

***Our Great Big American God:
A Short History of Our Ever-Growing Deity***

By Matthew Paul Turner
(Jericho Books, 2014)
241 pages.

I picked up this book just because of the title – it captured me, both by the love of faith and my enjoyment of politics and contemporary culture. It was a very interesting read that challenged some of my preconceptions about America’s interaction with the concept of God and how Americans practice the Christian faith.

Turner, writing in his prologue, says this: “This is not only a book about God, it is also about God’s people, more specifically, God’s *American* people.” (Turner, pg. 9, emphasis original) The book seeks to tell the story of how a belief in God shaped American culture but also seeks to explain or define how America has shaped our view or understanding of God. While I may not agree with all of his conclusions, I think he is correct – God has impacted our culture and our culture, for better or worse, has influenced our thinking about God.

The author begins with the beginning influx of the Puritans into our country and those who first settled the “New World.” He moves to trace the unfolding understanding of God through the founding of our country, the divisions about God during the period of abolition, slavery and the civil war, the industrial revolution and expansionist experience of America in the late 19th and early 20th century. He also seeks to trace the rise of fundamentalism, evangelicalism and the current trend to invoke God into the national discourse (both culturally and politically). In every age (and with every chapter), there are interesting perspectives and challenging thoughts.

The author says, “For four hundred years, Americans have narrated God’s story, and during that time, God has grown and evolved, become bigger and more unbelievable. Our stories have added theologies and folklore, miracles and fear, pro-*this* narrative and anti-*that* themes, ghost stories and strobe lights, Sarah Palin and more than a little humanistic sensibilities.” (Turner, p. 10, emphasis original)

I agree with the premise but not all of his conclusions. I agree that our culture, our historical experience, and our social context has impacted our understanding of God. Sometimes that has been good; sometimes it hasn’t been good at all. But only when we begin looking at how our culture has impacted our view of God can we begin to return to a biblical understanding of the Sovereign.

Sometimes I just need to step back from my political, social and cultural bias and try to see God as He really is. This book helped me do just that!

