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Theology

Are Anglican cathedrals more inclusive than parish churches?

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Abstract

Alongside ethnicity, gender, and age, this article argues that psychological type theory offers a distinctive lens through which to assess the inclusivity agenda of the Anglican Church. On this criterion empirical data indicate that cathedrals are achieving greater inclusivity than parish churches.

Keywords: empirical theology, cathedral studies, congregation studies, psychological type theory, psychology of religion

The challenge to be inclusive

The Church of England takes seriously the challenge to be an inclusive Church. If God's invitation is open equally to all, that invitation should be extended equally to all. Are there perhaps some sections of society more resistant to respond to the invitation, or is perhaps the Church less well equipped to tune the invitation to their ears.

While the issues of ethnic diversity and racial inclusivity are properly a matter of core concern, are there other visible criteria of inclusivity that may be matters of concern? The imbalance of men and women occupying the pews in Anglican churches has been recognised for many years. In our careful congregation survey conducted throughout the Diocese of Southwark a decade ago, with responses from over 30,000 churchgoers, David Lankshear and I found that within each of the three very different Episcopal Areas (Woolwich, Kingston, and Croydon) men accounted for 34% of adult churchgoers¹. The challenge to be an inclusive church properly focuses on growing a church more accessible to men.

The imbalance among age groups is also visible. Drawing on the Diocese of Southwark survey, Albert Jewell responded to the weighting toward older people, by emphasising the importance of distinctive ministry among this age group². At the same time, the challenge to be an inclusive church properly focuses on growing a younger church.

The argument of the present paper is to explore a less visible aspect of inclusivity than revealed by ethnicity, gender, or age. What may be less visible to the naked eye is the psychological type profile of congregations. If God's invitation is open equally to all, is that invitation being extended equally to all psychological types? Are there some psychological

¹ Francis, L. J., & Lankshear, D. W. (2021). Profiling adult churchgoers within the Diocese of Southwark: An overview. In L. J. Francis & D. W. Lankshear (Eds.), *The science of congregation studies: Searching for signs of growth* (pp. 19-41). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

² Jewell, A. Francis, L. J., & Lankshear, D. W. (2021). The greying generation: Profiling churchgoers aged seventy and over. In L. J. Francis & D. W. Lankshear (Eds.), *The science of congregation studies: Searching for signs of growth* (pp. 97-122). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

types more resistant to respond to the invitation, or is perhaps the Church less well equipped to tune the invitation to their ears?

In the present paper I explore that question in five steps. Step one introduces the notion of a theology of individual differences and distinguishes between the two concepts of personality and character. Step two introduces three models of personality proposed by psychologists and suggests that, while some of these models conflate personality with character, psychological type theory keeps a clear focus on personality. Step three discusses what is known about inclusion and exclusion within churches from studies exploring the psychological type profile of church congregations. Step four widens the discussion by introducing Walker's four-fold model of belonging to God and relating to the Anglican Church, through activities, events, people, and place. Step five explores how Anglican cathedrals are reaching a wider range of psychological types, not only through activities, but also through events and through place.

Theology of individual differences

Andrew Village and I grounded our development of a theology of individual differences in a strong doctrine of creation. The biblical basis for this doctrine of creation is informed by Genesis 1:27:

God created humankind in the image of God,
in the image of God, God created them,
male and female God created them.

The key insight provided by this biblical basis for a doctrine of creation is that the divine image embraces diversity and that such diversity is reflected in those created in the image of God³.

³ Francis, L. J., & Village, A. (2015). Go and observe the sower: Seeing empirical theology at work. *Journal of Empirical Theology*, 28(2), 155-183.

In contrast with the narrative concerning Adam and Eve, a doctrine of creation grounded in Genesis 1:27 is committed theologically to recognising that both men and women are created equally in the image of God, and to arguing that individual differences which are created equal (male and female) need to be accorded equal value and equal status. If such a theology of individual differences holds good for sex differences then, by extension, such a theology should hold good also for other differences equally grounded in creation, that is to say in the intentionality of the divine creator. Such differences may well include ethnic differences and some psychological differences. Before examining the implications of such a view, the Christian doctrine of creation needs to be set alongside the Christian doctrine of the fall.

The key point made by the Christian doctrine of the fall is that the image of the creator seen in the human creature is no longer unsullied. The image has been corrupted. The task to be undertaken by a sound theology of individual differences is to attempt to untangle those differences which can reasonably be posited to reflect the fall and those which persist as proper indicators of the image and of the intention of the divine creator. Those individual differences which reflect the corruption brought about by the fall must rightly be subject to the saving and transforming power of Christ (the doctrine of redemption) and the perfecting power of the Holy Spirit (the doctrine of sanctification).

In this context a theology of individual differences makes an important distinction between the concepts of personality and character. On this account the concept of personality is rooted within the doctrine of creation while the concept of character is rooted in the doctrines of fall and redemption. While the distinction between introversion and extraversion is conceptualised within the domain of personality, the distinction between pride and humility is conceptualised within the domain of character.

In the light of a doctrine of creation grounded in Genesis 1:27, the individual difference of sex (male and female) may be properly seen as reflecting creation rather than fall. In the development of our theology of individual differences, Andrew Village and I argued that it would be appropriate to conceptualise individual differences in ethnicity and in personality (but not character) in a similar way. On this account, in the eyes of God, being male is neither of more nor less value than being female, being white is neither of more nor less value than being a person of colour, and being introvert is neither of more nor less value than being extravert.

Now if this theory holds good, we may well expect a Church concerned with inclusivity, to give serious consideration to imbalances within its membership (and clergy) related to gender, ethnicity, *and* personality.

Psychological models of personality

There are a number of psychological models of personality that agree on including extraversion: for example, Eysenck's major three dimensional model, measuring extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism⁴; Costa and McCrae's Big Five Factor model, measuring extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience⁵; and Jung's model of psychological type, as developed by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, distinguish between introversion and extraversion, sensing and intuition, thinking and feeling, and judging and perceiving⁶.

These three well-established models of personality differ in important ways.

Eysenck's model merges normal personality with pathologies (neuroticism and

⁴ Eysenck, H. J., & Eysenck, S. B. G. (1991). *Manual of the Eysenck Personality Scales*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

⁵ Costa, P. T., & McCrae, R. R. (1985). *The NEO Personality Inventory*. Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources.

⁶ Myers, I. B., & McCaulley, M. H. (1985). *Manual: A guide to the development and use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.

psychoticism). The Big Five Factor model merges normal personality with aspects of character⁷. Psychological type theory focuses entirely on normal personality. The differences observed by psychological type theory avoid value judgements, in the sense that extraversion and introversion, sensing and intuition, thinking and feeling, and judging and perceiving are all value neutral. It is for this reason that psychological type theory can be integrated into a theologically coherent understanding of individual differences, acknowledging the key doctrinal structure of creation, fall, redemption, and sanctification.

Psychological type theory

Given this understanding of personality differences, psychological type theory may be of special interest to a Church committed to the Gospel of inclusivity. What are the four components of psychological type theory, how do we recognise them, and what implications do they carry for church life?

Introversion and extraversion describe two different orientations. Extraverts are oriented toward the external world; they are energised by the events and people around them. Introverts are orientated toward their internal world; they are energised by their inner ideas and concepts. Extraverts tend to vocalise a problem or an idea, rather than think it through privately. Introverts tend to think matters through privately before they speak about them. Extraverts tend to enjoy company and social events, but are drained by solitude and silence. Introverts tend to enjoy solitude and silence, but are drained by social events and company. The Church shaped by introverts and the Church shaped by extraverts may function quite differently.

Sensing and intuition describe two different ways of seeing the world. Sensing types prefer facts and data; they build up the big picture gradually by exploring the details. Intuitive

⁷ Lloyd, J. B. (2015). Unsubstantiated beliefs and values flaw the Five-Factor model of personality. *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 36, 156-164.

types prefer ideas and theories; they grasp the details slowly by fitting them into the big picture. The Gospel proclaimed by sensing types and the Gospel proclaimed by intuitive types may be shaped quite differently.

Thinking and feeling describe two different ways of evaluating the world and reaching decisions. Thinking types begin with the head and are driven by objective processes. Feeling types begin with the heart and are driven by subjective values. Thinking types strive for fairness and justice. Feeling types strive for harmony and peace. The community shaped by feeling types and the community shaped by thinking types may establish quite different priorities.

Judging and perceiving describe two different ways of relating to the external world. Judging types like their external world to be structured, tidy, and predictable. Perceiving types like their external world to be flexible, open, and spontaneous. Judging types perform best when they can plan well in advance. Perceiving types perform best when the deadline is just around the corner. The Church shaped by judging types and the Church shaped by perceiving types may work quite differently.

Church congregations

Building on research initiated in North America during the 1980s, three relatively small studies of Anglican congregations in England and Wales were published during the early 2000s, preparing the way for my study of 3,302 churchgoers drawn from 140 Anglican congregations⁸. The findings from this study of churchgoers were set alongside the population norms published by Kendall⁹. This comparison allows a view to be taken regarding just how representative Anglican congregations are of the population from which

⁸ Francis, L. J., Robbins, M., & Craig, C.L. (2011). The psychological type profile of Anglican churchgoers in England: Compatible or incompatible with their clergy? *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 15(2), 243-259.

⁹ Kendall, E. (1998). *Myers-Briggs type indicator: Step 1 manual supplement*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.

they draw. The data demonstrated over-representation in church congregations of introverts, sensing types, feeling types, and judging types. Among women those who preferred sensing, feeling, and judging accounted for 50% of churchgoers, compared with 37% in the general population. Among men those who preferred sensing, feeling, and judging accounted for 28% of the churchgoers, compared with 13% of the general population. The over-representation of some psychological types is inevitably reflected in the under-representation of other types.

Reviewing these findings I advanced the hypothesis that, if introverts, sensing types, feeling types and judging types constitute the majority of Anglican churchgoers, extraverts, intuitive types, thinking types and perceiving types are least likely to feel at home in the churches they attend. I tested this hypothesis among a sample of 1,867 churchgoers who completed a measure of psychological type, together with a measure of frequency of attendance and an index of congregational satisfaction¹⁰. These data confirmed that congregations were weighted towards preferences for introversion, sensing, feeling and judging, and that the individuals displaying the opposite preferences (extraversion, intuition, thinking and perceiving) recorded lower levels of congregational satisfaction. On the basis of these findings, I took the view that, not only were extraverts, intuitive types, thinking types and perceiving types less in evidence in church congregations, but those who were there were expressing lower levels of congregational satisfaction and thus more likely to join the growing community of church leavers that I had explored earlier with Philip Richter¹¹.

Ways of belonging to God

In his book, *God's believers*, David Walker drew together the fruits of series of conceptual and empirical studies, conducted over a decade, to invite the Anglican Church to

¹⁰ Francis, L. J., & Robbins, M. (2012). Not fitting in and getting out. Psychological type and congregational satisfaction among Anglican churchgoers in England. *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, 15, 1023-1035.

¹¹ Francis, L. J. & Richter, P. (2007). *Gone for good? Church-leaving and returning in the twenty-first century*. Peterborough: Epworth.

recognise and to appreciate the variety of ways through which people belong to God and relate to the Anglican Church¹². Through the presence and ministry of the Anglican Church, Walker argues that people value belonging to God in four distinctive ways, characterised as belonging through activities, through events, through place, and through people.

For Walker, belonging through activities involves engaging with church on a regular and frequent basis. Participants are expected to engage with church activities, not just on some occasions, but with the whole series. For example, engaging with Sunday services requires significant investment of time and energy and displays a sense of commitment week in and week out. Walker argues that commitment to such activities reveals a real sense of belonging to God.

For Walker, belonging through events embraces several different categories. Major Christian festivals, including Christmas, Harvest Thanksgiving, and Remembrance Sunday, offer a recurring pattern through the calendar. The occasional offices, including baptisms, marriages, and funerals, address particularly poignant points in the life cycle. Walker argues that participation in such events reveals a real sense of belonging to God.

For Walker, belonging through place acknowledges that the unlocked door of the parish church or the unlocked door of the cathedral may feel invitational, and the threshold relatively easy to cross into the hallowed space. Walker argues that there are many ways in which individuals may feel connected with a specific church that reveals a sense of belonging to God.

For Walker, belonging through people or through relationships recognises that local churches have associated with them key individuals who are recognised as representing the face of the church more broadly within the communities with which they interact. Some of

¹² Walker, D. (2017). *God's believers: How people engage with God today and how the church can help*. Abingdon: The Bible Reading Fellowship.

these key people hold a formal office, as priest, reader, churchwarden, or member of a local ministry team. Others are recognised simply for being there and for doing things. Walker argues that engagement with such people reveals a vicarious sense of belonging to God.

Anglican cathedrals

Studies conducted within Anglican cathedrals have applied psychological type theory to three of Walker's four ways of belonging, by exploring those who are part of cathedral Sunday congregations (belonging through activities), those who come to cathedral carol services (belonging through events), and those who come as visitors to cathedrals (belonging through place).

In terms of activities, David Lankshear reported on a study among 281 participants attending the Sunday service at Southwark Cathedral, and compared the psychological type profile of these cathedral attendees with the earlier study of 3,302 Anglican churchgoers¹³. In Southwark Cathedral they found higher proportions of intuitive types and thinking types. This cathedral's Sunday services were reaching people whom parish churches were finding it hard to reach.

In terms of events, David Walker explored the psychological type profile of 164 men and 239 women who attended two Christmas carol services in Worcester Cathedral in 2009¹⁴, and again compared his findings with the earlier study of 3,302 Anglican churchgoers. Walker's paper reporting his findings carried the title 'O come all ye thinking types. The wider appeal of the cathedral carol service'.

Drawing thinking types into Anglican churches is a particular challenge in light of the fact that the preference for thinking is much higher among men than among women and men

¹³ Lankshear, D. W., & Francis, L. J. (2015). Inside Southwark Cathedral: A study in psychological type profiling. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 18, 664-674.

¹⁴ Walker, D. S. (2012). O come all ye thinking types: The wider appeal of the cathedral carol service. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 15, 987-995.

are a minority within congregations. According to Kendall (1998) in the general population 65% of men prefer thinking compared with 30% of women¹⁵. Not only that, the majority of Anglican clergymen also prefer feeling, with the consequence that church congregations are saturated by a preference for feeling that makes access difficult for thinking types¹⁶. In the scientific spirit of replication, other studies have reported on the psychological type profile of 193 participants at carol services in Bangor Cathedral in 2013, 441 participants attending the Holly Bough Services on the Fourth Sunday of Advent 2019 in Liverpool Cathedral and 1,234 participants attending the two Christmas Eve carol services in 2019 in Liverpool Cathedral. All three replication studies confirmed Walker's initial findings that cathedral carol services were providing events reaching people whom Sunday activities were finding it hard to reach¹⁷.

In terms of place, two initial studies applying psychological type theory for cathedral visitors reported on 381 visitors to St Davids Cathedral and on 157 visitors to Chester Cathedral. These two initial studies were followed by more substantial studies of 2,327 visitors to St Davids Cathedral¹⁸ and 1,082 visitors to a further four cathedrals¹⁹. All four studies produced highly similar results. Like church congregations, cathedral visitors tended

¹⁵ Kendall, E. (1998). *Myers-Briggs type indicator: Step 1 manual supplement*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.

¹⁶ Francis, L. J., Craig, C. L., Whinney, M., Tilley, D., & Slater, P. (2007). Psychological typology of Anglican clergy in England: Diversity, strengths, and weaknesses in ministry. *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 11(2), 266-284.

¹⁷ Francis, L. J., Jones, S. H., & McKenna, U. (2021). The science of congregation studies and psychometric segmentation: O come all ye thinking types? *HTS Theological Studies*, 77(4), article 6747, 1-10.

¹⁸ Francis, L. J., Annis, J., Robbins, M., ap Sion, T., & Williams, E. (2012). National heritage and spiritual awareness: A study in psychological type theory among visitors to St Davids Cathedral. In F.-V. Anthony, & H.-G. Ziebertz (Eds.), *Religious identity and national heritage: Empirical theological perspectives*. (pp. 123-147). Leiden: Brill.

¹⁹ Francis, L. J., & Mansfield, S. (under review). Who visits cathedrals? The science of cathedral studies and psychographic segmentation.

to prefer introversion, sensing, and judging, although here once again cathedrals were drawing in a higher proportion of thinking types.

Set alongside the population norms, the major challenge posed by these statistics concerned encouraging more intuitive types and more perceiving types to cross the threshold. The report to the Association of English Cathedrals by ECORYS drew attention to the way in which visitor numbers had been impacted by ‘innovative exhibitions’ and events (p. 11), drawing attention to the Helter Skelter installation in Norwich Cathedral and the Crazy Golf installation at Rochester Cathedral. Reference to these specific installations and events raise an interesting question as to whether such innovation widens the psychographic profile of those who cross the threshold²⁰.

The potential for such innovation to widen the psychographic profile of cathedral visitors has been tested by a study conducted in Brecon Cathedral at the time when the Cathedral was closely involved in the Brecon Jazz Festival. Drawing on data provided by 196 visitors, Simon Mansfield found that visitors to Brecon Cathedral during this period differed significantly from the standard psychological type profile of cathedral visitors in two ways²¹. There were significantly more intuitive types (41% compared with 28%) and significantly more perceiving types (27% compared with 20%). These findings demonstrate that specific events have the capacity to widen the psychographic appeal of cathedrals. Replication studies are now needed exploring the psychological type profile of visitors to other cathedrals when they are hosting innovative exhibitions and innovative events.

Conclusion

²⁰ ECORYS (2021). *The economic and social impacts of England's cathedrals*.
<https://www.englishcathedrals.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Economic-Social-Impacts-of-Englands-Cathedrals-Case-Studies-2019.pdf>

²¹ Francis, L. J., Mansfield, S., McKenna, U., & Jones, S. H. (under review). Enhancing inclusivity and diversity among cathedral visitors: The Brecon Jazz Festival and psychographic segmentation.

This paper set out to test the thesis that empirical studies grounded in psychological type theory can illustrate how Anglican cathedrals reach beyond the constituency generally reached by parish churches. Drawing on Walker's model that distinguishes among different ways in which people may experience belonging to God and relating to the Anglican Church, this study explored the psychological type profile of those attending Sunday services in one cathedral, those attending Christmas carol services in three cathedrals, and those visiting seven cathedrals. In all three contexts of activities, events, and place, the data demonstrated a wider reach and greater diversity than found in the congregations of parish churches. Clearly the significance of the research reviewed is limited by the small number of studies so far conducted within Anglican cathedrals. The challenge remains for the replication and extension of this research tradition.

Meanwhile the existing research may be adequate to encourage the Church of England to appreciate the powerful and partially hidden resources within its 42 cathedrals. Indeed, it may be wise for a simpler, humbler, and bolder Church to acknowledge and to equip this resource offered by cathedrals for a leading role in evangelisation and mission, with a focus on growing a more inclusive Church.