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Empirical theology and biblical hermeneutics: Exploring lessons for discipleship  
from the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13-35)

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**Abstract**

This study engages the scientific approach of empirical theology with the investigation and evaluation of the reader perspective approach to biblical hermeneutics rooted in psychological type theory. By engaging participants attending the 2015 annual conference of the Institution for Socio-Biblical Studies, this empirical investigation tests whether individual psychological type preferences influence how academically-trained scholars within the field of biblical studies read, interpret and proclaim scripture. Eleven participants were invited in type-alike groups to engage in a conversation between the Lucan post-resurrection narrative concerning the Road to Emmaus journey and encounter and the contemporary theme of discipleship. The data clearly demonstrated how the distinctive voices of sensing, intuition, feeling, and thinking emerged from the ways in which academically-trained biblical scholars managed the exercise.

*Keywords:* discipleship, biblical hermeneutics, psychological type, empirical theology

### **Introduction**

Empirical theology is concerned with the rigorous application of the tools of the social sciences to the subject matter of theology. Theology is concerned with the systematic investigation of God, as God is experienced, conceived and discussed by the community of the faithful. Central to the theological enterprise is the notion of revelation, and central to the notion of revelation within Christian traditions is the nature and functions of the Holy Scriptures. The investigation of the ways in which the community of the faithful (the People of God) imagine that they access knowledge of God (Revelation) through the Holy Scriptures (the Word of God) is consequently a natural and legitimate activity within the domain of empirical theology.

The conversation between the People of God and the Word of God (the Holy Scriptures) has been variously understood and variously orchestrated at different times within the historical development of understanding the revelatory capacity of these texts. A major breakthrough in hermeneutical study in respect of biblical interpretation occurred with the emergence of the genre of approaches to reading the Bible characterised as the Reader Perspective (see Segovia & Tolbert, 1995a, 1995b). The reader perspective may conceptualise the revelatory capacity of scripture materialising not through unlocking the deep (and possibly hidden) meaning embedded in the text by the author, but rather through the dynamic interactions or dialogue between the reader and the text.

Although not itself consciously rooted within the traditions of empirical theology, the reader-perspective approach to biblical hermeneutics built constructively on insights and categories originating within fields shaped by the social sciences, and particularly by sociology. Drawing on concepts shaped by sociological theories, established traditions within the reader-perspective approach to biblical hermeneutics use the notion of social status and power relations to shape liberation perspectives on the reading of scripture (see Botta &

Andiñach, 2009), the notions of sex and gender to shape feminist perspectives on the reading of scripture (see Schottroff & Wacker, 2012), the notions of race and ethnicity to shape black perspectives on the reading of scripture (Brown, 2004), and the notion of gender orientation to shape queer perspectives on the reading of scripture (see Guest, Goss, West, & Bohache, 2015).

Another strand within the reader-perspective approach to biblical hermeneutics has drawn not on sociological theory but on psychological theory. In particular two pioneering studies by Stiefel (1992) and Bassett, Mathewson, and Gailitis (1993) drew on a psychological type theory as originally formulated by Jung (1971) and subsequently developed in dialogue with a series of psychometric instruments, including the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & McCaulley, 1985), the Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey & Bates, 1978) and the Francis Psychological type Scales (Francis, 2005). Psychological type theory distinguishes between two core psychological processes, the perceiving process that is concerned with gathering information and the judging process that is concerned with evaluating information. Jung helpfully described perceiving as the irrational process since it *was not* concerned with evaluation, and judging as the rational process since it *was* concerned with evaluation. The theory suggests that each process is reflected in two contrasting functions. The two perceiving functions are styled sensing and intuition. The two judging functions are styled feeling and thinking.

In terms of the perceiving functions, sensing types focus on the realities of the situation as perceived by the senses. They tend to concentrate on specific details, rather than on the overall picture. They are concerned with the actual, the real, and the practical. They tend to be down to earth and matter of fact. Intuitive types focus on the possibilities of the situation, perceiving meanings and relationships. They tend to concentrate on associations,

intuitions and the wider themes that go well beyond the sense perceptions. They tend to focus on the bigger picture and on the future possibilities, rather than on specific facts and details.

In terms of the judging functions, feeling types form evaluations based on subjective personal and interpersonal values. They emphasise compassion and mercy. They are known for their tactfulness and for their desire for peace. They are more concerned to provide harmony, than to adhere to abstract principles. Thinking types form evaluations based on objective, impersonal logic; they emphasise integrity and justice. They are known for their truthfulness and for their desire for fairness. They consider conforming to principles to be more important than cultivating harmony.

In a paper entitled 'Preaching to all the people', Stiefel (1992) drew on psychological type theory to formulate two hypotheses regarding the connection between psychological profiling and biblical interpretation. The first hypothesis was that the psychological type profile of the preacher may influence the content of the sermon. The second hypothesis was that the psychological type profile of the individual members of the congregation may influence their understanding of the content of the sermon. Stiefel illustrates these points by discussing the specific implications of perceptions shaped by sensing and by intuition and of evaluations shaped by feeling and thinking.

The distinction between sensing and intuition may shape the content of preaching. Preachers who prefer sensing may concentrate on the details of the scripture passage and fail to engage intuitive types in the congregation. Preachers who prefer intuition may concentrate on the big themes and ideas raised by the scripture passage and fail to keep the attention of sensing types in the congregation.

The distinction between thinking and feeling may also shape the content of preaching. Preachers who prefer thinking are likely to focus on theological concepts and to present them with well-ordered clarity, but fail to engage the hearts of feeling types in the congregation.

Preachers who prefer feeling are likely to focus on God's relationship with humankind and to emphasise the fellowship and warmth of the Christian community, but fail to engage the minds of thinking types in the congregation.

While Stiefel's insights were theoretically driven, the approach advanced by Bassett, Mathewson, and Gailitis (1993) was empirically driven. In their empirical study, Bassett, Mathewson and Gailitis (1993) set out to establish the link between preferred interpretations of scripture and psychological preference established partly by psychological type theory and partly by a model of problem-solving styles. Participants in this study were asked to read four passages from New Testament epistles and then offered a choice of interpretations that were intended to express preferences for thinking or for feeling (as defined by psychological type theory) and preferences for collaborative, for deferring, or for independent approaches to problem solving (as defined by their problem-solving typology). Although mixing two theoretical models makes the findings from their study difficult to interpret, their data at least provided some empirical support for a link between an aspect of psychological type preference and choice of interpretation. Most obviously, those classed as feeling types showed a preference for feeling type interpretations.

Working independently from the two pioneering initiatives reported by Stiefel (1992) and Bassett, Mathewson, and Gailitis (1993), Francis and Atkins (2000, 2001, 2002) proposed and developed the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics and liturgical preaching. This approach drew systematically on the four perspectives of sensing, intuition, thinking and feeling in order to explore and facilitate the conversation between the Word of God and the People of God in valuing the revelatory potential of Holy Scriptures.

The first step in the SIFT method is to address the sensing perspective. It is the sensing perspective that gets to grip with a text itself, giving proper attention to the details of a passage, and that may wish to draw on the insights of the historical methods of biblical

scholarship in order to draw in ‘facts’ from other parts of the Bible. The first set of questions asks, ‘How does this passage speak to the sensing function? What are the facts and details? What is there to see, to hear, to touch, to smell, and to taste?’

The second step in the SIFT method is to address the intuitive perspective. It is the intuitive perspective that relates a biblical text to wider issues and concerns. The second set of questions asks, ‘How does this passage speak to the intuitive function? What is there to speak to the imagination, to forge links with current situations, to illuminate issues in our lives?’

The third step in the SIFT method is to address the feeling perspective. It is the feeling perspective that examines the human interest in the biblical text and learns the lessons of God for harmonious and compassionate living. The third set of questions asks, ‘How does this passage speak to the feeling function? What is there to speak about fundamental human values, about the relationships between people, and about what it is to be truly human?’

The fourth step in the SIFT method is to address the thinking perspective. It is the thinking perspective that examines the theological interest in the biblical text and that reflects rationally and critically on issues of principle. The fourth set of questions asks, ‘How does this passage speak to the thinking function? What is there to speak to the mind, to challenge us on issues of truth and justice, and to provoke profound theological thinking?’

Like the work of Stiefel (1992), Francis and Atkins (2000, 2001, 2002) initiated the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics and liturgical preaching by extrapolation from psychological theory. Subsequently, however, like Bassett, Mathewson, and Gailitis (1993), Francis’ research group set out to test their research theory by means of empirical investigation, thus opening up the SIFT approach to biblical hermenteutics and liturgical preaching to the activity of empirical theology. This empirical research has been undertaken



through a series of workshops for clergy, seminarians, lay preachers and laity, including residential events.

These workshops follow a basic pattern of providing participants with opportunities to become familiar with and to experience psychological type theory at work in group situations. Generally this includes an opportunity to complete a recognised measure of psychological type and to reflect on the feedback from this assessment. The participants work in 'type-alike groups'. Sometimes four groups are identified according to dominant type preferences (dominant sensing types, dominant intuitive types, dominant feeling types, and dominant thinking types) and a single task is identified common to all four groups. Sometimes two sequential sessions are arranged: the first session working on the perceiving functions (sensing and intuition) and the second session working on the judging functions (feeling and thinking). In this situation different kinds of questions are posed for the two sessions in order to focus on the process being examined (perceiving or judging).

The first study to employ the dominant type preferences approach was reported by Francis (2010) who focused on the feeding of the five thousand reported in Mark 6: 34-44, working with two different groups: 24 licensed readers in England and 22 licensed clergy in Northern Ireland. Other studies in this second series include the following. Francis and Smith (2012) explored the narrative of separating sheep from goats reported in Matthew 25: 31-46, working with a group of 25 Anglican clergy. Francis and Jones (2015) explored two passages from Mark's Gospel featuring different aspects of discipleship (Mark 6: 7-14 and Mark 6: 33-41), working among 73 participants at a residential Diocesan Ministry Conference. Francis (2015) explored the footwashing account reported in John 13: 2b-15 in the context of diaconal ordination, working with 21 experienced preachers (clergy and readers).

The first study to employ the sequential approach was reported by Francis and Jones (2011) who focused on the resurrection narratives reported in Mark 16: 1-8 and Matthew 28:

1-15, working with two different groups: 26 ministry training candidates, and 21 Anglican clergy and readers. In stage one, the participants were divided according to the perceiving process and invited to discuss the Marcan narrative that is rich in material to attract sensing and intuition. In stage two, the participants were divided according to the judging process and invited to discuss the Matthean narrative that is rich in issues to engage feeling and thinking.

Other studies in this series include the following. Francis (2012a) explored the cleansing of the temple and the incident of the fig tree reported in Mark 11: 11-21, working with three different groups: 31 Anglican clergy, 14 clergy and lay preachers, and 47 lay people and clergy. Francis (2012b) explored the Johannine feeding narrative reported in John 6: 4-22, working with two groups of ministry training candidates: 13 women and 6 men, and 2 women and 5 men. Francis and Smith (2013) explored the birth narratives reported in Matthew 2: 13-20 and Luke 2: 8-16, working with 12 training incumbents and 11 recently ordained curates. Francis (2013) explored two narratives concerning John the Baptist reported in Mark 1: 2-8 and Luke 3: 2b-20, working with a small group of 8 people whom Astley (2002) would style as 'ordinary theologians', people associated with their local church and attending a church-based study group. Francis and Smith (2014) deliberately built on the earlier study undertaken by Francis (2013) among 'ordinary theologians' in order to examine the responses to the same two passages (Mark 1: 2-8 and Luke 3: 2b-20) by those professionally engaged in preaching, working with a group of 22 clergy. Francis and Jones (2014) explored the Johannine feeding narrative reported in John 6: 5-15, working with a group of 13 newly ordained Anglican priests. Francis and Jones (in press) explored two healing narratives reported in Mark 2: 1-12 (the paralytic lowered through the roof) and Mark 10: 46-52 (blind Bartimaeus), working with 23 Anglican clergy. Smith and Francis (2016) extended the study by exploring the Bartimaeus narrative working among 17 Anglican clergy. Francis and ap Siôn (in press) explored the theme of conflict in the cleansing of the

temple and the cursing of the fig tree reported in Mark 11: 11-21, working with two groups: 18 clergy and lay people, and 24 clergy and lay people.

### **Research question**

The research tradition so far established by Francis' research group still remains quite limited in respect of the range of scriptural texts explored and the range of participants engaged in the process. So far the focus has been largely on lay Christians and professional preachers, but the focus has not been extended to include scholars specifically engaged within the academic field of biblical studies. By extending the focus of this research tradition for the first time to work among academic biblical scholars, the thesis can be tested regarding whether professional training in the academic field of enquiry eclipses the influence of psychological type preferences on the way in which scripture is read and interpreted. This thesis is based on the notion that academic training may overlay psychological preferences by emphasising the importance of acquired skills and technical approaches in handling biblical narrative.

## **Method**

### **Procedure**

As part of the programme of the annual conference of the Institute for Socio-Biblical Studies, participants were given the opportunity to take part in workshops designed to provide an experience of studying scripture in type-alike groups. In the first workshop groups were constituted according to preferences on the perceiving process, distinguishing between sensing and intuition. In the second workshop groups were constituted according to preferences on the judging process, distinguishing between feeling and thinking.

### **Measure**

Psychological type was assessed by the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005). This instrument proposes four sets of ten items each to distinguish between

introversion and extraversion, between sensing and intuition, between thinking and feeling, and between judging and perceiving.

### **Participants**

The workshops were attended by eleven participants, four women, six men, and one transgendered woman. There were nine introverts and two extraverts, four sensing types and seven intuitive types, five feeling types and six thinking types, seven judging types and four perceiving types.

### **Analysis**

Each of the four groups was attended by one of the authors as a non-participant observer who was given permission to note the details of the discussion. In this process particular attention was given to occurrence of ways of approaching the text and of ways of talking about the text that exemplified recognised type characteristics. The results section of this paper present a summary of the notes taken in this context. The aim of the analysis was to allow the different perspectives emphasised by the groups (sensing types and intuitive types, feeling types and thinking types) to become clearly visible. In reading the four sections the reader now has access to the four distinctive voices of psychological type as these voices engage actively with a specified text of scripture.

#### **Employing the perceiving functions (Luke 24: 13-24)**

For the first workshop the participants were divided into two groups according to their preferences on the perceiving process: sensing and intuition. They were invited to read the first part of the Emmaus narrative and to address the following question.

#### **Luke 24: 13-24**

##### **On the Road to Emmaus: Part One**

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and

went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.”

For now focus on just this first part of the narrative, and on what has gone before in Luke’s narrative. Engage your preferred perceiving function (sensing *or* intuition) to examine and to explore what you see in the passage about discipleship.

### **Sensing**

The sensing group comprised four participants (three men and one woman) together with the observer. Initially the sensing group felt overwhelmed by the task. There was just so much detail in the story and so much of the detail was ambiguous. The first member of the group to speak began by trying to find out about the two disciples around whom the narrative was based. We just do not know enough about them. The data are ambiguous. Those two disciples said, ‘Some of those who were with us went to the tomb’, but they do not admit to going to the tomb themselves. What they have to say is itself all hearsay. Others had come back and told them ‘that they had seen a vision of angels’, but we don’t know whether they had really seen angels or just had a vision. As far as we know these two disciples on the Emmaus Road had seen nothing for themselves.

Indeed even the story that these two disciples tell about what they themselves had heard is ambiguous. The women had found the tomb and they had *not* found Jesus' body. All this tells us in fact is that the body had gone missing. This is not in itself a narrative about resurrection. No one has yet seen Jesus. The detail that clinches this view for the sensing group is that the disciples were looking sad. They were looking sad because they themselves had not reached a firm conclusion on the basis of the available evidence. They were still trying to make sense of the hearsay. 'Some women of our group astounded us', they said, but they did not know how to interpret what the women had to say. The women had said that the angels had said that Jesus was alive. But the angels had not said what 'alive' really meant, and the women had no first-hand experience of Jesus as 'alive'. They were looking sad because they were still full of horror at what had taken place over the past few days and as yet there was no clear outcome of hope.

There were other puzzles in the narrative, too, underlining the ambiguity in the story. It is puzzling that the disciples did not recognise Jesus when he joined them on the road. The clue may be in the text. The narrative seems to be set later in the day: perhaps the sun was setting and they were blinded? But the narrative also says that 'their eyes were kept from recognising him': perhaps this is part of the divine plan?

It is puzzling as to why the disciples were walking seven miles from Jerusalem that evening. Why were they not staying with the group in Jerusalem? Again the clue may be in the text. The narrative gives a key insight into the mind set of these two disciples when they said that 'We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.' Now Emmaus was a place well associated with the Maccabean hopes and victory of liberation. Where else would the disciples go to welcome the liberation that Jesus had held out to them?

Looking for lessons for discipleship, the sensing group returned to look for evidence in the text. The first clue concerned the social context. Discipleship is not something that is

done alone. These two disciples were there together and they continually speak of being part of a larger group. The second clue concerned the physical context of their conversation - they were walking together, and it is while walking that the deeper and more profound discussions of discipleship may take place. There is a detail in the narrative here that is of importance. When Jesus interrupted their conversation with his stark question, then they stood still. The walk may facilitate the conversation but at key moments of real depth and encounter there is the need to pause and to reflect.

The third clue concerned the facilitated conversation. The disciples would only have made slow progress with their deliberation had they not been joined by the third party. By themselves they were not fully understanding or grasping the full significance of what they were saying. They needed help from outside their own situation. That is what Jesus did when he joined them and he did so by asking questions. Moreover, the kind of questions that Jesus asked were very direct questions: 'What things?' Questions like this pressed the disciples to disclose their hand. Here is a good technique to employ in pastoral counselling.

The fourth clue concerned the openness of the disciples to confess, to speak out their faith in Jesus in a very open and honest way. They are not embellishing the story of their faith, but they are setting it out with all their uncertainty and doubt. They were hoping for a great deal, but they were still not convinced. In doing all this those two disciples were taking a great risk. They had not recognised Jesus and yet they were not trying to hide their faith, unlike the disciples who stayed back in Jerusalem behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. They were not afraid to disclose that they knew Jesus.

The fifth clue concerned the undeveloped Christology to which the disciples gave voice in the narrative. They were searching for ways to express their understanding of Jesus: 'a prophet mighty in word and deed before the people'. Their hope was that Jesus 'was the

one to redeem Israel', but they did not go on to express how this may have been achieved. When Jesus joined their conversation, Jesus did not reject their undeveloped Christology.

Although at the beginning the sensing group had felt overwhelmed by the task, by the end they had become energised by the wealth of detail with which they had been able to work. One member of the group expressed wonder at the wealth of detail: it is 'so very vivid and beautifully written', she exclaimed.

### **Intuition**

The intuitive group comprised seven participants (three men, three women, and one transgendered woman) together with the observer. The intuitive group began by 'brainstorming' initial responses to the text, offering brief comments or raising questions, none of which was developed by other group members or by the contributor at this point. After the initial brainstorming, a number of the themes raised began to be brought back into play, where there was some theme development and some explicit linking to the offerings of others, although none of this occurred in a systematic way.

The first questions raised were, 'Why were the two disciples going home to Emmaus? Were they sad?', which elicited a response by another participant commenting that people want to be at home when they are bereaved. This was followed by an observation by another participant that the disciples associated with other disciples because 'they were together' in the biblical text, and being together is important. Indeed, this 'being together' was seen as similar to that of the local ashram community with which the group was familiar, and in both cases (the biblical and contemporary situation) 'discipleship partners' were a common feature.

The conversation then shifted with the comment that, although the disciples were 'astounded' by the women's testimony and perhaps did not believe it, they still thought it serious enough to check it out for themselves. This was directly followed with a comment by



another participant noting that ‘movement’ was a theme in the passage, and how strongly apparent this theme was for the person making the observation. There was movement all the time until the disciples stood still. Although ‘movement’ had made such an impact on the person, there was no attempt to explain this in more concrete terms or to develop the idea further in other ways, and the group fell into a brief reflective silence, broken by the raising of a rhetorical question: ‘Are we seeing a pattern for discipleship here? That is, hearing the story, testing it out, and then believing it for yourself’.

Another participant then noted that these were ‘Jesus of Nazareth’s disciples’, emphasising the specificity of this; a person could not just be a ‘disciple’ because you needed to be a disciple of someone. Jesus’ disciples believed that Jesus was a mighty prophet because of what he said and what he did; however, it was also interesting to see that the disciples identified with their own people as well, as the use of the word ‘our’ indicated in the words ‘our chief priests and leaders’. Another question was then raised, asking what was meant by the words ‘besides all this’ as though this were some kind of ‘crunch point’. ‘Is this linked to the third day prediction?’ was the response of another, because there was no claim at this point that anyone had actually seen the risen Jesus, only that some had not found his body at the tomb.

At this point, one participant took the conversation back to an earlier question that had been raised during the initial brainstorming, ‘Why are the two disciples going to Emmaus at this difficult time?’ However, this time the question was posed with greater emphasis and incredulity, and again the same person who had responded to the initial question, repeated the observation about bereavement but developed it further through use of specific examples to illustrate the position. The disciples had been bereaved, and that is why they were going to Emmaus. This was their response to bereavement; people behave in different ways when they are bereaved, for example, see how the other disciples responded to the death of Jesus – Peter

got very busy and Mary could not sleep and went to the garden, to the tomb. People behave in different ways when they are bereaved and there are different responses to grief was the point being made. Suddenly, another participant drew attention to a particular detail that he had apparently noticed for the first time; Emmaus was seven miles from Jerusalem, and the two disciples were walking back to Emmaus to their house. This gave opportunity for the bereavement theme to be developed further when it was observed that during bereavement some people want to stay in a group and others do not, which may explain why these two disciples did not stay in Jerusalem with the others.

The participants then went on to raise other questions and make other comments, such as ‘What do we know about Cleopas?’ and ‘They did not see him [Jesus]’, ‘They were prevented from recognising him’, which was developed further. Mary also did not recognize Jesus in the garden, and this seemed to be a running theme in the narrative. Jesus appeared to individuals and small groups who cared about him and who were missing him. Then, in what was described as an ‘intuitive leap’ by the person making it, the veracity of this observation was applied to the apostle Paul. This began a ‘background’ exploration with a Bible linking resurrection appearances of Jesus in Paul, the results of which were intermittently interjected into subsequent conversation.

Meanwhile, another participant drew the group’s attention to the words ‘some believed and some doubted’ at the end of Matthew’s gospel, and this precipitated a brief return to the witness of the women at the tomb with the assertion that the disciples did believe the women visiting the tomb even if they checked it out for themselves, which gave the women some credibility in their eyes. This then led to a brief textually based conversation (with reference to a bible) concerning the word ‘Angelos’ and what this could mean in translation. In light of the reports about the tomb, the question about the strangeness of the two disciples leaving Jerusalem at this time was again raised.

Towards the end of the allocated time, after being stimulated by a number of aspects arising from the biblical passage, there was a recognition that the group needed to deal with the question of discipleship more specifically, in response to the set task, and this resulted in the inclusion of some new insights alongside some previously articulated ideas. In summary: on the journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus, the two disciples were talking about their experience of Jesus, the crucifixion, their disappointments, and their hopes. When they heard the report from the women about the empty tomb, they checked it out for themselves. You could learn today about discipleship from the two disciples on the road and also the wider discipleship group. The two disciples were sharing as they walked along, and it was noted that some very important conversations happen when you are travelling along. These kinds of conversations, however, are immediate and unplanned and they would not happen if they had been pre-arranged.

### **Employing the judging functions (Luke 24: 25-35)**

For the second workshop the participants were divided into two groups according to their preferences on the judging process: thinking and feeling. They were invited to read the second part of the Emmaus narrative and to address the following question.

#### **Luke 24: 25-35**

#### **On the Road to Emmaus: Part Two**

Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up

and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

For now focus on just this second part of the narrative, and on what comes afterwards in the Lucan narrative. Engage your preferred judging (evaluating) function (thinking *or* feeling) to value and assess the implications for discipleship.

### **Feeling**

The feeling group comprised five participants (two men and three women) together with the observer. The feeling group began by focusing on the human interactions and relationships in the narrative. The first observation made by the group was the importance of the shared meal; it was in the shared meal with the recognisable actions and mannerisms that recognition took place. The impact of this recognition was so great that the two disciples got up in the middle of the night and walked back to Jerusalem. It was noted that the disciples described their hearts as burning when they remembered walking with Jesus on the road, and this was a ‘feeling thing’. Their experience was now making sense to them on reflection, and this was considered to be a significant point because if this was viewed from a purely intellectual standpoint, it could not be understood fully; it shows that ‘the kind of knowledge given to us is not only linked to the thinking mode’.

Then, the relational notion of hospitality was raised – there was an urge on the part of the two disciples to be hospitable; it was late so they asked Jesus to stay on with them. However, as one participant pointed out, the disciples were not just being hospitable. There was more to the relationship than that because ‘they urged him strongly’ to stay on with them, which shows that they wanted more of his company.

The conversation moved to the scene where the two disciples arrived back in Jerusalem to the place where the eleven and their companions had gathered. The two disciples shared with them their experience of seeing Jesus, and they also heard about how Jesus had been seen in Jerusalem. This could be understood as affirming one another's experience and an appreciation of 'shared experience' in the discipleship group that is important and part of the 'emotional experience' of being in a group. Perhaps the experiences are different, but you can identify with them. The 'isolating' of the disciples in a context, was noted, and then their coming together as a larger group of disciples.

At this point, the feelings and the emotional state of the disciples were discussed. The disciples had moved from 'sadness' to 'excitement'; something was going on and they were part of it. It would have taken courage to return to Jerusalem, the place from which they were trying to get away. Then, there was a short discussion concerned with aspects of the wider biblical narrative, following on from the assigned text.

When the feeling group returned to the assigned text, they drew attention to the observation that it was 'immediately' after the breaking of the bread that the disciples recognised Jesus. Then, as soon as they recognised him, he vanished from their sight. The group was interested in the impact of this sequence of events on the disciples: 'How did the disciples feel about this at that moment?' they asked. The disciples could not have seen it as part of an hallucination because they acted on it so soon and the seriousness of their intent was shown in the way that they travelled back to Jerusalem in the dark.

Suddenly, a member of the group noticed that there were only eleven disciples gathered in Jerusalem but there was no comment about why there were eleven: Where was Simon? The conversation then returned to other places in Luke's gospel where Jesus vanishes, and an explicit link was made with Jesus' vanishing once he had eaten the broiled

fish (this passage was read out of a bible by one of the participants) and the ascension occurred straight after that episode on the Monday after the Sunday.

The conversation continued with the recognition that the whole experience had transformed the disciples' attitude and outlook. The disciples were now looking to the future; prior to this, they had been 'stuck', but now they were now able to move forward again. This story is also about our experience of discipleship: it is about when you get stuck and about what happens to enable you to go on again. Another participant noted that there was no one forcing an interpretation on the disciples. This was important since there were many people in church who felt that they had a problem because they could not believe a particular thing. In church, there was a need to be open with one another and not to worry if we cannot 'intellectualise it'. This point was supported by the observation that Jesus asked the disciples questions, rather than telling them what to believe, but it was also noted that Jesus gets 'quite direct with them' at times too. Trusting 'your guts' (which was what 'hearts burning' was about) is important.

The conversation moved on to an exploration of the necessity of the crucifixion. One member of the group could see how the crucifixion was 'inevitable', but not how it was 'necessary'. This led to a brief consideration of different doctrines of atonement. The main interpretation supported by the feeling group for the necessity of the crucifixion was the need for 'solidarity' with the human race. The crucifixion was about sharing in the immense suffering that characterises the human condition. When one participant then asked whether the crucifixion was 'necessary' so that the scriptures could be fulfilled, the view was dismissed on the grounds that this was 'doctrine and head thinking', but if you looked at the grass-roots level what 'people see is the suffering and the crucified God'. The conversation ended where it had begun with an interest in human experience.

### **Thinking**

The thinking group comprised six participants (four men, one woman, and one transgendered woman) together with the observer. The thinking group approached the narrative with the clear intention of analysing the core issues.

The first issue was to make sense of and to analyse the claim, ‘were not our hearts burning within us?’ What is of importance here to the thinking group is not the emotion itself, but the awareness of and the analysis of that emotion. We need to be aware of how our emotions are functioning and what we can learn from that.

The second issue was to explore and to analyse the connection between scripture and revelation. Jesus was revealed to them while he was opening the scriptures with them; but this revelation did not sink in until later. Jesus did not convince them with words alone but with his actions. It was the familiar gesture and action that led to full disclosure when their eyes were opened and they recognised him.

The third issue was to examine and to analyse what actually took place when Jesus was at the table with them. The narrative emphasises that Jesus performed the fourfold actions that have, following the writing of Gregory Dix (1945), become associated with the eucharistic liturgy. Those same four actions were a feature not only of the last supper but of the feeding of the five thousand. For these two disciples Jesus’ actions at the table were unmistakably eucharistic and as ‘he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave to them... their eyes were opened, and they recognised him’.

The fourth issue was to interrogate and to analyse how the writer of the narrative may have understood both the disciples’ initial failure to recognise Jesus and their sudden recognition of him. In the first part of the narrative, the writer argues that ‘their eyes were kept from recognising him’. Now in the second part of the narrative, the writer argues that ‘their eyes were opened, and they recognised him’. In both accounts the writer seems to be implying divine agency.

The fifth issue was to make sense of and to analyse Jesus' sudden disappearance. This motif is so familiar in the post-resurrection appearances. Jesus appears as if out of nowhere and just as suddenly vanishes again. This phenomenon raises profound questions about the precise nature of Jesus' resurrection body and its relationship with time and space. Elsewhere in the narrative Jesus is seen walking and eating quite normally. All this is so much more mysterious than a simple magical trick.

The sixth issue was to interpret and to analyse the way in which the narrative understands the Hebrew Scriptures. According to the narrative Jesus drew on the Pentateuch (the Book of Moses) and on the Prophets to show that the Messiah should suffer. It is this activity of Jesus that legitimates ways in which the Christian Church has read the Christian narrative into the Hebrew Scriptures rather than allowed the Hebrew Scriptures to be interpreted in their own right.

Looking for implications for discipleship, the thinking group focused on the problems raised by the passage. All sorts of difficulties have been raised by the group's attempt to analyse the narrative rationally. These problems and difficulties are precisely those that confront contemporary disciples living in a scientific world. Those who try to read the narrative as an accurate historical account confront the challenge of not recognising and failing to relate to the kind of world described, where angels materialise with messages and where strangers vanish from their sight. In today's world Christian disciples have to think through such matters and give a credible account of their faith to a sceptical world.

Drawing this section to a close the thinking group reflected on and analysed what they had accomplished and on what they had achieved. They recognised that they had used their thinking function to raise questions and to test the narrative. In so doing they appreciated how lots of people living their lives outside the Church, on the edge of the Church, and even in the Church were properly confused by aspects of the Christian story in general and by the stories



of Jesus' resurrection in particular. Yet in spite of the problematic nature of the Christian story, individuals continue to bear witness to their personal experiences of encountering Jesus on their journey of life and of feeling their hearts burn within them as they listen to, explore and examine the words of scripture.

### **Conclusion**

This exercise in the science of empirical theology built on a research tradition established by Francis' research group designed to explore and test the thesis proposed by the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics and liturgical preaching that the conversation between the Word of God and the People of God can be significantly shaped by the psychological type preferences of the reader. This thesis places the study within the field of the empirical investigation of the evidence underpinning a psychologically-informed approach to the reader-perspective theory of biblical hermeneutics.

Previous studies undertaken to explore and test the thesis proposed by the SIFT approach had been limited to lay Christians and professional preachers. The present study extended the research tradition among academic biblical scholars in order to test whether professional training in the academic field of enquiry eclipses the influence of psychological type preferences on the way in which scripture is read and interpreted. This thesis is based on the notion that academic training may overlay psychological preferences by emphasising the importance of acquired skills and technical approaches in handling biblical narrative. The data generated by the present study clearly demonstrate how the distinctive voices of sensing, intuition, feeling and thinking emerge from the ways in which academically-trained biblical scholars read, discuss and proclaim scripture. While it is reasonable to expect the acquired skills and technical approaches associated with any academic field of disciplined study to impact the way in which scholars approach their materials, the new evidence generated by the present study suggests that the academic training received by biblical scholars does not

eclipse the distinctive voices of their psychological type preferences. In this way the present study adds new weight to the evidence previously assembled regarding the empirical bases for the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics and liturgical preaching.

A clear limitation with the current state of knowledge in this field concerns the way in which the cumulative empirical evidence has emerged from the systematic investigations of just one research group working in the United Kingdom. The debate has, however, recently been opened to a wider international perspective by the research undertaken in Poland and reported by Chaim (2013, 2014, 2015). There is real value now in other research groups joining the conversation.

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