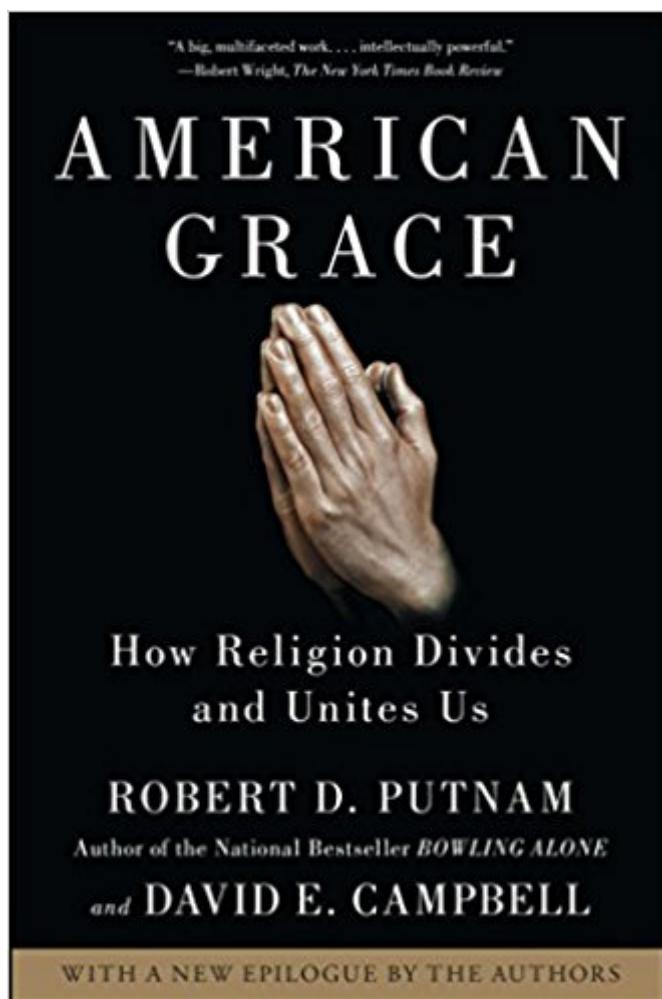


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# American Grace: How Religion Divides And Unites Us



## Synopsis

American Grace is "perhaps the most sweeping look yet at contemporary American religion. It lays out the broad trends of the past fifty years, assesses their sociological causes, and then does a bit of fortune-telling" (The Washington Post). Unique among nations, America is deeply religious, religiously diverse, and remarkably tolerant. In recent decades, however, the nation's religious landscape has undergone several seismic shocks. American Grace is an authoritative, fascinating examination of what precipitated these changes and the role that religion plays in contemporary American society. Although there is growing polarization between religious conservatives and secular liberals today, at the same time personal interfaith ties are strengthening. Interfaith marriage has increased, and religious identities have become more fluid. More people than ever are friendly with someone of a different faith or no faith at all. Putnam and Campbell show how this denser web of personal ties brings greater interfaith tolerance, despite the so-called culture wars. Based on two of the most comprehensive surveys ever conducted on religion and public life in America (and with a new epilogue based on a third survey), American Grace is an indispensable book about American religious life, essential for understanding our nation today.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This massive book eschews the narrow, monographic approach to sociological study in favor of an older, more useful model: the sweeping chronicle of national change over time. Harvard professor

Putnam (*Bowling Alone*) and his University of Notre Dame coauthor Campbell (*Why We Vote*) argue two apparently contradictory theses persuasively: first, that a "new religious fault line" exists in America, a deep political polarization that has transcended denominationalism as the greatest chasm in religious life; and second, that the culture (especially its younger generation) is becoming so much more accepting of diversity that thesis #1 will not tear America apart. The bulk of the book explores in detail cultural developments--the boom of evangelicals in the 1970s and 1980s, largely concluded in the early 1990s; the rise of feminism in the pews; the liberalization of attitudes about premarital sex and homosexuality, especially among the youngest generations; and what may prove to be the most seismic shift of all: the dramatic increase of "nones," or people claiming no institutional religious affiliation. Putnam and Campbell (with their researcher, Garrett) have done the public a great service in not only producing their own mammoth survey of American religion but also drawing from many prior statistical studies, enabling readers to track mostly gradual change over time. (Oct. 5) (c) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

**\*Starred Review\*** In recent controversy over the national motto, *In God we trust*, Putnam and Campbell see a symptom of profound change in the national character. Using data drawn from two large surveys, the authors plumb these changes. The data show that the tempestuous sixties shook faith in religion and that the seventies and eighties incubated a strong resurgence of devotion. But the two most recent decades add another twist, as young Americans have abandoned the pews in record numbers. Still, despite recent erosion of religious commitment, Americans remain a distinctively devout people. And devotion affects life far from the sanctuary: Putnam and Campbell parse numbers that identify religious Americans as more generous, more civically engaged, and more neighborly than their secularly minded peers. But the analysis most likely to stir debate illuminates how religion has increasingly separated Republicans from Democrats, conservatives from progressives. Readers may blame the Christian Right for this new cultural fissure, but survey statistics mark liberal congregations as the most politicized. But whether looking at politics or piety, the authors complement their statistical analysis with colorful vignettes, humanizing their numbers with episodes from the lives of individual Protestants and Catholics, Jews and Mormons. An essential resource for anyone trying to understand twenty-first-century America. --Bryce Christensen  
--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is an essential read for anyone who wants to explore institutionalized religion in America today,

whether a pastor, church leader, or a member in the pews. The authors not only thoroughly explore current extant survey data on nearly every relevant aspect of organized religion, they also get "up close and personal" with several denominations through an extensive interview/observation process. The statistical analysis used was spot-on, and the presentations through graphs and charts were lucidly clear for both technical and non-technical audiences.

Excellent!!!! How can America be so diverse and not be so divisive? This is something the book asks in its final chapter. Very interesting topics and the vignettes were very helpful in bringing home the points or topics the chapters tried to make. Not only did they help bring home a point they made it more meaningful and relevant. The authors feel that perhaps religion is not as divisive as are politics and racial and ethnic topics, but that remains to be seen.

As a starting point, I am a member of a Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod congregation. Hence, I am an extremist (at least in the terms of this book - there is only one true way to heaven) with an Jeffersonian twist (I accept you for who you are and will defend your right to believe it). This book relates the empirical findings of an extensive survey (or surveys) of religion in the United States. Largely they find religiosity with tolerance. This finding is consistent with my priors. It develops the rise of the religious-right as a grouping along moral agreement - largely with regards to sexual morals. The selection then follows a rejection of religion to some extent as a rejection of those morals. This theme reappears throughout the book. As indicated by my review title, I would like to stress that this book is on the sociology of religion and not theology. In this regard I would contend that American opinion does not define the parameters of divine reality. God is or isn't regardless of the opinions of the American public. What this text does is provide a snapshot of the American mind on these topics and how these opinions effect our interactions with each other. As such it provides important insights to those involved in congregations. I do have some irritations with regard to the text. The most significant is the juxtaposition of obedience with self-reliance. They are really not opposites. I wish my children to be both self reliant (economically and personally), but religiously obedient.

Excellent book regarding religion and the importance of it as an institution in American Political life. A refreshing view compared to the likes of Richard Dawkins or Krakauer's "Under the Banner Of Heaven"

Fantastic book! Some startling and unexpected findings that challenge conventional wisdom. Helps explain a lot about us.

Relevant for our polarized religious culture. Encouraging for our inclusive religious communities. Resource for individuals or communities who want a deeper understanding of the state and role of religion in our culture.

Book is full of a lot of good research information about religion. There were some sections I felt the author could have cut short. Made the reading tedious and almost boring, but overall the research information was interesting.

After Bowling Alone, I was hooked on Putnam's writing...a Harvard professor who writes accessible studies that illuminate real life. Who knew? Heavy on statistics, American Grace nevertheless is easy to understand and offers hints that explain our "religious wars" as well as our possibilities.

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