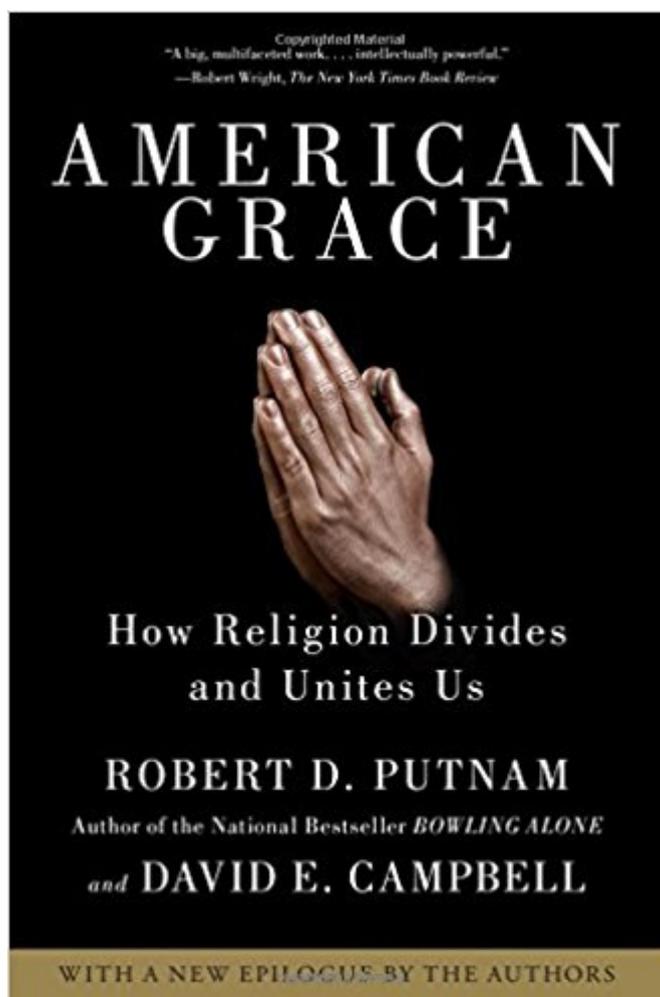


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# American Grace: How Religion Divides And Unites Us



## 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

I for one was blown away by the contents of this book. Once I started reading, I found it difficult to put down and fascinating. I am now convinced that we are all walking around with presuppositions

about religion and religious beliefs in America that are just plain wrong. Think about it. You're a smart, educated, well-read adult. You try to keep an open mind throughout your life, and then along comes this 550 page book and smacks you, and your belief systems right in the face. Everything I thought about our country's religious status is now subject to re-interpretation. Here's why: The authors did very substantial research, over a period of years. It was painstaking, and brutally honest. They approach this project the way you would do a massive pharmaceutical drug research study. They did not inflict their own belief systems on what they found. There has been no study like this, anywhere approaching this effort in more than 50 years. At the same time, they made the book highly readable which for a research study is more than surprising. If I had to compare this study to anything comparable, it would be the Master's and Johnson study on sexual practices in America published many decades ago. That study revolutionized our thinking about sexual mores in this country, and this study will do the same thing for religion. You do not have to follow this book in sequence. Go into the table of contents, find a chapter that interests you and you will be able to go into whatever depth you like. Read a few pages or read the whole chapter, just be prepared to realize that what we think is not necessarily what the rest of us are thinking, and believing. Here are a few concepts straight out of the book that should pique your interest in reading more.

With 550 page of text and another 123 pages of appendices, notes, and index this is an extensive assessment of the role of religion in American society. The information is strictly factual, measured from two major surveys led by the authors. In addition they draw on many standard sources, Gallup, the General Social Survey, the Pew Religious Landscape Survey, and others. The authors present the data,- the cross classifications, the correlations, the trend lines - in half page, black and white graphs. Emphasis is on four major religious traditions, Catholics, main line Protestants, evangelical Protestants, and the not religious, i.e. those answering "none" when asked their denomination. The authors make it clear that most of the "nones" do in fact believe in God; only a tiny number of Americans label themselves as atheists or agnostics. These four groups account for 90 percent of Americans. The Authors can classify individuals by the extent of their "religiosity" on the basis of how often they attend church and other variables. The authors examine the role of religion by ethnicity, gender, denomination, and race. They ask how the womens revolution has impacted religion. They examine religion and social class. Most of all they devote a chapter to "Religion in American Politics" to bring out how the current period seems to have divided Republicans from Democrats. Yet over the long run, that is since the fifties, religious adherence has varied greatly. The authors also examine religion and civic virtues. Interestingly they find, - and of course document, -

that religious Americans are more generous, more civically active, more trusting and trustworthy, in short, better neighbors.

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