"A deftly detailed history of Christianity's service to capitalism in the United States." —*New Republic*

One Nation Under God

How Corporate America Invented Christian America

KEVIN M. KRUSE

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.[1]

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."[2]

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."[3]

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.[4] 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."[5]

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."[6]

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."[7]

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."[8]

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."[9]

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.[10]

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.[11]

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."[12]

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.[13]

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."[14]

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."[15]

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.[16]

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."[17]

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.[18]

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.[19]

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."[20]

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.[21]

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!"[22]

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 unsubtle 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.[23]

FIFIELD WON A NUMBER OF powerful new 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."[24] In theological terms, the doctrinally conservative Presbyterian had little in common with the liberal Congregationalist Fifield.[25] "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."[26]

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."[27]

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.[28]

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.[29]

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.[30]

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.[31]

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."[32]

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."[33]

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."[34]

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."[35]

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.[36]

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.[37]

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."[38]

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."[39]

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.[40] 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.[41]

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.[42]

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."[43]

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."[44]

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 gospelers 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."[45]

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."[46]

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."[47]

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.[48]

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."[49]

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.[50]

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.[51]

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."[52]

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:

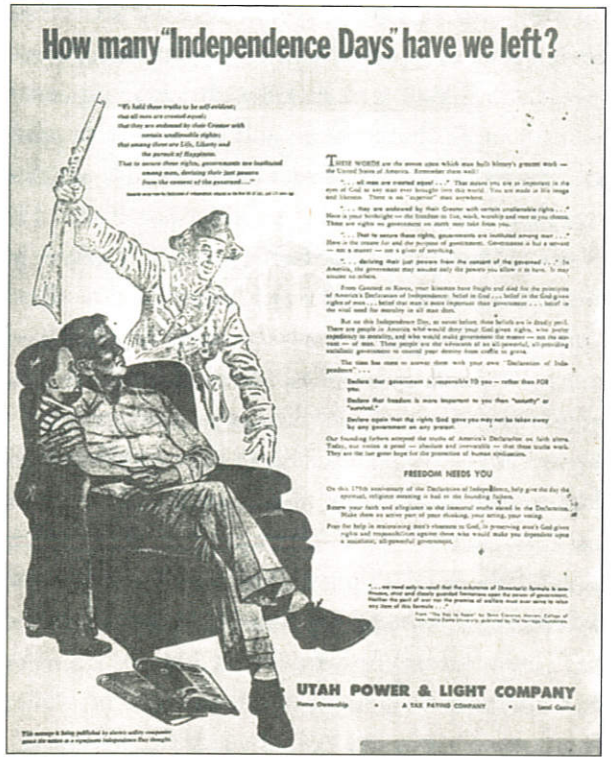
> These words are the stones upon which man has built history's greatest work—the United States of America. Remember them well!
>
> " . . . **all men are created equal** . . . " That means you are as important in the eyes of God as any man brought into this world. You are made in his image and likeness. 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."[53]

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



Utility companies such as the Utah Power & Light Company ran full-page advertisements that promoted the "Freedom Under God" celebrations of Spiritual Mobilization and, more important, its underlying message of Christian libertarianism.

theme of "Freedom Under God" and delivering it to their congregations on "Independence Sunday," July 1, 1951. They could also order, for a penny each, special worship calendars prepared by the committee, adorned with illustrations and messages supporting the festivities' theme. The interior was intentionally left blank so that the minister could mimeograph the details of his particular service and then literally wrap the Committee to Proclaim Liberty's message around it.[54]

On "Independence Sunday," the organization reported, "tens of thousands" of clergymen offered sermons on the topic of "Freedom Under God." Because the contest was limited to official minister-representatives of Spiritual Mobilization, the sermons invariably sounded its themes. "The effort to establish socialism in our country has probably progressed farther than most of us fully realize," asserted a Lutheran minister in

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 that 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."[55]

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.[56]

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."[57]

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."[58]

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.[59] 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."[60] 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.[61]

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."[62]

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.[1]

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