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The Psychological Temperament of Catholic Priests and Religious Sisters in Italy: An Empirical Enquiry

*Leslie J. Francis and Giuseppe Crea**

Abstract

This study draws on psychological temperament theory (a development from psychological type theory) to map the characteristics of 95 Catholic priests and 61 religious sisters in Italy, who completed the Francis Psychological Type Scales. The data demonstrated a strong preference for sensing and judging (the Epimethean Temperament, SJ) among both priests (71%) and religious sisters (61%). In their study of religious leadership, Oswald and Kroeger characterised the SJ preference as ‘the conserving serving pastor’. The implications of these findings are discussed for leadership strengths and weaknesses in the Catholic Church.

Keywords

Catholic Church – Italy – priests – psychology of religion – religious sisters

Introduction

Temperament theory was developed from the building blocks of psychological type theory by Keirsey and Bates (1978) and applied insightfully to religious leadership by Oswald and Kroeger (1988). Within psychological type theory as originally proposed by Jung (1971) and then developed by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers &

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McCaulley, 1985) there are four core building blocks defined as the orientations (extraversion and introversion), the perceiving functions (sensing and intuition), the judging functions (thinking and feeling), and the attitudes (judging and perceiving). Within psychological type theory the two perceiving functions (sensing and intuition) and the two judging functions (thinking and feeling) define the core psychological processes. The perceiving functions are concerned with the gathering of information. For sensing types the weight is placed on the details as perceived through the senses, while for intuitive types the weight is placed on the ideas perceived through the imagination. The judging functions are concerned with the evaluation of information. For thinking types the weight is placed on objective analysis, while for feeling types the weight is placed on personal and interpersonal values. The attitudes are concerned with the world in which the preferred functions operate. For judging types the outside world is addressed by the preferred judging function (thinking or feeling) that gives rise to a structured approach, while for perceiving types the outside world is addressed by the perceiving function (sensing or intuition) that gives rise to a flexible approach. The orientations are concerned with the source of psychological energy. For introverts psychological energy is renewed by the inner world and nurtured by solitude, while for extraverts psychological energy is renewed by the outer world and nurtured by company and activity.

Keirsey and Bates' (1978) development of temperament theory argued that the core determinant of individual differences in temperament resided in the perceiving process. They distinguished, therefore, between sensing types and intuitive types. Then they argued that the core differentiation among sensing types resided in the world in which the sensing function operated. They distinguished, therefore, between the SJ temperament and the SP temperament. They also argued that the core differentiation among intuitive types resided in the judging function that accompanied the intuitive function. They distinguished, therefore, between the NT temperament and the NF temperament. Oswald and Kroeger (1988) built on Keirsey and Bates' (1978) characterisation of the four temperaments to create profiles of how these four temperaments shape four very different styles of religious leadership.

The Epimethean Temperament (SJ) is styled 'the conserving, serving pastor'. SJ clergy tend to be the most traditional of all clergy temperaments, bringing stability and continuity in whatever situation they are called to serve. They proclaim a single and

straightforward faith, committed to down-to-earth rules for the Christian life. They serve as protectors and conservers of the traditions inherited from the past. If change is to take place, it emerges by evolution, not revolution. They excel at building community, fostering a sense of loyalty and belonging. They bring order and stability to their congregations, creating plans, developing procedures and formulating policies; and they are keen that these procedures should be followed. They can be trusted for their reliability, punctuality and efficiency. They are effective pastors, showing particular concern for the young, the elderly, and the weak. They are realists who offer practical and down-to-earth solutions to pastoral problems.

The Dionysian Temperament (SP) is styled 'the action-oriented pastor'. SP clergy tend to be the most fun-loving of all clergy temperaments, possessing a compulsive need to be engaged in activity. They have little need for or interest in the abstract, the theoretical, and the non-practical aspects of theology and church life. They are flexible and spontaneous people who welcome the unplanned and unpredictable aspects of church life. They can bring the church to life with activities for everyone from cradle to grave. They have a flare for grasping the moment. They are entertainers and performers at heart. They are at their best in a crisis and are good at handling conflict resolution. They are fun-loving and enjoy working with children and young people. They are better at starting new initiatives than at seeing things through. SP clergy may be particularly attracted to charismatic worship, responding to the leading of the Holy Spirit, welcoming a free-flowing form that allows for impromptu testimonials, speaking in tongues, and spontaneous singing.

The Promethean Temperament (NT) is styled 'the intellectual, competence-seeking pastor'. NT clergy are the most academically and intellectually grounded of all clergy temperaments, motivated by the search for meaning for truth and for possibilities. They are visionaries who need to excel in all they do, and they tend to push their congregations to excel as well. They enjoy the academic study and analysis of the faith, and may try to run their church as an extension of the seminary. They make great teachers, preachers, and advocates for social justice. They look for underlying principles rather than basic applications from their study of scripture. They see the value of opposing views and strive to allow alternative visions to be heard. They are more concerned with finding truth than with engineering harmony and compromise. NT

clergy need to be challenged in their ministry and to be able to move from one challenge to the next.

The Apollonian Temperament (NF) is styled 'the authenticity-seeking, relationship-oriented pastor'. NF clergy tend to be the most idealistic and romantic of all clergy temperaments, attracted to helping roles that deal with human suffering. They want to meet the needs of others and to find personal affirmation in so doing. They can be articulate and inspiring communicators, committed to influencing others by touching their hearts. They have good empathic capacity, interpersonal skills, and pastoral counselling techniques. They find themselves listening to other people's problems in the most unlikely contexts, and really caring about them. NF clergy tend to be high on inspiration, but lower on the practical down-to-earth aspects of ministry. They are able to draw the best out of people and work well as the catalyst or facilitator in the congregation as long as others are on hand to work with and to implement their vision. They are at their best when leading in people-related projects, such as starting a project for the elderly or for youth. They are most comfortable in unstructured meetings where they are good at facilitating group decision-making processes.

A series of recent empirical studies among church leaders has begun to chart how the distribution of these four temperaments varies both between denominations and within denominations. One interesting illustration of the difference is provided by a series of studies exploring the differences and similarities between two groups of priests within the Church of England, namely those ordained into the traditional professional mobile ministry and those ordained into 'Local Ordained Ministry' (see Bowden, Francis, Jordan, & Simon, 2012). In a study of traditional Church of England clergy (626 clergymen and 237 clergywomen), Francis, Craig, Whinney, Tilley, and Slater (2007) found that the SJ temperament accounted for 31% of the clergymen and 29% of the clergywomen. In a replication study among 622 clergymen, Francis, Robbins, Duncan, and Whinney (2010) found 27% reported SJ temperament. In a replication study among 83 clergywomen, Francis, Robbins, and Whinney (2011) found 40% reported SJ temperament. A very different profile emerged, however, among those ordained into Local Ordained Ministry. The SJ profile was recorded by Francis and Holmes (2011) as 54% among 39 clergymen and clergywomen considered together, by Francis, Robbins, and Jones (2012) as 65% among 144 clergywomen, and by Francis and Village (2012) as 57% among 56 clergymen and 54% among 79 clergywomen.

Three recent studies of Catholic priests in the USA, Australia and Italy have all drawn attention to the strength of the Epimethean Temperament (SJ) among the current generation of Catholic clergy. In a study among 55 Catholic priests in the USA, Burns, Francis, Village, and Robbins (2013) found that 62% reported as SJ temperament. In a study of 306 Catholic priests in Australia, Francis, Powell, and Robbins (2012) found that 68% reported as SJ temperament. In a study of 155 Catholic priests in Italy, Francis and Crea (2015) found that 76% reported as SJ temperament. This strong concentration of the Epimethean Temperament among Catholic priests leaves little room for the other three temperaments within Catholic ministry. In the Italian study reported by Francis and Crea (2015), the other three temperaments were represented as follows: Apollonian Temperament (12%), Promethean Temperament (12%), and Dionysian Temperament (5%).

Research question

The aim of the present study is to build on and to extend the work of Francis and Crea (2015) in two ways. The first aim is to replicate the earlier study among a second group of Catholic priests in Italy. Replication is wise in light of the very high proportion of Epimethean Temperament (SJ) priests identified in that study. Was that finding a rogue finding or would it be reproduced in a replication study? The second aim was to extend the earlier study to embrace religious sisters. Extension is wise in light of the broader and complementary ministry exercised by religious orders within the Catholic Church and the distinctive contribution that may be made by women within this context. Do religious sisters mimic the leadership style shaped by the psychological temperament of Catholic priests, or do they bring to different psychological temperament to the fore in ministry?

Method

Procedure

In the context of programmes operated in Rome for Catholic priests and religious sisters on the topic of personality and spirituality, participants were invited to complete a measure of psychological type. Participation in the programme was voluntary, and responses to the questionnaire were confidential and anonymous. Fully completed measures were submitted by 95 priests and 61 religious sisters.

Instrument

Psychological type was assessed by the Francis Psychological Type Scales (FPTS: Francis, 2005). This is a 40-item instrument comprising four sets of 10 forced-choice items related to each of the four components of psychological type: orientation (extraversion or introversion), perceiving process (sensing or intuition), judging process (thinking or feeling), and attitude toward the outer world (judging or perceiving). Recent studies have demonstrated that this instrument functions well in church-related contexts. For example, Francis, Craig, and Hall (2008) reported alpha coefficients of .83 for the EI scale, .76 for the SN scale, .73 for the TF scale, and .79 for the JP scale. Participants were asked for each pair of characteristics to check the 'box next to that characteristic which is closer to the real you, even if you feel both characteristics apply to you. Tick the characteristics that reflect the real you, even if other people see you differently'.

Participants

Among the Catholic priests, age ranged from 27 to 85 years, with an average age of 55.4 years ($SD = 15.0$); 4% were in their twenties, 14% in their thirties, 18% in their forties, 22% in their fifties, 17% in their sixties, 23% in their seventies, and 2% in their eighties. Among the religious sisters, age ranged from 24 to 74 years, with an average age of 50.6 years ($SD = 13.5$); 3% were in their twenties, 20% in their thirties, 25% in their forties, 25% in their fifties, 18% in their sixties, and 10% in their seventies.

Analysis

The research literature concerning the empirical investigation of psychological type has developed a highly distinctive method for analyzing, handling, and displaying statistical data in the form of 'type tables'. This convention has been adopted in the following presentation in order to integrate these new data within the established literature and to provide all the detail necessary for secondary analysis and further interpretation within the rich theoretical framework afforded by psychological type. Type tables have been designed to provide information about the sixteen discrete psychological types, about the four dichotomous preferences, about the six sets of pairs and temperaments, about the dominant types, and about the introverted and extraverted Jungian types. Commentary on this table will, however, be restricted to those aspects of the data strictly relevant to the research question.

Results

[Tables 1 and 2 about here]

Table 1 presents the type distribution of the 95 Catholic priests serving in Italy. These data demonstrate preferences for introversion (57%) over extraversion (43%), for sensing (81%) over intuition (19%), for feeling (54%) over thinking (46%), and for judging (87%), over perceiving (13%). In terms of the sixteen complete types, the most frequently reported types are ESFJ (21%), ISTJ (21%) and ISFJ (16%). In terms of psychological temperament preferences, the most frequently occurring temperament is SJ (71%), followed by SP (11%), NT (11%), and NF (8%).

Table 2 presents type distribution for the 61 religious sisters serving in Italy. These data demonstrate preferences for introversion (57%) over extraversion (43%), for sensing (72%) over intuition (28%), for feeling (56%) over thinking (44%) and for judging (80%) over perceiving (20%). In terms of the sixteen complete types, the most frequently reported types are ISFJ (21%), ISTJ (13%), ESTJ (13%), and ESFJ (13%). In terms of psychological temperament preferences, the most frequently occurring temperament is SJ (61%), followed by NF (15%), NT (13%) and SP (12%).

Discussion and Conclusion

Building primarily on the earlier study of clergy psychological temperament reported by Francis and Crea (2015) among 155 Catholic priests in Italy, the present study set out to address two core research questions. The first research question set out to replicate the study reported by Francis and Crea (2015) among another group of Catholic priests. The earlier study had found that three-quarters of the 155 priests in that sample (76%) had reported the Epimethean Temperament (SJ). The present replication study found that almost three-quarters of the 95 priests in this sample (71%) reported the Epimethean Temperament (SJ). The similarity between the two findings lends weight to the conclusion.

The second research question set out to extend the study reported by Francis and Crea (2015) to a group of religious sisters. The present extension of the original research found that three-fifths of the 61 religious sisters in the sample (61%) reported the Epimethean Temperament (SJ). While this proportion (61%) is lower than the

proportions found among priests (71% in the present sample and 76% in the original sample) this proportion remains high.

There are two clear limitations both with the present study and with the earlier study reported by Francis and Crea (2015). First, neither study was based on a random sample of Catholic priests (or religious sisters) but drew on an opportunity sample of participants within programmes on personality and spirituality. Second, neither study was based on large samples: the original study on 155 priests and the present study on 95 priests and 61 religious sisters. The results are, nonetheless, sufficiently intriguing and important to require more rigorous replication among Catholic priests and religious sisters serving in Italy.

The results are intriguing and important because the concentration of ministry largely within any one of the four psychological temperaments will give the Church a fairly clear and somewhat homogeneous or monochrome identity. Inevitably some may see a Church shaped by the Epimethean Temperament as a great strength, while others may see it as a significant weakness. In their earlier study, Francis and Crea (2015) argued that Oswald and Kroeger's (1988) characterisation of the Epimethean Temperament as producing 'the conserving, serving pastor' provides helpful insight into how such clergy may be shaping the Catholic parishes. Churches managed by SJ priests will not go through unnecessary change, and when changes are initiated they will be implemented by evolution rather than by revolution. Priests shaped by this temperament are unlikely to want to leave the church much different from the way in which they inherited it. SJ clergy will work hard to foster a sense of loyalty and belonging to the Church as they see it. They may have less patience with parishioners who want to see development and innovation. SJ priests may prioritise a sense of social, moral and spiritual obligation throughout their parishes. They may propose sound plans, clear procedures, and precise policies, and expect others to adhere to them. SJ priests may bring good administrative skills to ministry, but find dealing with people more problematic. SJ priests may take pastoral ministry very seriously and want to approach pastoral ministry in a highly organised and practical way. They tend to be realists who like a common-sense approach to pastoral counselling and to problem solving. For SJ priests worship tends to be formal and predictable.

What a Church shaped primarily by the Epimethean Temperament (SJ) may lack are the distinctive gifts and qualities that may be introduced by the other three

temperaments. Priests shaped by the Apollonian Temperament (NF), styled by Oswald and Kroeger (1988) as ‘the authenticity-seeking, relationship-oriented pastor’, are more likely to be inspired by their vision for the future and by their plans and hopes for change and development. They are less likely to be constrained by (or indeed aware of) practical considerations. Priests shaped by the Promethean Temperament (NT), styled by Oswald and Kroeger (1988) as ‘the intellectual, competence-seeking pastor’, are more likely to press the case for intellectual enquiry, for academic scrutiny, and for social justice. Priests shaped by the Dionysian Temperament (SP), styled by Oswald and Kroeger (1988) as ‘the action-oriented pastor’, are more likely to generate a sense of fun and vitality in church life.

When the findings of these recent studies among Catholic priests in the USA (Burns, Francis, Village, & Robbins, 2013), in Australia (Francis, Powell, & Robbins, 2012), and in Italy (Francis & Crea, 2015), together with the present study, are set alongside the profiles of Catholic priests reported in the 1980s by Holsworth (1984) and Macdaid, McCaulley, and Kainz (1986), it becomes clear how much the Church and the priesthood have become more homogeneous and more monochrome. Francis and Crea (2015) concluded their earlier study by raising two interesting questions for the Catholic Church. In light of the present study these two questions are worth repeating: Is this the kind of leadership that the Church has consciously planned for the twenty-first century? How has this concentration of the Epimethean Temperament among the priesthood come about? Further research among Bishops and among the faculty of Seminaries may be able to throw some light on these two questions.

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TABLE 1 Type distribution for Catholic priests serving in Italy

| <i>The sixteen complete types</i> | | | | <i>Dichotomous preferences</i> | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|----------|----|------|
| | | | | | <i>n =</i> | <i>%</i> | | |
| ISTJ | ISFJ | INFJ | INTJ | E | 41 | (43.2%) | | |
| <i>n</i> = 20 | <i>n</i> = 15 | <i>n</i> = 6 | <i>n</i> = 8 | I | 54 | (56.8%) | | |
| (21.1%) | (15.8%) | (6.3%) | (8.4%) | S | 77 | (81.1%) | | |
| +++++ | +++++ | +++++ | +++++ | N | 18 | (18.9%) | | |
| +++++ | +++++ | + | +++ | T | 44 | (46.3%) | | |
| +++++ | +++++ | | | J | 51 | (53.7%) | | |
| +++++ | + | | | J | 83 | (87.4%) | | |
| + | | | | P | 12 | (12.6%) | | |
| | | | | <i>Pairs and temperaments</i> | | | | |
| ISTP | ISFP | INFP | INTP | IJ | 49 | (51.6%) | | |
| <i>n</i> = 1 | <i>n</i> = 3 | <i>n</i> = 0 | <i>n</i> = 1 | IP | 5 | (5.3%) | | |
| (1.1%) | (3.2%) | (0.0%) | (1.1%) | EP | 7 | (7.4%) | | |
| + | +++ | | + | EJ | 34 | (35.8%) | | |
| | | | | ST | 34 | (35.8%) | | |
| | | | | SF | 43 | (45.3%) | | |
| | | | | NF | 8 | (8.4%) | | |
| | | | | NT | 10 | (10.5%) | | |
| ESTP | ESFP | ENFP | ENTP | SJ | 67 | (70.5%) | | |
| <i>n</i> = 1 | <i>n</i> = 5 | <i>n</i> = 1 | <i>n</i> = 0 | SP | 10 | (10.5%) | | |
| (1.1%) | (5.3%) | (1.1%) | (0.0%) | NP | 2 | (2.1%) | | |
| + | +++++ | + | | NJ | 16 | (16.8%) | | |
| | | | | TJ | 41 | (43.2%) | | |
| | | | | TP | 3 | (3.2%) | | |
| | | | | FP | 9 | (9.5%) | | |
| | | | | FJ | 42 | (44.2%) | | |
| ESTJ | ESFJ | ENFJ | ENTJ | IN | 15 | (15.8%) | | |
| <i>n</i> = 12 | <i>n</i> = 20 | <i>n</i> = 1 | <i>n</i> = 1 | EN | 3 | (3.2%) | | |
| (12.6%) | (21.1%) | (1.1%) | (1.1%) | IS | 39 | (41.1%) | | |
| +++++ | +++++ | + | + | ES | 38 | (40.0%) | | |
| +++++ | +++++ | | | ET | 14 | (14.7%) | | |
| +++ | +++++ | | | EF | 27 | (28.4%) | | |
| | +++++ | | | IF | 24 | (25.3%) | | |
| | + | | | IT | 30 | (31.6%) | | |
| <i>Jungian types (E)</i> | | <i>Jungian types (I)</i> | | | <i>Dominant types</i> | | | |
| | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> | | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> | | | |
| E-TJ | 13 | 13.7 | I-TP | 2 | 2.1 | Dt.T | 15 | 15.8 |
| E-FJ | 21 | 22.1 | I-FP | 3 | 3.2 | Dt.F | 24 | 25.3 |
| ES-P | 6 | 6.3 | IS-J | 35 | 36.8 | Dt.S | 41 | 43.2 |
| EN-P | 1 | 1.1 | IN-J | 14 | 14.7 | Dt.N | 15 | 15.8 |

Note: *N* = 95 (NB: + = 1% of *N*)

TABLE 2 Type distribution for religious sisters serving in Italy

| <i>The sixteen complete types</i> | | | | <i>Dichotomous preferences</i> | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------------------|------------|----------|
| | | | | | <i>n =</i> | <i>%</i> |
| ISTJ | ISFJ | INFJ | INTJ | E | 26 | (42.6%) |
| <i>n</i> = 8 | <i>n</i> = 13 | <i>n</i> = 3 | <i>n</i> = 6 | I | 35 | (57.4%) |

| | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|------|-----------------------|----|------|
| (13.1%) +++++ | (21.3%) +++++ | (4.9%) +++++ | (9.8%) +++++ | S | 44 | (72.1%) | | |
| +++++ | +++++ | | +++++ | N | 17 | (27.9%) | | |
| +++ | +++++ | | | T | 27 | (44.3%) | | |
| | +++++ | | | F | 34 | (55.7%) | | |
| | + | | | J | 49 | (80.3%) | | |
| ISTP | ISFP | INFP | INTP | P | 12 | (19.7%) | | |
| <i>n</i> = 2 | <i>n</i> = 1 | <i>n</i> = 2 | <i>n</i> = 0 | <i>Pairs and temperaments</i> | | | | |
| (3.3%) | (1.6%) | (3.3%) | (0.0%) | IJ | 30 | (49.2%) | | |
| +++ | ++ | +++ | | IP | 5 | (8.2%) | | |
| | | | | EP | 7 | (11.5%) | | |
| | | | | EJ | 19 | (31.1%) | | |
| | | | | ST | 19 | (31.1%) | | |
| ESTP | ESFP | ENFP | ENTP | SF | 25 | (41.0%) | | |
| <i>n</i> = 1 | <i>n</i> = 3 | <i>n</i> = 3 | <i>n</i> = 0 | NF | 9 | (14.8%) | | |
| (1.6%) | (4.9%) | (4.9%) | (0.0%) | NT | 8 | (13.1%) | | |
| ++ | +++++ | +++++ | | SJ | 37 | (60.7%) | | |
| | | | | SP | 7 | (11.5%) | | |
| | | | | NP | 5 | (8.2%) | | |
| | | | | NJ | 12 | (19.7%) | | |
| | | | | TJ | 24 | (39.3%) | | |
| ESTJ | ESFJ | ENFJ | ENTJ | TP | 3 | (4.9%) | | |
| <i>n</i> = 8 | <i>n</i> = 8 | <i>n</i> = 1 | <i>n</i> = 2 | FP | 9 | (14.8%) | | |
| (13.1%) | (13.1%) | (1.6%) | (3.3%) | FJ | 25 | (41.0%) | | |
| +++++ | +++++ | ++ | +++ | IN | 11 | (18.0%) | | |
| +++++ | +++++ | | | EN | 6 | (9.8%) | | |
| +++ | +++ | | | IS | 24 | (39.3%) | | |
| | | | | ES | 20 | (32.8%) | | |
| | | | | ET | 11 | (18.0%) | | |
| | | | | EF | 15 | (24.6%) | | |
| | | | | IF | 19 | (31.1%) | | |
| | | | | IT | 16 | (26.2%) | | |
| <i>Jungian types (E)</i> | | | <i>Jungian types (I)</i> | | | <i>Dominant types</i> | | |
| | <i>n</i> | % | | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | |
| E-TJ | 10 | 16.4 | I-TP | 2 | 3.3 | Dt.T | 12 | 19.7 |
| E-FJ | 9 | 14.8 | I-FP | 3 | 4.9 | Dt.F | 12 | 19.7 |
| ES-P | 4 | 6.6 | IS-J | 21 | 34.4 | Dt.S | 25 | 41.0 |
| EN-P | 3 | 4.9 | IN-J | 9 | 14.8 | Dt.N | 12 | 19.7 |

Note: N = 61 (NB: + = 1% of N)