

Original citation:

Walker, David Stuart. (2015) Unsettling the guardian : quest religiosity and psychological type among Anglican churchgoers. *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, 18 (8). pp. 655-663.

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Publisher's statement:

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* on 27 November 2015, available online:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2014.963291>

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Unsettling the Guardian: Quest religiosity and psychological type among Anglican churchgoers.

Abstract

Both psychological type and religious orientation have provided tools for understanding the make-up of church congregations and for examining the extent to which different styles of church services may appeal to distinct congregational profiles; however the relationship between the two instruments is relatively little studied to date. Some 390 individuals who attended a Christmas Carol service in a Church of England cathedral completed both FPTS and the Quest elements of the NIRO scales. Higher Quest scores were found among Intuitives than Sensers, replicating an earlier finding by Ross and Francis (2010). Unlike the earlier study the present survey also identified significantly higher Quest scores for Perceiving rather than Judging types. A further comparison of the combined SJ type with the remainder of the sample showed the former to have lower Quest scores. The findings are discussed and suggestions made for further research.

Introduction

Psychological type theory and the FPTS

Psychological type theory, in the form used in many studies of religious institutions and practices, follows the framework established and operationalised in the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI: Myers & McCauley, 1985). A distinctive feature of this instrument and of others that have followed it is that rather than locate individuals at points along a continuum it seeks to conceptualise the four aspects of the human psyche (the perceiving and judging processes, the orientations and attitudes) by way of polar opposites. For the purpose of the practical study of large samples, especially where the Type instrument needs to be administered alongside a variety of other questions or scales, alternative and simpler operationalizations have been proposed, tested and adopted. An important aspect of Psychological Type is that, whilst it has been found to be a very useful theory for church related studies, both the concepts and the operationalizations are applicable to the general population, irrespective of churchgoing.

The cathedral survey made use of the Francis Psychological Type Scales (FPTS: Francis, 2005), assigning to each individual respondent one or other type for each of the 4 scales: orientation (introvert or extravert); judging process (thinking or feeling); perceiving process (sensing or intuition); attitudes (judging or perceiving). This particular operationalization is well established in the literature for the study of churchgoers.

Significant research results using this instrument include those of Francis, Robbins and Craig (2011), [BD1] who compared some 3300 Anglican churchgoers with the wider UK population norms. This study found for women more introverts and judging types and for men more introverts, sensors, feelers and judgers among those who attend church. Walker (2012a) compared the data for cathedral Sunday morning congregations studied by Francis and Williams (in press) with that collected for the present study and found, inter alia, that the cathedral carol service attracted a larger proportion of thinking types than those present in the wider regular churchgoing population. More recently and most strikingly Voas (2014) [BD2] examined a wide range of possible correlates for Anglican church growth in England, on behalf of the Church Commissioners. The highest single positive correlation

was with the minister being an extravert. It would appear from these results that Psychological Type theory has a major role to play within the field of mission studies.

Alongside the above examples, other studies have looked at the relationship between Psychological Type and various scales and measures related to religious affiliation, belief and practice. Francis and Ross (2010) provide a bibliography of some of these, including explorations of links to: attitude toward Christianity; mystical orientation; charismatic experience; styles of believing; dogmatism; preferred ways of interpreting scripture; religious affiliation; the experience and appreciation of cathedral visitors.

There is no reason why either men or women should be evenly distributed across the 16 Myers-Briggs types. Walker (2012a) sets out the type tables for the dataset used in the present study and compares them with those for male and female UK churchgoers previously identified by Francis, Robbins and Craig (2011). Both sets of figures are heavily weighted towards sensing and judging types. Among the wider churchgoers some 78% of men and 81% of women were sensors, with the cathedral figures a little lower at 70% and 73% respectively. Some 86% of both male and female churchgoers were judging types with the cathedral figures almost exactly the same at 84% and 85%. Unsurprisingly this was reflected in a very large proportion of SJ types in both samples, 71% of men and 73% of women among the churchgoers plus 62% of men and 68% of women at the cathedral carol service. These figures are in all cases significantly above the UK population norms, which are listed by Francis, Robbins and Craig (2011) and identify that UK church worship appears to disproportionately attract some psychological types and not others.

The SJ combination is often referred to by the descriptor “Guardian”. The Guardian type is one that honours customs and traditions, seeking familiarity and stability in a fast changing world. They tend to join groups and be hard-working, loyal and dutiful, not least in sustaining social institutions such as churches. With such a characterisation, it is not surprising that they are found in relatively large numbers in church congregations.

Religious Orientation

The study of Religious Orientation in church settings derives substantially from the work of Allport (1966, p. 454) who distinguished between two groups of churchgoers. *Extrinsic Orientation* described those individuals whose membership and communal activity serves other ends whilst *Intrinsic Orientation* identified those for whom religion is “an end in itself”, providing the whole of life with meaning, context and purpose. Allport & Ross (1967) provide detailed characterisations of what might appear to be, as with the FPTS, distinct types. Batson and Ventis (1982, p. 150) made a strong case for the model to be extended by the addition of a third index, *Quest Orientation*. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Unlike Psychological Type, the theory of Religious Orientation is not readily applicable to comparing churchgoers with wider populations that include those who do not espouse religious faith. It is focussed on “how” religious people are religious rather than on factors relevant to the general population. Many of the statements found in the various operationalizations of Religious Orientation would make little sense to an individual to whom religion was of limited or no importance.

As the theory of Religious Orientation has developed it has increasingly been seen that the three dimensions of Intrinsic, Extrinsic and Quest are not descriptions of three distinct and differently motivated groups of individuals, rather they are best operationalized as scales, so that any given

person will have a personal score on each of the three. The positive correlations of around 0.3 to 0.4 found for example by Walker (2012b) between the three, along with strong positive correlations also found between Intrinsic (.66 $p < .001$) and Quest (.26 $p < .001$) and frequency of churchgoing, establish that a person for whom religion is a central aspect of their life is likely to score higher on both of these two scales than would one with more limited engagement. No correlation was found between the Extrinsic scale and churchgoing frequency.

Quest and the New Indices of Religious Orientation

As the concept of Quest Orientation is central to the present paper, it is worth quoting the characterisation given by Batson and Ventis (1982) in full:

An individual who approaches religion in this way recognises that he or she does not know, and probably never will know, the final truth about such matters. But still the questions are deemed important and however tentative and subject to change, answers are sought. There may not be a clear belief in a transcendent reality, but there is a transcendent, religious dimension to the individual's life.

This general characterisation is later refined by Batson and Schoenrade (1991) who distinguish between three components of the orientation, defining them as: readiness to face existential questions without reducing their complexity; self-criticism and perception of religious doubt as positive; openness to change.

Various scales have been produced over the period since Allport proposed his model and the measures have been used in a variety of ways. For the purposes of the present paper the statements used to construct the Quest scale found in the *New Indices of Religious Orientation* proposed by Francis (2007), and demonstrated therein to satisfy the requirements for internal consistency, have been adopted. The advantages of the NIRO scales include that they are designed to distinguish between individuals whose religiosity has been shaped by engagement with the institutional church; they also distinguish between the different components of each index. The three components of the NIRO quest scale are then each compiled from three individual statements. These statements, for which respondents were invited to give an answer from a 5-point Likert scale (disagree strongly=1, disagree=2, not sure=3, agree=4, agree strongly=5) are set out below:

Existentialism

I was driven to ask religious questions by a growing awareness of the tensions in my world
My life experiences have led me to rethink my religious beliefs
Religion only became very important for me when I began to ask questions about the meaning of my life

Self-criticism

I value my religious doubts and uncertainties
For me doubting is an important part of what it means to be religious
Questions are more important to my religious faith than are answers

Openness to change

As I grow and change, I expect my religion to grow and change as well
I am constantly questioning my religious beliefs
There are many religious issues on which my views are still changing

A total score is constructed for each respondent by adding up their scores for each of the nine elements. It is clear from their wording that the nine statements used to create the Quest scale presume a level of religiosity.

The value of studying Quest Orientation by means of the NIRO scales has been established in a number of recent papers. Walker (2012b) showed that the highest of the three scale means recorded (28.7) was for quest orientation. This contrasted with the Sunday morning results established by Francis and Williams (in press) where the highest mean (32.7) was for intrinsic orientation; it would suggest that different types of Church of England worship have different levels of appeal to the three Orientations. Moreover Walker (2013) identified that, after controlling for age, sex and the other two religious orientations, higher levels of quest religiosity were associated with positive opinions regarding both same sex marriage and the appointment of gay men as bishops. Walker (in press) further established a clear negative association between literal beliefs with respect to the Christmas story and Quest.

Quest religiosity and Psychological Type

The widespread availability of research based on the theory of Psychological Type among UK churchgoers, especially by comparison with the much more limited material that makes use of the concept of Quest Religious Orientation, provides in itself grounds for exploring the relationship between the two. If associations are to be found between them, then it might be possible to infer from this associations between Quest and the various fields within the study of religion that have proven associations with Type. Or, where such direct inferences could not be confidently made, at the very least likely areas for further research may be identified.

Francis and Ross (2000) had put forward a hypothesis for a link between three of the four elements of the MBTI and Quest orientation. With regard to the Perceiving process it was argued that intuitives are intrigued by complexity and are likely to endorse the view that doubt only strengthens faith, whereas sensors are more likely to avoid doubt and questioning. Hence, intuitives might be expected to record higher Quest scores than sensors. For the Judging process it was hypothesised that thinkers are more likely to be stimulated than feelers by the questions and challenges of faith and hence might be likely to record higher Quest scores than feelers. For the Attitudes it was suggested that judgers are more likely than perceivers to respond to a faith that is settled and decided. Hence, perceivers were predicted to record higher Quest scores than judgers. They had not identified theoretical grounds on which to propose any link between Quest and the two MBTI orientations, extraversion and introversion.

To test this theory they had invited a sample of 64 active adult Catholic churchgoers to complete the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator together with the six-item measure of Quest orientation proposed by Batson & Ventis (1982), however, perhaps due in part to the small size of the sample, no significant associations were found.

Working with a larger sample, Ross & Francis (2010) explored the links between Psychological Type and all three aspects of Religious Orientation. Using data provided by some 481 weekly churchgoing Christians from the UK who completed the MBTI and the NIRO, they found, as had been earlier proposed, that Quest religious orientation scores were indeed higher among intuitives than among sensors, and that there were no links to introversion and extraversion. However they were also unable to establish any relationships between Quest orientation and the Judging process or Attitudes. A second paper by Francis (in press) examined the relationship between the NIRO indices and the three major dimensions of personality proposed by the short-form Revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck, Eysenck, & Barrett, 1985) among a sample of 517 first-year undergraduate students. Whilst the Eysenck model for individual personality differences is very

different from the Myers-Briggs one, the concept of extraversion is common to both. Francis found that Quest religious orientation was associated with low extraversion scores. Although extraversion as measured in this way is not exactly as in the MBTI, this result would appear to be at some variance with the earlier hypothesis.

Finally, when comparing the cathedral carol service with regular Sunday worshippers Walker (2012a) and Walker (2012b) found differences respectively in the prevalence of particular types and the religious orientations. To the extent that associations can be found between Quest religiosity and Type this might assist in investigating the relative attraction of church worship to those with different scores across the NIRO scales.

Research Questions

In the light of this body of research three questions arise:

Is it possible to establish any links between Quest orientation and Psychological Type?

Can the particular four hypotheses put forward by Francis and Ross (2000) be established or repudiated?

Does the prevalence of the SJ type among churchgoing populations have implications for the attraction of church worship to those with a strong Quest orientation?

Method

Some 390 adults who attended a Christmas Carol service in Worcester cathedral in December 2009 thoroughly completed a survey containing both the FPTS and NIRO instruments. The means and standard deviations for the Quest scores associated with each element of the four pairs of type indicators were calculated. These were then compared for each pair using a standard t-test. A similar test was undertaken to compare the SJ type with the remainder of the sample.

Results

The mean Quest score for the 198 extraverts in the sample was found to be 28.58, with a standard deviation of 5.86. For the 192 introverts the mean was 28.72 and standard deviation 5.64. The difference between the two Orientations was ($p = .81$) not significant. This was in line with both the Francis and Ross (2000) hypothesis and the Ross and Francis (2010) findings over against the results obtained by Francis (in press) which would have suggested higher Quest scores for introverts.

The mean Quest score for the 274 sensors in the sample was found to be 28.23, with a standard deviation of 5.44. For the 116 intuitives the mean was 29.64 and standard deviation 6.32. The difference between the two Perceiving processes was ($p = .03$) significant at the $p < .05$ level. This was in line with the Francis and Ross (2000) hypothesis, albeit at the lowest level of statistical significance commonly accepted in such tests, whereas Ross and Francis (2010) had not established any significant association.

The mean Quest score for the 204 thinkers in the sample was found to be 28.56, with a standard deviation of 6.21. For the 185 feeling types the mean was 28.75 and standard deviation 5.20. The

difference between the two Judging processes was ($p = .75$) not significant. This was in line with the results of Ross and Francis (2010), which did not support the Francis and Ross (2000) hypothesis.

The mean Quest score for the 326 judges in the sample was found to be 28.21, with a standard deviation of 5.80. For the 64 perceivers the mean was 30.89 and standard deviation 4.91. The difference between the two Attitudes was ($p = .0006$) significant at the $p < .001$ level, the highest level of significance customarily used for such tests. This was in line with the Francis and Ross (2000) hypothesis, which the 2010 study had failed to produce evidence to support.

The mean Quest score for the 252 (65%) SJs in the sample was found to be 28.10, with a standard deviation of 5.48. For the remaining 138 (35%) respondents the mean was 29.66 and standard deviation 6.09. This difference gave a value of $p = .00995$, significant at the $p < .01$ level.

Discussion

Francis and Ross (2000) had proposed that no link would be found between the orientations and the judging processes, and Quest religiosity scores. Whilst Francis (in press) had found lower Eysenck extraversion scores associated with higher Quest scores it would appear from both the present data and the results of Ross and Francis (2010) that, when measured using the FPTS there is no association to be found between Quest scores and the two psychological orientations.

The link between the two perceiving processes hypothesised by Francis and Ross (2000) had not been found in their later study; the present study supports it, albeit only at the $p < .05$ level of significance. In itself this is not a strong result, but may become of greater significance when discussed in the light of the other findings of the paper.

The hypothesis put forward by Ross and Francis (2000) that thinkers would be more likely than feelers to be stimulated by the challenges and questions of faith, and hence would return higher Quest scores, has now failed to be borne out by both their own later research and the present paper, neither of which has identified any association. Indeed the current study showed a slightly higher mean for feelers than thinkers. A closer look at the three component parts of the Quest scale may give some indication as to why this may be; the *Existentialism* part of the index may indeed have a focus on the asking of questions and even “rethinking”, but the *Self-criticism* statements, with a focus on “value” and “what it means”, and a negative statement about “answers”, are cast in a more “feeling” register. The final section, *Openness to change*, ranges in its languages from “beliefs” to “views” and to what I “expect”. Overall it can be argued that there is a balance between words in the statements that might appeal to each of the two judging processes. However, it would be simple to recast the words of the nine statements in ways that remained true to the concept of Quest religiosity but which favoured one process over the other. That may in itself provide an argument for keeping the questions in their present form.

Francis and Ross (2000) had proposed that there might be a positive association between Quest religiosity and perceiving types on the grounds that “judgers are more likely than perceivers to respond to a faith that is settled and decided”. Notwithstanding the relatively small proportion of perceivers found in the present sample the study has supported this hypothesis at the highest significance level of $p < .001$. In terms of the three subsections used to form the Quest scale, it is clear that the notions of *self-criticism* and of *openness to change* have a strong resonance with the

perceiver's preferences. Moreover the individual statements that build up the scale make many references to having changing views, valuing uncertainties and to the prioritisation of questions over answers. Quest orientation would therefore appear to have a strong association with the perceiving attitude.

The high proportion of SJ or *Guardian* types found commonly in church congregations was reflected in the present sample, with almost two thirds falling into that category. It has been found that this group has a significantly lower mean Quest score than the remainder of the sample. Moreover the refining of the comparison from S to SJ has both increased the difference between the two means by a further 10% and strengthened the significance level from $p < .05$ to $p < .01$. This finding is consonant with the overall characterisation of quest orientation by Batson and Ventis (1982) in terms of "tentativity" and "uncertainty" and of such answers as are reached being "subject to change". The three subdivisions of quest by Batson and Schoenrade (1991) into *Existentialism*, *Self-criticism* and *Openness to change* again fit ill with the *Guardian* type. Moreover, the wording of the nine NIRO quest statements, with their constant emphases on change, doubt, questioning and rethinking, would almost without exception be potentially troubling to a *Guardian* type.

These findings raise the issue as to what sort of welcome quest religiosity is likely to receive in an Anglican church dominated by Guardians. With quest scores increasing with frequency of church attendance, it is clear that this orientation is present at the heart of church congregations. It is plausible that it may be an underlying factor in the various church conflicts (such as over same sex marriage) where the battleground is substantially between those seeking a traditional and more uniform position and those who wish to increase diversity and provisionality.

Conclusions

Clear links have been found between both sensing and judging types and lower quest scores. The combining of these two aspects into the *Guardian* type has further elaborated the distinction and has suggested that this may be a factor in church conflicts. Hence the relationship between psychological type and religious orientation is not simply a matter for academic interest but potentially of real significance to churches today. Further research might usefully build on the present findings by seeking to determine whether the strength of quest religiosity and the numerical domination of the SJ pairing vary in different types of churches or at different levels of church leadership.

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