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Psychological type and personal wellbeing among Catholic priests in Italy:

A study in positive psychology

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Abstract

This paper explores the connection between psychological type and personal wellbeing among a sample of 95 Catholic priests serving in Italy. Personal wellbeing was assessed by two measures: the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire and the Purpose in Life Scale.

Psychological type was assessed by the Francis Psychological Type Scales (FPTS) that draw on the development of Jung's classic model that distinguishes between two orientations (extraversion and introversion), two perceiving functions (sensing and intuition), two judging functions (thinking and feeling), and two attitudes (judging and perceiving). The data demonstrated that lower levels of personal wellbeing were experienced by introverts than by extraverts.

Key words: Clergy, psychological type, psychology of religion, wellbeing,

Introduction

Psychological type theory has its roots in the pioneering thinking of Jung (1971) and its development and refinement in a series of psychometric instruments, including the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & McCaulley, 1985), the Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey & Bates, 1978), and the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005). At its core psychological type theory distinguishes between two psychological orientations (extraversion and introversion), two perceiving functions (sensing and intuition), two judging functions (thinking and feeling), and two attitudes toward the outside world (judging and perceiving).

The orientations are concerned with identifying the sources of psychological energy. For extravert types, the source of energy is located in the outer world of people and things. Extraverts are exhausted by large periods of solitude and silence; and they need to re-energize through the stimulation they receive from people and places. Extraverts are talkative people who feel at home in social contexts. For introvert types, the source of energy is located in the inner world of ideas and reflection. Introverts are exhausted by long periods of social engagements and sounds; and they need to re-energise through the stimulation they receive from their own company and tranquillity.

The perceiving functions are concerned with identifying ways in which individuals take in information. For sensing types, the preferred way of perceiving is through their senses. Sensing types are motivated by facts, details and information. They build up to the big picture slowly by focusing first on the component parts. They are more comfortable in the present moment rather than in exploring future possibilities. They are realistic and practical people. For intuitive types, the preferred way of perceiving is through their imagination. Intuitives are motivated by theories, ideas and connections. They begin with the big picture and gradually give attention to the component parts. They are more

comfortable planning the future than making do with the present. They are inspirational and visionary people.

The judging functions are concerned with identifying ways in which individuals evaluate information. For thinking types, the preferred way of judging is through objective analysis and dispassionate logic. They are concerned with the good running of systems and organizations and put such strategic issues first. They are logical and fair-minded people who appeal to the God of justice. For feeling types, the preferred way of judging is through subjective evaluation and personal involvement. They are concerned with the good relationships between people and put such inter-personal issues first. They are humane and warm-hearted people who appeal to the God of mercy.

The attitudes are concerned with identifying which of the two processes (judging or perceiving) individuals prefer to use in the outer world. In this area, the two discrete types are defined by the name of the preferred process, either judging or perceiving. For judging types, their preferred judging function (either thinking or feeling) is employed in their outer world. Because their outer world is where the rational, evaluating, judging or decision-making process is deployed, judging types appear to others to be well-organized decisive people. For perceiving types, their preferred perceiving function (either sensing or intuition) is employed in their outer world. Because their outer world is where the irrational, data gathering process is deployed, perceiving types appear to others to be laid-back, flexible, even disorganized people.

In recent years psychological type theory has been employed in a number of studies among clergy with two specific research objectives in mind. The first objective has been to map the distinctive psychological type of clergy within different denominational contexts, both to explore the difference among these denominations and to map the consistent differences between clergy within a variety of denominations and the population norms.

Recent studies within this tradition include studies among Catholic priests in the UK (Craig, Duncan, & Francis, 2006), in Australia (Francis, Powell, & Robbins, 2012), in the USA (Burns, Francis, Village, & Robbins, 2013), and in Italy (Francis & Crea, 2015a, 2018).

The second objective has been to map the connection between psychological type and individual differences in approaches to ministry and experiences of ministry among clergy serving in the same denomination. Examples of studies within this tradition include studies of ministry styles (Francis & Payne, 2002), prayer styles (Francis & Robbins, 2008), and training expectations (Tilley, Francis, Robbins, & Jones, 2011). One particularly fruitful area within this tradition has been the exploration of the connection between psychological type and satisfaction in ministry as accessed by the Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS; Francis, Kaldor, Robbins, & Castle, 2005). The Satisfaction in Ministry Scale drew together items expressing personal accomplishment, personal satisfaction, the sense of dealing effectively with people, really understanding and influencing people positively, being appreciated by others, deriving purpose and meaning from ministry, and being glad that they entered ministry. Satisfaction in ministry is a variable of interest and importance for two reasons. First, satisfaction in ministry may be conceptualised as an index of positive affect and personal wellbeing. Secondly, and more importantly, satisfaction in ministry has been shown to offset some of the deleterious consequences of emotional exhaustion in ministry (Francis, Village, Robbins, & Wulff, 2011; Francis, Village, Bruce, & Woolever, 2015; Francis, Laycock, & Brewster, 2017; Francis, Laycock, & Crea, 2017; Francis, Crea, & Laycock, 2017; Village, Payne, & Francis, 2018; Francis, Laycock, & Ratter, in press).

Nine recent studies have explored the connection between psychological type, as accessed by the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005), and satisfaction in ministry, as accessed by the Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (Francis, Kaldor, Robbins, & Castle, 2005), drawing on samples of 748 clergy serving in the Presbyterian Church (USA)

(Francis, Wulff, & Robbins, 2008), 3,715 clergy serving in a range of denominations in Australia, England and New Zealand (Francis, Robbins, Kaldor, & Castle, 2009), 874 clergywomen serving in the Church of England (Robbins & Francis, 2010), 521 clergy serving in rural ministry in the Church of England (Brewster, Francis, & Robbins, 2011), 134 lead elders within the Newfrontiers network of churches serving in the United Kingdom (Francis, Gubb, & Robbins, 2012), 212 Australian clergywomen drawn from 14 denominations or streams of churches (Robbins, Francis, & Powell, 2012), 266 clergymen serving in the Church in Wales (Francis, Payne, & Robbins, 2013), 155 Catholic priests serving in Italy (Francis & Crea, 2015b), and 589 Canadian Baptist clergy (Durkee-Lloyd, 2016).

The main conclusion that is consistent across all eight studies links higher scores of satisfaction in ministry with extraversion and links lower scores of satisfaction in ministry with introversion. This finding is of interest for two reasons. First, all five recent studies of the psychological type profiles of Catholic priests in the UK (Craig, Duncan, & Francis, 2006), in Australia (Francis, Powell, & Robbins, 2012), in the USA (Burns, Francis, Village, & Robbins, 2013), and in Italy (Francis & Crea, 2015a, 2018) reported higher proportions of introverts in the priesthood. Second, it is reasonable to posit that much of the activity associated with the work of priests may favour the extraverted orientation, involving an outward-facing engagement with people and managing a wide range of social interactions - the kind of work that may energise and revitalise extraverts, but that may drain and exhaust introverts.

Research question

Against this background, the aim of the present study is to test whether the linkage reported between extraversion and satisfaction in ministry (a measure of work-related psychological wellbeing) among Catholic priests in Italy by Francis and Crea (2015b) is also

reflected in respect of measures of personal psychological wellbeing among Catholic priests. The notion of personal psychological wellbeing is itself a broad construct that has been operationalised in a variety of ways. Two operationalisations of personal psychological wellbeing that have recently played a prominent role in the empirical psychology of religion are related to the constructs of purpose in life (Francis & Penny, 2016), and happiness (Tekke, Francis, & Robbins, 2018). These constructs have been operationalised through the Purpose in Life Scale (Robbins & Francis, 2000) and the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hills & Argyle, 2002).

The Purpose in Life Scale (Robbins & Francis, 2000) has its roots in the theory of logotherapy as developed by the work of Frankl (1978) and was designed to provide a more succinct and focused measure of purpose in life than that developed by the earlier Purpose in Life Test (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964, 1969). The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hills & Argyle, 2002) has its roots in the psychological theory of happiness as developed by the work of Argyle (1987) and was designed to provide a more succinct measure of happiness than that developed by the earlier Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Argyle & Crossland, 1987; Argyle, Martin, & Crossland, 1989).

Method

Procedure

In the context of programmes operated in Rome for Catholic priests on the topic of personality and spirituality, participants were invited to complete a questionnaire covering issues relevant to the programme. Participation in the programme was voluntary and responses to the questionnaire were confidential and anonymous. Full data were provided by 95 priests.

Participants

Participants' age ranged from 27 to 85 years with an average age of 56 years ($SD = 15$); 4% of the participants 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.

Measures

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".

Happiness was assessed by the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hills & Argyle, 2002). This instrument proposes a 29-item measure to assess a unidimensional construct. Each item is rated on a five-point scale: "agree strongly" (5), "agree" (4), "not certain" (3), "disagree" (2), and "disagree strongly" (1). Higher scores indicate a greater level of happiness. Hills and Argyle (2002) reported an alpha coefficient of .91.

Purpose in life was assessed by the Purpose in Life Scale (Robbins & Francis, 2000). This instrument proposes a 12-item scale to assess a unidimensional construct. Each item is rated on a five-point scale: "agree strongly" (5), "agree" (4), "not certain" (3), "disagree" (2),

and “disagree strongly” (1). Higher scores indicate a greater level of purpose of life. Robbins and Francis (2000) reported an alpha coefficient of .90.

Data analysis

The data were analysed by means of the SPSS statistical package using the reliability and t-test routines.

Results

- insert Table 1 about here -

Both measures of personal psychological wellbeing functioned with a high level of internal consistency reliability among this sample of 95 Catholic priests: OHQ, $\alpha = .88$; PILS = $\alpha .92$. Table 1 presents basic information about the psychological type profile of the Roman Catholic priests and also examines the relationship between the dichotomous type preferences and scores recorded on the two measures of personal psychological wellbeing. These data demonstrate that among these priests there are 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%). These data also confirm that the statistically significant link between psychological type and personal psychological wellbeing is in respect of the orientations. Compared with extraverted priests, introverted priests recorded significantly lower scores on the index of happiness (OHQ) and significantly lower scores on the index of purpose in life (PILS). These data did not find significant differences in terms of the perceiving process (sensing and intuition), the judging process (thinking and feeling), and the attitudes (judging and perceiving).

Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to test whether the linkage reported between extraversion and satisfaction in ministry (a measure of work-related psychological wellbeing) among Catholic priests in Italy by Francis and Crea (2015b) is also reflected in respect of

measures of personal psychological wellbeing among Catholic priests. This linkage was tested among a sample of 95 Catholic priests who completed three psychological measures within the context of programmes operated in Rome on the topic of personality and spirituality. Psychological type was assessed by the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005). Personal psychological wellbeing was assessed by two measures: the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hills & Argyle, 2002) and the Purpose in Life Scale (Robbins & Francis, 2000).

The earlier finding by Francis and Crea (2015b) that introverted Catholic priests in Italy experience significantly lower levels of work-related psychological wellbeing in comparison with extraverted priests was consistent with findings from other studies exploring the connection between psychological type and work-related psychological wellbeing among seven of the other eight groups of clergy as reported by Francis, Wulff, and Robbins (2008), Francis, Robbins, Kaldor, and Castle (2009), Robbins and Francis (2010), Brewster, Francis, and Robbins (2011), Francis, Gubb, and Robbins (2012), Robbins, Francis, and Powell (2012), Francis, Payne, and Robbins (2013), and Durkee-Lloyd (2016). The present study has contributed to this body of knowledge by demonstrating that introverted Catholic priests in Italy also experience significantly lower levels of personal psychological wellbeing in comparison with extraverted priests. Introverted priests recorded lower levels of personal happiness and lower levels of purpose in life.

This finding is of particular significance within the context of the balanced affect model of clergy burnout as proposed by Francis, Village, Robbins, and Wulff (2011), and supported by Francis, Village, Bruce, and Woolever (2015), Francis, Laycock, and Brewster (2017), Francis, Laycock, and Crea (2017), Francis, Crea, and Laycock (2017), Village, Payne, and Francis (2018), and Francis, Laycock, and Ratter (in press). The balanced affect model of clergy burnout draws on Bradburn's (1969) classic model of balanced affect to

demonstrate that positive affect offsets the deleterious effects of negative affect. Priests who are able to draw on resources of positive affect are more able to cope with the consequences of the emotional exhaustion that leads to clergy burnout.

Especially in light of the general finding that ministry attracts a higher proportion of introverts (57% of the present sample of priests were introverts), the challenge facing those exercising a duty of care for the psychological wellbeing of priests may be to reflect on ways in which an introverted priesthood can be better resourced and better equipped to experience not only a greater sense of satisfaction in ministry but also a greater sense of personal happiness and a greater sense of personal purpose in life.

This is the first study to have explored the explicit connection between psychological type and the two constructs of personal happiness and purpose in life among Catholic priests serving in Italy. The study has been limited by the sample size ($N = 95$) which has restricted the depth at which the connection can be explored. Further studies are now needed to build on and to extend this initial enquiry.

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Table 1

Mean scores of happiness and purpose in life by dichotomous type

	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> <
<i>Happiness</i>					
extraversion	41	136.1	13.4		
introversion	54	126.6	20.1	2.6	.01
sensing	77	131.6	17.9		
intuition	18	127.0	19.0	1.0	NS
thinking	44	128.5	17.9		
feeling	51	132.5	18.2	1.1	NS
judging	83	130.5	18.2		
perceiving	12	131.9	18.1	0.2	NS
<i>Purpose in life</i>					
extraversion	41	54.7	6.3		
introversion	54	51.1	8.0	2.4	.05
sensing	77	52.9	7.4		
intuition	18	51.7	7.8	0.6	NS
thinking	44	52.6	7.1		
feeling	51	52.7	7.9	0.0	NS
judging	83	52.7	7.4		
perceiving	12	52.3	8.1	0.2	NS