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CHAPTER

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A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY

Leaders of the Boston Church of Christ felt that the story of their amazing growth needed to be documented by a qualified church growth researcher. They felt that such a study would be more credible if conducted by someone not identified with the discipling movement. I was given the assignment.

The initial data-gathering stage of this research was conducted during a ten-day visit to the Boston Church of Christ in April of 1985. Leaders of the congregation cooperated fully. I was allowed to sit in on all the leadership meetings. I observed training classes, Bible Talks, Wednesday evening house church meetings, and Sunday morning worship services. I interviewed leaders at all levels in the congregation's organizational structure. I also interviewed over 100 new converts.

The initial stage of the research also included interviews with leaders of other churches of Christ in the Boston area. These interviews focused on relations between their congregations and the Boston Church of Christ. In many of these congregations, there were members who had belonged to the Boston Church of Christ before leaving because of their dissatisfaction with the methods being employed. I questioned these members about their experiences.

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METHOD

Considering all the criticism that has been directed against the Boston Church of Christ, it is remarkable that they were as open as they were in allowing this study. Their openness is strong evidence that they believed that they had nothing to hide. They even permitted me to conduct two different psychological studies. One study involved the two newest converts in each of the 35 house churches that were meeting at that time. Results and implications of that study will be discussed in Chapter 3. The focus of the present chapter is on a much larger psychological study that involved over 900 members of the congregation.

A central element in the criticism that has been directed against the Boston Church of Christ, other discipling churches, and the discipling movement generally has been the charge that these churches employ methods that produce unnatural and unhealthy personality changes. Critics charge that discipling churches tend to make the members over after the image of the group leader, the group norm, or the group ideal. Supporters of the discipling movement deny that any such personality changes are taking place. This, of course, is an empirical question that calls for an empirical answer. There are many mysteries associated with the conversion process that can never be explained scientifically. This question, however, about the presence or absence of personality changes can be answered by the appropriate use of a personality inventory.

THE MYERS-BRIGGS TYPE INDICATOR

The personality assessment tool used in this study was the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI).¹ The

MBTI is one of the leading non-psychiatric personality instruments in use today. Unlike tests used to diagnose mental or emotional problems, the MBTI simply indicates normal healthy differences.

The theory behind the MBTI was developed by Carl C. Jung.² He observed that there are two essential psychological processes. He called these "perceiving" and "judging." Perceiving means becoming aware. Judging means reaching a conclusion. Jung observed that there are two opposite but equally valuable ways of perceiving. He called these "sensing" and "intuition." He also observed that there are two opposite but equally valuable ways of judging. He called these "thinking" and "feeling." According to Jung, all people use all four of these psychological functions, but not with equal skill. Each person has a preferred way of perceiving--either sensing or intuition. Each person also has a preferred way of judging--either thinking or feeling.

The two ways of perceiving in Jung's theory are quite different. Sensing is the process of becoming aware through the physical senses. Those who prefer this way of perceiving and thus use and develop it more tend to have good contact with reality and the ability to see things exactly as they are. They are able to focus on details that others might not notice. They tend to be very practical. Intuition, on the other hand, is an immediate awareness that comes from memory and associations rather than just from the physical senses. Those who prefer this way of perceiving and thus use and develop it more tend to focus on the big picture more than on details. They are able to see meanings, implications, possibilities, and relationships that others might not notice.

The two ways of judging in Jung's theory are also quite different. Thinking is the process of deciding between the true and the false. It is an objective, logical, critical, analytical process. What Jung called "feeling," on the other hand, is the process of deciding between the valued and the not-valued. It is a subjective, personal, value-oriented process. Feeling is not emotionality.

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It means making value judgments. Both thinking and feeling are rational processes.

In addition to a preference for one or the other of these two ways of perceiving and one or the other of these two ways of judging, Jung observed that people prefer one or the other of two opposite but equally valuable attitudes. He called these "extraversion" and "introversion." Extraverts use their most fully developed psychological process (sensing, intuition, thinking, or feeling) externally for dealing with the outside world. They deal with their inner world through an auxiliary process--their second most fully developed process. Introverts, on the other hand, use their most fully developed psychological process internally for reflection and deal with the outside world through their auxiliary or second most fully developed process. Extraverts receive energy from the outside world. They get energy from being with people. Introverts may use their energies with people, but they get their energy from within. Everyone extraverts part of the time and introverts part of the time. Jung observed, however, that people have a preference for one or the other of these attitudes.

Isabel Myers and her mother, Kathrine Briggs, elaborated on Jung's writings to develop one other important distinction. They observed that some people prefer to deal with the world through a judging process (either thinking or feeling), while others prefer to deal with the world through a perception process (either sensing or intuition). They noticed that those who prefer to extravert a judging process tend to be highly organized while those who prefer to extravert a perception process tend to be adaptable.

There are 16 different psychological types in Jung's theory as elaborated by Kathrine Briggs and Isabel Myers. All 16 of these types are good. Each has its own unique set of special gifts. There are no bad types--no

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types that are less desirable than others. When the MBTI identifies a person's preferences and thus a person's psychological type, what is indicated are simply normal healthy differences.

Each of the 16 MBTI types is identified by a four-letter code. The first letter, either "E" or "I," tells whether a person prefers an extraverted or an introverted attitude. The second letter, either "S" or "N," tells whether the person prefers sensing or intuition as a way of perceiving (the letter "N" is used for intuition because the letter "I" was already used for introversion). The third letter of the psychological type code, either "T" or "F," tells whether the person prefers thinking or feeling as a way of judging. The final letter, either "J" or "P," tells whether the person prefers a judging or a perceiving orientation to the outside world—whether the person prefers to deal with the external world through the preferred way of judging (either thinking or feeling) or the preferred way of perceiving (either sensing or intuition).

CHANGES IN PSYCHOLOGICAL TYPE SCORES

A person's true psychological type is inborn, according to Jung. Some of the preferences can be observed very early in life. A person's true type does not change. Healthy growth, maturation, and development take place within a person's true type. Changes in psychological type do not indicate normal healthy growth. Such changes indicate some pressure in the environment that causes people to deny their true type and try to become like someone else.

It is not healthy to pressure a person to deny his or her true type and become a copy of someone else. Trying to change a person from one psychological type to another is like spanking a child for using the left hand. One does not produce good right-handed people that way. One produces very poor right-handed people

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who are very frustrated. It would be far better to help the left-handed child develop the skill of using the left hand.

In *Gifts Differing*, as Isabel and Peter Myers were discussing how children develop best, they wrote,

*The finest examples of type development result when children's immediate environment encourages their native capacities. However, when an environment squarely conflicting with their capacities forces children to depend on unnatural processes or attitudes, the result is a falsification of type, which robs its victims of their real selves and makes them into inferior, frustrated copies of other people.*³

In the *MBTI Manual*, Mary McCaulley said,

*Isabel Myers believed that type preferences were inborn, but that environmental pressures were important in determining the likelihood of optimum type development. . Myers wrote that when external influences cause falsification of type, emotional difficulties will follow. It is for this reason that this Manual cautions counselors to check carefully with their clients and with their own observations of the client for evidence of type falsification. This is particularly important in counseling because a goal of treatment is to identify and strengthen the inherent preferences, not to continue the falsification process.*⁴

In *Psychological Types*, Carl Jung wrote,

*As a rule, whenever such a falsification of type takes place as a result of external influences, the individual becomes neurotic later.....A reversal of type often proves exceedingly harmful to the physiological well-being of the organism, often provoking an acute state of exhaustion.*⁵

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These quotations should be enough to emphasize the point that changing psychological type scores do not indicate normal healthy development, but may indicate a dangerous falsification of type.

Misguided religious influences could be an environmental influence causing people to deny their true type and try to become a copy of someone else. Martin Buber tells the story of a rabbi who tried all his life to become another Moses, but he never succeeded. Finally he stood before God in judgment and God said, "You are not condemned for your failure to become another Moses; you are condemned for your failure to become yourself."

Christianity, of course, requires one kind of change in personality. Christians are being made over after the image of Jesus Christ. His divine nature, however, is reflected in individuals whose gifts differ. Christian growth does not require falsification of type. Indeed, spiritual growth is hindered by any effort to deny one's true type and become a copy of someone else.

The MBTI can be administered with three different sets of instructions as a way of checking for falsification of type. Such falsification of type would be indicated by changes in psychological type scores. When a family counselor, for example, has reason to suspect that a teenager is being pressured to become a copy of a father or mother, the counselor may have that teenager take the MBTI three times. The first time the instructions are, "Answer the questions the way you think you would have five years ago." The second time the instructions are, "Answer the questions according to the way you think, feel, and act at the present time." The third time the instructions are, "Answer the questions the way you think you will answer them five years from now." If the results indicate that the teenager's psychological type scores are changing and becoming more and more like that of a parent, that

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result could indicate an unhealthy pressure on that teenager to become a copy of that parent. Such a result would suggest the direction the treatment of that family ought to take.

A similar approach was taken in the study of the Boston Church of Christ. Around 900 members of that congregation took the MBTI. They were asked to answer the questions three times. One time the members were told to answer the questions the way they think they would have before their conversion--or five years ago for the few who had been members that long. The members were also told to answer the questions the way they would at that present time. Finally, they were told to answer the questions the way they think they will answer them after they have been discipled for five more years.

The instructions made it clear that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers and no "good" or "bad" outcomes--just indications of normal healthy differences. The instructions stated clearly that no one was telling them that their answers ought to change. The instructions said that the purpose of the study was simply to find out if there were any changes and, if so, what those changes might indicate.

This kind of group application involving a single psychological instrument is not the approach a clinical psychologist or psychiatrist would take in diagnosing psychological problems of an individual. Several psychological instruments would be used and there would be extensive counseling before any diagnosis would be made if the focus were on an individual. The purpose in this study, however, was not to diagnose psychological problems of any individual. What was being investigated in this research was simply the overall group pattern. The focus was not on any individual, but on the dynamics of the group.

It should also be understood that this was not a

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longitudinal study that determined the psychological type of people at three different times. What was indicated was the present psychological type manifested by these people, their perception of their past psychological type, and their perception of their future psychological type. However, any significant changes in the pattern of these perceptions would indicate some kind of group pressure. A high degree of change and a convergence in a single type would be convincing proof that the Boston Church of Christ has some kind of group dynamic operating that tends to produce conformity to the group norm.

If the supporters of the discipling approach had been correct in their claim that no personality changes were resulting from their methods, this study would have found no statistically significant changes in psychological type scores. That would have cleared the Boston Church of Christ of all charges on this matter. The results would have given them a clean bill of health. For such results to be credible, however, it was essential that the leaders and members of the congregation not be told that changes in psychological type scores do not indicate healthy growth. If they had been given that information and the results showed no statistically significant changes in psychological type scores, critics of the discipling approach would not have accepted the results. They would have claimed that the results were biased by the members knowing in advance that their answers were not supposed to change.

The MBTI forms were passed out in Wednesday evening house church meetings. Some members were busy with retreats that weekend and did not have time to take part in the study. No pressure was put on anyone to take part. However, around two-thirds of the members did take part. There were 835 members who filled out all three forms. A few others filled out only one or two. Among the males, 378 filled out the past

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form, 402 filled out the present form, and 388 filled out the future form. Among the females, 471 filled out the past form, 478 filled out the present form, and 460 filled out the future form.

COMPARATIVE STUDIES

Before discussing the results of this study in the Boston Church of Christ, it is necessary first to discuss the results of some comparative studies. It would not mean anything to find a pattern of changing psychological type scores in the Boston Church of Christ if similar studies in other churches of Christ produced the same results.

The MBTI was administered to 304 members of churches of Christ that are not a part of the discipling movement. There were 150 females and 154 males in this sample. They were given the same past, present, and future instructions as those used in the study of the Boston Church of Christ. Not a single one of these individuals changed on all four of the MBTI scales or even on three of them. Three people changed on two of the scales and 33 changed on one of the scales. All 36 who showed any change at all in MBTI scores had very low preference scores on the scales involved in the changing scores. This level of change is about what one would expect under these conditions from random test error. The MBTI, after all, is not a perfect indicator. In this comparative study, however, there was no observable pattern in the few changes that took place. Those who changed from Extravert to Introvert, Sensor to Intuitor, Thinker to Feeler, or Judger to Perceiver were balanced by others changing in the opposite direction. The overall distribution did not change.

Another comparative study was completed just recently using this same methodology in studies of 30 members each in five local congregations representing five mainline denominations. These studies were con-

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ducted in Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches. Results were the same as those observed in the study of churches of Christ that are not identified with the discipling movement. There were no significant changes in psychological type scores. There was no pattern in the few changes that were observed. Overall distributions did not change.

This is what one would expect since mainline denominations typically recognize and respect individual differences. They value this diversity. They encourage individuals to become what they are uniquely capable of becoming and not mere copies of someone else. This is not the case, however, with certain manipulative sects. It is conformity that they value, not diversity. They tend to make people over after the image of a group leader, the group norm, or what the group regards as the ideal personality. Such pressure to falsify type is one of the reasons for the psychological damage often experienced by their members. They are made to feel guilty for being what they are and inferior for not being what the group wants them to be. As the gap between the real self and the pretended self grows larger and larger, the self esteem of these members sinks lower and lower. They become frustrated and depressed. They may develop serious emotional problems. They may become so dependent on the control exercised by their leaders that they engage in irrational behavior.

With this characteristic of manipulative sects in mind, another comparative study was done. This study used the same past, present, and future instructions with the MBTI to study 30 members each in six local groups representing six manipulative sects. Groups included in this study were: the Church of Scientology, the Hari Krishnas, Maranatha, the Children of God, the Unification Church ("Moonies"), and the Way. Results of this study showed a high level of change in psychological

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type scores. Results also showed a clear pattern in the observed changes. The past distributions tend to be normal. The present and future distributions deviate increasingly from the normal distribution. The changes in these six groups showed a clear convergence in a single type. In three of the groups the movement was toward ESFJ. Two moved toward ESTJ. One moved toward ENFJ. One of the reasons the publication of this book has been delayed so long is that this comparative study of manipulative sects was not completed until the summer of 1987.

RESULTS

An appendix at the back of this book discusses all the details of this study with all the appropriate statistical tables. What is discussed here are simply the major conclusions of the study in the Boston Church of Christ.

The first result of this study to be discussed is the observation that ***a great majority of the members of the Boston Church of Christ changed psychological type scores in the past, present, and future versions of the MBTI.*** Among the 835 individuals who took all three forms of the MBTI, less than five percent showed no change at all and less than seven percent had the same past and future type. Among the rest, a comparison of past and future types showed that almost 20 percent changed on one MBTI scale, 35 percent changed on two, over 26 percent changed on three, and over 12 percent changed on all four scales, thus experiencing a total reversal of type. The mean number of scale changes was 2.18 among the 835 members of the Boston Church of Christ who took all three forms of the MBTI. The present distribution was significantly different from the past distribution. The difference between past and future type distributions was highly significant.

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A second result of this study that must be noticed is that ***the observed changes in psychological type scores were not random since there was a clear convergence in a single type.*** Ten of the 16 types show

a steady decline in the percentage who came out as that type in the past, present, and future versions of the MBTI. Three transitional types show an increase from past to present and then a sharp decline in the future outcomes. There were three popular types in this study: ESFJ, ESTJ, and ENFJ. There was a steady increase in the percentage who came out with these three type indications in the past, present, and future results Percentages are figured separately for males and females since male and female distributions differ on the thinking-feeling scale. In the past, present, and future results, the percentage of males who came out ESFJ went from 2.58 to 26.37 to 54.23 while the percentages for females went from 5.10 to 34.31 to 53.48. ESTJs differ from ESFJs only on the thinking-feeling scale. The percentage of males who scored as ESTJ went from 7.73 to 15.92 to 20.37 while the percentages for females went from 4.67 to 13.81 to 23.04. ENFJs differ from ESFJs only on the sensing-intuition scale. The percentages of males who came out ENFJ went from 1.29 to 4.73 to 14.81, while the percentages for females went from 0.64 to 3.97 to 12 17.

There was a clear pattern of changing from introversion to extraversion, from intuition to sensing, from thinking to feeling, and from perceiving to judging. In the past, present, and future results, the percentage of males with a preference for extraversion went from 33 to 60 to 94 while the percentages for females went from 38 to 64 to 95. The percentage of males who had a preference for sensing perception went from 66 to 78 to 80 while the percentage for females went from 66 to 85 and then to 82. The percentage of males

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preference for feeling judgment went from 41 to 65 to 76 while percentages for females went from 53 to 73 and then to 71. The percentage of males with a preference for a judging orientation went from 37 to 80 to 96 while percentages for females went from 34 to 80 to 95.

Preferences for extraversion, sensing, feeling, and judging tended to remain stable while the opposite preferences for introversion, intuition, thinking, and perceiving tended to change. Among those who started as extraverts, 97 percent remained unchanged, but 95 percent of those who started as introverts changed into extraverts. Among those who started with a preference for sensing perception, 82 percent remain unchanged, but 78 percent of those who started with a preference for intuition changed. Among those who started with a preference for feeling judgment, 72 percent remained unchanged, but 74 percent of those who started with a preference for thinking changed. Among those who started with a preference for a judging orientation, 97 percent remained unchanged, but 95 percent of those who started with a preference for a perceiving orientation changed. There was a highly significant movement away from preferences for introversion, intuition, thinking, and perceiving and toward extraversion, sensing, feeling, and judging.

Those who were the least likely to change were those who already were ESFJs. They averaged only 0.32 changes on the four MBTI scales. Those who were the most likely to change were those who started as the opposite type, INTP. They averaged 3.55 changes on the four scales. There was a strong positive correlation between the number of differences between a type and the ESFJ model, on the one hand, and the mean number of changes on the four MBTI scales on the other hand. The more a person differed from the ESFJ model, the more likely that person was to change on more of the MBTI scales.

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What all of this means is that the Boston Church of Christ is producing in its members the very same pattern of unhealthy personality change that is observed in studies of well-known manipulative sects. Whatever they are doing that produces this pattern needs to be changed.

The six manipulative sects that showed the same pattern as was observed in the study of the Boston

Church of Christ are usually called "cults." I do not find that term to be especially useful. Many of the writers who have identified the characteristics of cults reflect an anti-religious, humanistic bias. By most of their definitions, the New Testament church would be called a "cult," churches of Christ today would be called "cults," and most of the conservative denominations would be called "cults." But those six groups that I have chosen to call "manipulative sects" are clearly producing unnatural and unhealthy personality changes.

The data in this study of the Boston Church of Christ does not prove that any certain individual has actually changed his or her personality in an unhealthy way. The data, however, does prove that there is a group dynamic operating in that congregation that influences members to change their personalities to conform to the group norm. To the extent that the members respond to that group pressure, the observed changes in psychological type scores are likely to become (or have already become)

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actual changes in the personality that is manifested.

This study that was conducted in the Boston Church of Christ has not been conducted in other discipling churches. However, since other discipling churches do the same things that the Boston Church does, it is extremely unlikely that similar studies in other discipling churches would find different results.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 2

1. Isabel Myers and Kathrine Briggs, *The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* (Palo Alto, California: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1976).
2. Carl C. Jung, *Psychological Types* (London: Keegan Paul, 1923).
3. Isabel Myers and Peter U. Myers, *Gifts Differing* (Palo Alto, California: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1980), p. 189.
4. Isabel Myers and Mary McCaulley, *The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Manual* (Palo Alto, California: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1985), p. 64.
5. Jung, p. 415.

Note: The author is thoroughly trained in the use of the MBTI. In 1983 he won the Isabel Briggs Myers Memorial Award for outstanding research in the study of psychological type theory. He served as treasurer of the Association for Psychological Type from 1983 through 1987. He is a member of the faculty of the MBTI training program conducted by the Association for Psychological Type to train professional users of the MBTI. He designed and tested a new self-scoring version of the MBTI now being published by Consulting Psychologists Press. In 1987 the author was elected as the next president of the Association for Psychological Type. Some of his type-related publications are listed below.

"The Relationship between True Type and Reported Type," with Allen L. Hammer, *Journal of Psychological Type* (in press).

"Implications of Communication Style Research for Psychological Type Theory" *Research in Psychological Type* 6 (1983): 1-20.

"Communication Style Preferences and Adjustments as an Approach for Studying Effects of Similarity in Psychological Type," *Research in Psychological Type* 5 (1982):30-48.

In addition to these publications, the author has presented eleven papers at regional and national conferences of the Association for Psychological Type and the Speech Communication Association reporting on his type related research.

End of Chapter 2

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