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Exploring how the followers of Bishop Barron in England repurpose the influence of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal: A study in religious orientation theory

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Abstract

The present study, rooted in religious orientation theory, invited participants attending Bishop Barron's event in London during February 2025 to complete measures of Catholic orientation and charismatic orientation. Data provided by 422 participants replicated the findings from 490 participants attending Bishop Barron's London event in February 2023. Taken together these data suggest that among the followers of Bishop Barron distinctive charisms at the heart of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal have been repurposed to accommodate a priest-led cognitive faith (in the mind) in place of a lay-led affective faith (in the heart).

Keywords: charismatic orientation, Catholic orientation, Bishop Barron, empirical theology

Introduction

Introducing the Catholic Charismatic Renewal

During the early twentieth century charismatic expression in Christian belief and practice became established in England and Wales through what are known as the classical Pentecostal Churches, including the Assemblies of God and Elim (Kay, 1990). The charismatic phenomena has spread more recently in England and Wales through the neo-Pentecostal networks of churches, often in connection with Black-led or Black-majority churches (Kay, 2007). During the 1960s the Charismatic Movement found expression through the main-line denominations in England and Wales, including the Roman Catholic Church as well as the Anglican Church (Church of England, 1981; Gunstone, 1982; Bax; 1986).

The 'Duquesne Weekend', a student retreat held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, during February 1967, is typically identified as the foundational event of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. During this event, numerous participants reported transformative spiritual experiences, including speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*), the classic hallmark of Pentecostalism (O'Connor, 1971). This 'outpouring of the Holy Spirit', as it was described, spread with remarkable speed to other American university campuses, notably the University of Notre Dame and Michigan State University. These origins situate the movement firmly within the American, academic, and post-Second Vatican Council context, an era of lay empowerment and spiritual exploration within the Church. By the early 1970s, it was increasingly being styled the 'Catholic Charismatic Renewal' to emphasise its aim of revitalising the Church from within.

Following its rapid spread across American university campuses, the arrival of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) in the UK during the early 1970s presented a significant cultural challenge to the Catholic Church. Archival evidence from Liverpool

Metropolitan Cathedral establishes the context for this tension, with a 1977 address by Archbishop Derek Worlock describing the prevailing Catholic model as a hierarchical, clergy-dominated structure creating a ‘separation of the sanctuary from the world’ (Worlock, 1977). In stark contrast, the CCR championed direct personal experience, lay-led groups, and emotionally expressive worship influenced by American Pentecostalism. This dependence on American leadership was evident from the outset; a 1975 national conference in Manchester (National Service Committee, 1975), for instance, was headlined by the American priest Francis MacNutt, whose book *Healing* (MacNutt, 1974) was required reading for all attendees. Furthermore, official guidelines circulated for the English renewal (Ryles, c. 1974), authored by Cardinal Suenens, listed only one other text as ‘suggested reading’ besides his own: the *Theological and Pastoral Orientations* (McDonnell, 1974), a report directed by the American priest Kilian McDonnell and published in the United States.

Archival records provide a quantitative baseline for the CCR’s initial footprint in England, demonstrating what was described at the time as a ‘fairly rapid’ period of expansion. A detailed 1975 report from the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton offers a case study of the movement's early presence at a local level. Within this single diocese, the report identified 13 distinct charismatic groups, part of a wider network of 41 prayer groups involving ‘upwards of 650 people’. The movement was anchored by two main centres of activity: the Rosminian House at Wonersh, which drew 50-70 people to its weekly prayer meeting, and the Benedictine Abbey at Worth, which hosted a larger monthly gathering of 120 people (Diocese of Arundel and Brighton, 1975). The movement's national reach, however, is better illustrated by an estimate of 5,000 Catholics committed to the movement, as documented in a letter from the Bishop of Menevia, also held within the same archives (Fox, c. 1975).

Globally, charismatic Christianity represents one of modern religion's most significant demographic stories, with estimates placing the number of Catholic charismatics at over 160 million (Ciciliot, 2019). As the fastest-growing segment of the global faith, its expansion is overwhelmingly concentrated in the Global South, with annual Christian population growth rates in Africa (2.76%) and Asia (1.62%) dwarfing the stagnant rates in Europe (0.04%) (Zurlo et al., 2023). This provides the context for the CCR's trajectory in the United Kingdom, where its eventual stagnation is best explained by the different religious competitors it faced. In the Global South, the movement thrives by competing effectively with independent Pentecostal churches, offering a similar experiential worship style while retaining members within the Catholic sacramental framework (Csordas, 2007) – a dynamic illustrated in Brazil, home to the world's largest Catholic Charismatic Renewal, where women constitute 70% of participants (Hayes, 2017). This function was understood by the Catholic hierarchy from the outset; a 1975 document from the English bishops framed the CCR as a 'providential remedy' against such groups, noting with concern that 'a sizeable number of Catholics, notably in Africa and Latin America, leave the Church as a result of that attraction' (Commission for Ecumenism for England and Wales, c. 1975).

Whereas the CCR in the Global South competed directly with Pentecostalism, its primary rival in the United Kingdom and the broader West was not another religion, but a pervasive secularism. Characterised by rationalism, individualism, and intellectual scepticism (Taylor, 2007), this secular context meant a purely experience-driven movement could be perceived by many as theologically 'thin' and less equipped to answer the deep intellectual challenges posed by a secular worldview. Furthermore, the rise of independent Pentecostal offshoots in the UK's urban centres may have siphoned off a significant portion of the demographic most drawn to high-intensity experiential worship, leaving the institutionally

'tamed' CCR in a weakened and strategically compromised position (Kay, 2007; O'Connor et al., 2016).

The CCR's decline in the UK was therefore not a simple failure but the result of being caught in an unwinnable, three-front strategic dilemma. It was simultaneously constrained by institutional suspicion from above, which limited its operational freedom; outflanked by more radical and unconstrained Pentecostal competitors from the side; and faced with a dominant secular culture to which its core offering of ecstatic experience was often ill-suited.

Conceptualising and measuring Charismatic and Catholic orientation

The emergence of the Charismatic Movement within the Roman Catholic Church raises a number of intriguing questions relevant to the fields of the empirical psychology of religion and empirical theology. For example, Heirich (1977), Halama and Halamová (2005) and Siekierski (2012) explored the process of religious conversion within the Catholic Charismatic Movement. Within this context, the present study draws on religious orientation theory to explore ways in which the influence of the CCR re-emerges with the ministry of Bishop Barron.

Within the empirical psychology of religion, the notion of religious orientation has been applied in two different ways. First, the term has been applied to conceptualising and operationalising differences in religious motivation as originally expressed in Allport and Ross' (1967) differentiation between the intrinsic orientation and the extrinsic orientation, and as subsequently expanded by Batson and Ventis (1982) in embracing a third expression, the quest orientation. For those scoring high on the intrinsic orientation, motivation resides in religion as the end in itself, as expressed in items like: My religious beliefs shape my whole approach to life. For those scoring high on the extrinsic orientation, motivation resides in religion serving ulterior ends, as expressed in items like: I pray chiefly because it makes me feel better (personal ends), or I go to church because it helps me to feel at home in my

neighbourhood (social ends). For those scoring high on the quest orientation, motivation resides not in religious certainty, but in religious exploration, as expressed in items like: I value my religious doubts and uncertainties (see further, Francis, 2007).

Second, the term orientation has been applied to create a family of measures concerned with conceptualising and operationalising openness toward a range of religious or spiritual practices, experiences, or preferences. In the first of these measures, Francis and Louden (2000) developed the 21-item Mystical Orientation Scale (MOS), building on the seven aspects of mysticism identified by Happold (1963). Subsequently, Francis and Littler (2011) developed the 21-item Charismatic Orientation Scale (COS), and Francis and Littler (2012) developed the 21-item Anglo-Catholic Orientation Scale (ACOS). The two scales developed by Francis and Littler (2011, 2012) were further modified and tested by Francis et al. (2013) among 670 lay Catholics attending three churches within the Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool to produce the 21-item Traditional Charismatic Orientation Scale (TCharOS) and the 21-item Traditional Catholic Orientation Scale (TCathOS).

In the foundation study, Francis et al. (2013) reported an alpha coefficient of .89 for the TCharOS. The percentage endorsements of the 21 items revealed the way in which the issues included in the measure successfully differentiate different levels of charismatic orientation, from those issues that attract wide-spread endorsement (and suggest a broad-based predisposition or openness to charismatic experience) to those issues that attract low endorsement (and suggest the heartland of core charismatic experience). In terms of a broad-based predisposition or openness to charismatic experience, five of the items were endorsed by at least two-thirds of the participants: 89% rated receiving baptism of the Holy Spirit; 79% rated praying for others to be saved; 78% rated feeling God's Spirit within me; 70% rated experiencing the work of the Holy Spirit; and 66% rated hearing God speak to me. A further three items were endorsed by at least half of the participants: 62% rated feeling led by God to

perform a specific action, 55% rated praying in the Spirit; and 50% rated sharing in open and informal worship.

Drawing closer to the heartland of charismatic experience, five items were endorsed by between one third and one half of the participants: 43% rated receiving ‘a picture’ from the Lord; 43% rated singing in the Spirit; 41% rated receiving ‘a word of knowledge’; 38% rated laying hands on someone for healing; and 33% rated seeing healings happen. The next set of three items, endorsed by just under one third of the participants, came much closer to the heartland of the charismatic experience: 30% rated being born again; 29% rated having a conversion experience; and 29% rated speaking or praying in tongues. The final set of five items, endorsed by just under one fifth of the participants, identified those most caught up in the charismatic experience: 19% rated attending charismatic prayer-group meetings; 19% rated singing in tongues; 18% rated being ‘slain in the Spirit’; 17% rated prophesying; and 16% rated interpreting tongues.

In the foundation study, Francis et al. (2013) reported an alpha coefficient of .89 for the TCathOS. The percentage endorsement of the 21 items revealed the way in which the issues included in the measure successfully differentiate different levels of Catholic orientation, from those issues that attract wide-spread endorsement (and suggest a broad-based predisposition or openness to Catholic experience) to those issues that attract lower endorsement (and may reflect aspects of the Catholic tradition being eclipsed within the contemporary world). In terms of a broad-based predisposition or openness to Catholic experience, eight of the items were endorsed by at least two-thirds of the participants: 91% rated going to the vigil or Sunday mass; 87% rated making the sign of the cross; 86% rated genuflecting before the Blessed Sacrament; 82% rated devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary; 77% rated praying for souls in purgatory; 76% rated being loyal to the Pope; 73% rated attending a Requiem Mass; and 72% rated visiting the Blessed Sacrament. A further four

items were endorsed by at least half of the participants: 65% rated the use of vestments by the priest; 63% rated saying the Rosary; 59% rated making the Stations of the Cross; and 54% rated lighting a votive candle.

In terms of those aspects of the Catholic tradition that are perhaps being eclipsed in the contemporary world, six items were endorsed by between two-fifths and one half of the participants: 48% rated making a Novena; 47% rated attending Devotions and Benediction; 45% rated going to confession; 45% rated going on pilgrimage to a Catholic shrine; 45% rated venerating your Guardian Angel; and 42% rated venerating Saints. The final set of three items, endorsed by under two-fifths of the participants, identified phenomena now least central to the Catholic experience in the contemporary world: 35% rated using incense in worship; 31% rated saying the Angelus; and 21% rated buying a Catholic newspaper.

The core research question that Francis et al. (2013) set out to address in this study was whether these two orientations were complementary or contradictory in nurturing Catholic identity and practice. In terms of the connection between these two measures, the data reported a large and significant correlation ($r = .62$, $p < .001$). This finding demonstrated that, within the Catholic community, Charismatic orientation may contribute positively to enhancing traditional Catholic identity, rather than detracting from it. Moreover, the data also demonstrated that Charismatic orientation was positively and significantly correlated both with higher frequency of personal prayer ($r = .18$, $p < .001$) and higher frequency of mass attendance ($r = .10$, $p < .05$). In other words, Charismatic orientation is associated with supporting the religious life of Catholic individuals in terms of personal and public Catholic practices.

An initial study among the followers of Bishop Barron in Britain

An initial enquiry concerning the interaction between traditional Catholic orientation and Charismatic orientation was undertaken among the participants attending the one-day

conference with Bishop Barron on ‘Sharing the Church’s Story’ in London on Saturday 11 February 2023 and reported by Francis et al. (2025). Drawing on data provided by 490 participants, they addressed three research objectives: to refine two short forms of the measures proposed by Francis et al. (2013) that displayed clear factor independence; to explore the endorsement of these two constructs among the followers of Bishop Barron; and to assess the association between these two constructs. Francis et al. (2025) reported the following findings.

First, the two short form (nine-item) measures demonstrated clear independence within a rotated factor solution and both reported satisfactory levels of internal consistency reliability: Charismatic orientation, $\alpha = .88$; Catholic orientation, $\alpha = .83$. In terms of the Traditional Catholic Orientation Scale, the item with the highest correlation with the sum of the other items indicates that making devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary ($r = .67$) is at the heart of the scale. In terms of the Charismatic Orientation Scale, the item with the highest correlation with the sum of the other items indicates that speaking and praying in tongues ($r = .70$) is at the heart of the scale.

Second, the level of item endorsement for the nine-items in the Traditional Catholic Orientation Scale indicated a high level of commitment to traditional Catholic practice. Thus, over three-quarters of the participants rated the following practices highly: making Eucharistic adoration (83%); going to Confession (Sacrament of Reconciliation) (83%); being loyal to the Pope (82%); making devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary (77%); and saying the Rosary (76%). Over half of the participants rated highly going on a pilgrimage to a Catholic shrine (62%) and attending Devotions and Benedictions (60%). Rated as of less importance were lighting votive candles (43%) and venerating relics (34%). The level of item endorsement for the nine-items in the Charismatic Orientation Scale indicated that charismatic orientation came a poor second to traditional Catholic orientation among the

participants. Thus, fewer than a quarter of the participants rated the following practices highly: speaking or praying in tongues (12%); singing in tongues (13%); prophesying (15%); attending charismatic prayer-group meetings (18%); and laying hands on someone for healing (22%). Rated as of greater importance were singing in the Spirit (29%), receiving a word of knowledge (41%), having a conversion experience (46%), and receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit (58%).

Third, the correlation between the two measures (Traditional Catholic Orientation Scale and Charismatic Orientation Scale) is modest although highly significant ($r = .18$, $p < .001$). This finding suggested that where followers of Bishop Barron espoused features of the Catholic Charismatic Movement, this supported their traditional Catholic identity rather than detracted from it.

Research objective

Against this background, and in response to the 'replication crisis in psychology' (Fletcher, 2021; Pennington, 2023; Plucker & Makel, 2021), the aim of the present study is to replicate the earlier study reported by Francis et al. (2025), in order to test whether the same results would emerge from a second study employing the same instrument among participants recruited within a similar context. This opportunity arose during Bishop Barron's visit to London 21-22 February 2025 for the event styled 'Evangelism and culture: The Bible'.

Method

Procedure

Participants attending the London conference were invited to complete a survey. They were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality, and by submitting the survey they confirmed that they were aged 18 years and over and gave their consent for the information to be used as research data and for research publication. Among the submitted surveys 422 provided completed data on the measures employed in the present analyses.

Measures

Catholic orientation and Charismatic orientation were assessed by the short forms of the Traditional Catholic Orientation Scale and the Charismatic Orientation Scale developed by Francis, Davis, and McKenna (2025). Each of these instruments comprise nine items. Participants were asked to assess 'how important each of the following practices is to your faith', using a five-point scale anchored by: 1 = low importance, 3 = medium importance, 5 = high importance.

Participants

The present analyses were based on the 422 participants (163 men, 258 women, and 1 who did not provide information about gender) who thoroughly completed the Traditional Catholic Orientation Scale and the Charismatic Orientation Scale. In terms of age, 4 were under the age of twenty, 50 were in their twenties, 77 in their thirties, 48 in their forties, 87 in their fifties, 106 in their sixties, 46 in their seventies, and 4 were aged eighty or above. In terms of marital status, 36% were single, 48% married, 4% widowed, 7% divorced, 1% separated, 2% living with a partner, and 1% failed to provide information about marital status. In terms of ethnicity, 45% reported as white British, 10% as white Irish, and 19% as white other; 4% reported as Black African, and 1% Black other; 10% reported as Asian, 3% as Chinese, 6% as mixed ethnicity, and 3% as other. In terms of employment status, 52% reported as in full-time work, 16% in part-time work, 23% as retired, 4% as homemaker or carer, 2% as unemployed, and 4% as students. In terms of education, 44% held bachelor degrees, 34% master degrees, and 8% doctorates. In terms of mass attendance, 46% reported attending at least once a week and 49% as attending several times a week, with 2% reporting attendance less than weekly and 4% failing to provide data on mass attendance. The majority lived in England (83%). The majority identified as Catholics (93%), with 5% as Anglicans.

The majority identified as lay (92%), with 3% secular priests, 2% religious priests, and 2% religious sisters.

Results

- insert table 1 about here -

Step one of the data analysis was designed to confirm the factor structure of the two nine-item forms of the Traditional Catholic Orientation Scale and the Charismatic Orientation Scale. Factor analysis using varimax rotated solution with Kaiser normalisation constrained to two factors was employed. The data presented in table 1 demonstrates the recovery of the clear factor structure, with factor one accounting for 26.9% of the variance and factor two accounting for 22.4%. These data demonstrate clear differentiation between the two sets of items, consistent with the data presented by Francis et al. (2025).

- insert table 2 about here -

Step two of the data analysis explored the structure of and responses to the nine-item Traditional Catholic Orientation Scale. Table 2 demonstrates that each item correlates well with the sum of the other eight items above .30 and that the scale generates an alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951) of .86. The item with the highest correlation confirms that making devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary (r = .75) is at the heart of this scale and replicates the finding reported by Francis et al. (2025). The item endorsements (in terms of rating the importance of the practice for their own faith at level four or level five on the five-point scale) confirm a high level of commitment to Catholic practices. Thus, over three-quarters of the participants rate the following practices highly: going to confession (Sacrament of Reconciliation) (81%), making Eucharistic adoration (79%), making devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary (77%), and being loyal to the Pope (76%). Over half of the participants rate highly saying the Rosary (72%), going on a pilgrimage to a Catholic shrine (64%), and attending Devotions and Benedictions (60%). Rated as of less importance are

lighting votive candles (43%) and venerating relics (31%). This pattern of responses reflect the pattern reported by Francis et al. (2025).

- insert table 3 about here -

Step three of the data analysis explored the structure of and responses to the nine-item Charismatic Orientation Scale. Table 3 demonstrates that each item correlates well with the sum of the other eight items above .30 and that the scale generates an alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951) of .87. The item with the highest correlation confirms that speaking or praying in tongues is at the heart of the scale and replicates the finding reported by Francis et al. (2025). The item endorsements (in terms of rating the importance of the practice of their own faith at level four or level five on a five-point scale) confirm that charismatic orientation comes a poor second to traditional Catholic orientation among the participants. Thus, fewer than a quarter of the participants rated the following practices highly: singing in tongues (12%), speaking or praying in tongues (13%), prophesying (15%), and attending charismatic prayer-group meetings (18%). Rated as of greater importance are laying hands on someone for healing (27%), singing in the Spirit (28%), receiving a word of knowledge (41%), having a conversation experience (49%), and receiving baptism of the Holy Spirit (59%). This pattern of responses reflects the pattern reported by Francis et al. (2025).

- insert table 4 about here -

Step four of the data analysis explored the correlations between scores recorded on the two scales of traditional Catholic orientation and Charismatic orientation, and the correlations between each of these scales and the two personal variables of sex and age. The data presented in table 4 show a small positive correlation between Charismatic orientation and traditional Catholic orientation ($r = .10$, $p < .05$). This is smaller than the correlation ($r = .18$, $p < .001$) reported by Francis et al. (2025). The effects of sex and age on the two

measures are trivial and suggest that there is no need to control for these effects in examining the association between the two orientations.

Discussion

These new data offer a range of insights into the followers of Bishop Barron in England that stimulate further reflection. The spiritual and institutional vacuum left by the containment of the CCR in England, alongside the broader decline of faith and religious affiliation (Francis, 2022) seems to have given rise to an opposing American import: a digitally-mediated traditionalist movement. This new counter-current is enabled by a global technological infrastructure that has reshaped the religious marketplace by facilitating powerful digital ministries. Bishop Robert Barron's ministry offers a compelling case study of this new counter-current, revealing a psychological profile that is intentionally and demonstrably *un-charismatic*.

The rise of this movement is contingent on a global technological reality: the digital divide. This disparity in internet access has created two fundamentally different religious economies. The key demographic growth areas for charismatic Christianity in the Global South are far less connected. With internet penetration in Nigeria recorded at 39% as of 2023, the religious economy there remains primarily local, physical, and communal (World Bank, 2025). Success is predicated not on digital polish, but on in-person, grassroots dynamism. The United Kingdom, however, exists in a state of digital saturation, with internet accessibility exceeding 95% (Office for National Statistics, 2025). This creates a hyper-connected, global, and disembodied religious marketplace where a local, volunteer-run prayer group must compete not only with the church in the next parish but with a worldwide marketplace of polished and well-resourced digital ministries, operating without geographical limits.

The digital religious marketplace in the UK, as in much of the West, operates on platforms predominantly designed by US technology companies (e.g., Google, Meta, X). While these platforms support a diverse range of religious expressions, their algorithmic and content models can be particularly advantageous for movements that are intellectually-focused. This is a manifestation of a broader principle of algorithmic amplification, confirmed in quantitative studies which demonstrate how YouTube's recommendation engine systematically funnels users toward the most engaging and ideologically coherent content within a given topic to maximise watch time (Ribeiro et al., 2020).

The central finding of this paper is a statistical 'uncoupling' of two spiritual orientations that were previously complementary. In the 2013 general sample, traditional and charismatic orientations were found to have a strong positive correlation (r = .62), indicating that a greater commitment to traditional practices was linked to a greater openness to charismatic experiences. In the 2025 Barron cohort, this correlation almost vanishes, becoming statistically significant only at the five percent level of probability (r =.10). This uncoupling is further illustrated by sharp declines in endorsement for foundational charismatic experiences. Support for 'receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit' falls significantly from 89% in the 2013 general Catholic sample to 59% among this new cohort. Similarly, endorsement for glossolalia ('speaking or praying in tongues') drops from 29% to just 13% between the two studies. This data suggests the group's identity is being forged not just in an embrace of tradition, but in a specific and measurable rejection of the core tenets of the charismatic mainstream.

However, a more detailed analysis reveals a pattern that complicates this picture of rejection. While the cohort has clearly moved away from the charismatic mainstream, an internal tension exists within their own spiritual landscape. This is best evidenced by the finding that the same key charismatic experience, 'receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit'

(59%), is still valued more highly by this cohort than an ancient traditional devotion like ‘venerating relics’ (31%). This suggests that their identity is not defined by a simple rejection of charisma, but by a selective re-ordering of spiritual priorities. The group is moving away from the communal and public expressions of the charismatic movement while paradoxically retaining a private, personal affinity for its foundational experience.

These practices can therefore be placed within four typological categories. First are Authoritative Practices, those reliant on the formal, sacramental mediation of an embodied priest, which is this cohort’s most valued mode, evidenced by the high scores for ‘Going to Confession’ (81%) and ‘Making Eucharistic Adoration’ (79%). Second are Autonomous Practices, traditional acts of piety undertaken by an individual. Crucially, this digital ministry reframes these into Authoritative Devotions, where an act like saying the Rosary (72%) is transformed from a private act into a guided, aesthetic catechesis via popular YouTube videos. Third are Cognitive Charisms, which are private, internal, and informational spiritual experiences where rational control is maintained. This category helps to explain the notable acceptance of experiences like ‘receiving a word of knowledge’ (41%), as these Cognitive Charisms are valued precisely because they do not disrupt the cohort's rational, Logos-dominant faith. Fourth, are Corporeal Charisms, which comprise the embodied, public, and ecstatic expressions of faith involving a surrender of conscious control, such as ‘speaking or praying in tongues’ (13%), ‘singing in tongues’ (12%) and ‘prophesying’ (15%). These acts that form the heart of the CCR’s *pathos*-dominant faith are almost universally rejected by this traditionalist cohort. This typology seeks to resolve the tension by suggesting that the followers of Bishop Barron are not rejecting charismatic phenomena outright, but are specifically rejecting its corporeal and public manifestations. They remain open to personal, cognitive charisms, such as ‘having a conversion experience’ (49%), but only insofar as they

can be integrated into a stable, ordered system that is governed by authoritative, priestly guidance.

This pattern finds an echo in the official ‘Suggested Guidelines’ circulated within the early English renewal (Ryles, c. 1974). Authored by Cardinal Suenens, it reveals a private caution that contrasts sharply with the public-facing role of ‘patron’ that he was concurrently developing (Ciciliot, 2019). While Ciciliot's work documents Suenens’ active ‘policy of presence’ to legitimise the movement, his private guidelines to the English bishops warned of ‘General Pastoral Dangers’. These included an over-emphasis on ‘experience’ at the expense of ‘doctrine’, the risk of ‘subjectivism and illusionism’, and a failure to consider ‘psychological factors’ (Ryles, c. 1974, p. 4). These private warnings, which frame the Renewal itself as ‘a possible source of weakness which should be feared’ (Ryles, c. 1974, p. 2), may be interpreted as indicating an early institutional anxiety rooted in this perceived threat from affective piety, prompting a corresponding call to ‘regularise the situation’ (Ryles, c. 1974, p. 8) through cognitive, theological oversight.

This psycho-spiritual profile can be further understood by mapping these categories onto certain models of cognitive and social psychology. The preference for Authoritative and Cognitive practices aligns with what Kahneman (2011) termed System 2 thinking – the slow, deliberate, and logical cognitive mode. These practices are ego-syntonic, meaning they are compatible with and reinforce a rational, controlled self-concept. The Sacrament of Confession (81%) is the archetypal example; it is an act of structured narrative construction wherein the ego remains the primary agent, rationally recalling, categorising, and articulating events to execute a systematic solution. Conversely, the aversion to Corporeal Charisms indicates a rejection of a spiritual mode that engages System 1 thinking – the fast, intuitive, and emotional faculty. These experiences, epitomised by glossolalia (13%), are ego-dystonic, demanding a surrender of conscious control that can be perceived as psychologically

threatening to a personality structure with a high need for order. A SPECT scan study of individuals engaged in glossolalia found decreased blood flow in the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain associated with willed control and self-consciousness (Newberg et al., 2006). The experience is therefore one of letting go of the rational ego, not actively engaging it.

Such an attraction to a highly-structured religious system can be conceptually linked to one of two distinct psychological responses, each correlated to different socio-cultural needs. Sociological research indicates that the experiential faith of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is most vibrant in communities facing material precarity and systemic powerlessness, particularly in the Global South. This pattern also holds true within the Global North, where charismatic and Pentecostal growth is often concentrated in urban, multi-ethnic, and economically deprived areas of the UK (Martin, 2002). In these contexts, the direct, unmediated, and intensely communal experience of the Holy Spirit offers a profound sense of personal empowerment and divine agency.

Conversely, for the highly educated and professionally established Barron cohort of the Global North, whose anxieties appear to be primarily existential rather than material, a different psychological remedy is required. Here, Compensatory Control Theory suggests that when feelings of personal control are threatened by the chaos of ‘liquid modernity’, individuals are motivated to endorse external systems that offer a vicarious sense of order (Kay et al., 2008). Similarly, Terror Management Theory posits that embedding one’s life in a timeless and heroic narrative provides a powerful buffer against existential anxiety (Pyszczynski et al., 2015). This movement may also offer relief from what Byung-Chul Han (2015) diagnosed as the burnout of the modern ‘achievement society’. Bishop Barron’s ministry is likely effective because his prominent teachings are shaped to address these specific psychological needs. By directly confronting the modern meaning crisis, his

apostolate provides a complete and coherent narrative framework for the self, which offers a powerful alternative to the exhausting project of inventing one's own meaning.

A primary application of this heroic, monomythic framework is evident in the ministry's deliberate reframing of the Sacrament of Confession. This focus is particularly striking given the established baseline for the general Catholic population in Britain. The foundational 2013 study of lay Catholics in Liverpool found that just 45% of participants endorsed 'going to confession' as important to their faith. This figure is consistent with wider national polling, which indicated that a similar proportion of UK Catholics (43%) reported never participating in the sacrament at all (*Catholic Herald*, 2016). Against this backdrop, the 81% of Bishop Barron's followers who rate the sacrament as highly important suggests the group's commitment to this discipline is a core defining characteristic. This high valuation may be explained by the ministry's pastoral strategy, which appears to shift the sacrament's emphasis from a passive reception of mercy to an active pursuit of moral discipline. While recent popes have framed the sacrament primarily through the lens of healing, with Pope Francis (2014) insisting the confessional must not be a 'torture chamber', Bishop Barron's popular apologetics consistently present it as an active engagement in 'spiritual warfare'.

This theme is notably articulated in a video shared on the ministry's platform, titled 'Why Men Need the Sacraments' (Word on Fire, 2020). Produced by the Knights of Columbus for their 'Into the Breach' series, it features Jared Zimmerer, then Director of the Word on Fire Institute, who explicitly connects the repetitive act of Confession to the virtue of 'grit', a psychological term for perseverance (Duckworth et al., 2007). As Zimmerer states, 'I think for men in particular it's a sacrament of grit. No matter how many times you have to confess the same thing over and over again, you just keep going, keep going, keep going'. This abstract concept is given a concrete meaning through a strategic visual juxtaposition: Zimmerer is shown performing a 'tyre flip' up a steep hill, a strenuous feat of Strongman

training associated with contemporary ideals of masculine strength and discipline. This cinematic encoding forges a symbolic link between the physical grit of the athlete and the spiritual grit of the penitent, transforming a sacrament of humility into an ego-syntonic, heroic quest for self-mastery.

Having established the sacrament as a training ground for this heroic identity, the framework culminates in a patriarchal vision of the family. Zimmerer argues that when a man leads his family to the sacraments, he is fulfilling three archetypal roles: leading them as their 'king', acting as a 'prophet', and embodying the role of a 'priest' through sacrificial love. This archetypal reframing may therefore account for the cohort's unusually high valuation of Confession, positioning the sacrament as the central means by which a heroic and psychologically resilient masculine identity can be forged against the perceived chaos of secular culture – a framework that appears to be attractive to the ministry's significant female following, as it provides a clear, structured vision of order and a sense of security to remedy the anxieties of liquid modernity within the patriarchal family unit.

The dissemination of this heroic narrative is notably driven by a new model of clerical authority: the 'influencer-priest'. While Bishop Barron is a primary exemplar of this phenomenon, he is part of a wider cohort of media-savvy American clerics advocating for a return to disciplined practice. Fr Mike Schmitz, for instance, whose *The Bible in a year* podcast became a global phenomenon, has collaborated with Barron on this theme; their joint discussions on the importance of the sacraments have garnered a combined viewership of over 470,000 on the Ascension Presents platform alone. This influence is most evident in the approach to the Rosary, a devotion which the data presented in the present study on the followers of Bishop Barron indicates is central to this cohort's identity, and which is also popularised through online recitations by figures such as Fr Mike Schmitz.

A qualitative assessment of the Word on Fire YouTube platform suggests a re-ordering of traditional piety, perfectly tailored to the psycho-spiritual disposition of this cohort. The ministry's three most-viewed videos are all guided recitations of the Rosary, commanding a combined viewership of over 13.4 million (as of October, 2025). This immense digital engagement suggests a profound need not simply for the Rosary, but for the Rosary as a priest-led, intellectually rich catechesis.

Through high-production techniques, the ministry transforms an Autonomous Practice into a new hybrid form: an Authoritative Devotion. This is a direct application of the *Via Pulchritudinis* (the Way of Beauty) advocated by Barron in his popular teachings, where the digital priest (Barron) transforms the familiar, rote prayers into an intelligible and visually stimulating act of devotion, interspersing them with expository voice-over commentary, a cinematic musical score, and a backdrop of high-resolution classical art. This strategy may serve a psychological function for a control-seeking audience. By engaging the mind with theological reflection and aesthetic contemplation, it resolves the tension between individual piety and the cohort's deep desire for clear, priestly leadership.

This suggests that the traditionalist cohort is defined by a psycho-spiritual disposition that sets it in opposition to charismatic piety, a contemporary divergence that finds its conceptual origins in the archives of the English Catholic hierarchy a half-century prior. Faced with the perceived *pathos* of the Charismatic Renewal, the bishops of the 1970s articulated a clear strategic need for an intellectually robust, authoritatively guided faith. Their vision was twofold: to impose 'clerical oversight' over CCR meetings and, most crucially, to counter the movement's perceived 'anti-intellectual attitude' and 'mass emotionalism' (Diocese of Arundel and Brighton, 1975).

While 1970s episcopal leaders, such as Archbishop Worlock in Britain, recognised that media 'power' needed to be 'in the hands of those whose very lives reflect the way of the

gospel' (Worlock, 1977), this wider institutional vision was apparently not realised. This failure led traditionalist critics, such as Bishop Barron, to perceive an intellectual and spiritual void, which they attributed to a post-Vatican II de-emphasis of rigorous catechesis (Faggioli, 2021). In a historical irony, the solution to an institutional predicament of the Old World (England) now appears to be facilitated by a digital ministry from the New World (America). Bishop Barron's digital apostolate can be seen as a fulfilment of the 'urgent need to publish more good popular books' and to provide 'theological review at a scholarly level' (Ryles, c. 1974, p. 9) – a call for rigor that was, at the time, a response to anxieties over 'a flood of "Pentecostal" literature' that was 'putting across confusing views on the nature of charisms' (Ryles, c. 1974, p. 9). By leveraging the modern media that Worlock foresaw, the ministry delivers a coherent, System 2 religiosity that aligns with the cohort's deep attraction for an intellectually structured faith, perhaps functioning as a therapeutic narrative for existential anxieties.

This divergence can be understood as a fundamental sorting of contemporary faith, culminating in two distinct spiritual ethoses. For the charismatic, whose faith finds its most vibrant expression in the Church's demographic heartland, the ethos is one of direct, affective experience: I *feel*, therefore I apprehend. For the Aesthetic Traditionalist, faith is not an act of emotional surrender but one of intellectual assent to a coherent and beautiful system, a spiritual psychological profile captured by the scholastic maxim: I *think*, therefore I apprehend.

Conclusion

In the spirit of response to the 'replication crisis in psychology' (Fletcher, 2021; Pennington, 2023; Plucker & Makel, 2021), the aim of the present study was to replicate the earlier study reported by Francis et al. (2025) among participants attending Bishop Barron's London conference during February 2023. New data were collected among participants attending

Bishop Barron's London conference during February 2025, employing the same measures in the same way among a different group. Set alongside the responses of 490 participants in the first study, the new data provided by 422 participants in the second study confirmed the main statistical findings of the original study. The scientific findings confirmed: the internal consistency reliability of the two core instruments (the Traditional Catholic Orientation Scale and the Charismatic Orientation Scale); the recovery of the clear two factor structure of the items comprising these two measures; the small positive correlation between these two measures demonstrating that the two orientations were complementary rather than contrary; the majority of participants were firmly rooted within the Catholic tradition, with a minority also rooted in the charismatic tradition.

Given the stability of the findings across the two sets of data, it has been possible to draw on these findings to illuminate the appeal of Bishop Barron's distinctive online ministry and to profile that distinctive ministry in dialogue with the contrasting appeal and waning influence of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. The suggestion is advanced that distinctive charisms at the heart of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal have been repurposed to accommodate a priest-led cognitive faith in place of a lay-led affective faith.

There remain three limitations with the present study that need to be addressed by future research. First, within the context of the replication crisis within psychology that stimulated the present study, it needs to be recognised that a single replication study is insufficient. Ongoing replication studies during future visits of Bishop Barron to England are needed to address these limitations. Second, the focus of these two studies has been on the followers of Bishop Barron who are motivated to attend in-person events in London. The main attraction of Bishop Barron's ministry is to online audiences and it is not sensible to generalise findings from conference participants to this wider audience. New studies conducted among online audiences are needed to address this limitation. Third, the current

findings have been explored by engagement with psychological theories that were not incorporated within the design of the surveys. Explicit operationalisation of these theories is needed to address this limitation within future studies.

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Ethical approval

This study received approval from the St Mary's Centre Ethics Committee (SCM22ECC0011).

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Table 1

Rotated component matrix

	Factor 1	Factor 2
Speaking or praying in tongues	.78	
Attending charismatic prayer meeting	.72	
Receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit	.63	
Having a conversion experience	.54	
Prophesying	.74	
Laying hands on someone for healing	.67	
Receiving ‘a word of knowledge’	.68	
Singing in the Spirit	.75	
Singing in tongues	.76	
Making devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary		.83
Attending Devotions and Benedictions		.70
Going to Confession (Sacrament of Reconciliation)		.72
Venerating relics		.71
Making Eucharistic adoration		.73
Saying the Rosary		.81
Being loyal to the Pope		.57
Going on a pilgrimage to a Catholic shrine		.69
Lighting votive candles		.43

Note: item loadings below .20 suppressed for clarity of presentation

Table 2

Traditional Catholic Orientation Scale: Item rest of scale correlations and item endorsement

	r	%
Making devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary	.75	77
Attending Devotions and Benediction	.59	60
Going to Confession (Sacrament of Reconciliation)	.61	81
Venerating relics	.62	31
Making Eucharistic adoration	.64	79
Saying the Rosary	.72	72
Being loyal to the Pope	.45	76
Going on a pilgrimage to a Catholic shrine	.61	64
Lighting votive candles	.35	43
Alpha	.86	

Note: *r* = correlation between the individual item and the sum of the other items

% = proportion who rated the importance of the practice for their own faith at level of four or five on the five-point scale

Table 3

Charismatic Orientation Scale: Item rest of scale correlations and item endorsement

	r	%
Speaking or praying in tongues	.67	13
Attending charismatic prayer-group meetings	.63	18
Receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit	.53	59
Having a conversion experience	.45	49
Prophesying	.65	15
Laying hands on someone for healing	.58	27
Receiving a word of knowledge	.60	41
Singing in the Spirit	.66	28
Singing in tongues	.64	12
Alpha	.87	

Note: *r* = correlation between the individual item and the sum of the other items

% = proportion who rated the importance of the practice for their own faith at level of four or five on the five-point scale

Table 4

Correlation matrix

	Sex	Age	CAT
Charismatic Orientation	.06	.03	.10*
Catholic Orientation (CAT)	.12*	.07	

Note: * $p < .05$