

# THE RELATIONSHIP OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TYPE PREFERENCES TO BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

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## *Abstract*

This paper tests the theory that lay people prefer interpretations of the bible that match their psychological type preferences. A sample of 404 lay, adult Anglicans from 11 different churches read a healing story from Mark's gospel and then chose between interpretative statements designed to appeal to particular psychological type preferences. Psychological type preferences were assessed according to Jung's typology using the Keirsey Temperament Sorter (KTS). Participants preferred interpretations that matched their personality preferences in both the perceiving (sensing versus intuition) and judging (feeling versus thinking) processes. Theological content may also have influenced choice independently of psychological type preferences because those with conservative rather than liberal attitudes to the bible also preferred sensing over intuitive and feeling over thinking interpretations.

*Key Words:* psychological type preferences, biblical hermeneutics, Jung's typology

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Biblical hermeneutics has undergone many changes in the last fifty years. The virtual monopoly of historical-critical studies within academic circles has given way to a plethora of methods stemming from secular literary methodologies (Thiselton 1992; Segovia & Tolbert 1995). These methods have increasingly stressed the role of the reader in shaping or controlling how scripture is interpreted. Biblical interpreters are now increasingly self-conscious of their social location, especially in terms of gender, ethnicity and politico-economic status (Segovia & Tolbert 1995). Among academic interpreters at least, there is a widespread assumption that scriptural interpretation is never free from influences beyond the text itself.

Alongside this self-conscious awareness of the links between social location and interpretation is a growing school of personal or autobiographical hermeneutics, which deliberately draws on individual experiences and preferences as valid tools for understanding scripture (Kitzberger 1999). Theologically, this is a major shift away from hermeneutical criteria that are based largely on rational understanding or ecclesiastical tradition toward

a more individual, pluralistic approach that stresses the potential of texts for polyvalent, local meaning. The assumption behind these new approaches is that God communicates through an interaction between the universal text and the particularities of the individual reader. The historical-critical scholars of the post-enlightenment saw such particularities or 'pre-understandings' as something that interpreters must move beyond. Contemporary post-modern scholars embrace the variety and individuality of such factors and see them as a key element in the creative process of reading (Adam 1995).

The debate between these different hermeneutics has largely been at a theoretical theological level between trained scholars. There has been rather little attempt to investigate empirically the possible factors that may contribute to individual differences in biblical interpretation among ordinary readers. Whatever theologians make of such factors, the current debate in hermeneutics will be more productive and focused if it is based on evidence rather than speculation. This paper investigates whether there is a link between personality and preferences for particular scriptural interpretations.

There is growing evidence that individual preferences for styles of prayer, spirituality and religious beliefs are related to psychological type (Francis 2001; Village 2004). Carl Jung (1971) suggested that personality could be described by a typology based on the two opposite orientations of the self (extraversion or introversion), the two opposite processes by which we perceive information (sensing or intuition) and the two opposite processes by which we make judgements (feeling or thinking). His ideas have been extended and used to create personality inventories such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or MBTI (Myers & McCaulley 1985) and the Keirsey Temperament Sorter or KTS (Keirsey & Bates 1978). Both of these instruments assess personality along four dimensions that are developed from Jung's personality attitudes and functions:

*Extraversion/Introversion (EI)*. Introverts prefer to concentrate on the inner world of ideas: they are energized by reflection and tend to value solitude more than being with people. Extraverts are energized by the outer world of relationships and objects: they tend to prefer action or discussion to reflection or solitude.

*Sensing/Intuition (SN)*. Jung's perceiving process refers to the way that people acquire information. Those who prefer sensing look at specific parts and pieces, rather than patterns and relationships. They have an eye for detail or practical application and value routine. Intuitives prefer ideas to facts: they enjoy linking information into bigger patterns of challenge

and possibility. They are curious about why things are the way they are, so they will question rather than accept at face value. Sensing types are comfortable with the familiar things in the present; intuitives thrive on new information and the imagined possibilities of the future.

*Thinking/Feeling (FT)*. Information that has been received needs to be assessed, and this is the role of what Jung referred to as the judging process. Thinking types prefer to reach decisions by objective, logical analysis and tend to make impartial judgements based on careful analysis and the application of principles. They have a strong sense of fairness, are often firm and tough-minded to others or themselves, and they may appear sceptical. Those with a developed feeling function make subjective decisions based on personal values and standards. They have a strong sense of empathy with other people, and will work for harmony, even at the expense of fairness. Feelers find it easier to judge a situation from within, rather than taking a more distant, detached view.

*Judging/Perceiving (JP)*. This dimension refers to stance to the outside world. Judging types prefer an orderly, planned lifestyle where decisions are made carefully and in advance of deadlines. Perceiving types have a more flexible approach to life: they make open-ended decisions that may change with circumstances.

Of these four dimensions, the perceiving and judging processes seem to be more closely involved in shaping Christian religious expression than the other two dimensions. Individuals who prefer sensing to intuition are more likely to separate the sacred and secular (Ross, Weiss & Jackson 1996), to prefer traditional aspects of Christian spirituality (Francis & Ross 1997) and to be more conservative in their beliefs (Francis & Jones 1998; Village 2004). Individuals who prefer intuition, in contrast, have more liberal beliefs and are more likely to find spiritual value in objects and events outside traditional Christian prayer or worship. The judging process also seems to be involved in shaping conservative versus liberal belief (Francis & Jones 1998; Village 2004) and charismatic expression (Francis & Jones 1997; Village 2004), though there are conflicting results from different studies. While Francis and Jones (1997, 1998) found a preference for thinking over feeling was associated with more conservative belief and less charismatic expression, Village (2004) found the opposite.

The links between psychological type and religious expression have prompted the theory that psychological type may be one factor that influences the way that people interpret scripture or respond to preaching (Francis 2003). Francis (1997) and Francis and Atkins (2000, 2001, 2002) used

this theory to produce short homilies based on gospel lectionary readings that were intended to reflect preferences for either sensing, intuition, feeling or thinking. Sensing interpretations focused on sensory aspects of a passage, often repeating the account with a particular attention to detail. Intuitive interpretations made links to other ideas in the bible or to ideas beyond the immediately religious, often raising questions that were left unanswered. Feeling interpretations stressed human relationships, examined interpersonal issues and emphasised empathy with figures in the biblical narrative. Thinking interpretations stressed impartiality and logical analysis, directed attention to matters of fairness or justice, and emphasised theological issues raised by the passage. The authors suggested that preachers and teachers using scripture need to be aware of psychological type preferences because different individuals will respond more eagerly to the particular styles and emphases that accord with their own psychological type preferences.

The perspectives developed by Francis and Atkins were based on theory, rather than any clear empirical evidence. To date only one study, to our knowledge, has attempted to relate biblical interpretation to personality type. Bassett, Matthewson and Gailitis (1993) sought to establish a link between preferred interpretations and psychological preferences established by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and a measure of problem solving styles. Participants were asked to read four passages from New Testament epistles and then offered a choice of interpretations for each that were intended to express preference for 'Thinking' or 'Feeling' (as defined by the Jungian model of psychological types) and 'Collaborative', 'Deferring' or 'Independent' (as defined by their problem-solving typology). The mixing of two personality models makes the results difficult to interpret; nonetheless there was some support for a link between psychological type preference and choice of interpretation. This was most obvious among those classed as feeling types by the MBTI, who showed a clear preference for feeling-type of interpretations. The results for those who preferred the thinking function were less clear cut because they had higher preference scores for independent- and feeling-type interpretations than for thinking-type interpretations.

In view of the paucity of research testing the relationship between biblical interpretation and psychological type preferences, we decided to test the theory as part of a wider study of biblical interpretation among Anglican lay people (Village 2003, 2004, 2005). The idea was to give people a passage to read and then ask them to choose between short interpretative statements that were based on the four psychological preferences sensing, intuition, feeling or thinking. The perceiving and judging processes were

chosen for particular attention because both theory and the previous studies cited above suggested that these were most likely to shape preferences for biblical interpretation. Psychological type preferences in the perceiving process (between sensing and intuition) and the judging process (between feeling and thinking) were assessed using the Keirsey Temperament Sorter. The latter provided a relatively short and accessible measure of psychological type appropriate for inclusion within a larger questionnaire. Recent empirical studies support the reliability and validity of the KTS as an effective and efficient operationalisation of the Jungian constructs of psychological type (Waskel & Coleman, 1991; Quinn, Lewis & Fischer 1992; Tucker & Gillespie 1993; Fearn, Francis & Wilcox 2001; Kelly & Jugovic 2001; Francis, Craig & Robbins unpublished). The main aim was to relate preference for interpretations to preference in the perceiving and judging processes, rather than to psychological type as such. It was therefore more appropriate to conceptualize scores as continuous variables, rather than as indicators of a dichotomous categorisation. Using scores, rather than type, is a better tool for research because it allows more powerful statistical techniques and reduces problems caused by using an absolute (and possibly arbitrary) cut-off point for determining type categories (Francis 2001; Village 2004).

Interpretative preferences are likely to be influenced by factors other than psychological type preferences. These may include church tradition, general beliefs about the bible, gender and educational experience. Since such factors have also been shown to be related to psychological type (Village 2004), it is necessary to demonstrate that correlations between interpretative preferences and psychological-type preferences remain after allowing for the effects of these other factors.

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1. *Sample*

The data were collected as part of a wider study into biblical interpretation among Anglican laity in England (Village 2003, 2004, 2005). Sample churches were chosen to reflect the range of traditions within the Church of England, and questionnaires were distributed by post to members on the electoral roll and by hand to those attending church over a several week period. Questionnaires were received from 404 people in 11 churches in central and southern England. The Anglican Church in England has congregations that span wide range of worship-styles and doctrinal posi-

tions, and the churches in the sample included people from Evangelical, Charismatic, Anglo-catholic and Broad-church traditions. The overall bias to women in the final sample (62.5%,  $n = 400$ ) reflected similar figures for the Anglican Church at large (61%) according to Brierley (1999, table 4.9.1). Median age (50) was slightly higher than the mean age of Anglicans (46) recorded in the 1998 English Church Attendance Survey (Brierley 2000, 117). Direct comparison was difficult because of the different age categories used in the two studies, but the difference seemed to arise mainly because of a higher proportion of people aged 30-60 in the present study (75% versus 52%). Over half the sample had higher education qualifications, which was probably a greater proportion than in the Church of England in general, perhaps reflecting the location of some churches in university towns and the complexity of the questionnaire. The sample in this study, while perhaps not wholly representative, nonetheless spanned a wide range of the sorts of people that attend the Anglican church in England.

## 2.2. *Instruments*

### 2.2.1. *Psychological Type*

The published version of the Keirseley Temperament Sorter (©Keirseley 1995) was stapled to the inside of the questionnaire. The answers were scored as per the directions on the sorter: scores for preferences within a dimension are always complementary and sum to 10 for extraversion-introversion and 20 for sensing-intuition, feeling-thinking and judging-perceiving. For the purposes of this paper, the main interest was in scores for the perceiving and judging processes, and the KTS sensing and feeling scores were used as continuous predictor variables in statistical analyses. A high sensing score implied a low intuition score (and *vice versa*) and a high feeling score implied a low thinking score (and *vice versa*).

### 2.2.2. *Biblical Interpretation*

At the start of the questionnaire, participants were asked to read a passage from Mark 9:14-29, a story about the healing of a boy possessed by an evil spirit. The text was from the New Revised Standard Version, but with book, chapter and verse annotations removed. Later in the questionnaire, short responses to the passage were presented in pairs, and participants asked to indicate which one of the two options they preferred. These responses represented different ways of attending or interpreting the passage. A passage can have many possible interpretations, and it would be impossible to reflect them all. Instead the aim was to limit the notion of

'interpretation' to responses of a particular style. There were five questions that gave sensing-intuition items in pairs and five that gave feeling-thinking pairs in random order (Table 1). The proportion of sensing choices was used to indicate individual preference among the perceiving process items and the proportion of feeling items was used to indicate preferences among the judging process items. A low proportion of sensing-type items indicated a higher proportion of intuition-type items, and a low proportion of feeling-type items indicated a high proportion of thinking-type items.

Table 1. *Interpretative items based on the healing story in Mark chapter 9*

Type	Items
<i>Interpretative choices by perceiving personality function</i>	
N	Perhaps religious faith is often a mixture of belief and doubt.
S	I can picture the scene clearly as the father cries out 'I believe; help my unbelief!'
S	I can picture the boy writhing on the ground, dust and foam sticking to his face.
N <sup>a</sup>	Why does the boy start to writhe on the ground when he is brought to Jesus?
N	Jesus takes the boy by the hand and brings him to life: a metaphor for resurrection?
S	With simple authority, Jesus commands the deaf and mute spirit to leave and never enter the boy again.
S	The disciples were inspired to pray with faith: the pathway to future success.
N	The disciples learnt through the down-to-earth experience of failure.
S	This story is a vivid account of a healing that speaks for itself.
N <sup>a</sup>	This story raises questions about the nature of sickness and the power of prayer.
<i>Interpretative choices by judging personality function</i>	
T <sup>a</sup>	This is evidence that the disciples were already trying to heal the sick.
F	The disciples felt ashamed that they couldn't meet the father's cry for help.
T <sup>a</sup>	It seems unfair to blame the father for doubting when the disciples had just failed to heal his son.
F	I can feel the deep love of the father for his son.
F	You can feel the awe that struck those who witnessed this miracle.
T	There is no direct evidence to show how the onlookers reacted to these events.

Table 1 (*cont.*)

Type	Items
<i>Interpretative choices by judging personality function</i>	
T	The evidence suggests that the boy had epilepsy; though what matters is how it was perceived at the time.
F	I feel sympathy for the boy, who must have been very frightened.
F	This is a story about people who feel hope, doubt, fear and love.
T	This story is evidence that unbelief and lack of prayer can lead to a failure to heal.

Note: S = Sensing, N = Intuition, F = Feeling, T = Thinking.

Items were presented randomly in pairs (SN or FT) and participants were given the following instructions: 'These statements are comments on the story, given in pairs. In each case please circle the ONE statement (a or b) that you prefer'.

<sup>a</sup> These items were correctly assigned to category by less than 70% of 21 independent experts who validated these items. Results for these pairs are included in the analyses because excluding them made no appreciable difference.

It is important in this type of research that the interpretative items presented genuinely reflect characteristics likely to be attractive to the relevant type. There is no objective way of producing items, so items were tested in two pilot trials and accepted only if they appeared to discriminate between the relevant types. In addition, all the items used in the final questionnaire were tested *post priori*, using a sample of 21 experts in psychological type such as MBTI practitioners. They were given all the individual items in random order and asked to indicate if they considered them responses that would be preferred by dominant S, N, F or Ts. All but four of the items were correctly assigned by at least 70% of experts. This indicated that they were likely to assess the correct type. Analyses were repeated with and without questions affected by these possibly dubious items, but this did not affect statistical significance in either direction, so results using all items are presented here.

### 2.2.3. Church Tradition

Participants were asked to describe their church tradition using the categories of (a) Evangelical or Conservative Evangelical; (b) Charismatic or Charismatic-Evangelical; (c) Anglo-catholic or High-church and (d) Traditional Anglican or 'Middle of the Road' Anglican. The latter were terms used by lay people to describe the Broad-church tradition. Within the Church of England, Evangelical churches tend to stress the importance of the bible and individual salvation through faith; whereas Anglo-catholic churches

stress the importance of sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and corporate participation through liturgical ritual. The majority of congregations, which have been described as 'Broad-church' (Brierley 1999), lie somewhere between these two traditions and embrace elements of both. Charismatics stress the guidance and gifting of the Holy Spirit and are found most frequently in Evangelical congregations.

#### 2.2.4. *Beliefs about the Bible*

The degree of biblical conservatism was assessed using the 12-item bible scale that measured conservative-liberal belief about the bible (see Village 2005 in press). Items covered subjects such as the inerrancy, authority and exclusivity of Christian scripture. Each item was assessed on a five-point scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Scores for each item were summed to give a bible score with high values equating to conservative belief about the bible and low values equating to liberal belief about the bible. The bible scale was internally reliable (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .91$ ) and statistically significantly correlated with other measures of conservative-religious belief (Village 2005).

#### 2.2.5. *Level of Education*

This was assessed on five-point scale: 0 = no formal qualifications, 1 = General Certificate of Secondary Education (or equivalent), 2 = Advanced Level (or equivalent), 3 = degree (or equivalent) and 4 = postgraduate degree).

### 2.3. *Data Analysis*

Data were analysed using SPSS for Windows 12.1. Examination of the distributions of the proportions of sensing and feeling interpretative items chosen indicated that they were normally distributed and did not require arcsine transformation before an analysis of variance. These two variables were initially tested individually against predictor variables, using a one-way ANOVA for factors (church tradition and gender) and correlation coefficients for continuous variables (education, bible score, KTS sensing and KTS feeling scores).

Analysis of variance using a general linear model allowed both factors (church tradition and gender) and covariates (education level, bible score, KTS sensing score and KTS feeling score) to be entered into the same model with the proportion of either sensing- or feeling-type items as the single dependent variable. All factors and covariates were initially entered into the model and then removed stepwise until only significant predictors remained.

## 3. RESULTS

The number of interpretative items chosen was normally distributed for both sensing-intuition and feeling-thinking pairs, with a slight tendency for more sensing than intuition and more feeling than thinking choices (Table 2). Choices within each process were made independently of each other, and there was no significant correlation between the number of sensing-type or feeling-type choices an individual made ( $r = .095$ ,  $df = 402$ , *NS*).

Table 2. *Number and proportion of interpretative items chosen in the perceiving and judging processes*

Process	Function	Choices within each function	
		<i>mean (SD)</i>	<i>proportion</i>
Perceiving	<b>Sensing</b>	2.8 (1.2)	.56
	<b>Intuition</b>	2.2 (1.2)	.44
Judging	<b>Feeling</b>	2.8 (1.1)	.56
	<b>Thinking</b>	2.2 (1.1)	.44

Note: For each process there were five forced-choice item pairs.

Table 3. *Proportion of sensing and feeling interpretative items by self-labelled church tradition*

Church tradition	<i>n</i>	Proportion of sensing-type items <i>mean (SE)</i>	Proportion of feeling-type items <i>mean (SE)</i>
<b>Anglo-catholic</b>	106	0.48 (0.022)	0.51 (0.021)
<b>Broad-church</b>	137	0.54 (0.020)	0.59 (0.019)
<b>Evangelical</b>	120	0.62 (0.019)	0.57 (0.020)
<b>Charismatic</b>	36	0.69 (0.037)	0.56 (0.042)

3.1. *Initial analyses*

The proportions of sensing and feeling-type items chosen varied between church traditions and with gender. The proportion of sensing-type items was highest among Charismatics and Evangelicals, intermediate in Broad churches and lowest among Anglo-catholics (Table 3,  $F(400, 3) = 11.81$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .082$ ). There were differences between traditions for feeling-type choices, but these were not statistically significant ( $F(400, 3) =$

2.31, *NS*,  $\eta^2 = .017$ ). The proportion of both sensing and feeling-type items were also higher among women than men (*Sensing*: women  $M = .58$ , men  $M = .53$ ,  $F(399,1) = 3.50$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .010$ ; *Feeling*: women  $M = .58$ , men  $M = .52$ ,  $F(399,1) = 6.80$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .017$ ).

The proportion of sensing-type items was significantly positively correlated with the bible score and KTS sensing score, but not with education level or KTS feeling score (Table 4). The proportion of feeling-type items was negatively correlated with education level, positively correlated with bible score and KTS feeling score, but not correlated with KTS sensing score. There were no significant correlations between item choice and other KTS scores for introversion/extraversion or judging/perceiving.

Table 4. *Correlation matrix for the proportion of sensing and feeling interpretative items chosen*

	Proportion of feeling choices	Education level	Bible score	KTS sensing	KTS feeling
Proportion of sensing choices	.10	-.07	.38***	.17***	.03
Proportion of feeling choices		-.13**	.21***	.02	.16***
Education level			-.11*	-.31***	-.17***
Bible score				.22***	.07
KTS sensing					-.19***

Note: Two-tailed Pearson correlation coefficients. Sample size varied from 393 to 404. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

### 3.2. *Multivariate analyses*

The relationships between choice of sensing-type items and KTS sensing score, and between feeling-type items and KTS feeling score, remained statistically significant even after allowing for the effects of other variables (Table 5). The other predictor variables were dropped from the model, apart from bible score, which remained a significant predictor of both independent variables after allowing for psychological type preference scores.

Table 5. *Analysis of variance for the proportion of sensing-type and feeling-type interpretative items chosen*

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	$\eta^2$	<i>p</i>
<b>Sensing items</b>				
Model	2	35.86	.16	.000
KTS sensing	1	4.13	.01	.043
Bible score	1	57.61	.13	.000
Residual	390	(0.05)		
<b>Feeling items</b>				
Model	2	12.61	.06	.000
KTS feeling	1	8.50	.02	.004
Bible score	1	14.92	.04	.000
Residual	390	(0.05)		

Note: Values enclosed in parentheses are mean square errors. Variables initially entered into model: church tradition, gender, education level, KTS sensing score and KTS feeling score. Variables were dropped step-wise until only significant predictors remained.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The significant correlations between the proportion of interpretative items chosen and KTS scores in both the perceiving process and the judging process give empirical support for the idea that psychological type preferences can influence preferences for biblical interpretation. The absolute coefficients were low (see Table 4), possibly because of the difficulty in producing accurate instruments and possibly because there were other factors that influenced interpretation. Nonetheless, these correlations remained significant after other factors were taken into consideration. Interpretations that reiterate details of a passage, or stress the sensory information it contains, are more likely to attract sensing than intuitive types. People who have a preference for intuition, in contrast, are more likely to prefer interpretations that establish connections beyond the immediate passage and raise deeper questions about it. Similarly, interpretations that stress the emotional or relational aspects of a passage are more likely to appeal to feeling types than to thinking types; who are in turn more likely to prefer interpretations that analyse the passage in a more logical and detached manner.

The fact that there were significant correlations in both processes indicates that attraction to a particular style or focus of interpretation may depend on a combination of how people register information about a passage and

how they make decisions about what it means. Both the perceiving and judging processes seem to come in to play when a passage is interpreted, but it is not clear from these results how they interact. If the perceiving process takes effect during the act of reading, then sensing and intuitive types may have different experiences of reading the same passage because they would attend to different aspects even as the text is read. This effect could act independently of the judging process, which might come in to play only later when the reader is trying to decide what the passage means. If this were true, both processes would function in the act of interpretation, and the model used by Francis (1997) and Francis and Atkins (2000, 2001, 2002), which was based on a four-fold dominant type, would need to be modified.

Choice of interpretation was also influenced by general beliefs about the bible. High (conservative) scores on the bible scale indicated a strong belief in the inerrancy, authority and exclusivity of the bible, while low scores came from people who valued the bible but believed it contained some errors, was not the final authority in matters of faith and stood alongside truth from other faiths (Village 2005). Conservative belief in the bible was strongly correlated with conservative views on morality and on the exclusive value of the Christian faith for salvation (Village 2005). Readers with more conservative beliefs tended to choose sensing rather than intuitive interpretations. Conservative religious attitudes are stronger among people who prefer sensing to intuition (Francis & Jones 1998; Village 2004) and KTS sensing scores were positively correlated with the bible score in these data (Village 2004). The sensing items were based closely on the passage and might, by definition, suit those who treat the bible more literally. However, a multivariate analysis confirmed that personality preference in the sensing process had an influence on interpretative choice over and above beliefs about the bible in general.

In the judging process, those with high KTS feeling scores tended to prefer feeling to thinking interpretations, as did those with high (conservative) bible scores. Francis and Jones (1998) found a link between conservatism and a preference for thinking over feeling, which runs counter to the results here. In our dataset, there was a weak link between bible belief and the judging personality process, with preferred feeling types having more conservative scores on the bible scale (Village 2004). Multivariate analysis confirmed that both conservative beliefs about the bible and psychological preference for feeling had additive effects in causing people to choose more feeling than thinking-type interpretations. We could not be certain why those with liberal beliefs about the bible pre-

ferred thinking-type items. Perhaps they were drawn to thinking-type items that allowed a degree of scepticism about the miracle. It was difficult to create items that totally avoided this possible bias because a slightly detached, analytical approach invariably gives some sense of suspended belief that is to some extent the hallmark of liberalism.

Although the choice of interpretative items appeared initially to be influenced by a number of factors such as church tradition, gender and education levels, these did not remain significant predictors after allowing for the effects of psychological-type preferences and conservative-liberal belief about the bible. Although gender and educational experience may well influence other aspects of biblical interpretation, their effects in this case seem to have occurred indirectly because both were also related to psychological type preferences. Gender differences in interpretation are generally thought to be related to imbalances in social status between men and women, but our results suggest that some may relate to gender-specific differences in psychological type. Education, and particularly theological education, may profoundly alter the way that people interpreted the bible. However, some differences in interpretative preference between those with or without higher education experience may arise indirectly because certain psychological types may be more likely to pursue academic study.

The idea that personality preferences can shape the way that readers attend to or interpret the bible has important implications for theological hermeneutics. Working out these implications must await more empirical data in what is a new and under-studied field. The possibility that personality traits or preferences shape the way that the bible is understood, strengthens the idea that the reader is the key locus of meaning. Demonstrating by empirical evidence that this may indeed be true has sharpened the need to show how the text can continue to be a source of divine revelation. This may require both empirical study and theological reflection.

Overall, these results indicate that exploring the influence of personality type on the interpretation of scripture could be a fruitful field of research. There is a need to replicate these findings, and in particular to determine if interpretation is influenced mainly by dominant type or by a combination of preferences in the perceiving and judging processes. Future work could also use different genres of scripture to see if this influences the interaction of personality with other factors. In particular, a more focussed examination of the relationship of personality type and the conservative-liberal content of interpretations may indicate more precisely the ways in which these two key variables influence how lay people understand the bible.

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