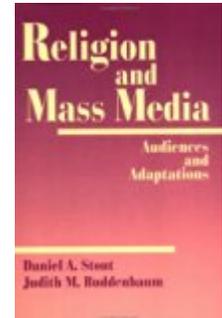




Daniel A. Stout, Judith M. Buddenbaum, eds.. *Religion and Mass Media: Audiences and Adaptations*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications Inc., 1996. 294 pp. \$63.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8039-7173-8.



Reviewed by Harold Hatt

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Religion and mass media are two extremely influential dimensions of popular culture. Unfortunately, mass communications researchers often lack an accurate sense of religiosity and religious folks often have a jaundiced view of the media. Consequently, dialogue about the interrelationship of religion and mass media, all too often, has been heated but not well informed. It is important to ask how religious people interact with the mass media. That is precisely what this book sets out to do.

By relating sociology of religion and mass communications research, this book may be pioneering new ground, but the editors have pulled together a team of experienced explorers. There are sixteen contributors, coming together from a broad range of locations on the religious and media studies spectra. Religious traditions represented are Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant, Quaker, Mennonite, Evangelical, Fundamentalist, Mormon, and Black churches. The writers from these traditions employ a wide variety of social science research methods.

Do the media trivialize, perhaps even undermine, religion? Do religious people appreciate and take advantage of the provision of news and entertainment by the mass media? Such questions may be debated with considerable zeal, but not always according to knowledge. There are typically many unexamined assumptions and considerable conjecture in discussions or arguments about such matters. To respond to such questions in a disciplined and systematic manner, the writers in this book do not focus on the content of the media, but rather on the nature of the audience and its response. In other words, the studies are not content-centered, but audience-centered.

The scope and organization of this book are appropriate to its aims. Part I reviews prior research. Part II reports empirical studies of the teachings about and attitudes toward the mass media in various religious groups. Part III reports studies on attitudes toward the mass media in general groups (groups not affiliated with a particular denomination). Part IV is a collection of case studies on the use of specific media by particular religious groups. Part V shifts its focus to the

next century, exploring implications of the emerging information environment for religious institutions.

The book is heavy on description. As is the case in much social science research, many of the findings come as no surprise. Nonetheless, the research helps us to move beyond conjecture. Moreover, we are frequently made aware of significant diversity within groups—even in those groups that are typically characterized as monolithic. And there are even greater surprises in store, all well founded on research data.

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