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Attitude toward Christianity and Paranormal Belief among 13- to 16-year-old students¹

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Attitude toward Christianity and Paranormal Belief among 13- to 16-year-old students

Summary

A positive correlation ($r = .19$) was found among a sample of 279 13- to 16-year-old students in Wales between the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity and a new Index of Paranormal Belief. These data suggest that sympathy for Christianity is more likely to foster than to discourage belief in the paranormal.

In terms of theory the relationship between a positive attitude toward Christianity and belief in the paranormal is ambiguous (Thalbourne, 2003). On the one hand, Christian teaching concerning a transcendent God, life after death, and the power of prayer may go some way to making belief in other transcendent phenomena, including the paranormal, more credible. On the other hand, Christian teaching tends to warn young people against belief in phenomena such as horoscopes and contacting the spirits of the dead (Boyd, 1996).

In order for these conflicting views to be tested, all 13- to 16-year-old students attending a sample of classes in one secondary school in Wales were invited to complete the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity, a 24-item index concerned with affective responses to God, Jesus, the Bible, prayer and church (Francis, Lewis, Philipchalk, Brown & Lester, 1995) and a specially-constructed 6-item Index of Paranormal Belief concerned with ghosts, horoscopes, fate, divination, and spiritual mediumship. All pupils accepted the invitation, providing 279 respondents (123 male and 156 female). All items were assessed on a 5-point scale: 5 = agree strongly, 4 = agree, 3 = not certain, 2 = disagree, and 1 = disagree strongly.

Both measures had satisfactory Cronbach alpha coefficients (Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity, .97; Index of Paranormal Belief, .77) and were positively correlated ($r = 0.19, p < .001$) which remained after controlling for sex differences by means of partial correlations ($r = 0.17, p < .01$), demonstrating a statistically significant but weak association (accounting for just 3% of variance) between a positive attitude toward Christianity among this age group and greater belief in paranormal phenomena.

References

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