

Review

Religion and Ethnicity: Theoretical Connections

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Abstract: The religion literature in Sociology remains largely disconnected from the ethnicity and immigration literature despite enduring connections between religion and ethnicity. This review helps to close this gap. It shows how the dominant theories in each discipline follow a similar trajectory and examines how exploring the theoretical connections between religion and ethnicity can advance our understanding of each social phenomenon. In particular, it can illuminate why America remains so religious as well as why America's religious congregations continue to be so divided along ethnic and racial lines.

Keywords: religion; ethnicity; immigration; immigrants

1. Introduction

One of the primary concerns of immigrants is establishing a transplanted version of their old religious organization in the new country [1-8]. Religion and ethnicity are deeply connected, and rebuilding their old church, synagogue, temple, or mosque helps immigrants to establish their ethnic identity, community, and settle in the new land [1-14]. Despite this intimate connection, theoretical understanding of ethnicity and religion remain disjointed. There are various descriptive case studies of immigrant ethnic groups, but few, if any, connect theories of religion with theories of ethnicity and immigration to understand ethnicity, religion, and the process of immigrant incorporation. The religion literature remains largely disconnected from the ethnicity and immigration literature despite enduring connections between religion and ethnicity. This paper helps to close this gap.

This review shows how the dominant theories in each discipline follow a similar trajectory. They can be divided into theories that predict the decline of ethnicity and religion as well as those that

account for the very opposite, the continuing significance of ethnicity and religion. Assimilation theories predict the decline of ethnicity and secularization theories predict the decline of religion. Besides these two dominant theories, there are a variety of other theories that account for the contrary. This review examines how exploring the theoretical connections between ethnicity and religion can advance our understanding of each social phenomenon. It can also help answer two perennial questions in the study of American religion—why America remains so religious as well as why America’s religious congregations continue to be markedly divided along ethnic and racial lines, why Sunday mornings remain the most segregated hours of America.

2. Declining Significance of Ethnicity and Religion

2.1. Classic Assimilation and Secularization Models

Assimilation theories, which can be traced to the Chicago School of the early 20th century, deal specifically with immigrants’ incorporation into American society. Secularization theories, which can be traced to sociology’s very beginning, consider the broader effects of modernization on society in general and religion in particular. These two major theories in immigration and religion, respectively, are surprisingly similar. They both expect ethnicity and religion to decline if not disappear over time.

The classic assimilation model assumes that ethnic and racial distinctions have no place in a rational modern society. Forces of modernity—industrialization, bureaucratization, urbanization, and democracy—that emphasize status by achievement, rationality, and impersonality will eliminate the need for ascriptive racial and ethnic categories. Selection based on racial and ethnic criteria is a vestige of a pre-modern society. Focusing on a relatively homogeneous group of turn of the 20th century European immigrants, the process of assimilation is expected to be largely inevitable and irreversible, following a smooth, straight, and singular line [15-17]. This is evident in one of the earliest and most influential presentations of the assimilation model by Robert E. Park and other members of the Chicago School.

Defining assimilation as a process of fusion and interpenetration, Park [16] presents a deterministic social evolutionist view of immigrant incorporation. Influenced by Darwinian and humanistic philosophy, Park places assimilation as the end stage of a race relation cycle of “contact, competition, accommodation, and eventual assimilation” (p. 138). As immigrants come into contact with other groups in an urban setting, they compete and fight over scarce resources. Eventually, however, ethnic relations evolve past competition and toward accommodation and assimilation. Human cooperation and interpersonal intimacy replace impersonal competition and tendency for domination and move the cycle of race relations inevitably towards assimilation. The time frame in which immigrant groups assimilate into dominant society is unclear, but the process towards assimilation is “apparently progressive and irreversible” (p. 150). Like Park, other immigration scholars like Lloyd Warner and Leo Srole [17] argue that assimilation of immigrants, namely white immigrants, is inevitable and simply a matter of time.

The secularization model also presents a social evolutionary perspective. Religion is expected to eventually yield to the forces of modernity. In the face of increasing urbanization, rationalization, and dominance of science characteristic of modernity, the decline and eventual disappearance of traditional

religious belief systems was considered inevitable and irreversible. Religion was considered to be part of the “childhood” of the human race, “merely a survival from man’s primitive past” that was destined to “disappear in the era of science and general enlightenment” (p. 587) [18].

Bryan Wilson makes one of the strongest cases for secularization. Defining secularization as the “process whereby religious thinking, practice, and institutions lose social significance” (p. xiv) [19], Wilson views secularization as a non-ideological fact of modernity. In the past, the community was the primary locus of human life and within the community religion was the source of social knowledge and order. Eventually, however, a rational societal system superseded the patterns of communal order. “...whereas religion once entered into the very texture of community life, in modern society it operates only in interstitial places in the system” (p. 155) [20]. Living in a scientifically advanced modern world, humans develop a pervasive rational orientation to the world, which draws them away from religion. In this situation, religion has little hope; it will irreversibly decline in the process of rationalization—shifting from community to society based systems.

Unlike Wilson who views religion as essentially a dependent variable, Peter Berger [21] presents religion as both an independent and a dependent variable. In his early work, Berger suggests that secularization, which he defined as the “process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols” (p. 107), originates from the religious tradition of Western culture. Rooted in ancient Judaism, Protestantism rationalized the notions of the sacred by taking out its “mystery, miracle, and magic” (p. 111). For example, compared to Catholicism, Protestantism radically truncated the vast wealth of religious contents by ceasing to pray for the dead, reducing the sacramental apparatus, and making miracles and intercession between the church and saints less significant. Once secularization has been initiated by religion, however, modern industry is taken over by the process of rationalization and eventually leads to autonomization—“the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols” (p. 107). At the “subjective level” autonomization manifests itself as a collapse of the world-view and at the “objective level” autonomization manifests itself as a pluralization of religious organizations [22]. With the collapse of world-views and pluralization, secularization progresses and worldliness increases.

2.2. *Similar Criticisms*

Both assimilation and secularization theories underestimate the resilience of ethnicity and religion. Ethnic and racial group identities and affiliations may have changed, but they certainly remain [23-29]. Like ethnicity, religion too lives on [30-32]. “Any discussion of religion in America must begin with the incontrovertible fact that Americans are a highly religious people...the United States (as a whole) is a religious nation” (p. 7) [32]. The majority of Americans continue to report that they believe in God [33-35]. Church membership in America has fluctuated little over the last 40 years and Americans’ religious contribution has been stable. Conservative Christianity is alive and well, the Christian Right is an influential political force, and new religious movements continue to flourish. Religion is not dead in America [30-39].

Assimilation and secularization theories are also limited because they are Anglo-centric. Classic assimilation theory prescribes a single path of incorporation—assimilation into a presumably

homogenous white Protestant middle class [40]. The only relationship that matters is the relationship between the immigrant ethnic minority in question and the white majority. In this relationship, the immigrant minority does all of the changing and adjusting while the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) majority stays intact, largely unaffected by the process of incorporation. The immigrant minority has little agency, preference, and choice in this process. They are expected to willingly shed their ethnicity to be accepted into the WASP majority and it is understood that doing so would be in their best interest [14,42-45].

Secularization theory is also Anglo-centric in that it has overwhelmingly focused on western societies, which are traditionally Anglo. Most of the contributors of the secularization model focus on institutionalized western, namely Judeo-Christian religions. Little attention is given to religions more popular in non-western nations like Buddhism and Islam. If classic secularization theorist had a more expansive view of religion and included non-Christian religions, they might have arrived at different conclusions.

3. Revised Theories of Assimilation and Secularization

3.1. Revised Assimilation Theories

Over 90 percent of the earlier waves of immigrants in the nineteenth and early 20th centuries were of European origin. Contemporary post-1965 immigrants, however, hail mostly from Latin America, Asia, and the Caribbean. The Hart-Cellar Act in 1965, which abolished the racially biased national origin quota system and sought to reunite families and meet market demand for skilled labor, brought more racially and economically diverse immigrants. Immigrants from Latin America are primarily low-skilled and uneducated, while immigrants from Asia include highly educated professionals and entrepreneurs on one end as well as destitute refugees and uneducated peasants on the other [46].

Persistent racial discrimination and institutional barriers to mobility lead some scholars to doubt that today's children of "people of color" immigrants will assimilate like the descendants of European immigrants. Ethnic/racial consciousness may emerge or reemerge in the face of these obstacles. Besides racism, greater opportunities to maintain ethnic identities made available through advancements in telecommunications, easy travel to homelands, and the ideology of multiculturalism lead others to render assimilation into the presumably white mainstream obsolete [23,47-51].

Responding to these changes, Herbert Gans argues that assimilation is a "bumpy-line" rather than a "straight-line" process [24]. Acculturation and assimilation processes can either be delayed or sidetracked by political and economic conditions in the host society, producing revived interest in ethnicity among immigrant groups. After several generations, ethnic groups can also reach plateaus and adopt a voluntary leisure-time symbolic ethnicity without cost [52]. By introducing the notion of bumpy line assimilation and symbolic ethnicity, Gans accounts for ethnic revivals without abandoning the concept of assimilation. Despite some bumps on the road, assimilation remains the dominant trend.

In contrast to contemporary assimilation scholars who maintain a singular assimilation vision, Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou argue that there are divergent paths [40]. Accounting for the ethnic/racial and pre-migration diversity of today's immigrants and changing socioeconomic political contexts of reception, three segmented paths of assimilation are proposed. First, some will follow the

traditional path of incorporation and assimilate into the white middle class. Second, those who have the support of strong and resourceful ethnic communities can circumvent outside hostility and lack of mobility ladders and achieve economic advancement while maintaining ethnic ties and preserving immigrant community values. Others, however, will not be able to find pathways to mainstream status. In the third path, the children of immigrants who lack strong ethnic communities, mobility ladders, and concentrate in an urban city with a hostile minority subculture may permanently assimilate into a minority underclass, particularly with the added consequence of racialization. Children of black, mulatto, mestizo, and Asian immigrants' "enduring physical differences from whites and the equally persistent strong effects of discrimination based on those differences, especially against black persons, throw a barrier in the path of occupational mobility and social acceptance" (p. 1006) [41]. "Segmented" theory of assimilation thus presents varied paths of immigrant incorporation based on the diversity of today's immigrants and the cultural and structural context of American society.

Other popular assimilation theorists maintain a general assimilationist future by reformulating the concept of assimilation. For example, Richard Alba and Victor Nee redefine assimilation as "the decline, and at its endpoint the disappearance, of an ethnic/racial distinction and the cultural and social differences that express it" (p. 863) [53]. Minimizing the Anglo-conformist bias of classic assimilation theory, Alba and Nee's definition of assimilation does not assume that any group is the ethnic majority and they are agnostic about whether the changes that result from assimilation are more mutual or one-sided. The majority group in question can change in the process of incorporation and the boundaries that outline what groups fall under the category of "majority" and "minority" can shift over time.

3.2. Revised Secularization Theories

In recent years, secularization has been revised to mean the declining "impact" of religion in society versus the decline of religion in it of itself. For example, Mark Chaves redirects secularization theory by arguing that secularization is best understood "not as the decline of religion, but as the declining scope of religious authority" (p. 750) [54]. What is critical to understanding the role of religion is not the mere existence of religious forces, but their actual "impact." In their study of religion and politics in a New England city, Demerath and Williams found that while religious organizational movements provided a "sacralizing counterweight" within the community, the movement did not affect the larger community itself (p. 201) [55]. Hence, while religious movements exist, their impact is minimal. Similarly, neo-secularization theorists argue that while the "quantities" of individual religious beliefs and behaviors may not have declined and in some cases increased, the "qualities" of ways in which people believe and practice their religion have secularized [38,56]. In particular, various studies show that while religion persists, it is increasingly privatized [57-60]. Robert N. Bellah and his colleagues find that Christians now emphasize a "personal relationship" with God and believe that one can become a Christian "without any church at all" (p. 234) [60]. They cite a woman who even named a religion after herself called "Sheilaism." "My faith has carried me a long way. It's Sheilaism. Just my own little voice" (p. 221) [60]. Thus, while religious beliefs and organizations may be stable and even on the rise, the substance of religious belief and the scope of religious authority have declined.

Neo-secularists have also moved away from the linear prescriptive that religion will inexorably disappear. Jos e Casanova argues that secularization theory should not begin with the premise that there

will be a fundamental conflict between religion and secularization and that religion will become increasingly privatized and disappear [61]. In particular, secularization theory should be reformulated to be flexible, dynamic, and complex enough to account for the possibility of legitimate forms of public religion (e.g., the emergence of new religious movements) existing in modern societies along with increasingly privatized religions. This kind of argument originates from the belief that the secularization trend is in fact a critical condition for the very existence of public religious involvement. Without the secularization and privatization of religious beliefs and practices, public forms of religion would have nothing to react against. Public religions exist and prosper as a source of moral authority, a normative critique of secularized society. This kind of reformulation eliminates the empirical paradox between continuing public religion at the face of increasing secularization and privatization of religion.

Neo-secularists have further revised secularization theory by arguing that secularization does not mean the decline or disappearance of religion, but its change. David Yamane argues that post-secularists have misrepresented and unjustly criticized secularization theory to mean the evolutionary decline or disappearance of religion and argues that “mature,” more recent formulations of secularization theorize the “transformation” *versus* the disappearance of religion (p. 113) [56]. The focus of secularization is more on change. There is now greater recognition that what is needed is a theory of religious variation and transformation—ways to understand how and why religion changes over time and place.

3.3. Change versus Dissolution

Following advances in secularization theory, assimilation theory should focus on how ethnicity “changes” in the process of assimilation instead of expecting ethnic and cultural distinctions to decline or disappear. Looking at recent works on ethnicity that challenge classic assimilation theory suggests that focusing on ethnic change instead of ethnic dissolution could be more useful. For example, while Gans is a strong proponent of the assimilation model, he finds that ethnicity can continue onto the third and fourth descendants of immigrants in an altered “symbolic” form [52]. Additionally, many immigration scholars have found that ethnicity is an “emergent” phenomenon that changes and takes shape under social structural conditions [24,44,62]. Mary Waters also finds that for some, ethnic identity involves a great deal of choice and can change over the course of one’s life [29]. David Lopez and Yen Espiritu further show that distinct ethnic groups can later take on a broader pan-ethnic identity that incorporates the ethnicities of various ethnic groups (e.g., a Chinese American taking on a broader Asian American identity) [26]. Continuing racial prejudice and discrimination can also fuel the construction and reconstruction of varied ethnic as well as pan-ethnic identities [41,47-51,85]. Assimilation theory can thus be more suitable for studying immigrant incorporation if the emphasis was placed on ethnic change versus dissolution. The focus should be on why and how ethnicity changes over time and place.

4. Why Is America so Religious?

Why is America so religious? A highly pluralistic modern country like America should be the least, not the most religious among the Western industrialized democracies. The visible presence of multiple religious worldviews and practices should undermine individuals’ faith in a single religion, particularly

one that is mono-theistic, absolutist, and claims to be “the” true faith. In view of this, critics of secularization theory are quick to point out that secularization theory is wrong—rising levels of pluralism does not lead to the decline of religion. Instead, increasing pluralism and competition among religions can provide more choices for individuals to choose the religion that best suits them and thereby increase church attendance [30]. Missing from this competition/rational choice explanation for American religious vitality is a consideration of how immigration and the ethnic diversity that it brings, affect the overall religiosity of America.

Uprooting, migration, and resettlement can be a “theologizing experience” that can make religion all the more salient in the new country [11]. The new world of relentless change, the confrontation with various new subcultures and worldviews, can make immigrants turn more urgently toward religion and its institutions. Ethnic churches offer emotional and social services that ease immigrants’ sense of loss. Immigrants can regroup, celebrate, and preserve elements of their home-culture in their churches. They can fellowship with co-ethnics, exchange news from the home country and share stories of trials and successes [1,2,4-14]. Religious organizations have served as a “refuge of free association” and “cultural particularity” and remain the preeminent form of voluntary association in the United States (p. 30-31) [63].

Immigrants were expected to shed their old language or nationality, but they were not particularly discouraged from retaining their own separate religions. Although it is clear to the immigrants that some religions are more valued by the mainstream than others, “becoming American” did not mean that they had to abandon their old religion in favor of “some native American substitute” (p. 1060) [64]. Through successive immigration of Europeans, being a Protestant, a Catholic, or a Jew have become “alternative ways of being an American” (p. 274) [5]. For these reasons, religion often became more salient for the early waves of European immigrants after their migration and settlement in America [1,5,12,65,66]. This pattern of religious revitalization continues with contemporary immigrants and their descendants.

4.1. Evidence from Post-1965 Immigration

Post-1965 immigrants and their children are enlivening religion in America. According to the Pew Forum’s 2007 Religious Landscape Survey, 84 percent of Latinos report that their religious affiliation is Christian compared to 78 percent of whites. According to the 2006 Faith Matters Survey, over a third (35%) of all Catholics in the United States report their ethnicity as Latin American [32]. The numbers of Latin Americans are higher among the younger cohorts of Catholics. About seven in ten (67%) of young Catholics who regularly attend church are Latin Americans (p. 299) [32]. The retention rate of Latino Catholics is also higher than the retention rate for all Catholics in the United States. The overall retention rate of Catholics is 63 percent; for Anglos the rate is 57 percent and for Latinos the rate is 78 percent (p. 301) [32]. This has led scholars to conclude that the Catholic Church in the United States “would have experienced a catastrophic collapse” without the inflow of Latin American immigrants (p. 299) [32,63]. The Catholic Church in the United States is no doubt being revitalized by Latin American immigrants and their children.

The older cohorts of Protestants in the United States are predominately white, but the younger cohorts of Protestants are more diverse. Nearly four in ten (39%) of Protestants under age 30 are non-

white (p. 45) [67]. The Pew Forum's 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey also found that only 1 percent of blacks and only 2 percent of Latinos identified themselves as atheist or agnostic compared to 4 percent of whites [67]. Among all of the major ethnic and racial groups in the United States, Blacks are the most likely to report a Christian religious affiliation (85%) followed by Latinos (84%) [67].

Asian Americans, the majority of whom are foreign-born, are less likely than whites, blacks, or Latinos to affiliate as Christian [32,67,68]. According to the Pew Forum's 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, approximately 78 percent of the US adult population affiliates with a Christian faith tradition while 45 percent of those who identified as "Asian" classified themselves as Christian. This finding, however, should be tempered by the fact that Asians in the U.S. are more likely to affiliate themselves as Christians than their counterparts in Asia.

While the majority of people in East Asia are not Christian, the majority (57%) of immigrants from East Asia in the United States are Christian (29% identify as members of Protestant churches and 27% identify as Catholic) (p. 49) [67]. Christians make up only 3.9 percent (Protestants are 2.6 percent and Catholics are 1.4 percent) of the population in Taiwan but in the U.S., Christians make up 20 to 25 percent of the Taiwanese population (p. 2) [69]. Pastors of Taiwanese converts note that the majority of their congregants converted to Christianity in the U.S. [69]. Other studies of Chinese congregations also report high numbers of Christian converts among Chinese Americans [4,14,70,71]. The same holds for other Asian Americans.

Whereas less than 6 percent of the population in the Philippines report that they are Protestant, over 18 percent of Filipino Americans claim to be Protestant [68,72]. According to a 2007 report by Vietnam's Government Committee for Religious Affairs, Protestants made up about 1 percent of the population. In the U.S., however, 13 percent of Vietnamese claim to be Protestants (p. 60) [68]. Christians are scarce in Japan and known to make up less than one percent of the population in Japan, but Christians make up approximately 43 percent of the Japanese population (Protestants 36.9% and Catholics 6.1%) in the United States [68,73]. And as more commonly observed, approximately a quarter of Koreans in South Korea versus over three-quarters of Koreans in the United States are members of Protestant churches [68,74]. This pattern of Christian overrepresentation in the U.S. likely applies to South Asian Christians as well [6,63,68,75]. Thus, while Asians on the whole do not report high rates of Christian affiliation compared to other Americans, Asians in the United States affiliate more as Christians than their counterparts in their home countries.

Besides enlivening Christian religions, today's immigrants are bringing and expanding other religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and Islam [2,6,10,63,76]. According to the Pew Forum's 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, people belonging to Islam and Hinduism are more likely to be foreign born. The majority of Muslims in the U.S. (65%) are born outside of the U.S. Similarly, the majority of Hindus in the U.S. (86%) are foreign born [67].

Available data on today's immigrants' religiosity, although limited, provide tentative support for the thesis that immigrants revitalize America's religiosity. The American Catholic church would enervate without the constant flow of immigrant Catholics from parts of Latin America. Many Protestant congregations in the United States are finding increasing numbers of immigrants in their churches and large numbers of African, Chinese, and Korean congregations are joining major Protestant denominations [2,4,6,8,14,64,77-80]. Mainline Protestant churches across the United States

whose membership are drying up are renting their space or selling their property to immigrant Protestants who have no problem filling the pews. And there are even fervent Protestant immigrants from parts of Africa, Latin America, and Asia who view themselves essentially as missionaries who are in the United States to bring spiritual revival [81-85]. As Jacob K. Olupona and Regina Gemignani note in *African Immigrant Religions in America*, “A large percentage of African religious community leaders and members view their migration to the United States in the context of an evangelical mission to the West” (p. 8) [85]. Accordingly, just as assimilation theory has been reformulated to consider the impact of immigrants and their descendants on the host society, secularization theory should examine how immigrants affect the overall state of religion in America. Doing so can shed light on America’s religious exceptionalism among the Western industrialized democracies.

5. Continuing Significance of Ethnicity and Religion

The fields of immigration and religion have theories that predict the decline of ethnicity and religion, but they each also have theories that explain the very opposite. There are theories that respectively explain the resilience of ethnicity and religion. In this section, I compare and connect some of these theories. I show how combining our understandings of ethnicity and religion can help us to address another enduring question—why America’s religious congregations continue to be so divided along ethnic and racial lines.

5.1. Meaning, Identity, Community

Religion is particularly good at providing individuals a sense of meaning, identity, and belonging. Classic works from Emile Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* to more contemporary studies of religious communities continuously show this to be the case [3,5,7,11,12,21,86-88]. Peter Berger argues that faced with the precarious nature of the social world, every society is engaged in building a significant world and that religion plays a pivotal role in the business of constructing meaning [21]. Religion “has a strategic part in the human enterprise of world-building” (p. 27) [21].

As previously discussed, the ethnic church is where immigrants find a sense of belonging, value, and shelter in the new land. It is in many ways their über community. In his study of Southern Italian immigrants at the turn of the 20th century, Rudolph Vecoli found that religion is one of the important “tried and true ways of coping with the great Unknown” and helping immigrants to deal with the various challenges that they confront in the new country (p. 33) [88]. Similarly, Will Herberg’s study of Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish immigrants concludes that religion operates as the “meaningful center of life”; it provides immigrants with a “fundamental way of ‘adjusting’ and ‘belonging’” (p. 72) [5]. Religion grounds people; it helps them figure out who they are.

Ethnicity too provides a significant foundation for identity, meaning, and community. According to the primordial theory of ethnicity, racial and ethnic distinctions have been salient and have commonly demarcated the lines of inter-group conflict throughout history because racial and ethnic distinctions are the basic group identity of humans. They are deeply engrained in the very nature of human sociality [89]. Ethnic ties are extensions of kinship affinities and ethnic alliances form because they advance the interests of those who are thought to have common descent.

The notion that ethnicity is primordial in nature is disputed, but there is consensus that ethnicity provides people with meaning, identity, and community [7,25,44,45,62]. In fact, ethnicity, by its very definition is based on the idea of a group with a shared cultural identity, language, and origin. The word “ethnic” is an adjective that is derived from the Greek noun “ethnos,” which means people or nations. An ethnic group is commonly connected by a shared heritage and a sense of people-hood. Ethnicity itself is community and identity.

Putting the similar functions of ethnicity and religion together, groups that are both ethnic and religious can have a stronger basis for meaning-construction and cohesion. The social glue is stronger. Ethnic religious organizations enable individuals to find community and construct a religious as well as an ethnic identity. Separate ethnic congregations may thus be popular in part because ethnicity and religion perform similar desirable functions and provide a more significant source for meaning and group solidarity.

Ethnic religious congregations for immigrants also offer a variety of social services and assistance and provide significant sources of social capital. Ethnic congregations are well-known for offering a host of services that facilitate immigrants’ adaptation and settlement like assistance in finding child-care, schooling, and jobs [2,4,6-8,11,45,90-93]. For example, churches in New York’s Chinatown provide food, housing, employment and a secure haven to recently-arrived immigrants from Fuzhou, China [4]. The second generation also benefit from being inserted into the ethnic community via religious congregations. Some of today’s children of immigrants can ward off the lure of oppositional inner-city cultures and the effects of racial discrimination and a segmented labor market by relying on the support of their parents and the ethnic community. And immigrant congregations “play a central part” in connecting children to the ethnic community (p. 316) [93]. Various scholars have found the ethnic church to be a positive source of social capital for the second generation [7,45,79,93-95].

5.2. Rational Choice

Social scientists have used the general theory of rational choice, which argues that individuals act rationally to maximize benefits and minimize costs, to explain both the salience of ethnicity and religion. According to the rational choice theory of ethnicity, ethnic groups are essentially rational interest groups that struggle to gain benefits in an unequal competitive society through organizing around ethnicity [49,96]. Individuals form ethnic groups because of the “strategic efficacy of ethnicity in making legitimate claims on the resources of the modern state”—because it helps them to advance their economic and political interests (p. 11) [49]. Thus individuals, particularly for whom ethnicity is more optional than imposed, may choose to identify themselves ethnically based on the costs and benefits of doing so. Similarly, rational choice theories of religion suggest that individuals turn to religion and its organizations to essentially maximize rewards and minimize costs; religious individuals are likened to religious consumers and religious organizations are likened to firms competing in the marketplace of faith [30,97,98]. “Americans are inveterate shoppers, and religion is no exception” (p. 169) [32]; America has a competitive religious market, a “divine economy” where spiritual entrepreneurs compete for the allegiance of self-maximizing and persnickety religious consumers [63]. Just as competition among firms in the free marketplace encourages material consumption, competition among religious organizations can heighten religious participation.

Following this logic, an organization that is both ethnic and religious can have an easier time mobilizing and competing for members. Since religion tends to be more institutionalized and organized in American society, a group that is both religious and ethnic can attract more members and offer religious consumers ethnic as well as religious goods. Congregations that appeal to individualized ethnic *and* religious interests and comfortably stay within ethnic and racial lines can be more competitive in the open religious market. This intimate link between ethnicity and religion can help explain why America's religious communities are so segregated.

6. Why Are Sunday Mornings so Segregated?

According to the National Congregations Survey and the Survey of Multiracial Congregations, about 90 percent of American religious congregations are racially homogenous [99,100]. America's religious congregations are more segregated than public institutions and residential neighborhoods. What Martin Luther King famously observed decades before still holds true: "at 11:00 on Sunday morning when we stand and sing that Christ has no east or west, we stand at the most segregated hour in this nation" [101]. This is partly due to the underlying connection between ethnicity and religion in the United States.

Religions in America have strong ethnic foundations [32]. Even today, Americans with Dutch heritage are likely to belong to the Dutch-Reform churches. As Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell note in *American Grace*, the "single measure of the percentage of people with Dutch ancestry has an 80 percent accuracy rate when predicting the proportion of Christian Reform adherents within a county" (p. 265). The same strong connection between ethnicity and religion can be found between those who report Greek ancestry and those that belong to the Greek Orthodox Church. Connections between Scottish or Scots Irish ancestry and membership in Presbyterian churches exist as does Germany ancestry and Lutheranism [32]. The symbiosis between ethnicity and religion is perhaps most evident in Black Protestantism. In the United States, 78 percent of Blacks affiliate as Protestants and the majority of black adults, 59 percent, are affiliated with historically black Protestant churches [67].

Stronger ethnic identities also correlate with stronger religious affiliation. According to the Faith Matters 2006 Survey, those with a stronger ethnic identity are less likely to leave the religion of their parents; are more likely to marry with someone in his/her childhood religion; and report that it is important that their children marry someone of the family's religion (p. 287) [32]. Blacks and Latinos, who tend to have stronger ethnic/racial identities than whites, are also twice as more likely than whites to remain in their parents' religion (p. 137) [32]. This strong link between ethnicity and religion contribute to the prevalence of separate ethnic congregations in America's open religious market where racial tensions persist.

Systematic survey data on the religious participation of today's immigrant second generation is scarce. A rare example is Pyong Gap Min and Dae Young Kim's survey of 1.5-and 2nd-generation Korean American adults and Korean English-language congregations in the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area. Results of their survey show that about two-thirds of the adults who attended a Protestant church as children take part in a Protestant church regularly. And over two-thirds of the 1.5- and 2nd-generation Koreans that attend a Protestant church attend a Korean congregation [102].

Various case studies also show that today's second generation are turning to ethnic congregations. These ethnic congregations not only provide shelter from racial marginalization and opportunities for "birds of a feather to flock together," they offer a consistent social space where the later-generation can construct their own ethnic religious identities [25,77-79,103-105]. Rebecca Y. Kim [25] finds that second-generation Korean American college evangelicals are creating their own emergent second-generation ethnic Christian identity through their religious organizations. Sharon Kim reports that second-generation Korean American evangelicals continue to construct their own separate congregations after college and counted over fifty second-generation Korean American congregations in Los Angeles alone [79]. Meanwhile, Russell Jeung [78] finds that congregations are helping later-generation Asian Americans to construct a broader pan—ethnic identity. In addition to providing protective benefits and social services, religious institutions provide new Americans the social arena, a third space, where they can continuously forge their own ethnic realities.

The continuing symbiosis between ethnicity and religion can thus contribute to the prevalence of separate ethnic congregations, particularly in a country that has an open religious market and enduring racial tensions.

7. Conclusions

Increasing globalization, ethnic religious conflict, and continuing and changing patterns of immigration have heightened scholarly interest in ethnic religious communities. Immigration and ethnicity scholars are no longer placing religion on the back burner. Most studies on ethnicity and or religion, however, speak to either ethnicity or religion theories and fail to see the interconnected nature of the two social forces. In response, this paper examined the ways in which the two groups of theories are connected and how exploring their linkages can illuminate our understanding of each social phenomenon. Following reformulations of secularization theories, assimilation theories should focus on ethnic "change" versus dissolution. Ethnicity will transform, but it will live on.

Looking at the developments in immigration theories, religion scholars should also seriously consider how immigration shapes the American religious landscape. Doing so can help explain why America is so religious compared to other Western industrialized democracies. Immigrants revitalize Christianity and bring and expand new faiths.

Examining the linkages between ethnicity and religion also help us to understand why America's religious congregations are so segregated. Ethnic and religious organizations have a stronger basis for meaning-construction and group solidarity. An organization that is both ethnic and religious can provide ethnic and religious rewards and have an easier time mobilizing and drawing members in the religious marketplace, particularly in a society where individual comfort is held at a premium and discomforting ethnic/racial divisions persist.

This leads to the final conclusion of the review that America's religious exceptionalism and America's ethnic/racial segregation are intimately related. Part of the reason why America is so religious, however seriously, may be because its religious institutions are so segregated. Allowing religious customers to relish in their ethnic/racial comfort zones and construct their own specialized unique identity and culture through religion and its institutions can heighten Americans' religious consumption. Religious leaders know that their religious consumers would be far less interested in

what they have to offer if they forced their members to cross ethnic/racial boundaries. This underscores the point that American religiosity can't be understood outside of ethnicity and immigration and recalls the old saying that ethnicity is really the skeleton of American religion [106].

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