CHAPTER 3

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS EXAMINED

The facts presented in Chapter 2 (and discussed much more fully in an appendix at the end of this book) demand an explanation.

1. It is a fact that most of the members of the Boston Church of Christ showed a high level of change in psychological type scores.

2. It is a fact that the observed changes presented a clear pattern of convergence in a single type: ESFJ. There was a strong tendency for introverts to become extraverts, for intuitors to become sensors, for thinkers to become feelers, and for perceivers to become judgers.

3. It is a fact that this kind of pattern was not found among other churches of Christ or among members of five mainline denominations, but that it was found in studies of six manipulative sects.

These facts cannot be ignored. They must be explained.

The explanation I offered to the leaders of the Boston Church of Christ was that these observed results indicate a dangerous falsification of type produced by some kind of group pressure. Chapter 4 examines unique doctrines and practices of the discipling churches that may account for the results that were observed in this study. Before considering these things,

however, it is necessary first to examine various alternative explanations that have been offered by the leaders of the Boston Church of Christ and various other individuals.

JESUS AS AN ESFJ

Results of this research were presented to the leaders of the Boston Church of Christ in December of 1985. In that two-day meeting, they rejected my explanation and offered several alternative explanations. The first of these had to do with the psychological type of Jesus. Kip McKeen argued that all the Boston Church of Christ is doing is making people over after the image of Jesus Christ. He concluded that this research simply proves that Jesus was an ESFJ.

My response was that one cannot do a personality test on deity. Jesus had all the gifts, not just half of them. ESFJs have four very important gifts. As extraverts, they have a natural ease in dealing with people. As sensors, they have the gift of practicality. As feelers, they are comfortable in the human
relations area and are probably sensitive to how other people feel. As judgers, they have the gift of being organized. ESFJs, however, do not have four other gifts that are just as important. Introverts have the gift of concentration, reflection, and ease in dealing with the inner world. Intuitors have the ability to see meanings, relationships, implications, and possibilities. Thinkers have the gift of objective logical analysis. Perceivers have the gift of flexibility. One can argue based on the gospel record that Jesus was an extravert, a sensor, a feeler, and a judger. One can also argue, however, that Jesus was an introvert, an intuitor, a thinker, and a perceiver.

The four psychological processes in Jungian theory may also be viewed as four communication styles. In their book, *From Image to Likeness*, Grant, Thompson, and Clarke suggest that the four gospels were written in the four communication styles. Matthew's gospel is clearly written in thinker style. He emphasizes the things Jesus taught. His gospel is a logical argument that Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. Mark's gospel is written in sensor style. Mark tells little of what Jesus said, but emphasizes what Jesus did. Mark's gospel is a gospel of power. It is short, straight to the point, action-oriented, and results-oriented. That is the way good sensors write. The gospel of Luke shows us the human side of Jesus. We learn from Luke how Jesus felt and what He valued. This emphasis is consistent with feeler style. John's gospel is quite different from the synoptic gospels. It is as though he steps back from the details to focus more on the meaning. John presents more of a theological gospel. This style is consistent with the way intuitors write.

Anyone who studies all four of the gospels should be able to identify with Jesus regardless of whether that person is an extravert or an introvert, a sensor or an intuitor, a thinker or a feeler, a judger or a perceiver. All people, regardless of their psychological type, should be able to identify with Jesus. Something is wrong with a proclamation of Jesus if only the ESFJs can identify with Him. Such a result would indicate that one is preaching only half of Jesus. One cannot adequately explain the results observed in the study of the Boston Church of Christ by arguing that Jesus was an ESFJ. Such an argument reflects too small a view of His divine nature.

**EFFECTS OF RADICAL CONVERSION**

A second alternative explanation offered by leaders of the Boston Church of Christ is that the observed changes in psychological type scores may simply reflect the effects of radical conversion from non-Christian backgrounds. They pointed out that the majority of their members did not grow up in churches of Christ, but converted from non-Christian backgrounds. They correctly suggested that the comparative study I did among members of churches of Christ that are not identified with the discipling movement was not a fair comparison in this regard. It is likely that around 75 percent of those individuals grew up in churches of Christ. Leaders of the Boston Church of Christ argued that people who have experienced radical conversion from non-Christian backgrounds may tend to exaggerate the difference between what they were and what they are now.

I replied that such an explanation might account for the degree of change in psychological type scores, but that it would not explain the pattern of convergence in a single type. Furthermore, in such a case, the present distribution would have been closer to population norms than the past distribution. What was actually observed was that the past distribution was the closest to population norms while the present and future distributions increasingly deviated from those norms. However, since the original comparative study in other churches of Christ included many individuals whose experiences were not
comparable to the experiences of most Christians in the Boston church, leaders of that church asked that additional studies be done.

One of these follow-up studies involved going back into other churches of Christ. This time, however, the only individuals included in the study were those who had recently experienced radical conversion from non-Christian backgrounds. Results of this study did not support the alternative explanation offered by leaders of the Boston church. The pattern in this study was not similar to the pattern observed in the Boston Church of Christ.

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Christ the way they thought it would be. Instead, it was very similar to the original study in churches of Christ not affiliated with the discipling movement. There were no statistically significant changes in psychological type scores. The past, present, and future distributions did not differ significantly. There was no convergence in a single type.

Another follow-up study involved going back into the data from the Boston Church of Christ. This time, however, there was a comparison of those who had grown up in churches of Christ and those who experienced radical conversion from non-Christian backgrounds. Results of this study did not support the alternative explanation offered by leaders of the Boston church. The pattern among their members who had grown up in churches of Christ was not similar to the original study in churches of Christ not identified with the discipling movement the way they thought it would be. Instead, the pattern was very similar to that of those members in the Boston congregation who had experienced radical conversion from non-Christian backgrounds. There was a high degree of change in psychological type scores. There was the same pattern of significant differences among the past, present, and future distributions. There was also the same pattern of convergence in the same psychological type: ESFJ.

**INDIVIDUALS WITH A HIGH NEED FOR CONTROL**

There is a third alternative explanation of the observed pattern of changing psychological type scores in the Boston Church of Christ. This explanation was not offered by leaders of the Boston congregation. It was offered, instead, by people outside the discipling movement who are sympathetic toward that movement. Changes in psychological type scores, according to this explanation, may simply be the result of reaching individuals with a high need for control. This explanation in a different form was advanced by some defenders of the discipling movement before this study was conducted in the Boston Church of Christ.

According to this argument, the Boston Church of Christ and other discipling churches are justified in using high levels of control over their members--even if this control has some harmful side effects--because they are assumed to be attracting individuals with a psychological need for such control. It may be true that discipling churches are attracting individuals who come from non-Christian backgrounds and therefore may need closer supervision and more guidance than would be the case with someone who grew up in the church. That is not the same thing, however, as saying that their members have a psychological need for high levels of control.

With this argument in mind, I conducted a second psychological study in the Boston Church of Christ. This study involved the two newest converts from each of the 35 House Churches that were in operation at that time. These individuals were given a personality test called "FIRO-B." The letters stand for Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation in regard to Behavior. This instrument measures expressed and wanted levels of inclusion, control, and affection behavior. The focus of the study was on...
the "wanted control" scores of these newest converts in the Boston Church of Christ. Results of this study indicated that only a few had high wanted control scores. Most were in the moderate range. Some had low wanted control scores. The overall pattern was normal. Several had higher scores on wanted inclusion or wanted affection than on wanted control.

The results of this study did not support the view that the Boston Church of Christ is attracting people with a psychological need for high levels of control. They are reaching a wide range of people with normal and diverse psychological needs. The high level of control that they exercise over their members cannot be justified on the basis of any psychological need for such control. Indeed, that high level of control may be responsible, at least in part, for the observed pattern of changing psychological type scores.

**OBJECTIONS TO DIVERSITY**

Results of the psychological type study among members of the Boston Church of Christ clearly indicate that something is causing their members to deny their true type and try to become copies of someone else. Results of the various follow-up studies show that the alternative explanations offered by leaders of the Boston Church of Christ and others should not be accepted. These changes cannot be explained by arguing that Jesus was an ESFJ. They cannot be explained as exaggerations caused by the effects of radical conversion from non-Christian backgrounds. They cannot be explained or justified as being a result of reaching people with a psychological need for high levels of control. There is something in the discipling methodology producing this unhealthy pattern. Whatever it is, it should be changed.

This leaves defenders of the discipling movement with only one argument. They cannot deny that the psychological type scores are changing and converging in a single type. They cannot deny that the members are being made over after the image of the group norm. They cannot deny that the discipling methodology is producing this effect. Their last line of defense, therefore, is to argue that this pattern is acceptable--that diversity in psychological type is not good and that Christians ought to change psychological type and become more and more similar to one another.

Psychological type theory teaches that one should avoid trying to change psychological type. What some people hear in that statement is simply that one should avoid change. They take such statements as an excuse for a refusal to change inappropriate behaviors or a refusal to grow up. Some people have misused psychological type theory in that way, but that is not what psychological type theory teaches.

Good personality growth is a goal that is shared by type theory and the world's great religions. Such growth, maturation, and development requires change. What type theory seeks to point out is that healthy growth takes place within a person's true type and does not require denying one's true type and trying to become a copy of someone else. What is involved here is a tension between the need to achieve one kind of change and the need to avoid another kind of change. Change is healthy when it is defined as growth, maturation, or development within a person's true type. Change is not healthy when it is defined as denying one's true type and trying to become another type. There is no conflict between Christianity and type theory. Every change that Christianity requires in human behavior can take place within a person's true type. No one needs to change psychological type in order to grow as a Christian.

In the current debate over the methods and doctrines of the discipling movement, it is important to avoid two opposite but equally dangerous extremes. The psychological study conducted in the Boston Church of Christ illustrates one of these extremes. They are producing
the wrong kind of change. They are producing conformity in psychological type. That is unnatural, unhealthy, and dangerous. But the Boston Church of Christ is not trying to produce changes in psychological type scores. They have no interest in psychological type theory. What they want is for their members to grow spiritually, to become more like Jesus Christ, and to be more evangelistic. They want to help their members overcome temptation and abstain from various sins. The way they go about doing this, however, is producing an unintended byproduct that is not healthy. They are changing personalities by making their members over after the group norm. That extreme must be avoided.

An opposite and equally dangerous extreme is to make no real effort at all to help Christians make the changes in their lives that they really ought to make. Some churches of Christ that are not affiliated with the discipling movement provide little if any individual assistance to Christians in an effort to help them grow as they should. Both of these extremes are wrong. Both should be avoided. The Holy Spirit changes people when they become Christians--but not by making us identical in psychological type. The growth that comes from the Holy Spirit produces a body with many different members that perform many different functions in many different ways. Influences that cause people to become identical in psychological type do not come from the Holy Spirit.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 3


END OF CHAPTER 3

Link to Chapter 4