

## CHAPTER 1

# “Freedom Under God”

IN DECEMBER 1940, MORE THAN five thousand industrialists from across America took part in their yearly pilgrimage to Park Avenue. For three days every winter, the posh Waldorf-Astoria Hotel welcomed them for the annual meeting of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM). That year, the program promised a particularly impressive slate of speakers. Corporate leaders were well represented, of course, with addresses set from titans at General Motors, General Electric, Standard Oil, Mutual Life, and Sears, Roebuck, to name only a few. Some of the other featured attractions hailed from beyond the boardroom: popular lecturers such as noted etiquette expert Emily Post, renowned philosopher-historian Will Durant, and even Federal Bureau of Investigation director J. Edgar Hoover. Tucked away near the end of the program was a name that few knew upon arrival but everyone would be talking about by the week's end: Reverend James W. Fifield Jr.<sup>1</sup>

Ordinarily, a Congregationalist minister might not have seemed well suited to address the corporate luminaries assembled at the Waldorf-Astoria. But his appearance had been years in the making. For much of the 1930s, organizations such as NAM had been searching in vain for ways to rehabilitate a public image that had been destroyed in the crash and defamed by the New Deal. In 1934, a new generation of conservative industrialists took over NAM with a promise to “serve the purposes of business salvation.” “The public does not understand industry,” one of them argued, “because industry itself has made no effort to tell its story;

to show the people of this country that our high living standards have risen almost altogether from the civilization which industrial activity has set up.” Accordingly, NAM dedicated itself to spreading the gospel of free enterprise, hiring its first full-time director of public relations and vastly expanding its expenditures in the field. As late as 1934, NAM spent a paltry \$36,000 on public relations. Three years later, the organization devoted \$793,043 to the cause, more than half its total income that year. Seeking to repair the image of industrialists, NAM promoted the values of free enterprise through a wide array of films, radio programs, advertisements, direct mail, a speakers bureau, and a press service that provided ready-made editorials and news stories for seventy-five hundred local newspapers. Ultimately, though, its efforts at self-promotion were seen as precisely that. As one observer later noted, “Throughout the thirties, enough of the corporate campaign was marred by extremist, overt attacks on the unions and the New Deal that it was easy for critics to dismiss the entire effort as mere propaganda.”<sup>22</sup>

While established business lobbies such as NAM had been unable to sell free enterprise effectively in the Depression, neither had the many new organizations created specifically for that purpose. The most prominent, the American Liberty League, had formed in 1934 to “teach the necessity of respect for the rights of persons and property” and “the duty of government to encourage and protect individual and group initiative and enterprise.” It benefited from generous financial support from corporate titans, particularly at DuPont and General Motors. But their prominence inadvertently crippled its effectiveness, as the Liberty League was easily dismissed as a collection of tycoons looking out for their own self-interest. Jim Farley, chairman of the Democratic Party, joked that it really ought to be called the “American Cellophane League” because “first, it’s a DuPont product and second, you can see right through it.” Even the president took his shots. “It has been said that there are two great Commandments—one is to love God, and the other to love your neighbor,” Franklin D. Roosevelt noted soon after its creation. “The two particular tenets of this new organization say you shall love God and then forget your neighbor.” Off the record, he joked that the name of the god they worshiped seemed to be “Property.”<sup>23</sup>

As Roosevelt’s quips made clear, the president delighted in using religious language to shame his opponents. A practicing Episcopalian, he

shrewdly drew on spiritual themes and imagery throughout his career.<sup>4</sup> In the judgment of his biographer James MacGregor Burns, “probably no American politician has given so many speeches that were essentially sermons rather than statements of policy.” During his two terms as governor of New York, Roosevelt frequently framed his earthly agenda in heavenly terms. Once, he introduced an otherwise dry speech criticizing Republican plans to privatize public utilities by saying, “This is a history and a sermon on the subject of water power, and I preach from the Old Testament. The text is ‘Thou shalt not steal.’” Roosevelt’s use of religious language was even more pronounced over his four presidential terms, especially when he condemned his enemies in the financial elite. In his acceptance speech at the 1932 Democratic National Convention, for instance, he placed blame for the Great Depression on the “many amongst us [who] have made obeisance to Mammon.” Likewise, his first inaugural address was so laden with references to Scripture that the National Bible Press published an extensive chart linking his text with the “Corresponding Biblical Quotations.” In the speech, Roosevelt reassured the nation that “the money changers have fled from their high seats in the temple of our civilization. We may now restore the temple to the ancient truths.”<sup>5</sup>

In introducing the New Deal, Roosevelt and his allies revived the old language of the so-called Social Gospel to justify the creation of the modern welfare state. The original proponents of the Social Gospel, back in the late nineteenth century, had significantly reframed Christianity as a faith concerned less with personal salvation and more with the public good. They rallied popular support for Progressive Era reforms in the early twentieth century before fading from public view in the conservative 1920s. But the economic crash and the widespread suffering of the Great Depression brought them back into vogue. When Roosevelt launched the New Deal, an array of politically liberal clergymen championed his proposal for a vast welfare state as simply “the Christian thing to do.” His administration’s efforts to regulate the economy and address the excesses of corporate America were singled out for praise. Catholic and Protestant leaders hailed the “ethical and human significance” of New Deal measures, which they said merely “incorporated into law some of the social ideas and principles for which our religious organizations have stood for many years.” The head of the Federal Council of Churches, for instance,

claimed the New Deal embodied basic Christian principles such as the “significance of daily bread, shelter, and security.”<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the 1930s, the nation’s industrialists tried to counter the selflessness of the Social Gospel with direct appeals to Americans’ self-interest but had little success. Accordingly, at the Waldorf-Astoria in December 1940, NAM president H. W. Prentis proposed that they try to beat Roosevelt at his own game. With wispy white hair and a weak chin, the fifty-six-year-old head of the Armstrong Cork Company seemed an unlikely star. But eighteen months earlier, the Pennsylvanian had electrified the business world with a speech to the US Chamber of Commerce that called for the recruitment of religion in the public relations war against the New Deal. “Economic facts are important, but they will never check the virus of collectivism,” Prentis warned; “the only antidote is a revival of American patriotism and religious faith.” The speech thrilled the Chamber and propelled Prentis to the top ranks of NAM. His presidential address at the Waldorf-Astoria was anticipated as a major national event, heavily promoted in advance by the *Wall Street Journal* and broadcast live over both ABC and CBS radio. Again, Prentis urged the assembled businessmen to emphasize faith in their public relations campaigns. “We must give attention to those things more cherished than material wealth and physical security,” he asserted. “We must give more attention to intellectual leadership and a strengthening of the spiritual concept that underlies our American way of life.”<sup>7</sup>

James W. Fifield Jr. was on hand to answer Prentis’s call. Handsome, tall, and somewhat gangly, the forty-one-year-old Congregationalist minister bore more than a passing resemblance to Jimmy Stewart. (His politics resembled not those of the actor’s famous character George Bailey, the crusading New Deal populist in *It’s a Wonderful Life*, but rather those of Bailey’s nemesis, the reactionary banker Henry Potter.) Addressing the industrialists at the Waldorf-Astoria, Fifield delivered a passionate defense of the American system of free enterprise and a withering assault on its perceived enemies in government. Decrying the New Deal’s “encroachment upon our American freedoms,” the minister listed a litany of sins committed by the Roosevelt administration, ranging from its devaluation of currency to its disrespect for the Supreme Court. He denounced the “rising costs of government and the multitude of federal

agencies attached to the executive branch” and warned ominously of “the menace of autocracy approaching through bureaucracy.” His audience of executives was stunned. Over the preceding decade, these titans of industry had been told, time and time again, that they were to blame for the nation’s downfall. Fifield, in contrast, insisted that they were the source of its salvation. “When he had finished,” a journalist noted, “rumors report that the N.A.M. applause could be heard in Hoboken.”<sup>8</sup>

With his speech at the Waldorf-Astoria, Fifield convinced the industrialists that clergymen could be the means of regaining the upper hand in their war with Roosevelt in the coming years. As men of God, they could give voice to the same conservative complaints as business leaders, but without any suspicion that they were motivated solely by self-interest. In doing so, they could push back against claims that business had somehow sinned and the welfare state was doing God’s work. While Roosevelt had joked that the Liberty League was concerned only with commandments against coveting and stealing, conservative clergymen now used their ministerial authority to argue, quite explicitly, that New Dealers were the ones violating the Ten Commandments. In countless sermons, speeches, and articles issued in the months and years after Fifield’s address, these ministers claimed that the Democratic administration made a “false idol” of the federal government, leading Americans to worship it over the Almighty; that it caused Americans to covet what the wealthy possessed and seek to steal it from them; and that, ultimately, it bore false witness in making wild claims about what it could never truly accomplish. Above all, they insisted that the welfare state was not a means to implement Christ’s teachings about caring for the poor and the needy, but rather a perversion of Christian doctrine. In a forceful rejection of the public service themes of the Social Gospel, they argued that the central tenet of Christianity remained the salvation of the individual. If any political and economic system fit with the religious teachings of Christ, it would have to be rooted in a similarly individualistic ethos. Nothing better exemplified such values, they insisted, than the capitalist system of free enterprise.

Thus, throughout the 1940s and early 1950s, Fifield and like-minded religious leaders advanced a new blend of conservative religion, economics, and politics that one observer aptly anointed “Christian libertarianism.” A critic in the mid-1950s noted with sarcasm that “these groups do as much

proselytizing for Adam Smith and the National Association of Manufacturers as they do for Christianity.” But his targets would have welcomed that as a fair description of their work, even a compliment. For they saw Christianity and capitalism as inextricably intertwined and argued that spreading the gospel of one required spreading the gospel of the other. The two systems had been linked before, of course, but always in terms of their shared social characteristics. Fifield’s important innovation was his insistence that Christianity and capitalism were political soul mates, first and foremost. The government had never loomed large in Americans’ thinking about the relationship between Christianity and capitalism, but in Fifield’s vision the state cast a long and ominous shadow. Accordingly, he and his colleagues devoted themselves to fighting back against the government forces that they believed were threatening capitalism and, by extension, Christianity. In the early postwar era, their activities helped reshape the national debate about the proper functions of the federal government, the political influence of corporations, and the role of religion in national life. They built a foundation for a new vision of America in which businessmen would no longer suffer under the rule of Roosevelt but instead thrive—in a phrase they popularized—in a nation “under God.”<sup>9</sup>

JAMES W. FIFIELD JR. MADE his fame and fortune in Southern California. The frontier mythology of the region had long attracted Americans looking to reinvent both themselves and their nation, but that was never truer than during the depths of the Great Depression. In the early 1930s, the lush landscape and the allure of Hollywood held out promises of a fresh start for a people who had never needed it more. A continent away from the East Coast establishment that had dictated national norms for centuries, the region proved to be the perfect place for new modes of thought and action. This was especially evident in the otherwise staid worlds of religion and politics, as Southern California spawned new directions in both.<sup>10</sup>

As with many other Depression-era migrants to Los Angeles, Fifield came from the Midwest. Born in Chicago and educated at Oberlin, the University of Chicago, and Chicago Theological Seminary, he had been recruited in 1935 to take over the elite First Congregational Church in

Los Angeles. Located on a lush palm-shaded drive, the church boasted a sprawling complex that included a massive concrete cathedral with a 176-foot-tall Gothic tower, a full-size stage, a wedding chapel, a modern gymnasium, three auditoriums, and fifty-six classrooms. As the new pastor soon discovered, however, the church had an equally impressive debt of \$750,000. While the deacons fretted about finances, Fifield launched a massive spending spree. A consummate organizer, he divided the church into four new divisions, hiring assistant ministers to run each of them with the help of their own complete staffs of secretaries, clerks, and organists, as well as five fully vested choirs shared between them. He recruited an instructor from Yale to launch a new drama club, while a new adult education series christened the College of Life started classes with a faculty of fourteen professors from nearby universities. Seeking to expand the church's reach even further, Fifield instituted five new radio programs and a speakers series, the Sunday Evening Club.<sup>11</sup>

Under Fifield's sharp direction, First Congregational rapidly expanded. The College of Life soon had twenty-eight thousand paying participants, while the Sunday Evening Club reported an average attendance of nine hundred each week, with collection plates bringing in twice as much as Fifield spent on programming. By 1942, the church was out of debt and turning a tidy profit. Its membership nearly quadrupled, making it the single largest Congregationalist church in the world and the church of choice for Los Angeles's elite. "Pushing four thousand," a reporter marveled, "its roster read like the *Wall Street Journal*." The advisory board alone included rich and powerful figures such as Harry Chandler, a wealthy real estate speculator and conservative publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*; Dr. Robert A. Millikan, a Nobel Prize-winning chemist who had graced the cover of *Time* before becoming president of Cal Tech; Harvey Seeley Mudd, a mining magnate and prominent philanthropist; Alexander Nesbitt Kemp, president of the mammoth Pacific Mutual Life Insurance Company; and Albert W. Hawkes, a chemical industry executive who would soon become president of the US Chamber of Commerce and then a US senator. The mayor of Los Angeles regularly took part in the services, as did legendary filmmaker Cecil B. DeMille. Chronicling the achievements of Fifield and his flock, a friendly writer anointed him the "Apostle to Millionaires."<sup>12</sup>

To be sure, the minister was well matched to the millionaires in his pews. Fifield insisted that he and his wife always thought of themselves as simple “small-town folks,” but they acclimated easily to their new life of wealth and privilege. Within a year of their arrival, they bought a mansion in an exclusive development on Wilshire Boulevard. “It had been built in the Twenties by a rich oil man for around a million dollars—using imported tile, special wood paneling, Tiffany stained glass windows, silk hand-woven ‘wall paper’ and many such luxuries,” Fifield remembered. “The extensive lawn, colonnade archways, swimming pool and large main rooms on the first of three floors enabled us to entertain visiting speakers, dignitaries and important people from all over the world who could and did assist the church.” The Fifields soon employed a butler, a chauffeur, and a cook, insisting that the household staff was vital in maintaining their “gracious accommodations” during the depths of the Depression. “The traditional image of a clergyman in those days [was] a man who has a hole in the seat of his pants and shoes run over at the heel,” Fifield acknowledged. “It was quite a shock to a lot of people to see a minister driving around in a good car with a chauffeur at the wheel, who did not have to ask for a discount because he could afford to pay the regular price.” Before long, Fifield was earning enough to pay full price even for luxury goods. First Congregational paid him \$16,000 a year, a salary that, adjusted for inflation, would be roughly a quarter million dollars today.<sup>13</sup>

Fifield’s connection to his congregation extended to their views on religion and politics too. In the apt words of one observer, Fifield was “one of the most theologically liberal and at the same time politically conservative ministers” of his era. He had no patience for fundamentalists who insisted upon a literal reading of Scripture. “The men who chronicled and canonized the Bible were subject to human error and limitation,” he believed, and therefore the text needed to be sifted and interpreted. Reading the holy book should be “like eating fish—we take the bones out to enjoy the meat. All parts are not of equal value.” Accordingly, Fifield dismissed the many passages in the New Testament about wealth and poverty and instead worked tirelessly to reconcile Christianity and capitalism. In his view, both systems rested on a basic belief that individuals would succeed or fail on their own merit. Although Fifield was not the first to suggest such connections, he put those theories into action in ways unlike any

before him. At First Congregational and elsewhere, the minister reached out warmly to the wealthy, assuring them that their worldly success was a sign of God’s blessings and brushing off the criticism of clergymen who disagreed. “I have smiled,” he reflected later in life, “when critics of mine have called me the Thirteenth Apostle of Big Business or the St. Paul of the Prosperous.”<sup>14</sup>

While Fifield took a loose approach to the Bible, he was a strict constructionist with the Constitution. Much like the millionaires to whom he ministered, Fifield had watched in alarm as Roosevelt convinced vast majorities of Americans that unfettered capitalism had crippled the nation and that the federal government now needed to play an important new role in regulating the free market’s risks and redistributing its rewards. For Fifield and his flock, Roosevelt’s actions violated not just the Constitution but the natural order of things. In December 1939, the minister placed a full-page ad in the *Los Angeles Times* decrying the New Deal as antithetical to the designs of the founding fathers. “From the beginning,” the ad read, “America has built on the ideal of government which provides that the state is the servant of its citizens, that all just powers of government arise from consent of the governed, and that government’s function is to provide maximum responsibility and maximum freedom to individual citizens. The opposite philosophy has been unwelcome in America until recently.” The New Deal, it continued, posed a dire threat to the American way of life, and it was the duty of clergymen to save the nation’s soul. In their crusade against the wanton growth of government, the church would find natural allies in corporate America because both were committed at their core to the “preservation of basic freedom in this nation.” “Goodness and Christian ideals run proportionately high among businessmen,” the ad assured. “They need no defense, for with all their faults, they have given America within the last decade a new world-high in general economic well-being.”<sup>15</sup>

To lead his crusade in defense of freedom, Fifield offered the services of Spiritual Mobilization. He had founded the organization in the spring of 1935 with a pair of like-minded intellectuals, President Donald J. Cowling of Carleton College, a doctrinally liberal graduate of Yale Divinity School, and Professor William Hocking of Harvard University, a libertarian philosopher. The organization’s founding goal was “to arouse

the ministers of all denominations in America to check the trends toward pagan stateism, which would destroy our basic freedom and spiritual ideals." Soon Fifield took sole control, running its operations from his offices in Los Angeles. The organization's credo reflected the common politics of the minister and the millionaires in his congregation. It held that men were creatures of God imbued with "inalienable rights and responsibilities," specifically enumerated as "the liberty and dignity of the individual, in which freedom of choice, of enterprise and of property is inherent." Churches, it asserted, had a solemn duty to defend those rights against the encroachments of the state. Heeding this call, the First Congregational Church formally took charge of Spiritual Mobilization in 1938.<sup>16</sup>

With First Congregational now supporting it, Fifield brought the organization into national politics. He began by simply distributing copies of the political speeches he delivered from the pulpit. In one such pamphlet, Fifield detailed at great lengths the "grievous sin" of the New Deal state, which had wreaked havoc on the professional and personal lives of upstanding businessmen with its unwarranted meddling in their affairs. "The President of the United States and his administration are responsible for the willful or unconscious destruction of thrift, initiative, industriousness and resourcefulness which have been among our best assets since Pilgrim days," he charged. "I speak of the intimate, personal observations I have made of individuals who have lost their ideal, their purpose and their motive through the New Deal's destruction of spiritual rootage." It wasn't merely the rich who were suffering but all Americans. "Every Christian should oppose the totalitarian trends of the New Deal," he warned in another tract. Dismissing Roosevelt's promises of progress, Fifield called for a return to traditional values. "The way out for America is not ahead but back," he insisted. "How far back? Back as far as the old Gospel which exalted individuals, which placed responsibility for thought on individuals, and which insisted that individuals should be free spirits under God."<sup>17</sup>

These pamphlets from Spiritual Mobilization drew attention from leading conservatives across America, men who were eager to enlist the clergy in their fight against the New Deal. Former president Herbert Hoover, who had been deposed by Roosevelt and disparaged by his acolytes, encouraged Fifield in personal meetings and regular correspondence.

“If it would be possible for the Church to make a non-biased investigation into the morals of this government,” Hoover wrote the minister in 1938, “they would find everywhere the old negation of Christianity that ‘the end justifies the means.’” (“Aside from all that,” he added, “I do not believe that the end they are trying to get to is any good either.”) In October 1938, Fifield sent an alarmist tract to more than seventy thousand ministers across the nation, seeking to enlist them in the revolt against Roosevelt. “We ministers have special opportunities and special responsibilities in these critical days,” it began. “America’s movement toward dictatorship has already eliminated checks and balances in its concentration of powers in our chief executive.” The New Deal undermined the spirit of Christianity and demanded a response from Christ’s representatives on earth. “If, with Jesus, we believe in the sacredness of individual personalities, then our leadership responsibility is very plain.” This duty was “not an easy one,” he cautioned. “We may be called unpatriotic and accused of ‘selling out,’ but so was Jesus.” Finding the leaflet to his liking, Hoover sent Fifield a warm note of appreciation and urged him to press on.<sup>18</sup>

As the 1930s drew to a close, these conservatives watched with delight as the New Deal stumbled. Though they had hoped to destroy the Roosevelt administration themselves, its wounds were largely self-inflicted. In 1937, the president’s labor allies launched a series of sit-down strikes that secured union recognition at corporations such as General Motors and US Steel but also roused sympathy for seemingly beleaguered businessmen. At the same time, Roosevelt overreached with his proposal to “pack” the Supreme Court with new justices, a move that played into the hands of those who sought to portray him as dictatorial in intent. Most significant, though, was his ill-fated decision to rein in federal spending in an effort to balance the budget. The impressive economic recovery of Roosevelt’s first term suddenly stalled, and the country entered a short but sharp recession in the winter of 1937–1938. As the New Deal faltered, Fifield began to look forward to the next presidential election—in “the critical year 1940”—when conservatives might finally rout the architects of the regulatory state. To his dismay, international tensions soon marginalized domestic politics and prompted the country to rally around Roosevelt again. “Our Mobilization program is developing somewhat,” Fifield reported to Hoover in May 1941, “although, of course, under great

difficulties in view of current tensions and trends.” An ardent isolationist, Fifield argued strongly for neutrality in the coming conflict but found his prayers unanswered.<sup>19</sup>

Unable to keep America out of the Second World War, Fifield resolved to use it for his own ends. Pointing to the fascist dictatorships of the Axis powers as examples of “pagan stateism,” he urged Americans to support Spiritual Mobilization as a bulwark against the coming threat. In a series of newspaper advertisements, the organization convinced nearly two million Christians to sign its official pledge. As originally written in June 1940, the pledge simply stated concern that the “rising tides of paganism and apostasy” around the globe were a threat to freedom. But as the war continued, Fifield began focusing on enemies at home. By 1944, the Spiritual Mobilization pledge had taken a more clearly partisan form: “Recognizing the anti-Christian and anti-American trends toward pagan stateism in America, I covenant to oppose them in all my areas of influence. I will use every opportunity to champion basic freedoms [of the] free pulpit, free speech, free enterprise, free press, and free assembly.”<sup>20</sup>

As the distraction of the foreign war drew to a close, Fifield looked forward to renewing the fight against the New Deal. The minister now counted on the support of not just Hoover but an impressive array of conservative figures in politics, business, and religion. The advisory committee for Spiritual Mobilization’s wartime pledge was, in the words of one observer, “a who’s who of the conservative establishment.” At mid-decade, its twenty-four-man roster included three past or present presidents of the US Chamber of Commerce, a leading Wall Street analyst, a prominent economist at the American Banking Association, the founder of the National Small Businessmen’s Association, a US congressman, Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, a few notable authors and lecturers, and the presidents of the California Institute of Technology, Stanford University, the University of California, the University of Florida, and Princeton Theological Seminary.<sup>21</sup>

In Spiritual Mobilization’s publications, these corporate leaders and conservative intellectuals strove to convince clergymen to reject the New Deal state. The organization’s annual bulletin, distributed to seventy thousand “carefully selected ministers of all denominations,” warned of the dangers of unchecked government power. The 1944 iteration, for instance, challenged Roosevelt’s famous claim that Americans cherished “Four

Freedoms”: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. “Within ever-narrowing limits, we still have freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly and worship,” noted conservative author Channing Pollock, “but freedom of enterprise, of labor, and of the smallest concerns of our daily lives are gone with the wind from Washington. Instead we are offered the preposterous and impossible ‘Four Freedoms’ of slaves and convicts.” The omens of a domestic dictatorship were clear, Senator Albert Hawkes agreed. “After careful examination of the records during the past ten years, one can only conclude that there is the objective of the assumption of greater power and control by the government over individual life. If these policies continue,” he warned, “they will lead to state direction and control of all the lives of our citizens. That is the goal of Federal planners. That is NOT the desire of the American people!”<sup>22</sup>

The organization’s national ambitions soon stretched its budget beyond even the ample resources of First Congregational, leading Fifield to search for new sponsors. In December 1944, Hawkes arranged a meeting with an elite group of industrialists at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York. Fifield found the audience to be just as receptive as the one he had addressed there four years before. After the meeting, the attendees dedicated themselves to raising funds for Spiritual Mobilization through corporate donations, personal checks, and solicitations from their friends and associates. Harvey Firestone, for instance, secured a donation at “the suggested maximum level” of \$5,000 from his firm and promised to “work out a studied approach to two other rubber companies in Akron.” H. W. Prentis Jr., meanwhile, sent Fifield the names of “twenty or twenty-five industrialists in this part of the country” from whom he could solicit funds. After Fifield wrote them, the former NAM president followed up with unobtrusive messages of his own. Prentis noted that he personally had funded Spiritual Mobilization’s work “in behalf of sound American Christian principles” and asked that they “give the movement some financial assistance” as well.<sup>23</sup>

FIFIELD WON A NUMBER OF powerful patrons that year, but none was more important—not simply in terms of supporting Spiritual Mobilization financially but also in shaping its growth and effectiveness—than

J. Howard Pew Jr., president of Sun Oil. Tall and stiff, with bushy eyebrows, Pew had a stern appearance that was matched by his attitude. As a US senator once remarked, “He not only talks like an affidavit, he looks like one.”<sup>24</sup> In theological terms, the doctrinally conservative Presbyterian had little in common with the liberal Congregationalist Fifield.<sup>25</sup> “He is far more modernistic in his religious views than I like,” Pew confided to a friend, “and I am not sure his views on the divinity of Christ are sound.” Politically, though, the two were in complete agreement, and that was what mattered most. During the 1930s, Pew had emerged as the voice of conservatism in corporate America, holding prominent positions in industrial organizations such as NAM and, more notably, serving as a driving force behind the American Liberty League. In his letter appealing for Pew’s support, Fifield offered words of flattery that had the benefit of being true. “During the last decade I have been pretty active in connection with the fight to perpetuate our American way of doing things and have had contacts with most of the individuals and groups throughout the country who are working upon that same problem,” he noted. “I just want to put in writing the fact that I have found no more steadfast, trustworthy, competent champion of our basic freedoms and spiritual ideals than J. Howard Pew.”<sup>26</sup>

Pew believed the postwar era would see a new struggle for the soul of the nation. In a letter to Fifield at the end of 1944, he lamented that “the New Deal is in a much stronger position than it has been for the last several years. It is my judgment that within the next two years America will determine whether our children are to live in a Republic or under National Socialism; and the present Administration is definitely committed to the latter course.” The oilman wanted to keep up the fight against Roosevelt, but after the “character assassination” he had suffered during his time in the Liberty League, he hoped others would take the lead. Fifield impressed him as a promising candidate. Looking over some material from Spiritual Mobilization, Pew believed the organization shared his understanding of what was wrong with the nation and what needed to be done generally. But to his dismay, the material offered no agenda for action whatsoever, merely noting that Spiritual Mobilization would send clergymen bulletins and place advertisements but ultimately “leave details” of what to do “to individual ministers.” Pew thought this was no way

to run a national operation. “I am frank to confess,” he wrote a confidant, “that if Dr. Fifield has developed a concrete program and knows exactly where he is going and what he expects to accomplish, that conception has never become clearly defined in my mind.”<sup>27</sup>

If Pew felt Fifield’s touch with the ministers had been too light, he knew that a more forceful approach would likewise fail. NAM had been making direct appeals to ministers for years, targeting them with outreach campaigns and mass mailings in hopes of swinging them over to industry’s side. For all the time and energy expended in these efforts, though, their campaign showed little sign of success. To understand just what had gone wrong, Pew reached out to his old friend Alfred Haake. Much like the oilman, Haake had an unshakable faith in the wonder-working powers of both Christianity and capitalism. Among other things, he credited prayer for curing a chronic childhood stutter and launching him on a lucrative career. Even though he had dropped out of high school, Haake worked hard enough later in life to earn a doctorate at Wisconsin and then chair the economics department at Rutgers. He moved on to battle the regulatory agencies of the New Deal as head of a manufacturers’ organization and then serve as a famed industrial consultant for General Motors. Haake was a man, in short, who understood both the problems of big business and the solutions of spirituality.<sup>28</sup>

In February 1945, Haake explained to Pew why the NAM campaign to ministers and others like it had all failed. “Of the approximately thirty preachers to whom I have thus far talked, I have yet to find one who is unqualifiedly impressed,” Haake reported. “One of the men put it almost typically for the rest when he said: ‘The careful preparation and framework for the meetings to which we are brought is too apparent. We cannot help but see that it is expertly designed propaganda and that there must be big money behind it. We easily become suspicious.’” If industrialists wanted to convince clergymen to side with them, they would need a subtler approach. Rather than simply treating ministers as a passive audience to be persuaded, Haake argued, they should involve them actively in the cause as participants. The first step would be making ministers realize that they too had something to fear from the growth of government. “The religious leaders must be helped to discover that their callings are threatened,” Haake argued, by realizing that the “collectivism” of the New Deal,

“with the glorification of the state, is really a denial of God.” Once they were thus alarmed, they would readily join Spiritual Mobilization as its representatives and could then be organized more effectively into a force for change both locally and nationally.<sup>29</sup>

Haake was so optimistic about the potential of a mass movement of ministers organized through Spiritual Mobilization that he signed on to become director of the Chicago office, with the entire Midwest as his domain. Together, Haake and Fifield resolved to build a real organization in the ranks of the clergy. “The goal,” Haake stated, “should be at least one active and strong ministerial representative for every city in the United States, and even into the villages and towns.” They worked quickly, increasing the number of ministers affiliated with the organization from little more than four hundred in June 1944 to over eighteen hundred in September 1945. Spread across all forty-eight states, these “minister-representatives” were largely concentrated in industrial regions, with New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Illinois leading the way. They were overwhelmingly Protestant, with high numbers of Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Lutherans in particular. Still, a scattering of priests and rabbis among the ranks allowed the organization to present itself as part of the new spirit of “Judeo-Christianity” that was then coming into vogue in the United States. This innovative “interfaith” approach had taken shape in the previous decade as a way for liberal clergymen to unite Protestants, Catholics, and Jews in common social causes, and now, in the postwar era, conservative organizations such as Spiritual Mobilization shrewdly followed suit.<sup>30</sup>

The national campaign to enlist the clergy required even more funding. In May 1946, Senator Hawkes arranged for Fifield to meet with another prominent group of businessmen in New York that included Donaldson Brown, vice chairman of General Motors; Jasper Crane, a former DuPont executive; Harry L. Derby, president of the American Cyanamid and Chemical Corporation; and Leonard Read, a former head of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce (and another powerful member of Fifield’s First Congregational Church), who had recently launched the Foundation for Economic Education, a pro-business think tank. Fifield easily sold them on Spiritual Mobilization, pointing to past accomplishments and noting rapid growth at the grassroots. “We have 3,517

committed representatives of our program in all the major cities and communities of the United States,” he reported, “and we expect before Easter 1947 to have 10,000. The program is gaining favor.” Duly impressed, the new Businessmen’s Advisory Committee for Spiritual Mobilization took charge of its fund-raising efforts and promised to support an “expanded program and budget of \$170,000” from then on.<sup>31</sup>

With the new financial support and sense of direction, Spiritual Mobilization underwent a massive overhaul. In February 1947, Fifield reported that he had already reached their goal for “the signing of ten thousand ministers as representatives.” This national network of clergymen would be the primary channel through which the work and writings of Spiritual Mobilization would flow. In a new monthly publication that bore the organization’s name, Fifield ran a column—with the businesslike heading “Director to Representatives”—devoted to marshaling these ministers to achieve their common goal of defeating the New Deal. Fifield repeatedly warned them that the growth of government had crippled not only individual initiative but personal morality as well. “It is time to exalt the dignity of individual man as a child of God, to exalt Jesus’ concept of man’s sacredness and to rebuild a moral fabric based on such irreducibles as the Ten Commandments,” he urged his minister-representatives. “Let’s redouble our efforts.”<sup>32</sup>

Clergymen responded enthusiastically. Many ministers wrote the Los Angeles office to request copies of Friedrich Hayek’s libertarian treatise *The Road to Serfdom* and anti-New Deal tracts by Herbert Hoover and libertarian author Garet Garrett, all of which had been advertised in *Spiritual Mobilization*. Some sought reprints of the bulletin itself. “I found your last issue of Spiritual Mobilization excellent,” a Connecticut clergyman reported. “Could you send me 100 copies to distribute to key people in my parish? I am quite anxious to get my people thinking along this line.” Others took more indirect routes in spreading the organization’s message. “Occasionally I preach a sermon directly on your theme,” a midwestern minister wrote, “but equally important, it is in the background of my thought as I prepare all my sermons, meet various groups and individuals.” As it shaped his work inside his own church, the organization also helped him connect with like-minded clergymen nearby. “Being a representative,” he wrote, “developed a real sense of fellowship

and understanding between me and some other ministers in our community who share Mobilization's convictions and concerns."<sup>33</sup>

As local bonds between these ministers strengthened, national ones did as well. In October 1947, Spiritual Mobilization held a sermon competition on the theme "The Perils to Freedom," with \$5,000 in total prize money. The organization had more than twelve thousand minister-representatives at that point, but it received twice as many submissions for the competition—representing roughly 15 percent of the entire country's clergymen. "I have profited from the materials you are sending," noted the minister of University Park Methodist Church in Dallas, "and am glad to add my bit to help the people of America recognize and accept the responsibilities of freedom as well as its privileges." The pastor at Pittsburgh's Trinity Lutheran Church agreed, calling the sermon competition "a concentrated and remarkable contribution to the cause of freedom." From Providence, Rhode Island, the minister of French Town Baptist Church echoed them: "I hope that this plan of Spiritual Mobilization, to have a great block of ministers in all parts of our great country in a concerted movement preaching upon the one subject, Perils [to] Freedom, will attract attention and cause a great awakening."<sup>34</sup>

Fifield's backers in the Businessmen's Advisory Committee were so pleased with his progress that they nearly doubled the annual budget. To raise funds, its members secured sizable donations from their own companies and personal accounts and, more important, reached out to colleagues across the corporate world for their donations as well. Pew once again set the pace, soliciting donations from officials at 158 corporations. "A large percentage of ministers in this country are completely ignorant of economic matters and have used their pulpits for the purpose of disseminating socialistic and totalitarian doctrines," he wrote in his appeal. "Much has already been accomplished in the education of these ministers, but a great deal more is left to be done." Many of the corporations he contacted—including General Motors, Chrysler, Republic Steel, National Steel, International Harvester, Firestone Tire and Rubber, Sun Oil, Gulf Oil, Standard Oil of New Jersey, and Colgate-Palmolive-Peet—were already contributing the maximum allowable annual donation. Other leading businesses, from US Steel to the National Cash Register Company, had donated in the past, but Pew hoped they would commit to the limit

as well. Recognizing that there were many conservative groups out there “fighting for our American way of life,” Pew assured a colleague in the oil industry that Spiritual Mobilization deserved to be “at the top of the list” when it came time to donate, “because recent polls indicated that of all the groups in America, the ministers had more to do with molding public opinion.”<sup>35</sup>

The success of Spiritual Mobilization brought increased funding, but also the scrutiny and scorn of progressives. In February 1948, journalist Carey McWilliams wrote an acidic cover story on it for *The Nation*. “With the ‘Save Christianity’ and the ‘Save Western Capitalism’ chants becoming almost indistinguishable, a major battle for the minds of the clergy, particularly those of the Protestant persuasion, is now being waged in America,” he began. “For the most part the battle lines are honestly drawn and represent a sharp clash in ideologies, but now and then the reactionary side tries to fudge a bit by backing movements which mask their true character and real sponsors. Such a movement is Spiritual Mobilization.” McWilliams explained to his readers the scope of its operations, noting that it now had nine organizers working in high-rent offices in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles and had distributed hundreds of thousands of pamphlets by pro-business authors for free. But no one knew who was funding the operation, McWilliams warned. There had only been vague statements from Fifield that “non-ministers who have a common stake in the American and Christian traditions cannot contribute service” and that it was “only natural that they give substance instead.” In McWilliams’s withering account, Fifield came off as a charlatan who prostrated himself before the “apostles of rugged individualism” to secure his own fame and fortune and, in return, prostituted himself for their needs.<sup>36</sup>

In response, Spiritual Mobilization’s sponsors redoubled their efforts. Charles White, president of the Republic Steel Corporation in Cleveland, sent out a mass mailing defending Fifield as “one of my personal friends.” The relationship was not surprising. Republic Steel had long led corporate resistance to the New Deal’s expansion of labor rights, most dramatically in the 1937 “Memorial Day Massacre,” when ten striking workers were gunned down by policemen outside one of its factories in Chicago. “Our company has supported his Crusade, generously, for some years,” White wrote, “and we believe in it deeply—the more so since I

have read this irresponsible article and see how ‘the opposition’ feels about Spiritual Mobilization.” The group “ought to have more support.” “Why don’t you send a cheque at once,” he all but ordered. “I consider this very important and suggest prompt and generous action on your part.” By all appearances, the appeal worked. In just a few months, Spiritual Mobilization had an additional \$86,000 in hand from thirty-nine corporate donors, with expectations of nearly \$39,000 more to come from another nineteen. In August, the board of directors decided to accept even greater levels of corporate giving, doubling the maximum allowable donation to \$10,000 a year.<sup>37</sup>

These corporate leaders increased their commitment to Spiritual Mobilization because they believed there was a fast-expanding totalitarian threat that endangered the nation. Although these were the early years of the Cold War panic, these businessmen were alarmed less by the foreign threat of the Soviet Union and more by the domestic menace of liberalism, which had been recently reinvigorated by President Truman’s surprising reelection in 1948. In their private correspondence, Fifield and his funders made it perfectly clear that the main threat to the American way of life, as they saw it, came from Washington, not Moscow. “There is a very much accelerated response to the efforts of Spiritual Mobilization,” Fifield confided, “because it is so obvious that the battle to collectivize America is really on, and on in earnest since the announcement of President Truman’s legislative program.” Pew wholeheartedly agreed. “According to my book there are five principal issues before the country: The socialization of industry, the socialization of medicine, the socialization of education, the socialization of labor, and the socialization of security,” he noted. “Only through education and the pressure which the people exert on their politicians can we hope to prevent this country from becoming a totalitarian state.”<sup>38</sup>

To educate Americans about the impending threat, Spiritual Mobilization took an even more aggressive approach to public relations in 1949. First it launched *The Freedom Story*, a fifteen-minute radio program consisting of a dramatic presentation and brief commentary from Fifield. The broadcasts were marketed to stations as a means of fulfilling their public service requirements in a way that would attract listeners. This allowed the organization to secure free airtime for the program, but it also

dictated significant changes in its content. In the original scripts, Fifield had directly attacked the Democrats, but his lawyer warned him about being “too plain spoken.” “I admire your determination not to side-step the issues,” he wrote, but “you can only go so far with respect to currently controversial and specific issues without disqualifying the program as a public service feature.” As a solution, his counsel suggested that Fifield use “from time to time a horrible example from current experience in the socialist and communist countries of Europe and Asia. We could go as far as we want in that field in the dramatic part of the program,” he continued, “and your speech could be developed in such a way as to make it plain enough to your radio audience that we are heading for the same kind of situation here.”<sup>39</sup>

Accordingly, the topics dramatized and discussed on *The Freedom Story* varied considerably, even as the underlying message about the dangers of “creeping socialism” remained a constant. Heeding the advice of his legal counsel, Fifield relied on foreign examples to illustrate the issue, decrying the impact of collectivism in communist lands. But the minister tackled domestic subjects as well. One week, the show explored Reconstruction, claiming that southern states had thrived without federal policies or subsidies after the Civil War; the next, it celebrated the history of the Boy Scouts, arguing that the private organization’s success stemmed directly from a lack of government meddling.<sup>40</sup> Fifield’s financial backers helped secure free airtime for these programs across the nation. “Republic Steel is taking steps to get them on radio stations in every town where they have a factory or office,” Fifield noted in March 1949. “We are expecting to be on one hundred fifty radio stations by June.” A year later, *The Freedom Story* was broadcast on a weekly network of over five hundred stations; by late 1951, it aired on more than eight hundred.<sup>41</sup>

Meanwhile, Spiritual Mobilization launched a new monthly magazine, *Faith and Freedom*, edited by veteran journalist William Johnson. The publication printed the work of an expanding network of libertarian and conservative authors, including Ludwig von Mises, leader of the Austrian School of economics; Leonard Read, founder of the Foundation for Economic Education; Henry Hazlitt, a founding member of the American Enterprise Association (later renamed the American Enterprise Institute); Clarence Manion, a former dean of Notre Dame’s College

of Law who became a noted right-wing radio host in the 1950s; Felix Morley, founder of the far-right journal *Human Events*; and Rose Wilder Lane, who had cowritten the *Little House on the Prairie* series with her mother before attacking the “creeping socialism” of the New Deal in her own work.<sup>42</sup>

While libertarian and conservative laymen dominated the pages of *Faith and Freedom*, the journal purposely presented itself as created *by* ministers *for* ministers. Spiritual Mobilization had long operated on the principle that clergymen could not be swayed through crude propaganda. “The articulation should be worked out before-hand, of course, and we should be ready to help the thinking of the ministers on it,” Haake noted in one of his early musings on Spiritual Mobilization, “but it should be so done as to enable them to discover it for themselves, as something which they really had believed but not realized fully until our questions brought it out so clearly. I am sure we may not TELL them: not as laymen, or even as fellow clergymen. We must help them to discover it themselves.” The new magazine embraced this approach wholeheartedly. “We know there are countless questions unanswered about individual liberty,” Johnson announced in the first issue. “We want a magazine which will serve the ministers who will shape the answers to these questions, a magazine which will stimulate them, a magazine which will challenge them, a magazine which will earn a place in their busy schedules.” *Faith and Freedom* sought input from subscribers, not simply printing letters but soliciting sermons that expounded on “the moral and spiritual significance of individual liberty” for publication in a monthly feature called “The Pulpit and Liberty.” Ultimately, Johnson argued, the magazine would receive a great deal of its direction from the clergymen who read it. “We shall,” he wrote, “depend heavily on ministerial guidance and criticism in developing a useful periodical for you.”<sup>43</sup>

*Faith and Freedom* thus presented itself as an open forum in which ministers could debate a wide variety of issues and disagree freely. But there was an important catch. “Clergymen may differ about politics, economics, sociology, and such,” Fifield stated, “but I would expect that in matters of morality all followers of Jesus speak in one voice.” Because Fifield and Johnson insisted that morality directly informed politics and economics, they were able to cast those who disagreed with them on those

topics as essentially immoral. For his part, Fifield claimed he approached all issues with an open mind and a desire to follow God's will. “There have been many solutions suggested for meeting today's and tomorrow's problems, and there will be more,” he noted in his first column. “Before we accept any proposal or remedy, we have the obligation to measure it, not only as to its probable effectiveness, but as to whether the proposal does not conflict with Christian principle and the spiritual values of liberty and personal responsibility.” Not surprisingly, when Fifield held liberal proposals to this standard, they always fell short. Time and time again, he condemned a variety of “socialistic laws,” such as ones supporting minimum wages, price controls, Social Security pensions for the elderly, unemployment insurance, veterans' benefits, and the like, as well as a wide range of federal taxation that he deemed to be “tyrannical” in nature. In the end, he judged, such policies violated “the natural law which inheres in the nature of the universe and is the will of God.”<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, for all of its claims about encouraging debate, *Faith and Freedom* did little to hide its contempt for liberal ministers. The magazine repeatedly denounced the Social Gospel and, just as important, clergymen who invoked it to advocate for the establishment and expansion of welfare state programs. Johnson even devoted an entire issue to the subject. “The movement is directed by a small, unusually articulate minority who feel political power is the way to save the world,” he warned in his opening comments. “Unclothed, their gospel is pure socialism—they wish to employ the compulsion of the state to force others to act as the social gospels think they should act.” Irving Howard, a Congregationalist minister, darkly noted the “pagan origin of the Social Gospel” in nineteenth-century Unitarianism and Transcendentalism, claiming it was part of a larger “impetus to a shift in faith from God to man, from eternity to time, from the individual to the group, [from] individual conversion to social coercion, and from the church to the state.” Other contributors drew ominous comparisons between the Social Gospel and similarly suspect ideologies. “Communism aims to destroy the capitalist minority no matter what killing, stealing, lying, and covetousness are required,” argued one. “The Social Gospel calls for the destruction of this minority by the more peaceful means of the popular vote, to put it bluntly, by *socialized* covetousness, stealing, and the bearing of false witness.”<sup>45</sup>

Consistently libertarian, the contributors to *Faith and Freedom* varied only in terms of style and sophistication. The June 1950 issue, for instance, featured four articles, each advancing the same message from different angles. In the first, George S. Benson, president of conservative Harding College, offered a folksy parable about a group of seagulls who let themselves be fed by shrimp boats and soon forgot how to care for themselves. “The moral,” the author noted for those who somehow missed it: “A welfare state, for gull or man, always first destroys the priceless attribute of self-reliance.” Next, Ludwig von Mises advanced a sophisticated argument to disprove “the passionate tirades of Marx, Keynes and a host of less well-known authors.” Prominent missionary R. J. Rushdoony then explained how “noncompetitive life” on a Native American reservation, which he called “the prime example in America today of a functioning welfare society,” inevitably reduced its residents to a state of “social and personal irresponsibility.” The fourth and final article, “Human Rights and Property Rights,” by industrial relations author Allen W. Rucker, asserted that any effort to take control of private property was “in direct violation of the Commandment, ‘Thou shalt not steal.’ That Commandment is not limited in the slightest degree; it is an adjuration laid upon all men, whether acting as individuals, as an organization, or as a state.”<sup>46</sup>

Conservatives concerned about the “creeping socialism” of the welfare state under Truman were emboldened by the Republican gains in the midterm elections of 1950. In an upbeat letter to Alfred Sloan, the head of General Motors and an ardent supporter of his work, Fifield reflected on the recent returns. “We are having quite a deluge of letters from across the country, indicating the feeling that Spiritual Mobilization has had some part in the awakening which was evidenced by the elections,” he wrote. “Of course, we are a little proud and very happy for whatever good we have been able to do in waking people up to the peril of collectivism and the importance of Freedom under God.” But the battle was far from won. “I do not consider that we can relax our efforts in any way or at any point,” Fifield noted. “It is still a long road back to what was and, please God, will again be America.”<sup>47</sup>

For Fifield and his associates, the phrase “freedom under God”—in contrast with what they saw as oppression under the federal government—became an effective new rallying cry in the early 1950s. The minister

pressed the theme repeatedly in the pages of *Faith and Freedom* and in his radio broadcasts of *The Freedom Story*, but he soon found a more prominent means of spreading the message to the American people.<sup>48</sup>

IN THE SPRING OF 1951, Spiritual Mobilization's leaders struck upon an idea they believed would advance their cause considerably. To mark the 175th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, they proposed for the week surrounding the Fourth of July a massive series of events devoted to the theme of “Freedom Under God.” According to Fifield's longtime ally William C. Mullendore, president of the Southern California Edison Company, the idea originated from the belief that the “root cause of the disintegration of freedom here, and of big government, is the disintegration of the nation's spiritual foundations, as found in the Declaration of Independence. We want to revive that basic American credo, which is the spiritual basis of our Constitution.”<sup>49</sup>

To that end, in June 1951, the leaders of Spiritual Mobilization announced the formation of a new Committee to Proclaim Liberty to coordinate their Fourth of July “Freedom Under God” celebrations. The committee's name, they explained to a crowd of reporters, came from the tenth verse of the twenty-fifth chapter of the Book of Leviticus, in which God instructed Moses that the Israelites should celebrate the anniversary of their arrival in the Promised Land and “proclaim liberty throughout all the land and to the inhabitants thereof.” This piece of Scripture, organizers noted, was also inscribed on the crown of the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. The committee originally had just fifty-six members, equal to the number of signers of the Declaration, but the list quickly expanded as others clamored for a place. Although the committee claimed to seek a spiritual emphasis for the upcoming holiday, very few religious leaders actually served in its ranks. Indeed, aside from Fifield and his longtime friend Norman Vincent Peale, the founding ministerial members of the committee included only a liberal Methodist bishop, G. Bromley Oxnam; the Catholic bishop of the Oklahoma City–Tulsa diocese; and a rabbi from Kansas City.<sup>50</sup>

The true goal of the Committee to Proclaim Liberty was advancing conservatism. Its two most prominent members had been brought

low by Democratic administrations: former president Herbert Hoover, driven from the White House two decades earlier by Franklin Roosevelt, and General Douglas MacArthur, removed from his command in Korea two months earlier by Harry Truman. These conservative martyrs were joined by military leaders, heads of patriotic groups, conservative legal and political stars, right-wing media figures, and outspoken conservatives from the realm of entertainment, such as Bing Crosby, Cecil B. DeMille, Walt Disney and Ronald Reagan. But the majority came from corporate America. J. Howard Pew was joined by other business titans, such as Conrad Hilton of Hilton Hotels, B. E. Hutchinson of Chrysler, James L. Kraft of Kraft Foods, Hughston McBain of Marshall Field, Admiral Ben Moreell of Jones & Laughlin Steel, Eddie Rickenbacker of Eastern Airlines, and Charles E. Wilson of General Motors. The interest of leading businessmen in the endeavor was so strong that the committee was forced to expand its ranks to make room for the others clamoring for a spot, including household names such as Harvey Firestone, E. F. Hutton, Fred Maytag, Henry Luce, and J. C. Penney, as well as the less well-known heads of US Steel, Republic Steel, Gulf Oil, Hughes Aircraft, and United Airlines. The presidents of both the United States Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers served, as did the heads of free enterprise advocacy organizations such as the Foundation for Economic Education and the Freedoms Foundation. As a token counterweight to this overwhelming corporate presence, the Committee to Proclaim Liberty included a single labor leader: Matthew Woll, a vice president with the American Federation of Labor, but more important, a lifelong Republican well known for his outspoken opposition to industrial unions and New Deal labor legislation.<sup>51</sup>

As the Fourth of July drew near, the Committee to Proclaim Liberty focused its attention on encouraging Americans to mark the holiday with public readings of the preamble to the Declaration of Independence. The decision to focus solely on the preamble was in some ways a natural one, as its passages were certainly the most famous and lyrical in the document. But doing so also allowed organizers to reframe the Declaration as a purely libertarian manifesto, dedicated to the removal of an oppressive government. Those who read the entire document would have discovered,

to the consternation of the committee, that the founding fathers followed the high-flown prose of the preamble with a long list of grievances about the *absence* of government and rule of law in the colonies. Among other things, they lambasted King George III for refusing “his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good,” for forbidding his governors from passing “Laws of immediate and pressing importance,” for dissolving the legislative bodies in the colonies, and for generally enabling a state of anarchy that exposed colonists to “all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.” In the end, the Declaration was not a rejection of government power in general but rather a condemnation of the British crown for depriving the colonists of the government they needed. In order to reframe the Declaration as something rather different, the Committee to Proclaim Liberty had to edit out much of the document they claimed to champion. Even their version of the preamble was truncated. They excised a final line about the specific plight of the colonists and ended instead on one that better resonated with their contemporary political aims: “When a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.”<sup>52</sup>

The committee’s corporate sponsors took out full-page newspaper ads to promote this pinched interpretation of the Declaration. The San Diego Gas & Electric Company, for instance, encouraged its customers to reread the preamble, which it presented with its editorial commentary running alongside:

These words are the stones upon which man has built history’s greatest work—the United States of America. Remember them well!

“ . . . **all men are created equal** . . . ” That means you are as important in the eyes of God as any man brought into this world. You are made in his image and likeness. There is no “superior” man anywhere.

“ . . . **they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights** . . . ” Here is your birthright—the freedom to live, work, worship, and vote as you choose. These are rights no government on earth may take from you.

“ . . . **That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men . . .**” Here is the reason for and the purpose of government. Government is but a servant—not a master—not a giver of anything.

“ . . . **deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed . . .**” In America, the government may assume only the powers you allow it to have. It may assume no others.

The ad urged readers to make their own declaration of independence in 1951. “Declare that government is responsible TO you—rather than FOR you,” it continued. “Declare that freedom is more important to you than ‘security’ or ‘survival.’ Declare that the rights God gave you may not be taken away by any government on any pretense.” Other utilities offered similar ads. The Detroit Edison Company, for instance, quoted at length from a Clarence Manion piece first published by the original Heritage Foundation. “Despotism never advertises itself as such,” Manion warned. “By its own sly self-definition it may label itself ‘democratic,’ ‘progressive,’ ‘liberal,’ ‘humanitarian,’ or ‘fraternal.’ Those who oppose it will be called reactionaries, fascists, and other ‘bad names.’” The Utah Power & Light Company, meanwhile, cut right to the chase in a full-page ad with the alarmist headline “How many ‘Independence Days’ have we left?” The utility company implored readers to “pray for help in maintaining man’s closeness to God, in preserving man’s God-given rights and responsibilities against those who would make you dependent upon a socialistic, all-powerful government.”<sup>53</sup>

The Committee to Proclaim Liberty also enlisted the nation’s ministers to promote the “Freedom Under God” festivities. Those on the Spiritual Mobilization mailing list received a suggested press release that merely needed clergymen to fill in the blanks with their personal information (“‘The purpose of the Committee,’ the Reverend \_\_\_\_\_ declared, ‘is to revive a custom long forgotten in America—spiritual emphasis on the 4th of July’”). The committee also established a sermon contest, modeled on the wildly successful “Perils to Freedom” competition that Spiritual Mobilization had held in 1947. The seventeen thousand minister-representatives of the organization were encouraged to compete for cash prizes and other rewards by writing an original sermon on the



Kansas. “It would be well to remember that every act or law passed by which the government promises to ‘give’ us something is a step in the direction of socialism.” A clergyman from Brooklyn agreed. “Today our homes are built for us, financed for us, and the church is provided for us. Our many services are in danger of robbing us of that which is most important,” he warned, “the right to our own kingdom of self.” “The growing acceptance of the philosophy of the Welfare State is a graver peril to freedom in America today than the threat of military aggression,” cautioned a Missouri Baptist. A Congregationalist minister in Illinois advanced the same argument: “People have been encouraged to believe that a benevolent government exists for the sole purpose of ministering to the selfish interest of the individual. We have achieved the four freedoms: Freedom to ask; freedom to receive; freedom to be a leech; and freedom to loaf.”<sup>55</sup>

First place in the sermon competition went to Reverend Kenneth W. Sollitt, minister of the First Baptist Church of Mendota, Illinois. Published in the September issue of *Faith and Freedom*, his sermon bore the title “Freedom Under God: We Can Go on Making a God of Government, or We Can Return Again to the Government of God.” As the title suggested, it was an extended jeremiad about the sins of the welfare state. Reverend Sollitt decried the national debt, growing federal payrolls, corporate taxation, government bureaucracy in general, and Social Security in particular, while still finding the time and imagination to use the parable of the Good Samaritan as grounds for a diatribe about the evils of “socialized medicine.” “For 175 years we have focused our attention so much on ‘the enjoyment of *our* liberty’ that we have been perfectly willing to pass all kinds of legislation limiting the other fellow’s liberty for our benefit,” he argued. “‘Government of the people, by the people, for the people’ has become government of the people by pressure groups for the benefit of minorities. ‘Give me liberty or give me death’ has been shortened to just plain ‘Give me.’” In the dire tones of an Old Testament prophet, he warned that “America stands at the cross roads.” “The one road leads to the slavery which has always been the lot of those who have chosen collectivism in any of its forms,” he said, be it “communism, socialism, the Welfare State—they are all cut from the same pattern. The other road leads to the only freedom there is”—free enterprise.<sup>56</sup>

The sermons delivered on “Independence Sunday” were amplified by a program broadcast that same evening over CBS’s national radio network. The committee had originally hoped to schedule the broadcast for the Fourth of July itself, but all airtime on the holiday had been reserved. As organizer James Ingebretsen noted, “Even if we had the Lord Himself making a return appearance, we couldn’t get the time.” He quickly warmed to the idea of holding a special program on Sunday instead, both to highlight the spiritual emphasis of the festivities and to build on the momentum of the day’s sermons. The national advertising agency J. Walter Thompson officially promoted the program, but organizers believed that a word-of-mouth campaign from the pulpit would be even more effective. “There will be a couple of hundred thousand ministers across the country who will have had direct word about this program and many of them will definitely be cooperative,” Ingebretsen said in a telephone call with the head of public affairs at CBS. “There will be thirty to forty million people in church that Sunday as usual . . . and we will pick them up just a few hours afterwards instead of three days later.”<sup>57</sup>

The program itself lived up to the organizers’ expectations. Cecil B. DeMille worked with his old friend Fifield to plan the production, giving it a professional tone and attracting an impressive array of Hollywood stars. Jimmy Stewart served as master of ceremonies, while Bing Crosby and Gloria Swanson offered short messages of their own. The preamble to the Declaration was read by Lionel Barrymore, who had posed for promotional photos holding a giant quill and looking at a large piece of parchment inscribed with the words “Freedom Under God Will Save Our Country.” The program featured choral performances of “America” as well as “Heritage,” an epic poem composed by a former leader of the US Chamber of Commerce. The keynote came from General Matthew Ridgway, who interrupted his duties leading American forces in Korea to send an address from Tokyo. He insisted that the founding fathers had been motivated, in large part, by their religious faith. “For them there was no confusion of thought, no uncertainty of objectives, no doubt as to the road they should follow to their goals,” he said. “Theirs was a deep and abiding faith in God, a faith which is still the great reservoir of strength of the American people in this day of great responsibility for their future and the future of the world.”<sup>58</sup>

The “Freedom Under God” festivities reached a crescendo with local celebrations on the Fourth of July. The Committee to Proclaim Liberty coordinated the ringing of church bells across the nation, timed to start precisely at noon and last for a full ten minutes. Cities and small towns across the country scheduled their own events around the bell ringing. In Los Angeles, for instance, the city’s civil defense agency sounded its air raid sirens, in the first test since their installation, resulting in what one newspaper described as “a scream as wild and proud as that of the American eagle.” As bells chimed across the city, residents were encouraged by the committee “to open their doors, sound horns and blow whistles and ring bells, as individual salutes to Freedom.” After the ten minutes of bell ringing, groups gathered in churches and homes to read the preamble to the Declaration together.<sup>59</sup> Both Mayor Fletcher Bowron and Governor Earl Warren, like their counterparts in many other cities and states, issued official proclamations that urged citizens, in Warren’s words, to spend the day reflecting upon “the blessings we enjoy through Freedom under God.”<sup>60</sup> That night, fifty thousand residents attended a massive rally at the Los Angeles Coliseum. Organized under the theme “Freedom Under God Needs You,” the night featured eight circus acts, a jet plane demonstration, and a fireworks display that the local chapter of the American Legion promised would be the largest in the entire country. Reverend Fifield had the honor of offering the invocation for the evening ceremonies, while actor Gregory Peck delivered a dramatic reading of the Declaration’s preamble.<sup>61</sup>

In the end, the Committee to Proclaim Liberty believed, rightly, that its work had made a lasting impression on the nation. “The very words ‘Freedom Under God’ [have] added to the vocabulary of freedom a new term,” the organizers concluded. “It is a significant phrase to people who know that everybody from Stalin on down is paying lip service to freedom until its root meaning is no longer apparent. The term ‘Freedom Under God’ provides a means of identifying and separating conditions which indicate pseudo-freedom, or actual slavery, from those of true freedom.” Citing an outpouring of support for the festivities, the committee resolved to make them an annual tradition and, more important, keep the spirit of its central message alive in American life. The entire nation, its members hoped, would soon think of itself as “under God.”<sup>62</sup>

## CHAPTER 2

# The Great Crusades

ON SEPTEMBER 25, 1949, ROUGHLY five thousand residents of Los Angeles huddled together downtown beneath a massive “canvas cathedral tent” at the corner of Washington and Hill. They had come to this place, in the shadow of the metropolitan courthouse, to hear an evangelical preacher tell them about a judgment that would be handed down by God rather than man. Only thirty years old and still largely unknown, Billy Graham nevertheless made a commanding impression as he strode onto the stage. Dressed sharply in a trim double-breasted suit with his wavy blond hair swept back, he set his square jaw and locked his eyes on the crowd. Drawing on the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah, the preacher told them that their so-called City of Angels shared many of the “wicked ways” of those infamous cities—sexual promiscuity, addictions to drink and “dope,” teenage delinquency, rampant crime—and it would inevitably share their fate of destruction unless its citizens repented and reformed. In many ways, Graham’s sermon that day was a preacher’s perennial, a warning of God’s wrath and a call for penitence. But his message took on unusual urgency because of an event then dominating the news. Just two days earlier, Americans had learned that the Soviet Union now had the atomic bomb.<sup>1</sup>

The energetic young Graham seized on the headlines to make the Armageddon foretold in the New Testament seem imminent. “Communism,” he thundered, “has decided against God, against Christ, against the Bible, and against all religion. Communism is not only an economic

interpretation of life—communism is a religion that is inspired, directed, and motivated by the Devil himself who has declared war against Almighty God.” He urged his audience to get religion not simply for their own salvation but for the salvation of their city and country. Without “an old-fashioned revival,” he warned, “we cannot last!” A virtual unknown when he began this “Christ for Greater Los Angeles” evangelistic campaign, the charismatic preacher rode the rising wave of nuclear anxiety to national prominence. Initial reports in the Hearst papers and wire services were soon followed by longer, glowing stories in *Time*, *Life*, and *Newsweek*. With crowds soon swarming to the outdoor revival, Graham had to extend his stay from the original three weeks to eight in all. When the Los Angeles revival finally came to a close in November 1949, organizers reported that a total of 350,000 people had attended. And Billy Graham had transformed himself into a rising star: a servant of God ready to fight the Cold War.<sup>2</sup>

In the conventional historical narrative, Graham’s dramatic debut on the national stage has been presented as part of a broader story of action and reaction: the Soviet Union discovered the bomb, and the United States rediscovered God. There are, to be sure, some grounds for the argument that the tensions of the early Cold War era helped fuel the religious revival of midcentury America.<sup>3</sup> As Americans confronted the reality that nuclear war might destroy the nation, countless people were certainly driven to prayer. But the spiritual revival of the postwar era was much more than fallout from the nuclear age. Its roots predated the Cold War, and its importance and impact stretched well beyond the concerns of that conflict. Despite all the attention Graham gave foreign threats in his “canvas cathedral” debut, his public ministry—especially in these early years—was much more concerned with domestic matters. He was not alone. Three important movements in the 1940s and early 1950s—the prayer breakfast meetings of Abraham Vereide, Graham’s evangelical revivals, and the presidential campaign of Dwight D. Eisenhower—encouraged the spread of public prayer as a political development whose means and motives were distinct from the drama of the Cold War. Working in lockstep to advance Christian libertarianism, these three movements effectively harnessed Cold War anxieties for an already established campaign against the New Deal.

Just as Spiritual Mobilization used faith to defend free enterprise, these movements called for a return to prayer to advance the same ends. Graham was the most prominent of the new Christian libertarians, a charismatic figure who spread the ideas of forerunners such as Fifield to even broader audiences. In 1954, Graham offered his thoughts on the relationship between Christianity and capitalism in *Nation's Business*, the magazine of the US Chamber of Commerce. "We have the suggestion from Scripture itself that faith and business, properly blended, can be a happy, wholesome, and even profitable mixture," he observed. "Wise men are finding out that the words of the Nazarene: 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these *things* shall be added unto you' were more than the mere rantings of a popular mystic; they embodied a practical, workable philosophy which actually pays off in happiness and peace of mind. . . . Thousands of businessmen have discovered the satisfaction of having God as a working partner."<sup>4</sup>

Billy Graham partnered with a number of businessmen himself. Following the lead of Methodist minister Abraham Vereide, Graham helped introduce captains of industry to the incredible power of prayer. In his hands, prayer was not simply a means of personal salvation but also, and just as important, a tool to improve the public image of their companies. In 1951, for instance, the Chicago & Southern Airline invited him to preach a dedicatory sermon aboard a four-engine airplane that had been outfitted with a pulpit and an electric pump organ. As the crew and congregation circled above Memphis, Graham led them in a solemn prayer that "the great C&S Airline may be blessed as never before." Years later, the minister would touch down in Memphis again to speak before a convention of hotel owners, where he furnished a similar sort of benediction. "God bless you and thank you," Graham said earnestly, "and God bless the Holiday Inns."<sup>5</sup>

Graham's warm embrace of business contrasted sharply with the cold shoulder he gave organized labor. The Garden of Eden, he told a rally in 1952, was a paradise with "no union dues, no labor leaders, no snakes, no disease." The minister insisted that a truly Christian worker "would not stoop to take unfair advantage" of his employer by ganging up against him in a union. Strikes, in his mind, were inherently selfish and sinful. In 1950, he worried that a "coal strike may paralyze the nation"; two years later, he

warned that a looming steel stoppage would hurt American troops fighting in Korea. If workers wanted salvation, they needed to put aside such thoughts and devote themselves to their employers. “The type of revival I’m calling for,” Graham told a Pittsburgh reporter in 1952, “calls for an employee to put in a full eight hours of work.” On Labor Day that same year, he warned that “certain labor leaders would like to outlaw religion, disregard God, the church, and the Bible,” and he suggested that their rank and file were wholly composed of the unchurched. “I believe that organized labor unions are one of the greatest mission fields in America today,” he said. “Wouldn’t it be great if, as we celebrate Labor Day, our labor leaders would lead the laboring man in America in repentance and faith in Jesus Christ?”<sup>6</sup>

His hostility to organized labor was matched by his dislike of government involvement in the economy, which he invariably condemned as “socialism.” Graham warned that “government restrictions” in the realm of free enterprise threatened “freedom of opportunity” in America. In April 1952, he stood outside the Texas state capitol and insisted, “We must have a revolt against the tranquil attitude to communism, socialism, and dictatorship in this country.” The next month, Graham spoke at a businessmen’s luncheon in Houston, warning that socialism was on the march around the world as well. “Within five years we can say good-bye to England,” he insisted. “Japan could go communist within two years. The United States is being isolated.” Two years later, Graham’s thoughts on the dangers of socialism became a bit of an international scandal after the Billy Graham Evangelical Association sent followers a free calendar. A page on England noted that “when the war ended a sense of frustration and disillusionment gripped England and what Hitler’s bombs could not do, socialism with its accompanying evils shortly accomplished. England’s historic faith faltered. The churches still standing were gradually emptied.” Learning of the slight, a columnist for the London *Daily Herald* denounced Graham with a new nickname: “the Big Business evangelist.”<sup>7</sup>

As preachers like Billy Graham helped to popularize public prayer, they thus managed to politicize it as well. They shared the Christian libertarian sensibilities of Spiritual Mobilization but were able to spread that gospel in much subtler—and much more effective—ways than that organization ever could. At the same time, their work helped to democratize the

phenomenon of public prayer. Spiritual Mobilization focused its attention largely on ministers, but these contemporaneous campaigns attracted a much broader swath of laypeople. Though they tended to target the rich and powerful, the changes they instituted ultimately made the movement more accessible to ordinary Americans and thereby set the stage for a larger revival to come. In the political ascendancy of Dwight D. Eisenhower, the prayers of Christian libertarians were finally answered.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT'S FIRST INAUGURAL address had been filled with scriptural references, but in his second inaugural in January 1937 religion was even more pronounced. Reflecting on the record of progressive legislation and economic progress in the first four years of his administration, the president portrayed himself, rather unobtrusively, as a modern-day Moses leading his people out of the wilderness. "Shall we pause now and turn our back upon the road that lies ahead? Shall we call this the promised land?" he asked rhetorically. "Or shall we continue on our way?" There was still much to be done, he warned, but the nation would soon reach "our happy valley" if it stayed on the present path. The Exodus theme of the inaugural address, speechwriters insisted, had come entirely from Roosevelt. But others still sought credit. In February 1937, Abraham Vereide sent the president a letter reminding him of a meeting they had had more than four years earlier, when Roosevelt was still governor of New York. "You may recall," the Seattle minister wrote, "that I reminded you about the story of Moses and the Israelites, stating that you were our Moses and we were Israel who needed to be led out of the bondage of Egypt, into the Promised Land. You may recall your own statement at that time and your pledge. Your efforts have been true to that pledge."<sup>8</sup>

While Vereide's praise for the president's religious rhetoric was sincere, his claim that he saw Roosevelt as a modern-day Moses most certainly was not. The Methodist clergyman was thoroughly conservative in his politics and, by the time of his letter, had long abandoned any belief in the worth of either private charity or public welfare. A deeply pious Norwegian, he had immigrated to America in 1905 and, a decade later, begun work as a minister in Seattle. During the 1920s, he ran Goodwill Industries' operation in the city with efficiency, organizing forty-nine thousand

housewives into thirty-seven districts to collect used goods for the needy. While his approach to running the charity was businesslike, so too was his attitude toward the underlying idea. “Promiscuous charity pauperizes,” he insisted in 1927, “and the average person seeking aid . . . does not want to work for it.” Nevertheless, his success in Seattle led to promotions at Goodwill and, ultimately, consideration by Roosevelt for a role leading the federal relief effort, consideration that led to their 1933 meeting in Albany. But as Vereide became more involved with charity work, he became less sure of its worth. “In conference with heads of governments and unemployment committees in New England and New York,” he later remembered, “I became convinced that [the] depression was moral and spiritual as well as material. The country needed a spiritual awakening as the only foundation for economic stability.” In 1934, Vereide resigned from Goodwill and began searching for a new career.<sup>9</sup>

Nearly fifty at the time, with trim white hair and a perpetually serious gaze, Vereide found the turmoil of his professional life mirrored in the nation. When the Methodist minister returned to the West Coast, he found businessmen and labor unions embroiled in an epic struggle that helped give him a new sense of purpose. First he spent three months in San Francisco, where the Industrial Association had recently retaliated against a dockworkers’ strike by assembling a private army to open the port by force, killing two strikers in the process. In response, the longshoremen convinced the rest of the city’s unions to join them in a general strike that effectively shut down San Francisco for days. Highways were blockaded, shipments of food and fuel turned away. As the city’s elite holed up in the posh Pacific Union Club, debating how to handle the largest labor uprising they had ever seen, Vereide ministered to them in regular prayer meetings.<sup>10</sup>

When the clergyman returned to Seattle soon after, he found it in a similar state of chaos. The city’s stevedores went on strike, and the Waterfront Employers Association prepared for a massive struggle. They put three ships in port to serve as barracks for an army of strikebreakers recruited from wherever they could be found, including fraternities at the University of Washington. Strikers kept control of the port, leaving dozens of ships idling in the harbor. Local newspapers gave voice to the worries of the business community. “Strike Costing City a Million a Day!” screamed the *Seattle Times*. The *Post-Intelligencer* grumbled that “a mob

of striking longshoremen” had “paralyzed Seattle shipping.” As pressure mounted, the mayor personally led three hundred policemen, armed with tear gas and submachine guns, down to the docks to break the strike. In the ensuing struggle, both sides suffered serious injuries before calling an uneasy truce. The next spring, in April 1935, union leaders from all over the West Coast descended on Seattle to make plans for an even greater wave of strikes that summer.<sup>11</sup>

That same month, Vereide had an important meeting of his own. On a downtown street corner he ran into Walter Douglass, a former Army major and a prominent local developer. The two soon began commiserating about how the entire country was, in Douglass’s words, “going to the bow-wows.” “The worst of it is you fellows aren’t doing anything about it!” he snapped at the minister. “Here you have your churches and services and a merry-go-round of activities, but as far as any actual impact and strategy for turning the tide is concerned, you’re not making a dent.” The wealthy developer said clergymen needed to “get after fellows like me” and motivate them to get involved. He offered Vereide a suite of offices in the downtown Douglass Building and “a check to grubstake you” if only he would take the job. Vereide readily accepted. The two men immediately made their way to the offices of William St. Clair, president of Frederick and Nelson, the largest department store in the Pacific Northwest, and one of the richest men in Seattle. “He made a list of nineteen executives of the city then and there,” Vereide later remembered, and invited them for breakfast at the Washington Athletic Club. The men at that first prayer meeting included the presidents of a gas company, a railroad, a lumber company, a hardware chain, and a candy manufacturer, as well as two future mayors of Seattle. Only one belonged to a church at the time, but even he had little use for religion, joking that the others knew him only as a gambler, a drinker, and a golfer—someone who swore so much “the grass burns when I spit.” But like the others, he rallied to Vereide’s call and joined what became a regular prayer breakfast for businessmen called the City Chapel. Their services were nondenominational, but the message that came from their meetings was one that called for a return to what they saw as basic biblical principles.<sup>12</sup>

That summer, the City Chapel held a retreat for Seattle’s elite at the Canyon Creek Lodge in the Cascade Mountains. With labor unrest still

simmering on the city's docks, the business leaders were worried. "Subversive forces had taken over," Vereide recalled. "What could we do?" After a great deal of prayer, city councilman Arthur Langlie rose from his knees and announced, "I am ready to let God use me." Others were ready to use him as well. The president of a securities corporation immediately offered financial support for a Langlie mayoral campaign, and others soon followed. On his first run for the office in 1936, the Republican came up short. His opponent secured the backing of the city's powerful unions and ominously warned voters about Langlie's affiliation with "a secret society," by which he meant not the City Chapel but a right-wing organization called the New Order of Cincinnatus. In 1938, however, labor split evenly between two competing candidates, allowing Langlie to win in what was understood nationally as a major coup for conservatism. "Seattle Deals Radicals Blow," read the headline in the *Los Angeles Times*; "Left-Wing Nominees Decisively Beaten in Mayoralty Election." The *New York Times* likewise called Langlie's election "a sweeping victory for conservatism," while the *Wall Street Journal* argued that the victory of the candidate who "promised industrial peace" had helped boost the market value of Seattle's municipal bonds considerably. From the mayor's office, Langlie's star continued to rise. Only two years later, he won election as governor of Washington, ultimately serving three terms, first from 1941 to 1945 and then again from 1949 to 1957. Now a nationally prominent Republican, Langlie made the short list for Dwight Eisenhower's running mate in the 1952 presidential campaign and then delivered the keynote address at the 1956 Republican National Convention.<sup>13</sup>

After establishing the breakfast group in Seattle, Vereide looked to expand his efforts to the rest of the nation. "Business and social leaders throughout the country are recognizing that economic reconstruction must begin with an individual recovery from within," he noted in 1935. "They are beginning to realize that we cannot solve all the problems of our present-day civilization by our wits, but must rely on a higher power to help. They hope to revive the spiritual life in commerce, to aid the churches and to get back to a real American home life." Accordingly, when they filed articles of incorporation, the founders of City Chapel announced their intention "to foster and promote the advancement of Christianity and develop a Christian nation." As the Seattle group

flourished, businessmen in other communities reached out to Vereide in hopes of starting ones of their own. The minister informed them that the organization followed “a non-political and non-denominational” program, but quickly added a line that suggested a political leaning akin to that of Spiritual Mobilization. “We believe with William Penn: ‘Men must either be governed by God or ruled by tyrants,’” he said. Through personal visits and correspondence, Vereide created a network of prayer groups across the nation. In San Francisco, a former secretary of the navy established one at the Olympic Club. The head of a wool trading business started another at the Boston City Club. A set of businessmen convened at the Lake Shore Club in Chicago to begin their own group, while an oilman did likewise with associates in Los Angeles. In New York City, Republican mayor Fiorello LaGuardia was so taken with the idea he sought Vereide’s assistance in getting a group started there too. The minister traveled tirelessly around the country to organize and mobilize new meetings. In a letter home that seemed routine for these years, Vereide noted in passing that he had “just returned from a visit with some of these groups in St. Paul, Minneapolis, Chicago, St. Louis, Miami, Palm Beach and Daytona Beach, and before that at Philadelphia and Baltimore.”<sup>14</sup>

Of all the cities enamored by the prayer breakfasts, none was more important than Washington, D.C. Vereide had not only national ambitions from the beginning but political ones as well. Even though businessmen had taken the lead in forming the City Chapel in Seattle, their meetings quickly became an important political rite of passage. A typical session in January 1942, for instance, attracted more than sixty business and civic leaders, including a national director of J. C. Penney, the president of the Seattle Gas Company, a railroad executive, a municipal court judge, and two naval officers. Notably, representatives of both political parties were on hand and, despite their different partisan affiliations, showed unanimity when it came to the rites of public prayer. A Democratic contender for the governor’s office gave the opening prayer, with the brother of the incumbent Republican offering comments; the closing prayer, meanwhile, came from the Republican candidate for the US Senate. The same month as that gathering in Washington State, Vereide held an organizational meeting for new breakfast groups in Washington, D.C. In the midst of a massive blizzard, he brought together seventy-four prominent

men—mostly congressmen, but with a few business and civic leaders as well—for a luncheon at the Willard Hotel. They heard testimonials to his work from Howard B. Coonley, the far-right leader of the National Association of Manufacturers, and Francis Sayre, former high commissioner to the Philippines and Woodrow Wilson's son-in-law. "I told the story of the Breakfast Groups," Vereide remembered, "and suggested to members of Congress that they begin to meet in a similar fashion and set the pace for our national life, in order that we might be a God-directed and God-controlled nation." The next week, the House of Representatives breakfast group began with Thursday morning meetings held in the Speaker's dining room; a regular Senate group soon met as well, on Wednesday mornings in a private room in that chamber's restaurant.<sup>15</sup>

These congressional breakfast meetings quickly became a fixture on Capitol Hill. Each month, Vereide printed a program to guide the groups in their morning meditations, offering specific readings from Scripture and providing questions for discussion. The groups were officially nonpartisan, welcoming Republicans and Democrats alike, but that was not to say they were apolitical. Most of the Democratic members of the House breakfast group, for instance, were conservative southerners who held federal power and the activism of the New Deal state in as much contempt as the average Republican did.<sup>16</sup> Political overtones were lightly drawn but present nonetheless. "The domestic and the world conflict is the physical expression of a perverted mental, moral and spiritual condition," noted a program for a House session. "We need to repent from our unworkable way and pray." The congressional prayer meetings gave Vereide immediate access to the nation's political elite. In January 1943, just a year after his introductory meeting at the Willard Hotel, the minister marveled to his wife how he was not simply mingling with important political figures but actively enlisting them in his crusade. "My what a full and busy day!" he began. "The Vice President brought me to the Capitol and counseled with me regarding the program and plans, and then introduced me to Senator Brewster, who in turn [introduced me] to Senator Burton—then planned further the program and enlisted their cooperation," he continued. "Then to the Supreme Court for visits with some of them, and secured their presence and participation—then back to the Senate, House—and lunch with Chaplain Montgomery." The rest

of the day, and the ones that followed, were packed with meetings, but Vereide pressed ahead. "The hand of the Lord is upon me," he noted in closing. "He is leading."<sup>17</sup>

Having won over political leaders in Washington, D.C., Vereide used their influence to establish even more breakfast groups across the nation. Businessmen in Cleveland had been interested in forming a regular prayer meeting, for instance, but they told Vereide that there was "a class of men we have not been reaching" and asked for help. "I am told that our own Senator Harold Burton is a member of one of your groups in Washington," wrote an organizer. "He is very favorably known in Cleveland as a church man and we are just wondering whether an invitation or other promotion material might carry considerable more weight if it could go out over his name as an honorary chairman or some such title." Vereide arranged for an immediate meeting with the Republican senator and secured his support. The very next day, Burton sent the organizers a list of prominent Clevelanders whom they should recruit. "You perhaps might also wish to quote some portion of this letter as indicating my interest in the movement," the senator volunteered. "It is important that there be deep-seated, moral convictions which shall form the basis for our daily decisions in business and in government."<sup>18</sup>

The contacts Vereide made in congressional prayer groups also gave him access to corporate leaders across the country. NAM president Howard Coonley had helped launch the breakfast meetings, and by 1943, both the past president and the current president of the US Chamber of Commerce were regular participants at the Senate sessions. Corporate titans followed their lead, inviting Vereide to join them for private meetings in their offices or small dinners with fellow executives. "The big men and real leaders in New York and Chicago," he wrote his wife, "look up to me in an embarrassing way." In Manhattan, Thomas Watson of IBM gathered together "a few of New York's top men" for a luncheon at the Bankers Club to meet Vereide and hear about his work. J. C. Penney took the minister to lunch at New York's Union League Club, arranged for a meeting with Norman Vincent Peale, and then promised to set up "a retreat for key business executives" soon after. In Chicago, Vereide lunched at its Union League Club with "fifteen top leaders," including Hughston McBain, president of the Marshall Field department store chain. Other

corporate titans sought more intimate audiences. The head of Quaker Oats spent an hour with Vereide in his Chicago office, while the president of Chevrolet spent more than three with him in Detroit. Given his travels, Vereide inevitably won support from the Pew family as well. While James Fifield had found a patron in J. Howard Pew, Vereide won support from his brother Joseph Newton Pew Jr., head of the massive Sun Shipbuilding Company and a powerful force in the Republican Party in Pennsylvania. As the minister shuttled back and forth between the private and public sectors of power in America, his success quickly became a self-fulfilling prophecy. The more politically connected he became, the more leading businessmen sought time with him. And the more backing he secured from corporate titans, the more eager politicians were to count themselves as his friend. Vereide believed he was bringing these influential people closer to God—but he was also bringing them closer to one another, and in a forum that seemed as pure and patriotic as possible.<sup>19</sup>

During the war, Vereide brought together his newfound political and corporate supporters to serve on the board of directors for the new national version of City Chapel, which he called the National Council for Christian Leadership (NCCL). By 1946, the forty-five members of the board represented an impressive range of public and private power in America. From the political arena, its number included eight members of the US Senate and ten representatives in the US House. Drawn in equal numbers from the Republican and Democratic parties, the congressmen were almost universally conservative in their politics. (Former senator Harold Burton, by then appointed to the Supreme Court, still served on the board with his former congressional colleagues.) These political leaders were joined by a number of prominent businessmen, including NAM president Coonley, timber titan F. K. Weyerhaeuser, earthmoving equipment manufacturer R. G. LeTourneau, and steel magnate Roy Ingersoll. The National Council for Christian Leadership made its headquarters in Washington, D.C., where Vereide had relocated during the war. In November 1945, with considerable help from a wealthy patron, the organization had bought a four-story mansion on Embassy Row, which became its official base of operations. “This,” Vereide announced with pride, “is God’s Embassy in Washington.”<sup>20</sup>

Despite the seeming hyperbole, Vereide's organization did reach into the highest levels of politics. In 1946, for instance, when President Truman appointed treasury secretary Fred Vinson to become the new chief justice of the United States, Vereide invited Vinson to join the Senate breakfast group for a "dedication" of his new position on the Supreme Court. A devout Methodist, Vinson readily accepted and brought along attorney general Tom Clark. Before a gathering of twenty-eight senators, the Presbyterian attorney general offered his own religious testimony, and then the new chief justice followed suit. As Vereide remembered, Vinson spoke warmly about the influence the Bible had not just on his own life but on all of American government and law. After a silent prayer, Missouri senator Forest Donnell led the dedicatory prayer, "invoking God's blessing on the Chief Justice and dedicating him in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit to his exalted and important position." Afterward, Vinson told Vereide that he wished the morning meeting had been "broadcast to all the American people, for he felt that it would do more than anything else to restore the confidence of the people in their government and to unite the nation in a common faith."<sup>21</sup>

The "consecration" of the chief justice of the United States was not an aberration. Indeed, when Tom Clark and Sherman Minton were appointed to the Supreme Court in late 1949, Vereide arranged for another ceremony dedicating their new roles as well. The two new justices joined Chief Justice Vinson and a bipartisan set of senators for a special ceremony in early 1950. Virginia senator A. Willis Robertson, father of the evangelist Pat Robertson, led the group in an opening prayer, after which they polished off plates of toast and eggs. In the discussion that followed, these leaders from the judicial and legislative branches reflected on the role of prayer in political life. Senator John Stennis, a Mississippi Democrat, spoke of how America often focused on material issues, but "we must balance our planning with spirituality." Chief Justice Vinson agreed. "I am not a preacher or even the son of a preacher," he reflected. "But I know we must adhere to the ideals of Christianity." Past civilizations, Vinson warned darkly, had crumbled from within as decadence removed them from their founding principles. Justice Clark wholeheartedly agreed. "No country or civilization can last," he said, "unless it is founded on Christian values."<sup>22</sup>

At the end of his “dedication” ceremony, Justice Sherman Minton urged those gathered to work for a closer brotherhood with the people of Europe. But Vereide had already begun just such an effort. In 1947, he unveiled a new International Council for Christian Leadership (ICCL). In theory, the ICCL was simply an extension of the NCCL, working alongside it in a common effort directed both at home and abroad. But in practice, many of Vereide’s allies worried it meant that foreign issues would take priority over domestic ones. Republican congressman John Phillips, a member of the NCCL board of directors, sent Vereide an impassioned letter in August 1948 reminding him that he had “repeatedly been told by your executive committee that there must be no connection between the two movements until the home-grown movement is stronger on its feet.” Phillips felt so strongly about the matter that he resigned from the board and asked that his name be removed from the group’s literature and letterhead. Responding with deep regret, Vereide insisted that he had never neglected their domestic priorities. “I have given myself unstintingly for the development in our nation of an appreciation for the protection of our form of government and private enterprise,” he asserted. Furthermore, the minister reasoned, any program to protect capitalism at home had to protect capitalism everywhere. “Our own economy will crack without the right relationship to [the] world economy,” Vereide argued, “and that whole structure is built on moral foundations.” The minister pressed ahead in his drive to give the organization an international presence, with quick success. Within a few years, Christian Leadership breakfast groups were meeting regularly in thirty-one foreign countries. England, France, West Germany, the Netherlands, and Finland represented the bulk of the initial growth of the group, but the ICCL made its presence felt in nations as varied as China, South Africa, and Canada, with isolated operations in localities such as Havana and Mexico City as well.<sup>23</sup>

Vereide recognized that the tensions of the Cold War could be exploited to win more converts to his cause. “The Time is Now!” he wrote members of the House breakfast group in August 1949. “On all sides today we hear people speaking fearfully of the spread of atheistic communism. Is there really anything we can do about it? Yes!” He urged the congressmen to stand up to communism in three ways—by maintaining their personal relationship with Jesus Christ; by “cultivating ‘intensive

fellowships,' i.e. the spread of small groups or cells," back in their congressional districts patterned on their breakfast group in Congress; and by working with like-minded Christians across the country to present "a united front against the forces of the anti-Christ." "The choice," he insisted, "boils down to this: 'Christ or Communism.' There is really no other. Those in between—playing neutral—are literally playing into the hands of the enemy."<sup>24</sup>

Just two weeks later, Americans learned that the Soviet Union now had nuclear weapons. The paranoia over the dangers posed by "godless communism" increased dramatically in the coming months and years, and so too would the campaign to Christianize America. Abraham Vereide and his associates worked tirelessly to win more converts to their cause, moving on to ever greater successes over the course of the coming decade. They would not be alone.

IN BOTH MEANS AND MOTIVES, Billy Graham's ministry represented a continuation of Abraham Vereide's. Fresh from his success in Los Angeles in late 1949, the sensational young preacher toured the country in a series of revivals that seemed, in the words of one biographer, "like a long Palm Sunday procession of celebration and arrival." He began in 1950 in Boston. There, a single, lightly advertised New Year's Eve service at Mechanics Hall attracted a crowd of more than six thousand, forcing stunned organizers to throw together a series of additional revivals at the opera house, the Park Street Church, Symphony Hall, and finally Boston Garden, where more than twenty-five thousand tried to get in. That spring, Graham held his first "crusade" in Columbia, South Carolina. Governor Strom Thurmond made regular appearances onstage at the services, as did Senator Olin Johnston and Supreme Court justice James Byrnes. Henry Luce, a devout missionary's son who had become publisher of Time Inc., came to see Graham preach to a record crowd at the University of South Carolina football stadium. Deeply impressed, he afterward returned with Graham to the governor's mansion, where the two stayed up late into the night discussing their faith. In the summer, the crusade came to Portland, Oregon. Frustrated by seating shortages in the earlier revivals, Graham convinced local organizers to craft a special

“tabernacle” of wood and aluminum that would seat twelve thousand worshippers. Nearly twice as many tried to get into the opening night’s service; a half million more came over the next six weeks. Graham ended the year with a similar six-week revival in Atlanta, where organizers converted the Ponce de Leon baseball park to seat twenty-five thousand, ultimately drawing in another half-million worshippers. Between these extended crusades in 1950, Graham scheduled one-off revivals wherever he could, ranging from an overflow audience of twenty-five hundred at the State Auditorium in Providence, Rhode Island, to an estimated one hundred thousand at the Rose Bowl in Los Angeles. In early 1951, Billy Graham’s travels took him to Fort Worth, Texas. The four-week crusade there was an unqualified success, with a total attendance of nearly 336,000, making it the largest evangelistic campaign in the history of the state or, for that matter, the entire Southwest.<sup>25</sup>

Of Graham’s legion of admirers during the Fort Worth crusade, Sid Richardson stood out. A crusty, barrel-chested oilman, Richardson was by then one of the wealthiest men in the entire nation, if not *the* wealthiest. Not even the reclusive Richardson knew for sure; much of his immense fortune was buried underneath the Texas soil in his vast oil fields. Still, the journalist Theodore White declared him “far and away the richest American” in a 1954 article, suggesting that fellow Texas oilman H. L. Hunt might be “his only rival in the billion-dollar bracket.” In one of the earliest attempts to rank America’s wealthiest citizens, *Ladies’ Home Journal* gave Richardson the top honors in its inaugural 1957 list, estimating his overall net worth at \$700 million. For his part, Richardson wore his wealth uncomfortably, like the rumpled suits that had to be custom-made for his stocky frame. For most of the year, the “billionaire bachelor” lived in two modest rooms at the downtown Fort Worth Club. But he also owned a private island in the Gulf of Mexico, a twenty-eight-mile-long retreat he purchased for a million dollars and then adorned with a luxurious hunting lodge.<sup>26</sup>

The oilman was a collector of sorts. He had started purchasing pieces of art from the American West at an associate’s suggestion, soon amassing an unrivaled array of Remingtons and Russells. He also collected political clients. By 1951, he was already a generous backer of both Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn and Senator Lyndon B. Johnson. That year, he hired

John Connally as his executive secretary, launching the career of another talented young politician. Believing Graham had similar potential, Richardson befriended the evangelist, introducing him to other leaders in the state and offering help whenever he could. Graham, for his part, adored the oilman, whom he always called “Mr. Sid.” When the preacher started his film production company, the first two features seemed to be tributes to Richardson, or men like him. Filmed during the Fort Worth crusade, *Mr. Texas* (1951) chronicled the conversion of a hard-drinking rodeo rider; *Oiltown, U.S.A.* (1954) told a similar tale about an oil tycoon from Houston who made his way to Christ. The second film cost \$100,000 to produce and was advertised as “the story of the free-enterprise system of America, the story of the development and use of God-given natural resources by men who have built a great new empire.” Years later, when Richardson passed away, Billy Graham flew down to his private island to preside over the funeral. The preacher offered the highest praise he could imagine for his longtime patron: “He was willing to go to any end to see that our American way of life was maintained.”<sup>27</sup>

The earthy Richardson had little use for Graham’s religion, but the two shared a common faith in free enterprise. “When Graham speaks of ‘the American way of life,’” an early biographer noted, “he has in mind the same combination of economic and political freedom that the National Association of Manufacturers, the United States Chamber of Commerce, and the *Wall Street Journal* do when they use the phrase.” Indeed, during the early years of his ministry, Graham devoted himself to spreading the gospel of free enterprise. In his 1951 crusade in Greensboro, North Carolina, he spoke at length about the “dangers that face capitalistic America.” The nation was no longer “devoted to the individualism that made America great,” he warned the crowd. If it hoped to survive, it needed to embrace once again “the rugged individualism that Christ brought” to mankind. Not surprisingly, Graham saw that individualistic spirit in self-made millionaires such as Richardson and, therefore, made no apologies for ministering to him and men like him. “Whether the story of Christ is told in a huge stadium, across the desk of some powerful leader, or shared with a golfing companion,” the preacher reasoned, “it satisfies a common hunger.”<sup>28</sup>

Much like his patron, and much like Abraham Vereide and James Field, the preacher hungered to make his presence felt in Washington,

D.C. His network of political contacts gave him easy access to the Capitol, where he led a congressional prayer service in April 1950. “Our Father, we give thee thanks for the greatest nation in the world,” he offered. “We thank thee for the highest standard of living in the world.” Although Graham was delighted to make new friends in the legislature, he had a bigger target. During the Boston crusade, he told a reporter that his real ambition was “to get President Truman’s ear for thirty minutes, to get a little help.” He peppered the president with letters and telegrams for months but had no luck winning an invitation until House majority leader John McCormack intervened. To Graham’s lasting embarrassment, their July 1950 meeting was an utter disaster. He and his three associates arrived at the Oval Office wearing brightly colored suits, hand-painted silk ties, and new white suede shoes. They looked, Graham remembered with a grimace, like a “traveling vaudeville team.” The president received them politely. A devout but reserved Baptist who was wary of public displays of piety, he held the foursome at some distance. When Graham asked if he could offer a prayer, Truman shrugged and said, “I don’t suppose it could do any harm.” The preacher wrapped his arm around the president, clutching him uncomfortably close. As he called down God’s blessing, an associate punctuated the prayer with cries of “Amen!” and “Tell it!”<sup>29</sup>

After their visit, reporters pressed Graham’s group to divulge details while a row of photographers shouted at them to kneel down for a photo on the White House lawn. To their later regret, they agreed to both requests. In sharing details with the press and posing for the picture, Graham had made a significant, if innocent, mistake. The president now viewed the preacher with suspicion, dismissing him as “one of those counterfeits” only interested in “getting his name in the paper.” Feeling used and furious as a result, Truman instructed his staff that Graham would never be welcome at the White House again as long as he was president, a decision leaked to the public by political columnist Drew Pearson. Graham continued to send unrequited letters to Truman, but he sensed that he had overstepped his bounds. “It began to dawn on me a few days later,” he wrote, “how we had abused the privilege of seeing the president. National coverage of our visit was definitely not to our advantage.”<sup>30</sup>

While Graham was dismayed at how the meeting went, Truman’s coldness toward him made it much easier for him to express his true

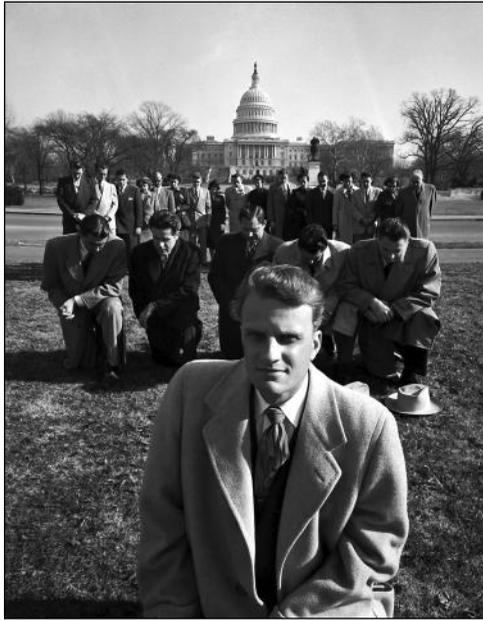
feelings about the president. “Harry is doing the best he can,” he joked at one revival. “The trouble is that he just can’t do any better.” In a more serious tone, Graham soon ventured to criticize the administration from the pulpit. In January 1951, he warned that “the vultures are now encircling our debt-ridden inflationary economy with its fifteen-year record of deficit finance and with its staggering national debt, to close in for the kill.” He chided Democrats for wasting money on the welfare state at home and the Marshall Plan abroad. “The whole Western world is begging for more dollars,” he noted that fall, but “the barrel is almost empty. When it is empty—what then?” He insisted that the poor in other nations, like those in his own, needed no government assistance. “Their greatest need is not more money, food, or even medicine; it is Christ,” he said. “Give them the Gospel of love and grace first and they will clean themselves up, educate themselves, and better their economic conditions.”<sup>31</sup>

In January 1952, Graham returned to Washington, determined to make a better impression than he had two years before. This time, his team planned a five-week revival in the capital. The focus of the Washington crusade was a series of regular meetings at the National Guard Armory, but it also featured daily local broadcasts on both radio and television, weekly coast-to-coast broadcasts of his *Hour of Decision* TV show on Sunday nights, and a network of prayer services coordinated over the radio. Graham led prayer meetings all over town, including daily sessions in the Pentagon auditorium. On Monday mornings, he held “Pastor’s Workshops” with local clergymen; on Tuesdays, there were luncheons at the Hotel Statler to discuss religion with “the men who have so much a part in shaping the destiny of the Capital of Western Civilization: the business men of Washington.” Graham courted congressmen as well, of course. When he first announced the crusade, he did so with a senator and ten representatives standing alongside him. Abraham Vereide, who had helped conceive the Washington crusade and served on its executive committee, invited members of his congressional prayer breakfast groups to attend a special luncheon with Graham for “a discussion on ‘The Choice Before Us.’” Despite the rift between them, Graham hoped to convince President Truman to attend the first service and, if possible, offer some opening remarks. Truman steered clear. A staff memo noted the president “said very decisively that he did not wish to endorse Billy Graham’s Washington

revival, and particularly, he said, he did not want to receive him at the White House. You remember what a show of himself Billy Graham made the last time he was here. The President does not want it repeated.”<sup>32</sup>

As the Washington crusade began in January 1952, Graham made clear his intent to influence national politics. If Congress and the White House “would take the lead in a spiritual and moral awakening,” he said, “it would affect the country more than anything in a long time.” Those who supported the revival were given cards to place in their Bibles, reminding them to pray daily “for the message of [the] Crusade to reach into every Government office, that many in Government will be won for Christ.” Although the president remained aloof, many congressmen embraced Graham. Virginia senator A. Willis Robertson secured unanimous Senate approval of the crusade, as well as a prayer that “God may guide and protect our nation and preserve the peace of the world.” Several congressmen took roles in the revival, including four who regularly served as ushers. Many more attended, with roughly one-third of all senators and one-fourth of all representatives requesting special allotments of seats to the Armory services. “As near as I can tell,” Graham bragged to a reporter, “we averaged between 25 and 40 Congressmen and about five Senators a night.” Congressional attendance was noteworthy, but so too was the overall turnout. Despite the Armory’s official seating capacity of 5,310, more than 13,000 people packed the venue on opening night, with crowds exceeding 7,000 allowed on subsequent evenings. Even with such limitations, the total attendance for the Washington crusade ultimately reached a half million. As Vice President Alben Barkley marveled to Graham, “You’re certainly rockin’ the old Capitol.”<sup>33</sup>

Interest proved to be so high that Graham soon staged a huge rally at the Capitol itself. At first, the idea seemed impossible. But a call to his patron Sid Richardson—who, in turn, called Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn—prompted Congress to push through a special measure authorizing the first religious service ever to be held on the steps of the Capitol Building. “This country needs a revival,” Rayburn explained, “and I believe Billy Graham is bringing it to us.” Even though it took place in a cold drizzling rain, the February service drew a crowd estimated to be as large as forty-five thousand. (The gathering, the House sergeant at arms noted, was larger than the one for Truman’s inauguration.) Graham reveled in the



In January 1952, Reverend Billy Graham launched the Washington crusade, staging religious revivals at the National Armory and, in a first for the city, on the steps of the Capitol Building itself. If Congress and the White House “would take the lead in a spiritual and moral awakening,” he said, “it would affect the country more than anything in a long time.” *Mark Kauffman, The LIFE Premium Collection, Getty Images.*

turnout, taking off his tan coat to address them in a powder-blue double-breasted suit with a polka-dot tie. To those assembled, and to the millions more listening over the ABC radio network, he called for Congress to set aside a national day of prayer as a “day of confession of sin, humiliation, repentance, and turning to God at this hour.” The minister noted that a formal return to God would benefit not just the American people but also the political representatives who had the faith to make such a cause their own. “If I would run for President of the United States today on a platform of calling people back to God, back to Christ, back to the Bible, I’d be elected,” Graham insisted. “There is a hunger for God today.”<sup>34</sup>

The proposal for a national day of prayer was nothing new; several presidents, including Abraham Lincoln, had called for similar religious observances in the past. Graham himself had tried to convince Truman of the need for a national day of prayer during their July 1950 meeting.

The idea generated considerable interest at the time, as ministers across the nation picked up Graham's proposal and urged Americans, in sermons delivered in their own churches and over the radio, to lobby the president. Thousands did. "The minds of the people must be directed more toward spiritual values," a Cincinnati woman wrote. "The time is NOW for *spiritual mobilization*."<sup>35</sup> Despite the outpouring of public pressure, Truman had not been swayed. The second time around, however, the president gave in. He still had reservations about public displays of prayer—in his diary that month, he noted that he abided by "the V, VI, & VIIth chapters of the Gospel according to St. Matthew," which were often cited for their injunctions against the practice—but he read the national mood and decided to acquiesce.<sup>36</sup> As Congress took up the proposal in February 1952, House majority leader John McCormack let it be known that Truman now supported the plan.<sup>37</sup>

Congress resolved, by the unanimous consent of both House and Senate, "that the President shall set aside and proclaim a day each year, other than a Sunday, as a National Day of Prayer, on which the people of the United States may turn to God in prayer and meditation." The language of the legislation was significant, as all previous congressional proclamations for days of prayer "requested" that the president designate a day, while this one alone "required" him to do so. Truman was thus bound by the law, just as every one of his successors in the White House has been to this day. In an apparent nod to the previous year's "Freedom Under God" observance, which was set to be repeated in 1952, Truman selected the Fourth of July as the date for the first National Day of Prayer. The choice, he explained, was intended to coincide "with the anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, which published to the world this Nation's 'firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence.'" In the official proclamation, Truman encouraged all Americans to ask God for strength and wisdom and to offer thanks in return "for His constant watchfulness over us in every hour of national prosperity and national peril." For his own part, the president observed the day of prayer by taking in a doubleheader between the Washington Senators and the New York Yankees. His critics noted with satisfaction that the Yankees beat the home team in both games and that Truman had to leave early when the second was called on account of rain.<sup>38</sup>

While Billy Graham welcomed the adoption of the National Day of Prayer, he saw it as merely the beginning of the political and moral transformation needed to save the nation. In late 1951, he insisted that “the Christian people of America will not sit idly by during the 1952 presidential campaign. [They] are going to vote as a bloc for the man with the strongest moral and spiritual platform, regardless of his views on other matters.” By that time, Graham believed he had already found the man who fit the description: General Dwight D. Eisenhower.<sup>39</sup>

EISENHOWER SEEMED AN UNLIKELY CANDIDATE to lead the nation to spiritual reawakening. For decades he had remained distant from religion and could not even claim a specific denominational affiliation. During his childhood, however, his family had been deeply devout. His grandfather had been a minister for the River Brethren, an offshoot of the Mennonites, and his father maintained that faith. His mother traveled a more circuitous spiritual path: born and raised a Lutheran, she joined the River Brethren at marriage but was later baptized as a Jehovah’s Witness when Dwight was eight years old. While denominations may have varied, the family’s commitment to a literal reading of the Bible remained constant, and a constant presence in their lives. In their white clapboard home in Abilene, Kansas, the Bible was a source of inspiration read each morning in prayers and a source of authority to be quoted again and again. “All the Eisenhowers,” one of Dwight’s brothers later explained, “are fundamentalists.”<sup>40</sup>

Dwight Eisenhower certainly bore the imprint of this upbringing—he had been named after Dwight Moody, a popular nineteenth-century evangelist who was, in essence, a forerunner of Billy Graham—but for much of his adult life he showed little of it publicly. The River Brethren required strict observance of the Sabbath, but Eisenhower rarely attended services during his military career. The Brethren demanded abstinence from tobacco, but he became a heavy smoker, going through four packs of Camels a day during the climax of the Second World War. The Brethren were also strongly committed to pacifism on religious grounds; Eisenhower’s mother condemned war as “the devil’s business” and believed those waging it were sinners. While most members of the River Brethren

and the Witnesses sought to secure a conscientious-objector exemption from military service during times of war, Eisenhower actively pursued a military career during a time of peace, leaving home in 1911 to enroll at West Point and then rising through the ranks over the course of two global conflicts.<sup>41</sup>

In spite of his outward indifference to the faith of his family, Eisenhower insisted that its lessons still resonated with him. “While my brothers and I have always been a little bit ‘non-conformist’ in the business of actual membership of a particular sect or denomination,” he wrote a friend in 1952, “we are all very earnestly and very seriously religious. We could not help being so considering our upbringing.” Indeed, while he lacked ties to any specific denomination, Eisenhower remained firmly committed to the Bible itself. Like his parents, he considered it an unparalleled resource. One of his aides during the Second World War remembered that Eisenhower could “quote Scripture by the yard,” using it to punctuate points made at staff meetings. After the war, his sense of religion’s importance only grew stronger. In an interview before he assumed the presidency of Columbia University in 1948, Eisenhower declared himself “the most intensely religious man I know.” Faith, he believed, was important not just for him personally but also for the entire country. “A democracy cannot exist without a religious base,” he told reporters. “I believe in democracy.”<sup>42</sup>

Comments such as these led Billy Graham—and many other Americans—to believe that their democracy needed Dwight Eisenhower. In a letter to Sid Richardson in late 1951, Graham wrote that “the American people have come to the point where they want a man with honesty, integrity, and spiritual power. I believe the General has it. I hope you can persuade him to put his hat in the ring.” Richardson had been friendly with Eisenhower since just after the attack on Pearl Harbor, when they met by chance on a train trip through Texas. He urged Graham to “write General Eisenhower some good reasons why he ought to run for the presidency.” “Mr. Sid, I can’t get involved in politics,” Graham demurred. But his patron was set on the idea. “There’s no politics,” he insisted. “Don’t you think any American ought to run if millions of people want him to?” When Graham replied, “Yes, Mr. Sid, I agree he should—” the oilman cut him off with a brusque “Well, then, say that in a letter!” Doing as

instructed, the minister exhorted Eisenhower to run. During the crusade in the capital, Graham related, a district court judge had “confided in me that if Washington were not cleaned out in the next two or three years, we were going to enter a period of chaos or downfall.” The stakes were high. “Upon this decision,” he concluded, “could well rest the destiny of the Western World.” Eisenhower told Richardson that it was “the damnedest letter I ever got. Who is this young fellow?”<sup>43</sup>

Richardson arranged for the two to meet, sending Graham to the general’s offices in Paris shortly after the Washington crusade. Eisenhower made a powerful impression on the preacher. “Although he was in uniform,” Graham later remembered, “his office looked like that of a corporate executive, with walnut-paneled walls, a walnut desk, and green carpeting to match his chair.” The two began talking about their mutual friend, but much of the two-hour meeting served as a chance for Graham to make his case for an Eisenhower candidacy. The minister would later downplay the importance of his visit in the ultimate decision, aware that other Americans—including a congressional delegation led by Senator Frank Carlson of Kansas, a close ally of Abraham Vereide—had likewise made the pilgrimage to Paris. But Graham’s spiritual support was surely influential in the general’s decision, as was the financial support Richardson promised. Once Eisenhower announced his intentions, the oilman put his vast fortune to work for him. Richardson’s direct contribution to the campaign was reportedly \$1 million, but he also paid for roughly \$200,000 in expenses at the Commodore Hotel in New York, where the general had established offices after returning home, and then covered most of his expenditures during the Republican National Convention in Chicago as well.<sup>44</sup>

In June 1952, Eisenhower launched his campaign for the presidency in Abilene. The town staged a massive parade in his honor, with a series of floats depicting events in his life, ending with one carrying a replica of the White House with him inside. His parents had long since passed away, but the candidate made an appearance at their old clapboard home, using it as a shorthand for his humble upbringing, his family, and his faith. In his comments, he condemned a set of “evils which can ultimately throttle free government,” which he identified as labor unrest, runaway inflation, “excessive taxation,” and the “ceaseless expansion” of the federal

government. These were commonplace conservative positions, but Eisenhower presented them in religious language that elevated them for his audience. Scotty Reston of the *New York Times* was reminded of William Jennings Bryan, the great evangelist for old-time religion and plain-folks politics. “He appealed to the virtues of a simpler era that this town symbolizes,” Reston wrote. “He appealed not to the mind but to the heart, and his language was filled with the noble words of the old revivalists: frugality, austerity, honesty, economy, simplicity, integrity.” Referring to Eisenhower’s memoirs of the war, the journalist noted, “His ‘Crusade in Europe’ over, he opened up a second front here as if he intended to start a second crusade in America.”<sup>45</sup>

Eisenhower encouraged the perception that his candidacy was a religious cause. In his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention, he declared the coming presidential campaign to be “a great crusade for freedom in America and freedom in the world.” He appropriated not only Graham’s “crusade” brand but also Graham himself. Shortly after Eisenhower secured the nomination in July 1952, the preacher received an urgent call from Senator Carlson, whom he had met months earlier during the Washington crusade, asking him to come to Eisenhower’s hotel in Chicago. There the candidate asked if Graham might be able to “contribute a religious note” to some of his speeches for the election season. “Of course, I want to do anything I can for you,” Graham agreed, with the caveat that “I have to be careful not to publicly disclose my preferences or become embroiled in partisan politics.” Soon after, the minister spent a few days with the campaign staff at the Brown Palace Hotel in Denver, offering scriptural references and spiritual observations that could be used to sanctify the secular positions of the candidate. Before leaving, Graham gave Eisenhower a gift of a silk-sewn red-leather Bible—red because, as one of his associates liked to joke, “a Bible should be read”—which the preacher had painstakingly annotated with his interpretations. Eisenhower treasured the gift, keeping it close at hand during the campaign and placing it on his bedside table at the White House. He seemed to value sincerely Graham’s advice, but he also understood the political benefit of his public association with the popular preacher. In a letter to Governor Arthur Langlie, who had been propelled to prominence in large part by Vereide’s breakfast groups and had served as cochairman

of Graham's 1951 Seattle crusade, Eisenhower noted with delight that the minister had praised the Republican "crusade for honesty in government" before his radio audience of millions. But Eisenhower wanted more if possible. "Since all pastors must necessarily take a nonpartisan approach," he acknowledged, "it would be difficult to form any formal organization of religious leaders to work on our behalf. However, this might be done in an informal way."<sup>46</sup>

While Graham insisted he could never reveal his political leanings, he spent much of the campaign dropping what seemed to be considerable hints. On domestic matters, Graham had long been sounding Republican themes of rolling back the welfare state and liberating business leaders to operate on their own. But on foreign policy too, Graham closely followed the Republican script for those issues, summed up by South Dakota senator Karl Mundt as the "K<sub>1</sub>C<sub>2</sub>" formula for its component elements of "Korea, communism, and corruption." "The Korean War is being fought," he told a Houston congregation in May, "because the nation's leaders blundered on foreign policy in the Far East." He called the Truman administration "cowardly" for not following the advice of General Douglas MacArthur and pursuing "this half-hearted war" rather than unleashing the full powers of the American military. On domestic issues, meanwhile, Graham condemned the "tranquil attitude to communism" in the country, warning that "Communists and left-wingers" posed a danger to the nation and that there already might be "a fifth column in our midst." As for corruption, Graham pressed the issue early and often, so much so that his comments became indistinguishable from the official Republican slogans. The GOP insisted, "We must clean up the mess in Washington"; at the same time, Graham asserted, "We all seem to agree there's a mess in Washington." Time and time again, the preacher made a clear political attack from the pulpit, only to walk it back slightly with a shrug and a smile. Once, for example, he made a disparaging comment about Truman, only to cut himself short: "I won't say anything more about that. Except," he immediately added, "that I have found that after my car has run for a long time, it needs a change of oil. That's the strongest political statement I'm going to make, now."<sup>47</sup>

Though the Eisenhower campaign made use of Graham as much as possible, the campaign of his Democratic rival, Illinois governor Adlai

Stevenson, refused to conduct religious outreach of its own. There were plenty of opportunities. In 1951, a group of leading clergymen formed Christian Action, which intended “to draw together Protestants on the non-communist left for the implementation of the implications of the Gospel in social, economic, and political affairs.”<sup>48</sup> It was, in essence, a liberal counterpart to James Fifield’s *Spiritual Mobilization*. The theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, who frequently traded barbs with Fifield in the press, served as one of its two national cochairmen.<sup>49</sup> In a response to Graham’s involvement in the Eisenhower campaign, Niebuhr suggested that Christian Action could counter his work by assembling “an inter-faith committee of ministers for Stevenson.” The group lined up 124 Protestant religious leaders and drafted a statement announcing their support for Stevenson as the candidate who could best lead “the free world in resisting the dread peril of communism.” The Stevenson campaign was divided on the proposal, but ultimately chose not to pursue it due to fears of a negative reaction in the press. Billy Graham had no such reservations. A few days before the election, he announced that he had conducted his own personal survey of 220 religious editors and clergymen and found that they favored Eisenhower over Stevenson by an overwhelming margin of six to one. Graham still insisted that, personally, he was neutral in the race. “I believe, however, it is the duty of everyone who calls himself a Christian to go to the polls and vote,” he asserted. “Every Christian should be in much prayer that God will have his way.”<sup>50</sup>

While Graham’s support was influential, Eisenhower’s campaign received similar endorsements from other Christian libertarian leaders. During the Republican National Convention in Chicago, for instance, Vereide’s International Council for Christian Leadership held a special breakfast meeting for nearly a hundred convention delegates at the Board of Trade Building. They prayed for the success of the Republican convention and, moreover, “for God’s man to be elected this fall, praying that America may become aroused and led by God in the coming election and that God’s grace and power may rest upon our country, preparing it for service at home and abroad as a nation under God.” In September 1952, Vereide sent a mass mailing to his national network of more than two hundred breakfast groups. He urged the members of the business and civic elite who participated to devote all their energies to the

cause of raising “alertness to the right choice and vote in the November elections.”<sup>51</sup>

Likewise, Spiritual Mobilization’s *Faith and Freedom* published a manifesto, titled “The Christian’s Political Responsibility,” in its September 1952 issue. Advancing arguments that would later be made by the religious right, the magazine sought to convince Christian voters that they had a duty to bring their religious convictions to bear in the ballot box. “The Christian may keep aloof from politics because it is ‘dirty,’” the magazine’s editor observed. “In that event, he may be sure the non-Christian cynic will take full advantage of his apathy. Politics will then be ‘played’ not according to the principles of Christ, but according to the principles of the anti-Christ. This is precisely what happened in our country to an extent that has shaken the foundations of our Republic. Action *must* be taken, and now.” *Faith and Freedom* followed the lead of Graham and Vereide, claiming it would never endorse one party or the other. But it offered a “political checklist for Christians” that nudged readers rather strongly toward the Republicans. When considering the Christian merits of a particular candidate, party, or law, the editor noted, readers should ask themselves a series of questions: “If it proposes to take the property or income of some for the special benefit of others, does it violate the Commandment: ‘Thou shalt not steal’? If it appeals to the voting power of special interest groups, or to those who have less than others, does it violate the Commandment: ‘Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house’?” As Spiritual Mobilization made the case for Eisenhower, others noted the connections between them as well. “America isn’t just a land of the free in Eisenhower’s conception,” journalist John Temple Graves observed that same month. “It is a land of freedom under God.”<sup>52</sup>

In the end, Eisenhower’s “great crusade” for the presidency proved to be every bit as popular as Graham’s own crusades. He took more than 55 percent of the popular vote, with even more impressive margins in the Electoral College, where he won 442 to 89. Stevenson only managed to win nine states, all in the still solidly Democratic South, but even there Eisenhower made historic inroads by taking Texas, Tennessee, Virginia, and Florida. Outside the region, he won every single state west of Arkansas and virtually every state north of it, including his opponent’s home state, Illinois. “Earthquake, landslide, tidal wave,” marveled Marquis Childs in

the *Washington Post*, “whatever it was it worked with the overpowering completeness resembling a natural force.” The famous columnist Walter Lippmann agreed, asserting that the president-elect’s “mandate from the people is one of the greatest given in modern times.”<sup>53</sup>

Reflecting on the election returns, Eisenhower resolved to put that mandate in the service of a national religious revival. He asked Graham to meet with him in the suite Sid Richardson had provided at the Commodore Hotel in New York, to discuss plans for his inauguration and beyond. “I think one of the reasons I was elected was to help lead this country spiritually,” the president-elect confided. “We *need* a spiritual renewal.” Graham, moved nearly to tears, responded with an excited exclamation: “General, you can do more to inspire the American people to a more spiritual way of life than any other man alive!” For the next eight years, Eisenhower would attempt to do precisely that. Working with Graham, Vereide, and countless others both inside and outside his administration, the new president endeavored to lead the nation back to what he understood to be its religious roots. In doing so, however, he would actually transform America into something altogether new.<sup>54</sup>