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Psychological type and attitude toward Celtic Christianity among committed churchgoers in the United Kingdom: an empirical study

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ABSTRACT

This paper takes the burgeoning interest in Celtic Christianity as a key example of the way in which churches may be responding to the changing spiritual and religious landscape in the United Kingdom today and examines the power of psychological type theory to account for variation in the attitude of committed churchgoers to this innovation. Data provided by a sample of 248 Anglican clergy and lay church officers (who completed the Francis Psychological Type Scales together with the Attitude toward Celtic Christianity Scale) demonstrated that intuitive types, feeling types, and perceiving types reported a more positive attitude toward Celtic Christianity than sensing types, thinking types, and judging types. These findings are interpreted to analyse the appeal of Celtic Christianity and to suggest why some committed churchgoers may find this innovation less attractive.

INTRODUCTION

The religious and spiritual landscape of the United Kingdom appears to be undergoing considerable change at the beginning of the twenty-first century with growing self-confidence among non-Christian world faiths, declining church attendance, and burgeoning interest in alternative spiritualities (Hay and Hunt; Heelas and Woodhead). Within this wider environment the Christian churches seem to have accelerated their interest in finding ‘fresh expressions’ of church (Church of England) and to have recognised the value of rooting some established expressions of church within fresh or distinctive expressions of spirituality. The interest in rediscovering the distinctive emphases of Celtic Christianity already re-emerging in the 1980s (see for example, Adam, *Glory, Deer, Tides, Power, Rhythm, Flame*; Allchin; Bradley) is one of the better known examples of this trend.

It is not the intention of the present paper to debate the authenticity of Celtic Christianity, or even to evaluate conflicting definitions of what counts as Celtic Christianity. What is clear is that over recent decades there has developed an interest in Celtic Christianity which has been evidenced by the proliferation of Celtic Christian music, books, pilgrimages, prayers, and workshops. Celtic Christianity is often presented as an alternative to ‘modern’ Christianity as it is seen to place emphasis on currently neglected issues, such as the importance of ecology and consideration for God’s creation, the role of women in the Church, care of one’s neighbour, the value of holy places, the importance of reflection and discipline, and the need for community in a world in which people increasingly live isolated lives. There is clearly considerable support for the burgeoning movement of Celtic Christianity in some sections of the churches in the United Kingdom.

What is equally clear is that there is considerable doubt about whether the notion of Celtic

Christianity is bringing any real benefit to church life. For example, Bradley (189) argues that, ‘Romantic nostalgia and wishful thinking remain key elements in the contemporary revival, with new concerns such as feminism and ecological awareness being projected onto the Celtic Church.’ Likewise, the popularisation of Celtic Christianity may be seen as a commercially profitable marketing strategy as according to Bradley (189), ‘The current movement has its less edifying side in the commercialism that has packaged and marketed Celtic Christianity as a commodity to sell books, compact discs and religious trinkets and to promote the burgeoning heritage and tourist industries’. There is clearly also not insignificant suspicion of Celtic Christianity in some sections of the churches in the United Kingdom.

Taking Celtic Christianity as an example of significant development in contemporary church life, the intention of the present paper is to examine the power of psychological type theory to explain individual differences in the way in which committed churchgoers in the United Kingdom respond to this innovation. Psychological type theory has its roots in the pioneering work of Carl Jung and has been further developed and popularised through a series of psychological assessment tools, including the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers, McCaulley, Quenk, and Hammer), the Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey) and the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, Faith and Psychology). This theory maintains that key differences in attitude and behaviour can be explained through understanding the human psyche in terms of four dichotomous indices: the orientations (extraversion or introversion), the perceiving functions (sensing or intuition), the judging functions (thinking or feeling), and the attitudes toward the outer world (judging or perceiving).

The two orientations are concerned with where energy is drawn from and focused. On the

one hand, extraverts (E) are orientated toward the outer world; they are energised by the events and people around them. They enjoy communicating and thrive in stimulating and exciting environments. They tend to focus their attention on what is happening outside themselves. They are usually open people, easy to get to know, and enjoy having many friends. On the other hand, introverts (I) are orientated toward their inner world; they are energised by their inner ideas and concepts. They enjoy solitude, silence, and contemplation, as they tend to focus their attention on what is happening in their inner life. They may prefer to have a small circle of intimate friends rather than many acquaintances.

The two perceiving functions are concerned with the way in which people gather information. On the one hand, sensing types (S) focus on the realities of a situation as perceived by the senses. They tend to focus on specific details, rather than the overall picture. They are concerned with the actual, the real, and the practical and tend to be down to earth and matter of fact. On the other hand, intuitive types (N) focus on the possibilities of a situation, perceiving meanings and relationships. They may feel that perception by the senses is not as valuable as information gained from the unconscious mind as indirect associations and concepts impact on their perception. They focus on the overall picture, rather than on specific facts and data.

The two judging functions are concerned with the criteria which people use to make decisions and judgements. On the one hand, thinking types (T) make judgements based on objective, impersonal logic. They value integrity and justice. They are known for their truthfulness and for their desire for fairness. They consider conforming to principles to be of more importance than cultivating harmony. On the other hand, feeling types (F) make judgements based on subjective, personal values. They value compassion and mercy. They

are known for their tactfulness and for their desire for peace. They are more concerned to promote harmony, than to adhere to abstract principles.

The two attitudes toward the outer world are determined by which of the two sets of functions (that is, perceiving S/N, or judging T/F), is preferred in dealings with the outer world. On the one hand, judging types (J) seek to order, rationalise, and structure their outer world, as they actively judge external stimuli. They enjoy routine and established patterns. They prefer to follow schedules in order to reach an established goal and may make use of lists, timetables, or diaries. They tend to be punctual, organised, and tidy. They prefer to make decisions quickly and to stick to their conclusions once made. On the other hand, perceiving types (P) do not seek to impose order on the outer world, but are more reflective, perceptive, and open, as they passively perceive external stimuli. They have a flexible, open-ended approach to life. They enjoy change and spontaneity. They prefer to leave projects open in order to adapt and improve them. Their behaviour may often seem impulsive and unplanned.

Studies concerned with assessing the relationship between personality and religiosity have investigated correlations between psychological type and preference for different styles of Christian spirituality (Ross, Weiss, and Jackson; Francis and Ross, *The perceiving function and Christian spirituality*), charismatic experience (Francis and Jones, *Personality and charismatic experience*; Jones, Francis, and Craig), conservatism of Christian belief (Francis and Jones, *Personality and Christian belief*), tolerance for religious uncertainty (Francis and Jones, *Psychological type and tolerance*), the quest orientation of religiosity (Francis and Ross, *Personality type and quest orientation*), mystical orientation (Francis and Loudon; Francis, *Psychological type and mystical orientation*), and attitude toward Christianity (Jones

and Francis; Fearn, Francis, and Wilcox; Francis, Robbins, Boxer, Lewis, McGuckin, and McDaid; Francis, Jones, and Craig). These studies support the argument that psychological type theory can account for individual differences in attitude, belief, and behaviour within the Christian context.

Against this background, the present study proposes to explore the extent to which individual differences in attitude toward Celtic Christianity among committed churchgoers in the United Kingdom can be explained by psychological type theory. Specifically four hypotheses are advanced concerning the relationship between attitude toward Celtic Christianity (as currently presented in United Kingdom churches) and each of the dichotomous constructs proposed by psychological type theory. First, it is hypothesised that introvert and extravert churchgoers are likely to hold similar attitudes toward Celtic Christianity because this form of spirituality balances introverted meditation with extraverted engagement. Second, it is hypothesised that intuitive churchgoers are likely to hold a more positive attitude than sensing churchgoers toward Celtic Christianity because this form of spirituality involves local churches undergoing change and formulating new visions. Third, it is hypothesised that feeling churchgoers are likely to hold a more positive attitude than thinking churchgoers toward Celtic Christianity because this form of spirituality is more shaped by the heart than by the head. Fourth, it is hypothesised that perceiving churchgoers are likely to hold a more positive attitude than judging churchgoers toward Celtic Christianity because this form of spirituality encourages a more flexible and spontaneous approach to worship. The first steps, however, involve the development of a measure of attitude toward Celtic Christianity, and the identification of an appropriate sample among whom to test the hypotheses.

In order to find a group of people who were really committed to local church life, the sample

was defined as clergy and key lay officers within the same churches. In order to avoid contamination from denominational or regional differences, the sample was focused entirely on Anglicans within one diocese of the Church of England.

METHOD

Sample

A sample of 248 clergy and lay church officers completed the survey instruments. The sample comprised 123 women and 125 men; 180 of the total sample were involved as lay church officers (for example, churchwarden, secretary to the parochial church council, treasurer), and 68 were involved in ordained ministry. Of the total sample, 6% were in their thirties, 15% were in their forties, 32% were in their fifties, 30% were in their sixties, 13% were in their seventies and 4% were in their eighties. In terms of marital status, 83% were married, 6% were single, 6% were separated or divorced, and 5% were widowed.

Instruments

Attitude toward Celtic Christianity was assessed by a new instrument developed specifically for the present project, the Attitude toward Celtic Christianity Scale (ACCS), a 40-item scale containing both negative and positive items concerned with an affective response to components of Celtic Christianity. The 40 items were selected from a larger pool of items by means of exploratory factor analysis and other correlational analyses. Each item is assessed on a five-point scale (agree strongly, agree, not certain, disagree, disagree strongly).

Psychological type was assessed by the Francis Psychological Type Scales (FPTS: Francis, Faith and Psychology), a self-report, pencil and paper, forced-choice format questionnaire. The FPTS consist of 40 items, each consisting of two pairs of characteristics from which

participants are asked to select the characteristic that they feel best represents their personality: ten items distinguish between extraversion and introversion, ten items distinguish between sensing and intuition, ten items distinguish between thinking and feeling, and ten items distinguish between judging and perceiving.

Data analysis

The scientific literature concerned with the measurement of psychological type has developed a highly distinctive way of presenting type-related data. The conventional format of ‘type tables’ has been employed in the present paper to allow the findings of this study to be located easily alongside other relevant studies in the literature. The data were analysed by the SPSS package, using the correlation, factor, reliability, and t-test routines.

RESULTS

The first step in data analysis concerned the development of a measure of attitude toward Celtic Christianity. The survey instrument included 60 items of an affective and evaluative nature intended to gauge the participants’ response to Celtic Christianity. Exploratory factor analyses and correlational analyses identified 40 items which cohered to produce a homogeneous unidimensional scale, named as the Attitude toward Celtic Christianity Scale (ACCS). The item rest-of-test correlations and the alpha coefficient presented in table 1

- insert table 1 about here -

support the internal consistency reliability of this new instrument. The scale items presented in this table also support the face validity of the instrument.

The second step in data analysis concerned an evaluation of the measure of psychological type. In the current study, the FPTs achieved alpha coefficients of .83 for the EI scale, .76

for the SN scale, .73 for the TF scale, and .79 for the JP scale. Thus, each of the four scales of the FPTS achieved alpha coefficients well in excess of the level deemed satisfactory by Kline.

The third step in data analysis concerned the examination of the distribution of the type frequency of the participants in the study. These data are presented in the conventional

- insert table 2 about here -

format in table 2. Within the current sample it was found that 58% preferred introversion and 42% preferred extraversion, 76% preferred sensing and 24% preferred intuition, 61% preferred feeling and 39% preferred thinking, and 85% preferred judging and 15% preferred perceiving. The most frequently occurring types were found to be ISFJ (20%), ISTJ (20%), and ESFJ (19%). Other studies among clergy (Francis, Payne, and Jones) and congregations (Craig, Francis, Bailey and Robbins; Francis, Duncan, Craig, and Luffman) have also shown preferences for introversion, sensing, feeling, and judging. In this sense, the present sample seems representative of the typical psychological type profile of committed churchgoers (lay and ordained) in the United Kingdom.

The fourth step in data analysis concerned examination of the relationship between psychological type and attitude toward Celtic Christianity. Table 3 presents the mean scale scores of attitude toward Celtic Christianity across the four dichotomous preferences proposed by the measure of psychological type. The significance of the differences between

- insert table 3 about here -

these mean scores was assessed by means of independent samples t-tests. These data demonstrate that: there was no significant difference in attitude toward Celtic Christianity between introverts and extraverts; that intuitives recorded a significantly more positive

attitude than sensors toward Celtic Christianity; that feelers recorded a significantly more positive attitude than thinkers toward Celtic Christianity; and that perceivers recorded a significantly more positive attitude than judgers toward Celtic Christianity. These findings, therefore, support all four hypotheses tested by the present study.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study set out to examine whether psychological type theory could help to explain the diversity of attitude toward the burgeoning movement of Celtic Christianity within churches in the United Kingdom today. Three specific hypotheses were advanced linking a more positive attitude toward Celtic Christianity with preferences for intuition, feeling and perceiving. A fourth hypothesis proposed that attitude toward Celtic Christianity would be unrelated to preferences for introversion or for extraversion. The data supported all four hypotheses, suggesting that there may be considerable power in psychological type theory for understanding individual differences in religiosity. It is now helpful to re-visit the three hypotheses proposing significant differences between groups in light of the new research findings and to examine the implications for developments in contemporary spirituality and church life.

The first hypothesis was that intuitive churchgoers are likely to hold a more positive attitude than sensing churchgoers toward Celtic Christianity because this form of spirituality involves local churches undergoing change and formulating new visions. The data confirmed this prediction, but the connection between Celtic Christianity and the intuitive function may be somewhat more profound. Intuitive types may be drawn to Celtic Christianity due to its emphasis on imaginative symbols and metaphors, the transcendent and ‘other-worldly’, poetic imagination, mystical experience, the concept of spiritual journey, personal renewal, and

sacred places where holiness can be encountered. Moreover, intuitive types may be attracted by the way in which these aspects of Celtic Christianity could provide inspiration for the Church today. It is for similar reasons that sensing types may perceive Celtic Christianity as abstract, ‘wishy-washy’, and not grounded in ‘the real world’. However, greater emphasis on certain aspects of Celtic Christianity, such as practical action and sensory experience, may enable sensing types to find more value in this movement.

The second hypothesis was that feeling churchgoers are likely to hold a more positive attitude than thinking churchgoers toward Celtic Christianity because this form of spirituality is more shaped by the heart than by the head. The data confirmed this prediction, but the connection between Celtic Christianity and the feeling function may be somewhat more profound. Feeling types may be drawn to Celtic Christianity due to its emphasis on community, care for neighbour, the belief that human nature is ultimately good, unity and harmony between humanity and the creation, and spiritual direction based on deep friendship and trust. Moreover, feeling types may be attracted by the way in which these aspects of Celtic Christianity could help to create a more harmonious, loving Church today. It is for similar reasons that thinking types may perceive Celtic Christianity as naive, illogical, and sentimental. Furthermore, thinking types may be suspicious and critical of the discontinuities between modern Celtic Christianity and historic Celtic Christian thought and practice, while feeling types may find such issues unproblematic in light of the support and help Celtic Christianity can provide today. However, greater emphasis on certain aspects of Celtic Christianity, such as discipline, justice, and theological study, may enable thinking types to find more value in this movement.

The third hypothesis was that perceiving churchgoers are likely to hold a more positive

attitude than judging churchgoers toward Celtic Christianity because this form of spirituality encourages a more flexible and spontaneous approach to worship. The data confirmed this prediction, but the connection between Celtic Christianity and the perceiving function may be somewhat more profound. Perceiving types may be drawn to Celtic Christianity due to its emphasis on the need to be open to fresh adventures of God's Spirit. Moreover, perceiving types may be attracted by the way in which Celtic Christianity could help the Church today to explore new ways of being Christian. It is for similar reasons that judging types may perceive Celtic Christianity as a 'passing fad' without lasting value. Furthermore, judging types may present a closed attitude towards 'new' methods of spirituality, while perceiving types are more willing to experiment with fresh approaches to spirituality. However, greater emphasis on certain aspects of Celtic Christianity, such as ritual, routine, and the value of the seasonal cycle, may enable judging types to find more value in this movement.

From the perspective of developments in contemporary spirituality and church life, two aspects of the present findings are of particular importance. According to the new research data, Celtic Christianity has particular attraction for intuitives and for perceivers. It is precisely these two groups who tend to be marginalised both in church congregations and among religious professionals. In the present sample, intuitives were outnumbered by sensors (24% compared with 76%) and perceivers were even more heavily outnumbered by judges (15% compared with 85%). In the study of Anglican congregations in England reported by Francis, Duncan, Craig, and Luffman, intuitives were outnumbered by sensors (28% compared with 72%) and perceivers were outnumbered by judges (32% compared with 68%). In the study of Anglican congregations in Wales reported by Craig, Francis, Bailey, and Robbins, intuitives were outnumbered by sensors (15% compared with 85%) and perceivers were outnumbered by judges (8% compared with 92%). In the study of church

leaders reported by Craig, Francis, and Robbins, intuitives were outnumbered by sensors (30% compared with 70%) and perceivers were outnumbered by judges (21% compared with 79%).

Psychological type theory would suggest that churches shaped by SJ leaders and supported by SJ members would naturally develop and foster an SJ approach to spirituality, with the consequent marginalisation of an NP approach to spirituality. It may be that intuitive types and perceiving types, who seem to be under-represented in the church, could find support for their preferred expression of spirituality within the context of Celtic Christianity. For NP types Celtic Christianity could offer an alternative to the SJ spirituality which is over-represented in the churches. This SJ preference among church leaders and members emphasises a disciplined commitment to structure, detail, tradition, and routine. In contrast, Celtic Christianity can support the NP need for a creative vision of Christianity by emphasising the importance of symbols and mystery in the faith (to meet the needs of intuitive types) and by emphasising the need to break away from existing routines to explore change in Christianity and spontaneity and flexibility in the faith (to meet the needs of perceiving types).

By way of conclusion, the present study has offered some further support for the view that individual responses to the burgeoning movement of Celtic Christianity may be related to differences in psychological type. The main limitation with the study concerns the limited size of the sample and the restriction to Anglican clergy and lay church officers within one diocese of the Church of England. The findings are, however, sufficiently challenging to prompt the replication and development of this research design more widely, since the new interest in Celtic Christianity is likely to continue to have significant impact on the spiritual

and religious landscapes of the United Kingdom.

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Table 1: Reliability analysis: Attitude toward Celtic Christianity (ACCS)

Celtic Christianity makes a positive contribution to the life of the Church	.9587
Celtic Christianity has become important in my own spiritual journey	.7161
Celtic Christianity helps the Church to exercise good pastoral care	.5669
Celtic Christianity speaks with relevance to many concerns of the present age	.6738
Embracing Celtic Christianity is a helpful way forward for the Church	.7523
Celtic Christianity offers a good and Godly way of living	.6978
Examples of the Celtic saints enable the Church to deal with the problems of our world	.4572
Celtic Christianity brings the doctrine of the Church to life	.6414
Insights from Celtic Christianity help me to worship God	.7203
Celtic Christianity distracts the Church from its true purpose*	.6821
Celtic Christianity helps me make sense of spirituality today	.7039
Celtic Christianity helps me make sense of the doctrine of creation	.6372
Celtic Christianity helps the Church to be open to the Holy Spirit	.7188
Celtic Christianity helps me make sense of the doctrine of salvation	.6228
Celtic Christianity helps me make sense of the doctrine of the Trinity	.6865
Celtic Christianity helps me to know who I am as a Christian	.6507
Celtic Christianity will help the Church to grow	.6039
Celtic saints provide the Church with good models	.4271
Celtic Christianity is a passing fad of the new age*	.6136
Celtic Christianity enhances our view of God	.7804
Celtic Christianity enhances the liturgy of the Church	.7282
Celtic Christianity offers valuable resources for worship	.7063
Celtic Christian prayers have no value for today's Church*	.5859
Celtic Christianity offers hope to today's difficult society	.6460
Celtic Christianity distorts the doctrine of salvation*	.5719
Celtic Christianity affirms all people as made in God's image	.6488
Celtic Christianity brings peace and comfort in this stressful world	.6254
Celtic Christianity leads to a wrong view of God*	.7673
Celtic Christianity does not address the problem of suffering*	.5445
Celtic Christianity helps Christians of different backgrounds to love one another	.5264
Celtic Christianity is a form of escapism from the real world*	.6734
Celtic Christianity is useful when thinking about our relationship with nature	.5224
Celtic Christian liturgy is trivial and banal*	.6910
Celtic Christianity has nothing special to tell us about creation*	.6273
Celtic Christianity develops and deepens my prayer life	.7268
Celtic saints are not useful role models*	.4816
Celtic Christianity helps the Church reach out to the world	.6766
I enjoy singing hymns rooted in the Celtic tradition	.6329
Celtic Christianity worships nature rather than God*	.6813
Celtic Christianity contains a great deal of unhealthy superstition*	.6951
Alpha	.9604

* reverse scored

**Table 2. Type Distribution
for committed churchgoers in the United Kingdom
N = 248 + = 1% of N**

The Sixteen Complete Types				Dichotomous Preferences		
ISTJ n = 50 (20.2%) +++++	ISFJ n = 49 (19.8%) +++++	INFJ n = 17 (6.9%) +++++	INTJ n = 10 (4.0%) ++++	E	n = 104	(41.9%)
				I	n = 144	(58.1%)
				S	n = 189	(76.2%)
				N	n = 59	(23.8%)
				T	n = 98	(39.5%)
				F	n = 150	(60.5%)
				J	n = 211	(85.1%)
				P	n = 37	(14.9%)
				Pairs and Temperaments		
ISTP n = 2 (0.8%) +	ISFP n = 9 (3.6%) ++++	INFP n = 5 (2.0%) ++	INTP n = 2 (0.8%) +	IJ	n = 126	(50.8%)
				IP	n = 18	(7.3%)
				EP	n = 19	(7.7%)
				EJ	n = 85	(34.3%)
				ST	n = 77	(31.0%)
				SF	n = 112	(45.2%)
				NF	n = 38	(15.3%)
				NT	n = 21	(8.5%)
ESTP n = 2 (0.8%) +	ESFP n = 6 (2.4%) ++	ENFP n = 9 (3.6%) ++++	ENTP n = 2 (0.8%) +	SJ	n = 170	(68.5%)
				SP	n = 19	(7.7%)
				NP	n = 18	(7.3%)
				NJ	n = 41	(16.5%)
				TJ	n = 90	(36.3%)
				TP	n = 8	(3.2%)
				FP	n = 29	(11.7%)
				FJ	n = 121	(48.8%)
ESTJ n = 23 (9.3%) +++++	ESFJ n = 48 (19.4%) +++++	ENFJ n = 7 (2.8%) +++	ENTJ n = 7 (2.8%) +++	IN	n = 34	(13.7%)
				EN	n = 25	(10.1%)
				IS	n = 110	(44.4%)
				ES	n = 79	(31.9%)
				ET	n = 34	(13.7%)
				EF	n = 70	(28.2%)
				IF	n = 80	(32.3%)
				IT	n = 64	(25.8%)

Jungian Types (E)		Jungian Types (I)		Dominant Types		<i>Leslie J Francis, Charlotte L Craig and Gill Hall</i>		
n	%	n	%	n	%			
E-TJ	30	12.1	I-TP	4	1.6	Dt. T	34	13.7
E-FJ	55	22.2	I-FP	14	5.6	Dt. F	69	27.8
ES-P	8	3.2	IS-J	99	39.9	Dt. S	107	43.1
EN-P	11	4.4	IN-J	27	10.9	Dt. N	38	15.3

Psychological types of clergy and lay church officers

Table 3: T-Test: Attitude toward Celtic Christianity and dichotomous preferences

	<u>Attitude toward Celtic Christianity Scale</u>				
	N	Mean	SD	T	P<
Extraversion	104	148.71	21.87		
Introversion	144	146.44	20.58	0.834	NS
Sensing	189	143.65	20.54		
Intuition	59	159.41	18.39	-5.269	.001
Thinking	98	143.78	20.78		
Feeling	150	149.76	21.07	-2.199	.05
Judging	211	145.90	20.75		
Perceiving	37	155.92	21.45	-2.695	.01