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Francis, Leslie J., Village, Andrew and Powell, Ruth

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Religious experience and religious motivation among Catholic and Mainstream Protestant
churchgoers in Australia: Testing and applying five short measures

Leslie J Francis*

University of Warwick, UK

Andrew Village

York St John University, UK

Ruth Powell

NCLS Research / Australian Catholic University, Australia

Author note:

*Corresponding author:

Leslie J Francis

Warwick Religions & Education Research Unit

Centre for Education Studies

The University of Warwick

Coventry CV4 7AL United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)24 7652 2539

Fax: +44 (0)24 7657 2638

Email: leslie.francis@warwick.ac.uk

Abstract

The present study draws on two sets of theories developed within the psychology of religion (concerning religious experience and religious motivation) to test three six-item measures of religious orientation (intrinsic, extrinsic and quest) and to develop two seven-item measures of religious experience (mystical and charismatic) among Catholic (N = 626) and Mainstream Protestant (N = 505) churchgoers participating in the 2011 Australian National Church Life Survey. The data demonstrated satisfactory levels of internal consistency reliability for all five scales. The mean scale scores revealed higher levels of intrinsic religiosity among Mainstream Protestants and higher levels of extrinsic religiosity among Catholics; but little variation between the two groups in terms of quest religious orientation, mystical orientation, or charismatic orientation.

Keywords: congregation studies, mystical experience, charismatic experience, religious orientation.

Introduction

The Australian National Church Life Survey has established a strong tradition in designing and conducting congregation surveys that draw on theological theory, sociological theory, and psychological theory. Influence from the psychology of religion within the National Church Life Survey has been seen perhaps most strongly in the way in which psychological type theory and measurement has been prominent in a number of published outputs from analyses conducted not only among churchgoers but also among church leaders (Robbins & Francis, 2011; Francis, Powell, & Robbins, 2012; Powell, Robbins, & Francis, 2012; Robbins & Francis, 2012; Robbins, Francis, & Powell, 2012a, 2012b; Powell & Pepper, 2015; Robbins & Hancock, 2015). The 2011 National Church Life Survey extended its application of theory and measurement drawing on the psychology of religion by including measures of religious motivation and religious experience. A major strength of the National Church Life Survey concerns the way in which the core items completed by all participants in the congregational survey are complemented by a range of different questions on the “back page”. Version K of the congregational survey in 2011 contained three recognised psychological measures of religious motivation and two recognised psychological measures of religious experience. The present paper explores the usefulness of these measures in illuminating differences and similarities between Catholic and Mainstream Protestant churchgoers.

Religious motivation

The aspect of religious motivation theory reflected in the National Church Life Survey has its roots in the pioneering work of Allport (1966) and Allport and Ross (1967) and is generally discussed within the psychology of religion under the notion of religious orientation theory. Allport distinguished between two religious orientations that he termed intrinsic religiosity and extrinsic religiosity. According to Allport (1966, p. 454) this model

distinguished between churchgoers whose church membership supported other non-religious ends (extrinsic religiosity) and churchgoers for whom religion is an end in itself (intrinsic religiosity). Allport and Ross (1967, p. 434) developed further descriptions of these two orientations. They argue that individuals motivated by extrinsic religiosity:

find religion useful in a variety of ways to provide security and solace, sociability and distraction, status and self-justification. The embraced creed is lightly held or else selectively shaped to fit more primary needs.

In contrast to the extrinsic orientation, they argue that individuals motivated by intrinsic religiosity:

find their master motive in religion. Other needs, strong as they may be, are regarded as of less ultimate significance, and they are, so far as possible, brought into harmony with the religious beliefs and prescriptions. Having embraced a creed the individual endeavours to internalise it and follow it fully.

Allport and Ross (1967) proposed two scales to measure their dimensions of intrinsic and extrinsic orientation. The intrinsic measure contained nine items, the first two of which were: "It is important for me to spend periods of time in private religious thought and meditation"; "If not prevented by unavoidable circumstances, I attend church". The extrinsic measure contained eleven items, the first two of which were: 'Although I believe in my religion, I feel there are many more important things in my life'; "It doesn't matter so much what I believe so long as I lead a moral life".

Allport's measures of intrinsic and extrinsic orientation demonstrated that individuals could occupy four locations defined on these two dimensions. Those who recorded high scores on the Intrinsic Scale *and* low scores on the Extrinsic Scale were defined as "pure intrinsic" orientation. Those who recorded high scores on the Extrinsic Scale *and* low scores on the Intrinsic Scale were defined as "pure extrinsic" orientation. Those who recorded high

scores on the Extrinsic Scale *and* high scores on the Intrinsic Scale were defined as “indiscriminately pro-religious”. Those who recorded low scores on the Extrinsic Scale *and* low scores on the Intrinsic Scale were defined as “indiscriminately anti-religious” (Hood, 1978).

Critiquing Allport’s model of religious orientation, Batson (1976) and Batson and Ventis (1982) argued the case for a third dimension alongside the intrinsic and extrinsic orientations, which they styled the quest orientation. The quest orientation gave recognition to a form of religiosity which embraces characteristics of complexity, doubt, tentativeness, and honesty in facing existential questions. Batson and Ventis (1982, p. 150) provided the following description of the quest orientation.

An individual who approaches religion in this way recognises that he or she does not know, and probably never will know, the final truth about such matters. But still the questions are deemed important, and however tentative and subject to change, answers are sought. There may not be a clear belief in a transcendent reality, but there is a transcendent, religious dimension to the individual’s life.

Batson and Ventis (1982, p. 145) also provided a six-item instrument to measure the quest orientation, which they originally identified by the name “Interactional Scale”. Two items were: “It might be said that I value my religious doubts and uncertainties”; “Questions are far more central to my religious experience than are answers”. Subsequently Batson and Schoenrade (1991a, 1991b) developed a longer twelve-item quest scale, which dropped one item from the original six-item scale (“My religious development has emerged out of my growing sense of personal identity”) and introduced a further seven new items.

Francis (2007) revised the three notions of intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, and quest religiosity as proposed by Allport and by Batson and attempted both to sharpen the conceptualisation and to improve the operationalisation. The New Indices of Religious

Orientation developed by Francis (2007) identified three components within each of the three orientations and proposed three items to reflect each component. According to this model extrinsic religiosity comprised the following three components: compartmentalisation (e.g., “While I believe in my religion, there are more important things in my life”); social support (e.g., “One reason for me going to church is that it helps establish me in the community”); and personal support (e.g., “One reason for me praying is that it helps me to gain relief and protection”). Intrinsic religiosity comprised the following three components: integration (e.g., “My religious beliefs really shape my whole approach to life”); public religion (“The church is most important to me as a place to share fellowship with other Christians”); and personal religion (e.g., “I pray chiefly because it deepens my relationship with God”). Quest religiosity comprised the following three components: existentialism (e.g., “My life experiences have led me to rethink my religious beliefs”); self-criticism (e.g., “For me doubting is an important part of what it means to be religious”); and openness to change (e.g., “As I grow and change, I expect my religion to grow and change as well”).

Like all good theories, religious orientation theory remains hotly contested within the psychological literature. Kirkpatrick and Hood (1990, p. 442) raised the question as to whether religious orientation theory and measurement was “the boon or bane of contemporary psychology of religion”, and that debate continues. What is clear from the literature, however, is that measures of religious orientation can be misused. These instruments are designed to distinguish different motivations among churchgoers not to distinguish between religious individuals and non-religious individuals.

Applied within the context of empirical theology, the three well-defined dimensions of religious orientation generate insight into the ways in which churchgoers see their local church.

Religious experience

The aspect of religious experience theory reflected in the National Church Life Survey has its roots in the pioneering work of Hood (1975) who focused scientific attention on the conceptualisation, assessment and measurement of mysticism. Hood constructed his Mysticism (M) Scale drawing on the conceptual model of mysticism proposed by Stace (1960). Stace maintained that mysticism can be addressed in terms of an introvertive experience of unity (according to which the individual experiences a unity that involves the dissolution of the empirical self) and an extrovertive experience of unity (according to which the individual perceives a unity of all things). According to Stace, both forms of mysticism embrace a core of five characteristics in common, although not all characteristics are present in every case. These five characteristics are: a sense of objectivity or reality; feelings of blessedness, joy, peace, satisfaction, happiness; feeling that what is apprehended is holy, sacred, or divine; paradoxicality (for example, God is closer than the air you breathe and farther away than the most distant planet); and the experience is ineffable (it cannot be adequately put into words). The M Scale consists of 32 items (16 positively worded items and 16 negatively worded items). Several investigations have identified either two factors or three within the M Scale (Caird, 1988; Hood, 1975; Hood et al. 2001; Reinert & Stifler, 1993). In the two-factor solution, factor one draws together items expressing an experience of unity; factor two draws together items referring to interpretation of these experiences. In the three-factor solution, differentiation occurs between introvertive mysticism and extrovertive mysticism, alongside the interpretive factor.

An alternative conceptualisation of mysticism to that proposed by Stace (1960) was advanced by Happold (1963). Happold's model adopted the four characteristics of mysticism identified originally by James (1902/1982), and to these he added a further three. Happold's model embraced the following seven characteristics: ineffability, the private or incommunicable quality of the experience; noesis, the sense that the experience conveys

insight into levels of truth inaccessible to the discursive intellect; transiency, the brief, inconstant, and intermittent nature of the experience; passivity, the sense of the undeserved, gratuitous nature of the experience controlled by a superior power; unity, the consciousness of the oneness of everything; timelessness, the timeless quality of the experience that transcends established notions of past, present, and future; and true ego, the sense that the experience links with the real self beyond and above the normal recognition of ego.

Francis and Louden (2000) drew on Happold's model to construct their 21-item Mystical Orientation Scale by identifying three items to reflect each of the seven components: ineffability (e.g., feeling moved by a power beyond description); noesis (e.g., knowing I am surrounded by a presence); transiency (e.g., experiencing passing moments of divine revelation); passivity (e.g., being grasped by a power by beyond my control); oneness (e.g., feeling at one with all living things); timelessness (e.g., losing a sense of time, place and person); and true ego (e.g., losing my everyday self in a greater being). The Francis-Louden Mystical Orientation Scale, and its derivative the Short Index of Mystical Orientation (Francis & Louden, 2004) have now been used in a number of studies, including religious professionals (Francis, Littler, & Robbins, 2012), general religious groups (Francis, Village, Robbins, & Ineson, 2007), and student groups (Ross & Francis, 2015).

Applied within the context of empirical theology, the measure of mystical orientation generates insights into the extent to which religious faith and practice are associated with the experimental aspect of religion.

The Francis-Louden Mystical Orientation Scale was developed as part of a suite of measures intended to access different forms of religious experience. A second instrument in this family is the Francis-Littler Charismatic Orientation Scale (Francis & Littler, 2011). This 21-item measure had its roots in the instrument published by Malony (1995, p. 116), the five-item scale employed by Francis and Jones (1997), the 14-item scale employed by Francis and

Thomas (1997) and the 15-item scale employed by Robbins, Hair, and Francis (1999), and by Loudon and Francis (2001). The 21-item scale tested by Francis and Littler (2011) found that among a sample of 232 clergymen the following items cohered to generate an alpha coefficient of .96: having a conversion experience; praying in tongues; experiencing the healing work of the Holy Spirit; attending charismatic prayer-group meetings; receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit; hearing God speak through a dream or vision; feeling God's spirit within me; being born again; prophesying; interpreting tongues; giving public utterance in tongues; laying hands on someone for healing; sharing in open and informal worship; being prayed over; receiving a "word of knowledge"; being "slain in the Spirit"; singing in tongues; and feeling led by God to perform a specific action.

Applied within the context of empirical theology the measure of charismatic orientation, used alongside the measure of mystical orientation, offers access to a second and different experiential aspect of religion.

Research question

Against this background, the present study addressed research questions of the data generated by the National Church Life Survey drawing on the five measures rooted in the psychology of religion: the three measures of religious motivation and the two measures of religious experience.

The first research question concerned the psychometric properties of the three six-item measures of intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, and quest religiosity in terms of internal consistency reliability; and in terms of the way in which these measures interrelate. According to the theory of the foundation paper (Francis, 2007), within a religiously active group intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity should be uncorrelated.

The second research question concerned establishing the psychometric properties of the 7-item abbreviated forms of the Francis-Louden Mystical Orientation Scale and the

Francis-Littler Charismatic Orientation Scale, as appropriate for fitting onto the “back page” of the congregation survey.

The third research question concerned comparing the responses of Catholic churchgoers and Mainstream Protestant churchgoers in respect of the three indices of religious motivation and the two indices of religious experience.

Method

Procedure

Form K of the Congregation Survey within the 2011 Australian National Church Life Survey included two batteries of questions focusing respectively on religious experience and religious motivation. The section on religious experience included measures of charismatic orientation and of mystical orientation. The section on religious motivation included measures of intrinsic orientation, extrinsic orientation, and quest orientation. These measures were completed by 1,131 participants who identified as attending either Catholic or Mainstream Protestant Churches. Those attending other denominations were omitted from the present analysis.

Participants

Of the 1,131 participants, 462 were male and 669 female; 132 were under the age of thirty, 302 were in their thirties and forties, 421 were in their fifties or sixties, and 276 were aged seventy or over; 432 were graduates and 699 had not been educated to degree level; 626 were Catholics and 505 Protestants; 45 attended church less than once a month, 373 attended church more than once a month but less than once a week, and the remaining 711 attended church once a week or more.

Instruments

Mystical orientation was assessed by the seven-item abbreviated form of the Francis-Louden Mystical Orientation Scale (MOS; Francis & Loudon, 2000). The abbreviated

measure selected one item representative of each of the seven components of mysticism that comprised the parent instrument: ineffability, noesis, transciency, passivity, oneness, timelessness, and true ego. This abbreviated measure was created especially for the 2011 National Church Life Survey. Participants were asked to rate on a five-point scale, from “low” (1), through “medium” (3), to “high” (5), the importance of each of the seven listed “experiences to your own faith.” Scale scores on the measure ranged from 7 to 35.

Charismatic orientation was assessed by the 7-item abbreviated form of the Francis-Littler Charismatic Orientation Scale (COS; Francis & Littler, 2011). This abbreviated measure selected items from the parent scale that recorded a correlation of a least .68 with the sum of the other 20 items as reported in the foundation study. This abbreviated measure was created especially for the 2011 National Church Life Survey. Participants were asked to rate on a five-point scale, from “low” (1), through “medium” (3), to “high” (5), the importance of each of the seven listed “experiences to your own faith.” Scale scores on the measure ranged from 7 to 35.

Religious orientation was assessed by the three 6-item measures of intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, and quest religiosity published as the short form of the New Indices of Religious Orientation (NIRO; Francis, 2007). The Intrinsic Scale comprised two items representing of the following three components: integration, public religion, and personal religion. The Extrinsic Scale comprised two items representing each of the following three components: compartmentalisation, social support, and personal support. The Quest Scale comprised two items representing each of the following three components: existentialism, self-criticism, and openness to change. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with each of the 18 items on a five-point scale, from “strongly disagree” (1), through “neural/unsure” (3), to “strongly agree” (5). Scale scores on each of the three measures ranged from 6 to 30.

Analysis

The data were analysed by the SPSS package, employing the frequency, reliability, and ANOVA routines.

Results

- insert tables 1 and 2 about here -

The first step in data analysis checked the scale properties of the five measures employed in the study. Table 1 presents the correlations between the individual items and the other five items within the scale for the three six-item measures proposed by the New Indices of Religious Orientation: extrinsic orientation, intrinsic orientation, and quest orientation. The strongest of these three measures is the Intrinsic Scale with an alpha coefficient of internal consistency reliability (Cronbach, 1951) of .74, followed by the Quest Scale ($\alpha = .70$) and the Extrinsic Scale ($\alpha = .65$). Table 2 presents the correlations between the individual items and the other six items within the scale for the two seven-item measures proposed by the Mystical Orientation Scale and the Charismatic Orientation Scale. Both of these measures generated strong alpha coefficients: the Mysticism Scale ($\alpha = .92$) and the Charismatic Scale ($\alpha = .82$).

The second step in data analysis explored the correlations between the three indices of religious motivation. Quest religiosity and extrinsic religiosity were positively correlated ($r = .46, p < .001$) and intrinsic religiosity and quest religiosity were positively correlated ($r = .14, p < .001$), but intrinsic religiosity and extrinsic religiosity were uncorrelated ($r = .05, ns$).

- insert table 3 about here -

The third step in data analysis compared the mean scale score recorded by churchgoers attending Catholic churches with the mean scale score of churchgoers attending Mainstream Protestant churches. The data presented in table 3 demonstrate that Protestant churchgoers recorded higher scores than Catholic churchgoers on the scale of intrinsic religiosity, while Catholic churchgoers recorded higher scores than Protestant churchgoers on

the scale of extrinsic religiosity. At the same time, there were no significant differences on the scale of quest religiosity or on the scale of charismatic orientation between scores recorded by Protestant churchgoers and scores recorded by Catholic churchgoers. Finally, Catholic churchgoers recorded slightly higher scores than Protestant churchgoers on the scale of mystical orientation ($p < .05$).

Conclusion

This study set out to address three research questions raised by the inclusion of five measures shaped by the psychology of religion within the congregation survey of the 2011 Australian National Church Life Survey. The first two questions were of a technical nature addressed to the instruments themselves, while the third question was concerned with the added insight that these measures could bring to the primary concern of the National Church Life Survey concerning the characteristics and vitality of church congregations.

The first research question concerned an examination of the three six-item measures of intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, and quest religiosity proposed by Francis (2007). The data demonstrated that all three measures recorded alpha coefficients that reached the threshold of acceptability proposed by DeVellis (2003) and that, in accordance with that theory the measures of intrinsic religiosity and extrinsic religiosity were orthogonal among a sample of churchgoers.

The second research question concerned an examination of the two newly proposed seven-item measures of mystical orientation and charismatic orientation. The data demonstrated that both measures recorded alpha coefficients well in excess of the threshold of acceptability proposed by DeVellis (2003).

The positive response to the first two research questions allows the third research question to be addressed with confidence. Practical insights can be generated into the differences between and similarities among Catholic churchgoers and Mainstream Protestant

churchgoers from comparing the mean scale scores of these two groups. Attention in the discussion will be given first to those areas in which there is no or little difference between the two groups.

First, in terms of the quest religious orientation there is no significant difference between Catholic churchgoers and Mainstream Protestant churchgoers. This suggests that there is no significant difference in the way in which these two styles of church either encourage or discourage a questioning approach to faith. Now there may be a sense in which this finding is counter-intuitive. Mainstream Protestant church may seem on the face of it to be more likely to encourage a questioning faith, and to be less likely tied to church teaching and to church doctrine in comparison with Catholic churches. The data, however, do not support that view. A number of studies concerned with understanding church-leavers point to the problems that some people have found in locating churches in which a quest approach to faith is acceptable (see Francis & Richter, 2007; Richter & Francis, 1998). This is an issue that deserves further investigation.

Second, in terms of charismatic orientation there is no significant difference between Catholic churchgoers and Mainstream Protestant churchgoers. The Charismatic Renewal Movement has influenced both streams of churches since the 1970s (see for example Francis, Loudon, & Robbins, 2013). There is no evidence from the present study, however, that the current influence is more evident either among Catholic churchgoers or Mainstream Protestant churchgoers.

Third, in terms of mystical orientation, there are slightly (but only slightly) higher scores recorded by Catholic churchgoers in comparison with Mainstream Protestant churchgoers. This finding is consistent with the view that the Catholic emphasis on sacramental worship may be thought to encourage a greater openness to the sense of mystery,

awe and wonder than the Reformed emphasis on a ministry shaped more by word than by sacrament. This also then is an issue that deserves further investigation.

There were, however, two measures on which Catholic churchgoers and Mainstream Protestant churchgoers recorded significantly different scores. The data demonstrated higher levels of intrinsic religiosity among Mainstream Protestant churchgoers than among Catholic churchgoers, and higher levels of extrinsic religiosity among Catholic churchgoers than among Mainstream Protestant churchgoers. Now this finding does offer helpful insight into how church attendance may serve somewhat different functions within these two different types of churches. Higher levels of extrinsic religiosity among Catholic churchgoers may draw attention to ways in which the sense of identity and belonging within the Catholic community continues to serve the positive function of bonding family members into church life for extrinsic reasons (see further Cohen & Hill, 2007). Some analysts concerned with church-leavers may feel that church engagement through extrinsic motivation is preferable to church-leaving (see Francis & Richter, 2007). Here again is an issue that deserves further investigation.

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Table 1

Religious orientation

Extrinsic orientation	
<i>Compartmentalisation</i>	
While I am a religious person, I do not let religion influence my daily life	.24
Occasionally, I compromise my religious beliefs to protect my social and economic wellbeing	.25
<i>Social support</i>	
One reason for me going to church is that it helps to establish me in the community	.49
I go to church because it helps me feel at home in my neighbourhood	.55
<i>Personal support</i>	
One reason for me praying is that it helps me to gain relief and protection	.33
I pray because it makes me feel better	.42
Intrinsic orientation	
<i>Integration</i>	
My religious beliefs really shape my whole approach to life	.44
I try hard to carry my religion over into all my dealings in life	.46
<i>Public religion</i>	
I allow almost nothing to prevent me from going to church on Sundays	.48
The church is most important to me as a place to share fellowship with other Christians	.39
<i>Personal religion</i>	
I pray at home because it helps me to be aware of God's presence	.52
I pray chiefly because it deepens my relationship with God	.58
Quest orientation	
<i>Existentialism</i>	
I was driven to ask religious questions by a growing awareness of the tensions in my world	.30
My life experiences have led me to rethink my religious beliefs	.43
<i>Self-criticism</i>	
I value my religious doubts and uncertainties	.46
For me doubting is an important part of what it means to be religious	.53
<i>Openness to change</i>	
As I grow and change, I expect my religion to grow and change as well	.35
I am constantly questioning my religious beliefs	.49

Table 2

Religious experience

	<i>r</i>
<i>Mystical orientation</i>	
Feeling moved by a power beyond description	.77
Knowing I was surrounded by a presence	.77
Passing moments of divine revelation	.77
Being grasped by a power beyond my control	.82
Feeling at one with all living beings	.69
Losing sense of time, place and person	.71
Losing my everyday self in a greater being	.75
<i>Charismatic orientation</i>	
Praying in tongues	.53
Experiencing the healing work of the Holy Spirit	.54
Attending charismatic prayer-group meetings	.57
Receiving baptism of the Holy Spirit	.51
Being born again	.49
Prophesying	.64
Praying in the Spirit	.67

Table 3

Mean scale scores by denomination

	alpha	N items	Protestant		Catholic		<i>F</i>
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Intrinsic	.74	6	24.6	3.5	23.8	3.8	15.0***
Extrinsic	.65	6	17.0	4.2	18.6	3.9	41.7***
Quest	.70	6	19.4	4.1	19.8	4.0	2.1
Mystical	.92	7	19.2	7.5	20.3	7.9	5.7*
Charismatic	.82	7	16.7	6.2	16.6	6.5	0.1

Note: N = Protestant, 505; Catholic, 626

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