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Introducing the New Indices of God Images (NIGI):
Distinguishing between God of Grace and God of Law

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Abstract

Building on a stream of research initiated by Benson and Spilka (1973) and drawing on insights afforded by empirical theology, the present study introduces the New Indices of God Images (NIGI) designed to distinguish between two divergent theological concepts of God, construed as God of Grace and God of Law, and each operationalised by brief three-item scales. Data provided by 5,269 students between the ages of 13 and 15 years who professed belief in God demonstrated good levels of internal consistency reliability for these two orthogonal measures. Construct validity for the two measures was established alongside measures of self-esteem (images of self) and of empathy (images of others). Higher scores on the Index of God of Grace were associated with higher self-esteem and higher empathy. Higher scores on the Index of God of Law were associated with lower self-esteem and lower empathy.

Keywords: God of Grace, God of Law, New Indices of God Images, self-esteem, empathy

Introduction

God images, and the related constructs of God concepts and God representations, have played an important role in the developing field of the psychology of religion (Hegy, 2007), in terms both of theory (Hall & Fujikawa, 2013) and measurement (Hill & Hood, 1999; Gibson, 2007). Integration of findings from empirical studies in the field has been made complex and difficult by the wide range of instruments that have emerged from differing conceptual and operational perspectives. Within the wide range of instruments, the measure proposed by Benson and Spilka (1973) has gained some prominence through consistent use (wholly or in part) by researchers over more than four decades, including studies by Spilka et al. (1975), Chartier and Goehner (1976), Jolley and Taulbee (1986), Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990, 1992), Brokaw and Edwards (1994), Kirkpatrick (1998), Rowatt and Kirkpatrick (2002), Webb et al. (2005), Granqvist et al. (2007), Reinert and Edwards (2009), Krentzman et al. (2011), Soenens et al. (2012), Gebauer and Maio (2012), Meisenhelder et al. (2013), Vonk and Pitzen (2016), and Whicker et al. (2017). This instrument, therefore, may be worth renewed scrutiny, critique, and development.

Against this background, the present paper has four main aims. The first aim is to critique the measure of God images proposed by Benson and Spilka (1973) and to assess the revision proposed by Francis et al. (2006). The second aim is to review the usefulness of the original and revised forms of this measure for exploring the connections between images of God, self, and others. The third aim is to subject the revised measure proposed by Francis et al. (2006) to further scrutiny and to test the development of the New Indices of God Images (NIGI) that draw on insights from empirical theology alongside the empirical psychology of religion. The fourth aim is then to examine the capacity of this new measure for contributing further insights into the connection between images of God, images of self, and images of others.

Critiquing Benson and Spilka (1973)

In their original conceptualisation and operationalisation, Benson and Spilka (1973) developed a ten-item semantic differential grid with a seven-point space between the opposing poles (see Osgood et al., 1957). From this grid they proposed two separate five-item scales: the ‘loving God’ index (rejecting – accepting, loving – hating, damning – saving, unforgiving – forgiving, and approving – disapproving) and the ‘controlling God’ index (demanding – not demanding, freeing – restricting, controlling – non-controlling, strict – lenient, and permissive – rigid). Drawing on data provided by 128 male students attending a Catholic high school (mean age = 15.4 years) who considered themselves Catholic, reported both parents as Catholic, had never associated with a non-Catholic organisation, and had been a member of a local Catholic parish for a least ten years, they reported a significant negative correlation between the two measures, indicating clear overlap between them ($r = -.30, p < .01$). Very few of the subsequent published studies report the correlation between the two scales, but where this correlation is reported that data show a stronger overlap: including Webb et al. (2005) drawing on a sample of 280 students ($r = -.43, p < .01$); Reinert and Edwards (2009) drawing on a sample of 150 students ($r = -.59, p < .01$); Soenens et al. (2012) drawing on a sample of 305 religiously active participants ($r = -.69, p < .001$); Meisenhelder et al. (2013) drawing on a sample of 158 oncology patients ($r = -.90, p < .001$); Vonk and Pitzen (2016) among a sample of 453 students ($r = -.63, p < .001$), and Whicker et al. (2017) drawing on a sample of 225 self-identified lesbians ($r = -.72, p < .001$).

Francis et al. (2006) tested the factor structure of Benson and Spilka’s (1973) ten-item semantic differential grid among a sample of 755 students between the ages of 11 and 18 years from two secondary schools in Scotland (one Roman Catholic and one non-denominational). The 755 participants constituted a heterogeneous sample in terms of religious practice: 21% attended a place of worship at least once a month and a further 45%

attended at least once a year, leaving 34% who never attended a place of worship; 10% prayed daily and a further 45% prayed at least occasionally, leaving 45% who never prayed; 30% self-identified as Roman Catholic, 36% as belonging to a Protestant Christian tradition, 31% as belonging to no faith group, and 3% as belonging to a non-Christian faith tradition. In this study, principal component analysis generated a three factor solution, with the three factors accounting for 44.5%, 13.1% and 10.0% of the variance respectively. Eight items loaded on the first factor with loadings in excess of .5. One item loaded on factor two at .8 (controlling – uncontrolling) and one item loaded on factor three at .8 (permissive – rigid). Rotated two factor and three factor solutions failed to recover the two dimensions proposed by Benson and Spilka (1973).

Reflecting on these findings, Francis et al. (2006) dropped the two items which failed to load on the first factor of the unrotated solution proposed by principal component analysis and calculated the scale properties for the remaining eight items. With these eight items the first unrotated factor identified by principal component analysis accounted for 54.0% of the variance, suggesting a strong single factor scale. The alpha coefficient of .87 confirmed a good level of internal consistency reliability for the eight-item measure. Francis et al. (2006) interpreted the new eight-item measure as defining unidimensional semantic space relating to God images ranging from positive affect to negative affect. In this semantic space positive affect was defined by the descriptors: saving, accepting, not-demanding, loving, freeing, forgiving, approving, and lenient. Negative affect was defined by the descriptors: damning, rejecting, demanding, hating, restricting, unforgiving, disapproving, and strict.

Images of God, self and others

Benson and Spilka's (1973) original work conceptualising and measuring God images posited a connection between God image and personal self-esteem. Working from dissonance theory they argued as follows:

A theology predicated on a loving, accepting God is cognitively compatible with high self-esteem, but it could be a source of discomfort for a believer with lower self-esteem. It does not make sense to be loved when one is unlovable. Consequently, the latter person can march to a different theology, one that is more consistent with his self-image. (Benson & Spilka, 1973, pp. 209-210)

In their original study, drawing on data provided by 128 male students attending a Catholic high school who regarded religion as personally important, Benson and Spilka (1973) found that self-esteem scores, as assessed by a modified form of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (Coopersmith, 1967), were positively correlated with loving God images, but negatively correlated with controlling God images. In a subsequent study, drawing on data provided by 116 male and 82 female students attending three Catholic high schools, Spilka et al. (1975) found that, for male students, self-esteem was negatively related to a wrathful God image. In female students, self-esteem was negatively related to a deistic God image and positively related to a loving God image, a traditional God image, and a kind God image.

Benson and Spilka's (1973) interest in explaining the connection between God images and self-esteem was developed by Francis (2005) in a study conducted among 755 students in England between the ages of 11 and 18 who completed three instruments: the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (Coopersmith, 1967), the revised Semantic Differential Scale distinguishing between negative and positive God images (Francis et al., 2006) and the short-form Revised Junior Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Corulla, 1990). The data demonstrated significant association between positive God images and positive self-esteem, after controlling for individual differences in personality. This study was subsequently replicated by Robbins et al. (2007) among 258 students in South Africa. Again after controlling for individual differences in personality, this replication study demonstrated a

significant link between high self-esteem and positive God images and a significant link between low self-esteem and negative God images.

Building on this field of research concerning the connection between God images and self-esteem, Francis (2007) proposed a connection between God images and empathy.

Francis argued that:

a more loving and more caring image of God may be likely to promote a more loving and more caring attitude toward others, and may be more conducive to enhanced emotional empathy, while a less loving and less caring image of God may be likely to promote a less loving and less caring attitude toward others, and may be less conducive of enhanced emotional empathy. (Francis, 2007, p. 74)

In his original study, drawing on data provided by 1,826 students (889 males and 937 females) between the ages of 11 and 17 years attending four secondary schools in England, Francis (2007) employed the Revised Semantic Differential Scale distinguishing between negative and positive God images (Francis et al., 2006), the empathy scale of the Junior Eysenck Impulsiveness Questionnaire (Eysenck et al., 1984), and the short-form Revised Junior Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Corulla, 1990). The data demonstrated a significant association between positive God images and higher empathy scores. This study was subsequently replicated by Robbins et al. (2006) among 258 students in South Africa. Again, after controlling for individual differences in personality, this replication study demonstrated a small but statistically significant correlation between positive God images and greater empathy scores.

In a third study Francis et al. (2012) employed a modified form of the measure of God images proposed by Francis et al. (2006), the empathy scale of the Junior Eysenck Impulsiveness Questionnaire (Eysenck et al., 1984), and the abbreviated form of the Revised Junior Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Francis, 1996) among a sample of 5,993 students

between the ages of 13 and 15 years. The data demonstrated that religious identity (being Christian or being Muslim) and religious attendance at a place of worship were less important in predicting empathy scores than the God images espoused by young people. After controlling for age, sex, and personality, the image of God as a God of mercy was associated with higher empathy scores, while the image of God as a God of justice was associated with lower empathy scores.

The series of studies reported by Francis (2005, 2007), Robbins et al. (2007), and Francis et al. (2012) all included a set of personality measures as control variables, because of the way in which individual differences in religiosity, self-esteem, and empathy are all known to be related to the three major dimensions of personality identified by the Eysenckian model of personality (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975, 1991).

Critiquing Francis, Robbins, and Gibson (2006)

Francis et al.'s (2006) reconceptualisation of the semantic space shaped from eight of Benson and Spilka's (1973) ten bipolar scales as distinguishing between God images ranging from positive affect to negative affect raises issues for both psychological and theological investigation. From a psychological perspective, the notion of locating positive affect and negative affect as opposite poles of a continuum runs counter to the well-established psychological notion, rooted in Bradburn's (1969) model of balanced affect, that negative affect and positive affect operate as partially independent systems. According to this understanding it should be possible to measure the two systems independently and not to see one as the mirror image of the other. This basic psychological insight suggests that the bipolar model of the semantic differential grid may not be the best way to measure God images that reflect positive affect and negative affect. As a consequence the present study proposes taking key descriptors from the original scales proposed by Benson and Spilka (1973) and presenting them in the classic Likert format.

From a theological perspective, the descriptors that have clustered to define God images at the negative affect pole of the scale may confuse a range of categories.

Theologically, a God who is hating and rejecting may be very different from a God who is demanding and strict. Alongside the insights generated from a psychology of religion approach, additional insight may be generated from an empirical theology approach to help to reconceptualise the measurement of God images. As a consequence the present study proposes to turn attention to the two potentially contrasting images of God that may be characterised as God of Grace and God of Law.

God of Grace, God of Law

The contrasting images of God characterised as God of Grace and God of Law have their roots in the work of Holdsworth (2024). In that paper Holdsworth argued that, in spite of the recognised difficulties in identifying clear and distinctive differentiated images of God within theological traditions (with the kind of directness and clarity sought by social scientific enquiry), a discernible and consistent theological difference may be sustained differentiating between the image of God of Law and the image of God of Grace. Moreover, according to Holdsworth, that difference can be traced through the Old Testament, and through the New Testament.

Holdsworth (2024) argued that this distinction between the contrasting images of God of Grace and God of Law emerges in both the Old Testament and the New Testament through theological reflection on significant crises experienced in the historical trajectory of faith in God. From the perspective of the Old Testament, the crisis of faith was brought about by the experience of Exile when God appeared to have reneged on promises made to God's chosen people in respect of the promised land. From the perspective of the New Testament, the crisis of faith was brought about by the experience of crucifixion, when God appeared to have reneged on promises made to God's chosen people in respect of the promised Messiah. Each

of these two collections of documents that comprise the Old Testament and the New Testament present a variety of views. Holdsworth (2024) argued that the distinction between ‘grace’ and ‘law’ is one way of describing a fundamental distinction of worldviews set out in Genesis chapters 1 to 11.

Holdsworth (2024) argued that what we might describe as ‘law’ is the worldview which is essentially anxious, and which believes that God’s good intentions in creation stand in danger of being subverted by human sinfulness. Law is all that stands between chaos and the maintenance of life in peace and enjoyment. In its fullest expression, it is a central theme of Deuteronomy, which itself is the manifesto of a group with a particular understanding of God in a postexilic setting. They believe that the Exile was in fact a terrible reminder of what happens when human agency is set against divine will, and law is disregarded. For the Deuteronomistic (D) writers God is hence both loving and jealous (Mills, 1998). God is loving in so far as God has gifted a chosen people with a land and their freedom, and the means and structures that will enable a society to flourish (all of which is tied up with the theological idea of Covenant). God is jealous and even angry and wrathful when the story of freedom is disregarded; when the gratefulness is ceremonial rather than sincere; when the law is flouted, and when other gods who offer easier conditions for living are entertained. This is set out in inescapable clarity at Deuteronomy 30: 15-20.

What we might describe as ‘grace’ is the worldview which is essentially optimistic and which believes that human corruption and sin will be overcome by God’s grace. While the D theology is essentially political and concentrates on the political and historical act of liberation as the setting for the establishment of the nation, Priestly (P) theology, which holds the optimistic view, is based on the concept of creation, and the sure belief that God has promised that life on the whole earth will persist, sin notwithstanding, as set out at Genesis 9:

7-17. It is a sacramental theology which sees God's purposes in the interconnectedness of creation, rather than the persistence of a state.

By the time of Jesus these two worldviews have been fused in an institutional religio-political way. It could be argued that Paul seeks to disentangle them, while highlighting the dangers of such institutionalisation. Following the D tradition, Paul affirms the political and liberating act which is evidenced in the election and establishment of Israel, as a theological entity. However, he disputes the contemporary interpretation of how admission is gained to 'Israel,' and also the soteriological consequence of equating 'Israel' with a religio-political system that appears to make salvation contingent upon the keeping of the law (Sanders, 1977). Hence Paul's writings emphasise the initiative of God, acting in a graceful and loving way towards humankind; rather than the attempt by humans to maintain good relations with God by keeping the law. Though not an exact parallel with the Old Testament distinction discussed above, the basic fault line is discernible between an anxious approach to a God who demands adherence to the law as a condition of salvation (law), and a loving and gracious God whose personal intervention in human history is evidence of a hopeful investment in humankind, despite itself (grace). Paul re-invents the sacramental tradition, and relates it to the theological concept of the Body of Christ.

Research objectives

Against this background the empirical contribution of the present study has two clear objectives. The first objective is to reframe some of the descriptors from Benson and Spilka's (1973) semantic differential scales into two sets of Likert type items that may differentiate between God of Grace (as reconceptualisation of positive affect) and God of Law (as reconceptualisation of negative affect) and to test the independence of these two sets of items. The second objective is to examine the cumulative predictive power of these two measures in

predicting individual differences in self-esteem (images of self) and empathy (images of others).

Method

Procedure

The Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity project invited participation from schools across the four nations of the United Kingdom. In turn participating schools were asked to invite all students attending two year groups to participate in the project: year 9 (13- to 14-year-old students) and year 10 (14- to 15-year-old students). Students were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. A total of 11,809 students returned thoroughly completed questionnaires.

Measures

Belief in God and God images were assessed by Likert-style items rated on a five-point scale: agree strongly (5), agree (4), not certain (3), disagree (2), and disagree strongly (1).

Personality was assessed by the abbreviated form of the Revised Junior Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (JEPQR-A; Francis, 1996). This instrument proposes three six-item measures of extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism, together with a six-item lie scale. Each item was rated as a dichotomous scale: yes (1) and no (0). Francis (1996) reported the following alpha coefficients for the three personality scales: extraversion, $\alpha = .66$; neuroticism, $\alpha = .70$; psychoticism, $\alpha = .61$.

Empathy was assessed by the empathy scale of the Junior Eysenck Impulsiveness Questionnaire (JIVE; Eysenck et al., 1984). This instrument contains 23 empathy-related items developed from the adult measure of emotional empathy proposed by Mehrabian and Epstein (1972). Each item was rated on a dichotomous scale: yes (1) and no (0). Eysenck et al. (1984) reported the following alpha coefficients: for females, $\alpha = .69$; for males, $\alpha = .70$.

Self-esteem was assessed by the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). This instrument contains 10 items. Each item was rated on a five-point scale: agree strongly (5), agree (4), not certain (3), disagree (2), and disagree strongly (1). In a recent study Francis and Lewis (2018), using the same rating scale, reported the following alpha coefficient: $\alpha = .81$.

Sex and age were both recoded on a dichotomous scale: male (1) and female (2); year 9 students (1) and year 10 students (2).

Participants

The current analyses were conducted on data provided by those students who had responded to the item 'I believe in God' by checking either the agree or the agree strongly responses, and had also provided complete data on the four measures required for the analysis: the measure of God images, the abbreviated form of the Revised Junior Eysenck Personality Questionnaire, the measure of empathy, and the measure of self-esteem (N= 5,269). Of these participating students, 2,235 were male, 3,006 were female, and 28 did not disclose their sex; 2,697 were in year 9, 2,545 were in year 10, and 27 did not disclose their school year.

Analysis

The data were analysed by SPSS, using the frequency, correlation, reliability, factor, and regression routines.

Results and discussion

- insert table 1 and table 2 about here -

The first step in data analysis employed exploratory factor analysis to explore the structure of the six items proposed for the New Indices of God Images. Table 1 presents the unrotated component analysis matrix for principle component analysis. A clear factor structure emerges in which the first principle component (God of Grace) accounts for 42% of the variance and the second component (God of Law) accounts for 36% of the variance. The unrotated solution indicates that these two components are orthogonal.

The second step in data analysis examined two aspects of the scale properties of the two identified factors: the internal consistency reliability expressed in terms of the correlation between each individual item and the sum of the other two items, and the item endorsement expressed in terms of the sum of the agree and agree strongly responses. The correlations show a high level of item homogeneity. The item endorsements show a much higher level of support for the God of Grace than for the God of Law.

- insert table 3 about here -

The third step in data analysis examined the scale properties of all seven indices employed in the subsequent correlational and regression analyses in terms of the alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951), mean and standard deviation. These data demonstrate good levels of internal consistency reliability for the measures of God of Grace ($\alpha = .90$), God of Law ($\alpha = .80$), and self-esteem ($\alpha = .84$), and satisfactory levels of internal consistency reliability for the measures of empathy ($\alpha = .75$), extraversion ($\alpha = .67$), and neuroticism ($\alpha = .67$). The lower level of internal consistency reliability for the measure of psychoticism ($\alpha = .57$) is consistent with the difficulties associated with measuring this dimension of personality (Francis et al., 1992) and with the findings of the foundation paper for this specific form of the psychoticism scale (Francis, 1996).

- insert table 4 about here -

The fourth step in data analysis explored the bivariate correlations between image of God of Grace, image of God of Law, extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism, empathy, self-esteem, sex, and age. The following three observations arise from the correlation matrix presented in table 4. The first main conclusion concerns the correlation between scores recorded on the Index of God of Law and on the Index of God of Grace ($r = .01$, ns). This non-significant correlation simply supports the outcome of the factor analysis, namely that these two dimensions are completely independent. The second main conclusion is that the

two measures of God images related both to empathy and to self-esteem in opposing directions. Higher scores on the Index of the God of Grace are associated with significantly higher levels of empathy ($r = .18, p < .001$) and of self-esteem ($r = .16, p < .001$). Higher scores on the Index of God of Law are associated with significantly lower levels of empathy ($r = -.09, p < .001$) and of self-esteem ($r = -.12, p < .001$). The third main conclusion concerns the complex pattern of associations between sex, personality, empathy, and self-esteem that may contaminate the apparent associations between God images and empathy and self-esteem. It is for this reason that multivariate analyses may be prudent.

- insert table 5 and table 6 about here -

The fifth step in data analysis examined the effect of the Index of the God of Grace and the Index of the God of Law on self-esteem scores (table 5) and on empathy scores (table 6), after taking into account the effect of personal factors (sex and school year) and personality factors (psychoticism, neuroticism, and extraversion). The data presented in table 5 and table 6 first re-present the bivariate correlation coefficients from table 4 for ease of comparison with the beta weights. Then stepwise regression enters the dependent variables in three steps. Model one enters the personal factors, model two enters the personality factors, and model three enters the God images. In the case of both self-esteem and empathy, each of the three steps adds significantly to the predictive power of the model. In the case of both self-esteem and empathy the largest proportion of variance is accounted for by the personality factors. In the case of both self-esteem and empathy additional variance is accounted for by the God images after personal factors and psychological factors have been taken into account.

Model three in table 5 confirms that self-esteem, as conceptualised and operationalised by the Rosenberg measure, is significantly higher among male students than among female students. Of the three personality variables, neuroticism is the most important in predicting individual differences in self-esteem. Higher self-esteem is associated with

higher extraversion scores, lower psychoticism scores, and lower neuroticism scores. With personal factors and personality factors also taken into account, higher self-esteem is significantly associated with higher Image of God of Grace scores ($\beta = .16, p < .001$) and with lower Image of God of Law scores ($\beta = -.07, p < .001$).

Model three in table 6 confirms that empathy, as conceptualised and operationalised by the Eysenck measure, is significantly higher among female students than among male students. Of the three personality variables, both neuroticism and psychoticism are important in predicting individual differences in empathy. Higher empathy is associated with higher neuroticism scores, with lower psychoticism scores, and higher extraversion scores. With personal factors and personality factors also taken into account, higher empathy is significantly associated with higher Image of God of Grace scores ($\beta = .11, p < .001$) and with lower Image of God of Law scores ($\beta = -.05, p < .001$).

Conclusion

Working from the earlier measures of God images proposed by Benson and Spilka (1973) and revised by Francis et al. (2006), the present study proposed two research objectives. The first objective was to refine some of the descriptors of God images from Benson and Spilka's (1973) semantic differential scales into two sets of Likert type items that may differentiate between God of Grace (as reconceptualisation of positive affect) and God of Law (as reconceptualisation of negative affect) and to test the independence of these two sets of items. Drawing on data provided by 5,269 students who had responded to the item 'I believe in God' by checking either the agree or the agree strongly responses, the unrotated component solution for principle component analysis clearly recovered the hypothesised two component structure of the six items. The unrotated solution indicates that these two components, differentiating between God of Grace and God of Law, are orthogonal.

The second objective was to examine the cumulative predictive power of these two measures in predicting individual differences in self-esteem (images of self) and empathy (images of others). Again drawing on data provided by the 5,269 students, two separate regression models, one for self-esteem and one for empathy, demonstrated that, after controlling for personal factors (sex and school year) and personality factors (psychoticism, neuroticism, and extraversion), each demonstrated a significant positive path from scores recorded on the measure of God of Grace and a significant negative path from scores recorded on the measure of God of Law. As hypothesised these two orthogonal measures each contributed independent prediction of individual differences in self-esteem and empathy.

Three key conclusions emerge from these findings that commend the New Indices of God Images for further research. The first conclusion is that, in measuring God images, Likert type items that are able to differentiate between positive affect and negative affect hold advantage over semantic differential scales that obscure the differentiation. The second conclusion is that insights from empirical theology are able to differentiate among different understandings of God in ways that are useful for the scientific conceptualisation and investigation of God images. The third conclusion is that measures of God images that distinguish between positive affect and negative affect add to the predictive power of models designed to explore the connection between God images and relevant psychological variables.

There are, however, important empirical and conceptual limitations with the present study. The empirical limitation concerns the reliance on two measures of only three items each. Nonetheless, the clear recovery of the two-factor structure produced by these six items offers encouragement for further research to explore the development of more substantial measures. The conceptual limitation concerns the way in which the six descriptors were all

derived from the original choice of descriptors proposed by Benson and Spilka (1973) and then retrospectively mapped onto the emerging distinction proposed by empirical theology between God of Grace and God of Law. Nonetheless, the utility of these two measures within the regression model offers encouragement for empirical theologians to offer a richer set of descriptors that more fully characterise the distinction between God of Grace and God of Law and for these descriptors to be tested in future research.

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Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity Project (AHRC Reference: AH/G014035/1) is a large scale mixed methods research project investigating the attitudes of 13- to 16-year-old students across the United Kingdom. Students from a variety of socio-economic, cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds from different parts of England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, with the addition of London as a special case, took part in the study. Professor Robert Jackson was principal investigator and Professor Leslie J Francis was co-investigator. Together they led a team of qualitative and quantitative researchers based in the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit, within the Institute of Education at the University of Warwick. The project was part of the AHRC/ESRC Religion and Society Programme, and ran from 2009-12.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval was given by the University of Warwick Research Ethics Committee (Ethical Application Reference: 34/08-09).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Table 1

Principle component matrix (unrotated)

	Factors	
	1	2
<i>God of Grace</i>		
I think of God as loving	.91	
I think of God as forgiving	.91	
I think of God as accepting	.89	
<i>God of Law</i>		
I think of God as strict		.80
I think of God as disapproving		.87
I think of God as demanding		.85
% variance	42%	36%

N = 5,269

Note: All factor loadings below .20 are suppressed for clarity of presentation

Table 2

Internal consistency reliability and item endorsement

	<i>r</i>	yes %
<i>God of Grace</i>		
I think of God as loving	.80	78
I think of God as forgiving	.81	79
I think of God as accepting	.78	78
<i>God of Law</i>		
I think of God as strict	.56	33
I think of God as disapproving	.69	18
I think of God as demanding	.67	20

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

yes % = sum of the agree and agree strongly responses

N = 5,269

Table 3

Scale properties

	N Items	alpha	mean	SD	Range	
					Lo	Hi
God of Grace	3	.90	12.2	2.5	3	15
God of Law	3	.80	9.7	2.8	3	15
Self-esteem	10	.84	35.3	7.0	10	50
Empathy	23	.75	17.1	3.8	0	23
Extraversion	6	.67	4.80	1.5	0	6
Neuroticism	6	.67	3.2	1.8	0	6
Psychoticism	6	.57	1.0	1.2	0	6

N = 5,269

Table 4

Correlation matrix

	Sex	Age	Emp	Est	P	N	E	Gra
God of Law (Law)	-.04**	.01	-.09***	-.12***	.15***	.07***	-.03*	.01
God of Grace (Gra)	.03	-.01	.18***	.16***	-.15***	.05***	-.01	
Extraversion (E)	.09***	.04**	.06***	.17***	.07***	-.12***		
Neuroticism (N)	.23***	.01	.37***	-.47***	.02			
Psychoticism (P)	-.27***	.02	-.39***	-.17***				
Self-esteem (Est)	-.14***	.01	-.07***					
Empathy (Emp)	.40***	.04**						
School year (Age)	.02							

N = 5,269

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 5

Regression on self-esteem

	<i>r</i>	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Personal factors</i>				
Sex	-.14***	-.14***	-.11***	-.10***
School year	.01	.01	.02	.02
<i>Personality factors</i>				
Psychoticism	-.17***		-.20***	-.16***
Neuroticism	-.47***		-.43***	-.43***
Extraversion	.17***		.14***	.13***
<i>God images</i>				
God of Grace	.16***			.16***
God of Law	-.12***			-.07***
R ²		.02	.28	.30
Δ		.02***	.26***	.03***

N = 5,269

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 6

Regression on empathy

	<i>r</i>	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Personal factors</i>				
Sex	.40***	.40***	.22***	.23***
School year	.04**	.03*	.03**	.03**
<i>Personality factors</i>				
Psychoticism	-.39***		-.35***	-.32***
Neuroticism	.37***		.34***	.34***
Extraversion	.06***		.11***	.10***
<i>God images</i>				
God of Grace	.18***			.11***
God of Law	-.09***			-.05***
R ²		.16	.36	.37
Δ		.16***	.20***	.01***

N = 5,269

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$