

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: York St John University		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 31 Theology and Religious Studies		
Title of case study: Using psychological insights to improve bible reading and preaching among clergy and lay people		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2005 - 2013		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Andrew Village	Professor in Practical & Empirical Theology	September 2007 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Village's empirical research on biblical interpretation has provided support for the continued development of the 'Sensing Intuitive Feeling Thinking' (SIFT) method of preaching, originally proposed by Professor Leslie Francis of the University of Warwick. The Village - Francis collaboration has resulted in specific recommendations on practical hermeneutics and preaching aimed at clergy and lay people. The research demonstrated how different psychological types prefer to handle texts and this has led to recommendations of how to interpret and communicate Scripture in ways that can improve biblical interpretation and the experience of preaching. The SIFT model of preaching has been widely disseminated through workshops and publications and there is evidence that it has helped preachers in and beyond the Church of England.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>The SIFT theory of preaching and biblical hermeneutics was introduced in 2003 by Leslie Francis. It drew on psychological - type theory to propose that readers, preachers, and their congregations might attend to the Bible in ways that aligned with their fundamental personality preferences. The idea had already spawned publications aimed at helping preachers, but there was no research to test the theory or show how the method might work in practice. The theoretical foundations were developed in a joint publication in which Village linked recent developments in biblical hermeneutics to the dimensions of the SIFT model [3.1]. Village was responsible for Part 1, which developed theoretical ideas about the links between hermeneutical notions of the worlds of author-text-reader and the SIFT constructs of perceiving and judging.</p> <p>The empirical research tradition that underpins this impact began with a paper derived from Village's PhD study on the Bible and Lay People. This was the first time a link between psychological type preferences and preferences for ways of interpreting Scripture had been established empirically. Village and Francis then developed the idea of using workshops to both train preachers in the SIFT method and to gather more data to test the link between type and interpretative preferences. This work has mainly been done by Francis; it has helped disseminate findings and resulted in over 20 peer-reviewed articles.</p> <p>During his time at York St John University (YSJU), Village has continued to work on empirical studies of Bible reading using data from surveys which demonstrated the wider applicability of psychological type to biblical interpretation. The work on lay people was replicated among 1061 Church of England clergy [3.2] and psychological type was also shown to relate to interpretation in a sample of 333 biblical scholars [3.5]. The research also broadened to look at more general approaches to Scripture such as literalism and how these related to type. In</p>		

this and subsequent work the distinction between *perceiving* and *evaluating* Scripture emerged as an important sophistication of the original theory. The perceiving functions of sensing and intuition were seen to relate in different ways of interpretation than the judging functions of feeling and thinking. Several studies have now shown that literalism tends to be associated with sensing rather than intuition [3.3; 3.4], whereas intuition is linked to more imaginative approaches typified by Ignatian spirituality or the *lectio divina*. The judging functions of feeling and thinking link biblical conservatism through more indirect effects associated with belonging to particular interpretative communities. The Village Bible Scale has been widely used in surveys as a measure of liberal versus conservative stance towards the Bible, and this has also been shown to be related to psychological type preferences in ways that can inform interpretative practice and preaching [3.6].

These studies have shown that psychological type can help people to understand why they might tend to interpret in various ways such as literally or symbolically, choosing different 'interpretative horizons', using imaginative techniques such as *lectio divina*, or a general disposition towards biblical conservatism. These insights from research can help clergy to understand their own preferences and how these compare with typical psychological type profiles and interpretative preferences of congregations. Understanding from this research has shaped the material intended for use in the church, as well as informing the practice of workshops with preachers, clergy and ministers.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

The book, jointly authored with Leslie Francis, was a key publication that developed the SIFT method in relationship to biblical hermeneutics.

The five articles are from peer-reviewed journals that publish empirical studies that meet the rigorous standards of quantitative studies in the social-scientific study of religion. They are all leading journals within their fields, publishing papers of national and international significance. The *Journal of Empirical Theology*, published by Brill, is the main international journal that publishes in the field of empirical theology. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* is a publication of the American Psychological Association (APA) Division 36 (Society for the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality). Since it began in 2008 it has established itself as leading outlet for psychologists of religion. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* is published in the UK by Taylor & Francis. It publishes work from a wide range of disciplines, including psychology and religion.

[3.1] Francis, L. J., & Village, A. (2008). *Preaching with all our souls*. London: Continuum.
[Can be Supplied by the HEI upon Request]

[3.2] Village, A. (2010). Psychological type and biblical interpretation among Anglican clergy in the UK. *Journal of Empirical Theology*, 23(2), 179-200. doi:10.1163/157092510X527349

[3.3] Village, A. (2012). Biblical literalism among Anglican clergy: What is the role of psychological type? *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 15(9), 955-968.
doi:10.1080/13674676.2012.681482

[3.4] Village, A. (2014). The relationship of psychological type to interpretations of Genesis among churchgoers in England. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 6(1), 72-82.
doi:10.1037/a0035184

[3.5] Village, A. (2015). Psychological type functions and biblical scholarship: An empirical enquiry among members of the Society of Biblical Literature. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 18(7), 605-621. doi:10.1080/13674676.2014.961246

[3.6] Village, A. (2016). Biblical conservatism and psychological type. *Journal of Empirical Theology*, 29(2), 137-159. doi:10.1163/15709256-12341340

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)**Impact arising from the research**

The impact of the research has been to better equip clergy and laity to read, exposit and/or preach on the Bible. The insight that psychological type preferences might influence the way that biblical passages are understood and communicated is helping preachers across the Church of England, in other denominations, and in other parts of the world. The research helps ministers and lay people in several ways:

- a) It enables them to understand why they tend to perceive the text in particular ways (sensing versus intuition), and what that might look like in practice.
- b) It helps them to understand why they tend to evaluate texts in particular ways (feeling versus thinking) and what that might entail in practice.
- c) It helps them to understand people who are different from them, especially how and why they might be different when it comes to interpreting the Bible.
- d) Studies related to literalism and biblical conservatism help them to see that these things may not be simply *theological* stances, but psychological ones as well.
- e) Preachers and those who teach from the Bible are helped to see the key features that can be emphasised from a text so that they can communicate effectively with people of various psychological types.
- f) Insights into Psychological Type can be applied more widely to communication and to relationships in ministry contexts.

Pathways to impact

The two means of dissemination of the research have been training workshops/ teaching sessions delivered in church contexts (mainly the Church of England) and publications specifically aimed at preachers or church-based learners.

Workshops

These are delivered to those who preach (clergy and lay preachers), and who are therefore likely to have considerable influence and reach within their churches.

Since 2013, there have been 2 or 3 each year in 11 dioceses in England and Wales, as well as single workshops in Canada, Cyprus and Denmark. Taken together, these workshops have involved over 500 people, including those responsible for training and mentoring in their dioceses. Examples of feedback from workshops led by Village [5.2] show that the material was widely appreciated, especially by ministry practitioners. In one workshop, 9 out of 10 indicated the research was likely to impact their preaching, with discussion indicating this could be by shaping sermons that suited sensing types (who are in the majority in most congregations) or developing their least preferred ways of interpreting biblical passages.

Publications

The Learning Church series, published by SCM Press, is designed specifically to provide resources for education for discipleship and ministry training, drawing on the results of empirical research to present new and challenging ideas in an accessible form. Village produced a title in the series *Encountering the Bible* (2016), which has two sections that use the SIFT research to help readers understand their own preferences in Bible reading (chapter 4), and to show how this can be transformative (chapter 9). This latter chapter uses Romans 12 to show how the skills associated with particular type preferences could enable readers and churches to enact the exhortations of the text in different and creative ways.

In a review in the *Church Times* [5.1] it was stated: 'This deserves to become a standard work for people getting into serious biblical study, whether from an academic or a 'devotional' point of view: both are catered for... It is not a guide to what is in the Bible — there are plenty of those. It is an introduction to different questions and approaches that a Bible reader needs to have in mind in encountering this complex and difficult text, and it succeeds spectacularly in this aim.'

Evidence of quality and scope of impact

The evidence of the on-going impact of the research comes mainly from the testimonials of those who have helped to arrange workshops for churches and dioceses. These are often

people involved in ministry training (usually in dioceses) and therefore have on-going relationships with those who attend workshops. We asked them to address their own personal experience of the impact of SIFT, report on the impact on others they knew, and indicate something of the scope of the impact within their sphere of responsibility [5.3; 5.4; 5.5; 5.6; 5.7; 5.8].

1. Positive and lasting benefits on the preaching and communication of individuals involved in religious ministry and leadership [5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.8]. These are often related to shaping the style or content of a sermon to the particular audience being addressed. E.g.:

“The whole process led to a much richer understanding of the passage under scrutiny and provided a bountiful variety of ways into the passage in terms of approaching constructing a sermon on it. It also led to everyone appreciating that their congregations would see the passage in a variety of ways and for the preacher to be more sensitive to these variations in their own sermon preparation in future.” [5.3]

“In the ensuing weeks [after a workshop], 8 different participants either remarked in conversations or sent me notes which expressed not just appreciation for the workshop but noted the manner in which the type-focused, interpretive understanding had prompted them to critically reflect upon larger questions of interpretive predisposition in their ministries. As one of the participants noted, “As soon as I began to appreciate how much my sole reliance upon the Feeling function dominated my interpretation for preaching, I also had to begin to wrestle with how much stronger I could be in my pastoral practice if I learn how to nurture my other, less dominant functions.” [5.6]

“When Scripture is interrogated through psychological type there is among people an ‘aha’ moment. That ‘aha’ moment crosses gender, age and language. What people begin to realise and experience is that we all bring to the text our own way of looking at the world and that way of looking at the world is very different depending on our psychological profile.” [5.8]

“Without fail, I get a more engaging and wider range of positive responses from congregants when I use material and ideas from the SIFT ... I also find that in the days following the preaching of a sermon based on the SIFT framework, that worshippers contact me to offer their own reflections on what was said much more than when I preach a conventionally prepared sermon. SIFT based sermons appear to have greater impact on worshippers’ engagement with Scripture and their own discipleship.” [5.4]

2. Wider benefits linked to SIFT for relationships and other aspects of ministry practice [5.3; 5.4]. SIFT involves the understanding of self and others, and how this works in communication. It is unsurprising, then, to find evidence of its wider applicability in ministry. Understanding of type, promoted by SIFT workshops, has influenced the way that ministry practitioners see relationships in general by helping them to understand the characteristics of themselves and people who are of a different type to their own (e.g. incumbents and curates [5.4] or leadership of a Buddhist community [5.4]). One person described the impact on curates and their training incumbents:

“Overall, ... we did see a dramatic diminution of the number of curates who had to be relocated mid-curacy. The work done on Personality Type had provided a mechanism that facilitated an even conversation and common vocabulary that was able, through time and effort, to resolve issues which previously would have ended in a complete breakdown of relationship.” [5.4]

“We also found that curates, and indeed their incumbents, were employing their understanding of Personality Type in a wider range of ministry, and sometimes family, contexts. There was a constant stream of anecdotal feedback of how people had found ways to transfer their new-found understanding to a wide variety of relational contexts.” [5.4]

3. Impacts extend beyond the workshop participants themselves [5.3; 5.5; 5.6; 5.7; 5.8].

Two of the testimonials mention training incumbents [5.4; 5.7] who have a key role in increasing the scope of the impact in churches through their work with curates.

“Follow up meetings with participants who were Training Incumbents, of which there were 16, confirmed that the training event had effected long-term impact on the way in which effective preaching was being conducted within the Diocese. Training Incumbents have an important role in the Church in that they oversee the training of curates, trainee ministers, so they were not only keen to develop their own preaching skills but be better equipped to provide feedback on the preaching of these trainee ministers cognisant of the way different psychological types approach the text and deliver the message. At subsequent training events for Training Incumbents these senior ministers continue to report positive effects from the training day for their own preaching ministry and for their role in training curates.” [5.7]

4. Impact beyond the Christian community. Although SIFT has mainly been researched and applied among Christians (and especially Anglicans) in the UK, it has also had similar kinds of impacts beyond the UK [5.8] and on other faith communities [5.3].

“These experiences of the SIFT method have enabled me to be more effective as a leader among the Buddhist community in the Waterloo and Guelph Region of southern Ontario, adapting my communication style to the predominant preferences of the variety of Buddhist groups with which I am connected.” [5.3]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[5.1] Document: *Church Times* 21st October 2016, Review of Village (2016) *Encountering the Bible*. London: SCM Press.

[5.2] Report: Feedback from 3 workshop/ teaching sessions led by Andrew Village

[5.3] Testimonial: Canadian lecturer and leader of Buddhist communities. (Note: The workshop was in 2009, but the benefits have extended into the eligibility period)

[5.4] Testimonial: Vicar and former Ministry Training Officer for a Church of England diocese (Note the person was appointed to post in 1997, but workshops were held in 2013 and 2014).

[5.5] Testimonial: Vicar in the Church of England

[5.6] Testimonial: Former Dean of Martin Luther College, Ontario

[5.7] Testimonial: Director of Mission and Ministry in a Church of England diocese

[5.8] Testimonial: Cathedral Dean in the Church of England