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Psychological type and hopes for the post-pandemic Church:

An enquiry among lay Anglicans

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Together they designed the Coronavirus, Church & You Survey and the Covid-19 & Church-21 Survey

https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/coronavirus-church-and-you/
Setting the scene

In an earlier study, Francis and Village (2021) examined the way in which psychological type preferences impacted the responses of lay Anglicans to Covid-19. Their data were derived from the Coronavirus, Church & You Survey that went live during the first lockdown and ran from 8 May until 23 July 2020. That survey included the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005) and was used to test two hypotheses concerning the association between psychological type and personal wellbeing, and the association between psychological type and the evaluation of change during lockdown.

In terms of personal wellbeing during lockdown the findings from this earlier study found that overall extraverts coped better than introverts, that sensing types coped better than intuitive types, and that feeling types coped better than thinking types.

In terms of the evaluation of change, the findings from this earlier study found that the judging process (thinking and feeling) was more important than either the perceiving process (sensing and intuition) or the orientations (introversion and extraversion). Feeling types were significantly more accepting of and positive toward the way in which the Church had responded to the pandemic.

Taking a second look

When the Coronavirus, Church & You Survey went live in May 2020, there was still a naïve hope that one sharp lockdown may solve the problem. When the third lockdown came into play in January 2021, we decided that the time was right to launch a second survey. The Covid-19 & Church-21 Survey was live between 22 January and 23 July 2021 and once again included the Francis Psychological Type Scales.

The focus of this second survey was different from the first survey. This time we were wanting to take a longer-term view of the impact of the pandemic on the Church and on the implications for the post-pandemic Church. The second survey also had a wider remit than the first survey. This time the reach was extended to the Catholic Church in Britain and Ireland, and to the Anglican Church in Canada and the USA.

From this wide source of data the present analyses are still focusing on the experience of lay Anglicans to keep the findings consistent with those reported by Francis and Village (2021).

Meeting the participants

There were 1,182 lay participants (who identified with the Church of England, lived in England, and had not offered ministry during the pandemic) who completed the relevant parts of the survey used in the analysis. These 1,182 participants comprised 38% male and 62% female (compared with 34% male and 66%
female in the first survey); 6% were under the age of 40, 9% in their 40s, 16% in their 50s, 32% in their 60s, 31% in their 70s, and 6% were aged 80 or over.

In terms of psychological type profile, there were more introverts (66%) than extraverts (34%), more sensing types (75%) than intuitive types (25%), more judging types (91%) than perceiving types (9%), and a closer balance between feeling (47%) and thinking (53%).

**Analysis**

The Covid-19 & Church-21 Survey assessed participant’s views on the post-pandemic Church by sets of Likert-type items. Each item was rated on a five-point scale: agree strongly (5), agree (4), not certain (3), disagree (2), and disagree strongly (1). In the following analyses the agree strongly and agree responses were combined into one category (agreed), while the not certain, disagree, and disagree strongly responses were combined into one category (not agreed). Differences in responses according to the binary type preferences were computed within 2x2 contingency table and tests for statistical significance by chi square. All reported differences reached at least the five percent level of probability.

**Introversion and extraversion**

Psychological type theory conceptualises extraverts as people who are energised by the outer world, and for whom contact with others is important. By way of contrast, introverts are conceptualised as people who are energised by their own inner world, and for whom solitude is important. This conceptualisation gives rise to the hypothesis that extraverts may have missed attendance at church and may have found online religion less satisfactory.

This hypothesis was supported by the different levels of enthusiasm reported by extraverts and introverts for investing in their local church post-pandemic. For example, 79% of extraverts maintained that we should do everything we can to keep church buildings open, compared with 72% of introverts. Three quarters of extraverts (74%) said that they would get back to their previous pattern of churchgoing if they can, compared with 68% of introverts; and 68% of extraverts agreed that they would cherish their local church more than they used to, compared with 59% of introverts. Two fifths of extraverts (39%) said that they would give more time to serving their local church than they used to, compared with 31% of introverts.

**Sensing and intuition**

Psychological type theory conceptualises sensing types as people who prefer to stay with the way of doing things with which they are familiar. By way of contrast intuitive types are conceptualised as people who
enjoy exploring new possibilities and who are attracted to extending their repertoire. This conceptualisation gives rise to the hypothesis that intuitive types may have grasped more readily the transition to online worship and to virtual church.

This hypothesis was supported by the different levels of support given by intuitive types and sensing types for online worship and virtual church. For example, 32% of intuitive types agreed that we should put our effort into developing virtual churches, compared with 24% of sensing types. A quarter of intuitive types (24%) said that they would meet people online for daily offices or prayer, compared with 18% of sensing types. The corollary is that while 10% of sensing types reported that they would go to services in church less often than they used to, the proportion rose to 18% among intuitive types. Similarly, while 72% of sensing types affirmed that they would get back to their previous worship patterns if they could, the proportion dropped to 65% of intuitive types.

**Thinking and feeling**

Psychological type theory conceptualises thinking types as people who make their judgements on the basis of objective logical analysis. They tend to be toughminded and critical. By way of contrast, feeling types are conceptualised as people who make their judgements on the basis of subjective personal values and interpersonal relationships. They tend to be warmhearted and affirming. This conceptualisation gives rise to the hypothesis that thinking types may not only take a more critical stance on the Church’s responses to the pandemic, as documented by Francis and Village (2021), but may also have a less optimistic view of the post-pandemic Church.

This hypothesis was supported by the different views on the future endorsed by thinking types and feeling types. For example, while 40% of feeling types considered that their church will emerge stronger than it was before, the proportion fell to 29% of thinking types. Similarly, while 32% of feeling types considered that new people will join the Church as a result of their online services, the proportion fell to 26% of thinking types.

Significant differences were also found between thinking types and feeling types in respect of the use made of social media by the Church and in respect of God’s activity during the pandemic. In the case of social media, while 46% of feeling types rated social media as a great evangelistic tool, the proportion fell to 38% of thinking types. While 51% of feeling types rated social media as a great pastoral tool, the proportion fell to 43% of thinking types.
In the case of God’s activity during the pandemic, thinking types displayed lower levels of confidence. While 67% of feeling types agreed that God has always been in control during the pandemic, the proportion fell to 59% of thinking types. While 55% of feeling types agreed that God would save us from the pandemic through science, the proportion fell to 47% of thinking types.

**Conclusion**

The present study has tested the thesis that psychological type theory can predict individual differences in the ways in which lay Anglicans express their hopes for the post-pandemic church. It is now worth locating these differences alongside what is known about the relative prevalence of different types within Anglican congregations as demonstrated by Francis, Robbins, and Craig (2011) and Francis, Wright, and Robbins (2016).

First, in terms of the orientations, extraverts displayed greater commitment than introverts to building back local churches. Extraverts account for just under half of Anglican churchgoers (46%).

Second, in terms of the perceiving process, intuitive types displayed greater commitment than sensing types to maintaining online services and virtual church. Intuitive types account for just one fifth of Anglican churchgoers (20%).

Third, in terms of the judging process, feeling types displayed stronger hope than judging types for the post-pandemic future of the Church. Feeling types account for three fifths of Anglican churchgoers (60%).

Now that, some two years after the first lockdown, the omicron variant is taking hold of the nation, the post-pandemic future continues to remain elusive. Meanwhile, the time seems right for a third survey.
References


