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Exploring the Marcan account of the Baptism of Jesus through psychological type lenses:

An empirical study within a Black-led Black-majority Pentecostal church

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Abstract

This study explores the effect of psychological type preferences on the interpretation of scripture among members of a Black-led Black-majority Pentecostal church in a multi-cultural city in the Midlands of England. The passage of scripture studied, the Marcan account of the baptism of Jesus, is rich in Pentecostal imagery. The data demonstrate that, while particular themes and nuances of the Pentecostal tradition are clearly voiced in the interpretation, the way in which sensing types and intuitive types approached the interpretation of Mark 1: 4-9 are distinctively different. The sensing types paid clear attention to the details of the text, while the intuitive types gave greater emphasis to the ideas and connections sparked by the narrative. These findings extend the validity of the psychologically-informed reader perspective approach to biblical hermeneutics pioneered by the SIFT method into the field of Pentecostal hermeneutics.

Keywords: Pentecostal hermeneutics, reader perspective, psychological type, SIFT, empirical theology

Introduction

The SIFT method of biblical hermeneutics, as documented by Francis and Village (2008), has its roots in the reader perspective approach to biblical interpretation. Although the reader perspective approach was initially shaped by sociological categories like power and oppression within the field of liberation readings (see Botta & Andiñach, 2009), race and ethnicity within the field of black readings (see Brown, 2014), and sex and gender in the field of feminist readings (see Schottroff & Wacker, 2012), the SIFT method was shaped by psychological perspectives, drawing on psychological type theory. The SIFT method of biblical hermeneutics, rooted in the reader perspective approach, is of particular significance because it identifies distinctive patterns of biblical interpretation shaped by the readers' individual psychological characteristics. The theory is that these psychological characteristics of the reader permeate across different sociologically shaped contexts and across different theologically shaped contexts. The research evidence to support such theory has been derived from studies conducted within churches ainy uninfluenced by the Pentecostal tradition and the Charismatic movement. The aim of the present study is to explore this theory among members of a Black-led Black-majority Pentecostal church.

Psychological type theory has its roots in the model of the human psyche proposed by Jung (1971) and as developed and refined by a family of psychological type measures, including the Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey & Bates, 1978), the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & McCaulley, 1985) and the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005). At its core, Jung's model of the human psyche distinguishes between two psychological processes styled the perceiving process and the judging process. According to Jung's definitions, the perceiving process is the irrational process. It is involved in perceiving the environment but not in forming evaluations. The judging process is the rational process. It is concerned with making judgements or forming evaluations. According to Jung, each of

these two processes is expressed through two contrasting functions. The perceiving process is expressed through the two functions of sensing and intuition: sensing starts with the details and the facts, while intuition starts with the ideas and the theory. The judging process is expressed through the two functions of thinking and feeling: thinking prioritises the head and logic, while feeling prioritises the heart and values.

Shaping hermeneutical theory

The relevance of psychological type theory for biblical hermeneutics was first given serious voice by Stiefel (1992). Quite independently, in developing the SIFT approach, Francis (1997) set out to explore a set of passages from Mark's Gospel by addressing the four functions of sensing, intuition, feeling and thinking to each passage in turn. Then Francis and Atkins (2000, 2001, 2002) applied a more rigorous test to the application of this approach by addressing it to the principal Sunday Gospel readings proposed by the three-year cycle of the Revised Common Lectionary. Subsequently, Francis and Village (2008) located the approach more systematically within the broader fields of hermeneutical theory and the theology and psychology of individual differences.

In the SIFT method the first step addresses the sensing perspective. It is this perspective that focuses on the passage of scripture itself, giving attention to the details of a passage, and possibly drawing on the insights of the historical methods of biblical scholarship. The sensing questions ask, 'How does this passage speak to the sensing function? What are the facts and details? What is there to see, to hear, to touch, to smell, and to taste?'

The second step addresses the intuitive perspective. It is this perspective that relates a passage of scripture to wider issues and concerns. The intuitive questions ask, 'How does this passage speak to the intuitive function? What is there to speak to the imagination, to forge links with current situations, to illuminate issues in our lives?'

The third step addresses the feeling perspective. It is this perspective that examines the human interest in the passage of scripture and learns the lessons of God for compassionate and harmonious living. The feeling questions ask, 'How does this passage speak to the feeling function? What is there to speak about the relationships between people, about fundamental human values, and about what it is to be truly human?'

The fourth step addresses the thinking perspective. It is this perspective that examines the theological interest in the passage of scripture and that reflects critically and rationally on issues of principle. The thinking questions ask, 'How does this passage speak to the thinking function? What is there to speak to the mind, to challenge us on issues of justice and truth, and to provoke profound theological thinking?'

Testing hermeneutical theory

Sound dialogue with the social sciences brings to the field of biblical hermeneutics not only a range of theories grounded in sociological or psychological observation, but also a sense of responsibility (or obligation) to test those theories with empirical science, drawing on recognised quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Both methods have been set to work in recent empirical studies designed to test the application of psychological type theory proposed by the SIFT approach. The present study builds on and develops the qualitative approach.

The qualitative approach to test the application of psychological type theory to biblical hermeneutics, as proposed by the SIFT method, has now been applied in a series of independent but related studies. Each of these studies has focused on specific passages of scripture and invited participants to work together in groups that have drawn together individuals of similar psychological type preferences. In turn these studies have explored reader responses to the following passages from the Gospels: the feeding of the five thousand reported in Mark 6: 34-44 (Francis, 2010); the resurrection narratives reported in Mark 16: 1-

8 and Matthew 28: 1-15 (Francis & Jones, 2011); the cleansing of the Temple and the incident of the fig tree reported in Mark 11: 11-21 (Francis, 2012a; Francis & ap Siôn, 2016b); the Johannine feeding narrative reported in John 6: 4-22 (Francis, 2012b); the narrative of separating sheep from goats reported in Matthew 25: 31-46 (Francis & Smith, 2012); the birth narratives reported in Matthew 2: 13-20 and Luke 2: 8-16 (Francis & Smith, 2013); two narratives concerning John the Baptist reported in Mark 1: 2-8 and Luke 3: 2b-20 (Francis, 2013; Francis & Smith, 2014); the Johannine feeding narrative reported in John 6: 5-15 (Francis & Jones, 2014); two passages from Mark exploring different aspects of discipleship reported in Mark 6: 7-14 and Mark 6: 33-41 (Francis & Jones, 2015a); the foot washing account reported in John 13: 2b-15 (Francis, 2015); two healing narratives reported in Mark 2: 1-12 and Mark 10: 46-52 (Francis & Jones, 2015b); the narrative of blind Bartimaeus reported in Mark 10: 46-52 (Smith & Francis, 2016), the Road to Emmaus narrative reported in Luke 24: 13-35 (Francis & ap Siôn, 2016a; Francis & Smith, 2017), the call of the first disciples as recorded in Luke 5: 1-7 (Francis & ap Siôn, 2017), the missionary journey of the disciples in Mark 6: 6b-17 (Francis, Smith, & Francis-Dehqani, 2017), and the Matthean pericopes on Pilate and Judas in Matthew 27: 3-10, 19-25 (Francis & Ross, 2018). More recently this research tradition has also been applied to the Psalms: Psalm 1 (Francis, McKenna, & Sahin, 2018; Francis & Smith, 2018) and Psalm 139 by Francis, Smith, and Corio (2018). The SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics has also been developed in Poland by Chaim (2013, 2014, 2015).

Research question

The research tradition designed to test and to explore the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics has been largely established within an Anglican and broadly liturgically-shaped ecclesiology. The aim of the present study is to extend this research tradition into a church shaped by African Pentecostalism. Within this environment it is anticipated that Pentecostal

themes may nuance the reading of scripture and that there may be greater caution exercised in the free interpretation of text. Such an environment may provide a good test of the thesis that the psychological type preferences of the reader shape the way in which text is read and the way in which the revelation of God is construed. The Marcan narrative of the Baptism of Jesus has been chosen for this exercise in light of explicit reference to ‘baptism with the Holy Spirit’.

Method

Procedure

As part of the education programme organised for the active members of a Black-led Black-majority Pentecostal church in a multicultural city in the Midlands of England, a Saturday School met on two Saturdays to explore the Marcan account of the Baptism of Jesus through the lenses of psychological type theory. On the first Saturday members of the group explored Mark 1: 4-9 through the lenses of sensing and intuition. On the second Saturday members of the group explored Mark 1: 9-13 through the lenses of thinking and feeling.

Measure

Psychological type was assessed by the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005). This instrument proposes 40 forced-choice items to distinguish between the two orientations (introversion and extraversion), the two perceiving functions (sensing and intuition), the two judging functions (thinking and feeling), and the two attitudes (judging and perceiving).

Week one: The perceiving functions

Participants

The 18 participants were divided into four groups: strong sensing types (5), strong intuitive types (5), and two groups of those who displayed less strong preferences. Mark 1: 4-

9 was printed out, together with the task, ‘What do you see in this passage and what sparks your imagination?’. The four groups withdrew to different rooms and worked independently.

Analysis

One of the authors joined the group of strong sensing types and another author joined the group of strong intuitive types as non-participant observers. The observers noted carefully the conversations within the group and checked their account and interpretation with the participants. Only data from these two groups of strong sensing types and strong intuitive types are reported.

Results

Sensing types

The participants in the group of sensing types had been listening carefully to the instructions. They settled down to the task, invited someone to read the passage slowly and reflectively, and identified a willing participant to feedback to the plenary session. The group then progressed through the passage in a fairly systematic way, identifying matters that seemed clear in the passage and raising questions about matters that required further investigations or more information.

Sensing spotted the account of *John* in the wilderness, but wanted to find out more. Sensing wanted to find out who first saw John there, and how they got the news around to draw others to that place? Had John started his preaching before people arrived, and did his preaching attract them? Was John known as ‘the baptiser’ before he moved out into the wilderness? There is a lot to investigate.

Sensing spotted the *wilderness*, but wanted to find out more about that wilderness. A wilderness is a dry place, a hard place. It is a place in which people get lost. It is a place of sin and darkness. But a wilderness is also a spiritual place. It is a place in which God can be

found. So what was John (and then Jesus) doing in the wilderness? There is a lot to investigate.

Sensing spotted the *people*, crowds of people, people who came from Jerusalem and from the Judean countryside. But a wilderness is not a natural place for people to go. It is not normal. Did they go there because they had already heard about what John was doing? But how did they find out about John? There is a lot to investigate.

Sensing spotted the *baptising* going on. People were being baptised by John in the River Jordan. They were confessing their sins. But we do not know about what motivated them. We do not know what John asked of them. Did they need to confess their sins before John baptised them? Did they confess to John in private or make a public confession? There is a lot to investigate.

Sensing spotted John's *distinctive clothing*. John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist. What was John saying about himself by his way of dressing? John's whole presentation was peculiar to his calling. John did not mind the things of society. He was not conformed to the world. He set himself apart. Was he conscious of imitating Elijah from the Old Testament? There is a lot to investigate.

Sensing spotted the way John spoke about *Jesus*. He was not willing to untie his shoes. That is a powerful statement. Surely a slave would be expected to do that. Why was John so unwilling? There is a lot to investigate.

Sensing spotted how John *recognised* Jesus. Was he expecting Jesus to turn up in the crowd? Was he there waiting for Jesus to appear? John clearly knew who the Lord is. There is a lot to investigate.

Sensing spotted John's reference to the *Holy Spirit*. While John baptised with water, Jesus baptised with the Holy Spirit. What does John mean by baptism with the Holy Spirit? Is baptism with the Holy Spirit more important? How does the Holy Spirit fit in? The Holy

Spirit touches the hearts of the people. Baptism with the Holy Spirit is about a new way, about a moving on, about living in a different way. The Holy Spirit was involved in the people hearing John's message, accepting his call to repentance, and then confessing their sins. There is a lot to investigate.

For Pentecostal believers who preferred sensing, mention of the Holy Spirit established connection with the roots of their tradition. They felt secure in the language that they recognised. They reaffirmed that John's whole ministry was the work of the Holy Spirit. John knew who the Holy Spirit was for him. Here is certainty that requires no further investigation.

Reflecting on the experience of working together, this group of Pentecostal sensing types recognised that a lot had been explored, and a lot of questions had been raised, but also that a lot of questions had been left unanswered. The experience had been interesting, but more answers would have been really appreciated.

Intuitive types

The participants in the group of intuitive types had not been listening carefully to the instructions. Instead of beginning, as instructed, by inviting someone to read the passage aloud, one member of the group quickly identified the task of real interest to be considering what sparked the imagination, and another member agreed to give feedback in the plenary session. The next 45 minutes were taken up by energetic conversation in which ideas flowed in no particular order.

Imagination was sparked by the notion of unworthiness. John said that he was not worthy even to untie Jesus' shoes. So how did he feel that he was worthy to baptise Jesus? This sparked reflection on how we are unworthy to be called by God to do great things for God. Yet God calls the unworthy and empowers them.

Imagination was sparked by John's bizarre manner of dress. He was clothed with camel's hair and had a leather belt around his waist. How did he really expect people to take him seriously? Would not others see him as a crank? This sparked reflection on a local character, a tramp known as 'the mirror man', who walked the streets, holding up and gazing into reflections in a mirror. Yet God may call people whom others see as cranks, to do God's work.

Imagination was sparked by the wilderness. Why did John decide to go into the wilderness? Was it his idea, or was it pre-ordained by God that John would be set apart from the city and town? In what ways did the wilderness make John's job easier, or more difficult? Perhaps living in the wilderness, like his crazy diet and manner of dress, just reinforced the image of a crank? This sparked a conversation about how Christians can be belittled by others if they fail to conform to the social norms.

The image of the wilderness is a rich image. Imagination was sparked by the wilderness in a completely new direction. The wilderness can be something psychological rather than physical. There are times when we are pushed into the wilderness by worry, by pain, by loss of faith. God sometimes gets our attention by putting us into the wilderness.

Imagination was sparked for the third time by the wilderness. Who was it who went out into the wilderness to see John: were they women, men, children, poor people, influential people? And why did they go? Sometimes God seems to push us out of our comfort zone and into the wilderness to meet with God and to hear what God is saying to us. It is important to leave our comfort zone and to risk going into the wilderness.

Imagination was sparked by the call to repentance and by the confession of sins. The people were baptised by John, confessing their sins. But it is not clear to whom they were confessing their sins, to John, to Jesus, or the crowd? Was baptism conditional on confessing sins? Or did confession come as the consequence of the new life given in baptism?

Imagination was sparked by John's prophetic proclamation. John proclaims with confidence that coming after him is someone more powerful than him. John proclaims with confidence that the coming one will baptise with the Holy Spirit. Where did that confidence come from? Had someone told him? Had God directly revealed it to him? And why should people believe him?

Imagination was sparked by John's obedience to God. John was seen as someone who put God's call before his own personal interest and personal wellbeing. John called people to repentance and risked unpopularity. Eventually John was a martyr for his obedience to God. We too are called to carry the costs of obedience. This sparked the reflection that when God calls you, you have no choice; you must accept the cost. Yet when God calls, God remains there with you supporting you.

Imagination was sparked by the idea that Jesus had walked from Nazareth of Galilee to meet John in the wilderness. Here was real effort, with real commitment, for a real purpose. This sparked reflection on the effort and cost people may associate with baptism today.

Reflecting on the experience of working together, the group of Pentecostal intuitive types recognised that the 45 minutes had passed very quickly, that everyone had been engaged in the conversation and that everyone's views had been listened to with interest and with respect. The experience had been energising and rewarding.

Week two: The judging functions

Participants

The 18 participants were divided into three groups: strong thinking types (6), strong feeling types (6), and one group of those who displayed less strong preferences. Mark 1: 9-13 was printed out, together with the task 'What issues in this passage touch your heart and what

issues stretch your mind?'. The three groups withdrew to different rooms and worked independently.

Analysis

One of the authors joined the group of strong thinking types and another author joined the group of strong feeling types as non-participant observers. The observers noted carefully the conversations within the group and checked their account and interpretation with the participants. Only data from these two groups of strong thinking types and strong feeling types are reported.

Results

Feeling types

For the feeling types their hearts were touched by the voice from heaven, 'You are my son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased'. It was good for Jesus to feel that affirmation, to feel that he is loved. It is good for us, too, to feel that God loves us.

For the feeling types their hearts were touched by knowing that Jesus' baptism was followed by a period of temptation by Satan. When we become Christians and are baptised in the Spirit, Satan attacks us in the same way. It is good for us to know that Jesus experienced this as well.

For the feeling types their hearts were touched by knowing that, when Jesus was being tempted by Satan, he was not there in the wilderness alone. The angels waited on him. It is good for us to know that when we are tempted we are not alone. The angels are there with us. For the feeling types their hearts were touched by the way in which, when Jesus came out of the water, the heavens were opened. This picture really had a huge impact on them: it blew them away. This was supernatural. This was God in action. But this is how it feels when God's love comes over you when you are baptised, and when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.

For the feeling types their hearts were touched by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came *like* a dove. The Holy Spirit is not a dove, but the dove signifies the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is all one person with God and Jesus. It is good to feel that the Holy Spirit guides us.

For the feeling types, their hearts were touched by how only Jesus heard the voice, only Jesus saw the dove. The voice and the dove were there specially for him as an individual. It is good to feel that God speaks to us individually.

For the feeling types, their hearts were touched by the very fact that Jesus came to John to be baptised. This goes to show Jesus' humility. Jesus did not need to be baptised. Jesus did that as an example. Jesus did that in obedience to God to fulfil the scriptures. Jesus' baptism set him up as a teacher, leader, healer. It is good to feel that our baptism sets us up to do God's work as preacher, healer, leader.

At this point one member of the group drew attention to the second question raised by the exercise: 'What stretches your mind?'. For some reason this question just did not seem as real or as pressing as the question concerning what touched their hearts. For the group of feeling types entry into the passage came through the heart rather than through the head, and as a consequence this second question remained largely unaddressed.

Thinking types

The participants in the group of thinking types decided to begin their session with a period of silence while individually they read the passage, reflected on it, and wrote their own notes about what touched their hearts and stretched their minds. When conversation began it began with sharp analysis. There was a lot in this passage to stretch the mind.

The mind was stretched by the statement that Jesus saw the heavens torn apart. This is dramatic language and suggests something very disruptive. But the text clearly says that *Jesus* saw it. Did no one else see it as well? Equally dramatic Jesus saw the spirit descending

like a dove on him. But did no one else see it? Was Jesus there all alone, or was there a crowd of people there who saw nothing?

The mind was stretched by the statement that Jesus heard a voice from heaven. The voice speaks directly to Jesus, 'You are my son'. Again, did no one else hear that voice? Was the voice real, or was the voice an idea playing in Jesus' mind?

The mind was stretched by the statement that the voice of God called Jesus 'the Beloved'. What does beloved mean? And why was that word chosen?

The mind was stretched by the statement that the Spirit immediately drove Jesus into the wilderness. Now why would the Spirit want to do that? The Spirit had just affirmed Jesus in baptism and now the Spirit drives him out into the wilderness. If God was pleased with Jesus, why treat him like this?

The mind was stretched by the statement that the Spirit drove Jesus out to be tempted by Satan. Why would the Spirit want to do that? There is a lot to think about in this narrative. Was Jesus set up to be tempted by Satan, or was this an accident?

The mind was stretched by the statement that Jesus was with the wild beasts and the angels waited on him. What were the wild beasts doing there? What were the angels doing there? Were the wild beasts with Satan, and the angels with Jesus? The wild beasts and the angels really puzzled one member of the group. He had not noticed them in the Bible before. Now he said, 'I need to think more about this. I want to understand more'. And what were these wild beasts, lions and donkeys with horns? And in what ways did the angels wait on Jesus? There is a lot to think about here.

The mind was stretched by the image of the three persons of the Trinity being there at the baptism of Jesus. Jesus the Son was there, God the Father was there saying, 'You are my son', and God the Holy Spirit was there in the form of the dove.

The mind was stretched by the thought that the Spirit descended on Jesus. Before his baptism did Jesus have the Spirit?

At this point one of the group recognised that all the conversation and energy had focused on what stretched the mind. But what about the other question concerning what touches the heart? ‘Nothing touched my heart’, was the first response given. The second response was more thoughtful and analytic. ‘The issue that touches my heart is how Jesus was affirmed. I recognise affirmation in God saying that he was well pleased with Jesus’. And with that recognition of affirmation the group of thinking types thought they had concluded their task of engaging with the passage through the feeling function.

Conclusion

The present study was rooted in a research tradition shaped by the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics and liturgical preaching, as illustrated by the sequence of independent but related studies reviewed in the introduction. These studies have supported the thesis advanced by Francis and Village (2008) that biblical interpretation reflects the psychological profile of the reader (and of the preacher). The theoretical basis for the SIFT analysis is grounded in Jungian psychological type theory (Jung, 1971) that distinguishes between two core psychological processes (one concerned with perceiving and the other concerned with evaluating or judging) and that distinguishes between two functions expressing each process: sensing and intuition as expressing distinctive ways of perceiving, and thinking and feeling as expressing distinctive ways of evaluating or judging.

By designing hermeneutical communities that separate participants on the basis of their preferred perceiving function, groups of sensing types are set free to work with their sensing preference unfettered by intuitive types, while groups of intuitive types are set free to work with their intuitive preference unfettered by sensing types. In this context sensing types excel at examining the content and the context of scripture, focusing on the details and on the

factual background, while intuitive types excel at spotting the connections between the text and their wider experience, seeking insights into the future. Similarly, by designing hermeneutical communities that separate participants on the basis of their preferred judging function, groups of feeling types are set free to work with their feeling preference unfettered by thinking types, while groups of thinking types are set free to work with their thinking preference unfettered by feeling types. In this context, feeling types excel at identifying with the human narrative and with the personal and interpersonal values at the heart of the scriptures, while thinking types excel at identifying the problematic and theological issues at the heart of the scriptures. Behind the text feeling types are more likely to encounter the God of mercy while thinking types are more likely to encounter the God of justice.

The problem with the research tradition exemplified by the earlier series of independent but related studies documented in the introduction to this paper is that the research tradition has been largely established within an Anglican and broadly liturgically-shaped ecclesiology. The aim of the present study was to extend this research tradition into a church shaped by African Pentecostalism. Within that environment it was anticipated that a different church tradition and different understanding of the authority of scripture may exert a stronger influence over the reader (and preacher) and consequently shape a reading of scripture less subject to the psychological preferences of the reader. This hypothesis was not, however, borne out by the data. Here within the African Pentecostal hermeneutical community the thesis advanced by the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics was fully supported.

The account of the hermeneutical community of Pentecostal sensing types was characterised by responses that really spotted the details in the passage and that were fully concerned to get to the bottom of these details. They explored the details about John the Baptist, about the wilderness, about the people, about the actions of baptism, about John's

distinctive clothing, about the way John spoke to Jesus, about how John recognised Jesus. The hermeneutical community of Pentecostal sensing types was particularly concerned to explore the presence of the Holy Spirit in the baptism of Jesus and to explore what John means by baptism with the Holy Spirit.

The account of the hermeneutical community of Pentecostal intuitive types was characterised by imaginative exploration of the big themes raised by the passage, and by how these big themes connected with wider aspects of their experience. They connected John's expression of unworthiness with their own unworthiness to be called by God. They connected John's bizarre manner of dress with well-known 'cranks' within their own community. They connected John's distinctive life style in the wilderness with the pressures to conform within their own society. They connected John's experience of the wilderness with their psychological experience of 'wilderness'. They explored how God pushes them out of their comfort zone into the wilderness experience. The hermeneutical community of Pentecostal intuitive types connected John's call to repentance with their own understanding of repentance preceding baptism. They connected John's obedience to God and his eventual martyrdom (not part of the current narrative) with the costs all Christians are called to carry. Their Pentecostal faith reminded them that when God calls, God remains constant to support them.

The account of the hermeneutical community of Pentecostal feeling types was characterised by concern with the human experience and values underpinning the narrative. They gave attention to the personal affirmation that Jesus experienced when the voice proclaimed 'You are my son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased'. They gave attention to the personal pressure that Jesus experienced when he was exposed to the attacks of Satan in the wilderness. They gave attention to the depth of humility that Jesus displayed when he came to John for baptism. The hermeneutical community of Pentecostal feeling types gave

special attention to Jesus' experience of encountering the Holy Spirit who came *like* a dove. Their hearts were touched by how only Jesus heard the voice, only Jesus saw the dove. Their hearts were touched by how good it is to feel that God speaks to them personally and individually.

The account of the hermeneutical community of Pentecostal thinking types was characterised by concerns with the complex issues raised by the narrative and by the sharp analysis needed to interrogate these issues. They analysed the statement that Jesus saw the heavens torn apart. They analysed the nature of the voice that spoke from heaven and the implications of Jesus only hearing that voice. They analysed the significance of the words spoken by the voice, giving particular attention to the choice of the term 'beloved'. They analysed the paradox posed by God both affirming Jesus and allowing Jesus to be exposed to Satan in that way. They analysed the problematic presence of the wild animals and the angels alongside Jesus in the wilderness. The hermeneutical community of Pentecostal thinking types was particularly concerned to analyse the Trinitarian teaching within the narrative when the Father's voice, and the Holy Spirit's presence were focused on the Son.

The present study set out to test the theory underpinning the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics (set within the reader-perspective tradition) for the first time among an African Pentecostal community. The evidence from this initial study supports the underpinning theory and also demonstrates how the encounter between the Pentecostal community and the Word of God in scripture can be enriched by engaging with distinctive hermeneutical communities that liberate the four distinctive voices of sensing, intuition, feeling, and thinking. Further studies structured in similar ways within African Pentecostal communities, but exploring other passages of scripture, are now needed to build on and to extend from the foundations established by the present study.

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Appendix**The Baptism of Jesus: part one****Mark 1: 4-9**

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

What do you see in this passage and what sparks your imagination?

Mark 1: 9-13**The Baptism of Jesus**

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

What issues in this passage touch your heart and stretch your mind?