Religions

an Open Access Journal by MDPI

CiteScore: 1.3
Impact Factor: 0.6

Special Issue Reprint

The Functions of Religion for Human Society

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Social scientists have long been interested in the functions of religion for the individual and larger groups comprising any number of people. While psychologists have led the way with hundreds of empirical studies showing the association between religion and various individual-level outcomes, far fewer sociological studies have examined the impact of religion on social groups and organizations. This Special Issue Reprint attempts to fill this gap by featuring contemporary articles that examine the sociological functions of religion for the individual and marginalized groups defined by race, sexuality, generation, immigration status, and political party identification. Two research questions frame the Special Issue: What are the functions of religion for minority communities? How do organizations draw on religious communities to promote their mission? To answer these questions, a group of international scholars analyzed qualitative and/or quantitative data gathered through in-depth interviews and surveys from respondents in the United States, China, the Middle East and North Africa. As Emile Durkheim originally theorized, and as the articles in this volume confirm, religion/spirituality continues to give meaning and purpose to life while also providing a sense of social solidarity via shared rituals and beliefs, especially among marginalized communities.

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