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Do different psychological types look for different things in sermons? A research note

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Abstract

A sample of 76 Evangelical Anglican churchgoers completed the Francis Psychological Type Scales and rated the importance that they attribute to a sermon speaking to their imagination. The data demonstrated that sermons speaking to the imagination were rated more highly by intuitive types, feeling types, and perceiving types than by sensing types, thinking types, and judging types. Different psychological types look for different things in sermons.

Key words: Psychological type, religion, congregational studies, preaching

Introduction

Reader perspective has come to play an increasingly important part in contemporary hermeneutical theory regarding the reading and interpretation of scripture. Sociological categories have become established in defining and shaping distinctive reader perspectives as illustrated by liberation readings, feminist readings and black readings. Psychological categories are also growing in prominence as documented by works like Rollins and Kille (2007), Francis and Village (2008), and Ellens (2012).

In their study of preaching, Francis and Village (2008) link contemporary hermeneutical theory with psychological type theory, as advanced initially by Jung (1971) and as subsequently developed and extended by a range of psychological type indicators, especially the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & McCaulley, 1985), the Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey & Bates, 1978) and the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005). They argue that different psychological types read and proclaim scripture in distinctive ways that reflect their type preferences both in terms of the perceiving functions (sensing and intuition) and in terms of the judging functions (thinking and feeling).

Currently empirical support for this theory has been derived primarily from research conducted among preachers using both quantitative methods (Francis, Robbins, & Village, 2009; Village 2010) and qualitative methods (Francis, 2010, 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Francis & Jones, 2011; Francis & Smith, 2012). The aim of the present study is to test the connection between the different psychological type profiles of churchgoers and their perception of listening to the same sermon. In particular, type theory suggests that intuitive types and feeling types are more likely than sensing types and thinking types to report that sermons speak to their imagination.

Method

A sample of 76 churchgoers (38 men and 38 women, of whom 17% were under forty, 51% in their forties or fifties, and 31% sixty or over) who had attended the same sermon in an Evangelical Anglican Church in England completed the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005), a 40-item forced choice instrument that distinguishes between introversion and extraversion, sensing and intuition, thinking and feeling, and judging and perceiving. They also rated the question, 'How important for you is it that a sermon speaks to your imagination?' on a five-point scale: agree strongly, agree, not certain, disagree, and disagree strongly.

Results

The congregation reported preferences for extraversion (56%) over introversion (44%), for sensing (70%) over intuition (30%), for feeling (56%) over thinking (44%), and for judging (94%) over perceiving (7%). Correlations between the continuous psychological type scores (with introversion, sensing, thinking and judging as the high scoring poles) and the item concerning imagination demonstrated negative correlations with sensing ($r = -.36, p < .01$), thinking ($r = -.29, p < .01$), and judging ($r = -.25, p < .05$) and independence with introversion ($r = -.02, ns$).

Conclusion

Two main conclusions emerge from these data, one primary and one secondary. The primary conclusion is that intuitive types, feeling types and perceiving types are more likely than sensing types, thinking types and judging types to look for sermons to speak to their imagination. Different psychological types may look for different things in sermons and consequently also hear different things in sermons. The secondary conclusion is that the Evangelical Anglican congregation reflects the general type preferences of Anglican churchgoers as reported by Francis, Robbins, and Craig (2011) in terms of preferring sensing, feeling and judging. On the other hand, this congregation prefers extraversion compared with

the general Anglican profile of introversion. This is consistent with the view that Evangelical Anglican congregations may give greater emphasis to social engagement and social interaction among its members.

The limitation with the present study is that it was restricted to one congregation and reported on only one aspect of sermon evaluation. The findings, however, suggest that the study deserves replication and extension.

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