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Psychological type profile of Roman Catholic priests: an empirical enquiry in the USA

James Burns¹

Leslie J Francis²

Andrew Village³

Mandy Robbins⁴

Abstract This study explores the psychological type profile of Roman Catholic priests serving in the USA, drawing on data provided by 55 priests who completed the Francis Psychological Type Scales. The data demonstrated clear preferences for introversion (67%), for sensing (64%), and for judging (91%), and a balance between thinking (49%) and feeling (51%). A very high proportion of priests reported preferences for ISTJ (27%), compared with 16% of men in the USA population. Implications of these findings are discussed for ministry in the Roman Catholic Church.

Keywords Psychology, priests, Catholic Church, religion

¹ Boston College, Boston, USA

² Leslie J Francis (Contact)
Professor of Religions and Education
Warwick Religions & Education Research Unit
Institute of Education
The University of Warwick
Coventry CV4 7AL United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0)24 7652 2539
Fax: +44 (0)24 7657 2638
Email: leslie.francis@warwick.ac.uk

³ University of York St John, England, UK

⁴ Glyndŵr University, Wales, UK

Introduction

The extant literature suggests that during the 1980s there may have been considerable interest in the USA in applying psychological type theory to illuminating the psychological profile of Catholic priests and other professed members of Catholic religious communities. For example, in their *Atlas of type tables*, Macdaid, McCaulley, and Kainz (1986) reported on a sample of 2,002 sisters in Roman Catholic religious orders, a sample of 114 brothers, a sample of 1,298 priests, a sample of 102 deacons, and a sample of 51 seminarians. Other studies published during the 1980s employing psychological type theory to profile Roman Catholic religious professionals in the USA included work on religious sisters by Cabral (1984) and by Bigelow, Fitzgerald, Busk, Girault, and Avis (1988), and on seminarians by Holsworth (1984). This particular line of enquiry does not seem to have been continued through the research literature.

Psychological type theory has its origins in the pioneering work of Carl Jung (1971), and has been developed and extended through a series of type indicators, temperament sorters, and type scales, including the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & McCaulley, 1985), the Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey & Bates, 1978), and the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005). In essence, psychological type theory distinguishes between two orientations (extraversion and introversion), two perceiving functions (sensing and intuition), two judging functions (thinking and feeling), and two attitudes toward the outer world (judging and perceiving). Type theory maintains that type preferences between introversion and extraversion, between sensing and intuition, between thinking and feeling, and between judging and perceiving remain relatively stable throughout life. At the same time, however, ways in which these preferences are understood and interpreted by individuals properly develop and change.

The orientations are concerned with identifying the sources of psychological energy. In this area, the two discrete types are defined as extraversion and introversion. 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 tranquility.

The perceiving processes are concerned with identifying ways in which individuals take in information. For Jung, the perceiving processes were described as irrational processes because they were not concerned with data evaluation, but simply with data gathering. In this area, the two discrete types are defined as sensing and as intuition. For sensing types, the preferred way of perceiving is through the five senses. Sensors 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. 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 processes are concerned with identifying ways in which individuals evaluate information. For Jung, the judging processes were described as the rational

processes because they were concerned with data evaluation and with decision making. In this area, the two discrete types are defined as thinking and as feeling. 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 (often more fully expressed as the ‘attitudes toward the outer world’) 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 processes 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.

Returning to those pioneering studies from the 1980s, to which reference was made earlier, the most relevant to the present discussion is the profile of 1,298 Roman Catholic priests reported by Macdaid, McCaulley, and Kainz (1986). According to this study, 52% of the sample preferred introversion and 48% preferred extraversion; 54% preferred sensing and 46% preferred intuition; 80% preferred feeling and 20% preferred thinking; 71% preferred judging and 29% preferred perceiving. From these figures, it is the strong preferences for

feeling and for judging that deserve some commentary. A priesthood so strongly shaped by feeling is likely to be characterised by a pastoral heart, but not by strategic leadership. A priesthood so strongly shaped by judging is likely to promote an organised and structured community, but feel much less at ease responding to the unpredictable fluctuations and changing demands of parish life.

Although the research tradition concerned with applying psychological type theory among religious professionals does not seem to have flourished in the USA after the 1980s, during the first decade of the twenty-first century the tradition has re-emerged in the UK. These studies include data provided by samples of 427 Church in Wales clergymen (Francis, Payne, & Jones, 2001), 278 male and 213 female Bible College students (Francis, Penson, & Jones, 2001), 57 evangelical church leaders (Francis & Robbins, 2002), 164 male and 135 female evangelical church leaders (Craig, Francis, & Robbins, 2004), 92 male missionary personal (Craig, Horsfall, & Francis, 2005), 130 male and 192 female evangelical lay church leaders (Francis, Craig, Horsfall, & Ross, 2005), 79 Roman Catholic priests (Craig, Duncan, & Francis 2006), 155 male and 134 female Christian youth workers (Francis, Nash, Nash, & Craig, 2007), 626 clergymen and 237 clergywomen serving within the Church of England (Francis, Craig, Whinney, Tilley, & Slater, 2007), 81 evangelical Anglican seminarians (Francis, Craig, & Butler, 2007), 190 male Assemblies of God theological college students (Kay, Francis, & Craig, 2008), 122 female Assemblies of God theological college students (Kay & Francis, 2008), 134 lead elders within the Newfrontiers network of churches (Francis, Gubb, & Robbins, 2009), 389 experienced preachers (Francis, Robbins, & Village, 2009), 154 members of the leadership team within the Newfrontiers network of churches (Ryland, Francis, & Robbins, in press), 101 Anglican health-care chaplains (Francis, Hancocks, Swift, & Robbins, 2009), 622 clergymen serving in the Church of England (Francis, Robbins, Duncan, & Whinney, 2010), 83 clergywomen serving in the Church of England (Francis,

Robbins, & Whinney, 2011), 148 male and 41 female Free Church ministers in England (Francis, Whinney, Burton, & Robbins, 2011), 693 male and 311 female Methodist circuit ministers in Britain (Burton, Francis, & Robbins, 2010) and 231 clergymen serving in the Church in Wales (Francis, Littler, & Robbins, 2010).

From these more recent studies, the most relevant to the present discussion is the profile of 79 Roman Catholic priests reported by Craig, Duncan, and Francis (2006). According to this study, 62% of the sample preferred introversion and 38% preferred extraversion; 51% preferred sensing and 49% preferred intuition; 79% preferred feeling and 22% preferred thinking; 66% preferred judging and 34% preferred feeling. From these figures, it is the preferences for feeling, for judging and for introversion that deserve some commentary. The preferences for feeling and for judging reflect those of the Catholic priests in the USA reported by Macdaid, McCaulley, and Kainz (1986). Here too in the UK is a priesthood shaped by feeling that is likely to be characterised by a pastoral heart, but not by strategic leadership. Here too in the UK is a priesthood shaped by judging that is likely to be strong in promoting a structured and organised community, but less adept at responding to unplanned pastoral emergencies. Additionally in the UK there is a priesthood characterised by introversion. Introverted priests may be particularly good at promoting a reflective spirituality, at dealing with selected individuals on a one-to-one basis, and at preparing well for public events; but they may be less adept at taking the lead on public occasions, feeling at ease in social events, and making strangers feel welcome.

Research question

Against this background, the aim of the present study was to conduct a pilot survey among the current generation of Roman Catholic priests serving in the USA, in order to test whether the profile reported by Macdaid, McCaulley, and Kainz (1986) has remained stable,

or whether the considerable fluctuations that have been experienced by the Catholic Church during the intervening decades may be reflected in a changing profile of priests.

Method

Procedure

A total of 241 Catholic priests from a mid-sized south western diocese in the USA (who had served in parishes or who were engaged in some form of ministry in their respective parishes within the last two years) were invited to participate in an on-line survey. Completed data relevant to the present analyses were provided by 55 priests, making a response rate of 23%.

Participants

Of the 55 priests who participated in the survey, 5 were under the age of forty, 8 were in their forties, 16 in their fifties, 14 in their sixties, 8 in their seventies, 2 in their eighties, and 2 in their nineties; 40 were diocesan clergy and 15 religious; the two largest ethnic groups were White or Caucasian (34) and Latino or Hispanic (10).

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: orientations (extraversion or introversion), perceiving processes (sensing or intuition), judging processes (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.

Data analysis

The research literature concerning the empirical investigation of psychological type has developed a highly distinctive method for analysing, 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

Table 1 presents the type distribution for the 55 Roman Catholic priests who participated in the survey. These data demonstrate preferences for introversion (67%) over extraversion (33%), for sensing (64%) over intuition (36%), for judging (91%) over perceiving (9%), and a balance between thinking (49%) and feeling (51%). Two further features of the type table are noteworthy. In terms of the 16 complete types, there is a strong presence of ISTJs who account for 27% of the priests, compared with 16% of men in the USA population. In terms of the four dominant types, there is a strong presence of dominant sensing types who account for 46% of the priests, compared with 37% of men in the USA population (see Myers, McCaulley, Quenk, & Hammer, 2003).

Conclusion

The present study has reported on the psychological type profile of Roman Catholic priests currently serving in parish ministry in the USA on the basis of a small pilot study of 55 priests serving in a mid-sized south western diocese. When these new data are set alongside data on Catholic priests in the USA reported in the 1980s and data on Catholic priests in the UK reported in the 2000s, four observations can be drawn.

First, in terms of the orientations, 67% of the current generation of priests preferred introversion, compared with 62% in the UK study and 52% in the earlier study in the USA. The current stronger preference for introversion may characterise a priesthood who is less interested and comfortable in public and social life and more focused on a ministry shaped by a church-based introverted spirituality.

Second, in terms of the perceiving process, 64% of the current generation of priests preferred sensing, compared with 51% in the UK study and 54% in the earlier study in the USA. The current stronger preference for sensing may characterise a priesthood who is increasingly content to guard the inherited tradition rather than to re-envision that tradition for a new generation. A sensing priesthood may be more concerned to conserve than to experiment or to initiate change and development. The emphasis maybe on maintenance rather than on mission.

Third, in terms of the judging process, 49% of the current generation of priests preferred thinking, compared with 22% in the UK study and 20% in the earlier study in the USA. This represents a remarkable change of emphasis from a priesthood primarily concerned with nurturing people to a priesthood more concerned with sustaining structures and systems. Here is a priesthood that may be fired as much by duty as by love.

Fourth, in terms of the attitudes toward the outer world, 91% of the current generation of priests preferred judging compared with 66% in the UK study and 71% in the earlier study in the USA. This growing emphasis on the judging preference may characterise a priesthood that is becoming less flexible, more firmly set and over-reliant on structures. Indeed increasing amounts of energy may be expended on maintaining the structures that there is very little energy left to breathe new life and new hope into those structures.

Taken together, these clear movements in the direction of introversion, sensing, thinking and judging have resulted in a high proportion of the current generation of Catholic

priests reporting ISTJ (27%). This is a considerably higher proportion than found among the male population in the USA (16%) according to Myers, McCaulley, Quenk, and Hammer (2003). In her booklet, *Introduction to type*, Myers (1998) provides the following succinct profile of the ISTJ type.

Serious, quiet, earn success by concentration and thoroughness. Practical, orderly, matter-of-fact, logical, realistic and dependable. See to it that everything is well organised. Take responsibility, Make up their own minds about what should be accomplished and work toward it steadily, regardless of protests and distractions.
(p.7)

This profile suggests a model of priesthood that may neither require nor encourage excessive collaboration with the laity. When collaboration is engaged against such a model of priesthood, in which goals and objectives are set beforehand, little may be left but to get the work done. In such a context what may be expected in terms of collaboration are workhorses rather than creative construction in which thinking, imagining and working go hand in hand.

The present study had demonstrated the potential in psychological type theory for illustrating and illuminating changes that may be taking place in the psychological profile of Catholic priests and for charting potential strengths and weaknesses associated with the profile of the current generation of priests. The major limitations with the present study concern the focus on just one diocese, the low response rate, and the small number of priests who participated in what was seen to be a pilot project. In light of this major limitation, the Catholic Church, particularly those in lead roles, could decide either to dismiss the findings or to commission a more detailed study to discover just how far these findings may indeed be representative of certain dioceses or areas and to identify processes capable of smoothing potential rough edges in such clergy.

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Table 1

Type distribution for Roman Catholic priests in the USA

The Sixteen Complete Types				Dichotomous Preferences		
ISTJ <i>n</i> = 15 (27.3%) +++++ +++++ +++++ +++++ +++++ +++++ ++	ISFJ <i>n</i> = 10 (18.2%) +++++ +++++ +++++ +++++ +++	INFJ <i>n</i> = 5 (9.1%) +++++ +++++	INTJ <i>n</i> = 5 (9.1%) +++++ +++++	E <i>n</i> = 18 (32.7%)	I <i>n</i> = 37 (67.3%)	
ISTP <i>n</i> = 0 (0.0%)	ISFP <i>n</i> = 1 (1.8%) ++	INFP <i>n</i> = 1 (1.8%) ++	INTP <i>n</i> = 0 (0.0%)	Pairs and Temperaments		
ESTP <i>n</i> = 0 (0.0%)	ESFP <i>n</i> = 0 (0.0%)	ENFP <i>n</i> = 3 (5.5%) +++++ +	ENTP <i>n</i> = 0 (0.0%)	IJ <i>n</i> = 35 (63.6%)	IP <i>n</i> = 2 (3.6%)	EP <i>n</i> = 3 (5.5%)
ESTJ <i>n</i> = 5 (9.1%) +++++ +++++	ESFJ <i>n</i> = 4 (7.3%) +++++ +++++	ENFJ <i>n</i> = 4 (7.3%) +++++ +++++	ENTJ <i>n</i> = 2 (3.6%) ++++	EJ <i>n</i> = 15 (27.3%)	ST <i>n</i> = 20 (36.4%)	SF <i>n</i> = 15 (27.3%)
				NF <i>n</i> = 13 (23.6%)	NT <i>n</i> = 7 (12.7%)	SJ <i>n</i> = 34 (61.8%)
				SP <i>n</i> = 1 (1.8%)	NP <i>n</i> = 4 (7.3%)	NJ <i>n</i> = 16 (29.1%)
				TJ <i>n</i> = 27 (49.1%)	TP <i>n</i> = 0 (0.0%)	FP <i>n</i> = 5 (9.1%)
				FJ <i>n</i> = 23 (41.8%)	IN <i>n</i> = 11 (20.0%)	EN <i>n</i> = 9 (16.4%)
				IS <i>n</i> = 26 (47.3%)	ES <i>n</i> = 9 (16.4%)	ET <i>n</i> = 7 (12.7%)
				IF <i>n</i> = 17 (30.9%)	IT <i>n</i> = 20 (36.4%)	

Jungian Types (E)		Jungian Types (I)		Dominant Types				
<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>Type distribution for Roman Catholic priests in the USA</i>		
E-TJ	7	12.7	I-TP	0	0.0	Dt.T	7	12.7
E-FJ	8	14.5	I-FP	2	3.6	Dt.F	10	18.2
ES-P	0	0.0	IS-J	25	45.5	Dt.S	25	45.5
EN-P	3	5.5	IN-J	10	18.2	Dt.N	13	23.6

Note: N = 55

+ = 1% of N