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Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion, 33

Psychological type and images of God

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Abstract

This study was designed to test the construct validity of the Index of Positive Images of God as assessing the theological conceptualisation of a salvific God of Mercy construed in relational terms by examining the location of the construct within the framework of psychological type theory. Extrapolation from psychological type theory hypothesised a significant association with the judging process but independence from the orientations, the attitudes, and the perceiving process. Data provided by 602 participants drawn from an online community concerned with Celtic Christianity confirmed a significant correlation with the feeling function of the judging process ($r = .23, p < .001$) and an additional smaller significant correlation with the intuitive function of the perceiving process ($r = .08, p < .05$). The data provide general support for the construct validity of the Index of Positive Images of God.

Keywords: God images, psychological type theory, empirical theology, psychology of religion

Introduction

Research into God images has a long and established place within the empirical psychology of religion, as reflected in the development of a disparate range of psychological measures (see Hill & Hood, 1999). One quite early instrument proposed by Benson and Spilka (1973) distinguishing between two constructs which they characterised as loving God images and as controlling God images. These two five-item measures of loving God images and controlling God images, incorporated within a set of ten semantic differential scales, have been used in a number of subsequent studies, including those reported by Spilka, Addison, and Rosensohn (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, Chickering, Colburn, Heisler, and Call (2005), Granqvist, Ivarsson, Broberg, and Hagekull (2007), Reinert and Edwards (2009), Krentzman, Robinson, Perron, and Cranford (2011), Soenens, Neyrinck, Vansteenkiste, Dezutter, Hutsebaut, and Duriez (2012), Gebauer and Maio (2012), Meisenhelder, Schaeffer, Younger, and Lauria (2013), and Vonk and Pitzen (2016).

What is not clear, either from Benson and Spilka's (1973) original study or from subsequent usage of this instrument, is whether these two constructs of controlling God images and loving God images are as discrete as the theory proposes. Two observations challenge this theory. First, those studies that report among their findings the correlation between the two scales generally show a considerable proportion of variance in common, including: Benson and Spilka (1973) drawing on a sample of 128 practising Catholic male students ($r = -.30, p < .01$); Webb, Chickering, Colburn, Heisler, and Call (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, Neyrinck, Vansteenkiste, Dezutter, Hutsebaut, and Duriez (2012) drawing on a sample of 305 religiously active participants ($r = -.69, p <$

.001); Meisenhelder, Schaeffer, Younger, and Lauria (2013) drawing on a sample of 158 oncology patients ($r = -.90, p < .001$); and Vonk and Pitzen (2016) among a sample of 453 students ($r = -.63, p < .001$).

Second, when Francis, Robbins, and Gibson (2006) factor analysed the ten semantic differential scales they failed to recover a two factor structure. Rather, Francis, Robbins, and Gibson (2006) found that eight of the ten scales all loaded heavily on the first unrotated factor identified by principal component analysis after the other two items had been removed. The two items removed from the original set of ten were controlling – non-controlling and permissive – rigid. The eight remaining items generated an alpha coefficient of .87, confirming the internal consistency reliability of the eight-item measure.

Examining the four positive descriptors loading most heavily on the principal factor (loving, accepting, saving, freeing) Francis, Robbins, and Gibson (2006) defined high scores as reflecting positive affect. Examining the descriptors at the opposite pole of these four semantic spaces (hating, rejecting, damming, and restricting) they defined low scores as reflecting negative affect. On the basis of these conclusions the instrument is known as the Index of Positive Images of God (IPIG). Theological reflection on the descriptors of positive affect (loving, accepting, saving, freeing) may conceptualise this dimension as reflecting the image of a salvific God of Mercy, construed in relational terms.

Research agenda

Against this background, the aim of the present study is to test the construct validity of this theological conceptualisation of the nature of God captured by the Index of Positive Images of God (IPIG) by locating scores recorded on this measure within the personality space defined by psychological type theory. Psychological type theory, as rooted in the conceptualisation of Jung (1971) and as operationalised by instruments like the Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey & Bates, 1978), the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers &

McCaulley, 1985), and the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005), identifies four core psychological constructs, defined as the orientations, the perceiving process, the judging process, and the attitudes toward the external world.

In Jungian theory these four constructs are conceptualised in terms of dichotomous preferences, that is as discrete typologies rather than as continua. The two orientations distinguish between introversion and extraversion; the two perceiving functions distinguish between sensing and intuition; the two judging functions distinguish between thinking and feeling; and the two attitudes distinguish between judging and perceiving. The psychometric instruments designed to generate the typologies rely first on producing continuous scale scores. It is these underlying continuous scale scores that are particularly useful in conceptualising and operationalising correlational analyses alongside other psychological scales. It is against these underlying continuous scale scores that it is proposed to test the construct validity of the Index of Positive Images of God conceptualised theologically as reflecting the image of a salvific God of Mercy, construed in relational terms.

Within psychological type theory, the orientations are concerned with identifying the source of psychological energy. According to the theory, extraverts are energised by engaging with the external world of people and of things, while introverts are energised by engaging with the internal world of ideas and reflection. Extraverts tend to find social isolation draining, while introverts tend to find social engagement draining. This distinction does not easily give rise to hypotheses relevant to endorsing images of God conceptualised theologically as a salvific God of Mercy construed in relational terms. The hypothesis is, therefore, that there will be no significant correlation between scores of introversion or extraversion and scores recorded on the IPIG.

Within psychological type theory, the perceiving process is concerned with the ways in which the world is perceived, the ways in which information is received. According to the

theory, sensing types begin with the details and move toward the bigger picture, while intuitive types begin with the bigger picture and move toward selecting the details. Sensing types tend to find abstract ideas and too many theories frustrating, while intuitive types tend to find facts and too many details frustrating. This distinction does not easily give rise to hypotheses relevant to endorsing images of God conceptualised theologically as a salvific God of Mercy construed in relational terms. The hypothesis is, therefore, that there will be no significant correlation between scores of sensing or intuition and scores recorded on the IPIG.

Within psychological type theory, the judging process is concerned with the ways in which the perceptions received by the perceiving process are evaluated and judgements about them made. According to the theory, thinking types are concerned with objective evaluation and logical analysis, while feeling types are concerned with subjective evaluation and concern for personal values and interpersonal relationships. Thinking types may tend to overlook the implications of logic-based judgements for human participants, while feeling types may tend to overlook the implications of value-based judgements for systems and structure. Now this distinction easily gives rise to hypotheses relevant to endorsing images of God conceptualised theologically as a salvific God of Mercy construed in relational terms. The hypotheses are, therefore, that there will be a significant positive correlation between scores of feeling and scores recorded on the IPIG and that there will be a significant negative correlation between scores of thinking and scores recorded on the IPIG.

Within psychological type theory, the attitudes toward the external world are concerned with identifying the preferred process for engaging with the external world. According to the theory, judging types extravert their preferred judging function (thinking or feeling) to operate in the external world, with the consequence that their external world is structured and organised, while perceiving types extravert their preferred perceiving function (sensing or intuition) to operate in the external world, with the consequence that their external

world is open and flexible. This distinction does not easily give rise to hypotheses relevant to endorsing images of God conceptualised theologically as a salvific God of Mercy construed in relational terms. The hypothesis is, therefore, that there will be no significant correlation between scores of judging or perceiving and scores recorded on the IPIG.

Method

Procedure

Participants were drawn from an online community of individuals interested in Celtic Christianity. An advertisement placed on Google appeared at or near the top of the listings when a search was made for Celtic Christianity or other related searches, inviting participation in an online survey. Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. The project received approval from the Glyndŵr Research Ethics Standing Committee (GRES1).

Instruments

God images were assessed by the eight-item Index of Positive Images of God (IPIG) proposed by Francis, Robbins, and Gibson (2006). This instrument comprises eight adjective pairs rated within a seven-point semantic space employing the scaling technique pioneered by Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957). The eight semantic scales were anchored by the following paired adjectives, sometimes presenting the positive descriptor first and sometimes presenting the negative descriptor first: damming – saving, rejecting – accepting, demanding – not-demanding, loving – hating, freeing – restricting, unforgiving – forgiving, approving – disapproving, strict – lenient. Participants were asked, ‘What ideas do you have about God? Please click on one option for each pair of statements’.

Psychological type

Psychological type was assessed by the Francis Psychological Type Scales (FPTS; Francis, 2005; Francis, Laycock, & Brewster, 2017). This instrument proposes 40 items made

up of four sets of ten forced-choice items related to each of the four components of psychological type. The four components comprise the orientation (extraversion or introversion), the perceiving process (sensing or intuition), the judging process (thinking or feeling), and the attitude to the outside world (judging or perceiving). Several studies have demonstrated that this instrument functions well in church-related contexts. For example, Francis, Craig and Hall (2008) reported alpha coefficients of .83 for the EI scale, .76 for the SN scale, .73 for the TF scale, and .79 for the JP scale. For each characteristic participants were asked to tick the box which is 'closer to the real you' or 'reflects the real you'.

Participants

There were 602 participants of whom 352 (59%) were female and 250 (42%) were male. Under 20s accounted for 1%, 10% were aged 20-39, 58% were aged 40-59 and 31% were aged 60 and over; 35% were Anglicans, 10% Roman Catholics, 12% Free Church, 6% New Church, 14% none, 16% other and 7% preferred not to say; 65% attended a place of worship at least once a week, 9% attended once a month or more, 10% attended at least six times a year, and 17% attended less than six times a year; 80% prayed by themselves nearly every day, 8% at least once a week, 2% at least once a month, 9% occasionally, and 2% never prayed by themselves.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed by the SPSS package, using the correlation, reliability and t-test routines. The scientific literature concerning the empirical investigation of psychological type has developed a distinctive method for analysing and displaying statistical data in the form of type tables. Employing this format enables data from this presentation to be located alongside other relevant literature.

Results

- insert figure 1 about here -

Figure 1 presents the psychological type profile for the 602 participants who completed the Index of Positive Images of God. The core information from this complex table of special relevance for the present study concerns the dichotomous preferences. The present sample is heavily weighted toward introverts (75%) compared with extraverts (25%), and toward judging types (68%) compared with perceiving types (32%). The present sample is also weighted toward intuitive types (61%) compared with sensing types (39%) and toward feeling types (56%) compared with thinking types (45%).

- insert table 1 about here -

Table 1 presents the scale properties of the Index of Positive Images of God in terms of the alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951) and the correlations between the individual items and the sum of the other seven items. The alpha coefficient of .81 shows a good level of internal consistency reliability. Generally each item co-varies well with the sum of the other items apart from the item not-demanding – demanding. The three items that best capture the mood of this instrument with the highest correlations are forgiving, accepting, and saving. Here is a measure of positive images of God that particularly values a God who is salvific in nature.

- insert table 2 about here -

Table 2 presents the correlation between the four components of psychological type theory and scores on the Index of Positive Image of God. In this table psychological type theory is conceptualised in terms of the continuous scale scores that underpin type classification, selecting the high scoring polarity of introversion, intuition, feeling, and judging. These data show that the strongest predictor of individual differences in God image scores is the continuum from thinking to feeling. There is also a significant correlation between God images and the continuum from sensing to intuition. Positive God images are significantly (but slightly) associated with a preference for intuition.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the construct validity of the theological conceptualisation of the nature of God captured by the Index of Positive Images of God as a salvific God of Mercy construed in relational terms by locating scores recorded on this measure within the personality space defined by psychological type theory. Extrapolation from psychological type theory led to the four hypotheses that scores recorded on the Index of Positive Images of God would be unrelated to the orientations (introversion and extraversion), unrelated to the perceiving process (sensing and intuition), and unrelated to the attitudes toward the external world (judging and perceiving), but significantly correlated with the judging process in the direction of higher scores being associated with the feeling function. Data provided by 602 participants who completed the Index of Positive Images of God alongside the Francis Psychological Type Scales reported a significant correlation of .23 ($p < .001$) with feeling, independence from the orientations and the attitudes, but also a small positive correlation of .08 ($p < .05$) with intuition. Overall these data support the construct validity of the theological interpretation of the Index of Positive Images of God.

The limitations with the present study include the highly specific character of the sample. Replication of the present study among other samples is commended.

The main significance of the present study concerns the way in which an instrument originated within the field of the empirical psychology of religion has been re-nuanced with an interpretation firmly rooted within theological discourse and tested for further use within the field of empirical theology. The broader fields of theology (biblical, systematic, and historical) provide a rich resource for refining and differentiating among diverse God images. The psychology of religion could be properly enriched by closer dialogue with the cognate field of empirical theology.

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Figure 1

Type distribution for 602 participants completing the Index of Positive Images of God

The Sixteen Complete Types				Dichotomous Preferences			
ISTJ <i>n</i> = 103 (17.1%) +++++ +++++ +++++ ++	ISFJ <i>n</i> = 58 (9.6%) +++++ +++++	INFJ <i>n</i> = 91 (15.1%) +++++ +++++ +++++	INTJ <i>n</i> = 67 (11.1%) +++++ +++++ +	E <i>n</i> = 151 (25.1%)	I <i>n</i> = 451 (74.9%)		
				S <i>n</i> = 236 (39.2%)	N <i>n</i> = 366 (60.8%)		
				T <i>n</i> = 268 (44.5%)	F <i>n</i> = 334 (55.5%)		
				J <i>n</i> = 408 (67.8%)	P <i>n</i> = 194 (32.2%)		
				Pairs and Temperaments			
ISTP <i>n</i> = 10 (1.7%) ++	ISFP <i>n</i> = 11 (1.8%) ++	INFP <i>n</i> = 76 (12.6%) +++++ +++++ +++	INTP <i>n</i> = 35 (5.8%) +++++ +	IJ <i>n</i> = 319 (53.0%)	IP <i>n</i> = 132 (21.9%)		
				EP <i>n</i> = 62 (10.3%)	EJ <i>n</i> = 89 (14.8%)		
				ST <i>n</i> = 136 (22.6%)	SF <i>n</i> = 100 (16.6%)		
				NF <i>n</i> = 234 (38.9%)	NT <i>n</i> = 132 (21.9%)		
ESTP <i>n</i> = 2 (0.3%)	ESFP <i>n</i> = 12 (2.0%) ++	ENFP <i>n</i> = 36 (6.0%) +++++ +	ENTP <i>n</i> = 12 (2.0%) ++	SJ <i>n</i> = 201 (33.4%)	SP <i>n</i> = 35 (5.8%)		
				NP <i>n</i> = 159 (26.4%)	NJ <i>n</i> = 207 (34.4%)		
				TJ <i>n</i> = 209 (34.7%)	TP <i>n</i> = 59 (9.8%)		
				FP <i>n</i> = 135 (22.4%)	FJ <i>n</i> = 199 (33.1%)		
ESTJ <i>n</i> = 21 (3.5%) ++++	ESFJ <i>n</i> = 19 (3.2%) +++	ENFJ <i>n</i> = 31 (5.1%) +++++	ENTJ <i>n</i> = 18 (3.0%) +++	IN <i>n</i> = 269 (44.7%)	EN <i>n</i> = 97 (16.1%)		
				IS <i>n</i> = 182 (30.2%)	ES <i>n</i> = 54 (9.0%)		
				ET <i>n</i> = 53 (8.8%)	EF <i>n</i> = 98 (16.3%)		
				IF <i>n</i> = 236 (39.2%)	IT <i>n</i> = 215 (35.7%)		
Jungian Types (E)			Jungian Types (I)			Dominant Types	
	<i>n</i>	%		<i>n</i>	%		
E-TJ	39	6.5	I-TP	45	7.5	Dt.T	84 14.0
E-FJ	50	8.3	I-FP	87	14.5	Dt.F	137 22.8
ES-P	14	2.3	IS-J	161	26.7	Dt.S	175 29.1
EN-P	48	8.0	IN-J	158	26.2	Dt.N	206 34.2

Note: *N* = 602 (NB: + = 1% of *N*)

Table 1

Index of Positive Images of God: Scale properties

	<i>r</i>
Saving – damming	.71
Accepting – rejecting	.73
Not-demanding – demanding	.28
Loving – hating	.52
Freeing – restricting	.54
Forgiving – unforgiving	.73
Approving – disapproving	.46
Lenient – strict	.46
Alpha	.81

Note: $N = 602$

r = correlation between the individual item and the sum of the other seven items

Table 2

Index of Positive Images of God correlated with psychological type

	<i>r</i>
Introversion – extraversion	-.03
Intuition – sensing	.08*
Feeling – thinking	.23**
Judging – perceiving	-.01

Note: * $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$