This study is concerned with the Cathedrals of England and Wales as both emblems of national heritage and as windows on spiritual awareness. The hypothesis is tested that the psychological type profile of visitors can predict levels of spiritual awareness. Data were provided by 2,327 visitors to St Davids Cathedral in West Wales who completed the Francis Psychological Type Scales and a Likert-type question concerning the sense of God’s presence. The data demonstrated that 42% of the visitors reported that they feel a sense of God’s presence during their visit to the Cathedral. Moreover, the likelihood of having this spiritual awareness was significantly higher among feeling types than among thinking types. The theological implications of these findings are discussed.

1. Introduction

The historic Anglican cathedrals of England and Wales stand as beacons of religious identity and of national heritage. It is with these cathedrals that the present study is concerned. Some of these historic cathedrals (like Ely in England and St Davids in Wales) have their roots in the pre-Reformation Catholic Church. Others of these historic cathedrals (like Oxford) were founded during the Reformation and drew on historic abbey churches. Cathedrals standing in both traditions share the richness of the medieval religious identity and national heritage and appear in many ways indistinguishable. Such historic Anglican cathedrals are properly distinguished from the cathedrals of the newer dioceses established during the industrial revolution (like Manchester and Wakefield) or those established during the twentieth century (like Chelmsford and St Edmundsbury).

St. Davids

The case study profiled in the present project is based on St Davids Cathedral in West Wales, where the history has been so well documented by the present Bishop of St Davids and former Dean of the cathedral, the Right Revd J Wyn Evans (see Evans/Worsley, 1981; Evans, 1991). In his guide
book to the cathedral Evans weaves a delicate tapestry intertwining the celebration of national identity and heritage with religious proclamation, with the emphasis consistently erring on the side of national heritage. The Bishop and former Dean is clearly formed by and part of his national heritage (Wales) as well as of his religious identity (Anglican).

St Davids Cathedral traces its origin to the very life and work of St David himself, the patron saint of Wales, as well as the founder of the most western city and cathedral in Wales. Tradition has it that David was born on the cliffs to the south of the cathedral on the spot marked by the ruins of St Non's Chapel (Non was the mother of David), and baptised at Porth Clais, where the River Alun enters the sea and where a holy well sprang forth to heal the blindness of the Irish bishop who baptised him. There, near the site of the Cathedral, David founded a monastery where the monks excelled in establishing an ascetic life-style and where David himself outstripped them in asceticism. ‘David the Waterman’ stood for long periods in the cold water of the river to subdue the flesh. Bishop Evans speaks proudly of the religious and cultural heritage descending from David.

The earliest cathedrals built in St Davids have disappeared from sight. Part of the blame for this is laid at the feet of raiding Vikings, who caused the deaths of Bishop Morgenau in 999 and Bishop Abraham in 1080. The Norman cathedral originated by Bishop Bernard has also disappeared. The Cathedral that serves St Davids today was begun in 1181 or 1182 under Bishop Peter de Leia, although the tower had collapsed by 1220. During the thirteenth century the Chapel of St Thomas Becket and the bell tower were added. In the middle of the fourteenth century, a wall was constructed to enclose the houses of the cathedral chapter as well as to separate the city from the secular world. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries major restoration and reconstruction works were undertaken. Further major reconstructions were undertaken towards the end of the eighteenth century and during the nineteenth century, engaging among the notable architects John Nash, William Butterfield and Sir George Gilbert Scott. A visit to St Davids Cathedral, supported by Bishop Evans’ guidebook, provides a rich and engaging overview of the religious identity and national heritage of Wales (see Evans, 1991).

Bishop Evans’ welcome to the cathedral (published at the beginning of the guidebook) makes clear the potential for this building to open windows into transcendence and into the heart of the Christian gospel. He writes as follows:

It is not guides or photography or architecture which come first - these are but adjuncts. Our prime and privileged task is to worship the God who made