Abstract
“God’s Business Men”: Entrepreneurial Evangelicals in Depression and War
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Yale University Ph.D., 2010

For decades, historians of the twentieth-century United States have treated evangelicals as politically apathetic and culturally marginal between the 1925 Scopes Trial and the Reagan revolution. To the contrary, evangelical businessmen during the Depression and World War II opposed the New Deal on theological and economic grounds, and claimed a place alongside other conservatives in the public sphere. Like previous generations of devout laymen, they self-consciously merged their religious and business lives, financing and organizing evangelical causes with the same visionary pragmatism they practiced in the boardroom. For example, industrialist R.G. LeTourneau and executive Herbert J. Taylor countered government centralization in the 1930s and 1940s with philanthropies that invested in a Protestant, capitalist, and democratic world. Meanwhile, the Christian Business Men’s Committee International, the Business Men’s Evangelistic Clubs, and the Gideons infused spiritual fellowship with the elitism of advertising culture. They were confident that they could steer the masses to Christ and free enterprise from the top down. Indeed, for a few exhilarating years, World War II seemed to give America and its missionaries dominion over the globe. Piety, patriotism, and power drew LeTourneau, Taylor, and the new National Association of Evangelicals to the center of it all, Washington, D.C. The marriage of religious and economic conservatism since the 1970s, which surprised many historians, reflects historical continuity rather than evangelical retreat.
“God’s Business Men”: Entrepreneurial Evangelicals in Depression and War

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of
Yale University
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by
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May, 2010
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe an immeasurable debt to the archivists who made my research possible. Bob Shuster and Wayne Weber at the Billy Graham Center Archives know every nook and cranny of American evangelicalism. Bob’s habit of staying late for out-of-towners gave me at least ten extra hours with the materials. My hosts Julie and John Worthen fed me, gave rides when I could have taken the train, and filled the evenings with laughter, talk, and movies. At the Margaret Estes Library at LeTourneau University, Henry S. Whitlow went miles beyond the call of duty by loaning me volumes of NOW. Dale Hardy, an archive unto himself, mobilized volunteers to catalog hundreds of disorganized boxes. His tour of the LeTourneau plant was a highlight of my visit, as was staying with Lee Wilkinson, a favorite childhood babysitter. The Hagley Library awarded me a grant-in-aid to spend two weeks with the papers of J. Howard Pew. Phil Wade at the Christian Business Men’s Committee headquarters not only searched for, but scanned, sources that fleshed out the stories of evangelical business men’s groups. I also thank the staff at the Library of Congress and the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library.

I am deeply grateful to the organizations that helped fund my graduate school career. The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation subsidized my first year with the Andrew F. Mellon Fellowship in Humanistic Studies. The Richard J. Franke Interdisciplinary Fellowship in the Humanities added three years of support. Most of all, the Lake Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship at the Center for the Study of Philanthropy at Indiana University enabled me to finish. Meeting the members of the Lake Institute board felt like being re-introduced to old friends. I thank them for their hospitality and their feedback on my research.

Extraordinary colleagues and friends helped me think through what I wanted to say, and did no small amount of hand-holding as I struggled to say it. Amanda Bell, Alexandra Block, Debbie Dinner, Jill Fraley, Brian Gold, Alison Greene, Keith Harper, Michael Jo, Geoff Kabaservice, Kramer A. Kramer, Tracy Lemos, A.G. Miller, Bethany Moreton, Robin Morris, Dawn Neely-Randall, Eva Pascal, Gabby Redwine, Maria Satterwhite, Reva Siegel, Linn Tonstad, Kate Unterman, Shira Weidenbaum, and Molly Worthen were conversation partners, editors, and cheerleaders.

Infinite thanks to Mary and Steve Hammond, Rachel Ramirez-Hammond, and Grace Hammond for their generosity, stubborn faith, and love.
For JR,

with love and squalor
INTRODUCTION

It was 1920 and workers were striking in Zenith, a Midwestern town whose gleaming skyscrapers gave middle-class strivers a sense of the sublime. Each morning, George F. Babbitt – a forty-six year old realtor, Presbyterian, Republican, Elk, Zenith Booster, and Chamber of Commerce member – gazed from his suburban window upon the thirty-five story Second National Bank, “a temple-spire of the religion of business.”\(^1\) Torn between unreflective faith in unimpeded capitalism and qualms about rhetorical and real violence against the workers (“bomb-throwing socialists and thugs,” he overheard, “and the only way to handle ’em is with a club!”), Babbitt went to church to learn “How the Saviour Would End Strikes.”\(^2\) “Hope the doc gives the strikers hell!” hissed the advertising man sharing his pew. “Ordinarily, I don’t believe in a preacher butting into political matters – let him stick to straight religion and save souls, and not stir up a lot of discussion – but at a time like this, I do think he ought to stand right up and bawl out those plug-uglies to a fare-you well!”\(^3\)

The Chatham Road Presbyterian Church of Zenith was a belligerent in a broader fight dividing white Northern Protestants. “Modernists” accepted historical and scientific criticism of the Bible, emphasized human potential over innate depravity, and denounced industrial capitalism’s extremes of wealth and poverty. They dismissed pietism without social reform as irresponsible, seeing inequality as a collective problem requiring collective, sometimes government, solutions. Conservative evangelicals or “fundamentalists,” by contrast, conceptualized orthodoxy as adherence to supernatural

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\(^2\) Ibid., 324, 321.

\(^3\) Ibid., 321.
doctrines that science could not explain: divine creation, original sin, the virgin birth, Jesus’s atoning death and resurrection, an afterlife in heaven or hell. To them, social change was a byproduct of conversion, which took place in individual hearts and trumped schemes for the common good. Trusting God to bless the righteous and curse the wicked, they defended capitalism by pointing to scriptures in which riches rewarded obedience. Making hay of communist atheism, they acknowledged no meaningful distinctions among the Social Gospel, socialism, and out-and-out Bolshevism. All represented sedition against God’s chosen nation, the United States, and evangelicals did fear collective punishment.

Babbitt’s evangelical minister argued that opposing Zenith’s strike was not a political statement, but a religious duty. The labor revolt capped “a generation” of spiritual warfare between Bible-believing Christians and enemies of the gospel and “the natural condition of free enterprise.”4 He mocked evolutionists and the “great poo-bahs of [theological] criticism” who “attack…the established fundamentals of the Christian creed.” He called labor unions “crazy systems…of despotic paternalism” that tried to stop the invisible hand of God from regulating the marketplace. “[T]his whole industrial matter isn’t a question of economics,” he concluded. “It’s essentially and only a matter of Love, and of the practical application of the Christian religion!” If management and labor could coexist in Christian brotherhood, “then…strikes would be as inconceivable as hatred in the home!” Babbitt, who was miserable at home, snapped, “Oh, rot!”5 But he could not resist the union-busting theology that excited so many of his peers. “I tell you,

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4 Lewis, Babbitt, 321.
5 Ibid., 321-22.
boy,” he exclaimed to his son, “there’s no stronger bulwark of sound conservatism than the evangelical church...”

This last was an unremarkable observation in 1922 when Sinclair Lewis published *Babbitt*, his cynical satire of business-class America in boom times. It was just as true in 1932, when Franklin D. Roosevelt embarked on an unprecedented expansion of state power to fight the Depression, and in 1942, when evangelical critics of the “tyrannical” New Deal kept a wary eye on the wartime alliance between government and business. Yet historians have largely overlooked the intersection of theologically conservative evangelicalism and political conservatism between the 1920s and the Cold War. Shortly after *Babbitt*’s release, fundamentalists lost the civil war within Northern Protestantism and a public relations battle with evolutionists at the Scopes Trial. By the end of the decade, they retrenched to develop a thriving and avowedly insular religious subculture.

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6 Ibid., 230.

7 For a wartime exposition of Babbitt’s pastor’s theology, likewise “from the viewpoint of religion and the Scriptures...[and] not a political treatise,” see Carl McIntire, *The Rise of the Tyrant; Controlled Economy vs. Private Enterprise* (Collingswood, NJ: Christian Beacon Press, 1945), xi and following.

8 “Evangelical” and fundamentalist were interchangeable identities during the 1930s and 1940s, although specialists will recognize many of my subjects as the “new evangelicals” who distanced themselves from “fundamentalists” mid-century. George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 48.

They did not, however, “become largely apolitical for decades,” as *The New York Times* fifty years later phrased the conventional wisdom about the post-1960s “New Christian Right.”

Like Babbitt’s pastor, real-life evangelicals engaged the vital issues of the day in terms they defined as religious, not political; eternal, not temporal; spiritual, not worldly. During the Depression and World War II, few questions were more urgent than the economic conditions for a free, prosperous, and virtuous society. Fundamentals joined libertarians, anti-Keynesian intellectuals, and small-government Republicans to preach individual initiative in a self-regulating marketplace instead of an activist state.

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Businessmen played a unique role as mediators between the evangelical subculture, to which they brought money and organizational skills, and the broader culture, to which they witnessed their faith. R.G. LeTourneau, a self-taught engineer who built a manufacturing company during the Depression, transformed his corporate platform into a pulpit. A blunt, quick-witted tornado of a man, his head permanently tilted atop a towering frame that survived two neck-breaking accidents, LeTourneau embodied George F. Babbitt’s “God-fearing, hustling, successful, two-fisted Regular Guy.”13 When evangelical businessmen stressed their status as laymen, as LeTourneau often did, it was to reject the implied mirror image of a cloistered, out-of-touch, effeminate minister. This gendering of roles, which countless collaborations and friendships belied, brought corporate divisions of labor and expertise into religious life. Just as businessmen felt unqualified to dissect Biblical passages in the original Hebrew, they doubted clerical competence in the rough-and-tumble realm of public affairs.

LeTourneau had particular reason to assert his manhood, because he was both a layman and a preacher. Born in 1888, he began working after leaving school in eighth grade, owing early factory jobs to his evangelical sect’s economic network. He fell in love with earthmoving equipment and began his career as a manufacturer in California, starting in California, moving in the mid-1930s to the Midwest, and landing in the South by the time America entered the war. A traveling evangelist, he advertised himself as “God’s businessman,” citing his success during the Depression as proof that servants of the Lord would prosper. “Christianity works not only for children and feeble old folks, but for a he-man, doing business, winning in the battle of life,” he said. This placed an

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13 Lewis, 195.
enormous responsibility on laymen “to win men to Christ and feel their responsibility for the cause of Christ just as much as the preacher.”¹⁴ He called God his “Senior Partner,” and jetted around the country to bring his plain-spoken testimony to church groups, Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs, and Chambers of Commerce.

As with many businessmen fighting the era’s cataclysmic market forces, government was sometimes LeTourneau’s adversary and sometimes a silent partner. On one hand, he brought his conservative gospel to the factory floor, tapping a stable of fundamentalist ministers for weekly “shop talks” and keeping up a steady stream of anti-union invective in devotional publications. He donated ninety percent of his profits to evangelical causes, including Bible schools, a Bible camp for poor and immigrant children, and an international conference center at one of his plants. He believed in Christian charity, not government handouts. On the other hand, he owed some of his millions to a wartime contract with the Roosevelt administration, and hobnobbed with governors and senators happy to minimize taxes and regulations to draw industry to their states. The economic dyad he proclaimed between God and each individual was unstable. Sometimes LeTourneau treated government as a friendly go-between. Other times, most starkly when his workers exercised their legal right to unionize, he cast the state not as the long arm of God, but as a threat to cosmic order. Sinclair Lewis would have dismissed LeTourneau’s inconsistencies as simple hypocrisy, but even if they were hypocrisy, they were not simple. Other evangelical businessmen were negotiating the same dissonance.

Groups such as the Christian Business Men’s Committee International (CBMCI), the Business Men’s Evangelistic Clubs (BMEC), and the Gideons believed that businessmen were God’s instruments to Christianize the world. As salesmen, they saw themselves a cadre of expert manipulators. If they could convince the masses to buy their products, then they must try to bend them to God’s will. According to the BMEC’s Vernon W. Patterson, an early patron of Billy Graham, “In business, [the layman] is accustomed to promote the sale and distribution of merchandise or commodities of all kinds...[W]hy should not such systematic planning be extended to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth?” Following nineteenth-century precedent, the CBMCI in the North, Midwest, West, and Canada, and the BMEC in the South furnished money and personnel for a range of evangelistic programs. Members held daily noon worship in urban centers, sponsored interdenominational revivals, taught Sunday School, led Bible studies, and sat on charitable boards. They created USO-style “servicemen’s centers” during World War II, and backed a wave of youth evangelism in the war’s wake. The Gideons participated in some of these efforts, but their focus, famously, was Bible distribution. By 1940, when LeTourneau served a term as president, the Gideons were amassing Bibles for public schools. The goal was to nurture a lifelong identification between Protestantism and American citizenship by countering evolutionary, Catholic, and communist influences.

The growing possibility that America would enter World War II heightened the groups’ urgency. Indeed, the evangelical conviction that God had anointed America to redeem the world was one reason that men such as LeTourneau had a vexed relationship

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to the New Deal state. Fundamentalists took seriously the scriptural injunction to yield
unto God what is God’s and unto Caesar what is Caesar’s.¹⁷ During peacetime, they
struggled to sort out which was which. During war, the existential threat to the nation
justified conflating the two.¹⁸ Even before Pearl Harbor, missionary hopes began to soar.
After America joined the fight, evangelical businessmen, clergy, and intellectuals joined
their countrymen and women in planning for postwar citizenship in a superpower.
England was in shambles, and the Soviet Union, a treacherous ally, did not have the
atomic bomb. The CBMCI, BMEC, and Gideons rejoiced that God was giving America
the power to evangelize every soul in the world. Their confidence was cultural, not
subcultural.

Herbert J. Taylor, president of Chicago-based Club Aluminum, preferred the
Rotary Club to the CBMCI. The suburb of Park Ridge, where he and his wife opened
their home to youth for Sunday School every week, was two hundred miles and a white-
collar culture apart from Peoria, the smokestack city where R.G. LeTourneau built his
first big plant. Five years LeTourneau’s junior, but born into money and college-
educated, Taylor was a different breed of businessman. He did not proselytize on the job,
but he made a version of the Golden Rule the company ethos. He helped launch the
career of future Billy Graham crooner George Beverly Shea by hiring him to sing hymns
on “Club Time,” a radio show otherwise devoted to advertising aluminum kitchenware.
Taylor gave money to Republican candidates, but was open to elements of the New Deal,
even serving on a regulatory agency in Washington during World War II. He was an

¹⁸ On evangelical nationalism during World War I, see Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture,
150-53.
infrequent public speaker, and few of the thousands who cheered at LeTourneau revivals would have recognized his face.

Behind the scenes, however, Herb Taylor shaped American evangelicalism in deep and lasting ways. His philanthropy, the Christian Workers Foundation (CWF), gave seed money and more to fundamentalist individuals and organizations that he deemed capable of cultural leadership on a national or international level. He focused especially on higher education, the gateway to elite status. He almost single-handedly brought the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, now ubiquitous on college campuses, to American soil. Other CWF legacies included Young Life, the Old-Fashioned Gospel Hour hosted by evangelist Charles Fuller, and the eponymous Fuller Theological Seminary. Taylor may have been less colorful than Babbitt-like businessmen, but behind his rimless glasses, he had keener vision.19

Taylor was the founding treasurer of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), which formed in 1941 and 1942 to unite fundamentalists as a political lobby and religious juggernaut to speed the evangelization of the world. The political lobby was in self-defense. Mainline Protestants had long since organized into the Federal Council of Churches (FCC) to streamline interdenominational cooperation and voice their concerns to the government. Motivated by the same wartime ideology of American “unity” that was spurring evangelicals to mobilize, the FCC campaigned for new radio regulations that would promote religious tolerance over theological specificity. The changes would all but disenfranchise fundamentalists from their most wide-reaching evangelistic medium. Foreign missionary work also suffered from government recognition of the FCC

19 I owe the description of the glasses to a conversation with William G. Enright, Nov. 1, 2009.
as the official voice of Protestantism. Evangelicals lacked automatic standing to receive visas, passports, and other authorization to go overseas, and the war worsened the backlog. The founders of the NAE wanted an organizational counterweight to the FCC with an office in Washington. To succeed, they had to persuade the notoriously independent factions of the fundamentalist community to accept the principle of strength in numbers and agree to a doctrinal baseline.

NAE’s first years brought both the teamwork and tensions between evangelical businessmen and clergy into sharp relief. Taylor and a handful of other laymen at the top wanted to run NAE like a corporation, with clear, achievable, and, above all, affordable short- and long-term goals. They expected an element of risk, especially with God guiding the organization, but they also trusted God to keep his projects financially stable. Many clergymen ran their churches on the same basis, so the businessmen, though outnumbered, had allies. However, the visionary behind NAE, a realtor-turned-preacher named J. Elwin Wright, followed the Spirit first and worried about the budget later. His extravagant leaps of faith, such as abruptly announcing that NAE would open an office for War Relief without investigating the cost or the need for government certification, moved NAE from a reactive stance to bold cultural interventions. But Wright might have bankrupted NAE without timely funds from Taylor and his colleagues, one of whom angrily resigned. Soon, Wright stepped down to a role that required no money management. The organizational consequences of the NAE’s lurching finances illustrate the most basic and powerful role of businessmen within the evangelical subculture. Any purse they opened, they could close.
Businessmen remind scholars not to take evangelical repudiations of “politics” at face value, but as triumphalist tropes placing all human concerns under the canopy of “Christianity.” This is not to say that evangelicals did not construct spheres of the “worldly,” to shun, and the “spiritual,” to shelter. Rather, it is to argue that the totalizing nature of evangelical commitment could, and did, collapse such boundaries with remarkably little fuss for religionists renowned for aggressive apathy toward mortal affairs. Historians of American religion have produced excellent studies of the fundamentalist subculture between the 1920s and 1950s, but assumed believers’ indifference to current events except as signs of the coming apocalypse. Historians of American politics and culture, like the New York Times, have treated the marriage of theological and economic conservatism like a shotgun wedding at the Reagan revolution.\textsuperscript{20} Clergymen, theologians, evangelists, and other full-time religious workers dominate each narrative, allowing intellectual and spiritual elites to speak for laypeople with one foot in the non-evangelical world. Bringing in businessmen shows that evangelicals have been part of the anti-New Deal coalition from the start.

Chapter 1

“God Is My Partner”: R.G. LeTourneau’s Prosperity Gospel

On September 27, 1940, radio listeners across North America tuned into “Ripley’s Believe It Or Not” to hear evangelical industrialist R.G. LeTourneau discuss the financial rewards of his faith.¹ The program opens with a fictional dialogue between LeTourneau, playing his younger self, and a colleague incredulous that God is their chief stakeholder. “The time…December, 1929, just after the memorable Wall Street crash,” the narrator intones. “The place – the office of a small factory in Stockton, California. The owner of the plant is talking with his assistant. They face the unhappy prospect of bankruptcy.” LeTourneau says that he intends to spend his last five hundred dollars on “one obligation…my missionary pledge.” The assistant gasps, “What? Facing bankruptcy and you’re going to use the last of your money for a church pledge? But we owe so much on other things.” LeTourneau is adamant: “I told God that as long as I had a dime I would pay that missionary pledge.” Introducing the punch line that made LeTourneau, who designed and manufactured earthmoving equipment, a minor celebrity, the assistant cries, “Why that’s actually making God – your partner!!” LeTourneau says, “Yes, I shall make God a partner in my business.” He would henceforth serve both God and Mammon by setting aside ninety percent of his salary and company profits for evangelical causes. “[Y]ou have made the Word of God a glorious, practical reality,” Ripley tells his guest

when the skit ends, then turns to his audience with his own trademark flourish: “And of such is the work of faith...Believe It Or Not.”

“Believe It or Not” is an apt phrase for the unsung story of business men such as LeTourneau who financed and mobilized conservative white evangelicals during the Depression and World War II. LeTourneau’s star turn on “Ripley” challenges a historiography of fundamentalism that focuses on preachers, full-time evangelists, and theologians who drew a sharp rhetorical line between believers and “the world.” This scholarship depicts a vibrant, proselytizing, yet deeply insular Protestant subculture whose members viewed the public sphere – “the world” of politics and hedonistic consumption – as hostile to the religious imperatives of saving souls, enforcing doctrinal correctness, and maintaining behavioral purity. Even as they appropriated dress, slang, music, and other aspects of broader white middle-class culture, evangelicals policed the boundaries between the heavenly and the worldly. Why, then, did a prominent evangelical executive appear on Ripley’s secular and frequently scandalous program, sharing the airwaves with Siamese twins and Indian firewalkers? Stranger still, why did Ripley treat LeTourneau’s faith as vital and heroic rather than a fossilized freak show?

The collaboration suggests that scholars of American religion have overemphasized the parochialism of twentieth-century evangelicals and, as a result,
overlooked their participation in multifaith or formally secular public spheres. Work, not church, was the site where laymen and often laywomen practiced fundamentalism within the homogenizing norms of a pluralistic civil society. A widely held belief in the essential Christianity (or, still more vaguely, “Judeo-Christianity”) of capitalism served as common ground. LeTourneau’s motto, “God is My Partner,” meant more than extravagant tithing. It celebrated the all-American icon of the self-made man and the conservative politics that went with it, holding individuals responsible for their fate regardless of socioeconomic circumstances. To be “God’s business man” was to adhere to a contractual theology as old as biblical Israel and as binding as a modern commercial agreement. It required obedience to divine commands such as observing the Sabbath; tithing; volunteering for church or evangelistic responsibilities; and adopting an ethos of “fairness” that valued relationships, especially with other Christians, over competitive

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advantage. God’s business men maintained a “Christian atmosphere” at work that challenged the conventions of male sociability, observing, if not necessarily enforcing, evangelical taboos against drinking, swearing, smoking, and overt sexuality. God, in turn, rewarded fidelity with profits and punished backsliding with losses. The divine-human dyad eliminated external causes of success or failure. Ripley was no fundamentalist, but he admired the seamlessness of LeTourneau’s identities as an evangelical and an entrepreneur. Quoting the Sermon on the Mount – “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father” – he challenged listeners to emulate LeTourneau’s pluck and piety.

LeTourneau had a weakness for portraying himself as Horatio Alger by way of Pilgrim’s Progress, and get-rich-quick sanctity made good radio. However, as evangelical fans knew from his writings and speeches, being God’s partner was neither a simple nor a solitary commitment. Nowhere did “Believe It or Not” stretch credulity more than in the opening dramatization, which reduced LeTourneau’s lifetime in evangelical circles to a road-to-Damascus epiphany. It was in 1919, not 1929, that


11 LeTourneau, 135; Lorimer, 111.


13 Ripley, 3-4.
LeTourneau declared his partnership with God after one of his missionary sisters accused him of caring more about his machines than Jesus. He sought out his pastor, who told him that “God needs business men as well as preachers and missionaries.” According to LeTourneau’s autobiography, he replied with immense relief, “All right, if that is what God wants me to be, I’ll try to be His business man.”

He did not always keep his promise. In 1931, he diverted a $5000 missionary pledge to his company (“Ripley” slashed it to the less oligarchical sum of $500), only to end the year in debt. He concluded that God was punishing his faithlessness and doubled his next offering.

Although 1932 proved to be the worst year of the Depression, the business prospered, confirming his belief – ubiquitous among evangelicals – that God was punishing the nation for a collective breach of contract. Only a revival could repair a people’s broken contract with God, and it was up to those who recognized the problem to take the lead.

LeTourneau settled on the ninety percent/ten percent distribution of wealth sometime between 1935 and 1940, launched a side career in preaching, and threw himself into revivalistic laymen’s groups such as the Christian Business Men’s Committee International and the Gideons. Meanwhile, he cultivated local and national politicians as he opened manufacturing hubs across the country, especially the segregated and anti-union South.

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14 LeTourneau, 109-10. While the autobiography is no less self-mythologizing than the “Ripley” program, this version of the story is more or less canonical by virtue of repetition. See also Ackland, 55-56; Lorimer, 40-41.

The “Ripley” introduction shows how difficult it could be to treat faith and business as bedfellows after a decade of plummeting confidence in capitalism. Setting the scene in 1929 links LeTourneau’s financial dilemma to the global economic crisis, but epic individualism displaces organized religion as the way out. The script omits LeTourneau’s preacher and moves the “God needs business men” epiphany from a church to an office building, sanctifying the workplace by separating it from the site of communal worship – the opposite of LeTourneau’s policy in his plants, where evangelistic services took place once or twice a week. By putting the spotlight on one charismatic man in a program devoted to “oddities,” Ripley, with his guest’s blessing, wrongly implied that LeTourneau’s partnership with God was unique. In fact, it belonged to a tradition that extended at least as far back as the Second Great Awakening, when business men such as Charles and Arthur Tappan subsidized preachers like Charles Finney and evangelical social movements such as temperance and abolitionism. A century later, LeTourneau filled auditoriums with laymen who renounced what they saw as the hubris of the New Deal and called America to humility, repentance, and conversion.

Far from abandoning a sinful and pluralistic society, twentieth-century evangelical business men such as LeTourneau sought to leaven it through exhortation and example. Their belief in individual redemption as the force behind social progress did not


17 LeTourneau, 209-10.

detach them from political questions; in business, private gain and public policy were intertwined with religious truth. The entrepreneurs, managers, and employers in this study believed in the top-down marketing of ideas as well as goods to a passive and manipulable population. As expert salesmen, they would help – or supplant – otherworldly clergy to win converts to fundamentalist Christianity. They knew how to think strategically, raise money, organize and publicize large events, and distill complex doctrines into compelling analogies and anecdotes. Theologically, business men focused on the bottom line, emphasizing common ground over sectarian conflict to enlarge the fold without compromising the “fundamentals.” They demanded cost-effectiveness and strategic thinking from the religious causes they supported, often through personal or corporate philanthropies, and tended them as carefully as other portfolios. Their spiritual authority hinged on success in a marketplace in which earthly and heavenly dividends were one. “The minute I started that partnership [with God], business boomed,” LeTourneau told Ripley, listing sales figures into the millions. Ripley applauded, “Mr. LeTourneau, in these troubled times, you are a magnificent example to those of little faith.” Poverty was an effect, not a cause, of despair.

LeTourneau was indeed a remarkable man, but he exemplified a breed of fundamentalist whose worldliness was their defining spiritual credential. This chapter begins by embedding him in the turn-of-the-century context in which he learned how to be a Christian business man. It sketches his peripatetic path to a career designing earthmoving equipment for private and public sector projects to build roads, bridges, and dams – the connective tissue of industrialization. As LeTourneau moved from California to the Midwest to the South, he cultivated powerful political allies, and simultaneously

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19 Ripley, 4.
benefited from and decried the growth of the federal government under Franklin D. Roosevelt. He viewed himself as a generous employer as concerned with his employees’ souls as with their standard of living, and held regular evangelistic services on the shop floor while fighting “communist” unionization efforts. By the time he appeared on “Ripley,” most of his profits went to the LeTourneau Evangelistic Foundation, which made him a powerful fundamentalist philanthropist. Whether he knew it or not, LeTourneau was as much a missionary as his sisters. His field was small-to midsized companies like his own, and his message was that employers and managers held the tools to build Christ’s kingdom.

LeTourneau’s generation was a living link between culturally confident nineteenth-century evangelicalism to embattled twentieth-century “fundamentalism.”

Jean and Marie LeTourneau, his paternal grandparents, were French Hugenots who came to Quebec as missionaries in the 1840s. After his father Caleb was born, they moved five miles across the border to Richford, Vermont, where French-speaking Canadians dominated the population. Jean continued to preach while he and his wife ran a boarding school, a farm and a saw mill. In 1881, Caleb married schoolteacher Elizabeth Lorimer, another immigrant from Quebec; three of her four brothers were clergymen. Caleb would have inherited Jean’s ministry if his older brother had not lost an arm in a mill accident and been unable to manage the farm. Instead, he took charge of the family business and became a leader in the Plymouth Brethren church, founded in the mid-19th century by Anglo-Irish evangelist John Nelson Darby. Convinced of the literal truth of

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20 Ibid., 6-7.
21 LeTourneau, 5.
the Bible and the need for believers to separate themselves from a fallen world and apostate church, Darby developed the end-times doctrine that would come to be known as “premillennial dispensationalism.” He divided world history into seven “dispensations” that began with a covenant between God and humanity and ended with humanity’s rebellion. He argued that the earth was currently poised in a “great parenthesis” between Christ’s resurrection and the end of the world. This “church age” offered a last chance for the unsaved to repent, and the burden was on believers to convert as many souls as possible. When the clock ran out, Christians would disappear en masse, “raptured” into heaven while everyone else endured the reign of the Antichrist. Holy wars would usher in Christ’s kingdom on earth at last.22

Premillenialism took hold among many conservative Protestants in Europe and the Americas. Although its claim to be an essential pillar of evangelical truth sparked fierce debate, its influence gave the Plymouth Brethren pride of parentage when fundamentalism emerged at the turn of the twentieth century. Conservative evangelicals felt pressed to counter emerging theological “modernism,” which treated the Bible as a human artifact instead of the literal word of God and concerned itself less with the redemption of individuals than with large-scale social reform.23 Transatlantic revivalist Dwight L. Moody was the most famous anti-modernist to adopt premillennialism as an


antidote to what he saw as a pernicious trend toward elevating human will over divine omnipotence. They practiced conventional evangelical asceticism, but distrusted outsiders. Robert Gilmour ("R.G.") LeTourneau, born in 1888 and named after Caleb’s Brethren best friend and business partner, was the fourth of Caleb and Elizabeth’s eight children. As a child, he internalized the magnitude of being in covenant with God, but had no idea that premillennialism made the Brethren special. Rather, he recalled visible markers of difference: in particular, the “prosperously dressed and bearded men” who gathered to talk after services.

These bearded men, including Caleb, were church elders, and part of a far-flung sectarian business network that took the LeTourneaus from Vermont to Minnesota and then to Oregon by R.G.’s fourteenth birthday. The Minnesota connection was familial as well as religious: Caleb’s brother Joshua, a printer in Duluth, hired him and Gilmour to build a house, and the pair became full-time contractors. Joshua introduced the new arrivals to Duluth’s Plymouth Brethren, which LeTourneau described as “a closely knit

24 Marsden, 32-39.


26 Boyer, 87.

27 LeTourneau, 7, 12.

28 Ibid., 23.
group intensely loyal to the church and to each other.”\textsuperscript{29} He owed the formative years of his working life to the Brethren’s clannishness everywhere. An explosively energetic boy, impatient with book-learning and infatuated with machinery, he quit school in eighth grade, insisting to his furious father that he was, at fourteen, a “man growed.”\textsuperscript{30} By then it was 1902, and the LeTourneaus had moved to Portland, Oregon at the invitation of a transplanted Duluth church member.\textsuperscript{31} (In a sign of upward mobility that could not have done R.G. any favors, the eldest son, Harold, stayed behind as a student at the University of Minnesota.) Portland was a boom town, with Midwestern farmers, German and Scandinavian immigrants, and Chinese laborers feverishly industrializing the region. Between 1901 and 1910, the city’s population surged from 90,000 to 207,000. Not only was there “a shortage of carpenters” like Caleb, there was a shortage of strong youth like R.G.\textsuperscript{32}

Caleb yielded to his impetuous, oversized son (“I was not going to squeeze my six-foot, 160-pound frame behind a desk made for little eighth graders”), and conspired with Brethren elders to catapult him into adult responsibilities.\textsuperscript{33} A “little, soft-voiced” Englishman, Mr. Hill, represented the sect’s transnational reach. He owned the East Portland Iron Works and hired LeTourneau to work dawn-to-dusk in the foundry. Another employer would have left the novice to his own devices, but as an evangelical business man and a friend of the family, Hill adopted a paternal role. He shielded

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 7-8, 11.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 22.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 19.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Walter Nugent, \textit{Into the West: The Story of Its People} (New York: Random House, 1999), 77-78, 132; LeTourneau, 19.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 22-23.
\end{itemize}
LeTourneau from workmen’s vices by warning the crew that serving him alcohol was a fireable offense. Under Hill’s watchful eye, LeTourneau learned to use his precocious vocabulary to “cuss harder without swear words than any man” – a boast that established his tough-talking masculine credentials within the bounds of evangelical propriety. Hill even took LeTourneau on as an apprentice, allowing him to use the machine shop after hours to experiment with new metals and alloys that were transforming the industry. As LeTourneau put it, “the whole science of metallurgy…[was] dumped on us without warning,” and he thrilled to the intellectual and physical labor of practicing chemistry on the fly.

Hill’s supervision and support kept LeTourneau within the Brethren fold, but could not produce the conversion experience that would make the boy a true believer. He went to church with his family and Hill every Sunday, barely staying awake and typecasting himself in the role of the outwardly righteous imposter. At 16, during a week-long urban revival – an evangelical tradition that carried over from the nineteenth to the twentieth century – the prodigal son finally found Christ. “No bolts of lightning hit me. No great flash of awareness. I just prayed to the Lord to save me…[and] all of my bitterness was drained away, and I was filled with such a vast relief I could not contain it.

34 LeTourneau, 29.
all.”36 It was Christmastide, 1904, and the sixteen-year old convert became an active, if “awkward,” church member. He sang too poorly for the choir. His three sisters played leading roles in the Young People’s Missionary Society, but LeTourneau was too terrified of public speaking even to deliver an opening prayer.37 For work, his spiritual maturation came just in time. Fire destroyed the East Portland Iron Works at the end of 1905, putting Mr. Hill out of business. LeTourneau had not completed the apprenticeship qualifications for the iron molders’ craft union, which shut him out of other jobs in Portland and may have been one source of his later anti-labor animus as an employer. When a former coworker invited him to a foundry in San Francisco, LeTourneau’s parents allowed him to go. For the most part, he boarded with Brethren families, joining a church on his own initiative. He completed his apprenticeship in the aftermath of the 1906 earthquake, and his union membership made him employable despite the disaster.38

LeTourneau’s religious and business ambitions, like those of many British, Canadian, and American evangelicals, were bound up in missionary work – especially to China, to which California was the port of call. Having displaced native peoples and foreign colonizers to establish its continental borders, the United States at the turn of the century was an imperial power in its own right. The annexation of Hawaii and the Samoan Islands was relatively peaceful, but only war with Spain could win political

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36 Ibid., 33. There is a vast literature on Christian conversion narratives and the identities that religious communities expected men and women to inhabit along the way. Most useful here is Randall Balmer and Lauren F. Winter’s survey of early American theologies and morphologies of conversion in Protestantism in America (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 37-43. As with many of LeTourneau’s stories, facts vary from version to version without harming the message. One biographer, quoting from LeTourneau’s speeches, describes a conventionally melodramatic moment: “Then I cried out in desperation to God, ‘Lord, save me or I perish!’ Right there something happened. The glory of the Lord broke over me and the full reality of salvation came into my soul.” Lorimer, 30.

37 LeTourneau, 35.

38 Ibid., 44.
control over Puerto Rico, Cuba (indebted to the U.S. for its independence), and the
Philippines (which revolted unsuccessfully against its new occupier).\(^{39}\) While some
Americans contested the strategic and moral value of conquest, white Protestants across
the theological spectrum could embrace a justifying ideology of racial superiority and
Christian progress. The fast-growing foreign missionary movement interpreted
unprecedented American access to dark-skinned and “Oriental” lands in light of the Great
Commission to “go ye into all the world and preach the gospel.”\(^{40}\) Undeterred by the
1900 Boxer Rebellion, an anti-colonial revolt that targeted foreign proselytizers and
Chinese converts, LeTourneau’s sister Sarah was studying Chinese and raising money for
the journey across the ocean.\(^{41}\) LeTourneau toyed with the idea of joining her and
building a foundry that would expose its workers to evangelicalism. He owed this dream
to Elmer Jones, one of his friends in the San Francisco Brethren. Jones had been born in
China to a business man-cum-missionary who, in retirement, served as a Chinese
interpreter in American courts. Elmer continued the family tradition by entering the

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\(^{40}\) William Hutchison, *An Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions*

\(^{41}\) On American missions to China, see Alvyn J. Austin, “Blessed Adversity: Henry W. Frost and the China
see especially 57 and 63-64, on business men and other wealthy lay patrons. Donald MacGillivray, *A
Century of Protestant Missions in China, 1807-1907: Being the Centenary Conference Historical Volume*
(Shanghai: The American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1907); G. Nye Steiger, review of Kenneth Scott
History* Vol 1., No. 3 (September 1929), 497. On the Boxer Rebellion, see Lynn E. Bodin and Christopher
Rebellion: The Dramatic Story of China’s War on Foreigners That Shook the World in 1900* (New York:
international oil trade and becoming a zealous advocate of “improv[ing] the living standards of the Chinese” by “giv[ing] them…the word of God.”\(^\text{42}\)

LeTourneau credited Jones for inspiring him “to do something for the lot of underprivileged peoples.”\(^\text{43}\) Significantly, neither man believed that conversion automatically improved living standards, although both rejected the “social gospel” of Progressive-era mainline Protestantism as they understood it. The social gospel argued that Christians must look beyond unsaved individuals to the problems of industrial society. Poverty, dangerous working conditions, unsanitary housing, and juvenile delinquency warped souls as surely as original sin, a concept some, but not all, adherents minimized or rejected for environmental explanations of crime and disorder. Indeed, many social gospelers saw themselves as deepening, rather than departing from, the evangelical tradition.\(^\text{44}\) More conservative evangelicals such as Jones and LeTourneau were adamant that the only way to make a Christian world was to make more Christians; their faith would guide their behavior. In fact, the differences between the camps were less stark than the same combatants would be willing to admit during the fundamentalist-modernist wars twenty years later. The quarrel over whether to transform persons or society often came down to prioritizing, rather than opposing, individual responsibility and social circumstances.\(^\text{45}\) While LeTourneau shared Elmer Jones’s assumption that Christian conversion led to Western civilization, he was equally certain that missionaries should improve material conditions before bombarding “the natives” with Scripture. He

\(^{42}\) LeTourneau, 87.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 41.

\(^{44}\) See n23. White and Hopkins distinguish between Christocentric “evangelical liberalism” and humanistic “modernistic liberalism,” 246-47.

doubted that “a lot of heathens have been converted to Christianity while slowly starving
to death.” Seeing “[God’s] power in better housing, food, and medical care” would bring
them “eagerly” to Christ.46

If LeTourneau sometimes sounded like the theological modernists he despised, it
was because his faith in God was inseparable from his faith in technological
modernization and progress. However pessimistic premillennialism should have made
him about a world that would deteriorate until the rapture, he thrilled to the seemingly
unlimited power of manufacturing. “We mechanics are blessed because all fields of
science are constantly discovering new theories and products that open new worlds for us
to conquer,” he avowed.47 His years in California, from 1906 to 1935, put him in the
forefront of new technologies and dramatic changes in the physical landscape. He helped
build a bridge from San Francisco to Stockton after the 1906 earthquake, then crossed it
to become a car mechanic in 1909, thirteen years into the mass production of motorized
vehicles in the United States and only months after Henry Ford introduced the Model T.48

With the exception of wartime service as an electrical machinist in the Navy Yards – a
poorly healed broken neck from a racing stunt disqualified him from combat –
LeTourneau spent his first ten years in Stockton fixing automobiles. When his alcoholic
business partner put the garage in debt, LeTourneau went to work for two brothers who
sold engine-powered, rather than mule-driven, farm machinery. This innovation made

46 LeTourneau, 250-51.

47 Ibid., 126.

Construction [sic], Use and Care of Motor Cars and to the Subject of Motorizing in America (New York: D.
Appleton and Company, 1905), 17; Showroom of Automotive History: The Model T,
California’s postwar irrigation and highway-building projects possible, as well as LeTourneau’s career.49

LeTourneau did harbor theological concerns about his enthusiasm for his work, but not the work itself. “I feared my love of machines was becoming an obsession that was taking me away from my love of God,” he explained.50 “Love” was not too strong a word; he coaxed, praised, and bullied his bulldozers as if they were children, not iron mules. He dismissed one invention as “the dumbest brute of a machine I ever made. No life or responsiveness. Loading, emptying, or hauling, it didn’t seem to care. I didn’t bother to name it.”51 By contrast, he refused to recognize the flaws in another experiment even after a colleague pointed them out. “I looked at my machine as a perfect baby, and didn’t mind when it cried.”52 Was his passion a form of idolatry, valuing his creations over God’s? During the war, he had settled the question by seeing himself as a tool in the Master’s plan. “I was just a mechanic striving to translate [God’s] laws in terms of machinery, and as long as I…didn’t get to thinking I was operating under my own head of steam, I was on the right track.”53 Yet he remained conflicted about his place in the evangelical hierarchy of “spiritual” over “material” matters. It was then, in 1919, that LeTourneau prayed with his pastor, learned that “God needs business men,” and brought the spiritual and material together by making God his partner.

50 LeTourneau, 92, 79.
51 Ibid., 131.
52 Ibid., 127.
53 Ibid., 79.
What partnership meant would evolve over time, but LeTourneau felt on firm
ground translating his faith into business terms. “I like my machines and they work,” he
analogized. “And the Gospel of Jesus Christ works too.”54 To “work” was to produce
measurable results, and with religion as with machinery, LeTourneau was willing to try
new approaches if the yield was poor. Because Stockton’s Plymouth Brethren community
was too small to sustain a church, LeTourneau and his young wife Evelyn – the daughter
of a Brethren family that had hosted him on and off until the pair eloped – followed
Elmer Jones’s urging and joined the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA).
Founded in 1887 by the Canadian-born preacher A.B. Simpson, the C&MA walked a
hazy line between conservative evangelicalism and the social gospel. Simpson was a
premillennialist and had ties to early Pentecostalism, both of which led him to contend
that supernatural forces governed everyday life. However, his zeal for world evangelism
grew out of his ministry to immigrants and the poor in New York City.55 Jones, the
world-traveling business man, made the case for the LeTourneaus to change
denominations on pragmatic rather than dogmatic grounds. “Ours is a working religion,”
he told them. “We work for Christ, and Christ helps us.” He convinced the couple that the
Stockton C&MA offered more opportunities for Christian activity than the Brethren.
Soon, LeTourneau found himself banging the drum in an outdoor gospel band and
hauling homeless alcoholics off the streets to the C&MA mission house.56

54 Lorimer, 169.

55 LeTourneau, 87-88; Albert Edward Thompson, The Life of A.B. Simpson (Brooklyn: The Christian
Alliance Publishing Company, 1920), 1-3, 41; Allan Anderson, An Introduction to Pentecostalism
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 29-31; Grant Wacker, Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals
and American Culture (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press), 3, 148 (Simpson
experimented with, then rejected, speaking in tongues).

56 LeTourneau, 88-89.
His partnership with God outside the church seemed off to a good start in 1920, a year after he had left his employers to become an independent contractor. At the top, LeTourneau, Inc. was largely a family affair, including his father Caleb, brother Bill, wife Evelyn, and assorted in-laws. In his work crews, LeTourneau made an effort to “attract a good Christian element,” believing that Christians worked harder than “your toughest redneck[s]” and might even convert them. While he insisted that he never discriminated against non-evangelicals because he hoped to save them, he sentimentalized faith as a bond between management and labor that served as an example for the church. “I had a mighty loyal bunch of men,” he said. “If all Christians could unite like that in their loyalty to the Lord” – an inadvertently revealing image of power and subordination, not equality – “this world wouldn’t be in the mess it was in.”

LeTourneau’s first big break came in 1926, when West Coast developer Henry Kaiser hired him as a subcontractor on a series of projects (the Philbrook Dam in the Sierra Mountains, the Southern Pacific Railroad freight yard in Fresno) and bought the patents to virtually all of his designs. Kaiser used LeTourneau’s equipment for a $75 million contract in Cuba and continued to throw work his way. As his contracts multiplied, LeTourneau joined the rush to build California’s gleaming future. Second, and more importantly, he designed what Time later called “the chief reason for [his] phenomenal success,” a “power control unit” to propel his scrapers. This was his own patent, not Kaiser’s; according to some accounts, including Time’s, the inspiration came

57 Ibid., 111, 118, 135-37, 162.
58 Ibid., 135.
59 Ibid., 180.
in a flash after LeTourneau reluctantly attended a revival meeting he had been tempted to skip so he could worry over the design.\textsuperscript{61} His cable-operated motor made scrapers dig up more dirt faster, with fewer equipment failures; a historian of the industry calls it his “single most important contribution to the field of earthmoving equipment.”\textsuperscript{62}

With the exception of the 1931 loss that he blamed on his disloyalty to the Lord, LeTourneau made his national name and fortune during the Depression. His signal event of 1929 was not the stock market crash, which looked then like a short-term cyclical correction, but the legal incorporation of LeTourneau, Inc. with twenty employees and a product request from “backward Russia.” His brother Louis crowed, “We’re in world finance now!”\textsuperscript{63} In 1931, LeTourneau became the indirect recipient of federal money when a Kaiser-led consortium called the Six Companies won a government bid to build the Boulder Dam (later the Hoover Dam) in Colorado. The Six Companies subcontracted LeTourneau to clear a highway from Boulder City to the dam site.\textsuperscript{64} Upon finishing, he tried his own hand at dam-building in Orange Country, California. Despite a confrontation with a creditor who believed in a seven-day work week, he held to his policy of honoring the Sabbath after anxious prayer. “I was sincerely trying to work with [God] as a partner, and it was His company, too.”\textsuperscript{65} After restoring the withheld missionary pledge, LeTourneau made $207,237 in sales in 1932, almost doubling his total of $110,800 in 1930. In 1933, sales shot up to $379,100, and came close to tripling

\textsuperscript{63}LeTourneau, 170.
\textsuperscript{64}Ibid., 174; Foster, 3-4; Haycraft, 72.
\textsuperscript{65}LeTourneau, 174-5, 181-83.
to $929,860 in 1934. It was not LeTourneau’s construction jobs that were pushing him ahead, but sales from his increasingly sophisticated designs. His business was small by comparison with industry giants such as Caterpillar, Inc. The product of a 1925 merger, Caterpillar sold $45 million in earthmoving equipment in 1930 and dwarfed LeTourneau even at its 1932 nadir of $13 million. Still, its executives took notice of their up-and-coming rival, and agreed to be LeTourneau’s nationwide distributor if he went into manufacturing full-time. In April of 1935, LeTourneau left the Stockton plant in the hands of “the relatives” – Louis LeTourneau, Evelyn’s brothers Ray and Howard Peterson, and another brother-in-law – to build a factory close to Caterpillar’s new headquarters in Peoria, Illinois.

After almost thirty years away from America’s industrial and agricultural centers, LeTourneau wasted no time moving his partnership with God to a bigger stage. Peoria was about 130 miles from Chicago, making it a satellite of the nation’s “second city” of manufacturing and finance after New York. Though dwarfed by Chicago’s population of 3,380,000, Peoria’s 105,000 residents made it the second-largest city in Illinois. In marked contrast to Chicago’s immigrant cosmopolitanism, they were 93.6% “native born,” a statistic that the Chamber of Commerce cited to depict a culturally homogenous

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68 Ibid.; LeTourneau, 162, 169, 199-201.

and harmonious workforce.\textsuperscript{70} The city bordered coal-mining country, and the Illinois River and a railroad hub made for easy shipping and transport. Farm machinery had been a manufacturing specialty since the early nineteenth century, in tandem with substantial grain and livestock markets and distilleries that recovered swiftly from Prohibition.\textsuperscript{71} The enormous Caterpillar factory, which employed 4000 workers before the Depression, would dominate the local economy for decades to come.\textsuperscript{72}

Following the footsteps of Christian entrepreneurs before him, LeTourneau saw his growing wealth as a platform that made evangelism more than a personal or business commitment, but a civic responsibility. He must use his success to show Depression-era America that partnership with God was the only road to recovery. Between 1935, when he arrived in Peoria, and 1938, when he made an even more pivotal expansion to Georgia, LeTourneau reinterpreted his role as an evangelical business man in three career-defining ways: becoming a public speaker, institutionalizing conservative Protestantism in the labor-management relations of welfare capitalism, and establishing the LeTourneau Evangelistic Foundation to apply most of his profits to Christian work. As skyrocketing sales cemented his faith in the free market and antagonism toward the New Deal, he mixed increasingly overt politics with his preaching.

\textsuperscript{70}Peoria Chamber of Commerce, “Facts About the Nation’s Bright Spot,” n.d. Papers of R.G. LeTourneau (Box F10, Folder 12), LeTourneau University, Longview, Texas (hereafter LeTourneau University); Cohen, 324-25; \textit{Fifteenth Census of the United States – 1930 – Population}, Vol. 1 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1931), 279. Second-generation immigrants like LeTourneau would have been included in the “native-born” total, so there was more cultural diversity than the percentage suggests.


It was only fitting, then, that LeTourneau launched his lay preaching career neither in church nor on a revival stump, but at the Peoria Chamber of Commerce, which invited its new member to join a roster of speakers in late 1935. As he tells it, God freed him that very day from a lifetime of paralyzing shyness before an audience. He probably exaggerated the miracle story—it strains plausibility that he came unprepared, or was later able to repeat word-for-word the supposedly spontaneous outpouring of the Spirit—but there is no doubt that his “torment of self-consciousness” was real.73 As proud as LeTourneau was of being a self-taught engineer—after dropping out of eighth grade, he became an avid consumer of correspondence courses—he was acutely aware that high school and college graduates knew more about the refinements of language.74 Praying for help after hearing “the experienced speakers ahead of me,” he “felt a desire to give a few words of personal testimony” to “a business crowd.” Despite his long experience combining evangelicalism and business, he worried that Peoria’s leading citizens would tag him as “a crackpot.”75

To the contrary, his blunt pitch for an all-encompassing religion with conservative political consequences struck a powerful chord. He had asked God “to give him the words,” and God obliged with well-worn nostalgia for a golden age of American Christianity and entrepreneurship. “You may wonder what religion has to do with business, and I used to wonder about it myself,” LeTourneau began. “Now I know that it was our forefathers’ faith in God that made our country great…I believe we need to get back to that faith, and when we do, God will lead us out of the depression we’ve been

73 LeTourneau, 35. He may have been summarizing the content rather than quoting.

74 Ibid., 54, 98, 209.

75 Ibid., 203.
in.” Since Franklin D. Roosevelt’s election in 1932, the national Chamber of Commerce had played tug-of-war with the administration and Congress over the New Deal, parts of which it was willing to support in practice, but most of which it opposed in principle.\(^7^6\)

The contractual theology that enabled LeTourneau to solve the Depression in a word, “faith,” was both familiar and invigorating to this “business crowd,” as was his American exceptionalism. The pilgrims “seeking freedom to worship God” understood that religion and business worked together, and reminded themselves every time they made a transaction. “They put on our coins the words, ‘In God We Trust,’ and God blessed this land above all others.”\(^7^7\) That it was Lincoln, not John Winthrop, who stamped God on the currency was irrelevant to the mythology that LeTourneau repackaged with indomitable zeal.\(^7^8\) The “forefathers” had made God their partner, and their descendants – here, in this room – could renew the contract on behalf of their countrymen.

Having called on business men to redeem the nation, LeTourneau argued that they must simultaneously redeem the church. Echoing his discussions with Elmer Jones, he continued, “We know as business men that when we have a product that won’t work, it won’t sell…Now, I ask you, what’s the use of having a religion that won’t work?”

LeTourneau had no use for a faith that “worked only on Sunday, or while you’re in church.” He envisioned “a new model that worked seven days a week, that would work when I was at church, in my home, or out at the plant.” Finally, he challenged laymen to take their rightful place beside clergy to make abstract truths concrete. “The preachers


\(^7^7\) LeTourneau, 203.

can tell us that Christianity works. They are God’s salesmen, selling Christianity and the 
Christian way of life. But unless we business men…testify that Christianity is the driving 
power of our business, you’ll always have doubters claiming that religion is all talk and 
no production.”79 Clergy in the audience who struggled to get men involved in the 
historically “feminine” religious sphere were thrilled, rather than offended, by 
LeTourneau’s call to arms.80 Perhaps this self-described graduate of “the school of hard 
knocks” could lend masculine credibility to the pews.81

Along with the Chamber of Commerce, the evangelical churches of Peoria gave 
LeTourneau a springboard to a nationwide bully pulpit. He repeated the speech to local 
congregations, then gave other talks. His reputation spread to churches and business 
groups out of town, so he hired a gospel quartet and drove to engagements on weekends. 
Most of his topics were inspirational – sermons, “funny stories,” or bootstraps-and-Bible 
tales of how to succeed in business. Titles included “Mental Attitude,” “Sinners in 
Heaven,” “Right Religion,” “Devil Power,” “Conference with the Lord,” “Morale,” 
“Mechanical and Spiritual Progress,” “Run God’s Business,” and “School of Hard 
Knocks.” Less often, but no less ardently, LeTourneau preached conservative politics. He 
attacked the New Deal’s Works Progress Administration – “W.P.A. or Law Enforced” – 
and the National Recovery Administration, which regulated hours and wages, gave the 
government the power to force competing companies into cartels, and enshrined the right 
of workers to collective bargaining. Along the same lines, he excoriated “Higher Taxes 
and Redistribution,” “Socialism – Theory,” and “Class Hatred”; called “Labor Union[s] a

79 LeTourneau, 203.
80 Kimmel, 175-81.
81 LeTourneau, 40.
Religion”; and warned against “Dictators and Propaganda.” The likely text of “Communist – Hate” describes communism as “a doctrine of hatred” and Christianity as “a doctrine of love.” The former “teaches us that we are not getting what is coming to us and we ought to fight for it,” while the latter “teaches us to love God and love our fellow man and try to help him.” LeTourneau opined, unoriginally, that everyone who “doesn’t like our way of doing business, and wants to teach us a new social order” should be thrown “by the seat of his pants…on a boat bound for a land he does like.” Christianity and patriotism were synonymous with capitalism.

One more reason for LeTourneau’s rapid ascent as an evangelical speaker is that by 1936, he was preaching to employees on the same themes and publicizing these “shop talks” as a sign of labor-management harmony. As early as his work on the Boulder Dam, he had welcomed a visiting evangelist to the worksite. He formalized the practice in Stockton, asking guests to speak to both the day and night shifts. Declaring that attendance was voluntary, he paid everyone who came on the clock. In Peoria, he continued to bring in outside speakers, aided by the proximity of Chicago’s fundamentalist strongholds. Creationist Harry Rimmer and Christian Business Men’s Committee leader William E. Pietsch made appearances, along with Marion Reynolds, the evangelist from Boulder Dam who had introduced LeTourneau to the idea of

82 “Sermon Notes, R.G. LeTourneau,” 1938-1942. Papers of R.G. LeTourneau (Box J1P, Folder 2), LeTourneau University. LeTourneau repeated himself often enough that some titles must date to the Peoria period.

83 Ibid.; Lorimer, 107. Anticommunism was a central theme of American political discourse and an important way in which fundamentalists were more mainstream than marginalized. See M.J. Heale, American Anti-Communism: Combating the Enemy Within, 1830-1970 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 42-144.
industrial evangelism. LeTourneau handled the rest of the meetings when he was in town, leaving tantalizing notes for 1937: “Comm[unist] Hate Christ Love” (again), “Business Help of God,” “L[eTourneau] Shop Temporal – Christ Eternal,” “II Cor. 4:18 [“the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal”], “You Picked Me God.” Just as he told the Chamber of Commerce, he told his workers that “Life is What You Make It” and “[You] Get What You Put In.” One newly recurring theme, however, showed LeTourneau using his religious platform to deal with business problems: “I Thank You for Your Loyalty,” “Loyalty Means Sacrifice” (twice), “Loyalty Beautiful,” “Loyalty is a Force,” “Compel [Not] I Nor Christ,” and “30 Pieces Silver.” Individually, these snippets could mean anything; together, they indicate that, like most manufacturers in 1937, LeTourneau feared that worker loyalty was very thin indeed.

As his lecture notes demonstrate, LeTourneau believed that the real-world opposite of “Christianity,” from the global red menace to potentially his own plants, was “communism.” The word carried a string of interlocking associations: atheism, arrogance about human potential to improve society, and replacing the individual with the collective. All these philosophies culminated in tyranny, most saliently, the mob rule that political conservatives had long attributed to labor unions. For premillennialists

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84 Ackland, 164.


86 n.a., “Peoria Plant,” Papers of R.G. LeTourneau (Box J5I, no folder), LeTourneau University.

such as LeTourneau, the stakes for humanity went higher. In their interpretation of the
Bible, Russian aggression was an early sign of the end times, and international politics
was God’s map for impending apocalypse.88 Europe in general and Rome in particular
also had roles to play in the divine drama, and Jews, God’s chosen people, were at the
center. Before most Americans were paying close attention to Germany and Italy, then,
conservative evangelicals were conflating communism, fascism, and violent anti-
Semitism into a single Satanic enemy.89 While in California, LeTourneau and Evelyn had
taken time off to study at the premillennialist Bible Institute of Los Angeles (BIOLA),
where they first met Marion Reynolds. Like the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago,
BIOLA provided interdenominational vocational training to fundamentalist Christian
workers, from preachers and Sunday School teachers (such as Evelyn) to laypeople
seeking biblical instruction (such as LeTourneau, who did his best, but leaped at a
contract from Kaiser that would deliver him from “the confinement of a classroom”).
BIOLA’s monthly magazine, *The King’s Business*, had the New Deal in its sights from
the start of Roosevelt’s first term, and its perspective was global. The editors culled dire
warnings from mainstream publications and the Congressional Record in 1933 to identify
the new president’s platform with international communism and fascism: “Russia has her
Stalin…Germany has her Hitler; and impossible as it may seem, the United States of
America has her Roosevelt!”90

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88 Boyer, 156-57.

89 On mass media treatment of Hitler as a buffoon, see Brands, 357.

90 LeTourneau, 151-52; Virginia Lieson Brereton, *Training God’s Army: The American Bible School, 1880-
1940* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), xiii-xix, 87-100, 140; Louis S.
Conservative evangelicals were only one group raising the alarm over concentrated political and economic power. Former President Herbert Hoover and Republican Senator Robert Taft both predicted that Roosevelt was leading the nation the way of Italy and Germany.\(^9^1\) BIOLA’s teetotaling Protestants were in accord with the free-market militants of the American Liberty League (A.L.L.), which the Catholic DuPont family organized in 1934 from the same ultra-rich contacts they had mobilized against Prohibition.\(^9^2\) While fending off a Congressional investigation of right-wing dissidents in America that circumstantially linked League members with an unlikely Fascist coup, the group churned out “educational” propaganda meant to mobilize the masses: *Government By Busybodies; Will It Be Ave Caesar?; The Way Dictatorships Start*, and other titles.\(^9^3\) Oil magnate J. Howard Pew, then a trustee of the mainline Presbyterian Church, was a founding member. Catholic politician Al Smith, formerly the progressive Democratic governor of New York and an erstwhile Roosevelt ally, supported Republican Alf Landon in the 1936 election. In a pre-election address to the A.L.L., he accused Roosevelt’s advisors of “disguis[ing] themselves as Karl Marx or Lenin, adding, “There can only be one flag, the Stars and Stripes, or the red flag of the godless union of the Soviet.” Congressional Republicans defended Smith from his own

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\(^9^3\) Wolfskill, 94-97, 64.
party’s attacks, and that fall, more than a third of the electorate voted for the moderate
Landon in spite, or because, of such anticommunist tirades.94

Radio star Father Charles Coughlin was another of LeTourneau’s strange political
bedfellows. Coughlin grew wildly popular blaming the Depression on bankers and Wall
Street “plutocrats” like Pew, whose vast power, he argued, only the state could contain.
Yet soon he saw the New Deal state itself as a “dictatorial” and “communistic” threat to
the livelihood of ordinary citizens. In 1936, his followers deserted him in droves when he
backed an ineffectual third-party challenge to the President. A brief comeback in 1937
and 1938 careened into anti-Semitism, but stayed on message regarding Roosevelt,
whose “radicalism” Coughlin now blamed on the “Marxist atheism” of “communistic
Jews.”95 Whether “free enterprise” meant the American Liberty League’s laissez-faire or
Father Coughlin’s government shield against “money-changers” who thwarted upward
mobility, these divergent anti-New Deal voices agreed that if it lost the battle with
“communism,” religious and other freedoms would go down with it.

94 Wolfskill, 150-54; Robert A. Slayton, “Al and Frank: The Great Smith-Roosevelt Feud,” in David B.
Woolner and Richard G. Kural, eds., FDR, the Vatican, and The Roman Catholic Church in America,
1933-1945 (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 55-56; Alonzo L. Hamby, For the Survival of
Democracy: Franklin Roosevelt and the World Crisis of the 1930s (New York: Free Press, 2004), 318, 320-
22.

95 Alan Brinkley, Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin and the Great Depression (New York:
social justice tradition, which tried to steer a middle way between the individualism and inequality of
capitalism and the forced equality and atheism of communism. His hatred of “international bankers,” which
had populist roots and potentially, though not necessarily, anti-Semitic implications, led him to fear the
private economic sector more than the tyrannical state – except when the latter, in his eyes, began to
resemble the former by concentrating power and wealth in a few hands. Brinkley, 129, 148-160. See also
Anthony Burke Smith, “John A. Ryan, The New Deal, and Catholic Understandings of the Culture of
Abundance,” in Woolner and Kural, 47-53; Kevin E. Schmiesing, Within the Market Strife: American
Catholic Economic Thought from Rerum Novarum to Vatican II (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004),
Years (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), who is skeptical of Coughlin’s relationship to populism:
“To try to summarize Coughlin’s monetary theories is to make them appear far more consistent than they
really were” (158-59).
All but Coughlin followed nineteenth-century precedent in viewing labor as one of the front lines of battle. Conservatives were right about the influence of Marxism on some intellectuals and activists in the movement, but they painted a broad red brush over the deep ideological and status divisions among workers. *The King’s Business* told a story about a “member of the employing class” who encountered a “militant” supporter of labor’s “extreme socialistic aims.” On a train ride, he converted her to the belief that Christianity, not communism, was responsible for “every step in moral progress and social advancement.” 96 When the National Labor Relations Board accused a business of union intimidation or strikebreaking, the Lawyer’s Committee of the American Liberty League rushed to the defendant’s side. By “plunder[ing] the rich to purchase the poor,” A.L.L. documents complained, the New Deal was igniting class warfare that could only end in “a common ruin of dissension, bankruptcy and revolution.” 97 After John L. Lewis formed the Congress of Industrial Organizations (C.I.O.) in 1935, Roosevelt had to navigate between the demands of a fractured labor movement and anti-union white Southern Democrats, both crucial to his coalition. “John Lewis and his Communistic cohorts” had better not try “a second-hand ‘carpetbag expedition’…under the banner of Soviet Russia,” Georgia Congressman Edward E. Cox futilely advised, conjuring images of rapacious Yankees storming the South after the Civil War. 98

LeTourneau arrived in Peoria at an unpropitious time to be a full-fledged “member of the employing class.” 1935 marked the third year of a nationwide strike


97 Wolfskill, 244-45, 122-23.

98 Heale, 116.
wave that had taken a heavy toll on manufacturing, and culminated in the Wagner Act’s protection of workers’ right to organize. In Illinois, he was the C.E.O. of a four hundred-strong hierarchy of skilled foremen and largely anonymous shop floor workers ranked and paid by specialization. Across the country, his deputies ran the Stockton plant, distancing him from emerging grievances. One management strategy would be to treat management and labor as inherently hostile and boost profits by paying as little as possible for long hours of punishing work. History and common sense showed that this was a recipe for union organizing and a poor advertisement for evangelicalism. Another possibility, paternalism, bound employer and employees together as a symbolic family in which the corporation determined its dependents’ best interests. LeTourneau preferred a progressive third choice, welfare capitalism, which posited a mutually beneficial relationship between employer and employee on more equal ground than paternalism and with better working conditions than the autocratic model. Adopted by many employers after violent strikes in the wake of World War I, welfare capitalism combined competitive pay, benefits, and opportunities for advancement with company-sponsored grievance channels, socializing, and recreation.101

LeTourneau’s evangelical version of welfare capitalism co-opted the familial imagery of paternalism, casting him as an avuncular patriarch devoted to employees’ spiritual and physical well-being. The “shop talks” were no mere ruse to pacify the workers with visions of heavenly instead of earthly rewards. He believed that his

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99 Kennedy, 292.

100 LeTourneau, 208.

partnership with God required him to proselytize the people God had put under his care, and he viewed the in-plant services as the most important benefit he provided. Like sick leave or safety inspections, which also encouraged allegiance to the company, communal worship was both the right and the pragmatic thing to do. LeTourneau candidly stated that he thought “a genuine Christian was apt to be a better workman than one who is not,” and described “better morale” as a “by-product” of the overriding goal “to get men to believe in Jesus Christ.”102 His blind spot, as with his first work crews in 1920, was his unwillingness to recognize that the power he held over his employees made some see shop talks as less than voluntary. “[W]hat would be the use of this company’s trying to force salvation on anyone?” he demanded when rumors flew around Peoria that professing Christians won more promotions than non-Christians – talk he found dangerous enough to warrant a response. “Unless you fall in love with my Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ…He will never intrude himself on you.” More to the point, it would be un-Christian for him to be anything but “fair and square” in work evaluations, or for employees not to distinguish between the company and the church. “There is a difference between loyalty to the organization you work for and loyalty to Christ…You who are not Christians, please don’t get confused, thinking that because you are not devoted to Christ you cannot be loyal to this corporation.”103 Loyalty, that recurring subject of shop talks, was what LeTourneau as a manager had most to lose.

To publicize all of LeTourneau, Inc.’s good works and bring Stockton and Peoria closer in spirit, he established a company magazine, NOW, published in the Peoria plant and named after 2 Corinthians 6:2: “Behold, NOW is the accepted time; behold, NOW is

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102 Lorimer, 102; Ackland, 166.

the day of salvation.” LeTourneau imagined the four-page weekly newsletter as “[n]ot just a house organ to express my own views and company policy, but one that would also voice the message of the Lord I was trying to serve as a partner.”

He took the title and the concept from its original publisher, an evangelical who “used…current news as a vehicle for presenting the Gospel message,” and promoted it as a free Christian magazine for readers outside the company. His sister Marie’s husband, tract writer Tom Olson, spun biblical allegories from inspirational anecdotes or current events in a two-page spread that comprised more than half of the written content. By 1938, there were ten times more issues of NOW than there were employees, and countless articles were reprinted as tracts and mailed to evangelical organizations and households. Funded not by the corporation, but by the LeTourneau Evangelistic Foundation, NOW was R.G. LeTourneau’s all-encompassing public relations program.

The cover of NOW usually displayed a machine at work or in progress, while the back page, “Plant Life,” compiled personnel and business updates to make the company feel like a family. For example, “Larry Alvarez, yoke dept., has bought a new Studebaker” counted as news. Such squibs burnished LeTourneau, Inc. by showing that lower-ladder employees could afford their own cars. The “Proud Papa department” and “Bridal Bureau” tracked births and marriages. Employees informed NOW about sick relatives; how they spent their company-bestowed vacation time; off-the-clock socializing (one pair of newlyweds returned from their honeymoon to “20 or 30 of the boys who presented a combination waffle iron and sandwich toaster”); and, of course,

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104 LeTourneau, 208.

religious activities. NOW chronicled LeTourneau’s evangelistic traveling schedule and worker initiatives such as the Bible study organized by men on Peoria’s night shift. Welfare capitalism’s paradigmatic leisure-time offering, team sports, was a regular feature. “Exercise thyself unto godliness,” one contributor noted, citing 1 Timothy 4:7-8; appropriately, the men’s basketball team played against the Salvation Army and the Y.M.C.A. Monday Night League. Business updates, though often mundane (”New 20-inch Monarch engine lathe ordered for Peoria”), drew attention to other employee benefits: arrangements for workers disabled on the job, “schooling” of foremen and sub-foremen in management techniques, stock options, and home rentals.

NOW even chronicled criticism and labor trouble, which were usually related. Peoria’s Labor Temple News charged LeTourneau with publicity-seeking “religious spectacularism,” sniping that “Christ probably never intended that His teachings should help to advertise road graders.” If LeTourneau wanted to show “a Christian spirit,” he could start by “meeting his workmen on a collective bargaining basis, where duly elected representatives of his laborers can voice their needs through spokesmen of their own choice.” Olson, the unnamed author of full-length articles, dodged the specific complaint and blasted “religious leaders,” presumably like those at Labor Temple, who “never have appreciated the preaching of the gospel...[and] delivered up the Lord Jesus Christ to Pilate to be crucified and then persuaded the people to demand his death.”106 This last clause took a clear shot at unions as mobs whipped into a frenzy by their “leaders,” not the representative democracies depicted by the News. Meanwhile, LeTourneau warded off a threatened strike at Stockton by establishing another talismanic feature of welfare

capitalism, a company union. He agreed to raise wages across-the-board by 10%, and the newly minted “Le Tourneau Employes [sic] Union” vowed to “protec[t] employes against irresponsible picketing or sit-down by minority groups” – that is, independent organizers who rejected the premise of labor-management comity.  

Peoria formed a copycat union, writing in NOW, “We know we have the best jobs, the best Boss, and the best Company, and we intend to keep them. We, therefore, pledge our loyalty to you in any and all of your undertakings.”  

The president, Mark Starr, had worked for LeTourneau since 1929 and accepted Christ at Stockton in 1933. He followed LeTourneau’s example and became “an earnest soul-winner” on the job and a lay preacher in his spare time until his death in 1939. As a mechanic, Starr was a craftsman and likely a supervisor with a vested interest in the existing plant hierarchy. However, he was by no means the only LeTourneau employee who shared his boss’s vision of industrial evangelism as defined, in part, by an open shop.

For this reason, heart of NOW was its evangelistic message. The October 23, 1936 issue was a characteristically imaginative Olson production. The first long piece began with a quote from a Time article about “a mob of miners, maddened by labor grievances,”

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107 “Plant Life,” NOW, Vol. 1, No. 21, October 16, 1936, 4; Vol. 1., No. 22, October 23, 1936, 4; Vol. 1, No. 23, October 30, 1936, 4; Vol. 1, No. 24, November 6, 1936, 4; Vol. 1, No. 25, November 13, 1936, 4; Vol. 1, No. 34, January 15, 1937, 4; Vol. 1, No. 38, February 12, 1937, 4; Vol. 1, No. 43, March 19, 1937, 4; Vol. 1, No. 48, April 23, 1927, 4. On company magazines, vacation days, “[r]ecreation and social programs,” foremen’s training, and company unions as defining features of welfare capitalism, see Cohen, 164; on organized labor’s resistance to company unions, see H.W. Brands, Traitor to His Class: The Privileged Life and Radical Presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 387-89.


110 See, for example, “19 Men Preach from One Motorcycle,” NOW, Vol. 4, No. 4, June 16, 1939. Eighteen “Peoria boys,” including The King’s Messenger Quartet, aided evangelist Carlton Null’s tract distribution – one on the bike, the others “with finances and prayers.”
who had started a coal fire in 1885 that was still burning. “Similarly,” Olson preached, “by one man’s act of disobedience sin entered into the world...burning its slow but relentless paths of destruction unseen.” Fond of such parallelisms, he quoted Time again: “Attempts have been made...to head off the fire by sinking cement walls, by forcing steam underground, by diverting a creek into the shaft. All failed.” Likewise, said Olson, “[a]ttempts have been made to halt sin by reform, by education, by drastic law enforcement. All failed.”

Having dispatched with the social gospel and the power of the state to change behavior, Olson found his next parable in News Week. A pastor had offered a prize to the parishioner who could “name the most horrible sin in the world.” He accepted “Rejection of Jesus” as “the nearest to his own, ‘The abuse of high privilege.’” Olson ignored the second phrase’s political implications, commenting only that Jesus was indeed “the highest privilege accorded an unsaved sinner.” He skirted closer to commentary with the headline, “President’s Voice Used to ‘Prove Broken Pledge.’” The reference to a recent Republican broadcast assumed that NOW’s readers listened to secular as well as evangelical radio, just as they read News Week along with The King’s Business.

“Whatever the merits or demerits of the [Republican] charge,” Olson hedged, “the incident calls to mind that God has a record of every word that we say.” He aimed a series of Bible verses at those without “the word of faith,” leaving open the possibility that they also applied to Roosevelt: “[W]ith their tongues [sinners] have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.” The closing quote, from Romans, was an altar call: “[I]f thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou
shalt be saved.”111 Later, in “President’s Popularity Sliding, Says Writer,” Olson used a similar device: quoting three damning paragraphs before observing that whether or not the critique was correct, Christ never became “over-confident” – or unpopular.112

By defining Christianity in the individualistic and pietistic terms of conservative evangelicalism, LeTourneau and his mouthpiece, Olson, also ventured into conservative politics. Without question, both men cared more about saving souls than about current events per se. But Olson was invoking worldly as well as spiritual conflicts when he used striking coal miners to illustrate original sin and publicized Republican accusations that Roosevelt was a liar. Other articles in NOW explicitly connected theology and politics.

“A few days ago President Roosevelt proposed to Congress for himself something of the reorganization of government that Jethro, the priest of Midian, proposed for his son-in-law [Moses] 3400 years ago,” Olson wrote after the Second Inaugural Address in 1937. The mistake, in both cases, was to increase the number of government departments to be supervised, only to put “the burden of all Israelites” on the leader (and, Olson added, provide an administrative template for Catholic “intermediaries” between people and God). During the court-packing controversy, Olson defended Chief Justice Hughes against charges of tyrannical ambition that one of his favorite sources – the Literary Digest, red-faced after predicting an electoral landslide for Republican Alf Landon113 – dismissed as the rantings of “[m]any an ardent pro-Roosevelt paper.” Olson compared the alleged misquoters of Hughes to “opponents of the gospel” who, “[s]eizing onto…”God

111 [Tom Olson], “Coal Mine Fire Burning 51 Years,” “Wins Prize for Naming Most Horrible Sin,” “President’s Voice Used To ‘Prove Broken Pledge,’” NOW, Vol. 1, No. 22, October 23, 1936, 2-3.

112 [Tom Olson], “President’s Popularity Sliding, Says Writer,” NOW, Vol. 2, No. 18, September 24, 1937, 3.

is love,’ or some similar passage,” went on to deny the necessity of salvation. Sneering at Roosevelt’s off-the-record disclosures to journalists, he pointed out that every word in Scripture “can be directly attributed to God,” for whom “[t]here is no danger of…ever being embarrassed by His own utterances.”

As a premillennialist, Olson often commented on international affairs, such as the British mandate in Palestine that might fulfill the prophetic requirement that all Jews regather in Israel. He pitted Hitler and Mussolini against the Apostle Paul, who “establish[ed] the civilization that the world’s dictators are seeking today to destroy.”

All told, Olson’s dogged sifting through any source that might yield a timely sermon illustration gave NOW’s subscribers a highly slanted, but informative, smorgasbord of popular journalism. Like The King’s Business, Moody Monthly, and other fundamentalist outlets, NOW ensured that conservative evangelicals read what other white, middle-class Americans were reading. This was not only to highlight the differences between the subculture and “the world,” but to rally the subculture to bring its weapons of gospel truth, prayer, and conversion to a common existential fight.

Both LeTourneau’s speaking career and NOW evolved rapidly over the same trajectory, from a small start in Peoria to an ambitious campaign for a national audience. So did the LeTourneau Evangelistic Foundation (L.E.F.), which began as a hazily planned depository for “God’s share” of company wealth and soon funded the other two endeavors on a grand scale, buying private planes that multiplied LeTourneau’s

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preaching opportunities, and mass-producing NOW and its accompanying tracts. In 1935, LeTourneau, Evelyn, and V.R. Edman – future president of evangelicalism’s intellectual flagship, suburban Chicago’s Wheaton College – formed the non-profit corporation with seventy percent of LeTourneau, Inc.’s common stock shares. Knowing that the company was likely to clear over $2 million in profits that year, LeTourneau and Evelyn wanted to formalize a means of giving half of it to God, the “Senior Partner.” Foundation philanthropy had been interwoven with Christian capitalism since the late nineteenth century, with the growth of a finance economy based in high-risk, high-yield stocks and bonds. Gilded Age business men and society women transformed urban charities from providers of “direct personal service” to centralized bureaucracies that mirrored the economic ideology and practices of their wealthy directors. However, it is easy to overstate a linear development from amateur “charity” to professional “philanthropy” (and, for women, “social work”). Nouveau riche business men and blue-blooded patricians both inherited an antebellum ethos of Christian stewardship. Based in the biblical parable of the talents, in which a master gives three slaves the same amount of money to invest and rewards the one who earns the most, the commandment carried the same weight in 1935 as in 1850: “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the

115 Lorimer, 185-86; Ackland 157-58.


more.”¹¹⁸ In that spirit, LeTourneau dubbed his foundation “The Lord’s Treasury,” and soon raised his commitment from fifty to ninety percent of company profits and salary.¹¹⁹

By relieving government of some burdens of social welfare, foundations hoped to gain leverage on public policy, often to promote a social “revival” with implicit or explicit religious motivations.¹²⁰ Legally, a foundation was a trust fund whose tax-exempt status hinged on the donor’s explicit restriction of the money’s use for charitable intent. Ideologically, foundations emphasized self-help while retaining paternalistic supervision and control, offering a welfare-style safety net whose success would be judged on efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and short-term assistance rather than long-term dependency. Multimillionaires such as Andrew Carnegie, whose “gospel of wealth” called on private citizens to stabilize industrial capitalism by mitigating its harsh inequities, and John D. Rockefeller, a devout Baptist who believed that “[t]he Lord gave me the money,” exchanged their wealth for power in many social sectors, from the arts and education to medicine, science, and religion.¹²¹

The L.E.F. was less ambitious than these predecessors or contemporaries such as Herbert J. Taylor’s Christian Workers Foundation, because it was more of a personal fiefdom, yet less hands-on. LeTourneau’s evangelistic expenses were the Foundation’s top priority; other causes received support more on a case-by-case basis than according to

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¹¹⁹ Lorimer, 128.


a strategic plan. LeTourneau delegated the management to Harold Strathearn, a fiery
Baptist preacher who he meant through J. Palmer Muntz, director of the evangelical
retreat center established by Billy Sunday at Winona Lake, Indiana. The British-born
Strathearn ran the Interstate Evangelistic Association, a fundamentalist Baptist coalition
based in Rochester, New York. The L.E.F. set up shop in Rockefeller Center, that citadel
of American capitalism, and by 1940 Strathearn ran both groups from the same office.122
Strathearn’s wife Dorothy, a popular Christian singer known as “the Gospel
Nightingale,” performed frequently on LeTourneau’s itinerary. Joyful News, the Interstate
Evangelistic Association’s newspaper, became by far the most militant of LeTourneau’s
publicity outlets, with puff pieces on “God’s business man” sandwiched between
denunciations of modernism.

True to LeTourneau’s longstanding interests, missionary work was the
Foundation’s first purpose: “[t]o teach, promulgate and disseminate the Gospel of Jesus
Christ throughout the world.” Second, the L.E.F. aimed to “unite in Christian
fellowship… the various Evangelical Churches,” in order “to appoint and engage
ministers, evangelists, [and] missionaries.”123 Both goals put the Foundation in the
mainstream of conservative evangelicalism in the mid-1930s urban North. The Great
Commission was the top priority, and ecumenical cooperation was required to storm the
barricades of heathenism, liberalism, communism and fascism. (White Southern
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122 Lorimer, 187-88.

123 Donald M. Taylor to W.A. Dyer, January 30, 1947, Papers of R.G. LeTourneau (Box J3F, Folder 75),
LeTourneau University; Haycraft, 74; Ackland, 156; LeTourneau, 204-5. LeTourneau does not say when
he decided to shift from giving 50% of company profits and his salary to giving 90%, but it had to be
between 1936 and the “Ripley” program in 1940.
Again, however, the L.E.F.’s beneficiaries bore the distinct stamp of its founder. The C&MA, an evangelical youth program for which Evelyn had volunteered in California, and Sarah LeTourneau’s China mission received the first bequests, followed shortly by NOW and Tom Olson’s tracts. Plant productivity quickly filled the Foundation’s coffers. In 1935, Stockton and Peoria netted almost $600,000 in profits. In both 1936 and 1937, LeTourneau, Inc. cleared over a million, with annual sales reaching $5,500,000.

LeTourneau was ready to expand his business again, and just as the Plymouth Brethren had kept him employed as a young man, the Christian and Missionary Alliance turned out to be the network he needed. In 1936, LeTourneau had attended a missionary convention in Omaha at C&MA radio personality R.R. Brown’s Gospel Tabernacle. One of the speakers was R.A. Forrest, the founder of a coeducational Bible and vocational school in Toccoa Falls, Georgia. Evangelical business men had helped Forrest’s dream to survive. California oilmen Lyman and Milton Stewart, who co-published *The Fundamentals*, paid off a $20,000 debt in 1915 after a fire swept through the four-year old Institute. Lyman endowed a women’s dormitory in 1917, and a few years later, Milton’s wife sent the money needed to complete a group of half-built classrooms. 1936 marked Toccoa Institute’s twenty-fifth anniversary, and Forrest was traveling the world to meet his graduates in the mission field. Impressed that the Institute taught

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125 LeTourneau, 205-7, 211-12; Lorimer, 74; Ackland,, 157-58.

126 Lorimer, 67.

Scripture and occupational skills to rural whites in Georgia’s hill country, LeTourneau sent a $1000 check from the Foundation to Forrest’s mailing address in Japan. Months later, Forrest surprised him by sending back “a bale of receipts” accounting for every penny. When they finally met in person, LeTourneau increased his support for the Institute to $10,000. He enrolled his son Donald at the Institute. In 1938, after preliminary scouting, he proposed that he build his next plant in Toccoa Falls with the Institute as a feeder school for workers. Forrest embraced the collaboration, and construction began that November.128

The story of Toccoa Falls and the attraction it held for LeTourneau is more complicated than the encounter of two evangelical entrepreneurs, one a layman in business, the other a preacher in education. Like other manufacturers, LeTourneau already had his eye on the under-industrialized South. High poverty rates, a Jim Crow work force that held wages down, and anti-union state governments guaranteed a cheap labor pool.129 Yet even as he prepared to build not only a factory, but a full-fledged company town, Toccoa Falls was reaping the benefits of the New Deal. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), one of Roosevelt’s first and most acclaimed initiatives, paid young men to work on civic safety and other improvement projects. A CCC camp established itself in Toccoa Falls in 1933 and 1934, replanting pine trees in deforested land, building picnic sites, and clearing a path to the falls. Campers donated surplus food to the Institute, and, when they left, the government gave the Institute four thousand dollars worth of lumber. The Institute wasted no time converting the CCC barracks into a


129 Kennedy, 254.
dormitory.\textsuperscript{130} In 1938, the National Youth Administration (N.Y.A.), which offered part-time jobs to students, settled on campus. Participants, including local teenagers who otherwise would have had to work full-time, took Institute classes, including Bible courses, if they wished. Following the N.Y.A.’s architectural blueprints, they built a radio center, an agricultural space, shops for machinery and woodworking, and a home economics building complete with a floor for women’s dorms.\textsuperscript{131}

LeTourneau might have protested such a thorough government presence on the turf now neighboring his, but instead, he took advantage of what was, by 1938, a paradoxical political battle over the economic future of the South. On one side stood conservative Southern Democrats who argued that minimal regulation, subsistence wages, and resistance to unions were the region’s best chance of drawing private industry away from the North. On the other was evidence of the New Deal’s utility: the CCC camps, for example, and the Tennessee Valley Authority, generating hydroelectric power vital to industrial development.\textsuperscript{132} In 1938, Roosevelt signed a Fair Labor Standards Act that enacted a national minimum wage targeted specifically at the South, which he called “the Nation’s number one economic problem.” He barnstormed through the region during the summer, trying to rouse voters against recalcitrant Congressmen he called the “Copperheads.” These legislators resisted government intervention that, to Roosevelt’s mind, would end the South’s economic isolation and, to their minds, would trample

\textsuperscript{130} Kennedy, 144; Moothart, 68; Troy Damon, \textit{A Tree God Planted: The Story of Toccoa Falls College} (Toccoa Falls: Toccoa Falls Press, 1996 [1982]), 68.

\textsuperscript{131} Kennedy, 252; Damon, 70-71.

Southern independence. Georgia’s Senator Walter George appealed to regional pride by waving the bloody shirt, sneering that Roosevelt’s tour was nothing less than “a second [Yankee] march through Georgia.” In November, when LeTourneau arrived in Toccoa Falls, Southern voters – which is to say, white voters – overwhelmingly reelected the Copperheads, including George.133 From the North, NOW offered a detailed assessment of the Republican party’s concurrent midterm comeback, hoping it would yield “a tax bill less onerous than expected, railroad legislation more helpful to owners,” and Congress “once again a deliberative body instead of a rubber stamp for the Chief Executive.”134 Yet repudiating the President did not mean rejecting the inroads the New Deal had already made in the South. LeTourneau contracted with the N.Y.A. to build an airport in Toccoca while he created an aviation training program at the Institute.135 In doing so, he tacitly acknowledged what pro-New Deal business men had contended since the end of the Hoover administration: that working with, rather than against, a powerful federal government could be the best way to navigate the Depression.136

Cooperation among church, business and state, though not Roosevelt’s state, was the theme of the four-day revival LeTourneau staged in 1939 to consecrate the Toccoa Falls plant. It was a practice he had begun in Peoria, where he had recapped the themes of his Chamber of Commerce speech: “I believe that a factory can be dedicated to [God’s] service as well as a church, and that it can be the means of saving many souls.”137

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135 Lorimer, 95.
136 Holl, 22.
137 Ackland, 72.
Georgia, apolitical fundamentalism was nowhere to be seen. An all-star cast of public figures joined LeTourneau in insisting on the unity of theological and political conservatism. Crowds of three to five thousand enjoyed free barbecue while LeTourneau introduced them to his contractual creed.\(^{138}\) “My faith in God has brought blessings on my business,” he said. By contrast, “[m]ultitudes are starving” because “the average man today” lacked initiative and faith. The solution was a Christ whose heroic masculinity and expert authority matched business men’s image of themselves: “a man big enough, who [knows] enough[,] to lead us.” Governor Eurith D. “Ed” Rivers boosted his region and evangelical religion by attacking labor unions. “Mr. LeTourneau had the means to go anywhere in the nation with his business,” Rivers said, but instead, he chose “Georgia and the southland. He’s not going to find Communists and sit-down strikes in the south!” The Governor added the evangelical refrain that “a spiritual revival is needed if the nation is to climb out of the present crisis.” Joining Rivers on the platform were Senator Richard Russell, a Roosevelt ally, and three state and local officials.\(^{139}\) “[W]e have…evidence that he is a generous man,” Russell said of LeTourneau, “and the fact that he is dedicating this plant with [revival] meetings starting today, we recognize as an answer to the power of God.” The C&MA’s R.R. Brown, who had brought LeTourneau and R.A. Forrest together, directed a 75-person choir.\(^{140}\)

Big business was represented by Preston Arkwright, president of the Georgia Power Company, and R.W. Wirt, Vice President of the Southern Railway. Arkwright

\(^{138}\) NOW’s cheeky headline bordered on blasphemy: “And Then 5,000 People Were Fed,” NOW, Vol. 4, No. 9, July 21,1939,1.


\(^{140}\) “Another Factory Revival,” NOW, Vol. 4, No. 9, July 21, 1939, 2, 4.
reiterated the anti-union message by praising welfare capitalism. Said Wirt, “This man is not starting a sweat shop. He pays better wages than the average employer. He works his labor reasonable hours. He needs no regulation. His employees need no protection.” Furthermore, Arkwright inaccurately asserted, LeTourneau needed no New Deal: “All this we see here today is individual enterprise.” While the Constitution did not quote the three clergymen on the bill, it noted that an evening service would “be dedicated to the factory workers of north Georgia and…centered about wholesome, friendly relations between employer and employe [sic].” LeTourneau was already trying to barricade himself against the union sentiment whose existence his fellow speakers were taking such pains to deny. When he took the podium, he went so far as to criticize capital as well as labor for relying on human institutions rather than the Lord. “[T]he Capitalists instead of trusting in God, are trusting in capital; the laborer today is trusting in his labor organization instead of his God – that’s what’s the matter.” Jesus “came down to this sin cursed world…and for our sakes became poor that we might become rich” in everlasting life, and in this life too. “[B]y the Grace of God, I am still trying to be His business man,” LeTourneau shouted. “I thank my Lord and Saviour for what he has done for me and I want to present Him to you.” Two thousand people stayed for services the first night.

Governor Richards would be proven wrong: LeTourneau could not escape labor unrest in the South. When a renegade faction of the Congress of Industrial Organizations

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141 Lamar Q. Ball, “Toccoa Factory is Dedicated to Principles of Christianity,” The Atlanta Constitution, July 12, 1939, 2.

142 Ibid., 1.

143 “Another Factory Revival,” 2, 5.
(CIO) tried to unionize Toccoa Falls in 1943, the same year the AFL finally triumphed in Peoria, LeTourneau responded with no small edge of hysteria. His primary forum was L.E.F. Foundation director Harold Strathearn’s *Joyful News*. “CIO Out to Communize LeTourneau Company,” Strathearn announced in a *Joyful News* issue largely devoted to the emergency. “The Bible is not silent on the important issues involved and the church should shout out a warning.” He claimed that workers had voted not to join the CIO in a National Labor Relations Board-supervised election, but rogue organizers refused to quit. “Remember the government is paying [LeTourneau] for your work,” they taunted the workers, calling the plant “A Center of Commercialized Religion.” Strathearn defended LeTourneau’s shop talks and his Foundation-financed evangelism.

He made a spirited case for welfare capitalism in an article entitled, “Bible Declares Rights of Capital and Labor,” defining employers and employees as spiritually, if not socially, equal; functionally complementary; and possessing reciprocal rights and duties. Scripture, Strathearn wrote, “spares the selfish employer no more than the slothful employee, those who hold back wages no more than those who hold back work.”

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147 “Georgia Plant Targeted by Ambitious CIO Organizers”; “Whose World is This?” *Joyful News*, May-June 1943, 3.

148 “Whose World Is This?”

Outrage drove Strathearn’s interpretation of the Bible, above all in his retelling of the parable of the vineyard. In the gospel accounts, a rich man leases his vineyard to tenants who not only refuse him its harvest, but hurt or kill each servant he sends to collect his due. Finally, he sends his beloved son, whom he is sure they will respect; instead, they kill him too. The rich man represents God; the son, Christ; and the tenants, Christ’s crucifiers. With these images very much in mind, Strathearn imagined the hapless servants as “company representatives” and the murderous tenants as “trusted employees” who seized control of the business. Because the “company representatives were not in sympathy with the new setup,” the employees “beat,” “stoned,” and “killed” them. The rich man and his son remained divine figures in Strathearn’s reading. The son’s sacrifice, he seethed, showed that “[p]rogressive confiscation will lead inevitably to complete seizure of property…The point in the biblical story is that these wicked men will be miserably destroyed and replaced by those who recognize the rights of the owner.” In other words, the battle between LeTourneau and the CIO rebels was only partly about profits. Just as importantly for fundamentalists, the social conflict enacted the eternal war between God and Satan. LeTourneau would never need to retire his speech on “Comm[unist] Hate Christ Love.”


151 “Bible Declares the Rights of Capital and Labor.”
But in 1939, as LeTourneau settled into Toccoa Falls, he saw another challenge and opportunity on the horizon – war. The Nazis seized Czechoslovakia and made pacts with fascist Italy and communist Russia, vindicating evangelicals’ and other Americans’ conflation of European tyrannies. In September, Britain, France and Canada declared war when Hitler invaded Poland. Roosevelt assured a nervous public that the United States would remain neutral, but was already pushing for higher military spending to help the Allies.¹⁵² The most immediate beneficiary was the manufacturing sector, and in 1940, LeTourneau again set his anti-Roosevelt politics aside and scored a four and a half million-dollar War Department contract to manufacture ammunition shells at Toccoa Falls.¹⁵³ This meant breaking with antiwar public opinion months before Congress passed the Lend-Lease Act putting America openly on the side of the Allies.¹⁵⁴ Evangelicals were part of the skeptical majority. As early as 1938, an article in *The King’s Business* warned of “propaganda aiming to convince Americans that a plunge into war would ‘serve the interests of democracy and the stabilization of peace.’” The author told readers to contact their Congressional representatives “urging them to oppose” any bills “which would permit war to be used as a pretext for sweeping away the God-given, Constitutional liberties which our fathers died to establish.” The “militarists” were New

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¹⁵³ Jacob Bos to R.G. LeTourneau, November 18, 1940, quoting *Newsweek*, November 11, 1940, 50. Folder 38, Box J4J, Papers of R.G. LeTourneau.

¹⁵⁴ Kennedy, 41-42, 387-88, 432-34.
Dealers writ large, “bureaucratic slave-drivers who will tyrannize over once free Americans” by subjecting them to Europe’s “war horrors.”

More than a dozen evangelicals wrote letters of protest – not “apolitical” complaints that LeTourneau was collaborating with Caesar, but passionate condemnations of the machinery of death. One correspondent cried, “How can you preach so zealously the LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST, and at the same time make SHELLS, that DESTROY those SOULS that Jesus died for??????” Another writer established her evangelical credentials as “a poor woman alone in the world, selling Home made Bread for a living, placing [religious] leaflets in each package of bread.” She asked, “Have you ever read where Jesus shouldered a gun to shoot men with?” – adding pointedly that “the Price of Blood” was “thirty pieces of silver.”

A Congregationalist pastor and NOW subscriber in Madison, Wisconsin, more openly insinuated that LeTourneau was behaving like a profit-hungry Judas. “It is true that they sold the Prince of Life for a few pieces of Silver. How can we be making munitions for profit without being charged with doing the same thing!”

The brothers of Synder Bros. Auto Service in Kansas City summed up the both disappointment of these fans of “God’s business man” and their hope that he would see the light. “We understand that you have dedicated your factories to God, and we pray that you will make them ministries of His service

155 Dan Gilbert, “Views and Reviews of Current News,” The King’s Business, December, 1938, 406. The same column echoed the complaint of fiscal conservatives that programs such as Social Security were swelling the deficit beyond sustainability.

156 Malcolm W. George to R.G. LeTourneau, December 31, 1940, Papers of R. G. LeTourneau (Box J4J, Folder 38), LeTourneau University.


158 Alfred W. Swan to R.G. LeTourneau, December 8, 1940, Papers of R.G. LeTourneau (Box J4J, Folder 38), LeTourneau University.
rather than ministers of suffering.” However, LeTourneau stood firm. In his form-letter reply, he argued that “[t]he aggressor nations of our day…are the enemies of God and the Bible.” He invoked evangelical respect for high office as a divine appointment, even – or especially – if God chose the office-holder to chastise His people. “The Apostle Paul exhorts us to be subject to the ‘powers that be,’ not only in the technicalities of the law, but” – LeTourneau could not resist his favorite theme – “in real loyalty.” A company memo in July 1941 made the financial considerations plain as well. “With defense business we can stay in business. Without defense business we are out of this business.”

Five months later, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor made all business defense business, and Letourneau’s dirt-movers proved more important than his shells. His cranes were already on the Hawaii base on December 7, and the Navy commissioned more to clear the rubble and ride aboard aircraft carriers to move broken planes out of the way for repairs. The Army requested, and received, a larger version of the latter design to lift wrecked bombers quickly off the ground. Between March and October of 1942, the Army Corps of Engineers used LeTourneau machines to build the 1,670-mile Alaska Highway as a supply route to Russia (an ally since 1941, when Hitler betrayed Stalin with a

159 Louie and Ted Snyder to R.G. LeTourneau, n.d., Papers of R. G. LeTourneau (Box J4J, Folder 38, LeTourneau University). They replied deferentially but firmly to his form letter. “[W]e cannot understand, how any christian can take part in war of any nature and still maintain that Christlike influence, which Christ desired we should as he gave the Beatitudes to his disciples….We cannot understand the position you take in considering the operation of your factories if it be in disobedience to God” and, in a favorite verse of fundamentalists, “unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor. 6:14). Louie and Ted Snyder to R.G. LeTourneau, January 17, 1941, Folder 38, Box J4J, Papers of RG. LeTourneau.

160 R.G. LeTourneau to John Kalsheek, April 8, 1941, Papers of R.G. LeTourneau (Box J4J, Folder 38), LeTourneau University. Fundamentalists took seriously the injunction in Romans 13:1-7 to submit to “governing authorities,” at least in the sense of obeying the law. For a later, but representative, exegesis, see Frank Stagg, “Rendering to Caesar What Belongs to Caesar: Christian Engagement with the World,” Journal of Church and State Vol. 18 (1976), 105-7.

161 E.R. Galvin to All District Representatives, July 7, 1941, Papers of R.G. LeTourneau (Box F1U, Folder 1), LeTourneau University.
surprise attack) and to set up defenses at America’s most vulnerable geographic point. LeTourneau’s Tournapulls and Carryalls cleared land, built highways and paved airstrips around the world, from Africa to Britain to Burma. During the Lend-Lease period, LeTourneau built a factory in Sydney. He recalled that it was soon “carrying both the Gospel and American industrial methods to Australia in gratifying fashion.” Sydney’s entire output, netting some $3,200,000 during 1941-42, went to the war. And just as LeTourneau products had been present at the beginning at Pearl Harbor, they were indispensable as the end drew near. A correspondent wrote, “I wish Mr. LeTourneau could have watched his equipment working on the beach-head at the time of the [D-Day] invasion, doing wonders that one would think impossible.” The same equipment helped rebuild London, France and Holland when peace came.162

America’s entry into the war transformed cultural critics into nationalists, and conservative evangelicals – who, like ideologues of all stripes, often lived both identities at once – were no exception. George Marsden argues that fundamentalist “ambivalence toward American culture, which is especially apparent in fundamentalist attitudes toward patriotism and social reform,” is best understood as a historically rooted “establishment-or-outsider paradox.” Until the mid-to-late nineteenth century, evangelicalism was the American religious “establishment,” and the next generation(s) clung to the memory of hegemony even as they retreated into the loyal opposition of a subculture. While there is ample evidence for this interpretation, Marsden uses it to argue for evangelical distinctiveness rather than evangelical variations on a popular theme – namely, American exceptionalism. Jeremiads and ardent nationalism have been two sides of the same coin.

162 Ackland, 115-29; LeTourneau, 230-32, 239.
since the Puritans. Even Marsden points out that premillennialists were little different, in their rejection of progress, than Mark Twain or Henry Adams, just as “the political attitudes of most fundamentalists were much like those of their non-fundamentalist Republican neighbors.” LeTourneau made sure to show that he was a good neighbor.163

The 1942 opening of LeTourneau’s plant in Vicksburg, Mississippi, was a pageant of white Christian patriotism. The ceremonies took place on November 28, 1942, almost a year after America had entered the war. LeTourneau’s first political act in the majority-black area was to follow “local tradition” and segregate his employees, although he distributed the “social amenities” of welfare capitalism equally.164 Yet the regional pride that had characterized the Toccoa Falls dedication gave way to a message of national unity. Visiting clergy, including Richard Forrest, had been building revival fever with morning and evening services all week. The Vicksburg Chamber of Commerce, which organized the factory’s consecration to the Lord, called the event “A Tri-State Patriotic Rally.”165 It opened with a war bond and stamp drive, after which the American Legion performed the “Flag-Raising and Pledge of Allegiance.” Homer Rodeheaver, a popular evangelical musician who had accompanied Billy Sunday, led the crowd in singing “America” before the invocation. The governors of Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana spoke, as did a visitor from Washington, Admiral John S. McCain. The father of the future presidential candidate thanked LeTourneau for a “grand time.”166 He and the

164 Ackland, 140.
165 n.d., “An Invitation to Attend a Tri-State Patriotic Rally in connection with the dedication of the Vicksburg Plant of the LeTourneau Company of Mississippi, Saturday, November 28, 1942,” 1. Folder 39, Box F1U.
166 J.S. McCain to R.G. LeTourneau, February 8, 1943, Papers of R.G. LeTourneau (Box J4J, Folder 24), LeTourneau University.
audience enjoyed an exhibition of LeTourneau, Inc.’s military-use equipment; a
“[p]atriotic display by Army, Navy, and Marine Corps”; a band playing over a top-of–the-line public address system; and, of course, “Free Barbeque for 10,000.” No one protested the message that evangelicalism, capitalism, and a militarized state would converge to decimate the enemy.

During and after the war, LeTourneau’s reputation as “God’s business man” soared beyond his impressive, if revised, self-presentation on Ripley’s “Believe It or Not.” He had always divided his calling into two parts: bringing religion into business and bringing business into religion. Having made contacts with fundamentalist businessmen in Peoria, he came to Toccoa Falls and Vicksburg eager to work on the second goal. In 1940, when Ripley interviewed him, LeTourneau was president of two predominantly Northern organizations: the Christian Business Men’s Committee International (CBMCI), founded in Chicago in 1930 as a revivalistic response to the Depression, and the Gideons, famous for placing Bibles in hotel rooms for traveling salesmen since 1899. Both groups – the membership overlapped – were white, mostly Protestant, nominally all-male, and comprised chiefly of white-collar workers, middle managers, small business owners, and entrepreneurs like LeTourneau.

At his inaugural speech for the Gideons, entitled “Let’s Have a Sixth Column,” he articulated more fully than he had at the Peoria Chamber of Commerce the leadership role of business men in the church. “Just as God called the men of old to do certain things, I believe He is today making that call more especially to commercial men to witness that the Gospel is still the power of God unto salvation,” he began. “We

167 “Your Invitation To Dedication Week,” 2.
commercial men have no conflict with the preachers” – a denial which implied the opposite – but “when we laymen who rub shoulders with people in the world every day tell them that Jesus Christ is the solution to all our problems…they can’t say of us as they sometimes say of the preachers, ‘They get paid for it.’” This astonishingly blunt rephrasing of his characterization of ministers as “God’s salesmen” transformed the church into a marketplace in which business men, for once, had no ulterior motives. However, “us laymen” alone possessed the expertise “to show…that [the Gospel] is practical,” not “only a theory” – a faith whose power stemmed from deeds, not words.¹⁶⁸

As LeTourneau discovered when he moved to Toccoa Falls, the South had its own evangelical business men’s groups with much the same philosophy. He began to work closely with two leading laymen. Vernon Patterson was a Charlotte-based Southern Presbyterian salesman who headed the Business Men’s Evangelistic Clubs (BMEC), and acted as an early mentor to Billy Graham. Rolan R. Stoker was a Baptist dentist in charge of the Atlanta BMEC; LeTourneau lured him to Toccoa Falls to set up a Christian conference center onsite. The second chapter of LeTourneau’s story is the story of these interregional networks of evangelical business men. In merging their religious and commercial lives, thousands of men across the United States and Canada placed themselves at the vanguard of national revival. To them, LeTourneau’s “practical” gospel was as transparent and reliable as Adam Smith’s invisible hand. God could be trusted to reward correct doctrine, earnest faith, and righteous living with happiness and financial success. By virtue of their worldly achievements, then, they claimed the authority to diagnose the causes of personal and social crises. Like mid-twentieth century business

¹⁶⁸ Lorimer, 196; LeTourneau, 203. LeTourneau may have had in mind James 2:14: “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?” (KJV).
men of all political and religious stripes, they were confident that with the right
marketing techniques, they could tell people not only what to buy, but what to believe.
Chapter 2

“Business Men Marching for Jesus”:
The World Vision of Laymen’s Evangelism

In May of 1934, as the Depression battered Charlotte, North Carolina, twenty-nine business men gathered at Franklin and Morrow Graham’s large dairy farm to fast and pray for a citywide revival. These men, like Franklin Graham, belonged to the Charlotte Christian Men’s Club (CMC), part of a predominantly Southern movement colloquially known as “the Billy Sunday clubs” and, more officially, the Business Men’s Evangelistic Clubs (BMEC).1 Sunday, the legendary baseball player turned evangelist, knew that the chief peril of mass revivalism was a community’s return to normal after the spiritual excitement faded. He turned to business men to sustain the momentum with follow-up evangelism, forming the first BMEC in Atlanta in 1917. White, interdenominational, and comprised of middle-class strivers who were or had connections with local elites, the clubs used social power for evangelical ends. At times, their lay-only membership ran into conflict with clergy. According to salesman Vernon Patterson, a Charlotte BMEC/CMC founder, the local Ministerial Association “completely ignored” the group’s first proposal for a large-scale awakening and publicly called the timing “inopportunity.”2 However, some ministers shared the business men’s vision of collective repentance for “the spiritual declension” that they too believed had incurred God’s wrath on America.3

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1 Because the Charlotte BMEC/CMC was a branch of the larger BMEC, I will refer to it hereafter as the BMEC/CMC.

2 Ham, 13-14.

3 Ham, 15.
During the months after the dairy farm prayer meeting, the BMEC/CMC methodically eliminated obstacles to an interdenominational revival. Getting theologically conservative Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists to cooperate with each other was not a problem; ecumenism for the greater good was well established in British and American Protestantism. The co-owner of the Cole Manufacturing Company donated land for a temporary tabernacle after other BMEC/BMEC/CMC members coaxed a reluctant city council into granting a building permit. Meanwhile, the evangelistic team of Mordecai Ham and William J. Ramsay came to the Reid and Spillman insurance firm – both Reid and Spillman were BMEC/CMC leaders – to discuss headlining the event. Ham, a Baptist salesman-turned-preacher, ardent Prohibitionist, and florid anti-Semite who had stumped the South for decades, agreed to an arduous schedule of twice-daily meetings for four months at his own expense. It went without saying that the BMEC/CMC would handle the administrative details of scheduling, advertising, equipment, ushering, and cleanup. Two supportive pastors also attended. Ham attributed continuing clerical opposition to “a real fight…between the evangelistic fundamentalist and modernist crowd,” with the latter dominating the Ministerial Association.

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5 Patterson and other BMEC/CMC leaders, “Ham-Ramsay Meeting, Charlotte, N.C. Aug. 30th – Nov. 25th, 1934,” 1. Papers of Vernon W. Patterson (hereafter VWP; Collection 5, Box 1, Folder 1), Archives of the Billy Graham Center, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois (hereafter BGCA).

When the revival began, the BMEC/CMC aided Ham with much more than busywork. Patterson galvanized public interest by giving Ham evidence purporting to show that a home across from the high school was a speakeasy and a brothel. Thirty thousand citizens signed a petition to censure the mayor before he knew what had hit him, since Patterson had notified the evangelist and the press first. Standing before thousands at the tabernacle pulpit, Ham accused the mayor and the school board of “lining up with bawdy houses [and] bootleggers.” He cast himself as a victim of political persecutors who “want to embarrass this soul-saving campaign.” Patterson fueled the excitement by producing a deposition that described junior high students buying grain alcohol at the home and going “up to the bedroom for immoral purposes.” Ham thundered that Jesus Christ was the only solution to human depravity in general and juvenile delinquency in particular.7

The BMEC/CMC and Ham were staging a circus of cosmic importance, and one of the sightseers was Franklin Graham’s teenage son, whom everyone called “Billy Frank.” He went to his first meeting after hearing that high school students were massing at the tabernacle to defend their honor. A dairy farm employee who had been saved during a previous BMEC/CMC revival talked him into going, promising to let Billy Frank drive the truck if he answered the challenge, “Why don’t you come out and hear our fighting preacher?” Graham liked the sound of “fighting,” and Ham delivered. The evangelist’s voice rang out as he berated the audience for its sins, painted lurid pictures of

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hell, told stories from the Bible, and, in calmer moments, spun down-home yarns to illustrate subjects ranging from the Second Coming to the liquor trade. Graham was “spellbound” by Ham’s authoritative, yet accessible, masculinity. “[T]he same preacher who warned us so dramatically about the horrible fate of the lost in the everlasting lake of fire and brimstone also had a tremendous sense of humor and could tell stories almost as good as my father’s,” he marveled. Ham himself boasted, “So far as [Billy Frank] was concerned, nobody ever attended revivals like ours except a lot of old, effeminate men and crazy women and children. Our meeting changed his hero from Babe Ruth to Jesus Christ.”

Both men were almost certainly exaggerating after the fact, but for the next two months, Graham came every night and even joined the choir. When he finally walked to the altar, the BMEC/CMC was waiting. A tailor he knew embraced him, “explained God’s plan for my salvation in a simple way,” and prayed with him until Graham was sure he was ready to “turn myself over to [Christ’s] rule in my life.” Someone handed him a card to record his name, address, and spiritual status. He checked “Recommitment,” feeling that his salvation had begun with his baptism and confirmation. He had been aimless about his immediate future, but soon came to believe that God was calling him to a Christian college to train for the ministry. The twentieth century’s most consequential revivalist would owe his career not just to Ham’s powerful preaching, but to the hard work, example, and ideology of evangelical business men.

While Mordecai Ham has earned a footnote in history as the man who set Billy Graham on the road to becoming the next Billy Sunday, the Christian Men’s Committee

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8 Graham, 26-30; Ham, 23-24.
9 Graham, 26-30.
remains behind the scenes. This chapter argues that the BMEC/CMC and related groups such as the Christian Business Men’s Committee International, the Christian Laymen’s Crusade, and the Gideons did much to institutionalize what historian Joel Carpenter calls “revivalism as cultural politics” during the 1930s and 1940s. Evangelical business men’s groups formed around a single, specific, and, they believed, timeless purpose, that of winning converts and helping churches to keep them. The groups self-consciously patterned their language, strategies, and hopes after previous generations of proselytizers, minimizing current events to emphasize the eternal need for redemption through Christ. Paradoxically, this focus on saving individual souls contained a totalizing social vision. Adopting a missionary motto from the 1880s, business men’s groups and their allies would settle for nothing less than “the evangelization of the world in this generation.”

This “watchword,” as its coiners called it, had foundered on World War I, which forced liberal Protestants to question nationalism and religious and cultural imperialism. Its reclamation by conservative evangelicals as a rallying cry in World War II frames the story of the business men’s groups in this chapter. What distinguished the BMEC/CMC and its ilk from other evangelical organizations with the same uncompromising missionary zeal was the conviction that white business men were divinely anointed leaders in every sphere of life: home, workplace, church, and civil

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12 Showalter, 120-46.

13 Hutchison, 180-90, takes the evangelically-appropriated watchword into the 1960s.
society. As entrepreneurs, managers, or “white-collared” employees – the winners of the long industrial revolution and the late nineteenth-century triumph of corporate capitalism – they were accustomed to cultural and, to some extent, religious authority. These men were not Rockefellers or Morgans, but Babbitts, the small-business men and community leaders that social critic Sinclair Lewis skewered in the 1920s. They owned or worked for enterprises with a few to a few hundred employees, a sector that created nearly two-thirds of America’s income. Even in the Depression, the belief that God rewarded faith and virtue with economic success ran deep in American life. So did the corresponding expectation that the successful be generous with their time and money. Business men’s decisions about where to volunteer or send checks reflected their values and gave them power in public life.

Evangelical business men’s intertwined assumptions of entitlement and duty put them in complicated yet productive tension with more visible religious leaders – clergymen. For generations, business men had served the church by managing


congregational finances, endowing buildings, expanding educational programs, organizing revivals, and, in some denominations, playing a decisive role in hiring and firing pastors. In all of these endeavors, business men and clergy negotiated professional turf, with both groups agreeing that a call to the full-time ministry commanded special respect even when God summoned amateurs to similar tasks. Yet business men had a history of doubting clerical effectiveness. Partly, this had to do with results. Evangelicals were prone to identifying any given historical moment as an unprecedented spiritual catastrophe, which inevitably called into question the performance of spiritual leaders. In the 1930s, clergy and laymen alike could point to the Depression, the New Deal, the ascendance of theological modernism in the 1920s, and the persistence of perennial vices such as drinking and “bawdy houses” as signs of collective failure. More importantly, early-to-mid-twentieth century business men believed in business almost as fervently as they believed in God, and clergy were not business men. Careful not to claim superiority to religious professionals, laymen’s groups declared that they were equal and complementary partners in world evangelization.

The ambiguous gender role of the clergy was critical to business men’s sense of prerogative. Since colonial days, women had outnumbered men in church membership, and their charitable, missionary, and advocacy work gave Christianity a feminine face. Although the imbalance predated the language of separate gendered spheres, elite nineteenth-century discourse placed “religion” in the domestic sphere of home and

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17 Sacan Berkovich demonstrates the elasticity of this rhetorical form, which was by no means a fundamentalist innovation, in The American Jeremiad (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 93-174.
family, rendering the manliness of clergy and male worshipers suspect. Evangelical business men’s groups sought to masculinize the church by urging laymen to treat religion as seriously as their careers. As R.G. LeTourneau – who presided over the Christian Business Men’s Committee International, the Gideons, and the Christian Laymen’s Crusade – put it, “We are going to sell laymen the idea that they are going to work for Jesus Christ seven days of the week or not call themselves Christians.” The groups went on to emphasize Christianity’s toughness on one hand and cash value on the other, in terms familiar to their audience. LeTourneau’s multimillion-dollar “partnership” with God had a host of antecedents, from Andrew Carnegie’s *The Gospel of Wealth* to Bruce Barton’s portrait of Jesus as a salesman in *The Man Nobody Knows.* Business men circulated a poem that, by underscoring the link between clergy and women, held them responsible for the survival not only of the church, but of civilization itself:

> Leave it to the ministers,
>  and soon the church will die,
> Leave it to the women-folks,

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and the young will pass you by,
For the church is all that lifts us from the coarse and selfish mob.
And the church that is to prosper needs the layman on the job.²¹

Business men’s groups made three major contributions to white evangelicalism during the 1930s and 1940s. First, they tried to forge a united front from regional evangelical business men’s networks – Northern, Midwestern, and Western, on one hand, and Southern on the other – that duplicated each other’s work on parallel instead of intersecting tracks.²² While the Northern CBMCI and Southern BMEC/CMC struggled to work together, their attempts to cross regional lines contributed to evangelical nationalism during World War II. Second, evangelical business men’s groups, whose members profited from the defense industry, shifted from blanket anti-statism during the New Deal to viewing the military-industrial complex as a godly arm of big government. In doing so, they helped cement what would become evangelicalism’s long-term identification with American militarism. Third, both despite and because of their fierce Americanism, evangelical business men exuberantly promoted what Graham’s colleague Bob Pierce called the “world vision” of postwar evangelicalism.²³ For a window of time between World War II and the entrenchment of the Cold War, more countries were open to Americans bearing the gospel than ever before. The evangelization of the world in this


²² Business men’s participation in the clergy-led National Association of Evangelicals is the subject of Chapter 4.

generation looked to some like a matter of years, not decades, and business men’s groups depicted themselves as soldiers on the front lines.24

The ingredients for an evangelical business men’s group in an industrial and consumer economy were (1) a common, nondenominational evangelical creed paired with a commitment to save America from sin; (2) evangelical practices that alienated would-be members from non-evangelical men, particularly taboos on smoking, drinking, gambling, swearing, and extramarital sex; and (3) exposure to what were, by the late nineteenth century, an array of class-specific clubs formed by white men who worked for a living, but did not perform manual labor. The canonical account of the Gideons’ founding begins in 1898 at a hotel in Boscobel, Wisconsin, where two traveling salesmen separately longed for Christian companionship.25 Shoe (or paper) salesman – sources vary – John H. Nicholson, about forty, lived a hundred miles away in the small town where he had been born. He arrived late to the hotel after a long day on the circuit. The only bed available was in the room of paint (or grocery) dealer Samuel E. Hill, in his early thirties. He was filling out sales orders in the smoke-filled lobby, ignoring the revelers around him. At bedtime, Nicholson opened his Bible. Hill, who was half-asleep, shot up and asked him to read aloud, confessing, “I am a Christian too.”

Nicholson and Hill agreed to meet again to form an organization of Christian “traveling men.” Nicholson invited a pious acquaintance whom he had met on a train, insurance (or grocery) seller William J. Knights. In 1899, the trio formed the Gideons at


Nicholson’s hometown Y.M.C.A. The name came from Judges 7. God orders his servant Gideon to winnow his army to a few fighters, who, because of their faith, scatter Israel’s enemy by blowing their trumpets in unison. The reference signaled defiant pride in the minority status of practicing Christians in a male commercial culture that required anonymous, raucous sociability. “God sifted [the Gideonites] down to a few real choice fellows,” Knights summarized Judges 7, redefining abstemious Christians as true friends and hearty companions.26 Rotary (1905), Kiwanis (1915), and the Lions (1917) offered less religious but equally appealing combinations of networking, friendship, and, above all, “service,” elevating white-collar work to a calling that transcended dollars and cents while conferring informal or formal civic power.27 Many men joined more than one club, layering their business, religious, political, and social ties.

The early Gideons adapted the traditions of existing business men’s groups for evangelism in ways that set a template for like-minded organizations. For decades, they functioned as a near-exclusive professional fraternity like craft unions, medicine, or the bar. In principle, only traveling salesmen could join until 1937, when “businessmen” – excluding doctors, lawyers, and other “professionals” – gained admittance. In practice, the Gideons were more inclusive, befitting a charter that celebrated the very mobility that made them seek each other out as “scattering seeds all along the pathway for Christ.”28

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26 On “the male culture of the workplace,” including all-but-required networking through leisure activities that were anathema to evangelicals, see E. Anthony Rotundo, American Manhood; Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 194-205.


At first, they made man-to-man proselytizing their only goal. To that end, they adopted a typical club accessory: a mandatory lapel pin. It was at once a conversation-starter, a brand, a badge of belonging, and a subtle class statement: only men who wore suits to work could wear one all the time. Since magazines were an important method of advertising the club and motivating its members, *The Gideon* debuted in 1900, a year after the group’s founding. In 1908, the growing movement launched its signature mission of putting Bibles in hotel rooms for traveling men. By 1910, Gideons were cooperating with clergy, leading revivals and delivering standardized messages to churches that publicized the local “camp” and asked for donations for the hotel Bibles. The next year, a Canadian branch formed. International, yet overwhelmingly Midwestern; all-male, but with an energetic women’s Auxiliary; and selling salvation with their other wares, the Gideons paved the way for other Northern evangelical business men’s groups.

In early 1930, the Gideons helped create the Christian Business Men’s Committee (CBMC) as an informal partner in evangelism. Chicago, now the Gideons’ headquarters, was the staging ground. A.H. Leaman, a part-time Mennonite pastor on the faculty of the Moody Bible Institute, enlisted them and five other laymen’s and women’s groups to

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30 Judges 7:21, “And they stood every man in his place around the camp.” Henderson, 5.

31 Henderson, 7, 9, 371, 24, 48.
organize a city-wide revival in response to the economic downturn. Leaman had two models in mind. One was Billy Sunday’s 1914 Chicago crusade, which Leaman remembered as a last show of evangelical unity before white Protestants fractured into “fundamentalist” and “modernist” camps. The second was an on-and-off urban tradition of noonday revival meetings, aimed at professional men on their lunch hour, that dated back to the nationwide “Businessman’s Revival” of 1857-58 – also inflamed by a market crash. Not atypically of Northern and Southern Protestants, whose major denominations remained institutionally separate since acrimoniously splitting before the Civil War, there was no indication that Leaman’s Chicago group and the Southern BMEC knew they were working on parallel tracks. It is likely, however, that Leaman remembered Atlanta’s 1911-1912 Men and Religion Forward Movement, the goal of which was to repopulate churches with “1,000,000 missing men.” It pioneered the modern advertising tactics – billboards, radio and newspaper publicity, and a simple brand-name message – that the CBMC would use to reach the same audience of male strivers. By making noonday meetings the center of his campaign, Leaman ensured that business men, not the

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cooperating women’s groups, would be the public face of Chicago’s hoped-for redemption.

After Leaman recruited enough evangelical groups to feel confident that God wanted the revival, he formed the Christian Business Men’s Committee to channel the excitement through a central administrative body. The chairman, Swedish immigrant C.B. Hedstrom, was a longtime Gideon who attributed his shoe store’s survival to his refusal to work on the Sabbath.37 Ernest Wadsworth was a lay evangelist with the Great Commission Prayer League. Paul Fischer was a lawyer.38 The most famous member was Vaughn Shoemaker, an editorial cartoonist for the Chicago Daily News. Vocal about his religious and political conservatism – his journalistic colleagues called him “the gospel cartoonist” – he invented the tax-weary character “John Q. Public” and would soon win the first of two Pulitzer Prizes.39 I have been unable to find the occupations of Executive Secretary Frank W. Sheriff and a J.S. Lincoln who soon disappeared from the rolls, but they probably matched the others: small business owners, salesmen, or professionals. Leaman and an early booster named Edwin Zorn were ordained clergyman and, as independent evangelists, each with one foot outside the church door. Fischer affectionately called Leaman “the father of the CBMC,” testifying to the comity that


38 Enlow, Men Aflame, 18.

contained clergy-lay tensions. This was especially true in the CBMC, which, unlike the Gideons and the BMEC, allowed preachers full membership.40

Leaman and his team thought the committee would be temporary. They raised $3000 for a six-week Eastertide extravaganza featuring noon services in Chicago’s marketplace, the Loop. When the excitement showed no sign of flagging, they kept going: twenty-five more weeks in the Loop, followed by open-air preaching in the summer. In the fall of 1931, they moved from daily meetings in the Loop to Monday-Wednesday-Friday noonday worship in rented downtown theaters. WMBI, the Moody Institute’s radio station, broadcasted the services to a wide swath of the Midwest and publicized them in the *Moody Bible Institute Monthly*. By mid-1932, when the Depression was at its worst, the CBMC had raised $25,000 to bring business men to Christ. The founders were now working to build a permanent organization of “consecrated, devoted men whose hearts God has touched with a burden and vision to get the Gospel to a desperately needy generation.”41

Later scholarly portrayals of an “American religious depression” cannot account for the CBMC and the Gideons, whose Southern counterparts in the Business Men’s Evangelistic Clubs were simultaneously gearing up for a revival. “Most of us are humble men of very little means…and all are carrying their full load in their respective churches,” a Charlotte BMEC/CMC member wrote to the newspaper in 1932. Yet they had probably saved more souls “than all of the churches of Charlotte combined” while

40 Ernest D. Christie, “Evangelistic and Bible Conference Fields,” *Moody Monthly* [note name change], Vol. 38, No. 10 (June 1938), 543.

“depression and unemployment have been doing such devastating work upon our poor.” He pleaded for donations toward prayer meetings, “three weekly gospel missions,” and Sunday schools in “destitute sections” whose residents “for the safety of society need the steadying influence of the gospel of Christ most of all.” The editors echoed the call, praising “the robustness, the virility, and the deep, consecrated earnestness” of the BMEC/CMC’s “emphasis on the evangelistic note in religion…that is especially needed in these days.”

The editors were prescient. In the 1930s, the Gideons adopted similar methods of evangelism that aimed for mass conversion in addition to “man-to-man” contact. These included Scripture memorization courses, tract publication and distribution, and open-air services with personal testimonies, preaching, and music. Both the CBMC’s Leaman and the Gideons had booths at Chicago’s centennial “Century of Progress” World’s Fair in 1933-1934. The informal motto of the business-boosting celebration was “‘Science Finds, Industry Applies, Man Conforms.’ It was a perfect setting for evangelical business men to challenge the very notion of human progress without God. Chicago’s evangelical clergy seized the moment as well. Rev. Paul Rood, a veteran of the 1914 Billy Sunday campaign and president of the World Christian Fundamentals Association,

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43 Henderson, 24-25.

led a revival at Moody Church during the 1933 World’s Fair and was active in the CBMC. In 1935, he became the president of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, the California counterpart to Moody Bible Institute. Not coincidentally, CBMCs formed within a year in Seattle and San Francisco, the latter for the express purpose of proselytizing at the 1939 San Francisco World’s Fair. Rood recruited investment banker Arnold Grunigen to head the San Francisco group. CBMC World’s Fair organizer Tom Olson, LeTourneau’s brother-in-law and in-house author, rented a building to show “Sermons from Science.” This one-man act from the Moody Bible Institute entertained audiences with sleight-of-hand demonstrations of lightning and other marvels to argue that God, not evolution, designed the natural world.

The San Francisco CBMC also distributed a pamphlet, “14 Prominent Business Men Look at Life,” that treated capitalist success as grounds for religious authority. Three CBMC-connected “executives,” three “manufacturers,” two bankers, an “investment dealer,” a “steel man,” a “wholesaler,” a “store manager” and a “merchant” gave brief testimonies. Many were simple statements of faith, but some made a point of tying business conquests to evangelical Christianity. “Christ is as real a companion and Lord in a busy life of everyday living in the heart of the financial district as He is when one is preaching His Word or worshipping Him,” asserted a Wall Street executive. The store manager called “Jesus Christ [the] Chairman of the Board…[and] the great conciliator in labor troubles.” An executive and an industrialist used similar clichés: “No


investment yields so sure returns as a life committed to the Lord,” and “Eternal assets can never be wiped out.” Although the men were uniformly white-collar or upper management, the accompanying text tried to flatten the differences between the pamphlet’s subjects and its implicitly male readers. “These men have not dealt in platitudes,” Olson (the most likely editor) emphasized. “The truths about which they have spoken are as explicable to the illiterate street hawker as they are to the bank president.” With that, he launched into John 3:17-18. “For God sent not His son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned…” All 14 business men’s narratives built up to an altar call.47

As editor of The King’s Business, the Los Angeles Institute’s monthly magazine, Rood championed the expanding CBMC as “The Ministry of Laymen” and “The Pew Speaking to the Pulpit.” Ministers routinely complained that laymen did not do their fair share of church work, and now the CBMC was taking action. Noting that the 1936 annual CBMC rally drew 11,000 people to Chicago Coliseum, Rood called “this continuous campaign in Chicago…one of the most significant and far-reaching evangelistic movements in America today.” The new Seattle CBMC was already holding noon meetings and radio broadcasts five days a week in the Metropolitan Theater.48 In March, the San Francisco CBMC invited Rood to speak at their first week-long revival. The King’s Business reprinted Arnold Grunigen’s closing address to show “what is in the minds of Christian laymen.” Grunigen was not one to hold back. He sneered at business


men “sitting demurely in a church pew Sunday morning, if the weather is bad, so they can’t play golf.” He attacked ministers in all denominations for the “excess program machinery and ineffectual whirring of wheels” that “the business world” would not tolerate. His assault on modernism would have done Mordecai Ham proud. Movies, book reviews, “politics, reform, civic betterment, pacifism, prohibition, and cleaning up a sick world” had no place in sermons or Sunday Schools. “Put first things first. Preach the Word, convict of sin, present the Saviour; and red-blooded men who read the papers and know the world is bruised, battered, and bewildered will accept Christ, one by one.” He ended by echoing Moody’s famous statement that God had put him in a lifeboat to save as many as possible from the “wrecked vessel” of the world.49 If the church did not change, Grunigen informed clergy, “the laymen will run the life boats and you can run the hulk.”50

Publicity in The King’s Business, Moody Bible Institute Monthly, and other national evangelical publications was one way to build the CBMC movement. Personal connections among business men, or business men and clergy such as Rood, mattered still more. If Arnold Grunigen sounded remarkably like R.G. LeTourneau – contemptuous of effete do-gooders who alienated “red-blooded men” from the church; exasperated at organized religion’s lack of business sense; and an electrifying preacher who made a point of identifying with the pew rather than the pulpit – it may have been because they shared the same lay-centered Plymouth Brethren upbringing. More than that, they once shared a home. The Grunigens were the family with whom 19-year old


50 Rood, “Around The King’s Table,” The King’s Business, Mar. 1936, 82; “Around the King’s Table,” Apr. 1936, 122 (Grunigen quotes).
LeTourneau boarded in San Francisco. LeTourneau and Arnold were about the same age, with the same intelligence, charisma, and hardscrabble ambition. Just as LeTourneau had dropped out of school at thirteen to use his bulk for manual labor, the blond, baby-faced Grunigen dropped out at fifteen to become an investment bank president’s protégé.

During the 1920s and 1930s, he became a regional manager and transferred to a more prestigious national bank with headquarters in New York as well as San Francisco. Over the same period, Grunigen participated in weekly street evangelism; served as an elder and a deacon at his church, where he also taught the Men’s Bible Study and was president of the men’s club; and became, at 35, the youngest present of the Mount Hermon Association, a Christian campground where Evelyn LeTourneau taught poor children Sunday School.51 When R.G. LeTourneau moved to Peoria in 1935, within the Chicago CBMC’s orbit, there is no evidence that he became involved right away. It was Grunigen who piqued LeTourneau’s interest in a group that professed what the industrialist had been saying for years, that religion and business were intertwined.52

In 1938, the five CBMCs – Chicago, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles (organized by Rood and Grunigen), and New York – met at the La Salle Hotel in Chicago to form the Christian Business Men’s Committee International (CBMCI). The CBMCI would link local CBMCs and coordinate large-scale projects. It would serve as an administrative agency without the centralized authority that conservative evangelical business men associated with Catholicism on one hand and the New Deal on the other.


52 “The Heaven and Earth Man: Our Chairman, R.G. LeTourneau,” Contact, Jan.-Feb. 1946, 6-7. This article credits LeTourneau with serving as a noonday speaker in the “early days” of the Chicago CBMC, but he was not in the area during the founding. No other source puts him in the CBMC until the late 1930s.
The 150 men at the meeting did insist that CBMC members, whatever their denominations, affirm a common set of evangelical beliefs. They approved a nine-point doctrinal statement that a historian distilled to “(1) inspiration of the Scriptures; (2) [belief in the] Trinity; (3) virgin birth; (4) man’s sinful nature; (5) death of Christ; (6) His Resurrection; (7) His premillennial return; (8) new birth through faith in Christ, and (9) everlasting punishment of the lost.” Only point (7), premillennialism, proved controversial. Not all fundamentalists agreed with the eschatological timeline that led to the Rapture, and demanding adherence to a debatable creed ran counter to the CBMCI’s lowest-common-denominator inclusiveness. In a typical compromise between principle and pragmatism, the convention agreed to welcome non-premillennialists into almost every aspect of the CMBCI as associate members, without the right to vote.  

The conference also reiterated the movement’s single-minded focus on evangelism. Prayer, Bible study, and training in “techniques for witnessing” were part of the convention program. Delegates held street meetings throughout downtown Chicago, crowding the radio schedule with live broadcasts.  

Finally, the delegates chose the CBMCI’s executive committee. A.H. Leaman was now a full-time evangelist, so Chicago chair C.B. Hedstrom became the International chair. LeTourneau was vice-chair; Grunigen, secretary. Dr. N.A. Jepson, a chiropractor who organized the CBMC in Seattle, served as treasurer. The fifth member of the committee, Charles Gremmels, held no official position, but, like LeTourneau and  

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54 CBMC USA, “75 Years of Ministry,” (2006), 3.  
Grunigen, represented national industry and finance. The founder of the New York City CMBC, Gremmels ran a shipping corporation and later established the meaningfully named Providential Realty and Investing Company. Born in a tenement to evangelical parents, he began working at a grocery store when he was twelve. At fifteen, he was saved at the Bowery Mission for the poor. He found his way to the Fulton Street noon prayer meetings, a remnant of the 1857-58 Businessman’s Revival, which he would attend for the rest of his life. When his first employer ordered him to work on Sundays, Gremmels quit and found a job at a ship broker’s office, where his career began. His religious activities expanded with his success in shipping: fundraising for missionaries, child evangelism, the Christian Association for the Blind. He joined the Episcopalian Brotherhood of St. Andrew, founded in 1883 to minister to men and boys, and earned a “laymen’s license” to preach in the church. He was the president of his county’s Gideon camp. His leisure pastimes included golf, fishing, and handing out tracts.

Many scholars have described American religion and capitalism as mutually reinforcing. Each, in its ideal form, rewards competition, innovation, and niche or mass appeal in an ever-changing marketplace. The first CBMCI executive committee comprised a generational cohort that not only embodied this relationship, but embraced religious and political conservatism as essential brakes on the forward motion in which they thrived. The “incorporation of America” between the 1870s and 1890s, when all


58 Jon Butler, Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 1-5, 285-86; R. Laurence Moore, Selling God: Religion in the
five men were born, encouraged nostalgia for a purportedly simpler and more localized past among protestors and supporters alike. The labor and populist movements pitted the paper riches of corporate shareholders against the producerist virtues of vanishing small farms, family businesses, sole proprietorships, and artisanal trades.\(^{59}\) William Jennings Bryan, the 1896 Democratic presidential candidate who would represent fundamentalists at the Scopes trial, spoke for many who objected to the centralization of wealth. “[T]he merchant at the crossroads store” and “the farmer who…toils all day,” he said, were as much business men “as the merchant of New York” and “the man who goes upon the board of trade and bets on the price of grain.”\(^{60}\) By contrast with Bryan’s voters, traveling salesmen such as the Gideons belonged to a category of workers with more to gain than to lose from capitalism’s new structures. Neither producing the goods they sold nor owning their own labor, the “nation of clerks” faced charges of servility to upper management, functional interchangeability, and physical enervation from a life in offices and trains. Next to rugged farmers and muscular self-starters, which cultural critics sentimentalized more floridly the more anachronistic they became, traveling salesmen bearing Bibles looked emasculated. Nevertheless, by 1938, salesmen, clerks, middle

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\(^{59}\) Trachtenberg, 1-10.

managers, and even hands-on industrialists like LeTourneau – business owners who controlled exponentially smaller units of production than the era’s tycoons – formed a middle-class backbone for corporate capitalism.61

With no sense of contradiction, these middlemen of the corporate economy shared critics’ nostalgia for simpler and more virtuous times, which evangelicals articulated in the familiar language of revivalism. The Gideons, the CBMCI, and their Southern counterparts in the BMEC still believed in the producerist ethos, for good reason. Their leaders came of age during the uneven and unfinished transition from economic localism to economic nationalism. For example, like most young men of their generation, the CBMCI executive committee members – Jepson excepted – went to work without finishing high school. States began trying to raise education levels with the next age cohort, born around 1900, because reading, writing, and arithmetic were becoming essential middle-class job skills.62 LeTourneau was acutely aware of the shift in his interactions with younger business men. Terrified of public speaking until his debut at the Peoria Chamber of Commerce, he never forgot the critic who proposed that he “hire a graduate of kindergarten to edit his column” in the company magazine NOW.63 The CBMCI men identified with the older economy in other ways. Hedstrom was an

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61 In a phrase that historians have applied retroactively ever since, Roosevelt Supreme Court appointee William O. Douglas complained in an antitrust case that “a nation of shopkeepers” had become “a nation of clerks.” Democracy and Finance: The Addresses and Public Statements of William O. Douglas as Member and Chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission (1940), 15. See also Rotundo, 247-251; Blumin, 9-13; Gail Bederman, Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1800-1917 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 84-88.


immigrant who had made good. LeTourneau’s first enterprise was a family farm, and he apprenticed as an ironworker a few years before state and federal governments began linking apprenticeship to educational achievement.\textsuperscript{64} Partly because they considered themselves self-taught, and partly because they viewed every human endeavor under the microscope of a personal relationship with a just God, the committee men were economic individualists. The enemy behind the Depression and the cultural side effects of capitalism – hedonistic consumption, the liquor trade, commodified sexuality – was not incorporation, but infidelity. Blaming disaster on personal or collective faithlessness, they poured their hopes for a better society into individual conversions and national revival.

LeTourneau, Grunigen, Hedstrom, Jepson, and Gremmels bridged both the pre- and post-corporate economy and the transition from nineteenth-century evangelical power to twentieth-century evangelical or fundamentalist marginalization. They were children when William Jennings Bryan, who was theologically if not politically sound, ran for president on a major party ticket. They were adolescents or young men in 1914, when A.H. Leaman saw Billy Sunday and came to mourn his revivals as a symbol of crumbling consensus. Having lived in both worlds, they missed the Christian America that they believed had nurtured self-made – rather, God-made – men like themselves. In 1938, the CBMCI’s leaders were such partisans of corporate capitalism that they defended it against the New Deal. Yet they longed for conservative Protestants to unite around a God who did business the old-fashioned way – one-on-one with a verbal contract. The nineteenth-century revivalistic tradition taught that Christianity’s essential truths, spelled out in the CBMCI’s nine-point platform, transcended denominational

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 44-45; “History of Apprenticeship,” Washington State Department of Labor and Industries, \url{http://www.lni.wa.gov/TradesLicensing/Apprenticeship/About/History/default.asp} (last accessed October 25, 2009).
affiliations. The innovative (and negotiable) doctrine of premillennialism reinforced this ecumenism by arguing that the “true church” was scattered among hypocrites and heretics in all churches. Nor were evangelical business men alone in their nostalgia for a white, hegemonic Protestant past. The second Ku Klux Klan and many liberal Protestants scapegoated Catholics and immigrants in the same language from a similar sense of loss. Adding the “I” to CBMC confidently forecasted a large market for yet another business men’s revival.

Yet the Southland, as Business Men’s Evangelistic Club leaders referred to their region, was conspicuously absent from the CBMCI’s map. Indeed, the two evangelical business men’s organizations took little notice of each other until LeTourneau moved to Toccoa Falls later in 1938. In addition to the sectional political and economic differences that LeTourneau was far from the first Yankee transplant to encounter, white American Protestantism divided at the Mason-Dixon line. Baptists, Presbyterians, and (until 1939) Methodists worshiped in separate Northern and Southern denominations that split in the mid-nineteenth century over slavery and the Civil War. In each case, the South “seceded” from its Northern ecclesiastical oppressor, while the North found no compromise that would make slavery compatible with church union. Each denomination had tried at

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66 Ahlstrom, 848-50, 916-17.


68 See Chapter 1, 39-43.

69 C.C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the Civil War* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 66-139; PCA Historical Center: *Southern Presbyterian*
different times to reunite with its sibling, but the Methodists were the first to succeed – in 1939, ninety-five years after the schism.\textsuperscript{70} The movie release of 	extit{Gone With the Wind} the same year showed how much white Northerners and Southerners had sentimentally reunited, not least over the necessity of black subjugation.\textsuperscript{71}

Still, competing sectional narratives formed a barrier to religious cooperation, and evangelical business men’s groups were no exception. The CBMCI did not imaginatively inhabit a “Northland,” but “America,” subdivided into the Midwest, New England, the West, and so on, with the South as something of an afterthought. Conversely, the BMEC tended to think of the Southland as “America” and the North as a spiritual cesspool, notwithstanding Northern supporters, crossover Southern evangelists, and truly national hubs such as Billy Sunday’s base in Winona Lake, Indiana.\textsuperscript{72} In October of 1936, for example, a relocated BMEC leader from Tennessee organized a chapter in Columbus, Ohio. “This offers a splendid opportunity,” BMEC newsletter 	extit{Christian Workers} enthused, “as so little work of this nature is being done in this section of the country.”

The missionary tone overlooked not only the CBMCI,\textsuperscript{73} but the Gideons, whom the

\textsuperscript{70} Goen, 9-10.


\textsuperscript{73} Having introduced the CBMCI, I will keep using the acronym even when the “I” does not apply (that is, to the CBMC before the 1938 convention or local committees at any time).
BMEC knew well. Though predominantly Midwestern, the traveling salesmen with hotel Bibles made inroads in the South as early as 1913. There were men active in both groups. Within months of the BMEC’s imagined conquest of Columbus, the Gideons would elect their first Southern president. Yet they were invisible to the BMEC in Ohio.

The November, 1936 issue of *Christian Workers* encapsulated the BMEC’s ambivalent interregionalism. “President Hargraves Visits North,” the front page announced. Among other appointments, BMEC president Boyd Hargraves met with evangelical lawyer James Bennett; the article fails to note Bennett’s leadership in the New York City CBMC, suggesting another missed connection. A New Jersey Sunday School group, “Everyman’s Bible Class,” went so far as to propose “a nation-wide organization of Christian Laymen’s Evangelistic Clubs.” Overall, however, Hargraves was “disappointed” with the trip, going home with no firm plans and his regional stereotypes intact, if not exacerbated. “The Christian men and women in our Southland have taken the church for granted,” he warned. “We found it when we came here and have indulged in a dangerous assumption that nothing could happen.” However, evangelical churches with “empty pews” proved that “something is happening.” Not far from these churches and New York pulpits where modernists questioned the divinity of Christ, the self-anointed Father Divine – black, charismatic, wildly unorthodox – packed in crowds. Hargraves sat through a boisterous six-hour service, “the aisles packed with human beings like sardines in a can,” and had to exit by fire escape. The lesson was clear: a short distance separated genteel modernism from racial and political “fanatic[ism].”

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During the service, Father Divine’s “negro lawyer” even reminded the black and white worshipers to register to vote. Hargraves concluded that “no more imperative challenge” faced Southern Christians than the “demand for a purely social service program” instead of the gospel.75

An editorial in the next issue by a Southern Methodist bishop struck a proto-populist note in a markedly shriller key. “United States is Money Mad Nation,” W.A. Chandler seethed in a jumble of timeworn accusations that all pointed North. “The usual raids upon the Federal Treasury, with increased numbers and added zeal, are operating at Washington,” he said of the New Deal. “If this money-madness is not checked it will eventually pull down our governmental structure as well as pollute the lives of individuals.” Certain individuals were already polluted: “the men who have amassed vast fortunes.” They “inflame all the people with the evil malady of greed and self-indulgence. No nation has ever perished on account of its poverty.” What really enraged him, though, was the media conspiracy to attack the South, the only part of America that still clung to values higher than money. He meant lynching. Northern “homicides…for money and money only” were far more monstrous than Southern “vengeance…for the most repulsive offenses,” and the former outnumbered the latter. Chandler’s sectionalized Christians had no need of the social service programs that so alarmed Hargraves. “The greatest peril of the American nation is its continuous and abounding prosperity.”76 As delusional as this tirade might have sounded in 1936, it might also have sounded hopeful.

Father Divine promised that material goods “come automatically” in return for “service


gratis for the common good of humanity.” R.G. LeTourneau had his partnership with God. Neither desperately poor nor plutocrats, subscribers to *Christian Workers* had more reason than most to hope that faith would yield material rewards – and to fear becoming “money mad.”

The same issue told readers that an unnamed manufacturer had summoned BMEC national field secretary Willis Haymaker to Peoria “twice in recent weeks for important conferences.” Haymaker, the son of Presbyterian missionaries, was born in 1895 and grew up in Winona Lake. He became the campaign director and advance man for a star-studded roster of traveling evangelists, including Gipsy Smith and Bob Jones, Sr., both Southerners with national audiences. LeTourneau, it appeared, wanted an advance man of his own. The Peoria plant was a year old, and he may already have been contemplating expansion to Toccoa Falls or somewhere like it. Haymaker obliged with a fulsome and revealing article entitled “Big Business and the Real Gospel.”

Haymaker was dazzled by the visibility of conservative evangelical culture in LeTourneau’s factory. The soon-to-be standard dedication ceremony for a new building addition featured a well-known Midwestern evangelist and netted fifty employee converts. In another preview of future institutional practices, LeTourneau arm-twisted a visiting evangelist at his church into leading a week of noon shop meetings. Tract racks

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77 Quoted in Watts, 106.


stood beneath every time clock; a man in the accounting department sold Bibles; Bible Institute of Los Angeles graduates comprised the King’s Business Quartet. One singer, a foreman who converted eleven of his twelve subordinates, described LeTourneau, Inc., as “a great opportunity for any young Christian.” LeTourneau added that it was a terrible opportunity for any young communist. “In these days of Bolshevism and Red agitation,” he said, “our modern industries need young men with a high purpose in life.” He was more candid than usual about the role of religion in his hiring practices. Many of the workers were in their early twenties because young men, in addition to being quick learners, “have a life before them and if won for Christ they can spend a life in service for Him.” Many were already evangelical, and LeTourneau culled applicants from their social networks, requiring all potential hires to “be recommended by someone whom we know personally.” Haymaker told BMEC readers that proof lay in the profits. “[W]hen you hear that there are 150 agencies in the United States and nearly 200 in foreign countries selling LeTourneau equipment, you come to the only true conclusion – this business is being honored of God.” Almost in the same breath, he applauded LeTourneau for treating success as a mere “byproduct” of faith. For both men, the line between product and byproduct was none too clear.81

Haymaker was one of four BMEC leaders whose contact with LeTourneau would catalyze interregional cooperation with the CBMCI after the industrialist moved to Toccoa Falls in 1938. All four had deep roots in business men’s evangelism. BMEC president Hargraves, a Chattanooga lawyer, was so committed to the organization that he

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redoubled his efforts to build clubs around the South when the Depression struck.\textsuperscript{82} “These troublesome times have caused a great deal of grief to all our clients,” he told Charlotte’s Vernon Patterson. “My folks sometimes think that I am practicing law as a side issue and [that] I am devoting most of my time to the National Association.”\textsuperscript{83} The tepid outcome of his 1936 trip North did not shake his commitment to growth. Patterson, for his part, dominated the BMEC/CMC of North Carolina and took important administrative roles in the headquarters. He spent his entire career as a salesman for a company that produced business forms, confidently personifying the nation of clerks. “Why should not plans be as systematically laid to cover a given territory with the gospel message as are laid for coverage of a territory in the sale of merchandise?” Patterson asked in a \textit{Christian Workers} essay listing the evangelistic advantages of laymen over clergy. Laymen had “freedom of action in spiritual matters,” “access to the masses,” and the ability to help “ordinary men in business against the hard knocks of the cold world.” Any revival they organized would be bigger than “a church membership campaign” and avoid becoming “an extremely emotional series of meetings” or a “bitter religious fight.”\textsuperscript{84} Finally, there was Rolan Stoker, the executive secretary of the Georgia BMEC and on LeTourneau’s payroll. The ex-dentist was developing a conference center to attract evangelical visitors and dollars to Toccoa Falls.

In August of 1940, CBMCI representatives came as guests to the BMEC’s annual convention, the inaugural event at LeTourneau and Stoker’s deceptively idyllic retreat.

\textsuperscript{82} “Program - Association of BMECs in Eleventh Annual Convention,” Aug. 14-16, 1931. Papers of VWP (Collection 5, Box 2, Folder 1), BGCA.

\textsuperscript{83} Boyd Hargraves to Vernon W. Patterson, Jan.1, 1933 and July 8, 1932. Papers of VWP (Collection 5, Box 2, Folder 1), BGCA.

The centerpiece was man-made lake – made by LeTourneau’s employees – that sheltered visitors from the sights and sounds of the industrial plants only a few miles away. “Motor boating, and swimming and tennis are popular pastimes with the many people who visit this exciting vacation-land,” the promotional literature enthused.85 LeTourneau intended his country club to be a white-collar fundamentalist crossroads, and Southerners, significantly, took the first step. The BMEC invited the CBMCI to discuss Vernon Patterson’s proposal for a new and jointly administered revivalist organization.86 To ensure Northern attendance, LeTourneau promised local and national CBMCI leaders a free trip, garnering participants from New York to the Pacific coast.87 The four hundred conference-goers concurred that the “world crisis” – the encroaching European war, which the CBMCI’s Canadians had been fighting for almost a year – was a critical time to rouse unreached laymen and funnel them into their geographically appropriate parent group.88 “We [in the BMEC] are ready to throw the weight of our Association back of a great nation-wide or world-wide program of vital evangelism,” Haymaker said. “[W]e are proud to cooperate in any sound, sane, constructive, Christ-centered and Spirit-led movement that has for its purpose the winning of lost men and women for Christ.”89 The CBMCI anticipated that “these interchanges of counsel…will tend to strengthen the work

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85 “Minutes of the 21st Annual Convention of the National Association of Business Men’s Evangelistic Clubs,” 8/14-17/41. Papers of VWP (Collection 20, Box 2, Folder 1), BGCA.

86 VWP to LeTourneau, June 11, 1940; LeTourneau to VWP, June 12, 1940. Papers of R.G. LeTourneau (Box J4J, Folder F19), LeTourneau University.

87 LeTourneau to VWP, June 12, 1940; “20th Annual Conv. Very Outstanding,” Christian Workers (Sept. 1940), 1.


89 R.G. LeTourneau to the CBMCI Board, Apr. 30, 1940. Papers of R.G. LeTourneau (Box J3F, Folder 42), LeTourneau University.
of both organizations.”

Bringing the inchoate collaboration down to earth, they decided, would require another meeting and intensive prayer for the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

Publicity for the “Emergency Called Conference of Business and Professional Men” went out in October. The featured Bible verse, 2 Chron. 7:14, was the motto of generations of revivalists: “[I]f my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” The familiar verse mapped out a familiar revivalist agenda, despite the seeming immediacy of “God’s Call to Laymen in the Present Spiritual Emergency.” The hundred men who gathered a few weeks later in Chicago prayed “for a great spiritual awakening and the evangelization of the world in the shortest possible time.” They hammered out the details of ecumenical cooperation, in this case, the BMEC-CBMCI rapprochement. Both group’s boards were on hand to develop policies and procedures for “how the various laymen’s organizations [can] cooperate most effectively…and the place and sphere of each.”

Arnold Grunigen had originally envisioned “a carefully selected list” of invitees representing “the truly evangelical, evangelistic forces” in North America. The self-selected participants, with Grunigen’s approval, took his elitism a familiar step further. All evangelical laymen were experts on religious truth. The problem was that too few sold their faith the way they sold their products, and buyers, lacking guidance, were going elsewhere.

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90 Paul Fischer to Boyd Hargraves, June 30, 1940. Papers of R.G. LeTourneau (Box J3F, Folder 42), LeTourneau University.

91 Carpenter, 119.


In fact, the conference-goers’ heightened sense of a world in danger went with, not against, the cultural tide. The impulse that propelled evangelical business men to join forces placed them in a broad current of American nationalism in the face of encroaching world war. Evangelicals implicated the usual suspects, such as theological modernism, drinking, and disrespecting the Sabbath, in this “world crisis.” However, everyday vice was not why *Christian Workers* editorialized at the end of 1940, “Present conditions compel Christian men to think seriously and act quickly.”

In establishing the Christian Laymen’s Crusade (CLC) as a clearinghouse to support existing evangelical business men’s groups, the Chicago meeting made war the subtext of bureaucracy. The CLC’s motto, “for the salvation of souls and a stronger fellowship among Christian men,” blandly summarized what the BMEC and CMBCI wanted from a dually aligned organization. The logo, on the other hand, depicted “crusade” literally. Three medieval crosses, not standard Protestant fare, surrounded a winged shield, sword, and helmet. These images, in turn, referenced an instantly recognizable biblical verse describing the “armor of God.” Metaphorical weapons of faith could fight against “principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

In 1940, however, the weapons were real, as LeTourneau, who was manufacturing them, well knew. The British endured relentless air attacks after the Royal Navy had barely escaped at Dunkirk. France signed an armistice with the Nazis. Mussolini’s Italy entered the war with Germany and Japan and expanded the

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96 See Chapter 1.
battlefield to Africa. Roosevelt was pushing as hard as he could to intervene, and isolationism was losing traction in public opinion. 

As much as this context shaped the CLC, it did not change the work at hand. “[T]hese laymen [have] a consciousness of the great spiritual poverty of a world torn by the forces of hate and destruction,” another early newsletter read. “It [is] their conviction that the Christian laymen of America held the key to the solution of this great problem” by tackling the existential crisis with sound business methods and frank, businesslike messages. First, the group needed a board of directors. LeTourneau, who headed the CBMCI and the Gideons, agreed to serve as chairman if Patterson, the president, shouldered most of the executive responsibilities. The rest of the hierarchy skewed North, because the headquarters stayed in Chicago. Vice-chair Paul Fischer, treasurer Charles Gremmels, and member-at-large Grunigen came from the CBMCI. William Bond, a realtor from Washington, D.C., joined Patterson from the BMEC. Andrew Wyzenbeek, the vice president of the Gideons, came on to represent the traveling salesmen, at last making the ties among the three groups official. Second, the CLC needed a portfolio. The original plan, sponsoring rallies in towns with BMECs or CBMCIs to boost membership in one or the other, seemed too narrow to maximize business men’s interest in conservative evangelical causes. The board decided that the


98 Perrett, 191.


100 LeTourneau to VWP, June 12, 1940. Papers of R.G. LeTourneau (Box J4J, Folder F19), LeTourneau University.

101 Christian Laymen’s Crusade Bulletin (May, 1941), 2. Papers of Herbert J. Taylor (Collection 20, Box 11, Folder 3).
CLC would advertise other laymen’s groups as well. It would act solely as a catalyst for existing efforts, establishing “no local committees or membership” to avoid even the appearance of competition. As with its parent groups, the CLC’s militant emphasis on laymen by no means precluded cooperation with clergy, whose support was essential for legitimacy. Rally speakers would stress their desire to “back up their pastors, but also to give a personal testimony of the power of the Gospel in their daily [business] contacts.”

Third, the CLC needed a full-time rally director and a list of seasoned speakers to fire up audiences for the testimonies of local business men. C.B. Nordland, a Baptist minister from the Chicago suburbs with a history of energizing laymen, accepted the position. Before he could start, Patterson scheduled preliminary events in Raleigh, Charlotte, Asheville, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Boston and Buffalo. For the ebullient Patterson, there was no time to lose. God, he implied, was not waiting for the “evangelization of the world in this generation,” but foreshortening the task. “I look forward in faith to a great work leading to a nation-wide spiritual awakening in the coming year,” Patterson asserted. If America was God’s redeemer nation, as evangelicals had long believed, the other nations would be next, with laymen at the helm. Patterson’s North Carolina contacts included the president of Pan-American Bus lines; the host of the BMEC’s daily devotional show (“said to reach 100,000 or more every morning,” which was unlikely, but inspiring); and a “[r]ural letter carrier” who “‘murders the King’s

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English,’ but [is a] great soul winner.”103 This short list, from a major player in the travel industry to a small-town mailman, showed how the common cause of lay evangelism relaxed normal business hierarchies. It also reiterated how much politically and religiously conservative business men banded together against a regime that seemed to threaten their liberties on both counts.104

The reading of a Protestant Bible in public schools, a church-state battleground since the 1830s, greatly concerned the CLC. Historically part of a larger power struggle between Protestants and Catholics, in the twentieth century, the King James Version also became a weapon in the evangelical attack on evolution. For example, at the 1925 Scopes Trial, Clarence Darrow unsuccessfully attacked a Tennessee law banning public schools from teaching “any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible.”105 Much more was at stake than competing versions of human origins. Anti-evolutionists such as William Jennings Bryan saw Darwinism as a bomb lobbed not just at God, but at the social contract. Many progressives extrapolated the biological inevitability of race and class hierarchies from “the survival of the fittest” (not Darwin’s phrase, but at the time, convincingly attributable to his philosophy). Evangelical business men also supported white supremacy, and all but endorsed “survival of the fittest”


104 The Pan-American Bus Lines is a case in point of how business leaders antagonistic to Roosevelt took advantage of very regulation they deplored. Pan-American and other large transportation companies secured a virtual monopoly on the industry in 1936 with the blessing of the Interstate Commerce Commission. Pan-American Bus Lines Operation, 1 M.C.C. 190, 203 (1936).

economics; survival of the faithful, as preached by the likes of LeTourneau, was very close kin. However, along with a more diverse array of Americans than fellow fundamentalists alone – especially during World War I, when evolution took on unpatriotic, Nietzschean overtones – they saw nihilism in the logic that men and women were animals. Their solution to this new threat was the same one they always offered: Protestant scripture, especially for the young and vulnerable. Between 1913 and 1930, ten Northern and Southern states bucked a trend toward less specific “moral education” by legislating Bible-reading as the highest form of character-building.106

Z. Park McCallie, who ran a prestigious boys’ academy in Chattanooga, was one of these educators. He had been on the CLC committee at Toccoa Falls, and Patterson wanted him to be a rally speaker. In 1922, McCallie designed a clever program to teach the Bible in public schools with private money. The Y.M.C.A., P.T.A., and church members raised the funds, designed the curriculum, and hired the teachers. A Chattanooga school board member described the elective class as a “free gift,” and boards throughout the county clamored to implement it. (As of 2009, the “McCallie Plan” is still in effect in Hamilton County, Tennessee.) One selling point was its apparent intra-Protestant neutrality. Although McCallie believed that “let[ting] the Bible speak for itself” would prevent doctrinal disputes, he told instructors to avoid “sectarian or denominational terms.” They should refer students with questions about their own

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traditions to their pastors, on the ecumenical assumption that next to the truth of the Bible and the saving grace of Christ, differences were merely details.107

LeTourneau became caught up in the push to sacralize the schools as evangelicals made a case for public veneration of the Bible as a matter of national security. In 1937, the annual conference of the Gideons voted unanimously to “extend [our] ministry to include the placing of a Bible in every (school) room in the United States, the same to be read daily.” The association had surveyed schools in the states that required daily Bible reading and discovered low compliance, partly because a large number of classrooms lacked Bibles.108 Like McCallie, the Gideons saw a public problem with a private solution, albeit less intensive (and expensive) than designing a full-blown course. The campaign for universal access was in full swing when LeTourneau won the presidency of the Gideons in 1940. In his acceptance speech, LeTourneau wove schoolchildren’s scriptures into a laymen’s call to arms. “Is not the hour overdue for the mobilization of the Christian forces of the world?” he shouted. “Should not the battalions of believers marshall [sic] their forces?” He called “put[ting] the Bible in the schools, where it is needed most of all…our big task today.” The word of God was “the backbone of our civilization,” and giving it to the next generation should be every Gideon’s top priority. “If each one of us would ask God what He wanted us to do, and if we would do it, we’d get these Bibles into the schools ‘in nothing flat.’” In sum, “[t]he need of the nations is a Blitzkrieg of the Bible.”109


108 Henderson, 103.

109 Lorimer, 157-58. See p. 48 for more from the same speech, “Let’s Have a Sixth Column.”
In January 1941, the Gideons made their largest ever one-time donation: twenty thousand Bibles for Georgia public schools. At the Atlanta Civic Center’s dedication ceremony, LeTourneau stood in front of an eighteen-foot cross his employees constructed of steel and 1380 Gideon Bibles, red spines showing. “There’s enough power in one page of one of these Bibles to stop Hitler’s army,” he said.¹¹⁰ A Christian Workers contributor went on to predict that schools without Bibles would teach “pure, unadulterated Bolshevism,” training “an army” of youth to “trampl[e] the Stars and Stripes under their feet.”¹¹¹

During the year leading up to Pearl Harbor, revival fever accelerated. Conservative evangelicals prayed with equal fervor to stop the war from coming to America, and for America to get right with God before it inevitably came. “Sure, we’re going to make the world safe for democracy again,” a critic of Roosevelt’s “war hysteria” scoffed in Moody Monthly. “The rights of the individual are to be upheld by uprooting him and placing him in army camps, maiming and killing him, and loading the rest with unbearable taxes.” The author advised American Christians to focus on Satan, the real enemy. “Christ has won some into the bomb shelter of His keeping,” and the church must rise up “to offensive battle for the Lord!”¹¹² Meanwhile, the journal’s editors blasted “modernistic theologians,” “Russianized liberals,” and “political appeasers” as “a Lilliputian leadership…[who] have ignored that Book which makes for character and moral statue.” The editors argued that they were “not talking politics,” because there

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¹¹⁰ Ibid., 162-63.


were no political solutions. “America and Canada and England need God desperately, and far more than they need men and munitions…Revival is the shortest cut possible to victory and safety.”

The BMEC was more optimistic about the state of America’s soul. A Christian Workers article on “Christian Men in High Office” singled out five governors (four from the South, one from Washington state) whose piety, the writer assumed, spoke well of their voters and must have a trickle-down effect on the rest of the citizenry. At the BMEC’s August 1941 annual conference, LeTourneau gave tours of the Toccoa Falls plant, “now helping Uncle Sam’s defense program.” LeTourneau’s new partnership with the government, in the context of what he saw as a religious war for the survival of Christianity and democracy, altered his anti-statist political tone. “A friend of mine is president of a 50 million dollar corporation and Washington said, ‘We need you.’ So he dropped his work and went to Washington for a dollar a year,” as was the custom for business men who served as ostensibly disinterested government consultants. LeTourneau depicted his friend’s decision to move to a different arena of power as self-sacrifice for the greater good, telling the BMEC, “God is calling us…to a bigger job than that.” Evangelical laymen needed to keep America on God’s side in the crusade against atheistic totalitarianism. According to the BMEC national secretary, “America’s first line of defense is not the power of the army or navy…but it rests upon the Word of God and prayer and personal testimony.” Another speaker found a military metaphor for the

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114 “Christian Men in High Office,” Christian Workers (June, 1941), 2.
116 For a jaded view of the dollar-a-year men’s effectiveness, see Milton Mayer, “Washington Goes to War,” Life (Jan. 5, 1942), 60.
division of labor between clergy and laymen. “Our preachers preach for years but the laymen must get out and get others to accept Christ. It makes me think of the air force bombing a position for a long time but the privates must go in and take possession.”117 Whether the specialists really outranked the grunts in this image was ambiguous, but the take-home message was clear. Evangelical business men must redouble their soul-winning efforts, because God would not let Christian soldiers lose.

When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, a dollar-a-year man in the CBMCI and the Gideons was stationed on the base. Charlie Pietsch, a former missionary to Japan and the son of another prominent CBMCI member, received authorization in the spring to distribute fifty thousand New Testaments with Psalms and Proverbs. The Navy Chief Chaplain also made Pietsch the first-ever layman to conduct officially sanctioned religious services aboard ship. The Gideons were low on money and skeptical of the testament project, so Pietsch, a real estate agent whose job for the administration was chairing the Hawaii Housing Authority, paid for the first 10,000 himself. He passed many of them out while leading Easter services on battle cruisers. The Gideons found a way to subsidize the rest, having adopted a new motto for reaching servicemen and women: “Arm them with the Gospel too.” After December 7, the group could not help seeing Japan’s choice of targets as providential. Surely some of the dead at Pearl Harbor had found God through Pietsch’s preaching or the inescapable testaments. More importantly, surely had some of the living.

After the U.S. entered the war, the government allowed the Gideons to distribute scriptures to the entire armed forces. Pietsch continued to exploit his Washington ties.

117 All quotes from “Report of Proceedings at 21st. Annual Convention, National Association of Business Men’s Evangelistic Clubs, Held at Lake Louise Conference Grounds, August. 14-17, 1941,” Papers of VWP (Collection 5, Box 2, Folder 1), BGCA.
One unlikely ally was Donald Nelson – president of Sears and Roebucks, dollar-a-year head of the War Production Board, and one of Roosevelt’s most prominent corporate supporters during the New Deal. Pietsch helped him open a Sears in Honolulu. Nelson expressed his gratitude by ensuring that the Gideons had a steady supply of printing paper throughout the war, despite the rationing it was his responsibility to enforce. A 1943 photo shows Pietsch ceremonially giving a Gideon testament to Vice President Henry Wallace. Roosevelt and every member of Congress received one as well. For Wallace, it was one of countless photo ops. For Pietsch and his business and religious networks, it was a sign that conservative evangelicals had entered the halls of power.

Pietsch’s World War II evangelism highlights how wartime emotions and government recognition transformed evangelical business men’s groups – in concert with other evangelicals and conservatives – from critics to watchful cheerleaders of American politics and culture. The BMEC, whose primary loyalty shifted from “the Southland” to the nation, further exemplifies white evangelicalism’s patriotic self-righteousness tempered with self-abasement. “President Roosevelt Appreciates Prayers,” Christian Workers announced with palpable pleasure in 1942. The BMEC was waging a campaign against liquor in the armed forces and had sent the President a resolution to that effect.

The President’s reply avoided the subject, but used the language of spiritual warfare to

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118 Henderson, 104, 115-16, 120; Brian Waddell, “Corporate Influence and World War II: Resolving the New Deal Political Stalemate,” Journal of Policy History, Vol. 11, No. 3 (1999), 233-39; Richard Holl, From the Boardroom to the War Room: America’s Corporate Liberals and FDR’s Preparedness Program (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 6-8, 33. Pietsch’s father, William Pietsch, was active in the CBMCI and gave them radio time in his weekly broadcast.


suggest affinity with its authors. He claimed “to be giving much consideration to thing spiritual in this world of madness. It is truly a war for survival and our faith and prayers are a fundamental and essential part of this great conflict.” On the other hand, in a widely circulated tirade called “Christ or Chaos,” Rolan Stoker set out a doomsday scenario of ideological invasion and defeat. “The Hydro-headed [sic] Octopus of Unamericanism has wrapped its slimy arms around the very heart of America and is pouring into her veins...the venom of Atheism, communism, and every other godless, Christless, and hellish poison.” Revival was the only cure. America must return to her place as “the watchman on the wall” (Ezekiel 3:17-21), guarding “the freedom of the pulpit, press, courts, and the sanctity of our homes.” The BMEC’s 1943 Armistice Day prayer blended ambivalence and ambition: “America must come back to God if we are to win a permanent peace and be a world-leader.” Revival was still necessary; America must come back. But the prayer struck a new, worldly note in defining God’s reward for revival as geopolitical power.

The Christian Laymen’s Crusade to unite Northern and Southern business men foundered during the war, even as the CBMCI and BMEC spoke an identical language of American conquest. In part, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), which aspired to be a clergy-lay and interregional coalition, siphoned off sources of the CLC’s funding and energy. (I discuss the role of business men in the NAE in Chapter 4.) Despite the BMEC’s subjugation of regionalism to nationalism, the CBMCI fell back in

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124 Carpenter, 189.
the habit of leaving the South off its map of America. More prosaically, both the BMEC and the CBMCI – and, by extension, the CLC, their shared spinoff – had trouble doing what business men were supposed to do best: raise money. The organizations were too decentralized to have stable finances. The “national” or “international” committees did most of the administrative work while granting locals almost complete autonomy, which mirrored their low-church Protestantism and political objections to big government. They built their budgets on voluntary pledges, not dues, which local groups routinely neglected to pay. While the CBMCI’s wealthy board members often made up part of the difference, the BMEC was less well-off.125 When America entered the war, the BMEC was preoccupied with institutional survival. “Your secretary cannot travel without money,” C.P. Pelham dryly informed the readers of Christian Workers. “My money is about used up, and I now need some from you.” The president of the Virginia BMEC delivered a two-page scolding. “Just how much does this work mean to us anyway? When we gave our hearts to Christ, did we give him our pocketbooks too?”126 It was in this context that BMEC president Boyd Hargraves first addressed the war at length in June 1942. American men were dying “[f]or victory over a foe, a foe to Christianity, to liberty[,] to our democratic way of life.” Yet war “only touches the body,” while the BMEC

125 The LeTourneau Foundation heavily subsidized the CBMCI. “The Heaven and Earth Man: Our Chairman R.G. LeTourneau,” Contact (Jan.-Feb., 1946), 7. To take another example, Charles Gremmels, the shipping magnate, and lawyer Paul Fischer each contributed $100 to the CBMCI in 1940 to “bridge the gap.” Gremmels to Arnold Grunigen, May 20, 1940. Papers of R.G. LeTourneau (Box J4J, Folder 23), LeTourneau University.

confronted soul-destroying sin. Saving soldiers before they faced Satanic enemies in flesh and spirit was not cheap.\textsuperscript{127}

In principle, the CLC should have helped the struggling BMEC by holding rallies to found new chapters. However, by settling in Chicago, the CLC became a virtual arm of the CBMCI instead of an interregional booster.\textsuperscript{128} Still, its creation had forged durable Northern and Southern ties, which intersected in the person of LeTourneau. He continued to lead the CBMCI, but stayed on the BMEC’s Executive Committee and built his next plant in Vicksburg. He plugged both organizations on his neverending speaking tour, which covered more Southern territory the longer he lived there.\textsuperscript{129} He remained in touch with Vernon Patterson and Rolan Stoker, who resigned from LeTourneau, Inc. to devote himself to the BMEC. In what must have been a huge relief to the treasurer, LeTourneau paid Stoker’s salary as executive secretary.\textsuperscript{130} But LeTourneau was only one man. The early stirrings of the Western and Southern Sunbelt, built on defense subsidies, independently tugged on America’s political, economic, and religious center of gravity.\textsuperscript{131} For most of the century, evangelicals in Chicago and California had been more

\textsuperscript{127} “Special Statement by President Hargraves,” \textit{Christian Workers} (June 1942), 3.

\textsuperscript{128} Vernon W. Patterson to David Enlow, May 18, 1962. Papers of VWP (Collection 5, Box 2, Folder 4), BGCA.

\textsuperscript{129} Papers of R.G. LeTourneau (Box J5J, no folder; sermon notes by state), LeTourneau University.


interpersonally and institutionally connected than evangelicals in Chicago and Chattanooga. The CLC, as originally conceived, signaled a larger societal change. As a young, mobile, multiracial population crossed the Mason-Dixon line North and West to follow jobs, Southern evangelicalisms dispersed with them.¹³²

One of these migrants was Charlotte’s Billy Graham, who came to Wheaton College in 1940 to supplement his degree from the Florida Bible Institute. He graduated in 1943 at twenty-four and began a suburban Chicago pastorate, intending to qualify for an Army chaplaincy. Instead, he got caught up in a business man’s movement to save the young men and women who were flocking to cities for defense work or the armed services. Every Saturday night, starting in 1941, insurance salesman-turned-evangelist Jack Wyrtzen held a “Times Square Youth Rally” with a radio broadcast that reached as far as Pennsylvania. He gathered enormous crowds through straight-talking charisma, combining distinctively fundamentalist theology with generic jeremiads about American culture. “Every unconverted person in the world has death, judgment, and the Lake of Fire before him,” Wyrtzen, the fundamentalist, warned. But it was Wyrtzen the cultural critic who spoke to broader anxieties about too much “commercial excitement, political strife and ambition, money making and pleasure seeking.” The wartime context changed the argument about a “money mad nation” that had appeared in Christian Workers only five years before.¹³³ The same gendered (and, in Christian Workers, regional) repugnance toward softness, effeminacy, and luxury put a sinful America squarely in


God’s sights. Yet in the early 1940s, softness, effeminacy, and luxury were more than sins; they were national security threats that could lose a war. Wyrtzen was in Times Square on Saturday night with the deadly serious intent to provide better entertainment than the myriad temptations on offer.

The rally idea spread to other Northern and Midwestern urban centers. Organizers attracted non-evangelical attendees, or at least attention, by assuring a delinquency-sensitized public that the meetings were wholesome, patriotic, and above all, fun. No stodgy sermons or dreary hymns would drive the fickle target audience back to bars and dance halls. In St. Louis, servicemen were part of the performance, making free calls onstage to homes and families far from Missouri. Minneapolis pioneered the “Singspiration,” sacred music with a safely white, but unmistakably syncopated, beat. In early 1944, Graham joined pastor Torrey Johnson, business man Herbert J. Taylor, and other Chicago-area evangelicals to introduce the phenomenon to the Windy City. They named themselves after one of Wyrtzen’s slogans, “Youth for Christ” (YFC), and chose Johnson – a twinkling-eyed, second-generation Norwegian immigrant with a Wheaton degree – to lead. In May, YFC filled Chicago’s Orchestra Hall, with Graham having the honor of the first sermon. In the fall, they drew twenty to thirty thousand to a war-


137 Ibid., 53.

138 Mel Larson, Young Man on Fire: The Story of Torrey Johnson and Youth for Christ (Chicago: Youth Publications, 1945), 4-5, 80-81.
themed “Victory Rally” at Chicago Stadium. The Chicagoans led a temporary national committee from the end of 1944 to mid-1945, when, at Billy Sunday’s Winona Lake, they incorporated Youth for Christ International. Graham took a leave of absence from his church to be the field secretary, traveling to get new groups established.

YFC’s Moody- or Sunday-sized numbers, combined with breathless conversion narratives of young lives yanked from the pit, obscured the likelihood that the group was primarily energizing the already born-again, much like the Charlotte revival where Graham “recommitted” himself to Christ. Between the large events and when Orchestra Hall was not available, YFC met at Moody Memorial Church, which was a far cry from Times Square. Similarly, the Minneapolis YFC started at a fundamentalist Bible institute and met weekly at First Baptist Church. In an important sense, though, it did not matter that YFC was reviving evangelicalism from within rather than bringing the tidal wave of new believers its leaders imagined. An energized evangelicalism – a revival in the church – was the prerequisite for the church’s revival of the world, and YFC was only one organization among many. Simply by linking conservative evangelical

139 Larson, Youth for Christ, 56-57.
140 Larson, Young Man on Fire, 84, 89.
141 Larson’s Youth for Christ begins with a litany of conversion stories, 11-18.
142 Ibid., 58, 53.
143 YFC’s own statistics suggest this interpretation. Of the estimated 70,000 attendees of the 1945 Memorial Day rally at Soldier Field, 1800 came forward to accept Christ and 5000 Christians vowed to become missionaries if God called them. That’s .03% and .07%, respectively, with the already saved having the clear edge. The same numbers held true at smaller YFC rallies. In the fall of 1945, Pittsburgh had 2300 attendees and 50 conversions (less than .02%) and LaSalle, Illinois claimed 3000 attendees and “over 50” conversions. This reflects the in-group nature of mass evangelism in general, not just YFC. Also, by evangelical reckoning, every saved soul is infinitely valuable. Torrey Johnson, “Pressing on in YFC,” Jul. 22, 1946, 4, Minutes of Second Annual Convention of Youth For Christ International, Inc.; Youth for Christ International, Inc. Board of Directors’ Meeting, Oct. 8-9, 1945, Records of Youth for Christ/USA (Collection No. 48, Box 9, Folder 4), BGCA.
activists who had been acting independently, networks such as YFC’s brought them closer to cohesion. YFC made evangelicalism visible to outsiders by emphasizing shared concerns, such as patriotism and juvenile delinquency, and defying fundamentalist stereotypes by exploiting rather than rejecting popular culture. “That the world needs a globe-rocking revival is evident,” wrote one booster. “Youth for Christ may bring it!” 144

Business men, especially the CBMCI, recognized YFC’s potential early on and were crucial to its growth. In Chicago alone, the Advisory Council included Herbert J. Taylor, the CBMCI’s Al J. Conn and C.B. Hedstrom, and the Gideons’ Robert Van Kampen. Vaughn Shoemaker, Carl A. Gunderson, and Reamer Loomis (all CBMCI) and Andrew Wyzenbeek (Gideons, CLC) appeared on a long list of business supporters. 145 The 1944 “Victory Rally” featured Taylor’s personal testimony, a prayer by the manager of Sears & Roebuck’s, and a corporate vice president on behalf of the New York rally. LeTourneau became a regular YFC speaker. 146 However, Johnson and his circle of pastors and evangelists were the stars, while business men by and large worked behind the scenes. The public image the movement promoted was that of a spontaneous eruption of the Spirit in several places at once, a “bonfire…completely out of human control.” 147 Workaholic Johnson had no illusions about the human labor required to tend the flames, even co-authoring an influential book of YFC “mechanics” for aspiring group leaders. 148 However, he and his business friends understood that YFC’s popularity, like that of any

144 Larson, *Youth for Christ*, 25.

145 Ibid., inside cover.

146 Carpenter, 172.

147 Larson, *Youth for Christ*, 59.

revival, depended on the bonfire. Spectacles of the Spirit gained power by cloaking signs of human manufacture, or, as those in the whirlwind understood it, the activity of the Spirit’s human instruments.

No event better symbolized the quiet significance of the CBMCI to the YFC than the second “Victory Rally” at Chicago’s Soldier Field, on Memorial Day, 1945, three weeks after Germany surrendered. The Chicago Daily Tribune estimated a crowd of 60,000 at the all-day affair. First, the Glenview Naval Station’s baseball team “soundly trounced” Wheaton College. Next, “[w]ith a smooth blend of religion and patriotism,” a marine color guard and Christian youth groups posted American and Christian flags around the arena. A “living cross of nearly 500 white uniformed nurses marched down the field” to a swinging version of “I Shall Not Be Moved.” A “missionary pageant” followed “with representatives of China, India, Africa, Russia, and the United States in native costumes.” Each of the five countries or continents “formed the points of a vast star.” The lights dimmed for a choral performance of “Gospel Lighthouse,” during which angelic figures blew trumpets from the colonnades. Charlotte police chief Walter Anderson – a BMEC member soon to be appointed to the Attorney General’s Conference on Juvenile Delinquency – addressed the crowd. Torrey Johnson preached “with tonal qualities suggestive of Frank Sinatra.”

The Chicago CBMCI served as soberly dressed ushers.149

Despite appearances, the two organizations were joined at the hip. The CBMCI experienced considerable wartime growth, and by 1945, the first task of many new affiliates was to establish YFC in their communities – at least thirty, by scholar Joel

Carpenter’s count. A spring issue of *Contact* confirmed the number and noted that other groups were “making plans.” Since mid-1944, CBMCI had welcomed YFC as “God’s answer to naturalism, modernism, communism, and materialism, which had invaded our schools and colleges for the past generation.” The CBMCI’s of Toronto, Milwaukee, Honolulu, Orlando, and Cleveland had taken action around the same time as Chicago. Detroit, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Louisville, Portland, Fargo, and several cities in Ontario were only some of YFC’s other CBMCI sponsors by early 1945. The head of Milwaukee’s CMBCI led the YFC as well; the CBMCI planned prayer meetings, contacted pastors, arranged radio coverage, and hired buses to take Milwaukee youth to the rallies at Soldier Field.

On a smaller scale, the CBMCI of Kenosha-Racine, Wisconsin, not only co-sponsored the YFC, but hired the personnel director and industrial chaplain of the Quaker Stretcher Company as director. Quaker Stretcher was an evangelical business on the all-encompassing LeTourneau model, and in 1943, the chief executive enlisted Torrey Johnson to help incorporate religion into the routine. “The result: a gospel shop meeting with a radio broadcast so that people listening in could share the novel witness of the gospel being preached in a factory, to men in working clothes.” Two years later, the youth of Kenosha-Racine and everywhere else the CBMCI sponsored YFC were in the sometimes-invisible hand of evangelical welfare capitalism and philanthropy. For instance, Torrey Johnson and Billy Graham could promote YFC anywhere, despite

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150 Carpenter, 172.

151 “The Story of Youth for Christ and How CBMC’s are Co-Operating, *Contact*, (Mar.-Apr., 1945), 1-5, 33.

152 Larsen, *Young Man on Fire*, 73-74.
rubber rationing and exorbitant air fares. The president of Quaker Stretcher charged their flights to his account.  

In addition to YFC, the CBMCI’s other priority during the war was establishing servicemen’s centers, or “Victory Centers,” where soldiers on leave could enjoy food, company, and Christian recreation. The model was the government-initiated United Service Organizations (USO), which brought together “the Salvation Army, Young Men’s Christian Association, Young Women’s Christian Association, National Catholic Community Services, National Travelers Aid Association and the National Jewish Welfare Board.” The practical, comforting, and domesticating goal was to provide “A Home Away from Home,” where soldiers could find coffee, companionship, toiletries, a cot, and, most important to many, stamps and paper for letters to their real homes. The extent of public concern about young servicemen’s morale and potentially antisocial escapism (drinking, fighting, prostitutes) could be measured in charitable donations to the National War Fund. In 1944, the USO received almost half the fund’s receipts to support more than 3000 centers around the country.  

Why the CBMCI decided to establish its own centers is unclear, but the USO’s coalition of Catholics, Jews, and the Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A. – the CBMCI was friendly with conservative local Y’s, but not the modernist hierarchy – likely inspired the evangelical alternative. Victory Centers provided as many creature comforts as they could afford, but their purpose was to save servicemen’s souls. As with YFC, national

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153 “The Story of Youth for Christ and How CBMC’s are Co-Operating,” 13, 33; Graham, 95.


networking proved vital, but California stole the lead from Chicago. Well before the war, when sailors on Pacific naval bases mostly stayed aground, an entrepreneurial evangelical named Dawson Trotman and his wife invited as many servicemen as could fit to live and worship with them in their Long Beach home. ("Onward Christian Sailors," Collier's would later quip.) Trotman, a Bible Institute of Los Angeles dropout who did odd jobs to make ends meet, felt called to evangelize naval bases on a larger scale. Described by his biographer as "cultivat[ing] [a] rugged, he-man image to counter the idea that Christianity was suitable only for women and children," he formed a group called the Navigators based on "man-to-man" discipleship. Leaders trained small groups of men in Bible memorization and other evangelistic techniques. The groups dispersed to become leaders and trainers in their own right, ensuring a self-perpetuating organization. In 1938, radio evangelist Charles Fuller began headlining Daws’ annual servicemen’s conference. The following year, Daws and two business men founded the Long Beach CBMCI. A member introduced him to Arnold Grunigen and Harry R. Smith, the vice-president of both the Bank of America and the San Francisco CBMCI. In 1942, the team opened a USO-style "Victory Center" in Market Square inspired by, if less intimate than, Daws’ house of praying sailors. "Christian Business Men from Land and Sea" was the title of Fuller’s dedicatory address.156 A visual echo appeared in a later Victory Center tract, featuring "a picture of the business man reaching across the globe to shake hands with the sailor."157


157 “CBMC Service Work,” Contact (Jan.-Feb., 1945), 17.
A 1945 ad for the weekly radio broadcast from “509,” the building’s address and nickname, laid out what else the Victory Center had to offer. The design resembled a rotary telephone, with different pictures in each circle. At the center, an older business man shook hands with a serviceman over the CBMC Service Man’s Center logo. “509 Market Street, San Francisco, Where we make ‘Man to Man’ contact with service personnel – for Christ.” Counterclockwise next to the serviceman, and directly in line with the “Man to Man” claim, was a picture of older women labeled, “With Cookies.” Above them, a man read what was likely a Gideon testament to a sailor, above the headline “Only Believe.” Next came a premillennialist poster, hanging above a ticking clock, with the verse LeTourneau had chosen a decade earlier for his company magazine NOW: “…Behold, now is the accepted time: behold, now is the day of salvation.” This was “Gospel Time.” A picture of Grunigen before a radio microphone depicted “The Speaker Today.” Three servicemen relaxing in a well-furbished living room pored over or chatted about the gospel in “Good Reading.” An impassioned business man, hair askew, leaned into two servicemen and pointed at a Bible verse: “Man to Man.” Servicemen flanking a piano adorned with flowers represented “Radio Artists,” followed by two more crowded pictures, “On the Air,” and “After the Broadcast.” The last three images were of the 509 entrance; two servicemen and a female volunteer surrounded by middle-class furniture, enjoying “Fellowship” (the headline might as well have been, “Women!”); and a sailor asking a staffer, “Any Stamps?”158 The civilizing furniture, the canteen of Cokes, and the benefit parties attended by women in furs could be found at any USO. The enormous rack of tracts advertising Youth for Christ meetings could

158 “Hear Our Every Friday Radio Broadcast Direct from the CBMC Service Men’s Center,” Jan. 1945, no folder. Courtesy of Phil Wade, Christian Businessmen’s Committee International, Chattanooga, TN.
not. As with YFC, the Victory Centers were more successful at niche marketing than mass conversion, and few were as strategically located or well-funded as San Francisco. However, both YFC and Victory Centers linked business, youth, religion, and patriotism in the hope of uniting conservative Protestants as a force in the postwar world.

Evangelical business men’s outreach to youth and servicemen reinvigorated North-South hopes to kindle a national – and nationalistic – white evangelicalism. Travel-related rationing and continued financial woes temporarily returned the wartime Business Men’s Evangelistic Clubs to fundamentalism’s Southern ghetto. However, local BMECs began initiatives similar to, and sometimes transplanted from, business men’s evangelism in the North. Birmingham and Macon opened Victory Centers, the latter founded by a couple from Toledo and staffed by a former “hostess” at Chicago’s building. BMEC’s in other cities followed suit. In November 1944, when it was clear that Allied victory was only a matter of time, the BMEC planned to convert the postwar centers into a “program for young people similar to the ‘Youth for Christ’ movement.” The quotation marks around an unfamiliar phrase were telling. The YFC “bonfire” was leaping from the Northeast to the Midwest to the West, but not to the South. Even

159 Clyde Wycoff scrapbook, n.d., 11, 39 Courtesy of Phil Wade, Christian Businessmen’s Committee International, Chattanooga, TN.

160 For the more standard daily meal-plus-gospel and Saturday night worship schedule of servicemen’s evangelism, not always in its own “center,” see “New CBMCs in Canada,” Contact (May-July, 1945), 15; “Here and There Among the Committees,” Contact (Aug.-Oct., 1945), 6-7.


163 “Ex. Committee Has Special Meeting.” 2.
Southern adopters, such as the BMEC of Toccoa Falls, were wary of combustion as a metaphor for the Spirit. LeTourneau’s own business men “intended to maintain control over the meetings in a supervisory capacity for a considerable time” before allowing YFC to run free.164

One explanation for YFC’s weakness in the South is that denominational loyalties overpowered ecumenical revivalism. The Southern Baptist Convention, the largest and most insular Protestant community, refused to join the National Association of Evangelicals and rolled out a YFC copycat (“Adventurers for Christ”) for good measure.165 However, the Convention did not speak for individual Southern Baptists. Prominent churchmen vocally backed the NAE’s (and, by extension, the YFC’s and business men’s) interdenominationalism.166 A more plausible argument is that YFC’s Chicago-based leadership welcomed interested Southerners, but put little effort into building a mass movement. Local YFCs, like local CBMCIs, formed from broad and deep evangelical networks, whether spontaneously or as a result of top-down organizing. Only Billy Graham knew the networks in the South, and his promotional tour with Johnson in 1945 was a disaster. Rolan Stoker noticed that in major cities, the meetings were “not attended by large crowds but by representative groups interested in ‘Youth for Christ’” – more church workers than screaming teenagers. After Atlanta, “Graham broke

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165 Carpenter, 158-59, 214; Larsen, Youth for Christ, 76.

166 Ibid., 146-48. Southern Baptist preacher Robert G. Lee, who keynoted the first St. Louis YFC rally, also gave the closing sermon at the NAE’s organizational meeting. Larsen, Youth for Christ, 52.
under the strain of months of hard work and went home [to Charlotte] for a rest.” Johnson “took out” after Knoxville.167

As a result of the CBMCI and YFC’s wartime regionalism, Southern business men did their own, less theatrical youth evangelism. There was the Charlotte BMEC/CMC’s annual Young People’s Camp; radio evangelism at Fort Bragg; various campaigns to fill public schools with Bibles; “carrying the message to the factories” in government-approved meetings with National Youth Administration defense workers; and traditional children’s ministries by the Women’s Auxiliary, whose hardworking wives lost an audacious bid to become “full-fledged members” of the BMEC in 1944. (Although women were doing every kind of evangelism short of public preaching, the Executive Committee, alert to the appearance of effeminacy, termed their accomplishments “special projects.”)168

The war’s dragged-out end was the catalyst to reacquaint, if not wholly reunite, Northern and Southern evangelical business men. As it became clear in 1944 that the Allies would win, many conservative Protestants believed that God had given America the long-sought opportunity to “evangelize the world in this generation.”169 The only superpower left standing, the United States could penetrate more nations with Christian

167 Rolan Stoker, “Reports on YFC Conferences” and “Secretary Stoker Speaks,” Fishers of Men (Dec. 1945), 1, 3. Johnson wrote a cover story, “Unfinished Business,” thanking the BMEC – now the National Laymen’s Evangelistic Association, but I will spare the reader need to learn a new acronym – for bringing “very important leaders” to meetings.


169 Carpenter, 211-32; Perrett, 398.
and democratic principles than ever before— if it did not fracture from within, as strike
waves and racial unrest ominously hinted it might. The BMEC reorganized at Toccoa
Falls in 1945, and a joint BMEC/CBMCI committee formed to negotiate “a friendly
relationship of fellowship and cooperation.” They agreed that if one group already
existed in a place the other wanted to evangelize, the second should back down and
encourage laymen to join the first. This solution to turf wars treated the BMEC and
CBMCI as a single evangelical business men’s movement, even as they maintained
separate regional and institutional identities. Not that regionalism was at the forefront
for the rejuvenated BMEC, which described itself as “On the March, Going
Forward...An Interdenominational, Pro-Church, Militant, Evangelistic Organization with
a Worldwide Vision.” The BMEC’s constituency was still “the Southland,” but the
group’s nationalism did not end with the war. “The Christian forces of America stand on
the threshold of the greatest era of opportunity that has ever challenged any generation.
Doors are opening...calls to Help us are being received – the ‘Green Light’ is ours.”

Evangelical triumphalism backed by American military might was neither
marginal nor misplaced. Other white Americans expressed the same world vision in
different language. Shortly before Pearl Harbor, Time publisher Henry Luce christened

170 Kennedy, 770-71; “Politics and Pressures: Racial Tensions and Post-War Strikes,”
http://www.detroit.lib.mi.us/GoldenJubileeExhibit/GJ%20WEB/III_Politics_and_Pressures.htm (last
accessed Nov. 26, 2009).

171 Paul Fischer, “Lake Louise Conference of National Christian Laymen’s Evangelistic Association,”
Contact (May-Jul., 1945), 20; “Minutes of Joint Committee Meeting,” Fishers of Men (Jan. 1946), 2. To
spare the reader another acronym, I will continue to refer to the renamed NLEA as the BMEC. The lineage
of the “Billy Sunday clubs” and personnel remained the same – Stoker, Patterson, and Walter Anderson led
the change – and the most important, but symbolic, shift was to the word “National” in the name. “Minutes
of the Meeting of the Incorporators of the National Laymen’s Evangelistic Association, Inc.,” Oct. 6, 1945.

172 “The Laymen’s Evangelistic Association is on the March, Going Forward,” Fishers of Men (Jan.1946),
3.
1941 the beginning of “the American Century,” which would export “our Bill of Rights, our Declaration of Independence, our magnificent industrial products, [and] our technical skills.” Columnist Walter Lippmann argued, “What Rome was to the ancient world, what Great Britain has been to the modern world, America is to be to the world of tomorrow.” Evangelical business men took up these themes, which, once the war began, became popular as well as elite conventional wisdom. In January 1943, *Christian Workers* opined, “The big task of Christianity now is to prepare for the peace that shall follow when the war is over. The world will be wide open for the preaching of the gospel…This is our supreme missionary obligation.” It was a government obligation as well. A Thanksgiving prayer looked forward to something like the Marshall Plan, “relief [that] will come to many with the benevolent measures of Allied Forces benefiting millions who have long endured the horrors of war.”

Few commentators, evangelical or otherwise, expected the aftermath to be easy. The Yalta Conference in February 1945, in which Roosevelt and Churchill yielded to some of Stalin’s territorial demands, seemed to vindicate fears of Russian treachery. Premillennialists whose theology predicted a one-world government were suspicious of the U.N. Charter, although the *King’s Business* wondered if “this will be God’s method to open doors for another priceless opportunity to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth

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173 Quoted in Perrett, 196-97.

174 Ibid., 196.


ere Jesus returns?"¹⁷⁸ No one doubted that the atom bomb could bring about the end of
the world, and much of the world was already in ruins before Hiroshima. Who would fix
it? How? The list went on, from the death of Roosevelt to the unfolding revelation of the
Holocaust, about which evangelical “Hebrew missions” had sounded an early warning.¹⁷⁹
“Surely God has set before us an open door,” a doctor wrote in Contact, “and enormous
responsibilities have been placed on us.”¹⁸⁰

The overwhelming responsibility for evangelical business men was funding, and
in some cases founding, foreign missions in the spirit of Pax Americana.¹⁸¹ “When our
boys in uniform won the victories, they didn’t stop at the borders, they went in and
possessed,” said one CBMCI board member. “So should it be with us…more than
conquerors through [Christ] who loved us.”¹⁸² The missionary imperative coincided with
economic expansion and the resurgent global conflict between capitalism and
communism. The CBMCI began living up to its “International” name in 1946, when
inquiries about forming affiliates came from “China, Korea, Jamaica, Australia, South
Africa, England, Scotland, and Holland.” Seattle chairman N.A. Jepson was headed to

¹⁷⁸ “Editorially Speaking,” The King’s Business Vol. 36, No. 6, June 1945 (207). See also Joe King, “Fifth
Street Philosopher,” Contact (May-Jul., 1945), 3, a poetic tribute to Grunigen that wishes “those who
meet/In Frisco town/In conference there/To shape the plans/For future world/would draw their grafs/From
Prince of Peace.”

¹⁷⁹ See, for example, “A Thanksgiving Message,” The Friends of Israel Relief Committee, Inc., Moody
Monthly (Nov. 1941), inside cover.


¹⁸¹ Richard Pierard, “Pax Americana and the Evangelical Mission Alliance,” in Joel A. Carpenter and

¹⁸² “Unaccustomed As I Am - - - Here Are Some Memorable Quotes from Seattle,” Contact (Nov.-Dec.,
1946), 30.
China. Washington, D.C.’s Glenn Wagner had already gone. Wagner met with the fledgling CBMCI-China, whose members included Andrew Gih, formerly a singer for CBMCI-Chicago. To complete the convergence of evangelical business networks, Wagner, who was representing the New Testament Pocket League, came loaded with six hundred Bibles from the Cleveland Gideons for China’s CBMCI. In 1947-48, the Gideons budgeted an unprecedented $21,300 for their own International Extension Program. They sent a representative to Japan at General Douglas MacArthur’s request for Christian missionaries to start, in his words, “a revolution of spirit…which will more favorably alter the course of civilization than has any economic or political revolution in the history of the world.”

As close as Asia was to the hearts of some evangelical business men, others agreed with CBMCI secretary Paul Fischer that missionary work was “most important…especially in Europe.” Although it was a shock to think of Protestant Europe as a mission field, evangelical theology dictated that suffering nations must have sinned in the eyes of God. “[F]or a century or more England has been sending Bible teachers and evangelists to America,” Wheaton president V.R. Edman wrote to LeTourneau of the conference establishing Britain’s Youth for Christ. “[B]ut now, conditions, spiritual and material, have reversed the process.” LeTourneau hoped to

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184 “Here and There Among the Committees,” Contact (May-June, 1945), 18.
185 Henderson, 55, 219; MacArthur to the Southern Baptist Convention, Dec. 13, 1947, quoted in Pierard, 174-75. MacArthur was a slippery character, and Pierard shows both how eager evangelicals were to reduce his complex views on religion to their own, and how easy he made it for them to do so.
improve England’s spiritual and material conditions, and move from producing earthmoving equipment for other countries to producing it in other countries, by opening a factory in Stockton-on-Tees.\textsuperscript{188} The revivalistic dedication ceremony was as elaborate as any of his had ever been, and he tacked on a month-long preaching tour.\textsuperscript{189} The British press was fascinated by the All-American industrial invasion of what one columnist called “some 200 lbs. of dynamic, restless hustle.”\textsuperscript{190} LeTourneau himself quipped, “I have not figured out yet whether I am over here to start a factory or to run an evangelistic campaign. But I know that if I let evangelism take first place the Lord will take care of the factory.”\textsuperscript{191} He was wrong – the Stockton-on-Tees plant never got enough traction to make a profit – but his publicity machine captured the exuberance of American business and American evangelicalism immediately after the war. “God’s Business Man, R.G. LeTourneau, Goes Global.”\textsuperscript{192}

So did Billy Graham, who compared his itinerancy on behalf of YFC to the time he spent before college selling Fuller brushes. “I was a traveling salesman again – not displaying a case of brushes this time, just brandishing my Bible.”\textsuperscript{193} Between 1945 and 1947, American servicemen started Youth for Christ chapters in Germany, Okinawa, 

\textsuperscript{188} In 1938, LeTourneau opened an earthmoving company in Australia that soon supplied earthmoving equipment to the Pacific Front. LeTourneau, 230-31.


\textsuperscript{190} Syd Jackson, “It’s ‘Mass Produce or Bust’ at Stockton!” \textit{Evening Gazette} (Oct. 23, 1946), 2.


\textsuperscript{192} \textit{Joyful News} (Nov., 1946), 4.

\textsuperscript{193} Graham, 94.
Guam, the Philippines, Portugal, Sweden, Ireland, and France. In 1946, Torrey Johnson, Graham, and two other men who had never left North American soil spent six weeks promoting YFC in Great Britain and Scandinavia. The following year, Graham spearheaded a well-publicized, but not well-financed, follow-up tour saved by a last-minute $7000 check from LeTourneau. Graham suggested to British and Irish YFC organizers that they create “a Christian Business Men’s Committee such as we have in America.” Torrey Johnson made the same point in a meeting with CBMCI leaders, stressing business men’s ability to “follow-up for the YFC rallies…to effectively maintain the interest, testimony, and to lend personal assistance and counsel to those won to the Lord.” Without coordinated evangelism, Johnson warned, “other ‘Hitlers’” would rise in Europe.

Johnson’s fear was rooted in political reality. By Harry Truman’s election in 1948, doors were closing to Americans. Stalin’s iron curtain in Eastern Europe. More heartbreakingly for evangelicals, Mao Tse-Tsung’s imminent victory in China’s two-decade civil war meant the downfall of Chiang Kai-Shek and his outspokenly Christian wife in one of American Protestantism’s oldest mission fields. The standoff with the


196 Graham, 108.


Soviet Union and Mao both heightened evangelical anticommunism and underscored its place in the mainstream of American politics. Liberals and conservatives, religious and non-religious, equated communism with totalitarianism, although they disagreed about the centrality of atheism and the economic implications for the post-New Deal state.200 Evangelical business men, however, could never think negatively for long. As business interests tamed elements of the New Deal, the members of the CBMCI, the Gideons, and the BMEC remained confident in their ability to sway potential consumers and converts.201

Billy Graham, self-described “salesman” for God, expressed the excitement, anxiety, and continued fractures of early Cold War evangelicalism. Still famous as one of Torrey Johnson’s YFC lieutenants, not yet as an independent evangelist, he addressed the BMEC’s 1947 annual conference and led a revival in Charlotte a few months later at Vernon Patterson’s invitation.202 The second event, in which LeTourneau participated, brought Graham’s “recommitment” full circle. The motto was “Christ in this Crisis.”203 A slew of form letters signed “Your Pal, Billy Graham” marveled, “Boy, this is

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202 Rolan Stoker to Billy Graham, June 3, 1947. Papers of VWP (Collection 5, Box 1, Folder 4), BGCA.

203 VWP to “Christian Friend,” n.d., invitation to Preliminary Rally. Papers of VWP (Collection 5, Box 1, Folder 4), BGCA.
SOMETHING for the South!”204 Within weeks, Graham was at the CBMCI conference, reminding Northern evangelical business men why they needed to sell their brand of Christianity to Europe. “Everyone is talking about the third world war. Not if, but when,” he said. There was only one response, and like the men around him, it was defiantly hopeful. “May we dedicate ourselves to getting the gospel around the world within the next two or three years.”205 Graham and business friends were too impatient to imagine wasting a full generation to evangelize the world.

204 Billy Graham to Ed Darling, Nov. 17, 1947. Papers of VWP (Collection 5, Box 1, Folder 4), BGCA.

Chapter 3

“The High Ethics and Morals God Would Want in Any Business”:
Herbert J. Taylor, Rotarian Fundamentalist

On February 5, 1942, the president of the Club Aluminum company gathered Chicago’s evangelical elite to organize a revival.1 Forty-nine year old Herbert J. Taylor had established himself as a business leader by rescuing the cookware manufacturer and retailer from bankruptcy in 1932, the worst year of the Depression.2 A devout Methodist who believed that God called laymen as well as clergy to Christianize the world, Taylor created the nonprofit Christian Workers Foundation in 1938 with 25% of Club Aluminum’s stock.3 The philanthropy provided seed money for evangelical causes that Taylor judged capable of national and international impact, and everyone he invited to the meeting at the Sherman Hotel represented an organization CWF had funded. Not only was the setting businesslike, but only three of the twenty-three attendees were church pastors. Anybody could be a “Christian worker,” and Taylor recruited other professionals to put their worldly experience and skills to work for the kingdom.

Herbert (“Herb”) Taylor brought his faith into the world and the world into his faith. He worked with other self-identified “Christian business men” to build and sustain networks that toiled for revival during the Depression, World War II, and postwar reconstruction. These business men, their uncredited female support staff, and like-minded clergy poured money, time, and expertise into projects they hoped would launch

1 Unless otherwise noted, information about the meeting comes from n.a., “FIRST MEETING OF HEADS OF GROUPS Cooperating in the Charles Fuller Revival Meeting,” February 5, 1942. Papers of Herbert J. Taylor (hereafter HJT; Collection 20, Box 11, Folder 22), BGCA (hereafter BGCA).


a fundamentalist, interdenominational, lay-led revival that would start in North America and eventually span the globe. They never doubted that this revival would be top-down: as in business, they identified and groomed leaders who would restore the evangelical brand from its subcultural status to the cultural dominance they insisted it had held until twentieth-century apostates snatched it away. Following a long tradition of business patronage of talented “Christian workers,” Taylor was one of evangelicalism’s corporate sponsors in a period that, contrary to influential opinions of the time and prevailing historiographical assumptions today, saw conservative Protestants as energetic civic actors instead of a demoralized remnant.4

Since the 1920s, when half a century of theological warfare came to a head in the urban North, the terms “evangelical” and “fundamentalist” had distinguished orthodox Protestants like Taylor from “modernists” who treated the Bible as a human and historically contingent document rather than the infallible and timeless Word of God.5 “By ‘evangelical,’” Taylor wrote in CWF’s charter, he meant a “New Testament…interpretation of [C]hristianity which emphasizes man's fallen condition, the atonement of Christ, necessity of new birth, and redemption through faith.”6 This lowest-common-denominator statement welcomed all who believed in the Bible’s divine authorship; the doctrine of original sin (“man’s fallen condition”); Christ’s death and resurrection (“the atonement”); a personal conversion experience (“a new birth”); and the early church as a model for communal worship (“New Testament” was code for

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6 HJT to George Corwin, July 29, 1939, Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 11, Folder 25), BGCA.
Protestantism’s *scriptura sola*, not the extra- and anti-biblical canon of Catholicism).

Like generations of evangelical laymen before him, Taylor drew the boundaries of Christian fellowship as broadly as possible within these limits, subordinating internal controversies to the common task of conversion. He took care to distinguish his philanthropy from the progressive social gospel that cooperated with the state to battle poverty and other problems that evangelicals viewed as symptoms of unbelief and business men, in particular, feared as breeding grounds for socialism.7

In tribute to Taylor’s networking prowess, the group at the Sherman Hotel formed a cross-section of his philanthropic interests and a Who’s-Who of fundamentalism’s Midwestern base. Taylor built CWF’s influence by requiring that either he or a surrogate serve on each beneficiary’s board, giving him a voice not only in individual ministries, but in the centrifugal growth of interwar evangelicalism. At the meeting, the presidents of Wheaton College, Moody Bible Institute, Northern Baptist Seminary, and the Chicago Evangelistic Institute represented Taylor’s interest in “youth work” and Christian higher education. The schools granted a spectrum of professional credentials, from Wheaton’s liberal arts B.A. to the vocational training of the Bible institutes and the seminary’s curriculum for aspiring clergy. The name “Moody,” in particular, drew disparate and often quarrelsome factions together around the legacy of turn-of-the-century evangelist Dwight L. Moody, a lay preacher and former shoe salesman whose message of Christian individualism had resonated with wealthy sponsors such as J. Pierpont Morgan and Cornelius Vanderbilt.8 Dr. Harry S. Ironsides, pastor of Moody Memorial Church;

7 See Ch. 1, n23.

Wendell P. Loveless, director of radio station W.M.B.I.; and Moody musical supervisor Dr. Homer Hamontree rounded out the spokesmen for Moody’s posthumous empire.

Business men and professionals were equally prominent on Taylor’s guest list. Shoe store owner C.B. Hedstrom and fellow evangelical Frank Sheriff headed the Chicagoland Christian Business Men’s Committee (CBMCI). CBMCI member Vaughn Shoemaker, the Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist for the Chicago Daily News who created “John Q. Public” to speak for the woebegone American taxpayer, chaired a Rotary-style lunch group called the Gospel Fellowship Club.9 William McDermott, a Daily News reporter, was in charge of the Family Altar League. Publisher and Club Aluminum board member Robert C. Van Kampen led the Chicago Camp of the Gideons, founded in 1899 by three traveling salesmen to provide Bibles and spiritual comradship to other men on the road.10 Taylor brought in the heads of other local missions that CWF supported, such as the Chicago Bible Society and the Great Commission Prayer League.

Another CBMCI founder, lawyer Paul Fischer, arrived as a delegate for the group Child Evangelism with Director Gwendolin C. Armour, widow of the famous, or infamous, meat-packing entrepreneur Philip D. Armour.11 The working conditions in her late husband’s stockyards helped inspire Upton Sinclair’s exposé The Jungle, but like

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Morgan and Vanderbilt, Armour was also a Christian philanthropist. He sponsored his brother’s progressive, interdenominational Armour Mission for children. The pastor of Armour’s upscale church moved him to establish the coeducational Armour Institute of Technology by preaching what wags dubbed “the Million Dollar sermon,” extolling the ways a million dollars could improve education in Chicago. Armour chose the minister to head the institute, and they collaborated until the tycoon’s death in 1901.12 Using her married name, Gwendolin managed her fortune and contacts to become a singularly powerful woman in otherwise all-male evangelical circles. She was the only person at the Sherman Hotel with ties to big business; J.L. Kraft, the processed-food mogul who conceived the Laymen’s Crusade for Christian Education, declined to come.13 Finally, two pastors joined Moody’s Dr. Ironsides as delegates from the pulpit: F.E. Otterbein of the North Austin Lutheran Church and Major A.E. Pepper of the Salvation Army. Finally, there was special guest J. Elwin Wright. A former business man who ran the New England Fellowship, an influential geographic node of fundamentalism, Wright was working with Taylor, among others, to form the National Association of Evangelicals.

Taylor tapped his assembled allies to coordinate the Christian Workers Foundation’s biggest project yet: a stadium revival starring Los Angeles-based radio

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13 Annual Report of the Christian Workers Foundation, July 1, 1941 – June 30, 1942, p. 2. Papers of HJT, Collection 20, Box 11, Folder 1, BGCA.
evangelist Charles Fuller. Fuller, a third-generation orange grower who had juggled business and the ministry before the agricultural depression pushed him into full-time religious broadcasting, was a star in California’s vibrant fundamentalist scene.\(^\text{14}\)

Converted and later based in Hollywood, he felt God’s call to preach, leaving the lucrative directorship of the Mutual Packing Association for intensive study at the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. A year after his 1925 ordination as a Baptist, he established Calvary Church in the fast-growing town of Placentia. His orange groves enabled him to refuse a salary. Like many evangelicals, Fuller was quick to recognize the potential of radio to create an imagined community of the faithful while using the conventions of the medium – music, crisp production, punchy messages – to lure unbelievers. He did his first religious broadcast in 1927 and resigned from Calvary Church in 1932 to preach from the airwaves full-time.\(^\text{15}\) Thanks to CWF advertising subsidies since 1940, Fuller had expanded his sunny, sentimental “Old Fashioned Gospel Hour” across North America, making him one of the biggest names in radio. Appearing on 456 stations by 1942 – almost double the number since CWF began covering national advertising in 1940 – the “Old Fashioned Gospel Hour” eclipsed other programs as America entered World War II.\(^\text{16}\) Wright’s laudatory 1940 biography, which Fuller sent to listeners and donors,

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\(^{15}\) J. Elwin Wright, *The Old-Fashioned Gospel Hour and Its Broadcasters* (Boston: Fellowship Press, 1940), 55-84; Hangen, 95.

\(^{16}\) Philip Goff, “We Have Heard the Joyful Sound: Charles E. Fuller’s Radio Broadcast and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism,” *Religion and American Culture*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Winter 1999), 71-72. Hangen appears unaware of Taylor’s vital role in the expansion of “The Old Fashioned Gospel Hour” in the 1940s. For example, she credits Charles and Grace Fuller with creating “Revival Hour Night” films for churches, a project conceived and executed by Taylor and his assistant Robert Walker. Neither Taylor nor the Christian Workers Foundation appear in her chapter on Fuller, and she attributes all of Fuller’s fundraising to ordinary listeners who responded to his weekly pleas for money (Hangen, 96, 109; “Radio Artists Films to Be Shown Here,” n.d., Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 33, Folder 27), BGCA).
added to Fuller’s aura as an evangelical star who had broken through to the wider culture.\(^\text{17}\)

Fuller had since proven his ability to pack stadiums, most recently with Wright’s support in Boston, and was scheduled to appear in Washington, D.C. and St. Louis. At the Sherman Hotel, Taylor proposed an October 1942 date for Chicago to give the assembled groups time to plan. Wright testified that Fuller’s appearance at Boston Gardens, sponsored by 1000 churches, drew about 28,000 people and inspired pastors to bring Fuller’s direct message of salvation into their own pulpits. “‘The typical remark was ‘I am not much of a preacher, but I believe I could preach as good as that if I had the same thing to preach about.’” Assuming a trickle-down effect from clergy to congregation, Wright and Taylor proceeded to delegate responsibility. A Nominating Committee comprised of two business men and three educators selected a General Committee to take charge of the major planning. Chaired by Taylor, who would select the Treasurer and the Finance Committee director, with his secretary and right-hand man Bob Walker as Secretary, the General Committee effectively made the revival a CWF project. (Moody’s Will Houghton accepted a symbolic Vice-Chairmanship because, Taylor told him, “some Moody identification” would guarantee “more enthusiastic cooperation.”)\(^\text{18}\) Taylor’s first action would be to write a “circular letter to pastors informing them of their appointment to the General Committee...[and] suggesting that

\(^{17}\) Wright, op. cit.; Hangen, 104.

\(^{18}\) HJT to Will H. Houghton, March 8, 1942; Will H. Houghton to HJT, March 10, 1942. Papers of HJT, Collection 20, Box 11, Folder 22, BGCA.
each pastor should appoint a contact man.” In other words, laymen would lure
“fundamental” clergy to rally the faithful by sparing them most of the work.19

The Nominating Committee went on to name chairmen for committees on
Personal Work, Ushering, Publicity, a Volunteer Choir, Prayer Meetings, and the
Cooperation of Youth Organizations. Business men and professionals led three of the six
groups: CBMCI’s Sheriff at Personal Work, or door-to-door evangelism; the Gideons’
Van Kampen at Ushering; and newspaperman McDermott at Publicity. Personal work, or
one-to-one evangelism, and ushering were such common business men’s tasks for
revivals that Taylor’s advance notes assumed that CBMCI, the Gideons, and the Gospel
Fellowship Club would provide all the necessary manpower.20 The meeting adjourned
with a warning about the risk of staging a public spectacle that instead of Christianizing
the city would only attract fellow believers. “The [Nominating] Committee further
recommended that a strong drive be made to bring the unconverted into the Fuller
Meetings to be held on October 4th.” Fuller’s own statistics showed why this needed to be
said. The 28,000 attendees as Boston Gardens had produced all of 100 new Christians,
about average for urban revivals.21 The goal should be to bait a trap for the unsaved, not
serve comfort food to believers.

Before Taylor and his Chicago team had the chance to bring Fuller to Chicago,
World War II intervened. Taylor, Wright, and the committees rallied the ministers, took
notes on Fuller’s St. Louis and Washington meetings, began an advertising campaign,

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19 Robert Van Kampen, “Minutes of the Committee for Nominating Various Officers and Committee
Chairmen for the Proposed Charles Fuller Revival Meeting,” February 5, 1942, Papers of HJT, Collection
20, Box 11, Folder 22, BGCA.

20 HJT, “Proposed Chas. Fuller Revival Meeting Agenda,” n.d. Papers of HJT, Collection 20, Box 11,
Folder 22, BGCA.

21 See Ch. 2, n44.
and even booked Chicago Stadium. Yet by late summer of 1942, gasoline and rubber rationing made Fuller’s trip from Los Angeles to Chicago prohibitive. Less than two weeks before the September rally was scheduled, Taylor informed Wheaton College President V. Raymond Edman that Fuller was cancelling the rest of his 1942 commitments “[i]n light of the recommendation by the Government that mass meetings be postponed for the duration.” The key word, for Taylor, was “postponed.” He suggested that the planning committees should “remain inactive for the present,” but be prepared to reconvene for “the great opportunity such a meeting would afford in bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to men and women throughout the Chicago area -- and the part we and the organizations we represent might play in making this evangelistic project count for the Lord.”22 His “we,” once again, meant a fundamentalist elite in which Taylor, the business executive, was as much an agent of God as Edman, the ordained minister who led a religious college. More than that, it reflected Taylor’s view of business as equally the pursuit of profit and its stewardship, with business men as architects of a social order that delivered what the masses needed.

Herbert John Taylor was born in Pickford, on the upper peninsula of Michigan, to Frank and Martha Ellen Taylor on April 18, 1893. The fourth child of seven, he inherited his business acumen and religious commitment from a large, close-knit family. His paternal grandparents came to Pickford from Ontario in 1882, five years after another

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22 HJT to V. Raymond Edman, September 18, 1942, Papers of HJT, Collection 20, Box 11, Folder 22, BGCA.
group of Canadians lay claim to the land.23 Taylor would cross the Canadian border many times as an adult, in the transnational spirit that wove American evangelicalism into a wider world of Anglophone Christianity.24 Patrick Taylor, the clan’s patriarch, established homesteads for his sons to inherit upon his death in 1884. They helped build Pickford from a settlement into a small commercial center. Frank Taylor, Herb’s father, founded the electric and telephone companies and managed a lumber-supply interest, a dairy, and a bank.25 Growing up, Herbert also learned from his entrepreneurial uncles: “Uncle Fred ran the hardware store; Uncle Ed the grocery; Uncle Andrew the shoe store; Uncle George the dry-goods store.”26 Fred and John were lay leaders in the Pickford Methodist Church, which Herb’s family also attended.27

Of the second-generation Taylor siblings, Frank left the largest mark on Pickford. In addition to his wide-ranging contributions to the local economy, he made time for public service. During his tenure as the town’s third supervisor, he expanded its landholdings and named three new streets after the middle names of his sons. He groomed the boys to inherit his businesses or establish their fortunes elsewhere. As an adolescent, Herb acquired an early appreciation for advertising by hawking the Taylor


25 Heidebrecht, 23.


27 Morrison, 139.
dairy. He also raised sheep and sold the wool to finance his education.\textsuperscript{28} Pickford was too small for a high school, so as a teenager, he moved to the county seat, Sault Ste. Marie, not far from the Canadian border. He took classes by day and worked for Western Union by night, spending summers in Soo Junction as a railroad relief officer.\textsuperscript{29} “[M]y mother was determined that we have a good education,” he remembered. Six college-bound children – the seventh went to a two-year technical school – cost more than even the largest business man in a remote Michigan village could afford.\textsuperscript{30}

While Herb Taylor spent little time in Pickford as a teenager, he often came home for weekends, worshiping Sunday mornings in the crowded Taylor pews at the Methodist Church. However, he did not consider himself saved until he was seventeen, when a visiting evangelist brought him to the altar. Taylor’s retrospective conversion narrative is characteristically crisp: “I became convinced, stepped forward, and accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour and Lord. I don’t mean to record that moment casually, but it was just that simple and straightforward.”\textsuperscript{31} It was, in a word popular with evangelicalists and business men alike, a \textit{transaction}, in which Taylor pledged his faith to Jesus and Jesus his fidelity to Taylor. In principle, the agreement made Jesus responsible for Taylor’s achievements and Taylor responsible for his failures. In practice, it fit comfortably with the American notion of the self-made man, with Taylor’s religious choices determining his earthly and heavenly fate. In his study of spirituality in nineteenth-century New England, Richard Rabinowitz links the development of a market economy to precisely

\textsuperscript{28} Heidebrecht, 25.

\textsuperscript{29} Taylor, 28.

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid.}, 27.

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Ibid.}, 25.
such entangling of commercial and religious language. Divine grace was a spiritual commodity akin to the products in the Taylor family’s stores, characterized by “instrumental use” and “exchangeability.” In a religious and financial ideology centered on rewards and punishments for individual actors, “[c]ommerce supplied key metaphors to enrich the language of moral experience – terms like investment, contract, and credit.” Methodists, whose theology held individuals responsible for their own conversion, had been promoting industry and profit as byproducts of Christian commitment for decades before Taylor claimed the faith. The message that hard work transcended “sacred” and “secular” callings, however, had much broader appeal than one Protestant denomination. R.G. LeTourneau, who was five years younger than Taylor and from a different tradition, would preach transactional theology to great effect.

Although Taylor framed his salvation in the unemotional terminology of exchange, he soon showed his religious fervor. Not long after declaring himself a Christian, he enrolled in Northwestern University, which a group of Chicagoans – six business men and three pastors – founded in 1850 as a place of “sanctified learning…under the patronage of the Methodist Episcopal Church.” By the time Taylor entered with the class of 1917, Northwestern, like other sectarian universities, had deemphasized its religious origins in pursuit of growth and academic respectability. It added several graduate schools, including a School of Commerce funded by Chicago

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business men. Enrollment in the College of Liberal Arts, which Taylor attended, leaped from 603 in 1900 to 1,469 in 1917.\(^{35}\) While a private college education was, by and large, an upper-middle class luxury, Taylor again had to work through school. Two of his sisters were also in college, and Frank could not afford three tuitions. On top of classes and the track team, Taylor telegraphed for Western Union and wrote about sports for two Chicago newspapers.\(^{36}\) He made a career-minded move to become business manager of the yearbook. Finally, as if he was not busy enough, Taylor started courting his future wife (and future Northwestern student) Gloria Forbrich, during his sophomore year, while she was still in high school. Her father was a Chicago-based advertiser and industry journalist, and the family claimed a lineage of American heroes that included the Methodist temperance and suffrage advocate Frances Willard.\(^{37}\) By all accounts, both families approved of the match.

Yet notwithstanding his crowded schedule and Northwestern’s drift from its Methodist roots, Taylor’s most formative undergraduate experience was the Young Men’s Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.). A popular extracurricular activity since students founded Northwestern’s chapter in 1880 – by the 1890s, thirty percent of the campus belonged to the men’s or women’s group\(^{38}\) – the “Y” combined aggressively


\(^{36}\) Taylor, 94-95.


\(^{38}\) Williamson and Wild, 125.
evangelical Christianity with a social gospel that preached economic and racial justice.\textsuperscript{39}

The polarization around “fundamentalism” and “modernism” that would fracture Northern Protestantism in the 1920s was only brewing during Taylor’s college years. In 1915, oilman Lyman Stewart finished publishing *The Fundamentals*, twelve paperbacks in which leading evangelicals denounced biblical higher criticism and centered their own theological core on a personal relationship with Christ, proselytizing, and prayer.\textsuperscript{40}

Meanwhile, the Northwestern Y.M.C.A. focused on the religious and humanitarian crisis of World War I. After graduating, Taylor and other members of the class of 1917 went to France as Y.M.C.A. relief workers. When America entered the war, they were already on the battleground.

Taylor’s three years in France secured his future in the business world. He temporarily left the Y to join the Naval Reserve, which took advantage of his skills as an aid worker and assigned him to direct the distribution of food and clothing to U.S. sailors near Brest.\textsuperscript{41} At the Armistice in November 1918, the Navy allowed him to go on leave and accept a position as the Regional Director of the Y.M.C.A. Hundreds of thousands of servicemen passed through Brest to return to the United States, and twenty-five year old Taylor’s job was to keep them out of what the Y considered trouble – drinking, prostitution, brawling, and other time-honored entertainments for battle-scarred men far


\textsuperscript{41} Taylor, 21.
from home. Taylor tackled the challenge with his first large-scale merger of evangelicalism and entrepreneurialism. Taking advantage of what one Northwestern history describes as “a scheme to exchange dollars for francs at an exorbitantly favorable rate,” he bought French pubs that were popular with Americans and converted them into “dry” hotels. “So unusual has been Mr. Taylor’s businesslike efficiency,” the Chicago Daily News reported, “that many of his large staff of assistants outrank him in point of seniority.”

The News staff were not the only people monitoring Taylor’s work. Taylor’s Y.M.C.A. service in France introduced him to the men who would launch his business career and, in some cases, remain friends and networking contacts for decades. Maurice Karker, Taylor’s naval commander, considered Taylor his protégé. Senator Robert L. Owen of Oklahoma heard about Taylor’s managerial gifts and arranged a job interview with constituent Harry Sinclair, president of the Sinclair Oil Company. George Perkins, the Y.M.C.A.’s chief fundraiser in France and a partner at J.P. Morgan, advised Taylor to take the position instead of another offer he found more tempting: that of Associate General Secretary of the Y.M.C.A.

According to Taylor’s autobiography, in which God directs every event into place, the conversation with Perkins laid out his future and philosophy of life. “You think I’m going to tell you to go with the YMCA, don’t you?” he quotes Perkins as saying. “Well, that’s not what I’m going to tell you. I’m going to suggest you go into business.

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42 Ibid., 22.
43 Pridmore, 113.
You have a considerable amount of God-given business talent.” Over the long term, he argued, that talent would enable Taylor to do more Christian work with youth than joining the Y.M.C.A. bureaucracy. Perkins predicted that Taylor would someday have his own company, “where you can influence the making of policies. You’ll be able to take time away...for your youth activities. By the time you’re forty-five, you’ll be spending more of your long time on young people’s projects than on your business.” Taylor concluded, in hindsight, that “Mr. Perkins was the vehicle through which I’m certain God presented me with a plan – His particular plan for me...From the moment I left Mr. Perkins’ office, I knew the course of my life.” In the first edition of his memoir, Taylor would cast himself in Perkins’ role as the voice of experience for confused young Christians. The title: *God Has a Plan for You.*

Taylor saw nothing unusual in finding his divine calling at J.P. Morgan instead of a church. He had spent his life around pious business men. Prayer, he wrote, had “clearly led” him to Perkins, a spiritual authority with one foot in business and the other in the Lord’s work. If Taylor also spoke to a pastor, he did not report the conversation. As much as he respected clergymen, he gravitated to people and organizations who shared his assumption that only fellow business men could give him practical spiritual guidance. No less importantly, for a young man on the make, confidants such as Perkins and Karker introduced him to business, social, and religious networks that would at once advance his career and bring him closer to the executive level that Perkins said would free him for evangelical philanthropy.

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46 Taylor, 22.
Step One in the plan was for Taylor to accept the position Senator Owen had arranged with Sinclair Oil. He returned to the United States in 1919, married Gloria Forbrich, and set out for Paul’s Valley, Oklahoma, 53 miles south of Oklahoma City.\footnote{Ibid., 30; “Pauls Valley, Oklahoma Facts, Schools, Colleges, Weather, Zip Code, and More,” http://www.citytowninfo.com/places/oklahoma/pauls-valley (last accessed Sept. 28, 2008). The apostrophe in “Paul’s” seems to have fallen out of favor since Taylor wrote about the town. I will use his spelling for consistency.} He was entering a frenetic growth industry. In the late nineteenth century, white settlers swarmed into the Creek and Cherokee-dominated land, which Andrew Jackson had designated as “Indian Territory” for the survivors of the Trail of Tears before the Civil War. Salt prospectors had discovered oil as early as 1859. In 1897, commercial drilling began in earnest, prompting the federal government to grant Oklahoma statehood in 1907, while Taylor was in high school. Twelve years later, when he and Gloria moved to Paul’s Valley, Oklahoma led the world in oil production.\footnote{Dan T. Boyd, “Oklahoma Oil: Past, Present, and Future,” Oklahoma Geology Notes, 62:3, Fall 2002, 98. Available at http://www.ogs.ou.edu/fossilfuels/pdf/OKOilNotesPDF.pdf (last accessed September 28, 2008); Oklahoma Indian Tribes and Languages, http://www.native-languages.org/oklahoma.htm (last accessed September 28, 2008).}

Henry F. Sinclair, a Kansas druggist’s son, had jumped into the turn-of-the-century oil boom. In 1907, his Oklahoma holdings made him Kansas’s wealthiest man. He and his brother ran a bank in Tulsa, and in 1913, Sinclair registered as the city’s first citizen. In 1916, he established the Sinclair Oil & Refining Corporation on Wall Street. Not yet forty, he controlled $50 million in oil wealth and other assets. The Wilson administration chose him to serve with eleven other petroleum magnates on the World War I War Service Committee, which is most likely when Sen. Owen sought to link Sinclair with promising young men such as Taylor. In September 1919, around when Taylor arrived at St. Paul’s Valley as a short-term assistant to the General Manager –
“just enough time to learn the pipeline end of the business” – Sinclair consolidated his United States, Mexican, and postwar European holdings into the Sinclair Consolidated Oil Corporation. Over 1700 oil wells pumped 40,000 barrels of crude oil per day, and Sinclair had his eye on the gasoline-powered automobile market. Taylor was exactly where he wanted to be, on the cutting edge of the postwar economy with a promise of promotion.49

Yet after the training year with Sinclair Oil, Taylor saw a brighter future as an independent operator and submitted his resignation. Business conditions had changed suddenly when a “wildcat outfit” set up the first oil well in St. Paul’s Garvin County “and local interest in oil really took a jump.”50 Now that county land was in demand, Taylor established what he later described as “a combination lease-brokerage, insurance and real estate office.” Each service had ready customers in the oil prospectors who swarmed into the area. Taylor shifted his base from St. Paul’s to Paul’s Valley, the county seat, and claimed plausibly to have become “involved in every phase of the county’s life.”51 He and Gloria moved from the Methodist Church to the Presbyterians, not to change denominations, but to encourage other well-off couples to rebuild the Presbyterians’ “dilapidated” building out of community spirit.52 The project exemplified Taylor’s commitment to the evangelical heritage of interdenominational cooperation for the common good. Soon, he was teaching the Presbyterian men’s Bible class and chairing the Finance Committee. Under his direction – or, as he put it, “[t]hanks to the Lord, and


50 Taylor, 30.

51 Ibid., 30.

52 Ibid., 30.
many enthusiastic church members” – the congregation raised $65,000 for a new church.  

Taylor also returned to youth work. He established the first Boy Scout Troop in Paul’s Valley. More significantly for his future, he started a branch of the Y.M.C.A.’s nonsectarian civic club, “Hi-Y,” in the Paul’s Valley High School. Among other activities, the group sponsored a Boys’ Work Council aimed at deterring juvenile delinquency, a cause long dear to middle-class Americans and especially evangelicals.

None of this religious and community service would have been possible if Taylor had not risen to the top of Paul Valley’s business and civic world. Although the oil lease-brokerage took off after Taylor left Sinclair, his insurance business faltered until a conversation with Gloria sparked an insight that he retold for the rest of his life as a road-to-Damascus experience akin to his meeting with J.P. Morgan’s George Perkins. In a rare scene portraying Gloria as a businesswoman in her own right, albeit over a dinner she had cooked, Taylor spoke petulantly of a resistant insurance prospect. Gloria replied with two questions. “First, does the man really need insurance?” Taylor said yes. Second, “Does he have enough money to pay for the premium?” Again, yes. “You know what I think?” Gloria said. “I think you’re to blame for not selling him the policy. It’s not his fault for not buying.” According to Taylor, “[t]hat straight answer changed my entire outlook on selling” – and, he might have added, on evangelism. It was transactional theology in action, with faith and hard work rewarded or rebuffed depending on the intensity of his commitment. He hounded the man until he bought a policy, sextupled his sales “after that

53 Ibid., 31.

quiet talk with Gloria,” and became one of the Travelers Insurance Company’s biggest sellers in Oklahoma.  

With success came responsibility. Taylor served as secretary of the Chamber of Commerce “to give the town back some pride so that useful projects could be started,” taking no salary until the Chamber was out of debt. He spearheaded a bonds issue to rescue the county from “an unhealthy backwoods image” by paving its roads to enter the automotive age. To his delight, *The Daily Oklahoman* headlined its coverage of the 1924 campaign “SIGN ’EM UP TAYLOR OF PAUL’S VALLEY.”  

Paul’s Valley residents, he imagined afterward, likely “remembered me best as a young man with a petition in his hand.”  

It was in Paul’s Valley that the relentlessly civic-minded Taylor made what would be a lifelong commitment to Rotary Club. Founded in 1905 by Chicago attorney Paul Harris to “make social friends of his business friends,” the club began as a networking fraternity that invited leading men from different professions to mingle with others at different locations (hence, “Rotary”). Within ten years, Rotary had spread to cities nationwide and spawned copycats such as Kiwanis and the Lions. After World War I, in which Rotarians volunteered as idealistically and efficiently as the Y.M.C.A., the movement became international. It provided local hubs for a national and global

55 Taylor, 32.
marketplace, appealing to “smaller business men and independent professionals” with a
stake in luring other investors to town, or extending their markets beyond their base.59

Rotary had always been religiously ecumenical, admitting Protestants, Catholics
and Jews (at least in principle) from the start. By the early 1920s when Taylor joined, it
represented a right wing of Progressivism, combining faith in humanity’s improvement
with suspicion toward the state as the source of uplift.60 At the first national convention
in 1911, Rotarians adopted “He Profits Most Who Serves Best” as their motto.61
Members expounded on the mission in a familiar mix of commercial and religious terms
that charged laymen, not politicians or clergy, with expanding Christian civilization.
“[T]he church has so many concerns in mind that it has made poor progress,” a speaker
argued at the 1925 convention. The Rotarian message dealt with “the real problems of
life,” and “[t]he men who are doing the work of the world are the men best capable to
lead in spiritual as well as in material things.”62 For example, Paul’s Valley vied with
nearby Wynnewood to host the area farmers’ market. Taylor thought that Rotary’s
business elites could resolve the tensions “for the common good of both cities.”63 Since
Paul’s Valley already had a Rotary club, he established one in Wynnewood, and
members worked out the disagreement. In addition to encouraging economic cooperation

59 Jeffrey A. Charles, Service Clubs in American Society: Rotary, Kiwanis, and Lions (Urbana and Chicago:

60 Ibid., 4, 42.

61 Ibid., 40.

62 Ibid., 51, 175n.

63 Taylor, 33.
between the cities, Taylor steered the Wynnewood group toward the youth work he was already doing.64

Taylor needed to ensure his legacy, for he had promised Gloria that they would only stay in Oklahoma five years before returning to her hometown of Chicago. Between 1919 and 1924, he had established a template for his professional life, which mirrored that of his father and uncles on a larger and industrial-age scale. He had also cemented his religious identity, which carried forward the irenic and cooperative legacy of nineteenth-century evangelicalism that he had first absorbed in Pickford. In 1924, Baptists and Presbyterians in northern urban centers were splintering along fundamentalist and modernist lines. Taylor gives no indication that the turmoil reached his own Presbyterian church or disturbed him as a Methodist. “The fundamentals” which other conservative evangelicals defined as battle lines, Taylor could take for granted. No modernist faction in Paul’s Valley was challenging “(1) the inerrancy of Scripture, (2) the Virgin birth of Christ, (3) his substitutionary atonement, (4) his bodily resurrection, and (5) the authenticity of [biblical] miracles,” as one scholar has summarized fundamentalism’s doctrinal core.65

With no need to be on the attack or the defensive – a position which suited Taylor’s temperamental aversion to conflict66 – his religious and business concerns were local, inclusive, and practical. Much like the “Presbygationalists” who cooperated to evangelize the frontier in the generation after the Revolutionary War, Taylor and Gloria concluded that the Paul’s Valley Presbyterian church must survive because Methodists

64 Ibid.; Heidebrecht, 28.

65 Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, 117.

66 Heidebrecht, 54.
could not reach the community alone.\textsuperscript{67} The business world was just as eager to prevent competitive impulses from thwarting mutually beneficial cooperation. Taylor’s assumption that business success carried the responsibility of public service started in Pickford, grew in the Y.M.C.A., and found its apotheosis in the Rotary Club, which, in principle, subsumed personal differences into the brotherhood of business men. Either Taylor saw no conflict between Rotarian optimism, on one hand, and evangelical belief in original sin and human inadequacy to improve a fallen world, on the other; or he perceived a conflict, but considered it negotiable, like the differences between Presbyterians and Methodists; or he simply lived with the tension, equally confident that Rotary and evangelicalism were forces for good, and exercising his prerogative to define their missions based on his reading of scripture and experience of the world. “Fundamentalist Rotarian” was not an oxymoron, but an identity, which Taylor brought back to Chicago – the center of both movements.

Going from Paul’s Valley to Chicago was going from the American hinterland to its central metropolis. Rotary International’s icon was a wheel with hundreds of spokes flaring from its Illinois hub. Chicago in the mid-1920s still lived up to its old boast of being the “city of the century,” a financial, manufacturing, agricultural, and transportation crossroads. In 1893, barely twenty years after the Great Chicago Fire decimated the city, raw capitalism rocketed it into international, yet peculiarly American, fame as the host of the World’s Columbian Exposition celebrating the quadricentennial of the New World. Observer after observer echoed the sentiment of local writer Henry B.

Fuller, who called Chicago “the only great city in the world to which all its citizens have come for the one, common, avowed object of making money.” By the end of World War I, the majority of these citizens were European immigrants; native-born whites comprised little over 20% of the population, but a huge share of employers. Chicago’s Christians tended toward polyglot extremes as well. Contending ethnic ghettos of Catholics collectively outnumbered similarly diverse and divided Protestants. White fundamentalists aligned with Moody-founded institutions clashed with mainline Protestant modernists at the University of Chicago; African-American congregations swelled with migrants from the South; and Sunday services took place in a cacophony of Scandinavian, German, and other northern European tongues.

By virtue of birth, education, and connections, Taylor, Gloria, and their baby daughter Beverly arrived poised to join the middle-to-upper class echelons of the native-born minority. Taylor had already lined up a job with his former Navy commander Maurice Karker, now the president of Jewel Tea Company, who “told me he’d take me into his company and move me along as fast as I was able to move.” Although Travelers Insurance, his Paul’s Valley employers, offered to transfer him at a high salary, Taylor “prayed about the matter, and…had a definite leading to go with Mr. Karker.” His sense of God’s will either confirmed, or was confirmed by, Taylor’s feeling that “I liked the man, knew his reputation and had a lot of confidence in him.” The trust was mutual, and Karker kept his promise of rapid advancement, whisking Taylor up the ranks to

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68 Miller, 15-17.


70 Miller, 461-64.

71 Taylor, 34.
Executive Vice President by 1930. During these years, Gloria gave birth to a second daughter, and the family marked its rising class status by moving from the city to the northwestern suburb of Park Ridge. While it no longer advertised itself as “A Restoring Place of Health & Vigor, The Recreation Place of the Tired & Worn Out,” its pitch to business men in the 1910s, it offered a quick train ride from downtown Chicago to a bucolic “village.” Park Ridge came complete with an actual park system, a country club, a thriving economy, and service groups such as Rotary and Kiwanis for men and a range of activities for women.72

Taylor became a trustee of the First Methodist Church and characteristically threw himself into congregational life.73 He and Gloria taught Sunday School in their basement and observed the rest of the Sabbath by visiting family, refusing to shop or enjoy “paid entertainment.” The couple also founded a storefront mission and soup kitchen on the Near North Side of Chicago, a once-affluent neighborhood whose steep inequality of wealth the Depression exacerbated.74 Arranging free donations of bread from a local bakery, the Taylors hired a full-time minister and contributed to the city’s intensely ethnographic academic climate by surveying two thousand homes near the mission to find out how many children were going to (Protestant) church, Sunday School, or both.75 The answer was about half, so they followed up by interviewing parents, the


73 Heidebrecht, 30-31.


majority of whom were first- or second-generation immigrants. The responses were predictable – lack of interest, or, more poignantly, that parents “couldn’t afford to buy the kind of clothes their children needed to attend Sunday School” – and exemplified a missionary challenge to urban churches nationwide.

“What we needed,” Taylor argued, “were nondenominational organizations that could provide a Christian witness to these children, and their parents, in a way they could understand and accept…and eventually, funnel them into the church of their choice.”

“Nondenominational” was a misnomer. Taylor envisioned an interdenominational collaboration of conservative evangelicals: he did not deem Catholics or Protestant modernists to be true Christians. However, even if the goal of the sociological endeavor was to produce more “fundamentalists,” a neologism entering its second decade as a synonym for evangelical traditionalists, the methodology showed how much Taylor had imbibed the Y.M.C.A.’s and Rotary’s Progressivism. Moreover, his solution – doctrinally sound Christians working together to funnel the unsaved into any cooperating church, elevating personal “choice” over sectarian distinctions – drew on evangelical history while riding a twentieth-century ecumenical wave that fundamentalists and modernists shared in common. The notion that Protestantism was a mass market with varied, but essentially compatible, segments attracted business men across the fundamentalist/modernist theological divide.

Once again, Taylor’s ecumenical vision hearkened back to the early nineteenth-century “evangelical united front.” In the 1920s and ’30s, like their predecessors a

76 Ibid.

77 Taylor, 48.

78 Ahlstrom, 778-79, 802-04.
hundred years before, white Protestants from different denominations agreed on a common message of salvation that gave them strength in numbers over religious competitors – not least Protestants with an opposing consensus on the essentials of the faith. The battle lines of biblical inerrancy, the facticity of past or present miracles (an issue that split conservative evangelicals over Pentecostalism), and the relative weight of individual redemption and collective action were specific to their time and place.

However, Taylor’s complex loyalties illustrate a common Protestant heritage fixed on the goal of a Christian America, even when Protestants lacked a common definition of “Christian.”

Taylor’s religious and charitable work in the early 1930s followed a parallel track to his business life. It was clear at the start of the decade that the stock market crash of 1929 had precipitated a familiar plunge in the American economy from boom to bust, though not, at first, to calamity. For much of the year, politicians and business men saw soaring bankruptcies, a sinking Gross National Product, and rising unemployment as a temporary downswing no worse than the brief postwar recession of 1921. One of Chicago’s looming casualties was Club Aluminum, whose two hundred and fifty employees would be out of work if it could not stave off its creditors. Networks based partly on business judgment and partly on personal relationships kept the company out of bankruptcy. An official at the Continental National Bank who knew Karker asked the Jewel Tea President to allow Taylor to rescue Club by taking charge of its affairs part-time. Taylor’s job skills suggested the match: Club Aluminum, like Jewel Tea, produced

79 Kennedy, 58-59.
and sold its products, and he was in charge of both parts of the operation. Karker agreed and let Taylor bring other Jewel Tea staff to help. By the time they finished their report Club Aluminum’s creditors in 1932, however, the economy was in far worse straits than a mere downturn, and the company was $400,000 in debt. As Taylor would stress when telling this story later, the logical decision was to close it down.

Yet echoing Methodism’s founder John Wesley, who had “felt [his] heart strangely warmed” on the road to conversion, Taylor sensed that “something strange was going on inside of me” that resisted business logic. Perhaps Club Aluminum offered the position of power that George Perkins, of J.P. Morgan and the Y.M.C.A., had urged him to seek so he could devote himself more fully to Christ’s kingdom. “It seemed to me that this was the company [God had] chosen for me to fulfill the second part of the original plan…where, in the future, I might influence the setting of policies that would enable me to give more and more of my time directly to the Lord’s work.” Club Aluminum’s history gave Taylor faith in its potential. At the beginning of the 1920s, a Methodist seminarian named W.A. Burnette had begun paying his way through school as a door-to-door cookware salesman on contract with an aluminum manufacturing company. His innovative tactics, most famously having female customers invite friends to product-demonstration meals in their homes, enabled him to hire a national sales force that pushed everything from pots to vacuum cleaners at generous credit rates. Aluminum was expensive, so its vendors emphasized its durability, hailing the advent of “waterless,” burn-free cooking with the metal’s even conduction of heat and imperviousness to rust.

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80 Taylor, 38.

The metal’s high cost and public health concerns in the 1920s devastated the market during the crash, but Taylor was certain that God wanted him to make Club Aluminum profitable again. In 1932, the worst year of the Depression, he left his $33,000 vice-presidency at Jewel Tea for the $6000 presidency of Club Aluminum. Unbeknownst to Gloria, whose father he installed on the Club board, he borrowed his salary from their personal Jewel Tea stock and put up their house as collateral. “I was convinced,” he said, “because the Holy Spirit told me so.”

Now that he was finally in charge of his own company, Taylor had no boss but God to please and free rein for his managerial ingenuity. He recognized that the female consumer’s point of purchase was less the home than the chain store, so he ended the door-to-door product demonstrations and contracted with retail outlets like Gimbel’s in New York City. The change in distribution enabled him to slash prices more than fifty percent, generating rapid profits that he put into advertising. In 1935, Club Aluminum contracted with A&P, Kroger, National, and Jewel (the grocery chain, not the tea company), and Taylor cooperated with them to refine his product’s appeal: a discount for buying a certain number of groceries; a $1 down, $1/week credit system; and free take-home trials. The Roosevelt administration’s early experiments with economic reform – bank regulation; the Agriculture Adjustment Administration (AAA); and, most

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83 Heidebrecht, 39-41.
importantly to Club Aluminum’s manufacturing arm, the short-lived National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), regulating hours and wages while giving workers the right to strike – failed to dent the Depression between 1933 and 1934. Yet due in no small part to Taylor’s ingenuity, Club Aluminum was not only climbing out of debt, but enlarging its market.

Taylor’s papers are scant before the end of the 1930s, so there are only hints as to his political views during the height of the New Deal. Contrary to the historiographical stereotype of the apolitical fundamentalist, however, he cared about partisan combat. In heavily Democratic Chicago, he was a registered Republican who made small, but regular, donations to local and national candidates. As his and Gloria’s surveys of urban children’s religious affiliations have already shown, he retained a strong streak of the good-government Progressivism that dominated the Y.M.C.A. during his service. Along with other “corporate liberals,” a category that included many Rotarians, he supported strategic cooperation between business and government to bind the New Deal to the survival of private enterprise.

Nevertheless, Taylor remained an evangelical individualist at heart, convinced that a good society came about through one right-thinking – and by extension, right-acting – person at a time. He attributed Club Aluminum’s turnaround chiefly to his

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84 Kennedy, 218, 130-52.

85 See, for example, HJT to the National Republican Party of Cook County, Illinois, giving $10 to the Congressional campaign of Ralph E. Church, March 29, 1940; William J. Balmer, Chairman of the National Progressive Republican Organization, to HJT, May 24, 1939, to “enhance the welfare of those Americans, whose problems can best be remedied by strong concerted action and...a national policy in government.” Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 1, Folder 28), BGCA. The Christian Workers Foundation also funded Republicans (Heidebrecht, 67).

86 Richard E. Holl, *From the Boardroom to the War Room: America’s Corporate Liberals and FDR’s Preparedness Program* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 4-5; Charles, 113-123.

Taylor’s account of its authorship combines the tropes of inspirational literature, hardheaded business advice, and a definition of religious practice that can be read with equal plausibility as nonsectarian or dogmatically evangelical. In his memoir, Taylor describes the Four-Way Test as an answer to prayer as he took charge of Club Aluminum in 1932. “I knew [God] didn’t want 250 people to lose their jobs and the pay they had coming to them, when they could not get jobs elsewhere,” he writes. The first priority, then, “was to set policies for the company that would reflect the high ethics and morals God would want in any business. If the people who worked for Club Aluminum were to think right, I knew they would do right.” Employees could save the company and their jobs if they pleased God in thought and deed, and the burden was on Taylor to show them how. The Sunday School teacher in him saw the solution: “a simple, easily remembered guide to right conduct – a sort of ethical yardstick – which all of us in the company could memorize and apply to what we thought, said and did in our relations with others.”

Uniformity was of the essence for two reasons. First, Taylor visualized a successful company as a single-minded organization of many complementary parts, much as the New Testament described “the body of Christ as one… [with] many members.”

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89 1Corinthians 12:12 (KJV).
Second, Taylor’s God inflicted collective punishment for anything less than total allegiance, making it imperative that the Club Aluminum creed win universal consent. Finding that “the right phrase eluded me” in his reading, Taylor bowed at his desk and prayed, then “wrote down the twenty-four words that came to me.”\(^{90}\)

While those words, as quoted above, would indeed become Taylor’s and eventually Rotary International’s trademark, they were not the first version of the Four-Way Test. His memoir compresses the timeline into a tidy conversion narrative that erases his starts and stops amidst the crisis facing Club Aluminum. In 1942, ten years after the fact, Taylor gave Rotary International permission to copy the Test.\(^{91}\) *The Rotarian* published a profile of Taylor by his friend William McDermott, the Chicago *Daily News* writer who headed the Family Altar League and served on the Charles Fuller revival committee. Taylor told McDermott that he had been “studying the Sermon on the Mount” over several months as he refined the formula “which he believes more than anything else is responsible for the comeback of the Club Aluminum Company.” The first two points of the original Four-Way Test, truth and fairness, were the same as in later iterations. Points three and four, as first worded, addressed Club Aluminum’s business needs head-on:

3. Will it build *goodwill* for the company and *better friendships* for our personnel [not just “better friendships”]?

4. Will it be profitable [rather than non-specifically “beneficial”] to all concerned?\(^{92}\)

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\(^{90}\) Taylor, 40-41.

\(^{91}\) Taylor, 52.

The final version amplified “friendships” to general “goodwill” as well as business networking, and stripped out the profit motive in point four. Pure idealism softened the rough edges of moneymaking pragmatism.

Both the memoir and McDermott describe an interfaith vetting process that shows the tension between Taylor’s personally uncompromising evangelicalism and his professional tightwalk around religious difference. After applying the first Four-Way Test for a two-month experiment – for instance, striking “superlatives” from advertising on the grounds that “best,” “finest,” and “greatest” violated Point 1, “Is it the truth?” – Taylor held a meeting with his four department heads, who just happened to be a Catholic, a Christian Scientist, an Orthodox Jew, and a Presbyterian. “I asked them if there were anything in The Four-Way Test that was contrary to their religious or moral beliefs.” They had no complaints, confirming Taylor’s conviction that the Test embodied “God’s principles, morals, and ethics,” which, by definition, were universal.93 Years after the fact, he found “God’s own original version of The Four-Way Test” in Jeremiah 9:23-24: “[L]et not the rich man glory in his riches; But let him that glorieth glory in this…that I am the Lord, which exercise loving kindness, and righteousness in the earth.” It was this Old Testament passage, which Protestants, Catholics, and Jews held in common, that Taylor quoted in speeches about the Four-Way Test “to groups of business men and professionals.”94 He tactfully minimized the Sermon on the Mount.

By imposing only a behavioral “yardstick,” not a theological one, Club Aluminum exemplified Christianity on Taylor’s terms without being officially

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93 Taylor, 41-42, 45.

94 Heidebrecht, 54.
Christian.95 Taylor was navigating the separate spheres of work and religion that middle-class Americans had mapped out in the nineteenth century by having it both ways: making his executive desk a place for prayer and religious discussion, but not proselytizing. His professional neutrality stood in sharp contrast to R.G. LeTourneau’s workplace evangelism, but philosophically, both men were intent on collapsing the separate spheres. In keeping with his emphasis on ethical action and empirical proof, Taylor believed that the Four-Way Test obliterated the line between “religion,” vaguely speaking, and business. “The source of character in industry is religious faith,” he told McDermott. “We have simply incorporated our religious ideals into a simple working code of four points.” He added, “[W]hat is the use – or fun – of having ideals if you don’t back them up with action? I mean really try to live up to them in your business and in your home as well as in church on Sunday.” Even if the Four-Way Test was not doctrinally evangelical, Taylor wanted it to be as life-changing as a revival service, pointing to employees who “have learned ways-of-doing that have changed their own personal lives.”96 Moreover, “evangelism” is not too strong a word for Taylor’s methods to make the Four-Way Test ubiquitous. He had it printed on salesmen’s calling cards, posters, plaques, and stickers for car windows; required staff to memorize and recite the four principles so that, in one manager’s words, “[i]t became a way of life when I was there”; included the Test in shareholder reports; and, to the dismay of the merchandising

95 Ibid.

96 McDermott, 36.
manager, inserted the Test into product packaging along with a letter from Taylor inviting complaints.97

Tucked into McDermott’s account, but not in Taylor’s, is an economic calculus of the Four-Way Test’s openness to short-term losses to build long-term “goodwill,” a trade-off Taylor compared to “a boomerang [that] will return to you tomorrow with a profit.”98 By seeming to level Club Aluminum’s power relations with an ethos that made workers moral agents who could call managers to account, Taylor hoped to ward off the threat of unionization. “Most strikes and lockouts can be traced directly to selfishness, insincerity, unfair dealings, or fear and lack of friendship among the men concerned,” Taylor told McDermott. “There are many ways to discover the flaw in a given case, but I think one can usually put his finger on it by applying the Four-Way Test.”99 In 1932, a nation accustomed for decades to regular, disruptive, and brutally suppressed industrial strikes elected its first labor-friendly President and Congress. When Roosevelt took office in 1933, a year into Taylor’s tenure at Club Aluminum, he signed the National Industrial Recovery Act. Although the Supreme Court would declare NIRA unconstitutional in 1935, the pro-unionization clause survived in Congress, and up-and-coming leaders like John L. Lewis of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) treated strikes as a tactical bludgeon with which to begin negotiations.100 Employers such as Taylor and LeTourneau tried to preserve the post-World War I system of welfare capitalism, in which executives sought employee loyalty with good wages and benefits, stock options

97 Heidebrecht, 49-52.
98 McDermott, 36.
99 McDermott, 36.
100 Kennedy, 151, 298-308.
representing “ownership” of the company, opportunities for promotion, channels for reporting grievances, and company-sponsored socializing, all to create quasi-familial ties that would override ethnic and class identities, preempt labor agitation, and minimize government regulation.  

Or, as the evangelical magazine *The King’s Business* put it, “There would be no capital and labor problem if all men were true believers in and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

While Taylor also believed that personal sinfulness, and not political injustice, made labor relations a matter of interpersonal misunderstanding that unions would whip up into mass revolt, he was willing to give parts of the New Deal a chance. In the 1920s, the symbiotic relationship between public service and profit was a truism that reached to the highest echelons of American business, and like the Four-Way Test, it transcended religious identification and political ideology. In 1922, as his newspaper wrapped up a two-year anti-Semitic serial based on the forged *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, Episcopalian Henry Ford proclaimed that “[s]ervice as a basis for profit-making is coming to be recognized as the true motive for creative industry.” General Electric president Gerard Swope, an Jewish alumnus of Jane Addams’s settlement house who would become a prominent New Dealer, described “What Big Business Owes to the Public” as the recognition of “[business men’s] responsibilities as trustees of other people’s money, their obligation of service to the public, and their duty to their

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101 Cohen, 174-79.
employees. Roger Babson, an M.I.T.-trained engineer and self-anointed “statistician,” and Bruce Barton, an advertiser whose bestselling The Man Nobody Knows cast Christ as a virile exemplar of “executive ability,” were theologically modernist, but politically conservative, Congregationalists. “Statistics show that the same qualities which make a man successful in business make him interested in religion…faith, vision, courage, sympathy, thrift, and industry,” Babson argued. He granted government the duty of “protecting men in freedom of effort and right of ownership; but only religion can energize men unto a maximum of useful service.”

For most business men after the stock market crash, however, the question was not whether government was a legitimate arena for “service” or its implacable foe. Rather, as in the Progressive era when Taylor came of age, the question was how to ensure that business was the equal or stronger partner in an unavoidably regulatory state. The spectrum from laissez-faire to corporate liberalism – in the business world, the “left” rarely went closer to socialism than that – was more nuanced than the rhetoric with which purists mobilized their forces. Ford, who devised an all-encompassing infrastructure of welfare capitalism in the 1910s to ward off internal discontent and, by

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104 Heald, 132-33.


extension, external interference, loathed the New Deal before it started. In the spring of 1932, while Herbert Hoover was desperately attempting to balance free-market principles with limited intervention into the tumbling economy, Michigan workers staged a “Ford Hunger March.” Ford’s security team killed three marchers, injured fifty, and created a public relations disaster by shooting a New York Times reporter in the head. A friendly grand jury blamed the riot on “a few [communist] agitators who go about the nation taking advantage of times of industrial depression.”

Ford redoubled his efforts to crush labor radicalism with the consent and cooperation of local, state, and federal officials, who already shared the same goal and, in 1932, had reason to fear that hopeless, hungry citizens would turn to revolution.

Yet Ford and other business men who tacitly accepted Washington’s support when they needed the law on their side insisted publicly on the market’s independence from the state. Refusing to comply with the NIRA when Roosevelt came to power in 1933, Ford wrote that government “should stick to the strict functions of governing. That is a big enough job. Let them leave business alone.” The enmity was mutual; Roosevelt’s deputy Harold Ickes called out Ford by name in accusing “the modern industrial oligarchy which dominates the United States” of holding tight to its wealth until it could replace democracy with a “big-business Fascist America.”

Gerard Swope, by contrast, helped create the NIRA and other major platforms of the New Deal.

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111 Kennedy, 352.
His 1931 *The Stabilization of Industry* (quickly dubbed “The Swope Plan”) argued that the Federal Trade Commission should supervise controlled cartelization and mandate that companies assume responsibility for employee pensions, life and disability insurance.\(^{112}\) At the same time, he viewed business self-regulation as the engine of reform, with the state playing a facilitative and supporting role. Just as Ford worked with government when profits or company survival depended on it, Swope intended to protect capitalism from “agitators” with business-initiated, government-backed responses to problems communists identified, but couldn’t solve.

Taylor was closer to Swope than to Ford in seeing the economic and social value of coordinating business self-interest and government regulation. In July of 1932, Hoover signed the Federal Home Loan Bank Act allowing homeowners to tap into frozen assets using mortgage paper as security for loans.\(^{113}\) The next May, Taylor chaired a group of business men that applied under the law to create the Chicago Federal Savings and Loan association; John B. Reynolds, the president of the Chicago Rotary Club, also served on the committee. Far from condemning government entanglement with private enterprise, C.W. Tower, a mortgage broker, told the *Chicago Daily Tribune* that “the advantage of loan associations operating under federal charter is that they will be under federal supervision,” unlike their freewheeling and often fraudulent predecessors.\(^{114}\) The Chicago bank opened in January, 1935, and, under the terms of the charter, offered to refinance up to $20,000 in mortgages on owner-occupied homes with five-to-twenty year


\(^{113}\) Kennedy, 83-84.

\(^{114}\) n.a., “Chicagoans Ask U.S. Aid to Form Building-Loan,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 6, 1933, 30.
loans. The founders hailed their association as “the first institution of its kind…to begin operations in Chicago under the new federal savings and loan bank law.”

Although Taylor considered himself religiously and politically conservative, his embrace even of one centralizing initiative made his faith and politics suspect in the apocalyptic context of evangelical opposition to the New Deal. So far, growled The King’s Business, the New Deal was a “most benevolent dictatorship…but a dictatorship it is, all the more impressive in that it has been forced upon a great nation, not by the force of arms, but by the force of circumstances.” By themselves, The King’s Business and non-evangelical Roosevelt opponents such as big business’s American Liberty League may have been marginal. However, they were not unrepresentative of more mainstream opinion makers. Sixty-three percent of newspaper endorsements in 1936 went to Roosevelt’s opponent Alf Landon, with Col. Robert McCormick’s retranchist Chicago Tribune and Hearst’s New York American claiming that the Soviet Union had commanded American communists to vote for Roosevelt. The disconnect between anti-New Deal editorialists and American voters, who awarded the 1936 Democratic ticket every state but Maine and Vermont, meant that moderate Republican business men like Taylor (who almost certainly voted for Landon) represented a right-leaning, but flexible, faction. Retaining their Progressive-era conviction that limited government action could facilitate private-sector solutions to public problems, they had ideological room to maneuver within the New Deal regime.

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Despite Taylor’s support of certain New Deal initiatives, he viewed Club Aluminum’s turnaround under his management as a gift from God, not the government. By 1937 the company was out of debt, empirical proof that with “honesty, fairness, a spirit of goodwill – those fundamental Christian values – [and] calling upon Christ and the Holy Spirit…[y]ou will become a thousandfold more productive.”\(^{118}\) At least in hindsight, the Four-Way Test, “good people,” and “good products” enabled forty-five year old Taylor to embark on the next phase of the life plan he and George Sinclair had developed almost twenty years earlier.\(^{119}\) Now that he controlled a profitable company, he could use it as a base for Christian work in two ways: branding Club Aluminum itself as “Christian,” and diverting part of its profits into an organizationally distinct evangelical philanthropy. First, he founded the Christian Workers Foundation. His dual roles as company president and nonprofit “trustee” cemented his reputation as a Christian business man and drew him into the upper echelons of conservative evangelical activism. 

Second, he combined religion and advertising in a company-sponsored radio program called “Club Time.” Starring fundamentalist crooner Beverly Shea, who would rise to greater fame as Billy Graham’s song leader, \textit{Club Time} debuted in 1944 and soared in popularity at the end of World War II. Ads for Club Aluminum products ran between psalms and hymns. Ratings and sales, not conversions, measured Club Time’s success.

\textit{Club Time} escalated the Four-Way Test’s challenge to collapse religion and business and code the result as “Christian” in a way evangelicals would recognize and approve, even while playing the Protestant-Catholic-Jew card that he knew from Rotary was both good manners and good salesmanship. The Christian Workers Foundation, by

\(^{118}\) Taylor, 40.

\(^{119}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 44.
contrast, was explicitly fundamentalist, but in the camp that supported interdenominational cooperation, doctrinal minimalism, and revivalist ambition, not religious and cultural separatism. Through the CWF, Taylor left formidable legacies in evangelical higher education; Sunday School and Y.M.C.A.-sponsored youth groups; tract modernization and distribution; missionary support; and the National Association of Evangelicals, for which he served as founding treasurer and frequent donor. What Club Time and the CWF shared in common, besides many of the same supporters, was Taylor’s business sense. Immersed in a top-down advertising culture that believed in its power to manipulate the masses, he had no more tolerance for guesswork and inefficiency in religious projects. Business strategy applied to theology made his career and philanthropy a holistic world.

Taylor charted a philanthropic course that demonstrated the utility of the foundation model to business men whose empires would not have registered on the Rockefellers’ radar. The Christian Workers Foundation had a single purpose, supporting national evangelism, and its spheres of influence radiated from that center. Although Taylor incorporated CWF during 1938 and 1939, its first real year of operation was 1940. Its portfolio demonstrates the meticulous, yet improvisational, nature of the enterprise, guided by Taylor’s interests, the need to get the word out in the evangelical community, and the tension between his national ambitions and the local projects that friends and colleagues asked him to support. Many of the organizations that received money were nowhere near the front lines of a world-changing revival, but played a part in building the local networks that CWF hoped to unite. For instance, Child Evangelism,

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120 Clyde Smith to HJT, June 19, 1939. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 1, Folder 18), BGCA; Taylor, 48.
Gwendolin Armour’s group, received $82.06 for ministry to African-American children “on Chicago’s northside.” $550.00 went to Taylor Missions, run by Taylor’s father, Frank, for summer Vacation Bible School in Pickford. Two American missionaries in Argentina each earned $22.50 per month, a total of $450, for their “fine job in evangelizing both the peasants and the high government and local city officials.”121

Earth-shaking investments, these were not. However, they showed the range of Taylor’s plans to make CWF influence the future of conservative evangelicalism as a civic force. The next chapter will trace CWF’s impact on the formation of the National Association of Evangelicals, as Taylor joined other evangelical business men to finance and steer what would become the flagship of fundamentalism. But first, it is crucial to understand that CWF’s concurrent projects gave Taylor his stature. Whereas LeTourneau outsourced the LeTourneau Evangelistic Foundation to Harold Strathearn, giving its projects a haphazard feel, Taylor personally selected his chief beneficiaries based on their potential to evangelize America over the long term. By 1948, his philanthropic web embraced Christian publishing, work-study scholarships for students at evangelical colleges and seminaries, the conservative high school ministry Young Life, the YMCA’s high school group Hi-Y (focusing on good conduct and citizenship, not religion; Taylor wrote six commissioned pamphlets on subjects such as “Time” and “Friends”), Fuller Theological Seminary, support for missionaries worldwide, and a stream of smaller projects such as “rural evangelism” in Kentucky.122 A close look at Taylor’s and CWF’s

121 Robert Walker, “Report of Activities of the Christian Workers Foundation, July 1, 1940 - June 30, 1941,” Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 11, Folder 1), BGCA.

122 On Taylor’s pivotal role in Young Life, which follows the same pattern as his dominance in IVCF – identifying a gifted religious entrepreneur and not only funding, but collaborating (or commandeering) his vision – see David B. Hunsicker, “The Rise of the PARACHURCH MOVEMENT in American Protestant Christianity During the 1930s and 1940s: A Detailed Study of the Beginnings of the Navigators, Young
most famous legacy, the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, establishes a pattern that would hold from the northside of Chicago to the NAE. Taylor and other business men were not merely check-writers for religious enterprises, but active and authoritative participants.123

CWF cannot be studied apart from the context of World War II and the evangelical dreams the war evoked. For centuries, white U.S. evangelicals had worked toward a “Christian America” and, by extension, a Christian world. They partnered in domestic and overseas missions with Anglophone allies from Canada, Great Britain, New Zealand and Australia, advancing an Anglo-Saxon hegemony that imposed “civilized” politics, culture, language, and religion on dark-skinned, Catholic, or heathen aliens. By 1942, when wartime rationing postponed the Charles Fuller revival, Anglophone evangelical leaders saw a geopolitical window opening to invade other lands with the gospel on an unprecedented scale. Allied victory, with America at the forefront, would open the borders of backslidden Europe and unevangelized Asia and Africa. World revival suddenly seemed within reach. As in World War I, conservative evangelicals’ triumphalism encouraged a measure of internal unity and politically aligned them with the majority of Americans.124

Life, and Youth for Christ International (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1998), 283-307. Taylor also supported the California-based Navigators, which ministered principally to servicemen, and Youth for Christ (respectively, Judy Carlson to HJT, September 6, 1946 ((Collection 20, Box 1, Folder 3)), Papers of HJT, BGCA; Hunsicker, 174). For Hi-Y, see Robert Walker, “Report of Activities of the Christian Workers Foundation, 7/1/40-7/3/40,” 2, Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Folder 11, Box 1), BGCA. For Fuller Theological Seminary, see HJT to Charles Fuller, Dec. 19, 1944, Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 33, Folder 19), BGCA. For the Kentucky mission, see Nellie DeWar to Paul Westburg, July 27, 1939, Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 55, Folder 11).

CWF groomed pious, yet worldly men (and a few women) to market the gospel at home and abroad with the efficiency of executives a multinational corporation. Taylor’s top-down philosophy of evangelism, culling the best and the brightest to deliver the message to the masses, continued to bear financial and spiritual fruit. The philanthropy’s 1945-46 annual report called the “phenomenal growth” of its beneficiaries “outgrowths of a wartime society – or at least the Christian’s attempt to meet the challenge of a wartime society.” Success hinged on “willingness…to adapt [organizational] working policy to the needs of the field.” It went without saying that rapid, flexible, consumer-oriented adaptation was also the wartime secret to the survival of businesses like Club Aluminum.125 Meanwhile, two phrases were on evangelical leaders’ lips, stationery, and banners: “the evangelization of the world in this generation,” which had been the World War I “watchword” of the missionary Student Christian Movement, and, more succinctly, “world vision.”126

The Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship flourished during and after the war. According to the biographer of C. Stacey Woods, the IVCF’s North American leader, “[i]t would be difficult to overestimate the significance of Herbert J. Taylor” in establishing the group in the United States.127 Taylor’s passion for campus Christianity stemmed from his experience with the Y.M.C.A. at Northwestern in the teens. By then, however, many conservative Protestants viewed the Y as a cesspool of modernism and longed for alternatives. In 1924, English medical student Douglas Johnson founded the

IVCF as an orthodox challenge to the Oxford Movement in the Church of England, which he felt emphasized personal experience over scripture. Within fifteen years, there was a chapter on almost every campus, and as of 1929, representatives had planted chapters the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia.128 For members, the group’s appeal lay in its combination of subcultural defiance and public witness; as in evangelicalism at large, the subculture provided the emotional and intellectual support they needed to speak up to scoffers.129 ICVF students banded together in prayer, Bible study, and missionary work, relishing their visibility in “secular” colleges and universities. Taylor heard about the group in 1940 from CWF scholarship winner and Young Life worker Ted Benson, a Wheatonite who knew the alumni in charge of the North American effort. C. Stacey Woods, an Australian, had studied at Wheaton and Dallas Theological Seminary in the early 1930s and now ran the Canadian IVCF. Charles “Charlie” Troutman, Jr., the American son of a Wheaton trustee, was his closest colleague. Yet despite their recruiting efforts, IVCF had not caught on in the U.S. In Benson’s view, it was a perfect test case for CWF’s goal to nurture highly educated, professional-class evangelical leaders.

To say Taylor was “sold” is an understatement. He contacted Woods and asked to sit in on a Canadian IVCF board meeting and meet with students. Convinced that he was witnessing a work of the Holy Spirit, Taylor ordered CWF to send monthly donations and used the funding as leverage to join the Canadian board. His real goal was to persuade


129 Sociologist Christian Smith’s theory of “sacred umbrellas” is useful here. They describe “small, portable, accessible relational worlds – religious reference groups – ‘under’ which…beliefs can make complete sense.” These subcultural shelters enable religious people to encounter difference without jeopardizing their faith. Smith, American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 106.
Stacey Woods to try again in the U.S. By April of 1940, thanks to Woods’ CWF-financed recruiting trips back and forth over the border, twenty-two American IVCF chapters had formed, some on prestigious “secular” sites such as Swarthmore, Johns Hopkins, the University of Chicago, and the University of Michigan. The Canadian Executive Committee, unable to stop the juggernaut after Canada entered the war and as the draft decimated its ranks, agreed to a three-year plan to house the skeleton leadership of IVCF-USA in the CWF office, with Woods commuting from Toronto. Like all of CWF’s projects, IVCF-USA could count on substantial, but decreasing, investments from the philanthropy, giving it time to stand on its own or fail: $5000 in 1940 (a breathtaking proposition, considering that the 1939 U.S. budget was $6000), $3000 from 1941-42, and $2000 from 1942-43. Chapters sprung up everywhere from Texas to the Ivy League. In September, 1941, the Canadian board yielded to Taylor and surrendered Woods full-time to IVCF-USA. His family had barely settled in their Wheaton home when Pearl Harbor transformed the evangelistic landscape. Death and hell were no longer abstract, and students flocked both to IVCF’s fundamentalist message and the relationships they could forge with fellow Christians. By 1945, IVCF covered a broad swath of the United States and sent its first missionaries to colleges in Latin America. In August, 1947, another business man Taylor had recruited to the ICVF board, John Bolten, Sr., hosted the Harvard conference that brought into being the International Federation of Evangelical Students. Like IVCF, the IFES started in Oxford and added Anglophone and European countries. Its world vision matched Taylor’s own: “to give the utmost possible assistance

130 During the 1939-40 school year, there were 22 IVCF chapters in the United States. 9 were in Washington or Oregon, and 8 were in Chicago or the upper Midwest. “List of United States Colleges and Universities in Which Fellowship Groups Were Officially Meeting at Close of Year 1939-40,” Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 60, Folder 24), BGCA.

131 Ibid., 86-89, 99-103.
to evangelical students…in the discharge of the divinely appointed task of carrying the Gospel of Christ into all the universities of the world.”

Taylor’s commitment to IVCF went well beyond fitting it into the CWF budget. He served as Chairman of the United States board from the start, and in his mild yet determined way, exercised the position’s power. Stacey Woods later described him as “a close friend, a wise counselor, but never a dictator.” Wooing industrialist and lay theologian J.F. Strombeck to the board, he floated the possibility of having IVCF publish Strombeck’s *So Great Salvation* (“excellent and timely…I agree with practically everything you said”) “to secure wide distribution.” Stacey Woods ran the draft of the IVCF-USA constitution by Taylor before proposing it officially. While Taylor announced that he would be “glad to recommend” the document to the other directors, he offered some business man’s advice. First, every chapter needed to brand itself as affiliated with IVCF, or “we are losing something in the way of strengthening the national and international unity….and also in furthering the bond” between individual members of different chapters. Second, he “suggest[ed]” a candidate for Treasurer who happened to be on the committee of CWF’s publishing arm, Best Seller Publicity. He also “hope[d]” that lawyer Donald Fleming “will be one of the two Canadian Board members selected to serve on the American Board.” Finally, Taylor “would appreciate” it if Woods reviewed the Canadian IVCF’s long list of prominent evangelical endorsers and pared it down to the men who were really involved. “As you know, I am not much given to window dressing,” he explained, “suggest[ing]” that American references be required to “take an

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132 “The International Fellowship of Evangelical Students,” n.d., Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 60, Folder 29), BGCA.

133 MacLeod, 80.

134 HJT to J.F. Stormbeck, September 24, 1940, Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 12, Folder 6), BGCA.
active part in promotion of Inter-Varsity, and to give of their time and influence.” Except for the Treasurer, who apparently turned the job down, Taylor got his way on every count.\textsuperscript{135}

If CWF and its associated projects were Taylor’s way of putting Club Aluminum’s profits into God’s work, his wartime radio program, \textit{Club Time}, turned God’s work into profits. For fifteen minutes a day in Chicago, then weekly nationwide, psalms and hymns would frame an advertisement for Club Aluminum products. Although he would never hitch evangelicalism to his corporate identity with the panache of an R.G. LeTourneau, Taylor aimed for both at the price of one. By contrast with CWF, which Taylor was simultaneously micromanaging, \textit{Club Time} followed the Four-Way Test, Rotary, and commercial logic in airbrushing its Christian message to an inoffensive sheen. Yet it also provided a platform for fundamentalist singer George Beverly Shea. Already famous within the subculture when Taylor tapped him for \textit{Club Time}, Shea became an instrumental figure in the Youth for Christ movement – all on Club Aluminum’s dime. Even when he began to sing at Billy Graham’s rallies in the late 1940s and early 1950s, he remained on Taylor’s payroll. A former business man himself, Shea’s sojourn with Club Aluminum both Christianized commerce and commercialized Christianity.

When Taylor adopted religious radio as an advertising format in 1944, he was uncharacteristically behind the times. Since the early 1920s, when preachers Aimee Semple McPherson and Paul Rader seized on the new medium’s potential to reach thousands of people in their homes, conservative evangelicals had flocked to radio as a

\textsuperscript{135} HJT to Stacey Woods, July 1, 1941, Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 60, Folder 24), BGCA; MacLeod, 60.
tool for mass proselytizing. Likewise, business executives recognized radio’s advertising potential, and some incorporated Christianity or generic “faith” into their sales pitch. Whether on local stations with limited range or the coveted national networks, religious shows generally ran fifteen minutes, Monday through Friday, and included a lengthy promotion from the sponsor. From 1936-46, General Electric President Charles B. Wilson personally selected the hymns that ended “Hour of Charm,” G.E.’s Sunday broadcasts on NBC. In 1940, cereal company General Mills spun off “Hymns of All Churches,” which had also debuted in 1936, and replaced a long-running soap opera with “Light of the World.” A Union Theological Seminary professor, a Jesuit priest, and a rabbi served as consultants to the biblical melodrama. (Eve after the Fall: “Yes, I know…It’s my fault we’re here now instead of in the Garden of Eden…but we have each other, Adam.”)

While Taylor’s papers do not indicate why he created “Club Time,” several factors likely came into play. He had divided his time between Chicago and Washington as a “dollar-a-year man” in Maurice Karker’s Price Adjustment Board during 1942 and 1943, and his resignation meant he was no longer an absentee CEO. The easing of government restrictions on the production of raw materials revived Club Aluminum’s

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136 Hangen, 21-22, 37-111.


retail business, which the company desperately needed to publicize. Taylor’s work with Charles Fuller had impressed on him the widespread appeal of a broadcast combining hymns, Bible verses, uplifting anecdotes, and wartime patriotism. Because the National Association of Evangelicals had been born in conflict with mainline Protestants over radio licensing, he may have wished to take a stand in the culture war over the airwaves. The Four-Way Test, the Christian Workers Foundation, and Taylor’s growing prominence as a layman meant that, at least among evangelicals, Club Aluminum was already “Christian” by association. “Club Time’s” inoffensive, cautiously ecumenical uplift – Fuller Lite – exploited this reputation for sales purposes and tried to serve God selflessly at the same time. It was a difficult and sometimes cynical balancing act, but pairing business and religion benefited both Club Aluminum and the increasingly mobilized white evangelical community.

*Club Time* began as a local-access program on Chicagoland station WLW, and Taylor ensured a loyal fundamentalist following by making a superb casting choice. Thirty-six year old George Beverly Shea, the Canadian-born son of a Methodist minister, shared Taylor’s gift for identifying the movements that would shape evangelicalism’s future. Indeed, he was already crafting his own legend. Too poor to complete his degree at a Christian college in New York, he joined the Mutual Insurance Company in 1929 and developed a singing career on the side. Craggily handsome with an extraordinary baritone, Shea easily attracted the support of evangelical business men during the 1930s. Erling C. Olsen, an investment consultant, early NAE backer, and lay theologian, hired Shea to sing on his New York area broadcast “Meditations on the Psalms.” In 1939, Moody Bible Institute President Will Houghton offered Shea a full-time administrative

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139 Heidebrecht, 44.
job at WMBI. Shea’s duties included performing every morning on “Hymns from the Chapel” and on Houghton’s weekly dispatch, “Let’s Go Back to the Bible,” which gave him a popular fan base. One admirer, freshly-minted pastor Billy Graham, hired Shea to anchor “Songs from the Night,” a radio program Graham had inherited from manufacturer William Erny and Erny’s pastor, Torrey Johnson.¹⁴⁰ This marked the beginning of Shea’s most famous collaboration; by the end of the decade, he and Graham would be lifelong partners in the latter’s famous “crusades.”¹⁴¹

Of course, when Shea met Graham in 1943, neither man knew that they would go on to lead an evangelical empire that would dwarf Moody, Sunday, and Finney’s. Nor did they work closely together outside of “Songs from the Night.” But they stayed in the same evangelical orbit by focusing on a challenge dear to Herb Taylor’s heart: unsaved, delinquent, and otherwise imperiled youth. In 1942, Shea had requested a leave of absence from WMBI to tour with Jack Wyrtzen, another former insurance man. Wyrtzen’s Saturday night rallies in Times Square offered a model for reaching servicemen, defense workers, and other wartime migrants to cities filled with temptations. In 1944, Shea was instrumental in pressuring Torrey Johnson to organize Youth for Christ in Chicago.¹⁴² Taylor put Johnson in touch with local Christian business men and used his radio connections to get the preacher a slot on, of all stations, WFCL,

¹⁴⁰ Mel Larson, Young Man on Fire: The Story of Torrey Johnson and Youth for Christ (Chicago: Youth Publications, 1945), 65.


¹⁴² Mel Larsen, Young Man on Fire: The Story of Torrey Johnson and Youth for Christ (Chicago: Youth Publications, 1945), 80-81.
the “Voice of Labor” in Chicago.\(^{143}\) Shea added the Youth for Christ circuit to his lengthening list of appearances.

As a performer, however, Shea served two masters: God and Club Aluminum. Taylor seems to have decided on a two-pronged advertising strategy for *Club Time*. First, he hoped to appeal to as many radio listeners as possible by being as soothing and inclusive as Wyrtzen was harsh and uncompromising. Second, he believed that product placement would be most effective with people who already trusted him or Shea, Chicago’s conservative evangelicals. The promotional campaign for “Club Time,” itself a promotional campaign, took place in churches, at Youth for Christ gatherings, and virtually anywhere else Beverly Shea’s agency booked him. The arrangement was simple. Upon soliciting or receiving an invitation from a church in WLW’s area, Shea waived his usual payment, explaining that Club Aluminum was his sponsor. He asked that the pastor mention the company in the bulletin, at minimum, and hinted that a word of thanks from the pulpit would be especially welcome. Since a Beverly Shea concert was almost certain to raise church attendance and draw coveted visitors, the pastor was delighted to oblige.\(^{144}\) These off-the-air concerts were “Club Time’s” bread and butter.

Shea’s letters to Taylor reporting on his *Club Time* engagements illustrate the mutually beneficial arrangement. A January 1945 appearance at the Oak Park Avenue Baptist Church in a Chicago suburb represented a triumph of business and religious networking. Taylor discussed *Club Time* with the pastor, who wrote an invitation to Shea to sing at a Sunday morning service, the prime-time slot for congregational marketing.

\(^{143}\) Hunsicker, 371-74.

\(^{144}\) Beverly Shea to Robert Walker, March 27, 1945. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 13, Folder 1), BGCA.
“[J]ust a few empty seats in the back room” kept the two hundred-strong church from filling to capacity. The preacher “spoke of Club Time on two occasions in the service, making mention of the sponsorship and the appreciation of his people for the daily broadcast.” At the end, “it seemed like most of the congregation came forward to greet us.”145 The next week, “there was no alternative [but] to accept [an] evening engagement” at a nearby Presbyterian church. Still, the place was packed: “a 50% increase in attendance,” according to the assistant minister, who estimated the crowd at three hundred.146 Youth for Christ’s Torrey Johnson pulled out all the stops at a Saturday night rally with thirty-five hundred present and a live broadcast. “Through the goodness of his heart, without a word from me,” he “had the song leader, on the air, mention Club Time, ‘at 1:15 each day,’ etc.” Later, “Torrey asked for a show of hands from those who had never written to a gospel program…Then he very kindly asked that these and others write in a note to Club Time, if they enjoy the program and its being on the air. So, that was a fine little bit of ‘promotion.’”

Listener letters were key to Taylor and his team’s evaluation of “Club Time’s” cost-effectiveness. Monthly charts, which grew more detailed over time, noted the date a letter was written; the name and address of the writer; to whom the letter was addressed (Shea, Club Aluminum, or, very occasionally, Taylor); “comments”; song requests; and

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145 Beverly Shea to Herbert J. Taylor, January 15, 1945. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 13, Folder 1), BGCA.

146 Beverly Shea to Robert Walker, January 22, 1945. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 13, Folder 1), BGCA.
whether the author had included another promotion, such as box tops or pre-stamped envelopes to the company.\footnote{\textsuperscript{147}}

The addressee was important because it indicated whether the writer associated the program with Shea, a known quantity from WMBI, or had absorbed Club Aluminum’s branding. “Comments” served the same purpose, showing at a glance which letters only mentioned Shea, and which also referred to Club Aluminum or, better yet, specific products. “My prayer is that the program may continue well into the future,” wrote Mrs. F.O. Safstrom of Elmhurst, Illinois to the Club Aluminum Product Company. The stenographer summarized the rest of the letter as: “Likes CAC [a brand-name pan]; works well on aluminum part of burners. Also likes CSP [another company product]. Says she will tell friends about the product and broadcast.”\footnote{\textsuperscript{148}} Such fans implicitly agreed that a Christian program obliterated any distinction between evangelism and advertising.

The overwhelming majority of writers, like Mrs. Safstrom, were women; housewives were more likely than their husbands both to buy Club products and listen to afternoon radio.\footnote{\textsuperscript{149}} Not all, however, felt comfortable intermingling faith and commerce. Mrs. Edith Johnson of Melrose Park angrily summarized a chronic Club Time protest: “My favorite hymn singer is on only 15 minutes a day, and seems like ten minutes are wasted in advertising.” She signed it, “Disgusted (Disgusted?)” Shea, who had an image

\footnotetext{\textsuperscript{147}}\textsuperscript{147} “Returns from ‘Club Time’ Radio Program,” n.d. (week of June 14-21, 1944). Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 13, Folder 1), BGCA.

\footnotetext{\textsuperscript{148}}\textsuperscript{148} “Returns from ‘Club Time’ Radio Program,” n.d. (July 15-August 2, 1944). Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 13, Folder 1), BGCA.

\footnotetext{\textsuperscript{149}}\textsuperscript{149} George F. Drake to Robert Walker, n.d.. A survey of “Hymns of All Churches” listeners found the audience to be “practically identical to other daytime programs…women between the ages of 35 and 50 years, who are housewives with families. Otherwise it would never pay them to continue the program, advertising breakfast foods, cake flour, and other foods.” Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 8, Folder 17), BGCA.
as an independent Christian singer to protect, was genuinely horrified to be perceived as Club Aluminum’s mouthpiece rather than God’s. Once, an over-obliging pastor sang the praises of Club Aluminum’s from the pulpit and asked Shea to elaborate. Shea leaped to his feet and clarified that he had come “‘to sing the grand old hymns, but not to speak of my sponsor’s product.’…There was a rather happy burst of smiles and a sort of feeling of relief, perhaps.”\(^{150}\) The awkward moment underscored the skepticism that evangelical business men courted in claiming to link God and Mammon. Uniting God and Caesar was far less controversial. Robert Walker and Shea infused the daily scripts with wartime patriotism, from the closing song “God Bless Our Boys” to “human interest” stories about wounded GI’s who took comfort in hearing their favorite hymns.\(^{151}\)

Taylor, Walker, and Shea’s audience-building strategies paid off in October of 1945, when the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) bought Club Time from WLW and transformed it into a nationwide broadcast. It would air weekly, not daily, showcasing the crisp production and coordinated advertising that only a network could provide. Nevertheless, it retained a certain homegrown charm. Taylor’s daughter Beverly joined the staff as a “dramatic reader,” and Taylor all but ordered employees to recruit new listeners. In a memo to “All Company Personnel,” Taylor framed the rechristened “Club Time – For Thy Good Cheer,” as the “best” way to “interpret the 4 Way Test” as World War II drew to a close. “[S]urely the greatest service that an individual or a corporation can render its nation is spiritual and moral influence of a constructive nature.” He quoted General Douglas MacArthur’s statement about the atomic age after

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150 Shea to Walker, March 27, 1945, op cit.

151 Beverly Shea to Robert Walker, January 22, 1945. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 13, Folder 1); Shea to Walker, July 31, 1945, and “Club Time, Tuesday, August 7, 1945.” Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 15, Folder 12), BGCA.
Japan’s surrender: “The problem basically is theological…[Peace] must be of the spirit if we are to save the flesh.”152 “Club Time’s” ABC debut would be piped through the office. “Meanwhile, of course, we shall all want to tell our friends about the program.” Taylor listed all twenty-five cities, stations, and times, and explained that commercials would at first be brief, so as not to alienate new listeners. “Club Aluminum Hammercraft Cookware, Club Glass Cookware, and our household cleaners and polishes” soon would underwrite the corporation’s spiritual and moral influence.153

“Club Time – for Thy Good Cheer” hit its stride in 1946, when the promotional team devised a feature called “Favorite Hymns of Famous People.” As George F. Drake, the chief advertiser, boasted to the Club Aluminum Sales Conference, they outsmarted bigger programs who could pay “big-name guest stars” by “writing to famous people, and asking them to let us feature their favorite hymns” for free.154 In the heightened religious climate following the war, it was a brilliant stroke. Public figures could appear pious and accessible without any work, and Club Time could imply support from luminaries outside the conservative evangelical firmament. Fundamentalists already got more than their share of airtime, with Shea’s base following him from WLW as it had from WMBI. For example, Olympic runner Gil Dodds and pilot Eddie Rickenbacher lent their fame to Youth for Christ, the Inter-Varsity Fellowship, and other Taylor-supported projects. Homer Rodeheaver, hardly a household name, had been evangelist Billy Sunday’s


153 Taylor to All Company Personnel, ibid.

154 George F. Drake, “Talk Delivered Before Club Aluminum Sales Conference,” December 17, 1945. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 8, Folder 19), BGCA.
accompanist and helped run Sunday’s fundamentalist camp and conference center at Winona Lake in Indiana. By including them, Club Time not only nodded to fellow believers, but stamped evangelicals as All-American while ratings more than doubled.

Marquee names came from politics and popular culture. Much like Taylor’s Four-Way Test, the list gestured toward Protestant-Catholic-Jew ecumenism while remaining overwhelmingly Protestant. By early 1947, Club Time had played the favorite hymns of J. Edgar Hoover, Fiorello LaGuardia, Lionel Barrymore (who chose a Jewish song), Ronald Coleman, Catholic actress Irene Dunne (“Mother Dear, O Pray for Me”), General Omar N. Bradley, Gen. John J. Pershing, Supreme Court Chief Justice Fred Vinsen, Wendell Wilkie, Rotary International President R.C. Hedke (no doubt selected by Taylor), and author Dorothy Dix. Shea told the Chicago Sunday Times that only two people had turned Club Time down: President Harry Truman, who diplomatically claimed that he “could not single out any one hymn,” and United Nations Secretary General Trygvie Lie, who demurred that his favorites were Norwegian. ABC affiliates seized the opportunity to solicit listener feedback and cement loyalty to the show. “Maybe You’ll Hear Your Favorite Hymn!” As before, fans responded, submitting hymn requests, questions

155 n.a “The Story Behind the ‘Favorite Hymn’ Promotion,” n.d. (1947). Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 10, Folder 2), BGCA.

156 Drake, op cit.

157 “The Story Behind the ‘Favorite Hymns’ Promotion” and “Schedule of Famous People…,” op cit.; “Listening in with Don Foster,” Chicago Sunday Times, April 27, 1947, 47.

158 Chuck Doty to George T. Drake, n.d., newspaper clipping of Club Time ad. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 10, Folder 12), BGCA.
about Club Aluminum products, and queries for Club-authored promotions such as “The Beatitudes of the Housewife.”

Listeners might have been less enthusiastic if they saw the charts, ratings graphs, and profit-loss analyses that consumed Club Aluminum and ABC in their discussions of the show. In January of 1947, Robert Walker wrote to the advertising manager of General Mills about “Light of the World” and “Hymns of All Churches.” He asked for “a frank statement evaluating… the worth of the show[s] to you as a commercial advertiser” and, more generally, “what you think of ‘religion’ as a media by which to reach the general public.” The response: “The good will created for General Mills… is immeasurable,” and the audience “particularly loyal” by comparison to higher-rated programs. “The complaints regarding the commercial sponsorship… are almost negligible.” The same month, the Vice President of ABC congratulated Taylor on reaching an audience of close to three million. “I’m sure I don’t need to call your attention to the fact that you have now built up and established an equity in ‘Club Time’ which makes it a highly valuable property.”

Taylor, however, never wavered in his conviction that his “highly valuable property” served God as well as Mammon. Tucked in one of his files is a tiny clipping from Printer’s Ink, glued to a blank page of his advertising company’s stationery. The

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159 Mrs. Wilhelmina Kraus to Club Aluminum Products of the Housewife, March 17, 1947. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 6, Folder 26), Archives of the Billy Graham Center, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois.

160 Robert Walker to Advertising Manager, January 15, 1947. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 15, Folder 26), BGCA.

161 Edward G. Smith to Robert Walker, January 27, 1947. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 15, Folder 26), BGCA.

162 E.R. Borroff to HJT, January 20, 1947. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 6, Folder 3), BGCA.
unnamed author describes the outrage of “the Missus” upon hearing an “oily announcer” tell “all to go to church – the whole family – if you don’t know where a church is, ask your Sunoco dealer.” He sneers, “On the way to church, stop and get a thankful of Sunoco, the righteous gasoline.” Taylor comments, “This is the sort of thing we have studiously avoided on Club Time. We have successfully steered away from: (1) self-righteousness (2) preaching (3) sectarianism (4) commercialism.” It was important to Taylor that Club Aluminum not tell people to go to church, not only because he couldn’t afford to alienate non-churchgoers, but because he believed that church was bigger than business. Similarly, church was bigger than “sects,” the foes of ecumenical evangelicalism. “Commercialism” did not include dropping the company name in bulletins and from pulpits, as long as he could rationalize that the preacher was Club Aluminum’s willing evangelist. Nor did it include interrupting hymns with advertisements, or even the Club Time introduction, which was suspiciously close to the church of Sunoco: “‘Club Time’…a coast to coast program of best loved hymns…presented to you in friendship by the Club Aluminum Products Company of Chicago!”

For Taylor, “commercialism” meant cynicism. It meant using God instead of allowing God to use him. Because being God’s vessel set him apart as a Christian business man from other business men, Club Time must ultimately serve God. This assumption blinded Taylor to his resemblance to the “oily announcer,” but it bound him to the iron sense of propriety on one hand and evangelical calling on the other that he

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163 Printer’s Ink, September 19, 1947,” dated in Taylor’s handwriting with typed comments above. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 10, Folder 2), BGCA.

164 “‘Club Time’ (For Thy Good Cheer),” April 7, 1947. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 6, Folder 3), BGCA.
integrated more deftly in the CWF. Still, *Club Time* and CWF had one goal in common: bringing conservative Protestantism into the public sphere, from Shea’s stardom to IVCF chapters in which future evangelical leaders mapped out plans for world revival. As the founding treasurer of the National Association of Evangelicals, which aimed for revival by uniting fundamentalists as a political and cultural interest group, Taylor was one of many business men to build and fund a fragile coalition that mapped the contours and became the voice of an evangelical mainstream.
Chapter 4

“Cooperation Without Compromise”: Business Men and the National Association of Evangelicals

Newspaper headlines on April 7, 1942, screamed of war and the business of war. Daily updates dripped from the front. “Paris District Bombed Again.”1 “Nazis Over Malta in Big-Scale Air Raid.”2 “MacArthur Hailed as Symbol of Spirit That’ll Beat Japs.”3 The “Reds,” as many Americans still called their Soviet allies, were “Stress[ing] Maximum Action and Production” from their socialized workforce.4 Americans, the coverage suggested, could outperform them with simple Yankee ingenuity. “U.S. ‘Hustle’ in Australia Builds Base in 12 Hours,” the Associated Press bragged.5 Yet this, too, was state-sponsored enterprise. Transnational “U.S. ‘hustle’” – which, in Australia, almost certainly relied on LeTourneau equipment – united the Roosevelt administration with previously hostile business sectors.6 Because national survival depended on the

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6 It should be emphasized that Roosevelt’s “corporate liberal” allies in the 1930s laid the groundwork by supporting the New Deal, smoothing its radical edges, and making business “hustle” indispensable to mobilization for war. See Richard E. Holl, From the Boardroom to the War Room (Rochester: University
military economy, conservative business interests accepted rationing, price controls, and other temporary regulations in exchange for long-term leverage against the New Deal.  

Headlines hinted at private industry’s formidable bargaining power. “Boeing Bombers Get Credit for Army Successes.”8 “[Official] Asks ‘Commandos’ to Spur Business…Stresses Need for Making Every Possible Weapon Now.”9 In this corporation-friendly climate, management was scoring political and public relations victories against labor. Overruling the National Labor Relations Board and foreshadowing bitter conflicts to come, the Supreme Court defined a “Strike Aboard Ship [As] Mutiny Even if It Is in Port.”10

Striking workers were not the only enemy within, and the war’s social transformations spilled beyond the sphere of government and business. Already tenuous lines between “public” and “private” life – politics versus the home, law versus personal liberty, male versus female – blurred almost to invisibility. Four months to the day after Pearl Harbor, the Army forced the first Japanese and Japanese-Americans from their San
Francisco homes to an internment camp. A group after Herbert J. Taylor’s heart, the Golden Rule Foundation, selected a heroine for the era of Rosie the Riveter: “American Mother of ’42 Has 13 Children and Job.” Overseas, soldiers facing death practiced raw religion that no one could dismiss as women’s, or womanly, affectation. “[Easter] Services on Bataan Most Impressive,” the New York Times wrote. As Japanese planes strafed the front lines, soldiers with guns at the ready admitted that this truncated outdoor communion was the first time they had attended church in years.

It was in this context that readers of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch came across the front-page headline “Church Group Warns U.S. Against Totalitarianism,” continued inside with, “Fears Radicals in Government.” The story described the first convention of a new group, the Temporary Committee for United Action Among Evangelicals (hereafter “United Action”). Boston preacher Harold J. Ockenga, in an otherwise revivalistic speech, condemned Roosevelt’s “managerial revolution” as one cause of the “break-up of the moral fiber of the nation.” William Ward Ayer, pastor of a leading fundamentalist church in New York City, told the assembly of 300 that Americans were “directed and governed by members of bureaus which were not a part of our original

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14 “Church Group Warns Against Totalitarianism,” St. Louis Post-Dispatch, April 7, 1942. Scrapbook of J. Elwin Wright (Collection 565), BGCA.

15 The Post-Dispatch did not cover Ockenga, but referred to “speakers,” plural, concerned about totalitarianism. The quote is in Carpenter, 147.
democratic system,” in which “men, not elected by the people, are assuming dictatorship of the people.” He warned, “We are living in an age of regimentation. Everyone is being counted, labeled, signed, classified. We may be sure religion will not escape;” especially given communist advances within the American government. Because “[t]he state is demanding that every force, educational, social and economic, shall be governmentally controlled,” evangelicals must fight back. “If we unite, we might be able to save the American democracy of our forefathers.”16 Only evangelicals resisted absorption into Roosevelt’s mechanistic, anonymous state. A faithful remnant in a fallen land, they must guard the covenant.

“If we unite” brought Ayers to the purpose of the conference, the political salience of which was more subtle than the Post-Dispatch headlines implied. In the fall of 1941, competing factions within conservative evangelicalism announced their intention to organize a national force for spiritual revival. One of them, United Action, was meeting in St. Louis to publicize its goals and begin setting up a formal structure; its leaders included Herbert J. Taylor. It denounced what it perceived as an unholy alliance between the federal government and the Federal Council of Churches (FCC), a modernist body representing most mainline denominations that claimed to lobby on behalf of all American Protestants. United Action wanted evangelicals to enjoy the same benefits that the Roosevelt bureaucracy gave the FCC: network radio time, on which modernists held a

monopoly, and expedited passports instead of months of hassle for missionaries unaffiliated with the FCC. Both issues cut to the core of the evangelical mission to spread the gospel as widely as possible, and highlighted the entanglement of the New Deal state in non-economic aspects of American life. Also in St. Louis was United Action’s evangelical antagonist, the American Council of Christian Churches, which agreed with the platform, but held stricter membership standards. United Action made a point of including as many evangelicals as possible, including those languishing in conservative denominations or churches that belonged to the FCC. The American Council, by contrast, required its adherents to sever all FCC ties. The standoff was a classic fundamentalist confrontation between ecumenists and purists, and it did not bode well for the unity all professed to want.

In part, the Post-Dispatch’s coverage emphasized wartime politics because few non-evangelicals could read between the lines of the internecine battle over how to revive America. However, they accurately reflected the anti-New Deal politics imbedded in evangelical fears of “totalitarianism,” which flowed into and complicated the wartime politics of “unity.” After all, Ayers’ paeans to democracy and collective responsibility could have come from a presidential fireside chat. United Action’s purpose, according to founder J. Elwin Wright, was “to find common ground upon which we may stand in our fight against evil forces, to provide protective measures against the dictatorships of either government or ecclesiastical combinations,” and “to seek ways and means of carrying on


for Christ unitedly and actively, but with freedom of action” for constituents.\(^{19}\)

Translated, “we” meant evangelicals of Wright’s ecumenical stripe, not the American Council’s separatists. “Government or ecclesiastical combinations” alluded to the New Deal state, the Catholic Church, and the FCC. “Freedom of action” signaled Wright’s fealty to conservative Protestant federalism. Evangelicalism’s voluntary association of diverse faith communities, each accountable only to God and conscience, rebuked the alleged dictatorships of Catholicism and the FCC. By implication, the American Council was arrogantly blocking a “spiritual union” of Christians on narrow-minded technical grounds.\(^{20}\) Wright and his colleagues devoted most of the conference to arguing that “united action” on their expansive terms was not only doctrinally sound, but pragmatically necessary, if evangelicals were serious about strength in numbers.

For all its disparagement of the American Council’s elitism, United Action viewed the non-evangelicals it eventually hoped to reach with the alarmist condescension of “mass society” theorists. Wright’s “we” relegated not just the American Council, but most of America, to the democracy-threatening ranks of the tyrannical or malleable. In 1939, leftist commentator Dwight Macdonald accused Stalin of “conditioning” the “masses” to appreciate superficial and soul-degrading art.\(^{21}\) Austrian conservative Fredrich Hayek countered that socialists like Macdonald were dragging the masses down

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\(^{19}\) “Church Group Warns Against Totalitarianism.”

\(^{20}\) J. Elwin Wright, “Report of the Promotional Director,” *United We Stand: A Report of the Constitutional Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals*, May 3-6, 1943, 8. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 20), BGCA.

Hammond

God’s Business Men, Chapter 4

The Road to Serfdom with planned economies like the New Deal. Business men pursuing mass markets had a sunnier view of mass manipulation, with Depression-era advertisers “want[ing] to exercise moral leadership” over fickle consumers. These strange bedfellows shared one conviction with each other and United Action: they, the enlightened, must protect democracy from the demos.

Shortly after St. Louis, United Action one-upped the American Council by renaming itself the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). The clerical leaders wanted a business man to be treasurer, but their first choice bowed out. Wright called Herb Taylor, whom he and radio evangelist Charles Fuller had visited at home to recruit to United Action. Taylor accepted the position and instantly became the most powerful layman in the overwhelmingly clerical NAE. For his six years as treasurer and many more on the board, he and a growing cadre of business men would play key roles in making NAE a “clearing house for evangelical activities…with a front in relation to government.” In 1942, however, it was by no means obvious that NAE would survive its infancy, let alone become an influential public voice for some 40 denominations representing 45,000 churches by 2009. Flush with the nationalizing and internationalizing impulses of wartime America, J. Elwin Wright dreamed big. He


24 The full name was originally National Association of Evangelicals for United Action.

25 J. Elwin Wright to Herbert J. Taylor (hereafter HJT), Nov. 24, 1941. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 11, Folder 22), BGCA; “Minutes of the Executive Committee of the National Association of Evangelicals for United Action,” May 11, 1942. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 16), BGCA.

26 Wright to HJT, Nov. 24, 1941.

imagined a conservative evangelical counterpart to the Federal Council of Churches – a vast network to advocate for “Bible-believing Christians” unrepresented by “representatives of Protestant Christianity [who] have departed from the faith of Jesus Christ.”

It was a recipe for a great awakening.

Building such a network among historically decentralized fundamentalists would be no small feat. Local, state, and federal governing authorities recognized the FCC as the voice of American Protestantism, a political equivalent to the Roman Catholic hierarchy. The specter of a papist super-church made the sheer scale of Wright’s proposal hard for some evangelicals to swallow. Fundamentalist federalism, as the Christian Business Men’s Committee International (CBMCI) and Business Men’s Evangelistic Clubs (BMEC) were also learning, valued independence of action over consensus of thought. Meanwhile, the American Council continued to lump NAE with FCC apostates and compete for members. The same regional differences that thwarted a CBMCI-BMEC alliance made NAE’s first initial stand for “Northern” more than “National.” As with the nearly bankrupt Club Aluminum in 1930, Taylor was taking on an enormous project with a minimal budget and every possibility of failure.

Once again, Taylor’s instincts about the project’s potential were sound. Business men midwifed NAE in two ways. The first was operational. Without business men’s

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28 n.d., 1942, “Policy Upon Witness,” labeled “St. Louis Meeting of Evangelicals” by HJT. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 16), BGCA.


loans, donations, and tireless fundraising, NAE would have folded in its first five years. The mercurial Wright boasted an entrepreneurial streak, but his faith in God’s provision encouraged an un-businesslike appetite for risk. Before he initiated United Action, he inherited and developed his father’s ministry and the real estate investments that sustained it. However, he was reckless with the NAE’s money when he was following the Spirit, and lost at least one close financial counselor as a result. The more even-tempered Taylor, who already had Wright’s trust as an adviser, was able to influence NAE’s long-term direction.

This influence was Taylor’s second, more visionary contribution to NAE. Wright’s ecumenical, civic-minded, and large-scale evangelicalism was what business men had been doing for years. The NAE’s ecumenism, with a lowest-common-denominator statement of faith and a preference for collective action over theological wrangling, echoed that of the CBMCI, Gideons, and BMEC. Its motto, “Cooperation Without Compromise,” came from the Navy Chaplain Corps. Taylor’s belief that evangelicals should participate in public life echoed the “service” ethos of Rotary and other business clubs. His desire for NAE to make a truly national impact paralleled his philanthropic Christian Workers Foundation (CWF), which generally snubbed local or regional evangelism. By contrast, the American Council’s decision to purge all traces of the FCC exemplified what many evangelical business men scorned as self-defeating fussiness. They modeled evangelism on the mass market, while the American Council

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31 Carpenter, 142.

was an island of the elect. Finally, as the speeches in St. Louis showed, NAE was business-friendly. In a time of war, the founders of the NAE, like millions of other Americans, linked capitalism, Christianity, and democracy as causes to fight and die for.

This chapter tells the story of NAE’s first several years from the perspective of business men. Their traditional strengths – networking, behind-the-scenes organizing, and, of course, managing money – complemented the efforts of clergy, theologians, and full-time evangelists to convince churches, denominations, and independent ministries that “cooperation without compromise” was essential to evangelicalism’s public witness. Just as significantly, business men made their interests part of NAE’s program. “Industrial chaplaincy,” or the training and placement of chaplains as a bridge from management to labor to prevent worker unrest, was a high priority at the start. Although NAE ultimately failed to institutionalize the combination of pastoral care and free-market ideology that it borrowed from pioneers such as LeTourneau, many postwar employers made chaplaincies a feature of welfare capitalism well into the 1950s. Other scholars have told the story of NAE’s entanglement with conservative business interests during the Cold War, but the alliance began at NAE’s birth.

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33 “‘Cooperation Without Compromise’: Highlights of the Seventh Annual Convention,” 1949, 1. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 66, Folder 23), BGCA.


Before NAE, there was NEF. J. Elwin Wright’s New England Fellowship had been an outpost of fundamentalism since 1931, when Wright renamed and restructured the Pentecostal ministry his father passed down to him in the mid-1920s. Rumney, New Hampshire was not an obvious evangelical mecca. Yet Wright made it a scaled-down version of Billy Sunday’s Winona Lake with help from fundamentalist contacts from his real estate ventures in Florida.36 In addition to conferences and camps at Rumney, the NEF supervised dozens of evangelistic teams, Bible study teachers, rural outreach, a radio show, and “gospel teams” of business men.37 Wright invoked his real estate experience to explain what he thought evangelical churches needed to do: “cut the red tape of precedent and explore new fields.”38 He moved the NEF headquarters from out-of-the-way Rumney to Boston, whose evangelicals had a history of interdenominational cooperation in the face of an insurmountable Catholic majority. The NEF found offices next to Park Street Church, a conservative Congregational redoubt. Its incoming pastor in 1936, Harold J. Ockenga, admired the NEF and would become one of the most powerful intellectual and administrative leaders in the NAE.39

In 1937, Wright traveled across the country, preaching with the Fellowship Radio Ensemble and making more connections: Charles Fuller, Moody Bible Institute president

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36 Carpenter, 142-43.

37 Ibid., 143.

38 Ibid.

Will Houghton, and the Africa Inland Mission’s Ralph T. Davis. It was Davis who suggested, in late 1940, that evangelicals represent themselves in Washington. His immediate concern was to protect missionaries from the draft, but he also feared the loss of religious liberty to a growing federal state in combination with the monopolistic Federal Council of Churches. So did the separatist founders of the American Council of Christian Churches, with whom Wright and Davis skirmished before forming the Temporary Committee for United Action Among Evangelicals in the winter of 1941.

War was the catalyst for the two fundamentalist factions to put the rhetoric of evangelical unity into action. As in World War I, conservative evangelicals rose to a fever pitch of patriotism against what they saw as an existential threat to America, God’s second Israel. With “unity” as a watchword for the entire country, evangelicals felt a cultural warrant to join together and advocate their hopes for the nation. The competition between the American Council and Wright’s United Action demonstrated how difficult it would be to rope every denomination, church, and individual identifying as “evangelical” under one roof. Yet both organizations responded to the centralizing circumstances of World War II by reimagining the perennial hope for revival as an immediate and collective challenge. Like Allied victory against the Axis powers, revival could only be thwarted by internal divisiveness (United Action’s primary concern) or conspiratorial subversion (the American Council’s).

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40 Carpenter, 144-45.


42 Carpenter, 158
The push for evangelical unity stoked nostalgia for Protestant “united action” before theological modernism ostensibly corrupted a once-Christian America.⁴³ Moody, Sunday, Finney, Whitefield – the hallowed names of interdenominational empire-builders in the past – legitimized the ecumenists of the present. The strategic fight between the American Council and United Action masked the common ground they shared with other evangelicals who, by the early 1940s, longed to restore their lost cultural power. In 1936, The King’s Business complained, “We are too narrow, too provincial, too circumscribed. God wants to lift us out of our provincialism and to give us a world vision.”⁴⁴ In mid-1940, Moody Monthly was so preoccupied with American unity that the prerequisite of evangelical unity was a given. While the editors continued to bash “the totalitarians now in control at Washington,” they followed their gibes with a plea to exercise evangelical custodianship over the nation through the ballot. Voting was “the self-conscription of patriots in an army set to save the American idea” from Nazism, communism, and fascism.⁴⁵

The King’s Business was under the editorial control of Paul W. Rood, the president of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles and, since 1929, of the World’s Christian Fundamentals Association (WCFA).⁴⁶ Founded shortly after World War I to coordinate revolts against German higher criticism within established denominations and eliminate evolution from public schools, the WCFA was a prototype for both the American Council

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Under Rood, the WFCA became one of several meeting grounds in the
1930s for clergy and laymen who wanted fundamentalism to invite people in rather than
shutting them out. His recruitment of Arnold Grunigen to organize California CBMCIs
paid off in attendance at the 1937 WCFA conference. Grunigen, C.B. Hedstrom, Jepson,
and William Pietsch – father of Pearl Harbor missionary Charlie Pietsch, and president of
the quasi-denominational Independent Fundamentalist Churches in America – were
featured speakers, along with LeTourneau and tract-writer Tom Olson. There was a
motley crew of pastors from Swedish Tabernacles (Rood’s background) and assorted
Baptist, Presbyterian, and independent “Bible” churches. Missionaries to Russia,
Belgium, and Syria gave presentations. Premillennialist Bible study alternated with
working sessions such as the CBMCI-dominated “Laymen’s Day” and “Stewardship
Day.” Participants could also learn “How to Have a Perennial Revival.” An early
supporter of NAE, Rood saw it not as a competitor, but as part of a web of evangelical
networks that grew stronger with each strand.

Taylor seems not to have participated in the WCFA, but was among the first
laymen to join United Action in 1941. Wright wasted no time asking him to recruit
business support for the spring conference in St. Louis. “It is not thought desirable to
send out any general call for funds,” Wright said, “but rather to find out if there may be
several of the Lord’s steward’s who might like to join in underwriting the movement
during this formative period.” A Woolworth executive and a New York stockbroker were
already on board, and Wright hoped for one or two “such men [who] should more or less

47 Carpenter, 7, 26, 37-38, 142.

Business (Jan., 1937), inside cover, 14.
equally divide the expense” of $2500.49 No large benefactors materialized, so in January of 1942, Wright took a page from the CBMCI and made a promotional and fundraising trip to the South. In Chattanooga, BMEC president Boyd Hargraves presided over a lively debate between Wright, whom a newspaper identified as a “Boston executive,” and evangelical clergymen with varied views on the need for a counterweight to the FCC. A Methodist bloc voted “no,” led by two pastors who “said they believed in all the fundamentals and did not believe the [FCC] was deserting them as charged.” Another opponent thought that conservative evangelicals should make their case within the FCC, instead of diluting Protestant strength through division. This was a sticky point for a group calling itself United Action, which Wright resolved by arguing that the FCC’s apostasy had divided Protestants already. Likewise, he would blame the American Council for discord within evangelicalism, in each case positioning United Action as a rock of orthodoxy in someone else’s storm.

No one mentioned the American Council in Chattanooga, however, and despite the dissenting Methodists, Hargraves stacked the deck in United Action’s favor. Perceived or actual government intrusion into religious liberty topped audience reasons to look favorably on the new movement. Grievances included government-distributed materials for possible inclusion in sermons; censorship of religious radio scripts; and, according to an army chaplain, documentary proof that “the [FCC] leadership was saturated with Communism.” Wright also red-baited the FCC, asserting that Roosevelt had a Cabinet-level “minister of religion” in the works “to end independent religious

49 J. Elwin Wright to HJT, Nov. 24, 1941. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 11, Folder 22), BGCA.
action." At a Hargraves-hosted dinner of 85 men, Wright’s proposal to institutionalize an alternative to the FCC won a vote by 81-4. It was symbolic, but it was a start.

The central problem galvanizing United Action and the American Council, fundamentalist access to radio, had business as well as religious and civic dimensions. Starting with the printing press, evangelicals had exploited technologies of mass media for mass evangelism. In the early 1920s, when radio was in its infancy, star preacher Aimee Semple McPherson wired her Angelus Temple for sound and received the third radio license in Los Angeles. While most subsequent evangelical programs were cheaply produced and local or regional in scope, national broadcast networks enabled a lucky few entertainers and advertisers – or both, such as Beverly Shea on “Club Time” – to gain a wide audience. By 1941, thanks in large measure to Taylor’s absorption of his advertising budget, Charles Fuller’s coast-to-coast “Old-Fashioned Gospel Hour” was one of the most popular programs on the air.

However, after Europe went to war, industry and federal regulations imperiled evangelical radio in two ways. First, in 1939, radio networks began giving free time to

51 “Religious Aims of U.S. Council Attacked Here.”

52 Minutes, Meeting of Committee for United Action Among Evangelicals, Jan. 19, 1942, 1. Scrapbook of J. Elwin Wright (Collection 565), BGCA.


55 Charles Fuller to HJT, Sept. 12, 1940. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 11, Folder 22), BGCA; Quentin Schultze, “Evangelical Radio and the Electronic Church, 1921-1948,” Journal of Broadcasting and Electric Media, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Summer 1988), 301. McIntire’s battle with broadcasting regulations would be lifelong. In the early 1970s, he was the first and only broadcaster to lose his license based on the Fairness Doctrine of equal time for opposing views. See Heather Hendershot, “God's Angriest Man: Carl McIntire, Cold War Fundamentalism, and Right-Wing Broadcasting,” American Quarterly, Vol. 59, No. 2 (June 2007), 373-96.
Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish religious programs “to promote the spiritual harmony and understanding of mankind.” Because the FCC represented “Protestantism,” evangelicals could not take advantage of this perk even if they were willing to abandon hellfire-and-damnation sermons. More alarmingly, mainline religious leaders proposed to ban paid programming, the only way evangelicals could get on the air. Carl McIntire paid to preach on the air, and he founded the American Council to fight back. “The very nature of radio,” he said, “calls for a central body representing the historic faith,” lest the din silence Christian truth.

J. Elwin Wright’s close ally Charles Fuller, with no hope that his network would subsidize “The Old-Fashioned Gospel Hour,” had another reason to fear for his ministry and livelihood. In August 1942, the American Federation of Musicians, a branch of the AFL, called a strike. The strike’s prime target was recording technology such as the phonograph, which, the union contended, jeopardized the jobs of live studio musicians. Fuller’s music was always live, but his players were not unionized, engulfing him and them in a labor conflict that would drag on for years. One of United Action’s first projects after St. Louis was to enlist the anti-labor National Association of Broadcasters to defend Fuller and other evangelical radio hosts from union pressure. “Racketeering”

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56 Schultze, quoting the National Association of Broadcasters, 298.

57 Sidney E. Ahlstrom and David D. Hall, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004 [1972], 1106; Executive Committee Meeting, NAE, June 17, 1943, 4. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 19), BGCA.

58 Hangen, 117.


was Wright’s word for the American Federation of Musicians’ national organizing campaign. “[T]he voice of united church must be raised against all interference on the part of the union with religious broadcasts.”61 While endorsing the evangelical logic that converting opponents was the only long-term solution, Wright was adamant that hope right now lay in lobbying the Federal Communications Commission. As untrustworthy as the other FCC, but more accountable to the public, the Federal Communications Commission might respond to aggrieved and organized evangelicals.62

Between the St. Louis meeting in April 1942 and the constitutional convention thirteen months later, Herb Taylor was uniquely placed to advise the newly-christened National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) on government and radio matters. Maurice Karker, the World War I naval commander who had brought him in to rescue the Jewel Tea Company, became chair of the Navy’s War Contract Price Adjustment Board. Its Congressional mandate was to prevent the three million companies supplying the war effort from making “excessive profits,” according to the vague language of the statute. “The game is extremely profitable to the government,” Time grumbled. After a thorough audit, with “gimlet-eyed price-board agents hang[ing] around to try to make sure no penny is mislaid,” a manufacturer could expect “a proposal to slash profits 25%, 50%, or maybe more.” With little room to haggle for fear of losing the contract, “voluntary kickbacks” put millions of dollars in federal coffers.63


Taylor’s vice-chairmanship of such flagrant state intrusion into free enterprise revealed more than his loyalty to Karker. Again, Taylor was willing to judge Roosevelt’s initiatives on a case-by-case basis instead of condemning the New Deal wholesale, using his Four-Way Test as a guide. Taylor would not have taken the unpaid post, which siphoned time and energy from Club Aluminum and CWF, without running it through his rubric of honesty, fairness, promoting “goodwill,” and “benefit[ing]…all concerned.”

Although *Time* viewed price adjustment as highway robbery, he (and the administration) saw it as thwarting profiteering and financing a just war while enabling substantial post-Depression growth. Not long ago, the same companies had no profits at all. Wartime imperatives of “unity” and “service” – the latter, again, a talisman for a dedicated Rotarian like Taylor – also justified keeping big business and big government intertwined. Finally, the Price Adjustment Board made Taylor even more valuable to the NAE. He had an office in the Pentagon, experience testifying before Congress, and familiarity with Washington’s esoteric ways.

As for radio, “Club Time” and Charles Fuller had acquainted Taylor with the business side of broadcasting, including the self-regulating industry bodies whose decisions were as binding as those of the Federal Communications Commission. Taylor and Robert Walker – who was writing war propaganda for the Office of Civilian Defense and running CWF during his employer’s long absences – gave Wright a crucial piece of

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advice in April 1943: attend the annual meeting of the Institution of Education by Radio (IER).\textsuperscript{67} Founded at Ohio State University in 1930, the IER promoted radio as a progressive educational tool in schools, colleges, and for the general public.\textsuperscript{68} The IER disapproved of paid religious broadcasting, ostensibly because it was partisan advocacy, but more because of the membership’s liberal politics and taste. The IER agreed with \textit{Christian Century}’s denunciation of “independent peddlers of spiritual nostrums who have no more ‘church’ behind them than a microphone…and a post office box in which to receive their proceeds,” which tarred every hand-to-mouth evangelist as a gold-digging Elmer Gantry.\textsuperscript{69} Asking listeners to give money for spiritual programming crossed a liberal line between religion and business, the sacred and the profane, that conservative evangelicals did not draw when preaching the gospel was at stake. The government’s favoritism toward the FCC, bolstered by the IER, left them no other choice.

The first IER annual meeting after Pearl Harbor, in 1942, brought liberal concerns about “independent” religious programming to a head. America could not afford another Father Coughlin, the unpredictable and eventually proto-fascist “radio priest” who had aroused a huge over-the-air following in the mid-1930s.\textsuperscript{70} Nor, IER participants believed, could democracy survive religious division. This was the same rationale that NAE and the American Council gave for reviving America and rejecting each other, but where

\textsuperscript{67} Papers of Herbert J. Taylor – Collection 20, \url{http://www.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/GUIDES/020.htm} (last accessed Dec. 17, 2009); Robert Walker to J. Elwin Wright, Apr. 27, 1943. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 16), BGCA.


\textsuperscript{69} Quoted in Fuller, 154-55.

evangelicals wanted to recruit, the IER celebrated diversity to the point of denying religious differences. It recommended that the Federal Communications Commission end paid time and require “that religious radio programs…should be addressed to a cross-section of the public – to Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and nonbelievers – and not to members of any one faith.” Either proposal would endanger evangelical radio, but as the IER’s 1943 gathering approached, Taylor and Walker saw a chance to intervene. The Federal Commission had not made any changes yet.

Wright and another NAE representative went. Wright understood that the radio crisis was a dry run for NAE’s largely untested claim to be able to achieve for “evangelicals,” as a group, the goals that eluded them when scattered. The IER marked his debut as NAE’s emissary to liberal outsiders instead of other fundamentalists. As Taylor and Walker had hoped, his presence gave evangelicals visibility and a voice. The same rules of liberal pluralism by which the IER threatened to silence them gave them a place at the negotiating table. Wright earned his nascent organization its first victory, leading a successful charge against the directive to encompass all faiths and none. However, the IER preserved the restrictions on paid programming, which the Federal Communications Commission soon adopted.

Wright’s small triumph and larger loss not only vindicated the need for NAE at its constitutional convention a few weeks later, but validated the elitist identity overlaying its grass-roots structure. Speaker after speaker imagined NAE in much the way the IER

71 Quoted in Fuller, 152.

72 Murch, 74.

73 Ibid., albeit unreliably, 154. Fuller describes an “Elwin Wright delegation” swooping in and flexing evangelical muscle, a version that no contemporary sources confirm.
imagined itself: as a cadre of leaders responsible for educating and inspiring the confused and easily swayed masses. In NAE’s case, the masses were the American people in general and disorganized evangelicals in particular. “[W]e had better frankly admit that fundamentalists have not always been wisely led,” Wright said, in a dig at separatists such as the American Council. The premise of “a new strategy under competent leaders” would be that “not all modernists are hopeless apostates,” but misguided by “apostate leaders.” NAE would rescue “the masses of the common people,” who Wright believed were “not hostile to the gospel,” from the FCC, “those blind leaders of the blind who have brought the church to its present low state spiritually.”

Macdonald and Hayek would have appreciated the biblical reference. They too saw themselves as prophets contending with Pharisees who held the masses in their thrall.

Harold Ockenga, the Boston preacher, made the political resonance of Wright’s language explicit. Whether Moody Monthly was decrying the hordes who voted for Roosevelt or the New York Times was condemning Germany’s “blind obedience” to Nazi propaganda, the solution was the same: America must embrace its destiny as the scourge of tyrants. Conservative evangelicals began by convicting everyone, especially Christians, of rebellion against God. “The heart of western civilization today is heathen rather than Christian,” Ockenga argued, and the result was “authoritative rule from above.” Yet expert authority, freely granted from below, was at the heart of Ockenga’s vision for NAE. A “chastened” postwar America would be “ready for an advance under the proper type of leadership” – evangelical. “It is up to us to make sure that the Christian

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church will return to a new leadership, producing statesmen for our governmental circles, influencing education, and rebuilding the foundations of society.”77 This was an aggressive version of the standard evangelical riposte to the Social Gospel, the New Deal, Marxism, and other ideologies of human progress. A revived church would “produce” the Christians who would, by God’s grace, change the culture.

NAE clergy’s emphasis on “leadership,” in addition to locating evangelicals within mainstream political discourse, paralleled the advertising philosophy of every business man in the room. Wright welcomed lay participants effusively. “[T]heir counsel and participation is essential. They will meet at various times...to prayerfully consider how they may be most helpful in a great advance movement for the church,” and the “report of their deliberations will be received with great interest.”78 The report did not surface in Taylor’s papers, but Wright had good reason to be solicitous of business men’s opinions, having raised a $24,000 budget from churches, denominations, and individual pledgers who Taylor discreetly harassed into fulfilling their commitments.79 “We have had a rather close time of it financially,” Wright admitted in January 1943, “but fortunately I have been able to get along without drawing salary.” He remained an unshakable devotee of the contractual theology to which R.G. LeTourneau, among others, attributed earthly wealth: God always rewarded obedient servants. “I feel sure,” Wright continued, “that we will reach the required amount if we continue [to be]

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77 Dr. Harold J. Ockenga, “Christ for America,” United We Stand: A Report of the Constitutional Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals, May 3-6, 1943, 10-12. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 20), BGCA.


79 ibid., 1-2; HJT to [blank], Nov. 1942. “According to our records you kindly pledged _____...” Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 16), BGCA.
faithful.” So they did, but the act of God required human agency. Taylor, for example, promised NAE $1250 from CWF and later added a $1000 loan that he was willing to write off as a gift. CWF also transferred its funds for Fuller’s radio broadcast to pay Wright’s salary and arranged the accommodations for the convention.

Whether other NAE leaders valued laymen’s ideas as much as their checks was an open question. Ockenga singled out the BMEC and the Gideons as examples of “organizations of business men…which should be closely identified” with NAE. Yet he went on to name only practicing clergy and the ordained Fuller as the “strongest [Christian] leaders in this nation,” ignoring the same groups’ fervor to drag what they considered a moribund church into a lay-led Christian America. In fact, none of the first business men in the upper echelons of NAE had close ties to the CBMCI, BMEC, or Gideons. John Bolten, a German immigrant who manufactured plastics in Massachusetts, served on the boards of Wright’s New England Fellowship and Taylor’s Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF). After the war, he traveled to Germany on a mission trip to youth co-sponsored by the IVCF, NAE, and Youth for Christ. Around the same time, he sold his company to buy an evangelical publishing house in Cincinnati. Tacoma timber baron and philanthropist C. Davis Weyerhaeuser paid to distribute IVCF literature at Yale, his alma mater, when Taylor and Stacey Woods were getting the American IVCF

80 J. Elwin Wright to HJT, Jan. 27, 1943. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 16), BGCA.
81 Robert Walker to J. Elwin Wright, Dec. 28, 1942. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 16); HJT to Charles Fuller, Feb. 2, 1943. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 13, Folder 11), BGCA.
82 Ockenga, “Christ for America,” United We Stand, 16.
off the ground. He had been the NAE leadership’s first choice as treasurer.84 NAE Secretary and legal counsel J. Willison Smith, Jr. was similarly pedigreed. Born to Philadelphia’s high society, he became a lawyer after graduating from the Wharton business school at the University of Pennsylvania. He lent his time to the Bible Institute of Pennsylvania, the Brotherhood Mission, and the Williamson Free School of Mechanical Trades. Keenly interested in evangelistic publishing, as were Taylor and Weyerhaeuser, Willison was the vice president of Bible Magazine, Inc.85

All four men’s biographies, especially their commitment to college evangelism, suggest a higher-caste demographic than the hardscrabble ambition and man-to-man bluntness of R.G. LeTourneau. (LeTourneau’s plant magazine, NOW, placed the chronically overbooked industrialist elsewhere for both the St. Louis meeting and NAE’s constitutional convention.)86 For NAE, having three Ivy Leaguers – John Bolten sent his son to Dartmouth – and Taylor’s Northwestern degree sent the message that fundamentalists were qualified to lead the country.87 “We know that the evangelical faith is not incompatible with the highest culture and the most effective education,” one speaker argued at the constitutional convention.88 To groom establishment-credentialed clergy and theologians, Ockenga was mentoring evangelical students at Harvard Divinity


85 United Evangelical Action, May 4, 1943, 2.


87 A. Donald MacLeod, C. Stacey Woods and the Evangelical Rediscovery of the University (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 195.

88 Dr. John Bradbury, “Cooperation Among Evangelicals,” United We Stand, 22.
School. Charles Fuller was making plans to endow a rigorous seminary that he hoped would demolish the not entirely undeserved stereotype of fundamentalists as close-minded absentees from American intellectual life.89

The constitutional convention and Taylor’s CWF connections brought a familiar roster of business men (and patroness Gwendolin Armour) into the NAE’s expanding bureaucracy. The Business and Professional Men’s Committee consisted of the BMEC’s William Bond, a real estate agent in Washington D.C.; from the CBMCI, Arnold Grunigen, New York banker Philip Benson, Seattle’s Jepson, and Chicago’s Frank Sheriff and Carl Gunderson; and Erling Olsen, president of the Fitch Investors Service in New York and IVCF board member.90 Armour served on the large National Advisory Committee with Weyerhaeuser and multimillionaire James L. Kraft of cheese-selling fame, her colleague in Taylor’s aborted effort to host a Fuller revival in Chicago.91 Texas manufacturer and cattle rancher John Mitchell, an important backer of one of Taylor’s other projects, Young Life, was also on the National Advisory Committee.92

The star business man of NAE’s first year was Finance Committee chairman Kenneth Keyes, who owned one of the largest real estate companies in Florida and the nation. A Presbyterian elder who, like Taylor, was a dollar-a-year man in Washington

89 Carpenter, 191-92, 195.

90 Executive Committee Meeting, National Association of Evangelicals, June 17-18, 1943, 5. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 19), BGCA; “In the Light,” Canadian IVCF pamphlet, 1941-42. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 60, Folder 2), BGCA.

91 Executive Committee Meeting, National Association of Evangelicals, June 17-18, 1943, 5; “To Be Present,” n.d. [1942?]. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 33, Folder 27), BGCA.

92 Executive Committee Meeting, National Association of Evangelicals, June 17-18, 1943, 5; Ted Benson to HJT, Nov. 30, 1940. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 11, Folder 7), BGCA.
during the war, Keyes took very personal charge of a $50,000 fundraising campaign.\(^93\) In September, he declared his intention to join Wright on a tour of the Midwest “for the purpose of interesting business men in the movement,” in Wright’s words. “He has a burden on his heart…that the business men of this country shall realize their responsibility as stewards.” In New York, Philip Benson was doing just that, arranging a small, exclusive meeting for Wright to pitch NAE to “men who are going to be able to make contributions not only of money but service in other ways…the executive type who are in positions of some responsibility.”\(^94\) Not to be outdone, Taylor began his treasurer’s report with an introduction to the Four-Way Test, followed by a Four-Way Plan: “1. Get the facts 2. Use the facts for a basis of plans 3. Sell the plan 4. Follow up and see the plan go through.” It was Business 101 for clergy, and perhaps especially for the spontaneous Wright, who enthused of his tour with Keyes that “[w]e are expecting under the blessing of God that this will be very beneficial in a financial way.” Anticipation was not a plan.\(^95\)

Business men such as Keyes and Benson worked hard for NAE during the alternately promising and frustrating year of 1943-44, but Taylor and the CWF played a special role. Taylor was the leading lay representative in Chicago, NAE’s headquarters and the evangelical and business capital of middle America. He was as much NAE’s salesman as Wright, who regularly consulted him and Robert Walker on how to present the new organization to the evangelical and general public. Marketing “united action” was proving even more difficult than the founders expected. The continuing agitation of


\(^{94}\) J. Elwin Wright, “Report of the Field Secretary to the Board of Administration, September 21, 1943,” Board of Administration Meeting, National Association of Evangelicals, September 21-22, 1943, 6.

\(^{95}\) “Report of the Treasurer,” ibid., 8.
the American Council, combined with doctrinal differences among evangelicals and unshakable fears of surrendering institutional autonomy, presented setbacks. Wheaton College, MBI, and Dallas Theological Seminary, all initially supportive, retreated from the American Council-NAE crossfire by adopting stances of studied neutrality.96 Although individual Southern Baptists served on NAE boards, the Southern Baptist Convention, representing five million evangelicals from outside the Midwest, Northeast, and West Coast, chose its usual insular course.97 These losses shrunk the budget for goals that NAE must show potential members it could achieve: widespread mass evangelism; a mission board to bypass modernist creedal requirements and send evangelicals into the field; a “Department of War Services” for chaplaincies and servicemen’s evangelism along the lines of the CBMCI’s Victory Centers; strengthening evangelical education; keeping evangelicals on the radio; and opening a Washington office.98

Inspired by Philip Benson’s plan for a business men’s banquet in New York, Wright asked Taylor to organize a copycat event in Chicago under the auspices of the Midwestern Regional Committee, led by pastors Torrey Johnson and Dr. Harry Hager.99 (In the fall of 1943, Youth for Christ, which Johnson would lead, was barely on the horizon.) Since Taylor, the CBMCI’s Carl Gunderson, and their secretaries took responsibility for every time-consuming detail, Taylor peppered Wright with questions to

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96 Carpenter, 152.

97 Ibid., 158-59.

98 J. Elwin Wright, “Report of the Temporary Field Secretary to the Executive Committee,” May 20, 1943; “Minutes of the Meeting of the Commission on Missions,” Sept. 17, 1943, 10. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folders 19 and 21), BGCA. The Committee on Missions met in the Chicago CBMCI’s Victory Center for servicemen.

narrow down the goals of the event and the message with which to maximize participation. “How do you announce the purpose of your meeting in your invitation to those you want to attend?” Who, exactly, did Wright want to attend? “Are you limiting your invitation to known conservatives? Or are you inviting some liberals?...Do you limit your invitation to those you feel can make a sizeable contribution to the work?” Wright reiterated his belief that only “business executives, or [men] in the higher brackets of income” should be on the guest list. The presence of liberals “would probably be embarrassing.” The “announcement” should be brief, advertising an informational meeting about NAE with “an opportunity to discuss the movement intimately around the table.” Finally, although NAE had just brought in much of the national CBMCI leadership, Wright suggested inviting “men who are in many cases not active in organizations such as the Gideons and the Christian Business Men’s Committees. Such men are usually snowed under with their work in connection with these organizations.”

Wright’s concern about overwhelming the business men’s groups was curious, because as the final list of about eighty prospects showed, to be an active evangelical layman was to be overcommitted. Taylor included only a few CBMCI officials and the indispensable Andrew Wyzenbeek, national vice president of the Gideons and member of the Christian Laymen’s Crusade. However, to coax the remaining multiply-affiliated men into giving NAE a hearing, Taylor and Walker dispensed with Wright’s demure invitation and took aim at the invitees’ profound sense of duty. One draft to go out under Hager’s name flattered each recipient as one of “Chicago’s and the midwest’s responsible evangelical lay leaders,” appealing to laymen’s service ethos as source of religious and

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100 HJT to J. Elwin Wright, Oct. 10, 1943; Wright to HJT, Oct. 13, 1943. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 21), BGCA.
social power. In language that could have come from any CBMCI or BMEC publication, the letter continued, “Now it is our turn and our time as business men” to back an “undertaking that calls our churches and our nation back to basic fundamentals – back to the Bible, back to ‘born-again’ religion, back to Calvary, back to the empty tomb…and then onward with God.” A personalized letter from Taylor elicited a pitch-perfect RSVP from an NAE Finance Committee member who could not attend. “I shall be glad to do anything I can to help with this work and would like to know just what is expected of me so I can fulfill my obligation.” Another sympathetic no-show left a message: “up to neck in church drive busy very much interested.” If Wright was still hoping to find a few business men who would drop everything to make NAE their primary cause, as he had in 1942, he was mistaken. Like everyone else, NAE would have to coax limited amounts from a large donor pool.

The Chicago dinner invitees with easily identifiable names and occupations fit the same demographic as the CBMCI and the Gideons (none of these Northerners would have joined the BMEC). They were small, often family, business owners; manufacturers several notches below Taylor or the still-absent LeTourneau; executives; lawyers; journalists; bankers. Letters went to Martin H. Chapman of Chapman Laundry, Hammond, Indiana; Ralph Ullman of Chicago’s Rivere Copper & Brass; Frank McConnell of the Illinois Bell Telephone Company; Albert C. Bass of the I.B. William Leather Company; banker Frank Taylor (no relation); and Arnold Torsell of the Chicago

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101 Unsigned, n.d.; draft invitation to Nov. 16, 1943 dinner on Hager’s church stationery. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 21), BGCA.

102 Rollin Severance to HJT, Nov. 8, 1943. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 21), BGCA.

103 Typed, annotated list of Chicago NAE dinner invitees, n.d. (Nov. 1943), p. 3. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 21), NAE.
Daily News. Taylor did not neglect evangelical business stalwarts who, like he, had far too much to do, but would at least give a hearing to a plan for national revival. There was Torrey Johnson’s client industrial chaplaincy client, Walter Black of the Quaker Stretcher Company in Wisconsin. There was a trio of early recruits to the IVCF administration: D. Cameron Peck, famed for his collection of hundreds of vintage cars; Paul Westburg, the district manager of Weston Electric Instrument Corps; and J.F. Strombeck, a toy manufacturer in Moline who had just recently opened an office in New York.104 Publisher Robert Van Kampen, president of the Chicago Gideons, served on the boards of Young Life and IVCF. Although no one took much notice at the time, he hired Billy Graham out of Wheaton College to pastor the church where he chaired the Board of Trustees.105 Fifty men accepted the invitation “over three-fourths” in Taylor’s estimation “business and professional men.”106 There is no detailed record of the outcome, but of the names listed above, Frank Taylor, Walter Black, and all of Herb Taylor’s IVCF colleagues either became or already were associated with NAE.

Not only did Taylor supply NAE with business men from his other CWF organizations – the IVCF’s mission to college campuses dovetailed with NAE’s quest for elite evangelical “leadership” – he used his role the NAE for the CWF’s profit. For instance, Wright often asked Robert Walker, whose writing and editing portfolio had earned him a journalism lectureship at Wheaton, to approve NAE publications before

104 Stacey Woods to HJT, Sept. 30, 1941. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 60, Folder 24); HJT to Mr. and Mrs. Beverly Shea, Feb. 6, 1945. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 24, Folder 26); “Wilmette’s Auto Sportsmen,” Wilmette Historical Museum Historical Society Newsletter, http://www.wilmettehistory.org/egloff.html (last accessed Jan. 4, 2010); J.F. Strombeck to HJT, May 20, 1941. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 60, Folder 24).


106 HJT to J. Elwin Wright, Nov. 10, 1943. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 21), BGCA.
they went to print. Walker scolded him for the quality of the brochures NAE planned to send out after the constitutional convention. “[I]n presenting any project to the public,” Walker explained as from an expert to a pupil, a promoter must use “proven techniques of gaining attention and the desired action from those you are attempting to reach.” Visually, the pamphlets did not reach the bar. NAE needed to follow “modern advertising procedure” and “be more colorful and attractive to the eye.” After all, “in the Lord’s work especially, we should use every means to make [our materials] as attractive as any product the world has to offer.”

“Better Printing of Christian Literature” happened to be motto of Good News Publishing, founded by the CWF. Wright also gave manager Clyde Dennis carte blanche “to print a new issue of 25,000 for us at once, dressing it up as you think best.” Afterward, NAE became a regular Good News client. Wright asked Walker to write the “Flash Sheet,” a newsletter keeping national and regional administrators up-to-date. “We need a catchy heading for it,” Wright worried, but “Flash Sheet” it remained.

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107 Robert Walker to J. Elwin Wright, Jul. 16, 1943. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 21), BGCA. On the importance of color to advertising “style” and high class, see Marchand, 120-28.


110 J. Elwin Wright to Robert Walker, Nov. 1, 1943. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 21), BGCA.
Being “modern” in the tactical, not theological, sense of packaging the same old gospel in contemporary wrapping, was central to NAE’s identity. The twin foils were the FCC’s theological modernism (a new gospel) and the American Council’s separatism (obsolete and ugly wrapping). To distinguish itself from the American Council, the more immediate threat to large-scale fundamentalist organizing, NAE defined its goal as “positive” evangelical unity based in common ground instead of “negative” unity obsessed with common enemies. “It is the firm belief of the brethren that the purpose of any new association…should not be inaugurated on a negative, but a positive basis; not to attack” the Federal Council, but “to represent” an alternative Protestantism,” Wright stressed to a leadership council after St. Louis. However, the distinction was strained for two reasons. First, NAE regularly assaulted the Federal Council, both from genuine enmity and to disprove the American Council’s insinuations that the two groups were in league. For example, “positive” could hardly have been the word that came to readers’ minds when the Chattanooga Free-Press paraphrased Wright’s accusation that the Federal Council “[c]irculat[ed] sex literature so vile as to be unfit for decent people to read.” Second, and related, the interdenominational hospitality that the NAE cherished as its improvement on nit-picking fundamentalism stopped at a statement of faith that was “inclusive” only on evangelical terms. The fundamentals were all there, from the necessity of new birth to biblical literalism, artfully worded to include almost anyone already in the fold. From within evangelicalism, Wright’s orchestration of an NAE creed without a premillennial plank and “acceptable to extreme Calvinists on the one hand

111 Minutes, Committee for United Action Among Evangelicals, Oct. 27-28, 1941, 2. Scrapbook of J. Elwin Wright (Collection 565), BGCA.

and…pentecostal and holiness groups on the other was nothing short of a miracle." 113

From without, NAE gave “sectarianism [a] new lease on life,” in the *Christian Century’s* judgment. 114

An early episode in which Wright sought out Taylor’s advice suggests that business men and evangelists or preachers differed about how to brand NAE as “positive” by contrast with the American Council. For a business man such as Taylor, “positive” and “negative” were advertising terms. They stood for tactical choices about how much to bathe the consumer in good feelings about buying a product or prey on anxieties about not having the product. 115 After instituting the Four-Way Test at Club Aluminum, Taylor banned advertising that implicitly denigrated the competition, which he considered neither “true” nor “fair to all concerned.” He told the marketing department to eliminate “superlatives” from ad copy. “No more would we be using words like ‘best’ or ‘finest’ or ‘greatest,’ nor even phrases such as ‘better than another brand,’” he wrote in his autobiography. “From now on…we [would] only tell the facts as we knew them about our product.” 116 This emphasis on “facts” was a mantra of the “scientific” advertising that Taylor would have absorbed as a young business man in the 1920s. Marketers believed that national consumer choice among “products offered…impersonally through the marketplace” would keep quality high and prices low, enabling winning manufacturers to increase and diversify production for an ever-growing percentage of the

113 D. Shelby Corlett, Nazarene Publishing House, to General Superintendents, May 12, 1943. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 16), BGCA.

114 Quoted in Carpenter, 153.


116 Taylor, 41. I have not found enough Club Aluminum ads to verify the claim.
The shift by the 1940s to emotional manipulation through color, tone, and popular psychology – that is, the changes Walker wanted in NAE pamphlets, fewer words and better visuals – presumed a less rational consumer, but did not necessarily dethrone “facts.” For someone who believed as wholeheartedly in his product as Taylor, the challenge was to present the “facts” in the most alluring possible light, informed by “scientific” analysis of the emotions that swayed consumer judgment.118

For a preacher like Wright, superlatives and comparisons told the “facts” of religion. Christianity was not pots and pans; it was a narrow road to salvation surrounded by malevolent forces on all sides. The American Council’s obstructionism was a case in point. Souls were at stake. The nation was at stake. Christendom itself was at stake, and founder Carl McIntire seemed only to want loyalty oaths. Of course, McIntire believed that Wright was taunting God by associating, however indirectly, with the FCC. Wright was not content to go the positive advertising route, puffing NAE and ignoring the American Council. The stakes were too high. Rather, he wanted to go to the mat with McIntire and show the world whose side God was on. In the advertising parlance of a later age, he wanted to go negative.

The opportunity arose when The Sunday School Times, a popular evangelical newspaper out of Philadelphia, aligned itself with the American Council after St. Louis. “There is no question that the National Association of Evangelicals is holding firmly to the fundamentals of the faith,” the editor, a member of one of the American Council’s founding denominations, was careful to say. However, the fight against the FCC bore clear parallels to World War II, as a pastor in McIntire’s camp had recently written.

117 Marchand, 2.

118 Ibid., 117-32.
“The basic issue may be stated in two words: Exclusivism vs. Inclusivism.” The latter was “a policy of appeasement” toward the Federal Council, bound to end in “some kind of ignominious ‘peace in our time.’” The Sunday School Times carried the pastor’s analogy further, to the European war “and finally Pearl Harbor.” Then, at last, “the American people were fused into one…against their common enemy, the Axis powers; but it was almost too late.” In short, St. Louis was Munich. The NAE’s “inclusivism” toward FCC-affiliated evangelicals was as naïve as Neville Chamberlain’s pact with Hitler. Almost parodying NAE’s exhortations for conservative Protestants to set aside “inessential” differences, The Sunday School Times decreed, “[A]ll the Fundamentalists of the country should be willing to submerge their own personal interest and prejudices, and unite not only in a proclamation of the pure Gospel and the great doctrines of Scripture, but also in open opposition to a common enemy.”119 The NAE, it seemed, was fundamentalism’s Vichy France.

Wright drafted a scathing reply and sent it to Taylor for approval. He addressed the war analogies immediately, calling the American Council “ill-advised and presumptuous” for creating an organization by one man’s fiat without “bringing [evangelical] leaders together and letting them build the movement from its very foundation.” In other words, the American Council was totalitarian, while NAE functioned “in a most democratic way.” Wright repeated The Sunday School Times’ acknowledgement that the two groups were theologically united. Instead of arguing, as he usually did, that their strategic differences could be overcome, he refused to separate the Council’s mission from its methods. “They evidently sincerely believe that the emphasis

should be on attack,” Wright fumed. “We have witnessed this strategy for a generation and seen it fail…The net result has been to make the word ‘fundamentalist’ synonymous with ‘bitterness,’ ‘strife,’ ‘ranting,’ and ‘division’ in the minds of a great section of the public.” The NAE intended to change that image instead of indulging the American Council’s bids for attention. “[W]e do not propose to answer in kind the attacks to which we have been subjected since the St. Louis Convention,” Wright concluded. “We prefer to ‘saw wood’ and let the results speak for themselves.”  

In Taylor’s world, Wright’s letter was the equivalent of taking out a full-page ad against a competitor instead of promoting one’s own brand. Taylor retorted that “[y]ou are surely answering in kind,” and recommended an alternative to brawling with the American Council that combined the Four-Way Test with Rotarian civility among competitors. The NAE, barely born, needed to manage first impressions, not least with the evangelical press that could give it free publicity and influential endorsements. “It seems to me that it would be the better strategy” to meet with the editor in person and lay down “the facts which you have presented in your proposed letter,” Taylor said. A polite conversation, he believed, would inspire a follow-up piece that “would contribute to the prestige of the National Association of Evangelicals.” Taylor argued further that NAE should be positive in its dealings with the American Council. “I have always found that when you have a controversy on your hands it is better to walk into the other fellow’s camp, find out where he is vulnerable and attempt to sell him on your point of view, rather than” – pointedly – “to write a letter to him which might just ‘put oil on the

120 J. Elwin Wright to “Gentlemen” of The Sunday School Times, n.d. (1942). Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 16), BGCA.
Wright listened. The next month, *The Sunday School Times* published excerpts from a much milder letter that stuck to factual clarifications. The editor apologized profusely for any "misunderstandings." Modern marketing principles had earned favorable coverage for NAE from a prominent American Council supporter.

Such collaboration between NAE’s clergy and business men grew in importance through 1944 and 1945 as an Allied triumph seemed inevitable. “The time has come for NAE to render constructive service as its major business, allowing organizational promotion to take second place,” President Leslie Marston, a Free Methodist bishop, wrote to Taylor in May 1944. His priorities were the creation of “a handbook of proven evangelistic procedures and principles” for revivalists; the “critical field” of Christian education; and mobilizing evangelicals around laws in most states that allowed students time out for religious instruction. “If the liberals capture this field” – that is, if only FCC churches offered programs for which children could leave – the tragedy would be great.” At the top of the letter, Taylor scribbled another mission: “Program for returning service men.”

A July “Flash Sheet” noted a Post-War Relief meeting that had taken place at the Bankers’ Club in New York. Attendees included Wright, several clergy and business men, and a Chinese-born YMCA worker who was a veteran lobbyist for humanitarian aid. “THERE IS MUCH THAT IS BEING DONE

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121 HJT to J. Elwin Wright, July 6, 1942. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 16), BGCA.


123 Leslie R. Marston to HJT, May 24, 1944. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 24), BGCA.
THAT WE CANNOT RELEASE TO THE PRESS AS YET,” the “Flash Sheet” warned in capital letters.\textsuperscript{124}

So many projects made business men and some NAE clergy nervous. Leslie Marston cc’d Taylor on a letter to Wright observing that “[s]ome fear we may spread into new fields before consolidating our earlier gains toward our initial goals,” a sentence Taylor marked. In particular, War Relief was shaping up to be a larger, more complicated, and more expensive proposition than anyone in NAE had realized. Wright had rushed into it without “reasonable certainty as to procedure and governmental authority” or “whether missionary or welfare organizations of experience are actually functioning in this area.” The “persistent refusal of passports by our own state department” to missionaries did not bode well (and, Marston did not add, was one of the problems that NAE had originally formed to fix).\textsuperscript{125} The government information that Wright finally received gave NAE two bad options: to “operate as a religious or mission board” with no financial or diplomatic help, or to “register as a War Relief agency.” The price of official recognition was $25,000, which Wright cheerfully assumed that NAE member churches would cover.\textsuperscript{126}

One problem with this plan was that NAE was already trying to raise $30,000 for its 1945 convention, and it was counting on business men, not churches. While some congregations were active in the movement, most had been grandfathered in by their


\textsuperscript{125} Leslie R. Marston to J. Elwin Wright, Oct. 20, 1944. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 24), BGCA.

\textsuperscript{126} J. Elwin Wright to Rev. J. Roswell Flower, Jan. 23, 1945. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 4), BGCA.
denomination, and the affiliation was meaningless to most parishioners. Wright perpetuated the fiction of NAE’s “grass-roots” might by counting denominational censuses, enabling him to claim to represent millions of evangelicals who, in reality, had little interest in the cause.\(^{127}\) Only a month earlier, at the end of 1944, President Marston had written to Taylor and other large donors that “during these initial years of foundation laying most of the financial burden must be borne by a comparatively few churches, organizations and individuals who have caught the vision of the immense importance of this work.” A postage-free return envelope accompanied the hint.\(^{128}\) In February, Wright asked Taylor and “several [other] people from whom contributions of a rather sizeable amount are to be expected” to turn in their mid-year pledges early, in order to avert a “financial crisis.”\(^{129}\) Wright’s secretary, who faced going without salary, thanked Taylor effusively for a $500 check. “It is a real source of anxiety that we do not have the necessary funds to carry on efficiently,” she confessed.\(^{130}\)

Another problem was that Wright, exhausted, wanted to be relieved of his position as executive secretary, but nobody wanted the job. Perhaps trying to broaden NAE’s geographic appeal, the executive committee deputized Taylor to interview two Californians. Bank of America’s Harry R. Smith demurred, saying that he wanted to focus on the San Francisco CBMCI.\(^{131}\) Next, Taylor wooed an assistant to a prominent

\(^{127}\) On the circular relationship between local indifference and NAE’s perpetual financial crises, see R.L. Decker to Carl Gunderson, Oct. 21, 1947. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 66, Folder 14), BGCA.

\(^{128}\) Leslie Marston to HJT, Dec. 1944. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 26).

\(^{129}\) J. Elwin Wright to HJT, Feb. 2, 1945. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 26), BGCA.

\(^{130}\) HJT to J. Elwin Wright, Feb. 7, 1945; Gertrude Clark to HJT, Feb. 13, 1945. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folders 26 and 25), BGCA.

\(^{131}\) HJT to J. Elwin Wright, Jan. 16, 1945. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 26), BGCA.
Los Angeles evangelist, disregarding not one, but two, “no’s” before reluctantly admitting defeat. After the rejections, Wright soldiered on, and Taylor stayed loyal to him amidst palace intrigue. He told another NAE administrator how much he had been praying about the executive secretary position since the second man turned it down. “I recognize Dr. Wright’s limitations and realize that he has many times moved ahead on important matters before securing proper authorization,” Taylor said. Yet Wright was “sincere,” “under great pressure,” and “most anxious to make a great showing to our constituency as quickly as possible.” It was true that “many of us have wondered whether…the work is progressing under his leadership as much as if we had another man.” But NAE owed its very existence to Wright’s creativity and drive. “[Dr.] Wright is an excellent pioneer. He is not thin skinned, [and] he takes constructive criticism in a splendid manner…I lean toward keeping Dr. Wright on as a top man in the administration of NAE until the Lord provides us a better man for the job.”

In the NAE as in his other philanthropic interests, Taylor was a power broker because he negotiated personality conflicts and philosophical disputes as deftly as he handled money. When The Protestant Voice asked President Marston to select three NAE leaders to profile, he picked himself, Taylor, and Harold Ockenga. Taylor declined the honor, explaining that “publicity…tends to hinder me in the Lord’s work.” He probably anticipated a deluge of funding requests after the story, but the real danger was to his reputation as a diplomat. Evangelicalism was full of men who craved a spotlight.

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132 Leslie Marston to HJT, Oct. 23, 1944; HJT to J. Elwin Wright, Jan. 16, 1945. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folders 24 and 26). BGCA.

133 HJT to T. Roland Phillips, Mar. 27, 1945. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 26), BGCA.

134 Leslie Marston to HJT, Feb. 14, 1945; HJT to Rev. Neville O. Hatcher, Mar. 15, 1945. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 24), BGCA.
Not being one of them gave Taylor the credibility to influence events behind the scenes, which is not to say that he was popular there. At least once, his determination to pay outstanding bills before salaries caused the NAE secretary to erupt. “I have been giving toward the support of my widowed mother and younger brothers and sisters since I began working in high school, and we are dependent on my salary,” she told an executive committee member.135 Taylor brought his impersonal treatment of Club Aluminum employees into NAE, with unsympathetic and undiplomatic results.

As the war drew to an end, more business men came to the foreground, including a new crop of hired hands rather than volunteers. Banker and CBMCI powerhouse Philip Benson set up War Relief warehouses in New York and Philadelphia without compensation. His paid assistant and soon-to-be successor, Philadelphia insurance executive Frank D. Lombar, introduced himself to Taylor with the unctuous observation that, “[O]ur business back-ground gives us much in common.”136 Robert Kelly, a former corporate treasurer with “a great deal of experience in sales promotion work,” charged $50/week to plan “NAE Week,” a publicity and fundraising blitz akin to the CWF’s “Tract Week.”137 Taylor, Keyes, who also sent $500 in response to Wright’s “financial crisis” plea, and Chicago’s Dr. Harry Hager formed a committee to tighten the bonds

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135 Gertrude Clark to J. Roswell Flower, Nov. 19, 1947. NAE Correspondence, folder 4, Flower Pentecostal Heritage. Courtesy of Molly Worthen.

136 Carl F.H. Henry, NAE press release, May 1, 1945; Frank D. Lombar to HJT, Feb. 1, 1945. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folders 28 and 26), BGCA.

137 J. Elwin Wright to HJT, Feb. 2, 1945. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 26).
between headquarters and regional affiliates, a centralizing step they felt was long overdue.\textsuperscript{138}

The NAE’s federalism had always been a fiction. Unlike the bottom-up growth of the CBMCI and BMEC, NAE started like a modern corporation, with a small group of innovators perceiving a vast consumer need. Yet it operated as if it were a popular movement instead of an elite-led experiment that could not even compel member groups to pay dues. Marston’s presidential successor, R.L. Decker, signaled a shift in the title of his inaugural speech at the 1946 convention, “An Evangelical ‘Over-All Strategic Concept.’” He meant the phrase, stolen from Winston Churchill, in two senses. One was evangelical stewardship of the postwar world. “Why do we not train our young people to take their places in the state department, in the diplomatic service, yes, in politics? Others do.” The other was the democratization and centralization of the NAE. He recommended that a U.N.-style “General Assembly” elect a Board of Administration to implement NAE initiatives as it saw best, with a budget to which everyone contributed.\textsuperscript{139}

In this climate of missionary exhilaration, but internal professionalization, J. Elwin Wright’s less-than-businesslike leadership style finally led to his resignation. At the beginning of 1946, Taylor had to mediate between Wright and a furious Kenneth Keyes, whose bond from stumping together for NAE was unraveling. The immediate issue was Wright’s creative money management, which Taylor also reproached. Keyes saw the episode, which involved poaching money from the War Relief Commission for

\textsuperscript{138} J. Elwin Wright to HJT, Feb. 16, 1945; Kenneth Keyes to Leslie Marston, Feb. 16, 1945. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folders 26 and 24), BGCA.

\textsuperscript{139} Dr. R.L. Decker, “An Evangelical ‘Over-All Strategic Concept,’” \textit{Action: Program of the Fourth Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals and associated organizations}, Apr. 24-May 2, 1946, 39-42.
the critically low general coffers, as a symptom of Wright’s overemphasis on program expansion and neglect of basic solvency.140 “Frankly I am not at all pleased with the financial showing for last year,” Keyes, still chairing the Finance Committee, grumbled to Taylor in April. Only two-thirds of expected contributions had come in.141 After another War Relief brouhaha, Wright,smarting, threatened to resign. “I am conscious of my unfortunate tendency to run ahead of explicit orders,” he said. “This tendency is one of the principal reasons why I have always felt that I was not competent to carry out the duties of the Executive Secretary of the NAE.”142 President Decker asked Taylor to attend a meeting of all the parties. The entire War Relief Commission wanted to quit “because Dr. Wright is making commitments and giving press releases out which they feel are so dangerous and disruptive…that they can not go on.”143 The meeting ended with everyone still in their jobs, but tempers still on edge.

When Wright decided to investigate the spiritual condition of postwar Europe and left at the beginning of October, Keyes was apoplectic and Taylor deeply disturbed. Keyes wrote a long letter to Decker after being notified that he had been re-elected Finance Committee chairman against his will. “I am very certain that in a business organization…the top man would not have made plans for a 5 to 6 week trip to Europe” – even, as in Wright’s case, at his own expense – “at a time when the employees of the organization were having to wait for their salaries and the organization was not able to pay its current bills.” He added that he “came to know and love J. Elwin on our western

140 HJT to J. Elwin Wright, Feb. 22, 1946; Kenneth Keyes to HJT, Feb. 25, 1946. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 66, Folders 5 and 3), BGCA.
141 Kenneth Keyes to HJT, Apr. 16, 1946. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 66, Folder 3), BGCA.
142 J. Elwin Wright to R.L. Decker, July 1, 1946. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 66, Folder 11), BGCA.
143 R.L. Decker to HJT, June 29, 1946. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 66, Folder 3), BGCA.
trip in the early days of NAE, but as a business man I just cannot see his policy of going
sere[n]ly on his way with the expansion programs without laying the proper financial
foundation as he goes along.” Taylor informed Wright that he was considering
resigning as NAE treasurer. “I do not believe that when funds have not been provided for
projects which have been approved, that we should go ahead and commit ourselves” to
new ventures. “As you know, we have continually done that in NAE, and it has definitely
placed us in hot water time after time.” To say the least, Wright was burdening his staff
and abusing Taylor’s generosity. “I was a little surprised that …you wrote to me asking
for an extra contribution from [CWF] of $1500, at a time when you were leaving a bad
financial situation to go to Europe.” Unlike Keyes, however, Taylor gave the European
tour the benefit of the doubt. “Now, Dr. Wright, you may have definitely had the
guidance of the Holy Spirit…I am therefore not going to reach any definite conclusion
until I have had a chance to discuss the matter with you.” He was satisfied enough with
Wright’s explanation to stay on as treasurer.

The uproar added to mounting administrative concern that Wright, who had
poured superhuman effort into NAE from the beginning, was “really worn to a
frazzle.” In May 1947, Wright’s NAE title changed to “assistant to the President.” He
held “no executive responsibility,” but resumed the role in which he had done so much to
get NAE started: that of salesman. “His chief function for us will be to continue to
cultivate the individuals with whom he is already in contact, for larger gifts...[and] add to

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144 Kenneth Keyes to R.L. Decker, Oct. 15, 1946. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 6, Folder 11). BGCA.
145 HJT to J. Elwin Wright, Nov. 14, 1946. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 66, Folder 11), BGCA.
146 R.L. Decker to HJT, June 18, 1946. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 66, Folder 3), BGCA.
this list,” Decker told Taylor.147 Another line NAE threw out to business men was the creation of the Laymans’ [sic] Advisory Committee. The group hired its own fund-raiser in the hope of getting a thousand men to commit to NAE.148 Scaling back Wright’s financial role – he remained NAE’s visionary-in-chief for years to come – removed a wild card, but did not change the fundamental problem: NAE’s need to energize the millions it claimed as members. “After traveling among the churches four or five months I am convinced that the ‘educational’ phase…is going to take much longer than most of us first supposed,” Decker told the CBMCI’s Carl Gunderson, slipping into advertising language. “The top executives of the denominations and the more alert, better informed pastors of the larger local churches were easy to sell on cooperation among conservative Christians,” but then grew “discouraged over our financial difficulties. The remaining denominations…are going to be more favorably impressed when our financial condition is better.” The vicious circle of needing members to give money to get members highlighted the real challenge. “Cooperation per se does not appeal to conservative Christians by and large. They want to know, ‘What is it doing for my church? How is it helping to win souls and advance the Gospel?’ We have to prove it does.”149

Ultimately, NAE needed to prove itself to non-evangelicals if it wanted to revive America. Many of its business men combined missionary work and self-interest through

147 R.L. Decker to HJT, May 1, 1947. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 66, Folder 11), BGCA.
148 S.A. Rohrer to HJT, Aug. 26, 1947. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 66, Folder 20), BGCA.
149 R.L. Decker to Carl Gunderson, Oct. 21, 1947. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 66, Folder 14), BGCA.
the Commission on Industrial Chaplaincy, formed in 1944. Just as Army and Navy chaplains embedded in fighting units boosted infantry morale, the Commission promised, pastors on the shop floor would boost worker morale. Members were “studying plans to reach organized labor with the gospel,” in the hope, as Wright put it, of “greatly reducing industrial unrest in the days of reconversion ahead.”

Chairman Irwin McLean came to the NAE through the Cleveland CBMCI. He was now a full-time NAE staffer in Detroit, where he had ample opportunity to witness industrial unrest first-hand. Because other NAE projects kept McLean busy, the Commission’s driving force was A.H. Armerding, “consulting engineer” of a Newark company that produced automatic stokers for furnaces.

All but one of the ten members of the Commission – the other was a cleric – owned or held powerful positions in small manufacturing outfits, like Armerding. They were concentrated in the Northeast and Midwest, like most of the NAE, and their other religious networks left few degrees of separation. Walter Block of Quaker Stretcher, IVCF benefactor J.F. Strombeck, and Young Life supporter John Mitchell were on the masthead. So was C.F. Agerstrand, a native Swede who founded a one-room steel

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150 Leslie Marston to HJT, Oct. 23, 1944. Depending on the date, the Commission is sometimes the Committee.

151 Carl Henry, “Ntl. Assn. of Evangelicals,” May 1, 1945, 1-2. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 28), BGCA.


154 The masthead is on p. 11 of The Industrial Chaplain.
treatment plant in Muskegon, Michigan in 1937 with $300. He made enough money to build a $10,000 addition in late 1940, possibly with the help of a government contract similar to LeTourneau’s.155 R.F. Nelson was the vice-president of Brooklyn’s Arma Corporation, which originated with a Navy contract in World War I.156 Rollin M. Severance, of Severance Tool Industries, established the Assemblies of God church in his Saginaw, Michigan headquarters and volunteered for the Prohibition Party.157 Samuel A. Fulton, who had served two terms as president of the Gideons since he joined the organization in 1903, manufactured automobile parts in Milwaukee.158 Torrey Mosvold, the president of Neptune Shipping, Inc., was from a prominent and philanthropic Norwegian family. Based in New York during the war, he had spent the late thirties in Chicago, where his sisters were in Bible school. Cementing his ties to Midwestern evangelicalism and eventually the NAE, he attended the ethnic church in which Torrey Johnson had grown up.159

Herb Taylor was supportive, but wary. “[F]rom the start,” he wrote later, “I felt the program was faced with tremendous handicaps and questioned whether or not the time, money, and effort…could not be used to a better advantage in the Lord’s


service.” Although more post hoc than he admitted, his judgment was right in the short term. The argument that evangelical religion protected business interests had little traction outside the fundamentalist subculture, for two reasons. First, psychologists had already claimed the field of “human relations” for science. Second, the religious diversity of the workplace forced the NAE Commission to choose between a forceful evangelical witness and a vague ecumenism that appealed more to employers. Over four years, Industrial Chaplaincy went from being “one of the major projects of the E.” to folding, at least temporarily. However, the popularity of more sophisticated versions in subsequent decades vindicated the Commission’s instincts in the long term.

Putting pastors in factories to tend to the spiritual and emotional needs of employees, alleviating grievances that could lead to union organizing, was not a new idea. The YMCA had offered such services to manufacturers during the heyday of welfare capitalism before World War I. Volunteers led shop-floor Bible studies at lunch break that mirrored noontime revival meetings for white-collar men – except, of course, white-collar men were free to leave their workplaces for worship. During the 1920s, however, the YMCA folded into the Social Gospel movement, whose radical edge was growing. Leftist urban preachers such as Reinhold Niebuhr in Detroit supported unions, went toe-to-toe with welfare capitalist barons (in Niebuhr’s case, Henry Ford) and demanded fundamental changes to what they saw as an unjust and unstable industrial

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160 HJT to Dr. Stephen W. Paine, Dec. 9, 1948. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 66, Folder 23), BGCA. See also Carl Henry, “Ntl. Assn. of Evangelicals,” May 5, 1945, 2. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 28), BGCA.

161 Fones-Wolf and Fones-Wolf, 3.

162 “Flash Sheet: Latest News from the Front Lines,” n.d.; context, Nov. 1944. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 65, Folder 24), BGCA.

163 Fones-Wolf, Selling Free Enterprise, 218-54; Fones-Wolf and Fones-Wolf, 10-33.
order. Employers saw diminishing returns to industrial chaplaincies as workers enlisted chaplains to make bread-and-butter demands, or treated them as a hostile arm of management and went on strike despite their counsel. Trapped between a shrinking pool of business backers and a swelling chorus of angry workers who had chaplains’ support, the YMCA closed its underfunded Industrial Department shortly before the Wall Street crash.\(^{164}\)

R.G. LeTourneau brought the industrial chaplaincy back to life at his Peoria plant in 1941, motivated by the army chaplains he dealt with as president of the Gideons and CBMCI.\(^{165}\) It was easy to transfer the chaplaincy’s spiritual, therapeutic and advisory roles from the hierarchical setting of the military to the hierarchical setting of the workplace. In both places, the chaplain stood outside the hierarchy as a sympathetic ally, someone who paid attention to men as individuals and reassured them that their superiors did not see them as interchangeable units. However, the paid onsite minister had little immediate effect on LeTourneau, Inc.’s robust religious routine. Visiting evangelists still came to preach at “shop talks,” one of whom, Toccoa Falls radio host Elliott Linblad, became LeTourneau’s industrial chaplain in Georgia.\(^{166}\) Evangelical employees continued to practice their own forms of witness. “The Word by Workers,” for instance, combined music and “testimony” in the company chapel at noon and midnight each


\(^{166}\) “Plant Life,” *NOW* (Oct. 3, 1941), foldout.
Wednesday. NOW chronicled the achievements of individual workers and encouraged employees to take collective pride in the company’s contribution to the war effort. “When we buy Defense stamps & bonds & when we pay taxes we’re helping to buy the materials we work with & to pay our own wages, because LeTourneau is practically 100% on war work,” a feature on the global market proclaimed. “Wherever our armed forces & our allies go, picture LeTourneau equipment...Because it’s wartime around the world it’s wartime around the clock & the calendar at LeTourneau’s.”

LeTourneau’s was, in truth, a cautionary example for would-be practitioners of evangelical welfare capitalism. Neither patriotic calls to sacrifice nor the chaplain prevented the rogue CIO organizing effort at Toccoa Falls in 1943. Two years later, the Supreme Court ruled that LeTourneau had broken labor laws by using threats and intimidation to quash a union formed by Peoria workers. These inconvenient facts notwithstanding, the midcentury industrial chaplaincy movement counted on spiritual enlightenment and interpersonal empathy to mend the breach between management and labor. Even before the war ended, advocates were nostalgic for the self-denying patriotism they claimed had brought brief peace to industry. Resolutely ignoring countless wartime strikes, they argued that religion was the only force powerful enough to replace nationalism as a bond between labor and management.

Industrial chaplaincy took different forms across the spectrum of Protestant theology and politics. In 1943, the year of a devastating race riot, the War Emergency

167 “Plant Life,” NOW (Mar. 28, 1941), 4.
168 Tom Olson, “Around the Clock Around the Calendar and Around the World,” NOW, Apr. 17, 1942, foldout.
169 Fones-Wolf and Fones-Wolf, 8.
Commission of the Detroit Presbytery hired an “industrial chaplain” for the entire city. He steered clear of shop floors and founded the People’s Institute of Applied Religion. Loudly pro-union and anti-segregation, the People’s Institute deployed an integrated “brotherhood squadron” to poor, black churches. The same year, the Federal Council of Churches arranged with the AFL and CIO to pay for a chaplain-cum-social worker in several Massachusetts factories. The FCC hoped that he could earn workers’ trust as a church employee and not the company’s. In an important sense, however, these theologically and politically liberal industrial chaplaincies had the same goal as LeTourneau: to calm the explosive social forces beneath a fragile, if not fictitious, wartime unity.

By 1944, the NAE needed to revise its founding analogy between America, united in war, and evangelicals, united in faith. The Commission on Industrial Chaplaincy offered a laymen’s narrative of NAE’s relevance to the postwar world. “Prior to the war, clashes between labor and management were prevalent,” a sleek promotional report informed attendees at the 1945 convention, which took place the week before V-E Day. Pearl Harbor had tempered “selfish interests,” but had not destroyed them. “[T]he fires of industrial unrest are still smoldering and ready to burst into flame as soon as wartime restraints are removed.” Thankfully, “moral and spiritual forces are equal, if not superior, to any patriotic motive” for comity. The cover of the brochure showed a Bible beaming rays over a factory with workers pouring in and out. In the foreground were representations of three core constituencies: a woman, hair coiffed like a secretary; a man

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170 Fones-Wolf and Fones-Wolf, 6-8.

171 [A.H. Armerding], “The Post-War Industrial Problem,” The Industrial Chaplain (1945), 12. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 15, Folder 10), BGCA.
in a business suit and tie; and a bulkier man with his sleeves rolled up under his apron. He was carrying a tool and rubbing shoulders with the business man, who listened closely as he talked.172

Other pages elaborated on the illustration’s industrial paradise of reciprocity between employer and employee. “The underlying principle of the Industrial Chaplaincy program is to bring to bear upon the industrial worker, and upon management as well, the challenge of spiritual and moral considerations.” According to a piece reprinted from *The Army-Navy Chaplain*, “G.I. Joe will hardly settle for less than a chaplain on the job with him who will talk his language and who has the same staff status that his Service Chaplain enjoyed.” The author imagined G.I. Joe deciding that “home missions had better begin at my work bench when I get back.”174 A.H. Armerding diagnosed “voluntary absenteeism,” a common form of worker protest, as “evidence of a sinister disease which is gnawing at the very heart of employee-management relations.” The cure was “mixing religion with business.”175 Walter Block of the Quaker Stretcher Company, who owed his minister-for-hire to Youth for Christ’s Torrey Johnson, took “mixing” literally by combining the jobs of Chaplain and Personnel and Public Relations Director. “[The chaplain’s] function…includes the direction of Chapel services, personnel counselling [sic], sick visitation and the editing of our Company’s publication.”176 From beyond the NAE, the Ford News Bureau sent pictures of five thousand white and black

172 *The Industrial Chaplain*, cover.


175 [A.H. Armerding], “A Need and Its Remedy.”

176 Walter Block, “To Whom It May Concern,” *The Industrial Chaplain*, 10.
employees worshiping together on Good Friday. The accompanying article did not note that Ford’s wartime strikes outnumbered the weekly “devotional services” institutionalized in 1940.177

As Armerding’s references to non-specific “moral and spiritual forces” and categorization of industrial strife as a “disease” showed, he was familiar with his chief competitor, industrial psychology. Like chaplaincy, the “science” of human relations located labor-management problems in the emotional lives of individuals, not the structure of the workplace. But psychology was thoroughly humanistic. By attributing agency to “forces” rather than “God” or “Satan,” Armerding gestured toward the language of human potential without ruling out the supernatural. Nowhere was the balancing act more apparent than in his foreword, which clearly addressed a non-evangelical reader. “In every well managed manufacturing plant, the machinery employed is given regular inspection and service in order to maintain the highest productive efficiency.” Workers deserved “just as much, if not more, consideration,” but not in “cold-blooded” performance reviews. Armerding rejected “[a]ny program based on the premise that the worker is merely a cog in the great industrial machine.” Industrial Chaplaincy “recognizes the personality of the worker.” It was not “mercenary.” In addition to “promot[ing] happier relations between management and labor,” its “benefits will be projected into the homes and family life of all concerned.”178 By positing personal, familial, and social happiness as industrial chaplaincy’s ultimate aims,


178 [A.H. Armerding], “Foreword,” The Industrial Chaplain, 1.
Armerding airbrushed its theological moorings. However, *The Industrial Chaplaincy’s* cover Bible and testimonials about communal “devotion[s]” and prayer brought evangelical Christianity to the fore. The warring messages plagued the Commission throughout its tenure.

After the convention, the Commission formed an independent, non-profit corporation called “Chaplain Counselors in Industry” and introduced a certification course at Wheaton College. New Commission director Ernest L. Chase, another engineer, explained that being linked to the NAE (or “any one organization”) limited their outreach. The new word “counselor,” he added, was another concession to the norms of non-evangelical industries they had canvassed. These businesses had rejected “the shop-meeting approach” of LeTourneau, Walter Block, and John Mitchell for a more therapeutic role. “[I]f we trained [our] men to act as personnel counselors, we would be acceptable to management, and have equal or greater privilege of presenting the Gospel in a personal way to laboring men and women.” Yet Chase was uncomfortable using the vocabulary of “atheistic psychologists.” He asked Taylor “not [to] mistake the scientific phraseology to mean we are forsaking the old Gospel,” but simply smuggling God’s word into the enemy camp. Whatever Taylor thought about the language, he was invested in the outcome. Having bailed the Commission out of a financial scrape once already, he made it a line item in the CWF budget for 1945-46. Not only that, he developed a strategy for approaching Chicago-area industries and promised to pay for the first

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180 Ernest L. Chase to HJT, Oct. 29, 1945. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 15, Folder 10), BGCA. See also Fones-Wolf and Fones-Wolf, 11.

181 Irwin McLean to HJT, Sept. 5, 1945. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 15, Folder 10), BGCA.
chaplain in return for having a say in the hire. Chicago, like the rest of the nation, was enduring a record strike wave for the first half of 1946, and Taylor was in the mood to “experiment.”

The Wheaton curriculum, for which Taylor earmarked $525, further muddied the mission of industrial chaplaincy by restoring Christian proselytizing to the job description. Military chaplains and seasoned clergy were eligible for the first six-week summer program in 1945, and five enrolled. College faculty and evangelical business men traded teaching duties. They started with “Personal Evangelism,” a “review of the need of the individual sinner for the knowledge of the Gospel…the responsibility of the Industrial Chaplain to meet the need and the most effective ways of dealing with the individual.” Next came an introduction to “Factory Organization and Administration,” succeeded by “Personnel Administration and Industrial Relations,” a “survey of relations between management and labor, and the techniques most successfully used to promote efficiency and harmony.” A week on “Organized Labor Problems” followed, covering the history and, intriguingly, “rights and privileges of organized labor in the average industrial plant.” Would chaplains try to hold employers to the standards of the National Labor Relations Board? After a primer on health and safety, students investigated “Community Resources” for referrals. There was more than a hint of the Social Gospel in the safety net “dealing with crime, the handicapped, family welfare, housing conditions and child care…local government, public safety, health care, educational and recreational

resources, and considerations for foreign born and racial groups.” At the same time, it was in management’s best interest to outsource social problems to agencies that would help workers for free.

Last came the task of persuading employers that the salary of a Wheaton-certified chaplain counselor would pay for itself many times over in employee contentment. It became very clear, very quickly, that the Commission had high-octane marketing to do. At the 1946 convention, Armerding put the best face on the situation. Only two of the five men in the first Wheaton class found chaplaincy jobs. “The accomplishments in the shop are still not sensational, and yet personnel problems are under control,” one characterized his encouraging, if unelectrifying, opening months. Still, these were early days. Thanks to Japan’s surrender and the Commission’s publicity campaign in the conservative Protestant press, Wheaton had thirty-five applicants for the 1946 summer program, a majority of them former military chaplains. Chaplain Counselors for Industry, Inc., now with the CBMCI’s Benson and Grunigen on the masthead, met a $10,000 budget without help from NAE headquarters. However, Armerding conceded, fundraising was a problem. “The early experimental stages of this work were not of such a character as to provide incentive for contributions from Christians generally,” he said. “A few of the trustees carried the entire financial load.” To an extent, the Commission found itself in the top-down plight that plagued the NAE as a whole. Unless a member church was in an industrial battle zone, it had no reason to care about an initiative by and for the

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183 Commission for Industrial Chaplains, “ANNOUNCING a six-weeks Seminar for Industrial Chaplains and Candidates,” n.d. (spring 1945). Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 15, Folder 10), BGCA.

NAE’s business men. But the Commission’s shifting identities and inability to communicate a clear purpose in crisp words were its own problems, no matter whom it was asking for money.

Armerding was far less upbeat in a fundraising letter a few months later, which he titled “Prayer for Industrial Evangelism.” Abandoning psychological terminology, he reflected on the Commission’s two-year anniversary of “deep concern for the millions of men and women in American industrial plants who are not being reached by any evangelical testimony.” The story, as he told it, was of unwary adventurers groping through an untrodden path surrounded by saboteurs. “From a religious standpoint, Rome was...drawing the working classes into her fold. From a political standpoint, the Communists were making great strides.” Such opposition was to be expected, but they knew they were “venturing into the Devil’s territory” when even “the Lord’s people” abandoned them. “[T]o our amazement, the large majority of Christians have shown utter indifference to the need and to the vast possibilities of this work. It is our hope and prayer that this apathetic condition will be dissolved.” He asked readers for “prayer,” meaning “prayer and money,” and signed off. At the bottom of the stationery ran the Chaplain Counselors for Industry, Inc.’s innocuous and, in context, incongruous motto: “A Nonprofit Association for the Development of New Techniques in Industrial Relations.” Perhaps the Devil was not solely responsible for evangelical lack of interest.185 If Taylor responded to Armerding’s letter, it is not recorded. He did donate five hundred shares of

185 A.H. Armerding to Brethren in Christ, Nov. 5, 1946. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 15, Folder 20), BGCA.
Club Aluminum stock to inaugurate a business program for Wheaton students, dwarfing his contributions to industrial chaplaincy.186

In 1947, still dissatisfied with the Commission’s progress, Armerding switched discourses again. He steeped himself in the literature of industrial psychology and regurgitated his findings in a ten-page, single-spaced, pseudo-academic paper for employers. “‘Chaplain Counselors’ for Industry: A Scientific Development in Counseling for Industrial Workers” was a brief for evangelical Christianity as the key to a happy labor force. Armerding got to the point on page 8, after discussing, among other topics, “self-values and other(s) values,” “basic urges (drives or needs),” “libido fixation,” “whole personality,” “human adjustment,” and “non-directive Rogerian styled psychotherapy.” Chaplain Counseling, he said, helped hypothetical workers “Bill” and “Mary” “incorporate in their own life spiritual resources from beyond themselves. These resources lie in the essentials of Christianity as found in the Bible. These become permanent values and new goals for an increasing maturity of life and efficiency on the job.” Any other therapeutic regime encouraged “neuroses and general unrest…mak[ing] the ground fertile for the seed of Communistic or other agitators,” and preventing “Bill” and “Mary” from “learn[ing] to adjust happily within industry’s limiting frameworks of authority.”

According to Armerding, who was by no means coherent, “Biblical Christianity” was a technology, not a theology. It was “the most powerful force known in the field of adjustment of human personality when used in a scientific therapeutic relationship.” It was a “personal function of the individual” that lacked any “denominational, organizational, or church function” or “outward forms and ceremonies.” Because

186 V.R. Edman to HJT, Feb. 14, 1947. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 15, Folder 39), BGCA.
“Christian spiritual means…answer man’s basic drives,” they could be applied inoffensively to “men of all faiths.” Science had spoken, and Chaplain Counselors for Industry, Inc. were ready to serve.187 Ernest L. Chase, the nonprofit’s director, had already contacted Union Carbide & Carbon, Marshall Field, National Cash Register, and other big businesses.188 The Commission’s financial plan for 1947-48 was to solicit fifteen evangelical business men to pay expenses until one of the corporate behemoths signed a contract, enabling the nonprofit to become self-sufficient. Taylor at least considered, and probably joined, the group of fifteen. It topped out at ten, or two-thirds of the budget.189 Union Carbide never called.

In 1949, the NAE’s Commission for Industrial Chaplaincies dissolved, but Chaplain Counselors for Industry, Inc. did not. “It is obvious that religious work as such is unacceptable to industry,” Armerding said. However, “[t]he larger industries seem to be very interested in securing the services of capable counselors, and we believe that evangelical Christians should seize the opportunity to secure such positions.”190 The 1948 convention report struck a rueful, but hopeful, note. Ernest L. Chase suggested a new iteration of the program, Insight Counseling “(the technical name for Chaplain Counseling),” to “125 of the largest, most progressive employers in America.” He asked 40 to allow a demonstration, and quoted some negative responses. They ranged from


188 A.H. Armerding, “Brief Report to Trustees for Year 1947,” n.d. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 15, Folder 45), BGCA.


190 A.H. Armerding to Stephen Paine, Mar. 22, 1949. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 66, Folder 23), BGCA.
time, cost, and redundancy to “you lack statistical scientific proof from previous
experiments”; “wait for the next war – then we shall be needing new plans badly”; and
“this would raise the religious issue with Catholics no matter how skillfully you handled
it.” Chase concluded that “years of patient planning” lay ahead, unless indeed there was
another war. “In such a case, we believe that many concerns will be tolerating our
Christianity in order to reach the benefits of our program.” In the meantime, Insight
Counseling would plod along, reaching out to new manufacturers and working to
establish its scientific credentials.¹⁹¹

Liberal Protestant industrial chaplaincy programs were similarly stymied until it
sunk in that the Cold War was the next war.¹⁹² Two examples from a small but potent
religious boom in industry, already in progress when the NAE Commission collapsed,
vindicated Armerding’s clumsy attempts to integrate faith and the psychology of human
relations. In 1949, Winston-Salem’s R.J. Reynolds started the movement’s shift toward
the South by hiring a former Air Force chaplain as “pastor-counselor.” The company’s
wartime union troubles were legendary, and it had only recently struck back by severing
its labor contract. Now it was in the middle of a bruising National Labor Relations Board-
supervised election. The chaplain, like the company’s free subscriptions to self-help
preacher Norman Vincent Peale’s Guideposts, was part of the company’s renewed
interest in welfare capitalism as a solution to labor-management strife. He called his job
“applied Christianity in the human relationships of industry and at the workaday level of
personal problems.” Keeping at arm’s length from management and giving a sympathetic

Annual Convention, National Association of Evangelicals, May 3-6, 1948, 21. Papers of HJT (Collection
20, Box 66, Folder 23), BGCA.

¹⁹² Fones-Wolf and Fones-Wolf, 12.
ear to workers, he received the lion’s share of the credit for rising employee retention and falling absenteeism. An R.J. Reynolds board member declared that he would not only “recommend,” but “crusade for,” “religious counseling in other companies.” On the other side of the religio-political fence, the United Church Men of the National Council of Churches formed a Religion in Industry committee in 1953. It identified low worker self-esteem as the preeminent industrial problem, and an industrial chaplain capable of “building spiritual values into work relationships” as the answer.

Fifty years after its first incarnation, industrial chaplaincy still crossed white, middle-class Protestant party lines by appealing to fears of social disorder. Anticommunism, with its tendency to root class conflict in individual pathology, could still be either liberal or conservative. In 1948, the CIO and the Congress of Racial Equality purged communists from their ranks, and former state department official Alger Hiss fought charges of treason. In August 1949, the Soviet Union dropped its first atomic bomb, and two months later, Mao Tse-Tsung took China. Over a dozen states instituted loyalty oaths for public employment. In February 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy made himself a sensation by inviting news cameras to watch him wave a piece of paper which, he lied, named two hundred more communists in the State Department. It was the NAE Commission’s misfortune to run out of money and energy just as the cultural climate for industrial chaplaincy was heating up. “[M]ixing religion with business,” to quote

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193 This account is indebted to Fones-Wolf and Fones-Wolf, 24-28.

194 Ibid., 20.
Armerding and LeTourneau, was shedding its stigma in a divided world facing nuclear annihilation.\textsuperscript{195}

For political and economic conservatives, a fight against communism was a fight against the New Deal. The National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), which housed some of Roosevelt’s most ardent and wealthy opponents, embraced workplace religion and industrial chaplaincies to both ends. J. Howard Pew of Sun Oil and the American Liberty League; his close ally Jasper Crane of Du Pont, where the Liberty League originated; and leaders from the likes of General Motors and the National Steel Corporation fought taxes, regulations and unions in the political system, the courts, and public relations campaigns. Government-industry collaboration during the war began to turn the tide in favor of the NAM, the Chamber of Commerce and the Council for Economic Development, NAM’s more ideologically diverse siblings and sometimes rivals.\textsuperscript{196} The 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, which restricted the right to strike and forbade “closed shops” that hired union workers only, was an NAM-led victory for the entire business community. Christian anticommunism was both a rhetorical strategy and, by the early 1950s, a workplace practice. “Christian freedom will give way to atheistic slavery…and the dead hand of bureaucracy will close the throttle on progress,” prophesied a NAM spokesman during the Taft-Hartley debate.\textsuperscript{197} The Church-Industry Relations group encouraged companies to supply workers with \textit{Guideposts} and other


\textsuperscript{196} Fones-Wolf, 7-8, 22-26.

Hammond: 

God’s Business Men, Chapter 4

religious literature, and took note of a spike in industrial chaplaincies in the early 1950s. 198

One of the first acts of the NAE’s Commission on Industrial Chaplaincies in 1944 was to appoint a liaison to the NAM, which indicates that some or all of the industrialists on the board were members. The goal was to lead a panel on industrial chaplaincies at the next NAM annual convention. 199 “By attendance at the meetings of the American Management Association and the National Association of Manufacturers, we have made many worthwhile personal contacts,” Armerding commented later. “We have also learned the current language of industrial leaders, and we are putting this to use in our literature and promotional work.” The replacement of “chaplain” with “counselor” was a direct result. 200 Given Armerding’s provincial, almost anthropological tone, at least two explanations arise for the evident rejection of the panel proposal. First, a cultural as well as an income gap separated the Pews and the Cranes from their small-business brethren. Second, and more speculatively, evangelical business men who took for granted the “shop floor” model of religion in the factory were, by and large, as distant from the power centers of their professions as the NAE was from the White House. (LeTourneau was a glaring exception.) Like the NAE’s founders, they were dissatisfied in a fundamentalist cocoon. They wanted their faith to transform the world. Over time, combining evangelical and therapeutic individualism in the service of welfare capitalism

198 Fones-Wolf, 224.


became a minority, but influential, management style. Today’s spiritual heir to the Chaplain Counselors for Industry is Wal-Mart.\textsuperscript{201}

CONCLUSION

It was 1934 and longshoremen were striking in San Francisco. Beginning in May, thousands-strong picket lines in port cities all the way down the West Coast blocked shippers’ access to the waterfront. In the Bay Area, as elsewhere, violence flared between strikers and municipal policemen colluding with private employers. On July 3, coffee magnate James A. Folger led a caravan of trucks with a police escort to seize goods from blockaded boats. An officer fired the opening shot of what would go down in history as “Bloody Thursday.” “Police used their clubs freely and mounted officers rode into milling crowds,” the San Francisco News reported. “The strikers fought back, using fists, boards and bricks as weapons.”¹ Peace barely prevailed on Independence Day. The next night, five thousand National Guard troops turned the city into a battlefield. Two picketers died in the crossfire, and unions from every trade announced a general strike. With San Francisco paralyzed and violence spreading to other cities, labor leaders suspended the longshoremen’s strike and employers agreed to arbitration. The San Francisco Chamber of Commerce and its brethren claimed that “communistic agitators” were sabotaging “industrial peace” with “un-American” ideology.² But the longshoremen’s union, empowered by New Deal legislation legalizing collective bargaining, won almost all of its original demands.³ The futile strike that business men crushed in Sinclair Lewis’s Babbitt was a relic of the ancien regime.⁴

For Abram Vereide, a Norwegian-born minister living in San Francisco, “Bloody Thursday” vivified his fears of a lower-class uprising and reinforced his recent shift from the Social Gospel to the gospel of wealth. Vereide had come to the United States in 1905. Energetic, entrepreneurial, and equipped with what he later called “a passion…to win immigrants for Christ,” he climbed the Methodist hierarchy in the Pacific Northwest. In 1916, he became the pastor of one of Seattle’s largest churches, where he established homes for the destitute and “delinquents,” as well as “an employment office, Americanization classes, Bible classes, and various other classes of instruction.” He transformed a church-affiliated social service agency into a nondenominational company, Good Will Industries, which distributed food and clothing with assembly-line efficiency. Vereide saw his work as a way to help poor newcomers seize America’s opportunities, as he felt he had, instead of falling prey to radicals who would replace individual achievement and Christian charity with egalitarianism by force.

Aiding the poor, disabled, and disenfranchised required cultivating wealthy patrons, and in the 1920s, Vereide’s goal of molding foreigners into “industrious and patriotic citizens,” won him friends in high places with ease. His sympathy with the powerful received a strong evangelical jolt in, of all settings, a 1932 meeting about New York relief efforts with then-Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt. Among the attendees was

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6 *Ibid.*, 41-44; Sharlet, 96.
7 Grubb, 39, 44.
the president of U.S. Steel, who proceeded to blame every depression in American history on collective rebellion against God. Revival “must come through the laymen,” he said, in Vereide’s recollection, “and the leaders of business and industry must begin to lead.” From this perspective, it was in society’s interest to minister to the elite rather than the poor. The elite could end the Depression by accepting the mantle of stewardship God had given them. The poor could do little to help the nation, but without the guidance of consecrated rulers, they could do a great deal of harm.

Between 1932 and 1934, Vereide began to take the top-down evangelism of R.G. LeTourneau, Christian business men’s groups, Herbert J. Taylor, and the National Association of Evangelicals to its logical conclusion: an exclusive focus on laymen at the top of the social order. “Concern for the ‘down and out’ is fairly common,” he explained. “Concern for the ‘up and out’ is more rare.” Converting the materially affluent but spiritually empty was the key to national regeneration. “The greater [men’s] sphere of influence in government or industry, the more responsible they are to make it plain…that Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is the only answer to human problems.” Subordination to Christ was “true leadership,” and politicians and business men who practiced it would lift up the masses like a magnet. Vereide agreed with the middle-class advertisers and tribes of social critics who imagined ordinary citizens as a volatile, but impressionable, herd. He was less sure of his own place in the world. After the presidential inauguration in 1933, he considered a post in the administration. Not long into the first “Hundred

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9 Grubb, 48; Sharlet, 96.
10 Grubb, 52.
Days” of the New Deal, he recoiled, certain that Roosevelt was dragging America down into radicalism.\textsuperscript{11}

In 1934, at forty-eight, Vereide left his church positions and Good Will Industries, now the ubiquitous “Goodwill,” to become a full-time missionary to the “up and out.”\textsuperscript{12} “Bloody Thursday” took place while he was holding regular prayer meetings for executives at San Francisco’s Pacific Union Club. He interpreted the riots as dystopian scenes of lower-class mob rule and moved back to Seattle, another flashpoint of the longshoremen’s strike, in 1935.\textsuperscript{13} Finding that “the manpower of the churches had dwindled badly, and politics seemed under the control of those who were not fit to take leadership,” Vereide formed a breakfast Bible study for conservative laymen.\textsuperscript{14} Members included the head of the largest department store chain in the Northwest, several other company presidents, a man Vereide praised as “the sturdy, rugged capitalist who had been chairman of the employer’s committee in the strike,” and Arthur E. Langlie, a Republican reformer on the City Council who in five years would be Governor of Washington.\textsuperscript{15} “We faced the problems of our own city and state, and those of the nation, as well as our respective businesses,” Vereide said after a weekend retreat in the Cascade Mountains. All agreed that “[s]ubversive forces had taken over” in each sphere.\textsuperscript{16} In a year, the Seattle club grew from nineteen to seventy-five.\textsuperscript{17}

In late 1935 or early 1936, Vereide met another Scandinavian immigrant driven by a Depression-inspired epiphany that American business men would redeem the world.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 48-49.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 53; Sharlet, 108.
\textsuperscript{14} Grubb, 53.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 55-57; Sharlet, 112.
\textsuperscript{16} Grubb, 57.
\textsuperscript{17} Sharlet, 111.
C.B. Hedstrom, the founding president of the Christian Business Men’s Committee International (CBMCI), was recruiting new affiliates. Vereide served as the Seattle CBMCI’s first executive secretary, persuading a breakfast club member to finance the organization’s trademark noonday services. However, he resigned after a schism that he blamed on “sectarian doctrines.” For several years, intertwined differences of social class and doctrinal rigidity caused the breakfast groups to expand on parallel tracks with the CBMCI and its Southern counterpart, the Business Men’s Evangelistic Clubs (BMEC). Vereide pursued big-business magnates no matter where, or if, they went to church. The CBMCI and BMEC attracted small-business men willing to make orthodox statements of faith. For example, after Vereide left the Seattle CBMCI, chiropractor and future missionary N.A. Jepson took over. Jepson balanced his career and the CBMCI with a six-day-a-week evangelical broadcast on local radio stations. Meanwhile, the breakfast clubs helped put one of their own, Arthur Langlie, in the governor’s seat.

The distinct constituencies soon re-converged in Washington, D.C., as business men took up the World War II drumbeat for evangelicals to unite and conquer. A BMEC chapter formed in the capital after a city-wide revival in 1939. Abram Vereide, ready to rescue lost souls in government, arrived late in the summer of 1941. He enlisted the president of the National Association of Manufacturers to organize a prayer breakfast for Congress in January, 1942. “Men must either be governed by God or ruled by tyrants,”

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18 Paul W. Rood, “Around the King’s Table,” *The King’s Business* (March, 1936), 82; Grubb, 62-63. I am anachronistically using the “I” in “CBMCI,” which the group did not add until 1938 (see Ch. 2).
19 Grubb, 62-63.
20 The breakfast groups and the CBMCI, in particular, grew at the same clip and in the same major cities; Sharlet, 138.
21 Grubb, 55-56.
23 Grubb, 60.
Vereide warned his hearers, citing William Penn. The quote may have been apocryphal, but the sentiment was heartening to men who had just sent Americans to fight and die for democracy. Equally appealing was the breakfast groups’ statement of purpose: “an informal association of responsible laymen banded together for mutual study and comradeship…to promote for home, community, and nation a more effective Christian leadership.” By 1943, dozens of Congressmen and Senators were holding weekly meetings for prayer and Bible study. Herbert J. Taylor came to Washington next, commuting from Chicago to the Pentagon for the Price Adjustment Board in 1942 and 1943. The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) opened its Washington office in 1944. R.G. LeTourneau flew in and out of town to discuss his multiplying war contracts, and made his usual forceful impression. The Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force and the Attorney General all spoke at a dinner honoring his contribution to the Allied victory.

The NAE had a personal tie to the breakfast groups, and its support may have had a cascading effect on other evangelicals whose patriotism tempered their hostility toward a swollen state. NAE president J. Elwin Wright had crossed paths with Vereide in the early 1930s, when Wright’s New England Fellowship and Vereide’s Good Will Industries both opened headquarters in Boston. Wright tried to mentor Vereide out of his

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26 Ibid., 70; the estimate is in Sharlet, 138.

27 See Chapter 3.


then-modernism, and apparently, the men stayed in touch as their beliefs came to align. 30

On behalf of NAE, Wright signed a 1945 fundraising letter for Vereide’s National Committee for Christian Leadership (NCCL), the umbrella group for the prayer breakfast movement. Representatives of the CBMCI, the Gideons, and Youth for Christ also signed. R.G. LeTourneau lent his name to the masthead, which he and several other evangelical business men shared with Republican Congressman Walter Judd, a former missionary to China; Democratic Congressman Brooks Hays, a racially progressive Southern Baptist; and American Federation of Labor (AFL) president William Green, whose deputies had incurred LeTourneau’s wrath by unionizing the Peoria plant.31

Vereide was shrewd to add Green, and Green was shrewd to accept. Ever since the longshoremen’s strike, Vereide had parroted Babbitt’s pastor’s vision of labor and management as a mutually self-sacrificing brotherhood. Green, a former Sunday School teacher, courted religious groups on principle, knowing the level of commitment they could bring and the respectability the associations conferred on the AFL.32 The letter’s addressee, Herb Taylor, had no quarrel with its motley endorsers. He had previously given $100 to the NCCL, and went on to make it a beneficiary of the Christian Workers Foundation.33

30 Collection 279 – Elizabeth Morrell Evans – T6 Transcript. Billy Graham Center Archives, http://www.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/trans/279t06.htm (last accessed Feb. 23, 2010). Evans was Wright’s secretary and collaborator. Sharlet refers to Wright and Vereide as “friends” (155), but the source he cites does not say so.


33 Congressman John Phillips to HJT, July 31, 1945; HJT to Abraham Vereide (Vereide went by both first names), Jan. 29, 1946. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 66, Folder 3), BGCA.
Anchoring Vereide’s coalition was a Christian vocabulary of worldly power as a blessing and a burden, the *noblesse oblige* of God’s grace. “Followship [sic] with Christ Means Sound Leadership for the Nation,” a 1945 brochure affirmed. “God summons the laity of America to work in close partnership with Him in daily living… In business and professional circles, in public office and private affairs, men of leadership found it paid to ‘do it God’s way.’” The theology was purposefully vague. Vereide defined a Christian as “one who is identified with the Lord Jesus Christ and led by His Spirit,” which was a far cry from the CBMCI’s nine-point platform. Nonetheless, the call to service tapped into an overarching faith in a God who elevated, sanctified, and justified business. The God of evangelical business men was the perfect C.E.O.: fair, attentive, rewarding success, punishing failure, offering help, taking a keen personal interest in the lowliest staff, never permanently firing anyone. Sin was the entire human race on strike. Evangelical business men believed, with no sense of contradiction, that God’s grace was unearned, yet a sign of virtue; spiritual, yet manifested in money; everlasting, yet easily lost; a joy, yet a yoke to bear. The “man of leadership” could never stop working for God, lest he fall from grace. LeTourneau, Taylor, Vereide, and their comrades labored punishingly hard to fulfill their contracts. They assumed that everyone else was either succeeding or failing by the same rules. They were neither the first American individualists, nor the last, to try to create the world in their image.

In 1966, *Popular Mechanics* published a long article about R.G. LeTourneau, his earthmoving equipment, his faith, and his future. “At age 77, R.G. LeTourneau is in a

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34 “Followship with Christ Means Sound Leadership for the Nation,” 1945. Papers of HJT (Collection 20, Box 66, Folder 3), BGCA.
class with the buffalo and thequilting bee, a slice of Americana disappearing from the
scene,” the author wrote half-admiringly. “In an era when corporations are run by ‘teams’
and committees,” there was little room for a “self-taught engineer who rose from garage
mechanic to president” of a business that he “controls with thedictatorial rule of a
benevolent despot.” LeTourneau’s talent and stubbornness had kept him in the
director’s chair. In 1953, he sold LeTourneau, Inc. to Westinghouse for $31 million and a
promise to stay out of the earthmoving business for five years. Now based in Longview,
Texas, the site of his last plants, he used the time to develop oil rigs. His first client was
future president George H.W. Bush. “Our feeling was that anyone who had that much
confidence in himself was worth the gamble,” Bush later said. To Westinghouse’s
litigious chagrin, LeTourneau returned to his beloved machines the day the contract expired. He obsessed for years over an electric wheel, almost sliding into bankruptcy in 1962 before emerging with a design that transformed the field. “The Lord chooses the weak to confound the mighty,” he crowed.

The culture of LeTourneau, Inc. did not change much after World War II. God
was still LeTourneau’s partner and co-despot. An engineer grumbled off the record, “[I]f
you argue, he’ll start spouting the Bible. I mean, how can you disagree with God?”
LeTourneau remained a staunch welfare capitalist. In Longview, as in Toccoa Falls, he
built a training school to funnel “country boys” into his factories. “I realize we don’t
always pay the highest wages, but we make it a rule that a man can have all the overtime
he wants,” he informed the stunned reporter, who called him “an anachronism in the age

of fringe benefits.”38 Somewhat less anachronistically, LeTourneau, Inc. was a family business at the highest levels. Each of LeTourneau’s four sons had begun working in the plant on Saturdays and in the summer at age ten, for ten cents an hour. In one case, the molding backfired: the patriarch clashed with and fired his son Roy, who forgave him and got his B.A. at thirty-six. The reporter observed that LeTourneau seemed bemused that anyone would want so much education, but thrilled to be the parent of a college graduate.39

Although LeTourneau liked to say, “I’ll retire in a pine box,” his son Richard took over the company a month after the article’s publication. For the next two years, LeTourneau devoted himself full-time to evangelistic activities, some old, some new. He continued to fly around the country and preach. NOW went to 600,000 addresses every month, subsidized by the LeTourneau Foundation.40 He favored the NAE over the American Council and was a loyal trustee of his home denomination, the Christian and Missionary Alliance. In the 1950s, the Foundation took a page from Henry Ford and went into “industrial-missionary enterprises” overseas.41 The Liberian government leased half a million acres of jungle. LeTourneau’s agents cleared enough of it to open a village, Tournata, to local inhabitants and adventurous North American evangelicals. In Peru, LeTourneau and a corps of Mennonite missionaries destroyed acres of rainforest on the Amazon River to build Tournavista.42 “The objective was to open up the area, develop it,

38 James, 176.
39 Ibid., 177.
and colonize it,” a brochure mid-1950s stated. Photos showed Amazon natives in school and church.43 Tournata never mustered a profitable industry and became solely a missionary town in 1966.44 Tournavista lives on as the name of a district in Peru, and in a Facebook group created by former missionaries and their children.45 On June 1, 1969, LeTourneau died from complications of an earlier stroke.46

As of this writing, LeTourneau’s legacy thrives in Longview, Texas. LeTourneau Technologies, Inc., a subsidiary of Rowan Companies, Inc., produces earthmoving equipment, oil rigs, electrical power systems, and steel.47 LeTourneau University’s central campus is down the road, with satellites in five Texas cities and online. Its mission is to nourish both spirituality and scholarship, “encourag[ing]…the qualities of ingenuity and entrepreneurship that contribute to free enterprise and the democratic process.”48 “Serving as an ambassador of Christ, you are a Christian leader,” the school tells some 3500 students. Graduates should leave with “an attitude of leadership, a desire to make a difference, a commitment to change the world for the glory of God.”49

Herbert J. Taylor did not have LeTourneau’s luxury of ignoring changing business trends as the economy roared into prosperity after World War II. As chief executive and majority stockholder of Club Aluminum, he essentially had free rein, and other stockholders rebelled. The company saw profits from 1947 to 1955, peaking at a

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44 Stjernstrom, 280.
$13 million sales volume in 1948. In the same years, however, the Korean War once again diverted aluminum to the armed forces, and the invention of lightweight, cheaper stainless steel revolutionized the cookware market.50 The “Club Time” radio program, still starring George Beverly Shea, fell to budget cuts in 1954.51 In 1958, a commissioned survey of the staff and sales force found a growing mismatch between Taylor’s management style and industry trends. As manufacturing and sales businesses merged into larger and more stable units, the strong-arm, high-volume advertising on which Taylor had cut his teeth was going out of date. Because Club Aluminum relied on an outside supplier, it could not respond rapidly to production problems that tarnished the brand name.52 Even the Four-Way Test and Taylor’s other ostensibly nonsectarian truisms came under attack. Workers longed for a more complex approach to problem-solving than slogans such as “Right Mental Attitude,” Taylor’s secular shorthand for “believing that what God wants done can be done.”53 In 1961, the American Stock Exchange de-listed Club Aluminum for the low volume and value of its shares. Taylor retired and handed the business over to the son-in-law he had groomed as his successor.54

The transition was smooth, because Taylor’s philanthropic and service commitments had made him all but an absentee president for years. As early as 1946, two major stockholders protested the number of shares held by the Christian Workers Foundation (CWF), and the toll CWF took on his time. In 1954, Taylor rose to the presidency of Rotary International. His biographer called the honor “the end of [his]

51 Ibid., 75, 78.
52 Ibid., 89.
53 Ibid., 89.
54 Ibid., 91-92.
productive years in the cookware business."55 Taylor and wife Gloria spent months on a world tour of thirty-eight nations, and *Newsweek* put him on its cover to honor Rotary’s fiftieth anniversary.56 When Taylor returned to Park Ridge, he became a more public evangelist than ever before, preaching “a blend of the Four-Way Test, the virtues of prayer and Bible memorization, the need in American society for higher moral standards, and folksy advice, especially to teen-agers, on being successful in life.”57 He told the lessons of his life on TV. He wrote for *Guideposts*, Norman Vincent Peale’s magazine of Christian and capitalist inspiration; its multimillionaire bankrollers included oilman J. Howard Pew, retailer Stanley Kresge, and newspaperman Frank Gannett.58 He spoke in high schools and anywhere else he could get an audience of youth.59

Taylor spent years organizing Billy Graham’s 1962 comeback crusade in Chicago, an event that marked the mainstreaming of conservative evangelicalism during the Cold War. Graham, once Youth for Christ’s second-in-command, was now giving Richard Nixon political advice. He was close to Pew, who, in 1956, had given Graham and his NAE circle $25,000 to establish the magazine *Christianity Today*.60 Moreover, in the wake of Catholic John F. Kennedy’s election, a group of fundamentalists wanted to Graham to run for President in 1964. The business man behind the draft, John Bolten, was a longtime Inter-Varsity and NAE patron. Fittingly, Taylor chose Bolten to buy out Club Aluminum and disperse its assets in 1967.61

55 Ibid., 81.
56 “Rotary President Taylor: 50 Years to the Good,” *Newsweek*, Feb. 28, 1955.
57 Heidebrecht, 85.
59 Heidebrecht, 85.
60 Graham, 288.
Taylor, the Rotarian evangelical, managed to grow simultaneously more liberal and more conservative in his last active years. In 1967, he angered many conservative Protestants by endorsing the Good News translation of the Bible, which simplified the text in contemporary English. His flexibility about Biblical literalism did not mean he had relaxed his doctrinal standards, however, especially in the Methodist Church. He withheld money from congregations that he accused of straying from “a real gospel message.” He turned his back on Northwestern, his Methodist alma mater, when the president asked him to be a trustee. He refused to give to the scholarship fund of a denominational seminary until he investigated the orthodoxy of the student body. In 1970, Taylor formed the Good News Movement for conservative Methodists with Stanley Kresge, the Guideposts financier. Optimistic that “the fires of evangelism are again starting to sweep through this great church,” he helped to sustain a conservative voice in the denomination that he loved.

Herb Taylor was almost eighty when a stroke incapacitated him in 1975. He lived for three more years, unable to speak, but taking daily walks, going to church, and listening to recordings of Bible readings. He died on May 1, 1978, and Shea sang at his funeral. The Christian Workers Foundation reverted to the Taylor family as a private philanthropy. Rotary International continues to trumpet the Four-Way Test. Robert Walker, Taylor’s right-hand man, was an evangelical journalist and publisher until he

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62 Heidebrecht, 102.
63 Quoted in ibid., 104.
64 Quoted in ibid., 104.
65 Ibid., 107-09.
died on March 1, 2008. Among Walker’s legacies are a nonprofit foundation to support missionaries and the trade publication *Christian Retailing*.68

The public-private World War II defense industry that wrested the United States out of the Depression changed the nation’s political and religious geography. When the Christian Business Men’s Committee International and Business Men’s Evangelistic Clubs launched the ill-fated Christian Laymen’s Crusade (CLC) in the early 1940s, the Sunbelt was only beginning to challenge the North and Midwest for industrial and demographic dominance.69 A warning flare went up in 1951, when Demos Shakarian, a dairy farmer and officer in the CBMCI of Downey, California, started the Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship for Pentecostals.70 In 1960, the BMEC (now Fishers of Men) dissolved into the CBMCI.71

Seemingly another instance of Northern evangelicalism swallowing the South, the merger proved to be the other way around. Resistance to the civil rights movement, anti-unionism, foreign policy hawkishness, and cultural traditionalism lifted evangelical business men below the Mason-Dixon line from subcultural obscurity into Richard Nixon’s “silent majority.”72 Chicago, the capital of fundamentalism for fifty years, and other Northern cities faced crumbling infrastructures, a white exodus to the suburbs, and

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71 CBMC USA, “75 Years of Ministry” (2006), 10.
72 Miller, 125.
soaring rates of poverty and crime. Meanwhile, the Southern and Western growth spurt that began in World War II steadily progressed. In Palm Springs in 1969, the CBMCI smashed attendance records for its annual convention. Half of the twenty-five hundred were walk-ins, a sign of the Sunbelt’s evangelical and entrepreneurial energy. In 1977, the CBMCI moved its offices to Chattanooga, Tennessee, where Boyd Hargraves had led the Depression-era BMEC. Northwest were the CBMCI’s old neighbors, the Gideons. In 1964, they had changed headquarters from Chicago to Nashville.

In 2010, personal evangelism is still the CBMCI’s primary emphasis, although the first generation’s street theater has given way to self-help books such as The Complete Christian Businessman (1991) and Eternal Impact: Investing in the Lives of Men (1997). Today’s CBMCI permits women to be members, and its leadership spans the globe from Ecuador to India. Workplace ministries such as Operation Timothy, “leveraging the natural connections that form in the trenches of day-to-day life,” show the lineage of industrial chaplaincies. Local CBMCIs hold prayer breakfasts in Vereide’s mold, drawing mayors and city councils. The seventy-fifth anniversary in 2006 issued the same challenge as the first. “We will never lose sight of the Holy Spirit changing the hearts and lives of businessmen, one life at a time!”

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74 Ibid., 11.
75 Ibid., 14.
77 Ibid., 15.
81 Ibid., 22.
Since World War II, the National Association of Evangelicals and the prayer breakfast groups have followed the different, but intersecting, paths where they started. For the NAE, still clergy-dominated at the highest levels, every political and social question raises the same theological problem: “What does it mean to be ‘evangelical?’” The overwhelmingly lay breakfast groups follow Eisenhower’s creed that any religious faith is fine as long as it promotes democracy over totalitarianism and capitalism over communism. Together, the two groups exemplify the growing willingness of evangelicals over the second half of the twentieth century to forge coalitions with religious “others.” Politics was not church. Allies in worldly battles need not share the same fate in the afterlife. In fact, as business men already believed, the most effective place to witness was on neutral ground. If answering God’s summons to preserve American strength and virtue meant mingling with modernists or even Catholics, perhaps God was taking another route toward the evangelization of the world.

Secondary sources on the NAE are scant after the 1950s, perhaps because during that decade, the organization allowed Billy Graham to become its public face. Along with intellectuals connected to Fuller Theological Seminary, of which Herb Taylor was a generous trustee, Graham helped precipitate a thorough and traumatic breach with the American Council of Christian Churches and other separatists. The combatants severed “evangelical” and “fundamentalist” identities, fracturing their common religious subculture along theological and ecumenical lines. The NAE’s self-described “new evangelicals” argued that the Bible addressed social issues as well as individual sinners, and the issues they picked amounted to a left turn. The ur-text of the movement, Carl Henry’s *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (1947), argued that
conservative evangelicals had allowed “pagan idealis[ts]” to control public debate over “aggressive warfare, political statism, racial intolerance, the liquor traffic, [and] labor-management exploitation.”

Although statism, “labor-management exploitation,” and the liquor trade were hardly absent from fundamentalist discourse, Henry’s opponents accused his circle of succumbing to modernism and the Social Gospel. Graham’s decision to work with the Federal Council of Churches for a New York City revival in 1957 symbolically sealed the rift. LeTourneau, Taylor, and the business men’s groups sided with the new evangelicals, but it might just as easily be said that the new evangelicals sided with them. “While the evangelical will resist the non-evangelical formulas for solution[s],” Henry wrote, “he assuredly ought not on that account to desist from battle against world evils,” but rather “give them a proper leadership.” Business men had practiced this philosophy all along.

While the NAE’s inability to grow, turnover at the top, and general disarray kept it on the sidelines through the 1960s and 1970s, Abram Vereide’s prayer breakfast “Fellowship” ensconced itself in the Washington establishment. Vereide’s successor, Douglas Coe, converted to evangelicalism in college in the 1940s. An Oregon native, he became deeply involved with Dawson Trotman’s laymen’s ministry, the Navigators, which emphasized intimate one-on-one “discipleship.” Like Trotman, Coe had no interest

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85 Henry, 78.
in theological hairsplitting, believing that submission to Jesus covered enough ground for anyone to stand on. \(^{87}\) Although Coe did not take over the Fellowship until Vereide’s death in 1969, he was instrumental in the group’s 1966 decision to “submerge,” avoiding media scrutiny by operating in near-secrecy. \(^{88}\) By then, the Fellowship had more secrets to keep than Congressional prayer requests. It fought its own Cold War by building ties with anti-communist dictators in Indonesia, Chile, South Vietnam, Ethiopia, and Cambodia. \(^{89}\) Totalitarianism fascinated Coe as a model for Christian leadership. He was, and is, given to comparing a covenant with Jesus to the Mafia or the Third Reich. “Jesus says, ‘You have to put me before other people, and you have to put me before yourself.’ Hitler, that was the demand of the Nazi party…If you’re gonna have any movement that moves men…you have to have that kind of commitment.” \(^{90}\) Perhaps because of the secrecy, or the mystique that the secrecy stokes, it is difficult to pin down the Fellowship’s concrete political achievements or the role of business men today.

Undoubtedly, the group’s conservative evangelicals are willing to make associations far beyond the fold. For instance, one of the Fellowship’s better-known associates grew up in Herb Taylor’s church. Her name then was Hillary Rodham. \(^{91}\)


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\(^{87}\) Sharlet, 210-11.  
\(^{88}\) Ibid., 223.  
\(^{89}\) Ibid., 245-50.  
\(^{90}\) Ibid., 30, 255 (quote).  
\(^{91}\) Ibid., 272-77; Graham, 651.
to lesser luminaries. As much as they preferred action to rumination, they thought a great deal about public policies that helped or harmed business. The New Deal pushed them to the right wings of the Republican or Democratic parties. Their conviction that God was sovereign over the “sacred” and the “secular” without distinction made regulations, taxes, and unions religious issues. A new and fractious conservative movement gave some of them ballast, while almost all took up the cause of a united and conquering revivalism. Evangelical business men in the 1930s and 1940s tried not to be of the world, but the same faith planted them in the world.
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