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on the thesis of this  
book is that familiarity  
and social cont...

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## **Analysis: American grace**

In the book *American grace*, Putnam and Campbell are surprised by the uniqueness of the American religion. The religion in America is a conundrum; people are able to unite despite their sharp religious diversities and tolerate one another. So, this book is set to answer a number of questions: What possible factors could be shaping the religious landscape in America? Do people of a faith have distinct characteristics that differentiate them from the rest? Are there characteristics for people of faith as compared to those who do not have? What could be the explanation for the unique combination of the Americans despite their diversity? What causes the tolerance? In my view, I can summarize that Putnam and Campbell are set to analyze the contemporary state of America's religiosity. They are so inquisitive especially on the relationship between religion and civic rules, religion and politics, the role of religion in uniting people and the religion's view about the America's journey to the current state. Putnam and Campbell are interested in knowing how inter-religious engagement brings tolerance thus providing 'grace' which is the greatest hope for the society (Putnam and Campbell, 59)

Putnam and Campbell did good research in this before drawing their conclusions. Through representative national surveys and several site visits, I think they explored in depth the religiosity of the Americans from the ground thus getting rich data to help them make very objective conclusions. In their presentation, there are the 1960's cultural and social changes, reactions to these changes that led to the political and religious split in America. They also show the currently-known standard of the postwar American religion.

Apart from that, they also reveal the nitty-gritty's in religion from the aspect

of the people within a denomination. They established there is polarization between religious conservatives and liberals, even within a denomination group. They also found out that those who are often involved in the religious aspects e. g. those involved in worship and praise teams for instance or who attend services mostly, are becoming more conservatives than before. This indicates that disunity is evident, right from a denomination, the mother church as the ladder goes. Hence, there is division evident between the conservatives and the liberals and the liberals versus the non-religious etc. (Putnam and Campbell, 77)

Putnam and Campbell illustrate how religious diversity and religious tolerance have developed interpersonally. However, how possible can polarization and this kind diversity coexist? Putnam and Campbell say that the coexistence comes about since the polarized clusters are not due to segregation brought by religion. Also, they say that the flexibility experienced in these religions which caused their divisions as it is seen, also allow them to get over their differences. They argue that at least in each extended family, there is a member of a different faith something they refer to as the ' Aunt Susan principle'. They claim that due to this ' Aunt Susan's principle, the Americans are able to coexist in their religious diversity. Consequently, the principle they refer to as ' My Friend A1' shows how the interfaith ties networks amongst people who are not of the same faith. According to their findings, such interlocking due to faith, relationships and interest, is the cause of the religious tolerance which in turn softens and cools the destructive religious aspects that may cause divisions (Putnam and Campbell, 37).

However, they acknowledge that the roles played by groupings such as congregational meetings are paramount. The flexibility in the religious involvement and probably the intrinsic voluntarism from people creates a picture that places like those of worship are for the like-minded. Thus, such commonality creates an easy time for the clerical leadership for they do listen to the voices of the congregants. Though easy in 'electing leaders' of the congregation the authors find that it brings politics into the religious groups. They can be affected and shaped by the people's attitude and thus can cause political mobilization in the church. This risks separating some church member (Putnam and Campbell, 434)

Putman and Campbell notice the change taking place in churches. They say that most churches depicts that things are not the way things used to be in the past; things are definitely changing. This is because many churches are nowadays are welcoming the move of welcoming women into leadership thus a show of embrace of equality in these churches. However, they were able to observe the racial segregation which is not less than it used to be, several years back. The clergy seems to be aware that causing members to take the direction that politics directs them does not help them at all.

Therefore, they preach religious tolerance. This practical religious tolerance is practiced and right from the church, by the leaders themselves. They have developed was of interpreting and presenting their faith to the people. They also show good neighborliness especially when people of they have different types of people in the same congregation. Generally, there is show of respect for the diversity of their faiths that even Putnam and Campbell confirm that they admire (Putnam and Campbell, 289)

In this book however, I have realized that there are fewer organizational notes than I anticipated. This study is based on the on the significance of network connections and associational belonging and I didn't expect, with this rich data, that Campbell and Putnam have given much attention to the individual based data more than group based. The data about the interactions with the congregations proves to be more illustrative and interesting thus making the book to be based on thorough research. However, the analysis of the American religion was well done and looks like it was from an insider's account.

I have also to appreciate the optimism in this book. Putnam and Campbell have depicted how well the Americans can come together despite failures in different areas. This book does not only show this but also shows some hope of things getting better. All in all, it is also not in order to underestimate the role religion play in dividing the American society. We can also see religion intertwined with social conflict and inequality in the society. Religion is showing adaptation to the change in the society that is justice-based.

Lastly, it is prudent to point out that reading such a highly research publication with clear arguments about why religious diversity and tolerance continues to serve the american society positively is an indication that religion isn't going away. Religion is with us to stay, to make life sweeter.

### **Works cited:**

Putnam, R. and Campbell, D. American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010

Johnstone, R. Religion in society: sociology of religion. New Jersey: Pearson, 2006