

topics such as divorce and the future of marriage. It is argued that the threshold for a successful marriage is now higher, that uncertainty about the survival of the partnership necessitates a more binding style of marriage contract, and that the advent of new platforms of relationship formation (such as dating websites and apps) can lead to less frequent but better-quality marriages. Although discussion of these issues is laced with jargon such as ‘plan formation under uncertainty’ and ‘market- and household-oriented production’, the use of plain language overall serves to describe circumstances and conundrums much like those that could be found in *Agony Aunt* columns and lifestyle writing in magazines and newspapers.

Rather than restricting the understanding of the modern family to one of family structure, the book also explores the family as the site of transmission of values that can make or break liberal societies. ‘Can children who have not been trusted to wander more than a block from home, or to organise games unsupervised by parents, or to go to the playground without safety gear, become adults who are willing and able to take economic risks? Will they tolerate others taking such risks, including standing by when those risks do not pan out?’ (p. 191), Horwitz writes. To put his argument more succinctly, ‘will a nation of bailed-out children produce a nation of bailed-out firms?’ (p. 192).

This is aided and abetted by an out-of-kilter view of how many risks the world of today actually poses to kids, though in most instances the world is less dangerous now than it was during the childhood of today’s parents. It’s not difficult to see how this can create a culture where people expect governments to help them eliminate risk from their children’s lives. It’s rare that a nanny state policy—whether it be restrictions and taxes on tobacco, alcohol, sugar or junk food—isn’t accompanied by some sort of appeal to the well-being of children.

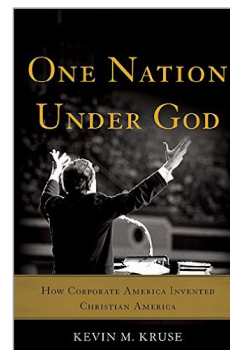
It could well be that the choices parents make about how tightly they wrap their children in cotton wool will have more impact on the future of liberal democratic society and the size of government than whether or not said parents are divorced.

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One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America

By Kevin M. Kruse
New York, Basic Books,
2015,
US\$29.99, 352 pages
ISBN 0-415-39431-7



**Reviewed by
Jeremy Shearmur**

This interesting and very well-researched book does not live up to its sub-title. Princeton professor of history Kevin Kruse explores the political and public use of a bland form of ‘civic religion’ in the United States in the 1950s and beyond. During this period, ‘under God’ was inserted into the Pledge of Allegiance (1954) and ‘In God We Trust’ was added to paper currency (1957). The belief that America has a special religious status has been a long-running theme in its history but this was typically linked to hardline Protestant views.¹ Kruse’s concern is with something new—a concept of ‘civic religion’ that removed content from religion so that its formulations could attract support from Catholics and Jews as well as Protestants. Kruse chronicles the political use of civic religion by Eisenhower and Nixon, and briefly in an epilogue by Reagan and the Bushes. His sub-title, however, suggests a corporate conspiracy that is not borne out by the substance of his book. The responsibility seems largely that of politicians.

Kruse starts his story with the emergence of ‘Spiritual Mobilization’ in the 1930s. It was co-founded to fight left-wing tendencies in the

church by Reverend James Fifield, the pastor of a big Congregational church in Los Angeles that had a wealthy congregation including several conservative Hollywood figures such as Cecil B. DeMille. Spiritual Mobilization promoted widespread 'Freedom under God' celebrations, with the ringing of church bells around the Fourth of July, and offered cash prizes for sermons on that theme. It also published a monthly magazine called *Faith and Freedom*, which featured the writings of many libertarians, while its weekly radio program was syndicated across the nation. Its ethos combined very liberal theology with libertarian economic views. The organisation became more libertarian than Christian after Fifield handed over its leadership in the mid-1950s to James Ingebretsen, who at the time had no religious commitments at all. Its supporters included the immensely wealthy J. Howard Pew (of Sun Oil), Jasper Crane (a retired Dupont executive) and a number of large corporations.

Kruse suggests that 'Freedom Under God' activities fed into the later promotion of a particular kind of bland civic religion. President Eisenhower played a major role in this, declaring in 1952 that 'our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply-felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is'. Kruse tells the story of the political endorsement of civic religion, its cross-fertilisation with the organisation of prayer breakfasts among civic and business leaders, and its blessing by Southern Baptist preacher and celebrity evangelist Billy Graham. Civic religion was re-enforced by promotional activities for Hollywood blockbusters on religious themes, most notably Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* in 1956. An Advertising Council campaign also encouraged attendance at churches or synagogues.

While its religious content was originally vaguely Protestant, civic religion was shaped to receive endorsement and support from Catholics and Jews as well. Politically, those involved in Spiritual Mobilization were strongly free-market, and Kruse characterises their approach as 'Christian libertarian'—a term he tries to apply more generally. But those who played a key role in support of civic religious themes in Congress included Catholic supporters of trades unions. The wider movement

had a broadly conservative social character, but was not libertarian. It also blended with Cold War anti-communism.

Kruse discusses the way in which anodyne religious patriotism became problematic at the level of schools. An objection was raised to a prayer being laid down by the New York Board of Regents (responsible for public education in New York), which was upheld by the Supreme Court. The Court also upheld a subsequent objection to the mandated reading of the Bible in schools. These decisions, and the discussion of them, threw up some wider issues. Atheists, agnostics and civil libertarians objected to any intermingling of church and state. Some conservative Evangelical Christians objected because the content of 'civic religion' was not specifically Christian. Other Evangelicals, and some Catholics, favoured the idea of religion—with as much Christian content as possible—playing a key role in the country's culture. Things were further complicated by lay people interpreting the Supreme Court decisions as an attack on religion, rejecting religious leaders' reassurances that this was not the case.

This leads us to a broader theme in Kruse's book: that is, popular support for a constitutional amendment that would secure the right to prayer in schools. This amendment was outflanked in a Congressional Committee by the leaders of many Christian bodies coming out against it. What was involved became a more conservative grassroots revolt against elite leadership in churches² that is echoed in contemporary political support for Republican presidential hopeful Donald Trump (and expressed against the strong advice of more traditional Republican leaders).

Kruse's book culminates with the cynical use of civic religion by Richard Nixon (which Kruse documents with quotations from Nixon's 'dirty tricks' man Charles Colson). Worship was instituted in the White House, and participants were invited to attend with an eye to political and financial support. Billy Graham was heavily involved (although how this is to be squared with his role in the Fundamentalist movement is not clear).³

Kruse tells an interesting and disturbing story. It does not, however, bear out the subtitle of his book. While corporate America provided funding,

this seems to have been done largely by way of political support for ‘free enterprise’ causes and Republican presidents. Spiritual Mobilization’s corporate supporters Crane and Pew were Christian libertarians—at least on economic matters—but for them this was about their personal political and religious convictions rather than activities undertaken to benefit commerce. There was also nothing in common between Spiritual Mobilization’s message and the ‘religious patriotism’ of Nixon. More generally, Kruse does not pay enough attention to the religious and political differences between those whom he discusses.

‘Civic religion’, however, is disturbing. Its dynamics are different between the US and Australia. We don’t espouse religious patriotism, as do many Americans, and there is not the same degree of religious—or political—populism (although One Nation and the Palmer United Party perhaps suggest some potential for this). In the US the issue is complicated by the Bill of Rights including the constitutional separation of church and state as well as the activist role of the Supreme Court.

Yet there is a general problem here. Why should the genuinely religious put up with the public solemnisation of events with vanilla formulations of religious sentiments that implicitly suggest that significant differences between their faiths are unimportant? What should the non-religious, such as myself, make of, say, the sanctification of mourning for public disasters when it might seem to us that if God were powerful and good in the way that the Abrahamic faiths suggest, we should be asking Him why he allowed the disasters to occur in the first place? Above all, the real message we should take from Kruse’s book is that we should not be willing to put up with politicians draping themselves with the mantle of religion.

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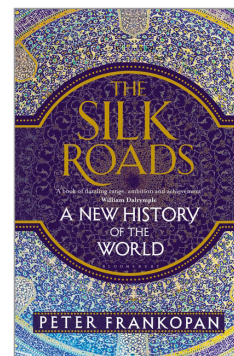


Endnotes

- 1 See, for example, Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (eds), *The Bible in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).
- 2 See Nancy Tatom Ammerman’s *Baptist Battles* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), where she gives an account of a populist, fundamentalist take-over of the Southern Baptist Convention.
- 3 See George M. Marsden’s discussion of Graham’s connections with Fuller Theological Seminary in his book *Reforming Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

The Silk Roads: A New History of the World

By Peter Frankopan
London: Bloomsbury, 2015
\$29.99, 636 pages
ISBN 978-1-4088-3998-0



**Reviewed by
Wolfgang Kasper**

This is Big History spiced up with much small detail. The title alludes to the long-distance trade between China and the West, which flourished first in Antiquity and then again during the 13th and 14th centuries. The author, Dr Peter Frankopan, an Oxford-based expert on Byzantine history, seems to have been predisposed by his Croatian background to look at history not so much from a British-maritime as a transcontinental land-route angle. The plural—*Silk Roads*—refers to multiple land routes through Central Asia and maritime connections around South Asia into the Gulf. The term was first applied in 1877 to the vast, disparate region between the Far East and the Far West by Prussian geographer-adventurer Ferdinand von Richthofen; it has retained an aura of mystery and fascination. The title, of course, also alludes to present-day efforts to build new, faster communications between ascendant China and old Europe.

I opened the tome with great anticipation: How did the achievements of the advanced Han civilisation influence Rome? What did they think in Chang’an (present-day Xian) about the Mediterranean West in Antiquity? What did almost-industrial Song