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Personality and attitude toward Christianity among churchgoers: a replication

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Personality and attitude toward Christianity among churchgoers: a replication

Summary - A sample of 158 churchgoers attending eight Anglican churches in the United Kingdom completed the abbreviated Revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire, together with the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity in order to replicate an earlier study by Carter, Kay and Francis (1996). The data confirm that scores of attitude toward Christianity were significantly negatively related to psychoticism, but neither to extraversion nor neuroticism scores.

Introduction

Eysenck's dimensional model of personality maintains that normal personality can be most adequately and economically described in terms of the three orthogonal dimensions of Extraversion, Neuroticism and Psychoticism (Eysenck and Eysenck, 1975). Scores on the Extraversion scale range from introverted social detachment to extraverted social engagement. Scores on the Neuroticism scale range from emotional stability to emotional lability (and precursors of neurotic disorder). Scores on the Psychoticism scale range from tender-mindedness to tough-mindedness (and precursors of psychotic disorder). This model of personality has proved to be productive within the psychology of religion in a series of studies using the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity, an instrument designed to assess positive and negative feelings about Jesus, God, the Bible, prayer and church in Christian and post-Christian cultures (Francis, Lewis, Philipchalk, Brown, & Lester, 1995).

A series of studies examining the relationship between attitude toward Christianity and Eysenck's dimensional model of personality in general samples have consistently reported a significant negative correlation between scores of attitude toward Christianity and psychoticism scores, but no relationship between attitude towards Christianity and either neuroticism scores or extraversion scores (Francis, Lewis & Ng, 2003). Although Carter, Kay and Francis (1996) found a significant negative correlation between attitude toward Christianity and psychoticism scores in a sample of 61 Anglican churchgoers in the United Kingdom no such relationship was found by Francis (1991) in a sample of 165 churchgoers of mixed denominational backgrounds in the UK.

Against this background the aim of the present study was to replicate the two earlier studies by Carter, Kay and Francis (1996) and Francis (1991) among a new sample of Anglican churchgoers.

Method

Adults attending eight Anglican churches in the United Kingdom were invited to complete a short questionnaire. Responses were received from 65 men and 93 women (a little over half of all attendees); 7 were under the age of twenty, 11 in their twenties, 9 in their thirties, 11 in their forties, 34 in their fifties, 39 in their sixties, and 47 were aged seventy or over. A large proportion of the churchgoers (81%) attended each week. The questionnaire included the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity (Francis, Lewis, Philipchalk, Brown, & Lester, 1995), a 24-item index concerned with affective responses to God, Jesus, the Bible, prayer and church assessed on a 5-point scale: 5 = agree strongly, 4 = agree, 3 = not certain, 2 = disagree, and 1 = disagree strongly. Respondents also completed the abbreviated Revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Francis, Brown, & Philipchalk, 1992), a 24-item measure of Extraversion, Neuroticism, Psychoticism assessed on a dichotomous scale: 1 = yes and 0 = no.

All four scales included in the study achieved satisfactory Cronbach alpha coefficients (Extraversion .85; Neuroticism .73; Psychoticism .51; Attitude toward Christianity .96). The lower alpha coefficient recorded by the Psychoticism scale is consistent with the normative data (Francis, Brown and Philipchalk, 1992). The following scores were recorded on the four scales: Attitude toward Christianity $M = 101.99$, $SD = 14.42$;

Extraversion $M = 2.89$, $SD = 2.26$; Neuroticism $M = 2.60$, $SD = 1.89$; Psychoticism $M = 0.89$, $SD = 1.09$.

After controlling for sex by means of partial correlations, no significant correlation was found between Attitude towards Christianity and either Extraversion ($r = .01$, *ns*) or Neuroticism ($r = -.08$, *ns*). A significant correlation was found between attitude toward Christianity and Psychoticism ($r = -.22$, $p < .01$).

Conclusion

These findings support the conclusion of Carter, Kay and Francis (1996) that individual differences in scores of attitude toward Christianity are related to psychoticism scores but independent of extraversion scores and neuroticism scores among churchgoers as well as among the wider population. Further replication studies would help to demonstrate whether or not the contrary findings reported by Francis (1991) were entirely anomalous or part of a wider pattern. If contrary findings were to prove to be part of a wider pattern, this discrepancy would begin to qualify the confidence which can be placed in the claim that individual differences in attitude toward Christianity are generally related to the dimension of personality defined by the Eysenckian psychoticism scale.

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