve tracks of the peripheral nervous system. This system governs the so-called smooth muscles, which are operative in numerous bodily functions that are not normally subject to voluntary control, such as digestion, respiration, metabolism, growth, and circulation of the blood. Therefore this system is very important for the biotic structure, but also for both of the psychic structures. In addition there is the somatic or animal nervous system, which governs the movement of the head, trunk and limbs. This system can be said to regulate the relation between the individual and his environment. Hence it is of great importance for the sensitive structure, and even more so for the spiritive structure.

In what way is the autonomic nervous system of special importance for the sensitive structure? To understand the answer to this question, one must realize that the emotions are closely linked to workings of the autonomic nervous system. Examples are dry mouth, the sudden catching of one’s breath, not being able to eat because of nerves, urinating because of nervousness, palpitations of the heart, blushing and growing pale, nervous sweat, and getting goose pimples. When excessive nervousness leads the autonomic nervous system to become irregular in its actions, stomach ulcers, intestinal disorders, heart complaints and the like can result.

4. 1. 3 The hormone system

Not just the nervous system but also the hormones are of special importance if we are to gain a solid understanding of the sensitive structure in particular. Hormones are substances that are produced in certain glands and carried via the blood to those parts of the body where they are to do their work. Recent research shows that hormones play an important role in quite a number of things that go on within us, including memory and certain learning processes.
In addition, the medulla of the adrenal glands is very important because it produces adrenaline, a hormone whose action is very similar to the action of the autonomic nervous system. When a person is under spiritive or bodily stress, the level of adrenaline in the blood appears to rise. Ill-defined compliance about weakness, total fatigue, listlessness, excessive irritability, depression, and irascibility are sometimes the result of faulty functioning on the part of the thyroid gland, the parathyroid, or the sex organs.

4.1.4 Relations between various parts of the brain

It is only natural that many researchers should be intrigued by the functioning of the brain. And so it was discovered that when the corpus callosum is severed in the case of certain patients suffering from epilepsy, all sorts of unusual mental phenomena result. The experiments through which this was discovered have taught scientists a great deal more about the functioning of the two hemispheres. The left hemisphere is specialized in analytical thinking, the forming of judgments and the solving of mathematical problems. It can express itself in words and has an awareness of time. The right hemisphere, by contrast, thinks in “wholes,” that is to say, synthetically, and could hardly express itself in words. It has very little awareness of time but is specialized in the recognition of faces and patterns. The right hemisphere probably contains the center for musical giftedness. The “division of labor” between the two hemispheres has led to all sorts of (unwarranted) speculation about the existence of two different “psyches,” one resident in each hemisphere.

A great deal of research has been done on the relationship between the cerebrum and the limbic system. All stimuli that enter the brain from the outside pass through the limbic system on their way to the cerebral cortex, and in the limbic system they are “emotionally colored.” This extremely important fact alone sounds the death-knell to all kinds of speculations about the so-called neutral, objective science. In the limbic system, our perceptions are “charged” with certain positive or negative affections. I will have more to say about this matter in due course. Studies about the relationship between
the cerebrum and the limbic system have, as a matter of fact, led to all sorts of wild evolutionistic ideas about an allegedly imperfect “piling up” of “brains,” namely, the “reptile brain” (the brain stem), the “mammal brain” (the limbic system), and the “primate brain” (the cerebrum) (the “primates” to include human beings and apes). Because of the imperfect connection between these “brains,” man is alleged to have a “limbic psyche” which is separate from his “cortical psyche.” None of these ideas has any scientific foundation.

There are somewhat more substantial studies that have been done with regard to the connections between the RAS and the cerebral cortex, on the one hand, and the RAS and the autonomic nervous system, on the other. As we established earlier, the RAS regulates the excitability of the cerebral cortex. The RAS also exercises a regulating influence on the autonomic nervous system, which in turn either mobilize the body (via the so-called sympathetic part of it) or relaxes it (via the so-called parasympathetic part of it). Depending on one’s inherited constitution, the RAS will function either to lower or to raise the level of excitability of the cortex, thereby making a person more of an introvert (turned in upon himself) or an extrovert (turned toward the outside world). Similarly, depending on one’s inherited constitution, the RAS can tilt the balance between the sympathetic and the parasympathetic system toward either the one or the other, with the result that the person is either more or less emotional in nature, depending on the balance. Thanks to these hereditary differences, we can go on to distinguish four so-called temperaments:

(a) The verbally fluent, confident but also somewhat quarrelsome sanguine person, is the non-emotional extrovert;

(b) The efficient worker who is also sometimes sluggish and self-centered is the phlegmatic person, the non-emotional introvert;

(c) The original, creative, but sometimes also depressed and vindictive melancholic person, is the emotional introvert;
It is obvious that each temperament has its strong side as well as its weak side. When the heart is turned away from God and yields to sin, the bad sides make themselves felt. But when the heart is directed to God and surrenders to the leading of the Holy Spirit, the strong side of a personality can be developed, and then a more Christ-centered formation (Galatians 4:19) can be seen in the cordiality, the sincerity, the cheerfulness, the friendliness, and the optimism of the sanguine person. Likewise, we see it in the leadership, the strength of purpose, the team spirit, and the resoluteness and zest for enterprise of the choleric person. Further, we see it in the true friendship, the creativity and sacrificial spirit of the melancholic person. Finally, we see it in the quiet calm, good humor, readiness to listen, and tidiness and thoughtfulness of the phlegmatic person. And so we see that temperament is only a nucleus of our character; even though the regeneration of a person does not change his temperament, his character can change completely under the influence of his “new heart.” Totally different operant and motivational factors will then begin to play a role in his life, and so a new knowledge and a new way of thinking will come about, (thus a new “cognition”) and we will see a new direction for his will. In this way the renewed person, within the wide constitutional boundaries of his temperament, can receive an entirely new character in which the image of Christ takes shape in a completely unique way.

4. 2 The Perceptive Structure

Up to this point we have been dealing with the biotic structure insofar as it “grounds” the mental structures or forms their foundation. Now it is time to take a look at the perceptive structure, which is the first of the three mental structures. We already know that characteristic of the perceptive structure are, first of all, sensation (meaning: sensory awareness), which we might regard as the most basic form of consciousness, and secondly, based upon it,
perception (sensitively and spiritively colored sensation), and thirdly, the simplest behavior responses (instincts, reflexes), in which no feelings or reflections (i.e. conscious deliberation or consideration) are involved. We must be careful to distinguish these two kinds of phenomena sharply from one another (i.e. the non-felt and non-conscious from felt and conscious) even though they never really occur separately in everyday life. It is a characteristic feature of scientific research to take things that are completely interwoven in everyday life and to "analyze" ("dissect") them, that is to say, taking them apart in order to understand them better.

4. 2. 1 Perception

The biotic structure is the first structure to develop in the fetus (the human fruit in the womb), and then comes the perceptive structure. It is in turn quickly followed by the development of the sensitive structure. The newborn infant already has a wide variety of sensory capacities at its disposal, but of course these must be (further) developed. On the one hand, perception lies at the very foundation of all that takes place in the mental structures (feeling, thinking, willing), but on the other hand perception also depends on how we learn to perceive. There are no two people who perceive the world in exactly the same way: "objective perception" does not exist. How a person perceives depends on his bodily makeup (constitution) and on all sorts of operant and motivational factors.

As for the operant factors, our perception is enormously influenced by all that we have learned. We live in a society in which, from a very early age, we learn to pay attention to all kinds of "signs." Think only of social gestures, (Does he want to shake my hand?) of directory signs, (Is this where I have to be?) of traffic signs, (May I drive here?). If a person who had been raised somewhere in the primeval forest were suddenly to find himself in a big city, he would "see" nothing of this. Conversely, if the city person were to walk through that primeval forest, he would notice only a small fraction of what the inhabitants of the forest perceived. The people accustomed to the forest would find it easy to track down food, whereas the city people, without resources, would soon perish. A
person’s sensation is “laden” with constant recognitions, which are dependent on one’s upbringing and on the environment in which one was raised. And so it can be stated without fear of contradiction that a convinced Christian “sees” his environment, his fellow human beings, and the things around him differently than a non-Christian. Not only does he have different convictions, he literally sees everything differently.

The difference becomes even clearer when we add the influence of feelings on sensation. All our sensations are deeply “colored” by sensitive factors, that is to say, all kinds of learned (= operant) affections, impulses and emotions. Some sensations repel us, whereas others give a good feeling. Still others make us sad, and it is very difficult to think of a wholly neutral sensation. As we saw earlier, our manner of sensitive reaction has been learned or acquired. The culture and society of which we are a part play a role here (we call this the macro-situation). Furthermore, also to be considered are the dominant values and views of our own “groups,” such as our family, our church, our political party, and our scientific school of thought (all of which we refer to as the meso-situation). Finally, there is the influence of the concrete situation of the moment (the micro-situation).

For Christians, in particular, it is important to recognize the operant and motivational influences at work in our perception. We interpret all kinds of stimuli as either pleasant or unpleasant, depending on our attitude toward the source of those stimuli. We tend to like a sermon more when it is being delivered by a preacher we greatly appreciate than when it is being preached by someone we don’t know. And when we dislike something or someone, we tend to notice those things about it or about him that serve to strengthen our dislike, while at the same time overlooking positive things that should perhaps change our mind. Naturally, sympathy produces just the opposite result. The sensations passed on by the RAS to the cortex move through the limbic system where they are “colored” by positive or negative affections. But none of this makes us any less responsible for our feelings. Ultimately, everything that occurs in the mental structures is under the control of our heart – and what is the attitude of our heart towards our fellow human beings? We are
fully responsible for our sympathies as well as for our antipathies. On the one hand, it is true that we are not conscious of the gigantic load of sensitive factors we are carrying with us, which were formed by our upbringing and our culture and which do indeed “color” our sensations. Yet the ultimate result of this “coloring” i.e. the ultimate perceptions, become conscious in our cortex or within our spiritive structure. We are able to take our perceptions and feelings into consideration and, where necessary, condemn and confess them! What “crops up” within us is not always under our control, but what do we do about it?

4. 2. 2 “Lower-level” learning

Because we are able to perceive, we can also “learn.” Learning always means the forming of a certain response and reaction to a certain stimulus. We see this first of all in the case of “lower-level” learning, which has been called conditioning. We could also speak of it as perceptive learning, which needs to be distinguished from both sensitive learning (the learning of affections, dispositions and emotional responses) and spiritive learning (for example, the learning of language, of abstract concepts and norms, and learning how to solve problems). Human beings have their perceptive structure in common with the animals, and so the learning of “automatic” actions is something that human beings “know” just as animals do. We should be especially thankful that this is the case, for our Creator has used it to provide for us in at least three kinds of situations. First of all, such “learning” occurs in even the smallest child that is as yet undeveloped in spiritive respects. Secondly, even seriously mentally impaired persons can still “learn” quite a bit perceptively. Thirdly, by means of this perceptive “learning,” “normal” people can learn hundreds of behaviors which they are called upon to perform very frequently and which they can carry out without having to stop and think, which is a good thing. Just imagine what it would be like if you had to think in a concentrated way each time you bent over to tie your shoelaces, just as if it were the first time! It took a lot of effort to learn that skill, but now we can tie our shoelaces quickly and without thinking about it.
I indicated that man has his perceptive structure in common with the animals, but we have also seen that there is nevertheless a big difference between human beings and animals. In the perceptive structure of man, the perceptive aspect *anticipates* the sensitive and spiritive aspects. This type of anticipation – especially as it relates to the spiritive aspect – is not found in the case of any animal. And then we should focus on the sensitive: precisely because the perceptive anticipates the sensitive, certain emotional types learn all kinds of intense automatic motor responses, for example, which either do not occur in non-emotional types or occur in them to a much lesser degree. What I am thinking of here is such motor responses as flaring up, clutching at your head or heart, all sorts of nervous tics, nail biting, and so forth. And as for the anticipation of the spiritive, learning English (or whatever one’s mother tongue might be), playing the violin or driving a car consists, of course, in good measure of automatic actions which we have learned laboriously by instrumental conditioning. Nevertheless, there is no animal that speaks English or plays the violin or drives a car. Even though the animals also have a perceptive structure, they would not be able to learn those actions. The more clearly our actions are spiritively “charged” the more human they are. These, then, are automatisms that we have had to learn in a very conscious way. Thought precedes such learning: one must also want to learn that and must consciously persist in the process in order to obtain the desired result. To be sure, it is perceptive learning, but then under the guidance of the spiritive aspect.

And so we see how relative the “resemblances” between man and animal are. It was very naive of the behaviorists to want to reduce all human learning to conditioning. Their approach was entirely wrong, for two reasons. First of all, in man the most characteristic learning is not conditioning at all but spiritive learning – the learning of one’s native tongue, of concepts, and of how to solve mental problems. In the second place, even conditioning itself in man is something different in principle than it is in the animal, for in most cases this perceptive learning in man occurs under the guidance of the sensitive or spiritive aspect. An example of “pure” perceptive learning in human adults is learning how to use all sorts...
of simple gadgets, such as the special doorknob of a particular make of car or of this or that room, which is something a dog could learn just as easily.

4. 3  The Sensitive Structure

And now we will look at the sensitive or feeling-structure. In this structure we distinguish three kinds of feelings between which there is nevertheless a considerable degree of overlap: affections (inclinations), impulses (objective needs, desires), and emotions.

4. 3. 1  Affections and impulses

When we discussed the perceptive structure above, we observed that sensations are invariably “charged” with, or “colored” by, certain positive or negative affections. Sugar molecules stimulate the taste buds, which thereupon send impulses to the “taste center” in the brain. There “taste” arises: it is the conscious perception of the stimulus. But in this perception of taste an effective evaluation is immediately involved, for most people find this sweetness they perceive to be “tasty,” whereas other things they perceive to taste “bad.” This affective valuation has a very important practical use: for example, when we perceive the smell of something burning or hear screaming and running back and forth in the house or see blood or feel pain or when we eat something that doesn’t quite taste right, we are immediately alarmed. These are all stimuli which, for us, are charged with a negative affection.

Thus in all such cases, our sense of alarm is a learned response. It is a conditioned reflex based on an affective reaction to stimuli. Nevertheless, the question can be raised whether all of our affections are learned, that is to say, whether inborn affections can be said to exist at all. For example, there have been quite a number of experiments and discussions concerning the question whether a “motherly instinct” exists. It is conceivable that what is called the “motherly instinct” is also something based upon learned behavior, which would then mean that mothers could only give “love” if they themselves had received it when they were babies. In our “civilized”
Western world, hundreds of thousands of children are abused by their mothers every year. It seems that many of the mothers who do the abusing did not themselves have a loving relationship with a mother in childhood, and perhaps they were even abused. And so, even love, to quite some extent, is something that has to be learned.

Affections belong not to the sensitive structure but to the spiritive structure. Yet at the same time they ought to be under the guidance of spiritive life. The Christian, in particular, ought to be able to understand that he is responsible for everything that takes place in his feeling life. And so we would do well to be more vigilant against all sorts of unreasonable negative affections which could also be called “prejudices;” for example, against black people, against Muslims, against men with long hair. Some Christians are only too happy to attribute such affections to a kind of “spiritual intuition;” for example, they claim to be able to “feel” that artists are no good. The truth of the matter is that such supposed “intuition” is really based on learned negative affections that are completely without foundation. And so our spiritive life also has its ethical side, as we have seen. Under the guidance of a heart oriented toward God and His commandments, we learned that we are also able to judge our affections critically, and, if necessary, condemn them. Likewise, under the guidance of the heart we also learn to judge our positive affections critically and – if they are good – to foster them.

As for impulses or “drives,” if you will, what was said about the affections also applies to them. As they fall within the sensitive structure, they ought to be under the guidance of the spiritive structure. It is true that both men and animals have a sense of structure and thus also have urges or drives (desires, longings, inclinations), which “drive” us and precede sober-minded judgment. But the difference to note is that in the case of human beings, those “drives” are, so to speak, “embedded” in our spiritive deliberations and decisions. This is the reason why man is also responsible for what he does with his drives. The most important drives are hunger, thirst, and sexual desire. It has proven very difficult to determine exactly how many drives there are and whether we may speak of separate drives as opposed to variants of the same drive. There is no need to go any further into these questions at this point.
However “animal-like” our drives might appear to be, the manner in which we deal with them, as noted above, is spiritive and therefore thoroughly human – or in any case, it ought to be spiritive. Naturally, we have a strong desire to ratify our drives, but on the other hand, it can also be very pleasurable for us to heighten our drives. And so (spiritively!) we have devised all kinds of ways to increase our appetite. Even our sexual behavior does not aim at immediate gratification of our sex drive, for that would leave us acting just like the animals. Rather, man is first of all directed toward increasing the sexual stimuli (sexual stimulation). He is not first of all intent on gratification. Because of his spiritive structure, man has the capacity to increase and refine the pleasure of gratification by strengthening these internal stimuli before satisfying them. And so for this reason we know something very striking, namely, that sexuality in man does not solely – or even primarily – have a biological function; rather, it is intended by God to be an expression of married love between a husband and his wife. This is why it is even possible, for example, for a husband to be willing to abstain from sexual intercourse with his wife if she has become an invalid or is temporarily ill, while he devotes himself to caring for her. Or to take another example, one may abstain entirely from sex and remain unmarried in order to become a missionary. In man, then, the drives are on an infinitely higher plane than in the case of animals, because they are embedded in man’s spiritive life. And what is especially important to note is that man’s drives are under the guidance of the heart, which serves either God or an idol.

4. 3. 2 Emotional life

It is natural that affections and impulses are often accompanied by strong emotions, which may vary from merriment to rage or fright. The emotions can also occur by themselves, as happens when we feel afraid or excited but are not aware of the cause of these emotions or their meaning. Such emotions could be the result of disturbances within the biotic structure, for we have seen that the autonomic nervous system has a great influence on our emotional life, as do certain hormones. Such vague fears and feelings of excitement can
also find their cause in the sensitive structure itself, for example, when we are unconsciously afraid of something. This is quite an important point in counseling, as we shall see in Chapter 6.

There have been many efforts to “categorize” the emotions. There are some psychologists who distinguish between “positive expectation” (hope), which might be followed by disappointment, and “negative expectation” (fear), which might be followed by relief. Some psychologists believe that all the emotions can be categorized under these two headings. But there are other psychologists who have developed much more complicated schemes in which they distinguish, for example, between anger, ecstasy, loathing, grief, horror, bewilderment, affection, attachment (devotion), hope, and the like. Again, each of these emotions can occur in varying degrees of intensity: for example, anger can be expressed as irritation (the lowest degree of intensity) rage, or frenzy (the highest degree of intensity).

It should also be noted that our emotions are embedded in the whole of our feeling life and in our spiritive acts and in the operation of our heart. But on the other hand, they are foundationally embedded in the physical-chemical processes of our body. An example will make this clearer. Let us suppose, for example, that somewhere I unexpectedly run into an acquaintance who has done me some wrong in the past, or perhaps someone whom I have treated rather badly. In the first instance, I might well become angry right away, or at least excited. In the second instance, I become somewhat embarrassed or even afraid; perhaps, by way of defense, I assume an attitude of indifference or aggressiveness.

In this situation, several “elements” can be distinguished:

(1) biotic: the immediate activation of the sympathetic nervous system and the secretion of the hormone adrenaline for the medulla of the adrenal gland;

(2) perceptive: my perception of the acquaintance and my spontaneous startle reflexes;
(3) sensitive: the excitement, anger, fear, indifference, or aggressiveness;

(4) spiritive: the memory of what the other person did to me, or what I did to him, and the resulting “interpretation” of my emotion;

(5) the heart ultimately determines what I will do with my emotions. I can give unbridled expression to them, or I can condemn them and bring them under my control and act in the proper Biblical way. If I choose the second path, I will first of all try to win my brother, and in the second place I will confess my guilt to him.

I now want to focus for a moment on the fourth point, namely, the spiritive “interpretation” of the emotion. Biologically speaking, all the emotions are similar: they are all accompanied by the same phenomenon of “physiological excitement.” But how we “interpret” this excitement will depend on our situation and our interpretation of it. For example, when someone has been given a placebo which he believes is a medication causing physiological excitement, he will feel much less emotional when he is in an emotional situation, than some other experimental subject will. The reason for this is obvious: he simply attributes the “excitement” to the placebo and accordingly does not feel excited. And so there is a considerable difference between biotic and sensitive excitement! One can interpret the same biotic excitement as a “no excitement” (“I do not feel excited”) or “fear,” or “anger,” or “affection,” and so forth, depending on the situation.

This is one reason why Christians must be very, very careful when they interpret their feeling life. To take a rather extreme example, it is clear that a man should not propose marriage to a woman when he is under stress conditions. Psychologists have demonstrated that people whom together experience great danger sometimes interpret their physiological excitement as affection toward one another; they may even imagine that they are in love. Such a situation is hardly a reliable basis for calmly taking such an important step as making a marriage proposal!
4. 4 The Spiritive Structure

4. 4. 1 The cognitive dimension

We now come to the spiritive structure. The first thing to do is to take a look at the cognitive dimension, which has to do with thinking, deliberation, investigation, and knowledge. Of course the development of language is of great importance when it comes to the development of our thinking. But it appears that the child at a very early age, even before language has begun to develop (take the case of a child who is a deaf-mute), begins to learn “concepts” like “table,” “chair,” “bed.” Little by little, the child learns ever more complicated concepts, right up to the ones we call abstract. The progress made by the child in this regard depends upon his intelligence. Now, intelligence is itself a very difficult concept that has been defined as “the ability to solve problems,” or even as “the ability to keep up with one’s class in school, or to follow a certain training.” It must be admitted that these definitions are quite vague, but this is only because the concept is so complex. Contributing to what we call intelligence are one’s language skills (stock of words or vocabulary, distinguishing of concepts, and the like), arithmetical skills, observation, reasoning, memory, spatial insight, and so forth. Thus intelligence is not only determined by one’s heredity (“constitution”); it also depends somewhat on the environment. Does the child find itself in an environment that is rich in language resources or poor? Does it receive little or much support from the adults in the environment? Does the environment offer the child a good amount of stimulation (by providing, for example, the right kind of toys to stimulate its fantasy and creativity) or not enough stimulation?

The development of intelligence in the child might well be described in terms of the ability to solve increasingly difficult problems. This line of thought has to do with another equally difficult question: What is “thinking?” It, too, might be described as “the mental activity of problem-solving.” Psychologists have used all kinds of experiments and tests to try to determine just
how “thinking” works. In the discipline of logic people try to figure out how we “ought” to think if we are to be regarded as thinking clearly, correctly and efficiently. But in psychology we investigate how people often really do think – in jerks, circuitously, up sidetracks that run dead, suddenly having something come clearly to mind by intuition or by subconscious processes, and so forth. In most cases it all works out for us, but we definitely do not always follow the shortest or most logical way to our destination. The way we actually think in a great many cases brings the influence of the sensitive structure especially to light, and the sensitive structure is something we have in common with the animals. Because they possess it, animals can indeed get sudden “insights” and in this way solve certain simple problems. In Chapter 3, we saw that the Gestalt psychologists speak of “aha-experiences” in this connection. Such experiences also occur in people. Yet all of this should not lead us to conclude that “thinking” actually occurs in animals. In the thinking of human beings, the sensitive does indeed play a major role much of the time, but thought as such is nevertheless substantially much more than the sensitive – it is spiritive. What this means is that man – but not the animal! – has the capacity in the spiritive structure to consciously put a series of representations in a sequence, selecting them, debating in his mind, comparing, putting in order, pondering them, weighing them. He does all this in order to find connections, to draw conclusions. Not until these things are occurring can we speak of thinking.

In the course of the centuries in our Western culture, much emphasis has been placed on the importance of this business of logical thinking. A number of thinkers even suppose that it was the most essential difference between the human being and the animal; they seem to think that thinking was the distinguishing mark of the human spirit. After all, man is – above all else – a rational being! Even of Jesus Christ we can read in the Athanasian creed: “... Perfect God, perfect man, having a rational soul and human flesh” – just as though the most characteristic feature of the soul or spirit of Christ was “rationality,” which would be this matter of “thinking!” Now, thought is a typical characteristic of the human being, but it is not the characteristic feature, nor is it the most important difference
between the human being and the animal. In the East – and also in Holy Scripture, which originated in the East – much more emphasis is placed on a kind of “thinking” that visualizes and meditates and is full of feeling, a thinking in which there is much more affection and involvement and much less abstraction. When the Psalmist lies on his bed at night thinking and pondering (see Psalm 63:6), his activity has very little to do with what our Western world calls “rational thought.” Ultimately, while thinking is a side of our spiritive act-life, it is under the control of the heart all the same. The highest kind of “thinking” is to be found not in our feeling-life or in the understanding; rather, it is what is directly governed by the heart. Our logical thought stands – or falls, if you will – with what goes on in the heart. “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he,” say the scriptures. “The heart has its own reasons, which reason does not know,” declared the great Christian thinker Pascal.

4. 4. 2 The creative dimension

Thus alongside “cognitive,” clear, logical, rational thought there is a quite different kind of “thinking” to be distinguished, namely, creative thinking. This kind of thinking has directly to do with the imagination, which is the “compartment” of our mind where on the one hand we can imagine or visualize things that already exist, and on the other hand can “invent” new things. I will first illustrate what I mean by the former. I call my wife on the telephone, and in my thoughts I see her as she sits on the couch at home. I recall our vacation and “smell” the sea once more. As for the latter aspect of imagination, I want to “invent” a new detergent, construct a new psychological theory, think up a new recipe. And so I try to imagine how I can achieve the goal I have set for myself – by doing so as well as possible and as soon as possible. In every sphere of our spiritive life, this creativity is useful and necessary:

logically-analytically for the scientific investigator;
historically for the technician or the statesman;
lingually for the instructor who, for example, is called upon to explain some difficult subject-matter;
socially for someone who is applying for a job, for example;
economically for the advertising man, for example;
aesthetically for the artist, of course (the artist is the creative person *par excellence!*);
jurally for the creative criminal;
ethically for the young man who is in love (he can be very creative as he strives to see or please his beloved!);
pistically for the believer, who tries to imagine what God will think of his deeds and tries to find ways of serving God – and does so, moreover, by the light of Scripture if he goes about it in the proper way at all.

Often creative persons can “see” what other, non-creative persons do not see. For the latter, orange crates are simply intended to contain oranges. But the creative person “sees” another possibility – that he could make a book-case out of them. Or perhaps he “sees” the possibility of turning an ash-can into a flower-box. Seeing such possibilities is characteristic of creativity: it involves reaching a projected goal by seeing new possibilities that heretofore had not been thought of. Moreover, this is usually done unexpectedly, also in connection with wholly other things, i.e. without any preparation or warning. To be capable of all of this, a person must also be open to new experiences and impressions and have a flexible – and not a strictly conventional – attitude. Furthermore, he needs a high level of energy and prolonged productivity (it “doesn't come easily,”) and what is of special importance is that he must attain freedom from the fear of making mistakes and from lack of assurance, from being unmotivated, and also from conformism. Many Christians are so conservative in the bad sense of the word that they only know how to follow well-trodden paths. And they’re always afraid of what “others” or the “church” will say of them. All they know how to do is to emphasize working hard and unimaginatively. The result is that their faith life is just as lacking in creativity as is their daily work and their marriage. So let’s have three cheers for creative Christians!

When it comes to this matter of creativity, surprising things...
often happen – also in the creative Christian life! Let’s say that you have been taking a good look at a certain problem. You turn the matter over in your mind and review the whole thing within your spiritive structure. At that point the thing to do may be to just let it stand, sometimes for a few minutes, sometimes for several years. And then there are those occasions on which you have to “sleep on it for a night.” The information has to sink down somehow into the mind. All of a sudden, there is a “relief” or “enlightenment.” Creative insight has emerged – sometimes at the craziest places or during the weirdest hours of the day. Archimedes was in the bath when his “happy thought” struck him, and he was so excited about his discovery that he ran out into the street stark naked. This story shows us just how excited a new idea can make a creative person. All of a sudden, the scientific researcher “has” the explanation of all of his experimental results. All of a sudden, the chef has that new recipe in his head. All of a sudden, the shopkeeper “gets” an idea for his new shop-window. All at once, the believer “gets” a clear insight into what he has to do – and he thanks God for it. Believers who place themselves intensely under the guidance of the Holy Spirit often have a special charisma of creativity!

4. 4. 3 The Conative Dimension

We may need to be reminded that the difficult word “conative” has to do with the will, and the will, too, is a typically spiritive, typically a human matter. There is quite a difference between the (sensitive) drives and the (spiritive, conscious, deliberating and choosing) will of man. In the psychology that is current nowadays, both of these are classified all too loosely under “motivation,” just as though there was nothing by which we can basically distinguish them. We have already seen a very obvious spiritive element even in the way we handle our (sensitive) drives. Conversely, the spiritive decisions of our wills can be determined entirely by our feeling life. All too often, emotional people allow themselves to be too strongly guided by their feelings, their sentiments, or their impulsiveness when they make important decisions. Behavior of this sort does not become a Christian. What we should do instead is to let ourselves be
guided by considerations that proceed from a heart that is directed
to God and His commandments.

In practice, of course, we allow ourselves to be guided in this area
by all sorts of “operant factors,” that is to say, by everything we have
been taught. Think also of the “rules” and “norms” of our culture, of
our parental home, and of the faith community to which we belong.
In this context it is not just a question of all sorts of customs having
to do with clothing and manners; some much more important
features of our (Christian?) culture also come into the picture. Here
I am thinking of the exaggerated emphasis on rational thought,
the exaggerated focus on “success,” on getting ahead, on earning
money, and the pressure to buy countless unnecessary luxury
articles, and so forth. We only rarely encounter people who are truly
“independent” and so are able to rise above all of this, by showing
that they are neither hangers-on nor reactionary obstructionists.
Moreover, the question could be raised whether they are very
congenial, socially speaking. Still, it is very important to consider
whether we come to our decisions of will under the influence – or
even the pressure – of the environment (society, friends, church) as
opposed to our own personal choice in dependence on the Lord,
His Word and His Spirit.

To the extent that our decisions are also determined by our
environment, it is very important to realize that people are
not motivated by the environment as it actually is but by the
environment as they think it is. Since our perception is “colored” by
both positive and negative affections, the environment appears to
us to be “colored,” that is to say, we come to our experience of it with
all kinds of preconceived opinions. And, even apart from prejudices,
we still often interpret appearances and the behavior of our fellow
human beings in a mistaken way. Psychologists have a deep interest
in what one human being attributes – whether rightly or wrongly –
to another or to a situation: here psychologists speak of attribution.
It seems that it is very much a part of our nature as human beings
constantly to ascribe to our fellow man certain intentions, opinions
and motives. Of course, this is quite understandable: we wish to
comprehend the meaning of our environment so that we can figure
out how to react to it. But there is also a dangerous aspect to this
crisis: “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Matthew 7:1), and even so, we can hardly refrain from judging. For example, sometimes we may think that someone is being unfriendly toward us: in other words, we “attribute” unfriendliness to that person. As a result, we are reserved toward him. What then happens is that the other person starts to behave in an unfriendly way toward us. And the unfriendliness we then perceive leads us to say: “Don’t you see that I was right?” Meanwhile, we fail to realize that we ourselves were the cause of the unfriendliness!

Also noteworthy is the fact that we attribute certain responsibilities to our fellow human beings and make our decisions on that basis. Investigations have shown that we are inclined to attribute a greater degree of responsibility – and therefore “nobler” motives as well – to people of higher social standing, people who have more power and capacity at their command. For example, if an earnest request is made for donated blood and a simple, uneducated and slovenly person comes forward to volunteer, we’re inclined to think that he has agreed to donate his blood because a great deal of pressure was placed upon him. But if a person of “higher” social standing agrees to give blood, we are inclined to say that in his case noble motives played quite a role.

Moreover, we practice “attribution” not only with other people but even with ourselves. Our will is strongly guided by our self-image – the image we have of our capabilities and qualities. And things get still more complicated because – in addition to all that was mentioned above – we attribute to our fellow man certain opinions about ourselves, and then this “attribution,” in turn, helps determine the opinion that we have of ourselves. We even appear to be masters in getting the image we think others have of us to turn out extra positively or extra negatively, depending on what we (in large measure unconsciously!) are after. Both the need to achieve success and the need to avoid failure – and these two are not to be confused with one another! – are strongly influenced by this kind of attribution. As a matter of fact, even constitutional and operant factors play a role here: some people, when it comes to their natural bent, are just more determined or more timid than others. And then there are some people who have simply had a more stimulating or
more discouraging environment to deal with than others.

The two needs I just mentioned have to do with what psychologists call “achievement motivation,” which is an important element in the conative dimension. In some Christian circles, words like “success” are weighed down with strongly negative affections. This is understandable, for just being out to achieve success and to receive the honor of others is equivalent to pride. On the other hand, fear of failure or looking silly in the eyes of others can be just as much of an indication of pride. Perhaps it is for this reason that many people are so passive, indolent and apathetic. Generally speaking, the abilities God gives us imply a mandate to look for a place of work and for tasks that are in line with those abilities. If we win the appreciation of our fellow human beings as we carry out our task, we need not be ashamed of the esteem we receive. It becomes a matter of concern only when praise from others becomes an end in itself, which means that it would replace praise from God. “Achievement motivation,” too, is in the final analysis a matter of the human heart, so that the honor of God rather than the honor of man is (or ought to be) the thing that comes first in our lives (see John 12:26, 43). And so we can well understand that the satisfaction we get from the completion of a difficult task is at the same time a gift of God. This gift never comes to the person who, out of (proud!) fear of failure, works below his “level.”

4. 5 Language

Now that I have dealt with the three dimensions of the spirtitive structure, I want to pause to discuss briefly two very important spirtitive phenomena, namely, language and social life. These two phenomena, as a matter of fact, are closely connected. Here I am using the term “language” in a broad sense. Falling under this heading are all means by which people “communicate” with one another, including spoken and written words, gestures, facial expressions, numbers, musical notes, traffic signs, flags, and pictures. “Language” always makes use of “communication-signs.” What I mean by this latter term is that “this” (sign, symbol) stands for (points to, means, symbolizes) “that.” This word stands for that.
concept; this numeral stands for that numerical value; this traffic sign indicates that order or prohibition, and so forth. Linguists (students of language) are concerned with phonetic laws, inflection, syntax, and the like, or with the question how we ought to speak if our use of language is to be considered “correct.” Psychologists, on the other hand, want to know just how we do actually talk: they want to know how language functions as a means of communication between persons, how languages are learned, from what kinds of psychological backgrounds new concepts and words might arise, where slips of the tongue come from, what the emotional value of words is, and so forth.

Anyone who “speaks” (or writes) has “encoded” his thoughts (and, to a degree, also his feelings) in language symbols (especially “words,” but also gestures, facial expressions, puffs of smoke, drumbeats, dots and dashes, and the like), which then need to be perceived by the listener (or reader) and “decoded” in his brain, which is to say that the symbols have to be “translated” again into thoughts and feelings. Communication of this order is unknown among the animals. Of course animals, too, are able to “communicate” with one another in countless ways (movements, grimaces, sounds, odors, touch). Yet, when it comes to the animals, this communication is strictly confined to the psychical structures. We see evidence of this when we ponder the fact that this so-called “language” cannot be modified or extended by means of thought and creativity: the animal has no spiritive structure to be used in such a way. This is the reason why animals never know any such thing as “culture.” Extensive experiments with chimpanzees, which concerned the learning either of spoken words or gesture language, have confirmed that these animals cannot learn any language at all in the human sense of the word.

Then how is that the children can learn their native language so easily and so well? Within a matter of a year and a half to two years, toddlers learn the basic structure of even the most complicated languages; moreover, they accomplish this feat almost without any conscious, systematic instruction. How do children learn how to catch separate words out of the stream of sound? How do they learn how to put the words they have to learn together into new sentences
on their own, and to connect words with concepts? Recently psychologists gave us the only possible answer: human beings possess a special aptitude for language, or, to use an even stronger expression, a language acquisition system, whereas the chimpanzees possess nothing of this sort. Now, this answer has something of the flavor of breaking through a door that is already open. Even so, it is quite remarkable that non-Christian psychologists, when they offer this answer, have in fact acknowledged very emphatically that there is a fundamental difference between the human being and the animal! In addition, they have made a real effort to give the term “aptitude for language” a meaningful content. Noam Chomsky, the famous psychologist of language, has suggested that there is a common basic structure to be found in all languages in the world, and that the child’s aptitude for language is a kind of a “skeleton-key” that serves to unravel the basic structure of his native language and enables him to discover what words are, how they are joined together, what the grammatical rules are, and so forth. In this way, every normal person, all the way down to someone with a barely minimal intellectual capacity, can “decipher” the basic structure of his native language without any real exertion, and can also deal with the special peculiarities of his own language – where it differs from other languages. For the rest of his life, a person is then able to apply the unlimited possibilities built into his own language in endless variations. He continually produces new sentences that have never before been expressed but still are understood by others with the greatest of ease.

It is exactly this creative element that is so characteristic of human language. And this element of creativity is rooted in the spiritive structure, which in turn is typical of human life. In this latter condition we can see the cognitive importance of language. What I mean by this is that our thinking and knowing consist for the largest part of concepts, which we can express in words. It may be that animals do not talk because they have “nothing to say” to each other; that is to say, they do not talk because they are unable to think in a scale of refined concepts. It is very much the question whether their communicative signals are ever symbols for concepts which are also able to exist “in” the animal independently of the process...
of communication. Yet this is precisely what makes language so typically human – people can think in concepts and bring those concepts to lingual expression.

4.6 Social life

What applies to language in connection with animals applies also to “social life”: it is strictly confined to the psychical structures, that is to say, to instincts and reflexes. Hence, it is to be understood as fundamentally different than the social intercourse and communication which takes place between human beings, which can be cognitively considered, creatively modified and conatively (i.e. by means of the will) taken in hand. It is because human socialization is not governed by instinct that we have to learn it at a tender age, just as we learn language. This has been demonstrated by research. When an infant smiles for the very first time, it is offering its first “social response” to its surroundings. The family, the kindergarten, and especially the elementary school are the important “training schools” for the social development of the young person. He has to learn to listen and reply and to adjust to others. He finds that doing so is easier or more pleasant in one case than in the other. He develops his first friendships and finds himself a member of a group.

It is especially during the secondary school years that the need of belonging and the sense of solidarity and popularity begin to play an important role in his life. Furthermore, during this period of his life the young person must learn how to “reconsider” his social relationship with his parents. He begins to reevaluate it, and the first closer social contacts with the opposite sex are made. In addition to all of this, the young person also begins to consider his future social position (further study, a choice of a career). Once he has become part of the work-force, of “socio-economic life,” he is faced with his most intense social contacts – marriage, family, working environment, a club, church, and state. He also begins to encounter strong “social supervision”: “What will the neighbors, or my colleagues, or my fellow club and church-members say?” At a later stage in life, social contact falls off somewhat, but it still
remains important. Without (adequate) social contacts, any person will wither away.

Within a person’s “social environment” there are various elements to be distinguished, such as lifestyle – on the one hand of the entire society and on the other of one’s own “group” (family, church, class). Also to be considered is the structure of the society of which one is a part, for example, the political system. Naturally, the form of the society and the lifestyle of the people are closely connected. Thirdly, it is very important what “groups” a person belongs to during his lifetime. Some of those groups are not chosen by ourselves (family, school class, state), but others we do choose, whether out of love or from like-mindedness (marriage, church, club, political party), or perhaps because of common interest (factory, army, group sport, labor union, political party). Beyond all such groups there are also various kinds of interpersonal relationships. Such relationships are ordinarily based on the function of one or both of the persons, so that the persons themselves do not really matter. Think, for example, of the shopkeeper and the customer, the policeman and the traffic violator, the person purchasing the ticket and the person behind the ticket-window, the employer and the employee, the teacher and the pupil.

Social psychologists are very interested in how people behave with their fellows and with respect to groups. Actually, we have already seen a number of examples. Think of the significance of prejudices (positive and negative affections) and of attributions. The “first impression” we get of a certain person (often quite accidentally) proves to be very important. It appears that when we form a notion of someone on the basis of that very first impression, it is very difficult to get rid of that notion later. One is inclined to explain away any later information that conflicts with it. Sad to say, this even happens among Christians. And so, if we turn our back on someone, figuratively speaking, on the basis of the first impression, what we are doing may be quite understandable in psychological terms, but it remains an antisocial and unethical behavior, if not downright unchristian. Here again we see that when it comes to our (spiritively governed) behavior, sensitive factors have a role to
play, on the one hand, even though it remains true that we remain fully responsible for that behavior, since it proceeds from the heart. We can work out our responsibilities more effectively if, as I am here trying to make clear, we become more aware of the presence and influence of these psychical factors.

Thus we have seen that man is by nature a social being through and through, and that we can never abstract him from the (many) groups of which he is a part. The most interesting groups are those in which the members share a strong sense of unity, often holding the same values and norms (a “faith” or “ideology”) and interact in a robust manner with one another. Think of the family, or a small, well-knit club, or a small, well-knit church congregation, or a small business, or a circle of friends, or a work group, or a group of people who share sleeping quarters in a barracks, or a group of students sharing the same floor in university housing. These are called “primary groups.” Just being part of such a group by itself has a strongly stimulating influence on a person, no matter what a mix of motivating factors there may be within the group. For instance, one could join a certain church congregation because one feels that one can serve the Lord best in that particular faith-community, that is to say, in a way that best accords with Scripture, but it is also conceivable that one would join simply because one feels most at home with the Christians there.

Not all the motives that might lead a person to join a particular congregation are equally “spiritual.” There are quite a number of very “human” (sensitive or spiritive) motives which, whether consciously or unconsciously, may be at work in such a decision. Here it is a matter especially of satisfying definite needs, and those needs come to expression in one’s interaction with a particular congregation (or in some other “group”). For instance, one might experience “certainty” there. Unfortunately, the point on which certainty is sought is often far from the question: “Is this the closest there is to the Scriptural idea of a congregation?” but is more likely to be: “Does this congregation confirm my own views about faith?” People are also looking for security, understanding, sympathy, assistance – and a Christian church provides those things too (at least, if it is what it should be). Yet, it should be recognized that
these are not the most important things for a congregation to be concerned with.

The “group” satisfies the deep need we have to “belong,” and so it helps to provide an “identity.” You may find a person saying: “I work for the railroad,” or “I belong to the Reformed Church,” or “I’m a member of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.” In some such way, the group has an extremely strong influence on the formation of one’s personality. Therefore we find people saying such things as: “You can surely see that he is (or, has been) Reformed,” or “... that he went to a private academy,” or “... that he has served in the Army,” or “... that he is an educator,” or “... that he studied at Harvard,” and so forth.
Chapter Five
The Normal Personality

A little earlier we saw that language has to do with the “lingual aspect,” and that social life is rooted in the “social aspect” of our spiritive or act-life. I went into these matters in somewhat greater depth at the end of Chapter 4. But we also came to see that these are definitely not the highest aspects of our spiritive life. The three highest aspects are the jural, the ethical, and the pistic layers. When we begin to deal with these higher sides or aspects, we are coming very close to the actual being, the deepest inner life, of man, which we have referred to above as the heart. These aspects have to do with the “ethos,” the religious-ethical condition (“mentality”) of the heart. Now it is time to go into this matter of the “ethos” in a bit more detail. Once this has been done, I will raise the question whether there is anything we can say about the stirrings of the heart.

5.1 Development of the ethos

Various researchers have investigated how the ethos, i.e. a person’s religious-ethical attitude, develops in the young. They have tried to do this especially by studying the “moral argumentation” of children of various ages, as well as those of grown-ups. Moral values and norms, of course, differ greatly from culture to culture and from one social class to another. Curiously enough, however, it still appeared possible to speak of a certain basic pattern in all moral argumentation. In other words, it became apparent that people everywhere come to a moral assessment of human behavior in roughly the same way. Despite the enormous influence of sin when it comes to these matters, it appears that we could nevertheless
speak of a kind of common “moral aptitude” among very diverse groups of people. Please note that I am not yet speaking of the moral motives for one’s own behavior, but of the moral arguments one uses to judge the behavior of others. Because of the presence of sin in our lives, these two could be vastly different from one another. Here we should recall what Christ had to say about the “plank” (beam) and the “speck” (mote) in Matthew 7:3-5.

What I find especially interesting is that people stop developing at very different “stages” in moral development. Many people reach a kind of “conventional level”: they judge behavior simply by the “good intentions” of the person involved, or just ask themselves whether the person involved is complying with the established rules of the social order. But there are some people who don’t even get as far as that: they get stalled at a “pre-conventional level,” which is very normal in the case of small children. They judge a particular action simply by the material consequences: “Breaking ten cups accidentally is worse than breaking one cup intentionally.” Or they may judge to what degree specific actions satisfy their own wants: “You scratch my back, and I’ll scratch yours.” But there are other people who reach a higher, a “post-conventional level.” They recognize a certain relativity in the laws and rules that are in force, and they come to realize that those laws and rules might conflict with higher spiritual values. At issue are not specific concrete commands and prohibitions but one’s higher values – even universal values like freedom, justice, equal value, and mutual respect.

It should be obvious that this final “level,” if we are content to use such a formulation, can be attained just as well by humanists as by Christians. Indeed, there are humanists who have a much higher moral awareness than a great many conventional Christians (or those who pass for such). Accordingly, the point to make here is that in fact it will be necessary to formulate a still higher “level,” namely, a religious stage which transcends all ethics. For why would a person hold to “universal principles” of truth and justice in the midst of a world that is full of unworthiness and unrighteousness? The humanist is in a bad way indeed if he has to somehow “base” his position on untrue and unjust man. On the other hand, the Christian is rich, basing his life on the perfect truth
and righteousness of God.

Whoever has come to such a realization sees in addition the relative character of all this talk about “levels” and “stages of moral development.” This highest, religious “stage” is not to be understood as a phase which follows upon the highest ethical “stage.” In the vast majority of cases, the development of the religious person takes place in the micro-milieu, namely, the family, where religion has been present, guiding the lives of the young from their tenderest beginnings. I need to put the point more strongly by insisting that regeneration (the new birth) and the illumination of the Holy Spirit are necessary if a person is to attain this high-level religious judgment of actions; indeed, it is necessary for a person to come of his own accord, out of his relation to God, to the performing of actions that are pleasing to God. The “Christian” who keeps God’s commandments just to gain the approval of others or out of submission to the authority of church and tradition is only a “conventional Christian.” And the one who keeps them on the basis of a specific notion of “personal” or “universal” ethical values is just a “post-conventional Christian.” However, the one who keeps them out of a genuine love for God, in intimate fellowship with God, in utter devotion to God, in reverent association with Him, and in submission to His Word – that person is truly a Christian.

The doctrine of the deceitfulness of our natural heart (see Jeremiah 17:9) should help us to understand how it is that people sometimes hold forth in a highly moral way while at the same time acting in a way that testifies to a low standard of morality. Perhaps the point should be expressed in stronger terms: social psychologists have found abundant proof that “respectable” people who have a highly developed form of moral reasoning are capable, under certain circumstances, of deceitful accommodation to the masses, of quite immoral actions under the cover of some such motto as “Befehl ist Befehl” (Orders are orders), and of a gross indifference with respect to the lives of other people, and even of unexpected aggression and vandalism. We should have known these things all along from the Bible, of course, but it took quite a while before the psychologists also managed to spot the connection. If someone believes that he is “respectable” and law-abiding, how does it come about that
he sometimes descends to actions of the lowest sort? Christians know the answer: No matter of highly we think of ourselves, the sinful nature will often show through in a painful way, provided the circumstances are “suitable.” That this is indeed the case will become even clearer from the paragraphs that follow.

5. 2 The Ethos and Our Relationships

5. 2. 1 The ethos and I

We have seen that it is necessary to distinguish between our (objective) needs (what we really “need,” whether we want it or not), and our (objective) drives (what we want, whether we need it or not). At this point we can compare our needs and drives with a third entity – our ethos or, as we might call it, our values. All three of these entities are governed by sensitive and spiritive factors, with the heart as the deepest and most important of them. Yet it is by no means the case that they are always in harmony with one another. Our desires are far from agreeing at all times with our objective needs, the needs which God has put in us as His creatures. Our values are not always in agreement with God’s norms – not by a long shot. Bearing all of this in mind, we see that it is possible to distinguish three kinds of people:

(1) a “harmonious” person is one in whom needs, desires and values (almost) completely coincide, for his drives are attuned to his real needs and therefore also to God’s norms. Furthermore, his values also harmonize with the divine norms that have been revealed by God in His Word.

(2) a “pseudo-harmonious” person is one who manages to sear his conscience so badly that his values are of the very lowest kind and therefore can coincide with his low desires. When Satan gets his slaves entirely in his power, they have “peace” (Luke 11:21). But in actual fact, of course, such a person is quite inharmonious, for while his values and desires do coincide, they do not coincide with his actual needs.
The connection between the (objective) needs (N), the (subjective) desires (D) and the values one stands for (V). Between N and D and V there are seven possible relations (see text).

(3) A completely “inharmonious” person is one in whom no two of the three elements coincide to any significant degree. His low desires deviate strongly from his needs but are in conflict as well with his values, which are not yet wholly degenerate, even though they have actually deviated quite strongly from God’s norms. Such a person is a slave to sin, and he has a bad conscience in addition. Still, for such a person there is considerably more hope than for the “pseudo-harmonious” person, precisely because his conscience is still at work.

Cognitive Dissonance

To complicate matters, we must now take note of the fact that among a person’s (objective) needs is the urge to bring his desires into harmony as much as possible with his values (however high
or low they may be). After all, every person would like to be a “(pseudo-)harmonious” person. Or, putting the point in different words, people generally have an urgent need for “self-justification.” In this connection, psychologists like to speak of cognitive dissonance. What they mean by this is that when a person, for example, does certain things he himself does not believe in or are not in agreement with his norms, he feels ill at ease. There is dissonance between what he is doing and what he thinks he ought to be doing. Therefore he will attempt to eliminate the dissonance, either by changing his actions (which often proves too difficult) or by adjusting his values. The cognitive dissonance is thus “resolved” by means of self-justification.

We experience this sort of thing every day of our lives. For example, a person may be of two minds – whether to go to church or stay home and watch the football game on television. He chooses the latter and now experiences “cognitive dissonance”: he really should have gone to church, but he did not. Should now he “resolve” this dissonance by making himself believe that he really doesn’t feel all that well, so that if there had not been a football game on television, he probably would have stayed home from church anyway. Strictly speaking, he does not change his norm, for he still thinks that Christians ought to go to church on Sunday afternoon, but he has declared simply that it is not applicable in this “particular” case! This is one way to preserve a harmony between one’s values and one’s desires. A second method is to justify one’s conduct with the help of other, less obvious values. In the present case, for instance, it could be: “Everybody has to relax now and then” or, “If I watch an important football game, I’ll have an easier time making contact with others (for example, my colleagues on Monday morning)” or, “Even in the beauty of human play and the movements of the human body, there is something of the greatness of our Creator to be seen.” (The third one is indeed a falsely pious cop-out!)

To be quite clear about it, this unethical excusing of oneself is a sin in the fullest Biblical sense of the word. Yet cognitive dissonance does not occur on the ethical level alone. We also encounter it in the purchase of all sorts of articles. A housewife buys more expensive detergent because she thinks her laundry will turn out whiter if she
uses it. Having made the purchase, she is now strongly inclined to believe it too, even though there is no objective difference to be noted. A person who has transferred to a different church denomination may delude himself into believing that it is indeed much better over there, thereby justifying to himself the step he has taken, even if it has not really improved the situation at all. Or it might be noted that the more expensive the medicine, the more the patient is inclined to believe that his treatment is helping him. These forms of self-deception are not concrete sins; but they are, of course, the consequences of the sinful brokenness of our life.

The theory of cognitive dissonance can also be applied to the upbringing of children. Whenever a child is under severe pressure and therefore refrains from doing something it would like to do, cognitive dissonance develops. Or the child can resolve it by reasoning: “I really want to keep on doing it, but I’m stopping because I am being forced to stop.” In a stronger case, the severe pressure being applied by the parents can even have a negative effect, for the thing that is forbidden now becomes steadily more attractive for the child. Unconsciously the child says: “If I want this so badly even though it is forbidden, then it certainly must be awfully attractive to me.” The result is that any time children get out from under the authority and direct influence of such strict, authoritarian (not to be confused with authoritative) parents, they often go and give themselves to their heart’s content, doing whatever was forbidden to them for so long. It is quite conceivable that parents who do exercise “authority” but try to reach their goal using milder threats and gentler pressure have more success. But even here cognitive dissonance does develop. Investigations have revealed that the child resolves the dissonance in an entirely different way. He reasons: “Oh well, actually I didn’t find it nearly so nice to do this or that.” And where a child receives a good upbringing – especially a Christian upbringing – in which the parents do their best to make it clear to the child why this or that is not good, according to God’s commandments, the child also learns to see the reasonableness of what their parents are asking of them, and as a result the child has no need at all of self-justification (actually, “self-deception”).

Also of great importance when it comes to cognitive dissonance
is the support which like-minded people give one another. The more people there are believing something, the more others are inclined to believe it too. People argue that if there are so many sensible, informed people who believe it, it could hardly be untrue. We see this sort of thing occurring just as well among Bible-believing Christians. Even in such circles there are just a few people with a completely independent judgment that is based only on the Scriptures. In making this observation, I am not laying blame, for many are not able to do much more than consciously or unconsciously rely on the judgment of “informed” people in the group or on the judgment of the crowd. If they happen to be thrown into contact with another “crowd” that is equally large and equally convincing, cognitive dissonance develops. Ordinarily it is not resolved by an objective investigation, for such an investigation could lead to one’s having to modify one’s convictions or even trade them in. Usually one does not wish to do either of these things, even if one has formed a vague impression that others might just be right. Without doing any basic investigating, sometimes without even having a good understanding of the other person’s conviction, one simply trots out “arguments,” which are actually intended more to set one’s own mind at rest than to convince others. Even though there are many who clearly cannot come up with any more than this, it is nevertheless a consequence of the sinful brokenness of our life. That’s why a recognition of this cognitive dissonance and of our self-justification can be so beneficial. “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17: 9). How very difficult it is to be truly honest with yourself – or better yet, honest with God!

5. 2. 2  The Ethos and the other

If it is already so difficult for a person to know himself, as we have seen, just imagine how much harder it would be to know others and see through them. We have already observed how much we allow ourselves to be guided by prejudices and “first impressions” when it comes to knowing others. Likes and dislikes often play a major role in our behavior, so that our (ethical) love of our neighbor can
easily become subordinated to our (sensitive) sympathy with our neighbor. Still, it remains a very interesting question what it is that causes us to find some people so sympathetic, whereas certain other people do not come across to us as sympathetic. Do we go first of all by a person’s character, his personality, his emotional balance? If this is what you think, you are wrong! Psychologists have shown that the physical attractiveness or unattractiveness of our fellow human beings plays a much greater role in our judgment of them than we generally realize. This certainly holds true for marriage, and so we find Lemuel saying in the Bible: “Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised” (Proverbs 31:30). This pattern also holds for how adults judge children. The more attractive the child is in appearance, the less inclination adults have to blame bad actions on him. From this fact we see just how unethical our judgment of others can often be! There are also some indications that the physical attractiveness of suspects in a criminal case plays a role in the administration of justice, although (thankfully!) this is true to a lesser degree as the offense becomes more serious.

Another factor that plays a role in our “sympathy” (likes) is the presence of an unusual talent. The area in which the talent doesn’t really make much difference. Things become much more complicated here, for people show great sympathy for others who are very gifted in an area of particular interest, for example, sports or science, but there are indications that many people have less of a liking for persons who come across as all too “perfect.” Moreover, the feeling of self-esteem that people themselves have seems to make a real difference. A person who is highly talented and uncannily “perfect” makes the greatest impression on people who are at the top (that is, people with a strong feeling of self-esteem) or on the “common folk” or pedestrian class (that is, the people with a very low feeling of self-esteem). To make an impression on the large middle group (the people with an average feeling of self-esteem), the highly gifted person needs to display somewhat more “human” qualities, for example, by making a blunder every now and then. Imperfect as we ourselves are, we do not easily tolerate the superior person – unless we are also “superior” (or think we are) or are
weighed down by a strong feeling of inferiority. But since most people possess neither of these characteristics, they feel more at home with those who display the same failings as they themselves do. In all of this, we see a clear ethical element: in general it is hard for us to tolerate a person who is clearly “better” than we ourselves are. “Sinners together” feel more comfortable.

Helping Your Neighbor

It is obvious that our love for our neighbor is easily “criss-crossed” by all sorts of sensitive factors. Let us say that at a given moment we know that we must help out a fellow human being, and yet we do not do it. Our failing here may be due to dislike or laziness, but sometimes there are very different factors at work. This we see when we consider what psychologists have called the “bystander problem:” someone is in distress and many bystanders clearly see it, yet no one extends a helping hand. Why not? Of course, we may say that it’s simply the “sin” in our life, but it appears that there is more to it than that. If there is just one bystander, it appears that he is much more ready to help his neighbor in distress than when there are many bystanders. This may not surprise you, but it is still useful to have psychologists sort out what goes on here and bring some exactness to our understanding of such situations. Psychologists have pointed to two causes of this pattern – which, after all, is a bit curious. It seems that having a great number of bystanders around works to the disadvantage of the person in need.

The first cause is that people unconsciously judge the impassiveness of the other bystanders to mean that the situation is not all that serious after all. If clouds of smoke or a cry for help should suddenly break into a waiting room, the chance of someone’s going out to investigate is much greater if that someone is alone than if he is with a number of other people. If two people are sitting in a waiting room facing each other, their passiveness is greater than if they sit back-to-back, for in the latter case they cannot judge each other’s reactions. The second cause of the passiveness that is found where there are a larger number
bystanders is that the responsibility for helping (and also the shame in case no help is offered) is spread over more persons, with the result that the responsibility per person is experienced as less. Even if it becomes abundantly clear that there is a real emergency, in which case the first cause is no longer in the picture, bystanders may still remain passive because of this second cause. Research has shown that bystanders in such a situation do not necessarily remain apathetic or indifferent; they may be extremely worried about the situation. And so it’s not that they have decided not to offer any help; rather, they have not yet got to the point of actually offering their assistance because they’re waiting to see whether anyone else will do it.

In situations in which it was abundantly clear that there was an emergency, and in which no one could make himself believe for very long that “someone else would help” – for example, when someone becomes ill in a train – people appear to offer assistance speedily. If neither the first nor the second of the causes distinguished above are a factor in the situation, bystanders appear not to be such wicked people as one might first think from hearing about their passivity. The evidence points in a more positive direction: in such a situation, once someone rushes forward to help, several others promptly also come forward to offer their assistance. So in some cases, bystanders appear to have an averse effect, but under other circumstances precisely the opposite is the case: the bystanders seem to motivate and activate one another. And so people who know they are being observed by others who themselves cannot help (perhaps because they are sitting behind glass) are quicker to offer help than people who are alone.

And so it appears that there is always an ethical undertone present in our readiness to assist. Either we shove the responsibility on to others and remain passive or – because we do not wish to make a bad impression on others – we offer our help. Nor is it easy to do the right thing: people have it in the back of their heads that you should not meddle too much in other people’s business. They remember what Solomon said: “Like one who seize a dog by the ears is a passer-by who meddles in a quarrel not his own” (Proverbs 26:17).
Aggression

In conclusion, when it comes to the ethos and the other (our fellow human being) special mention must yet be made of aggressiveness. What we are facing here is a very complex problem in which many factors play a part. Think first of all of biotic factors (we are familiar with all kinds of drugs capable of suppressing aggression in the human being), perceptive factors (people can teach themselves or others all sorts of aggressive reflexes, and one’s upbringing would also play quite a role here), sensitive factors (violent emotions accompany aggression), and spiritive factors (sometimes aggression takes place very deliberately and purposefully). There is a place in human life for moderate aggression, that is to say, for justified anger, but there are great dangers here. In Ephesians 4:26, we read: “Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down while you are angry.” Consider also Psalm 4:4: “Be angry, but sin not.” An aggression that intimidates, extorts, uses force, or is necessary to provide “relief” is out of the question in a Christian ethos.

These things can be made still clearer now that it has become apparent psychologically that aggression is not to be considered a good “exhaust valve,” as was often thought by earlier psychologists. Eating stills the “urge” to eat, but aggressive behavior ordinarily does not still the “urge” to engage in aggression. Rather, the urge is like the sexual urge: sexual activity increases – rather than decreases – the strength of the urge. And aggression only evokes more aggression as Cain, the first murderer, already realized (see Genesis 4:14), and as parents who allow their children to watch a great deal of aggressive television should also realize. Notorious in this connection is a psychological “experiment” in which human subjects – either jailers or prisoners – had to act in an imitation prison. To the horror of the people conducting the experiment, the process released totally unsuspected aggressions, even in mild-tempered subjects. What was made clear is that even in “honorable” people a “devil” is always potentially present, a devil that can be brought to light under certain circumstances. The Bible lays a finger on the truly guilty party – man’s sinful heart.
The ethos and God

We will now take a look at such questions as responsibility and obeying God rather than men (Acts 5:29). In the final analysis, human beings are completely accountable to God, and so they may never go against their conscience (insofar, of course, as their consciences is normed by Scripture). Therefore we may never take refuge behind what others have told us. People have always tried to excuse themselves by making such pronouncements as, “The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree ...” (Genesis 3:12) or, “These people ... said to me, Make us gods; ... they gave me their gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf” (Exodus 32:22-24). We are responsible for our own actions, no matter how understandable it is that people sometimes allow themselves to be led by others, or even to be totally misled.

It is remarkable indeed that there are so many people who believe in evolution or in Marxism, just as it is remarkable that there are a great many people who accept the body of Christian ideas – without ever really thinking about these things very deeply. But then it’s worth asking: how many of your ideas – or mine, for that matter – are really entirely your own? Isn’t it true that much of the time we parrot others without looking into matters ourselves? Isn’t it true that we’re very susceptible to the opinion of the crowd? Isn’t there something of the “conformist” in all of us, the person who, without thinking, sticks with current opinions? Quite a bit of psychological testing has been done to establish how far this conformity goes even in very sensible, intelligent people, and the results are shocking. Even in matters that are very obvious, where people can be 100% certain that they themselves are right, there are still some who would rather fit in with the manifestly wrong view held by the crowd. What is it that moves them to think along such lines? “The others are surely right – I’ve got to be mistaken,” or even, “Something’s got to be wrong with me . . ..” Here we’re talking about the testing of students, among whom you may surely expect a certain amount of firmness of character and power of
judgment. But consider how many more people there would be in actual, everyday life who would play up to the majority when it comes to political, moral, scientific, and religious questions. It is also a remarkable fact that the students who did have the courage to take a stand against the majority sometimes gave their (correct!) answers with a “bad” conscience: “Isn’t it true that I am wrong?” And so people can delude themselves so badly that they consciously do something wrong with a “good conscience” and do something good with a “bad conscience.”

False Obedience

All this becomes even more striking when tests are performed to find out how far people would be willing to go when it comes to obeying an authoritarian, deeply respected person even if such obedience would involve going against one’s own conscience and sense of responsibility. In a series of experiments that have become notorious, it became apparent that about two-thirds of the human subjects were willing to inflict unbearable pain on a fellow human being out of obedience to the person conducting the experiment. The subject inflicting the pain presumably thought they did not know any better, even if they were endangering the life of the person they were dealing with. These experiments involved tests in which experimental subjects had to give increasingly severe electric shocks as “punishment” to other subjects whenever they gave a wrong answer to a question. (In fact no shocks were being given at all, and all the pain that was apparent in the situation was acted out by the “victims.”) It is noteworthy that in advance of the experiment a group of psychiatrists had predicted that at most one subject in a thousand would persist to the almost lethal level of 450 volts. The actual number turned out to be 620 times as high – 62%!

Yet the people who served as subjects in these experiments were not cruel sadists; rather, they pressed the button inflicting the pain with distressed consciences, under stress, and sometimes almost underwent nervous collapse. Nevertheless, they did continue to obey the person conducting the experiment right to the bitter end! One cause of their action was that they resolved their “cognitive
dissonance” by casting all their responsibility on the person conducting the experiment, or in some cases even by placing the blame on the “victims” for giving such stupid answers!

We should not be too hard on the culpable two-thirds of the experimental subjects. Many situations in life are so complicated that it is very difficult to take a proper distance and get a good, total and integrated view of the whole so as to be able to make the proper choice between two moral principles. The two principles in this case would be, first, not to inflict pain on your fellow human beings, and secondly, to render faithful obedience to a “good cause.” We are all so accustomed to rendering obedience on a continual basis – to the physician, the policeman, the income tax authorities, our employer – that it is often very difficult to know exactly when we are supposed to obey our own conscience (or better: God) rather than man. But neither may we nonchalantly place this famous experiment on the same level as the “Befehl ist Befehl” mentality of many Nazis in Hitler’s Germany. The subjects in the psychological experiment mentioned above obeyed because they thought that useful, high-level scientific research was the goal, whereas in Nazi Germany anyone involved in reprehensible activities had reason to know that the most malevolent and disgraceful of aims were involved. The men of the SS and the Gestapo ordinarily did their work in a very vicious way and definitely did not need much pressure from their superiors to keep on with their cruelty. But as for the subjects in the experiment, they usually obeyed only under great pressure and with tremendous emotional antipathy.

For all who observe these tests from the outside, it is clear what the subjects ought to have done. But before you render such a judgment, you should put yourself in a situation where you are holding a smart professor in his white lab coat in very high esteem while thinking to yourself that you are engaged in useful, highly scientific work, while you are also aware that you can’t really grasp fully what your actions are doing to your victim. The truth is that only a few of us are sadists, but we are all sinners. And because we’re all sinners, it is often difficult for us to obey those who have been placed over us. And it is also difficult for us to get a firm grasp on the situation such that we know we must not obey.
The themes on which I have just touched, which revolve around man’s responsibility to God, bring us to the subject of crime. If it is true that all men are sinners—and it is indeed true—how then does it happen that only a comparatively small percentage of the human race falls into actual criminal behavior? Of course, I am using the word “criminal” here in the juridical sense—delinquent behavior. People fall into such delinquent behavior as a result of situational and personal causes as well as religious causes. On this point we should recall the formula (see above, p. 68): \( B = \text{[function]}(R, P, S) \).

First of all, the environment can have a highly unfavorable influence (the S-factor), as a result of which people fall into crime. On the macro-level, we can think here of the society to which we belong, which takes a far too tolerant position toward aggression and so-called “petty crime,” or of the (low) values which are sometimes prevalent in certain social classes, or of bad social contacts: “Bad company corrupts good morals” (I Corinthians 15:33). On the meso-level, we should think especially of the consequences of a bad upbringing. Children need to acquire social skills of all sorts as they are growing up at home, for they are not born with them. Parents have to deal with their children consistently, especially when it comes to punishment. Otherwise the children will not know what is expected of them. Children can be damaged especially when they are rejected by their parents and receive too little love, care and attention—or perhaps none. And on the micro-level, it is still true, sad to say, that “Opportunity makes the thief.”

As for the personal factors (P), I shall speak first of all of biotic causes. Research has demonstrated that hereditary factors undeniably play a role. We should not conclude that certain hereditary factors therefore “automatically” make a person into a criminal, but they do increase the inclination to delinquency. Other factors which can increase this tendency are certain brain abnormalities, like epilepsy, brain tumors, inflammation of the brain, and certain factors in metabolism (e.g. lead-poisoning, lack of calcium) and certain hormonal abnormalities.
In addition to biotic factors, there are all sorts of sensitive factors, such as the need for status, for conduct that suggests self-assuredness, or a certain over-active, anti-social, impulsiveness or aggressiveness, or even a neurotic tendency. The latter appears to occur especially in neurotic extroverts, that is, in choleric temperaments (see Chapter 4). Researchers have tried to explain these matters in terms of both the emotionality and the extroversion of the choleric person (see above, p. 75). His emotions (anger, fear) increase his inclination to criminal behavior, while on the other hand it has been demonstrated that extroverts are somewhat less susceptible to conditioning and also are not as quick to learn social behavior during their upbringing. What I am saying here only holds in a general way, of course: a person with the opposite kind of temperament, the phlegmatic, can also become a criminal, while on the other hand most cholerics are not criminals.

As a matter of fact, even when P and S are taken into consideration, everything has not yet been said. The R-factor (the religious condition of the heart) is of the greatest (though not exclusive!) significance. Of course it is true that Christians, too, can fall into crime. However, there are clear indications that among committed Christians the number of delinquents is quite a bit smaller than it is among unbelievers, and also that conversion to Christ is one of the most effective means of putting an end to delinquent behavior. It is when you start to bring religion and the heart into the picture that you begin to see that more is involved in delinquency than just “social behavior” and “degree of condition-ability,” which were mentioned above. In fact, social learning extends far beyond (perceptive) conditioning, as we have already seen. Moreover, delinquency is not just a matter of bad social behavior but of bad jural and ethical and religious behavior.

In an earlier section, we saw that the small child has a “moral disposition,” which, since people are prone by nature to anti-social and anti-moral behavior, has to be developed during the years of his upbringing. It is not the case that a good upbringing removes this proneness to evil; otherwise it would be possible to prevent a person’s ever falling into delinquency. Favorable circumstances (upbringing, refinement, stable surroundings) can at best damn up
the eruptions of the filthy wellspring that lies concealed in every one of us, and such circumstances are therefore a great practical benefit. But God, who knows and judges even the deepest thoughts (Psalm 139:1-2, 4), sees through the good behavior of the respectable citizen who keeps his lusts in decent check but in fact could not care less about his Creator’s authority over him. Both the criminal and the worthy citizen are in need of radical conversion, for in both, the heart is good for nothing, no matter how dissimilar their actions may be.

5. 3 The Heart

5. 3. 1 Heart and conscience

We are now coming closer to the inmost depths of the human person, which depths, for the scientific researcher, will always remain a mystery unless such depths are enlightened by the Word of God. On a number of occasions, I have already mentioned the conscience, which, according to the Bible, is a function of the heart. The Old Testament does not even have a word for “conscience,” and when it talks about the conscience the word it uses is “heart.” See, for example, I Samuel 25:31, where the literal term used is “heart” (the NIV has “conscience”); II Samuel 24:10; I Kings 2:44; 8:38; Psalm 24:4; 73:1. Precisely because the conscience is a function of the heart, it is always directly related to God. Therefore, a conscience that is functioning properly accuses us whenever we have been disobedient to God and His Word (see Psalm 139: 23f). The conscience is not to be understood as some religio-ethical “subordinate part” of the person but is the person himself, that is to say, in his inmost depth (the heart) in his total self-awareness, willing and doing, which either is or is not directed to God’s Word.

All of this is very clear from the New Testament, where the word “conscience” does occur many times. There is a “weak conscience” (I Corinthians 8:7), i.e. a conscience that is easily offended, which is broadly the same as a “weak faith” in God, in the sense of Romans 14:1. The expression “the conscience of him who is weak” which
we find in I Corinthians 8:9-12 refers in fact always to the person himself in his responsibility toward God. In Romans 13:5 (see also verse 6), too, the “conscience” is clearly the inner expression of the will of God in our life. All of this perhaps comes to its clearest expression and I Peter 2:19, where we find an expression which the King James Version translates as “conscience toward God,” but which the NIV translates as “conscious of God.” There is not a great deal of difference between the two: the “conscience” is a consciousness (awareness) of God, our reckoning with God, who knows and judges our inmost depths. When God has nothing to find fault with in us, we have a “clear conscience,” but when God, in accordance with His Word, condemns our inner feelings and our outer actions, we have a “guilty” or “corrupt conscience” (II Timothy 1:3; 2:22; Hebrews 10:22; Titus 1:15).

It is important to bear in mind that God’s Word and the Holy Spirit do constitute a perfect standard, whereas our conscience in and of itself does not. Therefore Paul writes: “I am not aware of anything against myself” (NIV: “My conscience is clear”), “but that does not make me innocent; for he that judges me is the Lord” (I Corinthians 4:4). Therefore, it is possible that even though our conscience does not accuse us, the Lord still has to reprove us. The opposite could happen as well: if our heart (in this case, the conscience) “condemns” us, we may still hand everything over to the Lord in the awareness that He “is familiar with all our ways” (Psalm 139:1-6) and will make it clear to us whether there is something awry, so that we could get rid of it (I John 3:19-21). Therefore, the conscience is not always a precise awareness of the will of God. For that matter, this is also evident from the fact that pagans who do not know the Word of God nevertheless have a “conscience,” however defective it may be (Romans 2:15). Every person is born with a vague awareness of God hidden deep in his heart (see Romans 1:18-21, 32), whereby he also has a faint awareness of the will of God, of “good and evil.” However, this defective natural moral consciousness is further formed – and may well be malformed – by upbringing and the entire cultural environment in which one lives.
Conscience and conditioning

Even though the conscience is a function of the heart, sensitive and spiritive factors play a major role in its development. For that matter, (perceptive) conditioning also plays a role in it. As a result some psychologists view the conscience as “nothing but” a bundle of conditioned reflexes. Every parent is familiar with the role of perceptive conditioning in the development of conscience because parents try to instill a certain type of behavior into a stubborn child or break him of it by means of (mild) corporal punishment. There was a time when it was fashionable for psychologists to disapprove strongly of spanking, but many of them have long since changed their minds on this issue. Corporal punishment certainly is very useful, provided it is administered promptly and consistently and is also explained to the child. Furthermore, it should always be in keeping with the seriousness of the offense that was committed and should be accompanied by “rewards” (i.e. praise for the child) whenever the child begins to exhibit the desired behavior. We can learn from the Wisdom of Solomon as expressed in Proverbs 13:24; 22:6; 23: 13f; 29:15.

Today we have plenty of evidence that pupils who have been brought up with a greater degree of moral “freedom” commit more offenses and crimes than those who have undergone a firmer, “more conventional” upbringing. But as noted above, a firmer upbringing means corporal punishment (now and then) plus explanation. Because man has a spiritive structure, he can consider his actions, understand why something is good or bad, and see what harm his bad behavior does to other people. Moreover, he has a heart, by which, if he is indeed born again, he can see why certain behavior amounts to “sin against God.” And so, for a child undergoing a Christian upbringing, the conscience is formed in accordance with the standard of the revealed Word of God.

It is precisely because the conscience can be deformed during the process of upbringing that people can, through a process of conditioning, acquire (sensitive) “guilt feelings,” as even the higher animals are able to do! It is very important to clearly distinguish feelings of this sort from concrete, ethical “guilt.” We may speak of
guilt only when a concrete law has been infringed. This (objective) “guilt” may or may not be accompanied by a (subjective) “feeling of guilt.” A “seared” conscience (I Timothy 4:2) can carry a tremendous load of guilt without there being any feeling of guilt. On the other hand, a “weak” conscience (I Corinthians 8:7, 10, 12) could easily lead to the piling up of a feeling of guilt without there being any actual concrete guilt as far as the transgression of God’s commandments is concerned. In some Christian families all sorts of taboos are instilled in the children, taboos which do not derive at all from the Bible but which are sometimes very hard to overcome. It is also for this reason that a good, thorough, genuinely Biblical upbringing is so difficult and also so important. The poet-author of the book of Proverbs was not only familiar with spanking but could also, in intimate relation with his child, say: “My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart ... trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil” (Proverbs 3:1, 5-7).

5. 3. 2 Heart and love

The essence of the relation between God and man, and also between a human being and his neighbor, is love (Matthew 22:37-39; see also Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). If a person loves, his heart goes out to the other. This idea is expressed in innumerable Biblical passages. I will begin by discussing “horizontal” love between man and his neighbor. In this regard we can distinguish between one-sided love, or love of neighbor, and mutual love. When psychologists discuss love of one’s neighbor, they like to speak of pro-social behavior, by which they mean behavior that leads to positive social consequences. This certainly sounds a lot different from “love,” but the definition does have the advantage of leaving the motives, the disposition, of the pro-social person out of consideration. We know all too well that a person can act pro-socially with the noblest of motives, but also with the most vicious or malevolent of motives. In any case, there are some
very self-seeking motives that lie between these two extremes. On the one hand, help and charity of all kinds often require from the person involved only a small sacrifice, but on the other hand help and charity can lead to honor, celebrity, prestige, and rewards. Genuine love of one’s neighbor is found where great sacrifice is demanded of the one involved, with little or no advantage in sight.

A very clear example of such behavior is provided in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). First of all, the Samaritan was not responsible for the condition of the wounded man (much pro-social behavior is in fact based on a feeling of guilt). Secondly, there was no one forcing the Samaritan to help (much neighborly help occurs in the face of social pressure). His act was entirely voluntary and even non-conformist, since leaders in that society (the priest and the Levite) had already failed to help. Thirdly, the Samaritan was not prompted by any feeling of solidarity, for the wounded man belonged to a nation other than his own with which his own nation lived on a footing of hostility. Fourthly, his act involved major outlays of time, exertion, risk, and money. Fifthly, the Samaritan did not ask for anything in return for what he did, and did not receive anything either.

The question can now be asked: is such neighborly love actually to be found in the real world? Psychoanalysts and behaviorist have simply denied that it is. Presupposing evolutionistic ideas like the “struggle for existence” and the “survival of the fittest,” these thinkers could not do otherwise than maintain that human behavior is out and out self-seeking. Christian thinkers can agree with this claim up to a point, but not on the basis of a belief in the evolutionary imperfection of man: rather, the basis is that man, though originally created good, fell into sin by his own free choice. Even in the case of the Christian who is indeed born again but in whom the sinful nature is still present, it is questionable whether one will ever come across a 100% disinterested act of a self-sacrificing disposition.

An embarrassing example illustrates the truth of this statement. The example involved 40 theological students who
were instructed to go to a particular building to perform certain tasks there. The situation had been set up in such a way that some of the students had to hurry to get there in time. For certain of the students, the task included giving a lecture on the Good Samaritan! All the subjects to the experiment, on their way to the building, had to go right past a man who was groaning and obviously in distress, although actually he was an accomplice of the people conducting the experiment. The number of students who stopped to help the man in distress proved to be pitifully small. Like priests and Levites, they rushed past the man in distress so that they would be on time for their interesting and honorable lecture on the Good Samaritan . . ..

However imperfect our readiness to help may be, it can be learned to a certain extent. This realization is of great importance when it comes to the rearing of children. Helpfulness in children can be fostered by rewarding them afterward in material or social respects. However, if the rewards are promised to them beforehand, they will have a bad effect, for the children will then be trained to judge their own behavior wrongly. They will imagine that they are doing something for the promised reward instead of out of neighborly love. As a result, they will not be quite so eager to help in other situations where there is no reward in sight. When children are being raised, it is important to foster their ability to enter into the feelings of others and so to offer help not for reward but simply to relieve suffering and give joy.

Setting a good example is of immense importance here. Children are quick to imitate an example, especially when they see the positive results of extended helpfulness. Moreover, children imitate our actions more readily than our words: if dad can talk nicely about neighborly love but never puts it into practice himself, his children generally will not do so either. Still, his words do have an influence: they influence the words his children will offer about neighborly love. People who talk a nice line breed people who talk a nice line. On this subject, see Matthew 23:3f; Romans 2:1-3; I Timothy 4:12, 15f; II Timothy 3:10f, 14.
Theories about helpfulness

Quite apart from all these influences and apart from the continued effect of sin on human life, which cannot be denied, we must admit that helpfulness does indeed occur. Many people, including non-Christians, can often be extremely helpful, even to perfect strangers, while remaining anonymous themselves and deriving no benefit from what they have done. Although we may be talking about sinners in such cases, we may never hold such helpfulness in contempt. Even Christ loved the rich young man for his honesty and sincerity. Still, such “good” qualities do not in themselves get anyone to heaven (Mark 10:21).

Helpfulness does occur. Self-interest undoubtedly plays a role in it, since a person is always inclined to gain the greatest possible advantage with the least possible expense. In psychology this point is brought out through the “costs and profits theory.” But this theory does not manage to explain the heroic instances of neighborly love in which the costs are extraordinarily high, e.g. the sacrifice of one’s own life, while the benefits are extremely low, e.g. no more than inner self-satisfaction. The sensitive theory, which tells us that helpfulness is proportional to “the ability to empathize,” comes closer to explaining genuine helpfulness. This theory focuses on our ability to identify with the distress of another person. The more we manage to identify, the greater our own discomfort, and the stronger the effort we make to lessen both our own discomfort and that of the other person by helping. Research has demonstrated that this ability to empathize can be stimulated in children and adults. When this is done, helpfulness increases.

Yet the spiritive theories that are used to explain helpfulness are more important still. Such theories relate helpfulness to norms. It appears that what we are concerned with here is not so much vague, general social norms but very personal norms. Many people do not know how to handle general norms. For example, they don’t know how to choose between “Love your neighbor” and “Don’t meddle in other people’s business.” They think the Golden Rule of Matthew 7:12 (“Do to others what you would have them do to you”)
is fine, but they are by no means eager for certain forms of help to be extended to them simply because receiving such help might morally oblige them on occasion to offer help in return. People often feel threatened in their freedom of action if they sense they are obliged to perform a service in return, and so they may say: “Let’s just not pay a visit to the neighbors, for then we will also have to invite them for a return visit before long.”

On the other hand, personal norms are much clearer. What I have in mind here especially is the view one has of one’s own moral obligations and responsibilities to offer help in specific situations. For example, if a person in a specific situation constantly succeeds in throwing the responsibility onto someone else, he can indeed imagine that he has a strong “sense of duty,” but if he is never “responsible,” he doesn’t have to do his duty either! In some such way, even certain Christians may accept for themselves the highest Biblical norms and yet turn out to be poor help-providers because they have so little sense of responsibility: when it comes right down to it, they declare that those fine Biblical norms are constantly non-applicable. It is here where we come to the crux of the whole matter: the question of personal responsibility forces us to confront the attitude of the heart toward God. Genuine love of one’s neighbor can only emanate from a genuine love of God.

5. 3. 3 Heart and faith

Even this, a human being’s love relationship to God, or religion, has been made the subject of psychological study. Such study takes place in a discipline called psychology of religion. But it happens that there are also researchers in all sorts of other disciplines – theologians, historians, ethnologists, sociologists, and philosophers – who have occupied themselves with this precarious subject. Earlier we observed that the human being’s religious relationship to God is, in its true essence, not accessible to scientific analysis. Consequently, scientists have proposed the greatest possible nonsense when they undertook to speak of religion. Even in response to the “simplest” question of all, namely, how religion is properly to be defined, the most
divergent answers have been given.

This confusion should not surprise us. It is precisely when scientific researchers occupy themselves with religion, which is a matter of the heart, that their own heart’s involvement is at its highest. Therefore, the scientific investigator is nowhere more “subjective” than when the object of his study is religion. In this area of study too – or perhaps I should say, precisely here! – researchers have indeed pleaded for “scientific open-mindedness,” but from a Christian standpoint we see that it works just the other way around. You can only talk about your religious relationship meaningfully when you are involved in that relationship yourself “with heart and soul.” It is only the religious person, out of his personal experience, who is “knowledgeable” about exactly those essential aspects of the religious relation about which nothing sensible can be said in any “strict scientific” sense. The religious person doesn’t just think he experiences the “higher world” and is in touch with it – he really does experience it and is in contact with it, whether it be the “world” of God or the (demonic) world of the idols. The heart has its own reasons for believing this.

And if someone, styling himself “truly scientific,” proposes to limit himself to the “objective observable facts,” he has a perfect right to do so. But then he must not expect to be able to study “religion.” At best he will be studying the visible, and therefore least interesting and least essential, aspects of religion. He could be compared to someone who proposes to study an automobile but does not believe in gasoline: perhaps such a person would be able to make some nice observations about the automobile, but the essence of the vehicle would still escape him. In similar fashion, scientific students of religion have become absorbed in religious ideas, forms of conduct, rituals, feelings, theology, confessions of faith, church institutions, and ceremonies – but without ever grasping that when focusing on all these things they were only studying “religiosity,” and not the religious relationship between God and man. All those things indeed have something to do with that relationship, but they cannot be equated with it.
At the same time, we shall also have to admit that psychologists in recent years have also become somewhat aware of these things. If they had listened to the Bible it would not have taken them quite so long to learn to make the basic distinction between external religious conduct and the inner religious experience of the heart. In today’s terms one would say: between “extrinsic” and “intrinsic” religiosity. Extrinsic religiosity is religiosity “on the outside,” which is a matter of social status (of “belonging somewhere”) and of self-interest (“what is religion worth to me?”). Moreover, extrinsic religious persons are of themselves often very authoritarian, heavily weighed down with all sorts of prejudices, and very confident that their own group is superior. There are people of this kind to be found in both liberal (modernist) and extremely conservative ecclesiastical groupings. It appears that the qualities of such people really can traced back to the same personal needs of security and belonging (see the discussion of Abraham Maslow in Chapter 3!). They accept their own “group’s” views regarding faith in a rather offhand manner and conceal their timidity and uncertainty behind their religious self-conceit and the way they look down on other “groups” (= churches).

It appears to be much more difficult to provide a personality description of the intrinsic religious person. The reason for the difficulty is that his religious experience cannot be traced back to some few sensitive characteristics; rather, it is a matter of the heart, to which all other needs and values in life have been completely subordinated. Human beings of this kind do not talk so much about a comfortable life, pleasure, ambition, social recognition, abilities, and so forth as they do of redemption, forgiveness, love, and helpfulness. The intrinsic religious person is not characterized by certain mental qualities but rather by a relation with God. But of course that relation does have an influence on the person’s mental life. And so the genuinely religious person proves to be not “neurotic” or “psychically unhealthy,” as Freud had thought, but rather turns out to be “more healthy” than the extrinsic religious person: he is less fixed, less legalistic, more flexible, is able to stand up more
courageously for his own convictions, is less dogmatic, and is less inclined to glorify his own “group.” Of course Christians have long been familiar with this distinction, but it is gratifying to see that even non-Christian psychologists have slowly been coming to such insights too.

In this discussion, of course, we must continue to bear in mind that only marginal phenomena of religion can be investigated by means of observation and experiment. And so the researcher can make hardly any distinction, for example, between the believing Christian who lives in communion with God and the occult mystic who, in the demonic world, obtains all kinds of experiences that the Bible forbids. As a rule, the worldly psychologist will look upon both these individuals as intrinsic religious persons, whereas the difference between the two, considered from Scriptural point of view, is as wide as the heavens! The psychologist will say: both are in a religious relation with the “higher world.” The Christian psychologists will reply: but then it’s a question of two “higher worlds” that are opposed to one another.

And so we need to ask ourselves the question as to what it means, from a Scriptural standpoint, to be truly religious. True religion is communion with God, service of God, worship of God, devotion to God, as these are only possible in the case of the born-again, redeemed, believing person: “... to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, wholly and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship,” or, as the King James Version has it, “which is your reasonable service,” or service of God, i.e. religion (Romans 12:1). With the aid of our psychological concepts we can now distinguish the following elements:

(a) the perceptive aspect: religion is first of all a consciousness of God’s presence, grounded in the heart and based on the Word of God;

(b) the sensitive aspect: this religious perception is affectively “colored,” “charged,” and so we can speak of joy, exaltedness, harmony, peace, and of being deeply touched or of awe, of shying away, of fear, or of a mixture of these; it all depends on how one knows God and on what the condition of the heart is at the moment;

(c) the spiritual aspect: the cognitive recognition, acknowledgment
and understanding of what is perceived of God. This is very important: awareness and feeling *without* knowledge is mysticism; knowledge *without* awareness and feeling is dogmatism;

(d) this entire religious experience, which is a matter of the whole person, and thus involves all the human structures, is “concentrated” in the human *heart*.
Chapter Six
The Abnormal Personality

6.1. Abnormal Behavior

Having discussed the “normal” human personality in the previous chapter, we now turn to the “abnormal” personality. What I have in mind here is not the “positively abnormal” or exceptionally gifted person, but the “negatively abnormal,” person, or the person with a “mental disorder,” the person who is “different from others,” “disturbed,” “mentally ill,” or whatever terminology one might care to use. But of course we run straight into a problem when we initiate such a discussion. What is meant here by “normal” and “abnormal”? What are the “norms” or standards by which we could judge such a matter? If a person thinks he is Napoleon, or refuses to venture into the street because he is afraid of open spaces (“agoraphobia”), or can only get sexual satisfaction through contact with, for example, a woman’s shoe, he is of course not “normal.” But suppose a person thinks he is a prophet of the Hindu god Vishnu, or suppose because of his fear of heights (“acrophobia”) does not wish to live in a high-rise apartment, or suppose he can only find sexual gratification with someone of the same gender, is such a person also to be judged as not “normal”? Such cases are not quite as clear as the former cases.

6.1.1 Norms for abnormal behavior

What norm determines what is “normal” and “abnormal” behavior? Some people would answer that only a statistical norm could do so. “Normal” is then simply the average behavior of a group; that is to say, normal is what most people do. The problem with this way of thinking is that there are so terribly many mental...
disorders to be found in Western society that, if you follow the statistical norm idea, you would almost have to call the neurotic normal, and the exceptionally well-balanced and well-adjusted personality abnormal. As a matter of fact, there are millions of people in the Western world who reside in psychiatric institutions. If we go back some years in history, we could find such people taking up the majority of the hospital beds. (This situation has changed since then because hospital stays nowadays are shorter in length, and other sorts of reception centers have been established.) And here we are only talking about the most serious of disturbances. If we go on to consider all mental disorders that are sufficiently serious to interfere with daily living, we would have to conclude that no less than one-third of the population appears to suffer from them, in both industrialized and so-called primitive societies.

Another possibility would be to appeal to the social-cultural norm, according to which “abnormal” behavior is behavior that is socially not accepted or unacceptable. Then we would be talking about the behavior of people who do not fulfill their social roles and do not conform to current morals or live up to certain expectations regarding their behavior. But here, too, we would run into some problems. After all, we think that people from the East often behave “strangely,” but could we therefore characterize them as “crazy”? Even within our own society we say quite freely of all sorts of people whose behavior or dress is eccentric that they are “nuts,” but does this mean that they really are mentally ill? In a society that is being de-Christianized, it may well be that prayer and church attendance will come to be viewed as “crazy,” but does such talk mean that Christians really are “crazy”? In any event, Christians and other “abnormal” persons, like political dissidents, have been shut up in “psychiatric institutions” in totalitarian situations, like the former Soviet Union.

We are on better ground when we consider the so-called personality norm. People do differ from one another in the structure of their personalities: because some are mentally dysfunctional, they exhibit abnormal behavior. According to this norm, abnormal behavior is characterized especially by (a) a perceptive-cognitive aberration, that is to say, a distorted picture of reality. Let’s say that you have an
unreasonable fear of spiders, or you hear strange voices, or you think you are President Truman. Secondly, according to this norm, abnormal behavior is characterized by (b) a sensitive aberration; that is to say, you feel ill at ease, or unhappy, or depressed, or you are frightened, or you can’t sleep, you have no appetite, you have all kinds of ailments and pains. These two symptoms make a proper adjustment to everyday life very difficult and point in a general way to the presence of mental disorders. But even this personality norm is only a relative thing. All of us, at one time or another, have suffered from unreasonable fears or delusions, and we all feel quite depressed at times. Moreover there is also the fact that some people lead a completely normal life and then “suddenly” exhibit completely abnormal behavior – without even so much as feeling fear or guilt. In such a case, it is precisely the absence of such feelings that can serve as an indication of a mental disorder. Or consider the example of a person who is particularly fearful or guilt-ridden, whereas it is possible that his fear is entirely well-founded; or perhaps his feeling of guilt is very concrete, for example, guilt before God.

Best of all, of course, is the Christian norm. This norm certainly does have an eye for the situational aspects of mental disorders, to which the social norm points, but also for the personal aspects, to which the personality norm points. Still, this norm includes more. On the basis of our Christian psychological view of man, I would point to the following:

(a) perceptive factors: the mentally abnormal person is not in (good) contact with reality and demonstrates this by reacting in ways that are neither effective nor realistic;

(b) sensitive factors: he does not know how to adjust to new situations with sufficient self-control and discipline, but experiences undue fear or depression;

(c) spiritive factors: his actions are often harmful to himself or to others; he cannot or will not always assume responsibility for them. His goals in life, when judged by God’s norm, will not be very valuable, but insofar as he has them, he does not try to reach them within the limits laid down by God’s norms, and within the limits set by society. What he attains does not afford him very much satisfaction;
(d) As for his heart: above everything else, it is not possible for a person to function at his best apart from the framework of personal fellowship with God and with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Outside of that fellowship, a life in accordance with God’s norms is not even possible, although it would be going too far to characterize all unbelievers as mentally “disturbed.”

6.1.2 Explanations of abnormal behavior

The explanations of abnormal behavior are just as complicated as was the discussion of norms. In the course of history, psychologists have as a rule looked to one of the human-structures to find a fitting explanation for mental disorders. But precisely because they wanted to reduce abnormal behavior completely to a single human-structure, they could never do justice to the full nature of mental disorders. On the basis of what was established in Chapter 3 above, we can now understand that the so-called organic model would try to reduce all mental disorders to physical-biotic causes, or bodily disorders. The behavioristic model looks for their causes in the perceptive structure and claims that feelings of fear and guilt can be attributed to conditioned responses to stimuli from the environment. The psychoanalytical model looks to the sensitive structure in its hunt for the causes of behavioral disorders; in other words, it looks at all sorts of (psychical) youthful conflicts and repressions. The humanistic model seeks it more in the spiritive domain and maintains that mental disorders arise when people are obstructed in their striving for “self-actualization.” And in addition to all of these we yet have the society-critical model, which seeks the causes of behavioral disorders not so much within the human-structures as in society, for example, in oppression and poverty.

Naturally, the Christian-psychological model finds traces of truth in each of these models. There are indeed some undeniable physical-biotic, perceptive, sensitive, spiritive, and social causes underlying mental disorders. But it is precisely in a Christian view of man that we can render an adequate account of this diversity of causes. What is important above all is that we can take the human heart into consideration, along with its directedness toward or away from the
living God. Therefore, when it comes to mental disorders, Christian psychology has room for certain concepts which scarcely play a role in non-Christian theorizing, such as responsibility, confession of sins, service, faith, hope, and love. We will come back to this matter in more detail a little later on.

The medical model, which is so popular today, deserves our special attention; in fact, it is adhered to by both psychoanalysts and behaviorists. According to this model, the mentally disturbed person is “ill,” and therefore must be treated “medically.” Because this way of speaking has become established, people today are comfortable with such terminology as “psychiatric illnesses” and “patients.” They also speak of the “psychiatrist” and the “psychotherapist,” both of which terms mean “soul-healer” (from the Greek “iatros” and “therapeut” = physician). All of this is really no more than “common parlance,” even though it has become somewhat typical. Strictly speaking, we can only speak of a “medical model” when two things are being asserted: (a) that there are such things as distinct psychiatric “illnesses,” each of which has its own causes, symptoms, and course; and (b) that because the patient is “ill,” he therefore bears no responsibility for his condition. He must not be given a sermon but must instead be “healed.”

As to the first point, however, the question is raised ever more frequently today whether such distinct “psychiatric illness-units” can really be said to exist. When it comes to mental disorders, it appears that the same causes can lead to very different disturbances, and also that the same disturbances can arise from very different causes. The situation is much more complicated than what we encounter when we deal with “somatic” medicine. In connection with mental disorders we have to do not only with viruses, bacteria, hereditary disorders, and so forth but also with problems arising in marriage and family relationships, at work, in society, and in the church. People suffer from being hurt, disappointed, frustrated, and they also suffer from grief and from all kinds of ballast acquired in their youth – too much or too little attention, parents who were either too strict or too lax, and so on. When it comes to this first feature, then, the medical model has gradually played itself out. But what about the second point? Is it still possible to call someone “mentally
ill” in a general sense? And is such a person not responsible for his being in such a sick condition?

6. 1. 3 “Mentally ill”

We will have to be much more careful with the characterization “mentally ill” than the medical model has been. For example, to begin with, we must not call the constitutionally disturbed person who is designated a psychopath “mentally ill,” but at most “mentally handicapped.” Such a person cannot be “cured,” for his disorder is anchored in his constitution; all we can do is try and teach him – which is what we attempt to do in Christian counseling – how he must live with his handicap as a Christian: in other words, how he may be able to “handle” it. Some of the psychopath’s patterns of behavior “happen” to fit in poorly in the society of which he is a part; in certain other societies he might not be conspicuous at all. But there are other behaviors of the psychopath which go against God’s norms, and that is a much more serious matter, which must be made clear to him in the course of counseling.

In addition to the difference between “ill” and “handicapped,” there is a second distinction we must make between “being ill” and “feeling ill,” or, to use more precise terminology, between being ill objectively and being ill subjectively. For example, a person could have a nasty tumor without being “ill” from it; that is to say, such a person might not feel miserable and might be able to live in a normal way, whereas on the other hand someone may feel very ill without the doctor being able to find a bodily cause. In such a case the doctor begins to look for the cause within the mental structures. What we have here in addition is a difference between the psychopathic person and the so-called “neurotic” person: the psychopathic person, in general, does not feel miserable and is not entangled in himself, but only comes into collision with his surroundings. But the neurotic person does feel miserable; he makes a problem of his nature and “suffers from his very being.” The causes of his suffering might lie in one or more of his human-structures, or quite directly in his heart. This is a matter for the counselor to find out. But he will have to begin by taking the “subjective illness” of the neurotic seriously.
Some counselors are very much inclined to shy away from the concept of “illness,” because they make the same mistake as the advocates of the medical model: they think that if we call the neurotic person “ill,” we thereby absolve him of responsibility for his situation. But this is not the case at all. Even when it comes to bodily illnesses, the person, however “ill” he may be, is often himself responsible for his infection or for the ravages that his profligate lifestyle has produced in his body. Some medical doctors have made such a point in a much stronger way by claiming that all illnesses of the body have mental (secondary) causes. Such claims have been made even for a genuinely infectious disease like tuberculosis, and also for cancer, which is a disease of considerable current interest. Moreover, it should be noted that all bodily diseases have mental after-effects (disappointment, depression, fear, anger). The biotic and mental aspects are so interwoven that it simply will not do to speak of biotic “illnesses” while at the same time throwing out the concept of “mental illnesses.” In any case, such thinking has nothing to do with responsibility: people are often responsible for both their bodily ailments and their mental ailments – at least in part. This interwovenness of the biotic and the mental, makes a rigid separation between bodily medicine, on the one hand, and psychotherapy or pastoral care, on the other hand, just as objectionable as a separation between “body” and “soul” (or “spirit”). In a certain sense all the human-structures – and above all, the heart – are involved in all illnesses or disorders. And so there is nothing wrong with speaking of “mental illness,” as long as in doing so we are not taking away from human responsibility.

There is yet the third reason why it makes sense to speak of “mental illness,” that is, “illness” in the sense of “not being able to cope with the situation.” The psychopathic person is “maladjusted,” whereas the neurotic person has drifted into “conflict situations.” It’s exactly the same way with bodily illness. Someone who is suffering from the “flu” cannot continue to walk around but has to stay in bed, and the heart patient cannot climb mountains anymore. There is always a relationship between two factors: the person’s tolerance level, or what he can manage, how much he can “take,” and the load or burden he has to carry, that is, how much he has to endure. The
heart of a heart patient has a lower tolerance level than the heart of a healthy person, which is why we say that the heart can “take” or stand less. The burden that such a person could carry is considerably smaller, and so he must refrain from mountain-climbing and stay down in the valley. But if his tolerance level becomes higher again, that is, if his heart recovers, then he could once again carry a greater burden.

It would appear that it is exactly the same way with mental problems. What we face in such cases is especially the mental tolerance level, on the one hand, which is what the person can mentally “handle,” and on the other hand, the load or burden to be endured, which is constituted by what comes at him from the outside, such as the attacks of illness on his body (especially brain injuries), as well as the difficult situation around him. If someone is struggling with mental disorders, if the burden is too great for him to bear, we would say that he cannot cope with his bodily illness and/or his circumstances, for his tolerance level is too low, in which case we would conclude that he has too little mental energy to be able to get the better of his problems. But as long as his tolerance level surpasses the burden that is to be endured, nothing is wrong.

Nevertheless, even people who have the highest possible tolerance level can get into a situation where the burden outweighs their tolerance level. In such a case, what is the person to do? He tries to compensate for his problems by building up certain “defense mechanisms,” as we shall see; he tries to increase his tolerance level in a forced and unnatural way. Thereby he becomes “neurotic,” but it is possible for him to hold out in this way for some time. If the situation gets still worse, however, he will eventually break down. He will collapse and become “psychotic” (in popular parlance, he will become “crazy” or “insane”). When he is in such a situation, he will no longer be able to cope with even the lighter loads that he was able to handle before. However, we see here at the same time – by way of anticipation of our subject – a clear hint of certain procedures to be followed in counseling. In such a situation, counseling is directed – if at all possible – to raising the tolerance level, especially mentally and spiritually, of the person involved and/or reducing the biotic and social load.
6. 2 Forms of Mental Disorders

I will now offer a brief outline of the most important symptoms of mental disorders, starting again from the various human-structures. Of course there are many symptoms which have to do with a number of the human-structures at the same time; therefore, at points, our division will seem somewhat artificial. Note carefully that in the case of the higher structures, the lower ones are also involved, but the symptoms of which we speak in connection with the lower human-structures cannot always be directly related to the higher ones.

6. 2. 1 Outline of symptoms

(1) Perceptive Disorders. See especially also (3) and (4); at this point we speak only of motor disorders, because the (reflex) movements originate in the perceptive structure. “Catatonia” is the word we use to describe certain of these disorders: an excess of bizarre motions or even motionlessness (sometimes for hours or even days at a time).

(2) Sensitive Disorders. Here we think of fright (a vague, indeterminate fear, sometimes a panic-producing fear, without one’s knowing just what it is that one is afraid of, accompanied by over activity of the sympathetic nervous system: palpitation(s) of the heart, shortness of breath, sweating, dizziness and nausea) and of depression (excessive dejection, despondency, often accompanied by self-accusation and a sense of inferiority; we speak here of a disorder if the depression is excessively deep and persists for a long time or keeps getting worse). Also to be mentioned here is neurasthenia (mental instability, irritability, brooding).

(3) Spiritive Disorders: (a) Cognitive. Here I would mention a “bizarre thought-life” (incoherent, strange, rambling), partial amnesia (the patient either forgets quickly certain things he has just recently observed or can no longer call to mind the events of long ago), and dissociative disorders like depersonalization (loss of one’s person, which means that the patient sees himself more and more as a stranger; he loses his “I”-consciousness and becomes subject to split
(4) Spiriitive Disorders: (b) Creative. The patient imagines all sorts of things: for example, he suffers from a phobia (an unreasonable, crippling fear of something which is in fact harmless, for example, a fear of certain animals, of open or closed spaces, of crowds, of heights, of the dark); from hysteria (see Chapter 3, Section 3.2, “Depth Psychology”); from hallucinations (“visions,” “voices,” without there being any sensory stimuli from the outside); from delusions (persistent errors from which one cannot be dissuaded, for example, concerning oneself: delusions of illness, delusions of self-condemnation, delusions of grandeur, or, as this phenomenon is sometimes called, megalomania; about possessions: delusions of poverty or riches; about social relations: the idea that your partner is disloyal or unfaithful to you, that all sorts of chance occurrences have a bearing on you, especially “paranoid” [morbid-suspicious] delusions, like delusions of persecution); and from confabulations (fabrications, often in the case of amnesia, filling a gap in memory; these are often quickly thought up and quickly forgotten, only to be replaced by others, and are not to be confused with delusions, to which such a person clings fanatically).

(5) Spiriitive Disorders: (c) Conative. Here I must make special mention of compulsive disorders. The patient may feel impelled to think things he does not really want to think (compulsive thoughts or obsessions), or he may do things he does not really want to do (compulsive actions) and which he repeats endlessly and with painful precision, for example, washing his hands extremely thoroughly dozens of times per day. In addition, I could mention here the falling away of inhibitions (impulsive, violent motions and inappropriate utterances). Also worthy of mention here are sexual disorders, where sexual gratification is sought by means of deviant activities, including such familiar examples as the transvestite, the exhibitionist, the masochist, the sadist, pederast, and the homosexual.

(6) The Heart: disturbances that affect the inmost depth of the personality. The person is frustrated about the meaning and purpose of life and feels guilty because he has not realized all of his possibilities (depression), or he tries compulsively to yet reach
the “true” fulfillment of his life.

A number of the mental disturbances that are listed above used to be combined under the outdated term “neurosis,” namely, symptoms such as fright, depression, neurasthenia, depersonalization, phobias, hysteria, compulsive disorders, and also category (6), which was called an “existentialist neurosis.”

Of course the list given above is extremely concise, but it still provides us, I believe, with an adequate summary of the variety of symptoms, a summary that can be useful for the remainder of our discussion.

6. 2. 2 Mentally disturbed conditions

The symptoms that were just enumerated are often found to be linked. Accordingly, I will speak of certain “conditions,” to be encountered in patients in whom we find a very distinct complex of symptoms occurring together. It is important to distinguish here between more permanent conditions and more temporary ones. In the former case, we are talking about conditions that are probably inborn or became embedded in the character in earliest youth. We would then speak of personality disorders, and the persons involved we would call “psychopaths,” or perhaps also “sociopaths.” These are people with a very difficult character. As a result they are constantly coming into conflict with their environment – hence the term “socio-path.” They themselves may find this annoying, but they blame their environment rather than themselves.

There are many different possible kinds of psychopathic personalities, varying from excessively happy people to extremely brooding, cold, stand-offish, bizarre, compulsive, paranoid, or hysterical people. The “psychopath” in a more restricted and more usual sense of the term is the anti-social psychopath, that is to say, the figure without a conscience, without morals, without any feeling of responsibility or guilt. Sometimes such a person will be a real “gentleman” or “lady,” but in essence the person will be an unfeeling, aggressive figure who has never learned to consider the feelings of others or to endure disappointments or to subject himself to norms or to postpone the fulfillment of his desires. Such a person
easily becomes involved in criminal conduct.

In addition, as I indicated earlier, there are temporary conditions which, in the life of the person involved, have a definite “history” with specific “causes.” We can classify these conditions roughly to the extent that biotic and mental causes play a role in their genesis. We then come up with four categories:

(1) **Biotic conditions.** Here the direct cause and also the main symptoms are biotic, but there are all sorts of important mental side-effects. (In a certain sense, of course, this can be said of all bodily sicknesses!) Here we might think of a concussion of the brain, or brain injury, and meningitis, but there are also such illnesses elsewhere in the body, such as diabetes.

(2) **Biotic-mental conditions.** The direct cause is always biotic, and then situated in the nervous system, but the symptoms are first of all of a mental nature. I am thinking here of all sorts of forms of “insanity” (professionals would speak here of “psychoses”), but also of such conditions as cerebral hemorrhaging, inflammation of the brain tissue, and brain tumors.

(3) **Mental-biotic conditions.** We usually call these conditions “psychosomatic.” Here we are concerned with all sorts of bodily disorders that have come about under the influence of the autonomic nervous system and whose first and foremost causes are mental. As an example, this may be true when there is palpitation(s) of the heart, high blood pressure, migraine headaches, stomach or intestinal ulcers, heartburn (stomach acidity), constipation, bronchial asthma, hiccups, itching, dermatitis, rheumatoid arthritis, pain in the lower back, muscle cramps, paralytic seizures, facial twitches, diabetes, obesity, bladder and menstrual problems, impotence, frigidity, or pain during sexual intercourse. Note that all of these ailments could also be inborn or may well have purely bodily causes! Just what the cause really is must be investigated by the doctor.

(4) **Mental conditions,** that is, conditions in which biotic factors sometimes do clearly play a role but where the specifically biotic causes are not yet known. Here I have in mind all sorts of conditions in which hallucinations, delusions and/or depression play a leading role, or certain neurotic conditions such as stuttering and the hyper-syndrome, that is, being “hyper” (nervous debility or neurasthenia).
6. 3 Causes of Mental Disorders

6. 3. 1 Personal factors

I have already pointed out that one and the same cause can bring on various mental disorders, and that one and the same mental disorder can have many different causes. Usually there are whole complexes of causes; moreover, there is also the matter of interaction between external causes and the person's own "susceptibility." Earlier I talked about the relationship between the weight of the burden to be carried and the person's tolerance level. There are interactions between the person in his surroundings, but there are also interactions between the different human-structures within the person. What's more, we must always bear in mind that all of these interactions occur under the guidance of the human heart, especially the spiritive aspects. Mindful of our formula $B = \text{[function]}(R, P, S)$, I will now take up the P- and S- and R- factors, and then first of all the personal factors (P). Here we must distinguish between inborn (= constitutional) and acquired factors. I will run through these two human-structures one at a time.

First of all, Biotic Factors. These always have to do with the brain, whether directly or indirectly. As for the inborn factors, we could speak here of hereditary disorders, brain injuries and metabolism illnesses. When it comes to acquired factors, there are all sorts of brain injuries that could be mentioned.

In the second place, (Perceptive and) Sensitive Factors. The inborn factors in this case will frequently be related to the biotic, but it is not clear in each case just how they are related. I would speak here especially of temperament, about which something was already said above in Chapter 4 (see 4.1.4). Each temperament has its weak sides, which can contribute to the emergence of mental problems. The melancholic temperament is especially strongly inclined in the direction of neuroses. As to the acquired factors which a person develops within himself, I would think especially of the defense mechanisms which one develops in order to deal with one's fears.
Freud maintained that those defense mechanisms were always unconscious, but the truth is that we are often well aware (or half-conscious) of the fact that we are suppressing emotions, disguising them, explaining them away, or working them off on others, and so, in such situations, we (half)-intentionally deceive ourselves. The principal defense mechanisms are:

(a) **Repression.** The “pushing aside” of unpleasant memories. It can be quite useful, but it is also very morbid. Sometimes, for example, after wartime experiences, there is even genuine loss of memory. Often the repression works out so poorly that the person concerned winds up suffering from all kinds of unreasoned fears.

(b) **Rationalization.** Thinking up a rational (intellectual) “explanation,” after the event, to make sense of a situation which otherwise would bring about fear or disappointment. Think of the “cognitive dissonance” which was discussed above in Chapter 5 (see 5.2.1). If it becomes morbid, the person involved gets more and more deeply entangled in a web of self-deception.

(c) **Reversal,** or turning something into its opposite. Camouflaging emotions or motivations by exaggerated expressions of their very opposite. Exaggerated action against immorality can point to the suppression of one’s own sexuality, just as too much concern for someone can be a mask for hostility toward that person. Likewise, bravado can camouflage fear, and so forth.

(d) **Regression.** Relapsing into an earlier – even a childish – form of life in order to cope with intimidating situations in an effort to obtain, for example, the sympathy of the people around you (e.g. by crying pitifully). Another form of regression is found when people are imprisoned or held hostage or are in some similar situation of helplessness and begin to **identify** with their oppressors, just as little boys do with their stern fathers.

(e) **Projection.** The opposite of identification. Instead of transferring the admirable traits of the other onto oneself, one transfers one’s own **undesirable** traits onto the other. Relevant here is Genesis 3:12-13, where Adam blames Eve for eating of the forbidden fruit, and Eve in turn blames the serpent. Fear of failure leads one to put the blame on another. Fear of one’s own
aggressiveness leads one to impute that aggressiveness to the other. Fear of one’s own sexual impulses leads one to ascribe those impulses to others (see “rationalization” above).

(f) Transference. Repressed or suppressed feelings are “worked off” on another person where this is possible with a greater degree of safety. For example, you may be furious at your boss, but you hold your anger in and take it out on your wife. Or you work off your longing for children by showing great affection for a lap-dog or a neighbor’s child. Perhaps a phobia is a fear that is worked off on some other, “safer” object than the original one.

In general, neurotic disorders could be regarded as exaggerated forms of defense mechanisms, by which a person suppresses his fears and provides himself with a certain measure of security, but at the cost of a certain amount of freedom of movement. The man with a phobia has to flee, and the woman with a compulsion to wash has to wash. If the stress increases, the defense mechanisms need to be strengthened, and eventually the elastic is stretched too far. Then it snaps: the person involved breaks down under his fears and becomes a psychotic (“insane”). In a certain sense, this psychosis is also a defense, but there is quite a price to be paid for it: the person involved loses a sense of reality and of his person.

In the third place, Spiritive Factors. The inborn factors here cannot be separated from the bodily factors or from temperament, both of which were discussed immediately above. In connection with the acquired factors, in which case natural predisposition, as always, plays a big role, we can point to problems in all facets of our spiritive life. Note once again the order of the aspects: problems having to do with thinking (brooding over things, for example), difficulties with authority (with exercising it or subjecting oneself to it), with putting one’s thoughts into words, with developing social relations, with the discerning of value or the management of valuable possessions, with the lack of harmony in one’s life (living at less than one’s best), discussing what might have been and experiencing remorse, having difficulty with the giving of love or with the accepting of love, and having difficulty with establishing and maintaining a bond with God.
6. 3. 2 Situational factors

Mental problems that a person experiences in interaction with his surroundings can be distinguished in terms of three levels, which we might call (i) the micro-level, (ii) the meso-level, and (iii) the macro-level.

First of all, the micro-level, that is, the situation of the moment. In everyone’s life, sudden and unexpected things may happen, severely testing one’s level of mental tolerance. Such an ordeal we call stress. There are three special categories of factors that can cause stress:

(a) Fear, whether a fear of something specific or a vague, undefined feeling of fright. Consider what was said about this matter earlier in the discussion of “defense mechanisms.”

(b) Frustration, that is, (the feeling of) being obstructed in the effort to reach a particular goal. People may feel frustrated in all sorts of situations and may react to them in any one of a number of different ways. For example, they become restless, tense, and begin to smoke or bite their nails. Or they make fools of themselves by fleeing into a fantasy world where they imagine they will yet reach their goal (think of the pornographic pictures on the walls of the enlisted men’s quarters). Or they become aggressive, either toward the thing or the person causing the frustration or perhaps even toward something that has nothing to do with the frustration (see what was said above “transference”). And so an entire community can work off its frustrations on selected targets, such as black people, or Jews, or migrant workers who have entered the country illegally. Finally, as a result of frustration people may become totally apathetic, without hope, helpless, depressed: they just can’t cope any longer.

(c) Conflict: for example, you have to make a very difficult choice between two things, both of which you want very badly, or perhaps it is the case that you really don’t want either one (for instance, to take care of your aged mother or to leave that task to others and live with the resulting bad conscience). Or maybe you want something and don’t want it at the same time: for example, you want not to do what your parents tell you that you should do, but neither do you want to hurt your parents. In such cases you have a conflict
situation, and it can bring on stress.

Secondly, there is the meso-level. Here I am thinking not only of events that bring on stress but also of the more or less permanent environment of which we form a part. We can be sure that the family in which we have been brought up has exerted a tremendous influence on us. Of course, the predisposition of the child and the responsibility of the older child and of the young person also play a major role here. In addition there are factors to be noted in the upbringing itself that may serve to foster or hinder the child’s normal development. Just what those factors are is a question about which there has been much debate. In the twentieth century the pendulum has swung back and forth. For a time it was thought that love, warmth, pampering (with punishment avoided) was the remedy of choice for all the emotional problems in children. But then came a time in which all those things were considered fundamentally wrong: all that mattered was sternness, discipline, strict regularity, and firm consistency. On the basis of Scripture we could have known all along that both of these points of view are wrong (even though many Christians have often not been aware of this). What really does matter in the raising of children is the balance of love and warmth on the one hand, and consistent discipline on the other.

For that matter, it is also true that many Christians have not been sufficiently aware of the difference between an authoritative parent, that is, one who exercises proper authority, and one who is authoritarian or imperious. The latter is a parent who proposes to “break” the child’s will or tries to bend the child to his will or keeps the child feeling small and dependent, while forcing upon it all sorts of unreasoned group norms. In contrast, the authoritative parent tries to guide the child’s will and behavior, but does not avoid discussion with the child, does his best to explain and lovingly elucidate what he has in mind in raising the child in a particular manner, tries to “understand” the child when it is being obstinate, respects the child’s own will and ways and interests, but resolutely resists the child when it is disobedient, using both arguments and force, while requiring the child to accommodate itself in a disciplined way. Research shows that authoritarian parents “grow” much more
aggressive children than authoritative parents. Curiously enough, authoritarian parents are much more like very indulgent parents in this regard than they would ever realize or wish to admit! Even psychopathic, neurotic and psychotic disorders can be furthered by the wrong kind of upbringing.

In addition to the influence of parents, the birth order of the children also plays a role in the parental home. In terms of what happens in the development of the child, it sometimes makes a big difference whether it is an only child, the eldest, the second child, the middle child, or the youngest. Each of these positions in the family has its advantages but also its disadvantages, which, especially if accompanied by an unfavorable predisposition, can have a significant adverse effect on the child’s development.

Even the meso-milieu of the adult still continues to exercise a favorable or unfavorable effect upon him. A great many problems arise within the marriage relationship, whether because of a poor sexual adjustment or because the partners devote too little time and attention to one another, or because they live past each other, having conflicting interests and goals, addressing too many reproaches to one another, possessing too little self-knowledge. And then there is the possibility of infidelity in the picture. Very difficult children could also be a problem for the parents themselves and undermine the marriage. Of course there are in addition legions of labor problems, especially when times are bad in economic respects. I am thinking here of unemployment, taking no pleasure in one’s work, conflicts with the boss or with one’s employees, carrying heavy or burdensome responsibilities (long working hours), and serious failures in one’s work. It is clear that if a person has a particular unfavorable predisposition, worries of these kinds can lead to serious mental problems.

Thirdly, there is the macro-level, that is, present-day Western society, of which we are all a part. Society, too, leads to all sorts of frustrations: traffic congestion, long waiting periods, too little money for popular luxury articles, social failure in a highly competitive economic world, and the experience of meaninglessness, of alienation. And so there are countless factors in our society which tend to make certain people neurotic. We may be members of a
number of different kinds of groups which no longer have any connection with one another. Modern mobility made possible by the automobile, train and airplane exposes us to all sorts of superficial contacts, whereby our solitariness and loneliness are increased. At the same time, we miss the sense of security which our street and neighborhood and church formerly gave us. Even the family is no longer a stronghold of safety and security: the various members of the family have too many divergent interests, no longer undertake any work together, are too independent, and are away from home too much because of increased prosperity. Moreover, parents have little authority anymore. This problem of authority gnaws away at many social structures.

In our modern society it is much more difficult to attain adulthood than it once was. Adult life has become very complicated. Moreover, many important aspects of adult life have become invisible to the children. Nowadays father’s work is usually done away from home. People are no longer sick at home or die at home, neither are babies born at home – all these things occur in the hospital. Moreover, death is not talked about any more; the funeral is put into the hands of strangers, and the modern burial place is camouflaged. And so modern man can easily react neurotically to death when it does suddenly show itself. Moreover, society is utterly hard, pitiless; advertising is aggressive. In a world that boasts of freedom, employers are unyielding. Anyone who does not fit in or is different from others cannot survive. Wherever you look today, society is intimidating. People have far too much contact with far too many other people, with the result that they often become afraid, suspicious, and dependent – also immature. Our prosperity has made all of these things worse rather than better, for it has made the individual too independent and self-reliant. Often he cannot stand it: it makes him fearful and lonely.

6. 3. 3 Religious factors

Fears, feelings of guilt, depression, psychosomatic disorders, thoughts of self-condemnation, loss of inhibitions, and confusion – all of these can be the consequences of purely personal factors.
But it would be a major error always to trace them back to these. For they may also have to do with a person’s relationship to God. A feeling of guilt then has to do with real concrete guilt. Self-condemnation is then no illusion but is genuine and justified. The fears and depressions a person experiences are then real, for they are based on a consciousness of future divine judgment. Of course we are very well aware that there are all sorts of religious delusions. And we also realize that religious and personal factors are sometimes strongly commingled; the evangelist or pastor has to be aware of the fact that genuine guilt, for example, may be mixed together with false guilt feelings. But there is also most definitely such a thing as mental need that is determined first of all by one’s relationship to God: in other words, need that is in the first place a need of the heart.

The person with this kind of need is not in need of any “treatment”: he needs the gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ, who, as our substitute, took upon Himself the judgment for the sins of all those who believe in Him. It is by faith – and by faith alone – that such a person will be able to be delivered from his fear and guilt. However, if his need is also affected by personal (and social) factors, the person will need in addition some broader assistance (instruction, encouragement, comfort). Moreover, there may even be some occult influences in the picture, in which case the person will need some specific spiritual care. I have written about this matter in Dutch in my book *Het domein van de slang*. (In the Domain of the Serpent).

### 6. 4 Mental Therapies

Now that we have briefly discussed the symptoms and causes of mental disorders, we can undertake a discussion of the therapies, the modes of treatment. This will not be an easy matter to discuss, for there are literally hundreds of different “psychotherapies,” all of which differ from one another to some slight degree. Let us again try to get some overview by starting from the various human-structures.
6.4.1 Outline of therapies

(1) **Biotic therapies.** Without going into this matter very extensively, I would mention psychosurgery (removal of healthy brain tissue to change a patient’s behavior), electric shock treatment (application of electric shocks, perhaps to lift someone out of a depression) and psychopharmacotherapy, with its many narcotics (sleeping pills), tranquilizers, and anti-psychotic and anti-depressive medicines. In some situations, such as a crisis, biotic therapies can be helpful, but they are not aimed at the purely mental sides of the problem. Moreover, they often have very adverse side-effects.

(2) **Perceptive therapies.** These are the behavioristic therapies that do not acknowledge anything but unconditioned or conditioned reflexes. Behavioral disorders are then seen as wrongly acquired reflexes, which can be unlearned in therapy, while new behavior patterns can be acquired by conditioning.

(3) **Sensitive therapies.** These are the psychoanalytical therapies which look for the causes of all conflicts in the “unconscious” drives of people. “Mental illnesses” arise when people can no longer live with the conflicts that have built up inside themselves.

(4) **Spiritive therapies.** These are the therapies that place more emphasis on cognitive processes (“Cognitive therapies”) or on free self-actualization on the part of the “client” (“humanistic therapies”), or which may even involve all sorts of (Asian) mystical methods and techniques such as transcendental meditation, yoga, and the like (“mystical-transcendent therapies”). There are countless mixes between these various categories of therapy. One such mixed form is “group therapy,” of which there are again a great many forms and varieties.

6.4.2 Do psychotherapies “help?”

For decades there has been conflict over the question whether all these different psychotherapies really “help.” Can they indeed solve mental problems? Are they able to offer a lasting improvement? And which of them work best? Or could it be that they are equally good – or equally bad? Besides, who is qualified to determine what is
“good” and what is “bad”. All of these questions are very important – for the psychotherapists, for the patients, and for the system that pays for treatment. The discussion of these questions began when some psychologists back in the 1950s claimed that people recovered spontaneously just as readily as they did from psychotherapy. In other words, when it comes to the question whether or not to receive treatment, it’s six of one and a half-dozen of the other. Since that time, research into the effectiveness of psychotherapies has been undertaken on a large scale, and it can be said that the results up to this point are very curious.

Let us agree first of all (for the time being!) what we understand by “improvement.” What I mean by it is a lessening of fear and fright, of psychosomatic disorders, of addiction, of psychopathic behavior, and of stress – or, to put it in more positive terms, improvement in one’s sense of one’s own dignity, of complete adjustment to circumstances, of personality characteristics, of social behavior, and of performance at work or school. It appears today that psychotherapy, in any case, is more effective than having no therapy. Moreover, the “favorable” effect of psychotherapy is quite substantial, almost comparable to that of school instruction or of medicine. But just as surprising is a second conclusion: the one therapy is no more effective than the other. Whether you are looking at a given therapy’s theoretical background or its technical approach, it does not appear to make very much difference.

Now, this does not mean that it makes no difference whatsoever what psychotherapists do with their clients. That it does indeed make a difference is evident from a comparison of serious therapies on the one hand, with ordinary recreational training or group discussions or informal gatherings and so forth on the other. “Placebo” treatments clearly also have a therapeutic effect when compared with no treatment at all. But it became evident that a serious psychotherapeutic treatment was twice as effective as a “placebo” treatment. And so, on the one hand it appears as though anything one might do for a patient will help, but on the other hand concrete, systematic treatment is much more helpful yet. Still, strange as it may seem, it does not
matter what kind of treatment it is. Whether it be talk-therapy or action-therapy or an individual or group therapy, or long or short therapy, or even treatment administered by an experienced or an inexperienced therapist – it all makes very little difference. The only thing that really matters is for the therapist to employ a concrete, well-defined treatment.

How are we to explain these startling conclusions? It would appear that there is no other conclusion to be drawn than this: In “placebo” treatments, to a certain extent, and in serious psychotherapies, to a much larger extent, certain beneficial factors are present which all psychotherapies have in common, no matter how much they may differ from one another in starting-point or methodology. It seems that what really matters is not the things the various therapies differ about but the ones they agree on. Now, these are the factors of which the therapists themselves are often not very aware, since they are inclined to put much more emphasis on the aspects in which their approach differs from the approach used by other psychotherapists. Yet those points of difference appear to be precisely the things that make no difference to the effectiveness of the treatment.

The really beneficial factors that are present in good measure in psychotherapies are also to be found in everyday life. That’s why so many people recover “spontaneously,” which means, in fact, that they recover because of stimulating changes in their surroundings, or because they grow more mature, or because they get help from pastors or physicians or friends, and so forth. Hence it appears that psychotherapy can be understood as a kind of “process of social influencing,” and that it does not differ all that much from other such processes that might be mentioned, such as upbringing, schooling, hygiene, and the aid of friends. Yet in psychotherapy, the social influencing that takes place is more directed, and more systematic than in ordinary life. Now, as to exactly what those very important “beneficial factors” are, this is a matter about which a fruitful discussion sprang up in the 1970s. But before we enter that discussion, I want to say something about where the Christian psychologist stands with regard to all these matters.
6. 5 The Christian and Psychotherapy

6. 5. 1 Secular and Christian therapy

We have seen, on the one hand, that the theoretical starting points of the various psychotherapies do not make all that much difference in terms of their effectiveness, but on the other hand, the Christian who undergoes psychotherapeutic treatment can be sure that he will often come into contact with the life and worldviews underlying them. He might well form the impression that they are very important indeed, and thereby they could become harmful to him after all. Therefore, it is a good thing to bear in mind that all the secular psychotherapies we have mentioned fail to appreciate that the heart directs all the human-structures. Or I could put the same point differently by saying that they fail to recognize the deepest cause of all mental problems, for that cause lies in the heart, that is, in the relationship of the person to God or to idols. One implication of this realization is that those secular therapies as such are, in principle, unusable in Christian counseling. It makes no difference whether we are speaking of perceptive, sensitive or spiritive therapies – every last one of them fails to appreciate the nature of the human being and therefore misconceives the nature of his problems. To get an impression of the views that underlie psychoanalysis, behaviorism, and humanistic and existentialistic psychology, in particular, one need only read again the relevant sections in Chapter 3.

Christian counseling must take a course that is different in principle. Of course it is aware of the mental causes of some bodily ailments and is also aware of the bodily causes of some mental disorders. Likewise, it is acquainted with situations and occurrences that are almost too much to bear mentally. But it also knows that there is more to the picture, for the simple reason that what is truly human in the human being is not the sensitive or even just the spiritive. Secular psychotherapy is convinced that it can grasp the whole person in its concepts and frameworks, and that it can scientifically analyze
the human being’s essential nature. In similar fashion, it considers itself able to “cure” the person who is “mentally ill.” But it fails to realize that all the aspects and structures of the human being find their unity in the heart, which is not accessible to scientific analysis. The knowledge, which the Christian psychologist possesses of the heart, is not derived from science but from Scripture. Hence counseling, properly so called, is not “scientific” in nature but is to be regarded as a Scriptural conversation from heart to heart within the framework of Christian social living on the part of two persons, the counselor and the counselee, in their personal and communal relationship to God.

This is not to say that Christian psychologists could never learn anything from secular psychotherapies. If secular therapists appeared capable of bringing about the kinds of “improvements” described earlier, we have every reason to be pleased. Yet, although we may be pleased, for the Christian counselor this can never be sufficient. He can never be satisfied with relieving people of stress, of phobias or addictions, or with rehabilitating them for society again without touching their hearts in the process. People are (co)responsible for getting into stress situations or for becoming addicted, or their psychopathic behavior, and so forth, no matter how many “extenuating circumstances” might be brought forward on the basis of their constitution, or organic disorders from which they suffer, or a difficult environment, or a bad upbringing, or a corrupt society. People are always responsible to their fellow human beings, and above all to God. In Christian counseling, people must be made aware of the responsibility they bear. It is precisely when they are living in fear and stress that people are more open to hearing the gospel message and therefore also to finding the supreme path to restoration. It is true that a social worker and a physician cannot spend all their time evangelizing; yet, the “closer” the person’s problems are to his heart – as is the case with mental problems – the more important it is that the counseling he is offered be evangelical.

In this discussion about psychotherapies, it is very important to point out that the Christian counselor can consider psychotherapies that appear to be helpful not because of their worldview background
or because of their methodologies but because of certain beneficial factors of which their proponents usually have very little awareness. This point needs to be stressed: it is important to understand that not a single psychoanalyst or behaviorist (or, for that matter, a theorist of any particular type) can ever claim that his therapy is better because it is psychoanalytical, or behaviorist, or whatever. The theoretical orientation appears to have nothing to do with its success. Therefore no one can maintain that Christian counseling would be less effective than secular counseling. If the goal is indeed to get rid of abnormal behavior or to bring about a readjustment to society, then it is clear that the same beneficial factors play a role in Christian counseling as in secular psychotherapies. We shall soon see that these beneficial factors have figured for many centuries in the Bible. If it is true that secular therapies do achieve a certain measure of (outward) success, it is because, as it turns out, they are employing nothing other than age-old Biblical wisdom, though often in garbled form.

And so, if what we are seeking is the person’s outward improvement, Christian counseling is of at least as much value as the secular therapies. But in fact it is superior — in the first place because it employs the beneficial factors in a pure way by making direct use of Biblical wisdom in this area. And in the second place it treats the whole person, both the various human-structures, and also the heart in which those structures find their unity. In his heart the human being stands in either a good or a bad relationship to God or in a relationship to idols. Whatever one might say of the Bible, one would at least have to grant that it is a book that claims to teach how people should live. Christian counseling differs from other therapies in that it takes the superior, divine wisdom of this book seriously, precisely when what is at stake is the effort to teach people with problems how they have to start living differently and better.

People with the Book make the best counselors, whether as “professionals” or not. As a matter of fact, even the non-Christian psychologists now know that professional therapists are not much more effective than non-professionals are. Most spiritive stresses and behavioral problems could be resolved by any wise and
spiritually minded church member. But what we find all too often
is that many Christians are quick to run to a psychotherapist or a
psychiatrist – even a non-Christian one. It should also be noted that
when the help of such a “specialist” is summoned, pastoral help is
not thereby rendered superfluous. A physician addresses himself
to the possible physical-biotic basis of the problem, whereas a
psychologist who may be called in addresses himself to the mental
aspect of the problem. But the person who provides pastoral care
will address himself to the innermost depth, the I (Ego), the heart,
the personality. Of course the very best thing would be for the
“specialist” himself to be pastorally equipped, but it is also possible
for him to work closely with a pastoral counselor.

6. 5. 2 Pastoral care and psychology

There has been a good deal of discussion about the proper
relationship between psychology and pastoral care. Let us now
distinguish four models drawn up by Christians:

(I) The dualistic model limits pastoral care to problems of faith
and leaves all mental problems to the (secular) psychotherapist.
This standpoint is very popular among Christians who are
psychologists, especially because many of them work at so-called
neutral institutions, where no other position would even be
permitted. Yet this point of view can easily be refuted. We cannot
divorce problems of faith from mental problems. A person’s biotic
and mental problems should never be considered as detached from
his relationship to God. This observation applies not just to the
person seeking help, the client, but also to the counselor, who, as a
Christian, may never be content with giving “neutral” advice.

(2) The Biblicistic model limits psychology to physiological
problems at most (in this area no harm can be done) and assigns
the whole area of faith and mental problems to the pastor. But here
we also encounter an objectionable separation, namely, between
physical-biotic disorders, on the one hand, and mental problems,
on the other – between “body” and “soul.” Here, too, we see a
failure to appreciate the unity of the person, for bodily ailments
always have spiritual (and thus pastoral) aspects, and mental or spiritual problems in fact always have roots in the lower human-structures.

(3) The integrationistic model at least sees through the objectionable divisions made by the prior two models. But often it does not seem to see through the status of secular psychology with sufficient clarity. Thus it will not do to try to integrate or blend so-called “neutral” psychology with Biblical ideas, for the psychology that is current simply is not neutral. In its roots it is anti-Biblical. What we want and need is not a blending of anti-Biblical psychology with Biblical ideas but a psychology which is itself faithful to the Bible, one which, from the ground up, is constructed on a Christian foundation.

(4) The model I am advocating here tries to follow a different route. It does not place Christian counseling in opposition to secular psychology; it does not subject the former to the latter but separates the two. It screens and critically assesses secular psychology and takes over what is useful in it, transforming it. All of this is possible because this model has a radically Christian psychology available to it, which could function as a “sieve” to catch and boil the good elements out of the porridge of secular psychology. That radically Christian psychology aims to be both scientific and pastoral.

6. 6  Christian Counseling

6. 6. 1  The good therapist

This book is intended to be a popular-psychological introduction to the topic – not a practical manual for counselors. Nevertheless, when something as practical as counseling is discussed, practical questions will unavoidably arise. One such question is this: What are the requirements that must be met by a good (Christian) counselor?

First of all, the counselor has been called to his task by the Holy Spirit. Secondly, he must be completely at his client’s service in utter obedience to the Lord and to His Word. He must have an aptitude for applying that Word in the counseling he offers. He
must have a practical wisdom and knowledge of life, a warm heart for those in need of help, a self-effacing disposition, a living faith, and a cheerful heart; he must live an exemplary life, have an exemplary family, a good reputation with “outsiders” and a deep sense of the responsibility that accompanies being a leader and of the accounting that must be rendered to God. Actually, this list of qualities should be applicable to all more mature Christians, even including the first point. Every believer who meets these requirements will come into contact with counseling and be unable to avoid it (Romans 15:14; Galatians 6:1; Colossians 3:16). But among the believers there will be some who have special gifts and a special calling for the work of counseling.

Before prospective counselors conclude that they require lengthy training for their work, they should be reminded again that trained, professional therapists do not appear to have a great deal more “success” than inexperienced “amateurs” who are warm, sympathetic, mature personalities and are willing to listen. Our churches should be full of such Christian “amateurs.” But this is not to say that such “amateurs” would not be able to profit from Christian psychological knowledge, that is, knowledge based on Biblical revelation and enriched with the critical, systematic findings of the acute Christian observer. Here are a couple of examples which have already been touched on in this book. It is useful to know something about the possible bodily causes of mental problems; about the theory of temperaments (especially about the relationship between temperament and character), about the ongoing influence of unconscious feelings and reflexes and the tactical approach to them; about the nature of fallacies (sophisms) with which people deceive themselves and how to expose them, about the difference between sensitive (impulsive) and spiritive (conscious-normative) motivation; about the influence of (false) attributions; about the relationship between needs, desires and values; about cognitive dissonance; about aggression; about the relationship between conformism and a person’s own responsibility; and about extrinsic and intrinsic religiosity.
6.6.2 The ground plan for counseling

From what has been discussed up to this point, a number of guidelines for Christian counseling follow almost automatically. The first rule for counseling is that the counselor must constantly guard against too easily indicating a single cause as the explanation for a particular problem. In reality, what he is facing is an enormous interaction of biotic, mental and social factors. Therefore, the counselor must always ask himself these questions:

(1) What biotic (“bodily”) factors are playing a role here? If the counselor suspects the presence of bodily factors, he must send his client on to a physician (unless he is a physician himself).

(2) What stress-causing factors are present in the client’s micro-situation, factors which might lead to fright, frustration and/or conflicts? Here social help must be made available; if possible, the social situation must be eased.

(3) What kind of temperament and character structure does the client have? What (exaggerated) defense mechanisms and what fallacies (sophisms) has he developed? How does he feel about his past, and especially about his parents? How does society and its social structure contribute to his problems? Here mental assistance must be provided, that is to say, instruction is particularly needful.

(4) What religious factors are playing a role in the situation? Here the gospel must be presented to unbelievers, and pastoral help needs to be offered to believers.

Of course, these four points are thoroughly interwoven with one another in practice. We must also remember that they break up into two elements:

(a) The burden to be borne, consisting of biotic (especially the acquired brain injuries) and social factors. The counselor must try to reduce this burden (this is especially where the physician and the social worker come into the picture).

(b) The tolerance level, which consists of biotic (bodily constitution and the condition at the moment), mental (see point 3 above) and religious factors. The counselor must try to increase this tolerance.
Of course too much professional dispersion of effort does not work in the client’s favor. It may instead lead to rivalry between specialists, or to an erroneous separation of bodily (physical) problems from mental-spiritive problems, or of physical-mental and spiritive problems. Because such professional dispersion of efforts does take place, the client often has to turn to two, or even three, or four, counselors. All of this could be avoided, of course, if more unity in the provision of help were provided, as follows:

(a) Broader instruction of counselors, so that the various specialists will have more knowledge of one another’s fields.

(b) Better cooperation among the counselors, by forming teams of Christian physicians, pastors, and, if possible, social workers and psychotherapists (all Christians). These teams should engage in intense communication with one another and, whenever possible, should work together in the same building, a center for providing counseling and assistance.

6. 6. 3 The atmosphere for counseling

Earlier we saw that psychotherapies seem to “work” because they start – often unconsciously – from a number of “beneficial factors” which they all have in common, factors which actually go back to ancient Biblical wisdom and therefore are put into practice completely and in the Biblical way only in Christian counseling. I will now deal briefly with these “beneficial factors,” and also say something about the proper atmosphere for counseling.

The first thing that is necessary is an intense, confidential, helping relationship, which is something like the relationship between parent and child. If the counselor is to have such a relationship, he must radiate a certain authority. The client must be assured of privacy and be confident that the counselor has only his well-being in mind. The counselor listens to him with never-flagging attention and with sympathy, making a constant effort to understand what the client is trying to say. Of course, in Christian counseling this
special relationship is based on the divine love which is bestowed on the counselor by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). Because of this love and the involvement of the Holy Spirit, there is a real spiritual unity and communion in prayer between the counselor and the client, provided that both are Christians (Ephesians 4:3; James 5:14-16). If the client is not a Christian, it means there must be a deep love of the neighbor on the part of the counselor (Romans 12:7-8; Galatians 6:10).

The second thing that is needed is what secular psychologists call a theoretical framework. The counselor must work with a “theory,” which, according to secular psychologists, is really a “myth.” That it is a myth, or that it has such and such a content, does not really matter – just so long as the counselor and the client both believe in it. The myth will then “clear up” the client’s problems and point to a possible “solution,” so that what the counselor and client are doing is given meaning. What a difference there is between such an approach and what the Christian counselor does! The Christian counselor starts with Scripture – not with a human theory, not with a myth, but with the inspired and infallible Word of the living God! The Bible does not give us a concrete and specific answer to any and every question, but it does give us an infallible “framework,” a framework which, at least on a general level, offers an explanation for a life lived according to God’s thoughts – the kind of life that is best suited for the client’s well-being.

A third element – and it is extremely important – is arousing hope. The client, by “going into therapy,” becomes motivated: he believes in the possibilities of counseling and begins to expect help from the counselor. These expectations on the part of the client can already contribute to his recovery, and so they constitute a “beneficial factor.” In this context it must be understood that when Christian counseling takes place, the counselor points away from himself and his methods in order to direct his client’s heart to God. The client must see that his counselor, too, is only a human being with limited insight and limited possibilities. Yet the counselor points to a perfect Book and an almighty God who, by His Spirit, can bring about the
total renewal of life. It is hope in God and in His promises and in the operation of His Spirit (which far exceeds human help) that serve as the “starter motor” that is able to get Christian counseling under way (see Lamentations 3:24-26; Psalm 42:5, 11; 43:5).

6. 6. 4 Special counseling procedures

Psychotherapists have engaged in heavy debates about catharsis, as it is usually called, by which we mean the “venting” of intense, pent-up emotions, a process that is also called “abreaction.” One psychologist will argue that this reliving of earlier emotions in an emotional way is very important, whereas another will maintain that a strictly intellectual approach to one’s emotions should be taken. The age-old conflict between the life of feeling and an emphasis on understanding can only be overcome within a viewpoint that leads both understanding and feeling back to the heart, by which both are ultimately governed. The mere venting of feelings, in itself, provides no solution. After all, the human heart is an inexhaustible fountainhead of sinful (sensitive) feelings and (spiritive) thoughts. This faucet must not be turned on unless there is a very good reason to do so. The Bible clearly warns against carelessness in this area (see Ephesians 4:26, 29, 31). When it comes to these matters, everything depends on having an understanding counselor: under his intelligent guidance, the emotions can be released in a very wholesome way, with the result that the client learns to forgive the people against whom his emotions are directed.

A second “beneficial procedure” is to give directions, give advice, convince, and map out goals with the client. When the counselor engages in this sort of thing, it is to make it clear that it is only with God and His Word that good counsel is to be found (see Psalm 32:8; Proverbs 19:20f; 21:30; 27:9). The counselor needs to convince his client – for his own good – that he must learn to follow Biblical directives, and so he tries to “reorganize” his client’s behavior in a Biblical sense (Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:8-10).

Directly connected with this is the third “beneficial procedure:” the client needs insightful instruction. First of all, the counselor must give his client information about his diagnosis and the proposed...
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plan of treatment. For example, he must make it clear to his client that the behavior in which he is currently engaged is unconsciously injurious to him and that he is afflicted with distorted ideas about reality, and so forth. Wrong ideas do lie at the root of many problems, and those mistaken ideas must be tracked down by the counselor and corrected in the light of Biblical revelation so that a “renewing of thought” (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:23) may take place. And so the counselor brings his client to self-examination. The client needs to gain insight into himself, into his motivations and feelings. This is made possible for him when the counselor places him before the mirror of God’s Word (James 1:23-25). It is not just a question of seeing through oneself but of being seen through by God and of learning from His Word about one’s heart, one’s thoughts, one’s offensive (wicked) way (Psalm 139:23f), and thereby of coming to the point of confessing one’s guilt. This renewing of thought teaches the client to confess his personal sins, to forgive others, and to live out of God’s forgiveness and acceptance himself. Self-examination that is directed entirely to the person himself can make one miserable. Therefore the heart must be directed to Christ (Romans 7:7-27).

Another way to gain insight is through feedback: the counselor sums up the impressions which the client’s behavior evokes in himself and in others. Through this process, the client is taught to look at himself from the standpoint of others, and thereby he gains more insight into himself. Of course, in Christian counseling it is very important that the counselor, when he undertakes this task, does not emphasize his own, subjective opinion but makes it clear: “Your behavior comes across to me thus and so; however, what is most important is not what I think about it or how I experience it but what the Bible, the authoritative Word of the living God, says about it.”

The counselor must be able to function as a personal example of maturity, of a well-adjusted, functioning human being. It is a normal and healthy phenomenon for us, whether consciously or unconsciously, to adopt the values, attitudes and behavior of a person whom we believe we can respect. From the counselor the client can learn how to remain calm, even in the midst of an outburst of rage, how to put down impulsive forms of behavior, and
how to make a choice when confronted with confusing alternatives
(of course this is something which demands vast self-control and
self-confidence on the part of the counselor). Still more important is
that the counselor not only function as an example himself but also
be in a position to point his client to the great example: Jesus Christ
(see Romans 13:14; II Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 4:19; Philippians
2:5).

It is absolutely essential that the counselor instill in his client a
conviction about the meaning of life and about one’s responsibility
and dedication. The client must learn to face up to the possibilities,
limitations and inevitabilities of human existence so that he will
be able to arrange his life accordingly. Every human being simply
has to make all kinds of decisions in life on his own, and so each
one must learn such independence. In this connection, the Christian
counselor will raise the question of what, according to the Bible, the
meaning of a human life is when ordered in accordance with God’s
Word and directed to His glory and His service (see Judges 5:31;
Isaiah 40:31; Proverbs 4:18; I Corinthians 1:9, 24; II Corinthians 4:4-
6; Ephesians 3:16-19, 4:13; Philippians 1:21; Colossians 2:2-10, 3:1-3; I
Timothy 3:16).

Finally, I would draw attention to the correction which is able
to take place naturally when the client, on the basis of his good
relationship with the counselor, comes to the realization that his life
really can be different. This realization brings about a change in all
the bitterness and unresolved conflicts in his personal life. In his
relationships, the client was rejected, oppressed, and so forth, but in
his new experience with his counselor he discovers what it is like to
be liked to be loved and accepted. Of course these discoveries will
require a lot of time, for the client needs opportunities to “practice”
being in a new, loving and meaningful relationship before he starts
“trying out” his new attitudes in public, where he will find less love,
on the one hand, but also less criticism, on the other. Moreover, it is
very important that the client be a member of a strong and loving
community of Christians, or be received into one. Above everything
else, the client must develop a new and close communion with
Christ and with God the Father. He must learn to throw himself
unconditionally upon God with his brothers and sisters in Christ,
being willing to take risks with his fellow human beings in general and daring to “exhibit” new attitudes and behaviors. If he does so, God will reveal Himself in His faithful love, and the client will experience that God loves him and accepts him in Christ.

6.7 Conclusion

In essence, the same “beneficial factors” that are apparently effective in secular psychology are also present in Christian counseling. But there are also some major differences when it comes to filling in the content. Secular therapies operate from a human viewpoint – they are strictly for and by human beings; therefore they cannot help but be man-centered, humanistic. Christian counseling, on the contrary, operates from the divine perspective: Christ is always at the center. For that reason alone, each and every one of the “beneficial factors” looks different within the framework of Christian counseling. In addition, there are differences of principle to be noted. The Christian counselor does not work from a “myth,” but from God’s self-revelation. He does not arouse any false hopes but offers real hope in the living God. He does not allow any and all emotions to pour out in uncontrolled fashion (abreaction), but dams them up and accompanies the venting of the emotions cognitively and with the light of Scripture. He encourages self-examination, but in doing so he directs attention not to himself but to the great example – Jesus Christ. He does not impart to his client a meaning of life which he himself has “made up,” but shows his client the true meaning of life with God.

It turns out that the Bible speaks expressly about all the “basic ingredients” (“beneficial factors”) of counseling. Moreover it is clear that in the Bible these “beneficial factors” always have an essentially different “directedness” to them than what secular psychotherapy is able to give them. And so we should not say that the “beneficial factors” are “borrowed” from secular therapy; it would be better to say that they are actively transformed and “converted.” Of course it should be remembered that they came from the Bible in the first place! In and of itself, secular psychotherapy is hostile to God and therefore is essentially also the active enemy of Christian counseling.
Still, even from our greatest enemy we can learn something. By making a serious critical examination of secular models and by screening them, we can bring some useful elements to light which otherwise would not so easily have come to our attention – like the “beneficial factors” – which we can then “absorb” in “purified” form into a Christian psychology, in the sense of working them into it.

Christian psychology in its entirety includes among its assumptions the conviction that even the greatest enemy of Holy Scripture can, by his utterances, unintentionally make us aware of facets of the whole of God’s truth – and we must remember that all truth is God’s truth – which formerly escaped our attention. But the most important thing to bear in mind is that Christian psychology is based on a conviction about which her enemies will never be able to teach her anything, namely, that no science will ever really understand anything about the human person if the person is not seen in his relationship as creature and, as is the case for the Christian, as believer, to God, who is our Creator, Preserver and Redeemer.