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Ashford and Pappalardo's "One nation under God: A Christian hope for American politics" (Book Review)

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significant catalysts to spiritual growth, with reflection on Scripture being the single most influential practice.

The third part of the book describes best practices that churches employ to foster spiritual growth within their congregations by looking at what the top rated churches from the survey are doing. Those churches share in common such practices as providing a pathway and next steps for their members, engaging with the Bible in an ongoing way, encouraging members to embrace the vision and mission of the church, and addressing local community needs.

This book will be of value to pastors and church leaders who want to gain insights on how spiritual development progresses and steps to facilitate that growth among church members. Survey results are presented in a very readable style and through numerous illustrations. The appendices provide information on the research methodology and Willow Creek's response to the results. The authors acknowledge that the book may oversimplify the process of spiritual formation and that individual growth is not predictable or linear but unique for each person. Although the survey results reported here are becoming dated, the book does provide a lens from which to consider spiritual development.

Reviewer

Elizabeth Pearson, Montreat College

Ashford, B., & Pappalardo, C. (2015). *One nation under God: A Christian hope for American politics*. Nashville, TN: B & H Academic. 160 pp. \$14.99. ISBN 9781433690693

One Nation Under God is an easy to read introduction to a Christian's role in the political world of the United States. In thirteen chapters divided into two parts the authors address three major issues; 1) Christians participating in American politics, 2) how the church and civil government fit together, and 3) how Christians should approach some particularly significant areas impacting both religion and politics.

The first portion attempts to convince the Christian that participation in the political process of America is biblical, in fact even necessary. Arguing for a position between political withdrawal by the Christian and the overly optimistic worldly view which sees politics "as an arena of endless hope [which] often ends as an arena of darkness and despair" (p. 2) the authors contend that Scripture supports the current state of political affairs which they conclude shows a "political realm [that] remains *structurally* good but has been corrupted *directionally*" (p. 9). Although their argument for this position is interesting and presented fairly well the authors fail to make a

convincing argument that this is actually the case. This chapter will not convince a critic but serves well for encouraging those who already hold this opinion.

The next four chapters address various aspects of a sphere-based system of influence in which the church is seen as just one of the spheres. In this section naïve and simplistic assumptions are made about the roles which each sphere plays in the life of the American people. Even in an ideal situation where each sphere, including the government, remained in its specific arena and did not intrude on the arenas of other relevant spheres there is too much room for encroachment by the other spheres on the church to make most Christians happy.

The remainder of the book focuses on specific issues of concern to Christians in contemporary American society including; sanctity of life, marriage, sexuality, economics, environmental issues, racial issues, immigration, and war. Most of the reasoning behind how the Christian should approach these issues, and the insistence that the Christian must approach these issues, is quite well done at an introductory level.

The brief conclusion affirms God's ultimate authority over all other powers, but makes clear that the church as it is presented in modern society and God are not necessarily equivalent. Being more clear earlier in the book about how the modern church and God's ultimate kingdom are currently still two different things would go a long way toward clarifying some of the arguments about the proper roles of the church and the government made earlier in the book for average lay readers. Despite some failings, this is a good introductory level book on this topic with good recommended reading sections after each chapter bolstering its usefulness even more.

Reviewer

Joseph Baumstarck, Jr., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Kurlansky, M. (2016). *Paper: Paging through history*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. 389 pp. \$17.00. ISBN 9780393239614

Paper is a unifying technology that all people need and use throughout their lifetime. Although one may laugh at the idea that one could write an extensive and engaging book on paper, Mark Kurlansky succeeds at his task. Kurlansky is a *New York Times* bestselling author who has written other books on common items such as *Salt: A World History* and *Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World*. The author uses his gifts as a researcher and storyteller to emphasize the significance of paper.