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Reading the Lucan call of the first disciples differently:
The voices of sensing and intuition

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Abstract

This paper argues that discipleship is a notion of growing importance to the Christian denominations and that the Marcan narrative of the call of the first disciples has been of particular importance in giving shape to this notion. The Lucan narrative of the call of the first disciple, involving the great catch of fish, is problematic in two ways, concerning its relationship with the Marcan understanding of call and also with the Johannine post-resurrection narrative. Against this background this paper reports on an empirical study, drawing on the reader perspective and on the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics, that illuminates the distinctive voices of sensing types and intuitive types reading Luke 5: 1-7.

Keywords: discipleship, reader perspective, SIFT, psychological type

Introduction

The primacy of the call to discipleship within the narrative of the Christian life, Christian witness, and Christian ministry has emerged across a range of Christian denominations. For example, within the Church of England, an emphasis on discipleship has been prominent in the three reports, *Formation for ministry* (Archbishops' Council, 2003), *Shaping the future* (Archbishops' Council, 2006), and *Developing discipleship* (Archbishops' Council, 2015). This emphasis on discipleship has consequent interest in the processes that consolidate the response to the call (see Jones, 2014). These processes are variously expressed across the denominations in a variety of ways, among which Astley (2015) lists the following examples: discipleship courses, education for discipleship, learning for discipleship, discipleship education, education for lay discipleship, extending discipleship, developing discipleship, Christian formation, formation in the Christian faith, liturgical formation, theological formation, human formation, spiritual formation, pastoral formation, formation in Christian service, faith formation, and ministerial formation.

Reading Mark

This emphasis on the call to discipleship is often resourced and justified by reference to the Gospel narratives and in this context particular emphasis is placed on the Marcan account as the 'Gospel of Discipleship'. The case is made, for example, by Francis (2015a) in an essay entitled 'Taking discipleship learning seriously'. In this essay Francis agrees with Farrer (1951) that Mark's decision to begin his Gospel with the call to discipleship is, on face value, a very strange thing to do. Mark's Gospel begins so very abruptly after the intriguing prologue (1: 1-13) with the announcement that, following John's arrest, Jesus came proclaiming the Reign of God (1: 14-19). Then Jesus began his ministry not by teaching about the Reign of God through words, not by displaying the Reign of God through actions, but by calling into discipleship his first four followers to experience, to reflect on and to bear

witness to the Reign of God: Simon Peter and his brother Andrew (1:16-18), and the brothers James and John, the sons of Zebedee (1: 19-20). Only after the School of Discipleship has been formed around these four fishermen, did Jesus' ministry begin to take shape and begin to make sense. Francis (2015a) sees significance in the way in which, immediately after their call, Jesus took these four disciples with him into the synagogue in Capernaum (1: 21-28). In the synagogue Jesus displayed what life is like when God reigns: the possessed man is healed. Then Jesus followed Simon Peter to his home (1: 29-31). There again Jesus displayed what life is like when God reigns, as Simon Peter's mother-in-law was healed of her fever. The puzzle posed by Mark's narrative is to posit why Peter and Andrew, James and John decided to follow Jesus in the first place, when the very signs of God's reign that may have attracted them do not emerge until later.

If the view of Marcan priority is accepted, then Matthew has done little to disturb the basic structure of the Marcan narrative. While chapters one and two present the extended birth narrative, chapter three expands the account of John the Baptist, and chapter four expands Jesus' sojourn in the wilderness, the Matthean extended preface to Jesus' emergence in Galilee does nothing to change or soften the surprising nature of the call of the first four disciples. Their willingness to follow remains unexplained and problematic.

Again accepting the view of Marcan priority, Luke has recast the narrative in major ways. Like Matthew, Luke introduces the birth narratives, provides an extended introduction to the teaching of John the Baptist, and expands Jesus' sojourn in the wilderness. Like Matthew, Luke changes the direction of the divine pronouncement from the personal affirmation of Mark (You are my son) to the public announcement (This is my son). However, unlike Matthew, Luke prefaces the call of the first disciples with the powerful appropriation of the Isaiah prophecy (the Spirit of the Lord is upon me), and with the Marcan narratives of exorcism in the Capernium synagogue, the healing of Simon's mother-in-law,

and the multiple healings. Yet, while in Mark Jesus ‘would not let the devil speak because they know who was’ (Mark 1: 34), in Luke the devils came out shouting, ‘You are the Son of God’ (Luke 4: 41). Clearly, good grounds are accruing for the first disciples to leave their boats behind and to follow Jesus. Most powerfully of all, however, Luke prefaces the call of Simon, James and John (whatever happened to Andrew?) with the narrative of the great catch of fish, after the fishermen had laboured all night long and caught nothing. From the perspective of the case that Luke is making, these disciples now have good grounds for following Jesus, and as a consequence the process of discipleship learning may emerge differently from Luke than from Mark. From the perspective of textual criticism, the fascinating question remains about the linkages between the miraculous catch of fish preceding the call of the first disciples in Luke (Luke 5: 1-11) and miraculous catch of fish in John 21 presented as a resurrection narrative (see for example, Marsh, 1963, pp. 655-660; Bailey, 1963; Neiryneck, 1990).

Attending to the Reader perspective

In the foregoing analysis the weight of interpretation has been on trying to recover the intention of the gospel writers (especially Mark and Luke) in the way in which they presented their narratives of the call of the first disciples. The reader perspective approach to biblical hermeneutics redresses the balance by placing the emphasis on the distinctive voices of multiple readers. In the first recension of the reader perspective approach, a sociological analysis of the readers’ location was taken seriously (see Segovia & Talbert, 1995a, 1995b), giving birth to diverse perspectives like liberation readings (see Botta & Andiñach, 2009), feminist readings (see Schottroff & Wacker, 2012), and black readings (see Brown, 2004). In a more recent recension of the reader perspective approach psychological theory came into play, as part of a wider renaissance of psychology interacting with the study of the Bible. In particular, the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics, as developed by Francis and Village

(2008) argues that psychological type theory can illuminate consistent patterns in the reading of the scripture.

Psychological type theory distinguishes between the two core psychological processes of perceiving (P) and judging (J). The perceiving process is concerned with gathering information, while the judging process is concerned with evaluating information.

Psychological type theory then distinguishes between two distinctive ways of perceiving and two distinctive ways of judging. The two ways of perceiving are defined as sensing (S) and intuition (I). Sensing focuses on facts and information, while intuition focuses on theories and ideas. The two ways of judging are defined as thinking (T) and feeling (F). Thinking prioritises objective logic, while feeling prioritises personal and interpersonal values.

According to the theory of type dynamics, one of these four functions occupies the strongest or dominant position in each individual, helping to shape that individual's dominant outlook on life. Sensing shapes the practical person, intuition shapes the imaginative person, thinking shapes the logical person, and feeling shapes the humane person.

Applying psychological type theory to the reader perspective approach to biblical hermeneutics, Francis and Village (2008) proposed the SIFT approach suggesting that sensing types, intuitive types, feeling types and thinking types may all bring different insights to the conversation between the Word of God and the People of God. This theory has been explored in a series of recent studies that have invited type-alike groups to discuss their interpretation of scripture and then to share their interpretations with each other. The following passages of scripture have been explored in this way: the feeding of the five thousand reported in Mark 6: 34-44 (Francis, 2010); the resurrection narratives reported in Mark 16: 1-8 and Matthew 28: 1-15 (Francis & Jones, 2011); the cleansing of the Temple and the incident of the fig tree reported in Mark 11: 11-21 (Francis, 2012a; Francis & ap Siôn, 2016b); the Johannine feeding narrative reported in John 6: 4-22 (Francis, 2012b); the

narrative of separating sheep from goats reported in Matthew 25: 31-46 (Francis & Smith, 2012); the birth narratives reported in Matthew 2: 13-20 and Luke 2: 8-16 (Francis & Smith, 2013); two narratives concerning John the Baptist reported in Mark 1: 2-8 and Luke 3: 2b-20 (Francis, 2013; Francis & Smith, 2014); the Johannine feeding narrative reported in John 6: 5-15 (Francis & Jones, 2014); two passages from Mark exploring different aspects of discipleship reported in Mark 6: 7-14 and Mark 6: 33-41 (Francis & Jones, 2015a); the foot washing account reported in John 13: 2b-15 (Francis, 2015b); two healing narratives reported in Mark 2: 1-12 and Mark 10: 46-52 (Francis & Jones, 2015b); the narrative of blind Bartimaeus reported in Mark 10: 46-52 (Smith & Francis, 2016), and the Road to Emmaus narrative reported in Luke 24: 13-35 (Francis, & ap Siôn, 2016a). More recently this research tradition has also been developed in Poland by Chaim (2013, 2014, 2015).

Research question

Given the potential dominance of the Marcan narrative of the call of the first disciples within the contemporary church, the Lucan narrative may provide a particularly interesting passage for exploring within the empirical science of the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics. Against this general background the precise research problem addressed by the present study has been shaped by three specific considerations.

The first consideration concerns the special context of the Summer School convened by the Institute of Socio-Biblical Studies. Here is a group of scholars who take seriously both the study of scripture and the context within which scripture is studied and applied. The second consideration concerns the limited time made available for this empirical experiment within the busy schedule of the Summer School. Given time for only one workshop, the emphasis was placed on the perceiving process (sensing and intuition) with a task shaped to profile the different voices of sensing and intuition. The third consideration concerns limiting

the extent of the text for discussion to the great catch of fish in order to test the extent to which this passage is or is not linked in the readers' minds with the call of the first disciples.

Method

Procedure

As part of the 2016 three-day Summer School of the Institute of Socio-Biblical Studies, participants engaging with the discipleship stream were invited to complete a recognisable measure of psychological type and to explore Luke 5:17 in groups organised according to their perceiving preferences (sensing or intuition). The passage was printed from the NRSV with the heading 'Luke's account of Jesus calling disciples: Luke 5: 1-7'. The task was printed below the passage: 'What do you see in this passage and what sparks your imagination?'

Measure

Psychological type was assessed by the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005). This instrument proposes 40 forced choice items to distinguish between the two orientations (E or I), the two perceiving functions (S or N), the two judging functions (T or F), and the two attitudes toward the outside world (J or P).

Participants

The 14 participants were divided into four groups: strong sensing types (N = 4), strong intuitive types (N = 4), and less strong sensing and less strong intuitive types (N = 6).

Analysis

One of the authors joined the strong sensing types and the other author joined the strong intuitive types. The authors noted carefully the conversations within their group and checked their account and interpretation with the participants.

Results

Sensing types

The group of sensing types read the Gospel passage aloud and then read aloud the task. They began their conversation by puzzling over the meaning of the task, ‘What do you see in this passage and what sparks your imagination?’ To this group the task seemed daunting and far from straightforward. There was a long silence.

The silence was broken by the participant who ventured that he saw the boat sinking. ‘This is a nice little ending to a story in which all seemed to be going so well, with such a great catch of fish. Suddenly a spanner is thrown into the works and the boat begins to sink.’

Now the ice had been broken, a second participant suggested that he saw the practicality of Jesus in the passage. The crowd was pressing on Jesus to hear the Word of God. Jesus took the practical step of getting into a boat and pressing off from the shore.

A third participant saw Jesus’ remarkable ability. Jesus had extrasensory perception and saw precisely where the fish were swimming in the lake. This observation sparked a response from a very different perspective, suggesting that often people standing on the shore could see where the fish were located while the fish remained invisible to the people in the boat. Jesus must have seen the fish before getting into the boat.

The first participant then returned to the conversation saying that she saw Jesus, the amateur, trying to tell the experienced fishermen how to do their work. And there are other occasions in the Gospels when Jesus acts like that too. One day there was a great storm and the experienced sailors were terrified. Jesus, the amateur, kept calm and told them that there was nothing for them to worry about.

Another participant saw the power relationship between Simon and Jesus. Simon called Jesus ‘Master’. He protested that it made no sense to let down the nets and yet obeyed with the words of subservience, ‘Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets’.

The group of sensing types was not only concerned about the details in the passage, but also about the textual problems raised by the passage. One participant recalled that this

passage near the beginning of Luke also appeared as a post-resurrection narrative in John. This sparked a lively reconstruction of the Johannine narrative from the corporate memory of the group. So was this really a post-resurrection narrative brought forward into Jesus' ministry by Luke, or had John taken a story from early in Jesus' ministry and transposed it into the experience of the disciples after the resurrection?

This exercise in textual criticism prompted another member of the group to try to reconstruct where Luke had placed this narrative within the Marcan structure from which he was working. Had Luke added this story of the catch of fish into the place where Mark already had Jesus entering a boat? Another member of the group, grappling with the distinctions between the situation of Mark's Gospel and Luke's Gospel, recognised that Luke seems to have been uncomfortable with the way in which Mark places the call of the disciples so early on and before they have been properly exposed to Jesus' words and actions. On this account, the great catch of fish prepared the way for the call of the first disciples.

Staying within the field of textual criticism, the group of sensing types went on to discuss the genre of this narrative about the great catch of fish. For some this narrative displayed the power of God at work in Jesus, just as in the healing of the sick or in the stilling of the storm. For others this narrative displayed a sense of magic and distracted from the reality of Jesus' life and work. One participant said that he disliked this pure fantasy stuff.

At this point in the conversation, the facilitator focused attention back on the second aspect of the task, 'What sparks your imagination?' One member of the group was quick to respond that nothing in the passage sparked his imagination. There is nothing there for his imagination to grasp. 'I would not like to have to write an essay on this passage', he exclaimed.

By now the group of sensing types had run out of energy and looked for the plenary session to commence.

Intuitive types

The group of intuitive types began by reading aloud the task followed by reading aloud the Gospel passage. Then the task was read again. Initially individual voices responded with immediate comments on the passage, and allowing reflective pauses between the various contributions.

The first voice found that the narrative sparked a 'picture in his mind'. This picture was of a distance between Jesus and the students whom he was teaching. The distance signified a sense of Jesus' detachment. The boat was buoyant and rolling around (a kind of floating teaching podium) and there was water creating distance between Jesus and the students.

After a reflective pause, the second voice found that the idea of 'deep water' sparked his imagination. Deep water conveys the sense of infinite possibilities, and signifies the unknown. The boat starts off in the shallows (close to the shore) and Jesus tells them to cast out into the deep water. There in the deep water are unknown risks and unknown dangers. The image of the boat beginning to sink emphasises even more the risks and the dangers.

After another reflective pause, the third voice found that the passage sparked thoughts about the repositioning of this story as a post-resurrection narrative in John's Gospel. The story is all the more powerful because it is located both right at the start of Jesus' ministry with the call of the first disciples and then again when the disciples have gone back fishing after the crucifixion.

After another reflective pause, the fourth voice found that the passage sparked a narrative about relationships. Here the disciples have complete confidence in Jesus and through this relationship Jesus changed frightened men into confident men. He changed dispirited fishermen into those who handled a great catch.

After yet another pause, an idea was sparked by the location of Gennesaret. This is a difficult place that sparks connections with the Gerasene demoniac, and with stories of Elijah, and is also reminiscent of George Fox, a preacher who detached himself from the crowds. All this gave rise to an animated conversation about how the mind can cross-reference very quickly in scripture – it happens almost immediately. It takes a lot longer to articulate in words the cross-referencing. In practice it happens in flashes, when you see the reference to the post-resurrection narrative or to the Hebrew scriptures, for example. To support this a story was related, which taught that it was not just activities that matter but also the symbols which are created through an experience. It is these symbols which are triggered at later points and are drawn on in new situations.

A new idea was sparked by the image of the fishermen washing their nets. They really were doing the boring job at the end of an unsuccessful day. Then a strange man turns up who is not really known to them and a miracle occurs. Here is a story about how the miraculous, the extraordinary collides with the everyday. Surely this is what the call to discipleship is all about.

A new idea was sparked by the miraculous catch. Here is a story about God's abundance - even more than was needed, even more than the books could really cope with.

Another new idea was sparked by the way Jesus had told Simon how to do his job better. This must have raised confusion in Simon's mind. Who is this person? What does he know about fishing? But it got Simon's attention and he was willing to walk away from his boat and respond to the call to discipleship.

After the reflective start, the pace of responses had really begun to pick up significantly. People entered the conversation more quickly and were sparking one another off, either by adding new insights or developing connections that others had made. This became particularly lively and engaged at its peak.

Then a member of the group took the conversation off in another direction, inspired by the image of the nets breaking and the boats beginning to sink. The question, ‘What is all that about?’ was posed to the group. A variety of responses was given in a rapid and highly energised exchange. The notion of ‘abundance’ introduced briefly earlier in the conversation came back into play – the nets and the boats point to overwhelming abundance, to God breaking through, and what this looks like. There are risks because the abundance is so great that it threatens to break everything. There was a collective buying into this image by the group and the image was developed. Today, trawlers have risks associated with their nets being too full and also there are incidences of Russian submarines being caught in their nets. The risks are real and great.

Leading in a different direction, a member of the group reflected on what happened as these fishermen chose to leave behind their boats and nets and to become disciples, realising that their future did not lie there with their nets. However, the disciples thought that great things would happen, but when things did not turn out as they had expected, they returned to their nets. Therefore, Jesus came back to remind and inspire them again with the same resurrection experience of what they had just encountered, and the disciples would recognise this. What did happen to these disciples in Acts? They became quite urban, and they did not go back to their nets. There was a sense, at this point, that a number of the intuitive threads that had been identified earlier were now coming together in a connective way. The conversation could have gone on much longer, but by now members of the other group of sensing types were heckling for the plenary session to convene.

Conclusion

This study has built on a series of studies that have explored the distinctive ways in which sensing types and intuitive types read and interpret different passages of scripture, including the following: the birth narratives in Matthew 2: 13-20 and Luke 2: 8-16; the

narrative of separating sheep from goats in Matthew 25: 31-46; two narratives concerning John the Baptist in Mark 1: 2-8 and Luke 3: 2b-20; two healing narratives in Mark 2: 1-12 and Mark 10: 46-52; two passages exploring different aspects of discipleship in Mark 6: 7-14 and Mark 6: 33-41; the feeding of the five thousand in Mark 6: 34-44; the cleansing of the Temple and the incident of the fig tree in Mark 11: 11-21; the resurrection narratives in Mark 16: 1-8 and Matthew 28: 1-15; the Road to Emmaus narrative in Luke 24: 13-35; the Johannine feeding narrative in John 6: 4-22; and the foot washing account in John 13: 2b-15. Cumulatively these studies support the theoretical position adopted by the SIFT method of biblical hermeneutics and liturgical preaching, namely that the reader perspective approach to hermeneutics should be concerned not only with the sociological contextualisation of the reader, but also with the psychological profiling of the reader in terms of preferred styles of perceiving and preferred styles of evaluating.

The present study has added to previous knowledge in two ways, related to the participants in the study and related to the passage of scripture studied. While previous studies in the series have generally been conducted among clergy and licensed preachers, the present study was conducted among participants attending the Summer School convened by the Institute of Socio-Biblical Studies. Here is a group of scholars who take seriously both the study of scripture and the context within which scripture is studied. It may have been anticipated that such participants were sufficiently immersed in the academic literature and methods of biblical studies for the discipline to have exercised greater influence in shaping their approach to biblical text. The evidence, however, suggests that the psychological preference between sensing and intuition clearly shaped the way in which such scholars set about their professional activities. The choice of Luke 5: 1-7 raised two issues of particular significance for biblical scholarship. The first issue, rooted in the source-critical approach, concerns the origins of the material that is common to the tradition of the great catch of fish

recorded as prefacing the call of the first disciples in Luke and recorded as a post-resurrection event in John 21 (see, for example, Marsh, 1963, pp. 655-660; Bailey, 1963; Neiryneck, 1990). The second issue, rooted in the redaction-critical approach, concerns the distinctive use that Luke makes of his sources, especially Mark (see, for example, Conzelmann, 1969; Flender, 1967; Franklin, 1975). In spite of the technical interest of these two issues (rooted respectively in the source-critical approach and in the redaction-critical approach), the reader-perspective approach (rooted in the theology of individual differences and psychological type theory) emerged as strongly significant in the way in which biblical scholars read and interpreted Luke 5: 1-7.

While the Summer School convened by the Institute of Socio-Biblical Studies provided an ideal context in which to test the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics among biblical scholars, there remain two significant weaknesses with the present study that need to be addressed by future research. The first weakness concerns the small number of participants within this workshop. The second weakness concerns the time limitation that allowed exploration of the perceiving process (sensing and intuition) but not of the judging process (thinking and feeling). Nonetheless, foundations have been laid on which future research may build.

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Appendix 1

Luke's account of Jesus calling disciples**Luke 5: 1-7**

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' Simon answered, 'Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.' When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.

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