Barry Goldwater wrote in his journal, "Today as I sit in the Senate in the year 1979 it is interesting to me to watch liberals, moderates and conservatives fighting each other to see who can come out on top the quickest against those matters that I talked so fervently and so much about in 1964 . . . Now that almost every one of the principles I advocated in 1964 have become the gospel of the whole spread of the spectrum of politics, there really isn't a heck of a lot left."[52]

10 Making the Moral Majority

"THE SIMPLE TRUTH is that there is a new majority in America," wrote Richard Viguerie shortly after the 1980 election. "And it's being led by the New Right."[1]

Viguerie wrote these words after spending more than a decade organizing for conservative causes—long years during which he raised money, wrote letters, and published a magazine for the movement. He was the self-made man of conservatism, a direct-mail innovator who made a fortune selling his famous list of names of conservative donors to activists eager to dip into the money well. He exercised so much control over the conservative funding base that some critics dubbed him the "godfather of the right."[2]

Born in a small town on the outskirts of Houston, Viguerie was the son of a midlevel petrochemical executive and a nurse who kept a vegetable garden. From an early age he defined himself politically as a conservative. As a reclusive teenager he adored Joseph McCarthy and Douglas MacArthur, and in college he became active in the Republican Party of Texas. In 1961, at the age of twenty-eight, he took on the role of executive secretary for Young Americans for Freedom. He started to do fund-raising work for the organization and quickly found that he preferred private, anonymous direct-mail solicitations to the slightly craven posture he had to adopt when going to ask wealthy men for cash.

His breakthrough came in 1964. As disappointed as he was by Gold-

water's defeat, Viguerie nonetheless had the presence of mind in the days after the loss to go to the office of the clerk of the House of Representatives, where he copied down 12,500 names of Goldwater contributors by hand. These donors formed the foundation for a master list of the most committed conservatives in the nation. By the late 1970s, Viguerie had collected the names and addresses of 15 million supporters of conservative causes, which he carefully stored on 3,000 rolls of magnetic tape and scrupulously guarded in his offices in a Virginia suburb of Washington, D.C.[3]

Despite his firmly conservative politics, Viguerie practiced an ecumenical approach to 1970s culture. He liked health food, ate raw lettuce to keep his acid-alkaline count in balance, and kept a jar of wheat germ handy. Although he and his wife were practicing Catholics, Viguerie dabbled in various other faiths. One of his children attended a Christian fundamentalist school, because the Vigueries believed that the rigorous religious curriculum would teach good moral character. Yet Viguerie was also drawn to Eastern religions, including the doctrine of reincarnation. The promise of rebirth deepened his libertarian convictions. As he told one reporter, "We must experience things for ourselves rather than having the government do for us, because we are constantly preparing ourselves for our future lives—perhaps thousands of them."[4]

In 1975, Viguerie branched out from the business of selling mailing lists to start a magazine: *Conservative Digest*. The publication sought to unify the disparate strands of a conservative movement that seemed all of a sudden to be on the march throughout the country. In 1969, a year after Nixon won the election, his aide Kevin Phillips wrote a book called *The Emerging Republican Majority*, which predicted that Nixon's victory was no fluke but that white voters in the South and in cities in the North and Midwest would soon form a voting coalition that could replace the old New Deal alliance, ushering in an era of conservative power. A series of conflicts in the early 1970s seemed to lend credence to his arguments by showing the breakdown of the liberal order. In May 1970, only a few days after Nixon announced the invasion of Cambodia and National Guardsmen killed student protesters at Kent State, construction workers in New York City beat up student demonstrators protesting the war on

Wall Street. The following year, in Pontiac, Michigan, ten school buses in a depot were dynamited to protest busing programs that were intended to integrate the school districts. In 1972, in Canarsie, Brooklyn, hundreds of white parents blocked the steps to a neighborhood school building and boycotted the local schools to try to keep black children out. In 1974, the parents of Kanawha County, West Virginia, kept their children home from school to protest the introduction of new textbooks incorporating selections from Malcolm X and Norman Mailer (the Heritage Foundation sent legal support). And the passage of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 was beginning to bring Protestants into an antiabortion movement.[5]

But the question was whether the working-class parents of Boston and Kanawha County could form an alliance with the old antigovernment, anti-union base of the movement. As the *Wall Street Journal* observed in 1976 of the longtime free-market advocates in the Republican Party, "They may be able to make common cause with working class 'social conservatives' against busing or abortion, but what happens when these same blue-collar or white-collar workers want bigger Social Security or unemployment compensation payments, more government spending on health care, or tighter government controls on utility bills?"[6]

Viguerie believed that the real base for the conservative movement needed to be blue-collar white people, the descendants of Irish or Italian or Eastern European immigrants, with "traditional" social values. Such voters could, he thought, be wooed away from their support for social and economic programs and labor unions through an appeal to them as individuals concerned about protecting their families, their neighborhoods, and their homes from the dangers posed by radicals. Viguerie published editorials urging conservatives to court the labor movement and to reach out to individual workers on "domestic social issues," even if the "labor bosses" remained out of reach. In a piece titled "Let's Get Union Members to Support Conservatives," he argued that union members were the ideal constituency for the conservative movement: "The individual union member began to realize that the more social programs his boss forced on the government, the more it was going to cost him." A 1976 article by the former Nixon staffer Patrick Buchanan outlined the future of the

Republican Party as "the party of the working class, not the party of the welfare class." The free-market businessmen and working-class social conservatives could make common cause, wrote M. Stanton Evans, the president of the American Conservative Union: "The important thing . . . is not that some of them reach their political positions by reading Adam Smith while others do so by attending an anti-busing rally, but that all of them belong to a large and growing class of American citizens: those who perceive themselves as victims of the federal welfare state and its attendant costs."[7]

To go with this heavy dose of populism, *Conservative Digest* sometimes affected a tone critical of business. Pat Buchanan wrote in 1977 that conservatives needed to make "an agonizing reappraisal of our heretofore almost uncritical support for American business." They had to fight the perception that conservatives were "lackeys of the National Association of Manufacturers or the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, volunteer caddies ever willing to carry the golf bags of the 'special interests.'" They needed to separate themselves from the business world: "If there is any political future for us, it is forfeit, so long as we let ourselves be perceived as the obedient foot soldiers of the Fortune 500." Viguerie followed up with an editorial arguing that "it is no longer axiomatic that whatever is good for General Motors is good for the country and that whatever is good for big business is good for conservatives." Businessmen had helped to further the cultural decline of the United States in myriad ways, such as advertising their products in pornographic magazines. They weren't capable of defending the free market—airline executives had testified before Congress that they needed regulations to survive. Viguerie even wrote that Ford was planning to build an auto factory in the Soviet Union, although he was only repeating a rumor rampant in conservative circles, and he eventually retracted the claim. He urged conservatives to boycott companies taking positions antithetical to their own: "What better place to confront the big businessman than in the free market place for which he professes such love and devotion?"[8]

But Viguerie also saw himself as a strenuous advocate for the free market. As such, despite drawing distinctions between being probusiness and promarket, he published many articles that sought to appeal to the same businessmen he sometimes criticized, by praising corporate PACs and advising "How Businessmen Can Stop Losing in Politics." *Conservative Digest* reprinted the speeches of Business Roundtable leaders and referred readers to the "excellent" political education courses of the Chamber of Commerce. It eagerly solicited business advertisements by trotting out its antigovernment bona fides. One such appeal read: "Mr. Businessman: Has the FTC gotcha down? Is the IRS holding you up? Are you getting heat from OSHA and gas from EPA? Is the EEOC straightening you out and the SEC slapping you down? You got troubles, friend. But maybe we can help. Our 400,000 readers are card-carrying capitalists. In a good scrap, you'd want them on your side. Just whistle, and we'll put in a good word for you."[9]

Viguerie argued that the blue-collar workers of the nation and their manufacturing bosses were natural allies against media elites, intellectuals, academics, and poor people on welfare. The industrialists and their assembly-line employees embodied the productive forces of the country, while the effete representatives of liberalism formed a coalition of waste and indulgence. Philip Crane, a conservative congressman from Illinois, reported in *Conservative Digest* on a meeting that he'd attended with union workers in Youngstown, Ohio: "Before this century is done we will all clearly see the battle lines that are being drawn: those who work for a living versus those who don't. The union members we spoke to are work-oriented people—eloquent in their condemnation of working on the government payroll instead of the private sector." The magazine printed fulminations against "rich liberals" and poetic denunciations of liberalism:

I think that I shall never see
A liberal who appeals to me;
A liberal who beats upon the breast . . .
For all the world, he knows what's best! . . .
"Ban the bomb! Boycott the grapes!"
"Pity the perpetrator when he rapes";

"Herd commuters onto buses";
"Tax the oilman if he fusses!"
The media adore his ideas murky;
But to me, he's just a liberal turkey;
For livings are earned by fools like we,
But these liberals want it all for free.[10]

Viguerie teamed up with an unlikely ally in 1976 to try to bring his conservative populism into electoral politics: William Rusher, the publisher of *National Review.* Rusher seemed nothing like a populist at first glance. He was a Manhattanite who loved to quote Shaw, Shakespeare, and Voltaire in casual conversation. One journalist described him as the only conservative in America who was a member of not one but two wine societies. But in 1975 Rusher published *The Making of the New Majority Party,* a book that made the case for a conservative alliance between businessmen and the working class. Class divisions between "haves" and "have-nots" no longer mattered in America, Rusher argued. Businessmen, manufacturers, hard-hats, blue-collar workers, and farmers were arrayed against a "new class led by elements" that were "essentially nonproductive," including academics, government workers, and the media. Liberal "verbalists," Rusher charged, such as sociologists and journalists, had invented the social programs of the Great Society and had "consciously promoted the growth" of a new constituency of poor people that "exists simply as a permanent parasite on the body politic—a heavy charge on both its conscience and its purse, carefully tended and forever subtly expanded by the verbalizers as a justification for their own existence and growth." Businessmen and workers should join together as productive Americans opposed to impoverished people on welfare and their bleeding-heart defenders in the world of liberal cultural elites. But neither political party was sufficiently committed to organizing this "new majority"—conservatives needed to start a third party to accomplish the task.[11]

Viguerie was inspired by Rusher's book. Together, the two men decided to try to take over the American Independent Party, which had

been George Wallace's political vehicle until he abandoned it in a quest for political legitimacy in 1972. Viguerie wrote an editorial arguing that conservatives should break from the Republicans: "Conservatives have been married to the Republican Party for over 100 years. It is time for conservatives to file for divorce." Rusher wrote to his friend William F. Buckley, "I have been a prisoner in the Republican Party's chain-gang too long, and I intend to try something different this year, even if it only amounts to a change of chain-gangs!" With financial support from the anti-union textile manufacturer Roger Milliken (the former donor to *National Review* and supporter of Goldwater) and the Heritage Foundation donor Joseph Coors, they started the Committee on Conservative Alternatives (COCA) to explore political possibilities for conservatives outside the Republican Party. "The workers in this country are fed up with the shirkers, and they are fed up with the government taking the fruits of their hard work to support those who don't and won't work," Senator Jesse Helms pronounced at COCA's first press conference.[12]

Viguerie hoped that Ronald Reagan, the candidate of the economic right, fresh from his third term as governor of California and starting to look toward national politics, could somehow be persuaded to run for the presidency on the American Independent Party ticket with George Wallace, the candidate of the social right. At the time, Reagan was growing eager to pursue a broader role in national politics. As he wrote to Lemuel Boulware, his old friend from GE, "I promise you I'll be trying to stir up the business world, including the exhortation to fight back against government's increasing lust for power over free enterprise." He even told the aging GE executive that an article Boulware had written for *Human Events* (a conservative magazine) had been the basis for some of his own speeches. Boulware still had great hopes for Reagan. When the politician began a radio program in 1974, Boulware wrote to him, "You are the lone one with the knowledge, facility, zest and credibility needed to make the initially disillusioning facts be both economically understandable and humanly attractive."[13]

Viguerie hoped that together, Reagan and Wallace could mount a challenge to Gerald Ford, the mainstream Republican whose politics seemed

weak and tepid to the circle around *Conservative Digest*. But the attempt was more fantasy than realistic strategy: Reagan was intrigued by Rusher's book, but his flirtation with starting a third party was quickly quelled by his backers and advisers, who wanted him to remain a Republican. Instead, Reagan challenged the incumbent Ford for the Republican nomination, choosing the liberal Republican Senator Richard Schweiker of Pennsylvania as his running mate instead of the volatile Wallace.[14]

Rusher and Viguerie went to the American Independent Party convention in Chicago anyway. Viguerie offered to run for president himself on the third-party line. But the party's delegates rejected the outsiders (one quizzed Viguerie about a rumor that he'd attended a convention in a saloon, while another accused him of being an acquaintance of William F. Buckley—part of the Rockefeller elite). "They're not conservative, they're out-and-out kooks," one of Viguerie's friends commented. Instead, the party nominated as its candidate in 1976 the former governor of Georgia Lester Maddox, a notorious segregationist whose main claim to fame before his entrance into politics was his vigorous attempt to prevent the integration of his chicken-shack restaurant in Atlanta. The convention even featured a keynote speaker who denounced "atheistic political Zionism" as the "most insidious, far-reaching force the world has ever known." Realizing that association with the racist and anti-Semitic far right would not help their cause, Rusher and Viguerie immediately resigned from the party. In a postscript to the campaign, Rusher ended up asking Coors to help pay off the debts that had been incurred by the project.[15]

Even though it failed, the COCA experiment was still important as a sign of the ways in which conservative activists were seeking to reframe their movement as an alliance between workers and businessmen. It was not so much that Viguerie, himself an entrepreneur, wanted to reject business conservatism, despite his occasional critiques of the Fortune 500. Rather, he sought to create a movement that would be capable of bringing together employees and executives, blue-collar workers and the men who employed them. At the same time, as a salesman of sorts, Viguerie was also well aware that abortion, busing, pornography, gun rights, and crime were exactly the kinds of morally charged and dramatic issues that were

capable of galvanizing public support. "To imagine that the New Right has a fixation on these issues misses the mark," Viguerie wrote. "The New Right is looking for issues that people care about, and social issues, at least for the present, fit the bill." To win elections, Viguerie believed, conservatives needed to develop a program that went beyond the tax cuts and antiregulation politics of the American Enterprise Institute. As the Heritage Foundation leader Paul Weyrich commented in an explicit jab at the Business Roundtable, "We talk about issues that people care about, like gun control, abortion, taxes, and crime. Yes, they're emotional issues, but that's better than talking about capital formation."[16]

SHOWING HOW the language of the free market could be used in the fight against racial integration, Senator Jesse Helms brought southern whites, who as a group had been Democrats since the Civil War, into the Republican Party. Over his years in Washington, Helms became known as a strident political leader for the cultural right. But his political career had really begun in the world of business conservatism.[17]

Helms was the child of a police officer in Monroe, North Carolina, a sleepy small town in the vicinity of Charlotte. After a short stint in college and a period working as a staffer for Senator Willis Smith, he became the executive director of the North Carolina Bankers Association in the early 1950s, lobbying on behalf of the state banking industry. In someone else's hands, the position might have been quiet and sedate, a comfortable, undemanding post. Helms took the opposite approach. In addition to his lobbying work (which some colleagues suggested was instrumental in getting finance-friendly legislation passed in North Carolina), Helms transformed the *Tarheel Banker*, the association's regular newsletter, into an outspoken political publication. One year after *Brown v. Board of Education*, he wrote an editorial suggesting that if North Carolina did not want to desegregate its schools, the alternative might be to create a separate private school system (as some southerners were already attempting to do, by pulling their children out of public schools and starting new all-white private schools). But he did not make his argument using the

typical tropes of segregation: white supremacy, the religious justification for separating the races, or fear of miscegenation. Instead he questioned the basic principle of public education. "We are far from convinced that public schools are the only way to make education available to our people," he wrote. "There is the private enterprise way which offers the same wide horizon for enlightenment." By accepting public education, whites in North Carolina had conceded on a basic principle that would make it hard to maintain segregated schools. After all, if the government controlled the schools, why *shouldn't* it also mandate who went to which one?[18]

Helms believed that it was more rhetorically effective to argue against public institutions in general and on principle than it was simply to defend segregation. "I prefer to oppose integration by attacking the cause rather than the Negro," he wrote to a reader in 1957. "Socialism caused the Southern problem; it is the club which is now being held over our heads." The South should simply avoid integration by abandoning the public schools. "If the South had been prepared to say in unity that we were ready to close our schools rather than surrender to the Supreme Court, the professional Negro and his liberal friends would have been handed the dilemma." A "white supremacy campaign," Helms argued, would not help the cause of the South. He concluded: "Just as I believe that the Southern white people have their rights, I feel also that the Negro is entitled to his. I cannot attack the Negro as a race, but I can in good conscience attack a socialistic system that lends itself to undue power by any group."[19]

Helms played an active part in various campaigns to advance opposition to the welfare state and labor unions. From 1957 to 1961 he served on the Raleigh City Council, where he organized businessmen to oppose "socialistic" measures. He resisted the construction of a third public swimming pool in Raleigh because the city operated one for each race and a third pool might induce pressure to integrate it: "Government at all levels should stop, insofar as practicable, its expansion into social areas. It is not mandatory that we have public swimming pools or tennis courts or parks." After leaving the city council, he brought conservative activists

such as Clarence Manion to speak to North Carolina businessmen. He worked with an organization called Citizens for the Preservation of Constitutional Government, which tried to expand conservative strength in mainstream business clubs like the local Chamber of Commerce. Along with other business friends, he tried to bring the Effective Citizens Organization, F. Clifton White's business-in-politics group, to run luncheon seminars for Raleigh business leaders to teach them the ins and outs of political activism. When it came to economics, the old Austrian Ludwig von Mises was Helms's favorite thinker. "I'm a sort of Von Mises economist, and I don't see any way for us to get out of the swamps until we drain off some of the specious political and economic philosophies which have been controlling the country," he wrote to a friend, complaining about government subsidies for Lockheed Martin. His ideal president, he claimed, would have the "candor of Hoover," the "charm of Kennedy," and the "economic awareness of Von Mises."[20]

After he left the North Carolina Bankers Association, Helms became a television and radio journalist at WRAL in Raleigh, a television station owned by a conservative who hired Helms to give "free-enterprise" editorials on the air. There Helms continued to speak out against the civil rights movement as it grew in strength. As at the *Tarheel Banker*, he transformed his criticism of the movement for black equality from a defense of segregation into an argument about the rights of private property. When lunch-counter sit-ins began in Greensboro, North Carolina, Helms claimed that he was not troubled by the demands of the young black students to sit and be served at the counter like equals. "It is not easy to argue with the Negroes' position that these dime stores encourage trade from all races in other departments but draw the line at serving food for consumption at the counter," he said on his evening opinion program, *Facts of the Matter*. "Frankly, if I were Negro, I would not like it either." But what bothered him was the protesters' assertion of *rights* even as they ignored the property rights of the shopkeepers—which for Helms were virtually sacred. "A dime store, and its lunch counter, is not a socialistic enterprise. It is not operated by the government." And the owner had the right to say whom he would serve. Helms even went so far as to say that

he would not object in the least to black people organizing economic boycotts of segregated lunch counters and refusing to eat at them, but that actually sitting down at the lunch counters meant violating the rights of the store owners to run their businesses as they saw fit.[21]

Helms had been a lifelong Democrat, like most southerners in the era of one-party dominance. But his loyalty began to waver with Barry Goldwater's vote against the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and he was so impressed by Nixon's "law and order" campaign in 1968 that he switched his registration a few years later. When he ran for the Senate for the first time, in 1972, wooed by an old friend who was a prominent North Carolina anti-union lawyer, he ran on the Republican ticket. Helms's campaign won large sums of money not only from the mill owners of the Piedmont (including Roger Milliken) but also from national figures in the world of the business right, like the Los Angeles Reagan supporter Henry Salvatori and Pittsburgh's Richard Mellon Scaife (one of the heirs of the Mellon fortune, and, with Joseph Coors, one of the main early donors to the Heritage Foundation). With the support of such businessmen, Helms used the ideas of individualism, free choice, and property rights to attack any policies that promised greater racial equality and integration.[22]

In some ways, Helms's political migration mirrored that of the rest of the white South. Upper-class white southerners had begun to drift away from the Democratic Party in the 1950s, a realignment that accelerated as Democratic support for the civil rights movement increased. But the rise of the Republican Party in the South also reflected the emergence of a newly affluent white suburban population in the region, which embraced ideas of economic growth and low taxes. These suburbanites did not define themselves as segregationists; like Helms, they often tried to distance themselves from the virulence of white supremacy. But at the same time they firmly rejected activist policies to further integration, such as busing and affirmative action, on the grounds that they violated principles of meritocracy and private property rights. Helms was poised halfway between the old southern Democrats, with their open racism, and this new conservative ascendancy. His ability to translate the politics of racism into the rhetoric of the free market helped him to create a new

kind of southern conservatism—one that could speak to conservatives not only in the South but across the country.[23]

In the fall of 1979, the televangelist Pat Robertson sent out a special report to Christian leaders across the country under the title "A Christian Action Plan to Heal Our Land in the 1980s." Robertson was no stranger to political debate. He was already the star of the *700 Club*, the Christian talk show distributed to more than a hundred television stations, and he ran the Christian Broadcasting Network, which offered round-the-clock religious programming. Robertson's "electronic church" was transforming the culture of evangelism. But the subject matter of his 1979 Christian Action Plan was not the typical fare of sin, salvation, and the culture wars. Rather, Robertson insisted that the moral illness threatening the United States in the late 1970s had its roots in the nation's political economy.

Robertson had chosen the date of the missive—October 1979—with care: it was the fiftieth anniversary of the stock market crash that had inaugurated the Great Depression. And the Depression, Robertson wrote, did "more to shape the existing framework of U.S. government policy than any other single event in recent history." The legacy of the Great Depression included "a powerful central government . . . an anti-business bias in the country . . . powerful unions," and, most important of all, "the belief in the economic policy of British scholar John Maynard Keynes, to the end that government spending and government 'fine tuning' would guarantee perpetual prosperity." Robertson conceded that such measures might have played a role in ending the Great Depression. But fifty years later they were responsible for the "sickness of the '70s"—the devaluation of the dollar, inflation, the decline in productivity. Robertson called for a "profound moral revival" to combat the economic weaknesses plaguing the United States. "Those who love God must get involved in the election of strong leaders," he insisted, and they should choose men and women who were "pledged to reduce the size of government, eliminate federal deficits, free our productive capacity, ensure sound currency."[24]

Robertson was not the only religious leader to focus on economic

policy in this way in the late 1970s. Although the "religious right," as it became known, was always deeply moved by issues having to do with family and sexuality, and had formed in part as a backlash against feminism and gay rights, its spokesmen often framed their political positions in antigovernment language—which made it possible for them to form an alliance with the business conservatives.

Since the collapse of Spiritual Mobilization there had been few serious attempts to encourage Christians to become involved with the political movement against labor unions and the welfare state. During the 1960s, conservative groups would occasionally try to organize Christians for conservative politics. The allure was obvious: churches offered the potential to build a mass movement, a conservative populist network to counter that created by labor unions. The devout oilman J. Howard Pew and the former CEO of GE Charles E. Wilson (described by John Conlan, an organizer who later became a congressman from Arizona, as a "choice fund raiser" who "loves the Lord") attended a couple of meetings of the Freedoms Foundation, which attempted in the early 1960s to build local political machines of Christians devoted to the conservative cause. Men of "prominence and character," as Conlan put it, would "infiltrate and capture the organs of elective machinery in their respective communities." But the effort never really took off. Nor did another attempt in 1962, when a Colorado real estate developer named Gerri von Frellick captured headlines for a few weeks after he started a new group called Christian Citizen, which sought to build "a 'grass roots' movement organizing itself on a national scale to train Christians how to accept leadership responsibilities" in precinct-level politics. This too quickly foundered, despite some early support from the Minnesota congressman Walter Judd, himself a well-known evangelical and conservative leader, and Bill Bright, of Campus Crusades for Christ. The Anti-Defamation League charged Christian Citizen with anti-Semitism, and local Denver newspapers suggested that it might be associated with the John Birch Society. Von Frellick insisted, somewhat unconvincingly, that despite its name, Christian Citizen was tolerant, open to all: "We don't care if he's liberal, conservative, Democrat, Republican, black, white, or Jew—if he is converted."[25]

The real problem with these halfhearted gestures toward mobilizing Christians for conservative politics was that they had no organic basis in any church community. They were largely instrumental—founded by business activists who wanted to show how libertarian and Christian principles coincided, or who simply thought that religious people could provide a mass base that their movement otherwise lacked. But in the 1970s, as the upsurge of religious fervor that has sometimes been described as the Third Great Awakening began to sweep the country, shifting the balance of the country's Christian population toward evangelical and fundamentalist churches and away from the old mainline denominations, religious leaders such as Pat Robertson and the Baptist preacher Jerry Falwell began to attempt once again to bring Christians into politics. To fight the culture wars, they sought to transcend the old divisions of creed and doctrine, to bring conservative Protestants and Catholics together to transform American society. (This was never fully successful—separatist fundamentalists like Bob Jones, Jr., condemned Falwell as "the most dangerous man in America today as far as Biblical Christianity is concerned" because he was willing to work with Roman Catholics, Jews, and Mormons.)[26]

But although their politics centered on the cultural conflicts of the decade, these religious men talked about economics as well. They argued that the growth of the state explicitly threatened the church, because the state was advancing norms and policies that contradicted true Christian values, and they insisted that Christians needed to organize to resist government power. The evangelical leaders of the 1970s sought to connect the idea of the market and opposition to the power of government to the war over American culture. In this respect they sounded remarkably similar to the businessmen who were organizing through the Chamber of Commerce and even the Business Roundtable at the same time—not in their emphasis on social issues (which the Roundtable avoided) but in their mutual insistence on the problem of a too-powerful central government.

Jerry Falwell always told his life story as the classic tale of a self-made man, and from his earliest days he nourished an entrepreneurial commit-

ment to building as large a ministry as he could. In 1971 he wrote about the importance of ministers using the insights of the corporate world to infuse the church with new funds and new members, writing that "business is usually on the cutting edge of innovation and change" and that therefore "the church would be wise to look at business for a prediction of future innovation." (Specifically, Falwell felt that churches should imitate shopping malls and provide a wide range of religious offerings so as best to attract the largest number of members.) And over the years Falwell's church did grow, coming to include not only a congregation of thousands but an elementary school, a high school, a college, and a seminary. The revenue of the *Old-Time Gospel Hour* (his television show) jumped from $1 million a year in 1971 to $1 million a month in 1975.[27]

In his early years as a minister, Falwell had been fiercely critical of preachers who became involved with politics. In his March 1965 sermon "Ministers and Marchers," he lashed out against Martin Luther King, Jr., accusing him of being used by Communists and insisting that the primary goal of any Christian leader had to be preaching the gospel: "Preachers are not called to be politicians, but to be soul winners." (Not that Falwell had entirely eschewed politics himself; early in his career he preached a sermon called "Segregation or Integration?" which argued that integration would destroy the white race; in later years he rejected this position.) But early in the 1970s Falwell changed his mind, deciding that he wanted to use his religious authority to play a role in politics. And although his first forays into political life were in the arena of culture—in 1977 he worked with the former Florida beauty queen and orange juice spokeswoman Anita Bryant in her campaign to overturn a gay rights ordinance in Florida, and in 1978 he went to California to support a state referendum that would have banned gay men and lesbians from teaching in the public schools—he was also interested in preaching the gospel on economics.[28]

In May 1978, Falwell began to publish a newspaper titled the *Journal-Champion* (in 1980 the name of the paper was changed to *Moral Majority Report*). The publication explicitly sought to provide Christian insight on matters beyond the specifically religious. This was no church newsletter but a political magazine. As one January 1979 editorial put it: "We must not be limited to the news of our churches and schools, at a time when politics and governmental processes of our national, state and local governments affect the vitality and very existence of our churches and Christian schools." The ultimate point was political action: "It is tragic when Christians don't vote."[29]

Early issues of the *Journal-Champion* carried numerous articles calling the faithful to the fight to cleanse America of sexual sin: homosexuality, pornography, and abortion. But interwoven with this campaign were descriptions of the economic and political crisis facing the United States. "The greatest threat to the average American's liberty does not come from Communistic aggression, crime in the decaying cities or any other external cause," read an article in the June 1978 issue. "It comes from the growing internal encroachments of government bureaucrats as they limit the freedom of Americans through distribution of rules and regulations, many times called guidelines." The newspaper criticized OSHA's "insulting or silly" regulations, and published an open letter to Congress denouncing the "faceless bureaucrats who sit in strategy meetings and formulate federal guidelines," saying that they "pinch our pocket books, restrict our work privileges, govern our spending habits, determine the 'safety' restrictions of our businesses and influence the type of homes we live in." It ran articles that argued that the welfare state was "corrupting a whole generation of people" and that Christian politicians needed to "roll forward the clock in progress toward individual initiative and individual freedom and family responsibility in our society."[30]

During the property tax revolt in California, when middle-class homeowners angry about their rising bills voted for a proposition essentially repealing their local property taxes, the *Journal-Champion* expressed enthusiasm. In language reminiscent of that which might be used to scold a pregnant teenager, it condemned New York City for asking for federal aid during its financial crisis: "The city should have believed in financial responsibility before it got into trouble." It criticized unions, saying that while the labor movement had accomplished much in the past, modern Americans "see the need to curb the crime and corruption among union

leaders," and even supported the Kemp-Roth bill for individual income tax cuts, borrowing rhetoric straight from Jude Wanniski.[31]

At times the *Journal-Champion* tried to ground its economic arguments in religious language. Inflation, the publication suggested, was a form of divine punishment for a nation in thrall to the false idol of the dollar. "Because of sin, God usually spanks His people in the pocket book—farmers get hit in their crops, other Americans get hit in the paycheck," just as those who fell into disfavor with God in the Old Testament were visited by famine, drought, or grasshoppers. "God is bringing the entire nation to its financial knees. If we want to control inflation, we should set our spiritual house in order." But at other times the newspaper carried articles that sounded as if they could have been written by any aggrieved consumer: "We have double-digit inflation, high unemployment, and we cannot get our mail delivered from one city to another." One writer enthusiastically praised free enterprise and the "ability to generate business without fear of government intervention," writing, "I can't imagine living in a society where we could not have a Big Mac, an ice cream cone, an Orange Crush or where the government was advertising an oil treatment for your car, a roll-on deodorant, or that 'little dab'll do ya' business." At such moments the *Journal-Champion* seemed nearly as taken with popular culture as any secular magazine.[32]

Falwell's ideas moved from theory into politics in the spring of 1979, when he founded Moral Majority in Lynchburg, Virginia, with a small group of conservative activists. Richard Viguerie was at the meeting; in 1976 he had observed, "The next real major area of growth for the conservative ideology and [political] philosophy is among evangelical people." Paul Weyrich of the Heritage Foundation was present at the meeting too, and so was Ed McAteer, a former sales representative for Colgate-Palmolive who had left his corporate job to work for the Christian Freedom Foundation, a group that sought to build "a communications network of 'born again' free enterprise–oriented Christians that reaches down into every precinct in the district." Weyrich and Viguerie were not themselves members of the evangelical network (neither one was even a Protestant), but they recognized—as the organizers of Spiritual Mobilization had done

long before—the political potential of the conservative church. At the meeting they spoke about the need to organize people who might seem to be separated by geography or by religious denomination around a new set of moral principles—to build a new organization that would speak on behalf of a "moral majority." The goal of the new group would be to mobilize Christians at the grass roots to participate in politics. And while Falwell emphasized the moral imperative of pushing for legislation that would protect the family and fight pornography and homosexuality, he also argued that part of the job of Moral Majority would be "lobbying intensively in Congress to defeat left-wing, social-welfare bills that will further erode our precious freedom." His book *Listen, America!*, published in 1980, included chapters on abortion, pornography, homosexuality, and the evils of television and the music industry—but it also included passages criticizing excessive "government intervention in business," mourning the "sad fact . . . that government is the major source of our economic instability in this country" and praising Milton Friedman's *Capitalism and Freedom*.[33]

THE ANTIGOVERNMENT and probusiness rhetoric of the *Journal-Champion* was not the only area of overlap that Christian conservatives had with business activists. Evangelical leaders often framed their entrance into politics defensively, arguing that they were resisting the growing power of the state. They claimed to seek power not in order to establish binding moral rules for the broader society but merely to protect their own institutions from the intrusive government. Christians mobilized to fight proposed changes in tax law that they thought would endanger the tax-exempt status of religious organizations. They campaigned against attempts to regulate financial donations sent via the postal service, which could have limited the fund-raising abilities of Christian television and radio programs. "Clearly, the bill is not only a bureaucratic nightmare but a direct attack on America's religious community," wrote the National Religious Broadcasters in a letter mailed to ministers and pastors across the country, imploring them to rally their parishioners to defeat the legislation and the "anti-clerical forces" behind it.[34]

The most dramatic confrontation between evangelical churches and the state in the 1970s was the struggle between the Internal Revenue Service and Christian private schools. The conflict had its roots in the widespread white resistance in the South to the racial integration of public schools after *Brown v. Board of Education*. Many white southerners took Jesse Helms's advice. They pulled their children out of public schools that were starting to admit black students, and they started an alternative network of new, all-white private schools instead. Some of these called themselves Christian schools; as institutions of religious instruction, they could claim tax exemptions. Even more began to call themselves Christian schools after the Supreme Court ruled that private schools could not deny black students admission because of their race, because they assumed that the IRS would never dare to attack the tax exemptions of religious institutions. Not all Christian schools were "segregation academies"—a legitimate Christian school movement had been gaining strength in the years after the Supreme Court banned prayer in the public schools. Nevertheless, during the years of the civil rights movement, their growth was spectacular: in the early 1950s there were fewer than 150 Christian schools in the country; by 1981 there were about 18,000. It was very difficult to tell the Christian schools apart from those that had been founded solely in an attempt to evade racial integration, which actively refused to admit black students.[35]

In August 1978, responding to the pressures of civil rights leaders, the IRS issued a new set of guidelines for Christian private schools. According to the new rules, in order to qualify for tax exemptions the schools needed to demonstrate actively that they were not practicing racial discrimination. If the school had been founded (or if it had dramatically expanded enrollment) at the time of public school desegregation, and if it had an "insignificant" number of minority students, it would be subject to an intensive review process to see whether the low nonwhite student population was the result of active discrimination. If the IRS deemed that the school discriminated in its enrollment process, the school would lose its tax-exempt status.[36]

The new rules touched off a wave of criticism. More than 100,000 letters poured into the IRS after they were announced. Thousands of missives flooded Congress. Hundreds of furious school and church leaders attended public meetings in Washington. "The issue is religious freedom," wrote Jerry Falwell. "We are crusading against abortion-on-demand, pornography and sex and violence on television, and government intervention. But I am especially concerned about the IRS attempt to legislate regulations that will control Christian schools . . . Fundamental pastors are unalterably opposed to intrusion by bureaucracies into our religious freedom." The evangelical minister Tim LaHaye, who had just published an anti-homosexuality screed entitled *The Unhappy Gays* and who would in later years write the *Left Behind* series of popular novels chronicling the aftermath of the Rapture, wrote that church-related schools saved taxpayers billions of dollars, and that the attacks on the Christian schools might prefigure an assault on the church itself: "Doesn't it seem strange that the U.S. government is lenient on communists, criminals, drug pushers, illegal aliens, rapists, lesbians, homosexuals and almost anyone who violates the law, but is increasing its attacks on Christians?" The entire issue demonstrated the necessity for Christians to get active in political life. As Robert Billings, the founder of the National Christian Action Coalition, exclaimed, "The cost of political negligence is slavery! As our government increases its crippling pressure on the Christian home, school and church, the need for Christian action becomes increasingly critical. If Christians do not master politics, we will, most certainly, be mastered by those who do."[37]

The IRS and the Christian schools became a special organizing point for activists outside Christian networks as well. James McKenna, who had been a lawyer at the Heritage Foundation, marshaled a variety of arguments in a special booklet he wrote in defense of the schools. First he claimed that desegregation had "accelerated chaos in public education," making the formation of separate schools necessary. Then he borrowed a page from the civil rights movement and insisted that the private schools reflected the "diversity" of the nation's heritage: "If different is wrong, a part of the richness of our heritage dies with it." Finally he suggested that the entire crisis might be "providential," shining a light on

the shadowy machinations of the IRS and showing the nation why the time had come to become "involved in the political process as a Christian." He concluded, "Resistance is a duty." The American Conservative Union gave a special press conference at which its president castigated the IRS for casting itself "in the role of social engineer and policy maker." The new regulations, he insisted, represented "an unwarranted and vast mechanism for the expansion of government power," and libertarians as well as Christians had a deep investment in fighting them. The ACU took credit for helping to generate the overwhelming number of letters to the IRS through one of its "Legislative Alerts," which bore the title "IRS Says: Guilty until Proven Innocent." *Conservative Digest* devoted a cover story to the Christian right, writing that the tax rules were "just one more example of ever-increasing government meddling in religion."[38]

The controversy over the schools had managed to unify the leaders of the Christian conservatives and the broader antigovernment right. Congress prevented the IRS from implementing its guidelines. In 1980 the Republican Party platform contained a plank promising to "halt the unconstitutional regulatory vendetta" against the Christian private schools. In later years, New Right leaders such as Paul Weyrich would say that the fight against the IRS was what had really galvanized evangelical Christians and made them enter politics—not the Equal Rights Amendment, not abortion, but the fight against the tax man. As Robert Billings told *Conservative Digest*, "Jerome Kurtz [the commissioner of the IRS] has done more to bring Christians together than any man since the Apostle Paul."[39]

EVEN IN the 1950s, the businessmen who had wanted to win churches away from the politics of the Social Gospel, according to which Christians had an obligation to take political action to aid the poor, had assumed they would need to struggle against liberal tendencies within Christianity. But by the 1970s this was no longer the case. The churches had become the natural allies of the businessmen. For preachers like Falwell and Robertson, no matter what aspects of religious doctrine might separate them, there was no need to agonize about whether the welfare state or government intervention or labor unions should be defended on the ground that they were pursuing the Christian goal of helping the poor. For these religious entrepreneurs, who had built their ministries with the savvy of marketers and the confidence of executives, it was natural to have faith in the marketplace and to see the state as a challenge to the strength and vibrancy of their churches. Yet at the same time, despite the efforts of *Conservative Digest* to tie a disparate movement together, and regardless of Falwell's theology of the market, there remained a certain dissonance in the religious and social conservatives' advocacy of capitalism, for the communal values of family and tradition they claimed to uphold were inevitably undermined by the logic of laissez-faire and the turbulence of commercial society. The leadership of the movement might speak the language of the market, but for the believers themselves there must have remained a schism. For all the ways in which the businessmen and the churches were able to work together, the alliance between them also required the suppression and avoidance of deep conflicts, even at the moment of its birth.