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January 21, 2012: One Market Under God

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Title: One Market Under God

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1/21/2012—Kevin Kruse, Associate Professor of history at Princeton, hyped his upcoming book, *One Nation Under God: Corporations, Christianity, and the Rise of the Religious Right*, by writing a piece on January 17, on the New York Times blog, Campaign Stops. I hope the book is better than the column. The basic idea is that the rich try to align their good fortune with the will of God. That is certainly true and is a criticism that has often been made of Protestantism in particular under the rubric of the Gospel of Prosperity. While the idea that God loves the rich is a weird deformation of Jesus' message—putting the camel before the horse, actually—there is a serious theological case to be made against the state-worship of the left, which would have horrified Marx. (Marx was at base a kind of libertarian, at least in theory). But nothing of all this has anything to do with one Nation under God in the Pledge of Allegiance. I told the story of how that happened in Huffington Post last May, but it bears repeating apparently: There used to be a tradition, adhered to by some presidents, of honoring Abraham Lincoln's birthday by sitting in Lincoln's pew at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church on the Sunday nearest February 12. On February 7, 1954, President Eisenhower was in that pew and listened to a sermon by George MacPherson Docherty in which Docherty repeated the -- possibly apocryphal -- story that Lincoln added the words "under God" to the Gettysburg Address to show that America's might lay not in military power, but in its spirit and higher purpose and that these same words should therefore be added to the Pledge of Allegiance. Eisenhower agreed and apparently arranged for a bill to be introduced to that effect the very next day. Clearly, Docherty was referring to Lincoln, not corporations. I'm not claiming that this is unrelated to limited government and to freedom, which was precisely Lincoln's hope—"that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom." But Docherty was not specifically referring to capitalism. This is why Kruse's column is so confused, moving from one Nation under God to "freedom under God" to "government under God." But these don't all suggest the same thing. Maybe the book will be coherent.