

BOOK REVIEW

Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality

Raymond F. Paloutzian and Crystal L. Park (Eds.)
New York: The Guilford Press, 2005

The topics of religion and spirituality have always received greater attention from various researchers and academics. Paloutzian and Park (2005) have synthesized the breadth of current knowledge on the psychological processes underlying spirituality, religious behaviour, and religious experience. Paloutzian and Park successfully gathered an excellent group of scholars to make contributions to this book. The articles in the field review the research conducted in this field from before Starbuck (1899) and James (1902) to 2004.

The handbook is divided into five parts. Part 1 discusses the foundation of the psychology of religion; Part 2 examines the religion through the developmental lens; Part 3 explores the religion and basic psychology subdisciplines; Part 4 looks at the construction and expression of religion and finally Part 5 examines the psychology of religion and applied areas. The authors attempt to present cutting-edge theories, conceptual frameworks, methodologies, and empirical findings emerging from all psychological subdisciplines. Coverage includes the neural and cognitive bases of religiousness; social, personality, and developmental issues; religion as a meaning system; and implications for behaviour, mental health, and clinical practice. Seamlessly edited, the Handbook provides a definitive portrait of the current state of the science, fosters the development of integrative theory, and identifies vital directions for future research.

In Part 1, the authors have established a clear definition of the psychology of religion by analysing past, present and future research on religion. The most useful part is when the authors were able to analyse the past 25 years research on this discipline. Moreover, this section is able to identify that religiousness and spirituality are fundamental human processes and phenomena. As such, they cannot be reduced to other processes, or limited to a single level of analysis. Instead, investigations must account for the micro and the macro, the individual and the

social, the particular and the universal, the subjective, the objective, and the meaning and the manifestations of religiousness and spirituality. In the measurement discussion, the study also concludes that the measurement paradigm in the scientific study of religion and spirituality has been largely successful and that we now have a sufficient arsenal of measurement instruments. The summary of various scales is very beneficial for researchers who are interested in the area.

In Part 2, the authors examine the religion through the developmental lens. This part, interestingly is able to address aspects of children's religious development which is rarely examined. The importance of this section is that there is little doubt that religion and spirituality play an important role in development across the lifespan. However, there is a need to understand the importance of religion for adaptation in later life than in early. They found that when they study other cultures, they recognize sometimes with a shock—that children are immersed in social communities with pervasive religious beliefs, sometimes subtle and sometimes conspicuous, which permeate children's experience in profound ways which encouraged researchers to diversify their efforts. An interesting finding is that conversion is a phenomenon of adolescence through midlife. Paloutzian (1996) makes the interesting observation that what is generally called "religious conversion" is a form of religious socialization. Conversion might be considered a more or less quick form of socialization, although some conversions arise from a conscious search for meaning. The conversion is found as a way to be accepted by their peers.

In Part 3, the authors explore the religion and basic psychology subdisciplines. Currently, religious and spiritual experiences such as meditation, prayer, and ritual have been described in the biomedical, psychological, anthropological, and religious literature. This part concludes that regardless of the connotation of the