

national attention to the unfinished quest for racial justice.

## A Revival of Religion

American religion prospered in the 1950s. New churches sprang up in the suburbs while older churches expanded their buildings to accommodate Sunday schools bulging from the baby boom. An even more significant development for American Christianity after World War II was the mainstreaming of Pentecostalism. This has been called the “charismatic movement” or, alternatively, “second-wave Pentecostalism.” Pentecostals, once despised as holy rollers, began to penetrate Catholic and mainline Protestant churches. One group working to spread the charismatic movement into mainline churches was the Full Gospel Businessmen; this interdenominational group introduced healing and speaking in tongues into churches where such manifestations had been unknown. Another movement contributing more generally to spiritual renewal was *Cursillo* (Spanish for “short course” in Christianity). Although *Cursillo* events today are not known for an emphasis on speaking in tongues, “many of the first leaders of the [Catholic] charismatic movement were influenced by the intense emotional experience of a *Cursillo* retreat.”<sup>5</sup> This movement began in Spain among Catholics; the first *Cursillo* event in the United States was held in 1957 in Waco, Texas, in Spanish. Since then, *Cursillo* has spread far and wide, using weekend retreats as venues for spiritual awakening. Except for a few sensational news stories, the charismatic movement took place largely behind the scenes and continues up to the present.

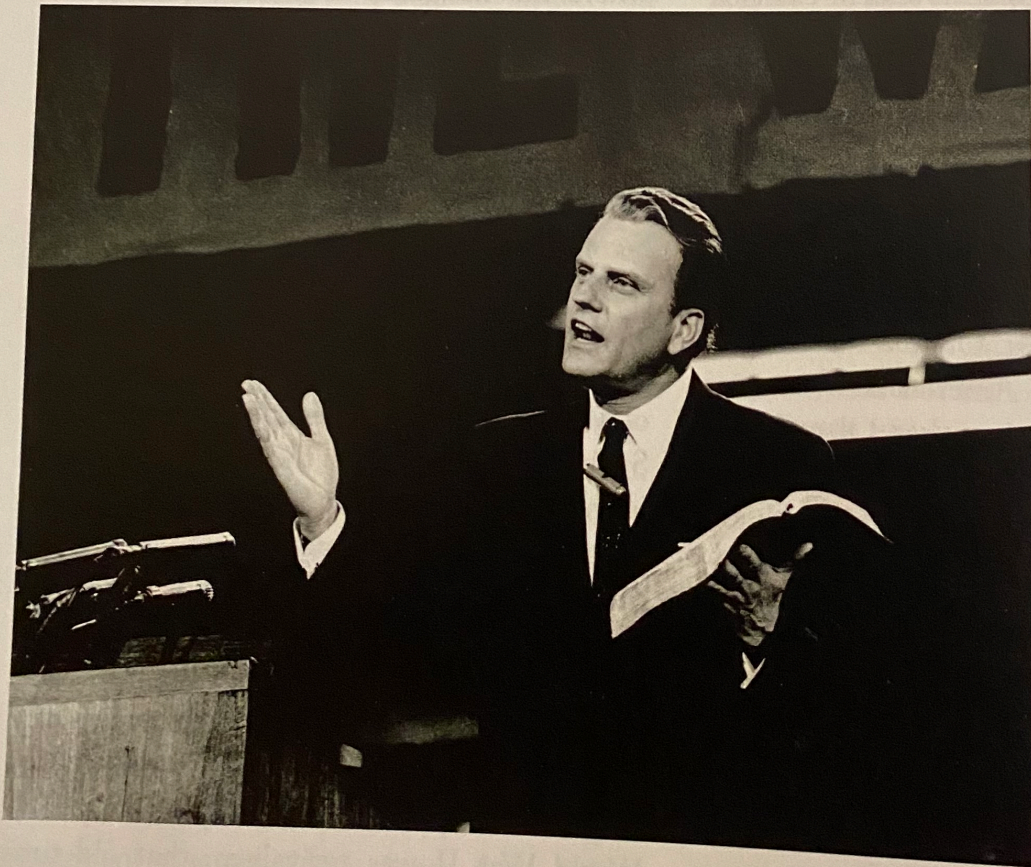
The most public form of Christianity after World War II was revivalism, that old-time

■ religion of repentance and salvation. Its greatest apostle was Billy Graham (1918–). Through his large stadium revivals and mass media broadcasting, Graham reached more people than any other preacher in Christian history. No matter how large the crowd, Graham somehow made each individual feel personally addressed. Graham's voice rang with the authority of Scripture as he denounced sin, warned of judgment, and proclaimed Christ as the only way to God. Graham closed every message with an invitation for people to come forward and make a public commitment to Christ. Radio and television audiences were directed to bow their heads, admit they were sinners, and ask Jesus into their lives.

Over a ministry spanning several decades, Billy Graham was able to change with the times and yet maintain a very consistent message. For

example, during the Cold War years, his sermons bristled with anti-Communist rhetoric, but later in life he called for nuclear disarmament and preached to huge crowds in Moscow and Kiev. Graham came from a fundamentalist background, yet his ecumenical stature grew until by the late twentieth century, a very broad swath of American Christians identified with him personally and volunteered to work at his revivals. When scandals over sex and money discredited other famous preachers, Graham's personal integrity remained intact. Through it all, his gospel of salvation never wavered.

Billy Graham became the unofficial chaplain to the White House. Beginning with Eisenhower, a long succession of American presidents invited Graham to Washington to serve as a spiritual counselor and to lead prayer meetings for high-ranking leaders. Of course, Graham's



**Fig. 8.3** Billy Graham preaching in the Greenville, South Carolina, Crusade, 1966. Photo courtesy of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

presence in the White House did not mean that every president believed in evangelical Christianity. Take, for example, Eisenhower's oft-quoted remark: "Our government makes no sense unless it is founded on a deeply felt religious faith—and I don't care what it is."<sup>6</sup> If American presidents used Graham for political advantage—as Richard M. Nixon seems to have done—then Graham was willing to take that risk.

Billy Graham preached to prepare sinners for heaven, but another brand of religion looked for success here on earth. Norman Vincent Peale (1898–1993) proclaimed the power of positive thinking. A minister of the Reformed Church in America, Peale mixed religion and psychology; the result was a gospel of self-improvement. His book *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952) promised success and peace of mind to those who think positively. Peale's message lacked any sense of tragedy, injustice, or sin; we have only to improve ourselves and all will be well!

Positive thinking fit well into the 1950s—the Depression was over, the war had been won, and people longed to pursue their own dreams. Positive thinking also drew from earlier forms of what Sidney Ahlstrom has called "harmonial religion." In this view, a person's oneness with the cosmos brings spiritual and physical health, and even economic well-being.<sup>7</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, the poet of nature and self-reliance, as well as Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of the Church of Christ (Scientist) are nineteenth-century thinkers belonging in this stream. Norman Vincent Peale was neither the first preacher of harmonial religion nor the last. His legacy lived on in Robert Schuller (1926–2015), promoter of "possibility thinking." Schuller's life was success incarnate, for he began his ministry in a rented drive-in theater in Southern California and ended up in the

dazzling Crystal Cathedral, completed in 1980. (The Crystal Cathedral went bankrupt in 2010. Two years later, it was bought by the Roman Catholic diocese of Orange, CA, and renamed Christ Cathedral.) The religion of self-esteem and success, now called "the prosperity gospel," continues to have new prophets and a wealth of followers in America.

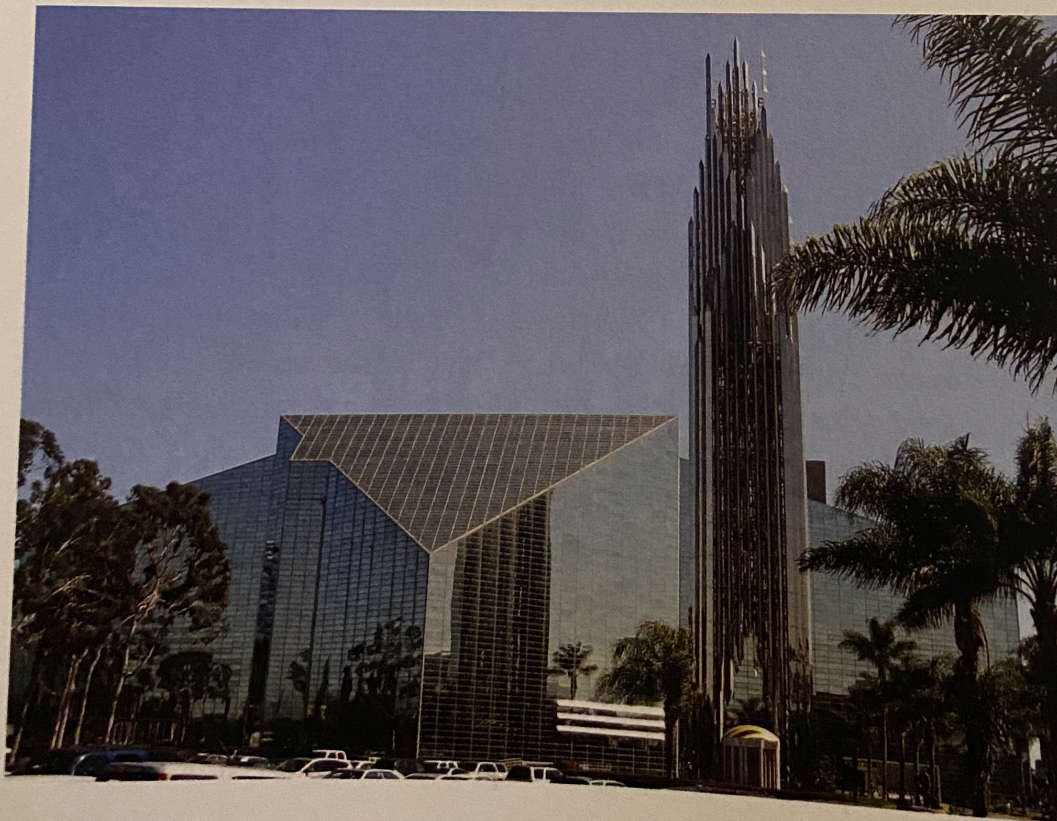
Fame was not "for Protestants only" in the 1950s. Archbishop Fulton Sheen (1895–1979) was a religious leader of national renown. Unlike Norman Vincent Peale (who saw nothing wrong with America that could not be fixed by positive thinking), Sheen saw a need for social reform. Like Billy Graham, he took seriously the classic Christian doctrines of sin and salvation and was an ardent foe of Communism.

Sheen was a brilliant communicator at Catholic University, where he taught theology for many years. Sheen's teaching went far beyond the classroom to reach a very broad audience. His books, especially *Peace of Soul* (1949) and *Life of Christ* (1958), were best sellers. From 1930 to 1952, he preached and lectured for the *Catholic Hour* radio broadcasts. Sheen was quick to embrace the new medium of television. His weekly television show, *Life Is Worth Living*, drew about thirty million viewers a week, running from 1951 to 1957 and earning an Emmy award.<sup>8</sup> In addition to being a pioneer in religious uses of media, Sheen was a bridge builder between Protestants and Catholics. He helped to dispel anti-Catholic prejudice by making Catholic teachings better known. Americans who had no prior contact with Catholicism saw Sheen as a Catholic bishop who was "warm, friendly and intelligent."<sup>9</sup> Sheen delivered the basics of Christian theology with conviction graced by Irish wit. No wonder Billy Graham called him "one of the greatest preachers of our century."<sup>10</sup>

We have noted several preachers who reached the masses in the 1950s. Theological seminaries, in contrast, reached a more specialized audience: future theologians and pastors. Two seminaries in particular illustrate two contrasting sectors of postwar Protestantism. The first is Union Seminary in New York City. Union was in its glory days in the 1950s. The brilliant German theologian Paul Tillich (1886–1965) began teaching at Union in 1933, after his criticism of Hitler caused him to be expelled from his professorship in Frankfurt. A Christian existentialist, Tillich used insights from classical theology and modern psychology to probe the “ultimate concern” of human existence. His three-volume *Systematic Theology* (1951–65) stands as one of the great works of theology in the twentieth century. Tillich came to Union in large part through the efforts of Reinhold Niebuhr, who also taught at Union. We have already described Niebuhr’s “Christian realism” in relation to World War II and

civil rights. Niebuhr and Tillich helped to put Union Seminary in New York in the vanguard of postwar theological education for mainline Protestants.

The second school is Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, founded in 1947. Not only was Fuller on the other side of the country from New York’s Union; it was on the other end of the theological spectrum. Union served a mainline and liberal constituency, while Fuller began with students and faculty who came from a fundamentalist background. The founders of Fuller wanted to remain theologically conservative while breaking away from the in-fighting, anti-intellectualism, and indifference to social issues that marred fundamentalism. Fuller sought to train leaders who would engage with American culture instead of separating from it. Historian George Marsden describes the struggle that took place in the early years as Fuller tried to chart a new course. Battles over biblical inerrancy raged, as



**Fig. 8.4** Christ Cathedral in Garden Grove, California. Formerly the Crystal Cathedral (Reformed Church in America). Photo: Arnold C. Buchanan-Hermit (Wikimedia Commons).

did power struggles between competing visions of the new conservatism.<sup>11</sup> Over time, a broader evangelicalism developed. Fuller now draws students from almost every denomination and from nondenominational churches (present-day fundamentalists regard Fuller as too liberal).

By the close of the twentieth century, Fuller Seminary enjoyed wide recognition for academic excellence and innovative programs. But Union Seminary in New York fell on hard times and had to sell some of its property. The West Coast school was thriving, and the East Coast school was struggling to survive. Although the stories of these seminaries are more complex than can be described here, their opposite trajectories over the course of half a century illustrate a larger trend in the recent history of Christianity in America: mainline decline and evangelical growth.

Even before the founding of Fuller Seminary, a new evangelicalism was being born. The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) was founded in 1943, providing a network for cooperation in evangelism, education, and humanitarianism. The NAE also launched the National Religious Broadcasters. Pentecostal Christians, traditionally shunned by fundamentalists, were included in the NAE.

Of several leaders who helped conservatives and moderates break away from fundamentalism, Billy Graham is the best known. When Graham accepted mainline support for his revivals in the 1950s, fundamentalists denounced him. But Graham knew that evangelism requires a big tent. Another key leader was Carl Henry (1913–2003), whose 1957 book, *The Uneasy Conscience of Fundamentalism*, called conservative evangelicals to social responsibility. A third major player in the new movement was Harold Ockenga (1905–1985), a pastor, scholar, and journalist who helped

establish the NAE, Fuller Seminary, and *Christianity Today*, the popular magazine of the new evangelicalism (founded in 1956).

Thanks to these and many other leaders, a new evangelical (post-fundamentalist) network began to flourish. It included publishing ventures, colleges and seminaries, evangelistic and humanitarian aid ministries, and Christian popular music. Today it has a strong presence on the internet and social media. This movement is “trans-denominational . . . built around networks of para-church agencies.”<sup>12</sup> According to one estimate, near the close of the twentieth century, about twenty million Americans identified themselves as evangelicals; this includes a host of people in many contexts who describe themselves as “born again.” Evangelicals come in an astonishing variety, but their core conviction is that Christianity begins with a spiritual transformation—conversion to Christ changes lives.

## Catholicism in the 1960s

In 1960 John F. Kennedy became the first Catholic president of the United States. In the course of the campaign, Kennedy had to address the fears—still common in America—that a Catholic president would serve the interests of Rome rather than of the United States. He had to convince the public that a Catholic president would respect the separation of church and state. Even though anti-Catholic bias was still “out there,” Kennedy’s election showed that the nation was moving toward a broader religious pluralism. Indeed, Americans of many backgrounds identified with Kennedy and the image of youth and courage conveyed by his administration. The assassination of Kennedy in 1963 plunged the nation into mourning, blurring old religious antagonisms.