

Personal Differences and Evangelism

In reading always start somewhere.

In the paper on “What Makes A Christian” here included we used the New Testament literature and the persons and communities they represent to appreciate the legitimacy of variety, of different ways of coming to and living with Christ. I have also included information about the Myers Briggs Type Indicator which helps us appreciate the different functions and attitudes by which we approach life, a very meaningful tool for enabling exploration of personal differences and preferences. These differences in persons call for differences in approaches to coming to and living with Christ and respect for the differences. In fact, although in our presentation of the Christian faith we have argued for personal relationship as the foundation for the possible varieties of faith, it also has to be acknowledged that for some persons relationship is problematic and ways that avoid relationship, such as the intellectualization of religion, are often preferred. However the fact that there is the reality of God, Christ, and Spirit at the heart of Christianity means we cannot long keep from dealing with what is at the center – and whether we deal with it and recognize it or not, relationship is still there as God’s gracious gift. In reality relationship is always gift in some sense which then enables response of the one to whom relationship is offered.

Included here is also a section on Other Religions and Jesus, an issue very important in our times. Our approach to this may provide us with freedom and friendly context in order to share the great gifts of Christianity with others.

The Moravian Church of the 18th century divided into groups according to age, station in life, spiritual needs, etc., each group being provided with community and spiritual care (even including embryos). Both denominations and congregations were often known as “*Gemeine*”, a German term for “fellowship,” centered around the relationship with the person of Christ. Not only were divisions created to enable personal and spiritual care, but the whole church was divided into “*Tropi*” or “Ways” according to the religious backgrounds from which persons came: Moravian, Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican. There was intentional preservation of the different Ways which was viewed as helping to preserve the treasures of the different traditions. There was no one way of being or one way of doing things though there was one Reality at the center of it all which ultimately could not be avoided and provided the dynamic resources arising from the reality of Christ who was painted at the center of each fellowship within the Church and at the heart of the “First Fruits”, the initial converts of Moravian mission. It was even understood that since the center of our faith is the living Person Jesus, he would work with us and direct us not in general but personal and particular ways. And he would direct us through persons in the congregation. Persons and communities then were viewed as the primary locus for the presence of the person of Christ. This is why the congregation is so important to persons exploring the nature and character of faith and life rooted in the personal character of God (Father, Son and Spirit).

Clues on the Differences of Persons — the Myers Briggs Type Indicator

Analysis of Personal Preferences in the MBTI

EXTROVERSION/INTROVERSION (ATTITUDES) have to do with whether one's primary investment of interest and energy is in the outer world of people, things, and events or in the inner world of mind and inner experience.

PERCEPTION: SENSING/INTUITION (FUNCTIONS) have to do with whether persons perceive their world primarily through sensory reception and observation (Sensing) or through inner awareness (Intuition) by which the world is viewed, understood, and ordered.

JUDGMENT: THINKING/FEELING (FUNCTIONS) have to do with the rational process one uses, how one decides, one's Judgment. Thinking examines abstractly and intellectually what is perceived and makes decisions on that basis. Feeling takes into account the way things and persons matter according to personal values (having nothing to do with emotions) and how decisions affect persons rather than principles.

JUDGMENT/PERCEPTION (ATTITUDES) have to do with one's preferred attitude toward *the external world*. Judgment means that one relates to the external world through a judging process (T or F), giving the world its order and structure from within one's rational process. Perception means that one relies on a perceptive process (S or N), responding to the world primarily in terms of the way the world presents itself and is perceived. In simplest terms this means that a J brings to the world a structure and prefers it *structured*, while a P prefers an *unstructured*, more spontaneous world. This preference is also used to determine one's **DOMINANT**, or most strongly developed, function. The Dominant function, because of its central role in one's life, may influence the way the others are exercised.

The Practical Impact of Preference

Preference affects how one learns,³ communicates, perceives the world, thinks and decides, handles conflicts, the persons to which one is attracted, how one works with others, and the vocations for which one is best suited.

In terms of **learning**, how easily learning would take place would depend upon the match of the preferences of the person with what one wishes to learn. Because preferences and what one needs to learn cannot always be matched because of circumstances and the needs of life, one must find ways to deal with learning processes that are not natural to one. This must first start with full acceptance of one the way one is, for to judge oneself inadequate (because what one needs to learn does not come easily or naturally) is the primary barrier to learning. To attempt to do what does not come naturally is difficult enough, much less to attempt to begin it with a sense of failure. To know how preference affects learning enables one to bring one's gifts to the task of adaptation to learning which is not natural to one's preferences and to choose areas of learning that are suitable.

The experience of being confronted with a learning process that is not natural to one's experience and preferences is most often experienced in higher education. If one deals with liberal arts or graduate study, outside of applied sciences, one is confronted with a theoretical approach to knowledge. One must learn theory and information, the application and experience of which is only a later issue. Some persons, however, learn through experience and their understanding is developed out of experience. Thus they experience difficulty in learning "deductively." Introversion and INTuition are most supportive of deductive learning and provide one with an advantage. A person with a J preference also

³. Gordon Lawrence, People Types and Tiger Stripes: A Practical Guide to Learning Styles, 2nd Ed., Gainsville, Fla.: Center for Applications of Psychological Type, 1982.

has some advantage in being able to plan and structure both materials and time. The Extrovert is somewhat at a disadvantage because of all of the distractions available to the Extrovert in the external world -- and the Extrovert (especially if having a Feeling preference) would rather be with people than books.

It is interesting to explore how preferences affect **the way persons work together**. *Differences in preference both provide added resources to any project and opportunity for conflict. It is important to learn how to take advantage of differences and to live with them.*

Joe is an Extrovert. His way of working things through is to talk them out. It does not make so much difference whether anyone listens or responds. He needs to talk to think. Jim is an Introvert and he does all of his thinking within his head, sharing only the results after he has finished his process. Joe's constant verbal patter is distracting to him, especially since Joe does not seem to really want any responses but merely to have someone there so he can extrovert his thinking. Joe sometimes wonders what Jim is doing in his long periods of silence and why he seems to share so little of his thinking.

Joe's process of perception is Sensing. This means that he is always exploring his environment and taking in information. He can provide a lot of information about what he observes. There is little that he misses. Jim is an INtuitive. He observes his world. But after receiving some information what he knows inside his head starts up and he already believes he knows what is there or what is needed without detailed observation. Of course, because he comes to conclusions so quickly he may miss important information. Joe would be content to go on observing and gathering information for some time while Jim quickly comes to a conclusion and would like to make any decisions needed and get on with it. Jim also has the ability to see where things are going, their pattern, direction and meaning. Jim focuses on the future while Joe focuses on the present. The two have a lot to give to each other if they can listen to and respect each other. Otherwise then may become impatient with each other.

Jill enters the process with Joe and Jim. Jill thinks and arrives at decisions by Feeling, being sensitive to persons. "How will this affect the persons I work with," is her first consideration. Jim "thinks" and decides things by Thinking, on the basis of what is right, responsible, and true. He is less moved by how his decisions will affect others. Jim and Jill find themselves drawing different conclusions and giving different advice. Jim could remind Jill of important principles and Jill could remind Jim of ways to be sensitive to the personal impact of their decisions and projects --- or Jim could tell Jill, "You're soft. You can't make the hard decisions." and Jill could say to Jim, "You're heartless."

Jill's J/P preference is P, which means that she prefers a more spontaneous, less structured life. She can delay decisions for some time and doesn't need to have everything carefully worked out and planned. Jim, on the other hand, has preference for J. This means that he needs order and structure to his life, he needs to know where things are going and to plan to meet future emergencies and problems. Jill at times drives him to distraction because she is in no hurry to work things out and get them done. Jill's openness and unpressured nature could prevent hasty decisions and Jim's careful planning and structured mind could help to get things done -- if they understand and respect each other.

In working together in an office, on a board, in a church, or wherever, responsibilities could be assigned according to personality type so that persons would be asked to assume responsibilities to which they were naturally suited. However, it should be remembered that persons develop and possess skills in areas which are not their preference. To work in harmony with one's preferences makes work easier, more pleasant. Yet skills will ultimately get the job done.

In interpersonal interactions and decision making which involve a number of persons, each could be allowed to make their contribution. The process would have to be managed by one who was not only aware of the preferences of others, but who could direct the process towards decision making without

allowing the differences to paralyze the process. A very helpful approach to problem solving is to allow everyone to express enough of their perspective to be sure it is heard. To make decisions without the hearing of differences quickly leads to conflict, or at least resentment. To hear others takes time, but it is time that must be taken if the process is to be democratic. In doing this, care has to be taken that no one's contribution is dismissed by ridicule. A good leader of the process would be able to "tease out" the particular contributions that each person can make and give necessary boundaries to the process. After a group has been together some time perspectives become known and the need for individual expression may become less -- if one feels respected and heard.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and Spirituality

Preference is also significant in one's religious life: e.g., the worship and sermons that appeal, one's desire to be involved in activities or reflection and discussion, one's response to Christian community, one's approach to the Bible, and one's preferred spiritual discipline. It even affects one's overall approach to religion and what one looks for in it.

Perhaps it would be helpful to briefly indicate the spirituality preferences which belong to the different attitudes and functions of the person:

Extroversion = preference for spiritual interests in the external world of action, persons (if an F), things, and nature;

Introversion = preference for spiritual interests in the inner world of mind, imagination, privacy and solitude;

Intuition = preference for meaning, the pattern of things, intuited meaning of events and life, the inner voice of God;

Sensation = preference for the experienced world, meditative imaging, for the Extrovert the world of creation, action and people;

Thinking = preference for more abstract, conceptual treatment of religion and principled treatment of life;

Feeling = preference for people and groups, religion as relational, personal, and social;

Judgment = preference for a structured religious and moral life;

Perception = preference for a more spontaneous religious life.

Of course, type is not the only thing that affects religious preferences. There are the conditioning that comes from one's background and tradition and the particular personal issues with which one deals which call upon one's religious tradition in differing ways.

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WHAT MAKES A CHRISTIAN?

The Reality of Being Christian In Different Ways

What makes a Christian?

What is it that makes a Christian? What do we ask those joining the church to commit themselves to and how do we ask them to understand themselves? Perhaps the church is more concerned with helping persons with life and the foundational relationship with God that all the possibilities of human existence may be discovered and owned. God's heart is open to us, and brings to us the reality to which faith, hope and love are response. *Our starting point in life with God is then the grace and gift of relationship responded to in faith, love, and hope, the central Essential of faith.*

We often feel that actual membership in an organized church is the primary constituent of spiritual life, but the New Testament presents a variety of answers which can be discovered among the differing perspectives of New Testament literature. Some would also state urgency for membership in order to have one's sins forgiven and be saved from hell, a perspective which does not fit the meaning and description of the Gospel where Christ loves us by sacrificing his life for us.

The New Testament Seldom Says Things One Way

It is important to remember that NT literature is the product of various individuals and religious communities. And not only do various communities look at tradition and issues in different ways, but there is clear indication of development and change in the process of understanding. Representing the perspectives of individuals we have Paul, Peter, Luke, Matthew, James and two Johns, one the final author of the book of Revelation which according to modern scholarship was begun by borrowing the preaching of John the Baptist (chapters 4-11), then included Christian tradition originating during the tragedies of the Jewish-Roman War (12-20:15), and towards the end of the first century receiving additional material and editing from John on the Island of Patmos (1-3, 21-22). When we read the Gospel of John we find an editor discussing his use of a Beloved Disciple Gospel (21:24). The author of Luke in 1:1-4 discusses his use of sources and research. And when we examine the Gospel of Mark there is clear indication of an earlier form and a later edition called to our attention by several endings to the Gospel. Sometimes we are not just clear on who these individuals were, such as the author of Matthew. However, the early church included all of these books affirming the value of their content, the variety of their perspective, and the need to preserve differing perspectives. Although in the second century there was an attempt to turn the varied Gospels into one, this was refused and the four were preserved. Of course some Gospels were not included because of the extent of their difference from Gospels generally accepted. A good example of this is the exclusion of the Gnostic Gospels. Yet whatever the selectivity of the early church and the legitimacy of the traditions, the church refused to resolve variety within the tradition by narrowing options to a few choices. Even the variety within individual communities and traditions was preserved by keeping the process of their thought in their literature.

Matthew's One Way

The Gospel of Matthew was placed first amongst the Gospels. I have often wondered if the positioning of Matthew was a compromise arrived at because Matthew's community was an early Christian community of great influence. It was placed first among four and was willing to preserve the other three. Thus the positioning of Matthew allowed the Matthaean community to more easily accept the different perspectives of other Gospel traditions. In reality Mark was a source of Matthew and should have been listed first. Matthew also shows no signs of the inner dynamics of change characteristic of the other Gospels. What the community has arrived at will be where it will stay and the core of faith on which it will rely.

Matthew seems to present the perspective of a tradition of great authority, beginning with genealogy, providing three chapters of a "Sermon on the Mount" modeled after the prototypical Mosaic reception and presentation of the Law (28:18-20). This was to call all to a greater righteousness (5:17ff) and a perfection as God's perfection (5:48). And the Gospel ended with the Great Commission which mediates Jesus' authority to the disciples and asks them to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything Jesus has commanded. Jesus then as the new Moses in Matthew calls for a righteousness greater than the Scribes and Pharisees and for perfection as our heavenly Father is perfect, expressed in the new Torah of the Sermon on the Mount (5:20 and 48). Jesus then promises to be with them to the end of the age (28:18-20). Indeed, there is *no process* in this Gospel of the Matthaean community, though there are traces of the older Jesus' tradition being preserved in this community which has modified some of it in a Pharisaic or Essene direction. Matthew then preserves an affirmation of the authority of the tradition of a particular Jewish Christian community which is to be continued to the end of time. But alongside Matthew the early church placed three other Gospel traditions, besides Acts, the epistles and Revelation. Jesus cannot be understood merely from Matthew.

The Model of Mark

The early church often had certain understandings of the intended usage and therefore design of the Gospels. It is intriguing that the earliest form of the Gospel of Mark included an ending where the women at the tomb were placed within the existential situation of those who had heard about the resurrection through reading the Gospel or preaching. They had heard, they read, but had not yet seen Christ (18:1-8). In the Baptism of Jesus (where the experience of the Baptism is addressed to Jesus, not the crowd) and the temptations in the wilderness in Mark (which have all of the Messianic particularities removed that we find in Matthew and Luke) enable the reader to see that the experience is not just that of Christ, but his experience. The organization and development of the narratives in John develop and detail the significance of the encounters of Jesus with persons and the model becomes "Come, see, and stay" with Jesus, included in two encounters in John 1. Women play a profound role in John, in all but the events of Chapter 21, from which the women disappear, a process characteristic of some other NT literature.

The Experience of Paul

Paul's approach to what is constitutive for the Christian community comes partially from his own extensive experience within the Christian community and his experience with God not always within the Christian community. Though he was constantly involved with the life and order of Christian communities, the transcendent experiential dimensions were always important. In Acts 9 the story of his experience with the resurrected Jesus is told by Luke and mentioned by

Paul in I Cor. 15:8, described by Paul in Gal. 1-2 and also in II Cor:12 where visions more than his conversion are mentioned in the context of discussion of his human weakness and sufferings. On the basis of his experience, and that of others, he formulates a very significant description of religious experience: spiritual gifts activated in all by the same Spirit, spiritual services of the same Lord, activated by the same God in all and for the common good (I Cor. 12), described according to the analogy of one body but many members.

In I Cor. 1 Paul indicates that whatever the divisions and loyalties within the church, that which is foundational is Christ and the cross, which is the power of God to those receptive. Jews want a sign and Greeks want wisdom, but Christ is the wisdom of God (not just the wise thoughts of God but the personal expression of God's Wisdom who was responsible for creation of the world). And God is the source of your life in Jesus Christ. "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord" (1:31/ Jer. 9:23-24). This is the mystery Paul proclaims, but this is not according to the mystery of this age or its rulers. It is a mystery born of its own reality.

In Galatians 1:6ff Paul indicates that there is no other Gospel than this, and it does not have human origins (1:12): the Gospel has its origin in Christ. Then he rehearses his story after his conversion, including his visits to Jerusalem and Antioch and the quarrels and agreements regarding the Law. Now the Law can no longer function in the old way and what used to establish a person's identity was changed. For in Christ Jesus you are children of God through faith, since you have clothed yourself with Christ. For those who clothed themselves with Christ there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. You are one in Christ and Abraham's offspring. And identity is found in God's action and grace (Gal. 3:23ff). In II Cor. 5:16 Paul indicates that from now on we no longer regard a person from a human point of view – we know him/her no longer in that way. All this is from God who reconciled us to himself in Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

The Presence of God and the Source of Life in Us

It becomes clear that Paul knows we are constituted by our origins, not by institutions or regulations, not by sexual, social or national identity. Ultimate identity and reality come from God and arise within us, embodying the fullness of the deity: Father, Son and Spirit. Sacraments (Baptism, Eucharist) embody the story of Jesus and the Gospel communicates its reality: "the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith" (Rom. 1:16). And for those in Christ Jesus, the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2). 'When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.' (Rom. 8:15-16, also Gal. 4:6) In the midst of all life's difficulties we cannot be separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:37-39) and the use of the Aramaic relational term, "Abba," meaning "Father" in a familiar and intimate sense, affirms that one is dealing with a personal and interpersonal reality rather than institutions and formulations of ethics and belief. All of significance arises from relationship and finds its home and destiny there. And the variety and varied potential of relationship and its expression is preserved in the inclusiveness of the New Testament. Thus we live from the Source in differing ways which are right for our uniqueness and needs.

In reading always start somewhere and focus on what intrigues you.